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Serinta behind the Traditional Poetry of the Alor People of Belagar and Pandai in Pantar, Eastern Indonesia

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Translated from the Indonesian by R. H. Barnes

This article addresses the local concept of *serinta*, stories or narratives implied in the composition of customary poetry. *Serinta* is a term recognized by the population of Alor,[1] Pandai, and Barnusa (peoples speaking the Lamaholot language in the version known locally as Senaing) and Belagar (speaking the Belagar language) on the islands of Pantar and Alor in eastern Indonesia. In reference to such a poem the Alor people will ask, *liang te neng serinta mari pai*, and the people of Belagar will ask, *dar u e serinta hura tarang*, both meaning "what is the story behind that poem?" On the other hand they may ask concerning a narrative or historical account what customary poem serves as its validation or confirmation. Among these peoples a history will be regarded as untrue if it is not accompanied by a traditional poem as confirmation, while such a poem must in turn have its own story. Domestic or foreign researchers who wish to investigate social

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1 Not the island of Alor, but the population speaking the language indicated on the western end of the Kabola Peninsula of that island.

history and culture in this region will find that understanding the local concept of *serinta* is essential for adequate exploration of these topics.

This article is intended to explain this concept and thus aid researchers to comprehend their data in greater depth and thereby make their analyses less "dry." Before explaining at greater length the function of the traditional poems with examples and the stories behind them, it is necessary to discuss briefly the peoples of Alor, Pandai, and Belagar which are the focus of the article. Barnusa, a grouping using the same language as Alor and Pandai, will not be addressed because no special research concerning local concepts has yet been made there.

The Alor people reside in three principal villages, namely Alor Besar (Lewong Beng, Large Village), Alor Kecil (Lewo Kisu, Little Village), and Dulolong (Dololu). Besides these three principal villages, the Alor people also live on the northwest coast of Alor, and a portion resides in Pulau Ternate and Pulau Buaya. In addition to the Alor people, other groups living on the island of Alor include Adang/Kabola, Kui, Hamap, Kelong, Abui, Mataru, and Kolana (Stokhof 1984: 108f.).

The language spoken by the Alor people is the Alor language, which is a variety of Lamaholot. In the Pantar and Alor Archipelago, there are three groups whose language belongs to Lamaholot, that is, Barnusa and Pandai on Pantar and Alor on Alor. Although these three groups possess the same language (differentiated only as dialects), each maintains its own identity. In daily life, the people of Pandai and Barnusa do not identify themselves as Alor people, and vice versa. On the other hand, although its language is different, the traditional poems of the people of Belagar are in part in the Alor language. There is a strong possibility that in the distant past, the Alor language became a *lingua franca* for the peoples of Alor and Pantar.

So far there have been several studies concerning the peoples of Alor, including Du Bois (1960), Stokhof (1984), Barnes (1973), Gomang (1993), and Rodemeier (1995). Although the title of Du Bois's book is "The People of Alor," it does not describe the Alor people as intended here, but the people of Atimelang, whom Stokhof (1984: 106) ranges with speakers of Abui. In his study Stokhof analyzes a war between Atimelang and the Alor people on the basis of a text in Abui to be found in Du Bois's book. This text concerns the murder of the Raja of Alor, Marzuki Bala Nampira in 1918. Barnes's work has to do with the kinship system of the Alor people, while Rodemeier (1995) intended to specify the location of Galiyao, which was mentioned in the Negara Kertagama

written by Mpu Prapanca in 1350 and also mentioned in European documents before the seventeenth century (see Barnes 1982: 407). In fact, Gomang (1993: 16f., 26–28) had already established the location of Galiyao on the basis of traditional expressions and poems of Alor, which indicated that Galiyao was a region of Alor and Pantar. Actually the position was indicated by the translator and cartographer Pigafetta in his account of the voyage of the Victoria, which reached Alor waters in February 1522 (Gomang 1999b). Pigafetta sketched Alor and Pantar, which he called Malua and Galliyao. Gomang's "The People of Alor and Their Alliances in Eastern Indonesia. A Study of Political Sociology" (1993) presents a comprehensive account of the population of Alor. Rodemeier (2006) is devoted to Muna, Pantar.

