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THE POGO NAUTA RITUAL IN LABOYA (WEST SUMBA)

OF TUBERS AND MAMULI

The study of the concept of the 'soul' was relatively undeveloped in the study of Eastern Indonesian societies until quite recently (Barraud, forthcoming; Geirnaert, in press, forthcoming; Platenkamp 1988a: 19-31, 1988b). Perhaps this negligence can be attributed to the deep rootedness of the Western conception of the dichotomy of the 'soul' and the 'body'. This dichotomy hinders an understanding of the relationships that may exist between the various components of living beings and inanimate objects in holistic societies (Barraud, forthcoming; Mauss 1983a: 311-330, 1983b: 331-361). The ideological bias of individualism (Dumont 1983) may have obscured the fact that in many societies such components do not pertain exclusively to one person or to one item. On the contrary, the components may well be essentially social in nature and crucial for ensuring the continuity of society. Recent studies in Melanesia, among the 'Are'are (Coppet 1981) and among the Orokaiva (Iteanu 1983), and in Indonesia among the Tobelo of the North Moluccas (Platenkamp 1988a, 1988b), have shown how apparently purely personal components are defined in terms of social relationships. The components of a person are part of a wider socio-cosmic whole, and are often represented by specific objects that circulate among the members of a community. The socio-cosmic ties implied by the components valorize these objects and lend meaning to a society's system of exchange.

The indigenous people of Sumba, Eastern Indonesia, also conceive of such components of the person. The components have often been translated as 'soul'. Thus, the notion of the 'soul' pervades several passages of a monograph on the people of Rindi, in the eastern part of the island (Forth 1981), as well as earlier essays of a more general character concerning several Sumbanese communities (Onvlee 1973). However, it was not the authors' main interest to study local conceptions of the 'soul'. During my fieldwork¹ among the Laboya of the southern coast of West Sumba, it soon became apparent that much of the women's work, namely weaving and

¹ Fieldwork was carried out between 1982 and 1984. It was sponsored by the Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO), The Hague, under the auspices of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), Jakarta. Much of the first six months was dedicated to administrative matters. In order to make up for lost time, I made a short trip to Laboya in October 1986 that I financed myself.

plaiting, was closely associated with life-giving processes and with certain stages of the human 'soul' at birth and death (Geirnaert 1989, in press, forthcoming). It also became clear, however, that the term 'soul' did not correspond to local ideas of how living beings are composed.

The Laboya believe that a living human being is the result of a particular combination of general principles of life. They also make a major distinction between the components of people who die from old age, and those who die an untimely, accidental death. The latter are considered to be particularly dangerous for the well-being of society. It is not until a special ceremony, called *Pogo nauta*, is carried out that the destructive influences of this type of dead can be removed. The *Pogo nauta* ritual works to recover the components of victims.

1. Laboya society

Laboya society is divided into clans (*kabihu*) and sub-clans or houses (*uma*). A clan (*kabihu*) consists of an 'elder' house, a patrilineally related group called 'elder house' (*uma pa kaya*) that includes all in-married women, and of several 'younger' houses (*uma pa ali*). Within one clan, all houses or *uma* are 'brothers' (*anguwu*).² The word *anguwu*, without any other specification, is a general term for real and classificatory male siblings. A younger brother is called *anguwu pa ali*, an elder one, *anguwu pa kaya*. Real brothers, that is men who share the same father and the same mother, are called *anguwu takka*. As we shall see, although the idea of patrilineality is strong in this division, *kabihu* and *uma* cannot be regarded as exclusively patrilineal descent groups.

Each *kabihu*, and subsequently each *uma*, has been founded by a man and his wife. A *kabihu* or an *uma* includes all patrilineally related descendants, that is, sons and brothers, unmarried daughters and sisters, as well as all in-married women. Daughters and sisters who marry out belong to the clan (*kabihu*) and to the *uma* of their husband. After her death, a woman is buried in her husband's village (*harona*) and her *dewa* or 'spirit' is invited to dwell in her husband's house (*uma*). *Kabihu* refers to a set of founding male siblings and their wives; *uma* indicates the siblings' order of birth within each *kabihu*. The term *uma* means 'house', but also refers to a group of descendants of a man and his wife (or wives). No marriage may take place between members of houses (*uma*) belonging to the same clan. A Laboya man must marry his *ana loka*, his mother's brother's daughter (real or classificatory). Some *kabihu* have common ancestors and are considered as 'brothers'. In that case, the *kabihu* themselves are ranked according to their ancestors' order of birth and may not intermarry. Others are

² The founding fathers of all clans originate from the village of *Hodana*, the ritual centre of Laboya, which is perched on a hill. However, because of feuds, many junior houses have moved away from *Hodana* to settle in villages lower in the valleys. These villages are considered to be younger than *Hodana*.

related to one another by marriage; they are either wife-givers (*loka*) or wife-takers (*lolo*).

One's name (*ngara*), closely associated with one's 'spirit' (*dewa*), is inherited patrilineally. Boys may be named after their paternal grandfather (FF) or after one of his brothers (FFB). People say that girls may not be called after women who belong to their maternal kin. Women may receive the name of their *uma*'s female members who have died before they married. Women's names circulate from one house to another and become part of the ancestral names of their husbands' *uma*. Ideally, a name indicates one's natal *uma*.³

