Being Maniq

Practice and identity in the forests of Southern Thailand

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Abstract: This paper, based on ongoing fieldwork among the Maniq people of the Banthat mountain range of Thailand, aims to consider aspects of their culture and practice which allow them to share a mutually coherent system of beliefs and practices over time, despite a noted absence of religious dogma and the subtlety of their ritual practices. It considers how the Maniq themselves describe cosmology, ethnic identity and material practice as being ineluctably linked within their own system of values and beliefs. Such a perspective may also point toward a useful analytical path for outside interpretation, helping to overcome some of the vexing problems hunter-gatherer ritual systems and practices often present for formal analysis.

Keywords: Maniq, Thailand, cosmology, religion, ritual, identity

The Maniq people living in the Banthat mountain range of Thailand are the northernmost population of Aslian-speaking forest societies found throughout Southern Thailand and peninsular Malaysia, variously referred to as Semang, or in Malaysia by the term *Orang Asli* (Benjamin 2002). Despite immense and longstanding pressures, some of these populations have displayed remarkable resilience and commitment to their traditional modes of subsistence, language and culture. This paper, based on ongoing fieldwork conducted by living and moving in the forest with Maniq people who continue to live as mobile hunter-gatherers in the Banthat mountain range of Southern Thailand, aims to consider aspects of their culture and practice which allow them to share a mutually coherent system of beliefs and practices over time, despite a seeming absence of religious dogma and the subtlety of their ritual practices. It considers how the Maniq themselves describe cosmology, ethnic identity and material practice as being ineluctably linked within their own system of values and beliefs. Such a perspective may also point toward a useful analytical path for outside interpretation, helping to overcome some of the vexing problems hunter-gatherer cosmological systems and ritual practices often present for formal analysis.

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The resilience of symbolic systems

Although language is a crucial means by which to understand the way people think, and the reasons they behave as they do, there is a danger in looking to what Bloch (1998) calls 'logic sentential' reasoning and articulation to provide us with a full and coherent picture. Indeed, the possibility exists that looking exclusively at linguistic representations of beliefs may *obscure* the actual means by which people experience and understand their world. This position may be particularly helpful in studying those 'egalitarian' hunter-gatherer societies who actively *prevent* the emergence of religious and cosmological doctrine, suppressing self-appointed leaders and placing a premium on personal autonomy. Examining the beliefs and practices of the Maniq people of Southern Thailand, this paper posits an analytical model which places belief and practice as not only of equal importance, but ineluctably bound to one another. Indeed, it is the *materialism* of Maniq notions of personhood which makes their worldview and system of ritual and cosmological representations so fascinating and challenging. This paper will also consider the performative subtlety of Maniq ritual practices and how such subtlety does not imply a dearth of rich religious and cosmological understandings of the world and the human condition.

It has been argued elsewhere that egalitarian societies have no basis for consistent cultural reproduction over time (Brunton 1989; see Lewis 2008a for further critical discussion). However, this position is contradicted by troves of data on populations separated across space and time. Looking to Southeast Asia for clues, one need only compare aspects of cultural data collected in Malaysia nearly a century ago (Schebesta 1929[1927]; Evans 1937) with more recent studies on the Batek (Endicott 1979; Endicott & Endicott 2008; Lye 2002, 2004); as well as the data collected in Thailand (Schebesta 1925, Evans 1927) in the same period,[1] with the data on Maniq practices laid out in the present paper. To do so would reveal remarkably similar practices and discourses among individuals whose lifespans are separated by several generations. Further, hunter-gatherer populations separated by geography and presumed to have had little or no contact over many generations maintain strikingly similar practices, a point emphasised by Needham (1964) when he identified a 'blood, thunder and the mockery of animals' cosmological complex extending from the Penan people of Borneo up to Semang populations in peninsular Malaysia. In the African case, it seems the system of taboos and principles known as *ekila* is found among Pygmy populations separated by thousands of miles, not to

1. Both Schebesta and Evans visited the Semang of the Trang-Phatthalung area in 1924.

mention mutually incomprehensible languages (Lewis 2008a). What makes a symbolic system more resilient and stable than language, if not some profound salience that is dutifully passed on through generations, through potentially extra-linguistic means?

