GENESIS IN BULI: CHRISTIANITY, BLOOD, AND VERNACULAR MODERNITY ON AN INDONESIAN ISLAND

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Christianity and local ontology in the North Malukan village of Buli intersect in surprising ways that upset conventional ideas about tradition and modernity. The poetics and cultural politics of blood, as these emerge in an idiosyncratic telling of Genesis, attest to a paradoxical modernity. In this ambivalent modern imaginary, traditional ontology frequently structures pretensions to being modern, while modern sensibilities form the basis of ostensibly traditional assertions. Attending to the discursive and ontological aspects of blood in Buli therefore provides a way of analyzing the entangled imaginaries of modernity and tradition in a marginalized Indonesian community, and by extension a way of bringing the debates about invented traditions and alternative modernities into constructive conversation. (Symbolism and politics of blood, alternative modernities, objectified tradition)

Tradition and modernity long ago lost analytical credibility as antithetical concepts or as simple descriptive labels appropriate for two radically different types of society. In the wake of the invention-of-tradition debate initiated in the 1980s, which called attention to the modern politics involved in making and remaking tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Hanson 1989), a new set of questions and research problems emerged as it became evident that while the political economy of modernity is inescapable, the cultural space opened up by this political economy contains multiple imaginaries about what it means to be modern. Just as tradition is inscribed within modern politics and imaginary, modernity itself is continuously vernacularized from specific cultural vantage points. One of the concepts to materialize as a heuristic device for talking about the dual processes of objectification and vernacularization has been that of "alternative modernity" (Appadurai 1996; Gaonkar 2001a; Knaft 2002a; Lichtblau 1999; Mitchell 2000a; Rofel 1999). The alternatively modern is, as Knaft (2002b:25) suggests, "the social and discursive space in which the relationship between modernity and tradition is configured." Within this space, the large-scale realities of political economy are reconstituted locally on many levels at the same time. What it means to be modern is vernacularized, yet the vernacular itself is objectified according to new types of imaginaries and sensibilities made available by the new political economy and ideoscapes of modernity.

This article seeks to chart a course between seeing tradition merely as a modern invention and seeing modernity merely as a tradition among others. The aim is to bring the debate about the politics of tradition and the discussion about the multiplicity of modernity (two theoretical discussions separated in both time and outlook) into closer mutual orbit. The bone of contention in both discussions, their

differences aside, thus seems to be to what extent the formative effects of political hegemony may be said to impinge critically on local practices and ideas, and to what extent localizing strategies succeed in remodeling outside structures of domination to create some autonomy. For the invention-of-tradition debate, one of the central issues was whether the focus on the politics of tradition ignored local forms of "world-making" (Ortner 1995; Sahlins 1999; Thomas 1992). Imperialism is not the only game in town, as Sahlins's (1994:380) sarcastic quip had it. Proponents of the alternative- or multiple-modernity hypothesis voice similar kinds of concerns against modernization theory in its more simplistic versions. As Taylor (2001:179) argues, conventional modernization theories fail because they assume the domain of the modern (and by implication the West) to be somehow beyond culture. As a consequence, modernization theory flattens the diverse articulation of modernity around the world, conceptualizing modernization as a wave-like process that floods local forms of world-making: "The belief that modernity comes from a single, universally applicable operation imposes a falsely uniform pattern on the multiple encounters of non-Western cultures with the exigencies of science, technology, and industrialization" (Taylor 2001:180).

Integral to the pluralization of modernity has thus been a rethinking of the concept of modernity itself, seeing it more as a site-specific imaginary, "an attitude of questioning the present" (Gaonkar 2001b:13), and less a simply given, wave-like process. As an imaginary, modernity is an exclusionary order that imagines a modern subjectivity set apart from an "Other" (Said 1995). This powerful imaginary about the fundamental difference between the modern and the rest has been institutionalized around the world within a system of global socioeconomic hegemony. The appropriation of this modern imaginary by those outside the imagined orbit of original modernity, however, is full of contradiction and irony (Carrier 1992; Chakrabarty 1992). The complexity and variety of these reconceptualizations are such that any singular or uniform definition of modernity is impossible. Rather, modernity is imagined and realized in a variety of alternative forms around the globe (Rofel 1999; Gaonkar 2001b:23). Although the alternative-modernity thesis has been criticized for its lack of attention to global political economy, for unintentionally incorporating a metatheory of modernity (Dirlik 2002; Englund and Leach 2000) as well as for slipping too easily into cultural relativism (Ferguson 2002; Mitchell 2000b), it does serve as a useful space for talking about the entangled imaginaries of tradition and modernity.

The imaginaries of tradition are in other words shaped in a complex relationship with modernity both as a cultural space and as a global, albeit refracted institutional setting. Similarly, modernity is not a universal form. It is remodeled by the discourses and institutions of the nation-state (Donham 1999; see also Bubandt 1999) and is appropriated from a local view that is the combined product of processes of objectification and the historical sedimentation of a localized ontology.

These considerations about the interwoven imaginaries of tradition and modernity were inspired by two types of responses I received in Buli to the question: Where do

people come from? The most articulate, if still brief, versions of these answers were those given in two different contexts in 1994 by Komo (pseudonym), a key informant and companion during fieldwork in Halmahera over some 34 months between 1991 and 2002. Komo, in his early sixties, is respected for his traditional knowledge, and like most members of the Evangelical Protestant Church in Halmahera (GMIH), a diligent churchgoer. He is frequently called upon to act as the ceremonial leader in marriage negotiations or in his capacity as the traditional legal authority to adjudicate in land disputes and family conflicts. He has also served one five-year term as a deputy to the state-appointed village leader, and he is eager to see that at least some of his ten children are placed in respectable if poorly paid positions within the state bureaucracy or as employees in the nickel mine that opened in Buli in 1997.

The first of Komo's answers to the question about the origins of human beings was presented as something that the ancestors believed and he merely asserted that "people, of course, came from blood." The second answer was self-consciously Christian, and a somewhat idiosyncratic rendition of the Creation story in Genesis. The two answers seem at first blush to belong to two very different conceptions of the world, the former traditional, the latter Christian and modern. Indeed, this is the perception surrounding the answers in Buli. But the themes of blood and Genesis that the two answers offer are closely intermingled. The Christian myth of human genesis is not interpretable without an understanding of the fragmented narrative that runs through it. This narrative deals with what one might call a Buli ontology of blood.