2. The components of living beings

Man consists of several components: a body (*tau*), which contains a spiritual and invisible element called *dewa*, and something else called *mawo*. Elsewhere I have extensively described *dewa* and *mawo* (Geirnaert forthcoming). The Laboya translate *mawo* into Indonesian as 'shadow' (*bayangan*). *Mawo* is the reflection of people, animals and plants in a pool of water. It is also the shadow they cast as they stand in the sun. However, as we shall see, *mawo* is far more than only a shadow. The Laboya believe that the 'Moon', the female half of the supreme deity *Wulla-Laddo* (lit. 'Moon-Sun'), 'glues' (*melekat* in Indonesian) *mawo* and *dewa* together in the body or *tau* of the unborn. *Mawo* is also breath, a feature of all living beings. When people die from an ordinary death, for instance from old age, *mawo* causes the body to rot. The Laboya speak of *mawo ta we* ('*mawo* to the water'), implying that, in this case, *mawo* is 'cool'. *Mawo ta we* is responsible for the putrefaction (*bau*) of the body (*tau*), and *mawo* makes the body smell. *Mawo* is a component of all living beings, including animals and plants, but it is also part of a wider and cyclic cosmic process. *Mawo* manifests itself in clouds, in smoke and in rain. The rotting fluids of the dead, that is, 'collective *mawo*' (Geirnaert forthcoming), are transformed into fertilizing rains and subterranean water. This 'collective *mawo*' nourishes all animals and plants, and eventually man as well. Because animals and plants have *mawo*, people may sacrifice buffaloes and pigs. Their *mawo* can replace that of a human being. *Mawo* is a necessary principle for 'life' in general, but it is not sufficient to induce 'social life'. As we shall see below, *dewa* is the principle that makes a social being out of a young human body (*tau*), consisting primarily of *mawo* and of some undifferentiated, undeveloped *dewa*.

At death from old age, *mawo* becomes embodied in the rotting fluids

³ Lately, rules governing the inheritance of a name have not been observed as strictly as in the past, and some confusion exists in name-giving.

In Laboya, nobility (*ata maraba*) is inherited through women only. Some matrilineal relationships (*duwu*) are distinguished from one another. Some of these *duwu* are considered to be particularly noble and wealthy. The *duwu* are discussed in another publication (Geirnaert forthcoming).

of the corpse. Following this process of liquefaction, the *dewa* of the deceased is called back into his or her house during a special ceremony (*Hapane nadewa*: '*dewa* that is talked to, requested', explained as '*dewa* that is called back and invited to climb in the house'). The *dewa* of the ancestors (*marapu*) are believed to dwell under the high, trapezoid roof of a Laboya house, a place forbidden to the living. The heirlooms of an *uma*, such as the omega-shaped golden ear-pendants or *mamuli*, and the weapons and enemies' heads seized during past head-huntings raids, are kept in this sacred loft. A newly built house is not fit for permanent habitation until the spirits of the founding ancestors and the heirlooms are ritually installed in the loft to protect the living. It is the task of the descendants to feed the *dewa* of their ancestors regularly, as a sign of respect and as proof that they remember the dead of their house. The memory of the dead is perpetuated in another and more important way as well. Once the *dewa* of a deceased is installed in the top part of the house, his or her name must be given to a child of that *uma*. *Dewa*, often translated as 'spirit' (in Indonesian the Laboya use the word *roh*), is specifically associated with the name of a person. In contrast to *mawo*, *dewa* is never associated with the putrefaction of the body; it never smells. It is the durable component of human beings that remains in the house. *Dewa* can speak, *mawo* cannot: the latter is only a form, usually a noiseless shadow often recognizable by a particular smell.

A child is not named for some time, often several years, after birth. One calls him or her 'child' (*ana*). Children are not considered as full social beings. They are often referred to as 'dogs' (*bagga*) until they are given the name of an ancestor. Before they are named, children consist of *mawo* and an undeveloped, unnamed *dewa*, a combination ensured by the 'Moon', the female half of the dual deity *Wulla-Laddo*, at the time of conception. To give a name to this combination after birth identifies a person because it determines his or her first set of social relationships. The latter include his father and mother and, through her, his mother's brother, and ultimately, the house's founding ancestors, as well as the ancestor after whom he has been named. The ancestor whose name he has inherited protects the *mawo* and the *dewa* 'glued together' in his body (*tau*) when he was still a foetus. These primordial links are the basis of a person's relationships maintained later in life. A person's unspecified *dewa* becomes differentiated and strengthened by the way in which the person expands his/her social network while conforming to his/her specific gender roles. Men in particular increase their name (*ngara*), and hence their *dewa*, during their life-time by organizing competitive feasts, by participating in ritual hunts (Geirnaert 1987), by occasional cattle-raids and, formerly, by head-hunting. Their aim is to become an *ata pengara*, a 'man of renown' (*ata*: 'man'; *pengara*: 'that has a name', from *ngara*: 'name'), and an *ata pote*, a 'rich man' (*pote*: 'rich'). Women acquire fame by giving birth to many healthy children. For instance, the apical female ancestor of one of the *duwu* is called

Dairo Buta Ana, 'Dairo Many Children' (*buta*: 'many'; *ana*: 'children'), for she had many descendants who gave birth to many children. However, a woman can only fulfill her procreative task on the condition that her husband (and his ancestors) accumulate and retain sufficient authority and renown. By conforming to this ideal, men protect the fecundity of in-married women against external influences and safeguard the *uma*'s fertility, ensuring the growth of the crops and the herds (Geirnaert forthcoming).

Mawo is a principle of life that circulates between living beings and the cosmos, ensuring the renewal of life-giving fluids, the 'collective *mawo*'. *Mawo* is also transferred from one clan to another, from wife-givers to wife-takers. Women have the ability to 'glue' *mawo* and *dewa* for their husband's clan and house. *Dewa*, however, is more specifically associated with an *uma*'s efforts to amass wealth. The increase and the growth of *dewa* is dependent upon the relationship between the *dewa* of the living and the *dewa* of the house's ancestors. *Dewa* is a manifestation of this relationship. *Dewa* characterizes all living things that belong to the realm of the house. Hence, cultivated plants and domesticated animals have a *dewa*, whereas wild species are only made up of *mawo* and *tau*. However, the *dewa* of plants and animals is a secondary and passive one, and is derived from their relationship to a house. Unlike man, they cannot increase the *dewa* of a house by deeds of their own. The Laboya specify that the *dewa* of animals and plants can never substitute that of a human being. If a person's *mawo* can be replaced by that of cattle, no animal sacrifice can ever recover human *dewa*.

