

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI  
FAKULTETA ZA DRUŽBENE VEDE

ANJA REBOLJ

**RITUALI ZDRAVLJENJA V CELINSKI JUGOVZHODNI AZIJI:  
KOMPARATIVNA ANALIZA DRUŽB HMONG IN AKHA, NJUNIH  
REPREZENTACIJ IN AKCIJ**

**HEALING RITUALS IN MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA:  
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HMONG AND AKHA  
REPRESENTATIONS AND ACTIONS**

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## **Rituali zdravljenja v celinski jugovzhodni Aziji: komparativna analiza družb Hmong in Akha, njihovih reprezentacij in akcij**

**Izvelek:** Hmong in Akha sta družbi holistične ideologije, ki je značilna za nemoderne družbe. Kolektivna ideja pomeni ključno vrednoto. Organiziranost družbe je usmerjena k potrebam in k prispevanju k družbi kot celoti. Obe družbi najdemo v gorskih območjih držav Zlatega trikotnika, vendar jezik družbe Hmong spada v družino Miao-Yao, jezik družbe Akha pa v tibeto-burmansko družino. Akha in Hmong sta v pogostih konfliktnih odnosih z nižinskim svetom in vlado. Njuna družbena struktura temelji na rodovih, sta patrilinearni in migratorni družbi, ki imata požigalniško poljedelstvo. Pričujoče besedilo poskuša razložiti ritualno ustvarjene, reproducirane in s pomočjo menjalnih dejanj transformirane odnose v izbranih družbah, da bi lahko uvideli fenomen ritualov zdravljenja kot eno izmed menjav, skozi katere se rekonstruirajo različni tipi odnosov. Reprezentacije bolezni in terapevtskih ritualov je treba analizirati in razlagati kot izraz temeljnih kozmoloških prepričanj, vrednot in načinov delovanja. Zlasti šamanistične prakse zagotavljajo sredstva za umestitev dinamike družbenih sprememb v trajne oz. stalne kozmološke rede. Vsako človeško bitje je sestavljeno iz različnih gradnikov, in sicer iz telesa kot materialnega dela, duše oz. duš kot duhovnega dela in imena. Oseba s pridobitvijo teh komponent postane del družbeno-kozmološkega reda. Kako Hmong in Akha razumeta združitev teh gradnikov znotraj osebe (in njihovo razdružitev v bolniku) kot rezultat vzpostavitve različnih odnosov in ustreznega hierarhičnega reda odnosov? To dosežejo z rituali rojstva, poroke in smrti. Menjava daril oz. rituali poroke, rojstva, smrti in letne ceremonije ustvarjajo, obnavljajo in preoblikujejo odnose med živimi ter med živimi in mrtvimi z združevanjem ali razreševanjem socialno-kozmičnih gradnikov. Preučevali smo prakse zdravljenja in načine, kako zdravilci (šamani) v družbah Hmog in Akha pridobijo sposobnost izvajanja teh dejanj. Proces zdravljenja se začne z ugotavljanjem vzroka bolezni s pomočjo uporabe tistih dejanj in zdravil, ki ponovno povežejo bolnika s kozmološko in socialno nišo. Tako se z namenom socializacije bolnika rekonstruirajo različni tipi odnosov in ponovno povežejo vse njegove konstitutivne dele. Ta ponovno postane cel (zdrav), kar pomeni enako, kot biti član Akha ali Hmong družbe.

**Ključne besede:** Hmong, Akha, medicinska antropologija, ritual, zdravljenje

## **Healing Rituals in Mainland Southeast Asia: a Comparative Analysis of Hmong and Akha Representations and Actions**

**Abstract:** The Akha and Hmong are societies of holistic ideology, characteristic of non-modern societies in which the collective idea is the ultimate value. The organization of society is aimed to the needs of the society and the contributions to the social system as a whole. Both societies are found in mountainous areas of various states of the Golden triangle - each belonging to different language family. The Akha and Hmong have a history of conflict relations with the lowland and the government. Their social structure is based on lineages, they are patrilineal and virilocal, practicing slash and burn agriculture and are therefore migratory. The present text reveals each society's relations which are ritually constructed, reproduced and transformed through acts of exchange, in order to be able to see the phenomena of healing rituals as one of these exchanges through which different types of relationships are reconstructed. Representations of illness and therapeutic rituals are analysed and interpreted as expressions of the underlying cosmological beliefs, values and ways of acting. Particularly shamanistic practices provide the means to situate the dynamics of social change in such enduring and permanent cosmological orders. Every human being is composed of different constituents, namely, the body as the material part, the soul or souls as the spiritual part and the name. A person becomes a part of a socio-cosmological order by acquiring these constituents. How do the Hmong and Akha consider the conjunction of the identified constituents within a person – and their re-conjunction in the patient – as the result of the re-establishment of different types of relationships and of the proper hierarchical order among these? This is what birth, marriage and death rituals all accomplish. The aim of the comparative analysis is to show whether Hmong and Akha healers (shamans) reconstruct different types of relationships in order to socialize the patient and thus re-configure the patient's constituent parts. I examined the act of healing and the ways in which the ability to perform these acts is obtained by healers (shamans) among the Hmong and Akha. The healing process begins by identifying the origin of an illness by administering those acts and medicines which re-connect the patient to the cosmological and social niche in order to reconstruct different types of relations with the purpose of the socialisation of the patient and re-figuring of the patient's constituent parts. The person becomes whole again - healthy - which is the same as being Hmong or Akha.

**Key words:** Hmong, Akha, medical anthropology, ritual, healing

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1	METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND STRUCTURE OF WORK .....	9
1.2	THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....	10
1.2.1	Rituals .....	12
1.2.2	Healing Rituals.....	13
<b>2</b>	<b>THE HMONG .....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1	ETHNOGRAPHIC INTRODUCTION .....	14
2.1.1	Value ideas.....	15
2.1.2	The Beginning.....	18
2.2	COSMOLOGICAL DOMAIN .....	18
2.3	SOCIAL DOMAIN.....	20
2.3.1	The House as Relationships .....	22
2.3.2	Social Roles of Women and Men .....	23
2.4	THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HMONG PERSON .....	24
2.4.1	Marriage.....	27
2.4.2	Birth .....	30
2.4.3	Death .....	32
2.5	THE HMONG MEDICAL SYSTEM.....	35
2.5.1	Diagnostic Systems.....	37
2.5.2	Therapeutic Systems .....	38
2.5.3	Shamanism.....	41
2.6	HMONG SUMMARY ANALYSIS.....	46
<b>3</b>	<b>AKHA.....</b>	<b>49</b>
3.1	ETHNOGRAPHIC INTRODUCTION .....	49
3.1.1	Value Ideas.....	51
3.1.2	The Beginning.....	53
3.2	COSMOLOGICAL DOMAIN .....	55
3.3	SOCIAL DOMAIN.....	56

3.3.1	The House as Relationships .....	57
3.3.2	Social Roles of Men and Women .....	59
3.4	THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN AKHA PERSON .....	61
3.4.1	Marriage .....	62
3.4.2	Birth .....	65
3.4.3	Death .....	66
3.5	AKHA MEDICAL SYSTEM.....	68
3.5.1	Diagnostic Systems .....	71
3.5.2	Therapeutic Systems .....	71
3.5.3	Shamanism.....	74
3.6	AKHA SUMMARY ANALYSIS.....	76
<b>4</b>	<b>CONCLUSION: COMPARATIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>SUMMARY IN SLOVENE LANGUAGE (Povzetek v slovenskem jeziku).....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>92</b>

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Illness, both as a biological and as a cultural phenomenon, analysed in its social and cultural context represents an important topic for scientific study especially in the field of medical anthropology, one of the subdisciplines of social and cultural anthropology. Illness is an inevitable part in the life course of every human being in any society. It is omnipresent. However, there is considerable cultural variation in the types and severity of symptoms considered salient and important for different social groups. We grasp the world as members of our own society and therefore we also necessarily comprehend the physical condition of our body through the culturally constructed filters of ethnomedical beliefs. In a cultural anthropological sense, a medical system is an organized set of ideas and values referring to a particular healing tradition. According to the ethnomedical approach in medical anthropology, all societies have medical systems that offer a theory of disease etiology, methods for arriving at the diagnosis of illness, and the prescription and practice of curative therapies.

Medical systems must be understood as social systems constituted of representations and organizational roles in institutional structures that are embedded within a given cultural system. The two most important roles in such institutional contexts are those of the healer and the patient (Timajchy and Brown 2005, 317). Shamans are healers to whom idiosyncratic roles are ascribed. They use trance as a method for diagnosis, obtaining curative knowledge and achieve healing by entering and communicating with the spirit world. The role assigned to a patient makes him momentarily excluded from normative behaviour. The patient must perform certain roles which result finally in resuming normative behaviour. It is the shaman's task to transform the patient into a person fulfilling the characteristics of a healthy person in the normative role once more. However, the healing ritual context assembles the family members and the ancestors of the patient as well, reaffirming the values of traditional roles and responsibilities (Douglas 1996, 117).

According to van Gennep (1960), *rites de passage* involve a process of three stages: one of separation, a transitional state of liminality and one of incorporation. Victor Turner (1969, 1974) defined the concept of liminality as a period of especially dangerous power, which has

to be constrained and channelled to protect the social order. It is not simply a twilight moment in ritual transformation, or, as Mary Douglas (1966) and Edmund Leach (1976) argued, a mediating element between contrasting structural positions, associated with what Douglas called “matter out of place”. It is indeed problematic to decide when a state is to be defined as liminal. In the particular case of illness and healing, taking the life course as a rite of passage in itself implies a liminal nature of the patients’ role. It may be conceptualized as a structural phase of liminality staged between two successive conditions of normality.

Healing ceremonies may be understood as one important class of rituals. All cultures have ritual means for curing illness. In societies in which shamans fill the role of healer, the medical systems are integrated into, and defined in terms of, the concepts and values of local religion. In such cases, religion and shamanism are usually based on elaborate cosmologies. Cosmologies are from Lévi-Strauss’ *Mythologiques* (1969, 81) onwards explored as complex systems of knowledge in themselves. They are ways to comprehend this world, the other world and the relations and the dynamics between the two. Douglas (1966) claimed a correlation between cosmology and social structure. The other possibility is of course non-existing correlation. Which side should be taken when dealing with the ethnic mosaic of Southeast Asia? From 1935 onwards, in several Indonesian societies, scholars identified and specified the dualism of social and cosmological order and its modalities (see van Wouden 1935, J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong 1935, 1951; cp. Rassers 1925, Lévi-Strauss 1958, Barnes 1974, Fox (ed.) 1988, Fox 1989, Valeri 1989). However, comparative research into the types of modality on Southeast Asia is still limited. One of the few analyses is provided by P.E. de Josselin de Jong (1965). According to Platenkamp (2007), the dualism of social and cosmological order is defined as a manner of organising the existent relations (social, cosmological, political) into holistic structures. Therefore, representations of illness and therapeutic rituals should be analysed and interpreted as expressions of the underlying cosmological beliefs, values and ways of acting. Particularly shamanistic practices provide the means to situate the dynamics of social change in such enduring and permanent cosmological orders.



## **1.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND STRUCTURE OF WORK**

As far as it is documented (Chang 1983) in many of the Southeast Asian societies shamanism plays a key role in healing rituals. An analysis of such shamanistic practices provides a privileged means of accessing the fundamental ideas and values on which the social life in these societies is based. Such an analysis may be furthermore facilitated by adopting a comparative perspective. A comparative analysis of shamanism and its underlying representations in the different societies will enable me not only to elucidate the basic characteristics of the shamanistic process of healing as such, but also to understand the differences between these practices, hence their unique cultural specificity. This study is based on the holistic perspective as formulated in Durkheim and Mauss' essay on classification (1903). Thus, both societies shall be presented as wholes and healing rituals will be understood in terms of the particular place they occupy in them (Barraud and Platenkamp 1990, 104).

The selection of the societies to be studied will be made on the following criteria. First, following Mauss (1982) a certain degree of differences and similarities, necessary for making a comparative analysis feasible, will be guaranteed by selecting two geographically proximate societies whose members speak languages belonging to different language families. Secondly, societies must be selected in which shamanism plays a key role in healing processes. The third condition is a pragmatic one: sufficient and precise ethnographic data must be available. These conditions are fulfilled by the Hmong and Akha societies.

The Hmong speak a language belonging to the Miao-Yao language family and their social system, cosmology, and shamanistic institution have been well documented. This population is distributed over Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. I will draw from work of Christian Postert who carried out his fieldwork from 2000 to 2001 with the follow-up trip in 2002, in a village with 350 inhabitants 60 kilometres northeast of the town of Luang Prabang in Laos.

The Akha social system and shamanistic practices have been equally well documented. The Akha speak a language belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language family. They are distributed over the nation states of Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Deborah Tooker

conducted her fieldwork among the Loimi sub-tribe of Akha from 1982 to 1985, with a follow-up trip in 1990, in Mae Suai District of Chiang Rai province of Northern Thailand.

For each of the societies I will summarize and the analyse data presented by the authors: the social structure, the cosmological structure, an overview of the rituals of life course for establishing the interconnections between the two spheres and a comparison of the societies as they are structured in their ritual actions. Next, a description of the conceptualization of the person as part of and generated by socio-cosmological systems of relations will be provided. Finally, I will explore the conceptualization and classification of illness and disease (etiology), and its social and cosmological dimensions, along with the shamanistic ritual healing practice.

However, from the outset the theoretical basis of this study needs to be established. To be able to answer the research question formulated above, I shall begin by defining the concepts and identifying the theories and models to be employed. I will orient myself particularly on the theories of the following scholars: E. Durkheim (1995 [1912]) and his work on religion; A. Van Gennep (1960), C. Bell (1997), and C. Barraud and J. M. D. Platenkamp (1990) and their contributions to the development of ritual theory; Levi-Strauss' work on symbols, especially *The Effectiveness of Symbols* (1963). For the description of social structure and kinship systems I will draw on Levi-Strauss and his *Elementary structures of kinship* (1971) and Dumont: *Introduction to Two Theories of Social Anthropology* (2006).

## **1.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The present discussion concerns the concept of ritual understood as “the medium chosen to invoke those ordered relationships that are thought to be obtained between human beings in here-and-now and non-immediate sources of power, authority, and value” (Bell 1997, xi). In order to fully adopt the above definition of the concept, it is necessary to situate it in the context of the selected societies.

Following Dumont (1986), the Akha and Hmong are societies of holistic ideology, where the individual is “Homo Hierarchicus” and thus recognized as an “*empirical* subject of speech, thought and will, an indivisible sample of human species (which I call for analytical clarity the particular man, and which is found in all societies or cultures)”... (Dumont 1986, 62). This system of ideas and values, as Dumont (1980 [1966], 37) defines ideology, is distinctive of non-modern societies in which the collective idea is the ultimate value. The organization of society is aimed to the needs of the society and the contributions to the social system as a whole.

By having recourse to *Annee Sociologique* and especially Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, we find that the individual is a member of society whose mind is filled with ideas of his or her society. The society therefore exists and is organized within the individual. Proceeding with Durkheim’s theory, social facts as “ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him” (1964 [1895], 3) bring a composite abstraction of ideas shared by members of a particular society to the collective mind or collective consciousness. Namely, social facts are a representation of the collective representations and they should be observed and analysed only in their own societal context. Religion as a social fact is also a site for collective representations and as such expresses the reality of particular society. At this point, Mauss (1990 [1950], 103) called for the study of “total social facts”. Every element should be analysed within its context as well as in terms of how the element influences the whole.

This whole consists on one hand of a social whole as a network, a system of relations or as a set of values through which it expresses itself. Parts and single relationships are not important. They are only the outcome of the encompassing network. On the other hand, there is a cosmological domain, composed of spirits, ancestors and deities. The social system and its structure is a reflection of the cosmological domain. Without the later, the former cannot exist. Both domains are interrelated through social values (and) expressed in ritual practices.

Dumont (1976, 1991) identified the concept of the hierarchical value of ideas as the basic constituent of non-modern societies. Every social context is defined by social values. And the social system as a whole is managed by the hierarchical “differentiation of values” (Dumont 1980

[1966], 244). The shift between contexts achieves an inversion or shift of values. Therefore, for every context the main value and the encompassed value should be detected. All social relations are a part of the encompassing cosmological order and can be understood only with reference to that order. The continuity of the order can only be ensured and secured through rituals - complex processes of transfer of persons and objects – as a means for constant confirmation of the underlying values. As already noted, members of such societies are a part of a comprehensive order of the dead and the living, and are constituted only through the circulation of valued constituent parts through acts of exchange.

### **1.2.1 Rituals**

Keeping the notion of wholeness - as the interconnections between different types of social and cosmological relations, each of them being valued differently in relation to the place they occupy in relation to the value system as a whole - in mind, rituals reveal social structure and representations which provide an inside view of the system of ideas and values of the society (Barraud and Platenkamp 1990, 103-106), the hierarchical order established in the social domain and between social and cosmological domain. Rituals are constructed on the basis of relationships and point the way to how a hierarchical order of these relationships is established. People conceptualize their society as the entirety of the relationships which constitute the socio-cosmic whole and therefore in terms of its temporality and permanence. Rituals “effectuate a circulation of beings and things along the relations that constitute this socio-cosmic universe” (Barraud and Platenkamp 1990, 117).

Catherine Bell wrote that rituals “communicate a rich density of overdetermined messages and attitudes” (1997, xi) and defined six categories of ritual action. This work will concern two of them: rites of passage will present the context of *the whole*, while rites of affliction are the text, the subject of the discussion. Arnold van Gennep regarded all rites as rituals of passage as being composed of three phases: separation as the exclusion from the social group, transition or the liminal stage and aggregation into another social group with a new identity. Life-cycle rites denote crossing the boundaries of space, time or social status. Birth, marriage and death rituals will prove their significance in the life course of every member of the society and the society as a whole.

### **1.2.2 Healing Rituals**

Healing rituals are a type of rituals of affliction which seek to rectify the disordered state (Bell 1997, 115) The process of healing is based on the idea that “disease takes root when key social relations – among the living or the living and dead – are disturbed” (Bell 1997, 116). Illness and health are symptoms of disorder or order in that whole discussed above. This reflects in the ritual context which assembles the family members of the patient in addition to ancestors and other deities. Therefore, the healing traditions are dealing with ordering of these relationships. In the Hmong and Akha society, healing is a central domain of the shaman. Every definition of shamanism includes general features of shamans and their agency (Lindholm 2005, 424-425). The key one is the trance which divides the shaman into an active and captured participant by entering an altered state of consciousness while shamanizing. There are two main rituals to exercise the healing powers: the divinatory session and the therapeutic session. The former serves for arriving at the diagnosis, the later is to rectify the problem (Bell 1997, 116-117). For Bell (1997, 119) healing ceremonies picture “complex cultural interpretations of the human condition and its relation to a cosmos of benign and malevolent forces”. However, they also demonstrate the power of human realm in relation to the spiritual realm by opening the space for redefining the cosmological order (Bell 1997, 117-120).

Turner (1957) claimed the role of the ritual as maintaining the unity of the group by being a part of the constant process of redefining and renewing the community. He argued many forms of ritual to be “social dramas” through which the social structure is expressed. In his work, Turner focused mainly on the transition stage “betwixt and between”, which represents van Gennep’s liminality. Illness could be treated as a period of liminality, as the patient is neither alive nor dead.

## **2 THE HMONG**

### **2.1 ETHNOGRAPHIC INTRODUCTION**

The Hmong are conventionally regarded as Sino-Tibetan people and belong to the Miao-Yao language family. They originate from the high steppes of Tibet and Mongolia (Chazee 2002, 105) and their primary settlement was in the southern provinces of the Chinese Empire. After the suppression of Messianic insurrection in the middle of the 19th Century, they migrated in successive waves predominantly south. They dispersed around the mountainous north of today's Vietnam, north-east Laos and Thailand and became the main producers of opium in this region. Their preferred settlement areas were the peaks of the mountains at elevations of thousands of meters, where they still were able to cultivate. Generally, the Hmong are accustomed to the mountain conditions and are usually reluctant to move to lower altitudes. Their fear from the lowland is strongly supported by traditional beliefs and religious considerations. The Miao-Yao, particularly the Hmong, are by nature what the Lao understand by Lao Soung, Mountain Top. Various attempts, including their opium production to prohibit the Hmong and the French-colonial and later the national rule on the subject matter, lead to new uprisings, such as that of 1918, 1922, 1957 and 1967 (Lemoine 1972). Up until today there are still violent conflicts between the groupings of Lao Hmong and the state that is perceived as a latent threat for the consolidation process of Lao national state (Postert 2004, 50-51, Postert 2003, 1).

Today the Hmong is dispersed around the world. Their distribution and dispersion increased during the Indochinese wars. After the Pathet Lao took power, numerous Hmong took refuge in Thailand, and others entered French Guyana, Canada, Australia and Argentina. In the last few years, refugees in Thailand have returned to Laos. The number of Hmong in Laos varies from 205,000 to 260,000 and it represents the third largest ethnic group in the country with four to five percent of the total population. There are 84,000 to 124,000 Hmong living in Thailand, 411,000 to 1,150,000 in Vietnam and between 5,031,000 and 7,350,000 in China. 100,000 Hmong live in the USA and approximately 10,000 live in France (Culas in Postert 2004, 50, 51).

However, in Laos, there is a distinction between the White Hmong, *hmoob dawb* (seventy percent of all Hmong living in Laos and Thailand) and the Green Hmong, *hmoob ntsuab* (thirty percent of all Hmong living in this area). They are the two largest Miao minorities in Laos (Bertrais, 1978, [1]2). Postert conducted his fieldwork among the White Hmong. They are distinguished by their dialect and slight variation in dress, traditions, handicraft and house arrangements. The social structure of the Hmong is densely organized through the existence of a dozen exogamous patrilines, and the religious life of the group is driven by elaborate death and ancestor rituals. They live the mountains in small villages of 30 to 60 households. Village location is determined by elders according to the slash and burn territory and the presence of water. Favourable climate enables them to act as shifting cultivators and opium producers. The mountainous areas offer large forested and calcareous territories suitable for swidden farming (Postert 2004, 51-52).

### 2.1.1 Value ideas

There are two basic constituents which govern Hmong society, *pa* and *hmoov*. The relations between the two concepts depend on the context, which defines the hierarchy of the constituents, whereby the dominance of the tone value idea rests on the subordination of the other.

One of the fundamental value ideas of Hmong society is the concept of breath/steam, *pa*, which is essential for the person's physical existence. Its origin is in the soil: different parts of the country differ in the context of their *pa*. The amount of *pa* decreases from south to north, whereby in the south one can find dense growth, warmth, the delicious taste of earth and people with darker skin (Postert 2004, 25). This constituent is supported with the collection of crops by the households. The offering to the spirit of the village called *dab thwv tim* enables the transformation of the non-social *pa* of the soil into the *pa* of the food which is possible to consume (Postert 2004, 53). The digestive process is understood as a transformation. The quantity of *pa* which dies in the stomach is attributed to the man and is called the *pa* of the blood (Postert 2003, 27). It enables a man to breath, grow and to reproduce.

