KINSHIP AND FOOD IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

EDITED BY MONICA JANOWSKI
AND FIONA KERLOGUE

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SOUTH EAST ASIA

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Cover photograph: Prayer before rice meal at the hearth headed by Balang Pelewan and Sinah Balang Pelewan, Pa' Dalih, Kelabit Highlands, February 2005.

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INTRODUCTION

Feeding the right food: the flow of life and the construction of kinship in Southeast Asia

Monica Janowski

The chapters in this volume derive from a panel¹ at the second conference of the European Association of South-East Asian Studies, which was held in Hamburg between 3 and 6 September 1998. The intention of that panel, and of this volume, was firstly to highlight the connections between kinship and food in the region, an area of research which would arguably repay more attention from scholars than it has received so far; and secondly to look at certain aspects of this, in particular the relationship between generations set up through feeding.

There has recently been a resurgence of interest in kinship (Carsten 2000; Carsten 2004; Collier & Yanagisako 1987a; Howell & Mellsus 1993; McKinnon & Franklin 2001; Peletz 1995; Strathern 1995), and it seems opportune to look at the relationship between food and the structuring of kinship, particularly in the context of the discussion of the relevance of the transmission of substance as a basis for creating kinship (Busby 1997; Carsten 1995; Carsten 2004; Fajans 1988; Gibson 1985; Thomas 1999; Weiner 1982). It has been recognized for some time that food is often used in Southeast Asia (as elsewhere) to construct boundaries between social groups (Manderson 1986a), but the implications of the feeding relationship which is inherent in many situations in which food is consumed have only recently begun to be explored (Carsten 1995; Carsten 1997).

The term 'kinship' implies some kind of basis in sexual reproduction. However, such a basis is difficult to prove for all ties of relatedness and for all cultures. Largely because of this problem the project of achieving any common understanding of 'kinship' was more or less abandoned during the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, as early as 1977 Marshall argued that we should start from an examination of all the kinds of connections which exist between people in different societies and then examine what unifies or differentiates different kinds of connection (Marshall

1977), and Carsten has recently reiterated much the same point, suggesting using the term 'relatedness' to allow a comparison between different ways of setting up relations between people, on the assumption that the existence of ties between people was, at least, a cross-cultural given (Carsten 2000).

Although it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the problems associated with using the term 'kinship' itself will remain if we try to compare all human cultures, it seems valid to use the term in a more restricted sense, in looking at indigenous ideas of relatedness which have a link of some sort to notions of sexual reproduction, within a given geographical/cultural area. On this basis, I propose to use the term to refer to ties of 'relatedness' between people within Southeast Asian societies which are associated with the production of successive generations of people. However, it is to be noted that although indigenous notions of reproduction and procreation in this area do have important links to sexual reproduction, a) they are not purely biological/sexual and b) reproduction is not perceived as an event but as a process (Carsten 1997; Cedercreutz 1999; Loizos & Heady 1999b; Strathern 1988).

In addition to this introduction there are ten chapters in this volume. Seven of them deal with Austronesian-language-speaking groups of people in Indonesia and Malaysia, one deals with a group in Northeast Thailand, one with the majority population of Vietnam (the Kinh) and one with the Inanwatan of Papua. The question of deciding on valid bases for comparing societies is a question too large to be tackled here. Broadly, in anthropological writings, comparison is usually either on the basis of common origins (cultural or linguistic or both) – which may be rooted in borrowing – or on the basis of the implied search for commonalties between all human societies. I am relying on the former basis here, although I do not pretend to be trying to go very far in legitimating this; it is certainly possible to raise queries about the different kinds of commonalties between different societies dealt with here. The seven Austronesian-speaking societies can arguably be compared and contrasted on the basis of fundamental cultural similarities between Austronesian societies, expressed in closely related languages, as has been the project of the Comparative Austronesian Project under the direction of James Fox at the Australian National University (although the legitimacy of explaining similarities in social structure on the basis of common linguistic origin can be raised – e.g. see Frake 1996). Inclusion of the three groups which are not Austronesian-speaking, and their comparison with Austronesian-speaking groups, is on the basis of all the societies concerned sharing certain key cosmological attitudes². Mainland Southeast Asian groups in Thailand and Vietnam have many features in common with most Austronesian groups, including the pivotal role of rice and a

number of cosmological features, which are expressed, for example, in house design (Izikowitz & Sorensen 1982). Finally, the Inanwatan of Papua are linguistically Papuan but on a cultural level demonstrate a mixture of Eastern Indonesian and Papuan elements (van Oosterhout, this volume).

Kinship in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asian societies may be divided into those which are based on membership of lineages and those which are not; the latter have generally been described as cognatic. Probably partly because there seems to be more to grasp hold of, scholars (particularly scholars from Holland, the colonial power in Indonesia) have shown relatively more interest in the lineal societies of the area, which are concentrated in the eastern part of the Indonesian archipelago. Van Wouden's thesis, developed in the 1930s (van Wouden 1968 [1935]), suggested that kinship in Eastern Indonesia is founded in a conceptual complementarity between groups which are conceived of as male and female and which relate to each other as wife givers and wife takers. This thesis has been broadly supported by research done since then, although it is now recognized that the exogamous groups concerned can be of fundamentally different types – they may be households, lineages, clans or territorial units – and the functions and significance of alliance vary from one society to another. The similarities between different societies are often apparent more at a mythical and cosmological level than at the level of social structure (Lewis 1988).

It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that attention began to be devoted to cognatic kinship systems such as those in the parts of Southeast Asia in which there is no clear membership of groups with a corporate existence. Freeman's concept of the 'kindred' (Freeman 1961) stimulated a good deal of discussion, and seemed to present the possibility of an understanding of kinship founded in the existence of corporate groups based on the kindred (although Freeman himself said, in fact, that the kindred among the Iban was a category of people rather than a corporate group). Although kinship is clearly very important as a basis for social organization in many non-lineal societies in Southeast Asia, some scholars have concluded that kinship as an organizing principle of society should be seen as being restricted to non-hierarchical non-lineal societies (King 1991; Rousseau 1978).

In the 1980s and 1990s, following Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss 1969; Lévi-Strauss 1983a; Lévi-Strauss 1983b; Lévi-Strauss 1987), a more focused interest has developed among scholars of the area in the notion of 'house'-based societies (**rumaq* in Proto-Austronesian [Blust 1980:11]) as a way of understanding kinship in the area – both in areas which have lineage-based kin systems and in those which

do not. This provides the stimulating possibility of understanding all of these clearly related societies within the same frame of reference. A number of edited collections look at the centrality of the house as concrete entity and as symbol in understanding kinship in the area (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995a; Fox 1993; Izikowitz & Sorensen 1982; Sparkes & Howell 2003). It seems clear that the notion of the house is central to societies throughout the area, and provides a means of understanding the way in which groups conceive of ties between people – both ties among the living and ties between the living and their ancestors.

Errington, in the late 1980s, introduced the idea that societies in insular Southeast Asia are divided into two types, with different types of kin organization: ‘centrist’ and ‘exchange’ societies, with the epitome of the former being the former Indic States and the latter including most societies in Eastern Indonesia (Errington 1987; Errington 1989). Fox has criticized this division, implying that one cannot make a wholesale differentiation between two radically different types of society and that, at least in Eastern Indonesia, it is not always easy to place a given group in one category or the other (Fox 1991). It does seem valid to suggest, as Errington has, that, through their emphasis on separation between wife givers and wife takers and the need to set up systematic exchange between them, the lineal societies of Eastern Indonesia place greater stress on division between the male and female halves of a cosmological whole. However, this may well be more a matter of degree than of qualitative differences in indigenous cosmology. It seems clear that there are clear cosmological continuities within the whole area, and particularly that there is a widespread emphasis on the potency of the cosmological unity which male + female represents.

Kinship and Food

The link between food and kinship ties, particularly at household level, is more or less an implied or assumed given cross-culturally within all academic disciplines (despite the difficulties of defining kinship); those who are close kin, and especially those who live together, eat from a common pot almost by definition (although they do not always sit and eat together). However, there has been limited exploration of the ways in which food is used to construct kin ties, and of how kinship can be manipulated through the ways in which food is produced and consumed (Fajans 1988; Fajans 1993; de Jong this volume).

There are two major contexts in which food is eaten together by groups of people: on an everyday basis; and at less frequent and often more lavish and festive occasions. Both are important in constructing ties between those who share food.

Although everyday actions are sometimes seen by some scholars as less significant than less regular, more spectacular events, they are in fact of considerable interest to the researcher, particularly where there are clear rules (spoken or unspoken) about how they should be performed, since they express what is conceived of as the proper structure of human life, despite the lack of explicit verbal emphasis (Bloch 1991; Bourdieu 1977). The consumption of everyday food is one of the most important everyday arenas in which rigid rules about how things should be done are often apparent, although they are often unspoken or only partially explicit.

All agricultural societies have a focal eating event focused on certain key cultivated starch foods, which in English we describe as the meal, which is repeated every day and often two or three times a day, and which is a key aspect of ties of relatedness, being shared (although not necessarily contemporaneously) by all those who belong to the minimal unit conceived of as being related, often described as the household³. The starch element of the meal, which Mintz has referred to as the 'core' (Mintz 1994) and which is the *sine qua non* of the eating event, may be made of one raw food or a combination of them. Its preparation is often elaborate and may involve a perceived transformation of its substance from one state to another which is not only physical but also to some degree spiritual. The finished product is usually described by a different term than that used for the raw food: bread in Europe (Camporesi 1993), *fufu* in West Africa (made of a variety of roots and plantain), *nasi* (Malay) or other equivalent terms in Austronesian languages. The other categories of foods which make up the meal have been described by Mintz as 'fringe' and 'legume' (Mintz 1994); Audrey Richards described only one category besides the staple starch food, which she termed 'relish' (Richards 1939). Mintz considers his 'fringe' to be the same as Richards' 'relish'. The point of fringe/relish is to enable the eater to consume as much of the 'core' starch as possible.

The meal, with its constituent parts, is not only eaten within the household on a daily basis. It may also be prepared and eaten a) for festive events which are shared by wider groups of people and b) to be shared with the dead. Both contexts generate and underline ties of relatedness.

Food in Southeast Asia: The Importance of Rice

Most societies in Southeast Asia are agricultural, although what are generally termed hunter-gatherer groups⁴ rely on wild root crops and on sago as well as on some cultivation of rice, nowadays, under encouragement from governments.

Both among insular Austronesian groups and on the mainland of Southeast Asia, rice is, in most societies, the most important crop and food qualitatively if not quantitatively. This is true of most of the societies studied by the authors in this volume: the Central Sumatran village studied by Fiona Kerlogue, the Minangkabau village studied by Carol Davis, the village in East Java studied by Rens Heringa, the Lio of Flores studied by Willemijn de Jong, the Isan of Northeast Thailand studied by Stephen Sparkes, the Vietnamese studied by Nguyễn Xuân Hiền and the Kelabit of Sarawak which I have studied. In many societies in insular and mainland Southeast Asia, Austronesian and non-Austronesian, the focal eating event or meal is described as 'eating rice' (*makan nasi* in Malay/Indonesian). Tai speakers use the word *khao* to mean either rice or meal, so that *kin khao* means both to eat rice and to have a meal. Although in many rice-growing societies only limited amounts of rice are grown and eaten and the 'core' of the meal is not always rice, it is, where it is grown, always regarded as the 'best' starch 'core'. It is eaten more frequently by those of higher status and at feasts and is eaten for preference at special meals held at life-cycle and status-generating events.

The presence of rice as a major crop in the majority of insular Southeast Asian societies is, from a practical perspective, something of a puzzle. Rice is native to the intermediate tropical latitudes, which includes mainland Southeast Asia except the Malay peninsula, but without modification it is not suitable for equatorial latitudes such as those in which the insular part of the region and the Malay peninsula is situated (Bellwood 1985), and varieties which will reach maturity in these latitudes would have needed to be developed over a long period of time. Especially without iron tools, cereals are difficult to grow in the tropical forest, since clearance of vegetation and regular fallowing is necessary for their cultivation, and they cannot easily be interplanted with existing vegetation; this continues to be a relevant consideration for many upland groups which grow rice in dry shifting cultivation in forest areas (Okushima 1999; Padoch 1983). Also, rice is a crop whose natural habitat is swampy areas, and growing it in dry conditions in forested areas would have required the development of varieties which would tolerate a lower level of moisture. It is possible that wet cultivation of rice in naturally swampy areas may be as old as shifting dry cultivation in Southeast Asia (Bellwood 1985) or even that it may have preceded shifting cultivation, using the kinds of shifting, extensive methods of wet cultivation used until recently in the Kelabit Highlands in Central Borneo (Harrisson 1960), which do not require metal tools. There is a suite of non-grain starch crops (roots and tree crops) which linguistic evidence points to being known to the early Austronesian inhabitants of the area (Blust 1976) and which are much easier to grow, being either native to

Southeast Asia or which grow well there. Rice has become the preferred crop and ideal staple starch for most groups despite the difficulty of growing rice in forested areas and in tropical latitudes.

Although rice may, at least in some areas of insular Southeast Asia, have been introduced as early as 2500 BC (Bellwood et al. 1992), it may have been a minor crop until recently in many if not most areas. Root crops (cassava, taro, sweet potatoes and yams) and grain crops other than rice (millet, Job's tears, sorghum, maize) are still widely cultivated by many groups, particularly those living in upland areas. In some areas root crops and other grains form a part, or even the whole, of the 'core' starch (Mintz 1994) eaten at meals, though often mixed with or substituted by rice if this is available. Millet is an important grain crop in some parts of Eastern Indonesia, and there are indications that it may once have been more widespread as a 'core' starch food. In Tanebar-Evav, for example, millet is still the 'core' starch (Barraud 1979), and it is the crop said to have been cultivated by the ancestors among the Lio in Flores (Howell 1991:228). The importance of rice fades as one moves southeast. In Banda Eli in the Kei Islands of Eastern Indonesia, the 'core' starch food eaten within the household is *embal* cakes, made of a type of cassava, although rice is eaten on important public occasions (Karttinen, this volume). In New Guinea, sago and root crops are grown, rather than grains. Sago is the 'core' starch food in Inanwatan (van Oosterhout, this volume).

At least as regards shifting cultivation, it is difficult to explain the cultivation of cereals, including rice, by using a Boserupian explanation based on necessity (Boserup 1965). It is doubtful that rice uses land more effectively than root or tree crops; but even if it did, it is only recently that there have been stresses (logging, the development of plantations, limitations on the use of land by governments) which would push people to adopt the cultivation of a crop which is so hard to grow in the ecological context. It seems likely that there have been other reasons for the cultivation of rice, rooted in the social, symbolic and cosmological role which it has developed in the area. It can also be hypothesised that the very difficulty of growing rice in the region may have contributed to the decision to grow it; success in the rice-growing enterprise is an achievement, conferring both social and cosmological status⁵. I will return to a discussion of links between status and rice later.

Despite the centrality of rice in most of the societies discussed in this volume, and the importance of the rice meal, which is (where enough rice is grown to make this possible) eaten three times a day, there are other eating events at which other starch foods (tubers and other grains), fruit and meat on their own may be eaten. Large quantities of food may be consumed in various contexts outside

the 'meal'; I would estimate that in a Kelabit longhouse probably roughly a third of the calories consumed are eaten outside rice meals. However, these contexts (which one may describe as 'snacks', to borrow an English concept) receive much less overt emphasis. Among the Kelabit, for example, they are not supposed to satisfy hunger⁶. They have as their purpose hedonistic enjoyment of the food and the social contact they entail; they are eaten by groups of people from *different* households, and provide a context for discussion and interaction. They are casual, do not take place at any particular time, are eaten in comfortable, relaxed positions without apparent rules about how people should sit or how the food should be laid out, and are shared freely with all and sundry without any obligations or relations of dependency being created through this sharing.

By contrast with the consumption of food in other contexts, Southeast Asian rice meals are serious and silent. Everyday rice meals are not normally shared outside the household and they are eaten in a standardised, even explicitly ritualised, fashion, with the food always laid out in a particular fashion and the participants in the meal sitting in a particular formation in relation to the food. An example of the cosmological importance attached to the rice meal among the now-Christian

Photo 1.1 Prayer before rice meal at the hearth headed by Balang Pelewan and Sinah Balang Pelewan, Pa' Dalih, Kelabit Highlands, February 2005.

Kelabit is the fact that grace is said before a rice meal, something that never occurs before other foods are eaten (see Photo 1.1).

Rice is not eaten only at the rice meal. It may be eaten on its own, without side dishes of the usual kind, in specified contexts which are associated either with the rice cycle or with the ancestors. For example, the Kelabit eat rice cooked in small packets known as *senape* mainly in one context: in the rice fields, during the harvest. Rice is also consumed in the form of rice beer (sometimes described as ‘rice wine’⁷) by some Southeast Asian groups. The Kelabit used to drink rice beer when they were working in the rice fields and when they gathered together in the evenings or had guests from outside the longhouse. In Vietnam, rice beer is paired with steamed glutinous rice at the Tet Festival (Hien, this volume). It seems that the consumption of rice beer is associated with bringing people together – people belonging to different households, and through the offering of rice beer to the dead, as is described in this volume for Vietnam and Lombok (Telle, this volume; Nguyen, this volume; also see Janowski forthcoming for the role of rice beer in the past among the Kelabit).

Although rice is the most emphasised element of the rice meal, the rice meal cannot take place without vegetable and meat side dishes (cf. Trankell 1995:136 for the Yong of Thailand). While rice for the rice meal is cooked in Southeast Asia without salt and is therefore bland, a pure food presenting itself as a unitary substance, side dishes are complex foods cooked with salt, onions, garlic, ginger and spices, which are made as tasty as possible. There is therefore an important oppositional, and complementary, difference between rice on the one hand and side dishes on the other.

The Gender Associations of Rice and Other Core Staples

There is, in all of the societies discussed in this volume, a complementary opposition between the core starch and foods eaten with it, which is mapped on to a complementary opposition between male and female.

Rice is associated with women and the female principle throughout insular Austronesian and mainland Southeast Asian groups. The association of rice with female goddesses and deities is widely reported in the region. It is often seen, explicitly or implicitly, as having been a gift from a divine, and often ancestral, female entity or as having grown from the body of such a divine female entity, as is the case among the Isan (Trankell 1995; Wessing 1997). Although both women and men are involved in cultivating rice, women are almost always the main decision

makers in rice-growing and they tend to be responsible for the religious and ritual aspects of rice-growing (although among the Lio only men are allowed to sow rice on dry rice fields – de Jong this volume). The Kelabit say that women are able to grow rice without men, while men cannot easily grow rice without a woman. In all of the chapters in the book which deal with rice-growing societies, the association of women and rice is clear.

In Banda Eli in Eastern Indonesia, where the staple everyday food is *emba* cakes, made of cassava, the growing of cassava, like that of rice in rice-growing societies in the area, is the responsibility of women. Rice, in this society, is traded in, and is associated with men. Other foods which are brought in from outside – including fish, the most important protein food eaten with *emba* cakes at everyday meals – are also associated with men. The meal including *emba* cakes and fish brings together female and male foods.

In Inanwatan, by contrast, the staple starch food, sago, is associated with men. This is a Melanesian society whose members define themselves as hunter and gatherers; it is in some significant ways very different in its cosmology from the other societies dealt with in this volume, but there are also some important parallels. In Inanwatan, men grow and provide sago for their wives and children; women are responsible for feeding children blood and then milk from their own bodies, which makes possible life itself. The complementarity between male and female comes out at funeral meals, when sago starch (male), associated with opening up and making grow, is served together with sago larvae, which are classed as a female substance and are associated with rotting, containment and transformation.

The most valued side dish to the rice meal, among the rice-growing societies discussed here, is meat. Although meat is not eaten at every meal, particularly in lowland areas where hunting is not possible or not easy, it is almost always eaten at important meals. Many of the chapters in this book attest to the fact that at the more ritualized rice meals, shared by groups which are wider than the household ('feasts'), the key foods are meat and rice (Heringa, de Jong, Nguyễn Xuân Hiên, Telle, Janowski). Meat is in many societies clearly associated with the male principle, and this is demonstrated in some of the present chapters (Janowski, Telle, Sparkes)⁸. With an association between women and rice and between men and the other key element of the meal at ritualized meals, the rice meal represents both a bringing together of the male and female principles, and what they achieve together in terms of reproduction. This may be explicit, as is shown by some of the chapters in this volume (Kerlogue, Davis, Heringa, Telle, Janowski).

Feeding and the Malleability of the Reproductive Process

Food is relevant to the construction of kinship in Southeast Asia in two ways: through sharing food and through feeding. In the sense that sharing food means, in effect, sharing the same feeding source, sharing and feeding are two sides of the same coin. The centrality of the feeding relationship is discussed in all of the chapters in this volume. For all of the societies dealt with, the feeding relationship exists between generations: ascending generations feeding descending ones among the living, and vice versa between the living and the dead. I will return to the relationship between the dead and the living later; first of all I want to look at the feeding relationship between the living.

The relationship between ascending and descending generations is a reproductive one: ascending generations produce descending ones through the coming together of male and female to produce children. It is believed to be susceptible to manipulation, not only through who reproduces with whom but in relation to non-sexual aspects of the reproductive process.

Reproduction derives, in these societies, from what the male and female members of a male couple achieve together, but this is not only through sexual union and birth. In Austronesian societies, the couple build a household together – what I have described for the Kelabit as a hearth-group (Janowski 1995), and what Helliwell describes as a rice group (Helliwell 2001). A major focus of the household and the physical house is the cooking hearth, where the meal is cooked. A building is defined as being a true house (Malay/Indonesian *rumah*), and the group inhabiting it is defined as a separate unit, by having such a hearth. The hearth is central to kinship in the area, and the meal cooked at it is emblematic of kinship. For these societies, understanding (kin) ties between people – the production of successive generations of people – requires an understanding of how people are related through food-based ties between people, mediated through the house and its central hearth (for an analysis of this in Langkawi, see Carsten 1997).

Together the couple produce food and children, something which is expressed in the material form of the house. As Bloch says for the Zafimaniry, who smear soot from the hearth on a child shortly after it is born: ‘It is almost as if what is being celebrated by this action is the production of the child from the marital hearth in analogy with the food that is cooked there’ (Bloch 1993:128–9). The house which the couple build, and at whose hearth the meal is cooked, is widely believed in the region to be imbued with life force (Waterson 1993).

As is demonstrated by the chapters in this volume, being fed key foods produced and cooked by that household makes you kin to the members of that household: to those who have provided the food and who share the food with you. This is founded in the notion, common in societies in other parts of the world too, that humans are, to a very considerable extent, made up through what they eat and who feeds them, particularly when they are foetuses and small children (Loizos & Heady 1999a). For societies in Southeast Asia, and in Inanwatan at the borders of Melanesia and Austronesian societies too, sex merely initiates a person; subsequent feeding, both within the womb, after birth and indeed throughout life, is vital in the production of a human being (e.g. see Carsten 1995, Carsten 1997; Janowski, this volume; Kerlogue, this volume; Oosterhout, this volume). The relationship between ascending and descending generations, then, is as much about providing the right kinds of food as about sex and giving birth; indeed in Southeast Asia as in some Papua New Guinea societies (Fajans 1993) there is a sense in which kinship constructed through feeding is seen as replacing biological kinship. Those who are siblings are not only so because they have the same parents, grandparents or more distant ancestors, but also because they have been fed the same food.

Within the womb and immediately after birth (through breastmilk), babies are fed by their mothers. What the mother eats is important, since this is transmitted to the baby. In Jambi (Kerlogue, this volume) as well as in Inanwatan (van Oosterhout, this volume), the mother gives life itself, and blood, through feeding her own blood (in Inanwatan) and milk; but in Inanwatan the father, through his input of sago for the mother to eat (and later for the growing child itself directly), socializes that life force, builds flesh, and sets up relatedness with the ancestors, because sago carries with it their flesh, buried in the sago gardens; while in Jambi it is women who provide the rice which continues to build kinship throughout life, following a pattern typical of rice-growing societies. Among rice growers, it is very important to eat the right rice: Davis reports that Minangkabau living in town try to eat rice which is from their own ancestral land – or at the very least from the Minangkabau area (Davis, this volume), and among Kelabit who have migrated to town it is important to eat rice from the Kelabit Highlands, and preferably grown by the hearth-group from which they spring (Janowski 2005a).

The fact that rice constructs kinship in so many Southeast Asian Societies is associated with the special relationship which it is believed to have with humans. The Kelabit say that rice is incapable of growing on its own; it needs human help to allow it to grow. Throughout insular and mainland Southeast Asia, rice is believed to have a spirit (in Malay, *semangat*) like that of a human, as Frazer recognized many years ago (Frazer 1922: 413–419). Tai-speaking societies use the term *khwan*

to describe the spirit of rice, the same term used to describe the spirit of humans (Trankell 1995:133). Many societies consider rice to be kin to humans. A number of myths in the area relate how crop plants, and most importantly rice, grew out of a dead semi-divine being, almost always female (Evans 1953:15–16; Fox 1992:78; Giambelli 2002:50; Schulte Nordholt 1971:271). The Inanwatan, for whom sago is the key, sacred food, say that humans have an ancestress who was half sago and half human (Oosterhout, this volume)

Because feeding and sharing rice meals (mainland and insular Austronesian Southeast Asia), sago (Inanwatan) or *embal* cakes (Banda Eli) plays an important role in constructing kinship, that relatedness is not fully determined by birth and is susceptible of alteration and manipulation. It has to be built up through appropriate feeding throughout life. If an individual eats rice meals or sago from a source other than that of the household into which he or she is born this will mean that it develops kinship with those other households whose rice or sago it has eaten. Because of this, adoption causes kinship to develop with the adopting household, so that gradually the child becomes more and more kin with its adoptive parents and less kin to its birth parents (Carsten 1991a and Kerlogue, this volume).

The feeding relationship between generations among the living is between ascending generations (feeders) and descending generations (the fed). That which is fed, sago in Inanwatan (van Oosterhout, this volume), *embal* cakes in Banda Eli (Karttinen, this volume) or rice among the other groups discussed in this volume, is produced and provided by those who head the household, who are the parents and grandparents (real or classificatory) of other members. At large-scale rice meals, a wider group of people is fed and this underlines and constructs kinship between all who participate (Karttinen, de Jong, Nguyễn Xuân Hiền, Kerlogue, Telle, Janowski). Among the Kelabit, the providers of a feast present themselves as the ‘parents’ or ‘grandparents’ of all present (Janowski, this volume); among the Sasak mortuary feasts are directed and led by a husband-wife couple, who take charge respectively of meat + side dishes on the one hand and rice on the other (Telle, this volume).

However, feeding does not only take place between the living, as is demonstrated by a number of chapters in this book. Dead kin are also fed by the living (Telle, Sparkes, van Oosterhout, Nguyễn Xuân Hiền, this volume). This needs to be understood in the context of the fact that in Southeast Asia, death is closely linked to reproduction – reproduction being a necessary corollary of the transience of individual lives, and hence the beginning and ending of life (Bloch & Parry 1982; Hoskins 1996). The kin relationship with the dead, like that with the living, can be manipulated through feeding. However, it is to be noted that the feeding is

going in the opposite direction to that between the living – rather than descending generations being fed by ascending ones, they are feeding them. I shall return to this shortly. First I want to take a look at notions of life force, since I think that this may help to elucidate this apparent paradox.

Kinship and the Flow of Life

In understanding kinship in Southeast Asia, I would suggest that we may find it useful to bring together the analysis made by Fox and others of the ‘flow of life’ (Fox 1980b) in constructing kinship in the area, with an understanding of food and feeding. There is a widespread belief in Austronesian societies in a quantifiable ‘something’, of finite quantity in the universe, which may be described as life force, potency or power. It is expressed in the Javanese concept of *kasektèn*, which Anderson describes as ‘power’ or ‘primordial essence’ (Anderson 1990), the Balinese concept of *sekti*, which Geertz describes as ‘charisma’ (Geertz 1980), the Tai/Lao/Isan term *saksit*, the Luwu (Sulawesi) concept of *sumangé*, which Errington describes as ‘potency’ (Errington 1989) and the Kelabit notion of *lalud* (Janowski, this volume). Geertz (Geertz 1980:106) has argued that the Balinese *sekti* may be equated with the Polynesian concept of *mana*. The Ao Naga concept of *aren* (Janowski 1984; Mills 1926) seems to be a similar concept; the Naga are not Austronesian speakers, but they display many similarities to Austronesian groups in the islands of Southeast Asia, including rice-growing, feasts of merit and the erection of megaliths. The Inanwatan of Papua also have a notion of life force, *iware*, which is closely linked to fertility and the ability to reproduce (van Oosterhout, this volume).

The ‘flow of life’ in Austronesian societies in Southeast Asia is, in Eastern Indonesia, associated with the relationship between wife givers and wife takers (Fox 1980a), with the gift of life being associated with the female and flowing from wife givers to wife takers. Fertility is, in effect, a manifestation of the ability to channel the flow of life. For other Austronesian societies in Southeast Asia, potency or life force tends to be associated with rulers and to radiate out from the ruling centre, which is often conceived of as male+female. A comparability can perhaps be established between the (male+female) married couple as source of life force at the most basic, household level for their dependants and descendants and the male+female ruler as source of life for his dependants within the kingdom, often conceptualized as his ‘children’ (Janowski 1992). The relationship between the source and the recipient of life force, and that between those who share the same link to the source of life force, are the basis of the most important kin ties

between people. In the indigenous conception, it is that source which makes the production of successive generations of people possible, and the key to successful reproduction is successful channelling of life force to descendants.

Among both lineal and non-lineal (in Errington's idiom, 'centrist'[Errington 1990]) societies, those who pass on life force possess it to a higher degree than others and are closer to its original source (the Creator Deity, identified with the Christian God by Christianized groups); they are, in effect, lower level sources of life themselves. This makes them 'elder' in the indigenous idiom (even if they are physically younger). Ancestors, too, are closer to the source of life; life force is transmitted by both senior kin and by ancestors to their descendants, through 'blessings' which give strong life, health and worldly good fortune (Bloch 1986; Bloch 1993; Geirnaert-Martin 2002; Schiller 2002; Sellato 2002).

If life force is transmitted by ascending generations to descending ones, it seems clear that it is associated with the process of reproduction – the production of descending generations on the part of ascending ones, through the bringing together of male and female in the married couple. The original source of life is a potent unity which was fractured with the beginning of life as we know it on earth – when reproduction began – necessitating the separation of the male and female principles which together make up the whole and generating differentiation, necessary for life (e.g. see Errington 1990; McKinnon 1991). Through reproduction, that which has been separated is brought together, although only to be separated again, in a perpetual cycle.

It may be that we should see what is achieved by the married couple, through reproduction, as being the transmission of life force, both through sexual activity and through the provision of appropriate food (rice meals, meals based on root crops or meals based on sago). The couple is arguably to be seen as a living, potent centre, generating life, a centre which exists to some degree within the most humble household as well as at the level of semi-divine rulers and high status aristocrats in hierarchical societies, although within the households of leaders and rulers a much more potent centre exists, conceived of as closer to the original source of life.

The focal starch food has a central role in the 'flow of life'. Among the Inanwatan, sago achieves the transmission of domesticated life force, ensuring that humans are proper human beings and not demons (van Oosterhout, this volume). In rice-growing societies in the region, rice has a special role in reproduction; its role in bringing the two genders together is sometimes explicit, always implicit (de Jong, Davis, Heringa, Janowski, Nguyễn Xuân Hiên, all in this volume). Within many rice-growing societies, the association of women with rice and men with meat has already been mentioned. Thus, reproduction through sexual intercourse and

reproduction through the building of proper human beings through appropriate feeding of rice meals are analogous: both involve the coming together of male and female. Both the male and the female parts of the unity which is the married couple are essential to reproduction. This implies that, despite the fact that, in many Austronesian societies, men and women do not lead very different lives on an everyday level, and can do each other's jobs at a pinch, male and female need, at certain moments, to be symbolically or physically distinct (Hoskins 1987). Their main 'products', food and children, can only be produced if they are distinct in their reproductive roles, at least at certain key, symbolic points. Thus, the production of food may be considered part of sexual reproduction; commensality is among a number of groups associated with sexual intercourse (Manderson 1986b:12–14; Ng 1993:134; Heringa, this volume; Osterhout, this volume), emphasizing the reproductive aspects of the co-production and co-consumption of key foods. For some groups such as the Lio studied by de Jong (this volume), women's role as distributors of rice to others is key to their gendered role, constructing networks of kin relations with other households.

The issue of whether the notion of shared substance and transfer of substance is a relevant way of understanding kinship in the region, which has recently been a topic of discussion (Busby 1997, Carsten 1995, Fajans 1988, Gibson 1985, Thomas 1999, Weiner 1982), can perhaps be approached in the context of looking not just at the transfer of physical substance but at the 'flow of life'. It does seem that the construction of physical substance conceived of as being the same (made up of flesh and blood on the one hand, which are wet, female and transient; and bones on the other, which are dry, male and permanent) is generally believed in the region to be made up through feeding. This process of construction, which we may term reproduction, is a process which is consciously undertaken and which is believed to be susceptible to alteration and manipulation, depending on the type and source of food. It could perhaps be argued that what is central here is not the transmission of physical substance itself but the ability to build the right kind of substance through being able to channel life force through food. The successful cultivation and preparation of the right food, and the control of nature which is involved in achieving this, makes people fully social beings (Dentan 1968; Fajans 1988; Manderson 1986a; Young 1971). Achieving this involves harnessing and channelling life force from the ancestors, who are the source of 'blessings'.

In general, the data we have on notions of life force seem to indicate that for many groups in the region it is a unitary notion. However, for some groups such as the Kelabit of Sarawak, and the Inanwatan of Papua, there is a distinction between socialized, humanized life force and wild life force (Janowski, this volume and

van Oosterhout, this volume). For the Kelabit, wild life force is associated with the male and humanized life force is associated both with the female and with the couple as a unity; for the Inanwatan, by contrast, wild life force is associated with the female and socialized life force with the male. In both of these societies, however, both types of life force are important, emphasizing the complementarity of male and female within the couple.

Feeding and Competition for Status

Feeding others generates status for the feeding couple in the region. This is particularly true in relation to meals consisting of the staple starch plus side dishes, as opposed to snacks. In all of the groups discussed here except two, rice is the staple starch which is most highly valued, and in all of these rice is closely associated with social status. While all groups in the region which grow rice also grow other starchy crops, it is rice which is ideally eaten at daily meals consisting of starch plus side dishes. Because rice is not easy to grow in many of the ecological contexts in Southeast Asia, including both the more arid areas of Eastern Indonesia and sloping land in forested areas, in many areas only a little rice can be grown, and this is achieved with some difficulty. Arguably this has the effect of making rice a particularly high status crop and food, since some skill, luck (i.e. an association with the divine or the spirits) and/or access to the labour resources of others is required to achieve success. In these contexts, even though not all households are able to eat only rice as their starch food at meals, high status households will eat only, or mainly, rice. Rice is often mixed with other starches so that at least some rice is eaten at each meal. In societies where there is very little rice grown, it is the starch food consumed at ritual meals and socially significant meals. Even in groups where no rice at all is grown, such as the Bajau Laut, rice may be bought in for consumption at important meals.

The association between status and rice means that feeding rice meals to others is generative of status for the feeding couple as well as generative of kinship. Where a couple feeds those within their own household they are demonstrating that they are able to provide this prestigious, difficult-to-grow food for their dependants. Where they are able to feed it to others outside their household, such as at feasts, this is even more generative of status. Feasts are the context for a good deal of competition for status (for an overview of status-generating 'feasts of merit' in Southeast Asia see Kirsch 1973). This occurs both through the provision of lavish rice meals at the feast on the part of the feast-giving couple and through the gifting of uncooked rice and animals to the feast givers on the part of guests (a common practice in the area),

who will then get a return in kind at their own feasts, making their own provision at their own feast more lavish. Competitive provision of rice meals for others through feasts is a major arena within which relative status is negotiated. This status is arguably founded in the kinship relations generated both through everyday meals and through feasting. The conflation of kin relations and hierarchical relations in the region is expressed through the use of kin terms between those of different status (e.g. see Kerlogue, this volume; Janowski, this volume).

Feeding Ancestors and the Flow of Life

I want to return at this point to the feeding of ancestors, which inverts the direction of feeding among the living, which is from ascending to descending generations. Why are ancestors fed? While the feeding of ancestors is common in Southeast Asia, the reasons for this have not been explored in the context of the fact that this feeding entails a reversal of the usual direction of feeding.

Three chapters in this volume focus on the feeding of ancestors: Sparkes' on the Isan of NE Thailand, Nguyễn Xuân Hiên's on the Tết Festival among the Kinh in Vietnam and Telle's on the Sasak of Lombok. In all three cases it is rice which is the most important food offered to the ancestors. In NE Thailand and in Vietnam, this is glutinous rice, which, as Nguyễn Xuân Hiên shows, is more ritually significant than non-glutinous rice and is more strongly associated with the ancestors and with building kinship. Rice beer is also offered to the dead in Vietnam, and used to be poured on graves in Lombok. Rice, in all of these cases, builds a complete community of kin, both among the living and with the dead.

The explanation for the feeding of the ancestors is generally given by the living in terms of the needs of the dead: they need the food of the living. However, feeding the dead can also be understood in relation to the transmission of potency or life force from the dead to the living. Feeding the ancestors is said, in all three cases dealt with in this volume, to cause 'blessings' – fertility, health and worldly good fortune – to be transmitted from the ancestors to their descendants. The world of the dead is a major source of fertility for the living throughout the region (see for example articles included in Chambert-Loir & Reid 2002b). Most ancestors enter the general kin group of unnamed individuals, and as such are part of a generalized source of fertility for the living (Bloch 1971); a small number, in particular village founders, remain as named individuals and are especially strong channels of potency (Chambert-Loir & Reid 2002a).

An important part of the relationship which the living set up with dead ancestors is through food. This is, in rice-growing societies, most importantly through

rice, and often through rice meals including meat, as we find in Lombok (Telle, this volume). Among the Isan of NE Thailand, the dead are ‘cared for’ (*lieng*) through being offered rice by women (Sparkes, this volume) – using the same word as that used for ‘caring for’ children, thus underlining the inversion of the usual direction of feeding.

Fertility is transmitted through various channels from the dead to the living, and one of these is food. In return for being ‘cared for’, the Isan believe that those who offer food receive ‘power’ or ‘potency’ (*saksit*) from the ancestors. Among the Kinh in Vietnam, the food (mainly rice) offered to the dead at the kin temple (*phan*) is taken home and shared among all kin, to whom it brings health and happiness (Nguyễn Xuân Hiên, this volume). Among the Tai Yong of Northern Thailand, the offering of all rice to the ancestors before it is eaten by living people unites the living and their ancestors in commensality and transforms the food eaten by the living into ritual left-overs (Trankell 1995: 134). In Kerek in Java and among the Sasak in Lombok it is believed that the vapour from the steamed rice rises up the ancestors implying, in a similar way, that the living are eating the ancestors’ ritual left-overs (Heringa, this volume; Telle, this volume). The ancestors eat the ‘essence’ of the food, but not its material substance, which is consumed by the offerers. Thus, it would seem that sharing food with the ancestors causes blessings/life/potency to be transmitted from them to their living descendants.

The feeding of dead ancestors is not the only example of feeding going from descending to ascending generations. In SE Asia, as in most parts of the world, the elderly are fed by their children and grandchildren. This is because of necessity: as people become older they become unable to perform productive tasks and need to be looked after. However, the rationale for feeding them may also have a cosmological aspect. In Southeast Asia, the elderly are regarded as close to the world of the spirits, as Heringa (this volume) points out is the case in Kerek. This may mean that they, like dead ancestors, are seen as able to access and transmit life force, because they are closer to the source of that life, which is the spirit world. Indeed, in the Austronesian world those who are socially and cosmologically senior are widely regarded as being older in precisely that sense – that they are closer to the ‘source of life’ – than those who are socially inferior, even where they are not chronologically older. However, as an individual becomes chronologically older he also grows closer to a return to that source of life. It may be that we should see the reversal of the direction of feeding – which reaches its culmination after death, when ancestors eat only the ‘essence’ of food – as a gradual process which is linked to this growing proximity to the source of life: as people become older, their partaking of food involves a transmission

of life force to that food, just as the ancestors pass life force to the food. This can then be passed on to their descendants who share it with them, just as the sharing of food with dead ancestors leads to life force being transmitted to their descendants.

Conclusion

Food is, in all the societies dealt with in this volume, an important basis for the construction of ties of relatedness – ‘kin’ ties. Such ties are based on local ideas about the reproduction of successive generations of people, which relate both to sexual reproduction and to feeding certain kinds of food. Kinship in the region is not fixed at birth; it is malleable and is believed to be based on feeding. In much of Southeast Asia it is rice meals which are the key eating event, the basis for constructing kinship through feeding. The chapters in this volume clearly show that eating rice meals together, and in particular feeding, are an important basis for the construction of kinship. This is true both in creating kinship between the living and in constructing a community of kin including the dead.

The core starch food – rice in most of the societies discussed here but sago in Inanwatan and cassava cakes (*embali*) in Banda Eli – is the key food in the construction of kinship for all the societies dealt with here. It has in each case a clear association with one of the two genders. While rice and *embali* cakes are associated with the female principle, sago in Inanwatan is associated with the male. The mother and father of a child have complementary roles in providing different foods for the child, and at ritualized meals the complementarity of the core food, associated with one gender, and other foods eaten with it, associated with the other gender, may be made explicit. At feasts in rice-growing societies, (female) rice is almost always accompanied by (male) meat as the main side dish, whereas at ordinary meals vegetables may be eaten with rice. This suggests that kinship in these societies, although founded in the reproductive relationship between male and female, is expressed and articulated not only through sexual activity but also through feeding complementary male and female foods. This is emphasised by the fact that eating together is often cast in a sexual light in the region.

I have suggested that it may be useful to look at the construction of kinship through feeding, discussed in all the chapters in this volume, in the light of the importance of the ‘flow of life’ in the region (Fox 1980b). Among the living, there is an indigenous (as well as a ‘common-sense’) logic in the suggestion that one should see the married couple as the source of life for their descendants; and the ultimate source of life is stated by Southeast Asian groups to be unified male +

female. The fact that the ancestors, as a source of fertility, are often related to as an undifferentiated group also implies the conflation of male and female⁹, which is in concordance with this logic. Among the living, the flow of life occurs through the feeding of descending by ascending generations; between the living and the dead, it occurs by means of the feeding of dead ancestors by the living. Feeding the dead constructs a commensal relationship with the dead, and may be interpreted as making possible the transmission of life force through the food shared, which flows in the opposite direction (from the fed to those doing the feeding) from the direction in which it flows between the living. Viewing the feeding relationship as central to the construction of kinship in the region, and understanding this relationship in the light of the well-documented importance of the 'flow of life', also central to kinship in the region, makes it possible for us to understand all of the societies dealt with in this book in the same frame of reference: a concern with the continued, and correct, channelling of life from one generation to the next, both between the living and from the community of dead kin to their living descendants.

The discussion presented here about the nature of 'kinship' in Southeast Asia fits into a wider debate currently underway about the nature of kinship, which focuses on trying to understand the concept in a way that is relevant to so-called 'Western' societies as well as to non-'Western' societies. This has been stimulated partly by a growing interest in the implications of an analysis of responses to new possibilities for assisted reproduction (e.g. Edwards 2000; Franklin 1997). It has been argued that the distinctiveness of the 'West', in relation to its propensity to seek out and identify scientific 'reality', is an illusion (Latour 1993). As Carsten points out (2004), when this is applied to kinship, it implies not only that 'Western' societies, like many, perhaps all, other societies, conceive of 'kinship'/'ties of relatedness' which are partially founded in 'biology' and partially in 'culture'; it also implies that the boundary between the two, for 'Western' as for non-'Western' societies, is an illusory, or at least a shifting one. Food, which has been shown in all of the chapters in this volume to be basic to the construction of 'kin' ties in Southeast Asia (and which is arguably significant in delineating groups of related people in all societies), is a very good – perhaps even the best possible – exemplification of this, since it is difficult to know (and this is true for both the outside analyst and for the participant in a given culture) whether to see it as 'cultural' or 'natural'. In fact, it should perhaps be seen as lying between the two, and as a powerful mediating and transformatory substance which acts as a means for turning 'nature' into 'culture' and vice-versa.

Notes

1 Organised by Monica Janowski, Fiona Kerlogue, Ing-Britt Trankell and Enid Nelson.

2 Platenkamp argues that there is no need to demonstrate common origin, but rather a similar 'general orientation to life', using James Fox's phrase, in order to be able to compare societies (Platenkamp, 1990). But what does this mean? At the very least one would have to identify, and demonstrate the sharing of, attitudes which are perceived as pivotal by members of the societies concerned. Indeed it raises the question of whether common origin (for example through borrowing) may in fact be indicated by the sharing of pivotal aspects of 'orientation to life'.

3 I will use the term 'household' for brevity to describe the minimal unit conceived of as being related, although cross-culturally it is a somewhat confusing term since the definition of 'house' varies widely and its relationship with notions of relatedness also varies a good deal.

4 In fact many such groups manage wild plant resources to a significant degree.

5 Hayden has argued that the domestication of plants was prompted by status and that the first domesticates were luxury, high-status crops which are difficult to grow, giving the example of rice in Southeast Asia (Hayden 2003).

6 Initially I found it difficult to eat rice prepared in the way in which the Kelabit eat it (cooked until the grains fall apart and then mashed), and I would eagerly watch out for opportunities to eat cassava chips, which were always offered to anyone in the vicinity in the open-plan longhouse. I vividly remember one occasion when it became apparent to the person who had prepared the chips that I was actually eating out of hunger; she showed concern and offered to prepare a rice meal for me.

7 Although the beverage prepared from fermented rice is often described in English as rice wine, it is technically a beer.

8 There are questions to be addressed which are not tackled here about the association of meat and the male principle in Southeast Asia. There are two major sacrificial animals which are eaten at feasts in the area: the pig and the buffalo. The gender associations of these two animals differ: while the association of the buffalo with maleness seems clear, the pig seems to be associated to some degree, in some societies, with either the female principle (see Geirnaert-Martin, 1992) or human culture as opposed to the wild, and hence by implication, perhaps, a fusion of the male and the female. Among the Kelabit, where the blood of the (domestic) pig was, before the introduction of Christianity, used to effect transitions from the unsocialized to the socialized, small children being initiated into 'proper' human life and men returning from the forest graveyard were given showers of pig's blood (Talla 1979:209, 250; for an analysis of the significance of the pig among the Kelabit, see Janowski 2005c).

9 Although named ancestors are, obviously, of one gender or the other. Whether they can be seen as being related to as part of a married couple (which would imply an emphasis on male + female) perhaps needs to be investigated in the light of the fact that named ancestors are often memorialized in ways which imply a focus on the couple of which they are part. In the Kelabit Highlands and among the Naga of NE India and NW Burma megaliths as memorials to feast givers, which constitute a permanent memorial to such people, may be erected in pairs symbolizing the married couple of which the named feast giver is part (see Harrisson 1962; Hutton 1922a and 1922b; Labang 1962).

2

RECONSTRUCTING THE WHOLE

Seven months pregnancy ritual in Kerek, East Java

Rens Heringa

Communal meals (*selametan*) are a principal ceremonial and to a certain extent religious element of nearly all rituals in Javanese culture (Koentjaraningrat 1984: 344–349). The proceedings were long presented as a primarily male concern (see Geertz 1960; Koentjaraningrat 1984; Mayer 1887). Recent Southeast Asian studies have, however, highlighted the role of women as the providers of daily as well as ceremonial and ritual meals (see Asmussen 1999; Carsten 1991b; Mander-son 1986a; Massard 1991; Trankell 1995) and as makers of food offerings to the gods (Brinkgreve 1997). For Java the contribution of women in the preparation and ritual exchange of food has been analysed among the mountain-dwelling Tenggerese of East Java (Lüem 1988) and in the aristocratic court of Surakarta (Brakel 1997). As the complementarity of male and female aspects in food exchanges needs further exploration an important theme of my chapter is the role of gender. The seven months' pregnancy ritual held in the villages of the subdistrict of Kerek on the northeast coast of Java forms the central focus of the enquiry.¹ An introduction to the area is followed by an outline of classificatory notions that form the cosmological rationale for the symbolic role of different foods. In the following section, similar concepts are shown to be valid for discussing the theme of kinship. The distinct manner in which kinship functions in Kerek is set off against a reconsideration of Javanese kinship as presented in the literature. Particular attention is paid to the gendered ideals operating among different social strata of the community.

Thereby the stage is set for the description and analysis of the food exchanges. My aim is to clarify the mythical and cosmological foundations for the sets of ingredients and food and show how the exchanges symbolically regenerate all levels of kin relationship comprising the whole of human and non-human social

bonds. Although only some of the food is specific to pregnancy rituals it will be shown that the ritual would not be effective without the full complement of food gifts that also form part of most other life cycle rituals. Throughout the chapter comparative references to ritual practice in other Southeast Asian areas will serve to strengthen the argument.

Kerek

The subdistrict of Kerek is an arid valley enclosed by the forested foothills of the Northern Limestone Mountain range, located 25 kilometres inland from the port town and administrative centre of Tuban. Its population forms a distinctive cultural group speaking an antiquated variant of Javanese. For centuries those in power – the local representatives of the Dutch colonial administration and the Indonesian government alike – have tried to make the people of Kerek adjust to a ‘standard’ Javanese cultural mould. Nevertheless the villagers have clung tenaciously to many of their old ways and modern developments did not have an impact until the mid 1980s.²

Although official rights to the mountain forests have long been claimed by the (colonial) government the villagers continue to consider themselves owners of the woods and guardians of the water sources.³ Their Javanese religious expression generally referred to as *kejawen* (Koentjaraningrat 1984) has incorporated only limited aspects of Islamic practice. As a result rituals include offerings to the ancestors and to the rice goddess Mbok Sri and numerous spirits, as well as prayers to Allah. Of interest to the present argument is the cooperative affiliation known from the literature as *moncapat-moncalima*, which unites the villages in a single socio-economic whole. The model ideally consists of a group of four or eight villages – one in each of the cardinal directions – surrounding the village in the centre (Ossenbruggen 1916/ 1977).⁴ A rotatory system of specialization among the villages, starting in the east, results in uniting the territory in a vast conceptual kin group that cooperates in the production of the basic needs of clothing-and-food (*sandhang pangan*) (Heringa 1993). Koentjaraningrat (1984: 432) has noted the rotation of the yearly purification rituals (*bersih desa*) among affiliated villages in Central Java. A comparable system governs the purification rituals and also the production of ritual ingredients in Kerek. A last distinctive aspect is that food preferences diverge from the general Javanese pattern. In the first place the consumption of rice – generally proclaimed the daily staple of all Indonesians – and meat is restricted to ceremonial occasions. Since the mid 1970s rice has been available in the market throughout the year, so the once-yearly yield is not the villagers’ only

access to the ritual crop. Nevertheless most villagers still keep to the old custom. Secondly the daily ingestion of the fermented syrup of the wildgrowing *lontar* palm – jokingly referred to as petrol (*bensin*) by the men of Kerek – has given the population a negative reputation with the average non-drinking Muslim Javanese. The function of the juice as basic ingredient for the traditional ritual beverage but also as supplement to a meagre diet has generally been overlooked.⁵

Ecological conditions in fact dictate the food preferences and also the characteristic system of mixed agriculture.⁶ Porous limestone soils and low precipitation have led the villagers to plant their dry fields and also sometimes their house yards with a year-round crop of the main staples, maize and cassava.⁷ The single yearly crop of rice is grown on dry fields (*gogo*) or broadcast on rain-inundated fields (*gogo rancah*). A variety of additional food plants generally provides a yield that is sufficiently spread over the year to prevent famine. A range of rootcrops, creepers and fruit-bearing shrubs and trees also offer vegetable greens. Agricultural tasks shared between men and women alternate with several gendered activities. The women operate as market traders, selling or bartering surplus fruit and vegetables, and also yarn and raw cotton that result from their specialty, the making of textiles (Heringa 1991; 1993; 1994). The men raise livestock to cultivate the fields and to be sold in the market for extra income, while their speciality is carpentry.

Basic Classificatory Concepts

Before dealing with kinship as it functions in Kerek I shall present a brief outline of the cosmological construct that underlies the symbolic ritual roles of the different entities – vegetable, animal, human and otherworldly – that make up the village universe. It should be kept in mind however that ‘throughout Asia the complex nature of classificatory concepts and the multitude of interlacing systems present problems of clearcut categories’ (Trankell 1995: 75–76). Of prime importance is the villagers’ need to create a balanced whole under all circumstances. Fundamental is the notion that the universe consists of three layers: upper world, middle world and lower world. As the sky forms the boundary to the upper world, and the surface of the earth or water indicates the limit to the lower world, the division can be understood as a dynamic scale between relative states of wetness and dryness. On this vertical scale moreover contingent states of low and hot versus high and cool are distinguished. Each component’s condition changes according to its transitory phase. Human beings are subject to the recurring cycle of life and death, while plants and animals moreover may undergo various culinary transformations through the hands of humans. Thus particular individuals and categories of human

beings are considered complementary to specific types of edibles. In Java as in eastern Indonesia 'the interplay of categories marks the contexts where alternative perspectives may apply' (Fox 1980b: 50).

It is of note that components conceptually endowed with an abundant life-giving quality are deemed most suitable for ceremonial use. Rice, certain cuts of meat and 'fruits' from the coconut and *lontar* palms – all belonging to the upper ranges of the scale – form the main ritual ingredients due to their high content of life-giving essence. However, fruits with many seeds, winding creepers, chickens-and-eggs and even certain root crops that all fit in the lower ranking categories may equally serve as ritual components. The life-giving power of elements from the lower world is further explained in reference to the beneficent influence of water and water spirits. The villagers moreover insist that the life-giving quality of edibles remains intact even after picking, killing and cooking; indeed the culinary treatments are said to increase efficacy. In Kerek therefore the opposition between 'raw' and 'cooked' ingredients does not universally overlap with the distinction between 'natural' ingredients and 'cultural' food as it is understood elsewhere (Gariné 1996: 10, in reference to Lévi-Strauss's work). Neither do the villagers conceive of the culinary process as the transformation of 'living ingredients into non-living edibles' (Trankell 1995: 76).

Active involvement in the life-giving phase of the cycle similarly determines the role of the human participants. Those in their reproductive phase join in the food exchanges among humans most actively. The elder and younger generations have supportive and mediatory tasks. Young adults initiate the meal by serving food and drinks, while seniors round it off through their gift of snacks that are distributed at the end of the ritual. They too – being 'closest' to the non-human world – undertake the contacts with otherworldly entities. On the territorial level the production of ritual ingredients shows a comparable division of contributions among the villages. Here I will only mention those that form the link between the end and the beginning of the cycle. The classificatory 'grandfathers' in the northern village – at the end of the (life)cycle – grow the coconuts and small hot chillies that soften and flavour the meat for the ritual meat soup. Moreover their *lontar* palms provide the sweet juice (*tuak*) that will smooth social contacts. The leaves from the *lontar* tree are dried and sent down from the north to be plaited into ritual containers by the 'nubile girls' of the village in the southeast, at the beginning of a new regenerative cycle.

Finally the timing of ceremonial occasions involves comparable notions. High points in the life cycle like weddings and circumcisions preferably take place during the hot dry season after the harvest. As a secondary ritual the pregnancy

ritual may occur throughout the year, although rain must be warded off. Ample discussion as to how harmony can best be achieved is considered a necessary part of the preparations, the more so when it concerns contacts with otherworldly entities – spirits, ancestors and gods – that often include ephemeral aspects.

Kinship Patterns: Sharing and Exchange

In the following section I will consider the manner in which the classificatory notions mentioned above find expression in the social organization of the villagers of Kerek. In anthropological terms Javanese kinship is of the cognatic bilateral type which merely means that theoretically descent may be transmitted equally through both parents (Barnard and Good 1984 : 70). Although the regional variation encountered elsewhere in Southeast Asia would suggest a considerable variety in emphasis, studies of kinship on Java have paid relatively little attention to this aspect (Hüsken 1991: 152). Studies of customary law (*adat*) have presented the Javanese as ‘an example of a territorially-based society ... where kinship has no significance’ (Hüsken 1991: 151 in reference to ter Haar 1962: 55). The social divisions encountered in Kerek make it clear however that this premise needs reconsideration. In particular the concept of the cyclical cooperation between the villages of Kerek as a classificatory kinship model (see above) appears to indicate that notions of kinship may well be the hitherto unnoticed structuring principle underpinning the territorial model. Moreover kin terms used to address spirits and gods seem to suggest that notions of kinship also function as foundation for the cosmological model. The data presented below will further substantiate this.

The basic social distinction among Javanese is that between ‘one’s own body’ (*awaké dhéwé*) or consanguineous kin and ‘other human beings’ (*wong liya*) (Robson 1987: 509). The first category includes ego’s three ascending and three descending generations. The second category is ambivalent as becomes evident from the alternate term for the ‘others’ as those who are ‘not yet [part of] one’s family’ (*rung kulawarga*). Indeed some ‘others’ will become affines without however being considered ‘one’s own’. In Kerek the interaction between the two groups is ruled by explicit prescriptions. *Awaké dhéwé* should give each other the nurturing care (*momong*) also given to small children. Clothing (*sandhang*), food (*pangan*) and shelter (*papan*) are shared spontaneously and without the need for a return gift. Among co-resident consanguineous kin ritual exchange is in fact exceptional whereas contributions to co-resident affines require a countergift. The exchanges are based upon the notion that the relation with ‘others’ – be it *wong liya* or married-in *kulawarga* – is ‘purely a gamble’ (*mung dolan*). The principal

instrument for forging harmony between the two parties is the ritual exchange of food during *selamatan*. Frequent reenactment of the gambling game of exchange may ensure positive results but more often results in fierce competition. Thus in Kerek the community is divided into insiders and outsiders, those with whom kinship – or ‘body’ – and food are shared and those with whom kinship and food are exchanged.

The central determinant ruling relationships among Javanese is the principle of seniority, according to which the senior party rates a higher level of respect (Robson 1987: 513–516; Hüsken 1991: 156). In the human world the ‘elders’ (*wong tua*), especially those who serve as mediators with the non-human ‘elders’ – ancestors, spirits and gods from both the upper and the lower world – are accorded the highest level of esteem. The seniority principle is further relevant for the choice of a marriage partner. The preferred match is one with *awaké dhéwé*, ideally a matrilateral second cousin (*mindhoan*, indicating both genders). Important is that the groom must be of an ‘older’ and therefore ‘higher’ level of descent than his bride. Nevertheless in Kerek marriage proceedings are ideally initiated by the future bride and her kin group, who are denoted as the ‘female side’ – *aris wedok* in Javanese or *pihak perempuan* in Indonesian. The groom’s kin group is known as the ‘male side’, *aris lanang* or *pihak laki*. Thus the relationship between the two affinal groups is marked by a gender distinction which is tied in with the precedence of elder over younger, showing a typical Austronesian pattern (Fox 1980a: 331). Even in marriages among those who are ‘others’ to each other the ‘male’ side is invariably considered ‘older’ and therefore higher in status than the ‘female’ side. One result is a rather strained relationship with the married-in husband who is denoted as one who ‘happens to have become co-resident’ (*kadang katut*). Although the regulated mutual give-and-take may tighten the bond over time a certain sense of mistrust always seems to remain.

Stratification: Compound and House Groups

In the literature the nuclear family has been presented as playing a central role in Javanese social organization (Dewey 1962: 28; H. Geertz 1961: 3; Koentjaraningrat 1984: 137). ‘Peasant’ communities supposedly operate on an ethos of equality while more encompassing or stratified kinship structures have been considered as mostly temporary or incidental (Koentjaraningrat 1968: 53–54). Again the local pattern in Kerek is not in line with these suppositions.⁸ Elsewhere on the north coast of Java differences in social status have led to the formation of pseudo-corporate descent groups with common property (Hüsken 1991: 152). This echoes

Leach's observation of the tendency of 'the property-owning sector [in a bilateral community] ... to create property-owning corporations which are conceived of as patrilineal descent groups, even though ... they are nothing of the sort' (1973: 53). Among the landholding elite of Kerek similar descent groups with a patrilineal bias occur. In contrast, the less affluent tend to organize themselves in a matri-filiational model conceived of as a 'matrilineal descent group'.⁹ The distinction is related closely to the ownership of land. Cultivated land located outside the village boundaries is the individual and hereditary property of men, whereas the house and its surrounding yard (*halaman* or *pekarangan*) – located within the village – tend to be hereditary female assets.¹⁰

The division results in contrasting residential and marriage patterns that divide the community into two social strata.¹¹ The majority belongs to the middle range and lives in matri/uxorilocal compounds as 'members of a fenced-in area' (*batihan*). The main house and hearth belong to the senior woman while her married daughters each have a separate house or at least a separate hearth. Men whose patrifiational group owns only dry fields (*tegal*) tend to settle uxorilocally but nevertheless continue to assist in the work on their father's land. The married-in husband is expected to donate (part of) his share in the yield to the household in exchange for the food prepared for him by his wife. In contrast the rice-land-holding elite is preponderantly patri/virilocal. Especially the village leadership – generally the owners of extended tracts of inherited wet rice land (*sawah pusaka*) – lives in male-owned lineage houses tended by a wife 'enticed' (*dirayuh*) into marrying-in through the offering of a bride price (see Heringa 1996). One of the sons will be chosen to inherit the family house, while the others generally settle in a neolocal household. The elite's marriage pattern differs from the general custom as well, as the inheriting son tends to choose a maternal (MyBD) or in some cases even a paternal (FyBD) cross-cousin. Landed families state that the preference keeps the property (*harta pusaka*) together. The endogamous trend, which is also encountered among the Javanese aristocracy (Hüsken 1991: 164–65), runs counter to the local matrilinear rule as well as Islamic precepts.

Several contrasts between the two social groups can be noted. Although both groups profess adherence to the cognatic pattern, the house group favours patrifocal aspects, while the compound group tends to attach more importance to matrifocal deliberations. Within the compound group the 'female' insiders form the sharing unit while the 'male' outsiders function as exchange unit. The opposite situation obtains within the house group although the preferred endogamous marriage results in neutralizing the distinction. The compound group stresses its 'female' role as husband taker while the house group concentrates upon functioning as

‘male’ wife taker. Finally the distinction implies that the ‘male’ house group stands in a senior position to the ‘female’ compound group.¹²

Pitonan and Manten Tingkeban

In the sequence of life cycle rituals the Javanese seven months’ pregnancy ritual is considered a minor event.¹³ It marks the time when the ‘candidate baby’ (*calon bayi*) is acknowledged as a partially living but still ungendered being. Ample attention has been paid to the proceedings in the literature (Raffles 1815; Mayer 1887; van Hien 1912; Geertz 1960; Koentjaraningrat 1984; Bratawijaja 1993; Pemberton 1994). A rather surprising uniformity characterizes the descriptions, a bias that is probably due to the mistaken idea that the customs of the aristocratic elite of Central Java are exemplary for those on the rest of the island. The existing accounts most prominently stress the ceremonial role of the prospective parents and the food offerings to ancestors and spirits rather than the exchange practices among kin. In my view the latter form the indispensable basis of the ritual in Kerek.

The feast is denoted as a *sedhekah ngaturi* as it comprises a variety of food ‘offerings’ (*sedhekah*) which will be exchanged and shared among those who have ‘been invited’ (*ngaturi*) to the ritual throughout its ‘36 hours’ (*semalam sedina walikan*) duration.¹⁴ As elsewhere in Southeast Asia the invitations are not only directed at those inhabiting the human world but also include otherworldly ‘kin’. The core of the celebration consists of two closely related beginnings: firstly the entrance of the young couple as a fully participating unit into their respective kingroups and into the community and secondly the recognition of the fruit of their union as a now partially human being. The aim of the feast as stated by the villagers is also twofold. First it is said to effectuate ‘the blessing of the baby’ (*keselamatané bayiné*). The second aim is expressed as *dadi siji*, ‘(actively) becoming one’ or also ‘(passively) to be made one’ and refers to a more complex set of relationships. I suggest that the ‘becoming one’ indicates in the first place the father and the baby. By acting as ‘master of the feast’ (*sing gawé*) for the first time in his life, he publicly acknowledges the child as his own. Secondly, it marks the (temporary) unison of the two affinal kingroups. I further suggest that ‘to be made one’ refers to the totality of non-human as well as human relationships. It will be shown below how each of these relationships is generated in turn through the exchange and consumption of specific sets of food gifts.

