

**Drumming with Winds: Dwelling, Healing, and Creation
among the Islanders of Southern Iran**

Nima Jangouk

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**School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa**

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Introduction

One was, and one was not. In the beginning was the wind. And the wind started blowing west to east and south to north in six different directions.

And the wind encountered the sparkle, encircled the little sparkle. And the wind kissed the sparkle unexpectedly.

And the blazing fire emerged ...

It was only the present. Neither the past nor the future. It was just us. Neither I nor the other. It was nothing, and it was all. I was caught by *zār* immediately and unexpectedly. An improvisational performance by Maestro *Mārgiri* and his son in a musical festival kindled a fire in me and I have been trying to learn from *zar* practices since then. Immediately, intuitively, fervidly, enigmatically, incompletely, and wanderingly, this work has been written and structured. Inspired by how *zar* blows in the world. Just like how *zar* dances the world.

Zar practitioners usually live in *ahle havā* (people of the wind) communities, which have historically been diverse groups inhabiting southern Iran by the Indian Ocean. Nowadays, the communities are mainly scattered across the central south, *Bušehr* and *Hormozgan* provinces, yet the latter hosts most of them in two port cities and one island: *Bandare Abbās*,¹ *Bandare Lenge*,² and *Jazireye Qešm*.³ Talking about *ahle havā* is talking about varied communities living colorful life paths which are unique to each group yet intersect with other communities. Despite all diversity, different *ahle havā* communities share the same insights revolving around ocean, wind,

¹ The Port of Abbas

² The Port of Lengeh

³ Qeshm Island

music, and healing that identify them as the practitioners of zar. The Ocean is the mother. We come from it and go back to it. The Ocean feeds us. The Ocean is Us. Winds fertilize the Ocean. They move it. Winds dance the Ocean. They can be caring or hostile. Winds can heal or harm. Music is the language of winds. Winds love songs and each blowing wind has its own song. Appropriate songs can soothe winds. Songs can heal. *Bābās* and *māmās*⁴ master the language of the winds. Such mastery comes from three main sources: being possessed by various winds and having them tamed; being a virtuoso drummer and singer and knowing how to communicate with them; being a skillful healer which becomes possible only by apprenticing a master healer for years on end. Healers are powerful. They are to follow. Healers are master human-winds.

The community that I have been learning from is based in *Salak*, Qešm.⁵ The healer, *Bābā Isā Qāderi*, lives in the village, training his assistants, conducting his band of musicians, and leading his community of about two thousand people,⁶ who are either living in the Island or have been scattered across neighbouring cities or islands such as *Hengom*,⁷ *Hormoz*,⁸ *Bandare K̄hemir*,⁹ *Bandare Lenge*, or *Bandare Abbās*.

The community is open to accepting all men and women who have gone through puberty. Although the elders of the community should be willing to accept the new member, the final decision will be made by the healer, only. There is little chance of conflict and disagreement as most applicants are already known to the community by kinship or neighborhood ties, however,

⁴ Baba and mama zar, male and female healers

⁵ Salakh Village in Qeshm Island

⁶ Two thousand is the population of *Bābā Isā*'s community approximated by him and his assistants.

⁷ Hengam Island

⁸ Hormoz Island

⁹ The Port of Khamir

in exceptional cases, such as accepting an “unknown anthropologist” into the very closed circle of zar participants, the healer tries different processes of communication, negotiation, assurance, and persuasion, to content the majority of the elders of the community.

Sunni Islam is followed by most Island inhabitants. Ahle havā in Salak self-identify as Sunni Muslims too, however, their practiced version of Islam is in some ways different from religious lifepaths common across the Island. Unwillingness to participate in congregational prayers, strong belief in the divine power of the wind, considering music as sacred flows of healing and guidance, and openness in tolerating more flexible patterns of the relationships between men and women, have made them exposed to receiving labels such as infidel, unbeliever, Sufi, sorcerer, majus,¹⁰ perverted, and evil by imams, mullahs, and even other followers of Islam in the Island.¹¹

Receiving labels from specific groups does not happen only because of religious reasons. Iranian modernist populations tend to label zar practices as backward, ignorant, and having adverse effects on the progress of the country. There have been inexhaustible attempts by Iranian intellectuals, including anthropologists, to find zar origins in African rituals, moved to southern Iran through slavery only a few centuries ago only, and practiced by Afro-Iranians only (Azimaei 2018; Heydari 2015; Zavieh 2012, etc.).

Such ontological narrowmindedness has put the ahle havā community between the scissor blades of deprivation and exclusion. They do not have any chance to perform their healing practices in

¹⁰ Majus is an umbrella term used to describe the members of community as non-Muslims who believe in one of ancient Iranian religions such as Mithraism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, etc.

¹¹ This has led to the emergence of new forms of zar practices, such as *nobān*, that try to move closer to Quranic teachings and common Islamic paths. Nobān practitioners label zar as misleading non-Islamic practices.

public (typically in the open air on beaches), therefore, zar has been exiled to enclosed havens since a few decades ago. The healers, their assistants, and their drummers are at risk of governmental violence, arrest, and torture on the one hand, and community-level devaluation, harassment, and violence, on the other hand. They have access to neither a high school nor a clinic in the village. The closest high school is only twenty-five minutes driving distance in *Tabl* town, and the closest hospital is only in Qešm city, which is about 50 minutes driving - on dirt roads - from the village. Different governmental policies, which are designed in and exerted from Tehran, do not reflect their needs. For over fifteen years, the Iranian government has allowed Chinese industrial fishing ships to fish in the Persian Gulf. This has led to unemployment and poverty among lifelong community fishermen who cannot compete with advanced fishing technologies used by Chinese corporations. The circumscription of maritime business by the central government has defined traditional maritime trades of the community members as smuggling and has made it limited, unsafe, and hazardous. The expansion of a gas refinery just by the village has not been welcomed by the community members since: “they avoid hiring us under the excuse of not having related education and appropriate skills but bring so many stranger workers to the village that cause so many problems for us.”¹²

Date palm cultivations has been a prominent livelihood of ahle havā in Salak. Qešm city municipality, however, has decided to cultivate mesquite trees all around the Island to make the roads look more beautiful. “What they did not know was that Pakistani mesquite trees have very long roots that go deep into the earth and steal all the water.”¹³ Their date palms are drying and dying one after another.

¹² *Bābā Ahmed* said to me in an interview (Salak village, July 2016).

¹³ *Bābā Ahmed* said to me in an interview (Salak village, July 2016).

The world of ahle havā is the world of deprivation and exclusion. The world of ahle havā is the world of *ataš*.¹⁴ “*Ataš va omid. Ataš va keyāl*.”¹⁵

“Which seed sank deeply into the earth and did not grow?”¹⁶ Ahle havā plants frustration and hardship and harvests hope and joy. Ahle havā dances with winds and bring vitality to the world. Ahle havā dances with winds and enlivens the world. The world of ahle havā is the world of warmth and generosity. Ahle havā celebrates togetherness. In the middle of the day and around lunch time, most families keep the house doors open to unexpected guests who possibly want to come have lunch with them. Night hours are times to gather and chill out. *Borqa*¹⁷ wearing women get together inside the house, while men gather in the courtyards sitting on *gofāre*,¹⁸ smoking hukkah, having spiced black tea and dates, and chatting in their white *dešdāšes*.¹⁹ The night unfolds by having dinner and then the two groups joining together in the yard to start the nightly event of storytelling. The story might be a sequel to one that has been told previously but most of the time, an older man or woman commences improvising a story and other participants, like a relay race, take turns in advancing it. The stories usually start from nowhere, are mainly improvised, and end abruptly, and even incompletely. Sea monsters, desert jinns, mysterious beards and fishes, sacred trees, *māsāyek*,²⁰ sailors, pearl-divers, rowers, poor families, ahle havā,

¹⁴ Drought and thirstiness

¹⁵ “Drought, thirstiness, and hope. Drought, thirstiness, and dream.” Told me *Sa’d* in an interview (Salak village, August 2016).

¹⁶ *Māmā Fāteme* reminded me of this verse by Rumi during an interview (Bandare Abbās city, July 2016).

¹⁷ Burqa

¹⁸ Large wooden benches made from the palm tree to put in the exterior.

¹⁹ Thobe is an ankle-length robe with long sleeves, usually in white.

²⁰ A well-known mystic, Sufi, dervish, gnostic, or scholar from any religion, and especially Islam

healers, zar, bewitchment, getting lost in the Ocean or in a desert, and resisting against sea storms and tornados are common characters and themes around which the stories are improvised. The night of ahle havā would not be thorough without performing music. There are usually two types of *dohol* in different sizes,²¹ accompanying a darbuka, a string instrument such as the oud and one or a group of singers. High tempo ecstatic songs are the most favorite ones that would lead almost every male participant either to start dancing explicitly, or to keep moving shoulders and arms stealthily for the rest of the gathering.

This being-with-music is one of the thickest life experiences of ahle havā. Ahle havā are together with music. At the day or the night, sailing on the sea or gathering on the beach, celebrating, or mourning, praying or chilling, constructing dhows, doing medicine, rowing the boats, together or by themselves, ahle havā are beating their drums. They are with music. Ahle havā blow with music.

As the winds blow in different directions, ahle havā's existence extends in different directions, too. Talking about the wisdom of zar practitioners, we are talking about being historically connected to the pre-Islamic and Islamic knowledge, mysticism, and literature. There is rich knowledge of constructing *burkas*,²² making dhows, healing sufferers, navigation, and weather forecasting shared by the people. The most famous Iranian poets, *Omare k̄ayyam*, *Ferdowsi*, *Hāfez*, and *Molānā* (Rumi), are well-known, appreciated, and quoted in the region. And various languages such as Qeshmi,²³ Farsi, Arabic, and Swahili are spoken in the village. This could be considered as the result of life-lasting and deep connections with other Iranians, Arabs, Africans,

²¹ A *dohol* is a round drum with two skinheads.

²² *Burka* is a reservoir for drinking water made of clay in southern Iran.

²³ *Jazirati*, which is the spoken language of the Islanders.

and Indians through cultural (trading literature, arts, healing knowledge, etc.), social (marriage, kinship, etc.), and economic (sea trade, slavery, etc.) relations.

Notes on the Research Approach, Writing Style, Transliteration, and Thesis Structure

I am notified of a *bābā*'s willingness to talk with me about zar practices only a few days after my arrival to the Island, however, I should be able to go and visit him in Hormoz Island, as soon as possible. The *bābā* has travelled from Fujairah to Hormoz to visit a patient and he is staying there for two nights only. I must move fast and meet him before he gets back to his homeland. I call my cousin, and he arrives at my residence in a couple of hours, and our trip starts. After about twenty minutes driving, we start noticing tiny sand grains hitting the windshield, and I am experiencing my first sand-rain just in a bit. "It is impossible to drive to Hormoz in a sandstorm like this." My cousin nods his head in approval, and the young man working at the gas station adds: "I do not think even the land crafts could take you to the Island in such condition."

Arriving to Hormoz is very important to me though, and I insist on driving a little bit after the storm gets calmer, for getting the land craft to the Island. "I am not going to kill us by driving to the wharf in this weather, Nima. Next time *enšā'allāh!*"²⁴ My cousin says before making a U-turn. We are going back.

The same night after my return to the village, I get the chance to join a musical band to replace one of their absent members, and this becomes a turning point in my fieldwork. Drumming with the Island drummers gave me the opportunity of making connections with zar drummers and being accepted by *Bāb Isā*, as well as his apprentices, drummers, and most of his other followers.

²⁴ if Allah wants

“By making that U-turn on that sandy day, were we really going back?” This question has perdured in my mind since that day. And it has considerably helped me to learn more about the research approach that I think is more appropriate to gain wisdom from zar. A sandstorm emerges when the winds intend to dance the sands. Sandstorms, like other winds, start blowing all at once, and dance the world in whatever way they want. There is almost neither a predictable beginning nor an end. The winds are gods. They decide to move us in their improvised dances. And our life is learning to blow with them. To live is to surrender to winds and let them take us. Blowing with winds is not about stagnation and congelation: it is about moving and openness. Blowing with winds is not about regularity, and order. Blowing with winds is not about clarity, and confidence: it is about chaos, questioning, and confusion.²⁵ I have been trying to follow the same approach in writing this dissertation, too. Discussions are not necessarily following each other in a specific order. They neither emerge predictably nor arrive to obvious conclusions. The discussions are not there to provide readers with touchable ends. Rather, they have been written down to help the reader feel wondering and start questioning.

Windy discussions are not my only fieldwork tokens. The writing style that has been used in the most recent parts of this dissertation (chapters one, three, seven, eight, nine, and the epilogue) are heartily learned from different ways in which ahle blow with the winds. Poetry is loved and practised by Iranians since a long time ago. In southern Iran, people live and die with poetry. I suppose that any piece of writing about Iranian cultural lifepaths should be able to present this poetic aspect, at least stylistically. The myths, fables, and fictions of ahle havā, on the other hand, contain so much mystery, vagueness, magic, exceptionality, incompleteness, transition, and

²⁵ It reminds me of one of my favourite quotes by Nietzsche: “I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star” (Nietzsche 1995 (1883): 17).

movement, in both style and content, too. Writing about immediate, intuitive, fervid, dancing, enigmatical, incomplete, and wandering practices, I believe, should follow an associated style of writing. This path, however, has not been followed intentionally in this dissertation. A few years ago I was caught by a writing style which reminds me of continual short breezes blowing before a stronger wind, reminded of how my body was moving in the small boats of *ahle havā* on the ocean, of how I was danced by the winds beating their drums during the healing events.²⁶

As mentioned earlier, my PhD research began more than ten years ago and after participating in a zar performance led by Bābā Qolāme Mārgiri. Since then, I have been trying to answer two main questions: what is zar? And how do zar healing practices work? This dissertation is mainly me striving to find answers to my questions. It consists of 15 different sections blowing in three main directions: the prologue and the epilogue serve as two different harbours at the beginning and the end, where my journey starts and then perches. There are also nine different chapters gusting with four different anchors. The four anchors, medicine in Iran, Iran, Qeshm Island, and ritual theory, try to contextualize the work, to help the reader become even more familiar with *ahle havā*'s historical and contemporary lifepaths, and to have a short review of different theories on ritual in anthropology. The anchors have been written during the very first years of my socio-anthropological journey as a PhD student at the University of Ottawa, when I was writing about zar holding hands firmly with my previous sociological training. Their heaviness might

²⁶ In his first years of writing professionally, Sa'edi was well-known among Iranian authors for his impressive realist writing style. After working with *ahle havā*, however, his style of writing was dramatically changed. Fantasy, mystery, and magic are the key elements of his later works. Nowadays Gholamhossein Sa'edi is well-known as the father of magical realist writing style in Iran (Moshfeqi & Alavi 2017). My own transition reminds me of him in different aspects including and explicit change in the style of writing.

contradict the lightness one needs to blow with winds, however, these anchors recall the educative passage I have been on since starting to learn from ahle havā. The nine chapters have been written after feeling bewitched by the enchantment of anthropology and getting caught by the mystic lingual worlds of ahle havā. Chapter five is the point from which I take flight and the flying keeps going until the end of the work.

There is a lot of Qeshmi, Farsi, and Arabic words and sentences in different sections of the thesis. The EIr²⁷ transliteration system has been used to help the readers become even more familiar with how those non-English words are pronounced in their original contexts.

²⁷ The Encyclopaedia Iranica

PROLOGUE

Twilight

The first day of spring, *Nowruz* (made up of *Now* [new] and *Ruz* [day, days] which means both ‘New Day’ and ‘New Time’ literally), is New Year’s Day in the Iranian calendar. It is one of the most important events in Iranians’ lives, as well as in people’s lives from other cultures globally and, more specifically, the Middle East; by celebrating Nowruz, many people in my country wish to weave a fresh story of their lives while the weather is gradually warming up, snow is melting, rivers are flowing, trees are blossoming, singing birds are returning home and the yellow sad world is again getting fresh and green.

In a bright pleasant day of spring 2010, only a few days after Nowruz, and only a few months after my marriage, just when I was feeling enthusiastic to begin a new life, I lost my father due to a massive stroke. He passed away after a very complicated brain surgery that saw him hospitalized in the ICU and in a coma for five days.

During that period, I was staying at the hospital every night, worriedly stepping, sitting, and even sleeping beside the ICU so as to ask the surgeons to find if anything was required or helpful to be done for him. He was unduly chained up by cardiac monitors and plastic tubes in a silent aseptic enclosed room and I was surrounded by distant and stern surgeons, physicians and nurses who even hesitated to describe me the situation clearly, if they ever knew it. I remember that some of our close friends suggested different alternative medical practices that would probably help him gain his health, from seeing a sorcerer for getting a talisman which would be able to invalidate the evil eye to applying energy healing by taking a cellphone to the ICU. Their suggestions, at the time, sounded completely idiotic to me and were, accordingly, promptly rejected. They, however, let me think more about the treatment process that was taking place.

I used to go to the hospital yard and think to my favourite memories with my father: the first experience of attending a seance during a trip to his father's homeland was one of the most colorful ones. He was from the south of Iran: the south had been known as the cradle of magic, full of astonishing stories about witches and sorcerers, mediums, unfamiliar beings, jinns and other strange creatures, animals, rivers, and winds, either Muslim or infidel, either good or evil. I remembered some mysterious novels and short stories he gave me as gifts, which had been written by my favourite Iranian authors, *Sādeq Hedāyat* (Sadegh Hedayat)²⁸ and *Qolām-Hoseyn Sā'edi* (Gholamhossein Sa'edi).²⁹ These stories had been embodying magical practices, fantasies, madness, rage, healing, and death, and I found myself asking: “were all those magical practices really that idiotic as I was thinking before?”

The hospital was in a mountainous summery region of Tehran, the capital of Iran and the city where I was born and grew up; I was recalling the days when my father was taking me for promenades and mountain climbing during my childhood. I could also remember him, walking lightly beside me and speaking of Iranian history, art, and poetry. He was a musician, and I could

²⁸ Sadegh Hedayat (1903 – 1951) is one of the most famous Iranian writers and intellectuals. He is best known for his surrealist novel *The Blind Owl* (1937).

²⁹ Gholamhossein Sa'edi (1936 – 1985) is one of the most famous Iranian writers and dramatists. He wrote the first ethnographic work about zar healing rituals in Iran. Moreover, many of his short stories present the culture of eastern coastal regions of Iran, generally, and zar practices, specifically.

frequently recall him playing his *Setār* (setar)³⁰ - sometimes accompanied by me as a *Tombak* (Tonbak)³¹ player - during our cool gatherings on summer nights.

It was during those five days that I began asking myself if those biomedical practices in that soulless clinical environment were consistent with the lifestyle of an artist who loved to roam his environment, watch the blue sky, admire the smell of the flowers, listen to the birds' songs, play his instrument, sing his favourite songs and poems, and move his body within the rhythms.

These were my initial steps toward continuous meditations on different medical practices which led to applying to do a PhD at the University of Ottawa and to working on zar healing practices, more specifically, by following the approach of social sciences.

I owe this, as well as so many other valuable things that I have had in life, to my dad. This thesis, therefore, is dedicated to my father, *Atā Janguk* (Ata Jangouk),³² who I love forever and still learn from, day by day.

³⁰ Setar [made up of Se (three) and Tar (string)] is an Iranian musical instrument from the lute family that is played by the musician's index finger.

³¹ Tombak is an Iranian goblet drum which is the main percussion instrument in Iranian music.

³² Ata Jangouk (1948 - 2010) was an Iranian musician, player, and teacher of *Tār* (tar) and *Setār* (setar). He is mainly known for his knowledge of Radif of Persian music, and for his efforts to combine it with Iranian folk music following a polyphonic approach.

CHAPTER ONE

Dawn

My encounter with zar began early in my life and kept going with long travels. When I was six years old, my parents took me and my older sister, as well as my grandparents, to Bandar Abbas, a port city in southern Iran's Hormozgan Province, where my paternal aunts and uncles lived. Throughout our almost twenty-four-hour trip, my grandpa was trying to help us bear the long trip in a small car by telling stories about his encounters and fights with jinns and other "supernatural" creatures. During that same trip, I experienced one of the most impressive events of my life when I participated in an evocation session: inside a cramped black room, family members chanted rhythmically, prayed with green beads in hand, and formed a circle. We were asking God to let us talk to one of our grandfather's wives who had passed away a couple of years earlier.

A few years later and during my adolescence which was all spent on reading, reading, and reading, another trip happened, this time in the company of one of the most famous contemporary Iranian writers, Gholamhossein Sa'edi. To fill my loneliness, I had started reading Iranian novels and short stories and Sa'edi's short story collection *Tars-o-Larz* (Fear & Trembling), was one of the most formative books I read. These stories took place in an unknown small village in southern Iran; I never forget those travels with Sa'edi's writings, full of descriptions about people's experiences of disorder, their confrontations with suffering and sickness, exotic events, possession, and alien creatures, as well as the rage of worldly things and happenings such as the cruelty of the sea or the winds.

Almost ten years after, I went to an outdoor music festival and decided to attend a nightly zar performance by *Qolām Mārgiri* (Gholam Margiri), a healer who was from a small village around Bandar Abbas. The wrinkle-faced old healer—with his long white hair and beard and his white turban and cloak making him look like an ancient sorcerer walked onto the scene. He started

gracefully drumming and, with an unbelievably touching treble voice, singing, and imploringly calling God's prophet to help him tame the devil winds: "Šir ellāh yā seyyed Ahmad, šir ellāh yā shir ellāh ..." ³³ Immersed as I was in his songs, I was completely bewitched by his performance. I felt caught, distracted, unable to look at the scene, and unable to stop shuddering even after he had finished singing and drumming.

I had grown up in a middle-class, modern, family that had tried their best to teach me scientific ways of understanding the world, therefore feeling such kind of emotions was a shocking experience for me. During the days and nights following the performance, I could not stop asking questions that related to the experience of participating in the show: according to what I have been taught, this man is not a knowledgeable guy, and this genre of music belongs to a primitive culture. But if this man is unknowledgeable, if this music is hoary and trite, how could it have such a strong impression on me; a master's candidate of sociology who has been following a quite intellectualist approach throughout his academic undertaking?

This was one of the other trips that I started to take, since I started traveling with winds. However, my realest, most transformative trip was leaving my country of origin, Iran, to move to Canada for my doctorate.

The new experience commenced with fears, doubts, and uncertainties about my new inhabitancy, when I would get lost on unknown streets and highways, and even more importantly, felt the urge to stop speaking the mother tongue I had spoken for years. All this was only the beginning

³³ Oh, prophet Mohammad you are the lion of Allah. Oh, lion of Allah, oh, lion of Allah ...

of a long path of finding new ways of communication and, at the same time, so related to my attempts for finding a suitable ontological and epistemological approach to study zar.

Zar practices are sacred performances, including complex, embodied, essentially non-verbal, irregular, and indefinite practices: endless lines of flight in which the worlds of beings and things, music, senses, illness, and healing are endlessly redefined and reconstructed towards potentially beneficial ways to continue living when a problem occurs. The type of social science I was familiar with upon my arrival in Canada was closer to the mainstream sociological approach, more specifically, the positivist school of thought taught at Iranian universities: one that insisted on applying documentary research, interviewing, or participant observation to explain causal relations between different variables for explaining social phenomena. My existing knowledge of social sciences at that time presumed a universal human body that could be separated from the world, viewed, recorded, decoded, and reported by observers. Even during my first months of studying zar, I had the understanding that such procedures of presuming a world of modern/traditional, science/superstitions, rational/sensory (intuitive), natural/supernatural, and mind/body dichotomies might produce data, but not profound knowledge, about practices such as zar.

I took the course ANT 6103, The Culture Question in Anthropology, which was taught by my thesis supervisor, Julie Laplante, during the first semester of my PhD at the University of Ottawa, and the book we were working on was Tim Ingold's *The Perception of the Environment* (2000). I clearly remember the distance, even disagreement, I was feeling from and about his discussions of our being in the world, but I was not feeling confident enough to participate in class discussions. One session, finally, I tried hard to overcome my fear of starting an academic discussion in another language to challenge Ingold's approach: I argued that I could find neither

the relevance nor the value of such kind of knowledge, in a world where people were getting imprisoned and killed because of their political orientations. In addition, at that time, Ingold's approach sounded so vague, intuitive, slow, and non-specific to a naïve student of anthropology like me. Little by little, I had the chance to learn more from zar practices, Ingold's phenomenological anthropology, and phenomenology, and all this let me find other ways of perceiving social phenomena.

Considering anthropologists as explorers of “conditions and possibilities of human life in the world” (Ingold 2000: 242), was one of the very first thoughts by him which resonated with me as well as with zar. Following such a track towards the task of anthropology, I started searching for the most proper way to follow the path of anthropology of zar healing practices. In *Making*, Ingold speaks of “knowing from the inside” (2013: 1) as a methodological approach in anthropology. Knowing from the inside means that knowing is only possible when perceived “from the very inside of one's being, through a process of self-discovery” (ibid.: 1). According to Ingold, our main anthropological attempt should be to grow into things, and to let things grow into us and become parts of us, transformatively. This suggests adopting an active, sensuous involvement with the world: paying attention to it, watching, listening, and feeling the world, and noticing what it retains to educate us (ibid.: 1). These lines impressed me. I was becoming familiar with such an approach towards knowing, a path which does not result in seeing the world and human beings as data sources, but instead as guides to understand human and non-human living beings and things as anthropologist companions in attempt to perceiving the world (ibid.: 243). I started to feel that this will help me to learn *from* zar healing practices, rather than *about* them.

Such a path was neither familiar with the prevalent traditions of anthropological research, classical ethnographies, nor even with so many recent methodological approaches in anthropology. But like a sacred wind which blows and catches the prey, knowing from the inside caught me little by little.



Anchor 1: Medicine in Iran

The history of Iran, in multiple research fields, is often divided into two major eras: Pre-Islamic and Islamic. By briefly reviewing academic literature discussing the history of practicing medicine in Iran, this division becomes even more apparent. Both periods, however, have at least one thing in common: the polyphony of medical practices that have been applied to help people live more comfortable lives. Practitioners of sacred healing and humoral medicine, as well as several apothecaries, bloodletters, bonesetters, midwives, and empirical oculists have long coexisted to create a colourful rainbow of medical services in the country.

According to a crucial source of Iranian mythology, *Šāhnāme* (Shahnameh),³⁴ Jamšid (Jamshid), the fourth Iranian king, developed and spread medical knowledge among Iranians. This likely refers to a specific branch of medical knowledge, close to humoral medicine, developed by Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Chinese, Hindus (Indians), Greeks, and Iranians throughout history. In ancient Iran, *Kuroš* (Cyrus the Great) employed Egyptian physicians to adopt their medical knowledge and his successor, *Dāriyuš* (Darius the Great), the third king of the Achaemenid Empire, funded the first Iranian medical school in *Šuš* (Sais), wherein Greek physicians used to teach their arts of healing to their Iranian apprentices. After Muslim conquest of Persia, different Arab caliphs showed interest in broadening humoral medicine by employing capable physicians from all around the world. Such a policy resulted in the impressive development of Islamic-Iranian humoral medicine (Ebrahimnejad 2014). Since then, and until the institutionalization of biomedical knowledge in nineteenth-century Iran, Hippocratic medicine was continuously being applied and getting developed.

³⁴ Shahnameh (the term means ‘the book of kings’) is Iranians’ national epic which is composed by Persian poet, Ferdowsi, between 977 and 1010 BCE.

Although humoral medicine was the most accepted version of medicine throughout Iran's history, it was never the only path in which Iranians have been doing medicine. Sacred healing practices, rooted in the teachings of pre-Zoroastrian Iranian religions, Zoroastrianism, and some relevant Islamic texts, have been always referred by people who were following other, different, and more fruitful ways to help people feel better. Sacred healing is common and favoured in Iran, even nowadays. Iranian sacred healing practices embody a lot of things³⁵ and beings such as the sun (and other smaller stars), moon, wind, fire, water, animals, birds, etc. as essential components.

In Iran, for example, one will often hear that healing and suffering are both gifts of God.³⁶ According to Iranian mythology and tales, for example, *Simorq*, a benevolent mythical bird, is capable of healing heroes who are considered good mythical champions. Even in my own childhood, every time my grandmother and I met, she had a new story about different stars, trees, and winds having their own moods and bringing ordinary people pleasure or suffering; specific waters could grant eternal life or, at least, make heroes invulnerable against wound, injury, pain, and illness. According to Iranian common thought, fire has the power of purification and destroying evil eye. In addition, scarifying animals, and birds, praying to sacred trees, vaporizing specific herbs, and drinking the extract of some flowers will help to heal different pains and injuries.

³⁵ I have borrowed the term from Tim Ingold (2012) to replace the common word 'objects' which is more relevant with a phenomenological approach.

³⁶ Or gifts of gods based on the teachings of pre-monotheistic Iranian religions.

Following paths of sacred healing among Iranians should be considered as shared knowledge coming from their positionality in the ancient world which let them live at the hinge of various cultures and civilizations. We know the perception that disease and health are gods' gifts has been widespread in other regions of the ancient world, like Assyria and Chaldea.³⁷ Similarly, being possessed by an evil spirit was considered a significant source of illness by Syrians, Egyptians, and other ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia (Elgood 1970: 2-12).³⁸

The colourfulness of medical practices among Iranians throughout the history, then, should be considered as their continuous connections with different peoples on the one hand, and their own attempts to develop the accessible knowledge, on the other. That is why medical practices in Iran have had diverse forms: herbal, humoral, sacred, religious, and biomedical. This creates a country in which all involved in healing practices—physicians, apothecaries, bloodletters, ophthalmologists, midwives, mullahs, fortune-tellers, exorcists, sorcerers, healers, sacred trees, mythical birds, holy spirits, and others—had been working together. These different and sometimes contrasting healing practices were demarcating their territories and at the same time interpenetrating each other's domains until the first decades of the nineteenth century, when the arrival of advanced biomedical knowledge of the “West” dramatically effected the historical co-existence of multiple Iranian healing paths.

³⁷ Jewish and Christian medical knowledge similarly acknowledge this.

³⁸ Possession has even found its way to monolithic religious beliefs and practices, in the medicine of the Gospels and The Acts, for instance: “there met Him a certain man, who had a devil now a very long time.” (Luke VIII, 27.). Or: “they brought to Him a dumb man possessed of the devil.” (Matthew IX, 32.). The story of King Saul, likewise, points to the prophet, being possessed by the evil spirit (I Kings XVI, 14.).

At the start of the nineteenth century, Iranians were experiencing new forms of relationships with their powerful northern neighbour, the Russian Empire. Thirty years of tense relationships, full of war and hostilities, led to the crushing defeat of the Iranian military and two major peace deals; these forced Iranians to pay huge amounts of financial damage and yield some parts of the country to the Russian Empire (Ringer 2006: 43). One of the most important outcomes of this defeat was a political crisis which saw high levels of discontent among courtiers, political elites, religious leaders, merchants, and civilians. Iranian political elites believed the country was in urgent need of immense socio-political reforms related to the military, government, and education: the military reform to constitute a better organized army, and the governmental reform for shaping an efficient bureaucracy, brought up the idea of concentrating on training potential leaders that would be able to promise Iran's 'political autonomy and territorial integrity' in the modern world. This was the beginning of a trend, in which Iranian students were sent to European countries (e.g., France and Belgium, and, after a while, Great Britain) to acquaint themselves with early modern science. Upon their return, the first generations of these students, as well as most diplomats, merchants, and travelers who had the opportunity to visit European countries tried to spread the idea of *bidāri* (awakening) in nineteenth century Iran (Ibid: 43). This gave rise to a chain of political protests by Iranians and led to the constitution of the first Iranian parliament by the King in the first decade of the twentieth century (Ibid: 43).

Different paths of educational reform can be considered as the main root of all changes in contemporary Iran. As mentioned, students were being sent to European countries to learn modern sciences. The significant expansion of the number of these students, as well as the establishment of the Iranian Polytechnic Institution, *Dārolfonun*, in the second half of the nineteenth century, led to gradual modification of various ways by which Iranians gained

knowledge and perceived the world (Gheissari 1998: 6). During this period the first Iranian secondary school was established, various books were translated, and the first scientific journal was published translated and composed books and published to introduce modern sciences to the society (Arjomand 1997: 23). Mainstream Iranian modernists also brought up the idea of social engineering to construct new ontological ways; this led to claims about the dominance of modern sciences (biomedicine, pharmacology, biology, engineering, physics, chemistry, geography, etc.) over other paths of practicing knowledge among inhabitants of the country (Behnam 2004: 4).

The Iranian *mise-en-scène* did not seem to be altered in the first decades of the twentieth century (Schayegh 2009: 21 & 197). Under the label of a national unity government, the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) kept trying to adopt a socio-political pattern of modernization, intertwined with industrialization, secularization, and cultural westernization policies (Behnam 2004: 5).

To briefly sum up our discussions, we can mention the Farsi phrase: *elm va taraqi* (science and progress) as one of the most frequent notions in Iranian newfangled periodicals during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries (Ebrahimnejad 2014: 121). Such an emblem best represents the mainstream modernists' idea that Iranians were in the need of "natural scientific knowledge" to become a nation "equal to those of the West." Meanwhile, biomedical science – moreso than any other branch of science' – was considered the main option to "tackle social problems, strengthen Iran, and recast it into a united, fit, modern society, because "only healthy people would be able to make a healthy society" (Schayegh 2009: 197).

During all those decades, Iran's so-called "only possible saviours," were criticizing the efficiency of medical paths other than biomedicine, and considering healers (as well as the artists, poets, clergymen, and scientists working outside of the mainstream modern tradition) as

backward and incompetent people with insufficient knowledge. Labeling the so-called “mass” as unaware, if not ignorant, was the other side of this double-edged sword (Schayegh 2009: 18 & 44).³⁹ Masses have often been thought as the source of superstitious and ignorant beliefs.

According to Kasravi, one of the most important modernist intellectuals of the time:

If we desire to remedy the ills of Iran, we, like true statesmen, must focus our attention on the source of the malady: the masses. We must save the people from corrupting superstition, instill into them a love for their country, arouse in them the instinct for social progress (Schayegh 2009: 36)

Although twentieth-century Iran was witnessing adherents of biomedicine who made every effort to marginalize other healing practices and biomedicine was itself gradually finding its way to Iranian hearts,⁴⁰ different healing practices were still active with the country’s people. Avoiding any type of exclusivism, it is best to say medical playground is still consisted of several types of medicine that wind around each other, and ceaselessly interpenetrate into their intellectual and practical territories to create new forms of medical ways in contemporary Iran.

³⁹ A recorded sample of these modernist criticisms of traditional medical practices goes back to the first decade of the twentieth century that *Mohammadhassan Kan*, one of the Iranian reformists writes: “the *qābele* (midwife) has never studied; what she knows, she has learned from another woman as ignorant as herself; she has empirically acquired some vague bits of information [...] All told [...] she has the same experience as all women who have borne children.” This is clearly contrary to his infatuation with “Modern physicians’ superior scientific knowledge” and their “familiarity with the complexities of the human body and its diseases,” by which they gain the ability “to make a proper diagnosis and intervene appropriately (Schayegh 2009: 44).”

⁴⁰ This was mostly because of two potentials: smallpox vaccination and modern surgery which is based on modern anatomy of the human body. Acceptance of vaccination was a slow process in Iran, while modern surgery could rapidly interest people in competences of western medicine (Ebrahimnejad 2014: 122).

In contemporary Iran, some of these healing paths, including zar practices, are being attacked from multiple perspectives: by Iranian mainstream modernists who tend to devalue the ritual as backward and superstitious, and also by an Islamic regime that is attempting to extirpate the ceremony as a form of religious diversion.⁴¹ The ritual, however, has always been considered by its practitioners to be a fruitful healing ceremony. This is why practitioners of zar have been successful in retrieving their legitimacy after a period of socio-political pressure and recess, [being impressed by and at the same time] influence other types of medical practice in Iran and find exquisite ways to freshly present themselves as healers, musicians, artists, and thinkers.

⁴¹ There are several reports (such as Sa'edi 1961) that talk about threatening, capturing, imprisoning, and torturing zar practitioners in contemporary Iran. During my fieldwork, I talked to some artists working with zar communities, and also two healers confirming this and complaining about such menaces existing even at the time.

CHAPTER TWO

With Devil Winds and Sacred Drums

“I do not know why I do not like to call it ritual. When you insist on the word ritual, it sounds to me like that you are talking about something weird. Something that comes from elsewhere. Have you not talked about celebrating *Nowruz* in our culture the other day? Do you not come from a city where people celebrate *Ašurā*⁴² every year? Our life is full of these events, whether too important or not that crucial. We do not call them ritual. These are different ways by which we just live and celebrate our being together. This is why they are important, long living, and prevalent among us. They are not special occasions that happen during our lives. They are how we live; they are just our lives.”

“I call those practices rituals or at least ceremonies because of so many reasons,” I responded. Ahmad, a famous photographer, and visual artist was originally from Qeshm Island, and had been working hard to record islanders’ life paths by shooting different events, including some zar healers as well as their instruments and equipment. He was one of the first people whom I learned about zar practices from. That is why I was trying to make a bridge between his perspective and my own understanding of socio-anthropological theories of religion: “first of all, we need to start using academic terms to be able to make scientific connections with scholars all around the world. I also do not think it is correct to suppose that zar is something that happens in people’s ordinary lives. There is an important classical sociologist, who considers the separation between the sacred and the profane as the very basis of any ritual and I, following him, do think that zar does not belongs to the everyday realm (Durkheim 2012).”

⁴² Iranian Shiites’ mourning in the anniversary of martyrdom of *Emām Hosseyn*, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson.

“I am not sure how to interpret this as I am not a sociologist. All I know is that we do not call zar a ritual. We call it nothing to be more accurate. Zar is zar: nothing more and nothing less.

Sometimes we call it *gāzi*⁴³ and sometimes these days *majles*⁴⁴ too. Which is closer to the way that we see it. It is like a soiree, a nightly party for us. Where and when we gather and share our suffering with one another. Like all other familiar events whatever is out in the world can be found in our zar assemblies too. There are goats and camels in the palm farms, you can find them in the meetings. There are trees, plants, and flowers out, you can find them there. We eat fruit and bread; you can find them there. Snakes, crows, fire, sun, the perfumes we wear, our gracefully angry sea and its vast beach full of warm sands—they are all there.”

