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Marriage rituals of the Galela people

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MARRIAGE RITUALS OF THE GALELA PEOPLE

1. Introduction

This paper presents a description and analysis of the marriage rituals of the Galela people, who live in the subdistrict (Indo.: *kecamatan*) of Galela in the northeastern part of North Halmahera, and in the Isle of Morotai.¹

The performance of these rituals follows upon an agreement between two groups of people, each originating from different houses, to establish affinal relationships (*geri doroa*; *dunu dapu*; *geri*: SpyB; *doroa*: DH; *dunu*: SW; *dapu*: SpyZ) between them. A house (*o tahu moi*, 'one house') represents a group of ideally patrilineal relatives and their in-married spouses. Therefore, the two houses that come to be related affinally should not have an ancestor in common, or constitute a common bilateral kindred (*o bolu moi*, 'one collection'²). When a marriage is contracted the groom's house is called 'the man's side' (*o nonau no*), and the bride's house 'the woman's side' (*o ngopedeka no*).

Elopement (*siloda*), recently in fashion, is regarded as contrary to the ancestral traditions (*o adati*, Indon. *adat*), and sometimes causes conflict between the two 'sides'. A formal marriage proposal (*o suku*) is considered an inseparable part of the activities that lead to marriage. Marriage should be supported by the kindreds of the bride and the groom, and produce a high level of permanent solidarity. The members of both kindreds take part in the ritual activities according to their rights and responsibilities; these include contributing to the expenses involved in these rituals.

2. The marriage ritual

The complete marriage ritual consists of five phases:

1. *O suku*, the marriage proposal; this concerns the proposal by a young man's relatives that a young woman become the wife of their 'son',

¹ Fieldwork among the Galela of North Halmahera was conducted in 1985 and 1986 under the auspices of the Universitas Pattimura Ambon. I am indebted to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs for having granted me a two-year scholarship, and to the members of the CNRS-team ERASME in Paris for their assistance and encouragement. I am also indebted to Charles and Barbara Grimes for assisting me in translating this text into English.

² From the verb (*i, pa*) *pòlu*. Van Baarda (1895:329) renders the meaning of this verb as 'to be available in large amounts', and *pa pòlu* as 'to collect in one's arms or hands'.

followed by a decision (*o demo ma butu*, 'the conclusion of the talks').

2. *O rugi ya tota* ('they bring [the bridewealth]'): the transfer of the bridewealth by the groom's relatives to the bride's family.

3. *O kawe ma wange* ('the day of the marriage'): the wedding festivities.

4. *O geri-doroa* ('the in-laws'): the groom's visit to the bride's family.

5. *O modoka yo sitota* ('they accompany the bride'): the bride leaving her home to live with her husband at his parents'.

2.1. *Suku* and *demo ma butu*

The marriage negotiations begin very early in the morning. Some men and women acting as representatives of the young man, are led by a man acting as spokesman, and go to the young man's house. They all go barefoot, and bring with them betel leaves, betelnut and tobacco in a large wooden or brass betel box (*o lasinari*, *o salopa*). They also take money, two *real* at most (which equals four thousand rupiah³), put on a plate and covered with a piece of cloth. This gift of money is called *o tahu mā ngoi* ('the opening-up of the house'), and it serves to obtain permission to gain access to the woman's house.

When the group arrives at the woman's house, they must stop in front of it and wait until they are given permission to enter. According to informants, they sometimes have to wait for a long time. This is meant to test whether or not the man's family's intentions are serious. But it may also be a punishment for the young man's previous wrong-doings.

In front of the house the man's spokesman and a spokesman for the girl's family will ask and reply in turn (in formalized speech called *dola-bololo*) about the purpose of the visit of the man's relatives. Afterwards, when both sides are satisfied with the responses, the man's party is invited to enter the house.

In the house the two groups sit facing each other. The leader of the man's group will then hand over the betel box and money to the leader of the woman's group, who will place them on a table prepared for that purpose.

Before another dialogue can begin, the woman's family must serve the betelnut and betel leaves that they have prepared and put into a small betel box (*kubilano*) made of coloured pandanus leaves (*isirota*). This indicates that the woman's family is happy to receive the visitors.

