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## **Sacrificial Food, the Person and the Ritual System of the Gadaba<sup>1</sup>**

*by Peter Berger*

### **Introduction**

All concepts mentioned in the title of this paper are highly problematic and it would probably not be very difficult to find social scientists who claim that one or other of the cited categories should be abandoned from academic discourse. Although each of the terms is in danger of being deconstructed or has already been questioned (e.g. Barraud and Friedberg 1996 on sacrifice) the present paper ventures to consider sacrificial food, the person and the ritual system together because the Gadaba of southern Orissa think of these domains as being very much interrelated. My aim is thus to trace these interrelations and describe the way in which, among the Gadaba, social persons are created and transformed within life-cycle rituals that focus on the preparation and consumption of different types of ritual or sacrificial food. Life-cycle rituals are connected with the wider framework of the ritual system, i.e. the collective sacrifices at village shrines during seasonal festivals. In the latter contexts, communion of sacrificial food between men and gods of the village are crucial for the maintenance of proper social relations, group identity on several levels, and the permanence of society in general.

By ritual system I mean a set of interrelated and interdependent elements (ritual acts) integrated into a coherent and ordered whole. The entity or whole may consist of sub-systems or sub-wholes, which are ordered hierarchically. Thus life-cycle rituals are embedded into the cycle of the collective village rituals. The idea of a cyclical movement corresponds to the perception of time, since seasons, agricultural activities, rituals and the flow of life are of a recurrent and alternating quality. By talking of life-cycle rituals or collective village rituals, I am referring to an indigenous model: the Gadaba themselves strongly have the idea that their rituals are ordered and interconnected. This becomes clear when, for example, they stress the proper sequence of rituals, or state that only a married man is eligible to participate in the communion of sacrificial food in village rituals. Nevertheless, the indigenous model can be a matter for negotiation and interpretation among the participants themselves. As such, in the hands of the anthropologist, it becomes an abstracted model of analysis and comparison.

In the following I will first introduce some ideas on sacrifice and the concept of the person. Asserting that Robertson Smith's theory may still be of value for the study of sacrifice

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is based on twenty-one months of field research between January 1999 and April 2001. Funding was provided by the FAZIT foundation and the German Research Foundation (DFG). My gratitude also to my friends and colleagues Arlo Griffiths and Noel Smith, who made valuable comments and corrections on the

I will highlight some of his arguments. The concept of the person is of more recent interest in anthropological theory. Although introduced to the discipline by Mauss as early as 1938, the topic only gained currency in the 1980s, particularly through the collection of essays edited by Carrithers and others (Carrithers et al. 1985). For my considerations of the person I mainly rely on the ideas of André Iteanu (1990) expressed in an article on the ritual system of the Orokaiva of Papua New Guinea. After this brief theoretical introduction I will describe some features of the ethnographic context, especially the main social units relevant for understanding the rituals, before outlining the features of sacrificial and ritual food. I will then detail the different steps of the life-cycle rituals, focussing on the role of food in the process of creating the social relations which make up the social person. In conclusion, the position of Smith and Iteanu will be set up against the background of the Gadaba material, and the relatedness of the different sub-systems within the overall ritual structure will be emphasized, as the issue of sacrificial food and identity will be raised.

## **II. Sacrifice, food and the person**

Sacrifice occupies an outstanding position in the *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* of William Robertson Smith, first published in 1889. While his contribution to the subject is frequently subsumed under the aspect of sacrificial commensality and communion (e.g. Bourdillon 1980), others (Evans-Pritchard 1981, Beidelman 1974) concede a more general importance to Smith's work, even regarding him as the "founder of modern sociology of religion" (Beidelman 1974: 68). For the present purpose I will indulge in neither a general debate of theories of sacrifice nor in a detailed critique of the *Lectures*.<sup>2</sup> I want instead to emphasise only three major aspects of Smith' work as relevant to the ethnographic material presented here: the relationship between society and religion; sacrifice or, more generally, ritual; and the social relevance of the 'natural' acts of preparing food and eating.

Although his book is mainly on the Semitic religion, he argues that his findings are generally valid for all "early", "ancient" or "primitive" peoples, be they Hebrew, Bedouin or others. In primitive societies, Smith says, the only type of community which is sacred and absolute is the kinship group. "Primitive man" thinks of his world in two classes: kin or potential friends, and non-kin or potential enemies (Smith 1997: 254). Kinship is therefore of absolute value, without differences of degree (ibid.: 255) and every individual grows up in a

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manuscript. Finally my deepest gratitude goes to my Gadaba friends in Koraput who made me understand a little bit of their culture.

<sup>2</sup> For example I do not deal here with Smith's theory of development of different sacrificial forms, his considerations on matriarchate or the totemistic aspect of sacrifice. Beidelman (1974) has discussed these issues in detail.

web of rights and obligations, which are self-understood and unquestioned. Kinship in primitive societies is not limited to humans: it includes the gods as part of its ‘natural’ state. Religion is part of the social organization. That relations to humans and relations to gods are just two sides of the same social system or lifestyle, Smith goes on, is taken literally by primitive man. Collective action is always directed towards gods and men, there is no separation between religion and “ordinary life” (ibid.: 30f). Since this form of religion is based on kinship, kinship and the sacred are one and the same (ibid.: 271).

