

WIZARDS, GURUS, AND ENERGY-INFORMATION FIELDS: WIELDING LEGITIMACY IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN HEALING

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An important premise for the anthropological study of healing systems is that they are cultural domains, constituted by local systems of knowledge, meaning, and social relations. People undertake their quest for health with more conviction if the medical systems they resort to are meaningful for them (MacCormack 1986), if the conceptualizations of health, disease, and cure correlate with their more general cosmology, and fit within broader patterns of personal and collective identity construction. It is this meaningfulness of the systems of healing within the broader domains of meaning-making, their place with reference to the dominant structures of knowledge and power, that may be understood as their legitimacy. This legitimacy may be particularly contestable in multiple medical systems, where several traditions of knowledge and institutional frameworks coexist and compete for state funding and paying clients, as well as for media coverage. In such a situation, discursive and performative strategies of legitimation can become a part of persuasiveness, both of an individual healer and of an ideology behind a certain therapy, thus having direct bearing on the therapeutic efficacy of treatment. In this paper, I will try to unravel strategies of legitimation used in the pluralistic medical field of the contemporary Russia. In this analysis, the Russian healing systems will be treated as reflecting broader cultural dynamics, expressing historical continuity as well as social change.

Types of legitimacy

Max Weber distinguished between three ideal types of legitimacy, and McCormack (1981, 1986) developed his ideas in relation to medical systems. Rational-legal legitimacy places a healing system and its practitioners within the context of a modern bureaucratic state, rationalist epistemology, and reductionistic and mechanistic cosmology. The worth of practitioners is judged by formal examinations leading to legal entitlements, and by their professional positions within the institutions established by the state. Ailments are interpreted as specific physiological disturbances of the body, caused by adverse external agents like

viruses, microorganisms, or toxic chemicals; or triggered by some internal irregularities in the construction of constituent parts, as in case of hereditary diseases. Cures are explained in terms of natural science, where the body is seen as a complex machine consisting of cells, tissues and fluids, further reducible to molecules and chemical processes.

In the conditions of today's Russia, this type of legitimacy is still primary. It underlies biomedical health-care, the main medical system that the state continues to finance (to a degree), and that the majority of people resort to on a daily basis. Its persuasiveness draws on the high authority of the natural sciences, that for the last century have been, and for many still remain the basis of their worldview. Affectively, biomedical health-care also feeds on the nostalgia for the former might of the Soviet industrial giant, the very epitome of modernity, as Bauman (1992) once remarked; the nostalgia for times past, where right and wrong, truth and falsehood, science and superstition were clearly defined. This is the attraction of the world of clear boundaries, the world without fuzziness, where ideological schemes reflect reality.

The second type, that MacCormack (*op.cit.*) after Weber calls traditional legitimacy, is less preoccupied with logical schemes within coherent systems of knowledge. It is pragmatic rather than theoretical, and is less concerned with the why and how of of theoretical explanations than with the practical efficacy. The principle rationale for a traditional healing system is that it has worked for many previous generations just as it continues to work now. The contexts from which these systems draw their meaning are less rational-logical, and more moral and affective. The driving force of persuasion is not scientific explanation, but rather historical depth. Traditional legitimacy in medical systems puts individual healers and their methods within a deeper temporal range, rendering these healing systems morally superior by placing them within broader chronological contexts of personal and national identity. For Weber and McCormack this type of legitimacy can be associated with a corporate group such as a

congregation or lineage; with specific and concrete chains of human links connecting generations of kin and providing continuity between past and present, village and city.

In present-day Russia, traditional legitimacy draws not only on concrete lineages and locales, but also appeals to the longing for the rural, pre-industrial past, the values of land (*zemlya*) and the people (*narod*). The reference to tradition has moral and political urgency in the ideological vacuum left after the demise of the Communist system, and in the need to reconstruct a national Russian identity. This involves redeeming or creating anew layers of the culture and links to the past that were once brutally erased. This newly emerging Russian national identity is conceived as having roots in the pre-Revolutionary past, in the rural peasant communities known as *obshina*, the epitome of peaceful consensus and communal concern. These values, utterly lacking in present-day Russia, are seen as an authentic alternative for the discredited Soviet collectivism. They are perceived as a badly needed moral counterweight to the imported western individualism that takes frightening forms in the aberrations of the incipient capitalism of the 'Wild East'. This is the legitimacy of a great national Tradition, coming from the Russian People, '*narod*,' the abstract sacralized entity, the source of uncontested strength and moral good.

Alternatively, traditional legitimacy might draw on small local 'traditions'. Thus, reference may be made to the shamans of Tchukotka or the Lamas of Buryatia, evoking the unbending spirit of distant ethnic groups that miraculously survived the onslaught of the all-grinding ideological and political machine of the Soviet state. The strengthened resilience of these little ethnic traditions is thought to be proven by the very fact of their survival. Medical systems that draw on traditional legitimacy, as compared to the rational-legal variety, are a classical example of bricolage as compared to an engineering project of the bio-medical field (cf. Levi-Strauss 1967). Not limited by detailed ideology, they are syncretic and highly flexible, and thus are prone to innovation cloaked in the mantle of tradition.

