

“RICH AS A RUNNING STREAM”

The Flow of Value in Ngadhaland, Indonesia

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This work is my own original research except where otherwise cited in the text.

A handwritten signature in dark ink on a light background. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "Ian Pollock".

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Wiwi isi, lema sema, “my lips are swollen, my tongue is flabby.”

Forgive me if I speak too long.

ABSTRACT

This is an ethnographic study of economic and social life in a mountainous region of Flores, Indonesia, inhabited by people known in anthropological literature as the Ngadha. The basic structures of affiliation in Ngadha social life are not static, but are dynamic processes. They change in form, grow and subdivide, and are filled with opportunities for advancement and risks of demotion, and ultimately disintegration. People pursue these opportunities, and counter these risks, through the skillful management of circulations or flows. These include circulations of material objects, which cross and recross the boundary between goods and commodities; circulations of people, who flow in and out of various affiliations at different moments; and circulations of energies, linked to dispositions of labor and food. These circulations connect humans, animals, and spiritual beings joining the living to the dead. With their variable currents and innumerable eddies, these flows form the substance of Ngadha forms of affiliation.

As described by Fox et al (1980) the metaphor of the “flow of life” describes circulations of goods and essences that are seen as necessary for the reproduction of human life in eastern Indonesian societies. These cannot be stockpiled and still remain vital, but undergo continual processes of depletion and replenishment. I argue that this concept of flow can help illuminate aspects of Ngadha life beyond strategies of marriage exchange. Circulations—repeated, ongoing, expanding, and endless—can be seen at every point of life, from loans between friends, to the construction of houses, to the most spectacular feasts and rituals. These movements are essential to the repeated reconstitution of social groups, which decay if they are not continually renewed. They also bring attention to a central tension between sets of values that are coeval in the Ngadha community: sedentarism, continuity, and accumulation on the one hand, and mobility, agency, and apparent dispersal on the other. Ngadha society is best seen as an assemblage of moving parts, where ritual and communal acts of renewal do not so much re-establish set structures but produce coherence out of constant flow, sowing a little to harvest a lot. This process is epitomized most dramatically in distributions of food called *meghe*—literally, “food” or “to eat,” especially food that fortifies a person before traveling or dying, or food used to host guests (Arndt 1961: 323)—which produce social outcomes even when much of the food is given to pigs.

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GLOSSARY

The following is a list of words in the Ngadha language that appear often in the thesis.

<i>Bhaga</i>	A miniature house dedicated to a female ancestor
<i>Ga'e</i>	Great; noble
<i>Ho'o</i>	Slave, descendant of slaves
<i>Ja'i</i>	Dance
<i>Lanu</i>	A generic term for a stone altar
<i>Lawo butu</i>	A woman's sarong, decorated with beads
<i>Loka</i>	A small complex outside a village maintained by a <i>woe</i>
<i>Meghe</i>	A pool of meat and rice redistributed to guests after feasts
<i>Mori</i>	Lord
<i>Ngadhu</i>	A carved post dedicated to a male ancestor
<i>Nua</i>	A traditional Ngadha village
<i>Reba</i>	An annual yam harvest festival
<i>Sangara</i>	A ritual announcement of a group's identity and ancestry
<i>Sa'o</i>	A traditional Ngadha house, and the social unit affiliated with it
<i>Sogo</i>	To borrow
<i>Wailaki</i>	A delegation to a ceremony, led by an organizer bearing a pig
<i>Woe</i>	A group of affiliated houses

NOTES

All words in languages other than English have been italicized and clearly labeled. Words in the Ngadha language are italicized and marked “BN,” for “Bahasa Ngadha.” Words in the Indonesian language are italicized and marked “BI,” for “Bahasa Indonesia.”

Key Ngadha terms that appear repeatedly are included in the glossary. The Ngadha language does not mark plurals; where I have relied on Ngadha terms, such as *sa'o*, *woe*, and *wailaki*, I have sometimes used them as both a singular and as a plural.

There is no standard orthography for writing the Ngadha language. I have based my own orthography on the inputs of my chief informants. I must caveat this by stating that I am not a linguist. Some features of Ngadha orthography in this thesis are:

- w is pronounced as “v” in English.
- ‘ indicates a glottal stop, ʔ.
- dh is a voiced retroflex implosive, ɖ.
- bh is a voiced bilabial implosive, ɓ.
- gh was most similar to a voiced guttural r, ʁ.
- I have avoided using accents, except when informants insisted.

German missionary Paul Arndt published a Ngadha grammar (1933) and dictionary (1961), which remains the only Ngadha dictionary available in foreign libraries today. Arndt based his orthography on German usages. Many features of his orthography were not shared by the participants who assisted me with Ngadha language questions. Some features of Arndt’s orthography include:

- c, which Arndt described as “a voiced h, like the German h in the interior, in blühen, blähen... Ngadha also has this h in the beginning of the words, in such a way that there are only relatively few words that begin with a vowel. These words are mostly interjection, natural sounds and the like.” Arndt also appears to have used c in place of a glottal stop, as in *moce*, which my participants spelled *mo'e*.
- dz, representing a sound between German “ds” and “dsch,” now rendered as “z” or “j,” depending on the linguistic subregion (see appendix I)

- v, which my participants rendered as “w,” though they still pronounced it like the letter “v” in English.
- x, as in the German “ch” in “ach” or “Koch.” This is now rendered as “h,” considered to be spoken with a Ngadha accent.

(Arndt 1961: 9)

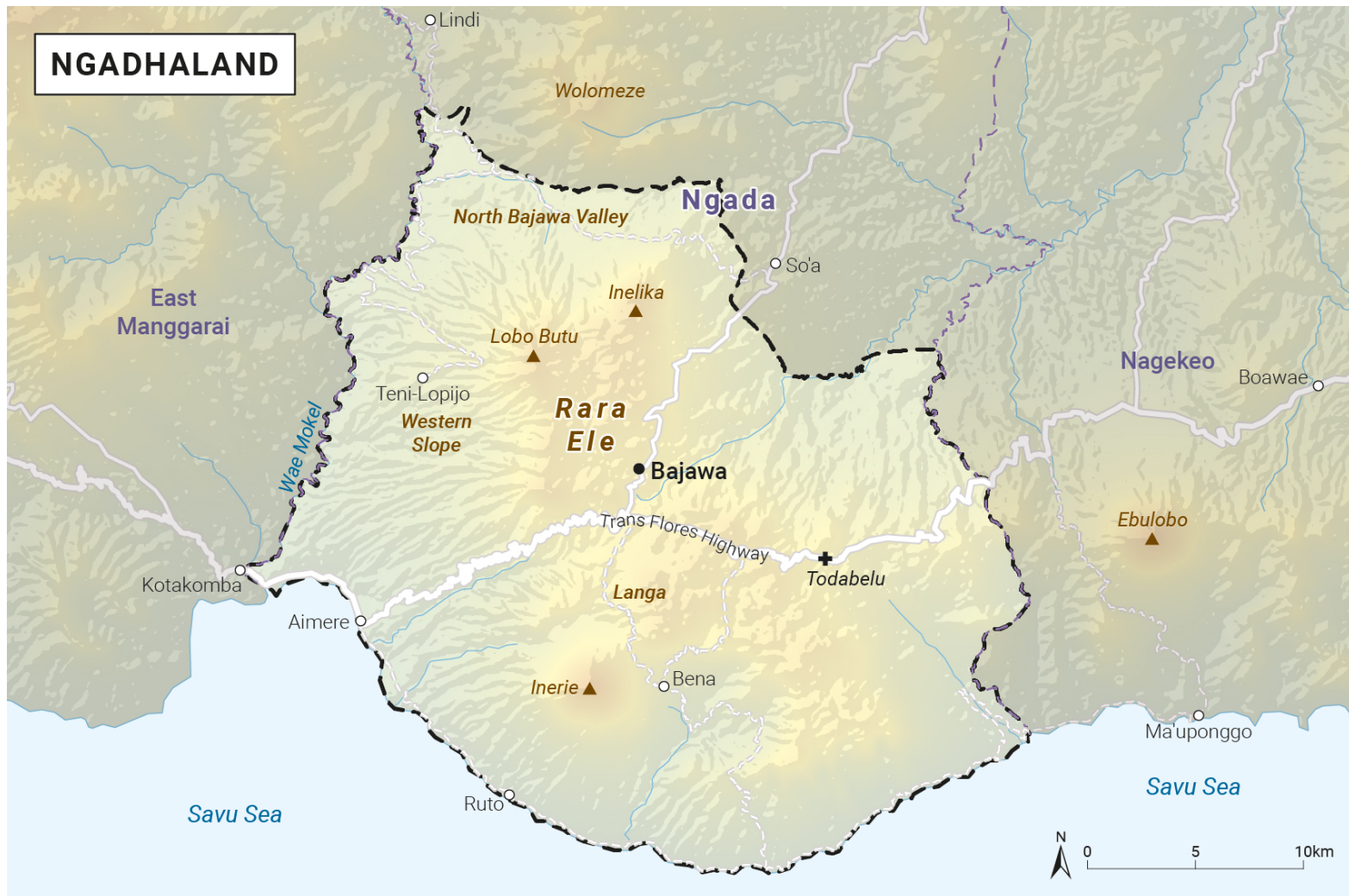
Local scholar Yohanes Mopa’s incomplete 2004 dictionary makes heavy use of accents, which he added to the typed edition by hand. As stated above, I have avoided using accents, except when an informant insisted.

Photographs and schematics are by the author unless otherwise credited.

The maps on page 13 and 14 are by Wayne Murphy.



Map 1 Indonesia and Flores



Map 2 Ngadhaland

INTRODUCTION

This is an ethnographic study of economic and social life in a mountainous region of Flores, Indonesia, chiefly inhabited by people known in anthropological literature as the Ngadha. The basic structures of Ngadha social life are dynamic processes, which change in form, grow and subdivide, rife with opportunities for advancement and risks of demotion, and always in danger of disintegration. People pursue these opportunities, and counter these risks, through the skillful management of circulations or flows. These include circulations of material objects, which cross and recross the boundary between goods and commodities; circulations of people, who flow in and out of various affiliations at different moments; and circulations of energies, tied especially to dispositions of labor and food. These circulations connect humans, animals, and spiritual beings, and join the living to the dead. With their variable currents and shifting banks, these flows form the substance of Ngadha forms of affiliation.

The term “flow,” in the context of the anthropology of southeastern Indonesia, draws an immediate connection to “the flow of life,” as described by Fox et al (1980). The “flow of life” describes circulations of goods and essences that are seen as necessary for the reproduction of human life and society, which cannot be stockpiled and remain vital, but are continually depleted and replenished. I argue that this concept of flow can help illuminate aspects of Ngadha life beyond marriage exchange. Circulations—repeated, ongoing, expanding, and endless—can be seen at all scales, from loans between friends, to the construction of houses, to the most spectacular feasts and rituals. These movements are essential to the repeated reconstitution of social groups, which decay if they are not continually renewed. They also bring attention to a central tension between sets of values that are coeval in the Ngadha community: sedentarism, continuity, and accumulation on the one hand, and mobility, agency, and apparent dispersal on the other.

The place and the people

I first visited the Ngadha region in 2010, when I was a roving researcher with a Bali-based NGO, concerned with the production and trade of traditional textiles. Our group flew into Ende, a sweltering coastal city, then traveled by car to Bajawa, the capital

of Ngada¹ regency. As our car navigated the twists and turns of the Trans-Flores highway, climbing higher and higher into the mountains, the landscape gradually changed. Clumps of giant, blue-green bamboo² began to appear, amid coffee orchards and fields of maize. The air grew cooler and cooler. As we arrived in Bajawa, a town of roughly 40,000 inhabitants on a hilly plateau, I caught my first sight of a mighty volcano, Inerie, whose near-perfect cone dominated the view to the south.



Plate 1 Bajawa from the air, looking south toward Inerie and the coast

We spent a few days visiting weaving groups, and one master in particular, who welcomed us onto the porch of her traditional house. During our conversation, it came out that her textiles were only meant to be worn by high-status individuals,³ and she really preferred to exchange them for live animals. But she accepted that these pieces were destined for the art market, and would not be worn but hung on walls. And if the

¹ I will use “Ngada” to refer to the regency, and “Ngadha” to refer a specific group of people and their language, which I will define later in this introduction. Not everyone in Ngada regency is a Ngadha person or speaks the Ngadha language.

² BN *betho*, Latin name *Dendrocalamus asper*. This is probably the most common form of bamboo in Ngadhaland, a towering variety that grows in tight clumps, with myriad uses, including in construction.

³ I will discuss such a textile in chapter 7.

ancestors agreed, she could take cash. She communicated with them by spinning a coconut, and seeing which direction it pointed as it settled. The ancestors gave their permission. They always did, she said. I was fascinated by this transaction. It breached my own concepts of the boundaries between the living and the dead, between goods and commodities, and between market and non-market forms of exchange. Over time, this moment and others like it strengthened my resolve to come back to Flores for further study.



Plate 2 The rooftops of Bajawa

I returned in 2014 for a few more days as a consultant with the World Bank, where I worked on a participatory anti-poverty program. While staying in a village on the slopes of Inerie, I witnessed a ceremony in which the thatched roof of a traditional house was replaced with tin, to the accompaniment of music, dancing, and sacrifice. The organizers were determined to attract as many of their friends and neighbors to the event as possible, and slaughtered a number of pigs to feed them all. I was familiar with the economic condition of the villagers, which seemed ill-able to support this kind of feasting. Leaders in the village expressed dismay that their community should choose to dispose of their resources this way, rather than putting them toward the expenses of health care or education. But the joy and expansiveness of the event was remarkable. It deepened my conviction that some mechanism was at work in Ngadha economic thinking that diverged from my own model.

