# Shamanism in a Post-socialist City

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*This article focuses on shamanic placemaking and the struggles for public space in the Siberian city of Ulan-Ude. Special attention is given to the indigenization of the city, which is a result of the mass immigration of Buryats from rural areas and the decay of the Soviet urbanization model. The article investigates how contemporary shamanism is involved in the decolonization of the urban space, new temporalization, and indigenous placemaking. Instead of dealing with traditional shamanist mediation between spirits and people, the emphasis is on mediation between the idea of ethnicity and the urban space.*

**Key words:** Siberia, Buryats, urban shamanism, placemaking, ethnicity, temporalization

## Introduction

This article focuses on shamanic placemaking and the struggles for public space in the Siberian city of Ulan-Ude. Special attention has been given to the indigenization of the city, which is a direct result of the mass immigration of Buryats from rural areas and the decay of the Soviet urbanization model. Public space has been considered here as a space of conflict, a playground for the struggle over who controls and who has access to it. Such a framework has *increased the focus on* the performative dimension of shamanic utterances and ritual acts (see [*Austin* 1975; *Tambiah* 1979]). We are of the view that shamanic rituals act on three levels: individual, family, and community. Performativity on the level of community is essential for this paper.

Siberian shamanism represents an effective and popular way to enforce indigenous rights to the urban space. This article investigates how contemporary shamanism is involved in the decolonization of the urban space, new temporalization, and indigenous placemaking. Instead of dealing with traditional shaman mediation between spirits and people, the emphasis is on mediation between the idea of ethnicity and the urban space.

## Burnt offering in the city outskirts

One summer morning in 2009, a Buryat family gathered next to a small birch grove in Verkhniaya Berezovka (on the outskirts of Ulan-Ude) – a fashionable leisure destination for city dwellers. There were about ten vehicles parked by the roadside, and family members were, as usual at family meetings, catching up with the gossip in the expectation of the shaman's arrival. Several people were absent because they could not beg off work. Men in baseball caps and leather belts (men during the ceremony should have a hat and a belt) set the tables and benches. Women were taking out foods prepared for the ritual.

Pretty soon, shaman Boris Bazarov (leader of the *Böö Mürgel* organization[1]) arrived at with his two assistants. The shaman's assistants set a stack of specially selected dry wood and kindling, then laid on top a sacrificial ram slaughtered and prepared in advance. Meanwhile, at the shaman's request, people were carefully writing down on a piece of paper their names, clan lineage, dates of birth, and Mongolian zodiac signs. It turned out that not all were confident of their zodiacs and some of them were knocked all of a heap discovering that they did not remember the zodiacs of their absent relatives.

The shaman took off his cowboy hat, donned a shamanic costume, and took out his drum. His first assistant also dressed up. The second, at this time, to purify the participants, performed the ritual of *fumigation* with a twig of juniper (bur. *arsa*). He also fumigated the wheels of the parked cars. Many cars were passing by, their passengers staring at us in surprise.

Bazarov decided to give a speech before the ritual had begun. He explained the history of shamanism and the meaning of the rituals we were about to conduct. He stressed that he had recently obtained his PhD in history. His dissertation was a study of Siberian shamanism[2]. Then he spoke about the origins of Buryat shamanism, arguing that it has Uyghur provenance. Therefore, it has nothing to do with the spoiled Mongolian Buddhism-shamanism, but that pure Buryat shamanism is the same as ancient Uyghur shamanism.

After the half-hour speech, the ritual finally began, and its structure did not differ from the same sacrifice to the spirits of ancestors which we had come across one year earlier in the Kurumkan region: (1) preparation of meat from slaughtered sheep and other offerings, (2) the calling of deities and spirits, (3) initial offerings of alcohol, cigarettes and milk (4) divination by sacrificial bowl throwing, (5) burnt offering,

[1] *Böö Mürgel* (bur.) – shamanic worship.

[2] In Ulan-Ude, neither the University nor the local branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences has the right to award degrees in ethnology and anthropology. Anthropological dissertations are defended as historical, in accordance with the Soviet tradition in which ethnology was an auxiliary science of history.

