

Politicians and Magicians: Power, Adaptive Strategies, and Syncretism in the Central Moluccas'

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Part of the once fabled Spice Islands, the Central Moluccas rose to prominence not so much because of their spices, but because of their central location between those regions making them, and especially the island of Ambon, the ideal place for transshipment. Cloves were known in ancient Rome, and wave after wave of foreign traders and adventurers, Malays, Chinese, Arabs, Indians, Spaniards, Portuguese, and finally the Dutch, came to the Moluccan shores in search of spices.

Thus, throughout their long, eventful history Ambonese were not only confronted by foreigners but also exposed to or subjected to their different and often more advanced, socio-cultural systems. The Ambonese were still headhunters when Hinduism was first introduced from the Javanese empire of Madjapahit. Islam began its conquest in the latter part of the fifteenth century, only to be checked by Catholicism brought by the Portuguese in 1511.² After Dutch arrival in 1605, Protestantism was introduced. The transformation of Ambonese society continued as the people adjusted themselves to the Dutch colonial policy and drifting economic interest in the Indies. Finally, the birth of the new Indonesian nation in 1950 again forced the Ambonese to reconsider the premises on which their society was built.

As a result of these patterns of historical contact the Ambonese socio-cultural complex resembles a building, erected centuries ago, whose foundations are still clearly visible but to which new rooms, stories, and styles have been added. The roof has been replaced, the walls patched up, yet the structure retains its distinctive and unique character. And while standing there, contemplating the wonder, one can detect workmen still busily adding and refurbishing. Similarly, the Ambonese socio-cultural system is made up of a perplexing variety of indigenous and borrowed elements—the legacy of many epochs of history. In addition, processes of "modernization" (here defined as adaptation to a changing social environment), are still in flux and new elements are steadily borrowed and incorporated into Ambonese society.

The selective integration of some foreign elements and the rejection of others, obviously related, have often puzzled and frustrated Western observers concerned with modernization and development. Particularly perplexing are times when new ideas or institutions are absorbed with relative ease while contradictory pre-existing notions are maintained. One common mistake made by Westerners is thinking that what is logically related in their system should he logically relate in another. However, it is clear that such relationships are not necessarily obvious to the borrower, or in many cases are of no interest to him. The borrower does not judge the merits of Western institutions in Western terms, but he interprets them in ways that make sense to him in terms of his own culture.

1 The field research on which this paper is based was undertaken in 1974-75 under the auspices of Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (The Indonesian Academy of Sciences) in Jakarta. During this period I was supported by a Fulbright-Hays Award for Pre-Doctoral Research and a grant-in-aid from the London-Cornell Project for East and Southeast Asian Studies. To all of these bodies I am indebted. I also would like to thank A. Thomas Kirsch and Robert J. Smith for their comments and criticism.

2 In the sixteenth century the Portuguese converted all villages that had resisted Islam except for the interior of Seram. This area was of no interest to the Portuguese nor the Dutch and was only subjugated shortly before World

Let us take a very simple example, that of the huge statistical charts found in so many offices of Ambonese village chiefs. In terms of Western statistics the charts are often quite useless, but this is not the point. The village chief adopted them not out of an interest in demography but because they represent an important aspect of his power as a legitimate representative of the Indonesian government. Wall charts, typewriters, letters of appointment, and other modern attributes of power are supplementing traditional indicators such as possession of certain magical charms, an elevated "throne" in the church, or a reserved space in a mosque. From the chief's point of view these attributes complement one another even though they seem incongruous to us.

It is the relationship between power and the absorption of new culture elements with which I am primarily concerned here. In the Ambonese context, those social fields, politics, religion, and magic, which are especially congested with beliefs, customs, or institutions derived from different systems and epochs, are precisely those fields that are highly charged with power, material or supernatural. It is my hypothesis that there is a close relationship between Ambonese conceptions of power and the Ambonese willingness to both adopt new allochthonous culture elements and maintain older, even contradictory ones. I propose that when newcomers with whom they could not deal in terms of their traditional knowledge of the world confronted Ambonese, they did not directly compare the adequacy of their socio-cultural system with that of the foreigners; nor did they consider that the new system might invalidate their own. Instead they interpreted the seeming superiority of the challenges in terms of an imbalance in access to power. In the eyes of the Ambonese it was not the superiority of the new systems that resulted in their dominance but rather the fact that foreigners had access to previously unknown sources of power. While there may be many reasons to accept new culture elements, the quest for power was one of the most crucial in determining which new elements were absorbed and eventually "syncretized" into the system, and which traditional elements were preserved.³