The proceedings differ in complexity depending upon the status of the feast giver. The relatively simple ritual carried out in and around the main house of the matrilocal compound is termed the ‘seventh’ (*pitonan*) in accordance with its timing in the seventh month of pregnancy. It is primarily directed at the preparation and

exchange of the food. After dark the *aris lanang* will arrange a *jagongan* party for the male guests who noisily entertain themselves with drinking and gambling in the front yard. The elaborate affair in and around the house of the elite is referred to as 'closely resembling' or 'following upon a wedding' (*manten tingkeban*) to which hundreds of kin and relations far and wide are invited.¹⁵ A *tayuban* performance by female singers (*sindir*, 'teasers') is featured for the entertainment of the men. Listening to the songs is complimentary but guests will have to pay for a dance with one of the performers. The night-time revelry of the gamblers in the compound and also the erotic songs drifting over the village throughout the elite feast eloquently demonstrate the competitive and unsocialized aspects of the *dolan* bond with *wong liya*. Considerable sums of cash are spent on the gambling and dancing. As elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Manderson 1986a: 16) the more ostentatious the entertainment and the more daring the individual expenses, the higher the increase in status may be for the hosting male kin group and for individual male guests.

At the head of the main ritual units stand the young couple's parents who through the marriage have become *besan* to each other. Robson describes the *besan* relationship as one of mutual respect but wonders at the social relevance of the term, concluding mistakenly that no special duties seem to be indicated (Robson 1987: 516). Carsten suggests that in Langkawi (Malaysia) the most important aspect of exchanges between the two sets of parents is their equality when focusing upon the common grandchildren (Carsten 1991b: 109). Although in Kerek the common grandchild creates a mutual bond as well, the seniority principle renders the relationship between *besan* structurally asymmetrical. The young father's role as 'master of the feast' makes him responsible for enlisting the cooperation of his kin group into granting material and financial support.¹⁶ The gifts consist primarily of money and will be used to procure a sacrificial animal and numerous other obligatory contributions. The 'male' *besan*'s prominent public role tends to overshadow the female side's task to contribute matching counter-gifts. Ideally both sides seek the help of consanguineal kin rather than that of affines, with a single exception: the contribution of the young husband's sisters-in-law, to which I shall return below. Close neighbours may be enlisted to perform the actual work, 'showing the interplay of kin-based and community-based behaviours' (Hüsken 1991: 9).

Initiating the Proceedings

Before the ritual proper can start the help and protection of otherworldly entities must be invoked by a gendered set of elderly officiants who serve as classificatory

kin to the whole community: Grandmother Midwife (*Embah Dhukun bayi*) and Grandfather Priest (*Embah Modin*), officiant of the syncretic *kejawen* form of Islam. Father Village Chief (*Pak Petinggi*) moreover contributes essential gifts from his house yard to aid the villagers in maintaining these contacts during the ritual. Since the early stage of the pregnancy *Embah Dhukun* has been in charge of countering negative influences caused by spirits. She too initiates the pregnancy ritual on the eve of the proceedings.¹⁷ First she will 'form a dam' (*nambaki*) against the rain spirit by sticking small red onions and chillies on a broom (*sapu lidi*) made from the ribs of a *lontar* leaf and placing it upside down on the roof. An incantation addressed to the 44 spirit companions of the baby-in-the-making invokes their continuing benevolence (see also Lüem 1992: 97).¹⁸ Next the midwife massages the young mother's belly with a mixture of aromatic medicinal herbs and pounded roots and submits the young parents to a head-to-toe purifying rinse (*adus kramas*) with hot water to which fragrant, white, red and yellowish green flowers (*kembang telon*) have been added. To make the rain spell last the couple should not bathe again until after the feast. During the rest of the proceedings the *Dhukun* will sit in the rice shed guarding the 'rice couple' – two earthenware vats containing the seed rice for the next year – an emblem of continuing regeneration. In return for her services she will receive a token of gendered gifts. The 'male' gift consists of a small amount of money and four coconuts-in-a-cluster (*kelapa sekanthet*). Its 'female' counterpart is formed by two cupped hands full of raw rice (*wosé sepitrah*), the amount habitually measured out for one person. The gifts-in-kind are replete with life-giving qualities. Ingredients for a sirih quid (*jambé suro*) form a reference to the *Dhukun*'s mediating qualities.

The core of the pregnancy ritual consists of a series of food events. The first two take place in a private ceremony in which only the future parents and their immediate kin participate. It is held around noon in the innermost part of the house under the guidance of *Embah Dhukun*. The third, assembled under the supervision of *Embah Modin*, forms the return gift for the village leadership. The three concluding events constitute the pinnacle of the ritual, which is enacted at nightfall in the presence of all guests with *Embah Modin* officiating. Leading up to the high point, the ingredients – while being transformed and assembled into edibles – are gradually moved from the private back of the house to the public front, thereby enacting the step forwards of the baby and the future parents in the cycle of the generations.

Early in the morning elite feast givers send representatives of their *aris lanang* to Father Village Chief's house to request the use of his heirloom *gamelan* for the accompaniment of the female performers. He is entitled to grant them this right

as tutelary descendant of the mythical landed ancestor Jaka Tarub whose spouse – the sky nymph Nawang Wulan – and her heavenly companions (*widadari*) will be personified in the singers with the help of the gamelan's mellow tones. The myth recounts how Jaka Tarub tricked the nymph – owner of rice – into marriage and thus procured the essential source of regeneration (see Heringa 1997). The return gift for the village chief's loan of the *gamelan* is the severed head of the sacrificial animal, an appropriate choice for the 'head' (*kepala*) of the village, the more so as it contains the brains said to be the 'seed' – the life-giving force – for his leadership. The second contribution from the village head – given to commoners and elite alike – consists of two coconuts and a bundle of young leaves from the yellow coconut palm (*kelapa gadhing*) in his house yard. *Embah Modin* will transform these ingredients into the offerings that will ensure the presence of deities, ancestors and the senior village spirit.

First he inscribes the likeness of a male and a female deity into the skin of the coconuts while voicing a magic incantation imploring the gods to make the baby resemble them in inner and outer beauty. In the local dialect this species of coconut is referred to as 'head' (*bathok*) and as *cengkir*, a term also denoting a six months' old child. Thus the deities' countenance is as it were 'marked' upon the baby's head.¹⁸ The *Modin*'s second task is the consecration of a series of offerings prepared by the *aris wedok*. The offerings consist only of rice – the essential 'female' gift – and have been created by the female side's mother and grandmother. The first is to be left at the sacred abode of the benevolent spirit guardian (*dhanyang*) who is addressed as the villagers' autochthonous ancestress: 'Great great grandmother [resting under the] banyan tree' (*Buyut [wa]ringin*). The *dhanyang* – as ancestress of the fourth ascending generation regarded as *wong liya* to most villagers – receives raw unhulled rice (*gabah*) wrapped in teak leaves, an appropriate gift for a remote ancestress resting at the boundary between the social space of the village and the wild forest. The offering to the ancestors is made up of steamed rice in four different shapes as a representation of the female side's main protagonists in the pregnancy ritual. A large rice cone (*bucu*) with a small invisible portion of yellow rice in its centre stands for the mother with her baby as yet hidden inside. To indicate the seventh month of pregnancy, the elite add seven small cones (*bucu cilik*) while commoners knead seven handfuls of rice into balls (*sega golong*). Two plates filled with porridge made from 'male' glutinous rice (*bubur ketan*) and two with cooled 'female' steamed rice (*sega adhem*) stand for the 'male' and 'female' aspects of the *aris wedok*, both living and deceased. The set will be symbolically offered on the graves of the female side's ancestors – one of whom is believed to be reincarnated in the child – before being returned to the house and consumed by the male *besan* during the final phase of

Photo 2.1 Embah Modin fulfilling his ritual task. The porch of the host family's simple bamboo house serves as working area. The two yellow coconuts donated by the village chief have been decorated with scratched-in drawings. Then he carefully applies a decoration of young coconut palm leaves to the banana leaf containers that will hold the return gift for the village leadership. A senior member of the 'female' host family offers drinks and snacks and ensures that all proceeds well. Margorejo, kecamatan Kerek, kabupaten Tuban, East Java, 1989. (Rens Heringa)

the pregnancy ritual. Finally the *modin* folds four banana leaf containers decorated with the young coconut leaves (*takir ponthang*). These containers will be sent as the token from the two kingroups to the village leadership – descendants of the village's first settlers – holding a sample of all raw ingredients and processed food exchanged during the ritual with the exclusion of meat. Below I will examine the details of this totality and the special position of meat.

Generating the Baby

The festive food prepared for the private phase of the ritual is a fruit drink (*rujak*) mixed from gifts of the two affinal groups. The *aris wedok* contributes pure

– boiled and strained – drinking water brought from the local spring, and palm sugar. The *aris lanang* contributes rootcrops and a pumpkin – which have been steamed a day ahead – and seven kinds of half ripe fruits: cucumbers, citrus and *mama'an* fruits, the fruits of the *lontar* palm, bananas and chillies. All belong to the category of life-giving fruits-with-many-seeds while the hand of bananas refers specifically to the male lineage group. Symbolically the ingredients of the fruit concoction form a complex metaphor for the ritual and its main protagonists. The seven kinds of fruit stand for the seven months of the first pregnancy. The women explain that the rootcrops – the ‘fruits underground’ (*pala pendhem*) from the lower end of the scale – express the baby’s ‘underground’ position still close to the spirit world. As tubers generally form an early breakfast, they also denote the drink as a prelude to further life cycle events. As a sign that the baby is conceived of as partially belonging to the human world, fruits of the higher categories are deemed appropriate as well. Although all of them are gifts from the male group, a gendered subdivision is explicitly recognized to indicate the as yet undetermined gender of the baby. Like the tubers, the pumpkin and the cucumbers – all *pala kesimpar* or *pala kependhem* ‘growing close to or under the earth’ – are said to be ‘female’ in opposition to ‘male hanging fruits’ (*pala gumantung*). The higher categories of the fruit gift remain raw to signal the as yet unsocialized state of the baby. As the range of distinctions demonstrates, symbolic meaning may express different notions simultaneously.

Around ten in the morning the husband’s mother and grandmother set to work hunkering down in the central back room of the house close to the ‘female’ areas, the kitchen and the rice shed. After all finely cut ingredients – raw and steamed – have been blended into a newly bought large earthenware bowl representing the womb, the mixture is kneaded vigorously with a medicinal root called *temulawak*.¹⁹ Finally boiling hot water is poured over the concoction and strained. The process reflects the *Dhukun*’s earlier ministrations. The massage is reenacted through the kneading of the fruit mixture with the ‘cooling’ medicinal root. The rinsing with boiling water repeats the ritual bath. The 44 spirits are represented by a similar number of tiny containers folded from banana leaf and filled with bits of raw ‘rice-in-the-bolster’ (*gabah*) and betel nut (*kinang*). At the moment when the female side’s gift of pure cool water and a flavouring of chillies and sugar are about to be added, a representative of the ‘female’ side joins the proceedings to critically test the result. Taking sips repeatedly she invariably insists that more sugar is needed. The added sweetness is said to make the drink more refreshing (*sedep*) but is also believed to increase the chance that the baby will be a girl. A bland (*anyep*) taste is expected to result in a boy.²⁰

During the process of mixing and tasting the *rujak* the conflicting concerns of the exchange groups come to the surface. Notwithstanding the *besan*'s insistence the women from the *aris lanang* – who hope for a male descendant – add sugar only reluctantly. The female group is in a relatively unfavourable position and cannot afford to be too persistent as the classificatory 'older' male group must be treated with circumspection. Moreover the contrast between the two status groups becomes apparent at this point. The elite feast conducted in the senior 'male' house shows a balanced situation with the married-in wives working harmoniously together in their own sacred area. When the *rujak* is prepared in the main house of the compound group, however, the mood is often tense as the senior 'male' *besan* have appropriated a part of the house which they would not be allowed to enter otherwise. Only if the young father-to-be is the ideal matrilineal second cousin does the problem not arise as his grandmother and mother are *awaké dhéwé*.

Once both parties have pronounced the taste satisfactory, the private ceremony takes place. After the *Dhukun* has set aside two glasses of *rujak* as the 'male' and 'female' ancestors' share, all close kin scoop up a glassful of the mixture and slowly

Photo 2.2 The final testing of the fruit drink. At the insistence of the obviously sceptical representative of the female side, the mother of the young father-to-be reluctantly adds more sugar. Margorejo, kecamatan Kerek, kabupaten Tuban, East Java, 1989. (Rens Heringa)

sipping it generate the new relationship between the *besan*. Instead of drinking the *rujak* the young parents share two beneficial drinks that have been prepared and consecrated by the *Dhukun*. The first is a herbal mix (*serbat*) intended to warm the couple internally and – like the external hot ritual bath – keep the wind spirit from entering their body (*masuk angin*). Second is a concoction of small rice ‘worms’ (*dhawet*) ‘swimming’ in sweetened coconut cream intended to increase the life force of the baby. A third glass – containing coconut oil mixed with boiled water which it is hoped will ensure a smooth delivery – will be kept and consumed in public during the final stage of the ritual.

Due to limited space the full range of symbolic detail cannot be dealt with here. One aspect deserves further elaboration although none of my informants has made it explicit. I would like to note the contrast between the raw ingredients from the male side with the processed contributions from the female side – the boiled water and the sugar – which may decide upon the ultimate gender of the baby. Thus on an abstract level the gifts as-a-whole appear to symbolize the constituents of the baby. The raw male gifts replete with seeds stand for the male semen, whereas the processed female contributions exemplify the ‘purified, sacred blood’ (*darah suci sing resik*) that is said to temporarily replace the red ‘dirty [menstrual] blood’ (*darah kothor*) in a pregnant woman’s womb. The foetus resulting from the blending of the two liquids is obviously personified in the *rujak* which also explains the prohibition for the future parents – the baby’s progenitors – from joining in the drinking of the fruit blend.

The private phase of the pregnancy ritual thus forms the baby and includes it in the circle of its immediate kin while the public third phase reconstitutes relationships on a wider plane. Together these two phases encompass the second phase, the food exchanges among the affinal groups. The mythical background to the villagers’ conviction of the indispensability of this phase will be considered in the following section.²¹

Rice and Money

Raw rice is the essential gift from the ‘female’ side. Rice gifts to affines are still preferably taken from the harvest even though rice can be bought in exchange for money. The notion is related to the concept of money as the rice gifts’ male complement, which is clearly indicated by the money gifts from the ‘male’ side. Moreover raw rice is also brought (*mbuwoh*) by all female ‘others’ while male *wong liya* contribute (*anjeng*) money. Together rice and money stand for Sri Sedana, the sibling pair of mythical ancestors who are destined to become a couple.

Elsewhere I have related the tale to a range of local fertility myths (Heringa 1997). Here it suffices to note that the couple's marriage or 'mingling' (*campur*) can only transpire once both have undergone a transformation.²² In the culinary context Sri (rice) is transformed by steaming. The conversion of Sedana (literally: [gift of] money) involves two possibilities that are based upon the contrast between two similar sounding, but differently spelled glosses that each have a distinctive meaning. The first – *dana*, money offerings – refers to the money donations from 'male' kin that must be transformed into ingredients for the 'male' food gifts. The second – *dhana*, surplus riches – indicates the money donated at the feast by male 'others', the total sum of which will only be known at the end of the feast. Elite feast givers in particular may incur debts by borrowing the sum to hire the singers. If the fancied windfall of gifts from *wong liya* does not materialize the gamble often necessitates the sale of fertile land.

Before the gifts can be stored in the appropriate area of the house all must be carefully noted so that debts can be balanced at a later occasion. The rice is taken to the rice shed in the inner reaches of the house to be weighed, poured into sacks and guarded by trustworthy elderly female kin or neighbours under the leadership of *Embah Dhukun*. The money gifts from the guests are recorded by a representative of the male side and kept in a special container.

The conversion of the money gifts received earlier from the 'male' kin is quite complex. Besides the fruits for the *rujak* they cover the costs of the ingredients for the food donated to all 'others' at the close of the pregnancy ritual. The eventual choices of these may be adjusted to fit the available funds as long as items from all three levels of the universe – water, land and sky – are included. A larger sum is laid out for a (male) sacrificial animal for the return gift to male kin. In accordance with each group's status, the elite offers a head of cattle while commoners provide a goat.²³ The animal is ritually killed in the back yard by *Embah Modin* with the aid of elderly men. Voicing a short Islamic prayer he catches the blood in a bowl and 'plants' (*tanam*) it.²⁴ Ostensibly he follows Islamic rules, but the villagers offer a pre-Islamic interpretation maintaining that the blood is offered to the chthonic spirits of the yard. The carcass is taken to the meat kitchen and divided into the prescribed cuts by the 'treasurer' (*bendahara*) who officiates for the male side. The most highly-rated parts – the fat, the organs and intestines, the head and the breastbone – are carefully set aside. The money gifts from the second ascending generation are meant to pay for a pile of *lontar* baskets and leaves of the teak tree to wrap the gifts to be taken home. The coconuts and spices to flavour the meat soup are procured specifically from the money donated by the male side's third ascending generation. The traditional alcoholic 'stupid [making] drink' (*wedhang*

gombloh) boiled with sugar and spices used to be made from the *lontar* syrup obtained from trees belonging to the classificatory third generation-in-the-north. At present sweet Malaga wine is its shop-bought substitute.

Two gifts are offered in kind, each indicating the specific life-giving role of the donor. The first consists of a hand of bananas from each of the 'male' side's wives as a metaphor for the daughter-in-laws' function of 'fruit' providers to the group. The second consists of basketsful of dry sweet snacks (*panganan*) from the senior generation of both sides. All snacks consist of ordinary or glutinous rice – in some cases pounded into flour – sweetened with palm sugar and combined with 'male' ingredients – coconut cream or grated coconut and small seeds or nuts for extra flavour – then steamed or dried in the sun and fried. The dryness of the many life-giving ingredients indicates the seniors' position at the high end of the scale and their impending reincarnation in grandchildren. As the snacks and the bananas are carried into the house they are sorted and pulled up in baskets to the platform underneath the roof – believed to be the abode of the ancestors – where an ancient aunt will guard them until their redistribution.

Rice and Meat, the Mythical Repast

During daily meals mature women and men – even those living under one roof – tend to keep out of each others' sight. In East Java as in Northern Thailand to 'watch other people eat is an almost voyeuristic impertinence' (Trankell 1995: 140). In Kerek the restriction is related to the sexual implications of the east Javanese dialect version of the Javanese term *mangan* ('eating' or 'consuming'), that stands for 'consummating' or 'having sexual intercourse'. A grown man and woman eating together therefore imply that they are having a sexual relationship. Even married couples do not eat in full sight of the family. Gifts of food received at festive occasions are generally taken home, to be divided among family members. Whereas among the elite the guests eat in commensality, men and women are still served separately in the front and in the rear of the house.

At all feasts, including the pregnancy ritual, the food for the affines consists of the obligatory set of 'steamed rice with meat soup' (*sega stelané becek*). The origins of the repast date to a mythical time when the social rules between men and women, insiders and outsiders were unknown. The local myth providing the rationale for the food set recounts how groups of men used to attack (*ngroyok*) female 'others' and 'eat' (*mangan*) them together, resulting in social disorder. It was the rice goddess *Mbok* (Mother) *Sri Ayu* – trusted counsel in matters of fertility and regeneration – who brought an end to the chaos. Her injunction laid down the

Photo 2.3 The female side's presentation for the food baskets. Embah Su layers the bottom of each plaited *lontar* basket with a bowlful of steamed rice. Margorejo, kecamatan Kerek, kabupaten Tuban, east Java, 1989. (Rens Heringa)

rules for moral and sexual order in the community: 'All right, eat me then instead, together with my child during the third [or: ritual] season.'²⁵ The 'child' refers to the bull providing the meat, which according to another myth was born from *Sri's* red menstrual blood (*darah kothor*).²⁶ Thus the substitute for killed women consists of *Mbok Sri* transformed into steamed rice who offers herself out of her own free will, combined with the boiled – rather than raw – meat of her transformed 'child'. The third season – the three months after the harvest – is still the favoured period for the initiation of contacts between the sexes.²⁷ The social pact instigated by *Mbok Sri* has been heeded ever since by mature villagers through the re-enactment of the prescribed food exchanges at each *selametan*.

As in the case of the special dishes for the pregnancy ritual, the transformation of the ingredients again follows a gendered division tied in with activities carried out in the 'female' and 'male' sections of the house. The rice is steamed by the mature women of the female side in the kitchen to the left on specially set up double ceramic stoves fed with wood through a single fire hole. Measure after measure of raw rice is handed out by the elderly guardians in the rice shed for all guests to receive a share. Though rather uninviting, the mixture of different qualities donated by the guests is nevertheless pronounced the essence of tastiness by all. Meanwhile the mature women of the male side cut the meat in chunks and mix it with the prescribed (*sapraboté*) spices in a temporarily set-up cooking area to the right, the 'male' side of the house. The seasoning is said to eliminate the unpleasant (*hamis*) smell and soften the meat for human consumption. Meat and digestive organs – literally the 'innards' (*jerohan*) – are brought to the boil in two separate pots. Once coconut cream has been added the women keep stirring until the oil comes floating to the surface.

The preparation of the side dishes for the food baskets for all outsider guests is marked by asymmetrical generational and spatial distinctions. Whereas the middle generation occupies itself with the meat soup intended for kin, this task is accorded to the unmarried siblings of the young couple. In their mother's kitchen the wife's younger sisters boil noodles – a wish for long life for the baby – while a kerosene burner provisionally set up in the central room of the house enables the husband's younger sisters to fry savoury coconut mix (*sambel kelapa*), salted fish and fermented soybean cakes or – for an elite feast – shredded chicken meat. The combination represents the cosmic totality consisting of a 'sky' element (coconut), a 'sea' element (fish) and a 'land' element (soybean or chicken), while also differentiating between the two status groups. The soybean cakes – produced from plant matter – are lower on the scale than chicken, which is however lowest on the meat scale. For the next phase, the assembling of the food gifts to the outsiders, the

elders of both sides take over again, once more in an asymmetrical manner. The female side is represented by their senior generation while the male side's task falls to the second generation. In the kitchen on the left the wife's grandmother fills the *lontar* baskets with a layer of slightly cooled rice, while the husband's mother arranges small portions of the side dishes on circles of banana leaf under the veranda at the front right. Conflicting explanations were given regarding the asymmetry. Possibly the use of a non-ritual kerosene stove in the 'female' house indicates the 'male' side's acknowledgement of the position of those who are not allowed to come near the hearth fire. Alternatively the relatively junior position of the 'male' side in completing the food baskets may be a subtle statement of its senior status.

The impending encounter between the male and the female sides – the last and public part of the pregnancy ritual – is announced in the late afternoon when the partition between the left (female) and the right (male) side of the bamboo or wooden house is removed with much uproar to form a single big space. Immediately the rice-filled baskets are carried out by young neighbours to the temporary roofed-over outer area to the right of the house where the husband's mother combines the food gifts from the different generations from the female and the male side. She places the banana leaf with the side dishes on the rice in the baskets and tops it off by a layer of the senior generation's gift of sweet snacks.

Finally the pregnancy ritual is brought to completion in a simulation of the birth when the male *besan* 'bursts through' (*metu*) the front door carrying the rice offerings from the female side (see above) and leading the young couple onto the front veranda. Once the food has been arranged on the table intended for visitors the young pair is encouraged to swallow the oil-and-water mixture that was set aside by *Embah Dhukun* in the morning. Then Father Village Chief (*Pak Petinggi*) receives the top of the big rice cone. The gift of rice dishes from the female side including the 'baby-in-the- womb' – the section of yellow rice hidden inside the large cone – is divided among the male *besan* who thereby publicly acknowledge their new relationship. Again the young parents refrain from consuming 'their own child'. Finally all outsiders are invited to take away one of the food baskets (*berkat*) for their families at home. At the same time a delegation of the male side carries the four special food containers (*takir ponthang*) that were made in the morning by *Embah Modin* to the homes of the village leadership. Once brought out to the front part of the house, none of the food gifts should remain behind, to ensure that the birth or 'bursting forth' (*weton*) of the baby shall come to pass smoothly and without mishap.

The steamed rice will thus be shared by all – kin and outsiders – in return for a 'female' gift of raw rice, but not until the women in the kitchen have made

Photo 2.4 The male side's return gift to the *wong liya*. Aided by young family members, the feast giver's mother portions out the full complement of side dishes upon a base of cut banana leaves. Margorejo, kecamatan Kerek, kabupaten Tuban, East Java, 1989. (Rens Heringa)

the vapour rise up as an offering due to the ancestors and the rice goddess. This custom – also noted among the Tai Yong of Northern Thailand – seems to imply that human beings are given 'the leftovers' (Trankell 1995: 134). In Java however the sharing of food with those who are higher in status is considered an honour. The complementary share of side dishes in the baskets is offered to all 'others' in exchange for their 'male' contribution of cash. Each share is moreover topped off by the seniors' free gift of snacks. Because the snacks are perishable all must be

distributed quickly, ideally reaching as many people as possible. The two affinal groups however are not allowed to savour the snacks themselves as 'they would then consume their own elders'. The upper layer is intended as *panasan*: to 'keep [the food] warm' or – in an alternate explanation – 'to guard against evil'. Therefore, the dry rice snacks symbolically refer to the notion of shelter or ancestral protection also suggested by the sacred area under the roof where the snacks are kept throughout the feast. The dry *lontar* leaf containers holding the food gifts have a similar protective function. As a free contribution not requiring an initial gift, the snacks stress the 'caring' (*momong*) role of the senior generation towards the community.

The meat, the second complement to the steamed rice, follows a limited system of distribution, although – like the side dishes – it requires an initial gift of cash. Before the meat is cooked the blood – the spirit aspect of the animal – is presented to the spirits, leaving the meat to be consumed by human kin. As such the blood is comparable to the offering gift of vapour. Again the *besan* couples and the young parents are prohibited from 'eating their own child'. As the guests come and go all mature kin and close relations are served with a plateful of rice and a bowl of soup with at least a token piece of meat. The younger generation and 'others' – both socially incomplete – merely receive a bowl of highly spiced broth and a plate of rice. Only elderly male kin of both sides and the village leadership – those [who sit] 'at the upper end' (*ing dhuwuré*) – receive morsels of high-ranking organ meat and a piece of fat. The division of meat thus follows a pattern determined by generational and social differences. However leftover meat too is perishable and all must be distributed. When taking leave the wives of male kin receive a share of meat to take home. On top of a measure of steamed rice which refills the container in which she brought her raw rice gift is a package of boiled meat wrapped in teak leaves, soon to be hidden inside the woman's carrying cloth when she walks home. The quantity and quality of the boiled meat is expected to be proportionate to the husband's initial gift of money (*dana*). After the feast any remaining meat will be prepared as a final offering from the feast givers to the senior generation of both sides in return for its gift of dry snacks. Cut into thin strips and seasoned with spices, the meat is left to dry in the sun on a raised platform in front of the house. A putrid smell and the buzz of hundreds of flies accompany the week-long process of preservation, announcing to all passers-by the feast givers' high status as well as their effort to turn the meat into *dhendheng*. Fried to a crisp and arranged in a basket on top of a layer of steamed rice it is carried in procession (*ater-ater*) by the feast giver's younger female generation to the houses of all senior kin.

Photo 2.5 *Weton*, the master of ceremonies – in this case an elderly representative from the male side who replaces the feast giver's deceased father – arranges the rice gifts from the female side on the visitor's table in the front veranda. Margorejo, kecamatan Kerek, kabupaten Tuban, East Java, 1989. (Rens Heringa)

Food and Kinship

All gifts of ingredients and counter gifts of food to humans have been shown to be chosen according to the appropriate gender and position on the classificatory scale of those who prepare and those who receive the food. Let us now consider

the classificatory and culinary qualities of the food in their relation to the social model. The first set – the *rujak* specifically prepared for the *besan* – has been analysed in depth above. It remains to be reiterated that it consists of cold, mostly raw ingredients floating in sweetened liquid each prepared by the mature women of the second and third generations. Whereas the ‘female’ side uses fire the ‘male’ side merely combines the raw ingredients and the liquid – both from the low end of the scale – in a single container. Similarly the three drinks for the future parents – herbs diluted in water, rice worms in sweetened coconut cream and oil in water – consist of a liquid in which semi-liquid ingredients float, mixed into a single glass by the ‘highest’ classificatory ‘grandmother’. Thus the four food elements of the pregnancy ritual belong to the wettest end of the scale. The floating ingredients remain separate, indicating the future development of the baby into a gendered being. At the other end of the scale the male and female ingredients for the sweet snacks have undergone repeated culinary processes, again by the hands of the eldest and therefore highest category of kin. Thus gradually they come to reach the highest grade of dryness as an image of their makers, the ‘dry’ senior generation who have passed their reproductive or gendered phase. In one respect however the snacks do not resemble the ‘wet’ drinks. In this case the equal dryness of male and female ingredients allows them to be fused into a single entity. I suggest that the relatively wettest and driest foods stand at opposite ends of the scale, as metaphors for the youngest and the oldest generation. As neither takes part in the regenerative process gendered aspects are played down or rendered almost invisible.

The three food sets offered to the middle generation show a clear differentiation; male and female elements – although brought together – remain separate. In all of them the rice gifts from the full members of the female side – blended together and steamed – form the half-humid female component. Rice can be said to express social cohesion and harmony, a state which may be likened to *momong* relations among *awaké dhéwé*. Meat gifts in contrast stress differentiation and hierarchical differences – either generational or social – thereby expressing the competitive aspect of affinal relationships. This becomes clear through the second and third set in which meat of differentiated ranking forms the male complement to the steamed rice. Although both elements are prepared by mature kin on ritual fires, the contrast between the homogeneous humid rice and its complements is noticeable. The gifts to the second generation, the rice and the meat-floating-in-liquid, are prepared in separate kitchens and served in separate containers. Each share is chosen in relation to the status of the receiver. Only elderly male kin and the village leadership rate high-ranking life-giving bits of meat. In contrast, the immature younger generation and non-kin are only given meat broth that nevertheless

Photo 2.6. Guests from the male side eat their fill of the festive fare – plates-ful of steamed rice accompanied by bowls filled with meat and soup. A supply of *lontar* baskets containing rice and side dishes and topped with snacks from the elders are waiting to be taken away by the *wong liya* guests.

incorporates coconut milk and spices, highly rated vegetable ingredients. The third complement to the rice – spiced, dried and deep-fried meat – is processed to the highest degree of dryness as a representation of its receivers, kin of the third generation. Placed directly on top of the rice it indicates the superior position of the male side, while it also represents the role of the elders as a protecting force in analogy to the dry snacks topping off the food baskets. As all sets incorporate

the opposing forces of female cohesive qualities and male divisive characteristics the two components cannot be fused but are served and wrapped in separate but equal measures to bring about the (temporary) unison of the *aris lanang* and the *aris wedok*.

The provenance of rice and meat among the two status groups relates to the difference in marriage preference. The landed 'male' group is in possession of married-in women, of rice land and cattle – providing direct access within the *awaké dhéwé* group to both meat and rice, whether it comes from the heirloom rice fields owned by the 'female' affines or from the communally male-owned heirloom fields. Among the compound group the sacrificial goat is brought in by the 'male' affines, whereas rice until recently was obtained by the 'female' side as their share from harvesting the fields of the elite. Hence the quantity of rice and meat obtained by the two status groups differs. As to their quality, access to meat in particular involves degrees of ranking relating directly to degrees of status and kinship with inclusion of spiritual kin. In the first place the meat gifts handed equally to the mature generations of both kin groups give expression to the cognatic pattern. Distinct gifts of beef or goat's meat and blood, however, denote the difference in status between the elite and commoners in relation to all receivers including the earth spirits. The token of shredded chicken included in the baskets spells out the high position of the elite donor and also his fictive kin relation with the receiver. Finally only those with access to a head of cattle can obtain the use of the music ensemble needed to accompany the singers who give expression to the elite feast giver's mythic kin relationship. Thus in the compound group male and also female regenerative powers or 'reproductive energy' (Trankell 1995: 94) come from outside. In contrast the house group can generate these powers within the endogamous kin group.

In this respect it is of particular note that the offerings to otherworldly kin only contain rice, a single unpaired element that specifically indicates the nurturing *momong* relationship among *awaké dhéwé*. The benevolent presence of the ancestors and the gods expresses their contribution to the pact. The only unpaired rice gift donated to humans is the rice forms shaped by the female side (see above) that – after having been consecrated at the ancestors' graves – are consumed by the male side at the moment when they publicly announce themselves as the grandchild's progenitor, thereby taking upon themselves the role of nurturing *awaké dhéwé*. The highest ranking share – the top of the cone – is moreover given to the human representative of the territorial ancestors who also receives the single unpaired meat gift – the brains of the animal, said to be the highest-ranking life-giving part. The first gift is 'female' and acknowledges *Pak Petinggi* as the *awake dhéwé* who

spontaneously contributes to and attends all *selamatan*. The second gift is 'male' and forms the return gift for the *gamelan*, the 'voice' that helps to bring the rice-giving ancestress – the sky nymph – to life. It also thereby honours him as the descendant of the married-in female *wong liya*.

Whereas the offering to the ancestors is the vapour – the essence of the rice – floating up into the air, the chthonic earth spirits receive a 'meat' gift consisting of the unprocessed blood said to be the essence of the freshly-slaughtered animal. In comparison, the spirit ancestress of all villagers receives raw unhulled rice, a gift remaining unprocessed as well, in keeping with her status as a chthonic being. Whereas the raw rice is placed upon the earth, the blood is buried in the earth, suggesting that in Kerek blood too has a chthonic quality in keeping with concepts encountered elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Among the Tai Yong of Northern Thailand spirits are said to thrive on blood and meat (Trankell 1995: 93;154). In Bali raw meat and blood are placed on the ground as an offering to demonic beings (Brinkgreve 1997: 230), while at the central Javanese courts of Surakarta a pot containing a mixture of blood from various animals forms part of the offerings to the demon goddess Durga (Brakel 1997: 257). This finally leads to a comparative note on the differentiated aspects of blood. Whereas the birth of a human child occurs after 'dirty' red blood in a woman's womb is replaced with pure white blood and fused with male sperm, the 'dirty' red menstrual blood of the rice goddess turns into the animal child transformed into the male element of the ritual meal. Thus red and white blood respectively seem to stand for unsocialized and socialized relationships.

The contents of the final gift – the banana leaf containers for the village leadership and the *lontar* baskets for the 'others' – generate the relationship of these two groups with the baby. Both containers – seen as metaphors for the womb, comparable to the pot for the *rujak* – once more enclose gendered complements that are kept separate, in this case by a layer of banana leaf. The male element – through its relative dryness and its upper position – expresses the higher status of the male side. Apart from the coconut savoury the male elements nevertheless stand low on the animal and vegetable scales in keeping with the early life stage of the baby. Although the complements have been prepared through the use of fire, this is done by non-paired members of both groups, thereby expressing the relatively low status of the food. In summary, the final food gifts in the baskets express the new relationships that have been effected during the ritual. Thus at the close of the pregnancy ritual its aims – the well-being of the baby and the renewed harmonious relationship among all present – have been brought into effect. Through the food exchanges the full range of social relationships has been reconstituted with the

inclusion of the new member of the community. The image of the flow of exchanges between social groups as a digestive process (see Geirnaert-Martin 1992 on West Sumba) suggests that a similar concept may also obtain in Kerek. The villagers' insistence upon the gendered aspects and the life-giving properties of all ritual food sets moreover indicates that in Kerek the 'flow of life' is not only conceived of as transmitted through a woman's blood (Fox 1980a: 12) but also through the exchange of male and female food.

Notes

1 The ongoing fieldwork upon which this article is based was initiated in 1977. In 1989–1990 a grant from the Program of Indonesian Studies (PRIS) at Leiden University enabled research to be undertaken under the auspices of the Indonesian National Research Institute (LIPI). A recent visit in February–March 2000 was funded by the Getty Foundation and the Fowler Museum of Cultural History. I would like to express my appreciation to all institutions involved.

2 At present outside interference has encroached to a point where the coherence between the villages may soon be a thing of the past.

3 This aspect shows similarities with other marginal groups on Java such as the Badui of West Java and the East Javanese Tenggerese.

4 In Kerek the terms *moncapat* and *moncalima* are unknown. Since the late nineteenth century repeated internal and external changes have influenced the situation as it exists today, with seventeen villages that, however, are still divided into nine hamlet clusters.

5 The drinking of alcohol as well as the eating of animals (snakes, young mice, fruit bats, frogs, giant turtles) from the 'wilderness' for added virility is considered to be against Islamic rules.

6 A similar ecological situation exists on the island of Madura off the coast near Surabaya and in several areas of eastern Indonesia. In all these areas the economic system is dependent in varying degrees upon the products of the *lontar* trees (Fox 1977).

7 Cash crops of cassava, peanuts and mango fruits bring in additional income.

8 The concept of equality was possibly inspired by a scholarly preoccupation with Central Java where village people and urban commoners were simply lumped into the single category of 'small people' (*wong cilik*) and contrasted with the aristocratic elite (Robson 1987: 508).

9 Matrilocality may be more common in Java than is generally acknowledged, the Indonesian administrative rule that the official household head (*kepala soma*) must be male having distorted the picture presented in the records.

10 The house yard (referred to as *halaman* or *pekarangan* rather than *kebun*) is a carefully swept, mostly bare area. Plants and trees for ritual use are grown close to the house and along the fence, while larger plots may be partially occupied by food plants.

11 A combination of patrilineal preferences among the elite and a matrilineal pattern among commoners is known from the Minangkabau (in West Sumatra) and Minangkabau settlers in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia (P.E. de Josselin de Jong 1977: 235–36) and among the Badui of West Java (Berthe 1970). It would go too far in the present context to discuss the historical developments that have led to this situation in Kerek and its theoretical implications. Nevertheless the patrilineal tendency must have originated at least three centuries ago, as some landholding families who have held positions in the village leadership for generations are in the possession of a written genealogy which goes back several centuries (see also Hüsken 1991).

12 In Kerek the partner (male or female) who remains among his or her own kin group is referred to as *suami* (usually ‘husband’ in modern Javanese), whereas the term *istri* (generally ‘wife’) indicates the partner of either gender who moves out. The usage implies a lower status for the in-marrying partner.

13 The highest ritual event is the wedding.

14 The gloss *selamatan* stands for the whole of the ceremonial proceedings; *sedhekah* refers more specifically to the appropriate food offerings. Funerals are the only rituals where guests may come uninvited.

15 [*Manten*] *tingkeban* is also the term used by the Central Javanese aristocracy, an example followed by the urban elite. The recent inclusion of parts of wedding rituals (Bratawijaya 1993) may be explained by the notion that pregnancy is a direct follow-up to the wedding.

16 At the wedding of the child the masters of the feast will be the *aris wedok*.

17 In Java a ‘day’ is considered to start after six in the evening, the time when the massage takes place. I here use the term in its non-Javanese sense.

18 Some say the figures represent the Indianized god and goddess of love, Kamajaya, and his wife Ratih. Others insist they are Janaka, the *wayang* hero Arjuna in his youth, and his wife Srikandi.

19 A similar earthenware pot is used for blue dyeing. Children born from one mother are denoted as coming ‘from the same dye pot’ (*tunggal wedel*) (Heringa 1989: 116).

20 According to Mayer’s description (1897 I: 266) of a pregnancy ritual in a lower-grade Javanese official’s (*assistent wedana*) family, the sweet taste results in the birth of a boy.

21 Only during a funeral is eating forbidden. Mourners from outlying villages may be served in a neighbour’s house.

22 The Javanese term for mingling is *campur*, which also refers to a sexual relation with mutual consent.

23 Due to Islamic injunctions goats probably replaced the pigs that still serve as 'female' provider of meat throughout eastern Indonesia (Fox 1980; Geirnaert 1992). In Kerek a wild sow figures as mythical ancestress, while to my knowledge goats do not occur in myth.

24 On Java, in contrast with the custom in Bali, the consumption of blood is not allowed.

25 In village dialect: *'Emboh mangana karo areké nek mangsa ketelu.'*

26 The myth is referred to by the villagers to explain why cattle are considered part of the household, and treated and talked to like children.

27 In recent decades the rule has increasingly been limited to the planting season and the Islamic fasting month due to the availability of rice in the market all year round. Consequently elderly informants express their fear that the imbalance might 'overheat' the area.

FOOD AND THE FAMILY

Assimilation in a Malay village

Fiona Kerlogue

Studies of patterns of classification, production and consumption of food in Southeast Asia can offer new insights into notions of relatedness, which may or may not correspond to those revealed by conventional analyses of kinship. This chapter aims to explore how concepts which inform such notions of relatedness are manifested in practices relating to food and other substances consumed amongst the Malay population of a village in Jambi, central Sumatra. The flexible way in which kinship terms are used and the fluidity of the boundaries of notions of kinship are linked to ideas about the constitution of the human body and how the consumption and sharing of food relate to this. The lack of rigidity in such classifications further relates to ideas of belonging at a wider level, in terms of community relationships and ethnic identity. My fieldwork was based in the village of Olak Kemang, one of eleven *kelurahan* strung out along the north bank of the Batanghari River opposite the administrative capital of Jambi province, the city of Jambi.¹ These eleven villages are collectively known as Seberang. Data was collected between 1995 and 2000, largely in Olak Kemang village itself, but also from the neighbouring villages of Ulu Gedong and Kelurahan Tengah, which until recently were part of the same village unit. The circumstances described in this chapter are those found in these three villages, for which the term 'central Seberang' is used.

The villages of Seberang have long been sites of settlement for immigrants to the area. Archaeological finds of Chinese ceramics suggest links with China dating back to the Sung dynasty, and that connections with India date back to the end of the first millennium is suggested by sculptured artefacts found in the area and a range of other sources (Abu Ridho 1995: 204; Suleiman 1976: 3; Nilakanta Sastri 1949: 84). Dutch and English traders established their factories in Seberang in the

seventeenth century, and the Chinese settlement which grew up around them gave the district the name of 'Petjinan', the Chinese quarter, a name which was retained until the 1930s even though most of the Chinese had left by 1700 (Andaya 1993: 129). In the early nineteenth century an English official, Lt. Crooke, described the town of Jambi as extending for three quarters of a mile along both banks of the river, 'the natives occupying the whole of the right [south] bank; and the few Arabs and other strangers who are settled there, a part of the left' (Anderson [1826] 1971: 394). In 1858 the Dutch East Indies army captured the palace on the south bank, demolished it and built their fort there. Seberang became a site of mediation, where Arab nobles met and negotiated with the Dutch on behalf of the sultan, who had fled upstream. As the Dutch consolidated their position on the south bank, and Chinese settlers moved in to benefit from trading opportunities, Malays took refuge on the north side, so that what was once the immigrant quarter became the home of indigenous Malays. Today the population of the eight upstream villages of Seberang, of which Olak Kemang is one, is made up for the most part of people who describe themselves as Melayu (Malays), while the downstream villagers are predominately Arab Melayu (Malay Arabs). However, there are also residents of Javanese origin, some recent immigrants and others descendants of past immigrants, as well as villagers originating from Palembang, in South Sumatra, and others from Sulawesi and elsewhere. There has been much intermarriage, and most local Malays are to some extent of mixed descent.

In this context, where members of today's population may be descended from ancestors having a range or mixture of different ethnic origins, with differing claims over land and cultural heritage, the question of who belongs, who is a local person, is hard to answer. A person may be described as '*orang sini*' (a person from here); '*orang Jambi*' (a Jambi person), or '*orang kita*' (one of us). The boundaries of these categories are unclear and to some extent reflect a similar ambiguity in relation to the definition of kin.

Defining the Kin Group

To use conventional terminology, the kinship system in Olak Kemang might best be described as cognatic. Few families are able to refer to ancestors by name beyond around three generations.² Accounts tend to emphasise birth order rather than gender, and include all the siblings of parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, the emphasis on birth order being characteristic of Malay societies. Since there is no sense of unilineal descent a female child is as desired as a male, but there is a strong desire for descendants (*keturunan*), so that all couples are expected

to want children. Traditional rules of inheritance are bilateral, so that both males and females may inherit property. According to *adat* rules both houses and land tend to be passed from mother to daughter, although *shariah* law is sometimes invoked in cases where there is a dispute. Post-marital residence is uxorilocal.³ This leads to a strong matrifocal emphasis in social relations. Since houses are generally passed from a mother to one of her daughters, with new houses for other daughters built adjacent to their sisters' houses, women's networks are particularly strong.

In Olak Kemang, the boundaries of both the household and of the family group are characterised by ambiguity and fluidity. The notion of family (*keluarga*) is potentially all-inclusive. In many aspects of life, distinctions tend not to be drawn between friends and kin. At weddings, for example, the women who prepare the flowers, cakes and betel ingredients for the ritual presentation made to the groom's side by the bride's side are as likely to be friends or neighbours as kin of the bride's mother, and the spokespersons and many of the other central participants in the ritual are normally also distant relatives if they are related at all. For the most part, villagers in Olak Kemang have a preference for local endogamy, which means that most people are related if not biologically then by marriage. Marriage unites the parents of a bride and groom who then become *besan*, an event which is ritually expressed in terms of food. The category '*besan*' confers obligations for the future, some of which are also food-related, as we shall see. Marriage thus signals an enlargement of the wider family circle which can spread laterally as well as vertically and for most people, any link, however distant, is deemed to unite kin. Thus if an individual is asked his relationship with another local villager and the relationship is so distant as to be impossible to explain, rather than deny a connection he will say that they are '*masih keluarga*' (still family).

Karim has remarked on the way kinship terms are used in both Malaysia and Indonesia for people beyond the local grouping to create fictive kin, or as she puts it, 'as if to recreate the intimacy and familiarity of consanguinal and affinal ties in local groupings in other spheres of life' (Karim 1995: 37). This practice is evident in everyday life in central Seberang, where kinship relationships are invoked in the terms of address used when speaking to almost anyone, whether there are formal kinship ties or not. All children are addressed as *Adik* (younger sibling); and unmarried adults are normally either *Kakak* (older sibling) *Ayuk* (older sister) or *Abang* (older brother). A similar use of kinship terms applies in the case of older people, usually addressed respectfully as *Datuk* (grandfather) or *Nyai* (grandmother). Parents' siblings are both referred to and addressed as *Wak*, followed by an affix referring loosely to birth order (e.g. *Wak Ngah* = Middle

Aunt/Uncle, *Wak Lung* = Oldest Aunt/Uncle) or physical characteristics (e.g. *Wak Muk* = Fat Aunt/Uncle). These terms may also be applied to non-villagers. I myself was referred to as *Wak Tih* (= White Aunt). In the site of his fieldwork in peninsular Malaysia, Wilder recorded a series of nine such 'gelaran' (appellations) assigned to a parent's siblings, always in the same order, so that birth order appears to be the only factor referred to in these affixes (Wilder 1982). Though this may once have been the case in Jambi, it is not so now, and the practice in Jambi allows non-kin to be included in the formula. Another instance of flexibility in the definition of biological relationships is that nieces and nephews may also address their aunt as *Mak* (= Mother). The appropriate affix referring to birth order is attached. Similarly, an uncle may be called *Pak Lung* or *Pak Cik* if he is older or younger than the natural father. This flexibility in the application of kinship terms may suggest a similar flexibility in roles within the family. It may also be significant that the non-Muslim forest-dwelling Kubu people, from whom according to a Jambi Malay origin myth the inhabitants of Jambi are descended, also address non-kin in the same terms as kin. Outsiders as well as members of their family are referred to as *Supik* (older sister), *Kulup* (older brother) or *Sanak*, a term which can be applied to an individual of either sex.⁴

An important dimension of Jambi Malay notions of kinship comes from the teachings of Islam. The Arabic term '*muhrim*' refers to close family members, specifically those who may not marry one another. Thus those who are a woman's *muhrim* are her husband, father, husband's father, sons, (or her husband's sons), brothers, brothers' sons, sisters' sons, or their womenfolk. One conceptualisation of the family group is informed by ideas about those who are *muhrim* to one another, and there are obligations, particularly relating to practices associated with a death in the family, which bind the group of *muhrim* together. Islamic teachings, however, define only those who must belong to this group; they do not preclude the family from including more people in this category. Jambi Malays have a tendency to include a number of people who may not be considered as *muhrim* by those with a more orthodox Muslim standpoint. One such category is adopted relatives, and it is to this group that I now turn.

Expanding the Family

For incomers to the community who have no pre-existing links and who cannot be drawn into it through marriage, adoption is not unusual. Those adopted are referred to as *anak angkat*. There may be a semi-formal ceremony at which prayers are said and food is shared, and those who have been subsumed into a family in

this way share most of the rights and responsibilities of consanguineal kin. For example, those who are regarded as *muhrim* may be expected to bathe or at least witness the bathing of the body of a deceased member of the family. They are unlikely, however, to inherit rice land if they have been adopted as adults (when the term *anak angkat* is still applied) and there are consanguineal heirs. The right to inherit is conferred, however, on adopted babies, who are often acquired by childless couples or by households which include an older woman who has little or no prospect of marriage. These babies are usually the children of poor Chinese plantation workers who receive a substantial amount of money in exchange.⁵ As Seberang people told me, it is rare for a Malay child to be adopted, for what Malay would give up their child? The Chinese babies are brought up as Malays and regarded as such. No reference is made to their biological parentage and despite their Chinese consanguineal origins they are regarded as full members of the family.⁶ Orphans and the children of distant relatives may also be brought into the family, as well as family members of all ages who are temporarily in the area. Thus it is hard to define exactly how large the family is; the size of the household, and by extension the family, is constantly fluctuating.

Absorption, Substance and Kinship

The desire to draw non-kin into the family circle is reflected in patterns of food exchange and consumption, and the shared assimilation of food may be taken to symbolise the assimilation of people into the family. This involves a change which could be described as somewhere between a physical and a spiritual transformation. There are many manifestations of the belief that consumption of various substances changes the individual concerned. Barbara Watson Andaya says that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries 'the ceremonial consumption of sacrificial food, notably flesh or blood, created a special relationship between those involved, while the most binding oaths were always those in which participants drank the water in which their weapons had been dipped.' (1993: 6/7). A similar example cited by Andaya relates to bonds forged between Sumatran Malays and Europeans:

'When a visitor to the Pasemah region was shown copies of treaties local groups had made with Stamford Raffles, he found that the wax seals were invariably missing. Since they were believed to contain the concentrated power of the signatories and to be charged with the sanctity of the exchange, the people had eaten them. Somehow, should the writing get lost the seal at any rate had become part of themselves and its potency would descend to their heirs' (Andaya 1993: 146).

The idea that the effect of consuming a substance has repercussions for future generations relates to the Jambi Malay belief that food is one of the key constituents in the formation of blood. Although all humans are initially composed of the same four elements – earth, air, fire and water, in balanced proportions – the form of each child is thought to be determined by the subsequent nourishment of the child. Carsten has described a similar notion in relation to Malays in Langkawi (1997: 110) where shared bodily substance is derived through shared feeding on milk. Jambi Malays have a very similar understanding. A mother's milk, in particular, is transformed into the blood of her children, and the blood of siblings is regarded as identical. Thus, as in Langkawi, children of different mothers who have at some time suckled at the same breast are regarded as kin, and they must not marry (see also Peletz 1988: 56–7). One way of referring to kinship is to say that people are '*sedarah*', meaning that they are of 'one blood'. However, the four elements of which humans are composed (earth, wind, fire and water) correspond with the body, breath, soul (*nyawa*) and blood respectively. The afterbirth is what is left over after equal measures of each of these four elements have formed the child's body. The blood is further modified by the mother's milk, and it is milk which determines the form of the child's body. The implication seems to be that it is after the birth of the child that kinship is created, through the mother's milk. As we have seen, babies introduced into a Jambi Malay family can become kin despite having both biological parents not only from completely different families but also from a different ethnic group. This view also seems to have implications which support the importance of the mother, rather than the father, as the centre, or generator, of the family group.

Explanations in central Seberang of the process of giving birth reveal another element in the make-up of a human being. When a child is born, the first element to appear is the water (*air ketuban*); second comes the baby itself; third comes the afterbirth; and finally the *sir*, the secret invisible element which is the child's character. One aspect of *sir* is the relationship between the child and its siblings, a secret unknowable relationship. This factor of kinship is one element of '*kebatinan*', often translated as 'instinct'. In Jambi, the word can refer more specifically to an instinctive connection between kin. *Kebatinan* is shared by consanguineal kin and also by children who have suckled from the same breast.

The closest family tie, as in other Malay societies, is the bond between siblings. Both Carsten in Langkawi (1997: 83–84) and Peletz in Negeri Sembilan (1988: 50–51) have discussed the relevance of the ritual activities involving the placenta in expressing the cultural significance of siblingship. Whereas in Langkawi the afterbirth is regarded as a younger sibling because it is appears after the baby, in Negeri Sembilan it is viewed, according to Peletz, as a sort of 'elder sibling', because

like an elder sibling it had acted to nourish and protect the foetus, 'guiding its growth and maturation'. In Jambi the placenta is referred to as the *bali*, or more usually, as in Negeri Sembilan, as the elder sibling, or *kakak*. The afterbirth watches over its younger sibling during the birth as an older sibling protects its younger sibling, who must never oppose him. In Jambi the term *kakak* is also used to refer to the second-born of twins. The explanation given for this is that it is usually the second-born child which grows up to be the larger, and therefore the one with protective responsibility towards its sibling. This suggests that attitudes towards kinship ties in Jambi sometimes relate more to social relationship than to biological fact. The term '*kakak*', although translated into English as 'elder sibling', and generally used to refer to the earlier born of two siblings, is also used to refer to non-kin with the sort of relationship deemed appropriate between elder and younger siblings. In the case of twins, the use of the term shows how the expected social relationship is a more important determining factor than biological birth order.

Peletz and Carsten consider the disposal of the placenta as important in symbolising the strength of the sibling relationship, in the first case in relation to gender and in the second in the 'anchoring' of the child to the house and to its symbolic sibling. However, in Jambi the strength of the sibling tie is more clearly expressed through the use to which the umbilical cord, rather than the placenta, is put. When a new baby is born, the tie between it and its older siblings is established not just through their blood, identical in substance. The umbilical cord which once tied the baby to its mother is boiled in water which is then given to the older siblings to drink. The power of the bond between mother and child is transferred to the older siblings by this means.

Contemporary examples of the belief that consumption of substances alters a person's nature abound in Jambi. *Air yasin* (water which has been sanctified by having the Yasin Surat from the Qur'an read over it) is slipped into the drinks of recalcitrant teenagers to improve their behaviour. One of my informants told me that when he was a schoolboy and about to take his exams, a phrase from the Qur'an was written in ink inside a bowl and the bowl then filled with *air yasin*. The ink dissolved into the water and the mixture was given to him to drink.⁷ This procedure would ensure his success. At name-giving ceremonies, eggs are given to children attending as guests to be taken home and eaten, thus helping to ensure their future fertility.

Community Substance

If a visitor drinks the water of the Batanghari River, this too effects a change in him to the extent that the visitor must surely return; eating one of Jambi's traditional

foods, *tempoyak*, (fermented durian sauce in which fish is curried) goes further: it establishes one's allegiance with the place to the extent that one can be called (jokingly) '*orang Jambi*' (a Jambi person). Thus the constant urgings to outsiders to '*jadi orang Jambi*' (become a Jambi person), which can best be achieved through marriage, or failing that then adoption. They can also be satisfied to some degree through consumption. In the same way that eating local food helps to shift a person towards becoming a member of the community, so eating with a family can also help to move a person towards membership of the family. Unlike the case in Langkawi, non-kin are often invited to eat a rice meal with Jambi families and they are not expected to refuse such an invitation. Although in the normal run of daily life only kin eat a rice meal together, this is not a hard and fast boundary, and breaching it connotes a desire to include and to be included. Through such devices, newcomers are absorbed into the body of the community.

The association of food with family is also revealed in the attitude of Jambi Malays towards distant communities of unrelated people, whom they still often describe as thieves and poisoners. I was warned not to accept food or drink from my hosts in an upstream village, who were regarded by my Seberang companions as jealous and unreliable people. Unexplained illnesses and deaths are often attributed to poisoning, so that the exchange of food is an expression of trust between people.

The shared consumption of food is an important means for reinforcement of community links, and in central Seberang there are many occasions when the community eats together. Communal feasts, *kenduri*, accompany all celebratory life crisis ceremonies, at which rice and meat are the central constituents. Guests are seated inside the house in long opposing rows, where rice taken from a common cooking pot is served to each individual. Plates containing the accompanying foods, usually of three or four varieties, are set out at intervals between the rows so that the four or five individuals seated closest together share the same dishes. In this way everyone eats the same food. The preparation, consumption and clearing up of these meals are divided along gender lines. Men are responsible for cracking open the coconuts and carrying the heavy items to the house where the meal is to be held. If a buffalo is to be slaughtered, this aspect of the ceremony is performed by men, with the slaughter itself carried out by a (male) religious leader. Women clean and wash the vegetables, fish and meat prior to the cooking, and they also prepare the *sambal* (relish) and cook the meat indoors. Outside, however, it is the men who cook the rice in huge containers, stirring with paddles, and after the feast it is the men who clean the plates, first by rubbing them down in a boatful of sawdust and then by rinsing them in another boatful of water. For the consumption

Photo 3.1 Before the *pesta penganten*, male friends and neighbours of the bride's side prepare rice for the guests. Jambi, Sumatra, 1995. (Fiona Kerlogue)

of the food the sexes are divided spatially, with the women eating in different areas of the house to the men. Family units are thus broken up and the community reassembled along gender lines. These occasions are seen as a witnessing by the whole community of the changed status of the individuals concerned, whether it is a child's naming ceremony, a wedding or a circumcision.

Under *adat* law, food performs a particular function in healing rifts in the community. If one member of the village transgressed against another he must make restitution in the form of the ingredients for a meal, either in the form of a chicken, goat or buffalo and the appropriate quantity of rice, coconuts and spices, according to the seriousness of the transgression and the number of people he had wronged (A. Mukty Nasruddin 1989: 137). The meal must be shared with those aggrieved, the sharing of the food restoring the ties which bind the community together. While modern laws have largely superseded these old practices, there are still rare occasions when this old *adat* practice intended to '*cuci kampung*' (wash the village) is enacted. In 1999, a feast of this kind was held following the death of a village teenager and the wounding of a child, for which the local police were held responsible. The police force was required to supply a buffalo and the associated ingredients for the feast, and representatives of the police, together with prominent members of the community and aggrieved relatives, met in the village *balai* (open-air community pavilion) where the meal took place. While such communal feasts are designed to heal rifts in the community, the celebratory *kenduri* strengthen existing ties and help to establish new ones.

The Exchange of Food

While the sharing of food at communal feasts signifies a unity which transcends narrow kinship divisions, occasions when food is exchanged may signal a more explicit relationship, distinguishing between affines and consanguineal members of the family. Jambi Malay weddings consist of a series of events starting several months before the wedding itself, including the formal proposal (*melamar*), discussions about the amount of the *mas kawin* (money given by the groom's side to the bride's), a procession (*antaran belanjo*) to deliver the *mas kawin* and other gifts to the bride's house some time before the legal formalisation of the marriage contract (the *akad nikah*), the wedding party itself and then a series of reciprocal visits between members of the two (now united) families. An important item in these formal visits is *sirih*, or betel chew. The first occasion on which it is presented is at the formal proposal (*bertimbang tanda*), when a *cerano* (offering tray) is carried by the groom's party together with a ring and a *keris* (ceremonial dagger)

Photo 3.2 The *antar belanjo* ceremony. The groom's party bring gifts, *nampan duobelas*, including raw materials for the wedding feast, to the bride's parents' home. Jambi, Sumatra, 1995. (Fiona Kerlogue)

to the house of the bride. Having accepted these gifts, the bride's side agrees a date for the next meeting, the *antaran belanjo*, with the groom's representatives.

One of the most important stages in the series of events surrounding the wedding is the *antaran belanjo*, the visit during which the groom's side brings provisions and gifts to the house of the mother of the bride. In the past, these gifts would be carried on twelve trays, and the occasion is still referred to as '*nampan duobelas*' (literally 'twelve trays'). The provisions include ingredients to be used for the wedding feast such as uncooked rice, eggs, sugar and coconuts. This gift is reciprocated by the bride's side in the form of twelve cakes, cooked in the days immediately preceding the exchange, and presented on plates which are returned after the wedding (*baliki piring*). The *antaran belanjo* is heavily weighted in the bride's favour in terms of the quantity of the gifts handed over, and although the provisions and the money are explicitly intended to and in practice are used to defray the expenses of the wedding feast, finding sufficient funds may represent a considerable burden on the groom and his family. However, the ceremony is often described as one of *menyerah/menerima* (handing over and receiving) and while this phrase ostensibly refers to the handing over of the groom to the bride's side, the sense of reciprocity is symbolised by the handing over of the gifts, the twelve cakes counterbalancing the twelve trays of raw ingredients presented by the groom. In a similar spirit of reciprocity, on this occasion it is the bride's side who

present the groom's party with a *cerano* containing *sirih* along with the twelve cakes.

Betel chew is not commonly discussed in relation to food, but there is a sense in which it should be regarded as such.⁸ Chewing betel is known as '*makan sirih*', (eating *sirih*) and it is used symbolically in a similar way to food in formal *adat* meetings. The offering of *sirih* to honoured guests was the most important expression of respect which could be made by a host, and a dance known as '*sekapur sirih*' (a betel quid) is still sometimes performed at weddings to accompany the presentation of the betel ingredients. Before any discussion takes place between the two parties in the formulation of the arrangements for a wedding, or in carrying out any of the stages of the wedding, both sides should partake in the chewing of betel.⁹

While the formal exchange of gifts marks the union of the two families, the preparations for the exchange strengthen other ties. The networks of reciprocity through which friends, neighbours and kin exchange their labour in the preparation of cakes as well as in the cooking of the feasts for guests at weddings and other ceremonies are repeatedly reiterated.

We have seen how at weddings the groom's side provides raw ingredients and the bride's side returns cooked items. It would be easy to draw the conclusion that this pattern of exchange relates to the notion of men as symbolically cool and women as hot, and parallels the notion of husbands as providers of the raw ingredients of life and wives as life-givers, as Ng suggests is the case in Minangkabau (1993: 136). However, in Jambi, several elements of this structural hypothesis are missing. Although Ng states that 'in Indonesia, the word '*makan*' (to eat) is a metaphor for sexual intercourse', this is not the case in Seberang. And although the pattern holds true in relation to the exchange of food at weddings, it is not the case at other exchanges. At Lebaran, the feast marking the end of the fasting month, cakes are exchanged by '*sanak keluarga*' or affines.¹⁰ Thus female *besan* (co-parents-in-law) must exchange cakes and daughters-in-law must give cakes or other cooked food to their parents-in-law. However, although Ng records that in Minangkabau mothers-in-law give their daughters-in-law cash and coconuts in return, an apparent echo of the dichotomy whereby husband-givers are associated with raw and husband-takers with cooked food, in Seberang the mothers-in-law return cooked food to their daughters-in-law, reciprocating the exchange precisely. And it is not only affines who exchange cakes at Lebaran; this is a widespread practice which is used to strengthen ties of friendship as well as kinship. The cakes brought by visitors are not consumed during their visit, but are left at the house to be eaten by later visitors. Thus community ties are

strengthened by the sharing of food even though the donors are not present when their gifts are consumed.

The exchange of cooked food on occasions other than Lebaran, however, is only undertaken by close kin, a mother sending food to her daughter or a daughter-in-law taking a meal to her parents-in-law, for example. The only exception to this rule would be in the case of fictive kin, especially two women who regard each other as sisters. In this case, one might drop by her friend's house with food which she has cooked, thereby expressing her perception of their relationship as one of kin. The exchange of food can thus serve both to define kinship and to blur its boundaries.

The Sultanate as Family

Many of the features described above, relating to how individuals are defined as belonging to a household, a kin group or a community, echo patterns at a wider level, and these seem to have a long history in the region. One feature which seems to have operated at the level of family and sultanate is that of drawing in extra members from outside the existing unit. The drive to increase the size of the family through means other than childbirth seems to be a longstanding phenomenon in Jambi (see Andaya 1993: 21). The proliferation of stories in Jambi folklore about childless couples suggests that in the past Jambi suffered from low population and infertility, so that there was a continuing need to draw outsiders into the com-

Photo 3.3 The twelve cakes which the bride's side will present to the groom's party are set out prior to the *antar belanjo* ceremony. Jambi, Sumatra, 1995. (Fiona Kerlogue)

munity. Andaya, suggests that the underlying cause of this attitude in Sumatra was fear of *tungguan putus* (which she translates as 'broken lineage'), a term reported by Marsden in the late eighteenth century.¹¹ This was not a term which I came across in Jambi, and although the idea of lineal descent may have once been important in the Jambi aristocracy there is no evidence that this was the case in the population at large. During the sultanate there were ranked classes amongst the aristocracy similar to those in Java which conferred status on those born into them. Marriage beneath a man's or woman's birth class would reduce the rank of the children compared with that of the parent. However no-one in Olak Kemang is part of this aristocratic system, which seems to have fallen into decline when the sultan moved his court upstream to avoid Dutch control in 1858.

