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Rens Heringa

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RITUAL CLOTH AS EMBLEM OF SOCIO-RELIGIOUS VALUES IN INDONESIA

Panel Introduction by Rens Heringa

Recent anthropological studies of Indonesian textiles have reported in detail on the important ritual role of locally-made heirloom cloths among a range of ethnic groups throughout the archipelago. Moreover, the few extant studies with a local comparative bias have shown how the function of one particular textile may vary between people living in different villages or belonging to different social groups. Geirnaert has pointed out that, obviously, this indicates that textiles may form part of a wider geographical or symbolical system (Geirnaert 1992:xxviii). It has also been shown that this type of comparative effort can be taken beyond the archipelago (see Gittinger 1992; Maxwell 1990). As yet, a concerted attempt at comparison of the meanings of ritual cloth among different ethnic groups within Indonesia has not been undertaken. Therefore, our panel will compare the manner in which one type of highlyvalued, locally-made ceremonial cloth functions among three ethnic groups in Indonesia: the Lio of central Flores, the Minangkabau of west Sumatra and villagers from Kerek, near Tuban on the northeast coast of Java.

The comparison concerns the most highly-valued type of textile and its ritual role among the highest-ranking social group in each of the three cultures: the *lawo butu*, the beaded sarong of the Lio, the *kain sandang gobo*, a heavily gold-decorated shoulder cloth of the Minangkabau and the *kain kembangan*, the flowered cloth of the villagers of Kerek. Certain differences in the symbolic meaning and function of the three cloth types will appear to be linked to the different forms of social organization and religious adherence of each of the three groups. Changes over time have influenced the cloths' function.

Weiner's distinction between alienable property - which may be owned by individuals or sections of the community, and is marketable or exchangeable - and inalienable property - which is collectively and eternally owned by the whole group - in Oceania (Weiner 1992), has served as an additional analytical tool for the case of the Indonesian textiles.

Three aspects are of particular interest for the analytical attempt. First comes the question in how far "female" and "male" properties may be attributed to the textile by each of the three groups. Many scholars have described Indonesian textiles as female goods, primarily because textiles are made by women and also because they often function as gift from the side of the bride in exchange for "male" metal objects such as weapons, jewelry or money. It has however been suggested, that textiles from

some areas in the archipelago may also be imbued with male qualities, depending upon the context (Gittinger 1979:107/108; Geirnaert 1992:93,101).

The second aspect of comparison to be considered are the differences in social organization among each of the three groups. The Lio have a double descent type, which means that a person inherits certain qualities or property from his or her mother and others from his or her father. For instance, membership in the ranked groups of nobles, commoners and slaves is inherited from the mother, while land and membership of a House are inherited from the father.

Minangkabau society is organized matrilineally, meaning that group membership and property are inherited from mother to daughter (or son). The Minangkabau adhere to a system in which descendants of the original population, who control *adat* titles and ancestral property, are ranked above newcomers.

The Javanese villagers of Kerek adhere to a bilineal system, which entails inheritance of membership in the group from both mother and father. Ownership of different categories of land divides the population into ranked groups. The highest category, agricultural land, is inherited from father to son.

The third aspect to be considered is the manner in which the three groups each combine a different foreign religion with their traditional customs (*adat*). All three still perform the rituals to honor their ancestors. The Lio converted to Catholicism in the beginning of this century. The Minangkabau, Muslim since the sixteenth century, have managed to forge a synthesis between matrilineal custom and patrilineally-biased Islam. The villagers of Kerek adopted the Muslim creed in the fifteenth century, and combine it with Hindu-Javanese custom.

In conclusion, the key to the comparative analysis can be summarized as follows. First, all three textiles will appear to incorporate male and female properties, be it differently stressed, in direct relationship to the male or female emphasis of each particular group's social organization. Secondly, all three textiles will be found to move from an alienable phase into an inalienable phase. The rituals indicate at which point this change occurs. The level of the Sumatran and the Javanese ritual differs from the one enacted in Flores. While the first two serve to increase the image of a single descent group, the latter functions to strengthen the whole village community. The first two rituals pinpoint the moment when the cloth changes into becoming inalienable. In the third, only an already inalienable cloth is appropriate.

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