“What about the wind? I have read that zar is originally Iranian as its insistence on the power of devil and sacred winds comes from ancient Iran.” My last question of the day led to our conversation on the theme of identity and marginalization in contemporary Iran. Like so many other talks these days, the rest of our conversation flew with the high winds of politics.

It is not difficult to find the importance of the wind in different aspects of Iranian lives, and it has never been a recent phenomenon at all. *Vāy*, the god of the wind, has been broadly worshipped as one of the initial gods in ancient Iran. In Iranian ancient chronometric knowledge, the twenty-second day of each month has been assigned to *Vāy*, and numerous ceremonies are performed to offer people’s sacrifices to the god of the wind (Fakouhi 2000: 148). *Vāy* is also frequently mentioned and consecrated in *Avesta*, the sacred text of Zoroastrianism, the dominant religion in pre-Islamic Iran (Boloukbashi 2001). Probably because of the Quran’s insistence on the esteem

⁴³ “Game” or “play” in Qeshmi.

⁴⁴ “Association” in Qeshmi.

of the wind, Iranian knowledge about the wind survived during the Islamic period, however there could be found a status reduction from an initial god to one of the God's means for exerting his power in the world (Bazargan 1968: 237). As one of the signs of God's power, in Quran, *Allāh* swears to wind five times (Meybodi 2018: 336): "And in the alternation of night and day, and in the sustenance, God sends down from the sky, with which He revives the earth after its death, and in the circulation of the winds, are marvels for people who reason." (Quran 45: 5 Clear Quran Edition) Or: "In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the oceans for the benefit of mankind; in the water that God sends down from the sky, and revives the earth with it after it had died, and scatters in it all kinds of creatures; in the changing of the winds, and the clouds disposed between the sky and the earth; are signs for people who understand" (Quran 2: 164 Clear Quran Edition).

Winds, according to Islamic teachings, are heralds of God's will, attention, kindness, happiness, and mercy. Accordingly, they are ruled by God: "If He willed, He could have stilled the winds, leaving them motionless on its surface. Surely in that are signs for every disciplined, grateful person" (Quran 42: 33 Clear Quran Edition). Allah applies different winds to bless, help, and protect his people: "It is He who sends the wind ahead of His mercy. Then, when they have gathered up heavy clouds, We drive them to a dead land, where We make water come down, and with it We bring out all kinds of fruits. Thus, We bring out the dead – perhaps you will reflect;" (Quran 7: 57 Clear Quran Edition); "O you who believe! Remember God's blessings upon you, when forces came against you, and We sent against them a wind, and forces you did not see. God is Observant of what you do." (Quran 33: 9 Clear Quran Edition); "God is He who sends the winds. They stir up clouds. Then He spreads them in the sky as He wills. And He breaks them apart. Then you see raindrops issuing from their midst. Then, when He makes it fall upon whom

He wills of His servants, behold, they rejoice” (Quran 30: 48 Clear Quran Edition). Conversely, winds could be mediums of damage and destruction, punishment, and harm for those who do not believe in God: “Are you confident that He will not cause a track of land to cave in beneath you, or unleash a tornado against you, and then you find no protector? Or are you confident that He will not return you to it once again, and unleash a hurricane against you, and drown you for your ingratitude? Then you will find no helper against Us” (Quran 17: 68-69 Clear Quran Edition). Also: “Or are you confident that the One in Heaven will not unleash against you a violent storm? Then you will know what My warning is like.” (Quran 67: 17 Clear Quran Edition)

These lines demonstrate the key idea that since a long time ago, wind has been inseparable from different aspects of Iranians’ lives. Several types of winds, with their different performances, have been and are used to name Iranian children. One would find lots of myths, fictions, tales, poems, and proverbs in which wind has the key role, directly or indirectly. In short, Iranian lives, whether in religious and mystic aspects or completely quotidian ones, widely – however variously and inconsistently – associate the wind with concepts of God, sky, heaven, human, rain, medium, air, breath, voice, sound, chant, song, music, fertility, life, creation, mercy, healing, smoke, fire, hell, disease, war, harm, and death. Thus, wind has a dual position in the world: on the one hand, it is regarded as a good entity that creates, bringing peace, mercy, and healing. On the other, it is regarded as the devil, which destroys, bringing harm, damage, and suffering.

Such an understanding of the wind is the basis of zar. Zar comes from the name of one of the deadliest winds in the world that blows in southern Iran and has the ability to possess people. Accordingly, related practices to help the afflicted heal from bodily sufferings are also called zar;

similar practices to cope with ill-treatment and abuse of all other devil winds are also called with the same name, zar (Sa'edi 1966: 57).

In an academic piece of work, especially when the author is trying to present a phenomenon which is mostly unknown to readers, it is common to initially discuss the roots and origins of the phenomenon. Here, however, it is almost impossible to provide readers with a clear knowledge about the origins of zar.

Along with zar practitioners in southern Iran, inhabitants of different Arab countries of the Persian Gulf also hold zar ceremonies. Moreover, one could find a lot of connectedness between zar rituals and similar practices and beliefs in many African countries. The fact that some healers, musicians, and sufferers in zar performances in southern Iran have African origins further complicates the situation. For a long time, and mainly due to the dominance of the diffusionist approach in social sciences, zar was considered an African healing ceremony which had moved to other societies via forms of trade and slavery (Modarresi 1986: 150). Throughout the twentieth century, several researchers insisted on Ethiopian or Abyssinian roots of zar (Lewis 1971; Natvig 1987; Idem & Hurreiz 1991). Little by little, however, other researchers began to apply different approaches, such as adaptive mythology, to study zar commenced to mention Persian origins of it (Riahi 1977; Modarresi 1986; Bazmandegane Qeshmi 2007; Sabaye Moghaddam 2009).

When studying zar, there are also researchers who put their hands on its Semitic or Arab roots, mainly by assuming an identification of two concepts: zar and jinn. What I learned from zar practitioners, however, is that in southern Iran, it is important to consider differences between jinn and devil (or good) wind. They live with both types of creatures, which means that seeing

jinn and wind as the same beings should be carefully considered. In other words, most people in southern Iran live with a specific type of invisible living beings, *ajennah*,⁴⁵ who are created from fire and live separately or in the body of other animals (such as cats, dogs, and pigs, among others.).²¹ like other beings, they have the ability to perceive the world which embraces the sacred world (including God and other sacred devil creatures^P) as well as things and living beings (including plants, animals, human beings, and themselves).

It is commonly assumed that inhabiting the world by perceiving it as a home shared with *ajennah* stems from Quran teachings that occasionally mention the creation and the life of jinns in the world: “He created man from hard clay, like bricks. And created the jinn from a fusion of fire. So, which of your Lord’s marvels will you deny?” (Quran 55: 14-16 Clear Quran Edition) Also: “We created the human being from clay, from molded mud. And the jinn We created before, from piercing fire.” (Quran 15: 26-27 Clear Quran Edition) Elsewhere, God says: “I did not create the jinn and the humans except to worship Me. I need no livelihood from them, nor do I need them to feed Me” (Quran 51: 56-57 Clear Quran Edition). There are also numerous verses in which Allah talks about the existence and presence of jinns in the world (Quran 6: 112, 128, 130 & 100; 7: 38 & 179; 27: 17 & 39; 34: 12, 14 & 41; 46: 18 & 29; 18: 50; 55: 15, 33, 39, 56 & 74 Clear Quran Edition).

Moreover, in Quran, there is even a separate chapter, *Al-Jinn* (The Jinn), that directly concerns these creatures:

say ‘it was revealed to me that a band of jinn listened in and said: “We have

⁴⁵ The plural form of jinn which means a group of jinns in Qeshmi.

heard a wondrous Quran. It guides to rectitude, so we have believed in it; and we will never associate anyone with our Lord. And Exalted is the Grandeur of our Lord—He never had a mate, nor a child. But the fools among us used to say nonsense about God. And we thought that humans and jinn would never utter lies about God. Some individual humans used to seek power through some individual jinn, but they only increased them in confusion. They thought, as you thought, that God would never resurrect anyone. We probed the heaven, and found it filled with stern guards and projectiles. We used to take up positions to listen in; but whoever listens now finds a projectile in wait for him. We do not know whether ill is intended for those on earth, or if their Lord intends goodness for them. Some of us are righteous, but some of us are less than that; we follow divergent paths. We realized that we cannot defeat God on earth, and that we cannot escape Him by fleeing. And when we heard the guidance, we believed in it. Whoever believes in his Lord fears neither loss, nor burden. Among us are those who are submitting, and among us are the compromisers. As for those who have submitted—it is they who pursue rectitude. But as for the compromisers—they will be firewood for Hell. (Quran 72: 1-15 Clear Quran Edition)

Very briefly, according to the Quran, jinns (that could be Muslims or infidels) are created from fire in different sexes before the creation of Adam. Jinns are expert at constructing buildings, mills, and baths, and are talented at sculpture and carpet-weaving: “[Jinns] made for him whatever he wished: sanctuaries, statues, bowls like pools, and heavy cauldrons [...]” (Quran 34: 13 Clear Quran Edition). They are invisible, extraordinarily strong and fast, able to adopt several faces and bodies, equipped with the capacity of perception and reasoning, thus competent to differentiate between good (or, legitimate) and bad (or, forbidden). Because of their potential for reasoning, like human beings, jinns are responsible to God and liable for their behaviour in the finite world at the day of last judgement (Motahhari 2001: 17-19).

One of the most important researchers of Qeshmi culture, the late Mrs. Dajgani mentioned to me during an interview that “the widespread deeply held belief in jinns among people of southern Iran is originated from Semitic/Islamic cultural backgrounds.” What I learned from different researchers, healers, and artists also allows me to say that although Islamic teachings are significant in acknowledgement of jinns’ existence, it is also possible to find evidence for similar beliefs in ancient religions of the Near East (e.g., e Zoroastrianism, one of the world’s oldest religions that has been particularly worshipped throughout Iran), specifically during the pre-Islamic era.

I was delighted when interviewees— inhabitants of southern Iran, generally and Qeshm Island, specifically— spoke with me about their experiences of living with ajinnah, either young or old, man or woman, poor or rich, literate or illiterate, sailor or shopkeeper, zealot or decent, etc. They know a lot of stories about jinns and do not hesitate to share their knowledge, including their own private experiences of different encounters with a jinn or a group of jinns – normally playing wickedly, dancing, discussing piercingly, celebrating a blessed event or mourning – in desolate houses or old baths, around water wells, under the shadow of a tree, or in the middle of the desert, in a place which is surrounded by stony hills and sandy mounds.

Like winds, ajinnah can possess people; those possessed by jinn should visit an exorcist. In southern Iran, being possessed by *ajinnah* is called *mazerrat* and the possessed person is called *mazerrati*⁴⁶ [, while it is necessary to insist that someone who is possessed by devil winds is called *zari* and has to visit different healers who are called *bābā zar* or *māmā zar*].

⁴⁶ In Qeshmi *mazerrat* means harm and *mazerrati* mentions someone who is being tormented by jinns.

The most common sign of jinn possession is experiencing sudden attacks, during which the afflicted person undergoes extreme mood changes, followed by changes in eye and face shape, shouting, crying, delirium, and aggressive behaviour. The afflicted will not remember what has happened to them after the attack and this ‘forgetfulness,’ as well as ‘unintentionality,’ are the two key symptoms of being possessed by ajinnah and guide exorcists throughout their practices. Exorcists could be dignified or humble mullahs, sorcerers or, in rare cases, even zar healers. The exorcism ceremony starts with an initial session on a Sunday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, during which the exorcist asks for a part of the sufferer’s cloth to keep with them during the following night. At night, the sorcerer asks God, other jinns, or winds to guide them how to help sufferer get rid of jinn’s attacks.⁴⁷ The following morning, the exorcist declares the way which works well to help the afflicted. There are normally seven different paths of exorcism: ship, hen, pigeon, *peri*,⁴⁸ boat, aroma, water, and light (lantern). Though each path has their differences, these ceremonies can be more or less described as setting a time for the next Saturday and Tuesday night and providing required things (including one of the seven thematic materials, seven eggs, seven loaves of bread, sea water [taken from seven different waves], soil [taken from seven different paths]), leaves [shorn off seven different trees], seven candles, three pieces of palm branch, dates, food, pastries, aromatic herbs, jasmine oil, and medical herbs) to perform the ceremony.

To begin the exorcism, the sorcerer and their disciple take the afflicted to an outlying place by the sea, under a sacred tree or somewhere in the desert after two o’clock in the morning. They then make fires, burn candles, and incense aromatic herbs and mix medical herbs and different

⁴⁷ Depending on the status of exorcist, they can be connected to different spiritual powers to ask for help.

⁴⁸ *Peri* (*péri*) is a special bag, woven from palm fibers to save dates in southern Iran.

oils to anoint the sufferer. After three Adhans (morning, noon, and evening Adhans), in the following evening, the exorcist asks jinn to get some food and pastry and leave the afflicted. This will be firstly asked like a sincere request but if the jinn does not accept the invitation to leave the afflicted, the exorcist can begin threatening or even punishing them by flogging the sufferer.

There is much similarity between possession by ajinnah and possessing by winds. However, in southern Iran, they are considered to be different paths of suffering and healing. *Zāri* is someone who is only possessed by one or more of devil wind(s) blowing in the world.⁴⁹

From zar practitioners, I learned that there are almost seventy-two Muslim and infidel winds blowing all around the world with us; however, their number is never limited and being possessed by a new wind, especially stranger winds that are commonly lost and wandering in the sea, especially at night, is always possible. Some of the most well-known and cruelest winds in southern Iran are: *Maturi*, *Bibi*, *Zār-Mābit*, *Šamtoru*, *Mombāfqis*, *Yalo*, *Rāskandar*, *Dingamaro*, *Šeyk-Šangar*, *Leylā*, and *Zār*. Each has their own territory and characteristics and holds the power to possess people at specific times and places. In Qeshmi, possession by a wind is also called ‘being ride by a wind,’ a deeply transformative process which lasts with the ‘mount’ eternally.

In an introductory session with an adept Bābā zar in Salak village, I was told about these different winds:

“Šeyk-Šangar, is a well-known wind that lives in the mountains and blows at nights. Someone who is possessed by *Šeyk-Šangar* feels itchy all-over the body, has nightmares, and sees black animals that approach them. After a while, small and big painful blisters appear on their body.

⁴⁹ In very rare cases, people have been possessed ajinnah and winds at the same time.

Although Šeyk-Šangar is a cruel dangerous wind, it normally does not kill the sufferer. Rather, it gives them a limited time to hold a majles. Zār-Mābit, on the other hand, does not wait for a long time. It is an intolerant wind that suffers afflicted with dizziness, long headaches and if not tamed fast, blindness. Dingamaro blows from Ethiopia and brings foot pain, knee pain, and swollen feet. Bibi is a female wind which brings internal pains like contraction of chest and heart issues. When Bibi possesses someone, they feel major weakness, frailty, and depression. An efficient way to recognize the wind is to make the afflicted wear some specific black garments: consequently, sufferers will rapidly experience muscle contractions and intolerable backache. Bibi hides herself from physicians. This means she does not reveal herself if any practitioner of biomedicine shows up or any biomedical treatments are somewhere at hand.” During the talk I was warned to pay attention, since “there are also good (Muslim) winds blowing with us. These winds that are usually called Mašayek⁵⁰ and are connected to mythical or religious (Islam or Sufism) hierarchies. Some of them are also known to have their shrines and pantheons, wherein, people possessed by them gather and hold their ceremonies. Šeyk-Abdolqāder, Šeyk-Feri, Šeyk-Odrus, Šeyk-Johar, and *Ben-Ali* are some of the most famous Muslim winds which possess people but in a different way help them to find peace of mind, stay healthy, follow Islamic rules, partially predict the future, reveal some secrets and even fight with devil winds and ajennah.”

To tame the winds, one should visit one of the healers who are called Bābā (also Bāb or Bā) or Māmā (also Mām or Mā).⁵¹ These healers are also leaders of Ahle havā (people of the wind) communities, which consist of those who live in a specific region and believe in the winds’

⁵⁰ Mashayekh means the spiritual Deans or Elderlies in Qeshmi.

⁵¹ *Bābā* [means father] and *Māmā* [means mother] are abbreviations for *Bābāye zār* and *Māmāye zār* in Qeshmi.

power to possess people. Healers are carefully picked and assigned by Elders of each community. To be elected as a zar healer, however, they must show impressive competency in drumming, singing, communicating with other people and winds, and, of course, skill when applying their knowledge of healing to recognize and tame the winds. An important factor to become a healer is being possessed by several – often the most dangerous – winds and then being healed by a senior Bābā or Māmā. All current healers have thus been previously possessed by several winds, all of which have been tamed and are still living with them.

This experience provides healers with the power to communicate with hostile winds more easily. For the past few decades, some of the most capable healers in southern Iran have been *Māmā-Hanife*, *Māmā-Fāteme*, *Bābā-Belāl*, and *Bābā-Habib*. Nowadays, *Bābā-Isā Qāderi (Bāb-Isā)*, who lives in Salak village in Qeshm Island, is known as the most proficient and knowledgeable healer throughout the region.

Zar can be celebrated in different ways according to the wind which has possessed the sufferer and that wind's common demands, expectations, and orders. The Healing Path, however, generally starts with experiencing an unusual manner. This includes fever, restlessness, lethargy and general weakness, chronic nausea and transpiration, chronic headaches and generalized pain, fainting, delusion, delirium, severe anger, and loss of vigilance and mindfulness. One of the most influential signs of being possessed by a devil wind, especially zar, is when someone feels either restless or lethargic, stares at things for a long time, escapes from their own home or family to join unknown friends, and, finally, dances to an inaudible drumbeat. After a short visit, the healer will be able to declare their initial diagnosis of the issue, the type of wind, and also the type of treatment (majles) that should be followed to tame the wind.

Depending on the wind's hostility, healers prescribe an isolation period that might last one to seven nights, but it is always possible not to isolate the sufferer before the main ceremonial stage. During the isolation period, the healer takes care of the sufferer in their home, talks to them to learn about their issues, and applies some kinds of herbal medicine as well as massage, anointment, and prayer to help the afflicted feel better. Then *gāzi*, the main phase of the healing event, begins.

The primary steps of zar healing practices are held on a Tuesday or Friday night right after the midnight in presence of the healer, their apprentices and musical band, as well as formerly possessed people who are available and trustworthy enough to participate in the ceremony. The event commences with providing things that are necessary to hold a successful majles. Based on the healer's initial diagnosis and according to the type of the devil wind which should be tamed, medical equipment can include a number of drums (*Dohol-Gap*, *Kasser*, *Pippe*, *Zife*, etc.), other instruments (*Dāyere*, *Tambire*, etc.), therapeutic herbal oils, hookahs and specific local tobaccos, herbal aromas (including *Gešte*, musk, incense, etc.), different bamboo sticks (so as to punish the wind); wide, long and colorful scarves to hide the afflicted time to time during the final phase; jewelry (such as gold or silver rings, necklaces, and bracelets) to convince the wind stop bothering the sufferer, eggs, rosewater, foods, pastry, fruits, vegetables (specifically, fresh basil leaves), goat milk and coffee to host the participants, and finally the animals to sacrifice if necessary.⁵²

In the world of Ahle havā, each wind has a specific song; once all required things are provided healer starts drumming. Drumming, however, does not commence with playing the exact song.

⁵² Specific winds such as zar might ask for blood to stop bothering sufferers.

Commonly, healers begin by playing some miscellaneous pieces to warm up the majles. By listening to other winds' songs, participants who are connected to those winds begin to lose their consciousness and dance with their respective winds. Little by little, the healer approaches the specific song. This drumming, which is accompanied by covering the afflicted in a circle made up of other participants, anointing them and burning aromatic herbs under their noses, leads to a semi-ecstatic manner, following which the afflicted gradually begins to sigh and dance. At the peak point, as distinguished by the healer, the wind "comes down"⁵³ and is ready to talk to the healer. The healer, correspondingly, talks to the wind and asks why it is bothering the sufferer and what its demands and expectations are, to stop suffering them.

The winds' demands can vary. They may ask for gifts (including golden rings or bamboo sticks), holding another ceremony (or ceremonies) in the following months, foods or pastries or offer life instructions and orders to be followed (e.g., not to drink alcohol, to meet up with parents regularly, not to have same-sex intercourse, etc.)

Healers normally try to negotiate with winds and compromise on a fair gift. The wind promises to stop harming the afflicted as long as they donate the specified gifts and keep their promises.

If everything goes well, the winds will be tamed, and sufferers will no longer be affected by them. After the majles, the formerly afflicted would become a new member of Ahle havā community. This means they become a follower of the healer afterward, and therefore are eligible to participate in subsequent gatherings held by the healer, as long as they remain loyal to Ahle havā-specific rules. These rules prevent members from touching specified unclean things

⁵³ In Qeshmi means almost defeated and possibly open to compromise.

(like humans' or animals' cadavers, feces, or urine), wearing all black clothes, drinking alcohol, committing adultery, and other such restrictions. They are also commanded to stay clean, fragrant, and dressed up all the time.

Nowadays, zar practices are performed secretly, in clandestine havens and by small groups of people which are consisted of only trustworthy members of the community. During my fieldwork, I had the chance to meet up and speak with zar researchers who could compare this to past decades [almost a hundred years ago], when “zar practitioners had their own pantheons and shrines, pilgrimages, and public dances and ceremonies in deserts or by the sea at least few times a year.”

Current circumstances inform us about a process of repression of specific peoples and their paths of living in contemporary Iran. This stems from two troughs: Iranian modernism and Islamic fundamentalism.



Anchor Two: Iran

Iran, the land of diversities and complexities, is a country in western Asia. The second largest country in the Middle East is bounded to the north by the Caspian Sea, and to the south by the Persian Gulf. There are also thirty-two islands politically governed by the Iranian regime in the Persian Gulf (Afary et al. 2016). The term Iran, which means the land of Aryans, mentions the tribes that were living in western parts of Siberia around the third millennium BCE and migrated to the mountainous regions of the present Iranian plateau around the second millennium BCE. It was this immigration that led to the constitution of the so-called “Persian civilization”, and the rise of Iranian empires in the ancient world (de Planhol 2004). Before the 20th century, Iran has mostly been referred to as Persia, the land of Persians,⁵⁴ which means that the country was only officially named Iran since the very first decades of the 20th century (Yarshater 1989).

Although the evidence narrates stories of human communities living in Iran since 120000 BCE, the emergence of agricultural communities goes back to 10000 BCE, and the genesis of urban life traced back to about the 5000 BCE, when major cities like Susa and Elam began to establish alongside the other Mesopotamian civilizations, like Sumer, Babylonian, and Assyrian civilizations (Foster & Polinger Foster 2009). This is one of the main reasons why sharing lands, skill, and knowledge is an inseparable aspect of life in Iran.

Some Iranian dynasties expanded to different parts of the ancient eastern world from Egypt to India, and from the Arab Sea to the Black Sea. In the seventh century, Islam was brought to Iran,

⁵⁴ A branch of Aryans who inhabited the southern Iran and founded the Achaemenid empire (Dandamayev 2011).

and since then, multiple Arab, Turk, Turkmen, Mongol, etc. -based communities have played a role in diversifying the country (Etheredge 2011: x - xvi).⁵⁵

It is only after the twentieth century that the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the constitution of Pahlavi dynasty replaced the old tribal paths of governing the country by a constitutional monarchy. Nowadays Iran's political system is a combination of Islamic theocracy and parliamentary democracy (Etheredge 2011: xvi), mainly ran by two powerful political allegiants; the Office of the Supreme Leader of Iran, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

The economic system of Iran is under the strong influence and intervention of the state, and mostly relied upon the extraction and the export of petroleum and natural gas. Agriculture and service sectors are other major parts of Iranians' economic life (The World Bank, October 01, 2016) which has been constantly diminishing since the beginning of the twenty-first century, largely because of political sanctions against Iran's uranium enrichment program.

Iran consists very different regions that best echo the spirit of diversity in their own ways. As Etheredge (2011: 2-5) explains: "Iran's physical properties are marked by sharp contrast. [The country is dominated by] a central desert plateau, which is ringed on all sides by lofty mountain ranges that afford access to the interior through high passes. In sharp contrast are the coastal regions [in both northern and southern Iran and] outside the mountain ring."

Harmonious with the cultural and geographical diversity of the country, about eighty-five million Iranians⁵⁶ live their lives in different ethnic, lingual, and religious ways. Such colourfulness emerges from various communities inhabiting the territory since a long time ago. As a result of

⁵⁵ Sometimes though military and violent actions

⁵⁶ The population of the country in 2021 (Iran Census Results 2021)

this interconnectedness, the country is inhabited by people from diverse backgrounds like Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Balochis, Lurs, and Turkmen, however, the so-called Persians constitute the majority of contemporary Iran's population. According to the distribution of the languages, Farsi is the formal language in Iran, however, other language and dialects like Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Balochi, Turkmen, Armenian, etc. are being spoken too.

The 'Twelver Shia' is formal Iranian religion. While Shia Iranians mostly inhabit in central, north-western, northern, and eastern parts of the country, Sunni Muslims live in the western, south-western, southern, south-eastern, and north-eastern parts. Baha'is, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews are the followers of other religions who inhabit throughout the country (Etheredge 2011: 10 – 23).

CHAPTER THREE

In the Land of Zar

Just before noon, and after a twenty-one-hour trip, we finally arrive. Feeling dizzy after listening to the continuous harmony of the tireless wheels, the railroad, and the stones, I get off the train. Wayworn and heavy, with half-open eyes irritated by the sharp sunlight, I am immediately hosted by the lash of a noticeable flow of warm motion of the air. I smile and say to myself: “welcome to the land of winds!”

In my cousin’s car, the mystifying way to the wharf enchants me. I find the southern province fascinating when I first encounter it, and I am impressed by the strange beauty of our short road trip: dark gray badlands with various heights and shapes on the right, and the vast blue-green glorious sea on the left. Old and thirsty trees reach hands towards sky, praying for the rain while green vibrant palms dance in the wind.

The dhow is big and safe. The mild sunlight plays with the spirited breeze on my face, and I swing with the wavy moves of the dhow on the water. The sea is enormous and splendid: “it is not that peaceful and enjoyable all the time,” one of the travelers mentions. “Do you know that the sea is alive? Do you know it has its own veins and flows of blood? Do you know what happens when it loses its temper and starts raging? Do you know what it means to be in the furious sea in a dawn-less night?” I think, and say, to myself: “brutal winds bring mercy, and the generous sea destroys.” I say to myself: “welcome to the land of the sea.”

There is a sandstorm indwelling all the Island upon our arrival to Qeshm city and country roads are dangerous to drive. This is a good opportunity to stay in the city for a few hours, to rest a bit, and to let new and old bazars of the city to educate me and help me learn from the sparkling life experiences of the people. The city, clearly, has two very different faces; however, people’s vivid lifestyle is distinctive and consolidated. I prefer to dodge the huge malls, fashionable vehicles,

and brand-new buildings in favour of the older section of the city. I have been already told that the old Town has, for a few centuries, been inhabited by “original Qeshmi people and not the new-comer strangers.” It does not take long to notice that the past is plainly interwoven with the present in the old Town. Historical houses, half-ruined buildings and cemeteries, small semi-dark teashops, lines of people in front of traditional bakeries, groups of women wearing colourful dresses working in local pastry stores, sunburn faced sailors chit-chatting by the alleys and old men smoking hukkah in front of their houses are noticeable everywhere. And the aged bazar is full of fresh sea creatures, catches of the day. The old bazar is a maze of tobacco aroma and colourful dresses. There I have the best experience of getting lost in the mysterious worlds of dates and figs, showy veils, fresh fish, tobacco leaves, people, pickled mangos, perfumes, and *burkas*. There, I say to myself: “welcome to the land of colorful flavours.”

In our way to Salak, we stop at the playground of jinns. It is a full moon that night, so we might be able to see them getting together and celebrating around midnight. To access the realm of jinns we drive an unpaved by-way for about forty-five minutes. There is no light but the moon and the stars, there is no image but the evil hills and our bodies moving with fear and trembling, and there is no sound but the waves of the sea hitting the rocks. Silence and dread, darkness and breath, the sea and the hills, cruel demons, and us. I say to myself: “welcome to the land of jinns.”

Salak is the town of the sea, the town of dust. Salak is the town of the winds. Salak is the town of the huge magical windows made by clay and inhabited by the spirits. Salak is the town of *burkas*.⁵⁷ Salak is the town of drought and thirstiness. gracious flows of kindness, however, is

⁵⁷ Water wells

endlessly running in the town. Flows of hospitality and support, flows of generosity. Flows of pleasant people who are always there for you; not being rich, but keeping doors open almost everyday around noon, to share foods and water with friends, and even strangers, who might need some rest and a refuge from extreme heat, hunger, or thirst.

The first day of my stay in town coincides with the thanksgiving ceremony. Sailors and their families gather by the sea to worship it and ask for blessing in the coming year. Men and women, old and young, poor and rich, everybody is part of the ceremony. It is here that I learn not to talk to women. It is here that I learn their social distancing rules for people from different genders. It is here that I start learning from sunburnt-faced sailors: about their seafaring traditions, fishing skills, dhow-making techniques, and their knowledge of aerology. It is from these sailors, during our nightly gatherings, that I learn the most beautiful stories of my life. It is from these sailors that I learn about their hardship for making a life in days of political pressure, social injustice, and economic deprivation. It is during our nightly gatherings that I hear the most astonishing descriptions of getting lost on the sea, in the anger of the sea, encountering ocean beats and being attacked by jinns.

Salak is the town of mosques and Adhan. Salak is the town of Islamic songs calling people to five scheduled daily prayers. Salak is the town of music. Nightly gatherings full of lute songs, accompanied by drums and claps, and completed by Qeshmi dancers shaking their shoulders as fast as possible following the flows of rhythm. Salak is the town of drummers. Salak is the town of witches and sorcerers. Salak is the town of wind tamers. Salak is the town of the winds: their properties, rings, scarves, bamboo sticks, gold coins, their slaves and sufferers live in Salak. Zar masters live in Salak. It is in here that I start learning from zar. It is in here that I start playing

and dancing with zar. It is in here that I start blowing with winds. I say to myself: “welcome to the land of zar.”



Anchor 3: Qeshm Island

Hormozgan province, with its population of approximately two million, lies down along the Persian Gulf and the sea of Oman. It constitutes one of the most important centres of exportation and importation, trade, oil refining, shipbuilding, and military activities. The region is suitable for palm cultivation and camel keeping which are habitual activities of so many of its inhabitants. The Persian Gulf itself, by lodging more than two hundred species of fish, is one of the most diverse sources of amphibian life in the world. Other than camels and the sea creatures (such as bittern, heron, pelican, osprey, dolphin, shark, flounder, oyster, crab, shrimp, prawns, and various edible fish), cats, dogs, sheep, goats, donkeys, birds, and poultry are the most frequent animals that live with people all-over the province. Hormozgan province comprises 2046 villages and 13 cities; this includes the province capital, Bandar Abbas, and Qeshm Island, the largest island of Hormozgan, Iran, and the Persian Gulf (Takmil Homayoon 2004: 18).

Qeshm island is located about twenty-two kilometers south of Bandar Abbas. Its 117, 774 inhabitants are spread across 69 towns and villages, as well as 15 ports. The island also embodies three smaller neighbour islands, Hormoz, Hengam, and Larak (Iran Census Results 2021).

Qeshm is a two-season island. During the hot, humid, and rainless season (March to October), the average temperature is 33 °C, during June and July, the temperature rises to 50°C with 86.5% humidity. The mild season, which lasts from November and through February, has an average temperature and humidity of 23°C and 55%, respectively. The specific climate condition of Qeshm, in addition to considerable amounts of lime in the Island's soil, has led to inappropriate vegetation on Qeshm. The Island's fields mostly look nude with sparse vegetation at the best. Plant life is, accordingly, limited to those tenacious herbs that can tolerate this tough climate. Prosopis, tamarisk, sacred fig, cedar, broadleaf plantain, ziziphus, chia and common chicory are some of the plants that living with Qeshm's human inhabitants. A unique characteristic of the

Island's plant life is the mangrove forests (approximately 6000 hectares worth) in the central northern regions of the Island.

On the very narrow sandy-clayey soil of the Island, people usually cultivate palms (as well as small amounts of onion, tomato, eggplant, and zucchini for their daily consumption) and raise their livestock (mostly camels, goats, cows, and poultry). Depending on their wealth, different families have palm groves with different sizes, wherein they live together with other non-human beings, animals, and plants.

One influential element of people's lives on Qeshm Island is the vogue of winds, storms, tornados, thunderbolts, and whirlpools, including the two most important winds: the wind of the north (*Šamāl*) and the summer wind (*Bāde Tābestani*). All these different kinds of winds play significant roles in the life of the Island's inhabitants. People of Qeshm have a profound knowledge of winds. More specifically, local weathermen (and women), as well as the sailors, carefully understand different motions of the air, name them, categorize them, and suitably perceive their benefits and harms. Depending on the direction, slope, speed and time of blowing, the most important winds can be categorized into eleven major types, which can greatly change the manner of the sea, the Island, and the people of the Island, making them calm, peaceful, healthy, wealthy, pleasant, nice, upset, angry, sick, poor, etc. The importance of the wind and its presence in different aspects of people's lives (myth, religion, poem and anecdote, music, art, architecture and even medicine) is a key aspect of all zar rituals.

The people of Qeshm Island have been living in the region since the ancient times. According to popular myths among the Island's inhabitants, the first human arrived Qeshm around six-hundred BCE and established his own family monarchy which was running the Island's affairs until two hundred and twenty-five BCE, when Nearchus, a navy officer in the army of Alexander

the Great, occupied the Island. Historical evidence shows that the Sasanian Empire (224 – 651 CE) was a time of efflorescence and prosperity on the island. A couple of dams and temples from that period are still available in the region, and now constitute some of the most important tourist destinations.

The invasion of Iranian territories by Muslim attackers between 633 and 654 led to their assault on the Island, occupying Qeshm and the entrance of Arab tribes to the region. Nowadays, Qeshmi people have a colourful heritage of Iranians, Arabs, and Africans.⁵⁸ In addition, there are seasonal and part- time workers from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, who – legally or illegally – live [either alone or with companionship of their families] on the Island as cheap labour force.

Fishing, maritime trading, dhow-making, agriculture, livestock, trading, mining, and weaving (specifically, fishing nets) are the most common paths through which people of the Island live. Fishing methods often embrace traditional ways of using different nets, whether by treading water on foot and very close to the coastline, or in the middle of the Ocean on small dhows, motorboats, or even rowboats. In their daily lives, inhabitants of Qeshm use at least 14 different marine vehicles and several devices (oar, sailcloth, trap, and net, etc.) to catch at least 95 types of fish, shrimp, prawn, and lobster.

Historical disposition of Persian Gulf as the connector of various civilizations and cultures is well considerable in different aspects of people's lives in Qeshm. The primary spoken language, Qeshmi, is a mixture of Farsi, Bandari, Arabic, African, Ethiopian, Swahili, Indian, English, and Portuguese, while any of these languages are also spoken throughout the Island individually.

⁵⁸ People of Qeshm believe that Africans have been mostly brought by Arab sheikhs who were running a slavery system to the Island, got freed and began their small businesses, cultivating and fishing afterward.

Three religions are openly practiced on the island: Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. However, most residents are Sunni Muslim and follow the practices of *Šāfe'i* School (*mazhab*).

All around the Island, people practice routine Islamic rites. Men are obliged to pray five times a day at the earliest time under the leadership of an *Imam* (Islamic leader) and in companionship of other men. Moreover, there is a *masjed jāmé* (principal mosque) in every city or village, wherein bathed shaved men wearing perfumes and white clothes practice *namāze jom'e* (Friday Prayer) every Friday. In addition to their religious significance, the mosques are also the major locus of many social, economic, and political gatherings, as well as crucial conversations and decision-making. *Fetr* (Islamic celebration of breaking the fast at the end of Ramadan) and *Qorbān* (Islamic celebration of the sacrifice) are two main respected religious ceremonies in which residents actively participate. Furthermore, Mullahs, religious scholars, Islamic shrines, and holy places are among the most admired people and places on the Island.

While Qeshm city is the center of religious Islamic teachings and practices, Salak (population 4400) is the artistic heart of the Island. (Iran Census Results 2021).

Southern Iran in general, and Qeshm and Salak more particularly, are diverse regions, wherein various groups of people live with their dissimilar territories, livelihoods, religions, languages and dialects, ethnicities, art, rituals, and performance. Qeshm has historically served as the connector of various civilizations and cultures. From very ancient times to the present day, people of Qeshm have been in constant connectedness with Greeks, Arabs, African, Indians, Chinese, and Europeans, among others, who have some different (and undeniably some familiar) understandings of the world. Such encounters have led to co-existence of varied paths of life in the Island.

One way this diversity is revealed is through medicine on the island. Although the first hospital was established in 1945, and most people believe in the worthiness of biomedical practices these days, there are some other forms of practicing medicine that complement this biomedical model. For many Qeshmi people, this is their favourite medical practice. There is one central hospital and a maternity ward, located in Qeshm city, and a couple of small clinics, dentistry and drug stores, spread throughout the Island.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, traditionally educated physicians, apothecaries, midwives, ophthalmologists, bloodletters, mullahs, fortune-tellers, exorcists, sorcerers, healers, sacred trees, and holy tombs and monuments are often met by people who are suffering from temporary or chronic issues of pain, disorderliness or malaise, to get help for dealing with their bothersome conditions.

⁵⁹ Normally, inhabitants of villages and smaller cities usually must drive between thirty minutes to one hour for having access to these medical institutions.

CHAPTER FOUR

Drumming with Winds

I opened the first chapter of my thesis by writing about my encounter with zar having begun since my childhood and kept going with long travels. The same chapter finishes by mentioning some of the wings that helped me fly with winds, especially after receiving their call and getting caught by the performance of Bābā Qolām. Favret-Saada's work (1977) helped me become mindful of the "folklorists'" tendency to regard zar practices as untruthful beliefs that are performed by backward people and only support the charlatanism of the healer. Gieser (2008) taught me how becoming an apprentice, is important to learn from zar practices as well as its practitioners. The philosopher and the jazz pianist, Sudnow (2001), told me about the skill acquisition process, which unfolds as bodily experiences through moving in the world. I also learned from Lindsay (1996) that drumming, as a practical and not a pedagogical experience, is generated, taught and learnt through bodily praxis of drummers who learn movements, take them to the world of the body, acquire the ability to play their drums, relate to the world and play their being in the world from their bodies (Lindsay 1996: 197 – 202).

