

**THE MINANGKABAU HEALERS AND HEALING  
METHODS: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS**

by

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BI</b>	Bahasa Indonesia.
<b>CBS</b>	<i>Culture Bound Syndrome</i> . It is used to denote mental disorders that are not covered by Western psychiatric concepts. However, some of them were listed in the DSM IV (Diagnostic and Statistic of Mental Disorders) by the American Psychiatric Association.
<b>Dt</b>	This is the short form of <i>Datuak</i> (the head of a matrilineage).
<b>PERTI</b>	<i>Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah</i> . This is the name of an Islamic party which focuses on education.
<b>PPP</b>	<i>Partai Persatuan Pembangunan</i> . It refers to the name of an Islamic party.
<b>PUSKESMAS</b>	<i>Pusat Kesehatan Masyarakat</i> . It denotes a health care center in rural areas.
<b>r.a.</b>	<i>radiAllahu anhu/ anha</i> (May Allah be pleased with him/ her). It is used in Islamic texts when a companion of Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.
<b>s.a.w.</b>	<i>sallAllahu ‘alayhi wa sallam</i> (Peace be upon him). This phrase is usually uttered when a Muslim mentions the name of Prophet Muhammad. It is used mainly in Islamic texts.
<b>s.w.t.</b>	<i>subhaanahu wa Ta ala</i> (Glory to Him, the Exalted). It is used by Muslims to glorify Allah, when mentioning one of His Names. It appears mainly in Islamic texts.

## Glossary

- Abangan:*** A group which follows the Javanese syncretistic belief of Javanese, Hindu and Islamic elements.
- Adat:*** The customary law.
- Adat Perpatih:*** The customary law that refers to Datuk Perpatih nan Sabatang.
- Aka (BI. Akal):*** The reason (in the sense of acting reasonable).
- Akikah:*** It refers to a ceremony that is related to birth. Usually, two goats are slaughtered if a son is born or one goat is slaughtered if a girl is born. The meat will be distributed during a banquet.
- Angin:*** It can be translated as ‘wind’. It can mean the ‘wind’ (gas) within the body. For some healers, it can describe the inner winds which form the different types of reality.
- Azimat:*** An amulet which contains certain verses (often from the Qur’an). It is used for protection against evil things like magic.
- Balai adat:*** The meeting hall for the discussions about affairs of *adat*.
- Batin:*** It refers to an inner meaning.
- Bomoh:*** The Malay term for a traditional Malay healer.

- Bundo Kanduang:*** According to traditional literature she was an influential queen in the early times. She stands for a woman who behaves in a wise way. A well-known women organization is named after her.
- Chakra:*** This term is used in the Indian medicine. It refers to energy centers of the subtle body.
- Darek:*** The ‘heartland’ of the Minangkabau which is located in the highlands of West Sumatra and consists of the three regions of Tanah Datar, Limapuluh Kota, and Agam.
- Datuak:*** The title of a *panghulu*.
- Dhikr (Bl. Zikir):*** It means the ‘remembrance’ of Allah.
- Dubalang:*** A person who is responsible for religious matters within the matriclan.
- Dukun:*** The traditional healer of the Minangkabau and also other places throughout Indonesia.
- Fiqh:*** Islamic jurisprudence.
- Gambir:*** It is a plant. In many villages, the people produce a kind of gum that will be exported. The people consume it together with the Betel plant.



- Hadith:*** A narration/ report of Prophet Muhammad. It is written down what he said, did or silently approved.
- Halal:*** This term is used in Islamic jurisprudence and means that the item or act is explicitly allowed. If a Muslim makes something that is considered to be *halal*, then he or she will be rewarded.
- Haram:*** This is a term which is used in Islamic jurisprudence. If a Muslim does an act which is considered as forbidden (*haram*), then he or she will be punished. If the person abstains from it, then he or she will be rewarded.
- Harimau jadian:*** It is a were tiger.
- Imam:*** The leader of the mosque/ prayer.
- Jamaat Tabligh:*** It refers to an Islamic movement that was founded in India. Its adherents go out for a period of 3 days, 40 days or 4 months. They go from mosque to mosque and preach Islamic principles to the people.
- Jinn:*** An invisible creature which was created from fire.
- Kadi:*** An Islamic judge.

***Kamanakan /***

**(BI. *Kemanakan*):** Children of the extended matri-family, it comprises the nephews and nieces of the *mamak*.

***Kampuang:*** see *payuang*.

***Kaum mudo***

**(BI. *kaum muda*):** The ‘young generation’. It is an Islamic reform movement that looks into the Islamic affairs in a more ‘modern’ and rational way by not just following the forefathers. Often new scientific discoveries are considered.

***Khatib:*** The person who delivers the Friday sermon.

***Kenduri:*** It is a kind of banquet for celebrating or remembering a certain event.

***Keramat:*** A ‘sacred’ place. It can be the grave of a pious person or any other place where the people expect some help.

***Keris:*** The Malay/ Indonesian dagger.

***Langue:*** It is a term that was used by Saussure. It is the formal system of the language.

***Langsuir:*** A kind of ghost.

<b><i>Latifah / (Pl. Lataif):</i></b>	This term is used in the Sufi medicine. In the body are certain subtleties, this means energy centers with different functions.
<b><i>Limau:</i></b>	Lemons/ oranges.
<b><i>Malaikat:</i></b>	An angel.
<b><i>Malim:</i></b>	A person who is responsible for religious matters within the matriclean.
<b><i>Mamak:</i></b>	The brother of the mother. In the traditional society, he is responsible for the upbringing of the children.
<b><i>Mande Rubiah:</i></b>	It denotes the female offspring of <i>Bundo Kanduang</i> .
<b><i>Manti:</i></b>	The assistant of a <i>panghulu</i> .
<b><i>Marifah:</i></b>	It refers to 'knowledge'. Usually, it means 'to know Allah' and sometimes it can also refer to get inner knowledge which includes the Unseen.
<b><i>Muhammadiyah:</i></b>	It is an Islamic reform movement.
<b><i>Murshid:</i></b>	A person with knowledge within a <i>tarekat</i> . A <i>murshid</i> can give instructions and teaching lessons.
<b><i>Nagari:</i></b>	The village community.

