

## Healers in Bali

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Healers in Bali are a good example of practitioners of magico-medical knowledge. Their medical diagnosis and practice needs to be understood within the magical, animistic worldview of Bali in which spirits permeate reality. Understanding healing practices in Bali necessitates an examination of this worldview, as well as the particular practices and negotiations that the healers engage in with patients.

The concept of healers (*Balian* in Balinese, *Dukun* in Indonesian) is a broad one, with practitioners ranging from traditional healers of mental or physical illnesses, to bone setters, massage therapists, mediums, and clairvoyants. *Balians* are ubiquitous in Bali. McCauley (1964) estimates that there is one healer for every 500 people while Muninjaya (1982) estimates that there are one for every 1000. According to Prof. Luh Katut Suryani (personal communication) the number of traditional healers has increased in Bali in the decade from 1988-1998 from 2500 traditional healers to 3500.

*Balians* tend to specialize in one particular area, and they often even specialize in a particular kind of illness. We can reduce the welter of kinds of *Balians* found described in the literature to three types: 1) *Balian Usada*. These are the traditional healers who have studied *lontars*, books inscribed on palm leaves, often written in *Kawi*, or Old Javanese; *lontars* are the sacred texts of the Balinese, and some of them relate to healing. As sacred, the *lontars* are efficacious for healing in two ways; on the one hand, they contain descriptions of illnesses, how to diagnose them, and how to cure them; on the other and, the *lontars* themselves contain magical power, which can be effective in healing. However, this aspect of the *lontars* perhaps relates more to the third category of healers. In a survey conducted in 1978 by the Department of Health in Bali (quoted in Muninjaya, p 39), it was found that 42% of the healers were *Balian Usada*.

2) *Balian Takson*. Comprising 46% of the healers (Muninjaya, 1982), *Balian Takson* are mediums, usually trance mediums who receive information from the spiritual world. These healers are often consulted by the Balinese. In my study of them (Edge, 1993), I found that the *Balians* diagnosed illnesses to be due to the failure to carry out ritual obligations, often toward ancestors, and normally the healing was predicated on making the appropriate offerings, bringing their lives and the transcendent world back into balance.

3) *Balian Paica*. These are healers that possess a power object. As indicated above, sometimes this object is a *lontar* or set of *lontars*, but often it is a stone or even an object that purportedly has been materialized during meditation. The survey (Muninjaya, 1982) found that 12% of healers fit into this category. While the classic instance of this category relates to having a power object, we can put into this category others who have discovered through dreams or through intuition a special healing technique; sometimes these techniques are combined with the use of a power object, and sometimes they are not.

There are four influences on Balinese healing practices. The first is the traditional Hindu worldview and literature, which is more philosophical than practical, but it conveys a system that is similar to the Aryvedic system. The second influence is from Buddhism, as there were early

Buddhist practices in Bali; medically, Buddhism de-emphasized surgical intrusion, and its tantric influences focused on magical elements. The third influence came from the Chinese, although this influence is found more in the *lontars* than in direct contact. Finally, the indigenous people practice a magical and practical form of medicine that has been incorporated into the *lontars*.

With all of these influences, it is obvious that there can be no unified system of magico-medical practice in Bali. I think there are two further reasons for this variety of practices. First, the worldview, deriving from Hinduism, does not urge practitioners toward the Truth, but rather urges incorporation; indeed, Hinduism may be the most eclectic of all religions. A second factor related to this comes from a traditional Balinese saying: *Desa, kala, patra*; which means, place, time, and circumstance. In other words, all knowledge and action is contexted in time and place and circumstance, so practices are particular, not general.

Illnesses come from outside the body and inside the body. Traditional knowledge does not accept biological influences, such as germs and viruses (but these are coming to be accepted today by the general population); rather, traditional medicine believes that illnesses from outside the body stem from two sources, either from karma from a past life, or from other people who can either use poison or black magic. Illnesses coming from inside the body are due to an imbalance. One of the central principles of Balinese philosophy is *rua beneda*, the magical principle of the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Any imbalance in the microcosm or the macrocosm can cause an illness, as well as an imbalance between a person and God. An imbalance can cause a *dewa*, a kind of demi-god to bring illnesses, or because an individual has forgotten the appropriate recognitions for them or for their ancestors. Bali is also populated by *bhutas* and *kalas*, demonic forces that can bring illness when the appropriate propitiatory offerings are not given for them.

