G. Forth

Ritual implications of settlement change; An eastern Indonesian example

In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 154 (1998), no: 4, Leiden, 593-612

This PDF-file was downloaded from <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl>

GREGORY FORTH

Ritual Implications of Settlement Change An Eastern Indonesian Example

As David Parkin has recently observed (1992:22), spatial orientation and position are 'fundamentally constitutive' of ritual acts. Throughout Indonesia, the space within which rites take place is frequently either the house or a village definable as a collection of dwellings and other buildings arranged in a particular way. Even where specific acts are not carried out inside houses or villages, these structures are often pivotal to more inclusive performances, for example in orienting component actions or in defining their beginnings and ends.

With regard to this significance of houses and settlements, it may be expected that when the form or location of built structures undergoes change, ritual activity will be affected. In this vein, Waterson (1990:36-40) has for example described ritual effects of externally imposed changes in house form in Manggarai (western Flores). A specific instance of the phenomenon concerns the hearth, which in many parts of Indonesia defines the centre and ritual focus of the house. Thus, where hearths have been moved outside houses at the urging of colonial and national authorities notionally concerned with hygiene, former hearth rituals have had to change with respect to either setting or content, with attendant alterations in their meaning and efficacy (see Waterson 1990:42, who cites Austronesian examples from as far afield as Sulawesi, Sumbawa, and Madagascar). Similar transformations in ritual practice have evidently followed from the adoption, also partly rationalized with reference to considerations of hygiene, of dwellings built on the ground, replacing older structures raised on wooden piles (see Waterson 1990:221, 234).¹

¹ Where formerly the dead were buried beneath raised houses, as in central Sulawesi and Roti (Waterson 1990:221; see also Fox 1993:169-70), a colonial ban on this practice resulted in the obvious change to burial outside dwellings and villages. At the same time, the social and symbolic character of the house has been more profoundly affected by this alteration in funerary practice (see Waterson 1990:228, note 8).

GREGORY FORTH is a professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta, specializing in social anthropology, and holds degrees from the University of Oxford and Simon Fraser University. He is the author of, among other publications, *Rindi; An ethnographic study of a traditional domain in eastern Sumba* (1981) and *Beneath the volcano* (KITLV Press, VKI 177, 1998). Professor Forth may be contacted at the Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H4.

Figure 1. Stylized representation of a Nage village (arrows indicate disposition of houses and graves)

Also relevant in this context is Clifford Geertz's famous account of a Javanese funeral, in which he indicates how undermining of 'the simple territorial basis of social integration' – mostly a village setting – during this century has affected an older pattern of Javanese communal feasting (Geertz 1973:148). In what follows, effects of settlement change on local ritual are explored with reference to funerary rites as currently practised by the Nage of central Flores. In particular, I describe the funeral of the late Emiel Waso Ea, who at the time of his sudden death on 8 July 1994 was the highest-ranking son of the last Nage rajah. Waso Ea's death occurred while I was staying in his house, and I was therefore able, with much sadness, to attend his burial two days later and to observe the series of mortuary rites concluded on 19 July.

By local standards, the house of the deceased was a modern building. It is located in a place called Hobo, just a short distance from the old village of Bo'a Wae, the seat of the Nage rajahs and since colonial times at least the centre of Nage territory. Like the great majority of Nage nowadays, the deceased was also a Catholic. The rituals I describe below, however, are not Christian rites but indigenous ceremonies which Nage to varying degrees still maintain. In the present instance, the dead man's relatives and followers expressed a commitment to ensuring that the full series of local rites was performed, partly in recognition of Waso Ea's reputation as a traditionalist and major promoter of Nage culture.

1. Nage houses and settlements: Form and orientation

Nage funerary rites provide a good illustration of a ritual series that begins and ends in the house, specifically the residence of the deceased in life. Although Catholic burial services could conceivably be held in nearby churches or chapels, even these are always conducted in the deceased's house. Connected with this is the continuing practice of siting graves near residential buildings or, in a more traditional context, inside villages.

Physically, a Nage village (*bo'a*) consists of a number of residential houses (*sa'o*) arranged in two rows placed on either side of an open, rectangular plaza (*nata*; see Figure 1). The houses face inwards, towards the plaza. Nage villages are always oriented towards a prominent peak. In the vicinity of Bo'a Wae and other parts of western Nage, this is the volcano named Ebu Lobo. Nage designate the extremity of the rectangular settlement disposed towards the volcano, thus the landward end, as the 'head' of the village, while the opposite extremity, the seaward (or downstream) end, they call the 'tail'. The orientation reflects major direction categories; thus the head of a settlement is always 'upwards' or 'landwards' (*zéle, zéta*), terms that generally describe

anywhere further towards the top of the volcano, while the tail is always 'downwards' or 'seawards' (*zili* or *lau*), thus in the opposite direction. Complementing this contrast is a second, dependent axis articulated by the terms *mena* and *zale* (see Figure 1). Referring to directions to the right and left respectively as one faces landward (or towards the top of the volcano), within the village the *mena* side is always to the right as one faces the 'head' of the settlement (and thus the volcano), and the *zale* side is to the left (Forth 1991a).