We may conclude that each human being is made up of a temporary and specific combination of a certain amount of 'collective *mawo*', and of his *uma*'s *dewa*. The possibilities of such combinations are infinite. The Laboya readily explain that this is why no two people are alike. *Wulla*, the Moon deity and a house's ancestors are responsible for each combination of *mawo* and *dewa* in a foetus. Women's power of giving life is compared to the ability of the moon to join *mawo* and *dewa* together in the unborn (Geirnaert in press, forthcoming). It is important to note that a person never 'owns' his/her *mawo* and *dewa*. The body of an individual functions as a temporary receptacle for *mawo* and *dewa*. The latter are social and cosmic principles that circulate in an everlasting chain of exchanges between the living and the dead.

3. *The consequences of violent death: A case-study*

In the case of normal death, *mawo* and *dewa* come apart once more. *Mawo* ensures the putrefaction of the body, after which *dewa* is returned to the *uma*. The name of the deceased remains in the *uma* only if his descendants ask his *dewa* to live in the house. It is precisely this process that is threatened by an accidental death. People who die an untimely and violent

death are described as *mate Wulla-Laddo* ('dead (of the) Moon-Sun'⁴). The reason why people die accidentally can usually be traced back to a case of incest (*hala*: 'wrong'; 'to go in the wrong way'; 'incest') committed by their ancestors. In myth, *Wulla-Laddo* is particularly concerned about *hala* and punishes the descendants of the culprits (Geirnaert forthcoming). The concept of *hala* is closely associated to the sun, *Laddo*, and to hotness. Instead of distintegrating into cool '*mawo* to the water' (*mawo ta we*), the *mawo* of such people cannot dissociate from their *dewa*. *Mawo* and *dewa* remain 'stuck together' against their will (Indonesian: *mau atau tidak mau, dewa dengan mawo masih melekat*: 'whether they like it or not, *dewa* and *mawo* are still glued together'). They become irritated and 'hot' (Laboya: *ngangaha*; Indonesian: *panas*). They turn into *mawo ta laddo* and *dewa ta laddo*, that is '*mawo* to the sun' and '*dewa* to the sun'. The body cannot decompose, and hence *mawo* and *dewa* are unable to come apart.

Although, in practice, the body eventually rots away, it seems that *mawo* and *dewa* remain identified with the corpse, and hence with a person, even if they are no longer embodied by the decaying body. *Mawo* and *dewa* may leave the body but cannot part and be recycled in the cosmos and in society. Everything is *hala*, wrong and hot.

The only way to counteract the effects of *hala* and restore the normal process of separation after death is to organize a *Pogo nauta* ritual. *Pogo nauta* is a costly and dangerous ceremony, and is seldom carried out in practice. Ideally, a *Pogo nauta* requires the participation of all the *uma*'s wife-givers and wife-takers. I was told that it may involve the presence of three to six thousand people, roughly half of Laboya society (about 12,000 inhabitants⁵). The guests have to be fed and entertained for at least two days by the *uma* organizing the *Pogo nauta*. Also, as on all ceremonial occasions, prestations between wife-givers and wife-takers have to be made. *Pogo nauta* creates a large flow of goods. Although I have attended ceremonies of this size among larger ethno-linguistic groups in other parts of West Sumba, the number of guests for the relatively small Laboya community may be overestimated. Yet this overestimation is significant. For the Laboya, *Pogo nauta* is a ceremonial occasion on which an *uma*'s wealth and power can be displayed. The more people attend the ritual, the higher the prestige of the house rises. During *Pogo nauta*, all social relationships are renewed and strengthened. *Pogo nauta* is not only costly, but also awesome, because during the ceremony, the living must address the upper deity *Wulla-Laddo*. Before describing *Pogo nauta* in more detail, I

⁴ *Ta* in Laboya means 'to', 'towards', 'of the', depending on the context of speech. It is interesting to note that *mawo ta Laddo* and *mawo ta Wulla* can be interpreted as '*mawo/dewa* of the', as well as '*mawo/dewa* towards'. *Wulla-Laddo* and the ancestors inflict different types of death (Geirnaert forthcoming). The reconstruction of the expressions demonstrates that the type of death determines the paths of *dewa* and *mawo* after death.

⁵ Not all guests are necessarily Laboya people. Because of intermarriages people from neighbouring ethno-linguistic communities are also invited to the ritual.

wish to recall a recent case illustrating the sense of urgency caused by repeated postponement of the ritual.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, in the spring of 1984, Tara Yelo complained about the *dewa* of his paternal grandmother (FM) who kept asking him to hold a *Pogo nauta* ritual for her. He was worried about this request, although he could do little else than promise her that the ceremony would be performed as soon as he could gather enough goods for the prestations. However, he was using most of his resources (mainly rice and borrowed money for which he had bartered several heads of cattle) to send one of his sons to study in Kupang, the capital of West Timor. He recalled that as the date of his son's departure approached, his grandmother's *dewa* became more pressing, appearing in his dreams nearly every night. Tara Yelo considered this to be an ill foreboding. In spite of his promises and the spirit's apparent patience, he feared that he would eventually have to bear the consequences of neglecting his dead grandmother.

When I returned to Laboya in the autumn of 1986, Tara Yelo was lying on the verandah of his house, unable to walk, crippled for life. He explained that a few months before, as he was working in his garden, grasping his large knife in his right hand ready to cut a piece of wood, the spirit (*dewa*) of his paternal grandmother took hold of his arm. The knife fell, deeply slashing his thigh. This was the spirit's revenge for postponing *Pogo nauta*. Perhaps more unsettling still, Tara Yelo feared that the old lady was becoming increasingly impatient and was planning more acts of retaliation for being forgotten.

According to the Laboya, the reasons for the spirit's anger are totally legitimate. The explanation lies in the past. Tara Yelo's grandfather (FF) had an elder brother (FFB) who had acquired considerable renown from cattle-raiding. In Laboya, stealing cattle from neighbouring tribes was widespread, particularly among ambitious men who wanted to become leaders of head-hunting parties. Only the rich, that is, men who owned large buffalo herds and many horses, could afford to organize such raids. Tara Yelo's grandfather (FF), Kedu Tolo Mala, disliked his elder brother's activities, and eventually disowned him as a brother.⁶ However, Kedu Tolo Mala's decision came too late, for his elder brother's enemies were already planning their revenge. One day, they attacked Kedu Tolo Mala's house and decapitated his wife, Tara Yelo's grandmother. The lady, called Kaho Pare, has been asking for a *Pogo nauta* ritual ever since, so that her *mawo* may come back from the moon where it is said to dwell, and so that her *dewa* may at last join the other ancestral spirits living in the loft of Tara Yelo's house.