In his evolutionistic conception of society, Smith is in accordance with the spirit of his time. However, as far as the relationship of myth and ritual is concerned he does not assume a mainstream position. Against the “Intellectualists”, like Tylor, Müller and Frazer, who are mainly interested in early religions as an expression of “primitive philosophy”, Smith proposes priority of ritual over myth. Although myths might be seen to take their place, Smith says, it is secondary to ritual action, which is the central part of primitive religion. Ritual, especially sacrifice, is prior and primary to myth, which has only an explanatory function. Belief and myth are subject to change and are not obligatory while sacred action, according to tradition, expresses the basic ideas and represents the persistent and binding core of religion (ibid.: 19f).

The ultimate expression of kinship between men and gods is the sacrificial meal that periodically declares and renews their sacred relationship. Ties created through a common meal, Smith states, are as such stable. Religion just confirms and supports this ‘natural’ act (ibid.: 207). Further, kinship is understood as a shared substance. After an infant is weaned from its mother’s milk, it is the community itself which nurtures its members jointly with the communal meal and thus constitutes and confirms kinship ties as physical relations (ibid.: 253ff).

While the article of Iteanu (1990) on the person is separated by more than hundred years from the *Lectures* of Smith it is nevertheless located in the same sociological tradition. Via the links of Dumont, Mauss and Durkheim, Smith can be regarded as Iteanu’s distant academic ancestor. Following Iteanu, the Orokaiva conceive of the person in a quite different way than “Western” societies normally do. While the latter see persons as discrete and autonomous essences that imply a strong and one-dimensional subject-object distinction, Orokaiva society has a pronounced relational perspective on the person in which the subject-object signification depends on the ritual context. All elements, whether gods, animals, things or humans, are only defined in relation to the superior and all-encompassing ritual system. If

any such two elements occupy a similar position in relation to the ritual system, they are seen as identical. “Thus subjects do not possess ontological identity in the Western sense; their identity is rather defined as a conjunction of ritually created social relations” (ibid.: 38). From birth to death,

... a social person continues to ‘grow’ by accumulating relations each time he participates in a ritual. After his death, the process is reversed. The funeral ritual extinguishes one by one each of the relations that had a part in the constitution of the social person, and the deceased is thus transformed into an image (*ahihi*) (ibid.:40).

Essential in the constitution of social persons are exchanges of raw pork which are distributed in the final phase of each ritual. The giver does “ritual work” (ibid.: 44) on the social person of the receiver, a favour which has to be reciprocated at a later date. Only after death, through the social person’s participation in his own death rituals – the point of his actual dissolution or transformation into an “image” - does he combine the full compliment of his social relations. Hence, a social person, while alive, is never complete (ibid.: 40), a difference to the Gadaba conceptions as will be seen. For the Orokaiva, every form of existence is in flux depending on rituals, which as Iteanu strongly reminds us, are no separate institutions, “but rather constitute a totality co-extensive with the realm of relations, that is, with the entire social universe.” (ibid.: 50) This would indicate that there are no relations outside the configuration which he would, for comparative purposes, propose to call “ritual system”.

The Orokaiva case as described by Iteanu is an extreme example, where the individual is completely subsumed within the holistic ritual framework. Maurice Bloch also stresses the contrast between “our” concept of the “bounded individual” (1988: 15), where social relations are conceived only as external and the “unbounded person” in many other cultures.

For us different people are linked *merely* by “social” or “emotional” or “moral” relationships, but these relationships are not for us as real as those which exist between the component parts which make up the individual (ibid.: 16, original emphasis).

However, Bloch criticises the theoretical position that radically polarizes holism and individualism and thereby ignores the possible shades in between.

### III. Ethnographic setting

The Gutob speaking Gadaba or Boro Gadaba are part of the indigenous Desia population that inhabit the hills of the Eastern Ghats in southern Orissa, namely the Koraput District. Every individual grows up with the Desia dialect of Oriya as a second mother tongue and, in almost

all villages, Gutob speakers live side by side with other groups that only speak Desia.<sup>3</sup> According to administrative criteria, the Desia are classified into Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) by the government.

Before I describe the categories of ritual food and the life-cycle rituals specific to the Gadaba, it is necessary to provide a few words about the social structure of which they are part (*vide* Pfeffer 1997, 2001; Berger 2000, 2001a). In social, ritual and economic respects the village (*gã, ungom\**) is a most relevant entity. According to the general pattern, every village is dominated by one of the ST categories<sup>4</sup>, the people referring to themselves also as Adivasi. They are regarded as the spiritual and economic landowners or *roit* and are said to be the first settlers or *matia* (“earth-people”). All other village inhabitants, whether Adivasi or non-Adivasi, are distinguished as *upria*, those who came “later”.

In an ideal typical village, the Gadaba would all belong to the same patrilineal clan (*bõso*). Among the Boro Gadaba we find four different clans (Cobra, Tiger, Sun and Monkey) and according to our ideal type there would be several villages made up only of Cobra, Sun, Tiger or Monkey. The Gadaba of each village have a different name and may therefore be regarded as a type of ‘subclan’. Each of these villages is in turn divided into four local lines<sup>5</sup> or *kuda*-groups holding one of the following titles: Sisa, Kirsani, Munduli and Boronaik. These groups again segment into several smaller units, which are also called *kuda* and generally consist of a group of ‘real’ brothers. The smallest social unit is the house (*gor, dien\**).

