Seas that Unite, Mountains that Divide: Language, Identity, and Development in Flores

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Abstrak


Introduction

Last year when I had the good fortune to be living and working in Indonesia, I participated in a workshop in Kupang that was organized by a Non-Government Organization (NGO/LSM) and attended by representatives from about thirty of the major independent NGOs from all over Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT). As well as scant and highly variable rainfall, NTT suffers periodically
languages to delineate 'linkages' among them. A linkage, in his terms, is a grouping of related languages comprised of once contiguous (or near contiguous) speech communities with dialects that have differentiated from one another over time. For Floresene languages, Fox proposes four such linkages: 1) the Manggarai linkage, 2) the Central Floresene linkage, 3) the Sikka linkage, and 4) the Lamaholot linkage. He then goes on to argue that based on current linguistic understandings, it is unwarranted to speak of a single Floresene culture or culture area. For comparative purposes, within the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur, there would appear to be deeper, linguistically-based cultural connections between the Manggarai linkage and Central Flores linkage groups and the language groups of Sumba or Savu than between these linkage groups and those of Sikka and Lamaholot. Similarly, the linkage groups of Sikka and Lamaholot would appear to have more in common with those of Timor and of parts of Maluku than with linkage groups in central or western Flores (p.8).

In an archipelago, then, cultural units for analysis may stretch across the sea, linked into segments of a broader regional communications network, before subsuming at a higher level all the population groups of a particular island, especially an island as extended and mountainous as Flores.

**Historical Connections: Focus on 'Flores Timur'**

Andrea Molnar seems about to make a similar point in her Introduction, when she begins by referring to differences in the climate, the terrain and the historical experience of the various regions of Flores as one moves from west to east. In respect of the colonial encounter, however, she seriously overstates her case when she claims that unlike Manggarai and Ngadha which "lama sekali tidak memurik perhatian kolonial Belanda sampai dengan tahun 1907..., "Flores Timur dikuasai Portugis pada tahun 1511 dan kemudian ditaklukkan Belanda pada tahun 1641" (p. 13). This is surely a slip. It was, of course, Malacca not Flores Timur which fell to the Portuguese in 1511 and then to the Dutch in 1641. While these dramatic events did have repercussions that were felt in what is now Kabupaten Flores Timur, the precise effects are quite difficult to specify. But Dutch ascendency in 1641 over Malacca certainly did not mark the end of Portuguese influence in eastern Flores. If anything, Portuguese interests there were strengthened, as Dutch control over Malacca then later over Makassar set the Portuguese in those places to flight and the exodus of Malay-speaking Catholics who accompanied them soon augmented nascent Christian communities elsewhere in the region, including in the eastern Flores area.

During Malacca's heyday as an entrepot, Portuguese and Dutch traders had followed in the footsteps of the Dominican friars, who established themselves in the mid 16th century on the island of Solor and subsequently at Larantuka in eastern Flores. Islam had arrived in the Solor archipelago at least as early as Catholicism and both these religions claimed adherents spread throughout the east Flores area in a changing and irregular pattern. The pattern was influenced by a series of overlapping developments. These included: 1) the turbulent struggle between emissaries of Makassar claiming suzerainty; 2) traders and missionaries from Portugal concerned with 'gold, glory, and gospel' (feitoria, fortaleza, a igreja); 3) Eurasians of Portuguese and sometimes Dutch extraction intent on amassing wealth and power; and 4) representatives of the Dutch East India Company trying in vain to establish a monopoly over trade in the area. Makassar withdrew during the 17th century and Portugal eventually sold its 'official' interests in the area to the Dutch in a treaty of 1859. Actual transition to Dutch rule, however, came somewhat later.
and only in the early twentieth century did the Dutch extend their administration into the interior. No political unity seems to have characterized the east Flores area until the Dutch set about amalgamating traditional domains and ‘rationalizing’ villages under the Raja of Larantuka and Raja of Adonara respectively (Abdurachman 1983; Barnes 1980, 1987).

As Barnes (1974:5-6) puts it,

the Dutch saw in the real and putative holdings of the two radjas of Larantuka and Adonara the embryo of a convenient administrative division. By 1931 all the land had been consolidated under Larantuka and Adonara, which were the only radjas still holding office (Dijk 1925:34).

The strengthening of two local rajas, one Muslim from among five said to rule ‘the five coasts’ (Paji Waton Lema) and the other Catholic allied with ten regents said to oversee ‘the ten village regions’ (Demon Lewo Pulo), laid a political division over an older ritual antagonism that categorized inhabitants of this area as either Paji or Demon. Whatever the nature of the Paji/Demon opposition, a colonial process of political re-structuring boosted the authority of two rajas in particular vis-à-vis other contenders.

