

EPITHETS AND EPITOMES:
MANAGEMENT AND LOSS OF NARRATIVE KNOWLEDGE
IN SOUTHWEST MALUKU (EAST-INDONESIA)¹

Aone van Engelenhoven

*Dep. Languages & Cultures SE Asia & Oceania
Leiden University
BOX 9515 2300 RA Leiden, Netherlands
E-mail: engelenhoven@rullet.leidenuniv.nl*

Abstract

The major vehicle for the transmission of cultural knowledge in SW Maluku used to be storytelling. Names and songs are the coordinates with which the audience evaluates the narrations and determines their truth value. After an ethnographic introduction, the function of names and songs in narratives is elaborated, exemplified by the ritual names of Leti Island and its main cultural hero. After discussing its management, it will be argued, that the mystification of storytelling inevitably results in the irreversible loss of narrative knowledge in SW Maluku and among its migrant community in the Netherlands.

Key words: storytelling, onomastics, names, songs, knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Geographical and ethnographic background

The extreme southwest of the Indonesian province Maluku features fifteen islands, which in maps dating before the Independence of the Republic were labeled as the *Zuidwester eilanden* ('Southwestern Islands'). In colonial times there was one central administration for the entire region, initially placed in Serwaru (Leti), but later relocated in Wonreli (Kisar).² In the present time the islands have been regrouped into three independent subdistricts: the Babar Islands in the East (including Luang and Sermata), Leti, Moa and Lakor in the middle and the Southernmost Islands in the West (encompassing Kisar, Wetar, Roma and Damar).³ In local folklore too, most of the islands are combined into one economical network called 'The Guided Islands and Conducted Lands'⁴.

¹Presented as a poster at the International Convention of Asian Scholars, Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands, 25-28 June 1998. I have benefited from the discussions of many people of whom I want to mention here Mr. G. Letsoin El Ew (Kei), Mr. Ch. Katipana (Kisar), Mr. S. Pormes (Serua). Special thanks to Cristian Suteanu and Jaap Timmer for their editorial advise and to Toos van Dijk for her information on the *yadmu* of Luhuleli. SW Maluku is located off the tip of East-Timor in the Regency of *Maluku Tenggara* (Southeast Maluku).

²Cf. map 28 in the *Atlas van tropisch Nederland*.

³In daily conversation they are indicated by the names of their respective administrative centres: Tapa (Babar), Serwaru (Leti) and Wonreli (Kisar).

⁴*Nohpaikra - Raipiatatra* in the Sung Language (Van Engelenhoven in press_a). Dai, Dawlor and Dawra east of Babar, and Wetar and Damar are generally considered not to be part of the network.

In anthropological perspective the inner islands of this network are strikingly uniform. Tradition distinguishes two groups of inhabitants: 'landowners' - the original population - and 'boat-owners' - migrant clans from either Timor, Kei or Luang. The latter inducted the so-called Luang 'Umbilical Cord' or way-of-life on the islands. Local folklore considers the alliance of 'The Guided Islands and Conducted Lands' as the main product of the Luang 'Umbilical Cord'. Other important cultural features in the region that are generally identified as its exponents are the organization of the clan into four semi-independent lines of descent (called 'houses', De Jonge and Van Dijk 1995:46) and the special vernacular for sung poetry (Van Engelenhoven in press_a).

It can safely be stated that Southwest Maluku remained unexplored for a relatively long period, due to its geographical remoteness and supposed economical unattractiveness.⁵ Before the arrival of European traders in the 17th Century, the Banda islands in Central Maluku had developed as a center of spice trade. The routes to these islands ran mainly along the north and east coasts of Borneo, passed Ambon. an alternative route went along Timor Island, west of Wetar. The little foreign influence found in Southwest Malukan culture, for example the barter of Indian cloth (Van Dijk & De Jonge 1991), most probably reached the Babar archipelago via Banda. The lack of any economical profit prevented the establishment of an east-to-west route from Kei to Timor passing the islands of Southwest Maluku. In the second half of the 17th century the Dutch East-Indies Trading Company (VOC) managed to set up an agency on most of the islands. Although the Christian faith usually followed in the trail of the Company, it took until the first half of the present century before the Malukan Protestant Church managed to achieve a fixed position in Southwest Malukan society.⁶

