

**RITUAL LEADERSHIP: ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES  
ON THE TALIABU INITIATION FESTIVAL**

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**GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

In 1913, the missionary A. H. Jansen, stationed in Namlea, Buru, visited Taliabu island and witnessed "a heathen circumcision festival." Before describing what he saw, he thought fit to reassure the directors and supporters back home that:

All heathen inhabitants of Taliabu want to become Christian; most of them have already received notes as Christian disciples; this festival shall therefore be the last (Jansen 1914:34).

Although premature, Jansen's prediction proved true for many Taliabu communities. Where, after several false starts, Christianity did manage to establish itself in coastal villages, and to extirpate enough Taliabu cultural practices, this festival did indeed disappear, and much of value with it. But it has survived elsewhere on the island. We need to ask, then, what factors led to its demise in some communities, to its survival in others; and in what form does it continue today?

The festival of which Jansen writes, *mangkanou*, is not strictly a circumcision rite.<sup>1</sup> It is focused around the initiation of boys and girls and in only a few localities is the foreskin of the penis pierced to allow the letting of a few drops of blood. The basic pattern of the initiation follows van Gennep's schema for *rites de passage*: the initiates are separated from juvenile status, spend a period of removal from social life, and rejoin society as individuals now responsible for their own actions (van Gennep 1960). *Mangkanou* also conforms to Victor Turner's development of van Gennep's schema. The middle—liminal—phase of the *mangkanou* generates what Victor Turner has called *communitas*, an alternate "modality of social relationship" (Turner 1977:96), in this case, the temporary dissolution of the

Taliabu norm of individuality. This paper, however, is concerned with the relationship between the *mangkanou* festival and Taliabu leadership.

This celebration is linked to a pattern of oscillation between social dispersal and festive, ritual concentration of a population, but those wishing to stage such a event have, in recent years, encountered serious problems as they try to adjust to the social, political, and economic environment of fixed village life. How best to approach this problem of differential survival of such a key cultural celebration? For my part, the beginnings of understanding came when I noted the characteristics of the several kinds of Taliabu residence patterns.

The combination of various outside agents, each acting on one or more aspects of Taliabu social and economic life, has resulted in several types of Taliabu social groupings. For heuristic purposes these can be arranged into three categories. Those of the first category live in established villages, some of several decades duration; for the great majority of residents, Christianity is the basis for ritual events, including Sunday services at a church.<sup>2</sup> Those of the second category live dispersed along a river valley, each family living by their current swidden fields and/or tree crop groves; Taliabu religion is the basis for ritual life, including events performed at the level of the individual household as well as those performed during periodic convocations of the scattered residents. The third group includes several examples of government-promoted hamlets (Ind. [*anak*] *kampung*) established under the authority of the nearby coastal village (Ind. *desa*); the degree to which Christianity or Taliabu religion is the basis of ritual life tends to depend on the relative strength of leadership in one or the other of the two streams. The cultural celebrations that Jansen alludes to have occurred in recent years only among groups in the second category and at least in one hamlet in the third category.

This last community, Wayo Nangu Haya, is of interest because it combines hamlet residence with an active Taliabu religious life.<sup>3</sup> While, in the initial phase of my fieldwork, settlement patterns and the presence or absence of *mangkanou* appeared to covary, the nature of the connection was at first obscure. Certainly, in established villages, two forms of authority so dominate the relations of power that there is little social space available for other, indigenous manifestations. Civil authority emanates from its source on the island of Java, and is mediated through Ambon and Ternate. The Christian establishment, sacrally weak on Taliabu, derives its authority by association with the state, mediated through the Department of Religion. Settlement patterns, then, have a certain diagnostic value in the study of cultural patterns, but the effective relation is that between forms of authority and both settlement and cultural patterns. Concentration and dispersal of a group depends on the nature of leadership, but so does the presence or

absence of communal celebrations. Taliabu religious traditions, including the initiation festival, depend upon the presence of individual spiritual leaders. The extent of their power determines the extent to which scattered members of a local population will congregate and contribute to the staging of ritual events. It is to varieties of leadership that we must look for a solution to our present problem: accounting for the differential continuation of the *mangkanou* celebration.

This paper begins with an historical and social structural sketch of the Taliabu people, describes the preparations for and the stages in the festival, and concludes with a discussion of Taliabu leadership and ritual within the context of social, religious, and political changes on Taliabu.

### HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

In 1570, the fourth sultan of Ternate, Babulah, proclaimed the extent of his rule in truly grand dimensions equal to a quarter of modern Indonesia's territory. The Sula islands, of which Taliabu is the largest, were included in this realm. Sulabesi, the most populous of the three main islands and long Islamic, became an established outpost of the Ternate realm and the collection point for taxes from the Sula islands. Its neighbors, Mangoli and Taliabu, heavily forested, sparsely populated, and isolated by periodic rough seas, were never fully integrated into the sultanate (van Hulstijn 1918:106; van Fraassen 1987:224). The few references to Taliabu in the first centuries of Dutch presence in Maluku refer to its abundant wild sago resources which were sometimes exploited by those en route between Ternate and Buton or Makassar.<sup>4</sup> More important were the occasional slaving and forced-labor abduction raids carried out by Tobelorese under Ternatan auspices. These served to increase the pattern of frequent residence shifts between the coast and the mountains, and for long periods the coastal population was a small minority of the total. In this way, the majority of Taliabu people escaped taxation and other influences from Ternate about as often as they were compelled to submit.