The body prevents the loss of *pa* in the blood. In the language of Hmong there is no expression for their own health, but only of to have fat and to have blood *muaj roj muaj ntshav* (Postert 2004, 54).

Consequently the hunger of wild spirits is directed mainly to the blood of the people. As the wild spirits gain access to the blood they that nose out the *pa*. If a man loses his *pa* his life is seriously endangered: the body becomes cold and it dies. The reproductive life *siav* of a human breathing and his *pa* appear to be closely intertwined. Living and breathing is one and the same thing (Postert 2003, 29). This constituent is presented as a thread, as a relationship in the context of the person's life. If this relationship is missing or the thread breaks, the person is missing the life *siav*, thereby the person is sick, incomplete and dies. People of different clans and of ethnic groups, kinship groups, men and women, all have the same life, the same *pa*. Even the *pa* of humans, animals and plants does not qualitatively differ: the differences arise only on the quantitative level (Postert 2003, 28). *Pa* is the attribute of the collective groups, and by extension that of individuals in the sense of socially undifferentiating between individual *pa*.

Name/prestige, *hmoov* in the ideology of the Hmong is crucial for the social existence of people. The meaning of the concept was summarized by numerous scholars (see Postert 2003, 30) such as Lemoine (1972), Mottin (1982), Bernatzik (1984) and Bertrais (1979) as luck, mana, magnetism, faith and respect, power, moral attitude, image, famous, etc. Namely, the translation of the concept presents itself as relatively difficult. For this reason more open terms are used. Firstly, the obvious notion of name, such as the name of an ancestor, is of central importance in the relationships of a Hmong in the context of his *hmoov*. The second is the notion of prestige (Postert 2003, 43). Three days after birth Hmong give a name *lub npe* or *meej* to a child. This is crucial for the fate of this person. The son will carry the name of a stranger or a patriancestor with the assumption that the name will carry all of the properties attributed to that person. Namely, the name must be attributed with a certain degree of *hmoov*. It is important for the naming of a son of a high degree of social differentiation (Postert 2003, 31). The Hmong will usually prefer a name which no other descendant of the descent group has. This implies the constitution of a relationship between the child and the ancestor or the foreigner. However, it is not the name itself to which *hmoov* can be attributed, but rather to the fact that the elders of the descent group in the ritual of naming bless the child with *hmoov*. On the other hand, the naming of a daughter does not mean giving her an ancestral name. At birth, a daughter's relationship to the ancestral house is not designated according to *hmoov*. It is when she marries that she changes her descent group.



The most visible expression of *hmoov* in a person is specific inheritance *qub txeeq qub tes*, a value received from the ancestors (Postert 2003, 32). These objects must be kept to maintain *hmoov*. They embody a continued relationship with the ancestors. Of particular importance is the traditional silver jewellery of the Hmong. The ancestors give *hmoov* to the descendants *hmoov pub*, where the verb *pub* expresses a strongly hierarchical relationship between “wife giver” and “wife taker” and indicates the lack of reciprocity (Postert 2003, 33). The ultimate origin of *hmoov* of a descent group is always the patriancestors. The inheritance is usually hidden. For example, a certain threshold can only be overstepped in specific ritual contexts and used against strangers. Namely, in the context of *hmoov*, the relationships are characterized by competition (Postert 2003, 38). Existing differences between two people in the context of their *hmoov* must be denied: otherwise mutual antagonisms will be provoked. Competition for *hmoov* means not all men can equally compete for relations to which most *hmoov* is attributed (Postert 2003, 40). It is assumed that the name and a man cannot match. Consequently, through the re-naming ritual a person receives a new name. To find a name that fits a person and has a lot of *hmoov*, means that the success and richness do not come automatically. With only personal effort and without *hmoov* a man can not succeed; correspondently, a man can also not succeed with only *hmoov* and without personal effort. A person has success, *hmoov* only if maintaining relationship with ancestors. Without this relation the person is no longer complete *txhij* or whole *txhu*: the person gets ill and dies (Mottin in Postert 2003, 41). A man is never in unlimited possession of his name and so in this aspect he is autonomous as a person. When he dies, he loses the right to his name and the right to this aspect of the person. However, the name, unlike its carrier, is permanent: people die while names of ancestors keep constituting the patrilinear group.

“Who is man, who liked money, does not want to be poor. Who is man, who liked to be alive, does not want to die.” (in Postert 2003, 42). The proverb stresses great importance of both concepts. Respiratory/steam and name/prestige win their value and validity in various contexts in which they dominate. At a more basic level, life *siav* is the necessary condition for human beings to be able to exist. However, the living alone is not sufficient in order to constitute a human being. Besides the reproductive life, the person is attributed with properties entailed in *hmoov*, which is described as an individual appropriation, competitive, even aggressive activity. Only both relationships constitute a man as a social person (Postert 2003, 44).

### 2.1.2 The Beginning

The origin myths speak about the beginning of all time and about the formation of cosmological and social domain and their relations. The Sky *ntuj* is regarded as the origin of all distinctions (Postert 2003, 13). However, Postert (2003, 14–17) emphasizes two different meanings of the notion of Sky used in myths. First, *ntsuj* is regarded as a cosmological creator, as an integral moral authority, whose existence is felt to be necessary. Second, the Sky occurs as an object of creation as in the act of creation of Heaven and Earth, separated by *teb*. However, the cosmographic regions remain through their emergence from the Unity, which ideologically and logically precedes them, complement to each other. In this case, the Unity is the Sky as the Spirit of Heaven Spirit of Earth, *dab dab ntuj teb*. In the former case, the Sky represents the original Unity, which arose from the act of distinction and stands before the Earth. Whatever interpretation we choose, the cosmic Unity was a precondition for the existence of life. Postert (2003, 19) describes the adoption of a primordial Unity as “an Archimedian point of reference of the cosmos, as its ideological foundation”. Namely, from the primordial unity, the entire cosmos was created. And when at one moment in time the Unity separated, the emerged entities can only be grasped through their relations of exchange and dependence.

## 2.2 COSMOLOGICAL DOMAIN

For Hmong, the past of the World is based on the exclusion of people from the cosmic order. The original undifferentiated and permanent Unity was split into two poles: *yeeb ceeb*, an invisible world of spiritual beings, designated also as a Land of dragons, and *yaj ceeb*, the visible world of humans (Tapp 1989b, 59). The frog, *Nblong Li* was killed by the first humans in a rage because he had lied to them about the size of the world. The dying curse of the frog was death and sickness and the separation to the world of humans and to that of spiritual beings. The world of the eternal darkness, *yeeb ceeb* is regarded as being localized under *nyob hauv qab* the world of *yaj ceeb* (Postert 2003, 19). A complete mix of these two worlds is not possible. If a wild spirit *dab* dies, it only converts to *dab*; if a man dies, it converts only to a human. The continuous flow of the Impermanent of the “wild” remains closed and forever and can not be compared with the

Impermanent which exists in the human world. A wild spirit rises from the death directly as a wild spirit. In *yaj ceeb* however, a deceased goes to the Spirit of the Dead *dab tuag*, leaves the social world and goes into the world of *yeeb ceeb* from which it can only return if proper rituals have been executed for the reincarnation (Postert 2003, 20). Another distinguishing feature between the two poles is the people in their sociality remain visible to the spirits, while people can no longer see the spirits, *dab*. What is more, the wild spirits can enter the social world and search among the living animals and humans for food. The protection against wild spirits is achieved by obtaining a good relationship with tame spirits, *dab nyeg*, which are mainly the house spirits *dab tsev*. Postert (2003, 22) finds the distinction between "tame" and "wild" similar to the one between raw and cooked. Namely, a house spirit - the same as a man - eats only boiled blood and meat, while a wild spirit eats raw blood and meat. Outside the house, there are the family's cultivated fields. Beyond and between the fields is the wild world of uncultivated forest, where the *dab quis* may dwell. According to Tapp (1989, 64), at the meeting of the Otherworld and the world of mortals there is water crossed by a bridge, where the souls meet the spirits and bargain with each other.

The unity of the house spirits is a coordinated social structure of the diversity of house spirits - the spirit of the house fire, the ancestors of the pillar of the house, the crossbeam, the spirit of the spouses, the (spirit of) four sides and many ancestors - to which offerings are made in order for them to protect the house (Postert 2003, 22). The offering to the spirits, *laig dab* is a ritual, which is repeated in various ritual occasions and contexts of the ritual cycle of the person again and again with slightly modified basic scheme, sometimes even several times. The first step is usually aimed at the patriancestors of the household, the second to the collective spirits of the house *dab tsev*, and the final to the spirit of the place *dab thwv tim* (Postert 2003, 164). Thus, the house, *lub tsev* as a community of living and the dead transcends the distinction *yaj ceeb* – *yeeb ceeb*, while the world of wild spirits is strictly separated from the world of humans (Postert 2003, 156). The connection of social and cosmic order can therefore never be a union of Heaven and Earth in the original Unity. The house spirits are to be regarded as an ensemble, which can only be understood in its entirety: “only the house as whole gives meaning to its parts in the relational structure of relations between the social and cosmological order” (Postert 2003, 158-159).

If the house spirits can no longer protect the social community of the house, the ritual integrity of the house as a social entity is endangered. The house is understood as the centre of relations, which secure the temporal existence of members as social beings. Most obvious expression of this is the necessity of a geomantic centre of the house which provides the members with the vital connection to the origin of their constituents (Morechand in Postert 2003, 158). If the constituents are removed, the person is not complete and may die. Only a shaman with ritual intervention can make a person whole again. The fragility of these relationships requires taboos within the house, *lub tsev mas qhov caiv*, which maintain the strict separation of the “domestic” from the “wild”. What Postert (2003, 160-161) finds interesting is how do the elements of the cosmos behave in relation to the basic value ideas. The activities, which have to do with *hmoov*, play no role for the wild spirits. Typical for them are activities which are an expression of the non-socialized *pa*, such as the search for food. However, when a man dies and becomes an ancestor, to him *hmoov* is attributed.

The ancestor spirits of the male head of the household dwell in the pillars of the house. Each quarter of the house has its presiding deity to which various offerings must be made (Tapp 1989, 63). All ancestors are present at the offerings. However, the ones who play an important role for the fate of the descent group are the ancestors of the last generations which are named (Postert 2003, 161). Making offerings is conceptualized as offering to the names of the ancestors. The names of the descendants and ancestors in the context of their *hmoov* create close relationships, where the dead bless the living with good *hmoov*.

### **2.3 SOCIAL DOMAIN**

Hmong village, *zog* is a settlement of younger and older brothers of the family of different clans. Clan, *xeem* is a social group whose members share a common surname, rituals and myths (Postert 2003, 113). The clan as a whole is a dispersed group: however, each local representative acts as a whole clan (Geddes 1976, 64). The clan is a spiritual community consisting of a broader policy regardless of genealogical and geographical distance, and members within a clan owe much to mutual solidarity. All members within a clan relate to each other as *kwv tij*, younger and older brothers who are distinct from biological siblings which come from the same womb, *kwv tij ib plab*

*yug* (Postert 2003, 118). The deity Saub advised the brother and sister who had survived the flood in a vessel of wood to marry in order to repopulate the earth. According to the myth (Postert 2003, 115), all clans emerged from the union of this couple. The woman gave birth which produced twelve children which represent the twelve Hmong clans. The fertility as a life principle is absent of antagonisms. However, the relationship between brothers implied in the myth is the one of a latent antagonism in the context of their *hmoov*. Relations between clans are therefore constituted in the context of their *hmoov*. What is more, all various social units differ in the context of their prestige: ethnic groups, clans within an ethnic group, even various households within a lineage (Postert 2003, 16). From this fact arises the imperative of clan exogamy. The Hmong dispose of negative selection of marriage partners, and the breaking of the incest taboo would offend the house spirits. This ambivalent relationship of prestige and fertility leads calls for periodic operationalization of these relations in various hierarchical ritual contexts (Postert 2003, 118).

Further differentiation of Hmong groups is a sub-clan history defined as spiritual community, which shares a common mythology and ritual practices and does not possess its own name (Postert 2003, 121). Sub-clans are usually named after an important member without any special function, given all the issues to reach a consensus principle is decided (Geddes 1976, 65). Another Hmong groups to mention are ritual communities. There are not determined by a genealogical relationship. They are more flexible than clans and the membership is flowing. There are also groups formed within a clan, which constitute themselves as communities through the operationalization of their joint relationship to the cosmos through rituals. The legitimacy of these groups does not just follow established genealogies, but are ritually re-established (Postert 2003, 128). The constitution of Hmong society in the context of its prestige has been in the foreground of the discussion so far. It results in the ongoing differentiation between various social units as well as the cohesion of the society. However, the need for reproduction in the society opens a context of fertility and introduces the affinal and marriage relations. Along these relations flows the reproductive life which enables their existence and the periodic renewal of the society.

### 2.3.1 The House as Relationships

The group of older and younger brothers, the roots and branches is another form of ritual community (Postert 2003, 123). Postert (2003, 151) defines it as the smallest ritual unit, often equivalent to the residents of a house. The older and younger brothers living together are called *ib tsev neeg*, people of a house, or even *ib tus dab qhuas*, the people who worship the same *dab* of the House: a married couple, their unmarried children as well as the already married son until a few years after the marriage (Geddes 1976, 86). The practice of patrivirilocal residence allows the continuation of the lineage development (Lee 1985, 7). The genealogy provides a certainty about the common ancestor in order to unite the members by the same ritual acts through rituals which constitute a person. All members of this group operationalize their relationship to the cosmos in the same way. This is the case for the members described above, within a ritual community for the clan, or for the entire ethnic group only in the decreasing degree.

The oldest living member is usually the spiritual head of the group and is considered a *tus coj dab*, the one who carries ancestors (Bertrais 1979, 21, Lee 1996, 2). His genealogical knowledge and knowledge of the conduct and timing of the rituals is of primary importance in order to perform the offerings to the ancestors, *laig dab* in life-cycle rituals. Only with the exact same performance of rituals in different households is the ritual unity of the group maintained and the invocation of a higher number of identified ancestors ensured. During the custom feeding of the ancestral spirits, *laig dab*, the male head of the household very slowly ladles a spoonful of rice and pork into a heap in the center of the table, before the altar of the *dab xwm kab*, or onto the eating place where no table is used. As he does so, he invites the spirits of his immediate ancestors to come and share in the feast, and to protect him and his family against the spirits of accident and disease. The household head is seated alone, while the rest of the family may carry on their household business as usual. This ritual is performed as soon as the first rice is cut, or when the first maize is harvested, and by some clans as soon as the first of a particular kind of gourd, *dib* has been reaped, and again on the last day of the old year, before the New Year celebrations begin. When it is over the family will sit down to eat, together with their close clan and affinal relatives from the village who must be invited as each household performs its *laig dab* (Postert 2004, 126).

Of particular importance is the ratio between younger and older brothers in a descent group. It is assumed that the younger brother respects and follows the instructions of the older brother, while the older brother is expected to sponsor and advise his younger brother (Postert 2003, 151). Mutual assistance is taking place in order to exchange forces, *sib pauv* (Postert 2003, 124). The rice fields are jointly managed by all household members. This activity is seen as collective and it serves for the reproduction of the social and cosmic order, while opium production of nuclear families is marked with competitive antagonism (Postert 2003, 155). At the same time, independent from the residence, there are certain taboos related to the older and younger brothers. Levirate is not allowed and the violation is censured by ancestral sanctions.

### **2.3.2 Social Roles of Women and Men**

In the group of younger and older brothers, men and women take on very different roles: it is only the men who take part in patri rituals, while women play no role in these rites. The mothers' role is first to breast-feed her babies and later on to teach her daughters womanly behaviour and tasks related to household chores and farming activities. A father on the other hand must primarily teach his sons the responsibilities in the sphere of agriculture, socialising and religion (Lee 1994, 45-47). At the level of social structure concerned with the concept of wife taker and the wife giver, a relationship between father and son is - compared to a root, while the relationship with a daughter is associated with blood, as previously - mentioned (Symonds 1991, 48).

“The role expectations of sons and daughters are symbolised by the places where their placentas are buried at birth” (Lee 1985, 2). A boy's placenta is usually buried beneath the central pillar of the house. The central post holds the house structure as well as the household spirits and religious symbols, and the role of the male descendant is to bear the household's ritual responsibility. The decisions concerning the household and the lineage are made by the male head of the family and the male relatives who represent him in his absence or after his death. This points to a highly valued social system with father-right as the norm. Therefore, the young married man lives in the house of his father or any senior male relative who has paid for the wedding. In this manner the young man repays their services and then expresses the need to incorporate the wife into her husband's parental household and the compliance of the kin group to help the young couple in their marital responsibilities. A girl's placenta is disposed of under the bedroom floor since this is the most convenient place when a woman

gives birth at home. The place of a girl in her natal family is only temporary. According to Lee (1985, 3), daughters are referred to as ``other people's women``. Through the rites of marriage, she is adopted into her husband's spiritual domain and no longer belongs to her parents' lineage. Should she be divorced or widowed, she can return to her consanguineous relatives but must live separately as only people with the same ritual system can inhabit the same house: she must seek remarriage in order to avoid becoming a ``lost soul`` and to have a proper place in the afterlife, unless she already has a son in whose lineage she is included as an ancestor (Lee 1985, 2 – 5).

## 2.4 THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HMONG PERSON

Which exchange relations within Hmong society are essential for the unity of social grouping units and cosmos and therefore for the ritual renewal? The individual is the smallest unit in which the constitution of these relationships can be pursued. Hmong myths contain ideas as to how a person is constructed and seems to nurse a common, socially undifferentiated origin in the context of regenerative life and subsequent social differentiation in the context of *hmoov*. The origin myth that discusses the emergence of the mythical person in the universal context of all ethnic groups, exemplifies the condition of the possibility of the existence of society as a whole and introduces the socio cosmological relations necessary to constitute a complete person (Postert 2003, 196). These relationships are based on the basic values of the Hmong.

The distinction between the Sky and the Earth was paralleled by a mythical origin pair, Nkauj as a woman and Nraug Lis Oo as a man, which arose in its physical, non-social aspects. However, the origin couple has neither the knowledge nor the ability to spread and multiply (Postert 2003, 197). Fertility and reproduction are linked to sociality. Lack of offspring is in such societies seen, as with the Hmong, as synonymous with the social death of the couple: how should they perform rites for the dead, who they revere as ancestors, when their descendants remain where they could reincarnate again? Thus the myth introduces the body, *cev*, as one of the major constituents of the person. What is more, it also shows the need to supplement this aspect of the person. The following part of the myth is now in the context of the relationship of man to woman and the question of obtaining reproductive life. Since the woman was created before the man it is possible to suspect in this context that the woman is hierarchically superior to the man (Postert 2003, 198).



As part of the analysis of this origin myth, the property of fertility of *sui generis* is attributed to the body. The reproductive aspect must be purchased. Therefore, a person must exchange relationships within which it acquires this constituent. As the myth shows, without the transfer of specific objects from the affinal relationship no reproduction takes place and the body-couple remains without offspring.

The context is now expanded, constituting the relationship between older brother to a younger brother, the question of authority between the two, the naming by Saub and the question of domination. Saub, also known as the big name *ta men* is identified as the source of all *hmoov* (Postert 2003, 199). *Hmoov* is the essential constituent for the cohesion of body and life of a person and is in hierarchical relationship of dependence with Saub. The name given by Saub is constructed as a hierarchical relationship. Other features of this expanded context of *hmoov* that fall into the brother relationship find their important role as a model for the ethno-genesis. The primacy of the elder brother, who by virtue of his *hmoov* reigns the Sky, makes him closer to Saub and thus closer to the spiritual power. This legitimizes the elder's domination, while for the younger the earth is reserved (Postert 2003, 200). The result is a pronounced hierarchy of social relations, which previously in the context of reproductive life between man and woman was not obvious (Postert 2003, 198–200). It is obvious that the qualities which are identified as aggressive or lively are only part of the relationship with which to maintain cosmic order. The universality of this relationship is symbolized in the need for ritual renewal as it will be presented shortly. What ideas are now expressed in the different modalities of the person in the context of their lives and their prestige?

Various aspects of the person, besides the body, manifest themselves in the ritual constitution of the person in the idiom of *plig* or *ntsuj*. Authors, such as Heimbach (1979), Bertrais (1979) and Lyman (1974) regarded these two idioms as synonyms and translated them as soul, spirit, psyche, integrating power, vital force and life force. *Plig* is a life defining constituent of the person. According to the Hmong, the body is maintained by *plig*, as the cords from the Sky on which the body hangs, connecting it with the Sky. If these are cut, the body gets weaker and the person is sick (Postert 2003, 201). The constituents of the person are independent of the values which they represent. The aspects of the person are considered according to a hierarchical relationship with the

origin. This is the condition for the possibility of their existence in human society. The person exists in all of its shares therefore not *sui generis*, but in a hierarchical relationship to the origin of these shares. *Plig* is not limited to persons, but is a constituent of relations, which shape the whole universe and are highly relational. The consequence is that the person's identity becomes dependent on the changing relationships in which the person is involved. There are different data on the number of *plig* in one person such as three *plig* (Heimbach 1979: 203, Mottin 1982, 5), five (Lemoine 1986, 344; Tapp 1989, 75), seven (Mottin 1982, 5), twelve (Lemoine 1992, 113-115) or thirty-two (Mottin 1982, 5). What is more important is to define which *plig* plays the prominent role in which ritual (Postert 2003, 200 – 201).

The presence of *plig* in one person is not naturally a part of the existence, but an expression of concern for the maintaining of relations with the ancestors (Postert 2003, 202). Failing this, the *plig* will leave the person and be reincarnated in another man, which leads to the death of the former. To prevent this, there are specific acts or ``Call of *plig*``, always performed for a newborn and often for a sick person, aimed at binding *plig* to the person and preventing his premature return into the cosmological domain. The silver necklets, *xauv*, worn by children and those who had been ill, have the aim of binding *plig* to the body. The diversity of relationships expresses itself in a variety of *plig*: the shadow *plig*, chicken *plig*, pork *plig*. The name of the person serves to bind all *plig* and the name of *plig* is used only to determine which *plig* to call. The Call of *plig* also includes some sacrifices to renew the socio-cosmological relationships and to receive all *plig* back. A person is constituted of a variety of *plig* as a composite of various constituents of the cosmos, which constantly threaten to disintegrate. The *plig* of the dead person circulate in new relationships in the exchange cycles of the cosmos. The individual is a composite product of relationships in which he presently finds himself (Postert 2003, 201–202).