1.2 Languages and speech styles

Except for the Non-Austronesian Oirata (Kisar) and the Batu Merah isolates (Damar) all languages in Southwest Maluku are descendants of Central Malayo-Polynesian through Proto East-Timorese. They dispersed throughout the region in three offshoots: the languages of Wetar, of Babar, and the Luangic-Kisaric isolects. The latter are a dialect chain extending from Wetan (one of the Babar islands) in the East to Leti in the West (Luangic) plus three other languages spoken on Kisar, Roma and Damar.⁷ After the Independence the government started a successful campaign to promote Malay as the national language. An irreversible and complete allegiance shift from the indigenous language towards Malay appears to be one of its implications in Southwest Maluku (Van Engelenhoven forthcoming). The type and degree of endangerment are governed mainly by the number of speakers. Meher, whose speakers are

⁵It took till the early eighties of this century before gold would be discovered on Wetar island. Since then regional infrastructure has been continuously improving. That notwithstanding, acces to most of the islands still very difficult.

⁶In the second half of the 19th Century the Dutch Protestant Mission undertook a serious attempt to implement Christianity onto the islands. Its campaign, under the supervision of both the Kupang and Ambon Mission Societies turned out to be a complete failure, because of which it was terminated in 1841. For a comprehensive account I refer to Neurdenberg 1876, 1884.

⁷There are two perceptions on the historical relationships of Southwest Malukan languages. For a lexicostastical rapport I refer to Taber 1993. An account based on soundchanges is found in Van Engelenhoven 1995b. The first perceives the Luangic dialectchain as one Luang language to which Meher (Kisar) and Roma are a sepearte subgroup. The latter considers both the Luangic dialects and Meher, Roma and possibly East-Damarese rather as descendants of a single proto-language.

rated near 10.000 (Taber et al. 1996:110), is rather stable. Malay influence is detected in its lexicon rather than in its grammar. The languages of the Babar archipelago are among the ones that are most dramatically in peril. On these islands, where languages are found with 50 speakers or less, people easily exchange their native tongue for a vernacular more adapted to modern times: Malay.

For many languages elaborate systems of speech styles are attested. In general a distinction is made between informal 'domain-talk', or daily speech, on the one hand and secretive and literary languages on the other. 'Land-owner' clans, for example on Leti, are often said to have a secretive language that is referred to either as 'former talk' or 'island-talk'. Among 'boat owner' clans this - sometimes imaginary - language is often perceived as an instrument for sorcery. The speech of the 'boat owners' appears to lack any special register, which could be labelled secretive. A possible exception is the Luang hunting jargon, *lirmetrialama* or 'inside-reef-speech' of which no equivalents are found elsewhere in the region.⁸

The main element in the literary or ritual languages, referred to as 'royal speech', is parallelism: the extensive pairing of lexical items. Elsewhere I elaborated, that in SW Maluku, different from the rapports on the phenomenon in Nusa Tenggara Timur, parallelism is a feature of the entire language and permeates both the lexicons and the grammars. Lack of space and time forces me not to go into the matter here. For a discussion I refer to Van Engelenhoven (1997). A special type of literary language is the so-called 'Sung Language', which is said to be identical from Marsela Island in the Babar Archipelago up to Kisar and Roma in the West. Notwithstanding its important function in the region's narrative tradition, this speech style has now on the verge of sinking into complete oblivion among the younger generations. As such it is expected to have disappeared within the next 20 years (Van Engelenhoven in press_a). The following paragraphs elaborate the consequences of this loss for the management of traditional knowledge in the region's societies.

2. VERBAL ARTS:

REMEMBERING THE PAST AND UNDERSTANDING THE PRESENT

2.1 Introduction

Southwest Maluku, like all regions of East-Indonesia, has a predominantly oral tradition.⁹ Notwithstanding its linguistic and anthropological likeness to the neighboring Timor region and Tanimbar archipelago, Southwest Maluku displays a divergent type of verbal arts. Since the turn of this century many scholars corroborated how in the eastern parts of Indonesia local histories are transmitted through extensive narrative poems composed of lexical parallelisms. In Southwest Maluku, however, it are stories with which history is

⁸A possible equivalent of the Luang hunting jargon I accidently heard on the reef near Tomra (West-Leti), where fishing women referred to certain kinds of fish with names of land-animals. Whether this is a remnant of a Luangic(-Kisaric?) speech behaviour or a local innovation, however, remains yet to be studied.