The third type of legitimacy singled out by Weber is charismatic legitimacy, where the only driving force is the personal power of the healer, the mystical radiation that emanates from his or her persona and makes her patients into the unquestioning followers. Loyalty here is to the living person, not to the system of knowledge or

the authority of a heritage. McCormack, based on Weber, notes that this type of legitimacy implies the strongest loyalty, and its efficacy is likely to be the most spectacular, as it engages the consciousness of the patients *in toto*, in the passionate act of devotion, in unreflecting trust. But this kind of legitimacy is also most fragile, as it is always contingent on the hard tests of efficacy. The charismatic hinges on the power of the individual to heal. It is often seen as coming from God, and so God can always take it away. The individual investments of followers in this type of loyalty are most intense emotionally, but least obliging in terms of identity construction. If the charismatic healer fails to correspond to the ideal image, he or she is out of a job. Leaving a charismatic leader does not necessarily involve shattering one's group identity or worldview, as the case may be with regard to the previous two types of legitimacy. Even more than the traditional one, this type of authority opens its domain for personal creativity and innovations that patients would accept unquestioningly as long as they are faithful followers of the charismatic personality.

In relation to healing systems of today's world, I suggest that a fourth type of legitimacy has appeared, to complement the three previously discussed: legitimation through alterity. It is constituted through reference to the foreign and distant origin of the craft, that in many cultures is imbued with power and value. In many societies, methods, knowledge systems, and individual healers from afar are often considered additionally powerful, even if sometimes dangerous. This is true for the attitude to Western medicine in the Third World countries, as well as to 'cross-cultural healing', a phenomenon salient, for example, in Africa, where people often seek help of medical/ritual specialists from other ethnic groups (Rekdal 1999). In many medical systems in the world, people appropriate the power of otherness in search of therapeutic efficacy.

The attitudes that join the foreign trends to local images of globality - the world as a single place - (Keane, 1999) are, however, highly idiosyncratic cultural and perhaps even individual constructions. On Russian soil, these constructions can be quite charged, in the face of Russia's historical ambiguity with regard to the world around. As regards Russia and the West, the conflict between pro-Western and anti-Western attitudes has defined Russian cultural thought for many centuries, but until recently this conflict has been a concern of only the educated few, the cultural elite. The imperial and superpower

ambitions that have informed Russia since the inception of its nationhood in the 15th century (formulated in the 17th century in the vision of Moscow as the Third Rome) coexist uneasily with themes of meekness, humility and obedience promoted by the Russian Orthodox Church as supreme personal virtues, the passes to the Kingdom of God (Lindquist 2000). The West can be seen from Russia as a coveted paradise of unlimited consumption and the possibilities of individual upward mobility: a 'civilized world'. At the same time there is also the image of the West as a desert of materialism, devoid of spirituality and poor in human emotion. The spirit and the warmth of feeling is ultimately to be found in Russia, forged in suffering and endurance (cf. Ries 1996). This idea, represented, for example, in the thought of Slavophiles, has a long tradition in Russian thought. In Soviet times, the West was derogated by the official ideology and celebrated by those members of the intelligentsia who opposed the regime. This duality was to a degree reflected in folk models of the world; yet, since the Soviet Union was a highly closed country, the attitude to the West (and to the rest of the world outside the country) was for most people an academic question.

In the last decade the situation has changed: the world outside has suddenly become a reality. Many people came to have relatives and friends there, especially in the USA and in Israel; and those who were lucky enough to become wealthy could easily travel abroad as tourists. In the first years of perestroika, with the initial waves of revulsion to everything Soviet, the image of the West as heaven tended to prevail. However, as the supposedly 'Western' institutions of market and democracy came to Russia, this attitude was rapidly reversed. The conspicuous failures of the so-called 'market reforms' further shifted the image of the West from admiration to resentment.

Alongside this, there is an unambiguous and widely shared feeling of supremacy over the non-Western rest of the world, reflected, for example, by the comment: 'At least, we are not some kind of Africa.' In fits of self-derogation, also characteristic of 'Russian talk' (cf. Ries, *op.cit.*), one can bitterly call Russia 'The Ivory Coast with nuclear weapons.' The implications are however that Russia has already reached the levels of development that made it superior (more civilized) than the lands of 'savages' (linear, geocentric, evolutionary thinking is still very much a feature of Russian folk models). The awareness

that the Russian economy is so dependent on Western loans (brooded over in the media) fuels bitter feelings of humiliation, stirring nostalgia in some: 'At least before we could feed ourselves.' Here is the lost pride of a former 'superpower,' aggravated by the awareness that Russia is put in the same structural position as that of 'savages,' that of a humble recipient, a beggar to whom the West gives alms but dictates conditions. These are very much the sentiments on which the Communists have been riding.

It has been noted that people's choices of health-seeking strategies sometimes reflect more than practical possibilities of access and affordability; more than the pragmatic search for therapeutic efficacy (Burns McGrath 1999). These choices may also be indicative of moral and ideological undercurrents that determine a place of a community, a group, or a nation in the global world. It is in this sense that health-seeking strategies can be windows on cultural transformations and contestations. In Russia, individual health-seeking strategies may be pragmatic last resorts; but they also may be political and ideological statements of identity and of belonging to different social groups, of cultural and ideological strands and flows, and as well of attitudes to past and present. In the health-seeking practices of afflicted persons these strategies of cultural positioning may be blurred and overshadowed by pragmatic concerns (that are the stronger the graver one's situation is). Healers' attempts to wield legitimacy through choices of treatment methods and through strategies of self-presentation are parts of the same processes. Unmuddled by the pragmatism of a suffering individual who acts in desperation in order to get well, the legitimating strategies of healers might reflect these processes of identity and belonging even more clearly.

