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Myth in a changing world

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I

Myth, like culture, belongs to those concepts which are used in the most divergent and often the most contradictory ways. As far as the idea of culture is concerned, we may discern an evident tendency towards a matter-of-fact concept of culture, which therefore does not serve as a standard of valuation within humanity as a whole or within a certain society. However, the use of the concept 'myth' shows but little of a growing unity, and even among the students of cultural anthropology we are still far from a *communis opinio* on the contents of this term.

The term 'myth' will be used in this article in agreement with those scholars who do not connect any judgment concerning true or untrue with the concept 'myth' ¹⁾. Furthermore, it will be used here in a wide sense, referring in general to the representation by means of language of events which human beings consider as absolutely essential for their existence and as giving meaning simultaneously to the present, the past and the future. In doing so, we will leave the point whether these events actually possess this meaning according to our views wholly outside of our considerations; likewise the question whether these events could really have taken place according to our scientific knowledge.

In this way 'myth' becomes a concept which is not restricted to a certain period of the history of mankind, nor to a certain type of

¹⁾ a.o. J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong, *Studies in Indonesian Culture*, vol. I Oirata, a Timorese settlement on Kisar, Verh. Kon. Ak. v. Wet. Afd. L N.R. (Transactions of the Royal Academy of Sciences, Division of Literature; New Series) XXXIX, 1937, p. 168: Myth is concerned with the things that are of vital interest to a human community — according to its own standards; Rubin Gotesky in his critical article on the views of David Bidney, *The nature of myth and society in the American Anthropologist*, vol. 54, 1952, p. 530: Myth, like any other belief, can be false, but it is not false because it is myth; cf. also the sociologist R. M. MacIver, who for the rest does take the concept in a very wide sense, in the *Web of Government*, 13th impression 1955, p. 5: We use the word in an entirely neutral sense.... We need a term that abjures all reference to truth or falsity.

civilisation. This becomes important when we are engaged in the study of non-western peoples at the present time and come to face the question why we should apply the term 'myth' to certain systems of thinking of the ancient non-western civilisations and why we should not do so in case of those which have been adopted from the modern Occident in recent times and which likewise are considered to be of fundamental importance for existence.

In order to give a fitting reply to this question we feel only too much the great lack of studies concerning the present modifications of old myths in the changing societies of non-western peoples, like we also miss investigations concerning the adaptation of western systems of thinking which partly replace or continue the old myths in these cultures. The following survey is intended as a short contribution to this highly complicated subject. For this purpose I have collected a few examples from the culture-areas of Southeast Asia and the South Seas. These examples are not representative for the whole of the society from which they have been taken, but perhaps they constitute together a series of cases which may be of some value for defining the problem more sharply.

II

The first example is concerned with the traditional interpretation of the changes in a society according to an ancient myth, where the family of the ruler plays a central role and which explains the decline, the disappearance and the reemergence of the ruler's family.

I have selected this example from the area which I studied in 1940—1941, viz. Western Timor, and more in particular from the regions Molo and Miomaffo, the central area of the former state of Sonbai²). From the report of Salomon Müller's journey we know

²) My field notes were lost during the war. However, the data used for the first two examples were partly noted down again in a later phase of the war period and both at the time and immediately after the war they were used in lectures. Moreover, I was able to add to these and to verify them by means of the extensive and important Dutch memoranda of the Netherlands Civil Service in the former administrative areas South Central Timor and North Central Timor, composed by the Administrative Officers H. W. G. Reijntjes (February 1948) and H. G. Schulte Nordholt (July 1947) respectively. Furthermore, I used information contained in the long article by the Reverend P. Middelkoop, „Iets over Sonba'i, het bekende vorstengeslacht op Timor" (Something concerning Sonba'i, the wellknown princely family on Timor), in *T.B.G.* (the Journal of the Royal Batavia Society of Arts and Sciences) LXXVIII. 1938, p. 392—509; this article contains on p.

that in 1828 the state of Sonbai was already in decay, but that its organisation was still such that the state consisted of three parts, situated from the southeast to the northwest. First there was Molo, also called Oimatan after the ruling clan in this area, next Oinam in the centre, the centre also of the state, and directly ruled by the prince of the Sonbai family, and finally, in the northeast, Miomaffo, also called Amakono after the ruling clan in this area, the Kono. Sonbai resided in the small centre of Oinam, but the title of ruler of Oinam was associated with the rule over the ancient state of Sonbai to which also many other regions of Western Timor had belonged. In 1828 this state had already considerably decreased in size and Sonbai had only little say over its "men" Kono and Oimatan, although according to the Timorese expression these were to be considered as the wings of the bird Sonbai. But there are clear indications that before that time Sonbai's power had extended over the major part of Western Timor and that even after the disintegration of the state prominent members of this family continued to exert a strong influence in the field of religion and politics as opponents in the interior against the influence of Kupang, the Dutch centre on the West coast. After the pacification of the interior of Western Timor during the period 1906—1910, the whole region was placed under the Dutch administration. A radja of Sonbai in the interior was completely out of the question; the state of Oinam had long since disappeared and Molo had become a self-governing area under a radja from the clan of Oimatan, whilst Miomaffo had the same status under a radja from the Kono clan. Some members of the Sonbai family who had plotted against the Dutch power had been banished and so the end of the history of the ancient state of Sonbai in the interior seemed to have reached its end. This was also expressly communicated to the Timorese in the regions of Molo and Miomaffo.

