

# Tradition and Monotheism in Eastern Indonesia

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# Tradition and Monotheism in Eastern Indonesia

by Susanne Rodemeier

## Introduction

Nusa Tenggara Timur, a south-eastern province of Indonesia, is populated mainly by Christians. The Alor-Pantar Archipelago has a majority of Protestant inhabitants who were baptized by Dutch Calvinists in the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, there are some coastal enclaves that have been inhabited by Muslims for centuries. In some areas, such as in the headland of Muna (Tanjung Muna) forming the northeast of Pantar Island, there is an even greater diversity of monotheistic religions, with some Catholic families living next to Protestants and Muslims.

All adherers of the three religious faiths living at Tanjung Muna share core elements of the local *adat*, which consists of core rules relating to social behavior. It is believed that the ancestors will notice transgressions of these rules, and may use their supernatural power to punish their human descendants. In Indonesia, the term *adat* was first used by Muslims to distinguish the non-Islamic practices from Muslim faith (Keane 1997:260-261). This is definitely not the case in the village of Pandai at the coast of Tanjung Muna, where Islam tolerates ancestral worship. The same is true for the Catholics in the inland village of Helangdohi, who do not only tolerate but even support such customs. Some villagers from Helangdohi had become acquainted with this kind of Catholicism on the nearby island of Flores, where ancestral worship is encouraged by the missionaries of the Societas Verbi Divini (SVD).<sup>1</sup> The attitude of Protestantism, at least in the Alor Archipelago, is quite the contrary of the permissive views held by Catholicism and Islam. In the 1930s the Protestant-Calvinist missionaries banned any kind of ancestral worship and destroyed most relics (Dalen 1928: Picture 1). These drastic measures demanded the disavowal of the ancestors, including the destruction of heirlooms and omitting of rituals. Moreover, people became 'silent' in the course of time: They stopped narrating their traditional stories, and no longer sang the ritual songs that were associated with certain dances. The ancestors were neglected for decades, which is one of the reasons why myths are rarely told and the knowledge of the local tradition is now very fragmentary.

When comparing Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam, it becomes apparent that these religions do not only differ from each other in their respective historical backgrounds and ideologies, but also have different ways of dealing with local traditions. Thus, for the reasons outlined above, the original cultural heritage survived to a much larger extent in those communities that became Muslim or Catholic.

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<sup>1</sup> On the work of the SVD on Flores, see also Schröter (this volume).

The communities settling at Tanjung Muna, on which this contribution will focus, are a very interesting case in point. There, the abovementioned religious diversity exists on a quite limited space, like in a nutshell within an environment moulded by the Protestant majority. The entire Tanjung Muna area covers approximately 400 km<sup>2</sup>, with about 2,000 people living in six villages. The population of the inland village of Helangdohi, where I conducted my research, consists of about 500 Catholics and 150 Protestants. Some of their relatives moved to the coast and are now residing in the villages of Bana and Lamalu. In Bana, Catholics from Helangdohi live together with a small group of Muslims, most of whom also originate from Helangdohi. The situation is similar in the nearby village of Lamalu, where a Protestant minority from Helangdohi live side by side with their Muslim relatives. Only in Pandai are the inhabitants exclusively Muslim. Even though the Protestants constitute the majority in the area, all religious groups live together quite peacefully, invite each other to religious rituals, and intermarry. The bride will usually follow the rule established by the Indonesian government, and convert to the groom's religion. Nevertheless, it is by no means unusual for the groom to adopt the bride's religion, regardless of whether he grew up in a Protestant, Catholic, or Muslim family.

In the following, I will particularly focus on a narrative I recorded in the Christian village of Helangdohi. It shows that the shared *adat* came into being when Islam arrived on the island several hundred years ago. Therefore *adat* is partly consistent with Muslim tradition and partly pre-monotheistic.

Currently, the Christians in Helangdohi worry that the peaceful coexistence between the religions might come to an end, and that a situation might develop as it emerged in the Moluccas during the time of my research.<sup>2</sup> Back then, people constantly listened to the latest news about the religious strife on the Moluccan island of Ambon on their shortwave radios. Furthermore, some of their relatives returned home from Ambon after having become directly involved in the fights, and brought firsthand news. Therefore, an important topic people discussed in 2000 was whether *adat* will be strong enough to keep peace in the area, because the *adat* rules had always been regarded as a guarantee that religious conflicts would never flare up at Tanjung Muna.

These feelings of uneasiness give reason to take a closer look at local ideas of how a peaceful coexistence was organized in former times, why it is considered fragile right now, and what actions are deemed essential to stabilize the situation.

### **The Arrival of Islam**

First, we will look at a narrative that deals with the past. The events recalled in that story took place in mythical times when, according to local belief, the ancestors

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<sup>2</sup> I did anthropological field-research at Tanjung Muna for about one year in 1999/2000, which was made possible by a Ph.D. scholarship from the Evangelisches Studienwerk Villigst e.V. In the following years I also did research at different places in the Alor Archipelago during several short-term visits.

established the ideal way for people to live together peacefully for all times. It is widely believed that, if all future generations unfailingly follow the ancestors' example, this should forever guarantee peace between all social groups. Myth analysis thus may enable us to understand the present situation somewhat better.

The myth about the 'relationship between hillside and coast' (*hubungan woto nung watang*) was told right at the beginning of my field research in 1999. The old narrator was pushed by several younger people to tell the origin myth of the village. Instead he told the myth on the arrival of Islam and the beginning of an interrelationship of *woto* and *watang*. *Woto* ('hillside') refers to the home of the narrator, the Christian village of Helangdohi in the upland area of Tanjung Muna; *watang*<sup>3</sup> ('coast') refers to the coastal Muslim village of Pandai. Interestingly enough, the myth deals with the simultaneous arrival of Islam in the two villages, as well as with the beginning of social relationships between them. In my analysis of the mythical narrative, I will put its contents in relation to the manner in which the religious groups (Muslims and Christians) coexist today. This will lead me to some concluding remarks on risks involved in this multi-religious situation.

Before the old man started to tell the myth, he recited the genealogy<sup>4</sup> of Helangdohi. If we count all generations he mentioned, we can assume that the myth's protagonist, Langduli Hiran, lived some thirteen generations ago. If we suppose that each generation spans 30 years, the genealogy leads us back to the second half of the sixteenth century. This roughly corresponds with the year of 1574, when 72 allies of Sultan Hairun, who back then was the ruler of the Moluccan island Ternate, collectively joined the Muslim faith (Barnes 1987; Barnes 1996:10-11). As these allies probably included the people from Tanjung Muna, this event most likely gives the historic background of the myth.