In what follows, I will outline the multiple field of health-care in contemporary Russia, focussing on the strategies of legitimation that underlie its constituent parts. These strategies are expressed in the ways health-care specialists fashion their own gestalts and their work places, the clinics or healing parlors where they meet their clients. These strategies are also conveyed in the narratives and styles of comportment that they display in interaction with their consociates: patients, colleagues, controlling authorities, and, of course, a visiting anthropologist. Also, these ways of legitimation are revealed in the advertisement media that offer the services of alternative medicine, an area of advertisement business that

has nearly developed into a special genre of popular culture. The specialists providing healing (and magical) services advertise widely, in broadcast, on TV, but especially through printed word. These ads appear in all-purpose advertisement and information newspapers offering everything from the equipment for gas pipeline construction to escort girls. There are also special newspapers that cater to those interested in the 'unknown', and to the adherents of popular and alternative spirituality. These newspapers feature articles on Old and New Testament figures and on Church feasts, horoscopes, health diets, loves potions and beauty recipes, internet sex, numerology, and satanic sects, as well as letters from readers with (supposedly) first-hand narratives of the supernatural events. Interspersed with these pieces of information, there are big and small ads covering the entire spectrum of healers and magi available on the market. The texts and pictures used in these marketing devices exemplify all existing types of legitimacy, articulating them within the multiple health-care system, and connecting them to broader cultural currents. But the contemporary field of alternative medicine in Russia did not appear in the cultural vacuum. Therefore, before describing it in more detail, I want to provide a historical background, by briefly sketching the field of alternative health-care prior to the fall of Communism.

Medical pluralism in the Russian health care before perestroika

As a number of scholars have noted, pluralism in local medical systems is the norm around the world (Mills, 1998). Much more rare, if not nonexistent, is a total dominance of and reliance on one particular type of medical care, be it biomedicine, locally established 'great traditions', or an indigenous motley of magico-medical practices. As an expression of universal globalizing processes, Western biomedical practices reach the remotest villages in tribal societies on all continents. As well, traditional and indigenous practices from the non-Western world become established in the West and compete with, and complement, Western bio-medical practices in the big urban metropolises of industrially developed countries.

In Communist Russia the official ideology strove to dominate all spheres of life. This included, not least, the system of health care. The only officially allowed, and bureaucratically established type of health care under the Soviet era was biomedicine. It included a dense network of

outpatient clinics, primary maternal and childcare, and a vast number of pharmacies selling large varieties of prescription drugs and medicines over the counter. Clinics and hospitals were free of charge, and backed up by a solid system of laboratory research. This does not mean, however, that there was no *de facto* medical pluralism even during the Soviet times. On the contrary, what was broadly termed 'alternative medicine' was developed semi-underground; its methods multiplied and were used, by choice or necessity, or by way of experimenting, by people of different walks of life. These 'alternative' methods were all the more popular since they had an aura of being officially stigmatized if not outright forbidden.

Folk medicine

As an illustration, it will be illuminating to relate an episode from my own past. I grew up in a family of technical intelligentsia, atheistic, without any roots in the village, and shaped by a mechanistic and materialistic world view. There were no special health problems in the family, and current ailments were dealt with by heart drops, antibiotics and bactericide drugs that were part of every home pharmacy. When my son was three months old, in 1979, he suddenly developed a bad case of inguinal hernia. For such an emergency, regular institutions of local, outpatient, primary child-care were clearly insufficient; and a high-powered child surgeon, found through multiple personal connections, was duly contacted. One of his references was that he had undergone advanced training in France, and that he was spending part of his time there, working in a big Paris hospital. For a private consultation fee of 60 rubles (half of a monthly salary), the surgeon examined the baby and pronounced his verdict. This type of hernia, he said, can be removed only by surgical intervention. In rare cases it disappears by itself in girls, but never in boys. But the baby was too small for surgery. We were to wait three months, and then the surgeon himself undertook to do the job. He said that this type of affliction was not directly life-threatening; but the baby should not be allowed to cry loudly, in order not to strain the groin muscles. This was more easily said than done, as the boy was obviously in pain and screaming continuously. His paternal grandparents lived in the working class outskirts of Moscow, and my then mother-in-law suggested consulting a neighborhood healer

(‘*babka*’), who, luckily, was known to have hernias as her specialty. When I mentioned this therapeutic option to my parents, they were indignant: surely I was out of my mind, to fall prey to silly superstitions and to drag the child to some strange den, certainly dirty, unhygienic and highly dangerous for small children who were prone to catch all kinds of infections! I was ashamed of my own pusillanimity, but the boy was screaming all the time, and, keeping this a secret from my parents, we took him to the *babka* anyway.

The healer turned out to be a stout woman in her mid-forties, who received us in her tiny apartment in a prefabricated apartment block, in one of the numerous vast areas of the Moscow ‘*novostroiki*’, recently constructed on the places of hinterland villages, but already dilapidated and slum-like in appearance. She asked us to wait in the small dark hall by the door, from where her modest abode could barely be glimpsed. She took the baby into her room where icons were hanging and an oil icon-lamp (*lampada*) was burning (which, at the time, was not entirely unusual, yet was still rather exotic to my eye), put him on the table under the icons, unswaddled him, smeared the hernia with the sunflower oil that we had been instructed to bring with us, and muttered something almost inaudible, spells or prayers or a mix of these, making quick movements with her fingers over the afflicted spot. The treatment took no more than five minutes and cost us five rubles. The woman asked us to visit her twice more for repeated treatment, but the third visit was not needed. In a couple of days, the hernia was gone, and never came back.

