

Communicative infrastructure in Tura society

The *Konon* procedure – summary description

The purpose of the *Konon* is not just to convey information to a group of people but rather

- to win their adherence to some proposal of action to be carried out by common consent
- to solve a problem affecting members of the community
- to settle a dispute between them
- to provide “added social value” to any kind of transaction (news, announcement, thanksgiving).

The *Konon*, by definition, is a process in which all those concerned by the matter at hand are necessarily involved. In fact, the interpretation of the “whom it may concern” in the context of *Konon* is quite extensive and flexible. In a sense, the *Konon* is, also by definition, public if public is understood relatively to the level at which the matter at hand needs to be decided: family, clan or village.

The *Konon* protocol is most probably common Mande heritage (see Ki Zerbo 2003:71ff. for its Jula parallel), but still fully functional in Tura society. Pervasive recourse to the *Konon* illustrates a preference of traditional oral society for relying on highly formal procedures in processing knowledge of potential public relevance.

Formalization in the case of the *Konon* requires that each adult male reformulates the message (news, announcement of a gift, a proposal, an issue in a conflict, etc.) in his own words, starting with the youngest and pursuing the procedure by order of ascending age until it reaches the elder, whose “final word” is then handed down in inverse order to the initiator. By inverting the order of seniority prevailing elsewhere, the *Konon* enforces inclusivity as a factor of social cohesion, while ensuring full mutuality of knowledge. While part of traditional knowledge, it turns out to be a powerful mechanism for promoting innovation by giving it status and legitimacy as an object of local discourse through the mouth of its regular participants, by opening a space of exhaustive negotiation, and – its ultimate purpose – by ensuring *control over communicative resources* relevant to a given issue, *prior to any decision regarding the issue itself*.

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