

## Oral Tradition and Identity of West Kalimantan Society

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### ABSTRAK

*Tulisan ini mengkaji tradisi lisan di Sambas, Sekadau dan Ketapang di kawasan Utara, Pertengahan dan Selatan Kalimantan Barat, mewakili tiga wilayah budaya yang berbeza. Wacana pelabelan identiti mereka berlandaskan tradisi lisan Dayak dan Melayu yang berkongsi kuasa, walaupun terdapat perbezaan dari segi kepercayaan dan agama. Interaksi sosial antara mereka dengan kumpulan etnik lain di Kalimantan Barat memperkayakan pluraliti identiti masyarakat Dayak dan Melayu itu sendiri.*

*Kata kunci: Masyarakat majmuk, tradisi lisan, Dayak, Melayu, Cina*

### ABSTRACT

*This article is an overview of oral tradition in Sambas, Sekadau and Ketapang in North, Central and South of West Kalimantan, representing three relatively different cultural regions. Discourse of their identity labeling is based on the plurality of the Dayak and Malays, who share political powers, despite religious differences between them. It is their social interactions with other ethnic groups in West Kalimantan that enrich the cultural and religious plurality in the region.*

*Key words: Pluralistic society, oral tradition, Dayaks, Malay, Chinese*

### INTRODUCTION

The West Kalimantan society is pluralistic from anthropological, historical and sociological perspective. There are several ethnic races, namely the Dayak, Malay, Javanese, Madurese, Sundanese, Bugenese, Batakese, Padangese, Banjarese, Chinese, Arabs, Indians and others.<sup>1</sup> Among the ethnic groups, the Dayak and Malay are considered as indigenous people (King 1994), who developed their cultural habitats in West Kalimantan (Syamsuar 2003). Historically, each of the two ethnic groups has their own layers of history. Some are still living primitively, while others are relatively modern. Sociologically, there are almost no ethnic groups who live in isolation due to increasing availability of transportation, communication and education facilities and infrastructures. They have made social and cultural contacts. Contacts that

take place through economic activities, such as the bargaining processes, great tolerance over respective ethnic interests, as well as the give- and-take processes of inter-ethnic values, have helped to develop their respective cultures.

Most parts of the West Kalimantan pluralistic society, whether in the *kampungs* or the cities, still live in the tradition of primary orality (Ong 1982). The social process that takes place in this tradition is not only communicated in the verbal form such as *pantun* (traditional poetry), poems, puzzles and narrative texts, but may also take the form of non-verbal media, such as dances in the healing ceremonies, the collection of honey ceremonies, land and forest clearing ceremonies. Such non-verbal communication facilities and media dances have become a part of the cultural reproduction processes or socialization processes of cultural values contained in them (Snyder in Royce 1977: 154).

Oral traditions handed down from one generation to the next were related to values, norms, laws and the whole system of past knowledge (Vansina 1973) and also those of contemporary nature (Teeuw 1984). Such are clearly observed in the literary texts that result in continuous changes of oral traditions being dynamic, active and lively (Lord 1976). In view of its content, literary texts are none other than the representation of social and cultural contexts encouraged by the thoughts and attitudes of a community. Therefore, literary texts are used as “projecting screens” to look at the faith, education, ideology, moral and politics that as a whole reveal the identity of community owner or its supporters (Hassan 1984).

This paper attempts to view the West Kalimantan communal identity through oral traditional texts. For that purpose, later in the second part, an overview of oral tradition activities in Sambas, Sekadau and Ketapang would be first explained in the three regions representing the north, central and south of West Kalimantan. In part three, a number of texts obtained from the three regions along with other texts duly collected during earlier researches would then be discussed.<sup>2</sup> And, in the concluding part, some conclusions are drawn up.

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF WEST KALIMANTAN ORAL TRADITION

As mentioned above, the West Kalimantan society lives in primary orality. In the context of oral traditions, *pantun* constitutes one of the phenomenal literary genres. Although this genre is identical with the Malay community, it has a profound place in the Dayak community. Among the Sambas, Cupang Gading (Sekadau) and Ketapang communities, this genre is called *pantun*, while in the *kampung* of Sekonaw (Sekadau) it is referred to as *nsangan* and *bekobo* (Aspar 2003). In the central region of Sawai tribal community, at Kampung Cupang Belungai, Sekadau, they are called *joda* and *jolai*. *Joda* is an expression uttered by a male in the form of lyrical poem when he is interested and wants to know

a girl better, while *jolai*, on the other hand, is the expression of a male after having passed through an introduction period. *Jolai* is performed by a male in order to win or get a greater sympathy from the girl whom he plans to court as lover (Aspar 2003).