The desire to increase the size of families in Jambi can, however, be seen to correspond with the need for a king to increase the number of people owing allegiance to him. As Andaya has pointed out, 'the ultimate measure of a king's success was the numbers of his followers' (1993: 35). The notion of the king's subjects as his children is explicitly manifested in two phrases: his followers were referred to by the term commonly used to refer to those in a patron-client relationship with someone in power, '*anak buah*', with the word '*anak*' suggesting an element of the child-parent relationship. Secondly, at marriages the couple are referred to in *adat* verses as '*anak rajah Jambi*' (children of the Jambi king). However, there is no implication of lineage in this term, and its use is rather an example of the way kin terms can be used to express relationships in a wider context.

The relationship of a ruler with his subjects was regarded as analogous to that between a father and his children. The analogy also appears to have included ideas that it was the king's responsibility to provide for his subjects, in the same way that a father in Jambi is expected to provide for his children. *Adat* law describes what might be interpreted as the trade or tribute relations between the king and the people of the interior as one of reciprocal exchange: the king supplied his subjects with rice (as well as metal tools, salt and cloth) while they sent downstream such forest products as gums and resins, ivory, rhinoceros horn and dragon's blood (A. Mukty Nasruddin 1989: 122). The idea that the ruling family must provide for the people is also suggested in accounts of the legendary first ruler of Jambi, Orang Kayo Hitam, the son of a Turkish prince who was shipwrecked off the coast, taken in by and married to a local queen (Mennes 1932). He was one of four children, each of whom took responsibility for some aspect of the affairs of the kingdom. The king's sister, Orang Kayo Gemuk, it is said, had responsibility for the kingdom's '*dapur*', its kitchen.

Jambi's history as an entrepôt and trading centre would have meant that it was important to forge links with outsiders. Orang Kayo Hitam's story provides

a model of incorporation of foreigners which was repeated many times. Jambi families still incorporate outsiders, especially men, into the body of the family, and in much the same way outsiders were subsumed into the sultanate. Some of these, as was the case with many Arab and Chinese traders, married local women, and were thus brought explicitly into kinship networks. Others, such as the *orang penghulu*, descendants of gold prospectors from Minangkabau, were absorbed into the sultanate where they were given some rights in return for their allegiance, and some responsibilities, such as the defence of the sultanate from external incursions in the regions where they were settled, normally on the borders with Palembang and Bengkulu (A. Mukty Nasruddin 1989: 117). The boundaries of the sultanate thus became blurred, with peripheral areas inhabited by people who had an allegiance but were not full members. The structure of the sultanate in this respect reflected the structure of the family both in its fluidity and in its drive towards assimilation.

Andaya has pointed out the use of kinship terms in earlier centuries in defining the relationships between kings of Jambi and the rulers of neighbouring kingdoms, as well as between the Jambi sultan and the Dutch officials with whom he had to deal. The Palembang and Jambi rulers commonly referred to each other as older or younger brothers, while Andaya says that the people of Seberang, which in the eighteenth century was the site of the VOC factory, referred to the sultan as their father and the Company as their mother (1993: 178). In 1664 a VOC official had been adopted by the Jambi *pangeran* as his son, and this implied a range of kinship obligations between the Dutch and the Jambi king's family (1993: 40). This phenomenon underlines the importance of the notion of family in the Jambi Malay world view. Relationships between kin necessarily involve duties and responsibilities, particularly between older and younger members of the family. Some of these obligations and responsibilities, however, extend beyond the family circle into the wider community and even to the level of the state itself.

Conclusions

In Jambi, kinship terminology suggests an inclusive notion of relatedness which does not fit in with the definition of kinship in terms of lineal descent which characterises much of eastern Indonesia. One explanation for this may be that there is a different perception of how biological relationships are formed. In Jambi children are not seen as resulting from the combination of different male and female bodily substances which differ in nature between different descent groups. On the contrary, humans are seen as being fundamentally the same physically.

Differences in the form of human beings are created after birth, initially through suckling (mother's) milk and later through the shared consumption of food. Kinship can be created through the shared consumption of food as well as through marriage and the birth of children.

The flexibility in notions of kinship found in the villages of central Seberang is perhaps both the result of and the reason for a degree of harmony and closeness amongst the inhabitants. They reflect a way of looking at the world which has been under constant change as a result of external influences, with Islamic conceptions being one important example. Ideas continue to change as a result of new 'scientific' notions of biological kinship which access to modern education is introducing. Administrative arrangements in the Indonesian state are also founded on assumptions about families and kinship which cannot take account of the diversity of long held conceptions of kinship amongst the many ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the practices which express these ideas have proved to be remarkably resilient in the face of these challenges.

Notes

1 Fieldwork was carried out in 1995 under the auspices of LIPI and sponsored by Jambi University, with further periods of field study in 1996 and 1997.

2 In Malay Arab families, who constitute the majority of the population of the three Seberang villages furthest downstream, descent is traced down the male line and daughters may not marry outside the clan. The villagers on whom this chapter focuses do not follow this system, and regard the Malay Arabs as immigrants.

3 This does not apply in the downstream Arab villages.

4 *Sanak keluarga* is a term used by Jambi Malays to refer to people related by marriage.

5 Banks refers to this phenomenon in Malaya during World War II (1983: 129).

6 Swift found a similar phenomenon in Jelebu: 'There is no full adoption of Malays because there are no Malay children to adopt' and 'Full adoption occurred when a Malay took (usually bought) a Chinese baby girl' (1965: 111). Swift comments that these Chinese babies were regarded as having no previous social existence and so were treated as full children. I would suggest that it was the nurturing by a Malay mother which was deemed to have created its social existence and thus its kinship.

7 The belief that swallowing a substance alters one's prowess in some way clearly dates back many centuries. In the mid-fourteenth century, Wang Ta-yuan reported that 'the fighting men [of Jambi] swallow a drug which prevents swords from wounding them.' (Rockhill 1915: 134).

8 See Trankell 1995: 101.

9 One Jambi folk tale tells of a girl who 'eats' the discarded betel chew of the king, and thus becomes pregnant by him. The story parallels many others in which girls become pregnant by eating fruits which they find in the forest. See Proyek Penelitian 1978/79.

10 The cakes exchanged at Lebaran differ from those exchanged at weddings in two respects: Lebaran cakes are '*kue kering*' (= 'dry' cakes) while wedding cakes are '*kue basah*' (= 'wet' cakes). Lebaran cakes are small, individual items rather like biscuits, whereas the cakes given to the groom's party at the *antaran belanjo* are generally large and will be cut and shared before being distributed. Cakes are also made on the occasion of the birth of a baby. Several different types are prepared, and these are given to visitors calling to see the new child. These small '*kue kering*' are not served at communal feasts but on small scale private visits. They may relate to the cakes described by Trankell in northern Thailand as they too are made from bean flour or reprocessed rice, banana and coconut (Trankell 1995: 100–101). Trankell describes the significance of these ingredients and the symbolism of the cakes in the context of northern Thailand, and the similarities in the ingredients of Jambi cakes and the contexts in which they are used there suggests that a similar symbolism once applied in Jambi. No-one I spoke to in Seberang however, was aware of such significance.

11 Marsden's account was based on data gathered in the Rejang and Pasemah areas of Sumatra, however.

4

FOOD, FERTILITY AND KINSHIP IN MINANGKABAU

Carol Davis

As I walked past the rice fields during my fieldwork¹ in a West Sumatran Minangkabau village, I was often greeted by those engaged in harvesting the rice with the call to ‘Come and eat with us. It’s nice to eat in the rice field.’ This appeared to be part of the code of Minangkabau etiquette associated with the public consumption of food. A polite refusal, together with a brief conversation, was all that was expected to acknowledge this courtesy. On other occasions during harvesting, my adoptive mother and I were invited by a close family member to share a meal in the rice field at a pre-arranged time. This seemed more significant, an acknowledgement of kinship ties also expressed through the collective lineage ownership of ancestral land on which the rice was grown. For even though the usufruct rights to that land are usually held by one or two people, it is not theirs to sell or pawn but is held in trust by the corporate group for future generations.

Rice and coconut milk are always important ingredients in this meal. The rice is either boiled and eaten together with fish or vegetables in a coconut-based sauce, or cooked in coconut milk and served as a sweet dish. Many of these dishes (especially the sweet variety) are also used in the feasts and gift exchanges at life cycle rituals and some are rarely consumed outside these two situations. Rice has three forms: (1) growing in ancestral land; (2) harvested, whether unhulled or hulled; (3) cooked, either on its own or combined with other ingredients, especially coconut milk. From my observations and discussions with informants, it became apparent that the relationship between those involved in the exchange and the nature of the exchange itself would determine the form of rice given. This is discussed later within a context that suggests rice has a symbolic association with fertility, matrilineal kinship and a sense of collective lineage identity.

I begin with a brief discussion about the Minangkabau kinship and inheritance system. This is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, discussions with informants indicated that ownership of ancestral land is important for the economic and physical survival of the matrilineage. Rice serves as a symbol of this property. Secondly, significant kinship relations (especially between women) can be identified and the importance of women in the descent group can be discerned. Women, who connect one generation to another both culturally and structurally within the matrilineal system², are the primary mediators between kin groups through their responsibility for the preparation and exchange of food as well as through sharing in its consumption at ritual feasts. Elsewhere (Davis 1995a) I have suggested that in the course of the life cycle rituals, men and women have complementary yet different roles: men exchange ritual speeches, women exchange ritual food. These roles are guided by *adat* (the rules and principles which form the basis of the Minangkabau social system as well as the values, morals and patterns of appropriate behaviour). Although men are responsible for producing one food dish within the series of marriage rituals – and I shall refer to this later on – women are most closely associated with the cooking and exchange of food. Consequently, my concern in this chapter is females as my intention is to investigate specifically their role in the relationship between food, fertility and matrilineal kinship. I argue, then, that the exchange and shared consumption of food (rice and coconuts in particular) both on a day-to-day basis and at life cycle rituals draw attention to and reinforce ties of kinship.

Minangkabau Kinship and Inheritance

In this section, it is useful to follow Bourdieu's (1990) differentiation between official kinship (associated with ideology and prescriptive rules) and practical kinship (what actually happens and what strategies are used to reach these outcomes). In accounts of matrilineal kinship (either theoretical or empirical in nature) a male-centred approach has often been followed, together with a focus on official kinship, without delving into how kinship relations actually operate on the day-to-day level. In these studies, attention is drawn to women's reproductive role (enabling the perpetuation of the lineage and determining the constituent membership³) while men's positions are associated with status and authority. The relationship between the mother's brother and the sister's son has been represented as one of the principal features of matriliney with the mother's brother, as head of the family, having responsibility for the welfare of his sisters' children and with inheritance passing from mother's brother to sister's son (see for example Schneider 1961, Fox 1967,

Levi-Strauss 1969, Parkin 1997 for a general discussion of matriliney, and Joustra 1920, Navis 1984 and Kato 1978⁴ for accounts of Minangkabau matriliney).

Many feminist anthropologists have criticised this male-centred approach (see for example Collier and Yanagisako 1987b, Howell and Melhuus 1993, James 1978, Rubin 1975). Some have argued that it does not comply with indigenous concepts or interpretations of the focal relationships within the Minangkabau matrilineal system (Tanner 1974, Tanner and Thomas 1985, Postel-Coster 1988, Prindiville 1985). Prindiville (1985) has suggested that we should pay more attention to female-female relations (in addition to male-male relations) in order to further our understanding of matrilineal principles. In a more recent publication, Blackwood (2000) has investigated the way in which women shape and control social relations and cultural processes. Through an analysis of women's kinship and production relations within the community, focusing in particular on household practices, lineage relations, ceremonial practices and agricultural production, she explores 'the webs of power through which women (and men) constitute and reconstitute social life' (2000: 15).

Collier and Yanagisako (1987b: 7) claim that 'gender and kinship are mutually constructed. Neither can be treated as analytically prior to the other, because they are recognised together in particular cultural, economic and political systems'. As I discuss below, women have an important role in these systems. As primary holders of the usufruct rights to ancestral property, they manage the land and are the main producers of rice, the staple food. This has a direct connection with the lineage's economic survival and affords women a place in the descent group which has been overlooked in some studies.

The 'official' Minangkabau account of the mother's brother's role⁵, given by both male and female informants during my fieldwork, does appear to be male-centred. The *adat* saying '*Anak dipangkan kamanakan dimimbiang*' ('carry a child, guide a sister's child') was frequently cited to explain the different behaviour accorded to a child by a father or a mother's brother and the latter's responsibility for his sister's children's welfare.

However, the practical account of kinship seems rather different and it is here that the shared consumption and exchange of food helps to unravel these accounts. Children are likely to divide their time between their mother's and their mother's sisters' houses, and frequently eat food cooked by their mother's sisters. The sharing of food serves as an indicator of the important obligations a woman has towards her sister's children. If her sister dies, a woman takes responsibility for the children, incorporating them into her own household. In her old age, her sister's children (alongside her own offspring) play their part in caring and pro-

viding food and shelter for her. Indeed whilst there are specific kinship terms for a mother's sister, it is more usual to call both mother and mother's sister by the same kinship term. This further reinforces the reciprocal rights and obligations afforded between a child and his/her mother's sister.

This mutual responsibility towards children indicates that, for women at least, their most important relationships are with their close female kin (mother, sister, daughter) and this was confirmed in my discussions with women of varying ages and social backgrounds. They form the central focus of the descent group. They may work together and even share the usufruct rights to one rice field. Of course, competition or jealousy may exist but close female kin tend to help each other in times of crisis. Unmarried sisters remain in the family house and following marriage often share the same living space or live as neighbours. Although sisters cook separately, they frequently exchange food dishes. Especially once their children have grown up and left the family home, they may eat together on a regular basis, each bringing cooked food to share in this meal.

Ancestral Rice Land

The association made between the survival of a matrilineage and the continued ownership of land is readily apparent at the ideological level. Here *adat*, embodied in proverbs (*kata pepatah*) and rules (*kata petiti*), provides the basis of Minangkabau descent and inheritance. This forms part of the 'adat which is truly *adat*' (*adat nan sabanyo adat*). In other words, whilst other aspects of *adat* may change or vary from region to region or even village to village, this particular category of *adat* and all it entails is regarded as both unchanging and applicable to all Minangkabau (Darwis Thaib 1965, Datuk Rajo Penghulu 1978).

According to one *adat* saying, inheritance runs from mother's brother to sister's son:

Dari niniek turun kamamak
Dari mamak kakamanakan
Patah tumbuhan, hilang baganti
Pusako alam baitu juo

From mother's mother's brother, it is handed down to the mother's brother
 From the mother's brother to his sister's children
 Where it breaks off, it grows again, where it is lost, it is substituted again
 It is just the same as with the inheritance of nature

(Benda-Beckman 1979: 147).

Yet *adat* offers multiple interpretations. As Karim has observed in her study of Malay *adat*, many of the tensions between hierarchy and equality 'are contained within the interpretive mode of *adat* which recognizes rules of social differentiation while simultaneously underplaying them through ideas of reciprocity and autonomy' (1992: 57). Another Minangkabau *adat* maxim states

Aienyo bulieh diminum
Buahnyo bulieh dimakan
batangnyo tatap tingga
 Its water may be drunk
 its fruit [may] be eaten
 but its stem remains forever.

This suggests that although ancestral property may be harvested and its produce used by individuals, the land itself is passed from generation to generation (and therefore belongs to and is collectively controlled by the lineage). Ancestral land is primarily used to produce rice. At certain times of the year (largely related to the water supply) growing rice may involve risking a poor harvest and other crops may be grown instead. It is the women farming the land who weigh up these risks, opting to grow rice if at all possible. Many Minangkabau (women and men) told me that if they have enough rice to eat, then their survival is assured. Those people who had no ancestral land indicated to me that they felt less secure. If they did manage to acquire wealth then they tended to invest in land which might ultimately become ancestral property.

According to Imran Manan (1984), several basic *adat* principles are applied to ancestral land, which should be allocated in accordance with the needs of the married women of the lineage. It is recognised that land rights are not static and that, at some future date, redistribution may occur in the light of the particular needs of different lineage sections. This is discussed at a meeting of lineage members presided over by the eldest woman and the *penghulu* (male lineage leader). However, ideally agreement should be reached through the consensus of all present. This is because ancestral property belongs to the corporate lineage group, not to individuals, and consequently cannot be sold or pawned unless all lineage members are in agreement.

The usufruct rights to the matrilineal group's ancestral land and house in the village where I conducted fieldwork have usually been divided equally between senior women of the matrilineage and have then been passed from mother to daughter when the mother reaches old age or dies. If the mother has no daughters then her son may use the land for his lifetime. Once he dies the land is returned to

the matrilineal group as a whole and usufruct rights are re-allocated to the female kin within the group closest to the dead man's mother.

If a woman is financially more comfortable than her brother, then she might pass her usufruct land rights to him. In one such case, a man who still had young dependants worked his sister's land and gave her a small portion of the rice crop in return. It was customary during harvesting for the brother's wife to invite her husband's sister to the rice field to eat with them. Although help in harvesting the crop may be offered, it would seem that this is only a token gesture on the part of the 'visitor' to the rice field; the primary purpose is for these relations to share a meal together. This opportunity is used to reinforce kinship and affinal ties and to acknowledge the important connection between present and future generations through sharing a meal at the very site which represents the future security of the lineage, namely the rice field.

According to *adat*, ancestral property may only be pawned under certain circumstances, namely to meet the burial costs of a member of the matrilineal group, on the first marriage of a female member of the group, for the urgent repair of an ancestral house, and during the rituals surrounding the installation of a *penghulu* (Benda-Beckmann 1979). In my field site, there were a few cases of ancestral land being pawned or sold to pay hospital or school fees (although this had to be agreed first by all members of the descent group). This is accepted with great reluctance as the existing lineage members fear that to lose ancestral land threatens their own and future generations.

Female members of the matrilineal descent group may lose their rights to ancestral property if they choose to migrate although if they later decide to return to their home village some ancestral land must be allocated to them. It is interesting to note that an association between this land and these female lineage members is maintained even from a distance. When a member of the family visits the female migrant, it is usual for a portion of the most recent rice harvest to be taken to her.

In the migrant city of Pekanbaru, in the province of Riau, rice is grown in the locale but migrants frequently told me they prefer rice grown on their own family's ancestral land. If this is not possible, then the next best thing is rice grown in the homeland. Indeed, many Minangkabau traders export rice from West Sumatra to this city where there is always a demand. Migrants seem to agree that rice grown there is far superior to that bought from their local market, describing the latter as 'hard' or 'tasteless', as if they are expressing their ethnic pride and identity through the texture and taste of a staple food which has supported their family for generations. Perhaps this is a further indication of their association with the homeland and the important economic security ancestral land provides. This rice reminds

migrants of their ties to their ancestral property, and therefore to their home village, their matrilineal descent and their Minangkabau identity.

Rice and Coconut Milk as Symbols of Matrilineal Kinship and Fertility

Food analogies, in particular rice, are often used in *adat* aphorisms either to draw attention to an important part of the value system or to some aspect of social organisation. For example

Nasi samo ditanak karak samo dimakan

As the rice is cooked so the *karak* is eaten

Karak is the crust of rice left at the bottom of the cooking pot, which is either discarded, scraped out and eaten as a snack, or consumed as part of the rice meal if the family has limited financial resources. This particular saying symbolises the need for people to share the good times and to help each other in times of difficulty (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan 1986/7: 268).

Reference to rice can also be found in some of the *adat* aphorisms to symbolise kinship or affinal relations. For example

Kuah talenggang ka nasi

nasi ka dimakan juo

The sauce mingles with the rice

The rice is also eaten

Here, reference is made to both rice and sauce (which generally has coconut milk as one of the basic ingredients). According to one official Minangkabau publication, the saying refers to the marriage between an individual and her/his mother's brother's child (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan 1986/7: 266). Although no further explanation is given, one could suggest that the rice represents the matrilineage and the sauce the father's matrilineal group, as it is this group which makes the goat curry for one part of the wedding feast (see discussion later in this chapter). Marriage is seen as a union between two lineages and is cemented through the offspring of the marriage. The child, as s/he reaches marriageable age, may then marry into the father's matrilineal family and this is regarded as one of the preferred forms of marriage. In this way, the initial alliance is sustained through the generations and, equally, the continuation of both lineages is assured.

Benda-Beckman (1979) reports that the literal translation of the kinship term *pariuk* (matrilineal family) is rice pot, suggesting that this descent group shares

one rice pot. The connection is therefore made between kinship and the cooking of staple food, making further links to the group's ancestral property on which rice is grown and to usufruct rights to farm that land, shared between the descent group's members.

In one traditional Minangkabau *kaba* (epic), *Kaba Cindua Mato*, which recounts the important role of women in Minangkabau society, coconut appears as a symbol of fertility. This epic is about the Minangkabau queen, Bundo Kanduang, who 'stood by herself, created together with this universe' (Taufik Abdullah 1970: 4). The *kaba* tells how Bundo Kanduang yearned for a drink of coconut milk and then, having satisfied this desire, she fell asleep. The messenger of *Allah* visited her in a dream and told her she would have a son. Thus she gave birth to Dang Tuangku who was 'a son of Indo Djati, the ancient Minangkabau idea of divine conception' (Taufik Abdullah 1970: 17). In Minangkabau ritual life, this association between coconut milk and pregnancy is readily apparent. At the *Tujuh Bulan* (a ritual celebrating a woman's pregnancy), a decorative dish of glutinous rice cooked in coconut milk is presented to the pregnant woman by her husband's mother and later consumed by the pregnant woman and members of her matrilineal descent group. This gift acknowledges and celebrates a woman's fertility. The two main ingredients – coconut milk and rice – suggest the relationship between a woman's fertility on the one hand and kinship relations and inheritance on the other hand. Together, they demonstrate the importance of marriage and childbearing in order to continue the lineage. Other gifts are also given to the pregnant woman by her husband's mother and other female kin. These include hulled rice, other dishes made from glutinous rice and coconut milk, and fruit.

Once the baby has been born, the paternal grandmother again takes hulled rice and a decorative gift of glutinous rice and coconut milk, as a celebration of the mother's fertility and in the hope that she will continue to bear children. A further ritual, several weeks later, formally incorporates the baby into her/his descent group and recognises the child's relations with the father's matrilineal group (the *bako*). This takes the form of a meal offered by the baby's mother to both consanguineal and affinal relations with female guests bringing gifts of rice with them. Although the baby becomes a member of the mother's matrilineal group, s/he represents the important bond between that group and her/his *bako*. *Bako* members, especially the women, are involved in – and may instigate – various life cycle ceremonies for that child.

As I illustrate later, during marriage rituals several different decorative gifts of rice cooked in coconut milk are exchanged between the bride's and groom's descent groups. These express the hope that marriage will bring children to further strengthen the alliance.

Shared Consumption of Food as a Symbol of Social Relations

Offering hospitality in the form of light refreshments (drinks and snacks) and/or a 'proper' meal comprising rice with *sambal* (side dishes of meat, fish or vegetables often cooked in coconut milk) is an important part of Minangkabau *baso-baso* (cultural etiquette). Yet this hospitality goes beyond mere polite behaviour. Field-house has suggested that the 'quality and quantity of food offered or shared reflects a common understanding of the closeness of various types of social relationships' (1986: 105). An analysis of the types of food or drinks offered can therefore reveal the kind of relationship the host believes she has with her guest. Mary Douglas, in her paper on 'Deciphering a Meal', suggests that both meals and drinks are social events but that meals rank higher in importance. 'Drinks are for strangers, acquaintances and family. Meals are for family, close friends, honoured guests. The grand operator of the system is the line between intimacy and distance ... the boundary between drinks and meals has meaning' (1982: 256). Food, then, expresses messages 'about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries' (Douglas 1975: 249).

In my fieldwork experience, people who visited my adoptive mother's house could be placed in a number of categories determined by their kinship relationship or their status in the community. They were offered food and drink according to their status. Close female kin (mother, sister, daughter) were only given a drink (usually of water or plain tea) if they specifically asked. They did eat with us on a regular basis, however, or we shared cooked food, suggesting that we formed one close kin group. Close male kin (such as married brothers) would be offered sweetened coffee (a more expensive drink) and they and their children would only eat with us occasionally (usually during religious festivals). This reflects the notion that whilst a brother and sister are members of the same kin group, he has married into his wife's family from whom his children reckon their descent. The day-to-day consumption of food is the responsibility of that kin group. Affinal relations (such as a daughter's or son's spouse's mother) were given sweetened tea, together with cake or fruit. Eating a rice meal was a rare occurrence usually reserved for life-cycle rituals, for religious festivals, or for when someone had come on a long journey specifically to visit. Unrelated visitors who came to the house were usually given sweetened tea or coffee and, if they had a higher status within the community than my adoptive mother, then cake and fruit would also be offered.

The visitor is expected to comply with *baso-baso* when receiving refreshments: consuming the drink or taking a cake from the plate prior to being invited to

do so, and before the most senior person present, is considered impolite. Instead the visitor is expected to wait until her host has encouraged her several times to drink or eat. To refuse drinks or snacks entirely may be viewed adversely by the host as a rejection of her hospitality and calls their relationship into question. Visitors are also expected to leave untouched a small part of their drink, or rice if a meal is involved. To consume all suggests that the guest should have been offered more and that consequently, the host is *ceke* (stingy), something which an accused Minangkabau woman would find highly insulting.

The importance of serving and receiving food and drink (either as host or guest) is learnt at an early age by Minangkabau children. If there are young girls in the household, they are expected to serve the food; children are gently encouraged to leave a token amount of food or drink to be polite (when not in their own home). At least, this is how I interpreted the somewhat surreptitious actions of Upik, a seven year old girl, whilst she was on a visit to her paternal grandmother's sister's shop. Upik was not regarded as a formal visitor, even though she is a member of a different descent group. Possibly this could be because of her age or her frequent visits. She was given cakes and sweets from the shop (on demand) by her grandmother's sister. If she wanted a drink she was usually given water. However, on this particular occasion Upik noticed that there was milk in the shop and asked for some. Milk is expensive, rarely purchased by the average family and is therefore considered a treat. Upik drank with relish and then realised to her apparent horror that she had very nearly finished the contents of the glass. Quickly, and looking around to check that no-one was watching, she added some water from a nearby jug so that the glass was half full. She drank a little more and then, leaving some milk in the bottom of the glass, went happily out to play. Upik seemed to understand that to leave the room having consumed all the milk would be both insensitive and rude and even an accusation of miserliness towards her grandmother's sister.

Tanner (1971) describes food as 'the primary expression of Minangkabau hospitality, of motherly or wifely care, and of social relatedness – [but it] can also be dangerous. Eating therefore becomes an act of trust' (1971: 58). Death and illness through poison are often cited as reasons to mistrust people from other areas and even from within the same village, particularly when the two parties have quarrelled. They might converse politely at a superficial level but would not accept food or drinks. I was struck in the early stages of my fieldwork by how vehemently my adoptive family told me I should not accept food from other villagers. I was advised that a drink was acceptable, as were snacks, but a 'proper' meal of rice and *sambal* should be avoided. When I enquired why, I was informed that there were

jealous people in the village who should not be trusted. At the time, in my naivety, and finding that everyone appeared to adopt a friendly disposition towards me, I found this rather confusing. After several months of fieldwork had passed, and I was publicly acknowledged in the wider community as part of my adoptive family, it seemed more acceptable that (at least in exceptional circumstances) I would eat at other people's homes. It appeared that my kinship ties with my adoptive family were gradually constituted over time in part through the shared consumption of a rice meal, cooked by my adoptive mother. Only once these were fully established could I safely eat elsewhere. As Carsten (2004: 40) has noted, in many parts of Southeast Asia 'the consumption of rice meals ... not only strengthens existing ties of kinship between household members, it can actually create such ties with those who have recently come to share residence' (see also Kerlogue, this volume).

The idea that food communicates feelings of trust or fosters harmonious relations is also apparent in the following example. I was visiting a friend whose daughter and husband, migrants of some years' standing, had returned to the village for the first time for a short holiday. When they had initially left on migration, the daughter's husband and her brother had argued and this had turned into a longstanding dispute. The brother appeared in his mother's house where his sister and her spouse were eating a meal. Although coaxed by both mother and sister to sit down and join them in their meal, he refused saying that he had just eaten at a friend's house. As soon as his sister and her husband had left, he fetched some food and sat down to eat. He told me that he had not eaten at his friend's house at all but that he did not wish to eat with his sister's husband. In this case, it was not that he did not trust his mother's cooking (indeed publicly he had claimed that he had already eaten so as not to cause her embarrassment) but rather that as the dispute had not been resolved, he did not feel able to eat with her guests. Eating together, then, is a sign of trust and 'relatedness' between two parties. Indeed once a dispute has been settled, Tanner (1971) observed that the parties concerned may have a meal together. Sharing food therefore publicly demonstrates harmony between two individuals or groups; it is believed that once people have eaten together they can no longer remain hostile (see also Kerlogue, this volume).

The giving and receiving of food seems particularly important during *Bulan Puasa* (the Islamic Fasting Month). Two days before the beginning of the fasting month, women visit the wives of their close male kin (especially a son or brother) as well as the wives' mothers and sisters, taking gifts of hulled rice and cakes. In return they are offered tea and cakes followed by a meal of rice and *sambal*, which both guests and hosts share. This process is reversed in a show of reciprocal exchange on the following day.

During *Bulan Puasa*, it is customary to give gifts of unhulled rice to those less fortunate than oneself. Male representatives from the mosque collect a litre of rice from each household in the village. This is then redistributed to poorer members of the community, or sold and the money used for the upkeep of the mosque. It is also customary for more affluent members of the family to give a litre of rice to less well off siblings. It could be argued that rice becomes a form of currency and is simply a substitute for money but in the case of gifts to siblings I think it goes beyond this to a symbolic association of the recognition of close kin ties with the connection being made once again with ancestral property.

Women also prepare a meal as a gift for the wife of their close male relatives (brother, son, mother's sister's son) during this religious period. This ritual is known as *Maantakan Pabukoan*. The meal, taken to the female affine's house during mid-afternoon, is carried in a special food container comprising several different compartments stacked one on top of the other. Inside, a variety of food dishes form a complete meal. This always includes hulled rice and glutinous rice cooked in coconut milk. The combined ingredients of rice and coconut milk may be viewed as a symbol of fertility. The children of this marriage are born into a different lineage (the brother's wife's lineage). However, as I have already suggested, a preferred form of marriage is between the woman's daughter and her brother's wife son. These marriage alliances ensure the perpetuation of both lineages through marriage between members of both descent groups in that and future generations.

Another event during the fasting month takes place as the day's fasting draws to a close. Known as *Terbuko Puaso* (ending the day's fasting), male relatives (especially brothers) arrive, often with their children, and eat a meal prepared by their female kin. The inclusion of the children in this shared meal is a further indication of the importance attached to the alliance between lineages, which may be continued into future generations through the marriage of children from each descent group. During the days following *Hari Raya Idul Fitri* (the day which marks the end of the fasting month) women of the same lineage share a meal and also begin visiting their husband's mother and sisters, and then more distant relations. They take with them gifts of hulled rice and cake (often with coconut milk and rice as ingredients) and receive a meal of rice and *sambal* in return.

The exchange of food on such occasions is an important means of maintaining relations between these descent groups. One of my female informants expressed her disappointment in her son's wife's family. She noted that it was customary to keep in regular contact with such affinal relations especially around *Idul Fitri* and for both families' main life-cycle events. But she had not been visited by, or invited

to the home of, her daughter-in-law's mother even though she lived in a nearby village. Even when the woman's mother had died, my informant had not been told directly (as is usual) but had heard long after the event and through a third party. It had not been possible for her to meet the obligations (visiting and taking gifts of rice) to her affines as prescribed by *adat*. This she found disturbing and questioned how a meaningful affinal relationship could be maintained if she could not fulfil her duties at important events such as these.

Food Exchange and Feasts at Life-Cycle Rituals

Bearing in mind that food symbolically expresses trust and relatedness in everyday life, it is hardly surprising that the ritual preparation, distribution and consumption of food through feasts and gift exchange is such an important part of life cycle rituals. Sanday (1990) suggests that 'ceremonial food concretizes the Minangkabau worldview, providing a model *of* and *for* the value attached to blending all the various ingredients of existence into a harmonious whole in accordance with the recipes codified by *adat*' (1990: 162). It is worth noting that many of these culinary dishes are specific to life-cycle rituals or religious festivals and in my experience are not eaten outside this context.

Carsten (1997) has argued that amongst the Malays of Langkawi Island consuming a rice meal during marriage rituals transforms the everyday domestic meal into a communal event: 'The boundaries between different houses and their inhabitants are negated as the community projects itself as a single expansive domestic hearth which keeps the external world at bay' (1997: 19). My data suggest that ritual feasts contribute to Minangkabau identity through inclusion (of all Minangkabau kin groups) and exclusion (of non-Minangkabau who have different customary practices and ritual foods). However, the boundaries between different Minangkabau kin groups themselves are not necessarily blurred through these activities. The preparation and exchange of food through these various life-cycle rituals establish and gradually strengthen an affinal network, but at the same time reinforce the identity of each constituent kin group.

Each individual's life is marked by a number of rituals that note the stages s/he goes through from birth to death.⁶ These rituals are governed by rules of *adat*. Discussions with older informants suggest that some of the finer details of these celebrations seem to have changed whilst some aspects have remained constant. *Adat* prescribes that a couple can only live in the same house once the *baralek* (wedding rituals) have been conducted, even if the Islamic wedding ceremony has already taken place (Navis 1984). My fieldwork data suggest adherence to this

practice; couples who ignore this rule run the risk of being ostracised by their families.

Marriage is rarely a partnership between two individuals. Although arranged marriages are becoming less common amongst the younger population than in the previous two generations⁷, marriage is still regarded as an alliance between two kin groups. I was frequently told that the purpose of marriage was to bear children thereby securing the further continuation of the lineage. Thus it is hardly surprising that rice and coconut milk form such an important part of the gifts and feasts at this time, with their symbolic emphasis on kinship and fertility.

The marriage proposal, announcement of the forthcoming marriage and the *batimbang tando* (ceremony involving the temporary ritual exchange of heirlooms) formally begin both the marriage rituals and the two descent groups' (bride's and groom's) intentions of establishing affinal relations. Food is exchanged between the mothers of the prospective bride and groom; the bridegroom's mother gives the bride's mother gifts of hulled rice, glutinous rice cooked in coconut milk and a large basket of fruit. The gifts of rice and coconut milk accentuate the importance of fertility in marriage. With the arrival of children, the marital relationship is confirmed, the affinal relationship strengthened and the perpetuity of the bride's matrilineage secured. This is significant to the groom's matrilineage as well as the bride's, bearing in mind the preferred form of marriage (discussed above).

The *batimbang tando* comprises two parts. Firstly, a ritual feast for the bride's and groom's female consanguineal and affinal relations, held at the bride's home; and secondly, an evening ritual of speeches (followed by the same type of food served to female guests earlier) for the bride's and groom's male consanguineal and affinal relations. The Islamic wedding ceremony is only a small event. Although gifts of food are exchanged and ritual feasting takes place, only close family of the bride and groom are invited. The *baralek* is a far bigger event, often involving several hundred people – consanguines, affines, friends and neighbours. These rituals take place over several days in both the bride's and groom's houses. Again food exchange and ritual feasting are central to all these rituals, with men's exchange of speeches also featuring in some of them. These exchanges of rice are not confined to the bride's and groom's immediate relations but extend to gifts from every woman (from the same lineage, clan, and affinal relations) who enters a house which is the site of a ritual occasion.

The exchange of gifts of rice between consanguines and affines at life-cycle rituals and in everyday life signifies the importance attached to these female relationships (Davis 1995b). Errington (1984) has discussed the significance of a gift of either unhulled or hulled rice. Speaking with men who observed women

taking these two forms of rice to a ritual associated with house building, he was given two different interpretations: firstly, that unhulled rice could be used as a seed, and could therefore increase and help to cover the costs of building a house; and secondly, that rice keeps for longer if it is left in its husk (1984: 89). Whilst both explanations are certainly plausible, they do not explain why some women take gifts of hulled rice and others take unhulled rice to the same ritual occasion. I was told that the form in which rice is given depends upon the kin relationship involved and the type of life-cycle ritual. An analysis of the gifts of rice given at life-cycle ceremonies reveals a tentative pattern. It would appear that, when there is a differentiation, the women of the same clan and those immediately involved in establishing affinal relations take hulled rice (perhaps an indication of their close ties and the likelihood that this will involve the sharing of future meals on a fairly regular basis). Those affines who are more distantly related take gifts of unhulled rice. On each occasion the gifts of rice are reciprocated with a meal of rice and *sambal*, perhaps as an immediate acknowledgement of the importance of these consanguineal or affinal relations.

Women from within the matrilineal descent groups (the extended family, lineage and clan) assist in the preparations of these ritual foods with those from the first two kin groups offering the most help. Affinal relations also play their part, further strengthening the ties between two descent groups. Each woman performs tasks in accordance with her kin relationship to the mother who has overall responsibility for organizing this event (Davis 1995b). As Blackwood (2000: 113) has suggested, 'the enactment of ceremonies is an enactment of social networks, obligations, duties and rights'.

Food dishes are specific to the particular life-cycle ritual. Rice is always served, either as the main food accompanied by *sambal*, or cooked in coconut milk as a sweet dish. Coconut milk is also used in many of the *sambal* dishes. Both raw coconuts and rice are presented in gift exchanges between the two descent groups in one particular part of the *baralek* (see Davis 1994 for further details). Both rice and coconuts, then, are important symbols representing the alliance of the two descent groups and the fertility of the bride. The ceremonial food is prepared and displayed on the basis of elaborate *adat* recipes and rules. Sanday (1990) argues that to ignore these rules could stop ritual proceedings. Although I did not see the cessation of any rituals on these grounds, I was always struck by the great care and attention to detail that went into the preparation of food for ritual feasts and exchanges within and between descent groups (Davis 1995b).

The archways through which the bride and groom pass outside both ancestral houses are decked with coconut leaves (again the association with fertility can be

discerned). In this part of the ritual, the bride collects the bridegroom and takes him back to her ancestral house (as post-marital residence is uxorilocal). Gifts of *nasi ranggah* (strips of glutinous rice, black rice and glutinous rice coloured yellow with turmeric, cooked in coconut milk and shaped together into a pyramid), *salamak kuning* (glutinous rice coloured yellow with turmeric and cooked in coconut milk) and *salamak hitam* (black rice cooked in coconut milk) are taken to the groom's mother. According to Frey, the colours black and yellow symbolise the unchangeable nature of *adat* and prosperity respectively (1985: 133).

In one of the marriage feasts, the main dish (goat and bamboo curry) is cooked by the bride's male relations (male consanguines and men who have married into her kin group) although the accompanying rice is always prepared by women. It is interesting that this occurs at the stage in the wedding rituals when the bride first brings her husband-to-be back to her home. It mirrors the *adat* aphorism mentioned earlier – the sauce mingles with the rice; the rice is also eaten – which symbolises the joining of two kin groups through marriage. The sauce (the curry, made with coconut milk) is made by the men, and, as we have seen, according to Minangkabau myths coconut symbolises fertility. The rice (symbol of matrilineal kinship) is provided for and prepared by the women. It is as if the preparation of this dish by both men and women signifies the importance of marriage, and the bearing of children, for the continuity of the matrilineage. Men's involvement at this stage also reflects the complementarity of gender roles at life-cycle rituals; the general pattern is that speeches are exchanged between male consanguines and affines followed by a ritual feast, prepared by women. The ritual cycle would not be complete without both male and female involvement (Davis 1995a, Blackwood 2000).

Except for the final marriage ritual, only guests eat at the ritual feasts. The association between preparing food and presenting the meal to guests is just as important here as it is in daily life. The offer and acceptance (or refusal) of food has a similar symbolic meaning associated with the strength of a particular affinal relationship. The hosts watch their guests and encourage them to eat more. A second helping is expected; refusal may be taken as a derogatory comment about the food or might question the actual or potential strength of the affinal relationship.

The bride and groom do not eat in company (either with each other or with their affines) during the first few marriage rituals. It is only several days later, at the *manampuh* (a ritual in which the bridegroom's female consanguines and affines make their first formal visit to the bride's ancestral house) that the bride and her mother share a meal with their new affinal relations. The following day, the bride

and her female relations visit the bridegroom's ancestral house, where they receive a meal although the hosts themselves do not eat. The final marriage ritual, again held at the bridegroom's house, is attended by the bride accompanied by one or two close kin (such as her sister or mother's sister). This is the second formal occasion for the bride's and groom's female kin to share a meal together. This series of marriage rituals, then, reflects the gradual and formal acceptance of the affinal relationship. Initially the main actors in this life-cycle ritual (bride, groom, their mothers and other close female kin) do not partake of the meal although their lineage representatives do. Towards the end of the marriage rituals, their shared meal symbolises the establishment of initial sentiments of trust and their hope for the strengthening of the alliance, eventually to be cemented through offspring.

Interestingly, the only exception to the pattern of ritual meals and food exchanges is during death rituals. When a death has been announced, female consanguines and affines pay their last respects to the deceased; no gifts are exchanged. The following day, the same women return with gifts of uncooked rice for the dead person's matrilineal group. *Sirih* (betel chew consisting of betel leaf, areca nut and lime together with other ingredients such as gambier) is offered in return, but no food. It is only in the third part of the ritual, seven days after the death, that a select number of women – representing their matrilineal group – are invited to a meal in honour of the deceased. In practical terms, there is insufficient time available immediately following death for the preparation of the large quantities of food that would be required for so many visitors. In addition, I would argue that, at an earlier stage, the provision of food by the dead person's matrilineal group would be inappropriate. Although the gifts of unhulled and hulled rice express condolence and relatedness to the deceased's family, a meal of rice and *sambal* (evident on all other ritual occasions) signifies the reinforcement of a consanguineal or affinal relationship. The lack of ritual feasting represents the break in this relationship through death. The meal, seven days after the death, symbolises the need to return to normal life in the future and to re-establish kinship and alliance ties.

Migrants and Adat

Migration, a long established practice for the Minangkabau, brings migrants into contact with other ethnic groups' ideas and worldviews. Often (but not exclusively) households are based on the conjugal family rather than the matrilineal extended family (which predominates in the village environment in their West Sumatran homeland). This has led some commentators to suggest that the significance of matrilineal descent is diminishing in the cities (see e.g. Maretin 1961, Kahn

1993). Yet to simply accept unquestioningly that the nuclear family model now takes precedence over the matrilineal extended family is to ignore other important principles of Minangkabau social organisation. *Adat* ideology and practices which emphasise the role of the extended family remain important both at the ritual and day-to-day levels. The life cycle ritual, in particular, is viewed by most of the migrants I spoke to as a means of keeping in contact with consanguines and affines in the city as well as maintaining an important link with their natal village. Over the years, an increasing number of women have migrated and one might assume that this, together with the decrease in arranged marriages, might lead to the loosening of affinal and consanguineal ties and anchorage in the home village. However, during my fieldwork I reflected on the number of women (in particular) who took these ties very seriously and would often travel several hundred miles to fulfil their kinship obligations at life-cycle rituals. Indeed women's exchange and shared consumption of specific types of food in the ritual context contribute to the importance accorded to matrilineal descent and at the same time to their shared sense of identity connected through the ancestral rice land to their homeland.

Equally, if it is decided to hold a life-cycle ritual in the migrant area, then as many relations as possible from the city and the home village attend the ritual, helping with preparations beforehand as they would if it was held in the home village. These events are just as elaborate, use the same ingredients and follow the same *adat* recipes and presentations. In both the village and the city, female kin are expected to assist in the preparations in accordance with the kin relationship to the mother organising the ritual and, whenever possible, they take time away from their daily work and other chores. Even if the migrants do not visit relatives in the same city on a regular basis, the life-cycle ritual, many told me, is a suitable occasion to ensure that this contact is maintained. Thus kinship ties are re-established, affinal relationships are reinforced and their Minangkabau identity renewed.

If the mother (or other close female kin) lives in the village then she will take rice from her own ancestral land (as well as some bought from the local market but grown in Minangkabau fields) for consumption at these feasts. It is as if this reinforces the attachment to one's homeland and maintains the collective Minangkabau identity.

Although the value of exposure to alternative ideas is readily acknowledged both in the ideology of *adat* and in the practices of everyday life, the Minangkabau strive to retain their independence in the face of dominant cultural forces. The state discourse of a national Indonesian identity which acknowledges yet plays down local identities is readily apparent. The state development plans (*Repelita*), national, regional and local bureaucracies, the media and education provide just

some of the contexts in which local and national identities and agendas compete.⁸ In the contexts of the construction of an Indonesian state ideology and an urban centre comprising many ethnic groups, matriliney as a social system becomes a powerful force in delineating a Minangkabau identity. Exchanging food (and ritual speeches) is one way of contributing to this by showing their differences. Minangkabau proudly cite two characteristics which they regard as setting them apart from other ethnic groups: their matrilineal kinship system and their culinary dishes. Peletz has suggested that for the matrilineal Malays of Rembau (believed to be the descendants of the West Sumatran Minangkabau), the ritual feast 'serves the crucial purpose of mobilizing lineage sentiment and galvanizing the group's sense of purpose, shared destiny, and overall social identity' (1988: 212). This point is just as pertinent for migrants in the city as it is for Minangkabau inhabiting their homeland. Food exchange and its shared consumption become symbols not only of lineage identity but also of ethnic identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the significance of food has been examined in terms of consolidating kinship identity, symbolising fertility and strengthening affinal ties in both everyday and ritual life. Offering and receiving food as well as eating together are signs of trust and relatedness between the various parties involved. The type of food given (whether a snack or a 'proper meal' of rice and accompaniments) is based on the kind of kinship relationship the host and guest(s) have.

In the village, where sisters (natural and often classificatory) live in close proximity, food is shared on a regular basis. Their children eat in each other's houses, reflecting the obligation a woman has to her sister's children – to provide for them in the event of her sister's death. Their sibling relationship, connected through their mother and through their lineage identity, is reinforced in their shared usufruct rights to the lineage's ancestral house and rice lands as well as in the reciprocal exchange of gifts and their labour during food preparations for life-cycle feasts.

Rice is fundamental to the Minangkabau way of life, indeed to their very survival. The ancestral land on which rice is grown is owned corporately by the lineage and offers security against hard times. Furthermore it enhances a shared sense of kin identity and anchors people – women in particular – within their descent group and village location. Although this is particularly the case for those who reside in the village, this also extends to female migrants. Many informants told me that, if they encounter periods of financial hardship or personal tragedy

which renders living in the city untenable, they can return to live off the land in the village. This was confirmed by a number of such cases which occurred during my fieldwork. Female migrants frequently remind their daughters, born and residing in the city, that their home village is also their daughters' ultimate place of origin and they too have usufruct rights to ancestral property, as female members of the lineage.

It is hardly surprising, then, that rice (unhulled, hulled or cooked) is such a dominant feature of the gifts of exchange and feasts at life-cycle rituals. Here, as in the analysis of *adat* aphorisms, rice symbolises women's membership of a descent group and reinforces her consanguineal and affinal relationships. I have also argued that coconut milk represents fertility or motherhood by examining the epic about Bundo Kandung, the Minangkabau Queen Mother, and the idea of divine conception, and by noting the importance of coconuts (raw and cooked) in many life-cycle rituals, in particular those surrounding pregnancy and childbirth but also those related to marriage. For the Minangkabau, the ultimate purpose of marriage between two individuals is the creation of offspring and hence the continuity of the lineage. When rice and coconut are blended together in some of the foods used in these rituals they represent the perpetuation of both descent groups, bearing in mind the preferred form of cross cousin marriage and the alliance between the two groups which, once established, is promoted in future generations.

By focusing our analysis on food (types of food, the sharing of meals and food exchanges), it is impossible to ignore women's structural position within the matrilineal system as some previous studies discussed earlier have done. This position is indeed related to the system of descent but, more than this, it is also related to women's primary usufruct rights to ancestral rice land within the lineage, land which is intended not only for their own use but also for future generations. Women's food and labour exchanges (prescribed by *adat*) and their shared consumption of food both on a day-to-day and on a ritual level help to define both their closest and more distant kin and affines and to reinforce the responsibilities (again set out in *adat*) that they have towards each other. This kind of analysis, then, not only demonstrates the symbolic relationship between food, fertility and kinship but also reveals women's significant position within this relationship.

Notes

1 Fieldwork, between October 1992 and October 1993 together with a short return trip in 1997, was funded by an ESRC grant and was undertaken under the auspices of *Lembaga*

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My fieldwork was largely conducted in one village in the West Sumatran *kabupaten* (regency) of Tanah Datar although I also attended life cycle rituals in many villages in the region as well as in other Indonesian provinces where large numbers of Minangkabau migrants reside. The section on ritual food, consumed and exchanged at life cycle rituals, is based primarily on my observations and discussions in one village, my main fieldwork site. It should be noted that the form these rituals take and the specific food used for feasts and exchanges do vary from village to village. Variations in such customs are reflected in the *adat* saying:

lain lubak, lain ikan
lain padang, lain belalang
lain nagari, lain adatnyo
 different pool, different fish
 different field, different grasshopper
 different village, different *adat*

However, in all the numerous life cycle rituals in which I participated (whether in the homeland or the migrant area) the exchange and shared consumption of dishes which used both rice and coconut milk was prominent.

2 Tanner (1974) argues that the mother (the senior woman of the kin group) is structurally and culturally central in the matrilineal kinship system. Structurally, the senior woman has responsibility for and makes decisions on agricultural activities, household management and general day-to-day handling of ancestral property. Female kinship and social networks foster a system of mutual support in both childcare and other daily activities. Culturally the mother is viewed as a source of both strength and wisdom, at the centre of any kinship group, epitomised in the legendary figure *Bundo Kanduang*, the queen mother of Minangkabau, whose importance is reflected at weddings and ritual displays and in women's ceremonial attire. Mothers should expect to be both valued and respected.

3 One of the problems with such an analysis is that men are represented as dominant and in control of household, descent group and village affairs, whilst women are portrayed as passive, rarely voicing opinions and concentrating their energies on domestic duties and childcare rather than attending to lineage or community matters (Davis 1995a). In spite of a substantial theoretical and empirical literature to question this portrayal, some anthropologists have continued to adopt this picture of Minangkabau gender relations. Kahn (1993) employs a male: female dichotomy with corresponding oppositions of modern: traditional; migrant: villager; merchant: rice farmer or craftsman which presents a somewhat outdated analysis. Kahn seems to insist on grouping women together into one homogeneous category characterised by their adherence to so-called traditionalist

ways, rather than acknowledging that women's (and men's) aspirations and roles vary. As Blackwood (2000: 9) notes, the 'extent of men's authority in Minangkabau society has remained in dispute as anthropologists try to unravel the knotty problems of domestic vs. public and formal vs. informal in Minangkabau kinship. The Minangkabau case has always disturbed universalistic assumptions about women's place in the world.'

4 In a later publication, Kato (1982) questions this assumption in a footnote, suggesting that more attention should be directed towards female-male and female-female relations in the kinship system (although he does not develop this idea further in his own study).

5 As each extended family has one *mamak* identified as representing that group so each lineage has a *penghulu* (male lineage leader) – a senior mother's brother – who takes a central role in life cycle rituals and mediates between two disputing parties within and between matrilineages. At one level it would seem that men dominate the group (male and female) discussions on issues such as inheritance and life cycle rituals which demand collective decisions. Although this might be how the conduct of such activities is formally recalled, women are not averse to speaking their minds in public. Also behind the scenes they engage in strategies to ensure that their views are taken into account and in the hope that the ultimate decision falls in their favour. Krier (1995) also draws attention to these strategies in what she refers to as 'public and performative politicking'.

6 It is not possible, in the space available, to provide an account of all life-cycle rituals (see Davis 1994 for further details). I have therefore focused attention mainly on marriage as this is important in both reinforcing lineage identity and for first establishing affinal ties.

7 My household survey data revealed a significant decrease in arranged marriages from 89% of marriages between people married before 1930, 71% of marriages between people married between 1930 and 1954, and 33% of marriages between people married between 1955 and 1992.

8 For further discussion of these points see Vass and Davis 1996, and Davis and Rayner 2000.

5

BEING 'BIG', BEING 'GOOD'

Feeding, kinship, potency and status among the Kelabit of Sarawak

Monica Janowski

During my fieldwork among the Kelabit, a group of about 8000 people² whose home is in the headwaters of the river Baram in Sarawak on the island of Borneo, my attention was very soon focused on the term and concept of *lun merar*, literally 'big people', who are also described as *lun doo* ('good people'). I soon understood that this concept is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of Kelabit society. The term *lun merar* was used to refer to any married couple with children (who may also be described as *diweng ruma*, literally 'they two of the house'); but it is also the basis of status differentiation, which is based on what the married couple achieves through their role as parents and grandparents. This achievement was, I found, measured and described in terms of how 'strong' (*kail*) a couple's 'human life force' (*ulun*) is, expressed in such comments as *kail ulun diweh* – literally 'their *ulun* is strong' (the pronoun *diweh*, which is also contained within the term *diweng ruma*, refers to two people). In this chapter I want to explore the central link between the married couple, or 'big people' and notions of potency, life force and fertility, and to suggest that this is central to understanding Kelabit notions of kinship.

The Kelabit

In the Highlands, the Kelabit live in longhouses of about 50–100 people which are usually grouped, sometimes in large groups as in Bario, the main population centre in the Highlands, sometimes in groups of two or three longhouses, as in the community of Pa' Dalih, my field site (see Figure 5.1). Wet and dry rice cultivation is the main agricultural activity (see Janowski 2004); Kelabit rice cultivation is very successful. The fact that certain varieties of rice which are grown in wet fields

Figure 5.1 Plan of the community of Pa' Dalih, 1988.

(known as *pade adan* and *pade dari* in the Highlands) have become very popular in the lowlands, and regular flights into the Highlands nowadays have meant that rice has become a cash crop (Janowski 2005a). The Kelabit also grow crops other than rice, either in dry rice fields or in gardens specifically made for this purpose; these include vegetables eaten as side dishes at the rice meal, secondary grain crops, fruit trees, sugar cane and root crops including taro, sweet potatoes and cassava.

Longhouses are, nowadays, made up of two parallel structures which are described as the *dalim* (the main living and kitchen area; literally, 'inner' area) and the *tawa'*, which contains a public gallery used in the past for receiving visitors (not much used now) and private rooms for sleeping and storage, *telong* (see Figure 5.2).

The longhouse (*ruma' kadang*) is made up of a number of units which I describe as hearth-groups. Each is focused on a hearth (*tetal*) and is known as a *uang ruma'* ('flesh of the house'), *lobang ruma'* ('house-cavity', probably meaning 'what is contained within the house'), *tetal* (hearth), or *ruma'* ('house'). Each hearth-group builds and owns a slice of the longhouse consisting of part of the *dalim*, containing the hearth, and part of the *tawa'*. Until the 1980s, most hearth-groups were made up of three generations, with one married couple with children in each generation; nowadays, however, with a high level of migration to town, few hearth groups contain three generations. There is one senior couple in each hearth-group, who are described as its *lun merar*, literally 'big people'. This couple is responsible for rice production and for maintaining the longhouse apartment. Until they become too old to be fully active economically, the oldest couple is the senior couple. In fact, however, couples gradually become 'bigger' until they become the senior, 'big people' couple of the hearth-group in which they reside, taking over from their parents/parents-in-law.

I describe the basic unit of Kelabit society as a 'hearth-group' both because *tetal*, hearth, is one of the terms the Kelabit use for it, and also because it is focused on the hearth itself. This is true physically; the hearth area is the only truly private area in the open-plan longhouse, and it is the area to which members gravitate when they are in the hearth-group apartment. The hearth is also where rice meals are cooked, and rice meals are what constitute the hearth-group, being the only activity which is always shared by members.

Figure 5.2 Cross-section of Pa' Dalih longhouse, 1988.

Since the 1960s, there has been a heavy concentration of population within the Kelabit Highlands in the northern part of the highlands at Bario, where there used to be just one longhouse settlement called Lam Baa (literally ‘in the wet rice fields’). There are now nine longhouses (nowadays with associated individual houses; since the 1970s an increasing number of hearth-groups are choosing to build individual houses for a variety of reasons which I will not explore here) at Bario, with another eight communities (some of them made up of more than one longhouse and with associated individual houses) outside Bario. The concentration of population at Bario is at least partly due to the concentration of government services there, including an airstrip. Many Kelabit, perhaps half of the total population, now live, either temporarily or permanently, in towns in Sarawak, particularly in Miri at the mouth of the Baram, to which there is a direct air service from Bario.

Kelabit Kinship

Kelabit kinship is of the bilateral, ‘cognatic’ type characteristic of much of insular SE Asia, and which is typical of the part of SE Asia which has been described by Errington (Errington 1989) as ‘centrist’. It has persistently come across as rather bland in the literature – almost as though it were some kind of watering down of what kinship *can* amount to elsewhere, including in other parts of the geographical area. While kinship in Eastern Indonesia (Errington’s ‘exchange archipelago’) has seemed to be at the core of understanding what these societies are about, the cognatic kinship system of the ‘centrist’ area has seemed to hold few clues to understanding the fundamental dynamics of societies in that area. It has, I would suggest, been essentially taken that kinship is not an important organisational principle in ‘centrist’ SE Asian societies. I hope to show that, through taking the notions of ‘big people’ (*lun merar*) and of *ulun* (which I gloss as ‘human life’) as central to Kelabit kinship, it becomes clear that far from being characterised by a lack of structure or significance, Kelabit kinship is at the core of the dynamics of this ‘centrist’ society.

The most obvious Kelabit term which can be translated into the English ‘kinship’ is *lun royong*, which means literally ‘people together’. This term is founded in biological relatedness. Relations between people classed as *lun royong* are of two sorts: a) between siblings (*kenanak*, literally ‘children together’) and b) between *lun merar* (‘big people’, the leading couple of a hearth-group) and their descendants/dependants. This latter relationship is equivalent to that between ascending and descending generations (between *tepoh* – grandparents – and *tetepoh* – ancestors – on the one hand and *anak* – children – and *mupun* – grandchildren/great-grandchildren/descendants – on the other)³.

However, not all those who are described in terms of biological relatedness by the Kelabit would be defined as related in the context of Euro-American kinship. For the Kelabit, all those who live together are defined as *lun royong*, and all those who are *lun royong* are only so describable because they live together. Thus the biological defines the social and the social defines the biological. The term for sibling (*kenanak*) is used not only to refer to those who have the same parents as ego and to those who are very distant cousins, but also to those who cannot be shown to have any biological relatedness. The term for grandparent (*tepoh*) is used to refer not only to one's biological grandparent and to someone who is one's distant great-uncle but also to someone who is the leader of the longhouse to which one belongs. Those of high status were in the past – and sometimes still are – described as fathers, mothers or grandparents by those who are not in that relation to them biologically. In addition, as occurs in many other societies, where someone comes to live in a community entirely non-biological ties with him or her are described using terms which are founded in biological relatedness – as children, mothers, fathers or grandparents. In the Kelabit context, this is through the use of parental names and titles (see below and Janowski 2005b), the use of affinal terms, and through actual adoption.

I would like to suggest that the relations upon which the terminology is founded – between siblings and between ascending and descending generations – are, among the Kelabit, *not* conceptually purely 'biological' (in the sense that this relates to the procreation of children through sexual intercourse), although there is no doubt in my mind that the Kelabit do have a concept of 'biological' kinship. However, to suggest that these ties are simply based on regular interaction, on having a common social life, does not take us much further. I would suggest that there is a conceptualisation of the relationship between siblings and between ascending and descending generations which is based on the transmission of something which is not the result of sexual reproduction, although its transmission usually occurs between people who are biologically related. This something is, I would suggest, something which the Kelabit call *ulun*, which I translate as 'human life' because it appears to be something the possession of which differentiates humans, for the Kelabit, from other life forms.

The transmission of *ulun* is symbolised and may also, I suggest, be seen as effected, in Kelabit eyes, through the rice meal (*kuman nuba*). It is, I suggest, the sharing of rice meals which makes people *lun royong*; it is this, the core event in a common social life, which constructs 'proper' human kinship, which I shall describe as 'rice-based kinship'. Although biological kinship is often coterminous with 'rice-based kinship', it is, I suggest, distinct not only conceptually but in terms

of its relative significance. There is little explicit emphasis or value placed on biological kinship, while rice-based kinship is emphasised and valorized.

I would agree with Carsten's suggestion (Carsten 1997: 281–292) that, rather than rejecting kinship as an analytical notion (Schneider 1984), we need to re-define it, using the term to describe ways in which people actually relate to each other, whether these are founded in biological relatedness or in social ties. For the Kelabit, I am suggesting that there is not a unitary but a dual conceptualization of relatedness – in other words, of kinship. One of the two notions of kinship is explicit and the other is veiled and implicit. The explicit concept is the one which is *not* biological (i.e. which is not based on sexual reproduction), that which I am calling rice-based kinship. The implicit concept is that which is founded in 'biology' – in sexual reproduction.

The existence of both notions comes out in the way in which adopted children (*anak nalap*) are handled by Kelabit society. A child who is adopted is presented with two conflicting modes of behaviour to choose from once it discovers that it is adopted (which always happens when it is quite young because other longhouse members cannot resist 'spilling the beans'). One is to remain with its adopted parents and the other is to return to its biological parents and siblings (who often live in the same longhouse). The message it receives from society appears to be that it will *want* to return to its biological parents and siblings but that it *ought* to remain with its adopted parents – because they have fed it rice. In other words, the child is presented, at a young age, with a choice between rice-based kinship with its adopted parents and biological kinship with its biological parents and siblings. The choice is perceived by the child as a difficult one which he or she has to face up to, and where he or she knows that the correct decision is the hard one. Thus, this decision is presented as a deliberate, human-generated decision, *against* biology, defining rice-based kinship as something deliberately engineered and difficult to construct⁴. The child often ends up to-ing and fro-ing but the correct ultimate choice is to remain with (and care for in their old age) its adopted parents.

'People Together': Kelabit Kin Terminology⁵

Kin are *lun royong*, 'people together'; close kin are *lun royong monung*, literally 'people close together'. What matters in determining closeness of kinship is, in practice, closeness of regular contact, including farming in close co-operation – but above all it is living in the same longhouse and eating rice meals together. Despite the fact that *lun royong monung* are usually fairly close biological kin, if

Photo 5.1 *Lun royong monung* (close kin) sharing a breakfast rice meal: the hearth-group headed by Lawe Padan, the headman of Pa' Dalih, and his wife Laba Awa in 1993. The rice is *nuba laya* or 'soft rice', which is cooked until the grains collapse and then packed in leaves. (Monica Janowski)

individuals do not live in the same longhouse or there is a feud with them then even close biological kin are not likely to describe each other in these terms.

For the Kelabit it is not possible *not* to describe oneself as *lun royong* with those with whom one has regular social relations. When a newcomer comes to live in a longhouse, kin ties are always traced, and, if none can be found, will be implied through the use of affinal terms or parental names and titles or constructed through adoption. As time goes on and co-residence persists further reshaping takes place which readjusts the perceived closeness of kinship to accord with actual closeness. If a person has no relatives, or none that anyone knows, then he or she would be *lun bekan*, a term which means 'other' or 'strange' person. This is a category which cannot persist with co-residence. Even those captured in the past in raids, taken into a household as *demulun* or slaves, are described as the 'grandchildren' (*mupun*) of their owners. Not to have any relations at all is tantamount to being of the lowest status possible and to say that someone has no *lun royong* is the grossest insult.

Not only people who live together but those who regularly relate to one another, for whatever reason, are considered to be *lun royong*, at least in affinal terms. The

affinal term *aja*' is often used to imply that even someone who belongs to another ethnic group (such as Chinese traders) is in some untraceable way distant kin.

Basic consanguineal terms and their rough English equivalents are: *mupun* (grandchild), *anak* (child), *tama* (father), *sinah* (mother), *tepoh* (grandparent), *tetepoh* (ancestors), *kenanak* (sibling) and *kanid* (cousin). The terms for grandparent, *tepoh*, and ancestor, *tetepoh* (which is the plural of *tepoh*), and for grandchildren or descendants, *mupun*, are used to refer to anyone at the appropriate generation level, however they are related. At the generation levels immediately above and below ego, there are separate terms for collateral kin – *sesinah* (plural of *sinah*) *menakan* and *tetama* (plural of *tama*) *menakan* for anyone of the next ascending generation, and *anak menakan* for anyone of the next descending generation. However, these are derived by using the lineal term with a qualifying adjective, and the lineal terms are very often (indeed always, in address) used in preference to collateral terms.

At the same generation level as ego, the term for same-generation cousin, *kanid*, is usually replaced by the term for sibling, *kenanak*, or the term *kanid kenanak* (sibling-cousin). These last two terms are used if the social relationship with the person concerned is intimate, or the speaker wishes to place emphasis on the relationship – for example if the person referred to is of high status.