As I have written somewhere else,

“in accordance with the hegemonic anthropological discourses of the twentieth century, zar participants' bodies have been [so far] studied as the “universalized natural body” (Haraway 1990: 146), which is “a fixed, material entity subject to the empirical rules of biological science, existing prior to the mutability and flux of cultural change and diversity and characterized by unchangeable inner necessities” (Csordas 2003: 1). In addition, following the protocols of normal science by which being-in-the-world is incessantly sundered from knowing the world (Ingold 2013: 18), zar practices have been considered symbolic activities [, predetermined, and] detached from the environment. The world of nonhuman living beings and things, all of the winds, sounds, seawaters, drums, aromatic herbs, flaming embers, moon, sea

monsters, and sandy hills and valleys that are primary actors of the ceremony, are routinely dismissed from anthropological studies of zar (Jangouk 2020: 67-8).”

To letting zar educate me, to receiving the call of these moving, unspecific, intuitive, never-ending, vague, improvised, disordered, and uncertain practices, to getting caught by the winds and start learning from them, to start blowing with winds, I flew frequently by the help of Ingold’s suggested method for doing anthropology, namely ‘knowing from the inside’. Ingold (2013) speaks of knowing from the inside, as a methodological approach in anthropology. Knowing from the inside is only possible, when we try to perceive “from the very inside of one’s being, through a process of self-discovery.” (ibid.: 1) According to Ingold, our main anthropological attempt should be to grow into things, and to let things grow into us and become parts of us, transformatively. This suggests adopting an active sensuous involvement with the world, paying attention to it, watching, listening, and feeling the world, thus letting it educate us. It was after becoming familiar with such an approach that I started becoming more confident that I can learn *from* zar healing practices (and not *about* them). Knowing from the inside, I think, is a path which does not result in seeing the world and human beings as data sources, but as guides to understand human and non-human living beings and things as anthropologists’ companions in attempt to perceiving the world (ibid.: 243).

Following these works, I took apprenticeship as my main, but not the only, research strategy. This meant performing a specific period of apprenticeship under the supervision of one of the most capable healers in southern Iran. At that time, I was relying upon my local connections which could persuade a healer to accept mentoring and sharing their knowledge of wind, spirit possession, illness and healing with me. Because of different political and cultural concerns,

however, I was a little bit worried about the possibility of being accepted by healers of the region, and this concern brought an alternative research strategy, which was drumming with zar drummers. I play an Iranian percussion instrument (the tombak) and accompanying zar drummers during healing ceremonies, I thought, could let me discover the cultural knowledge of zar practitioners through processes of attunement and enskilment.

My fieldwork was constituted of two different chronological stages of two months spread out a year apart from each other (Summer twenty-fifteen and twenty-sixteen) in coastal regions of southern Iran. I first travelled from Ottawa to Bandar Abbas, one of the most important port cities in southern Iran and on the coast of the Persian Gulf – if not the most important one – and the capital of Hormozgan province, where I met my uncle and cousins after more than a couple of decades, and for the first time in my life, some of my father's side distant family members. My plan was to find a healer either in Bandar Abbas or in Bandar Lengeh, another harbor city in Hormozgan province. As a matter of fact, when I was writing my research proposal at the University of Ottawa, I had found some acquaintances in Bandar Lengeh with the help of an old friend who had promised to connect me to a Bābā who, I was told, was eager to work with me as a zar apprentice.

Although I truly enjoyed the intercity roads and visiting the beautiful city, my experience of traveling to Bandar Lengeh was not satisfactory to me at that time: It was Ramadan, so neither I nor my cousin who was giving me a ride to the port city could drink or eat during the day. Moreover, I noticed that my connection was an employee of a politico-cultural institution supported by the radical bodies of the government. Lastly, it did not take long after commencing the interview that I started to feel the whole story was only a staging to lead my research into specific directions. Even my cousin who was scared of confronting a bābā zār in the real world,

and was hiding beside a wall, believed that “he did not look to be a real healer,” seeing him from afar.

We went back to Bandar Abbas, where my uncle and cousins were not looking that happy with my plan to meet zar practitioners on the one side, and zar practitioners did not want to meet me on the other side. After a few days of straying and confusion, I remember a conversation with a fellow traveller in the train, when I was going to Bandar Abbas. He told me about *Titovak*, a theatre band who were trying to mix zar and Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and I thought they probably knew someone who was ready to help so I called *Rezā*, my fellow traveller and we set a time to go to one of their informal performances. This brought a glitter for my work: I met two people who assured me that they could connect me to zar healers. One of them was *Sārā* who talked to me about having a friend in Qeshm who had been in contact with Bābā Isā, the most prominent bābā in the Persian Gulf region, for years. It was only one night later that I met *Fāteme* in a modern coffee shop in Bandar Abbas, and the day after I was on the dhow, leaving Bandar Abbas to Qeshm Island to meet Bābā Isā.

During the first phase of my fieldwork, I stayed in a village close to Salak, where Bābā Isā and his community live. This gave me the chance of short trips to Salak to meet zar practitioners during the day and at the same time having nightly access to other healers, practitioners of other forms of zar which had different names (but were so close to the healing ritual), local researchers, musicians, poets, theatre directors, photographers and folklorists who had worked on zar, religious and political officials who were comminating zar practices, musical performances and dances other than zar, dhow makers, palm cultivators, camel drivers, old sailors who had the traditional knowledge of navigation, and also Bāb Isā’s band informal performances all around the Island. Moreover, I had access to a library that made it possible to find some documentaries,

musical albums, myths and stories, psychological, sociological, and anthropological research, paintings and pictures about zar practices.

As I mentioned earlier, after our first encounter, Bābā Isā confirmed he was not willing to accept me as his apprentice, so I kept wandering to explore other possibilities. On the fourth night of my stay in the island, there was a recreational gathering, but one of the drummers who was supposed to play was sick and could not participate. The band leader, who was also a zar drummer, asked me if I could accompany them by playing darbuka and I jumped on this opportunity. As the inhabitants of the Island believe “whatever God wants happens”; the performance was a turning point in my fieldwork. On the one side, I was accepted as a drummer by some of the zar drummers and disciples of Bābā Isā. On the other side, I decided to improve and follow my second fieldwork strategy. Becoming a drummer and drumming with winds was what I started to think about at that time. Drumming as an anthropological research strategy could enable me to open myself to the world and attune to its different flows of senses, rhythms, and movements to learn from them. In order to become a zar drummer, however, I had to change the instrument I was accustomed to playing, as apparently my own instrument, Tombak, was not sacred enough to help me become a zar drummer. And so, I started practising Dohol gap in order to learn more from zar.

During my first stay in the Island, I had two dohol gap instructors, both named *Abdollāh*. The first Abdollāh was also called *Ahmad* by his close friends and relatives, and I will mention him by the same name, too. He was a middle-aged semi-professional drummer of different percussion instruments such as the dohol gap, kasser, pippe, darbuka, udu drum, and hang drum. I mention him as a semi-professional drummer not to downplay his musical skills, but to specify that he has a full-time job as a technician. Therefore, leading his band, training apprentices, and performing

music in various events in the Island is what he does regularly, but only after working hours. I had the chance to play dohol gap with him, and to become a drummer in his band and play darbuka and udu in four different ceremonies during my first stay in the Island, in Naqāše village. He lent me his dohol gap and started coming to my residence with his little son, who was a good dancer and drummer (and has become an even better artist, nowadays) to work with me. His focus in our nine sessions of about forty-five minutes was on teaching how to drum zar songs as well as the most famous songs of the Islanders. We also worked on performing dohol gap duets, improvising songs by group drumming, dancing with Islanders' unique rhythms, and the ways of behaviour that a Qeshmi drummer should follow to stay a trusted musician in the Island.

My second instructor, Abdollāh, was a casual drummer in Bāb Isā's band. He had not become a permanent member of the healer's band because of "being unorganized and mischievous, and not having strong faith in zar, although his knowledge of zar songs is better than all the other drummers except Bābā Isā."⁶⁰ I went to his sister's house in Naqāše five times, about one hour each time, to learn how to play zar songs. My twentyish-year-old impatient teacher tried to help me improve my dohol gap techniques, to put aside my "existing drumming skills" that were coming from Iranian music, and to become a zar musician.

During the second phase of my fieldwork, I had the chance to practice and play Dohol gap with *Hammud Memār* (Mohammad the architect) and *Sa'id* (a young sailor and the older son of *Dellā Medu*, the second Bābā of Salak), two professional drummers who were main members of Bābā Isā's band. I learnt from both Hammud Memār and Sa'id how to play basic and advanced zar songs, and how to sing zar lyrics. They also helped me to write down and record some well-

⁶⁰ A Qeshmi drummer told me during my second stay in the Island, when the more I looked for him, the less I found about him.

know zar songs and taught me to pronounce the terms and the phrases more accurately. We played together for long hours, day and night, in their houses, by the beach, and even on the ocean.

I believe that apprenticeship, “the process of developing from novice to proficiency under the guidance of a skilled expert (Downey 2014: 191),” is one of the most helpful ways for learning from zar practitioners. By learning how to play dohol gap under the supervision of zar drummers, we are, on the one side, asking them to teach us about their embodied skills and understandings, which allows us to “see, hear and feel the workings of the social pedagogical machine from within [...] how practices come together to shape expertise (Downey 2014: 192),” on the other side. This makes first-hand experiences of zar practices and knowing from the inside possible.

Apprenticeship as an anthropological method corresponds well with Ingold’s suggested approach for gaining anthropological wisdom (Ingold 2000 & 2013). Asking more experienced practitioners to show us how things are done, and engaging in skilful activities with them would reveal different paths of first-hand knowledge that lead to mastery. It is through this gradual process of enskilment (Ingold 2000: 416) that cultural knowledge could be learned by fine-tuning our perceptions and actions:

“We could say that the apprentice acquires such know-how by observation and imitation. To observe is actively to attend to the movements of others; to imitate is to align that attention to the movement of one’s own practical orientation towards the environment [, and] novices are instructed to feel this, taste that, or watch out for the other thing (Ingold 2000: 22 & 37).”

Apprenticeship as an anthropological method also corresponds well with my phenomenological approach. Sudnow's original work on acquiring the skilled hands of a jazz pianist, for instance, proficiently teaches us how gaining knowledge starts from our bodies moving with different flows of principles until they are interiorized to the "possession of so many types of concrete cases paired with types of responses that each situation leads fluidly to the next," instead of interiorizing the theory of a domain (Sudnow 2001: xii). This approach in considering the transfer of knowledge as the transfer of skills from the hands of the more experienced to the hands of the less experienced is undoubtedly inspired by Heidegger's philosophy of thinking:

"The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes - and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others. The hand holds. The hand carries. The hand designs and signs, presumably because man is a sign [...] the hand's gestures run everywhere through language, in their most perfect purity precisely when man speaks by being silent (Heidegger 1968: 16)."

I learned to drum, not only by my hands but rather by my body: drumming happens when the whole body starts to drum. Drumming zar happens when your body starts blowing with other bodies in the flows of music. It was one of my very first lessons that my dohol should become one with my body. I could not become a dohol player by trying to learn an instrument, taking it to my drumming classes and bringing it back home with me. My mission was to become one with my dohol.

I recall that I could neither accept nor understand the comments of my second "very strict" instructor who believed that I was a tombak player of Persian music and not a dohol gap player. My initial impression of him was that he did not like me and did not want to work with me for unknown reasons. Little by little and by learning more from zar drummers, I noticed that he was

correct for different reasons. I started my apprenticeship as someone who was following the principles of Iranian so-called *traditional* music, strictly. This said, I used to consider musical performances as sitting still and straight next to other band members, and focusing only on performing prewritten musical notes to educate the audience that is motionlessly perching in front of the band. Zar drumming, I learned, was dancing with the winds, and dancing the winds. I learned not to play predetermined songs but to find proper songs by paying attention to the patients and the winds. I was taught to open myself up to the winds. To call the winds. To invite them to talk with me and ask me to drum for them. I was taught to invite the winds to dance with me and let me know about their desired songs. I was taught to find the songs of the winds. Hammud Memār told me once that my hands should sound like *vazeše bād*.⁶¹ I was not sure how a percussion instrument would create the sound of the wind. Little by little, I understand that becoming a zar drummer is learning to create not the sounds of the wind only, but also to create sounds of the Sea. This is not imitating the sound of the wind rocking the palm tree leaves or the waves heating cliffs by the ocean when drumming. Rather, it means paying careful attention to the patient and their movements, to understand their entwinedness, to understand their being-with-the-sea. This is trying to understand the patient and not willing to educate them. Becoming a zar drummer is understanding ahle havā's life experiences, hardships, sufferings, cries and groans, and their healing efforts and hopes. That is why I was criticized by my second instructor, Abdollāh, for playing with "musicians'" hands. Being a zar drummer is playing with "sore" hands and this becomes only possible by understanding ahle havā's experiences of working hard in palm groves, rowing long on the sea, and enduring nailing in dhow building yards.

⁶¹ the blow of the wind

I was also taught that, contrary to my learnings from Persian music, I should close my eyes when drumming zar. Playing with open eyes will result in seeing and memorizing. Playing zar, however, is about learning not to see and not to remember. Zar drummers should not only close their own eyes but should close the eyes of the sufferers and other participants, too. Closing eyes makes us ready for dancing with the winds. It is one of the most important steps to forget the non-blowing world and to get ready for hearing the call of the winds. To communicate with them, and to pacify them.

This is how one can find the proper song. Zar drummers try to understand the patients by listening to their possessing winds and to play songs that sing of patients' experiences and gladden the winds. Zar drummers try to create a meaningful harmony between the brutality and the kindness of the winds and the fears, sufferings, bodily issues, hopes and aspirations of the patients, and zar becomes both music making and healing ceremonies in the same path, too.

Playing Dohol gap under the supervision of zar drummers in Qeshm Island was also a good opportunity of inclusion for me. I not only got the chance to participate in different gatherings held by Bāb Isā's disciples, listen to the different types of music they played, and sing and dance with them, but was also included in ahle havā's religious events and ceremonies, in their palm cultivating activities, in the unique relationship they had with their camels, in their sailings from Salak to nearby islands, and more importantly, in three different zar ceremonies held by Bāb Isā and his community.

That is how becoming a dohol gap player helped me attune myself to the world of zar practitioners. It was only by entering their worlds of rhythm and songs that I started to understand their sensory worlds of living with plants and animals, their understanding of blowing

winds and the dancing sea. It was only by drumming that I started to understand their worlds of sorrow, happiness, revelry, suffering, sickness, and healing; It was by learning to move with them, and in turn letting myself be moved by them, that I could know them meaningfully.

CHAPTER FIVE

Learning to Fly through - Even Heavy and Windless - Theories

Gone with Winds

With a cup of freshly brewed black tea, I am lounging on a comfy couch and enjoying the luxury of the air conditioner; two hours, this would have been unbelievable to me. After a long drive in a nearly broken vehicle, on unpaved bumpy roads, on a hot day. With a temperature over than 40°C 70% humidity, has made this one of my toughest fieldwork experiences, but I have finally made it to the second floor of Qeshm Office of Cultural Heritage and Tourism Industry to meet Mr. *Bāzmāndegān*, who, a few decades ago, began taking pictures of zar ceremonies, and has, little by little, become a zar researcher. The meeting takes place in a spacious bright room with plain white walls, starts and keeps going smoothly but a little bit formally, if not detachedly.

What I call “one of the most traditional anthropological interviews I did for my work” will soon become one of the most revealing and instructive meetings I had, to learn from zar Mr.

Bāzmāndegān’s calm voice and monotonous talking style reminded me of a gracious wooden dhow floating on the blue of the ocean in a golden morning. Little by little, I feel like I could not resist the flows of knowledge that are stealthily possessing me. With him, I notice the receptiveness of the winds, with him, I start departing to long travels throughout the history to meet with even ancient practitioners in ancient times. With him, I learn from other zar practitioners in other places. Talking with Mr. *Bāzmāndegān*, for me, was an academic course in anthropology of zar healing rituals. Learning from such a profound person, with his unique style of interweaving the past and the present, and interweaving what he had learned from master healers and what he had gained by studying zar for years, was reminding me of heartfelt divers of southern Iran, plunging to find luminous but veiled pearls deep in the sea.

This experience of talking with such a knowledgeable person made an impression and stayed with me for years. For a long time, I used to think that if somebody deserved to work “on” zar in

an academic setting, it is only him or people like him, and not me. Being from the Island, mastering the history, mythology, and the oral and written knowledge of Qeshm inhabitants, as well as working with zar practitioners as a life project made me think that he was one of the rare people of the wind, who was also eligible to blow with them academically.

Learning from zar, however, helped me become more familiar with the different ways one can acquire knowledge from winds. Winds blow and tell us about blowing with each other and into one another. Winds encompass all worldly beings and things and invite them to blow too. The world of the winds is a world of togetherness, a world of interconnectedness. In this world, it does not matter whether you are a rock or the sea. It does not matter if you are a camel or a palm farm. It does not matter whether you are an apprentice of zar or a healer. What matters, in the world of winds, is to blow, to move, to become a wind. Different beings and things, tiny or big, old or young, loud or quiet, modest or brutal, are called to move. And they start moving storm or breeze, master or student, stranger or local, they all blow with each other and into one another and this is how winds are winding.

Learning from winds, I slowly noticed that there should be different flows of air moving interconnectedly, to answer the winds' call to blow. I started understanding myself as an anthropologist working with winds, and I also started noticing the importance of other works trying to study zar healing practices. This was the basis of reviewing existing literature and theories about phenomenology of healing rituals, generally, and zar healing practices, more specifically. As a young bird who does not know how to fly, however, it was more than difficult for me to start winding with other winds, for years. This process of blowing with other winds, for me, took a long time, as I was unable to dare letting myself go in the world of winds for three reasons. First of all, I was raised and studied in a hierarchal educational system led by a despotic

centralist government, and for a long time, I did not know how to think independently and talk about my thoughts freely. Secondly, my academic background was in sociology, and I had been trained in positivist schools mainly, and needed much more time, skill, and knowledge to start thinking and writing anthropologically. Finally, although I was ready to receive the call of the winds, I did not have enough knowledge to understand their messages, to communicate with them, and to blow with them. Writing different sections of this chapter, where I review Farsi and non-Farsi works that have tried to study zar, and offer a theoretical section that introduces phenomenology, phenomenological sociology, and anthropology, has helped me a lot to become a wind-anthropologist and to blow with different flows of knowledge.

Review of the Existing Literature

The main body of the existing Farsi literature about the zar provided by social scientists tend to consider it as a “misleading,” “deceptive,” and “superstitious” ceremony which is banned by the government on the one side and, on the other, disdained by the Iranian proponents of modernization policies. For almost one hundred and fifty years, and because of modernization policies in contemporary Iran, zar practices have been labeled superstitions, therefore silenced and marginalized by the central governments for about a century. Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, zar communities have been constantly suppressed as deviant, infidel, and even demonic cults; hence, practitioners tend to preserve themselves from the probable harms of outsiders and are thus inclined to conceal themselves from social science researchers and their inquiries.

Iranian author, psychiatrist, and modernist intellectual, Gholamhossein Sa’edi, who helped me get closer to the world of zar during my adolescence, views zar in the following manner:

“Coastal regions of southern Iran are fertile lands for madness and mental disorders. Living in such coastal regions is unwillingly associated with failure, frustration, fear and anxiety. Fighting with the sea, being afraid of starvation, thirst, disease and death, as well as hard work and monotonous life have made people to slip towards zar ritual . . . Higher levels of panic and stress lead to more confrontations with devil winds. Whenever people are poorer and more unemployed, the winds get more powerful (Sa’edi 1966: 22-23).”

Prevalent social science approaches in contemporary Iran strongly rely upon inattentive application of adapted theories and research methods to study zar, which is a specific ceremony that stems from (and also recreates) its own locality and temporality. This has already led to considerable misunderstandings of zar practices. When reviewing the existing Iranian scholarly literature on zar, one will frequently find explanations such as “zar ritual should be seen as the product of mental disorders; ‘unconscious’ illusions and delusions that arise from the emotional deprivations and sufferings in a historical context” (Naghavi 2014: 163).

It is easily recognizable that in all of these works (such as Gholamhossein Sa’edi [1966]; Kaveh Safa [1988]; and Hesam Naghavi [2014]), in accordance with the hegemonic anthropological discourses of the twentieth century, zar participants’ bodies have been studied as the “universalized natural body” (Haraway 1990: 146), which is “a fixed, material entity subject to the empirical rules of biological science, existing prior to the mutability and flux of cultural change and diversity and characterized by unchangeable inner necessities” (Csordas 2003: 1).

In addition, in the most sympathetic studies towards the practitioners of zar, their practices have been considered symbolic activities empty of, or at best detached from, the environment (see Ali

Bulookbashi [2002[and Manijeh Maghsudi [2013]]. The world of nonhuman living beings and things—all of the winds, sounds, seawaters, drums, aromatic herbs, flaming embers, moon, sea monsters, and sandy hills and valleys that are primary actors of the ceremony— are routinely dismissed from anthropological studies of zar to the benefit of a kind of knowledge that tends to engineer a material world that consists of natural, discrete, and finished objects (Ingold 2010: 9). Iranian social scientists, consequently, have been mainly “seeing” zar as a monotonous and predictable “surgery procedure” done by “traditional” healers on the “isolated” body of the “motionless patient” through the employment of “medical” tools to change conditions from chaotic to well-ordered ones.

As previously mentioned, the first phase of reviewing non-Farsi literature, for me, began after getting caught by Ingold’s anthropology. The journey started by guiding my reading of three articles, “Oromos, Slaves, and the Zar Spirits: A Contribution to the History of the Zar Cult” by Natvig (1987), Grotberg’s “Mental Health Aspects of Zar for Women in Sudan” (1990), and El Guindy & Schmais’s “The Zar: An Ancient Dance of Healing” (1994). While these offered knowledge about zar ceremonies, however, they were based on implicit and explicit indications of western biological approaches, as well as Cartesian dualities of the mind and the body, thus missing the very core of zar practices, which do not abide by this dichotomy. For instance, the efficacy of healing practices was discussed through the fragmentation of the body/physical and mind/mental. Additionally, zar rituals were discussed as ceremonies to heal mental afflictions only. This conflicted with other findings that have elucidated the role of various rituals including zar, in healing different bodily afflictions.

Since the late 1970s, anthropologists have started to think about zar by applying anthropological approaches. Zar practices have been traced and studied, in a more descriptive approach, in Iran

(Modarresi 1968; Safa 1988), Iraq (Elyas 1977), Pakistan (During 1977 [in Baluchistan section]), Yemen (Bakewell 1985; Mo'mar 1988; Kaptenjins and Spaulding 1994), Saudi Arabia (al-Tayash 1988), and Kuwait (Ashkanani 1991), as well as in Israel (Grisaru, Budowski, and Witztum 1997), and Canada (Boddy 1994), as a result of immigrants' cultural transfers. However, while zar rituals are sacred healing ceremonies which are known, performed, and prevalent among the inhabitants of the Persian Gulf, the Horn of Africa, and the Red Sea, among different versions of zar practices, African ones, and especially those of Ethiopia and Sudan have been more popular for anthropologists to study (El Hadidi 2016: 4-5).

Ian M. Lewis's studies of the zar (1967;1981) as well as Janice Boddy's works (1989; 1994a;1994b), and Mosry's study (1993) are three different, but nonetheless interrelated works about spirit possession ceremonies, more specifically zar practices, in Africa. These works each following a functional approach inspired by Gluckman's theory of ritual. Gluckman's theory of rituals of rebellion talks about rituals as opportunities for expressing social tensions, and opportunities to manage the conflict under the umbrella of social order (Gluckman 1963: 127). Lewis, Boddy, and Morsy, follow the same approach and interpret zar in a way that can be called "the theories of peripheral cults" (El-Hadidi 2016: 11). In his study of sar, spirit possession ceremonies practiced in northern Somaliland that are similar to zar, Lewis (1971) mentions the structural conflicts that take place between husbands and wives. Zar, according to Lewis (1967: 626), is a mystical mode of defusing grievances between men and women; women, as "passive agents" of the social order, practice it as "compensation mechanism for their exclusion and lack of authority in other spheres" (1986: 27 – 28). Following such a path in focusing on gender differences in practicing sar (zar), Boddy's theory of ritual resistance (1989) talks about the conflicts between men and women which take place in marriage as a social institution. Her study

of zar begins in Hofriyat, a small rural community in northern Sudan, Africa, and mainly investigates of the role of women in zar practices, as well as the impact of the ceremonial acts in the lives of practitioners. Zar rituals, according to Boddy (1989: 341), should be considered “indigenous texts” with clear and indirect meanings in different levels which cultivate appreciation for ambiguity in gender constructs, personal relationships, and cultural typification (El-Hadidi 2016: 13). They should “unfold anew with every ritual performance.” According to Boddy:

“[...] controversial realities are embedded in overt text performance, and each gains from association with the other. Possession ritual, viewed as allegorical genre, is designed to compel the imagination; in making an adjustment between the apparent meaning of the rite and its multiple connotations, a participant leaps to the significance of the zar and is initiated to its course. This is, and given its potential subversiveness, must be, a personal, subjective, transformation. But because of that it may be therapeutic. For if discovery occurs through a participant’s own intellectual effort, if, in other words, she restructures the zar text by reflecting in her own imagination the creative process it embodies, thus renewing the inner consciousness of the work [...] then her consciousness of her own position in Hofriyati society may grow (Boddy 1989: 340-342).”

In a community such as Hofriyati, where women’s status can be impacted by various issues like divorce, infertility, or loss of a loved one, participating in zar ceremonies enable women to relate to the experience of “otherness.” Such experience of otherness, being connected to an alien spirit, an Other, for women who are in an Other (inferior) social position, provides them with opportunities to “redress these problems circumstances, meet with allegory and ritual which strengthens their identities [...], and create a positive appreciation for the existential, as opposed to the ideal demanded in structured everyday life” (El Hadidi 2016: 13).

The third and final approach of peripheral cults to study zar practices in Africa, belongs to Sohair Morsy's ethnography in which she studies 'uzr,' an alternative form of zar prevalent in some rural areas of the Nile Delta, Egypt (1993: 18). Based on Lewis's and Boddy's interpretations of women's social status, powerlessness, affliction, holding zar ceremonies, and constituting related communities, Morsy discusses how the ritual plays an important role in allowing both women and men to disobey the socio-cultural order, and temporarily exceed dominant principles of power relations (Morsy 1993: 124-125). This provides all members of the society with considerable opportunities to endure different forms of social control exerted by husbands, fathers, and brothers on the one side, as well as wives, mothers, and sisters on the other. Countering social sanctions accompanied by the violation of accepted patterns of behaviour, particularly in sexual, family, and parenting norms, is the principal function of participating in zar rituals (Morsy 1993: 123-125; 139-146).

Phenomenology

Any scholarly endeavour for understanding zar healing ceremonies must essentially rely upon paths of knowledge, by which ritual practitioners perceive the world embracing themselves, as well as other beings and things they live with. Following this way, we will be able to empathize with zar practitioners and prepare ourselves to understand their beings, relationships, feelings, sufferings, healings and in one word, their 'humaning.' Pursuing such an approach, however, does not mean disregarding existing theoretical approaches that would provide better understanding of the ceremonies. Unique characteristics of phenomenology, we believe, provides some of the most useful ways of thinking, along which we would be able to know the world of zar.

Here, I first introduce phenomenology as initially developed by twentieth-century philosophers like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Moreover, I will discuss how some sociologists and anthropologists, little by little, have started to get inspirations from phenomenological paths of thinking and even founded their own phenomenological approaches among other schools of thought in social sciences. Thence, I will introduce and describe ‘anthropology of being-in-the-world’ as my suggested bridge between the worlds of phenomenology and zar. Finally, I will end with a short review and conclusion of preceding discussions to provide a clearer idea of a phenomenological anthropology of being-in-the-world.

Since its flourishing in the first decades of the twentieth century, phenomenology has been one of the dominant philosophical movements among other paths of reflection on our being in contemporary world (Philipse 2003: 477). Contrary to some stubborn critics who have been ceaselessly trying to reject the idea of a “tradition of phenomenology,” I attempt to briefly introduce phenomenological tradition as the basis of methodological and theoretical discussions which will help better situate the zar healing ritual from an anthropological standpoint. As a matter of fact, our intended tradition does not embrace loyal scholars who have been strongly attached to specific monotonous sets of ideas. As Luft and Overgaard argue: “phenomenology is not, and never was, a philosophical school, if one understands by that a group of philosophers committed to identical, or very similar, sets of doctrines” (2012: 1). Rather, following the pioneers of phenomenology (i.e., Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty), in considering human as a free creator of meaning, our intention of tradition is close to moving along a path. Sharing specific “methodological commitments” on the one side and thoughtfully connected concerns about the “proper domain of phenomenological research” on the other, the various paths of

phenomenology try to prepare meaningful bases for different meditative endeavours (Luft & Overgaard 2012: 1).

During the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, traditional positions of folk, religious and philosophical knowledge were severely threatened by the dominance of the so-called western scientific view. It was in such a context that the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), constituted phenomenology as a valid and simultaneously non-scientific way to perceive the world. Broadening the prevailing domains of philosophical investigation of his time, Husserl succeeded in introducing a philosophy which was deeply concerned with the common crises of the time, and therefore eligible to rapidly catch the attention of many philosophers, artists, and scientists (Philipse 2003: 477). Some key figures in the phenomenological tradition include Adolf Reinach (1883-1917), Max Scheler (1874-1928), Edith Stein (1891-1942), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Aaron Gurwitsch (1901-1973), Roman Ingarden (189-1970), Eugen Fink (1905-1975), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), Bernhard Waldenfels (1934-), Michel Henry (1922-2002), and Jean-Luc Marion (1946) . They have all, in their way, played important roles in the bringing phenomenology to different philosophical areas such as philosophy of the mind, social philosophy, aesthetics, ethics, philosophy of science, epistemology, theory of meaning, and formal ontology. They also brought this idea to prominent theories like hermeneutics, deconstruction, and post-structuralism (Zahavi 2008: 661) as well as arts, natural and human sciences (more specifically sociology, anthropology, and religious studies) (Luft & Overgaard 2012: 1).

Phenomenology can be initially introduced as the sharp and diligent criticism of scientism, objectivism, and reductionism, and the ceaseless attempts to studying human (and, recently, non-human) living beings' existence and the life-world that lead to considering subject as "an embodied and socially and culturally embedded being-in-the-world." Faraway, so close to the eleventh – and the most famous – thesis of Karl Marx in *Theses on Feuerbach* (2002 [1886]: 65), "the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it," phenomenologists have tried not only to play their roles in the knowledge arena but also provide meaningful bases for understanding the world, beings, and things as well (Ingold 2007 & 2010; Luft & Overgaard 2012: 1). To do so, various phenomenologists have applied their own terms and expressions like intentionality, embodiment, self-awareness, intersubjectivity, temporality, historicity, and perception, which has opened up new horizons to the fields of psychological, literal, religious, architectural, ethnological, sociological and anthropological studies (Zahavi 2008: 662).

Like any other form of knowledge, phenomenology has been moving in meandering ways, however, as Paul Ricoeur has argued, "the history of phenomenology is the history of Husserlian heresies" (Ricoeur 1987: 9). Following many philosophers, social scientists, commentators, researchers and translators who have been working in phenomenological movement, I believe it is absolutely possible to find some shared concerns and motifs which shape the sturdy foundation of phenomenological approach, therefore band all phenomenologists together. We strongly believe that pursuing the footprints of Husserl [s transcendental phenomenology], Heidegger [s hermeneutical phenomenology] and Merleau-Ponty [s existential phenomenology] will let us grasp a better understanding of the communal body of knowledge known as phenomenology, and also prepare us to apply phenomenology to study zar healing ritual in a more profound way.

The founder and one of the key figures of phenomenological thought, Edmund Husserl, was influenced by ancient Greek philosophers (more specifically pre-Socratics, Plato and Aristotle), medieval scholastic philosophers, and the British empiricists. A key influence, Franz Brentano (1838 – 1917) was the author of *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874) and his former teacher in Vienna (Luft & Overgaard 2012: 3).⁶²

Husserl's well-known maxim, "back to the things themselves," is a good starting point to make ourselves more familiar with the way in which he describes and discusses his main thoughts and assessments. By 'back to the things themselves,' Husserl establishes modern phenomenology as an epistemological criticism of scientific projects of knowledge and scienticism, as well as scientific rationalization and endless processes of constructing theories. Rather, he recommends making more first-hand relations with / get back to the world as the very initial (preconditional) provider of all forms of consciousness (Philipse 2003: 479; Zahavi 2008: 664). Consciousness is, in fact, in one of the most fundamental concepts in phenomenology. Rejecting the Cartesian legacy which sees (human) consciousness as something by itself, an enclosed globe that "receives information through the senses" (Knibbe & Versteeg 2008: 56), Husserl discusses that consciousness is always and only consciousness of or about something. This is the meaning of

⁶² "Although Husserl is almost universally credited as the founder of the movement (at least in continental Europe), he was heavily influenced by Franz Brentano (1838–1917), one of his teachers in Vienna. Brentano, in turn, saw himself in the tradition of medieval scholastic philosophy, and appreciated the common-sense stance of the British empiricists. In this sense, one can certainly trace phenomenology back to modern or medieval philosophy, and one can easily find in it ideas inherited from Aristotle, Plato and the Pre-Socratics. But such a narrative would lose sight of the specificity of phenomenology as a movement. In order to capture the latter, we must let phenomenology originate in the Germanophone world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with Brentano and Husserl being the most important founders" (Luft & Overgaard 2012: 2).

intentionality, one of the most principal essentials of phenomenological thinking (Luft & Overgaard 2012: 3).

Coming back to Husserl's criticisms of scientific rationality, he believes that leaning against a natural naivety, positive sciences tend to reduce 'things and beings in the world' to 'objects of the world.' Such a theory-based orientation, also called natural attitude, is at the heart of most – even daily – of our consciousness and one must have it philosophically scrutinized to avoid such a commonsensical naivety in order to gain a good perception of the world (Husserl 1971: 152 – 153). To do so, it is required to concentrate on the ways in which “reality is given to us in experience” (Zahavi 2008: 669). In other words, we would not be able to perceive the very initial basis of our relationships with the world if long as natural pre-philosophical attitude constitutes the sturdiest foundation of our consciousness. Husserl's famous term, epoché, refers to “a procedure of bracketing, excluding, cancelling, putting out of action certain belief components of our experience (Moran & Cohen 2012: 106)” to suspend the validity of natural attitude (Zahavi 2008: 670) which will lead to ‘reduction,’ prevailing over “the naivete of life in the natural attitude [...] and uncovering the noetic-noematic structure of lived experiences” (Moran & Cohen 2012: 273).

It is only by applying epoché and reduction as methodological tools, Husserl believes, that we can distance ourselves from seeing the world as an external pre-constituted container, in which human lives. But I ask, what is our type of relation with the world? To be clearer, how does phenomenology interpret human connectedness to the world, other human and non-human living beings and things? In his later writings, Husserl addresses the intertwinedness of subjectivity, world, and other. According to him, subjectivity – which is always connected to the world – acquires its thorough relation to itself and to the world, only in relation to the other. This is what

he (1959: 505; 1973: 480) means by intersubjectivity, which “only exists and develops in the mutual relationship between subjects that are related to the world; and the world is only brought to articulation in the relation between subjects” (Zahavi 2008: 681). Such an essential concept is shared by most of Husserl’s phenomenologist followers thus far. Martin Heidegger, his most prominent student and one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, for instance, depicts that the life-world is an inseparable whole shaped from three intertwined domains: surrounding world, with-world and self-world (Heidegger 1993: 33, 39, 62), wherein world-experiencing / already being-with Dasein dwells (Zahavi 2008: 681). To be clearer, Dasein is not a being that lives among (separately from) other beings and tries to discover its positionality in the world. Rather, as a being which is consistently concerned about its being, Dasein is being with other things and beings, being-in-the-world. Heidegger criticizes the idealist tradition which puts subjectivity at the centre of its concentration and sees human as a subject that explores and explains himself, world and others respectively. According to Heidegger, Dasein is initially and eternally being-in-the-world, and self, world and others are intertwined, so, would be only understood in their interconnectedness (Heidegger 1988: 27 – 76).

Heidegger’s most famous work, *Being and Time* [Sein und Zeit] (1927), conveys many aspects of his phenomenological thoughts about being in the world. Relying upon the basic assessment of revealing a more profound type of knowledge – described by many interpreters of Heidegger as the religious / catholic side of his philosophy – and inspired by the philosophical heritage of Plato, Aristotle, Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, the Scholastics, Luther, Kant, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dilthey and [of course] his former professor, Husserl,⁶³ in 1927, Heidegger published

⁶³ The book is dedicated to Edmund Husserl “in friendship and admiration” (Heidegger 2008 [1927]: I).

one of the most influential pieces of history of philosophy which despite of its complicated – and even sometimes idiosyncratic – language, inspired many later philosophers such as Jaspers, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Derrida as well as scholars of other disciplines including theologians like Paul Tillich and Bultmann (Philipse 2003: 488 – 493). Related to our discussions, one of Heidegger's main debates is the construction of the concept of Dasein (i.e., Da [there] and Sein [to be] which can be translated as being there / here in English). Very briefly, Dasein is any being who has concerns / questions about its being. Normally applicable to human being but more accurately, pertinent to any being that satisfies its required characteristics (Heidegger 1996 [1927]: 25), Dasein is “essentially being-in-the-world, that the world in which Dasein lives is a meaningful world of tools, roads, farmland, and work, and that each Dasein projects freely its future life and is concerned with itself, others, and the world” (Philipse 2003: 490).

Heidegger's concepts spread rapidly in the philosophical world, especially in France, where a generation of young intellectuals and philosophers applied his analysis of being-in-the-world as the basis of their existentialist, phenomenological, and postmodernist approaches. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and, eventually, Jacques Derrida are some of the most important philosophers who take their inspirations of Heidegger's and Husserl's phenomenologies to their own different directions (Luft & Overgaard 2012: 5; Philipse 2003: 493). Under the heavy shadow of phenomenology, for instance, Sartre believes:

[...] perceptive field refers to a centre objectively defined by that reference and located in the very field which is oriented around it. Only we do not see this centre as the structure of the perceptive field considered; we are the centre [...]

