

PERSONHOOD AND “FRONTIER” IN CONTEMPORARY AMAZONIA AND SIBERIA¹

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The adage that anthropology is comparative if it can be defined as anything at all has been tested in recent years to great effect—particularly on the theme of the body (Gregor and Tuzin 2001; Lambek and Strathern 1998)—and with greater confi-

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dence than it had been a decade previously (Holy 1987). The body has provided a useful starting point for cross-cultural comparison because, at some level, the physically existing, universal human body can be considered a common factor among all cultures. While the apparent universality and constancy of the body may be questioned in light of ethnographic evidence, and while the body can be politicized in differing ways, when politics and history themselves are taken as points of comparison, a new and somewhat different challenge is set. Taking up both challenges and placing them alongside each other, this paper explores comparatively the themes of "frontier" and "personhood" in two regions, Amazonia and Siberia.

The authors of this paper carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Amazonia and Siberia (Olga Ulturgasheva in Yakutia among her own people, the Eveny, and Vanessa Grotti and Marc Brightman in southern Suriname and French Guiana among the Trio, Wayana, and Akuriyo), and our ensuing discussions of contemporary political and historical issues persuaded us that many shared aspects of the practical reality of the contemporary social lives of people in both regions would benefit from exploration in a wider arena. In June 2006 we made our first attempt to compare two regions in an international conference entitled "The 'Frontier' in Amazonia and Siberia: Extractive Economies, Indigenous Politics, and Social Transformations" held at the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge. Having published proceedings of this conference (Brightman et al. 2006–7), we decided to expand our comparative theme by discussing the constitutions of Amazonian and Siberian personhoods through relations between human persons and the other animate beings inhabiting the same social environments in a two-day conference under the title "Humans, Animals, Plants and Things: Personhood in Contemporary Amazonia and Siberia" at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris in June 2008. We are currently editing a book on the same theme, which includes contributions by many of the conference participants (Brightman et al. forthcoming). We will begin by elaborating the ways in which participants at our first conference in Cambridge reflected on the theme of "frontier," and then consider the theme of "personhood" and the ways in which we have continued to develop it.

AMAZONIA AND SIBERIA AS RESOURCE FRONTIERS

To compare frontier zones as theatres in which cultural difference is played out constitutes a doubly comparative scenario; each case compared involves the meeting of social groups and their own mutual comparison as an exploration of mutual similarity and difference. The word "frontier" evokes a sense of contested space and a capitalist ideology of progress, at least in its most often discussed usage, but also because of its more basic, pre-capitalist meaning as the ambiguous margin of a known space, especially a social and political territory. All of these associations contribute toward making "frontier" a highly politicized notion, and we encouraged the conference participants to focus upon how the "Western frontier" associated with extractive industry is challenged by indigenous peoples who set up defensive social and sometimes territorial frontiers based on their own interests, often strategically using their own cultural values or those attributed to them (Ramos 1994).

Amazonia and Siberia have long been frontier zones in the Western imagination, which regarded the torrid humidity of the one and the bitter winters of the other as incompatible with civilization; they were therefore long treated as depositories for the rejects of colonial societies, places where criminals or political opponents were sent to die exposed to the harsh environment while incarcerated in the Gulag and the *bagne*.² Both regions are seen as wildernesses, empty spaces or “open spaces,” and have been grouped together as such in legal literature (Bothe et al. 1993). National societies have invested relatively little in building cities and institutions in either region, attempts at “development” frequently have failed in a battle against an environment perceived as hostile (Macmillan 1995). Consequently, both remain places of infamous lawlessness, sometimes romanticized as unexplored spaces of high adventure; however, the contributions to this workshop show that this lawlessness is largely the manifestation of the frontier zone itself: the zone of contestation between different worldviews, where the rules and norms of neither apply. This aspect of the frontier recalls its pre-colonial usage as a synonym for the “marches,” the edges of the polity and hence of “civilized” society.³

In their long histories of frontier relations, Amazonia and Siberia have both been subject to predatory industrial exploitation from the center. Piers Vitebsky, chair of the final discussion of the Cambridge workshop, pointed out that “the shadow of the frontier is a center for which ‘frontier’ is a zone of advantage, an opportunity for exploitation. It is the zone of exemption from regulation where the regulations are weaker or slacker.” Ultimately, the notion of “going to empty space” reflects a historical and recurrent process of colonial expansion and resonates with histories of both Amazonia and Siberia. Notions of the timelessness and linear progress of civilizing processes and the emptiness of their objects continue to drive something resembling a perpetual imperial expansion whose promise of inclusivity is never fulfilled.