⁹The only written contribution I know of is the *Hikayat Leti* ('The Leti Chronicles'). This is an Indonesian version of the *Tui Pieri* ('The History of Peri') by Upa Marcus Denu II about the foundation of the Luhuleli domain on Leti. This text meets a generally felt need throughout Maluku to safeguard local histories for the generations to come. Similar 'literary' products are recorded for Kisar and Kei and are published on a regular basis in the Moluccan community in The Netherlands, for example Latukau (1997).

remembered¹⁰. Elsewhere (Van Engelenhoven in press_b) I elaborated how these tales were supported by small pieces of sung distichs composed of lexical parallelisms.

Correspondingly I distinguish two types of oral tradition that are distributed complementarily: narrations and sung poems. The first mentioned are classified in local tradition as either sacred *ttui* or profane *tuni*¹¹ along a gliding scale (cf. Straver's genre classification, 1993:43-65). The audience determines the sacredness and truthfulness of a story. Its appreciation is guided by the amount of clichés (*ktunu*) and the sung distichs (*tiatki*). The latter are perceived as summaries of a tale or part of a tale; the first mentioned are considered as references to related tales. Both are necessary for the location of story being told inside the audience's frame-of-reference.

2.2 *Tiatki*: sung certification of narrated truth

Songs summarize (parts of) a narration and are sometimes constructed in 'Sung Language', depending on the context of performance. In principle songs are distichs composed of parallel lines in daily speech. This is exemplified by the following lines that summarize the Creation of the World:

(1a)

Lanti mpupnuale rai /
iaari nkadwetu sletna,
Mpupnuale nuspaitra //
nkadwetu rapiatatra ne.

"The sky covers the land //
the waves enfold the ocean,
It covers the Guided Islands //
they enfold the Conducted Lands."

The main function of songs, however, is to warrant the trustworthiness of the narration. When the truth of a narration is challenged - either because of the story itself, but sometimes also because of the storyteller's status ! - the words of the song need to be adapted or refurbished.¹² As exemplified in (1b), this phenomenon, which I labeled 'literary fraud' (Van Engelenhoven in press_a), replaces certain sounds of the words in order to make the song look older, and thus more trustworthy than in daily speech original.

(1b)

Lanikie pupiniale rai //
ioirie kadwekie letna,
pupiniale nohpaikra //
kadwekie rai piatatra ne.

"The sky covers the land //
the waves enfold the ocean,
It covers the Guided Islands //
they enfold the Conducted Lands."

¹⁰Whether there has been a tradition of extensive poetry in SW Maluku or not, is not yet clear. Jonker (1932) did mention the *miana* lamentation in his Leti wordlist. However, in 1989 it had become fully obsolete and was replaced by 'funeral speeches'. Both lamentation and 'funeral speech' feature extensive parallelism. Only the first mentioned, however, was sung.

¹¹The available terminology differs from language to language. Therefore Leti terminology will be used in this paper, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

¹²The presence of a minister among the audience may be an example of why a performer prefers the 'older' (1b) over the 'modern' (1a). The minister, as an authority on the Bible, might want to challenge the traditional perception with the Biblical version. The unsailable truth value of the Bible in SW Malukan society would make singing of the (1b) variant the only possible method to endorse the traditional story.

Because of their reputed truth value these summarizing distichs, or *tiatki*, have become important, if not decisive, arguments in traditional lawsuits. The more *tiatki* one knows, the better one can advocate one's point. Consequently, 'literary fraud' is an intrinsic feature of perjury (for an elaboration, see Van Engelenhoven in press^a).