My being-in-the-world, by the sole fact that it realizes a world, then, causes itself to be indicated to itself as a being-in-the-midst-of-the-world by the world which it realizes. The case could not be otherwise, for my being has no other way of entering into contact with the world except to be in the world. It would be impossible for me to realize a world in which I was not, and which would be for me a pure object of a surveying contemplation. But on the contrary, it is necessary that I lose myself in the world in order for the world to exist and for me to be able to transcend it. Thus, to say that I have entered into the world, ‘come to the world,’ or that there is a world, or that I have a body is one and the same thing (Sartre 1992 [1943]: 317 – 18 & 365 – 6).”

Along with Sartre, one of the most inspiring figures of phenomenology was Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty casts a strong shadow on phenomenological anthropology and sociology, and he thrived in making new intellectual paths that bridge between the world, consciousness, and body.

Following Husserl and Heidegger – and trying to take a critical stance on them at the same time – Merleau-Ponty establishes his phenomenology based on the rejection of prevailing dualities of his time, like the famous Cartesian dualism between the subject and the object, which constitutes the basis of modern scientific knowledge. By his “I think, therefore I am,” Descartes left a heritage, Merleau-Ponty argues, which led to an incorrect and deep separation between the body and the mind. While Descartes introduces the mind as an “active subject” and the body as a “leaden object” (Howson & Inglis 2001: 302), Merleau-Ponty, relying on Husserl’s phenomenological concept of the relation between corporeal being and intentional consciousness, tries to institute a positioning, through which the body is considered as the creator of, and the impressive on the human being in the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 429 – 475).

Merleau-Ponty's first book, *The Structure of Behaviour* (1942), contains a strong criticism of behaviourism of Watson and Pavlov. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty questions the proficiency of [linear] causality in studying the trends of perception and behaviour, as well as rejects their theoretical departure point: the separation between mentality and physicality. Accordingly, by applying Husserl's concept of 'life-world' alongside Heidegger's being-in-the-world, Merleau-Ponty depicts the necessity of a fresh basis for studying perception, which could consider "intentional correlation between the perceiving organism and the perceived world was described from within, as it is experienced by the perceiving subject" (Philippe 2003: 495).

His next and most well-known work, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), is a successful attempt to provide such a blooming basis in this philosophical arena. Here, Merleau-Ponty contends that any type of knowledge cannot emerge from a third-person perspective. Rather, all forms of knowledge ingrained in our experiences of being in the world. On the one side, it would be meaningless to speak about different ways of 'knowing' without considering those experiential bases that these paths of knowledge are based upon (Zahavi 2008: 664), and on the other side, contrary to Husserl, a bracketing of the natural attitude would not be a valid method to help us grasp pure consciousness about the world (Knibbe & Versteeg 2008: 56). Therefore, according to Merleau-Ponty, all forms of knowledge have their own historical and socio-cultural roots and rise from "first-hand" approaches which stem from the interconnectedness of the perceiver and her/his world (Merleau-Ponty 2014 [1945]: ii-iii).

Criticizing the dominant scientific image which tries to depict the superiority of subject over the material world (that which embraces the opposition between the subject and the world), Merleau-Ponty speaks about our being-in-the-world as the essential source of any perception, consciousness, knowledge. All of our perceptions, according to him, are active bodily journeys

in the world, through which, we as body/subject (body/minds) probe our environments. In other words, “human behaviour is not a series of meaningless physical movements of the body, caused by mental processes in the brain, but an intrinsically meaningful dynamic structure, which is inseparable from the meaningful world in which the human being is situated” (Philipse 2003: 495).

As alluded to earlier, by applying concepts like embodiment or embodied mind, phenomenologists (specially those who are inspired by Husserl and more specifically Merleau-Ponty) often oppose Cartesian duality of the body and the mind. To continue a deeper discussion, however, we have to take into account that such an opposition also contests another Cartesian dualism: the duality of the mind and the world. As Husserl discusses: “the world is given to us as bodily explored and the body is revealed to us in its exploration of the world” (1971: 128). Thus, inspired by Merleau-Ponty, phenomenologists do not consider the body as a medium between the body/subject and the world; rather, being-in-the-world is essentially an embodied experience (Zahavi 2008: 682). In *The World of Perception* (1948), Merleau-Ponty demonstrates an inseparable relationship between the body and the world, wherein embodied experiences make the foundation of people’s consciousness through their lives. In his schema of the ‘intertwined’ and ‘indissociable’ relationship between the body and the world, human experiences are continuously shaped through bodily practices and these bodily experiences are regarded as the basis of any consciousness. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology avoids seeing beings as fixed ‘inaccessible and self-sufficient’ and undertakes to suggest continuity and interpenetration between body-subjects, life, and the world (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 322).

Most phenomenological anthropologists and sociologists have been under the shadow of Merleau-Ponty’s thoughts, wherein he presents the body as the site of experience. This site of

experience can only be understood by verifying “the ways, in which the body is lived” (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 71). If we live our bodies, and if living is only possible by perceiving the world we inhabit, gaining knowledge should be considered only as a bodily experience. This constitutes a firm basis for some contemporary anthropologists, especially those such as Thomas J. Csordas, who has specifically worked on healing rituals (e.g., Csordas 1990; 1994; 1996 and 1999), to write about bodily ways of perceiving the world, that are more noticeable in healing ceremonies. Following these paths is walking off the beaten tracks of conducting scientific projects to gain knowledge. However, it smooths o the way to reject the common separation between the body and the mind, and helps us better understand the approach of most healing ritual participants who do not practice medicine, by theoretically separating people’s minds from their bodies.

To take all this a little bit further, I should insist on another valuable teaching of Merleau-Ponty, which is the interconnectedness of body-mind and the world. As Merleau-Ponty argues, by moving in the world, we are constantly interpreting the world, and creating both ourselves and the world as we do. In reciprocation, the world is unceasingly creating us. The interconnectedness of people and the world blows with so many ritual participants all around the world, as well as the practitioners of zar whom I worked with and learned from.

Phenomenology in Sociology and Anthropology

Phenomenological sociology and anthropology are exquisite, fruitful, and lately known fields that are gradually acquiring their appropriate places among the enquiries of social sciences. Emanating from various theoretical strands of knowledge like phenomenological approaches of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, American pragmatist approaches of James and Dewey, hermeneutic phenomenology of Dilthey and Ricoeur, and Derrida’s deconstructivist

phenomenology (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 88), phenomenological sociology and anthropology have been moving away from their marginal position since the last decades of the twentieth century.

Initial attempts to bridge between phenomenology and social sciences , specifically, sociology, can be tracked to the sociology of Austrian philosopher and social phenomenologist Alfred Schütz (1899 – 1959), who was strongly influenced by the philosophies of Henri Bergson (1859 – 1941), William James (1842 – 1910), and Edmund Husserl as well as the work of well-known German classical sociologist Max Weber (1864 – 1920), who let Schütz concentrate on the concept of “meaning” as a central theme of his scholarly project (Kenneth 2012: 314). In “Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences” (1954), Schütz suggests social scientists to turn into new research paths by declining the temptation of studying human experience through applying already made theoretical models and alternatively commence with the experience, itself. Such a point of departure could be identified as the starting point of phenomenological sociology, founded by Schütz and pursued by his famous followers, Peter Ludwig Berger (1929 – 2017) and Thomas Luckmann (1927 – 2016) who began to move away from defining sociological research as an explanatory research conducted by an internal researcher above social facts, in favour of studying human experience from an internal position among the social things, as they are (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 9 – 11; Laplante & Sacrini 2016: 11). Moving smoothly on a phenomenological track, Schütz believes that social scientists will successfully achieve their scholarly goals only if they reject the duality of subject and object and begin considering it as a construct of our own subjective consciousness and stop separating humans from all the “thoughts, things and life-worlds that are created intersubjectively.” This leads us along his proposed method of “bracketing” in the social sciences, which implies tossing

out all existing theoretical and scientific explanations of a phenomenon and acquire all impressions from our everyday life to approach “things as they are,” and even embark on studying the paths in which we compose our worlds (Knibbe & Versteeg 2008: 56).

Influenced by both the neo-Kantian philosophy of Ernst Cassirer and Schütz’s new-found philosophy of social sciences, American anthropologist Alfred Irving Hallowell (1892 – 1974) first coined the term “phenomenological anthropology” in 1955’s *Culture and Experience*. However, labelling his own work about the ‘self’ as phenomenological, according to Hallowell, was mainly and even more or less simply, “for want of a better term” (Katz & Csordas 2003: 277). About twenty years later, yet in a more implicit way, another American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1926 – 2006) strove to construct the notion of “thick description” (1973) as the basis of his project of an ‘interpretive anthropology’ upon the sociological approaches of Weber and Schütz (Laplane & Sacchini 2016: 10). Despite his efforts to study Balinese concepts of person, time, and conduct with the help of Alfred Schütz’s phenomenology, phenomenological orientation never constituted the main feature of Geertz’ anthropology (Katz & Csordas 2003: 277).

As a matter of fact, clearer and more flourishing conversations between phenomenology and anthropology have only taken place since a new generation of anthropologists began to bring their profound knowledge of the pioneers of phenomenology (particularly Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty) into their different anthropological ways of research more broadly (Jackson 1996, 2013; Ingold 2000, 2011, 2013; Csordas 1990, 1993, 2011).

Consider, for example, the work of American anthropologist Michael Jackson (e.g., Jackson 1996; 2013). Jackson borrows from Husserl’s philosophy (1950 [1913]), Weber’s sociology

(1965 [1904 – 17]), and Schütz's phenomenological sociologies (1940, 1962, 1970, 1972, 1976), and Berger and Luckmann's work (1966), yet tries to develop the concept of the '(multiple) lifeworld(s)' (Laplante & Sacrini 2016: 10) in a way that reveals:

how a strictly sociological perspective [has] to be complemented with an existential perspective that [encompasses] the role of contingency, playfulness, unpredictability, mystery, and emotion in human life as well as acknowledging that human beings are motivated not only by a desire to construct social worlds in which they can find a sense of security, solidarity, belonging, recognition, and love but by a desire to possess a sense of themselves as actors and initiators (Jackson 2013: 14).

Withdrawing from explaining the social by relying upon [if not reducing it to] any biogenetic factor, unconscious process, invisible cause or antecedent condition, Jackson constructs new paths to study the concepts of life, world, human, culture, and experience, among others. For instance, he proposes a notion of culture close to that first proposed by Bateson and Mead (1942), more recently by Hallam and Ingold (2007), namely in suggesting culture is something continuously emerging and improvised through experience (Laplante & Sacrini 2016: 12):

In this view, society or culture cannot be conceptualized in terms of objective conditions that directly determine the possibility of thought or action from without. Society is equally a domain of instrumentality in which human beings make their lives and confer meanings whose existential import cannot, in the final analysis, be reduced to the meanings sedimented in pre-existing cultural forms. As Merleau-Ponty notes, the very activity that brings about the appearance of social structures and cultural forms also has "as its meaning to reject them and to surpass them (Merleau-Ponty 1963: 176)." [...] What is possible for a person is always preconditioned by the world into which he or she is born and raised, but a person's life does more than conserve and

perpetuate these pre-existing circumstances; it interprets them, negotiates and nuances them, re-imagines them, protests against them, and endures them in such complex and subtle ways that, in the end, human freedom appears as “the small movement which makes of a totally conditioned social being someone who does not render back completely what his conditioning has given him (Sartre 1969: 45) (Jackson 1996: 29 – 30).

Such precious endeavours in the field of anthropology, as well as those of Thomas J. Csordas and Tim Ingold which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, work well to open new horizons for social science researchers who have been creating their enquiries under labels like cultural phenomenology, hermeneutic anthropology, radical empiricism, and existential anthropology: though different in names, they are all indebted to phenomenology, theoretically and methodologically, in anthropological study of experience (Knibbe & Versteeg 2008: 48). Illness and healing, embodiment, sensory perception, suffering, violence, morality, creativity, art, religion, and ritual are some of the research arenas in which phenomenological anthropologists have been trying, as Desjarlais and Throop (2011: 88) put it beautifully, to “reconfigure what it means to be human, to have a body, to suffer and to heal, and to live among others.”⁶⁴

Whatever is the path, as being said before, phenomenological anthropologists’ intention is the study of the flows of experience by sensory participations in different life-worlds. Here,

⁶⁴ Jackson 1989, 1990, 1996, 1998, 2005, 2013; Csordas 1990, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2011; Ingold 2000, 2011, 2013; Stoller 1989, 1997a, 1997b, 2008; Desjarlais 2003, 2011; Duranti 2009; Throop 2010a, 2010b; Laplante 2015; Laplante and Sacchini 2016; Kleinman 2006; Kleinman and Kleinman 1991; Good 1994; Kapferer 1997; Classen 1993, 2005; Berger 1999; Geurts 2002; Howes 2003; Schull 2005; Das 2007 and Garcia 2010 are some works that would considerably help one to familiarize themselves with various paths of doing phenomenological anthropology.

phenomenological epoché / bracketing play important methodological roles. Therefore, phenomenological anthropologists primarily embark on finding ways to bracket the knowledge which is rooted in their own intellectual pouches (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 89). Defining epoché as the “bracketing of reality, a temporary refraining from any statement or truth or reality,” Knibbe and Versteeg believe that anthropological epoché means:

“views on reality are not evaluated for their truth, or analysed as forms of ‘false consciousness’, as society worshipping itself or as psychological constructs. Rather, they are understood as experiences of reality that arise out of the daily life and practical concerns of people, without reducing them to socio-economic conditions or principles external to the situation itself. So [different faces of our experience such as medicine, ritual or] religion [...] do not have to be ‘explained’, but simply ‘understood’ as the way of experiencing the world that is natural and unremarkable, strange only to the outsider (2008: 49).”

If epoché is one of the most prominent methodological commonalities between anthropology and phenomenology, then embodiment is the theoretical juncture of the wayfarers in the world of phenomenological anthropology. Following Husserl (1910 – 1911), but primarily indebted to t Merleau-Ponty (1945) (Laplane 2015: 53), phenomenological anthropology rejects theories that are constructed upon the duality of the body and the mind on the one side, as well as those theories which consider the body as a canvas drawn by external circumstances (e.g., culture as discussed in structuralist anthropology or political power as discussed in Foucauldian theories) on the other . Rather, keeping away from identifying the body as corpse that can be “examined, measured, inspected, interpreted, and evaluated in moral, epistemological, or aesthetic terms” (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 89), by insisting on embodiment, phenomenological anthropologists declare that human and non-human living beings not only *have* bodies, but *are* bodies.

Constructing meanings, experiencing the world, and our being in the world is only negotiated through our living body (Knibbe & Versteeg 2008: 50).

Phenomenological Approaches in the Study of Ritual

Scrutinizing rituals by following a phenomenological path is one of the most recent trends in ritual studies which is mainly pioneered by the work of American anthropologist, Thomas J. Csordas and his theory of Charismatic healing (Csordas 1991; 1994; 1999; 2002; 2009). Csordas commenced studying Charismatic healing rituals among Charismatic Catholics and the Navajo, trying to adopt an approach which would be committed to interpretive approaches, as well as clinical concerns, while simultaneously bound to experiential data (Csordas 1988: 122). To do so, he undertakes to apply a specific methodology rooted in Heidegger's hermeneutics and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to construct his own 'meaning-centred' medical anthropology, rather than limiting himself to pursue a 'disease-centred' path (Csordas 1983: 335).

Csordas argues for the necessity of adopting a hermeneutical point of view in order to understand the 'cultural rhetoric of transformation' in healing discourse. His insistence on a rhetorical aspect refers to the point that "healing is contingent upon a meaningful and convincing discourse that brings about a transformation of the phenomenological conditions under which the patient exists and experiences suffering or distress" (Csordas 1983: 360). Relying upon Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body [that considers the body as both a "source of representations [and] a ground of being-in-the-world (Csordas 1999: 184),"] Csordas presents the concept of embodiment as being-in-the-world, as the "intersubjectivity mediated subjective experience of embodied immediacy" (Vásquez 2011: 114).

Charismatic rituals, according to Csordas, involve four types of healing: physical, spiritual, and inner healing, as well as deliverance (Csordas 1983: 336)⁶⁵ which come from their specific approach toward human beings:

“Essential to the Charismatic healing system is a concept of the person as a tripartite composite of body, mind, and spirit. Conceptualization of a tripartite person creates a decisive cultural difference between Charismatic healing and conventional psychotherapy and medicine, insofar as the latter are predicated on a concept of the person as a dualistic composite of body and mind. For Charismatics the spiritual is, paradoxically, ineffable and empirical at the same time. Its ineffability was captured by an informant who said that the reason the spiritual could not easily be discussed was only because we have no language for it, and hence we are forced by default to describe it in the language of emotions. On the other hand, the spiritual is empirical in the sense that phenomena such as evil spirits, or the sense of divine presence, are experienced as real in their own domain, just as are viruses in the somatic and emotional traumas in the mental domain (Csordas 1994: 39-40).”

Csordas notes four elements – disposition, religious experience, negotiation of possibilities and incremental change – as the key features which constitute the therapeutic process. In presenting these elements, Csordas develops his previous study of ritual healing, in which three stages of predisposition, empowerment, and transformation are considered as successive phases of charismatic healing ritual (Csordas 1983: 348).

⁶⁵ While spiritual healing “treats the soul that has been injured by sin,” inner healing “treats emotional hurts or scars that may linger on from afflicted’s past” and in deliverance, “the adverse effects of demons or evil spirits on a person’s behavior and personality are removed by expulsion of the spirits judged to be responsible (Csordas 1983: 336).”

According to his theory of Charismatic healing, these four elements constitute a subsequent process, in which the afflicted, with their own psychological states and their own intertwinedness in symbolic resources and social networks, experiences the sacred. During this religious experience the “assumptive world” of the sufferer would be altered to help in overcoming troubles. However, it is not possible to estimate either the quality or the level of the change from an external viewpoint. Moreover, no one could abide the ‘change’ as an indispensable outcome. As Csordas (1988: 132-138) claims “where no definitive outcome exists and where our concern is to define minimal elements of efficacy [the] insight is all the more important for this discussion.” Thus, Charismatic healing processes develop a reorientation of the afflicted person’s attention to different experiences of their life to make a new phenomenological world for them. It grants the sufferer a “new self-meaning as a whole and holy person” (Csordas 1983: 333).

Csorda’s reformulation of embodiment as an anthropological concept is another important contribution to anthropology. Inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological theory of the body and influenced by Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice, Csordas rejects approaches which tend to consider the human body as an object that should be studied in relation to culture. Alternatively, he considers the human body as the ‘subject of culture’ or in more phenomenological words, “as the existential ground of culture” (Csordas 1993: 6). In Csordas’s approach, like Merleau-Ponty, embodiment points to an existential and universal human condition, in which people live the world through their bodily experiences.

Another important part of Csordas’s work related to studying zar is that on glossolalia as a phenomenon of embodiment. His examinations of glossolalia are based on two key presuppositions: first, that glossolalia appears as a form of nonsense or gibberish; second, that glossolalia speakers consider the common language as an incommensurate means of

communication with the divine (Csordas 1993: 24 – 25). The meaninglessness of glossolalia, as a phenomenological characteristic, makes it only recognizable for the participants. If, following Merleau-Ponty, one verifies the existence of gestural or existential meanings in all common languages, then it would be possible to claim that by its lack of semantic meaning, glossolalia exterminates ‘semantic level of linguistic structures’, fractures ‘the world of human meaning’, melts structures in order to make the birth of new structures possible, and develops the potential of ‘cultural change’ (Csordas 1993: 24 – 31). From the viewpoint of embodiment, glossolalia reveals ‘the unity of body and mind’ in a meaningful shared human world, wherein ‘intelligent bodies’ dwell (Csordas 1993: 31).

Csordas believes that:

religious practice exploits the preobjective to produce new, sacred objectifications, and exploits the habitus in order to transform the very dispositions of which it is constituted. What is out of the ordinary in such situations, and what therefore can be thematized as sacred, is the evocation in ritual of the preorchestrated dispositions that constitute its sense. The locus of the sacred is the body, for the body is the existential ground of culture (Csordas 1993: 39).”

The habitus he talks about does not only relates to the “gestures, postures, utterances, movements, and uncontrollable emotions of joy and empowerment that accompany practices such as praying, praising, singing, glossolalia, or the laying of hands,” but also embraces those “everyday preferences and inclinations, in the need to dress modestly or the rejection of the temptations of alcohol” (Vásquez 2011: 114).

As Vásquez (2011: 115) argues: “central to the process of self-transformation is the intimate, spontaneous, and embodied encounter with divine alterity.” Such strong feelings come from the “preobjective field of embodiment, that field of immediacy where the analytical dualities of subject and object, conscious and unconscious are [temporarily] collapsed” until they are revealed as narratives about the experience of encounters with the sacred (or God) (Csordas 1994: 282).

Csordas’s exquisite viewpoints have inspired several scholars to pursue and develop his phenomenological theory of ritual. For example, in “Ritual as Sensory Communication: A Theoretical and Analytical Perspective,” Bernhard Leistle (2006) investigates the question of meaning in rituals. More clearly, his main concern is to scrutinize whether ritual practices are meaningful. Adopting a phenomenological point of view, Leistle verifies communication, “a process of meaningful exchange between different entities,” as a process that should not be constrained to the human world, wherein social interactions occur. Rather, he introduces communication as a “constitutive feature of all experiential relations man finds himself engaged in (Leistle 2006: 40),” through which one should not speak of “reality exchange.” Rather, through communication, the world communicates itself “by immediately affecting the ways man refers to himself” (Leistle 2006: 48). Such a phenomenological scope describes sensory experiences, then, as mediums, by which man joins the world through meaningful states.

In Manuel Vásquez’s *More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (2011, Oxford UP), he also addresses religion and ritual, bringing phenomenology and Csordas’s considerations into play, but also deploys Rappaport, Ingold, and Gibson’s discussions to construct his own theory of religion. Vásquez’s scientific goal is:

“to lay the epistemological bases for a flexible yet rigorous non-reductive materialistic framework for the study of religion. I sought to overcome disabling dichotomies in religious studies that have privileged beliefs over rituals, the private over the public, text and symbol over practice, and mind and soul over the body. [...] I have argued that we can only appreciate their full materiality if we contextualize and historicize them, if we approach them as phenomena produced, performed, circulated, contested, sacralised, and consumed by embodied and emplaced individuals. Only when we see these discourses, beliefs, symbols, and texts as mobile yet relatively stable artifacts operating among and interacting with other material objects within the time and spaces constructed by the practices of situated individuals and groups can we avoid the threat of textualism, the temptation to make semiotic systems purely self-referential (Vásquez 2011: 321).”

“Religious enaction” as “variable patterns of religion and ritual practices which have a proscriptive (rather than a prescriptive) evolutionary logic, that are compatible with survival (Vásquez 2011: 197),” is the principal term he introduces and discusses. To do so, Vásquez (2011: 199) makes two foundational propositions: firstly, religion and rituals as ways of doing things in the world should not be considered as matters of belief but rather should be studied as matters of practice (Stewart & Strathern 2014: 117). Secondly, religion and ritual are intertwined with sensory experiences and the transformations of space, and “in general to tactile-kinetic matters and to material and expressive culture” (Vásquez 2011: 199).

Rappaport, insisting on the connections between ecology and religion, demonstrates how “religion and the idea of the sacred have played a key role in humanity’s evolutionary

adaptiveness” (Vásquez 2011: 314).”⁶⁶ On the other side, Gibson’s ecology of perception (Vásquez 2011: 118)⁶⁷ and Ingold’s ecology of life should be taken into account to let us understand what the environment affords our bodies:

“ecology is central in any fully materialist reading of religious emplacement...we must understand ecology, not as external reality standing against the subject, but as part of an integrated process of being-with and being-in-the-world. As Ingold (2000: 19) puts it: “[a] properly ecological approach ... is one that would take, as its point of departure, the whole-organism-in-its-environment. In other words, ‘organism plus environment’ should denote not a compound of two things, but one indivisible totality.” This would be a thoroughly embodied ecology, an “ecology of life,” as Ingold terms it, that does not set mind against matter, culture against nature, practice against structure, mobility against emplacement. In this ecology, “we do not have to think of mind or consciousness as a layer of being over and above that of the life of the organisms, in order to account for their creative involvement in the world. Rather, that we may call the mind is the cutting edge of the life process itself...” (Vásquez 2011: 317-318).”

When studying religion and ritual practices, we must recall Rappaport’s discussion about “the simple observation that the human species is, after all, a species among species and that, as such, humanity’s relations with its physical (318) and biotic environments are, like those of other animals, continuous, indissoluble, and necessary” (1979: 61). Subsequently, we should try to avoid from a “disembodied, detached, and purely rational Cartesian subjectivity that has been the foundation of western thinking and has [even] made its way into religious studies.” Thirdly, it is

⁶⁶ According to Vásquez, Rappaport should also be criticized for applying a functionalist approach for studying religion (Stewart & Strathern 2014: 118).

⁶⁷ which should be expanded to include other living beings like plants.

the ‘ecology of life’ which, by making strong connections between basic themes in studying religion like embodiment, practice, and emplacement, enables us to rematerialize religion sufficiently (Vásquez 2011: 319). Finally, it is now possible to revisit the idea of the sacred as the product of embodiment and emplacement, emanating from “affordances that places offer to the culturally in-skilled embodied schemas by means of which these affordances are given salience (Vásquez 2011: 318).”

It is this delicate interpretation of the sacred that causes s Stewart and Strathern (2014: 119) to acknowledge admirably that: “we can only applaud this final Ingoldian analytical position, in large part because in terms of ritual theory it exhibits the best fit with the holism of experience that we constantly encounter in ritual events and their self-emplacement in the cosmos they create and by which they are created.”

Theories in Flight

“I made the world from water,
then filled the water thoroughly with the wind” (Rumi)

“[...] a series of new voices to the discussion, voices that have inaudible up to now, although their clamor pretended to override all debate: the voices of nonhumans” (Latour 2004: 69)

As an apprentice of anthropology, one of the most challenging tasks I experienced was how to begin flying with theoretical winds. The few previous sections in this chapter, I suppose, could best show the uphill roads I have walked to be able to move along the theoretical currents that provided me with perspective for learning from zar practices. This hardship, in my opinion, has roots in three different but related grounds.

First of all, I myself was in a process of moving from positivist sociological approaches towards phenomenological paths in the intersection of zar, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy. Secondly, the more general issue of questioning the authenticity of academic resources for learning from practices that deeply rely on ‘other’ ways of acquiring knowledge for perceiving the environment. This, I believe, can create some of the most severe issues when doing anthropology, especially when researchers move along the famous binary, if not trap, of western and non-western, and scientific and non-scientific, in working with the so-called “pre-modern” communities and cultures. The third, and final, reason pertains to zar itself. I do not think that prevalent epistemological approaches in anthropology are suitable ways to studying zar as zar practices are so “complex, essentially non-verbal, irregular, indefinite, and endless” practices (Jangouk 2020: 79).

This, however, does not mean that either only specific approaches are entitled to talk about zar, or we should not get help from academic knowledge to learn from zar. When doing anthropology of zar, I found it important to avoid any type of theoretical narrowness and epistemological exclusion. Following the approach of eco-phenomenological anthropology, in my opinion, will help to overcome dualities—e.g., scientific and non-scientific, and western and non-western—and will help different approaches flourish with one another in acquiring knowledge from zar.

Let’s talk about the wind and the experience of being-with wind, or what I call entwinedness. From a scientific viewpoint, wind is the invisible flow of gasses, caused by differences in the atmospheric pressure and functions as a natural source with several impacts on human transportation, industry, and recreation on one side, and effects on the earth (erosion and desert dust migration, among others), plants and animals on the other. Although natural sciences have been generally seeing wind as an important source of power, human sciences have often

neglected its crucial role in people's lives. Conversely, throughout history and almost all around the world, people have themselves acknowledged the omnipresent, noteworthy, and meaningful experience of blowing wind, however in their own path which has not been necessarily consistent with the so-called scientific approaches.

Undoubtedly, the initial human experience of the wind and its kin (air, breeze, whirlwind, hurricane, cyclone, etc.) is related to her very first experiences of breathing. In the other words, all human beings (and as we will discuss further other non-human living beings, and even things) are entwined entities. Maybe that is why we are often able to find so many connections between the notions of breath, wind, creation, life, spirituality, divinity, and power among different people in the world: the God of the wind, for instance, was one of the most powerful gods in Mesopotamian civilizations. Likewise, the Navajo believe that life has emerged from the flow of two winds: a white and a dark blue one. Moreover, Berman (2000) believes that Native Americans often refer to the wind when they are mentioning the Great Spirit (Low & Hsu 2007: S3 – S5).

Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament, tells us that “the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being” (2: 7). In Job (33: 4), it is written that “the Spirit of God has made me, the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” In Ezekiel, a major prophetic book in the Old Testament, human bones become alive as the four winds blow on them (Ezekiel 27: 9). In the Quran, the principal Islamic text, God says that he has blown his spirit (breath) into the human being (Quran 15: 29). More related to these debates, Rumi (2011: 5) starts his well-known book in Iranian-Islamic mysticism by considering man as Ney, a local wind instrument (an end-blown flute), which tells the story of departure from the God's divine territory, whenever

it is blown. Many Iranian poets and Sufis have similarly considered wind as a messenger, or even connector, to their beloved ones, whether mundane or spiritual.

The uniqueness experience of the wind – its invisibility while it is felt, heard, even smelt thus perceived, its potency to pass the interior / exterior boundaries, and its tangible impacts on human and non-human living beings and things – has generated an “enormously rich range of ideas about wind and ways of being in wind, negotiating with, controlling and binding, inhaling and expulsing the winds” (Low & Hsu 2007: S2), which usually embraces perceptions about the relatedness of wind to creation, power, birth, divinity, healing, friendship, enmity, illness, death and destruction.

Here, I would like to scrutinize Tim Ingold’s concept of “living in the open” (2007) to better present my thoughts on blowing with the wind. Pursuing some local forms of non-Western (post-enlightenment) knowledge, the pioneers of phenomenological knowledge, and at the same time contrary to the prevailing objective scientific look which equates the world with earth and sky, while separated by the ground, I try to introduce an alternative approach which considers people as inhabitants in the world [instead of exhabitants of the earth]. Current approaches do not see the closed world as a residence (container) constituted of earth and sky and furnished by objects (i.e., whatever is non-human, thus belongs to the nature). Rather, we consider the open weather-world, in which all beings (human and non-human living beings) and things inhabit (Ingold 2001: 123). Dwelling in such a world which begins with our breathing means our immersion in fluxes of the wind and weather (Ingold 2001: 115) that bind all the substances of the earth. It is this immersion that underlies our different forms of living. As Ingold puts it:

There could be no life in a world where medium and substances do not mix, or where the earth is locked inside – and the sky locked out – of a solid sphere. Wherever there is life and habitation, the interfacial separation of substance and medium is disrupted to give way to mutual permeability and binding. For it is in the nature of living beings themselves that, by way of their own processes of respiration, of breathing in and out, they bind the medium with substances in forging their own growth and movement through the world [...]. To feel the wind is not to make external, tactile contact with our surroundings but to mingle with them. In this mingling, as we live and breathe, the wind, light, and moisture of the sky bind with the substances of the earth in the continual forging of a way through the tangle of life-lines that comprise the land [...]. It should come as no surprise, then, that most animic cosmologies attribute supreme importance to the winds,⁴ for not only do the winds give shape and direction to people's lives, they are also creatively (and destructively) powerful in their own right. It is not that they have agency; they are agency. The wind, to repeat, is its blowing, not a thing that blows. (Ingold 2001: 120; Ingold 2007: S19 - S31).

This approach helps us to understand the ground on which various forms of wind perception and wind knowledge are constituted.

For example, it is through such a positioning that, one could find foehn as a “warm, dry and downslope” wind in European Alps, which penetrates mind and body of local inhabitants of Swiss mountains and carries headaches, depression, suicide, and other illnesses (Strauss 2007: S165). In China, qi and feng are two well-known winds, both related to the spirits world. Hsu (2007: S117 – S134) explains how experiences of the self and environment, historically, has led Chinese to see qui – as a wind related to interior – and feng – as a wind related to exterior – associated with breath, spirit, shadow, and song, moving through the bodies and the world, and creating physical and mental suffering. The notion of the wind-based sufferers is not limited to

these regions but are widely accepted in other societies as well. Consider, for example, Rlung in Tibetan medical knowledge: this is the name of an outer wind, breeze, or air that assures the survival by creating inhalation and exhalation, and our mental and verbal activities. The Buddhist approach through the body considers any imbalance in the rlung as a major cause of both psychiatric and somatic disorders (Yoeli-Tlalim 2010: 319).⁶⁸ Some wind disorders can involve a wide range of somatic symptoms,⁶⁹ and psychiatric ailments (Gutschow 2009: 9).⁷⁰ These examples all reveal how our very initial bodily experience of being in the wind, which commences with our first breaths, allows us to be sensitive and respond to a world which is always in flux (Ingold 2007). It is by breathing that we feel enwinded, and by being in the wind that we embody the world and start blowing with the world, other human and non-human living beings, and things. It is by being in the wind that we communicate with the wind, negotiate with it, and conceptualize it as life or death, enemy or friend, sacred or devil, sickness and healing. It is how living is blowing with the wind.

Following this approach goes well along with the anthropological study of zar healing practices. As I have written elsewhere (Jangouk 2020: 68 – 70), in the twentieth century (1980s-1990s), anthropologists began to shift their focus away from existing symbolic, interpretative, and practice-oriented approaches toward embodiment and life ecologies (Gieser 2008: 301). Such shifts were deeply rooted in the work of Martin Heidegger and his concept of Being-in-the-world

⁶⁸ However, such Cartesian distinction is not compatible with Buddhist positioning.

⁶⁹ Including restlessness, frequent sighing, vertigo, tremors, erratic or diffuse pain, lassitude, insomnia, fright on awakening, protruded eyes, frequent moaning, delirium, and anger

⁷⁰ Such as amnesia, mania, catatonia, depression, dysphasia, dyslalia, and hyperactivity

(Heidegger [1927] 2008) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's approach to studying perception and embodiment (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2012). Both works created solid foundations for phenomenological anthropology (Csordas 1990, 2003; Ingold 2000, 2007, 2012). Briefly, Heidegger mentions "Dasein," which is his "label for the distinctive mode of Being realized by human beings" (Wheeler 2018) as Being-in-the-world. Two further explanations are required here: first, Dasein should be understood neither as the individual nor as the biological human being (Heidegger [1927] 2008). Rather, Dasein could be defined as "a way of life shared by the members of some community (Haugeland 2005: 423)." Also, Being-in-the-world as an indispensable feature of Dasein is profoundly intertwined with three others a priori conditions of being (Heidegger [1927] 2008): being-with, being-in, and being there. It is only through within-ness or through relationships with the world that we "are" (Gieser 2008: 301; Wheeler 2018). Heidegger has occasionally applied the term "dwelling" our way of being in the world (Heidegger 2013: 145–61). Building off Heidegger's philosophy, Merleau-Ponty suggests similar ways to explore the connectedness of perception and the world, but along a unique path that includes the body as well. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, our consciousness emerges from our bodily experiences in the world:

"Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body. A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its "world," and to move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation ([1945] 2012: 138–39)."

More specifically, Merleau-Ponty suggests that to perceive, one has to move in the world and perception only grows from experiencing the world tangibly. Being-in-the-world is thus in connection with our movements. A phenomenological approach to "Being-in-the-world of lived

experience” (Gieser 2008: 302) facilitates an anthropological undertaking that is more suitable for the study of moving bodies and their intertwinements with human and nonhuman living beings and things; and this also implies letting myself be moved.

Thomas J. Csordas (1990, 2003) and Tim Ingold’s (2000, 2007, 2012) phenomenological anthropologies⁷¹ have been the main sources of inspiration in my own approach to studying zar. Initially, Csordas’s theory of embodiment reformulates the body “as much a cultural phenomenon as it is a biological entity” (2003: 4); it is the existential ground of culture, an experiencing agent that should be at the center of our anthropological meditations on self, experience, and culture (2003: 3–6). I have learned, from Csordas, how moving bodies create new meanings. This is crucial when learning from healing rituals, and specifically zar practices, as the healing paths show themselves only by the practices of participants moving in the world and moving with the world to tame the devil wind and create the ‘sacred self’ as well as the community of Ahle havā (people of the wind).

I have also learned from his specific approach towards embodiment, that our ‘being-in-the-world’ should be studied as a bodily experience that interrelates all different aspects of life. The first time I was sailing on the sea with some zar drummers, quickly reminded me of Csordas: the waves were moving me exactly in the same way that playing zar songs had made me move! Another important teaching from Csordas, for me, is the importance of non-verbal ways of communication in zar ceremonies. It is almost impossible to learn from zar without paying attention to the important role that glossolalia, or what I would call the language of the winds, plays in communicating with winds and taming them.

⁷¹ Csordas borrows from Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu, while Ingold takes from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty

Furthermore, Ingold's ecology of life introduces human and nonhuman living beings and things as "active materials that compose the lifeworld" (2012: 427) in an unfinished open world that "everything may be something, but being something is always on the way to becoming something else" (2012: 435). The world is therefore not prepared for us beforehand but is rather ceaselessly coming into being around us (Ingold 2007: S24); to inhabit the open world "is to be immersed in the fluxes of the medium: in sunshine, rain, and wind. This immersion, in turn, underwrites our capacities—respectively—to see, hear, and touch" (2007: S30). Humans as living organisms in the environment not only move but are their movements (2007: 437).

In closing this chapter, I would be remiss if I did not mention a recent flight in the sky of knowledge, a flight which blows with flows of philosophy and ecological anthropology. Recently, I have had the chance to become more familiar with the notion of becoming, clearly indicated by Tim Ingold, in *Anthropology Beyond Humanity* (2013). As mentioned earlier, my very first experiences of learning phenomenology were going along with concepts of Being and being-in-the-world, introduced by Heidegger (1927) and followed by so many philosophers and social scientists, and to be more specific, by Tim Ingold (2001). In recent years, however, Deleuzian winds have blown with Ingold's approach, and have added the term "becoming" to his anthropology (Ingold 2011; Ingold 2013).⁷² According to Ingold:

Every animate being is fundamentally a going on in the world. Or more to point, to be animate - to be alive - is to become. Thus, whether we are speaking of human or other animals, they are at any moment what they have become,

⁷² I think that the emergence of "becoming" in Ingold's work might also have some hidden roots in his previous concept of "becoming knowledgeable" by practicing "lineal movement along paths of travel," or "wayfaring (Ingold 2011: 149)."

and what they have become depends on whom they are with [...] Thus, ‘to human’ is a verb [...] humans are humaning (Ingold 2011: 174-175).