**Language: Articulating Prestige, Power and Poetics**

This situation highlights the salience of another point Fox makes about language use. Languages are not politically neutral forms of communication. Some languages or dialects gain in both currency and prestige through their association with a centre of power and influence. As Fox (p. 2) notes,

in eastern Indonesia, state structures and ritual politics with a variety of developed status systems have existed within the region for a considerable period of time and have influenced the development of local languages. As a result, within dialect chains or networks, one particular dialect among various dialects may be accorded a higher status and may tend to be used, or at least understood, over a wider area than where it is regularly spoken. Such a dialect may achieve a kind of cultural hegemony or even become a mini-lingua franca across a dialect chain.

From reevaluation of known data and a brief linguistic survey in the area, Grimes et al. (1997: 9-10) propose this kind of scenario to account for the name given the language Lamaholot and its use ‘...as a language of wider communication from eastern Flores to western Afor.’ Early European sources refer to the language as ‘Solorese’ and the term Lamaholot is generally understood to correspond in part with the island name, Solor = Holot. Historically, a fort established on Solor served as a locus for European activities and Dutch-Portuguese rivalry in the area until Portuguese relocation to Larantuka on Flores eventually confirmed that port-town as the centre for commerce and governance through the subsequent colonial and post-colonial periods. In this context, Grimes and his collaborators (1997: 10) argue, the language of this area known to Europeans as the ‘Solor’ language continued to be used for commerce and interethnic communication and is now known as Lamaholot. But throughout this whole Lamaholot-speaking area are also found vernacular languages that are hidden by the dominance of Lamaholot as a language of interethnic communication.

Thus, the form of Lamaholot associated with the emerging political centre over time attained dominance across a wide area, such that ‘Lamaholot as it is known on language maps should perhaps best be thought of as a lingua franca (Grimes et al. 1997: 81).’

But where in this linguistic situation do we see signs of rival confederations headed by the Raja of Larantuka and the Raja of Adonara respectively? Did the Raja of Adonara’s dominion of
the five coasts’ have no significant impact on language intelligibility and language use? Without more socio-linguistic research, uncertainty prevails on points such as these now highlighted by the proposition that Lamaholot constitutes a lingua franca. Some years ago, as Fox (p. 6) notes, Gregorius Kerf (1977) sketched an outline of Lamaholot dialect groups and sub-dialect variation. He delineated what he termed West Lamaholot as the major dialect grouping having speakers in parts of eastern Flores, Solor, Adonara and Lembata. Within ‘West Lamaholot’, he distinguished a number of sub-dialects, two of which he regarded as rival variants deriving prestige from the Rajas of Laranuka and Adonara respectively. Grimes and his collaborators (1997: 77, 81) consider these two rival variants to be distinct languages, one of which they recognize as lingua franca Lamaholot and the other they designate the ‘Adonara’ language spoken in Adonara and parts of Solor. Both Kerf’s and Grimes’ interpretations thus accord the Raja of Adonara’s coastal confederation a sphere of linguistic influence, although one that lies beneath and is considerably less extensive than the Lamaholot ‘language of wider communication’.

If the prestige Laranuka conferred on Lamaholot led to its wider intelligibility, then it is especially ironic that in the heart of this ‘political centre’ a Malay dialect was localized and displaced Lamaholot long ago. Nowadays diglossia prevails as people’s personal and family life is conducted in Laranuka-Malay, whereas the business of government and its agencies is carried on in Bahasa Indonesia (Kumanireng 1982). Such contextual language switching is not uncommon in this area. In Adonara, the switching is between a form of Lamaholot appropriate among insiders and the national language Bahasa Indonesia used to officials and outsiders. Here, Nancy Lutz argues in her article for Antropologi Indonesia. Malay and Indonesian have always been seen as ‘languages of extralocal authority and state power’ (p.89). Thus, she suggests,

bilingualism in Adonara has political ramifications. It is not yet possible in Adonara to speak Indonesian at the village level without denying one’s linguistic heritage, because of the association of Indonesian with extralocal power and affiliation, moreover, to speak Indonesian in Adonara is also to deny local roots and affiliations (p. 93)

What Lutz explores in her discussion of ‘Bilingualism and Linguistic Politics in Adonara’ is not simply language switching, but the creation of new context-derived speech styles that draw on both languages simultaneously. A speaker may combine vocabulary and even merge forms of presentation in order to convey appropriate meta-linguistic messages, as well as the necessary information to particular audiences. So, the oral report a village head delivers to a visiting provincial political team will be encoded ‘in the language and in the symbols of the Indonesian nation-state’ (p. 90). By contrast, in a report on local matters to a public meeting, the same village head combines Indonesian vocabulary with Lamaholot deictics (references to himself or to the immediacies of the village locality) and adapts his oratorical style to the cadence and paired structure of Lamaholot ritual speech. If the one ‘performance’ attests villagers’ allegiance to the state, Lutz argues, the other sees the village head garnering two distinct legitimacies for local consumption, speaking in his capacity as village head but linguistically reinforcing his local ties and affiliations.