The myth on the 'relationship between hillside and coast'<sup>5</sup> goes as follows:

A long time ago, four envoys arrived at Pandai. They came from Ambon-Ternate, and their intention was to present some gifts and the Muslim faith exclusively to the local leader (*tuan tanah*, 'lord of the land') of Tanjung Muna. But the people of Pandai did not have such a local leader. Therefore, four men from Pandai – known by the names Bárang Bálu, Púkong Bálu, Bálu Mau and Láka Télung – introduced a number of influential people to the envoys. But the foreigners did not acknowledge any of them as the local leader. The situation changed as soon as Langduli Hiran from Helangdohi was asked to come to the coast. When he approached the coast, a rainbow followed him on his path,<sup>6</sup> which made the

<sup>3</sup> *Watan* (وطن) in Arabic means 'homeland; home country'.

<sup>4</sup> A genealogy of all clans at Helangdohi is given in Rodemeier (2006:392-393).

<sup>5</sup> The following version of the myth '*hubungan woto nung watang*' ('The relationship between hillside and coast') is a summary of several narrations of the same myth that I collected in Helangdohi. For full-length versions in the original language, see Rodemeier (2006:212-215, 356-370).

<sup>6</sup> One of my informants stressed that the vehicle of the foreigners could not get to the coast as long as the local leader was not there to welcome them. Only when Langduli Hiran approached the shore was the vehicle able to anchor.

four foreigners – now known by the names of Si Gógo, Suléma Gógo, Kima Lásang, and Makáni – aware of his heavenly descent. For that reason, they acknowledged Langduli Hirang as the leader of the whole area and presented him with religious paraphernalia along with the Muslim faith. He accepted all gifts and distributed them among the people of Pandai and his own people of Helangdohi equally. In Pandai, there remained those gifts that are needed for the daily Muslim prayer: the mosque (*tigis*), the ka'bah (*kabat*), a pulpit (*membar*, from the Arab word *minbar*, 'platform'), some poles (*tongka*), and a knife (*duri taku ata*, 'knife that frightens the people'), which in Pandai is used during the circumcision ritual. These gifts were regarded as useless in Helangdohi because there is no freshwater supply near the village ('*karena kita disini jauh dari air*', 'because we live far away from any water supply').<sup>7</sup> Due to this lack of water, it was agreed that the people of Helangdohi do not have to pray regularly, yet they got permission to join the prayers in the mosque at Pandai whenever they happened to be near the coast during prayer time. This is why the Islam practiced in the village Pandai is called 'big Islam' (*salang bea*), whereas the Islam in the village Helangdohi is referred to as 'small Islam' (*salang kihu*). The people of Pandai were ordered to ensure (*jaga*) both the appropriate accommodation for the gifts and the proper way to use them. Therefore, a mosque and a clan house (*uma*) named *uma* Maluku were built for storing the gifts. The name of the clan house reflects the origin of the foreigners: the Moluccan island Ternate. The gifts were used during Muslim rituals. The four remaining gifts were brought to Helangdohi and are remembered by the names of *samaratu*, *kapulili* and *wutung pati*, *pukong selaka*. *Samaratu* is the name of a further knife also used for circumcision (Rodemeier 2010:31); *kapulili* is a spinning wheel<sup>8</sup>; and *wutung pati*, *pukong selaka* are two poles with four handles each. Langduli Hirang handed the gifts over to his brothers, instructing them to keep them properly. Like in Pandai, this included the building of proper storage facilities and the integration of the gifts into rituals, which resulted in the division of the village inhabitants into clans (*lelang*) with clan houses (*uma*) that became the storage places for the gifts. The biggest *uma* became the communal house where all clans from Helangdohi and Pandai join for meetings, councils, and rituals that concern them collectively. The eldest of the six brothers from Helangdohi, Langduli Hirang, was the head of this house. Sengaji (also called Tang Haji Sulema), an influential man from Pandai, reciprocated Langduli Hirang's visit to the coast with a visit to Helangdohi. He did not arrive there with *limang amuk* ('empty hands'), but brought a kettledrum (BI<sup>9</sup>: *moko*; KS: *wulu*).<sup>10</sup> In return, Langduli Hirang,

<sup>7</sup> It is most likely that the lack of water is mentioned to explain why Muslim purification rituals cannot be practiced properly or at all in Helangdohi. However, this connection was never explicitly pointed out to me.

<sup>8</sup> The spinning wheel was probably meant to initiate the change from bark-cloth to cotton textiles. The meaning of the two poles remains unclear.

<sup>9</sup> The abbreviation 'BI' refers to the Indonesian language Bahasa Indonesia, 'KS' to the local language at Tanjung Muna, Kadire Senaing.

<sup>10</sup> Bronze kettledrums have the shape of an hourglass. They are known in many places of Southeast Asia as *moko*. A particularly large number of *moko* is found in the Alor Archipelago, yet the one

who is also known under the name of Wekang Ladang, presented him with a big stone (*wato*). In a next step after these gifts had been exchanged, their names were exchanged as well, so that each gift now carries the name of its receiver. This is the reason why nowadays the kettledrum is called '*wulu Wekang Ladang*', which means 'kettledrum owned by Wekang Ladang', and the stone is called '*wato Sengaji*' ('stone owned by Sengaji').<sup>11</sup> The kettledrum was stored in Langduli Hiranng's house, the *uma* Being. Helangdohi's return gift, the stone, also remained in the hilly area. It was 'planted' (*mula wato*, 'to plant a stone') in front of the *uma* Being under a sacred bush, the *kajong dari* ('spiky wood').<sup>12</sup> The exchange of the *moko* and the stone, as well as the exchange of the names of these gifts is an act that constituted a covenant also called *mula lewo*. It led to the establishment of a common village center, consisting of the *uma* Being and the sacred space where the stone was planted. According to the covenant, Sengaji's and Wekang Ladang's descendants now and forever throughout all generations have to follow rules that are part of the *mula lewo* contract:

1. It is absolutely forbidden to utter any accusation against anyone who belongs to the group of the other party to the contract.
2. The parties to the contract are obliged to invite each other to their respective rituals. Any invitation has to be accepted, either by showing up in person or by sending a representative.
3. Pandai has to protect the seaside of the shared village boundaries against anything that might intrude into the area from across the sea. In return, Helangdohi has to make sure that no threat enters into the joint territory from the hillside. Only when the party involved in a conflict is no longer able to ward off an unknown influence alone may the other party be asked for help.

