



Brunei Malay Traditional Healing Knowledge

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Wednesday, 26th March 2014 @ 2:30 p.m.

IAS Meeting Room 2.27, Level 2, FASS Building

Speakers' Profile



Born in France in 1970, she has a Bachelor's degree in Ethnology from the University of Aix-en-Provence in 1992, Master's degree in Anthropology from the University of Paris 1- Pantheon-Sorbonne in 1994, and a Postgraduate diploma in Anthropology from the University of Paris 1 in 1995. She taught French, History and Geography in Vanuatu (Melanesia) for 7 years, and in Brunei for 6 years, before starting her PhD research in 2012 at the University of Western Australia. Her research interests are on Brunei and Malaysia and include traditional medical knowledge and cultural change.

Research interests: Brunei, Malaysia, Traditional medical knowledge, Shamanism, Medicinal plants, Cultural change.

Abstract

Although all Brunei citizens, Malay and non-Malay alike, receive free Western medical care many also seek relief from traditional medical practitioners. Most commonly, an ailing individual tries traditional treatment for minor conditions or in cases where the hospital treatment seems not to be working. The reasons for the persistence of traditional healing in Brunei are closely linked to the cognitive representations of illnesses of Brunei Malays. Whereas the Western medical model understands disease as deriving from biochemical abnormalities or disease causing organisms or substances, Malay explanatory patterns for diseases are not drawn from a single aetiological system but rely on a composite ensemble of factors, ranging from physical trauma and biology (with the reference of '*kuman*', a generic term covering all parasites, germs and microbes), humoral elements (the role of climate and nutrition), "*angin*" (wind), and magic (sorcery, spirit attack). It also sees emotions as being an important potential cause of illness and emphasises the role of spiritual and religious factors. It is considered that certain conditions, such as the loss of '*semangat*' (spirit of life), severe mental stress ('*uri*') and incorrect behaviour, predispose to illness. Folk healers concentrate on an assortment of illness problems that modern medical personnel neglect, such as chronic or refractory disorders that necessitate time-consuming therapy, or which represent categories of folk illness which physicians exclude from the scope of scientific medicine. As human suffering and pain can go beyond the sickness curable by modern medicine, the traditional healer seems to be still in business. I propose to present here some of my findings regarding the Brunei Malay disease concepts and healing practices, which I recorded during the fieldwork I conducted in Brunei in 2013.