



## An Outline of Humanity

### A Travel Back into the Local Context

Gregor Neonbasu

**Abstract.** – The article figures the best way out for traveling back into local cultural discourse, of which it has given to the author a new chance to go back into the heart of the ordinary people's daily life. During the research time, he not only did collect data that gave him the chance to shape the understanding on local culture, but also materials of the fieldwork encouraged him to come closer to the atmosphere of ordinary people's life. Anthropological research became an interesting opportunity to go into the heart of the people. In this regard, an important point is that he discovered meaning and values behind the oral traditions of the local people's daily lives. In telling stories, he was able to experience how local people conceptualize the cosmology and other topic leading to local understanding of the ecological system. [*Timor, Biboki, social life, oral tradition, world view, global change*]

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#### Introduction

It is just like a person who is passing through a long journey: I really see that the academic task of the Australian National University of Canberra (ANU) for doing one year anthropological research, June 2000 – June 2001 (which was as an integrated part of finishing my doctoral studies), was a way for traveling back into the local culture discourse. Generally, every research always gives a new chance for a student – who is doing research – to go back to the

ordinary life context in which he/she will find the hidden treasures of science.

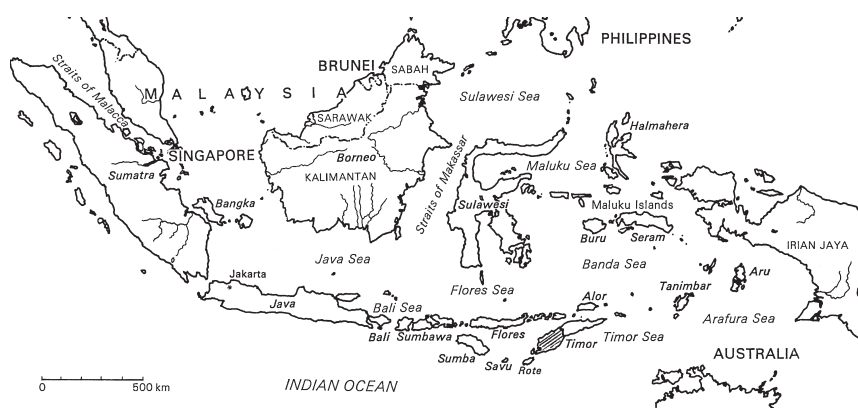
In this article, I would like to express the personal and social impression during the research time, of which not only field site did give me opportunity to shape my understanding of local culture, but also materials of the fieldwork encouraged me to come closer to the ordinary people's life atmosphere.

Such one year of anthropological research became an interesting opportunity to go into the heart of my people, from whom I have learned to understand more about the humanity of the ordinary people within their own perspectives of life. An important point that attracted me was that I got meaning and values behind the oral traditions of the local people's daily lives. In telling stories, I was able to experience how local people conceptualized the cosmology and other topic leading to local understanding of the ecological system. The following is just a further note about such experiences.

#### Understanding More about the Local Perspectives

It is really true that doing anthropological research is the best way to know well the heart of local people's point of view, linking the ecological sphere and human beings in a network creation frame with the ancestors and the Divine through communication.

I realize that there is a distance between me and the local culture of my own people, and it's not caused by others but by me. From the early process



Map 1: Indonesia.

of my formal education – let’s say, from elementary school up to university – I was away from my village and did not get the hold of my own people’s point of view, no attentive reflection on their daily affairs, and I spent most of my time doing “passing over” and learning a little bit of everything outside local people’s paradigm of living in a community. Various inputs, both through formal education and daily informal experiences, tighten my perspectives, i.e., mostly my perspectives on the local culture. When I was assigned to do an effective research, a new chance to enrich my own capacity to see different came to me straightaway.