On a related note, Benjamin (2013:454), comments that the ‘thunder complex’ does not necessarily represent an ancient, specifically *negrito* cultural pattern. Indeed, elements of this cultural pattern are found among non-*negrito* Orang Asli populations as well as Austronesian-speaking peoples with little or no direct connection to *negritos*, including the Penan on the island of Borneo. Benjamin thus concludes, rightly in our opinion, that ‘the negritos – not because they are “negritos,” but because of their similar way of life – found it desirable to retain and even elaborate certain components of this particular cultural complex’ (2013:454). This relates directly to the argument put forth in this paper, namely that Maniq cultural concepts and religious representations cannot be separated from their specific mode of production and social organisation. As we demonstrate, the Maniq themselves seem to conceive of their culture and lives in similar terms, making a direct connection between their cosmological ideas and ritual practices and their mode of life as a forest dwelling people.

It is worth mentioning arguments for the ‘simplicity’ of hunter-gatherer cosmology and religion because it serves as an example of an analytical tendency which seems to create a great deal of confusion amongst people confronted with the subtlety of an egalitarian ‘belief’ system. For example, Brunton (1989) singles out Endicott (1979) for criticism by pointing to his statements that the Batek seemed to lack a coherent, articulated ‘belief’ system. Perhaps, however, this is exactly the point. A culture lacking means by which to vest certain individuals with political authority is just as likely to lack means by which to vest individuals with ritual and dogmatic authority. The fact that the Batek seem to reproduce a complex of social and ritual behaviours over time makes this lack of orthodoxy all the more remarkable, and all the more worthy of our ethnographic and analytical attention. Woodburn noted that immediate-return egalitarianism is dependent upon the application of a ‘rigorously systematic principle’ (Woodburn 1982:445), which serves to ‘disengage’ people from imposing notions of ownership and personal property, if not, it should be added, claiming the right to ritual or cosmological orthodoxy.

Such problems with prevalent tendencies in the study of religion and its translation through anthropological texts have been noted by other authors studying immediate-return societies. When Lewis writes that ‘abstracting concepts from the social relations of production as they develop through time

obliterates the way they dynamically unfold into diverse areas of practice and ideology' (Lewis 2008a:303), he indicates the need for a similar anthropological perspective. Lye (2002:5) writes that, 'part of the problem…is in a narrowly constricted definition of knowledge and the forms that knowledge transmission might take'. Lewis observes that often in pre-literate, immediate-return egalitarian societies, 'certain key meanings and moral sentiments can be durably and effectively transmitted tacitly because they are embedded in inevitable sensory experiences connected with bodily maturation and performance rather than conveyed just by instruction and verbal exhortation' (Lewis 2008a: 298).

It is argued that these same principles apply not only to the interpretation of the Maniq data, but more importantly appear in Maniq emic views on the matter of what constitutes difference, and what features of human existence are most salient when it comes to experiencing and understanding cosmological systems.

The Maniq

The Maniq people, as referred to in this paper, live in and around the Banthat range of montane forest, stretching like a spine up the middle of Southern Thailand and extending through parts of Satun, Trang and Phatthalung Provinces. It should be noted that, based on our field work, this group is separate, in terms of geography and at least several generations historically, from the Semang groups formerly of Yala Province, who also use the endonym of 'Maniq'. Although different bands tend to stay in certain areas of the forest (generally), the various groups throughout Satun, Trang and Phatthalung Provinces can be understood as a single population, as they are closely linked by kinship and exchange ties and individually will move throughout the entire forested area over the course of their lives. These groups remain in Thailand, do not cross the border into Malaysia, and most likely have been in contact with Thai-speaking peoples for some time. Although the Maniq language contains many loan words from Malay, it also contains a lesser number of loan words from Thai, some most likely stretching back for many generations. Further – and perhaps more tellingly – the Maniq of the Banthat range also follow an outmoded Thai naming convention, in which male names are preceded by the prefix 'Ai' and female names are preceded by the prefix 'Ee'. Hence, among themselves, a man may be referred to as 'Ai-Kai', while a woman may be known as 'Ee-Pen'. Although in the past this was much more common as a mode of address implying intimacy and familiarity among Thais, today the appellation