I came back to Bajawa to begin my PhD fieldwork in March 2016, intending to write about the trade in traditional textiles, from the history of trade networks, to labor

organization, mechanisms for price-setting, the commensurability of various barter and fiat currencies, and the role of ancestors and other spiritual forces in shaping the textile economy. Most weavers lived south of the city, but I couldn't find a place to live there, and instead took a house about 2 km northwest of Bajawa, on an unpaved back road about a hundred meters east of a village I will call Bogala. One of many villages clustered in proximity to the city, Bogala moved to its current site in the early 1960s, following a catastrophic fire at its earlier site, a kilometer or two away. Coffee orchards and stands of bamboo ringed the village on all sides. It was not ideally placed for studying weaving, but the house was lovely, and the weaving center was only 20 minutes away by motorbike. I was joined there by my partner, Caroline (not her name), who lived in Bogala with me throughout most of my research period. In total, I was in the Bajawa area for roughly ten months, returning to Australia in March 2017.

Our house was owned by Bart,⁴ a man in his early 30s—almost exactly the same age as me. Bart was the first member of his family to get a degree, having trained as an engineer at a university in Surabaya, East Java. He had been a local facilitator for the project I worked on at the World Bank, a link that gave us an instant connection. Bart lived with his wife, Nora, who was heavily pregnant, and their two-year-old daughter. Nora came from a small village near Reo in Manggarai, and normally worked at the local government office nearby, but had taken leave for the last weeks of her pregnancy. When their second daughter was born, Bart and Nora named her after my partner, Caroline.

⁴ Bart, the house Molo Modhe, and the members of the Molo Modhe family are referred to by pseudonyms.



Plate 3 Caroline and me at the Bogala house

Bart and Nora belonged to one of Bogala's named houses, whose name I have altered to Molo Modhe, meaning something like "great plenty." The house stood on the plaza of Bogala village, and was inhabited by Bart's parents, Paulus and Maria. Paulus was about 80 years old. He hadn't known his own parents, who died when he was young, and before he married Maria and joined her house, he told me, he slept "in the ashes." He had no schooling, but when Bart asked to study, Paulus supported him. "Maybe I wasn't such a fathering father," he said; but he worked hard, supported his children, and made sure they were free to do what they wanted. When I first arrived to rent Bart's house, Paulus welcomed me with the gift of a sarong and a betel nut bag,⁵ and as the new house had no bed in it, he invited me to spend my first night sleeping beside him inside the traditional house. Paulus was full of stories, which he related in a Ngadha accent so thick I sometimes had to ask Bart to repeat things for me.

Bart's mother Maria was 61, and as the eldest daughter among her siblings, she was the inheritor of Molo Modhe and the possessor of its heirloom treasures. Maria was active in the life of her community, including the Catholic community, helping to tend the grounds of the Catholic monastery a few hundred meters down the road.⁶ Maria was

⁵ The sarong was in the Mbay style, a black two-paneled tube with yellow patterns in supplementary weft. This was the type of sarong most people used for everyday wear. The betel nut bag was called BN *lega*. This was a man's bag, a flat, rectangular shape, hung over the shoulder with a red ribbon. Women's betel nut bags were called BN *bere*, and had round bottoms.

⁶ The monastery belonged to the Order of Discalced Carmelites (OCD).

warm and generous, always on the move between her own home and the houses of her extended family.

Paulus and Maria had five children, of whom Bart was the second youngest. Their eldest daughter lived with her parents, and was destined to inherit the house from her mother. Bart and another of his sisters lived in houses about a hundred meters away, built amid coffee trees on land owned by the family. An elder brother lived on a farm in the North Bajawa valley, a two-hour drive away, on lands cleared by their father in the 1970s. He and his two sisters worked those lands together, along with the family coffee orchards on the plateau. The fifth sibling lived in Jakarta, the national capital, where he worked as a driver. All of the siblings except the one in Jakarta had at least one child, ranging in age from infancy to late teens.

Maria's siblings also lived nearby, including her brother Yoosneem, who became my good friend and an avid participant in this project. As Maria's eldest brother, he held a position of authority in Molo Modhe, a responsibility he took seriously. Yoosneem had worked as a shop boy, a farmer, a traveling salesman, and the primary carer for his parents in their old age. Now in his early 60s, he tended his arenga palm wine trees, headed the village Catholic funeral organization, and helped his wife harvest coffee for a bit of extra money. He had time on his hands, deep knowledge of ritual speech and practice, and the patience to sit with me for long hours, correcting my transcriptions, translations, and misconceptions. He introduced me to interesting people, mostly older men like himself, whom he approached with humility and deference. He also induced me to take him on little field trips, for instance to a Wolomeze village where little people⁷ were sometimes seen in the forest, or to a secret hot spring, where we competed to see who could sit in the scalding water the longest. I offered Yoosneem the chance to select his own pseudonym, and this is the one he came up with.

One of Maria's sisters lived a short walk through the coffee trees from our house with her husband Bram. Bram was a farmer, and also a carpenter, and a valuable resource on the topic of house-building in particular. His son-in-law Tomas worked in gardens near the lakes of Wawo Muda, on the uppermost part of the plateau, and also helped run a

⁷ BN *ebu gogo*, which will be discussed further in chapter 2.

small coffee shop. Tomas had little schooling, but he loved languages, and was teaching himself English, French, German, and Japanese, the better to speak with the small number of tourists who trekked past his lands.

Bart's close friend Robby worked in trucking and construction, and was involved in a number of money-making schemes of various levels of legality. He was living with his elderly mother in a traditional house a few kilometers away, after separating from his wife, with whom he had a son the same age as Bart's daughter. Robby was a frequent companion, and first taught me how to dance in the Ngadha style.

Bart and Nora lived just uphill from us, in a temporary bamboo house meant to last only until Caroline and I vacated the main house. Downhill from us lived Theo, another man my age from Boawae in the neighboring region of Nagekeo, with his Ngadha wife and their five children. Theo worked directing traffic for the Department of Transportation, and his wife worked in the maize fields behind their house. To my surprise, on learning that I was an anthropologist, Theo told me that as a boy he had shared his home with an ethnomusicologist for a whole year. (I was unable to figure out who it was). Theo was brilliant with languages and thoughtful about Ngadha culture. Mostly, he was grateful that its hierarchies, courtesies, and obligations felt looser than the ones he grew up with.

I said that I was interested in economic anthropology, and so in addition to talking about rituals and ceremonial objects, people spoke to me about their finances, their debts, their work lives, and their community obligations. They told me that they had inherited all kinds of responsibilities, which required them to spend much of their time raising pigs for ritual exchange. They told me that some defiant families across the valley had founded a new village, and were selling house plots on the new plaza at rock-bottom prices. They told me that marriage payments, which dominate the economic lives of people in many parts of Flores, had mostly been dispensed with here, and that marriages were held together by Bnon *kaju ranga*, meaning "firewood and pig feed," a husband's contribution to the economic life of his wife's house. They told me that the safest way to hang on to your money was to spend it or give it away as quickly as possible; that way

nobody could claim it from you, and when you needed something you could find someone who owed you.

After I came home from Bajawa and began to write up, I came to feel that, before I could write about something like the textile economy, more basic aspects of Ngadha social life needed another look. I needed to describe the sense of instability that pervaded social relations. Hierarchies were turning over as economic fortunes changed. Ngadha people were charging onto putatively unsettled lands in the north, and the settlers were changing the shape of both their new lands and their villages back home. Social groups that appeared to be held together by kinship were actually contingent on circulations of objects, people, feelings, and values. Some of these circulations were generations old. Others were brand new—people were proliferating them every day. Some were being terminated, while others, long forgotten, were being revived. Being Ngadha meant managing these flows with as much skill and care as possible.

Physical and cultural geography

Ngadha people live on the island of Flores, which lies near the center of the Lesser Sunda island chain, in the province of East Nusa Tenggara (BI *Nusa Tenggara Timur*, or NTT). To the north lies the Flores Sea, at the heart of the Indonesian archipelago, which stretches some 300km to the island of Sulawesi. To the east lies the Solor Strait, across which the islands of Solor and Adonara lie as little as 1km away from the Flores coast. To the south, the Savu Sea connects Flores to the islands of Sumba, Savu, Timor, and the other islands that make up the southern arc of the Lesser Sundas. To the west, the Komodo archipelago, home of the famous Komodo dragons, lies just offshore, while the island of Sumbawa lies about 70km away.

Flores is approximately 350km long, and narrow, measuring roughly 65km across at its widest point. Massive volcanoes, variously active or dormant, punctuate the length of Flores, some of them towering in excess of 2,200m above sea level. In some places, high, cool plateaus surrounding these volcanoes drop sharply down to low, sweltering plains. In others, precipitous gorges and mountain fastnesses harbor some of the largest contiguous forests remaining in NTT today. The island's ecology is shaped by these dramatic changes in elevation, and also by wet and dry monsoons, and a dry season that can last, especially in the drier eastern areas, for up to nine months. Across Flores, it is not uncommon to find different climates and habitats, with

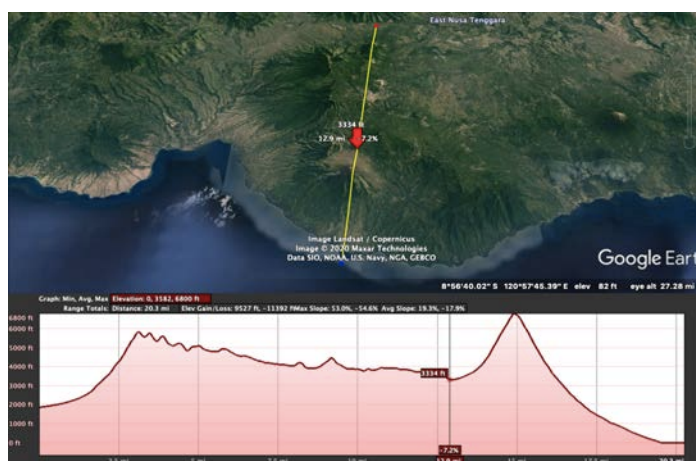
different geologies, temperatures, precipitation levels, forest types, and wildlife, close up against one another. The coast of Flores includes sandy beaches and sheltered bays, which invite landings from the sea, and also long stretches where the shores are rocky and exposed, and inhospitable to boats.

There is no “Florinese” people or culture. Most scholarship on Flores, following the paradigm of southeastern Indonesia as a single “Field of Anthropological Study” (Josselin de Jong 1984), divides the peoples who live there into discrete and comparable cultures, such as the Manggarai, Riung, Nage, Lio, and Sikka. As scholarship on Flores has progressed, from colonialists and missionaries to the present day, the boundaries between these peoples have broken down, and the number of named “cultures” has grown. Today, it makes more sense to talk of cultural linkages, similar to the linguistic linkages that both connect and distinguish speakers of Ngadha from speakers of similar languages used by their neighbors. These linkages may be contiguous across seas or over land. “In an archipelago, then, cultural units for analysis may stretch across sea, linked into segments of a broader regional communications network, before subsuming at a higher level all the population groups of a particular island, especially an island as extended and mountainous as Flores” (Graham 1999: 73).

I follow Arndt (1958) and Smedal (2000, 2009, 2011, 2016) in referring to the part of Flores occupied by Ngadha people as “Ngadhaland.” This territory lies within Ngada regency, and roughly comprises the present-day sub-districts⁸ of Aimere, Jerebu’u, Inerie, Bajawa, North Bajawa, Golewa, South Golewa, and West Golewa, with a total area of 786 square kilometers, and a population of 111,510 people (BPS 2016a: 71). This territory is anchored geographically by three main features: the volcano, Inerie; the plateau, where Bajawa is located; and the coast, which faces southward toward the Savu Sea. Inerie is a dormant stratovolcano, 2245 meters in elevation (Monk et al 1997), whose southern edge slopes directly into the Savu Sea. The plateau is located mainly to Inerie’s north and northeast, and includes more volcanic features, including the dormant volcano Inelika, a conical mountain of sand at Naru which provides much of the material from which Bajawa today is built (Rato 2014), and a sulfurous crater lake called Wawo Muda, which locals say appeared suddenly in 2001. The plateau is home to the towns of Bajawa and Mangulewa, a Catholic seminary at Todabelu, and countless smaller villages. The only large

⁸ BI *kecamatan*.

town on the Ngadhaland shore is Aimere, which sits on a stretch of windy beach, and has a small ferry terminal. The area to the immediate north of Ngadhaland is inhabited mainly by Soa and Wolomeze people; the area to the east, on the slopes of the volcano Ebulobo, is inhabited mainly by Nage people; to the south, the territory is edged by the rocky shores of the Savu Sea; and to the west, across the Wae Mokol river, live mostly Manggarai people. This is not to say that no Ngadha people live beyond these boundaries, or that everyone who lives within them identifies as Ngadha—far from it. I met people living inside these boundaries who came from Sumbawa, Sulawesi, Timor, Savu, Sumba, Bali, Java, Sumatra, the Netherlands, Canada, and every corner of Flores, as well as Indonesians of Chinese descent. The concept of “Ngadhaland” is merely a heuristic device, to help conceptualize a particular cultural geography.



Map 3 An elevated cross-section of the Bajawa plateau. Image © 2020 Maxar Technologies.

After Dutch colonial forces invaded the plateau in 1907, they established a small kingdom at Bajawa and named it Ngada, after the largest named lineage they encountered there (Barnes 1972: 83).⁹ The name “Ngada” was subsequently applied both to the kingdom and its people, and also to the language spoken there. Prior to this, “Ngada” or “Ngadha” was not the name of an ethnic group. The idea of the “Ngadha” gained traction in anthropology because Catholic missionaries with anthropological training were stationed on the plateau from 1920, and wrote a great deal about the people among whom they lived (Molnar 2000: 25). Continuing to call the culture “Ngadha,” and centering that culture on the town of Bajawa, is therefore partly

⁹ Ngada was one of five *onderafdeelingen* in *Afdeeling* Flores, and consisted of six *landschaps* or subdistricts: Ngadha, Riung, Tado, Turing, Nage, and Keo. These were administered by three rajas: the raja of Bajawa, the raja of Nagekeo, and the raja of Riung (Tule 2004: 33).

the result of the desire of each generation of anthropologists to create texts that can speak to one another. It is also thanks in part to the Indonesian state, which has a hand in reifying a Ngadha cultural identity based on language, performance arts, textiles, and Ngadha house architecture. This is partly done in pursuit of tourism (Cole 2007, 2008), and partly in service of efforts by the central government to codify and domesticate Indonesia's local cultures, in pursuit of a unified, multi-faceted national identity (Pemberton 1994). This kind of cultural display is commonplace at government events, such as Indonesia's Independence Day, on August 17th, when children representing the ethnic groups of Ngada regency wear ethnic costumes and perform dances on the soccer field near Bajawa's old colonial barracks.