Unlike in the classical ‘African’ cases, descent is not the only important feature in the Desia social structure. Ancestors do not play any important role as a genealogical focus and pedigrees are not remembered. Generally, clan-members conceive of themselves as ‘brothers’, in opposition to all others, deemed marriageable non-brothers. Genealogical reckoning is irrelevant. Although the names of *kuda* categories span across village boundaries, *kuda* groups, as units of social action, are only significant in intra-village contexts. In contrast, clan membership defines intra- and inter-village relations.

As Weber shows (1947: 109f), we rarely encounter such ideal types in reality and they merely serve as analytical tools for the sociologist. In many Gadaba villages we find only two

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the text Gutob words are marked with “\*”, all other words are Desia.

<sup>4</sup> From among the ST or Adivasi categories the Boro or senior Gadaba have the Ollar or junior Gadaba, Joria, Kond, Parenga, Bonda, and Didaye among their neighbours.

<sup>5</sup> Leach (1961) introduced this term in the context of affinal exchange and it has been revived by Pfeffer (e.g. 2000). In Leach’s context ‘local line’ refers to diagrammatic representations of “local decent groups” (*ibid.*: 56f). The important difference with the notion of ‘lineage’ is that ‘local descent groups’ or ‘local lines’ depend on descent *and* locality. In systems where the genealogical bias of the ‘African’ lineage is lacking “local lines”,

or three of the four title groups and in some we find additional *kuda*-categories. Also, most big villages include members of different Gadaba clans and villages as internal affines of the indigenous dominant clan. Generally they do not own land and have a ritually inferior position in relation to the native clan. Thus the situation gets more complicated. Every village is related to all other villages of a different clan as affines. In addition, villages or sometimes *kuda*-groups of different villages are linked in terms of ‘brotherhood’. Three such collective and diachronic relationships are distinguished: *tsorubai*, *panjabai* and *moitr*. I want to introduce them briefly here because they will become relevant in the context of the life-cycle rituals.

*Tsorubai* are the most relevant of these relations for the purpose of this paper. When two groups are related as *tsorubai* or *tsoru*-“brothers” they have reciprocal ritual duties on specific occasions, especially life-cycle rituals, but also in the case of excommunication of a Gadaba. Their most prominent and frequent work is to prepare and often to feed the sacrificial food called *tsoru* to their *tsorubai*. *Panjabai* are much more rarely needed but they are nonetheless indispensable. It is mainly their task to finally free each other from the ‘spirits’ of the deceased (*duma*). This point will be discussed below. Different from *tsorubai* and *panjabai*, groups linked by the *moitr* relationship may be of different clans. Despite this, it is “taboo” (*dos*, *umrang*\*) to exchange brides between them and they are therefore conceived as ‘brothers’. When we look for the ‘function’ of the *moitr* relationship we are apt to be disappointed. Although they are always invited on important ritual occasions, they do not perform such obvious services as ritual cooking. They are just present, never demand anything from their hosts, but accept gifts humbly. The *moitr* relationship is considered to be very sacred and, because it is highly formalized, in day to day life *moitr* avoid visiting each other.

The social entities of village, local line and house are relevant not only for political or economic activities, they are also units of ritual action. In most rituals the Gadaba perform animals are killed as offerings (*bog*) to the gods (*maphru*), malevolent ‘demons’ (*soni* and *rau*) or the spirits of the dead (*duma*). Words for “ritual” including sacrificial killing are *puja*, *biru* or *gelgel*\*. Before humans consume the meat of the animals, some of it is cooked and along with rice given to the gods, demons or spirits. To make an offering is called *betisong* or *leno’bong*\*.

The ritual unity of a village is demonstrated during all seasonal festivals, most lucidly during the month of April (*chait*), when the village is closed to outsiders and trespassers have

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detached from Leach’s diagrammatic context, may be a useful tool. Among the Desia *kuda* refers to such an

to pay a toll (*pajor*). On all occasions of collective village sacrifices led by the Sisa group of the dominant clan, the village displays unity as well as its internal hierarchy. Two of the major places of sacrificial worship are the shrine of the village goddess (*hundi*) in the centre, and the shrine of the “big” or “senior house” (*boro gor, moro dien\**) outside the village boundaries. Members of the dominant clan have an agnatic (*bai*) relation to the village gods, since they initiated the relationship when they settled. Accordingly, internal affines say that their relation to the village gods is of an affinal nature (*bondu*). This status difference is articulated through the commensal rules which regulate the consumption of *tsoru*, which is cooked as part of all collective sacrifices. Without question all Desia of the village participate in each collective sacrificial ritual, but to a very different degree (*vide* Berger 2001a).

#### IV. *Tsoru* and ‘ritual rice’

*Tsoru* contains boiled rice and meat of a sacrificial animal. Cows, buffaloes, pigs, goats, sheep and chickens are sacrificed on different occasions, the gods being distinguished by what they eat. *Tsoru* is made from the victim’s head only, except when chicken are sacrificed, then the whole animal enters the *tsoru*. The rules prescribe *tsoru* to be cooked in a new earthen pot (*handi*) near the place of sacrifice or shrine. Those who cook, as well as those who consume *tsoru*, should have fasted on the day of the sacrifice. Who should cook and who is eligible to eat depends on the context. There are three interrelated domains in which *tsoru* is cooked and consumed.

