

The Wooi on Yapen Island. A documentary approach to tradition and identity
of an endangered speech community in Papua

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A majority of the approximately 270 languages spoken in the Indonesian provinces Papua and Papua Barat are endangered. The linguistic competence of speakers under twenty is increasingly passive. A systematic and broader approach, integrating state of the art documentation techniques and best practice of developmental cooperation, is needed over the next decades to preserve this cultural heritage.

The council of traditional affairs on Yapen island (Gelvink bay) and elders of the ethnolinguistic group of Wooi agreed with researchers from the Center for Endangered Languages Documentation (CELD) at the State University of Papua (UNIPA) to carry out a comprehensive multimedia documentation of Wooi culture and language. In line with the multifunctional DoBeS-approach (Max-Planck Institute/Volkswagenfoundation) a corpus of primary data and metadata was generated in 2009. Wooi and neighbouring groups practice a very unique indigenous form of conflict resolution including the performance of symbolic bamboo crashes, called *hesokuru*. Interestingly, the documentary focus on “traditions” and *hesokuru* rituals turned out to be “identity work” – for both, the researcher and the researched.

Abstract for the EuroSEAS conference 2010

From anthropology to history; modes of remembering and transmitting historical knowledge on the island of Savu, NTT

Geneviève Duggan

Abstract:

A complex network based on genealogies allows the people of Savu in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) to order and remember their past over tens of generations as a tool for organising present-day society. Remarkable is the fact that this society had until recently no written traditions. However names found in genealogies transmitted orally only are to be found in a number of VOC documents. Yet what is mentioned in records has not necessarily left traces in collective memory. Conversely, events qualified as important at local level and well remembered until today were never part of Dutch records. While analysing strategies of knowledge transmission as well as the agendas of a number of social groups the paper aims at showing how an inter-disciplinary approach could enrich research in a region about which written documents are scarce.

Hans Hägerdal

The Gunung Mollo incident and the Lamakera murders: Oral tradition and historical documents in an East Indonesian context.

The social role and transmission of oral tradition in Indonesian cultures have been highlighted by a series of anthropologists in the last four decades. Some of the more important work has been undertaken in the context of Eastern Indonesia. The small-scale polities that dotted this part of the Southeast Asian Archipelago up to the twentieth century were mostly illiterate. Information of past events and people were transmitted through particular institutions and mnemotechnical devices, and the transmission process had a fundamental role in the self-understanding and identity of the societies.

At the same time, there was a European or Eurasian presence in parts of Eastern Indonesia since the sixteenth century, in particular in East Flores, the Solor Archipelago, Timor, and various parts of Maluku. The European written sources about early colonial enterprises are partly very detailed, even enabling the historian to study local society on a micro level. It therefore offers splendid opportunities to compare the oral stories recorded in modern time with contemporary accounts of the same events. Such confluent voices of the past are found regarding events from the sixteenth century onwards.

For a historian geared towards classical critical methods, it is tempting to use the oral records as a second-best source, to round out materials found in the archival records. However, the differences between the oral and written accounts are as interesting as the confluences. The former type of sources provide a later, retrospective view of the historical landscape, harbouring a fund of accumulated cultural experience that is in general not found in European reports, mostly emanating from the profit-driven Dutch East India Company (VOC), or the Portuguese colonial apparatus Estado da Índia.

The present study discusses two dramatic events found in local and European accounts. The first occurred in 1657, when the lord of the Timorese domain Amabi found his death at the hand of his enemies on the lofty Gunung Mollo in West Timor. The other event occurred on Solor in 1675. A Muslim cleric called Bilido and his brother went amuck and killed several persons in the village Lamakera under somewhat murky circumstances. Bilido was captured by the Solorese and delivered to the Dutch authorities for punishment. The two incidents are spoken of in great detail in the VOC papers, and the first event is also mentioned in a Portuguese missionary chronicle. The oral accounts recorded on Timor and Solor, respectively, have been preserved in very different ways. While the Solorese story of Bilido is similar to the European documentation, albeit with a quite different perspective, the stories about the Gunung Mollo incident have been much altered since the tradition was first noted down in 1847. All this provides important information about processes of transmission, and the potential stability of narratives over generations.

Abstract

**Assertion and Silence: The Evidence of the Past
in Rotenese Oral Dynastic Narratives**

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Oral traditions that draw upon the past are both selective and focused. In documenting these oral traditions as ‘histories’, the task of the anthropologist is to recognize what has been selected for transmission, the possible reason(s) for this selection and the social mechanisms for preservation. To do this effectively requires a knowledge of the past from other sources.