Several facts indicate that houses, too, are disposed with reference to a contrast of 'head' and 'tail'. Although the enclosed back half (*tolo*) of a house is not called the 'head', the rear part of this section, as well as the back wall, is named *lulu*, a term possibly cognate with *ulu* ('head'). Also, while this section does not actually stand any higher than the front half of the building, the open gallery or *téda*, its direction from the front is expressed as *zéta*, as of course is the 'head' of a village. A position on the front gallery, when speaking from this enclosed section, is then described as *zale*, in the sense of 'down, below'. Houses might therefore be described as disposed perpendicularly in relation to the village, with their 'heads' always pointing away from the centre of the settlement, thus in the *mena* direction on the *mena* side of the village and in the *zale* direction on the opposite side.

As the foregoing should indicate, Nage houses are oriented structures only insofar as they are included in traditional villages. In contrast, dwellings located outside villages are not oriented at all with regard to the indigenous system of directions. In the vicinity of Bo'a Wae, such houses are typically built close to modern roads, with the fronts facing towards the road (as in modern towns and cities). Near Bo'a Wae itself, many such houses line the main east-to-west 'Flores highway' or secondary (usually unpaved) roads that run perpendicular to this. If houses located outside villages are oriented in any way, therefore, it is to this main roadway, which, though it twists and turns considerably, is generally conceived as running east to west. Referred to by the national Indonesian terms '*timur*' and '*barat*', which are locally identified with the positions of the rising and setting sun respectively, this contrast obviously relates to a directional system quite different from that articulated by the indigenous Nage categories, which turn upon the Ebu Lobo volcano, or, in other parts of the region, another dominant peak. More recently, Nage have begun building houses along tertiary roads, or paths, perpendicular to secondary roads. The overall effect therefore is the construction of a grid comparable to modern city blocks where streets run either parallel or perpendicular to one another.

Modern houses lining modern roads are typically enclosed by a fence or hedge defining a yard. At present, the graves of household members are also located inside the yard, a practice perpetuating an indigenous ideal of bury-

ing the dead close to residential dwellings. In other parts of central Flores, communal graveyards have recently been constructed at some distance from both traditional villages and modern houses. But Nage in the vicinity of Bo'a Wae have yet to adopt this practice. According to the original practice, which some Nage still observe, graves are located in the village plaza immediately in front or to the side of residential houses or, if the deceased was low-ranking, just outside the periphery of the settlement. Their disposition in relation to buildings is, however, less important than the requirement that the head of the deceased (buried in a horizontal position), and thus the head of the grave, should point in the same direction as the head of the village, which is to say, the end of the settlement that points towards the volcano. Although concrete has largely replaced simple stone piles in grave construction, Nage orient modern graves in precisely the same way. Thus; while modern houses located outside villages no longer form part of larger oriented settlements, graves are still oriented in accordance with the local system of directions.

The construction of houses outside of villages is the main factor contributing to changing uses with respect to Nage dwellings. As far as rituals, and especially funerals, are concerned, alterations to the form of houses appear to have had less effect. Nage have recently begun building more modern houses inside villages as well as outside; nevertheless, modernity in construction (always a matter of degree) is still largely correlated with removal from a village. At the same time, while corrugated metal has largely replaced thatch, and concrete is taking the place of wood and bamboo, and while modern houses are increasingly constructed atop a foundation of stones and cement rather than being raised above the ground on wooden piles, like their more traditional counterparts, the newest buildings continue to display a basic binary division into a more public front half (*téda*) and a less accessible and more private rear section (*tolo*; see Forth 1991b). Rather than reflecting change in the fundamental structure, modern houses diverge from older dwellings mainly by the addition of components. These may include modules built onto the sides or back of the main body of the house, as well as separate structures (for example, kitchens built at the back or side of a house). Conforming to this description is the residence of Emiel Waso Ea, the Nage leader whose funeral provides the focus of the present discussion.

2. Nage mortuary ritual

As I demonstrated in an earlier description of Nage mortuary ritual (Forth 1993), component rites are mostly concerned with progressively removing the deceased's soul (*mae*) from the house, village, and other places associated with the person in life. To this end, survivors undertake a series of journeys,

each beginning at the deceased's house and ending in a return to the house. Just as the entire mortuary ceremony can be understood as an inclusive rite of passage, so component rites involve a series of passages. The several journeys can be summarized as follows:

(a) *Journey to the grave (formerly always inside the village)*

Nage prepare the deceased for burial in the back section (*tolo*) of the house, the part traditionally used for sleeping and cooking, but also for making offerings to spiritual beings (Forth 1991b). There the corpse is placed inside a wooden coffin², with the head (*ulu*) towards the back wall (*lulu*) and the feet pointing towards the front of the building. On the day of burial men seal the coffin and carry it out to the front of the house, where they turn it around so that the deceased proceeds head first to the place of burial. After burial, everyone returns to the house. Nage then perform a rite initiating a period of restriction (*ie*), isolating the closest relatives, who should remain inside the dwelling until the morning of the second day after burial. During this time the house may not be swept or otherwise cleaned, nor should the mourners wash or bathe. Restrictions are most strictly observed by a single principal mourner. Isolation of the mourners inside the house is accomplished by pouring water (*coe ae*) from a bamboo container on the right hand of the principal mourner (*pamo lima*) and then in a line along the front of the house, where the other mourners are seated in a row. The container is then discarded in the direction of the setting sun.

