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AFTER SUNSHINE COMES RAIN

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FERTILITY RITUALS IN MARSELA AND LUANG, SOUTH-EAST MOLUCCAS

Introduction

In the very arid area constituting the administrative subdistrict of the Babar Islands (*kecamatan Pulau-pulau Babar*) fertility rituals traditionally play a central part in the village community. Some authors refer to these rituals as the 'great feast' (see Stöhr and Zoetmulder 1965:164). There is an instantly striking similarity between the central theme of this ritual in the Babar islands and the main theme of the myths of creation. Though each is almost the other's mirror image, so that a relationship of direct dependence could be assumed, it is better to regard them as categories standing side by side, rooted in the same religious breeding-ground (see Schefold 1988:29). In the Babar islands the main theme emerging both from the myths of creation and the 'great feast' is the so-called 'sacred marriage of heaven and earth', a widespread theme in eastern Indonesia (see Fischer 1929:96-105, 125-127; Stöhr and Zoetmulder 1965:148-150).

The two islands whose 'great feast' we shall discuss in the present article belong to an area one might call a regional field of anthropological study. Here we can distinguish in various areas of life different manifestations of the same ordering principles, and this enables us to give a mutually comparative interpretation. Thus the islands demonstrate a close relationship in language and social structure. The latter is characterized by a symmetric marriage system. In Luang, the westernmost of the Babar islands, this manifests itself in a matrilineal and matrilineal order, and in Marsela, one of the eastern islands, in a patrilineal and patrilineal structure. In Luang the direct exchange that may take place is called 'exchanging shields' (that is, brother exchange), in Marsela 'changing places' (which amounts to sister exchange) (see van Dijk and de Jonge 1987:61). An important social unit in both islands is the house. In Marsela by tradition it embraces various lineages, whereas in Luang it originally consisted of only one lineage. In the religion we observe in both islands the same mythological theme differently expressed. Thus we find two manifestations of the 'sacred marriage' that we regard as local transformations. In Luang the marriage partners heaven and earth are personified; in Marsela

they are not. Here heaven and earth themselves are the marriage partners.¹

Due to the influence of Christianity, data on the 'great feast' have grown extremely scarce in this part of Indonesia. However, for Luang, unpublished source material at our disposal will enable us to achieve a certain reconstruction. In combination with this, for Marsela we can derive meanings from the current New Year's celebration, in which — as comparison with Luang shows — traditional elements still play an important part. Hence this historical perspective stresses those ideas that evidently are very important to the people of Marsela, despite all social developments, such as the introduction of Christianity. The fact that the 'great feast' — albeit in an adapted form — is still celebrated, is telling enough in itself.

New Year's Dances in Marsela

The Marselan 'great feast' is traditionally called *lulya* ('sacred'; Moluccan Malay *pomali*); nowadays the name *tampariyéy* is also used, a corruption of the Moluccan Malay *tahun baru* ('New Year'). In the ritual we recognize a variant of the mythological theme of the 'sacred marriage'. This variant comprises fertilization of the earth by the wind, regarded here as the bringer of rain. In the Marselan myth of creation it is two earthly elements, wood and stone, which through the mediation of a heavenly element, the wind, turn into the first human couple in the island; from wood the first man arises, from stone the first woman.

The celebration of *lulya* used to start around the time that the west monsoon was expected to break, in January;² nowadays the ritual begins with the Western New Year. After a long dry period, from September to December, the advent of the west monsoon rains is vital to the growth of the newly planted crops, mainly maize. The purpose of the New Year's ritual always has been to implore the ancestors and the deity to bring rain for the fertility of the earth, to give fertility and prosperity to the people, and to provide for a good yield from the sea. In their prayers, the Marselans

¹ From January 1981 till April 1982, and from March till July 1983, the authors carried out fieldwork in the Babar archipelago, each in a different research location. In July 1987, this was complemented by research among Luang migrants in Ambon. The research was entitled 'Anthropological Exploration of the Symbolic System of the Population of the Babar Archipelago', and was made possible by a grant from ZWO/WOTRO in The Hague. In Indonesia it was supported by the Universitas Pattimura in Ambon, and in the Netherlands by the Free University in Amsterdam. The research was carried out under the auspices of the Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LIPI) in Jakarta.

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² Old informants remember the annual celebration of *lulya* just before the west monsoon broke; but some of them claim it used to take place once every seven years, at the same time of the year. Possibly this ritual was the climax of seven successive New Year's rituals, in which each year was considered part of a cycle of seven. This phenomenon is also known in Savu (see Kana 1983:102).

A performance of the great dance, or nilay lewna, during the night.

phrase this request as follows: 'May there be many people, may they live far removed from danger, may the *koli* palms produce much water, and the sea a great yield'.³ As we shall see, the fertilization of the earth by the rain is presented in analogy to Man's. The dances performed during *lulya* are manifestations of these notions around fertility, and as such we selected these as the subject of our analysis. The dances prove to form a complex in which we recognize the mythological theme, but above all a symbolic opposition forming the pivot of the entire New Year's ritual.