of someone with either of these prefixes is generally considered insulting within Thai society. Nonetheless, the use of this convention among Maniq indicates their long standing interaction with the diverse Thai and Malay peoples of Southern Thailand. This includes the 'Sam Sam' people, descendants of the complex process of inter-marriage and conversion between Thai Buddhists and Malay-speaking Muslims that occurred throughout the border area between modern-day Thailand and Malaysia (Suwannathat-Pian 2000).

Some working estimates put the total population of Banthat Maniq between 140–400 individuals (Albrecht & Moser 1998; Lukas 2004; Wnuk & Majid 2014), although this number does not appear to be confirmed through any rigorous survey. While some Maniq individuals and groups have chosen to adopt sedentary lifestyles, living in permanent or semi-permanent dwellings while engaging in wage labour, a significant portion of Maniq people continue to live in the forests as mobile hunter-gatherers. Hunting by Maniq is typically done with the use of a bamboo blow pipe, known in the Maniq language as *bolau* (*bɔˈlau*), and poison dart, a technology found amongst other Semang groups in Malaysia. Tubers, wild fruits and honey also form the basis of Maniq diet, supplemented by rice and other outside foods obtained through trade, or through random donations by (primarily) domestic and Malaysian tourists.

The data reported in this paper, part of an ongoing research project, were collected among a group of Maniq who straddle the balance between engagement and withdrawal from the surrounding social milieu. These individuals continue to live as mobile foragers in camps consisting of between 25–35 individuals in the dry season, and breaking into smaller groups of 15–20 individuals during the rainy season. Although individuals may occasionally engage in casual labour for their sedentary neighbours – mostly in the form of 'favours' for individuals with whom they have good relations - the majority of their time is spent in temporary camps, both in the interior and on the periphery of the forest. Camps are constructed of lean-to style shelters, known as *ha'ya'* (*hãˈyãʔ*), with open fronts and sides, each typically sheltering a family group consisting of a woman, a man and their young children. Maniq camps are by no means random or itinerant. Although Maniq tend to spend between two to four weeks in a given camp, the network of camps they stay in are familiar and known to all, topographical and spatial points which connect Maniq individual and collective lives through the landscape over time (cf. Lye 2004). Indeed, knowledge of the landscape and the ability to orient oneself within the forest is seen as one of the distinguishing markers between childhood and adulthood.

The ages of individuals in the group are estimated at between ~2 months to ~50 years of age, although exact ages would be impossible to determine

as Maniq are not concerned with keeping track of ages in absolute numerical sense. In one particular group, there were two senior couples, both of whom had children ranging from infants and toddlers to fully independent adults with new families of their own. The two wives within these senior couples are sisters, which seemed to be – at least in the case of this group – the crux of kinship between all other members. Small children and unmarried girls continue to live with their parents in the same or a connected *ha'ya'*. Young men, when they are of marriageable age, tend to construct and sleep in their own simple *ha'ya'* as a prelude to finding a partner and having children.

History and relations with non-Maniq

While this paper is primarily focused on the internal processes by which Maniq identity and practice are created and made resilient, one must also understand the context of Maniq resilience in terms of developments beyond the edges of the forest. Although Thailand is notable for having never been subject to European colonial rule, the social and political history of the region has been shaped by varying centralising political forces for thousands of years (Wyatt 2004). As Scott (2009) has argued, the history of Southeast Asia, including those 'marginal' areas of autonomous and semi-autonomous hill peoples, cannot be understood outside of the context of the centralising tendencies of the lowland state societies. Typically, hunter-gatherers and hill societies in Southeast Asia represent the illegible, non-state space, where state control has always been tenuous. Consequently, the kingdoms of the past as well as the modern nation-states see these peripheral peoples not only as peoples who are just out of reach, but rather as examples of the uncivilised.[2] The emerging nation-states curtailed the autonomy of the foragers and the upland societies on a hitherto unprecedented scale.