The papers presented by speakers and panel discussions of the first conference emphasize that the comparison of frontiers involves the comparison of sets of political relationships as the varying ways in which subjects relate to others. Some contributors (Nugent 2006–7; Argounova-Low 2006–7) challenge this concept of the frontier on various bases, the most general of which can be summed up as the “complexity” of local realities (Cleary 1993:341). Certainly, it is clear that it would be untenable to claim the objective existence of a frontier as a real place “out there” in the world; on the other hand it is difficult to deny the importance of the idea of the frontier as a moral construct, an imaginary space which gives rise to real historical events. In this respect it is interesting to consider the frontier “symmetrically” (Latour 1991): besides its associations with “Western” ideologies of progress, the frontier in the sense of the contested edges of the known or the controlled, safe

2 Both made infamous through semi-autobiographical novels: Solzhenitsyn 1975 and Charrière 1972.

3 “1413 *Pilgr. Sowle* (Caxton 1483) IV. xxx. 80 To kepe the frounters of the reame fro perille of enemyes” (Oxford English Dictionary).

world can be said to exist for any social group. Just as much as frontier industries push forward the boundaries of resource exploitation, indigenous politicians seek to establish their own frontiers, albeit often defensive ones, by defining their identity and their relationship with the environment. The contested space that we have in mind is therefore above all a moral one: a frontier can be viewed from at least two sides, and it looks very different from the perspective of each side, based as it were on the different cultural assumptions and goals of each.

EXTRACTIVE ECONOMIES

While it may be suggested that there are different kinds of extractivism, and that it exists in “traditional” forms as well, it must be clear that the type of “extractivism” that is contrasted here with indigenous practices occurs on a large scale, and benefits actors in direct proportion to their distance from the place of extraction. It is characterized by the extraction of wealth in the form of natural resources, with relatively little long-term local investment in return. Extractivist actors thus operate on a supralocal level and, from their metropolitan point of view, they transfer resources from the periphery to the center (Wallerstein 1974). Stephen Hugh-Jones, chair of the first panel of the workshop, observed that the contemporary issues in both areas are framed by social and ecological concerns raised, on the one hand, by the introduction or continuation of extractive economies, and, on the other hand, by an increased global visibility and attention to concerns of indigenous peoples.

Amazonia is often portrayed as global property because of perceptions in the Western world of its environmental value as the “lungs of the world” and a center of biodiversity, although this often irritates Brazilians who regard the region as their own to manage as they see fit; Russia on the other hand jealously guards against outside interference in its own “wilderness,” although it too is a focus of global environmental concern. This difference reflects the type of state in each case: only the strong Russian state has the power to prevent foreign interference, the Amazonian states being relatively weak and contested. Amazonia is consequently a theatre of multinational activity, as well as being shared between several states, and is thus characterized by greater pluralism on a large scale. In view of this it is ironic that a great deal of the scholarly literature claiming to treat the general region is actually only about Brazilian Amazonia, and makes statements about the wider region that are not applicable to Bolivian, Colombian, Ecuadorian, French Guianese, Guyanese, Peruvian, Surinamese, or Venezuelan Amazonia.

Siberia, meanwhile, as part of Russia, whose “natural” wealth provides most of the national income, was kept throughout Soviet history in a situation of colonial dependency, and local people’s voices were extremely limited in their dealings with the imperial government. As a result, Siberia has for decades been used as a junkyard for radioactive waste and chemical industry (Nuttall 1998). Indigenous peoples’ activism in local political arenas in response to the extraction of natural resources is an important but recent development, beginning only in the early 1990s. Another

recent development is the emergence of political discourses calling for compensation, for equitable distribution of the revenue from natural resources, for sustainable development, and for indigenous peoples' land rights. Furthermore, in some parts of Siberia contested subsurface assets and revenues from their extractions are deployed as a mobilizing symbol in indigenous peoples' fights for regional autonomy and political decision-making. For example, Argounova-Low in her paper shows how the Sakha, in their attempts to gain economic autonomy, appropriate the diamond space and transform the emblem of a diamond into a cultural symbol of self-determination. However, in recent years Russia has put an end to its post-glasnost period of opening up to international organizations (such as businesses or NGOs), and the state is once again asserting itself with renewed vigor.