This myth helps to preserve the memory of the arrival of Islam in the villages of Pandai and Helangdohi, as well as of the circumstances that led to the close and ongoing relationship between the two villages. They help each other and never ask anything in return. Hence, both partners have unconditional access to any fruit of each other's land, including food and women. No return gifts and no bridewealth payments are expected. This deal was initiated by the foreigners from Ternate when they made the people of Pandai recognize the existence of the 'lord of the land', the *tuan tanah*, as the head of the area.

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biggest in size is kept in a Hindu temple in Pejeng on the Indonesian island of Bali. It is known as 'moon of Pejeng'.

<sup>11</sup> The names of the gifts that were exchanged confused the younger people in Helangdohi. They believe that Sengaji brought the stone from the coast to Helangdohi and in return received the *moko*, which originated from an unknown place in the forests surrounding the village of Helangdohi.

<sup>12</sup> The first human people, the founders of Helangdohi, were born under this same bush.

## The tuan tanah

The 'lord of the land' (*tuan tanah*) is widely known throughout Eastern Indonesia (Scholz 1962). He needs to be distinguished from the 'owner of the land'. The most important difference between a lord and an owner of the land is that an owner can make profit out of his land and even sell it, while a lord can only distribute the land for temporary use, as he himself does not own it. In Helangdohi, the *tuan tanah* holds the land in the name of his patrilineal forefathers who had been the first settlers on that very spot. These ancestors came into being at the same place where their descendants live today. They initiated a good relationship with the local supernatural beings who are regarded as the real, original owners of the land. Humans cannot directly enter into contact with these beings. Thus, the *tuan tanah* needs to call upon his ancestors to act as mediators whenever communication with the local supernatural beings is considered necessary. This is always the case when approval from the other world is deemed obligatory in order to ensure the health and fertility of both the land and the people living on it. Since a *tuan tanah* is permanently responsible for establishing a positive atmosphere between the supernatural 'owners' and the 'users' of the land, he has to conduct rituals that accompany the planting cycle. In return, the 'users of the land' give him a certain share of their harvest. Yet his duties go beyond this: He also has to make sure that nothing is done on the land that might disturb the beings in the other world. This is of special importance for any newcomers who have to ask the *tuan tanah* for permission to stay. Only after he has introduced them<sup>13</sup> to his ancestors will they be protected in the best possible way.

By telling the story of the 'relationship between hillside and coast', the narrator pointed out that several steps once led towards a peaceful coexistence between the neighbors. In a first, very decisive step, both the Muslim foreigners from Ternate and the people from Pandai acknowledged only one *tuan tanah* whose place of residence is the inland village of Helangdohi. The fact that he was accepted as the head, that is, the 'lord', of all the land in the whole area has a serious consequence for everyone in Pandai: According to the opinion held in Helangdohi, the people from Pandai have to admit that they do not own any land. All 'their' land is actually owned by Helangdohi, and the inhabitants of Pandai merely got permission to stay on the land and to use it, but not to sell it. Consequently, they can only make profit out of what they harvest. The myth insinuates that the people from Pandai were foreigners who had settled on the land of Helangdohi without permission by the *tuan tanah*, because prior to the arrival of the Muslim envoys they were simply unaware of the existence of the sacred center (Helangdohi) in the hillside area. This only changed when the four Islam scholars arrived from Ternate and asked to meet the local *tuan tanah*.

As Helangdohi has sovereignty over the entire region, land cannot be sold without the consent of the *tuan tanah*. This law has to be obeyed by both the people

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<sup>13</sup> While doing field research in Helangdohi, I was also 'introduced' to the ancestors: A kind of prayer (*gamar*) was spoken at the village's *mesbah* (the sacred place) by calling some ancestors by their names. Then they were asked to support me and my research plans. While speaking, a sip of palm-wine (*tuak*) was poured on the ground.

from Helangdohi and those from Pandai. Nevertheless, it is often ignored and was violated just a short time ago when foreigners managed to acquire a *hak milik tanah*, that is, officially registered land, in the Tanjung Muna area. Until then, this land had been entrusted to the *tuan tanah*, and was regarded as clan land (*tanah suku*). Someone sold it to non-Indonesian foreigners who built a hotel. Only recently has the new ownership come to be accepted, because the hotel employs people from the village of the *tuan tanah* and thus also brings profit to the clan members. This example shows clearly the difference between norm and practice. The myth establishes the rule, but there is always an explanation why breaking a rule is nevertheless in compliance with it. In the example given above, the reasoning goes as follows: Indeed the land has to be used by the members of the clan; this is now the case, since some of them work in the new hotel. Therefore, the profit goes to the whole clan, and it does not matter who actually runs the hotel or sold the land.

The myth furthermore reveals that there are different kinds of foreigners. First, there are the foreigners from Ternate; coming from a region that shares cultural similarities with Helangdohi, they knew that the *tuan tanah* as an institution has to exist in a village. This kind of institution was not known in Pandai, whose inhabitants came from some place in the far West.<sup>14</sup> Only when the foreigners from Ternate paid reverence to the *tuan tanah* did the people of Pandai become aware of his authority: He is the lord of the entire region, and thus any change or innovation needs to be approved by him. Upon this realization, the most influential person from Pandai set forth to establish good relations with Helangdohi. In order to strengthen the emerging peaceful relationship between the two villages, he brought a gift to Helangdohi, to which the *tuan tanah* from that village responded with a return gift. This is a kind of reciprocal exchange that has nothing to do with Islam, but is very much in accordance with local tradition. In this special case, it even resulted in the implementation of an ongoing marriage alliance (see below).

At this point, it becomes understandable why Christians tell a myth that commemorates the arrival of Islam. First, the story enables them to demonstrate that foreigners – the Muslims coming from Ternate – were the first ones to accept the traditional *adat* position of Helangdohi, as these foreigners legitimized the *tuan tanah* in his position as the sacred ‘lord of the land’. One can thus assume that foreigners are basically regarded as a positive influence by the people of Helangdohi.