[And] my ‘anthropology beyond the human’ would be beyond the human, not multispecies. [This anthropology] tells us that in our inquiries we join with, and learn from, the human and animal becomings (Ingold 2013: 6-9).”

Like the above-mentioned flows of knowledge, this fresh approach can be so helpful in studying zar. And although unintentionally, I think that I have been stepping on such a ‘becoming-with’ path when learning from zar, too.

My encounter with winds began early in my life and kept going with long travels. And like winds, I have traveled far away, and I have changed a lot.



Anchor 4: Ritual Theory

Nowadays, the term ritual is a witching concept for many academics, especially for those who study in religion, the humanities, and the social sciences. Several questions about meanings, roots, structures, and functions of rituals, as well as their existing and emerging forms and the diverse ways in which rituals are considered by different human and probably non-human beings, constitute the bases of such an almost recent interest in studying ritual, which is constantly blossoming regardless of all recently dominant trends of rationalization, modernization, and scientism in a so-called “disenchanted” contemporary world (Stewart & Strathern 2014: 13).

Although practicing ritual has existed for as long as humans have, organized study of ritual began less than two centuries ago (Bell 2009a: 1). From a very specific perspective, ethologists have recently mentioned the possibility of considering ritualization behaviour even among animals (Grimes 2013: xxv), which, at least, could be a remarkable sign for antiquity and significance of ritual practices. Nevertheless, apart from scattered observations of explorers, historians, philosophers, intellectuals, and authors, it is not possible to find any form of ‘studying’ ritual before the medieval period, when Christian clergymen at European universities studied rituals under the supervision of Roman Catholic Church. However, as Grimes (2013: xxv) describes, such ‘study’ was commonly “for the purpose of liturgical revision, preaching, or theological debate [...] from inside a tradition [and] for the benefit of people within it.”

The invention of the term of ritual returns to the nineteenth century, when Europeans started contrasting several aspects of their lives (e.g., religion, culture) with lifestyles of other people around the world. In noticing these differences, they attempted to explain polarities “under a universal category of human experience” like ‘ritual’ (Bell 2009b: 14). Since then, various

theoretical branches have emerged and developed to meditate upon a variety of colourful, mixed, and even disparate areas of ritual practice (Stewart & Strathern 2014: 13).

One key distinction between the nineteenth century paths and the medieval and early modern approaches was the presence and significance of scholarly perspectives, rather than religious (mainly Christian) intentions when studying ritual: this characteristic continued until the twentieth century and gave upper hand to the departments of Anthropology and Religious Studies in scrutiny of ritual beliefs and practices. Following the nineteenth-century scholars, anthropologists began to observe, document, analyze, and interpret various ritual events. During the 1960s and preceding decades of the twentieth-century, researchers in Religious Studies departments, mainly comparativists and religious historians, were also intensely interested in studying ritual. In 1977, the term ‘ritual studies’ was used for the first time, when the inaugural Ritual Studies Consultation was held during the American Academy of Religion’s yearly gathering. Thence, as Grimes mentions:

“Ritual studies is a new field, not because doing ritual or thinking about it is new, but because the effort to consolidate methods from the humanities and social sciences for the study of ritual in a context that is free to be cross-cultural and comparative is new. It is new as a distinct subdiscipline of the academic study of religion. The bulk of written material on ritual is not great if we are liturgically or anthropologically oriented. So, there is an immense need for annotated bibliographies, field studies of specific ritual traditions, typologies and taxonomies, and more fully developed theories. In addition, there is a need for studying the connections between ritual and therapy, theatre, theology, political science, kinesics, and psychosomatic medicine. The time for beginning ritual studies is ripe (2013: xxv-xxvi).”

In this dissertation, however, I am interested specifically in the anthropological study of ritual practice. Studying ritual in – more or less – anthropological ways has its origins in the nineteenth century, when early theorists of ritual began to inquire about the roots of religion by asking whether religion initially originated in human ideas or practices. This central question created an important dichotomy of myth and practice which remained dominant in the field for decades (Bell 2009a: 3). Early theorists of ritual,⁷³ scholars of the myth and ritual schools,⁷⁴ phenomenologists of religion,⁷⁵ and finally followers of psychoanalytical approach in studying religion were all interested in this question. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and his twentieth century adherents⁷⁶ could be considered as the very first groups of intellectuals who started approaching ritual in different evolutionary, anthropological / sociological, and psychological paths, therefore founding fresher currents of knowledge concerning ritual practices (Bell 2009a: 3–6).

In one of the very first explanations of myth, ritual and religion, Friedrich Max Müller described Indo-European myth as poetic statements by which the people had been trying to talk about nature and natural elements, more specifically, the sun. Following his work, Edward B. Tylor, discussed myths as intellectual attempts of primitive minds to philosophize about the world.

⁷³ E.g., Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), Edward B. Tylor (1832–1917), William Robertson Smith (1846–1894) and Sir James George Frazer (1854 – 1941)

⁷⁴ Such as Samuel Henry Hooke (1874–1968) and some Cambridge University Classicists, in particular Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928)

⁷⁵ Like Rudolf Otto (1869 –1937) and later phenomenologists of religion like Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890 –1950) and Mircea Eliade (1907–1986)

⁷⁶ Such as Theodor Reik (1888 –1969) and Bruno Bettelheim (1903–1990)

Building from Tylor's evolutionary framework but giving supremacy to rituals, William Robertson Smith declared that roots of religion should be sought in myths as explanatory principles, but in practices which could bind community members together. His well-known interpretation of the Semitic sacrificial ceremonies demonstrates how Robertson Smith considers the ritual as a "festive communion between humans and gods (Bell 2009a: 4)," based on the notion of eating together (Stewart & Strathern 2014: 14), that consolidates and renews harmony and integration throughout the community. Robertson Smith's most famous student, Sir James Frazer, was initially impressed by Tylor's perspectives about explanatory myths, but little by little, approached his teacher to discuss the primacy of ritual activities over mythical beliefs. While attempting to develop Robertson Smith's interpretation of ritual sacrifice, and still in an evolutionary framework, Frazer portrays rituals as the basic origin of "the most expressive forms of cultural life." As Bell (2009a: 5) mentions: "[For Frazer and his followers,] the universally diffused pattern underlying all ritual is an enactment of the death and resurrection of a god or divine king who symbolized and secured the fertility of the land and the well-being of the people." Such a theme (the ritually dying and reviving god) could be designated as the essence of all mythical notions and folkloric representations (Bell 2009a: 4-5).

At almost the same period but with a different focus, the British scholar Jane Ellen Harrison was studying ancient Greek religion. In her work, she focused on images which were still distinguishable on ancient pots and vases and supposed to be connected to ritual practices. Using a historical method and applying an evolutionary orientation, she presented her theory of ritual practices as sources for myths (Stewart & Strathern 2014: 14). In nineteenth-century Britain, Robertson Smith, and Frazer sparked other scholars' interests in working on the same field which led to the rise of 'the myth and ritual schools' (Bell 2009a: 5-6).

Nevertheless, William Robertson Smith and Frazer's influences were not confined to the nineteenth century Britain. At least two European schools of thought originated from their theories of ritual: in France were Emile Durkheim and the followers of his socio-anthropological school; in Austria were Sigmund Freud and the disciples of the psychoanalytical approach. Each broadly applied Robertson Smith and Frazer's insights to establish and develop their own unique ways of interpreting ritual activities.

Freud found major sources of inspiration in Robertson Smith's insistence on unconscious purposes of ritual practices: "The 'real' purpose and significance of ritual were different at times even from what the actors themselves believed" (Beidelman 1974: 65). Moreover, Frazer's work on dreams influenced Freud's own theories: the latter's approach to consider "primitive" people's religion as explanations of their dreams as well as their environment, even more specifically his representation of totemism as the main form of "primitive" religion (Frazer 1910), helped Freud to construct his own psychoanalytical interpretive theory of repression, unconscious [and religion] which was seeking to reveal different concealed levels of meaning (Bell 2009a: 13). "Primitive" people's rituals, Freud believes, could best acquaint us with the repression of sexual desires as the main spring of obsessive neurosis as well as religious faith: "We cannot get away from the impression that patients are making, in an asocial manner, the same attempts at a solution of their conflicts and an appeasement of their urgent desires which, when carried out in a manner acceptable to a large number of persons, are called poetry, religion and philosophy" (Freud 1975: 10). Therefore, Freud considers ritual as the process of "acting out of the obsessional neurotic's mechanism of repression," and ritual practices as obsessive procedures to pacify tabooed sexual craves and psychic tensions came up by such repression processes (Bell 2009a: 13-14).

In nineteenth-century France, Durkheim followed his interest in studying religious practices, following a unique approach which was totally different from the individualist approaches of Frazer and Freud. Although it is still possible to find common scholarly elements like studying ‘primitive’ people’s religion, keep thinking in a social evolutionist path and undertaking to study basic principles of human behaviour, between these thinkers, rather than adopting mental perspectives to describe ritual in a cultural level, by introducing the concept of ‘collective conscience’ and by discussing notions like solidarity and collectivity, Durkheim attempted to study social aspects of religious life. In his classic book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim (1965 [1915]) tried to study the interconnectedness of society and religion. In his discussion of totemism, when introducing the totem as the main symbol of the society, he argues that during ritual practices, and by worshipping clan’s totem, different groups in fact worship themselves. Therefore, according to Durkheim, worshipping totems during ritual practices is identical to worshipping the society; the notion of God could be interpreted in the same way as the representation of “the highest ideals of those who construct a profile of their deity” (Stewart & Strathern 2014: 28).

Emile Durkheim influenced many of his students, including Marcel Mauss who is well-known for his study of ‘the gift’ as a ritual activity, as well as British social anthropologists like Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955). Radcliffe-Brown is an anthropologist in the early twentieth century, who is mostly well-known for withdrawing from practicing armchair-anthropology and instead studying people through in-depth anthropological work. In other words, what is now known as anthropological fieldwork, which requires “periods of close immediate observation of single societal complexes,” is founded and presented as the essential base of anthropological knowledge by Radcliffe-Brown. Radcliffe-Brown is not the only

anthropologist response for introducing fieldwork, and other anthropologists and their work include Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) and Franz Boas (1858-1942); their studies of Andaman Islanders of the Indian Ocean (Radcliffe-Brown 1964 [1922]; 1965 [1952]), the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea (Malinowski 1922; 1935; 1948), and the Kwakiutl (Boas 1966) are all major contributions. This approach, of concentrating on specific societies with the aim of gathering data to providing firm bases of generalization and theorizing, led to the emergence of ethnography as the most significant form of anthropological research throughout the twentieth century (Stewart and Strathern 2014: 35-36).

Malinowski starts from humans' biological needs and the practical devices people uses to fulfil those needs. According to him, the socio-cultural dimensions of a society should be interpreted as the essential processes by which humans will be able to sustain themselves and remain alive. Therefore, the Trobriand rite of clearing magical garden, which is conducted by the main local sorcerer, *towosi*, contains different ritual activities,⁷⁷ and is finished by clearing the garden with axes that are already fortified by the magic power, best demonstrates the interconnectedness of ritual activities and productive work, which is required for satisfying community members', hence facilitates the enduring of the social life (Stewart and Strathern 2014: 37-38).

Both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown adopt primarily functionalist approaches to discuss ritual. Malinowski's functionalism attempts to study ritual practices in a more individualistic level and with an insistence on psychological characters and motivations. Radcliffe-Brown, following

⁷⁷ like fishing and presenting of fish to the ancestral spirits, looking for "magic bush herbs to bind onto the workers' axes [...] and calling on named ancestors to lead the way and imaging the garden as growing like a child in the mother's womb, as well as 'sweeping away' all troublesome insects and pests" (Stewart and Strathern 2010: 311-321)

Durkheim, prefers to adopt a narrower, concentrated approach which is more concerned about several aspects of ritual practices that function to create and increase different levels of social solidarity. In *The Andaman Islanders* (1964 [1922]: 234), Radcliffe-Brown argues that it is through ceremonies that communities instill sentiments in people. Andaman Islanders, for instance, hold their ritual performances to maintain, elevate and carry forward those emotional temperaments which are required for the survival of the community. However, following Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown (1964 [1922]: 124; 241) believes that predominant goal of ritual practices is to prolong social connections, to preserve social order, through animating the sentiment of attachment to the group.

Another prominent figure in studying ritual is E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973), who, though a functionalist, was also trying to approach both structural and symbolic levels of analysis in studying religious life of the Nuer of southern Soudan. Like the other functionalist scholars that I have mentioned (i.e., Durkheim, Mauss, Malinowski, and Radcliffe-Brown), Evans-Pritchard was interpreting ritual as the fruit of social life; however, he was not considering ritual practices as only symbolic representations of the social order. On the one side, when he criticizes Durkheim for devaluation of religion for the benefit of the society, Evans-Pritchard asserts that avoiding intellectual simplifications are necessary for adequate studies of rituals. On the other hand, criticizing both the individual and collective functionalisms of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown as reduction of rituals to either individual sensibilities or social structure, he insists on the role of environmental, historical, and economic elements that should be considered to provide us with a broader miniature of ritual practices as “highly complex and remarkably sensitive, refined, and intelligent” practices. Accordingly, in the level of symbolic analysis, Evans-Pritchard highlights importance of meaning when studying ritual. Although it is not possible for the

observer to understand the very internal meanings of rites, he believes that anthropologists should undertake to explore the actual meanings and experiences of ritual participants (Bell 2009a: 34-35).

These insights about ritual practices led to an outstanding theory of ritual, presented by British structural-functionalist anthropologist, Victor Turner (1920-1983). Turner's work is mainly based on previous ritual theorists, more specifically van Gennep's description of rites of passage and Gluckman's modifications on Durkheim's as well as van Gennep's understandings of ritual practices. Turner's theory relies upon a more inclusive version of structural functionalism that embraces social conflict as well as social change. Furthermore, in order to present a decent discussion about rituals, Turner warmly welcomes the presence of concepts like "meaning," "process" and "drama" to his theory (Turner 1969).

The main anchors of Turner's theory of ritual, well-known for an adept description of the 'liminal' and 'communitas,' are the scrutinizing of different levels of meaning, as well as considering the trends through which social structures become social processes. Both notions (i.e., liminal and communitas) are, in fact, are borrowed from and developed out of van Gennep's study of successive steps in initiation rites. In a near -Durkheimian approach, van Gennep (1960 [1908]) applies dualities like religion / magic or even the sacred / the profane to discuss sacred characters of human transitions (people's life-cycle passages from one status to another) and the role of rituals to facilitate these human transitions (van Gennep 1960 [1908]: 2-3). According to him "the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another (van Gennep 1960 [1908]: 3)," which normally takes place through passage rituals that embrace three different phases of separation, margin, and incorporation (Stewart & Strathern 2014: 30). Max Gluckman's (1911-1975) theory of ritual

should be considered as a primary source of inspiration for Turner's work, also (Stewart & Strathern 2014: 49); Turner was studying the Ndembu people of Northern Rhodesia as a member of a research group which was directed by Gluckman. Gluckman's contributions to theorizing ritual can be briefly described as a criticism of both Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown's theories. Contrary to those functionalist approaches which depict ritual as representative of unity and cohesion in a community, Gluckman focuses on the omnipresent levels of tension and conflict throughout human societies and explores how "rituals [could be] the expression of complex social tensions rather than the affirmation of social unity." More specifically, he acquaints us with "rituals of rebellion" during which traditional orders for distribution of power are suspended for a limited period; such temporal suspension enables communities to "limit [levels of] discontent, release social tensions [, therefore] channel the structural conflict." Gluckman thus describes rituals as social therapeutic processes which "exaggerate very real conflicts that exist in the organization of social relations and then affirm unity despite these structural conflicts [...]and reinforce the social status quo at the same time [...] thus [rituals] not only represent the structure of social relationships, but [could also] organize those social relationships" (Bell 2009a: 38-39). Inspired by van Gennep and Gluckman, Turner presents his own theory of ritual which is mostly well-known because of two specific concepts: 'liminality' and 'communitas'. While van Gennep's theory mentions three successive stages [disengagement, liminality and reunion (post-liminality)] that are traceable in most rites of passage, Turner's theory concentrates on the second stage, liminality, in a way that is more concerned about social structure and time. According to Turner, liminality is a transitional, 'in-between' state of being, during which people's deep-seated dispositions, in both personal and social levels, would get abscond to provide people with the opportunity of personal / social transformation. Liminality, as a state of

being in between a past and a future, being in a subjunctive mood of ‘no-man’s-land,’ allows us to experience a time of fantasy and drama (Turner 1985). These social dramas could be experienced in forms of breach, crisis, redress, reintegration, or schism which also act as sources to bring about a new social order (Turner 1985: 160).

As discussed earlier, Turner’s theory of ritual attempts to consider society as a dynamic process which is fed with the ceaseless (dialectical) struggle between structure and antistructure; it would be possible to discuss another product of liminal stage. Turner believes that liminality could create *communitas*, another —temporary, structurally-defined, and limited—state, which is a quite structure-less society based on relations of equality and consensus and aversion to the regular social structure. According to Turner, *communitas* embraces an anti-structural identity but functions to maintain and consolidate the social order at the same time (Turner 1985: 163).

Turner’s ritual theory, thus, introduces a different approach toward ritual practices, which insists on different aspects of liminal stages and illuminates their different aspects like appearing as plays, artistic products, sources of change, creativity, and improvisation (by which ritual participants try to cope with indeterminacy of life) and performance⁷⁸ (Turner 1982: 85; Stewart & Strathern 2014: 53).

⁷⁸ Turner considers liminal stages as performances because of several reasons. Firstly, he Points to the patterned styles they normally have; secondly, he mentions that ritual participants are normally “self-consciously aware of their being observed, that they were in fact performing for spectators in contexts of crises (Turner 1985: 180).” According to Turner, this self-awareness is particularly noticeable in especially in the “redressive phase of settling a conflict caused by an initial breach of norm (Stewart & Strathern 2014: 53).”

British anthropologist Mary Douglas (1921-2007) presents another impressive theory of ritual in structural functionalist approach. Following Turner's distinction of 'structure' and 'antistructure,' she develops her own concepts of 'group' and 'grid' to distinguish four different types of societies. According to Douglas (2003: 58), while grid is "order, classification, [and] the symbolic system, [group] is pressure, the experience of having no option but to consent to the overwhelming demands of other people." Thence, we would be able to find four hypothetical societies: those with strong grid and strong group, strong grid and weak group, weak grid but strong group, and finally weak grid as well as weak group (Douglas 2003: 49; 84). Ritual practices are more prevalent in societies with strong grid or strong group where people are dealt with high levels of collectivity and supervision. Accordingly, in those societies, rituals augment grid-like structural as well as group-like antistructural experiences of *communitas* [which is congruent with Turner's theory]. At the same time, despite following a structural functionalist approach quite close to Durkheim's, Douglas discusses rituals as forms of communication that emerge from social structure but also give forms to social relations. Specifically, by exerting "constraining effect on social behaviour," Douglas (2003: 41) describes how ritual practices could also "reproduce the real social relations among human beings" (Bell 2009a: 44).

Douglas's theory of ritual recalls that of famed French anthropologist and structuralist, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009). During the late 1950s and early 1960s [structural-] functionalist analyses of culture were confronted with considerable critics especially in terms of "the structural organization of societies, ritual activities, and cultural symbols" (Bell 2009a: 42). Such critics could provide sources of inspiration for different scholars who were seeking other tracks to meditate about the questions concerning ritual. (Creating and) Following a structuralist approach, as a "student of Marcel Mauss and an inconstant disciple of Durkheim" (Morris 1987:

265), Lévi-Strauss began his studies of religion and ritual by scrutinizing of kinship systems, totemism, and mythology based on scattered ethnographies conducted in the Mato Grosso and the Amazon Rainforest, Brazil.

Lévi-Strauss constructs his theory with the foundational proposition that different social phenomena are “symbolic systems of communication, deriving from and shaped by structures of thought rooted in the human brain” (Bell 2009a: 42). Such an assumption reveals the primary stance of the structuralist approach, which sees social structures as results of different cognitive (unconscious) processes of human brain, rather than considering them as products of human interaction; they are thus situated in the world and accessible to anthropological studies.

Following this path, several deductions await the structuralist anthropologist. First of all, as a result of ‘structures of binary opposition within the brain,’ human beings differentiate between two worlds—natural and cultural— as opposite worlds. Such opposition could be extended to include other dichotomies such as the dichotomy between form and content, nonverbal and verbal, and finally ritual and myth. According to Lévi-Strauss, while myths “turn away from the continuous to segment and break down the world by means of distinctions, contrasts and oppositions [ritual practices are] discrete units [which are] created by mythical thinking and pull them back together as best it can into an experience of reality as continuous and seamless” (Lévi-Strauss 1990: 679). To be clearer, in Bell’s words [according to Lévi-Strauss,] ritual is not a reaction to the world, emotional or otherwise, nor an enactment of the conceptual categories of the cultural group found in myth. Instead, it is a reaction to what thought and myth have done to the world, a rather doomed attempt to restore a mindless continuity to experience. Such a description hardly amounts to a real theory of ritual, and Lévi-Strauss was not especially concerned to develop one; he was content to see ritual primarily as a foil to myth (2009a: 43)

Turner's work on rituals has been a great source of inspiration for many anthropologists and their many approaches. His interpretations of ritual practices, I suppose, could be considered as the hinge that joins modern and contemporary theories of ritual together.

For example, American anthropologist and the founder of symbolic and interpretive anthropology Clifford Geertz (1926-2006), adopts Turner's insight about the hermeneutical reading of ritual symbols and the capacity of ritual as 'a suggestive language for communicating statements about structural relationships' (Bell 2009a: 68); however, he takes it to the arena of symbolic cultural analysis. His definition of religion as "a system of symbols which establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz 1993), could let us know about his great emphasis on the "system of symbols" which "influence people's feelings and motivations" by "formulating coherent conceptions" of "the general order of existence" (Bell 2009a: 66; Geertz 1973: 90). Contrary to earlier twentieth century theories of ritual,⁷⁹ Geertz discusses how cultural forms like religion or ritual "always exist in response to the problems of meaning that arise in real human experiences, such as the problems of evil and suffering" (Bell 2009a: 66). It is, according to him, in rituals that "the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world" (Geertz 1973: 112).

In his considerations about ritual, Geertz grants a significant position to the idea of 'change'.

Following Turner, who is attentive to mention rituals roles in preserving social structures

⁷⁹ More specifically, structural functionalist theories which were seeking to define ritual practices as second-hand phenomena dependent upon social structures and / or only reflections of them,

(liminality, redress, etc.), Geertz believes that rituals could be processes of social change. However, as Bell (2009a: 67) finely describes:

In Geertz's description, ritual enables a group's ethos and worldview—that is, their attitudes and their general concepts of world order (their experiences and their ideals)—to temper and nuance each other. It is a mechanism for the ongoing processes of adaptation and renewal that constitute communities and plays a crucial role in the way in which the sociocultural holism of a living community works. Geertz implicitly contrasted his approach with functionalist analyses when he argued that religion is sociologically interesting not because it describes the social order but because it shapes it.”

Such an approach leads Geertz to an insistence on the importance of ‘meaning’ and ‘everyday experiences’ in rituals. In his famous study of cockfighting in Bali, for example, Geertz elaborates on the ritual process through which “ordinary, everyday experience is rendered in comprehensible ways [therefore,] more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived (Geertz 1973: 443).”

The contemporary study of ritual practice also practices embraces the interconnectedness of ritual and power. For instance, Maurice Bloch applies a Marxist approach with Durkheimian insights to describe ritual as a kind of ideological bewilderment which ‘exercises a particular form of power [in a form that justifies] a power situation [as] a fact in the nature of the world’ (Bloch 1989: 45). Jean Comaroff's comparative research also interrogates this interconnection: in her work on pre-colonial and post-colonial ritual practices among the Zionist churches of Tshidi of South Africa (1979: 196), where she rejects seeing their rituals as “passive accommodation of colonialism,” and contrarily presents them as a “set of highly coded efforts

to control key symbols and defy the hegemonic order of colonialism” (Bell 2009a: 79). Sherry B. Ortner’s work, which is based on the American anthropologist’s fieldwork among the Sherpas in Nepal (1989: 11-18), discusses the ways in which “human practices produce and negotiate relationships of power” (Bell 2009a: 84), thence, preserve and re-constitute existing cultural structures.

There is a recent change in the study of ritual theory relating to the growth of ecological concerns when studying ritual from an anthropological perspective. This trend was pioneered by the American anthropologist Roy Rappaport (1926-1997), who founded his ecological ritual theory based on his fieldwork among people of New Guinea and their different rituals such as ‘*kaiko*’, the major pig festival among Maring-speaking peoples of New Guinea (Rappaport 2013 [1969]). Studying those ritual practices as well as other daily routines of different peoples let Rappaport notice that among specific tribes in New Guinea, domestic pigs were slaughtered exclusively during ritual processes. Such slaughters happen in a limited number of circumstances, such as war times [during which, killed pigs would be eaten solely by the band of combatants] or most notably, whenever the number of pigs would highly increases, so the tribes need to spend inordinate food and work to nourish them. Discussing ‘*kaiko*’ as an interwoven series of ritual practices which binds several elements like tribe’s people, their land and material world, animals, plants and rival tribes, Rappaport describes how ritual functions “to maintain an undegraded environment, limits fighting to frequencies which do not endanger the existence of the regional population, adjusts man-land ratios, facilitates trade, distributes local surpluses of pig throughout the regional population in the form of pork, and assures people of high quality protein when they are most in need of it” (Rappaport 1993: 41). Thence, Rappaport’s ecological theory of ritual considers ritual as connate process of ‘much larger and embracing cultural

ecosystems' which help to adjust the bond between people and their environment and consequently preserve 'a delicate but essential environmental balance' (Bell 2009a: 29).

Pierre Bourdieu's "theory of practice" also offers an influential, recent perspective on ritual. Contrary to the mainstream theories of classical and early twentieth century social science, Bourdieu believes that when discussing abstractions like social structures, it is not possible to talk about them as realities which exist without human acts. In other words, Bourdieu advocates for the type of social science which keeps out of studying abstract concepts but rather aspires to studying the practical ways⁸⁰ through which people embody and recreate these abstractions (like social structure, etc.) as cultural values. Thus, according to Bourdieu, social science should, initially and principally, pay particular attention to human practices. To do so, Bourdieu introduces and reshapes the concept of habitus. In one of his earliest definitions, Bourdieu (1977: 95) describes habitus as "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems." He later tries to provide another definition of the term:

"The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment [...] produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations. [The] practices produced by the habitus [...] are the strategy-generating principle enabling

⁸⁰ Often implicit and even unconscious

agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations (Bourdieu 1977: 72).”

However, his last definition of habitus, probably, will be more illustrative for the reader of his work:

“[habitus could be defined as] systems of durable, transposable dispositions, *structured structures* predisposed to function as *structuring structures*, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the *operations* necessary in order to attain them. Objectively “regulated” and “regular” without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (Bourdieu 1990: 53).”

In order to get closer to Bourdieu’s approach to rituals, and following Bell (2009a: 78), we can briefly and practically describe habitus as the “set of dispositions by which people give shape to social traditions or, in another formulation, as the structured and determined attitudes that produce structuring and determining practices” (Bell 2009a: 78). Such a definition could delicately bridge between the theory of practice and studying ritual. Ritual studies, first of all, should avoid from considering the prescribed, the unchanging or the subjective forms. On the contrary, what should be studied is “the act itself” and its usually latent chief substratum which is the “socially informed body” (Bourdieu 1977: 124).

Secondly, rituals are “strategic practices for transgressing and reshuffling cultural categories in order to meet the needs of real situations” (Bell 2009a: 78). Interpreting different ritual practices among the Kabyle of Algeria, Bourdieu discusses how the ‘collective’ feature of ritual as well as

its “carefully delegated forms of authority [and] complex and judiciously euphemized symbolism,” allow people to temporarily steer the natural order of life. Marriage ceremony that is followed by deflowering of bride, for instance, has the function of permitting the removal of virginity, which is considered as a change in an initially natural manner (Bell 2009a: 78).

Thirdly, paying attention to ritual practices like ‘gift giving’ as representative of “orchestrated improvisation” and “sense of the game” (Bourdieu 1990: 176) in much social practices (Silber 2005: 176), Bourdieu criticizes the structuralist views for focusing on reciprocal/egalitarian functions of the practices. Rather, he believes that “phenomena such as [...] the exchange of gifts, words, or women, is to ignore the structural ambivalence which predisposes them to fulfill a political function of domination in and through performance of the communication function” (Bourdieu 1977: 14). That is to say that ritual practices like gift exchange are complex ways which embrace conflict, challenge, and supremacy (Nicolaescu 2010: 7-8), function as means of “political dominance” and “social and cultural jockeying,” and consequently work as mediums for “the negotiation of power in social relationships” (Bell 2009a: 79).

CHAPTER SIX

Towards a Phenomenology of Zar

Dancing with Prophets, Praying with Jinns

We have just finished the *Eṣā* prayer, going out of the mosque, when I start talking to Faḵr about the story of Saul and David. In the story, Saul is being tormented by an evil spirit sent by God and is looking to find and listen to a piece of music that can calm him down (1 Samuel 16: 14 – 23 New International Version).

I heard the story of Saul and David from a member of my cohort in University of Ottawa PhD program a few years ago, and by telling the story to Faḵr, I am trying to persuade him that even prophets have applied music to heal people or at least help them feel better. As the follower of a tough reading of Islam, Faḵr considers zar ceremonies infidel and perverted practices, so does not participate in them and rarely even talks about them, and even then only reluctantly: “during the ceremony they play music, sing and dance ... they worship the winds while they must adore only God ... and those winds make them mix with one another: I have heard that when their winds come down men and women touch each other and dance together ... this is neither Islamic nor morally correct and will never become Islamic and correct,” he says.

Faḵr listens to the story, but while I am waiting for a sharp criticism of musical healing, he points out that I can find David’s story in Quran too: “in the Noble Quran God tells us to think of David. God had committed the mountains to glorify with David because he was an obedient man. God also had given him a nice voice so he could gather the birds by singing. He used to pray and exalt God with mountains and birds.”

“Glorifying God with mountains and birds?” I ask.

“Yes, of course! He knew how to talk to mountains and as a matter of fact, Solomon inherited the knowledge of communicating with animals from him.” Faḵr responds and starts whispering Quran verses: “And Solomon succeeded David. He said, “O people, we were taught the language

of birds, and we were given from everything. This is indeed a real blessing.” To the service of Solomon were mobilized his troops of sprites, and men, and birds—all held in strict order. Until, when they came upon the Valley of Ants, an ant said, “O ants! Go into your nests, lest Solomon and his troops crush you without noticing.” He smiled and laughed at her words, and said, “My Lord, direct me to be thankful for the blessings you have bestowed upon me and upon my parents, and to do good works that please You. And admit me, by Your grace, into the company of Your virtuous servants.” (Quran 27: 16 – 19, Clear Quran edition).

I am astonished by Fakr’s comments about Solomon. Solomon is important to my research not only for his knowledge of communicating with birds and other animals, but also for two other reasons: his ruling over sprits and jinns, and his control over the wind

According to Islamic-Iranian mythology, Solomon was ruling sprites and jinns:

“[so we placed] [...] the demons - every builder and diver [at Solomon’s service]. And others fettered in chains. “This is Our gift; so give generously, or withhold; without account.” (Quran 38: 37 – 39, Clear Quran edition);” “[...] And there were sprites that worked under him, by the leave of his Lord. But whoever of them swerved from Our command, We make him taste of the punishment of the Inferno. They made for him whatever he wished: sanctuaries, statues, bowls like pools, and heavy cauldrons. “O House of David, work with appreciation,” but a few of My servants are appreciative. Then, when We decreed death for him, nothing indicated his death to them except an earthworm eating at his staff. Then, when he fell down, it became clear to the sprites that, had they known the unseen, they would not have remained in the demeaning torment (Quran 34: 12 – 14, Clear Quran edition);” “To the service of Solomon were mobilized his troops of sprites, and men, and birds—all held in strict order” (Quran 27: 17, Clear Quran edition).

Solomon is considered as one of the most important prophets in Iranian culture; there are many temples, mountains, and hills with his name, and he is the subject of many poems and stories.

Tak̄te Soleyman (Solomon's throne), for instance, is a World's Heritage Site in northwestern Iran, in which, according to Iranians' beliefs, Solomon used to imprison sinner sprites.

Solomon also had the power to control the wind. During my childhood, I used to read Rumi's Solomon and Azrael every now and then: "Early in the morning a man goes to the palace of Solomon. He is so anxious that his lips have become white, and he has a pale face. Solomon asks him: "Why are you looking like this?" And he responds: "I saw Azrael [the angel of death in Islamic culture] earlier today and he scared me by staring at me with a frightening look that was full of rage." The man continues: "please, ask the wind, to take me to India so that I can save my life." Solomon commands the wind take the man to India. The next day, Solomon meets Azrael and asks: "why do you give God's creatures hard time? Why did you look at a faithful good man who is obedient to God in such a disturbing manner? He was so scared and asked me to help him to escape to India." Azrael responds Solomon: "He misinterpreted my look. I was not looking at him in anger. I was surprised because God had ordered me to take his life in India, so I wondered how, unless he had wings, could he get to India so soon."

Moreover, according to Quran,

And for Solomon the wind – its outward journey was one month, and its return journey was one month. And We made a spring of tar flow for him [...] (Quran 34: 12, Clear Quran edition);" "We tested Solomon, and placed a body on his throne; then he repented. He said, "My Lord, forgive me, and grant me a kingdom never to be attained by anyone after me. You are the Giver." So We placed the wind at his service, blowing gently by his command, wherever he directed (Quran 38: 34 – 36, Clear Quran edition);" "And to Solomon the

stormy wind, blowing at His command towards the land that We have blessed.

We are aware of everything” (Quran 21: 81, Clear Quran edition)

If he had the power to communicate with, or to have control over spirits, jinns and winds, was prophet Solomon not a *bābā zar* too?

I have been trying to find an answer to a specific persistent but principal question since 2006, when I started feeling interested in working on *zar* as a potential topic for my PhD project: why do people believe in wind possession? I do not think it is an out of mind question as, according to my own experience, after knowing about *zar* practices, other people feel similarly. As a student of anthropology working on the ritual, I am regularly asked two questions whenever talk about my PhD project: do I personally believe in *zar*? And why do *zar* practitioners think they are possessed by a devil wind and nothing else? This second question often refers to the role of the wind in making people feel afflicted or healed. In these lines, I try to find a way to reveal the inconspicuous, however strong, connections between blowing winds, Qeshm inhabitants’ living paths, their experiences of being possessed, afflicted, and healed. To do so, I suggest, we should pay attention to two different but at the same time interrelated aspects: the timeless and placeless human experience of the wind and the more specific relationships of the Island inhabitants with blowing winds.

According to a well-known belief prevalent among some inhabitants of Qeshm Island, the Persian Gulf has been the origin of the primitive man, and sailing knowledge started with them making simple rowboats and trying to oar on the ocean, first with hands and then with paddles, , to find out the secrets of the sea. However, during my first stay in the Island, I was told by a

researcher of ancient Iran that as stated in Shahnameh (*Šāhnāme*),⁸¹ Jamshid (*Jamšid*), the fourth king (*šāh*) of Persia, has been the founder of sailing knowledge among Iranians: “ then [Jamshid] used a dhow to cross the sea and go from one country to another, quickly” (Ferdowsi, Shahnameh 5.1).⁸²

Although the majority of Qeshm sailors believe the first ship has been made by Noah the prophet, so he was the first mariner among human beings, archaeological and historical research demonstrate that people of southern coastal regions of Iran have started sailing since six-thousand-year BC (Nourbakhsh 2002: 331). They used to celebrate *Noruze Sayyād*⁸³ on the first day of August every year, in which people used to decorate boats and take them to the sea, not to fish but to pray; give foods, fruits, and flowers to the sea; and sing and dance to celebrate the day and to make the sea satisfied and generous for the following year. According to *Bāb Ābed*, one of the oldest Qeshmi sailors, “every sailor must have a sufficient knowledge of astronomy, the moon’s position in the sky and oceanic paths and distances, as well as different winds including their names, intensities, directions, blowing periods and intention, which may lead to devastation or rescue of a ship.” The navigation knowledge of Qeshmi sailors has been based upon four main

⁸¹ Shahnameh, The Book of Kings, is an epic / composed by Iranian poet, Ferdowsi (Férdosi), Iranian poet between nine hundred seventy-seven and one thousand and ten AD. Concentrating on Iranian kings and heroes the book talks about mythical, legendary, and historical events, from primordial times to the Arab conquest of Iran in the seventh century AD
(<https://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/shahnameh/>)

⁸² According to Shahnameh, Jamshid was the founder of medical knowledge in ancient Iran, too.

⁸³ The New Year of the fishermen which is still celebrated in some regions of southern Iran.

paths: to the front, to the wind, back to the wind, and to the back (Karimi 2011: 108), which demonstrates the importance of the wind for assisting sailors to find their ways in the ocean.

During a warm evening in the island, when the hot and humid weather did not let us do anything but stay in front of the air conditioner, drinking tea and chit-chatting, Milad, a young Qeshmi fisherman, told me about the maritime winds by which Qeshmi sailors live:⁸⁴

Nobody knows the exact number of the blowing maritime winds but there are almost eight most well-known winds blowing in the region: *Šemāl*, *Sab’e*, *Teriye*, *Toveybe*, *Ğoyub*, *Ğows*, *Leymer* and *Lejzeb*. Every wind has its own characteristics, timing, direction, and effect. *Ğoyub*, for instance, comes (blows) between March 30th and April 30th. It is accompanied by dust often, and showers sometimes, starts suddenly and blows for only a short period of time. *Ğoyub* is able to make huge waves so has the power to bigger ships, dhows and smaller boats, as well as people. *Ğows* and *Šemal* are two well-known winds that blow throughout the year. While in summer, *Ğows* brings intolerable warmth and humidity, in winter rainwater clouds come with this wind. Inversely, *Šemāl* always brings the cold weather in summer. They are usually calm and blow in ten-day periods but might become cruel and harm people and ships too. *Leymer* and *Lejzeb* blow from mid-October to beginning of November. Blowing in ten-to-twelve-day periods, these two winds are deceiver and liar. They are both aggressive and brutal, disturb the sea and unsettle the water, so could be deadly and destroyer.”