Traditional ontology in Genesis shapes Komo's notions of what it means to be modern. The traditional answer, in turn, is influenced by both modern and Christian discursive conditions of conceiving and talking about tradition. Marginalized by modern Indonesian state prejudice, traditional imaginaries nonetheless enable Buli engagements with modernity. The result is an alternative modernity that simultaneously refracts Buli ontology and the Indonesian modern.

GENESIS AND THE ECONOMY OF SPEECH

One evening in mid-1994, I sat in Komo's house sorting lines and tackle for the next day's fishing trip. Jonas, Komo's son-in-law and an accomplished fisherman, was tying lures to fishing hooks, while Komo, whose eyesight had been deteriorating, was content to provide advice. As we worked at a leisurely pace, conversation meandered across a number of topics. Jonas, a member of the local church council, complained that people were unwilling to pay the contributions necessary to finish the new church building. Komo agreed, adding that he had heard that some of the recalcitrant villagers had in fact earned a good amount of money prospecting for gold in the forest to the north of Buli. For a while, we exchanged views on the new opportunities for earning cash that had emerged since the early 1990s, as Buli changed from an economic backwater on the remote east coast of Halmahera to a small pioneering town associated with the exploitation of timber, nickel, and gold. Eventually, conversation turned to the suspicion that witchcraft was behind the death

of a relative, and then to the reasons why people live and die. I took the opportunity to ask Komo where people came from in the first place. Inspired perhaps by our talk about church matters earlier, Komo said, "All people come from Adam and Eve. God created Adam out of a rib that He took from Eve. He then placed both of them in the Garden of Eden. They stayed there for a while, but Eve was tempted to eat that forbidden fruit called apple. Because of this, all women must now menstruate in an attempt to get rid of the dirt (Ind., *kotoran*)."

"But Adam also ate from the fruit, didn't he?"

"Yes," Komo said, "that is true, but he didn't swallow!"

Komo's rendition of Genesis was interesting in three ways. First, it differed from the answer he had given me only a few weeks earlier to the same question. On this earlier occasion, Komo had said that people came from blood. Second, his answer differed from my own memory of Genesis. Third, both answers seemed to be indications of a broader picture, which no amount of further prodding on either occasion succeeded in elucidating. As far as Komo was concerned, the two answers, for all their brevity, were the full story. The rest of this article is an attempt to fill in what Komo felt it was natural to leave unsaid. The treacherous brevity of his answers belies their ontological grounding and makes an explanation of the Buli economy of speech necessary. The contours of this economy are closely related to the issue of how to conceptualize a site-specific approach to modernity.

The people of Buli are not eloquent orators. They are avid gossips, but like many other Malukans, the roughly 3,500 Buli people lack the elaborate narratives and much of the intricate parallel ritual language present in other parts of eastern Indonesia, with perhaps Roti and Timor being best known for their elaborate forms of formal speech (Fox 1988).¹ It is very important for ritual officials to be eloquent at marriage ceremonies, to be able to "carry the word" (*ut mauting*), but Buli ritual orations are on these occasions usually short and lack the finesse and rhetorical intricacy of other east Indonesians. Parallelisms are rare and restricted to word couplets. Speeches are in other contexts either absent, very short, or directed inaudibly at the spirits and ancestors. Myths are relatively short and narrated with considerable reticence or embarrassment. Buli people, in short, do not cultivate an oral ritual tradition attentive to the social power of rhetoric.

This disavowal of formal rhetoric does not mean that the power of language itself is ignored. On the contrary, formulaic spells (*sarát*) are vital to the protection of life and are associated with medicinal cures, burials, and a wide variety of magical practices. It is precisely the efficacy of language—to which magic is a testimony—that necessitates a limitation of public rhetoric. While long ritual orations seem to proscribe an etiquette for communication and action in the world (Hoskins 1988), the few words of a *sarát*, if correctly formulated, can actually change the world.

The epistemological principles implied by such an understanding of language have been described for another Malukan people, the Hualu of Central Seram, where true knowledge shows its power through verbal paucity and simplicity, while verbal effusion betrays an ultimate powerlessness (Valeri 1994:208). Perhaps, then,

there is a general Malukan paucity of ritual orality. This paucity would not only mark a difference to most eastern Indonesian societies, it would also appear to be a feature of speech that stands in stark contrast to the everyday Malukan predilection for spells, gossip, and talk (see also Grimes 1997:122).

Compared, for instance, to the intricate incorporation of Genesis into Rotinese ritual language (Fox 1983), Komo's rendition clearly lacks rhetorical ornamentation. However, this rhetorical brevity is a form of discursive economy rather than an instance of a poverty of tradition. Rhetorically, what Buli lack in the art of parallelism, they make up for in conciseness: saying what is needed as briefly as possible. What makes the discursive economy of Komo's answers rich is not related to what the answers reveal about a stable and authentic tradition, but is rather linked to the way they speak to the place of tradition in the world, to local ideas about Christianity, and to the locally salient ways of being modern in Buli.

DESIRE AND DISAVOWAL

Tradition can mean both a type of cultural self-consciousness and an ontological grounding. In its first sense, tradition is an aspect of conscious identity and self-reflection, a creation to a large extent of the language of modernity. As Thomas (1992:215) suggests, it is useful to speak of tradition in this first sense as a product of objectification, a self-fashioning process whereby certain attributes become metonymic icons for a group and are reified as essential for its identity. Friedman (1992:361) lists the appeal to tradition as one of five identity strategies in a postcolonial and postmodern world, and describes how the roots of this strategy and the accompanying process of objectification reach back to colonial times.