***Naqshbandiyyah:*** The name of a *Sufi* order. It originated in Bukhara in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Esposito, 2003, p. 229).

***Nazar:*** It is a vow. Often it refers to the occurrence of an event (Esposito, 2003, p. 232). The person might say: “If this event happens, then I will feed 100 orphans”. In such a case the person must fulfill the vow.

***Nyawa:*** The ‘breath’ of life.

***Orang Bunian:*** Usually, it is an invisible human-like community in the forest. Sometimes the *orang bunian* are considered as good (like in Malaysia), sometimes they are considered as evil (like in West Sumatra).

***Orang keturunan:*** These are persons who act as mediums. A spirit comes down and speaks through their body.

***Panghulu*  
(**BL. penghulu**):** The head of a matri-clan or subclan.

***Pantangan:*** It is a kind of ‘avoidance’. In the healing methods, some behavior or food could be considered as harmful. In such a case the healer has to recommend avoiding that.

***Parewa:*** It is a (male) rowdy in the Minangkabau society.

**Parole:** This term was introduced by Saussure. It refers to the way the people are speaking. This could be different from the formal system of the language itself (*langue*).

**Paruik (BL. perut):** It is a subsegment of a subclan within the matrilineal unit.

**Pawang:** A healer who belongs to a pre-Islamic system. He or she also offers 'other' services. For example, he or she helps that a hunting expedition will be successful.

**Payuang (BL. payung):** Sometimes described as *kampung*. A number of houses which form the subclan of a matrilineal unit.

**Pelesit (Bah. Min.: Palasit):** It is a familiar that lives together with his or her master.

**Pencak Silat:** The local form of martial arts in West Sumatra.

**Pondok Pesantren:** A religious boarding school

**Rakaat:** It is a prayer unit of the Islamic prayer.

**Rantau:** All areas outside the *darek*.

**Reiki:** This is a Japanese healing method. By 'lying on hands' the healer tries to strengthen the 'life force energy'.

**Ruh (roh):** The soul.

**Ruqyah:** An Islamic incantation which is recited during the healing process. Very often it is recited for casting out evil *jinn*.

<b><i>Sadaqa:</i></b>	The alms.
<b><i>Saluang:</i></b>	This is a traditional flute made of bamboo.
<b><i>Semangat:</i></b>	The vital force.
<b><i>Shaikh:</i></b>	An Islamic scholar or the head of a <i>tarekat</i> .
<b><i>Shattariyah:</i></b>	It is the name of an Islamic Sufi <i>tarekat</i> .
<b><i>Sijundai:</i></b>	A special type of witchcraft.
<b><i>Suku:</i></b>	The matri-clan.
<b><i>Suluk:</i></b>	The formal retreat which is practiced by some Islamic <i>tarekat</i> like the <i>Naqshbandiyyah</i> . Such a retreat usually lasts for 40 days.
<b><i>Surau:</i></b>	A prayer house. There is normally no Friday prayer in such a prayer house.
<b><i>Tarekat:</i></b>	The term refers to the Arabic term <i>tariqah</i> which means ‘path’. It can also be used to the adherents of one particular Sufi path.
<b><i>Tasbih:</i></b>	A prayer bead.
<b><i>Tukang Urut:</i></b>	The massage specialist.

***Ulama:*** The Islamic scholar. Actually, in Arabic an *alim* is the singular form of *ulama*. However, in Southeast Asia, the term *ulama* is also used in the singular case.

**PERAWAT MINANGKABAU DAN METOD-METOD PERUBATAN: SATU  
ANALISIS STRUKTURAL**

**ABSTRAK**

Dalam tesis ini penyelidik ingin menggambarkan metod-metod penyembuhan Minangkabau di Sumatera Barat. Ditinjau di sebuah kampung di pedalaman dan menggambarkan metod-metod penyembuhan Minangkabau dalam kampung itu. Matlamatnya ialah menggambarkan metod-metod rawatan yang berlainan dan menganalisisnya menggunakan metod struktural menurut ide Claude Levi-Strauss dan Josselin de Jong. Ramai ahli antropologi menganggap metod struktural ketinggalan zaman tetapi tesis ini berhasrat untuk menunjukkan bahawa metod struktural masih boleh diguna pakai dan boleh menyumbang untuk menganalisis rawatan tradisional. Tambahan pula tesis ini menggambarkan bahawa ada pelbagai jenis dukun yang merawat dengan caranya tersendiri dalam kalangan masyarakat Minangkabau dan masyarakat sekitarnya. Objektif penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk meneroka para perawat Minangkabau dan jenis metod-metod rawatan mereka. Pelbagai jenis perawat, jenis metod rawatan dan tumbuh-tumbuhan perlu dikategorikan. Tesis ini juga mengkaji sama ada hipotesis Frederick Errington yang menyatakan bahawa Minangkabau berorientasikan tanda adalah benar dalam bidang perawatan. Masyarakat Minangkabau adalah sebahagian daripada masyarakat Asia Tenggara dan Dunia Islam; oleh kerana itu penyelidikan ini telah menunjukkan sejauh mana rawatan tradisional termasuk sebahagiannya dalam konteks perubatan yang lebih besar. Penyelidikan ini menemukan bahawa ada tiga jenis perawat yang masih memainkan peranan penting untuk kesihatan orang tempatan. Terdapat tiga elemen perawatan yang mempunyai peranan tertentu. Corak-corak unik daripada



jenis metod perawatan Minangkabau dijelaskan oleh penyelidik dan memberi kesan mengapa metod-metod tradisional masih relevan.