In contrast to Alor, which already has several studies devoted to it, those relating to Belagar and Pandai are minimal. All that exists so far are studies by Gomang (1999a, 2006) and by Rodemeier (2006). In European documents Belagar and Pandai are mentioned only in passing.[2]

The present article presents highlights of a special aspect of the investigations by Gomang. Gomang (1993: 16–22, 147–153) has shown that for the people of Alor traditional poems are a source of history and a medium of justification. Among illiterate peoples, each important incident is preserved in traditional poetry. For the people of Alor relating history or important events not supported by traditional poems is regarded as invalid. Alor poetry is composed in classical Alor language so that it may easily be determined if the poem is authentic or not. Of course it is not to be excluded that someone might invent traditional poetry using classical expressions in order to misrepresent an incident through such forgery. However, each such poem will be sung to accompany communal dancing (*beku*) circling a sacral altar in each village. According to the beliefs of the people of Alor, each recitation of history which is false or misleading as well as the composing of untrue poems contains within it catastrophe for the reciter and composer, even more so if it is sung while dancing around the sacral altar. At each communal event, such as a marriage festival or funeral, the elders always express themselves as follows, *tutu sejaraha molo-moloki, laheka mo mangger date*, meaning "history must be recited truthfully, if not, you will not die a natural death." Because of these beliefs, every Alor person will think twice before composing a false

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2 Van Lynden (1851: 331–333, 335); [Maier] (1914: 87, 89); Dietrich (1984: 319), and Gomang (1993).

history or poem for personal or communal purposes (Gomang 1993: 20, 21). The people of Belagar and Pandai have the same beliefs as do those of Alor concerning the place and function of traditional poetry. Gomang (1993: 16 f.) has interpreted the traditional poems of Belagar and Pandai because of their connection with history (*serinta*).

Meaning and Function of *Serinta*

The literal translation of *serinta* is narrative or story. Intended are stories concerning specific events in the ancient past. Customarily the Alor, Belagar, and Pandai peoples preserve important events in their traditional poetry. In time important events and incidents may be forgotten because rarely spoken about. On the other hand, traditional poetry is always remembered because always sung at communal festivals, such as those at marriages or erecting houses. Further, such poetry always uses metaphorical language related to the incidents about which the poetry was composed, so that should the event be forgotten by later generations, they still have the poems as sources of memory.

Another worry is that the poems may suffer the same fate as the stories, namely that they too will be forgotten, leading to a loss of an important source of information for research. Nowadays the youth of Alor, Belagar and Pandai are noticeably less interested in studying this poetry. It is important therefore to preserve this treasure of information, even if limitations of space restrict this article to only a portion of that information. It addresses only history and leaves aside other social issues.

Alor Traditional Poetry

As an example of such poetry, the following may be chosen (compare Gomang 1993: 151–153).

1. *Kira kata tanah Sagu murah*
   Mo maso hari biru
   Maso hari biru tutu take
   Naming tutu take

   Do not think that Sagu [Adonara] is easy
   So that you can just enter
   Just enter without speaking
   Not taking part in a discussion

2. *Galiyao, Solor Watang Lema*
   Being Bunga Bali
   Being Bunga Bali no naing homang
   Teleng no naing homang

Galiyao, Solor Lima Pantai
Raja Bunga Bali
Raja Bunga Bali in a tranquil place
Established a tranquil place

3. *Kolana-Kolana*
   Ikang Gere Kolana
   Ikang Gere Kolana
   Kolana-Kolana

   Kolana-Kolana
   The first problem is Kolana
   The first problem is Kolana
   Kolana-Kolana

4. *Mando e Larantuka*
   Ikang sele Mando
   Ikang sele Mando
   Mando e Larantuka

   The last problem is Larantuka
   What is the last problem?
   What is the last problem?
   The last problem is Larantuka

5. *Mel masuk Timor Dili*
   Kapal mel masuk
   Kapal mel masuk
   Mel masuk Timor Dili

   Report when entering Timor Dili
   The ship reports on entering
   The ship reports on entering
   Report when entering Timor Dili

6. *Belolong-Belolong*
   Manulaka Belolong
   Manulaka Belolong
   Belolong-Belolong

   Bao Lolong-Bao Lolong [the name of the Raja of Alor]
   Rooster Bao Lolong
   Rooster Bao Lolong
   Bao Lolong-Bao Lolong

Explanation and Commentary

The first two stanzas are called *liling*, which are special and exclusive poems of the Alor people. Stanzas three through six are popular poems, which are sung not only in group dancing by Alor people but also by other ethnic groups on Alor and Pantar, such as Kolana, Belagar, Pura, and Adang. The first two are sung with a plaintive and serious tone, while three through six are sung with a happy and jubilant tone. The last four are initial poems preceding the principal poems of a particular festivity.

