1. Language Activism: principle to practice

As the politics of fieldwork are increasingly radicalised, linguistic fieldworkers have been at the forefront of the development of a new research paradigm that advocates much greater involvement by community members in linguistic research, and sees linguists and community members working more and more in partnership. Grinevald was one of the first to articulate this stance, arguing the need for academic linguists to reassess their working relationships with speakers and their communities, particularly in regard to community participation in decision-making vis-à-vis the research process (for example, Grinevald 2003, Craig 1992). Descriptions of individual attempts to enact such a model have begun to emerge — for example, Wilkins (1992) and Stebbins (2003) describe the experiences and struggles of working within an action research framework, aiming for research to be directed entirely by the speech community.

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Cameron et al. (1993) compellingly address the issue of power, knowledge and control in relationships between researchers and the research community. The authors identify three frameworks for conceptualising relations between the parties:

i. ethical model: research on social subjects

ii. advocacy model: research on and for social subjects

iii. empowerment model: research on, for and with social subjects

The empowerment model is seen as a means for both parties to realise their goals: in conjunction with the investigation of their own research questions, researchers acknowledge the subjects’ agendas and share expertise to facilitate their fruition. While arguing for an empowerment model, Cameron et al point to the complexities of locating power, noting the interactions between its shifting and multiple dimensions. They acknowledge that empowerment is ‘not just a matter of giving people “more power” but of recognizing that every group in a community is itself an arena for conflict and struggle’ (1993: 89).

Grinevald (2003: 58) has recently identified the emergence of a fourth model for linguistic field research:

iv. fieldwork by speakers of the language community themselves

For communities, partnerships with academic linguists provide an opportunity to gain the skills that are essential for undertaking field research and language revitalisation or maintenance activities. For the academic community, working within an empowerment framework provides new, more rewarding modes of engaging with communities, and also strengthens opportunities for working towards language revitalisation or maintenance. Sections of the academic community are looking for ways of meeting the challenge of providing training to community members. For example, Woodbury and England (2004)
outline an academic program that offers linguistic training to speakers of indigenous languages of Latin America. Florey (2004) describes a program that seeks to empower community language activists in Central Maluku, eastern Indonesia, through training in language documentation and language maintenance techniques.

In some sociopolitical environments linguists are finding that the goal of working within an empowerment framework can be frustrated due to a wide range of factors from power and status differentials, to challenges wrought by local sociocultural conditions (political suppression, fear of political activism, et cetera), and to disparities in political awareness. In such settings, non-indigenous linguists commonly continue to direct the field research, albeit while trying to engage the community as much as possible and to build capacity through various strategies. This scenario raises challenging questions: Does language maintenance activity led by non-indigenous linguists constitute yet another appropriation of indigenous agency? How do linguists balance concern for language endangerment and language documentation with the goal of community involvement and ownership? Under these circumstances, (how) can we move from ideal or ethical principle to practice? Grinevald takes the provocative stance that there may be cases in which it is better not to undertake fieldwork, and suggests that we should ‘attend to those communities that are seeking the help and expertise of linguists’ (2003: 62). Certainly we have mounting evidence that language maintenance or revitalisation cannot succeed unless members of the speech community are politically engaged with language endangerment and form the goal of language maintenance for themselves (for example, Fishman 1991, 2001). Crystal (2003:19) notes that both bottom-up (community) and top-down (government) support are crucial elements in language maintenance enterprises.
It appears that successful language activism draws on a complex interaction between a number of factors:

- triggers for community engagement with language endangerment
- top-down (government) support
- bottom-up (community) ownership and action
- resolve on the part of linguists to work within an empowerment framework
- appropriate training programs to facilitate community involvement in research

This paper constitutes a case study in which political events in Maluku, eastern Indonesia, have triggered an awareness of language endangerment and led communities to begin to act on that awareness and to seek ways of working in partnership with linguists. Key questions that we ask in this paper are: What factors can trigger that essential political engagement with language endangerment by speakers of minority languages? How does this political engagement transform into language activism? How can these contexts / moments be transformative both for communities and for researchers?

2. Triggers for political engagement with language endangerment

2.1. Ambonese Malay, Malukan identity and language loss

Two key factors in the sociopolitical background of Maluku are crucially linked to language endangerment and the lack of political engagement by the community with this issue: the rise of Ambonese Malay, and Malukan resistance to incorporation into the Indonesian state.