From this perspective, tradition is related to the colonization of consciousness (Friedman 1992:338). Fashioned from the conditions of colonial rule, progressive conversion to world religions, and modernization, yet necessarily marginalized from them, tradition is conservative and on the defensive against the accepted idea of modernity as a wave of the new. Rational technology, scientific knowledge, and world religion all threaten to strip tradition of legitimacy. Any contemporary invention of tradition takes place within a specific niche of this historical and institutional framework and is restrained by more than internal limitations. To frame this in the Malukan context, the brevity of traditional orality in Buli cannot be reduced to an essential cultural trait. It is perhaps useful to describe it as a peculiar effect, at least in part, of the marginalization of tradition by modern discourse and modern forms of knowledge. In the same process by which modern truths are created and supported by modern institutions, aspects of the past assume a marginalized but essentialized truth value as well. Tradition is in this sense invented and objectified as the negative inversion of a desired modernity.

Such objectifications and the imagined modernity against which they are defined do not arise *ex nihilo*, however, and this is where the second mode of tradition as ontological grounding needs to be emphasized. Objectified tradition is thus assembled

from a field of specific, if changing, attributes interpreted from a specific, if changing, sense of the world. The process of objectification also has an ontological grounding in the largely unreflected aspects of customary discourse and practice. No matter how much tradition is the result of a political and historical sedimentation structured by colonialism and modernity, this sedimentation is also a creative process that is informed by a changing and fragmented "positive unconscious" of knowledge and action (Foucault 1973:xi). If this were not the case, modernization would lead to increased cultural homogenization, which does not seem to be happening (Sahlins 1994). Certainly within the societies of eastern Indonesia, which otherwise share many sociocultural similarities, differences persist (and even grow). Formal speech forms, for example, go from elaborate in Timor to unadorned in Buli. However, the loss of legitimization by custom and the aesthetic marginalization by traditional discourse of itself in the face of modernity happen in Timor as much as they do in North Maluku. Modernizing constraints cannot therefore stand alone when it comes to explaining the brevity of formal speech peculiar to Buli. As a consequence, traditional aspects of oral ritual brevity in Buli are not purely a new invention determined by the modern stigmatization of things traditional. Only the dialectic and diacritical interplay of marginalization by modernity and the continuous reformation of a cultural ontology sufficiently explains the brevity of formal speech in Buli, so that modern reification and aesthetic marginalization of tradition further tightened an already austere Buli economy of ritual speech.²

ONTOGENIC AND PHYLOGENIC INTERPRETATIONS OF MODERNITY

The two recurrent answers to the question of human origins arise from different interpretations of the question. The first response, "all people come from blood" (implicitly, the blood of their mothers), answers the question of human origins in a cosmo-physical sense. It derives its legitimacy from traditional knowledge about ontogenesis. In Buli, every human being comes from the blood of its mother, which accumulates in the womb during pregnancy. Life, in this sense, derives from the mother. Women's close association with fertility is of both cosmological and social importance. The necessity of "keeping the blood flowing" is thus an ideology which, as Fox (1980) and others have shown, is commonly involved in the ordering of asymmetric alliance systems throughout eastern Indonesia. In other words, blood is a master trope that pertains to the reproduction of both human and social life.

Compared to the first traditional answer, Komo's second response is seemingly of quite another order. His serious face and somber voice indicated that Komo intended his answer to be an authoritative demonstration in exegesis as it is practiced Sunday nights, when villagers meet in Bible-study groups to discuss issues raised during the sermon. To give his answer, Komo shifted from Buli to standard Indonesian, the language of government administration and church service. His response was clearly meant to show me his Christian conviction. Affiliation to one of the officially acknowledged world religions in Indonesia is closely linked to the

concerns of state ideology and simultaneously expresses an avowed support for the politically streamlined idea of modernization (Adnan 1990; Aragon 2000; Atkinson 1983; Kipp and Rodgers 1987; Spyer 1996; Stange 1986).

In this vein, Komo's answer to my question, posed in 1994 during the heyday of New Order rule, was an affirmation of his modern identity both as a Christian believer and as a supportive citizen of the ruling social order. As an extension of this link between religion and modernity, his avowedly modern answer served to performatively discard as stupid the ideas of his pre-Christian forebears. Using the Christian origin myth (see Leach 1967; Pagels 1988) as a platform of authority, Komo explains the origin of mankind as a whole in a kind of elaborate historical narrative in which Buli myths do not normally excel.

While the first response speaks of the origin of each human being repeated in every birth, the second response speaks of the origin of humanity. In the language of biology, the response that all people come from blood speaks of individual origin, or ontogenesis. The reworked version of Genesis appears to speak of the origin of the human species as a class, or phylogenesis. As has been pointed out, the emergence of humans as a phylor or class is a distinctly modern phenomenon (Foucault 1973; Rabinow and Dreyfus 1982:30). If Komo's version speaks of a phylogenic human origin, it would indeed be a modern myth. This would go well with the argument recently put forward by van der Veer (1996) and others (Asad 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991) that conversion to Christianity is also implicitly a conversion to modernity. However, this is not the case. While claiming to be modern, Komo's version of Genesis on closer inspection turns out not to be about humans as a class but rather an allegory of the ontogeny of children in the Buli universe. Instead of an origin myth about man, Genesis in Komo's rendition becomes part of an ontology of birth.³ In other words, the two answers, despite their different frames of reference, provide the same sort of answer.

The conversion to Christianity is indeed a conversion to modernity, but to a modernity of a particular kind, because conversion implies a process of translation that is simultaneously hegemonically structured and structurally unstable (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:25; Rafael 1988). While the terms of the discussion about the origin of people in Buli are largely a combination of state expectations and church orthodoxy, the semantic and praxeological details that go into the local making of modern and traditional assertions are not.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENSTRUATION

Komo's rendition disagrees in three points with the orthodox Christian version of Genesis, chapters 1 to 3.⁴ First, the relationship of primacy between Adam, the man, and Eve, the woman, is inverted (Genesis 2:22). In Komo's version, Eve is created first and Adam is taken from her rib instead of the reverse.

Second, menstruation is portrayed as Eve's punishment for her breach of the divine injunction against eating from the Tree of Knowledge. The Christian text

stipulates banishment from Eden, general toil for Adam's male descendants, and pain during birth for Eve's female descendants as God's punishment (Genesis 3:16-19). Menstruation is not explicitly mentioned, although it may be said to be contained in the notion of giving birth. Komo's interpretation is not unusual in a comparative perspective. Indeed, a long tradition in Christian hermeneutics has circled around the idea that menstruation is Eve's curse for her role in the Fall (Fonrobert 2000; Wood 1981).

