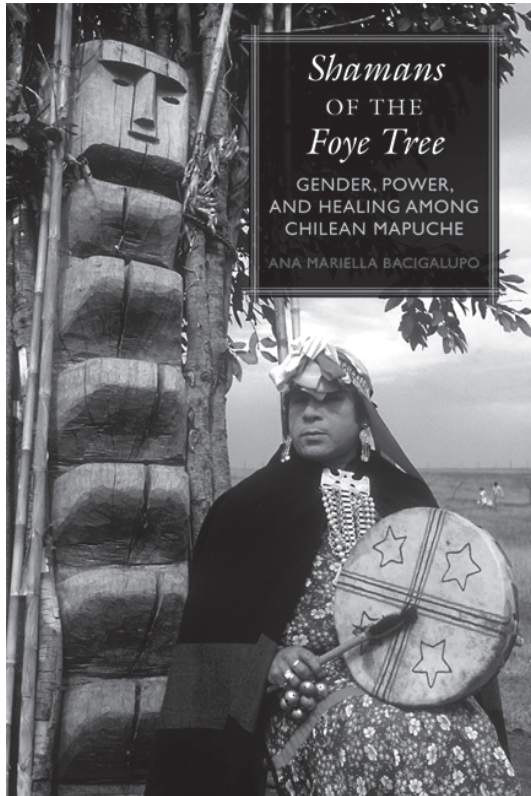


Shamans of the Foye Tree: Gender, Power and Healing Among Chilean Mapuche
Ana Mariella Bacigalupo, University of Texas Press, 2007, pp. 321, Austin, Texas.

Reviewed by Tom D. Dillehay¹



Ana Mariella Bacigalupo's *Shamans of the Foye Tree: Gender, Power and Healing Among Chilean Mapuche* is a descriptively rich and theoretically nuanced ethnographic analysis of Chilean Mapuche shamans or *machis*. Aimed at a wide audience of scholars and students, Bacigalupo raises critical theoretical questions relevant wherever religion, gender and body politics, spiritual power, and the identity of indigenous people in the nation-state intersect. At a time when the world is focused on efforts to understand religious manipulations of politics, political interpretations of religion, and clashes between political agendas and religions of the world, this book sheds light on the complexities and dynamics of these concerns from the viewpoint of indigenous gender structures and practices. Besides being an illuminating ethnography on Mapuche shamanism, Bacigalupo succeeds greatly in problematizing constructions of gender, spiritual power, health and healing, and race and culture,

as politically strategic discourses invoked in discrete religious settings that both replicate and challenge modern formations of subjectivity, personhood, and performance. As indicated in the book's title, a metaphoric centralizing theme is the *foye* or cinnamon tree, which serves as a source of symbolic healing and medicinal qualities, as well as a sacred emblem of shamanic authority and ritual performance.

Specifically, Bacigalupo hails the importance of examining the margins of indigenous shamanism in Chile to understand the subjective workings of the state apparatus as it affects the Mapuche and linkages between local and national ideologies. In using conceptual constructs drawn from anthropology and other social sciences, her ultimate objective is not just to understand shaman's lives but also to understand what women's and men's shamanic lives can reveal about the cultural construction of self and about the workings of the wider religious and political system of the Mapuche within the Chilean nation-state. Herein lies an important lesson for anthropologists about the value and relevance of the discipline to understanding wider political processes and to processes of subject formation.

Anthropological attention to processes of subject formation has generated critical observations regarding how these processes change over time and space, doing much to ground and specify the theoretical insights of other fields as well. Scholars have demonstrated how groups of people make and remake themselves through the prisms of race, class, gender, occupation, and ethnicity-categories that have been linked to "culture" in different ways at different historical moments. Set in this context, Bacigalupo explores how the subject formation of biological sex can mask other important issues such as gendered constructions of sexuality and personhood and ruptures in shaman gendered and sexual identities. Bacigalupo's theoretical departure draws on the works that examine both female and male shaman's strategy responses to current circumstances within a changing Mapuche society, emphasizing both boundary crossing and production. The most vivid illustration of these dynamics is an examination of the significance of balanced, gender-salient power in traditional and contemporary healing practices based on ancestral worship and spirituality. Bacigalupo's mapping of this particular case also illustrates how state-making apparatuses can be utilized by indigenous authorities to reinforce and transgress

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cultural and gender boundaries for achieving similar purposes: economic or political gain and the disruption or reinforcement of structures of traditional authority. In this regard, Bacigalupo is especially intuitive in seeing that the gender divisions of labor and the social position of both men and women have the potential to shape shamanism and its aesthetic and healing values.

Above all, the book is an effort informed by the complementary expertises of Bacigalupo as an ethnographer, ritual practitioner, and historian. The ethnography explores the complex ways in which indigenous cultural traditions interplay with the increased introduction of new and different non-ethnic ideologies, engaging state politics and leading, in some ways, to revitalized shaman renewal ceremonies that have invigorated gender political identities. Bacigalupo, as a historian, documents transformations as a religion oriented toward universal accessibility of shamanic teachings irrespective of gender and political status. And Bacigalupo, as an ethnographer practitioner brings vivid color and accuracy to the healing practices and spiritual beliefs of modern-day Mapuche *machis*. She demonstrates clearly how region wide patterns of healing authority, grounded already in a shared set of cultural resources, are shaped by responses to shared threats from both inside and outside the indigenous culture. Bacigalupo also points out that Mapuche shamans previously have either been examined in terms of spiritual labors and performers or not given much attention at all. When given attention, most studies have situated shamans within marginalized social settings that convey an artificial boundedness that does not always account for the real life-dynamics of the religious and political geography of shamans and their realistic identities within their own society.

Shamans of the Foye Tree stresses the importance of gendered power relations, which is a neglected topic in Mapuche ethnographies and in shaman studies in general. In this regard, this book represents a significant anthropological contribution to round out a picture of

cross-gender shamanism in a modern world. Aside from gender identity and shaman's sexualities, Bacigalupo deals with *machi's* construction of authority in the Chilean neo-liberal state, in which *machi* are usually typed by the state as sorcerer's and sexual deviants. But Mapuche healers are therapeutic and political entrepreneurs, often creating social hierarchies of both healing practices and institutionalized personhoods among themselves and others. Coming into view in this study are the new ways in which nationalist politics engage with Mapuche shaman renewal and its encounter with western religious sects, and the ways in which these encounters impact the effort to more strongly assert indigenous gender and occupational (shaman) identity. While not discounting traditionalist tendencies of resistance and revival, Bacigalupo is specifically interested in demonstrating how reaffirmation of practices of shamans has the means through which modernist forms can be adopted by local communities undergoing rapid change. Two of the several major contributions of this book are the insights that Bacigalupo provides into the thinking of some of the shamans who shape their society and into *machi* perceptions of themselves and of their place in the world. The result is a splendidly rendered ethnography that advances a wealth of informed analysis about specific renewal rituals and gendered power relations while suggesting many insights into the process of gendered shamanistic practices throughout the region.

All in all, this book provides plenty of new data, ideas, and questions for a wide range of scholars and students in studies of shamanism, gender, power and hierarchies, and identity politics. The book is destined to make a wide mark on the field, because of the broader intersection between gender, politics, and religious interaction that is at its core. *Shamans of the Foye Tree* is a must read for any scholar and student interested in these topics and in South American indigenous groups.