Apart from phenomenal poetry, in the kampungs there are relatively a great number of literary texts of oral traditions to be found. In the year 1990, I managed to record not less than 100 oral traditional texts in the kampungs in the vicinity of Sejangkung Districts of Sambas Regency.<sup>3</sup> Through the project entitled “The Homeland of the Malay Language: Evidence from West Kalimantan” (1998), 112 oral tradition texts were successfully recorded from three kampungs, 85 of which originated from kampung Daup, Sambas District of Sambas Regency.<sup>4</sup> And, through the project entitled “Identity, Ethnicity and Unity in Western Borneo: The Oral Traditions of Contemporary Kalimantan Barat and Sarawak,” a recording of 72 texts from 12 kampungs in the valley of Sekadau river and 21 texts from 5 kampungs in the valley of Sungai Laur downstream, Ketapang were successfully done.<sup>5</sup> This figure shall rise should a comprehensive collection over other areas is completed.

Among the Sambas people, narrative texts survive in the form of *bécerité* and *bédandé'* traditions. *Bécerité* is a narration of non-stylized text in the form of oral tradition, while *bédandé'* is a stylized one (Sweeney 1987). In the *bécerité* tradition, the narration of text could be done by either a male or a female. Besides in the home, this kind of activity could be performed in the *ladang* (unirrigated field), on a boat while fishing some fish and prawns or even in the market-places. Meanwhile, *bédandé'*, due to the sacred nature of its text according to its supporters, is staged at night time, sung and must be accompanied by some kind of offerings. Unfortunately, this tradition does not develop; instead it is on the brink of extinction because the process of obtaining such a text should follow relatively difficult stages and conditions. An example of *bédandé'* text (Effendi 1997) is as follows:

Wa astagafirullah timbul kisah Mambang Kuning Peri Kayangan;  
 Hilang kisah Mambang Peri Kayangan, timbul kisah Buta Raksasa Rantai Jin  
 Berantai;  
 Wa astagafirullah hilang kisah Buta Raksasa Jin Berantai, timbullah kisah  
 Raja Paik bercakap berbicara dengan anaknya Awang Darma Seri doi  
 Pandan.  
 Wa astagafirullah “Anakku Awang Darma dua beradik dengan Tuan Putri  
 Dayang Dandi Negeri Sari Negeri;  
 Hati-hatilah kamu tinggal dua beradik ini jikalau aku wafat siapa lagi yang  
 menggantikan aku raja lah menjadi raja;”  
 Wa astagafirullah, “Anakku Awang Darma buah hati cermin mata timbangan  
 nyawa.”

(And Forgive us Allah, comes the story of Mambang Kuning Peri Kayangan;  
 Gone is the story of Mambang Kuning Peri Kayangan, comes Buta Raksasa  
 Rantai Jin Berantai;

And Forgive us Allah, gone is the story of Buta Raksasa Jin Berantai, comes the story of King Paik talking conversing with his son Awang Darma Seri doi Pandan.

And Forgive us Allah, “My son Awang Darma brother and sister with Princess Dayang Dandi Negeri Sari Negeri;

Watch out you two brother and sister when I am gone whoelse will replace me as king to become king;

And Forgive us Allah, “My son Awang Darma, my beloved my bright eyes the delight of my soul.”)

The term of *bercerita* in the Sekadau community carries a variety of meanings. The society of Sawai tribe at Kampung Cupang Belungai divides it into three terminologies and levels namely *kesah*, *cerita* and *ngkaya*. *Kesah* is a story about the origin of man and his existence in this world; *cerita* is a story about an adventure and the magical and supernatural power of a hero who is believed to be a historical character; and *ngkaya* is a story which is considered to be the result of a narrator’s imagination or creation. The texts within the three traditions are often told in the midst of *ladang* (unirrigated field). The narrators are convinced that the telling of a story in the midst of an unirrigated field shall have influence on the plants apart from as a medium of inheriting the great and righteous values from the great-grandparents to the listeners.

