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SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN NIAS

Nias, Land of Men, in Tremor and Transition

There are two great plates in confrontation, the Eurasian and the Pacific plate, which created the island of Nias. By innumerable earthquakes during millions of years between the two plates the little island or the whole Nias-archipelago arose from under the sea. There are ancient teeth of sharks in the Museum Pusaka Nias in Gunung Sitoli, that are between 5 and 12 millions years old. These teeth were found in the interior of the island. Nias people named these teeth *Si'ugu Mbanua* (thunder of sky) or *Lelegua*.

- Nomen est Omen - Various Names of the island Nias

In a geographic book of Edrisi (1154) the island is named *Niyan*. In another document Ibn Al-Wardi (about 1340) mentions two names of the island, *al-Binaman* and *al-Banan*, names which refer to the banana-fruit.¹ Other names were told by the oral tradition to us:²

Once a time the island was called parrots-island (*hulo ge'é*). Hundreds of green parrots flew over the island. Shortly the year 2000 they had been extirpated.

Concerning another oral version in the sub-district *Moro'ö* the island was called island of the weeping people (*hulo ze'é*). Maybe, these people had many reasons to weep.

Hulo solaya-laya was another excellent name, the dancing island, given to Nias because the earthquakes always make the island like dancing. Or the island was seen like a cradle, always being moved: *Uli Danö Hae*.

Another name, *Ölia Ulidanö*, could be brought in association with the inhabitants on the top of the trees, where the *Ölia*-Liana bound together the top of trees and in that way shaped their habitation.

But the most famous name, which is in use and favorite still today, is *land of men, tanö niha*.

- Psychological quakes and tremor

Talking about "Society and Culture in Nias" we have to focus our attention on the fact, that Nias people always had been shocked. Shock and fear are deeply found in their souls. Finally we could testify this fact after the great earthquake with 8.7 in RS on 28th March 2005, when thousands of people in Nias left the island in fear that the whole island will sink into the sea.

But I intend to speak about shock and fear in a broader context. I intend to speak about shock and fear that always could be noticed on the island by the psychological earthquakes.

Fear tremor used to paralyze the people when each year usually in April after the harvest the head hunters were on the way. More than 1000 years ago the earliest Arabian and other documents about Nias, translated by Ferrand, just noted this fact.

Tremor touched the people, because often a mother died from giving birth to her child. You often hear 09.07.2007

about *si tosai furi*, which means, that the placenta or a rest of placenta did remain in the mother body after giving birth of the 5th, 6th or 7th child. Then the mother died. Tremor spread over all people in the region, when cholera, smallpox, malaria and other epidemics stroke them. Cholera and other epidemics are seldom now. But today, people still live in fear of sickness made by ill willing men or men caused illness. People also live in fear from poison. Fear from poisonous snakes. May be someone had climbed a coconut tree and there on the top was a poisonous snake waiting for him. Just a few times you hear about people who got bitten by a snake. More frequent the people get scared to be poisoned by ill willing men. And if people have no knowledge about the reason of sickness, they often suppose sickness is made from ill willing men. In 1902 during the annual conference of German Missionaries, 9th to 13th March, the missionary H. Lagemann gave a lecture about poison and what Nias people tell about poison.³

Another fear comes originally from the conviction that there are people with black magic. They are able to make you sick, to close e.g. the womb of a woman and so on.

Tremor seized the adult girls in former times, when lying on the ground their teeth had to be cut off. That had been a condition before getting married. And even the marriage often caused another tremor, when the bride was sold and given with force. The bride's name is *owöliwä*, which means marketable. The bridegroom is paying for his wife (*sowöli*). And after the wedding took place, after having given a feast for all villagers, the young couple will suffer to pay the debts for years.

Another fear, which is still alive, is the fear from ghosts and evil spirits. Three examples: Fear from the ghost (*maciana*) of a mother who died in giving birth of her child. Fear from the ghost of a young man who died without descendants. Fear from the deceased parents. Because of the deceased parents can make their own children become sick, if they do not enough worship them. That's also the reason why we e.g. cannot buy or acquire artifacts from an old traditional house in the north of Nias or even buy an old traditional house, because the belief is still very strong, that the deceased parents will revenge it and curse their children.

