

Conclusion

Bringing Back the Sun

Each fall, the first snow brings the shepherds home from the high pastures. Families return from their summer fields. The same villages that seemed abandoned during the height of the summer season now overflow with people and produce. Children spill from one house to the next. Storehouses are filled with fruit, grain, dried tomatoes, walnuts, bottles of wine, pumpkins. Looms are set up outdoors, and women begin weaving belts and headdresses for the coming Chaumos (winter solstice) festival. Old folktales are dusted off and told and retold around the evening fire.

Winter reaches its climax with Chaumos, and then, exhausted by two weeks of dancing and singing, feasting and praying, there is quiet. Winter, in the Kalasha valleys, is a time of drawing inward and a time of rest. Snow makes travel difficult. It is an *onjesta* time, and extra care is taken to separate *onjesta* and *pragata* things. Mornings are long, and people sit inside drinking extra cups of tea, waiting for the world to warm up before going out. Men take the livestock to graze in the nearby holly oak forests or offer fodder dried last summer. Women weave and spin, sort and grind grain. By early afternoon, the tall mountains above the valleys cast their cold, dark shadows over the villages, and people move indoors again. There is more talking. Night comes early, as does sleep.

By the time of the *ístam sáras* festival (in mid-March), the ceremony blessing the “first blossoms of spring” (Morgenstierne 1973:171) and marking the beginning of farming and the relaxation of *onjesta/pragata* customs, winter—once enjoyable—has grown wearisome. Everyone—men, women, children, anthropologists—is ready for spring, ready to plant, ready to work again, to move again. Yet winter

drags on. There is more snow. It is still cold. Worse yet, cold rain sets in. The weather becomes unbearable.

I remember thinking I would go crazy if the sun didn't come out soon, if I were trapped inside one more day, if I had to drink one more cup of tea. And I was not alone. Mothers complained that their children were "eating their heads" (driving them crazy). People started grumbling that they were in foul moods. Steve and I left for a two-week vacation, thinking that surely when we returned spring would also.

But the beginning of April saw more rain, more snow. "This must be unusual," I complained. My family agreed: it was unusual, and what was more, they said, almost every year was unusual like this. On April 10, it rained all night. It rained all morning and was bitterly cold. Mid-morning, Steve came running to the downstairs house. We all went out to see what the commotion was about. From our vantage point high up in Kalashagrom village, we saw a procession of women streaming down the road in the center of the valley. At first, I worried that the women had organized yet another political march to Chitral, but then I noticed that they were singing and laughing. I bolted to catch up, but Saras Gula Aya caught my arm and reminded me that I couldn't go: I was going to the *bashali* that evening. She told me not to worry, that she would tell me all about how women, every spring, bring out the sun after an interminably long winter. Here, then, is Saras Gula Aya's description (and my paraphrasing) of going Hawyashi (*hawyáši*):

Women, when it rains a lot, if the rain won't stop, they go. It's our custom. Every year they go. We're going to *ṭsiám góra kóṭa* [to the white castle/fort of Tsiam], they say, and go.

Every spring, if the weather is unseasonably bad (and almost every year it is), Kalasha women go Hawyashi. As they leave the villages, they proclaim that the weather is terrible and so are their moods. One woman takes a *khawá* basket. She fills it full of rags and declares that she is going to drown herself in the river. The men follow after her and try to prevent her from leaving, saying "don't go, don't go, the sun will come back." The women say, "No, no, the sun won't come back. I'm going, I'm going to Tsiam. The sun isn't coming." The men say, "No, no, don't go, don't go, the sun will come. If you go there you will get

cold." "No," say the women, "let us get cold, let us die (*nášik-oría*). I have no desire to stay here (*may da ne háwaw*). My sheep and goats are freezing. It's cold here. We're going." And the women take off. They take the basket and go. "Don't drown, don't drown," say the men, "The sun will come." The women leave, singing:

yáši párim day-o, hawyáši
[I'm going *yashi*, oh, Hawyashi]

may tábiat ásta túkur-búkur-o-, hawyáši
[My mood is also awry (higgledy-piggledy), oh, Hawyashi]

tsiám góra kóta párim day-o, hawyáši
[I'm going to the white castle/fort in Tsiám, oh, Hawyashi]

a ta ne báta him, o, hawyáši
[I'm not coming back, oh, Hawyashi]

bi zhe bat ást túkur-búkur háwan-o, hawyáši
[Seeds and stones have also become awry, oh, Hawyashi]

tsiám góra kóta párim day-o, hawyáši
[I'm going to white castle/fort of Tsiám, oh, Hawyashi]

may ta bátyak améyak ásta čilá háwan-o, hawyáši
[My kids (young goats) and sheep have become cold, oh,
Hawyahsi]

bačúyak ásta čilá háwan-o, hawyáši
[Calves have also become cold, oh, Hawyashi]

tsiám góra kóta párim day-o, hawyáši
[I'm going to the white castle/fort of Tsiám, oh Hawyashi]

a ta tsiám párim day-o, hawyáši
[I'm going to Tsiám, oh Hawyashi]