This matter is a serious one for a further reason. Tara Yelo's grandfather buried his wife in a tomb in the burial ground in the centre of the village,

⁶ This explanation may be influenced by modern standards of behaviour due to increasing Christianization.

expecting that he would soon be able to organize a *Pogo nauta* for her. It is generally admitted that if *Pogo nauta* takes place soon after death, the remains of the deceased may be buried in the centre of the village. But as *Pogo nauta* is postponed, the angry *dewa* becomes a threat to every member of the village community. The inhabitants of Tara Yelo's village ask him either to organize a *Pogo nauta* quickly or to remove Kaho Pare's remains from her grave in the centre of the village. However, for Tara Yelo, moving Kaho Pare is a costly enterprise that offers no solution to his problem. Indeed, the villagers would be out of risk, but not the members of Tara Yelo's *uma*. Tara Yelo cannot escape organizing a *Pogo nauta* for Kaho Pare. If he fails to do so, his son, and then his grand-son will inherit this obligation. As time passes, Kaho Pare's *dewa* will send more and more misfortunes to remind her descendants of their duty towards her.

The foregoing story demonstrates that an angry *dewa* is not only a disturbance for the members of the house, but also threatens the house's neighbours. The *dewa* of a beheaded person asks for revenge. In practice, raids between the members of an *uma* and their enemies have considerable consequences for a village as a whole. In retaliation, neighbours may or may not want to participate. Formerly, the reputation of the village men as warriors was visible for all; a skull-tree stood in the centre of the village, exposing the skulls of beheaded enemies. Hence, the renown of an *uma* acquired by its male members during warfare, an important part of an *uma*'s *dewa*, contributed to the village's reputation as a raiding unit (Geirnaert forthcoming). To set fire to a house was, and still is, relatively common among feuding parties. The houses, made of wood and grass, virtually touch one another, so that when one house is set on fire, the whole village often burns down. When such a disaster occurs, all the *uma* of a village suffer a considerable loss of prestige. The Laboya have never explicitly explained to me why the bones of a murdered person have to be buried outside the village walls; they just say that 'blood clings to them'. It is possible that by removing the bones from the centre of a village, neighbours are indicating that they are not planning to take part in any retaliation.

In the main, however, the remains of someone who died from a violent death should not be buried in the central square of a village until the *Pogo nauta* ritual has been performed; for the deceased's *dewa* is said to roam in the wilderness as long as his corresponding *mawo* is unable to induce the liquefaction of the corpse. In other words, as long as *mawo* and *dewa* are joined in association, *dewa* belongs to the 'wilderness', the usual domain of *mawo* after a normal death. Thus, *dewa* behaves as *mawo*, and everything is 'wrong' (*hala*). All things coming from the exterior, that is, from the forest and the uncultivated land, are dangerous for the village and for society as a whole, so long as they have not been duly presented to the founding ancestors and incorporated into the social world. To prevent the remains of a person who died from violent death from being buried in the

centre of the village is a way to keep *hala* away from the village community.

4. The Pogo nauta ritual

In Laboya language, *Pogo nauta* means 'to cut (*pogo*) the ladder (*nauta*)'. This ritual serves to call back the *mawo* and the *dewa* of a person who has died from an unusual death, *mate Wulla-Laddo* ('dead of the Moon-Sun'). Such violent deaths are characterized as 'hot', because they are associated with the sun. Victims of head-hunting raids in former days, and of car accidents or aeroplane crashes in modern times, belong to the category of *mate Wulla-Laddo*. So do people who are eaten by a crocodile, who die from a snake-bite, from drowning, from being hit by a thunderbolt or as a consequence of a serious fall. Ideally, a *Pogo nauta* must be held also for domesticated animals and cultivated plants that are accidentally killed or destroyed. Both the owner of a buffalo which has died from a thunderbolt, and the farmer whose rice fields have burnt down must plan a *Pogo nauta* for the *mawo* and the *dewa* of the animal and the crop.

As months go by, the more *Wulla*, the moon, is tempted to collect the dead person's '*mawo* to the sun' with one of her tips. At night, one may see the *mawo* of those unfortunate people sitting on the moon, crying and calling for help. Meanwhile, their *dewa ta laddo* wander in the forests and uninhabited areas, having no place to go because they cannot return to their respective *uma*. *Laddo*, the sun, may ask *Wulla* to feed him the *mawo ta laddo* of the dead for whom no *Pogo nauta* has been performed. *Laddo* may catch *mawo ta laddo* by asking them to climb along its 'legs' (*ledu*), the rays that make up a ladder (*nauta*) between the earth and the sky at sunset. Once *Laddo* has swallowed the *mawo* of the deceased, there is no hope left for the *dewa* who must then join the bad spirits that dwell in the wilderness and attack people. If *mawo* is completely consumed by the sun, there is no way to recover *mawo* and *dewa* for society. The *dewa* is lost to the *uma*, and the *mawo* to society. As long as *Pogo nauta* has not taken place, it is impossible to ask *dewa* to come and live among the other ancestral spirits of the *uma* where it can be fed. More important still, no child may be named after the deceased until *Pogo nauta* has been performed. A youngster called after a *dewa ta laddo* would go mad or die prematurely. The living would thus forget the name of the dead person altogether, meaning a loss of *dewa* for the *uma*.

The *Pogo nauta* ceremony is always promised to ancestors, but it is so costly that the living are seldom able to perform it. That is why I have never seen one unfortunately. In Sumba, important rituals are often spoken of as if they were imminent; it is part of the system of exchange in which a 'promise' (*ba*) is a sign that one does not forget his duties, although one may be obliged to postpone the performance of a ritual for an unspecified period of time. However, a few people were willing to describe the ceremony to me.