PEOPLE OF THE FRONTIER

It is on the level of human experience that the most compelling points of comparison between Amazonia and Siberia lie. Although two human habitats could scarcely differ more starkly in terms of geography and climate, the social life and recent history of the inhabitants are strikingly similar in a number of aspects. Both regions are vast areas of land (Siberia covers about 10 million square kilometers, and the Amazon rainforest about 7 million square kilometers), characterized by low population density, high mobility (in the form of internal migration), and a "shamanic" relationship between indigenous peoples and the living environment. The reasons for the similar population density (about 3 people per square kilometer)⁴ differ, but are due in both cases to differing extents as much to historical circumstances as to adaptation to the environment;⁵ indeed, "traditional" livelihoods more commonly include animal husbandry (reindeer herding) and nomadism in Siberia, in contrast with swidden horticulture and semi-nomadism in Amazonia, although hunting and gathering are common to both areas.

There are compelling points of comparison to be found in the relationships between local and global, between indigenous peoples and multinational corporations or states in both Amazonia and Siberia, where such relationships are the latest manifestation of a long history of enactment of social difference. The people who live "between" indigenous society and the great monolithic actors are much more numerous than the members of purely indigenous society, although they enjoy a far lower political profile (Ramos 1998; Wilson 2006–7). From their perspective, the "frontier" may not be a frontier at all,⁶ especially considering their unusually high mobility and the importance of internal migration within the regions (Cleary 1993).

4 The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following reference to Turner's classic discussion of the frontier: "1894 F. J. Turner *Frontier in Amer. Hist.* 3 What is the frontier?... In the census reports it is treated as the margin of that settlement which has a density of two or more to the square mile."

5 Amazonia's population is widely acknowledged to have been reduced to a tenth of its former size, mainly by disease, following the arrival of Europeans (Heckenberger 2005:144).

6 See Nugent 2006 and Reig 2006.

It is most frequently they who perform the physical work on sites of industrial extraction or on “exploration” expeditions (see Reig 2006–7). It is they who teach in local schools, and the boarding schools in French Guiana, Guyana, and the Russian Far North have existed with the express purpose of transforming indigenous people into state “citizens” like them. They frequently control the means of transport and telecommunications that allow interactions between remote indigenous habitats and the city—notably aeroplanes and two-way radio (Vitebsky 2000, 2005). Finally, as traders they have brought changes to indigenous economies, but these changes tend to be superficial rather than fundamental, being absorbed into indigenous cosmologies (Hugh-Jones 1988), unlike the effects of the changes in habitat which large state and industrial actors can bring about. Meanwhile, indigenous individuals (or groups) frequently take on these same “in-between” roles, for example through their political and economic activities (High 2006–7:34–46). However, it is clear that national and international policy decisions have a greater impact—often in unintended ways—than any other single influence upon the populations of the frontier (Colchester 1997).

It is a commonplace of much frontier literature, particularly that of an activist nature, to show how legislative frameworks for clarifying indigenous land and rights to natural resources still remain a subject of controversies and an object of sheer manipulation by those in power, both in Amazonia and Siberia; moreover they are frequently ignored and filled with lacunae subject to exploitation by those with the requisite knowledge and power. However, as many authors show, from the point of view of local communities, situations of apparent domination or exploitation often appear in a very different light (Hugh-Jones 1992; Ssorin-Chaikov 2000). Organizations representing, or claiming to represent, the interests of the indigenous populations have recently become much more profoundly interconnected. Moreover, in practice the worldviews of indigenous and capitalist actors (not to mention actors who do not fit into either category) frequently shade into each other through compromise, corruption, and long-term interactions of other kinds (see Willerslev and Ulturgasheva 2006–7:79–100).

