



The Truth in Relation A Lamaholot Understanding of Truth

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Abstract. – The article deals with the understanding and practices of the truth of the Lamaholot-speaking people in East-Flores, Indonesia. This traditional group of people does not have a theoretical understanding of truth. Analyzing sayings, social structure, and rituals of these people the author demonstrates that the truth as understood and practiced by the Lamaholot-speaking people is contextual. Truth is not absolute, neither relativistic. It depends on the context. Every person is expected to know what is right for him/her in a given situation and to act accordingly. Cultural sensitivity is a necessary condition to accept people's understanding and practice of truth. [*Indonesia, Flores, tradition, family, truth*]

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Introduction

The question of truth, of what is right or wrong, is present in all groups of people of all times. People can deal with it in sophisticated philosophical reflections or theological disputes. It can also be found in cultural practices, rites, and the wisdom of life of simple people. In all these, people ex-

press their understanding of truth, their efforts to do what is right, and their negotiations to deal with the violation of what is true. In certain cultures, the question of truth has been developed systematically as a separate intellectual endeavor, in others it is just lived out in daily life and expressed in sayings and deeds.

The Lamaholot-speaking people in the eastern part of the island Flores, Indonesia, also have their own understanding and practices of truth. However, there is no known study dedicated specifically to the question of truth of this group of people, except/before this study.¹ Over the decades there have been many studies conducted on culture and religion of the Lamaholot-speaking people. In 1932, Ernst Vatter published his book “Ata Kiwan. Unbekannte Bergvölker im tropischen Holland. Ein Reisebericht.” This diary of an anthropologist records many observations, which are useful for further research. Similar were the efforts of Paul Arndt in collecting myths, rites, and social practices of the Lamaholot people (1937, 1938, 1940, 1951, 2002, 2003 a, 2003 b). More profound and systematic works followed later by Indonesians as well as foreigners. To mention some of them: The publications of Karl Heinz-Kohl concentrate on the myth of creation (1990, 1998, 2002, 2009). R. H. Barnes has several publications on Kedang² and fishermen of Lamalera, in Lem-

¹ This is a revised version of Kleden (2018).

² Kedang is a different linguistic group on the island of Lembata.

bata (1986, 1996). Penelope Graham did studies on the social structure of the people in East Flores (1985, 1991). Gregorius Keraf (1978) and Y. I. Fernandez (1977, 1988) made a significant contribution to linguistic studies of Lamaholot. Yoseph Yapi Taum from the University of Sanata Dharma in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, researched and published on the linguistic characteristics of the myths of the Lamaholot people (1995, 1997). Another important study was done by Felysianus Sanga (2005) on the numbering system of the Lamaholot. Marianus Kleden from the Catholic University of Widya Mandira in Kupang, Indonesia, collected the sayings of the Lamaholot and analyzed their content concerning human rights (2008). In his article in *Anthropos* (2013), Polykarpus Ulin Agan describes the ritual around unusual death.

Although not dealing solely with the question of truth, in those studies mentioned above we can find sayings and practices that indicate people's understanding of the truth. In my own studies, I analyze the practices and sayings described in those studies as well as that what I – as a Lamaholot person – have heard and seen, concentrating mainly on the Lamaholot area of Ile Mandiri where I come from.³ By analyzing the practices and sayings, it will be demonstrated that truth is always a culturally specific, relative notion. At first, some brief information about the Lamaholot people will be given to then proceed with the understanding of truth among the Lamaholot people.

1 The Lamaholot-Speaking People in East Flores

Lamaholot is the name of the language spoken by the group of people living in the eastern part of the island Flores and the three small islands close by, as are Adonara, Solor, and Lembata. Besides, some villages of the neighboring islands of Pantar and Alor are also belonging to the Lamaholot-speaking people.⁴ There are differences within the Lamaholot people, but there are also many “unifying cultural and historical features of the Lamaholot language area” (Barnes 1996: 3). The Lamaholot group is not the only linguistic group residing in this region. There are two other groups: the Melayu people predominantly in Larantuka, and