Eastern Indonesia is a particularly rich field for such research for two reasons: 1) most societies in the region show a deep epistemic concern with ‘origins’ and convey this concern creatively, and 2) the depth, breadth, detail and diversity of archival resources on the societies of the region from the time of the East India Company are exceptional.

This paper examines the oral dynastic history of Termanu on the island of Rote. The Rotenese present an excellent case study because of their close contact with the Dutch over several centuries. One consequence of this contact is that existing archives preserve a remarkable record of local events from roughly 1650 to the present. Each of the historic domains originally recognized by the Company preserves its own oral account of its ‘origins’ generally portrayed in terms of tales of dynastic engagement and succession. These narratives are thus ordered and told for a purpose.

In the case of the central domain of Termanu, a remarkable feature of these narratives is that the genealogy that provides their ordering structure recounts the names of successive rulers that can be confirmed in archival records back to the mid-17th century. To appreciate the preservation of these narrative ‘assertions’ of succession, however, it is important also to consider their ‘silences’ and to examine the telling of these narratives in relation to relevant archival accounts to recognize how past events have been shaped to explain and justify a local social order.

Judith Bovensiepen

Two perspectives on the past: the destruction and victory of Funar

In *Quatorze Annos de Timor* (1909) Zola describes the total destruction of the 'kingdom' of Funar at the beginning of the 20th century. The destruction of Funar was part of the 'pacification' campaigns of Governor Celestino da Silva and was carried out by Captain Jeronimo who was motivated by the theft of local buffalo herds. Funar was re-built in the 1930s and then destroyed once again during the civil war in 1975. Its villagers only returned to their original lands in the 1990s and this research is based on fieldwork carried out in Funar between 2005 and 2007. Although the local inhabitants talk openly about the destruction of Funar in 1975, there is no mentioning of its earlier destruction in 1909. Instead, however, there is an important oral tradition about a man called Jeronimo, who tried to betray the king of Funar. However, the local account ends with the victory of the local king over Jeronimo. Where does the discrepancy between the two accounts come from? Why is it that the local narrative represents the incidence in terms of a victory, whereas the Portuguese account represents it as a defeat?

A thorough analysis of the local myth reveals that we can only truly understand this discrepancy through an exploration of local concepts of power. For the people of Funar, their king was a ritual authority and the guardian of a superior indigenous spiritual power, which could not be destroyed by outsiders. The Portuguese account prioritises political power and fails to recognise the true significance of Funar's ritual authority. The exploration and comparison of these two texts will not only give important insights into ideas about power in East Timor, but it will also make suggestions about the impact of the Portuguese intervention on the local political and ritual system. The key theoretical issues that will be discussed address not only the transmission of knowledge, but also the transformation of local ideas of power and potency. My main argument is that the Portuguese intervention has led to a transformation of the hierarchical relationship between political and spiritual power by strengthening the political aspect and failing to recognise the significance of spiritual potency.

What Do La Asan and Raja Gong Tell Us About the History of Adonara?

R. H. Barnes

Abstract

The question of the historical accuracy of legends and stories is a perennial concern made more difficult where there are few relevant documents to consult which might offer a resolution. This article looks at stories concerning the possibly historical figure named La Asan, who is credited with having established, disinterestedly, the authority and power of the Rajas of Adonara on the island of that name, and adjacent islands, in eastern Indonesia. These stories are full of improbable events: self-healing wounds, floating heads, disappearances into thin air, invulnerability, and instructions by the victim to his tormentors about how they might overcome his invulnerability and finish him off. The stories are not completely compatible with one another, and no one would take them as serious historical documents. Yet La Asan strongly points toward South Sulawesi influence--probable for other reasons--on Adonara, both in his name and in his alleged origin in Sulawesi.

Past Memories or New Inventions? Textiles in Kedang, Lembata

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Kedang at the eastern end of Lembata had until recently a prohibition on weaving, but used cloth imported from neighboring regions, both for ceremonial and daily functions. This changed to some degree during the Japanese occupation, when weaving was introduced in the newer settlements, but cloth used in ritual exchanges and for ceremonial wear still was mainly imported. In the mid-1990s the initiative of one woman brought significant change, as she developed a completely new type of garment to be worn by men on ceremonial occasions. She claimed that she developed the appearance of these textiles after talking to elders in her village. The cloths are made of handspun cotton, mainly left white, but with dark blue and red warp stripes prominently included.