So the women leave the villages singing, and the men follow, also singing and begging them to return. They walk out of the valleys

toward Tsiam, the mythical Kalasha place of origin. Once, it is said, ten women did not respond to the men's pleas that the women return, to their promises that the sun would come out again soon. These ten reached Tsiam, and there they married dogs. The dogs there are big and fierce, and won't allow Kalasha men to return. But women are always welcome. "But these are old words," comes the cautious refrain, "Who knows if they're true?" "They go, go, go, go, go. The men try to bring them back at Kort Desh [the Kalasha settlement that lies furthest down-valley], but they don't obey. Finally, the men catch up. They gather lots of wood, gather lots and lots of wood. They light a big fire to make smoke, and the smoke reaches the sky, reaches the sky. The smoke reaches to cloud brother-in-law [*jamó*]. Then he talks to the sky, the smoke talks to the sky, saying, 'don't rain, don't rain! The women are leaving, leaving all by themselves. Please let the sun shine.' Then the sun shines, and they all come back together."

Unlike most Kalasha rituals, going Hawyashi is spontaneous, and people agree about when the time is right. Often the women think to do it, though sometimes a man might suggest it. Like the *bashali* rituals, going Hawyashi is lighthearted and fun, but it is also important. To the Kalasha, going Hawyashi is important because this practice causes the seasons to turn, shifting the world of winter into the fertility and possibility of spring. To me, this ritual is important because, like the women's march to Chitral with which this book began, it serves as an embodied metaphor of what Kalasha mean when they say, "our women are free."

When women go Hawyashi, they say they are returning to Tsiam, the mythical place from which Kalasha believe they came. Although they may never make it there ("Who knows where that is? Who has ever been there and returned?"), in a way the very *act of going* is a return to the heart of Kalasha ethnicity, an enactment of women's freedom that is one of the most significant markers of Kalashaness. As its most basic level, Kalasha women's freedom is freedom of movement, a freedom that is always in implicit comparison to surrounding Muslim women, who never travel unescorted and who take great pride in the comfortable lives they make for themselves and their families within the high walls of Chitrali family houses. Kalasha women also value their freedom to be seen in a world where neighboring women take care to conceal themselves. Most critically, Kalasha women's freedom

is the right to exit an intolerable situation, freedom to disregard—once in a while—the authority of families, husbands, custom. And it is the expectation that their actions will have real effects.

Going Hawyashi, then, is a ritual enactment of the agency—as well as the complexities of and limits to agency—Kalasha women claim across other arenas of their lives. Women leave their villages, wearing the very *khawá* baskets that I argued in chapter 3 are emblematic of women's freedom of movement and their essential economic contribution. The women leave knowing that there are significant risks—indeed, they might drown in the icy river. They disobey the men who try to call them back. They are indifferent to both men's attempts to bring them back physically and their persuasive rhetoric and promises of better tomorrows. And in the end the idea that the women might leave is effective: the sun comes out.

Like other acts that demonstrate women's freedom, women actively *go* Hawyashi (*hawýáši parík*)—just as they *go* *ałášín* (*ałášín parík*) and *go* to the *bashali* (*bašáli parík*). While men may make speeches, give their word, and issue orders, women act—and in fact usually they *walk*. Women shape the invisible *onjesta/pragata* landscape by means of their physical movement through it, by their conscious decisions to go here but not there. They walk, sometimes alone, and sometimes long distances, to care for the fields for which they are responsible. They make and wear the clothing that represents Kalasha ethnicity. So women's freedom almost always involves embodied action or at least potential action.

And, to refine this further, Kalasha women's freedom is expressed through the power to act, not the power to speak. In the 1970s, feminist scholarship was stimulated by Edwin Ardener's (1975a) theory of "muted groups," in which he argued that dominant groups control the dominant form of expression, silencing those over whom they have authority or forcing them to communicate through a model of reality that does not adequately express their experience or worldview. Since then, a major objective of feminist ethnography and theorizing, both within and beyond anthropology, has been "rediscovering women's voices" (Smith-Rosenberg 1985:26, cited in Gal 1991). Recent works have looked beyond speech to consider both silence and action (Gal 1991). Maureen Mahoney has criticized Carol Gilligan's influential notion of "voice" as the site that "connects body and psyche as well as psyche and culture" (Mahoney 1996:610). She argues that silence

“should not be understood unidimensionally as the condition of disempowerment, or ‘being silenced,’ but carries the potential for strength and resistance” (622). Sometimes, then, silence makes authentic action possible.

Although there are many situations in which Kalasha women *do* speak, and many women whose words carry significant weight, “freedom of speech” isn’t part of the Kalasha conception of women’s freedom. They don’t, for example, say “our women are free because they have equal say with men.” Rather, women are free because they do things, make choices, go here or not, elope or not, wear this or that. And in the face of women’s action men’s words have little weight. So part of what women’s freedom involves is the recognition that male spoken authority—while real—is nonbinding.