Lutz relates the need for this linguistic dexterity to the fact that in Adonara ‘politics has bifurcated into “government” and local arenas’ (p. 93). In contrasting Adonara with Roti, she seems to imply that had the Adonaraese headman been drawn from among the village traditional
elders, he would thereby have had the authority to use entirely local language models without need of new hybrid forms. This comparative point needs to be explored more fully, I would argue since the lack of continuity Lutz points to here is not only as regards political leadership, but also in terms of the greater range of state-local contexts in which that village leadership must now be exercised. I wonder, in other words, if the distinction between 'government' and 'local' arenas can be that clear-cut given the extent to which New Order managerial governance has penetrated local village life.

Identity: Ancestral Relations, Migrations and Ritual Responsibilities

R. H. Barnes' contribution to Anthropologi Indonesia also stems from a project on language. His discussion of "Inner States and Constituents of the Person in Kedang, Lembata" draws on recent collaborative work on a dictionary of the Kedang language and complements his earlier monograph Kedang: A Study of the Collective Thought of an Eastern Indonesian People (1974). His article explores Kedang terms for intellectual and emotional states focussing on '...what makes a person according to Kedang language and culture' (p. 20). He thus provides rich linguistic materials, particularly useful for comparative analysis with Lamaholot and other Austronesian languages. The data concern cultural categories dealing with body and soul; intellectual functions, emotion and memory; forms of spirit and means of human-spirit communication. Brief mention is also made of how such concepts inform social relations, highlighting the affective tie between brother and sister as well as various 'one womb' ties of common ancestry. Barnes' data further suggest continuing concern with spiritual power and ancestral connection in Kedang. He notes that since his earlier fieldwork '...the village cleaning ceremony has been reestablished on an annual basis at the initiative of a former Catholic seminarian', together with the revival of ceremonial recitation of 'the descent lines down from God to the living children of each clan' (p. 26). A Kedang tradition (Barnes, p. 21) has it that animals, spirits and humankind all derive from a sibling set of seven brothers. Similarly, a Manggarai tale suggests a once unitary world became divided when conflict between siblings caused the creator to separate them such that the world of human beings and the world of spirits became distinct. From that time on, according to Manggarais as Maribeth Erb (p. 30) describes, an important division existed fragmenting not only the world of 'people', but also the world of 'animals'. So,

there are domesticated animals, and there are wild animals, just as there are 'domesticated' people (human beings), and wild people (the forest spirits). ...The animals of the forest, the wild animals people hunt and which prey upon their crops, are widely believed to be the domesticated animals of these spirits. Thus the spiritual world mirrors this one; it is separated from it, and yet is continuous with it (p. 30). Erb goes on to explore the significance of this view, for an area where predatory animals have an especially devastating impact on people's crops, in her article 'The Deer and the Boar: Hunting, Predatory Animals and Rituals of Respect in Rembong, Manggarai'. In a subtle and lucid analysis, she examines the significance for Rembong cultural identity of the ambivalent relationship these people have with wild animals, the rituals of respect that in Manggarai only Rembong accord them and the ritual hunt which unites all Rembong in observance of prohibitions surrounding it. Finally, she considers the impact of Catholicism's more dualistic worldview on these beliefs and
practices, suggesting that Rembong notions of continuity provide a better basis for an ecological understanding of man’s place in nature than a dualistic view where ‘nature is there only for exploitation’ (p. 34).

Contributions by Gregory Forth and Philipus Tule also concern questions of identity. While “Who are the Nage?” is a somewhat ambiguous question, in this article Forth sets aside a number of related issues to focus on reviewing various applications of “Nage”...in order to determine the probable derivation of the name” (p. 69). He considers data from aphorisms and toponyms, along with local traditions concerning ancestral migrations to argue that in pre-colonial times “Nage” referred to some kind of socio-political grouping focussed on Bu’a Wac, but tracing both geographical and genealogical origin to a long-abandoned village site named Nata Nage. Dutch colonial administrators later appropriated the term to designate a much larger political territory, although the extent to which the wider population of this territory came to consider themselves “Nage” during the subsequent colonial and national periods remains to be clarified. This article is admirable not only for its careful shifting of evidence on the issue it addresses, but also for its disentangling of linked but separate questions concerning the relations between an ‘ethnic category’ and its shifting historical referents in the light of colonial applications of that category.