In this article, I recall each journey of going around from one place to another with the informants, both educated ones and uneducated ones who know less about writing, yet mastering everything linked to their own culture. Mostly I spent time just gathering sayings uttered by the local mentor of villages; my objective was just to hear how they gather knowledge – in their relation with the ecological system – to understand their presence and others.<sup>1</sup> Something interesting about my people is that they are mostly uneducated, and although they do not understand much about culture, their expression of feelings seems like great hidden treasures. It was really amazing that sometimes they give what they have intuited; however, they lived and experienced it for years, since their ancestors’ time. In this sense, they explain something echoing in their hearts. Therefore, I spent more time listen-

1 One brilliant advice that James J. Fox (Australian National University of Canberra) gave me before going to field site was that each researcher has to be just like a tape recorder, for he or she has to hear everything as it is. He then told me not to ask too many questions, because sometimes informants would not respect the task to gain data if one asks too many questions. E.g., he recommended – as the first step of this academic journey – to read books dealing with researches and most especially the following books and article by Fox (1988 [ed.], 1988) and by Gossen (1974).

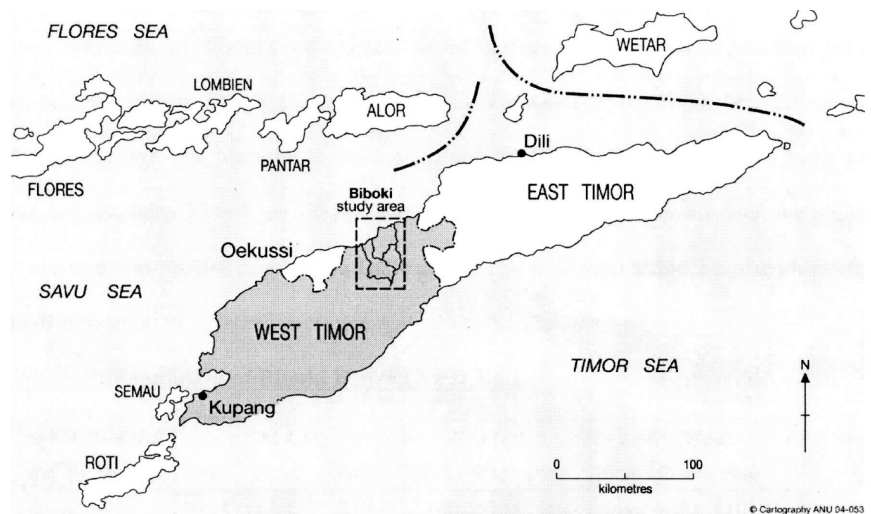
ing to what they told orderly and logically within the frame of their perspectives. For instance, I was listening to something related to past stories or habits and people’s oral traditions inherited from one generation to another.

Let me mention here the enrichment in collecting the rhymes of oral traditions,<sup>2</sup> to which I was included in a long discussion on native philosophical system, approaching an integrated worldview of the ordinary people. Sometimes, in these series of telling stories, I was told the old stereotypes which in more detail explained the ecological adaptation of the origin that became the basis for the local people in creating their behavior. Collecting oral traditions – also folklore – makes me realize more strongly that telling stories becomes a path to seek ways of thinking of local people, improving the ability to establish networks with each other.<sup>3</sup>

2 See, e.g., Father Vincent Lechovic SVD who started the recording of Timorese oral traditions when he was a parish priest in Soe, the capital city of South Middle Timor, the District of North Middle Timor (TTS). He also helped Schulte Nordholt to complete “The Political System of the Atoni of Timor” (1971) as well as a Protestant minister, the expert Rev. P. Middelkoop, who made detailed notes on Bijeli, Kapan, and its surroundings. See also Neonbasu (2005: 14f.).

A second academic adviser, Andrew McWilliam (Australian National University of Canberra), did an excellent anthropological work on place and precedence in southwest Timor, presenting hundreds of rhymes of the local people’s oral traditions (2002). See, the narrative (2002: 79f.), which identifies the origin of Nabuasa with the great limestones outcrop called Saenam. This narrative put together all the names of both tribes, people, and places names to seek the origin of a certain group of kinship. In dealing with this case, my documentation for completing my studies paid particular attention to Middelkoop’s work as well as McWilliam’s findings, and a number of contributions by several Divine Word Missionary priests.

3 See Neonbasu (2009: 15). In this the worldview of the Timorese is explained in the context of oral tradition and development in relation to the local people in solving a traditional dispute. See as well Neonbasu (2010a).



Map 2: Timor Island.