the Kedang people in the eastern part of the island of Lembata (Barnes 1996: 3). The name Lamaholot is composed of two words: *lama* and *holot*. *Lama* is often found at the beginning of the name of a village: Lama-Bunga (Lambunga), Lama-Walang, Lama-Bayu. *Lama* is also part of clan names: Lama Kleden (the Kleden-clan), Lama Koten (the clan of Koten). Sometimes, “Lama” is contracted to “Le” or “Ren”; therefore, we find Le-Betan (Lama Betan: clan of Betan) or Ren-Tukan (Lama Tukan: the Tukan clan). Thus, *lama* refers to the place (village) and the group of people. The word *holot* has two meanings. The first, which is promoted by most of the scholars, is sorghum. According to this reading, Lamaholot implies the region or the people of sorghum (Sanga 2005: 91). The second interpretation sees the word *holot* as coming from *holo*, which means to join two ends, or to connect, or being connected (M. Kleden 2008: 90). Hence, Lamaholot means “a region where its people and cultures are connected one with another or where smaller regional areas, clans, and communities are connected with one another because they share the same language, culture and tradition” (Kroon 2016: 3 f.). I follow the second interpretation for two reasons. First, as pointed out by Kroon, sorghum is rather complementary, not the main agricultural crop in this area. Furthermore, the Lamaholot word for sorghum is *wataholo* (sorghum crop) and not just *holo* (Kroon 2016: 3 f.). Secondly, as described by Barnes (1996: 3), there are different groups among the Lamaholot-speaking people, and yet they are connected and joined together. The name Lamaholot expresses the unity and connectedness of these groups despite all the differences.

To understand better its concept of truth, it is essential to have an idea of some cultural characteristics of Lamaholot-speaking people, which are common for all groups. The first one is their parentalistic image of the Divine. Like other groups of the small Sunda Islands, the Lamaholot people believe in a God who is father-mother and not father *and* mother as two different, separate gods, but the one God: Ama Lera Wulan – Ema Nini Tana Ékan (Father Sun and Moon – Mother World and Earth; see Arndt 1951: 1–32; 2003 a: 1–76). The female or mother dimension of the Divine is represented by the earth or world; and the male or father dimension by sun and moon. There is no way to choose to adore the one and neglect the other, because the two dimensions speak about the same God. Furthermore, this system of belief is pantheistic, meaning the Divine is the One who is present in and penetrating everything. The Di-

³ I am grateful for the information provided by Bernardus Kudi Balun, Densy Kleden, and Kas Koten in interviews. These three informants are from Waibalun.

⁴ P. B. Kleden (2015, 2010); Graham (1985: 31); see also M. Kleden (2008: 85–144).

vine is in nature, in the ancestors, and the social structure of the community. The Divine is not an object of adoration that is separated from daily life but is a power that is manifest in everything. Therefore, the whole world is sacred.

The second one is the kinship structure. People in a traditional village or *lewo tana* are divided into *suku* or clans. The number of the clans can vary from village to village. In the village of Waibalun, for example, there are 18 clans.⁵ Because the Lamaholot follow the patrilineal system, the name of the clan is inherited from the father. With marriage, a girl belongs to the clan of her husband, yet she keeps the name of her original clan. The bond of the families of the same clan is very strong because the clan is involved and responsible in all matters of the families. The clan is the first group who feels obliged to step in when a family is facing troubles. Marriages, deaths, opening a new field, or harvesting are occasions one cannot do without involving the clan. The clans are organized into more prominent groups called *klé* or *klé kématek*. Clans of the same *klé* are considered as relatives with certain rights and responsibilities. In a village, there are three *klé*. In dealing with matters related to *adat* (the tradition of marriages, deaths, opening a new field, or harvesting), clans of the same *klé* help each other. Regarding this, we note that the social organization is characterized by subsidiarity. And with this, harmony is guaranteed.

The third one is power relationship. The most powerful group in the village community is the group of the *ata bélén*, the landowners. In Waibalun, the clan of the landowners is the clan Balun, which is called “Raja Tuan” (Our Lordships).⁶ In governing the village, this clan is assisted by *ata kébélen*, people entrusted with special responsibilities. Among the Lamaholot-speaking groups, there are four main clans with special roles during rituals and in the governance of the village. The first clan is Kotén. In the ritual, the role of the representative of this clan is described as *péhé tilu – haga’ tara*, meaning: holding the ears – grasping the horns.⁷ He is responsible for the head of the animal to be sacrificed in the ritual. This clan bears responsibility to care for the internal affairs of the village. The second clan is called

Kélén. The word *kélén* has two meanings: the heaven and the tail of the animal. In the ritual, members of the clan hold the tail of the animal, while in social events they represent the village in dealing with other villages. They lead a war or guarantee peace. Marang or Maran is the name of the third clan. *Marang* is the word for prayer. Their role in the ritual is to lead the *maran-muke* or the prayers and to calm down the sacrificial animal. The fourth clan is named Hurit or Hurint, which means sword. The role of the members of this clan in ritual is to slaughter the sacrificial animal. In the governance of the village, the two last clans serve as advisors for the clans Kotén and Kélén. This distribution of roles demonstrates that no group can claim the whole rights and responsibilities for itself (Suban 2005: 11; Kohl 2002: 138 f.).

