

The Urban Gorap Ethnic Group's Concerns About The Fate Of Their Language And Ethnic Identity Amidst The Rapid Socio-Cultural Changes

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Abstract. *In 19th century colonial writers noted the existence of a minority ethnic group called Gorap people in Halmahera, North Maluku. This group, however, does not get much attention since then among scholars who study communities in North Maluku. By analyzing the few existing documents and doing ethnography, this study investigates the existence of this ethnic group, its diaspora, and the concerns and struggles of its members who live in urban Ternate about the future of their ethnic identity among some dominant ethnic groups in North Maluku. This study found the origins of Gorap community and their spread across some villages in Halmahera. It was also found that the urban Gorap community has deep concerns about the fate of their ethnic identity due to the continued threat of the Gorap language amidst the current rapid socio-cultural changes.*

Keywords : Gorap, endangered language, ethnic identity

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the last two decades, ethnicity has become an important issue in Indonesian politics and culture. This is certainly surprising because in the previous era, in the New Order era, discussions about ethnicity were taboo and therefore very sensitive. The changing political atmosphere since the reformation has made ethnicity an important identity in contemporary Indonesian socio-cultural and political life. This trend also influenced the emergence of a trend of strengthening ethnic politics since the reformation (Davidson *et al.*, 2020, Nordholt & Klinken 2007, Erb 2015).

Apart from ethnic political movements which tend to give rise to open contestation and conflict between various different ethnicities, this trend also opens up space for efforts to strengthen ethnic identity without the aim of gaining political power. This phenomenon occurs not because members of a particular ethnic group are fighting for certain resources vis-à-vis other ethnic groups, as generally happens in the politicization of ethnic identity, but rather an ethnic group is trying to maintain its ethnic identity which is in danger of fading or trying to introduce its existence to the public. This second

category is what happens to the Gorap ethnic group. They tried to maintain their language and tried to introduce the existence of the Gorap ethnic group to other ethnic groups in North Maluku.

Ethnic identity, like individual identity, is often a marker that people continually try to maintain. In today's society, which is increasingly influenced by the currents of change, often the identity of an ethnic group is the part that is felt to be threatened or is considered threatened. We found feelings of threat to ethnic identity in the urban Gorap community. They are gorap people who have migrated to the city of Ternate and have lived in this city for a long time. They are worried that there will be a phase of loss of ethnic identity in the Gorap community because the Gorap language is increasingly endangered.

The concerns of some members of the gorap community are not without reason. The Gorap language is increasingly under threat due to high contact with outsiders, easier access to information using Indonesian and Malay, and increasing use of cellphones to access social media using non-Gorap languages. Apart from that, many immigrants from other ethnicities settled and married into the local community. All of these tendencies have contributed

to reducing the use of the Gorap language in society. At the same time, it was felt that this would threaten their ethnic identity as gorap people.

The factors that cause the decreasing use of local languages vary widely. Factors such as war, conquest, migration, trade contacts are some of them (Dorian 1999). Apart from the influence of macro social factors such as these, changes in people's perspectives about their world and the world outside them, which are more ideological in nature, also influence changes in language use (Ga; 1995). Many urban gorap informants also mentioned internal and external factors, which contributed to the decline in gorap language speakers.

The Gorap people and the Gorap language have, so far, received little attention from researchers. Some colonial writers only briefly mentioned the existence of the Gorap people and the Gorap language but did not explore it further (Clerq 1890, Fraasen 1987). After the end of the colonial period, the gorap people and its language still received little attention from researchers. Some of the few studies have indeed been conducted. Among them is a study by Saidi, Waliyanti, and La Nani (Saidi *et al.*, 2024) on the ethnomathematics of the Gorap ethnic group. Another study is an ethnography about the Gorap people's views on environmental changes in Bobaneigo Bay (Amin 2020).

Specifically for the study of the Gorap language, there are two undergraduate theses that discuss this issue. One of them is an undergraduate thesis about gorap language affixation. This was written by a student from Bobaneigo, one of the gorap villages. Apart from discussing affixations, the study also found that the gorap language, when the study was conducted in 1991, was still used by the gorap community in their daily conversations (Fara 1981). Another undergraduate thesis discusses gorap language maintenance. The study found that the maintenance of the Gorap language, especially in Sondo-Sondo village, another Gorap village, is still good because the Gorap people in that village still use it in daily communication (Djalal 2022).