The geopolitical region of the Malukan islands is rich in linguistic diversity, with 128
Austronesian and non-Austronesian languages. Forty-two of the Austronesian languages are spoken in the fourteen islands of Central Maluku (Map 1), which include Ambon Island, on which the regional capital of Ambon city is located, the Lease islands (Haruku, Saparua, Nusalaut), Buru Island, and Seram Island. This area was formerly an administrative district (now divided in two) and still has currency on ethnolinguistic grounds vis-à-vis the northern and south-eastern regions of Maluku. Perhaps as many as fifty percent of the languages of Central Maluku are endangered (see Florey 2005a), yet there has been little consciousness of or political engagement with language endangerment and indigenous languages have long been neglected.

Map 1 — Indonesia showing Maluku and Central Maluku

A historic link between religious identity and language use in Central Maluku has been widely reported (see Florey 1991, 1997). Villages that converted to Christianity in the Dutch colonial era from the late sixteenth century enjoyed closer contact with the colonial authorities. The ensuing access to education and employment also encouraged the use of Ambonese Malay as a lingua franca. The sociopolitical currency of this Malay-based creole
led to more rapid loss of indigenous languages in Christian villages. Muslim Ambonese also spoke Ambonese Malay in interactions with Christians (cf. Kennedy 1955: 56), however, in contrast with Christian villages, indigenous languages spoken in Muslim villages retained their importance in most domains. It has been noted that this pattern of greater language maintenance in Muslim villages is breaking down in the modern era and languages in these settings are now increasingly endangered (see Florey 2005b, Musgrave and Ewing 2006).

In the postcolonial era from the mid-twentieth century, political events also impacted greatly on language attitudes and language use. Following independence from the Dutch, many Malukans, primarily from the Christian communities of Central Maluku, resisted incorporation into the Republic of Indonesia (see Florey and van Engelenhoven 2001). An independent Republic of the South Moluccas, Republik Maluku Selatan (RMS) was proclaimed on Ambon Island on 24 April 1950. Some 12,500 Malukan soldiers who served in the Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger (KNIL ‘Royal Netherlands-Indies Army’) and supported Malukan independence were transported to the Netherlands with their families. Following a prolonged and destructive guerrilla war, the RMS was defeated by the Indonesian armed forces in 1964. Through the remainder of the twentieth century, the Indonesian government continued to suppress any remnants of resistance.

Despite their political integration into the Indonesian state following the cessation of hostilities, Christians and Muslims continued to share a sense of alienation from the larger Indonesian state. Part of the discourse of ‘Malukan-ness’ was a sense of marginalisation from the decision-making processes of the central government. Malukans felt powerless to prevent the sale of their natural resources to national and foreign interests (wood, petroleum and other minerals), and aggrieved at the inequities that they perceived between the infrastructure
provided to the Javanese (roads, houses, etcetera) and the lack of such facilities in Maluku. Any local problems were overshadowed by the shared struggle against these larger issues, which unified a sense of Malukan identity.

In this context, it has been socially, politically, and linguistically more important to the people of Central Maluku, both Christian and Muslim, to mark their regional identity in contrast to a wider Indonesian identity. This contrast has been more important than marking membership of a local ethnolinguistic group. Ambonese Malay, as a creole widely used by Central Malukans, has provided an ideal marker of regional identity. With many loans from Dutch and Portuguese, and some from indigenous Malukan languages, Ambonese Malay is markedly different to Indonesian (van Minde 1997). Florey and van Engelenhoven (2001) outline the important role that Malay played in the RMS. It was the language of the proclamation, and also unified and identified the Malukan community both in Indonesia and in the Dutch diaspora. Ambonese Malay is a high status creole that is a source of pride to the people of Central Maluku both in the homeland and in the diaspora. Many songs have been written and recorded in Ambonese Malay, regular newspaper columns about local Ambonese life are also written in Ambonese Malay, and the language is heard everywhere in the region - on the streets, in local buses, at the market, and occasionally in informal segments of church services.