Different generation cousins, in English terms, are referred to as *anak* ('child'), *mupun* ('grandchild') *tama* ('father'), *sinah* (mother') or *tepoh* ('grandparent'), depending on generational relationship. This underlines the importance placed on establishing relative generational position. Kelabit are quite explicit that this is very important. Although kin terms are in fact often replaced by parental and grandparental names and titles (Janowski 2005b), if a kin term is used it must mark generational separation, and the way that parental and grandparental names and titles should be used depends on generational relationship, as we shall see. Kelabit are almost always related in a number of ways to each other, and there is a tendency to emphasise certain links over and above others, based on age difference, status and emotional relationships. Which terms are used will follow either what is perceived as the closest relationship that can be traced or that which an individual wishes to emphasise. Age difference is a particularly important criterion, although where there is a considerable difference in status a generational gap is likely to be generated even where the closest link would not suggest one and where the individuals concerned are close in age.

Affinal terms, all of which are used reciprocally, are: *awan* (spouse), *lango*' (spouse's sibling or sibling's spouse), *aja*' (used between those connected by a marriage between their consanguineal kin – such as parents whose children are

Figure 5.3 The Kelabit *tutul*.

N.B. The prefixes *te-* and *se-* make the prefixed words plural. The singular form of *tetepoh* is *tepoh*, of *tetama* is *tama* and of *sesinah* is *sinah*.

married or individuals whose siblings are married), *iban* (used between parent-in-law and child-in-law) and *ruai* or *ngeruai* (used between those who are married to two siblings, i.e. where the focal link is a sibling tie rather than one of marriage). The term for spouse, *awan*, is not used in address, only in reference, but the other terms are used in both address and reference. However, these affinal terms (even *awan*, although this is used more than other terms) are very rarely used among the Kelabit. Both in reference and in address there is a preference for using consanguineal kin terms or parental/grandparental titles and names; between spouses it is usual to use the parental or grandparental title. This is in contrast to the practice among the closely related Lun Bawang groups over the border in Kalimantan; here, parental and grandparental names are not adopted and affinal kin terms are commonly used.

Gender Marking in Kin Terminology

As can be seen in Figure 5.3, only at the generational level above ego is gender difference described by the terminology; the only terms carrying a gender message are those for mother (*sinah*) and father (*tama*). In other words, it is only marked in terms used vis-à-vis the generation whose reproduction produced ego.

It has been argued by a number of scholars that among Malayo-Polynesian peoples, males and females are not very 'different' from each other on an everyday level (e.g. Errington 1990; Karim 1992; Peletz 1996); this observation certainly applies to the Kelabit. Men and women tend not to spend a lot of time apart and their activities overlap considerably. There are few activities which are only ever performed by one gender or the other (probably the only one which is only ever carried out by one gender is hunting, which is restricted to men).

However, among the Kelabit gender difference is of considerable significance on a symbolic level, and is crucial to the construction of the role of the fully-fledged married couple in charge of a hearth-group, 'big people' (*lun merar*). The importance of gender difference is expressed particularly strongly in relation to food and especially the rice meal, arguably the central ritual of Kelabit life. The rice meal at *irau* feasts is particularly strongly ritualized, and here there are very clear gender roles and associations between the two genders and different foods (Janowski 1995).

It is very clear that, as is reflected in the terminology, separation and difference between the genders, on an everyday level, is most marked in the main reproductive years, from adolescence to about the age of 40. During this period males and females have a tendency to spend a lot of their time in same-sex groups, both socially and in terms of productive activities. This continues even after marriage. Gradually a couple begin to do things together, and as middle age and grandparenthood approach the couple becomes a really cohesive productive and social unit. The message seems to be that the couple grows towards economic, social and symbolic unity as their sexually reproductive years are left behind them. During the years in which males and females are most active in reproductive terms, on the other hand, they are not yet united in other terms. The fact that the kinship terminology only marks gender difference in the generation which is reproductive *vis-à-vis* ego fits clearly with this.

The distinction between sex and gender marking has been pointed to by a number of scholars (e.g. see Moore 1994; Strathern 1988). In relation to SE Asia, Howell has discussed this issue for the Lio of SE Asia (Howell 1995c). Among the Kelabit I encountered no instances of men taking on a female gender role or vice versa; in other words sex and gender are congruent. It seems to me that Howell's material on the Lio emphasises the importance of gender marking in the geographical area on a symbolic level: in ritual contexts the gender of participants is very important and it is essential that both 'male' and 'female' participate – whether these categories are filled by biological males and females or not (they are not always among the Lio, while as far as I know they always are among the

Kelabit). Thus the observation that on a day-to-day level – especially, perhaps (to use Errington's term (Errington 1989)) in the Western 'centrist' part of insular SE Asia – men and women are not very 'different' does not indicate that gender is not of central significance.

However, although men and women do not 'stand in' for the other sex among the Kelabit, it can be said that individuals are 'more' or 'less' gendered at different stages in their lives – or, more accurately, that they are gendered in different ways. Among the young, there is an emphasis on separation between the genders, in economic and social terms. One can take their sexual activity as emphasising their difference and separation, too, since this is necessary for successful reproduction. Among maturing couples, sexual activity becomes less important as biological reproduction wanes in significance, and there is a growing emphasis on unity and lack of difference on an everyday level – but co-existing with this is a ritual emphasis on separation, played out in the rice meal and especially at *irau* feasts.

The Descent Line (Tutul)

The emphasis in Kelabit kin terminology, and the tendency in practice, is three-fold:

- a) to fuse collaterals with lineals
- b) to emphasise generational difference, and
- c) to collapse affinals with consanguineals, with affinals being described for preference as consanguineals

As shown in Figure 5.3, cumulatively all of this has the effect of collapsing all kin relations *vis-à-vis* ego into a lineal relationship between *tetepoh*, *tepoh*, *tama* + *sinah*, *anak* and *mupun*. Thus all those in the same generation are described as 'siblings'; all collaterals in ascending generations as 'mothers' and 'fathers', 'grand-parents', or simply 'ancestors'; and all those in descending generations as 'children' or 'grandchildren'. It will be remembered that even unrelated people with whom there are social relations are reclassified as kin. All living kin – in fact, everyone belonging to the social universe – can be described, then, as though they belonged to one descent line *vis-a-vis* ego, in which the only place where difference is brought out in any way is at the *tama* + *sinah* (father and mother) level, where gender difference is marked. It is as though all living persons might, momentarily, *vis-à-vis* one individual, be imaged as belonging to one huge hearth-group focused on the (living) generation in which male and female are differentiated and fertile.

At naming feasts, *irau pekaa ngadan* (literally, 'irau for changing names')⁶, the child 'for' whom grandparental and parental names are taken acts as focus for such

Photo 5.2 The hosts of a naming feast (*irau*) posing with a pig about to be slaughtered for the *irau*, with the children to be named in the centre of the group. The parental names being taken by the young couple are, as is usual, very 'big': Balang Ngeluun and Sinah Balang Ngeluun – 'Tiger Above All Others' and 'Mother Tiger Above All Others'. Bario, 18 April 1987. (Monica Janowski)

an image of society. The grandparents, parents and child/children are displayed physically in a prominent position during the *irau*, with the child or children in a central position. Almost all of those present who are in the second ascending generation from the child either take a new grandparental or 'renew' (*ngebru*) their existing grandparental name, and in doing so state their kinship as grandparents to the child. Through this, an image is generated of a huge hearth-group focused on the grandparents of the child, its parents, and the child itself. This family, or hearth-group, contains, of course, innumerable mothers/aunts, fathers/uncles, cousins/siblings, grandparents/great uncles/great aunts and grandchildren/great nephews/great nieces, but it is as if these were mapped on to one another and the fact that relationships are lineal, collateral and affinal did not matter.

A number of scholars have noted the fact that, in SE Asia, there is frequently an equation between different levels of 'house', where the higher levels are inclusive of the lower (e.g. see chapters in Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995a; MacDonald 1987). In this context, Gibson has discussed the importance of siblingship for the Makassarese of South Sulawesi (Gibson 1995). He has argued that spouses

are transformed into siblings so that it can appear that the 'house' group, at the minimal level of household – and at higher, more inclusive levels too, by implication – reproduces itself without the need for affinity⁷. For the Kelabit, too, this image of a unified kin group is important, denying difference between members of the same generation – the unity of a classificatory sibling group which consists of all those at the same generation. However, among the Kelabit not only unity but difference, separation and division are important. This is expressed through the division of siblings into male and female, who are then united in marriage as spouses. For the Kelabit, both unity and the pull towards division, which is the basis of reproduction (both physical and social), are expressed in the concept of the *tutul*, or descent line.

Older people, particularly those of high status, are able to recite *tutul* to which they belong. I was usually told that there are two or three *tutul* in the Kelabit Highlands, based in different geographical areas. These follow a line of couples consisting of prominent male leaders and their wives. Because of the flexibility of kinship reckoning, everyone can tie himself or herself into one of these. Indeed, it is arguably vital that they do because this is one of the main mechanisms through which everyone is imaged as kin. As we shall see shortly, though, there is a sense in which there is conceptually only one *tutul*, into which everyone is tied. This unites all Kelabit as kin.

Status Differentiation and the Descent Line

The Kelabit are a group in which there is status differentiation, though no clearly delineated and named strata with different rights as in a number of other Borneo groups (King 1978)⁸. It is very probable that the Kayan/Kenyah system of three named classes (Whittier 1973: 109–110; Rousseau 1979) and the Kelabit system are related in their logic, although I have not heard Kelabit refer to each other as belonging to any named class, as would occur among the Kayan or Kenyah. Rather, they differentiate between people according to how 'good' – *doo* – they are. High status people are described as 'very good people' – *lun doo to'oh*. Such people were traditionally the leaders of longhouses and groups of longhouses and their wives, known as *la'ih raya* ('big men') and later as *ketua ruma* (longhouse heads, using the Malay terminology used by the Malaysian government). Demonstration of 'goodness' within the Highlands is through effectiveness in providing for dependants within the basic commensal unit, the hearth group, through the rice meal. Hearth-groups exist at different levels – the longhouse, the group of longhouses, and the whole of Kelabit society may be seen as hearth-groups,

projected as such at communal meals and feasts; Carsten argues that in a similar way a higher-level hearth is projected at communal feasts in Langkawi (Carsten 1997). The hearth-group, at any level, is headed by a married couple described as its 'big people' (*lun merar*). The bigger the hearth-group provided for, the 'bigger' the couple (Janowski 1995).

The term *lun merar*, or 'big people', operates in two domains at once: rice-based kinship and status differentiation. It means, in the former domain, a married couple who have grandchildren (who should be co-resident) and who are able to run an effective hearth-group (*tetal*), grow adequate rice, and feed their co-resident descendants. In the domain of status differentiation, the term *lun merar* refers to the leading couple of a longhouse or a group of longhouses – *lun doo to'oh*, or 'really good people'. The term *doo* – good – has, like *lun merar*, two meanings: it is used to refer to a couple who are able to run their own hearth-group effectively and it also refers to leading couples, who are described as 'very good' – *doo to'oh*. *Lun merar* of a longhouse or group of longhouses, like those of a hearth-group, enable the entity they head to continue to exist by organising rice cultivation and hunting; this makes them responsible, in some sense, for the provision of the rice meal for all. They are treated and addressed as though they were in a parental or grandparental relationship with other members of the longhouse. Within a longhouse or larger group, the *lun merar* were, until about the 1960s, addressed by the vocative forms of the words for 'mother', 'father' or 'grandparent' (*sina*, *tama* and *tepo*) by other members of the longhouse; the lower the status of an individual, the more likely he or she would be to address the *lun merar* of the longhouse as 'grandparent', indicating that he or she was also most junior in generational terms. They used the term *anak* – 'child' or *mupun* – 'grandchild' – to refer to other members of the longhouse, and would use the term *mupun* to refer to those of very low status, only marginally able to maintain a separate hearth-group. These were referred to generally as *anak katu* – literally 'children at the end of the longhouse'. The centre of the longhouse was where its 'big people' and their close relatives lived, and the ends were of lowest status (Lian-Saging 1976/77; Talla 1979).

Nowadays, with the coming of Christianity (which has discouraged emphasis on status differentiation) relative status – 'good'-ness – is often veiled, but continues to be very important. Among younger people, many of whom have migrated to town permanently or temporarily, assertion of 'good'-ness is not only through rice-growing but through success in town, through education, in government employment and in business (Janowski 2003b).

'Very good' couples are by definition in the main line of *tutul*, so that their names appear in recitations of the descent line. However, although the ability to

be 'good' is believed to be inherited, there is a lack of rigidity and predictability in the route which the *tutul*, as it is recited, takes down the generations. It does not always or even regularly follow a lineal route from parents to biological child. There is in practice (although not in theory) a good deal of potential for upward and downward mobility; a couple's children do not necessarily maintain the same level of 'good'-ness as their parents. 'Good'-ness has in each generation to be demonstrated. Relative success in demonstrating 'goodness' is reflected in the marriages which the couple concerned are able to arrange for their children. If a leading couple is not able to contract high status marriages for their sons and daughters, the *tutul* will move sideways to siblings or sibling-cousins who show themselves to be more effective.

Whatever route the recited *tutul* take, everyone, even those who are never likely to be the bearers of the main line, can tie themselves into at least one of them through the kin ties (lineal, affinal or fictive) which they trace with leading couples, and can appear as 'siblings' of a leading couple, even if distant ones. Because of the prestige associated with the recited *tutul*, everyone wants to do this.

As I have said, there is more than one *tutul* in the Kelabit Highlands. Each group of longhouses had, traditionally, one, which tied it together around the persons of the current leading couple of the leading longhouse in the group; and there is a sense in which each longhouse had one focused on its own leading couple. Indeed, there is a sense in which each hearth-group is a mini-*tutul*, going down the line of senior couples. However, despite the multiplicity of *tutul*, those who tie themselves into the central *tutul* of a group of longhouses consider that other *tutul*, associated with other groups of longhouses in other parts of the highlands, are really tied into theirs as subsidiary. This is reflected in political struggles; nowadays, for example, there are complex jockeyings for position relating to affiliation to *tutul* deriving from different parts of the Highlands, made even more complex by the fact that many people belong to more than one of these. This has become particularly complex because of the fact that a large percentage of the Kelabit living in the Highlands now live in the Bario area. Underlying these tensions is the fact that on an ideological level there is only one *tutul* to which all Kelabit belong, 'possession' of which is at issue. The route this overarching *tutul* really takes is never going to be accepted by all – only that it exists, with everyone vying to be as close to the focus of it as possible.

At *irau* feasts – held in the past at the secondary funerals of prominent leaders and nowadays for the naming of the first child (sometimes the first two children) of young couples – all Kelabit are invited to a huge rice meal which presents the longhouse to which its hosts belong – and to some extent the entire Kelabit com-

munity – as one hearth-group. In doing this, *irau* can be seen as being a momentary crystallization of the current centre of a/the *tutul* – certainly the centre of the *tutul* of the hearth-group holding it, probably the centre of the *tutul* associated with the longhouse, and to a certain extent, momentarily, as the centre of ‘the’ overarching focal *tutul*. *Irau* place emphasis on the relationship between grandparent, parent and child, the essence of the *tutul*. At them, the host couple – the grandparents of the child ‘for’ whom the *irau* is held – present themselves as providing a rice meal for all guests, and everyone else is tied momentarily into a huge hearth-group with that couple as their ‘mother’ (*sinah*), ‘father’ (*tama*) or ‘grandparent’ (*tepoh*). I would suggest that the central couple hosting the *irau* present themselves, through this, as the *lun merar* of the entire community.

In the past, *irau* were only held by leading couples, and *irau* would have been the site of tensions between high-status couples vying for leadership of a longhouse or group of longhouses. Because there were limited possibilities for building up resources to host *irau*, only leading couples were able to hold them. Nowadays, *irau* express a more complex and more socially mobile reality. With increasing ability to bring in resources from the outside world through working in town and through selling rice to town, all couples have become able to compete for status, because they have the wherewithal to hold big *irau*. All hold *irau* for their first co-resident grandchild. The implied claim to being at the focus of ‘the’ *tutul* on the part of each and every couple is problematic (Janowski 2003b). However, the fact that such claims are made emphasises the importance of the existence of such a focal *tutul*, on a conceptual level; the very impossibility of ever fixing its position makes claims worth making.

Life Force and Gender: Ulun and Lalud

There are two Kelabit terms – *ulun* and *lalud* – which are linked to the concept of a quantifiable ‘something’, a life force of finite quantity in the universe, which is of considerable significance in SE Asia. This ‘something’ is expressed in the Javanese concept of *kasektèn*, which Anderson describes as ‘power’ or ‘primordial essence’ (Anderson 1990), the Balinese concept of *sekti*, which Geertz describes as ‘charisma’ (Geertz 1980) and the Luwu (Sulawesi) concept of *sumangé*, which Errington describes as ‘potency’ (Errington 1989). Geertz (Geertz 1980: 106) has argued that the Balinese *sekti* may be equated with the Polynesian concept of *mana*. It would seem that the Ao Naga concept of *aren* (Mills 1926: 112) could also be included in this group of similar concepts.

Neither of the two Kelabit concepts of *ulun* or *lalud* exactly corresponds to these more unitary concepts which have been described for other SE Asian peoples.

While *ulun* refers specifically to human life, the term *lalud* refers to a raw life force deriving from places outside human control – the forest, and more recently, from Tuhan Allah (God) via Jesus. Tuhan Allah/Jesus can, however, also give *ulun*, specifically *ulun bru* ('new life'), which is associated with the end of the world and the second coming of Christ.

The word *ulun* is cognate with the two Kelabit terms for people (*lun* and *lemulun*) and to that for 'to live' (*mulun*). It is also cognate with the term for 'slave', *demulun*. However, while *mulun* can be used to refer to animals and plants, only humans seem to be able to possess *ulun*. Strength of *ulun* is related to high status and, in the Highlands, to rice-growing; hunter gatherers like the Penan are not described in terms of strength of *ulun*. This does not, however, mean that they are not admired and respected, for their forest skills – and for the *lalud* with which they are able to interact effectively in the forest.

Lalud, which does not have any obvious cognates, appears to be the chaotic life force which is present in realms which are not under the control of humans. Humans bring this life force into domesticated areas in order to tame it and channel it for human purposes. This process of bringing in has traditionally been the responsibility of men, who are associated with realms outside that under Kelabit control. On an everyday basis, this means the primary forest, where most men go almost every day to hunt, and which is full of spirits (*ada'*) (Janowski 2001). While women are very frightened of *ada'*, men say they are not; indeed some men have in the past had close relations with the most important of these spirits, Puntumid, known as the *ada' raya* or 'great spirit', who gave them the power of life or death over other humans (Janowski 2003a and Janowski 2005b).

Although I should emphasise that no Kelabit has ever explicitly told me that this is what occurs, I would suggest that *lalud* is brought into the longhouse through hunting. Wild hunted meat is then, arguably, brought together with rice and consumed at the rice meal, bringing together *lalud* and rice, associated respectively with men and women, to generate *ulun*. Most explicit references to *lalud* which I encountered were either in the stories which were traditionally told about mythical culture heroes like Tukad Rini (Rubenstein [1973: 967–1125] gives a version of this story, and Balang Pelaba of Pa' Dalih recited another version to me in 1993), who travelled into mythical realms and performed impossible feats like jumping from mountain to mountain or to the moon; such heroes are said to shimmer with *lalud*; or in the context of Christianity. Nowadays, the most important context in which *lalud* is encountered is Christian prayer. With the coming of Christianity, *lalud* has come to be associated very strongly with Tuhan Allah (God the Father) (who was identified by my older informants in Pa' Dalih with the pre-Christian

supreme deity, whom they named as Baru). It is believed to be accessible directly from Tuhan Allah through Jesus. However, *lalud* also continues to be associated with the wild, with the mountains and the forest; Kelabit show a predilection for praying on hills and mountains away from human settlements⁹.

Both men and women can access *lalud* through Jesus, whereas only men bring meat in from the forest, and it is mythical male heroes who travel to realms full of *lalud*. With the coming of Christianity, women join men to pray on forested hills and on mountains such as Murud and Batu Lawi (a mountain consisting of a male and female peak which had pre-Christian significance as well; its name is echoed in the pairs of male + female monoliths sometimes erected at death *irau* until the 1950s, *batu lawi*). However, men continue to have a relationship with the forest which is much more intimate than that of women. Women are still reluctant to enter the forest except in company and along well-trodden paths. In other words, there are continuities between Kelabit pre-Christian and Christian beliefs and practices, including in relation to cosmological beliefs about the nature and gender associations of *lalud* (Janowski 2003a).

‘Big People’ and the Transmission of Human Life Force to Descending Generations

As I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (Janowski 1995), it is primarily upon the provision of rice meals that the relationship between ‘big people’ and their dependants is constructed. Through their provision of the rice meal, *lun merar* are the source (*puun*) of human life – *ulun* – for their dependants. This is so both at the level of the basic hearth-group and at the level of the symbolic hearth-group which is the longhouse. I would suggest that the point of the rice meal is to symbolise – and perhaps even to bring about – the transmission of *ulun* to dependants, to descending generations.

It was a noticeable feature of everyday life among the Kelabit when I lived in Pa’ Dalih in the late 1980s and early 1990s that remarks were regularly passed – out of the hearing of those being discussed – about the strength of people’s *ulun*. Such remarks were only ever made about *lun merar* – couples who were heads of hearth-groups. Their *ulun* would be said to be relatively *kail* (‘strong’) or *kaya* (‘weak’). It seemed that only *lun merar* were ‘qualified’ to be discussed in terms of strength of *ulun*; I never heard anyone make such a remark about an unmarried person, an *anak adi* (nor did *anak adi* make remarks about the strength of other people’s *ulun*).

All such remarks that I heard were phrased in relation to success in rice growing. This might suggest that strength of *ulun* relates not to the rice meal as

Photo 5.3 Batu Lawi, a mountain of central symbolic significance for the Kelabit and related Lun Bawang and Lun Daye peoples. The two peaks of the mountain are said to be male and female respectively and were in pre-Christian times paralleled in the erection of paired megaliths in the forest for leading couples at huge *irau* feasts. (Photographer unknown; copyright Sarawak Museum, accession number KH150)

a whole but to rice only. However, it must be remembered that the rice meal is described as just that – *kuman nuba*’ or ‘eating rice’. In the context of the rice meal, rice does not only represent itself but also, at another level, the entire meal, both rice and side dishes. Though there is a tendency to veil the importance of wild foods in everyday contexts, at *irau* there is, on the other hand, an emphasis on the importance of wild foods and on the association of wild foods with men. Association of strength of *ulun* with success in providing rice needs to be understood with reference to successful provision of the rice meal in its entirety, both rice and side dishes (*penguman*).

I am suggesting that the rice meal represents a bringing together of rice (female) and meat (male). Together, these make *ulun*, proper human life, possible, and

represent the transmission of *ulun* to dependants and descendants within rice-based kinship. Thus, not only the unity of the couple but also its division into male and female is important. This is essential not only to its biological fertility but also to its ability to generate and transmit *ulun* to its dependants/descendants through feeding appropriate food at the rice meal. *Lalud*, associated with men, is vital to the generation of *ulun*; so is rice, which makes the difference between being simply a living being and being a true human.

I am also suggesting that generation of *ulun* is associated with closeness to the descent line, the *tutul*. As shown in Figure 5.3, the *tutul* is the main line down which the ability to generate *ulun* flows; it represents its continuity and unity. This is true even with the lowest level of *tutul*, that within an existing hearth-group. In their relatedness to 'the' overarching *tutul* (see above), all Kelabit are tied in to a unitary source of *ulun*, which is represented in living form in the persons of the high status couples who are in the main line of the *tutul* – even if it may be difficult, especially in the more complex and dynamic situation of the present day, to say who these are. One can, perhaps, talk of the existence of a 'flow of life' down the generations, parallel to the 'flow of life' which has been widely discussed for Eastern Indonesian societies and which also proceeds down the generations, although via a route involving the exchange of women (Fox 1980a). This might be seen as the 'centrist' version of the 'flow of life'.

It should be clear by now that there is an association between *ulun* and prestige. It is parenthood and grandparenthood which are the sources of social status among the Kelabit. The 'more' of a grandparent one is, the higher one's status, in terms of how *doo* ('good') one is considered to be. An individual is 'more' of a *tepoh* or grandparent by having lots of grandchildren – and this refers not just to lineal descendants but, and more importantly, to the grandchildren of those of ego's own generation who accept and emphasise their position as grandchildren *vis-à-vis* ego by stating this openly at *irau* feasts (by changing their grandparental names – see Janowski 2005b). It is those who are the living site of 'the' overarching *tutul*, 'grandparents' of all descendants, whether their own or those of related people who tie themselves into the *tutul* as their siblings, who are of the highest status – even though it may not be possible, especially nowadays with rapid social mobility, to say which couple this is. It is through this hypothetical couple, too, that *ulun* may be said to be transmitted to all Kelabit. Thus all *ulun* is, conceptually, ultimately from the same source and follows one path – the 'flow of life' is unitary. The fact that it is not possible to say at which *irau* this 'truly' occurs does not really matter – each couple, in hosting an *irau*, is, in 'saying' that this is what they are doing, asserting that ultimately all *ulun* is one.

In some senses, *lalud* too is associated with high status. This seems to relate to ability to manage and manipulate it, which is an ability associated with high-status men. Young men who are good hunters are respected and looked up to, and usually go on to become respected *lun merar* when they are older. Mythical heroes like Tukad Rini are high-status young leaders. Shamans who had relations with forest spirits in the past acquired great *lalud* in that way (Janowski 2003a: Chapter 7). However, the status associated with *lalud* does not transfer well unaltered into the world of men + women, the rice-growing world. Meat has to be eaten with rice; *lalud* has to be harnessed to a useful end, tamed and channelled. Pure, untamed *lalud* is inappropriate in the world of humans (who live, in the story of Tukad Rini, *luun atar*, 'on the flat land', differentiated from peoples with whom Tukad Rini of *luun atar* battles, who live in other, mythical realms – such places as 'outside the sky' (*palai'i langit*), in 'the cave of the great rock' (*bupu batu agung*), in 'the valley of the steepest mountain cliff' (*taruk mayar agung*) – realms full of *lalud* [Rubenstein 1973: 967–1125]).

Kelabit Names as Expressions of Big Person-hood

The Kelabit use a complex system of parental and grandparental names and titles (Janowski 2005b), which express and illustrate the Kelabit concern with 'big person'-hood, its nature, the need to prove it, and the generation of *ulun* through it. Male names also exhibit the significance, traditionally, of the male association with and access to *lalud*. All of these names are taken at *irau* feasts, underlining the link between the names taken and *lun merar*-hood.

There are three kinds of name: 'little names' (*ngadan i'it*), which are given to children when they are born or shortly after, parental names (*ngadan inan anak*, 'names when one has children') and grandparental names (*ngadan inan mupun*, 'names when one has grandchildren'). Grandparental names emphasise the full *lun merar*-hood of the leading couple of a hearth group; parental names are given to the young couple by kin of the generation above, primarily their parents/parents-in-law who are hosting the *irau* and taking grandparental names, and mark their setting off on the road to becoming fully-fledged *lun merar* when they become grandparents.

Kelabit parental and grandparental names normally consist of two 'name elements', which are words with meanings, with the prefix *sinah* ('mother') for a female parental name. Such words are often 'deep' or 'inner' (*dalim*; the same word is used to describe the kitchen and living area where the rice meal is prepared and eaten) words, with meanings at different levels which require exegesis. The term

ulun itself, which is considered very ‘deep’, is used very often as a name element. Many names also incorporate the word *doo* (which I am translating as ‘good’), words (such as *paran* and *maren*) which are used in neighbouring tribes for those described in the literature as ‘aristocrats’, or words which imply looking after or feeding others. All of these terms imply parenthood/grandparenthood and the transmission of *ulun* to descendants/dependants.

Kelabit ‘big people’ names display primarily the unitary nature of the couple, in emphasising *ulun* and through the fact that man and wife take the same core name as parents. However, the understanding that *ulun* cannot be generated without division into male and female is emphasised by the taking of separate grandparental names by couples. The use of names implying *lalud* underlines the importance not only of *lalud* but also of the male input which is associated with it. *Lalud* is implied mainly through the incorporation into male grandparental names of the names of powerful animals. Some of these do not exist in physical form in the Kelabit Highlands (e.g. the tiger, *balang*, and the crocodile, *baye*); they are believed to be present in spirit form, and as spirits (*ada*) have particularly high levels of *lalud*. The names of heroes in the stories about heroes like Tukad Rini emphasise *lalud* particularly strongly, referring to the heroes’ superhuman abilities.

Photo 5.4 Achieving parental status: Batang Kelapang (‘Kelapang River’) and Sinah Batang Kelapang (‘Mother Kelapang River’) (Kaz and Monica Janowski) at their hearth in Pa’ Dalih, with Molly, 1988.¹⁰ (Monica Janowski)

Siblings into Spouses

I have said that Kelabit parental and grandparental names underline the unity as well as the division of the 'big people' married couple. The married couple is divided, in fact, in two ways – in terms of gender and because spouses are classificatory cross-siblings.

To be appropriate and ideal marriage partners, two individuals should be, firstly, of the same status (should have acknowledged ancestors thought to have about the same level of 'good'-ness), and secondly, cousins – ideally third cousins (*kanid keteloh*). It is stated as desirable never to allow people to become too distantly related but to 'make marriages' (*naro' pawa'*) between cousins in order to avoid this. While first cousins cannot marry and second cousins should not, third cousins are considered ideal marriage partners. A significant proportion of marriages, even now, are suggested/arranged by the first and second ascending generation *vis-à-vis* marriageable youngsters, and this has the aim of setting up ideal matches between related individuals of the same generation. It is essential that they be of the same generation; it is considered wrong for people of different generations to marry. This reflects the concern, already mentioned, that generations should be kept distinct.

When two cousins are being considered as marriage partners, they will not explicitly be described as *kenanak*, or siblings; however, it is arguably the very fact of their classificatory siblingship that makes them appropriate partners. Thus, in effect the Kelabit aim to transform siblings into spouses. The bond between husband and wife may be said essentially to be a bond between classificatory cross-siblings; this echoes the way in which Malay husband and wife refer to each other as elder brother and younger sister.

Gibson has argued that, for the Makassarese, married couples must become, symbolically, siblings (Gibson 1995). I would suggest that, for the Kelabit, classificatory siblings (cousins) must become married couples. There must be a constant tying in through marriage of those who have become too distantly related.

The image of society as a huge hearth-group, displayed in particular at the rice meal at *irau* feasts, reflects, I believe, a Kelabit concern with the same static image of reality which Gibson found to be important among the Makassarese. I would suggest that this static ideal demonstrates, through the power associated with unity, the concentration of *lalud* brought in from the uncontrollable realm outside that controlled by humans, which makes the generation of *ulun* possible. However, in order for the truth of the static ideal to be demonstrated – that *lalud* is *really* concentrated, and that *ulun* can *really* be generated – the reproductive power of

the *lun merar* must be harnessed. This is *not only* biologically, but also, and arguably *above all*, in terms of the generation of what I have called 'rice-based kinship' – through feeding with appropriate food, generative of *ulun*. This appropriate food is the rice meal, which consists of elements which are associated with female (rice) and male (wild foods, especially meat).

Kelabit spouse-siblings represent the most absolute unity possible (echoing the mythical origin couples in many Southeast Asian societies, who are both spouses and siblings) and for this reason hold the key to the generation of *ulun*. However, the extent to which *ulun* is actually generated by a given couple varies, and this may be seen as the logical source of hierarchical differentiation.

Spouses, Siblings and Status

I would suggest that an analysis of the status of 'big person' among the Kelabit is essential to understanding what being *lun royong*, whom I have defined as being related through the production and consumption of rice and have described as rice-based kin, means to the Kelabit. In essence, all relations between *lun royong* – which means all social relations, since all Kelabit are by definition kin – can be seen either in terms of that between the two members of the 'big people' couple or that between the couple and their dependants/descendants – between the generations.

All members of the *same* generation are classificatory siblings (*kenanak*) and where they are of different gender are also potential spouses, unless their classificatory siblingship is extremely close (first or second cousins). The relationship between husband and wife is *both* that between the genders *and* that between siblings. As siblings, husband and wife shared the receiving of *ulun* from the same source; as spouses, they represent the bringing together of that which was parted through earlier conjugal unions, to transmit this *ulun* to descending generations, something which is only possible because of the difference between them.

The relationship between the generations, which is so centrally important in terms of relations between Kelabit individuals, is between those who are the origin (*puun*) of *ulun* and those who receive it – who then go on to become its origin. The 'big people' are, through being male and female, able to generate *ulun* for their dependants and descendants. Their reproduction means the dissipation of *ulun* to their descendants, which must be brought back in again through the re-unification of further spouse-siblings, who then again dissipate *ulun* through their own reproduction. Each time a couple is formed, however, it must bring in *lalud* again

from the forest in order to achieve the regeneration of *ulun*. This is mainly the job of the male member of the couple, through hunting.

The two dyads associated with the status of *lun merar* – between the spouse-siblings on the one hand and between the 'big people' couple as a unit and their dependants and descendants on the other – are different in quality. It is not because one relationship is affinal and one consanguineal that there is a difference, however: in the absence of descent groups and in the context of the imaging of all society as one hearth-group, the distinction between affinal and consanguineal kin is of little significance. It is because the relationship between spouse-siblings epitomises *both* division *and* total unity and stillness, which is the source of *ulun* and of kinship itself; while that between 'big people' and their dependants exemplifies the potential for human life which is the product of that unity and stillness.

The dyad between the 'big people' and their dependants and descendants is fundamental not only in the kinship system but in hierarchy. The 'big people' of a longhouse are simply the 'big people' of a hearth group on a grander scale, writ large (Janowski 1995). I would not, then, at least as regards the Kelabit, agree with the position adopted by a number of writers on Bornean societies, that kinship is of lesser importance in those Borneo societies where prestige differentiation exists (King 1978; Morris 1978; Rousseau 1978). There is no 'choice' between kinship and prestige differentiation; they are congruent.

Both kinship and the status differentiation which is associated with it hinge on the generation of *ulun*, which I have translated as 'human life'. This, the possession of which differentiates humans from animals, also differentiates them from other humans who do not grow rice, such as the Penan hunter gatherers who share the primary forest with the Kelabit, who are never described in terms of 'strength' of *ulun*, and who remain in Kelabit eyes, despite the respect in which they are held for their forest skills and their association with *lalud*, 'forever children' because they do not grow rice and provide the rice meal for their descendants and dependants (Janowski 1997). It is very clear that the Kelabit are aware that the choice between a Penan-style life on the one hand and the growing of rice, the generation of *ulun*, and the construction of rice-based kinship on the other is available to them. It is also clear that they know what the choice must be. Despite the difficulty of tearing young men, who are strongly drawn to the forest, away from hunting as a way of life, they, like young women, must enter into rice growing in order to be able to provide for others, generate *ulun*, and become full parents and eventually grandparents within the rice-based kinship system. Like the choice to remain with one's adoptive parents rather than return to one's biological parents, this is an explicit

statement of a decision to define rice-based kinship as constructed by humans, a difficult choice but one which, for the Kelabit, defines true humanity.

It is noteworthy, however, that rice-based kinship could be said to be founded in a paradox. It is based in the ability to generate and transmit *ulun* on the part of 'big people' couples, which generates status for them. However, the ability to do this is believed to be inherited, although one can never predict whether it will be inherited or not in the case of a given individual. Thus, rice-based kinship itself, which defines humanity and differentiates humans from the animals of the forest, is based on something which is nevertheless inherited through 'natural' kinship, between individuals linked through sexual reproduction and not through the feeding of rice.

Conclusion: Hierarchy and Kinship in Southeast Asia

I have argued for a central significance for kinship among the Kelabit, and that kinship is inextricably tied up with status differentiation. I have suggested that the Kelabit are concerned to construct a 'rice-based kinship' which is clearly different from the sort of biological kinship which exists among the animals of the forest – and among the Penan. This involves the transmission of *ulun* from ascending to descending generations through the rice meal. It ties all humans together who eat together, in that they all have, ideologically, the same source of *ulun*, which is transmitted down a central hypothetical overarching *tutul* or descent line to which all are tied in as siblings at some generational level. The concept of *lun merar*, 'big people' – parents/grandparents – is key to understanding the way in which both rice-based kinship and hierarchy are conceived and constructed. At the focus of 'the' overarching *tutul*, if one could locate it (its existence being more an ideological imperative than a necessary reality), would be, at any point in time, 'the' (living) central couple, in other words the couple with the highest status, the 'really good people' *par excellence*, the *lun merar* ('big people') of all lower-level *lun merar*. This couple, the living couple closest to the source of *ulun*, would embody (as do all couples, but this couple most of all) both complete unity and stasis and the constant interplay, down the descent line, between unity of the genders and of divided siblings on the one hand and their separation and division on the other. Both unity and division are vital to the regeneration in each generation of *ulun*, through the bringing in of *lalud*, to be tamed, channelled and processed into proper human life. In practice, however, there is no full consensus among Kelabit about relative status positions – and so the identity of this central couple at any one time can never unanimously be agreed upon.

I would like to suggest that this approach to hierarchy and kinship might be found to be relevant to other SE Asian groups, and particularly to other Bornean groups. In Borneo, it has been argued that *either* kinship *or* hierarchy is the basis of social organization – that where one is the organising principle of society, the other is not (King 1991; Rousseau 1990). However, groups which are described as being distinguished along these lines – lines which tend to coincide with a distinction between so-called 'egalitarian' and 'hierarchical' groups – are sometimes very similar linguistically and culturally. I would suggest that it may be more useful to see hierarchy and kinship as two sides of the same coin, and as being founded in the kind of relationship between generations within the hearth-group which I have presented here. This would allow us to approach an understanding of the 'hierarchical' and 'egalitarian' societies of the island – which are often closely related in other respects – in the same terms.

Notes

1 This chapter is based on fieldwork carried out in the community of Pa' Dalih in the southern part of the Kelabit Highlands in Sarawak, Malaysia between 1986 and 2005, with short periods in other parts of the Kelabit Highlands and among Kelabit living in the town of Miri in Sarawak. 21 months of fieldwork were carried out in 1986–88 with funding from the UK Economic and Social Research Council. Subsequent shorter periods of fieldwork between 1991 and 2005 have been funded by the Evans Fund at the University of Cambridge and the British Academy Committee for Southeast Asian Studies.

2 There were estimated to be 5,059 Kelabit in 1987 and a growth rate of 4% from 1970 to 1980 (Ko 1987, p. 35). If this growth rate is assumed, this would imply that the total would now be about 8000. Just under half of these are probably in the Kelabit Highlands and half in the town of Miri, with the rest mostly distributed around other towns in Sarawak. Martin (Martin 1992) estimates only about 1000 in Miri in the early 1990s, but admits that there is no way of assessing the numbers other than by guesswork. The number of Kelabit in Miri is constantly increasing.

3 Carsten (Carsten 1997: Conclusion) suggests that for Langkawi it is siblingship which should be seen as the basis for kinship, and she suggests that for other South East Asian societies, in particular swidden and hunting and gathering groups, this is also true. However, I would suggest that *both* siblingship – horizontal ties – *and* vertical ties between generations are of significance for the Kelabit. For hierarchical 'tribal' groups in Borneo this is widely true; vertical kin ties are vital to constructing inherited differentiation.

4 This presents an interesting comparison with what Carsten found among the people of Langkawi, who see feeding of rice as actually altering the substance – specifically the blood

– of what she describes as fostered children (Carsten 1997). Such an alteration in substance was never mentioned to me by my Kelabit informants.

5 Two Kelabit writers who have written dissertations on their own people, Lian-Saging and Talla, provide kin terms and analyses of their use (see Lian-Saging 1976/77: 149–153 and Talla 1979: 145–156). My description and analysis here, which is based on my own observation and discussions with informants in Pa' Dalih, differs in some respects from Talla's and Lian-Saging's descriptions of kin terms and the ways in which they are used. This is undoubtedly related to the fact that Talla's and Lian-Saging's dissertations are based on data from the northern part of the Kelabit Highlands, which is many ways distinct from the southern part of the Highlands where Pa' Dalih is situated. This includes differences in pronunciation, which are reflected in different spellings for kin terms used here and by Talla and Lian-Saging.

6 Until the 1950s, *irau* feasts were held at the secondary funerals of people of high status – the *lun merar* of a longhouse or group of longhouses.

7 Carsten (Carsten 1997: 92) also suggests that in Langkawi spouses are transformed into siblings.

8 Talla (1979a: 76–90), Lian-Saging (1976/77: 115–125) and Bulan (n.d.) suggest that until the Second World War there was stratification among the Kelabit; however they differ as to what form this took and the terms used for the different groups.

9 Despite the opposition of many pastors, who point out that one can pray anywhere and indeed assert that the best place to pray is the church which has been built by every community; while I was in Pa' Dalih in 1987 a letter was sent by the SIB authorities – the Sidang Injil Borneo church to which the Kelabit belong – and read out during the Sunday service, instructing that people should pray only in the church. The people of Pa' Dalih had recently constructed a rudimentary open-air church in the forest on a nearby hill by clearing vegetation and putting in some benches and a preaching table. It was clear that there was a debate going on within the SIB itself, however, as they have subsequently sponsored the pilgrimage to Murud mountain, which attracts huge numbers of Kelabit and related Lun Bawang.

10 We were given our names at a *kuman peroyong* ('eating together', to which all longhouse members contributed rice and for which a communal hunt was held; this was not an *irau*, as it was communally hosted) held on 2 October 1987, the same day we moved into the longhouse to run our own hearth. The Batang Kelapang is the river upon which Pa' Dalih, my field site community, is sited. The appropriateness of this name to us was explained to me as being at various levels, as follows: 1) that we came from far away and so we should be named after the main river in the Pa' Dalih area since this is visible from afar; 2) that the Kelapang eventually flows into the sea which connects with the sea around England from whence we came; 3) that we were important as is the Kelapang, which is the source of the mighty Baram river, and that everything flowed through us as it does through the Kelapang. 3) should be understood in the context of the fact that parental names always, nowadays, incorporate boastful, 'big' meanings.

6

NURTURANCE AND THE SPECTRE OF NEGLECT

Sasak ways of dealing with the dead

Kari G. Telle

A few days after Papuq Sip's death in January 1998, his bereaved wife, assisted by a female neighbour, was busy taking down bundles of 'red rice' (*pare beaq ganggas*) from the granary. All morning rhythmic pounding was heard throughout the compound as the women separated the red-brown rice kernels from the stalks, using long bamboo poles. Pausing from the strenuous work, the old widow noted that the rice was almost ten years old, and that it probably had lost much of its aroma. She and her husband had kept the rice so that when one of them died, 'some rice from their own house would follow along.' Several rice-bundles had been removed from the granary the morning Papuq Sip died, and more bundles would be taken down for Nyatus, the final mortuary feast to be held one hundred days after death. This morning she was pounding rice for the upcoming nine-day feast, for her husband should 'not die in a state of neglect' (*adin ndeq mate butung*).

Death, Food and Relatedness

Funerals are a frequent and most public event in rural Sasak communities on the island of Lombok. During my fieldwork, I attended numerous funerals and soon became absorbed in trying to understand the mourning and mortuary practices that mediate individual and collective experiences of death for the Sasak.¹ That all living beings are destined to die, but that we cannot know the exact moment of death, was a frequently made remark. While people draw different conclusions from this elementary 'fact of life', death is widely recognized 'as *the* occasion toward and through which' (Weiss 1996: 141) an array of Sasak social relations

are oriented. Insofar as death is a point of orientation in the development of many relationships, funerals and practices associated with the dead also provide insight into local ideas of the person as well as insight into the intersubjective relations that are of particular salience for people's well-being, in this life and the next.

Sasak Muslims tend to conceive of death (*mate*) both as a dramatic transition from one state of being to another and as a drawn-out passage towards completion. Although the timing of death is ultimately beyond human control – the moment of death is said to be 'God's secret' – transforming the deceased into an ancestor (*papuq baloq*) requires much work on the part of the living. That the deceased is utterly dependent on close kin, neighbours and ritual specialists in order to become 'complete' underscores how humans are social beings whose life-courses are inextricably enmeshed with those of others. An inquiry into the relational matrix of Sasak selfhood leads straight to the medium of food, which plays a vital role in the conjoined processes of remembering and forgetting that are occasioned by death. Food and food-related practices are important as kin relate to the dead on an everyday basis. A range of food-related activities are also integral to most formal occasions dedicated to the dead, although the place of food in conjunction with mortuary feasts has lately become a source of controversy in some of the heterogeneous Muslim communities on the island (see Telle 2000).

The overall purpose of the series of mortuary rituals is to assist the deceased in becoming an ancestor, and I will argue that food plays a crucial role in this process. To appreciate the charged significance food holds in aiding the deceased's passage towards ancestorhood, it is necessary to examine socio-cultural assumptions regarding the value of food and its generative potential. Concentrating on the flow of material substances from the living to the dead, my broader aim in this chapter is to probe the significance of food and feeding in the construction of Sasak relatedness. The term relatedness is used here to convey, as Janet Carsten puts it, 'a move away from a pre-given analytic opposition between the biological and the social on which much anthropological study of kinship has rested' (2000: 4). While the term is not unproblematic (cf. Carsten 1995; 2000; Janowski: Introduction this volume), it does invite consideration of the multiple substances and embodied acts that are locally recognised as generating enduring ties that extend beyond individual interpersonal relationships. The work that is carried out in connection with Sasak mortuary practices is largely couched in terms of nurturance and care, yet I will suggest that 'the performance of care' (Becker 1995: 57) is also motivated by the felt need for establishing a degree of separation between the living and the dead. A recurring theme in this ethnographic material is how food and the idiom of nurturing enable the 'feeders' to assert claims over the 'fed' through the

establishment of food-based ties. While the Sasak rely on offerings of food in order to assert a measure of control over the spirits of the dead who easily become aware of signs of neglect, it is also apparent that food serves as a conduit through which 'blessings' (*berkat*) may flow.

'We Sasak are poor, but we have food'

The Sasak refer to the island of Lombok as their 'world' (*gumi Sasak*). In so doing they also lay claim to having a deeper connection to this relatively fertile island located between Bali and Sumbawa than the other ethnic groups on Lombok. Regarding themselves as the original inhabitants, the Sasak claim to have more intimate ties to the land than relatively more recent arrivals, such as the Balinese, Sino-Indonesian, Arabs, Buginese and Javanese, who together make up less than 15 percent of the total population that is approximately two and a half million people.² Most Sasak live in scattered hamlets and rural villages where they are engaged in irrigated rice cultivation and other agricultural work, which is often combined with trading and a variety of service and retail jobs. Despite their majority status and ties to the original inhabitants, many Sasak continue to feel marginalized in relation to other ethnic groups. Indeed, a sense of having endured a long history of domination by 'outsiders' appears central to how the Sasak perceive themselves (McVey 1995; Ryan 1999). In the current 'era of reformation', this perception of marginality is tied less to lack of access to political office and administrative positions than to a sense that most Sasak live under more difficult economic conditions than the largely urban-based ethnic and religious minorities on the island.

On many occasions rural Sasak would introduce themselves to me by noting that 'we Sasak are poor (*dengan jelang*), but we have food (*dapat mangan*)'. It was mainly women and men engaged in agriculture who introduced themselves in this manner, at once drawing attention to poverty as defining what being Sasak entails, yet boldly asserting that the Sasak *do* control food. This and similar remarks about being 'poor' are statements about one's position relative to others (cf. Cannell 1999). Although there are great differences in terms of income and lifestyle in rural communities, and although there is a growing Sasak middle-class, it is the Javanese, Arabs and Sino-Indonesian merchants in the larger towns and urban centres who are generally considered to be rich and whose wealth is based on money (*sugih kepeng*). Statements to the effect that the 'Sasak are poor, but have food' might be taken to indicate an opposition between money and food as tokens of different 'regimes of value' (Appadurai 1986), in which money is the medium of

Photo 6.1 A woman pours ‘cooling’ water on the grave of a deceased relative. The food is later eaten at the graveside. Central Lombok, Indonesia, 1997. (Kari Telle)

depersonalized market transactions whereas food is the quintessential medium of personalized and multi-stranded relations. While money and food evoke different connotations, operating with a stark contrast between commoditized and moral spheres of exchange does not illuminate the experience of relative poverty.

Those who live on the fertile central plain that stretches across the island have long participated in the market economy and been embedded in larger state structures. The Dutch established themselves as the new colonial power on Lombok in 1894 after defeating the Balinese ruler of Karangasem in a protracted war. Using Sasak commoners as *corvée* labour, the Dutch improved and extended irrigation works and built several dams. The main purpose of these initiatives was to increase state revenue by increasing rice production (van der Kraan 1980). Although the total amount of rice produced increased, only some of it remained on Lombok. Huge quantities of high quality rice were sent to parts of the colony that were short of rice or shipped back to Europe, where some of it ended up as cosmetics (Lucas 1983). The combined result of rapid population growth, heavy taxation, and high levels of rice export had severe consequences for the increasingly impoverished Sasak population. Towards the end of the colonial era it was, ‘common knowledge among Dutch officials that about one-third of the population was destitute’ (van der Kraan 1980: 169). Summing up the legacy of Dutch colonial rule, van der

Kraan concludes that 'in their half century rule on Lombok the island was turned into a region of endemic famine' (1980: 173).

The majority of the population of the village of Bon Raja, which is located on the lush central plain, trace their origin to Pujut in south Lombok, a region where food shortages persisted into the late 1960s. Although their forebears who migrated to the plain were able to clear better land, most people in their forties or older have vivid memories of going hungry, especially in the 'poor season' (*musim jelang*) before the new harvest. The last period of widespread 'hunger' (*mejan*) occurred between 1966–67 when large areas of Lombok faced severe crop failures, even as people became embroiled in the killings that took place after the alleged communist coup and the rise of the New Order (Leemann 1989; McVey 1995). The southern part of the island was worst hit by the famine. One source estimated that as many as 30,000 people starved to death over a few months (Cederroth 1981), a figure that probably should be adjusted down to approximately 10,000 (Lucas 1983). At this time people survived by eating pulp from sago palms, banana and papaya stems, and people vividly recall how trees were completely stripped of their leaves. Several days, even weeks could go by between each time common people had a chance to eat well, that is to eat rice (*mi*), the vastly preferred staple.

In the light of this bleak history of famine and recurring food shortages, remarks like 'we Sasak are poor, but we have food' acquire a particular poignancy. Such remarks convey an enduring sense of poverty *vis-à-vis* other groups, but they also amount to a defiant assertion: the Sasak may well be rather poor, but they do after all control food. Having access to food does not merely guarantee one's continued existence and the ability to participate fully in social life, it also provides a measure of self-respect and dignity, despite being poor. It is those who lack food who are truly destitute and who are constantly humiliated by having to make others take pity on them. During fieldwork, I was struck by the fact that when scrawny and tired-looking men or women from southern and eastern Lombok occasionally turned up in the community 'asking' (*ngendeng*) for handouts of rice and vegetables, they usually brought along some simple kitchenware or pieces of used cloth. These humble items were not intended for barter, but were primarily used to redefine an awkward social situation. In this manner, the beggars made a symbolic gesture towards turning a deeply humiliating encounter into an occasion of exchange between roughly equal partners rather than one of mere transmission.

From conversations with older residents in the village, I have gained the distinct understanding that they generally feel that economic conditions have improved over the past three decades (compare Judd 1980). For many, the most significant legacy of the New Order regime is that they never faced severe 'hunger' in this

period. With the introduction of rapid growing rice strains after the Green Revolution, most people have become able to eat two or even three rice meals per day (cf. Corner 1989). It is hence older people who are most likely to observe that the 'Sasak are poor, but we have food' and be content with the situation. Whereas older villagers insist that this 'modern era' is one of relative prosperity, younger men who know that they will inherit plots of land that are either too small to support a family, or no land at all, are far less sanguine about modern times. To remedy a difficult economic situation, young men often travel to Bali for construction and factory work, but the allure of earning larger sums of money draws many Sasak men and women to travel as labour migrants to Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, most of them illegally. Given that Lombok is still plagued by an economic recession following the Asian monetary crisis in the late 1990s and that local employment opportunities are not improving, numerous Sasak will likely continue to migrate despite the risks illegal migration entails.

Most Sasak are Muslims but there is considerable variation in how Islam is practised and how it is understood to relate to *adat*, a loose body of customary knowledge and practices associated with the 'ways of the old folks' (*cara dengan toaq*).³ As in many Sasak communities on the central plain, there is a continuum of socio-religious orientations in Bon Raja. A small but vocal group of neo-traditionalist *pesantren*-educated reformers vigorously strives to purge the community of what they regard as un-Islamic practices by raising the level of scriptural knowledge. The community is also home to a severely marginalized group of Sasak Wetu Telu, adherents of a syncretist Islamic tradition centred around potent places, sacred cloth and the cultivation of ties to the ancestors. The vast majority of the villagers can be characterized as 'traditionalist' Muslims who are not much preoccupied with doctrinal matters but all the more concerned about the proper performance of rituals. It is the mortuary practices of this undogmatic majority of pious and not so pious Muslims that I consider here, focusing on how food serves to memorialize the deceased and how it is used to cultivate a desirable relationship to the dead. I do not attempt to analyse the entire sequence of funeral rites, but will offer an account of those aspects of current mortuary practices that provide insight into how the Sasak construct relatedness through feeding and consumption. The implications of these food-related practices suggest that food can be seen to occupy a place at the very centre of Sasak social reproduction.

The Process of Death

For the Sasak, dying is a process of transformation that requires much assistance from the living. Death is both a dramatic rupture and a lengthy process that is

difficult both for the deceased and for the mourners. When confronted with death, which is marked by the cessation of 'breath' (*napas*), 'traditionalist' Sasak Muslims do not value dramatic expressions of grief, such as crying and clinging to the corpse. Although it is considered natural to relieve the pain of death and abandonment through crying, bereaved family members soon busy themselves with the myriad of tasks that go into preparing the body for burial and getting the funeral under way. This manner of dealing with death is grounded in local understandings of death as gradual transformation, which in no way implies a complete severance of ties between the living and the dead (cf. Bloch 1988; Cederroth 1988). While people may feel like holding onto the deceased, they also know that a degree of separation must be established. People rely heavily on food in order to achieve a correct separation and to help the deceased depart from the 'worldly realm' (*alam dunia*) to take up a new existence in the 'invisible realm' (*alam ghaib*) populated by spirits. To contribute an abundance of food resources for the funeral is perhaps the most esteemed manner whereby bereaved kin manifest their love and reluctance to part with the deceased. Such tangible 'signs of bereavement' (*tada sengkala*) are said to comfort the forlorn spirit, an understanding that makes explicit the close association between caring and feeding. By contrast, emotional outbursts of grief are frowned upon because they pull the spirit towards loved ones, making it harder for the spirit to depart.

Death is often described as a passage from an embodied existence in and around the house and the neighbourhood to a disembodied existence in the grave. This passage profoundly affects the two broad components of the person; the spirit-soul (*nyawa*) and the physical body (*awak* or *perane*).⁴ During life, the body houses the spirit, which may temporarily leave the body during sleep, possession or if it is seriously startled. The spirit's connection to the body is only permanently severed with death; the cessation of breath signals the spirit's departure. The moment when the spirit leaves the body is known as *ajal*, which denotes the end of a person's divinely allotted lifespan. The Islamic concept of *ajal* is understood as the time when God calls the spirit to 'return' from the brief sojourn on earth. It is said that when a foetus is still in the mother's womb, it makes a contract with God that stipulates the length of the lifespan, marriage partner and level of material prosperity to be enjoyed on earth. Some consultants explained that *ajal* is the moment when a person has exhausted her share of rice (*beras*), the preferred staple and main source of sustenance. When death seems imminent, family members may thus try to ease the pain and hasten death by feeding the person some steamed rice (*mi*), as it is only when the last grain of rice allotted for earthly consumption has been eaten that the person can die. The exit from life is also commonly eased

by reciting the Islamic confession of faith and verses from the Qur'an, such as the Surah Ya Sin – the same verse that is whispered into a newborn's ear to protect the frail new life.

When Papuq Sip ceased to breathe one morning in January 1998, after having become progressively weaker over the past few months, a close kinsman was sent to notify the nearest *kiyai*, an Islamic official who is responsible for ensuring that people are properly buried and prayed over. The *kiyai*'s initial task is to prepare blessed water, literally 'naming water' (*aiq pamaran*), which is instrumental in marking the transition from life (*urip*) to death. The water was promptly taken back and sprinkled over Papuq Sip's body to notify him that he was 'already dead' (*wah mate*). Until this has been done, the person is merely 'sleeping': it is the performative act of splashing water on the body using a twig of *kelor* leaves that makes the person socially dead. Who talks to the deceased while sprinkling water over the body is of no particular significance. What is important is that those who were close to the deceased, such as the wife, children and siblings, remain with the body. Once the spirit departs, it begins to roam around, alternately hovering near the body and fluttering about in the neighbourhood. It is hence incumbent upon bereaved kin to comfort the distressed spirit, which is done by bathing and dressing the corpse and getting preparations for burial under way. Only persons of the same sex as the deceased perform the intimate act of bathing and ritually purifying the body. In Papuq Sip's case, those who took part were his younger brother, several nephews and his son-in-law. Having been bathed, prayed over in the yard and in the mosque, Papuq Sip was buried later in the afternoon, as there is now a preference for burial to take place as soon as possible, preferably within twenty-four hours.

The overall goal of the funeral and the mortuary feasts is to assist the deceased in becoming an ancestor, a process that is complete when only 'bones' (*tolang*) are left in the grave. For the Sasak, the disintegration of the corpse provides the model for the spirit's gradual separation from the living and incorporation into the hereafter.⁵ I once asked Kiyai Nalib, a reform-oriented ritual leader, to explain what happens after burial and he noted that:

'On the third day [Nelung], the spirit (*arwah*) hovers over his body and sees the body becoming bloated (*ba*). Crying, he thinks to himself: 'Why is my body like that? With worms penetrating the body and ants crawling all over it. I, who used to enjoy food; who used to be able to dance; who could move here and there, wherever.' Crying, the spirit returns to wherever he is, but on the seventh day [Mituq] he returns to the grave. At that time bloody pus is oozing out through 'the path' of the mouth and the nose and from all the

orifices (*getih darah sugul langan biwi erong saq beloang kun dalam awakn*) and the belly is bloated, as if pregnant. Now he cries even harder, thinking to himself: 'Why does this happen to me, why is my fate like this?' Well, it is at these moments that the spirit really needs to be helped with the prayers (*doa*) that we send over. Again, by the time of Nyiwa, he is allowed to see himself again. By that time the belly has exploded (*beda*). On Metang Dasa, the body is 'still wet' (*mansih basah*), but the rotting flesh is now starting to separate from the bones. But by the time of Nyatus 'only bones' are left (*tolang doang*). The fleshy parts have all disintegrated and merged with the earth (*jari tana*).'

This account centres on the twin process of bodily putrefaction and spiritual distillation, which is conceived as a temporal transformation from 'wet' flesh to 'dry' bones. Becoming disembodied is presented as being painful for the deceased, who is loath to accept that embodied worldly existence has ended. Kiyai Nalib insists that the living ought to help when the spirit gains awareness of the body's progressively wretched state and that these efforts should take the form of prayers (*doa*). By stressing how the spirit longs for his former life, Kiyai Nalib touches upon the issue that preoccupies many Sasak in relation to death: How to assist the deceased? And how is the required degree of separation between the living and the dead best achieved? Whereas Kiyai Nalib insists that prayers are sufficient to ease the spirit's distress, most villagers find that they also need an abundance of food to make the spirit accept a new existence in the grave. The moments that the *kiyai* singled out as particularly difficult transitions are precisely those times when the deceased's family arrange ceremonial rice meals accompanied by prayer (*roah*). Such meals are held on the third (Nelung), seventh (Mituq), ninth (Nyiwa), fortieth (Metang Dasa) and hundredth (Nyatus) days after death. Before discussing the significance of food in these formal events, I will first consider how some of my Sasak companions struggled to come to terms with the death of close kin in their everyday life and the significance of food in their endeavours.

Nurturing the Dead

Providing 'rice meals for the spirit' (*mi pelayar*) is one of the ways that bereaved family members express their 'love and longing' (*tunah kangnan*) for the deceased. In much the same way as she had cooked for her husband throughout their long marriage, Papuq Sip's widow continued to prepare three daily meals, consisting of steamed rice, a variety of side dishes and a glass of water for her spouse for the first nine days after his death. This was the time, she said, when she most strongly felt his lingering presence around the house. She placed the meal close to where her

partner used to sleep, and when the food or the water felt unusually 'cold' (*enyet*), she was pleased that the spirit had touched it. The widow continued to prepare meals for her husband, albeit more intermittently, until *Nyatus*, the feast which is held one hundred days after death. A few days before *Nyatus*, the widow confided to me that she hoped she would be able to stop preparing these meals once the big feast had taken place. Her statement, as I understood it, expressed a keen wish that her sense of grief would be less intense once *Nyatus* had been completed, as well as the hope that the spirit would henceforth remain in the grave. While initially the widow was pleased that the spirit returned home for meals, she eventually found the spirit's continued presence around the house bothersome.

The practice of preparing 'rice meals for the spirit', which reaffirms ties to the deceased by drawing the spirit into the house, is an act of nurturing relatedness. It is possible to see such flows of sustenance between the living and the recently deceased as the symbolic reaffirmation of affective and substantive ties that have been disrupted by death. But it seems to me that the serving of rice meals cooked on the house-hearth (*jangkih bale*) is more of a performative practice of actively fashioning food-based links to the deceased rather than an expressive statement of care. The notion of performativity is used here in a similar sense to that of Sahlins, who, in his discussion of 'performative structures', suggests that such structures

Photo 6.2 Women donate rice (*beras belangar*) for a funeral. Central Lombok, Indonesia, 1994. (Kari Telle)

are those 'which continuously make relationships out of practice' (1985: 28). That the recently deceased is included in the commensal routines of the domestic hearth group (*kuren*) is an example of the salience that the Sasak give to the role of nurturance, and more generally of commensality, in the processual constitution of kinship. The emphasis on feeding within the hearth group is clearly bound up with the assumption that relatedness is continuously 'under construction' (Carsten 2000: 18). When members of the deceased's hearth group present the spirit with rice meals they at once manifest their concern for the deceased and rely on food in order to create a mediated separation. For this separation to be successful, the living must ensure that the deceased has little, or preferably no, reason to feel 'slighted' (*ngeleng*). When a widow continues to prepare meals for her husband, she manifests her continued love and reluctance to part with him. Yet it is precisely such repeated acts of nurture that enable the spirit gradually to separate from loved ones.

The challenge of remembering the dead while also separating from them is confronted anew with each death. The difficulty of striking a balance between remembrance and the necessity of separation is a tension that suffuses many aspects of how Sasak Muslims face death. This experiential tension is premised on a deeply ambivalent relation towards the dead. Though it would be presumptuous to suggest that there are unanimously held conceptions regarding the nature of spirits, some fairly widely held assumptions regarding the nature of the recently dead can be discerned. For one, spirits are generally assumed to crave continued fellowship with cherished companions, whether they are related through ties of procreation and marriage or have developed affective ties through frequent interaction and co-residence. Secondly, it is assumed that the spirit's longing for loved ones poses a threat to the living. The tense and anxious atmosphere that frequently pervades the death scene can partly be attributed to these assumptions.⁶ Indeed, some Sasak are 'not brave enough' (*nden bani*) to look at, much less touch, a corpse. Yet others are adamant that 'each time a ghost bumps into or speaks to a living person, that person becomes ill with *ketemuq* – meeting a ghost' (Hay 2001: 114). Usually *ketemuq* is simply a sudden stomach pain, but it can take a variety of more or less severe physical forms. Nowadays, many Sasak reject the idea that the spirits may pose a danger to the living, seeing it as a remnant from when people were 'still stupid' (*mansih bodoh*) and ignorant of Islam. While this 'orthodox' Islamic stance is gaining ideological ground in the area of Central Lombok where I have worked (Telle 2000; 2003b), many aspects of local mortuary practices are intended to reduce the likelihood that the spirits will encroach upon the living.

Embodied experiences testifying to the permeability of barriers between the living and the dead inform the concern with how the mourners ought to respond

to death. For those who were close to the deceased, it is of vital importance that the spirit is able and willing to take up a new existence in the invisible realm. When four elderly persons in my hamlet, three of whom were next-door neighbours, died in the space of less than two months, many residents in the hamlet seemed rather distressed. Although neighbours reminded each other that the moment of death (*ajal*) is determined prior to birth, others took this series of deaths as evidence that spirits – much like human beings – do not like to be alone. Although I never heard anyone state outright that any of these deaths were caused by spirits craving companionship, this series of deaths alerted kin and neighbours to the importance of protecting themselves against the recently dead. When husband and wife die only days or a few weeks apart, it might be seen as a moving indication of the depth of their union. More disturbingly, the dead are felt to threaten the living with their proximity. Hence people become concerned when someone shows signs of overwhelming grief, such as crying incessantly, staring into space, ceasing to eat, and withdrawing from company. The experience of intense bereavement weakens the life force (*semangat*) and makes the person vulnerable to advances from spirits. Intensely bereaved persons are especially vulnerable to being ‘ensnared in impossible relations with the dead’ (Cannell 1999: 161). In the most severe cases, they may even want to ‘follow into death’ (*nurut mate*). To avoid such dire outcomes, the Sasak are mindful of their emotional responses to death and keep an eye on how others respond, taking care to involve those who have suffered a devastating loss in the pleasures and duties of sociality.