In a welcome addition to the ethnographic coverage of Flores, Philipus Tule, SVD, raises the issue of allegiance to multiple identities in his article ‘The Indigenous Muslim Minority Group in Ma’undai (Keo) of Central Flores. Between the House of Islam and the House of Culture’. Here he describes the quest of Muslims, whose ancestors were local people in the hamlet of Ma’undai in Keo, to maintain their identity as Muslims and ‘...as indigenous people who are committed to a particular local culture’ (p. 69). In this respect, Tule observes, the notions of

sai o (house) and dai ia (derivation) are very significant. Most of the Muslims in Ma’undai, in association with their non-Muslim relatives recognize their same derivation from quasi-mythical ancestors...and belong to a particular sa/o pu’a (source house) or sa/o ko’e ‘emba (an ancestral house) (p. 70).

Tule deals briefly with processes of Islamization (predominantly from Ende), the incorporation into local society of a prominent migrant Arab (Hadramaut) family, and aspects of religious education and Islamic practice. He then discusses “the performance of rituals relating to the house-cult”, arguing that for people in Ma’undai,

sai o is a centripetal force which incorporates and unites them into a group. To some extent, the identity that is expressed through ‘house’ seems to take precedence over their Catholic or Muslim identity (p. 77).

For indigenous Ma’undai Muslims, living around their mosque on the coast, it seems that Dar-al-Islam as an abode or territory animated by Islamic values is not incompatible with participation in local ‘house-based society’ where land rights and other prerogatives are associated with social and ritual obligations to ancestral houses. Thus, the challenge to the multiple identities of Ma’undai Muslims comes not so much from their Catholic relatives, as from tension with ‘orthodox migrants’ over the long-standing acculturation of Islamic values in a context where according to one of Tule’s informants ‘Islam and Adat are siblings’ (p. 82).
Development: Contesting Tradition, Challenging Tenure

The articles by Stroma Cole and Andrea Molnar move the discussion on to issues of development and modernization. Tackling the relation between 'Tradition and Tourism', Cole considers a case of '...emergent tourism development in the Ngada region of Flores' (p. 37). The analytic focus is on 'sustainable tourism development', a concept the author sees as entailing a number of contradictions notably between the facets 'local community participation' and 'equity'. Discussion of what is meant by 'equity' here is rather unsatisfactory, as the author quotes from sources which seem to be dealing with different notions. The notions cited range from equitable use of resources between current and future generations to equitable sharing of benefits between developers and local communities, as distinct from ideas about disparities of status or power within communities through to differential roles in local decision-making. After referring to these diverse notions, the author equates equity with what is 'democratic' or 'egalitarian'. The argument seems to be that if sustainable tourism's need for 'community participation' is taken to mean reliance on traditional social organization, then any power imbalances in that organization will be passed on to the tourist development thereby compromising the requirement for 'equity'. Thus, as Cole puts it,

when the traditional social organization is not democratic or egalitarian, the use of traditional power structures may contribute negatively to equity (p. 39).

The case study, presented to illustrate this argument, concerns a Ngada community characterized by three ranks, 'high, middle and low respectively' (p. 40). Initial positive experiences with day tourists caused a majority of villagers, keen to derive economic benefits from tourism, to want to establish a guesthouse in their village. Discussions, we are told, began over five years ago, although we are not told who was doing the discussing or in what context. The issue is not simply the sitting of a guesthouse, but rather who makes the decision on its location. Does 'the family that opened up the land for the village [who] have taken on the role and respect normally bestowed on members of the high rank' have that prerogative or should decisions now be reached, as apparently some other villagers suggest, 'more democratically' (p. 42)? This is clearly a power struggle and the author is interested in the extent to which tourism as a force for revival of 'tradition' may have strengthened claims made by some parties to maintain the prerogatives of rank. If so, tourism is not just a subject at issue in a broader debate over the basis of authority, but is rather implicated in shaping the terms of the debate. A more detailed exposition of the case would be needed to see how far this is so.