The notion of liver *Siab* has a special significance assigned inside a person. Again, there are a number of translations (see Heimbach 1979, Bertrais. 1979, Lyman 1974). However, all of them regard *Siab* as a place of emotions. The notion of *Siab* is a fixed component in many idioms, which describe the emotional state of a person. Every person only has one liver, but the liver can have three basic qualities: a very good liver meaning the person is satisfied, peaceful and has loving interactions; a sleepy liver; and an angry (hot) liver which manifests itself in anti-social behaviour,

unilateral enrichment at the expense of others and violent antagonism (Postert 2003, 204). It is of high social value that in a community there are more people with good than with bad livers. At the same time, however, it must be emphasized that in the life of every human being three basic qualities must manifest themselves, if the person is to be successful. Longer-term mood changes such as irritability or fatigue that persist for several months have to do with presence of a wild ghost or point at the influence of the ancestors due to the neglect of exchange relations (Postert 2003, 202–204). The liver *Siab* is also identified as the seat of recent knowledge about the traditions. If all the Hmong had forgotten them, exchanging their societal relations in the relationship that the cosmos must perpetuate, the Hmong feel deeply in their livers how to correct this matter. Also, the orientation of the shaman during his trance travel is based on the feeling of the liver (Tapp 1989, 78).

Rituals can be understood as a communication between the social and cosmological domain. The ritual cycle of the person has been in the foreground of the second part of this study.

#### **2.4.1 Marriage**

The exchange of a bride creates a relationship of affinity. There is a strong antagonism between foreign descent groups, which arises from the value context of *hmoov* as competition and latent aggression. The marriage ceremony through the exchange of gifts establishes and underlines the affiliation of two lineages, encompassing relations among gods, the dead and the living.

The cycle of marriage rituals may be initiated if the agreement has been reached on both sides. It begins with the abduction of the bride by the wife taker, who manifests himself in the context of his *hmoov*. Namely, he appears as a stranger, who steals the young unmarried girl of the wife giver with violence. As the donor of silver or money to the wife giver he takes the opportunity from the wife giver to prevent abduction. At the arrival into the house of the groom, the bride must stay in the bedroom for three days. Her existence is regarded as particularly vulnerable, since she is no longer in the house of her father and because she does not belong to her husband. This represents a liminal phase as the wild ghosts want the new bride and the house spirits do not know her yet in order protect her. Her *plig* slowly follow from the wife giver and must be called in order to

maintain the vitality of the bride. The separation from her patrilineal ancestors and her previous descent group follows a rebirth, the ritual construction of the person in the house of the husband and the inclusion into the ritual community of the man. The Call of *plig* takes place without the presence of representatives of the wife giver and is also accompanied by the offering to the spirit *laig dab*. After this ritual she will become a full member of her husband's ritual community and enjoy the protection of the patrilineal ancestors and house spirits: the taboos are lifted and she may no longer participate in rituals in the house of her father, which is now considered affinal. Therefore, the transfer of the bride into the house of the wife taker is above all a transfer of the relations, which ties the bride to her own matrilineal ancestral ties and by consequence to the recipients of the bride's ancestors. Nevertheless, the marriage ritual cycle is completed when the exchange with the original owner of the wife's life is completed. The original owner of life in the birth ritual is the spirit of the father-mother and is embodied in the wife giver in the marriage ritual (Postert 2003, 228–235).

The exact date for the marriage is discussed on the second visit to the wife giver and the final decision is made by the father of the bride. This is the real main ritual and it lasts two days and is called the drinking of alcohol, *haus cawv*. On the first day there are silver negotiations for the price of the bride. On the second day, the price of the bride and dowry are passed, and the woman returns to the wife taker. In the house of the groom, the closest patrilineal relatives of the groom gather to visit the house of the bride (Bourotte 1943, 42). That morning in the bedroom, the bride dresses in clothes made by the mother of the groom and embroidered with money. Before the departure, elders of the descent group perform an offering to the spirits' *laig dab* to inform the ancestors that the son will be leaving the house in order to get married. After this ritual the amount for the bride price is collected. It includes the castrated animals, the silver bars and silver coins, and the killed pork and some chickens which will serve as food at the house of the woman donor. On the way to the home of the wife giver, offerings to the spirits must be made to protect the bride from the hunger of wild spirits because the ritual exchange has not yet been completed and she is not yet fully integrated into the house of her husband. Her identity is still incomplete, and she is therefore exposed to the ``Impermanent`` embodied in the wild spirits especially in areas far from the social sphere of the house. A group gathers to 'welcome' the wife taker in the house of the wife giver. The people who are present characterize the wife giver as not only the patriline (relations

with the ancestors), but also as matrilinear relations with a former wife donor. These people serve as a link in a chain of affinal relations, along which women incorporated into the life of the house will be exchanged. What follows is the exchange of the bride price and the dowry (Postert 2003, 235-241).

In the analysis of the marriage ritual the gifts of silver neck rings, on one hand, and of silver ingots and castrated animals on the other are of particular interest. Special values are ascribed to these gifts. For the wife giver the presence of prestige is a necessary prerequisite for the connection of body and life. For the prestige, the wife giver exchanges items that are identical (an umbrella, coin-embroidered dresses and silver neck rings engraved with his name) and non-identical items (an umbrella and turban band, with coin-embroidered dresses and silver and neck-rings engraved with the bride's name and pumpkin blossoms). The dowry includes the ``Impermanent`` and is considered as autochthonous objects, which remain owned by the wife and passed on matrilinearly. These gifts represent the unification of relations that also make the wife taker whole. The exchange of dead animals as the embodiment of non-regenerative life for live animals provides a wife taker with a temporary possibility of regenerative life. Postert speaks here of cosmological marriages, which make what was split at the very beginning of all time temporarily whole again (2003, 253). The exchange of gifts in the marriage ritual constructs different part-whole relationships between the wife giver and the wife taker, which in different contexts relate to their differences in origin. The Hmong affinal exchanges can in all contexts be identified as general antisogamy. On the whole, marriage expresses a close and inseparable context in which the acquisition of *hmoov* and fertility take place (Postert 2003, 242–251).

For the rebirth of the bride, clothes are brought beforehand from the family of the bridegroom to the house of the bride. The bride put these clothes on at night and goes the next day into the house of her future husband accompanied by a mouth organ player and women's organization (Bourotte 1943, 44). As soon as she separates from her initial descent group she leaves the spiritual world and will be constituted into the descent group of her husband through cosmological relations. The separation is a potentially deadly event, since it is only in relation to this prestige that she can embody the presence of life. Consequently, she must be equipped with the prestige of the wife taker's ancestors in advance to be able to perform the transition into the house of the bridegroom

as a complete person. As the old social identity of the woman passes, she receives a new one through the clothes belonging to the ancestors of the house of the groom. The marriage ritual concludes at the home of wife taker where the gifts of the wife giver find their first use. Finally, the bride and groom are covered by the blessing formulas and their hands become tied through the presence of the descent group. In this manner, part-whole relationships are ritually constructed here, in which the wife taker provides the wife giver with prestige and the wife giver presents the wife taker with the gift of life (Postert 2003, 251–256).

#### 2.4.2 Birth

As the menstrual blood and semen come together in the uterus, the house of the child or the shirt *lub tsev me nyuam*, they form a fistful of foam *ib thooj npuas*, an amorphous mass, whose progressive growth is fuelled by the *pa* of the blood of the mother. The first and the second month of the pregnancy represent the coming of the shadow/image *plig* into the child. The emergence of visible social identity is therefore closely linked to the incarnation of the shadow/image *plig*. After approximately three months of pregnancy, the fistful of foam gains human traits. Consequently, the existence of the child does not disappear in the blood foam of the mother. The umbilical cord connects the child with the *pa* of the mother and is primarily of respiratory importance to the child (Postert 2003, 206–210).

The birth of a child must take place in the home of his father's ancestors. This is because the wild spirits have eternal hunger for *pa* and are attracted to the child at birth and to the raw blood. The child must in its social vulnerability be suspended from the permanent interest of the wild spirits and protected with ritual means. The birth ritual serves to establish relations between the child and its patrilinear ancestors in the framework in which *hmoov* is attributed to the child (Postert 2003, 211–212).

The birth ritual begins when one of the ritual elders of the descent group in the house of the family performs the offering to the spirits. First, there is an offering to the patrilinear ancestors inside the house at the assigned ancestral mountain side; secondly an offering is made to the house spirits and thirdly one is made to the village spirits. In the context of foreign and not socialized life, the house

presents itself in its external relations by continuing the ritual at the door of wealth. This represents the orientation towards the surrounding, alien cosmological environment to create a relationship and an exchange with the origin of life. The ancestors and the living members of the household represent a collective community which can only act in a united fashion. The relations of the house group are subordinated to the relations to the patrilinear ancestors because they renew the relations of the group in the context of their *hmoov* (Postert 2003, 217–218).

Calling the *plig*, *hu plig* is the ritual for summoning the *tus plig*, the soul or self, which is always performed for a newly born child and it takes place just inside the house, on the front porch (Tapp 1989, 67). At birth, the child has only human *plig*. If the child survives for three days after birth, the child is attributed pork, swine, cattle, water and buffalo *plig*. After this a prohibition is placed on the house for a period of one lunar month. The ritual may be performed by anybody who knows the appropriate words and formulae; in practice it is usually a man of some standing who may also be a shaman, although he does not have to be (Tapp 1989, 68). Usually, male ascendants are present and by offering to the spirits the ancestors they bless the child the *hmoov*. In the same ritual ancestors take the name and give it to the child and therefore provide the child with a social identity. Until this ritual the child is not a complete human being. The ritual specialist calls the *plig* by singing, which has the purpose of summoning the *plig*. The name is the owner of the *plig*. Without a name, a child cannot get socialized permanently in the framework of the house, but is in constant change and impermanency. Social relations between the child and the ancestors are relevant in this context. The name of a person represents cosmological relations from which the person gains his or her identity. The reincarnation of the deceased ancestor in the living being and the equality of names represent the reproduction of the prestige (Postert 2003, 219–221).

Offering to the spirit of the mother-father goes hand in hand with the calling of the *plig* and it takes place at the valley facing side of the house. The mother-father spirit is categorized as a non-social sphere and it stands in sharp contrast to the inner house exchange with the ancestors. The calling of the *plig* requires offering to the FM spirit because it is the original owner of the *plig* and it sends the *plig* into the house. These relations define the various categories of social life in terms of a cosmic order. In this case, the mother-father spirit is representative of the wife giver (Postert 2003, 221–224). That is to say, the maintenance of the society requires periodic rituals in order to

operationalise these relations in all the rituals of the cycle of the person, as already discussed in the marriage ritual.

In the last part of the ritual, male members of the descent group in descending order tie themselves with white cotton string to each wrist of the child, blessing the child with *plig*. The elders also bless the child with good *hmoov* and wish the *plig* to stay. This ritual section corresponds to the forging of relations between the descent group and non-social life which manifests itself inside the house in a regenerative form. If this is done, the delineation is established against the “Impermanent” bodily weakness and threat to social order, which is embodied in wild spirits. At the end of the ritual, a bowl is placed in front of the child with the offerings from all the parts of the birth ritual, which embody all constituents of the child as a social being: a cooked chicken and a rooster, a boiled egg and some rice, an incense stick as well as money gifts from the male members of the descent group (Postert 2003, 224–226).

Birth is an ambivalent situation meaning on one hand it requires the foreign, non-socialized prestige of the name provided by the child's father group; and the life and the body provided by mother's group, which establishes two relations: firstly, a relationship between the child and its mother group and secondly a relationship between a child and its father and his ancestors. In the context of pregnancy and birth, it is *pa*, valued for life and fertility that is recognized as a superior value in relation to *hmoov*, valued for name and reputation, which is suppressed by the former. The mutual protection of the value ideas in different contexts brings the mutual socialization of the constituents and the ritual perpetuation of society as a whole (Postert 2003, 228).

### **2.4.3 Death**

The cycle of death rituals is called the way of dying, *wedge ploj wedge* (Postert 2003, 267). Customs associated with the way of death have the aim to safely dispatch the soul of the dead to the otherworld “and its reincarnation as a member of the same clan” (Tapp 1989, 81). Full mortuary rituals are not performed for those who died violently or were killed evilly or for stillborn children; “they lack soul since they have not yet been called through the appropriate rituals” (Tapp 1989, 81). When a man dies, his *pa* also dies and starts to interfere with the “Impermanent.” The



first death ritual deals with the deconstruction of the person in the context of the person's life, which must temporarily subordinate the relationship of the person and the group in the context of its prestige (Postert 2003, 269). It is also prohibited to mention the name of the dead. In the second death ritual, in the context of its *hmoov*, releasing of the *plig* takes place, whereby the name of the dead is transferred into the pillar of the house, so that the dead can be proclaimed as a protective and powerful patrilinear ancestor. This enables its later reincarnation in the naming of the offspring in the birth ritual (Postert 2003, 31). After the ritual separation from the family, the dead can be transferred into the grave, where in the course of a year, *pa* of the dead goes to earth's *pa*. The cycle of the person's *pa*, the fundamental component of a person from birth till death, ends here. In addition, the last mortuary ritual *tso plig* is performed within a year after the death (Postert 2003, 263). The purpose of this ritual is to free the self of the deceased for rebirth.

The moment of death is called the cutting of life, *tu txoj siav*, and is announced with a salvo of shotguns by the closest male lineage relatives, in order to frighten away evil *dab* who may seek to attack the household. The salvo also serves to notify the village that death has taken place. The sons and male relatives invite neighbouring houses and a master of ceremonies. While waiting for all the deceased male kin and affinals to arrive, the body of the deceased is washed and dressed in special clothes of death. The family members now grieve loudly, especially the women of the house. A person must be found to sing the song of the opening of the way to the soul of the deceased, *tawv*. More shots announce the end of the preparation. Next, a variety of ritual experts will be appointed from among the village or surrounding villages. Very often these experts are younger men so that they can learn to perform the rites properly, while the exact procedure may constantly be discussed and advised by older men. Thus, the funeral is also an occasion for learning, and an occasion when kinship structure is ritually enacted. A funeral can only take place in the house of the same descent group as the deceased. Ideally the ritual officials come in pairs, as odd numbers are usually inauspicious and are simply practical as well. For the purpose of the funeral, sex-roles are reversed: women are excluded from most ritual proceedings and they are invited to be the first to eat on the day of the burial. Men on the other hand are in charge of serving the food and supplying water and wood to the house. Each guest will present some paper money to the master of ceremonies, as well as incense, spirit-paper, and some rice. Incense is frequently burned, at the feet and head of the corpse, both as an offering in the world of spirits and

to fumigate the stench of putrefaction. Most funerals last a minimum of three days but ideally go on for twelve. The more important the dead man, the longer his funeral will last. Each day of the funeral is based around the eating of the morning, noon, and evening meals. Before each meal the pipes are played, a different song for each day, and the drum is beaten. Before the burrial, all the of the dead man's debts must be paid off through a highly ritualized procedure since outstanding debts in this life will be carried over into the next, and may result in misfortune to the descendants (Tapp 1989, 81–84).

The opening of the way to the soul of the deceased, *tawv* guides the reincarnating self back to the village of his ancestors where he will dwell before being reincarnated (Tapp 1989, 81). The poem contains the long historical journey of the Hmong to the North of China. It describes the creation of the world and of the first couple, as well as the deluge and the first drought and it represents a historical journey backwards through time to the origins of humanity, to which the deceased must return before being reborn. On the way he must pick up his and her coat-placenta to wear during this journey. If the placenta holds the life of the person in a hierarchical relationship, it means the unification of the dead with his placenta to return to the origin of his life. In this context, the relationship is relevant to the wife giver's descent group: the placenta of the child remains in the possession of the wife giver, thus this person may be assigned the special responsibility and authority for these elements. For the Hmong, there are always the ancestors who make life possible in a process of continued cyclical renewal (Postert 2003, 274). After the song of expiring life, the corpse, dressed in the special death clothes, is ceremonially raised onto a bier elevated against the perpendicular wall of the altar, where it will remain until the day of the burial. Before each meal, the corpse is ceremonially offered food by the new household head as the pipes and drum are played (Tapp 1989, 81–85). The role of the feedings is to temporarily preserve the dead man's components until the death ritual is complete and consequently, to protect the living of the house (Postert 2003, 277).

After the morning meal on the day of the burial, the corpse is carried outside onto the mountain side of the house. As the final song of the mountain way is played on the pipes, the corpse is laid upon a stretcher. In the funeral procession, a young girl bears "a burning brand to light the way for the deceased, who will cast it down and return before the first stop, where the piper will stop

playing” (Tapp 1989, 85). The procession may stop several times; it may even start off in one direction and then reverse towards the west (the direction of death to confuse the wild spirits. Death attracts all kinds of evil influences, so many ruses and subterfuges are employed to avert these and to ensure that the souls of all those in the procession stay with the people and do not follow the deceased into the world of darkness. While the corpse is laid in the coffin, the final prayer directs the soul of the deceased on its way. On the first, second and third day of the burial, various purification and cleansing rituals are performed by the relatives by the deceased (Tapp 1989, 85).

Thirteen days after death (one Hmong week), a special ritual *xi-plig* must be performed by the immediate family of the deceased to invite the soul of the deceased back to the house before finally sending it back to the grave and to alleviate the long agony of this self which must remain beside the grave (Tapp 1989, 86–87). Namely, it is not the self which will be reborn which is invited, but the self which stays with the body in its grave at death, associated with its bones, and may become a ghost or evil if not properly appeased and told not to return during this ritual. This stems from the belief that the self is composed of three parts, one of which, at death, undertakes the long journey towards rebirth, one of which remains at the gravesite, and one of which mounts to Heaven to become a protective ancestor. Nevertheless, the Hmong do not give such clear-cut explanations. According to the shamanic tradition, there are three main selves, although these may be divided into five. However, the shadow *plig* seems the most likely contender for the self which remains at the grave (Tapp 1989, 87).

## **2.5 THE HMONG MEDICAL SYSTEM**

How is illness undone? The whole discussion aimed to lead to the healing rituals, commenced with two key value ideas of Hmong. The first was *pa*, associated with not only human attributes. It is accumulated in the relation to the environment through the agricultural rituals and to the wife giver through the marriage rituals. In the language of the Hmong there is no expression for their own health, but only to have grease, to have blood, *muaj Roj muaj ntshav*. On previous pages, the hunger of wild spirits for *pa* was already mentioned. The hunger is therefore directed to the blood

of people which is evident in little children and in the case of accidents. When the spirits bite people or when people are tangled in a bloody accident, they gain access to the blood and the person's life is endangered. On the other hand, *hmoov* is a value idea which is confirmed through the social identity and is associated only with humans. *Hmoov* is the effect of relations between the descent group and the patriancestors. There is a widespread phenomenon of name changing in case of illness. The purpose of the changing of a name is a renewal of the relationship, as the health of a person can only be maintained within the integrity of all aspects of a person (Postert 2003, 30-31).

The maintaining of the constituents in the network of exchange relations between the living, the dead and the spirits, can also be perceived as prevention and constitution of the Hmong person, a healthy person. The constant flow of the exchange between the person and the wife giver, the ancestors, the village spirits, is first ensured through the rituals of the life cycle and secondly through the yearly ritual cycle of each descent group. Namely, the ritual of birth, marriage and death establish and transform these and constitute the person in his vitality and social existence. Not carrying out this obligation of material and immaterial exchange in the proper way represents a threat of losing the constituents of a person which are the condition of life. Every death or sickness can be a result of the lack of the ritual exchange or incorrect proceedings of these rituals (Postert 2004, 56).

If sickness occurs in spite of the preventive measures, there are four categories of sickness according to Postert's informants (2004, 61-68). The first are caused by wild spirits, *mob dab*, or missing support of the ancestors, *dab txwv zeej txwv koob*. Healing is possible through shamanism, *neeb loj*, and the rituals of magic, *khawv koob loj*. It is important to stress that the Hmong do not perform rites for the wild spirits. The second category of sickness is the wandering *plig*, whereby the shaman detects where the *plig* in order to heal it, followed by the calling of *plig* which must be performed. Next, in case of injuries caused by external violence and all types of accidents in the mountainous Laos, the little magic is employed in case of bleeding, while fractures may be treated by employing green medicine. The final sicknesses are body sicknesses, *phav nyav*, which are presented to the Hmong through radio, medical stations and so on and are treated with chemical substances.

These four different disease categories are in real life situations not clearly separable and it is often felt they should be treated simultaneously. This fact is clearly presented by cases of spirit diseases which predispose the sick person to accidents or loss of a *plig*: run away *plig* may encounter a wild spirit or leave a person so weakened that insects attack the body. In an accident a *plig* may run away or the blood may attract the wild spirits. None of the levels seems to be the primary inducer nor hierarchically superior to other levels. At all levels there are diseases that are potentially life-threatening (Postert 2004, 68-69). The treating of diseases is deeply embedded into the complex cosmology of the Hmong.

Postert discovered close link between the construction of identity and the production of health in self-understanding of Hmong society. Inclusion into the society of Hmong is synonymous with healing, and preventive measures should be against accident or illness. Identity or health of Hmong is not in itself given, both are created through relationships. According to Postert's experience, the inclusion of exchange relationships in various cosmological beings could heal him through the incorporation into the kinship group. A relational concept of the person enables the healing of a person through the incorporation of individuals into a kinship group (Postert 2004, 73-74).

### **2.5.1 Diagnostic Systems**

Given the above established complexity of the individual disease categories and the possibility of their mutual connectedness, the search for the causes of the disease and evaluation of relative seriousness of the sufferers is of particular importance.

One of the simplest divination methods is *xuas txoj leeg*, the telling of time or counting of the hand. This method gives the information on the likely course of sickness as well as information on the seriousness of the patient state during the days of the disease. It is important to establish the first day of the moon month when the disease started. The first day is set according to the new moon. Days right after the new moon are considered favorable for health and fertility. Other means of divination to determine the cause of illness is consulting the pulses, *xuas txoj leeg*. In principle every person can learn this method, but in fact it is often only used by some shamans. These take the left or right hand of the patient, feel the veins groping and assess status and history while the

visual result of the veins is of secondary importance. Similar to the counting of the hand, abnormalities arise: the radial body side of the wrist indicates more positive signs when the person is sick, and alarming conjectures can be made when positive signs emanate out from the body directed side. The major differing arteries follow from radial to ulnar. The condition of the arteries is taken as a sign of the nature of the patient's relationship to various cosmological natures (Postert 2004, 75-78).

The throwing of the horns, *ntaus kuam* is a method used by shamans. The two horns are cut from the original horn and represent its two sides, which stand for the separate worlds of spirits and the people. If these horn halves are thrown to the ground by the shamans, a range of possible combinations and permutations become possible. Through the mediation of the auxiliary spirits of the shaman, the man apparently becomes what he with his own eyes could not see otherwise. It is possible to draw conclusions on the relationship between the world of spirits and the world of humans for each case. Although individual interpretations may vary, more exact positions in which the horns fall may be used to determine whether, for example, a malady is the result of an escaped soul or an ancestral soul in difficulties in the otherworld, and whether *ua neeb* or *ua dab* will be the most appropriate remedy (Postert 2004, 80-83; Tapp 1989, 71).