During the current celebration of this ritual, which now lasts for almost a month, in a village several ritual activities are performed, some of which were part of *lulya* even before the advent of Christianity. Thus the welcoming of the dead still forms the starting-point. Next, bride-takers and bride-givers visit each other; on these occasions the bride-takers used to be obliged to honour their bride-givers with presents (see below). Just as in the old days, standing on a stone in the centre of the village, one of the male village elders says a prayer for the well-being of the entire village. All villagers are gathered around the stone, and after the prayer, but also on the following days, they perform dances in this spot. During the New Year's celebrations of 1982 we witnessed various performances of several

³ *Koli* is the Moluccan Malay term for *Borassus sundaicus*. In Marsela the palm is called *éla*. Elsewhere in (eastern) Indonesia the tree is also called *lontar*. What is meant by the tree's 'water' is the fluid that fermentation transforms into palm wine.

traditional dances that have been part of *lulya* for a long time. In most cases they were danced by the people of the neighbouring villages of Marsela and Ilbutung.⁴ Here we shall discuss three dances that are part of every great performance, namely two dances in a circle and one in rows. The first two are the great dance (*nilay lewna*; Moluccan Malay *seka besar*), sometimes called men's dance (*nilay ommyeney*; Moluccan Malay *seka laki-laki*), and the women's dance (*nilay oppyaka*; Moluccan Malay *seka perempuan*) with *nyépola*, that is, asking for goods, also called *nyépola* for short.⁵ The circle of dancers always has front and rear sides. These are called *aye wanyey*, 'the prau's bow', and *aye eiliryey*, 'the prau's stern'. Between the front and the rear the circle of dancers must always stay open. Slowly the circle revolves counter-clockwise, or as the Marselans say: 'turning right'. Usually two women dance in the centre.

a) The great dance is performed by men only. The first dancer has to move in a flurry, stand on one leg, and almost touch the ground while dancing. This man is sometimes called *muyerein* ('champion'), a title derived from warfare.⁶ The dance is accompanied by a very long song (16 stanzas) with fixed lyrics. It describes the warriors' return from battle — by prau — and the feast celebrated in their honour. The dancers also express the warriors' strength by comparing them to an extremely hard and durable kind of wood, when they sing: 'I am like *upra* wood that grows on the stones along the sea'. It is said that if during the dance one of the dancers cries out the name of the champion's sacred sword (*Laylèwna*) that protects the warriors in combat, the dancers have to be cooled off afterwards. For this purpose a woman sprinkles them with the fluid of a young coconut. Further on we shall pursue the meaning of this.

b) During the women's dance with *nyépola*, the dancers, both men and women, in their song symbolically shoot arrows at certain people outside the circle. Dancing, the 'victim' must then bring into the circle a contribution in money or in kind (big fishes, *sopi*, cigarettes).⁷ This is done very elaborately. Thus *sopi* may be thrown at the dancers, or the struggle between a fisherman and his fish may be imitated by someone who is sometimes dressed up like a fisherman holding large dried fishes on a line, much to the spectators' amusement. From the performance of the dance on the occasion of building a house and in the marriage ritual, it turns out that it is the *pyamyoyo*, the bride-takers of a certain house, whom the circle of dancers, representing their bride-givers, 'shoot with arrows'. Informants told us that in the old days, during the New Year's performances of the

⁴ A specific story that we shall not discuss here underlies the solidarity of both villages, a bond that is expressed in, among other things, the common New Year's celebrations. But in principle the ritual unit during *lulya* is the village.

⁵ In the Babar islands *seka* is the general (Moluccan Malay) term for 'dance'.

⁶ In many villages the lead (or first) dancer is from the house that used to provide the actual champion in war.

⁷ *Sopi* is the Moluccan Malay term for a drink distilled from palm wine.

nyépola, within a village one house after another 'shot arrows' at its bride-takers, taking turns in various performances of the dance. During the final part of the New Year's ritual we attended, at the end of January 1982, the *nyépola* was performed one last time. Instead of one particular house shooting arrows at its bride-takers, in this case the two villages of Marsela and Ilbutung, taking turns, 'shot' each other with arrows.⁸ Here is an example of a song of questions and answers to go with it. The shooting village sings:

<i>Lienaemne</i>	Lien's father (the village head),
<i>miyam kyakyo awinyo</i>	go and guard the gate (to sea; that is, keep guard over the fish, go fishing).
<i>wéryay réwiennyo</i>	The villagers
<i>moti nyolor</i>	bring them to the sea.
<i>Inkéni wuki wéryayo (2x)</i>	Call together,
<i>Lienarenne kènnéwuki</i>	Lien's mother, call everyone,
<i>wéryayo.</i>	all the villagers.

Then the village 'shot at' enters the circle of dancers with goods, and responds as follows:

<i>Mikyonarayo</i>	Look at me,
<i>mièwyèrira wulyo. (2x)</i>	so that your hair will stand on end (in awe).
<i>Wanao yèwimoyo. (2x)</i>	Where shall I put my oar?
<i>Wanao liwyo lyoci kukyo</i>	Now where shall I place my oar?
<i>Wanao liwyemayo.</i>	Where shall I put my oar?