Andrea Molnar also deals with contests over authority when she provides contrasting case studies of the 'Consequences of Rapid Agricultural Modernization among Two Ngada Communities'. Molnar compares and contrasts responses to change among two groups who recently altered the focus of their agriculture from a subsistence economy to production of wet rice and/or cash crops for the market. One group, Taka Tunga, are mainly swidden cultivators in upland locations, while the other community, in So'a, dwell on the plains where they have now begun to use the plentiful water resources for irrigated rice fields. In Taka Tunga, enthusiastic planting of coffee, vanilla and cacao highlighted the extent of differential access to swiddens. Under the traditional land tenure system, one of the two 'original inhabitant' clans had accommodated later arrivals by dispensing swiddens to them on an annual basis, '...as long as
the various migrant clans participated in the agricultural ritual cycle and the rest of the ritual system of the community (p. 50-52). In 1994, one ‘migrant’ clan unilaterally appropriated land for cash crops, an action that supported by other such clans who ceased participating in the annual agricultural cycle rites. The unresolved dispute, Molnar observes, is not so much about rights to land, as a querying of the authority of the land-dispensing clan. As such, it is a challenge not only to the continuing relevance of the ritual system, but also to the very concept of prerogatives established by relations of precedence between clans. In So’a, however, ‘...changes in the focus of production actually reinforced and strengthened the traditional agricultural ritual cycle’ (p. 52). Here a move about twenty years ago from the uplands to the plains enabled the opening of irrigated rice fields in the lowlands in addition to the existing swiddens, which remained subsistence fields with some addition of cash crops. The ‘original’ land-owning clan, having already bestowed upland swiddens on ‘latecomer’ clans as secondary land-owners, now claimed the land in the lowlands but quickly bestowed it on individual families as similar-sized wet-rice fields in a form of private ownership that later extended to the upland swiddens as well. The ‘original’ clan still leads the rites and stages of the agricultural cycle in the swiddens and, while some are held in the wet-rice fields,

the spiritual potency of these fields are believed to derive from the traditional swidden fields. Thus participation in the communal clan rituals of the swidden fields is in the primary interest of every member of the community (p. 53).

In her discussion, Molnar notes the greater tolerance of sacrificial rites by the Catholic priest in So’a, compared with the ‘ban on performing sacrifice and offering to the ancestors’ in Taka Tunga where such rites have eventually declined (p. 51). But the land tenure aspect of her argument seems to have more explanatory power in elucidating challenges to traditional authority in one case, as against continuing respect for the ‘original’ land-owning clan in the other. In Taka Tunga latecomer ‘migrant’ clansmen, now growing long-life crops (tanaman umur panjang) with no more than annual renewal of their access to land, have begun to take matters into their own hands. By contrast, devolution of land holdings in So’a provided a secure context for villagers growing cash crops in the uplands and/or wet rice in the lowlands to do so while still affording ritual precedence to the ‘original’ land-owning clan. Furthermore, the rising level of prosperity in So’a, where newly opened wet-rice fields were additional to the continued farming of swiddens, would give people every reason to have confidence not only in the beneficence of the ancestors but also in the ritual system and its current form of mediation. Thus, in So’a devolved relations of authority may still have significance as part of a ritual system, whereas in Taka Tunga even claims to ritual mediation are rejected once relations of precedence no longer assure access to a livelihood in what has been a moral economy.

Concluding Comments

ANTROPOLOGI INDONESIA, no. 56, concludes with Indonesian-language abstracts of the two most recent anthropology theses on Flores topics completed at the Australian National University (those by Molnar 1994 and Aoki 1996). This Flores special edition of the journal is generally well presented, although marred by some unfortunate typographical errors, particularly as regards place names and ethnic designations. Thus, Jere Bu’a becomes Here Bu’a, here
Bu’u, and here Butu; Bo’a Wae becomes Bota Wae; So’a becomes Sota; Nage becomes Wage; Keo becomes Ke, Kei, Leo, and Weo on different pages. Such inconsistency will not deter those familiar with Flores, but may present difficulties for other readers. Furthermore, the lists of references cited are not always complete and some dates of publication are muddled or do not correlate with those given in the associated article. In the Kepustakaan on p.18 an author’s name (G. Forth) has disappeared so a publication of his is misattributed to S. Errington. In Nancy Lutz’s paper, we are asked to attend to bilingualism in a text in which ‘Lamaholot words are italicized’ (p.91). In fact, both Lamaholot and Indonesian words are italicized in what follows, although most readers will in any case be able to distinguish the two languages as required by the author’s argument.

These are, however, technical blemishes in an otherwise fine publication. The Editors are to be congratulated on their achievement. ANTROPOLOGI INDONESIA, no.56, makes essential reading for all those interested in the ethnography of Nusa Tenggara Timur and is highly recommended for anyone striving to understand the complex historical and contemporary issues informing language use, cultural identity and dilemmas of development in outer island Indonesia.

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