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Abstract

This article offers some ethnographic glimpses into Timpaus village life emphasizing gendered behavior cast in a perspective of general norms for behavior and age-related expectations of moral conduct. Aspects of village life are interpreted through narrative analysis to demonstrate both general and local patterns of meaning production. The goal is to uncover common themes in the data based on observations, discussions, conversations, and listening to and participating in various discourses with young and older villagers. In the analysis of the material a hermeneutic method is applied and narrative theory tested to investigate meaning production among villagers and especially young girls. The aim of this is to bring forth mental processes that sometimes produce and at other times confirm or oppose particular ways of understanding oneself and others’ place and position in the world. In this article, narratives are seen as linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable

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composite, displaying the significance that events have for one another. My concern is not how narrative as text is constructed, but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality.

Introduction

Timpaus is a small island approximately 12 miles long and two miles wide in the Banggai archipelago, east of Luwuk, Central Sulawesi. The island is fringed by coral reefs and there are no harbors that can accommodate any boats much larger than canoes. Communication is irregular as there is no post, telephone or radio contact with neighboring islands. The total island population (1994) was somewhat less than 1,000 residents divided between two villages: Kasuari and Timpaus. Timpaus village, where I lived during my fieldwork, had 390 residents. In Timpaus village the majority of the population identified themselves as Banggai people. In addition, individuals of Butonese, Buginese, Sangirese and Chinese ethnic identity had settled there. A section of the village was called kampung Bajau (Bajau settlement) and was primarily peopled by families of Bajau ethnicity. The ethnic origin of all villagers was well known and at times made relevant, for instance, to explain odd conduct or particular individual interests. Ethnic identity was not, however, a significant status during most everyday interactions. The islanders regard themselves as Muslims, and there is a mosque both in Kasuari and Timpaus village. The economy was primarily based on domestic subsistence production; the villagers obtained cash for the purchase of the commercial goods they needed from the sale of copra and occasionally some fish, including shark fins. The ethnographic material for this article was gathered during two periods of anthropological fieldwork (seven months in 1992–93 and two months in 1994) on Timpaus. In 1994 my daughter (14 years old) and son (11 years old) accompanied me during the fieldwork. More ethnographic information about Timpaus can be found in Broch (1998, 2003).

Personality differences among children, as well as adults, are often a focus of attention, and such differences are offered as explanations of diverse behavior in Timpaus. The islanders share several ethno-psychological explanations. They view personality as inherited and observable soon after birth. Also, certain likes and dislikes manifest themselves during the first years of childhood. Thus some people come to share an