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ETHNOLOGY

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CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY



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Volume XXVIII

Number 4

EXPLAINING VARIATIONS IN BORNEAN LAND TENURE:
THE IBAN CASE

277

R. A. Cramb

MELPA DREAM INTERPRETATION AND THE CONCEPT
OF HIDDEN TRUTH

301

Andrew Strathern

THE KALASHA (PAKISTAN) WINTER SOLSTICE FESTIVAL

317

Alberto Cacopardo and
Augusto Cacopardo

SOCIAL PRACTICE AND THE ONTOLOGY IN AKWE-
XAVANTE NAMING AND MYTH

331

Aracy Lopes da Silva

LEVIRATE AND SORORATE AND THE TERMINOLOGICAL
CLASSIFICATION OF UNCLES, AUNTS, AND SIBLINGS'
CHILDREN

343

A. E. M. J. Pans

TABLE OF CONTENTS - 1989

359

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Alberto Cacopardo and
Augusto Cacopardo

317

SOCIAL PRACTICE AND THE ONTOLOGY IN AKWE-
XAVANTE NAMING AND MYTH

Aracy Lopes da Silva

331

LEVIRATE AND SORORATE AND THE TERMINOLOGICAL
CLASSIFICATION OF UNCLES, AUNTS, AND SIBLINGS'
CHILDREN

A. E. M. J. Pans

343

TABLE OF CONTENTS - 1989

359

University of Pittsburgh

THE KALASHA (PAKISTAN) WINTER SOLSTICE FESTIVAL¹

Alberto Cacopardo and Augusto Cacopardo
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In three narrow and secluded valleys cutting deeply into the Hindu Kush ridges of northwestern Pakistan, dwells a small population of about 3,000 souls: the Kalasha. They are called *Kafirs* (Arab "pagan") by their Muslim neighbors for their stubborn refusal to convert to Islam. This group is unique in being the only Indo-European culture that was not absorbed by any of the great religious systems centered on urban civilization that inspire the philosophy and social organization of all other Indo-European people: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and, to a lesser extent, Zoroastrianism and Jainism. As Kalasha culture is described elsewhere (Alberto Cacopardo 1974, 1985; Augusto Cacopardo 1974; Borriello 1974) this article introduces a ritual rich in suggestive implications: the great festival of the winter solstice called Chaumos.

The survival of Kalasha culture into the present is due in part to a historic accident. When, on November 12th, 1893, the Durand line defined the border between Afghanistan and the British empire (Caroe 1973:381), the Kalasha became British subjects and thus avoided forced conversion to Islam by the Amir of Kabul. On the other side of the border dwelt a large group of Kafir tribes who spoke five different languages and shared a common culture and a polytheistic religion (Robertson 1896; Budruss 1960; Jones 1967, 1974; Jettmar 1986). Kalasha culture, although not identical, was undoubtedly similar despite marked language differences (Fussman 1972:391; Morgenstierne 1961, 1965, 1973; Strand 1973). The Kafir tribes in Afghanistan were soon after 1893 forcibly converted despite their fierce resistance (Jones 1974), while the less numerous Kalasha, under British rule were allowed to continue practicing the religion of their forefathers. Their Muslim neighbors continually exerted protelytizing pressures, and succeeded in converting a percentage of the Kalasha to Islam. This gradual process of conversion is still going on.

The three Kalasha valleys, at an altitude of about 2,500 meters, have been recently joined to the main Chitral valley by jeep roads, but until about ten years ago they were only accessible on foot. Kalasha economy is largely a subsistence economy based on animal husbandry and agriculture. Some items, like tea, sugar, or cotton cloth, are bought or traded at the main Chitral bazaar. Money has started to play a significant role only in the last few years. Kalasha agriculture is poor and the variety of products extremely limited (wheat, maize, millet, barley, and a few vegetables and fruits). Although men participate by taking upon themselves some of the heaviest duties like plowing and harvesting, the everyday tending of the fields, involving irrigation, and the manipulation of crops is left entirely to the women. Animal husbandry centers on goat herding which is entirely the work of men. Women are not allowed in the goat sheds, usually located above the

villages along the mountain slope. In summer the herds are taken to the high mountain pastures.

