Memories of Migration: Butonese Migrants returning to Buton after the Maluku conflicts 1999–2002

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Abstract

People from Buton, Southeast Sulawesi, have for centuries migrated to Ambon for work, there forming one of the most prominent communities of migrants along with the Bugis. Since the beginning of the recent conflicts in Maluku, official figures indicate that over 160,000 people have returned to Buton (previous population 450,000) as refugees. Some of these people, who could also be referred to as returned migrants (I use ‘returnees’ subsequently), retained strong connections with their villages in Buton while living in Ambon. However, integrating into society in Buton is providing some serious challenges, especially for those born and raised in Ambon. In this paper I will discuss some of these challenges, attempting thereby to gain some understanding of how their memories of past experiences (migration, life in Ambon, the conflict) are important to, and affected by, what they are facing today.

Several conflicts in recent Indonesian history have led to large numbers of people returning to their ethnic homes, but there has been a lack of attention to how they are managing to re-enter society there. It would be misguided to assume that since the people fleeing to Buton have been labelled as ‘Butonese’, there are no difficulties in this transition. We must recognise diversity amongst people who are all Muslim, and all call themselves Butonese. Their struggle to build new lives is both an important issue for Indonesia and an important issue in Buton, as they number about a third of the existing population of Buton. This paper will attempt to contribute some thoughts about the relations between memory and current behaviour, by taking a closer look at some illustrative issues in a local context. This paper is a preliminary report based on fieldwork in progress; it is partly a field report and partly a tentative attempt at theorizing with the data.

I will begin by discussing some background on Buton and the returnees (I have more to say on this terminology below), including the village of Boneoge where my research is taking place. Next I will outline my approach with re-
gard to memory, and give some examples. This will lead into a discussion of various issues in the village such as government aid for refugees, riots, dance parties, and contested land rights.

Buton

Buton refers both to the island of Buton, off the coast of the southeast peninsula of Sulawesi, and to the Buton administrative district, in the Province of Southeast Sulawesi. Buton District comprises the southern end of Buton and Muna Islands, as well as the Tukang Besi chain, Kabaena Island, numerous smaller islands, and a section of mainland Southeast Sulawesi. These regions together were once under the dominion of the Sultanate of Buton (with its court at Wolio). Buton District comprises 6463 km² with a population of approximately 450,000 before the influx of refugees (Buton 2000).

Butonese manuscripts indicate that the kingdom of Buton emerged in the 1300s. The 6th king converted to Islam in the 1500s (see La Ode Madu 1983; Zahari 1977; and Yunus 1995). The last Sultan died in 1960 and the Sultanate was dissolved. In the mid 60s Buton was branded as a ‘basis komunis’, and this has led, according to some, to Buton’s marginalisation in politics and in historical accounts of the region (but see Zuhdi 1999). There has been no thorough ethnography of Buton (but see Schoorl 1985; 1986; 1987, and Southon 1995).

The Buton area is linguistically diverse; those who consider themselves Butonese speak at least 14 different languages (Fox 1995). The people are approximately 99% Muslim (Buton 1987). Approximately 70% of the population are engaged primarily in agriculture, with another 6% in the government sector, over the province (Kristanto, Makaliwe, and Saleh 1989). But for the most part Buton is not very fertile, and ‘merantau’ (migrating for work) is a long-standing tradition. Ambon has long been the most popular destination for migrants from Buton ((Kristanto, Makaliwe, and Saleh 1989:579). The outlawing of the slave trade in the 1870s caused a labour shortage in the Banda Islands of Maluku, and this led to a period of intense migration from Binongko (Zuhdi et. al. 1996:128). Migration from Buton has continued, albeit at a slower pace, until the war began in Ambon in early 1999.

There is not much in the literature concerning the ethnic Butonese in Ambon, who in 1930 made up about 10% of the population of 107,000, and were the major immigrant group in Ambon at the time (Chauvel 1990:3). Chauvel concurs that they were mostly Binongko people, and puts their large-scale settlement at the last few decades in the 19th century (Chauvel 1990). The Butonese people established swidden fields in the hills behind the coastal villages of the Ambonese (Ouwerling 1930 in Chauvel 1990), but were not allowed to own agricultural land in Ambon (Benda-Beckmann 1996). They worked as food producers and as urban labourers; being less educated than the Ambonese, they would take jobs that the Ambonese considered beneath them (Meyer and Hardjodimedjo 1989). According to Chauvel (1990), the Butonese did not participate in, or have much influence on, the politics of the region.