But to a number of traditionalist Timorese in the heart of the old state this did not mean the end, nor did it to the descendants of the ruling family of Sonbai. In the Sonbai myths, which were also anciently the central myths of the state of Sonbai, indicating the position of the tribes and the clans in this area, there are passages mentioning resistance against the rule of Sonbai and the disappearance of this

398 ff. an excellent explanation of the collective-ego nature of the group-consciousness on Timor. For the early period I also consulted Dr Salomon Müller, *Reizen en onderzoekingen in den Indischen Archipel* (Travels and researches in the Indian Archipelago) vol. II of the edition of 1857.

princely family which, however, rearises after a period of darkness. The pattern of this story shows cyclical characteristics; it has been evidently inspired by the course of the sun, respectively of the moon. The myth also starts repeatedly by relating that in primeval times the first Sonbai came from the East and possessed a name which is related with heaven and light. He marries a daughter of Fai (night) Kune, the Lord of the Soil, whose family up to recent times still represented the religious power over the earth and the spring-water in the former centre of the state of Sonbai. But the myths of Sonbai not only knew of the temporary disappearance of Sonbai due to the rebellion of the Timorese grandees subordinate to him, followed later by a reemergence. Several stories were also current which showed how cleverly Sonbai knew to act against the Dutch and how he hoodwinked them. When relating these myths the anti-Sonbai interpretation stressed the fact, which was considered rather well-established, that in primeval times the various groups had been practically independent of one another and that Sonbai had acquired a dominating position by means of cunning and cruel force, a position which it had lost repeatedly due to rebellion against its tyrannical rule, until finally even the Dutch had come to act against this perfidious family. The pro-Sonbai interpretation considered the disappearance of Sonbai as a temporary phase, after which in accordance with the course of the myth a day would dawn which would show another reemergence of Sonbai.

Before long it seemed that these expectations were not going to be disappointed and that it would be proved again how Sonbai's power would reassert itself in the face of all opposition, even using the Dutch as its instrument. What was the case? Towards the end of the 'twenties the Civil Service in the Netherlands Indies for some time tended to combine small regions in order to constitute larger radja-ships. For Timor this meant likewise that the attempt would be made to combine a number of self-governing regions into larger units, and in doing so to try and link up with ancient custom, both as regarded the combination of territories and as regarded the installation of the new rulers. For Western Timor the decision was taken to aim at the centralisation of a large part of this territory into one self-governing region under a descendant from the Sonbai family in the interior which after all had formerly ruled over the ancient state of Sonbai. This was to be achieved by having members of the Sonbai family elected to the positions of radja as these became vacant, in this way attaining gradually a centralisation under the family of the Sonbai. And so it happened that in

1932 the position of chief of the Molo region which had become vacant due to the dismissal of the radja of Molo was not filled by selecting a member of the clan of Oimatan, but by taking a member of the neglected Sonbai family, Tua Sonbai, who did not belong in this position. This was merely to be a first step, although the person in question was emphatically told that his elevation contained no further implications. Unfortunately for this scion of the Sonbai, the plan for the reestablishment of the ancient state of Sonbai was given up shortly after his appointment as self-governing radja of Molo, and so he was in a rather ambiguous position. Of course he had become acquainted with the motives which had led to his elevation as radja of Molo. But even without these he would have cherished similar expectations as a further realisation of the course of the Sonbai myth. I do not know whether this radja strongly believed in the myth of his family before he had become radja of Molo. But the circumstance of his sudden elevation must have greatly strengthened this belief. In any case many Timorese in the central area of the former state of Sonbai considered this elevation to be the result of the activity of the ancestors of Sonbai on behalf of the bearer of the old Sonbai title, "son of Heaven".

Tua Sonbai exerted himself to promote belief in the Sonbai myth by keeping to the tradition concerning marriage current in this family. His official wives were indicated as "darkness" and they were not allowed to go out during day-time unless they were completely covered, in order that his marriage would still be considered as a repetition of the marriage of light and darkness in primeval times. But his main object was to have the title of ruler of Oinam recognised again officially, in order that it might become clear to all Timorese that he was not merely a radja of Molo, but the coming ruler of the state of Sonbai which was to be reestablished. Towards the Administration he made it appear as if this were a title without further significance; still he added that it would be worth something to him to obtain this title. It became his predominant preoccupation, and here we should not only think of personal ambition alone, but also of the aspiration to accomplish the course of the myth. When during the war the Japanese dominated the country, he tried to obtain their recognition of the title and they let him call himself "radja Molo-Oinam". However, the Japanese were defeated and therefore he had to start all over again. Quite soon after the arrival of the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration Officer who was the first to administer the area to which also Molo belonged after the war, he came to him with the same request. As I had, however,

been able to inform the latter on this point, he did not enter into the matter, just as little as the Administrator who arrived soon afterwards and who had administered the area before the war. He fully realised all the implications of the recognition of the title of "ruler of Oinam", if only as far as it concerned the adjoining areas which formerly had formed part of the ancient state of Sonbai during longer or shorter periods. He also prohibited him to bear the combined title of Molo-Oinam. After a few years the Dutch authorities disappeared again, but this meant by no means the dawn of a period which would offer new chances for the realisation of the restoration of the ancient state of Sonbai and for the further accomplishment of the phase of reemergence which had already started, all in accordance with the course of the myth.

III

My second example is from the same central area of the former state of Sonbai, but it concerns the Miomaffo region, and more in particular the eastern district of Bikomi. Our first example showed us the attempts of a social group, in this case a princely family, to restore the old position in accordance with the myth, but in the second case we are on the contrary dealing with a group which wishes to rise beyond the position it occupied in the myth and which for that reason tries to get away from the contents of the ancient myth by eliminating and substituting some of its elements, without, however, relinquishing the framework of the old myth in their attempts at attaining a new aim.