The fourth one is the norm concerning marriage. As mentioned above, marriage in Lamaholot is arranged by the clans and *klé kématek*. The arrangement is mainly about the dowry. In this part of the island, dowry is paid in the form of ivory; its number and size depend on the negotiation between the families of the bride and bridegroom (Vatter 1932: 80 f.). The regulations of marriage determine who can marry whom and who has to pay a dowry to which family. There are three *klé kématek* in the village, and marriage is arranged between them. Let us call the three *klé kématek*: A, B, and C. The men from group A can only marry women from group B, the men from group B marry women from group C, and the men from group C marry only women from group A. If a man from outside the village community wants to marry a girl, he first must be accepted by a clan from the group, which is entitled to take a woman from the group of the girl. The system is called *likat telo*, a terminology, which refers to the traditional stove with three stones. As the three stones guarantee balance, this also is done by the three *klé kématek* for the society. All the three groups are intensively interconnected in this triangle; therefore, caution and wisdom are required when negotiating about the dowry (Graham 1985: 27–61). The group that gives wives is called “Belaké,” or “Ama laké,” and the group that takes wives is named “Opu laké.” Because of the important position of the family that gives wives or “Belaké,” with this system of *likat telo*, every group gets its turn to be the “Belaké.” Even a landlord cannot exaggerate in showing his power, because he is “Opu laké” to the family from where his wife comes from.

5 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

6 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

7 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

The fifth one is about the integration of strangers. The main mythology of the people around the mount of Ile Mandiri demonstrates a model of integrating strangers into the local community. The main figure in the myth is Pati Golo Arakian, coming from Timor or Java and who is married to Wato Wélé, a woman borne by the mountain (Taum 1995: 18–32; 1997: 39–35). With this, foreigners are integrated into the local community. The mythological integration finds its political form in the Kingdom of Larantuka. From the four main clans, as mentioned above, three are given to the locals: Kotén, Hurit, and Maran. They are viewed as *ilé jadi* or “borne by the mountain.” The role of the clan Kélén is assigned to the newcomers of the clan Blantran de Rosari.⁸ Harmony is guaranteed as the highest principle of the community.

The sixth one is mutual help. The people of Lamaholot feel a strong bond to their village, which leads them to call it “Ina lewo tana” (mother village community), while the people are *kréak* or *ana lewo tana* (children of the village community; see Keda n. d.: 24). As children of the mother Lewo Tana, they are obliged to help each other in meeting their needs and accomplishing their responsibilities towards the village and the *Divine*: Ama Lera Wulan – Ema Nini Tana Ékan.

The terminology used for this mutual help is *gemohing*. People speak of *ola gelekat – gemohé gewayan*, which means: working to serve, functioning to assist.⁹ This solidarity is practiced when people open a new field as well as when they celebrate a feast. For a wedding or a celebration in honor of a dead person, every family will contribute according to the grade of the relationship. This contribution is named *pohé tali*, addition.¹⁰ What the others bring is meant to add to that what the host family has prepared. All contributions will be noted by the host family, because when another family has something to celebrate, the former host family has the moral obligation to make its contribution similar to that what they have received by that family.

2 Concept and Practice of Truth

Truth is always embodied and does not exist as something independently. We will see the different forms of the truth, which show that truth is related to different aspects of life.

2.1 Truth as Faithfulness to (His-)Story

The Lamaholot-speaking people have an oral tradition: Everything is orally transmitted. History is learned and told in the form of stories. Telling a story is not a matter of the creativity of a person but of the interest of the whole society (Kohl 1998: 71 f.). The cohesion of the community depends very much on the truth shared in a story. Storytelling becomes part of the ritual. In such a situation, faithfulness to the story and history is of great importance. Truth is what is faithful to the story and history.

We can see the importance of this truth in the following two examples. The first example is *tutu maring asa-usu*, i. e., telling the story of genealogy (Taum 1995: 18). The form used is called *koda kenalan* or *opak*, a literary form with clear norms on rhyme and rhythm of the words. The story has to be told in the right form with the right content, because any deviance would have its consequence for the storyteller: *mata menuré* (death in young age) or *mata baoba* (death in an unnatural way – see Taum 1995: 18). On the other hand, faithfulness in narrating the genealogy is a blessing for the whole society (*ike kwa'at*).¹¹

