

**TRADITION, CHRISTIANITY, AND THE STATE  
IN UNDERSTANDINGS OF SICKNESS AND HEALING  
IN SOUTH NIAS, INDONESIA**

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Thesis submitted for degree of PhD

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September 2000

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TRADITION, CHRISTIANITY, AND THE STATE: UNDERSTANDINGS OF SICKNESS AND HEALING IN SOUTH NIAS, INDONESIA**

The thesis describes the range of south Nias villagers' understandings of sickness and healing, and investigates how and why they draw on various cultural spheres in the interpretation and management of sickness events. Traditional notions of sickness etiology are set in the context of both Christian beliefs and the state's efforts to promulgate modern, 'scientific' understandings, in order to show how sociologically distinguished individuals draw variously at different times and contexts on all three fields of sickness interpretation and management.

The thesis begins with a history of Nias relations with the outside world, in order to delineate the genealogy of modern Indonesian attitudes to local culture. A brief medical history of Nias from precolonial times to the present completes the introductory material.

Traditional beliefs surrounding sickness and healing are introduced in the context of other traditional social, political and religious institutions. The process of conversion to Christianity is described, paying particular attention to the Christian construction of traditional religion and culture and the translation into the vernacular of Christian concepts. Contemporary village Christianity is described, and an attempt is made to characterise private religiosity and the range of Christian ideas on sin, sickness, and medicine.

The contemporary classification of illness into ordinary, spirit-caused, and witchcraft-caused diseases is discussed, together with the explanatory models involved. The various traditions of village healing are described. Finally, the various institutions of modern state medicine are described, along with the aims and local reception of government programmes aimed at social transformation. A concluding statement sums up the cultural dynamics described surrounding the interpretation and management of sickness in south Nias villages, showing how it is that notions of 'sin' have come to hold such a central position in the explanation of sickness on contemporary Nias.



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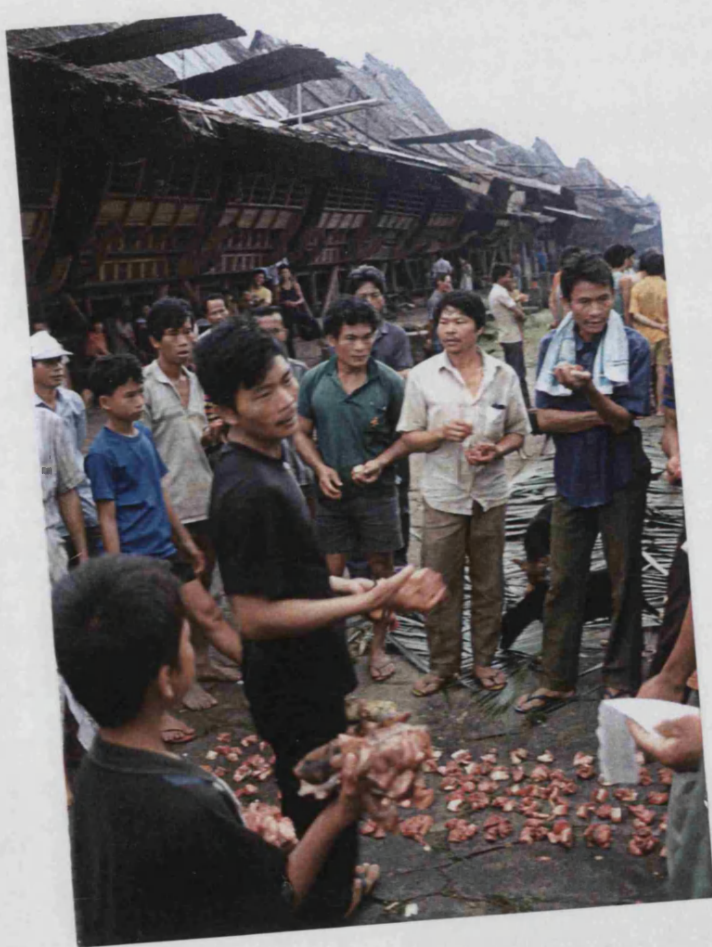
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I Mother and children



II Village street



III The division of meat





IV Elders singing *hoho*

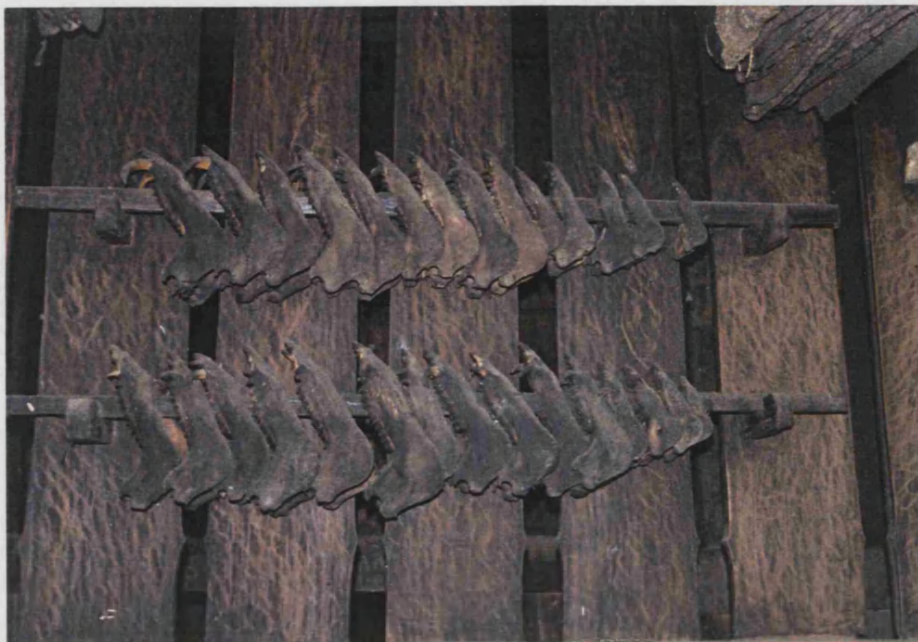


V Folk song and dance troupe performing at wedding



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was made possible by a generous grant from the Economic and Social Research Council, the permission of the Indonesian Academy of Sciences (LIPI), and the support of the University of North Sumatra (USU) in Medan. My thanks go to all these institutions, and in particular to my counterpart at USU, Drs Hamdani Harahap. The Department of Social Anthropology at LSE was an immensely inspiring and supportive study environment; my heartfelt thanks go to all the staff and my fellow students, but especially to my supervisors, Dr Fenella Cannell and Professor Maurice Bloch.

On Nias my work would have been impossible without the hospitality and friendship of many people. In particular I would like to thank Julius, Emanuele, Ama Winner and all his family, Akadira, Kornelius, Ama Yanty and all his family, Ama and Ina Liber, Fadoma, Ama Rina, Ama Siti, Ama Wita, Ama Japer, Ama and Ina Rahmat, Ina Asa, and all the people of Hiliamaeta, Orahili, Hilinawalö, and Lagundri. May God bless you all.

I have benefitted from comments and conversations with Pastor Johannes Hämmerle, Andrew Beatty and Henrikje Klasen, as well as my contemporaries at LSE, and help with German texts from Jessica Civiero. My thanks to all of you; all errors, however, are my own!

Finally, let me take this opportunity to thank my parents for their love and support, and my wife Mitzi and son Oscar for allowing me to be away for so long.

## CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

I begin this thesis on south Nias villagers' understandings of sickness and healing, and shall continue intermittently to illustrate it, with a substantial (and only lightly revised) quotation from my fieldnotes. The purpose of this quotation, as of the others with which I illustrate successive chapters, is to counterpose my analysis with a more descriptive presentation of the ethnographic material. It is my hope that these passages will convey the atmosphere of village society and culture in south Nias at the end of the twentieth century, during the last years of the Soeharto régime, and in particular the tone in which villagers relate to the spheres of Tradition, Church, and State. Further, it is my intention in presenting these quotations from my fieldnotes to reproduce - or at least draw attention to - the process of fieldwork, and to suggest the highly complex and open-ended ethnographic reality to which my analysis is only one of several possible approaches. The first such quotation consists of a description of Ama Wita of Hilinawalö. A local man, he is responsible to the state for running the recently-opened village clinic, and is thus a pivotal character amidst the various ways that exist in the villages of understanding and managing sickness.

### 1.1 PROLOGUE: Ama Wita, the village doctor

Ama Wita was born into a well-off patrilineage of the Bu'ulölö clan who originally settled the village of Hilinawalö. His father was a Protestant, not a noble but a well-respected commoner. In pre-colonial times his great-grandfather was *Balözamu'i* - "chief of the fierce ones" i.e. chief of the commoner warriors of the village. His grandmother's younger brother was caught not giving the head of a wild boar he had hunted to the nobles as customary tribute. Rather than become slaves of the nobles through the debt incurred as punishment, he slaughtered his wife and children with an axe, and then hung himself. This family history - or at least his awareness of it - perhaps inflects Ama Wita's commitment to the modernising, democratic and anti-feudal spirit of the Indonesian Revolution. He belongs to the Protestant BKPN church, along with the elected but state-appointed village head and the majority of commoner households, which has broken away from the conservative BNKP, whose constituency is rather the conservative nobles and others whose prestige depends on the traditional order. He is not, however, anti-tradition: as a state-employed nurse he has earned a right to sit and speak in village councils; he is a deeply tactful man and an excellent orator, frequently succeeding in reconciling the opposing factions of the village while others use their rhetorical skills to exacerbate them. His special skill is the use of traditional means, where necessary, to achieve progressive ends. Furthermore, he also leads the *Batu Salawa* ("Tall Stones") group, one of the two folksong and dance groups in the village - his being the one that most revises tradition for a modern audience. He enjoys a drink more than most, and is a committed *sirih* addict.

Fortunate to be receiving a good education, at secondary school Ama Wita developed the ambition to become a policeman. However, his father would not permit this, and he was



sent to the nursing school in Gunung Sitoli, where he studied for three years, graduating in 1983. He worked as an unpaid volunteer gaining experience at the clinics of Lölöwa'u, Hilisimaetanö and Bawömataluo until in 1987 he was made a government official on a salary, still stationed at Bawömataluo. In 1990 he was moved to Amandraya, and in 1991 he returned home to Hilinawalö to open the new clinic. This was something of a triumphal return, following the ideal, but all-too-rarely realised pattern of *rantau*, whereby a young man leaves the village and travels to study and work for several years, until he returns to the village rich enough to marry and set up house. By village standards he is a wealthy man, a government official on a regular salary with no need to work the land, which sets him off from the majority of villagers. His disposable wealth is increased by the fact that he and his wife have no children, though they have adopted the six-year-old Wita<sup>1</sup>.

Ama Wita's house, built after his marriage to a village girl on land bought from a *si'ila* family at the south gate of the village, is unique in the village. It is a one-storey cement and brick house in the incongruous style of a Medan suburb, painted brilliant white and complete with verandahs pillared in *batu spagnol*<sup>2</sup>, white tiled floor and shuttered windows. When villagers forego the impressive traditional houses the reason is generally their inability to afford the huge and rare timbers of which they are made, and the resulting 'foreigners' houses' (*omo ndrawa*) are often poor affairs with damp cement floors and little space for the air, superheated by the low corrugated iron roof, to circulate. Ama Wita's house, by contrast, shows a sensitive appreciation of the values of modern Asian architecture. Raised on a natural hill the doors and windows catch the breezes, and the white walls and tiled floor make the interior easy to keep clean and wonderfully cool. Though the means used to achieve such shining coolness are strikingly modern the effect is nevertheless continuous with markedly traditional valuations whereby coolness (*fa'okafu*) betokens sacred blessedness, and dazzling brightness (*lachömi*) the lustre of social glory. Villagers dropping in to evening surgery are able to find the traditionally correct place to sit given their status: a series of chairs reproduces the spatial index - the *farachina* or front bench - one would find in a traditional house. There they are treated to a virtuoso display of Ama Wita's credentials as a modern man, appropriate to his nurse's role as the mediator between the village and the world of modern medicine, science and hygiene into which he was inducted at training college. Whiteness has since colonial times been used by the agents of the state to denote the prestige of government and modern, western values. It is the colour of government buildings, clinics and hospitals, and the neo-classical villas of the westernizing urban middle-classes.

However, despite the fact that his house is a sparkling and incongruous emblem of pristine and hygienic modernity, Ama Wita is not simply the agent of a new medical discourse come to displace the old, as perhaps he would be if he was an outsider sent to the village. He is, after all, a villager himself, with family connections that give him rights and responsibilities within the traditional political organisation of the village. Thus the feast that completed the building of his house was celebrated in full traditional style. Seven pigs were slaughtered, the carpenter surrendered the house keys with the proper ritual, and the appropriate blessings were given by Ama Wita's mother's brother. This too illustrates a substantially re-invented tradition, applying the old ritual to a very different sort of building as he translates success won outside the village in the state hierarchy into traditionally legitimated prestige within the village. He is a particularly significant figure for our account of changing understandings of sickness and healing, since he is both a villager and the official organ of the new

<sup>1</sup> The practice of teknonymy - whereby adults are known as 'father of' (*Ama*) or 'mother of' (*Ina*) their eldest child - has spread from the north of the island within the memory of elderly southerners.

<sup>2</sup> "Spanish stones" - italianate architectural elements, in this case fluted columns with corinthian capitals, cast in concrete and sold from roadside centres to middle-class Indonesians.

understandings of sickness promulgated by the state. Thus, as a mediator he understands very well the prevalent folk understandings of sickness and healing in the village in a way that no outsider could.

He will tell you how, when he was at primary school, his mother suffered bouts of insanity which would compel her to flee choir group practice. She was taken to a healer in Bawögösalı, who found a paper image of a person under their house, with a red ribbon round its waist and pins in its heart and lower back. At the time Ama Wita subscribed to the family diagnosis of witchcraft by images, but nowadays if a patient presents such an affliction to him he discounts witchcraft by images and tries to discover the “real” problem by questioning the patient about the symptoms and duration of their sickness.

Professionally committed to the modern, scientific understanding of disease he claims not to believe in *bechu* (spirits) and says instead that most sickness is caused by disorderly hygiene and inefficient disposal of waste. As a villager, though, he understands from the inside how villagers traditionally interpret and classify sicknesses, and he has learnt to neatly map these (“mistaken”) traditional interpretations onto the correct scientific description. Thus *tesafo* (spirit-attack)<sup>3</sup> is “really” malaria. Pains below the sternum, traditionally understood as heart-disease, are “really” gastritis. The blue bruise on the lower back supposed to betoken the malicious entry of a spirit is “really” caused by a problem with blood circulation. *Gala-gala*, a fluttering pulse above the navel supposed to be caused by poisoning, is “really” caused by malnutrition or dehydration. *Balunö* (or twilight blindness) is believed to be caused by being the first person to be seen by an adulterer, but is in reality caused by vitamin A deficiency. And the traditional fear of simultaneous sun and rain as a time of special vulnerability to spirit-attack has a basis in truth on account of the humidity entailed by such phenomena. Thus from Ama Wita’s point of view most traditional understandings are mistaken and demand corrective education. Traditionally contagion was not really understood, he says, so that sickness was often spread through the handling of food and quids of *sirih*, the heart was supposed to be in the centre of the chest and was not linked with the circulation of the blood<sup>4</sup>, and eating unripe “cool” fruits such as papaya, banana or jambu was supposed to give children worms.

At times his point of view appears to share that of official state discourse on ‘the problem with Nias’ (see chapter III.6 below), whereby unhealthy customs, primitive mentality and lack of education are seen as responsible for poor health in the villages. Thus he describes (remembering his grandmother’s stories) how the bodies of the dead used to be disposed of on open platforms beside the river below the village. Dogs would apparently bring disease-ridden, decaying body parts back into the village, and when the wind blew from the west the stench was apparently atrocious. However, Ama Wita’s self-positioning between traditional and modern belief-systems is more complex than this would suggest. While his awareness of the “mistakes” in traditional notions of sickness leads him to criticise healing practices based on these mistaken understandings as ineffective and sometimes dangerous in the abstract, in practice he never criticises the traditional healers working in the village. Indeed, he claims to have seen healers occasionally cure malaria even though working within a mistaken diagnosis of spirit-attack. He is himself knowledgeable about herbal medicines in use in the village, and considers them - along with the massages, purgatives, vapour-baths and so on which village healers offer - often to be therapeutically valuable. He also appreciates the value of prayer and repentance in helping people get well, though showing a modern - and typically Protestant - understanding of symbolism when he says that the crosses painted by healers on patients’ foreheads should be better written on their hearts.

Furthermore, he believes poisoning to be a serious threat to village health; in discussing

<sup>3</sup> A glossary of diseases as understood by the people of Nias is given in appendix I below.

<sup>4</sup> Though he says that the traditional notion that blood heats food to digest it is broadly true.



such cases he assumes that the poisons are real animal or vegetable toxins, but that a supernatural or imaginary/psychological element means they can only be treated by traditional therapies which take this element into account.

Thus Ama Wita tells how he was himself poisoned with a quid of *sirih* when he was working as an apprentice nurse at Amandraya. The first symptoms were intense itching in the mouth, which he treated with some medicinal oil made by a traditional healer, followed by general sickness. He came back to Hilinawalö and sought treatment from the massage healer and herbalist Ama Idi (see IX.10 below). He was given a strong purgative, followed by medicine to cool the poison in his stomach, and he describes vividly how the poison itself was visible as rubbery balls in his faeces.

He is, in fact, something of a specialist on poisons, perhaps not a bad thing for a nurse in a Nias village. He is able to describe in detail the symptoms of poisoning using powdered asbestos from the mantle of a Petromax lantern (heat, vomiting, coughing blood and rapid death); the method of making a vegetable poison that produces on contact intense irritation of the skin; the procedures magicians use for testing their poisons on animals before selling them. He also has some knowledge of *silat*, the martial art found with variations all over Malaysia and Indonesia, and apparently knows how to kill using the two finger punches it teaches.

So much for the point of view of Ama Wita himself: how is his mediating position between the traditional and the modern perceived by other villagers? His wealth is taken as an example of a successful modern career begun with education leading to employment as a government official, and as such inspires parents to make sacrifices in the education of their children. His work as village nurse is contrasted with the work of traditional village healers in two ways that echo contrasts generally made by villagers between traditional and modern medicine. Firstly his efficacious knowledge and skills come not from descent or divine inspiration, but from book-learning and the quasi-magical technologies of syringes and pills<sup>5</sup>. The power of this knowledge derives from its European/western source. Secondly, his medicine must be paid for whether or not the patient recovers, and not within the gift/thankyou framework that organises repayments to healers (see chapter IX). However, he escapes criticisms of the anomie of modern medicine as manifested in the town hospitals since he speaks the local language and within the village he is linked to most of his patients by ties of kinship or co-residence. He is thus the acceptable face of modern medicine, ideally placed to educate and make the necessary negotiations between patients' and medical models of sicknesses. His success in the modern sphere is appreciated, and does not attract criticisms that he has achieved it by rejecting tradition (as well it might, especially to the more conservative members of the community) because he takes great pains to discharge his traditional obligations (such as the giving of an *adat* feast at the completion of his house), and supporting the authority of traditional elders and nobles. However, the most striking expression of people's respect for Ama Wita is made in very traditional terms, the terms that one might expect an ambassador for modernity to reject.

We noted above his frustrated ambition to become a policeman. When trouble is caused in the village by the rowdy young men, perhaps drunk and brawling or causing a disturbance at a funeral, as often as not it is Ama Wita who deals with the situation. These young men have great respect for him, partly because they see him as an ally able to mediate on their behalf with traditional village authority, but mostly because of his rumoured magical powers of invulnerability. It is said that it is not possible to strike him, that any aggression against him will rebound on the aggressor. In lowered voices it

<sup>5</sup> Allopathic doctors are increasingly criticised for over-prescription of antibiotics. While this criticism would certainly apply to Ama Wita's practice - I never saw him treat a single villager at the clinic without giving them an injection - this is what his patients want and expect.

is suggested that his and his wife's childlessness is a side-effect of the powerful medicine he once drank to achieve this invulnerability. This puts him in the same league as a handful of other legendary south Nias villagers who have made a success of military careers, based, it is said, on supernatural powers of invulnerability acquired from village magicians, and who are similarly childless. Ama Wita himself would certainly not claim such powers for himself, but he is clearly aware of the rumours and has not denied them.

Though these powers are merely rumoured, his powers as a healer, albeit affiliated to the state, are not, and these too may be seen in a traditional light. For centuries village healers have sought extra powers from foreigners, whether benzoin and tiger teeth from Malay traders, amulets and spells from coastal Moslems or songs and prayers from the early missionaries. Like the young Ama Wita village boys brought up on stories of the warrior past often long for a career in the police or army because of the power to which these careers give access, powers no longer locally available within villages pacified and now at the bottom of a hierarchy of state administration. This route was blocked by Ama Wita's father, but perhaps he has used his medical education in a similar way to the healers of the past - taking knowledge from outside and using it within the village as a source of power to help people and inspire respect.

His position between traditional and modern spheres, with good credentials in both, has certainly allowed him to do an enormous amount of good in the village. He is able to understand villagers and their ideas about illness, and explain new ideas in an acceptable way - witness his success in persuading people with cholera to leave their homes for isolation in the clinic - and to avoid the worst aspects of the introduction of modern medicine to a traditional community.

## 1.2 Research aims and objectives

The aim of my research, and this thesis to which it has given rise, is to describe and explore the contemporary sociocultural dynamics whereby villagers differently draw on tradition, Christianity, and state-sponsored modernity in seeking to express - and, perhaps, determine - their understandings, values, orientations and proper forms of relationship, particularly in relation to the explanation and management of illness. This interest arose during initial field trips in 1992 and 1993, when it became apparent to me that a more conventional research programme - investigating some thematic aspect of 'traditional culture' - would misrepresent sociocultural reality in the area I had chosen for my research<sup>6</sup>. Many traditions (i.e. the ancestor cult and feasts of merit) had been discontinued, others (woodcarving, stonejumping, music and dance) were self-consciously performed in non-traditional contexts. Other traditions, such as brideprice and traditional house-building, persisted, though with sociologically-significant unevenness. 'Traditional culture' was no longer a habitus, an all-embracing sphere, the "taken for granted" that exhaustively determines peoples' understandings, attitudes, orientations, and social interaction. If we must see it as an object, then it had edges, beyond which footholds might be found by the villager in other spheres of discourse from which to turn back and discuss 'tradition.' These

<sup>6</sup> I was also influenced by the publication at this time of Andrew Beatty's excellent monograph on central Nias (Beatty 1992), which very thoroughly dealt with the topic of traditional exchange, feasting for status and marriage alliance: the central institutions of 'traditional culture' on Nias.

footholds are typically to be found either within the discursive fields of Christianity, or state-sponsored modernity.

I thus returned to Nias in 1995, armed with an ESRC studentship and what then seemed like unlimited time, to research precisely this interaction between traditional, Christian, and State/education derived "spheres of culture" (as I initially liked to call them, though I came to prefer 'cultural fields,' since it avoided the neatly bounded assumptions of spheres, suggesting rather the imperfect patterns produced by magnets in an otherwise inchoate plain of iron filings...). With rather ingenuous grandiosity my research proposal claimed that I would:

"further anthropological understanding of cultural history and social change, and the relation of culture to individual motivation, by investigating how various cultural fields conflict and coincide in influencing the representations and motivations of people through their lives."

However, when after seven months I was obliged by family reasons to take a break in my research, a review of my material thus far in the cold light of London led me to limit my aims. Up to that point, language learning had had to be my principal concern - both Indonesian, and through it the difficult local language of south Nias - and my lack of linguistic proficiency meant that inevitably my data -though useful - were not of the width, depth or subtlety demanded by my research proposal. I therefore determined that in the second half of my fieldwork, resumed in August 1997, I would limit myself to a special area of focus. I settled finally on the topic of understandings of sickness and healing, since having been repeatedly ill in the field it both particularly concerned me and threw into especially high relief the contemporary cultural politics whereby tradition, Christianity, and state-sponsored education conflict and coincide. What were the implications of the trifurcation of culture into traditional, Christian, and modern streams for the classic subject matter of medical anthropology: the social process whereby biomedical "disease" is lived and experienced in its cultural context as meaningful "illness"? (Kleinman 1980:72; Helman 1994:107).

During my preliminary research orienting myself within village society I had been repeatedly struck by the inverted commas, so to speak, which enclosed village discourse on traditional beliefs and practices. There was always a characteristic self-consciousness in the manner in which my high status, male hosts would present me with an account, say, of village social organisation, of feasting for status, of weddings or funerals. Such an account would take great pains to be "complete," but would typically elide contemporary developments arising from conversion to Christianity and participation in the Indonesian state. Yet my hosts were not lacking in commitment to the state or church: their expressed opinions and domestic arrangements alike proclaimed solidarity with the progressive values promulgated by the state, and the depth of their religious knowledge and Christian faith impressed me deeply. The puzzle was the relative status of these various systems of

belief and status to villagers. Why were these three kinds of discourse - traditional, Christian, and "modern" - kept separate, and what did people really believe? Did people "really believe" the world view entailed by traditional beliefs and practices, whilst superficially imitating the signs of Christianity and modernity; or were exotic traditions today self-consciously preserved whilst people's true outlook was Christian and modern; or were all three systems of thought combined in a peculiarly Nias hybrid culture? Notions of illness and health seemed a particularly acute focus for research on these questions, since - being of life and death importance to villagers - interpretations and responses to illness promised a true picture of villagers' cultural orientations.

Reading through the recent literature on medical anthropology - the study of the social and cultural dimensions of illness and health - it quickly became apparent that there was a strong resonance between the Nias situation and contemporary theoretical preoccupations with medical pluralism, that is, the coexistence of diverse medical systems. In particular, Arthur Kleinman's (1980) study of the Taiwanese "health care system" was especially suggestive. From the simple expedient of not assuming non-comparability between "cultural" traditional healing and "scientific" modern medicine he was able to generate a deeply nuanced account of the interrelated popular, folk, and professional sectors that make up the contemporary Taiwanese health care system. Kleinman fruitfully followed up Dunn and Leslie's insistence on studying medical systems in their local setting, and Kunstadter's description of "choice points" where Northwestern Thai choose between diverse medical systems (with its suggestion that all medical systems may be pluralistic), concluding that the "plural life-worlds" Schutz describes for the United States may not exclusively apply to developed societies (see Kleinman 1980:34-7; Kunstadter 1976; Leslie 1976:356-367; Dunn 1976:133-158; Schutz 1970).

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's (1984) description of medical pluralism in contemporary Japan took Kleinman's insights a stage further. Focusing on the status of the systems (Kanpo, religious healing, and biomedicine) that make up Japanese health care, and the relations between them, she was able to demonstrate the complementarity between them, and the tension between local and universalised systems. Perhaps most importantly, she showed that history does not involve a simple trajectory from localised folk and religious notions and practices to universalised biomedicine: while biomedicine gains ground in modernising societies and acute illness, folk and religious healing gains importance in postmodern societies and in chronic illness (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984:212,220).

While such studies appeared to offer illuminating insights to the Nias situation, their theoretical ideas seemed largely not to have percolated through to ethnographies of medical ideas and practices in the southeast Asian region. Such ethnography was dominated by the literature on the one hand about Malaysia (and colonial Malaya), on the other concerning Bali and eastern Indonesia. The literature on the Malays (usefully summarised by Laderman 1991:3) dwells largely on the shamanistic *bomoh* and *pawang*, the ontological assumptions of whose exotic practices are drawn out to show the Malay

world view. According to the older writers, such as Skeat and Gimlette, these are the assumptions of magic and superstition typical of "primitive peoples," which may be expected to develop - given enlightened European intervention - to a universal, rational, world view (Skeat 1900; Gimlette 1991, originally 1915). Later writers, such as Endicott (1979), attempt to remedy the evolutionism of the earlier ethnographers (whose work he synthesised) by showing that the notions implied by such exotic healing practices, along with local theories of the supernatural world and the human soul, fit together to make a rational, structured, system.

Characteristic of this account, as of the work of many subsequent ethnographers describing the healing practices and religious beliefs of Malay aboriginal groups (see e.g. Karim 1981, Howell 1984, Roseman 1991, Laderman 1991) is the tendency to avoid discussion of the reception of modern medicine, or other recent accretions, which are assumed to be irrelevant to the elucidation of authentically traditional local beliefs and practices. These beliefs and practices are generally assumed to form a system informed by a consistent internal logic. Perhaps such a state of affairs is likely to be found when the communities to be studied are selected specifically for their remoteness and relative lack of social contact with other cultural groups or state personnel<sup>7</sup>. But it is significant that Karim, in a study devoted exclusively to traditional understandings, found two ideologically contradictory systems of ideas, the one based on the concept of *tulah*, or retribution for wrongs against community elders or the natural world, the other based on *kemali*, or the power of infracted taboos to make one sick, each applied in distinct contexts (Karim 1981:200). Endicott himself reproached earlier writers for ignoring the differences between the various aboriginal groups of the Malay peninsula in order to present their data as coherent systems (Endicott 1979:30).

In a kind of parallel tension with this holistic approach in the literature, however, we find the project of deconstructing traditional religious beliefs, to show the influence of Hindu, Chinese, Islamic, and Greek ideas. This tendency goes back to the diffusionist explanations of the 1930s, but nevertheless persists into the present. Carol Laderman's recent study of Malay *bomoh* and their performances makes a sustained effort to disentangle Malay humoralism from the humoralism of the medieval Islamic world (Laderman 1991:20-22). According to her account, Greek-Arabic medical theory arrived on the Malay peninsula in the fourteenth century, though there had been some prior exposure to Hindu *ayurveda* and Chinese medicine. Humoral theory took root because of its resonance with their preexisting world view; she suggests that this worldview, uncontaminated by outside influence, may be examined today through its survival amongst the non-Islamicised aboriginal populations discussed above. Thus we find among the Malays - as on Nias, as we shall see - the same foods and diseases classified as hot or cold (see below page 160), in a manner remarkably consistent with the writings of Maimonides, the medieval Arabic physician. However, in a modification that makes sense given the different climate of southeast Asia, the wet and

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<sup>7</sup> Carol Laderman specifically chose the village of her research into shamanistic healing in part because it was not contaminated by the penetration of cosmopolitan medicine (Laderman 1991:3).

dry of Maimonides' fourfold classification are simply mapped onto the cold and hot categories respectively, and the desirable mean is placed closer to coolness than in the Islamic west, where it is closer to warmth. Thus, for Malays as for Niassans, healers and their spells cool, and, contradicting Maimonides, sweating is good for the wet and therefore cooling effect it has on the body (see Laderman 1991:24-33; also see below pp 156-7)<sup>8</sup>.

We have noted above an example of a tendency widespread in the regional literature: that is, the notion that contemporary remote populations can illuminate as to the culture and social organisation of more acculturated groups prior to their exposure to alien ideas. Thus the beliefs and practices of aboriginal Malays are supposed to exemplify the ancient beliefs and practices of Islamicised Malays (Laderman 1991:22). When we come to consider the literature on Nias (see below chapter II) we will find this to be a recurrent trope. Thus the erecting of megaliths, the institution of feasts of merit, headhunting and asymmetric alliance - all present on Nias up to the colonial era - aligns Nias with a hypothetical ancient culture distributed from Assam through highland mainland southeast Asia and the islands of Eastern Indonesia all the way to Polynesia in the Pacific. This "Ur-culture" is then seen as being displaced to highlands and remote islands by subsequent population movements, and is diversely influenced by Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, colonialism and modern nation-states to generate the cultural map we find today. An originally pure, authentic, systematic, and singular culture is thus located in the remote past, whilst the cultural present is messy and contaminated. Kammerer's account of a "baseline upland culture" in northern Thailand, characterised by feasting and asymmetric alliance in pursuit of potency and fertility, is typical of this project (Tannenbaum & Kammerer 1996:8-9,18), though we shall find many further instances in the literature on Nias discussed in the following chapter.

In the literature on Malay shamanism, then, from the evolutionists at the beginning of the twentieth century, through structuralism to U.S. style culturalist symbolic anthropology, we find a recurrent assumption that pulls against the typical sympathy of anthropologists for the local point of view. The assumption is that, on contact with the wider world, "primitive," magical world views (and thus too the beliefs and practices of traditional healing) will inexorably become more rational and scientific. This misleading teleology of progress or development is persuasive because the outcome it predicts has been generally true of European history, and often is also true in the contemporary developing world. However it is misleading because where this process does take place it is not so much the outcome of a constant law of progress as the result of determined efforts on the part of transnational organisations, as well as foreign and local national governments. As such this Weberian principle of progress as inevitable globalisation, economic development, rationalisation, and disembedding of the economy from social restraints is in fact an ideology promulgated by those same transnational organisations and governments, and in large measure inherited by

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<sup>8</sup> See also Howell 1989:167-170 who relates that for the aboriginal Chewong coolness is seen as beneficial, associated with the supernatural and the world of the forest, contrasted with the dangerous heat of human settlements.

them from the ethos of the colonial era. Since it is significantly obstinate local cultures that prevent this ideology becoming hegemonic, it is perhaps not surprising that within the terms of this ideology their colourful and strange beliefs are portrayed as inevitably doomed, in the face of superior, more effective, and universally-applicable understandings, such as those of “modern” medicine.

In fact this is not always a one-way process. We have already noted Ohnuki-Tierney’s refutation of a simple trajectory from folk and religious healing to biomedicine for Japan. So too Suzanne Brenner has recently described how a textile-producing neighbourhood of the Javanese city of Solo has progressed “from a community that represented an emergent modernity in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Java to what is often characterised as an anachronistic bastion of “tradition” in the 1990s” (Brenner 1998:11). In my research into understandings of sickness and healing I therefore intended to follow the pluralistic model proposed by Kleinman and Ohnuki-Tierney, amongst others, hoping that by not making assumptions about an inevitable outcome to the contact between traditional, Christian, and biomedical ideas I would generate a more nuanced and realistic account of the relation between these different kinds of understandings. With this aim I accepted that the cost of the decision to spread my data-collection and description horizontally over various ways of understanding illness and healing would perhaps be a diminishment of that vertical depth which is the hallmark of much excellent ethnography.

Much of the literature referring to notions of sickness and healing on Bali and the rest of the Indonesian archipelago, like the studies of Malay aboriginal groups already referred to, consists of very detailed local studies of traditional life-worlds whose cost was often the relegation of discussion of participation in the nation-state and dramatic social change (inasmuch as these were significant in fieldsites deliberately chosen for their remoteness) to the status of an epilogue<sup>9</sup>. According to the assumptions of the “culture and personality” school, traditional culture was supposed to exhaustively determine individual psychology. The essentialism with which Bateson, Mead, and Geertz discussed “Balinese culture” or “the Balinese character” left little room for pluralist models of culture. Later ethnographies of the Indonesian archipelago are more theoretically sophisticated, and do show in some detail the influence of the state and religious conversion. In this respect the works of Janet Hoskins, Susan Rodgers, Susan McKinnon, Anna Tsing, Joel Kahn and Rita Kipp, are noteworthy (see discussion below). Healing concerns are often mentioned despite not being central to the themes of these fine-grained accounts. In particular again and again we come across the importance of appropriate exchange of objects and words, particularly with wife-giving groups, for individuals’ and families’ well-being, as well as the significance of measurement, naming and performance in divination and healing as well as in the exchanges that structure social groups (e.g. Hoskins 1997, Keane 1997, Kuipers 1990, 1998). Much of the detail in these accounts resonates with the Nias case, and these points of similarity will be drawn attention to below where they offer illumination to my own material.

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<sup>9</sup> I refer here to the deservedly classic work of anthropologists and ethnographers such as Josselin de Jong, Rodney Needham, James Fox, Shelly Errington, Valerio Valeri, and many others.

In recent years the body of literature directly considering the effects of religious conversion, globalisation, the state, and rapid social change has been growing. Much recent work has emphasised that individuals vary in their situatedness to cultural models, and make choices about what kinds of models to invoke when. Thus, whereas older, culturalist studies attempted to investigate the distinctive emotional range of particular groups (eg Bateson & Mead 1942), later writers such as Karl Heider would compare the languages of emotion used by Minangkabau, analysing the shifts in emotional repertoire they make when switching from their local language to the national language of Indonesia, *bahasa Indonesia* (Heider 1991). Unni Wikan, discussing how Balinese cope with tragedy, explicitly argues against the notion of essentialised Balinese-ness as masked theatricality and aesthetic pursuit. Her subjects actively manage their emotions by making choices between various available templates of behaviour, choices that are partially steered by various sociological positions, and motivated by the desire for health (Wikan 1990:xviii,23,175). Her account reveals significant complementarity between traditional healing and the work of doctors and clinics. The work of each is seen as being confined to separate realms and the recognition of multiple causation of illness episodes means that both traditional healers and doctors may be consulted (ibid. 230-1,261-2). Doctors in Bali apparently refer to traditional healers those patients they cannot cure (ibid. 3). Similarly Michael Peletz' work on gender among the Malay Muslims of Negeri Sembilan has stressed the significance of gender in situating actors to tradition. The men he describes are drawn to nationalist discourse and Islamic orthodoxy, whereas women's sphere is that of depoliticised tradition: in Negeri Sembilan all traditional healers are women (Peletz 1996:163). John Bowen, working on Aceh, has made the important point that ethnographers have invariably concentrated on what is distinctively local in their fieldsite, and have thus neglected the local importance of universal discourses (Bowen 1993:4-5). He is referring to orthodox Islam, but it is my contention that his comments apply equally to the universal discourse of what is variously referred to as "biomedicine," "cosmopolitan," "modern" or "western" medicine.

Bowen uses a pluralised version of Foucauldian discourse to frame his account. In the Gayo Highlands discourses on religion are various and receive divergent interpretations; they cannot be resolved into a single authoritative account of the Gayo attitude to religion (ibid. 8-11). Others have profitably used the notion of discourse to show both how cultures have been differently conceived at different times, both by members of the community and those that study them, and how important such discourses on local culture have been and are to the contemporary construction of "tradition" in an increasingly globalised world where nation-states in headlong pursuit of development press hard on local cultures. The work of Joel Kahn on the Minangkabau and Adrian Vickers on Bali are most noteworthy in this respect (see Kahn 1993, Vickers 1989), and has suggested the strong emphasis I place in the following chapter on the local effects of discourses (of the national state, the indigenous church, foreign travellers and anthropologists) about Nias.



Christian conversion is one theme of southeast Asian ethnography where the articulation between diverse cultural traditions - local cultures and a world religion - has received sustained consideration. It is also a subject where the tension between local culture and a universal discourse is unavoidable, forcing the analyst to recognise that local people may be subject to mutually contradictory allegiances, as members of a local ethnic group, a nation, and a world religion (q.v. Hefner 1993:25-6). Many ethnographic descriptions have, of course, concerned themselves with the local shadings Christianity has taken on in specific cultural settings. Characterising the range of Christian religiosity to be found in south Nias villages will indeed form an element of my account (see below VII.7). However, bearing in mind Bowen's warning against ignoring the local importance of universal discourses we will be examining in chapter VII the tension between local representatives of orthodoxy and the less orthodox, but still unmistakably Christian, practices of repentance healing and the giving of offerings to the church.

Conversion is, of course, the defining moment in articulation between traditional and Christian understandings. On Nias particularly "The Great Repentance" (as the conversion to Christianity from 1915 onwards is locally known) set the tone for the characteristically local elements of Nias Christianity, as well as clearly beginning the controversy - which on Nias is at the heart of the tension between the local and the orthodox - over what constitutes "proper" repentance (see below VI.7). A satisfactory account of conversion must explain the process from the local point of view. I follow writers such as Rafael and Hoskins, who have written exemplary histories "from below" that stress especially the process of translation as key to conversion (Rafael 1993; Hoskins 1987). The manner in which Christian concepts are rendered into local languages often has important consequences both for the uptake of Christianity, and for the generation of culturally-inflected local religiosity. Rafael describes how the use by missionaries of locally-loaded Tagalog terms such as *utang na loob* ('indebtedness') and *hiya* ('shame') compelled the locals' attention, while the local understandings of reciprocity and the soul encoded within them subverted the message the missionaries intended to convey (Rafael 1993:121-8). Hoskins explores the significance for Sumbanese of the translation of "the bible" as the local equivalent of "the holy or cooling words," and of the assimilation of the sacred quality of the church and Sundays to local notions of taboo (Hoskins 1987:143,152). Thus in the chapter of this thesis on the process of conversion to Christianity I explore in turn the local associations of terms used to render concepts such as God, the devil, demons, angels, the soul, prophets, the holy, and, crucially, the concept of sin. This approach yields many important insights on both the process of conversion, the construction of Christianity in local people's minds, and the construction of Nias tradition within local Christianity. I shall argue in chapters VI and VII below that distinctively local elements of contemporary religiosity - especially in relation to healing - as well as the process of conversion itself, were significantly guided by the local associations of the word chosen to render the Christian concept of "sin." At the same time I avoid a monocausal explanation of conversion, discussing other relevant social and historical factors that facilitated conversion.

Given the framework of this thesis - to explore the relations between traditional, Christian, and state-sponsored understandings about sickness and healing - the attitude of Christianity to tradition is crucial, in particular the partition of tradition into devil-worship to be discarded and *adat* to be conserved. In this last respect the work of Birgit Meyer and Janet Hoskins on the diabolisation of traditional religions by the translations of Christianity was very suggestive for the Nias material (Meyer 1994; Hoskins 1987: 292; see below 6.4). As I describe in the historical résumé below, the concerns of the indigenous Protestant church and the nationalist Indonesian state have dovetailed in significant ways, producing a "progressive alliance" between the discourses of church and state, against those of tradition, which comes to be portrayed as economically-wasteful, irrational, superstition. Christianity and the state both want the same kinds of people - self-reliant, economically-rational, individuals, rather than the traditional person, enmeshed in webs of economic obligation to affines and diverting income from re-investment to instant display of status.

However, Christianity as manifested in south Nias villages is not monolithic, as I will describe in chapter VII. Instead, the Christian religiosity of villagers varies along a continuum from the orthodoxy emanating from centres of Christian discourse, such as seminaries and priests, to the syncretism that characterises the discourse of uneducated villagers peripheral to such centres. This more syncretic variant of local society is thus able to blend with traditional discourse in what I shall term the "traditional alliance" of traditional and Christian discourse, from within which criticism of the state may occasionally be expressed.

Participation in the post-Independence national state has had, of course, significant consequences for traditional culture, and especially for those traditional understandings of sickness and healing to be explored in chapters VIII and IX. I shall describe below how, just as the discourse of orthodox organs of Christianity (with uneven success) diabolises traditional healing beliefs, so too the discourse of the state casts "superstitious" traditional beliefs as barriers to development - the supreme value of the New Order state - and thus as sins against nationalism. Simultaneously regional cultures and a strong sense of *adat* were promoted as "pillars" of the national culture and the spiritual corrective to the materialist dangers of economic development. This tension between the state urging the discarding of "primitive mentalities" while insisting on the preservation of social stability-maintaining *adat* and decorative regional traditions as spiritual corrective and cultural capital respectively in the modern globalised world was characteristic of the New Order government of President Soeharto. It has been described and commented on by many writers, in particular those attached to the Cornell school of Anderson and Siegel, which was consistently critical of Soeharto's government. Thus Virginia Hooker's introduction to her edited volume on "Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia" (1993) gives a clear analysis of the politics of culture I have just briefly summarised, while succeeding papers illustrate the consequences of this state ideology for regional arts, political language, television, architecture, and so on. Susan Rodgers, in her work on the Sipirok Batak, has described how under New Order

conditions, the character of wedding speechmaking has shifted from traditional ritual to theatrical art form (Rodgers 1979).

Especially suggestive for this thesis has been John Pemberton's study of how Javanese culture has been constituted through the recent history of colonialism and nationalism. In particular, he suggests that the depoliticised, aesthetic and theatrical nature of Javanese culture arose with the Dutch colonial policy of permitting ongoing ritual status to the royal houses of Surakarta and Yogyakarta, while denying them real administrative power. This provides the first step in a genealogy that leads to the New Order government's use of deracinated local *adat* to ensure social stability, foster a sense of national culture, and attract tourists. Pemberton vividly describes how contemporary Solonese experience "something missing" in this version of culture, and thus how this official effort results in the constitution of a dangerous and refractory "other" Java, characterised by night-vigils at sacred sites and the séances of spirit-mediums (Pemberton 1994: 61-8, 152-163, 269-290). Margaret Wiener's comparable "history of the present"<sup>10</sup> describes for Bali how the elements of local culture denied by colonial and nationalist constructions of culture gives rise to an "invisible world" that becomes a site of resistance to modernity (Wiener 1995: 9). Thus the moralising, progressive state discursively produces its own, refractory other. We shall see below, especially in chapter III but also throughout the thesis, how Nias as a whole, and in particular their traditional beliefs relating to sickness and curing, are officially constructed as the opposite, the obstinate *alter*, of the development mentality demanded by the state. This process does not only emanate from official discourse: we shall see also how certain villagers use this "other" Nias as a site of resistance to state discipline.

The historical period (1995 - 1998) during which my research was conducted was of special significance, covering the economic crisis of 1997 and approaching the fall of Soeharto. At the beginning of my fieldwork the degree of politicisation in south Nias villages was remarkably low. Golkar, the government party, typically won some 90% of the vote, and responses to political questions time and again illustrated that villagers felt it was not the done thing to criticise the government, let alone the president of the Republic. Villagers were hit hard by the food price rises that accompanied the flotation of the rupiah and the ensuing economic crisis. However, blame was directed at local Chinese middlemen in the market town, and the army, who confiscated Chinese shopkeepers' stores and sold them on at reduced prices to villagers, were perceived as heroes. It was only when outright violence and intimidation was applied by the military to prevent a swing in support to the opposition PDI party during the last election of Soeharto's term that direct expressions of discontent began to be made. Even so, villagers felt themselves to be witnesses rather than participants in the fall of the Soeharto régime, and the rioting students who largely brought about his fall were seen more as a threat to the nation than its saviour.

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<sup>10</sup> This phrase, explicitly invoked by Pemberton (1994:25) is taken from Foucault. His project to describe genealogies of knowledge has inspired the accounts of Pemberton and Wiener, as well as the present thesis.

Following Rita Kipp I attribute this low level of politicisation on Nias to the marginality of Nias to the state and the co-existence of several cross-cutting foci of identity available to villagers, in terms of local kinship groups, village affiliation, class within the village, religion, regional and national identity (Kipp 1993 in toto, see also Scott 1985:43). Resistance to state discipline on Nias typically takes the form, not of direct challenge to the representatives of the state, but of a simple avoidance made possible by the trifurcation of culture I describe. The total hegemony of state discourse is only possible insofar as culture is unitary; on Nias the possibility exists for retreat into the alternative discourses of tradition and Christianity, without necessitating direct confrontation with the discourse of the state. Throughout this thesis we will meet the various devices whereby mutually contradictory discourses are able to co-exist without conflicts becoming apparent. The work of James Scott on peasant resistance in Malaysia is suggestive in this respect, describing the everyday strategies whereby exploited peasants avoid compliance without the direct confrontation entailed by uprising or rebellion (Scott 1985: 28-36). Thus tradition, constructed by the state as a barrier to development, becomes a site of resistance as seen from below as well as from above, and in alliance with Christian discourse offers villagers a language to express criticism of the state.

So, to summarise the intention of this thesis: where recent studies of medicine and healing in the south-east Asian region tend to focus exclusively on the traditional sphere (e.g. Laderman 1991; Roseman 1991) I intended to map the articulation of traditional understandings with the Christian and the modern. Instead of teasing out the coherent logic of a traditional 'Asian medical system' (cf Leslie 1976) I considered it more important to investigate the social and historical factors that give rise on Nias to a contested co-presence of traditional healing, Christian healing, and cosmopolitan medicine. Rather than assume a radical distinction in kind, value and future prospects between traditional and state-sponsored biomedicine (signalled by the terms 'modern,' 'western' or 'scientific' medicine, which, following Leslie (1976) I term 'cosmopolitan medicine') I found it more useful in presenting local reception of diverse medical systems to balance them and not assume radical differences of the 'they have beliefs, we have knowledge' kind (see Good 1994:71). In so doing I intended to follow medical anthropologists such as Kleinman (1980) and Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) and their work on medical pluralism in Taiwan and Japan. Using Kleinman's inclusive model of a "health care system" I planned to research a wide description of the interrelated popular, folk and professional sectors of health care on Nias, the explanatory models of illness and treatment options implied within each, and the relation of individuals to these sectors of the health care system as revealed in family sickness histories (Kleinman 1980:24-50). When I needed to keep things simple in the field, I told myself I was aiming for a comprehensive report that would fully prepare a hypothetical foreign medical operative for service amidst the embattled cultures of healing on Nias. This, then, was the topic that occupied me exhaustively for the nine-month-long second phase of my fieldwork, and forms the subject-matter of this thesis.

### 1.3 Description of fieldwork site and research

A total of sixteen months fieldwork on Nias (Oct '95 - Apr '96 and Aug '97 - Apr '98) was necessary to learn the Nias language and collect the material for the present thesis. The *lingua franca* of Bahasa Indonesia through which I was obliged to learn the language of Nias I was able to study in London before departure. My fieldwork site was the Macnamölö region of the south. The principle village of my research was Hilinawalö Fau, but I also spent significant amounts of time in the villages of Hiliamaeta, Orahili Fau, and Lagundri. All these villages originated with the settlements of the sons of Mölö, the forefather who migrated to this region from Gomo some eighteen generations ago. They thus form a culturally homogeneous region, united by shared dialect, *adat* and myths, and allied by intermarriage. Until they were split by the defection of Fadoro (modern Hilisimaetanö) to cooperate with the Dutch, they also formed a military alliance, and their unity was ritually expressed and constituted by the seven yearly Tiger Feast, a ritual form brought with them from Gomo, which symbolically identified the river of the new lands with that of the old ancestral homeland. Under the appalling stresses of the economic crisis which have afflicted Indonesia as a whole since the flotation of the rupiah in October 1997, this military unity of the Macnamölö region re-emerged momentarily in 1998/9 when fighting broke out between the villagers of Maenamölö and those of To'ene'asi, their old headhunting enemies<sup>11</sup>. The Maenamölö region is today designated a "tourism area" (*daerah wisata*) by central government.

All three villages are of slightly above average size for south Nias, with around 2,000 inhabitants each. Each lies at the top of a steep hill, with the traditional layout of two rows of houses facing each other across a central, paved "street." Traditional houses are typically the home of a man and his wife with their sons and their families, if they are married. Modern 'Malay' houses are usually the home of a nuclear family. An elected village headman (*kepala desa*) is responsible to the state for the administration of the village; each however also recognises a traditional chief (*kepala adat*). However, only Hilinawalö still boasts a "great house" (*omo sebua*), home to the chiefly lineage. The Hiliamaeta great house was destroyed by fire, that of Orahili by the Dutch.

None of the villages have direct vehicular access. Hiliamaeta and Orahili are both close to roads, towards and along which they have expanded in modern, ribbon developments. Hilinawalö, on the other hand, is three hours' walk from the road. Hiliamaeta is close to the market and harbour town of Teluk Dalam as well as the sea and the backpackers' resort of Lagundri; Orahili is close to Bawömataluo, the largest traditional village of the south and a significant tourist attraction. Hilinawalö is more typical of south Nias villages in general in its remoteness from the road and market town; however it is on a circular track of south Nias villages promoted in the guidebooks, and under normal conditions receives visits from some hundred or so tourists every year. All three villages have primary schools and

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<sup>11</sup> The conflict began with improper advances made to a Maenamölö girl and ended with seven deaths.

both Catholic and Protestant churches, though the latter are in a numerical majority.

Livelihoods are generally based on wet rice cultivation wherever sufficient flat, irrigatable land is available for *sawah*, with mixed gardens on the hillsides providing tapioka and sweet potato and other products for domestic consumption and use. Pigs are raised, largely for the requirements of traditional exchanges at marriages and deaths. In Hiliamaeta copra-production from the extensive coastal coconut stands brings in as much as rice, and some families own rubber and clove trees. Hilinawalö has seen many farmers turning to the growing and distilling of patchouli oil from *nilam* shrubs. This has brought in spectacular profits to the village farmers, and notably not only to those with prior traditional status. However, it is fast becoming apparent that the *nilam* quickly exhausts soil, and is causing serious soil erosion on the steep slopes.

Conducting fieldwork in a series of different villages had the disadvantage of obliging me to repeat the initial social and ethnographic groundwork in each new site. However, it also had the huge advantage of confronting me with the variety of socio-political contexts in which the cultural dynamics that were my concern were being played out. In Hiliamaeta, for example, the traditional organisation of village society into *gana* groupings led by noble families remains important, whereas in Hilinawalö the dearth of nobles and the dramatic increase of wealth of commoner families producing patchouli oil has permitted readier acquiescence to the egalitarian and "progressive" social values promulgated by the Indonesian state. Had my fieldwork been confined exclusively to one village, by assuming its representativeness I might have misunderstood the complexity and unevenness of the socio-cultural dynamics I wished to describe, missing, for example, the important roles of proximity to roads, designation as an official 'tourist attraction', and the respective economic success of village nobles and peasant farmers in determining attitudes to tradition and modernity.

In Hiliamaeta I stayed in a traditional house with the village elder, Foakaini Fau, his wife, and their three sons, one of whom (my initial contact, Ama Winner) was a teacher at the local Junior High School. At Lagundri I stayed with Ama Yanty, a Moslem nobleman from Orahili who moved to this coastal (and Moslem) village in the 1970s to open a beach guest house for tourists. In Orahili I stayed in a concrete 'modern' house with Ama Liber, a nobleman and relative of Ama Yanty, who works as a teacher at the Junior High School in the market town of Teluk Dalam. When he was obliged to move to Teluk Dalam I moved to Hilinawalö Fau where I stayed first with Ina Asa, the widow of the Catholic community leader, in her beautiful wooden Malay house upstream of the village, and secondly with the village elder Ama Hikmat and his wife in his modern, two-storey house in the centre of the village.

During the first phase of fieldwork (Oct '95 - Apr '96) I was largely occupied with language learning at the same time as general ethnographic research on the themes of Christianity, Tradition, and the State. The second phase was spent collecting material on villagers'

understandings of sickness and treatments for sickness. During the first phase I was greatly helped by my hosts and language teachers, Ama Yanty, Ama Winner and Ama Liber and their families. I had the great personal privilege of becoming a member of their families, and the research opportunity to follow from the inside the unrolling of their families' lives. It was from these men - and through them when they mediated in interviews with others - that I learnt about the history and traditional culture of south Nias: about its complex rules and regulations about kinship and exchange; about clans and lineages and the founding of villages; about the meanings of traditional architecture, woodcarvings, and the village megaliths; and about understandings of witchcraft, magic and supernatural agency at once strange and tantalisingly familiar from the widespread ethnographic parallels they echoed. I allowed myself to be guided by a principle of serendipity, discussing whatever informants thought it important for me to know, and following up events or issues as they came up. I must confess that both language learning and the drawing back of the successive veils that cover the real social tensions in Nias villages today was, for me, a slow and even unfinished process. Just after my departure from the field a small war took place (as mentioned above) between Maenamölö (the area of my research) and the neighbouring area of To'ene'asi. I could never have predicted these events. I never became 100% fluent in the Nias language, and conducted interviews in a locally recognisable hybrid of Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Nias.

In Hiliamaeta, to the villagers' delight, I was primarily concerned with learning the proper way to behave and the rudiments of the language - and I was helped and encouraged in this above all by Sötiari and Akadira, the elder children of the house. I made the inevitable round of weddings and funerals and church services, as much because it was expected of me as because of my research interests. Emanuele, the traditional village chief, took me under his wing, and night after night chose what he thought I needed to hear. Assuming he was the only village chief I initially made the serious mistake of ignoring the government chief. In unravelling this problem, as in noticing the way everyday pragmatism and recognisably Protestant values contrasted with the ideal world of 'pure,' authentic tradition conjured up for me by Emanuele and my other informants, I became increasingly aware of tensions between traditional, Christian, and progressive versions of local culture. At this time too I was sick for the first time with dengue fever, and received an impressive firsthand introduction to what Pemberton might call "the Other Nias", an exotic mix of fervent Christian prayer, swords clashed by my head to drive out demons, and dark warnings about possibly malevolent neighbours. I did not spend long in Orahili because on the tragic death of their last surviving child my hosts left the village to move to the market town. However, while I was in Orahili my research was concerned particularly at attempting life histories, and in a study of the problems afflicting the village farmers from their own point of view, contrasted with explanations given by officials for these problems. At this time I interrupted my fieldwork for several months in order to be at home for the birth of my son.

During the second phase, in Hilinawalö, I used two assistants - Kornelius Wau and Julius

Hulu - to help me carry out focused interviews with a wide range of informants in which we collected a history of all the illness episodes they remembered, covering in detail their families' explanations for each illness and the treatments undergone (inspired by the methodology of Kleinman's 1980 study of the different sectors of the Taiwanese health care system). We made in-depth studies of three village healers, Ama Idi, Ina Lawe, Ama Rahmat, observing their practice as well as interviewing them many times. It was disappointing that for a variety of reasons I was unable to make sustained firsthand studies of ill people and the treatments sought by them, and had to rely on second hand accounts. We interviewed the leaders of the three church congregations - Catholic, Protestant, and breakaway Protestant - and traditional and modern community leaders, most on many occasions, both formally and less so. We travelled to other villages (Hilimaenamölö and around Gunung Sitoli) to collect material on prayer healing groups and kinds of magicians and healers not represented in Hilinawalö village, and to visit Pastor Johannes, a long-serving Capuchin friar well-known for his publication of vernacular accounts of traditional culture. I attended a prayer group in Hilimaenamölö to observe "dancing repentance," visited the clinic and chemist in Teluk Dalam on several occasions, and interviewed government officials in Teluk Dalam, Gunung Sitoli, and Medan. I also set schoolchildren and adults essays to write eliciting life stories or opinions on various issues. During this second phase the government appointed head of the village clinic, Ama Wita, made an enormous contribution to my research by furnishing me with information and granting me access to his practice, but especially through our ongoing discussions on the big questions that interest us both.

A further confession or warning should be made regarding the sample of informants to whom I had access. Perhaps inevitably given the many social constraints of village life, the vast majority of my most prolific informants were men, and of them many tended to be men of some social importance. Despite the close relationships I enjoyed with women in the families into which I was adopted, and the fact that my survey of sickness histories did achieve a broad sample, the voices of women and those of particularly low status are regrettably muted in my account.

(A note on languages: where words and phrases in the Nias language or Indonesian appear in the text they have been italicised. In almost all cases it is clear, either from the context or from the fact that no Nias word ends in a consonant, which of the two languages they come from. Where it is not I have indicated by prefixing Indonesian words thus: "Ind. *adat*.")

## 1.4 Introductory description of Nias

Nias, or *Tanö Niha* as it is known to its inhabitants<sup>12</sup>, is a very beautiful tropical island

<sup>12</sup> Whereas at Independence most names such as "Nias" which were applied by the Dutch to their East Indies possessions were returned to their indigenous form, Nias has never been restored to *Tanö Niha* - 'Land of the People.' This matter has been raised from time to time since 1985 in the Kabupaten DPRD council, and *Tokoh Adat* Ama Wa'omasi has written a



that lies in the Indian Ocean 85 sea-miles off the west coast of Sumatra, less than a degree above the equator. From NNW to SSE the island is approximately 120 km long and 40 km wide from west to east. The climate is very wet, with average rainfall of 2,955 mm per year and constant 80-90% humidity. There is no pronounced division between hot and dry seasons; rain falls at all times of the year, though the wettest months tend to be from September to November, the hottest from January to June. The extreme wetness makes landslips and sudden swelling of rivers common; this in turn makes the construction of permanent roads and bridges very difficult.

The island is surrounded by reefs which throw up a dramatic fringe of huge waves<sup>13</sup>. From coconut-palm covered coastal plains the land rises to 800m mountains, whose inaccessibility defends the last-remaining areas of undisturbed forest. Where river-valleys permit, wet rice paddies extend their horizontal patchworks of vibrant green, dotted with simple bamboo and sago-thatch field huts. Elsewhere the hills are covered with the mixed gardens of taro, tapioka, sweet-potato, dry rice, maize, rubber trees, timber, clove, and pineapple, as well as fruit trees such as banana, papaya, kueni mangoes, langsats, durian, and, increasingly, the low shrubs of patchouli-leaf. Village livestock consists of chickens, ducks, a few goats, and hunting dogs. Small children chase these marauders away from the unhulled rice, patchouli leaves and weaving grasses laid out to dry on the stone-paved 'street' between the two facing rows of high-roofed timber houses that make up a traditional village. The scent of patchouli hangs in the warm, humid air. All-important pigs are confined in pens outside the villages, further away from which live diminishing populations of wild boar, deer, monkeys and other small mammals and reptiles as well as many lovely butterflies and birds, including hornbills and the *beo*, a mynah-like bird symbolic of the island in Indonesian government iconography.

1,314 villages are scattered around this landscape. Those inland stand at the steep summits of hills and typically exemplify the traditional layout and spectacular architecture of Nias, which varies between the broad cultural regions of north, centre and south. Coastal villages - often less traditional in appearance - typically extend along the rudimentary roads which are unable for long to cross the landslip prone terrain to the interior villages. The ancestors of the people of Nias (*Ono Niha* - 'Children of the People') preferred to work the inland plains and hillsides of the island, and to this day fishing is a regrettable necessity forced upon those with no land. The *Ono Niha* culturally orient themselves towards the highlands and the river sources<sup>14</sup>; nobles are *si'ulu*: "the source people, those

pamphlet urging its restoration (Zebua, S 1995a).

<sup>13</sup> At Lagundri in the south since the 1970s a small community of largely Australian surfers have lived in agonistic symbiosis with the local villagers, an arrangement swelled in the 1980s by backpacker tourism. Numbers of tourists remained steady through much of the 1990s, but dried up drastically with the smog cloud of 1997, followed by the economic crisis and intermittent rioting that began at the same time and continues to the present day (March 1999).

<sup>14</sup> The important directions in one-street traditional villages - as on all paths - are *raya* (up) and *lōu* (down). Whenever two *Ono Niha* pass on a path the following dialogue must ensue: "Where are you going, Father (or Mother, Grandfather, Child, etc. according to

who are up." The people of Nias share ancient kinship with other highland Indonesian groups such as the Batak and Toraja peoples, the Sumbanese, and other 'exchange societies' of the eastern archipelago<sup>15</sup>. 10,000 years ago the ancestors of these Austronesian language speaking groups of the Mongoloid phenotype were most likely living in what is now south China. By 2,000 B.C. they had arrived in Nusantara - the Indonesian archipelago - by way of Taiwan and the Philippines, displacing and to some extent also absorbing autochthonous hunter-gathering Australoid populations, more alike to the present day aboriginal inhabitants of New Guinea and Australia (see Bellwood 1985:97, and summary in Waterson 1990:12-4). With them they brought the prototypes of their characteristic language; agricultural and livestock managing skills; architectural styles and symbolic elaboration of village and house space; god, ancestor and spirit cults; and customs of social organisation mediated by prestige exchange systems which integrated kinship, status and marriage alliance. These would all later over time diversify as separate groups were isolated in their highland and island fastnesses by later immigrations of Malays coming down through the Malay peninsula.

There is no single authoritative Nias origin myth. Ancestral myths are no longer absolutely tied to genealogies and the spaces they inhabit. In the south one will thus variously hear of Our Father Hia, forefather of Mölö, as the first ancestor to descend to Gomo in the centre of the island. He came down from Tetehöli Ana'a, the golden village in the sky, realm of his father Sirao, which itself had been the product of a long sequence of emanations from chaos, of dampness condensing from wind until it forms the *tora'a* tree - or two trees - or a divine spirit, Sihai, who splits, and from whose heart grows the *tora'a* tree, from whose buds grow gods, spirits, man, and all he needs, his weights and measures). Or one will hear of the disgraced pregnant princess Our Mother Samihara Luo, exiled by her father from a distant kingdom and washing up alone in a little boat on the shores of Nias, at the mouth of the river Gomo. She then gave birth to a son, and when he had grown sent him off to seek a wife, giving him her ring and telling him it would fit the woman who was right for him. He searched for years until, finding footprints in the mud beside the river Gomo, he followed them up to the source where he found a woman with hibiscus in her hair. He put the ring on her finger, married her - not considering it might be his own mother - and together they bore the ancestors of the Nias race. Or we may hear of a bisected spherical egg-like divine being, neither alive nor dead, the male half cast to the mouth of a river, the female to the source; later re-uniting to beget pairs of twins, the ancestors of the people... Or (and here we can make out the echoes of both 1930s academic diffusionism<sup>16</sup> and the speculations of a 1970s art historian<sup>17</sup>) we may hear tell of a people migrating from (Sirao's kingdom in

generation)?" "I/we are going up (or down)." The junior party then says, "May I go, Father (or Mother, etc.)?", and the other replies with an affirmative "*Lau!*"

<sup>15</sup> For the ethnological classification of the kinship/political complexes of the Malay-Indonesian world into "centrist" and "exchange" societies, see Errington 1989: 207-17, 239-43, 266-72.

<sup>16</sup> i.e. the Austrian archeologist Friedrich Schnitger, who argued that a common origin "in the valley of the Irrawaddy" would account for the ethnological similarities between the people of Nias and the Nagas of Assam (Schnitger 1989:125).

Barus, the Bataklands, Tibet or Assam, sailing up the river Gomo, and far upstream carrying their ships up onto dry land to live in since as yet they had no houses.

These myths may be seen as Lévi-Straussian transformations of one another, building new accounts around the theme of creation as differentiation from prior unity (pregnant mother analogous to spherical divine being or sibling twins which must be split into two so as to make possible the productive relationships based on difference and mediated by exchange). They narrativise the theme of sources - upstream - and ancient origins or descent, visibly worked out on the landscape, the houses and stones of the village, and the groups of people that inhabit them, as the umbilica to identity and power.

Some eighteen or nineteen generations ago Our Father Mölö set out from the ancestral homelands at Gomo to seek new lands in the uninhabited south. His sons became the apical ancestors of the patricians or *mado* that settled the villages of the Maenamölö region of the south. Every seven years their villages would join in the great Tiger Feast, which symbolically identified the new homeland with the old. At this feast they renewed their alliance, their social contract, laws and rates of interest and exchange, and ensured the health and fertility of their domains until the feast was held again (see Hämmerle 1986:14-26).

Today Nias as a whole, together with 131 outlying islets, constitutes a Kabupaten, or Administrative District, of the North Sumatra Regency. It is viewed by government as in many ways the problem district of the regency, bedevilled by economic backwardness, primitive customs, and superstition. The Kabupaten of Nias further subdivides into 17 Kecamatan or local administrative districts, only four of which have roads. The total population was 624,345 in 1996, implying a high average density of 111 per square kilometre<sup>18</sup>.

The administrative capital has always been at Gunung Sitoli in the north-east; today this is also where the airstrip and principal port are located. This was the first area to be settled by missionaries, since here they could enjoy some protection from the Dutch garrison as well as the more cosmopolitan atmosphere engendered by trade, and the presence of communities of Moslems and ethnic Chinese. Taken together, this largely explains the very different atmosphere between the north and south. The north saw the earliest conversions; and today its clans supply men to fill the highest ranks of local government and the Nias Protestant church. The north has often been said to be "more acculturated" than the south. Visibly indeed its villages have more in common with other poor peasant villages anywhere in Indonesia, while the ramshackle but rather charming port town of Gunung Sitoli resembles many other small ports in the Outer Islands. The visible architectural markers of tradition

<sup>17</sup> i.e. Jerome Feldman, who argued that the resemblance between traditional house-fronts in the south of Nias to the stern of Dutch galleons arose from copying (Feldman 1984:26-9).

<sup>18</sup> All statistics in this section are taken from Kantor Statistik Kab. Nias 1996, and refer to the year 1996.

are here most frequently met with transmogrified into the concrete of government offices and shabby tourist hotels. Brideprices remain higher than elsewhere in the island, however, and in many cases traditional elites have successfully re-made their status in the spheres of government and church hierarchies, or else through work away in the big cities of the Sumatran and Javanese mainland. The character of the south is rather different, with a heightened sense of pride in local culture at village level. Southern villages retain a strongly traditional appearance complemented by the huge 'great houses' and funeral megaliths of the chiefly patrilineages, whose internal power was exaggerated by their bitter resistance to the Dutch, prolonged right into the twentieth century. Under the New Order south Nias became a popular tourist destination, until in its final years foreigners' visits decreased, as a result of the regional smog and the nationwide civil disturbances attending the post 1997 economic crisis and the fall of Soeharto.

The strategy taken by this thesis in tackling villagers' understandings of sickness and healing is - as mentioned above - to hold in the frame both traditional and Christian ideas about the interpretation and management of sickness, together with those ideas presently being promulgated by the state. In doing so we intend to elucidate the status of each system of ideas, and discover how they combine with, replace, or influence the other such systems of ideas about sickness and healing in the present. The thesis thus has an important historical dimension, dwelling on the historical conditions and translations between systems of ideas that made possible villagers' conversion to Christianity and incorporation in a modern nation state. Special attention is paid to the process whereby 'tradition' has come to be constructed by both Christianity and the state. Showing how modern villagers draw in different contexts on all three systems of ideas in the interpretation and management of sickness, the ethnography presented challenges the state's notion of a simple progression from superstition to scientific notions of sickness causation and cure. Throughout, the significance of locally important themes are drawn out, such as the power attributed to words, names and images; ideas about the transmission of healing knowledge, learning, copying, and authenticity; notions of sources of power; and the appropriation of the foreign. It is intended that the whole builds into a useful explanation of how the remarkable special features of contemporary ideas about sickness and curing on Nias have arisen: that is, the powerful connection of sickness causation with notions of sin and exchange, the overwhelming emphasis on repentance-based forms of healing, and the explanation of poor health indicators in terms of tradition as a barrier to development.

The history of Nias that follows in chapter II is significantly a history of how foreigners have conceived of Nias, and it thus forms the background to chapter III, which describes the contemporary predicament of traditional culture on Nias. Chapter IV then presents a brief review of the introduction of cosmopolitan medicine. In chapter V we turn to a consideration of the traditional social and religious institutions that form the background to modern understandings of sickness and healing. In chapters VI and VII we turn to a consideration of Christianity from the process of conversion to contemporary religiosity and the range of Christian ideas on sin, sickness, and medicine. In chapter VIII we examine how sickness is

classified and explained in contemporary Nias, drawing together the three streams of cultural understandings. In chapter IX we investigate the range of traditional healers found today in south Nias villages. In describing their practice and beliefs concerning their practice we shall focus particularly on the transmission of healing knowledge, sources of power, and the special power ascribed to words and names. Chapter X describes in some detail the institutions of state medicine, health education and social welfare programmes, looking at both their aims, their implementation, and their reception by villagers. The final chapter returns to the unified vision of the contemporary moment of sickness understandings in their politico-cultural historic context, showing how tradition, Christianity and the state have interacted to produce the moralising of sickness so distinctive of Nias. Appendices provide a glossary of disease as understood in indigenous Nias terms, and the identification (where possible) and use of Nias medicinal herbs.

## CHAPTER II

# HISTORY OF NIAS RELATIONS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NIAS CULTURE

Indigenous history, as we have briefly glimpsed, consists in charters of descent and interpretation of the modified landscape that connect the nobles and elders of present communities to the original divine ancestors, whose way of life - agriculture, marriage alliances and other prestations, cults and rituals - each generation repeats on pain of the curses made at all foundation feasts. Though endlessly adapting as foreign elements are domesticated, this way of life - "tradition" - is, of course represented as an unchanging repetition of sanctified precedent. Traditionally, Ono Niha do not walk forward into the future, they walk forwards ("*föna*") into the past ("*meföna*"), following their ancestors<sup>1</sup>. History in its western academic sense exists for Nias only insofar as the island appears in foreigners' accounts. These accounts, written - until recently - by foreigners for foreigners, are tools - manuals - for interaction with the islanders; they tell the ship's captain what to expect and how to deal with the natives. We shall treat this history of representation of Nias in some detail, because these descriptions - with the assumptions that stand behind them - have become a significant, indeed an inescapable, part of that local culture itself. Both Indonesian State perceptions of Nias, and the Indigenous Protestant Church's perceptions of Nias traditional culture, are heir to such description. In the workshops producing tourist art woodcarvers work from photocopies of a Dutch exhibition catalogue. But most importantly for the present account, the history of discourse on Nias "culture" sets up the politico-cultural field within which people understand disease, and give evidence of their understanding by undergoing certain varying types of healing practice.

To my knowledge the earliest written notices of Nias appear in the treatises of various Arab geographers between 850 AD and 1,200 AD. These Arabic texts were written up by the geographers using accounts provided by navigators, so that each geographer's synthesis could then become the basis for the next generation of navigators' explorations. These accounts mention that the natives have much gold, use coconuts and their oil extensively, and insist on headhunting as a prerequisite to marriage (Akhbar al-Sin wa'l-Hind, dated around 850 AD); that they are cannibals, collect skulls to win prestige, and will buy ingots of copper for the value of gold (Aja'ib al-Hind around 1,000 AD); that they have pale skin, are of astonishing beauty, go naked and hide in the summits of mountains (Qazwini around 1,200 AD); and finally, by the process of chinese whispers perhaps characteristic to some degree of all ethnographic traditions, that they are cannibals that live in the summits of trees (Ibn al-Wardi)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare the mainland Karo Batak: "Karo envision the past as stretching out in front of them while they are moved into a future that lies unseen behind their backs" (Steedly 1993:10).

Trade had of course been plied across the East Indies for millennia: Tamil and Gujurati trade routes to the east are attested since the second century AD (Crawfurd 1967:188), and their ports in turn were in contact with the classical world; Chinese junks were active in the archipelago from the beginning of the fifteenth century; and we may expect Javanese, Bugis, and many others to have visited Nias from time to time. Nias was however always geographically marginal to local centres of power whether on Java or Sumatra as well as the principal trade routes north to China and west to India, Persia, Arabia and Europe, which passed through the Malacca straits between the Malay peninsula and the northeast coast of Sumatra. Aceh, on the northernmost tip of Sumatra, was the first landfall for ships arriving from India, Arabia, or the Cape; it was thus here that a powerful and cosmopolitan Muslim Sultanate developed mediating trade with north Sumatra, and it was the Acehnese Sultans and Queens who for centuries controlled the side-route down the southwest coast of Sumatra to Nias.

Coastal Nias village nobles played a delicate game balancing the power they wielded by kin connection to founding clans, and by domesticating foreign sources of power (iron, gold, cloth, ceramic heirlooms, gunpowder, techniques, artistic motifs, healing spells, etc.) traded for from without. The Acehnese considered Nias to be a dependency of their state, and it was used as a source of slaves, either bought from Nias chiefs for gold or other goods, or else kidnapped. Portuguese caravels first made their terrifying appearance in the pepper ports of the archipelago in the early sixteenth century. Malacca, further north on the Malay peninsula, became their main port, but like a Nusantara Eldorado rumours of a mysterious "Isle of Gold" drew many expeditions to the vicinity of Nias, where the fabled island was believed by Europeans to lie<sup>3</sup>. Beginning with the Portuguese, it was the arrival of the European naval powers with their attempts to secure trading monopolies - with appalling massacres when these were infringed - that extinguished pre-existing local sea-trading networks in the Indian Ocean.