The Concept of Power in Ambonese Society

For the Ambonese, power is an internal force that is something intrinsic to a person or object. It is a kind of magical force that is basically indescribable, amorphous, and intangible; yet it is "concrete" in the sense that it is an entity in the universe.⁴ Traditionally, power is contained in all aspects of nature, organic and inorganic. Men, ancestors, spirits, animals, and plants all have certain powers, as do rocks, springs, winds, and the heavenly bodies. Power can also be present in such man-made objects as weapons, talismans, and heirlooms, and it may be manifest in spoken words and in social positions. The amount of this impersonal force contained in things or beings, (even if of the same kind or class) varies and reveals itself through its efficacy. A man's physical prowess and courage, or the effectiveness of a sword or lance, are not only external signs of but are also measurement of the strength of this inner power.

Man is in a position to control or manipulate other powers, including those of other men. Indeed, in headhunting times, he had to do so in order to assure his own survival. Periodically he had to tap someone's power to renew his own and to assure the prosperity and fertility of his group and his crops. To increase his own life power, he had to go out and take it away from someone else. The headhunter had to kill in order to live, a hazardous but vital undertaking.

³ I have discussed processes of syncretism between new and old culture elements in another paper (Bartels 1976).

⁴ The reader will notice certain similarities between Ambonese conceptions of power and ideas of power in other parts of Indonesia, e.g., those outlined in detail for Java by Anderson (1972: 7-8 and throughout). It should be pointed out that in the Central Moluccas, on the crossroads between Indonesia and Melanesia, ideas about power have never become as elaborated as in Java and that the Ambonese concept is perhaps more closely related to the Melanesian concept of *mana*. (For a very concise summary of *mana*, see Hoebel 1966:468-469.)

In the same manner, other forces have to be dealt with, and can be tapped, manipulated, and controlled for human purposes. The proper handling of weapons brings victory in battle and success in hunting. The possession of certain stones insures invulnerability. The ancestors, founders of human law, can be controlled by adhering to their rules of life and propitiating them if their law is broken. Ancestors can also be employed to offset the power of others, e.g., they can actively aid in war or they can protect a village from evil spirits. In addition, the power of spirits which bring sickness and death, can be checked if one knows the correct magical formula, and by knowing the secret of spirit control one can redirect their powers to bring sickness to one's enemies. Power, in this sense is amoral; it can be used positively or negatively, depending on a person's intentions. Spirits and sorcerers abuse it; ancestors and curers usually handle it in a beneficent way, though occasionally the reverse can happen. Morality resides not in power but within the user or abuser of it. Others judge such a person in terms of the traditional or adopted codes of ethics thought to be applicable in a particular context.

Not everyone can control traditional powers or dares to do so since most are considered dangerous. The acquisition of many powers is subject to certain rules and sometimes reserved for people in certain social positions. However, when it comes to tapping new, previously unknown powers, the rules are suspended, or rather, at least initially, no rules govern their acquisition. Thus new powers can be attained by *anyone*, regardless of previous position in society and this can have a great effect on the social structure.

The crucial element in gaining access to any kind of power, traditional or new, is to find the right "key" for its manipulation and control. *Kunci*, the Malay word for key, is actually used nowadays to describe the words or objects needed to unlock esoteric knowledge in general, or open the way to the specific secret powers of someone or something else. But it is not merely sufficient to get the key. One must also use it in exactly the prescribed way. In the control of traditional sources of power, the precise repetition of a given formula or the exact reiteration of a prescribed ritual assures success, while minute change in detail may jeopardize the undertaking. In their initial attempts to handle new powers, the Ambonese therefore assumed by analogy that they could achieve the same results as foreigners by the precise imitation of their behavior.