When considering the maritime winds and sailors’ categorizations of the blowing winds, we should not neglect to pay attention to the common Islamic texts and stories about the wind which

⁸⁴ Maritime winds are “the winds that sailors know and communicate with, in order to plan to hunt, trade and travel on the sea, to avoid the danger and to come back to their homes safe and sound.”

are prevalent in the region. The majority of people of the Island are faithful Muslims who pray in mosques five times a day, read Quran regularly, and talk about and listen to Islamic teachings routinely. As one of the most distinguished creatures of God, wind occupies an outstanding position in Islamic teachings. In Quran, God, not only swears to wind, but mentions the wind as an important instrument in his hands, by which he exerts power in the world: “We send the fertilizing winds; and send down water from the sky, and give it to you to drink, and you are not the ones who store it” (Quran 15: 22, Clear Quran edition). Or: “So We unleashed upon them a screaming wind, for a few miserable days, to make them taste the punishment of shame in this life; but the punishment of the Hereafter is more shameful; and they will not be saved” (Quran 41: 16, Clear Quran edition). Even more related to our discussions, in Quran, God talks about wind as motivator of ships in the sea: “And of His signs is that He sends the winds bearing good news, to give you a taste of His mercy, and so that the ships may sail by His command, and so that you may seek of His bounty, and so that you may give thanks” (Quran 30: 46, Clear Quran edition). Or: “It is He who transports you across land and sea. Until, when you are on ships, sailing in a favorable wind, and rejoicing in it, a raging wind arrives. The waves surge over them from every side, and they realize that they are besieged. Thereupon they pray to God, professing sincere devotion to Him: “If You save us from this, we will be among the appreciative” (Quran 10: 22, Clear Quran edition). Also, in Quran, wind is informer of coming rain showers, as well as the fertilizer and the dryer of plants, trees, and gardens.

Moreover, both Islamic and Iranian Islamic mysticisms detail the role of the wind in the world. According to Islamic mystical teachings, different winds connect separate individuals together, bring a beloved’s message to the lover, and attach exiled human-beings to their relatives, God, angels and other spirits, non-human living beings and things, who ‘are’ / exist in the world.

Yusof, an old sheikh and a former mullah of one the Island's mosques, taught me that different winds could have different colors and smells. Referring to Rumi, he told me about seven distinct groups of winds that spread kindness, grace, mercy, happiness, familiarity (attraction), fear and regret throughout the world, therefore keep all of God's creatures prepared to receive his affection, favor and forgiveness.

Falling Sick is Learning to Move

In June 2019, I got sick. The issue started after a whole day working on my thesis in my supervisor's office at university of Ottawa, feeling hungry and going to a Middle Eastern restaurant for the first time, to get a beef wrap. Three to four hours after eating the food I started feeling cold, which was weird on a warm June evening. My first response was trying not to pay attention to it, but shortly after, that feeling cold turned into chill. I checked the weather app on my cell phone which was showing a temperature of 28°C and when sweating and nausea showed up too, I got sure that I had become sick.

After a quick review on my daily activities, I concluded that I was experiencing food poisoning. This led me to follow a series of self-treatment paths such as avoiding food for a few hours to let my stomach empty, then eventually drinking only water. The next day, I felt better, however the same issues appeared again in the evening, although weaker, so I thought I was getting better. My health situation was getting better during the third day, but a couple of hours after the midnight I woke up with severe sweating and nausea. On my way to the bathroom, I lost both my vision and hearing and fell on the floor. After a couple minutes of remaining blind and deaf and vomiting without anything coming out of my stomach, I decided to go to hospital. The physician who examined me at the hospital – as well as the other physicians whom I met during the following weeks – did not have any idea about my problem. He only asked me what I had done

that made me feel sick, then rejected my food poisoning diagnosis, as well as my latter suggestion of nervous roots of the problem, and lastly referred me for consecutive medical tests which could not show anything specific about my problems. A couple of weeks after, I was told that probably, I was having a viral infection, and the only thing I can do for now is to wait and, hopefully, the illness period of infection ends. Having to stay in bed most of the time and trying to cope with fatigue, body pain, headaches, muscle spasm, unusual sweating, and nausea for almost a month was not something ideal for a PhD candidate at a Canadian university who had just finished his busiest semester ever – filled with his first experience of teaching a class of almost 170 students – who had planned to concentrate on writing his thesis and enjoy the summer. However, this was only one aspect of my experience of being sick. But do sickness, becoming ill, and being in pain, have any other aspects except beyond discomfort and suffering?

Feeling pain and becoming ill are universal experiences common between human and non-human living beings. As far as our knowledge demonstrates, at least for humans, illness could be considered as an intense confrontation with the unusual which reveals itself in the early years of our lives. My own experience of pain-illness-death was dense and started quickly. My parents' insufficient childcare skills led to a series of physical problems, including but not limited to falling down the stairs, chronic styes (a bacterial infection in my eyelids), and a severe internal burn caused by eating powder drain cleaner during my first three years. Around the same age, I noticed my grandmother's mysterious tool, an asthma inhaler that she was using to treat her shortness of breath and endless coughing. And only a couple of years later, my most explicit experience of illness and death happened after my cousin's death, which took place after a five-month stay at our home to cure his kidney failure. Moreover, I was born in Iran in 1981, just a little bit more than a year after the start of the Iran-Iraq war which lasted for eight years. This

tarred my childhood with the experience of shooting, explosion, bombing, warning alarm, air attack, wounded bodies, broken arms, bleeding abdomens, amputated legs, and smashed skulls.

Direct physical contact is not the only ways through which people find out about pain, illness, and death. Our humanity is filled with eternal meditation on related themes: since humanity has existed, thinkers, poets, prophets, philosophers, mystics, and artists who have been contemplating human existence have had to ponder about experience of illness and suffering. Persian poetry, as the most traditional and prevalent cultural medium among Iranians, is laden with tales and allegories about sickness, suffering and healing. Being raised by a musician dad, by providing me with the opportunity of listening to various poems, stories and sometimes their interpretations, gave me a chance to be exposed to such thesaurus too.

But getting back to our earlier question concerning different aspects of being in pain and bodily sufferings! Although our experiences of illness usually tag along with emotional and physical harm, feeling weak and enervative, getting restricted and deprived from some of our ordinary daily activities, and require us to spend time, money, and effort to retrieve the healthy situation, thus often carry negative judgments and interpretations, as Carel (2016: 3-5) argues:

Illness is existentially and intellectually demanding and potentially rewarding. [It challenges] our most fundamental beliefs, expectations, and values [so could be considered] as a philosophical tool. Through its pathologizing effect illness distances the ill person from taken-for-granted routines and habits and thus reveals aspects of human existence that normally go unnoticed. [...] Illness changes how the ill person experiences the world and how she inhabits it. Such a dramatic and overarching change to experience deserves, or often simply demands, philosophical attention. A common reaction to a diagnosis of an illness is a sense of meaninglessness and despair; such an event challenges the

ill person to reflect on her life and search for ways of regaining meaning. As such, illness is one path leading into philosophical reflection by calling us to question our understanding of the world, fundamental beliefs, habits, and expectations.

As a matter of fact, considering illness as nasty and unsightly has more modern roots. In her doctoral research, Victoria Sweet (2006) shows that migraines, as well as short spells of flashing of lights in the eyes of a nun and mystic in the twelfth century, used to be considered as religious ecstatic experiences. According to Islamic teachings, Prophet Muhammad used to hear a bell ringing in his ears, to feel weakness, to fall down in faints and to experience semi-epileptic seizures which were expressive of revelation coming down to him. These are two good examples that demonstrate different cultures in different periods of time could have different interpretations of illness experience.

While contemporary western society values being healthy and young, devalues aging, and considers illness as fragility and deficiency (Frank 2010), some other cultures consider human experiences of aging and sickness as doors which open to other social resources such as wisdom and knowledge. One of the very first things I noticed about Bāb Isā after the first time I met him was his missing teeth. I could not understand why the most famous and capable healer in the region had not tried to fix his teeth, so I asked one of his pupils, cautiously, about the healer's missing teeth. He was surprised by my question, and I was also asked a question in return: "why should he try to fix his teeth?" Our further conversation let me understand that missing "a couple of teeth" is a sign of "gaining valuable things like much more knowledge and empathy." As mentioned earlier, being possessed by different types of winds is an important factor in becoming bābā / māmā zār. The more illness you have coped with, the better knowledge of taming winds you have acquired. These instances are compatible with Havi Carel's improvement

of existing literature on the phenomenology of illness, where instead of limiting herself to current ‘loss models of illness’ (see Toombs 1987; 1992, 1993), she suggests a ‘loss/gain’ interpretation in studying illness. Illness gains “might include personal or spiritual insight, moral maturity, edification, and emotional clarity, as well as an ability to focus on what is most important and let go of other things (Carel 2016: 67).” With my own illness, part of the gain revealed itself to me when I was resting in the bed and meditating about the unknown roots of my health condition: “is my body infected by unknown viruses?” “Am I poisoned with bacteria, parasites or viruses that physicians cannot diagnose?” Or “possibly I am possessed by a wind?” I was swinging along these questions when two further queries came occupied me: “why do I relate my illness to the food I had eaten that day, being in a rush and not washing my hands after using a public washroom in a shopping mall, ?” and “why do I only think to two possibilities, which are totally different, but at the same time so familiar to me?” To be more specific, I asked myself why I was relating my bodily issues to the activities I had on that day, and why I was restricting the origins of my bodily issue to only biomedical interpretation and the medical knowledge I had grasped by studying zar healing rituals. I believe that phenomenological theory in general, and phenomenology of health, pain, and illness in particular, will be appreciably fruitful to respond to these questions.

Towards A Phenomenology of Pain and Illness

If phenomenology insists on acquiring a first-person perspective to study the lived experience, meanings which are improvised in people’s everyday lives, then phenomenology of medicine should be able to relate the pain and illness we undergo to our lived experience, directly.

Different interpretations of pain and illness as well as different healing ways we follow should be considered as rooted in our everyday life experiences. The experience of pain and illness, as well

as the ways through which we try to respond to these experiences, are omnipresent among all human beings and animals, probably plants too, and all of us can remember some considerable moments of dealing with bodily issues throughout our lifetimes. Ironically, having deep roots in our bodily existence, pain, suffering and illness has mainly been studied only as physiological processes belonging to the different fields of biomedical sciences. Viewing the human body as “a subject of scientific investigation” and concentrating on “biological dysfunction, its causes, and treatment,” as well as “increasing reliance on medical technology for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment” has led to a narrow interpretation of human body as well as pain, suffering and healing experiences which seeks to understand “discrete mechanisms and functions in detailed, if piecemeal” ways (Carel 2016: 15-16).

Following Merleau-Ponty, phenomenological paths insist on the embodied aspect of human existence. This means that our experience is primarily an experience of “fleshly sensual” existence. This said, experiencing severe pain, chronic suffering and illness, and disability, could alter our embodied experience greatly (Carel 2016: 40). If our bodies are not only biological organisms, and if our experiences of pain and illness have roots in our fleshly sensual existence on the one side, and could change our existence on the other side, then biomedical sciences cannot reveal so many other aspects of having pain, being in illness and trying to find healing paths to cope with our bodily issues. Focusing on biological aspects of pain and disease could be meaningful, but only from a third-person perspective. As Svenaeus (2011: 334) writes:

“the demonstration that a previously unknown virus is responsible for multiple sclerosis (MS) might become meaningful for me, particularly if I suffer from an illness diagnosed as MS; however, in that case, it becomes meaningful primarily because it finds a place in my life as something that matters to me and my future projects (for instance, the discovery may lead to a new treatment

for MS). The meaningfulness for me of the discovery of the virus, in other words, will depend on whether or not I suffer from the associated illness (or somebody close to me does). [...] Yet the discovery of the virus could also be said to be meaningful in the sense that the scientific hypotheses and experiments involved in its discovery are understood by me. The discovery may allow me to understand the workings of this virus in relation to the workings of other biological entities – to understand a little bit more of the complex causal network of nature, which is the subject of scientific explanations and predictions. But this meaningfulness is different from that in the first scenario, in which the discovery of the virus was connected to the problems and prospects of my everyday life (which could, of course, include a general love for mankind in which I care about anybody affected by MS). The meaningfulness of the second scenario is the peculiar meaningfulness of the natural sciences – enterprises that, despite their origins in human culture, approach nature as something independent of human patterns of understanding.”

But how do phenomenological paths, specifically medical phenomenology, help us to understand a first-person approach towards the experience of pain, illness, and healing? What do they tell us about experiences that are so physiological, personal, and subjective on the one side, and deeply cultural, bodily, varied and ever-changing on the other side?

Let's start with the experience of the pain. When a friend tells us about having pain in the back, their issue seems to be a personal, physical one and at the same time vague and dumb problem with physiological roots that should be investigated through medical processes and treated by applying medical practices. In *Being and Nothingness* (1992 [1943]), French existential phenomenologist Jean Paul Sartre talks about our experiences of pain. To review his discussions

very briefly, let me start with a question and a famous quote: when was the last time you think about your body?

I went upstairs, and found my grandmother, not so well. For some time, without knowing exactly what was wrong, she had been complaining of her health. It is in moments of illness that we are compelled to recognize that we live not alone but chained to a creature of a different kingdom, whole worlds apart, who has no knowledge of us and by whom it is impossible to make ourselves understood: our body. (*The Guermantes Way*, Chapter one)

I think Proust's quote could be correct most of the time. We usually live our body and do not think of / about it. We normally walk and breathe without noticing our feet moving and our hearts beating. We eat without noticing our teeth chewing the food or our internal organs helping us to digest it. If there is no issue with our ordinary bodily activities, there is apparently no reason to think of our bodies. My ears are often clogged, and most of the time, when trying to listen to the world's sounds, I start paying attention to the change in my hearing ability and instead think about my ears. Getting back to the case of chewing food with rotten teeth, we feel pain and notice a kind of weirdness in a body part or bodily function (e.g., when trying to bite). Such experience of body resistance, which could be informer of pain or other bodily issues such as restlessness, fatigue, nausea, chill, dizziness, among others, will guide us to two concluding points which are key aspects of Sartre's discussions: First, the experience of pain (or any other type of body resistance) is intertwined to our activities. Second, being in pain might transform our perception of the world thence can open up other realms of experience to us. In "The Body" section of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre's discussion of phenomenology of self and embodiment

is elaborated on the example of the pain in the eyes when reading a book at night. Trying to understand our experience of becoming ill, Sartre, gradually but with careful detail, describes the experience of being in pain:

“My eyes are hurting but I should finish reading a philosophical work this evening. I am reading. The object of my consciousness is the book and the across the book the truths which it points out. [...] The words slip by one after the other before me; I *make them slip by*. [...] Yet at the very moment that I am reading *my eyes hurt*. Let us note first that this pain can itself be *indicated* by objects of the world, i.e., by this book which I read. It is with more difficulty that the words are detached from the undifferentiated ground which they constitute; they may tremble, quiver, their meanings may be derived only with effort, the sentences which I have just read twice, three times may be given as “not understood,” as “to be re-read.” But these same indications can be lacking – for example, in the case when my reading “absorbs me” and when I “forget” my pain (which does not mean that it has disappeared since if I happen to gain knowledge of it in a later *reflective* act, it will be given as having always been there. [...]) Pain in the eyes is distinguished from other possible pains inexpressibly and by its very being. This pain, however, does not exist anywhere among the actual objects of the universe. It is not to the right or to the left of the book nor among the truths which are revealed through the book nor in my body-as-object (the body which the other sees and which I can always partially touch and partially see), nor in my body-as-point-of-view as the latter is implicitly indicated by the world. Neither must we say that the pain is an “overprint” or that it is like a harmony “superimposed” on the things which I see. Those are images which have no meaning. Pain then is not in the space. But neither does it belong to objective time; it temporalizes itself, and it is in and through this temporalization that the time of the world can appear. What then is this pain? Simply, the translucent matter of consciousness, its *being-there*, its attachment to the world, in short, the peculiar contingency of the act of reading. The pain exists beyond all attention and all knowledge since

it slips into each act of attention and of knowledge, since it is this very act in so far as the act is without being the foundation of its being (1943: 436-438).”

Sartre’s description opens (at least) two important strands of thought related to zar healing practices. First, being in pain could change our world, our being and our perception of the world of human and non-human living beings and things. In his example of feeling pain in the eyes when reading a book, one could have a hard time to think, to understand, or even to concentrate as their ‘being’ is totally altered by experiencing pain. On the other hand, the letters could become confusing, the phrases could become unclear and vague, and the text could become hard (painful) to understand. Second, Sartre considers pain as a mooded side of our existence which is bound up in worldly routine performances. In other words, the experience of being in pain or ill is intertwined with our daily activities. If we are suffering from a headache when reading a book, even a short distraction, such as brewing some coffee, cooking, or doing yoga practices might alleviate the pain. As Svenaeus (2015: 112) describes: “pain is at this pre-reflective level a lived pain, which does not show itself as a sensation in one’s own body but rather as a pain belonging to the very activity of reading. The pain is not known – not focused upon as an in-itself – but still there in my pre-reflective way of being.” Sartre’s configuration of pain as a melody [the nature of pain as a melody] (Sartre 1992: 466; Svenaeus 2015: 113) that is played in sick person’s life in different tones and tempos is very close to the interpretations of health, sickness, and medical practices among practitioners of zar.

Finally, noticing that our bodies exist, our bodies are ours, but our bodies are still other, foreign, stranger or even alien to us in times of falling in pain or other bodily issues and becoming ill, could be a key perspective in interpreting different healing knowledge and practices, more specifically a sacred healing ritual like zar. The current aspect of being in pain and illness needs

deeper contemplation. However, such consideration requires us to talk about Sartre's discussions of different orders of the body first. Elsewhere in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre writes about three different orders of the body. While the first order refers to the material / objective aspect of the body, the second relates to the subjective aspect of it which refers to different ways in which we directly experience our bodies. To avoid getting trapped in dichotomies of Cartesian philosophy, Sartre suggests a third body order, intersubjective body, which is my body experienced by me and experienced by me as reflected by Others in their experiences:

I exist my body: this is its first dimension of being. My body is utilized and known by the other: this is the second dimension. But insofar as I am for others, the Other is revealed to me as the subject for whom I am an object. I exist therefore for myself as known by the Other – in particular in my very facticity. I exist for myself as a body known by the Other. This is the third ontological dimension of my body. With the appearance of the Other's look, I experience the revelation of my being-as-object; that is of my transcendence as transcended. A me-as-object is revealed to me as an unknowable being, as the flight into an Other which I am with full responsibility. But while I cannot know or even conceive of this "Me" in its reality, at least I am not without apprehending certain of its formal structures. In particular I feel myself touched by the Other in my factual existence; it is my being-there-for-others for which I am responsible. This being-there is precisely the body." (460-461).

Only one page later, Sartre writes about the experience of shyness which would be useful for us to describe the experience of being in pain or being ill:

The experience of my alienation is made in and through affective structures such as, for example, shyness. To "feel oneself blushing," to "feel oneself sweating," etc., are inaccurate expressions which the shy person uses to describe his state; what he really means to is that he is vividly and constantly

conscious of his body not as it is for him but as it is for the Other. This constant uneasiness, which is the apprehension of my body's alienation as irremediable, can determine psychoses such as erotophobia; these are nothing but the horrified metaphysical apprehension of the existence of my body for the Others. We often say that the shy man is "embarrassed by his own body." Actually, this expression is incorrect; I can not be embarrassed by my own body as I exist it. It is my body as it is for the Other which may embarrass me. (462)

Such an example of a shy person will be helpful for us to understand the experience of being ill more clearly. When we are in pain, when we feel sick, the experience of our bodies is different from the subjective, pre-reflective, natural way through which we perceive our bodies. At the same time, we already have a prevenient, ceaseless, first-person experience from our bodies so the perception we have of our bodies could never be an objective, third-person type of experience (such as the paths through which medical professionals see and manipulate our bodies). Rather, even if we start thinking about our bodily issues or treating them when in pain or experiencing illness, we are connected to the intersubjective order of our bodies. When pain or any other bodily issue shows up, we start considering ourselves as patients which, as we already discussed, is to perceive ourselves as subjects that have been objectified. Such a process of intersubjectivity, which is inseparable from the illness experience, is accompanied by the sense of discomfort, otherness, and alienation.

Walking on such paths, Sartre has been following Heidegger but, at the same time expanding his thoughts. Like Sartre, Heidegger has not written about the body and the experience of becoming ill or in pain, but there are several aspects of his philosophy, especially in *Being and Time*, that will let us gain a better knowledge of illness experience.

According to Heidegger, one influential aspect of our existence is our “being able to be.” As human beings, we have the potential to be what / who we want to be by taking the necessary steps (For sure, this does not mean there are no restrictions in the real world that limit us - comparable to Merleau-Ponty’s maxim that “being-in-the-world is not a matter of I think, but a matter of I can” (137). To be clearer, Dasein – being-in-the-world which is falling and disclosed, thrown and projecting, and for which its own most ability to be is an issue (Heidegger 1962: 225) – has the potential to become what it wants but its options are limited to choices which are available in the time and place it is thrown in). As Carel (2016: 79) concludes: “although this openness is restricted by common-sense limitations, it still characterizes human existence as singular in its freedom, openness, and power of self-determination.” When falling ill or feeling pain, especially chronic pain, our common capacity becomes limited or got partially or even fully lost. We have all had those specific moments of sickness, in which we had to encounter our weakness, insufficiency and dependency. Therefore, our first impression of falling ill could be a sense of loss in one of our human characteristics, our being able to. However, following a phenomenological path will allow us to go beyond this interpretation. More clearly, our being unable to be, in only a temporal stage which is usually followed by opening up therapeutic and rehabilitative work, which are other opportunities to be and do (Carel 2016: 83).

Another influential aspect Heidegger explains in *Being and Time* which could be even more explicitly connected to our analysis of body in pain and suffering goes back to his discussions of otherness. As Svenaeus (2011: 333) explains, otherness, intertwined with the human condition of meaningfulness, could be described as a “foreignness [unfamiliarity, alienness, unhomelikeness] that permeates the ill life, when the lived body takes on alien qualities.”

Heidegger believes that:

“Meaning is an existential of Dasein, not a property which is attached to beings [in the world], not something which lies ‘behind’ Dasein, or floats somewhere as a realm between. Only Dasein has meaning in that the disclosedness of being-in-the-world can be fulfilled through the beings discoverable through it. Thus, only Dasein can be meaningful or meaningless. This means that its own being and the beings disclosed with that being can be appropriated in understanding or they can be confined to incomprehensibility. If we adhere to this interpretation of the concept of meaning, that is in principle ontological-existential, all beings whose mode of being is unlike Dasein must be understood as unmeaningful, as essentially bare of meaning as such. Unmeaningful does not mean here a value judgment but expresses an ontological determination. And only what is unmeaningful can be absurd. Objectively present things encountered through Dasein can, so to speak, run against its being, for example, events of nature which break in on us and destroy us (1962: 151-152).”

Although in his interpretation, Heidegger does not discuss pain and illness directly, we can extend these lines to get good insights for discussing the experience of otherness when falling sick or having pain. Walking on Heideggerian paths, one can say our being-in-the-world becomes to an ‘unhomelike’ being-in-the-world, in moments of having severe or chronic pain or other bodily issues. While we inhabit the life-world as our “home territory,” thence the condition of not having bodily issues or, in better terms, having controlled bodily issues, a situation in which the body “has a transparent quality as the point of access to the world in understanding activities,” is a homelike being-in-the-world, feeling chronic or severe pain as well as falling sick confront us with an ‘unhomelike’ condition in which the body becomes an ‘other’ that acts in intimidating manners (Svenaesus 2011: 337). The otherness of the body could be experienced in various threatening ways (e.g., feeling severe pain in specific body parts like a rotten tooth or stomach while doing normal daily activities such as swallowing, chewing, walking, picking up

something, nausea, suffering from delusions, having shaky hands, a broken bone or elongation or rupture of ligaments, losing ordinary capabilities such as loss of vision, among others).

While the homelikeness of health is usually taken for granted (or as Gadamer writes, “dwells in the background” [1993: 144-145]), the unhomelikeness of illness is piercing and evident, making itself known to us and seeking our deliberation. As discussed earlier, Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world presents human beings as “Dasein [that] inhabit the world as a pattern of significance, a set of connecting tools” (Svenaesus 2011: 336). Therefore, one necessary aspect of experiencing the otherness when having severe bodily issues could be our inevitable confrontations with alterations in our loads of meaning and interpretation, of the world and of ourselves (Svenaesus 2013: 102).

Most medical anthropologists and sociologists who follow a phenomenological approach have paid attention to meditate the experience of otherness of one’s own body in falling ill.⁸⁵ Kay Toombs (1992: 90-98), for instance, describes five “loss of’s””, which are permanent and omnipresent associates of any type of illness. Her suggested list includes the loss of wholeness, the loss of certainty, the loss of control, the loss of freedom to act and the loss of the familiar world which suitably make bridges between the experience of bodily issues (chronic / severe pain, illness), otherness and the sufferer’s being-in-the-world.

Another theory of the otherness of the body can be found in Bernhard Leistle’s remarkable work on spirit possession, *From the Alien to the Other: Steps towards a Phenomenological Theory of Spirit Possession* (2014). Influenced by Bernhard Waldenfels’s phenomenology, Leistle tries to

⁸⁵ Richard Zaner (1981), Drew Leder (1990; 1992), Kay Toombs (1987; 1992), Havi Carel (2013; 2016) and Fredrik Svenaesus (2000; 2011; 2013; 2015) are delightful examples of depicting the otherness of illness.

develop a “structural-phenomenological anthropology of experience and self” that enables us to gain a deeper understanding of spirit possession (Leistle 2014: 53) as a process which is “experienced by the self as a getting or being out of control” (Csordas 1994: 18). Leistle (2014: 63) constructs his theory of spirit possession based on theories from Waldenfels, Csordas, and Merleau-Ponty. Leistle (2014: 63) reviews a valuable quotation of Merleau-Ponty, in which the philosopher attempts to interpret falling asleep, as “making oneself possessed by the world:”

I lie down in my bed, on my left side, with my knees drawn up; I close my eyes, breathe slowly and distance myself from my projects. But this is where the power of my will or consciousness ends. Just as the faithful in Dionysian mysteries invoke the god by imitating the scenes of his life, I too call forth the visitation of sleep by imitating the breathing and posture of the sleeper. The god is there when the faithful no longer distinguish themselves from the role they are playing, when their body and their consciousness cease to be opposed to their particular opacity and are entirely dissolved into the myth. Sleep “arrives” at a particular moment, it settles upon this imitation of itself that I offered it, and I succeed in becoming what I pretended to be: that unseeing and nearly unthinking mass, confined to a point in space and no longer in the world except through the anonymous vigilance of the senses... The role of the body is to ensure this metamorphosis. It transforms ideas into things and my mimicry of sleep into actual sleep.” (Merleau-Ponty 2012:166–167).

Leistle’s approach to interpreting the experience of otherness considers it as a mood which is essential to our potential of being / becoming a self which comes from our bodily existence. The experience of the other may happen in different ways, even in the very quotidian, habitual moments of life (e.g., the short instances during the day when we look at ourselves in the mirror and, just for a second, we are unable to recognize ourselves and start asking ourselves the question: “who is this person in the mirror looking at me?”). Following Merleau-Ponty and

Csordas, Leistle's theory presents "the self as essentially bound up with the world, therefore as open to forces of otherness," however at the beginning such an Other is alien to the self (Leistle 2014: 64). Falling sick, having severe or chronic pain, or being possessed by good or devil spirits alienate us from ourselves and the world (Leistle 2014: 71). In terms of the latter experience, it is through rituals that "the possessed self learns to respond to the alien" and transform it to the other which is tamed and under control (Leistle 2014: 73).

Towards a Phenomenology of Zar

How can phenomenology help us better understand zar practices? What can we learn from zar practitioners by following a phenomenological approach? This final section tries to answer these questions and to sum up our previous discussions about the experience of possession, specifically the experience of being possessed by winds in southern Iran. Two of Bāb Isā's patients can help illustrate this. These patients were already possessed by devil winds and the healer had helped them to tame the wind. They are feeling 'good' these days, and their experience of getting sick by the winds and getting cured by the healer has made them the members of the Ahle havā. I had the chance to meet with the first patient during a healing ritual, which I was invited to, and the second patient during my first week of stay in the Island when I was having drumming classes with Hammud Memār. I am mentioning the patients' stories under the pseudonyms upon their request.

Story 1. *Fātu*

Fātu, a thirty-seven-year-old woman, has been sick for nine months. Her sickness starts with feeling, then seeing, a big and painful pimple on her neck, under the right ear, which does not disappear, but gets even bigger for a couple of months. She is scared that the acne is a symptom

of cancer so visits doctors, but medical tests show nothing, and medical treatments do not help her feel better. The pain transfers to her right shoulder and she finds her right hand numb; this numbness extends to her right foot and her right side of the body becomes paralytic. She does not get her period anymore and her teeth start to fall out.

Story 2. *Abed*

Abed, a nineteen-year-old man, works on a small fishing boat. He has been leaving home to the sea early in the morning, when a broken branch of a sacred tree on his way, falls on his head. He scares and runs away to join his co-fishers as soon as possible but just before getting on the boat, he passes out. His family take him home and start to read Quran around him, so he wakes up the following day. He cannot recognize anybody and just escapes to the wilderness. They catch him and tie him up at home, but he urinates blood and becomes paralytic. His dad and brothers take him to Bābā, and the healer postulates that he has been possessed by a devil wind. The bābā prescribes some herbal ointments and binds a bracelet around his arm. This is a promise to the wind and a reminder to him that he must hold a ceremony within six months. He feels better but decides not to hold the ceremony. Two years later, when reading a book, he starts hearing drumming. He starts sweating and shaking. Losing his mind and not recognizing anyone, he starts dancing towards the wilderness.

What do we learn from reading these two stories? To start, I want to note that both patients' issues start with an alienness in their daily normal experiences which impress their being-in-the-world. One of the most common things we do every day is touching our bodies. Fātu's sickness starts with touching her neck, noticing something unusual, feeling pain around the edema, standing in front of the mirror to check it, and seeing the big acne. That is how she starts to experience the otherness of her body. On the other hand, Abed's issue begins with noticing the

otherness of the world, when the broken branch of a sacred tree falls down on his head. In Fātu's case, the otherness of the body expands – severe chronic pain, losing the ability to move, losing teeth, etc. – to the level that she feels an alienness of the body and of the world; in Abed's case, feeling the alienness of the world – that happens after “being threatened by a sacred tree” – is followed by a series of bodily issues which lead to experiencing the alienness of one's own body. If we remember Toomb's classification of different types of “loss of's which happen when having severe chronic pain/illness, both patients experience all the five categories: the loss of certainty, the loss of control, the loss of the familiar world, the loss of freedom to act, as well as the loss of wholeness. Experiencing these categories of loss changes their moods of existence from a homelike to an unhomelike being-in-the-world. Avoiding getting trapped in making Cartesian dualities of homelike and unhomelike being-in-the-world and feeling healthy and sick, if being healthy is connected to a homelike being-in-the-world, an unhomelike being-in-the-world has connections with pain and suffering. The experience of pain and bodily issues, loss, and unhomelikenness bridges the self and the alienness of the body and the world. However, this alienness is only experienced through their life-worlds. Both patients are inhabitants of the Island, blowing with different winds and having acquired good knowledge of them throughout their lives. They are also familiar with the wind (zar) culture coming from Islamic and non-Islamic knowledge of the world, which is prevalent in the region. Abed's work on a fishing boat gives him even a better opportunity to connect to the blowing winds. This is how their issues and their ways to deal with the problems are both rooted in their day-to-day life experiences (daily activities if we want to mention Sartre's interpretation of pain). In other words, the qualities of the experienced bodily issues, as well as the qualities of the healing process which will be

performed afterwards, are dependents on the ways in which beings focus upon things in their different worldly activities.

Both Fātu and Abed were possessed by the devil winds. Abed was possessed by Seyf, so to help him feel better, Bāb Isā requires his family hold a ceremony. During the ceremony, the wind comes down and asks for three sheep, one chicken, and 24 eggs. As he has broken his promise, the wind agrees to stop bothering him temporarily, but he must hold ceremonies for three successive years. As long as he fulfills the covenant, the wind stays tamed and will not bother him anymore. Fātu, conversely, visits Bāb Isā but he can not say that she is necessarily possessed by a devil wind. He suggests that they hold a small ceremony to make sure about the diagnosis and during the ceremony, the healer finds out that she is possessed by *Eskandar*. She has got the wind from her brother-in-law, and to tame the wind, Bābā isolates her at his place for three days. During the isolation period, the healer massages her body with local ointments regularly and has her drink a mixture of young crow's meat, saffron, cardamom, basil, and nutmeg. During the ritual, Bābā tames the wind by promising him a goat and two trays of local pastry but the wind requires her not to have sexual intercourse with her husband for forty days.

Based on Leistle's theory of spirit possession, "the possessed self must learn to respond to the alien [...] in a culturally standardized manner" (Leistle 2014: 72). However, talking about standardized ways does not mean that patients and healers open up the healing processes in predetermined, fixed, and unchanging manners. The whole track of falling sick and healing from suffering is endlessly open to improvisation. The art of dancing with the melodies of suffering and healing, is only and ceaselessly based on opening our being-in-the-world up to the world, by moving on extemporarily paths which are partially made at the moment.

Relating the bodily issues to the experience of being possessed by the wind and trying to name the wind is a response to the alien and the very first step to transform it into the Other, therefore, to tame or control it. Naming the wind, talking with it and asking about its demands for leaving the patient all happen in a specific life-world, so are based upon “a symbolic system consisting of names, attributes, and narratives circumscribing the cultural category of spirit” (Leistle 2014: 77), but still open to spontaneity, innovation and change. In accordance with our phenomenological approach, among zar practitioners, being healthy is defined from a first-person approach (rather than a third person one). This being said, feeling ‘better’, ‘normal’ or ‘healthy’ does not mean ‘not dealing with any bodily issues.’ Rather, while being unhealthy means suffering from an unhomelike being-in-the-world, being ‘healthy’ refers to reveling in a homelike being-in-the-world.

Looking from a third person perspective, inhabitants of the Island could be unhealthy / abnormal, suffering from psychological or medical problems. This is neither their way of understanding the bodily issues, nor the way their medical knowledge works. Based on the existing meaning patterns as well as the human capability of improvisation, medical practices in the Island seek to find, reveal, or construct a new understanding of the world and of the being-in-the-world (selves) to help people adapt to their new conditions: adapting to an “altered embodiment and environment in order to stay healthy or become healthy again, when life is obstructed by diseases or other threatening events. To become homelike in the face of unhomelikeness: this would be the health in illness” (Svenaeus 2013: 108).

I think this is a very more convincing way of understanding people’s sufferings and healing paths among zar practitioners. Most of the existing ‘analyses’ of zar rituals have been trying to ‘see’ them from diffusionist or conflict (e.g., Marxist or Marxist Feminist) perspectives,

therefore have limited themselves to look at the rituals as responses to inferiority, deprivation and economic, political, or social domination. An unavoidable result of such perspectives is to consider zar practitioners as primitive, ignorant, or at least backward, superstitious, and undeveloped. This is not an anthropological path. Anthropologists try to work with people, to let their knowledge grow in them, to learn from them, to become them.

Anthropologists try to learn from the world, from the wind, from the sea. As “the humans are small boats on the sea; the humans are the sea. Like sea, which is disturbed by harsh winds, and should be sedated for the unrest, humans should be sedated for the sufferings. All boats and dhows should get back home safely. This is only possible when winds calm down. Humans should get back home too: this only happens when they learn how to tame their winds.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

With Zar, on the Way

A breezy day, the glorious sun is shining on the sea, so it looks like a vast and splendid blue meadow decorated with golden pearls that are playfully roving with gentle waves. *Faḵr* and I are strolling by the coast, barefoot on warm sands, to visit *Sāleh Rahmān*, one of the most respected sacred men in the village. I have been hearing about him as a “sage man, mindful of the future events, and a treasure chest of the past stories” since the beginning of my stay in the Island, and *Faḵr* has strongly recommended me to talk with him if I am looking to record some well-known stories common among Qeshm inhabitants: “I am pretty sure that *Šeyḵ Rahmān* will provide you with breathtaking types of tales you are looking for. He once said to me that the sun is the mother, and the sea and the wind are its kids.”

On our way to his shed, I was imagining him as a tall old man with long white hair and beard, deep wrinkles on his face, sharp eyes, and captivating looks. This prediction was proven wrong when we met up at his dwelling. Short and overweight, dark-skinned and almost bald, and with a short beard, *Šeyḵ* was laconic in terms of speaking either directly or more in a subtle way, with big and modest eyes which were staring at the floor most of the time. When I asked him to tell us a story about wind, he glanced up at me distrustfully and remained silent for a good amount of time. The silence was finally broken with a deep sigh and deep look into my eyes: “why do you need to listen to a story about winds? Think of yourself instead!” *Sāleh Rahmān* said. I did not know how to respond. Time was passing so slowly, and I was trying hard to find a way to speak my piece and to let the conversation restart when he sighed heavily again: “you are coming from far away; you have changed a lot.”

Sāleh Rahmān’s tone sounded enigmatic, but unique and interesting to me: “I seek refuge in Allah from Satan the outcast ... In the name of Allah who is kind and merciful ... God was but we were not ... One was but one was not ... Six merchants on the dhow ... Gusty and roaring,

the generous sea ... Everywhere dark and six cruel winds blowing from six different directions ... and still six nights to the destination ... Everyone scared of the rage of the sea. Would the dhow break soon? Would the merchants get lost, and their sharks will make a celebration out of their bodies? They are terribly scared, but they also know that the God is great, and the sea is soft-hearted. They know that the God is forgiving, and the winds are humane. They know that the God is merciful, and the dhow-master is skillful.”