Once, for example, a coalition of elders was called together by Taksina’s husband. Taksina had been seen with a lover in her mother’s brother’s guesthouse. She claimed that her husband was cruel to her. He claimed that he was fed up with trying to convince her to stay, to behave. He wanted her father to return his bridewealth and “free” Taksina (a quite unconventional but not altogether unthinkable solution to their marital problems). The elders instead decided to direct Taksina to stay with her husband, to work hard in his fields and not take lovers. For an entire afternoon, the most influential men in the valley sat in Taksina’s father’s house instructing her with their most eloquent (if somewhat didactic) speeches about how she should behave. Finally, they asked her, point blank, whether she would stay with her husband. “I’ll stay,” answered Taksina firmly. Later I asked her if she had told the truth, if she really intended to stay. She replied, “Who knows, sister? Probably I’ll go *alaşın*. I’ll see later what I’ll do.” (And in fact I learned in a recent cassette-tape letter from my Kalasha family that she has gone *alaşın*). She insisted that she hadn’t lied, but the truth for her would be in the action she would take, not in spoken promises.

Similarly, the proclamations (chapter 2) issued by valley elders that Kalasha women should no longer wear shawls that cover their headdresses, that they shouldn’t keep chickens, that they should always go to the *bashali* when menstruating rather than sometimes staying at home, all these spoken mandates and many others are meaningful and compelling—to Kalasha women as well as other Kalasha men—but they are not completely *binding*. Because each woman

chooses for herself which customs to observe and how far to follow them, the social and religious landscape of the valley is constantly shifting—slightly but perceptibly.

And yet I have tried not to give the (false) impression that Kalasha women's freedom is an ideal women cultivate at men's expense. Men play a critical role in the Hawyashi ritual, were involved in the political march to Chitral, benefit from and encourage women's agricultural productivity, and make elopements possible. The concept of "our women are free" is an ethical model, embraced by Kalasha men as well as women, of the way the gendered social world *should* work. But this model does not exist in isolation. The cultural emphasis on women's freedom always coexists with an equally powerful and deeply felt model of respect for patriarchal authority—again, an ethical value in which women as well as men are invested.

These two values compete as models for how men and women ought to relate to one another, how social relations ought to progress. Parents and husbands line up on the side of patriarchy and conspire to coerce a girl into staying in a marriage that benefits them, even if it makes her unhappy. Young male lovers are exuberant in their support of the culturally sanctioned freedom of women to leave their husbands in their favor. Women who have taken one path and not the other have a stake in seeing that others do as they have done, in pushing their own choices as the more moral or righteous or courageous. A woman may support freedom of choice when she is young and in love and switch lines when her own daughter wants to leave her favored son-in-law. Or, just as likely, she may choose to stay married to the man to whom her father gave her—citing loyalty to her natal family—but encourage her own daughter to elope.

In fact, these two discourses not only coexist, but each presupposes the other. The assumption of male authority/control is the ground against which women's freedom is configured—it is this, after all, that the women are "not obeying" when they don't heed men's calls to return to the villages rather than marching to Tsiam, when they decide not to follow *onjesta/pragata* customs, when they elope with another man. And, conversely, women's freedom—and the assumption that Kalasha women are, as Hobart puts it, "liable to act"—defines the limits of male authority.

As Bradd Shore notes in *Culture in Mind* (1996), when incompatible models exist for the same domain of experience, conflict and

ambivalence are necessarily generated. At the same time, the collision of these ethical models, these different ways of making sense of and being in the world, makes ethical dilemmas poignant and the outcome of each situation unpredictable. I have a sense that this ambiguity at the very heart of Kalasha culture contributes to the ethos of flexibility and dynamism that, in part, has enabled them to survive for hundreds of years, and against all odds, as a despised minority.

Certainly Kalasha women don't see themselves as creating their lives out of nothing. They do the most they can with the options available to them. In this way, women's choices illustrate cultural innovation and cultural reproduction at the same time. For example, a woman has the right to reject the authority of her former husband and natal family in favor of another man she prefers. So, while she throws off authority, she embraces it in the same act, since she must elope with another man to be truly "free" of the first. Freedom therefore means choosing between available options rather than generating completely new possibilities herself. Women's choice operates in a similar way in other arenas. When women "threw off" some old customs of the *bashali*, they did not reject the cosmological symbolism of *onjesta/pragata* but instituted a new set of customs. This is not to minimize the radical nature of such choices, as each woman's life, relationships, and indeed the lives of many of the community change according to the decisions she makes. And it goes further than this. I think that these small, culturally sanctioned acts of rebellion make other things thinkable—allowing women to imagine that there are no absolutes, that they can do something about oppressive and intolerable situations, and that what they do might make a difference. They know spring can return after the interminable winter.

I asked Saras Gula Aya if the Hawyashi ritual really works, if it really brings back the sun. "What do I know, my daughter?" she said. "Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't." Then, looking up at the gathering clouds, she said that she guessed this time it hadn't. "Tomorrow or the next day," she said, "we'll go again."