<sup>2</sup> See Scarduelli 1986: 8 and Tibbetts 1979: 25, 45, 56.

<sup>3</sup> Diego Pacheco sailed around Sumatra in 1520 and was supposed to have found the Isle of Gold, but died in the attempt. Eight years later a French ship which sank off the coast of Sumatra was also said to have discovered it, but there were no survivors. In 1539 an envoy from the Bataks of highland Sumatra arrived at Malacca and persuaded the adventurer and explorer Mendes Pinto to accompany him back to the Bataklands by intimating that he might find a clue as to the location of the Isle of Gold, though his real motive was probably to secure Portuguese assistance in defending themselves against attacks by the Acehnese. King John III of Portugal sent three expeditions to find the legendary islands, but none arrived. By the time Marsden wrote his "History of Sumatra" in 1811 it was agreed that if the isles of gold existed they were probably the Ticos Islands lying close off the modern port of Padang, which may have been used as a clearing-house for the gold mined and traded by the inland Minangkabau Rajahs (see Catz 1989). Rumours of gold deposits in the interior still circulate today on Nias, but it is likely that all the gold exchanged by Nias nobles at marriage, and ceremonially recast at their feasts of merit, had its origins in the slave trade. However, the aura of mysterious hidden riches would continue to pervade outsiders' expectations of Nias, and the epithet "Island of Gold" was later revived by travellers' accounts of the 1930s (eg Borgers 1936). For a brief notice of the Frenchman Beaulieu's visit to Nias from Aceh in 1621, see Lombard 1967:94n.

In the second half of the seventeenth century visits to Nias by Dutch VOC ships became more frequent, and south Nias became known as a spot for ships' captains to anchor and take on provisions of water, pork, tubers, and fruit. Chinese, Acehnese, and European slavers continued to barter slaves from the village chiefs. When no Malay speakers were present on the Nias side of these transactions deals were negotiated by the chief who controlled trade at that port making piles of sticks whose number represented the number of packs of tobacco, weights of gold powder, lengths of cotton, bottles of gunpowder or number of rifles he required in exchange for the slaves he had assembled for sale. Coastal villages appointed a village noble to have the responsibility of exacting a harbour tax from anchoring ships. In 1668 a VOC trading post was established by the Dutch at Baros on the Sumatran mainland opposite Nias. The Nias chiefs of coastal villages were persuaded to sign contracts (the first is dated 1669) according to which they were supposed to have agreed not to deal with the Acehnese or other European powers. This of course did not prevent these other nations challenging the VOC monopoly; the Dutch response to which was to send retaliatory expeditions from Baros to burn down the villages of those who dealt with others. As the century came to a close the Dutch attempt to secure a trading monopoly in the East Indies was being strongly contested by both the French - who established a trading base at Sibolga on the mainland opposite Nias - and by the British, who took Padang in 1781 and established small trading settlements at Bencoolen and Natal.

In 1771 a sixteen year old boy, William Marsden, travelled out to Sumatra and spent eight years at the Bencoolen settlement: his elder brother John was in charge of the British settlement at Natal. In 1783 the first edition of his 'History of Sumatra' (covering peoples, flora and fauna) appeared with the support of Sir Joseph Banks and his Soho Square 'philosophical breakfasts.' In the first (European) ethnographic report on Nias Marsden described the people of Nias as forming "a race distinct" (Marsden 1811:475) from those on the mainland, on the basis of their lighter complexion and shared psychological characteristics. He commended their "docility and expertness" and their "industrious" and "frugal" character, and - ironically for our present interests - cites as an instance of their "skill in the arts" their practice "of letting blood by cupping, in a mode nearly similar to ours" (ibid. 476). However, he adds that they are "at the same time avaricious, sullen, obstinate, vindictive, and sanguinary" (ibid.). His assumptions of psychologised racism are striking. This assumption that different peoples had a unitary "character" that could be described and even analysed in relation to their climate or laws had been formulated in 1748 as "*esprit général*" or "*génie d'une nation*" by Montesquieu in his "*De l'Esprit des Loix*", and was also suggested by the writings of Herder in Germany. In Marsden's case, given the sources of his data, it seems that this description of a people's "character" has a strong affinity for the use of that people as slaves, given that the positive qualities he describes (docility, expertness, industriousness) are virtues to be esteemed in slaves, while the negative qualities (sullenness, obstinacy, vindictiveness) are those that would be vices in such a context.



This - as well as the following reports of Raffles, the surveys of the Dutch Lieutenants, the missionaries' papers on paganism, the legal inscription of *adat* by Dutch civil servants, the modern monographs by the Department of Education and Culture - is knowledge as performative, as the technology of both exploitative and philanthropic intervention. These descriptions make possible survival, diplomacy, and profitable trade in the places described. New knowledge, as Miller argues in 'Visions of Empire,' (Miller & Reill 1996:6) was not conceived as distinct from new economic and imperial opportunities by the natural scientists of the newly-formed Royal Society. Though the Enlightenment ideology they worked within represented Science as worthwhile in its own right, and knowledge as simply reflecting reality, this knowledge - as we shall see - is always *doing* something. And as such, of course, it is alike to local Indonesian concepts of performative knowledge, despite the fact that such local concepts of knowledge - the knowledge necessary for curing sickness, for example - would be othered as "mumbo jumbo" in contrast to scientific knowledge in the ethnomedical research of Kleiweg de Zwaan (see below).

When Dutch possessions in the East Indies were briefly ceded to the British in the wake of the Napoleonic wars Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Java. Later when the Treaty of Utrecht returned Java to the Dutch, Raffles was relocated, amidst imputations of financial ineptitude, to the British fort at Bencoolen on the pestilential west coast of Sumatra. There Raffles continued to pursue his humanist project of scientific research and paternalistic management of the natives. Strongly opposed to Dutch exploitation, tortures and executions, forced deliveries and commercial monopoly, he was committed to a programme of Free Trade inspired by Adam Smith, as well as the abolition of slavery (he was a correspondent of Wilberforce). It was this last which drew his interest to Nias, which he believed to be the "clearing-house" of slave dealing in the region. His accounts of Nias are notable for his Enlightenment assumptions, and are important for the present account insofar as they illustrate the ancestral form of modern state discourse on Nias.

Raffles has a natural empathy for the 'underdog,' and tries very hard to be generous. He has himself come from a simple family and has bettered himself through education and initiative. He describes the Ono Niha as:

"the finest people, without exception, that I have yet met with in the East. They are fair, and a strong, athletic, active race; industrious, ingenious, and intelligent, and forming a striking contrast to their neighbours on the opposite coast of Sumatra. What has more astonished me is, the degree (comparatively) of civilisation to which they have attained, without communication from without" (Raffles, S 1830:486).

He blames the internal brutality of Nias life - "the habits of cruelty and rapine" (Moor 1837:188) - on external factors (the slave traders) interacting with local custom (debt slavery). And his descriptions of brideprice and the disposal of dead chiefs on open-air platforms display an embryonic relativism, appreciating these practices in the first case for "the effect of raising the female character" (Anon 1822:7), and in the second for being of "almost poetic" (ibid:8) nature. But Raffles cannot help thinking and writing from inside the imperialist

paradigm of social-progress-through-European-intervention and the racism of essentialising the 'character of the natives.' From Adam Smith he inherits the notion, familiar from Ferguson's "Essay on the history of civil society" (Ferguson 1980, originally 1767), of an uneven human ascent from hunting, through animal husbandry and agriculture to trade. But he writes before the formulations of Maine, Spencer and Morgan: for Raffles social progress was not yet social evolution working by inner necessity. Nor was it always one way. As a humanist Raffles has ever before his eyes the noble examples of ancient Greece and Rome, and thus the possibility - even, perhaps, (following Montesquieu<sup>4</sup>), necessity - of cyclical 'decline and fall' (though Gibbon's magnum opus was not yet written). Indeed, in his "History of Java" he described the contemporary Javanese as the degenerate heirs to a great classical civilisation. From the great classical civilisations of the west, as of the east, the mantle - and responsibility - of civilisation was now assumed to have fallen to the empire-builders and natural scientists of Enlightened Europe.

It is this secularising, rationalising, imperialist Enlightenment discourse that has been inherited by the modern Indonesian state. Thus the wooden gods he describes the Ono Niha as worshipping do not for Raffles (as they would not later for the Indonesian government - see Atkinson 1987:177) constitute "a religion": this is something, along with further "civilisation and improvement" that should be supplied by the Europeans - or today the government "social welfare" programmes - who are in possession of it.

"Those Europeans" were to be the German missionaries of the Lutheran Rheinisches Mission from Barmen, who began to arrive on Nias from 1865. Their regression from the Enlightenment "psychology of error" to Medieval demonology (see McGrane 1989) in their construction of pre-Christian religion on Nias is explored in detail in chapter VI, sections 3-4 below.

Two further expeditions by heroic scientist-explorer-collectors of the nineteenth century followed in the 1870s, that of the German Baron von Rosenberg and the Italian Elio Modigliani. Like Marsden and Raffles, these men's sphere of scientific interest was encyclopaedic, and similarly ran parallel to the compulsion to appropriate objects, as well as facts, of value. Just as Nias village warriors would travel far outside the village to ambush victims and return with the added status and power constituted by hunted heads, so Modigliani (and later, Kleiweg de Zwaan) travelled far from their homes in Florence (and Holland), going to extraordinary lengths to acquire skulls which, by offering esoteric clues to the racial origin of Ono Niha, would increase their status within the Academies as well as giving Europe the power over distant 'races' afforded by their scientific description<sup>5</sup>.

Modigliani had a difficult time on Nias. He characterises Ono Niha as cunning, duplicitous, and treacherous. These latter were qualities no doubt brought to the fore by Modigliani's flouting of exchange expectations, taking what was not given (*sirih* bags and a sword covered

<sup>4</sup> In L'Esprit des Loix Montesquieu's account of Ancient Roman civilisation was informed by a notion of decadence operating as a kind of natural law of society.

<sup>5</sup> For a Sumbanese analogy, see Hoskins 1996:15.

in amulets for his collection), and refusing to give what he had (his Winchester rifles). For him Ono Niha are "*veri selvaggi*" ("true savages"), and "*puri idolatri*" ("out-and-out idolaters"). Anticipating Evans-Pritchard, Modigliani suggests that Ono Niha are prevented from becoming aware of the inadequacy of their spells and remedies by the invocation of sorcerers' activity in explaining failed cures. He notes the illogic implicit in the use of leaf chains as pathways for spirits when doors are also closed against them. He is deeply critical of noisy exorcisms at difficult childbirths, suggesting that the fracas has a negative effect on the unfortunate woman in labour. He notes that commoners may become slaves because of the debts they owe to *ere* (healers), and suggests that amulets against sickness are not really believed in since they were so eager to give them up in exchange for tobacco. Since mistrust accompanies all transactions on Nias, he says, their religious beliefs have created a spirit, the *bechu lauru*, which monitors exchanges and punishes fraud or short-measuring with sickness and epidemics. The ancient Romans, he writes, created a similar divinity, the *termine*, for the same purpose. "*Nell'infanzia,*" he concludes, "*tutti i popoli hanno ricorso ai sistemi medesimi*" ("in their infancy all peoples have recourse to similar systems" Modigliani 1880:153). Not inclined to seek the adaptiveness of shifting cultivation in the context of low population density, land surplus, and local soil types, Modigliani concludes that Ono Niha are irredeemably lazy, prevented by superstition from rationally managing agriculture.

Elsewhere in the text implicit evidence of local technology emerges that contradicts the image of lazy, irrational, and superstitious Ono Niha. They are skilled at wood-working and the forging of iron. They have quickly become masters of the flintlock rifle introduced by Chinese merchants, to the extent of being able to make their own. An elaborate technology of fish-trapping in rattan basketry is used in freshwater rivers, and an ingenious system for obtaining salt from sea-water has been developed. Portraits of certain local chiefs, like Sidöfa of Fadoro, give internal evidence of exceptional Ono Niha able to lead their people through social change by mediating contact with outsiders. But all this evidence does not for Modigliani displace the assumption that Ono Niha psychology and culture are infantile, with the entailment that progress will come from contact with outsiders (as he describes it did before when iron was introduced by Arab merchants). He criticises the Dutch for not using "*graduale incivilimento*" (ibid:32n), and pins their prospects on the German missions. As we shall see, this discursive framework which constructs local culture and character as infantile, lazy, superstitious, and irrational - the antifunctionalist approach to traditional culture - has been inherited from nineteenth century scientific enquiry by local departments of the Indonesian government as the assumed context for social intervention.

In contrast to the north, in the south of the island resistance to the Dutch was bitter and initially very effective. Lieutenant Donleben's 1846 expedition to survey the south was fought off by Hilisendrecheasi (modern Hiliamaetaniha), with a bloody revenge exacted the following year by Van der Hart (Modigliani 1890:49). A further surveying expedition in 1854 led by the Dutch Lieutenant Nieuwenhuisen and the German naturalist Baron von Rosenberg secured an alliance with the chiefs of Fadoro (modern Hilisimaetanö); this however sparked

a bloody indigenous war between Fadoro and its neighbouring villages led by Orahili (modern Bawömataluo and Orahili). Van Swieten's 1856 offensive to subjugate Orahili was fought off, so a fort was established at Lagundri, the deep horseshoe bay where ships could anchor in the south. Within two years all the fort's soldiers had succumbed to smallpox, malaria or typhus and had to be replaced. In 1859 a devastating attack was made by hostile villages, and after a year of extraordinarily frequent earth tremors around Lagundri (seen by villagers as the work of the gods), the fort succumbed to a tidal wave in 1861. The surviving soldiers took refuge in the friendly village of Hiliböbö - but the Orahili warriors intervened, threatening that if Hiliböbö protected them they too would become enemies of Orahili. Finally the few Dutch survivors managed to flee to Gunung Sitoli in a small boat (Modigliani 1890:60-2). This episode was followed in 1863 by the devastating offensive of Major Fritzen, who with a force of five ships and 628 men managed to destroy the villages of Hiliböbö, Orahili, Botohösi and Lölöwa'u. The south remained a dangerous place for Europeans, though, and two missionaries were rapidly compelled to flee the first two missions established in the south. The tidal wave thrown up by Krakatoa in 1883 destroyed the harbour at Lagundri Bay, and the port for the south was re-established at Teluk Dalam, where it remains to this day. Lagundri has since (in the 1970s) become the only place on the island where surfers and tourists stay - perhaps ironically, given its bloody and nightmarish history for Europeans. Southern resistance was finally quelled in 1907 with the arrest and transportation of Saönigeho, the chief of Bawömataluo, the largest village of the south which had been re-built by the Orahili nobility that had escaped Major Fritzen's massacre (Scarduelli 1986:16-26; Modigliani 49-70). Widespread conversion to Christianity followed with the "Great Repentance" beginning in 1916, and by the late 1920s the majority of the island's population were Christian.

Studies by Dutch officers and administrators (Nieuwenhuisen, Schröder, Rappard), like those of the earlier adventurer-scientists, again constitute instrumental knowledge. Sociological descriptions of social and political organisation and *adat* law facilitated the pacification and administration of local populations through local institutions. Back at the centres of Europe these accounts produced by missionaries, scientific adventurers and colonial officers constituted an archive which could then be studied by scholars such as James Frazer, Perry, and Robert Heine-Geldern. At the turn of the century the science of anthropology was coalescing out of this combination of the needs of Empire and Enlightenment concerns with classification of peoples (as "races"), universal history, and the origins of civil society. Since Raffles' approving comments on the high degree of civilisation on Nias, the hierarchical classification of human societies found in the work of Turgot, Montesquieu and Ferguson had, under the influence of the revolution in the natural sciences exemplified by Lyell and Darwin, developed into the fully-blown social evolutionism driven by natural law of Maine, Spencer, Morgan and Tylor. If early colonial exploitation - typified by slavery - had rested on the Aristotelian justification of the colonist and natives' relative positions on the Great Chain of Being, late colonial interventions (as typified by the Ethical Period in the Dutch East Indies) were justified by the colonist and natives' relative positions on the Great Ladder of Progress,

typified by the great colonial programmes of education and medicine.

For this new science and its racist/evolutionist paradigm, primitive societies illustrated our own origins. In "The Golden Bough" James Frazer used material from Nias<sup>6</sup> to illustrate 'animism,' which, following his mentor Robertson Smith's work on totemism, Frazer took to be the "earliest" form of religion in the evolution of human society. Elsewhere (Frazer 1918) Frazer develops Tylor's idea that cross-cousin marriage - as reportedly practised on Nias - represents an "early" or "primitive" form of social organisation and classification of kin.

At a stroke Ono Niha enter the western archive as extraordinary scientific specimens, whose isolation from the course of human social evolution makes them a living example of our ancient past, their beliefs and customs throwing light on the primitive origins of modern religion and society. This powerful new concept of Nias (and other such places) as Living Museums, with its in-built paternalistic justification of colonial (and state) administration, has proved extremely durable. It underwrites apparently positive primitivist, romantic and liberal constructions of cultural others as much as the more obviously negative constructions of racism and imperialism. As Fabian described, this "denial of coevalness" has been repeatedly re-invented by the successive academic paradigms of diffusionism, functionalism, and structuralism (Fabian 1983:37-71).

The first anthropologist to do fieldwork on Nias was Dr Kleiweg de Zwaan of the University of Amsterdam, who visited Nias in the 1910s. His research was designed to investigate the racial origins of the indigenous population. He attempted this through a dehumanising methodology of remorseless measurement, plaster-casting, photography, and collection of body parts. From his account of the resistance he met it emerges how clearly his subjects perceived the Foucauldian implications of such disciplining and measurement. One volume of his three volume report deals with *Die Heilkunde der Niasser* ("The Healing Arts of the Niassans"), and is of some importance for the present account, giving as it does data on understandings of sickness and healing from the period immediately previous to the widespread penetration of Christianity. Like Frazer, Kleiweg de Zwaan describes the fetishism of Nias practices invoking the power of idols as primitive errors, mistaken belief: no hint of Raffles' embryonic relativism here, more affinity with missionary discourse on superstition. For Kleiweg de Zwaan the interpenetration of religious with medical ideas is symptomatic of their low state of mental development. And like Marsden and Raffles he essentialises "the Nias character" or "the Nias opinion."

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<sup>6</sup> He quotes from Modigliani the Nias belief that spirits inhabit trees and are liberated when the tree dies or is cut down (vol 2 p33), the blocking up of a corpse's nostrils and jaw in order to prevent the soul escaping as a malevolent spirit (vol 3 p31), and the idea of the rainbow as the net with which a powerful spirit (Nadaoja) captures the souls of men (vol 3 p79). From Sundermann he takes the idea of the unborn child on Nias requesting a certain amount of soul from Lowalangi, which will determine the length of his or her life (vol 3 p29); and from Nieuwenhuisen the Nias belief that objects participate in the personalities of their owners, so that purchased weapons or clothes must be thoroughly scrubbed "in order to efface all connection between the things and the persons from which they bought them" (vol 3 p107).

Throughout Kleiweg de Zwaan's work untheorised footnotes draw our attention to customs and beliefs of other peoples that are similar to those being described on Nias. The Dutch Governor Schröder speculated that certain elements of Nias culture had been brought thence by the seafaring ancient Phoenicians. Perry of the Manchester School gathered worldwide cases of "megalithic culture," (including Nias), joined the dots, and proposed that the resulting line followed the migrations of his "children of the sun," the bearers of Ancient Egyptian culture. In the 1930s the art historian Robert Heine-Geldern discussed the archaeology and art of Nias in order to reconstruct the region's prehistory in terms of contacts and influences. In doing so he leant heavily on the '*kulturkreis*' concept ('culture-circle,' a complex of associated cultural elements, of which Perry's megalithic complex would be a classic example), introduced by Graebner as a development of Ratzel's criterion of formal similarity as evidence of historical contact:

"This [neolithic proto-Austronesian] culture probably came to the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia by way of China and central Indo-China (Laos and Siam) between 2000 and 1500 BC. Its bearers introduced to Indonesia the Austronesian languages, the outrigger canoe, rice cultivation, domesticated cattle or buffaloes, head-hunting, and the custom of erecting megalithic monuments." (Heine-Geldern 1935:307)

[This culture-complex] was closely connected with the megalithic system and still survives in many remote regions of further India and Indonesia, especially among the mountain tribes of Assam and of northern Luzon, and in the island of Nias." (ibid 308).

Focusing on Nias itself he proposes that:

"the oval form of houses in North Nias, *the use of images for averting evil spirits and illness*, and perhaps some stylistic plastical features, *belong to a culture more ancient than the megalithic...* It was succeeded by the megalithic culture with its stone monuments and buildings, its ancestral figures and symbolic ornaments. The art born of the merging of these two heterogeneous layers must have been influenced in early times by Indian art, enabling it to rise far above its original niveau." (ibid 312 my emphasis)<sup>7</sup>

Culture for the diffusionist is a mystery to be solved by teasing out the resemblances, the fingerprints of contact. And it is a mystery whose solution is fast receding into the mists of time:

"Il n'y a qu'un demi-siècle, on aurait encore pu trouver les réponses à ces questions, non sans intérêt du point de vue historique et sociologique. Aujourd'hui, il est probablement trop tard. Détruite par l'influence des missions protestantes, ainsi que par les terribles épidémies de paludisme qui ravagèrent l'île au cours de la première moitié du siècle présent, la culture de Nias, autrefois si originale, n'est plus qu'une triste ruine." (Heine-Geldern 1961:306)

This elegiac tone becomes characteristic of almost all subsequent scholarship on Nias. Since

<sup>7</sup> In a later article (Heine-Geldern 1961:299-306) he develops these elements taken from Indian art (perhaps directly, perhaps via the Hindu states of Sumatra) as the parasol, the armchair throne, the *chattrā* and *triratna* motifs and the *lasara* monster head carved on sword hilts and attached to the facades of chiefs' houses, which he identifies as the horned lion of Hindu iconography.

the expectation of cultures as bounded and holistically interlinked systems that had emerged from late C18th and C19th European romantic nationalism and racist scientism was rarely met with, this authentic condition could only be nostalgically reconstructed. For Nias, the *locus classicus* of such romanticising is the work of the Austrian archaeologist Friedrich Schnitger, Heine-Geldern's junior colleague at the University of Vienna. He too is committed to the idea that contemporary ethnography of Nias megalithism sheds light on prehistoric stone monuments, including those of ancient Europe. He makes much of ethnographic similarities with the Nagas of Assam, concluding that both groups must have had a common origin in the valley of the Irrawaddy (Schnitger 1939:125). His 'Forgotten Kingdoms of Sumatra' (Schnitger 1939) is an extraordinary book that combines scientific explanation with poetic evocation, and its success (being reprinted four times) testifies to the growing intellectual audience in Europe and America for romanticised accounts of exotic other cultures<sup>8</sup>. The thirties, as Joel Kahn has argued, was a period in Europe and America that saw the massive expansion of an intelligentsia with an 'in between' class status, characteristically committed to what Kahn calls "the expressivist critique of techno-instrumental modernity." At home the Great War had shattered the old 'traditional' structures; tractors had only just replaced the horse in the English countryside. Disillusioned with techno-rationalism, utilitarianism, social Darwinism, bureaucratisation and industrialisation, this intellectual constituency - drawing on the Frazerian position outlined above - began to construct other cultures as standing outside modernity, so that romanticising 'the orient' afforded discursive leverage with which to criticise western modernity (see Kahn 1995:xii, 10-16, 20). Reviving the Romantic privileging of Imagination over Reason, the new primitivism suspended rational criticism in the aesthetic appreciation of exotic customs. The Frazerian evolutionary discourse on primitive cultures remained intact, but its valuation was turned upside down.

Just as European travel-writers were extolling the romantic old primitive pacified warrior-aristocracies of the Indies' remote islands, these same nobles were sending their sons to native schools and making connections at the mainland centres (Batavia, Surabaya, Aceh, Padang...) of what would become the Indonesian nation. The worldwide economic crash of the 1930s hit Nias hard, dealing a mortal blow to the traditional Nias prestige economy whereby nobles had achieved their status through climbing a ladder of feasts of merit. The Japanese arrived in 1942, and are remembered for the terror and exploitation for which they were responsible. Independence of the Republic of Indonesia, declared in 1945, was finally achieved in 1949. Traditional élites apparently regarded Independence with less enthusiasm than the students and townsfolk. *Merdeka* - freedom - was not just understood in relation to the Dutch colonial oppressors, but also, in Soekarno's socialist critique of *feodalisme*, to the indigenous élite of nobles who had, until the depression of the 30s, largely flourished under the Dutch. Both Christian and traditionalist critics worried that *merdeka* was understood by the young as freedom from every social constraint (see e.g. BNKP 1986:81).

Soekarno's 'Old Order' (1949 - 1964) saw Nias becoming something of a backwater. In some

<sup>8</sup> I should perhaps confess that it was finding a decaying copy of this book on Nias in the eighties that first hooked me on the study of the island.

respects up to the present the road and bridge network on Nias has not yet regained the level of development it enjoyed under the Dutch. Poverty was endemic and the nobles' role in village economic and political life drastically diminished. *Owasa* feasts of merit gradually disappeared. Given the drastic economic conditions of the time, combined with Soekarno's policy of *Confrontasi*, relations with the outside world were dramatically curtailed. Though the Revolution had in part been caused by the leakage into the indigenous élite of political values (reformism, socialism) from the western tradition of Enlightenment-fathered radicalism, Soekarno later announced a sharp "veering away" (the official policy of *pembantinganstir*) from Western political and social values. No research was done on Nias during this period, the only significant study being that of Peter Suzuki, a Japanese PhD student at the University of Leiden, based exclusively on library research.

After Wilken's evolutionist work on *adat* law Dutch anthropology had been revitalised in the thirties and forties by the influence of Durkheim and Mauss. Durkheim's notion of cosmological classifications mapping onto social classifications produced the apotheosis of culture-as-system: the classic structuralist studies of van Wouden and Josselin de Jong. Peter Suzuki was a student of Professor Josselin de Jong at Leiden, and his 1952 PhD thesis on Nias is the only full scale study of Nias published during the long years of Soekarno's Old Order. Suzuki's thesis reconstructs the "Religious System and Culture of Nias" from the colonial and missionary archive. Criticising the diffusionists for not explaining culture *in toto*, he saw his task as being to reconstitute the hypothesized older, pristine, culture. (This systematic model of authentic culture is the misleading paradigm underlying the apocalyptic narratives of "dying culture" mentioned above.) His lack of fieldwork on Nias permits Suzuki to present the data in a perfectly patterned structuralist concordance between sociological and cosmological classifications: a threefold classification of gods, animals, colours, social strata, kinship categories and gender into polar dualisms with a residual category of those between both ends of a pole that mediate or represent the totality. This fit, following Kleiweg, he saw as typical of backward and primitive societies (Suzuki 1952:i). Here we note again the in-built ambivalence that constructs traditional culture as authentic but primitive, dovetailing with local discourse locating authenticity in the ancestral past.

Through Suharto's New Order (1965 - 1998) prosperity increased as Indonesia opened its doors to foreign investment and imported western economic technocrats to assist the new régime of stability ensured by state terror<sup>9</sup> and rapid economic development based on free market principles. National per capita incomes rose dramatically, the road and electricity networks spread, new schools and health clinics opened, but many complained quietly about the

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<sup>9</sup> It is ironic that the Indonesian state relies so heavily on terror to underwrite security (witness the extermination of communists that brought the regime to power in the 1960s, the 'mysterious marksman' killings of the 1980s, the execution of Acehnese dissenters up to the present) when its discourse represents the transition from tradition to modernity on Nias as one from violence and exploitation to safety and social justice. On Nias itself police interrogations of prisoners are notoriously cruel (a child suspected of stealing laundry was killed by police in Gunung Sitoli in September 1999) and military intimidation was used to ensure Golkar victories in the Soeharto era.



increasing gaps between rich and poor, central cities and marginal islands. Despite a general acceptance across the whole south-east Asian region of globalising US style economic philosophy, the central tenet of which is the freedom of capital and markets, the social consequences of such economic development have been resisted. The cultural variety of regional *adat*, whose air of feudalism and backwardness had embarrassed the progressive generation of '45, thus came under the New Order to be emblematic of "Asian Values," the cultural riches that would spiritually sustain those who conserved them amidst the materialism of development.

During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s there was an explosion in the number of academic publications on Nias, facilitated by ready access to research permits. The Swiss architect Alain Viaro made a thorough study of the traditional architecture (Viaro 1980), while the American art historian Jerome Feldman and another Japanese PhD student both studied the material culture of the south (Feldman 1979, 1984; Yamamoto 1986). Further publications on material culture were sponsored by the European museums that held so many Nias heirlooms, notably the Barbier-Müller Museum in Geneva and the ethnographic museum of Delft. General ethnographic studies were published in German by Wolfgang Marschall (1976), in Italian by Pietro Scardueli (1986). Margaret Patton, a PhD student of Feldman's at the University of Hawaii, wrote a thesis on the music and sung poetry (*hoho*) of south Nias (Patton 1987). In 1992 Andrew Beatty's fine-grained study of marriage exchange in central Nias was published. At the same time Indonesians (Mulia 1981; Danandjaja 1971) and Ono Niha themselves were joining in the project of documenting the traditional culture of Nias. Typically it was elders who either held office in the indigenous Protestant church (Mendröfa, B 1982a, 1982b; Mendröfa, S. W 1981, 1991; Zebua, H 1989; Zebua, S 1995a, 1995b, Laiya 1979), or the Department of Education and Culture who took to this task (Laoli et al 1985; Zagötö, D et al 1975), or else graduate university students writing theses (such as Gulö et al 1995). Where Ono Niha came to speak with the authority of official discourse they reproduced its assumptions. Thus both a recent thesis of three students at the University of North Sumatra, "Nias: reflections on development," (Gulö et al 1995) and a seminar held in 1975 at the Gunung Sitoli teacher-training college on "Various Socio-Cultural Problems of Development in Nias Society" (Zagötö, D et al 1975), explain the slow progress of development on Nias in terms of cultural impediments and primitive mentality.

### CHAPTER III

## THE CONTEMPORARY PREDICAMENT OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE: "PRIMITIVENESS," MENTALITY, AND DEVELOPMENT

We have treated the history of discourse on Nias in some detail because the Janus-faced ambivalence about 'primitive and backward Nias' whose genealogy we traced above, becomes crucial to an understanding of attitudes to Nias culture today. The central and compulsory ideological principle of contemporary Indonesian society is the priority of *Pembangunan*. Most concisely translated as 'Development,' this word actually means both 'building,' 'rising-up,' and 'awakening.' In order for *pembangunan* to happen, community-leaders are told by local government to abandon superstition and traditions (such as brideprice exchange) that they perceive to be maladaptive in order to progress and develop themselves. Given that the New Order Soeharto régime arose out of opposition to a coup attributed to communists, lack of commitment to *pembangunan* and *Pancasila* tends to imply communist tendencies, and everyone in Indonesia silently remembers the slaughter of suspected communists that accompanied Soeharto's rise to power.

The revolutionary Old Order of Soekarno, however, embraced communist values and opposed itself to the feudal élites supposed to have collaborated with colonialism. Indonesian nationalism was a modernist project, and its nuances have been classically described by Anderson (see Anderson 1990 and 1991). The New Order, in rejecting communism, has reversed the anti-feudal thrust of the Old Order. Local *adat* and regional arts are now promoted as counters to westernisation, as legitimating the state and promoting orderliness in society, as tourism resources, and as a spiritual corrective to the materialism of economic development (see Anderson 1990:173-182; Kartomi 1993:185; Hatley 1993:48-9; Hooker 1993:3-5). Furthermore, since building the Indonesian nation involves suppressing the diverse ethnic and religious communities it would encompass, Indonesian nationalism tends to culturalise regional, ethnic, linguistic and religious difference (Hooker 1993:5).

The Nias economy is based on agriculture, which was already in crisis before the economic crisis began in 1997. Intensification of rice production since the 1960s has been ecologically unsustainable, requiring capital inputs that hand to mouth household budgets can ill afford. Village producers are exploited by the Chinese middlemen in the market town to whom they must sell their produce. Manpower has been removed by education without being replaced by mechanisation: all ploughing is still done by hand. Villagers are extremely vulnerable to sudden price collapses, as with cloves in the 1980s. Development projects are typically co-financed by government, foreign aid, and business, so economic or political crises cause such important projects as roadbuilding to fold.

Ethnographic monographs published by the Department of Education and Culture (Depdikbud Jakarta 1982; Depdikbud Medan 1994; Depdikbud Medan 1995; Siahaan et al 1979, 1995 & undated; Simanjuntak et al 1995) work with the essentialist and evolutionist assumptions of old American Anthropology (Kroeber, Kluckhohn etc), despite the fact that such characterisations of culture have been discarded by mainstream academic anthropology since the work of Evans-Pritchard and Leach in Britain, and more recent work detailing the harm done by such characterisations (for example, Fabian 1983, Said 1978, Kuper 1988, Thomas 1989, Blaut 1993). In regional university libraries parallel publications line shelf after shelf after shelf detailing the "*Adat Istiadat Daerah X*" ("Traditional Culture of the X Region") and "*Struktur Bahasa X*" ("Structure of the X Language") for all the scores of regional cultures recognised within the Republic. All assume an ideal cultural universe - whose non-decadent version is located somewhere in the past - in which kinship, politics, economics, art and religion were all different sides of a neatly bounded sphere. Clearly stated in the tradition of US cultural anthropology, the assumptions of this cultural model (one people = one land = one history = one culture) are those of the ideology of C19th European nationalism, inherited by the Indonesian State on taking up the reins of colonial power. In this holistic vision of culture, progress and development are predicated on radical socio-cultural change. The great Indonesian anthropologist Koentjaraningrat uses relativist models to argue the need for a change from a traditional "mentality" to a new mentality appropriate to Development (Koentjaraningrat 1974:37-42; see also essays in Mardimin 1994)<sup>1</sup>.

For local officials at Nias Departments of Education and Culture, of Agriculture and of Health, tradition is in this sense constructed as the obstacle, to be replaced by modern understandings promulgated by education, noticeboards, loud-hailers on the tops of jeeps, social welfare programmes, television, and direct intervention. Since most officials in these departments come from Java or the Bataklands, it is not their own tradition they are expected to oppose, and Ono Niha reach office by learning to speak the government discourse themselves as they rise through education. Ostensibly (when it refers to Java or other Muslim Sultanates) Nationalist Indonesians oppose the imperialist stereotyping of colonial subjects, but they repeat the same structures of othering the marginal Orang Nias (or orang Dayak, Irian...) as indeed coastal Niassans do of those further inland. Unlike Batavia and all those other obsolete Dutch monikers, the name "Nias" has not been restored to *Tanö Niha*, despite the fact that no authentic 'Nias' word ends in a consonant.

However, the ambivalence we saw inhering in essentialist discourse on Nias traditional culture, reaching fullest expression in the romantic movement for the conservation of tradition, surfaces also in modern Indonesian state discourse. The exotic otherness of Nias

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<sup>1</sup> These assumptions (and the ideological flavour of the New Order) are also illustrated by this excerpt from Soeharto's 1973 Independence Day speech: "*Bahasa yang tertib mencerminkan cara berpikir, sikap dan tindakan yang tertib pula. Dan ketertiban inilah kunci utama bagi berhasilnya pembangunan dan pembinaan bangsa*" - "Orderly language reflects a way of thinking, character, and behaviour that are also orderly. And this orderliness is the primary key in the success of the development and progress of the nation." (quoted in Hooker 1993:272)

tradition is appropriated as cultural capital by state promotion of adventure/culture tourism to the Living Museum of Stone Age Nias. Furthermore, as New Order Indonesians came to appreciate how destructive of social cohesion economic development could be, *adat* became officially seen as the spiritual corrective to the ills of material development in addition to being a valuable attractor of foreign *devisa*. The *adat* politicians have in mind when they make such pronouncements, is probably High Javanese, but the fact remains that at different times and in different contexts villagers are exhorted to abandon superstitious and wasteful traditions, and as well to conserve the local traditions that are one pillar of the National Culture. Thus articles in the Nias cultural news magazine, *Suara Ya'ahowu*, tend to blame social problems on the decay of tradition, describing Nias culture - like the romantic European critics of mission - as 'dying.' This conservation movement seems to define as culture precisely those institutions that are now redundant and disappearing. Judging by the status of the magazine's correspondents, this romantic point of view is a luxury for those who have already made the transition to reasonably affluent modernity through government or church hierarchies.

Of course, local culture tends to be constructed differently looking each way: in the case of tradition-as-a-barrier-to-development it is precisely "superstitions" that are foregrounded, witchcraft and spirit beliefs and forms of ('feudal') social organisation and land ownership that run counter to modern state law (Robinson 1993:229). Within official discourse these cultural manifestations are not classified as *adat*, but as *kepercayaan* - "beliefs". In the case of tradition-to-be-conserved it is the decorative 'folk' performance arts, architecture and material culture that are stressed (Hooker 1993: 4-7, 206-7, 229-40.) "*Adat* is emerging as art... ritual is sliding into dramatic performance" as Rodgers (1979:33) writes of the Sipirok Batak. John Pemberton refers to this as the "Mini-ization of Indonesia" (1994:12-3), referring to Taman Mini, the Disney-inspired theme park presenting the regional cultures of Indonesia (see also Anderson 1990:176). These superficial strata of traditional culture - or even amputated signs for tradition, such as out of context elements of traditional architecture attached to municipal buildings - are officially appropriated as the *adat* that provides legitimation for the state (Kuipers 1998:4). From them, in a process reminiscent of the Victorian "invention of tradition" in Britain and the deliberate social engineering engendered by other nationalisms (Hobsbawm 1992:13), the Indonesian government has striven to forge a new, modern yet Asian, National Identity and Culture, constructed from "a combination of the high-points (*puncak-puncak*) of all the regional cultures of Indonesia" (Hooker 1993:4). In the era of globalisation - as illustrated by the official parallel publications on regional culture mentioned above - those regional cultures that support the National Culture must be squeezed into a universal two-dimensional spreadsheet, with identical windows to be filled in with each region's folk song, dance, architecture, wedding costume, customs for welcoming guests, etc. This then, is the postmodern irony of the politics of culture on contemporary Nias, the official compulsion to at once preserve and supersede a hypostatized<sup>2</sup> "tradition."

<sup>2</sup> The hypostatization of tradition in contemporary Indonesia is nowhere better described than in Pemberton's description of Java: "offerings are now made quite matter-of-factly expressly on behalf of "tradition" or, more precisely, *tradisi* itself" (1994:11). On Nias, foreign visitors to villages no longer visit the chief, but the chief's house.

Since official discourse only legitimates surface styles - material culture forms, for example - as legitimate local *adat*, within official discourse the deeper levels of local traditional culture - "superstitious" beliefs and sorcery, for example - become marginalised as dangerously other, a threat to national unity and development. In national representations the tradition-bound backwardness of Nias not only compromises development but shades into the anti-social evils of tribal conflict, murder, poisoning and black magic. This national message, manifested in the countless warnings I received from officials, policemen, taxi-drivers, and even Nias people themselves, is carried by two often repeated stories of young male Nias borders who apparently murdered and robbed their entire host families, one in the Karolands, one in Medan. The only real resistance to the state on Nias, amongst angry, primary-school only educated, unmarried young men, draw to their own advantage on this construction of the dangerous other Nias. They eagerly repeat stories of a gang of bank-robbers from Nias who used magic learnt from a famous village magician<sup>3</sup> to scale walls and rob the BRI Bank and the house of Eka, a Chinese millionaire, in Medan, before being caught and imprisoned.

The indigenous church elders and government officials who write about Nias *adat*, as well as the long-term resident of Nias, the Capuchin friar Father Johannes Hämmerle, see the solution as a process of documentation, study, and selection of the best from tradition, and a discarding of that which is contrary either to Christianity or Development (see Hämmerle 1986:9). This synthesis of the two extremes of tradition as something to be left behind and tradition as something to be conserved, is of course not unlike the New Order position, whereby the decorative, folk art aspects of tradition are to be conserved, the mentality to be discarded. As a discursive device, it admits that some of "traditional culture" is good, and some bad, while allowing the line dividing the two to be drawn in different places. Indigenous commentators (and we may include Father Johannes, now a naturalised citizen of Indonesia) in their pamphlets place more of tradition on the good side than the monographs of the Department of Education and Culture, typically written by Bataks, which (for example) assess the adaptiveness of brideprice and the *adat* of marriage for the success of the national family planning programme (Laoli et al 1985:194-199).

A similar notion of the desirability of leavening modernity with selected elements of traditional culture appears in the writings of critical students of development, from Chambers' insistence that development projects should not be imposed from the top down, but should be planned from the "bottom up" (Chambers 1986:7) to Arturo Escobar's notion of "hybridised cultures" (Escobar 1995:224-6). Perhaps this fate is necessary where regional cultures persist in a global economic context under an umbrella state republic which must prevent nationalisms at lower levels of segmentation as well as invent a National Culture. As

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<sup>3</sup> This man served a prison sentence for murder of a teacher. On his release from the high-security Medan prison for political prisoners (where he was able to resist torture and became the prisoners' leader according to the stories) he repented and eventually became a minister of the charismatic Pentecostal church, which is strongly inflected by the 'Great Repentance' described in chapter VI.

we shall see in chapters VI and VII, since Vatican II the Catholic church too has resolved to foster desirable aspects of local traditional cultures by inculturating local Catholic worship. The Catholic church has thus added its encouragement to that of the Ministry of Education and Culture and academic critics of development to the notion of generating local hybrid cultures from a mixture of progressive social values and a conservational stance towards the aspects of traditional culture valued according to the context.

The implication that it is even possible to divide into good and bad elements to be conserved or discarded, what was previously assumed to have been a holistic, integrated cultural system shows the degree to which notions of "culture" have been transformed since the 1960s by the exigencies of global capital. Simultaneously, the models of those writing about places such as Nias have made a parallel shift. Contemporary anthropologists characteristically emphasise how tradition is always changing, interdependent with other societies, a mosaic of diverse influences worked into a unity through the experiences of people living their lives through such fields of culture. Of course the greater isolation and longer timescale of intercultural exchange in precolonial days in politically and religiously self-sufficient villages such as those of Nias did permit social practice to work ritual, language and social organisation into a far more unitary whole than we find today as a result of rapid social, political, and religious change (cf. Rodgers 1979:30 on the Batak people<sup>4</sup>). The ethnography of Nias written in the 1970s and '80s (e.g. Ziegler 1990, Scarduelli 1986, Marschall 1976), nevertheless typically works with the older essentialist assumptions, and thus neglects the importance of Christianity, and apocalypticises social change as decadence.

Village elders, too, appear to speak within the same essentialist assumptions of their *adat* as permanent, unchanging, and uncompromising in its demands on the individual. However, from the village and family charters they tell, and the (now-defunct) annual and seven-yearly economic adjustment feasts (the village Budget), we know that the *adat* does indeed have a history of adaptation. The *adat*, in any case, is an ideal, the precedent aspired to by the villager whose inevitable shortcomings trouble his repose with the worries (*era-era*) that so often make men sick.

However unified tradition may have been in the past (and we shall return to this question in chapter V), today, as we have seen, the culture of Nias is characterised by a certain hypostatisation of tradition, as it is placed alongside two alternative streams of discourse, those of Christianity, and those of state-sponsored, western-derived but Asian-inflected modernity. Like the Comoros described by Lambek, culture on Nias "is not a seamless whole but consists of diverse and sometimes discordant strands...united...in social practice" (Lambek 1993:31). In terms of social psychology, "reference group orientations" in contemporary south

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<sup>4</sup> Rodgers continues: "Batak *adat* today occupies a much smaller area of social space for its participants than it did before the colonial experience. The deep penetration of national organization forms and values into the Tapanuli village over the last thirty years has also worked to relativise Batak *adat* into a new, humbler status as one ceremonial, moral, and religious order among a number of other institutional complexes" (Rodgers:1979:31). The same could equally be said for the villages of south Nias, whose contemporary situation shares much in common with the Batak peoples of mainland north Sumatra.



Nias villages "can actually be plural or contradictory" (Hefner 1990:25). The three-stranded model of village culture ("cultures as particular conjunctions of incommensurable discourses" (Lambek 1993:12), used in this thesis to organise the presentation of contemporary understandings of sickness and curing in south Nias, corresponds with the typically Indonesian notion of *aliran*, or "streams," organising the distribution of concurrent cultural, religious or ideological traditions, as those of contemporary political factions as described in the Jakarta weeklies, or the *abangan* and *santri* Moslems in the work of Geertz (in 'The Religion of Java' 1960). Contemporary cultural discontinuities are also at the centre of Rita Kipp's and Mary Margaret Steedly's recent work on the Karo Batak of north Sumatra, the predicament of whose traditional healers within the Indonesian state today (whom Steedly describes as "hanging without a rope"<sup>5</sup>) offers interesting parallels with the Nias healers we shall consider in chapter IX (Steedly 1993). Kipp has argued that modern conditions have "dissociated" Karo identity, by which she means that their class identities, their identity as Christians, and their identity as ethnic Karo no longer overlap (Kipp 1993:263). These three kinds of culture, then, these three kinds of discourse that villagers draw on - the contours that remain in the cultural landscape after its inundation by the flood waters of globalising modernity - share some characteristics of Marx's notion of diverse class ideologies, or Weberian status groups. However, in a crucial difference, they are attached to groups of people that are neither corporate nor exclusive. Individuals may draw on all three kinds of discourse at different times and in different contexts. Christian, traditional, and modern scientific knowledge all present themselves as presenting a sufficient, integrated and coherent description of life purposes, cosmology, ethics, etc. They do not share out the cultural subject matter, but each provides a totalising vision offering alternative - in some contexts, rival - explanations for the same events. Each contains the same in-built logical mechanisms for explaining failures in its own predictions that Evans-Pritchard described for Zande witchcraft beliefs.

The three streams influence one another as individuals knit them together through the multiple allegiances of their lives. Through coexistence with Christianity the traditional religion has gained a name (*molohe adu* - "the carrying of idols") and a coherent (if controversial) structure as a system of belief. The totalising vision of each encompasses the others, such that each stream of culture contains a representation of the others, so as to encompass them and often to explain them away.

Individuals' degree of recruitment to each stream of discourse, which runs along a continuum from the "centre" of each stream to its periphery, varies according to roughly predictive sociological indices. As a brief introduction: wealthy and well educated nobles are fluent in and deeply committed to both traditional and modern state discourse. They move according to context between two identities, one traditional the other modern, to the extent of having distinct names and wardrobes for each. Their wives often lead the village women's groups

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<sup>5</sup> "An unsupportable and seemingly inescapable situation...trapped between a past that was no longer tenable and a present to which they were, at best, only marginally relevant" (Steedly 1993:11)

through which government social welfare and health education programmes are introduced to the village. Impoverished nobles, on the other hand, have a more exclusive commitment to tradition; being excluded from the language of state discourse by virtue of lack of education, this constituency shows a marked resistance to, even resentment of, state discourse.

Commoners who have prospered are primarily committed to progressive state discourse, but typically attempt to convert their profits into traditional status. However, being also a significant constituency of village Christianity, its congregation-leaders and church elders, the version of tradition they are able to commit to is harshly undercut and superficial, dismissed as inauthentic by the hardliners of tradition. Wives typically assiduously attend both church and PKK meetings. The poorest level of village society, making a hard living with little land, are largely denied access to state discourse which they resist and resent. They typically also resent the economic demands of *adat*, its assumption of the priority of those of noble birth. Their strongest affinity, in particular that of their womenfolk, is for Christianity as it appears in its more marginal manifestations on the continuum from centre to periphery: the prayer meeting, repentance groups, and faith healing sessions.

The variation in the kind of Christian commitment held by villagers gives rise to an important feature of the articulation between those discourses of tradition, Christianity, and the state that are the subject of this thesis. Distinct versions of Christianity combine with each of the other two discourses in opposition to the third. Thus, in what we may call the "progressive alliance" Christian discourse runs together with that of the state in opposing tradition, whilst in the "conservative alliance" Christian and traditional discourse combine in criticism of the state. The constituency of the progressive alliance is the young, the well-educated and well-off who do not hold traditional status and do hold or aspire to positions in church, schools or local government, whilst that of the conservative alliance consists of older, poorer and less well-off villagers, particularly those with traditional status they have been unable to convert into modern cultural capital.

Villagers identify themselves within the terms of each discourse by partially imitating the coherent ideal produced by local representatives of the authoritative centres of each discourse, in ways of dressing, ways of speaking, ways of eating, ways of designing their new house. Authoritative discourse (as well as domestic styles, etc.) is thus produced and legitimated by authoritative centres, and copied by peripheral individuals whose allegiance is often multiple and shifts according to context. In the case of tradition, the authoritative centre is the village council where the nobles and elders sit, notionally accompanied by the ancestors of the village. Christian centres are the Synods, Theological colleges, Churches and ministers through which divine authority is mediated. The authoritative centre of state-sponsored modernity is the state hierarchy which mediates (rather marginal) relations with Jakarta, and whose representative in the village is the schoolmaster and *kepala desa* (village headman). Thus despite the great differences in content and internal logic to be explored in successive chapters, the formal structure in which peripheral individuals are related through imitation to central authoritative producers of discourse remains constant

within the three streams of culture.

Metaphors such as 'spheres' or 'streams' of culture tend to reproduce the misleading essentialism we noted in old-fashioned ethnographic assumptions about local cultures. Though their discourse may have internal dogmatic coherence they are, of course, neither objects nor purposive beings. The discourse is produced and copied by specific social actors in order to access the different kinds of power and status that each indexes. Details of the process of socialisation into each discourse differ. The language of Christianity is learnt in church, at weddings and funerals, in the home, in prayer meetings. The language of tradition is learnt in the home and in the ceremonies and councils of village life. The language of state discourse (typically spoken in the Indonesian language) is picked up in school and from the television (and in the home, if the parents are already strongly committed to the discourse of the state), thereafter through travel, medical encounters, in certain kinds of employment, and through social welfare programmes. Each of the three 'streams' of discourse is spoken in its own linguistic register. *Li Niha* - and, at its powerful centre, the parallel couplets of *hoho* - is the language of tradition, while Indonesian is the language of education and the state. Christianity is spoken in *li niha*, but like the others has its own characteristic vocabulary. Each vocabulary has a series of indexical words or phrases. Examples for traditional, Christian, and state discourse respectively would be *sumane* (respect, dignity), *fangefa* (forgiveness), and *pembangunan* (development). When one of these is heard the context is immediately set within the discourse to which it belongs. Places, too, index each discourse, particular registers being demanded by the schoolroom, clinic, or village head's office, the church, or the interior of the great house. And we shall see that within the correct social context - lest our focus on discourse be regarded too idealist - different forms of language and naming can be powerfully performative.

A tension crucial to the atmosphere of village cultural life exists for individuals who must reconcile the perceived need to achieve authenticity in the cultural spheres identified with, while at the same time achieving integrity by balancing all three. Those who exclusively commit to one such sphere of culture, who go out on an authentic limb, as it were, expose themselves to criticism in terms of the discourse of the other two.

Much of the cultural dynamics that are our concern, whereby certain understandings (of sickness and curing) contest for individuals' attention, is explained with reference to the interrelationships in play between these three spheres of contemporary culture. The contemporary trifurcation of culture is a product of history, and as embedded in ongoing historical change, for example in the effort being made by the state to require that its view of clinical reality is accepted as the only legitimate one, and to use medicalisation as an instrument of social engineering and control (qv Zola 1972; Illich 1975). The three-fold model of understandings of sickness and its cure provides the background to this history of engagements between the three streams, as each has been able to encompass, or forced to defer to, the others. Cultural processes, understandable in terms of village sociology, resolve the contests between streams in assigning explanations to illness episodes. A particularly striking

example of the crucial articulation between streams emerges in our discussion below (chapter IX) on notions of sin and repentance. The Christian missionaries adopted a local term - *horö* - for sin, using the logic of ridding oneself of dangerous heat from warfare and killing to avoid sickness and disaster implied by the indigenous term, while subtly changing its content, in such a way as effectively to compel recruitment to the new totalising vision of Christianity, and away from those of the traditional stream, within which, ironically, conversion originated. Where two or three streams concur, that is, agree, on some issue (as, for example, in insisting that sickness is a moral question), this attitude may be said to be hegemonic. Where two concur a significant reinforcement is caused, accompanied by a partial alliance between two streams of culture in representing the third as wrong, as for example when Christianity and the State agree that traditional feasting for status is a wasteful practice. Many such examples shall appear in the following brief history of medicine on Nias, with which these introductory chapters continue.

## CHAPTER IV

### A BRIEF MEDICAL HISTORY OF NIAS

When speaking from within the discourse of traditional culture, modern Nias people maintain that before colonial contact Niassans were taller, stronger, richer and healthier than they have become since. Dutch and Japanese soldiers are said to have had to look up to the warriors of Hilinawalö, and a war helmet of gigantic size preserved in the village supposedly proves the greater size of villagers in the old days. The irony is often noted that despite the availability of powerful modern medicines in present times, villagers live less long, have less children, and have less power than they did in mythologised precolonial times.

However, those teachers, officials and educated people who speak from within the discourse of development, as well as other villagers who assume this discourse in the context of conversation with a European, describe a familiar trajectory from primitive and unhygienic ignorance through various improving measures to a modern situation of ongoing amelioration of health conditions. Through the historical process we shall review below the discourse of Christianity has largely been encompassed by the discourse of development.

Both notions, of modern villagers as less well off than their ancestors and of their situation as constantly improving, though diametrically opposed, contain elements of historical truth. While settlements were still small and population low in relation to resources it is likely (though unproveable) that there was less disease caused by poor nutrition and contagion. For the nobles at least the historical period when the empty south of Nias was being settled by the descendants of Mölö probably was less troubled by the diseases caused by poverty, poor nutrition and concentrated settlement. As populations grew and villages became bigger the situation probably began to deteriorate. Higher population densities constitute human reservoirs for infectious illness. Malaria, rarer in hilltop villages than on the coast, became a more serious problem in the growing coastal trading ports in the eighteenth century, which would also have been the ports of entry for foreign viruses and bacteria. Cholera, which has claimed so many Nias lives in the twentieth century in spectacular epidemic outbreaks, was unknown prior to the 1820s when the virus was spread along imperial pathways from its home in Bengal (Ridley, M '97:11).

The violent confrontation of village life with Dutch colonial expansion at the end of the nineteenth century had then a catastrophic effect on village health, and it is from this nadir of social health, neglecting what came before, that development discourse is able to trace a steady improvement. As we saw earlier, the resistance of the southern village nobles to Dutch intervention was largely an internal affair based on pre-existing hostility to the villages which had made alliances with the Dutch. The kind of warfare initiated by the

Dutch punitive expeditions to the south, the scale and duration of the hostilities, were, however very different from traditional inter-village warfare. While under threat of attack nobles would declare a state of emergency and none could leave the village. Since this situation of threat persisted for unprecedented amounts of times compared to traditional warfare, crops went untended, food supplies dwindled, and populations weakened by poor nutrition and concentrated within village walls were vulnerable to epidemics of infectious disease. New diseases were also introduced by the garrisons of soldiers<sup>1</sup>, and spread to the local populations who had little natural resistance to these unfamiliar viruses. In 1919 Nias was devastated by the great pandemic of influenza that swept the world after the First World War.

Despite their heroic military resistance it seems that it was in part these epidemics, traditionally understood as signs of divine correction, that convinced the southern Niassans to adopt the religion of the white colonists and missionaries (see chapter VI on Christianity below). Having previously ignored the missionaries' preaching, as health conditions deteriorated the missionaries' promise that they could cure these diseases became more and more interesting. The traditional priests were valued by villagers for their ability to cure sickness and to ensure fertility and victory for their villages. As health conditions worsened these abilities failed for once to help. Since the missionaries constantly preached that traditional priests were dishonest fakers, these priests' inability to cure the ills caused by colonialism led some in desperation to try out the new way of the German Protestant missionaries (as argued in Danandjaja 1971). Thus began the waves of repentance according to which the problems caused at least in part by the colonial presence were attributed to Lowalangi's (God's) displeasure at the worship of idols and devils. These problems were to be solved by forsaking the traditional priests' help, by burning the wooden idols, by learning to read the Bible and sing hymns, by confessing sins, and by accepting the missionaries' drugs and medicines.

The Christian Mission, then, entered south Nias at a time of medical crisis. The missionaries' project was intelligible to villagers because like the traditional priests they claimed to be able to cure disease. Like the traditional priests too they accepted that sin was the cause of disease, but with a subtle difference that would have important consequences for the articulation of Christian and state discourse. For the missionaries sin was recognised as a distant cause of sickness and general ill-fortune, but in actually curing people they focused on proximate causes using a medical model of disease, hygiene measures and allopathic drugs. Thus, while justifying the disease-as-a-consequence-of-sin notion that provided continuity with the old religion and allows dancing repentance, trance healing and possession by the Holy Spirit to coexist with more orthodox religiosity, Christianity also introduced the disembedded techno-scientific approach to disease that has become characteristic of state discourse. From the start the Christian missions committed themselves to medicine and education, opening the first schools and hospitals that would be later nationalised at

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<sup>1</sup> In particular cholera and the particularly virulent strains of influenza that swept the world at the time of the Great War.

Independence. Today being a Christian leader (as opposed to a congregation-member) involves accepting the values of education and the 'modern' medical models of state discourse and rejecting traditional 'magical' models of sickness.

Christianity and 'modern' medicine were also allied in villagers' minds, at least up until Independence, as being powerfully effective kinds of knowledge that originated from abroad. The idea that techniques or knowledge from abroad had special efficacy had been present for a long time before colonial invasion demonstrated to villagers the limits to the efficacy of local knowledge. As we shall see in chapter IX much of the village repertoire of magic - healing and otherwise - originates in fragments of foreigners' religions, often Islam. Military defeat at the hands of the Dutch in the late C19th and early C20th dealt a death blow to the power that resided at the centre of the village and its rituals and in the persons of the head nobles and priests, and conversion to Christianity, and using the drugs and treatments provided by mission nurses, was seen as a way of accessing the power that lies over the seas. Thus Ama Idi, a contemporary healer in Hilinawalö, was initiated into healing by a dream in which two white-coated European doctors first killed, then cured, a small boy in order to instruct him in the arts of healing.

Colonial governors and officials as well as other European travellers describing appallingly unhygienic conditions in the villages at this time consistently failed to note how far this situation was a particular historical situation caused by recent demographic developments and the Dutch presence. Sanitation and hygiene becomes important with modern conditions of high population and concentrated settlement; the sanitation measures introduced by Europeans had been gradually developed in Europe since similar demographic conditions arose there in the Middle Ages. Similarly early missionaries such as Kramer and Lagemann were horrified at what seemed to them to be the villagers' almost pathological dependency on idols, to the extent that houses were on the point of collapse because of the weight of wooden images tied to the walls. It seems likely, however, that the profusion of wooden idols noted by these European observers was an exceptional response to the exceptional problems afflicting Nias society at this time.

Colonial officials and missionaries both attempted to intervene to improve village conditions. In 1910 the first colonial census was carried out, passes were issued to all adult men, and the carrying of weapons was prohibited except for purposes of hunting. In January 1914 the colonial government began to collect tax and issued orders that pigs should be removed from under the houses and made pens outside the village. Houses were required to be moved to the main road, and *corvée* labour was made compulsory. Resistance to these new laws resulted in the Huruna uprising of 1915, led by Nitano and Balöhalu (Harefa, F 1939:95).

As the old priests and much of the traditional religion were demonised in the writings of the missionaries, so too was the traditional structure of the village. Observers were horrified by the traditional houses, with their dark, smoky interiors, the proximity of pigs kept below the houses, and the disposal of corpses on open-air platforms outside the village. Coming



from Europe and institutionally prevented from seeing “the natives’ point of view” by their role as military governors they failed to see the adaptiveness of many local customs, and their interventions often only made matters worse. Used to European houses with glass windows they could not see that the darkness of traditional houses kept them cool in the terrible heat of the dry months, that the smoke kept malarial mosquitoes away as well as protecting the timbers from termites and other insects. Where they succeeded in persuading villages to move from inaccessible hilltops to new coastal or valley settlements they increased the prevalence of malaria. Where they succeeded in banning villagers from keeping pigs under the houses they left villages without a vital system for removing the faeces of children which, falling through the floorboards, were eaten by the pigs.

Whilst Independence in 1945-9 saw the Dutch summarily ejected from Nias, Independence was not, of course, a return to tradition for the people of Nias. Led by Soekarno’s socialist rhetoric, the Revolution was meant to overthrow not only colonial domination, but also the ‘feudal’ domination of traditional élites, and to lead the way to a new, modern, Indonesian society. Thus the techno-scientific discourse introduced by colonial government - which encompassed the secular projects of mission Christianity - was taken up by the new Indonesian state, and tradition, prior to its rebirth in a new form under Soeharto’s New Order, held sway only in those places too remote, or amongst those people too poor, to enjoy the benefits of modernisation.

The new nationalist government oversaw the nationalisation of the schools and hospitals set up by the Dutch colonial government and the German missions and the leadership of the Nias Protestant church being transferred into the hands of Niassans. In the eyes of villagers who had valued the foreignness of medical techniques and the knowledge taught at schools, however, nationalisation diminished the potency of the mission schools and hospitals. Miraculous cures effected by the now legendary Dr Hartmann of the Lukas Mission Hospital are still told, and contrasted with the incompetence of a long string of Javanese and Chinese Doctors who succeeded him after nationalisation. The first twenty years of the Indonesian State were of course economically catastrophic, and villagers had to wait until the 1970s to see the beginnings of the fruits of development funded by domestic oil and gas revenue. Primary schools began to be opened near the remoter villages, government secondary schools came to supplement the schools managed by the indigenous Protestant Church, and colleges for the training of teachers and nurses were opened at the regency capital, Gunung Sitoli. More resources became available to hospitals and many new village clinics were opened, staffed by Niassans trained at Gunung Sitoli, and finally in 1992 the first Niassan was appointed head doctor at the Lukas Hospital. By 1996 there were ten clinics in the Teluk Dalam area.

Vaccination programmes, sponsored by the international community and managed by the national government, succeeded in eradicating smallpox and yaws in the 1960s after overcoming the resistance of villagers worried by the fever following the injection; now all under-fives are given free vaccinations against DPT, measles and tetanus. The national

family planning programme was begun in the 1970s and has been acclaimed a success on the national level: at present two-thirds of families in the principal village of my research are registered as using some kind of contraception. However, resistance to limiting the number of children is still strong among certain sectors of the village, as we shall see below (chapter X.8).

Piped water was first provided to some families in the village by the Catholic mission in 1987; in 1996 the network was repaired and broadened with government money, and now all families have access at least to this clean water which has dramatically improved village health. Epidemic cholera, widespread in the 1950s and 60s, last struck seriously in 1983, causing panicking families to flee their villages, but has dramatically receded after the provision of clean water supplies<sup>2</sup>. It is now officially eradicated, and modern cases are euphemistically listed as '*munmen*' - vomiting and diarrhoea. A new road was being constructed to link the village to the main road of the south, and was to have been complete by the end of 1998; extension of the national electricity network to the village should have followed completion of the road. Both have been indefinitely postponed by the Indonesian economic crisis. In the meantime many patchouli farmers who have spent their spectacular profits prior to the crisis on private generators and TVs with satellite dishes now face a resurgence of the grinding poverty of the fifties and sixties.

Today, as a result of the measures described above, health indicators have dramatically improved since their earlier lower point, though they remain almost the worst in the North Sumatra province. The main problems today are respiratory infections and malaria, followed by skin diseases, internal ulcers, anaemia, bacterial infections and fungal infections of the skin. Babies and children are particularly vulnerable to dysentery and diarrhoea, worms, bronchitis and vitamin deficiencies, while older adults often suffer from high blood pressure and tuberculosis.

This of course, is a western medical assessment, and these categories of illness are those of allopathic biomedicine. As we have seen, this is the medical discourse that informs the pronouncements and interventions of the modern Indonesian state in the field of public health. We return to a detailed consideration of cosmopolitan medicine in chapter X, but first we must turn to the "traditional understandings" that modern health education is designed to supersede.

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<sup>2</sup> Cholera is spread by the contamination of drinking water with the faeces of those infected. It is a disease of poor sanitation *par excellence*, and thus responds dramatically to the provision of piped drinking water.

## CHAPTER V

# TRADITIONAL CONTEXTS OF ILLNESS-BELIEFS

### 5.1 From Tradition to traditions

In the preceding chapters we sketched the history of both Nias' relations with the outside world generally, and specifically of the introduction of cosmopolitan medicine. In the course of this we saw how important different conceptions of "traditional culture" are in positioning the introduction of modern, scientific medical understandings. The purpose of this chapter is to complete the introduction to Nias by describing features of the traditional social organisation and pre-Christian religion of south Nias villages that have escaped discussion so far. This is necessary in order to provide the broad context for the subsequent analysis of the transformation of those ideas in describing contemporary illness beliefs. It is therefore more of a sketch providing the context necessary to the thesis than an exhaustive description, and occasionally the reader will be aware that a glib pronouncement conceals analytic controversy that given space would be better discussed. For economy of space I have also suspended discussion here of topics one might expect to form part of a description of social organisation and religion because they will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, notions of the structure and content of 'traditional culture' vary, and these variations are inflected by the agenda of the speaker, whether government, church, academy, or the village elders. Under the conditions of colonialism '*adat*' referred to the customary law of each region which was recognised, and even sometimes enforced (for example see case summarised in Suzuki 1958:38-9), by the Dutch administrators. From the point of view of church and government today the category of *adat*, or *adat-istiadat*, comprises regionally distinctive elements of legitimate social organisation and ceremony, the etiquette of social interaction, as well as local styles of dress, architecture and dance. By contrast, '*kepercayaan*' ('beliefs') refers to illegitimate social and religious beliefs and practices, i.e. rationally-disprovable superstitions. Much of the Nias folk health care sector falls into this category.

For the village elders the term used to refer to traditional culture is '*böwö*.' Specifically this term refers to the system of exchanges and obligations set in motion by marriage, and synecdochally to stand for all the traditional institutions of Nias society. In traditional parallelism it is "our staff when we walk, our pillow when we sleep." However, since political control has been withdrawn from local social institutions to the hierarchy of the state, the ancestor cult has been replaced by Christianity, and the system of exchanges to win status at feasts of merit has been discontinued, *böwö* (brideprice) has indeed emerged as the central durable institution of village society. '*Hada*,' derived from Indonesian *adat*, is a

term that, while taken as a synonym of *böwö*, reflects a modern self-consciousness of what is seen nationally as distinctive about Nias.

The classic subject material of which elders speak when describing their culture to outsiders are origin myths; stories of the foundation and history of villages and their clans; marriage customs and bridewealth schedules; the weights and measures for gold, pork and rice; laws and punishments thereof; and funeral customs, particularly those of leading nobles. These are the classic sites of discourse on traditional culture, the *ha da*. A second, less overt, level of local discourse on tradition is concerned with *moni-moni* (behavioral rules local to the village), and *amaedola*, the conventional maxims or proverbs in which, especially during oratory, local ancestral wisdom is preserved and expressed. Below these more overt levels what the anthropologist calls local culture tends to be more invisible to villagers since it is taken for granted. In this category comes language, and linguistic classifications of colours, smells, etc., the calendar, techniques of cooking, farming, hunting, and so on. Increasingly, as certain villagers are now aware of Nias's place amongst the range of Indonesian ethnicities, these previously invisible elements are becoming an explicit and valued part of Nias identity.

Similarly to classical holistic models of culture within anthropology, village elders see the village *adat* as an internally consistent and unchanging whole. The notion that present imperfections and conflicts represent recent decay from a prior perfect authenticity is not only characteristic of traditional anthropological models, it is also characteristic of those who speak with the voice of tradition. Thus regional variations in *adat* pose a problem for village elders. Confronted with slightly divergent myths or social rules from other villages or regions, elders dismiss such variants as mistaken and incorrect. Because of the ideological importance of seeing tradition as the unchanging repetition of the actions of founding ancestors, elders do not see regional cultural variation as accreted difference over time, but either as errors on the part of the others, or (being generous) as differences in the practices of the founding ancestors of each.

Despite the village ideology of constancy, village *adat* did of course constantly adapt over time, though such changes were masked by the new technologies, practices, etc., being domesticated within local structures and idioms. Through this process of domestication foreign imports passed up the escalator of the generations so that they quickly came to be an integral part of the tradition passed down by the ancestors. However, postcolonial developments (i.e. appropriation by the state of political control; Christian conversion; replacement of feasts of merit by education as the route to status; the social disembedding of production and exchange; the requirements of building a National Culture and suppressing movements for local autonomy) have led to a real tendency towards the hypostatisation or freezing of traditional culture, which is withdrawing - as alternative fields of meaning, action and sociality grow - from forming the exhaustive contours of villagers' lived in world to being a cipher of regional identity.

*Böwö* (brideprice) - arguably still the most vital complex of traditional culture - is a case in point. Before the large-scale penetration of market exchange under the Dutch, equivalences between values in gold, pork and rice, as well as interest on loans, were periodically adjusted, fixed and solemnised at regular feasts. This no longer occurs in south Nias villages, so that through the depression of the '30s and the more recent pig epidemic and economic catastrophes of the late 1990s, brideprice payments and the debts they engender have become an almost intolerably severe burden which divert financial resources needed for agricultural inputs, hospital expenses, and the education of children. Telaumbanua has thus called (in *Suara Ya'ahowu*, the magazine of Nias culture) for an island-wide reduction in brideprice schedules to solve this problem. However, the regions of Nias are too divided for this to be practicable, and since so much honour is at stake no one will be the first to marry their daughter for a reduced brideprice, especially since the biggest marriages are between rather than within villages.

The contemporary fossilisation of tradition, locally permitted by its ideology of constancy, has thus been caused by the disappearance of certain of its elements (the ancestor cult, feasts of merit and internal political control), in combination with the state's efforts to manage alterity within its borders using classical but now outmoded academic models.

In looking closer at village traditional culture as the context for contemporary beliefs about sickness and healing, it is more useful to think in terms of a plurality of traditions, each with distinct though similar mechanisms for their perpetuation<sup>1</sup>. Thus the origin myths, knowledge, skills and supernatural capacities of carpenters, ironworkers, potmakers, *hoho* singers, funeral lamenters, and healers are transferred down lineages of such *ere*, as all these different kinds of experts (*ere* = 'expert') are known. Such lineages of *ere* do not always correspond to biological genealogies since knowledge may in some cases be passed on through apprenticeships, or supernaturally by way of dreams. (These mechanisms as they relate to the transfer of healing knowledge are examined below at IX.10.) Similarly, 'lower level' traditions not dignified with the title of *ere*, such as cooking, herbal medicine, children's stories, etc., are passed down from grandparent and parent to child.

The transfer of knowledge in all these traditions, high and low, is typically informal, consisting of a process of imitation and repetition. In particular in the higher *ere* traditions actual learning is eclipsed in the way people speak by a mystical, ritual transfer of a capacity. *Ere* are different kinds of people to non-experts. By faithfully copying one's master one displays the capacity one shares with them: imitation is the performance of identity.

Together, these higher and lower traditions make up 'village traditional culture.' To the extent that the people who reproduce these traditions are socially integrated in a bounded village or region, the traditional culture of the village or region would indeed have those

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<sup>1</sup> These lower-case traditions are the same as what Lambek (1993:68) terms "disciplines."

qualities of holism, boundedness and internal consistency characteristic of both the romantic apologists of, as well as development-minded critics of, local culture as described in chapter II. Previous to the establishment on Nias of the new traditions of Christianity and nationalist education such conditions prevailed to a far greater extent than they do today when the village is encompassed both by the state, the world economic system, and an international Christian community - despite the fact that (as we saw in chapter II) Nias was never truly 'isolated.' Furthermore, the ideological hegemony of nobles' power - now drastically compromised - previously afforded a strong unifying force over village culture, so much of which served to underwrite their own taken-for-granted supremacy. It is to such details of social organisation that we now turn.

## 5.2 The social context

In the beginning, it is said, a village<sup>2</sup> would have been comprised of the settlement of a founding male ancestor with his sons and their wives, with their retinue. At the ceremonial foundation of the village - the first *fondrakö* feast - the navel stone was laid over a buried human head, and the long paved street (*ewali*) was measured out with a vine stretched taut. At the *fondrakö* the laws of the village, its *böwö*, weights and measures and interest and exchange rates would be fixed, a sacrifice made, and a curse pronounced on whosoever should break these laws.

The unity of a patrilineally related group is perhaps the prime value of village life; such people are very physically related, they are *talifusö*, umbilical cords, and share their innermost substance, being "of one heart" (*saradödö*). This last phrase also implies agreement, and is forcefully expressed in ritual by the affirmative chorus of "*hu!*" The minimal patrilineal group - an old man and his sons with all their wives and children (*sagambatö*) - comprises the inhabitants of a single house: the term means "those of one floor." Such households would unite segmentarily in *nafu* (meaning a clump of bamboo) maintaining the cult of their apical ancestor. The maximal patrilineal group - the *mado* or clan - comprises all those descendants of an apical ancestor by whose name the *mado* is known. Today *mado* named after each of the six sons of Mölö (who originally settled the Maenamölo region) are distributed throughout the south and exercise almost no corporate functions. Typically, however, in each village one clan has a majority and is considered the founding clan of the village.

Originally - illustrating the notional perfection of the authentic past according to tradition as well as the academy - it is said that villages consisted of one clan only, and all were noble (i.e. *si'ulu* - 'those of the source/origins'). As time went on the village would incorporate others - perhaps refugees from a nearby war - who, if they did not already have them, would

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<sup>2</sup> Village = *banua*, which also means sky, intimating how, through having a proper symbolic structuring of space, the village repeats the template of the cosmic village in the sky whence came the first ancestors. See Viaro for an excellent account of the symbolic structuring of village space.

quickly establish affinal links, accepting wives - and the dependent role that came with them - from the host village.

With such developments social organisation in the village became more complex. A distinction came to be made between those (i.e. *si'ulu* - nobles) who could trace their genealogy back to the founding ancestors and who had never married women from lineages that could not. The residual class were known as *sato*, commoners. Slaves, either war captives or those whose debts could only be redeemed by their own person, were not considered to be real people at all, i.e. they mated without marrying, like animals. The *sato* were divided into groups called *gana*, homogeneous as to clan, which were mobilised as the social units bringing a single gift and receiving their food as a unit, at inter-village marriages and feasts of merit. Commoners were also divided into groups called *nafulu* simply based on groups of adjacent houses. These would be the units mobilised to do the work of the village, as ordered by the nobles, for example road and bridge maintenance and keeping the night watch.