Thailand in the present era is developing rapidly, with rural villages becoming intimately wrapped up in broader global patterns of material and cultural consumption. The villages at the forest edge in Satun Province depend largely on

2. Like all present-day nation-states of Southeast Asia, until the second half of the nineteenth century Thailand did not exist as a territorial national entity (Winichakul 1994). Western social scientists have used the notions of 'cosmic state' (Heine-Geldern 1963[1942]), 'galactic polity' (Tambiah 1976) or 'mandala' (Wolters 1999[1982]) to describe diffuse political power in early Southeast Asia. Typical features of these loose systems of domination were shifting tributary relations and fluid alliances between greater rulers, lesser kings, lords and princes.

small-scale rubber and palm oil production, and are increasingly accessible by well-built, marked roads. Electricity, broadband internet and mobile telephone service are widely present, and access to big box stores and global chains such as 7-Eleven and Tesco-Lotus are only a short drive from the forest edge.

Soon after the dissipation of the decades-long guerrilla conflict in Thailand in the late 1980s, migrants from Phatthalung Province and other areas began settling in the former forested interior areas of Satun Province. This led to increasing rates of intensive forest use and deforestation, as land was cleared for rubber plantations and other uses. During the almost 30 years of conflict, interactions between the Maniq and their sedentary neighbours seem to have been reduced to a minimum, an exception from the historical and present-day state of affairs. Although the Maniq were certainly affected negatively and at severe risk of becoming collateral victims to the violence, much of the forest remained untouched during the period of conflict. The boom in rubber in the 1990s has led to a rise in incomes for those with access to land, and has led to ongoing transformations in the cultural values and consumption practices of farmers and villagers, and their increasingly urbanised and educated children.

For hundreds of years, the Maniq experienced severe forms of discrimination and abuse. Within the prevailing concept of a hierarchical social order based on 'civilised' and 'uncivilised' peoples, the Maniq have often been relegated to the very bottom of this order by their neighbours. Maniq are perceived by their neighbours as wild people who do not use clothing, and the epitome of a decidedly *un-Thai* barbaric incivility and marginality. The forced schooling of Maniq children by local officials is often cited by Maniq as, until recently, one of the most feared threats from outsiders.

While they have maintained relationships of trade and political negotiation with their immediate neighbours, the Maniq people have also historically held a place of interest among the Bangkok-centred ruling classes. Most famously, HM King Rama V (Rama V, 2000 [1910]) penned an epic Thai-language poem about Maniq life in the jungle, based at least partly on accounts told to him by an orphaned Maniq child brought to the Thai court in the early twentieth century. The poem is known throughout Thailand and is read by many students to this day, with numerous versions available for age and reading level, including comic book and colouring book versions for children. In the present era, the local provincial government in Satun as well as local tourist agents seems to be aware of the Maniq as a 'symbol' for the province, using a cartoon Maniq-like figure on banners, signs and other printed materials.

Being Maniq

The term 'Maniq' is an endonym, differing greatly from the exonymic terms which have been applied over the years. These include the term *sakai* (ซาไก), a word of Malay origin implying 'servant' or 'slave'; *khon pa* (คนป่า), 'forest people'; and *ngo pa* (เงาะป่า), literally meaning 'forest rambutan', a reference to the wild forest varieties of rambutan fruit, which with its exterior furry spindles is said to resemble the Maniq people's own tightly curled hair. However, to say that the term 'Maniq' is an endonym requires two important clarifications. Maniq often speak of two broad groups of people: Maniq, themselves; and Hamiq, all outsiders. There is no general purpose term for 'humans'. It has been stated elsewhere that the term Maniq means 'human being' (Hamilton 2006:294), but in common usage it should not be interpreted in this way. Such a conclusion relies on a very particular ontology of 'humanity' that may not hold much salience for Maniq ways of seeing the world. Rather, the characteristics which matter most to Maniq conceptions of personhood differ greatly, as will be explored below.