(b) *Journey to a stream outside the village*

After the day of restriction (*ie*), the mourners, led by the principal mourner, leave the house and village early in the morning, before sunrise, and proceed to a nearby river or stream, where they perform a 'water-throwing' ritual (*libha ae*, 'to cast water behind oneself'). Facing the direction of the rising sun, each mourner dips a leaf in the stream, crumples it and tosses it over his right shoulder, thus in the direction of the setting sun. They may then wash their faces and hands. Returning to the village, each of the mourners brings from the stream a stone to place on top of the grave. Before they re-enter the settlement, however, a functionary places a bamboo trough containing prickly plants and noxious substances on the ground just outside the village gate way (see Forth 1993:45, plate 2).³ As the mourners enter the village, each steps right foot first over the trough, while the last in the procession kicks it

² In recent times, plank coffins have begun to replace hollowed-out kapok tree trunks. In earlier times, Nage say, kapok trunks were reserved for high-ranking adults, while other bodies were buried wrapped in leaf mats.

³ Contrary to the description in my 1993 paper, where indigo leaves and goat droppings are listed among the contents, the bamboo trough employed on this occasion contained only pieces

backwards with his heel. Nage explain this act as a means of preventing the deceased's soul (*mae*) from re-entering the village with the mourners, and as 'placing a boundary on death' (Forth 1993:44). By thus separating the deceased's closest relatives from his soul, which by implication shared the house with the mourners for the two nights following burial, the main period of restriction is formally brought to an end.

After re-entering the house, all the mourners seat themselves in the rear section of the building, where they are given small pieces of the leaf of a plant named *sau* (possibly *Leea indica*). These they chew, spit into their hand, and throw away over their shoulders. Other *sau* leaves are then cooked with rice to make a thin gruel, which the mourners consume. Afterwards, pieces of the stem of the *sau* are cut in the shape of beads – as many as there are mourners who took part in the water-throwing rite – and threaded onto a length of string, which is then tied to the wrist of the principal mourner (*pete sau*). By wearing the *sau* bracelet, this person is bound to observe other prohibitions until completion of the final mortuary rites described under (d) below.⁴

(c) *Journey to the deceased's garden and granary (outside the village)*

Later on the same day, the mourners perform a ritual 'to drive away the soul' (*'éga mae*). Leaving the village, people proceed to a field owned by the deceased. This is entered by one man, who, proceeding counter-clockwise, casts reeds, regarded as spirit spears, in each of the corners. When this is done, an elderly female relative enters the deceased's granary (*bo*), performs a dirge and, with her back towards the entrance, kicks portions of food onto the ground with her heel.⁵ The procedure thus appears to replicate the actions of the last person to return from the stream, who, after stepping over the bamboo container placed at the village gateway, similarly kicks it backwards and thus towards the exterior of the settlement.

of a single prickly plant (*foci 'eke*). One informant attending the 1994 funeral claimed that leaves of the *mo api* (another plant with burrs) and the *hebu* tree (*Cassia fistula*) should have been included as well.

⁴ According to earlier accounts of traditional mortuary rituals (Forth 1993), the procedures involving the *sau* plant might actually take place on the day of *ie*. In the case discussed here, however, I never heard this raised as a criticism of what in fact took place, and I therefore assume that the timing may be variable.

⁵ In the 1994 ritual the woman threw a package of maize skin filled with maize kernels, rice grains and peanuts onto the ground. According to one man, she should have performed the dirge in each of the four interior corners of the building before doing so. In this particular case, the structure selected to serve as the deceased's granary faced towards the back of the house, thus roughly eastwards, in the same direction as the house itself. Granaries in general, which in former times as well were often constructed outside villages, are, however, variously disposed; hence in this context, as in others, it seems that reversal, rather than orientation to any particular direction, is the significant principle.

As indicated by the name of the procedure, the purpose of *'éga mae* is to expel the soul from places with which the deceased was associated in life. Implicit in their performance is the idea that, after being prevented from returning to the deceased's dwelling, the soul takes up residence in his gardens or granary. Once the rites are completed, the living may take food from these places without fear of the soul following them back to the house.⁶ While the ghost may be encountered in some perceptible form before this time, Nage say that such manifestations should not occur after the completion of *libha ae* and *'éga mae*.