The large betel box (*lasinari*) and the small box (*kabilano*) are symbols of a son and a daughter. They are exchanged between the man's side and the woman's side before the dialogue starts. The man's side then declares the purpose of their visit, which is followed by a discussion. Decisions are not usually made during the first visit, since the members of each kin group need to confer amongst themselves as to whether they should accept the proposal of marriage, how much the brideprice should be, etc. A date is

³ From this gift the ritual negotiations may derive their name. Of old, a *real* was divided into *suku*. See van Baarda 1895:403-4.

set during the first visit for a time a few days later when the decisions will be given.

In earlier times marriage proposals took the form of a direct bargaining transaction between both sides. The man's side sent some women to the woman's family very early in the morning before the sun had risen, taking with them a coin face up in a plate, covered with a piece of red cloth. In the afternoon, if the coin was returned face down, this meant that the woman's side refused the proposal and that the man's relatives needed to increase the amount of money and send it back again to the woman's family. This could happen repeatedly, with the coin being kept at the woman's house for one night and returned the next day to the man's house. When the coin was returned face up, it meant an acceptance of the proposal, and negotiations could commence regarding the bridewealth.

A second meeting to hear the decision (*o demo ma butu*) nowadays takes place several days after the first visit. As during the proposal, special permission is needed to enter the woman's house. When the man's representatives are seated, the woman's representatives serve them with a box with betelnut. The spokesman for the woman's side then reports the results of their deliberation, informing them whether the proposal of marriage has been accepted or not. If the proposal is accepted, the negotiations regarding the bridewealth may then begin. On reaching an agreement, the date of delivering the bridewealth is decided upon. This meeting is attended by the village head, who acts as a witness. When the man's representatives return home they take with them the small betel boxes (*kabilano*) presented to them by the woman's side. The *lasinari* or *salopa* taken by the man's side are left behind at the woman's house. On the way home, they show the betel boxes to everyone they meet, indicating that they have been successful in bringing a young woman back to their house. At this point the young man and woman are regarded as being engaged (*i ma teke bobai*).

2.2. *O rugi ya tota*

Preparations for this occasion are made by both sides, the man's as well as the woman's, those who present the bridewealth, and those who receive it. All members of both kindreds contribute to the expenses for the activities of the marriage ritual. The man's side is responsible for the bride-wealth (*o suba* or *o rugi*), fish (*o nao*), and palmwine (*o dalu*). These items are basically the wealth that results from male activities, while the woman's side presents a counter-gift (*o sima*) of rice (*o tamo*), vegetable dishes (*o gaahu*) and peanut cookies (*o halua*), which are the wealth resulting from female activities.

Further particulars concerning the bridewealth and counter-gift are as follows. In contrast with the marriage proposal ceremony, where the number of the man's relatives is few, all the members of his kin group who have contributed towards the wedding are present at the ceremony of

handing over the bridewealth to the woman's family. This is evidence of the strong solidarity among them. Informants told me that 50-75 people may attend such an event.

The bridewealth is put on a large porcelain plate, covered with a cloth (*o baro*), and carried by a young girl (*o jojaru*). She is followed by an older woman carrying fish, betel, and tobacco, while a man carries palmwine in bamboo stems decorated with palm leaves (*o weka i sisangi*). The procession stops in front of the girl's house, waiting to be invited to enter. The bridewealth is taken directly to a bedroom prepared for that purpose and put on a pile of mats, around ten in number. While some women of the woman's side serve betelnut and leaves, two other women, a maternal aunt (MZ) of the boy and a maternal aunt (MZ) of the girl, enter the room to inspect the bridewealth. They then return and declare the results of the inspection to all present. The discussion will then continue to determine the date of the wedding. The village head attends this event and makes a speech. After that there will be a reciprocal offering of food (*i ma teke tatana*) whereby the people of the man's side serve fish and palmwine, and those of the woman's side serve vegetables, rice, or cookies.

When the man's group leaves the house of the woman, they take with them the betel boxes and the mats that were underneath the bridewealth. The betelboxes and the mats are then divided among the members of the man's kin group. According to my informants, at the time the bridewealth is presented by the man's side, the woman's side needs to present the counter-gift. The counter-gift is handed over at this time, as the woman is leaving to stay with the man, as her husband.

2.3. *O kawi ma wange*

The Galela people conduct this ceremony at the time that the marriage is legalized in accordance with either the Moslem or the Christian religion. The Galela people distinguish two kinds of marriage: 1) a civil or official marriage, and 2) a traditional marriage, known as *geri doroa* (popularly referred to as *gidoroa*).

The day before the wedding celebrations, each side erects a tent in front of their house for extra space and decorates the tent with young palm leaves. In the sitting room of the bridegroom's house (*o gandaria*), where people can move freely, in accordance with the divisions within a traditional Galela house, a special place will be arranged for the seating of the bridal couple (*o puade*).