We may get to a better understanding of what Maniq people mean when they make a distinction between Maniq and Hamiq by examining which characteristics are implied by the term 'Maniq' itself. The definition of this term, and the characteristics which it refers to, may differ on an individual and sub-group level. To those Maniq who have remained in the forest – noting a distinction to those who have settled down – 'Maniq-ness' is not a given, nor is it an inherited trait. Rather, 'being' Maniq entails inhabiting a specific forest landscape, and perhaps more importantly, engaging in what can best be described as an immediate-return system of ecological, economic and socio-political relations (Woodburn 1982). Being Maniq means to live in the forest, to obtain one's food sources through hunting and gathering, and to consume through an economy of demand-sharing (Peterson 1993), especially of meat. As one Maniq man put it:

> You can see that we Maniq go to the village, we can use knifes and other things from Hamiq, we can even drive a motorbike. But Maniq must live in the forest, must eat food from the forest, must live as Maniq. If they move into a house, they are Hamiq, not Maniq.[3]

In discussions with Maniq individuals, the most salient feature of 'Maniq-ness' is often described as a form of practice. Having Maniq ancestry or a 'Maniq'-looking body is not enough. 'Maniq-ness' is produced in the way bodies

3. All quotes from Maniq individuals were collected in Satun Province between 2013–2014.

are used, the spaces they inhabit, and the ways they interact with other bodies, both human and non-human. It is a materialist conception of identity in this sense, seeing the moral cosmos as a set of practices related to production, consumption and political relationships. Ka'ei *(kʰàʔēy)*, a superhuman figure whose affective being comes forth in the form of thunder and wind, is a moral arbiter, whose punishments are meted out on those who stray from the moral economy of the forest. Inclusion in the realm of *ka'ei's* interest – that is, to be one whose behaviour *ka'ei'* is concerned with – is, however, based on practice. Only by adhering to Maniq modes of production (hunting and gathering) and consumption (sharing) is one even considered Maniq and hence in *ka'ei's* realm of interest. Further, the requirements of individuals once included in *ka'ei's* realm of interest are these very same practices; it is the occasional breaking of these forms of economy and sociality that lead to *ka'ei's* wrath.

The forest is, in a sense, a 'giving environment' (Bird-David 1990). Maniq people do not necessarily speak of the forest as an agent in the same sense as humans, but the correlation between Maniq behaviour and abundance is a central concern:

> Yes, if Maniq still stay in the forest, still live as Maniq, there will be food. We can eat here, move here, and live here.

This basic outline seems to imply symmetry with ideas recorded among other hunter-gatherer and forest societies. Among the Chewong of peninsular Malaysia, personhood is understood specifically in behavioural terms, in the sense of how one acts and how one behaves. This behavioural definition of Chewong people according to Howell, 'extends into domains of non-human beings, that is, it includes all those things in the environment such as trees, stones, rivers, mountains, which are supposed to have consciousness...They are all "people" with identical person attributes to the Chewong' (Howell 1989:46). Similarly, the Batek 'have a general understanding that they are..."people of the forest"[and] that being forest peoples entails certain roles and responsibilities, of which one is the necessity of maintaining society inside the forest' (Lye 2002:401). Indeed, Batek – at least in the 1970s – believe the fate of the world *depends* on Batek remaining in the forest (Endicott 1979).

We can see similar echoes from hunter-gatherer populations with little historical or cultural connection to Southeast Asia. For instance, Bird-David (1990) has shown how Nayaka views on the forest as a 'giving environment' underpin their economic system, arguing further that Nayaka understand the category of co-social beings – those to whom one can 'relate' – to include non-human species and the forest itself (Bird-David 1999). In the African

context, Lewis (2008b) has described Mbendjele pygmies as having a similarly inclusive view of the forest, in which ‘they cannot conceive of their lives, or deaths and afterlife, without the frame of the forest around them’ (Lewis 2008b:12). When Lewis writes of the Mbendjele *ekila* system that it ‘anchors key areas of cosmological knowledge, gender and political ideology in the physical and biological experiences of human growth and maturation so that gendered practices and cultural values take on a natural, inevitable quality’ (Lewis 2008a:297), we can see similar contours of a ritual and cosmological system that cannot be separated from practice and the real world of economy, gender and politics.