In relation to this, something about traditional societies should be pointed out, in which one would have to solve the current environmental and other daily problems by using specific ways based on the following perspectives:

1. the paradigm of the society with a coherent belief system;
2. the problems of people's experience in an unpredictable world;
3. cosmological concepts of establishing networks among such items as the people, the ancestors, the Divine, and the ecological system;
4. rituals that derived from the ancestors' time of the past.

It is interesting that during my way back to my village on Timor Island, I was reminded that getting to the core of the ecological principal, which formulates a system of social, economic, moral, and political rules of the living community life of people, is very important. The ecological system becomes the central idea of local people's daily affairs as the principle of the ecological discourse always affected the perspective of the local people. In this case, I really learned to trace by imagining origin and structure of the universe and the elementary forces of the local sphere. In terms of the ecological theory, all the collecting data really presented the idea of the cosmological model of a system linking to the daily life of the local people.

Also the Timorese are sometimes faced with the social construct of reciprocity. The three related human behaviors in this case are: (1) gift, (2) counter-payment/return present, and (3) exchange. Such related cases do not only affect the economic life of local people but also refers to the paradigm of the

ordinary people's social relationships. Experiencing that way has its own benefit for someone who wants to analyze social relationship aspects of the local people's point of view, especially in understanding the background of local people, since they are involved in making gift, counter-gift, and exchange.

Logically, an act of giving in this sense has its act of returning, depending on people's behavior based on local tradition or society. In this case, the gift and the counter-gift not only affect personal agency but also mostly social agency, since from these acts people then move to the act of exchanging the belongings among them. In a broader understanding, the act of giving in a society always comes from people's heart in order to express his or her appreciation to others, which then has an echoing in the next step, i.e. the counter-act within a society.

### An Academic Journey

I called my past one-year anthropological research as an academic journey. Such research was meant to complete my doctoral dissertation, firstly entitled "Oral Tradition of the Atoni of Timor. Ideas of Origin and Conception of Life" but later on was changed to "We Seek Our Roots. Oral Tradition in Biboki, West Timor" (2011). This change happened, of course, not only caused due to the agreement of the writer and the supervisor but also to the content of this work.

Let me say a few words regarding the titles. According to the first one, my focus was on the topic "Oral Tradition of the Atoni of Timor" with particular emphasis on how the people of such domain trace their ideas of origin and conceptions of life. The main goal of this academic project was to inves-

tigate if oral traditions of ordinary people can help each person to get an understanding of their origins as well as their conceptions of life. Based on this notion, I then explored the whole area of the Atoni of Timor, however, I limited my analysis just to the people of Biboki. Based on my research in this smaller area, I related my findings to the other ethnic groups in the Atoni of Timor.

It seems that such academic work presents the way to learn about people who have used oral traditions to seek their roots of life. The role of oral traditions indicates that it forms the identity of both a person and a society.<sup>4</sup> More than that, oral traditions portray three related issues: human beings, society, and the environmental system. Based on the anthropological and sociological discourses, the function of oral traditions open a better way for seeing the worldview of local people, which includes things such as the way of thinking, way of living, way of behaving, and way of expression, as the ordinary people locate their lives within and among everything over the world.

At the present-day, Timorese never cease to link their daily activities with the early ancestors' lives in the hope that by doing so, the flow of life always strengthens them to look at all events of the realm.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, people have a precise idea of the fact that the current social life is essential for the prolongation of the life of the ancestors' time. It simply says that there is a nexus between the early life of the ancestors and the present people guaranteeing in this way the continuation of community life. Whatever the present people do, it should be based on the ancestors' efforts in the past. Bibokinese have an archaic idiom called *usak tukna*, "part of navel of the people," which refers to the close relationship between the present generation and the early generations, for they all have just one blood, they are *feto||mone*, meaning sister||brother.