For a better understanding of the situation I shall have to say something first about the structure of the small state of Miomaffo. We saw already that Sonbai resided in the centre of its state, at Oinam, with its "men" on the outskirts: Kono (Miomaffo) in the Northeast and Oimatan (Molo) in the Southwest. The same pattern was repeated in the small domain of Miomaffo of radja Kono. As regards Sonbai, Kono as a collective figure was the active ruler in the East, but as regards his own state he was first and foremost the passive ruler, seated in the centre and with his "men" on the outer fringes. Now the Bikomi area was situated in the eastern part of Miomaffo and it stood actively over against the passive centre of Miomaffo. However, by itself it constituted a tribe which was divided into four tribal sections, of which Atok and Bana formed the active, male, outside and Lake and Senaak the passive, female, inside.

I mentioned earlier that the ancient state of Sonbai had long since disintegrated and disappeared. After the pacification, a self-governing area Miomaffo was recognised under radja Kono, including also Bikomi. It so happened that the ties between Bikomi and the ruling family Kono had greatly diminished in the course of time, because this area had been often cut off from the Kono domain due to the sphere of influence of the Portuguese enclave Oikusi which extended up to Noimuti, another Portuguese enclave (until 1916, when this territory was exchanged against a Dutch enclave in Portuguese Timor). In later times the position of Kono was particularly weakened and that of Bikomi was correspondingly strengthened by the transfer of the Dutch administration from Noiltoko, the centre of Kono, to the East, to Kefamnanu. Moreover, the Administration had been in trouble continuously with the succession of the radja of Miomaffo, which led to a further increase of the decentralisation of this area.

This short survey of the rather complicated structure of small states like Miomaffo will have made it clear, that such a structure could never be continued in the organisation of a self-governing territory under a radja and a number of district-chiefs, as it was established under the Dutch administration. When in 1941 I was engaged in research in this area, a member of the above-mentioned Bana group was district-chief of Bikomi. He was an energetic and ambitious figure, self-taught, who did not like the idea of being placed under a radja Kono and who desired to become at least an independent radja of Bikomi, if not even radja of Miomaffo. He had not yet started to resist openly, because the position of radja had already for some time been filled temporarily by a member of the senior passive group in Bikomi, Sobe Senaak, who was closely related to the pretender to the post of self-governing radja, Gaspar Kono, and had loyally defended the rights of this Kono family. Bana, however, used every opportunity to advocate a position of Bikomi independent from Kono, to minimise the importance of Kono, to besmirch the reputation of this princely family and to elevate the origin of his own clan as much as he could.

It is far from easy to persuade the Timorese of this part of the island to tell the tales concerning their origins. In particular they said to be afraid that their own story would be stolen by other groups. I was therefore quite pleased, but also slightly suspicious, when the district-chief Bana of his own accord offered to tell me the tale of the origin of Bana, together with the elders of his group. This story relates how anciently the four ancestors of Bikomi had come from the East

and how they had finally arrived in the Miomaffo region, the present Bikomi. Then it was told that the first Bana married there and how, when his wife had been eight months pregnant, he had been carried off to heaven by two large birds. However, he came to life again on earth in the child which was born soon afterwards. This part was told with great emphasis, in order to stress the exalted origin and status of the group. Moreover, there was not the least mention that these ancestors had come from the East together with Sonbai and Kono. Sonbai only met Bana and his three brothers in this very region and a borderline was fixed between them, whilst Kono only arrived later. The four brothers divided the territory, which was suggested to have contained the major part of Miomaffo. The rest of the story related how the other Miomaffo grandees obtained land from the four brothers, or how they obtained their assistance in war after having implored their help and having expressed their subservience. Kono was one of these grandees; Bikomi assisted him in his war against Sonbai and Bikomi gave him territory.

In 1947 the spokesmen of the Bana group related the same story in a meeting of the whole Miomaffo region, which had come together to reach a definite settlement of the succession of the self-governing radja. But at the question of the Dutch administrator, what must have been the reason that Kono formerly had become radja over the whole of Miomaffo, they first became disturbed and fell silent and finally said that the reason was that he had come as governor on behalf of Sonbai, without being allowed to undertake anything without the approval of the four lords of Bikomi, and that when Kono had come to dwell in Bikomi he had become nothing. The district-chief of Ablal who came from a family which considered itself as the elder brother of the radja-family Kono and which formerly had been entrusted with the direction in the border wars, shouted at the Bana group in a realistic modern manner: You want to become radja to receive a salary, but where is your family-tree? He also showed that the Bana were never mentioned among the radja families of Timor. The official spokesman of the radja family Kono remarked: where was Bikomi when the Company (the Dutch administration) arrived? Why did you not come to the Company as a radja? But Bana maintained that the story about their origin was correct.

When in 1941 I had noted down the story of Bana and had read it aloud in order to check it up, I had put quite a different question at the end. I had remembered a story about the origin of fire in which the

name of the Bana was also mentioned. This myth relates how in primeval times a number of ancestors came into contact with fire which they did not yet know at that time. One took it in his hand, another put it in his dress, a third in his mouth, until one of them did the correct thing and took the fire along on a smouldering log. Now in this story Bana belonged to the silly figures and so I suddenly asked the speaker of the Bana group, whether he also knew the story of Bana and the fire. He spontaneously assented, but then a chill silence set in. After some time the district-chief raised himself and begged to be excused and soon afterwards all had disappeared. Later I heard from my servants that close to my camp he had been unable to contain himself and had burst into tears.

Undoubtedly the Bana group occupied a prominent position in this area, but it is unlikely that the ancestors of such an elevated princely group which had its origin in heaven as was propagated at present would have had such a role in the myth concerning the origin of fire. Whenever this myth was told, the reactions of the ancestors when trying to take the fire along in the wrong manner always caused irrepressible laughter. However this may be, the mere fact that I knew this myth was sufficient for Bana to make him realise that he had failed in his attempt to impress me.