The lyrics sung during the *nyépola* are improvised for the occasion, but always refer to fishing.

c) For the dance in rows, indicated with the indigenous term *wneysyoka* or *wnyeysoka* (Moluccan Malay *seka lelana*), men and women separately form opposite lines.⁹ While singing to the rhythm of the accompanying drum, both groups of rows move towards and away from each other. Only during *lulya* can the accompanying song asking for rain be sung with this dance.

<i>Otenkok,</i>	The rain is not doing anything (seems to be coming, is not coming),
<i>nmèney yanin.</i>	fall quickly on the earth.
<i>Ruri yoymyoli</i>	Quickly start planting
<i>wien ray wyawaan.</i>	in the earth.

⁸ This *nyépola*, performed by two villages, is a modern variant of the dance. In a certain sense, between both villages there is a bride-taker/bride-giver relationship. Here the modern performance is quoted, because the lyrics of the song sung on this occasion render so beautifully that which is characteristic of the *nyépola*.

⁹ A formation of mixed rows is also found. According to the villagers the orientation of this dance is not restricted to certain points of the compass.

Nkur nayelor
omannè nkur nayelor.

Flow down to the sea in a stream
 rain, flow down into a stream to the
 sea.

It is striking that, though it is a ritual for the purpose of imploring rain and fertility, that is, a good yield from both the land and the sea — in addition to beseeching numerous offspring for Man —, only fishing is central to all songs sung with the *nyépola*. And the goods introduced into the circle of dancers are usually fishes, along with *sopi*, cigarettes and money. In particular it seems odd that no agricultural products are mentioned. Could it be that fishes symbolize more than just the sea's fertility?

Po'ora in Luang

It seems we can find an answer to the questions arising from the *nyépola* and the other two Marselan dances, in the ritual called *po'ora*, as performed in Luang, in Sermata and within the Babar archipelago, among other places in Wetang. Reliable historical sources regarding these three islands bear witness to the performance in each of a fertility ritual similar in many ways to that of the other two. Most likely this ritual was also known further to the east, in Marsela, for instance.¹⁰ For that matter, the ritual has also been described for the region west of Luang, and in the literature, under its Letinese name of *porka*, it even became known as a model of an orgiastic feast (Stöhr 1976:197). The various descriptions show that by means of the ritual a similar aim was pursued everywhere, but that the occasion and the performance varied from one place to another. In Luang, the island we are best informed about, as a rule *po'ora* was celebrated only once every seven years, when the *aitiehra*, the wooden statue in the village centre, had decayed and needed replacement. This also applied to the leaf roof of the *romrihera*, a small house of sacrifice located near this sculpture (Müller-Wismar 1913/14:139).

As late as the second half of the last century the proper performance of the ritual in the island required at least one hunted head. These heads were usually taken in Wetar, but if an expedition to this island failed, victims were sometimes found less far from home (Earl 1850:175). Eventually the colonial administration forced the local heads to put an end to their ritual head-hunting raids. Solemn pledges were made, and the coconut came to serve as a substitute.¹¹ When at the beginning of this century the ethnol-

¹⁰ Müller-Wismar (1913/14:95-139) offers a detailed description of *po'ora* in Luang. He is also a reliable source for Sermata (1913/14:1-4), as is J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong for Wetan (1987:19-27).

¹¹ After a human head had been hunted for an 'idol feast', in 1859 Controleur van Eijbergen (1864:175-176) forced the local heads of Luang to give up head-hunting. And in 1916 Gezaghbeber Tersteeg reported that for the '*porka* feast' in the Southwestern islands the people had settled for coconuts instead of heads (Tersteeg 1935:569). He was right with regard to Sermata and Luang (see Müller-Wismar 1913/14:1-4, 95-139), but in Wetang the heads were replaced by young coconut palm fronds (see de Josselin de Jong 1987:25).

ogist Müller-Wismar visited Luang and Sermata, it turned out the nuts had been fully integrated in the celebration of *po'ora*.

Though in 1913 Müller-Wismar had the opportunity to record all phases of the ritual (not from his own observation — they were described to him), nowadays it seems that among the people of Luang this knowledge is lost.¹² In few other islands in the region did Christianity gain a foothold so soon. In many cases all that the people of Luang can recall about *po'ora* is that the term means 'leanness'.¹³ This meaning could derive from a situation of deprivation and hardship, a condition that no doubt led to performing the ritual. In the event of fatal epidemics or other disasters (such as fire), a village was usually moved, and during *po'ora* a new *aitiehra* statue was carved, as well as statues to be placed in a new house of sacrifice

Aitiehra statue in Luang, as shown in Jacobsen (1896:155).

(see also Jacobsen 1896:154-156). The term *po'ora* might also be a remnant from the days that for the people of Luang agriculture was still

¹² For an extensive description of the successive stages in the ritual, see Müller-Wismar 1913/14:95-139.