(d) *Journey to the western edge of the village*

After thus 'expelling the soul', Nage perform no further rites until after seven nights have passed. Several rituals are then conducted on the day following the seventh night. Generally called *ngeku* ('to wash the hair'), these begin early in the morning, when the mourners rub grated coconut in their hair as an act of cleansing. The first to do so is the principal mourner. Immediately afterwards, this person proceeds to the western edge of the village – the side facing the sunset (in the Bo'a Wae region, normally a place behind the houses on the *mena* side of the village) – and removes the bracelet made of pieces of *sau* stem, usually by looping it over something and giving it a tug. If the hair is not cleansed before this is done, the soul of the deceased could later follow the mourner back to the house. Other mourners then apply coconut to their hair.

Late in the afternoon, the same group again proceeds to the western edge of the village, bringing with them containers filled with the dregs of the coconuts. As they face east, a functionary places dregs on the back of their right hands and on top of their right feet. When the command is given, all cast the dregs backwards, projecting them in the direction of the setting sun. The mourners then return to the house. There each person takes a betel leaf, tears it in two, chews and swallows one half, and then discards the other half (conceived as being for the deceased).⁷ These two acts are explained as com-

⁶ Contrary to my published description (1993), in 1994 the rite conducted at the 'granary' preceded the rite in the field, but it is not clear whether this was considered to be an incorrect order. Performance of the water-throwing ritual and the rites to drive away the soul (*'éga mae*) on the same day – a combination described with the phrase *bo lowo* (literally 'granary and river') – appears to be the norm in the Bo'a Wae region. The *'éga mae* may alternatively be performed on the day following the water-throwing rite, however, thus making the funerary period, reckoned from the burial to the final rites, ten days long (*kobe sa bulu*). Although in the context of this particular funeral some participants claimed that this should be the case when the deceased is a person of high rank, both kinds of rite were in fact performed on the same day.

⁷ Although I never heard any specific interpretation of the act of swallowing the betel leaf, since betel is normally spat out – as is the *sau* leaf in an earlier mortuary rite – swallowing it could be construed as signifying finality and closure.

pleting the separation of the deceased from his living relatives and as facilitating his departure to the afterworld. The mortuary period is thereby brought to an end (*zebu kobe*, 'the nights are finished').

Especially the act of casting materials backwards in the direction of the sunset connects the final rites of *ngeku* with the water-throwing ritual conducted outside the village two days after the burial. Indeed, the final ritual may be understood as completing or confirming what was initiated, if not entirely accomplished, in the water-throwing ritual. In this way, Nage mortuary rites display a repetitive quality characteristic of ritual in general (Tambiah 1981), whereby subsequent acts appear to repeat what participants say was achieved by an earlier act. The point to be emphasized here, however, is that all these mortuary ceremonies are spatially organized with reference to the traditional village conceived as a bounded place, and to the house insofar as this is subsumed by a village. At the same time, much is obviously made of the opposition of sunset and sunrise (associated with the contrast of dead and living respectively), which circumstance, to a degree, allows modern Nage to articulate funerary rituals without reference to any built structure.

3. The funeral of E. Waso Ea

The part played by the village in defining various outward journeys and associated ritual acts naturally raises the question of what happens when the house of the deceased is not located inside a village. From here onward I refer specifically to the funeral of E. Waso Ea.

Despite its complexity, the house in which Waso Ea awaited burial still corresponds in its central structure to a traditional dwelling divided into a front and back section. As is usual, the deceased was removed to the back section, in this case normally employed as a sitting-room and reception area, where he rested in a plank coffin supported by a bedstead. There the coffin remained for two and a half days before being buried in the afternoon of Sunday, 10 July 1994. With the deceased's head towards the back wall of the rear part of the house, his physical disposition thus corresponded to that of a corpse prepared for burial in a traditional house and village.

In other ways as well, the indigenous procedures were quite straightforwardly adapted to a transformed built environment. Nevertheless, there were noteworthy differences from indigenous funerary procedures. For one thing, Waso Ea's funeral included an additional journey. The deceased's house in Hobo occupies a site some 200 metres outside, and mostly to the west of, the old village of Bo'a Wae. Located on the north side of the Flores highway, the front of the building faces a secondary road running roughly south to north, so that the house in effect occupies a corner lot. The additional

journey occurred immediately before burial, an affair elaborated with a Catholic ceremony, as in most funerals at present. Prior to the Christian service, the coffin was taken out of the deceased's house as it would have been in order to be carried directly to the grave site. However, it was then placed in the back of a lorry and, preceded by a motorcade of smaller vehicles, was driven to Bo'a Wae village. On arrival, the deceased was carried into the front gallery of the large house located at the head of the village, the residence of the last Nage rajah and natural father of the deceased. There the coffin was set atop a bedstead that had been placed parallel to the house front, with the head pointing to the *mena* (west) side of the village. Removing the lid that had been temporarily placed on the casket, the mourners crowded around to view the corpse once again. Amid much weeping and keening, Catholic prayers were said and a number of relatives gave speeches bidding the deceased a final farewell and asking forgiveness for any displeasure they might have caused him in life. This was a short ceremony, lasting no more than thirty minutes. Afterwards the coffin was returned to the lorry and driven back to the deceased's house. There it was set down immediately in front of the building, with the deceased's head towards the grave site, where the Christian burial service was to take place.