Leadership of the village was settled by a first-among-equals contest as to who amongst the nobles could rise highest up the ladder of feasts of merit (*owasa*). These were a named series of feasts at which the host distributed pork to the entire village and was awarded new titles as well as the right to certain gold ornaments and decorative motifs. He who had achieved greatest eminence in this series was known as *balö zi'ulu* - the 'tip of the nobles' - or, showing the influence of the wider world with which such men would deal, as *rajo*. At the *owasa* a large stone was dragged up from a nearby riverbed, dressed by stonemasons, and erected vertically before the house of the feastgiver alongside the *daro-daro*, horizontal stone benches erected at the funerals of his ancestors. In this way the megaliths that line the village street serve as mnemonics of social history. The successful man sought always to extend his personhood: into his children, into the families to whom he gave wives, into the gardens he cleared, and into the stones of the *ewali*. Even prized possessions such as a ceremonial sword "participated in the personalities of their owners" (Frazer 1936 vol 3 p107, taken from Nieuwenhuisen 1863).

From the commoner class certain men known for their wisdom and deep knowledge of village custom were chosen (by those already so chosen) as *si'ila* - 'those who know,' i.e. elders. To them fell the responsibility of representing parties in the settling of disputes at *orahu* (councils). These *orahu* consist of a characteristic style of oratory whereby the speaker chooses a respondent to 'receive his words.' At the end of each of the speaker's phrases, richly leavened with the *amaedola* or maxims mentioned above, the respondent cries out an affirmative "eeeeeeee!" or "yai ya heeeeeee!" Speechmaking continues back and forth until consensus - 'one-heartedness' - is reached.

The other principle responsibility of *si'ila* is to act as intermediaries between families in the negotiations that lead to marriage. Not for nothing is *böwö* (brideprice) taken as synecdochal of all of Nias custom. It is a deeply complex matter, the actual marriage ceremony being just one in a series of events whose ramifications extend backwards and



forwards through the generations. Brideprice schedules depend in amount on the status (noble, elder, or commoner) of the bride's father. The girl may not marry a boy whose father's status is lower than her own. If a noble man marries a commoner girl their descendants become commoners. Separate prestations, each specifically named, timed, and ritualised - and solicited by prior token prestations in the other direction - are made to the bride's father, elder brother, mother's brother, and grandmother's brother (or his representative descendant). The importance of naming permits a certain amount of negotiable elasticity to be concealed: for example, a certain prestation is always "110 *pau*" (a weight of gold) though the actual content negotiated by *si'ila* - today usually money - may vary. Naming and measuring are generally of huge importance in the villages of Nias: to know the name and measurements of something is to master it - hence the fear of the early anthropologist Kleiweg de Zwaan's anthropometric research mentioned in chapter II.

A marked asymmetry characterises relations between the bridegroom and his wife-givers, i.e. the parties named in brideprice prestations as well as members of their minimal patrilineages. Indeed the marriage rule as locally expressed is that a man may not marry a girl for whom he or his close patrilineal relatives would expect to receive brideprice. Since brideprice schedules include the bride's mother's brother (the groom's wife-giver's wife-giver) and grandmother's brother (his wife-giver's wife-giver's wife-giver) there is indeed a limited transitivity in this asymmetry. The emphasis in the literature on supposedly prescriptive matrilineal cross-cousin marriage in south Nias, particularly the idea that this involved a ring of villages (and clans) circulating brides in one direction only (i.e. Marschall 1976:127-9 and Viaro 1980:12, dismissed as a "fiction" in Scarduelli 1986:152-3), is an illusion cast by the influence of Lévi-Strauss's "Structures Élémentaires..." Despite the payment of a small prestation to a man's *sibaya* (mother's brother) if he does not marry his daughter, modern *böwö*-specialists state that this was never a prescriptive rule but a convenient arrangement, repeating the alliance of the parents and minimising burdensome lifelong dues to wife-givers<sup>3</sup>.

The *sibaya* (mother's brother) plays an important parental role in the bringing up of his sister's children, who will often stay in his house. At all important events of one's life marked by feasts the *sibaya* is an honoured guest. In return for the offerings made to him by his sister's children the *sibaya* gives blessings deemed essential to one's growth and success, to the extent that one's wife-givers are known collectively as '*si so ya'ita*' - 'those who own us' - an appellation otherwise reserved for *Lowalangi* (God). One's wife-givers are, indeed, the social manifestation of divinity, and this relationship has important relevance to one's health and sickness (see below chapter VIII). When help is needed in raising money (for a new house, for example), a trip round the houses of those who have married your sisters and daughters should meet the bill.

Today the brideprice exchange complex - a whole sphere of exchange distinct from that of the

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of south Nias kinship and marriage, a complex subject beyond the scope of this thesis, see Scarduelli 1985 and Beatty 1992a.

market - remains as vital as ever, despite its burden being made heavier by pig epidemics, successive economic crises, and opposition from church and state, both of which see it as a wasteful diversion of funds badly needed for education and the development of agriculture. Other features of traditional organisation have not, however, proved so durable. *Owasa* are today only performed as a traditional way of honouring prestigious outsiders: the Governor of North Sumatra and the Vice-President of the Republic, for example. This of course is far from the old *owasa*, which were, like *böwö*, woven into a complex sphere of exchange, such that exchange debts incurred at one feast would be repaid at another. Indeed Beatty (for the central region) argues that *urakha* (as such prestations are known) formed a distinct and parallel sphere of exchange to that of *böwö* (1992:295).

In some (but not all) villages of the south *gana* and *nafulu* groups are no longer maintained. This tends to be in villages where few *si'ulu* remain. In some cases *si'ulu* have managed to translate their traditional prestige into modern status by investing their wealth in education and business. However, more generally the social disembedding of production and exchange has removed the peaks - if not the troughs - in the distribution of village wealth. *Si'ulu* are no longer afforded traditional honours - such as the head of hunted game - and some satisfaction is expressed by richer commoners that today *si'ulu* are as likely to come to them for a loan as the other way around. Nobility does retain significance in ceremonial and traditional contexts, particularly marriage, but outside these - as it is said - "inside our home I too am a noble" ("*si'ulu göi ndra'o ba chöma*").

In all villages the state has introduced new administrative social units, designed to replace *gana*, though existing alongside them in some villages, with a division of contexts where each apply. Thus the map of the village is now quartered into neighbourhood groups (*rukun tetangga*) each with a leader (*ketua*). These groups are gathered into two citizen groups (*rukun warga*) to whose *ketua* the *ketua rukun tetangga* are answerable. The two *ketua rukun warga* are in turn answerable to the elected village head (*kepala desa*), who is assisted by his second-in-command, the *sekretaris*. The chief noble, or *balö zi'ulu* as he was traditionally known, is recognised in modern contexts as the *salawa hada* - the 'adat chief' - though in the absence of *owasa* there may be some ambivalence as to whom this refers. Feasting titles are now inherited rather than achieved.

Other significant contemporary social groupings are the three church congregations, each with their own leadership hierarchy: Protestant (BNKP), breakaway Protestant (BKPN), and Catholic (see chapter VII below). Further social networks, such as the cooperatives (*kongsi*) that share patchouli stills, and wired-up clients of those who operate private electricity generators, recruit on a pragmatic basis - like the *rukun warga* and *tetangga* - outside the traditional restraints of kinship. Significant clefts or lines of conflict within contemporary village communities tend to follow the boundaries of church congregations (especially between the BNKP and BKPN - see chapter 7 below), as well as between the old guard - looking to tradition for legitimacy - and the new - looking to the state. 'Tribal'

antagonisms between the regions of Nias also persist.

### 5.3 The religious context

Local talk about religion, as with society, starts from origins. The multiplicity of origin myths has been sketched above (pp 9-10). Common to all is the theme of the natural growth of an original undifferentiated but organic whole, from which, by a process of emanation and division<sup>4</sup>, proceeded the gods, men, and cultural artefacts of Nias, as well as the spirits and even sicknesses that plague them. By diverse means it is a story of parenthood, of descent: the euhemerising escalator of the ancestor cult transforming even deceased parents into supernatural beings. There is no word for 'god' in the Nias language. It appears that the gods are super-ancestors who form a notional genealogy connected to the first man, Hia, who descended to earth at the highlands at the source of the river Gomo. There is some evidence in *hoho* of local recognition of an equivalence between genealogical descent and descent as a coming down from heaven. Cults were primarily addressed to immediate ancestors, who were believed to pass offerings and requests on up the ladder. Arguably, the lower echelons of this notional genealogy being of more immediate concern to pre-Christian villagers, the present multiplicity of origin myths is a result of foreign enquirers demanding consistent explanations that logically tied the heroic persons mentioned in *hoho* to notions of creation and divinity satisfactory to the enquirers' expectations of a religious system.

The gods are often named in pairs of siblings, a tendency reinforced by the parallelism of *hoho*. Most actual cults seem to have been addressed to the brothers Laturedanö (the elder) and Lowalangi (the younger), with a general but not rigorous association of the former with the underworld, the latter with the upperworld, between which lies the inhabitable world of men. Administrator Schröder and Missionary Thomas both tell us that while many gods were known it is Lowalangi "who is always on their lips" (Schröder 1917:1183; Chatelin 1881:122-3). This fact made possible Sundermann's momentous translation of 'god' - the Christian God - as 'Lowalangi,' which is discussed in the following chapter. Pre-Christian Ono Niha believed that Lowalangi gave the unborn child in the womb a certain amount of *noso*, breath or soul-stuff, which returned to Lowalangi at death. On the amount of *noso* asked for and received determined the length of a person's life if it was not cut short by violence or sickness. Persons are thus composed of a body (*boto*), breath/soul (*noso*), and an additional component, the *lumö-lumö* or shadow, which becomes a spirit (*bechu*) at death.

Sirao, perhaps the earliest recognisably human manifestation of this exhalation of the divine, rules a kingdom in the ninth level of the heavens - Tetehöli Ana'a - though intellectualist moderns (such as schoolteachers and well-educated Protestant churchmen) place his kingdom simply abroad, on the Sumatran mainland, in Tibet or Assam (where they are familiar at first or second hand with the diffusionist literature of the 1930s discussed in

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<sup>4</sup> A feature general to Eastern Indonesian cosmologies (for a Tanimbar example see McKinnon 1991:38).

chapter II), or even - extremely controversially and memorably by a Batak schoolteacher in Gunung Sitoli - among one of the various Batak groups of the Sumatran highlands, who occasionally feature a clan emigrant to Nias far back in their own pictorial genealogies. At any rate, in the *hoho* of the villages of the south where I worked all the foregoing is typically condensed into the founding ancestor figure of Our Mother Dao who arrived on the empty island in a little boat, pregnant but alone, and subsequently married her own son. This myth has the enormous merit of satisfying the intellectualists as well as preserving the figure of an original singularity encompassing both female and male.

We postpone until chapter VIII a detailed examination of the spirits of the ancestors, the ghosts, evil spirits, and fairies that complete the Nias ontology of the supernatural, since they are of great importance in the explanation of sickness.

Just as above we were able cursorily to deconstruct the ideology of a single essentialised Tradition into a multiplicity of actual traditions or disciplines, so too with religion instead of delineating a system of belief - arguably an artefact of contact with Christianity and ethnography - it is useful to consider the actual institutions that carried these ideas. Thus the cosmology described above was passed from generation to generation through the oral performance genre of *hoho*<sup>5</sup>. These are the stories and history of the village and its heroes, reaching back to legends of the founding ancestors and gods, performed at great feasts and funerals - and, these days, as part of the 'traditional culture' put on for folk art festivals, visiting state dignitaries, and tourists. They are sung in modulated falsetto by a leading man (the *sondroro*), whose phrases are echoed, modified, or answered by a pair (or more) of (male) respondents. *Hoho* are classified by performance context as 'sitting *hoho*' (funerals) or 'standing *hoho*' (*owasa*); all share a structural division between the introductory section (the 'head'), the body, and the closing section. Texts are not fixed - in performance a single *hoho* may last hours, though when run through informally for purposes of transcription their size typically shrinks to a few dozen lines. The easy incorporation of the new in *hoho* gives the lie to the ideological notion of the rigid fixity of Tradition. Early in my research I was puzzled to be told that the *hoho* I was witnessing were the "words of the ancestors" - and then to catch references to my own arrival by aeroplane! Thus too the Hilinawalö *hoho* leader, Ama Sama, gives a splendid performance of the *hoho famoröfa Yesu* (the *hoho* of the crucifixion of Jesus) at religious feasts.

Transmission of *hoho* became more formalised into weekly sessions since the 1980s and interest paid by Depdikbud (the local Department of Education and Culture). Outside such formalisation however its transmission shared the organic characteristics of imitation and practise we note in the reproduction of other traditions (see chapter IX). Young men would begin as listeners, would start to join in the respondent choruses at first, later become a recognised respondent, and finally, perhaps, become a leader themselves. Just as in other traditions, the mechanical process of imitation and practise is eclipsed by notions of the spirits of the ancestors entering one's chest, producing the text themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> See Margaret Patton's thorough study of south Nias *hoho* (Patton 1987).

Another crucial institution for the reproduction of religious beliefs and practices was the priesthood, though after the vilification of these people by the missionaries and first generation of village Christians it is extremely difficult to obtain a clear picture of their practices. Known like the experts discussed above as *ere*, their expertise was seen as making them different kinds of people to the ordinary. In many ways they were doubtless perceived by the people in similar ways to the *ere*-healers of today discussed in chapter IX, in the combination of inheritance and supernatural legitimation in conceiving of the inheritance of their capacities, for example. In other ways, of course, there are important differences in the way villagers thought and think about the practices of pre-Christian priests and today's healers. Before Christianity lineage elders were able to communicate with house ancestors through the offerings and prayers made at house shrines, at celebrations of the harvest, for example; similarly the leading nobles could achieve a similar intercession at a higher, community-wide level with the village's founding ancestors through other offerings and sacrifices at the idols in the *osale*, or village shrine. It is unclear as to the nature of the help - if any - given them by *ere* priests in such contexts. Sources I have consulted<sup>6</sup> do not provide a clear account of how the priesthood was institutionalised at village and clan levels, how it mapped onto the social order. *Ere* were certainly both male and female, but we have no clear account of gender distinctions in their roles and practice. There are accounts of *ere börönadu* that resemble high priests. These were priests associated with the holiest site in the lands of a group of villages, the *fösi* tree shrine, or the temple where an especially important idol, fallen direct from heaven, was enshrined.

Above all what the old priests distinctively did was communicate with spirits - *bechu* - in a way to which ordinary people did not have access. To "*mo'ere*" ("to do what *ere* do") is to perform an incantation, accompanied by drumming, offerings and/or sacrifices, the burning of incense and the assembly of medicine, whose purpose is to name, to address, to summon, seek assistance from, to exorcise or dismiss, spirits. The stories of their initiation into healing would add to a prior eligibility by descent colourful stories of the kidnapping by spirits with which villagers would explain fits of amnesia and absence: then, as today, *ere*'s powers are constituted by the community's belief in them, even over the reluctance of the practitioner-to-be. Today such elements persist in the dreams healers tell when asked how they learnt of their own capacity, though as we shall see, these are now interpreted as visitations from angels apprising gifts of the Holy Spirit promised in the Bible, rather than spirits or ancestor spirits. So too a spell of madness today, on being cured by a faith-healing prayer group, becomes an initiation into practising such healing by allowing oneself to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, performing such possession through speaking in tongues. However, despite such continuities it seems that today's *ere* practice in a constricted, increasingly private, social space where too much talk of controlling spirits provokes hostility from the authoritative producers of Christian and State discourse, and where permissible mediation with the supernatural is now co-opted by state-legitimated position-holders in licensed religions.

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<sup>6</sup> Lack of time and proficiency in Dutch and German have prevented me from a thorough study of the rich colonial and missionary archives in Leiden and Barmen.

The technology of idols, as already suggested, formed an important part of *ere*'s practice. Typically missionaries focused on idol-worship in condemning the ancestral religion as sinful. Though headhunting and human sacrifice provided the classic contexts for perceiving the horrific sinfulness of savagery, these were exceptional events. The technology of idols was however day to day practice for villagers; described within Christian discourse as idol-worship it drew the Old Testament critique of Near-Eastern heathenism, so that missionaries were able to replay the history of their church and its struggle against paganism. Today's village Christians explain that what was wrong with the old religion - known now as *molohe adu* or "carrying the idols" - was that mere images - pieces of wood - were ignorantly treated as gods and worshipped as such, without realising that this makes the one god - Lowalangi - jealously angry.

The Nias word *adu* is normally translated as "image" in order to avoid the Christian critique implicit in the word "idol." I prefer the latter term because this is more precisely what *adu* means, with (today) identical etic and emic implications. *Adu* are indeed often carved images (though they may just be forked sticks), but the point is that they are more than what we generally assume images to be in being seen as spiritually alive. In Nias traditional conceptions often the image, as the name, leavings, and the shadow, even the stones erected at one's feasts, participate mystically in the essence of the person they stand for. Spirits (*bechu*) - as will become clear - inhabit a parallel world where images, names, and shadows have more reality than what they stand for.

*Adu* cover a huge variety of objects used for a wide range of uses. They refer to the figurative ancestor images, male and female, into which the last breath of a dying parent was transferred so that they may stay on in the house giving advice and blessings and receiving offerings, and giving access to the higher divine ancestors. An *ere* may fashion a statue to house a spirit that will then look after a pregnant woman, or she might make one as a substitute for the sick person, so that the spirit touching or eating the shadow of the sick person will unknowingly transfer its attentions to the *adu*, allowing the patient to recover. A sorcerer, on the other hand - for the power to heal is the same as the power to make sick - fashions a rough image in the likeness of his or her victim, and manipulates it to cause their sickness and death: that too is an *adu*.

Healing knowledge (and by implication sorcery, too) comes in bundles; what a healer learns from a teacher or sees in a dream is a combination of elements whose combination according to the correct procedure will bring about certain ends, ie. secure supernatural help or protection, activate an amulet, cure a specific disorder. With today's healers such a bundle typically consists of mantra and medicine. Where such pre-Christian 'recipes' survive, the mantra becomes the *fo'ere* or incantation, and the medicine covers a spectrum that joins herbal remedies to *adu*. Thus, with the simpler manifestations of *adu* - for example, as a roughly stripped forked stick of a particular kind of wood, wrapped in a bundle with a particular

number of a certain kind of leaf - it is hard to draw a line and say this object is an *adu*, these are herbs that are part of the medicinal recipe. Such concoctions of herbs may well have been boiled and ingested, or otherwise processed with oil and applied externally (as a modern doctor would deem necessary for them to have any biological effect); but they may well equally be simply burnt, or waved near the patient, or even cast away after they have been chanted over - all is legitimate 'medicine' (*dalū-dalu*) in the traditional sense.

The *adu* was brought to life, enchanted, the spirit was called into it, through the excellence or suggestiveness of the carving, and through its creation being done by the right kind of person (who had inherited or had ritually transferred to him or her the capacity to do so) in exactly the right way, i.e. its being drummed to, named and addressed in the incantation, and offerings being made to it. By being treated as if it contained a spirit, as if it was a social person, involved in exchange networks, being named and addressed, it became so (cf. Gell 1998:133-5). Today villagers say they "do not believe" in *adu*; however the Indonesian *percaya*, or Nias *faricayo*, does not mean the conviction of something's reality so much as performing this reality<sup>7</sup>. Villagers today do not make *adu* and call spirits into them, but if they did do the process exactly right then it would indeed have the same result as it always did: the *adu* would be alive again. Similarly villagers say they do not believe in *bechu* (spirits), but they are always taking steps to protect themselves from them: what they mean is that they deliberately avoid dabbling in technology that they now consider to be deeply sinful and angering to God. The *bechu* do of course exist - otherwise such technologies would not be so sinful - but a good Christian with strong faith should not be troubled by them. We turn now in chapters VI and VII to the story of how villagers came to make this change of mind. Then in chapters VIII and IX we turn to modern understandings of disease causation and healing, in the course of which it will become apparent how the traditional notions of descent and expertise, the power of names and images described in this chapter, are manifest in the present.

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<sup>7</sup> Compare Steedly 1993:35; also Lambek 1993:4,298.

## CHAPTER VI

# CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY

Having described, as far as is possible, the contours of pre-Christian religion on Nias, and the understandings of health, sickness and healing therein embedded, we turn now to consider how and why Ono Niha converted to Christianity, and the consequences of this transformation for understandings of sickness and healing.

Since the attitude of Christianity to the pre-Christian culture is significant in determining the modern status of elements of pre-Christian culture, we must pay attention to the Christian construction of Nias paganism through the process of contact, mission, and conversion, and the progress of the indigenous church. Before beginning this discussion I offer a descriptive passage from my fieldnotes, both to give the atmosphere of village discourse on Christianity, and to introduce the important themes of conversion, the tension between cosmopolitan and local religious identities, and the relation of Christianity to tradition.

### PROLOGUE: Ama Wati on Christianity

It is evening, and I sit on Ama Wati's terrace among the hibiscus and allamanda watching and greeting the constant stream of people returning from their fields, the men carrying spears and firewood, the women laden with huge bundles of patchouli and tapioka leaves. Ama Wati arrived a little late for our appointment in improbably ragged and muddy clothes and is now washing and changing. I feel a little uncomfortable to be seen by so many people waiting disciple-like at Ama Wati's door. He is very knowledgeable about history and tradition, but belonging to the incoming clan of Harefa his versions are often different from those of the Bu'ulölö, the founders of the village.

The house itself is not prestigious. Made of breeze blocks and cement it lies outside the village, upstream towards the school, and on ground to which one must descend from the path, which is not good. When the progressive BKPN seceded from the BNKP, taking over the old church and bell, the staunchly conservative Ama Wati donated his former prestigious family house site for the rebuilding of a new BNKP church. He has eleven children, most of whom he educated to a high level. Graduation photos cover the walls. He has sons now living in Bandung, Padang, and Jakarta. Ama Wati himself graduated from the Vervolk school in Ombölata in 1941, before the Japanese occupation.

Ama Wati finally emerges, smiling broadly in clean shirt and trousers, his hair brillantined and combed, and his daughter-in-law brings tea. After some friendly small talk I open my notebooks and start to ask my questions. We speak in Indonesian. He is a superb informant, checking with his eyes that I am following him and telling his stories slowly, waiting for my notes to catch up. Spotting the scene from the path a few old men come down and silently take up a position squatting on the terrace to listen, passing around their betel pouches. The daughter-in-law fusses around fetching chairs and tea for those of high status.



As a long narrative about a war between this village and another two generations ago draws to a close I ask Ama Wati about the differences between the old religion and Christianity.

"Aaaah!" he says with a broad smile, "*Adu* [images] in the old days were substitutes for God. They were a form of superstition, not real piety."

"They were symbols..." interjects a boy at school in Teluk Dalam, and receives a volley of frowns for interrupting.

"How then did Christianity originally come to Hilinawalö?" I ask.

"Hmmm. In 1903 the German missionaries established a mission at Lölöwa'u. The warrior chief Ndröu Hifo that I have just been telling you about went there to visit the chief Siwamolalai, his clanmate. There for the first time he heard singing, the singing of hymns, so different from the sound of *hohohohoho*. He saw the Bible opened, and a sermon preached to bring the people close to God. Ndröu Hifo asked Siwamolalai's youngest son, Simone Fetero, to come back with him to Hilinawalö, where he set up a night school to teach reading and writing. Amongst his pupils the first six families to be baptised were those of Zaita Harefa, Satani Harefa, Aluizaro Bu'ulölö, Manögö Nehe and Natola Bu'ulölö along with Ndröu Hifo. They were baptised by Tuan Sartor who came from Gunung Sitoli. At this stage the great house was used as a church, but as little by little more people wanted to come a church was built in Hilinawalö. It was square, with a tower and a cross in the centre of the roof, just like the new church we are building for the BNKP. The site of the old church and its graveyard are a sign of evidence for the truth of this story."

"So how was the new teaching felt to differ from the old religion?" - I attempt to return to my earlier question.

"The old ways were good in demanding respect for the dead," replies Ama Wati slowly, "but went wrong in making the dead into gods. It is proper to remember the dead with respect, but not to ask for their help. Thus also we disapprove of the Catholics' appeals to Mary, and the decoration of their churches with the emblems of the ancestor cult. Ancestor worship is what Chinese practice. Of course many in the village still do this, for example when they sacrifice a pig before hunting. Don't ask devils for help: pray to God. There is a story: 'A man went to heaven and asked why there were so many snails. Those are not snails, he was told, but the ears of those who have heard God's Word, but not with their hearts. Why, then, are there so many snakes, he asked. Those are not snakes, he was told, but the tongues of those who spoke the Gospel, but not with their hearts.'"

With this he leant back in his chair and took out his betel pouch, signalling a pause. As I scratched away in my notebook I thought warmly how like it was to listening to my own grandparents, the twinkle in his eye, the weighty rhythms of his stories, the smell of old age and eau de cologne.

This brief description introduces us to some significant characteristics of Nias village Christianity. Knowledge about Christianity, especially when sought out by a foreign researcher, offers status to he from whom it is sought. The kind of prestige to which such knowledge gives access is also signified through self-presentation, clothes, and attention to cleanliness and consumption styles. It characterises the style of those who have successfully

managed to convert traditional status - largely through their family's preferential access to education since colonial times - into that recognised by the cultural alliance of Christianity and state-sponsored modernity. Though this kind of status is seen as different from traditional status, it is still partially inflected by traditional values. Thus, knowledge about origins - in this case of Christianity - is especially important. Furthermore, there is a tension between the Christian notion of universal truth and the traditional assumption that knowledge is legitimated by family, an assumption particularly important in the sphere of healing knowledge, as we shall see in chapter IX below. Thus Ama Wati stresses early converts belonging to his own clan, Harefa, while others discount his knowledge as inauthentic because he is not a member of the village founding clan, Bu'ulölö. Thus too, in a strikingly traditional idiom he draws attention to features of the environment as "signs of evidence" of the truth of his story.

His account is also significant in that it succinctly illustrates the manner in which pre-Christian religious beliefs and practices are constructed within contemporary Christian discourse. So for Ama Wati the old beliefs and practices did not constitute a religion, they were "superstitions" that "substituted for religion." Ancestor worship is described as wrong, because Christian teaching has introduced a definite barrier between man and the divine, where traditionally a continuum was recognised linking people vertically to their elders, ancestors, tribal progenitors, and gods. Linking such beliefs to Chinese culture is of course an especially effective way of denigrating them within a nationalist frame of reference, given the national hostility to Chinese businessmen and shopkeepers.

The purpose of this chapter is therefore to explore how Christianity came to hold the position it does today in the contemporary trifurcation of culture in south Nias villages. In order to explain this process we shall be examining the history of Christianity on Nias up to the present day. We shall find particularly illuminating the manner in which the early missionaries described the 'pagan' beliefs and practices they found, as well as the various translations or equivalences they were compelled to make between traditional and Christian concepts in order to make their message intelligible to the villagers. If my analysis is correct, then it was the (unintended) consequences of such a translation - the choice of the word *horö* to render the Christian concept of sin - that was partially responsible for the mass conversion of Ono Niha in the early decades of the twentieth century. This chapter will close with a description of this "Great Repentance," as the process of conversion is known locally, and in the following chapter on contemporary Christianity we will explore how the traditional notions embedded in the term *horö* are responsible for many of the special characteristics of vernacular Christianity on Nias, in particular repentance healing.

## 6.2 Before the missions

The story of Christianity on Nias begins with the visits of the American Baptist Henry Lyman, and two French Catholics, Bérard and Vallon. For reasons which will become clear none of these proceeded to the project they envisaged of teaching Christianity to the Ono Niha; however their stories are of significance for the subsequent and successful German missionaries' understanding of and attitude to the indigenous "religion," and via this genealogical route the attitude of contemporary Christian villagers to their traditional beliefs, especially those concerned with sickness and healing.

Just as with Northern Europe so too on Nias the coming of Christianity began with slave populations who had been transported to metropolitan centres away from their homes<sup>1</sup>. Christianity, of course, often shows an affinity with the oppressed, and the missionaries' teaching on Nias opposed itself to the oppression of both village nobles and priests, and the colonial government. As we shall see, this history became important to the later alliance between the Christian Church and the early nationalist government. In 1830 the French Catholic missionary Father Jean Baptiste Boucho baptised thirty Ono Niha in Penang, part of the community deposited there by the slave trade. Part of the process of conversion was learning something of their prior beliefs:

"[he] rejoiced to discover that they already knew a beneficent creator God: Laubalangi. However, the majority of their rituals were directed to the appeasement of evil spirits known as *Cekhou*. Their moral laws were very strict: death was the punishment for adultery" (quoted in Hämmerle 1996:17).

From these baptised Ono Niha two further missionary priests, Fathers Bérard and Vallon, were able to learn the rudiments of the Nias language, and in 1832 they set off on the first missionary expedition to Nias. They arrived at the main port of Gunung Sitoli<sup>2</sup> and established themselves at the nearby village of Lasara. In a matter of weeks, however, they had both died of fever - commonly believed to have been poisoned by hostile natives. Today a stone plaque commemorates them in the splendid Catholic church of Santa Maria in Gunung Sitoli.

The narrative theme of outsiders being poisoned by Nias villagers recurs to this day, nor is it a story told just by outsiders wishing to point to the dangerous primitiveness of the island, but it is typical of villagers' explanations as well. As we shall see in chapter VIII, a whole category of illness on Nias is understood as being caused by other people, using techniques along the continuum from witchcraft to poisoning.

<sup>1</sup> I refer to Gregory's famously angelic Angles, as well as the strategy of Eligius and Amandus in the seventh century of purchasing slaves from as yet pagan England and Gaul, training them and then despatching them to found new churches in their lands of origin (see Fletcher, R 1997:151-2).

<sup>2</sup> Though by this time Nias had been returned to the Dutch, a garrison had not yet been re-established on the island, whose contact with the colonial government was confined to the purchase of copra and rice and the export of slaves (re-named 'debt-workers') from the coastal ports and the signing of contracts with the chiefs local to these ports.

Two years later than the unfortunate Frenchmen, in 1834, Henry Lyman, a Baptist missionary from Connecticut, visited Nias looking for a mission field. He was dissuaded by Dutchmen he met in the Batu Islands from opening a mission on Nias, or even travelling away from the coast into the interior, on account of the rumoured violence and treacherous character of the natives. He paints a vivid picture of the dangerous environment, which meant that "even the child who is sent to the spring for a little water, may never find his way back to his home again" (Carter, R 1856:336), but lays the blame for this state of affairs, as Raffles did before him, on the slave trade, which he describes as caused by exogenous factors, to wit the purchase of slaves by French, Dutch, Malay, Acehnese and Chinese traders (ibid 337):

"The Nyas people are said to be treacherous... This spirit, if it exists, has been produced by the nefarious traffic in slaves, which has so long been carried on there. More than two hundred per annum are now actually carried off by the Dutch government..." (ibid 335)

Lyman's point of view on Nias culture follows on directly from that of Raffles, seeing them as possessed of a significantly higher state of 'civilisation' than mainland Sumatrans, Malays, or even Javanese, a state of affairs that places them closer to Western civilisation than more 'savage' groups elsewhere in the archipelago. Markers of this higher state of civilisation are their severe laws and political organisation whereby (in the north and centre only) village chiefs meet in district "councils" (ibid 384-5), as well as their paler skin, language more "soft and smooth," and women more beautiful and better treated, than their ethnic neighbours:

"They appeared more open-hearted, manly, intelligent, independent, and friendly, than the Malays, Javanese, or central Sumatrans" (ibid 339);

"In their color, the Nyas people are fairer than the Javanese or Malays, while their cast of countenance is far superior to any other Asiatics I have met, many of them reminding me strongly of friends at home. They are open and frank, unlike in this, to both Malays and Chinese" (ibid 353);

"Their women are treated with more respect than in almost any other heathen nation.

"They are on terms of companionship with the men. They are very fair, extremely interesting, and there is more of the wife and mother about them, than I have seen in the natives of Java and Sumatra" (ibid 356).

In this way Lyman assumes a cultural progress from savagery to civilisation, but approves Nias civilisation as higher than its neighbours. Their aptitude for social development is shown by their reaction to writing, by which "their king could give his orders and be understood without leaving his house, and they could correspond with one another; at this they were highly delighted..." (ibid 339). However, as with Raffles' letters written to his cousin the parson, progress is not seen as working by natural law, but through intervention - in this case salvation brought by Protestant doctrine. Catholicism, however, will not do, and is assimilated by Lyman to paganism:

"It would be a very easy matter for the followers of the Pope to substitute their pictures and idols for the idols of the Nyas, and to engraft their mummeries, and impose their dazzling, pompous ceremonies upon them" (ibid 390).

The need for social development, notwithstanding their cultural superiority to their neighbours, is demonstrated by the "miserably poor and dirty" state of their homes, even those of the most powerful, and more forcefully by the devils and naked idols that they worship:

"The Nyas have no temples, or what may be strictly called, public priests. They have no holidays. They believe in two gods, Love Langi, the benevolent god above, and the least powerful, and Batoe Bedani, Satan, who has power over all men and evils in this world. To the latter they make all sacrifices, as being the most powerful, by the intervention, however, of the images in their houses. Besides these representations of Satan, they have in their houses images of all their family who have died, and when they make a feast, they give a portion to these; believing that when they cease paying respects to the dead evil will befall them" (quoted in Reid, A 1995:197).

The absoluteness of Lyman's condemnation of such heathen practices is shown by his refusal to recognise the *osale*, where images of the village-founders were kept and where councils and community rituals were held, as a temple, nor the *ere* or shaman-priests who mediated with the supernatural world as priests. He does not refer to these practices as 'religion,' with the assumption of an alternative belief-system to Christianity. Such paganism is not an alternative religion but the absence of religion, and the description of the practices subsumes them within the values of Christianity. Batoe Bedani (of the underworld) is Satan, and the preponderance of ritual addressed to him means that native practices addressed to the supernatural are demonic, involving the compacts with the devil that earlier characterised European (and New England) witchcraft. In these respects, then, Lyman's discourse on Nias is continuous with what McGrane (1989) describes as the medieval, pre-Enlightenment, demonology of alterity<sup>3</sup>.

The violence of Nias culture is not, perhaps strangely, blamed on this demonic paganism but on external oppression, and described from within the abolitionist critique of the Dutch management of their colonies, and implies that the remedy is to be found in more enlightened intervention on the part of the colonial government.

Despite all the ingredients of higher civilisation to be found in their culture (laws, political organisation, intelligence, friendliness, open-heartedness, independence and fair skin), mistaken belief and the demonic character of relations with the supernatural fatally flaws Nias culture and makes missionary intervention desirable from the natives' point of view.

Nias civilisation is not perceived to consist of an integrated system: much of it is good, as we have seen, and not described as integrally linked to the ritual practices, which are evil. This

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<sup>3</sup> This bears out Thomas's criticism of the kind of simplistic and essentialist historiography which, exemplified by McGrane, attributes specific cultural attitudes to specific historical epochs: "a particular historiographic mode prompts scholars to define a temporal sequence of 'stereotypes' or 'visions', but...over the periods they select, notionally succeeding discourses are in fact often copresent for the whole history under consideration" (Thomas 1994:104).

early missionary discourse implies that with external exploitation removed, and idol- and devil-worship replaced by Baptist Christianity, we might very well recognise ourselves in these natives.

A month after leaving Nias Lyman and his party were making the trek from Sibolga on the Sumatran mainland up to the as yet unknown Lake Toba in the Batak highlands when, before Tarutung, they were surprised by a party of Bataks and killed. A monument near the modern road marks the spot. These grisly deaths in the heart of darkness are remembered as martyrdoms by the modern Batak and Nias churches, generating a sense of shame today that continues the work of demonising their ancestors' beliefs and practices.

### 6.3 RMG - the early years

The first missionary to come and stay on Nias was L. Denninger of the Rheinisches Mission Gesellschaft, based in Barmen, Germany, the branch of Lutheran Protestant Christianity that was to dominate the Nias mission field up to the Second World War. Denninger had earlier fled Borneo with other RMG missionaries who survived the native uprising there in the early 1860s. In Padang he studied language from the Nias slave community, and, having secured permissions from the colonial government, arrived on Nias in 1865, while his colleague Nommensen set off for the Batak highlands, subsequently founding the Batak Church (HKBP). Dutch governors did not see conversion as part of their mission in the Indies, preferring the policy of indirect rule which left local social structures intact. However this was a time when they faced bitter resistance in Sumatra from the Moslem populations of Aceh to the north and of Minangkabau to the south, so an arguably appropriate process of Islamicisation of pagan Sumatra was halted by allowing the German missionaries to attempt to create Christian 'buffer zones' between the Moslem populations. Denninger established his mission at Gunung Sitoli in the north in order to enjoy the protection of the only Dutch garrison on the island, since the fort established in 1856 at Lagundri in the south had succumbed to smallpox, typhus, malaria, intermittent attacks by hostile villages, and, finally, an earthquake and tidal wave in 1861. The sacking of the fort had been punished by a devastating Dutch offensive in the south two years earlier in 1863, but these were still dangerous times for Europeans.

Despite the fact that many of these men, like Raffles and Lyman before them, appeared to blame the violence of inter-village warfare on the Dutch and Acehnese setting a high market value to slaves ready for export, a morning's meditation today among the graves - especially those of the children - beside the early churches of Ombölata is sufficient to guess that the perilousness of their situation, coupled with the threat of disease, played a psychological role in their portrayal of the demonic nature of traditional religion as a kind of spiritual "heart of darkness."

Other missionaries (Ködding in 1866; Thomas in 1873; Sundermann in 1878; Lagemann in

1887) followed close behind Denninger, establishing missions close by Gunung Sitoli. Missions established in the south were quickly abandoned on account of the endemic hostilities which were being aggravated by the Dutch taking sides in feuds between villages, as of Hilisimaetanö (or Fadoro as it was then called) against Bawömataluo (Orahili)<sup>4</sup>. Thomas attempted to start a mission at Bawölöwalangi near the port of Teluk Dalam in the south in 1883, but left in a rush when hostilities between that village and its neighbours broke out. Returning to Gunung Sitoli he met Elio Modigliani, the Italian naturalist and explorer who had just arrived on the island, and joined in the unsuccessful attempt being made by the Dutch governor to dissuade his visit to the south.

Few converts were made in these early years outside the narrow environs of Gunung Sitoli, which had been a centre for Malay traders long before the arrival of the Dutch East India Company, and whose inhabitants had thus experienced more of outsiders' cultures, some even having converted to Islam. Proximity to the Dutch garrison additionally afforded protection from attack, though the alliance between the Dutch colonial apparatus and the German missionaries was not a seamless one. The two groups had very different approaches to traditional culture, the Dutch following a self-interested policy of minimal interference in local affairs and exploiting locally institutionalised debt-slavery to provide contract labourers for their mainland plantations and mines, and exploiting traditional political organisation in order to administer the island through village and district chiefs. The missionaries' efforts were directed in the altogether different direction of transforming the traditional culture in the interest, as they saw it, not of themselves but of the natives. Missionaries were vociferous in their condemnation of the slave trade carried on by the Dutch (see Scarduelli 1986:24).

Given the perilous nature of their situation and the difficulty of making converts the early missionaries concentrated on their immediate environment, building their houses, churches and gardens so as to attract pupils, and attempting to teach the natives attached to their households about European ideas of gardening and livestock-raising, cooking, clothing, hygiene, discipline and time-keeping. The first school on Nias was opened by Denninger on his arrival in 1865 teaching theology, reading, writing and arithmetic, and by 1919 137 primary schools had opened all over the island (Danandjaja 1971:17). Medical clinics were opened in Gunung Sitoli, followed later by another in the south, at Hilisimaetanö. Such efforts introduced a significant ambivalence to the mission project, which was committed both to the saving of souls and the spreading of a technical and economising world view<sup>5</sup>. This ambivalence made possible the later 'progressive alliance' between Christianity and the state (see below).

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<sup>4</sup> See historical review in Scarduelli 1986; and Modigliani 1890 for someone who became embroiled in the action.

<sup>5</sup> cf Keane 1995:15, discussing Sumba in words that could apply to Nias: "the Dutch saw Sumbanese ancestor ritualists as both excessively materialistic and as believing in too many spirits, as too calculating and as irrationally blinded to economics by their moral commitments."

Prevented by delicacy and lack of proficiency in the local language from making an effective start to the work of preaching the gospel they confined their efforts to the sphere of social welfare that has now become the province (directly inherited from the church from whom many schools and clinics were taken over by the state at Independence) of government programmes, and sought to attract disciples by displaying the advantages of their lifestyle. The Dutch had displayed the impressive power of their unfamiliar technologies simply to intimidate the people, to make their exploitative dominance appear natural and forestall insurrection: for the first time the German missionaries were offering to share these magical new powers with them. They also set about studying the language, compiling wordlists and grammars which for the first time presented the language using the European alphabet, and then preparing translations, one by one, of the New Testament gospels<sup>6</sup>. Dr Sundermann, who was largely responsible for this work, selected the northern dialect for his translation, almost certainly because this was the region in which he worked, as well as being that of the administrative capital. Villagers, however, who find series baffling unless sorted into a hierarchical order, claim that he selected the northern dialect as being “the most refined.”

#### 6.4 Christian construction of traditional religion and culture

Following on from language study came the project of describing the heathen beliefs and practices that were proving so difficult to change, making the missionaries the ancestors of all subsequent anthropological scholarship on Nias. Our purpose in this and following sections is to consider, first, how the traditional religion was described by the missionaries, and secondly how new Christian notions were made understandable to Ono Niha. Rafael’s study of the significance of translations in the history of Tagalog Christianity (Rafael 1993) forms an important model for the present approach.

At this pre-fieldwork time, the late nineteenth and turn of the century, missionaries’ accounts were the raw material of much ethnological scholarship in the West. Lewis Henry Morgan researched his “Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family” (1871) by sending questionnaires on kinship terminology to missionaries all round the world. It was out of missionaries’ descriptions of the pre-conversion beliefs of their flocks that the anthropological subject of what came to be called primitive religion was born. In 1906 the German Catholic missionary Pater Wilhelm Schmidt founded the journal ‘Anthropos’ which would supplement the RMG mission press and Dutch colonial journals as a forum for the Nias missionaries and their academic descendants.

The first impression given by their writings is of a tremendous effort to make sense of the bewildering intricacies of the Nias ontology of the supernatural, covering otiose creator gods,

<sup>6</sup> Analogous to the discomfort villagers feel at regional variation in *adat* (“their version is wrong”) noted in the preceding chapter, the variations between the gospels pose a challenge to village Christians (Hämmerle, personal communication).



mythic ancestors, gods of the upper world and under world, bisexual divinities, evil spirits, spirits of the ancestors and spirits of the wild. The project was complicated by the fact that many divinities were called by different names in different regions, and often had many alternative names to suit the parallelist exigencies of traditional oral poetry. It was a common mistake to treat each of these variant names as a separate being.

The missionaries were also literalist in another way, characteristically interpreting origin myths and the words *niha*, 'people,' for the people of Nias, and *tanö niha*, 'land of the people,' for Nias, to mean that the Ono Niha had no knowledge or awareness of the outside world (e.g. Lagemann 1906:341), seeing their island as the universe, a ludicrous notion surely sufficiently belied by the slave trade which has somehow persisted into the introductory passages of many a twentieth century traveller's work. In similar vein, Møller<sup>7</sup> claimed that Ono Niha were unable to accurately count years (Møller 1934:121).

The missionaries expended much effort attempting to squeeze the natives' beliefs into the Procrustean bed of Christianity, and examples appear in the following section on the translation of Christian concepts. Further instances are provided by Lagemann 1906 tracing parallels between the Book of Genesis and Nias cosmogonic myths, the use of the word "*priester*" to translate "*ere*," and Thomas listing statements about Lowalangi, the upperworld God, which are aligned to Christian discourse:

"Without Lowalangi I am always sick on this earth and all my children will die.  
It depends upon Lowalangi whether he will give man life.  
Lowalangi kills, Lowalangi gives life" (Chatelin 1881:122 my translation).

The 'scientific' tone adopted by missionaries in these papers led them to describe Nias culture in the round, in contrast to Raffles' and Lyman's accounts of good civilisation flawed by bad devil-worship. In their descriptions they typically linked origin myths, gods, evil spirits, ancestors, idols, ideas of disease, pregnancy taboos, social stratification and the life-cycle. Both Sundermann (1892) and Thomas (see Chatelin 1881), studying the Nias language, make much of the fact that all Nias emotions are linguistically described by coupling an adjective to the local word for 'heart,' so that to feel compassion is to have a "broad heart" and to feel sad is to have a "hairy heart." This leads them to infer the existence of a unitary and systematic Nias idea of personhood to which this vocabulary of the emotions, if properly understood, would provide the key.

Similarly, Missionary Fries wrote a paper on headhunting, in which he linked the practice of ambushing and taking the heads of members of other villages as a prerequisite to feasts of merit and marriage and in order to sanctify chiefs' houses, to cosmological ideas (such as men being the pigs of the gods), and local ideas of an afterlife (such that slaves sacrificed at a noble's funeral would serve him in the land of the dead) (Fries 1908). The following quote illustrates how Thomas relates religious belief to the Niassan "character":

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<sup>7</sup> Møller, it should be noted, was not a missionary but a doctor.

"Typical of the Niassan character, is the relation in which they stand to their forefathers who have been raised to divinity. Thus they fear the lower-ranking gods more than the higher, even where the latter are stronger. Thus it can also be that the Niassan has more fear for the beghu, a lower ranking power, than for the higher divinities, thus the beghu plays a very much more important role in the reasoning of pagan Niassans than the powers that stand above these spirits" (Chatelin 1881 my translation).

However, despite these secular and scientific attempts to construct local culture as an integrated system their descriptions are firmly located within a Christian moral point of view. Nias beliefs and practices directed to the supernatural are classified as *götzendienst* or 'idolatry,' still pejoratively distinct from religion, but now implicitly described as sharing its formal characteristics as a system of belief. This perhaps arises in part from the attempt to map these beliefs onto Christianity, which is assumed to be internally consistent. Their scientific tone and the systematic nature of their presentation are motivated by a desire to fully understand local culture according to the standards of western science, but this does not require them to suspend moral criticism of local culture.

Lagemann's article on "The Nias maiden from birth to marriage" (Lagemann 1893) portrays women as the victims of superstitious ideas. Baby girls are unwanted, he claims, and a father's disgust at the birth of a girl is expressed by his giving her such names as "useless" or "what is that?"<sup>8</sup> He is consoled, however, by her role as a valuable addition to his agricultural workforce. Infanticide, or the exposure of twins and children born out of wedlock, is deeply censured and blamed on mistaken superstition. Together with "*diesen widerlichen und unwürdigen verhältnissen der poligamie*" ("these disgusting and unworthy practices of polygamy"), the purchase of brides and the exploitation of women as agricultural workers, these customs are responsible for "*die tiefen schäden des Niassischen volkslebens*" - "the deep damages of the Nias folk life." Only in those parts of domestic family life which are untouched by devilish superstition do the Christian values of mutual nurture and love represent a "glimmer of light," offering a "cultural entry" for Christianity (Lagemann 1893 my translations).

Kramer's paper on "The Idolatry of the Niassans" (Kramer 1890) is both explicitly and implicitly derogatory of indigenous practices directed at the supernatural. These practices are described as grotesque errors, exemplified by the use of objects such as stones, stalactites, teeth, and even umbrella-handles as protective magical amulets. The use of the word "*götzen*" - 'idols' - invokes the Old Testament critique of the pagan worship of the Middle East, and the word "*maul*" used to refer to the mouth of the idol to which sacrifices are offered has lexical connotations of beastliness and monstrosity. The word "*lustig*" ('merry, gay') as applied to the atmosphere of ceremonial feasts, which threaten to turn "*wild*" under the influence of palm-wine, further encapsulates Lutheran Protestant disapproval.

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<sup>8</sup> In fact such names were given before the naming ceremony in order to trick spirits so that they would not possess her.

Kramer explicitly blames cynical Nias chiefs and priests for using the superstitious ideas they generate to their own advantage. Thus he accuses chiefs of selling their subjects into slavery while telling the village that they have been abducted by *bechu*. The priests are accused of inventing new kinds of *adu* - the wooden images used to cure disease and exorcise evil spirits - simply in order to receive more of the money and pork with which their services were paid for. The rituals asking blessing from the ancestors and exorcising evil spirits are described as the "*spielereien*" or 'tricks' that the priests play on the people, and their content as "*hokuspokus*." Kramer's description of Nias religious practice is directed at discrediting the priests, whose initiation by retiring into the wild to meet a spirit through which they will subsequently communicate with the supernatural, is presented as a cynical fake.

The idolatry of the Ono Niha is thus presented as a system whereby priests and chiefs exploit their victims, the ordinary folk. As such, the activity of the indigenous priests is aligned with the "crafty" coastal Mohammedans, who for a fee will consult their mysterious books, "pretending" to find the name of the spirit, god or ancestor an unfortunate villager must propitiate if he or she is to find alleviation for their distress: "so is the heathen from all sides betrayed and lied to. Only the missionary tells him the truth" (Kramer 1893:495 - my translation). The missionary thus saw his role as exposing the superstitious lies engendered by the priests. Thus in Bawalia missionary Bieger went as far as to cut down a sacred *fōsi* tree<sup>9</sup>, the earthly incarnation of the heavenly *tora'a* tree from which sprang the gods, spirits, people, customs, weights and measures of Nias, in order to disprove local superstition.

Sundermann (1898) vehemently criticises the institution of brideprice, noting how a man whose wife had hung herself mourned her with the words "there lies a crown of gold," regretting the wasted wealth with which he had purchased her more than her person. He further describes the way in which cycles of reciprocal feast-giving favoured those already wealthy and permitted the nobles to amass wealth for their own feasts of merit as the "*verderbliche Volksitten auf Nias*" - "the pernicious folk customs of Nias," and he is also insistent on the amoral waste occasioned by the feasts of merit of nobles (Suzuki 1959:43). All were vehemently critical of the treatment of slaves: Thomas reports seeing three male slaves who had been crucified on trees and two female slaves whose backs had been broken as a punishment for stealing crops (quoted in Suzuki 1959:46). Kramer's paper on Nias idolatry concludes with these words:

"It is to be learnt from this description that the Niasser possesses a very developed cult of idols. This is a crushing load for the people and gnaws at their life marrow. Indeed it is plainly impossible that the people can rise in the world with such great expense caused by so many sacrificial feasts. They live there in poverty and misery, and moreover in constant fear of the evil spirits from which they believe themselves to be

<sup>9</sup> Consciously or unconsciously Bieger was repeating the act of the C4th St Martin of Tours, and this cutting down of pagan sacred trees became something of a *topos* in medieval hagiography, repeated by John of Ephesus and St Amandus, amongst others (see Fletcher 1997:45,62,153). Such confrontations go back, of course, to Elijah's successful challenge of the priests of Baal.

everywhere surrounded" (Kramer 1890:500 - my translation).

This new systematic model of local culture, coupled with a moral critique of cultural institutions, introduces a contradiction or tension that is developed in the discourse and practice of later writers, and becomes crucial in contemporary paradoxical attitudes to traditional culture. For if local culture is an integrated whole, replacing idolatry with Christianity entails a transformation of all of the local culture, not just those parts of it concerned with relations with the supernatural, since ideas of personhood, disease, etc. are all bound up with cosmology and the supernatural. Indeed, when describing secular customs of which they disapprove such as brideprice, wasteful feasting, slavery, the oppression of nobles, warfare, headhunting and human sacrifice, they do tend to assume that they will all be automatically transformed, without the Dutch interference they deplored, with conversion to Christianity. In fact, as we have seen, in the early years when few villagers were willing to listen to them expounding Christian dogma it was on such spheres as hygiene, diet, dress and agriculture that they focused, their practice as much as their discourse assuming that all spheres of native life were interlinked.

The contradiction or tension comes from the fact that many missionaries did value certain parts of local culture, such as their oral literature, which according to the model of culture or customs as integrated and interlinked, could not help but be transformed with conversion, along with everything else. The RMG missionaries must take some credit for the conservation of the Nias language - at least its northern dialect - into the nationalist present. Lutheran doctrinal affiliation demanded vernacular presentation of the Word of God. Their preaching forced them to learn the intricacies of local language use, for example in using more refined terms for parts of the body in the pulpit. Sundermann himself devoted much energy to recording local songs, stories and parables which he published in the Dutch journals and clearly valued as part of the 'richness' of local life (Sundermann 1905, see also Lagemann 1906). Fries (1907) similarly recorded traditional songs and recommended that other missionaries do not condemn such songs and singing as heathen practice. Many other missionaries though did not take this advice and exhibited a characteristically Protestant intolerance to traditional songs and dances, an attitude inherited by the indigenous Protestant church.

An exception appears in the later writings of the Rev. Steinhart, a Dutch missionary in the Batu Islands south of Nias, who from the 1930s through to the 1950s produced a series of articles presenting *hoho* texts (Steinhart 1934, 1955). His work of translation into Dutch of these texts led him to a relativist appreciation of indigenous categories and the mutual cultural misunderstandings that accompanied conversion (see Steinhart 1929) - the topic we turn to in section 6.5 below. He even attempted to revive the traditional revolving credit association (*sulö-sulö*) to assist Ono Niha in raising funeral expenses, but this effort failed<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> *Arisan* revolving credit associations are present today; they do not though have a direct genealogical relationship with traditional Nias associations, but have been re-introduced from the wider Indonesian region under the *gotong royong* banner of PKK programmes (see

## 6.5 Romantic criticism of the missionaries

In 1912 the Englishwoman Violet Clifton visited Nias accompanied by her husband, and her romantic attitudes set her in conflict with the German missionaries, who were her hosts on Nias. In the florid account of her trip "Islands of Queen Wilhelmina" (Clifton 1927) the first chapter on Nias opens with a quote from Baudelaire's *"Voyage à Cythère."* "Nias," she writes, "is a fairyland," (ibid 80) "a song set to the measure of the sea's music" (ibid 76). Local customs are appreciated by her from an aesthetic rather than a moral point of view, a perspective which sharply contrasts with her missionary hosts, who she likens to pine trees standing in the jungle (ibid 87). She expresses disappointment when the missionary and his wife bathe indoors in European tubs when "matutinal bathing," native-style in a stream, "was here a rite worthy of Venus's self" (ibid 76). Her romantic individualism sets her against the restraint exercised by culture over the individual and she is thus sharply critical of the Lutheran missionaries' intolerance of dancing, which for her, much given to running "for very joy upon the sands under the palms" (ibid 81), is a joyous expression of the individual spirit. The missionaries, she complains, have turned the Niassan into "a hopeless bastard, fathered of no tradition" (ibid 66).

An anecdote illustrates how her aesthetic appreciation of local custom leads her to suspend rational criticism and again sets her in conflict with her missionary host:

"Next morning I was in the little garden of the Mission House with the lady thereof. She was watching her gardener sowing seeds in the forceful earth. He came entreating her. I asked what he had said.

'He asked me to unpin my hair and let it hang loosely about me,' she said, 'or else the seeds he is planting cannot grow.' But she was unmoved and would not encourage such superstition. When she went indoors I let my hair down, for the fancy of the seeds being helped pleased me, and the joy of the Nias gardener when he saw me thus did, I daresay, thrill the grain he was planting to quicker life and greener health" (ibid 69-70).

Given her implicit project to liberate the individual spirit from cultural restraint in order aesthetically to enjoy self-selected culture, she is more critical of the natives' treatment of their womenfolk. To this end, then, she repeats Sundermann's criticism of bereaved men lamenting the brideprice rather than the person of their wives, and tells the sad story of a Nias bride (to whom she gives the pseudonym Salome) who died of despair after an arranged wedding.

By the 1930s this new tone pervades Western accounts of Nias (see Borgers 1936, Cole 1931), a tone characterised by a romantic aesthetic and a disaffection with Western modernity. This latter entailed a positive reappraisal of the formerly negative evolutionist notion of Nias as the living past<sup>11</sup>. The ethnomusicologist Kunst visited the island in 1930 to survey

chapterX.7), as an instance of the progressive use of specifically Indonesian *adat* in Development.

<sup>11</sup> The most spectacular instance of this *trope* of Nias as the living past was the 1933 film 'King Kong': the fictional island where the prehistoric survivals including the giant ape are

traditional musical instruments and genres of music. Lamenting the passing of authentic cultural forms he blamed the Lutheran missionaries' intolerance of native songs and dances (Kunst 1939). Kunst was accompanied on this trip by the Dutch photographer and artist Rudolf Bonnet, who together with Walter Spies<sup>12</sup> was responsible for developing the school of Balinese art and its international reputation (see Vickers 1996:112-4). Bonnet made a series of drawings and took a stunning series of photographs of Nias subjects, several of which were reproduced in the Austrian archaeologist Schnitger's "Forgotten Kingdoms of Sumatra": they are the photographic counterpart to Schnitger's description of "a world of beauty which is doomed to vanish, of a people and its culture whose dying fills us Westerlings with pity and reverent silence" (Schnitger 1989:123). Bonnet himself wrote an article entitled "*Stervende Schoonheid*" ('Dying Beauty') which appeared in a Dutch colonial newspaper. It is an elegiac portrayal of Nias which blames the German missionaries for destroying the simplicity and beauty of Nias culture and creating a degenerate half European, half Nias, bourgeois germanic society (see Suzuki 1958:21).

## 6.6 Translation of Christian concepts

We have seen above how the missionaries, in their attempt to describe the traditional religion of Nias, tried to fit their descriptions within the framework of Christianity. This attempt was possible because of the broad similarities (extraordinary to the extreme relativist) that do exist between 'traditional religions,' whether Asian, Middle Eastern, African, American or European. Because of these broad similarities the Christian observer could (and did) happily apply the Old Testament invective against the priests of Baal and Ashteroth to the *ere* of Nias, just as St Martin had to the pagan priests of Northern Europe. The New Testament too is brought to bear: the Publicans execrated by Jesus - because they were tax-collectors, flunkies of the Roman state - are translated as "worshippers of idols" (*niha solohe adu* - Matt V 47) in the Nias version of the Bible. This cultural substrate common to pagan Hebrews and Ono Niha meant that phrases such as the "casting out of demons," - *famofanö mbechu* - or "create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalms 51:10) - *fa'aso chögu dödö sohahau*, *ya'ugö Lowalangi* - translated smoothly and literally into the Nias language. Furthermore, the universalism of Christianity even allowed distant populations to be drawn into its own mythology: if the Niassan wanted to join his ancestors' genealogy to that of Adam, he could be told (and was) that they were the sons of Ham.

However, when moving to the level of the finer points of religious doctrine the fit, of course, was not so simple. Christian concepts had to be rendered into the Nias language, and often the words chosen did not have exactly the same meaning and associations to the Ono Niha as

found in the story lies next to Nias on the map, and the skipper recognises the natives' language as that of Nias (see Creelman & Rose 1933 for screenplay).

<sup>12</sup> At the outbreak of World War II Spies was being evacuated to Colombo along with other German nationals including RMG priests from Nias when their ship was bombed on 18 January 1942 by Japanese planes just to the west of Nias. Claire Holt, another associate of Spies', also conducted brief research on traditional dance on Nias in 1938 (reported briefly in Holt 1971).

they had to the missionary (it was Sundermann who made the Bible translation) who chose them. Compromises were inevitable: strongly traditional terms - such as *yaduhu* (one of several traditional affirmative cries made by a speechmaker's partner in *orahu*) for "amen" - would be more persuasive to the pagan Ono Niha, but ran the risk of losing their purely Christian connotations. Where the fit was inexact the two groups, missionaries on the one hand, villagers on the other, could speak the same language, read the same texts, but understand subtly different things by it. Of course, all this had happened before, many times: our words 'god,' 'heaven,' 'hell,' 'gospel,' 'holy ghost' and 'sin' had all been "semantically refashioned" from their Old English pre-Christian usage (Crystal 1995:24), and even today carry some of that pagan flavour<sup>13</sup>.

Arguably the most important choice for the translator and proselyte was the word to use for the Christian God. As we have seen above, Boucho had identified Lowalangi (Laubalangi in his account) as a beneficent creator God, and this was the usage that stuck, though not without controversy. Møller, the Danish doctor stationed on Nias in the twenties, favoured Sirao (see Møller 1934, also Suzuki 1959:1-8) as the Christian "*Alte Gott*." Suzuki (ibid) later also criticised the choice of Lowalangi, preferring Silewe and suggesting that the lack of conversions during the first fifty years of mission was due to this error. This latter is patent absurdity. Lowalangi is not strictly the Creator; in this respect a better case could be made for Sihai, who arose as a spherical egg from the moist winds of primal chaos, and from whose heart (after his, her, or perhaps better, its, death) the *tora'a* tree sprang. All the divinities and spirits and humans (along with crucial cultural items such as measuring sticks) sprang from buds of this tree<sup>14</sup>. There is no word for "a god" in the Nias language; the First Commandment is translated "let there be no other Lowalangi for you other than I" (*Böi so chömö Lowalangi tanö bö'ö, baero ndra'o*). There is no radical discontinuity between divinity and humanity in Nias cosmology (as is central to Christian doctrine) though the "gods" came earlier - Modigliani was most probably right in suggesting that these gods were 'euhermerized' ancestors - and according to some myths Lowalangi breathed life into the first humans. It is also said by some that Lowalangi allots soul-substance (*noso*) to us in the womb, determining the length of our life, and many idiomatic expressions invoking his name implied his power and omniscience. As Schröder notes, "their mouths are indeed full of him... but that is all there is to it," meaning no cult or offerings were made to him (Schröder 1917:1183, quoted in Hämmerle 1996:27, my translation). The epithet *So'aya*, which translates "Lord" in biblical and prayer contexts, means "the decorated one, the one with golden ornaments," and was previously applied to the noble village chiefs in all their *owasa* glory.

The translation of God as Lowalangi had the side-effect of implying that all other supernatural beings named and recognised on Nias were devils or demons, and that practices addressed to them constituted the grave sin of demonism and the worship of devils<sup>15</sup>. Whilst

<sup>13</sup> Does not the word 'God' suggest a sterner, more personal entity than the more abstract, Platonic, even Plotinian associations of *theos*?

<sup>14</sup> Identified with the Milky Way.

<sup>15</sup> cf. a similar case study from Africa in Meyer 1994:45-68.

this effectively demonised much of the traditional religious practices, choosing Lowalangi to render the Christian God clearly did give pagan villagers a crucial 'port of entry' into Christian doctrine. They would then be taught, with varying success, against their previous notions, that Lowalangi is radically distinct from the rest of nature, supernature, and mankind, all of which He created. The divine lost its rootedness in local landscape and ancestral genealogy, its source and origin in local human origins, and Lowalangi became the God, not just of Ono Niha, but of all the world's Christians, centred on Jerusalem and the Holy Land. One's allegiance to Lowalangi - one's religious identity - would in future link one to the cosmopolitan and progressive world of international Christianity, though an element of local identity would be sustained by the indigenously-led Protestant church.

To turn from God to the Devil. Lyman, as we saw in the previous chapter, took Lature Danö, Lowalangi's elder brother and god of the underworld, to be Satan. To see the Lowalangi of the upperworld, Lature Danö of the underworld divine pair as uncomplicatedly representative of pure good and pure evil is probably a projection of our deep-rooted Indo-European myth (first formulated by Zoroaster) of the primal battle between good and evil, as well as our traditional placing of heaven above and hell below. There is of course a strong sense in folk Christianity that God and the Devil are equal opposites, though theologians have always struggled against this, insisting that they are not coterminous, that Satan, along with the angels, spirits and man, is part of God's creation. The German missionaries thus settled on Aföcha, most feared of the evil spirits, as the Devil, and so it remains to this day. Aföcha's unambivalently evil motives did in some ways make him a better choice, since Lature Danö was not in the natives' stories simply an evil counterpart to the good Lowalangi: the good will of both deities was seen as necessary to one's well-being (see Suzuki 1959:1-8). The abstract concept of "evil" interestingly found no direct translation in the Nias language, and so is typically expressed negatively as "that which is not good" - "*si lö söchi*." The "deliver us from evil" of the Lord's Prayer is awkwardly expressed as "deliver us from Aföcha/Satan." The notions of heaven (*sorugo*) and hell (*narako*) were taken from Malay *surga* and *naraka* with Moslem precedent, but are also rendered and understood as *banua yawa* and *tou* ("upper and under world").

The demons of Christianity became Nias *bechu*, a smooth semantic transfer given the recognition of possession by such in the gospels. The *bela* - who correspond roughly to the fairies of Northern European tradition, associated with the forest and mischievous rather than evil - were assimilated to this evil category of *bechu*. The angels found no authentic Nias gloss and so were rendered as *malaika* from Indonesian *malaikat*, a notion already perhaps familiar to some Ono Niha who had sought mystical knowledge from Muslim Malays. The spirits of the ancestors, so important to traditional religious belief, were disappeared by translation to Christianity, or became *malaika satua*, the 'angels of the ancestors.' The entirely negative notion of *bechu* as demons would not do, and the *eheha* by which they had been transferred from the dying parent to their wooden image was appropriated by the taboo concept of the Holy Spirit. The dreams and visions by which ancestors might appear to their descendants were re-classed as visions of angels. The special



gifts that ancestors had been believed to pass down to their descendants, as *ere*, or specialists, in some craft (such as healing) was divorced from the notion of ancestors and referred to by the new notion (and word) of *talenta* - "talents" - a gift of God bestowed on men as suggested by the parable in Matt XXV 15<sup>16</sup>.

The concepts of soul and spirit were more awkward, and it was not possible for Sundermann to be consistent in their translation. Spirit as a synonym of soul, as in "Lord Jesus, receive my soul," could be rendered by *noso* - as we saw in chapter V that part of the incorporeal person traditionally understood to return to Lowalangi after death. An unclean spirit would be a *bechu*. The spirit of God is the *eheha Lowalangi*, where *eheha* is that part of the breath of a dying man that must traditionally be symbolically inhaled by his spiritual inheritor. The Holy Ghost is the *Eheha Ni'amoni'ö*. The "four spirits of the heavens" are the *mataangi*, the "eyes of the wind" - Malay supernatural beings secularised as "the points of the compass." And in the context of "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," spirit is rendered by *dödö* - heart. Similar elasticity is required by the translation of "soul," (variously *noso*, *dödö*, *eheha* and *lumö-lumö* - that part of the incorporeal person traditionally believed to turn into a *bechu* at death). Nor again is this just true of translation into Nias language: in the English King James Bible the same Hebrew word is variously rendered 'mind', 'life', 'person', as well as 'soul' (Cruden 1996:620).

For the word "prophet" the introducers of Christianity thought they had found a tailor-made indigenous concept, the *sama'ele'ö*, "one who channels." Its use, however, had important consequences for Nias Christianity. Since *sama'ele'ö* were (and remain) a not uncommon category of village religious specialists the use of this word appeared to legitimate a far more general access to revelation than the missionaries would have liked, and was thus partly responsible for the proliferation of charismatic religious leaders after the Great Repentance discussed below.

In a process of translation that resonates strongly with the case of *padu* on Sumba described by Hoskins<sup>17</sup> the indigenous notion of *amonita* - roughly correspondent to what we understand by "taboo" - something that is set apart for ritual reasons - was pressed into service to express the Christian notion of "holy"<sup>18</sup>. *Famoni* is the verb form, and traditionally meant "to undergo a series of prohibitions" appropriate to a specific time, as for example at harvest or hunting. These prohibitions would encompass dietary rules, abstinence from sex, and the use of a special vocabulary for significant objects, such as knives. Often this special lexicon would reverse normal meanings, so that a fire, for example, became "that which is freezing cold." *Moni-moni*, where the reduplication gives a noun with a somewhat trivialised sense of the root, refers to the rules and regulations of the village. *Famoni* came

<sup>16</sup> The talent was originally a large unit of Babylonian currency, equivalent to sixty mina.

<sup>17</sup> *Padu* ("bitter") traditionally referred to the taboo on speaking while planting, and came to be applied to Sunday ("the bitter day"), and the church itself ("the bitter house"), with Christian conversion (Hoskins 1987:137,143).

<sup>18</sup> Which also carries its own, rather different pagan legacy of connotation, linking wholeness to health.

to mean "to fast" in a Christian context, and "holy" was rendered as *ni'amonio* - "that which is *moni*-ed," as in the Holy Spirit - *Eheha Ni'amonio* (see above).

Finally we must consider the concept of sin, and its translation into the Nias language. This was again a translation that was to have crucial significance for the process of conversion, which forms the topic of the next and final section of this chapter. It would also be of central importance to understanding contemporary villagers' understandings of sickness. The word chosen to translate the Christian concept of sin was "*horö*". For pagan Niassans *horö* referred to violence, warfare, and the taking of heads. It also referred to adultery, which was seen as a form of violence. *Molau horö* - "to do *horö*" - was to go on a raiding or headhunting expedition, or to commit adultery. For the missionaries such activities were (along with idol worship) the apogee of Nias godlessness, and thus it made sense to them to use *horö* for the Christian concept of sin. For the pre-Christian Niassans however, such violent behaviour was socially approved for young men since it was crucial to the defence, growth, and fertility of the village community. However a kind of danger was associated with *horö* over and above that posed by the enemies' (or cuckold's) spears and swords: the warrior returning to the village from a successful battle or headhunting expedition was supposed to be accompanied by a kind of "heat" referred to as *hara*. Before returning to his house such a warrior was expected to lay down his arms and rub his back against the *adu horö*, a wooden statue, to which the dangerous heat or *hara* arising from his violence would be transferred. Should he neglect this precaution and enter his family house the heat he brought with him was believed to be responsible for subsequent sickness arising within the family. Some informants describe this dangerous "heat" adhering to the person who has just committed an act of *horö* rather in terms of a spirit, the *bechu horö*, which attaches itself to the person.

To this largely morally neutral notion of danger the missionaries added the sense of unethical and irreligious behaviour. This was possible because a partial step in this direction - the moralising of *horö* - had already been made through prior contact with Malay and Acehnese traders in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The "heat" of *horö* came to be called "*hara*," which would appear to be a loan word from the Arabic-Malay "*haram*" - which refers to that which is strongly forbidden or tabooed according to the laws of Islam. According to texts collected by Father Johannes Hämmerle, *hara* was associated with twins, the breech-born, studying magic, feasts of merit, beating gold, travelling abroad and clearing forest. Thus in some accounts from this time "*adu horö*" are referred to as "*adu hara*." Other concepts that would be later useful to the Christian teachers, such as "heaven," (*sorugo* from Malay *surga*) "hell" (*narako* from Malay *naraka*) and "angels" (*malaika* from Malay *malaikat*) were similarly introduced at the same time.

Pagan Ono Niha were not, of course, without ethics. They had highly developed traditions of appropriate behaviour and law, enforced at family level by the head of the family in meetings of all those members of a patrilineage living under one roof, and at village level by councils of the elders (see chapter V). Norms were conceived in terms of repeating the good

behaviour of one's ancestors, of "following in their footsteps," and of being of "straight" (*atulö*), i.e. honest, and not "crooked" (*abila*) character. Ethical or moral rules were always seen as produced by the agency of someone's wishes, that of an elder or ancestor. And thus villagers typically gloss "sin" as "that which displeases the Lord, that which is in conflict with the Word of God."

In a remarkably 'Christian' idiom, an individual's behaviour was likened to the "fruits of their character." Village conventions established typical punishments, often very severe for specific crimes, such as theft and murder. Rates of conversion between persons, labour, pigs, rice and gold allowed for exact compensation at conventional levels of multiplication, with a tax being made by the defendant to the council nobles as the "court costs." These norms and laws, however, did not come under the traditional category of *horö*. They were, though, similarly sanctioned by danger to health and fortune, but through a different mechanism. This mechanism, in the case of law, was the retribution made by the family or village council. In the case of sub-legal norms the mechanism was the pleasure or displeasure of the gods and one's ancestors<sup>19</sup>. By "following in the ancestors' footsteps," making the regular offerings owed to them and performing their wishes one was assured of their blessing; by contravening their wishes and displeasing them one risked their curse. The ancestors were not conceived to be entirely omniscient - the possibility existed of concealing one's behaviour from them, as obviously it did from one's father or the village council - and it is in this sense that modern villagers say that in the past a sin was only a sin if it was found out.

This traditional sense of wrongdoing that attracted retribution from the ancestors was not, as we have seen, conceived of as *horö*. It was, though, conceived in terms of debt. Wrongdoings were punished in council by fines, worked out through customary equivalences between people, gold, rice and pigs. One owed the ancestors performance of their wishes as one owed them offerings of first-fruits at harvest. Here was a strong point of linkage, since the Christian notion of "sin" was throughout the Bible conceived as a debt to God, that which is due to Him, and its punishment as a repayment (Cruden 1996:135). The Old Testament teaches the hard line also characteristic of Nias traditional notions that every sin must be repaid; the New Testament exhorts the forgiveness of others' sins on the model of releasing them from their debt (Matt XVIII 27-32), and offers us Jesus Christ and his death to "redeem" us from our sins, as one might redeem a debt-slave. The Lutheran Protestant church, to which the missionaries belonged, specifically taught that our sins were too "expensive" for us to repay, that we were saved only by the grace of God. Here was a language that Ono Niha could instinctively understand, much of their social and family life being mediated by exchange, much of their law being concerned with failure to repay and short-measuring<sup>20</sup>, their ancestors inflexible

<sup>19</sup> Recall that gods and ancestors are not perceived as different classes of beings: Lowalangi and Laturedanö are the original ancestors of the ancestors.

<sup>20</sup> Beatty, writing specifically about exchange, tells us that in central Nias charging high interest-rates and profiteering were seen as significant causes of misfortune "both to individuals and the community as a whole" (1992:213), and he stresses that today "offences against exchange norms loom large amongst the cardinal sins of vernacular Christianity (1992:214)."

in their demand for the correct offerings. The word used to translate “to forgive” - *efa’ö* - (literally “to put after, to put behind you”) applies equally in Nias idiom to extinguishing a debt, releasing from an obligation, redeeming a debt-slave, and Christ’s redemption of us on the cross, as well as divorce, marriage too, of course, being an exchange relationship.

The notion of wrongdoing, smuggled by the missionaries into the dangerous indigenous category of *horö*, differed from Christian morality - a universal and absolute ethical code overseen by an omniscient God - in being bounded by family and the village community. Families, not individuals, suffered when the ancestors were displeased<sup>21</sup>. Murder was no wrongdoing if the victim (a stranger - *niha bö’ö*) came from a distant village, hence the possibility of headhunting. Slaves had no ancestors, hence the possibility of human sacrifice.

The missionaries, however, taught that secret actions hidden in the individual’s heart, acts of aggression against total strangers, even drumming up spirits to heal or making offerings to their ancestor images, could all have the same catastrophic consequences as failing to pass on the heat of killing to the *horö* idol. This teaching, while at first baffling, was, when historical events caused the suspicion to dawn that it might possibly be true, to have very far-reaching consequences. It is to this process of conversion that we now turn.