Plate 4 Caroline with a high school student, dressed in a uniform adapted from traditional Ngadha clothing.

In the 1990s, Smedal noted that neither the people themselves nor their neighbors referred to them by this term (Smedal 1996: 45 footnote 2). In 2016, when I was doing my own fieldwork, my interlocutors used the term “Ngadha” some of the time, though it was easily confused with “Ngada,” which could refer to anyone from the regency of which Bajawa is the capital, and not exclusively to an ethnic or linguistic group. They were at least as likely to refer to their group as Bajawa, as some local scholars have done (e.g. Ngewi 2014, Nio 2015). I have decided to use the term “Ngadha” to refer to the people at the heart of this study, for two reasons. First, using the term “Bajawa” would risk conflating all Ngadha people with inhabitants of either the city of Bajawa or the village of Bajawa, where the Dutch-era rajas resided. Second,

“Ngadha” is the term used by other anthropologists who have worked in the area, and I would like this thesis to sit alongside their work.

People who live around the edges of Ngadha territory share linguistic and cultural similarities with neighboring groups. These linkages blur the boundaries of ethnic identification and calls into question the practice of centering some groups while marginalizing others. For example, Molnar’s participants, who live within what I have defined as Ngadhaland, told her, “There is no Ngadha culture. There is Bajawanese culture, but we are not Bajawanese. We are closer to the Nage, but we are not Nage.” (2000: 25).

The Ngadha language and its dialects belong to the Austronesian language family, and are part of the Central Florinese Linguistic Linkage, which includes the languages spoken by Ngadha, Nage, Keo, Lio, and Palue people (Tule 2004: 39-40).¹⁰ Within Ngadhaland, local people acknowledge a number of subregions, where different dialects of the Ngadha language are spoken, or where architectural details or cultural practices vary.¹¹ Bogala was in a subregion sometimes called Rara Ele, or “the Upward Road,” located west and northwest of Bajawa city, on the uppermost portion of the Bajawa plateau, where it slopes up towards the peaks of Lobo Butu and Inelika. The boundaries of these subregions were rough, but Rara Ele could be said to include the villages of Bogenga, Bomanu, Bowio, Eko Heto, Wolo Wio, Bomadha, Warusoba, Ngoranale, Beiposo, and Bogala, the name I have given for my home village. Some inhabitants of the region used the term fondly, referring to themselves as IsRaEl, short for BN *isi Rara Ele*, “inhabitants of the Upward Road.” Another person confided that it felt like a slur. “People around here are considered stupid and poor,” he said. “At election time, everyone assumes our votes can be bought for a half-glass of palm wine.” I use the term as it is the only one I know that takes in the entire cultural subregion, and I hope no Ngadha readers will find it offensive.

¹⁰ There is a history of referring to a “Bima-Sumba” subgroup of languages that includes Ngadha (e.g. Djawanai 1983: 1-2). There is an argument that this subgroup does not meaningfully exist (Blust 2008), and another that the group should be expanded into a “Bima-Sumba-Flores” group (Gasser 2014). There are also references to a “Ngadha-Lio subgroup” (Molnar 2000: 6), which may not be meaningful in the space of a larger linguistic linkage. Clearly more research is warranted.

¹¹ See Appendix I for more on subregions and their linguistic distinctions.



Plate 5 View from Lobo Butu to Inerie. Rara Ele is to the left of the ridge, and the western slope is to the right.

Ngadha speakers across all subregions appear to have some common cultural characteristics, including the celebration of an annual yam harvest ceremony called BN *reba*; weaving, an activity that is taboo in some parts of Flores, now mostly limited to the Langa subregion (Molnar 1994: 36); the production and use of textiles of an identifiable structure and aesthetic (Hamilton 1994); and pig rearing (Curnow 2007). Every Ngadha person belongs to a house, called BN *sa'o* (described in chapter 3), which is the fundamental social unit. Groups of affiliated houses are called BN *woe* (described in chapter 4). Villages, called BN *nua*, consist of a central plaza ringed with traditional houses (described in chapter 5). Within a village plaza, *woe* groups put up pairs of monuments dedicated to their original ancestors. The male ancestor is represented by a BN *ngadhu*, a carved wooden post, topped with a conical roof. This is paired with a miniature house with a carved face and a thatched roof, called a BN *bhaga*, dedicated to the female ancestor.¹² In most cases, you could walk into a village and tell how many *woe* lived there by counting the number of *ngadhu/bhaga* pairs in the village plaza. Ngadha society is cross-cut by a hereditary class system of nobles, commoners, and the descendants of slaves (described in chapter 4). Many groups of affiliated houses include individuals from all three levels.

Relevant Literature

In addition to my own research, this thesis relies on contributions to the understanding of Ngadha people by a number of scholars. Paul Arndt (1954, 1956, 1958,

¹² Molnar refers to the *bhaga* as an “ancestress house” (2000:191-194).

1959a, 1959b, 1961, 1963, 2005 [1924], 2007 [1931]), a Catholic missionary with the *Societas Verbi Divini*, lived in Ngadhaland and elsewhere in Flores for over 40 years, before passing away in 1962 at the seminary at Todabelu. Trained in Vienna-school anthropology (German *Kulturkreis Schule* [Molnar 1997: 397]), he wrote a number of works on the culture and language of Ngadha people, all oriented towards the project of Catholic missionization. Arndt wrote in German, and his works have never been translated into English, but some are available in Indonesian. He also wrote a dictionary, which is astonishingly comprehensive, but uses an obsolete orthography,¹³ does not distinguish between the local variations of particular words, and often offers up a large number of potential translations for a given term. I have noted where I am relying on his dictionary. Published works by Maria Banda (2017), Stroma Cole (2007, 2008), Jayne Curnow (2007, 2008, 2012, 2016), Hans Daeng (1988), Stephanus Djawanai (1983), Andrea Molnar (1994, 1997, 1998, 2000), Suzanne Schröter (2005), Olaf Smedal (1996, 2000, 2002, 2009, 2011, 2016), and Martinus Bambang Susetyarto (2018, 2019) provide ethnographic accounts of the region in more recent times. I also had the privilege to learn from Yohanes Mopa, a prolific and dedicated self-taught Ngadha scholar, who lives in Bajawa.¹⁴ Mopa is the author of over thirty books on Ngadha sayings, practices, language, and architecture, almost none of which have been published. His 2004 Ngadha-to-Indonesian dictionary, which he was in the process of revising, was of great use to me. He was incredibly generous with his time and knowledge, and I owe him a great debt of gratitude. In addition, I found dozens of theses written by students from the Bajawa area in the library at Flores University, in Ende, including Bhara (2011), Dhiu (2004), Dhone (2011), Eko (2015), Mere (2014), Ngewi (2014), Rato (2014), Titu (2016), Tonda (2014), and Wio (2013). Their reports on local practices, ritual speech, history, and cultural interpretations provided additional insiders' perspectives that greatly enriched my own ethnographic work.

¹³ See Notes on Language at the beginning of this thesis.

¹⁴ Because I cite Mopa's (self-)published work, I will use his real name.



Plate 6 Books by Yohanes Mopa, stored in his home.

This thesis aims to build particularly on the work of Molnar, Smedal, and Curnow. In her book on the Hoga Sara (2000), Molnar argues for a relatively fixed social schema, where precedence, ritual, and a fixed spatial organization of houses serve to reproduce the social order of the village. I will argue that ceremony does not merely reproduce past relations, but provides pathways for low-status people to create change in those relations.

Smedal argues that while potentials for social reversal exist, they are practically never realized (2002: 498). I will argue that they are in fact being realized. Smedal also refers to something he calls “floating value:” the sum of all the unclaimed debts in a community, resulting from unpaid bridewealth commitments (2002: 504). I will extend this concept to a much broader range of transactions, arguing that, because floating value cannot be subject to competing claims, the safest place to store one’s money or goods is in the hands of others. To this end, Ngadha people maximize their “net outgoings” in areas far beyond marriage payments (Gregory 2015).¹⁵

Curnow interprets Ngadha redistributive practices as an expression of “interdependence” (2007, 2008, 2012), even arguing that people’s survival is so deeply reliant on the support of others that Ngadha people “cannot exist in the singular... being

¹⁵ https://haubooks.org/viewbook/gifts-and-commodities/10_ch03 [accessed 30/07/2020]

singular plural [Nancy 2000] is the principal mode of existence” (2016: 159). My argument is based on a more conventional view of individual agency. I interpret the heavy mutual reliance of Ngadha people more as a play of strategies, in which people store value in debt claims with one another, allowing those claims to proliferate and grow, in the hope of enlarging future returns—a complex entanglement of giving and keeping (Weiner 1992).

In addition to scholarship on Ngadha people, I draw for comparative purposes on writings about people living elsewhere in Flores, including Forth on the Nage (1998, 2004), Lewis on the Ata Tana ‘Ai (1988) and the Sikka (2010), Allerton on the Manggarai (2004, 2007), Erb on the Rembong (1996, 2005, 2013), Howell on the Lio (1989, 1996), and Tule on the Keo (2004). For further comparative purposes, I particularly draw on writings concerning people living in Sumba (Hoskins 1993, 1998; Keane 1994, 1995, 1999, and 2001), as well as Maluku (Barraud 1990; Ellen 2003) and Timor (McWilliam 2009; Tusinski 2016).

I have taken the model of “the flow of life” as a starting point for analyzing the social and material circulations I encountered in Ngadhaland. This framework was first elaborated in a 1980 volume edited by James J. Fox. Beginning from an interest in comparing forms of marriage and marriage payments across different parts of southeastern Indonesia, the book posits that different societies in the area share a kind of ideology, linking the reproduction of people and social structures to the orderly circulation of essences. In particular, Fox wrote, “this ‘flow of life’ is synonymous with the transmission of a woman’s blood, the vital fluid that, united with semen, produces the human person” (Fox 1980a: 12). Women’s blood was transmitted by marriage; that is, when a woman’s affiliation transferred from one house to another. These movements of blood were then answered by a movement of goods such as weapons or gold, back to the family of the bride. These circulations of people and objects are essential to the ability of any social group to produce children, and hence to reproduce itself. They are also the basis for the formation of alliances, which in most southeastern Indonesian societies are held in place by the continual movement of women between habitual wife-giving groups and wife-taking groups, and also by delay in the delivery of marriage payments. Alliances are delineated by the transmission, or the promised transmission, of people and objects between groups, following established “paths” (Fox 1980a: 13).

Ngadha relations too, as I encountered them, were defined by the transmission or promised transmission of people and goods along habitual paths. Yet I found several divergences from the pattern described above. For one thing, in Rara Ele at least, marriage payments are extremely rare, and men are far more likely to join the houses of their wives than vice versa.¹⁶ Second, while marriage payments are rare, other kinds of circular exchanges unlinked to marriage are common, particularly exchanges of pigs¹⁷ and cooked, or partially cooked, food.¹⁸ Third, Ngadha people do not form wife-giving and wife-taking groups (Smedal 2002). This is unusual in Flores, and indeed in southeastern Indonesia, where such relations between groups are the norm (Guernonprez 1998). As a result, Ngadha people are involved in numerous exchange relationships, which pull them in all kinds of directions, and which do not have the assurance of future weddings to keep the exchanges alive. In other words, Ngadha people do have alliances based on exchange, but they are polyvalent, multi-scalar, contingent, and fragile. They require a different kind of care and maintenance. Finally, Ngadha people value the sorts of goods that might otherwise be involved in bridewealth exchanges, such as gold or high-status textiles, less in terms of their exchange potential, and more for the affordances they provide; they permit the people who possess them to make claims of ancestral support, and to organize the exchanges that are essential to the production of social groups.¹⁹

I first set out to study the Ngadha economy, with an interest in Graeber's formulation of a "human economy," in which the primary focus of economic life is reconfiguring relations between people, rather than allocations of commodities. "Human economics," he argues, recognizes that "the chief business of any social system... is the creation and mutual fashioning of human beings" (Graeber 2012: 412). In the process of linking "the flow of life" to broader ideas of economy, I have tangled with terms such as "moral economy" (Palomera and Vetta 2016), "community economy" (Gibson-Graham 2006), and "commons" (Gudeman 2001) or "spiritual commons" (McWilliam 2009). In the end, however, I have built this thesis mostly on its own terms, aiming to make a theoretical contribution by expanding the concept of the "flow of life."

¹⁶ Discussed in chapter 3.

¹⁷ Discussed in chapter 6

¹⁸ Discussed in chapter 9.

¹⁹ Discussed in chapter 7.

Methodology

I spent a total of ten months living in Bogala, conducting interviews and site visits, and doing participant observation. I took copious notes in oversized notebooks, which I typed up almost every evening. I did not use voice recording, and so ritual speech shared here was taken down at the time, then reconfirmed and retranslated with Yoosneem or other participants later.

The primary language of research was Indonesian. Everyone I encountered, including people over the ages of 70, had some level of fluency in Indonesian, either as a second or third language. My own Indonesian language ability began when I earned an intermediate certificate from Wisma Bahasa language school in Yogyakarta in 2007, and developed over the years I spent living in Indonesia, from 2007-2013, and again from 2014-2015. From the outset, I recorded as much information in the Ngadha language as I could, and studied vocabulary every day, not in the hope of becoming fluent, but in order to mix an increasing proportion of Ngadha words into conversations in Indonesian, much as my interlocutors mixed at least some Indonesian words into their Ngadha conversations in most contexts. I regularly checked spellings and definitions of words with Yoosneem, Bart, and Yohanes Mopa, and spent the final days of my research period reviewing all the Ngadha words, phrases, and couplets I had collected with Yoosneem.

In accordance with my initial desire to study textiles, I quickly established a strong relationship with a weaver in Langa, whom I call Ana, and her family. I visited with her throughout the year, and I am hugely indebted to her patience, openness, and generosity. However, as I moved through the writing process, my focus moved elsewhere, and most of her contributions will have to wait until I can move on to further publications. I also spent much of my time making regular visits to the weekly markets around the Ngadha region, learning about textile trading networks and consumption patterns. This data will also have to find another home.