An important point to be noted here is that Biboki people regard "centre" and "middle" as official places where "the flow of life" came to the reality of life. The Uab Meto expression *paha aisutin* can be *paha usan* "the navel of the land || the navel of the water" (*paha usna || nifu usna*), referring to

the lord of the land. In this respect, people believe that the lord of the land resides in the centre of the land || the middle of the water (*paha aisutin || nifu tnanan*). In daily life, a leader – in this case the lord of the land – should be present among his people (in the middle of the people), i.e., live in the centre of the area. The middle and the centre are seen as the strategic locations from which people of the whole area can be reached. In relation to this concept of place, I refer to Needham's view about head-hunting, where he explains in great detail that the skull in some way might be regarded by ordinary people as "a centre of power" (1976: 79). I would like to link the terms "middle," "centre," and "head," with which Biboki people use to denote the official place, with the power centre of a living community.

Let me repeat some important points dealing with the data collection mentioned earlier. Although the focus is only on Biboki people, the scope of writing is about the oral traditions of the Atoni of Timor. And, therefore, I have visited almost the whole part of Insana and Miomaffo regions (TTU), Amanatun, Amanuban, Molo (TTS), Amarasi, Amfoan, Fatuleu, and Kupang regions. I honestly have to admit, that not all the places mentioned above have been visited, and that the data from the visited places were not as complete as we hoped. As it was only a one-year research, it was impossible to collect all the data available in the visited places.

By the way, there are sufficient data and writings on Timor to develop the topic, however, these writings seem to be in a state of disorder. Later on, they appear to be precious, because there is a treasure behind the letters. In general, there are writings on the history of places and their heroes supplemented with various stories. The topics include ethnography, social life, and many studies in the relation to the Atoni Meto<sup>6</sup> with the ecological system within the frame of exerting a valuable economic life.

Only little parts of the collected data were used in this article. After all, I asked myself: Why do I have to do research throughout Atoni Meto region just to overview some specific material since my focus is just a certain domain of Biboki? The answer to this question is that the data from all over the Atoni Meto region later could be used as comparative data.

One main idea that impressed me during this academic excursion was that I was able to figure out the general balance of energy in local perspective

4 For further information about ten tentative functions of oral tradition, see Neonbasu (2010a: 411 f.; 2010b: 62–86).

5 Schulte Nordholt explained this thought underlying the Timorese's conception and said, that the ordinary people are dependent on the ancestors and the Divine (*Uis Neno*): "It is not 'the other world' in the way in which we are familiar with this concept, because this is the world which, combined with his own, forms an inseparable unity; in it live Uis Neno and the spirits and forces which transcend the human world and on which man is dependent" (1971: 151).

6 The term *Atoni Meto* or *Atoni Pah Meto* (people of the dry land) is used to refer to all those who settled in three regencies of West Timor, namely North Central Timor, South Central Timor, and Kupang (s. Neonbasu 2011: 24 fn. 39).

flowing through the social relations. In this case, native ecological concepts played a dominant organizational role within the ordinary people's mindset concerning the kinship principle of a living community. In such a way of thinking it seems that understanding the structure and function of the ecosystem becomes a vital task for the local people to create the best atmosphere of life. There are close ties between animal community, human society, the paradigm of the ecological principal, the ancestors' order, and the Divine.

### Participation of Others

Although sometimes I was misunderstood and received painful comments, I accepted all the comments wholeheartedly, which according to my own analysis, could be affected by their past personal experiences.

Such comments were such as:

- Why are we writing things which are not important?
- Why are we wasting money for such useless things?
- Is it relevant today?
- Do the people today give attention to the things being collected?
- Why do you raise again the infidelity?
- Is there no more great work aside from that?
- Can it bring the traditional simple people back to their primitive condition?
- Why are you going to all the regions to gather data?
- Is it not enough by staying only in a specific place?
- Is it valid to ask all people about custom?
- Can all the data from the informers be represented responsively?
- Don't we agree that the research method including the whole Atoni Pah Meto region is just a waste of money and energy?
- Are there still any reliable sources?
- Is going around Timor to do research appropriate and relevant to the chosen topic?
- Why do we trace again those non-belief things? Don't we agree that it is just an idolatrous act?
- Is there no more work as a priest, so he has to look for an activity by writing everything which is no longer needed?

The keyword for all the questions above is the concern about the human values and its existence in the pluralistic society. Without going through the

question one by one, I have to say that those comments are useful for anybody as a mirror, in the sense that one should question one's own biases and those of the others. Every simple act always has a meaning for others and the living society. Maybe some works do not need other people's participation but they automatically affect the life of the entire society.