A part of the landward extremity of the village plaza directly in front of the large house in Bo'a Wae is occupied by the graves of the Nage rajahs, Waso Ea's father and grandfather. Also buried there is his elder brother. That Waso Ea resided in the house in Hobo, and was buried beside this house, followed from his adoption, as an infant, by his father's sister and her husband, whose marital home this was. While his natural father and elder brother were members of the ruling Nage clan Deu, Waso Ea himself was thus primarily a member of his adoptive father's clan, Mudi.⁸ Since the death of his elder brother in the 1970s, however, he had come to identify himself, and to be identified by others, more and more as the leader of clan Deu.⁹ Nevertheless, his affiliation with Mudi had not lapsed, and a representative of this clan was included among the main group of mourners. As was pointed out at the time, the funerary procedures had to take into account the fact that the deceased 'had two clans', and it was partly for this reason that E. Waso Ea,

⁸ When bridewealth is paid, children are normally affiliated to the clan of their father. Traditionally, however, a woman's brother may ask to adopt one of her sons, and the sister and her husband are then under some obligation to grant the request. The adoption of Waso Ea, not by his mother's brother but by his father's sister, is locally described as an unorthodox inversion of this practice.

⁹ It may also be significant that the mortuary prestations owed to wife-givers were given to the natal group of Waso Ea's natural mother and mother's mother. At the same time, they could not have been presented to the group of his adoptive mother, as she was his father's sister, and hence a woman whose natal group was his own father's.

while buried in the compound of what was in effect a house of clan Mudi, was first taken, as it were for a final visit, to the principal residential house of clan Deu.¹⁰

It is noteworthy that, after this visit, the corpse was transported straight from the house in Bo'a Wae to the site of the outdoor burial service in Hobo and was not taken back inside the deceased's house of residence. In other words, Waso Ea was taken direct from a house of clan Deu to be buried next to a house of clan Mudi – an arrangement which recognized the Nage leader's affiliation to both clans. In every other respect the journey to the deceased's natural father's house can be seen simply as an additional rite, inserted into the indigenous funerary programme in much the same way as are Catholic rites.¹¹ The temporary removal of the deceased from his residence moreover was not bound up with changes in settlement pattern per se, even though it does reflect an adoption which, by pre-colonial standards, was unusual if not unorthodox (see note 8).

If the additional journey to the deceased's father's house was a deliberate and successful adaptation to unusual, if not exactly modern, circumstances, other deviations from indigenous funerary procedures were arbitrary and unplanned and, furthermore, negatively received. Indeed, throughout the mortuary period (10-19 July), relatives and followers of the deceased regularly complained that things were not being done properly. A particularly telling instance, and probably the most serious one, concerned the water-throwing ritual (*libha ae*), performed early in the morning after the mourners' day of confinement.

As is not unusual, the journey from the house to the stream took place in pitch darkness, a circumstance which on this occasion caused practical difficulties, owing perhaps to an increasing Nage reliance on artificial light, and generally detracted from the fluency of the procedure. A further problem was that the only place available for the ritual was the bank of a shallow stream which, in recent years, several Muslim families, mostly immigrants, have begun using as a place to defecate. For this reason it is now locally dubbed 'Shit River' (Lowo Ta'i), and mourners were, not surprisingly, reluctant to dip their hands into the water and to wash there. This obstacle to ritual efficiency was itself the product of settlement change of a specific kind: the movement

¹⁰ Membership of two – or even more – clans is not novel among Nage; nor is it a result of recent social change. In this regard, it is rather ironic that during his lifetime Waso Ea always insisted to me that it was impossible, in principle, for a person to belong to more than one clan.

¹¹ While Catholic rites are conducted mostly on the day of burial, modern Nage continue to recite prayers, sing hymns and burn candles during the nights following the burial, until the final traditional rites are completed. In fact, prayers may be said for the deceased and candles lit nightly on the grave, or in a shrine set up in the house, for months, or, as in the case discussed here, even years after the death.

Figure 2. Spatial context of mortuary rites performed for E. Waso Ea in Bo'a Wae (arrows indicate route to the site of the water-throwing ritual, *libha ae*)

Figure 3. The house of the deceased

of Muslims to the region and their building houses, and a small mosque, close to the stream. However, for the participants in the water-throwing ritual most consternation was caused by the requirement of stepping over the bamboo trough when returning to the house.

As noted, this must be done in order to prevent the dead from re-entering the village. Since there was no village, and hence no village gateway outside of which to place the bamboo container, participants had to decide what should constitute the relevant boundary in this case. One might suppose that the perimeters of the yard enclosing the deceased's house could have been used for this purpose. This yard has a number of entrances, however, and none corresponds unambiguously to a (landward or seaward) village gateway.