Second, the aspect of the gifts brought by the foreigners from Ternate – faith and religious paraphernalia – stresses that Islam and *adat* do not have to be in contradiction. They can be more than just mutually tolerating; they can support each other. This happened when the *tuan tanah* accepted the foreigners from Ternate and their gifts without offering a gift in return. What is described here is – in accordance with Marcel Mauss (1978) – not an exchange of material gifts but of respect. This mutual respect is remarkable, given the fact that the term *adat* was coined to distinguish Islamic from non-Islamic practices (Keane 1997:260-261). In some

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<sup>14</sup> Their origin is mentioned in another myth: Their forefathers possibly came from the Javanese Majapahit Empire, which would date their time of arrival into the fourteenth century or earlier (compare Rodemeier 2006:202, 254-262; Vatter 1932:24).



regions of Indonesia, this distinction led to a strict division into Muslim coastal people (*pesisir*) and the people in the nearby hillside areas (*pusat*) (H. Geertz 1963; Pigeaud 1967; Vickers 1987, 1993). The latter were regarded as backward because they were practicing ancestor worship. This changed somewhat after they converted to Christianity in the first half of the twentieth century.

In Helangdohi, conversion to Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century occurred at the same time when most *pusat* people in eastern Indonesia first adopted Catholicism or Protestantism; prior to becoming Christians, these groups had never adhered to any monotheistic religion. The situation at Tanjung Muna differs fundamentally from this pattern, since people in Helangdohi actually had embraced Islam long before they converted to Christianity. For that reason, some elements of local tradition regarded by the present Christians as part of *adat* are in accordance with Islamic tradition, such as circumcision and parts of the marriage ritual. Other aspects of *adat*, while being non-Islamic, were nevertheless established when Islam arrived in the area, such as praying at the Sengaji stone in front of the clan house (*uma* Being). This happened when the two villages of Helangdohi and Pandai ‘planted a village’, and established a common ritual center.

### **‘To Plant a Village’**

In the myth, the circumstances surrounding the arrival of Islam are important: The story brings to mind why Helangdohi has a *tuan tanah*, thus serving as a means of legitimizing the position of that village. In the second part of the narrative, however, *adat* increasingly gains importance, as *adat* rules helped to strengthen the new bond between Pandai and Helangdohi. This new relationship is based on a ‘*mula lewo* contract’, which literally means ‘to plant a village’. By planting the stone and storing the *moko* in a house nearby, the ancestors of both villages were given their exclusive residence in Helangdohi. This building became a sacred clan house and, together with the stone in front of it, the center for all rituals that involve both villages. Thus, it interconnects all inhabitants of Helangdohi and Pandai. A double reciprocal exchange sealed the new relationship between the coast (*watang*) and hillside (*woto*) areas. First, a stone (*wato*) and a kettledrum (KS: *wulu*; BI: *moko*) changed hands. In a second step, the names of the gifts were exchanged as well: The stone became called ‘*wato* Sengaji’, the kettledrum ‘*wulu* Wekang Ladang’. Thus, the name of each gift no longer corresponds with the name of its donor, but relates to the name of the receiver. This ‘double exchange’ serves to further strengthen the bond between the partners. But why is there an exchange of a stone and a *moko* in the first place?

All over the Alor Archipelago, a *moko* is the main element of a typical bridewealth given by the groom to the bride’s patrilineage. Given this custom the mythical *moko* gift bestowed by Pandai upon Helangdohi is comparable to a first marriage between members of two families that have never intermarried before, which is called ‘*buka jalan*’, ‘open the path’. As Helangdohi was the village that received the *moko*, it achieved the slightly more prestigious status of a wife-giver.

One might thus expect that Sengaji from Pandai was given a wife in exchange for the kettledrum, but as we know this was not the case – he was presented with a stone instead. We can assume that the stone symbolizes a bride, and therefore has a female connotation.

A further remarkable point is that Sengaji did not take the stone back to Pandai, but left it in Helangdohi. Nevertheless, the mythical exchange of the *moko* and the stone seems to be viewed as a prototypical marriage, which would explain why all descendants from both sides are forever exempt from paying a *moko*, even though they still have to follow the custom of *tukar manusia*, that is, give a girl back into the bride's family of origin. The custom of giving a *moko* is practiced only when the families of a couple have not yet been previously interrelated by marriage; in such cases, a *moko* is a mandatory gift that serves to legalize the marriage. As soon as this bridewealth (*belis*) has been paid, the bride and her children become members of the groom's patrilineage. From now on, the children will receive protection by their father's ancestors, and become heirs of his lineage. This change is usually marked by a change of nuptial residence from uxori-patrilocal to viri-patrilocal. In all cases where families have already intermarried in the generations before, no bridewealth needs to be paid, yet the firstborn daughter of a couple has to stay permanently at the uxori-patrilocal residence, and must marry a son of one of her mother's brothers. This custom gives rise to matrilocality. As long as there is neither a *moko* given as a bridewealth nor a girl staying at her mother's place of origin, all children of a couple remain the property of their mother's patri-lineage, and the couple has to live and work uxorilocally.

This 'cheap' way of marrying is typical for a *kakaring* relationship where the partners share all 'fruit' of the land, including women. The inexpensive marriage procedure between the inhabitants of Helangdohi and Pandai was very popular for a long time, and the custom was maintained even after people in Helangdohi had converted to Christianity some decades ago. Over the years, it led to a religious intermingling of all families in all generations.

Still, the question remains of why the stone remained in Helangdohi. Even if we assume that the stone is regarded as a symbol for a bride, it is remarkable that the viri-patrilocal residence rule was not observed. This may imply that the myth actually cites an example of a matrilocal marriage alliance without explicitly mentioning it. Patrilocality is still considered the most desirable form of postnuptial residence at Tanjung Muna; matrilocality is only practiced as long as the husband is bound by his obligations to his wife's male relatives. As a result, postnuptial residence often is only rhetorically patrilocal; in actual practice, there is a 'delayed patrilocality', which is tantamount to matrilocality.

On the individual level, the groom perceives uxori-patrilocal residence not only as being of low status but as humiliating, because he has to comply with any order from his bride's male relatives. As long as there has been no exchange of women (that is, a couple's daughter taking the place of her mother), his wife and children remain the property of the bride's patrilineage in Helangdohi. However, the main problem faced by a groom in this situation is that he has no control over supernatural protection relating to him and his children at his wife's place of origin, as his

ancestors cannot be active at the uxori-patrilocal residence. In this respect, he and his children are completely dependent on his wife's uxori-patrilocal relatives. The only way for a man to get out of these circumstances is to accept that his daughter stays in Helangdohi and will also get married there.