Although, at first I was hurt by the questions, but later on, as I reflected, I realized that those reactions were needed as bases for further qualified reflection. Again, I must truly say that when I heard those questions from the other side, they were very interesting to be learned, because they were being said by different people with different background and understanding. Moreover, the living contexts are also different in the sense that those who gave comments did not experience "what really is" as the writer did. Therefore, those questions are interesting to be studied with anthropological perspective. Again, the important thing in anthropological studies is trying to understand the context of the speaker, and above all, trying to understand their capacity, when they expressed the questions to others.

A way of understanding the context of the speaker is to overview the quality of a person's behavior, which means, knowing the self in general and others as well. We should not force others to think that what we think and do. Since one person acts differently from others, we have to urge ourselves to respect other's ideas.

I am aware of the background those questions came from. The worst thing I have heard was the statement that heritage, tradition (including oral tradition) and various cultures are considered as unbelief and did not bring a new breathe for now and the future. Things like this directly came, when I listened again and again to the recorded questions/answers and observed the social acts within the societies I visited during my research. At the end I was consoled, when I let myself fully participate in every celebration of life and rituals people did, whether in traditional houses or in specific places in big forests or lime stones over the Timor Island.

I joined the celebration of the ordinary people and by that I learned to track what they considered valuable for living in the frame of their local mindset, based on the ecological principle as mentioned before. Actually it is not difficult to let ourselves be brought into the basic structure of the celebrated rites as far as we think that all humans can make meaningful reflections for a better life. In the meantime I had a live-in-experience also with the people in the villages to get the meaning of rites as a living celebration with the ancestors and God as well.

In the following there are some recorded spontaneous sayings from the villagers:

- We are glad! Our inheritance which was damaged before is now being raised again.
- This act needs to be supported because it is an honor to our ancestors' inheritances.
- In the tradition and ancestors' inheritance, one can find one's roots of life.
- Education from time to time results only nothing. Custom never be deceitful since early time.
- Our custom appreciates politeness, not like what happens nowadays.
- The thing that creates disorder comes from those who have just finished their formal studies. The ancestor's inheritance never teaches us about bad things like that.

Here, these six positive points were not meant for fighting against series of sad comments before. By collecting such comments, I just would like to honestly say that there is a high appreciation from the society. There is dynamism of life within their hearts, individually or communal, macro and micro, and even secretly to establish their understanding of the realm.

### Context and Human Values

In the following, my recorded, positive comments will be deciphered, not to affect the list of questionnaires and the requirements, but just to have a look at another side effect of those sayings. The so-called research or study is always a specific side of work to turn down positively our eyes on the ancestor's inheritances to be kept and nurtured within the social tradition. Concerning the past inheritances' conservation, it is not only a way of paying our high respects to the human history, but, above all, it is also a way to care for human works. An article of R. A. Hinde entitled "Interactions, Relationships, and Social Structure" (1976) explains three universal theoretic frames within human beings. These are: 1) interactions, including the dynamic life among human beings; 2) relationships, which can be shown by the content, quality, and patterning of interactions; and 3) social structure, which is described by content, quality, and patterning relationships with others.

Whatever the Timorese understand, they could not escape the three basics as stated by Hinde. A general framework that could give a new motivation comprises three elements, firstly, interaction among individuals, which is seen as a basic factor of human life in every social structure. People al-

ways lean their activities onto interactions with others as a way to improve their daily activities. On this stage, we will get an understanding – or knowledge – about specific requirements from interaction on what we have carried through within the cultural context. Secondly, it is the functional and successful relationship between two individuals in a very wide context from the first one. The specific requirements being mentioned are not only the context and quality of interaction but also the question how far somebody gets into a relation network respecting the other in his/her personality. Thirdly, the surface structure of a group, seen from an empirical data got by a group, needs to be viewed in a frame of best acknowledgments about quality and strategy or related method with the surroundings.

I tried to accept all the comments as an integrated part of my academic journey. Those comments then became like precious grains which have to pass through a trial and the logical study about Timor Island as logged in needs to keep alive.