Pogo nauta serves to cool down *mawo ta laddo* or 'mawo to the sun' so that the body can decompose. The 'mawo to the sun' of the deceased is requested to come back from the hot vicinity of *Wulla-Laddo* to the world of the living. At a propitious hour of the day, it is called back into the house where it lived. The coolest time of the day is chosen for that purpose, that is, just before daybreak. As the morning star rises above the horizon, a special bamboo frame is set up vertically against the outside walls of the house, on the front verandah. Sometimes, bamboo poles are raised vertically on the ground, in front of the verandah, their upper ends resting upon the thatched roof. This represents the *nauta*, in this case, a cosmic ladder that links the earth to the sky. Gliding down the *nauta*, 'the mawo to the sun' of the deceased is able to leave *Wulla-Laddo's* heavenly domain and return to its kin. By coming back to earth, *mawo* is able to meet *dewa* again, ending the latter's aimless wanderings. As soon as *mawo* reaches the floor of the house, the *nauta* is broken into pieces, to prevent 'the mawo to the sun' from returning to the sky. Then, often on the same day, the *dewa* of the deceased is invited to climb to the upper part of the house and to live there with the other ancestral spirits.

The first stage of the ritual is dedicated to the reconstruction of the body (*tau*) of the deceased. This is done on the eve of *Pogo nauta*, in the male part of the house, a room where guests are allowed. Public activities never take place in the female part of the house. If clothes or other belongings of the victim are available, they must be brought into the room. In the case of a man, his head-dress, loincloth, broadblade knife and his betelnut bag represent his body. For a woman, the items are the same, except for the head-dress. The eyes (*watu mata*: lit. 'stones eyes', that is, the 'eyeballs') of the deceased must always be represented by a pair of *mamuli* or golden ear-pendants. The *mamuli* are said to be absolutely necessary during *Pogo nauta*. Together with other golden implements and sacred weapons brought by the first generations of ancestors to the house, some *mamuli* are part of an *uma's* heirlooms that are kept in the attic, where the ancestral spirits live. Ideally, only these heirlooms may represent the body of the deceased during *Pogo nauta*. It will be explained below why other types of *mamuli* should not be used on this occasion.

Among the noble, the reconstruction of the body is more elaborate. Apart from the *mamuli*, a golden pectoral (*maraga*) is the body (*tau*), and a golden crescent (*tabelo*) usually worn by women is the head (*kataku*). A gong represents the voice (*li*) of the deceased (throughout Sumba, gongs and drums are vocal means of communication with the ancestors; see Hoskins 1988). For a man and for a woman, knives (*katopo*) represent the arms and hands (*lima*). In the case of a man, a spear (*nabu*) may also symbolize an arm. A horse replaces the feet (*ledu*) of the deceased. The horse is not killed. It is compared to the dead man who is said to be walking soon towards the land of his ancestors. In the case of a woman, her ivory bracelets are put onto the knives that represent her 'arms'.

Two male buffaloes must accompany the dead. One is slaughtered, the other is kept alive. The two buffaloes are said to help the person, particularly if it is a man, 'to stand erect' (*dedena*). I do not fully understand this expression, although it almost certainly refers to the man's social status and prestige. In Laboya, someone who has no cattle is a nobody, a descendant of a slave, a category of people for whom, formerly, no *Pogo nauta* was performed.

A pig is slaughtered. Its boiled fat is used for oiling the hair of the deceased. Textiles are wrapped around the body like shrouds. They are the 'skin'. Finally, the person's betelnut bag (*kaleku*), displaying the appropriate colours and patterns associated with the deceased's status at the moment of his death, must be laid beside the reconstructed body. The bag is open so that it may catch *mawo* and *dewa* in time. A *kaleku*, a highly personal item, is the most specific representation of the owner's age and status. It represents his combination of *mawo* and *dewa* at his final stage in life; for instance, that of grandfather or grandmother (Geirnaert in press). Men's *kaleku* are larger than women's; the design is the same but for one exception. Only women of child-bearing age may adorn their *kaleku* with *mamuli* patterns. The significance of the golden ear-pendants in the contexts of marriage and *Pogo nauta* ritual will be discussed below.

Once the body of the deceased has been symbolically reconstructed, people wait until the morning star rises. Then, two wife-givers — for instance, the real mother's brother (*loka takka*), being the main wife-giver, and a member of another wife-giving group (*loka*) — must hold the *nauta* with both hands. Prayers are said to summon the *mawo ta laddo* of the deceased to return. The wife-givers have to 'cool down' (*maringi*) the hot *mawo* by coaxing it to return. They do so until they feel the *mawo* glide down the bamboo poles. They must hold the *nauta* strongly, as it shakes — an indication that *mawo* is returning. Indeed, the whole house shakes violently when *mawo* arrives.

As soon as the *nauta* stops shaking, the wife-givers call a male member of the *uma* of the deceased (a father, a brother or a son) to destroy the *nauta*. It is strongly forbidden for the wife-givers to do this. The use of knives by wife-givers would frighten *mawo*; it would return to *Wulla-Laddo*. This interdiction should be compared to taboos concerning other ceremonial situations. Ritual cleansing and exposure of knives and spears, together with golden ornaments, characterize a context in which war and violence are not only expected, but also encouraged. However, when successful processes of growth such as those of crops are the main ritual goal, all things that may kill must be avoided; only golden ornaments, like the golden *mamuli*, may be present (Geirnaert forthcoming). It seems plausible that during *Pogo nauta* the wife-givers should not touch things that may bring violent death, because they essentially act as life-givers, as we shall see below.

In the evening of that same day, the *dewa* of the deceased may be invited

to climb to the upper part of the house. However, this ceremony may take place later on. A religious specialist (*rato*) is usually asked by the members of the *uma* of the deceased to perform this part of the ritual. The ancestors of the house are expected to greet the *dewa* and feed it. From now on, the name of that person can be given to one of his descendants. The remains of the person, his bones wrapped in shrouds, may now be transferred from a place outside the village to a megalith in the village's central square. This second burial may be carried out separately, after *Pogo nauta*. In that case, the ceremonial invitation to his *dewa* to come and dwell in the house may also be postponed.