The tribe consists of three communities that correspond to each of the three valleys. The members of each community consider themselves as descendants of a common ancestor dating back about twelve generations. The three communities are in turn divided into intermediate social groups (*kam*) that play a great role in internal social relations. The *kam*² is patrilineal and exogamous; members descend from a common ancestor dating back about seven or eight generations and are bound by duties of reciprocal solidarity. The minimum social unit is the extended family. Fields, houses, and animals are owned by the family, but high pastures are owned collectively (Parkes 1988:643).

The patterns of economic exchange are of two great spheres: an ordinary one where things are bought, sold, or traded, that mainly concerns relationships with neighboring tribes; and an extraordinary one where the emphasis is on sharing and all exchange takes the form of a gift, at times unilateral. Unilateral gifts are mainly connected to a system of rank. Awarding prestige, special titles, and symbols to those that give prescribed feasts, is part of a system that distributes prescribed amounts of meat, cheese, and bread. This tends to level the economic differences caused by superior ability, fortune, or hereditary transmission, and preserves the egalitarian character of Kalasha culture. Meat, the most precious product of animal husbandry, is consumed almost exclusively in the extraordinary sphere of exchange, in these and other redistributive feasts (e.g., weddings and funerals) so that the quantity each individual gets is not a function of the number of goats he owns but of the number of feasts he is entitled to take part in (Cacopardo and Cacopardo 1977).

It is important to note that the prestige acquired in this way has no direct connection with political power. Public decisions are taken in the course of informal assemblies (*jirga*) open to everyone and in the course of which the most intelligent, wise, and eloquent play the main role. Distributions are therefore not aimed at political power, and seem to be the expression of a general cultural attitude well expressed by the words of the song women address to each other in one of the central days of Chaumos: *kia mai bata hin dai, amo tai bata dem*, (what I receive, that I give to you). It recalls the Golden Rule and the Maori formula quoted by Mauss (1965:277), "*Ko Maru kai atu, ko maru mai, ka ngohe ngohe*," (What Maru gives, that Maru gets, and that is good).

The symbolic system of the Kalasha contains a fundamental polarity: the dualism *onjeshta* - *pragata* that can be roughly translated as pure - impure (Loude 1980:17). *Onjeshta* is associated with the male sex, *pragata* with the female sex and especially with menstruation and childbirth. *Pragata* is the *bashali* (the house where women retire at the time of menstruation and childbirth) with the land around it (Graziosi 1961). It is usually located below the villages, near the river where water for washing is readily available to the women. During the seclusion period men must not approach them. *Onjeshta* are conversely the shrines of the male deities. Access to these holy places, usually located at a certain height on the mountain slope above the villages, is strictly forbidden to women.

At first sight this polarity appears to correspond to a high - low contraposition. Indeed all high mountain land is *onjeshta*, including the summer pastures, and forbidden to women. Here dwell the *suchi*, supernatural beings considered to be particularly pure, who seem to correspond to the fairies of many IndoEuropean folk-tales, as indicated by the fact that they are also named *pharian*, a Persian word that shares with the English one a common root. Several other supernatural beings are imagined by the Kalasha. God the creator ranks in a special class and, although ultimate cause of all things, does not bother with human affairs and is probably beyond the *onjeshta* - *pragata* polarity itself. The male divinities of the shrines belong to another class. They are heroes of myths, personal gods who tangibly manifest themselves in the holy places dedicated to them. They are the gods with whom the Kalasha communicate in the most intense and direct manner. Their inclusion in the *onjeshta* - *pragata* polarity and the high - low dualism does not involve an opposition between celestial and infernal gods, between Paradise and Hell, or between good and evil. Death for the Kalasha is not terrifying. They believe that all eventually will come to Paradise after a stay in Purgatory. Infernal gods do not exist in their pantheon. But they have a supernatural being of a fourth kind, a female deity called *Jeshtak*. This goddess, like the villages where humans dwell, does not belong to the *onjeshta* or the *pragata* realm. She is in charge of social and kinship relations within the community: each *kam* or group of *kam* has a temple (*Jeshtak han*) that hosts the *Jeshtak* emblems (wooden boards with two small protruding horse heads) corresponding to each exogamous group.

A better understanding of the male - female, high - low polarity can be acquired by connecting it with the contraposition between pastoralism and agriculture, which in turn leads to a more significant polarity between wilderness on one side and the domestic world on the other. When driving herds to the pastures, man comes in contact with a silent, untouched, virgin land, completely opposed to the low valley with its fields and villages where humans live. Animal husbandry is in this sense closer to hunting, considered *onjeshta* as well by the Kalasha, who practiced it in the past much more than at present. Agriculture, on the contrary, involves tilling the land, diverting water, and the destruction of pre-existing plant life to make space for what man can use.