(6) ecstatic trance and communication with the spirits, (7) shamanic trials (licking embers and a hot knife), (8) Purification of family members, (9) the collective consumption of the sacrificial meat and vodka (10) return home and offering up sacrifices for the *Galny Burhan* – spirit of domestic fireside (on an electric cooker).

However, the performance was much more colorful – every ten minutes, the shaman invoked prayers to more gods and spirits, drumming rhythmically at the same time. The only active participants in this ritual were men who belong to a single agnatic descent group and I – by way of exception. After many hours of major rites, the shaman and his assistant started to take hot stones out of the fire using the steel pliers, they flushed them with water and licked them. People looked at each other in silent wonder. Later on, hot stones were flushed with a herbal mixture, and people inhaled the fumes; it was supposed to purify them and protect them from diseases and evil influences. At the close of the ceremony, the shaman's assistant whipped the naked torsos of the participants, banishing all evil energies this way.

During the following feast, the shaman again began to advise on everyday matters. After a few cups of vodka, he delivered a speech on the advantages of polygamy. He claimed that polygamy is a part of the Buryat tradition and thanks to it, a man can beget a sufficient number of sons – at best over a dozen. He appealed to women not to reproach their husbands for making other women pregnant, especially when they cannot give birth to a son. Shocked women did not dare to oppose the shaman openly, but they did not look pleased by his social advice. Bazarov also explained why, when making sacrifices, one uses vodka rather than milk or water:

> *Each liquid has its information capacity. Water does not have a big one, milk's is a little bigger, and vodka has 1,000 times more capacity than water. Vodka is our information relay for communication with spirits. If we want to give them many requests, prayers, then I have to use vodka* [*Bazarov 2008,* pp. 10−11].

He also said that such a *tailgan* should be conducted every year and at least once every five years, it must take place in the sacred place of the descent group in the Kurumkan district. Tailgan gives the power, vital force (*amin, khii morin*) to the clan and guarantees contact with their ancestors' spirits who take care of every single member of the kinship group.

Finally, Bazarov and his assistants received payment, and went home. Slightly drunk drivers got in their cars and drove away; the rest went to the bus station, carrying bags full of leftovers from the consecrated feast.

Boris Bazarov strives to reconcile (re)traditionalism (shamanic costume, drum, and other paraphernalia, demonstrations of shamanic power) with urban modernity (the purification of car wheels, the place of worship within the boundaries of the city, a PhD in shamanism, vodka as a digital data storage device etc.). The urban venue for the meeting allows a substantial part of a kinship community to participate in rituals, without the strict need to travel hundreds of miles to a sacred family place (*oboo*) situated in their homeland. The scientific discourse embedded in the shaman's speech serves to educate urban Buryats, who seemed to be pleased with the rational explanation of every custom and the *longue durée* used to explain their origins. It is also worth noting that

in urban milieu a shaman is still accomplishing his main function − he mediates between: (1) descent group and the ancestors, (2) gods, spirits and the local community, (3) the global and the local, (4) the traditional and the innovative, (5) the past and the present.

He managed to show the genealogy of polygamist practice and, by doing so, to reframe the personal tragedy of women whose husbands have affairs as a responsibility for the continuation of the family. Placing the local ancestral cult on the scientific map, where it becomes part of a broad, ancient tradition, older than Christianity, allows participants to feel proud of their ethnic heritage, which had often been embarrassing in modern urban society. This mediation is possible because of the ambiguous position of Bazarov. He is a scientist and the object of his scientific interest at the same time; he obtains the power of scholarly knowledge (objectification) and keeps the position of a maintainer of tradition (spiritual power). As a result, he subverts the subaltern position of the shaman and native people *en bloc* in the urban space. Fragmented personal temporality and dictionaries (urban, pastoral, socialist-modern, traditional) are involved through ritual in the integral time of a kinship group – eternal in its nature[3]. Finally, the shamanic act could be seen as a form of symbolic decolonization or the indigenization of the post-Soviet urban space which, from the very beginning of the Russian presence, has been considered a stronghold of the Russian culture and power. This family *tailagan* was an episode in the process of reconstructing the urban space in Ulan-Ude.

