

Communication of Tradition(s): Narrative Templates of Magical Healing in Urban Shamanism

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The paper examines how Slovak traditional concepts related to magical healing are used in a group around an urban shaman living in Bratislava (Slovakia). It is argued that practitioners' stories about spiritual healing are based on narrative templates which could be identified in Slovak traditional folk stories. It is concluded that folk tradition plays an important role in adapting alternative spirituality to local conditions because it contributes to better remembrance of spiritual concepts.

▪ **Keywords:** Slovak traditional narratives, magic, spiritual healing, neo-shamanism, narrative templates, specific narratives

V članku je obravnavano, kako skupina, zbrana okoli urbanega šamana iz Bratislave (Slovaška), uporablja koncepte iz slovaške tradicije, povezane z magičnim zdravljenjem. Avtorica dokazuje, da zgodbe udeležencev o duhovnem zdravljenju temeljijo na pripovednih obrazcih, ki jih je mogoče prepoznati v slovaških ljudskih pripovedih. Ugotavlja, da ima pripovedno izročilo pomembno vlogo pri prilagajanju alternativne duhovnosti lokalnim razmeram, saj prispeva k boljšemu pomnjenju duhovnih konceptov.

▪ **Ključne besede:** slovaške tradicionalne pripovedi, magija, duhovno zdravljenje, neošamanizem, pripovedni obrazci, posebne pripovedi

Introduction

Traditional healing has long received intense attention in many academic fields, including socio-cultural anthropology, ethnology, and folkloristics. The early studies explored culturally situated practices from the comparative perspective; in this, they considered their magical components within local contexts, with the explicit or implicit assumption of their inferiority to Western medicine (e.g., Evans-Pritchard, 1976 [1937]; Rivers, 1924). However, contemporary research has demonstrated that in a globalised world, healing practices coming from different cultural traditions can be combined and transformed into highly syncretic forms; in this, magic becomes part of holistic worldviews linked to spiritual development; and scientific terms are often employed to legitimise magical healing (e.g., Čavojová et al., 2021; Keshet, 2009, 2011; Koch, 2015; Stevens, 2001). The process of blending traditions is complex and depends on concrete cultural milieus, in which local beliefs and practices can inform new healing systems (e.g., Jerotijević, Hagovská, 2020; Lindquist, 2001, 2005). My paper pays attention to a concrete case of employing a local Slovak tradition in the context of a global spiritual movement, that of neo-shamanism.

The emergence of neo-shamanism or urban shamanism has been ascribed to the post-war transformation caused by the decline of the great colonial empires and the rise of national movements in the Third World countries. “Peoples without history” (Wolf, 1982), which had long remained in the shadow of Western civilisation, came onto the political scene. At the same time, in the eyes of many educated people in the West, the values of progress, science and rationality came to be associated with colonialism and oppression. As a result, in public discourse as well as in academic works, non-Western traditions involving magic, formerly seen as backward and irrational, were re-interpreted in terms of the universal spirituality of humankind that in the West was lost or weakened due to the rationalization of the modern world (Herman, 1997: 364–365; Znamenski, 2007: 166–169). This change of meaning was particularly apparent in scholarly re-interpretations of traditional shamanism, which in a global discourse led to the change of its original connotation. Today the word ‘shamanism’ has multiple meanings: apart from its original reference to a religious complex in Siberia centring on practitioners utilizing drums and chanting to create an altered state of consciousness believed to enable communication with the spirit world, it can refer to a religious practice opposed to historical Western religions, featuring altered states of consciousness; or a primeval religion supposed to have persisted since the Palaeolithic among hunter-gatherer/nomadic peoples; or techniques of altering consciousness, in contemporary Western societies no longer necessarily yoked to religious beliefs (Kehoe, 1997: 377). The constant element of these varied meanings is the magical or spiritual healing linked to altered states of consciousness. In recent decades, the popularity of such practice in Europe – either labelled as shamanic or not – has increased despite the dominant position of Western medicine (Fjær et al., 2020).

The rise of interest in magic, religion and spirituality during the second half of the twentieth century has been repeatedly confronted with Max Weber’s notion of “the disenchantment”¹ referring to the expulsion of magic from the modern world in the process of rationalization. This idea has been contested on many fronts due to rising indicators of religiosity within established churches, as well as popularity of new religious movements and alternative beliefs. This change of religious and spiritual scene has been variously described as “the re-enchantment of the world”, “return to religion”, “new spirituality” or “new religiosity” (e. g., Bauman, 1993; Heelas, 1996; Heelas et al., 2005; Landy, Saler, 2009; Sutcliffe, Bowman, 2000; Tižik, 2006). In post-socialist countries “the re-enchantment” has had specific features, among other due to the official negative

¹ Weber’s expression *Entzauberung*, literally “the elimination of magic” (Weber, 1948 [1919]) referred to a path of continued progress towards greater understanding of the world and controlling everything by means of calculation which leads to the expulsion of magic from the modern world, supported by modern science’s development. However, as Kocku von Stuckrad (2002: 772) notices, Weber “was fully aware of the fact that the world’s disenchantment has always been challenged by mystic, intellectualized, or private religious reasoning.”

attitude to religions during the previous socialist era. The fall of communist regimes in the 1990s not only changed the situation of established churches, but opened doors for new spirituality (Ališauskienė, 2017; Smoczyński, 2016; Tižik, 2006). In Slovakia, the political change contributed to a “religious awakening” that was manifested in two ways: the return to traditional Christian forms of religiosity (especially Catholicism) and the spread of new religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. The latter included both institutionalized religious movements and diverse forms of spirituality, which often opposed traditional religious worldviews (Tižik, 2006: 8–11).

The diversity of spiritual phenomena and ambiguity of their names resulted in scholarly debates, in which various terms, and in particular the notion of New Age, have been criticized. According to Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (2000: 2), contemporary spiritual currents “invariably understand themselves to be ‘alternative’, either strongly (they are explicitly dissenting) or weakly (they are merely variant or optional)” to dominant ideas and structures of “official” religion as well as secular science, and for this reason, the loose category of “alternative spirituality” is appropriate. In my account, I will use this term. An important characteristic of these alternative sets of “values, explanations, lifestyles choices and communication systems” (Bloch, 1998: 59) is their enactment in micro, everyday settings. As Marion Bowman (2000: 395) has noted, “folk”, “popular” or “unofficial” beliefs are an integral part of people’s conceptual world which influences every aspect of their behaviour. This feature of alternative spirituality and its dynamic nature parallels folk tradition. At the same time, traditional beliefs merge with new ideas: the empirical research of alternative spirituality has shown that it can draw upon multiple traditions and philosophies simultaneously, combining them into individual packages of meaning (Aupers, Houtman, 2010: 135).