This recollection from the Soviet period serves to illustrate the actual multiplicity of medical systems in Russia of that time, and the pragmatic attitude of users when they ran up against real problems, despite the heavily dominating and perhaps even deeply internalized ideology that underlay therapeutic choices. Even back then, several health-seeking options were available as alternatives to institutionalized biomedical health-care. Simplifying for the sake of analysis, one can say that they fell into three broad categories that could be distinguished from one another both in terms of explanations and typologies of illness and in terms of ideological (or

cosmological) bases of treatment, as well as in terms of the sociology of practitioners and users. These categories are useful to consider in greater detail as they provided the genesis for the pluralistic field of health care that characterizes today’s Russia.

One of them was what later came to be labeled as ‘folk medicine.’ (My own early encounter with its representative was, as we have seen above, quite gratifying). Even though folk magico-medical practices were officially (and even popularly, by some circles of users) sneered at and vilified as superstition, folk healing survived and was passed via generations, unobtrusively thriving in villages and in the working-class circles in big cities. This folk tradition, borne by neighborhood healers, consisted of several main elements.

One of these was a rich repertoire of folk remedies, utilizing household means at hand, such as sunflower oil, honey, potions, brews and concoctions of herbs, roots and vegetables. These were ingested as drinks and put on body surfaces as compresses, embrocations and poultices. The second major element of folk medicine was the body of texts, spells and incantations. Those comprised prayers from prayer books officially acknowledged by the Church, as well as from apocryphal sources that survived from older times when prayer books were not yet unified. They also included texts of folk poetry generated locally and handed down through kin and neighborhood healers as well as created by individual experts. This highly expressive oral poetic heritage had been faithfully gathered by Russian ethnologists during the pre-Soviet and Soviet times, and has been available in specialized academic publications. These texts were kept also by practicing healers as private collections, pragmatically used in their own practices. Thus preserved, during Soviet times this body of texts was not forbidden but was nonetheless somewhat esoteric, and was limited in its distribution by specialized academic publications and private hand-written notebooks.¹ The third element of ‘folk medicine’ consisted of various sorts of ritual, or rather, para-ritual actions that were central to the repertoires of many folk healers. These rituals were highly idiosyncratic to individual healers, even though they contained a number of common elements, notably manipulations with church candles and tapers (and other church paraphernalia), sprinkling with consecrated water, and various styles of reading prayers, spells and incantations. Whatever these ritual elements were, they were optional and auxiliary to the main

element of healing: the movements of the healer's hands over the body of the patient, and, specifically, over its afflicted part(s) - as was the case in my own encounter with the *'babka'* described before.² 'Folk medicine' so defined has been called to treat not primarily biomedically defined diseases but a much broader range of social, psychological, and existential afflictions, of which physical ailments were only a small part. Accordingly, after perestroika, folk medicine practices gave rise not only to healing but to what is now widely known as *'magia'* (Lindquist 2000).

Bio-energy healing and the studies of the paranormal

The passes over the body by hands or fingers, combined with prolonged touch, massage and bone-setting manipulations, are also central in the activities of the category that, for the sake of simplicity, can be termed 'bio-field healers'. They are also known in Russia as extra-sensorial healers or, briefly, *'extrasensy'*, bio-energo-therapists, enio-therapists, and many other names. Among the urban *extrasensy*, however, these hand or finger gestures are stripped partly or totally from their ritual and textual paraphernalia characteristic for the village wizards.

Bio-field healing and *extrasensy* proliferated unofficially already during the Soviet times. The idea behind this kind of healing, couched in the language of the natural science paradigm, was (and still is) that the physical body of a human, animal, and even a plant, is surrounded by a certain kind of field, objective, measurable, but still of a not quite known nature. This field can be compared to the magnetic field and consists of subtle electromagnetic currents and radiations, both within and outside the body. These fields and energies are further postulated to have 'structures' that contain information not only about the psycho-physical health of the individual, but also about his or her past, present, and future. Healers are considered to be individuals who, with some unknown forces emanating from their hands or stored in their consciousness, can perceive the biofield, can see the enigo-information structures contained in it, and can diagnose and make corrections in these through the pure force of their will or conscious intention.

Some bio-medical practitioners discovered and developed these abilities and practiced them along with other more conventional methods. For example, I knew a dentist who used these methods in his practice for anesthesia and for

treating abscesses and inflammations. There were many rumors about a Georgian healer, the famous Juna, who for many years kept Brezhnev alive, and about people like her, employed to treat the aging top Party leaders.

These phenomena, that constitute a part of what in Russian pop-science talk is broadly labeled 'the unknown' (*nepoznannoie*), have long fascinated Russian popular and scientific imagination alike. In Soviet times, research of the paranormal was performed in special laboratories under the aegis of the KGB, in cooperation and in competition with the CIA, as the folk tales have it. People with paranormal abilities were connected to apparatuses, measured, and controlled through repeated experiments. An early account of this research is rendered in Ostrander and Schroeder (1970). The discourse about these studies of the paranormal is perceptible among today's healers. An informant, for example, told me about a colleague of hers, who at some point worked closely with the KGB researchers. As a part of the research program, this man, according to her story, was asked to read papers in the locked safety deposit boxes in the American embassy, and to use his clairvoyance to draw maps of classified objects such as the American military bases in Europe. Such cooperation, according to many healers, was no innocent thing: once one agreed to cooperate, one was trapped. Such people, it is said, in the end died horrible deaths or mysteriously disappeared.