2.3 *Ktunu*: co-ordinates in a narrated framework

2.3.1 'Wade-Leti': person names as epitomes

Another associated element to evaluate narrations with are the phrases or *ktunu* ('clichés'). Important *ktunu* in a narration are names of characters and locations, to be exemplified separately in two subsequent paragraphs by dialogues from the TuLieti, the narration on the creation of Leti Island according to the perception of the 'landowner' Upa Simon (Pai // Waru) Manina.

In this narration it is told how Tiwurlety, the mythical Creator of Leti Island, emphasizes his name when Slerlety, the founding father of the Prirulu-clan consents to remain there:

170. "You are a marna from Malay // Piatuala. You moved to Leti. 171. You moved to Leti. However, listen to my speech, which is this. 172. Use my rank and position to get (yourself) a living. ... 175. However, I really ought to say to you, that this (place) is called Leti Island // Leti Land and my name is **Tiwurlety // Paislety**." That is it.

By mentioning his name, the original inhabitant of Leti elucidates his status for the newcomer. As can be construed from his name, Tiwurlety as its creator is the actual owner of Leti Island:

98. So, that is (the meaning of) his name: **Tiwurlety** [Bail Leti] // **Paislety** [Laddle Leti]¹³. 99. Because he bailed it and laddled it up. Therefore the drainer belonged to the plan of God.

Tiwurlety is confined to this episode in the island's history. After conferring Leti to the new owner, Tiwurlety withdraws from the narrated scene without leaving any offspring. His name, however, does epitomize how he created the island. A closer inspection of the names of his heir, Slerlety, elaborates on the 'tale-summarizing' function of names. Whereas Tiwurlety has typical mythical characteristics in this tale and in its variants (being a giant, immortal etc.), Slerlety is clearly a human being, the first immigrant-settler on Leti Island and the founding father of the Prirulu-clan and its farm Iadum. As pointed out by the 'landowner' storyteller, Slerlety is not his genuine name:

111. Then as he crossed it, the water reached up to his knees. 112. It was kind of dry allright, but the soil was still liquid. 113. So he waded through the water thither and climbed up to listen. And then he was given his name and he was called **Slerlety**

¹³Because Tiwurlety laid the island bare by bailing and laddling away the sea water, he is perceived in local tradition as the creator of Leti Island.

(Wade-Leti). 114. That's the way it must be, Lordship! 115. He was called Slerlety, because when he disembarked from the boat he waded through water. 116. But that is his Letinese name. His Timorese name though is **Sairmalay** (Stick-Timor). 117 He was a native from that main continent.

However, further on he mentions one other name:

188. It may have been hereafter, that the marna of Prirulu, their forefather **Sieruliona** (Leave-Luang) that is, gets involved.

In other words: when Slerlety founded the Prirulu-clan he was called differently: Sieruliona. This name epitomizes his departure from the mythical Luang continent.

As can be seen from these three names, proper names in SW Malukan narratives have at least one underlying sentence that summarizes an event where the name-bearer has been involved in. This explains why storytellers feel compelled to arrange names. Their order reflects the chronology of the summarized events in them. The first mentioned name be the most recent, the last-mentioned name be the oldest, therefore: Slerlety - Sieruliona - Sairmalay.¹⁴ Any other arrangement violates the chronology of the events and thus falsifies the authenticity of their underlying statements.

2.3.2 'Fish-Roasting // *kalura*': place names as epitomes and epithets

SW Malukan toponyms too may summarize an event, again exemplified by a fragment in the TuLieti. Recall Tiwurlety's remark to Slerlety mentioned above:

175. However, I really ought to say to you, that this (place) is called **Leti Island // Leti Land** and my name is Tiwurlety // Paislety. That is it.

Leti Island // Leti Land is a simple parallelism of *nusa* 'island' and *rai* 'land'. As such it needs not to be an informative cliché like the above discussed anthroponyms. Whereas on Leti they are perceived as inherent elements of the island's ritual name, its occurrence in island names in other languages, for example *nohMoa // Rai Mioa* ('Moa Island // Moa Land', De Josselin de Jong nd), suggest they are an ordinary parallelism that function as an emphatic marker (Van Engelenhoven 1997:10). However, when the storyteller provides the following pair, toponyms too are related to historical events:

182. So this was what it (the island board of Luang) advised. 183. "We have nothing to eat // we have nothing to drink. 184. However, there are reefs // there are shoals.