The fundamental dualism *onjeshta* - *pragata* has therefore led us to the equally fundamental polarity between wild and domestic. But a further opposition emerges, even more significantly, at closer scrutiny: its two poles could be roughly labelled "sharing" on one side, "keeping" on the other. As mentioned, meat, the most important product of animal husbandry, is consumed only within the extraordinary sphere of exchange, based on communal sharing. Bread, the main product of agriculture, is everyday food, consumed in the ordinary sphere, where each family eats its own meal around the family hearth. Additionally, the high pastures, the most *onjeshta* of all places, escape the rule of property division at the level of the single families and belong to the entire community. So, the contraposition between the ordinary sphere in which goods are kept separate, and the extraordinary sphere, where goods are shared, is symmetrical to the opposition between domestic and wild, agriculture and animal husbandry, and bread and meat.

The winter festival of *Chaumos* illustrates this system of polar oppositions and the values which underly it.

THE CHAUMOS

The winter solstice festival of the Kalasha is a complex ritual revolving around three interconnected themes: regeneration, common to all ritual New-Year celebrations (Lanternari 1976:253); fertility; and unification or communion. Regeneration of the world as one life-cycle ends and a new one begins; fertility of fields, animals and men; communion of man with man, of men with nature, of the people with their divinities. The beginning of the festival is marked by the sun setting behind a certain tree located on one of the ridges closing the valley to the west. The *kazi*, the guardian of ancestral tradition who plays a major role in ceremonies, observes this and declares that *Chaumos* time has come. In 1973, when we started our field work, the festival began in the Rumbur valley on December 6th.

To understand the complex rituals of *Chaumos*, consisting of twelve holy days interposed by others dedicated to cleaning and preparations, it must be understood that there is a wide intermediate zone, between the two opposed poles of the fundamental *onjeshta-pragata* contraposition, that partakes of both spheres without belonging to one or the other. On this level, everyday life takes place. It is a realm that has its own goddess--*Jeshtak*--neither *onjeshta* nor *pragata*.

The existence of this intermediate sphere is due to the fact that the balance between the two spheres that come in contact on the plane of ordinary life is actually founded on the supremacy of one. The Kalasha are patrilineal and, although the subordination of women is far from reaching the extremes of their Muslim neighbors, men have a superior role. Women's participation in decision-making is indirect and only through the influence they might exert on their husbands. Thus we see that the male invades the female sphere, while the contrary does not happen. Men take part in agricultural chores while women are kept completely away from animal husbandry; men have obviously free access to the villages, but women must not approach the goat-sheds. Men enter the *Jeshtak* temple, but the shrines of the male gods are off-limits to women. On the whole, the space forbidden to women is much larger than the one forbidden to men, the *bashali*.

The *onjeshta* principle, in the course of the festival, penetrates this intermediate sphere, finally permeating it through the ritual dissolution of its opposite. It is a slow penetration enacted through the celebration of a communion gradually wider and deeper, finding expression on three closely connected levels. The first is social relations within the group. The second concerns the relationship between the community and nature. The third is the relationship between human beings and the supernatural.

The first day³ (*sarazari* [*saraz-arik*, to bring juniper]) sees individual offerings of juniper smoke in the sacred places where the gods are believed to dwell. Juniper is burned on the second day (*goshtsaraz*) and offerings are made in the goat-sheds, previously swept and cleaned. Each day ends with a dance held up-valley the first night and down-valley the second night, during which dried fruits are collected and redistributed. The rhythm is given by

songs only because tradition forbids the use of drums during the entire festival.