It is noteworthy that in both cases political aspirations are placed within the framework of the ancient myth without providing an interpretation of the wholly new situation in which Western Timor had come by its intensive contact with the Occident. In the first example we see how the change in the position of Sonbai is explained in accordance with the contents of the ancient myth as a phase of temporary disappearance, followed again by a rise which was to end in a restoration of the old position. In the second example we observe how the desired change of position is motivated by means of a changed version of the ancient myth which now has become rather the object than the subject of thought and which is certainly no longer faced with fear, because one neither expects religious sanctions when changing the myth, nor war from the side of the injured parties. But the point which evidently remained essential for their own thinking and for that of the closely related parties was that this attempted change of position was fitted in the framework of the ancient myth and that the future change was to be accomplished via a change in the past which had to legitimize the new position.

The reason why I have selected these two examples from my researches in Timor is not because I believe these to be representative for the thinking of the Timorese of Western Timor in general during the period of fifteen years ago. The world of ideas of the younger generation at Kupang and in the interior might easily have been made to provide other ideas in which both the ancient past and the modern present were viewed quite differently. My only object here was to present a series of types and therefore I have selected these two, quite irrespective of the fact whether they dealt with Timor or not.

IV

The third example is highly interesting because in this case the community in the modern situation looks to the present and tries to find a compromise between the old world and the new by placing cultural elements of different provenance side by side, whilst in the myth a process of change is at work, explaining the present situation and making it to a certain extent acceptable.

Here we are concerned with the Mimika people of Southwest New Guinea, a population of about 8500 souls living East of Etna Bay. In the interior of Timor we had to deal with small princedoms, but the very characteristic of Mimika society is the absence of social stratification, as remarked by Pouwer in his thesis *Some aspects of Mimika culture*³), a work which is of great importance to our investigation.

When we say that the community looks to the present, we can do so in a somewhat generalising fashion by indicating thereby a dominant attitude in the reactions of the Mimika people to modern times. Pouwer provides striking examples of this attitude, which he characterises as an attempt to attain a coexistence of the old and the new world. He says of the Mimika "It is characteristic that he (viz. the Mimika) resigns himself to the existing situation. He has become reconciled to the knowledge of having to live in two worlds. Both worlds have their own values, norms and demands. The art of living of the Mimika consists in the capacity of adapting himself in appearance or in reality to what is alien and of simultaneously keeping up what is his own. In this way he shows himself to be a realist and occasionally an opportunist. He

³) J. Pouwer, *Enkele aspecten van de Mimika-cultuur* (Some aspects of the Mimikaculture) The Hague, 1955.

looks for compromise, a thing which is not unknown in his own society either." ⁴⁾

It is possible to differ on the question whether this search for compromises within the traditional society is a result of its fundamental structure (a view which Pouwer is inclined to take), or whether it is a reaction due to an internal process of change within this society, which tries to find a way out of a conflict between conflicting determinants in the social structure. One thing is certain and that is that this tendency towards compromises was expressed in a curious characteristic of the Mimika culture, presumably already present before the period of intensive contact with the West, i.e. before the establishment of a regular Dutch administration (1926) and of the R.C. mission (1927). We find in this culture a stress of the horizontal line, a clear indication of its being directed towards the present. This is demonstrated i.a. by the kinship-system which in these societies so strongly influences the manner in which the social environment is approached. During his investigations Pouwer was struck by the circumstance that genealogical knowledge usually did not extend farther back than two generations and that even so it was rather fragmentary. He first believed that this vague genealogical knowledge would have to be considered as indicative of a loose social structure, but gradually it became evident that in this case other factors entered into play. Of these he mentions in the first place the fact that the whole kinship-system both from a terminological and from a functional point of view strongly accents the "sibling" and "cousin" relations. "Genealogically speaking it stresses the horizontal line instead of the vertical." ⁵⁾ Due to this horizontal trend the Mimika were able, both in the complicated modern period and in the previous period of the autochthonous traditional culture, to arrive at a compromise in which elements of different origin, c.q. of a different purport, found a place side by side ⁶⁾.

The same phenomenon is to be observed in the myth. Both among the baptised and the unbaptised we observe the tendency to place the traditional and the christian view side by side on the same level. But also in the process of change within their own traditional view of the world, in which alien elements are given a place within this picture, we observe how a certain co-ordination of indigenous and alien is

⁴⁾ o.c. p. 263.

⁵⁾ o.c. p. 61.

⁶⁾ Chapter VII/14 p. 250—267.

obtained. This is done by projecting the present differentiation in the world — as far as the Mimika are acquainted with it — into the times of the cultural heroes. This is the mythical period *par excellence*, a period which the Mimika keep strictly separate from the time of present-day mortal man. It was during this mythical period that several figures among the culture heroes went to the West. Already at that time they had at their disposal those goods which made such an impression in modern times, like rifles, airplanes, oil-derricks, mirrors etc. They departed from Mimika with the goods and they themselves never returned. Christianity and the Dutch administration (the "Company") have been originated by female culture heroes who left Mimika at that period for the West and who in the white men's country assumed the names of Maria (Mary) and Wirèrèmiina (Wilhelmina); of these two Maria went to heaven with an airplane. It is the descendants of those culture heroes who had gone to the West, but not the culture heroes themselves, who have returned to Mimika, viz. the traders, the civil servants and the Catholic missionaries who, however, no longer remember their original descent. Due to the separation between the period of the culture heroes and later times there are no expectations that this first period will ever return. "The departed ancestors do not come back. An ideal state is not expected. There are no messianistic hopes." ⁷⁾

This would constitute the great difference with several other peoples on New Guinea, as among these latter one does not find the attitude of compromise directed towards the present. There one harks back to the time of the culture heroes by means of messianistic movements which forecast the return of the culture heroes with untold riches. Up to a certain point this differentiation is warranted, but I still believe it to be wrong to overstress this difference. Concerning the Mimikan attempt to reach a condition of co-existence Pouwer says: "However, this need not be of a permanent nature. Both worlds may interpenetrate, or the one may replace the other." ⁸⁾ This is preeminently true for the myth, because it is noteworthy how many alien elements the myths have already absorbed, in contrast with the rites. We see how the solar hero no longer travels in a prahu, but in a motor-boat; the year-bird of another culture hero is changed into an airplane; a story concerning the disappearance of a person below the earth changes from the traditional content to a version with modern technical and christian elements

⁷⁾ o.c. p. 254.