About 200 years ago another tremor touched the whole island, the fear to be captured and brought away or to be sold over-seas. All over the island you could hear: People for sale (*laku niha*)! The missionary Henry Lyman, who had been in Nias in 1834, reported that two years ago (1832) in Gunung Sitoli "a French ship took four hundred as a cargo, and landed them on the Isle of France". The price was "twenty dollars per head, and four dollars more as a premium" for the chief.⁴ Nias slaves were sold to Aceh and all over the Malay world. Chinese and Aceh people were trading between Nias and other parts of South-East-Asia. The Dutch Controller Rappard estimated that the population of the north of Nias would not be above 50.000 inhabitants. He mentioned that in the beginning of the 20th century

Nias and especially the North of Nias had nearly been deserted.⁵

And who profited from this disaster? The chiefs and principals in the villages, the nobles from Nias became more and more rich and wealthy. By bartering the slaves, they obtained a lot of desirable things like iron, brass, gold, silver, great plates, gongs, guns, clothes and so on. Therefore they were able to build famous traditional houses, develop the megalithic structure of their villages and erect seats, pillars, stone figures etc. and celebrate the feasts of merit. The Nias-Megalith-Culture and the great traditional houses are connected to slavery.

In one of the following sessions Marschall will talk about the sources of the wealth of the nobles in Nias. That's the other aspect from fear and tremor of the past.

We had the same phenomenon in the years from 1990 to 1995 when people became rich in planting patchouli and selling the oil. A lot of Nias-people bought luxurious articles like TV, motorcycle, cars, and so on. Because there were not enough pigs and chicken on the island, each night the Ferry from Sumatra brought these animals that would be needed for the feasts.

We can conclude, throughout the history of the Nias people fear and tremor have impressed their hearts. Today the effects from this heritage are still relevant in the daily life. Fear can still be found all over the island. There is a lack of self-confidence. You cannot make your way alone. You must always be accompanied.

That's part one, the psychological aspect or background from Nias Society.

2. The Multiethnic Nias-people

The oral tradition of Nias gives us knowledge from two genealogical trees, reported from the two missionaries Thomas and Heinrich Sundermann. Elvio Modigliani examined this tradition in the field and confirmed it as if true.⁶ But nobody could explain sufficiently the sense of the two genealogical trees.

I am convinced, there is no doubt about it, that the descendants from the first genealogical tree are the first inhabitants of the island. Furthermore these first inhabitants must be seen as different tribes. With other terms, the very short report about the first genealogical tree is only a shortcut used by the later immigrants, because they were not interested to spend a lot of time or energy to deliver us the genealogies of these first inhabitants completely which were seen despicable in their eyes. In reality this first tree existed from various genealogical tribes. But all these tribes had no houses. Nias oral tradition describes them living in the precipices (or clefts) of the rocks, in caves, in the ravines of rivers, on rocky mountain, in or "under" water and in the top of trees. As the best they had primitive huts or shelters.⁷

We just wrote an article about the different ethnical origins of the Nias people which may be edited in the edition of this conference. We also will hear about "The Genetics of Nias" in the session of

Kennerknecht. Therefore I can abbreviate this chapter here.

When Forestier edited the archaeological results from the excavation in the cave of *Tögi Ndrawa* near the capital of Gunung Sitoli, the continuous presence of men in this cave since 12.000 years ago could be taken as a fact.⁸ And throughout these 12.000 years, the island of Nias had never been closed for new comers. The oral tradition of Nias and the genealogical trees had kept for us a lot of circumstantial evidence. Add to this the various traces of the Nias language, the different customs, the different conceptions of life and the different physiognomies of the Nias. For e.g. the funeral celebrations were quite different. In the north of Nias the deceased were buried in earth. But in the centre and south of Nias they were set out or hang up on a branch of a tree.

All these references fortify our conviction, that the origins of today's Nias people had been very different too. Also headhunting on this small island can be explained by the presence of different hostile tribes. Throughout thousands of years the ethnical differences had been resistant and could be maintained.⁹ We can easily imagine that the richness of manifold architecture and megalithic culture on Nias had been influenced by the different conceptions of life of the various tribes.