### **2.5.2 Therapeutic Systems**

Diseases and therapeutic systems are assigned to each other in so far as the variety of possible categories of disease in diversity reflects the appropriate therapeutic procedures (Postert, 2004: 84). Hmong Shamanism was extensively studied by Mottin (1982), Lemoine (1987), and Morechand (1955, 1968). However, shamanism is often presented as a separate theoretical and practical healing system without it being embedding in the broader medical system. Postert (2004) and Tapp (1989) put it in the context of the medical system of the Hmong, as well as in the context of Hmong society as a whole. I will start by outlining the Hmong therapeutic system.

The Otherworld can among other means be contacted through magic and through medicine. The green medicine, *tshuaj ntsuab*, is regarded as a knowledge genuinely owned by the Hmong. The spirits of medicine, *dab tshuaj*, are usually propitiated by a woman, at a special hanging altar set up

to one side of the *dab xwm kab* altar. There are 'wild' herbs which grow in the forest and 'tame' herbs which may be planted secretly around the house or close to the village. Herbal experts carry an enormous knowledge about these plants and their effectiveness. If another person wishes to learn green medicine, the renewal of the ritual relationship with the spirit of medicine by the appropriate sacrifices is required. Now, the transfer of knowledge of the appropriate herbs and their formulations and applications is made. The "teacher" will collect different types of herbs and lay them on the floor before the altar in her own house, light incense, burn spirit paper, and chant propitiatory words before her spirits of medicine, before dividing the heap of herbs into two piles for herself and her niece. In this way the spirits of medicine are symbolically divided between the two women. Green medicine is often resorted to before the consultation with a shaman, or in the course of shamanic treatment (Tapp 1989, 65-66; Postert 2004, 84-87).

The Hmong have two expressions for magic which can be used as synonyms: to make magic, *ua khawv*, or to make the spirit of magic, *dab khawv koob*. Unlike the green medicine, the origin of magic is Chinese and some of Postert's informants claim it resulted after the mythical times. In addition, the language of the magic rites is usually Chinese. The smaller (healing) magic, *khawv koob me*, differs from the great (healing) magic, *khawv koob loj*, so that the formulae and ritual spells of the former are comparatively lower in price, last only a few minutes and their efficacy is limited to rather less severe problem situations. The Hmong great magic is the ritual of affliction, directed primarily directly against the risks associated with the wild spirits, mostly as exorcism of wild spirits which make people ill people in their hunger for *pa*. Men dominate in acquiring magic formulae, *zaj khawv oob*. A teacher may or may not be from one's own kinship group. The efficacy of a formula requires it to be condensed to a single sentence. The placement of such a magic formulae requires paying a fixed sum. Magic acts mostly build on specific formulae for acquittal: correct recitation is of the utmost importance if they are to be fully effective. The recitation or the magic formulae is often accompanied by ritual actions or the making of ritual objects, which along with the formulae make a meaningful whole and good results. Regarding great magic, Postert (2004, 97) highlights the importance of individual *hmoov*. The therapeutic success depends greatly on the patient's *hmoov*, which in turn reflects the complex relationship of his kinship group to the ancestors, the house of the spirits and the positioning of the house and the graves of his relatives in

the geomantic system. An abuse of magic in the application is sanctioned by the fact that the formula loses efficacy (Postert 2004, 81-98; Tapp 1989, 66).

However, the two most effective means of communicating with the Otherworld are *ua dab* and *ua neeb*, and I will deal with them each in turn. As Tapp (1989, 66) wrote: “Magic and medicine form part of the rhythm and tempo of everyday life. *Ua dab* and *ua neeb* create a rhythm and a tempo of their own: properly speaking, they take place outside time, in a changeless world.”

*Ua dab*, propitiating the ordinary spirits, is another means by which mortals may communicate with the supernatural world. *Ua dab* may be performed by any adult male, usually the head of a household. *Ua dab*, the work of the spirits, is for oneself: it consists of particular rituals which are performed for one's own benefit, or for the benefit of members of one's own household. The two oldest (Tapp 1989, 66-67) and most important for the present discussion are *hu plig* and *laig dab*.

After each harvest the custom of feeding the ancestral spirits, *laig dab* is performed by the head of the household. He invites the ancestral spirits to the feast and asks for protection for him and his family against disease and accidents. When he is done, the family, close clan and affinal relatives from the village join the feast (Tapp 1989, 67). At the New Year, a special *hu plig* ritual is performed by each household, when the selves of the inhabitants of the house, of their domestic animals and crops, *plig qoob plig loo* are summoned back to remain within the household, and all the farming tools and domestic utensils are ritually blessed (Tapp 1989, 68).

*Hu plig*, the ritual for calling or summoning *tus plig*, already discussed at birth ritual, is often performed for a sick person. Among all *plig* a person possesses, there is the chicken regarded as “playful, and likes to wander” (Tapp 1989, 67). It leaves the body during sleep to play with other *plig*. There are different difficulties such *plig* may encounter: they may wander too far and get lost, or they may suffer an accident, such as falling into the otherworld through a deep hole, and be unable to return to the body, or they may be ambushed and captured by *dab qus*. Special means must be employed to recall it to its owner, who will fall sick, and maybe even die unless it is recalled in time. The shaman travels to the Otherworld to bargain with the spirits who may have trapped such a *tus plig*. The silver necklets, *xauv* is usually prescribed after serious illness to bind



the *plig* more firmly to its *tsev*, house, or the human body, *cev*. In less serious cases a *hu plig* ritual is often resorted to, in cases of sickness or mental distress (Tapp 1989, 67). “*Hu plig* is often performed at the actual site, usually outside the house, where it is diagnosed that the *tus plig* of a patient has fallen, in which case the soul-caller will go to that site with a chicken and incense, spirit-money to burn, and a bottle of rice-wine, and squatting by the site will quietly summon the *tus plig* to return to its abode. He will take an insect back with him from the site which symbolises the returning *tus plig*. On other occasions the ritual is performed at the open door, where a chicken is released to search for the insect before it itself is sacrificed” (Tapp 1989, 68).

### 2.5.3 Shamanism

Postert (2004, 99) ascertains that shamanism is a part of Hmong myths which have to do with the Permanent and the Impermanent. The two lords of the Otherworld present the latter. Ntxwj Nyoog, residing at the top of a great mountain, guarding the gates which must be crossed before the souls of the dead can return to the village of their ancestors, judges the souls of those who are to be reincarnated after their death. *Nyuj Vaj Tuam Teem* issues licences for rebirth. Once one's licence for life has expired, the shaman can intervene for an extension of the license. The myth on the origins, *hauvpaus* of shamanism, describes how “at the dawn of time Ntxwj Nyoog was killing humans faster than they were being created” (Tapp 1989, 60). Consequently, Saub entrusted some of his healing powers to a mortal Siv Yis, who was thus enabled to cure illness and disease. The legacy of Siv Yis are his instruments which were picked up by different people who used them and so became shamans (Tapp 1989, 60).

Hmong shamanism is in effect a psychodrama of great subtlety and power. Its ultimate aim is medical: “to heal an afflicted person, whether that affliction be physical, mental or coincidental, and to restore to the patient a damaged part of their own self” (Tapp 1989, 79).

In Tapps' writings (1989) one can find three main kinds of Hmong shamanism, *ua neeb*. *Ua neeb muag dub*, the dark-faced shamanism, associated with a possessive trance, can only be learned from the *neeb* themselves. The shaman's head is covered with a dark hood and he possesses an inner vision which allows him to see deep into the Otherworld, where the self of his patient is

trapped (Tapp 1989, 71). *Ua neeb muag dawb*, the white-faced shamanism is not associated with any kind of trance and may be learned by anyone who wishes to form another shaman (Tapp 1989, 65). A typical ritual performed by a non-possessive shaman, *muag dawb*, is that of the protective ritual performed in the case of continued misfortune by the members of a household, which takes place in the house in daylight.

*... its climax involves a trussed dog being led and chased three times around the house, led by a child and followed by the sick patient, while the shaman himself leads the procession, chanting in a loud voice, his assistant behind him beating his gong, and with outstretched motions of his arm before him, creating what appear to be rings of fire thrown out into the air from a burning brand held by his other hand. In fact he is throwing handfuls of millet powder from a pouch concealed at his waist through the flames of the torch, which blaze fiercely as they travel through the air, creating the illusion of fire-throwing. At the end the dog is led out of the house and sacrificed by the young men of the house, so that the self of the dog may 'bar the way' of the malevolent spirits who have been attacking the household. The dog's head is buried beneath a gate set up at the entrance of the village to further bar the way, while the two front paws are hung up as a warning to spiritual intruders, to *quas dab*, or block the way of the spirits (Tapp 1989, 71).*

Both of these kinds of shamanism were originally taught by Siv Yis, the premier shaman. There is also a third kind of shamanism supposedly taught by him known as *ua txheeb*, a special form of divination of the future or the state of a sick person's soul through drawing lots among thirty-two bamboo lengths and a porcupine's quill.

Only the shaman may depart the Otherworld and return to this one without consequences. Shamanism is a specialized vocation, to which relatively few men and women are called - usually the relatively well-established males, often with a wife and family, by the election of shamanic auxiliary spirits (Tapp 1989, 72). The *neeb* spirits choose a particular person to become an agent for their healing of others and to battle constantly with Ntxwj Nyoog. *Neeb* include a great number of natural and supernatural forces and figures, but their origin is most likely in the ancestral spirits of the shaman. The calling often manifest itself initially in a serious illness for which no cure can be found, until another shaman in a healing ritual recognizes the true cause of the disease.

However, the future shaman must seek help from a Master Shaman, *Xib Hwm* in the proper handling of the *neeb*, the acquisition of the necessary paraphernalia of a shaman, and the building of a shrine in his own house, which symbolizes the heavenly home of Siv Yis. The ritual paraphernalia may also be acquired from a member of his own descent group, some of whose own *neeb* will come with their equipment. Shamanism is therefore hereditary to some extent, since that person must also have been a shaman to have such equipment. However, there is no contradiction between this and finding a Master outside one's own family. The price paid for training by a Master, in the case of a Master not being related to his acolyte, is fixed in silver rupees. According to Postert, however important the role of a shaman may be and regardless of the received payment (2004: 101) the called ones are usually not fond of the fact of becoming a shaman because it is hard work (Tapp 1989, 59-73; Postert 2004, 98-101).

*Ua neeb* must be practiced for the benefit of a sick person who has consulted him, or for whose benefit he has been consulted by somebody else, who should not be a member of his own family. Usually a member of the patient's own clan and preferably a member of the patient's own descent group is chosen to visit the shaman's house and consult him and ask for his intervention into the spirit world for him. The shaman will usually throw his divination horns upon the ground to arrive at a diagnosis, and to determine whether his auxiliary spirits, the *neeb*, are sufficiently strong to be able to deal with the situation. After three days it is possible to establish whether the patient shows any signs of improvement. If the sickness worsens, it is clear that the shaman's auxiliary spirits did not feel adequate to deal with the situation, and another shaman may be consulted. If the patient shows signs of improvement, the shaman's intervention has proved timely, and he will be invited to proceed to the diagnostic and healing services. If the diagnose does not indicate that the seriousness of state of the patient is enough for shamanism, a shaman may, if he is a practitioner of another form of healing, continue to the patient's house to use an alternative form of diagnosis, for example, to examine the pulses of the patient (Tapp 1989, 75).

If the divination horns and other means of divination do not suffice to determine the cause of the illness, the shaman will proceed to the first part of the session called *ua neeb saib*, to see. The diagnostic shamanic session as well as the healing one takes place in the house of the patient. For the *ua neeb saib*, the shaman will proceed to the house of the patient with his equipment, usually

carried by an assistant or the consulter. *Ua neeb saib* requires no sacrifice and can be performed at any time. Tapp (1989, 76-77) provides the following description of the healing:

*In the house a small altar will have been set up for him against the wall facing the ceremonial porch, with a long bench before it which will function as his steed. After throwing the horns, lighting spirit paper and burning three sticks of incense, the shaman, seated on the bench before the altar, with his face covered by the veil" ... "will begin to jerk and tremble" ... "the whole body of the shaman is steadily bounding up and down upon the bench, exactly as though he were a rider on a cantering horse, while the assistant stands behind him beating the gong, whose sounds mingle with those of the shaman's fingerbell and the rattle which he holds in his right hand. These sounds, the smell of the burning incense, and the rhythmic motions of his body, all aid the shaman to enter into the trance which overtakes him as his auxiliary spirits, the neeb, descend and accompany him on his journey into the otherworld in search of the afflicted self. This may continue for some two hours, or longer. On his return to the world of mortals the shaman will be exhausted" ... "the shaman will communicate his diagnosis.*

On its journey in the otherworld towards rebirth, if the ancestral spirit, for whom the appropriate post-mortuary ritual has not yet been performed has encountered difficulties or hunger, it is the task of the family to ensure that the appropriate rites are performed as soon as possible. In case the self of the patient has become entwined with a neighboring fetus, a special shamanic ritual to separate the two (*faib thiab*) will have to be performed. More usually, the wandering self has fallen into a pit or hole, and the shaman must proceed to the shamanic session proper, *ua neeb kho*, to heal the patient. The shaman's concern throughout, is with the health, rather than the illness, of the patient (Tapp 1989, 77).

The second part of the session is *ua neeb kho*, to heal. If the patient's health shows signs of improving, the shaman's proceeds into the Otherworld and - with the help of his auxiliary troops - bargains with, frightens off or persuades the *dab qus* who may have trapped the wandering *plig*. The shaman does so by descending into a hole or bottom of the ocean to retrieve it, or bargaining directly with Ntxwj Nug, for an extension of the patient's life on earth. The methods employed when dealing with the forces of the Otherworld are the following: to bargain for the patient's *plig*

with the *plig* of an animal. After his preliminary diagnosis, the shaman specifies whether a combination of pigs or chickens or both will have to be sacrificed behind the shaman's bench by the men of the house. Their *plig* may be substituted by the shaman for the *plig* of the afflicted person, or it may be used to bar the passage of the evil spirits to this world, as a kind of decoy. Usually spirit paper is burnt at the throat of the pig when it is sacrificed, and the shaman may address the self of the pig with a few words of exhortation as to its conduct in the Otherworld, where it may be exchanged or substituted for the afflicted human self. On rare occasions the shaman may even substitute his own *plig*, his own life-substance, for the self of the patient, in which case the shaman is said to have already died, but to have been restored again to life with a shortened life-span. The paper is burned as a means of sending money to the Otherworld to aid the stricken self, and often the back and clothes of the patient who during *ua neeb kho* is seated behind the shaman on a low stool, will be daubed with the blood of the sacrifice so that, it is said, the *dab* will recognize the patient. The shaman actually restores the balance of the psyche by first identifying, then retrieving, the absent or lost parts of the self. The healing session resembles the form of the diagnostic session, but its purpose is entirely different (Tapp 1989, 77-78).

There is a variety of different healing rituals for different circumstances. However, it is possible to define five main parts. First, the shaman enters into trance, and invokes his auxiliary helpers. Next, the procession of the shaman and all of his troops proceed to the house of the patient to search the lost self. Third, the shaman and his spiritual army hunt the lost self and rescue it. The procession returns with “the fugitive self, carried on the back of a female spirit just as Hmong women carry their children, back to its proper home” (Tapp 1989, 78). The final part is the return of the *neeb* to their altar, and the shaman's return to normal consciousness. Due to the intensity of this experience the shaman may remember very little of what has happened. According to Tapp (1989, 78), it is possible that they do not see in the Otherworld, but they feel for the afflicted self in their livers. At the end of the healing ceremony, when the patient starts to recover, there will be a great feast in the house. The shaman is invited as the guest of honor, and before returning to his house he will receive a tribute for his services: the head and a fore-leg of the animal (Tapp 1989, 78). In addition to the left parts of the sacrificed animals, it is also obligatory to present the shaman with an amount of money ranging from 30.000 to 40.000 Kip (Postert 2004, 101).

It is necessary to note that the implementation of healing practices in concrete situations of an individual is of greater importance than the collection of universal therapeutic legality and general disease types, *yam mob* (Postert 2004, 107-108). Shamanism is widespread among the Hmong. Shamanic rituals are more likely applied than, for example, the big magic. The former are employed for bad dreams, headaches, or before a long trip, while the later is employed in more severe disease cases. However, they are both regarded in their respective areas of application as having the equal healing force. In general, the treatment of diseases caused by the escape of one or more *plig* which are accompanied by a general loss of vitality, without going beyond the typical symptoms, is generally entrusted to the shamans. However, disorders, the obsession with a wild spirit causing specific symptom, fall within the competence of magical intervention (Postert 2004, 106). Shamanism does not preclude the use of other forms of medicine. Herbal medicine is often used in conjunction with medicine. The effectiveness of modern medicine causes considerable problems to a traditional belief system based on shamanism as a form of healing. What is more, shamanism is considered not to be fully effective. The instruments of Siv Yis are not as effective as when he had used them, but it is true that knowledge deteriorates over the time. Therefore, shamanism and other forms of healing and technology are not what they were in their *hauvpaus* (Tapp 1989, 79).

## **2.6 HMONG SUMMARY ANALYSIS**

In the social domain, people and spirits are in constant exchange relations with one another. These exchanges continuously renew relationships between the two domains. The exchange enables the continuity of the social sphere. This permanence is a task of the society as a whole. The relations with spirits are defined by set of rules which must be observed if the society is to persist. If the obligations, prohibitions and taboos are not followed, the consequence (punishment), are bad luck, sickness and death. Maintaining good relations with the ancestors is the best prevention from misfortune. However, if the relations are not nurtured or if accidents occur in spite of preventive measures there are certain prescriptions defining the necessary steps to regain the protection of ancestors and nullify the effects of the wild spirits. The spiritual domain embraces forces which cause harm – always hungry wild spirits, as well as forces which set things right – ancestors.

Despite this, the domain is structured and clearly separates both forces. Also, the Hmong can perform ceremonies only for the ancestral spirits.

Two value ideas were set forth, *pa* and *hmoov*, the first indicating life as a relationship connection of humans to other beings endowed with a quality of cosmological origin and the second representing humans as social beings where socialisation of life arrives from relationships with the descent group and the ancestors. The health of a Hmong person can be maintained only in the integrity of all aspects of a person. The concept of a person is relational. Both constituents are in a constant exchange process following the principle of reciprocity in order to be maintained. However, these value ideas have different manners in relation to the cosmos. The concept of socialized *hmoov* has to do with ancestors, status, luck and faith as dependent of ancestors, and it has no part in the wild spirits. In case of illness, the purpose of changing the name is to renew the relations with ancestors. On the other hand, the un-socialized *pa* is exposed to the attacks of wild spirits. *Pa* is closely related to fertility, the reproductive life, *siav*. Wild spirits seek blood and once they have gained access to the blood they nose out the *pa* and the person dies. Not maintaining the relationship with ancestors means sickness or death because the person is not whole; maintaining relations is therefore prevention and constitution of (a healthy) Hmong person. A completely included Hmong person is also a healthy person. Health and identity of a person are created through exchange relationships. Incorporation of a person into a kinship group is the same as healing the person.

The flow of exchange is defined through the rituals of the life cycle and yearly agricultural ritual cycle of each descent group. The first ground and transform the persons' vitality and social existence. The umbilical cord connects the unborn child in the uterus with the *pa* of the mother. In the second month of pregnancy human *plig*, soul, comes into the child. After the child is born, calling of the *plig* must be performed to attribute the child with animal *plig*. The presence of *plig* in a person is dependent on maintaining relations with the ancestors: it is perceived as connecting the body with the Sky. If the relations are not maintained, *plig* leaves the body to die and reincarnates in another man. Hmong therefore ritually bind the *plig* to the body. At birth, the descent group in the role of the wife taker provides the child with *hmoov* by naming him, while the mother-father spirits presenting the wife giver sends *plig* into the child. However, the former is of course true for

male children only. That is to say, a woman is a part of her natal family only until she marries. Through the marriage rituals, she is adopted into her husband's spiritual domain. The marriage rituals are actually the context in which the acquisition of *hmoov* (by the wife giver) and fertility, life (by the wife taker) take place. Death rituals again place *pa* in the forefront. The soul of the dead must be dispatched to the otherworld and reincarnated as a member of the same clan.

Illness may however occur in spite of maintaining the constituents in the network of exchange between the living, the dead and the spirits. It may be caused by the wild spirits, the wandering *plig* or injuries. The listed causes are not clearly separated nor can they be hierarchically ordered. The two mainly used therapeutic processes in Hmong society are shamanism, *ua neeb* and summoning *tus plig*, *hu plig*. The latter is employed at birth as well as when a *plig* of a person wanders off and encounters different inconveniences. It may be performed by anybody who knows how, usually a man of some standing or a shaman. *Hu plig* is one of the means of propitiating ordinary spirits and it is performed for one's own benefit.

Shamanism however is performed for the benefit of a person who has consulted him. A shaman is usually the healer who arrives at the diagnosis and travels to the Otherworld to bargain, frighten off or persuade the *dab qus* to free the wandering *plig* or bargain with the Ntxwj Nug for the extension of the patient's life. The sick person is surrounded by his house people who cooperate in the healing session, which is aimed at the restoration of the whole. "The house serves as a model for integrity of relations of the household to the cosmos, which enables the social life" (Postert 2004: 105). It is what Platenkamp (in Howell 1996: 328) calls *a unity of intention* which involves the transfer of gifts on which the efficacy of the sacralization process – connecting the patient to the origin of *plig* – depends, whereby the emphasis is on the joint moral interest and not on the gift. The shamanic ritual, as that of birth and marriage (as rebirth of the bride), re-constructs part-whole relations with the origin of life (wife giver) and the origin of social order (wife taker), whereby the latter acts superordinate to the former.



### **3 AKHA**

#### **3.1 ETHNOGRAPHIC INTRODUCTION**

The Akha are found in the mountainous border region of Yunnan province of China, the Shan states of Burma, Northern Laos, Northern Vietnam and most recently, northern Thailand (Tooker 1988, 10). In the early 1990's (Chazee 2002, 133), there were 500,000 Akha in China and Yunnan, 40,000 in Burma on the east of the Shan State, and 40,000 Akha were found in the provinces of Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Tak, Kampheng Phet, Lampang and Phrae.

The Akha language falls within the Tibeto-Burman group. Because of the lack of an indigenous script, there is very little historical material on the Akha and much importance is stressed on the verbal transmission of history (Tooker 1988, 12). Lewis and Lewis (1984, 204) and Chazee (2002, 136) assume the Akha originated in southern China, an assumption that corresponds with their own myths. According to these scholars, there was a long north-south migration from the Tibetan region through Burma and Yunnan to their current position. The period of emergence of the Akha as an ethnic group occurred over 55 generations ago according to the elders of Akha villages in Long district, Luang Namtha province, Laos (Chazee 2002, 136). Historically, the Akha have had complex relations with various Tai groups of the lowland. Tooker (1996, 326) indicates they may have been displaced from some lowland areas to the hills by Tai groups.