With the arrival of missionaries and native Christian teachers after 1914, there began a fitful and ultimately incomplete process of settling the natives into coastal settlements centered on a school or church. The tradition of frequent resident shifts could not easily be altered. According to Taliabu people with whom I spoke, Ambonese soldiers under the Dutch used various pretexts to force most of the interior population to the coast. Those who ran and hid in fear, or who set man traps around their hill homes, were killed. The 1930s saw the end of the seminomadic lifestyle for most of the population, accomplished with considerable but undocumented loss of life. While some coastal hamlets were formed, in other coastal and hinterland

areas, settlements dissolved when people clearly preferred their garden homes or when they moved to other valleys. The cultural tendency toward shifting residences and periodic dispersal of settlements has continued, although the various hinterland hamlets and coastal villages represent another, newer option in the range of available settlement patterns.

The Indonesians carried forward the Dutch resettlement plans with great effectiveness. Fear again played the major part in eliciting cooperation. Many traditional *adat* leaders were hauled off to Sanana for reeducation, *adat* houses and dancing costumes were burned, taxation in cash was more comprehensive, and the population was more fully registered than ever before.<sup>5</sup> The last of the "wild people" were brought out of the mountains and resettled in the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> By the mid-1970s, President Suharto's *Inpres* development program began to establish some native hamlets around a school. There were also a few long-established villages anchored by Indonesian Catholic schools.

Several localities on Taliabu have long been known for their inhabitants' reluctance to participate in the processes of Christianization or Islamicization and resettlement. Even today, fear of governmental authority remains an important motivation for hamlet settlement. One locality on the south coast has seen several different settlement plans fall apart. After many attempts at establishing a viable hamlet, these people did succeed for a couple of years under the leadership of a teacher from Flores sent by the Bishop of Maluku. It dissolved when troubles arose over an incident of adultery and everyone took off to live in their own garden huts. Recently, new plans have begun under the threat of rumors that the army will be coming in if they do not establish their own settlement. A north coast hamlet has dissolved because the government-appointed village head used black magic to lure other men's wives and to cause his enemies to fall ill. The central obstacle to carrying out the plans for long-term fixed settlement for all Taliabu people is that there are few compelling reasons to abandon the wider range of settlement options in favor of a pattern of fixed residence in the coastal villages. In the first case above, there is insufficient will to take the initiative for construction of a new hamlet. The second exemplifies the customary means of settling disputes: people flee to their gardens rather than stay to settle differences within the hamlet context.

Taliabu society is fundamentally based on the cultural values of self-reliance and individual autonomy. Not wishing to be in anyone's debt, they prefer to avoid asking for help. House building and garden work is usually done alone. In spite of some changes through interactions with outsiders from Sulawesi, forms of work-sharing are still relatively rare. It is striking to note that even among close kin, free cooperation is very rare. In addition to these values, the centrifugal tendencies of Taliabu settlement patterns are

also a reflection of seasonal variation in resources and of the history of both internal violence and harassment from outsiders. On the other hand, a sense of community need not depend upon an actual fixed settlement, a village or hamlet. A man now living in a Christian-Islamic coastal village told me that, although people lived far from each other in earlier times, they would know when something was wrong within a family, when someone was sick or had died or was to be married, or when there was heavy work to do (e.g. building a festival house), and all would come to join with this family. Today, he continued, this does not happen. The *mangkanou* initiation ceremony was and, for some, still is the foremost means to maintain ties among families. In the old nomadic days, a sponsor of this ceremony would devote considerable time and effort to the construction of a large roofed dancing floor and would call together the people scattered throughout the mountains.

Unlike birth and death, which are observed among close kin, and marriage, which is usually accompanied by suspicion or even animosity, the initiation ceremony, *mangkanou*, is the preeminent celebration in Taliabu culture. No other event entails such a richly detailed set of practical and ritual requirements. All this makes it a ripe opportunity for disagreements regarding proper *adat* or customary procedure. *Mangkanou* is also work, *adat* work. Because the whole community of celebrants benefits from any ritual *adat* event, there is a strong moral compunction to assist in its preparations. Of course, not all respond to this call. In addition to regular religious occasions, the hamlet where I did much of my fieldwork also sponsored a *mangkanou* shortly before we left the field. This *mangkanou* was not without its own problems, and so it is worth investigating in our search for the reasons behind the demise of the *mangkanou* tradition among other Taliabu communities.

### BASIC PRINCIPLES OF TALIABU SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

In order to understand how the work for a *mangkanou* is organized, we need to look at the social organization of Taliabu people in general. Taliabu stands outside of the social organizational concepts commonly found in Maluku. None of these concepts—the *siwa-lima* divisions or moieties, the *pela* alliances, and the *soa* territorial divisions—play a significant role.<sup>7</sup> When I first asked about *soa*, people told me that I must mean *balinsoa*, the rude way to speak about mating, as animals do. Much later, on the north coast, when discussing dialect groups, I overheard someone mumble *soan walu*, the eight *soa*. I never did get a list of these eight groups that my main sources could agree on.<sup>8</sup> Under the sultanate, the Taliabu *soan* were neither exogamous nor strictly genealogical. Rather, there was a local adoption of

this borrowed term, *soa*, to refer to geographically discrete groups maintaining relations of mutual distrust. Conflicts did arise between families in different regions, sometimes leading to major feuds and bloodshed. In those former times, indeed, interregional relations were so strained that marriage between these groups was usually impossible. The important point regarding *soan* is that informants today cannot recall hearing of any concerted action in terms of such a group operating above the level of families.

While Taliabu people do not have a system of inherited ranks, much less a class system, there are four basic systems of precedence or hierarchy: relations of elder/younger across generations and within generations, relations between locals and outsiders, relations between affines, and relations between those in possession of effective spiritual knowledge and their students and patients. These qualifications may be compounded to yield figures of high status who nonetheless do not have jural authority over others.