The initial *moko* payment from Pandai obviously established the possibility of marriages. Within this system of exchange, one of the daughters of a couple<sup>15</sup> never moves to her father's place. She stays at her mother's home village, regardless of whether she is already married or not. Due to this practice, patrilocal residence never leaves a void (*tempat kosong*, 'an empty place') in the bride's family of origin, and thus the couple is free to move to the village of the groom as soon as a daughter takes the place of her mother. Upon reaching adulthood, this daughter will most likely marry one of her mother's brothers' sons, which is in line with the ideal of patrilocality, and this second-generation couple will continue to live in Helangdohi. When in the third generation one of the second-generation couple's daughters marries a man from Pandai, they can only move to the groom's village if one of their daughters stays in Helangdohi, with the option that she will eventually get married there. As a result of this rule, Helangdohi has come to be associated with femaleness: A bride will either live in this 'female' village, as it is indeed called by its inhabitants, because of her patrilocal marriage (moving from Pandai to Helangdohi) or because of her duty to take her mother's place by matrimony (remaining in Helangdohi when her parents move to Pandai). In both cases, Helangdohi becomes the place of permanent female residence. To sum up, what the ancestors established is a delayed patrilocality where at the same time matrilocality is maintained. As long as this kind of matrilocality is practiced, the men in Pandai and their families will most likely accept the higher status of the wife-givers in Helangdohi, because their daughters are living there.

This dependency also exists on the level of village relations. The village of Pandai will never be able to free itself from the subordinate position established in mythical times: When the groom gave a *moko* as the symbol for the initiation of a permanent marriage alliance, he also established Pandai's lower status as the wife-taker village. As long as their brides originate from Helangdohi and their daughters live there, the inhabitants of Pandai continue to be dependent on their partner village.

In summary, the women's matrilineal mothers, fathers, or brothers in Helangdohi are relatives of the *tuan tanah*, the lord of all the land of Helangdohi and Pandai. As has been shown, the people of Helangdohi were given sovereignty over the entire region by the local supernatural beings who permitted the ancestors of that village to stay, thus also establishing the authority of the *tuan tanah*. The ancestors from Pandai accepted this status of Helangdohi at the time when Islam arrived. This was the beginning of an interrelationship between the two villages. This can only come to an end if *adat* loses its importance, which might happen, for example, if people in Pandai decide to turn their backs on Helangdohi as the wife-giver village, and choose to look for wives in Muslim villages in the surrounding Solor-Alor Islands.

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<sup>15</sup> Ideally, this is a couple's first born daughter, but in many cases it is any daughter. It may even be a granddaughter.

### The Common Ritual Center

The symbolic marriage between the ancestors from Helangdohi and Pandai has a further dimension: All descendants of the parties in the contract once and forever have common ancestors, just as do brothers and sisters. This is due to another belief associated with the *moko*: A *moko* is not only a bridewealth, it may also be a *pusaka*,<sup>16</sup> that is, an heirloom. It is believed that it builds a bridge to its first owners, usually the founders of a family, a clan, or a village. As some *moko* are even viewed as abodes of the ancestors, it is conceivable that the coastal ancestors moved into the common ritual center in Helangdohi within the *moko*. The *moko* harboring the ancestors was then given a place inside the *uma* Being, where all *pusaka* (and with them the ancestors) of Helangdohi are kept as well. Now and forever, the ancestors of both groups are united in that house under the same roof, from where they protect both the people of Pandai and everyone living in Helangdohi.

Just as the *moko* was more than a bridewealth, the *wato* Sengaji was more than 'merely' the symbol for a bride. It is comparable to the 'ancestor stones' (*batu leluhur*, *batu pelat*) that are 'planted' (*mula*) next to the first pole of a clan house, which is located at the south-eastern side of the building. At these stones it is possible to contact<sup>17</sup> the founder of the house. The *wato* Sengaji was also planted, but at a different place: On the northern side<sup>17</sup> of the *uma* Being under a bush known by the name of *kajong dari* ('thorny bush') where the founders of the village, Helang and Dohi, once had come into being as newborn babies shortly after the waters of an all-destroying flood had subsided. It is believed that these ancestors were not survivors of that deluge but were of heavenly origin: They were born from the sky immediately after the flood. Therefore, belief holds that the roots of the bush *kajong dari* absorbed their amniotic fluids. Some five generations later the stone Sengaji was 'planted' under that bush. Over the centuries, the roots of the heavenly ancestors' bush and those of the ancestral stone 'grew' into each other, until they were finally inseparably intertwined. This place became the symbolic center of both Pandai and Helangdohi, with the bush and the stone as the visible symbols of the peaceful alliance between the ancestors of the two villages and their descendants of all generations to come. Making offerings at this stone is regarded necessary in cases that concern both villages.

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<sup>16</sup> In the local language, Kadire Senaeng, the term for *pusaka* (BI) is *wulu-gong*, meaning 'moko and gong', even though such an heirloom may be a Chinese porcelain plate or a silk textile from India.

<sup>17</sup> The orientation at Tanjung Muna follows two axes: The north-south axis is identical with the axis mountain-ocean (*woto-watang*); the east-west axis corresponds to the directions of sunrise and sunset. Therefore, an 'ancestor stone' in the south-east of a house marks the connection with the origin, because the East is associated with the origin of all life, and the South with the mountain that is the sphere of supernatural power. In Helangdohi, which itself is located in the mountain area, south-east is the direction whence the supernatural power can come. The seaside in the North, on the other hand, is associated with foreign influences coming from across the sea, but also with the allies living at the coast in Pandai.

### Living Together: Some General Remarks

As has already been pointed out, the alliance between coast and inland was established when Islam arrived on the island; this was the event that led to the contract called *mula lewo*. The contract included the mutual agreement to comply with certain local laws, which some narrators mention when reciting the myth.

It is mainly the rule that each village is obliged to invite its partner to any festivity, and in return has to accept any invitation which gives rise to the mutual dependence of the two villages. This mutuality is doomed to end as soon as one of the parties ignores the rule and does no longer join those rituals that require the participation of both villages. In this case the second rule becomes important: the contracting parties are not allowed to express any discontent with each other. It is intended to guarantee harmony, but is also the reason why fulfillment of the other rules cannot be demanded; thus, disregarding them does not entail any kind of reprimand or pressure.

A further rule demands that each partner village has to guard its respective boundaries. This means that the coastal people are in charge of warding off any potentially threatening influence (including visitors) that might come from across the sea. This idea corresponds to a pattern found all over Eastern Indonesia, where people moved from the coasts into the hillside areas in search of places that were inaccessible for slave traders (Hoskins 1993:42) and pirates. Thus, the people living at the coast – that is, those from Pandai – were assigned the task of fending off such foreigners. The coastal people, on the other hand, were afraid of the human and supernatural beings dwelling in the interior of the island, who were both said to possess dangerous power. These threats were to be warded off by the inlanders. The deal was thus advantageous for both sides.