## Indigenous temporalization and placemaking

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the complex transformation of the urban space and its inhabitants began, providing a starting point for the migration of Buryats from impoverished rural areas to the city. Embarking on its post-soviet path of building *a market economy,* Buryatia had to deal with the *fallout* of this process i.e. the collapse of industry. At the same time, urban identity *began to* undergo some surprising transformations. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, we observe a reassembly of the city's urban layout. Shamanic practices have become an important aspect of this reassembling [*Chakars, Sweet* 2018, pp. 168–170; *Quijada* 2019].

The new urban space is one of the most important dimensions of ethnic renaissance. It should be considered as a complex of practices dealing with the colonial and Soviet past. As a consequence, native Buryat and Evenki people have transformed themselves from strangers into hosts. We can use Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey's concept of the right to the city as follows:

> *The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization* [*Harvey (1)* 2008, p. 23].

[3] My interlocutor in Ulan-Ude said once: 'children are vertically directed to the eternity'.

Harvey also notes that "the right to change the city is not an abstract right, however, but a right that inheres in daily practices" [*Harvey* (2) 2008, p. 42]. Siberian natives obtain their right to the city by the indigenization of public space. Some of these practices are part of a conscious strategy created by ethnic activists and native representatives in the city council: (1) the insertion of ethnic-oriented elements of architecture into urban space: yurts, 'nomadic' monuments, buildings that refer to a style of architecture that took shape in Tibet and China and was adopted by the Buryat thanks to Buddhism, (2) the shift in the periodization of the city's foundation: from Udinskoye (colonial fortress settled by Russian Cossacks in 1666) to Huns City (Bur. *Hünnü Hoto*) – the ancient settlement which was founded in the 3rd century BC by the postulated ancestors of present Buryats, (3) the foundation of Buddhist and shamanic temples and shrines in the city [*Hürelbaatar* 2007, pp. 136–156].

Nonetheless, we can identify many unarranged practices: (1) dreams about the chronotope shaping urban legends, (2) the creation of shamanic sacred sites, (3) shamanic rituals, which give animation and new temporality to the urban space, (4) squatting: the uncontrolled construction of log houses (relocated from villages) on any available piece of vacant land [*Zhimbiev* 2000]. A thorough analysis of all these practices is out of this paper's scope. For our purpose, we concentrate on some shamanic and memory practices that are introducing indigenous temporality into the city: dreams, urban legends, and sacred sites.

Dreams are a very important element of Buryat life. In a dream, people can communicate with their ancestors, see the future or understand the past. The dreams of people with shamanic roots (*utha)* are recognized as very meaningful and prophetic. We can say that shamans and lay people are using dreams for the interpretation and transformation of their personal and social conditions. It allows the wresting of control of the colonial past and the framing of a host position in the urban milieu. One of my colleagues gave me a brochure in which he presents his philosophy and his dreams:

> *It is astonishing, but before my first shamanic initiation, I saw in several dreams my former incarnations. <…> In the second dream, I saw myself as an Orthodox priest, and that is why people called me "Father Mikhail" and it was in merchant Trunev's house – where Arbat <Street> and Dental Clinic No. 1 now are. I could see clearly that the hosts, Trunev and his wife, were arguing, and I stood, pausing, in front of a slightly open door. The servants came and greeted me, I made the sign of the cross over them and they kissed my hand in response. Then I went to work – to the church that was located in the municipal garden in Batareika <district>. I experienced old Verkhneudinsk <the old name for Ulan-Ude> for real, around the church there was the only fenced cemetery, from where, slowly but with solid step, a clear-cut crowd of ghosts was coming in my direction. Currently, I work as a doctor in a dental clinic – in the former house of merchant Trunev. So it would seem that karmic connections with this house brought me here but in another form* [*Khobrakov* 2009, pp. 21–22].

