



Anthropology & Aging

Journal of the Association for Anthropology & Gerontology

Film Review

Review of Rappoport, Dana. *Death of the One Who Knows*. Documentary Educational Resources, 2020. Runtime: 82 minutes 9 seconds. Language: English.

Fotarisman Zaluchu

Universitas Sumatera Utara
fotarisman.zaluchu@usu.ac.id

Vicky Rifai Adriansyah

Universitas Sumatera Utara
vickyrifai567@gmail.com

Anthropology & Aging, Vol 45, No 2 (2024), pp. 113-115

ISSN 2374-2267 (online) DOI 10.5195/aa.2024.530



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

This journal is published by the [University Library System](#) of the [University of Pittsburgh](#) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](#), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](#).

Book Review

Review of Rappoport, Dana. *Death of the One Who Knows*. Documentary Educational Resources, 2020. Runtime: 82 minutes 9 seconds. Language: English.

Fotarisman Zaluchu

Universitas Sumatera Utara
fotarisman.zaluchu@usu.ac.id

Vicky Rifai Adriansyah

Universitas Sumatera Utara
vickyrifai567@gmail.com

With a strong voice he articulates verses and poems. His memory remains sharp despite his aging appearance. However, unlike before, when he was the central figure in every ceremony, commanding people to follow his loud and firm speeches, now he only sits, and that too only when invited. As time progressed and Lumbaa grew older, there came new generations with new understandings. People now trust more in the teachings broadcast from the sturdy buildings known as churches. Christian religious leaders forbid what Lumbaa has long advocated for. Religion shifts focus away from what has been passed down through him. Indeed, some rituals still exist. Poems chanted in the Toraja language are still heard. But for him, these no longer hold meaning. Moreover, if performed incorrectly according to the traditional rules, they could lead to punishment from the ancestors, the source of all blessings [1:06:17]. He only shakes his head when asked about his view on the current situation [47:01].

In *Death of the One Who Knows*, Dana Rappoport, an ethnomusicologist specializing in South East Asia, stages Lumbaa as the central figure in this ethnographic film. Lumbaa is a traditional oral storyteller from the Toraja tribe in Sulawesi, Eastern Indonesia. In local language, Lumbaa is called “to minaa” (the one who knows): he who acquired his knowledge in a ritual manner passed down through generations. He plays a crucial role in his community by chanting during rituals, leading ceremonies for ancestors, and elucidating the actions required by indigenous traditions. Lumbaa has been performing this role for many years, as evidenced by photographs taken by Rappoport in the past. Rappoport highlights Lumbaa's strong character and charismatic figure prominently in the early sections of this 82-minute film.

In the following sections, the film shifts its focus to Yans Sulo, a younger man working as a Catholic priest. Yans Sulo presents truths deemed consistent with Christian teachings. According to Yans, the Bible teachings are meant to be followed, rather than listening to Lumbaa's teachings. For the new generation, *to minaa* is the religion, not Lumbaa, who teaches adherence to the original ancestors of the Toraja tribe. The confrontation between these two vastly differing beliefs and realities is accurately represented by Rappoport in this film. However, the situation is clearly not in favor of Lumbaa. Increasingly marginalized, Lumbaa no longer has a place. “The pastor prohibited the practices of our ancestors” [19:53], says Lumbaa. “It’s over. All are Christians now” [20:02], he adds. The church

buildings and statues, symbols of religion visualized in this film, not only indicate the presence of religion but also the government endorsing this religion.

Lumbaa lost his status as *to minaa*. In the past, Lumbaa played a central role in organizing ancient traditions, but now has become merely an observer. Beyond the loss of his position, what has truly vanished are the teachings that Lumbaa has preserved through generations. In the film, viewers witness Lumbaa holding on to the belief that contemporary life is always connected with ancestors. Lumbaa explains that the blood of ancestors flows through the bodies of their descendants today. These will only receive fortune and luck if they maintain a good relationship with their ancestors; obedience to the wishes of the ancestors is what will bring happiness and even eternal life. These practical teachings, implemented with such obedience, are what Lumbaa conveys.

