



Adresse Fossveien 24  
0551 Oslo  
Norge

Telefon (+47) 22 99 55 00

Post Postboks 6853  
St. Olavs plass  
N-0130

Faktura Postboks 386  
Alnabru  
0614 Oslo

Org.no. 977027233  
Giro 8276 0100265

**Nasim I. Mashak**

Poetics of the winds. Whisper games and love tales

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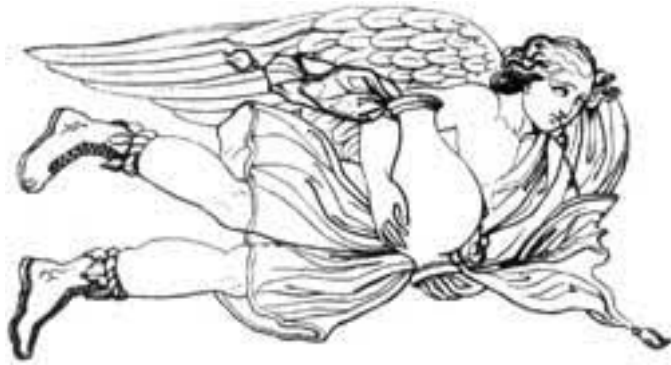
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## *Poetics of the winds*

*Whisper games and love tales*

*Nasim.I.Mashak*

Oslo National Academy of Fine Arts



***Part 1***

I finally met him, after years of mutual attraction. The first time I read about him was in 2009, and I started watching videos of him on YouTube. He played percussions and never skipped a beat. One day, three years later, he added me on Facebook and invited me to his concert in Oslo. It continued like this, I went to his concerts every time he played in Oslo, but I would always leave before the last song ended. Until 29.02.16, leap day, I decided to meet him for a glass of wine. Two years it lasted, that night.

He whispered, "Sometimes, when I play the drums, I get the Zar. While playing with my hair, he continued, "it's like a wind goes into my body and I am no longer in control of my body, totally disconnected" and he was not in control of his body.

He told me stories about his family and neighbors being possessed by the winds. Once he witnessed someone close to him becoming possessed, caught a fever and lost 15 kilos in two weeks right in front of his very eyes. He described that each and every one of these winds had different personalities and came from different cardinal on earth with different sets of rhythms. He played me the rhythms and I saw wind blow through his fingers and the rhythms traveled as far as Egypt, Sudan, Morocco and Somalia. With every wind a new rhythm was born.

After having watched the documentary "Wind of Jinn", made in 1969 by the Iranian film director and screenwriter Naser Taghvai, narrated by one of Iran's greatest political poets Ahmad Shamlu, and having read "Ahl hawa/Air people", a book written by Gholamhossein Saedi, I begun my journey with the winds and getting to know them.



Founded photo of Zar ceremony south Iran, photographer unknown

Far away from here by the warm coast of the Persian Gulf, there are winds with lots of power, their own identity, gender and religion. It is said some have an African background and once came to the area with slaves from Zanzibar and Somalia, while others are Muslim and come from the Arabic deserts, which mostly Sheikhs. These winds are capable of possessing people. For every wind there is a customary ceremony. Zar ceremonies are held to free the bodies of the winds and are often associated with exorcism, therefore forbidding them in Iran. The ceremonies are still held in secret, but are quite rarely held these days.

Dingomare is a wind and her place of birth is unknown. She has been portrayed as an old woman living on top of the green mountains of Oman. She is described as frightening and scary and can possess many people at the same time. She is found where instruments are played and there is dancing. Mostly it is women who are possessed by this wind. She is one of the most common zars in Iranian southern coasts, and especially in Bandar Abbas where the tradition of Liwa, music and dance from the area. This is because Dingomare fancies drums, and dance and lurks where they are played. She usually doesn't kill the demoniac and can give her targets up to two years to throw a ceremonial party for her. If they don't meet her wishes, she will punish them by taking their lives.