This notwithstanding, several people who were perceived to develop 'paranormal abilities' at some points in their careers agreed to participate in 'scientific' laboratory experiments. The results are available in special Russian language publications. V.Kharitonova (2000) recalls experiments performed by the laboratory of biophysics of Moscow State University together with the All-Russian Scientific Research Center of Traditional Medicine. One of them attempted to discover the human abilities to change the pH of a solution. Exposed to the directed consciousness of the healer, the solution is reported to have changed color from blue to yellow; the corresponding diagrams were printed out to show graphically changes in the pH. Another task given to a healer in the course of these experiments was to imprint images on photographic paper sealed within black light-impermeable envelopes. In another test, one of my main informants, a female healer, was given two Petri dishes containing cancer cell cultures. Her task was to kill the cells in one dish, and to boost them in the other; and also to heal or to develop tumors in infected experimental rats. She

was fully successful with the first set of tasks, while she failed completely with the second. In the first Petri dish all the cancer cells died; and, while the infected rats never developed tumors, the cancer cells she was supposed to boost did not grow better; in fact, their growth was also somewhat inhibited. In these experiments the healers acted without moving and blindfolded, whether within or outside the zone of visibility of the object. What they did, according to my informant, was to give mental commands, phenomenologically expressed as the strong will to achieve the desired result, and to clearly imagine the modeled transformations. These experiments were reported to be repeatable and controllable, which, it was said, were criteria of their 'scientific' character.

Non-Russian medical traditions

Another element of medical culture in Russia was represented by established non-biomedical traditions, notably homeopathy, acupuncture, and ayurvedic and Tibetan medicine. Hypnotherapy and elements of psychoanalysis were taught and practiced, but they were private, semi-underground, and known by a selected few, mostly in the circles of urban intelligentsia. Chiropractic and osteopathy overlapped with the traditional Russian folk-art of bone-setting and massage (known in Russian as 'manual therapy') that many village healers mastered to perfection. Chinese and Indian medical techniques were introduced by members of these countries, who came along with their compatriots -- students, workers, and traders -- to live in Russia during Soviet times. Also, there were Russian medical specialists who worked in closed institutions like 'The Institute of the Preservation of Lenin's Body', and were entitled to study and to experiment with foreign systems of knowledge. They introduced and developed these arts.

In Soviet times these disciplines were practiced privately, in semi-secret: they were not legally punishable, but nor were they widely advertised. They were also used to treat high-ranking party members in closed polyclinics. The practitioners were mostly people with medical, technical and natural-science college educations, and they combined these methods with bioenergotherapy and with modern Western biomedicine. They perfected and developed these methods and worked to invent machines and apparatuses based on their principles. One better-known example of this synthesis between a great non-Western medical tradition and the ingenious

technology is the Fol' apparatus that was introduced to alternative medical practices early on in Soviet times. It was based on the premise that acupuncture points of the human body exhibit different intensity of electric current compared to the surrounding skin: when the electrode touched the acupoint, the device beeped or changed the position of the pointer on the scale.

Another fruit of Russian technical inventiveness, the AMSAD program, gained popularity after perestroika and spawned a number of variations and improvements; today it is ubiquitous in centers of healing and magic centers in Moscow. This computer program is based on the premise that the spine is primary for the well-being of the body, and that every vertebra of the spine is connected to a certain internal organ. Disorders of internal organs are understood to be the direct results of wrongly positioned vertebra. This is expressed in biological magnetic currents that can be measured on the surface of the body, specifically on the palms of hands and the forehead. When the patient holds an electrode in each hand, and another electrode in the form of a metallic band is put on his forehead, the computer screen shows the person's spine with vertebra in different colors, connected by straight lines to the corresponding viscera. These schematics can be printed out. There is a legend for colors, on the spectrum from red through blue to green, corresponding to the graveness of affliction of the internal organs. If, on the schematic, your spine and viscera are all colored blue to red, this means you are in trouble. Healers usually have patients diagnosed in this way before and after treatment, so that the patient can see for herself the visible results of the therapeutic intervention. This indicates that even now the personal, charismatic legitimacy of individual healers is not entirely sufficient: the rational legitimacy of supposedly 'scientific' methods is resorted to, in order to supplement, if not to supplant, the patient's subjective experience of betterment. In their borrowing of legitimating strategies as well as technological apparatuses, distinctive medical subfields overlap. Importantly, however, the main weight of legitimation is still invested in the rational-scientific paradigm.

Complementary medicine in post-perestroika Russia

The three elements of non-biomedical health-care described above (folk medicine, biofield healing, and non-Western medical traditions) were thus in place even before

perestroika. The greatest change that came with the demise of communism and the onset of the new freedoms was that all these practices became clearly visible in the suddenly opening public arenas. Healers of all descriptions started to advertise in newspapers, and information about them, self-crafted or compiled by journalists, became available on radio and on TV. From being underground, and somewhat doubtful from the ideological point of view, healing suddenly went out of the closet. Initially, in early 90s, it almost acquired a character of mass hysteria.

One of the widest known names, among several others, was Kashpirovski. He was a psychologist, hypnotherapist and medical doctor who claimed to be able to heal all diseases in all people. He gave seances in big stadiums in the largest cities of Russia, which were telecast to millions of enraptured observers. TV spectators could see on their screens people in the audience who fell into trance, shaking and rocking and wringing their hands. As a part of the seance, Kashpirovski read out letters from grateful patients, who supposedly had miraculously recovered from incurable diseases. Also, people brought with them water in bottles that the healer charged, and that was supposed to contain his own unique healing energy. This water was to be used as a remedy from whatever diseases one suffered from. TV spectators were instructed to put vessels with water in front of their TV screens, to be charged during the telecast. While watching, they were instructed to concentrate on their particular diseases, or on those of their close ones, even if the afflicted persons themselves were not physically present in front of the TV. The healing energy of Kashpirovski was supposed to be transmitted, not only via the physical medium of water, but also through the bodies and the intentions of the family members concerned about their close ones.