Thus the Ambonese adapted, and often consciously searched out those elements of the intrusive systems, which they thought to be the key to the new power or powers in areas which a deficiency was felt or where an increase of power was considered advantageous. In previous periods, the lack of power was felt in different social fields. It also affected individuals, the whole group, or both. Typically, however, the Ambonese tried to maintain, improve, or rejoin their personal and social dignity; preserve their personal status and prestige; and improve their social identity by gaining access to some of the new sources of power. But whatever the motivation, the results were the same, namely that new elements were incorporated into the Ambonese system at particular points in their history.

The Accumulation of Political Power

Let us now continue the discussion on a less abstract level by looking at some concrete examples drawn from Ambonese political history which illustrate the tapping and absorption of new power. Although the history of Hinduism in the Central Moluccas still lies pretty much in the dark. Ambonese oral tradition and archaeological evidence suggest that Javanese princelings from Madjapahit and Tuban were able to establish small kingdoms in the Moluccas, prior to the sixteenth century. Generally, the effect of Hinduism on Ambonese life seems to have been

minimal and headhunting remained central to their life. Certain Hindu-Javanese political ideas and institutions did become widely accepted, and although modified, remain part of Ambonese culture today. The position of village chief was either introduced in this era, or at least considerably elevated with the adoption of Hindu titles, such as *raja* or *patih* for the village heads. The concept of *sakti*, i.e. the belief that *raja* or kings were filled with special hereditary supernatural powers, was adopted. For the Ambonese this concept represented an elaboration of their own belief that war leaders or other officials possessed certain magical powers. The only difference was that the source of this new power was believed to emanate directly either from the Hindu statues, *lingga*⁵, or the deities represented by them. These deities and their representations later fell victim to the High Gods of Islam and Christianity, but the concept of *sakti* has survived until the present and is particularly important in Moslem villages where the *raja* has both the political and religious authority.

The history of Islam in the Moluccas also remains to be written. Because of the uncertainties surrounding the advent of Islam, it can only be speculated that Islam was tapped as a new source of power by Ambonese kingdoms when conflicts arose among them. This may have occurred at one point in relation to the struggle for supremacy between the two most powerful Northern Moluccan empires, Ternate and Tidore, as both seemed to have commanded the loyalty of parts of the Ambonese population. Whatever the reasons for the acceptance of Islam, Allah, who had bestowed such great wealth on his believers, must have been quite an imposing source of power to Ambonese. This source was made even more attractive because of the straightforward and readily comprehensible requirements for tapping it. The *raja* also could enhance his personal powers through the adoption of Islam since it made no distinctions between political and spiritual power. With Islam the *raja* became the direct link and mediator between Allah and his subjects, enabling him to completely and exclusively control this most powerful of all sources of power. In addition, in some cases it appears that the Ambonese did not merely accept the new religion but adopted its proponents as well. Islamic immigrants were occasionally installed as village chiefs, possibly because they possessed the greatest knowledge about the new power⁶.

The Portuguese, who were singularly unsuccessful in early attempts to convert Moslems to Catholicism, also at first had no more luck among pagans. Sixteen years after their arrival they crushingly defeated a large flotilla of Javanese, Bandanese, and Makasarese vessels, leaving the Islamic kingdom of Hitu for Ternate; and at that point several pagan village states asked for baptism. Within a few decades most non-Islamic villages, outside the interior of Seram, followed suit (Schurhammer 1963: 663-665).

Some of the reasons for this sudden conversion seem fairly obvious. The Moslems apparently had the pagans on the run, and the pagans saw in the Portuguese a strong ally that they could play off against their enemies. From a pragmatic point of view, friendship with the Portuguese meant access to physical power. The Portuguese, although few in number, owned and could possibly supply them with weapons superior to their own lances and machetes. Such weapons were badly needed, as the Moslems already possessed some muskets and cannons⁷.

5 These statues were apparently worshiped until the seventeenth century (see Rumphius 1910 (2): 991 and Valentijn 1726 (3): 4-5). Tichelman reported the discovery of a golden Shiva image in Amahai, Seram (1960:177)

6 Some Moslem village heads trace their descent to places like Baghdad, Egypt, Pasei (Sumatra), Malacca, etc. Since such claims do not seem to be politically advantageous, as a claim to descent in direct line from the Prophet would be, and since those places are not particularly holy to Islam, it is doubtful that they are spurious. It is not clear if these early Moslem immigrants were always voluntarily taken on as *raja* or not, but intermarriages probably played an important role.