By the dream about his former incarnation, Khorbtakov managed to connect himself with the city history. He has been on the urban stage for centuries, and he was just changing costumes; he was a Russian priest and now he is a Buryat dentist. Now, one century later, he works in the place, which he remembers from his former incarnation.

Such stories are common enough to call them social facts. It could be interpreted as attempts to break the Russian monopoly on the city's past. Up to the 1970s, Buryat and Evenki were mostly herders or rural dwellers.

In the beginning, the future Ulan-Ude was a Cossack stockaded town, built-in 1666 to suppress and control the indigenous population. In 1783, Verkhneudinsk gained the status of district town and all through the nineteenth century it was an important trading hub on the way from China and Mongolia to western Russia. In 1920 it became the capital of the Far Eastern Republic (a temporary buffer state) and in 1923, it becomes the capital of the Buryat-Mongol ASSR [*Breslavsky* 2012, p. 299]. Memoirs and colonial documentation show that in the suburbs of 19th-century Verkhneudinsk, there were Buryat settlements, but their inhabitants had no city-citizen status [*Zhimbiev* 2000, pp. 32–34].

They had no right to the city and no rights in the city. The situation changed nominally in the 1920s when Verkhneudinsk became the capital of the Buryat Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic. From that time, some native party officials and members of the brand-new native proletariat were settled in the town. This change was emphasized in 1934 when the town was renamed Ulan-Ude[4]. Buryats made use of the new channels of social mobility provided by Soviet modernization and privileges under the socialist autonomous republic system. By 1970, a new urban ethnic elite had formed [*Chakars* 2014, pp. 89–116; *Batomunkuev* 2003] who mostly chose to assimilate progress and, at least in the public sphere, they acted like Soviet men.

However, a mass migration of natives to the city occurred only in the early 1980s and became a significant demographic phenomenon in the 1990s because of the *decollectivization* of post-Soviet agriculture. Until that time, Ulan-Ude was a Russian-speaking and Soviet-looking city. The ethnic specificity of this region was exhibited in a regional museum and the Buryat Theatre of Drama. Soviet emancipation of ethnic minorities was designed in the center (Moscow) and implemented in the peripheries without wide-ranging consultation with local communities. Furthermore, the Soviet idea of native Siberian emancipation was closely connected with modernization and was manifested in new factories, hospitals and schools, but not necessary by involving cultural specificities in urban plans. Therefore, Russians maintained a demographic and cultural hegemony in the city for the whole Soviet period. When we talked to urban Buryats, gradually, there emerged the definite impression that in the Soviet times, their every-day practices were based on the evident spatial city/kolkhoz [collective farm] dichotomy. The city was the place of modernity. In rural areas, albeit with state-farm modernization, people were able to practice numerous elements of their ethnic culture. Some shamanic practices could take place next to the collective farm but had no right to exist in the urban public space which means that the same person behaved differently in two different social spaces. Sometimes it can be seen even now, especially on the language level. Old Buryat urbanites often start to speak Buryat instead of Russian when they come to the village of their origins, but if someone publicly speaks Buryat in the city, they take it as a rude or even aggressive act.

This cultural dichotomy has been changing for the last three decades as a consequence of Buryat mass migration from rural areas. In 2010, only 62% of citizens were Russian and more then 30% were Buryat[5] [*Zhambalova* 2016, p. 116]. The decommunization

[4] Bur. Red Noon – red symbolised communism and Ude (noon) came from the name of the local river.

[5] The number of Evenki people is still small. This is because of Evenki's long tendency to assimilate with Buryats or Russians. However, Evenki play an important symbolic role in the city as a native nation.

of the city has never been completed, maybe because the titular nations had no urban past to restore and the soviet policy for *nationalities* stands at the origins of the modern Buryat nation and its territorial autonomy. Soviets established Ulan-Ude as the capital of the autonomous republic. There was no sense of restoring the Russian dominance from imperial times. That is why a new temporalization had to be provided. Oneiric narratives in which the current Buryat elite were present in the Tsarist city in Russian bodies are one of the strategies that empower the newcomers. Other practices concentrate on alternative historical narratives.