# **THE MINANGKABAU HEALERS AND HEALING METHODS: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS**

## **ABSTRACT**

In this thesis the researcher wants to illustrate the healing methods of the Minangkabau in West Sumatra. It looks at one village of the interior and describes the different healing methods of the Minangkabau in that village. The aim is to illustrate the different ways of treatment and to analyze it in a structural way by following the ideas of Claude Levi-Strauss and Josselin de Jong. For many anthropologists, structuralism and its methodology are outdated, but this thesis intends to show that a structural approach is still fruitful and could contribute to analyze traditional healing methods. Furthermore, this thesis will illustrate that there are different types of healers with their own ways of treatment within one village society and its network. The research objectives are to explore the Minangkabau healers and their healing methods. The different types of healers, healing methods and plants should be categorized. This thesis will also examine whether Frederick Errington's hypothesis that the Minangkabau are sign-oriented is correct in the field of healing. The Minangkabau society is both part of Southeast Asia and part of the Islamic world and therefore this research shows in how far these healing methods are embedded within a greater context. The research discovers that there are three types of healers who still play an important role in the health of the local population. There are three elements of healing methods that play a certain role. Unique patterns of the Minangkabau healing methods are described by the researcher and give an impression why traditional healing methods are still relevant.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

For “every disease there is a cure” is the translation of the above Minangkabau proverb. It is very closely related to an Islamic narration with the same content.<sup>2</sup> This could be an indication that the worldview of the Minangkabau is influenced by Islam and the healing methods are affected accordingly. It also shows that the people should try to find an effective healing method and not to give up hope.

The topics of this thesis are the traditional healers and their healing methods within the Minangkabau society. An interested reader could ask: Why should there be a research about these topics? Such a question is quite useful to understand the background of this thesis. Every researcher is linked to his research: Maybe there is a special interest which arose due to the reading of literature; perhaps a particular institute finances the research, and so on. In this case, the interest arose during the Master’s research of the researcher in the year 1997 (Stark, 1998). The researcher went to various villages to learn more about the customs of the Minangkabau. During the stay in the house of one family, the baby of the landlord became suddenly sick and got a fever. So the father and the baby went to see a traditional healer. It was a simple house, and the lady (the healer) was about 80 years old. She pressed the stomach of the baby and touched the forehead in order to see whether the

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from Rais Yatim (2015), p. 158

<sup>2</sup> ‘There is no disease that Allah has sent down except that He also has sent down its treatment’, is a narration and it is mentioned in Sahih Bukhari, Hadith No. 5678.

child had a fever. Then she took some leaves, cut them, put them in water and sprinkled the water over the body. After that, the landlord went back home. Indeed, the baby recovered soon. This was astonishing for the researcher. During that time the researcher was skeptical about such healing methods, and often used explanations like “this must be a psychosomatic disease” or “the psychological autosuggestions help within the healing process”. For example, the French pharmacist Emil Coué (1922) discovered that positive remarks have a positive effect during the healing process. If someone says: “For sure this drug will help you,” then the possibility that the healing process is effective is probably better. It is a kind of autosuggestion. However, in this case the patient was a baby. How could someone use such explanations here?

The next time the researcher became sick. Many red points covered the body, and there was a slight fever. It was assumed that it was a kind of allergic reaction and would disappear soon. But the researcher felt not well and was in a very remote area. Therefore, the people called a healer. It was an old lady too. She acted exactly in the same way as the woman in the other village. The only difference was that she prescribed to drink a little bit of the water in which the leaves were put. It can be supposed that these leaves must be substantial. This research looks whether these leaves play a major role in the healing methods of the Minangkabau.

At another time, the researcher wanted to get a treatment of cupping. Cupping is a method which is quite famous in Islamic medicine. When the researcher stayed in Makkah, there was the opportunity to study Islamic Medicine with a *shaikh* from Egypt and cupping played a major role. Therefore, the researcher was curious to see how the Minangkabau use cupping as they are part of the Islamic world. At night,

the researcher's brother in law took a motorbike and together with the researcher they drove to the neighboring village, but it was not easy to find the house of the healer. So the people were asked, and they showed on a muddy track which led into the jungle. It was a slippery path. In the moonlight, it could be adumbrated that on the right side was the jungle and on the left side, some abandoned graves. Finally, there was a lonely wooden hut. A dog came and barked, and an old man greeted and asked the researcher to come in. Finally, the healer made the cupping at the back of the head of the researcher. The complete method is explained in this thesis. All these experiences are fascinating, and it is assumed that the healing system of West Sumatra must be impressive. An explorative research should illustrate the features of the traditional Minangkabau healers and healing methods. Amongst anthropologists there is a discussion whether there is such a thing like a 'traditional' Minangkabau culture due to many influences from outside located powers (Kahn, 1993). Usually, traditional medicine is a medical system that can be defined as follows: "Traditional medicine comprises knowledge systems that developed over generations within various societies before the era of modern medicine" (Mardiana Idayu Ahmad, Haron Daud, Darlina Md. Naim, 2015, p. 4). In this sense, the term 'traditional' is used in this thesis.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

This research is explorative. There is not much literature available which explicitly describes the healing system of the Minangkabau. The experiences of the researcher (see Section 1.1) show that there is a healing system that is independent of the biomedical way of healing. The first question that arises is: Is it worth to describe the healing system?

Even though the researcher follows an explorative approach, nonetheless there are initial concepts and ‘basic’ questions:

- (a) How is the healing system organized? What are its features?
- (b) Are there different types of healers and healing systems?
- (c) What healing methods and plants are used?
- (d) The Minangkabau healing system is part of Southeast Asia’s healing traditions. During the colonial time, ethnographers like Kleiweg de Zwaan (1912) compared the Minangkabau healing methods with other societies. However, there are particular patterns or nuances. One author who conducted a research in different Indonesian societies is Heider (2006). He shows that different cultures use the same terms. For instance, both the Minangkabau and the Javanese have an understanding of the emotion of anger (*marah*), but this understanding differs. It can be assumed that a different comprehension of emotions will also affect the treatment. The research of this thesis is explorative, and one research question is to elaborate what Minangkabau healing methods are ‘special’ within the greater context of Southeast Asia.
- (e) Frederick Errington (1984) stressed in his research about the Minangkabau society that it is ‘sign-oriented’. As a consequence, he concludes that symbols are of less importance in the Minangkabau culture. The topic of this thesis is Minangkabau healing methods, and so it must be asked: Do symbols play a role in the traditional healing methods of the Minangkabau?