¹⁴Note, however, that, because the storyteller had forgotten the Sieruliona part in first instance, this name appears last in the rear of the quote, after Sairmalay. The fact, that this particular story-teller insisted on Slerlety's old name Sairmalay is understandable when we take in consideration, that a concurrent 'boat-owner' story-teller was in the audience. By only using the hero's Timorese - original - name the story-teller actually indicates, that the tale takes place in a period about which can only be narrated legitimately by landowners' whose forefathers were contemporaries of the narrated hero. At the time there were no other witnessing 'boat-owners' yet whose descendants might add to the present narration. Beside that does his narration focus on the time before the name Slerlety was actually introduced.

185. Look for *kalura* [a side-dish made of fish] and sagwire and use it to eat and drink and to inhabit the island and farm the land.” 186. And then they spoke and said: “Leti Island // Leti Land, Fish-Roasting // *Kalura*. 187. Roast fish and eat it too, then drink sagwire.”

This pair of names, however, deviates from the general toponym pattern. It metaphorically refers to Leti's role in the Interinsular Alliance: the production and trade of liquor (distilled sagwire).¹⁵ The following pair is again an epitome that metonymically hints at Leti's condition in the days of Slerlety, thus implying the latter's endeavors that contributed to the ultimate shape of the island:

189. Just after that he (Slerlety) happened to fetch Raitawung (Land in the Rear), after which they linked and joined, bound and tied it. And then they named the land and said: “Leti Island // Leti Land, Fish-Roasting // *Kalura*, **Floating Island // Land in the Rear**.” 190. And he pronounced its six names. 191. That is it, the track of Leti.

The order shows the same chronological principle that applies to person names: recent names precede older names. Certain toponyms, however, are epithets rather than epitomes, cf. Sairmalay's initial reply to Tiwurlety's invitation:

57. “I travel eastward to The Mother of Islands // the Father of Continents. That is Luondona // Wietrily.

Luondona // Wietrily is the first set of parallel names of Luang Island. The first mentioned parallelism, *Nusinne // Raiamne* ‘The Mother of Islands // the Father of Continents’, is more like an epithet. This parallelism metaphorically signals Luang's leading role in regional politics. The same parallelism applies to other nuclear islands, as for example Timor and Kei, which, too, are centers of insular trade and insular power. For Timor and Kei this parallelism is merely a reference to their respective function in the region. As such it is more like a title to be transferred elsewhere when the political situation in the region changes. For Luang it has become one of its three name pairs. Interestingly enough there seems to be no consensus on its place among the other names, *Nislely // Matmaha* ‘Ivory Tooth // Golden Eye’, which it may either precede or follow. This is elaborated in the following paragraph.

2.4 ‘Liberated Golden Plate’: obsolescence and loss of narrative ‘chunks’

As can be seen above names of persons and locations interrelate separate plot patterns within a single narrated frame-of-reference. These plot patterns, or narrative ‘chunks’ (Sweeney 1987:165) are lexically stored in the minds of the audience as *ktunu*. The audience therefore determines the contents of a story. Said differently, the audience perceives a story as a set of narrative ‘chunks’. This fact may explain De Josselin de Jong's (1937) observation of Oirata storytellers, who were arguing about the order of narrated episodes but did not at all question their respective authenticity. It comes as no surprise, that a SW

¹⁵Cf. § 1.1.

Malukan audience will be pre-occupied with the interpretation of the names rather than with the logic and truth value of the entire story where they occur in.

Names have properties similar to proverbs. As has been elaborated elsewhere (Van Engelenhoven in press^b) semantic bleaching is one of the most eminent characteristics of proverbs. This implies that they are rather unsuitable for the memorization of narratives. The above mentioned disagreement on where to put ‘Mother of Islands // Father of Continents’ in the row of Luang’s ritual names is an exponent of this finding. Beginning or finishing with this pair indicates the historiographic recentness or chronological remoteness of the name, respectively. This pair of names, however, is still comprehensive for the audience. When it no longer is understood it is automatically perceived as ‘ancient’, as for example with *Komelu // Komtutnu*, which is found in Riedel 1886. When suggested to a Leti audience in 1990, everybody recognized *Eelu* ‘Eul’, the name of a beach at Leti’s southern shore. Consequently, and in accordance with the rules of lexical parallelism, the element *tutnu* was understood as ‘cape’ or ‘its cape’. Although nobody could interpret the *kom* element in both parts of the name, it was immediately added to the series of known names of Leti discussed above: *Nusleti // Ralieti, Tuniina // Kalora, Nuspuuti // Ratiawnu, Komelu // Komtutnu*. The final position of the new name in the row implied its old age with respect to the other names: it had to refer to a period before the coming of Tiwurlety and Slerlety.