Concerning the case of the second genealogical tree, oral tradition is completely enthusiastic. Here the oral tradition doesn't deliver us the origin of other tribes or people, but the own nostalgic origin. The descendants from this tree simply call themselves *man* or *men (niha)*, also *child of man (ono niha)*. The descendants of this tree had been the authors of Nias oral tradition. In comparison with the inhabitants, who lived nearly 12.000 years in the cave *Tögi Ndrawa*, these new immigrants entered the island in a very modern time.

Then in the last centuries the various tribes had been growing up more and more to one homogenous folk. This process had been enforced by the colonial government, by the Christian Mission and finally by the Indonesian government and the modern period of globalization.

Nias Philosophy

- The Solution to overcome ethnical conflicts

If we agree to the concept of many different tribes immigrating in the island throughout thousands of years, then we can also presume that there must be ethnical conflicts. Therefore wise Nias-men or philosophers had been searching for a way to a peaceful life side by side. The way to overcome the conflicts was the myth from *Teteholi Ana'a*, the mysterious original village of all people on this island. But afterwards a misunderstanding of these myths took place. Great changes happened. Nias became a Christian island under Dutch government. Of course the Europeans did not always understand the mythical language, which is rich of symbols, proverbs and idioms. Maybe, sometimes the Europeans had been too quick with their conclusions.

On the other side Old Nias-people in the interior could understand and deliver the different versions of this myth very well. But they would not contradict the Europeans. Other Nias-people living in the neighbourhood of the missionary stations were given a good education in the schools to become the elite of Nias. But this elite lost their own understanding of their own oral tradition and replaced it by the biblical conception of the world and the academic theories of the Europeans. Therefore a misunderstanding of the old myths replaced the original concept of world and life of the Nias people. And this misunderstanding provoked a lot of contradictions as we see in the dissertation of Suzuki.¹⁰ Suzuki found out, that the missionaries did wrong when they choose the name of *Lowalangi* to be the name of the Christian God. He was convinced that *Silewe*, "the divine trickster" must be accepted as the highest deity amongst the different Nias-gods. - In short, nobody was able to give a satisfying solution.

After I had reflected it for a long time, after much field-research and looking out for old men to interview them, I found the solution, and the surprise was perfect. Based on a deeply understanding of Nias symbolic language, this solution looks very simple.¹¹ The mysterious and original village of *Teteholi Ana'a* is nothing else than the womb of the women. The 9 layers of sky are the 9 months of pregnancy, the 8 earth mean the growth process of the child in the womb of his mother. Then, when the child is born, it arrives in the 9th earth, the earth we step now. Just here is the solution to interpret the old myths that always are speaking about the origin of the different tribes. And here too is the solution to overcome the conflicts between the different tribes on Nias: we all have the same origin, we all are coming from *Teteholi Ana'a*. Therefore let's live in peace side by side.

- The advice to improve Nias humanity

Not only in Nias, but all over the world we can find the avarice. In Nias, the myth from the ancestor *Sirao* and his 9 sons tell us from this reality. *Sirao* would see who among his 9 sons would be worthy to inherit the village (kingdom) *Teteholi Ana'a*. Therefore he made a contest. He planted his spear in the place before his house and said: To Whom among you is able to climb up on this spear and to sit on its top like a cock, he shall inherit this village. 8 of the 9 sons had been very ambitious and egoistic to take over the heritage. But none of them was successful.

Finally it had been the turn of the youngest son. He humiliated himself and first gentle like worshiped his parents and worshiped all things. He asked for permission from all persons around him. Then he climbed up and sat on the top of the spear. That's he who obtained the heritage.

Saint Matthew wrote "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." (Mat. 5,5)

Transition from primitive habitation to the traditional Nias-Houses

The *men* or *niha*, descendants of the 2nd tree, brought with them new culture and progress for the island. The most outstanding thing was the knowledge to build a house. Because the immigrants

brought with them iron and forged handicraft, they were able to cut the trees with the *ax of man* (*fato niha*). Then they fabricated the *board of man* (*fafa niha*) and finally constructed the *house of man* (*omo niha*). Not only all dimensions of this house are taken from man's body. But also the house himself was constructed like the body of man. The horizontal beams in the right and left side of the house were given the name of shoulders (*alisi*), The axis beam in the midst above the dwelling room was now the backbone (*hulu*) with a carved head on the top (*balö hulu*). And the post below the house figured the feet.¹²

Then a revolutionary change took place in the island. Nearly all descendants from the first genealogical tree left their primitive habitations they had used throughout thousands of years and began to learn how to use the ax of man to make better habitations for themselves. Building a house became the essence of progress. In the beginning of the third millennium the essence of progress was to build a villa and cover it with polished ceramic plates. The recent earthquake had shaken such a thinking of progress, so that the construction of wooden houses had been given a new chance. The lack of forest and the high prices of wood hindered to do so.