There is some agreement that the Butonese were considered to be of lower status than Ambonese, by both Christian and Muslim

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2 The most common belief for the origin of the name Buton is from the Arabic “butuuni”, meaning “pregnant stomach” (Rudyansyah 1997), or stomach (Yunus 1995). Buton used to be called Butung, or Boetoeng in the pre-1969 Indonesian spelling.

3 There are numerous problems with this data; the real figure may be closer to half of that figure. See Muhlis 2000.
Ambonese (Chauvel 1990). Bartels, writing about recent times, remarks that ‘both Muslims and Christians considered them [the Butonese] as inferior, backward people’ (Bartels 2000:21). But this did not prevent social interaction, including marriage, between Butonese and local Muslims, after the Butonese had spent several generations there and had adopted local customs (Kennedy 1955, in Chauvel 1990). Mearns (1996) discusses perceptions and representations between Butonese and locals. Both locals and Butonese represent Butonese migrants as hardworking, entrepreneurial, and careful with money. Butonese talk of escaping a difficult existence in Buton, and being willing to work at any job to support themselves in Ambon. As Bugis migrants entered middle class, Butonese largely remained in manual, unskilled jobs. Mearns reports that Ambonese saw the Butonese as drunkards with the potential for violence, and of lower status (Mearns 1996).

Conflict and return

Violence broke out in Ambon on January 19, 1999, sparked by a fight between a local and a migrant in a bus terminal. The violence quickly spread, coming to be seen as a conflict between Christians and Muslims (the outbreak also coincided with the Idul Fitri Muslim holiday). However, many migrants describe the conflict as being related to resentment against migrants, specifically BBMJ, or Bugis, Makassarese, Butonese, and Javanese. In 2000, the U.N. reported the death toll at approximately 2500, with over 400,000 internally displaced people, over 18,000 houses burned, and over 1000 houses of worship burned (United_Nations 2000). Since January 1999 official figures indicate that approximately 160,000 ethnic Butonese migrants have returned to Buton as refugees, a number equivalent to 35% of the pre-existing population; this has had a huge impact on Butonese society. Some of those coming back from Ambon report that their ancestors migrated there up to 7 generations ago. Some of the refugees have returned to Ambon but the majority are in Buton to stay. They have received some aid but not as much attention from outside Buton as one might have expected (see Collins 1999).

There is tremendous variety in the current living conditions of the returnees. Some brought cash and goods with them, many brought nothing. Some have received government-built houses, but the majority have had to construct their own simple houses. Many spent periods living with relatives, or renting space in or under others’ homes. Often, land for planting has been made available to them, but many are not accustomed to an agricultural lifestyle, and are confused as to how to deal with monkeys and wild pigs which wreak havoc on crops in Buton. Many have had difficulty finding employment, and are struggling to feed the family and pay for children’s education. Some have returned to their ancestral villages in Buton, where they may or may not have relatives who still acknowledge them, but many have returned to a different part of Buton than they were originally from. Of the large number of migrants originally from Binongko, for instance, few have returned there, as it is a small infertile island far from the administrative center. During their years in Ambon, some frequently came back and forth to Buton, others have not seen Buton for 50 years, or never have. Some speak their local language in Buton, many others, especially the young people, don’t.

Reported changes in Buton include increased numbers of street children, increased unemployment and criminality, price inflation, and high levels of tension between returnees.

\[4\] In addition, there are a smaller number of Butonese refugees from East Timor.
and locals,\(^5\) including several cases of inter-neighbourhood riots.

**Boneoge**

Boneoge is a coastal village, in Kecamatan Lakudo, Kabupaten Buton, although the village is located on the island of Muna, adjacent to Buton island. I began living in Boneoge in December 2001. Population was 1481 in December 1998 according to Kecamatan figures, and 3483 in August 2001, giving an estimate of roughly 2000 returnees. Government figures indicate that Boneoge received the highest number of refugees for any village in Buton outside of the capital (Kantor Kesejahteraan Sosial Kabupaten Buton 2001). The standard occupation in the village is fishing, although many follow a flexible strategy of fishing, farming, and other incidental work. Locals speak Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Wolio (the language of the Butonese Sultanate), and Bahasa Muna; returnees speak Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Ambon, and sometimes Bahasa Muna. Most of the young people migrate, with the most popular locations being Ambon (still), Papua, Malaysia, and international fishing boats. All (but one) of the residents are Muslim, and the village is known for being strict in its observances. The returnees who have come back to Boneoge virtually all claim to be ‘Boneoge people’, often having family still in the village. Relations in the village have been remarkably peaceful, with no serious violent events, but it is still a struggle for the returnees to establish new lives here, and for the locals to adjust to living with them.