Shortly before proceeding to the river, the mourners had assigned the task of putting the bamboo container in place to an elderly ritual functionary. But apparently what instructions he may have been given were not clearly communicated or received. As it later transpired, a number of senior men thought the trough should have been placed at the beginning of the path leading to the stream, on the opposite (south) side of the main road from the deceased's house (see Figure 2). One can appreciate how this spot might just be construed, in relation to the house, as a reasonable substitute for a landward (or upstream) village gateway. In the event, however, the elderly ritualist placed the bamboo container on the northern edge of the main road, perpendicular to the roadway, and some distance westward of a narrow entrance leading into the house yard (see Figure 2).

No one expected to re-enter the yard by this small entrance. This is not surprising, since the mourners had left the house by the front door and through the main gateway, located moreover in closer proximity to the beginning of the path leading to the stream (see Figure 3). Returning from the stream by way of this path, in order to step over the bamboo container before re-entering the front door of the house, people had – or would have had – to walk about 50 metres down the main road, turn 180 degrees to step over the object, and then walk back up the road, eastwards, towards the house – all in the dark.

Why the old functionary placed the container where and as he did I was never able to discover, partly because the man (not the most competent of local functionaries at the best of times) was abruptly castigated for his conduct and later was not prepared to talk about it. One possibility is that he took his bearings from the course of the river flowing from the spot where the *libha ae* was conducted, which by definition corresponds to the same landward-seaward axis as does a rectangular village (see Figure 2). More likely, though, his decision reflected a perception of the modern east-to-west roadway as a village plaza, as is suggested by the fact that he placed the bamboo trough perpendicular to the road. Relevant in this connection is the regular

use of village plazas as pathways when travelling in a landward or seaward direction, as well as the fact that some modern roads running in these directions (thus, roughly north and south) in effect bisect the central plazas of pre-existing settlements. In addition, modern houses facing one another on opposite sides of a road obviously replicate the form of a traditional village. Although Waso Ea's house was actually not so disposed in relation to the main east-west highway, it would seem pertinent in this regard that the main entrance to the building is placed not in the front wall but unconventionally in the long side wall facing the road. Whatever the reason for the elderly ritualist's action, many participants were unable to find the container in the dark, and therefore did not in fact step over it before returning to the house. Although it was discovered in time for several to do so, and for the last in the party to kick the object backwards with his heel, the general feeling was that the procedure had been thoroughly botched.

Although milder than in the foregoing case, further controversy followed after mourners returned to the house to participate in the rite involving the *sau* plant. In the event, bits of leaf were passed round to the assembled mourners in a clockwise or 'leftward' direction, which in the opinion of some was incorrect (see Forth 1993:49 for further details of this contrast). Moreover, when pieces of the stem were tied to the principal mourner's wrist, some thought they should have been placed on the right wrist (as would accord with earlier accounts, see Forth 1993:43), whereas the bracelet was in fact bound around the individual's left wrist. Although not mentioned by participants, another anomaly may be perceived in the circumstance that, after chewing bits of the leaf, the mourners spat these out and threw them over their left shoulders, in contrast to the leaves ejected in the previous water-throwing ritual, which were cast over the right shoulder. As noted, the right hands and right feet are also used in the final rites described above, while in the first rite after burial, water is poured on the principal mourner's right hand.

With regard to the unsatisfactory outcome of the water-throwing ceremony ending the mourners' period of confinement, a general view of Nage mortuary ideology suggests, as a possible interpretation, that the dead soul had not been properly separated from the house or from the mourners, even though no one articulated this sentiment at the time. To the extent that mourners openly expressed concern about the efficacy of the rites at all, they spoke instead of the deceased becoming angry that his funeral had not been executed properly and exacting punishment in the form of crop failure. As shown in the summary of the rituals given earlier, there is in fact no rite that specifically expels the soul from the house. Rather, this is accomplished by a procedure intended to prevent its re-entry into the village as a whole. The rites called '*éga mae*', performed subsequent to the water-throwing ritual, remove the deceased's soul from his garden and granary, also traditionally

located outside the village. Yet in the present instance the places employed for these purposes – a small plot adjacent to the house (and indeed as close to the house as are the modern graves) and a storage structure located behind the house – were both situated within the house yard. Therefore, even if these rites had had their proper effect, the soul could still have been quite close by, and perhaps even inside the house.