2.2. Transformative events

Throughout the later part of the twentieth century Maluku, on the surface at least, appeared unified and in a state of relative calm. Beginning in 1999 that harmony was shattered when local tensions erupted over a seemingly minor incident in Ambon city between a Christian minibus driver and a Muslim passenger in the primarily Muslim suburb of Batumerah (Bertrand 2002). Christians and Muslims who had lived safely side-by-side for
centuries became enemies overnight and a three-year period of civil conflict and sectarian violence began in the (then) province of Maluku. This unrest - *kerusuhan* in Indonesian - wreaked enormous destruction on the Maluku region. Mosques and churches were the target for bombings. Ambon city quickly became segregated into religious regions (Map 2), and people could no longer move freely from one area to another to get to their homes, to visit friends and relatives or to go to the market. With only a small neutral zone, there were two harbours, two sets of buses, and separate marketplaces.

Map 2 — Segregation in Ambon city (Source: UN)

Barbed wire, sandbagged barriers and armoured cars became a common sight in the streets. Sniper fire, mortars, bombs and war parties led to thousands of deaths, and many more people were injured. Throughout Maluku, whole villages were destroyed and more than 500,000 people were displaced to refugee camps. The infrastructure of key institutions in Ambon city was greatly damaged, and all the records held in the governor’s office were lost.
when it was burned to the ground. Educational institutions were particularly badly hit by the conflict. The state university (Pattimura) and the Christian university (UKIM) were destroyed, as were many primary and high schools. When the Malino peace accord was signed in February 2002, the area had been split into two provinces and Maluku’s reputation as a bastion of Christian–Muslim social harmony had been destroyed.

During the kerusuhan period Indonesian national identity was severely discredited among many Malukans. As a result of Suharto’s largely successful efforts to equate his New Order government (1966–1998) with the state and with the nation, the collapse of his government, in many people’s eyes, also saw the legitimacy of the nation-state collapse. This intensified or reinvigorated separatist sentiments. In this environment the pan-Malukan identity, which had been conceived in contrast to the wider Indonesian state, quickly lost any meaning. Ethnolinguistic groups became fragmented and pulled into conflict with each other, particularly those that were composed of both Muslim and Christian villages. One widely publicised case was the Christian village of Waai on eastern Ambon Island, which was attacked with great loss of life and the destruction of the entire village by the Muslim villages with which it shares its ethnolinguistic heritage — Tulehu, Tial, Tengah-tengah and Liang. In western Ambon, the Christian village of Allang lived uneasily alongside its Muslim sibling village of Wakasuhi. In southern Seram, there was conflict between the Muslim village of Rutah and its sibling villages of Soahuku, Amahei, Makariki and Haruru.

The kerusuhan pushed people to seek refuge in their most local unit, which became the people’s most important source of identity and support during the conflict. In the complex environment of the city, this was often one’s local suburb as there is an historical tendency for Ambon’s suburbs to reflect a particular ethnic and religious identity. Those who found
themselves in border areas or in mixed communities remained precariously in their homes to protect their property or fled to the safety of a relative’s home. Out of town, the village, as a locally defined polity rather than a nationally defined geographic space, was most commonly the place to which people retreated for support and safety.

Many stories are now told of the role that indigenous languages, locally referred to as *bahasa tanah*, reportedly played during the conflict. While the veracity of these reports is impossible to establish, they do provide insights into language attitudes and the resurgence of interest in *bahasa tanah*. For example, Christians in Ambon and Seram assert that Liang and Tulehu used their local language to plan the attack on Waai — their Christian sibling in which there is very little residual knowledge of the language. Residents of Christian villages say they felt greatly disadvantaged by being primarily speakers of Malay and Indonesian, and thus not having a secret language that they could use to warn each other of conflict or to plan attack or retreat. A school principal who comes from Wakasihi and works in Rutah suggested that the *kerusuhan* may not have happened or that peace could have been restored more quickly if people in both Allang and Wakasihi still shared their common ancestral language. He suggested that language would overtly link them as a family or as one community. He noted that the same might have held true for Rutah and the four Christian villages that share its linguistic heritage.

Many of the stories about the role of language in the *kerusuhan* can be reread as an awakening consciousness, particularly by Christian Malukans, of the loss of the cultural and linguistic complex of the ancestral past. The advantages which had derived from their colonial alignment with the Dutch and the benefits of that alignment which continued to flow into the postcolonial era, had alienated them from their roots at the most local level. For both
Christians and Muslims the *kerusuhan* highlighted the salience of *bahasa tanah* vis-à-vis ancestral and community ties. The *kerusuhan* experience has radically altered all aspects of life in Maluku, and these stories demonstrate the transformative effect it has had on attitudes towards indigenous languages and language endangerment.