⁸⁾ o.c. p. 266.

and simultaneously it criticises the Catholic priest regarding the position of Heaven. Although a sharp distinction is still made between the culture heroes and their descendants, further stress on the aspect of the myth that originally everything had come from Mimika may cause a shift from the attitude concentrated on the present to one directed towards the future which presents itself as the projection of an idealised and modernised past.

V

In contrast to the accent on the present we find the stress on the expectations concerning the future as it occurs in the above-mentioned messianistic movements. A very important example of such a movement is to be found in the Biak-Numfor culture-area in Northern New Guinea, the subject of Kamma's doctor's thesis⁹⁾. What makes his investigation especially valuable is the fact that he has been able to collect data extending over a period of one hundred years, for as Stanner has quite rightly remarked in general on this point in his *The South Seas in Transition*: "What is essentially needed is a series of detailed case-histories of episodes over their whole sequence and an intense analysis of each local culture."¹⁰⁾

The messianistic expectations concerning the future in the region are clearly related to the representations concerning the mythical primeval period: In this period the establishment of an ideal condition was not effectuated. It might have been done by the central figure of one of the main myths, Manseren Manggundi, if he had not been ridiculed and if he had found more belief. For this reason he withdrew, but according to many versions of the myth his return is expected in the future; this will mean the dawn of an earthly state of plenty, as it is said in the version of 1854¹¹⁾.

Now in this case a messianistic movement means that Manseren Manggundi's return is being prepared. Such a movement arises due to the activities of a precursor, a "konohr", who says that in a vision or in a dream the impending return of Manseren Manggundi has been announced. At his return the dead will arise and they will share some

⁹⁾ F. C. Kamma, *De Messiaanse Koréri-bewegingen in het Biaks-Noemfoorse cultuurgebied* (The messianistic Koréri movements in the Biak-Numfor culture area), the Hague, 1954.

¹⁰⁾ W. E. H. Stanner, *The South Seas in Transition*, Sydney, 1953, p. 63.

¹¹⁾ Kamma, o.c. p. 103.

kind of ideal state together with the living. A time of abundance will arrive: treasures and food will be within everybody's reach. In order to prepare and to hasten this return, all believers have to concentrate on the spot which is indicated in the announcement. The desired tribute is to be given to the "konohr", they must no longer keep pigs or eat pork, they must not cultivate *labu*-fruit and in long nights of dancing they must demonstrate their faith ¹²⁾).

However, this myth of Manseren Manggundi has also become the framework in which, based on their own view of life, they began to account for the happenings in the world as far as these were manifested within their horizon. In the course of the years the myth underwent several changes, in particular the end which concerns the expected return. In this way the older versions mention a prahu, later, however, a steamboat, a motorboat and finally an airplane with which Manseren Manggundi will return from the West. Because he possessed the power over life and death, he should be still alive. And that he is still alive is proved by all the desirable goods which come from abroad, particularly from the West. This shows conclusively that he has continued to manifest his powers abroad and to give his riches ¹³⁾.

Within the framework of this myth we also repeatedly find an interpretation of the aliens from the West as bearers of Manseren Manggundi's message, but it became apparent that they only wanted to reveal part of their secret and kept back the essentials. This idea sometimes takes the form that they do not wish to unveil the secret of the identity of the Christian Messiah with Manseren Manggundi who had gone to the West. The reason why the foreigners were supposed to have kept silent about this towards the rightful heirs was in order not to be compelled to cede Manseren Manggundi's heritage — power over life and death and over riches — to those entitled to it ¹⁴⁾.

Especially revealing are the data which Kamma has collected concerning the movements during the period 1938—1943. Here the author also analyses the attitude of different groups of the population towards these movements. There the contrast among the adherents is particularly important, a contrast between a passive expectation concerning the sudden realisation of the ideal state and an active movement for taking the necessary preparations. Within this complicated situation, in which all kinds of motives manifest themselves, one movement also

¹²⁾ o.c. p. 100.

¹³⁾ o.c. p. 50.

¹⁴⁾ o.c. p. 139.

appears which wants to proclaim a war of liberation, not restricted to the Biak-Numfor area, but including the whole of Western New Guinea. In this case the framework of the ancient myth is nearly given up completely. The movement begins to assume a new form with a view of the future which is no longer interpreted from the past.

However, all the movements in these years resulted in nothing and partly they were smothered in blood. Nothing came of a speedy liberation under their own forces, and riches did not arrive either. But then suddenly in 1944 the ancient myth seems about to be fulfilled and completely fulfilled at that. The sky is full of airplanes, powerful fleets cover the seas, glaring torches descend, explosions reverberate, the full action of modern warfare appears to these people like an apocalypse. Moreover, news is brought from Biak, that hundreds of ships are putting their stores on shore in the very traditional centre of these messianistic movements and expectations. It seemed as if the ideal state had arrived. All prophesies were coming true, except for the return of the dead. It seemed as if the final phase had come with this descent of colossal power and riches. But the further course of the coming of the Americans upsets this whole scheme of interpretation¹⁵). Among many and particularly among the younger generation the old world of ideas has been upset because it has proved to be incapable of embracing the whole great world. This implies also a more acute break between the generations because it appears that the older generation does not possess the knowledge necessary for the orientation within modern realities. Still, this has not caused the disappearance of the influence of the messianistic expectations even on the group which has broken with the past. They continue to live or they are latently present in the expectations concerning the economical and political development. Kamma has indicated clearly in which way such a messianistic movement might change into a nationalistic one¹⁶).