How does the audience manage its knowledge? In order to solve this question I want to compare the presentation of certain names in the above mentioned TuLieti with the ones found in a concurrent story owned by the Prirulu-clan whose lineages died out in the present half of this century. Consider the information by a storyteller, allied to Prirulu via the patri-line:¹⁶

21. Well, at Surmiasa now, that house we talked about, concerning Surmiasa’s men, one of their leaders was named **Karaslewang**, one **Slerlety**, one **Lewnatrila** and one **Patullena**. 22. So afterwards it was this Lewnatrila whom they ordered to fetch the fire and whom they ordered to turn into a bird in order to get at the fire. 23. Then they stayed there (first), and then they came hither, you know.

The enumeration of these names is fixed. On inquiry, the storyteller dismissed any other order, which at first sight suggests a chronology of names. Since the number of names is four they cannot refer to one person, in which case one would expect three. Whereas *Karaslewang* (*Karaslewna*) ‘Liberated Golden Plate’ and *Slerlety* (see above) are very transparent, *Lewnatrila* is very obscure. The fixed enumeration therefore suggests, that the four names actually refer to two persons, *Karaslewang // Slerlety* being one of them. Later on in the text the storyteller reminds the audience, that before he settled on Leti, *Slerlety* (*Sieruliona*, that is!) stole a piece of gold on Sermata. This event is clearly epitomized by the name *Karaslewang*: ‘Liberated Golden Plate’:

62. Afterwards they happened to bring along a piece of gold, which the man (*Slerlety*) had swallowed on Sermata once...

¹⁶Leti tradition is matrilineal, patrilineal descent is not valid in local customary law (cf. § 1.1).

In the perception of the storyteller the four names refer to four separate men, clearly representing the four lineages of the clan (cf. § 1.1). His failure to recognize the story epitomized by the name Karaslewang relegating the plot of the golden plate theft to a disengaged detail, noted in passing.

This misunderstanding is explained in the first place by the intransparency of the names. A second reason may very well be the generally believed decreased knowledge on 'royal speech' (cf. §.1.2), notwithstanding the acknowledged skill of this particular storyteller. This loss of knowledge is even more apparent in the narration of the other storyteller:

204. And they were with six on their own. 205. **Soratmalay** (Remember Timor) // **Sairmalay** (Stick to Timor), **Resimalay** (Win over Timor) // **Talumalay** (Overcome Timor), **Iwarmalay** (Discuss with Timor) // **Woarmalay** (Challenge Timor). 206. And that younger sister: Lelmalay (Timor Spirit).

The storyteller discards the parallelism of the names and alludes to the unusual amount of six brothers and one sister. Taking the parallelisms into account, they are better analyzed as three brothers and one sister,¹⁷ which is the traditional amount and composition of offspring according to the Luang 'Umbilical Cord' (cf. § 1.2). This perception safeguards the narrative logic of the story: one brother immigrates to Leti (Soratmalay // Sairmalay alias Slerlety), one brother remains on Timor (Iwarmalay // Woarmalay) and the one who is second in rank (Resimalay // Talumalay) is killed when he wants to join his brother on Leti.

If a plot pattern is memorized through a name, it is obvious that a lessening understanding of names implies the obsolescence of the underlying narrative 'chunks', as exemplified by Karaslewang, eventually leading to a total loss, as in the case of Soratmalay.