Deborah Tooker (1988, 1) defines in short the Akha society as “Southeast Asian upland, tribal, lineage-based, animistic society practicing slash-and-burn agriculture”. The Akha are migratory subsistence farmers, planting mostly swidden fields. In a few areas, one finds terraced fields. Dry rice is a staple crop, a staple in some cases supplemented by opium. Their society is organized into segmentary lineages with a variant of an asymmetric alliance system (see Tooker 1991) and patrilineal and virilocal society. The largest political unit of the Akha is the village (substantial debate on this matter exists between Tooker and Kameron), and the basic economic/ritual unit is the household, while both units are linked as ritual units (Tooker 1988, 14).

Villages ordinarily range from ten to one hundred households. As shifting cultivators, new villages are set up roughly every three to ten years, although migration is by household unit. There is no permanent status hierarchy among villagers. Ritual specialists and 'big men' attain a higher status than other villagers in certain contexts. All of the people who fill these roles, however, are expected to be fulltime subsistence farmers. There seems to be an incipient status hierarchy developing among Akha sub-tribes, however. These units tend to be endogamous. Lineages, *gu* are named, but are not necessarily exogamous. The exogamous unit is the unnamed *phà*, which is usually smaller than the lineage, but may be coterminous with it if the lineage has not split. Throughout, Tooker (1988) refers to this unit as the sub-lineage. Their polity has always been village-level and relatively egalitarian. Akha lineages are not ranked, and intervillage relationships are egalitarian (Tooker 1988, 12-15).

Akha tend to think of social groupings either in terms of place (especially village) names or in terms of kinship groupings, the largest being the named lineage. Akha are also divided into non-descent-based subtribes (there is no accurate indigenous term for those groupings she has called 'subtribes'). Subtribes are sharply distinguished by clothing styles, although they also vary in customs and language. A single village tends to be of a single subtribe and the subtribes are, for the most part, endogamous. A preliminary examination of genealogies reveals that subtribes are not strictly descent groups or lineage clusters, although certain lineages tend to be found more in one subtribe than the other (Tooker 1988, 17).

The group of Akha which Tooker studied refer to themselves as 'loimi' (they rarely use the term Loimisa Akha - the last syllable, 'sa', comes from the Chinese word *shan* which means 'mountain'). It is a name of a mountain in the region of Kengtung city in the Shan states of Burma, and indeed most of the Akha of this subgroup come from that region. The name means 'Bear Mountain' (Tooker 1988, 20). They migrated into Thailand from Burma approximately fifteen years prior to her research (Tooker 1988). Loimi migration began in the late 1960s and continues in the present for economic and political reasons. At the time of her fieldwork however, the *ùló* Akha (studied by Alting and Kammerer) were the most populous group, constituting perhaps some eighty to ninety percent of all Akha in Thailand. Tooker concentrated her research on certain aspects of Akha society, relevant to her argument regarding schematic replication and boundary formation in

different social levels. Therefore, due to the lack of a full ethnography of the Loimi Akha, I draw also from work on Ulo Akha provided by Lewis (1969, 1970) and Kammerer (1986).

### 3.1.1 Value Ideas

When studying Akha, there is one value idea which encompasses both domains, *gylan*. There are various expressions employed to translate the concept. Kammerer (1988) and Lewis (1989) find “blessing” to be the most appropriate translation. Tooker, however uses the phrase “good fortune” (1988) or even “potency” (1996). *Gylan* comes from the Akha formulaic names of three great spirit owners, which represent the potency or well being of three realms important for the reproduction of Akha society: crops (*khaje* spirit owner), people (*bije* spirit owner) and livestock (*djeje* spirit owner) (Tooker 1996, 328). These are three forms of power which must be distinguished from power which denotes rule by force. Potency emanates or flows from the supramundane world and cannot be controlled by the individuals (Tooker 1996, 328). Blessing is closely related to carrying Akha customs, *A ka zah taw –eu* (Kammerer 1996, 83), which will be presented later on. Kammerer (1996, 82) designates fertility, especially human fertility and most particularly the production of sons, as the prototypical, the fundamental form of *gylan*, blessing among Akha. However, she as well stresses many forms of Akha fertility. “Not only must people produce male and female progeny, but rice, the crop par excellence and the focus of ritual, must be prolific. Similarly, domestic animals should be fruitful and multiply” (Kammerer 1996, 85).

The source of blessing is foremost *A poe mi yeh*, the originator, the one who precedes the sky and the earth. Yet, this statement needs some further consideration. The ideas of blessing are intersected with the asymmetric marriage alliance. The key relation is the one between the wife giver – their hands not joined with the wife taker, who has his hands joined with the wife giver, “reflecting the asymmetry in the relationship between the superior wife-giver and the inferior wife taker” (Kammerer 1996, 90). Namely, these categories are cosmologically central and structure ritual performances. Begging for blessing is performed on behalf of someone. Blessing may be in the form of long life, health, and well-being. Fertility is the highest form of blessing and may only be transferred by certain categories of people to others with whom they have a particular relationship. Therefore, “living patrilineal kin and wife-givers (affines), who within Akha

asymmetric alliance system are considered superior, can give fertility to their relatives” (Kammerer 1996, 93). Mother’s brothers, dead and living, give fertility to their sisters and cause their children to grow strong and big (Kammerer 1996, 89). Wife givers do not need and rely on their wife taker, while the wife takers need and rely on wife givers (Kammerer 1998, 663). A man and a woman depend on her brother for their status in the otherworld: without having a son who will perform offerings, they become homeless and nameless spirits (Kammerer 1998, 665). The genealogical mother’s brother or his ritually-created replacement and patrilineal ancestors are the most important source of blessing. *A poe mi jeh* plays a central role in the workings of the cosmos and ritual itself. But she/he is not discussed because she/he is so sacred and her/his presence is axiomatic. *A poe mi jeh* “is the foundation and origin of blessing not just in the beginning but also in the present” (Kammerer 1996, 91).

Wealth is considered to be more the work of the gods and ancestors, than of men. And wealth without male progeny does not bring status nor does remembrance after death. Though, Akha value wealth: ... “it is paired with rice in the couplet “Rice (Owner)-Wealth (Owner)” (ka k eh je k eh), but rice comes first. Rice is considered “the elder, the more powerful” and “female”, whereas wealth, sometimes glossed as “silver”, is considered “male”. On occasion rice is said to be wealth’s wife” (Kammerer 1996, 86). The most essential crop is rice, used to feed the ancestors, is also the expression of their blessing.

Kammerer (1996, 94) stresses the ambivalence of Akha towards wealth and its accumulation which is an expression of recognition and rejection of the potential hierarchy within the society. Wealth is admired but also discouraged and to some extent contrary to customs. Akha personal wealth is a situation of temporary good fortune. To be a mother or a father of a son means to have a status everlasting in the afterlife. Feasts of blessing proclaim successful fertility which ensures a place among the ancestors after death. Therefore, wealth without male progeny brings neither status nor remembrance after death (Kammerer 1996, 85).

### 3.1.2 The Beginning

Lewis (1969) establishes that most of the Akha concepts are based upon individual myths. Each myth is a separate entity to them, and if it holds together within itself, that is sufficient. There are often great variations in the myths from area to area, although usually the basic themes are the same.

According to the origin myths, first the Sky, *m* was created by ‘God’, *A poe mi yeh*. Akha have a concept of a supreme, all powerful being that they call *A poe mi ye*, literally the first two syllables mean ancestor, and the last syllable indicates great power. He/she was not in heaven or on earth, since there was neither then. Akha believe that God has always existed and that God lives in heaven (*m k’oe ta* – literally ‘on the sky’). According to Hansson (1983, 40-41), *A poe mi yeh* lives at the center of the universe where nine mountains meet, where ten rivers meet, and where ten big wells meet. (S)he has a kind of looking glass *hoteq* through which (s)he can see the whole world, looking one way to the down slope side, *gypho* and turning her/his head to the other way to the upslope side, *njapho* (Hansson 1983, 40-41).

This ultimate cosmic center is context dependent. It can represent the house or the village of *A poe mi yeh*; or the origin point of all human races in China, a walled and moated city called *djadelang*; or the ancestral village/household to which one returns at death, the abode of *A poe mi yeh*). In fact, in ritual texts, the journey to the ancestral abode is the journey back north to China, retracing the route of Akha migration by listing the villages and rivers through which the Akha have passed (Tooker 1988, 83). *A poe mi yeh* then created *M g’ah*, the second name in the full genealogy of Akha. *M g’ah* is considered to be ‘God’s child’. In point of fact, God had nine sons, children of the Sky, *m eu za*. However, it is *M g’ah* from which men and spirits are descended, because it is his son *Gah ne* who went on having progeny (Lewis 1969, 26-27). All other children of God are considered ‘no-son persons’, *shm byeh*, and bad, and only *M g’ah* is good. However, when there is a serious illness in the household, a spirit priest, *boe maw*, who knows how to do so, will repeat the names of all of them (Lewis 1969, 26-30). The spirit priest then follows the *Sm mi o*, one of the most important names and the father of all races, (Lewis 1969, 36) who is usually followed by fifty generations of his male descendants (Kammerer 1994, 662).

The earth was also created by *Ja bi oe lah*. The Sky, *m* is more or less the dwelling place of powerful owner-spirits, *yah sah*. These are supernatural beings of a high order, but still under God. The world is the dwelling place for people, while the Underworld, *mi o* is the dwelling place for the spirits; it is to this 'Underworld' shamans go when they go into a trance (Lewis 1969: 25-26).

According to Lewis (1989) the Akha word for religion is *zah* or *záng*. To follow a certain religion is *zah taw eu*. On the other hand, in Tookers writings we find a term *záng* (1988) and *zán* (1996) which she translates as something like 'way of life', 'way of doing things', 'tradition', or 'custom'. However, they both identify it as the most important notion for Akha identity which was laid out by *A poe mi jeh*. *Záng* includes religious practices, such as how to honour the ancestors, how to call on spirits during illness, how to carry out rituals, but it also includes what we would call technological practices such as how to plant rice, how to construct a house properly, etc.. In addition, *záng* includes rules for action, such as how to dress properly, how to interact with your father-in-law, etc. The idea is that you 'carry' the religion by following the various customs, making the proper sacrifices, and observing the proper taboos. There are those of course, who are indifferent to the religion (*zah*). Such cannot live in an Akha village, 'since they are no longer Akha'. Such people are considered to be 'like bats', *boe ha*, neither this nor that (Lewis 1969, 24). Akha are afraid of breaking the religion that has been handed down through their ancestors to them because they fear terrible sicknesses and deaths and other misfortunes that have befallen the people who have not acted accordingly. If a person does not live in an Akha village, he cannot for the most part, 'carry' *záng*, given that he lacks the context in which *záng* may be carried out. Behavior may be 'correct', *záng tshà-ē*, or 'incorrect', *záng mà\_tshà-ē*, in relation to *záng*. The correctness of behavior relates to the lining up of speech and the practice of an ideal *záng*. Namely, the Akha also make a judgment about the completeness of one's behavior in relation to *záng*. Likewise, one's *záng* may be the same as another's, *záng dú le-ē*, or different from another, *záng mà dú le-ē*, but not better in the sense of being truer. There are other actions clearly specified by *záng* that one should not do. These are called *záng bàng- ē*, 'to violate *záng*, expressing an attitude of 'evil', or even impurity that must be expelled through rites (Tooker 1988, 37-38).

### 3.2 COSMOLOGICAL DOMAIN

Akha also believe in some great spirits who live under God, and are the ones who carry out his orders. They use both ‘spirit-owner’, *yaw sah* and spirit, *neh* when describing them. The four main ones are: sky, *m*, or *m dzoe*, earth, *mi tsa* or *mi dzoe*, sun, *nah ma*, and moon, *ba la*. Akha do not fear these main spirits in the same way they fear the spirits, *neh*. They believe that these main spirits will not afflict, *gu la –eu* them. However, they also believe that if they say the names of these main spirits in a disrespectful way, they will die. In their proverbs they also speak of three great spirit-owners, *yaw sah* with various functions. One is *Je yeh*, the one who looks after livestock. The second is *Ka yeh*, the one who looks after crops. And the third is *Bi yeh*, the one who looks after people (Lewis 1969, 61-64).

According to Akha myths, originally spirits, *neh* and humans lived together. They could not get along and they separated. According to Akha genealogy, spirits and people have the same ancestry until *Tah pah mah*. Before the spirits and people divided, spirits led a life much like people now live. One of the main differences is that they worked their fields at night, which is considered the ‘time for spirits’, whereas humans worked their fields by day. After dividing, spirits made their headquarters in the Underworld, *mi o*, and people made theirs in the upper world, *mi ta*. But spirits also make forages into the world of man, seeking ‘thin-souled’, *sa la ba –eu* person whose soul they can eat. They sometimes hunt people, just like people hunt animals, *sha g’a g’a –eu*. If spirits are able to get hold of a human soul, often by frightening it out of the person first, they take it to their ‘Underworld’ dwelling and start to eat it. Shamans are called to discover what spirit is eating the soul, and what meat the spirit would like to eat instead of the soul. The spirit priest can also repeat spirit incantations in such a way as to either prevent a spirit from causing damage to a person’s soul, or to get the soul to come back to the body, and thus escape the spirit’s evil designs (Lewis 1969, 37). Akha believe there is the great lake of boiling blood, *shi bui lah ma*, or great lake of fire, *mi dza lah ma*, for all human rejects, *tsaw caw*, and those who have big sins. According to Lewis (1969, 26), this is the same as saying ‘below *Tah pah*’ and when speaking of the souls that die and can never get up past *Tah pah*, either due twins, parents of twins, or murderers.

Akha classify spirits into two classes, on the basis of the above. Those who live in the house, that is the spirits of the ancestors, *aphophi* (Tooker 1988, 86) are called inside spirits, *k'oe neh*. Those who live outside the house, and sometimes even outside the village, are outside spirits, *nyi neh*. Akha are much more afraid of the 'outside spirits', since they are the spirits of those who have died a terrible death in the jungle. They do not fear the 'inside spirits' so much. However, they can be afflicted, *gu la -eu* by the inside as well as the outside spirits. The main inside spirit is called *dzah mi*. This household spirit will either help or afflict, depending on how it is treated by the people of the house. It is said to reside in the main house post, *jm zeu* during the daytime, and in the fireplace at night. As to the 'outside' spirits, they are much more numerous, as well as tending to be more vicious. They can be divided into two classes: the kind that afflicts, and the kind that does not afflict (Lewis 1969, 64-68).

### 3.3 SOCIAL DOMAIN

The largest political unit of the Akha is the village, *phu*. The central post of the village represents the central post of the house of the 'village ruler', *dzöma*. Akha initiate a village by setting up a sacred axis at its center (see Tooker 1996, 329-330). On the whole, Akha society positively values the center (as opposed to periphery) and the middle (as opposed to upper or lower) which "represent well-being, abundance, good health and fertility" (Tooker 1988, 65). They also mark the periphery of the village by constructing a set of a three village. The village is the sphere of people, *tshohà*, of the domesticated, of 'us', the good as opposed to the spirits, *neq*, the wild, of 'others', *àtjho*, the bad, the ones who are cannibalistic, and cause illness and improper fertility. The village sacred water source, taken care of by the *dzöma*, is called *A poe mi yeh*'s water (Tooker 1988, 82-83). Indeed, in shaman texts, the shaman's capacity to move around, *djo-ë*, the Sky, *M* and Earth, *Mi* is her/his ability to circle around of the house of *A poe mi yeh*, the greatest of all ancestors (Hansson 1983, 59, 61). The village and its center represent civilization for the Akha. The *dzöma* represents Akha civilization in its most intense form: he is responsible for village harmony and concordance with *záng* and is a source for the fertility and prosperity of the village (Tooker 1996, 53, 57, 329). 'The right to rule', *dzodzà* passes patrilineally from father to eldest or youngest son but the position is not hereditary. Permanent status hierarchy among villagers does not exist. There seems to be an incipient status hierarchy developing among Akha sub-tribes, though. These units tend to be endogamous (Tooker



1988, 12-15). “Asymmetric alliance and status superiority of the wife-giver contribute to the egalitarian village organization” (Kammerer 1994, 660). Ritual specialists and ‘big men’ attain a higher status than other villagers in certain contexts. According to Lewis (1969, 21), those who have authority in their order of importance are: village priest, *dzoe ma*, blacksmith, *ba ji*, military man, *gui deu-eu*, which includes the headmen, spirit priest, *boe maw*, and shaman, *nyi pa*. All of the people who fill these roles, however, are expected to be fulltime subsistence farmers (Tooker 1988, 12-15).

Lewis states that, in order to establish a village, one must have members from at least three sub-lineages (1970, 825), since there are many customs, *zàng* that can not be carried out if this condition is not fulfilled. The segmentary system of Akha consists of three levels of descent categories called maximal patrilineages. They bear the name of the ancestor at the formative node - which can be considered to be surname groups like those of Hmong unnamed medial or sub-lineages and unnamed minimal lineages (Kammerer 1994, 662). Each village contains members of several lineages and sub-lineages. Akha lineages are not ranked (Tooker 1988, 12). All things considered, Kammerer (1996, 95) defines Akha as an egalitarian society. Asymmetry and equality are coexistent. The Akha status asymmetry in marital alliance is dyadic: every patrilineal family is inferior to its wife givers and superior to its wife takers. However, status asymmetry does not radiate outward to the ranking of lineages. The dyadic asymmetry is consisted as well as constituted by and constitutive of lineage equality (Kammerer 1994, 667). Kinship principles and broad sub-lineage ties are reflected in rituals conducted at the household level, emphasizing the significance of the household complex in Akha society (Tooker 1988, 52, 54). As a conglomerate of several exogamous units, Tooker (1988, 56) proclaims the village as “a microsom of all of Akha society in that it normally and preferably includes within it groups that are sufficient to reflect the basic framework of the Akha kinship/marriage system”.

### **3.3.1 The House as Relationships**

An Akha village, *phu* is a loose affiliation of households, *zog*. *Phu* and *zog* are linked as ritual units. Households are the basic production and ritual unit (Tooker 1988, 47). *Phà*, sub-lineage, is often referred to in daily life as those with whom one *tàq- ē*, ‘are attached to’, in the sense that

marriage within the group is not allowed and in the sense that when a household in the group performs certain rituals, others must co-celebrate according to certain rules, *lang dang tàq- ē*. Every Akha belongs to a named patrilineage. The exogamous unit is not the named lineage but the unnamed sub-lineage. There are certain referential meanings of the *phezà* that can mean “those of one’s household” which are used to reference levels between, and including, the *zoq*, household and the sub-lineage, *phà* (Tooker 1988, 42-43). Members of the extended family under a single ancestor altar are considered as one household (Lewis 1969, 808).

The family organization is patrilinear and the residence is patrilocal. Usually, the household is composed of the family restricted to the parents and unmarried children. The eldest son remains in the parents’ house to help them and may live with his wife and children in the same house. Otherwise, the initial postmarital residence is patrivirilocal. Therefore, the household membership may range from a nuclear family to an extended family of four generations (living in one or more houses). When a married couple has children it may move out and form its own household with the installation of the ancestor altar. Although they are a patrilineal society, the line of ancestors proceeds in couples - the males of the lineage and their wives – in order to strengthen the association with fertility and reproduction. Namely, Akha have a genealogical patronymic linkage system in which the final syllable(s) of the father’s name becomes the first syllable(s) of his son’s name. In fact, sons and daughters are named according to this system but “women’s names are not preserved in patrilineal genealogies” (Kammerer 1994, 661). In addition, the wife takers receive wives from the wife giver as well as a blessing of fertility. The household irrigation ditch is connected to *gylàng* and fertility, especially the fertility of people. Lewis (1969, 345) mentions sterility being seen as ancestors ‘blocking the irrigation ditch’. Sterile couples may have a shamanistic trance performed on them. The spirit priest, *bomo* could as well perform a type of spirit chanting called *yxhe djeq-ē*, ‘opening the irrigation ditch’ that would increase the household’s *gylàng* (Tooker 1988, 111-112).

Father of the house, *nym sah a da* is the oldest male of the house and the mother of the house, *nym sah a ma* is the oldest female of the house (Lewis 1969, 806). The household heads sleep closest to the center of the house (where the ancestral shrine is located). The elders are perceived as being in an inferior position in relation to their ancestors, but as holding a superior position in relation to

their living descendants. However, both the ancestors and the elders are viewed as looking after their descendants (Tooker 1988, 96-97). The house 'owners' are an extension of the household ancestors. This extension is represented in a physical way by the fact that the household 'owners', who are next in line to ascend to the ancestral section after they die, sleep just below and next to the household's central partition. As occupants of this position, no matter what their age, they are called *tshomo*, 'elders', a term that reflects their closeness to the ancestors. The term used most often to describe the elders, 'or household heads,' dealings with the ancestors is the term *lo-ë*, 'to make offerings to, to entertain or honor as a guest, as in *dàjang lo-ë*. The household head couple performs offerings to the ancestors, *àpho lo-ë*, twelve times per year. The ancestors are seen as temporarily visiting the houses of their descendants and in these offerings certain dishes of food are offered to the ancestors connected to the ancestral section/shelf in the house (Tooker 1988, 96).

An Akha house is spatially organized by a division on the male and the female side, each hierarchically arranged reflecting the proper hierarchical relationship of the household. Lower status members, (younger ones as well as cousins and distant relatives, orphans, widows and divorced women), although not always desirable as they may bring bad luck to the house - of the household sleep in a row extending out from the household heads towards the peripheral front and back walls of the house. The Akha are polygamous, but the situation of the majority of men is not in favor of it. The marriage follows the principle of lineage exogamy. Wife giving and wife taking relationships are central to Akha and the direct exchange of wives between minimal lineages is proscribed (Kammerer 1996, 90). The Akha essential marriage rule is negative: "do not exchange a wife for a sister" (Kammerer 1998, 663). All things considered, the relations between the wife giver and the wife taker are created by marriage and not presupposed by them (Kammerer 1998, 663).

### **3.3.2 Social Roles of Men and Women**

In most contexts, women are hierarchically valued lower than men (Tooker 1988, 278). Patronymic linkage established at the naming ceremony after birth incorporates sons as well as daughters into their father's patriline (Kammerer 1994, 661-662). After the wedding, the wife leaves her natal household to join her husband at his father's house. However, due to her

patronymic genealogical name, a woman's link to her natal patrikin is never completely severed. "An Akha woman is doubly affiliated into descent categories: she belongs to her father's and she belongs to her husband's" (Kammerer 1994, 666). The Akha offerings to the ancestors "include male forbears in the direct patriline as well as women married to those men. Thus, patrilineal ancestors are ascending husband and wife pairs, not just the men whose names are memorialized in genealogies (Kammerer 1994, 663): "when a sister leaves to marry she becomes an "other" (a *caw*), but a wife becomes the mother of the patriline's next generation. The first is lost to family and lineage; the second adds to both" (Kammerer 1994, 664).