A recent historical example of a foreign influence coming from across the sea is the advent of Christianity. When people in Helangdohi wanted to adopt the new faith in the 1930s, their partners in Pandai had to give permission. They did, because they regarded the inhabitants of Helangdohi as people without religion, as they had not joined any Muslim rituals in the mosque of Pandai in a long time. Since then, society at Tanjung Muna has been divided into Muslims and Protestants. Yet some of the Christian neophytes began to feel ill immediately following their baptism by Calvinist pastors. An oracle helped them to discover the reason for their sickness: The ancestors were discontented with the people because no one was looking after them anymore. Because of this, some Protestants dropped the new religion right away and did not adopt any monotheistic faith again until 1965, when they turned to Catholicism for reasons that had to do with policies pursued by the Indonesian state.

Since 1965 everyone in Indonesia who did not adhere to one of the officially accepted monotheistic religions (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, or Buddhism) was regarded by the state as an atheist – which was synonymous with being a communist –, and thus was in mortal danger. Local *adat*-based religious practices were not accepted as a religion. This, of course, held also true for the village of Helangdohi. After one inhabitant who did not adhere to any monotheistic

religion had been publicly executed in Kalabahi (the capital of the Alor archipelago), the remaining non-Christian villagers converted to Catholicism to avoid the same fate. This was a very conscious decision. Islam was not among the choices anymore, as this religion was regarded as impracticable as Helangdohi has no running water. Returning to Protestantism was considered too dangerous because it might cause sickness again. Catholicism was viewed as the best choice, since the Catholic priests who came from the nearby island of Flores did not ban ancestor worship.<sup>18</sup> People in Helangdohi therefore hoped that their ancestors would not cause any problems again, and that the Indonesian government would be satisfied; both hopes came true.

### **Interreligious Marriages**

Despite the division of the population into Muslims, Protestants, and Catholics, there was no change in the rules relating to the marriage alliance. Marriages between inhabitants of Pandai and Helangdohi continued to be common, notwithstanding the partners' respective monotheistic affiliations. The only mandatory rule newly introduced by the Indonesian government was *istri ikut suami* ('a wife follows her husband'). However, the local people viewed this rule as merely reaffirming their own pre-monotheistic practice; after all, it was in line with patrilocal postnuptial residence, where the bride had to move to the groom's village. When Christianity arrived, still another dimension was added to this rule: The bride was now supposed to adopt the groom's faith as well. Nevertheless, the groom will sometimes convert to the faith of his wife. In either case, such conversions do not depend on a spouse's religion *per se*, but on the piety of an individual, or on the devoutness of her or his parents. As a consequence, each generation within one single family may comprise all monotheistic religions – Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism –, and even siblings will sometimes adhere to different faiths. This is especially the case when matrilocal marriage is practiced.

Today, people at Tanjung Muna are quite worried that interreligious conflicts might erupt, similar to those they have witnessed shaking other regions of Eastern Indonesia in recent times, when shortwave receivers and refugees spread news about the violence. In the Tanjung Muna area, such a situation would cause most families to break apart. It is therefore forbidden to discuss anyone's religious affiliation: By being silent, people hope to avoid dissonances.

### **A Ritual Gets Reinterpreted**

Along with the Muslim faith, some ceremonial items came to Pandai and Helangdohi. The Muslim circumcision ritual (*sunat*) was brought to both villages when two knives were delivered by the foreigners from Ternate. While circumcision today is

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<sup>18</sup> On Catholicism on the island of Flores, see also Schröter (this volume).

still regarded as a Muslim ritual in Pandai, the situation is different in the now Christian village of Helangdohi, where the ritual was renamed: It became *sunat adat*, 'traditional circumcision'. The term *adat* suggests that the ritual was established by the ancestors long before any monotheistic religion came to the area, yet *sunat* is the Muslim term for circumcision. This is reflected in the myth, which leaves no doubt that the *sunat adat* is a survival of Muslim times in Helangdohi.

Thus, what is important in this context is that Christians and Muslims, irrespective of their differing religions, are united by their common *adat*. This is often stressed by quoting the saying: '*Agama yang berbeda-beda, tapi kita adalah satu*' ('although we follow different religions, we form a unity').

It may be noted here that defining *adat* as being pre-monotheistic has an advantageous side effect these days: It meets the interest of the governmental tourism office, which supports the Christian circumcision as a traditional ritual regarding it a potential tourist attraction. Nevertheless, the original connection to Islam is not totally lost, since when speaking in Indonesian the term *sunat* is used. It still refers to the Muslim ritual of circumcision. When the local language, Kadire Senaing, is used, we encounter a slightly different term, *suna gei* ('circumcise shave'). Still referring to the term *sunat*, the second term *gei* is not a translation of the Indonesian term *adat*, but means 'to shave'. If we merely look at the meaning of these words, no traditional or *adat* background is recognizable. However, if we consider that *suna* and *gei* are two different terms both referring to something that is cut off (skin or hair), it becomes apparent that *suna gei* is indeed an *adat* term. It conforms to a pattern of ritual wording typical of Eastern Indonesia where such 'word pairings' are widespread, particularly in ritual contexts: Two terms or words that share some kind of similarity in meaning are combined, or paired, to stress the sacredness of what is being expressed.<sup>19</sup> This renaming of circumcision, and thus its 'redefinition' from a Muslim ritual to an *adat* ceremony, turned out to be necessary only after conversion to Christianity when the performance of a Muslim ritual was no longer deemed appropriate. Circumcision in Helangdohi thus unites that village and Pandai by looking back to a shared beginning of the villages' circumcision rituals. Protestants are faced with a further problem: An *adat*-ritual is not acceptable, as the Protestant missionaries do not allow such traditional customs to coexist with Christian ones. Strange enough this ritual seems to divide Protestants and Catholics in Helangdohi. As far as I know, it was mainly Catholics who organized the last circumcision ritual (1997), which was joined by almost no Protestants.

### The Small and the Big Islam

Despite all the above explanations and descriptions, the question of why a Muslim community did convert to Christianity and now even performs Muslim rituals as *adat* ceremonies still remains to be answered. The narrators of the myth stressed that Islam in Helangdohi was different from Islam in Pandai right from the beginning.

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<sup>19</sup> James J. Fox (1988) gives an explanation of this kind of parallelism.

