

Myth and Ritual Education System in Sikka (NTT)

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Abstract

I propose to discuss the indigenous education system of the people of Sikka Regency (NTT Province) from the results of ethnographic research I conducted in 2005-2006. I ask specifically, 'how does the practice of ritual educate participants in a religious world-view that is expressed through cosmogonic myths?' In answer to this question I advance a performative theory of ritual education based on Gregory Bateson's social-cybernetic theory of the ecology of mind and Roy Rappaport's theory of ritual and sanctification. I argue that indigenous Sikkhanese cosmological ideas and practices are taught to be valued as truth as they are *embodied* in the practical action of ritual.

In support of my argument I draw on two versions of the indigenous Sikkhanese origin myth which tells of the creation of the world in terms of the separation and complementarity of the deity's female principle (*ina nian tana wawa*) and male principle (*ama lero wulan reta*). Each version of the myth has a distinctly different narrative, however both share the same circular logical structure of separation, obligation, reunification, and separation. I show that this logic is the same as the logic of sacrifice, upon which all Sikkhanese rituals are based. I suggest that during ritual performances the participants embody the logic of sacrifice through 'deutero-learning'. Deutero-learning is a developmental process by which "the subject has acquired a habit of looking for contexts and sequences of one type rather than another" (Bateson 2000: 166). The deutero-learning of the logic of sacrifice during ritual is carried over into non-ritual life and contributes to individuals' perceptions of the world. I argue that while the variations in Sikkhanese origin myths (which are not recited in ritual) can be explained by the syncretic influence of Catholicism, the logical *similarities* of these myths can be explained by the embodiment of this logic during ritual.

With regards to the explicit issues concerning this panel, my paper addresses the question of 'cultural memory' in terms of the individual embodiment of cosmological ideas in the restricted context of ritual. That is, although different individuals learn in an essentially unique and recursive engagement with their social and physical environment, the formality of ritual provides the conditions for shared experiences. In this way, the communal and practical action of ritual, more so than the abstract text of myth, is the 'technology' by which cultural values persist through generations. The potential for change is also relevant, and I therefore consider the possibility of syncretic forms of Sikkhanese origin myths feeding back into ritual practice.