In relation to the above said, I am always thinking about the effort to improve the local people's perspective: for instance, about how we are helping them to move from their own way of life (*micro*) to something real in the sphere of the broader societal network (*macro*). Do we only focus on the political development, or just on rebuilding the condition of the ordinary inhabitants, or are we already in the better way of developing the qualified human beings, in a sense that we offer a constructive way of life to establish prosperity among them in the frame of the current paradigm of life? Some cases are too sensitive to mention the people involved. For example, there were people, or a group of people, acting in the name of local and community development just to gain appreciation and support. Moreover, when these educated people are from the local community and have family, relatives, and ethnic and any other types of relation with the community, this can lead to a particular restricted family development, so that the attention will be directed to a certain group of people and not to the whole community. It is unquestionable that these relationships are widespread and mostly acceptable everywhere, even though some people start to secretly oppose such self-gratification practice.

I have foreseen that those incidents will automatically have a bad influence on the coming generation's perspective, because there will be a lot of critical anger. We hope that the positive reaction will emerge someday, even without acknowledging the people who work hard for it. My remarks here are related to structural changes for group domination. In the context of the Timorese, there was a compli-

cated way backwards. This is not only caused by the colonization in the specific region but also by the same system of life that was occurring among the Timorese itself after the colonization. There is a structured habit to colonize each other, competing to gain more through an unhealthy system of domination.

For whatever reason pointed out, we have to look for a way to solve this problem that is rooted in a wrong claim from the beginning when such issues occurred. It will be greatly difficult to stop the behavior that has been growing within the people, especially within the heart of the Timorese in this common way of perception. Regarding this case, I could note that this way is based on an incorrect data collection, which occurred in the 1950s, when the expert F. J. Ormeling analyzed several data to write his book “The Timor Problem” (1957). He had heard lots of false information about specific places, e.g., information about Biboki told by the people from Insana and other Atoni neighbors. At that time, Insana was in a better situation where there were some highly educated Insana people, a neighboring sub-district, who were trusted as good informants about Timor.

To prevent ourselves from this phenomenon, we need to prepare skillful personnel to observe the people presenting their ancestors’ stories performed in a boringly rhyme of oral traditions and in various versions, without being trapped into the habit of favoring specific groups. Groups like these usually tend to be unrealistic and take sides because the groups fought once (and will fight again) against each other having an eye only to one’s own interest. In this respect, doing research, and most especially collecting stories and oral traditions, is the best choice to form a better approach in overcoming the society’s problems.

In the context of human life, its real meaning can be seen clearly when we long to be closer to every human relation within a large society. There is a power of living (*élan vital*) that always moves into the social institution and the religious life. This power has not been taken into consideration as it is, therefore, it causes many problems that bother people’s creativity. It is a learning process to understand the context of the people and, at the same time, to be attracted to the living values owned by the ordinary people and the society as a whole.

Learning about a society is not easy, because we always face limited methods and a limited scope of understanding. Therefore, openness, honesty, and precision in catching every event are very vital. Entering into the social institution, we should always guide our mind to respect the values and, at the same time, encourage people to respect and help

one another, and we should create peaceful communities everywhere we are.

In this case, my mindset has been filled with the new values belonging to the past in contrast to our post-modernism and to the current people’s point of view. I also tried my best to be in the sphere of the ancestor’s life, just like the ordinary people are living their daily lives. Moreover, I have tried to base my understanding under the shadow of the ancestors thought as the indigenous had for a long period of time.

### Some Main Points

In developing human values and based on an exact way out, there is a serious concern that must be addressed to the middle class of people, such as the young people who are dropped out from elementary schools, high schools, and university. I assume that these groups, on one hand, have abilities – as potential groups – and, on the other hand, can be seen as the ones challenged by modern times. It is because the government and its education department only pay attention to those who are in formal education or schools. They hardly ever pay a serious attention to handle the out-of-school youth groups. Education should guide people to be able to make findings, to transcend themselves, and it should not make people to be passive and to wait for help from above. Education should also guide every person to be more creative in building a relation with fellow human beings and the surroundings.