The third day (*Chuin ari*) is characterized by a ritual clash fought with insults, often of a sexual nature, between nubile girls of the two sections of the community: up-valley and down-valley (Loude and Lievre 1984:212-215). This territorial division, no longer as strict as in the past, follows kinship lines. The eight *kam* of Rumbur are divided into two great groups and two minor ones, each tracing descent from a common ancestor dating back about ten generations. These ancestors are the grandchildren of *Banguta*, progenitor of all the Kalasha of the valley. Each of the two main groups holds a *Jeshtak han*, the temple of the female goddess presiding over social and kinship relations. The four up-valley *kam* have their temple in Balanguru, the down-valley ones in Grom. In the past, a strict exogamic rule denied marriage to individuals that have a common ancestor up to the seventh generation and allowed only unions with members of a different *Jeshtak han*. Thus up-valley married down-valley and vice versa. The distance in kinship allowing marriage makes the two groups foreign to each other but the exchange of women establishes ties of friendship. Upon marriage, girls leave their father's house, often reluctantly. The underlying enmity between the two groups and the girls' bitterness is voiced in the licentious insults exchanged from opposite sides of the bridge marking the territorial boundary between up- and down-valley. Tensions are discharged in the ritual battle of words and the conflict is ceremonially dissolved. While the young girls enact this opposition, adults prepare for the ritual celebration of union. In the evening, the up-valley people invite the down-valley for a communal meal at the *Jeshtak han* of Balanguru.

On the fourth day (*dahu pachen*, to cook beans) the down-valley section returns the invitation. The purpose is to consolidate a tie based partly on the remote common descent but much more on the frequent exchanges of women through marriage. The up-valley - down-valley polarity is reintegrated and brought to unity.

In the first four days of *Chaumos*, social ties are thus consolidated and strengthened. It is the first level of manifestation of the *onjeshta* principle, the communion of man with man, that in the course of the festival is gradually extended to the nonhuman. Ritual activities then halt for two days while wheat is brought to the water-mills to make flour for the sacred days to come.

The fifth festive day (*kutramu*) is spent making bread for the next three days, when such a chore is forbidden by Kalasha tradition. Women work late into the night. The men bake small animals of dough on the round iron plates normally used for baking bread. They represent mainly markhors (*capra falconeri*) and goats, but also cows and sheep. These are called *shara bira au* (markhor-shaped bread cakes). The figures are set on a wooden shelf running along the wall opposite the door, which in the house is the *onjeshta* place. They are left there until dawn, when the men symbolically draw the souls of the animals out of the houses. They are ultimately given to children. That same night, black sketches of the same animals are drawn on the *Jeshtak han* walls and a hunting ritual is held in the temple (Snoy 1974:84-86; Loude and Lievre 1984:225-233).

Markhors represent the realm of wilderness and are considered *onjeshta*: they live among the mountain peaks and for the Kalasha they are the goats of the *suchi*, the mountain spirits. Since animal husbandry is connected to this sphere, only men may mould the bread-figures that are also meant to favor reproduction of animals. With the rituals of *kutramu* night, the realm of wilderness penetrates into the realm of the domestic: the hearth, the home, and *Jeshtak's* temple. The intermediate realm of everyday life is thus reintegrated in the *onjeshta* sphere. The wild-domestic polarity (nature untouched, animal husbandry, sharing, communion, and social homogeneity) is reflected on one side. Nature dominated by man, agriculture, separation, and the principle of "keeping" appear on the other. The *onjeshta* principle is here expressed on a second level that includes the first one as well. Communion of man with nature corresponds and is connected to the communion of man with man.

Kalasha interpretate the ritual drawings sketched on the *Jehstak han's* walls during *kutramu* night as done in memory of a distant past when human beings, animals, fairies, and deities lived together in harmony until an incident caused their separation. It was a "golden age," a time before the emergence of all polarities (Snoy 1974:84; Loude and Lievre 1984:229).

On the sixth day of *Chaumos* (*Madayik*), the supernatural makes its appearance in the form that is closer to man. The dead come back to share a meal with the living. The community divides in two according to *Jeshtak han* membership, and each family, according to its possibilities and to the number of its members, brings to the temple food to be redistributed.

At dusk many people crowd the wide temple hall, lit only by a fire. The food is piled on the earthen floor just beneath the emblems of the goddess. A young boy builds the *kottik*, a small truncated pyramid made of tiny sticks. The *kottik* "symbolizes a prison where the Kalasha lock up men with bad thoughts, their enemies, to burn them" (Loude and Lievre 1984:238). It is brought out of the temple on the large flat stone on which it had been built and placed by the door. Then it is set on fire. Inside the temple, with the entrance covered by a woolen blanket, each person takes a splinter of resinous wood and lights it from the fire burning at the center. In the span of time it takes the *kottik* to burn, the ghosts of the dead come to take the offerings of bread and dried fruits that were left outside in a basket and on trays. They disappear when the small fire dies out. At that point, all throw their torches into the fire, the blanket is taken off the entrance, and normal conversation resumes. The offerings set outside the temple are given to children.