These culturally-situated social ontologies differ greatly from the ontologies many of us may be familiar with. Much as Viveiros de Castro (1998) has shown how an Amazonian cosmology inverts, in a manner, the ontological schema of typical Western cosmology, so too Maniq ontologies are based on different analytic criteria. The prohibition among many Southeast Asian hunter-gatherer societies on mocking or mimicking animals (Needham 1964) – especially animals which are prey –may also be understood through this lens. Being-ness is understood in terms of what one does and how one behaves, hence imitating an animal which one also eats could perhaps contain dangers, such as that one will take on the role of that animal. In the same way, Maniq are separated from Hamiq not based on lineage so much as on practice and behaviour. The salient feature of cultural and social being is what one does, economically, socially, politically and, to a much more subtle extent, ritually.

Subtlety of ritual among the Maniq

From the large, omni-present state-oriented religions, with their collective rituals and public demonstrations of piety, to the egalitarian systems of Central African hunter-gatherers with their elaborate, multi-day long rituals and music-making (Fürniss 2011; Lewis 2008a), religion and ritual are associated phenomena. Yet while Maniq appear to have none of the expected prominent, performative rituals, ritual is not only not absent from Maniq society, it is taken with the utmost seriousness and is seen to have important cosmological and practical implications.

As mentioned already, one of the central figures in Maniq cosmology is *ka’ei’*, who is manifested in thunder, wind and lightning, and on other occasions tigers, and is particularly concerned with transgressions committed by Maniq individuals. These transgressions can include adultery, mocking animals that

are hunted, burning human blood, but also deviation from the economic and sociopolitical norms of Maniq society, such as not sharing properly, unnecessarily cutting trees, selling meat to outsiders and causing harm to another person. *Ka'ei* is only concerned with the actions of Maniq people. As discussed earlier, the definition of Maniq-ness is rooted in practice, in a mode of economy and sociality. The concerns of *ka'ei'* are wound around the complex of Maniq moral community, but *ka'ei's* interest, and perhaps affective capacity, ends at the boundaries of Maniq society.

One of the primary means by which Maniq communicate with *ka'ei* is through the burning of the rhizomes of the medicinal *kashay* (*káˈʃāːy*) plant (*Boesenbergia rotunda*), sometimes together with monkey hairs and other animal bones, during storms, in a ritual action referred to as *tod ek kashay* (*tód / Ek káˈʃāːy*), 'burning kashay'. Anyone who has spent time living in a Southeast Asian rainforest could attest to the fear and sense of impending danger invoked by the violent wind, thunder and lightning storms which wend their way through during the afternoons, particularly during the rainy season but also at other times of the year. In addition to the loud noises of thunder and the unpleasantness of heavy rain, these storms also present real dangers, particularly in the form of falling trees and other debris, as well as flash floods from rivers and streams. While Maniq camps often have a small clearing in which shelters are built, the danger is still present, and if one is caught out without shelter, it could be a particularly frightful experience.

The *tod ek kashay* ritual involves allowing a piece of the *kashay* root to burn slowly by placing it upon a hot ember taken from the fire. This is performed with a remarkable lack of fussiness, or even discussion for that matter. When a storm is approaching, someone will set up the burning *kashay* root in the middle of the camp, and ask *ka'ei'* to move on and allow the Maniq to live in peace. On one occasion, the man performing the ritual said, 'why have you come here to cause us trouble? This is our home! We are sorry if we have offended you. Please leave us in peace'. The words were spoken casually, as if to someone in the camp. In fact, this is exactly how Maniq tend to speak with each other, shouting across the camp from their *ha'ya'* even when engaging in a long conversation. The smoke can also be inhaled and brought through cupped hands over the top of the head, as a means to extract some of the medicinal qualities of the *kashay* root.