3. Transforming political engagement into language activism

In the early stages of the reconciliation movement people began re-emerging from the refuge they had taken in their villages during the *kerusuhan* and began to reassess their roles and identities. At all levels of society and government Malukans are grappling with the desire to re-engage with their past and build towards the future. This process has involved questions of how to reincorporate components of their linguistic and cultural heritage into their village-level identity while working to reunite with other villages with which they share this heritage. At the same time people are looking to find ways to rebuild a wider Malukan sense of identity across the province.

The reconciliation period coincides with the period of regional autonomy in Indonesia. With regional autonomy, political and economic authority has been devolved from the central government in Jakarta to the hundreds of district level governments throughout the country. All over Indonesia grassroots movements and local forms of political engagement have been emerging (see for example the papers in Aspinall and Fealy 2003). In Maluku, this political context has opened up new opportunities for incorporating into the reconciliation process references to *bahasa tanah*, forms of local governance, and *adat* (local customary practices of social organisation and cultural representation). In 2002 representatives of both Muslim and Christian communities held negotiations that culminated in the Malino accord, bringing a formal end to the civil unrest in Maluku. As part of these negotiations, participants of the Maluku Reconciliation and Reconstruction Meeting produced a document outlining a
recommended approach to the rebuilding of Maluku. This document contains suggestions for action to be taken on a range of key issues including working with refugees and other traumatised people, rebuilding infrastructure, developing small industries, improving police–community relations, and forming an Interfaith Council. Crucially, the document begins by asserting the importance of *adat*, including indigenous languages, in the reconciliation and reconstruction process. The first three points in the body of this reconciliation document are aimed at refocusing the role of *adat* while the fourth also references *bahasa tanah* as part of the larger concept of Malukan cultural values:

1. For the sake of long-term success of the reconciliation process it is vital that the following leaders are involved in a key role in the reconciliation and reconstruction process of Maluku:
   - Traditional village leaders (*Raja*)
   - Traditional village councils (*Saniri*)
   - Youth and religious leaders and intellectuals

2. To consolidate the reconciliation and reconstruction process, we recommend that the *Adat* system is revitalised. This process should be undertaken by traditional leaders in co-operation with religious leaders and experts.

3. One of the key aspects of the revitalising the *Adat* system is to transform the role of *Adat* from a tradition/ritual-orientated role to a modernised social/political one.

4. We recommend that the teaching of traditional and cultural values of Maluku (for example, history, culture, language and art) will be incorporated in the school curriculum from Primary to Tertiary level education.

These statements demonstrate the importance that participants placed on the role of localised practice, in the form of *adat* and *bahasa tanah*, while at the same time explicitly
stating the need for this localised practice to be reformulated in order for it to function within the context of reconstruction. The *adat* leaders mentioned in the document represent this localised village-based practice, while religious and governmental leaders represent larger forces that operate at the regional and national levels. By bringing together *adat*, religious and government leaders as cooperative players in the reconciliation process, the document reflects the multidimensional nature of the causes of the *kerusuhan* and the multiple levels on which the reconciliation process must occur. The transformative nature of this endeavour informs both village level initiatives and the approaches taken by various elements within the provincial and district bureaucracies. Attitudes towards language activism that are developing among these different groups sometimes converge and sometimes work in opposition. This complex scenario brings with it multiple challenges and forms a crucial crossroads for the future of *bahasa tanah* and intra-Malukan relations more generally.

3.1. Community initiated language revitalisation

Researchers returning to Maluku a year after the Malino accord was signed saw a marked community-level change in attitude towards *bahasa tanah*. The *kerusuhan* had triggered political engagement with indigenous languages for the first time, and the first indications of language activism were also apparent. For example, an elder in Soahuku village in southern Seram Island had built an anthropology museum to house cultural artefacts and to act as a centre for cultural activities. Teachers in primary schools had developed language classes in the Muslim village of Tulehu (Ambon Island) and the Christian village of Lohiasapalewa (Alune language, Seram Island). In Christian Hulaliu (Haruku Island), where the language had been reported as moribund (Collins and Voorhoeve 1983), classes had commenced in the junior high school and the teacher suggested that there was now a new generation of speakers. Young people in Allang showed a resurgence of interest in their language through their youth groups that planned to promote the language and produce
schoolbooks.