The role of local traditions in the study of alternative spirituality has long been noticed by historians, archaeologists, scholars of religion and other disciplines: as Juliette Wood (2011) states, they “have increasingly realised that folklore and cultural tradition are necessary ingredients in comprehending ‘the big picture’ in a variety of contexts.” In folklore studies, this research problem is often addressed from the perspective of vernacular religion (Bowman, 2011, 2014; Bowman, Sutcliffe, 2000; Primiano, 1995; Roussou, 2021; Valk, 2008). However, alternative spirituality includes healing practices that people do not perceive as religious. As Anne Koch (2015) argues, alternative healing, including spiritual healing and traditional/folk treatments, might be seen as a form of magical self-care which has to be contextualized not only in relation to religion, but also to secular aspects of health care. I argue that to understand this contextualisation, it is necessary to explore it as a complex process based on the memorisation of magical concepts. Cultural knowledge acquired previously plays an important role in adopting new spiritual notions, and this knowledge includes native folk tradition as well as scientific explanations pursued by people due to their education.

I consider how some traditional Slovak folk concepts are employed in a specific spiritual milieu – in a group around a healer who uses shamanic techniques.² I present the results of ethnographic research which was conducted in Bratislava (Slovakia) from 2010 to 2012. The members of this group often referred to Slovak traditional beliefs concerning health. My previous work on folk beliefs in a rural environment in western Slovakia (Bužeková, 2009) allowed me to compare stories about magical influence on health that came from the same geographical region, but from a different discourse. To explain the mechanisms behind the process of combining Slovak traditional concepts and neo-shamanic notions, I will use the concept of tradition as communication (Boyer, 1990), and the theoretical perspective which sees narratives as types of cultural tools or mediational means (Wertsch, 2002, 2004). The main idea of this paper is that urban shamans' stories about magical harm and magical healing make use of the narrative templates which could be identified in Slovak traditional stories explaining misfortune, and that the concept of energy serves as a linguistic bridge making the connection between different notions possible.

The first part of the paper briefly characterises urban shamanism and my research. In the second part, I present the main theoretical ideas utilized in my interpretation. The third part discusses narrative templates that can be identified in Slovak folk stories explaining misfortune. The last part addresses the process of mediating urban shamans' experience in their specific narratives about magical influence on health.

Urban shamanism and tradition(s)

The term 'shaman', derived from the word *xaman* in the language of Siberian Evenki/Tungus, entered Western languages through its usage in Russia and through German travelogues of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. It referred to a traditional expert in communicating with the supernatural realm, primarily for the purpose of magical healing, but also for other community needs. Although the naming of such persons varied among different Siberian ethnic groups, the Russian inhabitants of Siberia usually used the term 'shaman', because the nomadic Evenki, hunters and reindeer herders, were scattered throughout Siberia and, thanks to their picturesque dress and tattoos, became the prototype of Siberian natives for Russian inhabitants as well as for Western travellers, who then introduced the word 'shaman' to the Western audience (Znamenski, 2007: 3–38). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shamanism became the main topic of many classical ethnographies on Siberian traditions (for example, Ksenofontov, 1992 [1928–1929]; Radlov, 1989 [1884]; Shirokogoroff, 1935). Since the beginning of the

² In the context of neo-shamanism, I will use the terms 'shaman', 'shamanic' and 'shamanism' as emic terms (for the discussion of emic and etic meanings of these terms, see Bužeková, 2010). When I will refer to particular cultural tradition which can be labelled as 'shamanic', I will state it explicitly.

twentieth century, however, this term has also been applied by Western ethnographers to various cultural healing traditions involving magic and altered states of consciousness. The term ‘shaman’ subsequently became a synonym for any traditional spiritual healer.³ Thus, research on various aspects of shamanic healing led to a discussion on the validity of the term ‘shamanism’ and to the ethnographic exploration of many “shamanisms” (Atkinson, 1992; see also DuBois, 2011).

The spiritual trend of neo-shamanism based on the re-interpretation of traditional healing practices coming from various cultures has emerged in the early 1970s and has gained increasing importance due to several political and intellectual trends in Western societies (for a review see e.g. Boekhoven, 2011; Kürti, 2005; Luhrmann, 2012; Znamenski, 2007). In this process, ethnographic and historical works played a central role. In the spiritual milieu the word ‘shamanism’ has been interpreted in accordance with Mircea Eliade’s idea of shamanic knowledge as the original spiritual experience of humankind (Eliade, 2004). Together with a general rise of interest toward non-Western traditions, this interpretation led to a new perspective: a practitioner of shamanism could draw on any tradition of spiritual healing, since all of them were supposed to have common roots in the distant past. This view refers to the ancient roots of humanity, but also to local folk beliefs and practices related to the native spiritual heritage. In Europe, many traditions have been re-interpreted by practitioners as well as academics in “shamanic” terms,⁴ although critical analysis of historical sources and folklore does not support arguments for a supposed shamanistic substratum in European vernacular cultures (Nygaard, 2022).

In Eastern Europe, as László Kürti has noticed, “neo-shamanistic phenomena may be connected to the collapse of the Iron Curtain, and with it, the dismantling of Soviet domination throughout the former East Bloc. This was followed by an instant re-emergence of religiosity along with new forms of spirituality” (Kürti, 2004: 1529). Neo-shamanism, however, varies from country to country. For instance, in Hungary this trend is connected to national identity and religious revivalism (Kürti, 2015) and for this reason can be classified as a neopagan religious movement. In contrast, in the Czech Republic, neo-shamanic rituals can be characterised by “eclecticism and the acceptance of an infinite number of varieties of spirituality” which created an individual religiosity (Dyndová, 2020: 162; see also Exnerová, 2018). The same can be said about neo-shamanism in Slovakia which started there at the beginning of the 1990s.

³ See, for instance, Grant, 2021. The meaning of the term ‘shaman’ referring to any kind of spiritual healer can be combined with the interpretation of shamanism as the universal practice of humankind having roots in our ancestral past (Hayden, 2003; Winkelman, 2020). For the detailed historical account on the transformation of meanings of shamanism see Znamenski, 2007.

⁴ For example, shamanism was connected to seidr, magical tradition of North Europe (Blain, 2005), as well as druidism and other pagan traditions in Britain (Wallis, 2003).