As they are completely unlike any other textiles produced on the island and in the wider region, at the time it seemed most likely that these were a new development without precedent. During a recent visit to the National Ethnographic Museum in Leiden, however, I studied one of the earliest collections from eastern Indonesia, brought together in 1827 by two explorers who travelled to the region as members of a Dutch scientific expedition. The collection holds textiles from Solor, an island just west of Lembata, and these are virtually identical to the textiles now woven in Kedang. The paper assesses the possibility of the survival in long-term memories of much earlier textile forms, possibly recollected from generation to generation.

Malielehi – freedom fighter or mad murderess?

In 1916 Bala Nampira of Dulolong, Alor, was appointed raja by the Dutch colonial authorities. Two years later the raja was killed when visiting Fungwati, a mountain village in the interior parts of the island. The murder of the raja coincided with an uprising headed by a woman named Malielehi.

The fate of the raja was shared by all but one of his accompanying men. The only survivor reported the murder in Kalabahi, administrative centre of the Eastern Indonesian Alor district, and a punitive expedition was sent to Fungwati. Hiding in a cave, a large group of villagers were found and killed. Malielehi was captured and brought to Kalabahi.

The episode is the most well documented event in the otherwise rather obscure history of Alor. It has left tracks in colonial documents, in western academic works as well as in oral and written tradition on Alor.

However, the understanding of the event differs radically. In some accounts, the raja is an honourable man who became victim of deceitful subjects acting under the influence of a raving mad woman. In other traditions, Malielehi is presented as a magical, benevolent, being, a *nala kang*, trying to save the mountain people from a harsh regime. Yet another line of reasoning is based on rationalizing arguments, where economic and political factors are enhanced. The interpretations depend on which side is taken, but also on the changing context – from a colonial to a postcolonial situation. In this sense, the story of Malielehi has a more general bearing: Who is good and who is bad in a conflict? This is rarely, if ever, self evident, and even less so in a world affected by colonialism and its aftermaths.

That the episode still holds dynamite on the local level became evident in 2004 when an Indonesian research team presented a report after conducting fieldwork in Alor. The team suggested that Malielehi should be elevated to the status of official National Hero, due to her heroic struggle against the Dutch colonial oppressors, represented by the raja. The report was stopped by influential people on Alor.

This paper intends to shed light on how the episode is presented in written and oral sources, in other words, the interplay between conflicting and simultaneous voices. It discusses different understandings of the event from the perspectives of the main actors in this historic drama; Malielehi and Bala Nampira, but also the anonymous crowd who were mercilessly killed while hiding in a cave – and the man who told the soldiers where to find the hiding villagers. Who is hero or heroine, and who classifies as traitor in this dramatic episode of Alor's history?

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ABSTRACT FOR EUROSEAS 2010

The enigma of alternated duets in Flores and Solor (Eastern Indonesia)

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If Eastern Indonesia is a rich fieldwork for linguists and ethnologists, it has unfortunately not deserve the same attention for ethnomusicologists. However, music does seem to offer one extremely precise way of reconstructing contacts between peoples as well as the migrations of culture through time.

A rare kind of music has been discovered in Flores in the 1930's, described and recorded partly in the 1990's. This art is rare, refined and still performed nowadays, in many villages, covering an area of 70 km, from Tana 'Ai to Tanjung Bunga (Flores) through West Solor. It concerns two linguistic groups: a dialect of Sikkanese and some dialects of Lamaholot. Lamaholot is one of the main language of Eastern Flores, Adonara, Solor and Lembata islands, with some speakers in Pantar and Alor's coasts. It is Austronesian, Central malayo-polynesian ; it is probably spoken by more than 300 000 speakers.

This art is based on two-part singing as a unifying musical principle, combining a first voice (*hode'*) with a second voice (*nuku*). In a larger landscape of big choruses and gong music, this art is isolated and stands as an enigma. From where could it come ? Through a recent fieldwork (2006-2007), and owe to recent musical discoveries, it may be possible to show the origin of this music. This paper will propose an hypothesis of migration, by musical evidences and other cultural indications. Music is used here as a technique for the understanding and reconstruction of culture history.

Short biographical data

Dana Rappoport, 42, is ethnomusicologist at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). She has been working on traditional music from Indonesia, mainly in South Sulawesi and Flores since 1991. Her Ph. D. (1997), about ritual Toraja musics from Sulawesi, has been augmented in a huge publication of songs in three languages (2010). Since 2006, she began a new fieldwork in Eastern Flores (12 months in 2006-2007).

Some publications

<http://case.cnrs.fr/spip/case/Rappoport-Dana>

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