In the Mahap tribal community at Kampung Sungai Mayong, Sekadau, *bercerita* is usually called *bekesah*, *begesah*, *becerita* or *ngkane* which as a whole takes the form of non-stylized ones. In comparison, the Dayak Kapuas community at Kapuas Hulu region, this term is known as *ngkane* or *ngkana*, but the texts take the stylized form, big volume texts, and the staging of the text is done through singing. The *ngkana Tingang Tebang*, for example, requires months to sing.<sup>6</sup> Example of text (Leban 2000):

<i>Hari ini Buderang pulang</i>	<i>Today Buderang (must) go home</i>
<i>Kami na lagik tau dentang</i>	<i>We may no longer be dwelt</i>
<i>Oleh bensia bebutatang</i>	<i>As (we) are manly animal</i>
<i>Tulan na benar supasang</i>	<i>We really could not be united</i>
<i>Kira nag auk Lengku umang</i>	<i>If we pity not thou parentless</i>
<i>Tujuh malam na tau dentang</i>	<i>Only seven nights could be dwelt</i>
<i>Jakuk Belian Lanak Lubang</i>	<i>Says Belian Landak Lubang</i>
<i>Udah tuntung piak hari dah siang</i>	<i>After that daylight comes</i>
<i>Baruk Kain Lungai benni benang</i>	<i>Then Kain Lungai gets ready</i>
<i>Kawah dah dansung ngadap ajang</i>	<i>Kawah already invited to eat</i>
<i>Tuk nni kai nuan pulang</i>	<i>Here some provisions for you to get home</i>
<i>Tuk kampuh kai ikat pinggang</i>	<i>Here is a belt worn cloth</i>

The story-telling tradition within the Ketapang community, particularly in the valley of Sungai Laur, runs well as can be seen in the *kampungs* of Jago,

Sempurna, Bayur Rempangi and Cali. While in the *kampungs* of Penduhun Melayu, Pangkalan Jihing, and Kuala Laur similar activities have almost disappeared. This phenomenon is caused by the influence of television. Besides that factor, there has been a growing belief in the community that oral texts tradition is impregnated with lies, so that it is of no value and cause sins when told to the next generation.

One of the successfully developed genres of oral tradition in the community of Ketapang is *syair*. While the people of Sambas and Sekadau read or sing the *syair* of *Raja Molok*, *Cormin Islam*, *Kiamat*, *Indera Putera*, *Siti Jubaidah*, *Dandan Setia*, *Nabi Bercukur* and the likes, the people of Ketapang, and even its youth, on the other hand, produce poems. The community in Rempangi and Kampung Sawah call them *kengkarangan*. However, considering the scrolled paper containing rolled poems which are later slowly unfolded and read before the audience, then *kengkarangan* is more like their *syair gulung* (*scrolled syair*). This *syair gulung* is part of oral tradition as it is not intended to be individually read and enjoyed but all together. An example of scrolled poem (Haz 2001):

<i>Karena melaju melambung-lambung</i>	<i>As speeding and bouncing</i>
<i>Tuntutan agama tidak dijunjung</i>	<i>Religious teachings are not upheld</i>
<i>Tidak sadar akan tersandung</i>	<i>Not realizing shall trip</i>
<i>Perut yang kempit jadi ngelembung</i>	<i>Flat stomach becomes pot-bellied</i>
<i>Karena zaman semakin pesat</i>	<i>As the age moves faster and faster</i>
<i>Banyak manusia melanggar adat</i>	<i>A lot of people violate customary laws</i>
<i>Rambut dipotong celana ketat</i>	<i>Hair cut and tight pants</i>
<i>Takkan malu keluar aurat</i>	<i>Having no shame revealing desirous body parts</i>
<i>Karena zaman serba mewah</i>	<i>As the age is so lavish</i>
<i>Tinggal pilih takkan susah</i>	<i>Being choosy causes no problems</i>
<i>Karena iman menjadi lemah</i>	<i>As faith growing weak</i>
<i>Ilmu agama harganya murah</i>	<i>Religious knowledge is cheap</i>
<i>Akibat iman menjadi lemah</i>	<i>As a result of weaker faith</i>
<i>Perintis agama menjadi salah</i>	<i>Religious pioneers become wrong</i>
<i>Menjalankan tugas membawa resah</i>	<i>Performing tasks causing restlessness</i>
<i>Membuat KKN menambah-nambah</i>	<i>Making corruption collusion nepotism even greater</i>

The texts presented above have their uniqueness. Although all the three are staged by way of singing, each of them has different melodies. In spite of their narrative elements, each of them is presented in different forms as well. Respective uniqueness of texts constitutes an inseparable part of identity of community's cultural owners or supporters.

## COMMUNAL IDENTITY

Identity, being the awareness of oneself, ethnic group, or as an heir to certain culture which is dynamic, liquid, situational, multidimensional in nature and always renews itself (Mulyana 1998: 158; Aamer in Collins 2001). Such nature is brought about by the fact that a person or social group always interacts with other people or other social groups. Through this interaction, that person or social group gets a variety of advantages, be it social, economics, politics and others. By understanding the dynamic nature of communal identity, it is obvious that the problem of identity, especially in the midst of a pluralistic society like that of West Kalimantan, becomes difficult.