Thus, he can only protest when what he witnesses deviates from Toraja tradition. In the film, Lumbaa explains that the celebration of New Year is observed merely because of governmental approval, not as a time for repentance, behavioral change, and returning to obedience to "the Creator, the Old God, and the ancestors" [26:36]. Similarly, according to Lumbaa's view, many current practices have strayed from the obedience to ancestral traditions. "This is not good" [47:24], he says shaking his head in disapproval, as if he truly has nothing more to say. The strong relation between himself and ancestors gives Lumbaa great confidence in what he does. Meanwhile, from Lumbaa's view, subsequent generations seem to lose their identity. They want to be called Toraja people and still respect some of the older customs, but they no longer have an intimate relationship with ancestors.

Yans is positioned as a representative of the contemporary religious group. Rappoport introduces Yans practicing Christian hymns, wearing his religious attire, and blessing marriages. From this point in the film, Rappoport invites viewers to observe a new life that considers past traditions obsolete. Now, people seek practicality and convenience. What was once considered good and useful no longer aligns with modern life.

On a larger scale, the clash of worldviews between generations depicted in this film reveals the complexity of intergenerational relationships in facing social and religious changes. Lumbaa, as a representative of the old generation, still holds firm to the beliefs and traditions taught by his ancestors, viewing the world through a lens of strong spiritual and physical relationships with ancestors—a relationship that gives him and his community identity, strength, and direction. Meanwhile, the new generation, represented by Yans Sulo and most of the other Toraja community members, has embraced Christian teachings, which fundamentally changes how they view and interact with the world. Christian teachings bring a new paradigm that emphasizes a personal relationship with God through faith rather than through rituals and ceremonies related to ancestors. In this context, the new religion is considered the source of truth and life, thus displacing and even prohibiting the traditional practices that have been followed for centuries.

This difference in worldview not only creates a distance between the generations but also causes identity conflicts among the younger community members. The film depicts a dialogue event [1:07:40] where participants seem to question their identity between maintaining rich and deep ancestral traditions and the new values and beliefs promised by Christianity. Although they still appreciate some aspects of the old tradition, such as using the Toraja language in rituals, the influence of the new religion often makes these practices lose their deep spiritual essence and meaning [47:34].

Throughout the film, it is clear that Rappoport draws on her understanding of the thought process of people in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia. Without having to play much of a role as a narrator,

Dana Rappoport, with her ethnomusicology skills and background, uses verses, songs, and natural speech from the actors in the film to build a very creative yet touching narrative. In this film, she guides us through locations, characters, and stories. Her method is unique. She asks questions, and the characters in the film provide the answers verbally or through their actions within the film. Without her narration, she sometimes allows the audience to understand the events by letting the characters take over.

Watching this film, viewers are deeply immersed in a sense of sadness. Initially, we see Lumbaa as a strong presence, but he gradually loses his role and his physical power. The sadness intensifies when we observe Lumbaa still singing and speaking, though not in actual situations—he merely follows his own recorded voice. Rappoport captures the climax poignantly when Lumbaa finally lies motionless, eliciting only tears. The film opens with weeping and closes with sorrow. The central character, Lumbaa, deemed too old and irrelevant, forever takes with him the entire understanding of indigenous traditions and the knowledge between the worlds of the past, present, and future. This profound sadness is what Rappoport endeavors to convey.

In conclusion, if viewers just want to know the history of past beliefs in Toraja, this film is very important as a reference. However, if viewers want to feel the heart of a human like Lumbaa, delve into his psychological conflicts, and the inner pressure that arises from his belief in his worldview as he ages, this film must be watched slowly, savoring every tone of Lumbaa's verses to gain its very valuable benefits. Because only in that way will Dana Rappoport's film make us marvel.