As is common throughout Indonesia, the central relation is elder/younger—*kakak/uli*. In Taliabu, this relation extends beyond the generation concerned and is traced bilaterally back three or four generations. The senior person of her generation is called the *mentuain* and has special jural rights such as being executor of the parents' lands, and also ritual rights such as being the first to accept the homage of an affine marrying one of her cousins. The special status of the *mentuain* is also indicated in the requirement that intimate relations between *mentuain*—such as touching during healing—must be preceded by a formal exchange of gifts. Because of the rule tracing precedence back to the eldest of several ascending generations, the *kakak/uli* relation may operate in defiance of relative age differences within a generation. When the two persons concerned are too distantly related for precise reckoning, the distinction between those native to a locality and those from elsewhere operates in favor of the former. Because the *kakak/uli* relation has precedence over all other hierarchical relations, it easily overrides gender relations. Postmarital residence is a more important factor in establishing hierarchy.

Marriage rules forbid unions between those reckoned to be closer than fourth cousins. In addition, partners must originate from different river valleys. All people of a certain locality, regardless of kin distance, may not marry because, having grown up together, "they are like siblings." While unions were commonly between people of neighboring rivers, depopulation through disease, warfare, and police actions from the latter nineteenth century through to the 1930s have reduced the nearby choices. With the reduction in cases of violence among Taliabu people, it is easier to search farther for spouses. The bride's side will try to force matrilineal residence. In

any case, if the groom's side cannot meet the marriage payments—and they have been rising rapidly in the last fifteen or twenty years as immigrants have brought more goods to the island—the man must come to live near his parents-in-law.<sup>9</sup> Outsider status is lower status. One's inherited land is far away, as are the fruit trees and sago palms which yield food for subsistence or sale to immigrants. Spiritual knowledge, too, includes knowledge of the names and characteristics of local spirits, knowledge lacked by outsiders. While some families have moved to the hamlet under study, the majority of outsiders have married into the settlement. This combination of positions—as outsider and as son-in-law—places unusual constraints upon the autonomy of in-marrying affines.

Descent lines and precedence combine in the figure of the eldest descendant of the original settlers of a valley. Prior to the 1920s, the only native political figure was this senior person of the line claiming original settlement of a river valley.<sup>10</sup> Newcomers must seek permission from this person before opening a garden or taking any natural resources from a valley. In general, this is a mere formality today and no recompense is required in return for the use rights that are given. When this position is held by one with acknowledged spiritual knowledge, this person receives a tremendous amount of respect. Still, in terms of general social intercourse, generation and affinity are the most obvious and clearest elements in determining status differences.

### RITUAL WORK IN WAYO NANGU HAYA

While living in Wayo Nangu Haya, I was able to observe the interplay of ritual work, status relations, and hamlet residence in the context of the celebration of a *mangkanou* festival. The hamlet formed around one man, Pasinama, the descendant of the original line which first lived in the area. Because he was an active spirit dancer and effective healer as well as a teacher in these matters, many people came to spend several days with him. Some, including his sons, built huts nearby. The formal village (Ind. *desa*) government on the coast, in response to commands from above to congregate the people of the area into one spot, urged them to form a new hamlet at Wayo Nangu Haya. Because so many came to dance *ndelayon*, in which one seeks to establish contact with ancestors and other spirits, Pasinama hired some people to build a large *adat* house. This hamlet is now the most active indigenous religious settlement on the island. With the nightly dancing in the large *adat* house, the regular offerings to spirits, and the healing sessions, all of which demand contributions for offerings to the ancestors and local spirits, there is a lot of *adat* work to be done. People say that these activities benefit everyone. For instance, infections wreak havoc in

the coastal *desa* but Wayo Nangu Haya is often spared. Yet it is very hard to get people, including Pasinama's own sons, to help with the work. Even the *adat* house remains in poor shape. When plans for a *mangkanou* began to be discussed, two questions prevailed: would everyone contribute to the feeding and accommodation of guests, and would everyone help with the construction of the covered dance floor? The challenge was clear: to try to get the community as a whole involved in the sponsorship of a celebration which traditionally is put on by the head of a single family, with minimal help from his or her kin, affines, and friends.

The major task in preparing for the *mangkanou* festival is the construction of a *befak*, a large sturdy dancing floor (the dancing gets very lively) usually constructed on the ground with a roof and a low decorated wall around it. The *befak* took a very long time to get built. When looking at the problems associated with getting people to contribute to the work of building the *befak* and pitching in with the other preparations, it is important to note a father's response to seeing several youths sitting around watching the work: "Work like this must be voluntary. As with all *adat* work, you cannot tell someone to work." There must be no bad feelings with regard to *adat* work. One is loathe to order one's children and younger siblings. The work was borne in the first case by in-marrying sons-in-law. Following these were juniors of these people and other affines. To his great disappointment, Pasinama's own sons were least willing to help with the work but he was unable to do anything about it. This imbalance between native sons and in-marrying affines caused the most obvious ill-will in the community. Some of those who were expected to contribute to the work took off for the mountains and returned only when the *mangkanou* was to begin. In addition to the sons-in-law, a great deal of the preparation work was carried out by a senior man, Waninama, active in *adat* work at his home in the mountains behind the hamlet. He took on the role of organizer, and carried out the responsibilities of the spiritual leader, with advice from Pasinama. The latter was not actively involved in the *mangkanou*.

### THE MANGKANOU CELEBRATION

When children reach the age of six or seven years, they are ready for the initiation but the norm is to wait for several candidates. Often, as in the case at hand, there will be a range of ages from six to seventeen years. No one may marry before being initiated. A child's parents, grandparents, or uncle and aunt may sponsor the event and often someone will mount a *mangkanou* for his children and his younger siblings' children at the same time. Besides the sponsors, each child has a pair of *mfigi* or guardians. These must be unrelated to the child and his or her nuclear family and they must

exert themselves for the good of the child and give the child clothing and a parting gift of trees.