## 6.7 The Great Repentance

It was nine years after Denninger’s arrival before the first converts were made, 25 in number, on Easter Day 1874. Progress was painfully slow, and entirely limited to the immediate area around the Dutch garrison at Gunung Sitoli settled by the missionaries, whose stations were all a short walk from one another. Thomas’ mission to Bawölöwalangi and Lagemann’s to Sa’ua in the south of the island both had to retreat in 1888, the first after two years the second after only one, when inter-village warfare made their presence impossible. By 1890 the number of baptisms had risen gradually to 706 (Danandjaja 1971:15). At the turn of the century Dutch road-building and pacification allowed new missions to be established in the west-centre, at Lölöwa’u (1903) and Sifaoro’asi (1905), and finally in the south: Sa’ua (1909) and Hilisimaetanö (1911). Pacification was by no means complete, however, but by 1915, the 50 year Jubilee of the Nias mission, when the last major uprising of Huruma-Lalai was finally put down, approximately 20,000 converts had been made, out of a total population of 135,000 (Schröder 1917:678). It was also in this year that the great rebel chief of Bawömataluo in the south was finally captured and imprisoned.

Missionary Fries organised the celebration of the Jubilee in Gunung Sitoli on the 27th of

<sup>21</sup> The distinction is not clear-cut though (and hence the success of Dr Sundermann’s translation) in that at the upper reaches of the traditional continuum that joins animals to gods the forebears of one’s forebears are the tribal progenitors, and their forebears are the gods, and the wishes, ways and words of the gods and tribal progenitors come to resemble a universal ethical code, uniting as they do the segmentary diversity of the regions of Nias. Additionally the Christian ethical code, or at least the Ten Commandments, derives from the Jewish “tribal progenitor” Moses.

September. He decided to have only native Ono Niha as speakers, and they were invited to speak on two subjects: "What has been gained in Nias during the last fifty years?" and "What lack we yet?" Responses to the second question were guided by four headings: "Deficiency in recognition of truth, the fear of God, the obedience of faith and love to our neighbour" (Kriele 1927:93). The resulting speeches, he later reported, showed "a deep spiritual insight into the situation, [and] had filled him with heart-felt joy" (ibid).

At his station of Humene just south of Gunung Sitoli, Missionary Rudersdorf began to hold weekly Bible study and prayer meetings in his study. These meetings quickly became so popular that all the furniture had to be moved out of the room, and finally meetings had to be moved to the church. The purpose of Rudersdorf's meetings, as of Fries' jubilee celebrations, was to consolidate their work by deepening the religiosity of the converted from the outward sign of baptism to the deep, interior transformation demanded by Lutheran Protestantism. They succeeded beyond all their expectations. The following year, 1916, came to be known by the missionaries as 'the year of the great experience,' and by the Ono Niha as 'the great repentance' (*fangesa sebua*). In the modern historical consciousness of villagers it has become a pivotal marker, marking a transition in epochs as significant, if not more so, than pan-Indonesian *Merdeka* (Independence).

It began with one man, Filemo, who significantly was sick with TB, at the Humene church in April 1916. I tell the story in the words of Pandita F Mendröfa:

"Its beginning came from a single man whose heart was illumined by the Holy Spirit, and who followed the meaning of the Word of God which he heard in church. When he thought on the Bible, which was living in his heart, it became increasingly apparent to him that it could not be proper for him to later receive a place in the Holy Kingdom since God knew the pollution of his many sins; later he would just be thrown into hell with the devils. Thus his heart was very sad, and all he could do was cry that he was a Christian in name only. All those of one house [i.e. his family] were sad too without knowing why; it was thought that that they were sick having been bewitched. And when he was asked for an explanation he replied: "My sin! My sin!"

When he went to see the missionary to ask the meaning of this, he was straightaway convinced that it was not because he was sick or mad, but that the sadness of his heart at his sins was repentance that came from God. The missionary prayed to his Redeemer, and then instructed him on the importance of making peace with those he had wronged. He then set off home, telling the news to strangers.

To begin this straightening out he went home to his father and mother and siblings and informed them of his sins, and he begged their compassion that they would forgive his wrongs and pray with him to his Redeemer that the Lord would forgive him his sin. From this all began to catch the realisation of the sins which he was straightening out; all were sad and cried as if someone had died in their house.

All the neighbours who visited took hold of this grief at sin when they heard the reason for their sadness, and the straightening out he had done with them. This spreading to neighbours and to those of the same village was very rapid, until later it reached all those of the same church.

Those whose hearts were tugged<sup>22</sup> by the Holy Spirit did not neglect to pray and read the Bible (those who could read), and they were tireless in going to see the missionary in the presence of the Spirit of God, and telling him the things that grieved them in their hearts along with [the sinful thoughts] that grew in their minds. And the missionary then instructed them on what thoughts it was proper to have (in accordance with the Word of God), and which others should be avoided" (BNKP 1986:46-8).

The grief and distress occasioned by the awareness of sin took spectacularly physical form<sup>23</sup>. The unabsolved sinners wailed and screamed as if in intolerable physical pain as well as mental anguish. Very frequently they literally became ill, only recovering with absolution and the "straightening out" of their crimes, many of which had been committed decades previously.

"There were other repenters who did not seek out those who could point out the way to them, who just thought themselves the way to come out of their grief at sin. And very quickly the way was opened to the devil to make men stray, and there were those who accompanied him into madness (speaking nonsense), who were urged by him to abuse their bodies, and who were made by him into false prophets.

... In the time following 1916 the repentance expanded round about very fast. Like sparks from a fire blown by the wind it couldn't be kept in a single place, and couldn't be prevented from spreading to other places like the wind (see John III 8). It headed for Sogaedu and the south; it crossed Gunung Sitoli towards the north; it crossed Lölöwua towards the west; and it crossed Sifaoro'asi, and went on spreading inwards to the villages of the wicked people in the centre. It came to an end after two to three months crossing all the districts of Nias, until it reached all the ends of Nias" (BNKP 1986:49).

Mendröfa describes the progress of this spectacular movement in terms that startlingly resemble the progress of epidemic disease. Indeed the metaphor of fire blown in the wind makes this connection explicit to Ono Niha, for whom dreams of fire traditionally betoken a coming epidemic. Filemo, with whom the movement originated, was himself sick with TB. This was a time of widespread health problems, caused by village populations, denser than ever before, suffering from overcrowding in a context of less-than-perfect sanitation. Resistance to the Dutch had finally collapsed, but had considerably worsened the health situation. Villages at war forbade their members to leave, and infectious diseases which thrive on poor sanitation, such as cholera, would suddenly decimate such tightly packed populations. Sickness, and especially epidemics, as well as misfortune in general (all of which were widespread at this time) were traditionally seen as signalling divine or ancestral displeasure with their descendants. The combination of social crisis, epidemics and military failure; the inability of their *ere* to adequately deal with it; the desirability for

<sup>22</sup> The term for this action of God "tugging the hearts" of sinners - *sugi*- also refers to the action of visiting someone to reclaim a debt.

<sup>23</sup> Cultural factors influencing the translation of 'sin' on Nias are thus in marked contrast to the Tagalog case described by Rafael 1993:134-5. For Tagalog converts "the prescribed internalization of guilt and repentance was circumvented" (ibid 134) because sins were attached to the *loob* (soul), the contents of which were understood to come from outside. Penitents thus appropriated the sins of others as offerings to appease the priest as figure of authority.

the common people of disengaging themselves from traditional obligations to nobles; the missionary translation's insistence that the Christian God was one with their God Lowalangi; the continuity of hymn singing, Bible-reading and preaching as oral styles with traditional *hoho* chanted poetry, *lagia* singing, and *orahu* oratory; the manifest efficacy of the German's technology<sup>24</sup>; combined with the fact that the missionaries were German and so distinct from the Dutch colonial aggressors (see Danandjaja 1971:25) provided an irresistible conjunction whose results we have seen. The indigenous terms '*Lowalangi*' and '*horö*' interpellated - commanded the attention of - the villager; sickness was experienced as the result of wrongdoing, which in turn was understood as *horö*/sin, thus compelling repentance within the discursive and institutional framework of Christianity.

Beatty describes a ceremony known as the *fombuvu* (Beatty 1992:211-3) which in central Nias was the traditional response to epidemics and other catastrophes believed to be caused by divine displeasure at human exchange sins: profiteering and short-measuring as well as adultery, "taking what belonged to others." At this ceremony a pig and a chicken were sacrificed to Laturedanö, interest-rates were lowered and the collective sins of the community were publicly confessed. Beatty argues that "The Great Repentance... found a traditional prototype for expiation and public confession in the *fombuvu*" (Beatty 1992:213). While noone in the south, where I did my research, had any memory of this specific ceremony, the logic that informs it clearly was present. Beatty's suggestion is consistent with my discussion above of the traditionally recognised kinds of wrongdoing that gained urgency through the missionaries' assimilation of them to the other traditional category of *horö*.

The missionaries themselves, given their initial long and fruitless struggle, saw the sudden and baffling repentance movement not so much as a direct result of their own efforts, but as "a mighty work of our God" (Kriele 1927:102). The Nias minister Mendröfa combined a person-centred (originating with a single individual - Filemo) with a sociological account, stressing how the 'contagion' of repentance spread through families and villages as kin confessed to kin, and jumping from village to village when out-married women returned home to visit their families of origin (BNKP 1986:49).

Mendröfa's account also emphasises the need for authoritative control of this process of repentance, which could otherwise go astray. Away from missionary guidance millennial expectations of the second coming of Christ occurred.

"One man declared himself to be the returning Christ; he was accompanied by a woman believed to be a prophetess and by his sister as 'the Holy Ghost.' These three, followed by a crowd of spiritually intoxicated people, marched from place to place in order to proclaim their revelations and receive the homage of believers. When they arrived at one station, with the intention of converting the missionary in charge, the latter immediately got the excited people, who were quite exhausted with hunger and thirst, into the hospital and provided them with food" (Kriele 1927:96).

<sup>24</sup> Understood in a sense broad enough to encompass reading, writing and hymn-singing as well as quinine, etc. etc.

Stories survive of men, so appalled by their new awareness of their sins, and consequences of them to come, that they committed suicide. Despite - actually in large measure because of - such excesses, the Great Repentance saw Christianity taking on a distinctive Nias character. Through the miracles, charismatic leadership, possession by, and even apparitions of, the Holy Spirit, the power of Christianity was appropriated and became part of Nias tradition. The initial fervour calmed, but the process of repentance continued, and by 1925 there were 65,000 baptised Christians on Nias, out of a total population of some 180,000, and a further 23,000 awaiting baptism. The huge increase in demand for instruction, Bibles and churches stretched RMG facilities to the utmost, and it was at this time that Fries began the policy of instituting a course, less thorough than the Ombölata seminary for teachers and ministers, to train evangelists (*sinenge*, used to translate "apostles" in the Bible) who could preach the true gospel in their home villages. 100 of these were in action by 1925 (ibid 102).

There was a general revival of the *fangesa dödö* movement after the second world war, at the difficult time following the Japanese occupation and Independence, when the old élite, supported by the Dutch, saw opposition from the Christian, young and progressive sectors of village communities reinforced by the anti-feudal discourse of the new Indonesian state. Today BNKP ministers tend to characterise the first 1916 wave of repentance as the "true" or "straight" repentance, and dwell on the inauthenticity of the latter period of enthusiasm. The latter period, which continues to this day, is supposed to be characterised by a greater physicality (see BNKP 1986:54-7, 59-69), involving ecstatic dancing, trance, speaking in tongues, prophecy and the seeing of visions. Typically repentance groups or circles meet weekly, and are led by a specially gifted repentance specialist (*tuka fangesa dödö*). Prayers and Bible-readings are followed by hymn-singing accompanied by hand-clapping, which leads to trance on behalf of the group leader, and perhaps others who regularly attend the group. Leaders and participants are of both sexes, but these meetings do seem to have a special appeal to women, who participate more centrally and enthusiastically than the men. The sick attend and hope to be healed. Repentance groups operate outside the bounds of institutional Christianity; they deal with fears - constituted by Christian translations as demonic - of witchcraft and spirits with which institutional Christianity is unwilling regularly to deal. More will be said about these repentance groups in the following chapter on contemporary Christianity, as well as in chapter IX on contemporary village healing; for now, suffice it to be noted that while the central BNKP officially disapproves of such charismatic religiosity, at village level this disapproval may not be sensed, and the groups may be carried on with the informal approval, and even attendance, of village *sinenge*.



## CHAPTER VII

# CHRISTIANITY TODAY

### 7.1 The proliferation of sects

The first synod of the Nias Protestant Church, the BNKP (*Banua Niha Keriso Protestan*), took place in 1936, though the Lutheran Protestant German missionaries of the RMG remained until they were rounded up in 1940 at the outbreak of the Second World War. This left local ministers effectively in charge, and the first *Ephorus* (Bishop) was Pandita Atoföna Harefa. A handful of German ministers<sup>1</sup> and other mission personnel returned in the fifties, but with the proclamation of Indonesian Independence in 1945 leadership of the Protestant church had been officially transferred to indigenous ministers. In 1948 the BNKP joined the newly-formed International Council of Churches; in 1950 the Indonesian Council of Churches, and in 1964 the East Asia Christian Conference, seeking and maintaining strong institutional links with the international Christian community, both within and beyond the Indonesian state. The BNKP retained contacts with Germany, and after 1956 several BNKP ministers and nurses travelled to Germany for training.

The post-war period saw the proliferation of Protestant sects and the consolidation of the Catholic church, all of which required legitimation from the state. Today Methodist, Pentecostal, Seventh-Day-Adventist and Salvation Army churches are all to be found on Nias. In the villages where I did research the charismatic religiosity of Pentecostals tended to attract disapproval as being self-inflationary, their financing as corrupt. The BNKP itself has seen a number of offshoots, all strongly disapproved by the conservative faithful. Regrettably I have very little data on these other churches on Nias, but congregation numbers are small for all but the BNKP and its offshoot, the BKP (see below). Such new churches require licensing by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion before they can operate legally: in New Order Indonesia legitimate religion (*agama*) must, according to the state Pancasila ideology, be subordinate to development and the state.

In 1933 in Sogae'adu the repentance specialist Ama Wohakhi attracted a huge following to his repentance meetings, including teachers from the Ombölata seminary. Their sect is known as the *Fa'awösa* ("the friendship alliance"), and has subsequently split into ("the friendship alliance of Jesus" and "the friendship alliance of the Spirit". Orthodox BNKP criticise them as being syncretic in their teaching, including Islamic doctrine, and following

<sup>1</sup> Dörmann, Schneider and Illing. Sister Hanna Blindow ran a girls' school in Gunung Sitoli until her death in 1959, when her work was continued by Sisters Dorothy and Ruth into the 80s. Sister Käte Jung worked on Nias from 1936 to 1972 (with 12 years forced absence from 1940-1952). She is remembered for her work at the Gunung Sitoli Public Hospital, in particular for her interest in local herbal medicine.

their own hearts rather than the authority of ministers. There is a *Fa'awösa* church nearby in Hilimondregeraya, and Hilinawalö villagers told me that their followers touch their heads after praying, using the same right-hand-wiping-back-hairline-from-forehead motion used traditionally to protect from *bechu*, and that their ministers can communicate with snakes, calling them out around the church (with Mark 16:18 as their manifesto).

During the turbulent period following the Japanese occupation a BNKP minister, Pandita Singamböwö Zebua went to study at the Theology School at Sipoholon in the Batak highlands of mainland Sumatra. On his return he too, with the support of the *Tuhenöri*<sup>2</sup> Adolf Gea, started a breakaway church in 1946 that came to be known as AMIN (*Angowuloa Masehi Idanoi/Indonesia Nias- Nias Group of Indonesian Protestants*). In 1950 another BNKP minister, Pandita Dalihuku Marundruri, together with three other BNKP ministers, established the ONKP (*Orahua Niha Keriso Protestant - Traditional Council of Christian Protestants*) splinter church.

Of significantly more importance to the present study is the recent secession of the BKPN (*Banua Keriso Protestan Nias*) from the BNKP. Accounts of the reasons for the split vary. The movement began in 1993/4 amongst the BNKP congregation of Bawömataluo, the largest and most powerful village of the south today as it was in the pre-colonial past. The BNKP had always been run from the north, with its head offices in Gunung Sitoli. Ephorus (bishops) have always been members of northern clans, such as Harefa, Mendröfa, Hulu, Telaumbanua. The language of worship has always been the dialect of the north. For some time BNKP elders from the south had asked for there to be two synods, one for the north and one for the south, but the administration would not countenance this, as threatening the unity of the Nias church. There were many complaints that funds from Germany were all targeted at projects in the north, not the south. The council for clerical appointments was felt by southerners to be nepotistic in its appointment of ministers, preferring those from the north.

The secession was largely triggered by two events. A change in the administrative structure meant that the former official village headman of Bawömataluo and the present village headman of Hilinawalö, amongst others, lost their seats. Pandita Sarumaha, a southerner who was minister incumbent at one of the largest churches in Gunung Sitoli was removed from his position, apparently against the wishes of many of his congregation. Southern congregations in some villages simply re-painted the signs of their churches, replacing the 'BNKP' with 'BKPN.' The more conservative elements in the communities complained vigorously: they had no wish to secede, and their churches, along with their bells etc. had been effectively hijacked by the new sect with no compensation.

The BKPN tends to recruit among the younger and more progressive elements in the community, while those loyal to the BNKP tend to be those elders whose status is of a more

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<sup>2</sup> *Tuhenöri* were the precolonial "Lords of an allied ring of villages" who were taken up as regional chiefs by the Dutch and Japanese. Under the Indonesian state they were soon to be replaced by *Kepala Kecamatan*, or 'Camat:' District Heads, between *Kepala Desa* (Village Heads) and *Bupati* (Regional Governors) in the state administrative structure.

traditional nature. Thus in Hilinawalö the BKPN group includes the village headman and the village nurse, while the BNKP group includes the two traditional village chiefs (*balö zi'ulu*).

Violent, even bloody struggles took place between the two groups for possession of the churches. The situation was particularly serious in Botohilitanö, where bloody violence pitted brother against brother, son-in-law against father-in-law. Armed guards were mounted outside the churches, and men went to Sunday worship armed with swords and spears. The police and military were called in, and attempted to enforce the sharing of churches, with one congregation having access in the morning, the other in the afternoon. Finally, at the end of 1997, central government came down in favour of the BKPN, ostensibly out of fear of civil violence and because the majority are BKPN<sup>3</sup>. A *Surat Penyataan* (Letter of Pronouncement) was issued, legitimating the BKPN appropriation of BNKP churches and property. The remaining BNKP populations have, with a great sense of grievance, set about fund-raising and rebuilding new churches (see below for a description of the fund-raising auctions and blessing of new churches).

I was told (by Ama Wati, a BNKP elder - see prologue to chapter VI) the following rather engaging story about the origin of Catholicism in the south of Nias: In 1939, at the time of missionary Michel, a certain Fobörö Halawa was introduced to the missionary and his wife. Frau Michel refused to shake his hand, thinking it dirty. He took offence, and left for Padang to look for another religion with Sohiro Dachi and Famasa Wau. In Padang they met Catholic priests, and thus brought Catholicism back to south Nias. Whether or not the story is apocryphal it does suggest that Catholicism's appeal rests to a significant extent - not in its 'neo-pagan' cults of Mary and the saints, as orthodox Protestants often suggest - but in part as an alternative to those who have some reason to be dissatisfied with the Protestant church.

A further appeal is its ongoing institutional dependence on the powerfully foreign. One might guess that the independence of the Protestant church would have an overwhelming appeal to the post-colonial Ono Niha, and to some extent of course this is true, and a source of Protestant pride. But within the Protestant church there is also a potent sense of nostalgia for the time of the German missionaries. The clinics and schools are often suggested to have lost their excellence at Independence, and critics of the BNKP sometimes suggest that its administration has 'lost the plot' since the missionaries left. The Catholic church's institutional dependence on Rome furthermore means it is a richer institution than the BNKP. The new church of Santa Maria in Gunung Sitoli is a staggering showpiece of modern architecture; and everywhere Catholic churches are more colourful than their Protestant counterparts. The ongoing presence of German and Italian Capuchin friars lend the potency that for Ono Niha attaches to the foreign, and their schools have a very good reputation. It is perhaps for this combination of reasons that the constituency of Catholicism in Nias villages is slightly weighted in favour of the nobles and their descendants.

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<sup>3</sup> In Hilinawalö there are now 190 BKPN families, 80 BNKP (and 40 Catholic). There has, however, been some evidence of a trickle of families back to the BNKP camp.

The enculturation of Catholicism on Nias since Vatican II has also been important on Nias in entering local debates on the value and significance of traditional culture. In this respect it is noteworthy that the most thorough recording and study of traditional culture on Nias has been done by a German Capuchin Friar, Father Johannes Hämmerle, to whom the people of Nias and anyone who seeks to study them owe a quite enormous debt of gratitude. Where almost all other outsiders have made it their business to destroy or remove the old material culture of Nias, Pastor Johannes, assisted by Sdr. Melkhior Duha, has established the first foundation (the Yayasan Pusaka Nias) and museum (in Gunung Sitoli) for their conservation. Architectural elements in Catholic churches now draw many traditional elements into their design. The Hilinawalö church has a traditional house built into its roof, and a *daro-daro* shaped altar. At Tögizita the font is composed of a large stone *adu ni'o niha* (stone idol in human shape) topped with a bowl and cross. Folk dance troupes perform in traditional costume at church festivals. Catholic Sunday worship at Hilinawalö concludes with a rousing "hu! heeee!" drawn from traditional chants. To Protestants this is all rather shocking, retrogressive, even blasphemous. But given the high status constituency of Catholicism, as well as the flowing together of the heartfelt appeal in all of Hämmerle's work to study tradition and conserve those parts that remain of value, with New Order state initiatives to embellish modernity with the non-threatening aspects of traditional culture, a reaction is occurring to the wholesale rejection of tradition characteristic of Protestantism, and the Old Order Indonesian state.

It is perhaps inappropriate - even offensive - to treat Islam within a section on Christian sects. However, as a department of institutionalised religion on Nias whose significance hugely outstrips the number of its recruits, it demands discussion in this context. Furthermore, what is most significant in the context of the present discussion - tracing the genealogies of the modern categories of magic and religion and thus modern attitudes to 'magical healing' and 'religious healing' - is Christian perceptions of Islam on Nias. Islam began on Nias with the seventeenth century visits of traders, largely Acehnese, at ports such as Lahewa, Gunung Sitoli and Onolimbu. According to Moslem informants the Acehnese did not make overt efforts to proselytise, but their technologies, knowledge and instruction were sought by Ono Niha. Some Acehnese actually settled on Nias, and a small, enclosed Moslem community arose at Mudik, near Gunung Sitoli. From them Ono Niha sought instruction particularly in *pencak silat* (the Malay martial art), in ways of healing (*perdukunan*) and in esoteric knowledge (*ilmu bathin*). Though conversion to Islam was not made a precondition of such instruction, the practices taught characteristically involved Islamic prayers and written spells. These Islamic prayers (*mantera*) and written spells (*azimat*) were subsequently disseminated across the island through the parent/chosen child, mother's brother/sister's son and teacher/pupil links through which magical and healing knowledge was inherited (see below IX.10).

Only where marriage to a Moslem was concerned was it necessary to make the formal submission to Allah whereby one joined Islam, and it was in this fashion that the earliest

conversions were made. The Mudik community nevertheless remained largely self-contained and insulated from the island's population at large. It hardly needs to be stated that once a Nias man had converted to Islam his sons and their patrilineal descendants would remain Moslem. Strong pressure would also be exerted on other men to convert on marrying their daughters. Different kinds of conversions began much later, during the late colonial period (i.e. the 1920s and '30s), when pagan nobles' sons were sent by the Dutch to the mainland to be educated. There it occasionally happened that they would form friendships and alliances with other Moslem young men from elsewhere in the Indies, and would convert to Islam as part of identification with anti-colonial Islamic nationalism.

Today only 8% of the Nias population are Moslem, and these are largely confined to coastal areas (Siahaan et al. undated:72). However, the Indonesian state is, of course, though avowedly secular, predominantly Moslem, and at the time of my fieldwork the Governor of Nias, Lafau, is - for the first time - a Nias Moslem. In the villages of south Nias where I worked there was only one resident Moslem family, that of Ama Lase in Hilinawalö. He had been posted there as a teacher by the government, and was personally respected and welcomed by the Christian villagers. He brought a fine strain of poultry with him from Gunung Sitoli, whose offspring were much sought after by the Hilinawalö villagers. They would also visit him when they were sick, since he had a reputation as a healer (*dukun*). He has an extensive knowledge of local medicinal herbs, and widely uses Islamic *mujarrobat* - prayers and *azimat* - in his practice. However, despite this personal tolerance for Ama Lase and his family I heard much muttered concern all over south Nias about the threat of creeping Islamicisation. The following stories told to me by villagers are typical:

"Ama Lase is here as part of a government programme to send Moslem teachers to, and thus to construct Musholla in, every village. They are planting Islam in Christian villages, so when Christian boys marry their daughters our sons will convert to Islam."

"The DPRD committee (who elect the Governor) was forced by the Governor of North Sumatra to elect Lafau, and not the more popular Harefa. Larosa, the last Governor, was very popular, and there was much development during his term. He died unexpectedly soon after the election of Lafau, and it is said that his death was caused by disappointment at Lafau's election."

"Have you heard that the Javanese government minister Probo Sutejo, while on an official visit to Nias, offered family heads who would convert to Islam 2m rupiah (£500) "development money." According to the story fifty did so in Lölöwa'u district, but have subsequently returned to the Christian church."

It is widely perceived, and resented, that Moslems get the best government jobs, and that government funds go to building mosques, but Christian congregations have to raise money themselves to build their churches. Many Christians typically do not view Islam with the relativity and tolerance demanded by the state; they characterise it not as an alternative religion, but as lies spread by the devil.

"Did you know that 15% of Jakarta Moslems have converted to Christianity? And have you heard the story of the lecturer at the University of Indonesia, a *hajji* and a *pesantren* teacher, who converted to Christianity, leaving his wife and children to

travel around preaching, with the gift that wherever he goes he finds himself able to speak the language?"

Allegiances to the various religious sects may, at times of conflict, override the ties of kinship. Thus stories repeatedly emphasise how the struggles in Botohili pitted brother against brother, son-in-law against father-in-law. The various sects of Christianity in the village have today come to take on aspects of the sociological function previously exercised by kinship groups such as the *mado*, or clans. At events that unite the village as a community, such as funerals of the very high status, ritual roles in the ceremonies which would previously have been apportioned to wife-givers, clan of the deceased's family, and wife-takers, are now allotted to BNKP, Catholic, and BKPN congregations, whose choirs, for example, will perform in succession.

Consistent with our discussion of belief as practice rather than a state of mind (chapter V), when elaborating the salient differences between their own and others' sects it is practices - such as the position of the body in prayer - that are stressed, and not differences in belief.

## 7.2 Centres and margins of orthodoxy

Christian discourse is not homogenous. The Bible, which many would see as the pure origin of authoritative Christianity, is itself a bundle of different religious attitudes, varying most dramatically between Old and New Testament, but also with the different writers of the former and latter. Christian discourse when reproduced by villagers (in explaining sickness for example) varies too, and the variation may be simplified as a range along a continuum from the more orthodox, that is, closely reproducing the dogma of the church (whether Catholic or Protestant) as produced by its authoritative centres, to the more syncretic or vernacular Christianity inflected by traditional values of those distant from such centres. Thus the "repentance healing" to be discussed in chapter IX, characterised by possession by the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and the exorcism of disease-causing spirits, is seen by those at the syncretic pole as the central Christian ritual, whereas by the orthodox as a dangerous straying from the true path. Experts at the centres of all three of the incommensurable discourses that make up village culture promote an 'authentic,' pure vision of totalising completeness, and tend to reject the totalising claims of the other two discourses<sup>4</sup>.

Factors predisposing individuals to fall towards the orthodox pole are (in decreasing order of predictivity): being a practising minister (*fandrita*); a theological education; a role as schoolteacher; IKIP teacher-training; status as civil servant; institutional appointment as *satua* (church elder) or *Sinenge* (evangelist) without full theological training; education to

<sup>4</sup> Volkman's comments (1985:14-5) on Toraja adat elders' "penchant for order and completeness" could just as well apply to Nias. Thus too Steedly describes Karo church elders' rejection "of the view of adat as a total way of life" (1993:70).

high school level or higher; having a parent falling into one of the above categories. Factors predisposing individuals to be towards the syncretic pole are: old age combined with low education; and having one's own (and one's parents') status achieved and identity worked out exclusively through traditional institutions of nobility, kinship, *orahu* speechmaking, etc., to exclusion of "modern" status through education, civic appointment, role in church. As in the circle from which we draw the metaphorical language of centres and peripheries, the syncretic periphery stands for very many more people than the few but influential centres: the ministers and educators who self-consciously struggle against the errors of primitive tradition of their pupils and congregations.

The centripetal force is the social aspiration by which the people imitate the style of the prestigious centre. An irresistible gravitational pull is generated by the centre of the Christian sphere sharing the same coordinates with the centre of the State sphere. These coordinates are "the modern style," in which Protestant values concur with the ideology of state welfare education programmes or PKK (see below X.7) manifested in clothing, houses, consumption choices, etc. Given that such imitation focuses on outward appearance a continuum can develop on a psychological as well as a sociological level: within a single individual an 'orthodox' exterior may conceal a more 'syncretic' interior. However the interiorising thrust of Lutheran Christianity, the notion of 'personal conscience,' flows together with the heart-focused radical interiorising of local-style repentance, and causes the inward to catch up with the outward consumption choices.

The centrifugal force in this social distribution of orthodoxy is the marginality of the village to institutional Christianity, whose centres (the Council in Jakarta, Jerusalem<sup>5</sup>, Rome, the theological colleges) are international and foreign, in stark contrast to the rootedness of paganism in the local. Communion - likewise the mass for the Catholics - is often not celebrated at the village churches for two to three months at a time, it being this long between visits of properly trained *fandrita* (ministers) or *pastor* (Catholic priests). These true centres of the parish congregations are thus absent from the village most of the time, and the churches are managed by briefly-trained *Sinenge* (evangelists) typically self-selected by the enthusiasm of their repentance, and untrained *Satua Gereja* (church elders), chosen for their maturity and social prestige.

To convey the background and actual working out of the production of orthodoxy - the manner in which authoritative centres of discourse are made - I can do no better than reproduce the self-account of a village boy who is attending theological college in Jakarta. Akadira's account clearly manifests the tension between official and popular understandings: we can see how he is being taught Christian doctrine at the authoritative centre of Christianity, the theological school. The Christianity he learns is designed to be the absolute truth, uninflected by local custom. A course in anthropology is even included to make this point. He

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<sup>5</sup> A typical ambition of BNKP ministers is to make the pilgrimage from Nias to the Holy Land. The maps that open the Nias bible, outside of geography classes the only material with which villagers ponder the place of Nias in the world, relentlessly stress the remoteness of Nias from the sacred landscape in which the Christian religion is rooted.

learns to explicitly condemn traditional village healers, even those practising simple herbal medicine; but when he and his fellow students fall sick they respond to the sickness in terms of possession by devils, which I shall argue in the next two chapters is the sphere of traditional explanations that is most vital today because it is an element of traditional understandings reinforced by the concurring discourse of Christianity.

### 7.3 Akadira goes to Theological College

“In the beginning, before I entered here, I didn’t have the slightest wish to go to Theology College. Since I was a child my ambition had been to go on to a technical college after junior high and study electronics. As it happened, though, my parents were afraid to send me away to a school outside Nias, and so I went to high school in Teluk Dalam. After I graduated I wanted to go on to higher education, but my parents could not agree, not having the money. In the end I asked for 50,000 rupiah from my parents and went on *rantau* to Medan and worked in a small restaurant for three months. After that I went to Padang and worked on a building site pouring cement for four months. The work was so heavy that finally, since I had no money left, I wrote to my father and he came and brought me back to Nias. For two years I helped my parents in their work.

In March 1996 I heard some information that undergraduates were being enrolled at the BKPKN Synod office in Teluk Dalam, to go to Theology School. My heart moved me to take this up, and I prayed to the Lord to help me become His servant, and to help me to obtain the permission of my parents. For two months I continually prayed that the Lord might make me worthy to become His instrument, as well as for the 275,000 rupiah schoolfees, not counting transport from Teluk Dalam to Jakarta, and other necessities too. In May I told my parents, and they agreed. The only important thing for me was my struggle to let the Lord change and renew my life with the power of His Holy Spirit. And when I thought of my childhood up to the present I saw many of my actions that displeased the heart of God, amongst others stealing, drinking, smoking, gambling. I constantly struggled and surrendered to the Lord, that my sins might be forgiven, and that I might be renewed and purified through His death, and that he might accept me as His servant.

On the 12th July 1996 thirty of us students left for the Arastamar Evangelical High School of Theology (SETIA) in Jakarta. Before leaving we had to collect photocopies of our high school and examination diplomas, pass photos, certificates of confirmation and baptism, certificates of good character from the *Sinenge* and village headman. After arriving in Jakarta I enrolled, filling in the forms, and being formally asked if I truly wished to be formed, educated, and obey all the school rules. I replied that I was ready.

A week before classes began we had to undergo ‘orientation’ at the hands of the bullying prefects, which reduced me to tears by the end. This went on for a week, and the next Monday classes began. After persevering for a month my faith began to wobble, to the point that the feeling arose to give up the course and go home. I wept on account of my lack of resolution and endurance.

There was no time at all to rest. A rule forbade us to leave the campus, to have girlfriends, or to smoke, and from Monday to Friday our time was full. We got up at four in the morning and prayed alone and then worship began at half past. After worship we did jobs in the kitchen, garden or yard, washed, and then classes began at eight through eleven thirty. After classes came midday worship until one, then lunch, and at two thirty classes again until four thirty, after which we washed again. We ate dinner at



six, and at seven we began studying until half past nine. We said our prayers in our room, and went to sleep at ten. Our food was rice with tofu and tempe.

Life went on like this for a year and a half, and it was very heavy for me. I wrote to my parents to ask for money, but there was no reply. Until with the Lord's help the way was opened whereby another church sponsored our classes as well as our transport expenses for the practical work course.

When one of our friends on the course was possessed by a devil or otherwise sick, all we students would really pray together over our sick friend for the Lord to heal them, and their sickness would disappear. They were not cured by our power, but we were truly touched by the power of the Lord. And I myself witnessed that through prayer all my problems and requests were answered and fulfilled by the Lord.

And indeed as our studies deepened we came to learn that God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit is an inseparable unity. We learnt the challenge of sin, or actions inappropriate to the Lord's wishes, which displease God. We learnt that God would not permit Satan to make mischief with or annihilate His people - those people who believed and accepted Jesus as their Saviour and God. So that wherever he was, the servant of the Lord had a duty always to denounce [evil] and tell the Gospel, so that there will be no more healers, prophets, magic, and so that they and all other forces of darkness will be confounded, along with various other traditional ways that really conflict with the Word of God. And all the treatments performed by all the healers, both from leaves, stems, and other ingredients, also conflict with the Will of God. We come to know and understand that the only way to overcome these afflictions is prayer, that if we pray in His name our requests are answered.

The verse from the Bible that made my heart firm and strong was John XVI:94: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Lord but through me." And from this I concluded that in my opinion traditional ways - especially of Nias - are opposed to what we were taught in the classes.

Now we are back on Nias doing our KKN practical for six months. There are one, or sometimes two, of us in each village, and we are meant to teach and motivate the congregations, so that all such things as healers, prophets and all the medicines that are believed to cure, whether made from threads or leaves or whatever, we appeal for them to be cast away, to be left behind, that only prayer should be performed when problems or sickness are experienced. If we pray to the Lord, the Lord will surely answer, and heal us.

For a year and a half now I have studied and delved in the Bible, and in this time too I have repented, and I feel how very far different is my life now than before I repented. The evidence is that I no more do those things like stealing, drinking, smoking, gambling, challenging my parents, and all the things that are evil in the Lord's eyes. I am grateful for the goodness of the Lord in calling me to be His servant. And I now believe and am convinced that I have been saved because I have received Jesus Christ as my personal saviour. And all this is not through my own skills, but through the strength of the Holy Spirit and the leadership of the Lord, to the glory of the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Thus I witness the experiences of my life, and may the Lord be with us. Amen. God bless."

## 7.4 Church services, celebrations of life cycle and calendrical feasts

Together with the Saturday trip to market, Sunday morning church-going - *möi ba migu* "going to Sunday" - defines the periodicity of the village week. The prohibition (*amonita*) of labour on the holy (*ni' amoni'ö*) day is taken seriously. In the morning until it is time for church the youngsters gather in groups round their guitars in the village street, and adults are busy ironing shirts and fixing hair styles. By 10.30 a.m., when the bells begin to ring, processions of women lead in colourful streams up the way to each of the churches. They wear a combination of dresses, two-pieces, and Javanese-style *kebaya* with *sarong*; some have their hair dressed in buns, in the Javanese style; many carry multicoloured umbrellas. The men come after and are much fewer in number - though all women like to go to church if they are allowed often their menfolk would rather rest, and only go if they have some position whose reputation they must uphold. Thus the men in church are those of significant status in either church or state hierarchies, the *Satua Gereja* (church elders), the village headman's and his secretary's (vice-headman's) apparat, the schoolteachers and civil servants. They wear uncomfortable-looking suits and ties with tie pins, handkerchiefs and dark glasses. As we enter the church it is noticeable that a largely female congregation faces an area at the front inhabited only by grand looking men. This area is defined by chairs with desks and a raised platform and it is here that the *Guru Jumaat* (congregation leader/teacher), the *Sinenge* (evangelist), the *Satua Gereja* and prestigious others sit. If it is one of the special occasions, every two or three months, when the minister or priest comes to give communion to Protestant or Catholic congregations respectively, this man is dramatically marked off by difference in dress. In his more usual absence the service is taken by the *Lektor* for the Catholics, or the *Guru Jumaat* for the Protestants.

The service itself consists of the familiar formula of hymn-singing, bible-reading, sung responses, led prayers, a sermon and a blessing. The hymn tunes, with their relentlessly spondaic rhythms, are perhaps a little dour, but this is compensated for by the choral group performances that follow the sermon. On a typical Sunday there may be as many as four of these groups performing, (stretching to up to twenty at the big churches at Christmas - a three and a half hour marathon service), and they range from the matronly women's choirs with their elaborate parts and harmonies, with a small male tenor and bass section, singing in Nias language, to the row of teenage girls singing in Indonesian, three well-scrubbed and combed teenage boys standing behind them strumming their guitars. The sound of these various groups rehearsing in the evenings and in the early mornings before everyone goes to the fields is constitutive - together with the guitars, the crickets, and the squeal of pigs, of the aural atmosphere of Nias village life. On high days and holidays a Casio keyboard and an amplification system add a chaotic *lachömi* (radiant glory) to proceedings.

The sermons, though vigorous and stern, have a rolling music to them that is strangely soothing, built out of a serendipitous combination of traditional oratorical dualisms and Biblical cadence<sup>6</sup>. Despite the almost narcotic combination of the preacher's voice, the

heat radiating from the corrugated iron roof, outside the windows the golden midday sunlight and the sounds of insects, birds and children, I was always surprised how well my friends could remember the contents of the sermon, and even the Bible-readings, when I asked them later. Texts and expositions were familiar and recognisable to me as the same as those the Church of England and my schools produced for me every Sunday as a child: the only cultural particularity that stands out was perhaps a greater weighting towards the description of sin and exhortation to repentance in the Nias churches.

What does stand out as characteristic of Nias worship was the stress on the giving of *ame'ela* - "offerings," a category of exchange defined by the lack of expectation of symmetric return<sup>7</sup>. Three times during the service the plates are passed around. Before, throughout, and after the Protestant service an irregular stream of women approach the *Guru Jumaat* with a bundle of bank notes in their hand. He grasps the hand containing the bank notes, pronounces a prayer of blessing, and retains the cash, writing down the amount and the giver's name in a huge ledger. This is known as *intensio* or *fangandrö saoha gölö* - "giving thanks," and it is given by those with a favour to ask as well as to give thanks for a boon granted. Thanking God after the event is typical of those closer to the authoritative centres of Christianity, while those more distant from such centres attempt to secure blessings in advance through offerings. It is not untypical for Nias church services to conclude with the reading out of the church finances, involving the careful naming of benefactors. This illustrates how the official doctrine that we cannot reciprocate the gifts we receive from God coexists with the popular feeling that blessings and afflictions should be met with offerings.

At the lifecycle celebrations of birth, baptism, confirmation, marriages and funerals a ceremony is performed by the family led by the *Guru Jumaat* (or *Lektor* for the Catholics), either in church or in the family home, in addition to the traditional customs, which minimally consist of the butchering, patrilineal and affinal distribution, cooking and eating of pork, and the giving of advice and blessings by family elders. At marriages the service in Church comes after the extended bridewealth negotiations and exchanges and before the tearful traditional ceremony where the bride's family say farewell and give advice and blessings to her and their son-in-law. At funerals the church service, held not in church but around the coffin, set out in the semi-private space outside the family house, concludes the traditional phase of all-night speechmaking, coffin-making, gambling and lamenting around the corpse. Always the movement from houses to churches allows for the processions that identify the groups meeting in the ceremony, men and women, patrilineage-mates and affines, the various church congregations.

The high point of the church calendar is Christmas and the New Year. Before Christianity (and the new strains of rice seed that can be cropped twice or even three times in a year) village ritual effervescence was periodised by the stellar and agricultural year so that the

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<sup>6</sup> Hints of this style can be detected in the language and style towards the end of Akadira's account of Theological College, above.

<sup>7</sup> "Voluntary" gifts made to healers in return for their services fall into this category of *ame'ela* to distinguish them from a price (*böli*) set by someone in advance.

period after harvest, falling in March, was the time when, first, families united with the first-fruits feast of commensality with the ancestors, and secondly villages would unite with the celebration of feasts of merit and the dragging of stones, and thirdly alliance-rings of villages would unite in the tiger feast. Today the holiday season is inaugurated on Christmas Eve, and lasts through to the communal village meals held out in the street on 1st January. Families regroup, and many who work on the mainland on *rantau* return to their villages. Family houses receive a significant "spring-clean," but farming work is kept to a minimum. In ritual contradistinction to the rather puritan ethos of simple style living (*hidup sederhana*) that predominates at other times, Christmas/New Year is a season of lavish spending and eating. Girls hope for a new outfit to wear, and poor families who barely have enough to feed all their members normally make a special effort not to limit their children's rations. After church on Christmas Day families gather for a large meal which should include pork.

New Year celebrations are seen as an integral part of the religious holiday, not as a secular counterpart to Holy Christmas. As midnight approaches villagers gather outside their houses to hear the bell ring out at midnight. Some older people say that the sound of the holy bells drives demons away that might bring bad luck to the New Year, the same explanation for bell-ringing as given by early European Christians. After the bell-ringing people return to their houses for family prayers and hymn-singing. Prayers ask for the sins of the past year to be forgiven, so that all may begin the New Year with "a clean heart." Next comes the meal, and after eating people go visiting other houses. Again people ask each other's forgiveness for all the wrongs they have done them in the past year, and absolve each other. For the young it is a chance for the boys and girls to see each other. As in Europe those who identify strongly as Christians criticise other villagers for dwelling less on the religious remembering than the secular opportunities it provides. The next day - New Year's Day - there is an important church service, followed by communal village outdoor eating, divided along the lines of the various Christian sects. On January 2nd life returns to normal. Villagers return to the gardens, children to school, older children to Sibolga and Medan.

## 7.5 Consecration and fund-raising of new church

Apart from the life cycle and calendrical festivities sketched above, significant celebrations are held to open new churches. The manner in which these ceremonies raise funds for developing the new church further resonates in a particularly interesting way with traditional exchange sentiments. I quote at length a description of such a long day in church from my early fieldnotes. The '*lelo*' is a competitive auction in church for fund-raising. It has been introduced via the pan-Indonesian '*lelang*,' but combines the strong traditional sentiments of achieving social prestige through generosity and acquiring blessings from offerings to the divine. The passage also illustrates the traditional framework within which the seniority of church officials is expressed and the combining of traditional, state-derived, and Christian in ceremonial and oratory.

"Sunday was dominated by the blessing and ceremonial opening of a new church built by the BNKP congregation of Bawömataluo, on the top of the path up from Orahili. It had been built in three months entirely from timber and with a sago-thatch roof (no corrugated iron or cement!), a balcony over the entrance, a nave and a raised apse, with plenty of windows and open ends to the roofs. However, I realised later that this commendable simplicity was merely the first stage in the growth of a proper cement church with a tin roof. The next time I passed the small wooden church stood inside a much larger but unfinished cement structure, like a chrysalis frozen in the moment of metamorphosis. I came to learn that these chrysalis-churches - and the demand for contribution they embody - are a common feature of the Christian Nias landscape.

The church was decorated for the occasion with multicoloured streamers, while the path was festooned with fronds<sup>8</sup> and coloured flags on bamboo, and a bamboo arch held a banner with a text from Corinthians. A crowd of gaily coloured women, faces dusted with white powder and wearing sarongs, jacket/blouses and buns in their hair twirled their umbrellas. The men in dark trousers, white shirts and ties wearing cologne and Brisk - The Modern Hair Cream - were assembling at the Bawömataluo roadhead, just below where the steep stone staircase leads up to the spectacular village entrance, with a view over all of south Nias, Lagundri Bay, and the ocean beyond. We all exchanged 500 rupiah (12 pence) or thereabouts for little paper flowers that were pinned on by young women, and then I was ushered out of the burning sun (it was 10 am) into the back room of the roadhead postroom and store where I have left my bike. Here the dignitaries were assembled with their wives on chairs: the ex-headman of Bawömataluo, the present headman, the Orahili headman who I shamefully mistook for Ama Sötiari, the Bawömataluo BNKP minister and a BNKP head from Teluk Dalam. As each entered I surrendered them my chair, and another was produced for me to sit on briefly before again surrendering it to some black be-robed Teluk Dalam minister. We passed and chewed betel, and in the silence produced by the sudden rush of blood to the ears and subsequent well-being it induces, I recognised a purely Nias scene of the welcoming of honoured guests with appropriate seats and the offering of betel.

Finally we emerged from the cool room, and the milling crowd resolved into a procession down to the church, women leading. Everyone crowded outside the locked church and back up the path, and the Order of Ceremony was read by the Master of Ceremonies into a faulty megaphone while the dignitaries assembled outside the door. We prayed, heard a reading from the Bible and listened to a song from the Bawömataluo choir, and then the key to the padlock was ceremoniously surrendered to the BNKP elder from Teluk Dalam in a set piece that was, of course, photographed<sup>9</sup>. Presents were then presented in turn to the dignitaries, and the wife of the Bawömataluo KD in the manner of an American President's wife snipped the red ribbon, which act was applauded by the crowd. The minister then unlocked the padlock in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, another song was sung in a complicated harmony generated by the inability of those higher up on the path to hear those lower down.

At last we all pressed into the church out of the sun for an extended status game of musical chairs. There was not room for all in the church, so the nave was filled exclusively with women, while the important men (including myself!) sat in a semi-circle around the back of the apse platform. When moving about on this platform one

<sup>8</sup> The white coconut leaves that are elaborately prepared and displayed around churches all over Indonesia at Christmas and Easter continue previous religious uses of the same material: on Nias to ritually join a house, including its ancestor images and its roof bar, to the stones of the ancestors outside on the village street, in *ere's* rites to protect and strengthen the house and its family.

<sup>9</sup> At the feast when a new traditional house is opened the carpenter surrenders the key to the owner in a similar fashion.

stooped so as not to disturb the hierarchy of height it embodied, as one does on the floor of the front room in a traditional house. Many did not fit inside the church and stood outside. The effect of this seating arrangement was that the minister's sermon admonished the women, while us men behind, not directly addressed, nodded in collusory approval with the minister's words. After several prayers and readings and this sermon, it was the turn of the choir-groups to perform, with harmonious offerings from the Orahili women's choir, the Bawömataluo choir, Hilinawalö choir, Lahömi choir, Teluk Dalam choir and the Emanuele Vocal-Group, this last with a bouncy karaoke accompaniment from an electric organ. This was followed by the dignitaries' speeches.

The minister's sermon was in Li Niha, heavily laced with the northern dialect (Biblical phrases and the vocabulary of Christianity spring to the mind in Gunung Sitoli dialect because the Bible, hymn- and prayer-books are all in the northern dialect); others spoke the southern dialect, but the Bawömataluo KD mixed his with a 60% proportion of Indonesian. There was much which I did not understand, but I did pick up on an emphasis on the BNKP joy at the growth of its church in the face of the 1993 secession by many households to the newly-formed Teluk Dalam based BKPN, caused by leadership disagreements with the Gunung Sitoli-based BNKP leadership. The ceremony was strongly backed by neighbouring village BNKP congregations, the Bawömataluo royal family (reception after held in their great house) as well as the local government (Orahili KD, Bawömataluo KD and ex-KD), so I imagine that as the original Nias Protestant Church it remains the establishment choice. Halfway through his impassioned speech, the Bawömataluo KD collapsed with an attack of what the congregation diagnosed as "*darah rendah*" (low blood pressure): he continued his speech supported on both sides in a stupendous display of community-responsibility in the face of personal disaster, until finally, with the phrase "*aefa ha'a...*" ("and after that...") he utterly collapsed in agony, and was carried to his chair beside me where he was energetically fanned by his womenfolk and brought coffee to bring his blood back up.

We had all already 'bought' paper flowers as well as being passed the collection bags twice in the course of hymns, but now began the centrepiece of the event, the "*lelo*" or competitive auction to raise money for the further cement and iron growth of this 'seed' wooden church. Prizes were first donated by three dignitaries - a framed collage of a golden church for 1st, a wallclock for 2nd, and a wooden tray for 3rd. Donations were called out by individuals, often speaking on behalf of others, and repeated by the 'auctioneer' with his megaphone, in the form "*Ina Serasi, di atas nama Komisi Wanita Orahili, lima ribu rupiah!*" ("Serasi's mother, in the name of the Orahili Women's Institute Choir, five thousand rupiah!") followed by the word "*Lunas!*" ("paid!") if the donation was paid on the spot, omitted in the case of those donations not so paid. All the donations or bids were noted by a clerk. The donations were offered most often "in the name of" one of the choirs that had performed, or else in the name of someone else. Timing of bids, especially the big ones (25,000 rupiah - £6; 60,000 rupiah - £15; 100,000 rupiah - £25!!!), was calculated to cause an impression, and the sober church atmosphere quickly transformed into a fairground or marketplace excitement, with the auctioneer skilfully maintaining the pace for about an hour. At the end the bids were totalled (1,120,000 rupiah - £280) and the winners were the choirs or individuals in whose name the largest total of donations had been offered. They were awarded their prizes by one of the three dignitaries each, - and then ceremoniously passed their gifts back to the minister as contributions for the church.

This kind of competitive auction, the *Lelo Gotong Royong* - 'Mutual aid auction' - (Ama Liber explained to me later) is a way of the community working together to raise money, another is the *Lelo Mate* (B.I. *Lelang Putus*) in which only the highest bidder pays the donation, so that the closing run is a tense and spectacular display of ostentatious generosity modulated by a gamble between freely-purchased or expensively won prestige. Though so similar in spirit to the "potlatch-mentality" of traditional

feasting, and specifically the kinds of exchange strategies whereby *si'ulu* raised pork and gold for their *owasa*, both kinds of *lelo*<sup>10</sup>, take their genealogy from a custom imported post-conversion from the wider Indonesian region. Neither is permitted in the Catholic church.

At the conclusion the key to the padlock was ceremoniously presented to the local BNKP congregation head by the Teluk Dalam minister and BNKP elder. The Bawömataluo KD (Ama Sua) remained slumped in the corner as we filed out, opening umbrellas and lighting cigarettes as we emerged into the sunlight. We processed to the great house of Bawömataluo where hundreds were fed on rice and pork in a style reminiscent of the great *owasa*. We each had parcels of brown paper containing rice and some pork, and additional plates of caked rice and pork on the bone were distributed in the name of the various village BNKP congregations, the pig's head of course arriving on the high table where I sat with the KDs and church elders. The meal was begun and concluded with ill-attended efforts to lead grace by the minister, drowned in the excited hubbub surrounding the distribution of meat. It was already 3 pm, and I had only eaten a boiled sweet potato for breakfast, so the food tasted excellent. The meal was followed by a very attenuated *orahu*, in which elders reproduced the form of exhortation and response in pairs, but with no opportunity for real oratory content, after which guests descended to the *ewali* and made their way home." (Fieldnotes, Orahili, December 1995)

Both the enthusiasm of the giving of offerings at such auctions, and the giving of offerings in church in response to sickness suffered or blessings received show the vitality of a traditional/Old Testament religiosity according to which divine blessings reciprocate obedience and offerings in vernacular Nias Christianity. Despite the often-repeated Christian teaching that God's gifts (*bu'ala*) to us are so great we could never hope to repay with our offerings (*ame'ela*), such offerings are nevertheless still construed as a way to secure protection and blessings (see Beatty 1992:208). This Christian severing of the direct exchange relationship reappears today in the payment of healers. Healers, as we shall see in chapter IX, are now understood to be using a gift or talent bestowed on them by God in response to the intensity of their repentance rather than (or at least in addition to) inheriting the capacity from a line of ancestral healers. When good Christians pay such a healer for a successful treatment they typically say: "My offering (*ame'ela*) can never recompense you, only Jesus can do that."

## 7.6 Prayer groups and trance healing

When a congregation-member is sick the *Guru Jumaat* or *Sinenge* may visit their house and pray with the family. Typically again such prayers revolve around the confession and absolution of sin, and the *Guru Jumaat* is given an offering of cash in return. For prestigious members of the community a ceremony including bible-reading, hymn-singing and prayer might be held at the sick person's house, again led by the *Guru Jumaat*, but with the added attendance of other members of the congregation.

Two rather different kinds of groups are confusingly both known as *owuloa fangandrö* - "prayer circles." Both meet weekly, but the membership of the first kind - which might more

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<sup>10</sup> Like *arisan* - savings clubs, or 'revolving credit associations.'

properly be called a prayer and bible-study group - is circumscribed by congregation, while the second - or prayer healing group - joins Catholics and Protestants of all sects. These latter groups begin with prayers, and then trance is gradually achieved by the repentance specialist (and perhaps other of the women who have been attending a long time) while the others sing and clap. Trance is marked by speaking in tongues. This consists of a baroque mixture of convulsively produced Nias language, Indonesian, nonsense, foreign words, bureaucratic and administrative names, and so on. These fragments are shored into a magnificently passionate re-appropriation of the potency otherwise lost in villagers' peripherality to modern state and religious discourse<sup>11</sup>. Repentance specialists themselves do not like to talk about the origins of this miraculous speech, typically claiming not to know, or saying it comes "from their heart," or that "they see the words in front of their eyes." (Most others say that it comes directly from the Holy Spirit.) These were exactly the kind of phrases with which the elderly female carrier of the lamenting tradition (the *ere sane'esi*) explained to me as the origins of the words of her laments<sup>12</sup>.

The healer is able to deal with sicknesses caused by spirits because they are a special kind of person (through the revelation of a gift or talent from God in Christian discourse, through the revelation of a capacity acquired through descent in traditional discourse), who can mediate communication with the invisible world of spirits. The entities causing sicknesses to the patients are still for Christian as well as traditional discourse, plural spirits ("demons" in Christian discourse, "*bechu*" in traditional discourse), whereas the Christian notion that the spirit entity helping the healer is the singular Holy Spirit has pushed out the traditional notion that a spirit-helper assists the healer: this is now seen as defining an act of sorcery or magic rather than religion (see chapter VIII sections 2 and 3). Drumming to call or communicate with the spirit world no longer takes place at these repentance meetings defined as religion rather than magic; however, as we have seen, rhythmic clapping does. What really sets these episodes off from traditional practices of manipulation of/communication with the spirit world is the formal characteristics of the language. Traditional *fo'ere* chants (see chapter V section 3) followed a strictly prescribed template; while certain words and phrases would seem unintelligible to a listener they had to be pronounced exactly as the *ere* had been taught in order to work. Speaking in tongues, however, is described as a spontaneous, unconstrained eruption from the repentance specialist's heart which bewilders even them.

This contrast has led commentators to see instances of the worldwide phenomenon of glossolalia as betokening a very modern, specifically Protestant, notion of individuality, interiority and authenticity in people's communication with the divine. Thus Keane

<sup>11</sup> cf. Tsing 1993:254-257, where significantly it is also typically women who manipulate such strategies.

<sup>12</sup> Also compare massage healers saying their "hands are moved by God" (chapter IX section 5), the herbalist healers having the ability of "seeing the herbs and recipes to use," (chapter IX section 3), and the notion of the village ancestors "speaking through people" when they tell the sung legends of *hoho* (chapter V).



(1998:25): "glossolalia (speaking in tongues)... is language whose very unintelligibility is the guarantee of its divine source and the sincerity of the inspired speaker". Keane argues that Quaker silence and Protestant austerity are also, like Pentecostal speaking in tongues, consequences of antagonism to pre-Christian (and, one might add, Catholic) fetishisation of language. We have noted above the real and often-commented on (by villagers) differences between Christian and pre-Christian dealings with spirits. But the continuities are equally striking: not everyone has this ability of speaking in tongues, as perhaps they should if the argument that glossolalia is a consequence of specifically modern and Protestant notions of sincere language. The glossolalia of repentance healers differs from that of Pentecostal congregations<sup>13</sup> in being restricted to a single specialist whose special capacity is often marked out by some index of difference such as a minor deformity. As we shall see in chapter IX section 10, all traditional experts use this combination of correct form (being revealed to be the right kind of person operating with the right formulae) with inspiration (talking about "seeing recipes in their hearts", or letting ancestors "sing through them") in such a way as to eclipse actual learning of recipes or texts. Speaking in tongues at these repentance meetings does indeed follow a set pattern: a simple prayer phrase is repeated amidst the clapping and gradually breaks down into the inspired "new language" of glossolalia. Just like *h o h o* or traditional oratory the performance builds to a climax and then ends.

Those in trance focus their dancing and hand movements on the sick present. Hand movements recapitulate the exorcistic moves of traditional massage (see below chapter IX.5), moving notional invasive entities down the body, down to the ends of limbs, and - with a flick and an exclamation - out. However in trance healing the hands typically do not touch the patient, but recapitulate the exorcistic massage movements on the air that surrounds the patient. Sickness is worked with in the context of explanations in terms of spirit attack or demonic possession, and the effects of unabsolved sin. The concepts of repentance and possession are significantly conflated: going into trance is "doing repentance" or "dancing repentance." Trance is understood as possession by the Spirit (*Eheha*), and those so possessed can see the afflicted's sins, can see if there is anything they are holding back on in their confessions, can see the cause of the sickness. These healing groups are a predominantly, but not exclusively, female sphere of activity; the repentance specialists around whom they gather are likewise predominantly, but not exclusively, female. They resemble cults of affliction in that one typically first visits a healing group when one is sick, and then stays after the successful cure. Newcomer women imitate those around who seem to know what they are doing. As Saridina, a 40 year old woman, put it:

"If I go to the prayer circle and I don't confess all my sins then my sickness will not heal, and the other people there will surely know it. The language used is "new language" (*li sibohou*), and I cannot understand this language, but I just follow the customary behaviour in the praying and repenting [in which she includes dancing and clapping]. Although I don't understand the language I nevertheless believe and am convinced that it is a divine inspiration, a blessing from the Lord to the people at the prayer circle."

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<sup>13</sup> The Pentecostal Church is represented as a small minority in south Nias, but unfortunately I have no data on their practices.

The form of religiosity manifested in these repentance healing sessions has much in common with Pentecostalism and Zionism. Its constituency is typically women, the uneducated, those with status in neither traditional nor modern systems (compare Comaroff 1985:176-9) for African Zionists, Volkman 1985:113 for Indonesian Pentecostalism). Indeed, Nias repentance healing resembles the "spiritualization" of Christianity in the African case described by Meyer (1994:57) as a kind of "pentecostalism or spiritualism 'from below'" independent of Pentecostal or Zionist missions.

## 7.7 Private religiosity and the range of Christian ideas on sin, sickness and medicine

Having described the institutional contexts of social Christian practice, we move on now to the less formal contexts of private religiosity. We may begin by remarking the impressive degree to which sincere Christian feeling, as well as its outward tokens, pervade village life. The old men, whose identity is largely drawn from the traditional sphere and who therefore can alarm the neophyte with their assumption of a rather 'angry' countenance<sup>14</sup> to betoken dignified gravitas, can nevertheless astonish with their chapter-and-verse-quoting knowledge of Scripture. The alarmed and astonished neophyte will then be soothed by the Christian touches that transform his elderly landlady into a grandmother: the grace before meals, her delight at your learning to say the Lord's Prayer. That part of the front-room wall where the ancestor altar once stood is now replete with certificates of baptism and confirmation, and religious illustrations along with the graduation photos. The acute sense of sin in the village should already be apparent. The lifelong struggles of the poor and the appalling reversals of village life, the death of children and economic catastrophe, are explicitly endured as the will of God. Grace is always said before eating, very much part of the modern *habitus* of eating (tables and chairs, plates and finger-bowls, fly-covers and lids on the dishes, the dishes themselves...) imitated by villagers. Prayers are said before beginning any new project, and before setting out on a journey, though these prayers are often combined with consulting one's "body omens" (*gara-gara mboto*). Thus, before leaving on a trip for example, having completed a brief prayer the traveller holds the palm of his right hand over his nose and blows out. The breath from the right nostril should be experienced as stronger than that from the left; if this is not the case, departure should best be delayed. Similarly a sneeze before leaving is always a bad sign. Prayer for many Ono Niha paradigmatically consists in repetition of a formula followed by "listening with the heart." When afraid Ono Niha instinctively pray for protection, and ask forgiveness for their sins. As we shall see in the next chapter on understandings of sickness-causation, a state of unabsolved sin makes one particularly vulnerable to spirit-attack. When they have a sudden panic because they sense the presence of a *bechu* they close their mouths with their hands, and make sure they don't turn their back.

The interiority of private religiosity is of course remote from the surveillance and control

<sup>14</sup> Compare Kuipers 1998:2,14 for Sumba.

authoritative centres exercise over the spheres of discourse that surround them. Private prayer may thus, as above, shade off into what ministers would call “using prayer wrong.” By this they mean using the “true names of God,” for example, to secure blessings or protection; to use prayer as a technique of power, as magic. Thus ministers attempt to correct the widespread belief that if you pray to Lowalangi for some end “with all your heart” then it will come to pass, whether what is desired is good or bad. This, insist the ministers, is magical thinking: *mantera* coerce spirits, but God cannot be coerced in this way. Magic - *elemu* - following the Judaic tradition, becomes for orthodox Nias Christians false religion, the quintessentially pagan and idolatrous attempt to control spirits, divinities, and nature with coercive techniques. These techniques are perceived as working, thus magic on Nias is typically defined against religion (*agama*), and not according to science, as irrational techniques that don’t really work (cf Tambiah 1990:6-10). On conversion, as we saw in the preceding chapter, pre-Christian ‘paganism’ was disassembled into *elemu* (to be jettisoned) and *kebudayaan* (culture - to be preserved). The precise point where the boundary between magic and religion, like that between magic and culture, is drawn, depends on where one temporarily stands, on the self-identity mobilised by a certain context or addressee.

It is seen as proper by villagers for science, “knowledge from the school bench” to be kept distinct from religious knowledge, just as enormous educational effort is made to keep religion distinct from politics in Indonesia. They are different orders of knowledge, discourses expected to be incommensurable but cooperative. Religious discourse insists that it is up to God whether you recover or die - the religious factor is primary, and the progress of the disease is just the way this is worked out. State medical discourse insists that what really matters in recovery is regularity and order, hygiene and medication, and that possessing devils or unabsolved sins are irrelevant. But both the church authorities and state officials (in the name of Progress and Pancasila) never permit the incommensurability between their respective discourses to come out into the open. With unflagging awareness and tact the good Christian insists one should combine hospital treatment with that of repentance or village healers, and the healer concludes his cure by saying that it wouldn’t be a bad idea if the patient could go along to the clinic and get a course of pills as well, just to be absolutely sure that the problem does not recur.

Centrifugal and centripetal forces achieve some kind of social equilibrium by distributing the continuum of positions between the two poles (the pure orthodox centres, the syncretic peripheries) along the sociological axes of education, roles in church or state, traditional or modern prestige, as sketched above. Wherever one finds oneself (or at that moment wishes to be seen) on these axes one can find the appropriate outlet for one’s religiosity, whether in the trance-dancing repentance-healing context, where the focus is on Spirit, or a seminary, where it is on Text. Indeed one can also find the appropriate support for one’s position in the Holy Word of God, the Bible, which itself encompasses a similar continuum of religiosity from the fierce traditionalism of the Old Testament - God as an inflexible Wife-giver demanding his share of meat, promising damnation if you fail to pay - to the radically new formulations of

the Sermon on the Mount: forgiveness, turning the other cheek, looking below surface observances. The cultural world of the Old Testament had much in common with pre-Christian Nias, and German missionaries noted a typical trajectory for the newly converted from an Old Testament religiosity to a progressive understanding of the difficult religiosity of the New Testament (Müller 1931:104. See also Beatty 1992:209).

Difficult though such quantifications are to prove, local commentators at the centres insist that the equilibrium is moving towards the orthodox pole, the narrative whereby superstition and error is constantly giving ground, through enlightened instruction, to a more proper sole and unmagical reliance on Jesus as our Saviour. To a certain extent I did find support for this point of view. From a sociological perspective, the principal predictor of orthodoxy - education to high school or beyond - is spreading its reach. With more education and both religion and the state being turned towards foreign centres, Nias self-identities are increasingly being formed more in international and national networks than local fora. Though as should be becoming clear by now, we would be wrong to see orthodox tendencies replacing syncretic ones. As we have seen, incommensurable discourses find ways of 'living together.'

From the point of view of the internal logic of these discourses, there seems also to be a process whereby Christians come to fear *bechu* less, though still believing in their existence, and eventually ceasing to believe in them altogether. The doctrine that faith in Jesus can, indeed must, replace the protection previously afforded by *mantera*, amulets, and the planting of special plants round the house effectively diminishes the fear of and, eventually, belief in spirits constituted, generated, by these practices. For Ono Niha unproblematically link the danger and power of supernatural beings to the strength of people's belief. Nor do beliefs have significant existence distinct from the practices which imply them, of which they are the epiphenomenon. If you do not fear *bechu*, there is nothing to fear. Village magic does not work in modern cities, and so on.

We turn, finally, to specific consideration of the implications for villagers' understandings of sickness and healing of their positioning on the continua described above. Akadira's essay on Theological School has already shown us the implacable opposition that the (foreign) authoritative centres of Christianity offer to traditional healing, even in its most innocent of manifestations, that of herbalism. Ministers and Priests would say that a good Christian when sick should go to hospital, though it would not be inappropriate to offer some additional prayers for recovery as well. The Bible-oriented, high modern-status village devout would have a similar attitude. Village evangelists (*Sinenge*) and the less well-off, less well educated village devout would be more inclined to Spirit, to repentance behaviour and prayer-group healing. Schoolteachers maintain that hospital medicine and the traditional healers can work together, since each work with different kinds of disease (see next chapter). The healers themselves see no conflict whatsoever between their Christianity and their practice: their skill is a Gift of the Spirit, descended through the generations. It is not they, but the Power of the Holy Spirit through (their ancestors and) themselves that

heals.

## 7.8 Case studies

To illustrate the preceding discussion, and to give a feeling for when to expect these various positionings vis-à-vis medicine and traditional healing, I conclude this chapter with the words of an assistant doctor, a schoolteacher, an evangelist, a herbalist, and a healer:

### The assistant doctor

Ama Dewi Wau works as nurse and assistant doctor at the Teluk Dalam Puskesmas in Jalan Kartini. Apart from Dr Zagötö the rest of the medical staff there are Chinese, Javanese, or mainland Sumatran. When he was 23 he worked for nothing with Dr Hartmann at the Lukas Hospital in Hilisimaetanö, to learn about medicine. There he made contact with a German sponsor who paid for him to go to medical school in Bandung in 1965. Ama Dewi's daughter is a village midwife, and his son would like to study medicine, but he can't afford it. In the old days, says Ama Dewi, capability would get you into school with no money, but now it is just money - even stupid people get in if their father is rich.

...He dismisses the traditional diagnosis of *simalapari* as nonsense. Really it is a disfunction of the nerves caused by high fever, high blood pressure, or cramp. The medical treatment depends first on finding out the cause, which should then be addressed. He denies there really being any diseases caused by spirits or poison, and even dismisses my suggestion that real poisons might be used. All diseases, he stoutly insists, come from viruses or fungi. Healers are of two kinds, those that help women in labour, and others that are seeking money or to intimidate people.

Villagers want instant, impossible cures (*dalu-dalu gamaula*) that are taken just once and cure completely, and prefer healers for this. It also makes them disinclined patiently to take antibiotics three times a day for a week - if it doesn't work right away it isn't working at all.

There are three reasons for the poor health situation on Nias, he said. Lack of education; lack of material prosperity; still believing in *bechu*. The first two are the responsibility of the government, the third of the church. Though he agreed that the massage practised by healers might be beneficial he dismissed it by saying that this was properly the role of physiotherapy and trained professionals.

His reaction to my asking about recent epidemics of cholera was the same as if I'd mentioned communism: "Oh no!" he said, "cholera is a forbidden disease..." Because of the international campaign to eradicate it he could not admit to any recent cases. "The key to village health problems," he said, drawing us back from the edge of the acceptable with the weighty words indexical of official discourse, "is environmental hygiene, and that depends on education."

Ama Dewi Wau's point of view is important because it illustrates so clearly the typical discourse of state medicine. The only hint that he is a local man is his attribution of special potency to colonial medicine because of its association with the origins and source of modern state medicine. Otherwise his positioning demands that traditional understandings are

simply wrong. Magical cures only work for diseases caused by magic; since all diseases are really caused “by viruses or fungi” magical cures are worthless. Interestingly, he takes the notion of traditional understandings of sickness causes and their appropriate cures as barriers to proper treatment a stage further. The way he speaks seems to imply that traditional understandings of sickness and poor health conditions are the same thing. He blames superstitious beliefs for actually causing those sicknesses that are superstitiously understood to be caused by spirits or sorcery.

### The schoolteacher

“In essence religion teaches that good actions will result in good, whereas bad actions have bad consequences. There are various religions that live side by side on Nias, such as Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholic Christianity, as well as a small Hindu and Buddhist part, and all teach what is good, and what may not be done. In particular, the Christian religion teaches that the wages of sin are death, meaning that every sinful action committed by a human being will surely be repaid with death, even if the process is not immediate. Death in this context may be caused by sickness, whose aim is to make the person who has sinned aware.

From this teaching conflict sometimes arises between religion and modern understandings about the causes or origins of sickness, and moreover on the way to cure them. On one side modern understandings can diagnose a disease based on scientific concepts using medical technology. Whereas on the other hand religion will explain that a sickness suffered by someone is a consequence of the sins they have committed. And even more radically, some members of society believe in inherited sin, so that the sickness - for example scabies or leprosy - may be caused by sins committed by parents or ancestors of the sufferer.

However, in such a case the religious understanding does not usually have an oppositional or challenging character. In fact often it has a cooperative (working together) character, meaning that the religious point of view also admits the existence and capabilities of medical knowledge and technology. Religion fully believes in medical diagnoses and ways of curing. The cooperative character indicated by religious understanding is seen in the various efforts to heal a certain sickness, inasmuch as besides the patient being given medical treatments, he or she is also always prayed over that they will be cured, and that their sins will be forgiven by the Almighty. And the religious effort to heal is often performed by a servant of the Lord (a worker in the religious field) who has a talent to heal, constituting to miracles given by the Lord, but with the condition that the sufferer must truly wish to repent and come back to the path fixed by the Lord. But these days servants of the Lord who truly possess the talent to heal are at most rarely met with or found.”

This short essay written at my request by a village junior high school (SMP) teacher illustrates other facets of official, state discourse. Thus we find the strong *Pancasila*-ist assertion of equality and mutual tolerance between those various religions recognised by the state, though the pre-Christian religion of Nias is cast not as a religion but as beliefs (*kepercayaan*). He dissolves the apparent conflict between state and traditional understandings - which he only mentions because I specifically asked - in terms of “working together” (*kerja sama*) and “cooperation,” both weighty New Order buzzwords. As a local schoolteacher he acknowledges the authentic value of repentance healing, casting this

authenticity in Christian terms as a true talent given by God. However, given his sociological positioning it is unsurprising that his attitude is closer to that of the institutional centres of Christianity than the vernacular periphery. Thus according to him those performing repentance healing should be officially accredited “servants of the Lord,” and he suggests that the miraculous true talent is a great deal rarer than commonly supposed by less well-educated villagers.

### The BNKP Sinenge

Ama Adilati lives in an iron-roofed traditional house opposite my current lodgings at Ama Hikmat’s. [As it happened, he died a week after I made the interview from which these extracts are taken. Held in enormous respect by the community, his huge funeral celebrations momentarily united all the religious sects of the village.]

...As to the borderlines between acceptable and unacceptable Christian practices, Ama Adilati said that ‘dancing repentance’ worked for some people if they believed in it. He didn’t seem to disapprove. But he did stress that Lowalangi helps those who are sick when they believe in Him, though he was clear that dancing repentance involved no conflict with the church. Prophecy, when it is truly a gift of God, is acceptable too. What is not acceptable is extraction [see below IX.7], which he described as “conjuring,” defence amulets, mantras, and dealing with *bechu* and *elemu*. This is all sin.

...He said that spirit-attack did sometimes occur, but a good Christian, he said, should go to hospital, not to a healer. At this point another man present interjected that diseases caused by dirt (*ta’unö*) or poison, or *elemu*, (*faosa, bara*), or *fogikhi*, were better treated by herbs or healers. Showing the tact and avoidance of conflict that permits mutually contradictory discourses to concur, Ama Adilati deferred to this opinion. His wife then related how she had suffered from a *tika*. Despite being told she must go to a healer, she just had it treated at the hospital for three months and it got better. This prompted Ama Adilati to a more uncompromising restatement of his position. He doesn’t believe in *bechu* and the rest, he said, but he respects the beliefs of others, and considers that treatments based on these beliefs will work for them - and conversely won’t work if they don’t believe. If someone is mad, for example, and they believe they are possessed, then exorcism will help.

Sickness and death emphatically can be a consequence of sin, he says. The origins of sickness are sin, lack of cleanliness, not looking after God. Sicknesses are God’s way of bringing us back to Him. Dreams are messages from God.

Blessings (e.g. those given by *sibaya* and carpenters) are not in conflict with religion, quoting “render unto Caesar...” and “honour thy father and mother...” Adat is one way to God, he said. ...Allowing adat into the church is permissible, but the Catholics go too far. The church is for prayer, not dancing. Nor is there any licence for Pentecostal behaviour to be found in the Bible, he said. It is permissible to use a *daro-daro* shape as an altar, as long as there is no question but that it is now an altar, not a *daro-daro*.

Lowalangi forgives and receives those of our ancestors who died before religion. It is understood that having no gospel they can have had no need of it, that they were in many ways more blessed than us.