These include the urban legends and folktales which often accompany shamanic rituals. The oral genre is very popular among (post)nomadic groups and has a long tradition. We can find plenty of oral stories that have spurred people to action or changed their social status. Nowadays, such narratives are also spread through Internet blogospheres and chats. Although these are no longer oral-only stories, they keep their folk, anonymous character, and the same stories can be heard in public transport and read on the Internet.

In some cases, urban legends help to decolonize the past and space by creating a new chronotope[6]. A chronotope which became a node around which ethnic conflicts and urban legends are constantly taking place is 'Gora Batareynaya' – a hill where the first colonial settlement was established in 1666. On this site in 1991, Russian activists put a memorial stone cross and since that time, they have been trying to erect a monument to the memory of their Cossack pioneers. Buryat activists actively counteract that project. Not far from the Cossack cross, in a place where the people believe Cossacks imprisoned Buryat hostages (*amanat*), they put a wooden tethering-post for ghosts (*serge*) and have started to conduct shamanic rituals there [*Nowicka, Wyszyński* 1996, pp. 135–136].

Shamanic symbolic actions become, in this case, rituals of rebellion, but not necessarily as defined by Max Gluckman [*Gluckman* 1954]. Shamans engaged in ritualized forms of resentment in order to express their disagreement with the colonial discourse. However, through the ritual expression of hostility to official narratives, their subaltern status is ultimately overcome and a new temporality is established. Because of the performative character of shamanic acts, a more accurate term would be 'rituals of subversion'. Through ritual performance, shamans subvert the Russian domination in the city and the right to its past. Unlike in Soviet times, the state is no longer the monopolistic guardian of the past. Public memory becomes a battlefield for the two main ethnic groups with unequal and ambiguous status: the Russian urban majority and the Buryat who are the titular nation in the Republic, but newcomers to the city. It is an apparent paradox that Russians generally do not take part in the rituals but it is their social status that is being transformed there. Gradually Russians are becoming alienated in the city that their predecessors built and, of course, are not happy with the symbolic violence performed. Shamans have provided an effective counter-narrative to the Russian colonial historiography and the natives have added it to their armory. Local Buryats started to claim that Batareynaya Barrow was an ancient shamanic sacred place:

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[6] Following Mikhail Bakhtin, we may define a chronotope as rooted in the culture forms of the perception, categorization and articulation of time and space. In our case chronotope provides sustainable spatial and temporal frames which define the status and rights of individual and groups in urban space (cf. [*Bakhtin* 1981; *Quijada* 2019]).

> *Before Russians built the fortress, there was a Buryat worship place. On that site, our shamans had been offering worship to the powerful <ghost> lords of this land. Russians intentionally built their stronghold on this place, as they built churches in our holy places*[7].

In effect, the Buryat community started to take a dim view of the Russian activists' efforts to establish the Cossack Pioneers' monument, and a strong grassroots lobby against the construction of the monument appeared. Perhaps for Russians, the memorial was crucial to maintaining their identity. Through this monument and the celebration of the anniversary of the city's founding, they tried to order and delimit the individual memories of citizens. However, for Buryats, it was an unacceptable attempt to humiliate their dignity and take possession of the history of their capital. It is commonplace to assemble public memory in the public space using historical monuments to stake a claim to a city [*Gordon* 2001, p. XV].

Resistance to the monument let many people see the Russo-centric character of Ulan-Ude's urban history. Some journalists, scientists, and bloggers started to deal with the native status of 'people without history' by creating an alternative history of the city of Ulan-Ude. This was not a scientific procedure, and primary historical sources were enriched with folktales, legends and become full of fads and fancies. Yet it has the performative power to reconquer the city's past and consecrate (ethnicize) some public sites.