First, as already mentioned, *tsoru* is prepared for all collective rituals at seasonal village festivals. In these contexts, the village priest (Pujari) performs the sacrifice<sup>6</sup> while the ritual cook (Randari) prepares the *tsoru*. The two always work together for the village as a whole and the Randari explained to me that they are like husband and wife, he himself occupying the female and junior position in relation to the Pujari. Whereas the collective sacrifices are taken care of by this ‘ritual couple’ at village festivals, every man performs sacrifices for his own house-god (*doron deli*) - the central wooden pillar of the house - and his wife cooks *tsoru*, which all household members consume jointly. Second, *tsoru* is cooked, served and sometimes directly fed to individuals at different life-cycle rituals. Pujari and Randari play no part in these contexts, but the sacrifice and cooking is done either by a ritual expert (*dissari*) or by agnatic and affinal kin of the person. Finally, the sacrifice of a cow or pig is required in cases of *jati*, i.e. excommunication from the “tribe” (*jati*). The temporarily excluded then have to be fed with *tsoru* by their *tsorubai* in order to rejoin the community.

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agnatic group with common residence (*vide* Pfeffer 1997, 2000; Berger 2000, 2001a).



Life-cycle rituals also include the consumption of a different type of cooked rice (*bat*) which is not considered as *tsoru*. Although part of a ritual process, this food (referred to with various names depending on the ritual context) is not part of a sacrifice and the regulations concerning *tsoru* – such as fasting and using a new earthen pot - are not valid. This food, consisting of cooked rice, fish and bamboo-sprouts, does not figure in collective rituals on village level but only during rites of passage. In the following I will refer to it as ‘ritual rice’ or ‘ritual food’ in contrast to ‘sacrificial food’ or *tsoru*.

## V. Life-cycle rituals

### *The Gadaba person*

Three aspects of a person may be distinguished: the human body (*deho, neri\**), an impersonal life-force or “breath” (*jibon* or *punda*) and a social quality.<sup>7</sup> During the transformations of a person in the course of the life-cycle rituals these parts have a different fate. At birth, the individual has a body and a life-force but not yet a social quality, which has to be constructed through ritual action. All three aspects make up the complete living person (*lok*). After death the complete person disintegrates. The body is quickly cremated and the social quality of the deceased is referred to as *duma*. For some time after death the *duma* is thought of as possessing life-force and in this condition the *duma* is dangerous to the living. After about a month the life-force attaches itself to the body of a woman to be reborn later. Then only the social quality remains. It is possible that two *jibon* are reincarnated in a single body. Such children are said to cry more, because the different *jibon* fight for the mother’s milk. As far as life-cycle rituals are concerned, most ritual activity is focussed on the social quality and only little on the life-essence or the body. Hence I will concentrate on the transformations and changes of social status the life-cycle rituals bring about, especially through the consumption of ritual rice and *tsoru*.

### *Steps towards personhood*

The birth (*jonom*) of a child in general takes place inside the house, at the same spot where people ideally should die. As soon as the woman is in labor, the midwife (*bandki dokri*) is called to deliver the child. Later, the umbilical cord and afterbirth are buried near the house and a flat stone is put on top, but no ritual (*biru*) is performed in the sense that no sacrifice

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<sup>6</sup> The actual killing is mostly done by a young man from the local line of the Pujari, i.e. the *Sisa kuda*.

<sup>7</sup> I am referring here to the indigenous classification. However, no Gadaba would be able spontaneously to describe such a scheme, which I have deduced from conversations as well as from observations of rituals. This holds especially for the social quality of a person. During lifetime this aspect is included in the general word for „human“, „man“ or „people“ (*lok*); after death it is more specifically described as *duma* (*vide* Berger 2001b).

takes place. While there is no *tsoru*, ritual rice is prepared. This *poti bat* is cooked by women of the neighbourhood, and jointly consumed by the midwife and all other people who had been present during delivery. The mother receives two plates, one for herself and another one for the newborn child, who is thus thought of as participating in the food. Until the day the child receives its name, he or she is bathed by the mother twice a day at the place where the umbilical cord has been buried.

### *Name-giving*

The name-giving ritual is performed on an odd-numbered day, the seventh or ninth day after birth. Should the infant die within this period (i.e. before name-giving), he or she would also be buried at the location of the umbilical cord and not cremated, as is the usual procedure for all individuals<sup>8</sup> after the name-giving ceremony. The names of the ritual (*sutok sorani* and *handi darani*) indicate that the period of impurity (*sutok*) is over and that the clay pot (*handi*), in which the bathing water for mother and child has been heated, is now thrown away.