As far as it is possible to draw conclusions, it seems that *Pogo nauta* often combines several processes into one: (a) a recycling of *mawo* through a symbolic putrefaction of the body; (b) a reconstruction of the body out of valuables, and hence a change of the body's nature from perishable to durable; (c) a second burial of the unperishable remains in the village square; (d) the recalling of *dewa*, in the sense of both 'calling back' and 'remembering'.

5. Gifts of tubers

One way to analyze the *Pogo nauta* ritual from oral reconstruction is to consider the nature of the goods used during the ceremony, and compare this with other patterns of exchange. One characteristic of *Pogo nauta* is that the wife-givers are requested to bring large quantities of tubers. The tubers must be buried deep in the earth outside the village or near a fountainhead, a place where *mawo ta we* dwells after death. The Laboya insist that the participation of wife-givers is crucial for the success of *Pogo nauta*. But I have little information about the role of wife-takers during the ceremony. It is said that 'they bring the usual things'; this refers to specific exchange items.

The flow of exchanges between wife-givers and wife-takers is the same in all circumstances: wife-takers bring buffaloes, horses, dogs, and weapons such as spears and knives, as well as golden ornaments — *mamuli* (ear-pendant), *maraga* (golden pectoral) and *tabelo* (golden crescent). Wife-givers offer pigs, cloths, rice, and ivory bracelets (and sometimes gongs as well). This is an ideal picture, for in practice, the costly *maraga* and *tabelo* are rare. In marriage prestations, *mamuli* cannot be omitted, whereas *maraga* and *tabelo* are usually replaced by buffaloes and horses.

However, a small but important addition marks the type of gifts made by wife-givers during funerals: as in the *Pogo nauta*, they bring tubers. Tubers are never given at weddings. Also, at burial, a *mamuli* may be inserted in the mouth of the dead, 'to accompany them in the grave, so that the ancestors may recognize them'. I have never seen this happen,

although I have attended many funerals in Laboya.⁷ This is a custom that, like so many ideal ones, is seldom followed.

It is not possible here to consider the full cycle of exchanges of the Laboya. Instead, we will focus our attention upon the meaning of the two conspicuous gifts that mark the contrast between the marriage and the burial: the tubers and the *mamuli*.

In mythical accounts and in some rituals, tubers and pigs are associated with chthonic processes of decay, in contrast to buffaloes and coconuts which represent new life.⁸ Generally stated, putrefaction must precede the renewal of life. Not only in myth, but also in the disposition of *Hodana*, the ritual village of Laboya, the buffalo is a metaphor for the community as a whole, whereas the pig represents only a part (Geirnaert forthcoming). The pig metaphorically refers to the termination of life processes while the buffalo, as a total social unit, encompasses the end of life as well as its renewal. Similar ideas govern the way in which the meat of these animals is consumed. During large feasts lasting several days, and particularly at funerals, pork is eaten on the first evening when it is dark, and buffalo meat during the daytime, the following day. Similar ideas are expressed by another type of association, that between 'front, upper part' and 'back, lower part'. In the division of meat during feasting, wife-givers are given the lungs, a seat of *mawo*, as well as 'the meat around the anus', a reference to the final stage of the life process (Geirnaert 1987).

The task of wife-givers is to ensure the continuity of life. They give a daughter or a sister to their wife-takers so that the latter can renew their *uma*'s life. They are responsible for the whole life process, from birth to the subterranean putrefaction represented by pigs and tubers. In contrast, spinning and weaving, a major female activity, are a metaphor for new life and birth. Women are compared to the 'Moon who glues *mawo* and *dewa* together in the unborn' (Geirnaert in press, forthcoming). Textiles represent the capacity of women to give life. The textiles and the pigs that accompany a young bride to her husband's home reinforce the idea that wife-givers are essentially life-givers, responsible for the whole life-cycle, from birth to death. Decay is a prerequisite for this everlasting process,

⁷ I have insufficient information about who gives the *mamuli* that should be put in the mouth of rich and noble people at their burial. I only know that it should be placed in the corpse's mouth by a member of the deceased's *uma*. Could it be a replacement for the voice of the deceased, just as *mamuli* are his eyes during *Pogo nauta*? In other parts of Eastern Indonesia, such as the Kei islands, sight is a characteristic of the living; the dead are blind (Barraud forthcoming). Similarly, among the Ema of Timor, a ritual called 'to open the eyes of the child' marks the entry of an infant into society (Clamagirand 1983: 135). In Laboya and other parts of West Sumba, the dead are generally conceived of as 'voices' (Clamagirand 1988; Hoskins 1988). However, whether these voices are sightless, I do not know.

⁸ During the yearly rituals that open and close the agricultural cycle, and in the myths that concern these ceremonies, several kinds of tubers are called 'pigs' whereas coconuts are called 'buffaloes'.

symbolized by a rotting pig or by subterranean plants such as tubers. It is noteworthy that only women may be called after the names of tubers (*Ngura*: 'young tuber'; *Hulli*: probably taro). Women ensure the flow of *mawo* between society and the cosmos. They also transfer from house to house the ability to join *mawo* and *dewa*. However, the people of an *uma* have to use their *dewa* to protect this process.

We may conclude that at funerals the tubers brought by wife-givers are meant to stress the association of *mawo* with putrefaction. In the context of *Pogo nauta*, the gift of large quantities of tubers induces the decay of the body of the deceased, after his *mawo* has been cooled down, so that *dewa* may become free to 'climb in the house'. The tubers act as a replacement for *mawo*.