In contrast to the conclusions of the two undergraduate theses, other researchers found that the gorap language was already at endangered status (Wurm 2007, Bracks 2023). In fact, Difa Fara, one of the informants who wrote a thesis on the Gorap language in 1991 and at that time concluded that the Gorap language was still used, is now worried about the threat of extinction of the Gorap language.

Of the few studies after the 2000s that have been discussed, except for one study, generally they have revealed the endangered condition of the gorap language. These studies, however, have not revealed the emic perspective of Gorap people themselves about the endangered status of the Gorap language, the impact of this situation on their identity, and what efforts they make to respond to this situation.

This article focuses on answering these questions from the perspective of urban gorap people, namely those who have left their villages and have settled in the city of Ternate. But before discussing these three issues, to provide context about the Gorap people, we will first briefly describe the origin and distribution of the Gorap people in Halmahera.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

Location, Sample, and Data Collection

This article is written based on our fieldwork conducted in urban Ternate. We purposively chose informants who are Gorap people but have migrated to and lived in Ternate. By employing qualitative ethnography, we collect data through interview, observation, and document analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis starts since collection begins until research is completed. In the analysis we classify data based on its sub-issue and connect them to other related issue in order to gain an understanding of what concerns urban gorap people have regarding their ethnic identity and to be able to draw sensible conclusions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Origin and Distribution of Gorap People

The word Gorap is often understood as an acronym that stands for the phrase Gabungan Orang-orang Pendatang (a combination of immigrants). Of course, in sociohistorical reality it is true that the Gorap people is a combination of people brought in from various different places by pirates, but such a match is just a coincidence. Researchers have not found he precise meaning of the word gorap. De Clerq wrote "Nobody has been able to explain to me the meaning of the word gorap. According to Gericke's dictionary, the word should mean "a kind of ship" in Javanese, which according to Veth (Java, II:323, note) means "small ship" (Clerq 1890). In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, the word gorap is a noun which means a sailboat equipped with wood that functions as a float (KBBI 2024). Fraasen estimates that the word gorap comes from the Bugis language gora meaning pirate, which in Loloda language is called gorapu meaning pirate (Fraasen 1987).

According to several colonial writers who visited the gorap villages, the gorap people were former slaves from all over the archipelago but mainly from Flores, Manggarai, Saleiyer, and Buton who were captured by pirates from Halmahera (Clerq 1890) and brought them to Halmahera. These former slaves later became pirates themselves. Those findings are in line with the collective memory of the old people in Bobaneigo village who say the origin of the gorap people is from Selebes (Sulawesi), Butung (perhaps meaning Buton) and also Manggarai. According to a 1930 population

survey conducted by the Dutch colonial government, the number of gorap people in Halmahera was only 125 people (Departemen van Economische Zaken, 1936)

Today the number of gorap people has increased and they live in several villages in Kao Bay, namely Bobaneigo, Sondo-Sondo, Nusa Ambu, Talaga Jaya, Nusa Jaya, Ekor, and Saramaake. They also live on Morotai Island in the villages of Pilowo, Galo-galo, Waringin and Daruba. Gorap language is used in these villages. There are records from colonial writers about gorap in the Loloda Islands but they are difficult to trace today (Clerq 1890, Fraasen 1987). Apart from the gorap villages where they live, gorap people also spread in small numbers to other villages in Halmahera (Taylor 1983), and there are also gorap people who live in urban areas such as the cities of Ternate and Tidore in North Maluku.

Gorap: Endangered Language

Gorap people do not have their own language, therefore they speak Malay (Wurm 2007), but Malay gorap is "Malayo-Polynesian creole, with a mixed vocabulary which also contains words from Malay, Indonesian and from the large West Papuan, North Halmahera lingua Ternate franca; under strong pressure from the language from which the majority of its vocabulary seems to have originated" (Wurm 2007). This mixture of various languages is also recognized by Gorap informants, and can also be traced in various Gorap language vocabularies which contain vocabulary from Malay, several languages from Sulawesi, several local languages from North Maluku, and other vocabulary of unknown origin.

Researchers such as Stephen A Wurm (Bracks 2023) wrote that the Gorap language is an endangered language because the number of speakers are decreasing. The findings of Christoph Bracks (Fishman & Joshua 1999) in A Documentation of Gorap owned by the University of Frankfurt, Germany, also places Gorap as an endangered language. Data from the research documents are in line with interview data with informants. The informants admitted that the Gorap language is increasingly endangered because many young people no longer use the Gorap language in their daily communication.