When collecting data, I gained the impression that our world today has been marked by deem and even lost sense of honest and sincere friendship. Honesty in relation to true friendship expression must be grounded in a transparent culture which essentially rooted in a specific tradition. Sincerity in relation to deep understanding in friendship must be really born from the pure heart without any enforcement and depression. Friendship, honesty, and sincerity are highly respected in the local society, and are always spread throughout ordinary people, when they are celebrating rituals in the traditional house. However, this values now vanish more and more into oblivion due to modernization influence and various effects, all of which seem not rooted or grounded on the reality of human life.

A Timorese folklorist, A. D. M. Parera, successfully wrote a book entitled “Sejarah pemerintahan raja-raja Timor” (The History of the Governmental System of the Timorese Rulers; [1971] 1994), out of which emerged a comprehensive history of the various Timorese kingdoms. Parera, who knew

several of the Timorese indigenous languages, described quite clearly the people who settled down on the island, namely, Helong, Atoni Meto (Dawan), Belu/Tetun, Bunak/Marae, and Kemak. Moreover, in the second part of this book he described ethnic groups outside Timor, such as the people of Sabu, Roti, Kisar, and Alor-Pantar. Parera tried to examine the relationship among the various Timorese groups, paying particular attention to compiling a history of each group. I am particularly interested in this work, as a basis for my critique of Schulte-Nordholt, who claimed that oral tradition (myths of origin) cannot be used in writing the history of field-work sites (1971: 23). According to Parera, most of the writers who wrote about Timor often used oral traditions that had been collected from the indigenous people (Parera 1994: 161).<sup>7</sup>

Father Lechovic, SVD, did a masterpiece recording the oral traditions for years during his pastoral work among the Timorese, and in this context he commended an article by a Protestant minister (Pieter Middelkoop) on *bonet* (a Timorese dancing with singing the rhymes), which was published in 1929. This text includes the following observation, “in dit ‘bonet’ flitsen zijn van de Timoreschen geest, die uit het binnenste der Atonis oplichten en daarom belangwekkend” (in this “bonet” [folkdance and folksong of the people of Atoni Pah Meto] the Timorese spirit shows up in flashes, which lights up from this innermost heart of the Atonis and therefore gains in importance).<sup>8</sup>

In short, not only do we need a good collaboration among people of the same level or religion but also among those of different religions and levels in a society to plan and do something meaningful for the common good, including the personal life. There is a need to foster collaboration on cross level and among religions for a more valuable life.

A plain and transparent friendship can be used as a bridge in building a useful network for future development. A productive cooperation grows up from the readiness to respect social realities, including ancestor’s inheritances and the culture. Some further concerns are listed as follows:

Firstly, work ethic must give new possibilities concerning a good management method and future-oriented perspectives. The potential and the con-

crete situation of the society, which is not exactly the same from one place to another, needs to be studied well in order not to be ranged on the same level with the present paradigm from the society. Here, we need someone who thinks holistically. In the meantime, we also need a thoroughly system of thinking that leads the ordinary people to new habits without forcing them to accept strange values. Work ethic can be seen within a simple and effective frame, such as allowing one’s self or the group’s choice to obey the administrative discipline (not to be understood by means of finishing the rules from a system of hard works, but only noted the activities done orderly using simple studies and easy to be understood). Here, we can describe it as a human service where all the activities are always inspired by a commitment of something great and valuable.

The second is the spiritual order or spiritual condition of the society. Generally, the quality of spiritual life is that of a heroic servant of embryonic state in every human work within the society. Without a good spiritual life, the service has neither spirit nor power. In other words, a strong spiritual life is the moving power of all dynamic work in the society. Therefore, in the same perspective, the presence and work of the anthropologist is a valuable hope for others.

Thirdly, the society needs a patron or model who gives inspiration or specific self-identification, in the sense that the words and actions have to be consistent. One of the social realities in the present society is the conflict of the difficulties of everyday life. It is exactly that the unappreciated condition always destroys the paradigm of the togetherness or unity within the society. Essentially, the conflict is at the core of the matter that blows the differences and oppositions within the society at large. This conflict also creates bad conditions for the present society, where nobody wants to accept the other or to consider others as they are, if there is no accepted guidance. The bias of this conflict also is seen in an unjust decision-making for a common problem, either in educational institutions or in other kinds of service within the society.