Let me now describe four healers (I will show videos of them engaged in their healing practices). The first two examples are individuals who would be categorized as *Balian Usada*. Jero Nyoman Mangku Jiwa is a school teacher. He describes his diagnosis as checking the *urat*, energy "veins" in the body. His grandfather was a *balian* and taught him the mantra formulas that he uses. But formulas are useless if one does not have a calling to become a *balian*. Jiwa worked on three of us Americans; two of us experienced no unusual feeling, only a kind of massaging, but as you see in the videotape, the third person experienced a sharp and sudden pain. Jiwa therefore knew that the *urat* was blocked, or it was not straight, so he had to take his own energy to that blockage and burn through it. As you can see from the tape, after treatment the patient did not experience the sharp pain any more.

The second healer is Tjokorda Rai, a healer and *balian usada*, who not only has studied the *lontars* extensively, but has investigated other healing practices from Asia and other locations. He begins his diagnosis first with the head; it is easier and he can tell the same thing as he can in working with the feet. If nothing is discovered, he moves to the area above the eyes to see if there is any stress. If he finds nothing, or if he wants to double-check his diagnosis, he will then go to the feet. He uses a small fairly flexible stick, poking the point of it at various places on the toes and between the toes; these places represent the vital organs, especially the five vital organs to him: heart, liver, spleen, kidneys, and bladder. Depending on the kind of illness, he will then use *mudra* hand signs, or massage, or apply herbs, typically blowing them onto the body. He then rechecks the spot between the toes; the patient usually feels a distinct

difference, having gone from excruciating pain to little or no pain. Tjokorda Rai is a respected healer in Bali, and his patients usually experience some sense of relief; I, myself, over the course of 24 hours experienced my sinuses draining and my ears unstopping after having suffered a problem for a period of over two weeks.

The next two healers are examples of the third category, with both of them being quite unconventional in their approach. Putu Boda Banjan had not been practicing long in 1996, when I observed him; he received this technique while in a dream. The particular patient that we see had been ill about two months with a stomachache, with his feet hurting, and he couldn't sleep because of the pain. He was diagnosed as having stepped on an object infused with black magic, which made him sick. This is the fourth time the patient had come for a healing session, which consists of the healer putting a mixture of coconut oil, *arak*, and *sindrong* (a mixture of herbs like ginger and turmeric) on the bottom of the feet. Then the healer takes a poker that had been heated in the fire until red hot and rubs it on the bottom of the man's feet to drive out the black magic. In the first session, the man said he experienced a smell like hair burning, but his feet were not burned; he was afraid of the cure at that time, but now he said he liked it, feeling the heat all the way up to his hips. The patient sought the help of a traditional healer because he had been to a Western doctor but had not been helped for this problem, but his symptoms were getting better in this treatment. The healer thought that the patient would come back another two or three times before the healing was complete.

The fourth healer is Jero Lingsir, who developed his particular massage technique through intuition. I saw him work on four patients, and in all of them, he massaged them and purportedly brought out a small object from the body, often from the naval or from the breast. Most of the patients had been to a Western doctor before, but had not received a cure. The man that we see in the video complained of pains in his stomach, and during the healing sessions two small objects were purportedly removed from the naval, but I could not examine them. The man obviously was in pain during this process, but it is unclear whether the pain resulted from the extraction of an object, or more likely, from the insertion of the object into the naval before "bringing it out." The same thing happened to a young woman who had a lump on her breast which she said could be felt but which x-rays could not find anything wrong with. Again, in a painful process, the healer extracted a small object about the width of a straw from her nipple; it was obvious that she was in great discomfort during this process.

Environmental factors, as the Balinese perceive them, are an important part of the healing process. First, since the Balinese are animistic, the physical environment as perceived by them is not simply the physical world. On the one hand, it is filled with spirits who can help and who can harm, and who are efficacious in both of those functions. On the other hand, the external world, the macrocosm, is merely a mirror of the internal world, the microcosm. The special connection between the individual body and the world at large is played out on a broad scale. Not only is the internal balance reflected in the balance of forces externally, and vice versa, but the physical body -- with its tripartite makeup of head, body, and feet -- is a microcosm of the tripartite nature of a building, a family compound, the village, the island of Bali, and even the three-part nature of the cosmos, with the upper world, the middle world, and the lower world.

Secondly, the social environment is fundamental. Bali fits into the category of culture that has been designated collectivist (Triandis, 1995), interdependent (Markus, 1991),

sociocentric (Shweder & Bourne, 1984), and relational (Edge, 1998). The self is defined in terms of its relationship to others, and therefore one cannot view either illness or healing as a purely personal or individual phenomenon. As an indication of this, rarely do you see only the patient seeking service at a *balian*, but usually the whole family comes along and discusses the problem, negotiating the illness and what is to be done for the cure (Pound). And thus, the placing of the illness within the social and natural environment, understanding its cause and why it can be cured, is as important a part of healing in Bali as it is in other traditional societies, as well as modern psychotherapy (Kiev, 1968). On the other hand, no study of the physical environment during healing has been conducted in Bali.

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