¹³ See also Jonker's translation of *pōra* in Roma: 'to die' (1932:174). A less fortunate situation also seems implicit in Riedel's interpretation of the name of the similar ritual in Leti: *raporeke rakiniau*, 'let there be abundance' (1886:372). The same applies to J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong's translation of the term *porka* (the widely known term for the ritual), in his analysis of the language of Wetang, which is part of the same group of languages to which those of Luang, Leti and Roma belong. His translation is 'to blow, as in blowing the fire' (1987:249), which metaphorically may indicate 'breathing new life into something'.

their main livelihood.¹⁴ In that case *po'ora* could refer to the months following the planting season, that is, the 'lean period' around New Year (Moluccan Malay: *musim kelaparan*), nowadays the time of ceremonial dances in Marsela. By no means, however, should one exclude the possibility that the term referred to the poor condition of the sacrificial house's roof, and of the statue in the village centre. Though the *aitiehra* was made of a hard and durable kind of wood (*aitiehra* literally means 'hardwood'), when affected by the elements, both the statue and the roof had to be replaced every seven years — an event at the heart of an extensive ritual.¹⁵

In all Luang villages the *aitiehra* represented a male creature of celestial origin. Some authors identify this creature with *Uplère*, 'Grandfather Sun', a deity who used to be worshipped in the island, while others suggest a link with the village founder.¹⁶ Müller-Wismar's notes confirm the latter view. But with regard to the statue he speaks less in terms of a village founder than of a first ancestor. No doubt this representation is linked to the original situation in which the Luang village was synonymous with a descent group. Though in most villages the *aitiehra* occupies no demonstrable position at the top of a common genealogy, with regard to, for instance, the previous settlement of Hinleli a relationship between the *aitiehra* and his offspring has been accurately documented.

Hinleli, now part of the federative village of Luang Timur, was founded by Lavnalugona, who descended from heaven and married Huriai Laliriai, the first ancestress who arose from the earth. The couple had four daughters, the founders of the four matrilineages forming Hinleli. The image of the first ancestor became the village *aitiehra*, while the image of the first ancestress was kept in the house of sacrifice.¹⁷ Hence one may assume that the attention paid to this *romrihera* during *po'ora* had less to do with the building than with its contents. In addition to the first ancestress's image, a statue called *luli*, it often contained another sculpture, the statue of a very early male ancestor. In most cases its identity cannot be traced, but in one village this statue, called *dopla*, can be identified as the first ancestress's brother.¹⁸ As will be shown below, this relative fits the context so well that it would not seem too risky to conclude that this was also the case in the

¹⁴ The island of Luang is eroded to such an extent that agriculture is possible only on a very small scale. The people are specialized in catching fish, which they largely barter in Sermata for corn, their staple food. In addition many women weave sarongs, likewise for trading purposes.

¹⁵ See Müller-Wismar 1913/14:6; see also Scholz 1962:109. The kind of wood used was *nava*, *Pterocarpus indica*.

¹⁶ See Scholz 1962:109-124, for his discussion of the literature then available.

¹⁷ Müller-Wismar 1913/14:79. In the former village of Pepupun (among others), where the German ethnologist did not find such a genealogical relation, the statue was described to him as 'identisch mit dem Stammvater' ('identical with the first ancestor') (1913/14:59).

¹⁸ See Müller-Wismar's data concerning the former settlement of Pepupun, now part of the federative village of Luang Timur (1913/14:82). In Pepupun the *luli* sculpture in the *romrihera* represented the first ancestress, Rarveru Rarvatu, while the *dopla* statue represented her brother Uppalka.

other Luang villages. Writing about a ritual in neighbouring Sermata showing all the characteristics of *po'ora*, Müller-Wismar — in line with our ideas on the sacrificial house — observes that the ritual actually has to do with the *aitiehra*, *luli* and *dopla* (Müller-Wismar 1913/14:1-2).

Hence we may take as our point of departure that central to *po'ora* was the replacement of the statue of the first ancestor descended from heaven, and that by replacing the roof of the sacrificial house, the images of the first ancestress and her brother were honoured at the same time. Considering the latter's kin tie with the first ancestress, like his sister he probably arose from the earth. In our view this brings the essence of the ritual directly within our field of vision: the special attention paid to the parties embodying the mythical marriage ritually visualized the creation of Man himself. We believe that the fact that in this portrayal the renovation of the male party alone sufficed has to do with the way in which notions around fertility had taken shape in the island, in particular notions regarding procreation. But before we discuss this, we shall first try to explain why also the brother of the first ancestress was regarded as belonging to the female party.

It would seem plausible that the reason for this must be sought in Luang's matrilineal and matrilocal system. In such a system a married man has two social roles to play: that of husband or begetter of the children belonging to his wife's lineage, and that of keeper of his sister's children, who are part of his own lineage, hence his descendants. The necessity to fulfil these roles properly confronts him with a dilemma: while living in his wife's house, he has a relation of descent with his sister's house. The old tradition — no longer honoured — that a Luang marriage united partners from one village probably solved this (see Riedel 1886:324).

The various roles of the married man recur in the *aitiehra* and *dopla* statues. The *aitiehra* may be considered the begetter of the *dopla*'s descendants from *luli*, so it is not strange that the latter two jointly represent the same party. The bond between the *dopla* and *luli* is essential to the Luang system, and entirely different in character from the relation between the *luli* and *aitiehra*. As a wife's brother, a man is associated with the female party; as a husband with the male party.

