
Wind of Affliction, Bodily Prescription; Zâr Healing Ritual in Southern Coastal Regions of Iran

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Résumé

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Amongst all of the environmental elements, wind has an outstanding importance for Iranians. For a long time and even nowadays, wind [has been] and is an inseparable constituent of Iranians' lives. One can consider a coherent bipolar model, in which wind occupies a dual position in Iranians' knowledge. On the one hand, it is regarded as a good entity that creates, brings peace and mercy, and heals. On the other side, it is regarded as the devil, which destroys, brings harm and damage, and suffers. Such a dualistic view through the wind is the basis of Zâr, the healing ritual which I am going to introduce. The word Zâr that comes from the name of a devil wind, refers to a specific ceremony in coastal regions of southern Iran, which is performed to heal the afflicted from bodily sufferings. The ritual is not limited to Iran and it is possible to find similar ones in Ethiopia, Somalia, Egypt, North

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Africa, Sudan, and other regions in the Middle East.

Zâr rituals are held by traditional healers (Bâbâ Zar, male healers and Mâmâ Zar, female healers) and previously possessed ones to tame the devil wind and help the afflicted get rid of the affliction. During the healing ritual, which is a performance filled with music, song, dance, clap, light, darkness, food, aroma and smell, healer tries to communicate with the jinn-wind, ask about its demands, and promise to comply with the wishes of the wind. These bodily practices and sensory experiences (singing, playing and listening [music], moving [dance], seeing [colors, scenes and displays], tasting [foods], smelling [odors], etc.) are in the heart of my investigations. For me, Studying Zâr means to understand the meanings as they are lived through these sensory and bodily experiences. Therefore, I believe that medical anthropologist should try to experience different life-worlds and ritual processes as well as bodily and sensory experiences of the Zâr practitioners, in order to best perceive and recognize the healing ritual.