Kashpirovski's popularity did not last long, however. He was accused of involvement in some money and sexual scandals, sued, and eventually forced to leave the country. As to his healing potential, more and more people accused him, not necessarily of being ineffective, but of aggravating conditions of those exposed to his treatment. Rumors started that ambulance services were overly full after his mass seances: people got acute attacks of the conditions they had suffered from chronically or latently. The healing power of a charismatic person, concentrated, multiplied, and amplified through the modern mass media, finally changed the sign and became the power of evil, not eliminating but aggravating diseases, not

healing but harming. Perhaps Russians in fact had grown tired of mega-scale charismatic leaders, who promised to solve all problems at one piercing glance for a faceless crowd, holding an unquestioning belief. Kashpirovski's charismatic legitimacy, that had initially seemed overwhelming, proved to be insufficient. Lacking all other legitimation strategies, he eventually had to quit.

Several other healers who ventured to perform on a mass scale also quickly left the stage. Some reappeared after many years, but as much more private persons, catering not for a mass of people, but rather for smaller groups of followers, connected to their leaders through more personal relationships. One of these people was Tchumak, who had been a big-time radio and TV-healer, and who reappeared ten years later in small newspaper advertisement promoting his business of mail-order trade. Now he was selling face and body creams charged with his energy, promising that these would bestow on their users the divine energy of the Cosmos, mediated by Tchumak himself. These would give their users not only health and well-being but also prolonged youth and beauty. Thus, in one decade his project metamorphosed from grand-scale ideas for the wholesale salvation of Russia through the healing power of one individual, to a commercial mail-order beauty business.

In the meantime, many specialists of the kinds mentioned in the previous section also appeared more publicly, attempting to make a living from their healing arts. In Soviet times, folk healers and other practitioners had jobs paid by the state and practiced healing on the side. Many of these jobs now had ceased to exist or could not provide incomes sufficient for survival. Many men and, especially, women started to advertise all kinds of magical and healing services. There appeared several specialized newspapers catering especially to the business of advertising magic and healing. In these advertisements the strategies of legitimation came forth with great clarity.

Legitimation through the scientific establishment

The first group of these strategies, clearly within rational-legal legitimacy, is to seek authorization in the established science. The text of an ad states, for example, that

Grigori Grabovoi graduated from the faculty of Applied Mathematics and Mechanics in Tashkent University, and

got a medical degree in Moscow specializing in general therapy. He discovered the region of creation [the ad does not disclose what that is], on which discovery a patent is pending. Grigori Petrovich is a member of the International Information Academy, the New York Academy of Sciences, the Russian Academy of Medico-Technical Sciences, an honorary member of the Russian Academy of Cosmonautics, a Doctor of Technical Sciences, a Doctor of Philosophy, a member of the Professional League of Psychotherapists... (This list of distinctions continues for half a page, containing dozens of other titles and degrees from Russian and foreign associations, leagues, and academies).

This advertisement finishes with 'the License of the Moscow Health Care Committee No. ...', a notification that is absent in the majority of other ads.

Such references to scientific degrees are interspersed with para-scientific terminology. Sometimes, the language of the scientifically conceived paranormal prevails. For example, healers qualify themselves as 'Progressor' or 'Magister of Cosmoenergetics', and offer 'Purification and treatment with the help of Divine Cosmic Energy, irrespective of nationality and faith. Without the use of medicines, prayers, spells, incantations, or hypnosis'. Others may include the title 'Hypnologist of the International Category' in the list of their distinctions: 'Parapsychologist, bioenergotherapist, clairvoyant, magus, hypnologist'.

Legitimation through the 'Russian roots'

Another strategy adopted by healers and magi is to advertise themselves as 'folk' healers' (*narodnyi tselitel'*) and as heirs to the village wizards. Legitimacy here is traditional, the thread of wisdom coming from the mystical *narod*. In advertisements, this fact can be stated concisely, in the title introducing the person, e.g., 'Aksinia - hereditary healer'. Or, the advertisement text, that can go on at length, may present the healer's genealogy in a more evocative way :

'The Razviazkin lineage was famous for its healers for many centuries. This hereditary line of healers was renown far and wide, the people having trodden the path to their house. When Sergei was born on the

holiday of the Baptism of Christ, in raging cold, everybody understood: he was not only continuing the lineage, he was also a heir to the secret knowledge. His destiny was, like that of his grandfather, great grandfather, and all the ancestors, to heal people, to save them from all troubles and misfortunes'.

In the background of the photograph there is a huge crucifix, with another massive cross on the healer's chest. He holds a crystal ball and a magic lantern in his hands.

Here we see how many healers (and magi), like this one, refer to God, faith, and religion, either in very direct terms, or, more subtly, through using Russian Orthodox church paraphernalia in conjunction with legitimation through 'folk tradition', and in order to augment the reference to the 'roots'. For example, a very concise advertisement introduces 'a folk healer', who promises to 'cure all diseases in one seance'. Instead of lists with degrees and distinctions, references to scientific publications and license numbers, there is one single phrase: 'Faith in God will heal you!' . Another healer, the owner of a luxurious parlor with guards and secretaries, who is often featured on TV in special programs on the subject of healing, introduces herself as 'Matushka Melania' -- *Mátushka* or Little Mother being an unofficial and affective way to address a prioress in Russian Orthodox Cloisters. The subtitle of the ad reads 'a hereditary Russian Orthodox Babka', and the photo features a beautiful, somewhat ascetic looking woman in her early forties, with an ancient Bible in her hand, against the background of Russian Orthodox icons and icon-lamps (a usual attribute of churches and religious households alike, an icon-lamp or *lampada* is a familiar symbol of a traditional Russian Orthodox piety). Advertisements feature an establishment referred to as 'the Center of Russian Orthodox Religious Healing'; a healer who heals through 'Russian Orthodox prayers from the Church prayer books', and so forth. Healers may call themselves 'the bishop of White and Black Magic', or the Nun Mother Ksenia.' This kind of blend, however, is quite contentious, since for a number of years now the Church has been waging a vigorous campaign against all kinds of healing and magic (Lindquist 2000).