### **1.3 Research Scope, Aims, Research Objectives and Assumptions**

When the researcher looked at the literature (Chapter 2), it became obvious that only very few books and articles focused on the Minangkabau healing methods. As a

consequence, the aim of this thesis is to illustrate the healing methods in the highlands of West Sumatra as this is considered to be the place of origin of the Minangkabau people. Another aim is to look at these healing methods from a structural point of view.

A list of the assumptions of this research is as follows:

- (a) It is assumed that the Minangkabau healing system is unique and this should be illustrated.
- (b) The structural method of Claude Levi-Strauss and the Leiden school of anthropology is still useful for the topic of traditional Minangkabau healing methods.

The research objectives are related to the aims and look as follows:

- (a) To explore the Minangkabau healers and their healing methods.
- (b) To categorize the different types of healers.
- (c) To categorize the healing methods and plants.
- (d) To examine Frederick Errington's hypothesis that the Minangkabau society is sign-oriented from the viewpoint of ethnomedicine.

The scope of illustrating the Minangkabau healing methods from all angles and in all places would be too huge. It would be impossible to conduct this research in the whole interior of West Sumatra. So it was decided to concentrate on one village community and the network of healers that are consulted by the locals. This means some specialists cannot be found in the village community like for example the healer who specializes in massage techniques for children. But some locals need his

service and go to him. Therefore, the researcher decided to include the networks of healers and their healing methods that play a certain role for the local population.

#### **1.4 Problem Statement**

This thesis intends to describe and illustrate the traditional Minangkabau healing methods and healers in a structural way by considering the ‘whole’ situation. This means it should cover the different types of healers. Furthermore, the description should comprise one village community and the network of healers who are contacted by the locals. There are researchers who described the Minangkabau healing system during the colonial time (see Chapter 2). However, the literature in the post-colonial time is ‘specialized’ and does not look into the Minangkabau healing system as a whole. Most researchers focus on ‘special’ topics. Moreover, many changes appeared during the post-colonial time: There are government health centers, new communication devices like televisions led to a more ‘modern’ understanding of the topic of health and medical disorders and so on. Therefore, the researcher looks into the Minangkabau healing system from a more ‘general’ perspective in order to detect particular patterns.

#### **1.5 The Composition of the Thesis**

Usually, the first step in research is to look at the available literature. In the literature review (Chapter 2), it can be seen what kind of literature is relevant. Interestingly most of the literature makes no difference between the different cultures and societies. For example, many books use the term ‘Malay magic’ (Endicott, 1985 & Skeat, 1900). But the critics state that this term is problematic. Raymond Firth mentions:



Even in recent publications one may read of 'the Malay world view' or 'Malay magical thought' as if all Malays, even nowadays shared the same concepts. My argument, to the contrary, is that certainly nowadays, in part of Malaya which has long been recognized as a stronghold of magical practices, Malays have been more pragmatic, showed more variation in their beliefs, been more experimental in their attitudes, than could be inferred from literature. (Firth 1974, p.19)

The Minangkabau are different in some respects from other Malay societies. They form the largest matrilineal society in the world (Metje, 1995, p. 23). In this sense, it is allowed to say that at least the social structure of the Minangkabau society is something which distinguishes the Minangkabau from many other Malay societies. But it is the question whether this is applicable for their healing system too.

If someone looks at the research publications regarding the Minangkabau, there is one work which stands out from the crowd namely the work of Frederick Errington (1984). Errington makes fascinating conclusions. The most important one is that he concludes that the society in West Sumatra uses signs instead of symbols. It has to be checked whether this is also the case within the medical system. Do the traditional healers (*dukun*) use symbols or signs within their healing methods? This is an important question in order to see how the healers work efficiently. Maybe there are also other healing elements in which signs or symbols are used? Many anthropologists seem to focus on the interpretation of symbols and neglect the sign. So if the Minangkabau society is indeed a sign-oriented society, then it would be fascinating to see how these signs are used. The field of medical treatment can be an illustrative example. In the literature review, it is considered that the Minangkabau is a society within the Malay-speaking world. Therefore, a researcher must be aware that the Minangkabau medicine is part of a greater context.

The questions mentioned in Section 1.2, just help to get a rough guidance. An ethnographer who usually follows the method of participant observation must be open to surprising discoveries. Chapter 3 provides background information about the history of the Minangkabau. Such an overview is necessary in order to see whether previous historical events influenced the healing system. For example, it might be possible that pre-Islamic elements can still be found in the healing system of West Sumatra.

Chapter 4 deals with the research method. It can be seen that the researcher did not stick to one particular method or methodology in a strict sense. The field of ethnomedicine is too large. One aim is to describe and analyze the medical treatment within the Minangkabau society. This means various methods are included like spells (and their analysis), plants, and so on. The researcher needs another approach to describe the features of plants compared with the features of spells. A plant must be described from its consistency. It is important to specify the location of the plant and the parts of the plant which are used within the medical treatment. How and when are these plants used? On the other side, spells must be analyzed in a different way namely from a linguistic side. Nonetheless, an emic point of view should be considered. This means the healing system should be described from the viewpoint of the healer. Regarding this point, there are many questions which should help to enable this: How does a healer recognize and classify certain diseases? How does he or she treat a disorder and why? Are there different categories of plants and diseases? Maybe it is necessary to describe the perception of the world. What does it actually mean if a person is sick? The background information of Chapter 4 about

the healers and the way of collecting data provides a first overview about the research and the research setting.