These community initiatives evidence the bottom-up support that Crystal (2003) points to as one of the crucial elements in successful language revitalisation. They also demonstrate that regional autonomy was affording communities much greater freedom to assert themselves than had ever before been possible.

3.2. Government intentioned language revitalisation

At the same time that bottom-up language activism has been appearing, top-down support for indigenous languages has also begun to emerge from government and regional institutions. Documentary evidence of this appears in the statements by the Reconciliation and Reconstruction Meeting cited above. A government sponsored initiative in this area is the establishment of the Maluku Cultural Institute, which is charged with researching aspects of local tradition, culture and language and has the explicit goal of supporting the reunification of Maluku. Additionally, the provincial governor’s office has introduced a policy of promoting the teaching of bahasa tanah in schools and the National Library of Maluku is seeking to develop its Malukan Studies collection.

All of these top-down initiatives have the goal of promoting local Malukan culture and identity in order support the rebuilding of the province. This is a potentially positive step for language revitalisation and language maintenance in the region, yet there are subtle complexities in assumptions about the nature of Malukan culture that lie behind these government programs and policies. In Indonesia, references to adat must be viewed in the context of cultural history and government cultural politics. For example, adat leaders have long been configured in contradistinction to religious leaders and government representatives (Cooley 1961, Kennedy 1955). During Suharto’s New Order regime, a key government
project was to strip the different systems of traditional social–political organisation found across Indonesia of any real power. Real cultural diversity and local identity were seen as potentially threatening to the central government, its program of economic development and to the unity of the Indonesian state. New Order cultural politics thus promoted sanitised representations of cultural variation by recasting emblematic components of culture, such as dress, music, and ceremonial performance, as folkloric symbols of diversity. Thus stripped of any real power and meaning, local culture could be used for the propagation of centralised government initiatives and the representation of pan-Indonesian unity. Commentary on the New Order government’s appropriation of cultural diversity regularly evokes the analogy of Taman Mini, the Jakarta theme park displaying one set of characteristic cultural artefacts representing each province in the country (Errington 1997, Spyer 2000: 164–168).

In this context, the reconciliation document highlights the complex and conditional relationship between adat and adat leaders on the one hand, and governmental institutions and government-sanctioned leaders on the other. These adat leaders are meant to work with religious leaders and ‘intellectuals/experts’, and, unlike the antagonistic relationship that sometimes existed in the past, these groups are now being brought together as cooperative players in the reconciliation process. The document can be seen as reversing the past trend of subordinating adat. By reinvigorating adat systems, there is the possibility of adat leaders regaining some of the real political power they once had. Throughout the reform period that has followed the fall of Suharto, similar programs of revitalising adat systems in the face of discredited government bureaucracy have been occurring across Indonesia (Acciaioli 2002, Warren 2005). Yet in the Maluku reconciliation document the adat system is not represented as something that should operate independently. With adat being placed in a co-operative role with established religious, governmental and educational institutions and personnel, it is not
difficult to also read these points as promoting continued government supervision and control of adat as it takes on a reinvigorated role within society.

The reconciliation document stresses the need to ‘transform’ adat into a modern political force. Adat is characterised as ‘traditional/ritual-oriented’ and this might be understood as referring to pre-modern systems of local customary social organisation that can be adapted to operate in the modern context. Another possibility is that adat is being understood through the legacy of New Order cultural politics. The speech by a government official at the inauguration of the Maluku Cultural Institute (Ambon Express 2004) suggests this latter approach is still pervasive, even six years after the end of the Suharto regime. This speech highlighted certain social–cultural systems as emblematic of pan-Maluku culture. These included the traditional system of inter-village alliances called pela-gandong, the system of proscriptions on resource use called sasi, as well as customary village organisations, traditional performing arts, and regional language. This official government rhetoric ignores the diversity with which such institutions are instantiated locally. Instead there is a romantic conception that these cultural components are the same across all villages. As pan-Maluku cultural elements that cut across religions divisions, their revival is meant to strengthen social ties throughout the province. This Institute, like other top-down initiatives, is run by the elite of Maluku, who are themselves largely alienated from their indigenous roots. The notions of ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ that they bring to the reconciliation process are those with which they had previously been inculcated by the Suharto regime. One of the most striking examples of this romantic Alifuru concept (see Florey and van Engelenhoven 2001) is the promotion of a single bahasa tanah. In part for ease of administering school language programs, in part from a sincere belief in a single Malukan culture, many government officials promote the idea that there is, or should be, one Malukan language. Such a concept is, of course, contrary to what
linguists know of the actual language situation, and more crucially, it is also contrary to local communities’ experiences and aspirations.