At birth, all children, male and female, become members of their father's lineage/sub-lineage. The in-married wives of the household become progressively incorporated into their husbands' lineage through a series of rituals carried out throughout their lifetimes, one of which, *je d'ang phi-ë*, may not be completed until after death. The ideal or the prescription for a woman is to become completely incorporated into her husband's lineage. However, for economic, circumstantial and other reasons, it may not be possible for a particular family to complete the cycle of rituals that would do this. Thus, normally, in the course of a woman's lifetime, she is almost never fully incorporated into her husband's lineage. The Akha, however, do say that when a woman marries, she becomes a part of her husband's lineage, and that for most cases in which her affiliation must be reckoned (such as in discussions of who can be the ritual officiant of *jemo* at weddings), her attachment is considered to be with her husband's lineage. The wedding ceremony only partially incorporates the woman into her husband's group. Thus, for most, and possibly all of her lifetime, a woman married into a household is also a representative of her natal group (Tooker 1988, 94).

Equality and status differences in Akha society are defined by the nature of blessing. Akha do not have feasts of merit. Feasts of blessing pull the households of the village together. Each village must have at least one white skirted woman. Namely, fertility as the essential form of blessing is illustrated by the ritual sequence begging for blessing, *gui lah sha -eu*, which takes place as a part of the ceremonial bestowal of a dowry and the initiation of a white skirted woman. Specifically, the Akha have three ceremonies which might be referred to as feasts of blessing: the bestowal of dowry (on which I will expand in the sequel); the initiation of a woman with at least one living son as a white-skirted woman during which the woman, her husband and co-resident sons and their

wives beg blessing from the woman's male natal patrikin-wife givers; and a rite purifying with a silver piece, *yeh dah shaw –eu*, that only a white-skirted woman may perform to repay her natal patrikin for breast milk and other nourishment (Kammerer 1996, 86-88). After her child-bearing years, a female household head may go through an initiation ceremony that makes her into a *ja je àma*, a mother of fertility/prosperity. Should that happen, she is then able to lead off household ceremonies relating to the rice growing cycle, as her *ja je àma* status gives her a particular relationship to rice and fertility. The initiation is expensive, so there are very few of these women in the village, and for the most part, the male household head is the ritual leader. In some cases, even where *ja je àma* carries out the ceremony, a male must be present, since only *àli*, males do *záng* (Tooker 1988, 98).

### 3.4 THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN AKHA PERSON

Following her pursuit of replicating schemes in Akha society, Tooker (1988, 276) defines a three-fold division of the body (head, middle and feet section), whereby these areas change in hierarchical and spatial sense according to the particular context. However, as already noted several times, Akha value the middle most. *Nyma*, heart-mind is located in the center of the person. Tooker (1988, 282) defines *nyma* as the emotional, character and thought center of the person. However, *nyma* is not only the feature of people but of animals as well. *Nyma* does not wander off as souls do. If a person's soul is lost and only the body is present, *nyma ma my-e*, the heart is not well, not at ease. However, if *nymas* join due to the mutual affection, the souls also join. The desired state of *nyma* is to be flat, to be at ease or connected and to be balanced with *sagla*, in other words, to not be too small nor too big (Tooker 1988, 283).

Akha believe that the soul, *sa la* fills the body. Some say there is just one, others say there are twelve and when they leave the body they leave three at a time (Lewis 1969, 56). Souls are invisible. If a person is very frightened, his soul will often leave his body, *la ba ba –eu*. If the soul leaves, it must be called back, *la ku ku –eu*, or the person will die. Akha have two ceremonies for calling the soul back: the regular ceremony *la ku ku –eu* and *la du beu –eu*. Both are performed by the spirit priest, *boe maw*. It is also usually a task of the spirit priest Akha have a meal of

separation, *g'aw za dza –eu* both at the time of funerals and divorce. The idea is both to keep the soul of those in the house from leaving to follow the person who has died, or in the case of divorce to keep the soul of the woman from staying behind with the husband (Lewis 1969, 56-57).

As a person dies, his soul stays near the body. The soul will stay until the body decays, and then goes to be with the ancestors. But the soul returns once a year or once every three years to its grave to see its bones until the body decays. “The teaching of the path” is done by a spirit priest when a person dies. It is the ritual for the soul for it to go to the land of the ancestors. The Akha also believe that there are new spirits coming along all the time, for as people die they become spirits. With regards to their ideas about the realm of the dead, there is a belief that when a great person dies, many children will be born. Myths represent this with the image of a giant tree falling: the next year there are lots of little trees in that spot. ‘No-son people’, *shm byeh*, parents of human rejects, *tsaw caw*, or people who have committed terrible sins must always remain under *Tah pah*. Only those who have “no sins” go to the “Underworld”, *mi o*, to live with the ancestors (not just Akha, but Lahus, Indians, Shans, Chinese, etc.) Those who have ‘small sins’ must live “on the way”, *ga peh*, whereas those with really “big sins” must go to “hell”, *shi bui lah ma*. If a person dies a terrible, *sha* death, then he will become a vicious spirit – unless those who repeat the spirit incantation know the proper way to prevent this. On the other hand, if someone in the home dies a “good” death, and has all of the burial procedures done properly, that person will become a helpful spirit – especially if it is from one’s own home. They especially ask the spirits from the last four generations for help, since those are more closely connected to them. However, they believe that those spirits will in turn ask some of the ancestor spirits from previous generations (Lewis 1969, 58-59).

An Akha person is best defined when perceiving what happens during the rituals of life cycle to a person’s status and how the value ideas travel between the exchange entities.

### **3.4.1 Marriage**

“Members of a groom’s patrilineal family (minimal lineage) are in a wife-taking relationship to members not only of the bride’s patrilineal family but of her natal sublineage and even her natal

lineage as a whole” (Kammerer 1996, 90). Marriage creates wife-givers and wife-takers, meaning that “marital unions produce and legitimize lineal heirs” (Kammerer 1998, 665). However, as already noted, in the case of the Akha’s, the affinity is not necessary only for the descent, but also to rise to the ancestor status.

Premarital relationships are encouraged and seen as a good experience given that pregnancy is seen as a positive sign for fertility (see Lewis 1969). For an Akha girl, marriage represents leaving her extended family, *pa*, and joining the extended family of her husband. Their children will belong to her husband’s family (Lewis 1969, 311). They marry outside of their sub-lineage (Lewis calls it sub-clan). Therefore, it is allowed to marry a mother’s brother’s daughter, but these marriages are not widespread. However, they do not marry parallel cousins, *cah peh*, since it would bring sickness and bad luck. The criterion on clan exogamy is seven generations counted by the young men before reaching the common ancestor with the girl. If a boy and a girl from the same sub-clan start living together, the elders perform the splitting of the sub-clan ceremony, after which they are considered to be of different sub-clans (Lewis 1969, 826). Akha men usually follow village exogamy and almost always tribal endogamy. If a girl marries outside of the tribe and wants to stay in the village, the couple can embrace a clan, *pa daw daw –eu*: a sponsor gives them fermented rice so they can establish an ancestor shrine in their home. A young man selects a girl he wants to marry. If she is willing, their parents and relatives cannot do much to prevent the marriage. Before the marriage ceremonies begin, the agreement is reached between the boy, girl and their fathers. The Akha expression for a boy getting married is “to fetch a wife”, *mi za la –eu* and the phrase for a girl is go-work-eat, *m dza –i –eu*, expressing a practice of virilocal residence (Lewis 1969, 313-322).

The marriage ceremony lasts three days. The groom, his friends and some married friends go to the village of the bride. The studied sources, Lewis, Tooker, Kammerer, do not mention the bride price, however they do note that the groom and his family prepare the feast. The girl’s parents present her with a dowry, an optional but prestigious rite, which includes a set of clothes, silver ornaments for a head dress, a small hand hoe, a machete, and food (Lewis 1969, 322). This is a first feast of blessing for the Akha. The bride, wearing a white skirt, stands with her groom opposite her natal patrilineal kin, the sources of blessing from her natal patrilineal ancestors

(Tooker 1996, 87). To give the dowry to the daughter, her parents prepare the feast and invite the elders of the village before she leaves. “After the feast, while the parents are ‘filling the carrying basket’, one of the elders will repeat a poetic chant, *sha zi zi –eu*, in which he will tell the story of the girl who is going to get married. The story will cover the time from her birth to the present, and will extol all her virtues” (Lewis 1969, 323). Before the sunrise the wedding group leaves the bride’s village and the groom puts his coat over his bride but Lewis does not provide any explanation for this. While walking towards the groom’s village, one of the young men yodels, *eu ceu gu –eu*, which sounds like shouting. At the arrival to the village, the bride goes to stay in the house of the groom’s brother or uncle until the wedding (Lewis 1969, 322-323).

When everything is set for the wedding, the groom sends one old coin to the girl’s village priest, *dzoma*, who will in turn give it to the elders of her home village. This is a sign of the respect and gratitude. If the village priest accepts the coin, the wedding will definitely happen (Lewis 1969, 324).

The marriage day is the first day which is favourable for the groom’s family and it is announced ahead of time because every one from the groom’s village must attend. No one from the bride’s village, however, can attend. The actual ceremony is not observed. There are only one or two elders present to guide the couple. Others are attending other chores. At the wedding there is also a guest of honor, *yeh maw*, usually an elderly woman selected by the groom’s family. She has certain obligations during the ceremony, such as advising the spirit priest on how to improve his aim, accompanying the future bride and throwing rice to the spirit priest’s side. On the day of the wedding, the bride enters the groom’s house along with a young girl carrying her head dress. The head dress was made by her and her mother and it is a part of the ceremony. The couple then walks to the fireplace near the dividing wall, *law ka* on the woman’s side of the house, and boil an egg and pass it around each other three times, *g’a lu m –eu*. At the end, they must each eat a little of the egg. After that the meal of joining, *u coe coe –eu*, follows: it consists of a cooked chicken prepared by a young male relative of the groom. The couple eats the chicken and afterwards the bride puts on her head dress. Now they are considered to be married (Lewis 1969, 325-328).



The groom and his friends catch a big pig, carry it into the house and put it on the floor on the man's side of the house and kill it. The elders will read, *gui eu*, from the liver and tell whether the marriage will be good. The groom and his friends cook the meat, while the women prepare rice. The elders are called first to eat the meal prepared on the rice table. The couple has a special meal, which they must eat together. After the feeding, a spirit priest blesses the young couple. The couple may sleep together on the third night after the marriage (Lewis 1969, 326-328).

In recognition of the status change of the new bride, three areas of her body are transformed before she enters the groom's house: the black skirt is replaced with a white one, her headdress is removed, her hair cut and a wedding hat is placed on her head and her feet are washed (Tooker 1988, 277).

### 3.4.2 Birth

The Akha believe there are three child-maker spirits, *za m –eu za sah a ma*, living in each person. “They allow a woman to become pregnant by releasing water from the “lake of children” (*zeu za zeu lah*)” (Lewis 1969, 346). God is forming the child until the fourth month. After this period a child comes to life and begins to move around. They call a pregnant woman one who is living under another, *a caw –eu la o jaw –eu*, expressing the necessity that she remain under her husband until the child is born. During pregnancy there are also food, behavior and other taboos with severe consequences and punishment to which the woman is subject. Also, the husband must follow certain restrictions (Lewis 1969, 346-351).

“If they hear that a girl has been born, they will say of the family, “They’ll have water now” (*I cu k aw –I –eu ya daw nga*). When a boy is born they will say of the family, “They’ll have game to eat now” (*Sha beu she –eu ya dza nga*)” (Lewis 1969, 352). Before the birth, the woman must prepare and have with her at all times a bamboo knife to cut out placenta, *da hi*, and a string to tie the cord. Women prefer to give birth at home, more accurately in a little house near the main house – in the event a human reject is born that would destroy the main house. But usually women give birth on the fields (Lewis 1969, 352-353).

The husband's mother, or if she is not present, the oldest woman is in charge and has a position of honor. She is a midwife, *a pi*, who presents a newborn with a present: if it is a boy she gives bodice, *la sha*, if it is a girl she gives her the cloth part of her head dress, *u tsah* (Lewis 1969, 359). The woman in labor must drink hot water and stay next to the fire in order to help the child to be born easily. When the child is born, it must cry three times to consider the child to be alive or truly born, *deh le-eu*. The crying denotes asking for a blessing, *gui lah*, a soul, *sa la*, and a lifespan, *zi*, all given by God. After that, the woman in charge gives the name to the child. This may not be the child's official name but a precaution against the child being named by the spirits who would claim it for their own. Now the woman in charge ties and cuts the cord and washes the baby. The birth of placenta follows. The father must cut it and bury it under the house, below the ancestor shrine. Later on, he will also cut and bury the cord with the placenta. The father must water the placenta with hot water once or twice a day. When the mother gets better, she takes over the watering and continues till the placenta disintegrates (which takes approximately one month). The placenta means "friend living with a child." They must therefore take care of it properly and the child will be healthy (Lewis 1969, 354-358).

If the child is healthy, they kill the chicken, *ya she she -eu*, and the name is given to the child by the man's mother, the woman's mother or the father (Lewis 1969, 381; Chazee 2002, 156). Within two weeks, the ceremony must be held to ensure the child's link with the *Amadame* parents' spirits, the *Ikrenue* house spirit and *Oune* sky spirit by performing feedings to these spirits (Chazee 2002, 157).

### **3.4.3 Death**

The Akha die and live nine times. A person dies, becomes a spirit for some time and is later reborn: however the reincarnations are not restricted to being an Akha person in the next life. This cycle repeats nine times and after that a person becomes a type of spirit, *mi bym mi ceh* (Lewis 1969, 396).

According to Akha myths, God is the one who grants people life span. Every Akha has a stamp inside the head, placed there by God, telling how long the person will live. Nevertheless, big sins

shorten the person's life. An Akha person dies when it is his time to die or if the death was caused by spirits, werewolves, vampires or eating something poisonous. Every being has a tree in the spirit world, *mi o*. A shaman can see the tree if she travels to the spirit world and describe the tree: if it is laying on the ground it is necessary to perform a ceremony to extend life or the person will die (Lewis 1969, 396-400).

To determine whether a person will die, the Akha ask a shaman to go into a trance or burn tapers, *shah leh do haw-eu*. The latter is performed by an elder, who lights two wax tapers. If the sick man's taper burns well, he will live - if not he will die. If the sick man's taper burns well and the taper of the elder man does not, there will be sickness in his home. Following the death of a person, relatives visit the house. Men bring cloths to put over the body and women bring cloths to put under the body (Lewis 1969, 400-407). Lewis (1969, 407-408) claims that the family and the village people feel respect and fear for the corpse. They are careful and do the procedure correctly so the dead will become a benevolent spirit. That is to say, if the funeral turns out to be bad, the person will become a vicious spirit. Also, those who die a terrible death become bad spirits, while those who die a good death and are buried in a proper way turn into good spirits (Lewis 1969, 59). Lewis (1969, 408) divides the funeral rituals into four main sections: preparation of the body and the coffin led and coordinated by the village priest; sacrifices and spirit incantations, which may be several months after the first part; the actual burial and at last the post-burial ceremonies. The main responsibility of the spirit priest is to lead the deceased down the correct path, the middle path, *ghángkháng djmàkháng*, "the middle ancestral path" (Tooker 1996, 62). Dangerous spirits lurk in the upper and lower paths. Notions of the "Middle Path" are also reflected in the Akha ideal of avoidance of extremes such as extreme happiness or extreme wealth. The ideal is to be satisfied, contented, neither too "up" nor too "down" (Tooker 1996, 64).

First, the body of the deceased is washed, *I cu dzui -eu*. Usually, this is the task of the eldest son. If the deceased is female, they must pierce her ears so that he will be able to get to the land of the ancestors. Next, the deceased's clothes are washed, *meh tsoe tsi -eu*, although the clothes prepared for the deceased are new. Now they clothe the corpse (in black or dark blue), *meh tsoe bi dm-eu*. They tie the thumbs of the corpse together and later also the toes with a silk thread or a specially made cotton cord. This is how they inform the deceased that he has died. A recount of the

deceased's genealogy, *tsui gui-eu*, follows. It is done by some near male relative or a village priest. This is the first time that the deceased's name is spoken out loud in the list of his ancestors. For a female, they repeat the genealogy of her husband. The son puts the silver in the mouth, *ka meh-ah pyu daw ah -eu*, of his dead parent. The purpose of silver is to buy things in the land of the ancestors. Next, the body is wrapped in the shroud, *maw taw taw -eu*, and covered with silk cloth, *boe bui sheu dm-eu*. They also tie the head, *bo ne u tsah tsah -eu*, with a red cloth. Now, a household member catches a chicken, ceremonially sprinkles it, then kills it and holds it over the fire. The chicken will hang up near the corpse until the burial and then will be put on top of the grave. The purifying life ceremony, *deh zah shaw -eu*, follows, during which the members of the family prepare the dishes according to the spirit priest's instructions. When the spirit priests finishes giving the life purifying food to the deceased, it is time for the purifying death ceremony, *shi zah shaw -eu*. This is the last thing they do on the day of death. A day before the coffin is cut, the spouse of the deceased must send an axe head in a dish (as payment) to the black smith to be pounded into shape. After the purifying death ceremony, a young person from each house must sit with the family all night, in vigil, *lo -eu* (Lewis 1969, 409-420).

### 3.5 AKHA MEDICAL SYSTEM

A person who is spiritually potent, *gui lah sa la hui eu*, will be healthy; a thin-souled person, *gui lah sa la hui eu*, is usually sickly and often attacked by spirits (Lewis 1969, 262). The latter is also the main cause of disease. The Akha sometimes wear certain amulets, such as a solid tusk from a wild boar and a tiger or a bag with powdered horn from a single horn to prevent them from getting sick. A follow-me-not ceremony, *meg gu gu -eu*, is performed to keep the illness from following, for instance, a person who has been visiting another village before entering his village. Likewise, in the case of a terrible death, *sha*, the follow-me-not ceremony is conducted because the spirit of the dead person will often try to follow the travelers back into the village. There are different ways of performing this ceremony, however they all include objects such as a thatch - a stick to block the path for the spirit of sickness to enter the village. The Akha perform an epidemic protection ceremony, *pu eh to -eu* to keep the human or animal epidemic from coming into their village. It includes a sacrifice – killing a chicken or a big black dog, depending on the closeness of the

danger, where the mouth of the animal must point away from the village to frighten away the spirit of the illness. The spirit priest will call the sickness to keep away from the village. Another preventive ceremony performed by the spirit priest is aimed to insure that no one from the family dies a terrible death. The offering and the incantation is intended for the last three females and males who have died in the household. There are also bad omens, *daw tah pu –eu*, which signify the spirits doing bad things to people. A spirit priest is called to come up with a remedy. However, the Akha believe that only thin-souled people see bad omens. Someone of the family will get sick or some tragedy will happen. The person who saw it will go to the spirit priest to repeat the spirit incantation for him to prevent the affliction. If a person does not recognize a bad omen and falls ill, the shaman will see what happened and the spirit priest will arrive to the remedy (Lewis 1969, 262-267).

According to Lewis (1969, 272) illnesses may be caused by accidents, poisoning and sorcery, soul loss or spirits. The latter are prevalent and it is a shaman's task to find which spirit is causing the illness: it may be the inside or the outside spirit, while in the context of divination, the affliction is viewed as similar (Tooker 1988, 44). When responsibility for illness is considered in terms of what wrong was committed that would cause a spirit to afflict a sick person, the *zog* is viewed as the responsible agent" (Tooker 1988, 45). If a person has chest pains, usually the spirit has shot an arrow into the sick person. The spirit priest or shaman will repeat the spirit incantations and pull out the arrow. The person will get well unless it is his time to die. A soul loss, *la ba ba –eu*, may also cause sickness: this happens if a person experienced an isolation, for example jail. The insanity is regarded as passed down by the ancestors. If there were several cases of insanity, the person's clan is not good. The Akha believe that paralysis is caused by a spirit "in the form of a crane (*hah cah*) flying over the person so that crane's shadow hits (*hah cah dzeh –eu*) the person" (Lewis 1969, 273). It is also possible that a disease is not directly caused by spirits but caught by contact with a sick person. According to Lewis (1969, 281), the Akha rarely use black magic such as sending an object to make someone sick and saying the right formula. However, if a person gets sick for this reason the shaman is the one who makes the diagnosis and the patient finds someone who is skilled at it and will hurt the sender. Special diseases indicate that a person has been chosen to become a spirit priest or shaman (Lewis 1969, 272-274).

In case of bodily injuries, the Akha chew up certain leaves and put them or certain types of bark on the wounds to stop bleeding. If the bleeding does not stop, they repeat spirit incantations or often they do both. The same goes for magical therapy. As a person who has the knowledge of medicines gets old, in the sense he cannot collect the ingredients himself, he will pass his knowledge to his son or someone he trusts (Lewis 1969, 308). Lewis (1969, 300) finds it difficult to identify whether the Akha consider certain remedies medical or magical - they often use a mixture of the two. The Akha treat lesser ailments themselves. Lewis (1969, 269) reports that the Akha feel they must treat every illness and try different kinds of treatment. When nothing helps and the person dies, it was his time to die (Lewis 1969, 281-283).

During the opening of the irrigation ditch, *yxhe djeq-ě*, the inside chanting is only performed by the spirit priest, *bomo*, in order to increase the household's *gylàng*. This spirit chanting may be done in positive circumstances, such as the desire to increase the household's *gylàng*, but it must also be done in negative circumstances involving certain violations of *záng* that affect the fertility of the household. The household irrigation ditch represents the unity of the household and its members as it is said that there is one for each household, *zoq*. In case someone moves out or when a member of the household dies, the irrigation ditch must be split, *yxhe bí paq-ě*, to maintain proper fertility (Tooker 1988, 111). The opening of the irrigation ditch, *yxhe djeq-ě*, must be done in the case of adultery if the husband does not divorce the adulterous wife to keep her in the household (Tooker 1988, 112). The household's *gylàng* is at risk through the wife, not the husband. A married man may sleep with an unmarried woman, but married women may not sleep with anyone except their husbands. Should a married man sleep with a married woman, it is the *gylàng* of the married woman's household that is affected. To restore this *gylàng*, either the woman divorces her own husband and marries the new lover which is the most common practice, or an *yxhe djeq-ě* ceremony must be carried out at her household to purify and re-open its spiritual irrigation ditch (Lewis 1969, 99).

### 3.5.1 Diagnostic Systems

The family of the patient consults the spirit priest, *boe maw*, or the shaman, *nyi pa*, if the sickness lasts and is serious, for instance if an affliction of the spirits is suspected. A member of the family visits the spirit priest, asks him for his help, gives gifts and explains the state of the patient. The spirit priest will divine, *ceh si tsi hae-eu*, which means to consult the paddy grains to see which spirit is afflicting the sick person and the kind of sacrifice that is needed. Between the spirit incantations he will use the grains to determine which spirit is causing the sickness. If the grains come even three times, the spirit priest was right. If not, he changes the paddy grains and tries another spirit until he determines the spirit responsible for the trouble. After that he can continue consulting the grains in order to ascertain what kind of sacrifice do the spirits demand, that is what kind of meat the spirits want to eat as well as the sex, the number and the color of the animal. He then reports his findings to the family member. The other possibility is that the spirit priest tells the messenger which spirit is afflicting the patient and to goes to the shaman to establish the sacrifice needed. In order to do that, the shaman will go into a trance. Sometimes the family goes directly to the shaman since the shaman can tell them the diagnosis as well as the prescription for rectifying the state of the patient and his family (Lewis 1969, 284-286).