The main role in the formation of neo-shamanic groups in Slovakia was played by the European branch of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies (hereinafter referred to as FSS) located in Vienna (see Bužeková, 2012, 2017). The Foundation's founder, the American anthropologist Michael Harner, laid the institutional and ideological foundations of the global movement. They were reflected in his concept of core shamanism defined as a path to humans' rightful spiritual heritage – the roots of spirituality, the universal principles which are not bound to any specific cultural group or perspective (Harner, 1980). Core shamanism, however, is only one of the “shamanisms” that are currently spread in Europe and North America (Znamenski, 2007: 248–256). In Slovakia, there are groups and persons that claim to follow particular shamanic traditions without attending FSS workshops and courses. Unlike the FSS, with its mission of transmitting the ideas of core shamanism to the broadest audience, these circles have been formed and have functioned on the basis of individual interests, personal contacts and friendships, and their meetings take place in private.

My ethnographic research into FSS groups was carried out in the years 2009 to 2013. In 2010 I got in touch with a group that formed around Peter, a spiritual healer, who was not affiliated with the FSS. Among other healing approaches, such as energy healing, he used Mongolian shamanic techniques.⁵ From the beginning of my research into Peter's group, I observed his interest in folk tradition and historical sites, and the same could be said about many of my informants from FSS groups. In numerous stories, Peter and other members of his circle used Slovak folk concepts related to magical harm. This tendency is common in neo-shamanic practice in Central Europe: for instance, as Kürti notices, in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, historical and folkloric sources inspire urban shamans (Kürti, 2004: 1529).

It should be noted that urban shamanism is not a simple replication of local traditions: as many studies have shown, they can be combined and reinterpreted (e. g., Lindquist, 2004; Wallis, 2003). Investigation of this process requires various theoretical tools due to its complexity. My aim here is to pay attention to concrete aspects of blending different traditions – to memory mechanisms supporting juxtaposition of (1) traditional Slovak terms related to health problems and magical healing, and (2) neo-shamanic concepts referring to spiritual healing. I will examine narratives about magical harm collected during my previous research in several villages in western Slovakia, and urban shamans' narratives. The central notions of my argument are tradition, narratives, and meaning. Thus, in the next part I consider tradition as an analytical term in relation to the workings of human memory; and then a theoretical perspective from which narratives are seen as cultural tools in the process of meaning-making.

⁵ I changed the names of practitioners mentioned here. For more about the practices of Peter and Peter's circle, see Bužeková, 2012.

Traditional narratives as cultural tools

Pascal Boyer (1990) points out that the term ‘tradition’ is often used in scholarly literature as self-evident, without proper theoretical elaboration. However, repetition or reiteration of traditional phenomena implies complex processes of acquisition, memorisation and social interaction which must be described and explained. He proposes to pay attention to the interdependence of memory mechanisms supporting transmission of tradition and social relations in a given community. According to him, traditional phenomena are communicative events, which are characterized by the participation of various actors. The distribution of traditional knowledge is subject to certain principles related to how people remember such events: “What is described as traditional in ethnography consists of actions or utterances which are performed with the guidelines provided by people’s memories of a previous occurrence” (Boyer, 1990: 8). Therefore, to explain traditional phenomena, it is necessary to look at how human memory works. Boyer argues that a notable feature of traditional discourse is the emphasis on specific situations instead of general principles; learning tradition means acquiring knowledge through experience, and expertise is the process of the full acquisition of the fundamental terms (Boyer, 1990: 113).

If we consider tradition as “a type of interaction which results in the repetition of certain communicative events” (Boyer, 1990: 23), neo-shamanic practice in a concrete cultural milieu could be seen as a tradition. However, my informants started learning shamanic knowledge as adults, when they already acquired supernatural concepts coming from their local environment – be it religious notions or folk beliefs.⁶ As many studies of developmental psychology demonstrate, human memory evolves during childhood, and episodic memory starts to develop during the preschool period (Nelson, 2003). It means that concepts learned during formative years influence consequent learning and remembering; they create cognitive schemata in which new concepts become embedded.

The process of creating meaning was described by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1956) as semiotic mediation, as “internalization”, which meant that mental functioning is formed – rather than a place to which external semiotic practices are transferred.

⁶ I understand the term ‘supernatural’ in accordance with Pascal Boyer’s theory of religion which frames religious practices and beliefs in terms of recent cognitive neuroscience research. Boyer argues that religious concepts are counterintuitive, which means that they violate our intuitive expectations about material objects, the animal world, or people. Minimally counterintuitive concepts (MCI), i.e., concepts that violate a few ontological expectations of a given category (such as a notion of invisible spirit which violates expectations about a category of person as a material object, because we intuitively expect that any material object is visible), are more memorable than intuitive and maximally counterintuitive (MXCI) concepts. This means that in the process of cultural transmission MCI are more successful and that is why we find similar kinds of supernatural beliefs all over the world, despite their cultural diversity (Boyer, 2001; see also Barrett, 2008; Norenzayan et al., 2006). In the cognitive theory of ritual competence Thomas E. Lawson and Robert N. McCauley (1990) relate counterintuitive concepts to interpreting ritual efficacy; see Kohonen, 2018 for applying this theory to traditional magical healing.

As James Wertsch and Nutsa Batiashvili (2020: 133) argue, this term corresponds to William James' notion of habit and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus. In contemporary cognitive science, this idea emerged in discussions about the "new unconscious", involving the so-called "fast thinking", a form of mental processing that is unconscious, biased, and confident in its conclusions. Fast thinking involves "confirmation bias", which means that we tend to rely on selective information that confirms our existing views: "Rather than making the effort to consider alternative evidence and hypotheses, our attention is unconsciously drawn to information consistent with our views, and it downplays, or simply overlooks contradictory evidence" (Wertsch, Batiashvili, 2020: 133–134; see also Mynatt, Doherty, Tweney, 1977).

For ethnographers studying traditional phenomena, this line of reasoning is relevant in interpreting people's narratives transmitted in a given community. Wertsch (2002, 2004) proposes a perspective in which narratives are seen as types of cultural tools or mediational means. He argues that the narrative tools provided by our socio-cultural setting offer a series of stories which we employ on any particular occasion of meaning-making. In exploring them, the narrative analysis must address not only specific texts about concrete events but schematic underlying codes and accompanying mental habits (Wertsch, 2012: 10–11).

Wertsch denotes such codes as narrative templates – the notion that grows from the ideas of Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp on textual "functions" found in folk tales (1928), and British psychologist Frederic Bartlett's notion of the schema (1932). In his analysis of Russian folktales, Propp focussed on generalized "functions" that characterize a set of narratives, as opposed to the particular events and actors that occur in specific narratives. Wertsch argues that a related line of reasoning may be found in the writings of Bartlett who viewed remembering as a constructive process and examined the generalized patterns or schemata brought to this process by the agent doing the constructing. He combines the ideas of Propp and Bartlett in the notion of narrative templates which are schematic in the sense that they concern abstract, generalized functions or schema-like knowledge structures. These abstract structures can underlie an entire set of specific narratives, each of which has a particular setting, cast of characters, dates, and so forth. Narrative templates are not universal archetypes: they are specific to particular narrative traditions that can be expected to differ from one socio-cultural setting to another (Wertsch, 2009: 129).