The reading of a number of texts reveals that the identity of the Sambas community has shown its multidimensional form. Generally, the Sambas communal identity is described as the embracers of Islam, but simultaneously uphold the local and Hinduism values. The text of *Raja Alam* (Effendy 1992), which I consider as phenomenal because of its huge volume, broad structural range and the support it gains from the people, has clearly demonstrated the same. Apart from the text depicting lives of animals, a great part of the texts duly collected in the Sambas region also shows similar things. The text *Si Bondang* (Effendy 1992) initially speaks about a pious young man who is fully obedient to his parents, in the final part he is depicted as Bondang with the attitude of having the superstitious belief in preternatural things. The fight between Si Gentar Alam with the Egyptian King in the text *Si Gentar Alam* (Effendy 1992) is depicted as reciting the mantras. The text of *Anak Hantu* (Effendy 1992) describes that in order to cure the ailing child of a king, the people resort to supernatural powers which they believe exist in the forests, in the big trees, seas and the likes. Interestingly, while picturing the element of faith, this text also tells about the current changes that take place in Sambas community. It is told that *anak hantu* are the long-haired youngsters who fail to perform *shalat*, enjoy destroying plants and injuring cattles, and being dishonest when dealing with other people in the market place.

The phenomenon of cultural identity in Sambas generally reflects and is applicable in the central region of the Malay community in the *kampung*s of Sekadau, Ketapang and others. The practices related to supernatural or magical powers are still dominant (Yusriadi & Hermansyah 2003). In the community of Embau and the Malay community in the interior of Kapuas Hulu, the Embau people are identified with such practices to some Malay community at Kapuas Hulu. Such phenomenon shows that, in the central region of Malay community, there has been some kind of “tug-of-war” among the local values and Hindu cultures as well as the Islamic ones that still prevail until today. In such communities, the role of witch-doctors, charmers and sorcerer are relatively important. The community members planning to hold marriage ceremonies or receptions will use the service of a *pawang* to prevent the rain, a witch doctor to

cure the sick, help deliver babies, locate man-eating crocodiles and the likes; while a sorcerer is still often used to ward off evil spirits prior to land clearing for ladang, paddy planting or in a football game so that the opponent will lose.

It is interesting to note, with regard to the context of ethnic identity, that almost none of the 200 Sambases oral texts ever recorded carries such a message. Informants state that Dayak and Malay originated from one offspring, the relations between the two tribes do not matter. What could be seen in the oral texts is in reality the dispute between Malay and Dayak as reflected in the texts of *Sultan Sambas and Dayak Sukung* and *Sukung War* (Asfar 2003). The two texts show that the war broke out due to Dayak Sukung refused to pay taxes to the Sultan of Sambas. In the course of the war, the Dayak Sukung finally agreed to pay taxes after having witnessed the extraordinary divine power possessed by Bujang Kijing who was an envoy sent by Sultan Anom.

The conflict described in the two texts is assumed to have really taken place among some West Kalimantan community members. A number of small conflicts arising among Dayak and Malay in the *kampungs* have been largely due to the issue that Malay had conquered the Dayaks. As a result, the Dayak community members are marginalized in all aspects of life. Therefore, the politics of taking the ethnic identity into the election of local dignitaries—such as mayor, regent and governor is very controversial. Accordingly, this situation is not conducive to the efforts of integrating the Indonesian nation.

While the Sambases oral texts describe the inter-tribal conflict between the Dayaks and Malays, the Sekadau oral texts are just the opposite. The two tribal community members are described as having led a life of close relations between two younger and elder brothers. In the text of *Ulu Kapuas* (Asfar 2003), recorded in the Kampung Cupang Gading, Sekadau, it is stated that the Dayak and Malay ethnic originated from the offsprings of two brothers namely, Cipok and Linok. What is interesting here is that the identity labeling did not come from them, but from a Javanese King, named Mas Demang Kuning. The reason for this was political, that is the sharing of power. Cipok was labeled as Dayak as he was assigned to safeguard the hinterland areas, while Linok was labeled as Malay, for he was assigned to safeguard the coastal areas. This text also explains the origins of Dayak Jawan, Dayak Sawai and Dayak Taman groups who resided along the Menterap riverbanks on the valleys of Sekadau river.

The granting of such label due to sharing of power described above also happened to the Ketapang community members. The *Orang Ulu* (Asfar 2003), text found at Sungai Laur downstream, Ketapang, informs us that the Dayak and Malay ethnic groups are brothers. It is so-called because the “orang hulu” is identical to the Dayak ethnic group who currently reside along the downstream of the Sungai Laur and are related to the Malay who inhabits Kampung Jago.