For every wind there are specialists named Mama zar and Baba zar who know how to communicate with the winds, lead the ceremonies and cure the patient. The language of many zar winds is Swahili. Baba and mama zar can speak Swahili, and the patient will also speak Swahili during the ceremony even though they don't actually know Swahili themselves. Many of these Swahili texts are not translatable by native speakers of Swahili, and have been assumed to be a blend of different languages, and is still called Swahili. The ceremonies are held exclusively for members of the Ahl hawa (Air people). The Ahl Hawa are the survivors, the marked ones. It is said that once you have been haunted by a wind, you will always remain an Ahl Hawa.

Early in morning on the day of the ceremony, one older lady member of air people walks around carrying bamboo sticks tied together. She uses them to knock on all the doors of the Ahl Hawa's informing that tonight there will be a ceremony held for Dingomare. Money, gold, expensive garments, animal sacrifices and blood are amongst what the winds usually ask for. A ceremony can last for several days and nights, but that depends on the wind and it's power. The rhythms being played continuously on the drums are specifically for Dingomare. When the Wind people gathered like this, they sit on the ground with their instruments, along with some supporters. Covered in a white sheet, the patient dances on their knees at all time and never to stand up. Even several more people can be possessed simultaneously during the same ceremony; they'll also be covered in white and join the dance. After many, many hours of these rhythms and dance and the patient is lying on the ground with no sign of movement, the drums stop.

The silence means that Dingomare has now left the room.

<b>Maturi</b>	۱- متوری
<b>Sheyx shangar</b>	۲- شیخ شنگر
<b>Dingmáro</b>	۳- دینگ مارو
<b>Omgâre</b>	۴- ام گاره
<b>Bumaryom</b>	۵- بومریوم
<b>Çinyâse</b>	۶- چین یاسه
<b>Pepe</b>	۷- په په
<b>Dâyketo</b>	۸- دای کتو
<b>Bujambe</b>	۹- بوجمیه
<b>Bâbur</b>	۱۰- بابور
<b>Namrud</b>	۱۱- نمرود
<b>Tagruri</b>	۱۲- تقروری
<b>Gesâs</b>	۱۳- قصاص

Names of a few common Zar wind

Politic of the winds: Zar ceremonies are common in the countries around the Persian Gulf such as Iran, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Northern African countries such as Egypt, Morocco and Sudan. The possessions are not associated with only with jinn (Spirits) winds. The instruments and the structures of this ceremony are also different from in the various areas from the Persian Gulf to Northern Africa.

In Womb and Alien Spirits.

The Canadian anthropologist Janice Boddy spent two years in Northern Sudan and dedicated part of her research to study the Hofriyat Zar cult. She described the ceremonies as being only for women, usually having to do with fertility or marital issues. She describes the gatherings as a feminist discourse.

Northern Sudanese natives living in Oslo describe it as a women gathering where the women can do whatever they want for the duration of the possession; drinking alcohol, not wearing their hijab, dancing - doing all that is forbidden. Janice Boddy sees the gatherings as feminist discourse.

My research shows that most of the countries that share this belief also share a narrow perspective on women and their rights within the frames of totalitarian regimes that practice political Islam as an ideology. Zar ceremonies are considered to be a form of music therapy due to the constant, repetitive rhythms played by several sets of drums, the movements to the beat, reminiscent of the dance of dervishes. This is the dance of 'samaa'.

Culture-bound syndromes are generally limited to specific societies or culture areas and are localized, folk, diagnostic categories that frame coherent meanings for certain repetitive, patterned, and troubling sets of experiences and observations...There is seldom a one-to-one equivalence of any culture-bound syndrome with a DSM diagnostic entity. (DSM-IV-TR book, American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 898)

"According to DSM-IV, culture-bound syndromes are indigenously considered to be 'illnesses', limited to specific societies or culture areas, composed of localized diagnostic categories, and used to frame coherent meanings for certain repetitive, patterned, and troubling sets of experiences and observations.<sup>1</sup> Examples commonly cited include *koro* in eastern Asia, *latah* in Malaysia, and *ataque de nervios* in Latin America."