In the area of language revitalisation and cultural revitalisation more generally, there are clear discrepancies between the approaches being taken by some government officials and approaches taken by communities. Nonetheless, there are people from government intuitions who do recognise the importance of true cultural diversity in ensuring the integration of *adat* and language initiatives within local communities. Although there are differing opinions in government circles about how to work with these revitalisation processes, it is important that awareness and engagement have emerged in the form of the top-down support which Crystal (2003) points to as another essential component for language revitalisation.

3.3. Local political acts in interplay with broader political contexts - Political Nexus

These examples have shown that exactly how *adat* is to be reconfigured and integrated and exactly how much variation is to be recognised among *adat* systems are issues that are open to varied interpretation by different parties. Given the approach of some government officials and seen in the context of recent Indonesian political history, the initiatives now being taken in many villages to reclaim their cultural and linguistic heritage are actually quite courageous. This re-imagining of the past to raise the status of *bahasa tanah* and other cultural practices can be attributed to the transformative nature of the *kerusuhan*. Although different stakeholders may have differing interpretations of what *adat* and *bahasa tanah* are, the fact that these issues are on the table and are being discussed from the local level up through the provincial level shows the development of a political nexus which is providing unprecedented opportunities for people to engage in language activism in Central Maluku.
4. Transforming relationships: speaker and academic communities

The events of the kerusuhan and the reconciliation movement have provided a transformative opportunity for language activism. At the community level, there is clear political engagement with language endangerment and language revitalisation. Despite the tensions between top-down and bottom-up approaches, for the first time the critical elements of government support for bahasa tanah and community ownership of language activities are both present. These circumstances have offered field linguists new possibilities for building partnerships in language activism with communities in Maluku, and greater opportunities for longer-term language revitalisation. The next stage in moving from principle to practice vis-à-vis an empowerment framework for fieldwork is to identify community goals and needs and determine if and how these might be incorporated alongside field research. This section outlines some of the ways that the research team (comprising the authors, Simon Musgrave and Betty Litamahuputty) has worked to meet the goals of such an approach to fieldwork.

4.1. Reconciliation with wider ethnolinguistic communities

In the current post-kerusuhan era, ethnolinguistic communities that comprise both Muslim and Christian villages have voiced a desire to reconcile, and come together once again as a community. For example, tension and suspicion arose between the neighbouring villages of Christian Allang and Muslim Wakasihu during the conflict (although in this case no outright violence occurred). People in both villages are now looking for ways of building bridges. One such initiative is through cooperative building works. A new government school building is being erected in Allang and people from Wakasihu have come to assist with the construction. In turn, when a new school is built in Wakasihu, people from Allang will contribute to the work. People from both villages now readily acknowledge that they share that same language, with slight dialect variation. Language activities are seen as another path to realise their goal of reconciliation.
One strategy which the research team has implemented to respond to the goal of reconciliation is by basing research in both Muslim and Christian villages. On Ambon Island, research is being conducted in partnership with community members in two locations (Map 3).

**Allang–Wakasihu** As noted above, Allang and Wakasihu are dialects of the same language. This ethnolinguistic group, located in western Ambon Island, also encompasses the Muslim village of Larike and the Christian village of Liliboi. In Allang, the primary research site with a population of over 4000, there are approximately 70 Allang speakers, or less 2% of the population. The language is now silent in Liliboi. In the two Muslim villages of Wakasihu and Larike language shift to Ambonese Malay is occurring, although the language is still strong.
Tulehu, Tengah-tengah, Tial, Waai Language vitality in this ethnolinguistic group is strongest in the three Muslim villages of Tulehu, Tengah-tengah, and Tial, (which Musgrave terms *Souw Amana Teru*). Research indicates that some 10,000 of the 18,790 people in these three villages (53%) are fluent speakers of *Souw Amana Teru*, and there may be a further 6,000 passive bilinguals. There are a few elderly rememberers in the Christian village of Waai and language use is limited to the domain of ritual practices. As noted earlier, Waai was destroyed during the *kerusuhan* but villagers are now returning and the village is being rebuilt. *Adat* rituals formed a part of the ceremonies held to mark their return.