Third, Adam is credited with not swallowing his bite of the offered fruit. Because of this precaution, Adam and his male descendants do not harbor in their bodies the "dirt" of the consumed fruit. Therefore men are exempt from having to expel this offending substance by menstruating. This differs from the orthodox text, which explicitly states that both Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6).

The key to understanding the link between the primacy of Eve and the role of menstruation as a prominent feature of Komo's version of Genesis is the short statement that "people come from blood." Komo's claim that Eve was the first being is simply a different way of asserting the Buli ontogenical notion that humans are formed from menstrual blood in the wombs of their mothers. Women in general and mothers in particular are the origin of human beings. It is therefore only logical that Eve, the first mother of all people in the Bible, should also be the first human being. In Buli understanding, the fetus is formed when the semen of the father succeeds in capturing the menstrual blood of the mother. The monthly additions of the mother's blood are contained during pregnancy in this incipient human form. It is because semen "wraps" (*opi*) around the menstrual blood in the womb that conception takes place (see Biersack 1983). For pregnancy to occur, this wrapping must continue many times over several months.

This idea is sometimes used as a defense in paternity cases. A young man in the village involved in a paternity case may indignantly insist that he could not possibly be the father of a child because he only had intercourse with the girl once or twice. The girl and her family vehemently reject such a claim because it entails an accusation of promiscuity on the part of the girl. If the boy's protestations were allowed to stand unopposed, the logical conclusion in public opinion would be that the girl must have had multiple partners for the pregnancy to develop. The gist of Buli notions of conception is that semen, the male fluid, has a formative function, while (menstrual) blood, the female fluid, is the substantive component of human life.

THE BULI ONTOLOGY OF BLOOD

Bodily fluids are indexical of a limited good, but female blood more so than male semen. There is a special emphasis on the ever-diminishing quantities of blood in the female body. The decreased fertility of older couples and menopause are indications that the body has "dried up" or "grown skinny" (*gaglt*). Lack of blood is also a symptom of illness. A frequently requested pill distributed from the local health clinic is the common vitamin pill. The fact that this pill is referred to as "the pill that adds

blood" (Ind., *pil tambah darah*) explains this popularity. The vitamin pill "causes the blood to return" and is therefore sought by people for whom lack of blood is a problem. This group could in principle include most people: children, old people, people with appetite problems, people who are underweight due to consumptive forms of illness like tuberculosis or anemia because of recurrent malaria. People who feel tired due to exhaustion or malnutrition are also said to lack blood (*kurang darah*). "Pills that add blood" are most frequently supplied to women who complain of fatigue or reduced fertility.

Every menstruation in Buli, called "to see blood" (*em lafláf*), is evidence of the absence of life, the wasting of a limited resource from the male point of view. Therefore, menstruation is considered beneficial if it occurs irregularly or infrequently. In this sense, menstruation is an evil of sorts, the index of a lost opportunity for a child. It is not an evil in the Christian sense (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988a:32), however. Menstruation is thus not explicitly associated with a devaluation of women (cf. Ardener 1975; Ortner 1974), nor is it seen as a kind of pollution (e.g., Douglas 1966).⁵ The containment of blood in the body is an index of fertility, while the appearance of blood is its negation, and associated with infertility and danger. This goes for menstrual blood as it does for blood in general (see Barraud and Friedberg 1996:379). In addition to being a master metaphor for fertility in the contexts of alliance and descent (if contained in the body), blood is also an index of danger (if spilt uncontrollably) in the contexts of ontogenesis and corporeal being. Blood is simultaneously an auspicious and an ominous symbol, depending on the context in which it occurs.

BLOOD AND MAGIC

In Buli, the ambivalent qualities attached to blood are related to rules of avoidance. Normally, burial effects the transition of the deceased into an ancestor spirit (*smengit*), but in some cases this transition cannot occur and the deceased becomes a roaming, dangerous spirit (*muming*). Muming spirits are created when the blood of the deceased is spilt uncontrollably and no proper burial is carried out. The example that people typically give of this dangerous waste of blood is when Tobelo forest-dwellers kill a villager and hide the dead body in the bush. The social memory of a long-standing enmity between Buli and their Tobelo neighbors is very much part of the martial self-identity of Buli people. Although the sectarian violence that ravaged Maluku and North Maluku after August 1999 threw many traditional oppositions into confusion and allied Christian Tobelo and Christian Buli as the conflict increasingly involved the cascading of religious enmity, suspicion toward Tobelo people remains strong.

One of the effects of the sectarian conflict in North Maluku, which cost over two thousand lives and displaced several hundred thousand in a total population of some 800,000, was to reinforce the ethnic aspect and belligerent tenor of many local identities (see Bubandt 2001; van Klinken 2001). Belligerence is thus a major

component of the male Buli sense of self, as evidenced by the high proportion of martial potions (*man de wela*) in the Buli medicinal cabinet. These martial potions occur in various forms in most Halmaheran societies. Under heavy moral pressure from modernist rhetoric, war magic was nearly banished during New Order rule. However, as part of the new cultural localism that sectarian violence and political decentralization have engendered, war magic has undergone a quiet renaissance. In Buli, Friday night is usually a time when young men roam the streets in search of girls or palm wine. But during the anxious social climate of 1999 and 2000, despite the fact that it was one of the few Halmaheran communities that did not become directly embroiled in the violence, Friday nights became an occasion for youths to furtively seek out ritual leaders to ask for their magical potions, just as the old men remembered it from their youth.

In Buli war magic, the connection between blood and death is intimate and the muming spirits act as a linking concept. In mythical times warriors were given magical eye drops before they set off to engage their Tobelo enemies. Conventional wisdom has it that if anyone were to see or be sprayed with blood during fighting without prior administration of these eye drops, their eyes would quiver uncontrollably and they would die in convulsions. The eye drops are medicine to block the muming (*lalao tiban muming ca*). The delayed ill effects of the blood spilled onto a man during fighting derive from the muming spirit of the person he killed or saw killed. The eye drops protect the eyes and thereby the whole person from being adversely affected by the sight of blood.