The theoretical frame is elaborated in Chapter 5. Here it is outlined how structural anthropologists like Levi-Strauss contributed to the field of medical anthropology and how it can be used in this thesis. Levi-Strauss (1977) wrote two remarkable articles which can be considered as classical works in the field of medical anthropology. It is discussed in how far these articles can be useful for the topic of this thesis. Furthermore, the relationship between symbols and signs are elaborated in detail. This topic is essential as the already mentioned assumption of Errington that signs play a significant role in the daily life of the Minangkabau people must be analyzed in greater detail.

In Chapter 6, the ethnographic data is shown. It is intended to describe the way how the healers use their knowledge. The first step was to find a suitable place for the research. At the beginning, it was assumed that the access to the healers would be easy. One healer was asked whether he would be willing to participate in the research. But he rejected it and proposed to the researcher to go to the *panghulu* (head of a clan or subclan) of the clan of the researcher. Here it must be mentioned that the researcher is considered to belong to a certain *suku* (clan) in the neighboring village community due to marriage. So the healer told that the *panghulu* Datuak Thoyib would be a healer. The researcher did not know that. As a consequence, the contacted healer did not want to interfere in matters regarding a *panghulu* from the neighboring community. Then the *Datuak* (the title of a *panghulu*) was asked and the research began.

As there are different ways of data collection, so there are different types of data: photographs (especially in order to classify plants), video sequences (particularly useful to illustrate healing techniques), recorded interviews (mainly to document the various interviews) and private memos (especially field diaries and sketches). In Chapter 7, the process of analysis is shown. All the mentioned data must be analyzed to get a proper overall picture. Of course, not all transcribed interviews can be published because these contain some hundred pages, but important excerpts are cited in order to interpret them and to integrate them into a broader context. In Chapter 7, the emic viewpoint is left and it is tried to look at the healing system from a structural point of view. However, the analytical part does not merely stick to structuralism. There are other theoretical approaches which could be useful. As one aim of this research is to illustrate and analyze the Minangkabau healers and their healing system as a whole it is clear that the healers themselves are acting persons. The system and other elements can be analyzed in a structural way, but the acting itself, which creates an intersubjective reality, could be analyzed in a different way within the framework of structuralism.

## **1.6 The Significance of this Research**

Describing a non-Western medical system is very crucial because the knowledge is going to disappear. Nearly all the healers who were asked are quite old. Most of these healers are older than 70 years, and some even died during the period of this research. It should be kept in mind that Western medicine cannot help to treat diseases which are different from what the physicians study. Peter Worsley writes about that fact:

Nevertheless, Western medicine is considered to be ineffective a wide range of physical illnesses and especially useless in dealing with psychosomatic problems ranging from heartbreak (not heartburn) to witchcraft. (Worsley, 1982, p. 335)

It is a dilemma for many practitioners of biomedicine that they are confronted with ‘irrational’ beliefs, and then they do not know how to act. Often they would categorize such a person as mentally sick and describe medicine like tranquilizers. In Germany, there was the case of Anneliese Michel. This was a case about exorcism with a tragic end as the affected person (Anneliese Michel) died and the exorcists were blamed for being responsible. When the anthropologist Felicitas Goodman (2006) looked into this case from an anthropological point of view, she concluded that the main problem was that nobody consulted a psychologist who was a specialist in transcultural psychiatry. Indeed, it seems that the viewpoint of the Western-oriented biomedicine has to consider also other belief systems.

Nowadays, in most of the Indonesian villages, there is a medical pluralism. The people can choose which healer they prefer: the Western-educated doctor or the traditional *dukun*. The anthropologist can see which doctor the people consult in which case. Sometimes, there is a purely economic reason why the people prefer to go to the local healer, but sometimes the people might go to the healers in certain specific cases. Most of the local Minangkabau of the research setting of this thesis are farmers and their income is sometimes not high. Therefore, a cheap medical treatment is important for them.

Traditional medical knowledge is still relevant today. In the past, many famous healing drugs originated from plants which were used by different traditional healers. Cinchona is an example which could be used against Malaria (Balick & Cox

1997, p. 31). At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish colonialists in South America discovered that the native Indians used the rind of a particular tree to treat Malaria. The Catholic clergy brought this medicine to Europe, and the success story of the cinchona rind began. In the year 1880, six million pounds of cinchona trees were exported from Colombia to Europe (Balick & Cox 1997, p. 33). It can be seen that a medical drug which originated from local ethnobotanical knowledge had a huge success story. There are many other examples. Balick and Cox make a list of 50 plants which help to develop medical drugs (Balick & Cox 1997, p. 38). Another important plant was coca for the suppression of pain (Murdock, 1980, P. 5). The colonial prejudices which stressed the superiority of Western knowledge seem to disappear step by step. The scientists realize that traditional knowledge could be useful and that many of these medical drugs have little or no side-effects at all. On the other side, ethnobotanical discoveries could be an important economic factor for many countries. Many small-scale or middle-scale companies can be built up and could help to develop rural areas too. An example is the use of *Tongkat Ali* which is famous as a Southeast Asian aphrodisiac. Many companies in Malaysia produce products which contain *Tongkat Ali* and these products are exported to many countries. For example, in the year 1999, the sales of herbal products were about 80 Billion US Dollar and in a country like Malaysia, the market for natural medicine was estimated to be 4.6 Billion Malaysian Ringgits with an annual growth forecast of 15-20 percent (Azdina Jamia Jamal, 2006, p. 37). So it can be seen that the market for natural medicine is quite important. The following research could discover whether there are plants which might be used for the domestic or even international market.