But to return to the notions around fertility, the female party seems to represent the lasting element in the village community. In our view this is portrayed in the sheltered location of the *luli* and *dopla* in the sacrificial house, where they are protected against decay. But the *aitiehra* placed outside, as the husband from without, decays anew in the course of every cycle, at the end of which, being no longer considered capable of contributing to procreation, he is replaced — time and again. Hence it is not hard to imagine that the transitory character ascribed to him repeatedly led to *po'ora* performances, while during the ritual the renewal of the sacrificial house's roof, offering protection to the *luli* and *dopla*, accentuated the permanence of the female party. In our opinion, which is also based on the

further course of *po'ora*, those celebrating the ritual, who themselves descended from the *aitiehra* and *luli*, in turn expected a creative effect from the former's replacement; they hoped for abundance and health, but above all for many children. Thus in *po'ora* a sexually charged theme manifested itself; in line with this, its ritual expression in the other phases was explicitly aimed at the preservation of the descent group.

This aim was expressed in a very special way, in the lengthy series of ceremonial acts with which the ritual was concluded, after replacing the *aitiehra* and the roof of the sacrificial house. We shall describe this series, which opened with the rite of 'carving the prau, knotting the net' very briefly below (for the unabridged version see Müller-Wismar 1913/14: 126-137). It was in this ritual phase that the coconuts played a leading part as substitutes for human heads.

At the end of a period of dancing on the beach, to the accompaniment of drums, which lasted for months, the villagers would knot a fishing-net and carve a miniature prau, about half a metre in length. This boat's name was *puou mati*, 'prau of the dead', and it was an important object in Luang's early ancestor cult. In the centre of each village a *puou mati* sculpted from coral lay hidden in the pile of stones at the foot of the *aitiehra* statue. It represented the preceding generations of the descent group that constituted the village. As the object of the ancestors' manifestation, this boat was related to the village, which itself represented a boat. As we mentioned above, in former days the people of Luang usually married within their own village, and all members of the descent group jointly constituted the so-called *puou mormiori*, the 'prau of the living'.¹⁹

The knotting and carving ritual was led by the head of the descent group forming a village, the *rilalawna*, assisted by four children, two boys and two girls of about twelve years old. Each of this youthful foursome was addressed with the same title, *rihera*. One boy and one girl represented the village community, and as we can derive from their roles in replacing the statues when a village was moved, they were associated with the mythical marriage partners (Müller-Wismar 1913/14:111-121). In order to distinguish them from the other two *rihera*, we shall call them the ceremonial first ancestor and ancestress. The other two children were associated with a second house of sacrifice, the *romkoda*, used especially in wartime. Here all able-bodied men would gather, after having joined the other villagers in carrying the fishing-net into the village, having sacrificed to the deity under the *rilalawna*'s leadership, and after finally having performed in pairs a sword dance in which they seriously wounded each other. In the *romkoda* they would sing the songs normally associated with preparing for battle. Next the men would fetch their weapons and gather around the *aitiehra* statue. Starting from the small war house, the male *romkoda rihera*

¹⁹ The original village, also called *prahu hidup* or *prahu kampung* in Moluccan Malay, usually consisted of four exogamous matrilineages ('houses') which jointly formed the endogamous descent group.

and the *rilalawna* would circle the group four times, first with a bamboo container of palm wine, then while spitting betel juice at them, and next while touching them with a bundle of cock feathers. Finally, uttering war cries, they would circle the warriors with fake weapons specially made for *po'ora*. Then the warriors would take seven coconuts and row to a small coral island on the rim of the reef surrounding Luang, where the young *romkoda rihera* would repeat the four encircling movements before piercing one of the coconuts with a real spear. In his description Müller-Wismar now also calls the boy *ahunamni rihera*, after the title of the warriors' champion in combat.²⁰ Next, the men would return with the coconuts in their boats, the sides decorated with young palm fronds as a sign of victory. Having landed on the beach where the women would be waiting, a reception ceremony would take place that sheds a special light on the meaning of the dances now performed in Marsela.

Wading out to the approaching warriors, the ceremonial first ancestor, whom Müller-Wismar called 'peace *rihera*' here, would bring them the miniature boat carved from wood, in which they would then deposit the coconuts (Müller-Wismar 1913/14:134). Then these would be laid on the beach, flanked by the youthful *ahunamni rihera* and the young 'peace *rihera*'. In this position they would recite a ritual dialogue in which every sentence was uttered thrice: 'Where do you come from? I come from Melai. What did you bring? I brought *ruhu* fishes. Come, and bring them along. I'm coming already. Bring them, I shall clean the fish.'²¹ Then the ceremonial first ancestress would approach with a basket and the knotted fishing-net. The *ahunamni rihera* would take it and, holding it open, would as if at play fish one nut after another from the beach and deposit these in the basket held by the girl. Finally the nuts would be cracked, releasing the coconut fluid; singing, everyone would then return to the village. The nuts, too, were taken along. In the village the ceremonial first ancestress would 'breast-feed' them. The ritual was concluded by burning the nuts on the beach; here, too, the collected ashes were left behind, after an offering had been made to them in the village. At this stage the *rilalawna*, the leader of the ritual, would say to the *aitiehra* statue: 'At this moment we have the seven; I hope that the number of people in our village will now soon increase'. After leaving the ashes behind, three other coconuts already broken would be laid at the foot of the statue, and the *rilalawna* would ask the *aitiehra* to close their holes, thus imploring him to heal the villagers' wounds. Next, the ceremonial first ancestor would take the nuts, sprinkle the spectators with coconut fluid, and put the nuts back in place before the statue, where they were left to dry out.