Exert from British journal of general practice

Also published by US national library of medicine

Whether why Culture bound syndromes are usually coming from non- western culture, has been a big debate about these so-called syndromes. One of the remarkable debates is Ann-Marie Yamada, and Anthony J. Marsella is Handbook of Multicultural Mental Health 2nd Edition in 2013 book.

A fundamental question central to the debate asks, if culture-bound syndromes are limited to specific societies or culture areas, who defines the criteria for mental illness?

Why is it that the non-Western disorders are contextualized in non-Western cultures, but those identified and coded in the West in DSMs and ICDs are the real thing? Certainly, they are as much cultural products as are those from non-Western cultures.

A parallel view is that certain disorders such as anorexia nervosa or even paranoid schizophrenia could be recognized as themselves culture-bound syndromes of the westernized or developed world. Here international classificatory systems would fall under the definition of a social construct.



***Boreas***, god of north wind and of winter  
***Eurus***, god of the unlucky east or southeast wind  
***Notus***, god of the south wind  
***Zephyrus***, god of the west wind  
***Ilmarinen***, blacksmith and god of the wind, weather and air  
***Tuuletar***, goddess or spirit of the wind  
***Venti***, roman wind god  
***Njord***, god of the wind, especially as it concerns sailors  
***Odin***, god of the airbreath  
***Borrum***, Celtic god of the winds  
***Vejobatis***, god of the wind  
***Bieggolmai***, unpredictable god of the summer winds  
***Biegkegaellies***, god of the winter winds  
***Dogoda***, the goddess of the west wind and of love and gentleness  
***Stribog***, the Slavic god of winds, sky and air  
***Varpulis***, the thunder god Perun  
***Amun***, god of creation and the wind  
***Henkhisuesui***, god of the east wind  
***Hutchai***, god of the west wind  
***Shehbui***, god of the south wind  
***Qebui***, god of the north wind who appears as a man with four ram heads or a winged ram with Four heads.  
***Enlil***, the Sumerian god of air, wind, breath, loft  
***Ninlil***, goddess of the wind and consort of enlil  
***Pazuzu***, king of the wind demons, demon of the southwest  
***Epigishmog***, god of the west wind and spiritual being of ultimate destiny  
***Da-jo-jo***, mighty panther spirit of the west wind  
***Fei Lian***, the Chinese wind god  
***Feng Po Po***, the Chinese wind goddess  
***Hine-Tu-Whenua***, Hawaiian goddess of wind and safe  
***Ara Tiotio***, god of tornadoes and whirlwinds  
***Vayu***, god of wind  
***Rudra***, wind or storm god  
***Vayu-Vata*** two gods often paired together; the former was the god of wind and the latter was the god of atmosphere/air

Different pieces have been produced within *Poetics of the winds* and more are to be born.

Several of the works share the same title and are all parts of one body that is growing.

- 3 hours and 45 minutes of sound recordings where I have chosen random people and told them about the winds and asked them to characterize a wind and what this particular wind of their fantasy is capable of.

- Video and sound installations, 2 minutes of dynamic and fast cuts. The images are research on videos, documentaries, clips and movies found on the Internet and in archives. The edited sound is from the biggest Shia Muslim ceremonies.

- Poetry translated to a 3-minute video and wind sounds recorded at different times and places.

- Poems in Farsi and English

- Poetic of the winds (Part 2, page.13)

Further dreams:

"The Shirazi people, also known as Mbwera, are an ethnic group inhabiting the Swahili coast and the nearby Indian Ocean islands. They are particularly concentrated on the islands of Zanzibar, Pemba and Comoros. Their origins are linked to Shiraz and southwestern coastal region of Persia. The Shirazi are notable for helping spread Islam on the Swahili Coast, their role in the establishment of the local Arab-Swahili sultanates, their influence in the development of the Swahili language, and the wealth they accumulated from trading commodities and Bantu-speaking African slaves."