3 MANAGEMENT OF NARRATIVE KNOWLEDGE IN SW MALUKU

3.1 The mystique of songs and names

The above mentioned pre-occupation with names and their correct mention in tales can clearly be seen an exponent of the SW Malukans' awareness of the inherent feebleness of this storytelling technique in terms of memorization and reproduction. As a consequence there is a tendency among some of the islanders to collect as many tales and songs as possible, whether they can be linked to other narrations or not.

Because of the taboo on interruption¹⁸ singing is a powerful tool in discourse as borne out by the performances in lawsuits. Without it, a story will inevitably be set aside as a 'phantasy tale', unless the storyteller convinces his audience of his expertise. A song of the *tiatki* type, like a name, is principally a summary of a narrative 'chunk' and warrants the historiographic truth of a tale. This inherent quality of evidence provider evokes an exactly reversed sentiment when a *tiatki* is encountered without a tale. Such songs are collected for magical purposes. The application of these songs often has a kind-hearted intention.

¹⁷The fact, that only one name of the sister is mentioned fits with the tradition. Feminine double names are confined to ancestral clan-mothers.

¹⁸Dubbed the principle of continuation (cf. Van Engelenhoven in press_b).

They may be whispered in a patient's ear to take away his or hers illness. Certain experts (referred to as *isuona* or 'witches', cf. Timmer 1998) are said to use them for evil practices, because songs whose tales are lost are said to enable killing over huge distances.¹⁹

Similar features are imputed to traditional names or 'pagan names' as they are labelled in local Malay. Like the distichs mentioned above names are related to historical events. The latter, however, are even more powerful than songs, because they are 'one-word' abstracts of plot patterns. The use of such names as a term of address is therefore acceptable only if they are partly pronounced.²⁰ Enunciating a name completely implies the narration of the story of which it is an abstract. As in singing each tale must be finished at the risk of severe psychological and sometimes even physical damage for either the audience or the performer. This perception obviously discourages or simply prohibits the memorization of names whose stories are not known or forgotten.

3.2 Instruments of memorization

All observations in the preceding paragraph imply, that storytelling in a SW Malukan context is a dangerous task, which needs to be handled with care.

Crystallizing a story through names seems an elegant method to memorize narratives. Each name, however, in principle only represents one story. The more characters or locations are involved in one story the more names will surface that each on their own entail another story.

Tradition wants it, that in the early days of Christianisation²¹ storytellers used wooden 'puppets' as instruments for the memorization of names. These statues represented a deceased clan-member and were automatically carved each time somebody in the clan died, after which they were stored at the attic of one of the four clan-houses. The storyteller, a member of that clan-house, was solely responsible for the storage. Because of this the attic was forbidden territory for everybody except the storyteller. He was the only one who knew whom the statues represented and consequently where the statues of narrated persons were located.

Inquiry among Kisarese and Letinese informants, who had witnessed such performances in their childhood, revealed, that storytellers narrated with the help of the ornaments carved on the statues. A distinction was made between ordinary ornaments, *wona*, for pure decoration and special motifs, *rou*, whose 'copyright' was exclusively reserved for the proprietor-clan. The painstaking description of one of these statues by the German ethnographer Müller-Wismar (1914) shows, that this latter type of ornaments, shaped as dugongs, ships, etc., carried a name of their own. Unintentionally he thus elucidated the mnemonics of these motifs for storytellers.

Mnemonic potential was also assigned to the environment, which is more or less implied by the importance of place names. Mountains, rocks, rivers and trees all have individual names and thus comprise their own history. For a migrant, therefore, one would presume inevitable obliteration of narrative knowledge, because he would have to leave all his mnemonic icons behind. However, during the sixties one could still find SW Malukan mi-

¹⁹This 'dark' aspect consequently accelerated a definite and acute abolition of traditional singing among SW Malukan migrants in the Netherlands in their attempt to adapt to the concept of 'pure' Christianity as it was advocated by the Moluccan churches and in their wish to come up to the *Alifuru*-concept, which defined the archetypical inhabitant of a free Republic of the South-Moluccas (Van Engelenhoven forthcoming).

²⁰Labelled politeness substraction (Van Engelenhoven 1995:107).

²¹Cf. note 5.

grant families in the Netherlands whose grandfathers were able to narrate clan-histories. The performer reproduced the stories either by means of pointing at the corners of a table, or by walking through the room, stopping at each corner to elaborate on the meaning of a name.