Even for Taliabu people, it is not easy to keep track of all the ritual details involved in the *mangkanou*. There are, clearly, elements that are truly essential and fixed and elements that are either dispensable or variable. There are three key and essential elements to the *mangkanou*. There is a communal meal followed by vigorous dancing each evening of the festival, the initiates are isolated for at least two days, and the initiates are dressed in special clothing and emerge from isolation to undergo symbolic and/or actual wounding. Before the *mangkanou* can begin, however, a great deal of preparation must be carried out.

Because all affines, relatives, and friends are invited to the *mangkanou*, the preparations—the smoking or, more recently, the salting, of pork, fish, or turtle; the working of sago; the gathering of money or establishment of credit for purchasing sugar, rice and cloth; the curing and storing of tobacco and the construction of a covered dance floor—may have to begin a year or two before the event. When all the preparations have neared completion and the date is set, people will go out to other locales to give news of the event. Before the ceremonial house, the *befak*, can be used, several requirements must be fulfilled. The *dego*, the offerings platforms, must be installed out by the paths to the hamlet. *Dego*, not necessary for the monthly offering meals, are essential at such a big event for the high level of activities is sure to attract a big contingent of the various unseen people—including ancestors and various kinds of nonhuman people and local lords. All the spirits—both good and bad—will expect to be shown this consideration. The *befak* too must be decorated for the enjoyment of the spiritual lords, for the ancestors, as well as for their living descendants—the human guests. Offerings of piper fruits, areca nuts, and tobacco must be hung inside; these, together with food and drink offerings at each meal at the *befak* are for the enjoyment of visiting ancestors. A white flag from the *adat* leader must be put in front of the *befak*. A gong and drums are placed inside. Finally, *wayo mutong* ("hot water")—tea or coffee with fried food for the blessing of the *befak*—is served and a short pray is uttered.<sup>11</sup>

A massive amount of bananas must be collected and stored in the house. At this point, it is very important that everyone involved, especially the candidates for initiation, dance every evening until the bananas are ripe. The attention of the ancestors and the gods will thereby be focussed on Wayo Nangu Haya. A small indication of the problems with carrying out the ritual requirements was Waninama's disappointment with the lack of assistance in setting up even such an important element as the *dego*. It was not planned in advance, so that the offerings and the decorations had to be solicited at the last minute, instead of being offered. It often seemed that Waninama was on

his own throughout. He had to collect the materials—the food offerings and the palm fronds and leaves for decorating the *dego*—go and put up the *dego*, and use the remainder for decorating the *befak*. Waninama said, if the *dego* is not in place beforehand, people will get sick: “Our *kembok haya* [superior soul] will see that the *adat* is just being put on willy-nilly. He’ll get mad and we’ll all get sick.” The point here is that all who live in Wayo Nangu Haya should have contributed food or fronds for the offering, since they were all to be part of the celebration to come.

On the eve of the ritual events, an auspicious communal meal, *pakanggomoin* (‘to make cool’), is eaten. This meal includes the two basic ritual foods, the bananas and *bagea*, baked sago and *kenari* sticks. Following this, the first night of dancing takes place and the festivities have fully begun.

The most common term used to describe the gathering of dancers is *rame*, busy, lively, festive.<sup>12</sup> The dancers hope to draw the attention of deceased relatives who will blow exhilarating wind to help the dancers achieve what Victor Turner (1974) referred to as “flow”—a feeling of exhilaration and absorption in the dance—and will hopefully keep them in mind in their relations with others in the spirit world. When the *mfigi* dance, however, they are each dancing for their own initiate’s protection and well-being, while one usually seeks spiritual aid for oneself and then for one’s family. It is essential for the health and welfare of the initiates that their *mfigi* dance *rame* every night, and ideally all night long. To sustain them, the parents provide the *mfigi* with beautifully decorated boxes kept filled with piper fruits, areca nuts, lime, and tobacco, and call them to drink coffee and eat through the night. The time of isolation of the initiates is dangerous, they are weak, and so the *mfigi* dancing is very important for them. Despite local differences, the dancing of the *mfigi* is always essential. As many people as possible should join the *mfigi* to keep everything *rame*, lively and spirited.

Before dawn following the first night of *rame*, the *mfigi* wake up the initiates who have spent the first night in their home and all assemble at the river for bathing. The clothes are left by the riverside and the boys are taken into seclusion in the forest, while each of the girls is sequestered in her *mfigi*’s home. The initiates are blackened with charcoal from burnt coconut husks and for two or four days must not be seen by anyone other than the *mfigi*. On the south coast, the role of the *mfigi* as dancer for the initiate is so important that the isolated initiates are visited only by young girls who bring food while the *mfigi* spend all the night dancing, the day sleeping.

In Wayo Nangu Haya, the boys stay in the forest as a group. They will often run wild, marauding in the forest or throwing stones out at people from behind forest cover. There is an enhancement of group feeling among them and their *mfigi* keep them well supplied with food and tea from their

parents. Although younger boys, of course, may grieve for the temporary loss of close family relations, especially if they do not know their *mfigi* very well, the time is not onerous for most of the boys. In contrast, each of the girls spends her time alone in the home of her guardians. For both boys and girls, the nights are spent in the guardians’ homes.

After two or four days of isolation, the children are bathed in the predawn hours. Their old, dirty clothes are cast into the river and they go into the bushes by the trail up to the *befak* to be prepared for their great emergence. The boys alone cross a symbolic boundary—they must step under and over crossed large knives (*peda nahu*) four times. Following this, the initiates are made beautiful. Their forelocks are cut back in imitation of the clear brow of an infant, cheap cologne or hairdressing is applied, and they are dressed in the special white clothes supplied by the parents. A headband (*pili*) of colored dried leaves and a colorful headdress (*dopo*) that conceals the face are affixed. People will try to get hold of a mirror to place on the chest to increase the glinting of light. The initiates are now ready to emerge reborn.

