

# Ekenier: The Land of Unyielding Sound

Making the Familiar Strange

By Floyd Althoff

## An Introduction

In my field work in Fargo, North Dakota, a city that I can only assume is *the* cultural epicenter of the Northern Hemisphere, I've come across a site with a people so compelling, so bewitching that I cannot think of keeping their existence a secret. This is none other than *Ekenier* [εκε:nje] and its Nosibian people.

## Andy Ehsyu

*Ekenier* lies in northern Fargo within a larger pilgrimage site known to locals as *Andy Ehsyu*. Nisobian devotees travel from around the world to meet Land Grant and gain knowledge and status through his trials. Though I have not been allowed to meet this Dr. Grant yet, I can tell his efforts do not go unnoticed.

## Noise Unceasing

Residents of the *Ekenier* building have an insistent connection with noise and its production. I have observed noise rituals performed both *en masse* and *en one's own*.



A Nisobian performer weeping during a pause in her cell performance.

## Relic of Perceived Identity

What I found intriguing were these calling cards that the pilgrims of *Andy Ehsyu* always carried. These cards contained supposed portraits of the individual. In the image below you can see that some changes have been made to the pictures that do not reflect the individual's appearance. An unusual ritual I witnessed is pictured below as well. The pilgrims approached a gray box-like altar on the wall and presented to it their calling card. Upon the display of green light from the altar, the pilgrim would enter the door to its right into a temple within which they sit and watch their peers make absurd sounds for hours at a time. These pilgrims must not understand that they may enter the room without this process as the door is already open. Even more alarming is that upon exit these pilgrims crowd the altar once again to present their cards as if to beg this altar's forgiveness for entering such a place.

Some may theorize that this is a ritual to ask for permission. Evidence for this is a nearby altar, in image four, which is guarded by holy administrators. When a card is presented, this administrator will permit the pilgrim to eat or drink and provide them with nourishment. These primitives must believe that the original altar in image three is guarded by hidden guards that permit their entrance. The pilgrims then forget their first attempt and desperately scan their cards again when leaving to avoid divine retribution. I, however, was allowed to enter and exit without such a ritual. This is either because their guards are not present or because the guards believe me to be a superior being among these pilgrims, to be admired for my intellect and charm yet feared for my prowess. The latter seems more evident and rational.

## The *Kwaír* and The *Khanductator*

These larger rituals, such as the *kwaír* are performed daily and are directed towards a single individual. This person, as I am told, is the *khanductator*. As the *kwaír* wails and cries at them, the *khanductator*, with great desperation, swings their arms to make the noise finally end. This test of endurance can last more than hours at a time with countless battles in one sitting. On occasion, these matches will be fought in a nearby arena and are open to an audience. These audiences, however, fight back at both the *kwaír* and *khanductator* with their own noise produced by slapping their hands together like a well-trained sea lion.

## The Cell Performance

Solo noise rituals can take many forms. The most common is the cell performance. An individual enters a 7' by 6' room, or cell, with only an 8" by 10" observation window and bare walls. Once in, the participants shout, scream, and howl the same material over and over. At times, I have observed them practicing how to count though I have yet to see one demonstrate the ability to reach higher than the number four and rarely even that. This solo ritual must be painful as performers will interrupt their noise with curses, tears, or long blank stares at the wall if they fail to bellow correctly.



A discrepancy between an individual and their Card of Perceived Identity.



A card presenting ritual.