The Sasak tend to confront death by keeping the distraught family company for the first nine days after death, a time when the spirit’s ties to the living is still strong. Moments after the person has expired, bereft kin are plunged into hectic activity and the demands of near continual hosting allow them few opportunities to brood over their loss. If they are not already present when death occurs, neighbours (*batur gubuk*) will now stream to the house where the deceased is laid out. The strongest obligation neighbours have toward each other is to pay a ‘visit to the dead person’ (*jengo’ dengan mate*), whose spirit is believed to remain in the neighbourhood. While it is people who are linked to the deceased through marriage and procreative ties who are likely to be most deeply affected by the death, neighbours are also inevitably affected. As the corpse turns stiff, it begins to exude an eerie ‘coldness’ (*enyet*), which is most intense in the house where death occurred, but which threatens to spread to nearby houses in the hamlet. An extraordinary infusion of heat and vitality is needed to counteract this potentially deadly ‘coldness’. The lively presence of neighbours who pay their respects generates a pleasant ‘warm’ atmosphere (*suasana hangat*). Their presence comforts

and protects bereaved kin, even as it consoles the spirit who is pleased to hear the farewells of family and friends. The collective 'performance of care' (Becker 1995) by the community of mourners enables the deceased to depart from the living, confident of being missed and cared for. In aiding the spirit's passage into the invisible realm, the mourners also protect themselves against threatening encounters with the dead.

Feasting the Dead

Turning now to the formal sequence of mortuary feasting, I will outline the sequence of the funeral and the mortuary feasts before moving on to a discussion of how the deceased is commemorated through food. Food, as Appadurai (1981) has noted, is a medium of 'semiotic virtuosity', and a range of culturally configured meanings are embedded in food and food-related activities. The premise underlying the following discussion is that food may also be a vital substance in creating and sustaining interpersonal and cultural processes. 'Food', as Fajans has argued, 'is not only transformed, it is transformative' (1988: 143). By this she means that while food may often serve as a symbolic medium, it also 'acts as a transformative agent, constructing or changing the entities between which it mediates' (1988: 144–45). As she usefully insists, people manipulate food 'not merely to symbolize changes and differences in categories but to create and sustain many of these changes' (*ibid.*). These general observations are eminently applicable to the Sasak, who use food not only to sustain living bodies, but to nurture relatedness and to forge productive links to the spirits of the dead.

It is the deceased's family, traced through the 'man's path' (*langan mame*), who are principally responsible for arranging the funeral and who contribute the bulk of material and monetary resources required for the mortuary feasts. A married woman's funeral is usually arranged by her children, her husband and his kin group (*kadang waris*). Just as a woman after marriage is expected to 'follow her husband' (*nurut semame*) and settle virilocally, so she is supposed to be interred in her partner's ancestral grave complex (*gubuk kubur*). Not infrequently, however, it is far from obvious who will become the 'owners of the feast' (*épen gawe*) and the place of burial becomes a matter of dispute. Given the status that accrues to those who host the funeral and the importance of establishing a mutually beneficial relationship to the deceased, it is not surprising that conflicts over the right to feast and bury a person sometimes arise. Quarrels over corpses that pit agnates against affines can become quite heated, especially when they turn into public dramas in which the different parties emphasize how well they have cared for, literally

'fed' (*impan*), the deceased, while accusing their affines of a history of neglect. Although conflicts over sponsorship are frowned upon as somewhat unseemly, the refusal to part with the deceased that is expressed in such shows of affection is also held to please the spirit, who is an invisible witness to these exchanges.

Death, more than any other rite of passage, brings family members, neighbours as well as co-villagers together in a joint undertaking. I have already noted that neighbours are expected to stay around the house where death occurred for the first nine days and 'help out'. The obligation to give moral and practical assistance is more formalized in the case of *banjar* members, who must provide labour and material contributions when a member hosts a funeral. As a ritual association of mutual assistance, the *banjar* is involved with 'feasts of life' (*gawe urip*), such as circumcisions and weddings. But it is in conjunction with death that the *banjar* has its *raison d'être*, with members contributing in kind, cooking for the 'feasts of death' (*gawe mate*) and generally assisting the deceased's passage. Given the *banjar's* central role in all aspects of the practical execution of the feasts, it is not surprising that *banjar* members also consider themselves 'owners of the feast'. This linguistic usage underscores the close ties between the feast-sponsors and the *banjar*, who together share the responsibility for giving the deceased a proper exit from the realm of the living.

Banjar groups tend to be organized on a territorial basis, with members residing within the same or adjacent hamlets.⁷ As a rule it is men who are registered as *banjar* members, but they belong as parts of a relational whole. *Banjar* membership is reckoned in terms of component hearth groups (*kuren*) built around a husband-wife pair and their dependants. The *banjar's* organization replicates the domestic hearth group that is formed around the conjugal pair, the smallest complete social unit in Sasak society. In much the same way as the *banjar* is organized on a hearth group basis, the key ritual offices are filled by a man and a woman, whose collaboration evokes the unity of the married couple. Women from the *banjar* work under the supervision of the 'mother of the rice' (*inan beras* or *agan beras*), whose main task is to guard the rice supply, whereas the men are supervised by the 'father of meat and side dishes' (*aman daun* or *agan daun*), who is responsible for carving up the sacrificed animals, mixing spices and deciding which dishes to be prepared. This 'parental' couple is responsible for the two central, gendered substances that form the basis of the ceremonial meals, that is, rice (*beras*) and sacrificial meat (*jangan*). The ceremonial rice meal thus seems to represent the bringing together of male and female elements. In fact, the theme of male and female coming together permeates all food-related work in the context of feasts, and it is impossible to miss the reproductive connotations of this activity. The work of preparing, assembling

and consuming a range of ceremonial foods is laden with meanings pertaining to fertility. The overall organization of ceremonial cooking evokes the procreational process, being organized, as it were, to further the ongoing 'flow of life' (cf. Fox 1980a).

Preparations for cooking begin as soon as the person has been pronounced dead as it is customary to provide a meal for everyone who pays a condolence visit upon hearing news of the death. This hastily prepared meal takes place before the body is carried to a prayer house or the mosque for congregational worship. Another ceremonial meal (*roah susur tanah*) takes place in the cemetery after burial or later in the evening in the house of the funeral sponsors. The meals that take place on the third (*Nelung*), seventh (*Mituq*), and fortieth (*Metang Dasa*) day after death are usually modest affairs. They involve the deceased's most immediate family who eat together before a *kiyai* recites prayers on behalf of the deceased. By contrast, the meals prepared for the burial, the termination of the wake (*Nyiwa*) and the one-hundredth day feast (*Nyatus*) are intensely social affairs. These meals are prepared by the *banjar* and involve the full range of people with whom the deceased has been involved, including near and more distant kin, neighbours, and other acquaintances. The *banjar*'s obligation to work for the deceased ends once *Nyatus* has been performed. At this time, the sponsors are no longer restricted by mourning taboos and may arrange 'feasts of life', without being accused of having no love for the deceased by improperly mixing 'matters of life' with 'matters of death'.

While *Nyatus* is the final feast held for an individual, *Bukur* is an important two-day long celebration in which a patrilineal kin group (*kadang waris*) honours the ancestors by replacing old and missing headstones, before sharing a festive rice meal among the graves. *Bukur* also affords an opportunity to inter the bones of family members who temporarily have been buried elsewhere within the kin group's grave complex. *Bukur* is vaguely associated with marking one thousand days after death, for a minimum of one thousand days must have passed before a spirit may be included in the ritual. Although *Bukur* is held for named spirits, most of these spirits eventually lose their individuality and become treated as a collective of ancestors (cf. Cederroth 1988). When *Bukur* has been performed, the headstones stand close together in neat rows and present a striking image of unity. Although people emphasize how the performance of *Bukur* serves to unify the living with their ancestors, many kin groups find it rather difficult to collaborate in this endeavour. This is partly due to the high costs involved, which include money for headstones and large amounts of sacrificial meat and rice. Nevertheless, most families aspire to carry out *Bukur*, as it is only when this ritual has been performed

that the forebears have been given their dues and their descendants are no longer burdened by 'debt' (*utang*).

Much of the funeral revolves around settling debts, which obstruct the spirit's smooth passage into the invisible world because they tie the deceased to the living. The process by which the deceased is transformed into an ancestor is linked to the putrefactory process whereby the 'wet' corpse is turned into 'dry' and durable bones. The work of turning the deceased into a 'dry' ancestor hinges critically on whether or not the living settle the deceased's unfinished business and acknowledge their debts. Debts, ranging from unfulfilled promises to outstanding economic obligations, make it difficult, if not impossible, for the spirit to journey into the invisible realm. One of the most immediate concerns of the funeral sponsors is thus to identify and settle the deceased's debts. For each post-burial ceremony that passes without anyone claiming payment or compensation, the sponsors become more assured that the spirit's passage is unobstructed. Once Nyatus has been completed, creditors lose the right to claim debts. A different logic pertains to the debts the living owe to the deceased, notably debts of substance and sustenance. A child receives 'red blood' (*da' beaq*) from the mother and 'white blood' (*da' putiq*) from the father, as well as gifts of nurturance through milk and prolonged feeding. Those who have been the beneficiaries of such procreational and substantial gifts

Photo 6.3 Women from the hamlet *banjar* preparing food at a mortuary feast. Central Lombok, Indonesia, 1998. (Kari Telle)

of nurture are expected to 'remember' (*engat*) their indebtedness throughout their lifetime, as such debts can never be effaced, only acknowledged. The deceased's children and other recipients of prolonged nurture are thus particularly obliged to look after the welfare of dead relatives. Assuming responsibility for the funeral and contributing material resources to make it a memorable affair is to publicly acknowledge debts that may never be entirely repaid. As public testimonies to the debts the living owe the dead, the mortuary feasts reveal the social person in his or her absence. The extent to which the deceased is fully revealed hinges on the extent to which bereaved kin 'still remember' (*mansih engat*) their debts.

Acts of Commemoration

Food holds a privileged role in the commemorative process, whereby a public memory of the social person is constructed. The logic of Sasak commemorative practices, in which a fairly direct equation is made between the person and movable wealth, is reminiscent of the significance of mortuary exchanges in Melanesian societies where, 'the problem set by death', according to Strathern, 'lies in the necessary substitution and replacement of the person by means of gifts of wealth objects (cf. Weiner 1980)' (1981: 205–6). In Sasak memorial feasts, it is above all food which is made to serve as 'concrete 'evidence' of what a life and a death have come to in social terms, but without reducing a life to this' (Battaglia 1990: 188). The 'owners of the feast' contribute the bulk of the resources for the mortuary feasts. Above all, this means that they must provide rice and meat, which are the two most indispensable ingredients for the memorial meals. No funeral in the community is considered complete without the sacrifice of at least several chickens or goats, but preferably one or more cows or water buffaloes. The multi-layered significance of sacrifice in connection with death has been treated more extensively elsewhere (Telle 2000). Here I will simply note that the act of wresting life from a large animal endowed with spirit (*nyawa*) is among the most prestigious ways that the funeral sponsors objectify their sense of loss, not least because blood sacrifice is also held to provide the spirit with an escort in the afterlife. In combination with meat, rice, which is the symbolically important core staple and traditional measure of wealth, is used to construct a collective memory of the deceased.

The practice of storing bundles of rice in the granary with the explicit intent that it will be consumed during the mortuary meals testifies to the importance of rice in the commemorative process. Prior to the introduction of rapid-growing rice varieties in the early 1970s, the yearly harvest was usually stored in the granary (*alang*) located in front of the domestic dwelling. The bottom layer of rice was then

known as the 'provision for the afterlife' (*sango'n akherat*). This rice layer, older consultants explained, should only be removed from the granary upon the death of the male head of the hearth group. Should the 'mother of the house' (*inan bale*) die before her spouse, it was not, in their view, entirely appropriate to use this portion for the funeral. Implicit in this view is the assumption that the husband has the primary responsibility for bringing resources into the house, whereas the wife is responsible for safeguarding and processing the resources that the husband has obtained in the effort to seek a livelihood (*mite*), commonly spoken of simply as 'looking for food' (*boja' mangan*). The elderly informants with whom I discussed the significance of the 'provision for the afterlife', were adamant that even when the hearth group was threatened by 'hunger' (*mejan*), this portion would only be touched once all other solutions, such as going into debt and borrowing rice from those who were better off, had been tried. Clearly, people would endure great hardship before depriving the hearth group's head of the rice that was meant to be feasted on in the funeral and to sustain the spirit in the afterlife.

As we saw at the outset of this chapter, emptying the granary of its contents is precisely what Papuq Sip's wife did in order to give her partner a memorable funeral. The bundles of 'red rice' (*pare beaq ganggas*) that the old widow now took down from the large granary were the harvest of their own hard work and had grown on fields that been passed down from Papuq Sip's forbears. It was therefore fitting, the widow explained, 'that some rice from the house should follow along into death' (*adin araq beras bale saq milu'n*). This rice had been placed in the granary more than a decade earlier with the explicit intention of using it for the funeral. Now that the rice was removed on the occasion of Papuq Sip's death, the old granary would remain empty – probably for good. The rice was of the traditional kind that is cut and threshed by hand, hence the stamping sound of the rice pestles going up and down alerted hamlet members to the forthcoming feasts. This sound, which is nowadays rarely heard in the community where most granaries stand empty, announced that the deceased was deeply mourned and cared for. The fact that the couple had prepared for their eventual demise by setting aside resources for the funeral effectively made Papuq Sip the retrospective host of his own funeral. Indeed, Papuq Sip appeared as a most generous host, as he had also dedicated a mature cow to be sacrificed for the funeral, a sacrifice that the widow decided to 'pair' with another large sacrifice at the final mortuary feast, one hundred days after the death.

It is not only the funeral sponsors who provide rice for the funeral: most of the women who pay a condolence visit (*belangar*) are also likely to contribute some rice. Women who were at all acquainted with the deceased pay visits of condolence

as soon as they hear news of the death, and most of them will return to celebrate the end of the wake and the termination of the mortuary sequence. In Sasak society, women are the principal providers of meals, a role they retain when someone dies. Only women who are in charge of their own hearth will *belangar*, but their gift is given on behalf of the entire hearth group. Men may try to put in a word about what and how much to give, but rarely do so, as this would be an intrusion into the female domain of domestic budgeting, which includes the management of food-exchanges between houses. By providing a condolence gift women manifest their relationship to the deceased and tangibly express their sympathy with the funeral sponsors. In principle, everything that is necessary for the preparation of the memorial meals may be given as a condolence gift (*pelangar*) with the exception of meat, which is associated with men and therefore inappropriate for women's prestations. Sugar, noodles, cooking oil, spices and tobacco are sometimes contributed, but the vast majority of women contribute rice, the nourishing source of life that is symbolically associated with women. The donated rice (*beras belangar*) is received in the yard by representatives of the funeral sponsors, then rinsed, poured into 100 kilo bags and stored in the house. Not infrequently, the sponsors ask neighbours to keep the donated rice until it is needed during the memorial meals, thereby signalling that they will not appropriate the rice for their everyday consumption.

For each memorial meal a portion of the 'rice from the house' (*beras bale*) provided by the funeral sponsors is mixed with the rice that has been offered as condolence gifts (*beras belangar*). Irrespective of the actual amount of rice that is donated, the 'mother of the rice', who is responsible for safeguarding the rice supply, will make sure that the *beras belangar* lasts until the Nyatus ceremony that terminates the mortuary celebrations. At that time, only a few handfuls of this donated rice may be left. What matters, however, is not the quantity but the fact that people are fed some grains of rice that is closely associated with, indeed emblematic of, the deceased as a social person. In fact, people often seem to recall a person's funeral in terms of the number of rice sacks that were piled up. One might say that these gifts of rice become a replacement of the social person, who is remembered and symbolically reconstituted as the staple food. The gradual consumption of the rice that has become available for the memorial feasts evokes the process of decomposition that the corpse is undergoing in the grave, a process whereby 'dry' durable bones associated with potency separate from the 'wet' flesh. This putrefactory process is said to have been completed at the time of Nyatus, the time when all the rice and other articles of consumption intended for use in mortuary feasts should be completely finished off.

At the conclusion of Nyatus, the *kyiai* who has been in charge throughout the funeral dispatches the spirit into 'invisible world'. In order to assist the spirit's departure, many of the person's possessions, supplemented with new ones, are handed over to the *kiyai*. Known as *patuk*, these items include the basic necessities of life: a set of clothes, a prayer outfit, a sleeping mat and pillow, an oil lamp, cooking utensils, pots and pans, oil and spices, as well as items that were particularly treasured by the deceased. The *kiyai* receives these items, as well as large trays with cakes, fruit and food, as a remuneration for his services, but these possessions are ultimately destined to reach the spirit. While the *kiyai* keeps the material manifestation of these objects, he must transmit their 'inner' essence (*isin*) to the spirit by way of prayers. When the small procession that carries the deceased's possessions departs from the house, those who are gathered call out: 'Keep walking! Don't return home! (*Lampah terus! Kendeq ule!*)' Their words are addressed to the spirit, who from now on is no longer welcome in the house or in the hamlet unless invited. By now the mourners have done their utmost to assist the deceased's exit from the world of the living and made it possible for the spirit to join the ancestral spirits.

My understanding of the dynamics of mortuary consumption is that by eating food that is intimately associated with the deceased, the mourners also bring to conclusion the existence of a social person with numerous ties to the living. Consumption thus becomes part of a broadly conceived nurturing process whereby the mourners aid the deceased's distillation into an ancestor by presenting tangible evidence of their relationship to the deceased, hence objectifying their sense of loss and thereafter consuming their objectification. Over the course of the memorial feasts, a memory of the deceased as a social person is fabricated through the food. Writing about the dynamic of Gawan mortuary rites, Munn (1986) has argued that they 'involve the creation of a temporary memorialization so that, paradoxically, forgetting can be generated' (1986: 166). In the Sasak case, it is less appropriate to speak of forgetting because the central objective of the commemorative practices is to effect a gradual separation of the living from the deceased, which potentially turns the dead into potent sources of support and blessing. For this separation to be successful, the mourners must make sure that the deceased has little reason to feel 'slighted'. By giving the deceased a lavish funeral, dispatching some of their possessions to the afterlife through the *kiyai*, and by continuing to provide food and prayers for their well-being, the deceased's kin can make reasonably sure that the dead will be content in their graves and not bother them unduly.

Nurturance and the Spectre of Neglect

In much the same way as the Sasak rely heavily on food to assist the deceased's passage towards ancestorhood, they also use food to cultivate good relationships with their forebears. To cultivate a desirable relationship with the dead requires considerable dedication. Ancestral spirits, those who are traced through the 'woman's path' (*langan nine*) as well as those traced through the 'man's path' (*langan mame*), easily become alert to signs that they are forgotten, such as when their descendants rarely visit the graves, fail to notify them of important happenings, or neglect to invite them for feasts. When the spirits feel neglected, they may begin to seek out people and roam around in their former neighbourhoods. The encounters that result when the dead initiate contact on their own tend to put those who are the object of the spirit's attention in danger. To prevent such undesired encounters from happening, people strive to 'remember' (*engat*) the dead during their everyday lives, by praying for their posthumous well-being and regularly visiting their graves. On such visits, villagers usually bring along some material tokens such as betel, cigarettes and tobacco. On more special occasions, hearth group members will also share a complete meal at the graveside. By providing food and other articles of consumption for their dead kin, the Sasak try to establish a good relationship with the dead, a relationship that is under the control of the living. Having said as much, I have indicated some of the reasons why most villagers are reluctant to refrain from bringing food to the graves, which is precisely what reform-oriented Muslim leaders currently urge them to do.

In March 1994, several hundred people gathered in one of the village cemeteries to celebrate Lebaran, the day that marks the end of the month-long Muslim fast. The day is characterized by conviviality, visiting and the hearty consumption of delicious food. As they visit the graves, most families bring trays of food, complete with rice and relishes, cakes and fruit, whereas the more 'orthodox' families simply bring a water kettle to pour 'cooling' water on the headstones. The mood that prevails on Lebaran is one of gaiety and relief now that the arduous fast is over. For many, however, gaiety is tempered by a sense of regret, for while the spirits are permitted to return to their earthly homes during the holy month of Ramadan they must return to their graves on Lebaran. The meal in the cemetery thus marks the spirit's re-entry into the graves. That morning Kiyai Nalib, an active and well-respected ritual specialist, made a brief speech before he led the congregation in a series of prayers. The core of his address was as follows:

Those who are dead will not eat (*medaran*) again. What the dead eat are our prayers (*doa*) and verses from the Holy Scripture, the Qur'anic verses. It is

Photo 6.4 Older women prepare the ingredients for chewing betel at a funeral. Central Lombok, Indonesia, 1997. (Kari Telle)

our prayers and the verses from the Qur'an that become their food (*ayat ayat jari mi daun*).⁸

Kiyai Nalib then went on to say that since the dead no longer have physical bodies, food is of no use to them. What the spirits need, he explained, is to be provided with *pahala*, or spiritual merit, to ease the 'torment of the grave' (*siksa kubur*) that the dead are likely to suffer as punishment for having been lax in carrying out obligations of worship. Warning the audience against placing food on the graves, he concluded by urging those assembled to pray for the dead to generate spiritual merit.

By stressing the importance of prayer, reform-oriented Muslims challenge longstanding ritual sensibilities predicated on the assumption that a combination of material and verbal elements are crucial for ritual actions to be efficacious. When Kiyai Nalib states that 'it is our prayers and the Qur'anic verses that become their food', he affirms the importance of nurturing the dead but changes the meaning of what counts as nourishment from food to potent words. What is especially noteworthy about this statement is not that he denies that spirits can partake of food, but the logic of substitution that is introduced. Having related yet distinct properties, both food and words are usually involved whenever Sasak Muslims

communicate with the spirits. This intertwining of objects and spoken words is precisely what neo-traditionalist reformers seek to undo (Telle 2000). Over the past three decades, Muslim preachers have repeatedly urged villagers to refrain from bringing food to the graves. Although their efforts have had some impact on local practices, most villagers keep bringing food to the graves on Lebaran and at other times of the year. In effect, they refuse to accept that the substance that sustains life and substantiates ties of relatedness should be withheld from the dead.

At present, most villagers in Bon Raja are reluctant to accept the idea that the spirits are content simply to receive prayers. This reluctance stems partly from uncertainty as to how to phrase prayers correctly and the inability to read Arabic prayer manuals. But their reluctance to relate to the dead only through the medium of prayer is not primarily due to a sense of linguistic incompetence, but more fundamentally concerns what counts as efficacious and moral action. Indeed, the idea of addressing the dead without material objects strikes many Sasak as both arrogant and preposterous. A young man explained to me that when he approaches the graves, he wants 'to bring something along, rather than show up 'empty-handed' (*ajung ime*), like the most destitute beggar.' It is more in keeping with the norms of respectful behaviour to act through a combination of words, gestures and material substances. While certain kinds of speech are deemed extremely potent, people tend to be suspicious about words that stand alone. On their own, words carry connotations of deceit or they are dismissed as 'light' (*ringan*) and inconsequential. To carry communicative weight, words must be accompanied by material tokens. Keane's assessment of the relationship between words and objects in Anakalang on the island of Sumba resonates with Sasak notions of what constitutes potent action. In Anakalang, Keane observes, 'things are rarely left to speak for themselves and words transmitted without accompanying objects are considered to lack communicative efficacy' (1994: 605). The assumption that speech ought to be accompanied by material tokens runs across diverse domains, including how traditionalist Sasak Muslims relate to their dead.

For these Sasak, 'remembering' the dead involves visiting the grave bringing along articles of consumption and sharing a meal at the graveside. By approaching the dead through material tokens, people appeal to norms of respectful behaviour that stress the value of deferential mediation through material or human intermediaries. By taking the trouble to visit the graves and bring along cooked food and other items of hospitality, people demonstrate to themselves and to others that they still 'remember', remembrance being an intentional act manifested through behaviour. After the actual visit is over, plates with betel and cigarettes are left

on the graves where they remain as evidence that the dead are still cared for. Moreover, such items, as Keane notes, 'formalize the act of giving' (1997: 89) and serve as proof 'of words and intentions that remain after the moment of speaking and giving' (*ibid.*). When reform-oriented Muslim teachers dismiss the practice of offering food to spirits as misguided idolatry (see Telle 2000), they also reject the significance of food and other articles of consumption as media of deference and communication.

The manner in which food is offered to the spirits encodes values of respect and deference. Sitting down next to the graves, a senior woman or man burns some palm sugar or incense and calls upon the spirits to descend through the 'path' (*langan*) created by the wafting smoke. Once the spirits have been invited, people retreat a little away from the gravesite. When the smoke subsides, they move closer to the graves and help themselves to the food, with everyone eating from the same tray in the style known as *begebung*. Now that the food has been offered the spirits, who possibly have consumed its 'inner' content or essence (*isin* or *sari*), their descendants eat the gross, material remains. Having been dedicated to the dead, the food has acquired the status of ritual leftovers (*lungsuran*). Through the simple gesture of offering food, a critical difference is thus set up between the spirits, who are honoured by eating first, and their descendants, who, by finishing leftovers, affirm their indebtedness and dependence. The connotations associated with eating leftovers are ambiguous as the consumers thereby manifest their inferior status. Yet by ingesting a substance that may possibly have been infused with spiritual presence, they also acquire some boon. By eating ritual leftovers, the Sasak literally incorporate the 'blessings of the grave' (*berkat kubur*) into their bodies. The Balinese practice of eating leftovers of food that has been offered to divinities, spirits and ancestors, which is also known by the term *lungsuran*, has been characterized by Wiener (1995: 107) as forming 'a kind of an alimentary structure of kinship'. Similarly, the Sasak practice of eating food that has been offered to the dead is an 'incorporated practice' (Connerton 1989) of remembrance, which reaffirms food-based links between ascending and descending generations through the ingestion of substances imbued with life-enhancing qualities, or 'blessings'.

By offering food to the dead, the Sasak also try to forestall frightening and potentially very dangerous encounters with the spirits. By providing the ancestral spirits with food and other items of consumption, people try to reduce the chance that the spirits will feel 'slighted' (*ngeleng*) and 'hungry' (*lapah*). Having crossed over into the invisible realm, spirits are unencumbered by the physical constraints that hamper most people. While the earliest ancestors are reputed to be far more potent than the more recently dead, all spirits are assumed to have the capacity to

Photo 6.5 Gathering among the graves. Central Lombok, Indonesia, 1997. (Kari Telle)

‘curse’ (*meram*) and to make the lives of their descendants miserable and difficult. Nothing angers ancestors more than when their offspring alienate rice fields or treat heirlooms without respect. Those who sell ancestral land and heirloom valuables risk provoking the ancestors to inflict a debilitating curse. A dramatic fall in worldly fortune and ill health are commonly attributed to an ancestral curse inflicted as a form of punishment. The slow and painful wasting away of a person’s life force and physical body may also be attributed to an ancestral curse. No matter how well or how much such a person eats, the body wastes away, ages prematurely, leaving the person ‘skinny and dried up’ (*kurus krempeng*). The symptoms that a person has been cursed are quite varied, but this embodied state always implies loss and diminishment. In the most serious cases, neglected and ‘hungry’ spirits seem to eat away at the bodies of their descendants, or they may thwart their efforts to secure a livelihood, reducing them to poverty and destitution.

When ancestors feel neglected they may chastise their descendants by cursing them, but in other cases they are simply overcome by longing for human fellowship. As a result, they begin to seek out loved ones and to roam around in their former neighbourhoods, frightening and making people sick as they accidentally bump into the spirit (*ketemuq*). When the dead begin to initiate encounters with the living, those who are visited are almost inevitably in danger. Prompt efforts are therefore taken to determine the spirit’s identity and to ascertain why the spirit is

seeking out family members. Those who are disturbed are likely to be advised to pay a visit to the grave, or urged to arrange a ceremonial rice meal accompanied by prayer for the 'hungry' spirit. Under such circumstances, villagers may also decide to turn over a few of the deceased's possessions to a *kiyai*, in order that he may dedicate and transmit these items to the spirit by way of prayers (cf. Telle 2000; Hay 2001). These different ways of handling unwanted visitations by spirits are essentially efforts to replace uncontrolled and dangerous encounters with the dead with controlled encounters, initiated by the living. These practices direct our attention to the ambivalence that characterises the relationship many Sasak sustain with the dead. They also illustrate that as the Sasak negotiate this ambivalent relationship, food is the favoured medium for attempting to bring the dead under control, as well as the source that generates ancestral 'blessings'.

Concluding Remarks

It has often been noted that symbolically important staple foods are those selected for commensality (Janowski, introduction this volume; Ohnuki-Tierney 1993). This is also the case among the Sasak, for whom the daily sharing of rice meals cooked on the hearth constructs and maintains ties between the different generations that comprise the hearth group. The value attached to feeding within the hearth group is grounded in the assumption that durable and affective bonds are powerfully constituted through the medium of food. To care for someone is synonymous with feeding that person, but such sharing inevitably implies an asymmetry between the providers and the recipients. Food and the idiom of feeding are used to create indebtedness: gifts of food create commitments that in turn enable the feeders to make demands on the fed. Such food-based ties continue to operate after death, when those who have been fed are expected to 'remember' those who have nourished them by providing the dead with tokens of hospitality such as betel and tobacco and with complete meals on more formal occasions.

A notable feature of how the Sasak confront death is that the medium of food is implicated throughout the entire process of transforming the dead into ancestors who are capable of bestowing 'blessings.' The implication of these practices suggests that food occupies a place at the very centre of Sasak social reproduction. The range of food-related activities that have been described in this chapter, such as feeding the dying person steamed rice, serving rice meals for the spirit, providing resources in kind for the mortuary feasts, bringing food to the graves, are all part of a broadly conceived process of nurturance that enables the spirit

to depart from the realm of the living. In fact, the deceased's transformation into an ancestor cannot be fully completed without the cumulative 'performance of care' by the community of mourners, which includes affinal and consanguineal kin, neighbours as well as *banjar* members. Once the final mortuary feast that is arranged for an individual has been concluded, however, neighbours and *banjar* members no longer have obligations towards the deceased, who has joined the ranks of the ancestors.

While the work that is performed in conjunction with death is predominantly couched in an idiom of care, I have argued that traditionalist Sasak Muslims also rely on food to make the permeable boundary between the living and the dead less porous. In effect, people use the medium of food to assert a degree of control over the dead, thereby protecting themselves against encounters with the spirits that might threaten their embodied integrity. It appears to be former providers of food and nurture, such as mothers, fathers and grandparents, who are most likely to seek out the living and who appear in dreams complaining of being 'thirsty' and 'hungry'. Such encounters reveal the considerable ambivalence that animates relations to predecessors rendered potent by virtue of their death. They also reveal that the feeding relationships that exist between members of different generations are highly charged. For traditionalist Sasak Muslims, food remains the privileged substance that is used to negotiate this ambivalent relationship and to create mutually beneficial relationships that transcend the divide between the living and the dead. Food is, in effect, the substance whereby the Sasak most tangibly incorporate ancestral blessings into their own bodies. For the Sasak, relatedness is continuously 'under construction', and this process continues after death through quotidian acts of feeding and flows of substance.

Notes

1 This chapter is based on sixteen months of fieldwork carried out over three periods between 1993 and 2001. I have attended fifteen funerals and been briefly involved in at least five more in a village I call Bon Raja, which is located in the administrative district of Jonggat, Central Lombok.

2 There are approximately 80,000 Balinese on Lombok. Most of them are descendants of the Balinese who established themselves on the island after the ruler of Karangasem assumed political control over Lombok in 1740 (van der Kraan 1980).

3 For a more detailed history of the Islamization of Lombok and the protracted conflicts between different Muslim groups, see Cederroth 1981; Ecklund 1979; McVey 1995; Ryan 1999.

4 *Ruh* refers to the life-sustaining essence that animates a person during life, while the *nyawa* is what continues to exist after death, after which it is known as *arwah*.

5 Robert Hertz in 1960 [1907] was the first to draw attention to how widespread this notion is in Indonesian societies. See Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Chambert Loir and Reid (eds.) 2002.

6 The tense atmosphere after some deaths is also linked to the problem of foul smell and fear of witches (*tau selaq*) who are attracted to the corpse. See Telle 2003b.

7 Two kinds of *banjar* are active in Central Lombok. In the 'old' or 'big' *banjar* (*banjar toaq/beleq*) membership passes from father to son, whereas in the smaller 'hamlet' *banjars* (*banjar gubuk*) membership is acquired by paying a stipulated entrance fee.

8 Sasak has three levels of speech. The term *medaran* (to eat) is used when addressing or referring to those of superior rank or status.

7 NURTURING MEMORIES

The cycle of mortuary meals in an East Indonesian village

Timo Kaartinen

The aim of this chapter is to describe and analyse practices of producing, sharing, and giving food in Banda Eli, a Muslim village in the Kei Islands of East Indonesia.¹ My focus is on a cycle of mortuary meals in which the relations of nurturance within the house extend to the whole village. In addition to playing out relations of reciprocity among the villagers, the sharing of food in this context is a means of continuing the life of society in the circumstances of death. The broader issue raised by the social and semiotic qualities of food in this ritual context is that of temporality – the orientations toward past and future events which people assume in practical activities. How does the sharing of food contribute to historicizing the balances and hierarchies of social life?

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the use of food in the mortuary rituals of Banda Eli, a Muslim village in East Indonesia. While the cycle of memorial meals in this village is found in various other Muslim communities, they involve a type of starch food which is the emblem of local society and the staple of its diet. *Embal* is a variety of cassava cultivated in shifting fields throughout the Kei Islands, and it is commonly stored and used in the form of dried biscuits produced after the cassava root has been grated, washed, and heated or dried in order to eliminate its natural content of cyanide. Along with various root crops and bananas, it is a basic item in the everyday diet of Kei. What sets *embal* apart is its durability and hardness. Biscuits of *embal* can be served simply as food to an assembly of people, but on special occasions – notably the final rites of mourning – they are made into bundles and their numbers calculated. On such occasions, the biscuits appear not so much as

simply a food substance but as objects. In contrast with shared food, which is a common, unifying substance, objects have a differentiating and mediating effect on society. The various forms in which food appears in the context of mortuary rituals can therefore help us understand the logic by which social relationships are transformed by death.

According to classical anthropological interpretations, death rituals are simultaneously a means for 'disaggregating' the deceased person from society, and for 'reinstalling' society by allocating his or her roles to others (Hertz 1960: 77, cf. Sather 2003: 177). Radcliffe-Brown understood these processes in terms of a psychological mechanism in which mourners – those people with the closest relationships to the dead person – are subject to the same fear and disaffection as that evoked by the presence of the dead body. This situation is resolved when the deceased is completely absorbed into the spirit world and the mourners welcomed back among the living by rites which reinforce the solidarity of society at large (Radcliffe-Brown 1964: 293).

In Radcliffe-Brown's view society is constituted by sentiments which people evoke in each other through their presence. The problem with this view is that it fails to take account of the contrasting orientations towards future and past events among people in the same collectivity. People remember, miss and mourn for other people even in their absence, and the hope of their return constitutes a diversity of experiential horizons which are as relevant for the continuing existence of society as the affection which co-present people feel towards each other. In the present ethnographic context, such diversity is made even more relevant because of the differentiating effect of absences and travels on society. As Nancy Munn argues in reference to the Gawa islanders off eastern New Guinea, travel may be meaningful as the context of practices which expand the spatial and temporal scale at which subjects become involved in relations with significant others. In such practices, the ability to transform and sustain others' recognition of the self means also the possibility of producing one's own value (Munn 1986: 15). Although the long absence of a person may come close to social death, absence does not merely cause anxiety over the fragile vitality and existence of human beings (as death is claimed to do), but creates conditions for achieving self-certainty and transcending personal relationships into a more lasting value.

In the society which is the focus of this chapter, there is a certain parallel between the ritual responses to death and to absence since each marks a period for the symbolic concentration of life-force in the form of food which is stored inside the house. When society is 'reinstated' during mortuary rituals this food is put back into circulation. Contrary to Radcliffe-Brown, however, I argue that sharing this

food does not simply reinforce a sense of mutual solidarity and affection among co-present people, but suspends this sense and transforms it into a resource for nurturing, value-creating processes in the future.

Funerals thus do not have to be seen as devices for maintaining society as a static entity. Their symbolism brings the experience of localized personal life into articulation with other spatial and temporal frameworks: the life-sustaining presence of ancestors and the value-creating absence of social others. At some stage, each of the two involves the anticipation of a potential future outcome by nurturing the memory of someone who is no longer present. In this chapter I develop this argument in reference to the use of *emba* in death rituals and address such questions as: How do feeding and nurture articulate the memories of personal life with collective categories and values? What is the role of food in concentrating and releasing value? If food is primarily a symbol for shared bodily substance, can it also contribute to social differentiation and the awareness of historical events?

The Production of Value

According to local traditions and historical sources, the village of Banda Eli was founded by refugees who fled the Dutch conquest of the spice-producing Banda Islands in Central Maluku in 1621 and settled in the remote eastern part of the archipelago.¹ The population of Banda Eli during my research was around 2,200, including people who had been absorbed into the village society from the surrounding Keiese villages. Although the village is part of the political and ritual system of chieftainships which covers all of Kei, it has a language of its own and the village practises Islam, which the ancestors already knew before their exile from Banda.

People of Banda Eli do not observe the elaborate system of marriage payments which is one of the emblematic customs of Kei society. Marriage is generally followed by the couple's residence with the wife's parents for one year or longer, which means that their first children are usually born there. At the end of their bride service most married men aspire to return with their wife and children to their father's house and assume the status of *amakaka* – a senior man with the right to represent his lineage in public meetings. In order to do so most men spend some time away from the village as traders or migrant labourers, collecting the wealth needed to build their own house or restore the house of their birth. During this period the absent husband has obligations to different parties: his own siblings and parents as well as his in-laws who still take care of his children. His return to his father's house is not certain; instead, he may end up living permanently

with his in-laws, or with a family into which he was adopted as a child. The man's ambivalent identity during his absence makes him a potential source of wealth and recognition for different categories of people. Remembering someone who is away and who might still return one day is a significant cultural theme because it expands the value of personal relations among those villagers who are associated with the traveller.

By a process reminiscent of Nancy Munn's (1986) idea of value transformation, the 'heat' and sense of indebtedness which people feel in their personal relationships is converted into a more permanent form of value. Insofar as the returning traveller is able to achieve a prominent status in the village his achievements are recognized as having a precedent in the travels of the founding ancestors. By the same token, his reconstructed or re-occupied paternal house acquires value as a social and historical category. While the wealth and recognition achieved by the traveller connects him metonymically to sea-faring ancestors, the house is the site of life-sustaining rituals which are voyages in a metaphoric sense. Taken together, travelling and nurturing generate a synecdochic image of the house as a nexus of agency and value in which ongoing events and the permanent existence of society appear as preconditions for each other. Such awareness is indicated by discourse in which the 'house' may refer either to the dwelling of a married couple and their kin or to one of the ancestral 'great houses'. The house in this latter sense is a collective category defined by its claim to a chiefly title and a fixed position in the village, and persons and groups are said to 'participate' in its various attributes.

As Susan McKinnon points out in her ethnography of Tanimbar, the logic by which human beings are separated from the house to signify productivity and value is not limited to male mobility and travel (McKinnon 1991: 83). In Banda Eli, elopements are the primary example of events in which women's absence can have similar structural consequences in generating awareness of the house as a collective and historical category. While marriages normally begin with a formal proposition to the bride's house it often happens that a girl becomes pregnant or runs away with a lover, thus forcing her relatives to accept the spouse of her choice. Instead of acknowledging the girl's agency in doing so her relatives react by declaring their 'embarrassment' and collective 'weakness' which has made possible the girl's capture by an outsider. This discourse draws a parallel between elopement and warfare, because each involves seizing something valuable from an opposing party. In this sense, elopement brings about a radical 'othering' of the rest of society in relation to the woman's natal house. The close relatives of an eloped woman call themselves *umbeter*, Keiese for 'grand-children of the house-mound', in reference to the category defined by the collective sense of embarrassment and weakness.

Restoring normal relations between the girl's and the boy's family requires the payment of material 'tokens' and 'fines' by the male side through which they acknowledge the eloped woman's value. By marking her absence from her natal house, the tokens objectify the relationship of the groups as part of the permanent constitution of the village society. When no settlement is reached the woman's relatives refer to her as 'foreign' – a word which suggests an analogy with the male traveller's absence in the 'foreign' lands of trade. In an analogy to the ever-greater wealth anticipated from a male traveller during his prolonged absence, the eloped woman is remembered as a potential source of recognition for her parents' house through her entire life.

A similar logic operates in other situations in which long travels enhance the fame and recognition of a house. In the past, the objective of a long sea voyage was often to acquire valuable trade objects in the form of which the traveller's fame was objectified and incorporated into the house. The yearly trading trips of Keiese boats to the commercial centres of Central Maluku used to be conceptualised as raids upon enemies, and the objects yielded by them were thought of as captured war booty. Over a large area, such trips were accompanied by a ritual during which a close relative (often the wife) of the traveller stayed in the house to 'sit and fast', suspending the usual relations of food exchange with other villagers (Geurtjens 1910; Barraud 1979: 20; McKinnon 1991: 80). A similar ritual is still practised in Banda Eli when a senior member of the house undertakes the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.

The role of food in the travel context gives an important clue to the significance of food in mortuary rituals. In her argument about inalienable possessions – the concentrated value which motivates exchange – Annette Weiner (1992: 38) argues that 'food is the most ineffectual inalienable possession because its biological function is to release energy rather than store it'. This argument is understandable in the context of Melanesian gift exchange in which food is ideally exchanged for more durable valuables with which travelling men seek to identify themselves in order to make their 'name'. The difference between this and the present context is that the people of Maluku do not emphasize food as a means of attracting guests through hospitality, but rather of enhancing their own mobility. Danilyn Rutherford (2003: 47) suggests the same for Biak, an island off West Papua, in which well-dressed women in the airport lounge were seen to give boxes of taro to travelling relatives. When I left my field-site for trips outside Kei I always received unreasonably large boxes of *embal* as travel supplies. The ban on exchange between the traveller's house and the rest of the community implied that similar supplies had to be stored in the house to sustain the secluded relatives throughout the voyage.

The travel supplies of *embal* are also important as an indication of the capacity of the house to maintain the awareness of house members of each other as individual persons. However far away they may be, their life force remains concentrated in the house, and it is extended to them through a poetically expressed awareness which people of Banda Eli call 'remembering'. The heap of *embal* which enables the house to suspend its interaction with other villagers is a material symbol of the transcendental, productive unity of men and women (McKinnon 1991: 83).

The power of 'remembering' to alter the temporal orientation of house members is shown by the paradoxical difference between the memory of people who never return from their travels and the memory of those who die and lie buried in the village. The problem I faced in my genealogical inquiries was that the personal identities of most deceased persons beyond two or three generations above the eldest living people were forgotten. An exception to this rule was people who had moved and died elsewhere. A village chief arrested by the Dutch in the 1860s never returned to Kei, but his descendants said that a travelling acquaintance had met a probable relative – somebody who looked like him – in the Javanese city of Semarang some years before. The memory of dead travellers is kept alive by photographs, clothes and other objects retrieved from abroad, as if to maintain the value-creating relationship to the places where they went.

Photo 7.1 Counted, bundled biscuits of *embal* on display at the meal which completes the mortuary cycle. (Timo Kaartinen)

I write about the importance of food in the context of travel because it offers a clue to the role of *embal* in mortuary rituals. As long as it is stored inside the house it maintains hope of the traveller's possible return. The keeping of food stocks during the travel ritual is in obvious contrast with the release of stocks of *embal* at the end of the funerary rites. Before giving a full account of mortuary rituals, I will describe briefly the production and consumption of food in other situations.

Eating in Ritual Contexts

Almost every day of my fieldwork in Banda Eli I was interrupted by a semi-formal ritual meal in one of the neighbouring houses. Most invitations were casual and came a few minutes before I was expected to go to the house hosting the meal. At the house a long piece of cloth was spread out on the front room floor, and the guests – mostly senior men – sat down on either side of the cloth on which the food and drinks were served. The place of honour was at the far end of the cloth, as far as possible from the door. It was reserved for the *imam* or whoever read the prayers which usually, but not always, preceded the meal. Eating was accompanied by relaxed conversation; drinks and cigarettes were served, and after a quarter of an hour the guests were on their way, particularly if they had other meals to attend.

In general, the meals practised in Banda Eli are reminiscent of Clifford Geertz's well-known description of a Javanese institution called *slametan*, also known as *kenduri* in the Malay peninsula (Geertz 1960). They usually coincide with calendric or family events but may also take place when someone from the house offering the meal constructs a house, undertakes a journey, or departs on pilgrimage. Prayer meals take place during particular days of the sacred month of Ramadan, the period of the Muslim fast. In addition, memorial meals are arranged at prescribed intervals after the burial of a deceased person.

Not all of these meals were the same. Aside from the nature of the food which was served, there were two observable differences: the method of invitation and the presence or absence of prayers. In most cases, the invitation was a very casual affair. I was often summoned to enter a prayer meal in a neighbouring house when I was in the middle of bathing and getting dressed in the morning. Sometimes a representative of the host simply pulled on my sleeve and indicated that I should enter a certain house. As far as I could tell, these invitations were extended to all adult men in the relevant part of the village without regard to their social status or degree of kinship; even persons known to be on unfriendly terms with the host were asked to attend.

Not all invitations are casual, however. When a senior person is leaving the village on a long distance trip, typically the Muslim pilgrimage, a formal invitation is explicitly addressed to senior members of each aristocratic house. Such invitations are called *undangan adat*. The farewell meal I arranged at the end of my fieldwork in 1996 was preceded by such invitations. Family events, particularly circumcision, marriage, and the cutting of a newly born child's hair were also advertised a few days previously.

The other distinctive factor is the presence or absence of prayers at the beginning of the meal. During most prayer meals which I attended, a senior man, whenever possible the imam of one of the several mosques in the village, would burn incense in a small bowl in front of him and begin reading the prayers appropriate for the occasion. The task of reading the Koran and the prayers was often delegated by the imam to one of the men sitting near him at the end of the cloth. In principle, the imam was generally entitled to a little compensation for being present at the meal. In some cases I witnessed, he received a small chicken; at other times, he might just smoke a cigarette with the other guests.

Co-operative work groups were the most common occasion when sharing food did *not* involve prayers. During the early months of my fieldwork, I was exposed to numerous work parties which had the objective of reconstructing one of the village mosques. Young men and school-children carried building materials and hoisted them up to the mosque while other people lounged around the construction site chatting and drinking tea in the shelter of the verandahs of the nearby houses. Every now and then senior men were invited to enter the houses and eat food which was served by women. The women also worked in teams to prepare the servings, and the same group of women often took care of several houses. The food contained fish or mutton; rice, a commercial food in Kei, was often included.

The most elaborate house-construction ritual I attended during my fieldwork took place in the morning of February 10th, 1992, on my first, initial visit to my field site. Before the erection of the house-posts, five plates of offerings (coconut, areca-nut, and betel-leaves) intended for the original owner of the land were placed in the centre and four corners of the house. A chicken was slaughtered, and some of its blood was rubbed hard into the bottom part of the centre post. After this, the village chief (*orangkaya*) who officiated the ritual smeared other house-posts with pounded green leaves and the remaining chicken-blood. Meanwhile an old woman was sprinkling rice around the whole house, after water had first been sprinkled on the frame. When the ritual was over, the wooden frame of the house was quickly lifted up and the posts placed into the holes which had already been dug in the elevated base of the house on the previous day. Some of the young

men who had performed the work were still shovelling soil into the holes as the guests witnessing the ritual were asked to enter the house next door and served fried cassava, cakes, and coffee. (Field notes, 1992)

One might explain the absence of prayers from this meal by the fact that, although it took place on a ritual occasion, it was not a question of a *religious* ritual. However, the meals served during the mosque work parties were not accompanied by prayers either. Although the people of Kei make a conceptual distinction between religion (*agama*) and locally salient customs, taboos, and rituals (*adat*), practices which belonged to either of these domains of tradition were not exclusive of each other. A better explanation for the absence of prayers on this occasion has to do with the form of sociality that prevails during work parties. While collective work is an occasion for a heightened consciousness of society, it does not involve an encounter with outsiders – a relationship that would transcend relations of co-presence.

A contrasting case, in which prayers are a predominant part of a shared meal, is the ritual related to the departure of a pilgrim to Mecca. In Banda Eli, *haj* or the Muslim pilgrimage is not just an individual act of devotion, but a collective affair which involves the entire kin and house of the departing person. People who remain in the village still frequently observe a custom called *moli*. To perform or 'sit' *moli* means that, during the absence of the male pilgrim, his female counterpart (who may actually be a man) remains in the house and goes out only when it is absolutely necessary. During *moli*, all relations of exchange between the pilgrim's house and the rest of the community are suspended. People staying in the house must settle their debts prior to the voyage, and they cannot receive food from outsiders but have to rely on their own supplies. In this way, the house affirms its autonomy relative to other elements of the community while, at the same time, it focuses on its interaction with the external world.

At the end of the Fast, teacher A prepared for his departure on pilgrimage. The family where I stayed was not on good terms with him on account of a quarrel which concerned a certain piece of land. After visiting the nearest town for several days, teacher A returned to the village for one day on which invitations were served to attend his departure meal. I visited teacher A's house on my return from school and wished him well for his trip. On returning home, I was told that his folks had come to bring *adat* to the senior men in our house. They did not observe the call to the pilgrim's house but discussed it afterwards, acknowledging that the invitation had been served in the appropriate manner. Later, women made critical remarks of the procedure, pointing out that *mbimi maaf*, the 'goat of apology' which was cooked and served to the guests, should properly have been on display

outside the house for a day or two prior to the ceremony. I was told that the person 'sitting *moli*' was to be the pilgrim's cousin, his father's sister's son, presently the most senior man among his close relatives. (Field notes, 1996)

The meaning of the departure meal was usually explained as asking forgiveness for any wrongs done to other people. This interpretation focuses on transactional relations between individual persons and reflects the Islamic practice of seeking reconciliation, on great holidays, for various harms one may intentionally or unintentionally have caused to other people. In another interpretation, forgiveness implies also the removal of those obligations and debts through which the pilgrim is connected to various houses besides his own. In a sense his personhood is transcended. The removal of debts, obligations and reciprocities places him in a similar position to that of a recently deceased person who is still remembered as an individual but who is no longer capable of participating in social life.

In broad terms, most types of ritual commensality practised in Banda Eli correspond to the Javanese *slametan* and similar institutions in other parts of the archipelago. However, the focus of the ritual meals in Banda Eli is not on the spiritual calm which *slametan*, in Geertz's (1960: 70) description, ensures for

Photo 7.2 Women collecting shellfish from the shallows at low tide. (Timo Kaartinen)

the participants, but on the relations of exchange which define the moral and cosmological coherence of houses as well as their individual members. There was a difference between the ritual import of shared meals in situations at which the participants were conscious of their membership of different houses and in those situations in which relations of co-presence flowed over the boundaries of individual houses.

Mortuary meals differ from each of these cases in that they bring out the cosmological dimension of relations within society. While the exchange aspect of the mortuary cycle would suggest that they are a means for disaggregating the personal relations and obligations between the deceased and other members of the community, they are also more than this. Ultimately the mortuary cycle transforms the value-creating absence of travellers into a general relationship between the dead and the living. As Maurice Bloch puts it, the meals create an image 'in which humans can leave this life and join the transcendental, yet still not be alienated from the here and now' (Bloch 1992: 5).

The Mortuary Cycle

Although it does not belong to the core of religious obligations in Islam, the custom of serving a cycle of meals at prescribed intervals after a death is known throughout the Muslim world. The Palestinian informants of Hilma Granqvist (1965: 87) suggested that the meals prepared in connection with the burial and during the following weeks are given in honour of the deceased, but also involve debts and loans which have to be reciprocated by the different families which participate in the mourning. Granqvist's further description of the meals suggests, however, that it is not a question of an exchange between two similar parties but between the family of the deceased and the community at large (ibid.: 89). A death brings up the need to bring to a conclusion different levels of personal existence. In the earlier rites, relatives of the deceased have specific obligations to the dead person; in the last ones, they are ready to 'turn from the dead toward the living', and the deceased has ceased to exist as a person (Geertz 1960: 72).

In Banda Eli, the mortuary cycle begins with meals arranged at intervals of three, seven, nine, forty, and one hundred days from the funeral. While the intervals at which the first memorial meals take place after the funeral are different from one ethnographic case to another, the fortieth-day meal always seems to close the first, 'public' phase of the cycle, after which close relatives of the deceased person continue to tend the grave or perform other services to him or her (Granqvist 1965: 98; Nadel 1970: 126; Cederroth 1988: 52). In Banda Eli, the later ceremonies

take place one hundred days after death and then on particular holidays during the fasting month of Ramadan. These include *malam kunut*, the 15th day of the Ramadan which follows the death, and finally on *nama rai*, the 27th of Ramadan in the two consecutive years after that. *Nama rai* corresponds to *maleman*, which is described by Geertz (1960: 79) as the most important calendric *slametan* in Java, which can be celebrated on several alternative days at the end of the Fast. After the cycle of mortuary meals has been completed, the dead person is no longer commemorated individually, but as one of the ancestors, (Mal.) *tua-tua*. On *sis soban*, a memorial meal which falls on the 15th day of the month of Rajab, the month previous to Ramadhan, *umbona ni sina*, 'their grandchildren', read prayers for the ancestors who are not specified by name. The last ritual which commemorates a specific person is called One Thousand Days. In this ritual, close relatives no longer have any special obligations to the deceased; instead, the focus is on exchange between the dead ancestors and the living generally.

In Banda Eli, meals which commemorate recently dead persons are variously called *baca-baca* (Mal.) 'read', *tahalil* (Ar.) 'raising the voice', or *sisiak* which derives from *siak* (Ban.), 'swing', 'sway'. The last term is possibly a reference to the bodily movements associated with the Sufi practice called 'remembering', *zikr* (Ar.) or *dikir* (Mal.), the repeated chanting of the Islamic confession of faith and the different forms of God's name. Such chanting sometimes takes place during ritual meals in Banda Eli, but it is not particularly associated with the cycle of memorial meals. No other rites coincide with the memorial meals which take place on the 3rd and 7th day. In connection with the 9th day meal, the personal belongings of the deceased are divided between people who participated in the funeral service. These people are called *si siwa*, 'the nine'. They are not necessarily true siblings but may be variously related to the deceased person. The idiom of siblingship is evoked by the special position of *kaikano*, the 'eldest' of them whose task is to 'comb the hair', while *kaimirino*, the 'youngest', 'washes the behind'.

In return for these services, the eldest and youngest siblings receive particular shares of the deceased person's property. The share of the eldest includes a pillow, a hat, a carpet, a saucer, a glass, a cloth, a shirt, and a pair of trousers. The youngest sibling gets a pair of sandals, a mortar, a sarong, a handkerchief, a shirt, trousers, a saucer, a glass, and a spoon. The intermediate siblings or their descendants, collectively called 'the seven', only get money which is donated by funeral guests from outside the house, as well as saucers and some clothes, and their share is considerably smaller.

The preparation of the corpse for burial is also a ritual of disaggregation in which the family of the deceased is represented in a disjunctive state. By Muslim

Photo 7.3 Guests assembled in the front part of the house during a mortuary meal. (Timo Kaartinen)

practice, the body must be interred quite soon after death, which does not allow for lengthy funerary vigils. Death thus results in an abrupt end to the bodily presence of the deceased among other members of society. Even so, the personal effects of the deceased allow certain visible aspects of him or her to remain among the living. At this point, death is constructed as a state of separation in which the objects remind the mourners of the dead person whose body they can no longer see. At the same time, the possession of the objects singles out the mourners from the rest of society.

Wa ref futat, 'on the fortieth day', the relatives finish the ritual tasks of the funeral and tend the grave which is often decorated with a small effigy. The grave is sprinkled with water (*njingir kubur rarono*); a 'house' is prepared for the dead person, complete with flowers made of coloured paper (*rakarja ndono ndofa*); *ndupa*, a clay pot plate is made and placed on top of the grave. These objects are usually made by old women skilled in pottery-making. Aside from rituals performed by the family, the fortieth day marks the completion of funerary rites performed by mosque officials, some of which have actually taken place during the funeral itself. *Lima perkara*, 'the five obligations', include (1) ordinary prayer, (2) a *tahalil* or reading of specific Islamic formulas by the *imam*; (3) *ndomuko*, lowering the corpse in the grave, which is done by the *modim*, a mosque official; (4) *rabaca talkim*, a reading

by a mosque official called the *khatib*, which involves passages from the Quran, said to bring the deceased to 'sit up and listen' (*mbormato mutet*) and to 'remember' (*mbingnyat*); (5) *ndusumburu*, Quranic recitation. What actually happens on the 40th day, aside from the memorial meal itself, is the decoration of the grave.

The next memorial meals take place 100 days after the funeral and during the Fast for three successive years. The ceremony which takes place on the fasting holiday of *malam kunut* is called *karkaro*, and it precedes the meals on *nama rai* of the following two years which complete the cycle. At these two meals, one thousand rectangular cakes of dried *embal* are prepared and bound in bundles (*lakar*) of 20 each. Each of the invited guests takes a bundle with him. The family of the deceased, who have prepared the *embal*, do not take any for their own food. On each *nama rai*, the sura of Yasin is read at the grave, which is also sprinkled with water.

The Practical Aspect of Mortuary Rites

The commemorative cycle can be divided into three distinct stages, demarcated by the meals of the ninth and fortieth day and the final celebrations at the end of Ramadan. Until the ninth day, the mortuary rites are accompanied by general attention given from the entire neighbourhood to the house of the deceased. The ninth day completes a process during which the community is gradually disaggregated. At this point the special status of the immediate relatives of the dead person is marked by the division of his or her possessions. The deceased is not commemorated as an individual person but in terms of the diverse obligations that the living have towards him or her. The period of forty days, which completes the second phase, is significant because it coincides with the length of the post-partum seclusion of a baby and its mother, as well as the period during which the female counterpart of a pilgrim is secluded within the pilgrim's house. I have argued earlier that acts of 'remembering' maintain a productive relationship between absent travellers and those people who stay behind. In parallel with this, mortuary rites also appear to sustain the memory of the deceased as a specific person, even as they cut the house off from the rest of society. The fortieth day more or less restores the normal course of life. Apart from the one-hundredth day meal, mortuary rituals arranged in this period mostly coincide with Islamic holidays. Prayers are still said for the benefit of a named person, but since similar meals take place in a number of houses simultaneously they no longer single out the mourners from the rest of the village. The third phase of the cycle can therefore be seen as one of the reaggregation of the house during which it gradually restores its capacity to produce life.

To clarify the nature of the nine relatives responsible for washing the corpse, one of my informants explained that the eldest sibling, *kaikano*, represents those who *rakan enaur mumuno*, 'chew betel first' during marriage negotiations. In other words, the group of relatives who are in key positions during mortuary rituals consists of people who also constitute a party in matrimonial exchange. I see this as evidence of the disaggregated state of the house at this stage since the prestige of the ritual falls only on its female element, as if to anticipate the reintegration of the house in parallel with the nuptials.

At the same time, however, the division of key ritual tasks between the eldest and youngest siblings suggests a single principle of ancestry which defines the genealogical core of the house. Aside from the principle of seniority, the house is also classified in terms of gender and divided into the 'children of men' and the 'children of women'. In mortuary rites, 'children of women' would be represented by 'the seven'. From the funerals I witnessed, I gather that the eldest and the youngest do not actually have to be siblings. Yet, particularly at the funerals of eminent persons, who represents the core group of the house is not a matter of indifference.

On Monday morning S., a man in his late 20s from a house near my home, was about to board the passenger boat which was moored in front of the Clinic. Just before the boat set sail, he received the news from Tual through the clinic radio of the death of his cousin (FyBS) who used to live in the same house with him in Banda Eli and who had just entered secondary school in town. S. decided not to travel to Tual. Soon it was also learned that someone from the town had already sent the clothes of the deceased and two pairs of his shoes to the village.

The boy who died had previously worked in the Aru Islands where each of his siblings had spent a long period of time. S. himself had recently come back from migrant work in Aru where the family maintained another house, after getting married to an Arunese woman. The dead boy's elder brother had also married a girl from Banda Eli. The death coincided with some tension in the family, said to be caused by quarrels between the new spouses and their in-laws.

A 'reading', *baca-baca*, was arranged for Tuesday morning. Apparently the death had already taken place on the day before the news was received in the village, and this constituted the meal of the third day. The seventh day meal, at which I was also expected to be present, took place on Saturday. Senior elders from each aristocratic family in the northern moiety were present. They were seated in the back of the room while commoners from neighbouring houses sat closer to the entrance. This appears to have been the big occasion, normally celebrated on the 9th day, since I did not receive

an invitation to the house two days later. There was a 40-day ceremony, but according to my notes it was held on the 23rd day from the death, perhaps to accommodate the schedule in which the brothers of the deceased had to return to work in Aru. (Field notes, 1995)

Intervals of so many days do not constitute a strict norm but provide a loose framework for defining each phase of the rites. However, I witnessed other occasions at which the meals were held strictly at the prescribed times. These cases involved families of chiefly status which may have had a more particular attitude towards ritual schedules than did the common people. It is worthy of notice that someone – probably the sister of the dead boy who worked in Tual – was in a hurry to send the clothes and shoes of her brother to the family. The ritual distribution of these articles may have been particularly significant because of the potential contest over the senior position which resulted from the presence of new in-laws in the family, and the fact that the membership of the house consisted of the children of two brothers, the elder of whom had died some time previously.

The fortieth day meal is a relatively more public occasion than the previous meals. In consideration of guests from outside the immediate neighbourhood, mutton or chicken curry and rice may be served instead of fried bananas, tubers and cakes, which are the regular fare at the earlier meals. As the associated rites suggest, the meal of the fortieth day shifts the focus of mortuary rites to the relationship between the deceased person's house and the rest of the community. From the cases I witnessed and noted down, it also appears that the meal is arranged by one house only, in contrast with the earlier meals, which are arranged by several relatives of the dead person at the same time.

M. came to get me before I had time to go myself. I had forgotten his grandchild had '40 days' today. I sat at M.'s house when the crowd came from the mosque; it turned out the *tahalil* was at R.'s house, and I. led me there by the hand. 'Now this is something,' said R. when I entered. Imam J. was there and L. who had also asked me to visit him tonight. When people started to leave, I was asked to stay, and I discussed religion for a good half an hour with R. and J. Then the son of M. asked me over to his house again before I went home. I was served some more mutton; M. will be leaving to return to his daughter's family in Tual soon. (Field notes, 1994)

The fathers of R. and M., the elderly men whose houses I visited in the context of this meal, were central figures in the great house, which also used to hold the position of *orangkaya* during the last decades of Dutch rule. The child commemorated at the meal was a grandchild of the two men whose children were married. The meal was held in the house of the child's mother, where she mostly stayed

even during her marriage. The *imam* was likewise affiliated to the house through marriage. The present marriage alliances and the historical position of the house in which the meal was served made it into a potent political rival to the house of the present chief, where I stayed during part of my fieldwork. For this reason, the host raised theatrical eyebrows at my arrival. The high-status houses of the northern moiety and the centre of the village were impressively represented. In my recollection, however, no common people attended the meal.

I have suggested that the Banda Eli mortuary cycle can be divided in three phases. The shift between the phases is marked by the meals on the ninth and fortieth day after death, and the third phase lasts until the day called *nama rai* at the end of the Fast three years later. The first two stages constitute a reverse birth in their timing as well as in the nurturing tasks which close relatives perform towards the deceased. On the fortieth day, decorations and effigies are placed on the grave in response to the prayers, Koranic readings, and other services performed by the mosque officials at the funeral. After the last stage of the cycle is completed, the

Photo 7.4 The body of a recently deceased person is publicly brought to the mosque before interment. (Timo Kaartinen)

deceased is no longer commemorated as an individual person but as part of the collective category of ancestors. It is only some years later that family members may decide to erect a gravestone for the deceased, with the name carved on it in Arabic script.

I have noted that the very beginning of the cycle involves small gifts of money made by people who visit the house while the corpse is being prepared for burial. Remarkably the concluding stage of Islamic mortuary rites often involves the distribution or display of money as well (Geertz 1960: 72; Cederroth 1988: 53). A similar pattern is suggested by the fact that the last two commemorative meals in the Banda Eli cycle focus on a great pile of *sanggera imbali*, flat, rectangular cakes made of *emba*. The nature of this food suggests that the rites are no longer about nurturance but constitute a distribution of edible objects. The *emba* cakes are dry and capable of being taken away and stored without spoiling. They are made of a homogeneous material that is also the staple food of the whole community, and this means they cannot be recognized for their origin. Above all, the cakes are counted and bundled to provide an equal share for each guest participating in the meal. While other food is available for eating on the spot, the *emba* is generally not consumed during the meal but brought to the *umboni anakni*, 'grandchildren and children', of each guest in his or her own house.