The textile study entailed learning mostly from women, while at feasts and ceremonies I was mostly in the company of men. At the time, this felt like a good balance. In the writing, however, I leaned strongly into the information given to me by

men, in male spaces, during mostly male activities. I acknowledge the resulting gender imbalance throughout the thesis, and will try to even out the perspective where I can.

Many people around Ngadhaland already had ideas about the kind of work that anthropologists do. Some even had firsthand experience. I met people who had known Jayne Curnow, who did her PhD research nearby some ten years earlier; Catherine Allerton, who studied in Wae Rebo, a few hours' drive to the west; Maribeth Erb, who studied in Rembong, a few hours' drive to the northwest; and Nao-Cosme Remon, who studied in Riung, and still lived in Kurubhoko, about two hours' drive to the north. People generally held that the job of an anthropologist was to make a record of "culture"²⁰ for posterity, preserving the particulars of its customs and practices in books that young people could then read in order to know themselves. The "culture" that belonged in such books was generally considered to reside in the heads of old men, who had learned it when they were young boys, pouring palm wine into the coconut-shell cups of their elders during long rituals and discussions. The young today, they complained, had too much freedom and too much entertainment, and did not absorb the details of their culture the way the old men had done. "If you want to understand this stuff," they snapped at their sons, "you'll have to buy this foreigner's book!" My attention legitimated their positions as holders of privileged knowledge.

This attitude contributed to a level of privileged access, as older men were eager to share their knowledge of ceremonial practice and ritual speech. I was also white, well-educated, and married,²¹ if not yet a father. These were markers of importance and privilege, and doubtless contributed to the desire of some people to include me in their groups when attending ceremonies. Furthermore, I was rich. My PhD stipend converted to an income of roughly IDR 20 million per month, outstripping the salaries of civil servants or other members of the local middle class. I was easily able to afford to bring small gifts of cigarettes, betel nut, sugar, coffee, or other small consumables that smoothed my path into people's homes, and induced them to share their time.

²⁰ BI *budaya*

²¹ Caroline and I married in September 2016, during a break from the field. When we first arrived, I told people we were already married, but that it hadn't yet been made official.

My privileged access had limits, of course. When Nora's baby was born, I was invited to a ceremony called BN *dhoro azi*, "younger sibling's descent," marking the infant's first symbolic foray out of the house. This was a women's ceremony; Bart, the child's father, was present, but the proceedings were run by his mother and sisters, and he was forbidden to eat any of the food prepared for the ceremony. The next time there was a *dhoro azi*, Caroline was invited, but I was not. It was often said that women had no role in "culture," but this was clearly untrue, and people often hinted at a world of women's business that would remain closed to me. It was not only women's events from which I was excluded. There was a lot going on that people felt no need to have validated or catalogued by an anthropologist. Fontijne noted in the 1930s that certain Keo rituals were off-limits to him (Forth 2004: 136). Similarly, I was not invited when Paulus helped stage a BN *keo rado*, a ceremony to appease the spirits after an unnatural death, even though he knew I wanted to come. When I perused the theses in the library at the University of Flores, looking for data on Ngadha practices, perhaps more than a quarter of them had their "findings" sections removed. These students had leveraged their insider knowledge to secure their degrees, then ensured that it would not be used for purposes other than their own. Limits still applied to what was appropriate for me as an outsider to know, to record, to judge, or to use for my own purposes. The refusal to share certain information was in some ways a political act, as my interlocutors shaped the parameters of how they wished to be seen, and how they wished to remain unseen (Simpson 2014). The ethnography I present here was made in collaboration with, not opposition to, my friends and partners in the field. I hope my fellow anthropologists will find this account to be both true and useful, and that Ngadha readers, whose uses for this study may be different, will feel the same way.



Plate 7 A thesis with the findings removed, Universitas Flores

Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of ten chapters, with the following structure:

1. **Introduction:** “Rich as a Running Stream”
2. **A history of circulations:** the people known today as the “Ngadha” arrived as many separate lineages, from many different directions, often driven by the flight from violence, especially the violence of the slave trade. In this context, Ngadha culture developed to accommodate dispossession from lands, the destruction of buildings and monuments, and the dissolution and reorganization of alliances. The end of slavery and intergroup warfare and the coming of the developmental state started social, economic, and ecological transformations that remain ongoing.
3. **The Ngadha house-in-progress:** The Ngadha house, the basic unit of Ngadha social organization, is a shifting assemblage of people, objects, and relationships. House buildings are always under development, as inhabitants upgrade their materials, add to their decorations, moving towards an apex that may be unreachable. Houses contain assemblages of objects associated with the ancestors, which are periodically supplemented and divided, and whose specific associations shift with each generation. Hierarchies between and within houses depend on the ability of leaders to keep the group from splintering.

4. **The Ngadha *Woe*: registering affiliation:** Groups of affiliated houses are not linked by a pure ideology of descent, but by more contingent links of collective endeavor. Houses must renew their “registration” in the group by participating in circulations of food, and by participating in delegations called to ceremonies held by other groups. These delegations, and the ritual speeches that frame them, allow a group of individuals with individual interests and strategies to signify their unity, and engage in inter-group relations.
5. **The Ngadha village-in-progress:** like houses, Ngadha villages are constantly being moved towards apical forms, and having that progress reset by moves, subdivisions, and social ruptures. While villages are meant to depict a spatial and cosmological order, social ferment within them means they are flawed texts, which are reconfigured with every move. Ngadha villages flow across the landscape, not firmly moored by houses or monuments.
6. **Circulations of pigs, “the basis of life”:** the exchange of live pigs is a primary element of the production of Ngadha kinship and affiliation. Pigs move seamlessly across the boundary between gifts and commodities. The flow of pigs is constant, but of uncertain intensity. Pigs are subject to multiple claims, but a pig that has been given away forms a value claim that cannot be taken from the person who holds it.
7. **Circulations of, and around, ceremonial goods:** Important objects, such as ancestral monuments or house heirlooms, afford their guardians the ability to instigate large gatherings and exchanges, and thus to shape the material and social circulations around them. This affordance is a key part of the value of these objects. Monuments and heirlooms are more durable than a human life, and so guardianship of them must be transferrable. These transfers often deviate from their ideal paths, creating questions about the legitimacy of their possessors to organize ceremonies around them.
8. **Future Flows:** Ngadha people create the future with reference to linked logics of sacrifice and planting, which allow them to “give a little and get a lot.” In sacrifice, Ngadha people negotiate with their ancestors across the inverted regimes of value that distinguish the living from the dead. By the agricultural logic that says seeds must be

planted to grow, people attempt to maximize their future flows by maximizing their “net outgoings.” Value stored in the hands of other people is protected from competing claims, and can be expected to grow in measured increments. People who appear to have nothing may have everything coming to them.

9. ***Meghe* distribution, an encompassing circulation:** analyzing spectacular redistributions of food, much of which goes uneaten, this chapter examines how Ngadha society can arise from circulations of energies, signs, and emotions. This complex practice illustrates a conception of abundance that underlies Ngadha resource circulations, going beyond discourses of waste and efficiency, in search of the greatest reach of intimacy and affiliation.
10. **Conclusion:** I close by returning to the question of “the flow of life,” and the role of social and material circulations in the production of Ngadha social life, and raising issues for further research.

CHAPTER 2: A history of circulations

This chapter is focused on political, ecological, and social movement and change in Ngadhaland, and the effects that ongoing changes are having today. I will argue that the “Ngadha” identity is a dynamic and emerging process, in-progress, becoming; not a “people,” but an agglomeration of arrivals, seeking better places, or fleeing from worse ones. People move across the landscape, changing not only their locations, but also the compositions of their social groups. Processes of group formation are ongoing, and as groups reform, the processes of constructing houses, villages, and other symbols of the connections between people are continually being started over again.

As much as this chapter concerns the past itself, it also concerns the stories that people told me about the past, and through those stories, the claims on land, resources, and identity that people were making in the present moment.

Flores and Bajawa on the record: a brief history

The first hominins to make Flores their home may have been the Flores “Hobbits” (*Homo floresiensis*¹). But the earliest occupation of the island by modern humans appears to have begun approximately 8000 years before present, when the bones of the Sulawesi warty pig, an introduced species, begin to appear in the archaeological record² (Morwood and van Oosterzee 2007: 223). Flores was not settled in a single migration. Austronesian-speaking settlers reached the island around 4500 years ago (Bellwood 1985 in Hamilton 1994: 22). In the centuries that followed, the islands of eastern Indonesia, including the lesser Sundas, became enmeshed in trans-hemispheric circulations of people and goods, focused especially on the trade in spices (Ellen 2003: 4). For all of the human history of Flores, people have been coming and going,

¹ Evidence of the presence of *Homo floresiensis*, a meter-tall hominin, has been found at Liang Bua in Manggarai and Mata Menge in Ngada. Flores today remains full of stories about small people who live in the forest, called by names such as Ebugogo in Nage or Ana Kae Azi in Ngadha. I collected some such stories myself, but for a more definitive description see Forth (2008) “Images of the Wildman in Southeast Asia: an anthropological perspective.”

² Drawing on the relationship between modern humans and this species of pig, Morwood and van Oosterzee suppose that this first wave of human migration moved from Sulawesi to Papua before curling south and west along the Lesser Sunda Chain. They therefore guess that these first arrivals were Papuan language speakers (Morwood and van Oosterzee 2007: 223).

carrying with them the languages, histories, and cultures of the societies from which they originated.

The first mention of Flores in historical records comes from Tang dynasty China, whose ships were sailing along the Flores coast between the 7th and 10th centuries AD, en route to Timor and its supplies of sandalwood (Monk et al 1997: 684). In the 1300s, records of the Java-based Majapahit Empire named Flores and other islands on the route to Timor as dependencies (Metzner 1982: 65, Dietrich 1984: 321).

Flores was first mentioned in a European text in 1512 (Metzner 1982: 67). Profound political, economic, and ecological changes around Flores coincided with the arrival of Europeans in the 1500s.³ New world crops, including cassava, sweet potato, and maize, became staple food sources (Monk et al 1997: 700).⁴ Prestige trade goods, particularly ivory, seem to have arrived in Flores at this time, carried from India and mainland Southeast Asia by Portuguese sailors (Lewis 2010: 133-4). Water buffaloes, which would become one of the most ritually important animals in central Flores (e.g. Djawanai 1983: 106, Forth 1998: 29, Smedal 2000: 123, Ngewi 2014: 44), also appear in the archaeological record starting around 500 years ago (Morwood and van Oosterzee 2007: 102).

The political organization of Flores during this period was as diverse and varied as its landscape. By the 17th century, the Portuguese, Dutch, Ternatean, Goan, Butonese, and Biman empires were all jockeying for control of the waterways and small islands surrounding Flores, or making claims on slices of the territory of Flores itself (Needham 1983; Dietrich 1984; Metzner 1982; Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008).

Flores did produce some trade goods, including food, cinnamon, fustic, pepper, and dye woods (Lewis 2010: 133-4), but its most valuable export—to repeat words found in both Aritonang and Steenbrink (2008: 268) and in Lewis (2010: 136)—was its people, who were sold into slavery in exchange for gold, ivory, textiles, and other foreign prestige goods. Slave labor was the engine of the sugar plantation economy in Dutch-controlled Java, and the main sources

³ The first Portuguese landing on Flores may have been in 1550, or earlier; in 1512, Antonio de Abreu became the first European to mention Flores in his writings (Metzner 1982: 67), and Portuguese sailors were visiting the island of Solor, just off Flores' eastern tip, in 1515 (Ruth Barnes 1989: 72).

⁴ In 1522, Magellan's ship *Victoria*, guided by pilots from Tidore, sailed directly past Flores, en route from Maluku to Timor (Barnes 1989: 123-4).

of slaves for Javas plantations were the islands to the east, including Flores (Needham 1983: 4). In 1689, the Dutch East India Company banned the use of slaves from the western islands of the archipelago. This only intensified the capture and sale of slaves from the eastern islands (Ellen 2003: 102). By 1700, the city-state of Ende on Flores' south coast had become a central entrepôt for the slave trade in the Savu Sea, and a base for slaving expeditions around Flores, Timor, and Sumba (Forth 1981: 7-8; Knaap and Sutherland 2004: 118-119). The extraction of slaves from Flores increased after the 1840s, when the burgeoning horse trade from Sumba depressed the supply of slaves from that island (Forth 1981: 427-8). In 1860, the Dutch banned Europeans and Chinese in their territory from owning slaves. But this ban covered only a portion of the population, in only about 25% of the territory of the Dutch East Indies, and was enforced only in "piecemeal fashion" (Klein 2004: 204). As late as 1901, Endenese mercenaries were still being paid in slaves (Needham 1983: 35), and the trade still persisted there in 1907 (Metzner 1982: 69).⁵

Colonial authorities maintained a disinterest towards Flores for centuries. Dutch ships were stopping in Flores as early as the 1630s (Needham 1983: 17), but as late as 1824, the Dutch colonial state gazette still advised the following policy toward the island: "hands off as much as possible" (Forth 2004: 105). The Dutch purchased Flores from Portugal in 1859, then neglected to place any permanent residents on the island for another twenty years (Metzner 1982: 107).

The Bajawa plateau, and much of the rest of the interior of Flores, remained uncontrolled and unmapped. One Dutch colonialist complained, "how much longer should we still have to accept that there is a large island [Flores] in the middle of the Indian Archipelago which is nominally under our control but whose interior is hardly better known to us than the relatively few areas which, after persistent efforts of so many travellers, still remain of the famous blank spots in Africa's interior" (Metzner 1982: 63). The Dutch evinced no interest in Ngadha territory until 1871, when they heard there might be tin in the mountains there. In 1889, Dutch prospectors attempted to determine the truth of this rumor, only to be repelled by fierce local resistance (Molnar 2000: 11). At the turn of the 20th century, only about one quarter of the Flores

⁵ In some parts of the Dutch East Indies, slavery reportedly continued into the 1940s (Boomgaard 2003: 93) or even the 1950s (Elmberg 1968: 137-8). Even as late as the 1950s, on the coasts of Kodi, west Sumba, the sight of a strange ship offshore sent people screaming to the hills, fearful that slavers were coming to abduct them (Needham 1983: 41).

coastline was under Dutch control, and the interior, including Ngadhaland, remained largely independent, unexplored, and unmissionized, either by Christians or Muslims (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008: 237).