Early in the morning on the day of the wedding, the bridal couple will legalize their marriage in a civil ceremony, for Christians, or at the office of Moslem Affairs, for Moslems. In the afternoon, around four o'clock, the bridegroom and his party will go in procession to the bride's house. They stop in front of the house. The groom will then be led by two of his sisters and his parents into the bride's bedroom. She, in turn, is accompanied by two of her sisters and her parents. From the entrance of the house on their

way to this room, the bridegroom and his company will encounter several curtains hanging down as an obstacle on their path (*o ngara*). At each curtain, the bridegroom will have to give a present to those in attendance there in order to pass (*o ngara ma ngoi*). With the consent of the bride's parents, the bridegroom can take his bride out of the house to go to church to receive the blessing of the church. Those who are Moslem do not have to do so and go straight to the celebrations. Christians will go following the church ceremony, accompanied by an orchestra playing merry tunes. In front of the bridegroom's house the bridal couple will be welcomed by male war dancers (*soda*) and female dancers (*sisi*). Led by the dancers, they will then enter the house. The wedding feast will start in the evening, during which the bridal couple will be seated at the *puade* to receive the congratulations of the invitees. From each of their representatives they will receive advice for a happy married life, and the festivities will continue late into the night.

2.4. *O geri doroa*

The Galela people consider the phase of the marriage ritual in which the bridegroom pays a visit to the bride's relatives an important part of the traditional marriage ceremony. This visit takes place three to seven days after the wedding, depending on what has been agreed upon by both parties.

On that day the house of the bride's parents is the centre of activities. The latter will erect a tent in front of their house and both sides will prepare presents. The man's side will prepare tobacco (*o tabako*), betelnut (*o dena*), betel leaves (*o bido*), and lime (*o gahu*), accompanied by fish (*o nao*) and palmwine (*o dalu*). The woman's side will prepare cooked rice (*o tano*), vegetables (*o gaahu*) and peanut cookies (*o halua*). A table will be put in the centre of the house. In former days this table was called *o dangi kokiropa*, denoting a platform which functions as both a table and a bed. The room is arranged in such a way that the two sides will sit on opposite sides of the table.

The man's side will start for the in-laws' house early in the evening, taking presents with them (*o dadana*). The men carry the palmwine and the fish, while the women carry the betelnut, leaves and tobacco. In former days, the newly married man would wear shorts, with his upper body bare (although nowadays he will be properly dressed), and would go barefoot. He walks in front. A young unmarried man walks in front of him to function both as a shield (*o dodato*) and as an assistant. Arriving at the house, he enters and goes directly to stand at the head of the table, where the new bride is already waiting, standing at the other end. Elders (*o dodihimo*) of the man's side will gather at the table opposite the elders of the woman's side. These elders personify the ancestors of both sides. This ceremony is traditionally seen as the point at which the marriage is contracted, and it formalizes the affinal relations between both sides.

The new husband, with the help of his assistant, then serves betelnut, betel leaves and tobacco to all present. He is not allowed to leave the place except where necessary to serve the older people. Some time later, the young husband and wife leave the gathering to enter a room already prepared for them. They are only accompanied by each of their assistants. There they present betel leaves and betelnut to each other (*i ma teke sirota*).

The next ceremonial activity is a reciprocal offering of food between both sides. The man's side will serve fish and palmwine, while the woman's side will serve steamed rice, vegetables and cookies. This ceremony may last until late at night, and if mutually agreed, will be repeated the following evening. Afterwards the newly married man will stay at his in-laws' for a couple of days.

2.5 *O modoka yo sitota*

This ceremony is the focal event of all the activities that constitute a wedding. When the time for this event arrives, members of the man's side become very busy. They erect a tent in front of their house and prepare for the foot-washing ceremony for the bride (*mi tiodo*, 'she is cleansed'). This ceremony has characteristics that are very different from the *geri doroa* ceremony. In the afternoon a large procession of the bride's relatives will leave the bride's house to proceed to the groom's house. Along the way the bride will walk on mats until she reaches the house of her new husband. Her relatives will take with them presents as counter-gifts, which consist of rice in a basket (*o poroco sigi*), rice cooked in coconut milk (*o daroko*), cookies (*o halua* and *o korma buruhu*), tools and utensils (*o gogeremo*), and other gifts which are products of women's handiwork (*o ngopedeka ma gia ma jojobo*, 'product of a woman's hands').