Other fields of progress were: woven clothes, agriculture, cattle breeding (pigs and kippen), shaping gold and silver, all kinds of measuring equipment, custom (*böwö*) and law (*huku*).

But even more; these new immigrants with a high sense of tradition consequently delivered their own genealogy and worshiped the deceased parents or ancestors. For this reason they started to make figures from their deceased parents. These figures, named *Adu*, became famous all over the world in their primitive art. But another consequence of this high esteem for the own ancestors was their negligence for the genealogies of the primary inhabitants of the island.

There still remain two questions about the last immigrants. First, in which century did they enter Nias-island? And second, where was their original country or people? Based on all information, based on various symptoms and the Nias oral tradition we can suppose that they came from southern parts of China. Beside the oral tradition, various symptoms confirm this assumption such as symptoms from linguistic, customs, genetics and last not least the physiognomy of many Nias people, which is similar to Chinese physiognomy. But there are also other indications. Chinese immigrants can be found not only in the Nias-island, but all over the Indonesian archipelago. Before the colonial period Chinese ships controlled the great sea-routes of South Asia.¹³ And in the neighborhood of Nias, in the western coast of Sumatra opposite to Nias, a Chinese town, port and dockyard had been founded a few hundred years ago. One named this town new port, in Chinese language *Singkuang*.¹⁴ This name can still be found in the map. May be this town had been the starting or transit place of the immigrants who arrived in Nias to bring with them much progress and a new culture.

When did this immigration take place? In answering this question we can prove it from much coincidence in time:

The statement from the archaeologists told us, that the cave *Tögi Ndrawa* had still been inhabited in 1300 A.C. In this time Chinese ships crossed also in the western sea-route of Sumatra. The port of Barus was well known by the trade of camphor and incense. And there was the gold mines in South Tapanuli. All those things were located in the neighbourhood of Nias. There was also coincidence with the oral tradition in Nias, especially with the genealogies. The Dutch Controller Rappard told us, that the genealogies he obtained on Nias in the beginning of the 20th century always counted about 24 generations.¹⁵ Rappard counted one generation by 35 years. Therefore dated the immigration about 1000 A.C. May be it's more realistic to count 25 years for one generation, $24 \times 25 = 600$ years. Add another 100 years, the distance from the time when Rappard had been on Nias, then we can conclude, that the people of the second genealogical tree is living in Nias for 700 years.

At this time the 12.000 years old Hoa Binh-Culture and other primitive cultures came in the end. And nobody is thinking about the loss of identity. The *Bela* or *Ono Mbela* left their dwellings on the great trees and began the process of assimilation to become men. Keep in mind, in the belief of the Nias, the descendants of *Bela* are still living on the tree, but invisible like spirits.

The Traditional House – Omo Hada

Since the descendants from men constructed their houses in the island, a new period had been opened in Nias. From now on, the quality of a man was measured from his ability and success to build a house and to give a feast for all villagers. Then he would no longer be treated like a child (*iraono na sa = still a child*) in his village, but he would be respected like an adult man (*satua mbanua = an adult of the village*). He would no longer live in the forest, but in the village. He would sit in the village council like a wise man and participate in all speeches. Other young married people shall continue their poor life in the forest, cutting trees and burning up the new fields to plant rice and to breed pigs. If they are lucky and living economically, if they do not fall sick, if there are no enemies and so on, once in the time they shall be able to build a house in the village and to celebrate a feast.