Gorap informants who already live in the city of Ternate also said that parents and adults in Gorap villages generally tend to no longer accustom their children to using Gorap language in daily conversations. They prefer to use Indonesian or Ternate Malay when interacting with their children. An informant suggested "parents should interact with their children using Gorap language so that children not only understand Gorap language passively but can also use it in active communication." She said that even though he had

lived in the city for a long time, she often used gorap when talking to her children. The result is that even though her children were born and raised in the city of Ternate, they understand Gorap language, even her oldest child can speak Gorap language.

Another Gorap informant, Mrs. Difa, a career woman who is the principal of a high school in the city of Ternate, also regrets the lack of attention of parents in Gorap villages in maintaining the Gorap language by getting their children used to using Gorap. Difa's concern about the importance of preserving the Gorap language has been going on for a long time. When she was still studying as an undergraduate, she chose to write his thesis on the Gorap language with the title Affixation of the Gorap Language in 1991.

Like other informants, Difa also said that access to communication technology such as television, mobile phones and the internet in general, which generally do not use Gorap language, also makes children interact more with non-Gorap languages compared to Gorap languages. This situation has certainly contributed greatly to endangering the Gorap language among the Gorap people who live in Gorap village.

During a field study in Bobaneigo village, one of the main gorap villages, we gathered children from grades 3 to 5 of elementary school in an informal setting. We asked about the meaning of some typical gorap vocabularies, most of the children did not understand the meaning of the words asked. There were only a few children in the observation and interview who stated the meaning of the words correctly, even though they seemed doubtful. When asked why they don't know the meaning of these words or are unsure, they say they rarely hear these words. The results of these observations confirm interview data from urban gorap people in the city of Ternate and also data from previous researchers that the gorap language is indeed endangered.

Gorap: Endangered Identity

Various studies have shown that language is a very important component of an ethnic identity. Joshua A Fishman (Fishman & Joshua 1999) wrote "Although language has rarely been equated with the totality of ethnicity, it has, in certain historical, regional and disciplinary contexts, been accorded priority within that totality". In fact, Wodak said that language itself is part of identity construction - "Language choice, and language itself, are part of identity construction" (Wodak 2012). Ethnicity is not something that is genetic but is constructed socioculturally (Amin & Syamsiar 2016). Nancy C. Dorian writes "Ethnicity can feel very primal, but it rests fundamentally on social rather than on biological underpinnings—and socially constructed categories are subject to change" (Dorian 1999). Therefore, changes in the sociocultural

environment, including language, can easily cause changes in the sense of ethnicity. In other words, sociocultural changes that threaten the use of language as the main marker of ethnicity also pose a major threat to the existence of an ethnic identity.

The results of interviews with several gorap informants in urban Ternate revealed that gorap identity has always relied on gorap descent and language. However, according to them, it is impossible to maintain offspring because of the high rate of intermarriage between people and non-gorap so that their descendants will find it difficult to maintain their gorap identity. The only aspect that could still potentially be retained is language. Unfortunately, according to them, the gorap language is increasingly endangered. The trend towards decreasing use of gorap language worries the informants.

Their worry is not just about losing the Gorap language, but more about the consequences of this loss which could lead to the loss of their ethnic identity. Informants such as Hamsiah, a housewife who has lived in the city of Ternate for decades, emphasized that the Gorap identity can only survive if the Gorap language is still used daily. Therefore, according to him, in order for Gorap people to still have a Gorap ethnic identity, Gorap people must continue to use the Gorap language and get their children used to using the language. Another informant, Difa, a leader of the gorap community arisan (locally called arisan) in the city of Ternate said "if this language disappears, we will no longer have a sign that we are gorap people, we will lose our identity as gorap people."

When asked why it is so important to maintain gorap identity, urban gorap informants generally say that their ethnic identity must be maintained because everyone has an ethnic identity as a marker of who they are. Difa said that gorap identity is like something that belongs to us that has been with us since childhood, but then it is eroded slowly and will disappear, of course we are sad and will defend it. He also said, "if everyone has their own ethnic identity, there are Makeanese, Tidorese, Ternatenese, Galelarese, and others in North Maluku, and we are the only ones who don't have one, then it's not just them who don't know who we are, even we ourselves, we don't know who we are. That certainly hurts a lot."