**Naming**

The position of the returnees in Buton is ambiguous in a number of respects. First, they have found that in Ambon they were often seen as not Ambonese, and in Buton they are often seen as not Butonese. Second, they are in some respects returned migrants, and in some respects refugees. They are returned migrants to the extent that they see their journey as beginning and ending in Buton. But returned migrants tend to go home because of less urgent factors than these ones did, and often come home bringing wealth. Refugees are seen more as passive victims, and returned migrants more as (differentially successful) actors. Also, refugees tend to be going somewhere foreign; the returnees in Buton could be described as being refugees in their own land. To the extent that they are refugees, home is Ambon, and to the extent that they are returned migrants, home is Buton. These ambiguities in where ‘home’ is for them, and in their ethnicity, provide a repertoire of ways in which the past may structure understandings of (and thus action in) the present; the ambiguity at the same time provides challenges for the returnees in their current lives, as their rights in Buton are contested.

In Buton, the returnees are often referred to as ‘eksodus’. The term ‘eksodus’ usually refers to the act of leaving one’s land of birth and homeland; although here used as a noun, it seems to reflect a view that the returnees are Moluccans. Perhaps for this reason, many of the returnees reject this term; there has been a protest by returnees at the office of the District Head (Bupati) over the use of the term. Many returnees also reject the term pengungsi (refugee), saying that they are not living in tents, begging for food from the government, and eagerly waiting to return to Maluku (95% of returnees say they do not want to go back (CIDES 2000)). They want it recognised that they are Butonese people who have come home to begin their lives again in Buton. They only permit the label ‘refugee’ in the context of receiving aid. Outside of this context, the label is

\(^5\) This term is chosen for ease of distinguishing between those who have recently come back from Ambon, and those who have grown up in Buton.
associated with a denial of their rights in Buton—rights to live here, to compete for jobs, and to reclaim ancestral land.

In the village of Boneoge, the word ‘pengungsi’ is used to refer to a returnee settlement on the outskirts of the village. The returnees themselves have named the area ‘Matoka’, but many villagers do not know this name, and persist in calling the area ‘pengungsi’. People also use the word pengungsi to refer to the government aid (rice and money) which is distributed every three months or so. Thus the differences in perceptions of who the returnees are begins with the terminology used to describe the returnees and their neighbourhood. Such naming can lead to a feeling of marginalization; the group of returnees who live at Matoka have now formed a local neighbourhood organisation; I perceive this to have grown out of feelings that the village in general does not look after their interests as much as they would like.

**Memories**

Memory is implicated in identity. Here memory should be seen not as an imperfect but unbiased retrieval and storage mechanism, but rather as a constructive process, which is culturally influenced, structured by narratives (see Fentress and Wickham 1992), and adapted to a context. Processes other than random storage and retrieval are at play, such as value judgements, memories being established by group discussion (see Middleton and Edwards 1990), and influenced by interests. Antze and Lambek (1996:xiii) argue for examining ‘the cultural shaping of memory, to the roles of trope, idiom, narrative, ritual, discipline, power, and social context in its production and reproduction’. Memory can be seen as ‘a signifying practice and an index of identity, as part of a moral discourse taken up by individuals and groups, often unselfconsciously, as a means to articulate, legitimate, and even constitute their selfhood and relationships to others’ (Antze and Lambek 1996:viii), i.e., their membership in a group.

Another unacknowledged aspect of memory is that in its role connecting the past with the present, it is not just our memories of the past which influence our view of the present, but also our current situations influence our memories of the past (see Connerton 1989). Relating this to collective memory, Halbwachs writes ‘our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present’ (1992:34). Our memories are influenced not just by present challenges but also by the social group surrounding us. We adopt our stories of the past to ‘the mental habits and the type of representation of the past common among contemporaries’ (Halbwachs 1992:75).

Liisa Malkki has elaborated a concept of a ‘mythico-history’ (1995). Myth and history blend together, events are fitted in with existing themes, which are in turn modified, and this blend both expresses and influences how people interpret what happens around them. The mythico-history is a reconstruction of the past in moral terms. When relating memories of the past, especially of their own or their ancestor’s migrations, returnees are also making comments on who they are. In studying people’s mythico-histories, ‘it is not so important to separate the elements of myth and history as it is to grasp the moral drama that fuses them together’ (George 1996:67). When returnees relate stories of their past, we can try to gain insight to these mythico-histories. One

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A mythico-history is a blend of myth and history, in the sense that its truth is not ‘verified’, but it expresses something about how the people represent their past, their journey, etc.
should treat these narratives as a form of social action that is relevant to the current situation.