They both were identified as the off springs of a woman who survived the amuck of *tilan* fish that killed all other people.

Apart from the reason of power sharing, the identity of ethnical groups between the Dayak and Malay, it is also due to religious differences. The community members of kampung Kepari, Ketapang, have an interesting story to explain the origin of identity change above. According to them, the story about the origin of Dayak and Malay is believed to have started at a party held by 40 prophets and their followers. In that party a variety of foods—pig's meat, beef, mutton, chicken, dog's meat and the likes as well as some drinks—fermented palm wine, *arak* and plain water were served. The youngest of all the prophets was Muhammad who came after all Islam's forbidden food and drinks were eaten up by the other prophets.

The process of identity formation that could be currently observed in both the Dayak and Malay community is an open one. The community members of both groups are involved in a relatively intensive social interaction with other community groups from out of West Kalimantan. The text of *Ulu Kapuas* (Asfar 2003) shows the social interaction between the local community and the Majapahit kingdom. *Hikayat Tanjungpura* (Asfar 2003) depicts the social interaction between Ketapang community group with the community members of Sriwijaya kingdom and Malay Sultanate in Melaka. The text of *Wan Unggal* (Effendi 1992) reveals that after the Sambasese people crippled a tyrannical king, Wan Unggal, who was in another version called *Tan Unggal* (Effendi 1992), kidnapped one of a Javanese King's children to be installed as the King of Sambas. The text *Asal Sambas* (Asfar 2003) describes the kings of Sambas as descendants of the child of a Chinese king.

Hundred or thousand of years earlier, the ethnic groups in West Kalimantan must have interacted with one another. In terms of linguistic context, such interactions can be seen through language distribution (Collins 1998 & 2002), while in the oral text tradition the same can be seen from the similar story motives in various places. The origin of paddy, for example, both in the community members of Dayak and Malay, is believed to have come from heaven. The Sambasese community members believe that paddy which was originally as big as a coconut was first brought down from heaven by Kalantika as told by texts *Kalantike* (Effendi 1994), whereas in the Dayak Kendayan's community, it was brought by Nek Baruakng Kulub, as described by text of *Nek Baruakng Kulub* (Effendi 1994). The stories about Pak Saloi which are popular within the Malay community are also popular within the Dayak community under the name of Pak Aloy. Social interactions between the ethnical groups of Dayak and Malay and the two groups with other ethnical groups who came later to West Kalimantan therefore enrich the plurality of the two group identities. The plurality of identities has been the element of cultural mosaic of West Kalimantan community.



## CONCLUSION

From the number of the above texts, the identity of West Kalimantan community is obviously pluralistic in nature. Close relation between the Dayak and Malay which they themselves have admitted as brothers or an elder-younger relation cannot be dichotomized. The geographical aspect that is marked by a great number of rivers, hills, and mountains have caused the Dayak and Malay community members in the *kampungs* to develop their perspective identities, although generally reveals similar roots. The plurality of identity is believed to be more dynamic, liquid, multidimensional, and undergoes continuous change in the future. More changes are expected with the availability of transportation facilities and infrastructures that makes the mobility of community members of the groups greater.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Data obtained from West Kalimantan Statistic Bureau (2000) lists the number of respective ethnic population: Dayak: 1,234,162 people or 33% of total number population 3,732,940; Malay 1,208,537; Javanese 341,173; Madurese 203,612; Sundanese 89,493; Bugenese 121,223; Celebes (non-Bugenese: 30,091); Bataknese 18,809; Padangese 7,493; Sumatra (non-Bataknese and Padangese 12,755; Banjarese 24,117; Chinese 352,939; Arabs 3,549; Indians 929; others 83,537 and foreigners 531.
- <sup>2</sup> Among others the materials from the project of The Homeland of the Malay Language: Evidence from West Kalimantan, cooperation between ATMA and PPKM.
- <sup>3</sup> Parts of the texts being collected have been analysed as post-graduate thesis entitled "Sastra Lisan Sambas: Suntingan Teks, Terjemahan, dan Analisis Struktur (1992).
- <sup>4</sup> The synopsis of the 112 texts has been compiled by Yusriadi (1998), research assistant of the said project.
- <sup>5</sup> The oral texts at Sekadau and Ketapang were recorded by Dedy Ari Aspar, a researcher of PPKM Untan, Pontianak.
- <sup>6</sup> Ngkana texts Tingang Tebang is being recorded by Yeskil Leban, a teacher and Headmaster at Nanga Pinoh, Sintang while the narrator is his own father.

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