> *The Uda river estuary and Selenga banks were busy places; there was a place called 'Chuck-stone' and on the top of that rock was Oboo. <...> Shamanic rituals attracted to the 'Chuck-stone' a large number of Buryat nomads. <...> Another of the important factors is that the Uda estuary was a part of the ulus <state> of Buryat-Mongol prince Turukhai Tabun – a well-known historical figure. Here, we are personally convinced that at the Uda estuary, called by Buryat-Mongols 'Udyn adg' until the alien Cossacks <came, there> were two sacred Oboo. It means that this is a sacred place of the Buryat-Mongols. And according to the Federal Law on June 30, 2013, №136-F3, in order to counter the actions offending religious beliefs and feelings of citizens, two sacred Oboo should be restored to a sacred place on the river Uda estuary. Only these two sacred Oboo have the right to stay at that place and nothing else. No need to commit sacrilege yet again!* [*Bulutov* 2012].

From a former Cossack stockaded town, native people started the process of a new indigenous temporalization. Various practices: shamanic rituals, the selection of historical evidence and folk tales are consequently reframing the public memory of the native people, and other urban sites have fallen under the shamanic rituals of subversion. As a result, the new chronotope binds indigenous people to the urban space and its past.

One of the most popular locations for shamanic rituals is the suburban land called 'Verkhnyaya Berezovka' in Russian and 'Deede Ongostoi' (the upper place filled with ancestral spirits[8]). This area was included within the limits of the city in 1930, and

[7] www.buriatya.org, accessed 21.04.2020.

[8] In fact, the word 'ongostoi' means woodsy yard [*Badmaeva* 2005, p. 76], but probably due to the shamans' activity, people started to associate this word with 'ongontoi' – a spirit.

because of that, some Buryat households were displaced to other rural regions. Although the master plan for this place was created in 1930, there was little development and the land remained peripheral until the 1990s. The only large investment was a huge open-air ethnographic museum. Nowadays, it is mostly a leisure center and a place for dachas. After the USSR collapsed, Buddhists built a monastery there and the Orthodox erected a modest church. Local Buryats claim that Deede Ongostoi is a very powerful place and the local spirits did not allow the Soviet authorities to erect any industrial buildings there. The spirits only gave the nod to the museum in a bid for the additional empowerment of this land by a large number of shamanistic exhibits [*Hürelbaatar* 2007, pp. 145–147]. In the opinion of native amateur historians, Deede Ongostoi became a shamanistic sacred place after the Cossacks settled down on the Batareynaya Barrow and cut off the road to the previous sacred spot [*Bulutov* 2012].

Urban shamans also perform rituals within the area of the archaeological site called 'Huns city' (bur. *Hunnu Hoto*), located on the city's outskirts, near Ivolga village. It is widely believed that Huns, who build that settlement, are closely related ancestors of the present Buryats. Shamans performing sacrifices on this site venerate the Huns as progenitors of Buryat clans. Shamans connecting Buryats with the ancient Huns undermine the classical urban temporality. The Huns were the first urbanites and builders of the city 2,300 years ago, a long time before the Russians appeared. The Russian colonization and Soviet periods are transformed into relatively insignificant episodes in the history of the eternal city of the Huns. The Hunnic Fund (NGO) propagates the idea of Ulan-Ude as the oldest city in Russia, and the city council supports it probably because they are counting on the growth of tourism. The archaeological site became a center for the indigenization of the urban past. In 2011, the Buryat State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre staged Attila by Giuseppe Verdi there, and a Hunnic fashion week was held. This year the first Hunnu-oriented investment will be held. A reconstruction of a Hun town will be located on a river island.

The Hunnic Fund and archaeologists are striving for *UNESCO* World Heritage status for the Hunnic archaeological site. The new periodization of urban history was presented in a film by the President of the Hunnic Fund – Oleg Bulutov:

> *We are Huns, and we have to understand this. The History of Huns city is our common history <…> 2,300 years ago the city was already here and the first citizens appeared in that period; there was a school there, crafts workshops, houses. <…> The whole territory around was inhabited. On the place wherein the 17th century Cossacks built a ring fort, we had had a trading factory for Central Asian merchants. It was a medieval factory from the 9th to the 15th century. The Cossacks were the latest wave of immigration to a well-developed area, and they considered themselves as Huns too since they belonged to the Golden Horde before*[9].