An example from Boneoge can be found in the varying tales of migration between locals and returnees. Locals talk about the journeys of their ancestors who migrated to foreign lands but returned. They frequently mention that even if a Butonese lives in Ambon, he or she should frequently return to their village in Buton, such as at Idul Fitri. They often mention directions from the elders (*pesan nenek, pesan orang tua*) that one not ‘forget’ Buton, that it was foreseen that one day, all the migrants would have to return to Buton, because of some disaster, and that those who had not kept up contact with Buton would have more difficulties than those who had. There is a Butonese novel (*La Ode Boa* 2000) as well as a historical myth (*La Ode Madu* 1983) both expressing that if you forget your brothers back in Buton, there will be disastrous consequences for all. Thus the large group of migrants who have never visited Buton in the intervening years can be seen as morally inferior, as they have neglected to listen to the wise words of the elders. While staying in Ambon and enjoying economic success, they have failed to respect Buton. This helps to establish a hierarchy in Buton today, with the migrants having slunk back in failure, economically and morally destitute, now paying for their past mistakes. On the other hand the migrants themselves tend to tell stories of their initial journeys to Ambon as a struggle to succeed, involving hard work, sacrifice, and great discomfort. But eventually they gained skills and wealth, and now look at those who never migrated as hillbillies, unwilling to change and develop, unlike about the outside world. They often make comments about how the work of migrants developed Ambon, and it was also their remittances sent home which built up Boneoge, including the mosque which is the pride of the village. So after their work and sacrifice, they don’t like being looked down on upon their return. They feel that if it weren’t for them, Boneoge would still be undeveloped now.

People are clearly uncomfortable with the returnees’ unclear identity, as ostensibly Butonese but often more Ambonese in culture (to locals’ perceptions). Perhaps by being between categories of ethnicity (in this case by being in certain respects neither Butonese nor Ambonese), they may be considered polluting of the system, in the sense of Douglas (1966). It may be, in fact, that the influence of people’s experience of migration, conflict, and flight, along with their status as refugees, is more constitutive of their identity than is their homeland or Butonese ‘culture’. In fact the returnees do often contrast themselves to both Butonese locals and Ambonese locals, suggesting that in both contexts they are contrasting locals with themselves as migrants. For instance, migrants often recall how Ambonese people swear at friends when they meet them, spend what they have immediately, and live to be fashionable (*bergaya*), in contrast to the migrants being polite, saving their money, and not being as interested in looking trendy. When the discussion turns to life in Buton, the returnees often mention how people here are stingy with money, not helping each other like how it is done in Ambon. (‘I got more help from neighbours in Ambon than from family here’). It is useful to distinguish between popular memory and official memory (e.g. Jing 1996). While the official memory of the Ambon conflict primarily features ‘provokator’ as the cause, popular memory accounts among returnees are often different from official accounts (as is usually the case in cases of conflict (Brass 1997)). Returnees often describe the conflict as starting because of jealousy of migrants on the part of the Ambonese. In recalling their lives in...
Ambon, returnees rarely used the word 'Kristen' or 'obet' but rather 'orang Ambon', including when referring to the ‘other side’ (pihak mereka). It seems that the salient characteristics for them were not Muslim-Christian but Butonese-Ambonese. Having this sort of memory of the conflict supports a non-Ambonese identity among the returnees, and fits with a mythico-history of struggle and oppression as migrants. When the returnees think of themselves as having been evicted from Ambon as Butonese migrants, it surprises them to not be accepted as Butonese in Buton, and in fact to be labelled ‘Ambonese’ there. Their current struggle for acceptance as Butonese could lead returnees to highlight those memories of the conflict which emphasize their Butonese identity.

Memories are used in order to deal with current challenges. Our memories shape who we are and how we act. But what situations we face now also affect our memories. George (1996) found that people interpreted ritual songs as being about whatever their sites of contention in the local arena were. Similarly, memories are reconstructed according to the present context. As Hale (1997:836) puts it, ‘how people remember the past is predicated on simultaneous discussions of political alternatives for the future’. According to Jing (1996:45), ‘making the past serve the present requires the constant employment of cultural inventions to turn a combination of hallowed myths, historical distortions, and imagined realities into collective beliefs’. In order to have an informed perspective on memories, we must try to understand the contexts in which they arise. When recalling life in Ambon, the returnees often recall features which relate to challenges today in Buton. For instance, the two most frequently mentioned aspects of life in Ambon are the economy, where it was easy to make money, and the communality of neighbourhood life, where everyone helps everyone else. In Buton today, many of the returnees are scraping out a living with difficulty, and are finding that they are not receiving as much assistance form family and friends as they would have hoped.