The communion is now extended to the dead, and a new polarity is integrated. Death is *pragata* and the cemeteries, located low below the villages are, like the *bashali*, impure. In these two places the Kalasha localize the *pragata* sphere: in the one birth takes place, in the other death has its abode. That death is *pragata* is not surprising. But why is birth, its opposite, *pragata* as well? Birth is *pragata* because it brings death with it, while *onjeshta* is life without beginning or end, immortal life. In the ritual of *Madayik* the polarity is integrated: the immortal souls share a meal with their descendants destined to die.

The central part of the festival now approaches. The next two days are dedicated to purification and preparation. Houses are completely emptied and

thoroughly swept. Women weave new baskets to replace the old ones, as tradition suggests. At this time everything is renovated; the old and dirty are carried away by the closing cycle. The day of the purification of women opens the most sacred week of the year. At this point a series of prohibitions and obligations comes into force. The kitchen implements must be replaced with new ones, it is forbidden to drink milk or tea or smoke cigarettes or come in contact with objects of foreign origin, like soap. The Kalasha converted to Islam must leave the villages, sexual intercourse is prohibited for the whole week. The community is all turned towards the *onjeshta* pole. What comes from outside can not be part of it. And certainly sex, causing birth, that brings death with it, is not part of it either. The integration of the *onjeshta* - *pragata* polarity is achieved through a preliminary separation. The idea is to make the sphere of purity embrace everything, driving away what does not belong to it, almost to deny its existence. The wild - domestic polarity appears again when men retire to the goat sheds where they make bread on stone slabs. The iron-plate used in homes, and thus connected to the domestic realm, is not *onjeshta*.

The seventh festive day (*Shish au adua*) is thus dedicated to the purification of women. Women's work is agriculture, thus the ceremony of their purification takes place in a field and bread is the sacrificial offering. The women of each village gather around small fires lit in the neighboring fields. An *onjeshta suda* (purified young man) takes some water in the hollow of his left hand and with the right one lights a juniper branch in the fire. He swiftly touches the water with the branch, then three times describes a circle with it over the head of each woman holding five large bread-cakes (*shish au*) between her palms, and finally throws it behind her back. Then he breaks off a piece of bread and throws it in the fire while the woman begins to eat the rest in an informal atmosphere of chatting and laughter.

The eighth day of the festival (*Pushau adua*) is the most sacred. *Chaumos* unfolds in a gradual crescendo. There is first communion between the members of the group, then the markhors arrive representing nature wild and untouched, then the souls of the ancestors come from the land beyond birth and death, and, finally, the divine, the source of immortal life, arrives. What follows is a synthetic description of the events as they took place on December 16 and 17, 1973.

A drawled malinchoric chant, sung by women, began before dawn. Later, a procession led by the *kazi* descended from the village of Grom perched on the mountain slope. The men were leading several male goats. It advanced slowly while the sad notes of a solemn chant filled the narrow valley. Men from the other villages joined in, bringing their goats to be sacrificed. The women gathered at the rear and halted at Balanguru village, while the procession, goats in front, started up the frozen trail leading up-valley to the sacred little wood that conceals the shrine of the god *Sajjigor*. It was snowing heavily. The holy place consists of a wide clearing circled by evergreen oak. At the center of the clearing stands a small, square, stone building, lower than a man. Two weathered horse heads protrude from a carved wooden board with a square hole in the middle.

When the procession arrived at the sacred clearing, a fire was lit by the shrine. An elder, his hand on one of his goats, kneeled on the ground and

prayed, raising his voice: "O *ghona Sajjigor, Balimahin tai tara ajona ita au...putr bi je gum bi de*" (Great *Sajjigor*, *Balimahin* is here as your guest... give us seeds of wheat and of sons and daughters) "*khayar kari, khoshan kari, homa suwal kabul kari*" (give us assistance, give us happiness, may our prayer be fulfilled). The goat, a male like all the others, was then pushed towards a seated young man who held it firmly in his lap. One of the *kazi's* sons, chosen for his strength, cut its throat swiftly, collected some of the blood in the hollow of his hand, and threw it on the altar board and in the fire.