After a prayer to calm them and make them soft, weak (*mbolomo*; Ind. *lembut*), and beautiful, the initiates, supported by their *mfigi*, come out of the forest and line up according to seniority traced back several generations.<sup>13</sup> Together they shout a war cry to those waiting in the *befak*. Four times the call goes back and forth from the house to the initiates. Between each war cry, the initiates, supported by the *mfigi*, advance forward toward the *befak*. The initiates face the rising sun and the effect is dazzling. One woman told me: “We’re sad because the children [*mangkanou* initiates] come out all white and we think of our grandparents, of our parents, and everybody cries, the children cry; it’s very sad and touching.” After the initiates have advanced to the area in front of the house, they stand still while older brothers, uncles, and friends make war cries and threaten the initiates with the long war knives.

From the time when the initiates lined up on the trail and Waninama uttered the prayer to make them soft and weak, they have been semiconscious and their eyes are shut. They hear the yells but do not know that the long knife blades are swishing through the air inches from their faces and bodies. Guided by their *mfigi*, they have no idea they are in front of the ceremonial house. After the war dancing, the initiates are led to the ramp leading up to the *befak*.

At the base of the ramp, each of the initiate’s feet is placed on a plate and a prayer is uttered. The children, again in order of kin ranking, are carried by their *mfigi* up and into the house. Two sprouted coconuts and stalks of red leaves (*Cordyline terminalis*), both considered signs of longevity and vitality, are brought into the house with each of the initiates. Like the



coconut palm, the child should grow tall, straight, and true, and live a long and fruitful life. The red leaf plant is very hardy; it is a permanent record of the person who planted it. The two kinds of plants will be planted together as signs of everlasting endurance.

The initiates are now arrayed in status order on mats with their *mfigi* supporting them. More war dancing takes place inside the *befak*. There are many immigrants from Sulawesi in attendance and one of them is challenged to join in the dancing. Actually, people do regret the crowds and they often mentioned that these festivities should be for Taliabu people only. Once this phase of dancing—twenty minutes or more—is finished, it is time for the ear piercing.

Waninama, as the ritual leader, says a prayer to the initiates and then claps his hands four times in front of their faces to bring them to consciousness. Their headdresses are pulled back and then the leader blows on their faces to make them sleepy. The ear-piercing equipment—a coconut frond sliver in a piece of coconut husk—is not ready and there is some anxiety about getting the job done quickly and safely. Since there must be no communication between parents and initiates, and this is a worrisome operation, the initiates' parents have stayed away. The little ones begin crying over the piercing, so several of the boys have only one ear pierced. This deviation by Waninama as the organizer did not sit well with Pasinama as the *adat* master.

The initiates now do their own *mbayai*, the war dance, but yet again the practice sessions for the initiates were never done, so most of them are too shy to take part. The last stage of this part of the *mangkanou* is the handshaking between the initiates and all of their relatives and with all children. This marks the initiates' reintegration into everyday life and parents and initiates are now reunited and the taboos regarding initiate-parent communication are no longer in force. While said to be an important element, many parents stayed away from this offering of peace between the initiates and the rest of the community.

Pasinama, who avoided the *befak* throughout the festival, is now ready to receive the initiates in the old *adat* house to give them his blessing. Following this, they return to the *mfigi*'s houses and change into the new clothes given by the *mfigi*. There is another *pakanggomoin* meal in the afternoon. Another day passes, with the evening once again devoted to lively dancing in the *befak*, now including the newly initiated, and the second day after the piercing, the initiates return to the *befak* for the removal of the ear plug. After this, the initiates are given gifts of trees and land from parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. A last communal meal is served in the afternoon. The *mfigi* do not eat in the *befak* until after they have been fed from the initiates' hands and gifts of dry food, oil, and coffee have been

given to the *mfigi* by the parents. The *mangkanou* is over and those guests who have remained until this stage now return home. The initiates are now responsible for their own actions.

## DISCUSSION

Although the *mangkanou* does not involve the overt transmission of secret knowledge to the initiates, the period of seclusion provides the context for the first sharp gender distinction in the initiates' lives. This middle period also recalls Victor Turner's analysis of what he calls *communitas*. In this alternate "society," regular distinctions are effaced. In class societies, the middle, liminal phase of the ritual passage is characterized by a loss of rank distinctions. Because Taliabu children are generally all treated alike, this classless aspect of the liminal phase is irrelevant. On the other hand, the usual distinction between elder and younger siblings and cousins disappears in this period. The social invisibility of the initiates and the complete sharing of food during seclusion also fit with Turner's analysis (1967:99-101). The boys form a close band outside of society and outside of the village. On the other hand, girls are sequestered in individual houses within the village. The boys experience a camaraderie that contrasts with the individuality of normal adult society, while the girls are cut off from each other in contrast with the normal routine of sharing tasks. The details of the ceremony and especially the experiences of both male and female initiates are, in their particulars, meant to be secret. Children should not know about the initiation events beforehand, so the details of *mangkanou* are not common knowledge. When the initiates emerge reborn as autonomous and responsible individuals, they are given the trees which signify and enable their independence. Beyond the initiation ritual itself, the *mangkanou* festival as a whole demonstrates status publicly. The sponsors seek to overwhelm the guests with food and tobacco and with the demonstration of a festive celebration. The careful attention to rank order of the initiates clarifies any doubts as to senior kin lines. In addition to these important matters of status, we have seen that *mangkanou* functions as a family reunion of sorts, bringing together kin, affines, and friends from afar. It provides an occasion for the arts of dance, song, and storytelling. Finally, the celebration of *mangkanou* brings the initiates into direct exposure to the beneficence emanating from powerful ancestors and, through them, the gods themselves.