Notable is that the poems include admixtures from other languages than the Alor language, for example Malay (*kira*, *kata*, *hari*, and *biru* in stanza one) and Dutch (*mel* from *melden*, report, in stanza five, for example) and yet are regarded as traditional and are always sung in communal dancing. The word *ikang* in stanzas three and four literally means fish in Indonesian, but *ikang* here is used as a metaphor for complicated and difficult problems, such as the difficulties for fishermen in pulling a line when the bait is struck by a large fish. *Mando* in the fourth stanza derives from *dodo* meaning descend and becomes *mandodo* meaning to drop or place lower. The sequence of the stanzas offered here according to an informant is connected to the process of the exchange of Kolana, Mademang, and Kui (all on the island of Alor) for the island of Atauru by the Dutch and Portuguese. At that time Kolana, Mademang, and Kui were under the control of the Portuguese, but were traded for the island of Atauru (now part of Timor Lorosae), which then was still controlled by The Netherlands. These stanzas were composed to memorialize this exchange. The first stanza pertains to the difficulties involved in and the place of the negotiations, namely Sagu, Adonara. The second refers to the final completion of the process of exchange. The third refers to the agenda of the meeting relating to the problem of Kolana. The fourth refers to agenda of the final meeting involving Larantuka, Flores. The fifth refers to the reporting of the results of the meetings to the Portuguese Governor of Timor Dili. The sixth contains praise and thanks to Raja Bao Lolong of Alor, because his proposals were regarded as brilliant in disposing of the problems discussed in these meetings.

The story behind these stanzas is that the time of the rule of Bao Lolong there was an invitation from the Dutch and Portuguese authorities to hold a meeting at Sagu, Adonara. This meeting was attended by the rajas on the islands of Solor, Adonara, and Lembata and those from the region of Galiyao (Alor and Pantar). The topic of discussion was the exchange of Atauru for the three Alor rajadoms of Kolana, Mademang, and Kui. The difficulty derived from the fact that there were around 400 heads of families living on Atauru who did not want to submit to Portuguese authority. They requested that if Atauru must be given to Portugal, they be moved somewhere else. The problem was to find a place to which to move them. Each of the rajas who attended was asked for advice, but the only one who answered was Bao Lolong. Those who were silent or did not answer are remembered in stanza one. The Raja of Alor, Bao Lolong, answered in

clarification that "from olden times the people of Alor were tied in an alliance of *bela baja* [similar to *pela* alliances of Maluku] with the people of Atauru, Manututo, and Motaain, therefore, let them be moved to Alor, because Alor is also their country and they are our brothers." The preparedness of the Raja of Alor to receive the people of Atauru is preserved in the second stanza, in which the Raja of Bunga Bali (Alor) prepares to establish a tranquil place in which for them to stay. These preparations represent the most important result from the meeting at Sagu. Subsequently all of the rajas who were present at the meeting were taken in a Dutch ship to report the results of the conference to the Portuguese Governor of Dili. This set of events is preserved in stanza five.

In order to implement the results of the meeting in Sagu, Raja Bao Lolong ordered the harbormaster of Alor (at Alor Kecil), Anakoda, to move the people of Atauru to Alor and settle them at the village of Latakae above the village of Baorae or Alor Kecil. Even today they are still referred to as people of Atauru.