However, the reality shows that there are deviances in the myths. About the same ancient event there can be more than one version and sometimes the versions contradict each other. The interest and the intention of the storyteller cannot be neglected. The version of Pati Golo Arakian mentioned above clearly shows the interest of integrating foreigners into the society. Another version of the same genealogy concentrates only on the local population with a quite negative view to foreigners.¹² Important is the fact that these different versions can co-exist without much problem. This is because the particular version is narrated to

8 See Fernandez (2005: 5); and based on the name, it is obvious that they are of Portuguese descent.

9 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

10 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

11 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

12 Y. Yapi Taum gives the example of the marriage of Lia Nurat, the brother of Wato Wele, with Uto Watak Teluma Burak from the Sikka region (1995: 24). She is a stranger who destroys the life of Lia Nurat and with him the life of the local people. Karl-Heinz Kohl points out how some myths of creation are influenced by the Jewish-Christian version of creation as is told in the Bible (1990:79).

the group that owns it. Where the population consists predominantly of locals, the version that gives preference to them is told, while in the context of a mixed population the version promoting a peaceful co-existence has the preference.

The second example of truth as a faithfulness to the story and history comes from the ritual around death. When a man dies, among the first things the bereaved family needs to do is to inform his mother's family officially. In case of the death of a woman, the family of her eldest brother is to be informed. This is important, because the official announcement of the death has to be made in the name of two elderly couples, representing the two clans. Beside this intention of getting the name of the elders, the visit to the family of the mother of the dead man or the brother of the dead woman is to start the process of talking about the second dowry (Kohl 1998:141–151). The first dowry, which is given at the wedding, is for the mother and, therefore, it is called *ae susu ma* (for the breast of the mother). The second dowry is meant for the clan or even the *kle kemalek*.¹³ The A *kle* has to pay the second dowry to the B *kle*, the B to the C, and the C to the A. When a man from a clan that belongs to the A *kle* dies, the family needs to check who from the B group still needs to pay dowry to the group C, and who from the C group is still in debt with the A group. If they could find those in debt, a circle is declared as closed, meaning they do not need to pay a real dowry. When the circle is not closed, because one of the chains is missing, the bereaved family needs to prepare ivory on the third day after the funeral while a celebration is conducted. In the morning before the celebration, a chicken will be offered as a sign that the case is closed. During the celebration in the evening, a representative of the wife-giving clan/*kle* will inform the whole village solemnly how the concerned families have found a way to close the obligation of bringing the second dowry. When later the person from group B dies, the families just repeat what is already negotiated and agreed upon on the occasion of the death of that person from group A. The same happens when a person from the C group dies. Interesting is that all these negotiations and agreements are kept in the memory of the people. There is no written document. Therefore, it is a big responsibility of all families to be faithful to the ways in which they have resolved the cases in the past. Truth is expressed in faithfulness to the story and history.

13 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

The economic and social reputation of the families is at stake.

The reference to the truth is the history that is kept in the memory of the people and transmitted in stories. Once something has become a common story for the whole community, it has value as truth, even though it might not have happened as it is told in the story.

2.2 Truth as Right Positioning

Truth is not only about propositions, the adequacy of what is said/told with regard to reality: the story or history. It is also about the position one takes in the limited freedom given to a person. The Lamaholot-speaking people do not have fully arranged marriages, but, as mentioned above, there are regulations from which group one can take a husband or wife. The *kle* from which one can take a wife is called *muro' wana*: the proper right side (Kohl 1998: 148 f.). It is expected that young men and women follow the norms in making their choice of whom they are going to marry. This is important because deviance from the common regulation would cost chaos in settling the question of the second dowry.

Truth as the right position is shown in the traditional dances called *dolo'* and *sole' oha'*.¹⁴ On special occasions, like on the feast of harvest or the wedding of sons and daughters of important families, the dances are performed, normally in the evening. These celebrations and the following dances were in the past the moments for the young people to express their love. The dances are started by the girls. When a young man wants to join, he has to make sure that the girl on his right side is a girl he can marry. The girl has to be his *muro' wana*.