The connection between blood, danger, and death is apparent in other contexts as well, including magic, witchcraft, and burial. With magic, the consumption of tomatoes is prohibited if one also regularly drinks magical fighting medicines, as many Buli men, despite their Christian allegiance, do on Fridays. These medicines consist of roots (*aiwáo*) that are grated and mixed with palm wine. They ensure martial invulnerability and make the person "forget fear" (*talinga namcait*). However, the blood-like redness of tomatoes would counteract the protection of the medicine. Any wound or scratch due to fighting would bleed profusely and be fatal.

Shedding blood was also previously a danger in connection with the execution of *suanggi* people. *Suanggi* is the Moluccan Malay term for villagers suspected of being cannibal witches, beings that in Buli are termed *gua*. Until the early years of this century the punishment for a person suspected of *gua* activity by a large proportion of the village was drowning at sea, the body being weighted with stones and dropped overboard from an outrigger. Apart from ensuring that the suspected cause of sickness and death in the village disappeared without a trace, this procedure also prevented any inauspicious blood spilling, since to kill the accused on land entailed the danger of spilling the blood of a confirmed *gua* on the ground (Maan 1922).

In several contexts, shedding blood on the ground establishes an unbreakable link with a locality. Shedding the blood of a witch on land, particularly within the village, would cause the witch to eternally return to the place of its slaying. Geographical bonding initiated by shedding blood is also evident in the creation of muming spirits.

For up to a year after a slaying, the muming spirit of the murdered person haunts the place of the killing. Only later does the spirit assume a more roaming nature. Similarly, Buli people rejected a proposal by the district administration in the 1970s to move their village to another location on the grounds that blood had been shed there in the past fighting Tobelo enemies.

Blood is a danger at death and burial even under normal circumstances. Gua witches appear at every occurrence of severe sickness and death, drawn by the smell of blood (Bubandt 1998a). They remain a danger to all villagers for the three days and nights it takes for burial to transform the liminal corpse into an ancestral spirit (*smengit*).

BLOOD AND BIRTH

Ritual burial of the placenta after birth is analogous to the burial of a corpse in that it, too, attracts the morbid attention of witches. This incipient analogy between death and birth is not coincidental. Birth is dangerous to both mother and child. The mortality rate of mothers giving birth is as high as anywhere in eastern Indonesia, and the Buli assertion that men die in the forest and women die during childbirth is not without statistical foundation. This danger is directly linked to blood. Because babies originate from the blood of their mothers, they are said to be born raw (*ulúlif*). This condition attracts the gua witches, who also are lured by the smell of blood. However, the raw quality also constitutes a danger in itself, that of decomposition and death. Various medicinal compresses and concoctions administered after birth therefore aim at expelling the raw blood from the mother and child. The newborn child, for instance, is kept close to a warming fire during the first few months of its life in order to be "cooked" (*masa*).

As part of this "cooking" process, a female member of the household carries out a procedure called *tarke wawái ca* (to hold the child to the fire). The child is first washed with warm water soaked in roots from the mangrove tree (*wat*). The roots cleanse slime (*peperá*) and raw blood from the baby. Then the woman warms her hands by the fire that she tends next to her bed and proceeds to squeeze a part of the baby's body. This is repeated until all areas of the body have been treated. The procedure is carried out every morning and evening and makes the flesh "stick to the bones" (*lit mali long na*), thereby forming the child. In effect, the child hardens into a safer social form. This social process of forming continues the natural forming of the female blood by the male semen during conception. The mother of the baby treats herself in the same way twice a day "to expel that which is inside" (*facapang fapéisa ta pomúl*). She finishes the process of *tarke* by standing astride the smoking embers of the burning coconut shells to allow the heat to enter her.

A number of other practices also aim at banishing the raw blood from the body of the new mother and she is subjected to numerous food prohibitions. These prohibitions relate to a way of classifying foods according to their taste and supposed constitutional nature. Food may be bitter, sweet, sour, slimy, oily, or raw. Of these,

only food and drink said to be bitter (*ngingái*) are considered beneficial to the restitution of the mother's body after birth. The other categories of food are prohibited because they contribute to the decomposition caused by the remaining blood in her body. Thus, meat, fried and uncooked foods, as well as food containing coconut, fruit, or sugar are prohibited for the first few months after birth. Mucoidal foods are a particular danger for the same reason that "slime" is dangerous to the baby. Food prohibitions on octopus, squid, certain types of fish, and most mollusks are therefore rigorously observed.

Sex and blood are symbolically related, as with "wrapping the blood" in the mother's womb. The relationship is also highlighted by a Buli belief that first menstruation does not take place until "a path has been cleared" through sexual intercourse. In other words, sex is a precondition for menstruation, although menstrual blood is a precondition for intercourse to lead to pregnancy. Nonetheless, sex and blood should not be inappropriately associated. Sexual intercourse is generally avoided during menstruation, "so as not to cause the woman more trouble than she already has," as one man put it. The same man speculated that sexual intercourse during menstruation might be the cause for venereal disease, especially gonorrhea, because the menstrual blood could be pushed into either sexual partner.

In this speculation, traditional etiology combines an incipient analysis of the reasons for a relatively modern sickness with a hinting reference to an ethnic prejudice toward the Javanese. Gonorrhea is thus known playfully in Maluku as "the Javanese winnowing tray" (*sosiro Java*). The sexual connotations of the bouncing rhythm of the winnowing tray in use are obvious to most people in Maluku. The specific mention of its supposedly Javanese origin adds a political edge to the pun. Nationalist discourse in Indonesia portrays Java as the center of refined culture and advanced technological modernity. During New Order rule, however, Malukans came into close contact with increasing numbers of ordinary Javanese who had been transmigrated to the province as part of a government policy to develop eastern Indonesia economically and culturally. The transmigration program brought many adventurous but socially disadvantaged young Javanese women to the province, willing to improve their lot by whatever means available. In the process, female transmigrants from Java have in Maluku developed a reputation of being promiscuous and without propriety.