Another use of memory is to heal past trauma. In a refugee situation, with regard to memory and identity, Daniel and Knudsen (1995) write, ‘one of the most important components in the recovery of meaning, the making of culture, and the reestablishment of trust is the need and the freedom to construct a normative picture of one’s past within which “who one was” can be securely established to the satisfaction of the refugee.’ There is a psychological need to remember in ways which support certain versions of identity. It is not surprising that many reported returnees memories can be related to efforts to categorize themselves or to resist certain categorisation.

**Culture clash**

Many changes in the village over the past few years, associated with the returning of the migrants, have been seen as positive. For instance, the village is now ‘ramai’ (bustling, lively). There are new businesses, using the skills of the returnees, such as a mechanic, many skilled builders, and food warungs. Many people have been reunited with relatives after long separations. Many new houses have been built in the village, by the wealthier migrants, raising the prestige of the village. But both the returnees and the locals are currently facing a period of adjustment as they get used to living with each other. The remainder of this paper deals with several sites of contention between these groups. Although all claim to be Butonese, locals and returnees have many different customs and styles. These differences

7 A term indicating the Christian side in the Ambon riots, where ‘Acang’ refers to the Muslim side.
are very salient for the villagers, and play a large role in their perspectives on the identity of the returnees, which in turn have implications for future intra-village relations. Small incidents accumulate and can influence whether a returnee chooses to stay in the village or to leave and migrate somewhere again.

Many locals find the language used by the migrants who return from Ambon to be abrasive (kasar). They speak in confident, booming voices, and are said to often swear when greeting each other. Initially, this caused offence among many of the villagers who were not used to it (those who often visit Ambon understand that the loud voices do not indicate anger). This separates social groups and hinders interaction. Bahasa Ambon is a trend which has caught on in schools; many parents protest that their kids now speak Bahasa Ambon, without ever having been to Ambon. This is seen as a threat to local culture, as the many of the returnees do not speak the local language, bahasa Muna; some parents say ‘my child never speaks bahasa Muna anymore, only bahasa Ambon’.

Drinking is more common among returnees, and this gets attention from many locals, especially the older generation, whose religious leanings prohibit drinking. The returnees are often perceived as not following Islam strictly enough, with comments like ‘they never go to the mosque’ or ‘maybe they don’t know how to pray anymore, only drink’. In general, displaced people are often seen as having faulty morality, as they are removed from the community which traditionally polices their behaviour (Malkki 1997). Young returnees are seen as ‘nakal’ (wild, naughty), and are said to no longer listen to the older generation. School teachers have reported that more discipline problems tend to occur with returnee children (which is easy to understand, considering that they have been uprooted).

### Aid and riots

The government has been distributing rice and cash to refugees over the past three years. Aid distribution at the kabupaten level has involved both government officials and NGOs which claim to represent the refugees, in order to reduce corruption. There have been many allegations of corruption directed at both, and several NGO leaders have been murdered in the past month in Baubau (the capital of Buton), apparently in connection with aid distribution. In October 2001, also in Baubau, riots broke out, sparked by a stabbing between rival returnee groups controlling aid distribution, but shifting to become a riot between locals and returnees. This occurred as members of one particularly notorious returnee settlement threw a bomb into the neighbourhood of their rival; this incensed the locals. Locals banded together and marched on the returnee settlement, just outside of town, with intention to forcibly evict them. Police special forces (Brimob) rushed in from the provincial capital to forestall this, but the locals’ patience with ‘eksodus’ was at an end. Other returnees argued for distinctions to be made not between refugees and locals, but between violent gang members and the rest of society. The habit among preman ( mafia-type youth) to categorize themselves as from settlement X, trying to build a fierce reputation, was denounced by other returnees from the settlement, who were trying to live peacefully. And again, the use of terms like ‘eksodus’ and ‘pengungsi’ to group all returnees together, was seen to be dangerously polarizing society between insiders and outsiders. Also contributing to this polarization was the practice of returnees being housed in government-built settlements rather than being mixed into pre-existing villages.