The assumptions and goals of these different categories of actor can be seen as based upon differing relationships to nature. The stereotypical frontier ideology regards nature as something to be subdued and exploited, and many perceive this as the worldview of extractive industry. Meanwhile, indigenous politicians frequently portray the peoples they represent as living in harmony with nature, as do many NGOs and some anthropologists, affecting how indigenous peoples perceive themselves as well as how they are viewed by others. These differing worldviews can be said to correspond on a deeper level to the ways in which society and nature are constructed and imagined. Philippe Descola has suggested a scheme by which four social ontologies can be distinguished as ideal types on the basis of their relationships with the natural world; in order to avoid a spurious or ethnographically inappropriate dichotomy between nature and culture, he proposes defining these ideal types according to the relationship between “interiority” and “physicality” of different types of actor, whether human or non-human (2005:176). “Naturalists” assume that

difference is cultural because the principles of material existence are universal: on this basis extractive capitalists may attempt to “persuade” local actors that it is in their interests to adopt certain relationships to the “natural” world in terms meaningless to their interlocutors. “Totemism” and “animism,” which both assume shared interiority, tend to be the ontologies presented as characteristic of indigenous peoples, whether in terms of social and cultural “facts” or as part of political strategies, and this is the basis for the “harmony with nature” in which they can be said to live if we translate these ontologies into “naturalist” terms. Through ideal types such as these we can begin to understand the proliferation of frontiers, moral and physical, that are created and challenged through time. It is on the basis of such differences in the social constitution of the person and other actors that often radically different, competing or intermingled conceptions of property can exist, as the contributors to Hirsch and Strathern (2004) explored through Melanesian case studies; indeed, property is an important theme in these regions where claims to land and resources are so deeply contested.

For a long period, culminating in the twentieth century, colonial actors actively concentrated the indigenous populations of Siberia and Amazonia into larger settlements and actively suppressed their endogenous belief systems in favor of world religions or political ideologies. This was carried out largely by the state in Siberia, and largely by non-state actors (particularly Christian missionaries) in Amazonia, although here this also frequently took place with state encouragement. Subsequent generations have consequently been obliged to balance different forms of expertise and knowledge: those passed on by their families and those required for interaction with encroaching national society.

As a result of the efforts of the indigenous people—many of them from Amazonia and Siberia—involved in drafting it, the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2006 and by the UN General Assembly in September 2007, takes the issues of extractive industries, and the competing worldviews found on the frontier as we have defined it, to the highest legal and political arena⁷. Some anthropologists have portrayed the often simplistic characterizations of identities and ontologies that are represented in the declaration as a dangerous threat to the non-indigenous inhabitants of “frontier” zones (Kuper 2003). But the United Nations should not be naively taken as the highest authority in the production of truth; it is instead a political theatre in which various groups compete to serve their interests, often using highly distorting rhetorical strategies to further their aims (Vitebsky 1995a:197–201).

Of course the reality is far more complicated than it is portrayed by the high-flown rhetoric of international politics: for example, indigenous organizations, while in many cases genuinely working to establish and uphold the rights of indigenous peoples, often unwittingly serve the interest of states and corporations seeking representatives with whom they can “do business.” Having said this, it is also true

7 The Russian Federation abstained from voting for adoption of the Declaration, and has not subsequently endorsed it.

that there has been some considerable improvement in recent years from a previous situation in which the state and corporate interests felt no need to consult local indigenous people at all, treating them instead as inconvenient and less than human elements of a hostile natural environment.

The ambiguity of and fascination with the margins of society are largely expressed in Amazonian societies through the pervasiveness of affinity, which has been a theme in ethnographic literature of the region for some time (Rivière 1993). The very fabric of society can be seen as being composed of affinal frontiers on a myriad of scales, from the person and the body to society itself and the cosmos (Viveiros de Castro 2001). Affinity's most important feature may be a dangerous but vital source of social renewal: people must risk engaging with the frontiers of society in order to allow society itself to continue to exist. When put in these terms, such ideas, which have hitherto been portrayed as characteristically Amazonian, can be applied to other regions and cultures in terms of the principle that affinity can be regarded as a social and moral frontier on a variety of levels or scales. This suggests that the idea of the frontier can be constructively used if it is radically rethought. For Raffles, it is "entirely too obvious" that parts of Amazonia are frontiers, but for him the frontier implies "linear spatialities, discrete social systems, and the inevitability of incorporation" (2002:153). Instead, we should begin to think of the frontier in terms of the politicization of space and, following the lead of recent theories of the body,⁸ to see it as multifarious, interactive, and perspectively variable. The body and personhood are closely linked, and the study of personhood in Amazonia and Siberia therefore provides a basis for an understanding of the frontier more in tune with indigenous ways of understanding the world. This was the subject of the conference we held in Paris in 2008.

PERSONHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY AMAZONIA AND SIBERIA

We stressed above that the relationship between man and the environment in the two regions is a key point of comparison. This relationship is at the heart of indigenous understandings of personhood; here, persons are defined in relation to their social and physical environments, and not in isolation or in abstract. This led us to develop the theme of personhood, through a conference addressing one of the classic themes in the anthropology of Amazonia and Siberia involving animistic worldviews—shamanic cosmology and spirituality.