It was always accepted that people in Helangdohi practice the ‘small Islam’ (*salang kihu*) out of necessity because their village lacks a freshwater supply. Most likely, this shortage of water was also the main reason why the mosque was located<sup>20</sup> in Pandai. Yet the people of Helangdohi got permission to pray in Pandai whenever they happened to be near the coast at prayer time. However, they rarely came to Pandai, as it takes a walk of up to two hours to get there. Given such a situation, one can easily imagine that it was only a small step to further reinterpret Muslim rituals in order to adapt them to the local circumstances in the inland village, which was not yet Christian at that time – that is, to transform them into *adat* customs as can be seen by the term *suna gei*.

Yet such a reinterpretation of tradition is also possible in the other direction. Islam in Arab countries explicitly tried to put an end to the worship of stones. Nevertheless, my Christian informants in Helangdohi told me that the Muslims from the coast asked the ancestors in Helangdohi to keep the stone Sengaji as a site of prayer. They deemed this arrangement necessary because the mosque remained in Pandai; thus, people in Helangdohi needed the stone, as otherwise they would have been left without a place where to pray.

In the Pandai-Helangdohi myth, ‘gift’ is a pattern that appears several times; there are gifts that were presented and gifts that were part of a reciprocal exchange. The former figured prominently when the Muslim foreigners from Ternate arrived and delivered different kinds of gifts: faith and religious paraphernalia. However, they were not presented with anything tangible in return, even though they were bestowed with the immaterial gift of respect. As has already been pointed out, gifts were also of importance when the alliance between Pandai and Helangdohi was forged, when material goods changed hands and switched names. As becomes apparent from these two examples, gifts are presented for quite different reasons, the main difference being that some gifts are made when someone asks a favor, while others are exchanged when an agreement on some issue of mutual interest needs to be reconfirmed.

Gift exchange is obligatory whenever a contract is made; most commonly, this will be a marriage contract where male and female goods (that is, gifts given by the relatives of the bride and the groom, respectively) are exchanged in order to seal the new alliance. Moreover, the gifts define the relationship between the two families now joined by marriage: Their value indicates the importance attached to the newly established relations by each party involved. A comparable situation is found in the myth when Pandai and Helangdohi launched their alliance. On that occasion, the two parties presented each other with two different gifts, the type of gift establishing the position to be held by each party in the new relationship: Pandai gave a *moko*, which marked its subordinate status as the wife-taker and at the same time signaled the villagers’ acceptance of Helangdohi as holding the slightly higher status of a wife-giver. As has already been discussed above, this first exchange of gifts can be interpreted as a symbolic marriage. It forever exempted all Pandai-Helangdohi couples from paying any bridewealth. This is the main reason why their relationship is

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<sup>20</sup> Theoretically, the *tuan tanah* could have given orders to move the mosque to Helangdohi.



called *kakaring*, which means that the partners, just like brothers, are on an equal level.

Such gift exchange in mythical times is quite different from those cases where gifts are offered without demanding a gift in return, but instead with the intention of asking for help. In the myth, the latter is exemplified by the episode when people on Pantar are presented with the Muslim faith and religious paraphernalia. No return gifts are mentioned, but it is stressed several times that all gifts were accepted by the *tuan tanah* from Helangdohi, whereupon he and his brothers divided them among the people of the two villages. In sharing the gifts from Ternate, the principle of seniority was respected: As Pandai was the place where faith and paraphernalia had originally arrived, it had a right to a share of these gifts. In Helangdohi, on the other hand, there existed the *tuan tanah*, and it was due to him that people could eventually receive the gifts, which lent Helangdohi a slightly higher status. Moreover, the *tuan tanah* is forever the owner of all gifts, because he was the one the Muslim envoys had been searching for – the only person entitled to accept the things they wished to present. In return people ‘presented’ them with respect.

It becomes apparent that the foreigners felt subordinate to the local ruler. By presenting their gifts solely to the *tuan tanah*, and by expecting no gift in return, they accepted the authority of the ‘lord of the land’ as the highest-ranking individual at Tanjung Muna, and thus the local hierarchy. Only by submitting to the *tuan tanah* could the Islamic scholars be accepted and protected by his supernatural beings. The myth thus serves to substantiate the fact *adat* was accorded higher rank than Islam right from the beginning by the local population at Tanjung Muna – and even by the envoys from Ternate who brought Islam to the region. Still, *adat* and Islam together became the traditional unifying force for all people living in the area, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

### Conflicts

The myth narrators of the now Christian Helangdohi assumed that the arrival of Islam was the beginning of a peaceful coexistence with their neighbors from Pandai. They believe that prior to that event the relationship between the two villages had either been nonexistent or hostile. They further presume that the newly established bond could only last for centuries because the common ground established by the ancestors became a shared *adat*. As far as the living people are concerned, the *adat* relationship involves both social advantages and duties, and the ancestors eternally control the fulfillment of these rules.

A look at the contemporary situation at Tanjung Muna shows that the relationship quite obviously is not as satisfactory as it could be. The rule of inviting each other is a case in point; discrepancies become apparent as soon as a feast has not a religious but an *adat* background. For example, people in Helangdohi complain that their relatives from Pandai, even though they had been invited, did not join a ritual that was most important for the relationship between the two villages: The

renovation of the roof of the clan house *uma* Being, where the Pandai ancestor Sengaji once stored the *moko*. This is an ongoing subject of discussion in Helangdohi, as the building is already rotting away. The villagers in Helangdohi hold the view that people from Pandai have to participate in this ritual, since by keeping a *moko* in the *uma* Being they got a share in that clan house. The roof of the *uma* Being literally connects, shelters, and protects both Helangdohi and Pandai, which is expressed in sacred (*palolo*) verses<sup>21</sup> that have to be sung while the roof is being restored (*'liang uma takka'*, literally: 'songs/clan house/close the roof', 'songs that are sung only when the roof of a clanhouse is closed'). One day, people in Helangdohi decided to ignore the fact that their neighbors from Pandai had ignored the invitation. Neglecting the rules, they began to restore the roof of the *uma* Being on their own. Shortly after they had set to work, the eldest man of the Being clan died, and punishment by the ancestors was established as the cause of his sudden death: It was believed that the ancestors got angry because the villagers of Helangdohi performed the ritual in an improper way, that is, without their neighbors from Pandai.