According to the name traditional house (*omo hada*), the house is not only seen as habitation to dwell there. The traditional house and especially the house of the chief are seen as a place to establish and maintain costume and law, house of Adat. Here was the place for the long discourses of Adat, which in the Gomo-area are named *gego* or *orahu*. An old etymological explanation derives this word from the word *perahu*, which means boat. Coming from over the sea, their ancestors had been sitting in one boat and talking together. Now when they build their traditional houses they felt like sitting in a boat and they did remember their origin in long speeches. Therefore the term *perahu* changed into *orahu*.

- The Seat Osa-osa and Osali, the Seat of the Word

The word *osali* explains us the position of *omo hada* in Gomo. First it was necessary to become a rank or famous name in the society. When this event happened a seat (*osa-osa*) of stone or wood had been made, and the successful man or his wife stood upon this seat and was carried in their village from one end to the other end. The feast (*owasa*) took place only for one day. But the effect from this feast was, that the man has now a seat in the village council and can raise his voice (*li*). Then there had been an open-air place in the villages of *Gomo*. Here the seats of the counselors had been erected. And this place was given the name *Osali ndra Ama*, *Osali* of the Fathers. The long-term *osa-osa li* became abbreviated to *osali*, it means 'throne of the word.' But often the council took place in the chief's house and there was an *Osali* too, although in another manner. There was a great wooden chest with carvings, which was named *osali* or *usali*. This chest had two functions. First, like depository of all necessary or precious tools of the village like gongs, measures of rice, the *afore*-measure of pigs, weights of flesh from slaughtered pigs (scale) and so on. And the second function was like a throne of the chief. The place of this chest was in front of the wall, which separated the back private room from the great meeting room in the front of the house. And the figures of the deceased ancestors had been placed on the wall behind the chief. These ancestors and their spirit were always present and were represented in paternal line they by the chief of this tribe. Therefore this chest in the chief's house was named *Osali Nadu*, Throne of the Figures.

The place where all these things originally happened is in the valley of *Gomo* and the village *Sifalagö*, with its second name *Börönadu*. The more one did distract from *Gomo*, the less one could notice progress and the traces of a new culture. But finally the new culture spread all over the island by the way of migrants from *Gomo* to other parts of the island. The highest density of the new culture could be developed in the south of Nias. *Mölö*, son of *Hia*, and other descendants of men, *Zinö* and *Lalu*, transmigrated to the south of Nias and there rose up to the caste of *Sí'ulu*. The members of this caste were seen like the parents and strictly separated from the commoners (*sato*), who had been treated like their children.

- The different types of traditional houses

In the same wise the house of man, initially erected in *Gomo*, became the traditional house and reached its highest performance in the south.¹⁶ The characteristics are the vertical walls in both side of the house, which support the roof. This had been the mainstream of spreading the culture of men in the island, from the *Gomo* area to the south.

It is quite different, if we depart from *Gomo* to the North, where the original influence of men culture decrease and change with the cultures from the first inhabitants of the island. Spontaneously new types of traditional houses would develop in Central Nias, in the sub-districts of *Lölömatua* and *Lölöwa'u*, in the area of *Bawölato* (in a distance of 55 km from

Gunung Sitoli) and in the area of *Holi Idanö Gawo* (about 40 km from Gunung Sitoli). They built their houses like what ever comes in their mind. Or they made extensions when more room were needed for a young couple. In the center of Nias one must pay attention to the fact, that there is a great variety to create something. The house from *Ama Obedi* in the *Oladanö* village near the hot springs of *Idanö Gawo* cannot be attached to one style. *Ama Obedi* told me, that his father had visited a lot of villages and traditional houses. Then he combined various elements in his new house. The same creativity is reflected by the great variety of stone and wooden figures. Even the language differs from one place to another. In Nias we are told, that the differences in language depend on the water we are drinking in the different areas.

But in the north of Nias one developed the more unified type of the oval house. This house is also named *Omo Laraga*, because *Laraga* was the ancient capital of the north, when Gunung Sitoli did not yet exist. *Laraga* lies in the mouth of the river *Idanoi*, 11 km to the south from Gunung Sitoli. In *Laraga*, the ancestor *Daeli* immigrated the island and much later also *Polem* from Aceh in 1642. Now there is nothing than gardens. Archaeological excavation is needed to become more witness of this time.

- The reasons, why the Gomo-house nearly disappeared

Most traditional houses are found in the south of Nias, may be about 3.000 or more. But in the northern parts of the island not more than 250 houses are remaining.