In August, 1907, as a wave of military expeditions consolidated Dutch control all over the Indonesian archipelago, a so-called “pacification” force set out from Ende to conquer the Flores interior. Over seven months, they subdued local forces across central and western Flores, including at Bajawa (Steenbrink 2013: 105). On September 20, 1907, following a series of deadly skirmishes, Captain Hans Christoffel met with local leaders at Bajawa to establish Dutch rule of Ngadhaland (Forth 2004: 106). The Dutch set up new lines of authority, placing district and village chiefs under the control of a raja. The absolute, hereditary power invested in rajas was new to Ngadhaland, which had never been politically united before (Djawanai 1983: 255-6).

The Dutch also invited in the Societas Verbi Divini (SVD), a Catholic monastic and missionary order staffed mostly with Dutch and German priests and brothers. Under the terms of the “Flores-Timor-Sumba Contract” of 1913, the Catholic church was granted a monopoly on education in Flores (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008: 262). The SVD founded a mission at Todabelu, a Ngadha area east of Bajawa, in 1920; in 1929, a minor seminary, founded in Sikka Natar in 1926, was moved there as well (Baghi 2020: 140; Langadjawa 1978: 45). The Catholic church also had responsibility for nearly all economic development in Flores, using funds raised from Holland and Germany to build water systems, agricultural extension centers, and vocational schools, and to conduct health programs (Webb 1986a: 166). The establishment and entrenchment of the Catholic Church—far more than Dutch colonial rule—made the 1920s “the decisive decade for the future character of Flores society and culture” (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008: 246). While some SVD priests, trained in Vienna School anthropology, produced works on Ngadha religion and culture (Molnar 2000: 16-18), and travelers and traders produced accounts with some basic ethnographic information (Molnar 2000: 14-15), there was little interest in the history of the area. In 1938, a Dutch administrator wrote, “little is known about the history of the Ngada” (Molnar 2000: 9).



Plate 8 Berkhmans Seminary, Todabelu.

After a brief period of Japanese occupation from 1942-1945, during which Arndt and other Europeans in Flores were interned by Japanese forces (Bader 1964: 639-42), the Bajawa area returned largely to the stewardship of local leaders and Catholic missionaries. Throughout this entire period, as momentous events elsewhere led to political and social transformations in other parts of Indonesia, the Catholic Church remained the locus of power and influence in Bajawa, as in much of Flores. No violence associated with Indonesia's struggle for independence, from 1945-1949, appears to have taken place in Bajawa, and Catholic publications produced in Flores during those years did not mention the conflict even once (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008: 250). Flores was absorbed into the Republic of Indonesia only in 1951, after the dissolution of the Dutch-supported Nation of Eastern Indonesia.⁶ Even then, the German, Dutch, and other European missionaries of the SVD remained in place, as they had for decades, and continued to administer education and development on the island. By the 1950s, Catholic mass organizations dominated agriculture, education, and politics in Flores, to such an extent that even priests within the SVD were concerned that the Church was becoming a "state within a state" (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008: 281). The rise of the New Order in 1965-66 was accompanied by terrible violence in many parts of the country, including in some parts of Flores, but there was little killing in Bajawa, where Catholic youths were held back by local priest Isak Dura (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008: 254). When I asked older people about their memories of

⁶ Negara Indonesia Timur, or NIT

the time between the Japanese and the New Order, the only event that people spoke of was a 1954 famine.

The New Order government placed a greater emphasis on state-driven development, but lacked funds, especially in its early years. The first regent of Ngada in this new era, Yan Yosef Botha, wishing to encourage commodity crop production but lacking the resources to support planting, resorted to urging children, when shooting at birds with their slingshots, to use candlenuts instead of stones; then, if they missed the birds, at least the candlenut trees could start growing in new areas. This story stands in stark contrast to the hundreds of development projects—some 357 across seven sectors, including agriculture, transport and communications, health, and more—funded and managed through the Church in the same period (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008: 259).

In the 1970s, however, the state became more capable, and more assertive. Java, Indonesia's most populous island, began to industrialize, ushering in a new era of rapid economic growth from around 1971 (Hill 2000: 16). This growth spurred the integration of islands such as Flores into Indonesia's national economy as never before, as Java sought raw materials for its factories, and markets for its manufactured products (Dick 1996: 22). Around Flores, including in Ngadhaland, agricultural techniques introduced by the Catholic development regime in the 1960s and 70s allowed cash crops such as coffee and cacao to be grown on a far greater scale than ever before (Webb 1986a: 173). High commodity prices in the 70s encouraged smallholders to increase cash crop production (Hill 2000: 17). New roads, and the arrival around 1974 of the island's first minibuses, made it easier than ever to transport sacks of produce to markets and ports (Metzner 1982: 181). In 1973, the Indonesian state introduced universal primary schooling, breaking the Church's monopoly on education; mandated that all teachers, including teachers in Catholic schools, join GOLKAR, the president's political party; and disbanded Catholic mass organizations (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008: 255). In 1974, the government made its first real commitment to development in NTT in the second five year plan (PELITA) (Webb 1986a: 173), and the churches of Sumba, Timor, and Flores ceded the lead in development efforts to the government for the first time (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008: 259). The Church remained ubiquitous and influential, especially as Indonesian priests and brothers displaced Europeans, a process called "Indonesianization," which began in the 1940s, (Webb

1986: 139).⁷ But this period of direct Catholic monopoly over the politics and economy of Flores was over.

This moment marked an inflection point, which was notable in the way almost everyone I spoke to about the past: a transition between two eras, referred to vaguely “these days”⁸ and “the old days.”⁹ These designations were highly contextual, depending on the speaker, and the particularities of their experience. They didn’t depend on reference to the great political movements of the time. Rather, for each speaker, the onset of “these days” marked the moment that the economic changes of the New Order developmental state finally reached their villages and touched their personal lives.

From here, I want to pivot away from the historical record, and focus on the histories that people in and around Bajawa related to me personally: the living narratives and memories that animate understandings of the past among Ngadha people today.

The arrivals and migrations of the first “Ngadha” people

The first arrival of people now known as Ngadha into the territory I refer to as Ngadhaland would be difficult to date, but there was an entry: the Ngadha do not consider themselves to be autochthonous, but to have traveled to Flores by boat, and landed on the southern coast of the island. A Dutch administrator estimated in 1916 that the Ngadha settled in their current region “250 years ago,” presumably meaning some time in the late 17th century (Van Staveren 1916: 120).¹⁰

⁷ The Indonesianization of the Church remains ongoing. In 2014, I encountered a Polish priest at the SVD mission in Riung, who had been in place for some 50 years.

⁸ BI *zaman sekarang* or “the current era”

⁹ BI *zaman dulu* or “the previous era.”

¹⁰ If true, this would be roughly the same time that a large community of refugees from the Dutch sack of Goa established itself at Ende, around 1675 (Andaya 1981 in Needham 1983: 18). Ende then became a center for slave trading from at least 1700 (Forth 1981: 7-8).



Plate 9 Aimere bay and the mouth of the Wae Mokol river.

These arrivals encountered original peoples—for example, the eastern bank of the Wae Mokol river was inhabited by a people called Lopi. They also encountered a variety of spiritual beings. One such type of being was referred to as “lords of the stones/lords of the soil,”¹¹ understood as the original owners of the land. Two other types of beings were encompassed by the phrase, “gods above, spirits below.”¹² The gods¹³ dwelt in the sky, and were remote arbiters of fortune. The spirits¹⁴ were associated with water, which they could cause to appear and disappear capriciously. In addition to these and other types of spiritual beings, the land was inhabited by beings of a more ambiguous, semi-spiritual nature. One example of these were BN *ybu ngiu*. Neither spirits nor fully human, *ybu ngiu* were “mountain men,” even to the mountain men themselves, as inhabitants of the Bajawa plateau are wont to style themselves.¹⁵ In Arndt’s dictionary (1961), the BN words *yibu* and *ngiu* would translate as “stupid” and “shaky,” however, along with the entry for *yibu*, he included the term *yibu ngongo*, or “stupid and without speech.” I have to wonder, then, if the phrase isn’t cognate with the Nage term *ebu gogo*, which

¹¹ BN *mori watu mori tana*

¹² BN *dewa reta nitu rale*. The term *dewa* for “gods” is cognate with usage in Balinese Hinduism. I have used the Rara Ele dialect for the prepositions *reta* and *rale*, which could also be spelled *eta/ale* or *zeta/zale*, depending on the speaker.

¹³ BN *dewa*

¹⁴ BN *nitu*

¹⁵ BN *ata dua* or “mountain people” was a phrase I sometimes heard Ngadha people use to refer to themselves. In addition to referring to the plateau where most Ngadha people live, it was simultaneously used to suggest a people who were countrified and easily fooled, and also, conversely, a people who were crafty, underestimated, and liable to outsmart their smug coastal neighbors.

Forth wrote about at length in his 2008 book, “Images of the Wildman in Southeast Asia: an anthropological perspective.” In his book, Nage people describe *ebu gogo* as small, hairy, speechless, ape-like creatures that live in caves and in the forest; similar indeed to *homo Floresiensis*. Ngadha people also used the term *ebu gogo* to describe such creatures, and maintained that they were different from *ybu ngiu*. Another term for *ebu gogo* in Ngadha was BN *ana ka’e azi*, or “elder and younger siblings.” There were two types of these: the ape-people of the forest, but also figures who resembled modern humans in miniature, who always dressed in traditional Ngadha clothing, and who were visible from a distance, but invisible from close by. These spirits, gods, non-human creatures are understood to still populate the landscape in between the human spaces of villages. There were also people who made appeals to a kind of Indigenous status based on connections to these “original,” not-quite-human inhabitants.¹⁶ In Langa, on the shoulder of the Bajawa plateau, where each year *woe*¹⁷ Langa undertook a day of ceremonial raiding, marauding through the villages of their friends and neighbors and stealing their chickens and produce; participants said that they were playing the part of *ybu ngiu*.¹⁸

In the days when the first Ngadha ancestors arrived in Flores, ocean waves still washed from the shoreline all the way up through the river gorges to higher points on the mountainsides. A couplet, of the kind that are common in Ngadha speech and around southeastern Indonesia (Fox 1988),¹⁹ describes the fresh and unformed nature of the place:

Tana lala, watu bomo Sodden earth, soft stones²⁰

In one telling, two original groups of pioneers rode the waves far up into the hills. In several other tellings, the ancestors’ first landing was in Rajong, on the western bank of the

¹⁶ In Maladhawi, which is not a Ngadha village but a Wolomeze one, at the northern edge of the Ranamoe valley bottom, people claimed both descent from and an ongoing relationship with *ebu gogo*, who dwelt not only in the forests nearby but also in small houses called *ga’a*, which were maintained by each family. I believe this word is in the Wolomeze language, but so many languages and dialects are spoken in central Ngada that I can’t say that for sure.

¹⁷ BN *woe* is usually translated as “clan.” This term will be fully unpacked in chapter 4.

¹⁸ This complex ceremony, in which I participated, was called BN *bui manu*, or “burnt chicken,” referring to the cooking of the stolen chickens at clan Langa’s secret *loka* shrine, hidden in the forest. I will describe it in more detail in chapter 3.

¹⁹ In Ngadha these are called BN *pata dela*, “sayings of the elders.” Yan Mopa has compiled several books of these.

²⁰ BI *tana cair/lumpur, batu lembek*

mouth of the Wae Mokol.²¹ From there, they spread in all directions—not only east, into Ngadhaland, but also west, into Manggarai, and north, into Uluwae, Lindi, and Wolomeze. They also set a boundary between land and sea, to prevent further incursions of waves into the hills. This is described in the couplet,

<i>Maghi padhi penda mera</i>	A line of lontar palms, a rank of pandanus
<i>Wae bata ma'e langga</i>	The sea water shall not trespass ²²

Some of these stories suggest that all Ngadha people today are descended from one or several sets of original ancestors who made one, original landing. And there are sets of names—the names of male ancestors in particular—that come up again and again in connection with various stories of the creation and peopling of Ngadhaland. But not all stories of arrival begin with shared “original ancestors,” and not all arrival stories are presented as myth. Many stories are related to the arrival in Flores of particular lineages—not “Ngadha people” as a whole or an entity—who emerge from myth into a more mundane relation of movement, intermarriage, and settlement.

One such story was told to me by Yohanes (Yan) Mopa, who told me that his own ancestors first left India for Sri Lanka, then moved through Java, Lombok, Sumbawa, and Sumba. From there they sailed to Flores, landing at a place called Ruto, at the base of Mt. Inerie. He gave me this couplet related to this arrival:

<i>Nai pu'u Ruto Pali</i>	Climb to the source of Ruto Pali
<i>Se'e be'i lele</i> ²³	???

Yan could not translate the second line for me, and neither his dictionary (2004) nor Arndt's (1961) were any help, making this a curious piece of his family history.

²¹ Leo, in Teni, said the toponym Rajong meant, “a place for stowing boats.” BN *rajo* means “boat,” but because Rajong is now in Manggarai, a Manggaraian place name is used.

²² BI *lontar baris, sejenis pandan baris / air laut jangan langgar*

²³ Although Yan gave me these words himself, none of them appear in his own 2004 Ngadha dictionary. Looking in Arndt (1961), BN *see* has nine entries, including “to get stuck,” “to stay behind,” “to take a detour,” and “to fall ill from sorcery.” BN *be'i* is absent. BN *lele* has six entries, including “firm,” “energetic,” “obedient,” “to demand,” “to repeat,” “profitable,” and “enough stock!” (German *Vorrat genug!*), an exclamation given before the distribution of food at large feasts. (Arndt's orthography does not use apostrophes in words.)