The procession is arranged in the following manner. The *poroco sigi* is carried in front, followed by the *daroko*, the cookies, and the people carrying the tools and utensils, then the bride and groom, and finally the relatives. The bride will wear bracelets, earrings, necklaces and anklets, all of gold. This procession indicates the social status, wealth and fertility of her family.

In front of the groom's house they are received by a man performing war dances, who is one of the groom's or his father's brothers. Another dance is performed by the groom's or his mother's sisters. The latter symbolizes the power of the ancestors of the woman from whom the groom is descended, while at the same time indicating their superior quality. In former times a similar display of women's wealth and strength was to be seen in the mortuary rituals (*o modoka i sisi*).

Following the dances, the mother-in-law escorts the bride into a room in the house to change her clothes, after which she will reappear in the sitting room and seat the bride upon a chair. This chair is surrounded by the utensils necessary for the foot-washing ceremony. They consist of a white cup (*o udo-udo*) filled with perfumed water (*o muja*), a white basin

(*o lelanga*), a piece of the stalk of the betel tree, yellow rice, and eggs. These latter items were formerly used in the worship of ancestors (*o goma*) who safeguard the family traditions.

The bride is then seated on her mother-in-law's lap with her feet in the white basin. An elderly woman regarded as the preserver of the traditions stirs the water in a cup while muttering the following: 'Brothers and sisters, we will purify the bride (*ria de o gia nongoru, mia modoka mi tiodo kasi*)' The audience will affirm this, responding '*jo!*' The elderly woman then washes the bride's feet. After that, she offers the bride seven mouthfuls of the yellow rice and egg. The purpose of the foot-washing and the feeding is to purify the new bride of all dirt and evil, and to give her strength for her stay in her new home. This is dependent upon the power of the ancestors of the man's family and her legal confirmation as the daughter-in-law of the husband's family. This ceremony also functions as the important acknowledgement of and tribute to the ancestors that is necessary to complete all ritual activities.

3. *The exchange of gifts*

We observe that all ritual activities include occasions for exchanging gifts by both the man's and the woman's side. This exchange is basically an exchange of the wealth that results from male activity for that resulting from female activity (see the table below).

EXCHANGE OF GIFTS BETWEEN THE GROOM'S AND THE BRIDE'S RELATIVES

Phase	Gifts from man's side	Gifts from woman's side
<i>suku</i> and <i>demo ma butu</i>	betelnut and leaves in large betel box (<i>o lasinari, o salopa</i>), money	betelnut and leaves in small betel box (<i>o kabilano</i>)
<i>rugi pa tota</i>	<i>suba/rugi</i> , consisting of 1 piece of white cloth and 1 dozen plates, sum of money (<i>o jojaru ma ija</i>)	cooked rice, vegetables, cookies
<i>geri-doroo</i>	palmwine, fish, betelnut, tobacco	cooked rice, vegetables, cookies
<i>modoka yo sitoa</i>		<i>sima</i> , consisting of rice (<i>o poroco higi</i>), rice cooked in coconut milk (<i>o daroko</i>) mats, utensils

Of the exchanges mentioned above, the giving of the bridewealth (*o suba* or *o rugi*) and that of the counter-gifts (*o suma*) by the woman's side require further explanation.

3.1. *Suba*, the man's gifts

The gifts designated as *o suba* consist of three kinds, viz.:

1. One piece of white linen cloth (*o baro da are*) and a dozen plates (*o lelenga*). Both are called *o adati*, meaning that both of them are related to the ancestral traditions. This kind of gift is always required. The white cloth is called the 'head of the bridewealth' (*o suba ma sahe*), and the plates are called 'the base' (*o suba ma nanaho*).

2. An amount of money, at the most 160 *real* (320,000 rupiah), called *o jojaru ma ija* ('the price of the girl'), intended as a reparation or compensation to the bride's family.

3. A request for compensation, called *o gogolo*, is seldom made any more. This is made by the bride's family (but not her parents) to the groom's relatives. It is a compensation for her parents' care, and for any misdeeds she may have committed towards her relatives in the past. If this request is met with, it must be reciprocated with rice cooked in coconut milk accompanying other counter-gifts.

In earlier times, the bridewealth used to consist of money to the amount of 30 *real*, of which 15 *real* were for the bride's virginity and another 15 *real* for the care she had received from childhood (van Baarda 1895:402). In addition to the money, a gift (called *o gogeremo*) of tools and utensils consisting of 3 swords, 3 shields, 3 knives, 3 porcelain cups and 3 porcelain plates was given (van Baarda 1895:346).