The most common misunderstanding of present-day Christians is that they only believe

when they receive the benefit of it. Ama Adilati is always exhorting villagers to be patient, not to expect immediate results. God gives both riches and poverty, so if we work hard and receive little, then God is trying to approach us.

Ama Adilati illustrates village Christian discourse that is closer to the vernacular pole than the schoolteacher above: his is a religiosity of the heart more than the head. His boundary between religion and magic lies further towards the latter: thus prophecy and “dancing repentance” are generally authentic and acceptable, only extraction healing, amulets and spell-casting are not. A glimpse of the more hardline discourse of the Christian centres appears in his insistence that “good Christians” should go to hospital not healers. This comment is out of tone with the rest of his discourse, and is an example of discourses being temporarily elicited by certain interlocutors and contexts (in this case an interview with a foreign researcher). It is interesting that this discursive inconsistency is pointed out by another present, and Ama Adilati’s manner of resolving the contradiction illustrates his way of resolving incommensurability between discourses. In an eminently reasonable manoeuvre to allow different discourses to exist together (that would nevertheless be unacceptable to the more orthodox Christianity of seminary-trained priests), he argues for a strong relativity, that efficacy depends on one’s beliefs. Similarly he resists hardline Christian demonisation of the ancestors’ way of life with wisdom that would be unacceptable to those positioned closer to institutional centres of Christianity: “having no gospel they can have had no need of it, ... they were in many ways more blessed than us.”

As we have seen, such attitudes are typical of the seminary-untrained *sinenge* (evangelists) who effectively lead village Christian communities remote from weekly priestly surveillance, and whose institutional role arose with the enthusiasms of the Great Repentance. However, they do have an institutional Christian role, and thus their discourse falls short of the even more syncretic religiosity of uneducated members of their congregations, to be illustrated in the following case study. Thus Ama Adilati asserts the errors of sects other than the Protestant BNKP (such as the Catholics and Pentecostals), he places lack of cleanliness between sin and neglecting God in listing the causes of illness, and reprimands the overly traditional exchange ethos of vernacular village Christianity.

### The traditional elder

Ama Sama is a 65 year old village noble (*si’ulu*). He is one of two principal *ere hoho* (teachers and leaders of traditional poetry performance). He also has ironworking skills and is a specialist in herbal medicine. As a regular participant in cultural performances, he says that *fo’ere* [special chants accompanied by drumming which summon spirits], the “old way of healing, has become culture” [*kebudayaan*].

The origin of sickness, he says, is from food. He does not believe in myths, and though he does believe in *bechu* he is not afraid, because we have the sign of the cross and the promise of the Bible (from which he quotes chapter and verse, from John’s gospel and the story of Noah. If one needs to walk alone in sun and rain [the classic context of spirit-



attack] all you have to do is touch your *anano* [forehead between the eyes - 'Lowalangi's place'] and say, "In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," and you will be safe.

Despite these brave words, his healing practice contains many exorcistic elements, though he describes it as "poison", or "heat", that he is expelling with his gestures and spells.

Ama Sama, as an uneducated man with traditional status, is an individual with a predictably strong sociological affinity for traditional discourse. Thus, going even further than Ama Adilati, he puts both extractive healing, amulets and healing spells on the acceptable side of the boundary between religion and magic. His use of religious formulae as protection from spirits would of course be dismissed as unacceptably "magical" by more orthodox organs of Christianity. Similarly, as an expert of the *hoho* vocal style he has composed a *hoho famoröfa Jesu* ("the *hoho* of the crucifixion of Jesus") which is performed at large village Christian ceremonies, such as at Easter and Christmas. He thus exemplifies the combination of the syncretic pole of village Christianity with strongly traditional discourse in that traditional alliance which is the site of discourse resistant to the discourse of the state.

### The religious healer

Taögömböwö Halawa, of La'uri, Gidö, a 71 year old man. Interview conducted and reported by my assistant Julius Hulu, a graduate of Medan University of N. Sumatra.

"When he was young Taögömböwö never desired to become a healer. But this changed after he married. Suddenly - seeing the lack of medical facilities near his village - the intention arose to study how to treat various sicknesses. Starting at that time he strove to study from someone who could treat sickness. He began by learning how to treat sickness caused by being poisoned by someone (*nilanguisi niha*). This kind of treatment became the first priority in his studies, because at that time (and in fact up till the present) the pattern of thought of local society was still really very primitive. They didn't have the progressive broad-mindedness to develop themselves and help each other to build progress together.

At that time a large part of society was discontented because there were among them some who had a surplus (*kelebihan*) over others. This would consist in the success of one family in sending their children to school to a high level. In such a situation the narrow-minded would feel jealous-hearted until hatred arose in their hearts, and in the end they sought a way to knock down the successful people, by any means, perhaps even poisoning them. Seeing this state of affairs Taögömböwö made it his first priority to study the medicine for poisoning. And according to his faith he sought a way of treatment that was appropriate to the teachings of religion. Thus the treatments he carries out are not based on *elemu*.

His manner of treatment is to call the poison out of the patient's body, and then to give medicine made from various kinds of plants, and then praying to the Lord Jesus for His blessing on the treatment. The technique of calling out the poison he learnt from his teacher; whilst the plants to use in his medicines he knows from his dreams. To become someone who can cure in this way you must preserve your purity and integrity before the Lord. You cannot give in to anger, envy, jealousy, hate, pride or arrogance. This

constitutes the prohibitions (*moni-moni*) for mastering this technique of treatment.

...After the poison has come out of the patient's body [manifested as leavings in a plate], he then gives the herbal medicine. Before drinking it the patient must first confess all his sins before Lord Jesus. Because according to the Lord's promise, "there is no sickness if there is no sin." Thus, in order that Lord Jesus should cure the sickness, the patient must first truly repent of all their sins."

In the account of this religious healer we note again the alliance of traditional and syncretic Christian discourse. His practice, seen by priests and doctors alike as magical and therefore sinful or anti-development repectively, is nevertheless firmly situated by himself within Christian authenticity. His Christian religiosity is strongly inflected by traditional values. Thus, the moral component of his healing talent is referred to as the *moni-moni* that are special restrictions for the carrying out of certain procedures according to pre-Christian ritual, and the confession and repentance of sin is seen as an absolute precondition of healing. His service to his community is based on a very traditional problem (state discourse would say the problem with tradition): the prevalence of poisoning and spells used to bring down those who manage to develop themselves according to the models of the progressive alliance between orthodox Christianity and the state. Further striking features of Taögömböwö's account, such as his reluctance to become a healer, the relationship of descent, teachers, and dreams to his healing talent, and the presentation of curing practices in bundles, will be fully discussed in chapter IX on traditional healers.

## CLASSIFICATION AND EXPLANATORY MODELS OF DISEASE

On Nias sickness is differentiated into consistent sets of symptoms which are named as recognisable diseases, with treatment typically being specific to the disease diagnosed. Many of these diseases correspond on a one-to-one basis with diseases recognised by cosmopolitan medicine, though the etiology or explanatory model attached to the disease may vary dramatically from that recognised by cosmopolitan medicine<sup>1</sup>. This portfolio of diseases is broadly stable across all the cultural regions of the island - a fact which is noteworthy given the important differences between regions in other sociocultural domains such as kinship and social stratification. These diseases are currently classified according to kinds of proximate cause into three groups: ordinary diseases (*fökhö sito'ölö*), diseases caused by spirits (*fökhö nilau bechu*), and diseases caused by witchcraft (*fökhö nilau niha*). This is a modern classification, produced by the distinction introduced by Christian teaching between ordinary and supernatural causation.

Encompassing all three categories is the deeply engrained notion that sickness is produced by the invasion of the body by alien entities, whether poisons, germs, or spirits. Curing, as we shall see in the following chapter, thus typically concerns itself with the extraction of these alien entities. Generally speaking, once symptoms have been recognised as a specific named disease the cause of the disease follows on from the place of the disease within this threefold classification, though some disorders admit of more than one kind of causation, and the contents of each sharply defined category does vary between informants. However, as we shall see the category of ordinary disease is growing, with certain named diseases that used to imply supernatural or agentive causation increasingly allowing alternative explanation as ordinary diseases. Distant causes such as guilt and sin, breaking of taboos, cursing and inherited disease are also recognised, acting above the threefold classification of proximate causes.

### 8.1 Ordinary diseases

Ordinary diseases are understood to be caused by *tungö* (germs) or dirt (*ta'unö*) in washing water or food, from environmental factors such as a change in the weather, or through accidental damage to or disrupted functioning of the person (i.e. overwork, overtiredness, irregular or inadequate eating, or thinking too much<sup>2</sup>). Within the category of ordinary

<sup>1</sup> It may be useful while reading this chapter to refer to the glossary of diseases as understood on Nias, presented in appendix I.

<sup>2</sup> Beatty (1992:184) points out the etymological link between thinking too much and having a lot of debts, the common root *era* referring to counting.

diseases a distinction is made between light diseases (*fökhö saoha*) which tend to be unnamed other than by a simple description of symptom(s) and which do not require specialist treatment, and serious ordinary diseases which are typically described by suffixing the term for the sick body part or organ to *fökhö* ("disease, sick, pain"), as in *fökhö betua* (stomach ache), *fökhö delau* (headache), *fökhö mboha* (toothache), *fökhö ate* (liver disease) or *fökhö tödö* (heart disease). These conditions are understood as being caused by physical damage or overwork of the affected organ, or else by uncleanness or the presence of germs in washing water or food.

Bruises, sprains, nosebleeds (*tefeno*) cuts and wounds (*boto luka*) all come under this category, as does *tekhe-tekhelö* (pain in the bladder accompanied by difficulty urinating, mostly among children) which is understood to be caused by falls or blows to the groin. Many skin diseases, such as *belua* (tinea versicolor), *böni* (ringworm) and *egimö* (scabies), are understood as ordinary diseases caused by washing in unclean water due to the presence of germs. At the turn of the century according to Kleiweg de Zwaan *tungö* were understood as "tiny animals" put in water or food by spirits (thus collapsing the classificatory distinction between ordinary diseases and diseases caused by spirits), or else fragments blown in the wind from a "tree of sickness." Today *tungö* is rendered into Indonesian as *bibit penyakit*, or "seeds of sickness", just as the English "germs" derives etymologically from the word for seed. Similarly the idea of dirt (*ta'unö*) causing sicknesses previously understood as caused by poison (*lanu*) shows the influence of Christian and state health education on notions of disease causation. Other diseases are understood as ordinary on account of their frequency: thus colds (*mo'ino*) are caused by overwork and the frequency with which children suffer from chicken pox (*sowua zitaora*) cause it to be understood as an ordinary disease. *Fökhö cido*, the disease of old people whose symptoms are cough, stooped posture, thinness, fainting and bloody faeces similarly has an ordinary etiology, believed to be caused by working too hard when young<sup>3</sup>.

Ideas of "heat" and "cooling" are important within ordinary and supernatural etiologies of illness, and health is maintained by keeping a balance between heating and cooling factors. Heating foods are cassava, taro, chili, instant noodles, durian, kueni mangoes, *pulut* rice pudding, coffee, alcohol and betelnut; those that cool are papaya, banana, young coconuts, rice and leaf vegetables. Anger and physical exertion also cause heat, while relaxation and prayer cool. Excessive heat leads to fever (*fa'aukhu*), and in extremes, madness. Heat is also generated by spirits<sup>4</sup>, childbirth, headhunting, poisoning, the beating of gold and ironworking; it is cooled by cooling medicine and the sprinkling of water prayed over by a healer. Some informants, typically Moslems or those who have inherited healing knowledge originally acquired from non-indigenous Malay *dukun*, state that health is maintained by keeping in balance the four elements of the human person: fire (associated with aggression

<sup>3</sup> Klasen describes this condition (which she calls *sido*) as caused by the accumulation of remnants left after curing of sicknesses suffered during a person's lifetime (Klasen 1990:43). I found no evidence for such ideas in south Nias.

<sup>4</sup> Though sensations of cold and shivering are also associated with spirit-attack.

and anger), water (calmness), earth (physical strength) and wind (intestinal gas).

*Senu* is a kind of insanity characterised by introversion, passivity and refusal to eat or speak. Unlike other forms of madness it is understood in terms of an ordinary etiology, either caused by worry, grief, losing wealth or frustrated ambition, or in the absence of such factors by a sickness in the brain.

This category of ordinary diseases accounted for roughly half of all reported sickness on Nias, and 67% of sicknesses reported by Niassans living in Medan.

## 8.2 Witchcraft diseases

Other consistent constellations of sickness symptoms - diseases - are recognised as being diseases caused by witchcraft. Many apparently straightforward afflictions, such as cough (*e ha*), boils (*faosa*) and swollen glands (*bara* or *helamö*) fall into this category. These diseases "caused by people" are further divided into kinds according to the means of attack. These kinds do not, however, amount to an exclusive classification, since a single named disease can in some cases be caused by more than one of these methods of attack. However, generally speaking certain diseases are associated specifically with one of the three methods of attack. Furthermore, each of these three means of attack - poisoning, use of spells or images, and commanding spirits - are associated with ascending levels of skill/knowledge on the part of the sorcerer.

Most commonly cited motives for episodes of poisoning or sorcery (reportedly very common on Nias) are primarily envy at another family or individual's good fortune (for example in being able to educate their children whereas one's own family cannot), in which case afflicting one of their family members with illness will exhaust their resources on treatments and so bring them back to a level. Another classic motive is revenge during a long conflict between two families, for example over disputed land. If one family has been worsted in litigation or fighting they may (if they are able) attempt to retaliate by making someone in the other family sick, in which the purpose will not so much be to exhaust their resources on treatments but to kill out of revenge. Thirdly, when outsiders such as visiting kin, teachers or officials come to live in the village and are perceived to be arrogant (*asile yawa*), villagers with such powers may afflict him or her with bizarre sicknesses in order to test their protective magic, and force them to leave the village. Lastly, those who claim or are reputed to have magical powers attract similar testing by the magic of others. In contrast to some African examples in contemporary Nias prosecuting the suspected sorcerer typically does not become an issue. Though a person's sickness is definitely attributed to poisoning, opinions as to who might have been the poisoner typically remain private suspicions and public accusations are not made. Though informants recognise the possibility of revenge magic, and the healer's cure may be seen as returning the sickness to the sorcerer, whoever he or she may be, today villagers invoke Christian forgiveness, even praying for their poisoner "to become aware and

repent", and only act on their suspicions in avoiding food or drink prepared by suspected sorcerers or poisoners (see case history III below). This means little, since all village children are brought up to treat anyone within the village who is not family - and everyone outside the village - as potential poisoners, rather as European parents implore their offspring not to accept sweets from strangers. Fear of poisoning thus reinforces to children local ideas of when it is and is not appropriate to share.

Diseases caused by poisoning (*sigöñalanu*) or "making to eat" (*nife'a*, Ind. *sitermakan*) resemble ordinary diseases in that they are understood to be caused by the introduction of noxious substances (poisons or *lanu*) into the victim's food or onto his or her skin. However they are distinguished from ordinary diseases in that technical medicine, deemed appropriate to ordinary diseases, would have fatal consequences if applied to diseases caused by witchcraft poisoning. Such poisons are said to be derived from animal venoms (from sting rays, snakes, scorpions, poisonous centipedes or land eels), toxic plant saps, household materials such as powdered asbestos mantles from paraffin lamps or pesticides<sup>5</sup>, or else substances with an apparently more supernatural mode of action such as the skin of a dead man's foot (which causes *simana guli gahe* in which the victim unconsciously performs bizarre behaviours). Poison is also understood non-substantively as a quality present in the speech or actions of certain powerful people, or in powerful objects. This kind of poison is known as *söfu*: the words of powerful orators "have *söfu*", and a well-tempered steel blade "has *söfu*." Plant or animal toxins in their natural state are known as *biso*, and only become *lanu* when prepared by a sorcerer.

Thus coughs without mucus are attributed to poisoning, as is jaundice (*fökhö ate*), *gala gala* (stomach ache accompanied by a fluttering pulse in the navel - probably malnutrition), *fökhö hele-hele dödü* ("pain at the springs of the heart" - probably gastritis) and *muta ndro* (vomiting blood). Typical treatments for ingested poisons are rites to "call out the poison," as well as purgatives (*laferuru*) followed by medicine to cool the poison (*fanokafu lanu*). *Bio-bio* is a classic example of a disease caused by people in which poison is applied to the victim's skin by impregnating his or her clothes with poison. Its symptoms are red itchy rash which spreads over the entire body accompanied by fever. It is thought that if it is untreated by a village healer and penetrates the bones it will be fatal. I was told that the poison which causes this disease is made from stinging plants (*lato* and *liga*<sup>6</sup>).

The second kind of diseases caused by people involve techniques such as spells (*mantera*), images (*gambara*) or substances passed over a victim's head or left on the path for them to step over. Though as we shall see both spells and images are used in the commanding of spirits, this second kind of witchcraft is spoken about (generally as *nigambaraini* - "being done by images") without reference to spirits, as though the speaking of spells and/or

<sup>5</sup> Baygon is the proprietary brand, typically used in suicide attempts. Such suicides are typically young women resisting an unwelcome choice of husband, or men suffering economic catastrophe, shame, or abandonment by their spouse.

<sup>6</sup> Refer to appendix II for a list of local herbs used in village medicine.

manipulation of images were sufficient to directly cause the sickness. As we saw in chapter V, image and name (when correctly made or pronounced by the right person) are traditionally perceived as participating in the essence, spirit or shadow of what they portray or refer to, a theme that will be important in the following chapter on traditional healing. Just as leavings which have been in contact with a person can be acted on to bring sickness to a person (the spirits follow the leavings), the manipulation of images and names affects what they refer to. This connection, encompassing both Frazer's magic of sympathy and contagion, is conceived as mediated by spirits. In the case of leavings, spirits are thought to follow the leavings, for example when one sends spirits to follow a thief using something he left behind, or even the stalks of the bananas he stole. The pre-Christian priests (*ere*), to whom modern healers and magicians are heir, were conceived of as those special people who could see the world of spirits and understand their language. In this parallel world the image or name has more reality than the thing they stand for: spirits are summoned by naming them, and they are easily tricked by substituting an image for a person, or re-naming a sick child. The meaning of the spells used to activate images used in witchcraft, though abstruse, does often seem to imply instructions to spirits, and the logic implied in the manipulation of images closely resembles the directing of spirits to cause sickness, despite the fact that the collusion of spirits in causing such diseases is often elided in peoples' accounts today. This elision is probably part of the process described in the preceding chapter whereby those trained in Christian dogma exhort direct reliance on Lowalangi, deny the relevance of spirits in daily life and make of them devils, with whom to make contracts is one of the worst sins a person can commit. The development of a classification that distinguishes diseases caused by spirits from diseases caused by witchcraft is also, of course, part of this process.

Classic examples of diseases understood to be directly caused by spells or images are delayed labour, in which the woman is believed to have been "locked" (*lakusi*) by a spell, and those in which the glands become swollen, i.e. *bara* (swollen glands in the neck), *helamö* (swollen glands in the groin accompanied by scabs on the lower leg), and *tika* (swollen glands at neck or groin accompanied by a small scab and fever). It is significant that these are all relatively commonplace conditions (swelling of glands or lymph nodes accompanies many common infections) whereas it is the more exotic afflictions in which the explicit commanding of spirits is still understood to be involved.

In the above cases cosmopolitan medicine is again believed to be strongly contraindicated and possibly fatal, and the disease must be combatted by a healer whose skills and powers are "on the same level" as the person who caused the disease. If the healer is successful his or her spells will return the sickness to the person who sent it. In sicknesses caused by images (*nigambaraini*) the sorcerer makes and activates an image of the victim out of plants, wood or paper and then brings it into proximity with the victim, for example by burying it under their house. Some people say that the sorcerer also keeps a "copy" of the image in his or her own possession, which he or she "works on" in order to afflict the victim. In order to cure such a disease the healer must find and ritually de-activate the image. Typical examples of diseases caused by images are *sisuka*, signalled by stabbing pains in the chest and difficulty

breathing, and the non-aggressive form of insanity known as *owöhö söchi*, which causes the victim to indulge in peculiar behaviours.

In the third kind of witchcraft-caused diseases (*nigayuni*) the sorcerer is supposed to command spirits who then afflict the victim with disease by touching, entering, breaking off the breath, sucking the blood or eating him or her. Though this does introduce an element of permeability between the categories of disease caused by people and those caused by spirits, generally speaking specific diseases are typically understood as caused by spirits acting under the command of sorcerers. Typical examples are dizziness (*fehhölömbanua*), severe headache (*nigasini*)<sup>7</sup>, love magic (*sisundre*), *buru* (a kind of madness typically afflicting women, causing them to pull out their hair, open their clothes, rage with bad temper and refuse food), and *simalapari*, in which the mouth is twisted violently round to the cheek so the patient cannot eat, with only one eye able to blink but leaving the rest of the body unaffected. Older and uneducated villagers tend also to see blocked labour as caused by mini-spirits (*ono mbechu*) under a sorcerer's command.

A sorcerer with the ability to command spirits is a *sombahe*, the activity he or she performs is *fombahe*. In order to afflict a victim, the *sombahe* must first make an image of the victim from wood, plants or paper, or alternatively steal a photograph of them. The image is then placed on a red cloth (*kacumbo*) while the *sombahe* calls the spirit using the *mantera* he or she has learnt. Spirits that may be so summoned include the great spirit (*bechu sebua*), the *zihi* or sea spirit, the *soma* spirit, or the mini-spirits (*ono mbechu*). The *sombahe* is understood as having an ongoing relationship with the spirit he or she controls, and the spirit is only visible to its *sombahe*-master. They must make regular offerings of white chickens or chicken eggs to the spirit they "look after", and if they fail to keep this up the spirit will turn on them and suck their blood. Once the spirit has been summoned the *sombahe* orders it to go to the victim; once it has arrived the *sombahe* pierces the image with a needle wrapped in red thread. At this moment the spirit enters the victim, and the victim feels a pain as though being stabbed with a knife, but no blood emerges and no wound is apparent. In the variant of *fombahe* known as *fombahe famunu* (*fombahe* "that kills") this will continue for three days, until on the third day the sorcerer pierces the image's heart with the needle, at which moment the victim ceases breathing and dies. The spirit emerges from the victim's body at the moment of death, and returns to the sorcerer for the exchange protocols to be concluded by the gift of an egg, white chicken, or dish of food. It then roams free until it is summoned again. This kind of etiology is implicated in fatal sickness where the patient wastes away quickly before dying, in the absence of diagnosis of some other named condition. The wasting is understood to be the consequence of the spirit "eating" the victim, or "sucking their blood." Victims of *nigayuni* (who include Ama Wita, the village nurse) describe becoming aware of a disc or wheel spinning before their eyes, making them feel faint, dizzy and sick. Ama Wita was able to grasp the wheel, though he could not feel it, and throw it

<sup>7</sup> Strictly speaking in this case (*nigasini*) it is a kind of mystical lightning that is called down by the sorcerer to afflict the victim with a blinding headache that can have fatal consequences. Described symptoms resemble those of meningitis.



behind him, thus avoiding further effects of this kind of *fombahe*, which can lead to one-sided paralysis (*mate dambai*).

A variant of *fombahe* known as *fombahe famaesi* is used by sorcerers to exact revenge on those who steal from them. The sorcerer requires some leaving of the thief's: if it is bananas that have been stolen, for example, the stalks where the bananas were broken off the plant will do. He or she then recites mantera over the leavings in order to summon a spirit. In *fombahe famaesi* this usually will be a mini-spirit, and the symptoms to be described are believed to be characteristic of attack by mini-spirits. An offering is made to the spirit and the *sombahe* tells the spirit how long he or she wishes them to attack the victim for. The mini-spirits eat the leavings and then fly to the thief and enter his or her stomach, causing the disease known as *fa'agambu* or *buru gambu*. The victim will moan with pain as the spirit moves in their stomach; the stomach swells, they lose appetite for food and water, the body becomes thinner and thinner and their face becomes pale and yellowed<sup>8</sup>. Finally, on the day agreed in the pact between sorcerer and spirit, the mini-spirit enters the victim's heart, and stops up the flow of blood. The victim dies in convulsions with a dramatically swollen stomach. Yet again, such conditions cannot be treated with technical medicine, and only a healer whose skills, capacities and knowledge are on a level with those of the sorcerer will be able to help the victim.

### 8.3 Diseases caused by spirits

As with diseases caused by people, so too various recognisable constellations of symptoms are attributed to the direct actions of spirits (*bechu*). This category of disease goes by the indigenous term *sitesafo*, "those who have been *tesafo*", from the Indonesian *tersapa* - "touched or afflicted by a spirit." The exogenous derivation of this term provides evidence for the historical dialogue between Niassans and outsiders, in this case Malay traders, in developing their ideas about sickness and the supernatural world. As we shall see in reviewing these spirits believed responsible for certain diseases one by one, the contemporary portfolio of dangerous spirits (and, as we shall see in the following chapter, the repertoire of curing) has many further points of linkage with region-wide traditions. Furthermore it is very striking how many references are made to animals, objects and themes from the outside world in the context of spirit-beliefs.

According to pre-Christian myths, *bechu* grew from the same world-tree, the *Tora'a*, from which the major divinities and first humans (along with culturally important items such as measuring sticks) also sprang. They thus assumed a position on the stepped continuum that joined animal life to humans, spirits and gods. Contemporary villagers, however, combining the teaching of the Bible with the traditional beliefs of their forefathers, describe *bechu* as "devils" (Ind. *setan*) created by Lowalangi at the creation of the world. Those categories of

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<sup>8</sup> These symptoms are typical of the splenetic enlargement that follows severe malarial infection.

spirit whose name and characteristics show least influence from outside Nias, which we may thus assume to be the “oldest” *bechu*, constitute a separate category of being that sustain themselves by feeding off humans. Many contemporary categories of spirit, however, are described as having their origin at the death of a human, just as traditionally spirits of the dead (*bechu zimate*) arise as a transformation of someone’s shadow (*lumö-lumö*) at death (see chapter V).

We have already noted various instances (adoption of technology, writing from coastal Malays, conversion to Christianity, the language of speaking in tongues) of the local cultural strategy whereby the power of the foreign is drawn into the heart of local power by passing up the escalator of the generations. Spirit-beliefs are crucial in this local elision of any difference between foreign-derived and local potency, linking as they do the two diverse sources of power in the village, which might otherwise appear to be opposed. One such source is at the ritual centre (the *fusö* or navel) of the village, looking inwards and backwards to origins, to the ancestors and their time-hallowed ways. The other source is the power of things foreign, from over the seas, looking outwards and perhaps too forwards to the future. Both the worlds of spirits and foreigners are similar in being incomprehensible to most people, and potentially very dangerous, though offering huge advantages to those able to secure exchange-relationships with them. In some old stories the two worlds seem even to be identical, since according to traditional belief the land of the dead lies over the seas; spirits like foreigners are aggressive, frightening, pale or red, and often of great size; spirits speak a kind of gobbledy-gook; and all manner of reversals (right becomes left; day becomes night) characterise the difference between the worlds of the living and the dead, making inwards and backwards perhaps not so irreconcilable with outwards and forwards as it might seem.

Spirits are usually invisible to normal people, though they can be felt through a sudden sense of fear, goosebumps, or the hair standing up on the back of one’s neck. On several occasions I have been in the company of villagers - mostly children - when they have claimed to see a spirit. In such circumstances their sense of fear was very apparent, and they often instinctively covered their nose and mouth, presumably to block points of entry of the spirit into the body. However, it was explicitly stated that spirits enter through the lower back, and I was often told that it was very dangerous to turn one’s back on a spirit. From the front one is protected by an angel (*malaika*) on the forehead, but one is vulnerable from behind. Protective spells often work by activating the seven angels that protect the body. Wiping the right hand three times back over one’s forehead and over one’s hairline is said to afford one protection, and many people repeat phrases learnt from a healer or else the Christian formula *Ba döi nama, nono, ba geheha ni’amoni’ö* (“In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”) in such circumstances. Amulets are made by healers using originally Moslem written spells (*azimat*) learnt from Moslem Malay traders by their ancestors or teachers, and are frequently worn by children as protection against spirit-attack. Resins such as benzoin (*kumöyö*) and asafoetida (*inggu*) are believed to repel spirits on being burnt; at dusk most families light fires outside their houses with the triple purpose of disposing of rubbish and repelling spirits and mosquitoes: fragments of goat horn or rubber-soled sandals added to the

fire are thought to increase their efficacy against *bechu*. Red-leaved plants are believed to constitute a barrier against the movement of spirits; they are thus planted around graves to keep *bechu zimate* in, and around houses to keep *bechu* out. Sinlessness and regular church attendance are thought to give some protection against spirit-attack, while a guilty conscience conversely makes one especially vulnerable.

The ability to see spirits is confined to seers (*sama'ele'ö* - see chapter IX) and those born with a special ability to see them, often following a line of descent through only one in each set of siblings (like the gift of healing - see chapter IX). Recipes do exist, however, whereby normal people can be afforded a temporary ability to see them. These usually involve coffin wood (i.e. shavings or fragments left over in the making of coffins): in one such technique coffin wood ash is smeared on the forehead between the eyes, in another the adept is instructed to stand over a fire of coffin wood and look back between his or her legs through the smoke.

As in most of the Southeast Asian region, places considered to be dangerous on account of the presence of spirits include the seashore, especially capes or headlands, rivers, springs, watertanks, caves, the forest, graveyards and any place that has been the site of former violent death. Times dangerous for spirit-attack are dusk, nighttime, midday, and above all when it rains while the sun is still shining (*teu zino* - "blue sky rain"). In a belief taken from Moslem Malays, Fridays and the nights preceding Friday are seen as particularly dangerous.

Despite the fear in which they are held, spirits are conceived of as of limited, or at least of not human, intelligence. They are hopelessly confused if their victim changes their name - and so many children have their name changed by their parents if they frequently fall ill. Significantly too spirits are unable to tell the difference between images and the people they represent, so that making a wooden statue of a sick child may allow them to recover, as the spirits will continue to attack the statue, not the child.

According to the very diverse descriptions of villagers, spirits either attack by touching people's shadow, or else by entering them, eating, sucking their blood, or simply by appearing to them, challenging them, or touching them. Invasion of the body with associated physical symptoms is a common theme. Spirits are thought of as entering through the lower back (where a black mark is left as a sign) and moving around in the stomach while they "eat" the victim. The victim experiences abdominal pains and their bellies often swell up. Paleness, wasting and loss of appetite occur as the victim is devoured from within. Death is caused by the spirit's attentions moving to the heart, stopping it up or sucking out all of its blood, and after death the spirit leaves the body.

The symptoms related above are known as *fa'agambu*, a disease category that implies the etiology described. Where pains move around the body, the sickness is called *sihulu*, and patients diagnosed with this spirit-caused condition very much fear the pains moving to their

heart, since this would be fatal. Attempts to cure it involve cutting to let out blood and rubbing chili in the wounds, whilst reciting prayers. Non-fatal fevers - *fa'aukhu* ("heat") and *fogikhi* ("the shivers") are commonly attributed to contact with a spirit, and any sickness initially diagnosed as ordinary and so treated with home remedies and doctor's medicine without improvement will typically be reclassified as due to either witchcraft or spirit-attack. *Agakandro*, in which the patient's eyes turn up into the head while arms and hands are convulsively tensed<sup>9</sup>, is also believed to be caused by spirit-attack, as is *mate dambai* (one-sided paralysis), and the peculiar condition known as *simalapari* (see above).

In eliciting classifications of named kinds of spirits, just as in eliciting classifications of disease themselves, it was striking that while each individual's classification was internally consistent with sharp boundaries between categories, problems emerged in combining these individual accounts into a meta-classification that could be said to be true for the whole of the south Nias region. Each village has its own tradition, but even within villages differing accounts could be collected, the fault lines typically dividing original settlers from immigrant clans. The glossary that follows assembles information given by a range of informants for the sake of completeness, but does not engage with the variant names or conflicts between different people's accounts. Instead I seek to reproduce the spirit of a single account, with its clearcut definitions and vivid descriptions.

#### The Zihi (*zihi* or *bechu sebua* - "the great spirit").

Described by many as the biggest and most frightening of the spirits, the Zihi in its natural form has tears of fire, hair like a halo of fire around its head, and a body red like the embers of burning charcoal. For some it is identical with the *bechu nasi* or sea spirit. Before becoming a complete or "great" Zihi, this spirit goes through a seven day successive metamorphosis of animal forms. On the first day it is visible as a pig on pathways near the village, and in this form it can eat or touch people it meets with, so long as their faith is weak. On the second day it appears as a large horse that appears jumping out from the verge on roads running along the sea. Drivers involved in accidents on the road often claim that such an occurrence led to the crash. On the third day it becomes a buffalo, and causes mischief in much the same way as the horse. On the fourth day it becomes a cat, and is blamed for stealing chickens or chasing livestock. On the fifth day it becomes a goat and runs with ordinary herds of goats, being blamed for their disappearance. On the sixth day, at midnight of the full moon, the Zihi transforms again into a male deer, and on the seventh it becomes a full Zihi with eyes shining like streetlights, available to take commands from *sombahe* to eat their victims, causing the symptoms of *fa'agambu* described above.

#### Mini-spirits (*ono mbechu*).

*Ono* means child, but these spirits are neither the spirits of children, nor immature spirits. I thus translate *ono mbechu* as "mini-spirits" following the sense of *ono* in which *ono meja* ("table child") refers to a drawer, *ono kusi* ("lock child") is a key, etc. They may be

<sup>9</sup> Cosmopolitan medicine understands this condition, which is always accompanied by high fever, as typical of death as a result of fevers caused by malaria, dysentery, etc.

commanded by *sombahe* to enter their victim's stomachs, causing abdominal pains; they are also able to travel around the body causing moving pains (*sihulu*); it is thought that death ensues if they enter the heart. They are small in size, and are often said to cause accidents, characteristically by "colliding" with a victim's legs.

#### The Red Spirit (*bechu soyo*).

This spirit has a roughly human form, being three metres tall with a blood red body, hair shiny like metal and a protruding forked tongue. It lives near springs, watertanks and washing places, only roaming abroad and even entering villages when it is drizzling. It does not have the power to kill and is not commanded by *sombahe*, but is believed responsible for afflicting children with children's fevers (*anachö-nachö*), especially those accompanied by red spots, such as chicken pox (*sowua zitaora*). When children defy their families' warnings not to play in the yard when it is drizzling and water falls on their head from the eaves of the house-roof it is thought to have "touched" them, causing the fever.

#### The Balaeka Spirit (*bechu balaeka*).

This is a particularly terrifying spirit that originates from the forest, and is said only to be found in south Nias and the Tello islands. It has a body like a cave bat and a face like a dragon, with thick ears like an elephant, teeth like a tiger, claws like a monkey, and walks "like King Kong." It has pitch black skin and burning red eyes. The Balaeka is attracted by the smell of sick people, specifically those sick because of witchcraft: its appearance is so terrifying that those that see it, or "are challenged" by it suffer intermittent attacks of madness, drifting "in and out of awareness."

#### The Land Sow Spirit (*bechu sigelo danö*).

The Land Sow is a four-footed spirit in the shape of a pig that dwells in or near caves, landslide sites and holes in the land. When evening is turning into night it leaves its lair and lies in wait by a nearby path, ready to attack the first person that comes along. Its victim will experience goosebumps and a thumping heart as it lays hold of their body. On returning home the victim will become feverish, feeling hot and cold with no appetite for food or drink, becoming thin and dried out after a few days. At this stage doctor's medicine will be of no effect if it does not actually make the patient's condition worse. The diagnosis of *tesafo* is confirmed when the victim has a nightmare in which the Land Sow Spirit appears.

#### Spirits of the Dead (*bechu zimate*)

These spirits of the dead (we might call them ghosts) originate from people whose lives have been marked by sin, especially murderers, sorcerers and suicides. Within a Christian context it is explained that their sins prevent them from being accepted by the Lord. Within a more traditional context the issue is not so much the deceased's moral record as the manner of their death. Those who have died away from the village, or else died hard, from violence, drowning, or falling from a coconut palm, for example, are believed to wander after death, screaming out and making strange noises that frighten people walking near their grave sites after dark<sup>10</sup>. Even those who have died well are believed to return to their former house

four days after their death, causing voices to be heard by their family. Villagers refrain from mentioning the recently deceased by name for fear of attracting the attentions of their spirit.

#### The Form-Changing Spirit (*bechu sitobali*).

This especially powerful spirit originates from the corpses of sorcerers with very high magic who have not “thrown away” their magic before their death<sup>11</sup>. In the absence of the deceased’s dead body being treated by someone else with even more powerful magic, the corpse will change shape to become an animal, usually a tiger, but also perhaps a rhino or crocodile. This is the *bechu sitobali*. Magic is conceived of as very hot and dangerous knowledge, analogous to the *hara* or *horö* of killing and other tabooed events discussed in chapter VI and XI. Since the missionary translation of sin as *horö* an analogy has developed between the urgent need to throw away bundles of magical knowledge before death and the need to confess and be forgiven one’s wrongdoings or sins before death.

#### *Bechu sowanua* (“inhabitants” - also known as *bela*).

This class of disease-causing supernatural being is perhaps better converted into the European tradition as “fairies.” They are white-coloured creatures that live in the tops of the tallest forest trees, whose activities are typically characterised as mischievous rather than evil. They are especially renowned for their habit of abducting people walking alone through the forest. In the case of a disappearance attributed to such a cause traditionally a great crowd of people from the village would set off into the forest as noisily as possible, banging on the trunks of trees as they past, until the missing person was found or returned. The *sowanua* would sometimes leave their abductees perched high up on the smallest twigs of the trees, which miraculously would support their weight. If such a returned abductee managed to return with a *sowanua* hair its possession would afford him magical powers to pass through tiny spaces and become light enough to sit on the thinnest twig. Diseases such as *bahi* (smallpox), *sowuluzukhu* (measles), and *laya’atö*, all characterised by fever and a rash on the skin, were attributed to powders (dried leaves or ashes) that the *sowanua* threw down from their treetops onto people passing below. Nowadays adults will remember their mothers explaining their childhood illnesses in such a way, but in the villages of my study it has come, much more than explanations of sickness invoking *bechu*, to have more the status of a folk belief - a story told with a twinkle in the eye - amongst all but the oldest.

#### *Maciana*

Known all over the Southeast Asian region (Indonesian: *Pontianak*), *Maciana* is the spirit of a woman who dies in childbirth. For most purposes invisible, it is recognised by its voice like the bleating of a goat. Some say that women have nothing to fear from *Maciana*, that it only disturbs men alone in their house or field hut. Others, however, maintain that it is attracted by the smell of blood at childbirth, and will attack women in labour.

<sup>10</sup> Moslems in particular tell of the ghost of a man stabbed to death in the back whilst at his prayers, who is condemned to eternal wandering, the knife hilt still sticking out of his back.

<sup>11</sup> A few miles south of Gunung Sitoli stands an ancient stone which is a preferred place for magicians to “throw away” their magic.

### The Spirit with the Transformed Breast (*bechu sitobali susu*).

This spirit is local to the Hilimaeta/Lagundri region, and is said to be the ghost of a Hilimaeta girl executed for having premarital sex (or committing adultery, versions differ) by being cast off the eastern cape of the Lagundri bay with stones tied to her ankles. Her ghost is said to haunt the dramatic seabird-infested rock known as *Batu Hitö*<sup>12</sup> that stands off this cape, and is recognised by its one infernally long breast, that it is obliged to wear wrapped round its neck. Her lover, who was hanged from a tree, is occasionally said to have become a *bechu sebua* or great spirit that has eyes like headlamps and flies through the palmtops. *Sitobali susu* is not invoked in explaining sicknesses, but is believed to cause fishermen to drown.

### Spirits of the Living (*bechu zauri*)

Though they do not cause sickness, the appearance of a spirit of someone still living is a well known sign that that person is about to die. Such spirits can only be seen by seers, those with an inherited capacity to see spirits, or those with magical knowledge that enable them to borrow this capacity. If a very sick person becomes unconscious or very confused it may be said that his spirit is walking, in which case healers are supposed to be able to call back the spirit and thus overcome this augury of imminent death. Sometimes the spirit will be heard to call out the person's name in the night. In such a case traditionally the family would rush out carrying torches and shouting, "Go back home! You are doing a wrong thing, and you have lost your way!"

## **8.4 Distant causes: guilt, sin, taboos and cursing**

The etiologies of disease described above, either ordinary or involving witchcraft or spirits, constitute proximate causes of sickness. As patients and their families strive to make sense of sickness-events, these proximate causes may be combined with distant causes such as guilt or sin, cursing by parents or ancestors, withholding of wife-givers' blessings, and infractions of traditional taboos. With the exception of the breaking of taboos, which are associated with specific disorders, distant causes predispose or make one vulnerable to sickness in general, and its specific manifestation as disease is explained by reference to proximate causes. The classic example today is sin somatised as guilt or weak religious faith: this is seen as weakening one's defences against both witchcraft and spirit attack as well as ordinary diseases. Similarly curses made by ancestors or parents in response to filial disobedience and the withholding of blessing by wife-givers in response to infractions of exchange expectations give rise to non-specific afflictions whose precise manifestation is typically additionally explained by one of the proximate causes described above.

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<sup>12</sup> Known by foreigners as *Batu Gajah*, or "elephant rock" on account of its silhouette, and marked thus on old Dutch maps.

We begin with the traditional notion of infractions of taboos or prohibitions as causing diseases. The most typical examples of this are the elaborate prohibitions which were traditionally imposed on pregnant women and their husbands, the breaking of which has specific consequences for the future health of the unborn child. Thus one informant reported his mother's explanation for his asthma (*ambö badu*) as being her having approached a dying animal while pregnant with him. In an attempt to remedy this she later burnt the skin of the same animal around him. Another reported his parents' explanation for his liver disease being that a snake had slithered by him when he was newborn. It is significant that in both cases the informant disagreed with his parents' explanation and offered an alternative: sequestered within the sphere of traditional ideas and finding no reinforcement in the spheres of either Christianity or cosmopolitan medicine, such ideas now enjoy the attenuated status of folk beliefs among all but the old with no education or fluency in Indonesian.

As we have seen in chapter V traditional ideas describe a continuum from animals to the creator God such that the young are to the old as the old are to the ancestors, as the ancestors are to the tribal progenitors, and such tribal progenitors are to the gods. The well-being (health, wealth, productivity, fertility and worldly success) of those lower in the scale depends on the blessing of those higher, and this blessing depends on the obedience and appropriate prestations or offerings to those higher. As we saw in chapter V a horizontal step fits into this vertical hierarchy in that the blessing of wife-givers is deemed indispensable for the well-being of their wife-takers. When disobedience or renegeing on exchange obligations perverts this hierarchy then parents, wife-givers, deceased ancestors or gods are expected to retaliate by withholding blessing or instituting a curse. The spirits of the ancestors may be said to "follow" their disobedient victim, so that the explanation of illness so caused may approach the model described above for illness caused by spirits. Such curses have a corporate application, affecting families as a whole, and are said to run down nine generations of the patriline before expiring. This is a commonly invoked explanation (at the "distant" level of causation) for the same disease being "inherited" down through a family line, and is referred to as *horö nga'ötö* - "descended sin". Thus families afflicted with a run of bad luck - typically ill-health but also failed crops, economic problems, etc. - will look to the past to see if a case of significant disobedience to an ancestor's wishes or a shortfall in the fulfilling of exchange obligations is available to explain these current problems. If such a case can be found, remedying the cause of the curse should result in its being lifted. In such cases, then, "sin" as wrongdoing is a cause of illness, but the wrongdoing is narrowly defined as failure to follow the words and ways of parents and ancestors - *h a d a*, Ind. *a d a t* - or failure to meet exchange expectations. These ideas have been reinforced by Christian and state messages, and continue to be important in explaining contemporary misfortune and sickness.

A different understanding of "sin" informs a distinct traditional understanding of the causation of disease, one that is nearly redundant nowadays, but of significance in understanding the genealogy of contemporary notions of sin as a cause of disease. As we saw in chapter VI, the bible-translating missionary Dr Sundermann chose the indigenous term *horö*



to translate "sin." For pre-Christian Niassans *horö* referred to violence, warfare, incest, adultery, and the taking of heads, as well as magical knowledge, beating of gold, ironworking, breech-births, and the birth of twins. *Molau horö* - "to do *horö*" - was to go on a raiding or headhunting expedition. A special and compelling kind of danger was associated with *horö*: the warrior returning to the village from a successful battle or headhunting expedition was supposed to be accompanied by a kind of "heat" referred to as *hara*. Before returning to his house such a warrior was expected to lay down his arms and rub his back against the *adu horö*, a wooden statue, to which the dangerous heat or *hara* arising from his violence or tabooed activity would be transferred. Should he neglect this precaution and enter his family house the heat he brought with him was believed to be responsible for subsequent sickness arising within the family.

Some informants describe this dangerous "heat" adhering to the person who has just committed an act of *horö* rather in terms of a spirit, the *bechu horö*, which attaches itself to the person. Thus *balunö* (twilight blindness, understood by technical medicine to be caused by vitamin A deficiency) is described by older informants as being caused by being the first person seen by someone who has just committed adultery. A more direct notion of sin causing disease is provided by *bere-bere*, small abscesses on the eyelids or around the eye, believed by some informants to be caused by spying.

The traditional sphere then provides two ways in which certain actions may result in bad luck and sickness. Where the action consists in neglecting offerings to or going against the wishes, words or ways of parents, wife-givers, ancestors, tribal progenitors or gods the recompense - the exchange idiom is apt - is conceived as arising negatively from a withdrawal of blessing and positively as an active curse. The sense of punishment as repayment perhaps drew on the councils of the (living) elders which punished discovered infractions of village law or exchange expectations and apprehended thefts by enforcing restitution, levying fines or ordering enslavement or execution.

The second traditional notion, of a dangerous heat or bad spirit arising from violence or adultery, differs from Christian sin in that the actions involved, though creating danger, are not necessarily condemned as bad actions. Thus iron-working also creates dangerous heat which must be cooled in order to protect the ironworkers family from consequent sickness. It does resemble sin, however, in its greater emphasis on the individual, and since specifically murder and adultery were stressed by missionaries and local church leaders as prime examples of sin, the two distinct traditional notions became combined in villagers' understandings of Christian sin, and its power to cause sickness.

Notably during (see chapter VI), but also ever since conversion with little diminished fervour, repentance behaviour has taken on central importance in villagers' responses to most sickness. Whenever a family member is ill, in addition to taking them to a doctor or calling a village healer, the family will gather in the house. Prayers and, perhaps, hymns and bible

reading are led by the family head or a relative with a position in the Church, or if the illness is severe, by an invited congregation leader. All close family members, and the patient as well if he or she are well enough to participate, confess and ask for forgiveness from one another for offence or neglect given in the recent past. Each then formally forgives (*efa'ö* - to "put after" in the sense of put behind them) the other, with special emphasis on the patient. This is then followed by intense prayers for the recovery of the patient, while participants clasp their hands together and move them vigorously up and down over the body of the patient. The meeting is closed by recitation of the Lord's Prayer, and the serving of coffee or tea.

Sin is thus commonly invoked as a supplementary cause in most sickness. The mechanism understood to be involved varies from sin or lack of faith making one vulnerable to the malevolent attentions of spirits, to the suggestion that sins generate their own possessing spirits, to a disease being sent direct as a punishment from God (Lowalangi). The sins confessed by family members still are hypothetically topped by murder and adultery, but in practice more often cover stealing, lying or cheating, short measuring, arguing or fighting, neglecting or not helping, laziness, disobedience, infrequent church attendance, inadequate giving to church collections, and resorting to magical techniques, whether in curing, protecting crops, seeking a boost in fertility or good fortune. The organs of Christianity (missionaries, seminaries, international links in church organisation, indigenous church elders and ministers) give authoritative definitions of what practices are against the will of God, and hence constitute sin. Failure to make offerings to the idols of the ancestors has been re-written as laziness in going to church and being stingy in one's contributions to the church coffers. Old sins such as failure to avenge have been suppressed, and new sins, such as dabbling in magic, have been introduced. They have also attempted to instill an internalised individual conscience of sin, with dramatic success. The linkage of the new term, with its new imperatives, to powerful traditional beliefs and practices such as *horö* and ancestral cursing made the notion of sin viscerally compelling for the converted Niassan, and embodied guilt is very commonly invoked on Nias in the explanation - some medical researchers would add causation - of distressing physical symptoms, and almost universally motivates sick people to repentance. Even if blame is apparently deflected by attributing a disease to witchcraft or spirit-attack, the victim will nevertheless repent and pray for forgiveness, since his or her sins caused Lowalangi to withhold his protection from magic or spirits in the first place. Time and time again good Christians describe sickness as a sign from God, as God "tugging our hearts," as a road which brings us back to God. This word for God reprimanding our hearts is *sugi*, which refers also to the action of visiting a kinsman to reclaim a debt (see Beatty 1992:214). The agreement of both local tradition and the Old Testament in viewing wrongdoing as debts - on the analogy of fining in council as punishment and correct behaviour as that which is owed to God or the ancestors - paid a large part in making Christianity intelligible to villagers, paving the way for New Testament teaching exhorting the untraditional forgiveness of sins on the analogy of releasing someone from a debt.

## 8.5 Contemporary dynamics of sickness understandings

Broadly speaking, today children learn traditional understandings from healers, parents, and, especially grandparents. Since parents are busy working the fields and elderly grandparents usually stay at home in the daytime to keep an eye on small children, grandparents play a particularly important role in the nonformal education of children, and this mechanism accounts in part for the persistence of traditional ideas. Christian understandings are also learnt from grandparents and parents (and to this extent have already, in two generations, become "traditional") as well as healers, church elders, sermons and the Bible. "Modern" understandings are learnt from the village nurse and other medical staff they encounter, as well as parents, school teachers, church elders and the village headman's apparatus.

In attempting to elucidate the dynamics of understandings of disease causation, the first fact to note is the amount of "foreign" elements that have been integrated into traditional beliefs. Examples mentioned above are the use of imported substances such as benzoin and asafoetida to repel spirits, the use of foreign languages in *mantera*, Moslem *azimat* used by Christian healers in making amulets, Friday as a day of special vulnerability to spirit-attack, as well as the metamorphosis of deceased healers into spirits in the shape of animals such as tigers or rhinos, as well as the incarnation of *zihi* as buffaloes and horses, all of which animals are not indigenous to Nias. This would appear to suggest both that the foreign is associated with special potency, and that foreign ideas have historically been eagerly incorporated into local understandings. The father of one Moslem healer I know travelled to Padang and Aceh to learn magical and healing knowledge, and his son incorporates the knowledge thus gained - for example of *mambang* as a special category of spirit - into his practice. Thus we should not be surprised when we hear that safety-pins somehow inserted in the navel are supposed to protect girls from the unwanted attentions of men, or that possession of someone's photograph potentially gives one sinister powers over that person. From iron- and gold-working, through house-shapes imitating galleons (Feldman 1984) to guns, clothing and Christianity, foreign artefacts and knowledge along with the powers with which they are associated have been appropriated by Niassans. As we shall see in the moralising of understandings of sickness by scientific cosmopolitan medicine, "modernity" is not always secularising or disenchanting: unexplained bright lights in the forest at night suggest the eyes of spirits to some, UFOs to others exposed to television. This openness to the non-local would also provide an alternative to common origins in explaining region-wide commonalities in understandings of sickness and healing.

As we shall see later in discussing the local reception of modern, cosmopolitan medicine (chapter X), despite being explicitly set apart from tradition as a kind of knowledge, its reception has benefited from local understandings of the potency of ideas and technologies from over the seas, just as the *azimat* (written spells) and *mantera* (spoken spells) of immigrant Malay dukuns were incorporated in the last century. Nor has Christianity provided a direct challenge to the belief in spirits causing illness, since even the New

Testament contains many stories of Jesus and his disciples casting out demons.

However, directions of change are discernible in assessing the dynamics of contemporary understandings of health and sickness, notably a slight movement away from invoking causal agents such as witches and spirits, and a growth in the category of diseases understood in terms of ordinary etiologies, for which cosmopolitan medicine is indicated. However, in an ironic counter-movement, since state propaganda claims that “modern medicine” can swiftly and effectively cure disease in a way “folk healers” cannot, its failure in many cases to do so leads to common re-diagnoses of ordinary diseases as diseases caused by spirits or sorcerers, which are not expected to respond to modern medical treatment.

As a result of health education initiatives by the state and church, those villagers who have been exposed to such initiatives do understand malaria and cholera according to scientific understandings, i.e. as caused by the infected bite of a mosquito and faecal contamination of drinking water respectively. Church and state emphasis on hygiene has led to the disease-producing substances that may be present in food or drink being referred to less as poison (*lanu*), which implies another’s malevolent agency, than as “dirt” (*ta’unö*), which implies blame on the victim (see chapter XI).

Fluency in Indonesian and participation in national culture through national media and schooling has also led to the illness-producing micro-objects called *tungö* being understood less in terms of substances spread by *bechu* (such as the powders thrown down from trees by the *sowanua* to give humans rashes with fever) than as *bibit penyakit* - non-agent linked “seeds of sickness.” Thus too the notion of sickness produced by “winds” which is embedded in the Indonesian language (i.e. *masuk angin*, “wind entering”), sounds recognisable to Niassans for whom *tungö* are in myth borne on winds from the *Tora’a* or a tree in the land of the dead. For those fluent in Indonesian such concepts are then used to “explain” local concepts, so that an *ono mbechu* “is” an *angin halus* (“a subtle wind”). These translations then redound within local usage in phrases such as *ani sofökhö*, a “wind of sickness” referring to cholera, and within the Nias language provide an alternative vocabulary to those disinclined through strong identification with Christian faith to invoke spirits, since firm faith and regular prayer should protect one from *bechu*<sup>13</sup>.

It is thus typical of the contemporary situation to find two levels of explanation for the same phenomena, one invoking spirit-beliefs and the other a secular, materialist alternative. As described above, spirit-attack may alternatively be rendered as wind entering; fires lit outside houses at dusk may be described as repelling *bechu* or mosquitoes; red-leaved plants are planted outside houses to protect from *bechu* or simply to decorate the front yard - when planted on a grave they either prevent the spirit of the deceased walking or decorate the grave. When pigs are slaughtered at weddings or funerals the hairs are burnt off as the animal dies: this is both cleaning the meat and constitutes a sacrifice to the *bechu*. Such

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<sup>13</sup> Characteristically translated into Indonesian in a Christian context as *setan* - “devils.”

simultaneous dual explanations or alternative vocabularies allow individuals' utterances to fit without conflict in changing contexts (discussion with grandparents versus schoolteachers, for example), and it fits with local expectations of knowledge that there should at once be a simple explanation for things, as well as a hidden, esoteric level of explanation.

It is tempting to describe this as a new state of affairs, as a villagers' strategy to negotiate the contemporary coexistence of contradictory spheres of interpretation. Evidence for this claim could be found in Kleiweg de Zwaan's research over eighty years ago, which found almost all sickness to be attributable to the actions of spirits or sorcerers. However, though it is likely that such a vector of transformation has taken place to some extent we must not exaggerate it, since it is likely that Kleiweg de Zwaan focussed on exotic interpretations and ignored more prosaic understandings of ordinary disease.

## 8.6 Chains of diagnosis

Choice of treatment for a specific illness depends on the kind of disease understood to be afflicting the patient. If the disease is ordinary but not serious rest and non-specialist home treatments are indicated (massage, herbal teas or poultices, patent medicines from the chemist, etc.). If it is serious but still understood to have an ordinary cause, then the help of a healer known to have had successes in treating similar disorders will be sought, or, if the family can afford it, recourse to a doctor or clinic is the best option. However, if the sickness is diagnosed as a disease caused by spirits or people doctor's medicine is strongly contraindicated, and the services of a healer with a socially recognised specialty in treating such a disease must be sought.

In the village all diseases recorded in my survey were treated with traditional herbal medicine, whether administered by mother, healer or patient. 45% of all diseases were not treated by a doctor, though this includes the 19% who did use patent medicine bought from the chemist. 26% used no cosmopolitan medicine at all. Doctor's medicine is very seldom used without being supplemented by traditional treatments administered either by a family member or healer. While village healers are always consulted for diseases attributed to sorcery or spirits, they are also consulted for ordinary diseases in 25% of cases; very few (5%) saw a doctor for diseases attributed to sorcery or spirits.

The fixing of a diagnosis is a family matter, settled by the same kind of family meeting that addresses all family affairs. Often a range of different opinions will be expressed. The patient's self-diagnosis, while entering into the debate, is not privileged: as in all such meetings when all have had their say the opinion of the eldest usually leads consensus. This means that while the young do pick up the scientific understanding of disease promulgated in schools, a time lag of a generation must pass before such understandings are reflected in family diagnoses. Since unabsolved sin is implied as a distant cause in most sickness, the family meeting will often include prayer for the patient, and family repentance behaviour.

Traditionally only one healer could be consulted at a time, since asking for and receiving treatment constituted an exclusive relationship between the patient's family and the healer. If the treatment did not appear to be working, then the healer would tell the family that his or her powers were inadequate to surmount the disease, the relationship would be terminated, and the family would be recommended the services of another healer whose powers were supposed to be greater, at least for the disease in question. This traditional rule continues to mean that treatments (both traditional and modern) are sought sequentially, and one must prove inadequate before another is sought. This prevents doctor's and healer's treatments being simultaneously sought. It is thought that to do this would anger both doctor and healer. In general, doctors' knowledge is not seen as varying greatly between practitioners, so that if the sickness does not respond quickly to a doctor's medicine it is thought that an ordinary etiology has been disproved. Failure of a healer's treatment, however, does not challenge the diagnosis on which it is based. It is simply thought that the specific healer's knowledge or capacities are not "on a level" with the spirit or sorcery causing the sickness, and another healer is sought.

Typical chains of diagnoses and treatments begin with a diagnosis based on the symptoms of the illness, as well as the presence or absence of factors that might implicate sorcery (an ongoing dispute with a neighbour suspected of magical powers, for example) or spirit-attack (perhaps having experienced a feeling of fear walking near a graveyard soon before the onset of symptoms). As treatments fail, the first diagnosis (which is often an ordinary one) is reconsidered, with more factors implicating sorcery or witchcraft being taken into account.

At this point we are trespassing on material that belongs more properly in the following chapter on healers and their cures, so we shall conclude this section on understandings of disease with three sickness histories related in informants' words. These stories illustrate many of the themes discussed in this chapter, as well as providing a vivid introduction to village healers, which will be the subject of the next.

## 8.7 Case histories

The following case histories were elicited by sitting down with a family and asking them to describe all the significant illnesses that they remembered afflicting living family members. I asked them to particularly note the symptoms suffered, the various explanations given for the illness, the treatments sought, and the outcome.

### Case History I: Jasmani's fever

Jasmani is a 25 year old married Catholic woman, educated to secondary school level, and resident in Hiliamaetaniha.

"I suffered from fever (*fa'aukhu*) when I was 18 and living at my parents' house. In the

first place I received treatment from my parents, consisting of papaya leaves, mondra, sugar and onion. The mondra was pounded, the onion was roasted and pounded along with the papaya leaves, then mixed with the sugar. When this was done a small glass of water was mixed in and the juice squeezed out of the mixture. The liquid was strained, put in a glass, and prayed over by my parents before being given to me to drink. I was forbidden to blow on the medicine, and afterwards the grounds were rubbed on me, all over my body. I took this medicine for two weeks and one day it would be better, one day worse.

"In connection with the lack of change my parents took the view that I should go to a healer and I obeyed my father's order. The name of the healer was Fomarise of Hiliamaeta. I went to her house and was asked what was my sickness. I answered, "I am hot/I have fever" (*mofa'aukhu*). After asking she put water in a dish and began to pray while taking the water and dabbing it on me three times. Then she prayed again and then pronounced on the origins of my sickness, saying I had been struck by a spirit at the edge of a river while washing.

"After this came the first treatment. She took garlic: one clove she rubbed over my body and another she put in my pocket so that the spirit would be kept far from my body. Next came the second treatment. The healer took nine pieces each of turmeric, mondra, ginger, red onion and sago leaves, nine small strips of old cloth and a red hot knife. She put water in a coconut shell, and nine times the hot knife was dipped in the water. After all was bundled together I was called by the healer for us to pray together that it might be blessed by the Lord. Afterwards I was told to lie down while the healer took the medicine and rubbed it all over my body while saying:

'Sharp is the mondra water  
Sharp is the turmeric water  
Sharp is the water of the knife  
Sharp is the red onion water  
Sharp is the garlic water  
Sharp is the water from stones at the heart of the hearth  
Sharp is the water from the ashes of coconut shell  
Sharp is the water of old sand  
So all kinds of sicknesses  
May they be thrown to the shitting-place  
May they fall beside the pigs  
Amen'

"And after this was finished I felt like all my sickness had disappeared. After this I gave my thankyou offering to the healer, consisting of money and betelnut. The healer was invited to eat at our house as a token of respect. My parents greeted the healer and handed over the expression of thanks saying that there is really no reward except from Jesus Christ. The healer then told me to go and get treatment from the doctor at the hospital in order to kill the seeds of the sickness.

"The next day I went to the doctor, and after I was examined he said I had malaria. I was taken to a room for an injection, then given many kinds of medicine for malaria and vitamins, which I was told to take three times a day, and best if they were taken after meals so I wouldn't feel dizzy, said the doctor.

"After going to the hospital I went to report to the healer that I had been to the doctor that day. The healer said, 'good, now you must go to the church and give your offering to give thanks to the Lord for the healing of your sickness. It wasn't through me, but through the child Jesus Christ.'"

Jasmani's story illustrates several features of the patterns of village understandings of sickness discussed in this chapter. We note the initial informal use of home-made herbal remedies reinforced by Christian prayer. Though there is initially no suggestion of an etiology based on spirits or witchcraft a doctor or hospital is not visited, presumably because of the expense (see case study II). A local village healer is consulted when the sickness fails to respond to the home remedies, and the spirit-based causation originates with this healer, rather than the patient or her family. The healer's practice is - from an outsider's point of view - distinctly pre-Christian in its use of the spell and magical numbers of ingredients. However, from the point of view of the actors it is thoroughly embedded within devout Christian faith, and no contradiction is felt, even relating the episode to a foreign researcher. It is the healer himself who recommends recourse to the hospital, giving the lie to the assumption of state discourse that traditional healers are generally a barrier to the uptake of state medicine. Instead the Nias situation has much in common with Bali: Unni Wikan describes significant complementarity between traditional healing and the work of doctors and clinics. The work of each is seen as being confined to separate realms and the recognition of multiple causation of illness episodes means that both traditional healers and doctors may be consulted (Wikan 1990: 230-1,261-2). However, doctors in Bali apparently refer to traditional healers those patients they cannot cure (ibid. 3), which would be extremely unlikely on Nias.

The medical pragmatism of villagers is well illustrated by the episode, as well as the ease with which mutually contradictory discourses find ways of coexisting. Thus in this case the hospital diagnosis and treatment is remembered and appreciated, but it doesn't negate the healer's diagnosis. The episode is remembered as Jasmani's fever, not Jasmani's malaria; and the very structure of the story encompasses the hospital section within the frame of the initial and return visit to the healer, concluding with his insistence on the priority of healing from Lowalangi and sealing the cure with offerings in church, in the traditional idiom of reciprocal relations with the divine.

#### Case History II: Fobariti's poisoning.

Fobariti is a 63 year old Protestant grandmother educated to primary school level.

"In 1971 I experienced the sickness known as being poisoned. I felt the sickness as pain in the stomach, but not like a normal stomach ache as for example caused by wind or dirt in food. The pain continued to get worse so I went to the hospital in Teluk Dalam and stayed there a week. According to the doctor's examination my sickness was jaundice or liver disease, and I followed the treatment of being checked every morning and given an injection. However there was no change after a week in hospital, despite being firm in taking the daily medicine it got heavier as time went on.

"Since I felt no beneficial effect in my body my husband took the policy in the matter of my sickness along with my children to check me out of the hospital. And before leaving I reported to the doctor that I was going to leave today with the reason being that my sickness had gotten that much worse, and I went on to ask how much was the doctor's charge for my having stayed a week there. The doctor replied that the cost was 150,000 rupiah (£37), so I paid it, and then returned home with my husband and children.



"After we had returned home my brother advised me to go and get treated by a healer, and my children were of the same opinion. So the next day I went to the house of a healer. When I arrived at the healer's house he [or she, pronouns being ungendered in Nias language] greeted me with "blessings upon you!" and I replied as well. Then I lay down and the healer approached me and directly enquired "what sickness have you?" I answered that I had a pain in my stomach and that I had spent a week in the Teluk Dalam hospital without there being any change.

"The healer told me not to speak, and said "let us pray together to examine your sickness." Then the healer prayed for a long time, until he was sweating from the exertions of his prayer. And after we had finished praying together it was apparent to him that the sickness I was suffering was being poisoned by someone. Later in the evening I had to confess my sins, all the sins from when I was small right up to the present - stealing, slandering, envying, being jealous, deceiving - I related in front of Allah or the Lord, even though in actual fact I couldn't see. I continued to speak while the healer waited sitting in a chair facing me, watching me as I was filled with remorse at my actions and cried out loudly. When the confession of sins was over next I gave the donation for the confession of sins, which is not obligatory but as much as you will. The healer stood and I gave the offering into his hands while saying, 'here is my thankyou; it is not much but very little indeed.' Then the healer accepted it and offered it to Allah while saying: 'here is the token of respect from Fobariti to redeem her sins which she has related to you. In your name may her sins be separated from her. Amen.'

"After the prayer came the prayer to chase away demons (*manandrö ba wasöndrata*). The healer stood while I sat on the floor, meaning that I was under his hands. The healer spoke: 'In the name of Jesus leave Fobariti's body...ndeheeee...ris! You are a devil, depart Satan to your dwelling place, quickly I tell you, depart! No bones do you have, no flesh...tik! Devil's fire you have put inside Fobariti here's body - open! pull! tak! ris! tik!' This was the way of chasing away a spirit which has been put inside a human being.

"For three weeks I underwent this with the healer and all my sickness vanished, only my stomach was a little painful, and the healer was untiring every morning and evening in praying for my stomach. His way of making the sickness in my body go away was by continuously striking my stomach while saying, 'I beg from you compassion, oh Lord, that you pour out your spirit of fire, burn and wipe out the fire of the devil... tak! Oh great helper Katarahari... tik! In the name of Jesus I say to you... to Fobariti... ndehee... open! ris!'

"Indeed it is true that at this time of sickness - about a year or more - my living situation was quite nervous and I'd almost given up hope who to turn to. But even so I didn't tire of washing out my body and soul before the All-Powerful One.

"I don't really know where my sickness came from. I just thought that it began in my stomach then went for my head and washed all over my body. My father, uncle, husband and children were all of the opinion I should go to a prayer group. I had to repent all my actions that were unacceptable to God, and not escape from surrendering myself to Lord Jesus. Finally I was healed following the treatment that had been given by the healer. That is how I was cured."

Fobariti's story differs from Jasmani's in that the greater wealth of her family permits the desirable initial response to what appears to be an ordinary illness, the visit to hospital. Nevertheless, her family is not so wealthy that the fee is trivial: the exact amounts, and the substantial burden they imply, are accurately recalled over twenty-five years after the

event. Otherwise the chain of diagnosis and treatment follows the typical pattern described above. An initial ordinary diagnosis is discounted when the illness fails to respond after a week of hospital treatment. A healer is then consulted, and it is with them that the poisoning or spirit-based explanatory model originates. The blurring of the boundary between spirit and witchcraft-caused categories of sickness causation reflects the extent to which the contemporary threefold classification of disease by cause is a modern product constituted by exposure to Christianity and education. Again, the apparently pre-Christian practice of the healer - including references to a spirit-helper - is subordinated to an emphatically Christian framework. Thus the evil spirits expelled are referred to not as *bechu*, but as *setan* (devils). This Christianity, of course, is of the strongly syncretic variety, and thus we witness a particularly vivid account of explicit confession and repentance as part of healing - significantly in order to "separate" from the patient sins that are conceived as metaphysical substances, like spirits, poison, or even dirt, that enter the body and produce disease.

### Case History III: Julius' cough.

Julius, from Gunung Sitoli, is the 28 year old Protestant son of an official in the Justice Department. He is a graduate from Medan University and has recently married. At the time the story opens he was 19, at High School in Gunung Sitoli.

"In the beginning this sickness arose when I was having a holiday at my grandmother's house in Anaoma village in Alasa. She advised me not to go to the houses of certain people, whom she suspected of not having good hearts, nor yet to drink or eat at their houses. She was concerned that they, as poor and uneducated people, might out of envy or sick-heartedness attempt to bring down a capable family by giving poisoned food or other things connected with black magic.

"I felt myself to not really believe all my grandmother's advice, and I went on visits to the houses she had forbidden. And in the houses I was given food and drink, and there were others where I was just given coffee. And this happened just two days after I had been at my grandmother's.

"And when I had been there for four days I had already begun to cough a little. But at that time I thought the cough had been caused by the change in climate that I had experienced. So I wasn't too concerned about the cough, and nor was granny. I stayed at my granny's for ten days and then I returned to Gunung Sitoli. At the time I reached Gunung Sitoli my cough was a little worse. The cough was very frequent. My mother suggested I be treated by a doctor. And I said there was no need to go to the doctor, it is enough for me to drink medicine bought from the chemist.

"As it happened, after drinking medicine from the chemist for four days my cough was that much worse. My mother forced me to go and see a doctor. The doctor said my sickness was an ordinary cough, and gave a list of medicines that had to be bought at the chemist. But after I took this medicine my cough did not lessen. In fact my body got that much thinner and the cough worse. Every day my body was weaker and I suffered from fever.

"Seeing my condition which worsened every day my parents suspected that my cough was caused by being poisoned by someone. Because the cough caused by poison differs from the ordinary cough in producing no mucus. They asked me if I had visited any house that had been forbidden by my granny while I was at her house. And so I admitted that I had. At that time my parents were very angry with me, and I could only say sorry for

the wrongdoing I had done. They attempted to treat me with various medicinal oils they had previously bought from a healer, and after taking the medicine my cough lessened a little.

"However, the cough continued, and I still had little appetite for food. At that time a relative arrived from my grandmother's village, and he was a healer who could treat sicknesses from poisoning like the one I had. After my father told him the story of the origins of my sickness he was very sympathetic and offered to treat me.

"First he extracted the poison which I had eaten by calling it out. He filled a dish with clean water, and then recited a mantra while tapping it three times in front of my body. Then he said another mantra while lifting it up, and then he showed it to us. On top of the dish were cuttings of very fine hair, a few drops of oil and a few other unrecognisable things. The healer said that this was the poison I had eaten. After calling out the poison he gave me medicine to drink made from oil and plants. This was repeated for three days, and I felt the condition of my body gradually improving. My cough was very much less, and my appetite was much better.

"After he had finished the treatment he said that all the poison had not come out yet. The poison that had come out was the poison in the lungs, whereas the poison in the stomach had not come out yet. The healer advised that I should be treated by a healer who was more clever than he. My parents decided on my uncle, a skilled healer, and they called him to come and treat me.

"When he saw the condition of my body which was very weak and pale he was sorry for me. He questioned my father about the cause of my disease and who had ever treated me, and how. After my father had related all of it, my uncle said that my sickness would certainly heal - and then he began to treat me.

"I had to sit cross legged, facing him on a mat. Then he drew a calm and quiet to himself and fully concentrated on treating me. As soon as he felt that everything was ready he said to me, 'let us pray.' At that time he prayed to the Lord and told me to pray in my heart. Then he took a dish of clean water which I had to put a silver coin in, the prerequisite of his calling out the poison. After that he calmed and quietened himself again, then ordered me to open my mouth and breath through it. Then he held the dish by my navel, and recited various mantra while turning around the coin with the tip of his knife. Three times this was done, reciting the spell while turning the coin at my navel, and three times at my chest. After that he showed us the dish, and I was astonished to see it because on top of the water had appeared still much more of the poison. It looked like snippets of human hair, threads of tiger hair and some drops of oil. When I asked my uncle why the healer who had treated me before had not been able to extract all the poison which I had eaten, he said that he was indeed clever, only he was still not yet able to take in hand poison as serious as this one.

"He then went on to make a medicine for me to kill the venom of the poison in my body, made from seven limes, the yolk of an egg and nine drops of medicinal oil. He first prayed while holding his hand over the glass of medicine, and then gave it to me to drink. He said there was still much poison in my lungs and stomach, and it had to come out lest it have fatal consequences in later days. Treatment he had given me was for the poison in my lungs; next he performed the treatment for the poison in my stomach.

"His way was first to massage my stomach with the aim of breaking down the poison which had clumped together at my navel. He then gave me a "coffee remedy" made of various fruits and leaves made into a very bitter concoction like coffee, and its use was to purge me, so that all the poison which was lodged in my stomach would come out together with my shit. As normal after purging I felt very faint afterwards, since so

much of the liquid inside my body came out, but this was not a problem.

"The first of my uncle's treatments I felt to have a very beneficial effect. Already I wasn't coughing any more; if I did cough it was rarely, just once, and not painful. He called out the poison from my body for three days. At the first calling the poison that came out was in great quantity and made up of different kinds. The second time there was less, and the third day none at all. This was a sign that all the poison in my body had come out. And although there was no more poison left in my body my uncle nevertheless continued to give me medicine made from limes, egg yolk and a few drops of medicinal oil.

"My uncle stayed in our house for a week to treat me. And at that time he said that my sickness was cured, and we shouldn't worry any more. Before he returned to his village my parents gave him rice and pork to eat, and gave him a sum of money as an expression of our thanks to him. My uncle did not insist on a certain amount of money, he just accepted what we were willing to give. He also kept the silver coin.

"Thus did my uncle treat my sickness until it was healed. It felt like the health of my body was returned to the state it was in before I was sick. Now I was truly healthy. The cough was no more, and the shortness of breath I experienced while coughing had healed as well, I was no longer weak, my appetite was good and I was able to resume all activities.

"Meanwhile we didn't make revenge against the person we suspected of giving me poison - we just prayed to the Lord that he might make him aware and always bless him or her. And my family always cultivated good relations with their family, although the relationship was not intimate. Occasionally their family visited our house in Gunung Sitoli, and always we were careful and constantly watched them so that the same events would not be repeated. And although they visited us, we never visited their house in the village."

Julius' story is very revealing of the characteristic framework of witchcraft suspicions in Nias villages, and shows how they generally remain suspicions and do not become accusations as a result of Christian reluctance to mix oneself, through revenge, with such un-Christian behaviour. His story again very clearly illustrates the typical pattern of successive diagnoses with their appropriate treatments described in this chapter. An initial ordinary explanation is attended by self-prescription with chemist-bought medicine, this being a relatively well-off family. When Julius fails to respond he is taken to a doctor. When the illness fails to respond swiftly to the doctor's treatment, events leading up to the onset of the illness are recalled, and the family together comes to suspect poisoning. The patient accedes to the family diagnosis, and an appropriate traditional healer is sought. When the illness still fails to adequately respond, the healer himself terminates his service, referring the patient to another healer with knowledge that is appropriate to the illness, thereby following the traditional rule of single, successive treatments. This is similar to the pattern of health seeking-behaviour Kleinman terms hierarchical and exclusive (Kleinman 1980: 187-8). By this he means that treatments are not sought simultaneously, but as a sickness fails to recover successive treatments are sequentially and exclusively resorted to. The repertoire of treatment choices in Taiwan is however, too different to make comparison useful.