VI

Our use of the term 'myth' will not have met with difficulties or objections for the societies with which we have dealt up to the present. When we now proceed to apply it to societies like those of Java or of

¹⁵) o.c. p. 182.

¹⁶) p. 188, 191, 192; for these questions compare also G. Balandier, *Messianismes et Nationalismes en Afrique Noire*, *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, 1953, p. 41—65.

the modern West, it becomes necessary to stress once more that we do not use this term in opposition to truth or to proved historical facts.

It is for instance beyond all doubt that Dipanagara, the prince of the Jogjakarta royal house, who became known because of the Java war which was carried on against the Netherlands in the years 1825—1830, was an historical figure. However, for many of his adherents he was simultaneously a mythical figure. Not because he was a person to whom miraculous characteristics and deeds were attributed. If this had merely been the case, he would have been better described as a figure with legendary traits. He was a mythical figure to his adherents, because his appearance was considered as the realisation of a myth known on Java concerning the essential course of events embracing the past, the present and the future. This myth contained both an interpretation of the past and expectations concerning the future closely related to this past. For it was said that in the past the stages had already been foretold through which the future would pass and in which way these stages could be recognised as well as the figures which were to play a role in the decisive phases of the change. The messianistic expectations which arose from this view were the outcome of ancient Javanese ideas concerning the function of the ruler as the renewer and maintainer of cosmic order, ideas which had been influenced by Indian concepts concerning the successive cosmic periods, and by the Islamic belief in the coming of the Mahdi. In his actions Dipanagara was considered as realizing this myth and many of his adherents recognised in him the redeemer from misery appointed for this time and the restorer of order who likewise seemed about to realise those constantly changing expectations which were always connected with the Javanese ruler Jayabaya who had lived centuries earlier¹⁷).

However, these expectations were not realised in the figure of Dipanagara because his action miscarried. And so his figure seemed to have been reduced for posterity to one of those many disappointed expectations concerning the arrival of great changes. But when eventually more than a century later a great change was actually brought about and Indonesia became an independent republic, Dipanagara obtained a place in a new interpretation of events, relating to the past, the present

¹⁷) G. W. J. Drewes, *Drie Javaansche Goeroe's* (Three Javanese Guru's), Leiden, 1925, and the literature mentioned there; B. J. O. Schrieke, *De Javaansche Messias voor en tijdens de Islam*. (The Javanese Messiah before and during Islam), Annual Volume of the Oostersch Instituut, Leiden, 1941, p. 77—79; C. C. Berg, *Nederland en Indonesië* (The Netherlands and Indonesia), in the periodical *De Gids*, August—September 1952.

and the future, viz. in the myth of the awakening of the Indonesian nation and of their struggle for national freedom and independence.

This new myth, which partly replaced the old myth and partly continued it in a new form, had grown under Western influence. Whilst the former myth looked towards the future based on the past and was only intelligible to those who formed part of the traditional society, the new myth belonged to a world of ideas which had become international and which had been spread over the world starting from the Occident. The persons who have given form to this myth in Indonesia have therefore been Indonesians who had had a Western education. By means of this myth they determined the past, the future, and before long also the origin of Indonesia in the modern world and they gave vent to the urge of self-expression which formerly had been realised in different language.

It was particularly Snouck Hurgronje who — without using the wording and the terminology connected with our subject — signalled and characterised this phenomenon, as is proved by the short article he wrote in 1916 about the first large-scale national movement on Java, the Sarekat Islam¹⁸). In an earlier article he had already pointed out that the name Sarekat Islam was far from expressing the nature of this society. According to his view the common tie was the desire to give light and air and liberty of movement to the indigenous population and to tell the world clearly of their existence and of their desire to be heard in the future¹⁹). In his observations of 1916 he also considered this movement in the first place as the emergence of a new form and a new language among a people which was beginning to participate in the international spiritual life of mankind. He characterised the appearance of the Sarekat Islam as the strongest proof of the progress which had set in. He wrote: "Here a young people is awakening and coming of age socially and politically." The first strong manifestations of the collective thinking of the indigenous population took place in this movement, where they found a possibility to express themselves in a manner understandable to outsiders, whereas formerly everything had remained locked up inside or expressed in an incomprehensible language. However, Snouck Hurgronje adds, the fact that this point has been reached must mainly be counted to the credit of the European influence on indigenous society.

¹⁸) C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Verspreide Geschriften* (Collected Works), vol. IV part. II, p. 409—410.

¹⁹) *o.c.* p. 400—401.

Nevertheless, this influence had been mostly exercised unconsciously and the results were certainly not appreciated by most of the Europeans. Undoubtedly the concept of the modern national state belongs to the European world of ideas. But according to their views the national state was a development in the centre, to which the peoples recently admitted into the periphery of the Western sphere would be unable to attain for a long time to come. For the course and the rhythm of the Occident had now become those of the whole world, whilst the place and the development of the non-Western peoples to be determined from this standpoint introduced them into one of the phases which the West had long since left behind.