Despite the masculine perspective of this ethnosexual prejudice, the general danger of sexual intercourse during menstruation is as real for women as it is for men. Sexual intercourse is dangerous because it obstructs the free flow of menstrual blood. Instead of being a special logical case, menstruation in Buli marks the inauspicious presence of raw, decomposing blood. Treating menstruation as an isolated analytical phenomenon in Buli therefore is inappropriate, as is generally acknowledged in the large and still expanding body of anthropological literature focusing on menstruation (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988b; Delaney, Lupton, and Toth 1976; Hoskins 2002; Knight 1991; Montgomery 1974; Skultans 1970; van de Walle and Renne 2001). In the same way as the blood associated with birth, menstrual

blood must therefore be expelled. The forceful containment of such blood through intercourse, as opposed to the normal containment of blood in the body, would lead to decomposition and death.

Sex, birth, menstruation, decomposition, and death are ontological domains linked by blood. The symbolic linkage is above all olfactory. Thus, the lexeme *pupui* refers to the smell of both sex and blood, just as it includes the smell of decomposition. This is the smell that attracts gua witches at birth, death, and placenta burial (Bubandt 1998a). During fieldwork in 2002, several Buli friends mentioned the overpowering smell of decomposition as their most vivid and troubling memory of their visits to Tobelo following the large-scale slayings that occurred there in December 1999. Some suggested that the danger of an overpowering smell of rotting corpses, rather than security considerations, was the real reason that for a while in 2000, boats did not dock in Tobelo harbor. Bloodshed during the violent riots was also considered to be responsible for a sharp increase in cases of witchcraft-related illness. Although Buli lay eighteen hours away from Tobelo by boat, witches were said to be attracted to Buli by the smell of blood.

BLOOD AND RITUAL

The implicit tenet of the Buli attitude toward blood is that although blood is the *sine qua non* of human life, the less direct contact humans have with it, the better. In particular, vision and smell are inauspicious modes of contact. While blood is partly an auspicious symbol, the detrimental effects of contact with blood necessarily mean that there are no beneficial ritual uses of blood in Buli. Two ritual occasions in which an auspicious presence of blood would normally occur are circumcision and sacrifice. Both types of ritual are performed in Buli, but both de-emphasize the significance of blood. A brief outline of the history of Christianity and Islam in North Maluku is necessary before describing circumcision.

In terms of religious allegiance, Buli reflects the general picture of the island of Halmahera. Today a slight majority of people in Buli (and Halmahera) are Christian. Discounting a wave of Catholic missionization during the sixteenth century, their conversion to Christianity began when the Calvinist Utrecht Mission Society (Utrechtsche Zendingsvereeinging) began work on the island in 1866 (Haire 1981). However, the ruling sultanates of the north Malukan region have been Muslim probably since the thirteenth century. A large minority of the Halmahera population, which until the early twentieth century was subject to the Muslim sultanates of Ternate and Tidore, is today Muslim. About a third of the Buli population is Muslim, and circumcision (Ind., *sunat*) here follows Muslim tradition. However, the amount and significance of blood in the circumcision rite are matters of some dispute. Christian people in Buli say that there is much blood involved in the circumcision ritual (although few have actually witnessed it), while the local imam emphasized to me that there was very little or no blood. Relations between Christian and Muslim people in Buli were until 1999 generally amicable and there was some intermarriage.

Nonetheless, the frequently tense religious climate in Indonesia did affect inter-denominational relations in the village. The protracted conflict after 1999, which poisoned the relationship between Christians and Muslims in North Maluku, was thus in many respects a continuation of the religious politics of New Order rule (Bubandt n.d.). In New Order discourse, religious and ethnic differences were politically suppressed, except when serving nationalist-aesthetic purposes (Acciaioli 1985; Bowen 1986; Kipp 1993; Pemberton 1994; Tsing 1993). Although appeals to religion or ethnicity in order to underline regional or political differences were not tolerated in the public arena, implicit references to religious and ethnic difference nevertheless suffused state portrayals of the nation (Kipp 1993:109; Mackie and MacIntyre 1994).

Thus, on the one hand the New Order rhetoric of tolerance was heavily employed in Buli along with traditional exhortations about customary unity during the conflict elsewhere in North Maluku, in a successful bid to prevent Buli society from fragmenting internally along religious lines (see Bubandt, *In press*). On the other hand, the New Order cultivation of ethnoreligious difference, which was the basis of the religious paranoia that flared during the conflict in 1999, was also implicated in a multitude of informal forms of prejudice. The Christian idea that blood is abundantly present during Muslim circumcision could be seen as a tactic of putting ontological elements and traditional values to use within the conditions and constraints of a politically precarious context.

Traditional custom (*adat*) in Buli features only one sacrificial ceremony. As was the case in Muslim circumcision, the role of blood in this ceremony is played down and its symbolic significance thereby obviated. The ceremony involves the capturing, presenting, and eating a green turtle to honor and placate Ían Toa, the supreme guardian spirit of Buli people. The killing and butchering of the turtle is not, however, regarded as part of the ritual. Rather, the ritual is concerned mainly with the theme of ingestion. After being presented to the guardian spirit at his shrine in a preliminary ritual, the turtle is taken to the beach to be killed. The turtle cannot be butchered near the shrine because the smell of its blood would anger Ían Toa. The smell of blood (*pupúi*) is the foremost cause of his spiritual anger. He is portrayed as highly masculine with very little tolerance toward women. Unlike human beings, Ían Toa does not have a real mother. He was born not from a woman but from the spadix of a wild betel palm. Despite his masculinity, he is also a child and not sexually active. The double absence of a mother and a wife is an important feature of his ontologically self-sufficient masculinity. During the ceremony, the guardian spirit enters a medium. The first words the angry spirit utters when he has possessed his medium always include a tirade against the stench of blood in the village due to Buli men's supposedly inordinate interest in sexual relations with women.

While blood is present during Muslim circumcision as well as in the main Buli sacrificial ceremony, it is employed as an auspicious ritual substance in neither. In fact, I am not aware of any auspicious uses of blood, whether in ritual or in the context of everyday activities.⁶ In this regard, Buli seems at odds with most societies

in eastern Indonesia where, as Howell (1996:17) observes, "[i]t is only the deliberate cutting of flesh and taking of blood which carries the life-promoting efficacy."