Within the village of Boneoge, locals often complain about the government aid distributions, saying that rich returnees receive aid but poor
locals don’t. Returnees claim that they are discriminated against if they migrate for work, as it becomes difficult to collect their aid packages. People who often migrate experience difficulties in dealing with the government, as they do not conform to the government’s pattern of having a permanent residence. Some locals have complained that they are marginalized, for instance being refused beras sejahtera (cheaper rice for the poor) on the basis of their Ambonese identity card, protesting that they are Boneoge people, even though their identity card is from Ambon. In the face of such difficulties, one commented: ‘they should be glad that we came back and livened up Boneoge. If they want to be like that, we will leave, and what will be left here?’

**Pesta joget**

In Ambon, dance parties (*pesta joget*) were common to celebrate weddings and other occasions. In Boneoge they have become a point of contention between young returnees and the older generation of locals, frequently mentioned by both groups. The parties involve loud dangdut music until 3 or 4am, with couples dancing facing each other. The older generation of locals protests these parties, saying that they disturb other residents, that the young men drink and are not dressed appropriately. The parties are said to provide opportunities for unsupervised contact between the sexes, make the young people sleep half the next day, and be in contradiction with religious values. This has become a big issue for many young returnees, who are very eager for the parties to continue, as a form of entertainment they are used to, providing them with a break from their everyday activities. The dispute over the parties highlights differences in habits between returnees and locals. One young male returnee, expressing dissatisfaction with being looked on as a troublemaker, said: ‘it is us, the dancers, the drunks, who built the mosque’ (meaning that donations from migrants supplied the money to build the mosque). In a recent election for the new leaders of the LPM (*Lembaga Pengembangan Masyarakat*, or Village Council), an older returnee won a landslide victory, displacing the local man who had previously served in the leadership and was attempting to be elected as head. The reason given by many observers was that returnee youths came out in force, and all voted for this one candidate as he would allow dance parties to continue. This is an example of a particular issue highlighting difference and becoming a focus, and people digging in their heels to protect what they feel is an essential part of their way of life. The result in this case was a change in the political makeup of the village. It served as a potent reminder that the returnees and their habits are now part of Boneoge society.

**Land disputes**

There are many cases of migrants coming back to Boneoge and reclaiming land which belonged to their ancestors. Their belief is that their right to the land still holds. Often in such cases, someone else has been using the land for years and also claims it as theirs. While often such claims are worked out amicably with other surviving descendants, in some cases disputes arise. Often the opinion of locals is that since the migrants never came back to check on the land, then whoever has been using it for all this time now has the right to continue doing so. If a migrant had come back to Boneoge every year or so, and checked up on the land in question, they would have a better claim. One might wonder if this is just a difference between the generations, not between returnees and locals. But, it is the older locals who are against the dance parties; older returnees do not generally object to them. Many local youth do enjoy the dance parties, but it is the returnee youth who are vocal in defending the dance parties.
chance of retaining their rights to it. The implication is that the returnees have been negligent in their duty as Boneoge citizens if they have never come back, with the result that they lose their rights to the land. The village policy is to try to resolve disputes at the village level, with the involvement of the Village Head, the Imam (mosque leader), and other important village figures, to find a solution which keeps everyone moderately happy. If this fails, then the case is taken to the Camat (sub-district head), or to court in the Kabupaten town. These kinds of disputes can tear families apart, and in some cases almost represent a decision as to whether the person is welcome in the village or not. If home is considered to be the place where people have to take you in, then land disputes are about determining where home is for the returnees. Rights to land depend also on knowledge of the past, or established memories of the past, with regard to which ancestors had rights to what land, and how those rights transfer to children. Migrants might be disadvantaged in terms of this knowledge, and this might cause them to lose disputes.

Conclusion

I have attempted to describe how I am using the concept of memory in order to understand something about the day to day identity negotiations going on in Boneoge. When trying to approach the topic of ‘identity’, it is vital to appreciate the context in which identity is asserted, and when trying to understand people’s memories, it is vital to appreciate the context in which memory is used. I have provided some examples of such contexts, examining several events and situations in Boneoge, in the hopes of understanding something about the events as well as the more abstract concepts mentioned above.

This article aimed to outline an approach to memory, migration, and identity; to explain the situation of a group of ‘refugees’ who are caught in between categories; and to examine the variety existing within a group who all claim the same ethnicity and the same religion. The last point has an implication for analysing conflict: effective analysis should elucidate the complexity beyond the simple labels of ethnicity and religion.

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