World champion of Whisper games Wikipedia

I will follow the winds from Shiraz to Zanzibar, where it is said that many of them have originated from, and back to Southern Iran to continue the whisper game. The route has a lot of unresolved mysteries, ancient cultures, sufferings and wounds and unheard tales.



Nasim means "a gentle wind or breeze" in both Persian and Arabic.

I am a wind and I was born in Tehran in 1983, 1362 in the Iranian calendar numbered 6620, at 8:25 pm. That night besides my parents and my two brothers, there was someone else in the room. Khoda was his name and he was so grand that he was invisible to us, they said. He had a gift I should forever carry through my flesh, with my every bit of being. The gift was called Islam and was told to be the last and the most complete religion of the world. Only an infidel thinks about changing to another religion. I tasted him through my mother's breast milk everyday. He was even greater than my dad. They chose my name from a book written by his allies on earth, even they didn't have the pleasure to meet him, but they had seen angles. I had to believe in him, pray to him at least 5 times a day, praise him and never doubt him or his legacy. At first he was introduced to me as God. Later he became god and along the way he became it and it became odd. On 09.03.00 I traveled in the belly of a giant metal bird that swallowed my identity in the on the way to here and I was given a new number, 3320.

Everything, no matter how big or how small, has stories to tell. We just need to find the right angle to hear its tale. Overhearing and recording conversations, the sounds of strangers in the bus, at a café or in the streets, the sound of a leaf struggling to stay on the tree the last day of fall, poetry, lyrics, rhythm, flow, migration, religion, human behavior, identity politics, cultural similarities and differences, sexuality and sensuality are amongst my fields of interest.

I didn't choose god, I was promised to him since birth. But instead, I chose music, kept it close to my heart and never lost it until this day.

At the end of the corridor to the left there is a room, the darkest but warmest room in the house, with a window to a backyard. It was one of my brother's rooms until they both left suddenly, when I was about four. In the room there were shelves covering one of the walls and white sheets with green patterns which hid the content of the shelves; cassette tapes. After the Islamic revolution music became forbidden, especially if it came from the west. I remember exactly when I fell in love with music; the first song on that beige and orange Sony tape with blue pen markings on it, Kool and the gang - so fresh. Music and lyrics are a big part of my artistic practice. I arrange events, invite and notify people through social media. I have been DJ-ing for 15 years and, like Dingomare, I possess people through music, control their body movements and change their moods. When possessed they dance for hours and for those hours nothing really matters - sex, language, geography, religion, identity and race. When I play I feel like a magician, like god.



**"I love to get nostalgic about you, pretend you are out of my reach, stolen. It will never be us, the magnetic field that draws me to you. People praise god because it has always stayed unreachable, perfect and never observed for its errors. Don't get too close darling, remain a secret from afar."**

Oslo 2019

*Part 2*

I've passed by where you live  
Repeatedly  
I still do  
You are the most handsome in the whole neighborhood  
Always stand firm  
With your chest forward  
Your mouth open  
Ready to sing  
Like a talented opera singer  
Although I each and every time listen carefully for your voice  
I never hear anything  
Sometimes I also cry loudly  
So loud and (yet) I let no one hear me  
Elevated but bound you are to the ceiling  
I am also bound to the ground  
Although I can travel in the belly of a giant metal bird  
Everything is within a huge prison  
With fatal borders, and gravity is  
The strongest jailer from which no one can escape  
Still, I dream of flying away  
So far away that/where I can discover new species  
Suppose you do the same  
Today, I saw two people that collected feathers on the street  
Guessing they are planning the same



Photo nr.1



I met him a long time ago, when I moved to Norway. He caught my eye from the day I laid eyes on him. He looked so proud; no matter the weather he was always standing firm. Exactly how I was taught a man should be. Each time I looked at him; I wanted to be like him, proud and self-assured, godlike.