On the one hand, *Pogo nauta* shows some similarities with birth, when *mawo* and *dewa* are also joined together. But their reunification is short-lived. The goal of *Pogo nauta* is to transform *mawo ta laddo* into *mawo ta we* as soon as possible, so that *mawo* can separate from *dewa* and rot away. On the other hand, *Pogo nauta* is in many ways like a funeral. However, there is a major difference between the body of ordinary dead people and that reconstructed during *Pogo nauta*. Whereas the former rot away, the latter remain unperishable: the 'body' is made of gold. The durable quality of *mamuli* contrasts sharply with the subterranean tubers representing the decaying *mawo*. One way to understand this inversion is to consider briefly the significance of *mamuli*, the golden ornament 'that cannot be omitted'.

6. The Mamuli of a house

Mamuli have intrigued all visitors to Sumba. A comprehensive study (Rodgers 1985) on insular Southeast Asian jewelry has shown that they deserve to be studied more closely, because 'they are part of coherence systems — tightly integrated systems of words, concepts, social organizational patterns, images of time, mythical assertions about the way the universe is ordered [...]' (Becker and Yengoyan 1979, cited in Rodgers 1985: 21). *Mamuli* are of divine origin and are used to facilitate contact between the living and ancestral spirits (Rodgers 1985: 172-175).

Speaking of *mamuli* in East Sumba, Onvlee wrote:

'The *mamuli*, the golden ear-pendants, are given at least in pairs. One of each pair is [...] bare or undecorated. It represents the feminine aspect. The other pendant [...] is adorned with a horn-shaped decoration of its lower half. It is considered masculine. Each *mamuli* is fastened to a woven chain which represents the male principle against the female principle embodied in both kinds of *mamuli*' (1977: 157).

Recently, it has been shown convincingly that in some East Sumbanese textiles, the shape of a *mamuli* represents female genitalia (Holmgren &

Spertus 1989: 31-33). It is worthwhile to note some of the associations Sumbanese make between *mamuli* and the world of the ancestors, as described by several anthropologists working on this island.

'To the Sumbanese, precious metals are of heavenly origin: the sun is made of gold, the moon and stars of silver, *deposited in the earth when the sun and moon set and when a star falls from the sky*' (Forth 1981: 16, in Holmgren & Spertus 1989:32; my italics, D.C.G.).

'[...*Mamuli*] are never taken out of the dark, for fear that their huge powers would kill onlookers and bring natural disasters [...]. It appears that these jewels are the very essence of the lineage and its political and religious powers' (Rodgers 1985: 174, in Holmgren & Spertus 1989:32).

Mamuli are sometimes female, sometimes both male and female; they are to be kept in the most sacred place of Sumbanese houses, and yet they are regularly and openly used as gifts. As Rodgers notices, the use of *mamuli* differs from East to West Sumba:

'Much as the western part of the island has more ethnic variety than East Sumba, its uses of such jewelry pieces as *mamuli*, gold chains, and forehead ornaments are more diversified than in the eastern rajaships [...]. Documenting other West Sumba jewelry traditions awaits further research by Sumba specialists' (Rodgers 1985: 175-177).

The Laboya share many of the beliefs discussed above. In Laboya, as in East Sumba, there are 'male' and 'female' *mamuli*; the former have 'feet' (*ledu*) — that is, their tips turn upwards and are finely decorated — whereas the latter are straight and plain.⁹ However, the Laboya emphasize that there are two kinds of *mamuli*: those you may give away and those that may never leave the house. The ones that may leave the house become part of the prestations given by members of the house to their wife-givers. In principle, they cannot be used for a *Pogo nauta* ritual. Only the *mamuli* that remain in the house may replace the body of the deceased. The reasons for this obligation will be analysed below. I do not know whether *mamuli* received as a bride-price can serve as heirlooms for a *Pogo nauta*. It may be that if a house is able to keep *mamuli* long enough, that is, for several generations, these will become integrated into the *uma*'s mythical past and subsequently be considered as heirlooms.

The acquisition of the first *mamuli* of a house is always associated with the founding ancestors. Some stories relate how the first *mamuli* was

⁹ 'Male' *mamuli* are far more common than female ones, but I do not know whether this is a modern development. Nowadays no man wears ear-pendants. Women still wear them for ceremonial purposes. It is said that formerly men should wear 'female' *mamuli* whereas women should adorn themselves with 'male' ones.

obtained from the wife-takers in exchange for the first daughter of the house given away in marriage. Just as in the rest of Sumba, *mamuli* sometimes seem to be strongly associated with femininity in Laboya. Yet this feminine quality of *mamuli* depends upon the context in which they are used. They are not intrinsically feminine: there are male and female *mamuli*. In the context of marriage prestations, in daily life, and in myth, a *mamuli* appears to be a substitute for the body of the bride. It is a replacement of her capacity for giving life from the moment *mawo* and *dewa* are joined together, until death, when putrefaction sets them apart once more. The *mamuli* embroidered on the plaited betel and areca nut bags, worn by married women of childbearing age, refer to this idea. At weddings, the *mamuli* is a countergift for the fertility that is given away by the house. The flow of *mamuli* between houses characterizes marriage exchanges.

In the *Pogo nauta*, the significance of the *mamuli* appears to be totally different. *Mamuli* that are inalienable from the house cannot and do not replace the fecundity of new in-marrying brides. These *mamuli* are believed to have been kept in the house ever since they were acquired by the founding ancestors. Few houses succeed in keeping their golden ear-pendants as heirlooms for several generations. Only the wealthiest can comply with this rule, and its transgression can lead to serious problems. I was told of a *mamuli* that spoke up and refused to be given away to one of the *uma*'s wife-givers. The descendants would not listen because they had no other *mamuli* to offer, and gave it to their wife-givers. But the *mamuli* wanted to come back to its house of origin. It has been given away again since and brings misfortune to each *uma* in which it stays. The members of its house of origin are afraid it will bring them misfortune as well.