The above represents the broad outlines of the events referred to in the stanzas. The informant who related this history was in 1992 around 75 years old and died some years ago. He had only three years of primary education at the Volksschool in the Dutch period. The story of this exchange of territory is of interest because it is plainly related to the implementation of the treaty in the year 1859 between Holland and Portugal. After experiencing wars since the beginning of the seventeenth century through the middle of the nineteenth, disturbing to the economy, and rivalry in spreading their religions, these countries agreed to end hostilities through the treaty of Lisbon of 20 August 1859. According to this treaty, The Netherlands renounced its claims to Pulau Kambing (Atauru) and recognized Portuguese sovereignty over it. Among other matters, Portugal renounced all claims on Pantar and Alor.[3] Resident of Timor van Lynden's report of 1851 (van Lynden 1851: 336) mentions that Kui, Batulolong, and Mademang at that time were still under the Portuguese. This memoir also mentions the Raja of Alor Bao Lolong. In May, 1874, Kolana, Erana, and Batulolong refused to accept the Dutch flag until they received permission from the Portuguese authorities (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1875 (2): 27). At the beginning of 1880, the Raja of Erana let it be known that he would like to receive the Netherlands' flag and had already returned the

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3 *Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indie* – Timor (1860 [101/58]: 2 f.); see Heyman (1895: 78, 85); Ezerman (1917: 875, 881).

Portuguese flag to the Raja of Likusan, Portuguese Timor. The flag was also given to Kolana, where traders from Likusan were told that they were no longer free to trade in Kolana (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1880: 25). Furthermore, the Raja of Alor who formerly had exacted taxes from a few villages on Atauru was ordered once again no longer to do so (Kniphorst 1885: 338 f., 344). These circumstances indicate how important it is that these poems and histories be recorded and documented.

Traditional Poetry of Pandai

There are many traditional poems of Pandai related to history. For example, there are stories that tell of the connection with Majapahit, connections with the Muslim kingdoms of Ternate, and others. The following are stanzas relating to the spread of Islam on Alor and Pantar.

1. *Raja Dinga Lai buno sura*
    Kupang Kota gere
    Kupang Kota gere Selangdosi
    Lewo Selangdosi

    Raja Dinga Lai [Raja Pandai] sent a letter
    Going up Kubang Kota [name of a stepped path]
    Going up Kubang Kota to Helangdohi
    The village of Helangdohi

2. *Being Ladang Duli bisa dike*
    Mau Roba lodo
    Mau Roba lodo woto watang
    Wekang woto watang

    Raja Ladang Duli [Raja of Helangdohi] is very wise
    Went down via Mau Roba [name of a stepped path]
    Went down Mau Roba interior and shore
    Divided among the population of the interior and shore.

Explanation and Commentary

These poems are called *beler* by the people of Pandai and their neighbors, such as Belagar and Alor. *Beler* are exclusive to Pandai and their intonation is very melancholy. They are sung in communal dancing and concern social issues such as history, kinship, and erecting temples. The history or *serinta* validating them is as follows.

They were composed to memorialize the arrival of two learned religious scholars as envoys of the Raja of Ternate in order to develop Islam in Alor and Pantar. News of the coming of two Muslim learned men, Si Gogo and Selama Gogo, was an-

nounced to all rajas of Alor and Pantar. On a certain day all rajas gathered at Pandai. The boat that brought the two envoys from Ternate was already offshore at Pandai, but only sailed back and forth in the waters in front of Pandai because the envoys did not want to land. The Raja of Pandai as the head of house sent messengers to the Ternate boat and asked that it land the envoys quickly because all rajas were present. However, the two envoys did not yet want go ashore. They said that, "we may not yet land because the Sultan of Ternate ordered that we must not land if we have not yet seen a rainbow because once all the rajas have arrived a rainbow will be seen. So far the rainbow has not appeared, which means that not all rajas have arrived." The messengers from the Raja of Pandai reported this answer to the rajas who were already present. Then Raja Dinga Lai remembered that indeed not all rajas were present because Raja Being Ladang Duli who bore the title Raja At the Center of the Land had not yet appeared. Raja Dinga Lai then wrote a letter and ordered a messenger to take it to Raja Being Ladang Duli. The messenger climbed the steps named Kubang Kota at Helangdohi to the home of Being Ladang Duli. Being Ladang Duli received the letter from Raja Dinga Lai of Pandai and hurried to descend to Pandai using the path called Mau Roba. As soon as Being Ladang Duli arrived at Pandai, the rainbow appeared and the envoys from Ternate came ashore.