This concentration of spiritual attention upon the *mangkanou* benefits all who attend only if it is celebrated according to the dictates of the ancestors. In the Taliabu tradition, of course, knowledge of these instructions is personal and in some ways—due to the ego-centered

perspective typical of bilateral systems—idiosyncratic; there is no public canon applicable to any and all types of community. The burden of responsibility for carrying out these dictates of *adat* is a heavy one. The hamlet-wide celebration of *mangkanou* also demands extraordinary organizational skills.

An elderly man, Bapak Tua, as he was called, told me that in the old times there were never as many potential visitors as there are now. For this reason, and because sugar and rice were not necessary, it was not such a great expense to mount a *mangkanou*. While one or two families would sponsor the event, as noted above, many would come to help get things ready. In former times, there were no large houses, he said, so for a *mangkanou*:

You had to make a certain place for it. Send out the news, "I want to make a house for my children, an *adat* house." Those [who live in the area] of Gela come to help, help with this house. You had to gather lots of seedlings because later for the party there will be lots of food. Later, lots of fish, add *bagea* (sago sticks), also a great many. So at that time people already begin to work on it, work on the house together with work on the foodstuffs. Then when the party starts, it is very *rame*. *Mangkanou* is four days and four nights. *Rame* straight through the nights. So there must be lots of food. Up until today. But today, for those who already know [about modern and Christian ways], it has already begun to disappear. People do not want to make [the *mangkanou*] because it's a waste. You lose out on the supplies of rice, sugar, this and that; in the end you lose.

Bapak Tua here cites two reasons for the decline of *mangkanou* in his part of the island, a decades-old village of Taliabu Christians and Sulawesi Muslims. Using a common contrast between traditional ignorance and new awareness, the people of whom Bapak Tua speaks now "know" the newer regime, Christian and, the suggestion is, rationally economic. Bapak Tua's village does not present the social context for *mangkanou*—the oscillation between dispersal and congregation—within which the costs are balanced by the social rewards of coming together and revivifying the links among dispersed individuals and families. Status under the regime of the fixed coastal *desa* villages is linked directly to the money one has on hand and in the form of cash-crop trees. Status in Wayo Nangu Haya still rests in major part on how well one treats one's guests, and on how much one knows about the spirit world and the ways to communicate with this source of power. The *mangkanou* festival provides an arena for display of knowledge and of

communal cohesion. It has to be big to succeed. This wonderful conjunction of the social and the spiritual depends upon a resident Taliabu spiritual master. And this Bapak Tua's village does not have.

What does the Wayo Nangu Haya case have to say about the nature of Taliabu forms of leadership? In *Kings and Councillors*, Hocart (1970:34–35) wrote:

It is not only the ritual that exhibits a certain structure, but also the society that practices it; for the ritual is a social affair, it requires the cooperation of many, and so society must organize itself for ritual... This ritual organization is vastly older than government, for it exists where there is no government and where none is needed.

This statement applies very well to traditional Taliabu practices. In addition to the large-scale ritual complex that is *mangkanou*, the regular ritual life of Wayo Nangu Haya also provides the basis for cooperation and sharing in the hamlet. The basic pattern of this regular ritual life is the serving of hot beverages and food two days prior to and following the new moon. This sharing of food and drink marks the placement and the removal of piper fruit, areca nut, and tobacco offerings to gods and ancestors. Taliabu culture, then, exalts not only self-reliance and individual autonomy, but also cooperation and togetherness. The latter value depends upon some type of leadership. Given that leadership is based on access to and the employment of power, and given that in Taliabu power is based on knowledge, especially that gained through spiritual contacts, the type of leader required for the organization of ritual designed to maintain contacts with the gods, spirits, and ancestors, must be one in possession of ritual and spiritual knowledge. In Wayo Nangu Haya, Pasinama is this person.

In the case of the *mangkanou* festival, however, someone else was needed to organize the preparations for these events, and the material and labor needed to support these events—collection of food for the guests, the construction of the *befak*, and so forth. This role was filled by Waninama. But the latter is also a senior man, spiritually knowledgeable and a respected healer. He originates from outside the Wayo Nangu Haya area and is a distantly related cousin in a line junior to Pasinama and so, within Wayo Nangu Haya, he accepts Pasinama's authority. Of course it was not always easy for Waninama when his decisions were vetoed by Pasinama, and I contend that the tension felt especially by Waninama was a product of the need—due to the large scale of coordination that this *mangkanou* demanded—for a figure to bear responsibility for the necessary communal organization. Because of the regular strains among (and within) families living together in a hamlet of such size, the head of the original family must



either assume a role of authority over the residents as a whole (for which there is no precedent in Taliabu tradition) or find himself too much a member of the sociopolitical networks at play to be any sort of impartial leader. While retaining ritual authority, Pasinama, it may be surmised, felt unequal to this task of organization and implementation. Lacking a suitable apprentice (one whose status is below Pasinama but at least equal to that of most other hamlet residents), Waninama took this responsibility upon himself. Waninama's natural leadership ability was called to service but the nature of his kin and affinal ties—with just a few close links to the main families of the hamlet—were just as useful.<sup>14</sup> Still, in the hamlet context, his hard-won spiritual knowledge was secondary to that of Pasinama. The question remains: why did Pasinama refrain from personal involvement in the ritual segments of the *mangkanou*?

As noted, throughout the festivities, Pasinama, the *adat* master and senior member of the original family, did not come to the *befak*. He crossed Waninama's plans on several occasions, most noticeably when the male initiates were moved three times over the course of their two-day period of isolation. Pasinama, rather than discuss the local custom of *mangkanou* beforehand, waited for Waninama's innocent deviations from proper *adat* before making his pronouncements upon the ritual process.