As long as I can remember I have been envious of men for their amount of freedom. Before I moved to Norway from Iran, I made a couple of short trips to Bergen and Oslo to visit my brothers who had moved here in 1987. On my last trip before moving here to stay, I shaved my long curly hair. When I got back to Tehran my mom cried for the loss of my femininity. I started wearing men's clothing in the streets of Tehran, knowing that if the moral police would catch me, I'd be facing jail time and many lashes. They chased me once when I was dressed as a boy and wasn't wearing hijab but I managed to flee, I ran so fast that night that I still feel that rush like it was yesterday. The definition of freedom changes depending on the geography of where one is born.

It's been 15 years, this August 2018, after a long time of obsessing about him, that I decided to approach him. I found his address on Google maps and started writing letters and sending them to Fossveien 10b. Three letters were sent containing poems, parts of which are found on p.14, p.17 and p.19.

Every day for several months, I took pictures of him from different angles, using my phone. The photos have been printed on different kinds of papers as a test. Photo no. 1 was printed on rice paper. Exhibited together with bird migration photos taken in the same neighborhood and printed on transparent paper. They were hung with invisible thread and thus had the freedom to move. The sizes of the photos are decided depending on their quality since they are documented with a phone.

I'd sometimes ask myself how he feels as he is watching the birds fly by?

The more I observed him the more I saw how similar he was to god, to my dad, to the percussionist and every other man I admired. He didn't look freer than me; he was stuck and rusted, even though he was placed on highest point of the neighborhood. He wasn't born up there. A long time ago he was put up there to turn and dance with the wind. But each time they wanted to refer to an opportunist they used him as an example, so one day he stopped moving. I've learned I have to do everything in my power for the man in my life, put him first, highest. I am a wind! I could move him; in my photos I have already made him move!

Mom used to say: "You have to refine your sharp edges. Do something about that sharp tongue of yours, no man will ever put up with your bullheadedness. You have to compromise or you'll end up alone. You have to make some serious changes". She sighed for a moment; her throat was dry, took a deep breath and continued, "You could have been married and had a family of your own by now. You don't know how to keep a man; you always have to look smooth, wear your lipstick and look fresh. Wake up together with him in the mornings, prepare his breakfast, and keep the house shiny and tidy at all times. Leave nothing dirty, leave nothing wrinkled. Cook him good meals three times a day; men don't like to eat what they had for lunch what they also had for dinner. Always be home when he comes home from work. Stand up go to the door and greet him. It is disrespectful to stay seated.

I did all that for your dad for 40 years, but he never noticed."



The storm is on the way, do you hear?  
The drums he wears on his shoulders  
The bells he carries in his pockets  
Never have I heard him play the same piece twice  
Constant new rhythms  
His fingers are magical  
Sometimes he is scandalous when/as he practices black magic  
He pulls all the clouds towards each other and they roar  
He makes the sky scream out  
I've even seen him squeeze together two human hearts at the same time  
Every time he's been here  
You, on the other hand, are so brave  
Without losing your balance  
You just dance, steady in a circle  
En pointe

*Jailbirds in an endless sky  
We are the most dedicated wardens  
Constantly concerned with lines, borders  
To get shaped, we are in need of measurements, instructors  
Let's fly to endlessness and never get to the destination*



Photo nr.3



Photo nr.4

Sometimes I think  
If there was no war  
Would warriors have existed?  
If there was no captivity  
Had freedom meant anything?  
If there was no resistance  
Had the salmons swum against the flow  
Followed the scent back home again?  
When the time comes, I want to  
Follow the scent and go back home  
That day, I will be as light as ashes