In all three case histories we glimpse the extraordinary activities of traditional healers as

perceived by their village patients. The heady combination of spells, prayers, spirit-helpers, herbs, exchanges, massages, and apparent conjuring tricks is as exotic and baffling to us as it is natural and obviously efficacious to villagers. In the next chapter we turn our attention - at last - to a sustained description of the varieties of village *ere* ("experts"), and explanation of their various treatments. In so doing we will attempt to trace the understandings of healing knowledge and its transmission, the sources of their power, and the special performativity of words, common to all.

## CONTEMPORARY VILLAGE HEALING

## 9.1 Preventative measures for health maintenance

Before proceeding to describe the various specialties that make up specialist healing knowledge on Nias we shall begin by reviewing the various kinds of preventative measures taken by families to protect their members from sickness, as well as those steps taken in response to sickness within the family before calling a specialist healer.

Diet is perhaps the foremost preventative measure taken by families to keep their members healthy. Firstly, as mentioned above, one should eat only at home where food is cooked by one's womenfolk, or at other households closely linked through descent or affinity; all other food contains a threat of poisoning. Secondly one should eat in adequate quantity to sustain one for the day's work. Lack of appetite is a sure sign of disease. To call someone "fat" (*asolo*) is to compliment them on robust good health; thinness (*fa'afuo*), typically combined with pallor, bespeaks sickness. For most villagers the morning meal consists of boiled or fried bananas or root vegetables such as taro, sweet potato, or cassava, taken with sweet tea, or coffee for the better off. The midday meal, cooked either at home or in the field hut, consists either of the same again or rice, mixed either with flavoured instant noodles, hard-boiled eggs fried in chili, or boiled tapioka leaves. The evening meal consists of rice with side-dishes for the better off of salted fish, hard-boiled eggs or tapioka leaves in a coconut-milk and turmeric sauce. Saturday is market day so those going into town will bring back fresh and salted fish, or, if they are well off, a little pork for Sunday lunch, since pigs are butchered for sale on Saturdays. Pork is additionally eaten by participants in funeral and wedding feasts, tiny portions being widely circulated amongst family and affines (see chapter VIII). The bulk of the diet thus consists of carbohydrate foods such as root vegetables and rice (the more prestigious choice) supplemented with protein contributed by fish, pork, and eggs. (Village chickens are primarily egg-producers, and their exceptionally tough meat is only rarely eaten.) Schoolchildren also receive a supplementary bowl of protein-rich *bubur* porridge weekly at school, where the importance of eating the five food groups (rice, vegetables, fruit, meat or fish, and milk) is stressed. The only green vegetable regularly consumed is tapioka leaves: "foreign" vegetables imported from the Karo Highlands such as cabbage and carrots are available at market, but can only be afforded occasionally by the wealthier villagers. Children supplement their diet with seasonal fruits they collect themselves; adults must typically sell fruits they produce such as pineapples and papayas at market to raise cash, and only rarely consume them themselves. A healthy balance is maintained by eating "hot" foods (see previous chapter) when the outside temperature is cool, and vice versa. Eating hot with hot (the classic example would be durian fruit and *tuak* palm wine) is thought to

dangerously raise body heat, leading to fever or madness. Eating too much of a single kind of fruit, particularly if unripe, is thought to give children worms.

Daily washing is also seen as essential to health. Just as lack of appetite is a sure index of sickness, so too is "fear of cold water." Villagers wash twice a day, in the morning on rising and in the evening on finishing work, before eating the evening meal. In villages such as Hilimaeta and Orahili, where piped water has not been made available, this still involves walking to the *hele* outside the village. These *hele* - one for women, one for men - are part of the traditional structure of the village which must be prepared at their founding, and consist of a watertank fed by a spring or stream, from which water may be drawn by removing wooden stoppers from holes in the brickwork. The morning stool is deposited, with no provision for privacy, a little downstream, after which villagers wash themselves from head to toe whilst sharing gossip. Soap is carried in a little bucket along with a clean sarong; toothpaste is used by some, but the elderly still use ground charcoal to clean their teeth. Women bring clothes to wash, and return home with containers full of water for domestic use. Clothes are dried by being spread on the house roof; mats, mattresses and pillows are also occasionally laid out in the sun to drive out bedbugs. Where water has been piped through the village, as in Hilinawalö, better off households have constructed a watertank at the back of the house where washing and defecation takes place. Poorer households either share the facilities of relatives or use the *hele*. Those whose health is poor make sure that they wait for the sun to rise before washing in the morning, and that they complete their evening shower before the sun sets. Washing in the dark constitutes a prime danger of spirit-attack. Hands are additionally rinsed in a bowl of water before eating, which is done with the fingers.

Thirdly, sufficient rest is deemed essential for good health, a requirement that must be held in balance with the back-breaking demands of farming. Fields are often a good hour's walk from the village up and down steep hills; a complete absence of labour-saving technology means that even ploughing must be done by hand, and at the end of the day firewood and pig fodder must be carried back from the gardens. It comes as no surprise that musculo-skeletal problems with the back and legs are attributed to overwork: a similar explanation is given for the symptoms of tuberculosis - coughing, stooped posture and collapsed chest - which is widespread among the elderly. Tonic herbal teas are made with *sila'öta* leaves or the curled shoots of the *woli-woli* fern are added to food to combat exhaustion, but prevention can only be secured by raising children to help out, by resting in the field hut at midday, and sleeping soundly from eleven at night until five-thirty in the morning. However, on the nights before family funerals many stay awake all night, the carpenters making the coffin while the older men give speeches, the women lament, the young men play cards, youths sing with guitars and the children play.

As follows on from the description of spirit-beliefs in the preceding chapter, health is also maintained by taking protective measures against *bechu*. This includes lighting fires outside the house at dusk; avoiding places associated with spirits<sup>1</sup> particularly at evening, night,

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<sup>1</sup> Many contexts associated with danger of fever from spirit-attack such as dawn and dusk,

or midday; the wearing of amulets (*fatahana mboto*) made by healers, and so on (see section VIII.3 above).

Prayer-group, choir, and church attendance and donations to the church also protect one against spirits, and the regular confession of sins and repentance avoids the danger of sickness through sin (see section VIII.4 above). The Christmas and New Year festivities, in particular, are seen as the time for both cleaning the house and clearing out the sins of the past year. At midnight on the last day of the year, after the church bell has rung out, families pray and confess and absolve each other together, before going out on visits around the village to repeat the process.

The messages of state health education (to be investigated in detail in chapter X) have penetrated certain sectors of village society, particularly schoolteachers and their families, young married women, those close to the church and those whose status derives not from tradition but propinquity to the apparatus of village government. Such people will stress the importance of hygiene, orderliness, and diet for maintaining their families' health.

Lastly, to maintain one's health one should be obedient and helpful to one's parents; refrain from sinful actions; fulfil the demands of tradition and the expectations of one's ancestors, for example by giving one's forebears adequate funerals and tending their graves; one should be fair in exchange, neither giving nor taking without a proper return; one should avoid worry and the harmful "heat" of anger; one should be strong or tough (*abe'e*) enough to handle the rigours of the farming life; and one should cultivate good relations with non-kin neighbours in order to avoid conflict, sorcery or poisoning.

## 9.2 Responses to illness and home healing

When feeling unwell, villagers strive nonetheless to continue to perform their duties in going to the fields, cooking, childcare and so forth. If they are able to do so the sickness is generally classified as a "light sickness" (*fōkhō saoha*) which is expected to improve with time, and little action is taken. If the sick person is not able to continue working they will stay indoors, usually lying down where they normally sleep. Staying indoors is believed to protect from spirits to whom sick people are particularly vulnerable<sup>2</sup>. If suffering headache a band is tied tightly around the head, and embrocated oils bought at market are rubbed on the temples, or a patent medicine containing paracetamol is taken. If stomach ache, the same oils are rubbed on the stomach or taken internally in hot water, and perhaps a spouse or family member will rub the patient's stomach. Musculo-skeletal strains and injuries are also treated with embrocated oils and a spouse or other family member's massage, and colds and upper

forest, and places near water are times and places where mosquitoes swarm. The symptoms of falciparum malaria (high fever, delirium, convulsions and death) are paradigmatic of *tesafo* - being touched by a spirit.

<sup>2</sup> The *Balaeka* spirit of the forest is said to be attracted by the stench of sick people; visiting them it is believed to terrify them into madness.



respiratory tract infections are treated with the embrocated oils rubbed on the chest, paracetamol preparations and the wearing of extra clothing around the throat and chest. Some say that fevers can be removed from the body along with sweat if one wraps up warm and then climbs a steep hill under hot sun. Cuts and wounds are treated by applying chewed ipomoea or *lagene* leaves to the cut (this keeps the wound clean, and the leaves contain a little anti-histamine which prevents inflammation).

In cases of sickness that prevent the patient from working a family meeting is usually held to pray, perform repentance behaviour, and decide on further action to be taken, whether taking the patient to a clinic or calling a healer. Since both these options involve expense, preliminary treatment efforts may be made in the home. These include the massage and patent medicines bought at market as described above. Furthermore, family members, especially grandparents or the elderly, will have some knowledge of healing remedies and techniques, even if they are not specialist healers themselves. Such remedies and techniques constitute a repertoire of family healing which are learnt by the younger members of the family and passed on later by them to their descendants. These treatments will be described fully in the following sections, but we may note here that sick family members will often be given the most common village medicine of egg yolk, orange juice and sugar, herbal teas, poultices or vapour baths, or applications internal and external of healing oils with secret ingredients bought from specialist healers. Home healing is generally accompanied by spontaneous prayers to the Lord for recovery and forgiveness of sins, but not formulaic *mantra*. These latter are however associated to the more "special" techniques and remedies transferred to one by one's *sibaya* (mother's brother). Healing knowledge as given by one's *sibaya* differs from that learnt from parents and grandparents in approximating the specialist healing knowledge of *ere*.

### 9.3 Herbal medicines and herbalists

Though there are several acknowledged experts in herbal medicine in the village known as *ere same'e dalu-dalu ba mbanua*, knowledge of plant remedies is also diffused more generally amongst the community, particularly amongst those who have worked the land all their lives and hence have a deep knowledge of the local flora. Everyone learns as children to put chewed *gowi* or *lagene* leaves on cuts or wounds while they are out at the gardens; the egg yolk, orange juice and sugar medicine mentioned above is universally used without the mediation of an expert; and more complex combined remedies for specific remedies are generally made by grandparents, and learnt by their grandchildren. Medicines made from locally-available plants are free, of course, which is a powerful recommendation given the poverty of villagers and the expense of doctor's medicine or consulting a healer.

Medicines are sharply differentiated from foods by villagers in that even numbers of ingredients are used in the preparation of food, odd in the preparation of medicines.

Medicines are also prayed over that the Lord will add His efficacy to them, whereas only a generalised prayer of "grace" is made over food, expressing gratitude to the Lord. Experts maintain that herbs picked from a quiet spot have greater efficacy than those found beside the path, for example.

Plants are prepared in a very diverse number of ways, often combining multiple ingredients, for the purposes of many different kinds of treatments. Fresh herbs may be boiled into tea or simply crushed and squeezed in water; dried ingredients may be ground into a powder and then steeped in boiling water. In these cases the liquid is often drunk while the grounds are smeared over the body. Leaves may be coated in oil before being wrapped in a banana-leaf packet and roasted by the fire: the leaves are then applied externally on the skin. Ingredients may be pounded together and then strapped onto the body with a cloth. Other herbs are steeped in boiling water and the vapours are then inhaled by the patient and absorbed through his or her skin. Coconut oil is widely used, its efficacy strengthened by having the ashes of burnt leaves or written spells mixed in, or else by having special leaves or magical objects left in the bottle. Such medicinal oils are both massaged externally onto the skin, as well as a few drops being taken internally or added to a medicine such as that made from egg yolks, orange juice and sugar. Plant saps are applied to abscesses, and latex from *jarak pagar* is used to fill dental cavities. Herbs and fruits with powerful laxative properties are used in combination to make purgatives to expel poison from the gut.

In the course of research I made a list of local plants used for medicinal purposes on which I recorded the various uses of the plants described by different informants. This project revealed that there is at best only a very general consistency in the ways that plants are used as medicine in the village. Villagers in general express a generally-held principle that plants bitter to the taste, such as papaya leaves, *rawa-rawa*, and *söma-söma buaya* (clerodendrum) work against fever and worms and as a strength-giving tonic. Members of the allium family (onions, shallots and garlic) are typically used against spirit-generated illnesses, and, together with burnt aromatic resins are thought to repel *bechu*. Members of the zingiber family (ginger, turmeric, galangal) are used externally for skin fungi and internally for coughs. Citruses are typically used to counter poisoning.

Heating and cooling properties are often invoked to explain the action of herbs. Cooling starfruit or guava ease high blood pressure, while heating coffee exacerbates it. The cooling property of tamarind - ingested and spread on the body - is believed to counteract *fa'agambu*, attributed to invasion by a malevolent spirit, in which the belly swells up. Cooling papaya fruit helps a "hot" stomach ache. Such understandings are widespread in the southeast Asian region. Coolness as a special quality of a healer's touch and breath, as on Nias, is also widely reported (Laderman 1991: 24; see also Endicott 1979; Howell 1981; Roseman 1991). As elsewhere (e.g. Laderman 1991: 25) extreme cold is also seen as dangerous: the ideal mean lies towards coolness. However, on Nias the rule whereby "hot" plants help "cool" conditions, and vice versa, is not without exceptions. Thus, externally applied compresses of heating substances such as cloves, black peppers, onion and cassia are supposed to "draw out the heat"

of stomach ache or fever.

More exotic remedies which are not strictly herbal are also commonplace. As in much of the Southeast Asian region, flying fox blood, bile, meat and broth is used for asthma; a teaspoonful of lamp oil is thought to be good for stomach ache; a few drops of mother's milk or morning dew ease eye infections; mashed crab mixed with dew is a common remedy for malaria; and red mud is dissolved in water for those with convulsive fever (*agakandro*).

Combining all the remedies suggested by different informants in the village reveals great variability in the use of plant medicines. Each family has a definite idea of what plants how prepared cure what kinds of disease, but over and above the generalisations suggested above there is little correspondence between different family traditions. Where the same plant is used for the same condition, one family may use it internally, another externally. The range of uses of the various local plants used as medicine is presented in an appendix to this thesis.

Where herbs are used by recognised healers or *ere* their preparation and administration is generally accompanied by specific prayers, *mantera* or other techniques, and it is to these supplementary practices, as well as to the inherent characteristics of the plants and the essential attributes of the healer that efficacy is attributed. It is to a consideration of these healers and their practices that the rest of this chapter is dedicated.

## 9.4 Healers

Although as we have seen healing knowledge is generally diffused among the village community, with recipes and techniques being passed down family lines, there are also men and women in the village who are believed to have special knowledge - and special efficacy in the application of their knowledge - in treating illness. These people are known as *ere*. An *ere* is a specialist, and in addition to *ere* healers there are *ere* ironworkers, *ere* potmakers, *ere* lamenters and *ere hoho*<sup>3</sup>. Many *ere* from other traditions (such as ironworkers) also claim special healing powers. Notionally at least, all *ere* have in common the fact that they did not themselves choose but were chosen to perform this duty. *Ere* healers are frequently marked out as being special people, for example by being breech-born (*sitosai*), having a peculiar deformity such as a twisted finger, or else having suffered spells of madness.

All *ere*'s capacities, including ironworkers, potmakers, etc. as well as healers, are normally descended from either mother or father with just one in every set of siblings being singled out. Occasionally the gift skips a generation. Shortly before dying an *ere* healer might explicitly select one among his or her children to whom they pass on their knowledge and

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<sup>3</sup> I myself was given the title *ere zihönö* at a *fa'ulu* feast. Meaning "expert of the thousands/the people," this was the village elders' translation of "anthropologist."

capacity. Otherwise an *ere* to be will have persistent dreams of a deceased parent or grandparent in which they are called to the craft, and a special ritual also exists whereby the *ere* to be can learn from their deceased forebear by communicating with them at their grave (see below section 10).

Christianity, with its historical antagonism to the ancestor cult, has had some impact on these ideas. Today's healers typically claim to be such both by virtue of descent and as a direct blessing or talent from God. The special relationship of a healer with a spirit guide or tutor is never explicitly claimed these days, though it is implied in the language of some *mantra*<sup>4</sup>. Worried about conflict with Christian virtue, those who have had dreams in which persons dressed in white call them to the healing arts often relate their dreams to a minister or church elder. Typically they will be reassured that the persons in the dream are angels, not devils (since orthodox Christian teaching does not recognise ancestor-spirits such spirits must be either angels or devils), and that they are being apprised of a divinely bestowed talent to help people. The minister or church elder will then be asked to bless this talent, to which they generally accede. If they are a foreign Catholic pastor, or a very orthodox Protestant minister they may feel it improper to explicitly bless magical practices that involve dealings with spirits; however, in such cases they will simply give a general blessing which is understood by the supplicant as a blessing of their craft. Both in this and in other ways healers seek to rebuild the traditional integrity of healing and religion which was historically threatened by conversion to Christianity and its hostility to magic, the ancestor cult, and dealings with spirits. Healers are typically very spiritual people motivated by the desire to help other people, and they humbly describe themselves as channels of power in healing others. Christian prayers are a central part of their practice, and moral purity conceived in Christian terms is seen as a prerequisite of their efficacy.

Arrangements do also exist for *ere* to teach their craft to apprentices. In such cases, however, simply teaching the recipes, techniques and spells is considered insufficient. The proper exchanges stipulated by the teacher (typically a white chicken, white cloth, and a sum of money) must be made by the apprentice in return for the knowledge transferred by the teacher, otherwise the teacher may become sick. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the apprenticeship a ritual is held without which the recipes, techniques and spells would be ineffective. The apprentice then has to treat a patient with the disease for which he or she has learnt the cure and display the capacity he or she has acquired. The teacher then "owns" the apprentice as their pupil, and the relationship is terminated with the pupil's last offering of thanks to the teacher, consisting of money and a white cloth, half of which is returned to the pupil. On leaving their teacher's house the pupil must not look back, and they must not meet for a month. In practice however people usually speak as if all healers received their special gift from descent and/or God, not from an apprenticeship with another healer.

Though people speak clearly as if some people are healers and the rest not, in fact a

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<sup>4</sup> However, such an allusion was made in a villager's description of a healing episode that took place in 1971. See case history II, section 8.7 above.

continuum exists between those casually treating family members or friends with remedies or techniques they have had practised on them, witnessed, or which belong to their family repertoire of home healing, to real, true healers who possess powerful efficacy by virtue of descent and divine blessing. People noted for having “cool hands” fall near the former end of the continuum, apprentices towards the latter. Classification and naming is ever a central feature of knowledge on Nias, but whilst classifications and categories are always presented as absolute, in practice their contents and boundaries are always shifting, between regions, informants and contexts. A case in point is the presence of magic within healing knowledge. The local term for magic, *elemu*, is cognate with the Indonesian *ilmu* which has all knowledge as its reference. It is probable that previous to conversion what has subsequently come to be classified as sinful knowledge was simply distinguished from other kinds of knowledge as being more potent. Informants speaking from within the discourse of Christian respectability sharply contrast “healers with magic” (*duku so elemu*) who should repent of their dealings with devils and return to God, and other healers - massage specialists, herbal specialists, etc. - whose practices are wholly integrated with Christian faith, and whose capacities are described as “gifts of the Spirit” (*bu’ala geheha*).

However, as we shall see below practices in all the healing specialisms shade into magic, or, as we saw above discussing spirit-beliefs, admit of two explanations, the one magical, the other merely material. Thus extraction gestures in massage may be described as removing “ordinary” sickness-substances such as congealed blood or as removing winds, spirits, or sorcerer’s poisons. “Spoken medicines” (*dalu-dalu wehede*) which would be seen by our respectable Christian informant as characteristic of “magic,” pervade all healing techniques and in practice avoid Christian criticism by becoming “prayers,” just as spirits of the ancestors appearing in dreams become angels, and the talent to heal becomes a divine blessing as well as a descended capacity. Depending on one’s degree of proximity to mouthpieces of Christian orthodoxy objects such as bezoars or amulets may be classified either as “magical” and thus reprehensible to rely on (one should just rely on one’s faith in Jesus), or else as “medicine” (*dalu-dalu*), not magic. Thus the majority of villagers would classify practices that would be seen as “magical” by ministers and some church elders as “medicine” as long as they were being used to help and not to harm others.

Being a healer is a dangerous business, exposed as one is to the heat and malevolent spirits of others’ sicknesses. To withstand these dangers the healer must be strong in body and mind, as well as morally virtuous in Christian terms, and in traditional terms powerful and sophisticated in coping with magic, images and dangerous spirits. Healing knowledge holds potential danger for others too, in that the power to heal is seen as the same as the power to harm. A village saying goes “like man with woman, sickness with medicine, sorcerer with healer.” A mantra, spell or prayer that cures a disease can also cause the same disease in others, so that a prerequisite to learning a spell is always a promise never to use it to cause harm.

Healing abilities are said not to work on oneself or one’s own family, so healers when sick are

obliged to be treated by another healer, and regularly seek doctor's medicine if they can reach or afford it. Healers often specialise in certain diseases for which they have specific treatments, and for successes in treating which they have become well known. Healing knowledge is clumped into treatments for specific diseases - an apprentice would learn a procedure for "calling out the poison," for example, and have transferred to him or her the capability to make it work - rather than consisting of general principles. If a healer fails to cure a specific disease, this implies not that he or she is "not a real healer," but that their knowledge/power is not as high as that of the sorcerer or spirit causing the disease. Nias understandings on these matters are the same as Wikan describes for Bali, where it is essential for the healer to be *cocok* (appropriate) for the patient. So too, on Bali as on Nias, patients expect a quick response to treatments; where this is not forthcoming, the healer will him or herself discontinue their services, referring the patient to a more powerful or more appropriate healer (Wikan 1990: 232). Just as on Nias, an unspoken contract between healer and the patient's family assumes that no other healer will be consulted without the present healer terminating with the proper words and exchanges. However, if the amount of *nosu* bestowed by Lowalangi on a person in the womb has been exhausted, then it is their appointed time to die. In such a case there is nothing that any healer can do about it apart from telling the patient that this is the case. There is a procedure for "holding back the breath" which is supposed to be able to keep such a person alive for a week or so, but this is seen as a great sin in Christian terms, for contravening the will of God.

Payment of healers by the families of their patients is a complex and ambiguous business. It was repeatedly emphasised to me that a "true" healer does not fix a price for their services; the reward is "up to the patient," only given if the cure is a success and is described as an *ame'ela*, an "offering." It is said that healers who "fix a price" are "not true healers," and similarly to be seen to make one's living from healing is to be "not a true healer." However, before beginning a treatment healers frequently stipulate various "prerequisites" that must be met. These prerequisites are generally conceived of as items necessary for the healer to perform the cure, such as betel, tobacco and sirih, perhaps a length of cloth or a silver coin. These remain the property of the healer after they have served their purpose in the cure<sup>5</sup>. Similarly a meal, perhaps of pork, may be demanded. At the conclusion of a successful treatment the patient's family will generally feed the healer a meal, and present them with some money as an expression of thanks. The giving of this thankyou money is often accompanied by a little speech in which the head of the family demeans the value of this offering, stating that only the Lord or Jesus can truly repay the healer for their services.

Healers are classified as specialising in one of five areas: giving medicine, massage,

<sup>5</sup> Sometimes a healer will place these offerings on a plate and raise them up while speaking a mantra that implies they are an offering to his or her spirit guide, who is asked in return to send a vision of why the patient is sick and what can be done to help them. An example of such a mantra is: "Here is [the patient's] offering of respect to the teacher so that his/her sickness may be cured. May the devil's fire that has struck him/her be frozen. May the medicine for him/her be revealed to me. I ask from you my teacher the medicines for [the patient]. I ask you that the way may be made visible to me, as I give medicine to him/her."

childbirth, sickness-extraction, or second sight. Respectable Christians, uncomfortable with the traditional dogma that the knowledge to cure is the knowledge to harm, relegate all those who use knowledge to harm others to a sixth category of "people with magic." In the order given, these areas of speciality map loosely onto the continuum mentioned above, so that specialists in giving medicine or massage do not have the "true" gift of extractors or seers. Any one healer may combine one or more of these areas of speciality in his or her practice, though the list in the order given loosely constitutes a pyramid whereby higher (later) areas of knowledge tend to encompass those below. Thus all extractors and midwives would also have knowledge of giving medicine and massage, whereas not all medicine or massage specialists would have knowledge of extraction. A further specialty of bonesetting was until recently represented by a famous bonesetter in Sirombu; however this seems to be a historically recent addition to the Nias healing repertoire, probably introduced by a healer who has studied with Karo bonesetters in the Batak highlands. It was ignored in classifications of healing presented by village informants.

In Hiliamaeta village there are two male (45 and 50 years old) and one female (35 years old) massage healers, all of whom also give medicine. There is also a 40 year old woman who practices as a midwife, massage healer and seer; a 45 year old female massage healer and seer; a 70 year old female repentance healer, and a 30 year old healer that some would call a magician. Normally illiterate he becomes possessed when healing when he can read and write and speak other languages; he has mastered the art of seeing poisons and dealing with the images of sorcery. Nearby in Hilibaruzu there is a very old female extractor healer. In Hilinawalö village there are three male givers of medicine, two male massage healers (who also give medicine), two female midwife healers (who also give medicine and massage), and one male seer. A famous female seer lives in the neighbouring village of Onohondrö, and it is common for villagers to seek the help of "more powerful" healers in other villages.

We will now proceed to consider each of these six categories of healing knowledge in turn (excepting the giving of medicine, already discussed in section 2 above), before returning to general discussion of the transmission of such knowledge, sources of power in healing, and the power of words and names, before concluding the chapter with an assessment of village healing.

## 9.5 Massage

After herbalism, massage healing is the most common form of village healing, commonly part of the repertoire of home healing, in which context it is typically used to relieve musculo-skeletal aches and pains caused by overwork, as well as being a talent bestowed by descent or direct blessing from God on special massage healers (*ere solomö*). A story is told about the origins of massage -healers' knowledge:

"Once upon a time a man took a pig, slaughtered and boiled it without cutting it up. After

it was cooked he carefully cut it up in order to know the channels of its innards. And from this experience the healer could take guidelines for knowing the channels of human innards. As time went on he developed until this knowledge about the channels of the innards was adequately perfect, and he was able to learn off by heart all the positions of these channels, up to the point that if someone experienced a certain illness he could recognise which were the innards that needed to be massaged. And this knowledge of massage was descended from person to person as time went by up to the present."

Massage is thought to cool the body, and is hence indicated by the majority of illnesses, especially fever and spirit-attack. It is able to remove bad winds that cause stomach ache, headache, and pains that move around the body, as well as dissolving disease-producing lumps of congealed blood.

Before beginning to massage a patient the healer will pray, asking for blessing on the oil and herbs he or she will use, stilling their heart and concentrating so that the nature of the illness and the procedure best suited to cure it will become apparent. The massage healer uses coconut oil for the massage: oil from the rare *garambijo* coconut is especially effective, and typically the healer will have a special bottle of oil which he or she tops up whose original contents were blessed at the beginning of their career. Sometimes a magical object such as a bezoar found by the healer or presented to them by their ancestor or teacher will remain in the bottle of oil. Often prior to the massage extra medicine is added to the oil, often in the form of ashes: perhaps burnt *lu'u* leaves, or, for those whose teacher or ancestor received instruction from Malay *dukun*, burnt pieces of paper on which Islamic *azimat* have been inscribed, often in red ink.

The oil is rubbed onto the patient's body beginning at the head and rubbing down the torso and limbs towards the hands and feet, left side preceding right. The purpose is to remove poisons, bad winds or spirits by moving them down the body and out at the extremities. According to some, these noxious substances should be removed from the left side of the body, since they enter by the right. As he or she massages the body the healer may murmur a prayer such as: "Leave all you poison in the name of the Father, leave all you poison in the name of the Son, leave all you poison in the name of the Holy Spirit!" The syllable "makh!" is then uttered as the healer's hands reach the extremities and the notional poison is expelled. The joints of the body such as shoulders, elbows, wrists, knees and ankles are also seen as points where noxious substances may be expelled. Crosses are often made at these points with the healer's finger dipped in the oil at the beginning of the treatment, and during the massage a sensation of relief is created by increasing pressure at these points before suddenly releasing it with a flick of the hand, "to eject the bad winds." To relieve stomach pain the healer sits behind the patient with fingers pressing deeply into the patient's navel; still pressing deeply the hands are drawn apart towards the patient's sides. Just above the hip the healer's thumbs pinch the sides against their fingers until the pressure is suddenly released with a flick of the hands. Headaches are relieved with a similar sequence of increasing pressure suddenly relieved with a flick at the temples and above the eyebrows.



Where blood vessels are visible on the surface these are rubbed downwards in order "to move the blood around." Where hard lumps are felt in the tissue these are interpreted as clumps of poison or congealed blood; they are softened by repeated rubbing, then expelled either by the techniques described above or by being passed out in the faeces. Drinking *mondra* (purple ginger) juice before the massage is thought by some healers to soften up such lumps. The belly is massaged deeply with clockwise circular movements of the hand. Anti-clockwise movements would drive the poison further in, possibly with fatal consequences, whereas clockwise movements lift it out. At particularly tender points the healer will blow gently as his or her hands touch the spot in order to increase the cooling effect of the massage. Repetitive striking of the tissues with the healer's hands drives out bad spirits.

Manipulation of certain external points is thought to help heal internal organs such as liver and heart to which they are supposed to be connected. In very sick or unconscious patients pressure is applied to the tissue of the hand between thumb and forefinger: if this elicits a twitch in the patient's eyes then massage can save their life; if not, their time has come and nothing can be done.

The presence of tourists staying in bungaloes on Lagundri and Sorake beaches near Hiliamaeta village has led to the two massage healers of Hiliamaeta attempting to commercialise their skills by offering massages to tourists. Since fixing a price makes one "not a true healer" they attempt to let tourists decide how much to pay them. This however exasperates the tourists who demand a fixed price. One of these healers in particular has done very well from the tourist trade, rebuilding his house and educating his children with the proceeds.

## 9.6 Midwives

In the old days, it is said, at births either the mother or baby or both always died. God took pity, and sent angels to teach people in their dreams to help women in childbirth. These were the first midwives, or *ere samatumbu'ö iraono* - "experts in giving birth to children." Mostly but not exclusively female, midwife healers can also heal the sick, and their repertoire of healing techniques usually covers herbalism and massage.

One of the problems with which they most frequently deal is a woman's womb being "locked" - labour thereby being delayed or prevented - by sorcery, malevolent spirits, or the breaking of taboos (such as not sitting in doorways) while pregnant. Foreign observers such as the Catholic pastors from Germany and Italy claim that this worry is an illusion caused by village women's inability to count the months properly. In any case, treatments for this condition range from giving herbal medicines to drink<sup>6</sup>, to putting a frequently used padlock and key in water, praying over it while unlocking the padlock with the key, and then giving the water to the woman to drink. A mantra for this condition is *Samokai si lö sogusi* - "the

<sup>6</sup> Made from *söma-söma buaya*, *nazaleu*, *gösömi* leaves, *cöfö-cöfö* or *na'a-na'a*, or coconut oil.

keyless opener.”

Through massage of the pregnant woman the midwife is able to ascertain the position of the baby. If the baby does not turn naturally to present head first prior to labour the midwife is able to turn the baby by direct manipulation. Often women speak as if this never happens naturally, but depends on the midwife’s massage.

The midwife helps labour by sitting with her back to the wall holding the belly of the woman in labour who sits between her legs. In this position she gives a continual massage moving her hands downwards over the belly and encouraging the woman. In a difficult or long labour she will use her arms to hug the woman in labour very tightly just above the womb in order to force the baby downwards. When the baby is born she makes sure it begins to breathe by holding it upside down by the heels and smacking it. She then cuts the cord and ties it off to prevent bad winds entering the baby’s navel, washes and wraps the baby. The midwife helps the placenta (the *ka’a nono*, or baby’s elder sibling) to be delivered by further manipulation of the belly, if necessary putting her hand inside the woman to pull it out. The placenta is subsequently buried by the husband in cool ground so that the baby will not suffer from fever. After the birth the midwife may have an ongoing relationship with the baby, treating it for the sicknesses of infancy.

Recently the Ministry of Health has begun offering training courses for traditional midwives, a subject we return to in chapter X.

## 9.7 Extraction

The practice of extractor healers (*ere sangeheta*), along with that of the seers described in the following section, is conceived as being a higher level of knowledge to that of medicine-givers, massage -healers and midwives. It is said by some that extraction and second sight cannot be learnt as by an apprentice from a teacher, but constitute a talent bestowed by descent, or, in Christian vocabulary, a gift of the Spirit. Today extractor healers are rare and typically very old, while seers continue to be a well-represented sector of village healing. This is to be explained by the sustained attack by mission and indigenous Christianity on the “fraudulent” practices of extractors, whereas village Christianity has in its own way reinforced the ideas of prophecy, exorcism and repentance which inform the practice of seers.

However, as we have seen much sickness on Nias is explained by the invasion of the body by noxious substances such as poisons, spirits, dirt and germs, so that much healing is conceived as the extraction of these substances. Thus whilst extractor healers are now rare, extractive procedures permeate the practice of medicine-givers, masseurs and other healers. Medicine givers administer purgatives to remove poison from the gut and stomach, and let bad blood poisoned by an entering wind out of cuts in the arm which are then rubbed with chilli to combat *sihulu*, where pains move around the body<sup>7</sup>. As we saw in section 5, massage

healers make extensive use of extractive hand movements, moving “bad blood” or “bad winds” down to and out of extremities, or flicking them out of the joints. One massage healer’s treatment for the itchy rash of *bio-bio* consists of “pulling out the poison” at the original site of infection with forefinger and thumb.

Extractor healers work through massage. Beginning with prayers and using special oils familiar from our discussion of massage-healing, the extractor healer apparently removes foreign objects from deep within the patient’s body tissues, usually the navel or belly region. The removal may be effected by the healer’s fingers or by sucking with the mouth. Objects so removed include stones, nails, hairs or threads, and the treatment is concluded with the administration of cooling herbal potions, both internal and external, to the patient.

Other techniques too - such as the “calling out of the poison” with a dish of water and a silver coin described in case history III in the previous chapter - result in the removal of poisons in the form of solid objects. Together with extraction by sucking or massage such techniques are disapprovingly classified by some as “magical healing” (see section 9 below). For those who do not disapprove, such practices are “not magic but medicine” since they help and do not harm people, are accompanied by prayer, and efficacy is ascribed to God working through the healer.

## 9.8 Prophets, seers, exorcists, and repentance specialists

Today this category of *ere sama’ele’ö* (“prophets”) covers a continuum of activities from the recovery of lost objects and the treatment of sickness through second sight and divination (*tanu, mananu*), to the exorcism (“separation” - *toto, mama’oto*) of ancestor or other spirits “following” and causing sickness, and repentance healing, where patients are cured through the healer’s prayers during which they become possessed by the Holy Spirit.

Divination is used to answer questions such as whether a child will succeed on *rantau*, to find objects or livestock that have been lost or stolen, and to discover who it is that has done some evil action. For purposes of healing divination can tell whether or not the patient will recover, the cause of the illness, and the herbs and treatment that will cure it. The seer must be pure in heart and have confessed and repented of all their sins. Praying deeply, the seer will then see visions that answer the question in his or her heart. In note 4 above a mantra is given whereby the healer offers up the patient’s prerequisites with his or her “teacher” in exchange for a vision of the correct treatment. Alternatively they will use a mirror, a glass or dish of water, or a white cloth, in which the visions will appear. A male seer in Hilinawalö uses an egg in a dish to discover the identity of thieves. Holding the egg upright in the dish with his finger, the seer recites the names of those suspected. When the true name is

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<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century Marsden cited as an instance of their “skill in the arts” their practice “of letting blood by cupping, in a mode nearly similar to ours” (Marsden 1811: 476).

mentioned, the egg will remain upright in the dish when the finger is removed. A seer from Gidö uses the following method to diagnose sick patients. He takes a glass of clean water and pours three drops of coconut oil onto the surface. If the oil sinks into the water it is a sign that the patient will not recover even if treated. If the oil disperses over the surface of the water this means that the patient's *noso* ("breath-soul" - see chapter V) has been dispersed by a sorcerer, and prayers must be made to God to supply the patient with fresh *noso*. If the oil floats in droplets on the water, then the patient will be cured if treated. Another seer uses a handspan length of a palmrib which he measures off three times along his arm mentioning names or different suspected causes of his patient's sickness. When the correct name or cause is mentioned, the palmrib will measure a shorter length on his arm.

This connection between divination and measurement is widespread in the exchange societies of Indonesia. Hoskins (1987:257) describes a comparable ritual for Sumba, where, unlike Nias, the ancestral religion continues to be practised alongside Christianity. In the Sumbanese case the diviner lunges at the sacred corner with a spear; if it touches the wall the answer is yes, if it falls short it is no. Measurement is of special significance on Sumba as on Nias, organising as it does the prestations at weddings and funerals through which kinship is constituted. In both cases the logic (implied rather than claimed in the Nias case, given the opposition of Christianity to explicit dealings with spirits) is that measurement is not absolute and universal, but may be influenced by spirits. Within traditional conceptions, as we shall see in the discussion below (page 180-182), names and measurements participate in the essence of things, and it is this universe of essences that is the sphere of spirits.

Exorcism, or "separating" following spirits, has been assimilated to the category of seers or religious healers because Christian credentials are essential to survive Church disapproval of practices dealing with ancestor spirits and *bechu*. Since spirits can only afflict those made vulnerable by their sins, such exorcism takes the form of repentance healing. The patient must first confess and repent of all their sins. The patient then sits in an attitude of prayer while the healer stands before them and begins to pray. If the session is part of a weekly repentance school (see chapter VII), those present will sing hymns of repentance and clap their hands. The healer goes into a trance which may be described as possession by the Holy Spirit. In their trance they can "see" the cause of the sickness, they can "see" spirits afflicting the patient, as well as the treatment, if any, that will cure them. Their praying becomes speaking in tongues, or, in the Nias expression, "new language" (*li sibohou*), a rhythmic and energetic blend of nonsense, Nias words, Indonesian, and biblical phrases. Some say this is the language of spirits, others the language of foreigners<sup>8</sup>. The healer sweats and spits with the intensity of their praying, and makes more and more energetic passes of the hands over the patient, appearing to get hold of and cast away parts of their aura. Soon the trance subsides, and the session is concluded with prayer, and a thankyou payment to the healer.

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<sup>8</sup> Village children often heckle tourists trekking to villagers with nonsense-speak, which, supposedly imitating the foreign language of the tourists, actually sounds very like a seer speaking in tongues.

Within this category conceptions of the source of the seer or repentance healer's talent focus less on descent (though an ancestry of seers is claimed by some) and more on a direct blessing or gift from God, severally conceived as Lowalangi, Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. This gift arises out of the depth of the seer-to-be's repentance. This repentance is often the result of affliction, be it sickness or madness or other kinds of suffering. Christian teaching demanded that chains of mediation with the supernatural such as offerings to ancestor spirits and control of other spirits be suppressed in favour of following the Church and its officers, faith in Jesus and direct reliance on one's personal relationship with God. Christian seer-healers, recognising precedents for their practices in the activities of Jesus, the apostles and prophets in the Bible, thus suppress the descent idiom of their gift by understanding it to be a direct blessing from God. This category of healer - now referred to by many as "religious healers" - was thus able to reintegrate their practice with the new religion, and is thus today the most vital sector of village performance healing. Extraction healing and the invocation of spirit guides, which were not able to be reintegrated in a similar way, are by contrast now rare.

As we saw in chapter VI, Christian missionaries used the local term *sama'ele'ö*, which had referred to village specialists (*ere*) in divination, to translate the "prophets" of the Bible. Niassans were struck by how similar were the practices of the Old Testament prophets to these village healers. The missionaries, however, were disturbed by the pagan idolatry, unscientific mumbo-jumbo and Moslem spells of the healers, and taught that unless they repented they were damned as black magicians, dealers with devils, or fraudulent quacks. Converted villagers carrying on family traditions of healing so much in demand in the village reconceived *fo'ere* chants - with the drum accompaniment removed - as prayers and came to see their 'talents' as a gift from God. As good Christians, they sought blessing for the talent of which they had been apprised by another seer or in their dreams. Many ministers would not bless claims to gifts they saw as heretical outside the community of saints, but would give a simple blessing of the person, laying a hand on their head and uttering a prayer. The healer, of course, took this as blessing of their talent, and almost without exception believe themselves to have the full support of the Church<sup>9</sup>. Christian hostility to healers was incorporated by the argument that there are true healers and false healers, with only the latter using deceit as a way of making a living. Thus too strongly Christian villagers distinguish "religious seers" from "black magic seers." If questioned, they might explain that only black magic seers use techniques and instruments whereas religious healers simply pray, and in the depths of their prayer see visions in their heart given to them by God. However in practice many seers often do use techniques and instruments to attain their second sight and only attract condemnation from the most orthodox (such as trainee ministers on fieldwork from theological college - see chapter VII), whereas the village community in general sees them as devout Christians.

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<sup>9</sup> An exception is Ama Haogö, who features in section 9 below. He was himself an ONKP priest who was compelled to leave the Church in his pursuit of magical powers.

## 9.9 Magicians

As we have seen to be the case with herbalism, massage, extraction and divination, “magical” procedures, while supposed to be contained in a single category, nonetheless pervade all the other categories of specialist healing. Some ignore the category of magicians (*niha so’elemu* - “people who possess magic”) in the classification of healers altogether, others restrict the category of magicians to those that bring harm to others (*samakiko niha*). The use of the term always involves some kind of discursive agenda. It is probable that in the last century the word *elemu*, taken from the Malay *ilmu*, referred to high and potent knowledge - such knowledge, like the term that stood for it, frequently being acquired from overseas. As such it was a desirable commodity - a good thing - though feared by others who did not possess it as well. In the Christian era it has come to have a negative implication. *Elemu* now stands for sinful knowledge, for knowledge and practices that are contrary to religion. It has taken on this negative meaning because the procedures of *elemu* are typically procedures that request or oblige spirits to act in the interests of the practitioner. A good example is the *sombahe* described in the previous chapter summoning *ono mbechu* to afflict a victim with sickness. In this respect *elemu* was continuous with the village, family, and agricultural rituals seeking blessings and fertility that made up the traditional religion and ancestor cult, perhaps set apart from such rituals in that they address ancestor spirits, tribal progenitors and gods, whereas the magician summons spirits of non-human origin. In the old days, though, all *ere* - who combined the roles of healer and priest - were distinguished from ordinary people by their ability to see and converse with *bechu*. Since Christianity reclassified spirits as either angels or devils *ere* too became implicitly divided between those good healers exercising a gift of God of which they had been apprised in their dreams by a vision of an angel, and those evil “people with magic” who make offerings to and compacts with devils for others’ downfall and their own gain. The most dogmatic organs of Christianity (young villagers fresh from the seminary or non-native ministers) cast all village healing as “magic” and sinful, but the village community in general - including the congregation elders - see village healers as holy people blessed with a divine gift. They will point out that the spells uttered by these healers are Christian prayers and that they have acquired their blessing through the depth and sincerity of their repentance.

Magic as practised and as believed to be practised today is not just concerned with healing or making people sick, though these are its paradigmatic concerns. Magical techniques are used to protect the house and gardens from thieves: bunches of *boli* leaves with an open safety-pin pointing downwards concealed within are hung at the four corners in one such technique, with a further open safety-pin, pointing upwards, buried directly below each bunch of leaves. Another example involving the summoning of *ono mbechu* to follow a thief through his leavings is described in 5.3.

The lowest form of magic, that is the first to be learnt by the student, is love magic (*fokasi* - significantly taken from Indonesian *kasih* = affection). In one such procedure, the aspirant

must sit up until the middle of the night and then recite a mantra while imagining the beloved in the palm of his or her hands: thus the aspirant will enter the beloved's dreams and fascinate them. In another such procedure the mantra (in mixed Indonesian and Nias language) "Oh prophet Adam, just as Mary's love for me let her/him love me" is recited while mixing three drops of dew with seven drops of blood from a hornbill's foot and three drops of blood from the liver: the mixture is then given to the girl or boy to drink as soon as possible.

Magical procedures and mantra are also taught to achieve superhuman strength or abilities, such as invisibility or the ability to walk up walls. Such magic was perhaps more desirable in the warrior past, but still is of relevance. The story is told in Hilinawalö of three village boys who became robbers while on *rantau* in Medan. Their ringleader, Ajo, had studied the arts of invisibility and walking up walls like a gekko from Ama Zanati, a famous magician from Hilitou'ö. They apparently managed to rob the BRI Bank head office in Jalan Pemuda, as well as stealing 3m rupiah (£750) from the house of Eka, a Chinese millionaire, before being captured and jailed. Ama Zanati, to whom the ringleader of the Medan robbers was apprenticed, is famous for once having killed a teacher. To hide the body he sliced it up and ate the liver. He was caught, but twisted off the bars of his cell in the police station, and escaped. On being recaptured he was sent to Medan's notorious Jalan Gandhi prison for political prisoners. When he was tortured the finger-press would jam, and he proved immune to both electric shocks and immersion in sewage. If people tried to hit him, it was their hands that were broken. He became the prisoners' leader, and was reluctant to leave on being released. Finally he returned to Nias, repented, and joined the Pentecostal Church. He is now nearly sixty years old. His story captures some of the ambiguity of the magician on contemporary Nias: sinful and thus damned previous to repentance he, and the robber's ringleader he trained, nonetheless have something of a heroic aura when, as representatives of specifically Nias-sourced power they stand up to the power of outside.

Other procedures and mantra are used for protection against violence, wild animals, or to intimidate those that may be hostile to us. In this last case the mantra ("*setara tutu tapa rasa jahe tuali*") is recited three times before shaking the person's hand. Mantra to protect against violence depend - according to the teachings of one magician - on the material being used to attack one. Thus the mantra to protect from iron calls on the King and Lord of Iron whilst crossing the chest and measuring in handspans from one's navel to neck. Magic syllables may be uttered when being struck to prevent the blow from harming one: consisting of implosives such as "*kup! ka p!*" or "*hup!*" their utterance does indeed have the effect of tensing the muscles to protect the body.

Magical amulets (*fatahana mboto* - "body defenders") or talismans (which many would class as "medicine, not magic," though others would disagree) are commonly worn, particularly by children, to protect against sickness, poisoning, spirit-attack, crocodiles, etc. These consist of small packets of cloth tied around the waist or neck; they contain ingredients such as single-cloved garlic, benzoin resin, nasal mucus, nasal hairs (from the right nostril), eyelashes (from

the right eye), or even skin from the sole of the foot, as well as pieces of paper, often red, with writing or crosses on. The healer utters mantra while combining the ingredients, and is repaid with betel-nut, tobacco, perhaps a chicken, and a sum of thankyou money. Certain amulets serve specifically to lock the jaws of crocodiles, say, or to give you the power to control people by simply raising the palm of your hand. Others give you the power to ascertain whether food has been poisoned by touching the roof of the mouth with your tongue: if this tickles, the food is safe. With other amulets one simply pulls a hair on your big toe, and if it hurts, again the food is safe.

Magical knowledge is acquired in much the same way as the healing knowledge described above. Though people do say that a capacity for magic can be inherited, today this descended aspect tends to be suppressed. Where magic is perceived as sinful, to claim a lineage of magicians would be to claim the consequences of inherited sin. More commonly then it is learnt through apprenticeship, and each procedure with its associated list of ingredients and mantra is learnt individually, just like healing remedies. Would-be magicians typically travel in search of their knowledge: often they will have studied with Islamic *dukun* in Aceh or Padang. Some informants claim that magic originates from women, that men must learn magic in the first place from women. The ancestress Silewe was (according to some myths) the first magical healer, inventing the art of carving wood so well it comes alive when drummed over.

The modern repertoire of magical procedures thus encompasses great variation. One man's prayer is another man's spell, and even a single magician may know and use mantra that derive from both spirit-invocations from the pre-Christian Nias religion, as well as mantra supposedly in Hebrew that contain the original names of God, and Islamic *azimat*.

Procedures deriving from the pre-Christian religion typically include spells that address or command spirits. Thus as we noted above, the spell to protect from iron calls on the Lord of Iron, and curing spells often command possessing spirits to tell their name - in language the spirit is powerless to resist.

Procedures deriving from Islam typically involve *azimat*: spells and figures written in Arabic script - often taken from the Koran - on paper which is then burnt, to be dissolved in water and drunk, or in oil to be rubbed on externally. The Ayat al Kursi is a particular favourite. Magicians and healers keep little books or grimoires in which they record these written spells for future copying. Where the healer is a reasonably devout Christian they will typically deny or be unaware of the provenance of such techniques from within the canon of Islam. Today books of such spiritual remedies - *Buku Mujaarobat* - are published by Indonesian Moslem publishing houses, and are owned by some Moslem healers.

Christian "magic," as mentioned above, consists of spells in notional Hebrew and containing the original names of God (*El*, *Elhai*, etc.). A German pastor complained to me that he was



often pestered by villagers with requests to be told the true original name of God, as well as the words or spell spoken by Jesus when performing his miracles. Ama Haogö of Sirombu was a minister of the ONKP indigenous Protestant church until his quest for magical knowledge compelled him to leave the church. He had apparently made a deep study of magic from the Bible, and was able to walk on water. He now teaches his apprentices the Hebrew mantra and its associated hand movements used by Jesus against the Roman soldiers in the garden of Gethsemane: "*Ini ijuttu mirabi yahub, hup! hap! hap!*" - when performed correctly it causes all one's attackers to fall down, and its efficacy is attested by one of his apprentices who had the opportunity to test it in Jakarta<sup>10</sup>. He also teaches the names of the four "angels of protection" - *Elhai*, *Ellion*, *Ellsajahdai* and *Elloakh* - the simple speaking of whose names activates their protection. Ama Haogö gives all his apprentices a bottle of water with a piece of paper inside, and a few drops of this water serve all manner of magical purposes, from curing sickness to preventing people from leaving your house after breaking in.

## 9.10 Transmission of healing knowledge and sources of power

Non-specialist "home healing" is, as we have seen, picked up within the family from parents and grandparents. More special treatments are often more formally taught to young people by their *sibaya*, their mother's brother, as part of his ongoing blessing in return for the prestations due to them. Healers, conceived on a continuum from approximations to "true" healers, acquire their capacities and knowledge ideally from descent, but also from apprenticeships in which a formal exchange relationship is instituted with the healer their teacher. The teacher, of course, should ideally be a "true" healer who has acquired his or her talent from descent, and may have been sought at distant sources of spiritual and secular power outside the island of Nias, particularly the Moslem state of Aceh<sup>11</sup>. European doctors and villagers who manage to acquire medical training at Jakarta or Bandung similarly enjoy the special efficacy resulting from the source of their knowledge from centres of colonial and modern state power exterior to Nias. The importance of descent in the identity of healers is manifested in the term *kataruna* - an Indonesian loan word from *keturunan* = 'descent' - being used for healers who work through possession to exorcise spirits.

Notions of inherited and taught capacity for healing are combined in the tradition of *fatara ba lewatö* - "learning at the grave." The following is taken from a healer's self-account as related and transcribed by my assistant Julius Hulu:

"Faozaro Halawa was born into a family in which both parents were healers. His mother was a massage-healer, and his father was a herbalist and midwife. In the beginning he was not a healer. But because he was breech-born he was taught so he could do massage. Finally his mother showed him massage for nine days, and in this time he

<sup>10</sup> Other informants told me that magic learnt on Nias would not work in the cities of the mainland: perhaps this spell's source within a world religion gives it a more universal application.

<sup>11</sup> Prior to the colonial period Nias was subject to two centuries of more or less exploitative relations with the powerful Moslem Sultanate of Aceh.

already knew massage and the parts of the body that should be massaged for a certain sickness.

After his father died, he was ordered by his mother to be made a healer by the spirit of his father (since during his life his father never had the opportunity to show him). And after being pushed by his mother finally he did make contact with his father's spirit by the way of going to his father's grave.

The time for *fatara ba lewatö* is Friday night, from 9 p.m. until 3 a.m. on Saturday. The reason it has to be on Friday is because God created man on Friday. And if it is before 9 p.m. or after 3 a.m. the spirit that is questioned will not answer, or it will be other spirits that want to mislead you. There are also preconditions that have to be undertaken at the *fatara ba lewatö*: a metre length of white cloth, one chicken egg, and a bottle of *hezaitö* coconut oil, which is later used for massage.

"The manner of performing the *fatara ba lewatö* is: the egg is placed over the mouth part of the grave - a stick has been buried coming up from the corpse's mouth so that a hole remains through which one can speak with the corpse. The oil is placed over the place of the corpse's heart in the grave, and the white cloth is put on the stomach part of the grave, and is used as the seat for he who would study.

"After this he first prays to the Lord. And at the moment the prayer is finished he directly goes on to speak to the spirit by calling his name three times. And when the spirit has answered then we tell the purpose of our coming. We speak to the egg we have brought, and we must consider that this egg is the spirit we are making arrive.

"The conversation between Faozaro and the spirit of his father went like this:

Spirit: 'What is your aim in coming here?'

Faozaro: 'I come here to ask about your healing work when you were still alive.'

Spirit: 'For what? Is it not to make people sick?'

Faozaro: 'No. But to help people that are sick.'

Spirit: 'Make a promise of this.'

Faozaro: 'I swear: if I use it to make other people sick may I obtain no descendants and no good fortune.'

Spirit: 'What is it then you want to know?'

Faozaro: 'To help women having a difficult labour.'

Spirit: 'This is the way...'

"Faozaro then learnt the way to help women in labour, and the way to help those struck with *bara, tika*, and rotten innards."

Christianity has added the notion of healing-powers as a direct blessing or gift from God, and the idea that a talent for healing should be blessed by an officer of the church in order for it not to be sinful. Such notions, however, have not replaced ideas of descent but have been added to them. This situation contrasts with the case among the Malay Muslims of Negeri Sembilan described by Michael Peletz, for whom dreams and trance have been effectively delegitimised as sources of traditional authority through the influence of orthodox Islam (Peletz 1996: 164,168). The Nias case is more similar to the *bomoh* of Trengganu described by Carol Laderman, who, despite being disapproved of by the Islamic establishment, nevertheless see themselves as devout Muslims (Laderman 1991: 18-9).

Despite the institution of apprenticeships, and the considerable amounts of "thankyou money" received by healers it is constantly reiterated by informants that a "true" healer has not

sought out their talent themselves, and does not practice healing in order to make a living. Healers are typically apprised of their talent in dreams, and their stories constantly repeat the theme of their reluctance to take up their duty to heal, a reluctance only overcome by repeated dreams, insistent social pressure, even their own or their family's sickness resulting from their refusal of their duty. These dreams provide a particularly illuminating example of how ineffable personal experience is interpreted according to socially legitimate models. We shall illustrate this with three such stories from my fieldnotes:

"Ama Rahmat is a healer who comes from the north of Nias, but has been posted with his family to Hilinawalö village to work as a schoolteacher. He is a Moslem, and his healing draws on extensive knowledge of herbalism and use of Islamic azimat. His healing career began when his wife was pregnant. She was very sick, and when the children were born they were often sick too. He prayed deeply to Allah until one day he dreamt of an old lady dressed in white, and she taught him to recognise and treat sickness. He asked a Christian Pastor about the dream, and was reassured that the old lady was an angel sent down to help mankind. Since having the dream in some cases he knows the disease they are suffering from, as well as the herbs and prayers to cure it, directly from the old lady. Where this does not happen, he prays and looks into a glass of water to see the plants to use, like in a picture."

Ina Lawe is a 75 year old traditional midwife and massage healer in Hilinawalö. Her knowledge of midwifery has come down from mother to mother through six generations, but what is passed down is not so much a corpus of remedies and techniques but an innate capacity to receive instruction from the Lord which visits one daughter in each generation. Sixty years ago, when she was fifteen and married with one child, her friend Masitö had a serious fall so that both her feet were reversed. Masitö dreamt that Ina Lawe could help her, but she refused, feeling incapable because she was so young. Then for three nights running she dreamt of three old men in white who told her she must be able, never mind if she was mocked by others, it was God's command. Masitö came to Ina Lawe having herself dreamed three times of Ina Lawe healing her: in the end Ina Lawe started massaging her and she was cured. She never saw her mother work because she died when Ina Lawe was still young: she says she learns what to do through the angels in white, and through prayer and inspiration from the Holy Spirit."

"Visited Ama Idi in the evening, one of the two male massage healers in the village. He described his ability to come from two sources, firstly hereditary from father to son for four generations, and secondly through repentance at the *fangesa dödö* (see chapters VI & VII). At one of the *fangesa dödö* meetings as everyone was singing and clapping and speaking in tongues he saw a vision of two bottles of coconut oil. This was sixty years ago, before Independence. He asked the Evangelist what it meant and was told he was chosen by God to be a massage healer like his father. He did not accept this, though, feeling he was too young. He then had a strange dream: he was going to market when he saw a house to the left of the path with two European doctors inside, both dressed in white coats, and somebody else. They called out to him, and because it was a big and attractive house he went over. They greeted him and took him inside. To his left was a bed on which lay a child about thirteen years old. One after the other the doctors stood barefooted on the child's chest, moving down towards the stomach, until shit came out of him. Ama Idi was shocked and asked them why they were torturing the child. The doctor answered: 'We called you to show you the way.' The child was dead. They got down and made prostrations one on either side of the child. Then one doctor lifted the dead child by the tops of his shoulders, lifting him from behind, while the other doctor rubbed the child's hair back from his forehead. Then, making a V with index and middle finger, the second doctor pushed his two slightly bent fingers into the child's eyes, then neck, heart, navel, and groin. Then using both hands he did the same to both knees and

inside the arch of the foot. He repeated this process three times, and the child came alive. The doctors prayed and Ama Idi prayed too. They looked outside and saw hundreds of children in school uniform who wanted to be examined. The doctors examined them, and separated out the healthy ones and sent them home. Those that were sick were given the same treatment as the child who had been brought back to life, and then they were sent home. However, even after this dream Ama idi still rejected his calling. Until one day his mother-in-law, who was a seer, became ill. She had a vision of Ama Idi as a massage healer, so first thing in the morning she called for him to take oil and spread it down her body, and she instantly recovered. Atulö (another man in the village) also dreamt of meeting one of the same European doctors who advised him that Ama Idi should be blessed and should give an offering to the Church. This was the time of the Great Repentance, when everyone was praying and speaking in tongues, and all those with magic or poisons were made known, when Lowalangi appeared in the sky as an enormous being of radiant light lying face down over the village, his fingers like *pinang* palms, his legs like trunks of sago. Ama Idi has had no apprentices, but when he knows he is going to die he will pass the knowledge on to his youngest daughter."

It is noteworthy in all these cases that the healer presents him or herself as overcoming their own reluctance to become a healer; they describe their gift as arising independently of their own will, often even against it. It is other members of the community whose belief in and need for the healer's gift confirms him or her as authentically being this special kind of person. On Nias, to set out to become a healer as a career choice would definitely make one not a true healer. This is true for much of the southeast Asian region, vividly recapitulated by Unni Wikan for Bali (1991: 250).

It is also striking in all of these accounts how the prosaic learning of techniques and remedies is eclipsed by the transfer of a capacity to find the knowledge within oneself, or to hear it in prayer. Ama Rahmat had no teacher but learns his skills from visions. Ina Lawe's healer mother died when she was still young, so she could not have learnt from her; it is the Lord, she says, that moves her hands as she massages. Despite Ama Idi's father being a healer before him, he claims the techniques he uses come from the dream, not from watching his father. I did not ask him if the European doctors' style of treatment was the same as that practised by his father: I suspect that it was. Informal learning, as a son learning to farm from his father or a girl learning to wash and cook, is inexplicit on Nias. The child learns by watching, copying, and trying again, but people do not draw attention to this process. It is thought that developing these skills would happen naturally anyway as the child matured. I myself, struggling to learn the Nias language, was told not to worry, that the capacity would grow in me naturally as I ate village food! Just as men learning *hoho* by attending *hoho* sessions, beginning as one of a chorus until later becoming a leader, is talked of not as learning but as becoming able to let the ancestors sing through you, so one becomes a repentance healer by attending *fangesa dödö* meetings, beginning to speak in tongues as the Spirit moves one, and eventually becoming a leader oneself.

Generally then, explicit instruction is eclipsed by the ritual transfer of a capacity, as in the concluding ritual of a healer's or ironmaker's apprenticeship, without which the techniques learnt would be useless. What is important is that one's skill is not just vaunted by oneself, but

is sanctioned by dreams, by other people's dreams, and, crucially, by other people calling one to treat them, and by them giving gifts back for the successful treatment they receive. The actual learning of treatments is "vanished" in healers' accounts, in which they legitimate their practise by claiming a link of descent as well as the Christian short cut of direct inspiration from God. These links of descent make chains connecting those in the past who have had the gift to those to whom they have passed it on. These chains stretch back through time to the first ancestors, the source of the Nias people themselves. As we saw in chapter V, for some the divine ancestress Silewe is the mother of all healers.

However, these chains which reach back to the source through the centre or navel have disguised forks which branch legitimately away from Nias to the potently foreign which is appropriated into the heart of local potency by passing up the escalator of the generations, to Acehnese *dukun* and European doctors. Specially potent objects used in magic and curing also derive from centres or sources, such as the *mustiko* stones very rarely found like a pearl inside coconuts on opening, the polished gemstones found at the source of the Muzöi river, or bezoar stones found inside dead animals or at the centre of tree trunks; or else from outside Nias, such as imported benzoin and asafoetida resin, Dutch silver coins, even safety pins.

In olden times the land of the dead and the spirits lay across the seas; like foreigners' language the language of the spirits is gobbledygook, and so the power of foreigners may have been understood to some extent as equivalent to the power of the ancestral spirits of the Nias people. Beatty (1992:188) tells an old central Nias myth whereby foreign objects such as cloths and gongs originate from the Bekhua, denizens of the underworld over the Eastern horizon (the direction of the mainland). At other times, though, these two sources of power appear distinct and opposed. At such times the interior derived power of sources and origins stands up against the power of outside, as in villagers' stories of their ancestors' resistance to the Dutch, in which for example magic egg-stones that exuded oil afforded the warrior that found them superhuman powers of invulnerability. (Significantly, these egg-stones originate outside Nias, however, being cast up by waves from the sea. Nowadays this theme of local potency standing up to the foreign is suppressed and seen by *Pancasila*-repecting elders as dangerous, appearing in muted form in such stories as the Medan bankrobbers (see above) and the affliction of foreigners with magic or poisoning. The particular constituency of this dangerous resistance of interior-derived to exterior-derived power is young, unmarried village men from the commoner class. As recently as 1982 a contingent of young men from Hilinawalö went on the rampage over some supposed slight and took the head of a young man from a neighbouring village. It was treated as a police matter, and some of the youths were caught and given prison sentences.

Through the history of C18th depredations by the Acehnese, C19th pacification and colonial rule by the Dutch, and C20th status as backward margin of a modern state, the source of power is perceived to have been lost to abroad. Thus the bottled heart of Hia, the progenitor of the Niassans, which gave advice to his descendants, was cast away into a stream by a married-in wife it was always reprimanding. Hia's heart flowed down into a river, out and across the

seas, where it washed up finally on the coasts of Europe, transferring power there. The notion of indigenous centres and origins as the source of power has furthermore been diminished by conversion to Christianity, a world religion originating from Judaea and Palestine, a point forcefully made by the maps in Nias editions of the Bible. The notion of power through descended gifts has survived Christian hostility to the ancestor cult, but now exists side by side with the alternative notion of a direct link of divine inspiration to God. Nowadays the origin story told by many educated Niassans no longer involves the descent to Nias of the first ancestors from the village in the sky, but the theory of a 1930s Austrian diffusionist archaeologist, whereby the first people to settle the island came from Tibet. The centre-source and origin point itself thus comes to be outside, in the realms of the potentially foreign.

### 9.11 Power of words and names

A central component of all the healing procedures described above is language. A spell, mantra or prayer is one of the crucial elements taught to one who would learn the way of curing a certain disease. As well as being spoken, words are also written and burnt or dissolved and ingested by the patient or rubbed on their skin. Healers and magicians keep notebooks or grimoires in which they copy down the spells they know; these books are such a focus of healers' special knowledge that when people repent of using sinful, magical knowledge they typically surrender these notebooks to a minister of the church. This efficacy ascribed to words alone is puzzling to the European, who tends to see words as simply contingent signs with no inherent power of their own.

In olden times the *ere* were those who could see the spirits invisible to others, who could understand their language, which was incomprehensible to everyone else. Having summoned them with the sound of their drum they could command spirits in the language of *fo'ere* chanting, which spirits could not but obey. "*Haedira! Böidira! Sittira!* Tell me your name! Arise! Speak! Inform!" the healer demands of a possessing spirit, since knowledge of a thing, person or spirit gives one power over them, just as knowing the name of a disease implies the treatment indicated. This is, in fact, a very common feature of healing practices all over the region. Malays sometimes seem to suggest that spirits are only names (Laderman 1991: 18), while the Acehnese villagers described by John Bowen conceive of words as items of exchange with the supernatural world (Bowen 1993: 12). Bowen's description of how this understanding of the power of words is in conflict with the modernists and Islamic orthodoxy finds many analogies with Nias (ibid. 13).

The *ere's* gestures together with the exorcistic syllables he or she utters (*makh! hu! ris! tik! efata!*) cause by describing the spirit's departure from the patient's body. Chants such as that given in the chapter VIII case history ("Sharp is the mondra water, sharp is the turmeric water...") name the ingredients and give them the efficacy ("sharpness") with

which they are described. Parents still change the name of frequently sick children so as to throw off the *bechu* that may be troubling them. Children's diseases are known by the trivialising term *anachö-nachö*; to refer to the sickness more seriously as *fa'aukhu* (fever) would make them worse. Just by knowing someone's name a sorcerer can harm them; in one such technique counting the unrepeatable letters in the victim's name establishes the number of each ingredient to be used in the spell.

This must be set in the context of a society in which the power of naming and measurement gives one ownership and power over the thing named and measured. Villages as a whole would change their name when devastated by repeated catastrophe to avert their evil fortune. As nobles climbed the ladder of feasts of merit their new status would be implemented by giving them a new name. Village culture was very much dominated by oral traditions. Babies become people by learning to speak the Nias language (*li niha* - "the sound/voice of the people"); boys become men by learning to speak in the authoritative language of *orahu* (village councils - see chapter V); and men become elders by letting the ancestors speak through them in the chanted poetry of *hoho*. To be a healer/priest - an *ere* - was to be able "to do *ere*" (*fo'ere*) which refers to chanting accompanied by a drum.

Given such preoccupations it is perhaps unsurprising that Niassans were vastly impressed by the power of writing. The Baptist missionary Henry Lyman, who visited Nias in 1834, reported the amazement of local chiefs when he showed them how a written order could command distant soldiers without any word being spoken. At much the same time the ancestors of today's healers were learning written spells in Arabic - *azimat* - from Malay *dukun*, and Modigliani tells us that villagers would come down to the coast to consult Malays for the solution to their problems: the Malays' consulting of their books was perceived as a powerful form of divination. It was the technologies of hymn singing and reading from the Bible that attracted the first chief of Hilinawalö to study Christianity. Today's villagers are fond of quoting the passage in the Bible "whatsoever you ask in my name, it shall be granted you," and Christian healing prayers almost without exception invoke "the name of Jesus" and show considerable continuity with pre-Christian exorcism:

"In the name of Jesus I say to you don't be inside Jeki's body. Ndeheee... [clasped hands shaking] Tak! [hands violently flinging outwards]. You are Satan, the Devil, in the name of Jesus don't be here... Tik! Devil's fire that you have entered into Jeki... Pull! Open! Ris!

In the name of Lord Jesus Christ the sickness suffered by Jeki is healed, in the name of our Lord Jesus everything that has entered his flesh will come out. In the name of Lord Jesus Christ the devil's fire will become cool. Oh Lord may our request to you be granted and Jeki's sickness be cured in your name, not in the name of the devil."

We have also noted the use of "the original names of God" and notional Hebrew in healing mantra taught by Ama Haogö. With Independence and compulsory education in the national language of Indonesian - and the influx of tourists of various nationalities - new languages have come to be integrated in Nias notions of the power of words and language. Indonesian language is today used in the village to draw to the speaker the power associated with the

state. Thus young men who aspire to a position, and older men who already hold a position in local government, that is in the state rather than the traditional hierarchy, make use in their *orahu* speeches of words and phrases in Indonesian, particularly the keywords of state discourse. Parents are keen for their children to learn English - the language of white foreigners - believing that the capacity to speak their language will draw to them the gifts of wealth and power enjoyed by its native speakers. All these new languages come together in the "speaking in tongues" (*li sibohou* - "new voices/language") of repentance healing. In trance, healers are often believed to be able to speak and understand the speech not just of spirits, but of foreigners too. The ecstatic utterances of those "speaking in tongues" juxtapose nonsense syllables, Nias language, words and phrases of Indonesian, as well as formulae from Christian prayer and Biblical language. The utterer displays themselves to be possessed by and connected to very diverse sources of power for their healing, promiscuously appropriating *ad proprios usos* the power of the ancestors, the state, the West, and the Christian God. Above (VII.6) we noted the argument that speaking in tongues is a specifically Protestant consequence of dogmatic opposition to the fetishisation of language. Whilst partially approving this argument, we simultaneously noted the degree to which the mechanical efficacy in exorcising spirits and curing attributed to speaking in tongues is continuous with pre-Christian curing practices. This paradox is to be explained by Christianity being constructed as fundamentally opposed to the fetishistic approach to the spiritual on Nias typified by practices surrounding *adu*, or idols, whilst asserting that Christian practices that fetishise objects (crucifixes, Bibles, churches, bells) or language (the spiritual power attributed to liturgy, scripture, sung and prayed formulae) are really symbols (Ind. *lambang*), not fetishes.

## 9.12 Assessment of village medicine

We have noted above the horror which village lack of hygiene and the '*Dreckapotheke*' of indigenous healing inspired in the first Europeans to visit Nias villages. This horror has never entirely worn off, and we shall see in the following chapter how state health education is premised on replacing primitive superstitions with 'scientific' medicine. Cosmopolitan medicine at the time of later colonialism and mission was intoxicated with the success of antiseptics, penicillin and the sulfa drugs; this optimism is maintained by contemporary Indonesian medicine, though recent research (on the failing war against malaria and growing resistance to antibiotics) in the West suggests that the optimism may be as unfounded as denigration of traditional healing methods were.

The drinking of urine or nibbling red clay as medicine; bandaging pus-filled wounds without disinfecting them or regularly changing the bandage; letting dogs lick human wounds; drinking unboiled water; letting human shit fall through the floorboards and keeping pigs below human habitations - all practised in Nias villages and condemned by colonial Europeans and modern Indonesians - have recently been proved to have at least as positive a



therapeutic effect as the corresponding biomedical treatments (which do not offend puritanical horror of the exuding body). Pigs consume detritus, including faeces, and keep the village clean. Drinking unboiled water and a more casual approach to hygiene inoculates against local viruses and bacteria. Saliva has been found to contain a powerful range of antibacterial and antifungal enzymes and proteins (Root-Bernstein 1998:110-119). The “stinking plaster” won favour over antiseptics among Great War doctors as “the Orr method” (ibid.102-4). Clay is a valuable detoxificant, as well as containing many indispensable minerals (ibid.59-63), while medically important hormones and enzymes are present in urine (ibid.119-133) and urea is already used in many face creams and moisturisers. Urban Euroamerican Modernity resists such remedies because of our own cultural taboos, in this case the Puritan horror at the body, especially the exuding body. If we can follow Weber, Merton, and our instincts in making connections between Reformation Protestantism (of whom the RMG missionaries, the BNKP ministers and Nias village modern élites - and the Heroes of Independence and the Modern Indonesian State in their different branch of the family - are the descendants), and the disembedding of the individual from *adat* hierarchy and extended kin groups, giving all modern, bureaucratic, equal access to monotheist divinity, then it is perhaps not surprising that secular disapproval of the exusion of the person into his or her social and physical environment (merit stones, ancestor images, *böwö* debt - see chapter V) became that Victorian horror faced with the actual physical exusions of the body.

The “magical” use of words seems strange, even simple and naive, to the Western observer. The words of any particular language, after all, are supposed to have only a conventional association with their referents. Etiologies of disease based on the actions of malevolent spirits or supernatural aggression by sorcerers find no support in the scientific assumptions of cosmopolitan medicine, so methods of curing based on such etiologies are dismissed by cosmopolitan medicine as useless or dangerous. With a few useful exceptions herbal and other remedies have little more than a placebo effect. Quaint beliefs and practices, such as the extraction of bad winds, is quackery and superstition; where the healer “pretends” to extract objects such as stones, nails or hair, it becomes pernicious fraud. Attitudes such as this pervaded the early missionaries’ attitudes to village healing, and, as we have seen, have partly determined changes in emphasis in the repertoire of village healing.

However, ethnographic sensitivity to the claims of healers and their patients, as well as recent research in neuropsychimmunology and medical assessments of complementary medicine, suggests that to see the practise of healers as deceitful fraud is to entirely miss the point of how their therapy works. Vaccination, after all, is medically respectable despite “tricking” the immune system with etiolated viruses into believing it is under attack by a certain virus so that it manufactures its own defences. Nor, as successive ethnographic studies have insisted, does ‘trickery’ necessarily preclude sincerity on the part of the healer. The classic account is “The Sorcerer and his Magic”, in which Lévi-Strauss shows how a healer comes to believe in his gift as he sees the results of what he had first assumed to be tricks (1993:167-185). So too Michael Lambek’s sensitively accounts for the apparent conjuring tricks practised by healers in Mayotte without any imputation of cynicism or fraud. These

"conjuring tricks" have much in common with extraction as practised on Nias, of which a vivid example is given in case history III at the end of the previous chapter. With a light touch, Lambek suggests that from the point of view of the healer's knowledge the sleight of hand mobilises the actual, esoteric healing mechanism (Lambek 1993:287-301). Today it has become common to treat traditional healing as a form of psychotherapy working within local cultural understandings (e.g. Laderman 1991: 14; Crapanzano & Garrison 1977: 1-40, 383-449). Laderman (ibid.) claims that the theory of Malay ritual practitioners amounts to an "indigenous form of conscious psychotherapy," and suggests that it addresses with particular effectiveness those problems caused by cultural restraints. Wikan (1990: 176) describes for Bali how somatization of interpersonal distress is common because issues are typically not brought out into the open, and these somatised complaints are especially effectively addressed by the practice of *balian* (healers). *Balian's* diagnoses, she claims, defuse guilt and anti-social feelings by putting the problem beyond the person, though at times they also have the negative effect of sowing suspicion and dissension (Wikan 1990: 256). The same could be said with truth of Nias *ere*.