Because Being Ladang Duli was regarded as the oldest raja he was given the honor of receiving the package from the Raja of Ternate. The package contained a Koran and the tools for circumcision. The Koran and the tools were divided among the rajas present. Those who attended were the coastal rajas, and after receiving these gifts they announced that they would become Muslim, while Being Ladang Duli himself said that he would retain the traditional religion, that is *halaik*. His reason was that Helangdohi was situated in the interior (*woto*) and had difficulty obtaining water, while Islam requires plentiful water. Because all of the coastal rajas accepted Islam, for the peoples of Alor and Pantar, Islam is equivalent to the shore, while *woto* is non-Islamic. The two poems presented here memorialize this event.

The Concept of the *Pesisir* World

The two poems here possibly throw light on an issue which until now has been a subject of debate among foreign and domestic experts. The first question is when did Islam arrive in Alor and Pantar? Pi-

geaud applied Javanese *pasisir*, meaning coastal areas, to the Javanese literature rejuvenated under the influence of Islam in the geographical range from Surabaya and Gresik in the east to Cerbon and Banten in the west from about 1500. The "Pasisir period of Javanese history" began with the introduction of Islam and the fall of the ancient Hindu kingdom of Majapahit. He also spoke of the spread of "Pasisir culture" to other islands (Pigeaud 1938: 347–349, 477f.; 1967: 6f., 134). Geertz (1963: 58) extended this generalization to a series of other maritime peoples. Islam spread in the east, including Nusa Tenggara Timur, because of Javanese influence or influence originating in Java. Javanese influence cannot be denied because it was, of course, significant as shown by existing contemporary evidence. But the first entry of Islam into NTT at Alor and Pantar is witnessed by evidence dating before its arrival at Ternate. The dynasty of Dinga Lai governed Pandai at the same period as the rajadom of Munaseli which was destroyed because it was attacked by Majapahit. The poem presented above shows that Islam entered Pandai during the reign of the Dinga Lai dynasty. Therefore, it is reasonable to suspect that Islam arrive in Pandai near the end of the Majapahit kingdom, at a time when Islam was not yet particularly strong on Java. Meanwhile Ternate became a very strong Muslim kingdom during the sixteenth century. According to Barnes (1987: 225), not long after Appolonius Scotte, commander of the Dutch army, was asked to attack the Portuguese in the fort at Lohayong, Solor by Ternate at the beginning of the year 1613, the Raja of Gowa (Makassar) sent an expedition to Solor to demand tribute, which Scotte rejected because he held that Solor was only obliged to Ternate, not Gowa. Solor, Alor, and Pantar were already for a long time in an alliance, *bela baja*.[4] Based on *bela baja* which is the same as the *pela gandong* alliance in the Moluccas, Ternate regarded itself as the power over Solor, free to send an expedition in order to convert Alor and Pantar to Islam.

The concept of the *pasisir* (or in the Indonesian language and Malay *pesisir*) has been debated in much literature by experts. There are those who regard the concept of the *pasisir* as the same as Islam, the *pesisir* population being Muslims and the *pesisir* culture being the same as Muslim culture. The idea that the concept of the *pasisir* implied Islam was first recognized for Java by Pigeaud, because in general Muslims settled near the shore. In the process the Muslims identified themselves as

shore people. Subsequently the exclusive association of *pesisir* culture with Islam was challenged by Vickers (1987, 1993). According to Vickers the equation of Islam with the shore is a misrepresentation because not all shore dwellers are Muslims, as is shown by Bali. Most Balineses living near the shore are Hindu. Gomang (1993: 49f.; see Barnes 1995: 499; 1996: 1, 377 n. 1) interceded in the controversy. According to Gomang it is true that not all shore dwellers are Muslims, but in certain places such as Alor, Pantar, and Solor, Muslims identify themselves and are identified by non-Muslims, whether living near the shore or in the interior, as shore people. According to Gomang, the problem is not just a question of location of residence, whether near the shore or not, but more importantly whether the opposition between the shore and the interior is culturally accepted. Among the population of Alor and Pantar the opposition between the shore and the interior is culturally associated with that between Muslims and Christians (Gomang 1993: 49f.; 1999a; see also Barnes 1995: 499).