Possibly also relevant in this respect was the omission of an offering of food to the ancestors, described as a normal part of the final ceremonies (*ngeku*) and as a way of summoning previously departed spirits to come and fetch the soul of the recently deceased. That this was neglected may be explained partly by the fact that the deceased's house lacked an interior hearth, the part of a house where all such offerings to beneficent spirits should be made.¹² Whatever the reason, this omission appeared to be much less a matter for concern than the faulty execution of the rites conducted on the second day after burial. Noteworthy here is the value of these rituals as an important terminus in the mortuary procedure. Even if the dead soul still retains a foothold in the world of the living after this time – where, according to one local interpretation, it may simply hover in the air – the water-throwing ceremony and accompanying rites initiate a process of separation that is completed or confirmed, after a ritual hiatus, seven days later. With regard to local evaluations of these rites as having been conducted unsatisfactorily, it would appear significant that, even after they were performed, there continued to be reports of perceptible manifestations of the dead man's ghost in or near his residence – contrary to the general idea that ghosts should not be encountered after '*éga mae*'. Indeed, one manifestation in particular – the scent of a western men's cologne favoured by the deceased – was still being noticed by his widow until at least October 1996. Family members also reported being awakened in the deceased's house, months after the funeral, by a sensation of being touched by someone, the scent also being present as they awoke.¹³

¹² No traditional rites of offering of any sort have ever been performed inside this particular house; nor, so far as I am aware, has the separate kitchen built behind the house ever been deemed an appropriate substitute in this respect for the absent interior hearth. This is not to imply that Waso Ea and his family have not regularly participated in such rituals. Rites of offering benefiting clan Deu as a whole continue to be conducted in the old village of Bo'a Wae, and more particularly in Deu's cult house, the common property of the deceased's (natural) father's group. That this building was not used in the present context is explained by the requirement that all house rituals connected with a funeral should be performed in the dwelling of the deceased.

¹³ During the night of 16 July, thus several days after the '*éga mae*', I thought I heard a lot of banging about the house, including a rattling of doors and shutters (which were always locked at night), in the early hours of the morning. When I mentioned this to the deceased's adult daughters the following morning, they suggested that the noise was probably made by the dead

4. Conclusions

Judging from indigenous funerary procedures as described by ritual experts and as approximated in varying degrees at present, the funeral of E. Waso Ea displayed considerable continuity with the past, and the rites appeared, superficially at least, for the most part to have been performed accurately and adequately. It might therefore be concluded that changes in the built environment of Bo'a Wae have had relatively little effect, or less than one might expect, on indigenous funerary ritual. Even though the location of houses outside villages and in relation to modern roads has resulted in settlement reorientation – or perhaps better said, disorientation – Nage have largely been able to accommodate their mortuary rites to a transformed built environment. One factor favouring this accommodation is the prominence of the east/west (or sunrise/sunset) contrast as a mortuary theme, since this can be articulated as easily outside villages as it can inside. In fact, it is even possible to use the main motor road for this purpose.

Even so, it is unclear how long this continuity of tradition can be expected to last. One can well imagine how the performance of mortuary rites in new spatial surroundings may lead to increased uncertainty about their proper performance, thus promoting more radical change. The construction of houses outside villages has already had an effect on some Nage mortuary rites, more particularly those defined with reference to the contrast inside/outside as this applies to the village. If the major change with regard to modern dwellings is their location outside bounded villages oriented along a landward-seaward axis, therefore, it seems significant that the ritual that is least readily adaptable to this change in residential organization – stepping over and kicking away a bamboo trough outside a major boundary – was the one which went most wrong at Waso Ea's funeral.

Consistent with the observable continuity in Nage funerary ritual, change in the built environment is arguably reflected less in the perceptible form of traditional procedures than in participants' assessment of their performance as being incorrect or otherwise unsatisfactory. It perhaps goes without saying that connected with their dissatisfaction was a perception that the ceremonies were lacking in efficacy. Expressing this another way, one might say that this perception had less to do with the objective content of rites than

soul trying to regain entry to the house. Though they had heard nothing, they remarked that one or two days earlier, the sound of someone bathing had been heard coming from the deceased's favourite bathing-place, but when this was investigated no one had been found there. In this connection the women expressed the opinion that the soul was probably still close by, a possibility they linked with the sudden and unexpected nature of the death (although diagnosed a year earlier as a diabetic and as suffering from high blood pressure, the deceased was not ill immediately prior to his death, which appears to have been caused by a major heart attack).

with the subjective experience of their participants. Thus the rituals, even if they were executed in conformity with older models, were experienced as less meaningful in the modern setting or as possessing a different meaning.

It is unlikely, therefore, that dissatisfaction or anxiety was caused solely by rites being performed badly, as in the case of the ritual crossing of the bamboo trough. Even so, one cannot infer that rituals performed in a more traditional setting, including an older spatial arrangement of indigenous houses and villages, are (or were) always experienced as being efficacious. Ghosts of the dead should not be perceptible after the soul has been ritually separated from the village and other places on the second day after the burial. Yet this does not mean that, even after the most efficiently executed funerals, close relatives will not continue to experience the dead as a presence still close by. Sentiment does not always conform to the logic or ideology of ritual and may at any time result in statements or behaviour contradicting the latter (see Traube 1986:204, 205).¹⁴ Stated another way, ritual efficacy as a subjective experience – involving a consensus that a rite has been executed correctly and has fulfilled its proper aim – is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of factors, and moreover is often not decided until well after the performance (as, for example, when the improper performance of a rite is later interpreted as the cause of misfortune).