There are two ways in which the Ternate urban gorap community maintains its gorap ethnic identity. The first way is to try to maintain the Gorap language and the second way is to show the non-Gorap public the existence of the Gorap ethnicity. The first way is to continue to encourage the use of gorap language both in the family and in the activities of gorap association (arisan gorap) in the city of Ternate and encourage the idea of compiling a gorap language dictionary. They appreciate the Gorap language dictionary that has been compiled

by the North Maluku Language Office (Taha *et al.*, 2014), but the dictionary has limited vocabulary, and therefore needs to be made more complete by Gorap people who understand various Gorap language vocabulary.

The chairperson of the Gorap social gathering, Difa, said that in the city of Ternate, the Gorap people's social gathering is a place for the Gorap people to get together as well as to unite themselves. But if this forum is increasingly ignored, then the identity of the gorap people, who are a minority in this city, will also be threatened. There is an agreement that at every social gathering they must use gorap language so that this language can be maintained. Social gatherings (Arisan) are also a way to maintain their sense of presence in this city. Difa said, "even though we are small, we exist, and this social gathering is important to maintain our sense of existence."

The second strategy to maintain Gorap ethnic identity is to introduce the existence of Gorap ethnicity to the non-Gorap public, including registering Gorap ethnic status at the Ternate city government office. As a result, the Gorap tribe is now one of 28 tribes registered at the Ternate city government office. The implication is that in events related to cultural diversity celebrations organized by the city government, the Gorap ethnic group can display their typical food, typical dances, and others. The gorap ethnic group is also involved in the Legu Gam event, a kind of annual folk party organized by the sultanate of Ternate, which is open to the public, which displays various ethnic cultures living in North Maluku.

The Gorap ethnic group also often presents itself at the Jailolo Bay Festival, an annual West Halmahera district government event that showcases various ethnicities and cultures. At each moment they often display various dances, food and typical gorap clothing. They also plan to appear on a radio program called Ragam Budaya on Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) Ternate to inform the North Maluku public about the gorap ethnic group, its language and culture.

These urban Gorap informants admit that the Gorap ethnic group is indeed the most minority ethnic group in North Maluku, and that the population is so small that it is possible that there are North Maluku people from this ethnic group who do not know that the Gorap ethnic group exists. In various local political contestations which are often linked to ethnic political contestations, only large ethnic groups such as Makean, Tidore, Ternate, Tobelo-Galela, Sanana, are the subject of public discussion. Small ethnicities such as Gorap are not taken into account, as if they are considered non-existent. Hamsiah said, "if we exist but we are thought not to exist, that will hurt".

The informants think that the Gorap ethnic group really needs to appear at various public events

to show the typical Gorap culture, to show that they exist. Difa said, "Using the platform provided by the government like that is important to show that we also exist, and by doing that we will be seen. "Other ethnic groups who come from far away from Ternate, such as Sulawesi or Sumatra, are proud to display their identities here, so should gorap."

The informants also stated that they strongly supported the idea of compiling a gorap language dictionary. For them, the dictionary not only protects the Gorap language so that it does not disappear completely because it is recorded in the dictionary, but also shows that the Gorap language exists, meaning that the Gorap tribe also exists. In other words, dictionaries and also appearances at public events are seen as part of efforts to declare that the Gorap ethnicity exists.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research are consistent with several previous studies which found that the gorap language is endangered. Urban Goraps who live in the city of Ternate expressed their concerns about the decreasing use of the Gorap language in daily communication in Gorap villages.

The urban Goraps see this phenomenon as an early sign of the extinction of the gorap language. For them, the Gorap language is the main marker of the existence of the Gorap ethnicity, so if the Gorap language is endangered, it will threaten the existence of the Gorap ethnic identity. It is this threat to identity that is very worrying because if the Gorap ethnic identity disappears then not only will they not be known by other ethnic communities but they will not even be able to recognize who they are. In their minds, this is painful for them because everyone in North Maluku has an ethnic identity and they cannot possibly take another ethnicity as their new identity. For gorap people, losing their identity is a big loss. There was no other way, so as not to lose their gorap identity, they are implementing two strategies, namely maintain the gorap language in conversations among themselves and introducing the gorap ethnic culture to the public of North Maluku. Maintaining the use of gorap language as an inward strategy and introducing gorap ethnicity to the non-gorap public as an outward strategy.

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