Photo 7.5 A girl collecting shellfish at the seashore. (Timo Kaartinen)

By their semiotic qualities, the flat cakes of *embal* represent a synthesis of two, opposite kinds of sociality, which are distinct aspects of everyday life and ritual in Banda Eli. On the one hand, they are food and suggestive of nurturance, which constitutes the power of the house to generate and incorporate people and 'be filled' by them. On the other hand, they have some of the characteristics of money and are capable of 'flowing out' to the domain of production and exchange, which transcends the boundaries of individual houses. As Cécile Barraud (1990: 223) argues for another Keiese village, the permanent relationship that stabilizes the existence of houses is not affinity but the relationship to dead ancestors. Although the practices of exchange between houses in Banda Eli are profoundly different from those that prevail in the surrounding Keiese society, the mythico-historical category of the house plays a similar role in the constitution of persons in society.

Vitality and Value

Many aspects of Banda Eli society suggest Lévi-Strauss's concept of house societies. This concept was originally meant to account for the 'proto-capitalist' transformation in which exchanges between different categories of kin lost their systematic, structuring effect on reproduction. In Lévi-Strauss's argument, the 'estates' – heirlooms, titles and land – possessed by the house fetishize social relationships by suggesting that they are based on durable personal obligations (Lévi-Strauss 1987: 155; Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995b: 10). The case of Banda Eli does not entirely fit in this model. People in this society do not derive their sense of continued existence from reproductive exchanges within society, but from their mediating position in the exchange between the ancestors and outside powers. While the early ethnography of Kei made much of the permanent relations of marriage exchange between groups called *fam*, which may be understood as lineages associated with a particular house (Geurtjens 1921; van Wouden 1968: 11), houses in Kei are seen as durable elements of each village. Houses continue their existence even if the social groups they contain may 'die out' and be replaced by others. The instability of reproductive relations is therefore recognized in Keiese ideology. This brings back the question of what people of Kei mean by asserting that houses are permanent realities.

An answer to this question is that houses are not just social but cosmological categories, and they are not constituted by marriage exchanges alone. As Cécile Barraud has emphasised, Keiese marriage exchanges are merely a part of a more complex ritual system in which central relationships are expressed in an idiom of feeding (Barraud & Friedberg 1996: 372). She argues that in Keiese cosmology the

existence of human beings depends on feeding the island and its invisible spirits with hunted and captured food so that they may protect human beings and the gardens in which they grow their vegetable food (*ibid.*: 378). Even as the house appears as a continuous source of life, its continued existence is based on death – in the form of hunted game and spoils of war – which derive from the interactions of living people with outsiders.

I have argued that mortuary rituals in Banda Eli have many parallels with the rituals through which people of a particular house ‘remember’ absent relatives in order to sustain personal relationships and obligations over the distance. Locally produced food is symbolic of the collective group’s ability to extend itself beyond the seas and sustain the pursuit of wealth by its members. The insecurity which this condition implies for personal life is not unlike the insecurity caused by death. At the same time, it implies the potential for acquiring recognition and wealth which last longer than personal lives. The process of value transformation, in which personal affection and care result in a more lasting continuity of social life, is reminiscent of Maurice Bloch’s notion of rebounding violence. Bloch argues that the common aspect of various rituals is the abandonment of the vital, nurturing aspect of social life in favour of a transcendental existence in which people are violently transformed and return to conquer a position in which they command recognition by others who live in the ordinary world (Bloch 1992: 20). In this way, ritual creates an experiential certainty of one’s position in the world. This sounds very similar to what I have written about the men who abandon their in-laws and children for long travels in order to return and assume their fathers’ places in society. But when Bloch’s idea is applied to death rituals it raises the question of who, or what, can experience life without the nurturing attention of others. Bloch’s answer is within the functionalist tradition: ‘The death of the individual is the source of rebirth of the group’ (Bloch 1988: 24). As other scholars have pointed out, he ends up perilously close to a sociological metaphysics in which the value of individual lives is simply absorbed in the sacred aspect of collective thought (Sather 2003: 242; Kapferer 1997: 215).

The lasting recollections which the people of Banda Eli entertain of those who died elsewhere suggest an openness to historical events and offer a counter-example to Bloch’s argument. Such historical awareness does not contradict the holistic awareness of the life-giving power of ancestors. But in order to understand how the Banda Eli ideology reconciles its dependence on ancestors for nurture and on the outside world for value, it is necessary to take into account the different temporalities which are at play in its processes of value transformation. The reverse birth of the ancestor maintains the nurturing relationship of ancestors towards society.

This, however, is not the explanation for the continuing existence of houses which become extinct and disappear if living people do not 'fill' them and remain 'aware' of their history. Such awareness depends on the activity of living persons who are extracted from the house for reproductive purposes, and whose achievements are a measure of its 'greatness'.

The general argument of this chapter is that the continuity of the village and the continuity of the house correspond to two different orientations towards time. People who remain absent are remembered for long periods, sometimes generations, because of their open-ended potential for producing value and difference in society. People who return become influential members of the community for their lifetime, but after their death they are transformed into sources of the nurture which makes new reproductive cycles possible. The events of personal life are not simply forgotten; instead, the different 'pasts' of origin, departure and death create different modes of apprehending the future (Munn 1992: 115). While food plays a central part in nurturing memories, these memories do not simply substitute the linear experience of time with a fixed image of the past.

Notes

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8

CONSTRUCTING BODIES, CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES

Nurture and kinship ties in a Papuan society¹

Dianne van Oosterhout

In Inanwatan, a community in the Bird's Head area of Indonesia's easternmost province, Papua, identity concepts are focussed predominantly on the body. Shared origins and shared bodily substance define identity and the borders of the patrilineal kinship group or community. The construction of shared substance takes place at the kinship level through the exchange of bodily substances and other types of 'food', of nurturing substance. Nurture relations, including the exchange of sexual substances, are at the basis of the construction of related bodies in Inanwatan, and these are capable of overpowering blood relationships. Lineal kin is constructed and perpetuated through a chain of such nurture relations. Affinal ties are downplayed in the process, diminishing the influence of female blood and of women and wife-givers in general. In this chapter I will show how bodies are reproduced, constructed and deconstructed, and finally reconstructed in a new cycle of life, forging kinship ties across generational and social borders through the construction of communal flesh. Alongside this process, then, kinship and communal identity are shaped and reproduced. The consumption and exchange of sago and sago-like substances (semen) play a profound role in this identity-generating process. After providing some idea of the context in which the Inanwatan people live and relate to each other, I will discuss Inanwatan notions of the body, of reproduction in general, and of the construction of related bodies. It is essential to gain some insight into these notions if we want to understand Inanwatan kinship relations.

Context

Inanwatan is located in the dense coastal mangrove swamps along the south coast of the Bird's Head. This linguistically Papuan population is located at the fringes of

both the Indonesian State and the Melanesian world, revealing a complex mixture of New Guinean and (eastern) Indonesian or Austronesian cultural elements. In an ongoing process, Papua, previously called Irian Jaya, is becoming increasingly integrated within the Indonesian state, while local populations at the same time appear to stress 'indigenous' but also overarching Christian identities. In Inanwatan, for instance, the village outlook is largely defined by Indonesian standards, but the inhabitants use the village primarily as a locus of public life and withdraw to their sago gardens as much as possible. Meanwhile, this group of people is also outwardly oriented, and in regular contact with other ethno-linguistic groups. Although the local infrastructure is still relatively basic when compared with the central part of Indonesia, the population maintains trade and marriage relations with remote ethno-linguistic groups living elsewhere in the Bird's Head and in the Onin Peninsula. In addition, a considerable part of the Inanwatan population resides in the nearest town of Sorong for extended periods of time. There they come into contact with migrants from other Indonesian provinces. Through long-lasting trade contacts which extended as far as the Moluccas (Haga 1884-II: 307–308), overseas wealth objects entered the local exchange systems, while other languages,² other ethnic groups, and Islam (Ibid-I: 290)³ also had a profound influence on the outlook of Inanwatan society. Furthermore, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, small groups of traders from China and later Sulawesi settled in Inanwatan permanently. Missionaries from the Moluccas and Western Europe⁴ and Dutch colonial administrators followed in their footsteps in the second decade of this century, introducing among other things Christianity, as well as imposing the formation of permanent villages. Inanwatan was initially formed out of 17 *gobo* (Inanwatan term for river arm, sea arm, or liver) or *dusun* (Indonesian term for 'clan'-domain or [sago] gardens) that were scattered around the mangrove wetlands and at that time still engaged in mutual warfare. In the 1960s Papua became part of Indonesia, a change that continued to alter the social and spatial outlook of Inanwatan.

The Inanwatan area became a *kecamatan* (sub-district) within a newly founded province, and Inanwatan was appointed the administrative centre for its immediate neighbourhood. The village Inanwatan consists of three sub-villages (*desa*) with a total population of nearly 2000.⁵ Usually, however, a considerable part of the population resides in the *gobo*, which are located inland, or in Sorong, seeking food and a cash income. Most people live from subsistence produce (sago and fish) and occasionally from cash income, but they define themselves basically as hunters and gatherers. The women and children mainly fish and gather fruits and vegetables, whereas men hunt and fish in the open sea. New status products like zinc

roofs, outboard motors and chain saws are slowly entering the exchange domain, replacing cloth and ceramic jars, while new opportunities to earn cash income are gradually increasing. Although most of my informants saw the advantages of such developments, they did not really expect to profit from them. They said the benefits would probably go to outsiders, and that the exploitation of the land and the fishing waters would pose a threat to the cosmological balance.⁶ Many informants were concerned about the loss of their language, which is increasingly being replaced by Indonesian.⁷ They talked of social and environmental decay, of weakening kinship ties, of loss of values and autonomy. Such experiences of loss and social decomposition are often expressed in terms of the human body. Bodies are thought to have grown smaller and skinnier, blood to have become less fluid, less strong, and increasingly polluted, and skins more flaccid and dirty.

This provides us with an interesting entrance into the kinship and exchange domain, because according to Inanwatan viewpoints bodies are constructed through a coagulation of bodily substances and consequent nurture, particularly by means of sago consumption. Nurture, including the consumption of bodily substances, contributes to the construction of flesh, or rather, flesh 'of one's own', and the body is thus incorporated into the group of kin, of people of the same flesh. This also applies to the community at large. As some informants put it: 'we all share the same food and therefore the same flesh and scent',⁸ we have the same origins.⁹ But this Inanwatan 'body' or community as a whole is likewise experienced as less strong and autonomous than in the past, due to the influence of new external political and cultural centres. 'Foreign' foods, for instance, such as rice and canned fish, alter bodily substance and scent, rendering them less pure and less strong, and alter identity. As yet such foreign food is no competition for local food, but if the Inanwatan population were to alter their consumption pattern more and more in this direction, it is envisaged that national identities would increasingly replace local ones. Comments on weakened flesh therefore express a concern for weakening nurture and kinship ties, and for transforming identities. Bodies, then, reflect feeding relationships, but they are more than that. Bodies, or rather body parts, actively fuel or feed processes of inclusion and exclusion, of drawing borders between related and unrelated bodies. They are constructed through nurture, but are also constructive, providing nurture for other bodies. For these reasons I focus on the body as a site of interaction to study the relationships between food exchange – including bodily substances – and kinship in Inanwatan. In the following sections I will first deal with Inanwatan concepts of body structure and reproduction, and then go on to detail how the exchange and production of nurturing substances contributes to the construction of kin.

Body Parts and Body Movement

The body in Inanwatan is considered to be a partible unity, consisting of a number of constitutional elements that are ordered along a preferential pattern. Combined they form a life-containing unity, whereas the elements apart can transcend the boundaries of the unity. Such a view of life is not unique in the Melanesian nor in the Austronesian world. Herdt, for instance, wrote that the Papua New Guinean Sambia perceive 'a *structure of essences* that governs all life' (1987: 75, original emphasis). The Indonesian Sa'dan Toraja of Sulawesi, similarly 'distinguish various body elements which are interrelated according to a specific order' (Tsintjonis 1992: 111). According to Herdt's line of thought, all forms of life can possess the same structure, containing the same elements in the same order. Indeed, this association is made by the people concerned, who talk of the soul of the earth or a house in a similar manner as of the soul of a person. They likewise perceive of the house as of a human body, containing blood, bones, a soul and a skin. Such associations help to explain why, for instance, cosmological imbalance is expressed in terms of the human body. Moreover, in Inanwatan these various types of 'bodies' are interrelated: through marriage and death, human juices flow from *gobo* to *gobo*, where they enter new bodies, and from bodies to the earth, and back again in the form of food. Separate parts of the body can follow different tracks. Bones, for instance, can become heirlooms or the object of exchange between wife-givers and wife-takers.¹⁰ The second process (i.e. interrelation through death) has been defined by A. Strathern for the New Guinean Highlands as a 'grease cycle' (1982: 118). This cycle connects people to other people and to the land (when the decaying grease of corpses mixes with the soil), thereby influencing each other's substances. It follows that the individual body is influenced by substances outside its own boundary, through death, but also through marriage. Partly, then, bodies are shaped and valued through relationships with others. M. Strathern expressed this as follows:

'The body, then, has no inherent properties or capacities . . . the body features as a register, a site of . . . interaction . . . It is a microcosm of *relations*' (1988: 131, original emphasis).

In Inanwatan, the separate body parts are interrelated in a structured way, but are at the same time related to other substances in or outside other bodies; a body is indeed a microcosm of relations. This indicates that substances are not bound to the individual body, but that boundaries are fluid. And yet these substances still belong to it. Marilyn Strathern described this fluidity in terms of partibility:

'Such parts or appendages can also be objects *outside the boundary of the skin*, yet are nevertheless considered part of the person. The perception of Melanesian bodies as *internally* divided, creates an apparent homology between internal and external relations or parts. Thus the person, 'composed of relations', appears to extend beyond the skin boundary to include objects and persons considered at any one time to be an objectification of such relations. It is easy to see then how transactions appear as the extraction, and absorption, of parts of the person. In being multiple is also partible, an entity that can dispose of parts in relation to others' (M. Strathern 1988: 185, original emphasis).

From eastern Indonesian examples, however, it becomes clear that such a fluidity of boundaries is not limited to the Melanesian world, as, for instance, was shown by Tsintjlonis. He argued that 'the boundaries between life and death are not firmly fixed' (1992: 108), and related this to the order of bodily substances. The loss of integrity and completeness would be considered to be death (Ibid: 111). This suggests that at various stages in a single life, the boundaries can be defined and constructed differently. Marx, in an analysis of body substances in both Papua New Guinea and Papua, remarked that movements or exchanges of substances, in particular, influence the definition or construction of bodily boundaries:

'Conception, birth, growth, life, and death are conceived of in terms of transactions of substance. Economic affairs, food production, social hierarchies, kinship relations, marriage, the life cycle, ritual, disease, and virtually all other cultural elements can be reflected by or expressed in terms of notions about body substances and their transfer' (Marx, 1994: 10).

In Inanwatan, these various elements are not only expressed in terms of notions about body substances and their transfer. The character of these substances and the routes along which they are transported also contribute to processes of inclusion and exclusion, or, in other words, to the definition of dynamic borders between related and unrelated bodies. During various stages of life, related bodies are constructed and deconstructed through various forms of nurture:

'A major theme to emerge from the literature on Melanesian personhood is the primacy that substances – in particular, sexual substances such as semen and breast milk, bodily substances such as blood and bones, and food – play in the determination of individual identity and kinship' (Lutkehaus 1995: 14).

Likewise, in the process of exchange of nurturing substances, Inanwatan persons become more and more included within the *gobo* borders, until they eventually embody the *gobo* and, finally, the bodily borders dissolve completely. The body

has become the land, and thus feeds the future generations and contributes to the construction of kin. Exchanges of food, of nurturing substance, guide the process in which kinship identities are formed.¹¹ During different stages of the life cycle, the types of food and substances exchanged reveal variation. But before we focus on the various stages in the exchange process in which nurture contributes to the construction of kin, more detailed information is required on the role of exchange of substances in reproduction. This provides the initial stage in the construction of new bodies, bodies that are not yet clearly defined as related bodies.

Reproduction, or the Exchange of Body Substances

Reproduction, or the regeneration of bodies, is locally described as something invented by human beings themselves. Initially, people could only multiply through repetition, following vegetative forms of reproduction, like shoots from a sago tree, and in a similar manner to their origin being, Kekeaò, who was half human and half sago tree. According to Inanwatan ideas, all human beings originate from the sago-part of this tree. The flesh of the sago tree is compared to semen, whereas the fruits of the tree are likened to 'female eggs'. The tree reproduced images of herself through self-insemination. Indeed this origin mother is considered to have been a hermaphrodite (see van Oosterhout 2001b: 369), reproducing by swallowing her own stem ('penis' [*iigo*]) and the sago ('semen' [*mawu'ò*]) inside it. The first descendants lived on the branches of this tree, still very dependent on their origins. They initially had no autonomy over their own reproduction, which was controlled by the origin mother. As they longed for sexual reproduction, they deliberately cut their bond with their mother (the umbilical cord). The tree fell down and Kekeaò disappeared, taking the major source of vegetative life force to the west. Human beings hence gained autonomy by appropriating the power of life. This life force is locally called *iware*,¹² and means something like enabling, creating, or to be fertile. The result was that one part of this *iware* was transformed from a vegetative reproductive force into a human reproductive force, while the other part remained unchanged. *Iware* received two different faces; one of growth in volume, the vegetative force, and one of regeneration, the appropriated reproductive force. However, this transition not only meant an increasing autonomy on the part of human beings, but also a break with their inert source of *iware*, and with their mythical origins. Life force was now no longer constantly renewed, so human beings now became destined to die. The moment of death could be postponed by internalising or consuming other sources of *iware* to replace what had been depleted, by consuming life force, that is, through food or other nurtur-

ing substances.¹³ Intercourse, or the transfer of *iware* through sexual substances, is defined as the major cause of the gradual destruction or depletion of *iware* inside individual bodies. The transition from a vegetative into a human form of reproduction was caused by human desire; (female) desire for semen and intercourse, and (male) desire for leadership and descendants. Along with desire, pollution was born. Both are said to destroy *iware*. From that moment onwards people were forced to exchange substances to reproduce, and to consume external sources of *iware* (such as food) to maintain the body. You could say that the emergence of pollution and death led to the birth of descendants, but also to the need for consumption and to constantly exchange and guard *iware*.

The separation into two complementary forms of life force paralleled the separation into life and death, but also into male and female bodies. The first form of *iware* became associated with female reproductive power, femaleness, and life, while the second form became associated with male reproductive power, maleness, and death.¹⁴ These forms are complementary; both play a role in the process of human reproduction.¹⁵ Without female reproductive power, a body could not grow, whereas without male reproductive power, the result would not be a human being, but a supernatural or evil being. Put differently, both multiplicity out of one source and the coagulation of different substances are essential to construct human bodies. In short, whereas at first living beings possessed the inert capacity to reproduce through multiplicity, they had to learn how to reproduce through sharing male and female substances. Moreover, women had to be made co-operative and share their sexual substances to ensure that they did not reproduce without the involvement of men; their reproductive power had to be socialized by men to ensure the perpetuation of human beings. Unsocialized reproduction, then, became defined as antisocial, and embodied by evil beings, in many parts of Papua called *suangi* (assault sorcerers or witches).¹⁶ Men ensure female co-operation, among other ways, through threats of *suangi* accusations, by controlling female desire, and by protecting their masculinity – for instance through enforcing taboos on female menstrual blood or even female scent. Uncooperative women face the possibility of being accused of *suangi* and hence of being excommunicated (social death). Formerly, they could even be killed.¹⁷ Kinship regulations are thus at least partly based on the necessity to share bodily substance, to contribute *iware* and on the fear of uncontrolled *iware*-depleting female reproductive powers. Through processes of exclusion and inclusion (exchange), such uncontrolled powers are coped with, and located outside the moral community. This way borders are drawn between people 'of one's own' and potentially lethal persons, including uncooperative kin. Now that we have defined why people need to exchange *iware*, why they

have to act socially, we can proceed with examining how such exchanges gradually add to the construction of related bodies.

Conception

The transformation from procreation through multiplicity to procreation through intercourse required some physical adaptations. The most important ones were directed at making the female body fit to carry a child, and transforming individual desire into shared and coagulated substance. Such bodily changes polarised gender differences; women had to be transformed into nurturing mothers, and their sexual desire controlled by men. Thus these changes were induced by the need to share substances, but at the same time contributed to this necessity, because gendered bodies were no longer capable of individual reproduction. Initially a foetus is formed by the coagulation of male and female sexual substance. Semen is essential in this process in two ways; it makes the woman's blood stick and transfers girls into nurturing women, and it makes the breasts grow and the body become fuller.¹⁸ Men and women regard this transfer as more important for reproduction than the onset of menstruation. In addition, for Inanwatan women, absence of menstruation would only imply a lack of need to shed polluted blood, for instance when semen no longer enters the body, but there would still be enough blood in a woman's body to produce a child. Menstruation would thus be related to intercourse or other polluting substances.¹⁹ Nevertheless, men state that a foetus is formed by menstrual blood. For men, then, the newly born child is partly constructed out of polluted blood (and this has consequences for how they treat the newcomer), even though they stress their role in transforming the female body into a reproductive body. Semen thus feeds the female body until it is ready for reproduction and, later, coagulates with blood to form the foetus.

In a way the female body is considered to be a medium to produce descendants for men. Men transfer life force (*iware*) to the female body and thus obtain rights to the prospective offspring.²⁰ Hence they control female reproductive capacity, to some extent, by feeding women with male substance. But they cannot completely control a woman's blood; this may be too hot, too fast, or too strong, or made that way by these women themselves. Only strong semen would survive the coagulation with blood and not be destroyed by it: male substance has to overpower the force of female blood.²¹ Female blood needs to be 'conquered' by male nurturing substance, which ideologically justifies male control over reproduction, female bodies, and female sexuality. Paradoxically, men treat the female body as a poten-

tial danger for reproduction, and as depleting strength from them, while at the same time they depend on it in order to reproduce the patrilineal descent group.

During the first couple of months the foetus is formed and shaped, and this process requires large quantities of semen.²² This depletion of semen also affects a man's health negatively as he loses *iware* to produce the child.²³ This poses some problems for men as they are on the one hand expected to supply semen while on the other hand their own bodies are negatively affected by this. Failure to fulfil this obligation may lead to accusations of selfishness by their spouses, and even to accusations of *suangi*, of acting in an antisocial manner. After about four to five months, contact with semen endangers the unborn child and the health of its mother. But perhaps more importantly, if women still consumed semen at this stage they would conceive twins, an act which is regarded as one of *suangi*. To produce a second, *suangi* child would mean that the woman had been too greedy. After the contribution of semen terminates, the foetus grows as a result of female nurture. Her husband and his relatives should contribute the required food. Again women must not consume too much nurturing substance; if they grow too fat or if their babies are born too big, they are accused of consuming more than their share and of depleting too much food and *iware* from their feeders. This *iware* is encapsulated in the food itself, and contains, besides the life force that is present within food, also the labour and care, or the *iware* invested in it by its provider.²⁴ Women are thus fed by their spouses to contribute to the child's growth, but it is the women who are responsible for preserving a delicate equilibrium between their own and their child's body size, and for protecting male *iware*. Men and their relatives, on the other hand, may be accused of failing to contribute enough food for the pregnant woman, a failure which may be a reason for her relatives to claim the child and raise it themselves. A foetus is hence not automatically considered to be a man's relative; its kinship status is not yet clearly defined, but becomes so through a number of successive nurturing contributions.

We have already seen that the father's male relatives contribute to the child's growth as well. They help to supply food for the pregnant woman (a man may not hunt or fell trees while his wife is pregnant), and therefore have some influence on the formation of the child. This is, at the same time, a delicate matter, as the danger of transgressing sexual taboos exists: sharing food has clear sexual connotations in Inanwatan. Particularly while pregnant, women therefore have to avoid contact with their husband's male relatives and may not eat in their presence. A pregnant woman also keeps food taboos, especially during the second half of pregnancy when she contributes to the growth of the child. She should not eat too much, and should avoid eating meat and sea fish, as this would pollute her and her child's

blood. Besides the food she consumes, a woman has an inherent source of *iware* to induce foetal growth, the *mato*, the elder twin sibling or placenta. The *mato* is also the twin soul of the *ara'ugo* (shadow, reflection), the child's soul.²⁵ Through the *mato* a woman gives the *mato*'s twin sibling the vital energy to grow, the energy to become 'more of the same', or vegetative *iware*. But this form of reproduction is also associated with *suangi*, and thus potentially threatening.

To summarise, the body is shaped in a gradual and carefully guided process in which men and women have complementary roles. A child's *iware* should be the result of combined effort, and the foetus fed by the bodies of both parents. This also means, however, that a newly born child possesses substance which is female, and therefore foreign (to the father). From a male point of view the child possesses polluted blood, while its flesh is constructed indirectly through female consumption of male nurture. In addition, it possesses unsocialized *iware*, which is transferred to it by its mother through the *mato*. A child's body therefore needs to be purified from its mother's unsocialised and contaminating influence, and its flesh transformed into 'flesh of one's own' (from the father's point of view), hence contributing to a socialised form of *iware*.

Construction of Common Flesh: From Shared Substance to Single Substance

After the child is born and separated from its *mato*, it no longer receives *iware* automatically. In order to grow, then, its body needs to be nurtured by other means, initially by breast milk. As it is the mother who suckles the child, it only becomes a member of the *dusun* of its father when it is given some sago porridge from the ancestral trees. This usually happens after about a week to a month after birth, but not until the father of the child has paid the midwife for her help, and the mother of the child 'for the pain in her back during the delivery'.²⁶ Also, if the bride price payments have not yet been completed, the child will remain a member of the mother's *gobo* until the debts have been paid.²⁷ Both food and gifts should thus be given by the father's relatives to obtain full rights in the child. The sago feeding ritual is the first step in establishing legal and social nurturing relationships, and in purifying the child's body from the polluting effects of its mother. Through food, and particularly through sago, the body is shaped more and more into a related body, reflecting the care invested in it.²⁸ The amount of flesh on a body symbolises the care, in the form of nurture, invested in the individual. Flesh is therefore not an individual matter, but a social one. Lieber, writing on the self and the body in Pacific Island societies, describes the body as 'a locus of shared social relation-

ships, or shared biographies' (1990: 74). In Inanwatan, flesh is likewise collectively nurtured and even collectively 'owned' by a father and his relatives. To concur with Becker, who wrote on Fijian notions of the body, the body 'is the responsibility of the micro-community that feeds and cares for it' (Becker 1995: 57). Failing to fulfil this responsibility, to produce and distribute food, invites a moral judgement and leads to suspicions of greediness and unwillingness to share with others, in fact to suspicions of *suangi*.²⁹ A *suangi* negates exchange by both withholding nurturing substance (food) from his/her relations, and by stealing and consuming nurtured substance (flesh). In a similar way, in Papua New Guinea 'people are judged "good" or "bad" according to whether they share or hoard food' (Kahn 1986: 37). Also in Fiji 'the community's moral qualities are symbolically condensed in bodies, which record and reflect the care vested in them' (Becker 1995: 85). These moral qualities are directly related to nurturing obligations, in the first place towards kin. *Suangi* are therefore often identified among one's own group of kin. They consume more than their share of *iware*, and fail to reciprocate or transfer *iware* to their nurture relations.³⁰

Through feeding the intimate relationship between two parties is constructed and maintained. This relationship is expressed in terms of 'parents' and 'children', or 'food givers' and 'food takers', terms that are not free of hierarchical connotations. Consuming food that is provided by others is considered as acknowledging a position of dependency. Moreover, eating food that is given by others is also a matter of trust; food provides a perfect medium to enact grievances, for instance by providing too little food, but also by poisoning someone. Between husbands and wives, and between in-laws, there always remains some fear of poisoning or neglect, so gifts of food by in-laws are carefully examined as to their quality and quantity. Improper gifts are considered to denote a lack of respect – and constitute a serious insult. To avoid tensions, daily food exchanges do not easily cross kinship borders, while exchanges between in-laws are carefully guided in ritual settings (I will come back to this later).

Flesh is ideally shaped by close paternal kin who provide proper food, and food from their own *gobo*. So if people say that they share the same flesh, they mean that they were fed by the same group of persons and from the same land, and hence have become people of the same flesh. It is therefore considered important that children eat from the same trees as their fathers and paternal uncles, so that they become like them.³¹ Informants often said: 'we are what we eat, through eating the same food we have become who we are.' This comment clearly expresses the link that is made in Inanwatan between consuming food and constructing identity. In a very similar way, Meigs pointed out that:

'It has often been observed that the producer of a food is identified with the food he or she cultivates, kills, or cooks. It has less frequently been observed . . . that we are what we eat: the consumer is identified with the food he or she consumes and thus absorbs' (Meigs 1984: 26).

Moreover, through the consumption of food from their own gardens, ancestral substance which has entered the land through the corpses of dead members re-enters the bodies of their descendants and hence contributes to the construction and regeneration of flesh of one's own, as expressed by one of my informants:

'We, the grandchildren, eat the sago our ancestors have planted. That is why the sago of other people does not taste any good, we cannot eat it. Their ancestors will get angry and make us ill. We can only eat from our own ancestors. They planted and fed the trees. We are made out of sago'.³²

What matters, then, in the construction of related flesh, is the consumption of sago from one's paternal *gobo*, and the consumption of 'flesh' of one's own. In a symbolic way, consuming sago could be associated with endo-cannibalism. This also helps to explain why sago cannot easily be shared with strangers. What is of importance as well, however, is the metaphoric meaning of the production and consumption of sago as a sexual act. Sharing sago or processing sago from the same tree can therefore have some sexual connotations, which has implications for kinship and avoidance rules, as will be shown in the following section.

Through sharing the same food, a child gradually becomes more of the same flesh, decreasing its mother's nurturing influence and the impact of 'foreign' blood (from the point of view of the father and his kin). The final stage in this process was formerly the process of initiation of children into adulthood. In fact, initiation still exists in an adapted form but in secret, because the church, which does not allow such activities, is not supposed to know about it. The novices were (are) fed by their initiators, who replace the parents as nurturers. During this period they are not allowed to touch food themselves, and may only eat roasted sago and fish. This is explained as being meant to cool and slow down the blood. So initiation cools and immobilises the (influence of) female blood. In addition, boys are reported to have been fed semen by elder male relatives to make them grow faster, i.e. to construct more flesh, and to transform them into masculine men.³³ This practice of semen consumption still, according to several informants, takes place occasionally. Initiators thus forge a 'flesh'-bond between related men, overpowering blood relations. The aim of Melanesian initiation, Marilyn Strathern argues, is to make individuals 'incomplete' so that they may become reproductive members of society (see M. Strathern 1988: 26). Elsewhere she takes this argument a step further by stating

that Melanesian initiation is preoccupied with the need to *decompose* or *dismantle* aspects of an individual (1992: 66, original emphasis). Hence, male ritual would not produce 'males' out of 'females', but potential 'fathers' out of 'persons', and would dismantle their female aspects. Making blood- and flesh-containing boys into flesh-men, according to this line of thought, would thus transform them into men and potential fathers but incomplete reproductive persons. Female initiation rituals would, in a similar manner, transform persons into potential mothers by making them incomplete reproductive persons.

Older women reported that they were given cold semen, shed by paternal relatives³⁴ and put in bowls made of leaves, during their initiation, supposedly 'to open the way' and to stimulate them to favour heterosexual relations. Without this practice it would be hard to become pregnant in married life; it cooled down and slowed the blood so that it would not destroy their future husband's semen, and could clot and coagulate with this semen. It did not directly contribute to familiar flesh, but it is said that through initiated women the shape of their paternal kin is introduced into their husband's *dusun*, because this semen would be used to help forming the prospective foetus. This semen was thus fed to them to make their bodies fit for motherhood,³⁵ and to influence the bodies of their prospective children. It would also make their skin and flesh feel no pain during the tattooing ritual that followed directly after it. Their blood was shed while they were drugged with semen to make their flesh feel numb.³⁶ Women said that tattooing prepared them for the pain and hardships of delivery, which they were well aware still posed a serious threat to their lives.³⁷ Nowadays the practice of feeding semen to girls no longer exists, but female novices are fed with sago instead, and are not allowed to eat any game (pork, sea fish), as this would strengthen their blood. 'Opening the way' for girls could from this point of view be explained as decreasing the strength of blood, so that conception will be possible. Women with blood which is too strong and hot are considered unable to carry any children, since their blood would merely destroy the semen. Boys used to be tattooed as well during their initiation, a practice intended to shed polluted blood and in this way to integrate them within their *gobo*. No mention is made of the need to decrease the pain felt in the flesh of boys: tattooing would make it stronger. Put differently, male initiation is meant to strengthen the flesh and decrease the influence of blood, whereas female initiation is primarily focussed on diminishing the strength of a woman's blood, partly by making their flesh feel numb, as well as on transferring ancestral flesh to her children. Initiation does not transform girls into blood-women, as opposed to flesh-men, but rather diminishes their inert reproductive power and the strength of their blood (and hence makes them incomplete) in such a way that

they are transformed into potential mothers, being neither flesh nor blood. Female initiation thus appears to dismantle female aspects, and slightly enhance their male aspects, which may seem rather puzzling. But in the context of the supposed need to overpower female blood, downplaying femaleness would be the only way to control female sexuality and transform girls into mothers. Furthermore, this appears to have a function in reshaping the women who enter new kinship groups after marriage (see below).

To summarize, during male initiation flesh is strengthened by the consumption of roasted food and semen. During female initiation male substance transforms girls into nurturing mothers, whereas the consumption of roasted food (and semen) prepares the female body for pregnancy and delivery. Both forms of nurture socialize the innate capacity of females to reproduce. Flesh becomes increasingly distinct, increasingly more like the other members of the *gobo*. Through nurture, then, flesh is constructed and blood is deconstructed: whereas food taboos deconstruct the distinct features of blood, prescribed intake of food constructs the distinct features of flesh. The child is further incorporated into its father's *gobo* and becomes a full member, sharing the same flesh as the other members. The construction of related bodies, of bodies which are defined as belonging to the same kinship group, is a process which is already initiated before conception by selecting which fluids can or cannot be matched (blood which is too hot or too strong, such as that of women who are too closely related, would not match). After the actual conception, men and women have different roles in nurturing the foetus. Already during pregnancy the mother's influence is somewhat tempered by the food the father and his male relatives provide. After birth, the child's body becomes more and more of the same flesh through these nurture relationships, and this process is close to completion after initiation.

Regeneration of the Gobo: From Single Substance to Ancestral Substance

During adult life, a person becomes more and more integrated into the *gobo* by consuming food which has been obtained from the land and which is shared with relatives. In addition, a person now actively contributes to the construction of flesh of the other members of the *gobo* through reproduction and the production of food for nurture relations within the *gobo*. Although the production and consumption of food enhances a person's *iware*, the labour invested also depletes it. Part of the *iware* produced, in addition, is transferred to nurture relations (such as children), so in a gradual process, a person's *iware* decreases in strength. Other

depleting activities or moments are, for instance, the consumption of 'bad' or exotic food (such as rice), the pollution of blood by breaching taboos, the shedding of semen, childbirth, and, of course, intercourse and reproduction. Part of this released *iware* is said to just disappear from circulation or control, but most of the time it would be absorbed or consumed by other persons. This may be deliberate, for instance by *suangi* or spouses, or it may be unintentional, by offspring. The idea is that a person's *iware* gradually decreases, and that part of this *iware* is transferred to others. A remaining part disappears from circulation. It is this part which is believed to cause the general decline of *iware* in Inanwatan society, leading, among other things, to weakened flesh and smaller bodies. Although this loss is of great concern for the people of Inanwatan, I will here only focus on local perceptions of transfer and perpetuation of *iware* through the bodies of related persons.³⁸ Reproduction, as we have seen, was one form of transfer, but the death of a person and consequent decay of his or her body also releases *iware* which can re-enter circulation.

The process of death and decay starts immediately after birth, when the child is separated from its main source of *iware*. Through the intake of *iware*-generating substances such as food, this process can be delayed, but sooner or later the point is reached when the body starts to decay and a person dies. According to the Inanwatan point of view, death never occurs naturally, but as a consequence of the accumulation of events which all contribute to the depletion of *iware*. True or final death occurs at the completion of a sequence of moments or events. The last instance of depletion would therefore merely finish the job. The indicator of the moment of death can be found on the skin, the border between the self and the other. When this border decomposes and starts emanating a foul scent, a body is defined as a corpse. Now the process of rotting, which may have started long before, is speeded up. In practice the moment of actual death is considered to occur several days after breath and the flow of blood have terminated. During this intermediate phase, the soul still functions as a normal member of the community, participating in conversations and in communal meals. This soul is invited to eat together with the participants in the burial meals, and served, besides sago porridge, sago larvae, and fat fish or the fat of pork. In short, it is fed greasy food, which is considered to build up a lot of flesh, even in a corpse. The corpse is guarded against theft by *suangi* or other beings (and, formerly, head hunters) until the flesh has clearly started to rot. The flesh of fresh corpses still possesses much *iware*, and is therefore a powerful source of nurture.

While the process of rotting proceeds, the corpse is left alone by its relatives until only the bones are left. During this time, the final payments that a man still

needs to make are completed by his surviving relatives, otherwise the rotting process would be hampered, and the *iware* which is encapsulated within the corpse would be lost for re-circulation. In addition, this rotting is assisted or speeded up by gifts of food; it is fed with raw meat not only after the communal meals with the dead which take place immediately after death, but also while the corpse is rotting. The share of food a living person would receive during rituals is now put near the rotting corpse, but in its unprocessed form. Whereas the communal meals immediately after death initiated the transformation from a living into a dead person, the corpse is now left to 'eat' on its own and to eat unprocessed red meat. These solitary and unprepared meals effectuate a transformation from a related person into an anonymous ancestor; nurture ties that were constructed through sharing the same meals are dissolved along the way. It is noteworthy that the meat given to the corpse is not dried or cooked, which is, as we saw, at other moments during the life cycle, a means to bring about the cooling and slowing down of blood. Rather, the raw meat enhances the 'blood' of the ancestor-to-be. These food-gifts of 'blood' contrast sharply with the gifts of grease or flesh during life and immediately after death. Through consuming blood, the dead are further dissociated from the living, becoming more distantly related. This may seem to contradict the general downplaying of blood relationships in favour of nurture or flesh relationships, but at this point it functions to deconstruct the nurture relations that existed with the deceased, so that another type of relationship can be established. Relatives become part of the ancestral domain. When the bones are dry, ancestors receive the essence of gifts of food (smoke, scent) or valuables; from then on they receive only the spiritual form of these gifts.

The rotting process thus separates the soul of the dead from its body and transforms it into an ancestor spirit, while the juices are released and enter the soil. The soil becomes saturated with ancestral substance, which eventually re-enters circulation in the form of food. Sago or a fruit tree is planted near the corpse, so the released juices enter through its roots and contribute to its growth.³⁹ After the bones are dry, the ancestor spirit can return to the world of the living in the form of the soul of a foetus born within the *gobo*. The cycle is now completed; that is, the cycle of men, and of women who do not leave the *gobo*, and the cycle of girls who die before marriage. The cycle of most women reveals some major differences though, because women usually (at least nowadays) marry into another *gobo*. In any case, the rituals of the life cycle are centred around the transfer and enhancement of *iware*.⁴⁰ During this process a person becomes more and more integrated within his or her group of kin through successive acts of nurture, guarded by sexual and food taboos, until its body itself becomes part of a *gobo*'s circulation of *iware*.

From Foreign Substance to Ancestral Substance

When a woman enters a different *gobo*, which often occurs, she is confronted with a group that possesses unfamiliar flesh and often no related ancestors. Again, sago plays an important role, first of all in helping to make initial contacts with prospective in-laws. In this situation, however, food is shared with people who are of different flesh. Nurture relations are initially dominated by the woman's party, that is, the prospective wife and her relatives. A woman offers gifts of cooked food such as fish and vegetables (hardly ever sago) to her parents-in-law to show her competence as a wife for their son, and her willingness to take care of her parents-in-law. At marriage, the couple eats cooked sago together,⁴¹ and this is the public sign that they are now married. While the husband's relatives provide gifts of ceramic jars, plates, and cloth to the wife's family, her family provides the raw food for the party.⁴² The female relatives of the husband cook the sago, the pork, and the fish they received. The couple's relatives, however, do not all share their meal; only the guests can eat from it. They eat from the dishes of their hosts,⁴³ or take the food back home, wrapped in baskets made from sago leaves.⁴⁴ The food comes from the land of the woman, and is interpreted as an attempt to plant some flesh of the woman's *gobo* or family into the bodies of their in-laws, of poisoning even, but most of all as a sign that they are in fact superior to the wife-taking party. If they all shared in the meal, this would mean that they were equal partners in the marriage pact instead of having a different status. Moreover, it would also mean the breaching of the sexual taboo now operating between the two groups. After they are married, the couple starts eating together, but a woman initially does not eat in the presence of her male in-laws or mother-in-law. This is related to the aforementioned fact that sharing sago can be associated with a sexually tabooed relationship. A woman may not even eat from the same trees as her in-laws. She therefore needs to cook separately from her sisters-in-law, and uses her own fireplace, pans, and dishes.⁴⁵ Newly wed couples' habit of sharing a single dish and bowl to underline their marriage and to stimulate pregnancy underlines the sexual implications of sharing food-preparing and food-serving artefacts. It is also to be noted that substances and utensils which have been in contact with 'foreign' food are considered to be imbued with the (sexual) substances of those who have handled them.⁴⁶

Only after a woman has given birth do the taboos on sharing food become less strict, but they are still prominent, as we can see for instance in the sago-feeding ritual after a child is born. The mother of the child may not even be present when her child is fed for the first time with sago from its father's trees. Only when she

has become a grandmother can she eat freely with her husband's relatives, and from the same trees. However, older women often eat by themselves or with their grandchildren. Gradually, a woman's flesh becomes more and more the same as her in-laws through sharing their food. Finally, when a woman dies, her corpse is considered completely assimilated into her husband's *gobo*, and her flesh is allowed to rot on their land. This way, her juices enter the land and become part of this *dusun*'s ancestral substance, which eventually returns into the bodies of the descendants in the form of food. During the burial rituals the relatives of a woman's husband complete their final payments to the *gobo* of the woman's origins, and in this way they obtain complete rights to her body and body products, including her bones, flesh, and juices.

Part of the funeral ritual is the sharing of a meal by the wife-taking and wife-giving party, and this time it is the wife-taking party which provides and prepares the food, while the wife-givers have come as their guests, and are consequently now of equal or slightly lower status. The meal consists, just as does the burial meal for deceased *gobo* members described above, of sago porridge, roasted sago, sago larvae, and perhaps some roasted pork. The sago symbolizes the cooled-down or dried relationship between both parties, while the sago larvae and pork add fat or strength to the corpse's flesh. But the larvae also symbolize the transition of the woman from being an outsider into being a member of the group, as well as the transition of her foreign body into a related corpse. After a lengthy period of nurture through the consumption of sago, in which a woman's flesh gradually becomes more similar to that of her husband and his relatives, and in which relationships are strengthened, a very short moment abruptly ends the relationship between the kin group into which the woman was born and that into which she married. This condensed moment is symbolised by the sago larvae, which are considered to be a highly nutritious food. Furthermore, the moment of collecting these larvae is very precise, as they soon transform into sago flies, after which their nurturing contents are lost. The two parties sit and eat together, and finally, at the closure of the meal, their relationship is resumed at a more or less neutral level in which status differences are decreased or even reversed. The burial meals are characterised by their potential chaos; as plenty of palm wine passes around, men and women get drunk, which may easily lead to outbursts of violence. The woman's relatives may accuse her husband of poisoning or negligence, whereas her husband's relatives stress the care they have invested in the woman. This does not always occur in an atmosphere of serious threats (although this is potentially possible), but primarily as a game. I am therefore inclined to see this chaos as partly staged and as functional in transforming the relationships between wife-givers and wife-takers. During

marriage, the wife was treated as a stranger, an intruder, and the relationship with her relatives was characterized by hierarchical differences and mutual mistrust. Only after death is the value of the woman and the gift made by her relatives fully appreciated, and relationships become less tense.

Sago Production, Production Roles, and Regeneration of the Gobo

The variation in purposes and preparation of sago is, as we saw above, related to different stages in life cycle rituals, but also to the life cycle of the tree itself. Sago larvae, for instance, can of course be consumed daily, but are never offered during life cycle rituals such as marriage. They are associated with grease, but also with decaying material: they emerge from the decomposing 'flesh' of the sago tree. The larvae transform into sago flies if they are not consumed. The time it takes for a larva to become a fly (3 days) parallels the time it would take for a dead body to become a rotting corpse. These sago larvae are classified as female substance, as are other side-products of the sago tree, such as roof panels and food baskets made from sago leaves. Roof panels are used to close a house to generate new compounds. So female products of the sago tree are associated with rotting, transformation, containment, and rebirth. Male sago products, by contrast, are used for opening the way to conception and for forging familiar flesh. Male and female sago products are in a way as complementary in reproducing the kinship group as wife-givers and wife-takers, and male and female sexual substances. Men, in ritual context, build up, open up, or make grow, whereas women contain, finish, (en)close, or transform.

This classification is also valid for the production cycle of sago, and for the way sago trees are reproduced. Men cut the trees, open up the bark, and pound the sago into chips. Women wash the sago chips to make them into raw sago and pack and prepare it as food. Men plant new sago shoots so that new trees can grow, while women eat the sago fruits which grow at the tops of the trees. Through the women's faecal excretions, these seeds can in principle grow into new trees, but it is never certain where this will be. Planted shoots are owned by the kin group and cannot be consumed by non-kin, whereas wild trees, including those which grew due to female consumption of fruits, are unmarked and can be cut more freely. Moreover, planted trees are usually preserved for personal consumption, while 'wild' trees can be sold or exchanged. This sago is considered of inferior quality; informants say, for instance, that it is harder to prepare proper porridge from these trees because it does not stick together sufficiently but falls apart. So planted, male,

domesticated trees are more highly valued than undomesticated trees, classified as female. Men use cut and bare but as yet unprocessed trees to attract pigs, while women collect the sago larvae that grow in the rotting remnants of the cut tree. Hence women handle the 'head' part of the tree, while men handle the 'body' part and the 'feet'. Women (or the wife-givers) plant seeds, while men (or wife-takers) plant shoots, as some informants put it.

This mirrors Inanwatan ideas of conception and the construction of human beings, in which it is women who control reproduction through division and repetition, while men control reproduction through coagulation and regeneration. In terms of production, nutrition, as well as exchange of sago-products, male and female efforts coagulate to produce a new unity. The sago tree thus not only represents a *dusun*'s regeneration, but also facilitates it. Through processing, handling, or consuming the products of this tree, persons become integrated into the *dusun* and contribute to its communal substance. The transformation of a woman's flesh from foreign into 'flesh of one's own' is also a transformation from human reproduction back into primordial vegetative reproduction. By downplaying the female role in reproduction, then, men actually attempt to control and claim female reproductive powers; precisely the same powers which they treat as threatening in human reproduction are the powers which reproduce the patrilineal kinship group. From a horizontal form of descent, reproduction is transformed into a vertical form of descent of the entire *dusun* through the female form of *iware* or life force. This transformation is embodied by the female body itself, as she eats her way down from the top and fruits of the tree through its body right down to the roots, until she finally becomes a new shoot of the *dusun*, containing ancestral substance.

Although in fact two parties are involved in reproduction, offspring ideally only belongs to one *dusun*, so the role of the other party is ideologically ignored or downplayed. In this way, the transfer of blood is replaced by the forging of flesh. This helps to explain why in ritual context the role of wife-givers as nurturers is also downplayed, and even transformed during the mourning rituals. People invest in nurture to construct 'flesh of one's own', but such investments require, ironically enough, the integration of foreign food and blood in order to reproduce. This need is disguised by the emphasis on male nurture and descent through paternal lines. As long as the incorporation of women is fruitful, this type of relationship forges new ties and results in a wider access to resources. But it also provides the opportunity to affect the flesh and blood of other *dusun* negatively, which would lead to visible violence and neglect on the part of men, and to suspicions of invisible attacks by women (*suangi*). Not surprisingly, then, in-married women are often accused of

such anti-social behaviour. The co-production, division and consumption of food, as well as the mixing of flesh and blood, is necessary to survive, in the Inanwatan world view. It is a delicate matter, however, as relationships are forged as well as expressed through food, but room is left for manipulation by women and their relatives.

A child's blood remains irrevocably connected to its mother and her ancestors, although their influence is tempered considerably, but a child's flesh and bodily scent is shaped (and before birth already modelled) by the father and his relatives. Through their nurturing substance (semen and food) the child becomes part of the *gobo*, becomes connected to the land and its ancestors. In adult life, a man's semen and food contribute to the flesh of subsequent generations of the *gobo*, whereas a woman's blood may be transported to another one. What constructs the *gobo*, then, is male substance, but what contributes to affiliation is female substance. Flesh reveals a *gobo*'s *iware*, its strength in producing food and attracting and incorporating new blood in order to reproduce the *gobo*. 'Foreign' blood is an essential element for the maintenance of a *gobo*, but poses, at the same time, a threat to its unity. A *gobo*'s vital power is thus also revealed in its capacity to accommodate or overpower the strength of this blood by producing offspring (we saw, for instance, that when female blood is too strong in comparison to semen, this will not result in offspring). Another expression of this power is the production of familial flesh.

Through the nurture of male substance – and sago falls into this category – different generations of men, who may not be related by blood, are connected to each other. In addition, through this type of nurture (of male substance), people are connected to their land as well as to their ancestors. By contrast, female blood and female reproductive capacity, more or less controlled by men, connects different groups of kin whose flesh is, most of the time, not 'of one's own'. Therefore, although women transfer and transform male substance, the identity of a *dusun* is constructed and perpetuated by men.

Conclusions

Inanwatan kinship relations are centred around the construction of familiar flesh through male nurture of sago and semen. Reproduction of the kinship group takes place through co-substance in which blood and semen are the two main forms of co-substantiality, but with a public emphasis on semen, as it is semen and sago, or rather male substance, which reproduces the kinship group. The result is the presence of two analytically distinct forms of descent, which could be summarized

by stating that women circulate male substance vertically, forging descent lines, and men circulate female substance horizontally, forging affiliation. Overtly, male substance and male handling of female substances is presented as representing and reproducing the group of descendants, whereas the influence of female substance and female handling of male substance is downplayed. In other words, a *dusun*'s growth and development parallels the model of vegetative propagation, a form of reproduction which is considered anti-social in individual human beings and which is embodied by the female body, but which is considered proper at the social level. Male control over female reproductive powers, then, is legalized by the supposed need to socialize reproduction, to socialize potentially dangerous women in order to reproduce the flesh of the *dusun*. However, this process involves the integration into the *dusun* of precisely those forces that could potentially destroy the flesh of the kinship group. Or, in other words, by incorporating and appropriating female bodies, men gain control over the reproductive process, but, at the same time, they have incorporated potentially lethal forces into the core of their existence.

Women have eaten their way down into the roots of the kinship group, from where they have the power to infect the ancestral substance which feeds the future generations, and in this way to endanger the regeneration of the entire *dusun*. Male-female relationships are therefore both complementary and antagonistic, an antagonism which is also repeatedly expressed between entire kinship groups during the various exchanges of food which take place between wife-givers and wife-takers. Men often act violently in their attempt to control female substance and female reproductive capacity or desire, and out of fear of what may happen when women's lethal powers escape the boundaries of their individual bodies and enter the shared body of the *dusun* or the community at large. Women, in turn, are quite ready to use fears of pollution and witchcraft to gain some sense of autonomy and power over the actions of men and other women such as female in-laws. Ironically enough, pregnancy is both a symbol of male domination and a female source of power and autonomy in which notions of pollution, witchcraft, desire, and greed are tools of domination as well as suppression. In conclusion, the nurture relations and exchanges of food (particularly of sago) which have been described have provided us with a fruitful entry into the domain of kinship and male-female relations, particularly into the process through which kinship and gender identities are formed. The various ways in which sago is reproduced, processed, prepared, served, consumed, and even decomposed, parallel the processes of construction, incorporation, deconstruction, and regeneration of human beings in relation to their land and patrilineal relatives.

Notes

1 The fieldwork was conducted in 1995 and 1996 and was sponsored by the Netherlands' Organisation for Tropical Sciences (NOW/WOTRO).

2 The Patipi language (Onin Peninsula) has had a strong influence on the Inanwatan ethno-linguistic outlook. Inanwatan, for instance, is originally a Patipi name (*Inansowatan*) meaning 'it's only sago' or 'a big sago tree', and several fam ('family') names still refer to their Patipi origins. The Patipi traded valuable objects and weapons for sago and other products of the tidal forest, but they also obtained slaves in warfare and sold them to work in the spice trade.

3 In several villages of the Inanwatan sub-district Islam is predominant and influences expressions of identity.

4 In Inanwatan Dutch Protestant missionary workers (Utrechtse Zendings Vereniging) were operative until the end of the 1950s. At present, the Indonesian GKI (*Gerakan Kristen Injil*) coordinates the Protestant communities.

5 This information is derived from a local report from the sub-regional governmental office (Laporan Kependudukan Kecamatan Inanwatan, July 1995, Kantor Camat).

6 See van Oosterhout 2002.

7 The Inanwatan language belongs to the South Bird's Head language family (de Vries 1996).

8 See also van Oosterhout 2001, where notions of scent in relation to moral conduct are dealt with in more detail.

9 These origins refer to a common descent from an origin being called Kekeaò, who was constructed from a sago tree. She is half woman, half tree.

10 See also van Oosterhout 1998: 149.

11 Ethnographic data from elsewhere in Melanesia similarly reveals that the substances bestowed in intercourse and nurture are analogous to objects given in exchange (Lutkehaus 1995: 14).

12 See also van Oosterhout 1998 and 2002 for more extensive discussion of *iware*.

13 Compare this with Hua notions of *nu* [vital essence] as described by Meigs: whatever can be eaten or otherwise ingested is a source of *nu* and, conversely, whatever is a source of *nu* can be thought of as nourishing (1984: 99).

14 See Elmberg, who describes the central Bird's Head Mejprat conception of *an*, as the hot, vegetative forces (1968: 209) which are connected to warmth, life, passivity, the power of growth, and femininity (ibid: 208), and opposes it to *cha*, connected with concepts of cold, death, ghosts, action, and maleness (ibid: 208).

15 Elmberg likewise comments that the male cold and female heat are complementary concepts of polarity (1968: 210).

16 In the local language *suangi* is called *me'ido*, the mother's disease, implying that it is primarily female relatives who are suspected.

17 Men can also be accused of *suangi*, not if they do not directly contribute to reproduction, but indirectly, if they do not contribute nurturing substances such as food.

18 In Melanesia this is rather common, as for instance for the New Guinean Baruya. Semen is responsible for developing a woman's breasts. It also makes her breasts produce milk and allows her to become a nursing mother (Godelier 1986: 52).

19 Compare this with the case of the Papua New Guinean Highland Pangia, where the occurrence of first sexual intercourse was thought to stimulate the onset of menstruation, thus creating a fertile female from one who was previously infertile (Stewart & Strathern 1999: 353).

20 This form of transfer of life force has been noted repeatedly elsewhere in New Guinea. According to Hua males, for instance, Meigs noted that the sex act, although it increases the female's vitality, decreases the male's. Each act depletes the finite quantity of a man's *nu* (vital essence) (1984: 41).

21 The pregnancy of women is therefore, among other things, a way to prove a man's masculinity.

22 Sørum noted, by contrast, that the Bedamini consider repeated acts of coitus necessary for conception. With each act, a different part of the child is implanted by the father (1984: 321).

23 Such a point of view is rather widespread in other New Guinean societies, as for instance the Etoro, where a child possesses life force as a direct result of his father's loss of it (Kelly 1976: 42).

24 Compare this with the Hua (Papua New Guinea) relationship between food and vital essence (*nu*): food carries some of the *nu* and therefore some of the power of the person who cultivated or prepared it for eating (Meigs 1984: 20).

25 The New Guinean Etoro, for instance, similarly believe that a person has two spiritual components: an immaterial spirit double, and the *hame*, a life force or animating principle (Kelly 1976: 37). The spirit double resides in a shadow or reflection, whereas the *hame* embodies the animating principle and vital energy of human existence (see Kelly 1976: 39).

26 This is called *harta belakang*, wealth for the back.

27 This occurs more often nowadays than before, as an increasing number of *gobo* are no longer capable of paying enough. The child then becomes a member of the mother's *gobo*.

Most men fear that they will no longer remain the central pillar of the house and that there will be a general shift to matrilineal descent in the future.

28 In various other societies, such as the Melanesian Fiji, the relationship between care and body shape is likewise clearly made. Weight loss and thinness are associated with social neglect or deprivation (Becker 1995: 38).

29 LiPuma recently noted, for instance, that among the New Guinean Marind, sorcerers 'want things for themselves', thus expressing a possessiveness, a sense of greed, that is the opposite of sharing and reciprocity (1998: 70).

30 See also LiPuma: sorcerers internalize or consume the relations of which they are composed. They literally cannibalize the life force (*min*) of their own kin (1998: 71).

31 Although women often provide food for their children, and fathers largely contribute to the production of this food, only paternal uncles are compensated for the nurture they have invested in a girl when she gets married. The *harta susu* (wealth for the milk) is therefore not paid to the mother of the bride, but to her paternal uncles. Their nurture is publicly emphasised, regardless of the fact that the parents of the bride have also made a considerable contribution.

32 Bloch and Parry described a similar concept for the Melanesian Dobuan. The flesh in the Dobuan idiom is planted in the gardens as the corpses of the ancestors are planted in the village mound. What reproduces the lineage in a material sense, then, is – in Dobuan ideology – the flesh of its own kind. The consumption of yams thus amounts to an act of symbolic endo-cannibalism (1982: 28).

33 Nowadays people claim that boys are not as tall as they used to be because they engage in sexual relations too soon, thus losing too much semen to grow properly (van Oosterhout 1998: 148).

34 I.e. paternal uncles.

35 Girls are perceived to become fertile sooner (than before) as they have sexual relations at an early age, and thus receive extra fertilizing power (semen) (van Oosterhout 1998: 148).

36 It could be that this numbness of flesh is meant to initiate the future transformation of a woman's flesh into flesh which is similar to that of her husband and his relatives (see below), but I have no clear information on this matter.

37 Lutkehaus concludes from the material available on initiation practices in New Guinea that scars, tattoos, and other forms of bodily mutilation are permanent signs of the initiate's change of status and ability to endure the pain associated with acquiring them (1995: 18). In Inanwatan, this practice prepares girls for a future status, i.e. for motherhood. The real test for women, then, is not the initiation, but pregnancy and consequent delivery.

38 See also van Oosterhout 2000, 2002.

39 Consuming corpses thus not only deprives a *gobo* of its nurturing substances, but also of its ancestral substances, including the ancestral spirit.

40 Compare also, for instance, the Hua, where an enormous structure of ritual and taboo exists for the precise purpose of managing the community's *nu* from the birth of its individual members through their deaths (Meigs 1984: 129).

41 This meal may be prepared, and/or imbued with fertility spells, by a female healer who is a relative of the husband.

42 The wife's family also provides gifts of cooking utensils so that the woman can cook for herself and her husband.

43 These dishes are carefully examined to check whether they are clean enough (i.e. with no food remains) and are free of dubious traces which could lead to suspicions of poisoning.

44 These are made by the woman's relatives from leaves of their sago trees.

45 An average Inanwatan kitchen has 3 fireplaces and 3 sets of pans, but even more sets are possible. One is used by a grandmother, one by the wife of the *tiang tengah* (central pillar, eldest male heir), and one by a daughter-in-law.

46 This helps to explain why leaf wrappings are often preferred over dishes. But in the context of female initiation, the consumption of semen out of leaf bowls could be interpreted as consuming male substance from a male bag, so it replaces direct consumption while carrying the same potent meaning.

9

RICE RITUALS, KINSHIP IDENTITIES AND ETHNICITY IN CENTRAL FLORES

Willemijn de Jong

Rice is a scarce and prestigious alimentary resource among the people who live in the dry southern coastal area of Central Flores in Eastern Indonesia.¹ Often, they are not able to grow enough food to meet the needs of their households. To get cash earnings, they depend to a large extent on the cottage industry of *ikat* weaving. The people call themselves *Ata Lio*, Lio people, but they differ in economic respects from those who live in the northern area of Central Flores where agricultural conditions are better. For convenience, I will use the term 'Southern Lio' for those who subsist on agriculture and weaving, and 'Northern Lio' for those who subsist on agriculture. I will not use these terms with regard to their identities, because the people do not explicitly identify themselves in this way.

Among the Southern Lio, rituals concerning the production, exchange and consumption of rice are important in two contexts: in the yearly cycle of agricultural ceremonies, and in lifecycle ceremonies. After a brief description of the meaning of rice as the most basic prestige good in everyday life, I shall focus on the ritual practices of exchange and consumption of rice and infer from them transformations in kinship identities. It is not my intention here to interpret the symbolic meaning of the ritual actions.

My suggestion is that these ritual practices create social boundaries which are crucial for the construction of different kinds of kinship identities and also for ethnic identities. Specifically, while in the past agricultural rice rituals used to generate hierarchical identities related to the house and its ancestors, today life-cycle rice rituals create less hierarchical identities for people, as wife givers and wife takers and as household members, particularly for women as wives with authority within their households.

Further, I shall contend that with the decreasing importance of the agricultural rice rituals and the increasing importance of lifecycle rice rituals, which I was able to witness in one of the cultural centres of the Lio, a transformation in kinship identities is occurring. The Houses (*saò*), corporate socio-religious units based on patrilineal descent, are losing their former importance. I use the term 'Houses' further on to distinguish them from houses as physical structures. Together, the Houses used to constitute a rather bounded and politically autonomous village community. Nowadays, kinship identities related to household membership are becoming more prominent. Households or 'hearths' (*bu'u waja*) are, here, co-residential units of production and distribution based on the nuclear family. Through the ritual exchange of rice and other prestige goods, husbands and wives often create social networks today that far exceed the territory of the village. Compared with the exchange of rice, its shared consumption is of secondary importance in this context. With the shifting meanings of the agricultural and lifecycle ceremonies, kinship and ethnic identities are also shifting.

Alimentary Resources, Ritual Practices, Kinship and Ethnic Identities

Before I embark on the presentation of my ethnographic data, I would like to point out briefly the relevance of the topic of this chapter with regard to current debates in anthropology and to elucidate some central notions and concepts.

I would like to consider the alimentary dimensions of kinship under the broader perspective of identity construction. This issue, especially as it relates to ethnic and cultural identity, has been debated in anthropology since the end of the 1960s with a heightened awareness since the end of the 1980s of the impact of globalization (cf. Friedman 1992, Mach 1993). As several authors have emphasized, kinship may play an important role in processes of construction of ethnic identity. In certain cases, for instance in Hawaii, the extended family with its related values is a core issue (cf. Friedman 1992). Often, if not universally, ethnic identity is based on ascriptions by descent (cf. Eriksen 1993). Generally, ethnic identity is closely connected with the construction of history or narratives of origin and with power differences (cf. Friedman 1992, Yanagisako and Delaney 1995).

It thus seems indispensable to add the aspect of kinship to Barth's classic definition of ethnic groups (cf. Barth 1969) as Elwert and Eriksen do. Elwert conceives of ethnic groups as groups which encompass and comprehend families and which ascribe to themselves a (possibly exclusive) collective identity (Elwert 1989: 33). In his view, as a rule ethnic groups organize kinship in that they

create heredity as a social construction through membership by birth. Eriksen explicitly includes kinship elements in his definition of ethnicity, when he says that

'Ethnicity is an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction. It can thus also be defined as a social identity (based on contrast vis-à-vis others) characterised by metaphoric or fictive kinship (Yelvington, 1991: 168). When cultural differences regularly make a difference in interaction between members of groups, the social relationship has an ethnic element. Ethnicity refers both to aspects of gain and loss in interaction, and to aspects of meaning in the creation of identity. In this way it has a political, organisational aspect as well as a symbolic one' (Eriksen 1993: 12).

Ethnic identity concerns the symbolic aspect of ethnicity. I use the terms ethnicity and ethnic identity referring to this definition.

Based on the arguments of Elwert and Eriksen, my stance is that kinship identities are often at the core of ethnic and other social identities, and that from this perspective anthropological kinship studies could be of renewed interest as well.² This would both include and extend the renewed concern with kinship in relation to gender (cf. Peletz 1995, Franklin and McKinnon 2001). Both kinship and ethnic identities develop from the interactions of ascriptions of self with ascriptions of others, or more generally of interactions of we-images with they-images, in local contexts but informed by regional, national and global influences (e.g. family policies, including constructions of the household, the housewife and the family) (cf. Risseuw and Palriwala 1996, Stivens 1998).³

Rituals are particularly interesting for the construction of kinship and other social identities if we look at them not only as a medium of reproduction of structures as in most older approaches, but following Kelly and Kaplan (1990: 141) also as 'the practice that makes structures, the practice that defines and authorizes' and thus recognize with them that 'the rituals in ongoing practice are a principal site of new history being made'. Mach (1993: 90) also gives a helpful clue with regard to the significance of rituals for kinship identities, when he says, '*Ritual is a creative act through which people identify themselves and others. Therefore, if conflict is perceived and encoded in the model of the world, ritual expresses it, materializes it and transforms it into behavioural acts. (. . .) The differences between groups which, in everyday life, may appear unclear and dispersed, are brought together in ritual, defined and transformed into a single coherent performance of identity and conflict*' (author's italics).