Wertsch and his colleagues explored narratives about historical events on the level of national memory (Wertsch, 2000, 2002, 2012; Wertsch, Batiashvili, 2020; Wertsch, Karumidze, 2009). I will try to apply this perspective to shamanic stories at the level of individual experience. Urban shamans' aim is to heal themselves, other people, and society. Shamanic healing is spiritual and based on supernatural beliefs: it takes place during a journey into the world of spirits – a "non-ordinary", "separate" or "dream" reality that provides authoritative answers to shamans' questions. In accordance with the perspective

presented above, I assume that people who participate in shamanic sessions use the stock of relevant stories distributed in their cultural environment; and that they employ corresponding narrative templates on occasions of meaning-making. Thus, it is useful to look at traditional folk tales related to magical healing, also based on supernatural concepts. Below I will briefly consider them and identify some corresponding narrative templates.⁷

Explanations of misfortune in Slovak folk stories

Folk beliefs about magical influence on health refer to magical harm and magical healing. The terms denoting magical harm in languages other than English are often translated to English as witchcraft or the evil eye (see, for instance, Dundes, 1992; Pew Research Center, 2018: e23; Stein, 1974; Stewart, Strathern, 2004). In the context of Central Europe, witchcraft and the evil eye are considered related terms (Pócs, 2009). The notion of witchcraft is treated by folklorists and anthropologists as an analytical category, although there have been debates about its theoretical value. Many researchers pointed out that folk beliefs have diverse meanings that are produced in accordance with specific socio-cultural settings; in real life, witchcraft can mean different things to different people and varied notions of ‘witches’ can co-exist within the same community (see, for example, Jerotijević, 2010, 2015, 2017; Mencej, 2008, 2016, 2017a, 2017b). Thus, as Stewart and Strathern have noted, “it is not worthwhile to make and adhere to any rigid definitional distinctions. It is more important to recognize the complex and shifting boundaries of indigenous conceptualizations and how they change over time” (Stewart, Strathern, 2004: 2).

The ethnographic research in several villages in western Slovakia in the years 1997 to 2003 revealed several concepts of supernatural harm (Bužeková, 2009).⁸ The following terms were most frequent:

- *urieknutie, úrek, uštknutie, úrok*. These words are related to the verb *riečť*, to tell (more or less corresponds to the English term ‘charm’). They are used as synonyms for other terms linked to the noun *oči*, eyes: *z očí/oču prišlo*, meaning ‘from eyes’ or ‘coming from eyes’ (translated to English as “the evil eye”);

⁷ In this paper, I will let aside valuable ethnological and folkloristic works on Slovak folk narratives concerning magical healing (see, for example, Bednárík, 1954; Čižmár, 1946; Holuby, 1958; Horváthová, 1974, 1975, 1986; Jakubíková, 1972; Kosová, 1973) because my aim is to explore the process of meaning-making, and this requires knowledge of a local context. I have such knowledge only in relation to my own ethnographic research.

⁸ During the period 1997–1998 I visited 15 villages in the regions of White Carpathians and Myjava in western Slovakia to collect folk tales comprising supernatural concepts. My research was part of a project of the Department of Religious Studies of the Comenius University in Bratislava, aimed at mapping supernatural folk beliefs in Slovakia. I spent only one or two days in every village, and my enquiry was directed to various topics. In 2000 I spent two weeks in a village in White Carpathians and then in 2000–2003 I conducted the standard ethnographic long-term research in a locality situated in the region of Záhorie. In those two villages I focused on the folk explanations of misfortune, especially witchcraft beliefs.



- *porobiť/porobenie, zarobiť, pobosorovať/bosoráctvo,⁹ čarovať/počarovať/čarodejníctvo* (these are verbs and nouns which more or less correspond to the English notions of witchcraft, sorcery, and casting a spell);
- *prekliat'preklatie/kliatba* (curse);
- *gniaviť* (to push, to mash), *tlačiť* (to push), *mora* (a nightmare). These words refer to possession.

My aim here is not to give an accurate translation of Slovak terms to English, on the contrary: I would like to point to the difficulty in finding precise equivalents of folk terms in different languages. English translation here does not reflect the multiple meanings of these words. Their use could vary from narrative to narrative and their meanings could overlap. For instance, the word *gniaviť* (to push, to mash) can mean ‘witchcraft’ in one story and ‘possession by the dead’ in another; the word *prekliat'* ‘to curse’ can be associated with magic, but not necessarily – it could mean just a strong wish to harm someone because of revenge. Thus, the traditional folk stories that I recorded did not reflect a coherent system of belief where each folk term had an exact meaning. Rather, those terms were used on particular occasions of meaning-making and corresponded to a given social situation. In these stories, most misfortunes were interpreted in social terms by the actions of people who interacted with the victims. It is important to notice that the intent or absence of intent of a person who was supposed to cause harm corresponded to distinct narrative templates.

The narrative template related to *unintentional* magical harm was associated with the terms *urieknutie, úrek, uštknutie, úrok, z očí prišlo*. *Urieknutie* was the most recurrent term, and it will be used here henceforth. All these words refer to the idea that a person can cause sickness by a look, verbal praise, or admiration (not necessarily expressed by words). The sickness appeared in a short time interval after an encounter with a certain person and was interpreted as its consequence. If not cured immediately, it was supposed to cause serious problems and even death, especially if babies and children were affected. However, the people who supposedly caused the sickness did not intend to harm others; their influence was described as spontaneous and was never interpreted by narrators as evil. Often the harmful effect was explained by their inborn abilities, a certain power (for instance, “strong eyes”). The English expression “the evil eye” therefore is not a satisfactory translation; I believe that it is better to translate these words as “the harmful eye”. The corresponding narrative template is the following:

- A victim meets a person who either looks at the victim or praises them.
- A victim feels sick.
- An experienced person identifies the cause of the sickness.
- Magical healing is performed.

⁹ From the Hungarian term for witch of Turkic origin, *boszorkány* (Pócs et al., 2000: e37).