Positioning oneself is very important among the Lamaholot-speaking people. The *belake'* (the brothers of the mother) are always on the right side of their *opu*. A wife can never go before her husband; children are always behind their parents.¹⁵ This right positioning is not only about physical placement but also in expressing one's opinions. *Vis-à-vis my belake'*, I must always show my respect. Even if I have something against the family of my mother's brother, I have to be silent, or, if I want to express it, I need to find a gentle way so that he would not be publicly shamed. If

14 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

15 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

his feelings are hurt, it might cause him to cut off the relationship with my family, and this, in turn, is an offense against my mother. The worst is when my uncle and his clan decide not to participate in any of my family's celebrations. My highest social obligation is honoring the family of my mother's brother, even to the extent of not making a public statement against him. The *belaké* are considered as *kayo puken*, *wai matan* (the roots of the tree, the spring of the river).¹⁶

In our modern context where power is distributed through a democratic procedure and economic richness determines more and more who influences society, there are some people who try to translate the traditional frame into the new context. In this case, they find it important to rightly position themselves before those who have power, political or economic. If you know that a certain person has a say in determining your situation, you need to think twice before making any criticism about him in public. An example: In 2003, a diocesan priest in Larantuka, Flores, was brought to the court for criticizing the regent publicly. With many priests and religious, a layperson participated in a rally supporting the priest, because they know that as a citizen the accused priest has the right to criticize the public authorities. However, soon after, the regent of the district transferred the wife of that layperson, a nurse, from the capital of the district to a remote place on another island. When I started to publish some articles in the local newspaper defending the priest, my sisters, who were government officials, reminded me of the possible consequence for them if I would continue taking a position in favor of the priest and against the politician. In the end, their concern did not come true.

Another example concerns the political choice in the time of elections. Quite often my relatives shared with me their choice during the elections of the local parliament members. Normally there is more than one candidate from the village or neighboring villages. In such cases, the whole family sits together and discusses how to make their choice. And usually, the family divides the votes in such a way that preference is not only given to the quality of the candidates but the family relationship is also taken into consideration. If a candidate is from the group of the *belaké*, then he/she will be given priority over any others.

Truth depends on the position one has in society and his/her relationship with others. Respect for

people of higher rank in the social structure as well as in the political and economic system determines whether truth is spoken and revealed or not. It does not have an absolute value.

2.3 Truth as a Revelation to Society

Telling the truth or doing it is not primarily for the sake of the person but for society. It is not about the satisfaction or the calmness of the conscience of the person after revealing the truth, but about the functioning of the whole society, the harmonious relationship between families, clans, and *klé*. It is that people do not have any interest or commitment to tell or do what is true, but higher value and more significant importance are given to social harmony and peace. Socially appreciated is not the person who stands firmly and fights courageously for the truth but the one who promotes intact relationships and strengthens the cohesiveness of society, even to the extent of keeping silence about an injustice done by others. A person who likes to fight is called *gening alant* and is not liked by people because he only makes noise (*wengi*) in the village.¹⁷

What counts is what affects society – a mistake or even a crime will not be acknowledged freely by the offender until it is “revealed” to society. As long as the offense is not known by the larger society, it remains a secret of the person or among the small circle of family members. People feel guilty, but this is not strong enough to uncover their misbehavior.

There are four forms of revealing the truth. The first is when the family of the victim decides to make it known. This is done not in a peaceful way but with *hudok*, meaning a verbal attack to the offender and his/her family. They will shout with loud voice dirty words in front of the house of the offender. With this, the whole village comes to know about the accusation. If the alleged offender or his/her family responds, there will be a genuinely engaging verbal fight. After this, a legal process (*perkara*) starts in a calmer atmosphere to bring the two parties together.¹⁸

The second way is through the *elang* bird (a kind of eagle). This revelation in particular is in cases of extramarital pregnancy. Although a pregnant girl is trying to hide her pregnancy, if the *elang* shouts above her house repeatedly, the

17 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

18 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

16 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

whole village will believe that she is pregnant.¹⁹ She might keep secret the man who has impregnated her, but later when she gives birth, she will reveal his name as it is believed that by doing this the process of birth goes without many difficulties.

The third way of revelation is by means of an oath. When two families are in conflict and each is claiming to possess the truth, the last option to come to the truth is to swear *sumpah adat* (traditional oath) in front of the elders of the village and the whole *lewo tana*. An animal will be sacrificed. Both parties will drink from the blood and swear in the name of Ama Lera Wulan – Ema Nini Tana Ékan and all their ancestors that they are right and are ready to bear the consequence if their claims are not true. The statement expressed in the swearing can be like this:

Dopa ilé rae mai, wawé gang moé, ula dorang moé, lua watan lau mai, wadza déka moé, kobu dorang, todok di matadzo, walét di matadzo, héli lau lali haka guté pilé moé, apu angi teka moé 1951: 2).

“Going to the mountain, a boar will attack you, the snake will swallow you. You go down to the sea, the shark will gulp you; the alligator will bite you. Stumbling you will die, tripping you will perish. The power from right and left will finish life, the dewfall and wind will blow you.”