Different reasons can be found. Viaro just mentioned that people in *Gomo* don't highly estimate the maintenance of the house. The oldest houses he found in his researches had been built about 50 years ago. There are even older houses like in *Lawalawalu*, but restored by the descendants.

Another reason is the lack of timber/wood. People in *Gomo* always clear the forest or secondary forest by burning up the whole territory to plant rice and other quick growing plants for about two years. Then, after harvest they quit it again. Therefore no forest can grow up.

Another handicap is the expensive costs to build a traditional house. Even more the owner of the house has to slaughter several pigs by each stage of construction. For that reason the traditional houses are given the name carcass of pigs (*amatela mbawi*). And since the pig pestilence killed the pigs about 1997, the prices of a pig escalated.

There was also an officer (major) 'camat.' The Camat of the sub-district *Gomo*, who visited all villages in his area to make campaign, not to build traditional houses anymore, but to invest the money for the education of the children.

I always propose to build traditional houses without waste money for pigs and expensive feasts. However, for Nias people it's nearly impossible to build *Omo Hada* without *Hada* in the meaning of slaughtering pigs in each step of construction.

Therefore Museum Pusaka Nias is supporting now the reconstruction of three great and unique traditional

Gomo-houses in the villages *Orahili Sibohou*, *Sifaoro'asi Gomo* and *Hilizamurugö*.

When starting the reconstruction in *Sifaoro'asi Gomo*, we assembled the officials and 3 principals from high schools and we inspired them to make this traditional house like a school for their students to learn local culture for education.

Great stages in the development

The common way for the sailing-ships was along the western coastline of Sumatra. Here could be found the famous products of merchandise: camphor (kapur barus), incense (benzoic) and gold since the time of Pharaoh. See archaeological excavation in the area of Barus, situated in the coast of Sumatra opposite of Nias.

The reason why Nias in one of the first documents was called the island of bananas, may be the possibility of sailing ships to obtain there fresh water, bananas and coconut. Bananas and coconut are growing very well in this island. In modern time, besides Bananas and coconut, Nias exports also cacao and latex. Rice had been cultivated in a more modern time when the descendants of men immigrated in the island about 700 years ago.

I suppose it as my own hypothesis. When this modern time began in the island, the Hoa Binh-culture came to end. The inhabitants of the caves left their habitations used for thousands of years. May be in this time other tribes also changed their old habitat, like the tribe of *Bela* or *Ono Mbela*, a tribe with white skin, who were further never more seen on the top of the trees. Behold, Nias people are proud because of their white skin. May be most of them are really descendants of *Bela*. But it is classified like disgracing Nias people, if we would classify them like *Ono Mbela*.

There is a coincidence between Nias oral tradition, genealogical trees, archaeological evidence and reports from the new port in the coast of Sumatra named *Singkuang*, opposite to the *Gomo*-area in the southern part of Nias. There must be the starting point for the development and the beginning of a new time.

We just mentioned above, that the new comers named themselves *Niha*, i.e. man. They brought with themselves carpentry and house building, iron and gold forging handicraft, planting of rice and other plants of agriculture, pig-breeding, weaving, worshipping of ancestors, genealogy and rich of oral tradition, customs and law.

After all Nias traditions, these new comers settled in *Börönadu Gomo*. From there they spread their blessings all over the island. And here in *Gomo* one started with the building of houses, the house of man (*omo niha*). Here is the cradle of Nias architecture. The dockyard from *Singkuang* and the skill of the Chinese carpenters may have influenced this architecture.

- The colonial period

After China has lost its role in the sea of South-East Asia, the Portuguese and the Dutch colonial area began. In Nias this took place in the midst of the 19th

century (because of Raffles and the English, the trade of slaves moved to *Pandelingen*).

Until that time Nias still had its natural religion by worshipping the ancestors (Modigliani: *per me sono I puri attenati*). A few Chinese Buddhists had been living in the towns of Gunung Sitoli, *Lahusa* and *Tello*. And along the coasts had been living a group of Muslims from Aceh, Minangkabau or Sulawesi.