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Superior weaponry is one cultural element, which has rarely met with much resistance when diffused from one society to another, and Ambon was no exception.

Yet access to physical power hardly seems a sufficient reason for the acceptance of Catholicism and the Portuguese were in no position to force their religion upon the Ambonese. It seems likely that the Ambonese "pagans" accepted Christianity after the great sea battle because the outcome demonstrated the superior powers of the Christian God. How else could the Portuguese, far out numbered, fighting an enemy who had the same weapons, be so invincible? Obviously, they had great protective "magical" powers at their disposal. The natives could even witness the transfer of this power in the form of the Holy bread and wine given to the foreigners by their priests. These priests claimed that they were consuming their God's flesh and blood to give them strength, a concept not altogether alien to head-hunters who on occasion drank the blood or ate the brains of slain enemies for the same reason.

Thus, through baptism the Ambonese hoped to tap this superior source of power and regain a balance of strength with the Moslems. Christianity offered an alternative source of power in their attempts to fight off political annexation. The *rajas*, usually the first to convert, were also able to borrow some of the political power of the Portuguese through baptism and thus enhance their personal status and prestige. Their godfathers, often high Portuguese officials, not only bestowed the honorific of "Dom" upon them but also gave them Christian first names as well as their own surnames. Commoners only received a Christian first name. When Sinapatti, *Raja* of Nusaniwe, was baptized, he took on the name Dom Thomas de Soysa⁸. Similarly other titles like *capitão*, for a war leader, were adopted for other *adat* officials.

Once the Portuguese were firmly established in the region, their rule became oppressive to both Moslems and Christians. But despite attempts by both groups to rid themselves of the Portuguese, Catholicism remained firmly entrenched. Some Christian villages converted to Islam as a matter of political strategy, but sooner or later were forcibly reconverted. Force also resulted in the conversion of some Moslem villages to Christianity. In general even under great pressure from both sides at various times, villages steadfastly held on to that religion which they had first adopted.

The arrival of the first Dutch ships in the Central Moluccas gave new hope to the Ambonese. The Dutch were not only welcomed but actually actively courted to come and settle.⁹ After the Dutch ousted the Portuguese in 1605, the transition from Catholicism to Dutch Calvinist Protestantism was smooth. The form of the religious service was changed, but many Catholic customs (for example, wearing black robes to church) still continued. Politically the situation soon reverted to conditions that prevailed in Portuguese times.

Initially, the Ambonese estimated that the Dutch were in possession of a power even superior to that of the Portuguese and they saw them as the key to regaining their own independence. They were correct in their first estimation but sadly mistaken in their second. Shortly after the Dutch had established themselves, they tried to impose the infamous Spice Monopoly. This act was fiercely resented not only by the Moslems who controlled most of the clove regions, but also by the Christians who were forced to supply war vessels and warriors to fight against any village resisting the Dutch. During the so-called Ambonese Wars between 1622

an important role.

8 De Soysa is derived from the Portuguese name de Souza. These Portuguese names were never rescinded and many *raja* clans of the Letimor peninsula of Ambon still bear the Ambonized names of the godfathers of their ancestors, e.g., de Quelyu (Portuguese: de Coelho), Loppies, Lopis, (Lopez), Gaspers (Gasparis), etc. However, not all Portuguese names were bestowed upon their carriers, some go back to intermarriage (Abdurachman 1973:139).

9 Rumphius (1910 (1):22) reports an Ambonese delegation was sent to Java to ask the Dutch to return to Ambon shortly after they had first appeared in Moluccan waters.

and 1656 the Central Moluccan population was decimated and hundreds of thousands of clove trees were extirpated. Moslems and Christians often fought side-by-side, but the Dutch were usually able, as the Portuguese had been before them, to play one group against the other. During this period no new spiritual forces could be tapped, Christianity declined, and the old *adat* powers were revived.