This was the most sacred time of the year. The god *Balimahin* had arrived on his woman-faced winged horse with hoofs of burning embers. He would stay until the next night, "the night of the torches," before returning to the once-*Kafir* Bashgul valley, in today's Afghan Nuristan. A male god connected to the vital forces of fertility and reproduction, he appears on a horse with a woman's face. In the woman's bosom life takes form. In the mythical symbol, the two poles are integrated: male and female, immortal life and birth and death. It is the supreme union, the *onjeshta* principle reveals itself and includes its opposite. The god comes from Nuristan, but as a divine being he comes from the world of beyond and he rides a winged horse that connects the two worlds. A woman-faced vehicle, it is through the woman, in fact, that humans pass from the world of beyond to that of life and death.

Once all the animals (22 male goats) had been killed, a second communal ritual began; this time bread, made by the men at the goat sheds during the night, was offered to the god. At the end of the ritual the bread cakes were divided and distributed to the crowd, who then returned to the villages.

At the men's arrival there, young girls began to sing and greet them with an erotic dance. In groups of three, the girls cheerfully repeated "*mandao chutak, chutak*" (words connected to the act of making love). They twisted an edge of their wide woolen robe to form a penis and, laughing uproariously, they danced towards one boy or another. The boy then joined his thumbs and index fingers to symbolize the vulva and danced towards the girls, who retreated, then charged forward again.

In the dance, gender roles are inverted. The man plays the woman; the woman the man. They exchange position. The male - female polarity appears as relative, tied to the world of forms. In these sacred days the community is connected to the essence underlying all forms. In the rituals the game is revealed, the dance celebrates the identity of opposites. At the opening of the new year, the community returns to the beginning, to the source of all life. It is therefore an appropriate time for initiation ceremonies that mark the beginning of a new stage of life for boys and girls. After the dance, many people headed for the *Jeshtak han* where some boys and girls dressed for the first time in adult clothes.

The purification ceremony of the men was performed in separate groups late in the evening of the *Pushau adua*, at the goat sheds. The ritual, called *Ishtongas*, is dedicated to *Dizala Dizao*, the Creator. On the terraced roofs a fire was lit, a burning juniper branch was circled over the heads of the participants, a young kid was sacrificed and a few drops of its blood sprinkled on the men's faces. Ceremonial activities continued into the night. At the goat sheds rituals were held to ensure fertility of the herds and successful hunting (Augusto Cacopardo 1985:744).

The festival's ninth day (*Chettai adua*) began with a great ceremony at the *Sajjigor* shrine, which was opened by the young initiates throwing small bundles of red willow twigs on the shrine. Willow catkins are the first visible signs of spring, so this tree might be considered "a point of concentration of the life force of plants" (Propp 1978: 112-114). There were no blood sacrifices and only bread and juniper smoke were offered to the god. Back at the village, the women danced cheerfully until the men returned. The men, holding each other by their shoulders in a single line, walked slowly down into the village solemnly chanting to *Balimahin*, the *gondameshalak*. Their procession closed in a circle with the women in the middle, sitting on the ground. When the circle was broken, cheerful dancing was resumed. Men and women sang to each other in short contrasts and teased each other with crude sexual jokes.

In the most sacred time of the year, when all sexual contact is forbidden, the energy of sex, repressed in the homes, is ceremonially unleashed. The normal order is subverted. Sex, a source of impurity, is reintegrated in the realm of the pure, the *pragata* is accepted in the *onjeshta*, and the unification of the two poles is believed to bring life.

The dancing persisted until the *dehar* (the tribe's shaman; see Siiger 1963; Loude 1980:18-20; Augusto Cacopardo 1974:21-31) and a few other men started stacking wood at the center of the clearing to form a pile more than twelve feet tall. This was for the huge bonfire of the approaching "night of the torches" (*Chanja rat*). When it was done, everybody returned home for a few hours of rest.

Late that night the *kazi* led a slow procession singing the *gondameshalak* ritual chant. The drawled and solemn notes echoed between the steep cliffs of the narrow valley. Each person held a torch, some several feet long. When the procession reached Balanguru, the yearning and solemn chant died. It was replaced with a cheerful dance accompanied with great laughter and hand-clapping. A few young men released their energy, and rushed around the fire, jumping and whirling madly. The *dehar*, brandishing a long torch held between his legs like an enormous penis, performed a running dance across the clearing and around the huge bonfire.

Balimahin, bringer of fertility, had arrived and was about to leave. In those two most sacred days the community was lifted above birth and death and was one with the eternal, with the source of all life energy. In the dance, the triumph of life was celebrated.