In Chapter 5, 6 and 7 it is tried to integrate this research into a broader context of the scientific discussion. There are famous approaches within medical anthropology like the semantic model of Byron Goods. But it is essential to mention that there are also other anthropological theories that could help to get a better understanding. This research focuses on structuralism. Many scientists might consider that a structural perspective would be old-fashioned, but it is still part of the anthropology of the body. Structuralism can deliver a positive stimulus in the field of medical anthropology. In Chapter 7, the healing system of the Minangkabau is analyzed from such a structural point of view. However, purely focusing on a structural viewpoint could be not sufficient. The acting of the healer takes place in a particular lifeworld and this is actually the field of sociological phenomenology. A close friend of Claude Levi-Strauss was the well-known phenomenologist Merleau Ponty. He tried to consider both approaches structuralism and phenomenology (Schmidt, 1985). A healer and a patient grow up in a special context and the researcher has to reveal that. For example, it could be possible that the people believe in ghosts which could be the cause of a certain illness. Such ideas must be integrated within the healing process.

It is tried to consider different theoretical approaches with the main focus on structuralism. Like already mentioned other approaches should be considered too. If the researcher would focus on just one method, then the view would be narrow. In Chapter 6, the healing methods are described. These methods differ, but nonetheless, there are similarities that help to classify them. It must be stressed that a village community is not a homogenous unity. There are different viewpoints and even views that are opposed like dichotomies. For instance, the belief in ghosts and the

use of practices which could be described as magical are heavily rejected by orthodox Islamic scholars. Furthermore, it is tried to illustrate the various methods regarding the field of healing. These ethnographic descriptions should help to get a good insight view. Then in Chapter 7, the various healing methods are analyzed by considering the theoretical approaches of Chapter 5. The structural method usually tries to 'create' a model that illustrates a simplified explanation of the whole healing methods. At the end, some concluding remarks are made in the final chapter.



## CHAPTER 2

### TRADITIONAL MINANANGKABAU AND MALAY MEDICINE

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter can be called a ‘literature review’, but it must be emphasized that there are different ways how to write a literature review like a context review, historical review, integrative review, methodological review, and many more (Neuman, 2006, p. 112). It was decided to write a context review which intends to show the knowledge regarding traditional Minangkabau medicine from a broader context. The Minangkabau is not an isolated society, but it had contact with other cultures and societies. Minangkabau people live not only in West Sumatra but also ‘outside’ especially in Negeri Sembilan and West Aceh. Therefore, it is useful to look at the non-Western medical practices within the Malay-speaking world too. Moreover, there is much more literature available which could be helpful, and it could be a good ‘starting point’ to make further reflections.

Sometimes, it is tried to stress the inconsistencies or contradictions of some literature, and from time to time the literature is summarized to get a complete picture. In so far it cannot be considered as a typical literature review because the researcher could not be critical-evaluative in any sense. This means sometimes the knowledge is just written down. It must be added that the researchers do not contradict each other in every topic. On the contrary, from time to time they complement each other. And this is exactly the way science should be.

From the literature review, it can be seen that the literature regarding the Minangkabau healing methods is quite limited so far. From time to time important features were omitted. The probably most important book from Alfred Maaß (1912) neglected spells and focused too much on a comparative view. Other researchers like Darnys (1993), or Lajtai (2003) wrote about healing methods in a very brief way. Therefore, the reader can get only a limited impression of the Minangkabau healing system itself. The literature about the healing system in the surrounding Malay-speaking world is more detailed than the literature about the Minangkabau healing system. So it makes sense to look at the healing systems in the nearby cultures also in order to get a broader impression. The Minangkabau society is not isolated from other societies. Moreover, many people go outside of their original village. This way of moving to places outside of the homeland is called *merantau*. The Minangkabau society is a society which is quite famous for the practice of leaving the traditional homeland and ‘finding their luck’ outside (Naim, 1985; Kato, 1982). Swift mentions that the Minangkabau matrilineal system often pressures men to leave the hometown as the way of living in the *rantau* is a welcome relief (Swift, 1985, p. 351). This Chapter 2 provides a basic frame from which the ethnographic data of the later chapters can be evaluated, and it juxtaposes the Minangkabau medicine with the Malay medicine in order to understand the greater context.

## **2.2 Literature about the Minangkabau Healing System**

The literature of the Minangkabau Healing system is the main topic of the following pages. It should look at its medical treatment methods from different points of view.

In this chapter, the literature which directly covers the topic of Minangkabau healing methods is reviewed. The most important work is probably the research of Alfred Maaß (1912). This book was written in German with the title *Durch Zentral-Sumatra* [Translation: ‘Through Central Sumatra’]. It contains two large volumes with articles of different specialists. In the second volume, Kleiweg de Zwaan wrote about the medicine in Central Sumatra. The title of this part is *Die Heilkunde der Minangkabauer* [Translation: ‘The Healing System of the Minangkabau’]. This section contains more than 300 pages, and it covers various diseases, birth taboos, magic, and so on. Kleiweg de Zwaan made an enormous comparison between the medicine of the Minangkabau with other medical systems from Aceh, Borneo and even Africa and Europe. This research highlights that the Minangkabau way of healing is in some sense unique, but nonetheless part of a greater system. The book was written about 100 years ago, and it would be interesting to see in what respect the healing system is still the same or different nowadays. The most significant contribution of this book is the mentioning of many plants and their botanical terms. Another point which must be added regarding this work is that the research of this expedition covered mainly the *rantau* (the surrounding areas of the Minangkabau heartland). Therefore, it is quite difficult to evaluate in how far this research is representative of the traditional Minangkabau healing system in the *darek* (the three original Minangkabau areas in the interior). The primary target of the research of Maaß was to get an ethnographic overview of the healing system in Central Sumatra. There was a vast collection of data, yet important parts were neglected. The research team described the healing system of the *dukun* only and did not consider that the Minangkabau form an Islamic society in which Islamic healing methods can be found too. Nonetheless, the book of Maaß is important as it is one of the few books

that focused on the Minangkabau healing system and described its many features in detail.