Šeyk̲ said this, closed his eyes, and started praying mutely. It did not take long for him, however, to continue narrating the story:

In the middle of panic and darkness, one of the merchants decides to do something. He calls other merchants loudly but warmly to get closer and gather around him as he knows a very old story from his sixth ancestor back and it takes six nights to be narrated completely. The merchant asks his fellow travelers to close their eyes and pray: ‘let’s close our eyes and talk to God mutely. Let’s thank God for taking care of us as well our families and communities by now and pray to him for saving us for at least six more nights: until this story is finished.’ Then the merchant starts telling his story: ‘God was, and we were not, we were not, and God was. Once upon a time, a middle-aged poor couple was living in Qeshm. The guy’s job was taking care of rich people’s camels: taking them to the desert and grazing them every day. One day when taking care of the camels the man sees two guys wrestling with one another. Approaching them uncertainly, he notices that a man is fighting with a dragon and the ugly creature is about to kill him. The shepherd decides to intervene and help the man. He reminisces Allah and kills the dragon. The rescued man tells him that he is the king of jinns and

not a human-being, and as the shepherd has been so helpful to him, he is not going to harm the shepherd: ‘you saved my life, and this makes me thankful to you forever. So, I will compensate you by fixing one of your family issues. I know how much you want to have children, but your wife is barren, so you are still living by yourselves. Do not take camels for grazing tomorrow. Just stay at home and wait for a wandering Dervish who passes by your neighborhood. Go say hi to him and he will give you a red apple. Eat the apple, make love with your wife, and wait to see what happens.’ The jinn recommends to the shepherd and disappears.

The shepherd does so but after a couple of weeks they notice that he is the one who has got pregnant. After nine months, nine days, and nine hours it was the proper time for delivery, but the man could not deliver the baby. He has so much pain and they both think that the guy will die but then they hear an old woman knocking on the door and asking permission to enter the house. She is a *māmā* and has come there only because the baby has been on the way. The old woman helps them with the delivery, but the shepherd gives birth to a baby dove. The shepherd and his wife are so shocked and sad, but the old woman tells them that they need to take care of the dove well because it belongs to jinns’ dynasty. They start feeding the bird until a couple of months when he starts flying and talking to his parents. One day the dove asks shepherd to follow him to the desert, takes him to a well, and asks him to go into the well. The man crawls fearfully into the well and surprisingly finds a gold treasure there. They become so rich, build a castle, and start living there, wealthy, and comfortably, for a long time.

After years, the dove asks shepherd to go to the king's castle and to propose to his daughter. The shepherd says that he is only a dove, and the king will not let her daughter marry a bird. The dove becomes a handsome young man instantly and gives his shirt to the shocked man saying that they will have no choice if the old man shows them his dress when proposing to her.' The young handsome guy also provides him with detailed guidelines and instructions: 'go by the sea and start praying. And you will notice two whales getting close to you. Do not even look at the black whale that shows up first. Finish praying when you see the white whale. Change into the sea. Become the sea and ride the white whale. After crossing the sea change into the summit. Become the summit and wait for the phoenix on the next beach. It will bring you a small bottle. Take it. Follow the sun and keep going. Right in the middle of the day, when it is the time for noon prayer, you will arrive to the fire. Change to the fire. Become the fire and the wind starts blowing and puts you out. Ride the wind and go to the king's castle. You will find out that her daughter has got blind there. Tell them that you can heal her and rub the medicine that you will find in the bottle onto her eyes. Then close her eyes with a clean kerchief and pray for three days and nights. Opening her eyes after three days and nights, she will be able to see again, and it will be a good time for proposing to the king's daughter. If anything wrong happened, just let her smell my dress.'

The old shepherd follows the son's guidance step by step. When proposing to the king's daughter, the king gets mad and orders his guard to kill him. The shepherd gives the shirt to the young woman and after smelling the dress, she becomes a

beautiful dove, too. The shepherd ride the dove and they come back to shepherd's house, where she changes to the previous girl again and marries the shepherd's dove son. They lived wealthy and happily for years and raised a lot of righteous children.

I was surprised that the story he told us ended that way: the impressive words he was selecting, and his musical style of narrating was so close to Iranian rhyme prose, but at the same time I was disappointed as I could not find any connections between the story and zar healing practices. Thankful and frustrated, left with an ambiguous feeling, we decided to finish our black coffee that was scented with cinnamon, red rose, and cardamom, and leave his place. When saying goodbye to him, I still had a busy mind trying to make connections between zar and his story, and was fighting the temptation to ask him to talk about any possible connections. I think that Šeyk noticed my busy-minded-ness as, when convoying us, the silent man prevented any further conversation after taking a short hesitant stolen-look into my face and breaking the silence by saying: “Allah Karim Allah Karim my son! You are coming from far away and you are traveling far away. May God be with you and protect you all the time!”

The confusion started living with me afterwards. It was only recently, before I began this chapter, that I could understand what his words meant. Zar ceremonies are principally to heal sufferers who have been possessed by winds. Being possessed by a wind means opening ourselves up to live with an Other worldly creature. One becomes less human, worldlier, and thus much aware of their being-in-the-world. Such transitions are usually accompanied by other changes and becomings such as becoming in pain, restless, sick, patient, wind's mount, song, wind, healed, disciple— and if the practices do not work, becoming a sacrifice. It is in these ways that sufferers come from far away, change a lot, and travel far away.

As former sufferers, healers have also gone through this. To help people in their communities, they also become caregivers, healers and mentors, drummers and singers, musicians and dancers, bābā and māmā. To tame the winds, healers might become aggressive or kind-hearted, punisher or cuddly god or devil, a specific bird or animal, wind or sea, relative or stranger. The master of the winds also comes from far away, changes a lot, and travels far away.

Blowing with winds, inhabitants of the Island become the members of Ahle havā (people of the wind) community. And blowing winds at the same time live in, come from, and go to close and far lands, dry deserts, unknown seas, lonely islands, other planets, and mysterious skies. From India or Zanzibar, from Amazon or Portugal, from “the other side of the world,” blowing winds get lost and start wandering in the Island. Early in the morning, right in the middle of the day, they open themselves up to the world and change to water vapour at the head of a local well, a bird like a crow or a reptile such as a snake, a jujube plant, or a wandering shadow too. Blowing winds possess people and become people. They become pain and restlessness. Talkative or voiceless, peaceful or hostile, wild or tamed, Muslim or infidel, enemy or friend, blowing winds suffer and heal, agitate or calm down, deceive or lead. Winds come from far away, change a lot, and travel far away.

No need to write that to understand such blowing practices and people, to know more about such a blowing world, one needs to learn how to blow with them, too. This was not something that I learned by reading methodology on phenomenological research or studying healing rituals. Now that I remember the first years of doing my PhD, I recall so much effort to find the best theoretical approaches and methodological strategies for studying zar. The more I was trying, the less I could find something which really suits the ritual. Then, at a specific moment, I had to go to the Island and start my fieldwork. Unsure and up in the air. Even after my second stay in the

Island, even until very recently, I was not too sure about the paths I followed to study zar healing practices. And it is not since a long time that I have started feeling that I was uncertain and hazy because I could not notice one thing: it is not me who decides about the ways to study zar, it is zar who leads me along itself. To learn from zar and its practitioners, I believe, the researcher cannot pick the proper approach after a review of the existing literature and the identification of related theories and research methods. On the contrary, one needs to learn how to become a researcher. Becoming a researcher, I think, starts with the surrender of one's position as the scholar of social science, learning how to bypass predetermined steps of research already provided by mainstream sociology, and learning how to improvise the study. Opening ourselves up to the ceremony, accepting its vagueness, learning to communicate with its specific non-verbal language, closing eyes, keeping silent, being up to listening to and moving with sounds, dancing with drums, blowing with winds, relying on the world, holding power to the topic of the study and let ourselves be guided by it are all essential to become a researcher who want to learn from zar healing practices and not about them. It is essential to learn to move.

I learned to move by letting my mind fly after listening to Qolām Mārgiri's performance for the first time. By traveling far away. from Iran to Canada: an experience which let me as a former student of positivist sociology become a phenomenologist social scientist. I learned to move towards unknown destinations: where I needed to talk, read, write, and think in other languages. Where I walked and breathed in -45 °C and had to work minimum-wage jobs that I could never imagine, to pay my university tuition fees. Where I lived as an international student and experienced being regarded as an 'Other:' a stranger who needed to become a warrior to fight with different types of deprivation I was encountering because of my origin, residency status, language and accent, skin colour, gender, etc. This is not the whole story though, as moving led

me to experience most lovable moments of my life. Traveling to Canada let me find phenomenal people who I never had the chance to meet with earlier. Even more exciting to me that some of them had the same passion as mine to learn, to perceive the world by practising being-in-the-world sensuously, to seek knowledge “on lonely mountains or near the sea.”⁸⁶ Without these people and their enormous help, I certainly could not keep working on my project. For the Canadian Anthropology Society, I organized a panel, volunteered, and presented at their annual conference; I have published a book chapter about zar I began teaching by traveling far away from Tehran to Ottawa. Some of these experiences, the most valuable events in my life, took place during fall seasons: where I was enjoying hiking in most beautiful trails that I had ever seen.

This is not the whole story, though. Becoming a researcher, at least for me, was impossible if I had not traveled long again, to Qeshm Island for learning from zar practices and practitioners. I had the chance to learn a lot by going that far. Not only from zar and about zar but also about the world, about myself, and about the ways of perceiving the world by taking care of camels on a dry desert in 55°C, by becoming more familiar with sea creatures, by confronting my fears meeting up with snakes or long nightly walks in wild deserts to find jinns and talk to them about their perceptions of health and illness. Becoming a researcher was only made possible by working hard on the boats, sailing in small dhows on the unruly sea which helped me confront death, and the severe “fear and trembling” that come with it, and by learning to attune myself

⁸⁶ As Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science* “We do not belong to those who have ideas only among books, when stimulated by books. It is our habit to think outdoors – walking, leaping, climbing, dancing, preferably on lonely mountains or near the sea where even the trails become thoughtful” (Nietzsche [1882] 1974: 322)

with new worlds of sight, smell, sound, and movement. It was drumming, singing, and dancing with zar practitioners and in zar healing ceremonies that helped me to sense in a new way, step into an undiscovered rhythmic path, and enabled me to dance with the practitioners, participating in the exquisite ways of moving their bodies during the ceremony that reminded me of sailors' movements on their dhows. All this, which I call drumming with winds, made me a researcher of zar. Drumming with winds also gifted me with the privilege of being empathetic with Ahle havā community (people of the wind). When I started to study zar, I felt neither brave nor knowledgeable enough to risk my social or academic status by working on a 'misleading', 'deceptive' and 'superstitious' ceremony that had been banned by the government and was disdained by Iranian proponents of modernization policies.⁸⁷ In the summer of 2015, I had a short talk about anthropological paths to studying zar in a research institute in Tehran, Iran, and was condemned by a well-known professor of anthropology⁸⁸ for "forgetting my principal anthropological duty to train the backward superstitious people who believe in the ceremony, and for receiving money from western states to keep Iranians ignorant by assigning truth to deceptive ideas such as zar." Since then, I have been frequently talking about zar healing practices for

⁸⁷ As a consequence of modernization policies in contemporary Iran, zar practices have been labelled as superstitions, therefore silenced and marginalized by the central governments for about a century. Furthermore, since the Islamic revolution in nineteen seventy-nine, zar communities have been constantly suppressed as deviant, infidel and even demonic cults: hence, the practitioners tend to preserve themselves from the probable harms of the outsiders, and are thus inclined to conceal themselves from the inquiries of social science researchers. Accordingly, when reviewing the existing Iranian anthropological literature on zar, one will frequently find such kinds of explanations: "Zar ritual should be seen as the product of mental disorders; "unconscious" illusions and delusions that arise from the emotional deprivations and sufferings in a historical context (Naghavi 2014: 163)."

⁸⁸ At the most well-known Iranian university, the University of Tehran

different Iranian communities and in nearly all of them, I have been receiving comments, if not critics and complaints, about being supported, financially or politically, by an Iranian or Canadian governmental association, to support the superstitious and to propound anti-scientism and backwardness. Drumming with winds has helped me keep warm-hearted in supporting the rights of zar practitioners to follow their own healing paths, and doing anthropology in more independent research paths. I have, like the winds and their masters, come from far away, changed a lot, and will travel far away.

Zar itself blows in so many ways and becomes so many things. Since its emergence in 1979, the Islamic government in Iran has been dreaming of presenting only one acceptable version of being Muslim and living an Islamic life. During the first couple of decades after the regime change, and even now (though less frequently), the radical revolutionary Muslims who held power were trying to provide an agenda following which all Iranians would be saved from evil and get close to heaven's gates by perceiving humanity and different ways of humaning (Ingold 2015) including the arts, religion, and medicine, among others in the proper orthodox approach which was obviously defined by the government.

It did not take long, however, as per the Farsi expression, that the dream disappeared in moving waters. Time passed and different governmental groups started blowing in different directions too! After a few years, there could be found various orthodox approaches to living a proper Islamic life, even in smaller cities and among smaller communities. Considering this, the health-care strategy of the Islamic government was to support biomedical paths of healing, to propagate a specific approach towards religious medicine developed at *Qom Seminary* by Mullahs, who were reliable because of their strong connections with supreme leaders of Iran. Accordingly, it was necessary to mute or at least to backlash other approaches to “perception of the

environment” (Ingold 2000), the world, human body, the sacred, and sacred healing, inevitably. It is hard, though, to catch the wind! Being labeled by the post-revolutionary government as a non-Islamic and deceptive tradition, zar found its ways to blow in a very different direction: in 1986, the *Fajr* International Music Festival, was founded; the new political regime was going to differentiate itself from the old one by supporting artistic genres of music that were produced by socio-economically deprived people from all around the world as an ideal form of Islamic cultural strategy. It was a great opportunity for zar practitioners to perform their songs annually during the festival nights. Even modernist critics of zar healing practices were eager to listen to these songs and considered it a valuable ancient musical form.

I was myself a critic of these performances for a long time, as I considered it as a political trend which was seeking to de-medicalize and mutilate zar ritual, therefore making it defective and incomplete. Only recently have I noticed that the initial, strongest impression I got from zar performances was made possible by attending one of those shows in a smaller festival which was held by the government as well. I have had almost the same experience with a 2014 musical festival held by BBC Persian in Istanbul, Turkey. I had just begun working on my thesis proposal, and felt so annoyed by the performances which were so far from zar world, saying to myself that those performers were swindlers trying to hand out their unrelated songs to ignorant listeners for money or fame. I am not sure about the reason that was behind holding such a festival but what I understand now is that festival was one of the directions from which zar was blowing. Writing these lines, I recall the first time I met a *bābā zār* in Bandar Lengeh, a harbor city a hundred and ninety-two kilometers far from Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan province, Iran. I clearly remember my cousin who had given me a ride there, was so scared of seeing ‘the sorcerer’ hiding behind a wall not to let him directly look into my cousin’s eyes. Even a novice

researcher like me could discern, after a short talk, that he was not a ‘real’ healer. I remember my cousin had a big smile on his face as he tried to explain to me that he was a ‘faked’ bābā zār.

And I was so irritated by what had happened at that time. It took a while for me to understand that even meeting an ‘unreal’ bābā was one of the directions from which zar was blowing. Also, even among people who believe in the ceremony, live it in their lives, and do not participate in it to gain financial benefits or fame, different communities have their own different versions of blowing with winds. Nubān, for instance, is a wind ritual practiced in Bandar Abbas by its own followers who criticize zar practitioners because of deviating “Islamic teachings,” for believing in the duality of the sacred, “imagining” power in the hands of devil winds, and playing a drum “which is not a sacred instrument” in their rituals. During Nubān ceremonies, therefore, one listens to only one string instrument, *Tambire*, which is accompanied by singing a lot of verses from Quran (or inspired by Quranic verses). Sufferers who participate in Nubān ceremonies (as well as all other participants) must be Muslim and also eager to go through long hours of worship and praying for helping the healers and their communities to convince Allah heal the afflicted.

During my stay on the island, I had the chance to meet with an Imam who believed that “under the order of Allah” some winds could bother people and other non-human living beings (jinns, animals, and plants); at the same time, he was a radical critic of wind rituals as they were using a non-Islamic way, playing music, to heal people. With a big smile, a beautiful heart, and skilful hands which knew how to bake tasty cookies, Imam was blaming zar practitioners for breaking Islamic rules of physical contact between men and women. Thus, he was trying to improve a new version of “Islamic healing,” based on appealing to God and incantation, which I supposed was close to exorcism.

Even among different practicing communities, zar is not considered as one specific healing ritual. Rather, there are different zar ceremonies all over the region. For instance, in Salak, with less than 3000 inhabitants, there are two rival bābās with completely different approaches to the ritual: while Bāb Isā follows a more flexible approach which entitles him to apply innovative healing ways during the ceremony (such as letting people who are curious participate in the ceremony), and to perform zar songs at different art festivals, *Dellā Medu* considers zar more conservatively. And although Dellā Medu respects Bāb Isā's healing knowledge and sometimes assists him during the ceremonies, he believes that because of his more profound knowledge, as well as his loyalty to zar traditions, he is the more prominent bābā. According to tradition, he believes, bābās should be conscientious of even the smallest rules of the ritual, should not permit strangers to participate in ceremonies, and should not perform zar songs in any event other than healing ceremonies.

A little bit farther from believers, there are local researchers all around the region who have been concentrating on studying the ritual since long ago applying either scientific third-person perspectives or more conventional ways that are moving closer to the practitioners' life-worlds. Academic approaches, however, tend to follow a modernist view, as the heritage of folklorists, such as Sa'edi (1966), who regard zar as an untruthful belief of credulous and backward people, with roots in people's ignorance and deprivation.⁸⁹ As mentioned, the 2014 BBC Persian Zar

⁸⁹ "Coastal regions of southern Iran are fertile lands for madness and mental disorders. Living in such coastal regions is unwillingly associated with failure, frustration, fear and anxiety. Fighting with the sea, being afraid of starvation, thirst, disease and death, as well as hard work and monotonous life have made people to slip towards zar ritual [...] Higher levels of panic and stress lead to more confrontations with devil winds. Whenever people are poorer and more unemployed, the winds get more powerful" (Sa'edi 1966: 22-3).

Festival was a musical way of blowing. Nowadays, one can find an increase in the number of bands who try to infuse their music with zar melodies. Barad, for instance, is a well-known musical band in Iran that attempts to mix rock music with wind healing rituals, and zar songs more specifically. Recently, some ethnomusicologists have been trying to reach out to healers to record and even note their melodies. Poets, novelists, photographers, movie and theatre directors have been inspired by zar teachings in their works and performances.⁹⁰ Contemporary politics in Iran includes very different groups and activists who might dislike zar because of racist tendencies such as mentioning about its so-called “African” or “Semitic” roots on the one side, or passionate nationalist adherents who admire zar as a ritual coming from “our” (i.e., Iranian) golden past when “we” were still practicing Zoroastrianism and were not corrupted by Muslim Arabs.

Zar comes from far away, changes a lot, and travels far away.

Despite all the complexities of his thought, Heidegger has been an interesting face for most phenomenological philosophers and social scientists. After my second stay in the Island, I got as close to Heidegger’s philosophy as I could find and found strong familiarities between his approach towards Dasein’s being-in-the-world and some common paths to perceiving the world among inhabitants of Qeshm. Often, I even applied Heidegger’s thoughts for interpreting zar knowledge as well as its various practices and performances. Among Heidegger’s interpreters, it is highly agreed that his second path of philosophizing was so affected by East Asian philosophies,

⁹⁰ For example, *Macbeth Zar*, a musical comedy that blends zar with Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, has won the New Experience Section at the twenty eighth Tehran International Theater Festival (2009) as well as the award for the best theater ensemble in Moscow Nights Theater Festival (2012). France’s Avignon Festival and Armenia’s HighFest Theater Festival also hosted the play (Sheikhi 2018)

more specifically *Tao Te Ching*,⁹¹ where he has borrowed the concept of ‘track’ which plays an essential role in Heidegger’s ‘after-the-turn’ philosophy.⁹² Affected by both Heidegger’s philosophy and *Tao Te Ching*’s deep knowledge, I used to consider zar as a path of life. When writing these lines, however, I started to think about the competency of the term ‘path’ to describe zar. I also asked myself why I should borrow from Heidegger and Laozi, sage people for sure, who come from other cultures? Is not that being tempted to apply more fancy philosophers to describe a culturally different form of knowledge? And so, following semi-colonialist ways of knowledge, while criticizing it at the same time, in my work? Now I think it would be a better approach to consider zar, according to zar practitioners themselves, as the wind.

Like blowing winds, zar starts blowing from somewhere and at a time that you do not expect. Exactly the same way that I did not expect to hear such a story at Šeyk Rahmān’s shed. I was confused listening to him, lost in it and not even noticing that the story should be going for six nights, so why it did finish there. I did not notice why things did go on that way, why those things did happen, and even what happened to the main story of merchants on the dhow in a stormy sea. I learned from Šeyk to close my eyes, open my ears, leave behind the desire to understand and go with the flow of the happenings. He knew I was looking to hear a story about zar but did not mention zar in the story directly. Zar, however, was all over his story. I think that Šeyk Rahmān was trying to teach me a valuable lesson: to stop trying to understand and analyze

⁹¹ *Toa Te Ching* is a Chinese classic text which is attributed to Laozi, the Chinese sage who was living in the sixth century BC.

⁹² Tao literally means ‘the way.’

and to start blowing with the world, with stories, with songs, with people and their feelings and sufferings, instead. Although different from mainstream research methods in social sciences, this would be a more related way to learn from zar, I suppose. One can never understand the wind: they should learn to blow with it. To become a researcher of zar, one should learn not to understand, to get confused, to welcome it, and to move with it. it will find you at the proper moment, and it will let you know whatever you need to know. To start knowing the wind we should learn how to blow. To start knowing the wind we should learn how to become the wind. Like winds, we should travel far away, we should change a lot, and we should come back from far away.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Blowing in Each Other

and

Phenomenology of Zar

Gardens are shaped by walls and doors as separators,
Trees meet each other blowing in the fresh air however.
Branches feel sorrowful about sitting apart from each other,
But roots happily dance arm in arm together.
(Farsi poem)

Warm sands and the patient sea which is motherly singing its lullaby: velvet waves singing cryptically. The waning moon whispering to the wind and winking stars shooting small dirks to wandering evil spirits. A couple of dogs are roaming around the sea, and I am walking along the coast to participate in a zar session.

As I get closer to Bāb Isā's home, the night gets quieter and darker. I recall earlier that evening when Sa'id, a drummer in Bāb Isā's band, found me in Faḵr's small grocery store and muttered something that I could hardly hear. I could not understand what he was saying, therefore, using his head and eyes, he asked me to go out of the store: "Be at Bābā Isā's house tonight! At ten pm!" "What will be going on there?" I asked expectantly. "Did you not wait long to be with us? Tonight, will be the night!" Saied responded with explicit eagerness in his eyes. Trying to imagine what would be waiting for me, I turn left to a narrow alley, with Bāb Isā's house at the end. Fiery charcoals burning orange and red in metal and brick braziers on both sides of the dusty path; the fragrance of frankincense and the sound of drums. I enter Bābā Isā's house.

On the left corner of the small sitting room, which is fully carpeted by different red rugs, *Rāhil* is almost lying down, half-awake. On the walls are small and big drums, a couple of mirrors, some bamboo sticks, only one wooden circle drum and colorful flags, each of them belongs to a specific wind: these are probably to protect the community from the harm of devil winds. And right in front of me, on the biggest dowdy wall of the room, a huge formal flag of Iran, clearly visible to any newcomer: probably to protect the community from the harm of the government inspectors and agents.

Zar cloth in the middle of the room on the floor, Bāb Isā and his band sitting around the cloth warming the drums up: saying hi to them, feeding them with fresh basil leaves, anointing the drums with sacred oils and intoxicate them by burning incense and letting the drums breathe the pleasant aroma of the dried herbs.

Eight men and five women have made a spacious square sitting on the floor by the walls; one of them is Shams, the patient's husband who seems to be worried and not-that-comfortable. Trying to take care of her, as she seems to be there and not there, staring at me, with a pale face and a desperate look, with her mute moving lips, like when someone is trying hard to talk but feels too weak for that, and you cannot hear anything.

Rāhil, The Wind-Traveler: A Story

Rāhil⁹³ and her husband come from a middle-sized village which is located less than two hours driving from our village. She is not originally from the village but was born in the second most important city of the Island in an almost wealthy family that made the most of life by trading precious clothes between Iran, India, China, and other countries of the Gulf, and along with some other people of the Island, smuggling cosmetics and beauty products, every now and then, to bring more money home to live a little bit more comfortably. One day, accompanying her older sisters, Rāhil goes to bazaar to buy some decorative pearls and passementeries, where she meets with Shams, a young day-labourer who works on a fishing boat and has come to the bazaar to see his old friend. They fall in love, get married despite family oppositions from both sides, and move to Shams' parental house, where post-marriage issues start to show up. The mother and some sisters of Shams did not like their daughter-in-law, as she looks

⁹³ Rāhil's meaning is literally close to the traveller in Arabic.

to be spoiled, and too weak to fulfill either “her expected household responsibilities” or the “necessities” of a rural lifestyle. Shams, however, has been supporting his wife constantly. They cannot bring children to life even after a couple of years and this makes the situation even harder. Shams’ family push him to marry a second wife, one of their relatives from the village, and this becomes the turning point of their family life. Dispirited and not too happy, Shams remains loyal to Rāhil, however this unhappiness along with her complaints against and arguments with Shams’ family lead to annoyance, coldness, and quarrels between them.

Early in the morning of one of the hottest days during the summer, Shams goes to the sea. When he comes back home Rāhil gets shocked after suddenly seeing him in the living room and starts screaming. She passes out after a few seconds. Shams brings her “back to consciousness” by massages, warm water compress and some herbal remedies, however she keeps suffering from chills and fever and delusions. He continues taking care of her until the following day when Rāhil runs away to the well, crying and screaming. Shams catches her and pushily brings her back home. She passes out again. Next morning, she wakes up from a severe pain in the back. The pain moves to the legs and acute uterine bleeding starts. The pain never stops until the next week when she loses walking abilities. For the next couple of months Rāhil keeps suffering from severe bleeding, lethargy, fever and chills, delusions, and complete paralysis in the legs. The elders of the village believe it is a devil wind and recommend him to take his wife to a bābā zar, but he does not accept. Physicians in Qeshm cannot diagnose her problem so he decides to take Rāhil to Shiraz, a main city in southern Iran with well-equipped hospitals but even in Shiraz doctors cannot find the correct treatment. Different ultrasounds and MRIs do not show anything wrong in her body. Various descriptions do not work to help her get better and day by day she gets closer and closer to death. Desperate and despondent Shams agrees to rely on Bābā Isā’s knowledge as the last available option for saving Rāhil’s life.

After a preliminary examination and following a weekly stay at Bābā Isā's home for receiving primary but necessary care, the healer concludes that she is not possessed by a devil wind and refers them to an exorcist, as she is possessed by a very brutal jinn. When the exorcism session fails too, Bābā Isā decides to hold only one first and last zar session, just in case, uncertainly, and hopefully, "to release her from the chains of the cursed Satan, by the help of God who is the Most Merciful of the Merciful, and to restore my dignity as a zar healer, Insha'Allah."⁹⁴

The healer's people arrive, and little by little the square becomes bigger, when Bābā Isā's novices start welcoming the participants with aromatic oils and burning incenses: "we should be always scented at the presence of the winds, and they enjoy good music. Clapping with anointed hands is very satisfying to the winds." Listening to Hammoud's explanations, I feel the heavy looking stare of Dellā Medu on me. The orthodox healer is clearly unhappy with me being there, as he believes that no stranger should be allowed in zar performances. I feel shy and uncomfortable until his hard stare is distracted by Bābā Isā's voice: "*Marhabā Dellā Marhabā!*"⁹⁵ Thank you for coming tonight bābā! You know doctor Nima, right? I have heard he has met up and talked to you already!" With a big smile on his face, sprinkling too much rosewater on our own clothes and faces, Bābā Isā succeeds in convincing him of being flexible with my presence and participation.

Three dohol gaps in the middle, praising powerful winds, and the healer singing songs, chanting our devotion to merciful and brutal winds ... the night starts with our prayer in glory of the most

⁹⁴ If Allah wills

⁹⁵ In Qeshm Island, most people say marhabā instantly after seeing each other. It's their kind of saying hi to one another.

well-known Muslim wind: Abdol-Qāder:⁹⁶ “*Šerellā yā Abdol-Qāder, Mahye din fi Qalbi hāzer ... Jalālellāh baādi, Mahye din fi Qalbi hāzer ... Yā rasoulallāh inah, Ben ziyārat ghāsedināh ... Mertajā menka šefā’at, Arta rabbal ālamina ...*”⁹⁷

Little by little, song by song, and dance by dance ... The winds notice the music and prepare to come down ... Hands blowing with the drums, and drums blowing with the winds ... people mix with burning plants, exhalant aromas, groaning drums ... People blow with winds, the healer sings, drums play, winds blow ... Everybody and everything is moving ... The world is moving ... The world is dancing ...

“*Vaduye va lā duye zār yā varār, Yā varār rā vaduye qalandar, Hoye zār yā varār*” ... “*Kele zār vafu, Vana mā vafu, Šeyk-Šangar vadu*”

Rāhil, though, is not moving.

Each song belongs to one of the winds and by performing different songs, people who already have those winds, being spontaneously dancing, sometimes without wanting to. Their dance moves are sharp and short, quick and aggressive, repetitive and continuous. Their winds, however, have already been tamed by Bābā Isā, so it is the novices’ responsibility to take care of

⁹⁶ Abdol-Qader Gilani (also known as Mohyeddin [= the purifier of the religion]), was an eleventh and twelfth-century theologian and mystic and also the founder of the Qaderi sufism path in Iran. Some zar communities, including Bābā Isā’s people, believe that he has been blowing in the world to protect real Muslims from evils and hazards since his passing.

⁹⁷ “Oh the lion of Allah, oh the purifier of the religion you are living in our hearts ... Oh the glory of Allah, oh the purifier of the religion you are living in our hearts ... You are the eyes of prophet Muhammad ... please send our greetings to him ... we are desperate and in need of your intercession, please plead with God, the owner of both worlds, to forgive us.”

them, bringing their winds' properties, scarves, rings, bracelets, bamboos from the healer's treasure hidden in the backroom, and helping people to wear them when dancing with their winds. This changes the environment into a vivid scene in where one can only notice splendid colors, smells, and dancing bodies. Rāhil, though, is not moving.

People intoxicated by blowing with flows of wind and song, the healer's apprentices turning around to help them in their sacred dances, Bābā Isā, drumming, singing, even clapping, and moving around the patient uncertainly, appealing to the presence of powerful winds for their mercy, but she is not making even a small gesture: desperate and sick, fragile and low-pitched, Rāhil does not move.

Bābā Isā gives us a break. For me, it is a good chance to let my painful palms calm down a little bit. I have never clapped for such a long time in my life and having some time to rest will be a good opportunity to cope with the pain that is starting from my shoulders and moving to my fingertips brutally. Having some fresh camel milk, accompanied by homemade cookies, dates, and black coffee sweetened with rock candy and spiced with cardamom, tastes like heaven! I have to be careful not to put the small glass cups on the floor when I am done; it is one of the non-negotiable rules for zar practitioners. Instead, one must shake the glass in front of their faces to say they do not need more drinks, otherwise, the novices keep serving you. As long as you are served by drinks, foods, or pastries, you must finish them completely. This is one of the other non-negotiables you need to respect when participating in a zar session, and I am sure that somewhere very close, Dellā Medu is staring at me to see if I respect the rules properly.

In the house yard there are different groups of people having hookah. It does not take long to recognize Bāb Ahmad smoking thoughtfully in silence. The old man with a well made-up white

moustache had a nice impression on me a couple of weeks earlier, when we met up for the first time and spent an evening together in his ancestral palm field, talking about zar. I enjoyed his description of the political situation and its impacts on Islanders' lives as well as on practicing ceremonies, his deep knowledge on Sufism, and even his pleasant recommendation to read Molana (Rumi) in order to learn more from zar (which sounded so sweet and, at the same time, weird to me).

“Marhaba Bab Ahmad! What do you think about the session? It sounds like Bāb Isā is having a tough night trying to calm the wind down: is it really a wind?”

“Allah knows doctor Nima, only Allah knows. It is a very sly wind. I have never seen such a crafty wind in my whole life, but believe in Allah and trust Bāb Isā: he will find a way to tame it. For him, there is only sooner or later, but not never!” The wrinkled face mellow Islander responds to me calmly but confidentially, pointing out to the internal stage by moving his eyebrows and hands at the same time, where drums murmuring notify that the following part of zar has arrived.

The second round starts fast: without neither a prelude nor a serving, the band starts playing. No other one dancing now, Bāb Isā and his assistants, as well as all the other participants, are concentrating on Rāhil who has been moved to the centre of the circle and covered with a white scarf embroidered with marginal golden patterns. Clapping and drumming, hands blow with the music ... singing and swaying, bodies unify with the winds ... Once again, the world and whatever-in-the-world moves: Rāhil is not moving though.

It's warm and humid in the room, and I am worn out by the endless participation in their practices that sounds to be pointless, sterile, and unfruitful. My hands are in pain, and I feel irked

by the repetitive monotonous cries of the drums. Bāb Isā, covered with sweat but still insistently, does not stop beating the crying sickly woman with his bamboo stick, and I read doubt and fatigue in his eyes, telling myself: “he is trying to figure out a way to declare the failure to his peoples. This is going to be a defeat and can never help this woman feel better.”

Right in the middle of the frustration, the healer raises his hand violently, ordering his band to stop drumming and us to stop singing and clapping. He quickly leaves the room without saying a single word or looking into anybody’s eyes, keeping everyone confused until his return a couple of minutes later, when he has on a luxurious cape, splendidly woven with green and gold cloths. Neither saying a word nor looking to anybody’s eyes, walking unusually fast, the healer takes a small *dāyere*⁹⁸ off the wall and sharply approaches the sufferer. Standing up right above her head, Bāb Isā starts singing with the sharpest possible voice, meaningless songs which are so closer to screaming than singing, and wildly hitting the drum with a horrifying weird look in his eyes. Muddled and bewitched, I feel that the Bābā has transformed into Satan, a devil wind: violent, unconscious, and cruel. He puts the drum aside and starts beating Rāhil again. And the wind insider her starts crying loudly, begging the healer to stop the punishment, announcing that it agrees to temporarily stop her suffering. The wind defeats: it has come down and is ready to compromise. This is the most critical step in zar ceremonies: the healer hugs the woman,

⁹⁸ Dāyere is a small-sized made by attaching goat skin onto a round wooden frame. There are also jingles (very thin metal rings) attached inside the wooden frame. The player holds the instrument vertically with both hands and by tapping fingers on the goat skin on the bottom and the corners of the instrument. Shaking dayereh during the performance produces a sharp sound which is made up of the dialogue between the beaten skin and shaking metals.

caresses her hair and face in order to calm her down, and she starts to cry silently in the Bābā's arms.

The doors open, the lights turn on, and people start hugging each other. The healer's assistants entertain the guests with herbal oils and odors, hookahs, and small cups of flavoured goat milk and black tea. Rāhil is hobbling in the room, trying hard to take more than two –three steps before her body forces her to sit down. The wind is tamed.

Speaking with Winds: of Language, Meaning, and Sympathy

In late summer 2015, in the middle of getting back from my first stay in the Island and getting prepared to return to Ottawa, I get invited to give a lecture about zar healing practices in southern Iran, at Siavoushan, a psychology centre in Tehran. The institute was funded almost a decade ago by a well-known Iranian psychoanalyst, educated in Germany and keeping loyal to his “national identity” both politically and culturally. Waiting for the lecture to start, I recall the couple of years that I was attending the Centre, as a patient, for get help getting rid o’ the situational depression which had targeted me after my father’s passing. Thinking of the past days, I notice a masterly Iranian calligraphic frame on the front wall reflecting a quote by Rumi: “people are concealed beneath their tongues. This reminded me of several conversations I had with zar practitioners and their antagonists, as well as their insistence on speaking with winds as one of the last steps in taming them. Both sides used the phenomenon as a strong weapon against each other. The step takes place after the wind is verified, comes down, and is ready to compromise. As winds are born in and blow from different places in the world, they speak different languages which could be Portuguese, Chinese, Swahili, French, Welsh, Arabic, German, Indian, etc., also a mix of more than two languages, or even a language that is unknown to us. While the believers say two people (healer and sufferer) acquiring the ability to speak a totally new language which

has been previously unknown to them could be a sign of their being right, the contenders think that the evidence shows none of the participants can speak even one correct and complete sentence in any of the claimed languages. It is so interesting but not coincidental that only a little bit later that day, one of the university professors who has attended the lecture mentioned hearing this “meaningless weird language, claimed to be Scottish English, but totally gibberish” during one majles, which would be “the best proof to repudiate superstitious practices of the Islanders.” I recite a poem by Bidel Dehlavi,⁹⁹ in response: “and so much subtle meanings, imprisoned behind the curtains of secret, because of the foreignness and insufficiency of the tongue,” and the conversation goes somewhere else, but the discussion stays with me.

Later in the afternoon, I recall the warm blowy evening at Bab Ahmad’s palm field, when he recommends me to read more Rumi for understanding zar more accurately: “Have you read the story of four men arguing about grapes as each knew them by a different name?”

“Four persons, a Persian, an Arab, a Turk, and a Greek, were traveling together, and received a present of a dirhem.¹⁰⁰ The Persian said he would buy “angur” with it, the Arab said he would buy “inab,” while the Turk and the Greek were for buying “uzum” and “astaphil” (staphyle), respectively. Now all these words mean one and the same thing, viz. “grapes;” but, owing to their ignorance of each other’s languages, they fancied they each wanted to buy something different, and accordingly a violent quarrel arose between them. At last, a wise man who knew all their languages came up and explained to them that they were all wishing for one and the same thing” (Rumi 2001: 160-161).

⁹⁹ Bidel Dehlavi (1642-1720) was an important poet and Sufi from India but well-known for his Persian poems which are fantastic, surreal, delicate, and difficult to understand.