This outline of the ontology of blood in Buli is intended to support the argument that the references to menstruation and Eve's primordial position in Komo's rendition of Genesis relate to the central but ambivalent role of blood in Buli ontogenesis. The notions of human ontogenesis make it both logical and necessary that Eve, as the prototypical mother, be cast in the encompassing position instead of Adam. Women are by necessity prior to men because of their close relationship with the basic element in Buli ontogeny, blood (see also Valeri 1990:257). Blood is a necessary substance for the ontological existence of humans, yet it is also inherently dangerous and must therefore be socially managed and symbolically contained. The ambiguity that most Buli people would assign to blood, and which fits the ambivalent status of blood in other Indonesian societies (Hoskins 2002; Pedersen 2002), has the status of a social fact. It crosscuts many of the central aspects of Buli social life: birth and death, gender and sexuality, alliance and witchcraft, ritual and ethnicity, tradition and modernity. The ambiguous ontology of existence entailed by notions of blood is also part of the conceptual tool kit by which people make sense of political events like transmigration and sectarian violence.

THE AMBIVALENCE OF BLOOD: FOODS, TABOOS, AND WORLD RELIGIONS

The rich semantics of the ontology of blood that runs through Komo's version of Genesis has one last core theme, that of Christianity itself. The problematics of conversion and Christianity are contained in the dilemmas of ingestion and ritual prohibition. The theme of food taboos is central to Komo's version of Genesis. While Eve is guilty of eating the forbidden fruit, Komo claims that Adam did not ingest the fruit of knowledge. This emphasis on the ingestion of or abstention from a prohibited food places Komo's rendition of Genesis within a more general pattern of food prohibitions in Buli.

Most Buli still observe ritual injunctions against eating certain foods, collectively known as *suang*. In exchange for not eating a particular animal or (less commonly) plant, individuals and their lineages (Houses) receive protection and good fortune from these species, which are said to function as "boats" for powerful spirits. The contractual relationship of abstention and protection is usually established by a not too remote, named patrilineal ancestor. A story typically recounts how the ancestor tries to consume the animal species but falls ill. During the following night the patient is visited in a dream by the *suang* spirit who suggests an arrangement: the ancestor and his family abstain from eating or harming its "spirit boat" and in return receive magical or medicinal roots and the promise of future help in precarious situations. The notion of the forbidden fruit to a Buli person invokes the notion of a *suang* spirit, and an association between spirit and a paternal line is suggested by

Komo's version of Genesis. In effect, the forbidden fruit of Christianity is a gendered version of a clan taboo.

This is not the only instance in Buli of a *suang* spirit being associated with a world religion. The Muslim prohibition against pork is thus in Buli related to the wild pig being the *suang* spirit for the Barabakem lineage. A story tells that a Barabakem man married a Muslim woman. At first, both spouses refused to convert to the religion of the other. Eventually, the woman gave up Islam, but insisted that she would not eat pork. Not long after that she fell pregnant and gave birth, not to a child but to a pig. The husband then realized that her misgivings were correct. Not wanting to raise the pig as their own child, they decided to abandon it. One day, a storm gathered on the horizon and the father set the pig onto an old Chinese plate and put it to sea in the expectation that the pig would drown. The storm did not sink the plate, but floated it smoothly to a small island in front of the village. Realizing that the pig must be a spirit being, the father searched the island unsuccessfully for it, but the following night the pig visited him in a dream, and he decided to honor it as his *suang* from then on. So, too, have most of his descendants since then.

This story of the Muslim-inspired food taboo on wild pig circles around the themes of ingestion, abstention, and birth, as did the Buli version of the biblical prohibition against the forbidden fruit. In a way, the two stories are transformations of each other. The Buli interpretation of Genesis explains how the woman consumes the forbidden fruit while the man (inconspicuously) abstains. Eve, in other words, wrongly ingests a fruit that is like a protective *suang* spirit. As a consequence, she is punished by relative infertility (of which menstruation is a sign). She is condemned to constantly and unsuccessfully abject the *suang*, the very abjection that hinders pregnancy.⁷ In the story of the Muslim *suang*, the woman abstains from eating the forbidden animal while the husband wrongly continues to consume it. The Muslim woman falls pregnant and gives birth to the very *suang* she would not eat. In her case, the refusal to ingest the *suang* results in fertility/pregnancy and the anomalous birth of a pig.

Given the formative role of male semen in conception, it is only to be expected that the father's consumption of wild pig should result in the birth of a pig. The parents will not raise an animal as a human and so abandon it. What began as an unnatural and threatening birth evolves into a beneficial relationship, for it turns out that the pig is merely the "boat" for a human-like spirit. Here the human content of the mother's blood reveals itself. The husband then abstains from eating the *suang* and thereby establishes a mutually beneficial relationship with the spirit.

The story about the wild pig was recounted to me as evidence that Islam also contained the notion of *suang*. A man who had converted to Islam late in life told me that the Kaaba stone in Mecca had depictions of many types of animals, all of which were *suang*. The effect of the story is therefore to indigenize Islam, much as Komo's interpretation of Genesis relocates the Judeo-Christian myth within a Buli ontology of blood and food.

However, the strategies by which this relocation is accomplished are not quite the same in the two cases. For Muslims the *suang* is Islamized and in turn Islam is brought within the controlled orbit of Buli conceptions of the world. Such an explicit strategy of assimilation is not available to the Christian population, since the demonization of tradition is much more intense in Indonesian Protestantism than in eastern Indonesian Islam. Although *suang* spirits feature centrally in the lives of Christian Buli, rituals to honor the *suang* are private and discourse about them is largely subterranean, because the *suang* are condemned and demonized in Christian rhetoric. Since their earliest days in Buli, Dutch missionaries have demanded that the destruction of paraphernalia associated with *suang* worship accompany conversion, and in Christian parlance the *suang* are consistently referred to as devils (*setan*).

Blood and food are central and related issues in the Buli Genesis, and ingestion and abjection are an issue in both contexts: blood is contained and encompassed in conception or abjected in menstruation; (prohibited) food is either (correctly) rejected or (wrongly) ingested. It is from the perspective of these principles that being Christian or Muslim is made to make sense, in the process both indigenizing Christianity or Islam and bringing local ontology and modern sensibilities together into meaningful wholes.