The fourth one is by asking a *mola* (shaman). To find the truth whether a person, who is being accused of practicing black magic and causing the sickness or even death of another person, is guilty or not, a *mola* is asked to perform a ritual. In some places, the *mola* uses the seeds of sorghum, which he puts into boiling water. The accused person has to take out the seeds. If his fingers burn, it is proven that the allegation is true. If not, the search for the truth must continue. In another place, the *mola* works with an egg. After mentioning the name of the accused, the *mola* breaks the egg and puts the yellow part in his hand. He then pours water on the surface of the egg while saying that if the yellow part will break into pieces, the allegation is true, if not, it is false.²⁰

Once the truth is revealed, the negotiation to settle the case starts. Unless it is murder, the settling of the case does not create much noise. The concerned families, under the guidance of the elders of the village bargain about the *denda* (fine)

which should be paid by the offender. The fine is not primarily for the sake of economic compensation for the damage done, but it is a matter of reparation of the image of the victim and the re-establishment of relationship. With the payment of the *denda* the case is considered closed.²¹ No further mentioning about it is allowed to be made in public. Truth has its effect when it becomes known to the village community. Therefore, people tend to keep silent about it until it is revealed by one or another way. Once it is revealed, people would say that they had known it already long before.

2.4 Truth as Unity

The truth is not partial; it is the wholeness and serves the unity. There are different words in the language of the Lamaholot to describe the truth. One of them is related to wholeness: *teka*. Its meaning is “to meet the core of something.” When one throws a stone and it meets its object, people will say *teka*.²² A true proposition is a statement that meets the core of the reality. A true behavior meets the essential of the social norms. The truth, therefore, is not evaluated independently and separately from the wholeness of the social norms. This relation is more clearly expressed when we see the reaction of the people to a true proposition or behavior. They would say *pada’ jaha, péé kewé*, meaning “it fits very well, that is what we are looking for.”²³ People can identify themselves with a true proposition or behavior, because it does not cause separation and division but instead brings them to unity.

For the Lamaholot-speaking people, the unity of the community is considered as one of the highest values to promote. Very often we hear this phrase in Lamaholot: *Puin taan uin to’u, gahan ta’an kenahan éhan* (Suban 2005: 12), meaning: “Let’s bind us together, let’s make us one ligament.” This is an encouragement to contribute to the unity, to the inseparable and undissolvable unity of the village community. A similar statement is: *Pai taan uin tou, guhan taan éhan tou or guhan taan kahan olon* (M. Kleden 2008: 118), which means: “Come, let’s make us a knot; bind us together in a bunch.” There can be different opinions on an issue, which is important for the village community,

19 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

20 (1951: 131–133). Polykarpus Ulin Agan (2013) describes a long procedure in finding the committed sins of the past of a clan or family.

21 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

22 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

23 Bernardus Kudi Balun, interview, May 1, 2010, in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

but now it is time to bring them all together to a common understanding and agreement. The common decision is compared to a bunch of wild grass, which is bound in a single bunch and is used to cover the roof of traditional houses. When the grass comes apart, and the bunch becomes loose, it can no longer protect the roof from the sun and the rain. The agreement of the clan, the *klé*, or the village community is the fundament for every member to refer to his/her proposition and behavior.

The agreement of the community has a religious character. It is the Divine himself who is present in the community and guides it towards a decision: *Lera Wulan gikat téti lodo hau, Tana Ékan tama lali géré haka. Ta'an one to'u, kirin ekan. Puin ta'an uin tou, gahan ta'an kenahan éhan* (Keda n. d.a: 34 f.), meaning: "The heaven comes from above, the earth arises from below; the two become one heart, one word, one bunch, inseparable, insoluble." Because the decision has a divine character, it requires everyone in the village community to stay firm on whatever has been decided as a community. Going away from this decision for whatsoever reason is a betrayal. The truth, therefore, is measured in the compliance to what has been deliberated and agreed upon by the community. If the village community decided a certain person has to bear the responsibility for the sake of whole community for the burning of the houses in the neighboring village, in case of an investigation of the police, all are obliged to say his name before the police, even though he might not be the real culprit. They are not fearful to do this, because the most sacred sanction is not what the legal authority can do but what the village community decides. Whatever you say has to strengthen the bond of the community: *Puken one naen puin raan uin ehan, tutu koda nimun matink naen gahan raan kahan olon marin kirin* (M. Kleden 2008: 121).²⁴

The understanding of truth as unity is also clear when we see the practice of settling a dispute between families or clans in a village community. In Adonara, there is still being practiced a process called *mela saré* or *tapan holo* (Medan 2012). If there is a conflict or court case between two families or clans, the people prefer to settle the case in their traditional way, or having the traditional way in parallel to the legal court. Traditionally, the elders of the village community will deliberate the

case and settle it with a certain fine to the party that has been found guilty. The family of the offender has to do *nedhan déi* or *paté hélo élé kirin*, i. e., bring the amercement or pay the compensation. The fine depends on the accusations, normally an ivory or *sarung* (woven cloth) in the case of adultery or a pig or goat for defamation or occupying wrongly a piece of land. With this compensation, the case is settled, and the process is called *mela saré* because it brings back the *mela saré*, peace and reconciliation, or *tapan holo*, the process that restores the conflict and puts the relationship in the right condition. The unity and harmony of the village community are recovered (Sanga 2005: 250).