In specific narratives, the generic category ‘victim’ could be represented by a narrator or someone who they knew, often children, but also animals (i.e., cattle) and plants (grain). The symptoms of sickness could be a sudden headache, sleepiness, nausea, problems with the stomach, spasms, or others. “An experienced person” could be a narrator, a person from a victim’s family, or a person with special knowledge of healing charms related to *urieknutie*. Magical healing could consist of various actions involving the use of material objects, certain herbs, or body liquids. Such actions included making “the ember water” – throwing a certain number of embers into the water; washing oneself by it and/or drinking it; spitting on a piece of clothes or urinating on it and then rubbing the forehead with it; or using the herb named *čistec* (literally ‘cleaner’, the plant called woundwort in English) – either burning the herb and breathing smoke, or preparing a potion and drinking it, or washing oneself with the potion, or combining breathing, drinking, and washing.

The diagnosis was often described as the first phase of healing, for instance: when embers in the ember water sink, or if the potion made from *čistec* after washing contains some impurities, the sickness is caused by harmful eye. Identification of the person who caused harm, albeit unintentionally, was important, because sometimes they had to contribute to the healing, as is described in the following narrative:

Mária: It happened when my grandma still lived. I have a sister who is twelve years younger. When my mom worked in the field, grandma was with us, the children. She used to tie up my sister to her back. One day then, my sister started turning her head in a strange way, she was twisting it again and again. I wanted to put her head in a normal position, but she twisted it again. And again. Grandma said that the neighbour who just visited us, aunt Ulina, must have cast a harmful eye on her. She took my sister from her back, I stayed with her, and grandma ran to the neighbour: “You visited us, you cast the harmful eye on her!” And so, they grabbed the woman’s gloves. Women used to wear gloves with a string keeping the pair together. Grandma took a piece of this string from aunt Ulina and burnt it together with herbs, and she put my sister in the smoke. I cried in the courtyard; I was afraid that my sister would die. And when aunt Ulina came to us another time, grandma put my sister into a carpet, swaddled her [laughter], and stood up in front of her. So that aunt Ulina couldn’t cast the harmful eye on her.

Researcher: *Did the neighbour want to harm her?*

Mária: No! No! One cannot help it! It is not malice. What do you think, do I have such eyes? ... Can I cast the harmful eye? ... I will tell you, my daughter lives near the forest, and any time I come visit her, or they come visit me, her children tell me: “Grandma, you cast the harmful



eye on us!” – “But my dear kids, I don’t want to harm you! I like to see you, I like you, I don’t see you often. And I don’t want to harm you, but I can’t come and not look at you!”

I documented the harmful eye belief in every locality I visited; it was a topic that people often mentioned spontaneously. Most of my informants considered it to be a natural bodily illness, often justifying their attitude by the opinion of medical doctors who supposedly believed in the natural causes of such disease.

The Slovak folk beliefs related to *intentional* magical harm are linked to the social world rather than nature. Thus, they are much more complex and diverse. Unlike the harmful eye explaining bodily illness only, the words *porobit’, zarobit’, pobosorovat’, prekliat’* and *gniaviť* are used to explain various types of misfortune: illness and/or death, accidents, loss of property, or broken relationships. These themes produce different narrative templates. For this reason, here I will consider only stories about an illness which may result in death. The corresponding narrative template is the following:

- A victim falls ill and may die.
- A victim or their relatives look for the causes of misfortune.
- They indicate an attacker and/or harmful magical means, often with the help of an experienced person.
- They perform corrective actions.

Similarly to the template of the harmful eye, the generic category ‘victim’ here could be represented by a narrator, someone who they knew, or an animal; but also by people who lived in the village long ago (which is rare in the harmful eye stories). Importantly, many tales were about magical harm done to cattle – one of the basic economic articles of the household in rural areas in Slovakia until the mid-20th century. In such stories, magical harm is typically done by some material objects an attacker has put in the barn, for example:

We had very nice cattle, we had it nice... But every year, a cow or a calf died, something always died. When this continued for three or four years, my mother told us: “You know what, dig under the bottom of the barn, take a look if you have something there”. And we dug up everything, threw it out, but we didn’t find anything really. But then, the cattle stopped dying. Was that true, what do I know? It stopped, I know that. Someone did it. Well, people could wish you harm, you know.

The attacker is frequently a victim’s neighbour, often a relative, but they also could be a person with inborn supernatural power (in western Slovakia such a person is usually called *bosorka/bosorák* – a female witch/a male witch). Their identification was an answer to the question: “*Who did it to me, and why?*” Thus, the story is always about

negative aspects of social relationships – conflicts, envy, revenge, and so on. Magical harm can be done by various means. For instance, a witch can do it by her supernatural power; a neighbour or a relative performs magic, often involving material objects (see also Jerotijević, 2010). Identification of magical objects is a part of corrective actions, which can include magical healing, but not necessarily. Many stories also talk about the victim doing counter-magic to the attacker, often with the help of an experienced person. Such a person can be a member of the family but also a person with inborn supernatural abilities who can heal, and also harm people. In the past, there were several villages in western Slovakia and Moravia where people travelled to meet such experts. In my material, the village Hrozenkov was often mentioned. The female experts on magic who lived there were called *bohyně* (plural, in singular *bohyňa*, from *bohovat'* 'to cast a spell with the name of God, *boh*¹⁰), *vedomkyne* (plural, in singular *vedomkyňa*, from *vedieť* 'to know'), or *veštkyne* (plural, in singular *veštkyňa*, from *veštit'* 'to perform divination'). Their "magical services" included divination and healing:

It has also been said that people were doing sorcery [porobili], and some people were arguing that this was true. And someone would say that it was not true. But one old woman, who has already died, had a neighbour. And the woman's husband died. And she got sick... And when she was thinking about it all one night, she concluded that their neighbour cast a spell on them [pobosorovala]. So she went to Hrozenkov. She arrived there and she saw that woman on the water [surface], in a kind of water pool. I don't know, I've never been there in my life, I am just telling you what I heard. There she was, that neighbour who wanted to cast a spell [porobit'], appearing on the water. She put something under a wooden ladder at the riverbank where they often went. The woman didn't overstep it, but her husband did. And then he died. Yes. Yes, yes. They went to the river, and there they found some rags buried. Yes, they found it there and then I guess they removed them; I don't know. Her husband died, and she died soon afterwards.

However, *bohyně* could also perform black magic:

When I worked with other women at the cooperative farm, one woman, who was even younger than me, was threatening us: "I will go to

¹⁰ The word *bohyňa* in Slovak means 'goddess'. As a folk term in my data it has a different meaning, although it refers to the divine realm through the root *boh* (God/god). Dobšovičová Pintířová (2016: 17) states that during her research on this phenomenon in Moravia she asked people why *bohyně* (plural of *bohyňa*) are called that. The answer was: "*Protože bohujú, vyzývajú Boha*" ("Because they *bohujú*, invoke God"). My informants could not explain the etymology of the word *bohyňa*, but they never ascribed any divine characteristics to *bohyně*.