4 MYSTIFICATION, FRUSTRATION AND THE LOSS OF NARRATIVE KNOWLEDGE

As can be concluded from the paragraphs above the lexical storage of plot patterns as names, either with or without the authorizing support of songs, forms the pragmatic genius of SW Malukan storytelling. The worldwide admired handicraft of the islanders, the statues, the textiles and the goldsmithry primarily functioned as a means to fixate the motifs and ornaments with which the narratives were memorized. In this perception it is understandable that these artifacts whose importance was well acknowledged by the islanders, were easily sold or bartered (Jacobsen 1896). The artifacts themselves could be easily replaced by new made ones. The *rou*, however, being the counterparts of names on artifacts, were not for sale.

Because the region remained undisturbed for a long time, its peoples failed to assess the new influences of Christianization and modernization in general. The Dutch missionaries perceived the statues and the rituals that went with them as exponents of the idolatry which they meant to eradicate. The islanders were encouraged to give up the statues, which were donated to missionaries and ministers, or simply destroyed. The last collective destruction took place in Tutukei (Leti) in the late sixties where all remaining statues were piled up in front of the Serwaru church and then burned. The know-how of their production was not transmitted to younger generations and consequently disappeared with the last practicing generation.

The only medium to transmit knowledge on *rou* appears to be traditional textiles, which are still very much favored in the region. Women, to whom weaving has traditionally assigned to, still learn how to make the motifs and dye them onto the cloth. The link, however, between the name of a *rou* and the 'narrative chunk' that goes with it has been lost.

SW Malukans are very much aware, that they have lost a piece of knowledge that was stored in the artifacts they used to make and the stories they used to tell. Evenso they acknowledge the power of names and songs. This awareness evoked an apotheosis of everything that can be regarded as a remnant from the past. This is especially salient on Kisar Island, the main center of textile production in the region, where the status of one's clan rather than the price one wants to pay determines what kind of cloth the client may expect.

The SW Malukan migrants in the Netherlands, on the other hand, had other problems to face. Being a complex minority within a group of exiles, they felt compelled to adapt to the Central Malukan majority who aspired a Free Republic of the South-Moluccas (RMS). This ideal required the full support of the entire exile community, which lead to the re-evaluation of the *Alifuru* concept, the Seramese mountain tribes as the prototypical inhabitant of the Moluccan state (Van Engelenhoven forthcoming). In order to come up to this concept all elements expressing the SW Malukan divergence needed to be concealed or adapted. Parents persisted in speaking Malay to their children, discouraging any use of the indigenous language. The mystique of the names (§ 3.1), however, did fit in. Being former soldiers, the exiles were acquainted with the healing practices of the Seramese mountain tribes through the reciting of mantras (Florey 1996), commonly referred to as *fufu*. Whispering sets of names into the ears of a patient was a fashionable practice among SW Malukans who were even consulted by

Central Malukans. The knowledge on names was nevertheless perceived as heathen and thus evil, because of which it was never transmitted on to the younger generations.

The only principle that was transmitted touched upon the obligation attached to storytelling, paraphrased as *jangan sembarang* 'no indifference'. However, no distinction could be made between genuine historical narratives and uncommitting fairy tales. Consequently even the latter are only told after great hesitance when one is convinced of the audience's good intentions (Kleyer et al. 1984:17).

The awareness of the importance of storytelling and the loss of narrative knowledge inevitably evoked a feeling of great frustration among the second and third generations. In their search for roots more and more SW Malukan migrants return to their islands of origin to find the knowledge that they have lost. In SW Maluku they cannot be helped any further. Not only are the respective life styles in the Netherlands and on the SW Malukan islands too great a gap to bridge. The present inhabitants too are aware of the increasing obsolescence of narrative knowledge. As a consequence researchers are more and more advised to look for answers among the migrants in the Netherlands.

5 CONCLUSION

At the turn of the century it becomes more and more manifest, that SW Malukan culture will not survive in the next century. Recent publications in the field of linguistics and anthropology have convincingly shown its importance for science. The least we can do before it is too late is record as much data as possible before the wonders of this particular way of living will have disappeared.

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