It is believed that faithfulness to the common agreement will bring blessings to the whole community: *Puken doré ait hama teniban, nimun temata hémo rupan uji* (M. Kleden 2008: 119) which means: "Because you follow the rules you will get the reward, since you obey the requirement you will receive the recompense." The rule of the community is not arbitrary and there is a clear orientation. The community does not punish anyone without reason: *Puken ait nalan hala, open hukum tao namé, nibun temata nédin kuran, open pulu nate kaé* (M. Kleden 2008: 119), meaning: "Punishment will not be given to us when we handle matters according to the norms, torture will not run after us when we behave in compliance with the regulations."

It is not a virtue only to look for one's own safety. Solidarity, considering the consequence of a deed to the others, is part of the philosophy of the Lamaholot-speaking people. The Lamaholot children are brought up with the advice: *Lage aé', niku kola* (When you move forward, also look at the back).²⁵ Success in life does not consist in how far one can bring himself, but how he moves together with all the others. This has also consequences for the understanding of truth. Telling the truth for the sake of truth is not seen as something ethical, whereas it is ethical when people take into consideration the advantage and disadvantage for the whole community before telling or revealing the truth.

Because it is the responsibility of everyone to safeguard the good name of the family, clan, or village community, it is more acceptable if a person keeps silence about the truth, because revealing it would bring damage to the fame of the family or the clan. It is not only a person who is

24 "To protect the interest of the society, people need to be brought to unity; in order to bring them to a common understanding people need to talk together."

25 Densy Kleden and Kas Koten, interview, February 2, 2017, Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

shamed because of a crime or an offense against others but also the whole family or clan. Therefore, in order not to lose face for the group, they tend not to reveal the truth.

The understanding of the truth as unity has special consequences for those in the leadership position. They must deliberate with the community to come to an agreement in facing a difficult situation or in dealing with malicious neighbors. Their first task is to gather all the members to discuss and come to a common understanding, and then take a decision for the whole community: *Pupu ribu, puin ratu, pupu naan getan, puin naa golé. Puin taan uin éhan, gahan taan kahan olon. Péhén pegéng, gurun gawak, boté baan*²⁶ (“Gather thousands, unite hundreds; gather all parts, unite all elements. Bind all to a single knot, bundle them together to one tie. Hold them, embrace them, and carry them”). On this decision, all should hold. As the guarantee for the unity of the community, the leaders have to protect the members. Their role here is compared to a hen that guards its chicks, and a male bird that defends the young birds: *Boté téti haak, tedun lali léin, prekun mala manuk ina, prama nopén kolon roné*²⁷ (“Carry them on the shoulders, protect them with the feet. Guard them like a hen guards its chicks; defend them like a mother bird defends the young ones”). This responsibility is so important even at the cost of not revealing the truth.

2.5 Truth as Rectitude

Practicing the truth is compared to walking a straight way. It is not in the sense of telling the truth by being too verbose. It is about living a life according to the will of the Divine and the norms of the community; it is about not being crooked. A truthful person goes a straight way, does not make many complications and detours: *nae pana di mopa-mopa*.²⁸ On the occasion of the inauguration to a certain position, the people wish: *Pana maan mopa-mopa, gawé maan saré-saré*²⁹ (“Go always in rectitude, cross always cautiously”). This means, your behavior shall always be by the norms. You shall not forget the customs nor neglect the statutes. You commit yourself firmly to

the tradition as you look straight to the mountains or as you keep your eyes on the sea: *Akén gelupa nopé tenoa raé ilé, akén kehuli nopén ida lau béan*³⁰ (“Do not forget to look towards the mountains, always remember to keep your eyes on the sea”).