Upon being asked by the people of Helangdohi why the villagers of Pandai ignored the invitation, they apologized, saying that they had just forgotten to come. This is an excuse Helangdohi has to accept, even though one of the rules mentioned in the myth states that it is mandatory to accept an invitation. Moreover, people in Helangdohi are expected not to take offence, because another rule states that the partner villages may not be angry with each other. Pandai disobeys the first-named rule, not only by ignoring invitations to *adat* rituals in Helangdohi, but also by 'forgetting' to invite the leader of Helangdohi to the mosque for the celebration of Idul Fitri, the Muslim ritual, at the end of Ramadan. By doing so, people in Pandai disregard that in former times the two villages shared this ritual as well: The eldest man from Helangdohi had to be invited to come inside the mosque and sit next to the entrance during the whole ceremony. The place inside the mosque, next to the door, corresponds to his place during *adat* rituals in the clan house *uma* Being. Both obligations were not supposed to end with the conversion of people in Helangdohi to Christianity. The uncomfortable situation arises as the people at the coast more and more often 'forget' to follow the *adat* rule.

In this situation, people in Helangdohi face a dilemma: They are not allowed to complain. They have to follow the ancestors' rules laid down in the mythical contract, which forbid any accusations against any member of the other party. To complain and to talk about their discontent with Pandai would mean to ignore *adat*. In that case, they would have to be afraid of punishment by the ancestors. Thus, the only option people see is to keep silent, and to wait for times when an upcoming generation may feel a stronger responsibility for tradition, and will hopefully take care of the dilapidated *uma* Being – which now, after the roof has not been renovated for years, requires the more complex ritual of building a new clan house.

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<sup>21</sup> The verses are given in full length in Rodemeier (2006:389).

## The Telling of Myths to Avoid Conflicts

There are some strategies to avoid conflicts. One is to delay *adat* rituals in the hope that an upcoming generation will feel more responsible for *adat* matters. While waiting, another strategy is used: *diam saja*, 'just keep silent'. This means that it is important to not talk angrily, as everything that is put into words can become reality. Behind this idea is the belief that most people in the Alor Archipelago have a *mulut panas*, a 'hot mouth'. This term means that something will come true simply by being put into words. The ancestors will hear what is said, and try to satisfy the wish of the speaker, even if that wish may have been expressed unintentionally. The same is true with anger. Thus, people think it is best not to talk at all when some suppressed issue of discontent might come up. They hope that this prevents anger from becoming so strong that self control is no longer possible. This would result in a warlike situation, which no one wants to risk.

Astonishingly enough, another way to avoid conflicts is not to be silent but to speak. Speaking, however, is only acceptable in special circumstances, which are established when a myth is told. This becomes necessary when traditional rules have been ignored be it by chance or on purpose. Only if the wrong behavior is straightened out by speaking the right words aloud can punishment by the guarding ancestors be avoided or halted.

Such a situation occurred when I visited Helangdohi for the first time. I did not know of any contract with Pandai, and thus walked directly to Helangdohi, where I asked for permission to learn the local *adat-istiadat*. That same evening, old men and some younger people came together. The younger ones tried to prompt one of the old men to tell the origin myth about the arrival of the first settlers at Tanjung Muna, yet he ignored their wish. Instead, he told another myth, namely the one on the relationship between Pandai and Helangdohi, which has been discussed above.

Why the old man chose to tell this specific myth was because he felt the necessity to stress the common religious tradition of Muslims and Christians in Tanjung Muna. By telling this myth, he reminded the audience that both sides have the obligation to follow the ancestors' example and rules, even after having become divided into Muslims and Christians. His decision was spurred by the mistake I had made when I went straight to Helangdohi without visiting Pandai first. According to the myth, I was a stranger coming from across the sea, and thus would have had to be 'warded off' by the people in Pandai. Only with their permission would I have been allowed to walk on to Helangdohi. Here the *mulut panas* becomes important again. The old man did not say what I did wrong; instead, he told the story of the appropriate behavior expected from any newcomer. By doing so, he 'corrected' (*bikin lurus*) the wrong behavior and demonstrated that he and all people in Helangdohi know how to behave in the proper way. My wrongdoing was straightened out by speaking aloud the right words, that is, by telling the story of the appropriate behavior. The words of the old man became reality, being stronger than any transgression of the rules I had committed. As the ancestors were informed that people in Helangdohi know how to act properly, they would not cause any problems;

and my mistake could be straightened out even without the people of Helangdohi informing those of Pandai.

I was not the only reason for the decision to tell this myth at that special evening. The main reason was definitely that the relationship between Helangdohi and Pandai was somewhat strained as the head of the *uma* Being had died just half a year before, allegedly because of Pandai's negligence of its *adat* relationship with Helangdohi. Telling the Pandai-Helangdohi myth thus was meant to refresh the knowledge about *adat*, and maintain the possibility that the pending ritual will someday be performed after all.

### Conclusion

In the Christian village of Helangdohi, it is still possible to tell a myth in order to straighten out transgressions of the rules, although it is most doubtful that this method works for all kinds of conflicts. Strife involving several groups of people is particularly difficult to settle, no matter what way of solution is chosen. Nevertheless, members of all religious faiths remember that a common tradition exists, and pay tribute to that heritage. This does not necessarily imply that they perform traditional rituals or tell myths, but it still means that the adherents of all monotheistic religions invite each other to jointly celebrate certain religious holidays, and that people accept these invitations. For example, the Protestants will ask all others to join their annual nativity play at Christmas; the Muslims summon everyone for a common meal (even though not into the mosque) on Idul Fitri; and the Catholics invite to their Easter church service.

Over time, however, the commitment to a common origin increasingly turns into a lip service; the shared knowledge about that heritage gradually becomes lost. The strength of the ancestors as controlling institution is often ignored and therefore loses its power. This development got a strong push when the government launched a resettlement program in the 1960s when villages from the mountain region had to move to the coast. Living in some distance to the ancestors' land the letters lose their influence, which is not the case for those people who still live in the village center. The resettlement program also caused a spatial separation of religious groups. People of the various faiths are still relatives, but now live in different villages, or at least in different parts of one village, depending on their religious affiliation. In everyday life the neighborhood relationship, which corresponds with shared religious faith, has come to be more important than relationship based on family bonds. This results in a religious division into purely Muslim, Muslim-Protestant, Muslim-Catholic, and purely Protestant villages. Interestingly enough, there is one exception: Protestants and Catholics live together in Helangdohi without being spatially separated from each other. Only there, in the immediate vicinity of the village founders, common descent and shared *adat* seem to outweigh the division based on faith.

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