Part of the answer lies in the phrase used to dismiss traditional healing, that it exercises 'little more than a placebo effect.' The placebo effect refers to the mysterious manner in which a substance with no physiological effect can nevertheless produce cures if the patient believes that taking it will help them. In 1955 Dr Beecher reported a 30% success rate for the placebo effect. The power of the placebo effect can however be powerfully strengthened if both the doctor and patient hold strong positive beliefs about its efficacy. A good example of this can be found in treatments applied with the sincere belief of the doctor which with subsequent medical advance are shown to have no physiological effect. In 1979 Drs. McCallie and Benson found that 70 to 90% of the time outmoded treatments for angina for which no physiological support can now be given did actually work, particularly when supported enthusiastically by the practitioner. Again in 1994 Dr Roberts and his team found that "under conditions of heightened expectations" debunked treatments for bronchial asthma, herpes and duodenal ulcers had excellent or good results 70% of the time (see Benson 1996:28-31; Moerman 1997:242-7). Even in the case of medicines proven to be pharmacologically active, a part of their beneficial effect must be attributed to the placebo effect they induce.

Representations in the mind directly affect the body through the mediation of the limbic system and hypothalamus, the endocrine system and the autonomic nervous system. It makes no difference to this process if the stimuli are real or imagined. Imagining a relaxing situation and actually being in it both cause the hypothalamus to chemically instruct the endocrine system to secrete hormones and neurotransmitters that stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, slowing the heartbeat and breathing. Imagined as well as real fear similarly cause accelerated heartbeat and breathing. States of mind thus strongly impact on the body's ability to heal itself, largely through their action in strengthening or compromising immunologic reactions. Though the precise mechanism is still unclear researchers agree that it is this link between mind and body that explains the functioning of the placebo effect, as

well as its negative counterpart, the 'nocebo' effect, involved in voodoo death, psychosomatic disease, and disease produced by feelings of guilt. This would seem to be the clue that explains the effectiveness of "magical" elements in Nias traditional healing, as well as the origin of disease in beliefs in spirits and witchcraft. In a 1962 study Drs Ikemi and Nakagawa found that "skin reactions indistinguishable from actual allergic reactions were induced by *believing* contact with a poison had occurred," and in 51% of cases "suggestion was a more powerful force than were the constitutional factors" (quoted in Benson 1996:59). It is perhaps more than coincidental that so many allergy-like reactions of the skin, known on Nias as *bio-bio*, are attributed by villagers to sorcery or poisoning.

In this light the practice of *ere*-healers appears less as fraudulent quackery, more as the creation of strong belief in a cure, belief which enables and empowers the mind/body to heal itself. Well performed spells and prayers that convincingly describe the overcoming of a patient's disease in terms of the patient's socially legitimated belief systems cause the patient's mind and body to respond as if they were true. The all-important use of performance in traditional healing<sup>12</sup> draws on the traditional notion of belief not as a state of mind, but as doing something, as constituting that which is 'believed' through action. Idols are animated, spirits and gods given life through being treated as real people, addressed by name and given offerings (see chapter V). Techniques such as the exorcism of spirits, the removal of "sickness substances" in the form of stones, hair or nails, massaging "bad winds" out of the body, the letting of "bad blood" and invoking the power of God to heal may all be seen as very powerful techniques for mobilising the very real healing powers of the placebo effect, just like the "persuasive, if erroneous" logic and "cosmic drama" of heart surgery (Moerman 1997:246). Similarly belief in "magical" ring stones that make one brave to speak in public, in amulets that protect from sickness, or spells that make one invulnerable all give the possessor the confidence that brings about the supposedly magical effect.

What is important in this kind of healing is the mobilisation of strong belief, both in the patient, the healer, and the community at large. One of the most impressive features of the Nias village healers, indeed, is the depth of their conviction in the efficacy of the treatments they practice: "...and if we do this, and this, you must be cured!" This conviction strikes one as not in the least arrogant; in their characteristic loving humility they pass the credit for their abilities on to its supposed source, to the Lord, to their lineage, to their teacher. It is these chains of links back to potent origins which we explored in this chapter that radiates the aura of efficacy and gives the healer the belief in themselves essential to the patients' belief in them. As we saw too, the healer's journey to becoming a healer is played out on a social stage, with dreams and exchanges enmeshing his or her practice with family and community, giving social legitimation to reinforce the creation of belief.

Azande-style protective arguments prevent counterexamples and failures in treatment from undermining the beliefs. Villagers readily admit the possibility, indeed often prevalence, of

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<sup>12</sup> See volumes by Laderman 1991, Roseman 1991 and Atkinson 1992 for regional ethnographies dealing with the importance of performance in healing, and Kuipers 1990 for its importance in social life.

fraudulent practice in healing - "just pretending" to extract illness. Villagers classify healers into those who do it for a living, to make a profit, and thus have no real powers, and those really powerful women and men who have a calling from God or their ancestors which they cannot refuse. If a cure fails, either the sorcerer's *ilmu* is higher than that of the healer, or else it is the patient's set time to die, his or her *ajal*, when the *noso* bestowed on them by Lowalangi has expired.

As we have seen in this and the previous two chapters, despite hostility from the organs of Christianity contemporary village healing has rebuilt its prior integration with religion, slotting itself into and adapting healing spaces within Lutheran missionary Christianity, with its focus on faith, repentance, conversion, the pathology of sin, and the Gifts of the Spirit. Healing of this kind thus remains embedded in the suprasocial as well as the social networks of family and community, overdetermining individuals' socialisation in these beliefs. Parallel strands of the medical research on the placebo effect alluded to above have shown how powerfully religious faith and participation in social networks generate the neurological well-being essential to fighting illness (Levin 1994:1475-82; Matthews et al 1993; Berkman & Syme 1979:186-204).

We turn in the following chapter to an exploration of the penetration and reception of "modern" state-sponsored medicine in Nias villages. In many ways of course villagers attribute the efficacy of modern doctors and nurses with their white uniforms and stethoscopes to their links to sources of power in the centres of the Euro-American West and the Indonesian state. These potent connections - as well as the expensive exchanges made in return for treatment - mobilise patients' belief and the powers of the placebo effect, despite the limitations of cosmopolitan medicine as manifested in a poor, remote and marginal part of the tropical world. Thus cosmopolitan medicine to some extent at least also works by the principles we have sketched for traditional healing, through the power of belief. The history of medicine is in large part the history of the placebo effect - of procedures now known to be useless or harmful, but which worked because doctors and patients believed in them. Coronary bypass operations are just one of the most recent examples (Moerman 1997:245-6). As we shall see, the practice of modern technical medicine on Nias has had undoubtedly beneficial effects, on child mortality above all, but has also been beset with problems. These range from the distance of patients from practitioners, the expense of treatment and irregular supplies of drugs, to the difficulties of communication and the divergence of explanatory models of disease held by doctors and patients. As we saw villagers to learn traditional understandings of disease through their and their families' treatments with healers, so doctors and nurses very explicitly see their job as educating their patients. A large part of the energy of state-sponsored medicine is thus directed at health education, at replacing the explanatory models of disease and curing we have been exploring.

## CHAPTER X

# COSMOPOLITAN MEDICINE AND THE STATE

### 10.1 Hospitals and Doctors

Since the 1960s the outreach of state medical services has multiplied. According to a recent mission statement of the national Ministry of Health amongst the "basic principles of health development" are that "the results and outcome of the development programme should be equally shared by all people," and "health endeavours should be ... evenly distributed" and "should be adjusted to demographic, socio-cultural and economic factors of each region" (Departemen Kesehatan 1998).

Various options are now available for those south Nias villagers who can afford modern medical treatments for their ailments. In the local market town of Teluk Dalam there is a clinic offering in and out patient drug treatments and simple surgery. The doctors and nurses are all ethnic Chinese, Malays from Sumatra, or Javanese, with the exception of Ama Dewi Wau, a noble's son from Orahili. Until 1995 another noble's son, Dr Rudolf Wau of Bawömataluo, held a private medical practice in Teluk Dalam. His family paid for him to go to medical school at UKI in Jakarta, and now he has returned to Jakarta to work. Presently private medical services are offered by an ethnic Chinese doctor in Teluk Dalam. The Lukas hospital in Hilisimaetanö, opened by the German missionaries, bequeathed to the BNKP at the outbreak of WWII and nationalised in 1963, now offers a similar level of service to the Teluk Dalam clinic. Up until 1963 there were still German staff at the hospital, and mission funds were used to send villagers to Germany for training. Up until this time the hospital enjoyed a very good reputation with villagers, but this has declined in the absence of foreign doctors and modern equipment. Ama Lindung Dachi was another noble's son (of Hilisimaetanö) trained at SPR in Balige who worked as a nurse at the Lukas Hospital and was famous for his bold operating style. It is generally recognised that Niassan doctors and nurses are better able to communicate with villagers (many of whom do not speak Indonesian) and to negotiate with local belief systems, but as in all professions Nias is seen nationally as a very undesirable place to work.

Operations more complex than simple surgery and other treatments requiring special equipment still cannot be offered in south Nias. The much larger hospital in the regency capital of Gunung Sitoli offers more services, but those that can often travel to Siantar or Medan on the Sumatran mainland in search of treatment. Villagers consider that hospitals and clinics on Nias are far from the centres of medical knowledge and expertise to which one must travel in order to obtain the best treatment.

## 10.2 Chemists

Travelling to mainland hospitals is, of course, far beyond the reach of most villagers, who find it hard to meet the costs of treatment in Teluk Dalam or Hilisimaetanö. Since villagers appreciate the efficacy of cosmopolitan medicines but are unable to pay hospital charges, many self-prescribe medicines that have worked before for family members treated at hospital by purchasing them from the unlicensed drug seller in Teluk Dalam. He is of Chinese descent, though his family has converted to Christianity and is assimilated to the Sarumaha clan that dominates the villages around Teluk Dalam. He learnt his trade working at the Lukas hospital with the German doctors: he ordered supplies of drugs, and by over-ordering built up his first stock of drugs.

His father was a trader, and he himself has tried dealing in five-and-dime goods, cloth, crockery and building materials, as well as buying rice and mung beans from villagers, which he ships to the mainland. However, his most profitable business is selling medicine. Other shops sell balsams, embrocated oils, antiseptic ointments and patent preparations containing paracetamol for colds and headaches, but apart from the hospitals and village clinics he is the only retailer of chemical drugs. His house on the main road of the market town resembles Chinese houses all over Southeast Asia, family rooms on the first floor and the ground floor given over to his business, sacks of agricultural produce stacked against one wall ready for shipment to the mainland, against another racks of wet batteries charging for his customers, while he himself sits expansively in front of cabinets full of medicine, at a desk covered in bottles of pills, customer's account-lists, and a large wooden abacus. White-haired and effetely plump, his appearance is in stark contrast to the wiry villagers he serves. Like many businessmen of Chinese descent on Nias he wears an air of pitying superiority, combined, in his case, with ingratiating affability<sup>1</sup>. His business is illegal since he does not have the requisite licence from the Department of Trade and the Health Department in Gunung Sitoli. Furthermore he sells a great many medicines which by law may only be sold against a doctor's prescription. He says with the guilty smile of one confessing to an addiction that he has tried to stop selling medicines, but his customers would not permit it, knocking on his door at midnight demanding medicine.

The most popular drugs bought at his shop are tetracycline for diarrhoea, chloroquine for malaria, paracetamol and western-style patent medicines such as Bodrex and Antalgin for flu and colds. Most customers ask by name for the medicine they want. Occasionally they bring in a pill without knowing its name and ask for more of the same. Only a few ask his advice on what medicine to buy, which is probably just as well, given his lack of training. Women buy multivitamins more than men, and a few women buy contraceptive pills, though they are very ashamed to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> In the last months of my fieldwork, as the currency plummeted and the price of trade goods soared far beyond the budget of villagers, shop owners - almost all of Chinese descent - faced sporadic looting by village youths who believed they were profiteering amidst the national economic crisis.

Though he approvingly mentions traditional remedies such as *kumis kucing* for backache and *cöfö-cöfö* for eye problems he is generally despairing of traditional ideas about healing, casting much of it as "*bohong*" - lies. The real problem with Nias, he says, is the lack of discipline, the way time is wasted by the formal exchanges that must precede a purchase. He finds the uncritical nature of village oratory ridiculous: the respondent cries the affirmative "*yai ya hö!*" whatever the speechmaker is saying. However, in recent years he has noticed a great deal of change in people's rejection of traditional ideas and acceptance of cosmopolitan medicine. More and more villagers, he says, are coming to his shop. However, they do not understand very well how to use strong medicine, though by now they do appreciate the role of rehydration salts and tetracycline for diarrhoea and chloroquine for malaria.

### 10.3 Midwives

The Health Department of the regional government aims to provide trained midwives (*Bidan*) for every village to manage pregnancies, births and the medical care of under-fives. These must normally follow the three year course for nurses at the Sekolah Perawat Kesehatan in Gunung Sitoli followed by an extra year for midwife training. However, given the shortage of women able to afford such training the government has made an exceptional gesture of respect to the traditional health system by offering three month courses for traditional midwives, who may then work in partnership with village clinics. They are known as *dukun terlatih* - trained traditional healers - and there are currently 121 of them in the Teluk Dalam region, compared to only 46 *Bidan*. If this policy of cooperation, rather than antagonism, was to be extended to village healers in general, it would go a long way towards mitigating some of the damaging consequences of the state construction of tradition described below in section 10.5.

### 10.4 Village clinics

These village clinics - *Puskesmas*, or Social Health Centres - constitute the sector of cosmopolitan medicine outreach that has seen the most expansion in the last decade. They are designed not only to provide conventional health services but also to promote community participation, disease prevention and health education. There are now ten in the Teluk Dalam region. Since distance from hospitals and lack of roads has been (after poverty) the most important obstacle to uptake of state medical services, the aim has been to provide all villages with a nearby clinic staffed by a trained nurse offering simple treatments, health education, vaccinations and referrals to the hospitals. In 1984 such a clinic was opened in the village of Bawömataluo, an hour's walk away for Hilinawalö villagers. In 1991 Hilinawalö finally received money from the regional government to build their own clinic (also serving the villages of Bawögösali, Onohondrö and Siwalawa) on the old football field that was

being eaten away by the river. This new clinic replaced the dispensary (*Balai Pengobatan*) which had been set up and supplied since 1989 by *Bantuan Desa* money, that is a government grant. Ama Wita, a Hilinawalö villager who had trained as a nurse at SPK Gunung Sitoli and was appointed a government health official in 1987, was recalled from his post at the Bawömataluo clinic to run it. He is given a government salary, but has to return 61,500 rupiah (£15) a month to the Health Department in Gunung Sitoli to pay for the drugs with which he is supplied and which he sells to villagers.

Monthly dissemination of medical knowledge sessions are supposed to be held monthly at the Protestant church, illustrating the ongoing alliance between church and state in spreading secular and modern medical understandings. Immunisation of under-fives also supposedly takes place monthly at the clinic, but this depends on the irregular delivery of vaccines from Gunung Sitoli. In September 1995, 1996 and 1997, as part of the national campaign (PIN) to eradicate acute polio myelitis, all village children under five received liquid polio vaccine at the clinic. Vaccination is no longer perceived as a sinister discipline to be avoided, but is welcomed. Criticism rather points to the frequent cancellations caused by the failure to arrive of vaccine.

The diseases most commonly treated at the clinic are, in order, malaria (*vivax* and *falciparum*, the latter accounting for 20% of cases; the nearest laboratory is at the Teluk Dalam hospital, but where the spleen is enlarged diagnosis is made and treatment - chloroquine - given); dysentery (for which antibiotics such as cortimazole or chloramphenicol are given); upper respiratory tract infections (treated with ampicillin or trisulfa); bronchitis; diarrhoea; anaemia.

Ama Wita's statistics describe a dramatic improvement in village health since the clinic was opened in 1991. 255 people were treated for malaria in 1992, only 133 in 1998; 190 were treated for upper respiratory tract infections in 1992, 108 in 1998; cases of bronchitis have similarly fallen from 186 to 52, anaemia from 197 to 31. Since complete figures are given for the year 1998, only two and a half months of which had passed when the statistics were given, we must conclude that these figures were more or less invented by Ama Wita to illustrate a change he has perceived, or at least feels ought to have happened<sup>2</sup>. This improvement in village health since the opening of the clinic (but also coeval with the provision of piped water and the general raising of village incomes as the price of patchouli has risen) is generally confirmed by villagers, whose only complaint about the opening of the clinic is the expense of medicine.

The last outbreak of cholera in the village took place in 1991, the year the clinic was opened. Five villagers who tested positive were confined (after a certain amount of resistance) and treated in the clinic. Their contacts and family were all also given precautionary treatment.

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<sup>2</sup> Ama Dewi Wau, the assistant doctor at the Teluk Dalam government clinic in Teluk Dalam, complains that inadequate statistics are one of the barriers to the development of modern medicine on Nias.



Since all five recovered and no one else in the village was infected the clinic quickly earned a good reputation amongst villagers, helped enormously by the popularity and respect in which Ama Wita is held in the village. He is himself a remarkable man whose authority and expertise spans both the traditional and modern spheres (see prologue to chapter I).

## 10.5 The Official View of Village Health Problems

Ama Wita was trained at the nursing college where his teachers were all outsiders, and it was there he learnt how traditional Nias practices have a negative impact on village health. As we have seen, in some respects he repeats this point of view, but in others he does not, especially in forbearing to criticise the practices of traditional healers in the village. It is time then, that we clearly described this official point of view, before going on to investigate how schools and Development of Family Prosperity programmes attempt to remedy the situation.

The official point of view is not monolithic, and important differences of emphasis exist between statements of the national Ministry of Health (*Departemen Kesehatan*) and those of local health officials. A recent report (March '97) of the Ministry to the WHO<sup>3</sup> evaluating the "Health for All 2000" programme identifies constraints in the following order. Firstly lack of resources (especially health professionals in "undesirable areas"), then rural poverty, followed by the huge geographical area with its remote islands and heterogeneity of language and culture. In specific cases, such as diarrhoeal diseases, "traditional habits and beliefs regarding the illness" are identified as a principal constraint, and with neonatal tetanus "traditional/socio-cultural habits of certain communities may still be high risk factors." Since "equity for health" is a prime goal of the programme, it is planned that tariffs should be adjusted for low-income communities ("the poorest 20% of the population still have inadequate access to health services"), but in the present the main strategy is health education and promotion. There are currently health education units at all local branches (*Dinas*) of the Ministry; "rapid ethnographic assessment" techniques are supposed to be used to assess local needs, and health education targets schools, households, mothers, workplaces, public places and health institutions, also using TV and radio media, with traditional media also suggested to overcome heterogeneity of the community (though no such projects were known on Nias).

According to figures presented by the Nias Regency Statistics Office, Nias has the third highest infant mortality rate and the lowest life expectancy of the entire province of North Sumatra, after only Tapanuli and Tanjung Balai. In official publications and in writing the reasons given for this poor state of affairs are typically the following. Firstly, poor communications - the isolation of Nias as a whole and the interior villages in particular.

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<sup>3</sup> A large proportion of the national health budget comes from "international partnerships", NGOs such as Rotary and Lyons' Clubs, and the WHO.

This makes it difficult both for villagers to reach medical services in the towns and for medical staff to reach the villages. Secondly, the lack of education, which leaves villagers unaware of important rules of hygiene, of quarantine for infectious diseases, of the right way of using cosmopolitan medicine, and of the quackery of village healers, to give the most frequent examples. Thirdly, the blame is put on "primitive mentality" and the strength of *adat*, which means that villagers must continue to practice unhealthy customs. In this context lack of education and the strength of *adat* are seen as two sides of the same coin, and this is the reason most commonly cited in conversation with health department officials and non-indigenous medical staff. Poverty is only seldom mentioned as responsible for the poor health situation, and when it is it is often blamed on the villagers themselves, as a consequence of their bloody-minded sticking to the old ways, especially the economic debts entailed by affinal prestations.

In informal conversation, however, it is the third reason, in which the 'character' (*sifat*), 'pattern of thought' (*pola pikir*) or 'mentality' (*mentalitas*) of villagers is collapsed into their customs or *adat*, that comes to the fore. Indonesians do not like to be posted to work on Nias: it is certainly not a prestigious posting, they are far from home and its civilised entertainments, opportunities for self-enrichment are all but nonexistent, and they find life on Nias at best uncomfortable and at worst threatening. Furthermore, the Nias people are notoriously difficult to work with. Officials rarely speak any of the local language, and so find communication with villagers difficult, and the local culture impossible to grasp in its own terms. This they do not see as their own shortcoming, but as a rather shameful lack of "Indonesianness" on the part of Niassans.

This point of view is not unique to the medical field: a similar account is given by government officials of problems in the fields of agriculture, tourism, and development in general. In their failure to comprehend local culture from the inside, this discourse on the character and culture of Niassans is strikingly continuous with that of the Dutch colonists and German missionaries described above. The following list of complaints in the health field I collected from conversations and interviews with officials in Medan, Gunung Sitoli and Teluk Dalam, as well as from official publications of the Department of Education and Culture. All were noted more than once, and many on repeated occasions.

Livestock should not be permitted to roam the village but should be kept in pens or fenced enclosures. Traditional houses are insanitary and are not properly cleaned; windows that cannot be closed allow insects to enter, and the disposal of kitchen and toilet waste is inadequate, being simply thrown out of the back of the house, allowing germs to breed and disperse. Toilets and kitchens should not be adjacent, as they are in traditional houses. Villagers wash neither themselves nor their clothes adequately, and do not make a habit of washing their hands before preparing food or *sirih*. Villagers do not understand the elements of a healthy diet: they eat too little protein, too many root vegetables and not enough green vegetables. They do not understand the necessity to limit the numbers of children they have, and are thus unable to adequately feed, clothe and educate their overlarge families. They do not appreciate the value of cosmopolitan medicine, are reluctant to seek appropriate treatment, and resist vaccination and quarantine. They misunderstand anatomy and the true sources of

sickness. The treatments they seek from traditional healers, based on these mistaken understandings, are at best useless and at worst damaging. They are duped by these healers who cynically exploit villagers' ignorance in order to make a living. And last but not least, sorcery, witchcraft and poisoning are rife in the villages.

Lack of uptake of medical services is typically blamed on primitive mentality rather than inability to meet its not inconsiderable costs. However, inasmuch as poverty is recognised as contributing to poor health, it too is blamed on local culture and the character of villagers. The fact that they are bound by custom makes them unable to develop, especially in the agricultural sector. In the economic field they are driven by the necessity to repay customary debts, particularly those resulting from marriage, rather than investing in inputs such as fertiliser or insecticide. They do not understand the importance of saving. When they do make profits (as they have recently with patchouli, whose price has risen dramatically) they spend the money on immediate consumption rather than investing it back into their agricultural enterprises or saving for lean times to come. They are unable to innovate originally: if one family has a success with a commodity or technique, they are either brought down by other people's jealousy or all seek to copy it, without each looking for their own entrepreneurial niches.

Resisting the urge to directly answer these criticisms, I shall proceed to describe the two main ways in which the state seeks to remedy them, through education of children in schools and instruction of women by state-sponsored health education programs, known as PKK - *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*, or Development of Family Prosperity.

## 10.6 Schools and health education

Since schools are a central institution of the cultural engineering whereby the state is attempting to replace villagers' mistaken primitive understandings by modern scientific ones and instil a sense of national citizenship over tribal affiliations it is worthwhile to consider them in some detail.

Nias children, like children everywhere, have always picked up knowledge and techniques through non-formal processes of education within the family and village community, and continue to do so. More formal education, in for example ironworking, potmaking or healing, was and continues to be carried out through apprentice-ships of young people to elders expert in the craft. However, this expert knowledge is imparted to apprentices in much the same way as non-formal education within the family and community: that is, by the young watching, imitating, and trying again and again to get it right, with little in the way of abstract exposition on the part of the teacher. Apprenticeships are different from non-formal education, however, in that the apprentice makes a ritual payment of *sirih*, money, or a white cloth in return for the expert's knowledge, who will also conduct a final ceremony that ratifies the acquisition of the apprentice's knowledge. Without this ceremony the apprentice

will not be changed in such a way as to become an expert, and their knowledge is seen as not working without this ceremony<sup>4</sup>. A similar pattern exists for children who inherit expert knowledge from a parent or grandparent - the knowledge and techniques are learnt by watching and imitating, but the transformation of the person which makes the knowledge and techniques efficacious must be ratified by a ceremony, or, if the parent is deceased, by a dream. In conversation villagers tend to elide the 'watching and imitating' part of the acquisition of skills: they talk as if the knowledge or ability was entirely dependent on the inheritance of a capacity, or its ritual transfer from a master (see chapter IX).

Since the eighteenth century new forms of instruction became available from Acehese Moslems who set up shacks at the coastal ports of Lahewa, Gunung Sitoli and Onolimbu. They taught *puncak silat*, a martial art widespread in Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as techniques of healing and esoteric knowledge (*ilmu bathin*). This esoteric knowledge would have included the ability to trace written verses from the Koran, not, however, as part of learning to read and write as a means of communication, but as magical charms or *azimat*. These teachers were happy to accept the traditional recompense of gold and *sirih* wrapped in a white cloth: this was believed by the villagers to be the traditional return in Aceh as on Nias.

The school education first introduced by the missionaries had then traditional precursors which to some extent inflected and continue to inflect the way school education is practised and received on Nias. In other ways, though, the new kind of education was and continues to be perceived as radically different from traditionally-transferred knowledge. Thus present-day villagers contrast modern doctors' and traditional healers' knowledge, the former as learnt "on the school bench", the latter's as passed down by divine or parental inheritance.

The first schools the missionaries set up in the villages were singing schools (*sekola manunö*) and prayer schools (*sekola fangandrö*). These schools, which continue to be run by village *guru jumaat*, largely repeated the traditional model of teaching, for example of a group of apprentices by a master ironworker. Thus a teacher whose knowledge constituted a transformation of his essence (as the spiritual knowledge and rituals undergone by a minister make him a different kind of person to others) taught by example and repetition, and pupils' acquisition of the new knowledge or skills was ratified by a ceremony of graduation or baptism. Students, furthermore, by repeating and becoming expert in singing or speaking the hymns and prayers, hoped to acquire through this mastery some of the essential quality possessed of their teacher, for example the powers to bless and see and speak to God. However, differences marked off even these kinds of mission schools from their traditional precursors. Villagers expected classes to be taken by the person who possessed the transformed essence, in this case the German missionaries, and were disappointed when teaching was delegated to native assistants<sup>5</sup>. This problem was avoided by extending the

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<sup>4</sup> Thus healers I interviewed about their healing techniques would often expect a return gift for the knowledge they gave me. I was able partially to evade this expectation by explaining that I only wished to know about their techniques, and was not asking for the power to use these techniques to be transmitted to me.

attribution of transformed essence to these native assistants as well, though according to official church doctrine they were not themselves ministers but congregation teachers, by assimilating them to the traditional category of “prophets” (*sama’ele’ō*). The second significant difference was that the transfer of knowledge was not expected by the missions to be returned with a gift, other than some commitment to Christianity. Nias Christians, though, as Christians elsewhere, happily continued giving offerings to cement the value of knowledge received and to secure blessings. Missionaries, as later the indigenous Protestant church, interpreted these offerings as donations to the church and wrote them down in the parish ledger.

Other classes held at village schools run by the mission taught reading and writing and general subjects. We may imagine that teachers in these classes were as exasperated as contemporary non-indigenous primary school teachers at the tendency of village children in class to “imitate without understanding”, another example of traditional models of education inflecting the reception of the new.

It was from these mission schools that the Nias educational system has grown. At the Ombölata seminary, native teachers were taught to serve in village schools which were funded and run by the RMG mission. At Independence these schools were taken over by the BNKP, the curriculum being set by the state. Other missions, especially the Catholics, also opened schools which are still open today, and the Catholics (who receive funds from abroad) will occasionally pay for the schooling of exceptionally promising but poor students. In these early days before Independence village mission schools were largely a route to the mission seminary and posts as church elders, village teachers or native preachers.

The Dutch also opened schools, notably the Hollandsche Inlandsche Schools (H.I.S.) to which sons of village chiefs who cooperated with the colonial government were sent. This policy had a mixed effect. Some, like Faogöli Harefa, a noble’s son from Gunung Sitoli who went on to head the Public Native School on Tello Island just south of Nias, fully imbibed the colonisers’ version of history and local culture. Thus, inspired by Korn’s research on *adat* and language, he wrote in 1939 a volume on the “History, Tribal Stories and Customs of Nias”. In this work he uses the word ‘*hamba*’, or servant, instead of the first person singular pronoun; he excuses the myths he relates for being contrary to science and scripture; and he introduces his résumé of recent history with the words: “It is indeed very fortunate that this island is now commanded by the Dutch, for had it not been who knows what would have become of its inhabitants” (Harefa, F 1939:90).

Others, however, were set off on a very different tack by their experiences of education. Muhammad Ali Wau, son of the chief noble of Orahili who had struggled against the Dutch, was sent to the H.I.S. school in Padang on the mainland. There he met Aheat, a Moslem magician (*so’elemu*) from Tello Island just south of Nias, from whom he studied *silat*,

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<sup>5</sup> Furthermore in south Nias these native assistants would typically have come from north Nias, where the missions were first established.

healing and magic, and as a result converted to Islam. On his return to Nias he worked as a lawyer in Gunung Sitoli, frequently defending Niassans against state prosecutions. He became active in the fight for Independence, and was made an officer by the Japanese in recognition of his membership of the Fons Kemerdekaan in Teluk Dalam, which fought bloodily against the Dutch in the late 1930s.

After Independence the mission schools and seminary were taken over by the BNKP, and the colonial government schools were nationalised. The early years of Independence, what has come to be called the Old Order under President Soekarno, saw little expansion of the educational system. Villagers educated at this time rarely spent more than a couple of years in primary school, and even the sons of south Nias village chief nobles rarely made it beyond secondary school to high school. Peasant families had not yet adjusted to releasing children from their agricultural and domestic duties, and the combined cost of forgoing free labour and paying for uniforms and books made of education an unfeasible luxury for most. The shortage of primary schools meant that villagers would often have to travel daily to the school in a neighbouring village where they would typically be bullied, and even prevented from attending by the host village's children, who would dismantle bridges that had to be crossed. Such schools as there were were largely staffed by *fanolo* - native assistants, or stipendary teachers. Today, elderly villagers who were educated at these schools complain that these teachers had little knowledge to pass on - in many cases they didn't even speak Indonesian.

Parents may have been reluctant to spare children from work in the house and fields, schools distant and unwelcoming and teachers inadequate, but the impression one gets from discussing their childhoods with elderly villagers is that education was nonetheless highly desired, and frustration experienced in failing to obtain it.

As we have seen, Nias Christianity with its German Lutheran roots was hostile to traditional leadership and status based on the *fa'ulu* feasts, which it saw as tyrannical and wasteful. The ideology of the Indonesian revolution, drawn in part from European Communism, was also hostile to traditional hereditary élites which it characterised as 'feudal', and emphasised the renewing vitality of the young as against the conservative village elders and nobles who had often colluded with the colonial governors (see sketch of F. Harefa above). This dovetailing of Christian and Nationalist opinion won out over the imperatives of *adat*, and the last real *fa'ulu* feasts in the south took place in the 1930s. The vacuum for the seeking of status and advancement was filled by the education of children, which was necessary to rise in the church as well as in the national hierarchy<sup>6</sup>, and was exhorted as a prime value of both church and state. From this time on village parents have sacrificed all to secure a good education and a good marriage for their children. Education has not just replaced the *fa'ulu* feast as a means of advancement - there are also structural parallels with the *fa'ulu* system in the competition between peers, and the ceremonial

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<sup>6</sup> Similarly the government ban on inter-village warfare denied young men opportunities to distinguish themselves as warriors, and this gap was filled by the seeking of work in the national police or military.

“passing-up” to the next school class, as well as from school to school. In the old days status was marked by the name of the highest feast an individual had given in the named ladder of feasts, now by the category of the highest school graduated from: primary, junior high, or high school.

With the security and stability of the New Order of Soeharto, coupled with new state income from oil and gas in the 1970s, the educational infrastructure began to improve dramatically, with the Department of Education and Culture aiming to provide a primary school for every village<sup>7</sup>. Newly trained Batak schoolteachers began to arrive in the 1970s. Villagers’ incomes also improved somewhat with the (temporary) boom in clove prices in the 1980s, followed by the dramatic rise in the selling price of patchouli oil in the 1990s. The 57% of Indonesian children receiving primary school education in 1973 rose to 97% by 1984 (Ricklefs, M C 93:305). Problems remain with access to education in remote and rural areas like Nias, and it is not easy for peasant families with many children to educate them to the level they would desire. For each child, even if sent to the state schools and not the fee-paying church schools, money must be found for uniform, shoes, books and pens. Secondary and high school students require in addition the cost of travelling to the market town or boarding there, and all schools insist on ‘buildings money’ and contributions for new school equipment, for sport, for example.

Villagers’ accounts of their schooldays often begin with their reluctance to go to school which is overruled by their parents’ compulsion. Their accounts are subsequently structured by the competition of end of term and end of year exams, and the shame or pride these entail; family poverty and sickness figure large as recurring obstacles to education. They tend to present themselves either as good or bad students, some making a transition from one category to the other. Good students hope to become government officials, lawyers, engineers, electricians, or tourism industry workers. ‘Bad’ students often dream of joining the military or police, or else leaving Nias on *rantau*. Problematic behaviour exhibited by students typically consists of running away home or exhaustion, either from bicycling a long way to school, working too hard outside school, or both. Fighting between (male) students or assaults on teachers are frequently recorded, and long feuds can continue with a teacher a student has crossed, and whom he will often suspect of having “poisoned hands”. Punishments begin with the giving of advice and rise up through beatings to temporary bans and expulsion.

To the observer educated in the western tradition it is striking how far the style of teaching in village schools relies on the traditional method of imitation and repetition, without the abstract explanations and testing of pupil’s comprehension characteristic of education in the western tradition. Thus, giving instruction in health education, the teacher recites lists - for example of the “five ideal foods” or the things that must be cleaned - presented in formulaic and invariant form. Pupils are encouraged to shout out with the teacher the word *‘sehat’* (healthy) whenever mentioned, as if the force of their utterance actually constituted their

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<sup>7</sup> As a “backward area” (*daerah tertinggal*) 60% of primary schools in the south Nias district were opened with special “presidential grants” (*inpres*, or *instruksi presiden*).

healthy condition, and all together also shout out the official maxims such as “cleanliness is the beginning of health” and “a healthy mind in a healthy body”<sup>8</sup>. Memory of such lists is tested rather than comprehension, and all in all the presentation of health messages, particularly to primary school children, resembles traditional prohibitions rather than scientific explanations.

We have reviewed the history of education in some detail because it is such an important factor in the interaction of traditional and modern understandings, especially in the field of health and curing that is our concern. We have so far noted various continuities between traditional concepts and the local version of modern education on Nias, aspects in which to a limited extent the new is understood in terms of the old. We now turn to a consideration of how school education marginalises and supercedes traditional understandings in general, before passing on to specific consideration of how schools explicitly attempt to replace traditional understandings of sickness and health.

Firstly, of course, the knowledge taught in schools is represented as scientific truth; where local knowledge is introduced into primary school classes it is marginalised as folk culture or children’s stories.

The conflict between the demands of peasant agriculture and education has already been mentioned. Primary schooling begins at seven years, by which time village children have already begun helping their parents in the domestic and agricultural work. Schooling thus partially removes children from family peasant-farming activities: children of poorer families must work in the fields in the afternoon, leaving them exhausted and unreceptive in the classroom, while for the more well-off school activities replace farming duties. This is a significant factor determining more traditional attitudes among poor village families, and more progressive attitudes among the less poor.

School of course removes children from the home/family context in which the non-formal education of children in local traditional culture takes place, and this effect is more marked as one moves up the hierarchy of schools, most pronounced where children at secondary and high schools board in the market town or regency capital. In the old days, when agricultural activities were practiced on an annual calendar, the period after harvest (March/April) was a time of rest from work in the fields when many of the feasts and rituals of traditional village life - consecration of the harvest, marriages, feasts of merit - would be celebrated. As children participated they would imbibe the forms and meanings of local ritual. Nowadays the agricultural year has been disrupted by the Green Revolution: new varieties of rice are harvested up to three times a year, and the now-limited ritual season - when a proportionally higher number of marriages are celebrated - currently takes place in the school

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from the Latin tag *mens sana in corpore sano*, here is an element of the modern way of thinking promulgated in schools being identical to the kind of modernity that grew out of the western tradition. (This, of course, was also the kind of modernity taught at the Dutch HIS schools.) Other elements, however are supposed to be distinctively Indonesian/Asian. See paragraphs below on *Pancasila* and *Gotong Royong*.



holidays, in December or August.

The sacrifices made by village parents in sending their children to schools they themselves were often unable to attend (or only in a very attenuated fashion) show that they recognise the knowledge taught in schools to be of the utmost importance in doing well in today's world. Village parents hope that their children will reach a higher level of education than themselves, and that they and their families will be, as a consequence, better off. More progressive parents explicitly attempt to instill independence (*tolong sendiri* - "helping yourself") in their children, a value they see as crucial in the modern world. They thus resign themselves to a lonely middle-age, sending their children away to school, and hardly expecting them to return to the village since job opportunities for the qualified are so much better on the mainland. There is thus an important sense in which parents feel their knowledge to be inferior to that of their children; hoping that their children will do better in life than they have done, the unconditional respect for age - a primary motor of the transmission of tradition - is broken.

Schools also teach children about new non-traditional kinds of interpersonal relationships. Friends are made with children from other villages - relationships that in later life will cut across the traditional boundedness of the village as a social unit, typically crossed only by marriage or warfare. At the secondary and high schools in the market town village children will mix with the sons and daughters of the businessmen of Chinese descent who live there; at schools on the mainland they will make friends with Indonesian children from a range of ethnic backgrounds. This disrupts local values and traditions, so that the games children play, and the ghosts they fear and tell stories about (to take just two examples) are drawn from traditions wider than the local. Particularly where children board in town boyfriend/girlfriend relationships (*pacaran*) develop in a way which would be impossible in the village. These may develop into love marriages contrary to village *adat*; where such relationships end without marriage but with the girl's virtue publicly compromised she may be prevented by shame from returning to the village, and thus forced into flight, often into the world of prostitution. New kinds of leadership too are introduced, modelled on state rather than village hierarchies. Thus students are expected to submit to foreign (i.e. Batak) teachers, just as in adult life they will be expected to submit to foreign government officials, police and military. Similarly class prefects are elected by the students, just as in later life they will elect their village heads.

So far we have reviewed the more or less indirect ways in which school education marginalises traditional knowledge. As institutions of the state, schools are centred on the Indonesian nation and not on the sociocultural world of the village. We turn now, after this long and rather general digression, onto the direct ways in which schools attempt to influence children, with special emphasis on health education. Abia Gulö, a mathematician at the teacher training college in Gunung Sitoli, succinctly expresses the official line:

"In order to bring into being the national aims as set forth in the '45 Constitution it has

been laid down that national education should be based on *Pancasila* and should aim to raise piety towards God Almighty, intelligence and skill, heighten morality, strengthen character and stiffen the national spirit and love of homeland to create a people who can develop themselves and be responsible for the development of the nation."

Every Monday morning flag-raising ceremonies are performed at village schools all over Indonesia. The military format of these ceremonies, whereby the students assemble and march in regimented lines presided over by a head teacher as the 'Commandant of the Ceremony', and at which the five principles of *Pancasila* and the abbreviated version of the '45 Constitution are read out, hark back to the role of the national army in the Revolution, and perhaps beyond that to the military rituals of the colonial government.

Pass grades are essential in three course units, *Pancasila*, Indonesian language and Religion, in order for students to pass up a year, and every school year (at all levels of schools, including universities) begins with intensive P4<sup>9</sup> courses in the national ideology of *Pancasila*. The five principles of *Pancasila* are belief in one God Almighty, a just and civilised humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by consultation and consensus, and social justice for all. The formula was worked out by Soekarno to reconcile and unite the diverse ethnic groups and ideologies that powered the Revolution, from Communism to Islam. Under Soeharto's New Order, however, *Pancasila* came to mean absolute submission of the individual to the state, the total suppression of voices opposing the President or government, and the rigorous depoliticisation of religion and ethnicity<sup>10</sup>.

There are also scheduled periods when the schoolchildren together clean the schoolyard and rooms, sweeping, weeding, planting flowers and so on. This is called *gotong royong*, a Javanese term for a traditional Javanese practice of collective community work. It has become a centrepiece of nationalist ideology, a pan-Indonesian "traditional" characteristic of society whereby local infrastructural facilities such as roads and bridges are supposed to be repaired and maintained by the collective effort of the local community. This example illustrates clearly the manner in which state ideology endorses a few elements of tradition (in this case significantly Javanese) as giving the distinctive Indonesian cast to the national culture's version of modernity. Such elements typically either play a role in social control or provide the cultural colour deemed essential to national pride and attracting tourists. They are never political, and are usually divorced from their traditional context.

Thus in the early 1990s, with the latest Five-Year Development Plan stressing the development of culture tourism to attract foreign capital, the Department of Education and Culture inaugurated an annual festival of traditional culture, the *Pesta Ya'ahowu*<sup>11</sup>, to be

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<sup>9</sup> *Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila* - guidelines for the comprehension and putting into practice of Pancasila. This "compulsory indoctrination in the state philosophy" was begun in 1978 and takes place not only in schools but also in work places (Ricklefs, M C 91:306).

<sup>10</sup> During Soeharto's last years, as the tensions in this enforced hegemony mounted, scarcely a newspaper was printed without some individual, object, or argument being denounced as "anti-Pancasila".

held in Gunung Sitoli, timed to fit with the new round of the Indonesian Open surfing championships to be held at Sorake beach, and the opening of the first luxury hotel, the Sorake Beach Resort. At the same time the Department ordered all schools to prepare and rehearse groups performing traditional song and dance. These groups then met in competitive tournaments to find the best group in each region, who would then perform at the festival. Costumes were cut and sewn, and songs were written and choreographed at the orders of local Department of Education and Culture officials, who gave rigorous guidelines for the kind of material to be used. I give an excerpt from the text of one such song from Hilinawalö, since it gives such a clear impression of the version of Nias tradition being currently revived in schools:

"Greetings to you our honoured guests  
 Greetings!  
 (...)  
 Many people's hearts are attracted to the land of the people of the south  
 There is tourism in the land of Teluk Dalam  
 There are tall stones in Hilinawalö  
 Planted in the ground before the great house  
 In Bawömataluo there are huge traditional houses  
 And at Sobagi mböhö there is a ship that became a rock  
  
 Come on don't fall down, let us go and see  
 These tourist places that are not outside the best  
 Surfing places swimming places  
 in Botohili, Sorake, Lagundri..."

Here the traditional elements are depicted entirely out of context as attractors of tourists. Other such songs, such as the following example from Hiliamaetaniha, written to accompany a wardance, have a much more authentic traditional flavour, but this is encompassed by the modern nationalist point of view both in the context of presentation and in the words themselves:

"Come on you men brave in battle  
 Let us make our hearts as one<sup>12</sup>  
 Let us strike the bamboo and form ourselves into a spearpoint  
 Fence your houses  
  
 Strike out to the front and the sides  
 You who have long hearts (i.e patient) have been cheated  
 By those who would destroy your life  
  
 Rarely do people go to their work  
 Girls and boys, boys brave in battle  
 Take the path through the thicket as if going to hunt  
 Hunting with dogs, whether to spear a deer  
 Whether a wild boar whose teeth have become one<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Pesta* = feast (from Portuguese), *Ya'ahowu* is the vernacular Nias greeting, which translates as "may you be blessed."

<sup>12</sup> According to traditional rhetoric, social unity and consensus is achieved by the uniting of hearts.

Whether a mouse deer, a pangolin, or even a human

We now pity you whose heart<sup>14</sup> did not reprimand you  
Modern times are far different  
From the laws of our ancestors  
Now that we are under the laws of religion  
Now that we are independent in Indonesia"

Here the traditional elements, as I have indicated in the footnotes, are impressive, but they are transcended by the final verse which unites state and Christian discourse in consigning such heroic tradition to a vanished past. The state discourse criticism of tradition as hindering productivity also creeps in with the line "rarely do people go to their work" in the third verse.

By re-introducing de-politicised traditional culture into the curriculum, education officials are able to deny that schools are antagonistic to local traditions. Thus when I asked Abia Gulö, the teacher quoted above, whether education conflicts with traditional Nias values, his answer was emphatically in the negative:

"Traditional Nias values have been planted in the soul of Nias people for a long time since olden days when first people were to be found on Nias. These traditional Nias values are very appropriate to the values of *Pancasila* as the basis of the Indonesian State, which becomes the primary material of education in the various schools around the Indonesian region. Nias is the only region in the whole of Indonesia whose traditional values are truly appropriate with the *Pancasila* values professed by the Indonesian nation".

In claiming a perfect fit between Nias traditional values and *Pancasila* Pak Gulö probably has in mind the volume by a North Nias culture pundit (Mendröfa 1991), which attempts to rescue the traditional culture of Nias from official disapprobation by arguing that its essential spirit is in line with *Pancasila*.

Health education proper at village primary schools falls under two curriculum courses, principally Sport and Health Education, and to a lesser extent Natural Science (IPA - *Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam*). Fitness of the children is an important concern of Sport and Health Education, achieved by scheduled athletics and gymnastics sessions and team games of football, handball and Indonesian rounders (*bola kasti*). Teachers complain that the movements and exercises of gymnastics and the rules and techniques used in the team games "are not yet really right - thus it could be said that these sports activities for physical fitness are just a way to make the people sweat and enjoy themselves".

After fitness, cleanliness is the most important value taught in Sport and Health Education.

<sup>13</sup> Such boar tusks which have grown together into a ring (*öri zöcha*) are much prized magical objects believed to bestow invulnerability on warriors, and are said to be worn invisibly under the skin on the upper arm.

<sup>14</sup> Hearts are the site of emotion and supra-rational decision-making according to traditional understandings of the body.

"What is the beginning of health?" the teacher asks the class. "Cleanliness is the beginning of health" is the correct answer, and when it has been provided the teacher questions further, "and what must we keep clean?" The correct answer to this is "our bodies, our clothes, home, the environment, and food and drink." Teachers regularly examine the cleanliness of pupils' hands, nails and clothes, and reprimand them if they are inadequate. Environmental cleanliness is emphasised by the practical sessions of *gotong royong* cleaning of the school and its surroundings - another list on which pupils are tested consists of all the objects which should be cleaned in the home (floors, sleeping spaces, furniture, kitchen utensils) and in the environment.

Efforts to instill the value of cleanliness by teachers are particularly emphasised when the village is afflicted by epidemic sickness. Instruction consists of the rote learning and testing of these lists, as well as reprimanding those whose personal cleanliness is inadequate. As mentioned above, much of the instruction resembles unexplained traditional prohibitions: don't eat "just anywhere", as at roadside stalls; don't drink unboiled water; don't often drink iced water as it will ruin the teeth and give one stomach ache; don't read with your eyes too close to the book; reading while lying down interrupts the breathing and will make your lungs sick; wash twice a day using soap; brush your teeth and change your clothes every day. The importance of rest is also stressed, with a minimum of eight hours sleep every night, and if necessary a midday nap of one or two hours.

Natural Science classes at primary school offer more in the way of explanation, beginning to put health messages in the context of human biology. Thus pupils learn about the structure and parts of the body, the function of each, and the external and internal factors that affect each of these parts. Internal factors stressed are the presence or lack of nutrients and vitamins, so that pupils are taught the importance of a diet that contains vegetables and fruits, fish, meat or eggs, milk for those who can afford it, and sufficient rice. At the end of classes every day children are given a bowl of mung bean porridge known to the pupils as *makanan bergizi* - nutritious food. Since this food is locally unfamiliar the message is that local food is inadequate when compared to "foreign" food. Describing the external factors influencing the human body, teachers mostly discuss pollution or degrading of the environment. Thus pupils are told not to wash in rivers which are dirty from factory effluent, and to be careful of breathing in dust in the long, dry season between monsoons.

In 1996 the *Gerakan Jumaat Bersih* (Clean Friday Movement) was inaugurated by local government to reinforce these messages of environmental hygiene. According to the mission statement published by the Ministry of Health (Departemen Kesehatan 1998):

The Clean Friday Movement is a National Movement which aims at enhancing the community's acceptance of exercising clean and healthy habits and practices through religious and social activities, by the provision of latrines, clean water, liquid and solid waste disposal facilities, particularly at places of worship, public places, schools, government offices, etc.

Activities are conducted by individual members of the community, families, managers of places of worship, schools, madrasahs, pesantrens, and government and private institutions through the Clean Friday Movement and the following activities may become routine:

In households: the use of latrines; boiling drinking water; hand washing with soap after having been to the toilet and before eating or feeding infants; taking baths with soap at least once a day; brushing teeth after every meal and before going to bed; open windows of house and kitchen for adequate ventilation; keeping the environment clean, indoors as well as outside the house; and owners of livestock should keep the stable clean. Its location should be separated from the house.

In the community: with every member of the community participating, help to build latrines for those who don't have one; form groups who need clean water; organise activities aimed at promoting good sanitary conditions at places of worship, environment, schools/madrasahs/pesantrens and other religion oriented training institutions.

Clearly aimed at the national Moslem community for whom Friday is the weekly day of worship, the Clean Friday Movement has had no impact on village life, though its messages are repeated by PKK programmes and health education in schools and at the village clinic. However, in the regency capital of Gunung Sitoli, which does have a sizeable Moslem population, every Friday trucks from the local government offices drive round the town with loudspeakers exhorting the townspeople to participate in the "movement", and in the Moslem quarters of the town this is the day that people sweep out their front yards.

## **10.7 Family Health and Prosperity Programmes (PKK)**

For the sake of national development and stability the New Order saw a concerted effort to spread the message of Indonesian modernity, through women, to the rural and underdeveloped regions of the archipelago. In describing this process we must recognise a kind of Heisenberg principle, in which specific anthropological understandings of "culture" have had an important impact on sociocultural reality. The unevenness of national development was officially understood against a background of a patchwork of cultures understood according to the strongly culturalist and relativist models of old-fashioned Boasian American anthropology. This vision, appropriated by the father of Indonesian anthropology, Koentjaraningrat, sees "mentality" as a manifestation of culture as an essential whole. This construction of culture is distinctively Janus-faced, at once constructing cultures positively as fragile and precious living entities requiring conservation, and negatively: people belonging to primitive cultures may be expected to share a primitive mentality; and such primitive mentality is a barrier to development, which requires its own mentality (see Koentjaraningrat 1974). Such academic models lie behind official New Order policy whereby cultural diversity should be celebrated as part of the richness of the National Culture while at the same time engineering the mentality of more primitive groups so as to be appropriate for participation in National Development.

In 1983, in MPR decree no. II, the "role of the woman in development" was officially inaugurated, ostensibly responding to the concern of NGOs and development studies about gender inequities in development. Thus, in the 1993 GBHN (Broad Outlines of the Nation's Direction), it was explained that "women, as the equal companions of men, should play more of a role in development and society through raising their knowledge and skills, always considering the character, dignity and prestige of women as a group." As part of this initiative PKK programmes for the "building of family prosperity" were devised and implemented, with especial emphasis on rural and remote areas. Despite the rhetoric invoking gender equality, the targetting of both women and primitive areas by these programmes reveals how women's role in non-formal education of their family is seen as making them the key to influencing the mentality of the next generation: with their low levels of literacy women had been responsible for perpetuating the primitive mentality that hinders development. The intention of PKK is to bring national values into local communities and families. Women as mothers of the next generation of citizens are seen as key to moulding the nation's future. In the official jargon they bear "five duties"<sup>15</sup> as wife, mother, holder of the household, member of society, and citizen of the state. Thus in the official literature the big words of New Order social control - *keamanan* (security), *kertertiban* (order) - are used to describe the families to be generated by PKK:

"The understanding of PKK is a movement that grows from below to develop society with women as the motor. The movement is to develop the family as the smallest social unit. A Prosperous Family is a family that is able to create harmony and balance between material and spiritual development, that is a family whose way of life is embraced by a tight feeling of mutual understanding and mutual helping in the atmosphere of a harmonious family where security and order are guaranteed, to respect basic rights and the rules of the law along with doing their duty as good citizens and social beings, as instructed by *Pancasila*."

In official statements PKK - in reality a compulsory adult education programme - is described as "a social movement from below" in the hope that describing it so will make it so. What is really indoctrination is represented as "society developing itself." In the Orwellian political world of the New Order official descriptions were consistently taken for the reality they were supposed to describe. Thus in official discourse women became equal to men because they were described so in the 1993 GBHN, not because they appeared so according to social indicators. Official statistics are in any case notoriously unreliable and inadequate in contemporary Indonesia: we have above noted a local instance (figures given by the village nurse to show the falling incidence of disease in the village) where the figures are made up to illustrate a supposed pattern. In fact PKK is run at regency level by the wife of the Regent; at regional level by the wife of the Regional Governor; at village level by the wife of the village head. Women's role in the administrative structure thus recapitulates a common Indonesian pattern seen also in the Union of Civil Servants' Wives (*Dharma Wanita* - another organisation set up in 1974 to further "the character, dignity and prestige of women as

<sup>15</sup> *Pancadarma*- like *Pancasila* a nationalist invocation of Javanese classical heritage. *Panca*- or "five, penta..." is a Hindu-Buddhist metaphor of multiplicity based on the image of the five fingers of the hand.

a group") whereby women participate according to the status of their husbands<sup>16</sup>.

The implementation of PKK and other social programmes share the conviction that statements create reality. Local government offices and local businesses displaying their *Pancasila*-ist credentials have signs painted and displayed bearing exhortations to pay tax on time or to use Bahasa Indonesia in public places; on village roads all over Indonesia single signposts spaced fifteen metres apart carry the keyword for each of the PKK "root programmes", and learning this list of ten keywords is the first step for women "following" PKK.

The ten "root programmes" of PKK are learning and implementing *Pancasila*, community self-help (*gotong royong*), nutrition, clothing, housing and household order, education and skills, health, building living cooperation, preservation of the living environment, and healthy planning. Taken as a whole the programme re-writes a new common *adat* for Indonesia, supposedly fashioned from putatively general traditional elements inflected by the values of development. Participants are supposed to take the best from the local (i.e. foodstuffs, "area traditions and cultural arts", etc.) but in practice the directives replace functions generally organised by traditional culture, such as determining spiritual outlook, organising collective works, helping families afflicted by disaster, putting on weddings and funerals, designing houses, clothing and feeding children.

The first programme on the learning and implementation of *Pancasila* teaches villagers that they must be pious towards the Lord Almighty according to their own religion, while respecting the different religions of others. The family and local community should be run as a kind of guided democracy according to the "Indonesian" principles of consultation and consensus (*musyawarah dan mufakat*), for example in choosing marriage partners for children. One must love one's nation and appreciate how one's local area fits into the nation: thus one should know the names of the President, Vice-President, Provincial Governor, Regent, and Regional Governor. One should put the nation before local allegiances, and the public good must be put before that of the individual, for example if someone's house land is needed to construct a road. The principles of *Pancasila* are well understood and generally accepted throughout village society. Resistance to specific government departments and ministers may occasionally be expressed, even towards the end of his rule to the President, but not in my knowledge to *Pancasila*. Just as village healers see themselves as devout Christians while being disparaged by the institutional organs of the church, so too villagers see themselves as good Indonesian citizens even though they are perceived by officials to be recalcitrant to state discipline.

The *gotong royong* programme "gives the understanding that mutual assistance which is based on a foundation of *gotong royong* is a characteristic and trait of the nation since olden times which must constantly be preserved and cultivated. This spirit of *gotong royong* must begin with oneself, family members, citizens of society, and the state." In practice this means

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<sup>16</sup> The chairperson of *Dharma Wanita* was the President's wife, Ibu Tien Soeharto.



organising voluntary teams to perform the tasks required by other of the 10 PKK programmes at family and community level: planting supplementary foods, fencing and cleaning the village, maintaining clean water supplies, waste water outlets, irrigation ditches, roads and places of worship. Such collective projects were traditionally managed by village elders in council and implemented by social groups known as *gana* (see chapter V). These projects are an important part of the community life of the village; families gain or lose standing within the village councils according to the amount they have participated in road-building and so on.

The food programme introduces the same material on nutritious diet described above in the context of health education in schools. While official literature emphasises the use of foodstuffs which can be found in the local area, in practice the programme focuses on introducing locally unfamiliar foods (such as the *bubur* porridge made by PKK member women and served daily at schools), new methods of cooking (such as baking cakes), and raising supplementary food and medicinal crops on patterns lifted from Malay kampongs, traditional Javanese villages and European gardening. Within the clothing programme village women are taught "the true and correct way" to sew, wash, repair and wear the right kinds of clothes appropriate to context. I will discuss below how new eating and clothing styles are indeed adopted as signs of that progressive status characterised by the alliance between Christian and state values.

The mission of the housing programme, "to spread the importance of houses not being just a place for shelter and protection", is deeply ironic in a country whose traditional architecture has inspired a series of books on houses' social, cultural, religious, and material functions. The programme provides a list of requirements for adequate housing, which in their lack of flexibility and subtlety effectively disqualify most traditional architecture, including that of Nias. A house should be a dwelling for a single household, and should stand at an adequate distance from another. It should have a dry roof and floor and a window opened daily for sufficient circulation of air. It should have a clean water supply, at a distance from the latrines to dispose of waste. The house should be regularly cleaned and mattresses and pillows aired. There should be a hole or chimney for the kitchen smoke, and there should be bedrooms with doors. Nias houses stand side to side with interconnecting doors, and each houses a minimal patrilineage; they have no hole for kitchen smoke since the smoke circulating in the high roof space prevents dengue and mosquito-carrying mosquitoes and parasites of the wood. These advantages are locally appreciated, and it is the expense of the materials, craftsmen, and ritual involved in the building of traditional houses, especially given the rarity nowadays for some of the huge timbers required, that means that so many "Malay" houses are built instead.

The education programme stresses to women their responsibility to educate themselves and see their children through proper education, allowing them the opportunity to go to school as well as the time and equipment needed to study, in order to eliminate the "three blindnesses":

letter and number blindness, Indonesian language blindness, and "basic knowledge" blindness. Lectures and study groups are supposed to be held, along with reading and writing competitions to motivate the women. Skills drawn from Malay and Javanese village traditions, such as recipes for face powder and making *kerupuk* crisps, are also demonstrated. As we have already seen, the value of education is well-rooted in villagers' motivations. Often more than half the household budget is spent on children's schooling, and the educational level of one's children has come to be the primary index of status within the village.

The health programme is focused primarily on recruiting village women to other health programmes, such as immunisation, examination of pregnant women at the village clinic, regular weighing and examination of babies under-five, and resorting to trained medical staff when dealing with sicknesses within the family. Secondly it serves to instruct women in personal, household, and environmental hygiene. The instructions are very basic and detailed, assuming a startling degree of ignorance. One should wash twice a day with clean water using soap, towel and clean clothes. One should brush one's teeth after eating, and wash hands before and after eating and after going to the toilet. One should regularly wash and dry clothes, get rid of body odour using *sirih* lime water, and use other innocuous traditional remedies. Household furniture and kitchen utensils should be washed and dried regularly; when cleaning the house do not neglect sleeping places, eating place, guest room, bathroom; air mats, mattresses and pillows regularly; boil all drinking water; always flush out the toilet with clean water after use. It is notable that women's lives, more than those of men, have been medicalised by the state initiatives of the health department and PKK. This is of course a general feature of cosmopolitan medicine. Uptake, as in so many other spheres already noted, is stimulated by the desire to imitate the life styles of the successful but devout, and limited by the financial means required.

The "living cooperation" programme encourages village women to form cooperative groups for saving or agricultural and handicraft projects such as weaving or sewing suggested by the PKK program. Produce should then be sold at village or market stalls. These cooperatives should choose leaders who are either senior PKK women or else teachers or others part of the official village administration. Each village PKK organisation dispenses state funds which can be used to lend money to such cooperative ventures. Rotating credit associations were very much part of the traditional village economy, though the nineteenth century forms skewed to benefit the noble class have already given way to the egalitarian and democratic pan-Indonesian form known as *arisan*. In the three villages of my research PKK financial loans were simply used (very occasionally) to bail out the poorest farmers, and I heard of no extant handicraft cooperatives, though these do exist in other villages, producing "traditional" woodcarvings for sale to tourists.

The "preservation of the living environment" programme is intended to teach love for the plants, animals and nature that make up the village environment. Women are taught not to dirty the water, air, or surrounding nature, and to understand the existence of mutual

interdependence between humans, society, and the surrounding nature. This part of the programme does not resonate significantly with local concerns. Local officials and more developed villagers wage an ongoing struggle against those who let livestock wander around the village *ewali*; ironically however by so doing they forego the services of an excellent waste-disposal system.

The “healthy planning” programme teaches women to plan their family life according to economic constraints. Thus they must learn to save, and keep a balance between family income and outgoings. They must prioritise family needs according to PKK values. They must understand the importance of the ‘Small Families are Happy and Prosperous Norm’ (NKKBS) and limit the number of children according to family income, and prevent children from marrying at too young an age. Since the only constraints that might compete with the economic in the targetted examples are the imperatives of tradition, the message of this programme is that traditional imperatives (to have many children, to borrow money to pay for a family funeral or wedding) are backward and hinder development - such traditions are “anti-*Pancasila*”.

These programmes are (or rather were) taught at monthly meetings at which lectures would be given, as well as demonstrations of cooking, sewing, gardening, held. Occasionally government officials would visit to give a talk on *Pancasila*, cooperatives, or planning. By 1998 all village women were nominal PKK members, but the programme’s energy was almost entirely occupied with its bureaucratic management: the appointment of ten Section Directors, Treasurer, Secretary, and Director, and the maintenance of the PKK Big Book, the Cadre List Book, the Activities Book, the Meetings Minutes Book, the Agenda Book, the Inventory Book, Guests Book, Mail Book, List of Families Being Cultivated and the Cash Book. Currently the function of PKK most relevant to villagers is the availability of financial loans, typically used for house building or repair and agricultural projects such as the purchase of seed, fertiliser, or livestock. The programme has otherwise lost momentum in recent years, and meetings are currently held six-monthly if at all in the villages of my study.

Resistance to the programme is described in different terms by different people. Officials and teachers blame village women’s ignorance and “closed attitude to new things.” Village women who are reluctant to follow PKK typically either sense the programme’s hostility to local traditional customs and knowledge and fear that “they want to ruin our families”, or simply complain that they cannot spare the time from their household, parental and agricultural duties to attend meetings. Some husbands have refused to spare their wives’ time to join the programme or attend meetings. The programme’s messages have, however, penetrated village life inasmuch as they have been reinforced by two other deep concerns of many villagers: to be good Christians, and to display the status of one’s own family while not being humiliated by failing to measure up to the status markers displayed by other peer families.

Since the early years of Nias Christianity, when mission wives taught village women to sew, cook and garden<sup>17</sup> and Missionary Lagemann wrote that women's domestic role was the "chink of light against the dark background" of "the deep damages of the Nias people's way of life" which afforded "a point of entrance to Christian Culture" (Lagemann H, 1893:305-6), that Christian Culture has been displayed by lifestyle changes significantly similar to those exhorted by the PKK programme. Many "western" vegetables and flowers were first introduced by German missionaries, as were tables and chairs, western-style clothing, and so on. To most villagers these western practices were seen first and foremost as being Christian, and up to the present the family meal has been a prime site of Christian practice, seamlessly blending the saying of grace and sitting at a table with hygiene measures such as a finger bowl and napkin to wash hands before and after eating, and netting to protect cooked food from flies. Furthermore, Christians do not blanch at the programme's hostility to local custom, heir as they are to similar hostility on religious grounds. Christian women have typically followed their congregation leaders' wives in joining the PKK organisation; those who resist joining are typically the very poor and traditionally-minded who have little time for church activities either.

Presenting meals in the manner described above, particularly to outside guests, is also valuable currency in the pursuit of family status in contemporary Nias, as is serving "foreign" food, wearing smart clothes, growing flowers outside the house, and building PKK-approved toilets. Most investment goes into acquiring the objects whose maintenance is stipulated by PKK: household furniture and a guest room with a door to be cleaned, mattresses and pillows to be aired, expensive soap and toothpaste instead of the "primitive" ash and charcoal.

Respect for *Pancasila* in the sense of tolerance and respect for other religions and the unity of Indonesia has for some time been deeply rooted in the village, both amongst those with positions of traditional and modern status. Thus the Moslem family of a north Niassan schoolteacher posted to the otherwise entirely Christian Hilinawalö have experienced no significant hostility from villagers. Since the 1997 national election, with its incidents of military intimidation and falsely-counted votes traditional village leaders have criticised Golkar and the government, but not *Pancasila*: they typically accused Soeharto and the government of turning against *Pancasila*, and thus losing their legitimacy. As described in the history of schools on Nias rehearsed above, the value of education for children has also

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<sup>17</sup> I have been using the word "gardening" for the new practices of plant cultivation introduced by the PKK programme, Missionaries' wives, and imitation of urban middle class homes in Medan and Jakarta. Such practices significantly differ from traditional practices in various respects. Traditionally all food plants were (and are) grown in gardens at a distance from the village, and medicinal plants were not cultivated but collected in their natural environment. It was of great importance that all plants were banished from the stone-paved interior of the village, the only exception being russet-leaved plants such as *endruwo* or *nazalöu* planted around the house, thus resembling a garden, but intended as a defence against bechu. "Gardening" as I use the word means growing plants around the house, in containers or in the ground, often in the form of a hedge delimiting the house's private exterior space, for food or medicinal use, or for purely decorative floral display. Flowers chosen often resonate with local traditions: the omnipresent hibiscus, for example, worn in the hair of mythical ancestresses.

been keenly appreciated long before the introduction of PKK. *Gotong royong* collective work on community projects had also previously appeared in Hilinawalö to replace the kin-based *gana* since that village has seen a dramatic decline in the noble class that manage *gana*. In other villages community work is still performed by *gana*.

In such cases where traditional practices have declined because integration in the state has weakened traditional village leadership it does seem reasonable to introduce new practices that serve similar functions to the old. However, as noted, the entire PKK programme is written as though it were replacing a vacuum. Despite references to local knowledge (traditional medicinal plants, locally available foodstuffs), in practice it ignores local knowledge and skills, and its success would see the homogenization of all the local cultures of the Indonesian nation. However, its success depends less on instruction given at PKK meetings than on villagers imitating new practices in search of religious orthodoxy, status, and improved quality of life. In this search, of course, it is not just PKK practices that are available to them. They are added to a repertoire that still includes traditional markers of family status, such as an *adat* house or prestigious weddings and funerals. However, as argued in chapter III and V, the diminished importance of traditional village leadership has tended to deny village *adat* the ability to be adapted and updated to suit new conditions. This then reinforces the New Order project to limit cultural diversity to decorative, de-contextualised and de-politicised signs of local traditions, such as costume and architecture.

## 10.8 The Family Planning Programme (KB).

In 1822 Raffles estimated the population of Nias “considerably to exceed 200,000 souls” (Raffles, Sir S 1822:2), while in 1863 Baron von Rosenberg put the figure between 230,000 and 250,000. One hundred years later in the census of 1961 the population was recorded as 314,829, doubling in thirty-five years to 624,345 in 1996 (Kantor Statistik Kabupaten Nias 1997:45), with a population density of 132 per square kilometre in the south of Nias (ibid:46). Village origin stories suggest a precolonial demographic history in which original settlers in the valley of the Susua River gradually expanded over the whole island. Typically conflicts between male sons of the ruling *Balugu* would result in one leaving, accompanied by a retinue of family and dependants, to found a new village on virgin territory. The empty south of the island was settled sixteen generations ago by Mölö, son of Sedawa or Talauföfö (genealogies differ from village to village) of Gomo, and his five sons in turn founded the original five clan-villages of Maenamölä. By the time of the arrival of Europeans such as Raffles and von Rosenberg in the C19th villages were distributed over the whole of Nias, but the lands around each village were still more than adequate to support the village population. As families grew and multiplied, sons could clear new land within the village boundaries; all village land was nominally owned by the village nobles, but usufruct was available to those who cleared the land, and with the planting of “hard crops” the land became owned by the planter, and could be inherited by his sons. Through the colonial period numbers continued to

grow, it being not uncommon for a couple to have ten to twelve children, and village populations swelled, notwithstanding the export of slaves and workers to the mainland and substantial mortality from epidemic sickness.

By the beginning of Soeharto's New Order Nias was in demographic crisis. Exceptionally high village populations exacerbated poor health and poverty. In most cases residual forest and village lands available for clearing had run out. Forest trees necessary for building traditional houses became increasingly hard to find: those for the great house in Bawömataluo had to be imported from the neighbouring Batu Islands. Sons were compelled to subdivide their father's gardens and ricefields; those with education left to seek careers in the mainland cities, those without either education or land also left and typically ended up as exploited labour in the ghettos of Medan, Padang and Jakarta. The Green Revolution promised to solve the land problem by introducing new rice varieties that produced three harvests a year, but village farmers were too poor to purchase the inputs such intensive agriculture requires, and productivity fell. Nias, which had always been self-sufficient in foodstuffs, and had exported rice under the Old Order, was forced to import rice from the mainland, and continues to do so to this day.

Population growth for Indonesia as a whole mirrored that of Nias, doubling between 1961 and 1996. The problems we have described for Nias were also afflicting the nation as a whole, in particular the pressure on resources and the swelling of urban ghettos with rural migrants. Thus with the first Five-Year Development Plan (*Repelita I*) begun in 1969 a national family planning programme was inaugurated. According to official pronouncements repeated with each successive Five-Year Development Plan, national productivity is threatened by the rapid population growth caused by better medical facilities and improved life expectancy. National productivity will be diverted into feeding, clothing and educating all the extra children, and not into raising the general quality of life and the workforce. Known as *Keluarga Berencana* (Planned Families) or KB, the programme has been internationally hailed as a success, and has been held up as a model for other developing nations. Since 1980 annual population growth has lessened a little on Nias, from 2.95% in 1980-1985 to 1.74% in 1990-1995 (Kantor Statistik Kabupaten Nias 1997:44). This decrease in population growth took place five years earlier in North Sumatra as a whole, so that Nias trails behind the province it belongs to: the total fertility rate for Nias fell from 5.32 in 1990 to 4.11 in 1995, whereas North Sumatra in the same years fell from 4.29 to 3.17 (ibid:54).

Although recruiting women to the family planning programme is an important part of the PKK healthy planning programme, KB itself is managed by medical staff, i.e. *bidan* and *puskesmas* nurses. Thus in Hilinawalö, given the temporary absence of an official *bidan*, it is Ama Wita who negotiates with village women. A range of contraceptive devices are available; all were free up until 1987, but since then a financial contribution to costs is insisted on for all except the I.U.D. spiral, which is fitted free at the Lukas hospital in Hilisimaetanö, and condoms, which noone in the village uses, largely because frank discussion

of the mechanics of sexual intercourse is deeply uncomfortable for villagers. Three-monthly injections (of Depo-Provera) are more popular than the daily contraceptive pill, since mothers can be forgetful in taking the pill. Subcutaneous implants ('Norplant') in which six small tubes are put under the skin of the arm remain unpopular.

As part of the Project for the Inventorying of Local Culture in 1985 the Department of Education and Culture published a monograph on "the Customs and Ceremonies of Marriage on Nias" (Laoli et al. 1985). The research team consisted of three north Niassans and one Batak: research duties were shared out, and the Batak, Drs Jasudin Siregar, took responsibility for the final chapter on the "analysis of data". This chapter teases out the "values" implicit in Nias marriage customs, and considers them in relation to national marriage law and the national family planning programme. Noting that population growth is caused by increasing "anti-mortality factors" and ongoing high "pro-natality factors", Drs Siregar attempts to identify these factors amongst Nias marriage customs.

Firstly, listing "pronatality factors," he cites the prestige attached to having many children, particularly boys, who are seen as continuing one's life after death. Secondly he notes the importance of children as a workforce for peasant families. Thirdly he mentions the high infant mortality rate during the colonial period, which made it necessary to have many children in order to guarantee that at least some would survive. Fourth he lists the importance of having many children in order to ensure that *adat* feasts such as one's own funeral will be carried out in as prestigious a manner as possible. Lastly he identifies a taboo on discussing matters related to sex in the Nias "cultural climate" which makes the introduction of contraceptive technology difficult (ibid:195-8). Against these five "pronatality factors" he sets four factors that make the family planning programme possible on Nias (ibid:198-9). These are the principle of monogamy, high brideprices making divorce a rare option, the Christian church supporting the family planning programme, and school education.

It is noteworthy that two of these cultural factors, the taboo on discussion of sexual matters and the principle of monogamy, derive from Christian rather than traditional culture, thus illustrating how seamlessly heterogeneous elements can combine in the contemporary "cultural climate". Thus too villagers explaining to me their resistance to contraception claimed that "God has promised man that his descendants will be as plentiful as the stars in the sky, as the grains of sand on the beach." Job 5:25 does indeed promise that "thy offspring shall be as the grass of the fields," but the villager's formulation was drawn from the traditional blessing of wife-giving affines to a couple at their marriage:

He ya'ugö umönöma  
Ya'ahowu ndra'ugö mane tanö  
Ya'ahowu ndra'ugö mane banua  
Ya oya chömi ndraono ba halama  
Ya oya chömi ndraono ba mbanua  
Ya si mane döfi ba mbanua

Oh you our son-in-law  
May you be blessed like the land  
May you be blessed like the sky  
May you have many children in the gardens  
May you have many children in the village  
May they be like the stars in the sky

Ya si mane ene ba nasi

May they be like the sand beside the sea

The cultural assumption that it is a human right and indeed the very purpose of marriage to produce plentiful descendants, engrained through the long history noted above when unsettled land seemed limitless, is very powerful on Nias. Plentiful reproduction of rice, taro, livestock, people and gold was (and still is) all part of the undifferentiated fertility or good fortune (*harazaki*) which Niassans attempt to secure through exchanges with God, the ancestors, and wife-giving affines. *Na oya nono oya harazaki* (if many children much fortune) is a familiar village saying, as is *ato nono ba ato zolului halöwö* (many children, many workers), explicitly recognising the practical link between agricultural productivity and many children. Those most opposed to contraceptive use thus see the family planning programme as an effort to “destroy our families.”