Legitimation through alterity

A sizable group of magi and healers refer to foreign magical practices for legitimation. An ad introduces 'the parlor (*salon*) of the Supreme Magic by Selene Vamp, the heir of Ancient Babylonian teachings to the seventh generation, Magister of Black Magic and Voodoo, Knight of the Order of the 10th Legion, of Three Winds'. There is a hereditary Scythian priestess and there is a Magister of Indian and Tibetan Medicine. There is 'Tamara Asgard – the only one in Russia who masters the secret techniques of ancient Scandinavian runic symbols'. A center offers 'all kinds of sorcery, from primitive Voodoo and Wicca to the Supreme Magic.' 'Reiki – for those who seek the spiritual power, a Japanese tradition to extract the vital force, to become one with it, and to transmit it through your hands'; 'The Supreme Voodoo priest Seraphim Kassandr , blessed by the Great Voodoo Priest Babalua Vonban Kanbobo.' There is a 'Higher Priest of Pagan cults, shaman-parapsychologist of international class, adept of the Black Moon Mystery'; there are Celtic and Egyptian priestesses; and a lot more. In Moscow there is at least one very popular and successful 'neo-shaman', a student of Michael Harner, who helps her clients to journey underworld and to find their 'Power Animals'.

Those who seek legitimacy in national folk and historical traditions, as well as the diverse conductors of 'the Cosmic energy,' tend to be 'holistic.' They offer help in solving problems of social, emotional, and psychological character, health problems proper being seen as a derivative of general disturbances in the patient's life. The understanding is that when the whole life of the patient is magically repaired, health problems will disappear by themselves, as a beneficial side effect. These experts generally qualify as 'magi' and promise to solve family and love problems, alcohol and drug addictions, and, increasingly, business problems (see Lindquist, n.d.). Magi can advertise without a license, but, strictly speaking, they are not allowed to promise to treat medical conditions (this rule is not always followed in practice).

Bureaucratic legitimation: licensing

Strictly speaking, to advertise as a healer, a person needs a license from the Russian Ministry of Health. These licenses are only granted to people who have a nursing school or medical college education. Another requirement is to have passed a training course in bioenergotherapy,

where people with healing abilities, who probably have been practicing privately for years, are given a paper with an official stamp certifying that they are 'folk healers'. There are several centers in big cities that test and train such people, and that are authorized to issue licenses and certificates. Many healers who come to these centers already have a medical diploma, but not all of them. Therefore, along with 'bioenergoinformation' training, these courses offer the basics of medical education. Apart from the license, healers trained in this way are likely to further internalize the paradigm of biomedicine and its terminology. Only those so licensed are officially permitted to advertise as healers, and to promise the treatment of medically defined conditions. These people want to see themselves as a part of bio-medicine, and they use rational and bureaucratic ways of legitimation in many ways, both in the technical equipment of their clinics, and in their discursive strategies of self-presentation. As part of my fieldwork, I conducted extensive participant-observation in one such clinic, observing its day-to-day work.

Center 'Nina'

Center 'Nina', called so after its founder-director, and one of the two acting healers, occupies a large, somewhat dilapidated locale on the ground floor of a huge apartment building in the prestigious architectural style of 'Stalin's empire'. The locale is within ten minutes walk from a subway station, some twenty minutes subway ride from downtown Moscow. It is neither slum nor suburbia, but neither is it quite central. This geography was used by the director to explain the lack of patients at the time of my fieldwork. Another possible reason for the center's emptiness, and the ensuing financial problems of its owner, was the persistent poverty in which even middle-class Muscovites continued to linger after the financial crisis of August 1998. People did not have money, and they could not afford paid medical care; and so 'Nina – a Center for Treatment and Rehabilitation' (*Letchebno - ozdorovitel'nyi tsentr*) was running low. Its interior design was unpretentious. It consisted of two small rooms, occupied by the two healers, and of one big hall divided into small cubicles by old battered wax cloth curtains, with cots used for massage and acupuncture.

Apart from the healers, the staff consists of two masseurs, an ultra-sound specialist, two secretaries who answered the phone fourteen hours a day, a book-keeper, and a logistics nurse. The center's income is brought in by the healers, and

from this money the salaries are paid to all the staff. The center has a license of the Ministry of Health, and this fact is announced proudly in its ads and on the outdoor signs carrying the name of the establishment. The center advertises in all-purpose newspapers; and it also has a newspaper of its own, which in better economic days when the center was bursting with patients was written by a professional journalist. These ads list the diseases that the center claims to be able to cure. Among them are: diseases of cardio-vascular system: hypo- and hypertension, stenocardia, ischemia, post-infarctic and post-stroke states, heart failures, thrombophlebitis, varicose; diseases of the gastro-intestinal tract: gastritis, colitis, stomach ulcers, enteritis, hemorrhoids; urological and reproductive diseases; enuresis, infertility, impotence, cystitis, and so forth. Basically, Center Nina promises to treat all thinkable afflictions of all outer and inner organs, from top to toe. It even ventures to attack benign and malignant tumors, which many healers are reluctant to do.