When, after the festival had ended, I asked Pasinama why he did not exert more presence at the key points in the *mangkanou*, he told me: "The error began with the *adat* house. If you begin taking from the tip [of a branch] before returning to the tree [trunk], this cannot be done."<sup>15</sup> He also said that the boys' isolation hut should have been prepared beforehand down by the river. The point here is the matter of precedence. The *mangkanou*, at the *befak*, is likened to the branch; the regular ritual cycle, at the *adat* house, to the trunk. The *mangkanou*'s arrangements, organized by Waninama, overrode the *adat* house in two alternative ways. Although I could not obtain explicit statements detailing this problem, it appears that the *mangkanou* took place at the same time as the regular lunar rituals, and so these latter were ignored. Pasinama had, I imagine, expected the *adat* house to maintain its nightly pattern of *ndelayon* dancing. This was not kept up as the *befak* festivities attracted all of the attention. Because of this, Pasinama took down the drums and gong in the *adat* house, a very serious move. Somehow, then, the *adat* house was bypassed, hence Pasinama's refusal to be involved. Only when the ceremony of the ear piercing was completed did he summon the initiates to his room in the *adat* house to give them his blessing and gifts of trees.

The continued vitality of the *mangkanou* tradition on Taliabu depends upon suasive ritual leadership. The authority of a Taliabu leader is based on

access to and control of knowledge. His or her authority is grounded in the ability to contact ancestors and diverse nonhuman beings—invisible people who live in tree tops or among large boulders and waterfalls. If one has established regular contacts with certain of these beings, one receives communications in dreams. Spiritual masters also know the names of the local spirit lords and can thereby appeal for forgiveness for someone who commits a transgression against the lord. These contacts bring benefits to the master, to his or her family, and to those others who live within his or her environs. For example, an elderly couple, residents of a coastal village, have spent the last few years in Wayo Nangu Haya because, they say, their aches and pains are less severe near Pasinama and they can benefit from his powers of healing. Even the authority that comes from success in hunting is based on the hunter's contacts in the spirit world. Knowledge gained through contact with beings in the spiritual realm, then, provides the basis for one's authority and for one's ability to attract followers. The newer types of knowledge—of reading and writing, of cash-crop production, and of the ins and outs of profit, credit, indebtedness, and land rights—may be esteemed, but possessors of such knowledge are rarely, if ever, able to attract the kind of following that a successful shaman can. Under the new regime in the coastal villages, of course, the authority vested in the position of village head (*kepala desa*) emanates from the state apparatus whose effective power is the police based in the village or in the district capital. The village head must know something of literacy, commodity trading, and legal matters as well. Clearly, this new civil pattern whose terminus is the village head with the subsidiary hamlet heads (*kepala dusun*) is grounded in a set of values wholly different from that forming the basis of Taliabu leadership.

It may be that organized hamlet life and *mangkanou* are not compatible. Missionaries, identifying all customary *adat* practices with heathenism, appeared to believe that native life was totally imbued with spirit belief and practice. In attempting to Christianize, they sought to expunge all traces of *adat* with any connection to local religion. So, if drums attended the singing and dancing meant to call upon the ancestors, all drumming—even for nonreligious functions—must go. Where their efforts bore fruit, drumming no longer accompanies the playful exchanges of love songs among teenagers, calls neighbors to assemble to meet visitors, or signals the arrivals and departures of respected elders. In this way, Jansen saw that Christianity's entrance meant *mangkanou*'s exit. But today there is a little church in Wayo Nangu Haya and sometimes the lay preacher of the Protestant Church of Maluku (GPM) comes to lead Sunday service. One of Pasinama's sons told me that in Wayo Nangu Haya "*adat* and church" are not in conflict, but are equally valid and parallel to each other. The editors of *Indonesian Religions in Transition* write that the Dutch, believing that

independent religions would soon disappear, saw Christian missionization as a means to forestall the development of a nation fully united by Islam (Kipp and Rogers 1987:16). A substantial number of Taliabu people, however, had already resisted Islamic conversion. In Wayo Nangu Haya, Christianity alone is not bringing cultural traditions to an end.

The evident strains in the Wayo Nangu Haya *mangkanou* were, with one exception, not directly related to Christianity. The one exception was the one-day delay at the beginning of the ritual cycle because these officially Christian people feared problems, not with god but with the government, if they began on a Sunday. It is perhaps worth mentioning that an official within whose jurisdiction Wayo Nangu Haya lies told me that it was against the law for a researcher to instigate "*adat*" such as *mangkanou*.<sup>16</sup> He sought to use my presence to attempt to forestall what he imagined would be a wild convocation of scattered natives (perhaps because he was denied the 1950s and 1960s expedient of merely hauling the principals off to the capital for reeducation). It is therefore clear that the transition to the Indonesian settlement pattern has impinged on Taliabu independence in two ways, placing them under the intrusive eyes of external authority, and placing individual families and family components (such as married brothers) in sometimes uncomfortable juxtaposition with each other. It is not the convocation for *mangkanou* that generated animosities. These animosities developed within the tension between the maintenance of the coresident community and the tendencies toward its dispersal. The completion of the work was delayed because so many families were living in the hills, each at their own garden site. Instead of being pleased by the call to congregate for a celebration, they were annoyed by the call to come back to the hamlet to prepare for a celebration. When a couple of families call their kith and kin to congregate for the celebration of a *mangkanou*, most of the difficulties in preparing it are avoided or operate only within the families sponsoring the event.