3.2. *Sima*, the counter-gifts

The amount of the *sima*, counter-gifts, depends on the amount of the bridewealth. If the bridewealth is large, then the counter-gifts are also numerous. The *sima* consist of:

1. *Tamo oko* or *daroko*: rice cooked in coconut milk and wrapped in woven pandanus leaves shaped in a cone and decorated with palm leaves. According to van Baarda (1895:422), the form represents a mountain.

2. *Poroco sigi*: uncooked rice in a basket of pandanus leaves, in the form of a mosque dome.

3. *Jungutu*: a mat, a handicraft product of the bride's. There are 15 of these, upon which the *tamo oko* and the *poroco sigi* are placed and are later presented to the village head.

In addition to the items mentioned above there are other ritual gifts (*ma momote*, litt. 'that which follows') consisting of other handicraft products of the women (*o ngo pedeka ma gia ma jojobo*), namely types of tools and utensils (*o gogoremo*).

4. *Suba and sima as parts of a whole*

The word *suba*, part of the expression *o suba pa tota* ('to bring the bridewealth', by the man's side to the woman's), derives from *sembah* (Indon.), and means 'worship'. *O sima*, on the other hand, designating the counter-gifts made by the woman's side to the man's, denotes 'in front of'. These meanings indicate that the relation between the man's and the woman's side is a hierarchical one. In marriage relationships the woman's side is superior to the man's.

The items that form part of the *suba* gifts are white linen cloth, plates, and a sum of money. The cloth and the plates constitute an inseparable whole. The former represents the 'head', the latter the 'base' of the *suba*. The man's side presents these gifts to the bride's parents, representing the 'owner of the [bride's] house' (*o tahu ma duhutu*). These specific gifts are conceived of as bearing witness to an adult man's ability to 'work' (*o mamancari*, 'a job', Indon. *mencari*, 'to search [for an income]'), and hence to provide food and clothing for those who are dependent upon him. Yet there is more involved than the care of the living. For the white linen cloth serves not only as a baby shawl (*o ngopa ma nanaho*, 'the cover of the child'), but also as a shroud (*o sone ma nanaho*, 'the cover of the dead'). And, whereas a plate or bowl is a container for food, and large porcelain bowls used to serve as a bathtub for children (*o ngopa ma oos*), these bowls used to be buried in the grave of their owner. In other words, the gifts of *o suba*, considered as an inseparable whole, accompanied members of the 'woman's side' from birth to death.

The counter-gift of *o sima*, on the other hand, presented by the woman's to the man's side, included cooked and uncooked rice, mats, and utensils. The utensils represent the bride's 'burden' (*ami gina*) that accompanies her to her husband's house. They remain her property.

The rice cooked in coconut milk is divided among the people present at the foot-washing ceremony. This gift is called 'the people's share' (*o kawasa ma gimina*), that is, the share of all the inhabitants of the village into which the bride has married. This suggests that at this stage of the marriage ritual, the village as a whole is involved as 'the man's side'. The rice put into the conical basket, however, is 'the share of the owner of the [husband's] house' (*o tahu ma duhutu ma gimina*). It is given to the parents of the groom, and divided later among the members of the groom's kin group.

The plaited mats given by the woman's side are also distributed among the latter. Like the white linen (given by the man's to the woman's side), these mats are also employed at funerals. The corpse of the deceased enveloped in shrouds is wrapped in them. And, just as the *suba* as a whole testifies to the adult man's ability to 'work', the mats as part of the *sima* bear witness to the adult woman's ability to plait.

Considering the gifts exchanged at marriage in relation to each other, then, one observes that the gifts and counter-gifts represent a whole which is composed of contrasting ideas.

The man's side and the woman's exchange items that bear witness to the roles played by the adult man and woman. Furthermore, the items exchanged between the two sides are employed not only in activities of life and procreation — such as marriage and birth —, but also in acts surrounding death. Yet, the relation between the exchange partners is a hierarchical one: in marriage relationships the woman's side is superior to the man's side. The woman's side presents gifts that are called 'in front', the man's side gifts designated as 'worship'. However, such relations between the woman's and the man's side, expressing ideas about life and death, male and female, are embedded in relations between the community of the living — defined at the levels of the household, the house and the village as a whole — and the ancestors.

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