Turning urban sites into ancient and sacred shamanic places is a modern practice of temporalization and historicization, which undermines the Russian hegemony in the urban past and present. Shamanic sites link urban Buryats with the pre-colonial period. For that reason, shamans perform rituals in the so-called Huns city – an archaeological complex

[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyr3e30vBCw, accessed 21.04.2020.

in which evidence of Huns/Buryat past activity is preserved. Michael Guggenheim argues that 'modernity is a process that tends to turn anything into an object with a history and a biography' [*Guggenheim* 2009, p. 39]. Thus, a boom in the protection and restoration of memory sites accompanies temporalization. It also provokes conflicts about the destiny of monuments, buildings and archaeological sites. From that point of view, it is a place of an alternative temporalization of Ulan-Ude/Huns city. The Hunnic origins of the city have become the leitmotif of the indigenous counter-narrative to the colonial historiography. Of course, any attempt to write their own native history entails submission to the axiomatic structures of the Western Episteme [*Thakur* 2016, p. 11].

Nevertheless, we can say the same about any use of modern form. The important thing is that shamans and other native actors are transforming the archaeological site (constructed by Western science) into their historical representation in the urban space. Bulutov promotes the civic project of the Huns city reconstruction, which is included in the urban development plan.

Shamanic practices offer alternative possibilities to look into the past. While historians can only pose questions to the sources (in our opinion 'a dialogue with source material' is just a pompous metaphor), shamans can talk with the spirits of individuals from the past. They can choose interlocutors, and very often, those are the ancestral spirits of the shaman's clients or famous persons. During these conversations, new historical narratives appear as sources with a unique ontological status and insights into the past. Buryat shamans can communicate with persons from recent history (e.g., a tormented spirit of the victim of purges during Socialism) or medieval ancestors (e.g., a soldier of Genghis Khan's army, tribal leaders who organized resistance to Russian colonization). A shaman has to interview the spirit to know his personal history. It is a *conditio sine qua non* for understanding the reason why the spirit is disturbing the people. A solution to the present misfortune is very often hidden in the past [*Buyandelger* 2013; *Swancutt* 2007]. Specific 'oral history' practices produce dozens of microhistories that are permanently remaking the Soviet past and the period of colonization into Hunnic times and reassembling the natives with the land. What is worth noticing is that all those microhistories are based on personal and affective relations to the past. Unlike in academic history, dead persons have amazing agency; Buryat origin spirits (*ongons, ug garbal*) and angry, tormented spirits of the people who died brutal deaths (*shüther, boholdoi*) put forward demands, persecute or help people, bring and take away sickness, establish sacred places, eat, smoke and drink the vodka offered to them. Time loses its linearity and the past is constructed based on kinship. As we can see, urban shamans play a significant role in the indigenization of the urban space and time.

Consequently, it is beside the point whether they represent an 'authentic' tradition or 'pretend' to be traditional. Their acts are socially meaningful and allow native urbanites to obtain their right to the city. It is more important how and under which social and political circumstances urban shamanism became 'traditional' or 'authentic' [*Wallis* 2008, p. 31]. Following Tambiah, we claim that shamanic rites should first and foremost be examined within the performative frame of social action [*Tambiah* 1979, p. 129]. Of course, the symbolic domestication of the city space and time is only one of the social functions of the urban shamans. They are also deal with the post-Socialist economic and social uncertainty [*Buyandelger* 2007], tourism development, nation-building [*Nowicka, Wyszyński* 2013] and the revival of ethnic culture [*Graber, Quijada, Stephen* 2015], but these are beyond the scope of this paper.

Discussion about traditions always refers to time and temporality. Using modern categories (tradition, history, and heritage) and pre-modern forms (rituals, dreams, ghost talk), shamans have established a new collective perception of how the city and its inhabitants are placed in time. They invert the modernist, progressive New Time [*Neuzeit,* see: *Koselleck* 2004, pp. 222–254] and install their own regressive temporality whereby native people exercise their right to the city by placing the city in a wider, indigenous time frame. Unlike in Eliade's idealistic theory of shamanism, myths and rituals are not only vehicles that transport the participants back to the world of origins, to the world of events which took place 'in that time' – *in illo tempore* [*Eliade* 1964]. Contemporary shamans also use those vehicles to travel along the axis of linear time to the past and establish ethnic boundary markers, which allow the appropriation of the city and the introduction of a division into hosts (Buryats, Evenki) and guests (Russians).