The sacrificial ritual commences before sunrise at the 'burial place' of the umbilical cord. A ritual expert (*dissari*) performs the ritual in front of the stone, beside which the mother sits with her child. Although all gods are evoked the ritual is especially addressed to *soni* and *rau*, two principally malevolent spirits, who are a major source of illness and death. Several domestic animals (chicken, and a pig or goat) and wild animals (catfish and/or dove) are sacrificed. Along with a few grains of rice, a tiny portion of every animal<sup>9</sup> is cooked in a leaf over a small fire and then offered to the gods and spirits at the place of sacrifice. While the midwife later cleans clothes and utensils and performs purification rites for all members of the house, the men of the local line cut up the animals. Heads and liver are cooked as *tsoru* separately from the animals' bodies. After the ritual expert has given a name to the child, he does *betisong* inside the house<sup>10</sup> and then feeds the mother with *tsoru* and puts some of it in the hand of the infant. Then ritual specialist, midwife and senior members of the local line start eating *tsoru*, followed by the other men and women of the local line. Non-*tsoru* rice is distributed to all households of the village.

This ritual accomplishes several transformations. First, it finally disconnects the child from the umbilical cord and the place where it is buried. No further rituals are conducted at this spot and, should the infant die, she or he is not buried there, but cremated on the

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<sup>8</sup> People who died of smallpox or leprosy are an exception and are also buried.

<sup>9</sup> Often a piece of the gullet from the severed head.

<sup>10</sup> The offerings are placed on the threshold to the sacred room, at the fireplace, at the entrance to the house and in the yard – sometimes also near the sacred pillar of the house.

collective cremation ground. The ritual brings about the end of the pollution period, which has affected the houses of all village agnates and prevented affines and outsiders from eating in their houses. Moreover the child may now be touched by others and has received a name, which is of social and ritual relevance. Only if an individual has a name can he or she become the target of witchcraft. Finally, through the commensality of *tsoru* the child is officially incorporated within the local line. The additional distribution of cooked non-*tsoru* rice to all households is a declaration and recognition of the new village member. Thus for the child *sutok sorani* represents the entrance to the social world, the initial step in the process of increasing ‘socialness’. Lacking many other relations complete persons have, the infant is nevertheless attached to the basic social units of house and local line.

#### *Birth thread and first haircut*

However, the child’s existence is not immune to attack from malevolent forces. Therefore, one week after *sutok sorani*, around two weeks after birth, the malevolent spirits of *soni* and *rau* are again invoked on the day the “birth threads” (*jonom suta*) are tied around the infants neck and hip along with “medicine” (*oso, sindrong\**) to protect the child from evil influences. Prior to such protection, the child should not be moved beyond the realm of the house and village. A white chicken is presented and dedicated to *soni-rau* and then released. If *soni-rau* do not harm the child within the subsequent year and a half, the chicken will then be sacrificed for them. This promise (*manasik*) is fulfilled around the time the child begins to walk, in a ritual called *bal utrani* (“to lift the hair”). Outside the village, at a place where two footpaths cross, the animal is sacrificed by a ritual expert (*dissari*) and the child’s hair is cut for the first time, either completely or partially, and left within the sacrificial area, together with the birth thread from the neck.<sup>11</sup> The meat of the chicken is not cooked in a new pot and the food is not referred to as *tsoru*. However, the ritual expert does *betisong* inside the house of the child, i.e. he offers cooked rice and meat to the gods and then feeds the child with the same rice.

At about six months after birth, in between these two interconnected ritual sequences of *jonom suta* and *bal utrani*, the child begins to eat rice. This step is not accompanied by any ritual action and it could be argued that the Gadaba do not think of this step as important, since the child has previously already eaten *tsoru*, although not in a material way. However, there is significance attached to the ‘real’ consumption of rice. When a baby is born, it is still

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<sup>11</sup> The thread around the waist is only removed on the day of cremation.

associated with the realm of the dead (*duma*) and said to “play” (*keliba*) in the “community of the dead” (*duma kul*). That newborn children are smiling or laughing without an obvious cause and are unable to focus their eyes on somebody else is reported as proof of this fact. From every meal, a portion is put aside for the *duma* first, then the family members commence eating. This first rice is also referred to as *sig bat*. When a child starts to eat rice, everyday rice as well as sacrificial rice, it seems that the infant has loosened its ties with the world of the dead and is situated more firmly in the community of “people” (*lok*).

### *Completing the person*

Following the cutting of hair (*bal utrani*), the next regular phase of the life-cycle is marriage. In the process of accumulating social relations, marriage is a most decisive phase. In order to commence the marriage rituals, one should not be in debt to the extra-human sphere for promised sacrificial offerings. When a child is in danger of dying of fever, the parents consult a spirit medium and, on his advice, may promise to perform a *bato biba* (“path-marriage”) should the child recover. This promise may be redeemed only years after the infant has recovered but it has to happen before marriage. *Bato biba* is a very expensive and elaborate ritual which lasts for around three days and resembles the marriage procedure in many ways. It differs mainly in that it includes a whole night of dancing and playing of a multitude of gods, who are invoked and possess the body of a spiritual medium (*gurumai*). Several chickens and a black ram are sacrificed in front of the house of the child, and a white wether is sacrificed for *rau* before dawn outside the village. During the following day, the hair of the person in question is cut and the ritual expert feeds the whole family with *tsoru*. Although a more thorough analysis of the ritual is necessary, some basic features seem to be clear. The period between the promise of the ritual and its actual performance resembles the period between the “birth-thread” (*jonom suta*) ritual and the first haircut (*bal utrani*). In both cases, a promise (*manasik*) has been made to *soni-rau* on behalf the child by its family. During this time, the person is in an extraordinary situation and subject to certain prohibitions. The person’s hair may not be cut and he or she should not eat anywhere but in his or her own house. The *bato biba* disconnects the relationship between *soni-rau* and the person, and the debt is paid. Through the consumption of *tsoru*, the person re-enters the realm of the ordinary or profane and is set back on his or her path to complete the next step to personhood, the marriage (*biba*).