- The Christianisation

Together with the colonial time, the mission and Christianisation of the Nias-people began. The Christian Mission had enormous merits for the Nias people in all sectors/ways: formal and non formal education, agriculture, health, household, hygiene, morality, religious life, prosperity, developing Nias language by editing books for school and church and so on. Pastor Uwe Hummel will expose us the history of Protestant Mission on Nias. I will note here only one example. In the whole southern part of Nias, from 1956 until 1981, there was not any governmental junior school except the protestant and the catholic junior school. And when the government in 1981 had inaugurated the first middle school in Teluk Dalam, years passed away until this region got the first high-school.

I don't change the matter now, but I also want to attract your attention to a characteristic aspect of nias culture, the separatism. Dutch government contested that separatism on Nias increases quickly; new villages and new clans were founded with adapting new family names. Then the Dutch prohibited founding new clans with new family names.

We can see the same thing among the Christians of Nias. Before the end of the second world war and the celebration of the Indonesian State, in Nias existed only four churches: *Fa'awösa khö Yesu* (AFY) 1933, *Banua Niha Keriso Protestant* (BNKP) 1936; originally from Zending, 1865, *Fa'awösa khö Geheha* (AFG) 1937 and Catholic Church (Gereja Katholik) 1939. Nowadays, 60 years later, we have 58 different churches or Christian denominations.¹⁷

The splitting in so much different churches or denominations can be seen as an effect of the characteristic Nias Culture. Only the own family is important, not the public welfare, no social work for the community. And in the south of the island they had only been successful in building well-structured megalithic villages and the great chief's house, because the chief could force them and because of the slaves.

This aspect can also be seen on each feast. When the Batak-villages on Sumatra are giving a feast, then all people unanimous working together and bring their contributions, so that host of the feast has no loss. But in Nias the giver of the feast afterwards shall have a great loss and a lot of debts. All people come to make him poor. But he will become honors and have a famous name in the village.

Therefore even after the earthquake, Nias-people are not well disposed for social work. In the first months after the earthquake there could be seen a lot of "Nias-Volunteers". But in fact they were not

volunteers. They worked for the double salary of a common worker.

At this time we cannot imagine that the Nias people shall be able to catch "The Spirit of Kobe". When in 1995 in Kobe, Japan, an earthquake took place with 7,3 SK, immediately on the first day 20.000 volunteers worked together to save people and help them. And through the first three months the number of volunteers rose until 1,3 million. They cooperated in a very good companionship. Therefore in 1997 the government made a campaign in an effort to renew the social responsibility on the base of working together (*gotong royong*) and autonomy. The Spirit of Kobe cannot yet be expected on the Nias-island.

- The Emigration and the modern Nias

Since about 25 years ago the emigration of young Nias-people were increasing more and more. 90 % of the Nias-people are farmers. But the methods of agriculture and the results are lagged far behind, far from self-supporting. On the other side there is no industry found in the island. And after various crises during the last 10 or 12 years in the Asean States and especially in Indonesia, the tourism nearly collapsed. Another motivation to emigrate is the extreme costs of marriage.

In the annual book of Nias the statistics of the population note nearly 700.000 inhabitants. But nobody exactly knows how many people have left the island, trying to get better subsistence, better work or better education in the great towns of Java and Sumatra, and in the large *kelapa sawit* oil plantations of Sumatra or even in Malaysia or else-where. At least 200.000 Nias people are living outside of Nias. The intention is often the same: going *oversea* (*misiyefo*) to Sumatra or somewhere else to *seek* (*mangalui*). A lot of them shall seek for income by clearing and burning down the great forests of Sumatra and cultivating plantations of *kelapa sawit*. In August 2006 in the province of Riau 50.000 ha Kelapa Sawit-plantations burnt up. About 100.000 Nias-people are mentioned to live in the Riau-province. But Nias-people also live in other provinces and in the great towns like Medan, Palembang, Jambi, Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya.

There is still to notice a difference between these emigrants. The emigrants of the northern parts of Nias often like to work in the forests or plantations of Sumatra. But emigrants from the south prefer to live in the great Indonesian cities as craftsmen and so on. And because there is a great lack to find craftsmen or specialists on the island, now after the earthquake a new immigration took place. But not Nias-people came back to Nias. People who immigrated to Nias were craftsmen and specialists from Sumatra or Java etc. What shall happen in 2009, when the period of helping Nias-people has ended, when the reconstruction shall be finished, when the organizations shall have left this island and Nias people shall awake from a short dream of money?