Maniq ritual has a highly personal element to it, and the casualness with which it is enacted is consistent with Maniq attitudes towards performance in general. Anyone can enact this ritual, at any time, and it does not seem to be something which is seen as a discreet action in any sense of the word. It is important to note that the use of the term *tod ek kashay* as the 'name' of

a ritual complex is a projection of the language of anthropology. When the Maniq refer to it in this way, they are referring to the specifics of what they are doing – literally burning *kashay*. In this sense, burning *kashay* as a means to communicate with *ka'ei'* is one action on a spectrum of practices which are seen as connected to the Maniq relationship with *ka'ei'* and ancestors who pay periodic visits. *Kashay* root can be burned, but Maniq will often simply shout 'ka'ei'!' toward the sky when thunder cracks or the wind picks up. Indeed, it is rare to see any type of ritual activity performed in the same way. Variations will occur based on the materials available, the mood of the people involved, and the degree to which people believe the onset of thunder is connected with the behaviour of people in that specific camp, as opposed to Maniq elsewhere in the forest. Further, as Maniq say, sometimes thunder is simply thunder.

The *tod ek kashay* ritual seems to be related, at least in its function, to the well-known 'blood sacrifice' documented among many communities in Southeast Asia (Endicott 1979; Needham 1967). Although they rarely enact it in the present era, the Maniq are familiar with the ritual, and do report that in the past it was more widely practiced. The blood sacrifice is seen by Maniq as something to be enacted under extreme circumstances, particularly when they know that someone within the camp has done something to upset *ka'ei'*. One older Maniq man, already a grandparent many times, described how his mother would organise *cacoh mehum* – offering blood – when he was a child:

> My mother would make the others do it. They were afraid. My father was afraid to do it. But she would make them …[laughing]… she would go around like this and make the others cut themselves here. She would put it together and throw it to the sky, like this, like we do with *kashay*.

The disappearance of the blood sacrifice among Maniq is a topic worthy of further consideration. For the purposes of this paper, we wish to mention it to emphasise that ritual among the Maniq is a blended spectrum of practices, which serve as a channel for Maniq to communicate with *ka'ei',* especially when Maniq fear that (mis)behaviour – excess of behaviours which stray from Maniq-ness may lead to negative cosmological consequences.

The danger of false rituals

On another occasion, we were told how several Maniq had been compelled to perform for a group of outside tourists, dignitaries and other onlookers in what had been billed as a traditional Maniq marriage ceremony. This is not an

isolated phenomenon. Porath (2001) describes a similar situation in which a group of Maniq from Trang Province were compelled to perform at the opening of a new department store in the provincial capital. In the 'ceremony' described by our informants, two adult men were shown to 'negotiate' a price in exchange for the marriage of one man's son to the other man's daughter. The son's family was obliged to pay a chicken, make a speech, and burn incense, among other ritual-like actions. At the conclusion, the daughter's family presented her in marriage.

The problem, we were told, was that the ritual was a complete sham. It bore no resemblance to anything the Maniq do –not to mention the absurdity of Maniq keeping and trading domesticated chickens in the forest. The man who relayed this story expressed resentment at being forced to perform in such an undignified manner, although he recognised that humouring Hamiq was a political obligation, in order to prevent harassment or any other forms of trouble. The main problem, however, was that he was concerned about what his ancestors would think, and how *ka'ei'* might react. He was concerned with the meaning of such a ritual, and how its symbolic meaning indicated a profound and troubling deviation from the moral aesthetic of Maniq cosmology and their relationship with *ka'ei'*. By mimicking the notion of payment and exchange between Maniq, especially for something as important as the reproductive capacities of their children, the false ritual enacted a subversion of Maniq values, and hence presented a cosmological risk.

Knowledge, development and religion

Regarding the acquisition of skilled tasks, Bloch writes:

> the transmission of knowledge...may have less to do with the culture of education...than with a general feature of the kind of knowledge that underlies the performance of complex practical tasks, which *requires* that it be non-linguistic'. (Bloch 1998:7–8)

Such knowledge falls outside the 'sentential logical' knowledge of explicit linguistic representation. Indeed, pedagogical practices among the Maniq certainly demonstrate this. Learning the skills of forest life, especially among children, is something done without explicit instruction, and these skills are learned from an extremely young, even pre-linguistic age.