The lineage moved up the slope from Ruto, but eventually went back down to the coast to Taka Tunga. From there they spread eastward along the shore, then went up into Nage territory near Mt. Ebulobo, to Keo Belo, then back to the coast at Savu Ledho near Ma'uponggo, then up to Lere south of Mt. Ebulobo, then down to Wio, then Wajo, then Riti, then Ma'unua near Nangaroro, where there is an old well that was dug by one of Yan's ancestors. Some of the lineage continued eastward to Ende, and then traveled by boat to Solor, an island in the Lamaholot chain, just east of Flores.²⁴ Yan said he had been to Solor, and found a community there that had all the same rituals he had grown up with in Ngadhaland, and lived in a house with the same name as his own.

This tale of movement is central to many Ngadha historical narratives—a continual flow of people through space. There is a clear relation here to what Fox (2006) called “topogenies,” ordered successions of place names, which are common in eastern Indonesia (Fox 2006: 89). Rather than describe his family history by reciting a list of his ancestors—a genealogy—Yan recounted to me a list of locations where his ancestors settled for some period of time. Yan's account differs in some ways from Fox's description, however. Fox argues that, in both topogeny and genealogy, “points of origin and termination are critical” (2006: 99). In this case, while Ruto, the point of entry into Flores, is clearly defined, the story gives no sense of termination. The family's descendants spread across vast, non-contiguous areas, spanning many cultural regions. Their movements were fragmented, multi-directional—even occasionally doubling back on themselves—and ongoing; the story does not indicate that the family's travels have ended, or that they have reached their true and final place. And while many topogenies suggest that the current location of the family is their final home, nothing in Yan's story suggests that parts of the family will cease to migrate. The story reflects connections between members of Yan's lineage and several locations (particularly the site of the first landing, and the site of the well); but those connections are not exclusive to that family, nor do they seem to constitute grounds for Yan or his near relatives to make claims on those locations. The connections between people and places are not inherent but contingent, reliant on an ongoing occupation of that space. Rather than appealing to the authority of precedence based on a point of origin, Yan's story focuses on expansion and movement, with greater emphasis on where people are now than where they were

²⁴ It was not clear from Mopa's telling how many generations were encompassed by this story.

before; on “lastness,” the quality of being the latest group to occupy a space, rather than “firstness,” the rights of precedence.

With each move, houses were dismantled and relocated, or started again from scratch. New alliances and social bonds were formed, while others were left behind. As a rule, Ngadha people understand themselves always to be in the process of developing their house structures, improving the materials and adding decorations in phases, moving towards the eventual achievement of an apical form.²⁵ In practice, these processes are often abandoned or restarted, as people restart their lives, by force or choice, in new locations.

Starting over, again: the story of Teni-Lopijo

If Yan Mopa’s story was one of triumphant expansion, a contrasting narrative can be found in the story of Teni and Lopijo, two hamlets on the outer, western flank of the Bajawa plateau, where the mountain ridge of Lobo Butu slopes away to the Wae Mokol river. These hamlets and their inhabitants moved over and over again, not out of pioneering spirit, but in flight from violence. Their story illustrates the social, spatial, ecological, and economic flows that characterize life in Ngadhaland.

Many Ngadha people regard these villages as something of a time capsule, where old Ngadha ways live on, isolated from the changes of recent decades. Weavers there, for example, are among the last in Ngadhaland to spin their own thread and craft with natural indigo, and to exchange their handiwork for live buffaloes—or for prices indexed to the price of buffaloes, rather than prices based on the costs of materials and labor. The food staples are hand-pounded hill rice, grown in unirrigated plots; large-kerneled maize, which stores well; and the meat of wild pigs, hunted with the aid of dogs and clubs, and smoked on racks above the kitchen fire. I visited Teni-Lopijo twice in 2016, and spent a couple of nights there, looking around, chatting to people, drawing sketches, and conducting interviews. When I visited, the towns were reachable by foot or motorbike, but not by car or truck.

²⁵ Phases of house development will be discussed in chapter 3.



Plate 10 Walking into Teni.

Teni and Lopijo were two separate hamlets, on two different mountain ridges, until the 1970s, when the government moved them to their current location.²⁶ Now they sit together on one ridge like two halves of a single village, separated (or joined) by a soccer field and a chapel, with Teni on the uphill side, and Lopijo on the downhill side. People in both hamlets identify as culturally Ngadha, though there are differences between them, including in dialect. On the Teni side, the dialect is closer to what is spoken in Bajawa, while in Lopijo, there are more Manggarai elements to the language. The common example given by villagers is a term meaning, “to walk around.”²⁷ In Teni, the term is *la’a-la’a*, as it is in Rara Ele and other parts of Ngadhaland. In Lopijo, however, the term is *lako-lako*, which I was told is Manggaraian, and which sounds a bit funny in Ngadha, where the word *lako* means “dog.”²⁸

Settlement on the western slope was shaped by the continual retreat from violence, and especially from the slave trade. The area was exposed to raids from the sea, and from across the Wae Mokel river, and so was generally considered to be unsafe for settlement. This was a common fate of exposed areas in Flores during the height of the slave trade, when some large swaths of the island were almost entirely depopulated by slaving (Erb 1994: 199). Slavery was endemic in Ngadha villages, too. People were enslaved primarily through capture in war (Molnar 1994: 52), and also through debt bondage; in some cases, girls were offered as wives in repayment of debts (Arndt 1954: 42). In the early 20th century, the missionary Paul Arndt

²⁶ It was not clear from my discussions which level of government was responsible for relocating villages.

²⁷ BI *jalan-jalan*

²⁸ Arndt also includes definitions for BN *lako* as “a type of cricket,” “a type of small clam,” and “to observe, ambush, guard, search, listen” (1961: 276).

recorded the slave trade as a major source of wealth (1954: 458). Even today, Ngadha people divide themselves into three hereditary classes, one of which, called BN *ho'o*, are the descendants of slaves.²⁹

The continual flight from enslavement drove individuals, houses, and groups of houses from place to place. In the first half of the 20th century, Arndt described the security situation in Ngadhaland:

“For security, villages in the same area form political unions, often built close together, though the breadth of their country may necessitate locating them farther apart. In the presence of danger they want [to be able] to come together quickly to face the threat of an enemy. A village that stands alone will easily be conquered by enemies. Thusly, if there is a clan that wishes to join, they are welcomed with glad hearts to strengthen resistance against enemies, and to reduce the desire for conflict from enemy parties, even though they must cede land and fields to the people joining them. This situation is called *go beke meku mole paa maja* — to get a friendly chest and a peaceful lap³⁰” (Arndt 2009: 451³¹).

When I visited these hamlets, Teni was already in at least its fourth location. Its previous three locations had been sacked and burned by raiders, old enemies remembered as the “Sengge Buru,” who continually raided the slope from across the Wae Mokol, hunting for slaves. Each time their homes were destroyed, the villagers retreated higher up into the hills, to more obscure and defensible locations on remote promontories, accessible only by narrow paths lined with thorny hedges.³² In addition to moving and renaming their villages, they muddled the name of the territory; I heard it referred to variously as Wae Ghole, Keli Kombos, Keli Kijo, and Hea Wea³³. This was a diversionary tactic, meant to help the inhabitants of the western slope escape the notice of rulers in Bajawa or elsewhere, and protect against invasion.

²⁹ While Smedal (2016: 177) found *ho'o* people to be few in number, in my own research in Rara Ele, many people claimed to belong to this class.

³⁰ BI mendapat dada yang ramah dan pangkuan yang damai.

³¹ Arndt (2009) is an Indonesian translation of Arndt (1954) “Gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse der Ngada.”

³² A type of euphoria was used.

³³ Keli Kombos was the name of a pair of hamlets that existed in the time of Raja Pia Mole. It was suggested that moments of succession between kings were good opportunities to change the names of hamlets, in the hope of escaping the notice and hence the rule of the new king. Wae Ghole literally translates as “hillside water.” While BN *ghole* means “hillside” or “slope,” it can also contain the meaning of “tumbling,” or “churning,” or a sort of inversion, reversal, or dangerous chaos. In one phrase, “*Jawa ghole du'a*,” translated as “Javanese overturn/cheat mountain (people)” (BI *Jawa putar balik/tipu pedalaman/udik*). I could say more about contradictory descriptions of mountain people—and many Ngadha people describe themselves as “mountain people” (BN *ata dua*)—either as bumpkins, or as clever tricksters. Hea Wea (meaning “golden cup”) is the name of the present-day *desa* in which

Over generations, refugees driven by violence continued to arrive on the western slope and join Teni and Lopijo. One of these families³⁴ brought the first rice and maize to Teni, sharing them with everyone, but reserving the right to the first planting each season.³⁵ Each descent group had its own named water source,³⁶ and a chance to erect monuments to its male and female ancestors, called BN *ngadhu* and BN *bhaga*. Today, Teni and Lopijo are home to 19 such groups, a denser conglomeration than I saw anywhere else. The names of some lineages begin with “Mb-”, a combination that is common in place names in Manggarai, to the west, but (to my knowledge) unknown in Ngadhaland or in the Ngadha language. Some of these groups used living trees, instead of cut and carved posts, for their *ngadhu*, a practice that is common in Wolomeze, to the north, but which I never saw elsewhere in Ngadhaland.³⁷ The living *ngadhu* belong to families in the lower, slave class,³⁸ and are positioned downhill of the carved *ngadhu*, which belong to families of the upper class;³⁹ later arrivals with different customs, taking an inferior position, socially and spatially, to the families already in place. Other groups have not yet erected *ngadhu*, or are using placeholders—tiny pitched roofs of thatch, supported by meter-high posts—in place of *bhaga*, indicating that no houses in those families have yet risen to the level of prosperity that would permit them to construct these monuments. Just off the ridgeline lie the abandoned stone platforms and graves of the previous settlement of Lopijo, its last location before it was moved to its current site in the 1970s; on the next ridgeline to the north, the footpath to Ranamoe passes a ruined stone platform that was once the center of Teni.

Teni-Lopijo is located. The name derives from the legend of Lobo Butu, a tree that once grew on or near the peak of the mountain that separates the western slope from the plateau. This tree once bore on its branches all variety of golden objects, and was the source of much of the gold in Ngadhaland today.

³⁴ Woe Longga

³⁵ Before that, local people subsisted on tubers, including a forest tuber known locally as BN *ejo*. This tuber is known in other places around the region as *sura*, *suja*, and *suza*.

³⁶ These are called BN *mata ranga*—BN *ranga* meaning “sweet potato,” and also being the staple pig feed

³⁷ I observed this in the Wolomeze village of Maladhawi. The living tree was called a *ngandhu*, and served a similar purpose to a BN *ngadhu*, as a symbol of a male ancestor of a clan, and the locus of public rituals.

³⁸ BN *ho’o*

³⁹ BN *ga’e*



Plate 11 A living *ngadhu*, Lopijo.

Teni and Lopijo remain the only hamlets on the entire western slope of the plateau. They are the strongest example of Ngadhaland as a Zomia, an upland zone to which people retreat in an attempt to escape from violence or domination: “runaway, fugitive, maroon communities,” living in “shatter zones or zones of refuge” (Scott 2009: ix-x). The history of Teni-Lopijo is a story of people thrown together; not a unified whole, but an amalgam of families, lineages, languages, and traditions, united in their desire to escape enslavement. Violence, and the retreat from it, periodically severed the connections between people and places, as they were continually forced to uproot their families, rebuild their homes, and establish new monuments in new locations, periodically starting everything again.



Plate 12 A temporary *bhaga*, Lopijo.

In addition to shaping human settlement, violence contributed to the shaping of the landscape and its ecology. The empty grasslands of the western slope were not solely natural, but a result of actions taken by the people who lived there. One of these actions, as described above, was a retreat from vulnerable areas to remote hilltops and ridge lines, where settlements and inhabitants were easier to defend from raids and slavers. These lands were unsafe to settle, and also unsafe to farm, or to put under any kind of intense utilization. Instead, villagers frequently subjected these open lands to burning, which protected approaches to the village, by depriving potential raiders of cover or concealment. The burning encouraged the growth of grasses for grazing, and animals were let loose on these lands, identified by unique nose rings. Burning was also a tool for hunting, driving wild pigs, deer, and other game animals out of their hiding places.

Over time, the Dutch and their client rulers in Bajawa succeeded in suppressing local conflicts and slavery in Ngadhaland. After 1917, resistance to Dutch rule faded away (Molnar 2000: 13); small-scale, inter-village warfare petered out around the 1930s (Djawanai 1983: 251). Excepting the brief, violent period of Japanese occupation,⁴⁰ the open, burnt lands between villages, which had been vulnerable to attack, could now be used safely. Ngadha people in the western slope and elsewhere did not immediately begin enclosing these lands. Rather, they filled the region's grasslands, still depopulated and burnt clear of trees, with herds of buffalo and other livestock. As this "peace dividend" produced larger numbers of animals, the ceremonies at which these animals were killed ballooned in size (Schroter 2005: 339). The numbers of sacrificial victims grew; families competed with one another to kill more animals, attract more feasters to attend, and distribute greater amounts of meat. The oldest inhabitants of Ngadhaland today were young during this period of inflated animal production, and their recollections were crowded with memories of grand, extravagant sacrifices. These recollections contributed to their conceptions of wealth, defined in large part as an abundance of animals available for exchange, slaughter, and distribution. This concept continues to play a role in how many Ngadha people think about economic development today.

By the early New Order period, government officials were frustrated by the refusal of villagers around Ngadhaland to adapt more fully to changes in the security situation. They were still burning land to raise large herds, preventing the development of agriculture, and performing

⁴⁰ Local memories of the Japanese occupation center on hunger, forced labor, and the need to hide women in granaries while the men buried their food in bamboo tubes.

large sacrifices, rather than investing in businesses or education (Langadjawa 1978: 55). The government particularly wished to push a program called 5K, named for five agricultural commodities whose Indonesian names all started with the letter K: coconuts, coffee, candlenuts, cinnamon, and cotton-tree fiber.⁴¹ This program was promoted with the slogan,

Kalau tidak tanam lima K, If you don't plant the 5K

kau ka lima You'll eat your hands⁴²

Teni and Lopijo people had long been involved in local trading networks, carrying clay pots, textiles, and agricultural products over the mountain track to the Bajawa plateau.⁴³ But it was impractical to carry large loads of low-value commodity crops over such a difficult path, and the conversion of grasslands to commodity agriculture progressed slowly, to the mounting frustration of government officials. In 1976, in a bid to coerce villagers into penning their livestock and planting commodity crops, Indonesian police officers stormed up into the hills, shooting all the loose livestock they could find. The event still resonates today, compounding the villagers' distrust of outsiders and the state.