In the present case, dissatisfaction followed not just from incorrect execution, but from what some ritualists judged to be an omission of certain elements, including the above-mentioned food offering to the ancestors. Complaints were also voiced about the failure of certain mourners, most notably the deceased's two half-brothers (who missed even the water-throwing ceremony), to take part in all the rites, and about the fact that different rites were led or conducted by different individuals. As this would suggest, Waso Ea's funeral generally suffered from a lack of leadership and coordination unconnected with recent changes in the Nage built environment. It is also unlikely that a formally complete Christianization of the community will not have affected the perceived efficacy of traditional funerary ritual. Owing to the scale of conversion, a split between converts and non-converts cannot explain the absence or the inconsistent participation of relatives and other mourners mentioned just above.¹⁵ On the other hand, it is quite possible that the value of indigenous mortuary procedures is diminished or outweighed by a faith in the efficacy of Christian rites, or by a belief that virtuous souls will attain afterlife regardless of how correctly any sort of ritual is

¹⁴ Traube (1986:205) describes how the Mambai of Timor often postpone or incompletely perform their final mortuary ceremony owing to continuing emotional attachment to the deceased, thus, as she puts it, subordinating 'cosmological conviction' to feelings of 'personal loss'.

¹⁵ This contradicts the suggestion of an anonymous reviewer, whose evaluation and comments I nevertheless gratefully acknowledge.

performed. By the same token, interest in maintaining traditional mortuary rites may to a large extent have a different basis, for example a commitment to preserving local custom for reasons that are neither religious nor even particularly 'cultural'. However that may be, specific influences of Catholic theology and ritual on modern Nage funerary ceremonies cannot be simply assumed. Thus, while Nage have learned that dead souls go to heaven and live with God, many continue to speak of the afterlife in conformity with an indigenous conception of a not-so-distant 'village of the dead' (*bo'a ata mata*) to which a deceased person is admitted only after mortuary rites have been completely, and properly, executed.

A few qualifications aside, it is clear how changes other than those affecting house form and settlement pattern are relevant to negative local assessments of the mortuary rites conducted on behalf of E. Waso Ea. At the same time, alterations to the built environment played a distinct and significant part. Although the failure of the group of mourners to remain properly constituted throughout the mortuary period might be ascribed to a pre-existing lack of social cohesion, it is also significant that many of them resided in modern houses some distance from the house of the deceased, yet not so distant that they could not return home for the night or attend to other tasks. In a more traditional context, mourners would reside in one and the same bounded village or, if they did not, would move temporarily to the village of the deceased before the burial. If the peripheries of a village, considered as both a spatial and a social whole, represent a significant physical boundary articulating the separation of the dead soul from its living relatives, then one might indeed question whether Nage can ever again experience crucial ceremonies like the water-throwing ritual and the rites for 'expelling the soul' (*'éga mae*) as being entirely effective.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Observations on which this essay is based were recorded during a visit to Flores in 1994. Other information on traditional Nage funerals, settlement form, and orientation was collected during earlier visits sponsored by the Indonesian Academy of Sciences (LIPI), initially in 1984 and 1985. This paper is a revised version of one read at the conference entitled 'Transformations of Houses and Settlements in Western Indonesia' held 18-21 June 1997 at the University of Leiden. I am grateful to the conference organizers for allowing me to publish the paper separately from other contributions, and especially to Mr. Gaudenz Domenig for helpful suggestions for revision. Funding for travel to Indonesia was provided at various times by the Central Research Fund of the University of Alberta and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

REFERENCES

- Forth, G., 1991a, 'Nage directions; An eastern Indonesian system of spatial orientation', in: O. Gron et al. (eds), *Social space; Human spatial behaviour in dwellings and settlements*. Odense: Odense University Press.
- , 1991b, *Space and place in eastern Indonesia*. Canterbury: Centre of South-East Asian Studies, University of Kent.
- , 1993, 'Ritual and ideology in Nage mortuary culture', in: Tong Chee Kiong and A. Schiller (eds), *Social constructions of death in Southeast Asia*, pp. 37-61. [Special issue of *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 21-2.]
- Fox, J.J., 1993, 'Memories of ridge-poles and cross-beams; The categorical foundations of a Rotinese cultural design', in: J.J. Fox (ed.), *Inside Austronesian houses; Perspectives on domestic designs for living*. Canberra: Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University.
- Geertz, C., 1973, 'Ritual and social change; A Javanese example', in: *The interpretation of cultures*, Chapter 6. New York: Basic Books.
- Parkin, D., 1992, 'Ritual as spatial direction and bodily division', in: D. de Coppet (ed.), *Understanding rituals*. London / New York: Routledge.
- Tambiah, S.J., 1981, *A performative approach to ritual*. London: British Academy.
- Traube, E.G., 1986, *Cosmology and social life; Ritual exchange among the Mambai of East Timor*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Waterson, R., 1990, *The living house; An anthropology of architecture in South-East Asia*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.