Before her actual marriage-ceremony, a woman has to accomplish the passage leading her away from her house of birth into that of her future husband. She will therefore be served her final *tsoru* (*ji-tsoṛu*<sup>12</sup>) of her father's house. From that day onwards, she can no longer receive the *tsoru* of her father's house, nor enter the sacred room or the attic of the same. The groom is not the subject to such change. When the young woman is first brought to the groom's father's house, the future couple is mouth-fed with ritual-rice (*tikdar bat*) by the members of the groom's family. Bride and bridegroom are then also made to feed each other.

In marriage, as in death rituals, the *tsoru* complex is the most conspicuous (at least for those concerned) and most important aspect of the proceedings, and in both cases the sacrifice of cattle is prescribed by the rules (*niom*). On the actual marriage day, the couple is provided with four or five different types of *tsoru* in the groom's village. Unlike the previous occasions (e.g. name-giving), here the *tsoru* is not fed by the ritual specialist but by members of different social relations, who also perform the sacrificial killing of the animals (chickens and cows). In front of the house, the couple is provided with *tsoru* by the village-clan members of the groom. This *tsoru* (*atri tsoru*) is shared within the local line. Later, the couple is called and in turn served with *tsoru* (*mamu tsoru*) by the two maternal uncles (*mamu*) of the couple and by the bride's father.<sup>13</sup> Finally, on the following day, the above mentioned *tsorubai* of the groom's local line prepare *tsoru* inside the sacred room of the house. This *tsoru* should only be eaten among the so-called *baro bai* ("twelve brothers"), which refers to clan members of twelve different villages who are said to have shared *tsoru* in mythical times.<sup>14</sup> No affine may attend this meal.

I have focussed on the consumption of *tsoru* in the marriage ritual because it is this aspect which is considered to be most effective and brings about the transformation of status. After a man is ritually married he is said to have a "name" (*nã*). He can now participate in every group activity and the totality of his social relations is the equivalent of the complete social person. Bride and groom have previously eaten the *tsoru* of their respective houses in the context of seasonal festivals and at the rituals of name-giving and possibly *bato biba*. However, during the marriage they are fed for the first time by their maternal uncles and their *tsorubai*. Although we may see these relationships as existing collectively before the wedding, for the two newly married persons these links are ritually activated only from then

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<sup>12</sup> The kinship term *ji* here means „daughter“, but it is also a term of address for ego's father's sister; i.e. signifies women of alternate generations leaving the village for marriage.

<sup>13</sup> Unless the groom's wife's-father (*satra*) and his mother's-brother (*mamu*) are identical.

<sup>14</sup> The „twelve brothers“ are very important as a category but it hardly takes shape as a group, which is joined in social or ritual action.

onwards. This is expressed in their participation in exchanges. The new couple set up a household and a hearth of their own and participate in the exchange of rice (cooked, husked or paddy), beer and liquor between houses within the village and beyond. Furthermore, since others can only accept *tsoru* from a ritually married person, only a married man may act as *tsorubai*.

Similarly, the couple's relationship with the gods has been transformed. A passive beneficiary of the sacrifices before his marriage, a married man becomes the sacrificer for his own house, communicating directly with the divine<sup>15</sup>, the *tsoru* being prepared by the woman of his house. Husband and wife become a junior mirror image of the village priest and his ritual cook. On the village level, the new household contributes money for the sacrificial animals and rice (*potri caul*) for the preparation of *tsoru* at the shrines of the gods in and around the village. The *tsoru* cooked at these shrines can only be consumed by young boys or married men from the dominant clan, whereas all others are excluded.

Although ideally every man and woman should ritually marry and receive the different types of *tsoru*, some cannot afford the expenses and remain unmarried even though they have children. In fact, the priest's son - in the village where I lived - had a wife and children without being ritually married. As a consequence, he cannot follow his father into office until this has been done. Nobody accepts *tsoru* cooked by him or his wife and he is not eligible to share *tsoru* at the village shrines together with the other men of the dominant clan. Thus, even though an unmarried man suffers no disadvantages in everyday life, his ritual capacities are limited and his social person remains rudimentary, lacking the ritual relations that are established through the commensality of *tsoru*.

#### *The process reversed: removing the dead*

*Tsoru* and ritual food have the capacity not only to build up the relations a social person consists of and to integrate him or her into society, but also to transform the person into a status beyond the realm of the living. A series of death rituals<sup>16</sup> aim at removing the social person from society, to disconnect the previous established relations.

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<sup>15</sup> This does not mean however that unmarried boys and girls may do have a ritual status in some contexts. On the contrary as junior counterparts of the priest (Pujari) his young son may perform a sacrifice along with him. In different rituals unmarried boys and girls are required in diverse ritual roles.

<sup>16</sup> In a different paper I have dealt in some detail on the transformations the death rituals accomplish (Berger 2001b).