The ethnographic feature most obviously common to Amazonia and Siberia is shamanism—indigenous cosmology in both cases is characterized by forms of "animism" (Descola 1996; Vitebsky 1995b; Willerslev 2004, 2007), where ritual specialists enter into relationships with spirit familiars.⁹ Because these spirit familiars are manifestations of the living environment—including plants, animals,

8 See for example Vilaça 1999.

9 Many authors of general works on the subject give prominence to discussions of Amazonian and Siberian shamanism—see for example Eliade 1964.

mountains or rivers—shamanism is fundamental to the relationship between man and the environment in both regions, despite all their geographical differences. A crucial aspect of shamanic worldviews both in Amazonia and Siberia is that the boundaries between human and nonhuman worlds are blurred, implying the permeability and transformability of its human and non-human, spiritual and material components (Shirokogoroff 1931; Vitebsky 1997, 2005; Viveiros de Castro 1992; Willerslev 2007).

In a recent comparative discussion of animistic modalities across Amazonia, Siberia, and North America, Carlos Fausto elaborated on a distinctive feature of their sociocosmic systems, i.e. “a common mode of identification between humans and non-humans” (2007:498). Accordingly, distinctly and dynamically articulated ways of producing people and sociality are prominent in Amazonian hunting modalities of predation and commensality as well as in Siberian and North American hunter-gathering idioms of love-sharing, compassion, and reciprocity. These ontologies are part of what Fausto calls “the Sibero-American shamanic tradition which has a historical unity of its own” (ibid.). In this conference we chose to leave the vast topic of historical unity in the background, to concentrate on this shared shamanic tradition.

For most of the hunters and reindeer herders who lead a nomadic lifestyle in Arctic and sub-Arctic Siberia, subsistence is regulated according to an adjustable schedule, which follows the relatively unpredictable and unstable environmental conditions prevailing in this region. This is analogous to the way in which many foods and other resources in Amazonia are dispersed throughout the forest, compelling non-agriculturalist groups to trek long distances to gather what they require. Swidden horticulturalists living in the less fertile interfluvial zones also shift their gardens periodically to allow the forest to regenerate soil fertility. Indigenous environmental management in both regions requires specialist knowledge of and relations with animals and plants; this also affects the ways humans construe their social universe, their concepts of soul, body, and person. The relationships between humans, animals, plants, and other non-human objects therefore became one of the central subjects for debate during the conference, and involved discussions of distinct forms of sociality including jaguar shamanism (Casey High), domestication of manioc (Rival), production of food and principles of commensality (Costa), the concepts of the soul and the body (Willerslev), constructs of property and “mastership” (Fausto), interplay between sound, material objects, and the human body (Davy; Miller; Skvirskaya), and dogs and wolves as non-human counterparts of human personhood (Mette High; Vallikivi; Safonova and Santa).

SHAMANISM

In animistic ontologies, the constitution of humanity is extended in a meta-physical dimension where there is a place for such distinctive features as fluidity and malleability of boundaries, and for processes and movements across visible and invisible realms. In these highly ambiguous and shifting spirit-worlds, the precise intentionality behind the distribution of objects and visible substances is not always the same; only those with specialist knowledge such as shamans can intentionally

distribute influence in the invisible realm (Grotti 2007:31). As has been documented in the ethnographies of both regions, the shaman holds a ubiquitous and ambiguous position within local communities. He can combine the expertise of an elder and the swiftness and fastness of a young hunter along with an unequalled spiritual power, which has provided him with knowledge in dealing with the ambivalence and transformability of this sentient world (Chaumeil 1993). Typically, the shaman has been an expert in redressing an unfavorable situation among humans, such as illness or starvation, and in rehabilitating social and ecological integrity by undertaking an arduous supernatural journey, recollecting the pieces of the patient's dismembered soul, or conversing with the master of the animals about the cause of hunting failure (Bogoras 1909; Hamayon 1990, 1994; Rappaport 1968; Rivière 1969; Vitebsky 1995).