Alimentary rituals seem particularly suited to represent and to create kinship and ultimately ethnic identities. The rituals which are the focus of this chapter are embedded on the one hand in agricultural festivals which concern the whole *adat* village, a community based on customary law, and on the other hand in lifecycle feasts which concern certain kinship groups within the community, at least as long as mainly village endogamy was practised and migration was still limited, that is until the 1970s. These rituals originate from situations of crisis in cycles of fertility of crops and of human beings, but also from conflicts in micro-politics, and they also induce conflicts, as I was able to observe on many occasions.

The most important food rituals in Indonesian societies are meat rituals connected with sacrificing, and rice rituals. An intriguing example exploring the connection between meat rituals and ethnic identity is discussed in Volkman's study of funeral ceremonies among the Toraja of Sulawesi (cf. Volkman 1984). Although she does not explicitly deal with the issue of kinship identity, but with the encompassing complex of ethnic identity, she raises some questions about it. Meat and rice rituals are often interlinked (cf. de Josselin de Jong 1965, van der Weijden 1981, Howell 1996, Wackers 1997), but I will focus here especially on rice rituals. In the anthropological literature, the term 'rice rituals' is often used with regard to the ceremonial agricultural cycle (cf. de Josselin de Jong 1965, van der Weijden 1981). I use the term here also with regard to the exchange and consumption of rice in ritual contexts of the human lifecycle. The notion 'ceremony' is used here to denote non-everyday events and practices which show a sacred dimension, and the notion 'ritual' for the single sequences and practices of a ceremony.

The Meaning of Rice in Everyday Life

The village of Nggela with about 1,300 inhabitants,⁴ on which I focus here, is known in the southern region of the Lio as one of the important cultural centres or *adat* communities. The villagers have created a local identity as *Ata Nggela*, people of Nggela, and distinguish themselves from other Lio villages by means of political and cultural criteria. The most important of these are a village council with seventeen instead of seven aristocratic elders, large bridewealths for their women who excel in *ikat* weaving and who are said to have a particularly white skin, a norm of postmarital residence which is uxorilocal instead of virilocal, refined behaviour including language use, and, not least, a cycle of twelve instead of the usual three agricultural ceremonies. Their singular raindance (*muré*) is considered in the village and beyond to be a cultural marker of both Nggela and Lio identity (cf. de Jong 1997). Both *Ata Nggela* and *Ata Lio* identities can be considered to be ethnic

identities according to the definition pointed to earlier. The terms for ritual actions and kinship relations vary among the Lio. I will use here the notions and concepts of the research location.

Rice is conceptualized as a prestigious luxury good and in certain contexts as a sacred or even divine kind of food in the south. Today, it is associated in the first place with lifecycle feasts (*pulu*) which are important for the social networks of all people born in the village. Moreover, rice is associated with high-ranking persons who perform sacred duties on the one hand, and with ancestors and other supernatural beings including the rice-goddess Iné Paré on the other hand.

The category of high-ranking people with sacred tasks consists in the first place of the noble village elders and in principle also their wives. They are the male and female heads of the major Houses (*sa'ò*),⁵ which are named corporate kin groups based on patrilineages (*suku*). The elders bear the title 'distinguished man' (*mosa laki*), their wives 'distinguished woman' (*fai ngga'é*). The untitled heads of the less important Houses also belong to this category. All these people have the task of preparing and offering (*pa'à*) rice to the ancestors of their Houses at the agricultural festivals, and the village elders additionally have to make offerings to the founding ancestors of the village and to the spirits and deities.⁶ In everyday life it is forbidden for them to eat cassava, the staple food of the village population, but they should preferably eat rice. These food regulations mark them visibly as privileged persons and distinguish them from the so-called 'ordinary people' (*ata réwo*).

As far as everyday life is concerned, rice consumption is scant indeed. At the end of the 1980s, in the poorest households rice was eaten only once every two weeks, in middle range households rice was consumed twice or three times a week, whereas only in the few wealthy families was rice eaten daily.

How does this pattern of consumption relate to the production and distribution of rice and of other alimentary resources? Besides cassava (*uwi kaju*) the staples in this coastal area are maize (*jawa*) and millet (*lolo*). Some rice (*paré*), yams (*uwi*) and beans (*bu'é*) are also cultivated. These crops are grown by swidden cultivation on dry fields (*uma maja*). Only some elite households grow rice on irrigated fields (*uma ae*). Coconuts (*nio*) are also cultivated. Until the end of the seventies these constituted a cash crop, but nowadays they are rarely sold outside the village.

Whereas the major economic task of the women in the approximately twenty villages in the southern Lio area is the production of cloth for wearing, for ritual exchange and for sale, it is the main task of the men to cultivate food for daily consumption and for ritual purposes, as well as to breed animals (horses, pigs, goats) for rituals and to obtain cash, if needed (cf. de Jong 1994, 1998a). The division

of labour according to gender overlaps. Men help women with certain kinds of work in textile manufacture, and women help men in food production. Women assist in the planting and harvesting of all the crops; only the planting of rice is prohibited for women. Most cooperative labour is performed within the household, the most important production and distribution unit locally. Agricultural wage labour hardly exists in the south. Short-term labour cooperation in agriculture is provided by kin and neighbours on a reciprocal basis.

According to local customary law, *adat*, the period of cultivation of the fields is restricted to seven years on the village land in the west, and then seven subsequent years on the village land in the east. Because of overuse of particular plots of land in recent decades, however, fertility has severely decreased and rice especially can be grown only for a few years at a time. Most families have to buy supplementary food for daily consumption through the selling of cloth. The large quantities of rice needed for consumption at lifecycle feasts are only partly provided by the hosting spouses themselves. On the one hand they rely on supplies of their own which they may have invested in one or more rotating saving associations run by married women. On the other hand they also rely on kin and neighbours. In the event of crop failure, which occurs regularly, subsidized rice is distributed to the households by the regional government and by the Catholic church.

Practices of Rice Rituals in Agricultural Festivals (Nggua)

In contrast to other *adat* communities in the Lio area, agricultural festivals were not performed in Nggela during the 1980s and 1990s, except during the cultivation cycle of 1987/88. One explanation often heard in the village and in the region was that there was severe disharmony amongst the elders in relation to the correct performance of the ceremonies. Here we have to bear in mind that the ceremonies used to reflect the ranking positions between the village elders. Briefly, it can be argued that the following changes are responsible for the collapse of the agricultural festivals at the end of the 1970s.⁷ As far as the economic system is concerned, land which was common property until the beginning of the twentieth century became private property under the influence of colonial taxation, and cloth production has surpassed agricultural production in the south, particularly because shorter fallow periods have caused increasing soil deterioration. The introduction of new technologies for rice cultivation and of cash crops effected no real economic improvement for the majority of the population in this region. What seems more important is the transformation of the political system, in that since Indonesian

independence in 1945 village autonomy and the regime of the council of noble village elders have been replaced by a strongly centralized political structure with a formally elected village government. At the same time the social system consisting of ranked nobles, commoners and slaves has been formally abolished. Increased formal education and labour migration have effected geographical as well as some social mobility. Finally, Catholic institutions have superseded the old ways of belief in the religious system. Although all these factors also apply more or less to other Southern Lio communities who still do perform their cycle of agricultural festivals, in contrast to the village of Nggela, these consist mostly of only three instead of twelve ceremonies, and often seven village elders are involved and not seventeen. So it can be assumed that a major reason for the disappearance of agricultural festivals in Nggela is the complexity of the festival cycle, the performance of which requires extensive cooperation between many village elders who are competing for prestige and power within a changed political arena.

During my first year in the field from October 1987 to September 1988 I had the opportunity to document the whole cycle of agricultural festivals, because the elders tried to revitalize them at that time. They had been strongly motivated to do so by the district governor (*bupati*) within the scope of a current programme developed by the central government, to make the region more attractive for tourism. Flores was hardly developed with regard to tourism at that time, and that has not changed much since then (Schalcher 2002). Earlier, together with some other villages in the region, Nggela had been selected by the district government as a typical Lio 'tourist village' (*désa pariwisata*) due to its outstanding hand weaving industry and its architecture, consisting of a considerable number of ceremonial houses encircling the megalithic cult place. At that time, however, the elders were not able to continue the festivals beyond one ceremonial cycle.

Since the second half of the 1990s, however, several decayed ceremonial houses, which are needed for the agricultural festivals, have been rebuilt despite high costs. And surprisingly, in October 2000 another revival of the agricultural festivals started and is still going on. Interestingly, a younger generation of emigrants from Nggela living in West Timor and Bali (where ceremonial life flourished due to increased earnings from tourism) seem to be the main motivators. These expatriates are trying to prevent the cultural traditions of their ancestors and their local history from being lost, according to what people say in the village. Additionally, this generation also seems to be hoping for a more affluent future through tourism in their native place, where they may possibly spend their old age (as occasionally can already be observed). Due to that reason, they may also be interested in sponsoring ceremonies and ceremonial houses.

On the one hand, the village population, especially the women, did not much regret the vanishing of the cycle of agricultural festivals during the 1980s and 1990s, because for them it requires additional labour to prepare the recurring ceremonial gifts. On the other hand, people in the village thought that more cases of illness and death occurred during that time, because in particular the ceremony of the purification of the village was not practised. Today, however, people in the village talk about the agricultural ceremonies with much satisfaction and pride. They particularly emphasize the purification ceremony with the eventful four-day dancing feast that also attracts people from the neighbouring villages and relatives from the neighbouring town. Inevitably, through the regional and transregional developments during the last twenty years or more a shift in the meaning of the agricultural ceremonies has taken place.

After a brief overview of the agricultural ceremonies and the significance of rice I shall present some selected practices of rice rituals which are particularly interesting to highlight the argument of this chapter. According to the former head of the village (*kapitan*) and head of one of the most important Houses, called Sa'o Ria, the agricultural ceremonial cycle consists of twenty festivals (*nggua*). Some of these, however, constitute mere stages in the main ceremonies, so that from a more general perspective we can speak of twelve festivals.

The first three ceremonies and the fifth one are divination ceremonies, in which the village elders try to prophesy and to influence the harvest and the prosperity of the people. The fourth one is a planting ceremony of rice, maize and millet, and the next six ceremonies relate to the harvesting of first fruits, particularly vegetables, maize, yams, beans, millet and rice. Interestingly, the staple food cassava does not appear in the rituals. The culmination of the ritual cycle is the final ceremony concerning the ritual purification of the village followed by a four-day dancing-feast (*joka ju*).⁸ In other *adat* communities of the Lio often three festivals are celebrated, one at planting, one at harvesting and one with regard to the purification of the village (cf. Arndt 1944, Orinbao 1992, Wackers 1997).

The major actors in the agricultural ceremonies in Nggela are the seventeen noble village elders. As heads of the major Houses they traditionally constitute the village council, allocate the land and initiate and authorize every phase of the agricultural cycle, including the rituals in which they mediate between their followers (*ongga*) and the ancestors (*du'a bapu*). Because they have both religious and political functions they are often called 'priest-leaders' in the anthropological literature on the Lio (e.g. Howell 1989, Wackers 1997).

According to a shared view concerning village history, it was the heads of the highest-ranking Houses who founded the village who allocated land and

also women to the Houses that emerged later. Those Houses who were able to give a large quantity of gold as a counterprestation also obtained their own titled head (*mosa laki*); other Houses stayed in a client relationship (*poa paso*) with the highest-ranking Houses. Within each House land was collectively owned and cultivated by the sub-group called *podo*, in English 'pot'. These are agnatic groups, i.e. groups of brothers and their households, with the eldest brother as a head of the sub-group (*podo nia*). The households or 'hearths' (*bu'u waja* or *bu'u lulu*), based on the nuclear family, are the smallest social units of the House (cf. also de Jong 2000).

The Houses as kin groups are both physically and symbolically represented in the ceremonial houses, called 'houses of the agricultural festivals' (*sa'o nggua*), which function as a means to strengthen the identity of the groups. The highest-ranking ceremonial houses are built in a circle around the megalithic cult place (*kanga*) and the village temple (*keda*)⁹ in the sacred village centre (*oné nua*). Whereas the villagers generally identify the cult place and the temple as male, the ceremonial houses are represented as female (cf. also Howell 1995b, de Jong 1998b). The latter are particularly related to the agricultural ceremonies, as many of the rituals are practised inside the ceremonial houses. Each of these houses is divided into two halves with a hearth each, connected with certain sub-groups or *podo*. The right half of the ceremonial house (seen from the inside), associated with the elder brother, outranks the left side, which is associated with the younger brother.

What role does rice play in the cycle of agricultural festivals? It is the duty of the twenty-eight Houses (*sa'o*) and their *podo* in the village to periodically deliver gifts or tributes to the supernatural beings and to the village elders as confirmation and acceptance of their control over the village land. From the perspective of the subjects (*ongga*) this duty is called 'offering four grains to the village altar' (*tu mboko sutu ghéle tubu*). The four grains refer to millet and rice, with rice ranking higher. The right of the village elders (*mosa laki*) to demand tribute is called 'to pick flowers' (*pu'i liě sowa wonga*) and is derived from the local system of land allocation which I have mentioned before.

Recurrent major practices in the agricultural festivals are offerings of rice inside the ceremonial houses, on the public cult place, at the temple, in the sacred village centre and on the fields. To this end, at the most important ceremonies all the in-married women of every House (who are the managers of its different households) gather in their specific ceremonial houses to offer a small basket containing about one and a half kilos of husked rice (*paré isi se wati*). The female head of the House (*fai nggaě*) or a male representative receives the rice. After the rice of each

household of the *podo* has been put together, she or he starts to perform the ritual duties. This consists of the 'measuring' (*kula*) of the rice of the *podo* according to the principle of seniority as well as the 'boiling of the rice for offering' (*seré are pa'a*).

People and objects should ritually be smeared with blood (*ra*) before they can come into contact with the spiritual beings. Blood rituals are performed in cases of transgression of the ritual order. But at the agricultural ceremonies the sacrificing of an animal is less significant than it is among the Northern Lio (Howell 1996: 104, Wackers 1997: 237–238).

To explain the significance and meaning of rice in agricultural festivals, I shall now describe the ceremony in which rice figures most crucially, namely the ceremony of the rice harvest. This festival is called *loka paré* which means 'pouring out rice'. It is performed in the first place 'to offer to the ancestors on the cult place' (*tau nggua nawu bapu loka paré leka kanga*). Generally, it can be designated as the largest offering ceremony of rice within the cycle of agricultural festivals. In all the other ceremonies rice is merely strewn (*pa'a réra*), not poured (*pa'a loka*). The preparations include the husking of rice (*waju*) two days before and the rubbing of the body with yellow rice flour (*lali paré kuné*) on the eve of the ceremony. The festival itself consists of two events, the offering of husked rice during the daytime (*pa'a loka*) and the offering of packets of cooked rice during the night (*pa'a are gau*). I shall present here the first event with a focus on the numerically largest House, Sa'o Ria. It consists of fifteen *podo* and more than 250 members and plays the leading role in this festival. Most heads of the village were recruited from this House. Together with Sa'o Labo, its wife giving House, it is the highest-ranking House of the village, politically and ritually.

On the morning of the ceremony of the rice harvest the ritual of measuring rice (*kula*) is performed in all the ceremonial houses, on the one hand to prepare a basket with ten to fifteen kilos of rice (*wati* or *mbola*) to bring to the cult place and on the other hand to prepare the rice for the rice packets. In the ceremonial house of Sa'o Ria the sub-groups (*podo*) of both halves of the house provide a tribute: the right side bestows a very large basket (*wati bha*), and the left side gives a smaller one (*wati*). Probably because of rivalries about positions of rank and power during the nineteenth century there are now three differently ranked elders within Sa'o Ria. Normally there is only one head of a House. Two of the elders belong to the right 'hearth' of the house (*bu'u pa lau*) with three and six *podo* respectively, one to the left 'hearth' (*bu'u pa ghéta*) with six *podo*. The most important elder (*mosa laki pu'u*) of the right hearth and the one of the left hearth perform the measuring simultaneously. They have replaced the female heads.¹⁰

Photo 9.1 The female head (*fai ngga'é*) of Sao Labo, one of the leading houses in the village, ritually measuring rice (*kula*) from its constituent households, 1988. (Willemijn de Jong)

Those village elders who are allowed to ascend to the cult place proceed there, sit down at their places according to their rank and receive betel (*nata*). The major village elder (*mosa laki pu'u iné amé*), the one belonging to the House Saò Labo, offers palm wine on the *tubu*, the megalithic altar, and gives it to the other village elders to drink ((*tau roé*). Meanwhile the twenty-eight Houses bring their baskets to the cult place. Together they symbolize 'the land and the stones' (*tana watu*), in other words the village in its entirety.

The major actors in this ritual are the heads of 'the seven Houses' (*saò lima rua*), led by those of Saò Ria. Together with three other Houses the seven Houses claim precedence because of settling first in the village. After litigation about ritual transgressions and the associated fines have taken place, they perform the ritual of measuring rice (*kula*) at the cult place. This is now done by means of a large china plate (*bha*), which is put in a huge flat basket (*logé goré*). With the last basket, belonging to Saò Labo, the offering of pouring out rice (*loka*) on the cult place as well as to the north and the south of it is conducted.

The rest of the rice is redistributed. This ritual consists of three parts. The first share is called 'tired hands' (*lima mo*). It is a tribute from the village subjects' land

Photo 9.2 At the big offering ceremony related to the rice harvest (*loka paré*), the heads of the major Houses (*mosa laki*) perform the ritual redistribution of the twenty-eight houses of the village on the megalithic cult place (*kanga*), 1988. (Willemijn de Jong)

(*pu'i liě sowa wonga*) to the titled heads of the seven Houses. The second share is called 'tired backs' (*longgo mo*) and goes to those heads of the seven Houses who have performed the offering of rice (*tau loka paré*). The third part is simply called 'share' (*majo*) and goes to the three highest-ranking village heads among whom are those belonging to Sào Labo and Sào Ria; a further handful of rice goes to the baskets of each of the twenty-eight Houses. This rice should be offered in their ceremonial houses (*tau pa'a leka du'a bapu*) and symbolically represents the seed of the next agricultural cycle. After the rituals conflicts often arise about the correct performance of the ritual tasks. In fact these are conflicts about the actual ranking positions of the village elders.

Interestingly, in Southern Lio the rice-goddess Iné Paré does not play an explicit role in the ritual cycle of agricultural festivals as she does in the north (cf. Yamaguchi 1989: 485–486, Howell 1996: 104, Wackers 1997: 200–204, 220–221).¹¹ None of the elders ever spontaneously referred to her. Only the elder who has the task of painting a male and a female figure on the egg at the egg-divination ceremony said that these figures represent Bobi and Nombi, the mother and father of Iné Mbu Iné Paré, as the rice-goddess is also called. Pronouncing their names

is not permitted, he said, only remembering them silently during the painting. He related this to an agreement with the small island of Palu'e, which is located north of the Lio area. Everywhere in Central Flores except on Palu'e parts of the body of Iné Paré were buried, out of which grew food crops, especially rice, according to the regional origin myth of the rice. Because no part of her body was buried there, the people of Palu'e did not cultivate rice.

In the southern coastal area of the Lio region the cultivation of rice is always threatened by drought. The prohibition on mentioning the name of the rice-goddess and her parents may also express the ambivalent relation between the village people in the south and Iné Mbu Iné Paré as the embodiment of an important, but scarce, food crop.¹² The association of rice, femaleness and expected fertility may also explain the fact that only men are allowed to plant rice – a symbolic form of procreation. For women planting of rice is forbidden.¹³ Furthermore, the people in the south do not claim descent from the first wave of immigration of the people who constituted the Lio among whom were the parents of Iné Paré (the Aewora group). They reckon descent, instead, from the kin groups of the second wave of immigration from the north (the Wewaria group). Thus, they do not consider Iné

Photo 9.3 Only the heads of some of the Houses are entitled to conduct the conspicuous offering of rice at the ceremony of the rice harvest (*loka paré*) at different places of the sacred village centre (*oné nua*), 1988. (Willemijn de Jong)

Paré to be an ancestress from whom they descend in a direct line as people in the north do.

If we look at the ritual practices in agricultural festivals presented above in the light of the significance of food exchange and food consumption, we can draw two conclusions. Firstly, exchanges of rice as the most prestigious kind of food are crucial in the south. These exchanges take place between human beings and supernatural beings in particular, with the village elders as intermediaries (cf. Mauss 1923/24). Secondly, the shared consumption of rice among adult human beings is of minor importance in the agricultural ceremonies. This also applies to the rituals in which cooked rice is prepared and publicly offered to the supernatural beings. This cooked rice is distributed after that to the children of the village who eat it on the spot.

Practices of Rice Rituals in Lifecycle Feasts (Pulu)

Lifecycle feasts, called *pulu*, are events in which rice rituals play an important role. They are celebrated at important events in an individual's life, and they are more or less elaborated, depending on wealth and rank. Among the now Catholic Lio, lifecycle feasts occur at birth, first hair-cutting, first communion, betrothal, bridewealth delivery, wedding, transfer of the wife to the house of the husband, the building of a new house and at death.¹⁴ It is interesting to have a closer look at bridewealth ceremonies, because in this context rice rituals are most conspicuous and elaborate.

Generally there are three kinds of marriage processes in the south; these are marriage by formal courting (*tana alé*), marriage by informal courting (*po'u uta*, *wangga kaju*) and marriage by elopement (*paru nai*) (cf. also de Jong 1998a).¹⁵ At marriages by elopement, which are unusually rare in this village, the parents of the young woman in most cases initiate gift exchange after four nights by presenting cooked and husked rice and meat (*aré podo* called *dhonga* in this case), after which the parents of the young man present some animals and money as a first instalment of the bridewealth, 'so that the woman can leave the groom's house' (*panggo gha'i*). Only in exceptional cases are bridewealth and a counterprestation of rice and textiles not exchanged at all. At marriages by formal courting, which are practised by members of wealthy and high-ranking families, exchanges of marriage gifts are most elaborated and rice rituals can best be exemplified. In this case gift exchange starts shortly before the betrothal, with husked and cooked rice and other food gifts from the parents of the young woman to the parents of the young man to entice them to give a large bridewealth, as people say.

The delivery of bridewealth (*tu ngawu*) mostly takes place six months after betrothal. It has a public character, because according to customary law a marriage is only legitimate if the village community has witnessed the transfer of bridewealth. The parents of the groom as well as the wife takers (*weta ané*) and the nearest consanguinal 'younger and elder brothers' (*aji ka'é*) of the groom's father give animals (horses, pigs, goats) and money to the parents of the bride. His parents also give gold jewelry, if available. The parents of the bride as well as the wife givers (*nara amé*) and the nearest consanguinal 'younger and older brothers' (*aji ka'é*) of the bride's father and the 'younger and elder sisters' (*aji ka'é*) of the bride's mother give rice and hand woven textiles.¹⁶ The textiles are finally donated to those who have given an animal (cf. also de Jong 1998a, 1998c). Consanguinal kin from within the House (*aji ka'é doa*) and neighbours also bring rice, 'so that the pots get filled' (*penu podo*). More remote consanguinal kin bring a small amount of money as a substitute for palm-wine (*ae moké*). At bridewealth feasts we can again distinguish two events, namely the assembling of the bridewealth at the house of the bridegroom (*dhéra*), and the delivery of the bridewealth at the house of the bride (*nggewa téé*). Here I shall present the second event.

At the home of the bride her parents invite the male wife takers and consanguinals of the groom's side for a ritual meal. At first, (as at the event of the assembling of bridewealth at the house of the groom) the female spouse of the household offers some rice and meat on the graves of the ancestors, and the consanguinal relatives and neighbours who help with rice and services, this time of the bride's side, eat together (*pati ka aji ka'é no'o bhisu manga*). Then the wife takers are welcomed with a drink. A representative of the groom's family puts the major part of the bridewealth (gold jewelry and money) inconspicuously on a plate (*tu ria*) and puts the plate before the representative of the bride's family. As a response, female relatives of the bride's family ritually present betel and packages containing textiles (*tolo nata*). One or two days before, rice and textiles have been collected. The (female) wife givers bring their gifts (*dha pata bénga*) without a special invitation and a festive meal is not obligatory. After the ritual presentation of the cloths an opulent meal is served (*ka ria*) to the wife takers. At the end of the meal the bridewealth is officially delivered. Guests who could not be present again receive plates of food at home (*tu fi'i*).

Subsequently female relatives and neighbours of the bride bring the textiles and gifts of food, among which are roasted rice (*kibi*), boiled rice, as well as husked and unhusked rice, to the home of the groom (*tu genu aré*). The bride now has the ritual task of distributing cooked rice to the family of the groom (*soko aré*). By means of this ritual the bride is officially incorporated into the House of the groom as a

member with special rights and duties. If she is for instance a member of Saõ Labo by birth she becomes a member of Saõ Ria, if the groom belongs to that House. From now on she is called a 'child' (*ana*) of the groom's House, and in former times, before the spread of Catholicism and the concomitant introduction of the modern wedding ceremony, she was officially allowed to sleep with the groom. This shows that, according to customary law, after the delivery of bridewealth the marriage process would be complete.

After the meal in the house of the groom his mother examines the textiles in the presence of the bride. The next day the bride and her friends distribute the roasted rice and the textiles to the relatives of the groom who have given an animal. Not infrequently, both after the delivery of bridewealth and after the presentations of the counter gifts, consisting of textiles and rice in particular, conflicts about the quantity and the quality of these gifts arise. It may happen, for instance, that the bride has to go home to supplement rice or to substitute some of the textiles.

During the whole process of bridewealth transfer, which actually starts with the betrothal, the parents of the bride make large gifts of rice together with other luxury food (meat, coffee, sugar and cakes) to the parents of the groom. This occurs

Photo 9.4 At the delivery of bridewealth (*nggewa té'é*) the father of the groom (left) and other males of the wife takers are offered a ritual meal of rice and meat (*nggewa té'é*) at the house of the parents of the bride, 1987. (Willemijn de Jong)

particularly immediately after the actual delivery of the bridewealth (*tu genu aré*), four nights later (*tu aré podo*), eventually again a week later (*tu aré gau*) (if two pairs of golden earrings have been given) or within a year, if, in cases of virilocality, the transfer of the bride to the house of the bridegroom is performed. Moreover, such gifts are also made at the next large agricultural ceremony (*nggua baru*). After that the young wife celebrates the agricultural festivals in the ceremonial house of the groom, and each time she brings with her a small basket of husked rice as a gift. Until the wedding ceremony, nowadays the final stage of the marriage process, she helps the parents of the groom with the harvest and her parents receive up to ten percent of the yield as a gift. Moreover, if there are lifecycle ceremonies in the family of her husband or if someone is ill, she again bestows at least a gift of rice. After the wedding it is the responsibility of the spouses themselves to cultivate their own affinal relationships (*wuru mana*) with gifts and thus to negotiate and to build up their own networks of support.

A successful performance of the ritual practices of gift exchange at marriage is crucial for kinship networks and that means for the social security of the participants. Marriage relations thus do not develop automatically. Severe conflicts about gift exchange can mean that it becomes impossible to create

Photo 9.5 At the end of the bridewealth ceremony (*tu ngawu*), the bride (left) and her friends prepare food for the ritual distribution of coked rice (*soko aré*) to her in-laws through which the bride becomes a wife and mother in her husband's House, 1987. (Willemijn de Jong)

affinal relations, and in severe cases they may even result in a separation of the spouses.

From the ritual practices in the lifecycle feast pictured here, we can now draw three conclusions. Firstly, exchanges of rice as prestigious food are at the core, this time mainly between different categories of human beings, particularly in one direction from wife givers to wife takers, and to a lesser extent between human beings and supernatural beings. Secondly, the shared consumption of rice among human beings is significant in the context of lifecycle ceremonies, in contrast to agricultural ceremonies. Thirdly, members of those categories which exchange rice together, do not eat together. Only those who present the same kind of gifts share ritual meals.

Constructions and Transformations of Kinship Identities

To what extent are the rice rituals in agricultural and lifecycle ceremonies creative acts of identification, and which kind of identities are ritually performed today? In a unique way the cycle of agricultural ceremonies as a whole represents certain aspects of the village history, for instance the meaning of the houses and their relations of dependency as givers and takers of land and of women, and the ranking of the Houses and of the village elders (cf. also Howell 1991). This is also reflected in rice rituals. It can be contended that, in the same way as genealogies, the major local actors can effectively use these rituals for the ‘invention of tradition’ (cf. Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983) with the aim of improving their ranking positions – an issue which I can only briefly outline here.

The fact that Sa’o Ria as a wife taker plays such an important role in the festival of the rice harvest raises questions with regard to official representations of the social order. Actually Sa’o Labo as a wife giver ranks more highly, and thus should lead in that festival rather than Sa’o Ria. Here we clearly see that the supposedly original hierarchy based on criteria of seniority and marriage has been transformed. According to shared views of the origin of the village, the first and actually most important House that was founded in Nggela was the House of the elder brother of Sa’o Labo. In the course of the history of the village, this House has provided his younger brother, Sa’o Labo, with ‘rights and authority’, because it allegedly was not capable of exercising its ritual functions. Sa’o Labo, again, had given Sa’o Ria wives and land and thereby political and ritual rights, because the wife taker Sa’o Ria was very wealthy. That is why the ranking positions of these Houses are generally represented in a way that is diffuse and partly open to negotiation, particularly

since Saõ Ria has three elders and other rich Houses also claimed titles as village elders. These conditions had to be integrated into the ritual practices. Or rather, the village elders used the agricultural festivals to create new elements with regard to authority and ranking positions and thus based on their power also legitimated them. Additionally, genealogies and narratives of origin and kinship were revised with the effect of 'naturalizing power' (cf. Yanagisako and Delaney 1995). The final result was that there were different ritual functions for seventeen village elders, seven of whom were particularly prominent, with Saõ Ria playing the leading role in rice rituals at the harvest of rice and Saõ Labo and his elder brother in the rice rituals at the harvest of the first maize.

The actions of the elders also have implications for the members of their Houses. The latter use the rituals to create ascriptions or classifications of inclusion and exclusion in the first place with regard to kin groups and categories that also extend to the ancestors, and ultimately to village membership, to membership in the ethnic group of the Lio and to membership in the cosmological world. So it can be argued that there are no other occasions that are more important for the construction of social identities as members of the Houses and of their *podo* than the yearly agricultural festivals. One male informant once made exactly this point, when he said, 'Agricultural ceremonies are important for unity within the Houses, to know who is one's younger brother (*aji*) and who is one's elder brother (*ka'ě*). If the agricultural ceremonies are not performed any more, the people do not know each other any more, who their relatives are within the *podo* and within the *adat* house.' There are also irregular occasions such as litigations about land, at which the members of the Houses and of their *podo* meet, but not necessarily all of them as is the case at the yearly agricultural festivals. And interestingly, the individual households of the *podo* actually do not play any role in the agricultural feasts, either in the ritual practices or in the discourses. Unquestionably, however, they are the basic units which have participated with gifts in the agricultural ceremonies in recent times.

The rice rituals in the agricultural festivals not only strengthen membership in the Houses and their *podo*, but also collective and individual hierarchies based on precedence or seniority. For instance, only the members of the Houses which have established themselves up to a certain time in the past in the village and which possess land can participate in the ceremonial cycle and bring their 'four grains of rice' to the cult place. They descend in the female line from nobles (*ata ria*) or commoners (*ana fai walu*). The descendants of slaves (*ata koò*) and other landless newcomers (*ata mai*) are excluded from participation. And only noble men and women, those who descend from one of the nine first matrilineal clans (*kunu*),¹⁷ are

eligible for the titled offices of male and female head of the main Houses (*mosa laki* and *fai nggaë*) and the associated ritual tasks in relation to measuring, cooking and offering of rice. With Oppitz (1994) it can be argued that in the case of the Southern Lio too the act of offering emphasizes the boundaries and hierarchies between living kin on the one hand and dead kin and other supernatural beings on the other, rather than that the living and the supernatural beings constitute a unity as the communion theory contends (cf. Howell 1996, Wackers 1997). Thus, the rice rituals in the agricultural festivals tend to reify identities tied to the old kinship and ranking system as well as the old belief system.

New elements have also been created in the lifecycle feasts, for example the ritual of publicly presenting textiles (*tolo nata*) at the bridewealth feast and the ritual of giving rice at the four nights (*tu kobé sutu*) after the delivery of the bridewealth. These new elements concern gifts from the side of the wife givers. This is part of a process which started in 1910 in the course of the conversion to Catholicism. Catholic lifecycle feasts such as the first communion and the wedding, which were unknown before, were newly created and partly shaped according to local *adat* values. The presentation of textiles and rice as marriage gifts has increased since Indonesian independence in 1945 and particularly since the 1980s. This also applies to the gifts of rice and other food during the bridewealth feast. For instance, during the four nights after the delivery of the main part of the bridewealth the parents of the groom formerly got only plates with cooked rice and meat (*tu fi'i*); now they get pots with cooked rice and meat and additionally husked and unhusked rice as well as other luxury food (*tu kobé sutu*). There is a clear tendency for the bride's side to provide more and more gifts. This may be motivated by the fact that village brides have entered into competition with brides from outside who are possibly equipped with more resources. Thus, the former distinct hierarchy between wife givers and wife takers with the higher ranking of the wife givers has weakened.

Through the performances of rice rituals in the context of lifecycle feasts the categories and identities of kinship which are most prominently constructed are in the first place the household, with the spouses as the main actors, and with special emphasis on the wife as the organizer of gift-giving of rice and textiles. Further, relations with wife givers and wife takers as well as consanguinal kin are created or strengthened. In the case of the bridewealth feast, the spouses of two households interact in the first place with each other. They are the organizers of the festive events and the main gift givers. On the one hand, we have the 'parents of the bride' (*iné amé ata fai*) who are the wife givers in a narrow sense, which means that they provide the bride together with rice and textiles. On the other hand, we have the 'parents of the groom' (*iné amé ata kaki*) who are the actual wife takers and who

provide the bulk of the bridewealth. In the ideal but nowadays seldom practised case of maternal cross-cousin marriage the parents of both sides are related as brother and sister respectively. This may explain why the people used to say that 'the brother gives cloth and the sister gives animals' (*Nara pati luka lawo, weta pati éko*). Symbolically and practically, the relationship between brother and sister with regard to mutual support has further significance, although the sister is juridically incorporated into the House of her husband (cf. also Howell 1990).

Apart from the parents of the bride, who give rice and other goods such as textiles to the parents of the groom during the marriage process, there are other categories of kin who provide rice and textiles. These are on the one hand the wife givers (*nara amé*) of the bride's side, and on the other hand the classificatory younger and elder brothers and sisters of the bride's father and mother respectively (cf. de Jong 1998a for more details on kinship terminology in Southern Lio). In contrast to the wife givers (*nara amé*) and especially the wife takers (*weta ané*), close consanguinal kin (*aji kaé doa*) as well as neighbours (*bhisu manga*) can be asked for help of goods and services without any special formal requirement. In the literature on the Lio there is a strong emphasis on the wife givers and wife takers in gift exchange (cf. Howell 1995a); however, in the ritual and social practices the consanguinal relatives are also significant. This is clearly visible in the two subsequent meals of rice and meat for consanguinals and affinals (particularly wife takers) at both the event of the assembling of bridewealth goods (*dhéra*) and at the delivery of the bridewealth (*nggewa téé*). Even dead kin can participate in these exchanges, represented by living kin with whom they were closely related.

Further, the bride achieves her social identity as a wife through the ritual of sharing out cooked rice (*soko aré*) in the house of the groom. In accordance with customary law she obtains thereby the right to distribute household resources and authority within the house, as the people in the south say.

Marriage relations do little to strengthen identities of *podo* or House membership today, because it is usually not the complete *podo* which functions as wife giver or wife taker, let alone the whole House. This can only be contended from a highly abstract structural and socio-centric point of view, not from a more action-oriented and ego-centric approach. However, exogamy rules have to be followed with respect to patrilineages (*suku*) or Houses (*saò*) because of the asymmetrical alliance system, and also with respect to matriclans (*kunu*). But these marriage rules are of minor importance for kinship identities. Younger people often do not know their more remote relatives. Kinship terms inform them in principle about marriageable and non-marriageable persons, but in case of doubt they have to ask older relatives.

Whereas the agricultural ceremonies are in danger of vanishing and special efforts are needed to continue them, lifecycle ceremonies with exchanges of gifts are thriving. Related to regional and transregional influences since the 1980s, particularly with regard to the search for new income opportunities through migration and through tourism, the meanings of agricultural and lifecycle ceremonies are shifting, and at the same time a transformation of kinship identities is occurring. The agricultural ceremonies appear to be losing their former main function, defining and redefining the social ranking system and the local belief system. Thus except for the village elite, membership in larger social units such as the House and the *podo* are tending to lose their importance as a locus of identity, whereas the social unit of the household becomes more significant in this respect. Today, it is rather the case that the agricultural ceremonies, embodied in the dancing feast (*joka ju*), create an identity as *Ata Nggela* for the people living in the village and in the region, and an identity as *Ata Lio* for those who have migrated to other regions in Indonesia, such as West Timor and Bali. As far as the lifecycle feasts are concerned, wealthy high-ranking women are most active in organizing and performing rice rituals in lifecycle feasts, but women of poor low-ranking households, including those descended from slaves, can also participate (in contrast to the agricultural ceremonies) and have the possibility of negotiating their networks with affinal and consanguinal kin through exchanges of rice, though on a smaller scale.

At first sight, the social units of Houses (*sa'ò*), House segments (*podo*) and households (*bu'u*) can be looked at as symbolically equivalent, with all three levels having male and female heads. However, it is my view that the changes in kinship identities that are taking place cannot simply be considered to be switches in focus from the higher level of the House and of the House segment to a lower level of the household. For instance, those people belonging to the category of descendants of slaves and other immigrants in the village cannot participate in agricultural ceremonies, because as landless people they are not members of the Houses, but they can participate very actively in lifecycle ceremonies, to create networks of kin. And whereas households are commensal units in everyday life, House segments and Houses are units of distribution (and formerly of production), but they are not units of consumption of common meals in agricultural ceremonies. Commensal units in the context of lifecycle ceremonies consist of consanguinal and affinal kin of the spouses of a household, whereby the spouses organize the meal, but they do not participate themselves.

The socio-political and economic contexts behind these changes in kinship identities can be outlined as follows. After independence, the Indonesian state

officially abolished the feudal ranking systems of nobles, commoners and slaves. This had only gradual repercussions on the outer island of Flores. Although the ranking system is still influential with regard to political succession and choice of marriage partners among the village elite, changes are clearly noticeable, from a marked hierarchical ranking system based on ascription by descent and marriage to a slightly more egalitarian system of social stratification based on achievement. This also leads to more individually oriented kinship identities and relationships. With the increasing spread of the monetary economy in the 1970s and the growing importance of formal education, associated with the hope that at least some family members could achieve salaried positions as government employees (*pegawai*), the quantity of cloth produced increased. Gold jewellery and textiles were sold to finance secondary school education. Whereas only a small stratum of government employees could rely on the social security system provided by the state, for the majority of the people in the village kinship ties continued to be most crucial for social security. Strengthening ties with nearest kin, namely consanguinals and affinals, was achieved by an increased exchange of gifts of prestige products that could be provided most easily, namely textiles and rice. Within these changed socio-political and economic conditions, women as the givers of these prestige items obtained more bargaining power. And for the first time non-elite women also became empowered to use their gifts as instruments to advance the shifts in kinship identities.

Conclusions

In the agricultural ceremonies, rice is most important as a means of exchange, particularly for offerings to the supernatural beings. This is exemplified in the ceremony at the rice harvest.¹⁸ The shared consumption of rice among living human beings is of lesser importance. Offerings of other items, such as yams, millet, and palm-wine are less frequent, and sacrifices in the sense of blood offerings do not occur regularly in the agricultural festivals in the south of Central Flores. Rice offerings as gifts to the ancestors, nature spirits and deities are recurring elements in all the agricultural ceremonies. Men mostly organize and perform the rice offerings, particularly in the public space. No other institution in the village has lent itself so well to the manipulation of the relative rank positions of Houses, groups of *podo* and elders, and hence to the invention of tradition and to a transformation of the hierarchy of power relationships among the men, as the ceremonial agricultural cycle. Moreover, food taboos for people with duties of offering rice also served as a marker of hierarchy in everyday life among women and among men, as well as between men and women.

In bridewealth ceremonies as well as in other lifecycle feasts, rice is particularly important as a gift item in ritual exchanges to support different categories of kin who are in need, and as a special kind of food which is collectively consumed among different groups of people and which thus strengthens social differences and identities between them. In lifecycle feasts rice is also offered to the ancestors, but compared with agricultural festivals this is far less important, whereas the exchange of rice among living kin and the collective consumption of rice is far more significant. The ritual exchange of rice in lifecycle feasts is organized and performed by the female spouses who are the authorities within the households with regard to the management of resources, particularly of rice and textiles. At the occasion of the bridewealth feast, the male representatives of the households who contribute to the bridewealth gifts (with gold jewellery, cattle, and money) are not only affinal relatives, but also consanguinal relatives. Altogether, these guests constitute a network of social relations on which the spouses of the hosting household can rely in times of need.

The kinds of items that are exchanged and consumed during lifecycle ceremonies and the way this is done are important as cultural markers for kinship identities as well as for ethnic identities. For example, the Lio as an ethnic group distinguish themselves from the neighbouring Sikka or Maumere people in the main bridewealth items given from the groom's family to the bride's family, which are gold jewellery among the Lio and ivory tusks among the Sikka/Maumere people. And they also differ in the way they exchange them. In a similar way, they differ in the exchange and consumption of rice at lifecycle ceremonies and consider their own way to be typical of their ethnic group.

Hierarchical kinship identities based on the Houses as well as on their *podo* are increasingly losing their importance. Less hierarchical identities as wife givers and wife takers are becoming more significant. This also applies to identities as classificatory consanguinal relatives and as household members, particularly as husbands and wives who now often create networks far beyond the village borders.

The ritual use of rice as a prestigious alimentary resource in the agricultural and lifecycle ceremonies contributes to the construction and transformation of kinship identities and of ethnicity. The latter is evident when the impending disappearance of the agricultural ceremonies is taken into account. However, the agricultural ceremonies are clearly not absolutely necessary for the moral and cosmological universe today, otherwise a moral breakdown of village life would have occurred during the 1980s and 1990s, which the people feared but which did not happen. The transformations in the south outlined here may foreshadow those in the Lio area as a whole, namely the waning importance of the Houses and the *podo* as kin

units, with wife givers and wife takers having further significance. Whether they are willing and able to mobilize the complete agnatic groups as well as other relatives in their exchange transactions depends on the negotiations of the spouses of the households. That is why, in social practice, the ego-centric units of wife givers and wife takers are not congruent with the socio-centric units of the *podo*.

The agricultural festivals and lifecycle feasts in one of the Lio centres in the south of Central Flores show important cultural, as well as historical and political aspects of village life. Specific parts or recurring elements of these ceremonies, such as the rice rituals, help to create kinship identities and strengthen ethnicity with regard to the village community and the ethnic group as a whole. With the shifting meaning of the agricultural and the lifecycle ceremonies and with the shifting ritual use of rice, however, these identities are also shifting, in that kinship identities linked with the village elite are losing ground and other kinship and ethnic identities are being reconfigured. In this sense, Mach's concept of rituals as creative acts and as performances of identity also applies to the rice rituals of the Lio.

Notes

1 Under the auspices of the Indonesian Academy of Sciences (LIPI), supported by Universitas Indonesia in Jakarta and Universitas Nusa Cendana in Kupang, and with a grant provided by the Canton of Zurich, Switzerland, I conducted fieldwork in the southern part of Central Flores in 1987/88 and 1990/91, complemented by shorter visits in 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999 and 2003. Altogether I have spent more than two years in the field.

2 Williams (1995: 201), for example, also points to the failure of studies to make connections between constructions of kinship and of ethnicity, when she says, 'Few discussions of the now central concern with ethnic boundary constructions (. . .) in contemporary nation-building proceed without comment on what Charles Keyes (1981) has called the "aura of descent" that surrounds lay and professional conceptions of ethnic identity and its links to culture and territory. Nonetheless, too few conscientious efforts are made to examine the continuities between cultural constructions of kinship and those of other categorical distinctions such as race, nation, and caste.'

3 Mach (1993: 263) has, to my view, developed a useful way of conceiving of identity. He says, 'Identity, or rather the processes of reciprocal and mutual identification, is a dynamic concept which involves constant interactions between groups in which their we-images and they-images change together with the changing balance of power and with the degree of accommodation and conflict in the interplay of forces which shape the social context. Thus identity is more than just a self-image and a set of stereotypes held about "the other".' He

focuses on ethnic identity in complex societies, but unfortunately does not reflect on the issue of kinship.

4 In 1990 the inhabitants of Nggela amounted to 1,283, 551 men and 712 women, living in 257 households. Sources: 'Daftar Isian Potensi Desa dan Kelurahan Tahun 1989/90, Desa Nggela' and 'Kecamatan Wolowaru Dalam Angka 1990. Kantor Statistik Kabupaten Ende'.

5 Semantically, the term 'house' has two meanings, both of which are expressed by the Lio word *saʔ*. It designates on the one hand a kin group as a socioreligious unit, and on the other hand a physical structure. Cf. also Howell's account (1995) with regard to the social organization of the Northern Lio which, however, does not correspond in every respect with my data on the Southern Lio.

6 These high-ranking persons are installed by means of a ritual (*ra lima*), at which their faces and hands are smeared with the blood of a chicken or a pig, 'so that the spirits will know them'. Subsequently, they are allowed to touch the ritual objects (*tau déo*) and thus to perform the ritual tasks.

7 A more comprehensive publication about the ceremonial agricultural cycle and socio-political transformations among the Lio will follow.

8 This ceremony now takes place after the harvest and during school holidays in the month of July. In former times, however it was performed about February, when the maize was flowering, not only to purify the village but also to cleanse the fields from destructive insects. However, most people fell into debt, because of the scarcity of food before the harvest.

9 The temple has long ceased to exist in Nggela as in other Lio communities (cf. also Orinbao 1992: 27). In Nggela the temple was probably built for the last time in 1947, shortly after Indonesian independence. Its rebuilding is very expensive, requires a cooperative effort of all the houses and a complex ceremony that ostentatiously displays which of the village elders possesses most authority and power. As this is a highly contested affair in this village it is unlikely that the temple will ever again be rebuilt. Obviously, this sacred building in its full shape is less important than the cult place and the ceremonial houses which are unrelinquishable. During the cycle of agricultural festivals that I witnessed the temple was substituted by a hardly recognizable small copy of the temple, called *waka*, northwest of the cult place.

10 In 1988 the elders in Saʔ Ria discussed the installation of female heads for certain ritual tasks again, but this was not translated into reality.

11 In the eastern part of the Lio area, called Lisé, all cultivated plants are said to originate from the bodies of two sisters with the names Bobi and Nombi (cf. Sugishima 1994: 149–150).

12 Prohibitions on addressing people by their names also exist in other strained social relations among the Southern Lio, for instance between mother-in-law and son-in-law

and between father-in-law and daughter-in-law. Using teknonyms instead of names is also considered as a sign of reverence.

13 The Northern Lio make an even more explicit association between planting rice and sexual reproduction (cf. Wackers 1997: 217).

14 In contrast to other feasts, at death ceremonies the wifegivers give only unhusked rice and textiles.

15 Cf. Howell (1995a) and Wackers (1997) for marriage ceremonies in the northern and Prior (1988) in the eastern Lio region.

16 At the bridewealth feast of a bride of one of the highest-ranking families in the village in 1992 two pairs of golden earrings, ten horses and one million rupiah were given by the groom's side. The counterprestation from the bride's side consisted of 87 pieces of textiles and of 500 kg of rice. At the wedding feast additional gifts were given, among others 200 kg of rice.

17 *Kunu* is an important regional matrilineal descent category in Nggela and in other Southern Lio villages. *Kunu* can be considered to be matriclans, as descent is traced in the female line from plants and animals without known genealogical links, conceived of as 'origin' (*pu'u*). Connected with these origins are particular food and other behavioural prescriptions which are called *tebu*. According to notes by a former village head of Nggela there were more than forty *tebu* at the end of the 1940s. Within named *kunu*, membership of social rank (nobles, commoners, slaves) and with that rights to politico-jural and ritual offices as well as skills in craft, healing and magic are transferred. *Suku*, however, is a local patrilineal descent category among the Southern Lio. *Suku* can be thought of as patri-lineages, because descent is traced in the male line from a genealogically known apical ancestor, called *embu*. Associated with these ancestors are again special behavioural rules, at least with part of them. Only women who marry male progeny from these *embu* have to observe these rules. The *suku* manifest themselves as corporative groups in named *saò* or Houses. Within the named *saò* rights on land and special rights on politico-jural and ritual offices are transmitted. Cf. Howell 1995a for categories of descent among the Northern Lio.

18 Mauss (1923/24) has pointed to the relevance of gifts to ancestors and deities in the sphere of ritual exchange.

10

RICE FOR THE ANCESTORS

Food offerings, kinship and merit among the Isan of Northeast Thailand

Stephen Sparkes

[T]he notion of an ancestor spirit knocking about the house can cause serious contradictions in a Buddhist environment. (Wijeyewardene 1970: 252)

The aim of this chapter is to investigate aspects of food offerings, in particular offerings of rice, with the intention of shedding light on the complex cosmology and kinship relations among the Isan of Northeast Thailand.¹ As the quotation above suggests, there appears to be a contradiction between beliefs in ancestral spirits and Buddhist doctrine among some of the Tai-speaking peoples of Thailand.² After taking a closer look at food offerings and the role of women in their preparation and ritual performances, this apparent contradiction appears to have far less significance. Food offerings are an integral part of both spirit and Buddhist rituals, and I shall argue that there is a similar underlying logic of reciprocity in both despite the differences between the religious terminology of Buddhist merit-making (*tham bun* or *het bun*) and that used for conducting a spirit ritual (*het phithii*).

Food offerings provide an insight into aspects of gender relations and kinship. Because women are responsible for the preparation of food, including cooking and arranging food offerings, it is important to understand female perspectives regarding these events. The fact that the Isan have been described as being uxori-local, at least for a period of time after marriage, with the youngest daughter having the responsibility for looking after her parents in old age (Keyes 1975) and as having 'matrilineal tendencies' (Sparkes 1993; 1997) suggests that residence patterns are determined by women to a large extent. Women are what Hale (1979) refers to as the 'fixed points' in the kinship system, and the ancestors (*phii süasaay*,

phii diawkan, *phiiphau phiimae* or *phiipuu phiinyaa*)³ are usually reckoned along female lines. Hence there is a cluster of associations between women, food offerings, kinship structures and the ancestors that should be investigated in order to form a better understanding of gender, cosmology and food offerings in Isan society.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. I shall first attempt to give an overview of Isan cosmology presenting both the differences in concepts in Buddhist and spirit rituals and similarities in light of food offerings. In the second part I shall discuss the important role of women in the house by means of examining the significance of food in the domestic sphere, a predominantly female one, and how relations among the living (kinship) and between the living and the dead (ancestors) are maintained. In addition, the use of rice, symbolised as a female goddess, illustrates yet another aspect of how food is intimately related to female identity. In the third part of this chapter, I shall investigate food offerings in the context of Buddhist rituals and making merit for deceased family members.

Fieldwork for this chapter was carried out in the Isan village of Na Din Dam ('Black Earth Rice Fields') in the province of Loei, Northeast Thailand.⁴ The Isan of Loei have many cultural and linguistic affinities with the Lao on the other side of the Mekong River whence they originally came. Loei was until quite recently relatively isolated from both the rest of Northeast Thailand and from Bangkok, and elderly informants explained that less than fifty years ago, in order to reach the capital, villagers had first to take a boat down the Mekong to Nong Khai, a terminus for long-distance buses and, later, trains. It was not until the 1970s, when Loei was properly linked to the rest of Thailand via a road network, that the cultivation of cash crops began on a large scale and the general integration into the rapidly growing Thai economy commenced.

Despite the influence of the Thai Sangha or monkhood, put in place for the most part during the reign of Chulalongkorn in the middle of the nineteenth century, and the Thai education system, introduced in the 1930s, Loei has retained its own particular dialect of Lao and many cultural traits that are not only different from central Thai traditions but also vary from those of the rest of Northeast Thailand.⁵ This can be seen in the following exploration of rituals that combine notions of kinship and food offerings.

Overview of Isan Cosmology

Tambiah's ethnography on the Isan of the neighbouring province of Udorn, entitled *Buddhism and Spirit Cults of North-east Thailand* (1970), provides a general overview of Isan cosmology. He speaks of two collective representations within a single field

(1970: 337) and argues for syncretism as a useful way of understanding the workings of Buddhism, Hindu influence and spirit beliefs. In this structuralist approach, Tambiah describes the cosmology as a 'durable, if not timeless, mutual accommodation between Buddhism and the spirit cults' (ibid: 377) which includes opposition, complementarity, linkage and hierarchy. Other scholars working on Theravada Buddhism in Thailand, such as Keyes (1977) and Kirsch (1977), also claim that there is a single religious system with tensions and distinctive symbolic opposites.

Briefly, these aspects consist of the following: the dominant discourse of Theravada Buddhism, with its order of monks, written texts, the underlying theory of *karma* and merit-making activities; Hindu ritual practice derived from Khmer culture mostly in the form of royal ritual performances and medical treatises; and the original Tai beliefs (oral traditions) in nature spirits, ancestral spirits and a whole pantheon of gods and spirits that influence the cosmos. Buddhism is often contrasted with the other two aspects, in what Leach calls a distinction between 'philosophical' and 'practical' religion (1968) since Buddhism tends to be concerned, at least in doctrinal form, with reincarnation, and Hindu and animist elements, what I label as the 'spirit religion', are concerned with well-being in this world. Villagers, however, verbalise these differences by distinguishing between 'religions' (written texts) using the word, *sasanaa* as in *sasanaa phut* (Buddhist religion) and *sasanaa phaam* (Brahmin religion), in contrast to local oral traditions and beliefs in spirits (*paphenii isaan* and *sua phii*). In reality the distinction is blurred and depends very much on context and the motivations of participants as well as ritual procedures.

I shall argue in this chapter that although the structuralist approach sheds light on some of the complex elements in Isan and Thai cosmology, it focuses too much on differences between the many strains of religious belief and runs the risk of becoming an intellectual game for anthropologists and other social scientists in designing a systematic whole with numerous contradictions. A somewhat different approach to such complexities has focused not only on what is called different 'strands' but on the moving between different 'interpretative paradigms' to borrow expressions that Barth refers to in the complex array of beliefs on Bali (1993: 4). Beatty, analysing Javanese religion, uses a similar approach to Barth and speaks of 'contested ideas' in the form of debates, of the 'modalities of expression: the said and the unsaid, ambiguity, suppression and irony, unequal discourse' (1999: 5–6). Both scholars concentrate on thought in action and the way that local people express these contradictions in context.

What emerge as central in this approach are similarities rather than differences since villagers are more interested in creating continuity and harmony within an

Photo 10.1 Monks receiving food offerings as part of a mortuary ritual. (Stephen Sparkes)

overarching set of values and beliefs than emphasising contradiction and tensions that could actually undermine these beliefs. This is not to say that villagers are not aware of differences but that they are often more focused on specific contexts and what is the suitable practice or ritual for addressing a particular problem. What constitute ritual events are a number of common features, regardless of whether one is engaged in a Buddhist ordination ritual, seeking the protection of forest spirits or making merit for a deceased relative.

These common elements that villagers described whenever asked about the performance of any ritual consisted of the following: Pali chanting, holy white thread (*saay sin*), candles, flowers or leaves, betel and home-grown tobacco (*yaa sup boolan*) and rice offerings. These elements were present in both Buddhist and spirit religion rituals. Pali, the language of the Buddhist scriptures, was used both by monks at holy day rituals and by various ritual specialists to invoke a range of spirits, *khwan* or life-essences and ancestors. The holy thread was used to demarcate the ritual space around the offerings and participants, encircling the *baasii suukhwan* cone in *rites de passage* and transferring merit generated by monks through chanting to objects or people. Auspicious numbers of flowers and candles were presented on trays in front of Buddhist altars and when seeking favours from spirits. Food offerings were presented to the *khwan* when seeking to

call it back into living bodies but were also used to earn merit by placing rice and sweets in the bowls of monks. Food offerings are particularly important since they establish a continually renewable link between the spirit world and the world of the living. It should also be noted that these offerings are always prepared by women and symbolise the role women have in the kinship group and in maintaining a series of relationships with the monks in the temple, among kin and with the ancestors, envisaged as either spirits inhabiting the compound or souls awaiting reincarnation at the temple.

What emerges in relation to the investigation of food offerings is a notion of reciprocity. Key terms here are *lieng* and *duulé*, which can both be translated as 'caring for' or 'looking after', on the one hand, and *naptheu*, which be glossed as 'paying respect' or 'acknowledging fear', on the other. Terms in the first set refer to how humans and spirits actively take care of each other, be it a mother nurturing or looking after her children (*duulé luuk*) or the living feeding ancestral spirits (*lieng phii*); they are directly connected with feeding or offering food, an integral part of female identity. *Naptheu* is a more general term referring to respect for elders or superiors, be they living (such as grandparents, a husband or monks) or ancestors; and refers to part of the hierarchical arrangement of relationships based on age, gender and ritual-religious status. The notion of the transfer of 'power' or 'potency' (*saksit*) can also be applied in the sense that the offering of food 'transfers' merit or protection to those who carry out the act in ritual contexts. To have *saksit* implies that one receives offerings and in return benefits from protective power, similar to Bloch's notion of 'blessings' resulting in 'protection' from the ancestors among the Merina of Madagascar (Bloch 1982,⁶ also see Telle on the Sasak in this volume). Women, having less merit than men and less social status, require more protection.

The notion of the acquisition of power and protection through offerings of food, which underlies the practices of both Buddhism and spirit religion, is a useful starting point for investigating the complex cosmology of the Isan. Tannenbaum (1995: 11) claims that power and protection imply each other among the Shan, another Tai-speaking group of Southeast Asia. This can be argued for the Isan of Northeast Thailand, and I shall explore this in the remaining sections specifically in relation to concepts of gender.

The House and the Rice Barn as Female Symbols

As mentioned above, the majority of scholars have described the Northern Thai and the Lao, including the Isan of Northeast Thailand, as uxori-local or matrifocal

based on periods of post-marital, uxorilocal residence and the tendency of the youngest daughter to remain with her parents in old age (cf. Keyes 1975; Sparkes 1997: 379–437). There is considerable variation in these patterns but, nevertheless, women appear to act as the focal point in how kinship is organised. The responsibility for presenting the offerings to the ancestors is primarily female except for very large rituals when a male priest is called in.⁷ In general, rituals that are carried out in the home involve far greater participation by the female members of the household, that is a grandmother, daughter, her daughters and other female members residing in the same compound area. On many occasions, maternal aunts and even distantly related women would gather together to participate in marriage rituals, restoring the life-essences and propitiating the ancestors. This was possible since most lived in the same village, unlike men who often resided outside the village, that is in the compounds and villages of their wives.

An example of such a ritual that I observed in Na Din Dam was called *phithii lieng phii*, which means ‘ritual for caring for the spirits’. These spirits were ancestors residing in the compound and the house, and female informants claimed that they looked after the living in that particular building or compound. The ritual was performed by a priest who was the eldest child of the old lady residing in the house. Those who participated were the women of that particular house, including her daughter-in-law, together with women from the surrounding compounds who were closely or distantly related to her. A number of offerings (candles, betel quids made with pieces of banana leaves, flowers and balls of sticky rice) were presented by the priest to the ancestral spirits that occupied a shelf attached to the spirit post (*sao phii*) of the house. The old offerings were removed and the new ones were arranged beside a small Buddha statue that shared the same ritual space. The priest then proceeded to chant Pali verses while holding a burning candle over a bucket of water, sanctifying the water by transferring the power of the texts through the fire when the hot wax fell into the water. The women had, in the meantime, changed into cotton wrap-arounds used in bathing and lined up below the veranda. At the end of the ritual the priest poured the sanctified water over their heads while continuing to chant.

I suggest that the house is a female symbol, not only because of the primary responsibilities women have in the domestic sphere for cooking, cleaning and looking after children, but also because of the duties and obligations with regard to the ancestral spirits. Recent work on the concept of the ‘House’ in Southeast Asia (cf. Sparkes and Howell 2003; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995a) shed light on the inter-relation between gender values and cosmology. The house is defined as a focal point of ideas, architecture and people and as a structure that ‘positions’

Photo 10.2 Woman preparing banana cone offerings for the calling of the rice spirit. (Stephen Sparkes)

notions of gender within a context for analysis. Continuity in Isan society can be understood in terms of location of women, post-marital residence and the maintenance of ties with ancestors. Food offerings, as illustrated in the ritual above, are a concrete manifestation of these relations. Whenever there is contact initiated by the living, there are food offerings, at least rice but, on other occasions, more elaborate meals.

The expression *lieng phii* needs to be examined further to illustrate this point. *Lieng* can be translated in a number of ways: 'to care for', 'to watch over', 'to raise' and 'to guide'. It implies a responsibility for a particular person or spirit and a sense of dependency. The most common manifestation of caring is giving food, that which sustains life, and this is primarily the role of women. Keyes refers to women's role as 'nurturers' (1984) and this forms an important part of female identity. In return for offerings, the spirits provide 'protection' for the women participants and their families.

Cooking is the responsibility of women and except for the slaughtering of animals and preparing dishes of raw meat (*lap dip*) at large festivals, men hardly ever concern themselves with preparing meals, food offerings or alms for the

monks. The kitchen area (*haung khua* or *heun khua*) is separate from the main part of the house, usually opposite the veranda, and slightly lower than the living quarters. The reason given for this is that smoke should not enter the house proper. Food is prepared in the kitchen and then carried to the veranda where it is consumed. The washing of utensils is also done in the kitchen. In modern, two-storey houses the kitchen is sometimes located on the ground floor together with storage areas, under the sleeping quarters and veranda.

The word for kitchen, *haung khua*, is related to the word for family (*kaup khua*). *Kaup khua* literally means 'covered by the kitchen' and implies that commensal relations determine the composition of the family. This places women in a central role in the family since it is their cooking and providing food to the various members that defines the family unit rather than the more static concepts of blood relations. Analysis of households among the Isan requires a flexible conceptual model and examining the kitchen and the provision of food seems a suitable approach. Women are not only fixed points in the kinship system if one analyses residence patterns and spirit offerings but also in the day-to-day composition of the household. The importance of women in the house, however, is undermined somewhat by other factors, including gender hierarchy.

The organisation of space reflects the symbolic organisation of gender values and a general ordering of the cosmos based on the opposition of above (*suung*) and below (*tham*) that is significant among all the Tai-speaking groups. Although the house may be seen as primarily a female symbol, it is organised spatially according to the dominant discourse of Buddhist values based on male superiority (cf. Tannenbaum 1995; 53–64). The Buddha statue now occupies the shelf for the ancestors (one could say that it has usurped their powers over the household) and represents the most sacred point in the house, standing for 'above'. The kitchen, as already mentioned, is 'below' the living quarters and is associated with women. The axis of above and below also relates to the body, with the lower parts of the female body considered 'unclean' due to the association with menstrual blood and its threatening properties to male spiritual powers. Hence, the house reflects a number of gender associations in relation to space, the female 'part' of the house or at least that part that is most associated with women being classified as subordinate, reflecting the overall subordinate position that women have in the male-dominant Buddhist discourse. Despite the importance of food in all sorts of offerings, the site for the preparation of food is accorded less value than other parts of the house.

Yet another illustration of the relation between food and women in terms of beliefs is the spirit of the rice. This spirit is known by several names, revealing the complexity of Isan cosmology: these include *khwan khao* (the life-essence of

rice) or *mae kusook/mae phoosop* (often translated as 'Mother Rice'). The former name shares many traits with names of the other life-essences that inhabit people, animals and other animate objects. These *khwan* are easily frightened and may flee the bodies or objects they usually possess. On such occasions the *khwan* need to be called back with offerings of food and promises of security, health and wealth. These ceremonies are called *baasii suukhwan* or 'welcoming the *khwan*'.⁸ I shall describe such a ceremony for the *khwan* of the rice below.