As in many other hunter-gatherer societies, childhood among the Maniq seems to be conceived of as less of a clearly distinct developmental stage, separate

from adulthood, than as a period of life in which one as yet lacks the skills and capacities to produce food and other necessary products in the Maniq economy. Maniq parents, like many parents the world over, love their children and shape their lives around being with and among their kin and offspring. Yet children do not necessarily receive fundamentally different treatment than adults. This is indicated by, among other things, the lack of highly visible forms of infant-directed speech. While exceptions are made for children's lack of economically productive activity, they are included in the economy of sharing and personal autonomy in much the same way as any adult Maniq person would be.

Learning lacks the iterative procedures one would expect to find in connection with complex tasks. As such, when an approximately two year old child was learning to butcher a squirrel with a large, sharp knife and prepare it for eating, the parents of the child simply sat back and watched, while the child's five year old sister sat by her, demonstrating in practical terms how the action is performed. Childhood, in this regard, is a process of becoming, through the acquisition of the intellectual knowledge and the bodily skills which make one Maniq. Children's games are miniature versions of adult activities. Pretend digging for 'tubers' is a favourite task, so much so that within a few days of staying in a camp, one has to be careful where one steps, as there is a real danger of tripping over the dozens of deep holes pockmarking the forest floor in and around the camp. Maniq children further play 'house', constructing miniature *ha'ya'*, complete with leaf floors.

While the extension of early childhood pedagogy and Bloch's (1998) theories on how to consider cultural knowledge do not necessarily translate into analysis of religious representations, they do point us in the direction of what forms of knowledge we should be looking for in trying to understand how cosmological systems are manifested. Indeed, the Maniq themselves point us in this direction through their own views on the matter, which show the centrality of the performance of certain modes of economy and sociality in their thinking of the world. But to understand how this merges with cosmology and intellectual processes, we should also consider how learning takes place and how knowledge, once acquired, is stored and performed. If the knowledge necessary for Maniq-like behaviour and action is by necessity, 'not language-like' (Bloch 1998), then we must choose a novel lens to understand their cosmological system.

If Maniq experience their difference from Hamiq based on the kind of highly skilled and complex actions they perform on a daily basis, and if the performance of these skills then serves not only as a moral symbol of Maniq-ness, but also as a means by which Maniq-ness is something performed and ineluctably part

of bodily action, then we can see how such subtlety of ritual actually masks – or rather causes us to miss – a vastly more complex cosmology and ritual orientation. As demonstrated, ritual is not absent in the minds and conceptions of Maniq people. On the one hand, they do perform rituals, which, despite their apparent simplicity have profound implications and meaning. On the other hand, Maniq are clearly aware of the danger in negative ritual, and how the performance of false rituals can have serious cosmological repercussions. Indeed, both of these rituals pertain directly to the argument put forward in this paper, the first by highlighting the dangers of 'inappropriate behaviour' within an immediate-return context, and the latter by highlighting how false representation of Maniq values and society can cause collapse in a similarly disastrous way.

Religious representations, while achieving some form of heightened salience or presence in the form of conscious rituals, are not *only* present in ritual. Rather, religious representations may also be perceived and analysed through practice, and should not be separated into variations of causal or non-causal models. For the Maniq, religious and productive activities are not separated ontologically within their own schema, nor do they appear to be separated from an outside perspective looking in. The type of implicit knowledge and memory necessary for Maniq society (the technological tasks necessary for living in a hunting and gathering mode of production and consumption) is *a priori* necessary for the types of explicit knowledge and memory underpinning Maniq religious representations and beliefs (the ideological reinforcement of an immediate-return system). These two domains overlap within ritual concepts and practices among the Maniq, and they should for outside analysis as well. This may help us to better understand how cosmology can be mutually coherent within societies whose ideological and political systems serve explicitly to subvert the forms of dogmatic and hierarchical practice and knowledge which seem to be the customary target of ethnographic analysis.

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