Hrozenkov, I will cast a spell on you all there [zarobím vám všetkým]!” Because they laughed at her and said she had slept with her uncle and another man. They told her: “Tell us, Anča, did you sleep with him too, that musician? They both slept at your house.” And she said: “Just you wait, I’ll go to Hrozenkov!” The two women spreading the rumours didn’t even eat their lunch, they were frightened terribly, and in the afternoon they were weak and infirm. They asked her to forgive them, in fact.

The meanings of the terms corresponding to the intentional magical harm overlap. For example, the word *pobosorovat’* usually means a harmful influence of a person endowed by inborn supernatural power (*bosorka*, a witch); the word *porobit’* usually refers to magic which is performed by a neighbour who is not supposed to have inborn supernatural abilities; and the word *gniavit’* typically denotes a negative experience during sleep which could be caused either by people or by revenants. However, the words *porobit’*, *pobosorovat’* and *gniavit’* could be used as synonyms in the same narrative:

When my brother-in-law was single, he lived in a house which belonged to a strange woman and her husband. He’d always been amazed that when the clock struck midnight, she would start screaming, yelling that something was strangling her. When they came to her: “And what is wrong with you? What is wrong with you?” – “Something is behind me. Something suffocates me, something pushes me” [gniavi]. But when those guys looked behind her, they didn’t see anything! They took something from the house, I don’t even know what, and they went to Žitkov, to a bohyňa. She told them: “When you go to bed you will meet a woman. That woman will go towards you. She will meet you. There is something in each corner of her duvet.” She said that the two neighbours were very angry at each other; one was a monster, and the other was, too. When they left the bohyňa they really met their neighbour. Opening her duvet, they found something in the corners. Just like the bohyňa said. They threw it out and the woman was no longer choking. It was the two neighbours, you see, one did magic on the other – cast a spell on her [porobila, pobosorovala]. This is what they have told me many times.

It appears that the traditional terms as such are only part of remembering stories about magical harm resulting in illness: people employ them when they mediate their experience, and narrative templates as part of memory are behind this process of mediation. The next part of the paper will explore in what way traditional terms are incorporated into narratives told by Peter and members of his group.

Magical healing and energy

Peter's circle was gradually formed on the basis of his personal contacts. It consisted of six regular members, including Peter (two men and four women, at that time aged between 22 and 35, students and college graduates). Three members of Peter's circle were initially learning core shamanism at FSS seminars, and Peter himself participated in two workshops on core shamanism. But then they started practising the Mongolian version of shamanism together with Peter who was initiated into this in 1994, when he had already been practising astral journeys for several years. The members of Peter's group claimed that he had the reputation of being a recognized expert in esotericism and shamanism, as he began his spiritual "career" in the early 1990s. He also was represented as a person with special spiritual capacity, including being able to see the aura and energy (for more about Peter and his circle see Bužeková, 2012, 2019).

The members of Peter's circle, as well as most of my informants in FSS circles, stated that they were not religious, although they used such terms as "God", "deity", "sacred", or "shrine". They saw shamanism as a practical spiritual path that offered a specific way of healing (considered to be compatible with any religion). The shamanic healing takes place during the ritual of a shamanic journey to the "other reality", to the world of spirits, involving altered states of consciousness (henceforth ASC).¹¹ As I argued elsewhere (Bužeková, 2019, 2020), my informants perceived ASC as a channel to the universal spiritual energy. This concept belongs to the most important notions of neo-shamanism and other spiritual trends and serves as a linguistic bridge between science and spirituality, legitimizing alternative practices by using the language of science (Keshet, 2009, 2011; see also Lindquist, 2001). In Peter's circle, the tendency to explain misfortunes and illnesses in scientific terms was strong because in the past he worked in health care and claimed that this practice improved his expertise, as he could combine biomedical knowledge with "seeing" energy (Bužeková, 2009).¹²

Shamanism was not Peter's primary activity: for him, it was only one set of useful spiritual techniques. He was involved rather in energetic healing through astral travelling, which he regarded as a different instrument in comparison to shamanism. He also used his alleged special abilities (for instance, seeing the aura) to make more precise diagnoses and more effective healing:

Peter: I used to work for an internet portal on numerology and everyone there called me a shaman, although I was not a shaman at that time. No one was interested in the techniques I used, but I was able

¹¹ For more about shamanic practices in Bratislava see Bužeková, 2012, 2017.

¹² In this text, I concentrate on shamans' interpretation of misfortune and the corresponding healing techniques and do not interpret shamanic practices in terms of a new religious movement.



to treat a person or an animal, and also to influence the environment, which actually captures all the things that a shaman should do. So, it somehow became my name. I usually intervene three times, three to five times, no more is needed. Because I'm not healing the symptoms, I'm dealing with the source. Because the source is not always directly in the body, it is often connected to the aura.

Researcher: *Do you see the aura?*

Peter: *Yes. As a child, I had friends – purple, pink, blue and red spheres. My favourite leisure activity was talking to them under a bed, I was covered with a blanket. Let's just say I wasn't completely normal, at least not in the common sense of the word. I see it as it is coloured, it is not something like a cloud, you can see it from the front and from everywhere.*

Apart from the members of his circle, Peter helped other people. His clients found him through personal contacts or via the internet; he did not advertise himself. According to him, he could heal from distance and did not need to know a patient personally. Most of the problems he solved were interpreted in terms of energy. The causes of illness were represented in two basic kinds of destructive energetic attacks: (1) contaminating a victim's body by negative energy; and (2) draining energy away from a victim (*cucat* 'to suck the energy out'¹³). Both types of energetic attacks can be intentional, but "sucking the energy out" can be unintentional. Both types refer to a link between the attacker and victim (for instance, talking, touching, contact with material objects, etc.). Remarkably, in his stories about such attacks, Peter used traditional terms *urieknutie* (the harmful eye) and *kliatba/preklatie* (curse):

Peter: *I heal with my own energy when needed, but I tend to heal urieknutie and preklatie through astral travelling. I would put it this way: there are things that are named differently, and yet they are the same techniques that were used in the past. Shamanism is specific in some things, but in a way, it is the same as folklore, folk beliefs, and such things. I know that urieknutie is an energetic attack. I know that it is usually done by someone who had no idea they did it. They call it urieknutie, but in fact, when a person needs energy, they often take it from another person. And, actually, when they've done it once, they've made a channel. And they can do it any time. And that other person, of course, feels weak and, over time, becomes depleted, but [the first person] keeps*

¹³ The words *cucat*, *vyčičiavať* have several meanings in Slovak and can be understood as 'to deprive someone of strength, to exhaust someone' in addition to sucking itself.

taking, and so [the other person] becomes burned out. Thus, washing by čistec actually helps, because washing interrupts the connection. But on the other hand, it can also be removed in other ways.