For the non-Western peoples to have accepted this view would have meant simultaneously that they gave up to determine their own fate and their own expectations of the future. It is fully understandable in this situation that the younger generation of these peoples educated as they had been in the Western manner were powerfully impressed by the concept of the modern national state which had become of fundamental importance in the thinking and acting of the West during the last centuries. Also in the Occident this idea had often been the carrier of messianistic expectations and the support in the struggle against alien rulers or against those who were considered as oppressors. Just like in Europe the modern national state had come to replace, with or without struggles, the sphere of power of these rulers, outside Europe the national movement now was also directed towards the conquest, by peaceful or other means, of the sphere of power of the Western national states in their respective colonial territories ²⁰). Whilst engaged in this struggle the eyes of peoples like the Indonesian were, however, not only directed towards Europe. They also observed the developments in countries like those of the Near East, of Japan, of China and of India. And the future expectations of many Indonesians were often brought in relation with the future developments in those countries and with the role the latter were to play in world-events, which were believed to be decisive for the Indonesian people.

The new national myth was directed towards the future, but it also tried to find a link with the past of the non-Western peoples, if only due to the need for a better understanding within wider circles within

²⁰) Th. J. G. Locher, *Ontwikkeling van het Nationalisme* (The Development of Nationalism) in the E.N.S.I.E. encyclopedia, vol. III, 1947, p. 179—184; J. Suys, *Nationale en koloniale gedachte* (The ideas of nationalism and colonialism) in *Sociologisch Jaarboek* (Sociological Annual) I, 1947, p. 37—58.

their own communities. Some trends even heavily stressed the return to a reinterpreted and idealised past. In any case, it is true for Indonesia that it was no mere accident that the Sarekat Islam became the first national mass-movement. Although in this connection the word Islam did not possess in the first place strictly religious implications, stressing rather what was autochthonous in contrast to what was alien, the movement was far from being divorced from the Moslim-Javanese world of ideas.²¹ Both the name and the movement flung a bridge, so to say, between old and new expectations and ideals.

The Sarekat Islam not only formed a temporary bridge between old and new; during a short period it also united different movements whose expectations concerning the future coincided only in part, viz. in so far as they concerned the abolition of the colonial status and dependency on the West. On the nature of the society which was to be established afterwards opinions strongly diverged. Beside the current which strove mostly or exclusively after the establishment and the construction of the national state, there were in particular two other trends which became prominent. In the first place this was the tendency which strove for the establishment of a state with a pronounced Mohammedan character, basing itself on the one hand on ancient Moslim expectations of the future and on the other hand participating in the developments of modern Islam. In the second place there was the current which considered developments in Indonesia as part and parcel of the dualistic struggle between labour and capital, within which the struggle for national freedom was merely to be seen as a means or as a phase of development. That we are dealing here with contrasts which have become very acute in the course of time is proved both by the recent history of the Indian subcontinent and its division into two states once freedom had been obtained, and by the long struggle between nationalist and communist China. Also the history of the Indonesian republic has already shown the type of conflict to which these contrasts may lead, if they must not inevitably do so.

For our present subject the communist view as it has developed in the course of the years is of the greatest importance. In the old marxist view the course of world-history was preeminently seen within the framework of Europe, where the central conflict of the class-struggle was to assume ever more acute forms until the coming of the great

²¹) N. Adriani, *Geestelijke stroomingen onder de bevolking van Java* (Intellectual currents among the population of Java), in *Verzamelde Geschriften* (Collected Works) II, p. 143; c.f. C. Snouck Hurgronje o.c. p. 425.

revolution of the final struggle due to the unification of the workers' proletariat, when after a transitional period of the dictatorship of the proletariat world-history was to enter the phase of the classless communist state of peace. In this view the non-Western countries remained completely in the background and the periodisation of the history of mankind was determined to a large extent by the frame of Western history.

As the communist revolution failed to come in Western Europe and in America, whilst it was realised in Russia, the communist-marxist view of world-events was considerably changed in various respects. The stage of the struggle between labour and capital was moved further and further away from Western Europe to the whole world and due to this shift the non-European countries obtained a place of constantly increasing importance in the struggle against Western imperialism, which was seen as the final phase of capitalism. As a result the appreciation of the movements for national liberation in the colonial countries and the cooperation with these movements underwent a change. In 1925 the meeting of the Comintern stated explicitly that in non-Western countries too much one-sided stress had been laid on the mobilisation of the proletarian workers and that for the revolutionary struggle the importance of the farmers and of the national movements had been underrated. In so far as the national movements could be considered as being directed against Western imperialism, they had to be strongly supported. In this connection the attitude of the Indonesian communists was likewise criticised ²²).

This change in the communist view of world developments enabled them to consider the struggle for national liberation of the non-Western peoples to a certain extent as the accomplishment of a phase in their own struggle. But the communist parties were never allowed to go so far that — in spite of all possible cooperation — they might ever give up their independent character and their independent existence. This was clearly expressed by a communist author regarding the too far-reaching agreement which a leading Indonesian communist had concluded in the past with a non-communist party: "For the very reason that the task of the communists insists on the most consistent support of bourgeois-democratic demands and on a consistent bourgeois-agrarian revolution, cooperation is completely logical, even when viewed from a

²²) J.Th. Petrus Blumberger, *De nationalistische beweging in Nederlandsch Indië* (The nationalist movement in the Netherlands Indies), Haarlem, 1931, p. 189 ff.; S. J. Rutgers, *Indonesië* (Amsterdam, 1947), p. 159.

consistent bourgeois standpoint. But this does not take away from the fact that there exists a fundamental difference in so far that the communists want to convert the bourgeois revolution in its further development into a proletarian revolution, an object which the bourgeois democrats will want to prevent as a matter of course." ²³⁾

For Indonesia we observe in this way the development of a curious series of consecutive new myths, which partly replace and partly continue one another. Already the expectations concerning Dipanagara were built up of elements of different origin. These messianistic expectations concerning the coming revolution were partly converted into expectations regarding the coming national freedom and after the arrival of the liberation Dipanagara was given a place among the great precursors of the struggle for national liberation. But this national liberty is again considered by trained communist Indonesians as being merely a temporary phase in the development towards a communist society.