In the course of the discussion, the figure of the shaman and implications of his presence or absence from a community as a result of Soviet anti-religious policy and repression of shamans in Siberia (Balzer 1993, 1999; Ssorin-Chaikov 2001; Vitebsky 1995b, 2005) and processes of Christianization in Amazonia (Vilaça and Wright 2008) were not treated as central topics in our debate; instead the papers focused on particular patterns of shamanic and animistic thought and action which persist across both regions. As the conference papers showed, despite great geographical differences Amazonia and Siberia bear striking similarities, suggesting that shamanic and animistic ideas have endured over the widest range of environments, social structures, and historical periods.

In his paper, Casey High emphasized that the shaman figure and shamanic worldview should be viewed as central to an understanding of broader socio-political relations. His account has shown how shamans, as specialists in bridging the human and non-human worlds, are seen in the context of witchcraft accusations, at once as a key source of knowledge and as a potential threat to peaceful conviviality. Animal spirits therefore acquire a central role in mediating Huaorani relations with various human "enemies." This has contributed to emerging forms of sociality, expressed in the local idiom of *comunidad*, and has led to the suppression of jaguar shamanism in many Huaorani villages. While Huaorani shamans are feared for adopting the dangerous perspectives of jaguars and other animals, neighboring Quichua shamans have today become both the target of witchcraft accusations and a source of shamanic curing.

If the source of political accusations among Huaorani is located within Amerindian ontology with its notion of intensive transcorporeality, in Siberia we may observe a different but comparable phenomenon. In the post-Soviet era, having all but disappeared, shamanism seems now to be undergoing an elaborate and prominent revival, which echoes significant aspirations of ethnic and political transformations for some republics such as Sakha (Yakutia), Buryatia, Altai, and Tuva. In the case of "cultural revitalization" propagated by the urban intelligentsia, shamanism becomes a highly politicized matter, especially with regard to the issue of territoriality and the assertion of ethnic identity. For example, in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) shamanism is formulated in oppositional, culture-defending, boundary-defining

terms. As Sakha leaders respond to new political opportunities by declaring “sovereignty” and negotiating bilateral treaties within the Russian Federation, they help create the political basis to fertilize the cultural revival (Balzer 1993, 1999).

At a distance from the hype of politicized ethnic revitalization in the city, shamanic and animistic practices, unadulterated and consistent with their everyday engagement with the animals and spirits of the land, persist through small rituals, such as the feeding of the fire and the interpretation of dreams and omens practiced by hunters and reindeer-herders in the Siberian forest (Vitebsky 1997, 2005). For those inhabiting the forest and moving around vast areas of land, religious sensibility belongs to an animistic worldview and the principles of sociality rooted in millennia of accumulated ecological experience and interaction with the environment; for the urban intelligentsia, the current fad of a “shamanic renaissance” functions as a convenient and flexible metaphor for ethno-political aspirations.

This distinction between the “revivalist” or nationalistic view of shamanism and more forest- or land-bound shamanic worldview may be compared with that observed by Stephen Hugh-Jones (1994) in the Amazon region between “horizontal shamanism” and “vertical shamanism.” That is to say, the Siberian “revivalist” view of a shaman, which emphasizes the verticality of a shaman’s social position, corresponds to the concept of the shaman as a priest, characterized by hereditary role-ascription, high social status, and unambiguous moral wisdom. In a sense, revivalist rhetoric driven by large Siberian ethnic groups articulates the hierarchical status of a shaman and the exclusivity of his spiritual knowledge and power, which feed into the nationalist claim over their genealogical relations to a particular territory.

The less articulate and subtler type of shaman corresponds to the more “classical” type, characterized by individualism, low social status, and moral ambiguity. In this case, shamanic agency and knowledge is bound to human interaction with non-human spiritual entities and thus can be distributed and dispersed among various agents. The social position of such a shaman is horizontal, and this type of shamanism entails such social markers as charismatic leadership, shamanist cosmology, egalitarian ethos, direct exchange, and bilateral descent (Hugh-Jones 1994:35-44; Pedersen 2001:416).

This form of shamanism appears to belong more closely to the animistic social ontologies characteristic of the indigenous groups of Amazonia and Siberia (Bogoras 1909; Tan-Bogoraz 1939; Hamayon 1990, 1994; Ingold 1980, 1996, 2000; Iokhel’son 1910; Jochelson 1926; Kwon 1998; Shirokogoroff 1935; Willerslev 2004, 2007), although at the same time the societies of both regions carry the potential for “vertical” shamanism under certain circumstances. As Pedersen puts it:

Since animism “conceptualizes a continuity between humans and non-humans” (Descola 1996:89), it seems to both imply and be implied by wider societal relations of a horizontal character. If people cannot perceive themselves as potentially being in the shoes of others, if people cannot imagine themselves as Others (whether human or nonhuman) and Others as themselves, then the very basis for animism is likely to break down because its ontological principle depends on an unbounded potential for identification (2001:416).