Following a death, the *tsorubai* and the mother's brother (*mamu*) of the deceased are immediately informed and if possible the corpse is cremated on the same day.<sup>17</sup> In this procedure the *tsorubai* perform most ritual tasks. They cut the first wood, build the pyre and take a tiny clay pot of cooked rice, as *tsoru*, to the cremation ground to feed the *duma* – all on the day of the death.

The feeding of the *duma* by the *tsorubai* is repeated on the third day after death, when the period of impurity (*sutok*) ends. During a small ritual the *tsorubai* and then all family members offer rice (*tsoru* and ritual rice) and liquor to the deceased on the cremation ground and at his or her house. Inside the house, the *tsorubai*, *mamu* and senior men of the local line assemble. The *mamu* offers liquor to the dead, who is addressed, told that everything has been provided for her or him, and asked not to harm or otherwise interfere with the living. Then the *tsorubai* offers *tsoru* to the *duma* from a special plate and distributes the remaining food equally on the plates of all others, who are thus effectively sharing one plate with the dead.

A more elaborate ritual for the dead called *bur* or *obdel*\* follows within ten days, when performed quickly. But the proper time for it is the month of *pus* (January) and all large scale rituals of its kind fall in this month. The *bur*, lasting in the elaborate version for two or three days, includes exchanges of living cows and raw meat parts, and a big feast. The general structure, however, is basically the same as the one of the small ritual performed on the third day. A cow is sacrificed in the name of the dead and *tsorubai* and *mamu* separately cook *tsoru* for the *duma*, some of which - along with all sorts of paraphernalia, liquor and beer - is brought to the cremation ground. In case the *bur* is performed several month after a persons death, the *duma* has already lost the capacity to attack and possess people. Nevertheless she or he is again told to retreat and to stay away from the living. On return from the cremation ground, the *duma* is again served with food and drink around and inside the house, like before. After the *bur*, concern for the *duma* dies down and he or she is not provided with any more offerings.

### *The final revival*

Perhaps many years later, when the *duma* of a village or a local line have increased in numbers, the men decide to perform the *gotr* ritual in order to abandon all spirits of the dead simultaneously (*vide* Pfeffer 2001). For this purpose all *duma* are collectively raised and later individually transformed into the bodies of buffaloes, one animal for each *duma*. On the main

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<sup>17</sup> *Mamu* is a classificatory category; if the genealogical mother's brother is already dead at his nephew's funeral, his son or grandson may be present in his stead. If for some reasons no representative of the mother's brother's local line is available any senior affine may perform his tasks.

day, the revived *duma* in their buffalo forms are dressed up and led outside the village where they are tied at a specific place. Several groups of clan members from other villages - foremost the above mentioned *panjabai*, but also the *tsorubai* of the hosts - then take the buffaloes to their villages and slaughter and eat them in the following weeks.

Again, food and feeding are decisive in this process. By feeding the buffaloes with *sig bat* (*tsoru* and/or ritual rice) the transformation is accomplished and the *duma* is revived in the buffalo body. It should be noticed that this food is called by the same name as the rice first put aside for the newborn baby or, more specifically, for the *duma* still associated with the newborn baby. After the *duma* are thus brought back to life the buffaloes are feasted for one or more days by all villagers and guests. While the women weep and console their revived relatives, the *panjabai* behave in a frenzied fashion, dancing around their buffalo brothers and sharing their food and drink. All this happens in the host's village before the buffaloes are led away.

There may be several buffaloes for one deceased individual. Not only do sons provide a buffalo for a deceased father, but also a *mamu* may provide a buffalo for a deceased nephew. Therefore, the spirit of the deceased comes to life in two different villages simultaneously in the form of two different buffaloes. Both are fed with *tsoru* or ritual rice, by his affines in one village and by his agnates in another. On the main day of the ritual, the *mamu*, along with his own *panjabai*, takes his "buffalo-nephew" to the *gotr* performing village to be slaughtered. Thereafter the other (agnatic) buffaloes are led away by the external agnatic groups, i.e. the sponsor's *panjabai* and *tsorubai*. Afterwards the *duma* are said to be gone without the possibility of return. They have left the social world and the system of exchange which constitutes it.

## VI. Conclusion

The concept of the person that emerges from these ritual actions clearly is of the unbounded and relational type as described by Iteanu and Bloch. Iteanu's phrase that the social person grows, "...by accumulating relations each time he participates in a ritual" (1990: 40), perfectly corresponds with the Gadaba material presented here. Life-cycle rituals compose the person in a process of gradual additions and subtractions of social relations. In contrast to the Orokaiva however, the Gadaba person is considered to be complete after marriage not only after the death rituals have been performed. For the Gadaba, a person is of high social relevance directly after death because of the potential threat he or she represents for the village. However, the rituals up to the *bur* are aimed at removing the *duma* and to try to



decrease his or her social capabilities. The relational and unbounded properties of the person perhaps become most obvious in the final phase of the death rituals. Far from being conceived as a unique essence, the social person of the dead can be revived in two different places, by two different relatives simultaneously. The person, representing a specific social relation rather than a fixed substance, becomes an object of exchange. In one case, it is exchanged along affinal lines between the maternal uncle's group and the group of his deceased nephew. In the other case, the same *duma* is given away to clan brothers by the sponsors of the ritual. For the participants, the multiple nature of the person poses no contradiction. A similar situation is faced when the life essence (*jibon*) of two deceased persons reincarnate into one womb and then are present in a single individual. However, it would probably be incorrect to describe the concept of the person as something wholly ephemeral. It is true that the life essence remains instable throughout the life and is put out of balance through instances of shock or fear. Likewise, social quality is not considered to be something that is necessarily attached to life. A newborn child has no social person and, through misconduct, an individual may lose his or her social quality. 'Socialness' in both cases is created and regained through ritual action. Nevertheless, to say the Gadaba conceive of their personality in day-to-day actions as fleeting would be overstressing the point.