The key characteristic associated with *mangkanou*, and indeed with regular Taliabu ritual life, is the presence of viable spiritual leadership. Christian missionizing, unless it leads to total renunciation of Taliabu beliefs, does not lead to the end of ritual life. Changes in settlement patterns, too, are themselves a function of the presence or absence of individuals with spiritual authority. Taliabu cultural life, including *mangkanou*, is threatened when missionization and the state apparatus combine with a lack of strong traditional leadership. When traditional authority is itself weak, a whole range of new values are able to exert their influence. In turn, new influences from outside can weaken a ritual master's influence over a dispersed population. Economic changes—not considered in this paper—are taking

place throughout Taliabu society. At this stage, in Wayo Nangu Haya, we cannot be certain of the extent to which the viability of traditional leadership, represented by Pasinama and Waninama, will decline in the face of the newer economic regime. Yet, while Pasinama's sons may appear far more interested in money than in spiritual knowledge, it is well known that the call to spiritual leadership can come at any time. Pasinama bemoans his sons' lack of enthusiasm for ritual work, but people say that when he is gone, one of his sons will rise to the occasion and assume his father's ritual and spiritual responsibilities. The *mangkanou* celebration was not without its problems, but in the end the strength of Pasinama's authority—attested to by his numerous students, the size of the Wayo Nangu Haya settlement, and the good health of its members—remained undiminished.

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### NOTES

1. For recent notes on other initiations in Maluku, see Platenkamp (1988:144–148) and Valeri (1990).
2. The one Taliabu community that is Islamic, a legacy of the island's inclusion within the Sultanate of Ternate, is omitted from consideration in this paper. Many of the villages in this first group are also home to Islamic immigrants from Sulawesi.
3. For the sake of anonymity, a toponym is used for the hamlet and the residents' names have been changed.
4. The earliest Dutch reference may be that of 1618 (Coolhaas 1960:89).

5. Taliabu people use the term *adat* to distinguish their own ways from those of outsiders. Its referents include ritual prescriptions, Taliabu religion, and the norms and customs that govern social relations.
6. According to people near Kowalo and at Lipomo, in some cases Taliabu people accompanied the Indonesian police on these missions.
7. On *siwa-lima*, see Valeri (1989); on *pela*, see Bartels (1977); and for *soa*, see van Fraassen (1987).
8. Several sources list divisions for Taliabu (de Clercq 1890:114-115; Heeres 1895:215-217; Valentijn 1724[I,2]:87; Rooselaar cited in van Fraassen 1987:219; van Hulstijn 1918:39-40). Among those who list eight *negorijen*, van Hulstijn notes that Taliabu's low population led to a system of four pairs, the major partner headed by a *sangaji* (district head or *soa* head), the minor by a *kimelaha* (village head). Although none of the lists correspond exactly with those given by Taliabu informants, there may have been a synthesis of two ideas, the eight administrative villages called *soa* and corresponding to *kampung* (van Fraassen 1987[I]:141) and the local sense of separate, often mutually antagonistic, regional groups.
9. Payment comprises three types: fixed customary payments which go primarily to the bride's parents, added requests from certain of the bride's close elder kin, and a combined payment for distribution among other close kin of the bride. The bride's side pays nothing more than for coffee, tobacco, and *sirih-pinang* (piper fruit, areca nut, and lime) offered to the groom's representatives during negotiations.
10. People used the Indonesian phrase *Tuan Tanah* for this figure. Largely because of poor information, the nonindigenous political relationships among non-Muslim Taliabu people, coastal dwelling Muslims and the Ternatan state cannot be considered here.
11. *Nene Jou sane selamat dan pakanggomoin*. 'Grandfather Lord, [we] call upon [you for] safety and good health.'
12. I use *rame* in the text when, as in Taliabu, the reference is to lively group activities in general. Thus people will say it is *rame* here tonight when they drop in on a friend whose house is full of visitors. *Rame* is also used for spirit dancing or for the modified war dance that is pursued with

great gusto each evening of the festival. In Taliabu, to *bei rame* is to put on an occasion for festive gatherings of any sort or for any religious occasion in which at least several people dance *ndelayon*.

13. The ranking order is usually based on the relative birth order of grandparents. Where the initiates are too distantly related to establish the character of their grandparents' relations with each other, those whose ancestors are from distant locales are ranked lower. There was some confusion regarding my son. Because he has a very distant origin, and perhaps because he was considered a sibling of Ipa, his friend and a low ranking person, he was initially put at the end. At other times, as during the preceding hair-cutting ceremony, he was placed arbitrarily in the middle. Finally, probably because it was more diplomatically proper to place him at the front, he was given first position with the following justifications: because the myth of the ancestors who left the island is often interpreted so that their new home is an island off America and we were from "America," we were therefore Taliabu people's *kakak* ('elder sibling').
14. While it is true that Waninama has the abilities demanded of a civil leader—an understanding of politics, an ability to lead others in work tasks, and an understanding of the ways of outsiders—he ought not be put into the secular side of a civil-ritual leadership dyad. There is today another type of leader, a civil position, designated by the Indonesian government, the hamlet head (Ind. *kepala dusun*). This functionary reports to the village head (Ind. *kepala desa* or *kepala kampung*) and is expected to ensure residents' compliance with government demands that they perform weekly community work (Ind. *bakti*) and pay taxes and ad hoc contributions (Ind. *sumbangan*) to the village or district government. It is held by a man who takes no active part in ritual, and moreover, in keeping with the Taliabu ethos in matters of leadership, he is very reluctant to give any orders whatsoever. Indeed, he spent the two months prior to the *mangkanou* at his second home down the coast. This foreign position of *kepala dusun* does not figure in this account precisely because the *mangkanou* event is an indigenous institution while the *kepala kampung* is not.
15. "Yang salah mulai di rumah adat: kalau mulai ambil di ujung baru kembali di pohon, tidak bisa."

16. This official's attitude is no longer consistent with Indonesia government policy regarding *adat*, but it is an anachronistic example of the 1950s and 1960s policy among those posted to Taliabu.

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