CONCLUSION

Komo's story of Adam and Eve reveals the complex nature of tradition and the ambiguities of being modern in Buli. Blood, as a sign of equivocality and ambivalence, is important for giving symbolic form to these complexities and ambiguities. Despite the narrative paucity that Buli tradition maintains in response to state marginalization, as well as for its own ontological reasons, blood is semantically thick in a wide variety of contexts. Whether these contexts are of a general nature and concern issues such as birth, illness, and death, or are specific and related to issues of ethnicity, gender, sectarian violence, or religion, they are shot through with ambiguity.

The ambiguity is related to the dialectic way in which modern sensibilities and power relations shape discourses on tradition in Buli on the one hand, and a historically sedimented ontology gives shape to Buli imaginaries of modernity on the other. The irony contained in Komo's version of Genesis is that when Komo thought he was being modern, he was being so within the symbolic universe of traditional ontology, with ingestion, encompassment, and abjection as its central themes.

The reverse is true for his supposedly traditional answer that all people come from blood. The brevity of this answer is not just an effect of a tight discursive economy in Buli; it is also the embarrassed expression of the silencing of traditional discourse by modernity. Komo's traditional explanation is explicitly devalorized as "what the people who came before us thought" (*smat ta ntuba rfikir*), a disparaging wording that characterizes Buli attitudes to tradition in a variety of fields from shamanistic rites to garden magic. This "cultural cringe" was part of a Buli pattern

of responding to the New Order marginalization of tradition, enforced not only by government officials and clerics of the Evangelical Protestant Church, but also by a local public discourse in which tradition was objectified in many contexts as backward and outdated. Buli tradition during the Suharto years was restricted to performative occasions by a New Order political sensibility that was internalized by Buli people as much as it was imposed by outside officials, but that ironically took refuge in an unlikely place: the modern imaginary.

There is an ontological as well as a political grounding to tradition. Traditions emerge out of the interaction of its two modalities: as an objectified entity and as the doxic particularities of saying and doing. Gaonkar (2001b) shows how a similar kind of complex duality characterizes modernity, and emphasizes the need to complicate the opposition between modernity as a social phenomenon and a particular kind of political economy, on the one hand, and modernity as a cultural space, on the other. A site-specific analysis shows how the complex interaction of this dual modality of modernity with tradition, in its simultaneously objectified and ontological form, produces convergence and divergence in surprising forms and contexts. Imaginaries of tradition and modernity interact in a multiplex process of mirroring.

From the ontology of blood, at once marginalized by modernist self-censorship and yet reasserting itself within modern explanations, a complex vernacular modernity is woven in Buli. This ambivalent imaginary of modernity is largely the effect of 30 years of Buli accommodation to New Order rule and the specific kind of high modernism it represented (Bubandt 1998b). The nation-state plays an important but never wholly determinant role in the production of locally salient modernities. In Buli, New Order modernity was refracted in ways that both reproduced it and created new spaces for imagining and practicing an alternative form of modernity.

In historical hindsight, however, this paradoxical modernity, with its curious mix of cultural cringe and modern traditionality, may well turn out to have been specific for the New Order period. Certainly, the fall of the New Order regime, the concomitant legitimacy crisis of its centralistic "development paradigm," and the advent of sectarian strife along both ethnic and religious lines in the midst of a new politics of decentralization have made local tradition politically salient and emotionally valorized in ways that could hardly have been imagined before 1998. After half a decade, post-Suharto politics has begun to display new ways of being modern and traditional in Buli, as indeed throughout all of Indonesia.

NOTES

1. Maluku or the Moluccas is an archipelago between Sulawesi and New Guinea. Halmahera is the largest island in the province of North Maluku. The predominantly Christian population of Halmahera is comprised both of Papuan-speaking groups in the north and Austronesian-speaking peoples in the south. Buli is one of six Austronesian languages spoken in the central and eastern parts of the island.
2. Other contributing factors to this economy of ritual speech might be the secret rather than public nature of ritual speech in Buli and the fact that the ritual elite in Buli (the title holders, or *ebai ngasan*) derived their legitimacy from the sultanate rather than from oral proficiency.

3. This is not to suggest that a condition of symbolic or cultural homogeneity exists in Buli. Komo's story of Adam and Eve is an individual interpretation of Genesis and the Fall, not a version for which there is a general consensus. Komo's story of Genesis could conceivably be contested and rejected as a misinterpretation by Buli people better versed in Christian lore. Even so, Komo's version is still a significant reinterpretation rather than a misrepresentation, because it reveals traces of a Buli ontology contained also in the more traditional response. Thus it suggests the value of exploring the ontological contours of individual cultural (mis)understandings. Misreading, misrecognition, and misinterpretation are, after all, integral to the micropolitics of establishing symbolic orders (Bourdieu 1977).
4. The narrative of Genesis in the Indonesian-language Bible (Alkitab 1993), which is available and widely used in Buli, does not vary significantly from the English version. The biblical references given below are the same for the English and Indonesian versions of Genesis.
5. In Kodi and Huaulu, two other east Indonesian societies, it is not "dirt" but bodily integrity that is at stake in their conceptions of blood and menstruation (Hoskins 2002:331). Blood, however, is inherently ambivalent and a total dismissal of menstruation as polluting may therefore be excessively confident. The polluting aspect of menstruation is, for instance, entailed by the Indonesian term for menstrual blood and menstruation, "dirt" (*kotoran*), an expression also used in Buli.
6. The only exception is that a little blood of a slain enemy formerly was drunk after a battle for protection from the muming spirit of the enemy. Some young men from Buli took part in the violent battles in the Tobelo and Kao districts in early 2000 and related that some of the Christian Tobelo combatants had revived the Tobelo practice of eating the liver and drinking the blood of the slain. The disgust with which these stories were told and received demonstrates the absence of this practice.
7. Kristeva (1982) defines abjection as the process of ejecting something from oneself because it has come to be intolerable. It is intolerable because it violates a budding sense of self, and must be evicted if an identity is to be formed. Abjection is, however, always unsuccessful because it seeks to jettison something that is already part of the self. Since abjection is always unsuccessful, it must constantly be repeated. Self-identity is thus condemned to live with this uncomfortable part within itself that it can neither accept nor tolerate (McAfee 1993).

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