The following 150 years were marked by oppression and exploitation. All resistance by the Ambonese was in vain. After the British interregnum, the last large-scale rebellion, involving both Christians and Moslems, broke out but was quickly crushed. Soon, gradual but very decisive changes occurred in Dutch Ambonese relations. The Dutch, in expanding their operations in the western part of Indonesia, needed an ever-increasing administrative and military apparatus. The main regions for recruiting personnel were Christian areas, especially the Central Moluccas, since in Dutch eyes Christians could be trusted more than anyone else.

To prepare low-level administrators and soldiers, an increasing number of schools were opened to educate Christian children. The use of the local language was forbidden. Instruction was in Malay and later also in Dutch. Since the importance of cloves had long since declined and the region was economically destitute, the Ambonese Christians seized their chance. They wished not only to improve themselves economically, but also regain a sense of destiny, a sense of self-respect, and respect by others.

Christianity and Western education became the keys to the new power the Dutch offered. Dutch attempts to revive Christianity were readily accepted and soon the Christians spoke of themselves as possessing a *pangkat Serani* (rank of Christian) that was closest to the rank of European and above everyone else (Kraemer 1958:14). They also referred to their religion as *Agama Ambon* (Ambonese religion) and they walled it off from other Christians who were a potential threat to their privileged position within the Dutch colonial system. The most notable effort at exclusion was directed against Chinese Christians who were, at times, refused access to the main church in Ambon on the grounds that they were not Ambonese (Kraemer 1958:20).

Similarly, Western education was readily adopted not because of a sudden thirst for knowledge, but to gain status. The large number of schools in Ambon City was insufficient "to meet the catastrophic rage for learning Dutch." Unemployment among graduates from these schools was very high and most returned to their villages as idlers because they had achieved a status which precluded working with their hands. From this, it becomes clear that it was not merely economic mobility that drove Ambonese on; economic considerations were merely one aspect of the quest for status and prestige. In effect Ambonese Christians were striving to gain the same powers as the Dutch possessed. Eventually they came to perceive themselves as "Black Dutchmen" and their region as the "Twelfth Province of The Netherlands." They saw the Dutch as the source of all mundane and spiritual power. As evidence for this one can cite the initial refusal of Ambonese Christians to accept administration of the sacraments by a native minister. The transfer of the sacraments from a white hand was equated with the transfer of "white power," and when the sacraments were held in a black hand it was believed that they had lost much effectiveness (Tutuarima 1960:155).

Prior to this period, the village leader had been most instrumental in the adaptation of new elements, but with the specific needs of the colonial government power was open to everyone and it seemed as though every Christian scrambled for it. This resulted in a considerable loss of status for the *raja*. If the hypothesis about the relationship between the access to power and the acceptance of new culture elements is to hold up, it is to be expected that the Ambonese Moslems, in imitation of their Christian brothers, would try to improve their position by demanding access

to Western education. The Moslem *raja* actually succeeded in achieving this end while at the same time preventing similar advancement among their subjects.

The Moslem *raja*, the pivotal figure in his village as both spiritual and secular head of his community, was also the main link to the Dutch administration. Therefore, the Dutch decreed that the children of these Moslem *rajas* could attend Dutch schools but the commoners could not. The *raja* quickly realized the advantages of this ingenious policy. Their new status was raised to the same level as that of the Christians, which was as much as they ever could hope for; and at the same time their exclusive access to Western education further enhanced their power and status within their own villages. For this reason, they had a vested interest in keeping the status quo, and actively or passively discouraging any aspirations of their subjects to gain access to Western education. They were not willing to share their key to power.¹⁰

The present-day situation in Ambon is very complex. The Ambonese Christians, once at the top of the native hierarchy throughout Indonesia, had maneuvered themselves into a very narrow socio-ecological niche. Because of their cooperation with the Dutch they fell the hardest after Indonesian independence. With the Central Moluccan region they lost their distinctiveness and at the moment they are struggling to keep ahead of the Moslems. Just as Christianity furthered their ambitions during Dutch times, Islam fulfills the same role for their Moslem brothers today. Both groups perceive education, now available to everyone, as the key to personal and social advancement.