Researcher: *Do people come to you with such problems? With urieknutie?*

Peter: *Mostly.*

Researcher: *Is it a physical illness?*

Peter: *It is not. Energy attacks are eliminated, and the person is fine within two weeks. Kliatba, on the other hand, is intentional and special, and it is not always possible to remove it. The person can be treated, but the source cannot be found. It can be kliatba coming from a generation back, or two, or three, that is, ancestral, and therefore it cannot be removed. Shamanism, for example, helps a lot with this. Usually, the cause is losing a piece of soul. It is brought back in, and its return often helps the person.*

As we can see, Peter does not see *urieknutie* as a bodily illness – which differs from the meaning of this word in folk tales; and he employs the notion of energy to explain the phenomenon. But the difference between *urieknutie* and *kliatba* in Peter's eyes is the same as in folk tales – *urieknutie* is unintentional and *kliatba* is intentional. His accounts of these two notions corresponded to the narrative templates of unintentional and intentional magical harm in folk tales – and, again, incorporated the concept of energy in his explanation. For example, Peter describes the illness of his friend's child as follows:

Recently I took care of her little son. I've been there four times. The little one had digestive problems. It was a newborn, and he could neither poop nor eat. Everything went out, and when he got something in, it didn't go out. So, either the problem was that everything went out or everything remained inside. I did an energy treatment. His intestines, both liver and stomach, were damaged. The first thing that was needed was to adjust the upper exit, to explicitly lock it. It was caused by kliatba coming from her mother-in-law, his own grandmother, who thought that the woman stole her son. The little one was fine until grandma's first visit, then it started, and then it wouldn't end. And now he manages to defend himself, the organism is already strong, he would not let it go in. Well, we had to solve it somehow. It is difficult to find the right amulets for small children. You can have a red ribbon, or you can do it by putting a knife under the cot, but they have cats. When there are cats in a household, I cannot hang knives under the cot. Generally, the knife is directed towards the door, and it works by severing those energy connections. Sharp points



and edges radiate negative energy, so it creates a field in the direction where the knife is turned. That is why the knife should be always directed to the door, to repel the energy.

Thus, this specific narrative follows the narrative template of intentional magical harm: a victim falls ill and may die – a victim or their relatives look for the causes of misfortune – they indicate an attacker and/or harmful magical means, often with the help of an experienced person – they perform corrective actions. The category of ‘experienced person’ in Peter’s narratives was represented by the narrator, by Peter himself. It should also be said that Peter’s grandmother was a local healer, a herbalist who lived in a village in western Slovakia. Thus, Peter’s knowledge of folk terms can be traced back to the older generations of his family.

Other members of Peter’s circle also provided narratives about “sucking the energy out”, which could be unintentional or intentional. In the following specific narrative, Mira talks about a private session when Nora, who had previously participated in FSS events, “sucked the energy out of” others during the shamanic session:

It is unpleasant to be exposed to such things. We dealt with Nora there, right? She sucked the energy out of the whole group, indeed... There was a demonstration of a shamanic technique – you take a rough stone, ask a question, and look for answers there... Well, Rudo asked who wanted to be a volunteer... So, Nora said: “I do!” They practiced for about half an hour, and perhaps after fifteen minutes we all were hurting, and we all fell asleep. That was terrible... Peter stopped her by cutting the connection, but others were not able to so he helped them.

Another member of the group, Leo, described intentional harm done by his own grandmother, who was supposed to have “her own black magic.” She used it not only to cure her diabetes but to harm her descendants by “sucking the energy out” of them or cursing them (*preklínat*). Leo emphasized that he and his mother were able to defend themselves by means of shamanic techniques:

Leo: *Yes, black magic [čierna mágia]. When you visit her, she sucks the energy out of you as much as she can, and she curses you.*

Researcher: *How did you feel it?*

Leo: *Well, you leave and you’re completely exhausted, or you tell her things that you didn’t want to. She starts asking questions and you say things that you shouldn’t tell her, things that we promised not to tell her, and she always manages to extract everything out of everyone. And you go away completely empty, spent, you’re not able to do anything all*

day long. And she curses people [posiela kliatbu]. But we've already discovered how to defend ourselves, so it somehow doesn't work with us. I've got animals,¹⁴ they automatically attack her. When it didn't work with us, she started to curse others in our family. Peter said that there are always enough resources in the family. Now she's cursing my mom's husband. He is ill, he has a urinary tract inflammation, and he has been taking strong antibiotics for three weeks. He is trying to cure it, he is a doctor and yet he is not able to cure himself. He says he got it from the hospital, but he didn't get it from there because it started when she stopped cursing us and started cursing him. She started telling me and my mum that we were bastards. My brother is well because he is stupid and lets her do it. Since we began to defend ourselves and her curses didn't work, I and my mom became bastards. She found out that something was wrong, that it wasn't working, that it was coming back to her. Her magic, I guess, came from the Jews. Because during the war they hid a Jew in Kubín. And somehow, they talked with him about what to do and how to do it, and he probably trained them because even her mother knew such things. But it might not only be the Jews – up there, in Orava, people still do it.

As we can see, Leo interprets folk concepts in terms of energy and also employs shamanic terms (power animals). He traces the origins of his grandmother's abilities to tradition – either Jewish or folk tradition of the Orava region situated in northern Slovakia. In general, in Peter's circle, the knowledge of magic was represented as part of tradition(s) with ancient roots. Slovak, or rather Slavic tradition in this context was an important source. But when it came to specific cases, Peter referred to local context and local concepts, invariably interpreting them in terms of spiritual energy, and sometimes linking them to shamanic terms. For example, in the following specific narrative he presents a story about Nela who wanted to be a witch (*bosorka*):

There is a lot of magic in Myjava.¹⁵ After all, Nela bought that house there because it was a witch's [bosorka] house. Nela is casting spells [robí čarovanie], she is doing the lower magic. She has clients, they come to her when they have a problem. Or when they want to hurt someone. She is concerned with how to create some potions and similar things, usually she uses hair and the like. I don't like it very much; I don't like it. But it

¹⁴ A shaman is supposed to have power animals – allies who help them in their spiritual as well as mundane life. To find an ally, a shaman travels to the Underworld, to the roots of the world tree. The number of allies is not limited.