²⁰ Müller-Wismar 1913/14:133. The literal meaning of *ahunamni* is 'dog's tongue'.

²¹ Verbatim translation of Müller-Wismar (1913/14:134). There are indications that the ritual as reported to him was performed in former Letluli, a village now part of Luang Timur. Some ancestors of Letluli people were migrants from Melai, a name which according to the present inhabitants of Luang refers to Timor.

So as best to analyse its main line and to bring out its distinctive features, here we shall leave aside many interesting aspects of this ritual conclusion to *po'ora*. For this purpose it is vital to regard a cool condition as an aspect of fertility. In the Babar islands coolness as a feature of fertility is considered an important value. A case in point, we think, is the accommodation of the female party — the lasting element in the village community — in the *romrihera*, where the leaf roof constantly shelters the *luli* and the *dopla* statues from the heat of the sun. Coolness guarantees the continuity of life, and hotness, its counterpart, apparently does not signify more than its opposite. But, as the analysis of the final rites will show, generating coolness first of all implies the determined creation of hotness, and this places the latter value in a different light.

In the series of ceremonial acts we can distinguish two consecutive stages: (1) the preparations for war and engaging the enemy, and (2) welcoming the returning warriors and resuming normal life. The first stage is dominated by invulnerability and danger, that is to say, generating hotness in the warriors against the background of the battle to be fought. When this ends in victory, they return to their own community with seven 'hunted heads'. But in addition to the living who await them on the beach, this community also embraces the ancestors represented by the 'prau of the dead'. Here a comparison imposes itself with the Marselan *lulya*, in which during the ritual the living and the dead also form a unity. By depositing the 'hunted heads' in the miniature vessel, the community of the living and the dead as a whole is expanded.²² The ceremonial first ancestress' act of clasping the nuts to her breast at a later stage in the village also indicates such an addition. The wholesome effect this has at once becomes clear when after the ritual dialogue the heat of warfare is transformed into a cool atmosphere embodied by the ceremonial first ancestress with her fish basket. Now the 'hunted heads' are regarded as the catch of the men who went fishing. The girl associated with the first ancestress receives these heads/fishes from the young *ahunamni rihera*, and this beautifully visualizes the complementary relation between hotness and coolness. With regard to the mythical wedding celebration, the backdrop of the ritual head-hunting raid, the 'enrichment' of the ceremonial first ancestress must surely concern one thing, namely ensuring reproduction, the continuity of the group. The more so if we consider the wish expressed by the *rilalawna*. It is likely that healing the villagers' wounds and sprinkling the crowd with coconut fluid when the nuts had been reduced to ashes mainly concerned the warriors, who were still 'hot'. By healing their wounds inflicted during the sword dance (in battle), and cooling them off with refreshing coconut fluid, the warriors' hotness is prevented from

²² Compare the same expansion that head-hunting was meant to achieve among the Atoni of Timor (Schulte Nordholt 1971:352).

turning against their own community; actually in this way normal life is resumed.

If we take features of fertility such as hotness and coolness at their local value, Müller-Wismar's description of *po'ora* offers us a chance to understand why in Luang head-hunting was considered necessary. In our view the prime aim of the ritual was to achieve a cool state, beneficial to the continuity of life of the village community. This coolness arose from the heat of the head-hunting raid, and thus hotness must be regarded here as positive to the community. Aimed as it was at renewed fertility, this raid might best be described as 'catching fish'.²³ Therefore, the attention paid to this subject in the New Year's dances of Marsela invites an unexpected interpretation.

Once Again, the Dances of Marsela

In Marsela, a possible link with the Luang ritual described above is indicated by the names of the dance formations and the dancers, as well as by the content of the songs belonging both to the *nyépola* and to the great dance. The subject of the latter's song is the arrival of the war prau bearing the warriors, and the dance visualizes this. In combination with frequent songs about fishing, and its portrayal in the *nyépola*, both Marselan dances seem to reproduce the ritual mentioned above. Could the dancers of the great dance be the crew of the war prau returning with fishes/heads that they bring into the circle of dancers during the *nyépola*?