Today the scramble for political power and social recognition involves not only Ambonese Christians and Moslems but also ethnic groups from both the Southern and Northern Moluccas. Strategies vary; some people have turned inward to search for power in the traditional culture, others look to the new state of Indonesia, some even try to tap directly sources of power beyond the Indonesian horizon. Leaving the internal struggle aside, most Ambonese agree that their society has to survive in a modern world. "Development" and "up-grading" have become the new catchwords. Significantly, the English term "up-grading" which arrived in Ambon via Java clearly demonstrates that the Ambonese still perceive the differences between their own socio-cultural system and those of more advanced societies in quantitative rather than qualitative terms. I have tried to show that this has been true throughout Ambonese history, and I have suggested that in the field of politics this has meant the absorption of those foreign culture elements that were believed to restore the balance of power.

The Persistence of Traditional Sources of Power

As previously stated, traditional sources of power in Ambonese society have remained remarkably stable despite the adoption of new ones. Ancestors and spirits have survived persecution by Portuguese friars, torture of those believing in them by Dutch ministers, and they still hold their own against reform-minded Ambonese church leaders. In the Moslem community it was always easier to acknowledge the existence of evil spirits since they were recognized in Islamic cosmology. The ancestors were protected by the isolation of Ambonese Islam from the mainstream of Moslem thought during Dutch times and this is still strongly felt despite reformist influences.

¹⁰ It was partially for the same reason that many Moslem *raja* sided with the Christians in an attempt to set up the independent RMS in 1950. The loss of power, the fear of "drowning in a Moslem sea," and the threat of a massacre by Javanese troops taking revenge for the Christian support of the Dutch, were some major reasons for the declaration of an independent South Maluku.

The coexistence of the ancestors and God can be partially explained by the way the Ambonese view the diffusion of power. God has a certain quantity of power but the ancestors, among other forces, also have command over power. Power is cumulative and the use of one source does not negate the use of another. As a matter of fact, employing both sources of power may be doubly effective.

In pre-European times, and until the last rebellions against the Dutch, the war leader seems often to have had greater powers than the *raja* and his office certainly preceded that of *raja* in traditional society. Formerly, his title was *malessy* but in Portuguese times it was changed to *Kapitan*, clearly in an attempt to gain the same prestige, if not the wondrous powers of the seemingly superior Portuguese *capitão*.¹¹ But while the war leaders "upgraded" their position by taking on the new title and the new religion of their Portuguese models, they did not let go of the traditional magical powers they gained from certain weapons and amulets which made them courageous and invincible. Even though the office of *Kapitan* has become largely non-functional after Dutch pacification, individuals with such titles are still believed to have great power and other villagers often fear them. In the event of inter-village feuds, increasingly on the rise in Ambon because of land pressure, they go with their fellow villagers to the church or mosque to pray for God's help. Afterwards they go to sacred places to implore the help of the ancestors. Often, when the Ambonese are in need of power beyond human capacity, they request aid from both God and the ancestors.

One important factor in the persistence to belief in ancestors is that they fill a void between men and the rather remote abstract God of both Islam and Protestantism. In Ambonese Islam they have taken on the role which Islamic saints have elsewhere. Similarly, among Protestants they have a role like that of Catholic patron saints—it would have been interesting to see what would have happened if Catholicism had remained. Another factor accounting for the persistence of ancestors is that they are a reality to believers. Ancestors and spirits are not a fiction of the mind, as Westerners like to think; but rather Ambonese, including many religious officials, can see, meet, and communicate with them. It is only presently that high leaders of the church, in their attempts to gain equal status and prestige within the world community of churches, have begun to deny the power of the ancestors. Some Moslem reformers do so also, but it will probably be technology that will finally drive them away.

Absorption of Power in the Field of Curing

So far, I have discussed the concept of power mainly in the political field. Now I want to give some brief glimpses into a very different field, curing, to show that the concept of absorption of power is not limited to one socio-cultural arena. The traditional healer, the *dukun*, or as he is usually called in Ambon, the *orang baruba*¹², also had to continuously adapt himself to the new realities of the changing social environment. Islam and Christianity brought new ways and new powers of healing. A prayer by a sick individual, or more effectively by a religious official, was a new alternative to the traditional magical formulae used by the curer. Ambonese Christians also seized on what they saw as the magical qualities of bread and wine dispensed by Holy Communion. These were believed to give people special strength and were brought home from church to be given to the sick in order to restore their health (Kraemer 1958:21). Religious officials, on the other hand, perform rites of exorcism in order to rid a person of evil spirits.