The other name for this spirit, 'Mother Rice', is possibly a combination of traditions that emphasise the ideal nature of motherhood (see Hien on female symbolism of rice in Vietnam in this volume). This mythic figure is associated with self-sacrifice, that of a mother putting the needs of her children before her own. There are a number of legends which explain that a woman was actually transformed into the first rice seeds by sacrificing herself (cf. Trankell 1995: 133). This second character is more mythic than the *khwan khao*, who resides in the rice barn located in the same compound as the house and sometimes inhabits the fields. The *khwan khao* receives small offerings of sticky rice in the paddy fields before planting along with a prayer beseeching help in obtaining a bountiful harvest. There are also certain rules to be observed by villagers as to when to remove or add rice to the rice barn. On holy days (*wan phra*) when villagers attend services at the local monastery it is considered inauspicious to remove rice from the barn.

The rice barn (*heun khao*) is usually a small oblong structure on pillars about a metre and a half above the ground for protection against animals and insects. It is women who fetch the rice from the rice barn for cooking in the kitchen but it is men who carry the large sacks of rice after harvest into the barn for storage or to the rice mill for de-husking. Women are responsible for cleaning, sweeping and presenting small offerings of rice and flowers at the door of the barn on holy days and on special occasions for household rituals. The most important ritual involving the *khwan khao* is the calling of the *khwan khao* after the rice has been placed into the barn. This is done a month or so after the rice has been harvested and placed inside the barns, that is in February. Villagers explained that calling the life-essence of the rice is to thank the spirit for the rice and, as is the case for all such rituals, for 'good luck' (*sook dii*) and 'contentment' (*sabaay jai*), which could be understood as reinforcing order in the cosmos according to established tradition.

This ritual of calling the life-essence of the rice takes place inside or immediately beside the rice barn. It is one of the few rituals I observed that was conducted by a woman, and I interpret this as further evidence of the intimate relationship between women and rice. Not all such rituals were performed by women: 'Brahmin priests' (*mau*) or a male elder in the compound also conducted them. Whenever

I observed a man conducting the ritual, he sat either on a raised bed beside the barn or at the entrance, looking into the barn. When my neighbour, an elderly woman in her late sixties, conducted the ritual, she sat inside the rice barn. There is a possible analogy with the temple, which women cannot enter when Buddhist ceremonies are being conducted. Here the opposite appears to be the case, with women performing ceremonies inside the barn and men excluded. Villagers neither confirmed nor denied this association, saying that this arrangement suited them best and generated contentment (*sabaay jai*).

The actual ritual is similar in many respects to other callings of the life-essence for persons. A *baasii* cone was made of interwoven pieces of banana leaves and decorated with flowers. Compared to other rituals I have seen the cone was smaller and less elaborately decorated. The usual offerings of sticky rice, a choice of cooked food including meat dishes, salt, chillies and fruit that the family will consume after the ritual is complete are placed before the cone together with a clean and pressed blouse and traditional Isan skirt (*phaa siin*), a small comb and a mirror. The idea behind these offerings is to entice the *khwan* to enter the rice barn and remain in the compound to watch over that family and ensure a continued

Photo 10.3 Elderly woman calling the spirit of the rice in a rice barn. (Stephen Sparkes)

supply of rice in exchange for respect, symbolised by the fine food and clothes of welcome. The rice spirit is not a vengeful entity and her benevolent intervention can be obtained through such rituals. The inducement consists of a verbal invitation, praising the spirit, boasting about the fine food and gifts offered and about the good moral standing of the potential host family. In most cases only the ritual expert was present in or beside the rice barn, although other family members, especially the women of the compound, prepared the offerings and partook in the meal afterwards.

Despite the fact that the rice spirit is not an ancestor there are many parallels between the relationship between the residents of a particular compound and the spirits that inhabit it. In addition to these spirits there are male spirits that 'own' the land (*jao heun*), village spirits (*jao baan*) and territorial spirits (*phii lüang*) which all crave offerings. Female spirits of rice, the earth and rivers tend to be benevolent and are often given the title of 'mother' in contrast to the sometimes aggressive male spirits which punish and require tribute on a regular basis (Sparkes 1995). The ancestors are somewhere in between, being largely protective and benevolent but at times causing trouble if they are disobeyed or ignored. What is clear is the underlying principle of reciprocity and the importance of food, and hence women, in establishing and maintaining relations with the spirits. The role of women in performing these rituals is most prominent in the examples chosen above. This is illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 10.1 Reciprocal relationship between villagers and spirits

It is interesting to note that women serve the needs of the whole kin group or household since their families also benefit from their actions. Women's key role in preparing the offerings, participation in and even conducting these rituals is not rated as having an equal value or generating an equal status to those rituals and ceremonies conducted by monks and other male specialists. This imbalance in gender values reflects a general hierarchical relationship between the dominant

discourse of Buddhism and the spirit beliefs such as giving offerings to ancestors. The subordinate position of women is thus reflected in the subordinate function of the spirits in the overall cosmology, and these are mutually reinforcing. Women, however, play an equally important role in the preparation of Buddhist rituals and participate to a greater degree in merit-making than men. To understand this phenomenon one needs to explore the importance of food as a means of establishing relations within the context of the Buddhist monastery and in relation to the ideology of merit-making for deceased family members.

Rice for Merit Making

As in spirit rituals, rice is also important in a number of Buddhist ceremonies and is related to the central concept of making merit (*tham bun* or *het bun*) in Theravada Buddhist traditions of Southeast Asia. This is manifested in different forms such as giving rice to the monks on their daily early morning rounds of the village (*tak baat*) or rice offerings to the ancestors in order to hasten a new incarnation, that is to earn more merit for them and tip the balance in their favour. Through the act of accepting food from the laity, monks transfer merit to the person who is giving rice or to another who has been indicated beforehand.

It is noteworthy that this notion of transferring merit differs to a large extent from doctrinal notions of the theory of *karma* that underlie the ideas of merit (*bun*) and demerit (*baap*). Strict interpretations of Buddhist notions of *karma* state that one's circumstances are determined by previous incarnations, hence accounting for the differences between people based on social status, wealth, gender and appearance. One's actions in a particular existence will further influence future incarnations. The ultimate goal is the cessation of this pattern of rebirth and the attainment of Nirvana, following the Eightfold Path to Enlightenment. Spiro (1970), in his analysis of Burmese Buddhism, labels this orthodox belief as the Nibbanic form of religious practice, a kind of ideal adhered to by highly educated monks in monastic centres. As Spiro and other scholars (cf. Leach 1968) have pointed out, the concept of *karma* and the goal of overcoming attachment to material existence and desire provides an explanation for suffering and overcoming suffering on an 'esoteric level' but does not deal with everyday problems villagers encounter and does not provide them with the means of influencing the world around them. The notion of *karma* is thus contextualised at the village level to serve the ends of the villagers themselves.

Various scholars have written about this contextualisation of doctrine. Hanks (1962) explains that this 'ideology of merit' not only explains differences but

allows for manipulation. Merit and demerit become similar to a system of credits and debits that can be altered by actions in the present existence and can be transferred to others. One can thus eliminate the possible future effects of negative actions through meritorious behaviour such as donations to a temple, and one is able to influence future incarnations by making merit. The goal, however, is not so much Nirvana and the cessation of all desire but rather a rebirth in better material conditions, with a higher social status, and, for women, rebirth as a man. Villagers interpret Buddhist doctrine in terms of the material world and the ability to change events and influence the cosmos.

The most common form of influencing the balance of merit and demerit is making food offerings to the monks on a daily basis. This is primarily the task of female village members who, as mentioned above, are responsible for cooking and the preparation and presentation of food offerings for the ancestral spirits. The role of women has been described as 'nurturers' by Keyes (1984) since they nurture both their own families and kin and ordained monks, novices and nuns in the local monastery. In this way, one could argue that the feminine ideal of providing food, of caring for others (*lieng*) incorporates a number of diverse ideologies, including fulfilling kinship requirements, establishing contact with the spirits and maintaining the sanctity of the monkhood.

This latter role requires some further explanation since the monks represent an ideal existence removed from the mundane and material concerns of daily life and especially the attachment to sexual desire and the presence of women in their midst. Many of the rules of the monkhood concern avoiding contact with women and seeking not to be aroused by their presence. This is a serious challenge for most young men who are ordained but becomes less of a worry for elder monks. The reason that this is a problem is that monks have daily contact with women of the village since women are the ones that provide them with food. A survey of average daily morning offerings from households in the village of Na Din Dam over the period of one year is presented in the table below.

Table 10.1 Morning food offerings to monks.

Averages	Children	Adults	Elderly
Males (rains retreat)	1.5	3.5	4.7
Males (rest of the year)	0.7	0.5	1.7
Females (rains retreat)	4.5	12	12.5
Females (rest of the year)	3.8	5.9	5.9

Table 10.1 indicates that village women give food offerings to monks considerably more often than men and that this happens from childhood through to old age with daughters carrying out the responsibility for their mothers on behalf of their families. This is noticeable during the rains retreat (*phansaa*)⁹ and during the rest of the year. One reason for this is that women prepare the food and consider that they should acquire the merit for their efforts in the kitchen. Another reason is that women see the task of providing for the monks as confirmation of their importance in the Buddhist religion and monastic routine. The abbot of Na Din Dam stated that without the women of the village the monkhood could not exist, confirming Keyes' insight of women as 'nurturers' (1984) on many levels, something that affirms their identity.

Yet another explanation forwarded by male and female villagers is that women have less merit than men do and do not have the opportunity of entering the monkhood and acquiring merit in that manner. One could interpret this in orthodox Buddhist terms as an indication of women's lower social status due to their greater involvement in continuing the karmic cycle of suffering, manifested in menstruating, pregnancy, giving birth and breastfeeding. This seems to affirm

Photo 10.4 Food offerings for recently deceased family members and ancestors. (Stephen Sparkes)

female status in terms of the domestic sphere, providing food and looking after children (Ortner 1974). However, it is important to see these acts of providing food as complex, combining notions of the subordinate position of women according to the dominant Buddhist discourse and a strategy for overcoming this by means of establishing a relationship of dependency on women's actions from the point of view of the monks and an affirmation of female identity as nurturers.

Rice offerings for merit bring us back to the theme of the ancestors mentioned in the section above and tie together Buddhist notions of merit and of the fulfilment of kinship obligations. This apparent contradiction, alluded to by Wijeyewardene in the quote at the beginning of the chapter, is no longer present since the villagers' understanding of merit and *karma* has been thoroughly modified in contrast to orthodox Buddhist teaching such that merit may be 'transferred' in order to influence future incarnations and remove sins of the past. The notion of existing as ancestral spirits (Tai spirit concept) is limited in terms of time: they are responsible for watching over the living *until* their souls (Buddhist concept) are reincarnated. This is possible since new ancestors are constantly being created as one generation passes away and others are eventually forgotten.

An example of how merit making and acts to show respect and care for ancestors (*lieng phii*) are combined is the ritual of *khao sak*, usually held in the month of September. On the morning of these occasions, family members gather together to prepare food offerings for the ancestors. Given the matrifocal nature of the Isan, this means assembling kin at the houses of a daughter of the deceased parents. This varies somewhat due to the varied nature of the composition of compounds and the growing tendency for single-house compounds. Even though it is not as common as two generations ago, there are still many examples of several daughters residing in the same compound, often the eldest and the youngest; the former because land is usually available for at least one other house in the compound and the latter since it is common for the youngest to inherit the parental house. Hence, *khao sak*, like other rituals where kinship ties feature prominently, is an opportunity for women to meet and renew kinship ties and obligations: women as 'fixed points' in the kinship system to use Hale's expression (1979).

In the case of the *khao sak* rituals that I have observed, the time women spent together was limited to the morning, in contrast to the more elaborate calling of the life-essence for candidates for the monkhood (*baasii sukhwan naak*) or 2–3 day merit-making celebrations for the deceased held in the family compound (*tham bun uthit* in Thai or *kep khao* in Lao). The *khao sak* ritual is concerned with merit making for deceased family members and is performed by close relations and neighbours after the offerings have been blessed by the monks.

Phinthong (1990: 146) defines this ritual as one that allows the spirits to return to the land of the living for one day, a respite from hell or the shortening of time in the wait for incarnation. It also occurs when the rice is at a critical stage of maturing in the fields, and it is believed that the ancestors may intervene beneficially and ensure a successful harvest. My informants expressed the goal of the ritual in terms of making merit for the dead (*het bun khon taay*), of influencing their karmic journey and the form of their next incarnation. Many stated that because of demerit from previous existences, delays might occur before the soul (*winyaan*) can be reborn. The merit making by the living aims to shorten this interval, and is a typical example of how village notions of Buddhist karma have been strongly influenced by beliefs in ancestral spirits and the relationship between the living and the dead.

A short account of a particular ritual shows how the elements of Buddhism and the spirit religion combine.¹⁰ The following ingredients were prepared and placed in packages of banana leaves: pieces of a dessert made of rice, coconut milk and sugar (*khao tum*), bamboo shoots, corn niblets, slices of yam, cucumber, oranges, custard apples, guava, pomelo, melon, pumpkin, *lamut* (a sweet tropical fruit), tobacco, local cigarettes, betel quids, areca nuts, *catechu* (reddish bark), pieces of dried fish, raw pork, wasp larvae, peanuts, flowers and small candles. Most of the ingredients represent some of the choicest delicacies of the Isan kitchen and are mostly sweet while others such as the raw pork are festive dishes. There are also tobacco and betel that are important elements in social interaction, gifts offered to guests, friends and the ancestors alike.

Villagers proceeded to the monastery for holy day services (*wan phra*) that did not differ significantly from regular rituals except that the hall was very full and villagers had taken along large trays of elaborate dishes. Towards the end of the ritual, monks and novices received these trays instead of the usual offerings of rice. Each family had acquired the name of a particular monk or novice beforehand by drawing lots. The amount of food present was enormous and the raised platform where the monks were seated was covered with trays, plates and containers of rice. The merit generated by these food offerings was transferred to recently deceased family members. Water was then poured from containers into bowls while the monks chanted, transferring the merit generated in the Pali texts into the water. After the ritual was completed inside the hall, villagers took the food packages described above into the monastery grounds and opened them, laying the ingredients out at the base of a large tree. The sanctified water was then poured slowly beside the food to transfer the merit to the deceased whose spirits are believed to inhabit the monastery since the ashes are often located in urns buried in the monastery or in small pagoda-like structures (*chedii*) along the monastery walls. Mother Earth (*mae thoranii*), another benevolent female

spirit, transfers the merit to the souls of the deceased. The terms used are *phii* (a general term for spirits, including ancestral spirits) and *winyaan* (Buddhist soul that is incarnated), and these terms appear to be interchangeable at this point, fusing together spirit religion and Buddhist beliefs.

Reciprocity is the underlying logic in both belief systems and may be illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 10.2 Reciprocal relationships between the living and dead

The spirits care for and protect the living (*lieng* or *duulé*) as long as they remain in this world and it can take many years before they are incarnated. In the meantime, they look after the interests of the kin group. It is considered very difficult to be reincarnated and merit is required in order for this to happen. However, at some point in time, the souls will acquire a new existence. This can be greatly facilitated by the help of the living carrying out merit-making rituals. Knowing that future generations will perform this ritual on behalf of their parents and grandparents is one motivation for carrying out the ritual: it brings ‘contentment’ (*sabaay jai*) to the living and appears to be a means of dealing with the phenomenon of death. In the spirit religion, reciprocity is direct but not always manifest since ancestors influence and interfere in often unpredictable ways. In Buddhism it is delayed reciprocity over generations and preserves a pattern of ritual obligation to the dead. The role of women in these rituals is important since it is the female line (*faay phuuying*) that is maintained and affirmed. Women also affirm their identity as nurturers by providing the key element for generating protection or merit.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show the relationship between kinship bonds, the role of women in the preparation and performance of rituals of food offerings

and cosmology. Isan cosmology has traditionally been described in terms of spirit religion practices and Buddhism but a closer look at food offerings reveals a similar underlying logic of reciprocity, of establishing a relationship between the living (primarily women because of matrifocal and uxorilocal tendencies) and ancestral spirits of that kinship group. Showing respect for and fear of the spirits results in positive interventions and ensures the material well being of the kin group.

The domestic sphere is characterised as 'female' based on the division of labour, residence patterns and obligations towards maintaining bonds with the spirits of deceased family members. Rice is the most important food offering, paralleling its importance as the staple food for Isan communities. Women prepare nearly all food whether it is intended for consumption by the family members of a household ('covered by the kitchen' – *haung khua*), as offerings for the spirits or as a means of generating merit for transferring to the souls of the deceased.

Food offerings affirm women's central role in maintaining kinship ties and in upholding the philosophy of 'retreat' from worldly concerns of the monkhood. They both confirm the dominant ideology of Buddhism and at the same time constitute the identity of women as 'nurturers' in relation to the family, spirits and the monkhood.

Notes

1 The term 'Isan' refers to the Lao-speaking inhabitants of Northeast Thailand. Isan is a Pali word meaning 'northeast', that is northeast of the Thai capital. The people of Northeast Thailand refer to themselves as Isan although the term 'Thai-Lao' is also used, combining the notion of citizenship (Thailand) with culture identity (Lao) that is shared with the majority of inhabitants of Laos.

2 The quotation refers to the Northern Thai but the same phenomenon of ancestral spirits is found in varying degrees among all the Tai-speaking people of Southeast Asia.

3 There are various ways of referring to the spirits of deceased family members and the context often determines which expression is the most appropriate. *Phii* is a general word for spirits but may be combined, for example, with such words as *süasaay*, meaning lineage or line of descent, *diawkan*, meaning 'in common', *phau-mae*, meaning 'father-mother' and *puu-nyaa* referring to the father's parents. There is never any confusion between evil or nature spirits and the ancestors although the root word is the same.

4 Fieldwork was carried out for approximately one year in 1991–92) and for about 6 months in 1994–95. I have also visited the village of Na Din Dam for subsequent short visits. The first visit formed the basis for my MPhil thesis (1993). The second extended stay provided

additional data to compare the Isan of Loei with the Shan of Mae Hong Son Province for my doctoral thesis (1997). I have also worked in various parts of Laos between 1995 and 2003 and this has provided additional comparative material.

5 The Isan of Loei province have much in common with the Lao in Saiyaburi and Luang Prabang provinces of Lao PDR, directly across the Mekong River to the north. Linguistically, there is ample evidence to suggest that the Isan in Loei have migrated down the Mekong since the sixteenth century. Migration ceased completely in the 1970s due to the Second Indochina War and insurgency activities in Thailand that closed the border.

6 The Merina of Madagascar have many cultural similarities to groups in Southeast Asia, whence they originally came. Bloch (1982) argues that the blessings from the ancestors rejuvenate the social unit or *deme*. However, the symbolic association of women with death and discontinuity of the patrilineal social unit differs in many ways from the ethnographic material presented here. The mechanism of reciprocity is, nevertheless similar.

7 See S. H. Potter's account (1977) of the role of women in the domestic sphere among the Northern Thai.

8 Other expressions used by villagers were *het khwan* ('to make the *khwan*) and *riak khwan* ('to call the *khwan*). The specialist for these ceremonies is called either *mau phaam* (usually translated as 'Brahmin priest' although his techniques and position do not resemble those of the Brahmins of Hinduism) or specifically *mau khwan* (*khwan* specialist).

9 The rains retreat (*phansaa*) or Buddhist Lent refers to the three-month period from August to early October when many village boys and young men enter monastic life. For most this is the only time they are involved in full-time study of Buddhist texts and morality. There is an increase in support in terms of food offerings and attendance at holy day celebrations at this time throughout the country.

10 This particular *khao sak* ritual took place on 23 September 1999. I also observed this ritual in 1992 and in 1994. The ingredients and the procedures are similar in all cases as are the explanations given by the ritual specialists and participants. This ritual is also referred to as *khao salak*, the original Lao name.

11

GLUTINOUS RICE, KINSHIP AND THE TẾT FESTIVAL IN VIETNAM

Nguyễn Xuân Hiên

Vietnam's geographical position between the two ancient civilisations of China and India has made the country a meeting point of various material, spiritual and ideological tendencies. Vietnam, in her turn, has actively contributed to the development of these other civilisations. As a result, the daily life of the Vietnamese is influenced by their neighbours' ways of life while at the same time retaining its own distinct identity.

Daily life, of which two crucial components are eating and speaking, is represented in condensed form in material life. The Vietnamese are rice eaters. Around ninety percent of the population are peasants who make their living from the cultivation of rice. Their ancestors, living in the mountainous regions of the country, selected from *in situ* wild rice to produce the two types of rice cultivated today: glutinous and ordinary (Nguyễn Xuân Hiên *et al.* 1976: 18). Nowadays ordinary rice is consumed on a daily basis by almost all Vietnamese, but in the past it was glutinous rice which was dominant. Its preponderant role is seen especially in ceremonial feasts and religious contexts with the participation of kin members.

Notions of kinship reflect, among other things, the spiritual relationship between human beings in day-to-day life. During the Tết period, the Vietnamese New Year, the way rice is consumed, and more especially the way glutinous rice is consumed, reveals most clearly the particular patterns of human relationships which are characteristic of the Vietnamese.

In this chapter I discuss, in multi-disciplinary terms and with ethnological, folkloric and cultural evidence, the relationship between glutinous rice in the Vietnamese Tết festival and the consolidation of kinship. Fieldwork data collected over the past four decades, as well as surveys and interviews undertaken recently,

provide the basic information on the basis of which I bring out key issues, corroborated by stories and travel accounts from past eyewitnesses.

The Main Features of Vietnamese Kinship

The people of Vietnam comprise some 54 ethnic groups, out of which the *Kinh* or the *Việt*, who live chiefly in the capital and in the plains regions, make up over 87 per cent of the population. They believe themselves to be the descendants of a legendary couple named Lac Long Quân (a Dragon King) and Âu Cơ (a Fairy Princess), who lived some four thousand years ago. According to legend, after the couple had lived together for one year, Âu Cơ delivered a sac containing one hundred eggs and from these eggs emerged one hundred males. They grew up without suckling and became healthy people. From these brothers all the *Việt* are descended (Linh Nam Chích Quai 1695: 12–16).

The patrilineal emphasis in *Việt* conceptions of kinship is shown both in the fact that in the legend all the offspring were males, and in the reference to their not suckling from the mother. More importantly, the story reveals that the *Việt* believe themselves to all be in a sense siblings. They call one another *đồng bào* ('people from the same womb') and believe that they share the same ancestry. They consider that: *Giot máu dào hơn ao nước la* ('A drop of red blood [is] more precious than a pond of water'). They advise one another: *Gà cùng một mẹ cho hoài đá nhau* ('Chickens from the same mother [hen] don't kick [fight] against one another').

*Tuy rằng xú Bắc xú Đông,
Kháp trong bờ coi cùng dòng anh em.*

Living in East or West,
All people inside the borders are our siblings.

Vietnamese children grow up in this environment of sibling sentiment. Their way of addressing others emphasizes, in a clear manner, this sense of family relationship. In Vietnamese, the person spoken to is always addressed by the speaker in the same terms as his family members. When addressing a non-family member, a Vietnamese uses the same personal pronouns as if he is addressing his great grandfather or great grandmother (*cu*), grandfather or grandmother (*ông/bà*), uncle (*bác/chú*), aunt (*cô/dì*), brother or sister (*anh/chị*), child (*con*), nephew or niece (*cháu*). The speaker refers to himself not by using a pronoun, but as a child (*con*), nephew, niece or grandchild (*cháu*), or younger brother or sister (*em*) of the hearer. Thus in Vietnam, the sense of kinship is expressed on a daily basis through terms of address.

Traditionally, the Vietnamese live together in family groups which form *giáp* (hamlets) and *làng* (villages). Their strong feeling of association with their birthplace consolidates kin purity in local settlements. In the early 1930s, the inhabitants in many villages in the Red River Delta (North Vietnam) still belonged to only a few *ho* (lineages). For example, in Quang Ái village (Gia Bình district, Bắc Ninh province) all villagers had the family name Đinh; in thirty other villages, all residents belonged to the same patrilineal clan Nguyễn (Gourou [1936] 1965: 125, 127). At that time, the average population of each village was estimated at between 300 and 500 people.

The degree of coherence within a *giáp* or a *làng* varies widely. In most cases, the whole *giáp* serves as one extended family or *nhà*. Children move freely from one house to another and are scolded or cared for by anyone. Babies are looked after and even breast-fed by neighbouring women who are suckling their own babies. Each *nhà*, which includes affines as part of the extended family, is likely to work the land as a unit. Neighbours borrow and share food, offering mutual help in times of sickness, birth, marriage and death. A proverb emphasises: *Bán anh em xa mua láng giềng gần* ('Change a brother who resides far from you for a next door neighbour', or 'A good neighbour is worth more than a far kinsman'). Hamlet and village are the basic social units for the socialisation of children, social control, worship, festival celebration, funerals, and for most mutual help and semi-leisure activities as well as for the definition and maintenance of the norms and values that lie behind all these activities (Nguyễn Xuân Hiên 1996b: 1–3).

It is unimaginable that the life of any Vietnamese could be separated from his relationship with his or her *nhà*. The family is considered to be the basic institution for perpetuating society and the community and for providing protection for the individual. The *nhà* has played a special role in the development of Vietnamese society and continues to do so. It includes husband and wife and their unmarried children as well as, very often, the husband's parents and the eldest son's family. Thus a family may include three or four generations. Members of the *nhà* usually live in separate dwellings but together in a definite area. Within this group, each core family (*tiêu gia đình*) is economically independent. The image of the core family seated around a tray of food and a large pot of rice, rather than individual portions, and eating together, expresses this sense of the 'harmonious, orderly family community' in the traditional Vietnamese countryside (Bích 1999: 25). The dwellings of nephews, nieces and other close relatives are built in the same neighbourhood. In other words, a neighbour relationship is also likely to be a kinship relationship. Nowadays, kin do not necessarily live close to one another. However, most urban people are still registered in their home village, they pay taxes to their home village administration and continue to participate in village

activities and carry out all customary obligations as a normal villager does, insofar as they are able to do so.

In some senses, the concept of kinship is often extended to fellow-countrymen. The Vietnamese remind one another:

*Nhiều điều phủ lấy giá huong,
Người trong một nước thò thương nhau cùng.*
A crimson crêpe curtain covers the ancestors'
[memorial] tablet [on the altar],
People from the same country must pity one another.

On the other hand, the Vietnamese observe the actual clan relationship in a particularly respectful manner: *Ho chín đời còn hơn người dung* ('Relatives in the ninth generation are closer than people in the street').

Although the clan is defined patrilineally, Vietnamese people have a strong relationship with members of their mother's lineage, belonging in effect to two lineages (*ho*), although the father's is dominant. After marriage, although she joins her husband's clan and lives with his family, a wife retains her surname and does not take her husband's clan name. She continues to have ritual obligations towards her natal relatives (Bich 1999: 26). Describing traditional lower class families, Pham Van Bich points out that the wife also had an important role in the cultivation and custodianship of rice, the transplantation of seedlings being exclusively her responsibility, and in its use. The head of the family had to seek her permission before taking any rice from the store (Bich 1999: 34, 39). In the traditional rural context the position of women and their families remains relatively strong, and in day-to-day life kin sentiment also includes affines. Although there is thus a sense of common kinship, affines may be regarded differently according to their gender: *Dâu là con, rê là khách* ('Your daughter-in-law is your daughter, your son-in-law is your guest'). But even affines who have no prior contact with one another can recognise one another through their family records or history.

In this context, kinship plays an important role in economic and social life and rice serves symbolically to stimulate the consolidation of kinship. A central element in this consolidation is the Tết festival, and a central element of the Tết festival is the shared consumption of glutinous rice.

Glutinous Rice and Ordinary Rice

Most non-rice eaters know only one kind of rice, non-glutinous rice, what I shall call 'ordinary rice'.¹ This type of rice has a long or round grain shape, and is white or

transparent in colour. But in Southeast Asia, both mainland and maritime, people also cultivate and use another kind of rice, glutinous or sticky rice.² This type has an opaque endosperm and a round or oblong grain shape. The opaqueness is an important distinguishing characteristic that consumers demand (Nguyễn Xuân Hiên 1987: 212–218).

It is believed that after a long period of hunting and gathering, the ancestors of the present-day Vietnamese, who lived in caves in mountainous regions surrounded by dense forest, discovered, probably by chance, some (primitive) rice that was stickier than other rice. Profiting from this natural mutation, they carried out a simple selective process to obtain some stickier rice, i.e. rice with a more glutinous quality. Then, with these germplasm materials, they selected further and further, year after year and from generation to generation. As a result, they obtained some rice with rather prominent glutinous traits and some others with prominent 'ordinary' traits. At that time, it is believed that they cultivated a great deal of semi-glutinous rice (mountainous glutinous rice) in small patches of land around their caves. The ordinary types of rice retained a modest place in their cultivation. When their descendants left their stone dwellings and settled in the valleys and later in the plains, the situation changed. The new, enlarged and more stable environment in deltas, together with demographic pressures, forced them to cultivate more ordinary rice, which is generally less responsive to soil fertility, more high-yielding and requires a relatively shorter growth period. The same process may well have taken place elsewhere where rice was domesticated (Nguyễn Xuân Hiên and Bui Huy Dap 1964: 34).

To sum up, primitive rice was neither glutinous nor ordinary (as seen from our present perspective). Primitively cultivated rice had both traits. Then semi-

Photo 11.1 Ordinary rice (left) and glutinous rice (right). (Nguyễn Xuân Hiên)

glutinous rice (or mountainous glutinous rice) appeared as a result of artificial selection and was cultivated chiefly in valleys around the mountainous regions (piedmont areas) (Nguyễn Xuân Hiên 1996a: 37). But in lowland environments, the dominant rice type was an ordinary one and the true-to-type glutinous rice, less suited to the new environment and less high-yielding, was forced to retreat to a ritual and ceremonial role.

This picture is supported by myths concerning rice, particularly those which emphasise its essentially female nature. The Rice Spirit and/or the Rice Goddess, which resides in the rice barn,³ is female. The female association with rice is particularly emphasised in relation to glutinous cultivars, which are preceded by one of the female denominators *Cái* or *Bà*, supporting the supposition that glutinous cultivars were more central in the past.

It is worth pointing out that the *bánh chung*, the typical Vietnamese glutinous cake in square form, is believed to represent the Earth, and the Earth is female; at the same time the *bánh giầy*, a round cake made of glutinous rice, represents the Sky, and the Sky is male. Traditional Vietnamese cosmology is dualistic: it involves the *âm* (embodying the female principle) and the *duong* (representing the male principle), and the *âm* always precedes the *duong*. Glutinous rice belongs to the earlier *âm* and ordinary rice to the later *duong*. The *âm-duong* concept dates back from the late first millennium BC, i.e. from the latter period of rice domestication (Nguyễn Xuân Hiên 2001: 30–32). These origins help to explain the role of glutinous rice in ritual meals in Vietnam, especially at the Tết festival. They also echo the dualistic symbolism of the two cakes – *bánh chung* and *bánh giầy* – eaten at Tết.

Glutinous rice is used in a much broader range of contexts than ordinary rice and is present in countless day-to-day foods and specialities. There is an almost infinite variety of ways of preparing glutinous rice, but there are certain key points to note. Firstly, most traditional cakes are made of whole grain glutinous rice. The use of glutinous flour has appeared relatively recently, when mechanical engineering developed to the level where it could satisfy the need in rural areas. Secondly, filling ingredients are always made from locally available resources, whether wild or cultivated: bean (mung, red, white or brown), cane sugar molasses, rice syrup and pork. In coastal regions where coconut palms find ideal conditions for growth, coconut is an important ingredient in all dishes and cakes. The extensive use of coconut milk (as in South Vietnam) and spices such as ginger and turmeric makes the cakes colourful and effective against cold weather ailments. Thirdly, wrapping materials are also found locally and consist of various kinds of leaves, but preferably banana leaves.

The Vietnamese Tết Festival

Tết Nguyên Đán, or Tết as it is more commonly referred to, is for the Vietnamese the most important festival of the year. They in fact observe many ‘*tết*’, a word which etymologically refers to a bamboo internode, i.e. a commemorative date (among other dates) in the year. But since the 1968 Tết military (or Tết Mậu Thân) event, the Vietnamese word *tết* has been internationally accepted as a synonym for the Lunar New Year. The first day of this Tết normally falls between January 21st and February 20th of the Gregorian calendar.⁴ In the past, the Vietnamese celebrated their Tết during three consecutive months when farmers, who made up the vast majority of the population, were free from all agricultural business.

*Tháng giêng an Tết o nhà,
Tháng hai cò bạc,
Tháng ba hôi hè,
Tháng tư cày vo ruộng ra . . .*

The first lunar month, we celebrate Tết at home,
The second month, we gamble,
The third month, we organise/participate in festivities
The fourth month, we plough our fields . . .

However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Tết period was reduced from the traditional three-month duration to one month. Recently, it has been reduced further, and is now usually celebrated over a continuous period of about 18 days, from the Lê Ông Táo on the 23rd day of the 12th month⁵, to the Lê Hà Nêu on the 7th day of the 1st month of the New Year).⁶

For the Vietnamese, the Tết festival is charged with a triple meaning. First, Tết is the occasion for reunion with kin members who come back to their paternal home to meet and present greetings to one another. *Về quê an Tết* (‘to come back to one’s home village and “eat Tết” [celebrate the Tết]’) is for the Vietnamese not merely a trip to their home village but more of an annual pilgrimage to search for their roots and communicate with their ancestral kin. Urban people spend at least one day in their home village to celebrate the ancestors’ cult at the kin temple.

*Đi viếng làng giu họ,
Đi viếng họ giu anh em.*

To participate in the village ceremony
To reinforce the family relationship,
To come into the kin temple to maintain kinship.

Secondly, the Tết period is the best opportunity for offering gifts to kin members, grand-parents, parents, relatives, and acquaintances, in order to express goodwill and improve relations. A basket of top quality glutinous rice is a common gift to family and kin members. On the eve of the Tết, all kinfolk have to contribute to the worship at the kin temple. The contribution varies considerably depending upon the wealth of the kin members but the essential constituents are a basket of best quality glutinous rice and a jar of rice alcohol.

Thirdly, the Tết festival is the appropriate period to pay visits and offer greetings to *nhà* members, and also to former teachers, business partners, and people in the neighbourhood. At this time, the sense of family is enlarged to embrace the whole neighbourhood, the whole village (Nguyễn Xuân Hiền 1991: 50–53, 1998a: 37–47).

*Mông một chúc tết mẹ cha,
Mông hai tết vo, mông ba tết thầy.*

The first day of the Tết festival, we visit and present greetings to our mother and father,

The second day, to our parents-in-law; and the third day, to our teachers.

The spirit of reconciliation has a good opportunity to develop in the Tết period. A Vietnamese proverb goes: *Giân dên chêt, Tết dên cung vui* ('Even if you are in a bad mood, you have to keep calm and behave cheerfully during the Tết period.')

Tết is also the time for everybody to celebrate his birthday. Everyone becomes one year older on the Lunar New Year's day. From this concept springs the practice of *mùng tuổi*, i.e. giving some money in a small, red envelope to children and servants for the celebration of their anniversary. The Vietnamese take little notice of their actual birthday.

In the Vietnamese language, the expression *ăn Tết* (literally, to eat Tết) is used to express the idea 'to celebrate Tết'. Eating is, in fact, a key component of the Tết celebration. From half way through the year, farmers begin to fatten pigs and poultry for Tết. Half of the national pig population is slaughtered on this occasion. Popular wisdom sums up the essence of the Vietnamese Tết: *Dói dên chêt, dên Tết cung no* ('Even during a critical food shortage, you are able to eat your fill during the Tết period') and *Di cày ba vụ, không du ăn ba ngày Tết* ('What you received as pay during three rice seasons is not enough to cover your expenses for three Tết days.') (Ỗn Nhu Nguyen Van Ngoc [1928] 1991: 288). Furthermore:

*Có không, mùa đông mới biết,
Giàu nghèo, ba mươi Tết mới hay.*

Have or have not, in winter you'll know,
Rich or poor, on the eve of the Tết festival you'll see.

At Tết, members of the *nhà* (extended family) usually go to the house of the eldest son of the family to eat. The daughter-in-law supervises the preparation of the food, assisted by all the other female members of the family. The family sits together, in circles, according to a hierarchy governed by kin relationships in which the eldest generation is always served first regardless of chronological age: *Bé nhưng con nhà bác* ('[He is] young but [he belongs to] the higher hierarchy [level]'). As Le Thi Que, cited in Pham Van Bich, puts it:

A member, whatever his social status, finds his place . . . at the feasting table determined on the one hand by the place he occupies in the order of generation, and on the other by the order number he holds in his own family. (1999: 25)

Gender is also a factor. For example, Luong Van Hy reports that in the past, in upper-class families women traditionally ate separately from the men, though there is evidence that an exception was made for senior women (Bich 1999: 36). The same would apply in the case of the absence of male offspring. If a family has no male offspring, the woman, young or old, who is highest in the order of hierarchy takes the title of family head and fully assumes all the honour and responsibility of this function. Some lineage groups (for example, the Nguyễn in Da But village, Van Giang district, Bac Ninh province) do not observe this customary rule; here, the title of head must be transferred to a male member from lower in the hierarchy, even he is still very young.

The most important items on this occasion are the *bánh chưng*, *bánh giầy* and (glutinous) rice alcohol. On the eve of the first Tết day, *chè* (sweetened porridge) is also made. On this occasion two special *chè*, *chè kho* and *chè lam*, are very popular. The former is prepared with sugar, mung bean paste and glutinous rice flour, served in a condensed state. The latter is in a solid state, made of ground popped glutinous rice mixed with sugarcane molasses syrup; effectively, it is a candy. It is worth noting that all other *chè* are in a liquid state and served in small cups. During the Tết period, many families make for themselves various kinds of *mứt* (candied fruit), from lotus seeds, tangerines, pineapples, bananas, persimmons, ginger, lemons, sweet potatoes or tomatoes. And every day, on the ancestors' altar, a dish of newly steamed glutinous rice (*xôi*) stands near the other offerings. Thus, both the ancestors and living kin are fed at Tết.

The first and most respectful thing for a Vietnamese to do when he or she goes out on the first day of the first lunar month is to go to the kin temple and burn three or five joss sticks on the ancestors' altar. When a Vietnamese clasps his hands to his breast, kow-tows and prays, uttering the name of his ancestors, and bows

and kneels three times in front of his family altar, inhaling a pervasive fragrance of joss-sticks, he is communicating directly with his ancestors, asking for protection for the coming year. If he cannot perform this duty to his ancestors personally, he should ask a close relative who lives near the kin temple to accomplish this duty for him (Toan Ánh [1970] 1996: 98).

Tết is also a period for visiting one another. Visitors, male or female, young or old, relatives or non-regular acquaintances, are hospitably and respectfully served with all the offerings taken from the altar. They must taste, whether much or little, all the offered items, whether *bánh chưng* or *mứt* or *chè* or rice alcohol. It would be an insult to refuse at least a morsel of each of the dishes offered by the host family, and in practice such a thing would never happen. For itself, the host family, even in times of hardship, is at pains to be hospitable and will often invite a guest to eat its last available dish. In this way, the serving of food to those outside the immediate family circle acts as an indicator of the sense of extended kinship prevalent in Vietnamese village life.

During the Tết period, people pay no attention to *com* (ordinary boiled rice), which is eaten throughout the year, at least twice a day, at midday and in the evening. Even so, on each Tết day, every family has to cook *com* made with fragrant rice; this is used as an offering on all occasions. At every feast table, a china pot of *com* is placed in a corner and kept warm but nobody thinks of taking a grain from it. The eating behaviour of the Vietnamese during the Tết festival reflects past as well as ritual reality, thus both expressing a link with the past and with ancestral kin and emphasizing the enduring ritual centrality of glutinous rice.

Glutinous Rice Eating during the Tết Period

As we have seen, in the past, probably before the 10th century, glutinous rice was the main staple grain. Nowadays many Vietnamese ethnic groups still continue to consume glutinous rice in their daily diet. The average Vietnamese consumes 10–12 kilograms of glutinous rice per year, according to the principle *rằm ba tết bay* (three-tenths on the 15th day of every month and seven-tenths in the Tết festival period).⁷ Glutinous rice and its products are ingredients in over 400 kinds of dishes, 70 kinds of cakes and sweetmeat, 22 kinds of *chè* (sweetened porridges), *cháo* (soups, gruels), 20 kinds of beverages (liquors, spirits, wines, alcohols and beers), 30 kinds of pickles and pickled fish and shrimps. It is during the Tết period, however, that a preponderance of glutinous rice is most clearly seen (Nguyễn Xuân Hiền 1998b: 39).

In the Tết period, glutinous rice is principally used for preparing two traditional cakes, the *bánh giầy*⁸ (a round glutinous dumpling, without filling, about 30 cm in diameter and 6–8 cm high) and the *bánh chung*⁹ (a square cake made of glutinous rice filled with green bean paste and fat pork, about 25 cm across and 8 cm high). For the Vietnamese, it is unthinkable to celebrate the Tết festival without the *bánh chung* and *bánh giầy*. These two cakes, especially the *bánh chung*, take a prominent place on the altar of any Vietnamese ancestors.

In the countryside, even poor villagers may have *bánh chung* to celebrate the Tết. A form of 'savings bank' called the *ho bánh chung* (literally, kinship group for the *bánh chung*) ensures that *bánh chung* is available for its members. From the second lunar month onwards, a fund is jointly set up by some poor villagers. One of them or a local trader will loan the capital at a reasonable rate of interest. A month before the Tết festival, accumulated capital and benefit is divided equally among the *ho* members to cover the expenses of providing *bánh chung*.

According to Vietnamese legend, these two cakes were prepared for the first time at the suggestion of a Deity by Prince Lang Liêu during the reign of King Hùng VII (about the beginning of the 1st millennium BC). They were first mentioned in written literature in stories collected under the title *Linh Nam Chích Quái* during the Tran dynasty.¹⁰ The story goes as follows (Linh Nam Chích Quái 1695: 58–61):

'After defeating the invading Ân and reigning over a country in long-lasting peace, King Hung¹¹ wanted to pass the throne to a successor from among his sons. He called together his twenty¹² *công tu* (sons) and *quan lang* (governors) and said: 'I want to hand over the throne to whoever amongst you can satisfy my wishes. Whoever can bring the most delicious delicacies for me to offer to my ancestors on the altar by the end of this year so that I may accomplish my filial duty, will be placed on the throne.'

The king's sons all tried their best to find delicious food and rare delicacies in the forest as well as in the sea, and these were countless in number.

The eighteenth prince, named Tiêt Liêu, whose mother had been disgraced and had died of a disease, was alone with only a few councillors and servants so his difficulties were evident. He was worried for nights and days; even while he slept he worried, so he dreamed all the time. One night he saw in a dream a Deity who said: 'On the earth and under the sky, rice is the most precious item human beings possess. Eating rice you become strong and healthy, and you can never have too much rice. Nothing can compare to it. Make cakes with glutinous rice, one in a square shape, the other in round form, representing respectively the earth and the sky. Then fill them up with *trân cam my vi* and wrap them up with leaves to show your deep gratitude to your parents who went through great pain in giving birth to you.'

When he awoke, Tiêt Liêu was very pleased and murmured to himself:

Figure 11.1 A scene of *Bánh chung* preparation (probably early 20th century). (National Archive of Arts, Saigon)

‘I’m supported by a supernatural power!’

After that he carefully followed the advice received in the dream by selecting white and opaque glutinous rice in round form, discarding the broken grains, washing them thoroughly and wrapping them up with green leaves in a square shape, filling them up with delicacies that encapsulated the fact that the earth embraces a multiplicity of items. Then he stewed the parcels carefully, and thus produced the *bánh chung* (namely, thoroughly stewed cake). Next he boiled more glutinous rice and pounded it well, kneading and shaping it into the form of a cupola to represent the sky. This he called the *bánh giầy* (namely, well pounded cake).

On the appointed day, King Hung joyfully ordered the dishes from his sons to be served. He went from one end to the other and realised that all imaginable delicacies were present. Unlike all the others, Tiêt Liêu offered only two dishes: the *bánh chung* and *bánh giầy*. With great surprise the king asked him the explanation. Tiêt Liêu told the King his father what had happened in his dream. The King tasted both dishes and found them delicious, so delicious that he could not stop eating them; he found that these delicacies surpassed all the dishes offered by the other princes. The king praised Tiet Lieu lavishly and repeatedly, then pronounced him the winner.

On the Tết festival, King Hùng used these cakes as offerings on the altar of his ancestors. The people imitated him and gave the name *tiết liêu* (cakes to eat in festivities) to these cakes, a phonetic imitation of the prince's name, Tiết Liêu.

King Hung passed his throne to Tiết Liêu, while the other twenty-one sons were appointed to govern various places, which became autonomous regions. Later, they built *mộc sách* (wooden hedges) preventing land expansion [from other governors]. Therefore from that time on, the country was divided into *sách* (villages in mountainous areas), *thôn* (villages in delta regions), *tràng* (hill villages) and *phương* (dwelling units in cities).¹³

Nowadays, the *bánh chung* is made of top quality glutinous rice, mung bean paste and fat pork, sometimes with some added shallots which make the *bánh chung* less likely to go stale. Buddhists also prepare the *bánh chung chay* (vegetarian *bánh chung*) or *bánh chung ngọt* (sweetened *bánh chung*), which are filled up with green bean paste, sugarcane molasses or brown sugar and fibrous coconut flesh. The rice is coloured using a mixture of *lá riềng*¹⁴ or, in some special cases when you want to have a red *bánh chung*, using the flesh of the *gấc* fruit,¹⁵ and the whole is wrapped up with *lá goi* leaves.¹⁶ The most well-known characteristic of these leaves is their resistance to being torn and their colour-neutral reaction after cooking. The well-cooked *bánh chung* remains green as the leaves don't turn the cake's outer layer black as banana leaves do.¹⁷ The cakes are bound with four or six fine *lat dăng*.¹⁸ (Figure 11.1)

The *bánh chung* is cooked in a large pan for many hours, most often at night. The entire family gathers around an open air wood fire, the children lying down and listening to fairy tales. Children challenge one another with the riddle:

*Trong xanh ngoài xanh,
 Trông dẫu, trông hành,
 Lon I nằm giữa . . .
 A, a . . . Cái gì ? – Bánh chung.*
 Inside, outside both green,
 Green bean, shallots are cultivated,
 Pigs of I race¹⁹ lie in the middle . . .
 What is it ? – A *bánh chung*.

This *bánh chung* retains its long-standing popularity with the Việt as well as with other ethnic groups.

The preparation of *bánh giầy* is more difficult and needs skilful labour; in the past only youngsters from Quán Gánh village, on the outskirts of Hanoi, could produce delicious and well-presented *bánh giầy*. A proverb warns *Khôn khéo bánh*

giây, *vung dai chây cô* ('If you are clever and skilful, you prepare the *bánh giây*; if you are awkward and foolish, then you work with pestle and mortar.') This is one of the reasons why nowadays the *bánh giây* is less popular than the *bánh chung*. This traditional cake was in the past a central offering in any ritual ceremony. For example, the contribution by the head of the *giáp* at his banquets during village celebrations consisted of a pig over 100 kilograms live-weight and 244 *bánh giây*. Sometimes a large *bánh giây* of up to 80 centimetres in diameter was made for the purposes of worship. (Figure 11.2)

Normally families from the same *ho* collectively prepare the *bánh giây*. The first *bánh giây* must be offered to ancestors on the altar at the family temple and at the clan temple. Small *bánh giây* are reserved for children and divided between them according to the following principle:

*Nằm trong an lòng với bún,
Nằm ngoài an khoai chấm mỡ,
Nằm giữa an nua bánh giây.*

If you lie at the inner border of the bed, you eat wet noodles with chitterlings,

Photo 11.2 The *Bánh chung*.
(Nguyễn Xuân Hiền)

Figure 11.2 Two strong men making the Bánh Giây. Traditional woodcut, early 19th century. (National Archive of Arts, Saigon)

If you lie at the outer border, you eat sweet potato with molasses,
If you lie in the middle of the bed, you eat half of a *bánh giây*.²⁰

The dualistic symbolism expressed in the making of (male) *bánh chung* and (female) *bánh giây* at Tết is underlined in the myth of origin of the two cakes which associates the *bánh chung* with the earth and *bánh giây* with the sky. Together they represent the whole cosmos, something emphasized in the inclusion of all the products of nature in the original mythical *bánh chung*.

Most Vietnamese living abroad continue to observe their ancestors' custom of eating glutinous rice, especially during the Tết period. The modern (individualist) way of life may not permit them to manifest their kinship relations regularly but many still prepare the traditional cakes. Instead of *lá giông* they may wrap up

Photo 11.3 The *Bánh giầy quán gánh* with a slice of *giò*. (Nguyễn Xuân Hiên)

bánh chưng in banana leaves. An extract from *pandanus* leaves can replace the traditional extract from *lá riềng* to colour the glutinous rice.

Eating Xôi during the Tết Period

As well as the *bánh chưng* and *bánh giầy*, the two other essential items made of glutinous rice in the Tết period are *xôi* and rice alcohol.

Xôi is the most common way of cooking glutinous rice. It is prepared, in general, in two ways: boiling (to make *xôi thổi* or *com nếp*) and steaming (to make *xôi* or *xôi dồ*).

Putting well washed glutinous rice directly into boiling or cool water in any kind of pot on the fire produces *com nếp* (cooked glutinous rice). It is not necessary to soak the rice in advance. It takes about half an hour to prepare this cooked rice which is generally tasteless, even insipid.²¹ It is very difficult to produce nicely cooked glutinous rice. Most of the time, what is produced is *com nếp nát* (pasty and shapeless cooked glutinous rice); this has given rise to the expression *chán nhu com nếp nát* ('tasteless like pasty glutinous rice', or 'as dull as ditch water'). But

if the cooking is slightly overdone, at the bottom of the pot lies a layer of burned rice (*cháy com nếp*) which is very much appreciated by the Vietnamese for its aromatic and sweet smell. *Nhât ngon là đầu cá gáy, nhât thom là cháy com nếp* ('The most delicious food is the carp's head; the most fragrant is the burned layer of cooked glutinous rice.')

Xôi is steamed in a special utensil called a *cho* which is made up of three parts: a) the *nôi cho* (steamer),²² made of baked earth or wood or bamboo or more recently of brass or stainless metal,²³ the bottom of which has seven or ten holes; b) the *vi (cho)* – a bamboo lattice lining put on the *nôi cho* bottom, preventing the rice grains from falling into the boiling water in the *nôi dáy* and allowing the hot water vapour to evaporate from the *nôi dáy* into the steamer; and c) the *nôi dáy* (boiler), that is, an ordinary pot; but when the steamer is placed above it all the chinks must be carefully filled with a mixture of wood or straw ash, water and *giấy ban* (traditional thin paper made of bark of the *dó* tree).²⁴ Before steaming, the glutinous rice normally has to be soaked in water for at least twelve hours. It takes about another hour to prepare the *xôi* which is considered more delicious than *com nếp* (boiled glutinous rice) and is therefore more appreciated by the Vietnamese. Steaming, as cooking specialists explain, preserves the minerals, vitamins, and protein in the milled rice; moreover, the rather high temperature of water vapour in the steamer promotes the cooking process.

Many baked-earth dishes have been excavated in archaeological sites in Vietnam. By the late 1980s, some thirty of these had been found, the oldest being from An Dao site, Phu Tho province, dated to *circa* the second millennium BC. These dishes are about a span in diameter and one to two centimetres in thickness with many holes equally spaced through the thickness (Lê Van Lan 1976: 221). Some archaeologists believe that these dishes would have been used as the bottom parts of steamers for glutinous rice.²⁵ The well-known proverb of the Muông ethnic group in Hoà Bình province: *Com dô, nhà gác, nước vác,*²⁶ *lon thui* ('Steamed rice, house on stilts, water-carried-on-the-shoulder, burned [singled] pork') suggests that the only way the Muông prepared rice was to steam it (*dô*). They steamed rice, both glutinous and non-glutinous, in bamboo or wooden steamers.²⁷ The Muông continue to prefer eating steamed rather than boiled rice.

Steaming rice is an important part of the art of cooking in Vietnam. At the age of ten, a Vietnamese girl is taught by her mother to become proficient in the art of steaming glutinous rice so that her future mother-in-law will be satisfied with her culinary skill. The mother advises her daughters *Nghe hơi nôi cho* ('[when you steam glutinous rice, you have to] listen to the evaporation in the steamer [to adjust the fire]'). A well-known saying confirms this difficulty: *Làm rê chó xáo thịt*

trâu, làm dậu cho dậu xôi lai ('A son-in-law never cooks water-buffalo meat and a daughter-in-law never re-steam the *xôi*.) In the countryside, many glutinous rice steaming contests are organised during the Tết period to promote this particular skill.

Rice Alcohol in the Tết Period

Xôi is always accompanied by *ruou* (rice alcohol).²⁸ In the *Tê Nam Giao* (Heaven worshipping ceremony) celebrated every year in spring personally by the King, *xôi* and *ruou* were two absolutely essential offerings. At the popular level, one proverb goes: *Có xôi, có ruou mới nên cỗ* ('No feast without *xôi* and *ruou*'). Two other verses tell the same story:

*Có cúng, có bái là có ruou,
Có tiệc, có lễ là có ruou.*

No worship ceremonies, no anniversaries without *ruou*,
No feasts, no festivities without *ruou*.

and

*Dắt nước hương hoa,
Người ta com ruou.*

Land and sea [must have] joss sticks and flowers,
Human beings [must have] cooked rice and rice alcohol.

Glutinous rice is the only raw material used in making Vietnamese *ruou*. Some ethnic groups such as the Mèo (Hmông) in Hà Giang province will sometimes use maize for distilling alcohol but their favourite is always an alcohol from (glutinous) rice. Low quality rice is used. The grain is husked, to produce *gạo lứt* (brown rice) which is still covered by a thin layer of bran. This contains a high percentage of nitrogenous matter, which promotes the fermentation. First, the *gạo lứt* is roughly steamed twice; then traditional yeast²⁹ is added and the fermentation process develops. The main product, the alcohol, is reserved for human consumption, while the marc (brewers' grain, *hèm* in Vietnamese) is used as a feedstuff in pig husbandry. This by-product was, in many cases, the main profit for rice alcohol producers. The marc is also used to prepare a special sauce, the *dầm bông*, for a famous Hanoian delicacy, *bún ốc* (wet noodles with boiled water snails) (Nguyễn Xuân Hiền 1999: 44). To the basic *ruou trắng* (white alcohol), flowers or medicinal herbs or animal matter can be added to obtain tens of kinds of *ruou thơm* (= *ruou mùi*, aromatised alcohol) and *ruou thuốc* (medicinal alcohol). By the end of the

Photo 11.4 A Vietnamese Thai rice steamer on the hearth of a house on stilts, late 1950s. (Nguyễn Xuân Hiên)

18th century, Hai Thuong Lan Ông, one of the most famous physicians in Vietnam history, had listed more than twenty kinds of *ruou* (Hai Thuong Lan Ông Lê Huu Trác [1782] 1972: 76). (Figure 11.3)

According to ancient tradition, the rice alcohol offered to ancestors on the altar must be made from glutinous rice cultivated in the same field where they themselves cultivated rice which they consumed when they were alive, thus consolidating kinship links between the living and the dead. That is the reason why in the past, especially before the French invasion and the installation of a colonial administration, alcohol production was a family, or at least a kin, business. On some important occasions such as wedding or funeral ceremonies and the Tết festival, alcohol was distilled from home-produced rice for the family's own consumption. Sometimes, a couple of families from the same *ho* shared their raw material and organised a distillation group to produce enough alcohol for their own needs, thus broadening the sense of kin by involving a wider group which may involve a whole village. At the same time, there were a few *lò* (distilleries) which specialised in this business. However, there were no more than four hundred for the whole of Tonkin (North Vietnam); and they were mainly managed by local notables who were themselves very regular drinkers. By the early 1900s the distillation of rice alcohol had come to be gradually concentrated in a couple of villages. In Hà Đông

Figure 11.3 A scene of rice alcohol drinking. Woodcarving from the community house in Ha Hiệp village, 17th century. (National Archive of Arts, Saigon)

province, for example, only 25 out of 742 villages specialised in alcohol production and each of these had from 50 to 60 stills (Gourou [1936] 1965: 136). There were three reasons behind this concentration: the availability of relatively fertile rice fields suitable for cultivating the *nếp con*; the availability of a famous *thuộc* (yeast); and the skill of the amateur producers. In any event, alcohol production in those days enjoyed merely a local, or at best a regional, dimension. The national and provincial authorities took no measures to attempt to control or tax rice alcohol distillation.

With glutinous rice as the key raw material, various Vietnamese ethnic groups in the North as well in the South produce a special beer³⁰ called *ruou cần*, which is a kind of crude beer drunk through long bamboo tubes. In this case the sense of shared consumption is taken one step further, with several people drinking the beer from a single container. Nowadays, with the development of tourism, this traditional way of drinking alcohol flourishes everywhere in mountainous areas. The *ruou cần* is drunk on every possible occasion: feasts, ritual ceremonies, religious celebrations, funerals, weddings and so on. Whenever a significant event takes place, whether it be happy or sad, all the villagers – men and women, young and old, even very small children – are invited to gather at the longhouse and

drink *ruou cần* to the vibrating sound of the gong; it is an occasion of pride and joy for the whole village (Seton 1938: 222). *Ruou cần* can be consumed at any time of day, but it is normally drunk in the evening. For these people, the drinking of *ruou cần* brings the whole village together. The ceremony may last for three, five or eight days according to the wealth of the village and to how long the supply of *ruou cần* and food holds out.

Conclusion

In Vietnam, rice and rice products are closely associated with notions of kinship. The core family eats together, while the extended family, defined patrilineally and living in close proximity, cultivates rice together and feasts together at Tết. Offerings of rice and rice wine are made to the ancestors, including them in this extended family network. Although patrilineal clans are at the core of Vietnamese conceptions of family, affines have a significant part to play, which may derive in part from the central role played by women in rice cultivation, which in turn is linked to their symbolic association with fertility. Their subordinate role is expressed in their eating separately from the men, but the importance of hierarchy based on generation is also evident in that some senior women may eat with the men. The order in which food

Photo 11.5 A scene of *Ruou cần* drinking in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. (Dr. Hoang Luong)

is served also reflects this concern with generational seniority and a hierarchical concern with birth order. Thus food practices show how such matters can override or complicate definitions of relationships based on consanguineal connections.

While the sharing of food can go some way towards defining family membership, the sense of kinship connection extends to all Vietnamese, who express this identity, which is one of both ethnicity and kinship, through maintaining the traditions of eating and offering glutinous rice dishes at Tết festivals.

Although ordinary rice dominates in terms of quantity eaten in Vietnam, it is glutinous rice that is ritually significant, being the key component of all Vietnamese ceremonies and feasts. This is probably because glutinous rice was central to the diet of the ancestors of the present-day Vietnamese when they lived in the mountains. Glutinous rice is particularly prominent during the Tết period in Vietnam, when it is given in both raw and cooked form to members of the extended family, and of the lineage. Glutinous rice is also offered to the ancestors, both in the family temple and in the clan temple, so that prayers can be communicated to them. Kinship is thus consolidated between both the living and the dead.

One of the main forms in which glutinous rice is eaten at Tết – in the form of *bánh chung* and *bánh giầy* cakes – emphasizes the complementary dualism, associated with male and female, inherent in the cosmos, and links this explicitly to kinship. The fact that only glutinous rice can be used to make these cakes underlines the ritual centrality of glutinous rice, and its centrality to the construction of kin ties.

The Tết tradition has been greatly simplified over the last two decades, a period during which over two million Vietnamese have resettled in more than one hundred countries all over the world. Even in their fatherland, the large gap between rich and poor does not permit all people to enjoy their traditional glutinous cake. However, the traditional patterns of behaviour live on in people's aspirations. Overseas Vietnamese still see the Tết festival as an occasion at the week-end to meet their *dông bào* and share the rare happiness of eating the *bánh chung* in a traditional environment.³¹

Rice, then, and especially glutinous rice, plays a central role in defining and consolidating kin relations in Vietnam, whether in the core family, the lineage or the country as a whole.

Notes

1 *Oryza sativa* L., 1753 proles *utilissima*.

2 *Oryza sativa* L., 1753 proles *glutinosa*.

3 Many ethnic minorities still believe that the Rice Goddess governs the rice crop every year, and that the Rice Spirit may get angry and leave the rice barn if she is treated with

disrespect by, for example, people entering the barn with shoes on or with wet, bare feet. It is ordinarily only acceptable to enter the rice-barn with bare, clean feet. Pregnant women and/or menstruating girls and women are forbidden to approach or enter it; they are 'unclean' and therefore the Rice Spirit would leave the barn and the amount of the next rice harvest would decrease disastrously should they enter it.

4 Beside Tết, the Vietnamese also observe the Gregorian New Year holiday.

5 This is the festival for the Táo Quân (Kitchen Genie), the day when the Táo Quân goes to Heaven to report to Ngọc Hoàng (the Jade Emperor) on the activities of all the family members.

6 This is the festival to lower the Nêu pole.

7 The 15th day of the lunar month is a day of worship for Buddhists.

8 In the Vietnamese language this cake name can be written in three different ways, while the pronunciation remains almost the same: *bánh giây* ('well pounded cake') or *bánh dày* or *bánh dầy* (both the latter mean 'thick cake'). The first version is adopted by most well-known orthographers.

9 Sometimes this cake is misdescribed as being made of steamed glutinous rice.

10 Linh Nam Chích Quai is an anthology of folktales and legends; it was initially collected and recorded in written form by an unknown scholar during the Tran dynasty (1226–1400) but revised with an introduction by Vu Quynh (1453–?) in 1492 and then further revised by Kieu Phu (1447–?) in 1493; this ancient literature suggests that glutinous rice was in widespread use from ancient times. My reference is from a photocopy of the wood-block printed copy dating from 1695.

11 One of the Hùng kings in the legendary Hùng dynasty, which consisted of eighteen kings (or more logically, eighteen family lineages), who reigned in Vietnam from the second to the middle of the first millennium BC.

12 In most popular versions of the story in modern Vietnamese as well as in other languages, this number is given as 22, but the original story refers to 20.

13 Besides the Việt, who are the majority ethnic group, the Chăm, many of whom now live in Thuận Hải province and whose ancestors were the famous Champa kings, have a similar tale. This is entitled *Cadiêng* and concerns the two traditional cakes, the red *xakaya* in round form, representing the Sun and the white *paynung* in square form representing the Earth.

14 *Alpinia officinarum* Hance.

15 *Momordica cochinchinensis* Spreng.

16 The leaves of a wild arrowroot species *Phrynium capitatum*.

17 From Central Vietnam southward, instead of the traditional *lá giong* (which grows wild only in North-western Vietnam), banana leaves from the species *chuôi hột* are used in wrapping up the *bánh tét* (or *bánh tày*, i.e. the *bánh chung* in cylindrical shape).

18 Fine strands of *Bambusa indonensis* McClure, usually coloured red.

19 A famous breed of pig from the Red River Delta, North Vietnam.

20 In the past, especially in North Vietnam, when security, whether real or imaginary, was not assured and there was a constant threat from the cold, the middle of the bed was the most desirable place for children as well as for adults.

21 To eliminate this tastelessness, a little salt is added in the final phase of cooking. But the crucial skill in cooking *com* rests in the ability to adjust the quantity of water according to what is appropriate to each rice cultivar.

22 In North-eastern Thailand, the steamer (*huad*) is a basket made of a special type of red bamboo, the *phai daing*, which is resistant to damage from insects, rodents and small animals and can be used for 10 to 15 years. It seems that the Thai steamer has no specific cover and the cook uses any cover from another pot to cover the *huad*. In Southern China, the steamer and its cover are both also made of bamboo.

23 Some recent models of metallic steamer have two or three layers and a transparent plastic cover.

24 Some Thái and Mường people used a wooden steamer or a special bamboo basket similar to the *cho* (steamer) of the Việt. This basket is put directly above a pot half-full of water, which is used as a *nôi dáy* (boiler) by the Việt.

25 In North-eastern and North-western Thailand, especially in Non Nok Tha, similar dishes were excavated by Chester Gorman, who was of the same opinion (personal communication in 1978).

26 The Mường used to carry stream water in a long hollow bamboo, sometimes as much as three metres in length, on their backs or on their shoulder to their houses on stilts built in large valleys.

27 Many ethnic groups used to steam both ordinary rice and glutinous rice. They only began to boil it in recent times.

28 The Vietnamese do not differentiate between wine, alcohol and spirits. One of the reasons is that they use only one raw material: *nếp con* ('offspring' [low quality] glutinous rice).

29 This traditional yeast, called simply *thuộc* (literally, 'medicine'), is said to consist of more than forty ingredients. The quality of rice alcohol depends largely on the yeast used. The recipe which they use for yeast is kept a close secret by any alcohol-producing family.

30 Technically, alcohol made from rice is a beer although it is often described in English as rice wine.

31 Whenever the first day of Tết occurs, overseas Vietnamese have to celebrate it at the week-end, after a busy week of hard work.

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