This type of *mamuli* is entirely different from those that may circulate. Inalienable *mamuli* can speak since they are inhabited by ancestral *dewa*. The Laboya say that such *mamuli* are a 'shape', a container for the spirits of the dead of long ago. The inalienability of *mamuli* relates to the permanence of the house as a social unit, and hence to the durability of primary social relationships. These include (a) the ties with the founding ancestors, (b) the links with the (first) wife-givers and (c) the links with wife-takers. *Pogo nauta* brings new life and strength to these relationships. During the ritual, the *mamuli* do not only refer to these relationships of the past and the present, they anticipate those of the future as well. Because these social links only exist in terms of a relationship between *mawo* and *dewa*, the *mamuli*, and perhaps the other golden objects as well, give evidence of the flow of *dewa* and *mawo* in a particular house through time. The house that holds a *Pogo nauta* ritual distinguishes itself from others; its permanence stands in contrast with that of other houses. It is this idea of continuity and durability that distinguishes the second stage of *Pogo nauta* from the first, when the concern is with putrefaction and *mawo*'s

transitory quality. This contrast marks an important shift in the relationship between *mawo* and *dewa* and in the relationships between the participants of the ritual.

As soon as *mawo ta laddo* is transformed into *mawo ta we*, *mawo* is no longer a major concern for the community. The *mawo* of the deceased is recycled and joins the pool of 'collective *mawo*'. The responsibility for the transformation rests with the wife-givers. Tubers replace the *mawo* of the deceased. It is significant that the next step, asking *dewa* 'to climb in the house', is carried out by the eldest male member of the *uma* of the deceased, or by a religious specialist, a *rato*. It appears that only members of the *uma* can summon *dewa* to come into the house, just as only inalienable *mamuli* can be the true representatives of the *dewa* of the house's ancestors. After the *mawo* of a deceased of 'hot death' has been recycled as a socio-cosmic principle, his *dewa* becomes a part of the house's *dewa* represented by a *mamuli* that is able to talk. During *Pogo nauta*, the *mamuli* transforms a previous and temporary combination of *mawo* and *dewa* into permanent *dewa*. In the process, *dewa* emerges as the superior element of the three components of man (*tau*, *mawo* and *dewa*).

The *Pogo nauta* ceremony does not only enable the house to recover lost *dewa*. As all social relationships have been re-activated, the man who has organized the ritual is now able to plan more feasts, and build up his name (*ngara*), and thereby to contribute to the growth of his house's *dewa*. To stand still is to lose *dewa*. The amount of *dewa* shared by the members of an *uma* is always challenged by other *uma*. Clans and *uma* are involved in an everlasting competition for increasing their 'name', so that they 'can be proud' (*boina*) and acquire the respect (*libawa*) of others.

7. Conclusion

An analysis of the nature of the relationship between *mawo* and *dewa* is essential for an understanding of Laboya ideology. This relationship intervenes in many, if not in all rituals, and especially in the large ceremonies that mark the yearly agricultural cycle of Laboya. As such, the relationship of *mawo* and *dewa* is not always constant, for it varies throughout the year, displaying different configurations in different contexts.

Mawo essentially implies the idea of life, the fecundity of women, the fertility of the herds and the abundance of the crops. As a feature inducing putrefaction, *mawo* has a transient quality, associated with the flow of water. It relates to reproduction and to the passage of women from house to house. *Mawo* is part of an everlasting cosmic circulation of life-giving fluids that are, as a rule, accessible to all. However, this collective generalized flow of life is continuously threatened by what may be translated as 'wrong', 'bad' (*hala*). It is an *uma*'s task, and eventually that of each society, to defend its share of *mawo*, and thus all reproductive life, against evil influences coming from outside (Geirnaert forthcoming).

Part of the yearly rituals serve to expel *hala* and to recover collective

mawo for the whole community of Laboya, and for all other societies of the world, including 'the Dutch', as I was told on several occasions. One of the annual rituals, called *Padu* ('bitter'; 'forbidden'), closes the yearly agricultural cycle at the end of the dry season. One stage of *Padu*, called *Bole nauta* ('to hit the ladders with sticks'), has some similarity with *Pogo nauta*. On that occasion, bamboo poles symbolizing cosmic ladders between the earth and the sky, are destroyed after the *mawo* of presumably hot ancestors have been reintegrated into society. *Bole nauta* must be carried out just before the *Lalu we* ceremony (*lalu we*: 'shimmering water'). This ceremony, performed 'to let the water flow', 'to open the path of the water', marks the opening of the sowing season (Geirnaert forthcoming). The rituals show that a loss of *mawo* inevitably implies a loss of fertility for all.

Dewa relates to several aspects of a house (*uma*). *Dewa* can manifest itself by a voice — that of an ancestral spirit belonging to the house. Symbolized by the speaking *mamuli*, *dewa* relates to the permanence of a house and its social relationships. *Dewa* represents the historical consciousness and identity of the members of a house. *Dewa* is also a 'name' which will diminish unless it grows. In this sense, *dewa* concerns the honour and prestige of a house. In relation to *dewa*, all clans (*kabihu*) and houses compete with one another.

If 'life' and 'fertility' seem the best words to translate the idea of *mawo*, 'renown' appears to capture most of the meanings of *dewa*. Yet it is important to stress that *mawo* and *dewa* cannot be considered as separate entities. They are always interdependent. Protection of the flow of *mawo* can only be effectuated by continually proving the honour of one's house (or village), and by proclaiming its renown, represented essentially by *dewa*, as a war-waging, or nowadays, a feast-giving unit. *Mamuli* embody a house's *dewa*.

It may be suggested that a house's *mamuli* are regularly strengthened by the addition of *dewa* each time a *Pogo nauta* ritual is performed. This could explain why *mamuli* have awesome powers 'that may kill onlookers'. But in turn, a house's *dewa* cannot exist without being regularly sustained by new *mawo*. The latter is brought into the house through in-marriage women. Women bring their ability to procreate, as well as their spinning and weaving skills which enable them to capture collective *mawo* (Geirnaert in press, forthcoming).

Thus, *Pogo nauta* operates in the context of the *house* and expresses one configuration of the relationship between *mawo* and *dewa*. In this context, *dewa* is superior to *mawo*. In other contexts, such as during the yearly rituals, other configurations can and do exist. The careful analysis of the relationship between *mawo* and *dewa* in different contexts is required to construct the ideological system of the Laboya as a whole.

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