The norms of the Divine are called *Koda*, the Word, or, in its full formulation: *Koda pulo kéhirin léma*, meaning: “Ten words, five phrases.” *Koda* contains commandments and prohibitions that need to be followed to guarantee harmony in society. *Koda* gives the orientation to live as an individual, to keep the village in peace, to strengthen the bond of the family. Who listens and holds on the *Koda*, will wander in security and safety, nothing will disturb him: *Pana aké tala raran saka matan, gawé aké tala nékin doni jaén. Pile mala uli élan, tada mala raran laén. Temodok di sama todok hala, béwalet di sama walét kurang*³¹ (“He will not get lost and stumble. He will find the right place, he will discover the correct way”).

A person is trustworthy if he/she speaks the truth as decided by the family, clan, or village community – *Koda mopa kirin murén, tulan gahin mopamu* (“honest words, truthful expressions, crystal clear directions”). Such a person will find success in life. *Pukén koda marin kirin, pukén koda mopamu. Marin kirin murén wana, éhin diké wain saré. Tobo geleté muko puken, paé geluor wai matan*³² (“Because his words are true and his sayings are correct, he will harvest abundantly and slice plentifully the palm tree, he will enjoy sitting in the freshness of the banana tree and drink fresh water from the spring”). On the other hand, a liar will suffer the consequence of his behavior. *Koda beopén opén, kirin semalin salin. Sisa tuén kuto balik, tobo mela diké hala. Paé maé saré kuran, pelaté apé gerara rera*³³ (“His words are lies, his saying deceits. He will be cursed, cannot sit quietly. He will not recover from his illness; he will feel the heat of the sun”).

26 Densy Kleden and Kas Koten, interview, February 2, 2017, Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

27 Densy Kleden and Kas Koten, interview, February 2, 2017, Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

28 Densy Kleden and Kas Koten, interview, February 2, 2017, Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

29 Densy Kleden and Kas Koten, interview, February 2, 2017, Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

30 Densy Kleden and Kas Koten, interview, February 2, 2017, Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

31 Densy Kleden and Kas Koten, interview, February 2, 2017, Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

32 Densy Kleden and Kas Koten, interview, February 2, 2017, Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

33 Densy Kleden and Kas Koten, interview, February 2, 2017, Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores.

3 The Value and Limitations of Truth in Relation

From the explanation above, it has been obvious that truth is always in relation to something/someone. In fact, the Western-Greek tradition also defines the truth as relation: *adequatio intellectus et rei* – the adequacy of the intellect and things. If there is no adequacy, there must be something wrong on one part of the relation. In the culture of the Lamaholot, truth is the adequate relation between a proposition or behavior with the Divine, creation, the village community, and the self. The truth is not absolute; it has its value in its relation to other cultural values.

However, how to react and what to do when such an understanding of truth conflicts with other important values, like justice? Is it acceptable to keep silence, not to reveal the truth about a crime committed by a person of higher rank in society against a poor family? Should I let the practice of corruption of government officials continue without any criticism, just because bringing it to the light would mean damaging the good name of my friends or bring difficulties to my relatives who are working with the government? Can we tolerate the violence against women and children in the family, because voicing it might bring trouble to the husband and his family? These and similar questions are raised and faced by those who consider other values as central for the life of society.

For me, the relative understanding and practice of truth comes to a crucial point when for the poor and the weak the price is unjustly high. In traditional societies, this was not often the case because the social equilibrium was guaranteed by mutual responsibility of the families and clans, and the abuse of power was controlled by the practice of meetings and negotiations. In the modern context, when social control is weakening and the power center has shifted from the chief of clans and village to democratically elected leaders, such an understanding of truth has lost its meaning. Continuing practicing it would lead to cases of injustice and big crimes being silenced. Catholic missionaries see these situations as a challenge for evangelization. Christians are called to stand for the truth and to fight against injustice. Jesus says that the truth will set people free (John 8: 32); he also reminds us that what counts for salvation at the end of the day is the work of compassion and justice (Matt. 25: 1–46). One way to do this is education, both formal and informal. We need to point out who are the victims of such an understanding and practice of truth. Who are those

who will continue to suffer if we have no courage to challenge it? This will take a long effort, but not without fruitful benefits.

Conclusion

I have presented the concept and practice of truth of the Lamaholot-speaking people in the most eastern part of Flores. It is obvious that there is no clear-cut definition of truth, which fits all situations. However, it is not relativism and does not allow arbitrariness. Every person is expected to know what is true for him/her in a given situation and to act accordingly. At the same time, it requires a good insider's view to make a judgement about the truth and the truthfulness of the person, his/her statement, or behavior. Cultural sensitivity is a necessary condition to accept people's understanding and practice of truth. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the last part of the article, when such an understanding of truth conflicts with other important values, a decision has to be made. This relativization of truth for the sake of other, more important values is still in line with the understanding of truth in a context.

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