The center is modestly equipped with an ultra-sound, ECG, and an old battered computer with the AMSAD program mentioned above. I did not see any of these machines used on patients, especially since the computer was chronically out of order. Even though not much used in practice, the diagnostic equipment is very important in the healers' self-definition within the scientific paradigm. They insist on using the apparatuses instead of their own 'extra-sensorial' perception for the new patients, even though the latter are reluctant to do so and can actually refuse, since these diagnostics cost extra. Both healers working in the center are known to possess X-ray vision: they are said to be able to 'see' the disturbances in the bio-energy-information field of the patients, and can tell from which organ these disturbances emanate.

However, these healers refuse to use their extrasensory diagnostic abilities on new patients. 'People are vicious', - was Nina's explanation, - 'they walk out of here saying how great they feel, and right there out in the street they say they feel no changes and that they threw away their money. So I prefer to work with biomedical diagnostic methods, all sorts of tests and machines. If they have their blood and urine tests when they come to me, and their ultrasound diagrams showing the size of their tumors, and their electrocardiograms, and their X-ray tests, then they can compare them with the same tests taken after a course of healing with me. They see their erythrocytes and

leukocytes and all the rest of it changed, and they can follow how their uterus myoma has reduced in size, and then they see that it worked. Most of all I want to work with hospitals and polyclinics, to have access to their testing and diagnostic facilities; I send all our case cards to the local polyclinic and ask them to examine the patients; but I never got any response. No wonder, they are so overburdened. But there is also so much envy and arrogance.'

Thus, Nina persistently seeks rational-bureaucratic legitimacy for her practice, and is largely refused it. The conventional bio-medical institutions show little respect or concern for healers of this kind. Several other healers told me how much they wanted to work in cooperation with the established health-care institutions, and complained about the nonchalant and contemptuous treatment that they received. One reason may be, as Nina suggested, that these institutions are heavily 'overburdened' and have no time or means for experimental activities for the validation of healers. But, too, one can often hear from bio-medics that the majority of healers are 'charlatans', even though the idea of bioenergotherapy is not quite foreign to all bio-medical practitioners. Healers compete for patients on unequal terms with the biomedical establishment. Biomedicine, even though currently in demise, still provides most elementary health care free of charge, while the healing clinics of the kind I am describing have to charge their patients to survive. While the biomedical establishment rests on rational-legal legitimacy, and healers try to wield such legitimacy by different means, this legitimation is for them never conclusive. So, at the end of the day, healers have to rely on their individual charismatic legitimacy, yet, as we have seen, that is always open to contestation. The proof of their worth as healers is in the results of their therapy, and these results must be perceptible and incisive, since people often pay for treatment with the last of their funds. If positive results are not forthcoming, old patients leave, and new ones do not come.

Conclusions

This brief ethnographic glimpse at one of the para-scientific healing establishments confirms a more general observation that I made in the beginning of this paper. Both magi and, especially, healers are primarily dependent on their own personal charisma, this indefinable psychic 'intensity' that emanates from a person making him or her a center of attraction for other people. The

influence of a charismatic leader on her followers is so strong that she can cause changes not only in their thoughts, behaviors, and life-styles, but sometimes also in their bodies. In healing, however, charismatic legitimacy is always open to contestation by the tests of therapeutic efficacy. This means that, no matter how efficient any particular treatment happens to be (and it is never universally efficient for all patients and all diseases), these healers are forced to resort to other strategies of legitimation. Many healers in Russia, who work within the bio-medical paradigm, tend to rely on its primary brand of legitimacy - the legal-bureaucratic one. As a part of it, they draw symbolically on the authority of modern natural science and technology, that, in contrast to the folk models of the supernatural, is strongly supported by the Church.

Magi, by contrast, tend to seek legitimacy in domestic or foreign Tradition. This Tradition is authorized mostly through the reference to the Russian Orthodox religiosity in its folk form, that, as in many religions, stands in opposition to the official Church ideology. Alternatively, magi might draw on foreign esoteric traditions. This allows them to cater for the groups of potential users who resent the legal-bureaucratic system that epitomizes the state. This also allows them to capture those prospective clients who feel alienated from the Russian Orthodox Church, which, for some people, is associated with Russian nationalism, backwardness, passivity, and the rejection of modernity and globality.

Overall, healing and magic in Russia appear as a remarkably pluralistic cultural realm, where tradition and modernity, domestic and foreign, rational logic and beliefs in the supernatural are mixed together into a veritable cultural whirlpool or a bizarre post-modernist collage. The analysis of the field of alternative health-care in Russia indicates that no political, ideological, or economic barriers can prevent cultural flows from moving in time and space, providing enterprising individuals with the material for cultural creativity and with the possibilities for multiple choices.

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Notes

- ¹ A fine collection of these texts, with accompanying ritual actions, was gathered by the Russian ethnologist and folklorist Valentina Kharitonova, who had studied folk

and traditional magico-medical practices for the last thirty years in different regions of Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine.

² Some Russian students (and practitioners) of healing tend to see these movements of hands as a secondary external manifestation of the pure force of consciousness, the thrust of will, that emanates from the really powerful healers, and that essentially constitutes the healing act. Accordingly, many healers and magi claim to be able to, and often in fact do, perform healing per telephone or via a photograph. The latter type of treatment is most widespread in magical practices designed to cope with alcohol and drug addiction: mothers and wives bring their men's pictures to the magi and expect the result in the absence of the 'patients' and even without their knowledge or consent. Here I shall eschew the discussion of this type of healing, as I did not encounter much of it in my fieldwork.