Suddenly the dance stopped. The *dehar* stepped out of the crowd and stood alone in the clearing with upraised arms. In a trance, he began whirling with great force while the crowd retreated to avoid being hit. He said a few words and twice threw himself backwards breaking the circle. Finally, he dropped senseless into a man's arms who was following, ready to catch him. Through him the gods had sent a message, that exceedingly close contacts with the Muslims had enraged them. At the climax of the religious year the shaman was reminding his people to respect ancestral tradition. Muslims, for the Kalasha bring all that is *pragata*. They had to be kept at a distance.

Dancing resumed when a group of women formed a circle. Clapping their hands rhythmically, they sang, "*kia mai bata hindai, amo tai bata dem*" (what I receive, that I shall give to you). They repeated the same words while

illustrating them with arm gestures showing a flow going to one person and from there proceeding to another. They were expressing by this the founding principle of Kalasha society: a sharing that creates and maintains community.

The dance continued for several hours until it was abruptly halted by the solemn notes of the *gondameshalak* that again filled the valley. One man started the chant to let it die slowly while others in a chorus would pick it up, stretching the notes until the echo joined in. By this time the immense bonfire was reduced to a heap of embers. *Balimahin*, the bringer of life, was leaving the valley. The great celebration of *Chanja rat* was over.

With the departure of the visiting god, *Chaumos* approaches its final phase. The following day (*Lawakbirk*), is still one of the most sacred. Once contact with the source of life has been established, the relative nature of opposites and their substantial unity is again celebrated with another dance of role inversion. But this time roles are inverted thoroughly. In each village, one or two couples of men and women cover their faces, put on the clothes of the opposite sex, and dance for hours while boys and girls sing and clap their hands teasing each other with improvised verses of a sexual nature. In this dance the irreconcilable opposites reveal themselves as only appearances. Men become women and women men. Forms dissolve into the primordial all-comprising Indistinct, the Unformed from which life springs. "Man periodically feels the need," writes Eliade (1976:440) "to reacquire, even if for an instant only, the condition of perfect humanity, in which the two sexes coexisted, as they coexist, with all other qualities and attributes, in the divinity." The beginning of the new year coincides with the beginning of the world: the ritual brings the community back to the deepest level of the sacred, beyond all polarities, for a total regeneration that in this last holy day is finally accomplished.

With rhythmical progress, the Winter Solstice festival slowly approaches its end. After two days of rest, comes *moss au adua*. This day the men at the goat sheds make meat-filled bread cakes (*moss au*). The heads and the legs of the goats sacrificed at *Sajjigor's* shrine, which had been put aside, are eaten the following day *shish kurr* (heads feet). All prohibitions are now lifted. Men are allowed to sleep with their wives. The great festival is over.

Three days go by while life in the valleys resumes its regular course, and the fourth is once more a festive one: it is called *dahu tatttu* (dahu = beans). Groups of girls of the two sections of the community make rounds of the villages singing a song demanding a good crop for all the different kinds of beans grown in the valley. They stop in each house to collect dried fruits and thank the giver by singing wishes of abundance of children and food for the household (Loude and Lievre 1984:302-310). In the course of *Chaumos* the male principle represented by *Balimahin* has fecundated its opposite. With the ritual quest the women now symbolize reproduction.

Four days later another sacred day (*Dagarik*) closes the long festive period. In the late evening a vigil is organized in each village in a chosen house to await the arrival of the mythical white crow who carries the wishes of the Kalasha to the gods (Loude and Lievre 1984:312-313). He is the invisible spirit of the black crows that will soon appear. Just before dawn the eldest woman of the house gives each of its members some beans and walnut kernels to hold in the right hand and beans and nutshells in the left. They stand outside scanning the sky for the crows. Omens are good if the wait is not

long. When the birds arrive the content of the left hand is thrown out while the beans and kernels of the right hand are quickly eaten. Women burst out in a relieving dance.

CONCLUSIONS

The three themes of regeneration, fertility, and unification are harmoniously interwoven in the great orchestration of *Chaumos*. Regeneration: all defilements are eliminated through the ritual purification of villages, goat sheds, and people; dirt is swept and washed away; old implements are burned or replaced with new ones. Fertility is invoked in all prayers to the gods, it is ceremonially evoked from the bread figures ceremony to the last ritual collection of *dahu tatttu*. *Balimahin* himself is a bringer of life.