HUMAN–NON-HUMAN RELATIONS

In her paper on the Evenky of Southern Siberia, Alexandra Lavrillier described a classic animist ontology. Her ethnographic account showed how human-animal relations are based on a certain level of identification, which emphasizes both the autonomy or individuality of each physical body or species and shared spirituality, i.e. identification of human with non-human spirits. According to her ethnographic data, every social being (for example, human, wild/domestic animal, wasp, and spider) holds one spiritual essence or “spirit load.” The “spirit load” of each social being varies according to one’s own potential of ritual power. For example, the giant wood wasp does not have the same ritual power or “spirit load” as a spider; the “spirit load” of a wasp is different from that of a spider. Spirit load accumulates through a person’s lifetime, echoing the forms of composite personhood described in accounts of Amazonia, especially by Joana Miller in her contribution to the conference. Meanwhile, the importance given by the Evenky with reference to personhood to relations with a plural universe of non-human beings was recalled by Andrea-Luz Gutierrez’s paper about sound symbolism and animal imitation. By contrasting different modes of imitation, in hunting and storytelling, Gutierrez illustrated the complexity and sophistication of Quichua relations with non-human beings.

The subject of relationships between humans and predatory animals allows us to explore distinct forms of alterity construed in relation to the body and soul both in Amazonia and Siberia. Kinship, marriage, and “mastership” entail plural personhood (or “dividualism,” discussed in Carlos Fausto’s paper), recursive containment and multiple referentiality. István Sántha and Tatiana Safonova argued that the boundaries between dogs and humans are blurred by the socialization processes of early life among the Evenky; during childhood, dogs and children play together and become part of each other’s societies; or rather, of the same society. The constitution of the person was brought into question by Mette High, who showed that, among Mongolian gold prospectors, increases in wolf attacks have become associated with human transformations into wolves, to such an extent that the distinctions between wolves, spirits, and humans have become increasingly blurred.

The relationship of humans with jaguars and wolves including kinship, marriage and mastery was the subject of several papers. Laur Vallikivi commented on how the Nenets try to negotiate their well-being and peaceful co-residence with the spirits through their alliance and kinship with wolves. Among the Nenets it is more often a woman who is able to have and develop kinship ties with a wolf due to the shared element of impurity attributed both to women and wolves. Here, the humans turn into wolves and then again into humans, a transformation experienced primarily by temporarily marginalized persons, such as an abandoned wife, a person lost in the tundra, or a dead son who has not reached the realm of the dead yet and wishes to return to life. Becoming fully human again is made possible when the real wolves in the human-wolf’s pack are killed by reindeer herders. Being a lone survivor, the man-wolf becomes de-socialized from the real wolves and acquires an opportunity to become human again. Vallikivi’s account emphasized the element of recursive containment when human and wolf represent two constituent parts of one person,

expressed through the idiom of blood kinship. The Nenets concept of human-wolf exemplifies double identification or double referentiality found commonly in accounts of Amazonia (Albert 1985; Vilaça 2006).

Given that animals are persons, rituals surrounding the killing of animals for meat have always raised special interest among anthropologists. Luiz Costa's paper showed how Kanamari transform game animals into edible meat by removal of blood and skin, which de-subjectivizes them. According to Willerslev, "unlike some Amazonian peoples, whose shamans can by means of magic transform the inherently problematic meat into less problematic foodstuff (Descola 1996:91-2; Hugh-Jones 1996), not all the Siberian hunting groups have found any absolute solution to the moral dilemma of killing and eating prey. Rather, what makes animals edible from their viewpoint is the fact that, although they are seen to have their own minds and thoughts, just like humans, they are nevertheless conceived of as 'Other'" (Willerslev 2007:78). Also, the persistent ideas about the continuous rebirth of the souls of killed animals might help to ease their feelings of bad conscience. Still, hunters at times experience feelings of moral anxiety when killing their prey (Willerslev 2004, 2007), which, in contrast to Amazonia, Siberian societies do not have the ritual means to appease.