## Conclusion

In the last three post-socialist decades, we can observe a qualitatively new phenomenon in urban shamanism. We can identify a few of its distinctive features: (1) exceeding the limits of clans, tribes and sometimes ethnicities, (2) institutionalization and centralization, (3) urban emplacement (4) eclecticism and syncretization, (5) the partial Soviet hiatus in the living transmission of shamanic knowledge (6) market-oriented activities (complementary medicine, fortune-telling, extrasensory support for businesses and individuals), (7) involvement in projects of ethnonational revival.

However, many of these features can also be seen in the practice of contemporary rural shamans, and a hermetic division between urban and rural exists more in researchers' minds than in the external environment. We believe that these two oppositions might be set up along the folk-urban continuum (see [*Redfield* 1941]). A focus on the wilder processual and structural context of shamanic praxis may give us a clue to finding a way out of the vicious circle of authenticity. By various acts of 'shamanic speech' and rituals, shamans transform the post-Soviet city into the ancient native metropolis. The metamorphosis of native countrymen into hosts of the city is the perlocutionary effect of shamanic praxis. It is an essential social effect of urban shamanism, which gives a new sense of time and history. As a result, a new chronotope is established. The former colonial town and Soviet industrial city is being transformed into the ancient native capital – the oldest town in Russia – built by Huns 2,300 years ago. The new indigenous temporalization should not be considered as a false or invented tradition. It is the way native people exercise their right to the city.

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# Шаманизм в постсоциалистическом городе

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В настоящей статье анализируется роль современного шаманизма в процессе деколонизации городского пространства и основания новой этнической темпоральности. На протяжении последних 30 лет наблюдается качественно новое явление в бурятском шаманизме: городские шаманы, кроме стандартных практик (медиация между людьми и духами предков, духами – хозяевами местности и высшими божествами), начали выполнять новые функции. Через проведение шаманских ритуалов проводится медиация между относительно новым бурятским населением в городе и его историей, что позволяет утверждать о создании бурятских хронотопов, которые наполняют городское пространство новыми этническими смыслами, историческими нарративами и символикой, таким образом меняя временны*е* рамки и идентичность города.

Трансформация городского пространства является одним из важнейших аспектов этнической активизации, которую следует рассматривать как комплекс практик, оперирующих на колониальном и советском прошлом. В результате буряты в постсоветском Улан-Удэ превращаются из чужаков в хозяев города. Используя концепцию «права на город» Анри Лефевра и Дэвида Харви, мы делаем вывод, что сибирские народы приобретают свое право на город путем практики автохтонизации общественного пространства.

Особое внимание в статье уделено автохтонизации Улан-Удэ – явлению, которое возникло в результате массовой иммиграции бурят из сельской местности и кризиса советской модели урбанизации. Улан-Удэ (в прошлом Верхнеудинск), ставший в 1934 г. столицей Бурятской Автономной Советской Социалистической

Республики, развивался и функционировал согласно модернистским (внеэтическим) советским паттернам: буряты (титульное население республики) составляли меньшинство и в городе, и в целой республике. В то же время демографическим большинством в Улан-Удэ были этнические русские, переселенные в Восточную Сибирь только в XX в. Дезинтеграция советской аграрной системы привела к массовой миграции бурят в город. Бурятские иммигранты обладали амбивалентным статусом: являясь представителями титульной нации, в русскоязычном постсоветском городе они воспринимаются зачастую как чужие, а горожане-старожилы (и русские, и буряты) стигматизируют иммигрантов словом «головары», в связи с чем освоить городское пространство и сделать его своим стали важнейшими задачами для десятков тысяч новых уланудинцев.

**Ключевые слова:** Сибирь, буряты, городской шаманизм, осваивание пространства, этичность, темпорализация

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