### 3.5.2 Therapeutic Systems

The spirit chanting, *neq thó thó-ě*, of the ‘inside’, *làqxho*, and ‘outside’, *làgnji*, depends on the spirits addressed: *aphophi* (ancestors) or *neq* (spirits who separated from people according to the origin myth), is performed quite frequently (Tooker 1988, 126). Certain types of affliction require a dual ceremony (Tooker 1988, 187). They are performed in the cases of illness or affliction by spirits, cases of impurity, and as well as in cases where a build-up of *gylàng* is desired. In all these cases a spirit priest serves as an intermediary between ordinary humans and the worlds of the spirits, whether ancestral or otherwise. He is the ritual officiant and does the actual chanting. What is more, spirit chanting is an integral part of Akha society, as it is illustrated by the fact that it is required for the establishment of a new ancestral shrine in a new household. Additionally, it is one of the few times in which descent and alliance groups are delineated through the offering of contrastive types of meat and bowls, *xmmà tjhì-ě* (the others are marriages and funerals as already

mentioned). Thus, it has relevance to the basic social groupings of Akha society. Just as important as its usage to re-establish balance between the world of humans and the world of spirits, a division that is homologous with other significant divisions in Akha society, notably those between the Akha and the non-Akha, and between the domesticated world of civilization and the uncivilized world of the forest. One main difference between the two types of ceremonies is that, in normal ancestral offerings, the household head (or *ja je àma*) is the officiant, while in spirit chanting, a specialist and intermediary, the spirit priest, *bomo*, is required, whereby the spirit priest cannot chant for his own ancestral section, reiterating the separation of the roles of intermediary and descendant. Outside rituals include offerings to other numerous spirits apart from one's own ancestral spirits, usually seen as spirits of the underworld. Inside offerings are given with respect while the outside offerings are given with disgust, to get rid of them. The household members themselves are poised between the two forces of the inside and outside (Tooker 1988, 130).

The asymmetric nature of the inside and outside is reflected in the type of offerings they can be made for each. The inside offerings include a set of annual rites through which the household members honor their ancestors. In addition, offerings can be made for special occasions such as illness or the desire to build up the good will of the ancestors. Outside offerings, on the other hand, are not made regularly and are only made when affliction arises, or when one desires to ward off affliction ahead of time. Divination is used to determine whether the cause of any particular affliction is an inside one or an outside one, or both. Some of the purposes for which inside/outside spirit chanting is carried out, especially curing may be accomplished by consulting other specialists besides a spirit priest as well, particularly a shaman, *njìphà* or even non-specialists such as elders. However, the set of rituals in relation to shamanism differs significantly from that of the spirit priest. Ceremonies performed by elders or a family member are of a smaller scale than those performed by specialists. In general, an illness or affliction must have reached a fair degree of seriousness before spirit chanting, *neq thó thó-ě*, which is costly largely in terms of loss of livestock, would be considered. "The officiant selected and the level of ritual carried out depends on such factors as the type and seriousness of the illness, the age of the affected person (elders requiring more elaborate ceremonies than those younger), the economic situation of the family in question, personal preference for a particular shaman or spirit priest (as well as her/his availability), and the results of divination" (Tooker 1988, 132-133). Further, the inside/outside



ceremonies do not constitute the whole repertoire of the spirit priest. The whole repertoire would include chanting for the following occasions: illness; impurity (sometimes associated with illness); violations of *záng*, *záng bàng le-ě*, which may also concern illness and impurity; desire for good health, well-being, good fortune, *gylàng*, which can be related to the establishment of a new ancestral section; death and paying tribute to the spirit priest's 'owner', *jôsháng*; installation of another spirit priest; installation of a *yyjeàma* and finally, installation of a blacksmith (Tooker 1988, 132-134). However, the concerns of this discussion are the first four occasions aimed at rectifying the occurred imbalance between the world of humans and the world of spirits and at ensuring the future balance.

Tooker gathered information on the types (1988, 140-142) of the inside of spirit chanting ceremonies. The ones which have to do with illness of a person are the following: clearing the irrigation ditch to regain fertility; opening the *phima's* door which is sometimes called also opening the illness door, *nagoq phang-e* performed for the patient recovering but periodically falling into relapses because he is being called by the spirits; leading around the household, *zog djo sjhe-e*, done for illnesses for which a serie of previous rituals did not cure; and bringing about well being, *sha dang dang-e*, performed for the household's health. The last two ceremonies also require outside chanting. Tooker's (1988, 190-235) findings on the outside spirit chanting concerning illness are the following: chanting to get rid of, *m tjaq tho dze-e*; *xhe ghe-e*, on the level of household or village; *mo dzeq dzeq-e*, splitting the body to release the *neq* that is holding the soul of the sick; *lagnji tho dze-e*, outside chanting to get rid of the spirits of the underworld. The first two ceremonies require inside and outside spirit chanting performed in cases of serious illness performed by the spirit priest.

Continuing with the two main causes of illness, the family must find and bring to the house someone who knows how to repeat the spirit incantation. It may be the spirit priest, the shaman or some elder. The family prepares the pre-ceremonial feast for the person who will repeat the incantations. All village elders are invited to the feast (Lewis 1969, 286-288). From this point on the procedure differs if the diagnosis set was the affliction by the spirit or the soul loss.

In the first case, after the feast, the person who will repeat the incantations must kill the sacrificial animal close to the fireplace on the women's side of the house. The people of the house prepare a winnowing tray with usually seven dishes on it. The person repeating the incantations sits facing the ancestor shrine with the tray before him. If it is the spirit priest, he must start the incantations during the day, if there is a shaman, she must start during the night. No matter who repeats the incantation, nothing must be left out because there is a danger of affliction for that person and also the patient will die. If the incantations were repeated correctly, the sick person will get well, only, of course, if it is not his time to die and if his luck-blessing, *gui lah*, is big (Lewis 1969, 286-290).

Calling the soul back, *la ku ku -eu*, involves ceremonies which differ from inside and outside ceremonies. It is usually a task of the spirit priest who orders the family members in what they must prepare. He then takes the winnowing tray with prepared dishes, taking white thread and a piece of the patients' clothes. He goes to the village gate with the tray, puts it on the ground and begins to call the soul of the patient to retrieve it from peripheral areas (the forest or underworld) - beyond the village gate if the patient is a grown person and inside the gate if the sick person is a child, depending on the time spent outside the village. He calls the soul to come back to the general area of the body: the household where its grandmother lives - the female owner of the house (Tooker 1988: 293-294). At the return of the spirit priest, the household head makes the patient get up and eat some rice so that they can report to the spirit priest that the soul came back and the patient has appetite, even if this is not true. The spirit priest ties the white thread around the patients' wrist to keep the soul from running away. At the end, the household head will present a gift for the spirit priest. If the soul did not actually come back the person will die (Lewis 1969, 290-293).

### **3.5.3 Shamanism**

Now here is a closer and more detailed look at Akha shamanism. According to Lewis's notes (1969: 146), shamans, *nyi pa*, are a relatively new phenomenon in Akha society. Unfortunately, he does not manage to determine whether Akha shamanism was borrowed from Shan. There is no mention of shamanism in the original Akha customs in the beginning of their religion. Only spirit priests and village priests are mentioned and this fact may also be related to the position of

shamans in the status rung which is the lowest in Akha hierarchy. However, they are considered very important, especially when it comes to divining.

It is usually a woman who is chosen by one of the three *pi tso* spirit owners to become a shaman. The Akha shaman travels between the world of people and the world of spirits. She may travel in three directions: east if she is chosen by the eastern *pi tso*, middle of the sky if selected by the middle of the sky-one *pi tso* or west if chosen by the western one. The shaman learns the words directly from the *pi tso*, while the spirit priest is taught by other spirit priests. As observed by Lewis (1969, 148-150), the spirit owner falls on, *nyi pa galle-eu*, the person at the age of thirty. The sign for this is a peculiar, special sickness. It can be perceived as two different *pi tso* trying to get the same person. In this case, a spirit priest must clearly perform the tragedy ceremony, *u ca shaw-eu* after which the person becomes a shaman in one of the groups (Lewis 1969: 150). The shaman's main task is to go into trance, *nji pa shi eu* (literary meaning the shaman dies), and visit the underworld that is the world of spirits (Lewis 1969, 152).

In addition to going into trance, shamans can divine also by touching the hand, *a la ah toe hay-eu* which appears similar to taking a pulse. Holding the patient's wrist, the shaman asks the spirit owner to tell her which spirit is afflicting the person (Lewis 1969, 188).

Shamans are purported to visit the land of the ancestors in their journeys to the spirit worlds. There were two ways for shamans to go to the ancestral world, one way is by horseback – which is most often done according Tooker, (although the Akha never ride horses, especially the women who instead have small ponies), and one way by foot (Tooker 1988, 63). The shaman's purpose of traveling to the spirit world is to establish which spirit is causing the sickness by capturing or eating the soul of the patient. She can go into trance at home or at the patient's house. If it is the latter case, she visits the house and goes into trance at night, while the spirit priest does during the daytime. While in a trance, the shaman drinks only the liquor along with the house spirit, *dzh mi* (Lewis 1969, 153).

Each time the shaman goes into trance, she has a helper, *nji pa pi caw*, usually the woman of the house. And before she goes into trance she rubs the patient's forehead and down the tip of the nose

with soot. This way it is easier to find the patient's soul. The soul is wrested away from the spirit by the spirit slave, *a dzaw*, which was sent by the shaman to argue with the spirit. The shaman supposedly asks the afflicting spirit what kind of meat it is hungry for and the next morning she tells the family what kind of offerings they should make (Lewis 1969, 164). The shaman's journey begins with the spirit chanting which is describing her path and presenting herself, her appearance. She continues with praising the house spirit trance chant and calling the bugs out in liquor. The latter is the most anticipated part whereby bringing the bugs proves the shaman to be good, or if the shaman cannot bring the bugs, he or she can be proven to be a poor, or even fake, shaman. The shaman asks the house spirits to let the bugs come out of the great, or God's, house. These bugs are left to drink the liquor for some time and then sent back (Lewis 1969, 173).

### 3.6 AKHA SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Human life derives from the Otherworld and it also returns there at death. This circulation is a part of the continuous exchange between the sphere of humans and the sphere of spirits. Fertility, the gift of life, comes first. It precedes status and wealth. However, life in the sense of a living person exists only in the sphere of humans. Status dictates the faith and luck of the person in this world – depending on the following of *zang* – and ensures his existence as a benevolent spirit after death. Status is therefore gained through male offspring, promising the ancestor's role in the otherworld. Again, both constituents are necessary for good life. Owing to the patronymic linkage, daughters and sons are incorporated into their father's patriline. After the wedding, the wife joins her husband at his father's house. However, a woman's link to her natal patrikin is never completely severed. A woman is doubly affiliated into descent categories. When she, as a sister, leaves to marry she becomes someone else's: she as a wife becomes the mother of the patriline's next generation. The Akha offerings to the ancestors consist of male forbears in the direct patriline as well as the women married to those men.

The explanation above stresses, once again, the relational concept of a person. The underlying value ideas dictate the exchange relations. Failing this, the person is vulnerable or exposed to the destructing influences of the Otherworld which presents itself in the light of sickness. The patient

is not whole as a person and is also not a full member of a society. What is more, illness is treated as an affliction on the household, not as a matter of the individual. Members of the household must seek help and cooperate with the specialist, spirit priest and shaman to save the person's life.

The shaman is considered to be the most powerful agent when dealing with the Otherworld. Usually a woman is chosen to become a shaman by receiving a call and knowledge from spirit owners. She performs healing rituals on behalf of someone. For the restoration of the afflicted state, she divines to establish what is the reason for the patient's disease: whether it is the outside or the inside spirit who is causing the illness or she detects where the lost soul is. Then she bargains with the afflicting agent or searches for the soul to save the patient's life. By reconfiguring patient's constituents, she renews the relations between the domains and heals the patient.

#### 4 CONCLUSION: COMPARATIVE SUMMARY

In this final part the findings of the present work will be drawn together. The frame of the exploration was defined by the hypothesis set at the beginning: *a comparative analysis of shamanism and its underlying representations in the different societies will reveal the fundamental features of the shamanistic process of healing as such, and the differences between them, hence the cultural specificity of each of them.* The theory concepts and their authors employed at the outset proved as a consistent guidance through the aimed analysis.

The analysis of the Hmong and Akha societies provides the context and contributes to the text for the present work. Previous pages are the basis for identifying key similarities and differences between the two societies as well as portraying the medical system of the Hmong and Akha. The societies were analyzed as entirety of exchanges - from annual ritual cycles, rituals of life cycle as well as healing rituals - which are dominated by value ideas of each society. The first part of the comparative analysis will parallel both societies as wholes, whereby each society accepts a particular perception of “being the entire universe” (Barraud, Coppet, Iteanu, Jamous 1994: 101) which will lead to a comparison of both medical systems and healing rituals in particular.

Thus the scope of the anthropological research is the comparison of the underlying concepts of every society. Therefore, to read the text, that is to analyze the healing rituals, it is necessary to present the context, to provide the whole by presenting the ordering of key phenomena in each society and the world view and its presentations of their members. The ethnographic foundation for the examination of the selected societies, the Hmong and Akha, was based on the works of Postert (2003, 2004) and Tapp (1989) for the former, and the ethnographic foundation provided by Tooker (1988, 1996, 2004), Lewis (1969, 1970) and Kammerer (1996, 1998) for the latter. The contemplated comparison demanded that certain data to fit into the model employed, that is data contributing to the comprehension of relations between the social and cosmological domain. However, anthropologists use different models and therefore gather different kind of data. The work on the Hmong proved to include data necessary for the present analysis, while anthropologists who studied Akha used different models and consequently their data called for further exploration of Akha society. Both societies are found in mountainous areas of various states of the Golden triangle - each belonging to different language family. The Akha and Hmong

have a history of conflict relations with the lowland and the government. Their social structure is based on lineages, they are patrilineal and virilocal, practicing slash and burn agriculture and are therefore migratory.

To move deeper into each of the societies as holistic societies, the Hmong and Akha each have certain value ideas which constitute them. Origin myths explain the creation of the world and the appearance of the value ideas as well as the importance for the persistence of their society and its meaning. Fertility and breathing are in both societies regarded as synonyms which denote life - a value idea which emerged first and comes from the cosmos. Life is all around and in the case of the foetus the life becomes embodied. Secondly came status in the sense of socialisation of life which is necessary for the person to exist. From this point on the Hmong and Akha differ in ascribing significance to these ideas whether in general or considering a particular context, whereby the value ideas complement each other at all times. Obtaining the (reproductive) life precedes socialization of human life - the creation of humans as social beings. Yet, a person can only exist through the socialisation of life by binding *plig* (Hmong) and *sa la* (Akha) to the body which are placing it into the social domain. In the case of the Hmong the appropriate name enables a man the pursuit of status and remembrance after death. The latter is evidently dependent on male offspring who will perform the offerings for the male ancestors. In the Hmong, the sense of competition and wealth is more explicitly expressed, thus going hand in hand with their marriage system – generalized exchange and latent aggression towards foreign descent groups. The Akha, emphasize blessing or fertility which can also be seen in their asymmetric alliance system and genealogical patronymic linkage system. The wife's brothers are the ones who are the source of blessing and direct whether the wife and her husband will have a son who will perform offerings for them to have a status of ancestors in the otherworld. Yet, to be able to comprehend the way these ideas pervade both societies, it is crucial to follow their course in the rituals of life cycle.

The flow of the value ideas is clearly expressed in the marriage ceremony during which the affinal relations are established, whereby the nature of relations differs with regards to the marriage system of the society. The Hmong's generalized exchange is accompanied by a strong antagonism of foreign descent groups. Their marriage rituals are visibly the exchange of *hmoov* for fertility for the wife taker and fertility for *hmoov* for the wife giver. The dowry and the bride price are

obligatory. The Akha asymmetric alliance system, however, reflects the superiority of the wife giver throughout the marriage rituals. Also the premarital sexual relations are encouraged in order to prove the reproductive capacity. The dowry is optional, while the bride price does not exist, only the wedding ceremony itself is on the wife taker. These differences continue when a child is born. The Akha name their children, male and female, according to the patronymic linkage system, while the Hmong choose a name which will bring the man luck, power and respect with, of course, the personal effort of the man. Daughters are exempted from giving the ancestral name, as they marry they change their descent group. This difference is also evident as they bury the placenta of the newborn child. When a person dies, the death rituals must be properly conducted so the value ideas continue their flow and that the constituents of the persons resolve themselves in the matter that the reincarnation of the person's soul is possible and that the person gains a status of an ancestor. The visible expression of the movement of value ideas are gifts being exchanged in the life cycle rituals.

The value ideas in Hmong and Akha society are in every respect evident in the relations between people or between people and spirits. In both societies, health related to the value ideas which are expressed through the continuity maintained by following the rules, avoiding taboos, which again overwhelm all levels of relations and bind the social and cosmological domain in the same manner. Health, in both societies, is regarded as a completeness of a person. The concept of a person is in these societies relationally defined. Every human being is a knot of social and cosmological relations that can be sustained through the exchange processes. Comaroff explained this concept well (1984, 52):

*Illness, or more precisely 'affliction' ... is experienced as a dislocation in the ordered set of social relations and cosmological categories which encompass the subject. Though it is made manifest in the being of a particular sufferer, such illness expresses a wider disturbance in the web of relations of which the victim is a part – relations which are once physical, social and moral. Illness is thus a comment upon the state of accommodation between a particular sufferer and his wider context.*

To return to the hypothesis, the core comparative question is how do the Hmong and Akha consider the conjunction of the identified constituents within a person – and their re-conjunction in the patient – as the result of the re-establishment of different types of relationships and of the



proper hierarchical order among these? This is what birth, marriage and death rituals all accomplish. The aim of the comparative analysis is to show whether Hmong and Akha healers (shamans) reconstruct different types of relationships in order to socialize the patient and thus re-configure the patient's constituent parts.

Every human being is composed of different constituents, namely, the body as the material part, the soul or souls as the spiritual part and the name. A person becomes a part of a socio-cosmological order by acquiring these constituents. Gift exchanges/rituals which take place during marriage, birth, death and yearly ceremonies, construct, reproduce and transform relations among the living and between the living and the dead by bringing together and resolving the socio-cosmic constituents. Van Gennep's concept of rites of passage (1960) encompasses the private ceremonies commemorating personal milestone as well as the regular communal celebrations (Brown 2005, 410). Through the three stages - separation, liminal phase and aggregation - the person's constituents are renewed and his status is changed. If one of the person's constituents is afflicted, the person becomes a patient: "disease takes root when key social relations - among the living or the living and dead - are disturbed" (Bell 1997, 116). While human efforts at maintaining these relations seem almost powerless when considering the influence of the forces of the otherworld, "rituals of affliction hold all these powers to some degree of accountability and service" (Bell 1997, 120). Hmong and Akha meet similar, common, causes of illness. They conceive of a particular relationship between the act of sacrifices and the practice of the processes of healing: the inattention of the household to perform the sacrifices for the ancestors (Hmong and Akha) and other spiritual beings (Akha) prescribed by the tradition negatively affects the wellbeing of members of both societies. This manifests itself in the illness, which is thought to be inflicted by ancestors withholding their protection and hungry spirits.

To return to one particular value idea Hmong life principle is *pa*, breath which is closely intertwined with *siav*, reproductive life or it can be also said it is one and the same thing. Akha have *gylan*, potency, fertility also indispensable for the physical condition of a man. These two concepts are essential for a person's physical existence. The beginning and the end of life is indicated through the movement of *pa* or *gylan* from the cosmological sphere to the social sphere and vice versa. Life always derives from the ancestors, whether through the wife's father in the

case of the Hmong or through the wife's brother in the case of the Akha. Loss of *pa* or *gylan* is a negative condition which concerns both domains, human and spiritual. Pertaining of *pa* or *gylan* in the social sphere is a process of passing away. If the life principle disappears, this can be seen as an early death. Shamanic exegeses identify illness as the result of the early loss of *pa* or *gylan* by getting rid of hungry wild spirits by ritual means. Namely, the unsocialized life principle (Hmong *pa*, Akha *gylan*) is exposed to the attacks of wild spirits conceptualized as acts of consumption, while the reputation-like constituents which make the socialisation of human life possible have to do with the ancestors and their protection against misfortunes.

The second cause of illness is soul loss. Person's *plig* (Hmong), *sa la* (Akha) - the life defining constituent of his body - is of cosmological, non-social origin. During a person's lifetime, *plig* or *sa la*, must be withdrawn from spiritual domain, embodied into the person and transferred along social and socio-cosmological relations of exchange that constitute the Hmong and Akha society. The aim of these acts is to bind the *plig*, *sa la* to the person and to prevent its premature return into its domain of origin. The child's *plig*, *sa la* is socialized by being offered gifts that embody prosperity and social status. By performing the birth ritual for the child, the range of social and cosmological relations in which is to be embedded is further extended. These relations provide the child with a more encompassing identity as a social being. The *plig* and *sa la* must also be binded to the bride as she changes her descent group at the wedding.

According to the Hmong, the body is maintained by *plig*, as the cords from the sky on which the body hangs. The presence of *plig* in one person is an expression of concern for the maintaining of relations with the ancestors. Failing this, the *plig* will leave the person and be reincarnated in another man, which leads to the death of the former. Hmong shaman bargains with the forces of the Otherworld for the patient's *plig* with the *plig* of an animal (or he even substitutes his own *plig* for the self of the patient), frightens off or persuades the *dab qus* who may have trapped the wandering *plig*, descending into a hole or bottom of the ocean to retrieve it, or bargaining directly with Ntxwj Nug, for an extension of the patient's life. The shaman restores the balance of the psyche by first identifying, then retrieving, the absent or lost parts of the self. Akha believe that the soul(s), *sa la*, fills the body. If the soul leaves, it must be called back, *la ku ku -eu*, or the person will die. Akha shaman's purpose of traveling to the spirit world is also to establish which spirit is

causing the sickness by capturing or eating the soul of the patient. The shaman establishes what kind of meat the afflicting spirit is hungry for. In both societies, binding of the soul to the body is employed, first during birth ritual and secondly in case of illness. However, different types of diseases are actually not clearly separable and are treated simultaneously.

In the Hmong and Akha society, the ritual expert most often consulted in case of the disease is the shaman. However, Hmong shamanism is a part of their origin myths, while the Akha consider the shaman to be a relatively new vocation. There is also a difference in prevalence of men as shamans in Hmong society as opposed to women shamans in Akha society. However, in both societies shamans receive the call and their powers directly from the Otherworld. They command idiosyncratic knowledge - provided by the teacher shaman - that in principle is not shared by other members of their society. The application of their powers and knowledge to the patient involves the obligatory transfers of certain types of gifts. These transfers are necessary for the establishment of the relationship between the patient and the cosmological origin of his constituents. The task of the shaman is to divine and rectify the problem with the help of his or her spiritual army by going into trance and traveling to the Otherworld on horseback. Both societies also share the following facts: the act is conducted at night and shamans actually subordinate the relations with the invisible spirits to socially significant means of communication by applying ritual language.