While the current situation is widely spread out to the little and simple people, often public services tend to be addressed only to the rich people and those of a high social level (upper class). The main point of this phenomenon is the scope of human acts that is only oriented to personal needs and limited to beneficial groups. In this point, what is needed, is a holistic view by societal agencies aiming to include the abilities owned by the whole society being served.

In relation to the previous idea, the uniqueness of the society need to be accommodated without losing and erasing the essence of the inheritances

7 The main reason to publish the new 1994 edition of Parera’s work was to highlight his notion of the benefit of both learning oral tradition and learning from oral tradition to trace people’s conception of life.

8 See also Neonbasu (2005: 14f.; 2011: 12). Father Lechovic, SVD, wrote prayer books in Uab Meto, a native language of west Timor, as well as a local songbook and translated the Bible from an English version into Uab Meto.

from one generation to another in a quite long time. The service tries to build the faith of what people have, and not to bring out something new. Personally, I assume that it is indispensable to implicate methods of approach that respect all inheritances owned by the people. This is a humanistic approach where the single method is being implicated by not discounting the social values. The people are invited not to discount the flow of life in the concrete situation where they live and move in a strong and exact spiritual frame.

At the end of this section, I specifically would like to refer to the reality and function of the traditional house. For Timorese this is the centre of human beings, individually and communal, which is seen as the centripetal strength for all the people who own such a traditional house. In each traditional house, all members can identify their genealogies, in which they are aware of having the same origin house (*oikogeni*).<sup>9</sup> From genealogy and *oikogeni*, everybody will know his/her origin of place called “topogeny,”<sup>10</sup> which can be traced in various oral traditions.<sup>11</sup>

One of my articles (2008) presents an articulation of genealogy based on topogeny as well as *oikogeni*. Beginning with the specific name of Belu (Timor) called Fehalaran, I went out to analyze several related place-names to trace the origins of local people’s sites. In this sense, topogeny is related to the notion of telling the long and complicated history of an area. For the sake of human beings, stories never put separately topogeny and a group of people’s activities of the domain.<sup>12</sup>

9 Regarding the terms topogeny, genealogy, and *oikogeni*, see for further discussion Philipus Tule SVD (2004). This book is the extension of Tule’s doctoral dissertation under the supervision of James J. Fox at the Australian National University of Canberra. This is a masterpiece of Keo culture, on which all the scholars can rely to learn more about Keo and Flores Island. I personally respect this academic work, for its content is really rich to overview – and criticize – the French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss regarding the “house-based society.” Tule has a brilliant argument to explain it in more detail with data recording from his own village, which opens a new perspective to a theory facing the current trend of people’s point of view. See also Molnar (2000).

10 Fox presents in an article (1997: 8f.) a clear explanation about “topogeny,” which is commonly used by the Austronesians in terms of structuring the social knowledge linking to a specific place.

11 In my doctoral dissertation (2005, 2011) I recorded several stories, in which the mentioned places can be identified as the origin places for tribes that had claimed such places to belong to them. In this regard, not only do people claim the places but also identify themselves as those who have networks – relationships – with others from the same domain.

12 See Neonbasu (2008). The aim of this article is just to propose to the readers the important role of Fehalaran of Belu

## Conclusion

Every traveling back to one’s local culture is a sincere step not only to know the context of human life, but above all, to know the essential presence or existence of the human itself. There are two basic structures considered as bases for human life, such as “to be” and “to have.” These two structures are carrying each other to give appreciation for human existence and human actions.

Traveling and entering into the life of the villagers gave a rich input to understand these two above-mentioned structures, although it was not easy to fully understand them by only relying upon the notes taken during the research. Many collected materials need to be reflected upon within the frame of various disciplines of study to arrive at the core of human’s life.

The quality of a society is often depending on how far a person makes efforts to understand the essence of these two structures. Besides, the decisive factor, which I think can help a lot, is applying an honest and sincere sphere to share experiences and works with people we meet. A single act is valuable for all involved and depends mostly from the ability to share with other people. Sharing here is not merely telling stories and communicating to others, but above all it is in appreciated and highly valued actions that can guide other people to a meaningful and fruitful change.

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