Plate 13 Burnt pastures below Teni-Lopijo.

⁴¹ Respectively, BI *kelapa*, *kopi*, *kemiri*, *kayu manis*, and *kapok*. (All “k” in Indonesian, all “c” in English.) The government has also supported other commodity crops at different times, including cloves, cacao, and timber woods such as albizia and ampupu.

⁴² The first line of this slogan is in BI. The second line, which puns on the first, is in BN.

⁴³ Lopijo potters dug clay from the bed of the Wae Mokel and carried it back to the village, a considerable distance.

Land conversion remained slow until finally, in 2008, a new road for vehicles connected the market at Aimere to Wawa, several kilometers away from Teni-Lopijo. The road does not reach the hamlets, as there is no bridge over the gorge of the river Koe; but it has made the commodity trade more palatable, and since that time, candlenut trees have taken over a larger and larger share of the slope, replacing grasses with trees, and open lands with enclosed plots. The road has also reoriented the people of Teni and Lopijo away from Bajawa, and established Aimere as the main destination for local produce.

The landscape, shaped by the needs of a different era, is currently undergoing a social and ecological transformation, as lands are enclosed and huge numbers of trees are planted. And new settlements are appearing, lured by the apparent emptiness left behind by centuries of sustained violence and insecurity. Officially, unenclosed lands are considered unclaimed, classified as “forest,” and placed under the stewardship of the Ngada department of forestry. In this perceived social void, near Uluwae, where the northern valley meets the western slope, the government has established two transmigrant communities, known as S1 and S2. I passed through these communities, but didn’t get to know anyone there. But they add an intriguing potential to the mix.

Over time, the 19 groups of affiliated houses that reside in Teni and Lopijo have intermarried, to the point that everyone, regardless of affiliation, linguistic difference, or class, is related in one way or another. The unity of the hamlets was summed up for me with this phrase:

<i>Lulu poli</i>	Neatly wound as a ball of thread
<i>Loge mogo</i> ⁴⁴	Tight like a bud that has not yet opened

The western slope, and the hamlets of Teni and Lopijo which are located there, illustrate the social, spatial, ecological, and economic flows that characterize life in Ngadhaland. The villages were displaced over and over again by violence. As a result, they have been forced to restart the processes of village foundation and house construction, time after time. Their villages, and the ancestor shrines and houses that make them up, represent not a connection between the people and the particular space they occupy, but the commitment of a group of people to each other, and to the shared and ongoing work of claiming and defining a living space. Teni and

⁴⁴ BI *gulung/atur rapi // pucuk belum mekar/bersatu*. BN *loge* refers specifically to the young leaf of a lontar palm before it spreads open.

Lopijo are populated by lineages with diverse origins, who sought refuge and built solidarity in a defensible location. Some of these have erected public monuments to their ancestors; others have yet to do so, but are understood to be in the process of erecting them, even generations after their arrival and integration into the village. Social hierarchies based on class, precedence, and wealth persist, yet are complicated by the everyday realities of intermarriage and interdependence.

The violence that drove settlement patterns has largely faded, but memories remain strong, and occasionally I received a stark reminder that I was moving through a post-conflict space. In early December 2016, I arrived in Teni with Caroline and our guide, Tomas,⁴⁵ on foot—soaked through with rain, footsore, and bleeding from leech bites, after hours lost in the forest—we learned that some local women had seen us, but rather than help, had hidden themselves. The reason, we were told, was that my partner and I were wearing trousers. The Dutch, the Japanese, the police, all wore long pants, and all they brought was trouble. The women wondered if we, like those earlier men, had come to assault them.⁴⁶ Better, they thought, to keep out of sight.

Enclosure, expansion, social transformation: the story of Rara Ele

The main site of my research was not on the western slope, but in a region called Rara Ele, or the “upward road,” which makes up the highest portion of the Bajawa plateau, northwest of Bajawa city. I was based in a Rara Ele village I call Bogala, with members of an extended family from whom I was renting a house. Some of the key members of that family were Bart, a man almost exactly my age, and the first university graduate in his family, who first built the house I was renting; his parents, Paulus and Maria, who occupied the family’s traditional house along with several of their children and grandchildren; and Yoosneem, Maria’s eldest brother, who had married into a house several doors down, and was one of my most frequent companions. Yoosneem and Paulus in particular presented me with a version of local history in which their family is remarkably influential. While it is possible that their version exaggerates

⁴⁵ Tomas had walked the path often as a boy, when he accompanied his father on weeks-long expeditions in search of wild forest products—but not recently. Until 2008, the path was traveled daily by traders and travelers carrying clay pots, textiles, and farm produce for sale or exchange in the villages of Rara Ele or the market at Bajawa. When the road to Aimere opened, people stopped walking along the mountain path, and it disappeared. Unfortunately Tomas did not know this when he guided me and Caroline on a hike from Eko Heto to Teni.

⁴⁶ BI *pukul*, literally “to beat, to hit”

the centrality of members of their own family, the contours of the story dovetail perfectly with my broader understanding of change in the surrounding area.

Bogala moved to its current site in in early 1960s, following a catastrophic fire that destroyed many of the homes on its previous site. Moving the village removed its residents from a site that had become ill-omened by the fire, and also put them closer to Bajawa, to a year-round water source, and to a road. The move was gradual, taking place over several years. The move was also partial—of the four *ngadhu* posts in the village, only three were moved. The fourth was abandoned, and the group to which it belonged is not present in Bogala today. I will go into more detail on the relocation of Bogala in chapter 5. But moving to a new location meant starting the process of developing and dedicating a new village over again, from scratch—a process that remains incomplete decades later.



Plate 14 The center of Bogala.

At that time, Rara Ele, like the western slope, was mostly treeless, and burning for hunting and clearing remained common. That began to change in the 1970s, when farmers began planting tracts around Rara Ele with coffee, the 5K crop of choice for the high, cool regions of the plateau. Coffee trees were permanent crops, which didn't have to be replanted annually. They also managed all right with little tending for most of the year, requiring intensive labor only during the two to three months of the harvest season. With labor time freed up, and nearby lands bound up in coffee, the inhabitants of Rara Ele began looking for new lands to exploit. They

found them to the north, in the valley between the Bajawa plateau and the mountains of Wolomeze, in a valley that now makes up the subdistrict of North Bajawa.⁴⁷

The story of the North Bajawa valley, and its settlement by Ngadha people, echoes the myths about the original arrival of Ngadha ancestors in Flores. It was a wasteland, people said; marshy, with grass up over your head. The first road into the valley was opened up in the late 1960s. Supposedly nobody lived in the valley, as, like the western slope, it was too exposed, and unsafe for habitation. Yet the first car to travel that road, carrying the regent Jan Botha, was greeted by some original inhabitants, who rode out on horseback to meet it, and welcomed it into their village with a buffalo sacrifice.⁴⁸

By 1971, Yoosneem, Paulus, and all of their siblings, along with many other families from Rara Ele, were claiming lands in the valley, simply by clearing them and fencing them off. They built field houses, and planted wet paddy rice, other food crops, and timber.⁴⁹ White rice from these fields became a staple food back in their home villages on the plateau, displacing maize, root crops, and red or black rice, which grow in dry fields. Paulus liked to talk about how hard he worked in those days. He would rise before dawn, hoeing his property right up to the boundaries, eating nothing until a mid-morning snack of maize flour and palm wine—up to ten 10 liters of palm wine a day, he said with a smile, plus cigarettes and maize. That could power a day's labor.

⁴⁷ BI *kecamatan Bajawa Utara* Govt resettlement programs also made land available to families from kecamatan Bajawa to relocate in Aesesa and Kurubhoko Memori Bupati p 216].

⁴⁸ In one retelling of the event, these villagers were so amazed by the car's tires that they beat them with sticks and knives, accidentally slashing them open.

⁴⁹ Because timber takes decades to mature, people often plant it in areas that are difficult to access in the hope and expectation that by the time the trees are ready to cut, there will be a road enabling it to be removed.



Plate 15 The view from the North Bajawa valley to the plateau.

The mid-1970s, when these farms were becoming productive, was also the moment when the government asserted itself in the development of Flores, including through the establishment of universal primary education. Teachers in those state schools brought a state presence to small towns that had never had one before—and also state salaries, which increased the availability and circulation of cash in areas where trade was previously dominated by barter (Curnow 2007: 152). Land surveying began in earnest (Metzner 1982: 227). The production and sale of agricultural commodities was reorganized through government cooperatives (BI *Koperasi Unit Desa* or KUD), which brought New Order governmentality and a more direct integration with global commodity markets to poor farmers (Metzner 1982: 146).

In 1988, Paulus and one of his brothers traded some horses for Bali cattle, the first cows in Bogala.⁵⁰ Cows were cared for differently than buffalo. Rather than running free, like the buffalo that once roamed the now-enclosed and tree-planted grasslands, the cows were tethered, and were moved twice a day to locations with good fodder, often by the sides of roads and paths. Whereas rich families owned many buffalo, but let them run loose over open grasslands, it remains uncommon for families today to own more than a few cows. Also unlike buffalo, the

⁵⁰ It's unclear how long there have been horses in Flores—I don't remember seeing mention of them in Morwood and Van Oosterzee, which specifically mentioned the appearance of pigs and buffalo in the archaeological record. Horses however are deeply woven into Ngadha cultural practice, including in a literal way: BN *jara*, or "horse," is the name of a prominent pictorial motif on Ngadha traditional clothing. Cloth with *jara* motifs are also referred to as "horse cloths," and were traditionally (though no longer) reserved for people of high status. Horses are also included in several traditional bridewealth payments—see appendix II for more details.

production of cattle was unrelated to ceremonial advancement; cows and cow blood have no place in the practice of traditional ceremonies. Cattle are commodities only. Bart told me that when he was a boy in the 1980s, the family ate meat almost every day. He was talking about the offal left over from the cows his father brought to the abattoirs in Bajawa.

In 1989, Yoosneem was the first person in Bogala to replace his robusta coffee trees with arabica seedlings, which were provided by the government.⁵¹ The family planted coffee on their lands throughout the 1990s, steadily filling in gardens that were previously planted with maize, beans, and other subsistence crops. By 1997, coffee occupied nearly all of the family's lands on the plateau. Families around them were planting trees as well, not only coffee, but albizia⁵² and ampupu,⁵³ two types of timber. The slopes and hills surrounding Bajawa transitioned sharply from grasslands to trees during this decade. Whenever I stood on a promontory with Bart, Yoosneem, or others, they could point out over the landscape, now thoroughly green with trees, and remember a time not long ago when all of this was grass.

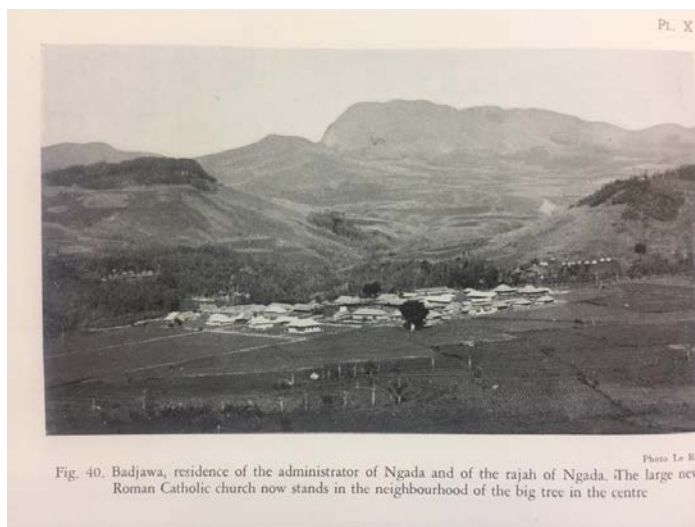


Fig. 40. Badjawa, residence of the administrator of Ngada and of the rajah of Ngada. The large new Roman Catholic church now stands in the neighbourhood of the big tree in the centre

Plate 16 Treeless hills around Bajawa before 1942 (Kunst 1942: Pt. X)

⁵¹ The international market prefers arabica to robusta, which is why the government encouraged the change. Local people, however, wax nostalgic about the aroma of robusta beans, which, when roasted, apparently could be smelled for a hundred meters in every direction.

⁵² *Albizia chinensis*

⁵³ *Eucalyptus urophylla*



Plate 17 Tree-covered hills of Bajawa in 2016.

Some forests did remain on the uppermost parts of the plateau, which had held a protected status since the Dutch colonial era. In the 1980s and 90s, as the population grew⁵⁴ and coffee became profitable, the people of Rara Ele cut into those forests, clearing the land and planting coffee orchards.⁵⁵ In the 1990s, the government, required by law to protect mountain watersheds, declared the inner slopes and forests of the upper plateau a protected area. In response, a large alliance of villages organized to force the government to allow development. Since then, most of the forest in the upper plateau has been reclassified to permit locals to fell trees and replace them with coffee, while the steepest areas have been burnt, planted with ampupu trees, and used as cow pasture.

When the government opened up lands for settlement or development, it was demonstrating a fact about life in Ngadhaland that is different from many other parts of Indonesia: the existence of land that is perceived to be unowned and unutilized. In other, more densely populated parts of Flores or the rest of Indonesia, there may be no such thing as land that

⁵⁴ Statistical information from prior decades is not completely reliable, in large part because administrative boundaries shift frequently, making comparisons between districts of the same name at different times less meaningful. With that caveat, the population of the subdistrict of Bajawa, which includes Rara Ele and Bajawa town, rose from 20,625 in 1968 to 28,451 in 1977 (Langadjawa 1978: 14), a roughly 40% increase in a single decade. By 2015, the population had risen to 39,138, nearly double the 1968 figure (<https://ngadakab.bps.go.id/statictable/2016/10/03/31/jumlah-penduduk-luas-daerah-dan-kepadatan-penduduk-kabupaten-ngada-menurut-kecamatan-2015.html>, accessed 1 June 2020).

