

W.A.L. Stokhof, Woisika I: an Ethnographic Introduction. Pacific Linguistics D19, 1977. Pp.ix+74.

The Woisika are a short stocky mountain people who practice swidden agriculture, remaining closely tied to their immediate environment for many of their needs. They form one of eight language groups on the island of Alor which lies north of Timor in the Lesser Sundas of eastern Indonesia. Since this work was written, the area has suffered from severe famine caused by crop failure. Many have died as the Indonesian government has met with a host of problems in their attempts to get emergency foodstuffs to the people. This, and the invasion of East Timor next door, is doubtless causing substantial change. Thus the historical value of recording the Woisika way of life.

Stokhof's own reason for this monograph is that in order to understand the Woisika language, a background to the people and their culture is necessary. His main work on the Woisika language is to follow. This smaller piece may be seen as a chapter in it. It is a very brief ethnography which never attempts to go beyond simple empirical description. As the work is only a minor offshoot of the author's principal research, it cannot help but tend toward superficiality. Hasty value judgements by the author add to this trend. For instance, in the short section on traditional religion and imported Western creeds, the author sums up the situation as "A depressing mixture of old fears and many newly obtained ones" (p.35).

The rationale for this monograph would be that something is better than nothing, particularly in the light of subsequent events on the island and within the region. It becomes one more film file for the ethnographic catalogue and a study aid for linguists with an interest in Woisika.

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