Even 100 years before the book of Maaß, the English scientist Marsden published *The History of Sumatra* which contained some important botanical terms as well (Marsden, 1975). He described which plants were used for which disease. However, the list was very brief and did not comprise any ideas of the cause of disorders. The reason was probably the lack of access to the interior areas of Sumatra. Furthermore, it has to be considered that the main intention of the book was to describe the history of Sumatra.

A Dutch article about the healing system of the interior of Central Sumatra must be mentioned too. It was written by J.J. Kreemer (1908) and it dealt with the healing system of the highlands. This article is essential as Kreemer made an important contribution: He differentiated clearly between the causes of diseases. There are diseases from 'outside' and medical disorders which originate from the body itself. Kreemer wrote that the main reason for the first category is the belief in ghosts. A huge variety of spirits resides in different areas. For example, the water ghosts live in the water, and it can happen that the victims become terrified by them and get a shock, then they become ill. One famous method to treat these disorders is to use spells which threaten the ghosts. Kreemer also mentioned a second category of disorders which comprised diseases 'within the body itself' like diphtheria, and in such a case the healer must use ingredients which are effective. Often these plants have a cooling function. Kreemer's article is very useful as he described the stories of many ghosts and he cited many spells too.

M. Joustra was also a Dutch researcher who wrote an important book about the Minangkabau culture. The title of his book is *Minangkabau. Overzicht van Land, Geschiedenis en Volk*. It was published during the colonial era in the year 1923. He focused on Muslim ideas. These ideas were sometimes different from the orthodox ideals (Joustra, 1923, p. 142). He mentioned that the *dukun* still use a kind of animistic behavior, for example, the treatment of the placenta after birth. The main contribution of Joustra's work is that he stressed the Islamic elements which are important in the life for the Minangkabau. Even healing ideas are affected by this.

A recently published article by Almos and Pramono (2015) looks at the Minangkabau traditional medicine from an ethnomedical point of view. In the article with the title *Leksikon Etnomedisin dalam Pengobatan tradisional Minangkabau* it is stressed that three types must be differentiated if a researcher looks at the traditional Minangkabau medicine. These types are the types of diseases, the types of herbs and the types of the treatment process. One of the interesting points about this article is that it mentions local forms of diseases and illnesses (for example *sijundai*) and their treatment. However, the article is very brief (10 pages only), and for the reader who is not necessarily an expert in the field, it is not easy to understand the background of local concepts. Nevertheless, the publication is very important as it explains such local concepts so that the reader knows that local categories of illness exist in the Minangkabau society. Unfortunately, the authors neglect diseases which do not fall into a local category (like for example Malaria), but for which a local treatment method exists.

### 2.2.1 Herbal Treatment in West Sumatra

The books of Marsden and Maaß (see Section 2.2.1) focused on different diseases and their healing plants. It was important for these researchers to collect and identify the plants, but it was also necessary to write down how these plants were used. There are various ways how to use a healing plant. It is possible to eat it or drink it and it is possible to use it externally, like sprinkling water over the body. It should be noted that these former researches did not fulfill the modern standards of the field of ethnobotany which includes botanical classifications and a clear description how to use medicinal plants. In these early books, the authors recognized that some plants have special features. For example, various types of lemons can be used to expel spirits or protect the person so that these spirits will not disturb them at all (Kleiweg de Zwaan, 1912, p. 460).

Lajtai (2003) another anthropologist also noted that there is a large variety of *limau* (lemon) like *limau kasturi*, *limau purut*, *limau kambing*, and so on. It would be interesting to know for which case the healer chooses which *limau*. However, the article of Lajtai is too brief.

Many plants are used for the treatment of certain diseases. A famous local plant is *jari angau* (bot. *acorus calamus*) which can be utilized for instance when a woman still loses blood a long time after she delivered a child. Then the root of this plant is cut into small pieces and is mixed with *kunci bolai* (bot. *Zingiber cassumunar* Roxb). After that, the whole ingredients are given in water and the woman drinks it. This is just an example of local knowledge which was collected by the expedition of Maaß (Kleiweg de Zwaan, 1912), but also by later researchers like Darnys (1993)

who conducted his research in the province of Riau. Other researchers can use such books as a kind of reference.

Rafli Sabirin is a healer who originates from Kamang, Bukittinggi. He studied *tasawuf* with different scholars of West Sumatra and Riau. Nowadays he lives in Malaysia where he published the book *Pengobatan Al-Quran. Penawar Segala Penyakit* (Sabirin, 2014). This book describes some diseases and the way of treatment. For example, he explains the treatment of hemorrhoids. Together with special plants like the leaves of *hempedu ular*, and others (Sabirin, 2014, p. 206), these ingredients will be put in hot water, and after that, the patient will put the water on the affected part of the body. Unfortunately, the writer describes the treatment of a limited number of diseases (altogether only 15). He does not mention illnesses that originate from a mystical background or widespread diseases like diarrhea. Nonetheless, it can be said that the book is a valuable source of information on how certain diseases can be treated. The reader can see that both plants and Qur'anic verses can be used for healing purposes.

### **2.2.2 Other Forms of Treatment**

Besides of the prescription of certain herbs, there exist other forms of treatment. One famous type of treatment is massage. In the book of Maaß, it was mentioned that this was used if the patient suffered from certain pains like a pain in the back or a headache (Kleiweg de Zwaan, 1912, p. 345). The traditional healer used oil which helped him during the treatment. Usually the *dukun* massaged from the periphery towards the center. In the case of a headache the healer started from the root of the nose, and then he moved his fingers upwards towards the temples and finally

towards the neck. Normally the healer used the thumb, but he could also use other parts of the body in order to increase the pressure, for example, the heels of the feet. Kleiweg de Zwaan stressed that the healer never used any instruments during the massage.