Unification is first between the two sections of the community celebrating their tie. Then humans and nature are joined with the arrival of the *markhors*, and men are joined with their ancestors descending from the world of beyond. Finally, the god of life arrives in the valley on the most sacred day of the year and mortals are one with the eternal. In the great celebration of life and unification all the polarities interacting in everyday life are integrated: up-valley - down valley, wild - domestic, immortal life - life subject to death, man - woman, divine - human.

It is through unification that both regeneration and fertility are achieved. The whole purpose of *Chaumos* is to purify the community from the inevitable degeneration of the world, the result of its fundamental imperfection consisting in the very existence of the opposites. The festival climaxes in the ritual overcoming of the opposites.

The whole system of oppositions can be seen as unfolding from a deeper, cosmogonic, layer (the most removed, at present, from the conscious appreciation of the Kalasha themselves) to the more explicit and concrete layers of ecological, social, and economic relations.

The deepest level seems to be that of the opposition between immortal life and mortal life, which mirrors, in a way, the more fundamental separation between the Unformed and the world of forms. The opposition between divine and human is a suffered separation achieved through the female function of generation.

The next level, then, is that of male and female. Through the woman, human beings are born in this mortal world. Therefore women are *pragata*, like the *bashali* where birth takes place and the cemetery, abode of death. The idea of impurity of the woman among the Kalasha cannot be so easily reduced to a sort of suprastructure of a hierarchical social relation between the sexes. This is demonstrated by the fact that virgin boys, who stand low in social hierarchy, are highest in the hierarchy of purity among the humans. The impurity of the female is connected to a deeper cosmogonic view that ascribes her the role of generating the world of mortal forms, by harnessing the immortal vital energy carried by the male. This is why the fertility celebrated during the most solemn days of the festival is invariably of a male, and explicitly phallic kind.

The association of the seed of man with the seed of plants obviously implies the well-known metaphor of the woman as earth. But rather than

resulting in an explicit opposition between heaven and earth, in the case of the Kalasha this takes on a much more concretely ecological aspect in the opposition between the higher and wilder realm of goat herding and the lower and domestic reign of fields and villages. The contraposition between wild and domestic is therefore the next level. The dicotomy between animal husbandry and agriculture can be set in the intermediate stretch of a continuum that has at one end hunting and gathering, as the least environment-affecting cultural form, and at the other end the city, extremely inclined to the destruction of plant and animal life spontaneously expressed by the territory.

Agriculture implies an act of giving form to the world according to human interests and needs. It is the realm of separation and distinction, where the rule is private property and the principle of "keeping" prevails. Remember how the extraordinary sphere of circulation of goods, based on the principle of redistribution and connected to animal husbandry, is opposed to the ordinary sphere of circulation based on private consumption.

There is here a connection between communion of people with nature and communion of people with people, that is one of the most intriguing and significant aspects of the system. In a way, the whole symbolic and ritual complex can be seen as aimed at counteracting those precise forces that have lead, in other cultural contexts, to the development of higher, urban centered civilizations, with their emphasis on social stratification, concentration of wealth and power, and separation from nature.⁴ The tension between the system and those forces seems an aspect of the *onjeshta* - *pragata* dichotomy. A drive towards the *onjeshta* pole pervades the whole Kalasha culture and is fully expressed in its religious system. In the ritual complex of *Chaumos* this drive reaches its climax in a deep unification at all levels of human experience.

NOTES

1. This article is the result of common research and discussion by the two authors. However, the introduction and the conclusions are written by Alberto Cacopardo and the section on *Chaumos* by Augusto Cacopardo.
2. The transcription of Kalasha names in this text is not scientific. For words recurring in other publications, we have used the spelling most commonly employed.
3. A more detailed account of the events of each day can be found in Loude and Lievre 1984, and Augusto Cacopardo 1985.
4. The scope of this article does not allow the discussion of the opinions of authors to which we have implicitly made reference in the brief conclusion. Specifically: the contrasting points of view on ethnographical interpretation held by Geertz (1987:52), whose position is not accepted here, and Lévi-Strauss (1966:314-315), whose inspiration is evident in our approach; the interpretations offered by Douglas (1975:60-71) and Gluckman (1965:248-250) on the impurity of women in general, and by Parkes (1988:653) on this conception among the Kalasha; and the ideas of Clastres (1974) on the resistance of primitive societies against the development of hierarchy and social stratification.

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