Now, the blessing of the earthquake can be seen all along the great provincial roads. Never before, Nias saw so much trucks, modern cars and motorcycles like today. Then, because of a few streets had been rebuilt and asphalted with hot-mix, the head of the

police reports that each month 10 people die by an accident on the road.

In my opinion, the earthquake of the 28th of March 2006 marks the beginning of a new modern time for Nias. Though most of the foreigners are busy in the capital or in villages, which could be reached by car, though the impracticable interior is still left behind, I think that the nearly hundred international or private organizations, which are working in Nias now, cannot work without any effect for the young generation in Nias. I wish, that the influence of all these foreigners on Nias will bear its fruits in the future. I do not mean only the foreigners from Europe, America or Australia, but even more the foreigners from Sumatra, Java or Flores, from Malaysia, Korea, Taiwan or Japan.

The Autonomy of the Island Nias

After the end of president Soeharto's regime, in the end of the 20th century, a more democratic movement rose in Indonesia. When Indonesia introduced decentralization in the whole nation, the Nias-island became an autonomous land in 1999 (UU Nr. 22). The focus had been to mobilize and strengthen the own resources to develop and govern the land with responsibility.

Five departments had been reserved for the central government in Jakarta: foreign affairs, justice, defence, finances, duty and religion. But there are too many exceptions. For example the port in Gunung Sitoli is a national port and not under the autonomy of the Nias-government.

After this first step, in the year 2003, Nias with its 22 sub-districts split itself into two lands or districts: Kabupaten Nias, the northern part of the island, and Kabupaten Nias Selatan, the southern part. Nias was broken down in two autonomous lands, the land or Kabupaten Nias including 14 sub-districts in the north, and the land or Kabupaten Nias Selatan including 8 sub-districts in the south. The southern sub-districts are *Pulau-pulau Batu, Hibala, Teluk Dalam, Amandraya, Lahusa, Gomo, Lölömatua* und *Lölöwa'u*. And the northern sub-districts are *Idanögawo, Bawölato, Gidö, Sirombu, Mandrehe, Lölöfitu Moi, Gunung Sitoli, Hiliduho, Alasa, Namöhalu Esiwa, Lahewa, Afulu, Tuhemberua* und *Lotu*.

But there is still much endeavor to continue the process of splitting to establish another four new autonomous districts or towns: Nias Barat, the western part of Nias, Nias Utara, the northern part of Nias and the autonomous capitals Gunung Sitoli and Teluk Dalam.

And afterwards one intends to establish an own province, the province of Nias.

The basis shall be the 132 islands which all together are named Nias-archipelago with 5.625 km² (= 7,8 % from the province of Northern Sumatra).

Concerning the annual statistic book from 2001 there had been 678.347 inhabitants¹⁸. These nearly 700.000 inhabitants are divided between 657 villages (desa) and 6 little cities or Kelurahan.

By the new political reorganization one reflects the old arrangement of adat-area, named Öri. Less or more each öri had been limited from the extension of different clans, tribes and customs. Often a new sub-

district is based on the origin of a common ancestor. After 1965 under the government of president Soeharto the Öri's had been abolished. In the book Propinsi Tanö Niha about 70 Öri are listened.¹⁹

Maybe, a modern generation will grow up in Nias with more formal and non-formal education and technical knowledge. I met young Nias men who came back to Nias as specialists in Computerization, but cannot speak Nias-language and do not have any knowledge about Nias culture and history. For those and for all young people of Nias people we wish to bring forward our

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¹⁶ Viaro, Alain: noch unveröffentlichtes Manuskript.

¹⁷ Report from KANTOR AGAMA, Gunung Sitoli, Nias, dating from may 2006

¹⁸ *Nias Dalam Angka 2000*, Vlg. BPS Kabupaten Nias, S. Xviii – xix

¹⁹ Ir. Restu Jaya Duha, SE. und Ir. Noniawati Telaumbanua, 2004, *Prospektif & Wacana Pemekaran Kabupaten Nias menuju Pembentukan Propinsi Tanö Niha*. Gunung Sitoli, P.T Bumindo Mitrajaya. S. 65-71;

