Identity, Medicine, and the Gogodala: A Survey on Observations By An Anthropology Student in Papua New Guinea

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The Gogodala

• Hunter gatherers
• From the fly river province.
• Embrace a messianic form of Judaism
• History of exposure to missionaries
• Some community leaders now seek the right that some Jews have to return to the holy land (עֲלִיָּה aliyah)
Gogodala Identity

- **Gogo:** West Dalagi: Man
- Oral Tradition
- Trace their heritage back to two ancestral canoes who’s passengers founded the 8 clans of the Gogodala.
- Previously practiced a sort of worship different to that seen today.
- Missionaries of the early 20th century did away with much of what used to be part of Gogodala culture: Tribal symbols and Art, the 500 foot long houses, and previous forms of religious practice.
- “Missionaries of the Unevangelised Fields Mission (now the Asia Pacific Christian Mission) established a station in Gogodala territory in 1934 and two years later local converts and native evangelists, in concert with the missionaries, were responsible for mass destruction of all traditional art and ceremonial paraphernalia”
- But there was a cultural revival in 1972 after the previous two decades of intensified missionary activity.
Purpose for the trip

- To assess the Gogodala declaration of Jewish affiliation.
- To document different aspects of Gogodala life: Religion, Gender, Medicinal culture.

We all had to be very careful with how the situation was handled as to bring information to the Gogodala without influencing their sense of identity one way or the other.
**Medicine and Well being**

- **GILALA**: The word
  - The power of the word was believed to heal all ailments through the channelled good of the holy spirit.
  - There was a misinformation on the cause of AIDS.
  - Contraception was not popular.
- In traditional Gogodala belief sickness was believed to be caused by malicious attacks by bad spirits or sorcery.

**Most people resorted to the folk sector to cure ailments**

- Some traditional medicines were:
  - Mango Bark: used for snake bites
  - Ginger: For upset stomach and pregnancy termination
  - Popo (papaya): the seeds were used for malaria, other parts of the plant were used to treat influenza, cough, and the common cold.
The Prayer Warriors

- Where called upon for long term chronic illnesses.
- Rabbi Sussman’s session for her leg.

Balimo
Bringing things into perspective

I believe that bringing back such research will be able to put into perspective how people choose what religious beliefs to follow in modern society. How societies or even individuals choose what they believe in.

Gogodala ~ aprox. 25,000 people

Another puzzle piece in the nature of religion?

Though DO NOT FORGET THE PARTICULARS OF THE GOGODALA CASE.

The parallels

- The Gogodala’s case may be part of a bigger phenomenon.
- My own culture in Dominican Republic where a messianic movement has existed for decades.
- They emphasize using the word of god instead of using any medicines to heal.
  The Prayer Warriors.
Conclusions

• The Gogodala are a people who’s identity was brought into question after the missionaries of the 20th century.
• STDs and AIDS are currently issues that have been exacerbated by cultural factors. Also During my visit a medical doctor was not available in the Balimo area.
• The clinic however was not swamped by chronic cases and modern drugs where available. Cough, flu, and diarrhoea where the main ailments treated there.
• Currently a desire to leave Papua to go to a more developed country exists, though many Gogodala lack the technical skills to live there.
• The main proponents of this desire seemed to be the tribal leaders and designated rabbis among the Gogodala.

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(Thank You Very Much)
Works Cited