PERSPECTIVISM AND ITS CRITICS

The common element of shamanism brought to the fore the important theoretical topic of perspectivism, developed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998) to understand native Amazonian systems of predation. Siberianist participants drew attention to the resounding echoes of Amerindian perspectivism in their own material. Rane Willerslev described how Siberian Chukchi bodies and souls mirror each other, leading him to suggest that here, "the soul of the soul is the body." Chukchi people carry various spiritually charged objects upon their persons, which constitute their soul matter. Here, as in Amazonia, the soul is shown to be physical (or corporeal) rather than abstract, and relative rather than absolute; meanwhile, personhood is hybrid and composed of bodies and objects. Willerslev's paper made a striking comparison with the Amazonian case presented by Joana Miller, who showed the importance of bead necklaces and other body ornaments for the Maimandê as components of the person. It is the possession of these body ornaments that defines a subject, giving it intentionality, orientation, conscience, and memory. The loss of these ornaments results in illness, and their role justifies understanding them as constituting what are conventionally called spirits or souls.

Laura Rival, in her presentation on native Amazonian understandings of manioc, criticizes theories of animism which attempt merely to theorize materiality as an effect or extension of human agency, and argues that cognitive theories such as those of Alfred Gell (1998) and Pascal Boyer (2000) are inadequate to explain animism. She argues that manioc has a double life, involving two life forces. The first of these characterizes the soul, and the second its biological life. The manioc plant is regarded by Amerindians as a person inhabited by spirit and intentionality, which allows communication with it by humans. This plays an important role in the set of

ecological relations and ecological management allowing the domestication of the plant. An important implication of Rival's argument is that perspectivist theory, which derives from studies of predation, has placed too much emphasis on human-animal relations, and especially in the context of hunting, at the expense of the important relationships between humans and plants. A similar point was also made by Marc Lenaerts, who showed the plurality of Asheninka discourses about alterity, the classification of living beings, and personhood, according to whether they are addressing each other or Westerners, switching between "perspectivist" and "naturalist" modes of thought.

Several other papers explored the boundaries of personhood and perspectivism in the two regions by considering the role played by objects conventionally understood as "inanimate." Vera Skvirskaja spoke about the importance of the tundra house and the sacred sledge for the Nenets; for them, these objects play an important role in the construction of personhood, transcending genealogical memory and kinship terminology through their more immediate and less esoteric nature. Damien Davy, presenting comparative data on Guianese Amerindian material culture, showed the potential remaining for a subject that has hitherto received little attention; by presenting the richness of material expression of Amerindian myths, he illustrated their importance.

Drawing together many of the arguments presented in other papers, Carlos Fausto in his keynote address considered the notion of "mastership" in Amazonia, and suggested that the hierarchical relations between persons found in Amazonia can be seen as a template for human relations with things. Asking how Locke's political theory might appear from an Amerindian perspective, he suggested that, far from lacking a notion of *dominium*, Amerindians construct ownership upon distinctive concepts of selfhood and personhood, and of control over persons and things. This led him to suggest the idea of "possessive dividualism," where ownership of various kinds of attributes is involved in constituting the person as well as playing a role in interpersonal relations.

The notion of possessive *dividualism* shows that ownership is understood by indigenous people in either of the regions under discussion in ways quite different to Western society's possessive *individualism*. For the former, hierarchical relations are present at every level of human existence, but they may be reversible, as shown by Willerslev, which is not the case for the latter. This gives us further insight into the themes of the first conference, on extractive industry, which is after all based on processes of appropriation of resources, which in turn are based on ideas of property. The limits of the person are often blurred for native Amazonians and Siberians, and the living environment is never fully distinguished from personhood and society; instead, all actors in a social universe, human and non-human, are in a constant process of movement. Ownership in such a context is never absolute, and does not involve an absolute distinction between owner and thing owned. Instead, the owner and owned may be mutually dependent, and indeed mutually constitutive.

Recent postcolonial or post-authoritarian transformations in Amazonia and Siberia should be understood in the light of indigenous notions of transformation,

according to which personhood and environment are linked by constant processes of interaction at the level of being and identity, as well as at the level of material production. Change is often largely understood through processes of appropriation and expropriation, accompanied by population movements and put into effect by political action. The insights afforded by the discussions summarized above provide a starting point for understanding how processes of historical change on the grand scale may be experienced by indigenous peoples separated by great geographical distances, but united by cognate and mutually intelligible cosmologies.

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