¹⁵ A region in western Slovakia, bordering the Czech Republic.



is her business. ... Actually, she was my target once, whom I was asked to destroy. She wasn't doing these things then. Her ex-boyfriend came to me and told me that his wife did not want to give him a son and was blocking his property. I told him that I was not a killer or something like that. But he wanted to solve the problem because he thought someone was attacking him. So, I made an energetic field around him and cleared the space around him. And after three years, I met Nela. That was the only time I was in contact with a person who I was originally supposed to work against. But I did not do it, I never do it, the potential attacker means nothing to me. I just build a [energetic] wall, or I send some animals to guard a victim. Thus, I just defend, I do not attack.

Peter says that he is solving problems mostly by using his own energy. The following specific narrative, again, follows the narrative template of intentional harm:

Zuza is a girl who was on a shamanic course with us, when she was seventeen years old. She had problems at home, and she solved them by marrying a boy whom she did not like, just to get away from home. And now she is complaining, and now she wants to deal with it because she is losing energy and she is getting weak. She came to me, and I saw that her husband is doing black magic [porobil]. He attacks her, he compels her into things she doesn't want. When solving problems like that, I spend my own energy. Let's just say it is not a problem for me to do it when someone has a problem, but most people who come to me don't have a real problem. They just have problems in their heads.

Thus, it can be concluded that Peter's narratives about spiritual healing are built upon narrative templates of unintentional and intentional magical harm. Although Peter and members of his circle are supposed to practise traditions with foreign roots – Mongolian shamanism, astral travelling, energetic healing – they use folk concepts that are part of their native folk tradition. The notion of energy serves them as a bridge between different discourses. Hence, on particular occasions of meaning-making, Peter and other shamans draw on the folk tradition to interpret illnesses and spiritual healing.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to point out that memory mechanisms behind the incorporation of folk beliefs into a spiritual worldview need closer attention. In this regard, the investigation of traditional narratives appears as a path worth following. I argue that tradition provides

spiritual seekers with suitable narrative templates related to illness and magical harm. In the process of mediating their experience, urban shamans create a specific amalgam of traditional beliefs and alternative spiritual ideas, glued together by the notion of energy. This concept bridges shamanic and scientific discourses. Thus, in the eyes of educated people, it legitimizes spiritual healing and also justifies their native tradition.

Many neo-shamanic practices are wrapped in the language of science; the neo-shamanic texts emphasise that “in the age of science, belief and faith have become irrelevant” and encourage spiritual seekers to retain “intelligent scepticism and a critical mind” (Cook, Hawk, 1992: frontispiece). Neo-shamanism resonates with scientific thinking also by experimenting with various techniques, and by the absence of a doctrine obligatory for all practitioners: “In contrast to spiritual groups that insult the intelligence of educated people by their adherence to rigid spiritual standards, neo-shamanism does not impose any doctrinal requirements. It attracts people by its loose structure catered to highly individualised practices” (Znamenski, 2004: xiii). However, despite a seemingly unlimited variety of available spiritual paths, practitioners’ choice of healing techniques and their explanation is restricted by their cultural knowledge. Therefore, local traditions, including supernatural folk beliefs, play an important role in adapting neo-shamanism to specific cultural conditions. The interpretation of tradition in spiritual terms (and vice versa) supports the practitioners’ cultural identity, and at the same time places their culture in the context of universal human knowledge.

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Komunikacija med tradicijami: pripovedni obrazci magičnega zdravljenja v urbanem šamanizmu

Sodobne raziskave so pokazale, da se v globaliziranem svetu zdravilne prakse, ki izvirajo v različnih kulturnih tradicijah, združujejo in preoblikujejo v sinkretične oblike. Magija pri tem nastopa kot del celostnih svetovnih nazorov, povezanih z duhovnim razvojem; da bi jo legitimirali, praktiki pogosto uporabljajo znanstvene izraze. Proces mešanja tradicij je zapleten in odvisen od konkretnega kulturnega okolja, v katerem lahko lokalna verovanja in prakse sooblikujejo nove zdravilne sisteme. V članku je obravnavan primer uporabe slovaške tradicije v okviru globalnega duhovnega gibanja neošamanizma.

Neošamanistično gibanje, ki temelji na ponovni interpretaciji tradicionalnih zdravilnih praks iz različnih kultur, se je pojavilo v zgodnjih 70. letih 20. stoletja in je postajalo zaradi številnih političnih in intelektualnih teženj v zahodnih družbah vse pomembnejše. V globalnem kontekstu se praktiki neošamanizma lahko oprejo na katero koli tradicijo duhovnega zdravljenja, saj naj bi vse imele skupne korenine v davni preteklosti. Ta pogled se nanaša na starodavne korenine človeštva, pa tudi na lokalna ljudska verovanja in prakse duhovne dediščine. Avtorica trdi, da je za razumevanje kontekstualizacije neošamanizma v lokalnem okviru potrebno neošamanizem raziskati kot kompleksen proces, ki temelji na pomnjenju magičnih konceptov. Z drugimi besedami, pri sprejemanju novih duhovnih konceptov ima pomembno vlogo prej pridobljeno kulturno znanje, to znanje pa vključuje tako domače ljudsko izročilo kot znanstvene razlage, ki jih ljudje pridobijo z izobrazbo.

Avtorica je med letoma 2010 in 2012 etnografsko raziskovala, kako je tradicionalne slovaške ljudske koncepte uporabljala skupina, zbrana okoli šamanskega zdravilca iz Bratislave. Za razlago mehanizmov, ki so v ozadju procesa združevanja slovaških tradicionalnih in neošamanskih konceptov, uporablja koncept tradicije kot komunikacije in teorijo o pripovedi kot vrsti kulturnega orodja oziroma posredniškem sredstvu. Dokazuje, da urbani šamani v pripovedih o magičnem škodovanju in magičnem zdravljenju uporabljajo pripovedne obrazce, poznane v slovaških tradicionalnih razlagalnih pripovedih o nesreči. Ob posredovanju svojih izkušenj urbani šamani ustvarjajo specifičen amalgam tradicionalnih verovanj in alternativnih duhovnih idej, ki jih povezuje pojem energije. Ta poveže šamanske in znanstvene diskurze, s čimer v očeh izobraženih ljudi legitimira duhovno zdravljenje in izvirno domačo tradicijo.

Avtorica ugotavlja, da si kljub navidezno neomejeni raznovrstnosti razpoložljivih poti do duhovnosti udeleženci izbirajo in razlagajo tehnike magičnega zdravljenja s svojim kulturnim znanjem. Zato imajo lokalne tradicije, vključno z ljudskimi verovanji v nadnaravno, pomembno vlogo pri prilagajanju neošamanizma

lokalnim kulturnim razmeram. Razlaga tradicije z duhovnostjo (in nasprotno) podpira kulturno identiteto udeležencev in hkrati njihovo kulturo postavlja v kontekst univerzalnega človeškega znanja.