11 The term *Kapitan* has become so deeply rooted in Ambonese society that many people claim that it is an indigenous term, and the term *malessy* was the title of the *Kapitan's* deputy.

12 From Indonesian *orang berobat*, literally, "person administering medicine."

In Moslem society, it was the *raja* whose pre-Islamic spiritual powers were elaborated as he became the religious head of his community. In Christian society, it was the minister who infringed on the domain of the *dukun*. The *dukun*, however, seem not to have fought the new powers but rather added them to their repertoire. Jesus and Mohammed were used as familiars alongside certain ancestors and spirits. Ambonese saw the Bible or the Koran in general, as the key to the secret of the superior powers of the foreigners. The very books themselves possessed magical powers, much as their own *pusaka* (sacred ancestral heirlooms). Therefore the *dukun* added these books to the other paraphernalia used for healing. Verses from the Koran or the Bible were used in the same fashion as traditional magical formulae adding more power to their healing efficacy. The sorcerers (*suanggi*) also tapped the same sources of power using them to make their enemies ill.

In a typical healing ritual, the *dukun* starts out with a prayer, asking God for help and then proceeds to pronounce one of his traditional formulae over a glass of water that is then charged with power. The formulae are given to him either directly by an ancestor appearing in a dream, or handed down through his descent line. The patient then drinks this water at specific times and sometimes follows various other instructions in order to get well again. In other cases, certain plants, especially ginger, are used. This is rubbed on the patient after the procedure preceding the drinking of the water. One Christian healer told me that by "speaking" over the water, it changes into the blood of Christ. The point is that the curer draws on both traditional and Christian powers to reach his desired results.

Western medicine, long eyed with utmost suspicion, for fear that the Dutch might use it for sinister purposes, is becoming increasingly acceptable to the Ambonese. From a Western viewpoint, this should pose a new threat to the art of the *dukun*. He has accepted Western medicine and tapped its powers. Some healers start their traditional diagnosis now by feeling the pulse of the patient. When, in one case, his young westernized patient was startled by this procedure, the *dukun* told him he does so in order to find out what kind of spirit has entered him. Some healers use stethoscopes and even administer shots as part of their traditional healing procedure.

Such additions are used not merely to imitate Western medicine in order to ward off its onslaught on the *dukun's* profession, but they are also selectively incorporated because they add to the healer's power to cure—just as the borrowings from Christianity and Islam did. As a matter of fact, the healer generally does not see the doctor as a real competitor, nor do doctors usually see healers in this light. Rather, a split in the science of curing has occurred; the curer continues to be the expert on sickness caused by angry ancestors, sorcerers, and evil spirits; while the doctor cures "natural" sickness caused by bacteria and viruses.

The *orang baruba* sometimes send their patients to doctors and doctors sometimes refer their patients to the *dukun*. For example, one excellent young Ambonese doctor, a Moslem, told me of a child who came to him with a tumor on his mouth. The doctor said that he had treated many cases like this with antibiotics and every time the swelling disappeared within a few days. But whatever he tried on the child, nothing helped. He finally referred the patient to a famous Christian *dukun* who "spoke" over water and the child was cured only a few days after he drank it. The doctor merely shrugged his shoulders, saying that all his medicine is useless if the cause of the illness is a spirit.

Perhaps the clearest examples of the selective use of power, any power, are to be found in the behaviors of the patients themselves. While there is still some hesitation in villages, some fear the unknown, which often makes the villagers prefer the *dukun* to the doctor, the increasing acceptance of Western medicine has not ceased. The usual pattern among people who have access

to hospitals, doctors or medics, is to go there first and if they do not obtain the desired results, they go back to the *orang baruba* for help. In their desperation, they are willing to try any source of power, traditional or modern. The end result of such behavior is that the modern source of power is slowly integrated into the system, even though, as we, have seen with politics and religion, the traditional sources often continue to remain effective. In the field of curing, the *dukun* will be useful as long as there are *suanggi*, evil spirits and angry ancestors who must be dealt with.