In the following analysis of the dances we assume that in Marsela as well, hunted heads may be identified with fishes. This will prove to provide more insight into the songs and dances that will turn out to form one coherent whole with the theme of the New Year's ritual.

a) We may characterize the great dance as a war dance. Particularly in this dance the names 'prau's bow' and 'champion' apply to the first dancer. While dancing, one of the dancers may exclaim '*Laylëwna!*', the battle cry of the village of Marsela. It is the name of the symbolic war prau and of the sacred sword that the champion used to wield in war. This sword, or just crying out its name, rendered the warriors invulnerable in battle. In Marselan terms: sword and warriors were made hot. This atmosphere of hotness during warfare could not co-exist with one of coolness centered on fertility. This is evident for instance from a rule that the women staying at home had to observe: they were not allowed to spin or weave. (The end products of these activities, which bride-givers present as counter-gifts to bride-takers, symbolize fertility.)

On their return from battle, warriors had to be cooled off; otherwise their knees would swell and their muscles go flaccid. The hot condition would

²³ It is striking that in related cultures whose main livelihood is agriculture, head-hunting is compared to 'harvesting'. Schulte Nordholt calls attention to this among the Atoni (1971:422), Downs among the Toraja (1977:123).

not limit itself to the warriors. Nature too would remain hot: the *koli* palms would not provide water, and no rain would fall. It is said that for the same reason, following the warriors' example, the dancers had to be cooled off after the war dance as well.

b) What is the deeper sense of the women's dance with *nyépola*? As we could establish above, in this dance bride-takers are called on to bring bride-givers goods, usually fishes and *sopi*. In the songs sung at the New Year's ritual during the *nyépola*, fish is also asked for. Fish and *sopi* are the things the groom brings to the bride's house in the course of the marriage ritual, in addition to the bride-price of gold and *bastas*.²⁴ In particular during *lulya* the bond between bride-takers and -givers is confirmed anew by a gift from the bride-taker. We were told that the latter would bring to his bride-giver's house a *basta* — in the old days sometimes along with gold — hoping to receive from him in return coolness (prosperity and fertility), which was considered inherent in the bride-giver.²⁵ On this occasion the presentation of the bride-price was repeated, as it were. In our view, what the *nyépola* during the New Year's ritual visualizes first of all, is this (repeated) presentation by the bride-takers to the bride-givers: the latter form the circle of dancers entered by the former bearing fishes

The struggle between a fisherman and his fish as imitated during the nyépola.

²⁴ *Bastas* are imported cotton cloths decorated with various block-printed motifs. See Van Dijk and De Jonge 1989.

²⁵ The bride-takers express this as follows: 'We are going to the shade-giving tree'.

and *sopi*. Implicitly present is the counter-gift, that is, prosperity and fertility.

But the dance's meaning extends beyond this. A link may be assumed with the war dance warriors (see section a above). Before a Marselan man can marry, he has to collect enough bride-price goods. No doubt in the old days voyages to other islands used to be indispensable for this purpose. To put it more forcefully, a man was not considered a man until he had been overseas for quite some time. Only then, after having fully acquired a man's status, could he marry. The aspiring bridegroom's voyage overseas reminds us of the voyage the warrior used to embark upon for his head-hunting raids.²⁶ Thus our assumption mentioned above falls entirely into place: the fishes as part of the bridegroom's bride-price are identical with the warriors' harvest of hunted heads. Could in the old days a man's head-hunting raid have been a first condition for marriage — as was the case elsewhere in eastern Indonesia?²⁷ The following arguments support this view.

It is said that if on the 'hot' warriors' return from battle they are not cooled off in their village, the *koli* water will fail to flow and the rains will not come. As *koli* fluid is compared to a man's semen, we can establish that a warrior's continued hotness will obstruct his fertilizing potency. Only after cooling off does this potency again become effective. In other words, to a man the heat of war precedes the coolness and fertility of marriage. The goods introduced during the *nyépola* dance are all hot: fishes and *sopi* ('hot water') — which are actually bride-price goods — and cigarettes. And we may assume that the hunted heads too are hot.²⁸ Thus the bride-takers give their bride-givers hot bride-price goods in exchange for coolness (prosperity and fertility). In our view, the *nyépola* dance visualizes a transformation: the hotness of the fishes and hunted heads brought by the warrior and the aspiring bridegroom, as well as these men's own hotness, turn into the bride-givers' coolness. The circle of dancers represents both the bride-givers and the women on the beach awaiting the warriors with their coolness. The whole scene is very similar to the reception ceremony for the Luang warriors described above. The transition from hot to cool is a condition for reproduction. Hotness provides a fertilizing potency which after cooling contributes to new life. In this context, what is valid for the Atoni of Timor, also applies in Marsela: death (the head-hunting raid) is the condition for life (marriage) (see Schulte Nordholt 1971:356).

²⁶ An accurate report of the Port Essington Expedition (around 1838/39) shows that in particular the inhabitants of the Babar islands were feared head-hunters. They too fetched their heads in Wetar. See Earl 1850:175-176.

²⁷ This was the case among the Atoni of Timor. Marriage and head-hunting, life and death, are closely related. War and death turn out to be conditions for life and marriage (Schulte Nordholt 1971:356).

²⁸ Death on a head-hunting raid is considered an 'unusual death' and designated as hot.