In the Orokaiva case, "ritual work" is done on social persons by means of meat exchange. The receiver of pork "grows" (Iteanu 1990: 44) as a consequence of this exchange. Among the Gadaba, although exchange of living animals and meat parts is also obligatory in many rituals such as marriage, *bur* or *gotr*, the constitutive part of 'person building' is effected by the ingestion of ritual food and *tsoru*. That is, it is not the exchange of food but the actual eating of it which brings about the transformation.

The social production of the person through life-cycle rituals is not an end in itself. Rather this cycle is related to other levels of the ritual system. Supplied with *tsoru* and ritual food during life-cycle rituals, individuals maintain the proper relationships towards the village gods. As Smith points out, alimentary communion is a central aspect of such relations. On several occasions throughout the year, the village gods receive sacrificial offerings. *Tsoru* is prepared in the immediate vicinity of the shrines and jointly consumed by men and gods. Although different gods are not attributed with clearly defined functions, the Gadaba stress that without proper relations to the gods (i.e. without sacrifice), life in general would be impossible. In these contexts, *tsoru* confirms more than it transforms in that offerings and alimentary communion renew and perpetuate these essential relations. Smith's other thesis - on the kinship relation between god and worshippers - is also partly supported. For the

founding clan of the village, the gods are like ancestors, i.e. they are agnates. This view is again based on a relational perspective, not on one of essence. Gods are different from humans and spirits of the dead<sup>18</sup> but the fact that they share *tsoru* indicates an agnatic relation. The relational logic of the clan system then defines all others as “affines” of the gods. Relationships are made transparent in the sacrificial and the alimentary code, the division of the sacrificed animal and consumption of *tsoru*. Village agnates eat the head of the animal, their affines the neck, and all others may only consume the body of the animal (*vide* Berger 2001a).

Smith’s kinship hypothesis is only partly accepted because I do not share his evident materialism. He argues that in “primitive society”, kinship is of a “natural” kind (1997: 257): as gods are understood as being of the “same stock” as their worshippers, they form a “physical unity” (*ibid.*: 255) of shared substance, especially of blood. Through commensality this physical bond is strengthened, even constituted “in a very real sense” (*ibid.*: 257).<sup>19</sup> I have already underlined the view that kinship is rather a matter of relations than of essence. Blood, milk, bones and other material items which are thought to be shared as an essence are symbolic representations of these relations. By describing the way persons are ‘constructed’ through *tsoru* and arguing for the generative capacity of sacrifice, I am talking of the field of symbolic action and ideas. Nevertheless, it may be sensed what Smith points at when talking about the “real sense” in which eating constitutes relationships. *Tsoru* is thought to be effective through the ‘material’ act of consumption, the actual eating. During the name-giving ceremony, the child is symbolically fed with *tsoru*, which is put on his cheek or into his hands, and this changes the social status of the infant. However, the child is only considered to have completely left the world of the spirits when he starts eating rice itself - *tsoru* and profane rice - and strangely enough this transformation is brought about without ritual, but as a gradual process. In conclusion, I want to stress that eating is always a cultural and hence a symbolic act, not only in ritual context. In every human society probably there is no such thing as merely ‘natural eating’, as Smith would have it when he states that, “...it is not the custom of savages to take their ordinary daily food in a social way, in regular domestic meals. Their habit is to eat irregularly and apart...” (*ibid.*: 260). Among the Gadaba, as elsewhere, also every-day consumption is regulated in relation to time, place and company. In alimentary

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<sup>18</sup> They are for example different in that they occupy different positions in the ritual exchange system.

<sup>19</sup> In the last paragraph of his book Smith writes, “In primitive ritual this conception [the sacramental communion] is grasped in a merely physical and mechanical shape, as indeed, in primitive life, all spiritual and ethical ideas are still wrapped up in the husk of a material embodiment” (1997: 418).

as in sexual intercourse, two themes closely related in many cultures, the mental and the material – to use Godelier’s phrase - are inseparable.

Further, food, eating and commensality are in many cultures, especially in India, a question of identity. This aspect has been present latently throughout the paper. The consumption of *tsoru* assigns identity on different levels. It provides the individual with the social relations that make up his or her existence. Identity is bestowed on the level of the household and local line in rituals like the name-giving ceremony. For women it is a question of identity, when they change their *tsoru* sharing group with marriage. On a more inclusive level, the commensality of *tsoru* is a demonstration of the identity of the village, its gods and the dominant clan. Finally, only through the feeding of *tsoru* to those who have been excommunicated can the status as Gadaba be regained.

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