On Seram Island, research is being conducted in partnership with community members in both Muslim and Christian villages (Map 4).

Map 4 — Seram Island research sites

Rutah, Amahei, Haruru, Makariki, Soahuku This language of southern Seram Island is strongest in the Muslim village of Rutah, although, like Allang, perhaps only 2% of the
population of 2,286 people are fluent speakers. The language is moribund in the four Christian villages, with a total of no more than ten speakers. In Rutah, the *muatan lokal* component of the school curriculum which allows for local language and/or culture content has been used to teach English language.

4.2. Training and education

In order for community members to be able to undertake their own linguistic research, training and education in linguistics and information technology is a priority. Many educational institutions from primary to tertiary level were destroyed during the *kerusuhan* and education in Ambon still faces many challenges. The Pattimura University campus at Poka (on the south coast of Ambon’s northern peninsula) was destroyed in July 2000 and the university now has a city campus which was built to accommodate classes during the *kerusuhan* and reconciliation years. In the eyes of Muslim Ambonese, Pattimura continues to be associated too closely with Christians, and the return to the Poka campus is hampered by repeated threats that it will be destroyed unless the university executive clearly meets the reconciliation goals of representative access and staffing levels for Muslims and Christians.

In the years before the *kerusuhan* there was no linguistics program at Pattimura, although some linguistic training was available under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, which had established its regional base on the university campus. However the SIL facilities were also destroyed when the university was attacked. Senior university staff who support the reconciliation goals of expanding the roles of customary law and indigenous languages would like to see the development of a linguistics program, but in the current uneasy stage of rebuilding, planning and implementation of such goals are difficult.

If the process of setting up facilities for research, training, and materials development is
difficult at the level of the university, such educational opportunities are virtually nonexistent at the village level. Yet the strongest desire for detailed documentation of languages and the development of teaching materials for use in schools comes directly from village communities. Support of these local aspirations has become a central part of our work through providing an opportunity for community members in each site to draw on the skills of the research team. This has included training speakers and their descendents in the technical skills needed to carry on language documentation and develop language maintenance. Community language workers in each of the villages where we have been working have been actively involved in recording and transcribing data, administering language vitality tests, and liaising with other members of the community in a range of issues related to language revitalization. Additionally, younger non-speakers in some communities have taken on the role of language apprentices working with older speakers (see Hinton 2001). These youths have, for example, produced booklets for use in schools that are made up of photographs that they have taken of everyday village life, accompanied by captions in the indigenous language that they have collected from older speakers in the community. These activities are beginning to repair the breaks in language transmission between the older, speaker generations and the younger, non-speaker generations.

In order to bring this kind of training back to the university sector and to help develop ties between local communities and provincial institutions, the research team organised a one-week residential language maintenance training program. The workshop brought together speakers and descendents from four different ethnolinguistic communities and staff from schools, universities and other key institutions including Darussalam and Pattimura Universities and the National Library of Ambon. The workshop offered training in language documentation methodology as well an introduction to objective ways of analysing and
comparing different bahasa tanah. Participants in the workshop developed proposal writing skills and the outcomes of these activities included a number of proposals for community-initiated projects that will involve Christian and Muslim villages working in partnership.

Training of this sort focuses community members on their own expertise and helps to build capacity for communities to undertake their own research. The workshop was able to support institutional regeneration, further the training of village residents, and start building a local resource pool for language maintenance activities. Training also strengthens the research capabilities of academics and develops expertise which will help to counter some of the more romantic notions of language and culture promulgated from certain government circles. Importantly, this workshop also brought Christians and Muslims together from four different ethnolinguistic communities. This was the first time since the kerusuhan for many of these people to meet and work so intensively with members of the ‘other’ community. The language maintenance projects which were developed during the workshop are a way of continuing these positive interactions into the future.

4.3. Not all communities are ready to be involved in language work

While there have been positive outcomes among the research and training activities that we have been able to undertake in partnership with many communities in Central Maluku since the reconciliation period, this has not been the case in all settings. The long-term traumatic effects of the kerusuhan are still apparent wherever one goes in Maluku at this time, and in some communities the level of suspicion, fear, and grief that are still being felt is so high as to preclude engagement with language endangerment and the rise of language activism. The ongoing recovery process in such communities means that personal and community resources are directed to areas other than language. Distrust of people from outside the village community means engaging with either neighbouring villages or outside
researchers is not currently a possibility. The only appropriate response to this is to respect a community’s decision not to be involved with language maintenance. As a result we are, in the first instance, working with communities that are themselves in the initial stages of language activism (cf. Grinevald 2003). At the same time, we remain aware that ongoing changes in the social–political climate can result in other communities moving into a stage of more active engagement with language issues in the future. Such a shift in attitude might come about as a result of further internal healing in the community and a more outwardly oriented reengagement with neighbouring villages and with the wider Malukan community.