Traditional Poetry of Belagar

Laira are the most important traditional poems for the people of Belagar. Although there is a mixture of phrases from other languages in these poems, the principal language is that of Alor. Even though the principal language is the Alor language, speakers of the Alor language and related dialects such as that of Pandai and Barnusa do not sing these songs for similar ceremonies, such as those of marriage and erecting new dwellings. This situation indicates that in some ways the language of Alor represents a *lingua franca* for the region of Alor and Pantar. In daily conversation, the people of Belagar frequently joke with friends using the expressions, *aing di senaing adang e*?, "do you also know the Alor language?", to those who indeed do not know that language with the intention of demeaning them.

For marriage ceremonies, the following poem is always sung.

1. *Mari-mari tonda Jawa eli*
   Dong ba Jawa eli
   Mari-mari tonda Sina eli
   Dong ba Sina eli

   Come let us greet them, the people from Java
   They come from Java
   Come let us greet them, the people from China
   They come from China

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4 Gomang (1993: 88–93), Barnes (1982: 408), Dietrich (1984: 319).

2. *Ua gilu malu banga*
   Sai ba lola
   Sailola rento-rento
   Ua gilu malu banga

   They come to propose for you
   They propose in accordance with our customs
   They come in large numbers
   They come to propose for you

3. *Ming ba uring*
   Kame serang kurang
   Moneng ba serang kurang
   Lelang tokong ba kurang

   You see
   We are poor people
   We own nothing [of our own]
   You may see that we are poor people

4. *Ari walba lulung*
   Banga hama lulung
   Lelang banga wenga saku
   Dong ba wenga saku

   We only possess some orphans
   We offer them
   But they [the traders] refuse
   They refuse

5. *Ideng mako mara goleng*
   Didi mara goleng
   Piring Sina dulang Jawa
   Sering dulang Jawa

   There is a set of Chinese cups
   Our people throng about them
   Chinese cups and Javanese trays
   Beautiful trays from Java

6. *Banga ua gento pesang*
   Malu kubang lolong
   Malu kubang lolong riko-rako
   Moling ba mara

   They come and propose [for me] according to custom
   [But] I am too young
   I am too young so that I am perplexed
   Please deliberate over it

7. *Ina tunggu moling tunggu*
   Ina pela tiwang
   Ina pela tiwang orang lelang
   Lelang Etitonu

   You think we wait [but do not take long]
   You will cause [all of those goods] to disappear
   You will make all of the goods at the dancing place disappear
   At the dancing place of the clan Etitonu

8. *Bineng lodo pana*
   Nantu watola
   Watola serang lau e wela
   Weling wulu pitu

   [Say] your sister agrees to go with them
   But she demands a *patolu*
   The *patolu* is for her brother
   Whereas her bridewealth is seven *moko* [bronze drums]

Explanation and Commentary

It has already been shown to some extent that the expressions used in this poem represent a mixture of languages, including Malay (*mari*, *tunggu*, *piring*, *dulang*, and *mangkuk*), Makasarese (*pela*, to throw away or eliminate), classical Belagar (*wengu saku*, reject), while for the most part it is composed in Senaing (the language of Alor, Pandai, and Barnusa). Nevertheless the people of Belagar speak of this poem called *laira* as exclusive to Belagar. These poems are sung on only two occasions, marriage and erecting a new temple. The traditional poem for marriage is called *jaung dar* (women's poem), while that for erecting a new building is called *molang dar* (craftsmanship poem). The poem presented above is a *jaung dar* sung during group dancing (*dari*) as the last stage in the wedding ceremony in order to release the bride to go to the home of the groom.

This poem is sung in a solemn and melancholy tone. In the group dancing, the poem must only be sung in the sequence as quoted above. It can be seen that these stanzas are ordered logically and describe the coming of Javanese and Chinese and that their arrival is greeted enthusiastically. They undertake negotiations to purchase a woman, at the time a natural thing to do. Further the trade goods brought by the traders from Java and China are described, including *moko*, bronze drums, used as bridewealth. Also described in the poem is how a family coaxes a girl to allow herself to be sold and how this girl responds.