Following from this, the Marselans as we saw, also directly link the heat of war with natural circumstances. They view the advent of rain as dependent on the hot warrior's cooling off. The head-hunting raids were undertaken in the hot season, when traditionally agricultural activities, all associated with an atmosphere of coolness and fertility, were suspended — while on the other hand there was a lot of fishing. Around December and January, the rainy season finally brings the long dry period to an end. But Marselans believe that the rain's fertilization of the earth can occur only after the hot warrior returning from the war has been cooled off.

c) If the *nyépola* dance creates the conditions for fertilization, of both Man and the earth, the subject of *wneysyoka* is fertilization itself — and this can now take place in a state of coolness. Asking for rain is central to the song sung during the dance. In our view, in its performance and meaning the dance is comparable to rattan-pulling, which also used to be done to bring rain. It has been suggested in the literature that rattan-pulling, in which men at one end of the rattan and women at the other, move to and fro, portrays coitus (Tersteege 1935:569). The same may apply to the *wneysyoka*. On the basis of the analogous relation assumed between the man's semen and the rain, it is likely that from the symbolic performance of the one, the other is expected to result. Here we recognize the mythological theme of 'the sacred marriage of heaven and earth'; but it manifests itself in a manner entirely different from the one we encountered in Luang.

The analysis of the three dances shows that they form a coherent whole. The great dance is the war dance performed in an atmosphere of hotness; the *nyépola* expresses the subsequent transition from this hot condition to one of coolness, and thus portrays a cooling process; and finally the *wneysyoka* is the dance of fertilization, and is performed in a state of coolness.

In short, the dances have shown us that the Marselan New Year's ritual celebrates the advent of the expected coolness after a hot period. Then, in this state of coolness, new life can successfully develop.

Conclusions

We saw how an important aim of the 'great feast' is achieved, namely the renewal of the fertility of all creation. So as to let reproduction occur in a state of coolness, one of hotness must first be created. This basic fact raises the question of why features such as hot and cool are so fundamental to the ritual performed. They also underlie the few fertility myths we were able to collect during our fieldwork in the Babar archipelago. There is for instance a myth from the island of Dawera, about a woman who deliberately wounds her finger in order to let the first corn in the island come into being by means of her blood falling onto the earth. The wound's hotness results in fertility. In another myth of the island the same theme is repeated: the first coconut palm grows from a hunted head. Apparently

the concepts are basic to a religious breeding-ground from which both the myths and the ritual arise, and which may have incorporated the enormous transition in nature from hot to cool. Unlike the situation in western Indonesia, in the southern Moluccas, where a dry period lasting months precedes the rainy season, the crops' fertility is a constantly recurring problem.

How shall we call the man's contribution to reproduction, and the woman's? The man's contribution is an 'injection' as it were, from without (the Luang *aitiehra*, the warrior bringing hunted heads or fishes, the Marselan bridegroom introducing goods from outside), a potency to fertilize that is designated as hot and which becomes productive only after having been enveloped in an atmosphere of coolness.²⁹ The woman's contribution to reproduction is her ability, in this atmosphere of coolness, to let new life mature from within.

In warfare everything is done to maintain the atmosphere of hotness, with the warrior as its exponent. Ritually the men are made hot, while the women must refrain from activities producing coolness (for instance the Marselan ban on weaving). During fertilization the all-pervasive theme is coolness; the men are cooled off ritually. The warrior's hotness is like the sun's radiation that has to make way for the cool rain, for the man's cool semen. Hence in an atmosphere of warfare coolness must be excluded, whereas hotness is to be avoided during fertilization. Periods of hotness and coolness alternate, and must remain strictly separated.

What is striking here is that in a transition from one atmosphere to another, the man is guided by extraordinary ritual acts, while on the other hand the woman in the atmosphere of hotness need only refrain from certain daily activities. Weaving and spinning are typically feminine activities that link the creation of coolness exclusively to the woman. From the material presented we may derive that in this fertility ritual the women are permanently associated with coolness, even in an atmosphere of warfare, whereas in the various atmospheres the men are successively associated with both hotness and coolness.

The ultimate aim of the 'great feast' is coolness; hotness is not an aim in itself, for without coolness it is useless. Coolness dominates hotness, and not the other way around. The atmosphere of warfare is subservient to that of fertility, to which the woman is central. Thus both in Marsela and in Luang, she is the community's life-giving source, it is she who represents the permanent basis. In Luang this was visualized in the statues sharing the shelter of the sacrificial house, in contrast to the *aitiehra* who was renewed time and again. In Marsela the first woman arose from stone, a symbol of imperishability in contrast to wood, from which the first man

²⁹ All goods which the bridegroom/warrior contributes come from outside: money, cigarettes, fishes, hunted heads, and the two bride-price goods gold and *bastas*. As the uncultivated land in the island, on which the *koli* palms grow, is designated as outside, the *sopi*, a product of the *koli* palm, may also be classified as outside.

in the island arose. In the song of the great dance the Marselan warrior too, taking part in a head-hunting raid, is associated with wood, even with 'hardwood', which also is the literal meaning of the Luang word *aitiehra*. In Luang, with its matrilineal and matrilocal system, this role of the woman may not be surprising. But in Marsela it is striking, for here we find a patrilineal and patrilocal organization. The same ordering principle is active in both societies; it is expressed in various manifestations within a regional field of study.

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