VII

When we now look at this series of examples taken together, we observe that they all deal with the present, the past and the future, but with the stress placed differently. In the first case — the Sonbai-myth — it was an expectation of the future which implied a restauration of the past in a cyclical course of events. In the second case — that of the ambitious district-chief — the framework of the myth was maintained, but a change was introduced in the representation of the past which had to motivate and to legitimize a tendency directed towards the present and the future. This example was of great interest also because the community under survey already possessed the possibility to reject the whole myth and to appeal to the new times and the new ideas which had already penetrated here. In the third case — the Mimika in Southern New Guinea — we saw an attempt to reach a compromise between the old world and the one that had recently reached there, a compromise by means of a concentration of all attention on the present, whilst also within the myth a process of change was at work, which tried to explain the present situation and to make it acceptable to a certain extent. For the rest I expressed the opinion that in this culture the balance between the old and the new world was rather unstable and that a development was not impossible which would include a much

²³⁾ Rutgers, o.c.; p. 169.

stronger direction towards the future and in which the projection of an idealised and modernised past might be an important factor. The fourth case — the Manseren movement in Northern New Guinea — was a clear example of messianistic expectations and movements, linked to an ancient myth. Here, however, this future was not to be a restoration of the past, but the fullest possible realisation of the chances for the establishment of an ideal situation or a state of bliss, which had been missed in primeval times. The interpretation of these missed chances was highly influenced by the knowledge, the power and the prosperity observed among the foreigners, so that the myth functioned simultaneously as an explanation of events in the world outside the community in so far as this was manifested inside its horizon. This example also threw some light on the transition from such a messianistic movement to a nationalist one. Finally, the fifth case — which concerned Java and the whole of Indonesia respectively — provided three examples of more or less messianistic expectations for the future. The first of these grew out of a myth which, due to influences of various origin, had developed into a vision of the future with coming eras and with redeemers who would be active during these eras, all based on the past. The second had been borrowed from the West; it was directed towards the future national independence of the Indonesian people and the development of the national state of Indonesia in the modern world, but in the process the view of the Indonesian past had undergone a change. The third, likewise borrowed from the occidental world of ideas, placed the whole of the future development of Indonesia in a world-wide class-struggle, mainly directed against the capitalist-imperialist West. Here national liberation was merely seen as a phase in this struggle, whilst the whole course of humanity was situated within a certain line of development, of which the present-period was mostly determined by the realisation of the revolution in Russia as the beginning of the great change in human existence.

The general definition of the term 'myth' as given in the introduction stressed how the myth simultaneously determines present, past and future, but purposely the accent was not put on the past, as is mostly done with reference to its reiterative character. Undoubtedly this is true for most myths, but I do not consider it to be inherent in the nature of the myth. In pronouncedly traditional types of culture the direction towards the past or towards a future considered as a return of the past will strongly predominate, but in civilisations like those of the modern West we may expect a direction towards the future, without this future

necessarily being considered as a repetition or a partial restoration of the past²⁴). It is in any case inherent in the myth that it refers to events simultaneously related to the present, the past and the future, although the accent may greatly differ in different myths as regards these three categories. It is this characteristic which often gives to myth a double structure: "altogether historical and anhistorical" as Lévi-Strauss puts it. Although the latter still adheres to the view that the chief characteristic of myth is its reference to the past, his recent observations on the myth (for the rest mainly directed towards other aspects and opening up unknown vistas in this respect) also tend in the direction of the views developed here. This is proved by the passage preceding his qualification of the double structure of myth quoted above, where he writes: "On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time: before the world was created, or during its first stages — anyway, long ago. But what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future. This can be made clear through a comparison between myth and what appears to have largely replaced it in modern societies, namely, politics. When the historian refers to the French Revolution, it is always as a sequence of past happenings, a non-reversible series of events the remote consequences of which may still be felt at present. But to the French politician, as well as to his followers, the French Revolution is both a sequence belonging to the past — as to the historian — and an everlasting pattern which can be detected in the present French social structure and which provides a clue for its interpretation, a lead from which to infer the future developments. See, for instance, Michelet who was a politically minded historian. He describes the French Revolution thus: 'This day... everything was possible.... Future became present.... that is, no more time, a glimpse of eternity'." ²⁵)

²⁴) W. F. Wertheim, *De generatiestrijd buiten de westerse cultuurkring* (The struggle between the generations, outside the occidental culture area), in *De Wereld der Mensen, opstellen aangeboden aan Prof. Fahrenfort* (The World of Men, essays presented to professor Fahrenfort), Groningen, 1955, p. 168 ff.

²⁵) Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The structural study of myth*, in *Myth*, a Symposium, edited by T. A. Sebeok, American Folklore Society, Philadelphia, 1955, p. 52 (see also *Journal American Folklore*, 1955, p. 430). The writer then continues: It is that double structure, altogether historical and anhistorical, which explains that myth, while pertaining to the realm of the *parole* and calling for an explanation as such, as well as to that of the *langue* in which it is expressed, can also be an absolute object on a third level which, though it remains linguistic by nature, is nevertheless distinct from the other two.

Where Lévi-Strauss speaks about "replacing" we still continue to use the concept "myth". However, we do not apply this arbitrarily, but explicitly within the framework of a general definition. His remarks concerning politics show likewise that it is by no means fortuitous that in most of our examples the myths are of a pronouncedly politico-social type. This makes it easier to indicate the transition from the myths of the types of traditional cultures described here to those of modern society. But this does not mean to say that we cannot go further. Finally, the advantage of the predominance of politico-social myths in the series provided above is that this also demonstrates the strong influence of society and of specific groups in society on the contents of the myth. On the other hand it is also evident that myth itself exercises a strong influence on society.

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