The *serinta* behind the poem above is linked to the ambition of a father who wishes to acquire the valuable goods brought by the Chinese and Javanese traders. The father has a very beautiful daughter of around fourteen years who is blossoming in the village. In fact, in the house there are several female servants (orphans) who may be traded for traders' commodities. However, when the father tries to trade these servants for the goods mentioned above, the traders refuse. Then the girl is forced to prepare herself to be traded for them. Through per-

sistent importunity finally the girl prepares herself. This incident saddened the villagers very much and led to the composition of this poem.

Gomang (1993: 62f.) states that this poem is closely related to the issue of the slave trade in eastern Indonesia from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries which has been much discussed.[5] This poem also reveals a fresh nuance to the question of where people acquired the slaves for their trade. These studies report that the slaves derived from (1) war captives from wars between different ethnic groups; (2) abductions, which is also linked to stories of head-hunting; (3) debtors who cannot pay and permit themselves to be taken as slaves; and (4) very poor people who ask to sell themselves as slaves.[6]

This Belagar example offers a fresh nuance because the poem indicates that the process of bargaining for the young girl took place following established local custom. The status of *moko* mentioned in the poem as bridewealth (*weling*) is traditional. The people of Alor and Pantar do not regard a woman exchanged for *moko* as a slave, because in that case all women, from the wives of aristocrats to those of ordinary people exchanged for *moko*, would then be slaves. In reality that is not true. The number and value of the *moko* used as bridewealth for a woman of Alor and Pantar express prestige or (social) value. Thus to exchange a daughter for a *moko* as described in the poem is both natural and ideal according to local custom. It becomes clear from this analysis that slave trade in eastern Indonesia in the past was facilitated by local custom.

It is only necessary to comment that the people of Alor and Pantar regard the exchange of *moko* for a woman with a trader from elsewhere as being different than slave trade. For them it is a natural activity. Should this process be completed and subsequently they take the woman and turn her into a slave, that is a different matter. Clearly the tradition and customs of the people of Alor and Pantar were abused by the outside traders. Cases of treating workers from Nusa Tenggara Timur as slaves or even worse by owners of plantations in eastern Malaysia may be seen in the same light. The tradition or practice of *merantau* (labor migration) by the people of Alor and Solor is also abused by labor brokers. The owners of plantations in eastern Malaysia hire labor brokers to go to Solor and Alor to coax young people to come to Malaysia without official documents and to smuggle them in. There they work without salary or wages. If they complain too strongly, they are threatened with being reported to the police as illegal immigrants which means that they will be jailed. Times, of course, have changed and slavery has been eliminated, but practices equivalent to slavery still take place under a new form.

Final Comments

This article presents only a few examples of traditional poetry and *serinta* behind them and only touches briefly on history. There are many poems and *serinta* dealing with other aspects of history still to be investigated. The local concept of *serinta* exists only among the Alor population speaking Lamaholot and Belagar. Serving as the foundation of traditional poetry, *serinta* represents the reason for composing such poetry and functions to control the validity of a narrative or story. In the opinion of the writer this local concept is essential for those researchers wishing to carry out investigations into the history and social circumstances of the peoples in the region of Alor and Pantar.

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5 Needham (1983), Reid (1983), Sutherland (1983), and Metzner (1977).
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The Legacy of Eugene A. Nida

A Contribution to Anthropological Theory and Missionary Practice

R. Daniel Shaw

Introduction

"Good missionaries have always been good 'anthropologists'" (Nida 1954: xi). Missionaries like this opening line of Nida's book "Customs and Cultures," which has served as a basal anthropology text for thousands of missionaries around the world for fifty years. But Nida also knew that missionaries were desperately in need of anthropological theory that could work itself out in the reality of their field experience. He went on to point out that he had "become increasingly conscious of the tragic mistakes in cultural orientation … of missionary work" – something missionaries do not like to hear. Finally he concluded that opening paragraph by stressing the need for missionaries to take both theory and practice seriously (1954: xi):

Accordingly, this treatment of *Anthropology for Christian Missions* [the subtitle of the book] is directed to those who may have been unaware of the invaluable assistance which the science of anthropology can provide or who have become desirous of knowing more of its implications in various parts of the world.

Ten years later, in his preface to "Toward a Science of Translating," Nida made the same point (1964: ix):