The practitioner is called to heal the patient. Yet, illness is treated as an affliction on the household. The whole household is seen as the source of violation and violations are handled on the household level. The sick person is present at the healing ceremony but exempted from the cooperation with the rest of the household members which must act in accordance with the shaman's instructions. The knowledge of the appropriate incantations will ensure the successful retrieval of the patient's soul. The causing entities of the Otherworld must be persuaded to trade the trapped soul for something else, usually meat of dead animals. Namely, acts of healing gain their effectiveness only if the patient's family transfers particular gift objects to the shaman. The processes of transfer require the ritual enactment of relations of conjunction, connecting the constituents (Hmong *plig*, Akha, *sa la*) and their spiritual owners (Hmong father-mother spirit, Akha *bije*) to qualities originating in the society's ancestral order. The objects/beings transferred in opposite direction embody these qualities: the objects composing the bride price/wedding feast and the payment of

shamans are exchanged for the *life* embodied in the bride and dowry. Hence, in the process of exchange, the position of the shaman is structurally similar to the position of the wife giver: he/she is the receiver of objects deriving their value from ancestral ownership and acts as mediator of relations with the spirit domain. On the whole, the analysed form of exchange and its underlying value conjunction can serve as a model to understand the Hmong and Akha and their similarities and differences, along with their representations and actions. The embodiment of life in human beings and its incorporation into the social order result from the conjunction of the act of exchange of two different origin relationships: *plig/sa la* originating in spirit domains, is exchanged against objects belonging to the ancestral origin of the society. Since the prolonged embodiment of the *plig/sa la* by the patient, new born children and the bride are dependent on the conjunction of values. The act of exchange reflects the re-establishment of the superiority of the ancestral order of society over the non-social order of the spirit domain.

In the present text I strived to understand and assemble each society's relations which are ritually constructed, reproduced and transformed through acts of exchange, in order to be able to see the phenomena of healing rituals as one of these exchanges through which different types of relationships are reconstructed. I examined the act of healing and the ways in which the ability to perform these acts is obtained by healers (shamans) among the Hmong and Akha. The healing process begins by identifying the origin of an illness by administering those acts and medicines which re-connect the patient to the cosmological and social niche in order to reconstruct different types of relations with the purpose of the socialisation of the patient and re-configuring of the patient's constituent parts. The person becomes whole again - healthy - which is the same as being Hmong or Akha.

## 5 SUMMARY IN SLOVENE LANGUAGE (Povzetek v slovenskem jeziku)

Bolezen je vseprisotna in je neizogiben del življenja vsakega človeka v kateri koli družbi. Vendar pa v posameznih družbah obstajajo kulturne razlike v tipih in resnosti simptomov. Svet dojemamo kot člani lastne družbe in zato tudi fizično stanje našega telesa nujno razumemo skozi kulturno konstruirane filtre etnomedicinskih prepričanj. Bolezen kot biološki in kulturni fenomen, preučevan znotraj svojega socialnega in kulturnega konteksta, predstavlja pomembno temo za znanstveno raziskovanje, zlasti na področju medicinske antropologije, ki je ena od poddisciplin socialne in kulturne antropologije. V kulturnoantropološkem smislu je medicinski sistem niz idej in vrednot, ki se nanašajo na določeno tradicijo zdravljenja. Po etnomedicinskem pristopu v medicinski antropologiji imajo vse družbe svoje medicinske sisteme, ki vključujejo teorijo etiologije bolezni, metode za njeno diagnosticiranje ter predpise in prakse kurativnih terapij. Medicinski sistem je treba razumeti kot družbeni sistem, ki je sestavljen iz reprezentacij in organizacijskih vlog v institucionalnih strukturah, ki so vgrajene v dani kulturni sistem.

Ceremonije zdravljenja so pomembna vrsta ritualov. Vse kulture imajo ritualna sredstva za zdravljenje bolezni. V družbah, v katerih šamani izpolnjujejo vlogo zdravilca, je medicinski sistem opredeljen v smislu konceptov in vrednot lokalne religije in vanje vključen. V takšnih primerih religija in šamanizem običajno temeljita na izdelanih kozmologijah. Kozmologije so vse od Levi-Straussove *Mythologiques* (1969, 81) naprej preučevane kot kompleksni sistemi znanja same po sebi. Obstajajo načini, kako razumeti ta svet, drugi svet ter odnose in dinamiko med njima. Douglas (1966) zagovarja korelacijo med kozmologijo in družbeno strukturo. Druga možnost je, da ta korelacija ne obstaja. Katero stran zagovarjati, ko se ukvarjamo z etničnim mozaikom jugovzhodne Azije? Od leta 1935 dalje so znanstveniki v več indonezijskih družbah opredelili specifični dualizem družbenega in kozmološkega reda in njegove modalitete (glej van Wouden 1935, JPB de Josselin de Jong 1935, 1951, ss. Rassers 1925, Lévi-Strauss 1958, Barnes 1974, Fox (ur.) 1988, Fox 1989, Valeri 1989). Kljub temu je primerjalnih raziskav o tipih modalnosti v jugovzhodni Aziji še vedno zelo malo. Eno redkih analiz je prispeval P. E. de Josselin de Jong (1965). Nanašajoč se na Platenkampa (2007), je dvojnost družbenega in kozmološkega reda opredeljena kot način organiziranja obstoječih odnosov (socialnih, kozmoloških, političnih) v holistične strukture. Zato je treba reprezentacije bolezni in terapevtskih

ritualov analizirati in razlagati kot izraz temeljnih kozmoloških prepričanj, vrednot in načinov delovanja. Zlasti šamanistične prakse zagotavljajo sredstva za umestitev dinamike družbenih sprememb v trajne oz. stalne kozmološke rede.

Kot je dokumentirano (Chang 1983), šamanizem v mnogih družbah jugovzhodne Azije igra ključno vlogo pri ritualih zdravljenja. Analiza šamanističnih praks zagotavlja privilegirana sredstva za dostop do osnovnih idej in vrednot, na katerih temelji družbeno življenje teh družb. Ta študija je gradila na holistični perspektivi, kot sta jo opredelila Durkheim in Mauss v eseju o klasifikaciji (1903). To pomeni pogled na družbo kot celoto, medtem ko so rituali zdravljenja razumljeni v smislu prostora, ki ga v teh družbah zasedajo (Barraud in Platenkamp 1990: 104).

Analiza družb Hmong in Akha zagotavlja sobesedilo tega dela, saj opredeljuje ključne podobnosti in razlike med obema družbama ter opisuje njuna medicinska sistema. Okvir preučevanja je določala zastavljena hipoteza: *komparativna analiza šamanizma in njegovih temeljnih reprezentacij v različnih družbah razkriva ključne značilnosti šamanističnih procesov zdravljenja kot tudi razlike med njimi in kulturno specifičnost*. Družbi sta analizirani kot celoti izmenjav – od letnih ritualnih ciklov, do ritualov življenjskega cikla in ritualov zdravljenja – ki jih določajo vrednote obeh družb. V prvem delu komparativna analiza vzporeja obe družbi kot celoti, pri čemer vsaka družba sprejema svojo percepcijo *being the entire universe* (Barraud, Coppet, Iteanu, Jamous 1994, 101), kar omogoča primerjavo njunih medicinskih sistemov in še posebej ritualov zdravljenja. Kot etnografska osnova za preučevanje družbe Hmong so služila dela Posterta (2003, 2004) in Tappa, za družbo Akha pa dela Tookerjeve (1988, 1996, 2004), Lewisa (1969, 1970) in Kammererjeve (1996, 1998). Obe družbi najdemo v gorskih območjih držav Zlatega trikotnika, vendar jezik družbe Hmong spada v družino Miao-Yao, jezik družbe Akha pa v tibeto-burmansko družino. Akha in Hmong imata zgodovino konfliktnih odnosov z nižinskim svetom in vlado. Njuna družbena struktura temelji na rodovih, sta patrilinearni in migratorni družbi, ki prakticirata poživalniško agrikulturo.

Hmong in Akha imata kot holistični družbi določene vrednote, ki ju konstituirajo. Miti o izvoru razkrivajo nastanek sveta in pojav teh idej kot tudi njihov pomen in pomembnost pri ohranjanju družbe. Dihanje in plodnost sta v obeh družbah razumljena kot sopomenki, ki označujeta življenje,

to pa je vrednota, ki se je pojavila prva. Življenje je povsod. Fetus pomeni njegovo utelešenje, vidnost za človeška bitja. Nato je prišel status, čast v smislu socializacije življenja, ki je nujna za človekov obstoj. Od tu dalje se družbi razlikujeta glede na to, kakšno pomembnost pripisujeta idejam na splošno in v določenih kontekstih, pri čemer sta si ideji ves čas komplementarni. Življenje predhodi socializaciji človeškega življenja, človeka kot socialnega bitja. Vendar lahko oseba obstaja le skozi socializacijo življenja s *plig* (Hmong), *sa la* (Akha), ki je vezan na človeško telo in ga tako postavi v družbeno domeno. V družbi Hmong primerno ime človeku omogoča doseganje statusa in spomin po smrti. Slednji je odvisen od moških potomcev, ki bodo opravljali daritve za moške prednike. Bogastvo v smislu konkurence oziroma tekmovanja je pri Hmong bolj jasno izraženo in gre z roko v roki s prikrito agresijo do tujih rodov in generalizirano izmenjavo kot sistemom poročanja. Na drugi strani Akha poudarjajo blagoslov življenja, ki ga je prav tako treba obravnavati v povezavi s sistemom asimetričnega zavezništva in genealoškega patronimičnega rodovnega sistema. Ženin brat je tisti, ki je vir blagoslova in določa, ali bosta žena in njen mož imela sina, ki bo opravljal daritve zanj, da bosta imela status prednikov v drugem svetu. Da bi dojeli, kako te ideje prevevajo obe družbi, je ključnega pomena, da sledimo njihovem toku v ritualih življenjskega cikla.

Pretok vrednot je jasno izražen v poročni slovesnosti, med katero se vzpostavijo odnosi svaštva, pri čemer se narava odnosov razlikuje glede na poročni sistem v družbi. Generalizirano menjava pri Hmong spremlja močan antagonizem do tujih rodov. Poročna ceremonija je menjava *hmoov* za plodnost za ženojemalca in plodnosti za *hmoov* za ženodajalca. Dota in cena neveste sta obvezni. Pri Akha pa sistem asimetričnega zavezništva skozi celotni poročni ritual odraža večjo pomembnost ženodajalca. Prav tako so spolni odnosi pred poroko zaželeni, da se preveri plodnost. Dota ni obvezna, nevesta nima cene, le poročni obred je breme ženojemalca. Te razlike se nadaljujejo, ko se rodi otrok. Akha svoje otroke ne glede na spol poimenujejo v skladu s patronimičnim sistemom, medtem ko Hmong izberejo ime, ki bo človeku prineslo srečo, moč in spoštovanje, seveda ne brez njegovega osebnega prizadevanja. Hčere so iz poimenovanja izvzete, saj po poroki zamenjajo rod. Ta razlika je razvidna tudi iz mesta, kamor pokopljejo placento novorojencev. Ko oseba umre, morajo biti obredi smrti pravilno izvedeni, da vrednote nadaljujejo svoj tok in da se konstitutivni deli osebe razrešijo na način, da se duša osebe reinkarnira in da

umrla oseba pridobi status prednika. Vidni izraz gibanja vrednot so darila, ki si jih izmenjujejo v obredih življenjskega ciklusa.

Vrednote v družbah Hmong in Akha so v vsakem trenutku prisotne v odnosih med ljudmi ter med ljudmi in duhovi. Zdravje je v obeh družbah povezano z vrednotami, izraženih s kontinuiteto, ki jo vzdržuje sledenje predpisom, izogibanje tabujem, kar ponovno preplavi vse ravni odnosov in veže obe domeni. Zdravje v obeh družbah pomeni popolnost osebe, koncept osebe pa je opredeljen z odnosi. Vsako človeško bitje je preplet kozmoloških in družbenih odnosov, ki se lahko ohranja le s procesi menjave. Comaroff pravi (1984, 52):

*Illness, or more precisely 'affliction' ... is experienced as a dislocation in the ordered set of social relations and cosmological categories which encompass the subject. Though it is made manifest in the being of a particular sufferer, such illness expresses a wider disturbance in the web of relations of which the victim is a part – relations which are once physical, social and moral. Illness is thus a comment upon the state of accommodation between a particular sufferer and his wider context.*

Na tem mestu se spomnimo zastavljene hipoteze. Ključno vprašanje je, kako Akha in Hmong razumeta združitev gradnikov znotraj osebe (in njihovo razdružitve v bolniku) kot rezultat ponovne vzpostavitve različnih vrst odnosov in pravilnega hierarhičnega reda med njimi. To je tisto, kar rituali ob rojstvu, poroki in smrti izpolnjujejo. Namen primerjalne analize je pokazati, ali zdravilci (šamani) družb Hmong in Akha rekonstruirajo različne vrste odnosov, da bi socializirali bolnika in s tem ponovno konfigurirali sestavne dele bolnika.

Vsako človeško bitje je sestavljeno iz različnih gradnikov, in sicer iz telesa kot materialnega dela, duše oz. duš kot duhovnega dela in imena. Oseba postane del družbeno-kozmičnega reda s pridobitvijo teh gradnikov. Menjava daril oz. rituali poroke, rojstva, smrti in letne ceremonije vzpostavljajo, obnavljajo in preoblikujejo odnose med živimi ter med živimi in mrtvimi z združevanjem ali razreševanjem socialno-kozmičnih gradnikov. Van Gennepov koncept ritualov prehoda (1960) zajema ceremonije, ki zaznamujejo osebne mejnike vsakega posameznika, kakor tudi redna skupnostna praznovanja (Brown 2005, 410). Skozi tri faze – ločitev, liminalna faza oz. prehod in združitev – se gradniki osebe obnovijo in status posameznika se spremeni. Če je ena od



človekovih komponent prizadeta, ta oseba postane bolnik. “... *disease takes root when key social relations – among the living or the living and dead – are disturbed*” (Bell 1997, 116). In medtem ko se človeško prizadevanje za ohranjanje teh odnosov zdi skoraj nemočno pri vplivanju na sile drugega sveta, “*rituals of affliction hold all these powers to some degree of accountability and service*” (Bell 1997, 120). Hmong in Akha si delita podobne najpogostejše vzroke bolezni. Gre za odnos med dejanjem žrtvovanja in prakso zdravilskega procesa: nedoslednost gospodinjstva pri opravljanju žrtvovanj za prednike (Hmong in Akha) in druga duhovna bitja (Akha), ki jih predpisuje tradicija, negativno vpliva na dobrobit članov obeh družb. To se manifestira v bolezni, ki se je zelo verjetno pojavila zaradi umanjkanja podpore oz. varovanja prednikov in zaradi lačnih (divjih ali zunanjih) duhov.

Življenjski princip pri Hmong je *pa* in je tesno povezan z rodovitnostjo, lahko bi ju celo enačili. Tudi Akha ima podoben koncept, *gylan*, plodnost, ki je fizični pogoj človeka. Ta dva koncepta sta ključna za biološki obstoj posameznika. Začetek in konec življenja je opredeljen z gibanjem *pa/gylan* od kozmološke sfere v socialno in obratno. Življenje vedno izhaja iz prednikov, bodisi preko ženinega očeta v primeru Hmong ali preko ženinega brata v primeru Akha. Izguba *pa/gylan* je negativno stanje, ki prizadene obe domeni. Ohranjanje *pa/gylan* v družbeni sferi je proces minevanja. Če življenjsko načelo izgine, to lahko pomeni (pre)zgodnjo smrt. Šamanske razlage opredeljujejo bolezen kot posledico zgodnje izgube *pa/gylan*, kar je možno popraviti z odganjanjem lačnih duhov s pomočjo ritualnih sredstev. Nesocializirano življenjsko načelo (pri Hmong *pa*, pri Akha *gylan*) je namreč izpostavljeno napadom divjih duhov, kar je koncipirano kot dejanje prehranjevanja, porabe. Na drugi strani pa imajo gradniki, povezani z ugledom oz. statusom, ki omogočajo socializacijo človeškega življenja, opraviti s predniki in njihovo zaščito pred nesrečo.

Drugi vzrok bolezni je izguba “duš(e)”. Človekove *plig* (Hmong)/*sa la* (Akha) so nujni gradnik človeškega telesa in so kozmološkega, ne družbenega izvora. V času posameznikovega življenja je treba *plig/sa la* umakniti iz duhovne domene, jih utelesiti v osebo in jih prenašati s pomočjo socialnih in socio-kozmoloških odnosov menjav, ki tvorijo družbi Hmong in Akha. Cilj teh dejanj je vezati “duš(e)” na osebo in preprečiti njeno (njihovo) prezgodnjo vrnitev v domeno izvora. “Duš(e)”otroka se socializira(jo) z darovanjem darov, ki utelešajo blaginjo in družbeni status. Z

rituali ob rojstvu se obseg socialnih in kozmoloških odnosov, v katere je otrok umeščen, še dodatno poveča. Ti odnosi otroku zagotavljajo identiteto družbenega bitja. *Plig* in *sa la* je treba vezati tudi na nevesto, ki ob poroki zamenja svoj rod.

*Plig* telo ohranja kot niti, strune z Neba, na katerih telo visi. Prisotnost *plig* je izraz skrbi, negovanja odnosov s predniki. Če te skrbi ni, *plig* zapusti osebo in se reinkarnira v drugem človeku, kar pa pomeni smrt za prvo osebo. Hmong šaman s *plig* živali kupčuje s silami drugega sveta za *plig* bolnika (ali celo z lastnim *plig* za *plig* bolnika), straši ali odganja *the dab qus*, ki so morda ujeli zablodeli *plig*, ki je padel v luknjo ali na dno oceana, ali pa baranta, se neposredno pogaja z Ntxwj Nug za podaljšanje bolnikovega življenja. Šaman ponovno vzpostavi duhovni del tako, da najprej ugotovi, kje se *plig* nahaja, nato gre ponj. V družbi Akha verjamejo, da *duša(e)*, *sa la* napolni telo. Če *sa la* odide, ga je treba poklicati nazaj, *la ku-ku eu*, sicer bo bolnik umrl. Šamanov namen je potovati v drugi svet, ugotoviti, kateri duh z zadrževanjem in uživanjem *sa la* pacienta povzroča bolezen. Šaman ugotovi, katere vrste mesa je duh lačen. Vendar pa različnih vrst boleznih ne moremo jasno ločiti, zato jih je treba obravnavati hkrati.

V družbah Hmong in Akha je šaman tisti ritualni strokovnjak, s katerim se v primeru bolezni najpogosteje posvetujejo. Šamanizem v družbi Hmong nastopa v mitih o izvoru, medtem ko je v družbi Akha to relativno nov poklic. Pri Hmong je očitna tudi prevlada moških šamanov v primerjavi s šamankami družbe Akha. V obeh družbah bodoči šaman prejme klic in svoje moči neposredno z drugega sveta. Šamani uporabljajo idiosinkratično znanje, ki so ga prejeli od svojega učitelja šamana in ga praviloma ne delijo z ostalimi člani svoje družbe. Uporaba šamanove moči in znanja vključuje obvezne prenose določenih vrst daril. Ti transferji so potrebni za vzpostavitev odnosa med bolnikom in kozmološkim izvorom njegovih gradnikov. Šamanova naloga je prerokovati in odpraviti težavo s pomočjo svoje duhovne vojske tako, da vstopi v trans in v drugi svet potuje na konjevem hrbtu. Obe družbi si delita tudi naslednji značilnosti: šamani svoja dejanja opravljajo ponoči, z uporabo ritualnega jezika (komunikacijskim sredstvom, značilnim za družbeni svet) pa si dejansko podredijo odnose z nevidnimi duhovi.

Zdravilca se pokliče, da bi ozdravil bolnika, vendar bolezen velja za prizadetost celotnega gospodinjstva. Slednje predstavlja vir kršitve in s kršitvami je treba opraviti na ravni

gospodinjstva. Bolna oseba je med ceremonijo zdravljenja prisotna, vendar je izključena iz sodelovanja z ostalimi člani gospodinjstva, ki morajo delovati v skladu s šamanovimi navodili. Znanje pravih "čarobnih" besed zagotavlja uspešno vrnitev bolnikove duše. Entitete drugega sveta, ki povzročajo bolezen, je treba prepričati, da dušo zamenjajo za nekaj drugega, ponavadi za meso mrtvih živali. Namreč, dejanja zdravljenja so uspešna le, če bolnikova družina prenese šamanu določena darila. Procesi prenosa zahtevajo ritualno vzpostavitev odnosov združenja, ki povezujejo človekove gradnike (Hmong *plig*, Akha *sa la*) in njihove duhovne lastnike (Hmong duh oče-mati, Akha *bije*) s kvalitetami reda prednikov družbe. Predmeti/bitja, ki so preneseni v nasprotno smer, poosebljajo te lastnosti: predmete, ki sestavljajo ceno neveste/poročno pojedino in plačilo šamanu, se zamenja za življenje, ki je utelešeno v nevesti in njeni doti. Zato je v procesu menjave šamanov položaj strukturalno podoben položaju ženodajalcu: šaman je prejemnik predmetov, katerih vrednost izhaja iz lastništva prednikov in deluje kot posrednik odnosov z duhovno domeno. Analizirana oblika menjave in njeno združenje vrednot služi kot model za razumevanje družb Hmong in Akha (podobnosti in razlike), predstav in dejanj. Utelešenje življenja v človeških bitjih in njegova vključitev v družbeni red je rezultat združenja dveh odnosov različnega izvora: *plig/sa la* iz duhovne domene se zamenja za predmete, ki pripadajo izvoru družbe, to je prednikom. Ker je podaljšano utelešenje *plig/sa la* v bolniku, novorojencu in nevesti odvisno od združitve vrednot, dejanje menjave odraža ponovno vzpostavitev superiornosti družbenega reda prednikov nad redom duhovne domene.

V tem delu smo stremeli k razumevanju in prikazu vseh odnosov v posamezni družbi (ti so ritualno konstruirani, reproducirani in transformirani preko menjalnih dejanj), da bi uvideli fenomen ritualov zdravljenja kot eno vrsto teh menjav, skozi katere se rekonstruirajo različni tipi odnosov. Preučevali smo dejanja zdravljenja in načine, kako zdravilci (šamani) v družbah Hmog in Akha pridobijo sposobnost izvajanja teh dejanj. Proces zdravljenja se začne z ugotavljanjem vzroka bolezni s pomočjo uporabe tistih dejanj in zdravil, ki ponovno povežejo bolnika s kozmološko in socialno nišo. Tako se z namenom socializacije pacienta rekonstruirajo različni tipi odnosov in ponovno povežejo vse sestavne dele bolnika. Ta ponovno postane cel (zdrav), kar pomeni enako, kot biti član Akha ali Hmong družbe.

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