Conclusion

Over the years the Ambonese responded to the threat that foreign socio-cultural systems posed to their own. They did this not by wholesale questioning of their beliefs and customs but rather by trying to expand their socio-cultural universe in order to make it viable again in the new changing and changed environment. This was accomplished, more or less successfully by two means. On one hand the Ambonese selectively adapted and absorbed new systems, concepts, and ideas, which they thought to contain the powers that their own systems lacked. This selectivity explains the presence of many seemingly unrelated elements from different cultures in the fields we have discussed.

On the other hand, traditional beliefs and customs centering on power were not simply replaced, but continued to be valid and enhanced by new borrowings. Examples of this process may be found in the war leader who added a new title, tapped God's power through prayer and yet still relied on the magic of his ancestors; in the *orang baruba* who depends on God and his magic and adds Western medicine; and, on a general level, in all Ambonese who see no contradiction in placing their fate in the hands of both God and their ancestors. The view that power is cumulative, that it is refracted and reintegrated to meet one's needs, explains the survival of traditional beliefs and institutions in fields where the most intensive pressure from competing systems was felt. In fact it was actually in these very fields that most adaptations occurred.

The selective absorption of new culture elements often appears to the outside observer as a series of random efforts or desperate attempts, to prop up the traditional socio-cultural system in the face of the overbearing weight of a more "modern" one. The selective and seemingly superficial modernization, which is by no means confined to Ambon, has often been interpreted as a stumbling block to social change and reform. By looking at these conservative tendencies in a historical perspective, as I have attempted to do here, it appears that this type of neo-traditionalism may actually be an important factor in facilitating rather than constraining social change.

The elements periodically absorbed by the Ambonese were, precisely because of their potency, dynamic elements like Islam, Christianity, and certain aspects of Western secularism. These caused and are still causing profound changes once they became part of the system. Once new and greater powers are evoked and unleashed, they usually tend to evolve into the "dominant" form of power as was the case with Islam and Christianity and is now increasingly true with Western secularism. However, this tendency does not mean that one system simply replaces the other over time but rather that the result is a new system which still resembles its parent systems but is quite different from both.

Occasionally, the reverse process occurs, namely the return to traditional sources of power when new ones do not work. Tendencies in this direction can be found among both Christians and Moslems, who, after the collapse of the colonial system and the *Republik Maluku Selatan* (RMS), searched for new strength and a new cultural identity in *adat*. Perhaps this search is a necessary stage prior to confronting a new, a known situation. At times this "relapse" into

traditional patterns can be quite literal and spontaneous as the following anecdote illustrates. Although it may be apocryphal, this anecdote 's greatly appreciated by the Ambonese Christians and Moslem and it also captures the essence of Ambonese ideas about power and as such seems to provide a fitting conclusion to this paper.

Some time ago, an Ambonese Protestant minister was sent as a missionary to a small island in the South Moluccas which then was still "heathen." He tried to convert these islanders using every persuasive argument he knew. He pointed out the superior power of the Christian God over their deities, but in vein. The natives were rather annoyed but finally their *raja* promised that they would accept Christianity if the minister could prove the superior powers of his God. He agreed to do so. They decided that both the minister and the *raja* would ask God and the native deities, respectively, to set a mango tree afire. If the minister succeeded, the islanders would convert, if not, or if the natives succeeded, they would take his head. Each had 30 minutes to complete the task. The *raja* had the first turn but nothing happened. When the minister's turn came he closed his eyes to be able to pray intensively. When he opened his eyes after 15 minutes to glance at his wristwatch nothing had happened; and nothing happened after 20 and 25 minutes despite the fact that his prayers were becoming increasingly frantic. He became more and more nervous; sweat was running down his forehead. Then, just seconds before his time was up, the tree burst into flames. His head was saved and the impressed natives let themselves be baptized as they had promised. It was only after he had safely returned to Ambon that he told the full story. "Well, it wasn't really God who put the tree on fire. When the time had almost run out I became terrified and just resorted to ancestral Black Magic.

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