Placards posted by the island roads in the local language attempt to directly counter such traditional wisdom with the new KB wisdom: “Many children much trouble; few children serenity and prosperity.” The KB message promulgated at schools, clinics, churches and PKK meetings focuses less on the national/social implications of population growth and more on the immediate inability of parents having many children to adequately feed, clothe and educate them. This message is generally well understood by village parents well aware of the difficulty of meeting these costs. The divergence in understanding between village parents and the family planning programme lies principally in the parents seeing the necessity to limit their children as a lamentable consequence of poverty, whereas the programme represents this poverty as a lamentable consequence of not limiting the number of children.

The ideas and contraceptive technologies of the family planning programme have by 1998 largely penetrated Nias society, thanks to improved attendance at schools and the opening of village clinics. The limits of its penetration in the villages of my study are those sectors of the village population whom poverty keeps out of school and the clinics, as well as those villages still remote from roads and clinics where primary schools are still inadequate and understaffed. However, statistics showing impressively large numbers of fertile couples registering as “KB acceptors” are misleading. Couples may be registered as “KB acceptors” without actually using contraceptives. Others do use contraceptives, but to limit their children to numbers considerably higher than the two children insisted on by the programme. Indeed, traditional herbal medicines to prevent pregnancy have long been part of the village medical repertoire.

Registration for the KB programme has typically taken place after the “follow my leader” pattern described above for the PKK programmes. Wives of those in village administrative positions were the first to register, compelled to follow their husbands’ identification with progressive national values. Others with similar ambitions then followed. The Protestant church’s support of the programme (as noted in Laoli et al. 1985) has also been crucial, making KB registration part and parcel of being a good Christian, with women members of church



groups such as choirs or prayer and bible-reading groups often registering together *en masse*. However, this process applies mostly to those who use the church and its institutions as an avenue to status and influence in the community, and who thus participate most energetically in church groups. Those congregation members more distanced from the institutions of the church and the organs of its dogma typically participate in prayer and worship in order to secure blessings and prevent sin from causing disasters: being essentially in pursuit of fertility and blessings they are not predisposed to limiting their fertility. Where such people do register with the family planning programme they typically do so in order to avert negative repercussions suspected to follow opposing the government's will. In this context it should also be noted that PKK capital loans as well as free medical supervision of under-fives are conditional on KB participation.

Finally, it is striking that penetration of family planning values are expressed in the very traditional language of shame. In the words of a teacher from Hiliamaeta:

Nowadays most parents feel ashamed to have many children, since they would be mocked over it by people who know how to order the distance between children. They would say allusively "many children but you don't know how to manage them." And even more if you have a married daughter and have more babies yourself, this is seen as really shaming and ridiculous.

## 10.9 Patients' accounts of treatment

The most significant determinant of villagers seeking medical attention at hospitals and clinics is that the sickness which they are suffering is understood by themselves (or their parents if they are a child) as an ordinary "sickness of the body" of sufficient gravity to justify the effort and expense of treatment. Less serious ordinary sicknesses are likely to be treated by home herbal remedies or patent medicines bought directly from the chemist. As we saw in chapter VIII all Niassans recognise this distinction between ordinary sicknesses of the body and those caused by people or spirits, though those with a higher degree of education will classify as ordinary sicknesses to which others attribute a supernatural etiology, malaria providing a classic example. For certain named constellations of symptoms such as a cough (*mogeha*) the presence or absence of a certain symptom will determine whether an ordinary or supernatural explanatory model is assumed: a cough with phlegm is an ordinary sickness; without phlegm the cough is caused by witchcraft. Even Ama Wita, the village nurse, believes that sicknesses caused by poisoning respond best to traditional purgatives and remedies to cool the poison. For other sicknesses, understood to be caused by spirit-attack, witchcraft or poisoning, the kind of medicine offered by clinics and hospitals is seen as inappropriate and even dangerous: it is commonly thought that a doctor's injection would be fatal to a patient suffering from *tesafo*, that is, being touched by a spirit.

Education results in an increasing number of named sicknesses being classified as ordinary, and

thus more recourse to modern medical treatment. However, since deciding on which explanatory model is used to interpret a certain sickness is a family matter in which parents have the final say, there is a time lag of a generation in this secularising process.

For sicknesses classified as ordinary all villagers agree that cosmopolitan medicine is a good thing, that it can save lives, and they are happy with the increasing presence of clinics and hospitals on Nias, despite official rhetoric describing “traditionally-minded” villagers as resistant to modern medicine. Only the most sophisticated, well-educated young suggest that modern medicine may have a negative effect, for example when surgeons are inadequately trained or the drugs used are of poor quality. Such sophisticated observers tend to adopt themselves the position of official discourse, suggesting that in “more primitive villages there are also still people who consider that the modern style of thinking can break and threaten the human soul, whereas the government’s aim is to guarantee society’s health.” I sought but did not find people with such views in the villages of my study.

This uptake of cosmopolitan medicine for ordinary sicknesses is however limited by two factors: firstly villagers’ ability to pay the to them considerable expense of such treatment, and secondly their ability to make the difficult journey to clinic or hospital. Since villages are linked to each other and to the roads by narrow footpaths such a journey would often involve several hours’ walk in great heat, climbing and descending steep hills, often with difficult river crossings to be made in the valleys. Such effort is well-nigh impossible for the seriously ill, and in these cases wooden stretchers are made with an umbrella mounted above so as to shade from the sun so that the patient may be carried to the treatment centre by family members. The opening of more and more *puskesmas* clinics in remote areas in recent years has done much to address this obstacle to uptake of modern medical services, but the problem remains for those whose condition requires more specialised treatment or surgery than can be offered at these simple clinics. Thus of the villagers I interviewed those most hostile to cosmopolitan medicine expressed their hostility not in terms of an imputed project to break the human soul, but in terms of its expense: why if our ancestors were strong, healthy and lived long using only traditional medicines should we be so afflicted with disease and compelled to ruin ourselves financially in order to receive treatment?

Thus the resistance to cosmopolitan medicine stressed by its providers lies mostly in the classification of certain sicknesses as due to the action of people or spirits, and the belief that cosmopolitan medicine has no power to help in these situations, and may even greatly worsen the patient’s condition. The only other obstacle to uptake of modern medical services that arises from “traditional” patterns of thinking is that the elderly sick may be unwilling to submit to residential care in clinic or hospital for fear of dying there. A “good death” on Nias must take place in one’s village, ideally in one’s house, surrounded by the family with whom one should settle accounts, asking and giving forgiveness, and giving final advice.

However, having sought treatment at clinic or hospital villagers are often impatient with lack of immediate results. A typical pattern emerges from sickness histories whereby an

initial constellation of symptoms is diagnosed within the family as an ordinary sickness of the body. If, despite rest, extra food, home herbal remedies and patent medicines bought at shop or chemist, the condition worsens the patient will then (if they can afford it and are able to make the journey) seek treatment at hospital or clinic. But if the patient's condition does not clearly respond to such treatment within a week or so the "ordinary sickness" explanatory model will be questioned; retrospective questioning will seek to establish whether the patient just prior to the onset of his or her illness broke a taboo, put themselves in danger of spirit-attack, or ate food away from the home, and if such a factor can be found the explanatory model of the sickness will become a supernatural one. Hospital treatment will be discontinued, and the services of an appropriate healer sought.

Traditional and modern treatment is rarely simultaneously mixed, as it is thought this would be offensive to both doctor and healer. Traditionally a healer will tell a patient he or she is unable to overcome their affliction, officially ending their healer/patient relationship and giving them permission to seek the services of another, sometimes even recommending another healer whose knowledge is more appropriate to the patient's condition. Healers will also occasionally advise their patients to have supplementary treatment at a clinic - they have cured them, they will say, but they need doctors' medicine to remove the remaining "seeds of sickness" that are still inside them. Patients also occasionally report cases where a doctor or nurse has confessed him or herself unable to overcome an affliction and advised them to seek help from a healer. Amongst the villagers of Hiliamaeta a local nurse who was also considered to be a traditional healer enjoyed a very good reputation until she was posted to the Batu Islands. Her successes, particularly in treating asthma with boiled flying fox, are retold in a partisan spirit as supporting local medical traditions against the foreign. A similar tone informed stories of a German nun who collected local herbal remedies, as well as the reception of my own research interest in traditional healing.

Villagers' accounts of visits to clinic or hospital typically describe first the difficult journey to the place of treatment. They are often impressed by the technology and medicines on display. After noting the time spent waiting to be seen they describe the questioning by nurse or doctor, the examination, the doctor's diagnosis, giving of medication and prohibitions (of exercise and certain foods), and payment. An astonishingly common complaint of patients I interviewed related to the "social feeling" of doctors, whereby more important, wealthier, and "cleaner" patients in the waiting room are seen before less important, poorer and "dirtier" patients, even if the latter arrived first. The generality of this criticism - uttered by old and young alike - amongst a society traditionally ordered by hierarchy and precedence surprised me. The old hierarchies have of course substantially broken down in the nationalist period, though their formalities linger - in village councils for example - where they are embedded in the symbolic arrangement of space in house and village. Village hierarchy, fragile and subject to challenge within the village, carries little weight outside other than in the traditional context of inter-village marriages. One has only to witness the diminished stature of an old village noble in town on market day - an old man buying vegetables - and

compare it to his presence and authority back in the village to grasp this point. The hospital or clinic, though, distanced from the village, containing people from many different villages, and as a place emblematic of modern nationalist values, is expected to be run on egalitarian principles, and villagers are offended when it is not.

Informants also repeatedly draw attention to problems of communication when visiting hospitals and clinics. As good Indonesian citizens villagers are expected to use Indonesian in public places, and as noted above the vast majority of doctors speak not a word of the local language. This puts the elderly and ill-educated poor at a disadvantage, a disadvantage that is officially seen as their own fault. Local nurses in such cases play an invaluable role in translating patient's symptoms and the doctor's instructions. The better educated young also pointed out to me that deeper problems in communication arise when "patient and doctor do not share the same knowledge": doctors' explanations and advice tend not to be grasped in the sense in which they are meant by patients who have not digested the modern health education messages promulgated in schools and by PKK programmes.

The medicines given by doctor and nurse - pills, injections, ointments etc. - are typically seen by patients as of the same kind as herbal remedies known in the village, but as having greater potency since their ingredients come from all over the world, in contrast to village medicines which are limited to what is available in the local area. The dietary advice and injunctions to avoid hard work are likewise seen by patients as continuous in kind with the prohibitions given by traditional healers, and are described in these terms.

The contrast between traditional and cosmopolitan medicine is typically described in terms of diverse origins of their healing knowledge, the essential attributes of their practitioners, and the appropriate form of payment. Thus the knowledge of doctors and nurses is learnt "on the school bench" - since all go to school, the acquisition of such knowledge is theoretically open to all. Healers' knowledge, as we saw in chapter IX, arises within them spontaneously as a result of an essential quality acquired through descent or divine blessing. Where their knowledge is learnt from another healer the acquisition of the knowledge must be ratified by a ceremony which transforms or gives them an extra essence, without which the techniques learnt would not work. Cosmopolitan medicine and medical services must be paid for in cash whether or not the patient's condition improves; traditional healers are given a voluntary payment, usually of a meal of pork and rice with an additional prestation of gold or cash, construed as a gift expressing thanks (in the Nias sense of *thankyou* extinguishing a debt) and only if the patient recovers.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION: THE MORALISING OF SICKNESS

Preceding chapters have been concerned to explore the ways illness is explained and managed, and in particular to attempt to explain why it is that in such an overwhelming way sin is invoked in explaining illness on Nias. I have argued that this has occurred through a complex historical interaction between traditional, Christian, and state discourse. All health indicators are lower for Nias than any other regency of the North Sumatra province. This state of affairs is perceived by both the villagers themselves and ethnically-foreign health service providers - in their different ways - as the villagers' own fault. Thus the health officials blame local backwardness and primitive mentality, poor grasp of hygiene and nutrition, and the prevalence of black magic and poisoning. Villagers have either internalised this "progressive" discourse, or else they blame the discarding of old social values, materialism, and forgetting God for the sufferings and losses caused by sickness.

I hope to have shown in the course of my argument that Nias modernity is not simply secularising or disenchanting. Value-laden or ideological explanations of sickness have not been replaced by ordinary, materialist accounts of causation. This research thus reinforces the research of Ohnuki-Tierney in Japan in challenging the universality of a simple progression whereby traditional magico-religious understandings of sickness and healing are progressively replaced by the scientific understandings of cosmopolitan medicine (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984: 212,220). Sickness has, through the process I have described, come to be moralised in new ways alongside the old, serving the ideological needs of a new centre of power. As we saw in chapter X, the propagation of social values by the Indonesian state uses techniques strongly informed by the traditional notion of the intrinsic power of words and names. This is illustrated by the signboards along all village roads which by simply stating the keywords of desired new social values are supposed to create them.

As we saw in chapter VIII, sickness on Nias is differentiated into consistent sets of symptoms which are named as recognisable diseases, with treatment typically being specific to the disease diagnosed. These locally-recognised diseases are currently classified according to kinds of immediate cause into three groups: ordinary diseases, diseases caused by spirits, and diseases caused by witchcraft. Within all three groups sickness is often conceived as produced by the invasion of the body by alien entities, whether poisons, germs, or spirits. Curing thus typically concerns itself with the extraction of these alien entities. Distant causes such as guilt and sin, breaking of taboos, cursing and inherited disease are also recognised, acting above the threefold classification of immediate causes.

In uneasy relation to this classification since it spans the modern distinction between ordinary

and supernatural causation is the notion that sickness may be caused by an excess of heat, conceived in both ordinary and supernatural ways. At the ordinary end of the scale, this heat is present in atmospheric temperature and solar radiation, as well as in hot foods, while other foods have the ability to cool. Anger and physical exertion also cause heat, while relaxation and prayer cool. Excessive heat leads to fever, and in extremes, madness. At the more supernatural end of the scale, heat is also generated by tabooed events such as the birth of twins, childbirth, the beating of gold, ironworking, headhunting, war, and adultery. In its lower manifestations such heat is cooled by cooling medicine and the sprinkling of water prayed over by a healer. Heat is danger, contrasted with blessings, which cool. In its higher manifestations this heat of war, killing, adultery and tabooed events - known as *horö* - would have to be ritually removed by an expert into a special kind of wooden image, the *adu* - or idol - of *horö*.

These various immediate causes of sickness are complemented by a notion of distant causes. According to this, the vulnerability - lack of protection - that allowed one to succumb to attack by witchcraft, spirits, accidents or germs in the first place is explained by the displeasure, curse or withholding of blessing by the gods, ancestors, wife-givers or parents. In various ways obedience and offerings are due to each of these categories of being; where this obedience or these offerings are withheld so too is the blessing with which they are reciprocated. This withholding of blessing constitutes a reason for misfortune or sickness invoked in addition to an immediate cause.

Adultery - in addition to the dangerous *horö* it created - was seen also as wrong, as *sala*, in that it broke the social law. This social law was conceived as the rules set at foundation feasts for appropriate exchange and sharing within the community of gods, ancestors and humans. In the Nias language the word for "brideprice" - *böwö* - refers to customary law in general. Pre-Christian ethics were conceived as the correct following of these laws of exchange; from this followed health and prosperity, just as following the old laws of rice-planting and harvest secured returns as bountiful as those enjoyed by the divine ancestors who had fixed these ways.

Today villagers have to an uneven but significant extent accepted the Christian teaching that all blessings come from God, not from ancestors or wife-givers. Contemporary villagers maintain that in the last analysis all sickness is because of sin; our sicknesses are signs from God calling us back to Him. He is reprimanding our hearts just as we would remind a kinsman of a debt. This exchange idiom of sin - present in both the traditional understandings of the withholding of blessing as distant cause of sickness and in the civic punishment of wrongdoing by a fine - is also, of course, firmly established in both Old and New Testaments.

All sickness events in the village are today attended by what I have called "repentance behaviour" (see chapters VII & IX). Family members gather around the sick person to pray to God, and to confess sins of disobedience to senior family members, who offer their forgiveness. As the uptake of authoritative Christian teaching is uneven, so families confess their sins

both to God, and to their elders present whom they have wronged.

I have argued that both this contemporary centrality of sin in understandings of and responses to sickness, and the process of conversion to Christianity itself, are and were significantly due to the missionaries' use of the word "*horö*" to translate the Christian concept of sin.

Sundermann, who translated the Nias Bible, chose *horö* because of its association with the paradigmatic Christian sins of murder and adultery, in spite of the fact that it stood for the amoral, non-ethical force of danger I described above. Christian teaching thus collapsed this traditional notion of very dangerous heat arising from certain tabooed activities with the notion of ill effects being caused by the displeasure of supernatural beings. The range of supernatural beings was condensed in the single figure of Lowalangi - the name of one of the tribal gods chosen by Sundermann to translate God.

The traditional sense of wrongdoing (known as *sala*) that attracted fines in council or retribution from the ancestors was not, as we have seen, conceived of as *horö*. It was, though, conceived in terms of debt. One owed the performance of one's ancestors' wishes as one owed them offerings of first-fruits at harvest. Here was a strong point of linkage between Christianity and tradition, since the Christian notion of "sin" was throughout the Bible conceived as a debt to God, that which is due to Him, and its punishment as a repayment.

The notion of social wrongdoing, smuggled, so to speak, by the missionaries into the dangerous indigenous category of *horö*, differed from Christian morality - a universal and absolute ethical code overseen by an omniscient God - in being bounded by family and the village community. Families, not individuals, suffered when the ancestors were displeased. Murder was no wrongdoing (though still of course, an instance of *horö*) if the victim came from a distant village, hence the possibility of headhunting. Slaves had no ancestors, hence the possibility of human sacrifice.

The missionary priests, however, taught that secret actions hidden in the individual's heart, acts of aggression against total strangers, even drumming up spirits to heal or making offerings to their ancestor images, could all have the same catastrophic consequences as failing to pass on the heat of killing to the *horö* idol. This teaching, while at first baffling, was, when historical events caused the suspicion to dawn that it might possibly be true, to have very far-reaching consequences.

Suddenly in 1916, beginning with individuals, it seems that Nias people became agonisingly aware of sins they had committed, often in the distant past. This awareness typically manifested as illness, madness, and hysterical fear. Long queues formed outside the missionaries' offices, of people desperate to know how they could be released from this terrible burden, which they felt would otherwise kill them. Such supplicants were instructed that they should confess their sins before God to a priest and ask for forgiveness from those they had wronged, and take refuge in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. These people would then

return to their home-villages, and villages of origin as well if they were women, and by making their confession to family there, would communicate their sense of immediate physical danger if they withheld knowledge of wrongdoings known only to them. Thus the movement spread, to the amazement of the long-frustrated missionaries, so that by 1925 it had reached every corner of Nias.

Missionaries understood the cause of this repentance to have been their preaching on sin. I have argued that - in a way - they were right. The strongly interiorised sense of transgression - what Christians call "guilt" - arose because the use of the word "*horö*" for sin brought together local ideas of transgressions against elders, ancestors or gods (which had not before been seen as instances of *horö*) with this amoral notion of the physical danger associated with certain activities, notably killing and adultery.

This was possible because a partial step in this direction - the moralising of *horö* - had already been made through prior contact with Malay and Acehnese traders in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The "heat" of *horö* came to be called "*hara*," which would appear to be a loan word from the Arabic-Malay "*haram*" - which refers to that which is strongly forbidden or tabooed according to the laws of Islam. Thus in some accounts from this time "*adu horö*" are referred to as "*adu hara*." Other concepts that would be later useful to the Christian teachers, such as "heaven," "hell" and "angels" were similarly introduced at the same time (see chapter VI).

In effect, the missionaries' preaching on sin had been telling villagers: stealing, lying, making offerings to your ancestors and conjuring spirits to heal, - all these activities are kinds of *horö*, that is, they have the power, if unremoved, to make you very ill and even kill you. Their removal could only be achieved through Christian repentance. Traditional techniques of treatment, involving the technology of idols, exorcism, and offerings to the ancestors and gods, would not work because they themselves caused the *horö* that was the root of the problem.

During the months of instruction prior to baptism, new converts moved from a recognition of the similarity of Old Testament values (retribution and fear of God) to those of their own tradition, towards an appreciation of the new values (love, forgiveness, conscience) of the New Testament. Missionaries noted how the first sins to be confessed were those of the Old Testament, being so close to the customary law of *adat*. They learnt that some old sins (in the sense of offences against the ancestors) such as the failure to avenge, were mistaken, and that other practices they considered natural and normal were in fact dangerously sinful. They learnt to apply the traditional model of codified social law to ethical behaviour, so that the new concept emerged of "*huku Lowalangi*" - the law of God, distinguished from the other emergent category of *adat* as the social customs specific to a region. Again, the transition from a kind of traditional ethics conditional on obedience to the specific wishes of one's own parents, wife-givers, ancestors and gods, to modern universal Protestant virtue, was softened by this articulation between tradition and the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the



moral law, the Ten Commandments, was given by God - Lowalangi - specifically to Moses and the descendants of Abraham, only later becoming universalised. Furthermore, traditional obedience to and following of the ways of Nias tribal progenitors and Gods came to resemble universalising norms, since tribal progenitors and Gods at the higher levels united the segmentary diversity of the regions of Nias.

By the time of the Second World War the people of Nias had taken over the running of their own Protestant Church. In so doing they repeated the local cultural strategy of appropriating foreign sources of power, which, passing up the escalator of the generations, come to be seen as the unchanging tradition of the ancestors. This strategy had long been applied to prosaic technologies brought from abroad, as well as more magical and religious technologies for dealing with sickness. Thus the grimoires of modern magicians are full of the Moslem talismanic diagrams known as "*azimat*" and Toba Batak calendars of fortunate days. Modern magical ingredients too include such foreign-derived objects as benzoin and asafetida resins, coins, and even safety-pins (see IX.9).

The missionaries saw the Great Repentance and the sudden appearance of a Christian sense of guilt as cause for rejoicing: it was a "Mighty work of [their] God," a miraculous wind of faith blowing through the pagan island. They were less thrilled by the repentance specialists who appeared with it, and many of those who made strongly messianic claims were seen as having strayed from the true path. I have mentioned the vituperation with which traditional healers were condemned by the missionaries. This demonisation was largely taken up by the indigenous Protestant church, as well - as we have seen in chapter III - as by the modern state. Healing through herbal medicine and massage has persisted with its more dramatic explanations of practices addressed to spirit entities muted and the *mantra* or spells that accompany the preparation and application of medicine combined with or replaced by prayers to Lowalangi.

Today it is repentance healing - rather than extraction, for example - that constitutes the most vital sector of the more esoteric village healing specialisations, precisely because of the extent to which its healing practices are integrated with vernacular Christianity. The treatment of diseases believed to be caused by spirits only publicly takes place as part of repentance healing. People say that sin and spirit-attack are linked since unconfessed sins weaken one's natural defences against spirits. Indeed sometimes people speak as if unconfessed sins were a kind of evil spirit that attended the sinner, such as in the case of the 'spirit of *horö*' causing night-blindness by entering your eye if you are the first to see someone who has just committed adultery.

Today repentance healers hold weekly meetings attended by regular members, and to which the sick are brought. They must first confess and repent of their sins; they then sit in an attitude of prayer while the healer stands before them, praying too. A hymn of repentance is taken up by those present, accompanied by rhythmic clapping, and in some cases, dancing.

The healer then goes into a trance understood as possession by the Holy Spirit. Those so possessed can "see" the patient's sins, can see if there is anything they are holding back on in their confessions, can see the cause of sickness. In a crescendo of excitement that has the healer pouring with sweat she or he makes convulsive rhythmic movements directed at the patient. The passes of their hands in the air over the patient's body - supposed to be produced by a Will other than the healer's - recapitulate the exorcistic moves of traditional massage, moving notional invasive entities down the body, down to the ends of the limbs, and - with a flick and an exclamation - out.

The trance state is marked by the healer's prayer turning into "speaking in tongues." This consists of a convulsively produced baroque mixture of Nias language, Indonesian and foreign words, and nonsense. Known as "*li sibohou*" - new language - it is understood by some to be the words of God, the language of foreigners, or the language of spirits. The performance is a tremendously vivid instance of the power of the foreign being thus drawn into the heart of local potency.

It is also a dramatic example of the vitality of those traditional beliefs that have found reinforcement within Christianity, a vitality which as we shall see sustains them in the face of hostility from the state and best educated sectors of the community. As far as practitioners and their groups are concerned, their practices are legitimated by the Bible, and they are quick to point to the verses in the gospels where the gifts of healing, casting out of spirits and speaking in tongues are promised to all who truly believe. Within Christian discourse, as we have seen, the hierarchy whereby obedience and offerings go up while blessings come down is condensed into a direct relationship between individuals and god. The traditional notion of a continuum without a distinct break between natural and supernatural, widely reported in the region (cf. Laderman 1991: 38), was decisively challenged by the emphatic assertion by seminaries, priests, and the Bible, of a radical discontinuity between the human and the divine. In concert with this shift conceptions of the source of the repentance healer's talent (the notion and word, "*talenta*", come from the Bible) focus less on descent, which was crucial to the efficacy of traditional healers' knowledge, and more on ideas of a direct blessing or gift from God. This gift responds to the depth of the healer-to-be's repentance, which is itself often the result of affliction.

The institutional church is less happy about the phenomenon of Nias repentance groups, believing that it is the only body that can truly mediate between the individual and God. Its representatives - Nias people themselves - do not deny the possibility of such gifts as the gift of repentance healing; however, they think it unlikely for this to genuinely occur as often as it does. They thus warn that many such repentance healers may have strayed from the true path by following their own hearts rather than authoritative instruction, and thus be dangerous to those that follow them. In the past congregations have broken away from the indigenous Protestant church organisation as a result of following such charismatic leaders. But church ministers only visit the villages for a service once every two to three months, and congregations are led in their absence by lay preachers who have not studied at theological

college. These congregation leaders, mediating between institutional and local Christianity are able to prevent a conflict emerging between official disapproval and repentance practice.

The classificatory scheme whereby diseases are supposed to be either ordinary, or caused by witchcraft, or by spirits, is very much a contemporary product, and not exactly a rigorously consistent one at that. Witches may command spirits; some say it is spirits that put germs in the water. The fragile distinction between ordinary and supernatural that we find today arose largely through contact with Protestant Christianity, which opened up this ordinary space in notions of disease causation. In the fifty years before the Great Repentance the missions concentrated on medicine, schooling, and social improvement projects. It did so by implying in the context of schooling and mission social work projects that for practical purposes one should treat the world as though it were devoid of spiritual agency, as if it worked by discoverable natural laws. As we have seen, Christian teaching insisted that all supernatural intrusion in our world (from spirits, ancestors, wife-givers, parents etc.) was concentrated in one God. The notion of spiritual factors in disease-causation was assented to by mission teachers, but they were removed to a remote plane of distant causes acting behind immediate materialist explanations, and only very rarely to their exclusion.

Modern, supposedly secular medicine and education, as well as market-oriented economic rationality, thus entered on the back, so to speak, of Christianity. Since then, of course, responsibility for health and education has been taken over by the Indonesian State, though many schools are still managed by the Nias Church. In conceiving and implementing its education, health, and health-education programs, the State has to an astonishing extent taken on the mission's - and the later colonial state's - attitude to traditional culture on Nias. Both see the feasting and gift-giving traditionally demanded at feasts of merit, marriages and funerals as wasteful: that is, as inappropriate exchange contrary to the imperatives of development. This attitude of the modern state is shared by government monographs on issues of health, education, and culture<sup>1</sup>, ethnically-foreign local government officials and health officers, as well as many well-educated villagers themselves, in particular those working as nurses, teachers, and in administration.

By selecting one of the old gods - Lowalangi - as the Christian High God, the missionaries effectively demonised all other aspects of traditional religion as the worship of idols and devils (see chapter VI). This has been a widely-reported consequence of the encounter between Protestant missions and traditional religions (compare Meyer 1994 for African Christians; Hoskins 1987: 292 for Indonesian). The nineteenth century missionaries were the first to write at length about the local culture - indeed they are in a sense the founding ancestors of ethnographic description of Nias. In their descriptions, as in their social work, they assumed that the culture of Nias was an integrated, organic whole, so that transforming local religious practices would necessarily transform local culture in general. Regrettably this entailed that a few possibly valuable cultural traditions such as sung legends, song and dance

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<sup>1</sup> Depdikbud Jakarta 1982; Depdikbud Medan 1994, 1995; Laoli et al 1985; Siahaan et al 1979 & undated; Simanjuntak et al 1995; Zagötö et al 1975.

would be lost: one or two "enlightened" missionaries set about recording them for posterity. The appallingly poor health situation was thus seen not as a consequence of colonial history but, along with the danger of raiding and headhunting, as the flipside of local paganism; all demanded intervention and legitimated Christian and colonial discipline.

The attitude of the missionaries and colonial administrators made it inevitable that they missed the adaptiveness of many village practices. The dark and smoky traditional houses came in for much criticism, which did not appreciate how cool and mosquito-free they are. Where they succeeded in banning villagers from keeping pigs under their houses the colonial government removed a vital system for removing rubbish and the faeces of children, which, falling through the floorboards, were eaten by the pigs. Where they succeeded in persuading villages to move from inaccessible hilltops to new coastal or valley settlements they increased the prevalence of malaria. Above all, hostility to traditional healers or priests missed the value of their local and inexpensive therapies using herbs, massage and performance to work within local understandings of sickness, its cause and cure.

The Indonesian State, as heir to colonial and missionary discourse, continues to work with the same model that sees culture as a system of values which manifests in specific mentalities, and according to which the mentalities of Indonesian traditional cultures are not appropriate to modern economic development (see eg. Koentjaraningrat 1974; Mardimin 1994). This model is enormously influential, and forms the background to official research on regional cultures and ministerial planning for health and education. In the sociopolitical climate of Soeharto's New Order, from the late sixties to the late nineties, Development - or *Pembangunan* - has been the primary value. Not to put Development first implies being anti-*Pancasila*, the state ideology, and therefore un-Indonesian. Traditional understandings are therefore constructed as a barrier to development, since they are supposedly holistically integrated into a system of traditional beliefs that must be superceded in order for the development-mentality to replace the traditional-mentality.

Within this official construction acceptable regional alterity - as we saw in chapter III - is confined to superficial decorative features such as traditional architecture, costume, music, dances, and other cultural performances which for Nias include stone-jumping, wardances, and "hoho" - sung legends. It does not include deeper levels of cultural alterity, such as concepts of land ownership and inheritance at variance with that of the state, non-world religions or so-called "primitive" understandings of sickness causation and healing. As such the present research on Nias bears out ethnographic accounts conducted elsewhere in Indonesia during the New Order period, in particular Hooker 1993, Rodgers 1979, and Pemberton 1994.

Health statistics for Nias, which are the lowest in the province, are explained in official reports by poor communications, lack of education, and primitive mentality. Where poverty is mentioned, it too is explained by lack of education and primitive mentality. Places such as Nias thus become stigmatised in national discourse: all over Indonesia one hears Nias

described as a dangerous, backward place where violence and black magic are rife, where poverty and poor health are explained not by economic marginalisation but by mentality: the villagers' un-Indonesian refusal to develop themselves. In the mainland cities, where emigrant Nias people attempt to make a living despite only being offered the lowest jobs, they are seen by other citizens as thieves and robbers. Two often repeated stories, in which Nias lodgers apparently murdered their entire host families, carry this national message of Niassans as irrefractorily and dangerously backward. It is, as I have suggested, not only outsiders who stigmatise Nias people thus. For Nias people themselves, a condition of finding work in administration, education or health is learning to speak the language of state discourse.

We saw in chapter X how, as part of the wide-ranging official project to create a new National Culture, the state targets village women with its Development of Family Prosperity Programs, known as PKK. Despite the mission-statement rhetoric invoking gender equality, the targeting of both women and rural and remote areas by these programmes reveals how women's role in non-formal education of their family is seen as making them the key to influencing the mentality of the next generation: with their low levels of literacy women had been responsible for perpetuating the primitive mentality that hinders development. The intention of PKK is to bring national values into local communities and families. Women as mothers of the next generation of citizens are seen as key to moulding the nation's future.

Taken as a whole the programme re-writes a new common culture for Indonesia, supposedly fashioned from putatively general traditional elements inflected by the values of development. Participants are supposed to take the best from the local (such as foodstuffs, "area traditions and cultural arts", and so on) but in practice the directives replace functions generally organised by traditional culture, such as determining spiritual outlook, organising collective works, helping families afflicted by disaster, putting on weddings and funerals, designing houses, clothing and feeding children.

The programme's messages have penetrated village life inasmuch as they have been reinforced by two other deep concerns of many villagers: to be good Christians, and to display the status of one's own family while not being humiliated by failing to measure up to the lifestyle status markers displayed by other peer families. As we saw in chapter VII, the uptake of new social models promulgated by the state follows a traditional pattern of appropriation of the powerfully foreign, which becomes domesticated to succeeding generations as part of ancestral Nias tradition. Appropriation of foreign models (in styles of dress, speech, food consumption, worship, etc.) takes place through a process of imitation (see IX.10 & X.6) which informed traditional patterns of learning, and the display of one's identity with social groupings (see chapter V). Both Christianity and state-sponsored modernity frame their discourse in opposition to traditional "superstitious" fetishising of language (in healing *mantera*) and objects (the *adu* of ancestral religion). Both nevertheless manifest new forms of fetishism, whether the state's signposts along village roads which

implement social programmes simply by stating them, or villagers attributing mechanical healing efficacy to both traditional prayer formulae, the names of God, and the spirit-exorcising power of spontaneous speaking in tongues. This - I have argued - is not to be explained by generalised syncretic mixing, but by the simultaneous presence of the diverse cultural systems of tradition, Christianity and the state, each varying along axes between authoritative centres and more syncretic distant margins. As we have seen, those at margins distant from the authoritative centres tend to work the three cultural systems together into a whole without perceiving conflicts between diverse understandings, while those who stand sociologically close to such centres strive to keep their discourse as 'pure' as possible, uncontaminated by the other two except insofar as they are committed to either the conservative alliance between Christianity and tradition, or the progressive alliance between Christianity and the state.

In investigating the contemporary culture of healing in south Nias, we have thus confirmed the importance of keeping in the frame diverse, alternative systems of ideas (Kleinman 1980: 34-7; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984), and not focusing exclusively on traditional ideas. We have seen how each sphere of discourse is influenced by coexisting with the others, generating a kind of complementarity between diverse discourses on the causes of sickness and healing. We have seen the importance of investigating how each sphere of discourse is produced by authoritative centres, and received by more and less marginal peripheries. Despite ethnography's traditional preoccupation with the distinctively local, we have seen the local importance of the universal understandings of orthodox Christianity and cosmopolitan medicine (Bowen 1993: 4-5). Reinforcing themes of Wikan's research on Bali we have seen that culture is not a given determining individuals' attitudes (as earlier work typified by Bateson & Mead 1942 suggested), but a series of models and fields of meaning, sometimes contradictory or in conflict, amongst which individuals make choices, significantly steered by their sociological positioning with respect to such available models and fields of meaning (Wikan 1990: xviii, 23, 175).

Today villagers who want to gain respect and influence and avoid shame must do so by combining and balancing status as understood and offered severally by Tradition, Christianity, and the State, each of which has a totalising vision, language, and values of its own which the individual must reconcile. As argued above, the wealthier and thus better educated - particularly those who work as teachers, nurses, or in administration - have to a large extent internalised the discourse of the state. For them, as for their fathers and grandfathers, sickness and its remedies continue to be seen in strongly moralised terms. For their grandparents the suffering of the sick was often seen as an indication of the ancestors' displeasure. For their parents the prevalence of sickness came to be the physical expression of unconfessed sins against the Christian God, and for them it has come to be the consequence of backwardness and shameful un-Indonesianness.

As we saw in chapter VIII.4, the prevalence of sickness is for Niassans in a very real way an index of the sin and evil in the world, be it of sinners, sorcerors or spirits. I was once told that

the poor health conditions on Nias were a result of *horö nga'ötö* - descended sin - originating from the ancestral incest whereby the Nias race is described in myth as arising from the union of a woman with her son. Epidemics, such as the pig epidemic which lasted from 1995-8, are very commonly explained with reference either to the community's lack of faith, or else to neglect of the ancestral ways or the presence of tourists breaking village *moni-moni* (customary rules). The power of this notion of sin as distant cause of sickness has been reinforced by cosmopolitan medicine as introduced by the missionaries and carried on by the Indonesian state, which has also blamed villagers for the prevalence of diseases they suffer, whether under the rubric of "Social Medicine" or "Public Health Policy" or "Family Welfare Education" or "Family Planning." Just as Carol Laderman found in 1980s rural Malaysia, the construction of local culture as an obstacle misses how flexible and pragmatic villagers can be (Laderman 1983). We have recognised a kind of 'Heisenberg' principle, whereby older ethnographic accounts as well as contemporary ones that focus only on traditional ideas have become part of the ethnographic reality to be found in the field (see also Vickers 1989 and Kahn 1993, both of which works are primarily devoted to a similar argument for Balinese and Minangkabau respectively). Thus the organs of Indonesian state discourse assume that tradition exhaustively determines individuals' attitudes, and must be replaced (rather than complemented) by 'progressive mentality.' The official finger points at primitive customs and patterns of thought (including inadequate house and village design) which are held responsible for everything from poor hygiene (and hence the spread of infectious diseases), overpopulation, and poor diet to poverty and backwardness. Within New Order state discourse, whose central value is that of "development", practices that hinder development amount to a cardinal sin. The internalisation of this message is manifested in the widening of the already all-important centrality of sin in sickness-causation to include the sins of backwardness, tradition-mindedness, and poor hygiene and diet.

Both institutional Christianity and the state, as we have seen, demonise those aspects of local culture which are recalcitrant to their own discourse. At the same time they do not provide satisfactory routes for addressing the evil they thus help to create, and hence the ongoing popularity of traditional and repentance healing, which do. Following the recent history of medicine on Nias we have traced a movement from traditional social models of sickness that could criticise the status quo, hence the possibility of Christian conversion, to the Protestant and nationalist construction of individuals, which has penetrated even traditional and repentance healing. In the process we have described, local notions of sin changed from being a question of social disorder to one of an internalised individual conscience. Addressing illness came to involve focusing inwards on the individual, rather than outwards at society<sup>2</sup>. Protestant values on Nias prefer striving for the improvement of one's own family and looking to one's own shortcomings. In New Order Indonesia political protest was silenced by the ideology of all-important stability underwritten by terror. In the field of understandings of sickness and healing, we have seen how cosmopolitan medicine has

<sup>2</sup> See Kiernan 1994:79-80 for a similar account of how the culture of healing combined with a Puritan ethic tends to political acquiescence.

typically been used to medicalise social problems<sup>3</sup>, which are then moralised as the fault of individuals rather than the responsibility of the state.

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<sup>3</sup> qv Lock 1980 for a Japanese case with many similarities.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Glossary of diseases and their remedies as recognised in the villages of Maenamölö

#### AGABILA (AGAKANDRO)

SYMPTOMS: Eyes turned up into head, arms and hands convulsively tensed. Symptoms only last a few minutes at a time. ETIOLOGY: Comes from the wind, or *bechu* (spirits); typically affects children. Symptoms caused by excessive heat of fever; often fatal sign. CURE: 3 drops of juice of söfö-söfö leaves in eyes; massage; prayer.

#### AMBÖ NOSO (AMBÖ BADU)

“Lack of breath.” SYMPTOMS: as asthma. ETIOLOGY: Blocked airway. May be caused by mother approaching dying animal when pregnant. CURE: Same animal’s skin burnt around patient; Asma Salon medicine; fried flying fox liver eaten 3 times running; flying fox blood drunk, then daily drinking of broth made without innards; drink oil in which poisonous millipede has been fried until crisp.

#### ANACHÖ-NACHÖ (FA’AUKHU - “Heat”)

Trivialising term for childhood sicknesses, which should not be referred to as “*fökhö*” (sickness) lest they get worse. SYMPTOMS: Fever, i.e. “heat”. ETIOLOGY: comes from spirits; being out in the rain while sun shining. CURE: Prayer accompanied by painting of cross in lime on patient’s forehead; söfö-söfö leaves rubbed on body; söfö-söfö distillation drunk.

#### ANI SOFÖKHÖ

“Wind of sickness.” Term for epidemic cholera. Protection gained from massaging with coconut oil mixed with onion. Onion protects against spirits.

#### A’ULU (FA’OMBUYU)

SYMPTOMS: Pain in the foot making walking impossible. ETIOLOGY: An affliction sent by spirits.

#### **BAGU**

**SYMPTOMS:** Swollen gland on neck. Inability to swallow. **ETIOLOGY:** Wind entering; germs; eating ice or chilled drinks.

#### **BAHI**

Smallpox. **SYMPTOMS:** Fever, followed by appearance of pox eruptions on skin. **ETIOLOGY:** Being struck by powder thrown down by spirits from trees. **CURE:** Infusion of cōfō-cōfō leaves drunk and grounds spread on red spots on skin.

#### **BALUNÖ**

**SYMPTOMS:** "Twilight blindness." Inability to see in low light (as symptoms of vitamin A deficiency). **ETIOLOGY:** Said by some to be the result of being the first to meet someone who has just committed adultery, thus being afflicted by the "spirit of sin/of the sinner". **CURE:** Striking knife blades at the crown of the head to make the spirit flee.

#### **BARA**

**SYMPTOMS:** Swelling on neck with no pus that gets harder over time. **ETIOLOGY:** Witchcraft. **CURE:** Dry earth, gambir, and egg yolk pounded together and applied.

#### **BELUA**

**SYMPTOMS:** As tinea versicolor: itchy white patches on trunk. **ETIOLOGY:** Washing in unclean water. **CURE:** Rubbing galangal slices on affected area; squeeze sōsa leaves in hands and spread on patches.

#### **BERENÖ (BERE-BERE)**

**SYMPTOMS:** Scabs or small abscesses on eyelids or around eyes. **ETIOLOGY:** Said by some to be from spying; otherwise temporary affliction in cold weather. **CURE:** Squeeze a bedbug and apply shit that comes out to the affected eye.

#### **BIO-BIO**

**SYMPTOMS:** Itchy, scabies like eruptions on skin; heat; or simple rashes resembling allergy or histaminic reaction to stinging plants or insects. **ETIOLOGY:** Witchcraft; caused by substances left on clothes (bio-bio of the skin), or in food (bio-bio of the bones, which can be fatal if untreated by a healer). Poison supposed to include extractions of stinging lato and liga plants. **CURE:** For bio-bio of the skin: massage with healer's oil with 9 gitō lio leaves burnt and mixed in; ash on skin; prayer and mantra accompanied by pulling out motions at site of initial infection. For bio-bio of the bones: 18 burnt male sides of coconut shells (the side

without the eyes) ground up with 3 spoons sugar into coconut oil, rubbed on, left to dry, and rubbed on again.

#### **BÖNI**

**SYMPTOMS:** as Ringworm. **ETIOLOGY:** From germs in water. **CURE:** Direct application of roots of ginger family (galangal, turmeric, ginger).

#### **BURU**

**SYMPTOMS:** Madness typically of women involving episodes of pulling out hair so it hangs down, tearing off clothes, anger, and the refusal of food. **ETIOLOGY:** Witchcraft. **CURE:** Discovering and dealing with the spell through which the witchcraft was worked.

#### **BURU ANI**

"Buru of the wind." **SYMPTOMS:** Swollen stomach and constipation. **ETIOLOGY:** Witchcraft. **CURE:** Discovering and dealing with the spell through which the witchcraft was worked.

#### **BURU GAMBU**

"Swelling buru." **SYMPTOMS:** Fever, swelling, enlarged stomach, no appetite, weakness, discomfort lying on side. **ETIOLOGY:** Comes from witchcraft eaten, stepped on, or crossed over the head. **CURE:** Steaming with cōfō-cōfō leaves and massaging them on.

#### **EGIMÖ**

**SYMPTOMS:** Red and watery pockmarks. **ETIOLOGY:** Germs and unclean water. **CURE:** Washing with hot water; rubbing with healer's oil. Ground turmeric warmed in oil and spread on. Asömbata leaves boiled in water used to wash spots.

#### **EHA**

Cough. **SYMPTOMS:** Cough with fever. **ETIOLOGY:** Either ordinary sickness from food or wind, or from witchcraft poisoning. Generally coughs without mucus betoken witchcraft. **CURE:** Pharmaceutical cough medicine. Bulu wöria leaves mixed and drunk in water 3 times running. 3 zini-zini leaves squeezed in one and a half glasses of warm water with half teaspoon of salt. Juice of an orange mixed with egg yolk and sugar, and sometimes a few drops of healer's oil or afasi and ö'ö leaves squeezed in warm water.

#### FA'AUKHU

"Heat." SYMPTOMS: Fever, dizziness, headcold. ETIOLOGY: Either ordinary sickness or from spirits. CURE: Rest, prayer. 3 handfuls of boli leaves squeezed in water with which you wash. Crushed banan shoot compress on head. Flu remedies from chemist. Drinking juice of kencur. Gruel with söma-söma buaya.

#### FAMACHÖ

SYMPTOMS: as rheumatism. ETIOLOGY: Very common. Can be understood as caused by overwork, as sent by bad wind, or as caused by feeling of guilt at sin. Can be inherited. CURE: Odd numbers of cöfö-cöfö and lamo-lamo leaves boiled and drunk; massage with oil into which ashes from burnt kencur leaves inscribed with spells have been mixed. Must not eat kangkung, chicken or gowi salidi.

#### FAOSA

SYMPTOMS: Boil, abscess, or ulcer. ETIOLOGY: Either ordinary (dirty blood), from misty weather, or caused by witchcraft. CURE: Dressing of grated ladari mböhö, or ground enuo lölö and soleha tips, or worm dung, or red mud mixed with egg. Burning benzoin and goatskin.

#### FAOSA ZUSU

SYMPTOMS: Breast abscess. ETIOLOGY: Dirty blood or witchcraft. CURE: Mud from hornbill and swallow nests mixed with gambir, 3 red onions and yolk, then spread on, left to dry, and applied again.

#### FEKHÖLÖ MBANUA

"Spinning sky." SYMPTOMS: Recurrent dizziness and head pain. ETIOLOGY: Witchcraft of calling down lightning. CURE: Massage, mantra, healer's oil, bezoar water.

#### FOGIKHI

"Shivers." SYMPTOMS: Shivers, headcold, fever, coldness, dizziness. ETIOLOGY: Spirit-attack. CURE: Handful of lase leaves or papaya leaves squeezed in water; smoking with burnt goatskin; steaming with cöfö-cöfö.

#### FÖKHÖ ATE

"Liver sickness." SYMPTOMS: Yellow eyes, loss of appetite, fever. ETIOLOGY: Overtiredness, poison, snake approaching newborn baby. CURE: Rest, prayer, diet of boiled chicken.

#### FÖKHÖ BETUA

"Sick stomach." SYMPTOMS: Colic, nausea, faintness, diarrhoea, vomiting, hard stomach. ETIOLOGY: Unclean food or water; disordered eating; eating too much papaya; wind entering. CURE: Strong tea with salt. Maziambu, nidöni, or zamba leaves squeezed in water, sometimes with ground rice. Stomach dressing made of papaya leaves, gowirio leaves, bago leaves and onion roasted in banana leaves over fire then bound to stomach, or simply chewed red onion and garlic smeared on belly. 3 drops of lamp oil drunk in hot water.

#### FÖKHÖ CIDO

SYMPTOMS: Cough, stooped posture, thinness, faintness, bloody faeces, in old people only. ETIOLOGY: From working too hard when young, as farmers or becak drivers. CURE: Tonics such as sila'öta leaf tea; otherwise none, death.

#### FÖKHÖ DELAU

"Headache." SYMPTOMS: Dizziness, head pain. ETIOLOGY: Too much thinking or worrying. CURE: Tight bandanna round head; head massage; pharmaceutical aspirin.

#### FÖKHÖ DÖDÖ

"Heart disease." SYMPTOMS: Loud heartbeat; sweats; easily scared. ETIOLOGY: Ordinary; from exhaustion or thinking too much. CURE: Rest; eating chicken or pig hearts.

#### FÖKHÖ MBOHA

"Toothache." SYMPTOMS: Toothache. ETIOLOGY: Ordinary; rotten molars. CURE: Sticks of citronella beaten and cooked, then chewed. Rinse with cold salty sirih leaf tea. Pharmaceutical painkillers and antibiotics.

#### GALA-GALA

SYMPTOMS: Pain, accompanied by fluttering pulse, in the navel which persists whether full or empty. ETIOLOGY: Poison; wind entering navel; failure of midwife to clean umbilicus.

#### GOA-GOA

SYMPTOMS: Scabs on head which peel to reveal smelly pus. Usually children. ETIOLOGY: Uncleanliness. CURE: Washing with warm salt water. Turmeric ground and squeezed and mixed with coconut oil, spread on head with chicken feather.

#### **GUMO-GUMO**

see SOWULUZUKHU

#### **HELAMÖ**

**SYMPTOMS:** Simultaneous scabs on lower leg with pain in pelvic glands. **ETIOLOGY:**

Ordinary illness, or from stepping on spell. **CURE:** Tying either patient's hair, pinang leaf or ladari fibre around big toe or foot. Measuring a length of kiliömö matting fibre from hip to foot, then throwing it out of the door.

#### **KHETE-KHETELÖ**

**SYMPTOMS:** Difficulty or pain urinating. **ETIOLOGY:** Ordinary; typically caused by fall or blow to groin. **CURE:** Infusion of sitoto'ene leaves with batu dawai. Sirih lime rubbed over bladder area.

#### **LAYA'ATÖ**

**SYMPTOMS:** Rash, itchy, thick red spots. **ETIOLOGY:** Caused by leaf powders or kitchen ash thrown down from trees by bela. **CURE:** By bleeding, or rubbing on hearth ash.

#### **MALARIA**

**SYMPTOMS:** Hot and cold fever. **ETIOLOGY:** Unclean environment generating many mosquitoes; rainy weather; eating unripe fruit; washing while sun shines and rain falls; spirit-attack. **CURE:** Pharmaceutical anti-malarials. Rest. Chicken gall swallowed every day for three days. Mashed crab mixed with dew. Papaya leaves squeezed into water and drunk.

#### **MATE DAMBALI (MATE DAMBAI)**

"Half-death." **SYMPTOMS:** One-sided paralysis. Fever and faintness. **ETIOLOGY:** From spirits, bad winds, or as result of high blood. **CURE:** None if from birth. Rubbing with coconut oil mixed with garlic, ginger, and onion pounded in, or ashes of paper with arabic azimat written in red ink.

#### **MATE TAOLO**

**SYMPTOMS:** Convulsive fits. **ETIOLOGY:** Ordinary; may be inherited.

#### **MOFISO**

"Deafness." SYMPTOMS: Earache with pus.

#### **MO'INO**

SYMPTOMS: Running nose; hot body. ETIOLOGY: Ordinary; overwork. CURE: Juice of odd number of oranges with egg yolk and sugar.

#### **MUTA NDRO**

"Vomiting blood." SYMPTOMS: Vomiting blood. ETIOLOGY: May be hereditary. Witchcraft by poison or images. CURE: None if hereditary. Image must be neutralised. Infusion of kuping gajah.

#### **NIFE'A**

"One made to eat." SYMPTOMS: General illness with stomach pain and fever. ETIOLOGY: Witchcraft poison using animal venoms and toxic saps and resins. CURE: Cooling medicines; burning benzoin smoke.

#### **NIGAMBARAINI**

"One imaged." SYMPTOMS: Tiredness, headache, pins and needles in neck. ETIOLOGY: Witchcraft using images. CURE: Counteracting the image.

#### **NIGASINI**

SYMPTOMS: Severe head pain. ETIOLOGY: Struck by special kind of lightning summoned by witchcraft. CURE: Spells; massage with oil containing wood from a tree struck by lightning.

#### **NIGAYUNI**

"Enchanted." SYMPTOMS: Dizziness; faintness; apparition of spinning disc; can lead to mate dambai paralysis. ETIOLOGY: Disease sent by a sorcerer using a tame bechu. CURE: Attempt to catch and cast away disc; counter-magic.

#### **OWÖHÖ**

"Mad." SYMPTOMS: Violent, dangerous insane behaviour. ETIOLOGY: May be from inherited sin, or spirits. CURE: Prayer, exorcism, cage or stocks for restraint.

#### **OWÖHÖ MOWA**

**SYMPTOMS:** Insanity with repetitive behaviours such as screaming or banging down a chair.

**ETIOLOGY:** May be inherited, from spirits, or witchcraft, or from accidental damage to head or spine. **CURE:** Getting close and talking.

#### **OWÖHÖ SÖCHI**

**"Benign madness."** **SYMPTOMS:** Insanity with peculiar behaviours performed unconsciously.

**ETIOLOGY:** Being played with by a magician's manipulation of an image. **CURE:** A seer-healer must find the image and neutralise it.

#### **SENU**

**SYMPTOMS:** Insanity with introversion and passivity; refusal to eat or speak. **ETIOLOGY:** From stress or thinking too much; broken heart; losing riches, frustrated ambition.

#### **SIGAMBU (FA'AGAMBU)**

**"The swelling."** **SYMPTOMS:** Whole body swells up. **ETIOLOGY:** From collision with a bechu, often acting under orders of a magician. **CURE:** Mix oranges and tamarind fruits in a small bucket of water, drink a glass whenever thirsty and wash in it.

#### **SIGÖNALANU**

**"One afflicted by poison."** **SYMPTOMS:** Neck and stomach pain; fever; inability to eat.

**ETIOLOGY:** Witchcraft by poisoning. **CURE:** Healer's massage with special oils and calling out of the poison. Remedies that induce vomiting. Orange juice mixed with egg yolk and healer's oil.

#### **SIHULU**

**SYMPTOMS:** Sudden pains that move around the body. **ETIOLOGY:** From the wind or bechu.

Fatal if it moves to heart. **CURE:** Rubbing with heating ointments made from pounded onion, ginger and garlic. Cutting to release black blood, then rubbing chili in wounds.

#### **SIMALAPARI**

**SYMPTOMS:** The mouth is twisted round to the side of the face, so the patient cannot eat, and only one eye is able to blink, but rest of body unaffected. **ETIOLOGY:** From spirits or witchcraft. If untreated death follows quickly. **CURE:** Healer writes azimat in red ink then

burns paper and dissolves ashes in oil, and massages face with it, accompanied by prayers.



#### **SIMANA GULI-GAHE**

"One who eats foot-skin." SYMPTOMS: Unconsciously doing peculiar things. ETIOLOGY: Witchcraft; poisoning with the skin from the foot of a corpse. CURE: Healer's medicine, massage, and prayer.

#### **SISUKA**

SYMPTOMS: Stabbing pain in chest; difficulty breathing. ETIOLOGY: Witchcraft; stabbing a model with pins. CURE: Massage, taking of the image.

#### **SISUNDRE**

Love magic. SYMPTOMS: Strange behaviour, laughing and crying; illicit sexual behaviour. ETIOLOGY: Caused by bechu as a result of spell of person in love with patient. CURE: Healer's medicine, massage, and prayer.

#### **SITESAFO**

Spirit-attack (from Indonesian tersapa = touched [by a spirit]. SYMPTOMS: Fever; bad dreams. ETIOLOGY: Attacked by a spirit at twilight, by a river, or when sun and rain together. CURE: Healer cuts a long turmeric root lengthways and presses on patient's forehead in shape of a cross. (Afterwards if you clean the turmeric you can see the shadow of the bechu.) Alternatively cross made with sirih lime. Infusion of söfö-söfö leaves, boli, zau-zau, or ndruru-ndruru leaves drunk and washed in.

#### **SOWUA ZITAORA**

Chicken pox. SYMPTOMS: Fever and itchy spots. ETIOLOGY: Ordinary sickness of childhood. CURE: Wash in water boiled with sowua zitaora leaves, or boli leaves and höru bark.

#### **SOWULUZUKHU**

Measles. SYMPTOMS: Red, spotty rash, itch, fever, red eyes. ETIOLOGY: Ordinary sickness of childhood. Bela's hearth ashes thrown down from sky. CURE: 9 baby shrimps ground and mixed in coconut water with sugar and drunk. Crab porridge. Young coconut water drunk with sugar. Lie on your side at night so sickness can leave; if you lie on your back it could sink in and kill you.

#### **TALU SOYO**

SYMPTOMS: Blood in faeces. ETIOLOGY: Ordinary disease: eating dirt. CURE: Cooling

medicines; as FÖKHÖ BETUA.

#### TEFENO

SYMPTOMS: Nosebleed. ETIOLOGY: Ordinary. CURE: Nostril plugged with sirih leaf.

#### TIKA

"Stabbing." SYMPTOMS: Fever, small scab, and painful swelling on neck or pelvic glands.

ETIOLOGY: Witchcraft; if untreated boil breaks leaving hole in neck that can be fatal.

CURE: Healer, not doctor. A special coin rubbed on clockwise.

#### TIKA LATE

SYMPTOMS: Boil from which a little blood seeps out, typically on postpartum mothers.

ETIOLOGY: Witchcraft. CURE: Very dangerous: none.

#### TIKA MATE

"Eye stabbing." SYMPTOMS: Pain like a needle in the eye. ETIOLOGY: Witchcraft. CURE:

Mix juice of limo sari orange with an egg yolk and put three drops in eye with a broken needle.

## Appendix II: Uses of Medicinal Herbs in the villages of Maenamölö

ACHE (Indonesian: aren)

Infusion of bitter roots used for *agafökhö hele-hele dödö* (gastritis); sap used for making palm wine (*tuak*).

ACHOZILA SEDE'IDE, BULU (Indonesian: sosor bebek)

*kalanchoe pinnata* (lam.) pers., crassulaceae

Infusion of leaves for cough. Leaves used in head compress for fever.

AFASI (Indonesian: kapas) kapok

*ceiba pentandra* gaertn., bombaceae

Pounded, mixed with egg yolk, stirred into hot water and drunk for cough. Leaf tea for postnatal recovery.

ASE RANDRI, ASÖ (Indonesian: asam gelugor)

*garcinia atroviridis* griff., guttiferæ

Fruits eaten to cool fever, and for mouth ulcers.

ASE ZAO (Indonesian: asam) tamarind

*tamarindus indica* l., caesalpiniaceae

Fruits eaten to cool fever, esp. *fa'agambu*, also as laxative.

ASÖMBATA (Indonesian: daun sayur asam)

Leaves boiled to wash *gimö-gimö*; also ground with onion and poulticed to boils and abscesses.

BAGO (Indonesian: tembakau) tobacco

Leaves used in stomach compress for stomach ache.

BALA (Indonesian: pepaya) papaya

*carica papaya* l., cariaceae

Fruit mashed with sugar and a little water to cool hot stomach ache. For stomach ache from poisoning - with stabbing needle pains, also shivering fever and malaria, leaves squeezed out in hot water, mixed with pounded ginger and drunk. Leaves may also be used in stomach compress for stomach ache. Dried ground seeds mixed in hot water and drunk for stomach ache. For backache leaves may be wrapped in banana leaf with coconut oil and roasted, then contents rubbed downwards on patient's back.

BATU DAWAI

Boiled and drunk for difficulty urinating.

**BAWA** (Indonesian: bawang) onion

*allium cepa* L., liliaceae

Mixed into coconut oil and massaged on to protect from cholera (*ani sofökhö*).

**BAWA SAFUSI** (see DASU)

**BAWA SARE**

*allium schoenoprasum* L., liliaceae

For swollen stomach mixed with *lada hita* and clove flowers, chewed and applied to draw out heat.

**BAWA SOYO** (Indonesian: bawang merah) shallot

*allium ascalonicum*, liliaceae

Ground into paste with sugar and applied to ulcers or abscesses. Paste smeared on body for spirit-attack. Burnt with garlic and benzoin in a male coconut dish to chase off bechu, charcoal put around person suffering from spirit-attack. Used in stomach compress for stomach ache. Mixed with swallow and/or hornbill birdnests for ulcers on the breast (*faosa zusu*).

**BETUA** (Indonesian: kapur) sirih lime

Painted in cross on forehead for *tesafo* (esp. children). Directly applied to wounds and itching skin. Rubbed on groin for difficulty urinating.

**BIO**

Leaves rubbed on skin for *lato* burns.

**BIO AKHE**

Bud mixed with coconut oil, roasted and applied as poultice for spirit-attack.

**BOLI**

Leaf tea drunk for fever (*fa'aukhu*), washed on for spirit-attack and *sowua zitaora* (chicken pox); bark squeezed in water for malaria. Wood repels lightning.

**BUNA LEWATÖ** (Indonesian: purong)

*codiaeum variegatum* L., euphorbiaceae

Plant repels *bechu*. Leaves infused to ease labour. For poison a stem is boiled, mixed in a glass with coconut oil and drunk.

**CAKE** (Indonesian: cengkeh) clove

*szygium aromatica* L., myrtaceae

9 cloves and 9 black peppercorns ground, mixed with coconut oil and massaged onto person with hot fever. Chewed with sirih for blocked labour.

CÖFÖ-CÖFÖ (Indonesian: bandotan) celestine

ageratum conyzoides, compositae

Leaf tea wash for *tesafo*. Infusion drunk for rheumatism; also roots may be roasted and strapped onto affected joints. Growing tips may be rubbed in hands and rubbed on for fever and cough.

DASU (Indonesian: bawang putih) garlic

allium sativum, liliaceae

For spirit-attack smeared on body (sometimes mixed with water) to chase away *bechu*.

Grated into oil and massaged onto tendons that have seized up. Used in stomach compress for stomach ache. At epidemics bulbs hung in doorways to repel *bechu*.

DIMA (see LIMO)

DIMA ADULO (Indonesian: jeruk perut) kaffir lime

citrus hystrix, rutaceae

For coughs, stalk cut away from fruit, lime may then be inserted and then whole roasted or salt added, then juice mixed with sugar and egg yolk, then drunk. For spirit-attack sliced and smeared over body from top to bottom. For cigarette addiction three fruits squeezed, juice mixed with egg yolk and Vigour (Chinese herbal alcohol) and drunk every morning for five days.

DOROI, BULU

Leaves squeezed out in hot water then drunk as a laxative.

DURLA (Indonesian: durian) durian

durio zibethinus murr., bombaceae

Infusion of leaves for stomach ache. For intestinal worms a fistful of leaves with tops and bottoms cut off pounded with turmeric, *mondra*, ginger, strained and one glass drunk.

ENDRUWO

Planted around house to keep away *bechu*.

ENUO LÖLÖ

Trunk grated and rubbed on abscess, boil to ripen pus.

FAKHE SOWOYU stale rice

Grated with onion and put around boil, avoiding tip.

FANUZA'A SOYO (Indonesian: pacar air)

impatiens balsamina linn., balsaminaceae

Pounded and applied to black-bruised finger nails and boils; cooked with salt and drunk to clean stomach; infusion to freshen mouth.

**FAYA-FAYA** (BUA LAMO-LAMO) (Indonesian: ceplukan)

*physalis peruviana*, solanaceae

Infusion drunk for rheumatism. One stick boiled with dry *sikuci* leaves, a handful of dried *sowua batui*, drunk daily for a week for jaundice or chronic stomach ache.

**FINO** (Indonesian: pinang) areca, betel

*areca catechu* L., arecaceae

Flower pounded and mixed with hot water and drunk by post-parturient mother to complete evacuation of womb.

**FÖRIA** (Indonesian: pare)

*momordica charantia* L., cucurbitaceae

Infusion of leaves drunk for coughs.

**GALAGARU** (Indonesian: jadam)

For rheumatism rubbed on painful area; can also be drunk. Also ingested as laxative.

**GAMBE** (Indonesian: gambir)

*uncaria gambir* Roxb., rubiaceae

Ingredient in dressings for boils and abscesses.

**GITÖ LIO**

Ashes dissolved in massage oil for *bio-bio alitö*.

**GOWI-GOWI** (Indonesian: suruhan)

*peperomia pellucida*, piperaceae

Anti-sorcery.

**GOWI NENE** (Indonesian: tapak kuda)

*ipomoea pes-caprae*, convolvulaceae

Leaves fed to sick chickens.

**GOWI NIHA** (Indonesian: ubi rambat) sweet potato

*ipomoea batatas* Lamk., convolvulaceae

Leaves chewed and resulting paste put on cuts and wounds.

**GOWI RIO** (Indonesian: ubi kayu) cassava

Leaf ingredient in stomach compress for stomach ache. Leaves pounded with red onion, roasted and smeared on body for needle-pricking pains.

GÖNA SAFUSI (Indonesian: nanas) pineapple (variety)

Juice drunk with sugar for chicken pox.

HINDRIFO (Indonesian: pacing)

*costus speciosus* (koenig), zingiberaceae

For poisoning leaf and root powdered, mixed with warm water; water drunk and grounds externally applied; also leaf infusion drunk. For heat inside leaves pounded, mixed with egg yolk and stirred into hot water, cooled and drunk. For spirit-attack and to cool body tips and root ground with turmeric tips and root, squeezed in hot water and drunk.

INGGU (asafoetida)

Contraceptive ingredient. Hung in front of door to keep away *bechu*.

IWA-IWA (Indonesian: teki)

*cyperus rotundus* L., cyperaceae

Fruits chewed for *fa'ici-ici mboha*.

JAMBA (Indonesian: jambu air)

Leaves squeezed in hot water for stomach ache.

JARA (Indonesian: jarak pagar)

*jatropha curcas* L., euphorbiaceae

For delayed labour tips pounded, mixed with egg yolk, stirred into hot water, cooled and drunk. Leaf infusion for cough. Latex as tooth filling.

JARU-JARU (Indonesian: iler)

*coleus scutellarioides* Benth., lamiaceae

For peeling-skin sickness (*la ofö*) cooked, mixed with salt and spread on peeling skin. Leaf infusion for diarrhoea and to cool stomach. Planted around house to protect foundations being attacked by *bechu*.

KULI MANI (Indonesian: kayu manis) cinnamon

*cinnamomum burmannii*, lauraceae

For lack of appetite pounded with cloves, mixed in coconut oil, and rubbed on stomach.

KUMÖYÖ SAFUSI (Indonesian: kemenyan) benzoin

*styrax benzoin*, styraceae

Burnt on coals to repel *bechu*; also in some contexts to attract tutelary spirits.

LADA (Indonesian: cabe) chili

*capsicum* spp., solanaceae

Rubbed in incisions for *sihulu*.

LADA HITA (Indonesian: merica) black pepper  
piper nigrum l., piperaceae  
Chewed in sirih for blocked labour.

LADA LIMi (Indonesian: cabe rawit)  
capsicum frutescens l., solanaceae  
Dry fried with tobacco, mixed with coconut oil and drunk or poulticed for *fökhö dödö*.

LADARI MBÖHÖ  
Grated as dressing for boils. Root juice used to clean out eye.

LAGENE (Indonesian: cakar ayam)  
selaginella doederlinii hieron., selaginellaceae  
Chewed and packed on cuts and wounds.

LAHETO SOYO (Indonesian: jamur kayu)  
ganoderma lucidum karst., polyporaceae  
Tea drunk for rheumatism.

LAHIA (Indonesian: jahe) ginger  
zingiber officinale rosc., zingiberaceae  
For cough chewed to get rid of throat tickle. Rubbed all over body for spirit-attack fever.  
Contraceptive ingredient.

LAHINE lily  
Contraceptive ingredient.

LAKUE (Indonesian: lengkuas) galangal  
alpinia galanga, zingiberaceae  
Rubbed on *belua* (tinea versicolor). Contraceptive ingredient.

LASE (Indonesian: duku)  
lansium domesticum corr., meliaceae  
Leaf infusion for shivering fever. Bark boiled and water drunk for malaria. Cooled leaf infusion for cough. Bark boiled and decoction mixed with coconut oil and drunk as purgative for poisoning.

LAWAYÖ MBELA (Indonesian: sente)  
alocasia macrorrhiza, araceae  
Juice of fruits applied to boils. Stems repel *bechu*, and can be rubbed on wounded or stung skin.



LIMO (Indonesian: jeruk)

Juice drunk with egg yolk and sugar for poisoning.

LIMO SARI

As *limo* above.

LU'U, BULU

Dried, burnt, and ashes mixed into massage-oil for spirit-attack.

MAGI (Indonesian: mangga) mango

*garcinia mangostana* L., *guttiferae*

Fruit gives appetite to sick. Heats stomach.

MALIMBE (Indonesian: belimbing manis) starfruit

*averrhoa carambola* L., *oxalidaceae*

Fruit cooling.

MALIMBI SAISÖ (Indonesian: belimbing wuluh)

*averrhoa bilimbi* L., *oxalidaceae*

Leaf infusion drunk for high blood pressure.

MAZIAMBU (Indonesian: jambu perawas) guava

*psidium guajava* L., *myrtaceae*

Leaf infusion drunk for stomach ache; also to wash out sick eye.

MONDRA (Indonesian: bangle) purple ginger

*zingiber purpureum*, *zingiberaceae*

For cough root squeezed in cool water, mixed with sugar and drunk. Root repels *bechu*. Root chewed in sirih for blocked labour. Root grated into water and drunk for intestinal worms.

MÖMÖMBATU (Indonesian: patikan cina)

*euphorbia thymifolia* L., *euphorbiaceae*

Rubbed on chest as medicine for lungs.

NA'A (Indonesian: nangka) jackfruit

*artocarpus heterophylla* Lamk., *moraceae*

Leaves roasted and compressed on heart for shortness of breath.

NANDULO (or NAZALÖU) (Indonesian: andong)

*cordyline fruticosa*, *liliaceae*

Planted to repel *bechu*. Leaf tea with salt drunk to dissolve "clotted blood lumps."

#### NDRARA, BULU

Bitter root sliced, pounded, and rubbed on for fever, dysentery, spirit-attack, malaria.

#### NDRURU-NDRURU

Leaf tea wash for spirit-attack. Fistful of leaves pounded in coconut water with sugar to cool poison.

#### NDURU-NDURU (Indonesian: senggani)

*melastoma candidum* d.don., *melastomaceae*

Drops of sap from cut stem used as eye medicine. Tips mixed with egg yolk and rubbed on top of head for *agabila*.

#### OLALU

Tips pounded with sugar and egg yolk to cool stomach.

#### ONO GAE (Indonesian: anak pisang) banana shoot

*musa* spp., *musaceae*

Used crushed in head compress for *fa'aukhu*. Pounded in warm water and drunk for stomach ache. Variety known as *ono gae bo'ole* pounded and mixed with egg yolk for bloody diarrhoea; and tip pounded, heated in fire and dipped in kerosene, then pressed on *hele-hele dödö* for *fökhö dödö*.

#### O'O (Indonesian: alang-alang)

*imperata cylindrica* l., *poaceae*

Leaves squeezed in water and drunk for cough. Leaves pounded and mixed with water, then smeared on head of sick person for spirit-attack.

#### RAMBUTA (Indonesian: rambutan)

*nephelium lappaceum* l., *sapindaceae*

Tips of leaves pounded and squeezed in hot salty water, then drunk for body pains and distended stomach.

#### RAWA-RAWA

Leaves squeezed in hot water, then drunk for malaria and worms.

#### RIGI-RIGI (Indonesian: ) maize

Cob cores burnt to charcoal and then drunk in water for diarrhoea.

#### RUKU-RUKU (Indonesian: selasih) holy basil

*ocimum sanctum* l., *lamiaceae*

Leaves increase quantity of lactation.

**SARE** (Indonesian: serai) citronella  
cymbopogon citratus, poaceae  
Stalks cooked and chewed for toothache.

**SEKHULA** (Indonesian: kelapa muda) young coconut  
cocos nucifera l., palmaceae  
Uncooked coconut milk drunk for cough. Coconut water mixed with sugar for measles, as general cooling medicine for the sick. Coconut oil often used as base for other herbal medicines, whether rubbed on externally or drunk. Also vehicle for more magical remedies such as with bezoar stones, or dissolved ashes of azimat spells. Male (unholed) end of coconut shell wood burnt and ashes mixed in water with *sewawa*, then drunk, and grounds applied externally for fever. Male coconut shell wood also used in smoking out *bechu* from patient.

**SEWAWA**  
Chewed in sirih for blocked labour.

**SIKACO**  
Chewed on sirih for blocked labour.

**SIKHÖ MAO** (Indonesian: kapasan)  
hibiscus abelmoschus l., malvaceae  
Powdered root used in compress for stomach ache.

**SIKUCI** (Indonesian: kumis kucing)  
orthosiphon aristatus, lamiaceae  
Tea for exhaustion and overwork.

**SILA'ÖTA, BULU**  
Leaves poulticed onto sprains or broken bones. Pounded and infused for exhaustion (*cido*).

**SILADRE** (Indonesian: selderi) chinese celery  
Eaten for high blood pressure.

**SITOTO'ENE** (Indonesian: kenengen)  
Infusion of leaves drunk for difficulty urinating.

**SOWUA BADU'I** (Indonesian: meniran)  
Leaf tea cooled and drunk for malaria, as gargle or mouthwash for tonsillitis and toothache.

**SOWUA ZITAORA**  
Leaf tea washed on skin for chickenpox.

SÖMA-SÖMA BUAYA (Indonesian: bunga pagoda)

*clerodendrum japonicum*, verbenaceae

Leaves roasted, mixed into soup and drunk as cooling medicine. Leaf infusion drunk for stomach ache. Leaves roasted in banana leaves and rubbed on skin for malaria.

SÖNDRU, BULU

Leaves pounded and smoothed on body for body or stomach pain. Tips infused and drunk and rubbed on for bronchial asthma and respiratory infections, to lower fever. Vapour 'smokes out' *bechu*.

SÖSA (Indonesian: ketepung cina)

*cassia alata* L., caesalpiniaceae

Leaves rubbed on skin for tinea and ringworm.

SÖSÖMA (Indonesian: kembang sepatu) *hibiscus*

*hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, malvaceae

Leaves, dried, powdered, and packed on sprains.

SÖSÖMA TOROSI (Indonesian: kembang sepatu sungsang)

*hibiscus schizopetalus*, malvaceae

Leaf tea as cooling medicine and drunk for coughs.

SUKHU (Indonesian: pipping)

tips ingredient of measles medicine (infused).

SUKHU-SUKHU MBAWI (Indonesian: ilalang)

*setaria faberii* Herrm., poaceae

Stems boiled with pork and drunk for *bere-bere*.

TAWUO (Indonesian: sirih) betel

*piper betle* L., piperaceae

Cold leaf tea with salt for toothache rinse. Contraceptive ingredient. Chewed against nausea.

TUKA MANU (Indonesian: jengger ayam)

*celosia cristata* L., amaranthaceae

Leaf tea drunk for bloody diarrhoea.

TURUWA (Indonesian: kencur) galangal

*kaempferia galanga* L., zingiberaceae

Grated and juice applied to skin for tinea, and other fungal skin infections.

UFU-UFU

Leaf infusion cools poisons.

UNDRE (Indonesian: kunyit) turmeric

*curcuma domestica*, zingiberaceae

Juice of roots ingested and spread on skin to repel *bechu*, and cool *tesafo*, also for dressing scabies. Contraceptive ingredient.

ZAU-ZAU

Leaf tea wash for spirit-attack.

ZIRÖ, ZIRÖ SAITÖ (Indonesian: jintan, jintan hitam) caraway, black caraway

Both used as contraceptive ingredient.

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