4.4. Tensions within government and educational sectors

As we have seen, there has been a dramatic shift towards language activism at the village level in many communities. In addition, many aspects of government policy and the actions of individual members of the bureaucracy point toward top-down support for working with bahasa tanah in Maluku. However, given the far reaching effects of the kerusuhan on all aspects of life in Maluku, it is not surprising that social, political and personal tensions remain high and can hold back progress in different aspects of redevelopment, including language activism.

Maluku was closed during the kerusuhan and even after the Malino accord was implemented special permits were need for outsiders to enter the region while a state of civil emergency was still in effect. The status of Maluku has been normalised and it is now open like any other province in Indonesia. Yet this open status is interpreted differently by different agencies, including by various Indonesian diplomatic missions around the world and by those overseeing research. This can cause uncertainties for building cooperative programs between Malukan communities and international researchers. It is clear that there will be ongoing obstacles that all stakeholders in the reconciliation process have to negotiate, including
community members who want to initiate language programs and local and foreign researchers with an interest in the languages of Maluku. Sensitivity to the situation and a willingness to cooperate with the different players involved is crucial to assuaging concerns of government, educational and security authorities. For example, the workshop described above included an opening ceremony to which bureaucratic officials were invited. The rector of Pattimura University and the head of the district education department gave opening speeches and a representative of the security forces was present.

More complex difficulties can arise where there are politicised divisions within communities and institutions. These might result from long standing personal issues. They might be directly related to the sectarian fallout of the *kerusuhan*. Tensions can also arise when reformers who are trying to develop and improve opportunities in Maluku are perceived as threatening by people who feel more secure with some form of the older status quo. And these different kinds of motivations can of course be interwoven to produce situations in which researchers, like members of communities where they work, need to move carefully, cooperating with people who are prepared to work with us, engaging members of different factions when possible, and stepping back when necessary, as we would do in the case of difficult language situations already mentioned above.

5. Conclusion

Linguistic research was necessarily suspended during the *kerusuhan*, and there were times in which we wondered if circumstances would ever change to see the resumption of peace and permit our return. At the same time, language endangerment was accelerating due to the ongoing events. This suggested that local engagement with language and building an empowerment framework between communities and researchers were aspirations that might never be attained. The case of Maluku has shown, however, that major social–political events,
even those which are enormously destructive like the kerusuhan, can in fact have tremendous transformative effects. Communities are now experiencing a stronger sense of their needs and their aspirations, which in turn means that there are new opportunities for researchers to find tangible ways of enacting the goal of working in partnership with these communities in an empowerment framework. Some of the tangible outcomes of this synergy can be seen in the community-based projects developed during the language maintenance workshop described previously. These include a detailed proposal for the development of a language and culture centre in Lohiasapalewa as the site for locally conducted research and archiving, and a Cultural Association in Allang which has prepared a proposal for government funding to begin language revitalisation work. Other initiatives, which involve members from different ethnolinguistic communities cutting across secular boundaries, include the development of educational materials for schools and the production of an agricultural dictionary. The dictionary team proposes to document a cross-linguistic vocabulary of agricultural terminology, and also to include ethno-botanical information and ethnographic descriptions of traditional agricultural practices from different communities. A final project would see the documentation of ritual language, a proposal which itself opened up a healthy dialogue between members of different communities and academics about the privileged nature of specialised knowledge and the extent to which such knowledge should be allowed to enter into the wider public domain.

The dramatic changes in awareness of and engagement with language endangerment that have occurred as part of the post-kerusuhan reconciliation process in Maluku demonstrate that the rise of language activism may be triggered by the most challenging of transformative circumstances. In the case of Central Maluku this has included engagement from all sides - communities, government, academia - in a process of ongoing reassessment, dialogue and
activity. It also emphasises the need for flexibility and openness on the part all stakeholders to be able to respond to the constantly shifting sociopolitical environment in order to create synergies for language activism.
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