¹⁰⁰ A silver coin

Little by little, I read more of Rumi. I read not only the second part of his poem that was framed in the psychology centre, “people are concealed beneath their tongues, the tongue is a curtain over people’s souls,” but I arrive to another fascinating story by him, the story of the Hoopoe and Solomon:

Solomon’s tent was put up by his men, And all his birds came back to him again. He spoke their tongue and knew them personally, So one by one they flew there eagerly. The birds stopped twittering inside his tent, Than brothers they became more eloquent:

Sharing a language is a bond so deep, With foreigners we’re prisoners in their keep. Some Turks and Indians though might speak the same, While fellow Turks are strangers but in name.

The tongue of intimacy is set apart, Beyond mere words, it’s being one at heart.

By verbal and non-verbal intimations, Our hearts give thousands of interpretations. (Rumi 2001: 76-77)

This story from Rumi, as well as stories from other Sufis, offers important lessons about zar. The winds’ tongue is a particular tongue; their language is their own. As the wind moves and howls it talks to us, but not through using words that are known to all of us. The wind language is the language of intimacy and being in each others’ hearts. As different winds blow into each other, different people interpenetrate each others’ existences, and this experience of blowing in the world helps them talk together, communicate one another, understand each others’ fears, pains, hopes, intentions ... without applying exact and intact words and phrases. This language is neither Swahili, Arabic, old Arabic, Welsh, Chinese, French, Spanish, English, Chinese, German ... nor a mix of two or more of them. This language is not a language common in any specific region in the world: It is the language of being-in-the-world. The winds’ language can be totally wordless created by only sounds. The winds’ language can be even created by the silence merely:

when Uthman became caliph, he stepped up into the pulpit. The people waited to see what he would say. He was silent and said nothing. He looked steadily at the people, and a state of ecstasy descended upon them so that they were unable to move, and could not tell where they were. Not by a hundred preachings and sermons could such an excellent state have been shown to them. Precious lessons were imparted, and secrets revealed (Rumi 2020: 235)

Being-in-the-world speaks with a language that is created by hearts and not tongues. Tongue would be such a foreigner to reveal our existential secrets with. Tongue is insufficient to talk about being-in-the-world. A language which is created by hearts talks about love: it is only such a language which is capable of talking about care.

Winds' language is a new one created, better to say improvised by only the participants, therefore only sounds understandable to them too. And that is why 'the strangers' find it incomplete, meaningless and deceptive: "the tongue of intimacy is set apart, beyond mere words, it's being one at heart." Common words are considered insufficient and foreign by the winds, correspondingly. Winds need to talk about specific meanings which cannot be and should not be revealed to the 'strangers.' That is why they choose to create and use their own words, their own sounds, which would be perceivable through having attuned hearts and not sharing the same lingual skills. The winds speak languages which are closer to sounds and songs, to drumming and dancing ... To understand what winds say, one needs to become not only empathetic but also sympathetic toward those who belong to them: winds' steeds. This would only happen by suspending our current sensuous worlds, opening ourselves up, and trying to attune ourselves to zar practitioners' sensory worlds. To understand what winds say, one needs to learn how to keep silent, how to drum, how to get possessed, how to move, how to tame winds ... To understand what winds

say, one needs to learn how to blow with winds. It is the only way to speak with them. It is the only way to know about their homelands, the reason they make us ill, and the ways to tame them. Blow with the winds, talk with them, tame them, and they will reveal the remedy: this is how winds speak!

When the session ends, I find out that Bāb Isā is talking with Rāhil and her husband privately. I ask the healer about his post-ceremonial special recommendations for the couple, and he smiles, stares at the yard tiles, and says nothing to me. It is only after noticing my curiosity that he feels pushed to respond: “Only Allah is well-aware of all the secrets. I recommended them to come back for another ceremony in four or five months. In order to get better, she needs at least two more ceremonies. It is a cruel wind that I have never met before. At first, I thought that it was a wind sent by either her mother-in-law or her sisters-in-law but it was a mistake. So once again I thought that it was a jinn. Then something told me that I had made the same mistake before and I guessed that it was a pretty sly and villainous wind ‘pretending’ to be a jinn. Then I got able to catch him: he is a Chinese wind being wandering on the sea. He possesses Shams initially but then after meeting Rāhil and liking her more, decides to possess the poor woman instead.”

“How did you find it out? How did you realize that it was a Chinese wind only pretending to be a jinn?”

“I do not ‘realize’ doctor Nima: Allah tells me. Allah knows everything and I do not know anything. Sometime during our dance tonight, I was saying to myself that I would not be able to help her. I even did not know such a wind existed. I was feeling so sad of not being able to help her but I decided to insist. Such a strong wind and I talked to God when everybody was dancing. I talked to God. I begged him to help me heal the woman. And he responded that he was stronger than any wind. So, Allah told me to find a new way: ‘if there is a strong wind you get stronger. If

there is a cruel wind you get crueler. If it pretends to be a demon you pretend to be Satan: become the king of all the devils, become the ruler of all the winds!’ I only listened to what Allah was telling me to do.”

Zar is about drumming and dancing with winds, becoming winds, and blowing together and into one another. This blowing happens in a world, the sensory world of zar practitioners, that embraces all the movements, instruments and songs, feelings and thoughts, fears, pains and remedies, gods and demons, paths and possibilities ... which are waiting to make themselves revealed to us.¹⁰¹ Blowing together, and into each other, takes place in different paths and directions: the healer blows with sufferers, other zar practitioners, and even those who do not necessarily believe in the winds and even those who might be there but are not necessarily visible to everybody (Allah and his angels, Satan, jinns, other spirits, etc.). This all happens in various directions such as drumming, dancing, singing, healing, playing, praying, researching, philosophizing, or any other passage toward perceiving the world. In whatever path or direction the winds blow, there is always a communication between oneness and multiplicity. Like winds, which blow and unify various things and beings, like winds which blow and create a unified world, zar blows and creates peace and unity out of tension, multiplicity, and unpredictability. Zar unifies different sounds and languages under the category of one healing language, the language of the beloved. This language might sound totally meaningless or even unnoticeable to us. I once asked Bāb Isā about the meanings of the songs he sings during the ceremonies. He first said that those were lines in old Arabic language but when I insisted that there should be some possibilities to translate old Arabic, he said that those songs were sent by God and only Allah

¹⁰¹ I am using ‘us’ and not ‘them’ because there is no evidence that they do not want to appear to people other than zar practitioners. But only if we are open-hearted enough to notice them!

knew their meanings. This is exactly what I mean by the language of the beloved which is adequate to heal:

I think of rhymes, but the Beloved says: / “just for my face reserve your
constant gaze!
Sit comfortably my rhyme-enthusiast / to me you rhyme with fortune that
will last.
Words aren’t for lovers to reflect upon / what then are words? Around
vines, they’re a thorn.
Word, sound, and speech I strike relentlessly / so I can talk to you without
these three.
The word I kept from Adam all these years / my secret, I’ll now whisper in
your ears.
What I would not tell Abraham I’ll tell / and things that Gabriel doesn’t
know as well! (Rumi 2004: 107 – 108)

In whatever path or direction winds blow, there is always a communication between oneness and multiplicity. Like winds, which blow and unify various things and beings, zar blows and unifies different things and beings in different times and places. By tuning people’s movements as well as their emotions, perceptions, intentions, hopes, sufferings and desires, with other beings, things and worldly flows, zar creates a phenomenological unity which transcends temporality and locality and makes healing possible at the personal level and serves as the basis of creation of a community (Ahle havā [people of the wind]) at social level. This is how the world reveals its mysteries to us, and healing and unity are acquired.

Such blowing together and into one another starts from the very first steps of perceiving the bodily issue as a case of wind possession, and becomes heavier based on intimate and heart-to-heart connections created during various stages of the healing process (i.e., during the initial examination, preliminary medical caregiving during the isolation period and the principal healing process during the main session). As I mentioned earlier, sufferers become new members of the

healers' communities when the wind is tamed either temporarily or permanently. This, I suppose, is a way to make sure that people's blowing in the world keeps going forever.

Blowing together and into one another does not happen based on a horizontal community structure. New healers are assigned by either the most capable healer or a council of most knowledgeable members of each community to ensure that the most adequate healer becomes the new *bābā* or *māmā*. Medical, botanical, and navigating knowledge, musical skills, compassion, a good singing voice, kindness, a sense of responsibility and public communications are amongst various essential characteristics one needs to have for becoming a wind tamer. Healers can choose their apprentices on their own, however, I believe that the whole wind taming ceremonies could also be considered as a path of apprenticeship. Healing or knowledge of taming winds reveals itself by tuning people's movements as well as their feelings and intentions with all other worldly flows (other human and non-human beings and things). Such process of disclosure takes place when the healer engages participants in different bodily experiences (skillful activities) that help them sense *zar* knowledge, step-by-step, to understand each others' experiences, and to become able to participate in each others' experiences. This is what I mean by blowing with each other and into one another.

All this, however, is nothing fixed and can be considered as an ever-changing process. There is a source of winds' behaviours, songs, dances, and remedies available to all healers for sure but all of them could be considered as flexible, interpretable, and thus modifiable when needed. Like the language, poems, and songs that are created and improvised during the ceremonies, healing, as the most proper way of taming the wind, is created and improvised based on participants' movements, intentions and feelings under the mentoring of *bābā* or *māmā* who are the most knowledgeable ones about communities' life-worlds of medicine, music, personal manners and

social relations, thence are the most reliable ones to blow with. In this sense, improvisation means blowing with each other as well as into one another to sense new ways of healing in the world.

CHAPTER NINE

Blowing with Flows of Madness and Creation

- “To those human beings who are of any concern to me I wish suffering, desolation, sickness, ill-treatment, indignities” — Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

- “What a pain you create, that becomes a treatment for all my pains!
What a darkness you create, that becomes a flood of light and strengthens my eyes!”— Rumi

The roaring sea is shouting its anger out. The only thing one can hear is the tumult of the spumous waves and the only thing one can see is darkness. In the darkness, a small boat is wandering in the stormy ocean, getting whipped by cruel brows of wind and water. And in the boat, I am wondering if these will be my last moments of life, or if we will survive losing our way towards the village on the furious sea hours after the sundown.

A couple of hours after dawn that day, three friends of mine, two of them disciples of Bāb Isā, had taken me to Hengom¹⁰² to see and worship a sacred jujube tree¹⁰³ that was able to cure specific illnesses (e.g., epilepsy, infertility, depression, asthenia, and paralysis). After spending the whole day on the island, I asked them to go back to our village before the night fell; this was contrary to what they had planned, which was to stay at Hengom and fishing crabs at night. They were going to pair some home-made palm vodka with king crabs and, as drinking was strongly prohibited in the region, I did not want to face possible consequences of breaking Islamic rules. That was why I insisted on returning to Salak, although they warned me about sailing, “especially on a small boat, in a dark and windy night like this.”

¹⁰² Hengam is a beautiful and lonely island located about thirty kilometers south of Salak village.

¹⁰³ Jujubi (Konar or Sedr in Farsi), also known as Christ’s thorn jujube (the scientific name of *Ziziphus spina-christi*) is an evergreen tree which is native to the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, southern Asia, and tropical Africa. Its fruits as well as leaves, roots, and even its boughs and trunks have different nutritive and medical application for people of southern Iran.

“It is less than forty minutes sailing, and the sea does not look to be too bad. And who knows? Tomorrow can be even worse. So, let’s go back!” I persisted in asking, and so began the adventure.

The more we get away from the coastline the more severe situation becomes. Never-ending gusty night all around, and we are lost in the ferocious sea storm. Wandering on the water for over two hours, I was all wet, close to tears because of seeing death waiting for us eagerly, horrified, disappointed. I was in so much pain after the water hit on the frail body of the boat, and the throbbing jerks made by the waves could easily throw us out of the boat.

After a couple of hours wandering on the sea, finally, city lights appeared. Surrounded by the wild waves that become more brutal second after second, I cannot stop thinking of falling into the savage ocean before arriving to the village. Totally tired and desperate, I try to guess if my swimming skills will be good enough to save me or not, and I cannot think of any chance given the stormy water that apparently has an avid desire to annihilate our small boat.

Imprisoned by endless darkness, I suddenly see a bright split in the sky. A diagonal line of light gets bigger and clearer in the sky, and right behind the ray of light, on the sea, I see a huge monster approaching the boat. It does not take long for me to recognize him: he is Nessie, a childhood friend of mine.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Loch Ness monster is a huge marine creature that, according to Scottish culture since ancient times, inhabits Loch Ness, in the Scottish Highlands. As a huge humpy-backed beast with a very long neck, it can be savage and brutal but in specific unknown conditions, the monster will be keen on saving tough yet kind-hearted lake-farers too. Loch Ness monster stories have been employed to create various artworks such as different poems, fables, songs, movies, etc. I used to watch a fiction television series during my childhood that had portrayed Nessie as an ugly but soft-natured friend for the teenager boys of

I have been thinking about my experience of getting lost in the dark stormy sea, approaching death, and surviving by the help of Nessie since that night. During all these years, I mainly have had two different concerns regarding the incident: firstly, how did this occurrence happen to me? I never had such experiences beforehand (or even something close to it) nor since. Secondly, the incident reminded me of some of the chats that I had with zar practitioners before that perilous night. Prior to getting further and writing about my thoughts on these two topics, it will be helpful to briefly recount two island inhabitants' stories. These two members of zar community had experienced analogous moods that led them to suffering and sickness; seeking treatment and help, they met with Bābā Isā and his assistants.

Monsieur Kosravi has been in contact with Bābā Isā and his family since he was a teenager. Being a difficult kid and having some bad attitudes, however, makes Bābā Isā have him excluded from his close circle of family, friends, and followers. As Monsieur Kosravi tells it, "being taught by delinquent peers, I started to participate in evil and immoral activities such as shoplifting and abusing younger kids of the village. After a couple of years, I was leading a gang that used to be the nightmare of almost everybody in the area. About thirty years ago and on a summer evening, I was going to have some wine. Right after picking the Chinese wine bowl up, I saw an old man right in front of me: the swarthy old guy with a gray beard, green turban and cape, and a pair of very big eyes staring at me and burning from anger, started approaching me ... heavily ... slowly ... I could not avoid his deep looks."

He inhales deeply and continues: "Actually I could not do anything. He came in front of me, took my wrist, squeezed it very strongly, and led me to throw the bowl toward the wall. I did it

the region. This was how I became friends with Nessie, started playing with it, and trust it as a reliable guard since my childhood.

spontaneously and when the shards of the bowl were everywhere on the floor, he smiled at me and left the room. I could only start following the old man after some seconds, but I could never see him anymore nor met him in my life afterwards.”

Monsieur Ḵosravi “stops drinking, puts all his deviant actions aside, and tries hard to make up for his previous mistakes.” A few months later, when he talks to Bābā Isā about this experience, the healer tells him that he has met with Seyyed Ahmad, a “Muslim wind who is a good friend of Allah.” Little by little, Monsieur Ḵosravi notices that he has been possessed by Seyyed Ahmad. Seyyed Ahmad is a calm wind that appears rarely but is not hesitant to show himself by coming down and dancing with other winds during different ceremonies. The wind also has a good knowledge of healing bodily pains and has provided Bābā Isā with helpful medical recommendations a couple of times. This is how Monsieur Ḵosravi gains Bābā’s trust again: the healer counts on him nowadays, Bābā Isā counts on Monsieur Ḵosravi, listens to his medical recommendations, and has even once asked him to lead a zar healing ceremony.

Robāb is a young woman living in Qeshm city with her husband and three children but is originally from a small village around Bandar Abbas. As a teenager, she falls in love with her cousin when hosting him at her dad’s house for less than a week. The day after her beloved leaves the village to his father’s house in Qeshm, sometime around noon, when Robāb is going to the palm farm for calling his dad to come back home to have lunch, a beautiful tree on the way catches her attention. She finds the tree so unique and glorious, that she stops on her way and starts staring at its extremely green branches. Mixed with the sunshine and the leaves, she notices a small woman on top of the tree. The woman is young and astonishingly beautiful, with a bright face and a green and golden scarf, which has been patterned by golden coins. It does not take long that their eyes lock one into the other and Rabab finds “something really scary” at the very

end of her looks. Rabab loses consciousness.

After that night, she starts losing weight and feels dizzy and weak, possibly from severe bleeding. One night a couple of weeks later, she hears a bird singing on top of the wall in front of their living room. The situation gets even worse as she is no longer able to sleep. The bird sings, flies to their yard, and sings for her every night and her song scares her. Her parents can neither see nor hear the bird anywhere, though, and only connect her experience as being bothered by nightmares. After visiting a general physician, she is referred to a psychiatrist at a hospital in Shiraz, one of the major cities in southern Iran, about seven hours driving from her home.

Though she is diagnosed with depression and starts the prescribed course of biomedical care, her situation not only does not improve but becomes worse. The nightly birdsong ends, but now she has to fight with other issues such as weakness, drowsiness, boredom, restricted ability to move, and irregular menstruation, among others. Almost everybody in the village thinks that she is possessed by a devil wind, and finally, her family decides to ask Bābā Isā to visit her.

Bābā Isā says that she has been getting annoyed, but not caught, by a Peri that is possibly in love with Robāb's cousin, too. He holds a very short healing session which includes prayer and anointment; providing Robāb is provided with some herbal teas and bodily practices and Bābā Isā ends the session by recommending her dad help Robab getting married to the person that she loves, as soon as they can. The following week, one night, Robāb hears the night bird singing on the wall again. She goes to the yard and sees the same woman-bird sitting on top of the wall, singing and smiling at her again. Robāb passes away and gradually starts feeling better after coming around. She marries her cousin and now lives with him and their three kids in Qeshm Island.

What can we say about these three experiences? How can we interpret or at least try to understand the phenomenon of seeing, hearing, and making connections with creatures that other people can rarely see, listen, or connect to? From a scientific point of view, probably, these surreal stories happen as results of losing control over our minds in times of doubt, fear, disaster, and powerlessness. Illusions and hallucinations, according to mainstream psychological knowledge, attack us, deceive us, disconnect us from reality, and dehumanize us during our confrontations with extreme anxiety, restlessness, happiness, temptation, guilt, hatred, and love. In other words, it is during the moments of perceiving our openness to danger and harm, our incompatibility to manage, and our vulnerability against ultimate passions, bodily issues, and death that human beings' responses take extraordinary irrational, suspect, and unreal forms.

Let us think: how irrational and unrealistic are these responses? To discuss this, let's look at two prominent voices in the history of knowledge, Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher whom I opened this chapter with, and Molana (Rumi), the Iranian Sufi referred to frequently throughout this dissertation. Nietzsche dealt with severe health issues since his childhood, experiencing his first migraine at the age of nine. Only three years later, at 12, his eyes began to cause problems: poor eyesight, the result of eye fatigue and other sight issues, led to his vision diminishing and even blindness of first his right eye, then eventually almost total blindness later in life. Hemorrhoids, vomiting blood, abdominal fits, occasional faints, visual hallucinations, and the other most heard bodily issue, syphilis—which now sounds to be false, misdiagnosis of a brain tumor according to recent studies by Huenemann (2013: 64) — exposed the philosopher to different levels of medical care; this included following prescribed medications and diets, and even being hospitalized in psychiatric clinics before his final breakdown in Turin in 1899. Nietzsche, nevertheless, published at least fifteen books before his tragic collapse, most of them

written in a poetic style, as close to producing art as if the philosopher was playing music, his pen in hand, and dancing with words and ideas, writing down his thoughts.

About mid-thirteenth century, Rumi was one of the most prominent jurists and instructors in the Islamic world, until he met *Šamse Tabrizi*, a dervish who was traveling throughout Middle East to find somebody who could tolerate his company, learn from him, and become his best friend. They met up and, for about six months, had long-term in-depth discussions, until Šams decided to leave Konya and disappear. Molana made every effort to find him but the harder he tried the more he failed. After losing Šams, Rumi changed completely. The suffering he had to deal with made him an ascetic and, at the same time, a poet dancing in the city with every sequence of sounds which could make him think of Šams. Nowadays Molana is well-known, not only in Iran and other Farsi-speaking areas of the world, but in almost the entire world for his sensational poems and unique style of spiritual dancing (Sama, the dance of whirling dervishes), as well as his humanist reading of Islamic teachings and deep considerations about humans' being in the world.

I briefly mention Nietzsche and Rumi, because I think their painful life stories can help create connections between life, suffering, madness, and creativity. Both suffered throughout their lives, one with bodily issues for most of his life, while the other was coping with the pain of separation from his beloved until he passed away.

This is not the end of the story though: both responded to the painful conditions of their lives by creating. Although there are three significant resemblances between the ways that Nietzsche and Rumi opened in the world to respond to their hardship, one specific aspect is important here. They both created works of art such as rhythmic prose, music, poetry, dance, among others, and they both believed that these works of art should bring happiness (literal happiness which means being happy and joyful) to us. Key to my discussions in this chapter, however, is the fact that both Nietzsche and Rumi created real responses to their suffering. By insisting on the term real, I would like to question the mainstream scientific duality of real/unreal and the criteria on which

these categories are defined and developed.

In one of my favourite Farsi poems, Rumi asks:

How could I know that this longing would drive me so crazy?
That it would make my heart a prison, and my eyes a river?
How could I know that a flood would appear and carry me away,
and hurl me like a boat into a vast sea of blood?
That waves would beat and split my boat board by board,
until each board twists away from all the many tortures.
Then a sea-monster would raise its head and swallow the sea.
And such an immense sea would go dry like a desert plain.

Following my earlier discussions about Rumi's suffering and illuminating the specific metaphorical language of the Farsi poetry to non-Farsi speakers a little bit more, I can say that these lines speak about Rumi crying sharply because of his intense love of Šams. He says that experiencing deepest sorrow ever makes him cry and moves him towards madness. In the middle of such sorrow, melancholy, and madness, he feels like his tears have created a big sea, in which he is moving on a small boat when a storm starts and destroys his boat. Wandering in the flood a ferocious whale-looking sea monster appears and guzzles all the water.

We leave Rumi in his frightening sorrow of separation from Šams alone, to ask the question "how and why should any of us consider this as an unreal experience?" I am not sure what would happen to Molana if he were living nowadays, but I can imagine that psychiatrists would diagnose him with schizophrenia and label the ways in which he describes his suffering as delusions and hallucinations, or in the best-case scenario, would reduce him to a mad poet who must go through psychiatric biomedical care. No need to say that this is the best way to deprive humanity of one of its most influential faces throughout the history.

Returning to our three examples of experiencing 'different' events in life, keeping the connectedness of suffering and creation as reviewed in stories of Nietzsche and Rumi with ourselves, is there a way that lets us defend the 'reality' of such experiences? Following philosophers like Heidegger and Svenaeus, I think that everyday life for human beings will become possible only in a being-at-home condition. In other words, to make the unknown world

familiar thus liveable, we must make it a homelike place. This home-making becomes feasible only by ceaseless concealing of whatever aspect of our being-in-the-world reminds us of strangeness, violence, and uncanniness of the world (Heidegger 2006 [1962]). In specific moments of life, when experiencing fear, loneliness, restlessness, loss of control, weakness, severe guilt, vulnerability, pain, suffering, fragility, and mortality, the uncanny character of the world reveals itself, and human beings notice that the world could be neither fully controlled nor perceived by them.

For a long period of time throughout history, and as a prominent branch of human knowledge, we have been seeing such ‘revelation of evil’ as negative phenomena which should diminish. This is not the end of the story, though: following such a governing approach towards life we have also been making various causal models that intend to relate, categorize, and modify different human experiences. Awareness of uncanniness as an independent variable results in unpleasant human moods, fear, suffering, loss of control, asense of finitude, among others, as dependant ones. Hallucination, melancholy, daydreaming, illusion and delusion, depression, and madness are dreadful consequences of foresaid factors that need to be cured and controlled. Contrary to this viewpoint, I think that these phenomena should not be labeled as negative results but instead be considered as different phenomena of experience that not only represent our moods but rise from the core of our very beings, so should be pondered as those moods per-se. This being said, my first example at the beginning of the current chapter should not be seen as being caught in frightening and stressful conditions that results in deviation of mind and forging ‘unreal’ responses to cope better with the fear and confusion of a particular chaotic situation. Rather, what is experienced in times of ultimate confusion, panic, and canniness is the representation of different moods that already live in us and with us, and become able to reveal

in more transparent and noticeable ways during those specific moments. Nessie was not a result of my fear, then, but rather it was my fear of death as well keeping slightly hopeful to survive the stormy ocean. Accordingly, Seyyed Ahmad has been Monsieur Khosravi's guilt, an internal tension between drinking alcohol or repenting and becoming a "good" person. Likewise, Robāb's woman-bird, I think, should be interpreted as her experience of falling in love with her cousin, as confrontation with her femininity.

To live is to move: we inhabit the world and as our life goes on, we change, we grow. Not a single moment during this moving from one person to another is detachable from our bodily being. We cannot exist without our bodies, and our bodies cannot exist without us: we are our bodies, and our bodies are us. As living beings, we improvise our being in the world in different bodily ways, endlessly. Our life, this path of improvisation, has different aspects, too: some more noticeable and some more unobtrusive. It is probably obvious to so many of us that our life experiences shape our bodies. One might be able to think of the embodied essence of improvising life, too.

There is another related aspect, however, that needs the deepest pondering to uncover: improvising life also embodies various missions of getting exposed to different aspects of being in the world which is usually marginalized when perceiving the world. Improvising life embodies moving away from quotidian ways of inhabiting the world and stepping into indirect, hidden, perilous, and mysterious paths. Both feeling unsafe and taking adventure are integral to our existence, just as joy and suffering are. To be thrown into uncanniness is not something to be either diminished or bypassed: we should welcome our uncanny being in the world; we should welcome our life: remain unsettled, so that something new can emerge!

Such acceptance of pain, of ambiguity, of separation and loss, of fear and finitude, such acceptance of suffering will move us to flourish, to open ourselves to ‘other’ aspects of being, and to create new paths of life towards novel thoughts and feelings. Such acceptance of being is the very initial worldly source of creativity. Creativity is the essence of our being in the world. Following such interpretation of life, every single human being is a god and all our human activities, composing songs, writing poetry, doing scientific research, philosophizing, healing, and any form of gaining knowledge about the world, is a form of artistic improvisation that becomes possible by blowing in the world riding winds of creativity.

In compliance with this, winds are not the cause of illness. Rather, winds are the shapes of illness: winds are illness. As human beings we are exposed to pain, suffering, and illness. In other words, our being is being-with-pain. Experiencing bodily issues, having pain, suffering, and falling ill are necessary phenomena of our existence and confronting them usually follows by processes of making and creation. In this sense, healing is improvising paths of knowledge about human body in the world, creating new ways of acknowledging our afflicted being in the world, so as to make the burden of suffering bearable.

Such creation is a collective process which embodies all components of humans’ being in the world. All the winds, animals, songs, birds, moon, ocean, demons and angels, sea monsters, poems and fables, plants, gods, jinns, afflicted, healers and their bands, and other participants dance together to improvise a path, without any specific harbor, but leading us to a new land which is more inhabitable. It is in this sense of creativity that every single ceremony is a new zar performance. It is in this sense of creativity that every single performance is recreating zar. It is in this sense of creativity that a healing ceremony, zar, approaches a work of art as much as is

possible. It is in this sense of creativity that the healing practices and making arts unify. Zar is creating artistically. It is in this sense that zar is life.

EPILOGUE

In Praise of Life

1

“Eventually, life is the only valuable thing that we have.” Driving in twilight, I remember Dervish Safa’s words during our nightly chat by the sea about his ways of communicating with winds as a skillful sailor.

I have been warned about the possibility of cancer by a general practitioner after unexplained bleeding, and am driving, before dawn, from Montreal to Ottawa for relevant tests and ultrasounds when I start whispering: “eventually, life is the only valuable thing that we have.”

2

Life is the only valuable thing that we have. And if I have mainly, if not only, written of pain, suffering, and affliction in my dissertation? Nietzsche’s philosophy comes to mind: “to those who are of any concern to me, I wish suffering and sickness.”

3

For me, Montreal is the city of music festivals. After two years of constraining life flows, music has started moving the world once again. Summer nights of the city reveal many shrouded secrets. Moving with music, people become one with each other and with the world. Moving with music is becoming-with-the-world.

4

Winds also reveal shrouded secrets. They blow in the world and move it. Winds blow with us and move us. They unchain us. Winds bring us together and make us one. Winds chant. They play the drum and sing dance songs. They are kings of music. Winds blow from the past and take

us to the future. They are kings of time. Winds blow from the sea and subdue the coast. They are kings of land. Winds blow among trees and make animals move. They are kings of life. Winds ride us. They are our kings.

By blowing with winds, we understand our interconnectedness with the world. By blowing with winds, we get to know our ocean-ness and our land-ness, our song-ness and our dance-ness, our plant-ness and our animal-ness. By blowing with winds, we get to know our one-ness ... our world-ness. Blowing with winds is becoming with the world. Winds are kings of becoming-with-the-world.

5

Midnight in Saint-Sauveur. I am stuck in bed because of a flu in the middle of the summer, and the pain is unbearable. The fear of dying alone is cruel and I am so powerless to resist. I start groaning uncontrollably. Am I whimpering or singing? Why am I making sounds when dying of pain? Are these sounds making me more powerful to bear the pain? Am I expanding myself, challenging my loneliness, to overcome the pain? Am I trying to connect to the world, am I reaching out to the world for help?

6

Winds ride us. They make us sick and care for us. Winds heal us. Winds relate us to the visible and the invisible. To whatever is and whatever is not. To whatever we can do and whatever we cannot do. To whoever we are and whoever we are not. Winds are messengers of endurance and survival. Winds are messengers of healing and life.

Winds ride us. They make us become one, with one another and with the world. That is the only way in which winds heal us. We share private experiences of pain and suffering with other people of the wind, and they support us. We share our very secret stories with healers, and they help us. We learn to welcome our oneness. The unspeakable, however, must be expressed in the language of the winds. Winds' language is a language of chant; they have their own songs.

Winds play the drum and dance, and healing becomes possible only by learning how to speak the language of the winds.

Blowing with winds, we become new persons. This new wind-human has more power to bear the pain and suffering, to heal, and to solve their various problems. It is only because of these new wind-humans that a new community, the community of Ahle havā, people of the wind, is created.

That is how winds create and protect our togetherness. That is how winds protect our life paths, knowledge, arts, and relationships. That is why winds are our kings. We become with winds. It is only with winds that we are. Winds are our gods. We are, to blow with winds. We are, to become winds ...

7

I have been warned about the possibility of having cancer by a general practitioner after a series of bleedings and am driving from Montreal to Ottawa to have some related tests and ultrasounds before dawn when I start whispering: “eventually, life is the only valuable thing that we have ...”

The sun starts to rise when I am close to one of my favourite spots on the way, the rivière à la Loutre. Bashful arrows of sunlight, playful stone hills, the gentle sky, and eternal green trees are

gloriously beautiful. I think that I am also part of such beauty. I am blowing with the world and this blowing with is the miracle of life. “Life is beautiful and eventually, life is the only valuable thing we have!”

The sun has risen. And two birds are playing with the wind.

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Photos of Qeshm



Photo 1. Off the Beaten Track: Road to Salak Village



Photo 2. Off the Beaten Track: Road to Salak Village



Photo 3. Off the Beaten Track: Road to Salak Village



Photo 4. Off the Beaten Track: Road to Salak Village



Photo 5. Palm Trees in Salak Village

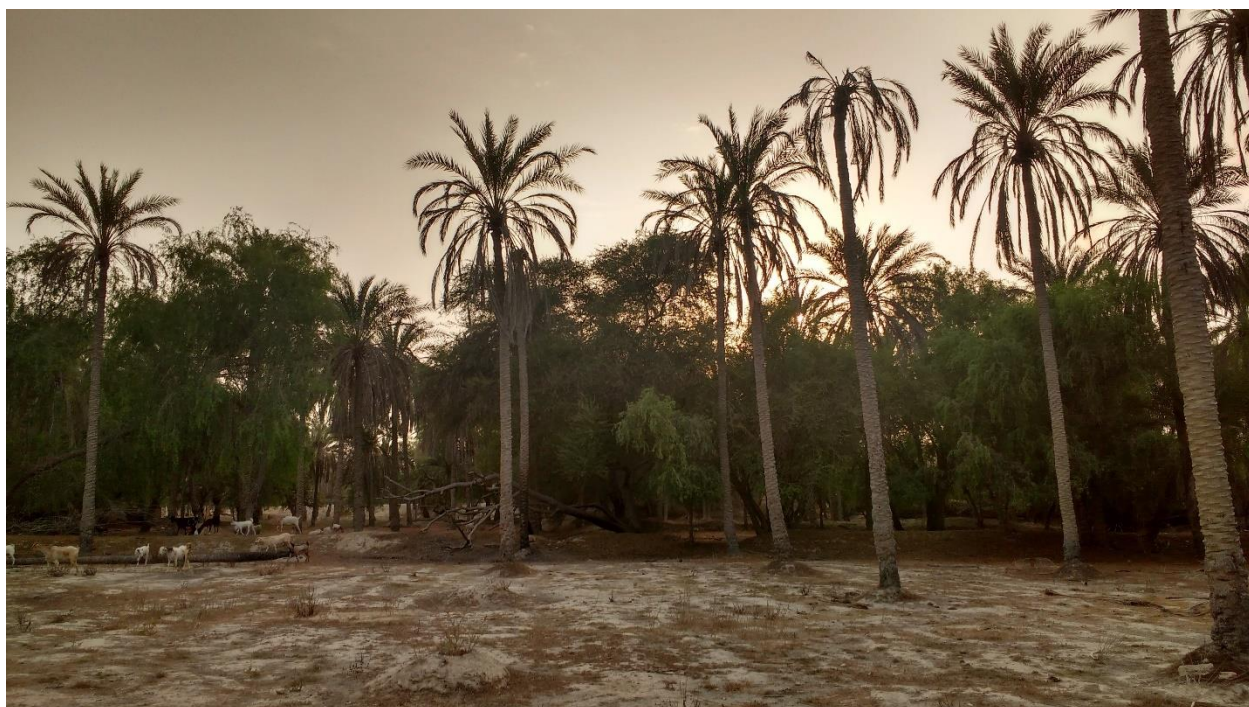


Photo 6. Palm Farm, Salak Village



Photo 7. Looking for Water: Naqāše Village



Photo 8. Woman at the Water Well: Naqāše Village



Photo 9. Camels: Salak Village



Photo 10. Camels: Salak Village



Photo 11. Dhows, Boats, and Grey Mangroves by Tabl Village



Photo 12. Lāft Port: City of Wind Towers



Photo 13. Salak Village



Photo 14. Salak Village



Photo 15. My Residence: Salak Village

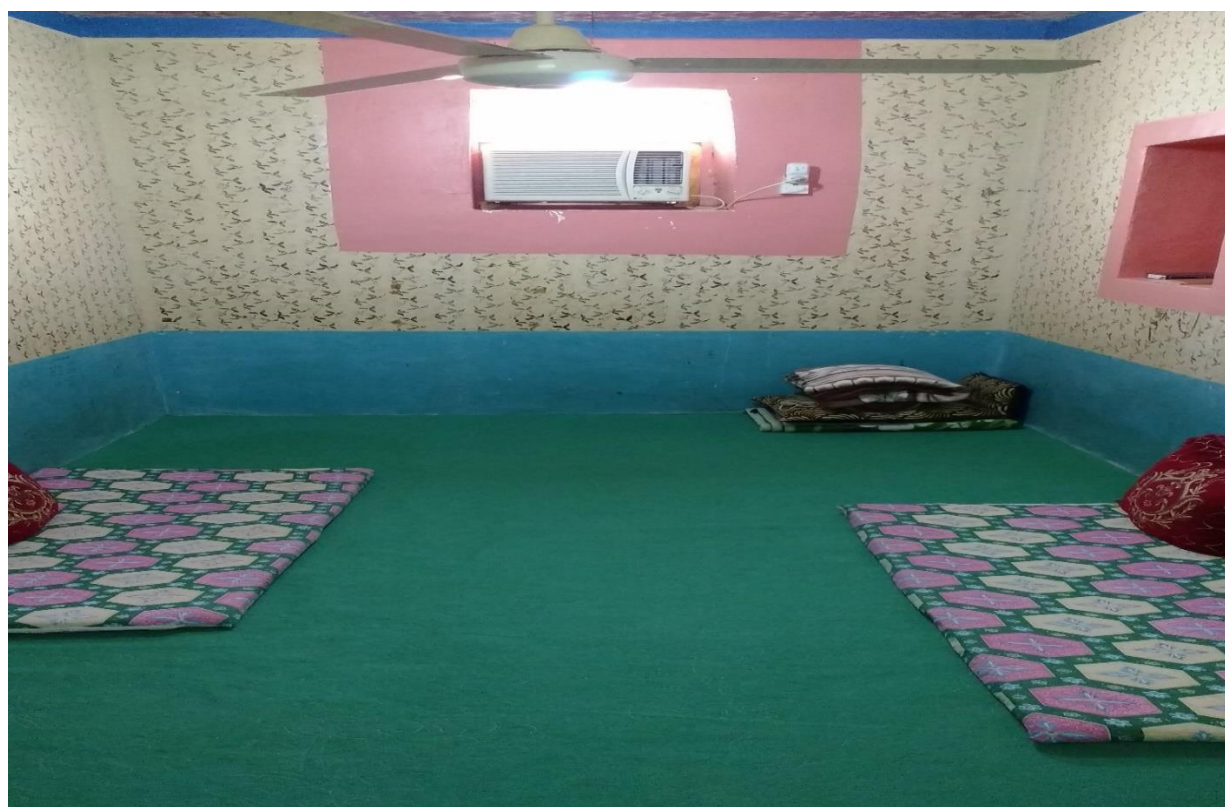


Photo 16. My Residence: Salak Village



Photo 17. A Qeshmi Lunch: Mashed Baby Sharks & Rice



Photo 18. Children Playing by the Ocean



Photo 19. Soheyli Beach: Qeshm Island



Photo 20. Gomborun Beach: Qeshm Island



Photo 21. Zar

Photo Courtesy of Ahmad Bazmandegane Qeshmi



Photo 22. Zar
Photo Courtesy of Ahmad Bazmandegane Qeshmi



Photo 23. Zar
Photo Courtesy of Ahmad Bazmandegane Qeshmi



Photo 24. Sunset in Hengom Island



Photo 25. Sunset on Persian Gulf