Another wide-spread treatment which was described in the book of Maaß is cupping. It could be used for various forms of diseases like a back pain or a headache. Kleiweg de Zwaan noted that it is not allowed in Islam to make mutilations. This is the reason why cupping cannot be used for all parts of the body like for example the face (Kleiweg de Zwaan, 1912, p. 346). In Sumatra, the cupping expert uses a horn of a cow and suck so that there will be a vacuum. After some minutes, the healer removes the horn and makes some scratches and put the horn in the same place, in the same way, so that the dirty blood can be removed. This method is slightly different from the Islamic method of cupping. In the Islamic medicine, the healer makes some scratches with a knife and then he uses a small fire in order to create a vacuum before he puts a small glass on that place. Nowadays, many Islamic healers use modern cupping sets with certain pumps to create a vacuum.

### **2.2.3 *Semangat* and the Concept of the Body**

*Semangat* (in Minangkabau language: *sumange*) is a term which is mentioned by many authors who write about the medical system in Indonesia or Malaysia. Endicott translates it as the 'vital principle' (Endicott, 1985 p. 49). If this vital principle is weak, then the body is vulnerable. This can happen if a person gets frightened or wakes up suddenly (Endicott, 1985, p. 49). Therefore, the healer must



restore the original strength of *semangat*.<sup>3</sup> In the case of the Minangkabau, the idea about *semangat* is similar. Kleiweg de Zwaan mentioned that women are very often victims of special types of certain magical attacks due to weak *semangat*. However, de Zwaan seems to be confused about the term ‘*semangat*’ and the idea of the soul. Often he used the word ‘*semangat*’ and the word ‘soul’ as synonyms.

The concept of the soul is a very complex one and confused many researchers. In the following chapters, this concept is explained in the broader context of the Malay-speaking world. In the literature about the Minangkabau medicine, the concept is not well described by the various authors. The body of a human being consists of the four elements fire (*api*), wind (*angin*), earth (*tanah*) and water (*air*). According to Kleiweg de Zwaan, the soul enters the body after six months of pregnancy. He mentioned the term *buruang tubuah* as a term for the soul (Kleiweg de Zwaan, 1912, p. 186). This term can be translated as the ‘bird of the body’. Unfortunately, the author did not explain more about this idea. In Islam, there is a connection between birds and soul. For example, the souls of the martyrs will be in heaven in the shape of birds. A bird is an animal which can fly around without boundaries, and it is a well-known fact for many Muslims that the soul can leave the body during sleep.

It is Allah Who takes away the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep. He keeps those (souls) for which he has ordained death and sends the rest for a term appointed. Verily, in this are signs for the people who think deeply. (Qur’an 39:42)

It is well possible that the idea of the soul being similar to that of a bird is an idea which is of Islamic origin. This idea should be considered.

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<sup>3</sup> Here the Bahasa Indonesia term is used in order to make it easier for a comparison with the Malay medicine. Nonetheless, it is tried to use the Minangkabau terms whenever it is possible.

More details about the concept of the soul in West Sumatra were given by Edwin Loeb (Loeb, 1974, pp. 121-123). He wrote that the Minangkabau have two different concepts and three expressions regarding the soul. There is the soul which leaves the body during death, and it is called *nyawa*. The *semangat* is the vital force and a healthy person in Minangkabau is called *urang basumange*. If a person has a strong vital force, then this is expressed in his face. Loeb writes that the people believe that the *semangat* has an own consciousness and an own will (Loeb, 1974, p. 121). Another word is *jiwa* the 'life principle'. Loeb mentioned that this term is derived from the Sanskrit word *jiwa* and probably it is closely related to *nyawa*.

Karl Heider is another author who looked at the concept of *semangat*, and how the Minangkabau see it. He remarks that for many people there are three particular meanings which are related to *semangat*: a) *Semangat* is a driving ambition which motivates the people to act, b) *Semangat* is a patriotic inspiration which was felt by Indonesians during the struggle for Independence, and c) It is a joyous feeling (Heider, 2011, pp. 76-77). He further writes:

In addition to these three particular meanings, *semangat* as a positive spirit is located variously. People have *semangat*, but also villages may have it. There were differences of opinion on *semangat* in objects. But some of my informants resisted the idea that objects could have *semangat* – that would be just superstitious, incompatible with Islam. (Heider, 2011, p. 77)

Furthermore, he stresses that there is a difference between men and women regarding *semangat*:

Generally there are some differences between men and women. Women's *semangat* is more limited; women have to hide that *semangat*, while men can show it; men's *semangat* is for strength, while women's is for beauty (Heider, 2011, pp. 78-79).

The *dukun* can use certain spells to arise *semangat*. In the description of Heider, it can be seen that the concept of *semangat* is also prevalent in West Sumatra. However, there seems to be a slight difference compared with other regions. The most striking one is that objects do not contain *semangat*. In other regions like Malaysia, some researches stress that *semangat* can be found in objects like trees, rocks, and *keris* (Farrer, 2009, pp. 136-137).

Another person who mentions *semangat* is Katherine Stenger Frey who writes in her book with the title *Journey to the Land of the Earth Goddess* that there is a twofold concept of the soul:

Every person was thought to have a real soul, the *njao*, and a soul which could disappear, the *semangat*. They explained the disappearance of the *semangat* as having been captured by an evil spirit which would make the person lose his vital power. It was up to the *dukun* to track down the lost *semangat* and return it to the sufferer. (Stenger Frey, 1986, p. 41)

From this remark, it can be seen that one of the main tasks of the healer is to strengthen the *semangat* or even return it to the patient.

#### **2.2.4 The Minangkabau Culture and Medical Disorders**

In this chapter, it is intended to look whether there are special features regarding medical disorders which are only valid for the Minangkabau society. The matrilineal social structure and the strong adherence to the customary law (*adat*) are elements which can be called unique in some sense and so it is not surprising that some researchers look at the socio-cultural background and how this could be a reason for certain diseases or illnesses.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For the difference of the terms 'disease' and 'illness' see Section 5.4.