⁵⁵ In 1977, a total of 1047.73 hectares were planted with coffee in all of Ngada regency—which at that time included all of what is now Nagekeo regency (Langadjawa 1978: 67). By 2006, 2,699 hectares were planted with coffee in Bajawa subdistrict alone (BPS 2007: 204)

is unclaimed. In the neighboring region of Nage, for example, even the steepest river gorges are owned by one house or group of houses (Forth 2004: 123). It is possible that the land claims of the Department of Forestry were overlaid on prior claims made by houses or lineages, but these claims had lapsed. In my discussions about the exploitation of lands held by the Department of Forestry, I never heard anyone make recourse to prior claims. Instead it was clear that people's claims required some degree of ongoing engagement with the land, and that such claims could lapse if not attended to.

As in other parts of Southeast Asia where smallholders are expanding into a frontier, enclosure in Ngadhaland was not the regular Marxist vision of the seizure of the commons (Hall 2012). Instead, the general availability of lands for enclosure, and the possibility of attaining a kind of prosperity based on commodity trade rather than the ownership and sacrifice of large animals, made it possible for many families to begin lifting themselves out of poverty. Whereas wealthy families once ran large herds on otherwise unproductive lands, it was now possible for anyone to enclose those lands and plant permanent tree crops on them. The enclosure of lands on and off the plateau, and the planting of pasture lands with coffee and other trees, brought the “peace dividend” boom in buffalo production and sacrifice to an end, sometime around 1980 (Schroter 2005: 339). Buffalo for sacrifice are no longer produced in Rara Ele, and buffalo breeding and care is now rare in much of Ngadhaland;⁵⁶ buffalo are now purchased with cash from Boawae or elsewhere. The social, economic, and ecological transformations of the 1970s and 80s practically erased buffalo production from the upper plateau (Smedal 2009: 277-278). In 2015, the subdistrict that contained my home village of Bogala, only five people owned a total of five buffaloes—in contrast to 80 people owning 310 cows, and 675 people owning 1426 pigs (Kelurahan Susu 2015: 12).

One effect of this change was a dispersal and leveling of economic power. More families had cash incomes, and great herds were no longer practical. According to some Ngadha people, with the loss of animals in this period, “the Ngadha became poor” (Schroter 2005: 339). In 1982, a government official, asked about the progress of the prior fifteen years, said that people in Flores were worse off than before (Webb 1986a: 182-3).⁵⁷ Some people said this to me as well.

⁵⁶ There may be Rara Ele families raising buffaloes on their lands in the North Bajawa valley.

⁵⁷ Webb dismissed this an “old man’s assessment.”

The ones who did, I eventually realized, were the *ga'e* people, members of the hereditary upper class. Meanwhile, people from lower class backgrounds told me how, in recent decades, their homes, diets, and health had drastically improved, and they were sending their children to school and on to university for the first time. If some Ngadha people did feel they had become poor, it was the formerly rich and high status, who became comparably poorer as their exchange superiority, based in control of herds of buffalo, was worn away by land enclosure.

The prosperity engendered by this expansion was visible all over Rara Ele. With roads and electricity reaching more and more villages, moderately profitable commodity agriculture on the plateau, and productive new farms off the plateau, families in Rara Ele began to build. In 1981, Paulus built a concrete house for the family, reconstructing their wooden traditional house inside it. Other families in Bogala did the same. Today, the village plaza is ringed with concrete houses, most of them with *sa'o* hidden inside. As they rebuilt, some houses took advantage of their growing prosperity to upgrade, improving their social position by adding carvings to the faces of their *sa'o*, and adding new symbols⁵⁸ to reflect the acquisition of new lands in the valley. Motorbikes, rare in Bajawa as recently as 2002, are now common. And according to Bart, any family in town could now afford to send their children to university, if they so chose. (Bart himself was the first member of his family to go to university.) In 2002, the family decided to make upgrades to their traditional house, and began gathering materials. In 2015, after more than a decade of preparation and work, they dedicated their new *sa'o*.

During the same period, down in the North Bajawa valley, settlers from Rara Ele were also building homes. These houses were field huts at first; but over time, some were replaced with BN *sa'o keka*, the lowest form of Ngadha traditional house, then with *sa'o mola*, the next form.⁵⁹ There were no villages—not like on the plateau, with a rectangle of houses arranged around a central plaza. But now there were traditional houses; the people who built them were now affiliated with those houses, and not with the houses from which they originated. As families subdivided, established houses on the plateau divided their house symbols, and some were carried to the valley. Most of these houses remained tied to *ngadhu* and *bhaga* in the

⁵⁸ BN *fi'i riti more gili*. These will be discussed in chapter 3.

⁵⁹ Phases of house construction will be discussed in chapter 3.

villages where their natal houses were located. A few have now managed to erect their own *ngadhu* and *bhaga*, making them effectively autonomous segments of their greater lineages.⁶⁰

I made a number of trips down to the North Bajawa valley during my research, and when I did, I always saw familiar faces. Many of my neighbors in Bogala maintained lands in the valley. Some had converted their field houses into larger, more permanent BN *baru* homes. Others had built new *sa'o*, often standing alone, apart from any sort of village, making a strong declaration of their ownership and rootedness. But the realities of claims on the space of the valley were more complex.

On one occasion, Yoosneem took me to visit a Bogala man named Yan Muga on his lands in the valley to the north. We found him and a friend sitting by a simple field house, eating pieces of fire-roasted cassava. We talked for a long time, and he shared a number of stories, couplets of ritual speech, and other information. Then he mentioned that he had recently received an unexpected visit: a delegation from *woe* Ngusu. They informed him that they wished to remove a particular tree from his property, and replant it at a village nearby as a living *ngadhu*. They had selected the tree by BN *bui tibo* divination, burning twigs of bamboo until they popped, and then reading the cracks for signs. In recent months, I had seen two instances of living trees used as *ngadhu* posts. One was in Lopijo, where there was a segment of *woe* Ngusu, and where there were a handful of living *ngadhu*—but Ngusu's *ngadhu* was not one of them. The other was in Maladhawi, a village just across the valley from where we sat at that very moment. Maladhawi was not a Ngadha village. Its people were from the mountains of Wolomeze, and spoke a different language. The land where we sat, which Yan Muga had claimed as a Ngadha settler on an apparently open frontier, was also subject to claims from Wolomeze people coming southward into the valley, while Ngadha people came northward. Ngadha people were more numerous and wealthier, and controlled the regency government. Their claims were winning out. Yet a Ngusu delegation was here, to claim a living tree, replant it in that contested earth as their own symbol, and guard its deepening roots.

Settlers from the villages of Rara Ele are still slowly opening new settlements, continuing a trend that began in the colonial period. They treat the North Bajawa valley as a frontier space; a political vacuum, devoid of prior claims or social structures. It is also a frontier where social

⁶⁰ Lineages and segmentation will be discussed in chapter 4.

transformation is possible; where old conformities can be reinforced, or new cultural forms can be “constructed” out of bits and pieces from surrounding societies (Kopytoff 1987: 3). Those houses standing alone were like the front of a wave of settlement, spreading out into a frontier, as if there were no claims upon that space (Kopytoff 1987: 14). In the context of competing claims, it is difficult to say whether erecting a symbol like a *ngadhu* projects precedence—as if the current inhabitants of the land were the first people to settle there—or a kind of “lastness,” a declaration of power, admitting that the new claim is laid over, and supersedes, a prior one.

At the same time, the social and economic forms I encountered on the plateau were shaped in large part by developments in the valley below. Families with new farms in the valley planted coffee trees on the plateau; new lands grew food, old lands grew commodity crops. The families that prospered this way grew until they segmented, with part of the family remaining in the old house on the plateau, and part of the family starting their own houses, in the valley. The exploitation of lands in the North Bajawa valley impacted the labor, income, and economic resilience of households in Bogala; the establishment of new houses and *woe*, in both the village and the valley; the ability of Bogala villagers to competitively upgrade their “home” *sa’o*; and the ecology of the plateau, where burning has largely ceased and the land has been overwhelmingly planted with trees.

Conclusion: Circulations and progressions, through time and space

I read the history of Ngadhaland as a history of flows. People circulate from region to region, town to town; *woe* and villages change their location and their composition; hierarchies shift. Ngadha migrations are overlaid on the claims of “original” people, non-human beings, and the living inhabitants of Wolomeze and North Bajawa valley. At the same time, houses and villages are periodically moved, split, or founded anew, jumping from late phases in their progressive development, back to the beginning again.

Teni and Lopijo provide evidence of the potential of the social structures now called “Ngadha” to adopt and absorb people, and to give them a stake and a sense of belonging. They are evidence, on the one hand, of the weakness of the connections between groups of people, and between groups of people and the places they inhabit. Even when seemingly anchored by buildings and monuments, villages can move, and groups of houses can arrive, disappear, subdivide, change their composition, or change their identity. They are also evidence of the

strength of bonds between people, who join together, relocate together, and negotiate political, linguistic, and cultural differences to stay together. In a sense, the culture called “Ngadha” manifests in a system for tolerating, accommodating, and compositing difference and change. While there are particularities to the western slope, I would argue that the condition of social flow that characterizes Teni-Lopijo can be extended to Ngadha communities more broadly.

The story of Bogala demonstrates the interrelated impacts of political, ecological, and economic change. Its inhabitants responded to changing political, security, and economic conditions to pursue expansion in the northern valley, transform their landscape, and remake the physical structure of their village.

The landscape itself has changed, and with it people’s relationships to land, family, and future. The culture as it is contains traces of past movements and potentials for future movements. Basic social structures can dissolve or reform without causing a fundamental cultural rupture. Movements are not only historical but ongoing, with continuing expansion into perceived frontiers. Ngadha social life today—people’s concepts of hierarchy, affiliation, wealth, and connection with place—has been profoundly shaped by histories of arrival and expansion, and of violence and retreat.

In the next three chapters, I will explore the ways that this history of movement, dissolution, and reformation is expressed in the three most prominent types of Ngadha affiliation: the house, networks of affiliated houses, and villages. I will argue that on the one hand, these structures are resilient, able to withstand the shocks of relocation, segmentation, and even destruction, without causing a fundamental cultural rupture. They are also remarkably fragile, and depend upon patterns of repeated action to continually renew and maintain their membership, their hierarchy, and their alliances with other similar groups.

CHAPTER 3: The Ngadha House-in-Progress

Ngadha society, like many societies around eastern Indonesia, is often described by anthropologists as “house-based” (Levi-Strauss 1982; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Fox 1980 & 1993; Waterson 1990). The house as a social unit has been thoroughly explored in Flores (e.g. Molnar 2000, Tule 2004, Forth 1998, Smedal 1994 & 2011), and in southeastern Indonesia generally (see e.g. Cunningham 1964, Keane 1995).



Plate 18 Three *sa'o* in Nage village, Jerebu'u.

In the Ngadha language, the traditional house is called a BN *sa'o*. This term refers to a physical building and to a social unit. As physical buildings, Ngadha *sa'o* are distinguishable from the traditional houses built by people in surrounding cultural areas.¹ Molnar (2000) contains a thorough description of the houses she encountered in Hoga Sara, not too far from Rara Ele, on the far side of the Naru sand volcano.² Her descriptions closely resemble *sa'o* as I encountered them in many parts of Ngadhaland. In addition to its architectural style, a *sa'o* building also contains a number of physical symbols and signs, which describe the house, its descent and membership, and comprise a part of its corporate and (notionally) inalienable property. Every

¹ In Wolomeze, house exteriors appeared similar to Ngadha houses, down to the use of BN *ana iye* miniature houses on the rooflines of particular homes. The meaning of these *ana iye* was not connected to position in the lineage, however, but to whether that house had performed an apical ceremony, achieving a rank called *ndoko mbo'o* in the Wolomeze language. This was the highest of seven social ranks.

² The sand that seems to make up the bulk of the Naru volcano provides the aggregate for concrete produced in Bajawa; the region is built from it. For a description of the community and sand mining in Naru, see Rato 2014.

Ngadha person is affiliated to one *sa'o*. Most often, a *sa'o* consists of a consanguineal family of grandparents, their children and their spouses, and their grandchildren, making up a minimal exogamous kin group;³ the most common ways to become affiliated with a house are to be born to parents who belong to it, or to marry into it. Because people are affiliated to only one house at a time, anyone who marries into another house severs most rights and affiliations with the house into which he or she was born.

All of these elements of the *sa'o*—the physical building, the set of symbols, and the social group—all undergo constant churn. The physical house, at a given moment, is at a particular phase in its development, suggesting the phases through which it has already passed, and the phases it has yet to attain. The symbols are gradually built up and dispersed, as the house prospers and subdivides, splitting both property and the symbolic deeds to that property. The living membership of the *sa'o* stands in for the complete family, which includes ancestors long dead and babies yet to be born; they are passing through a particular type of house membership, during which time they are responsible for the house's upkeep and improvement. The house that one sees is largely understood to be a stand-in for the house as it will someday become. These changes and potentials for change mean that the *sa'o* as it is encountered at any given moment is merely the present instantiation of a process in motion. The house is more than the building, or the social unit, as it appears at this moment in time. The house is an unfolding process.

The physical house in flow: progression, replacement, relocation, and decay

On September 18th, 2015, at 10:26 in the morning, a slender twig of bamboo popped in the hearth of a newly built traditional house. The cracks in the twig were read for signs. Did it pop at the base or the tip? On the left or the right?⁴ The signs were good. The ancestors approved of the new traditional house, and *sa'o* Molo Modhe was ready for habitation.

³ Parents do not marry their children, or brothers their sisters. Marriages among close relations are generally forbidden by the Catholic church, which requests genealogies before consecrating marriages. However, it is technically possible, if uncommon, for two members of a single *sa'o* to marry one another. Bishops can provide dispensations permitting first cousins to marry. And because houses can absorb members who are not consanguineal kin, it may be that such a couple are not related to one another by blood.

⁴ This is a common form of divination, called BN *bui tibo*.



Plate 19 The hearth of Molo Modhe.

The new house replaced an old house, from which it differed in a few architectural details, such as the amount of carving on the house's front face, and the completeness of carved friezes⁵ in the house's interior. In its construction materials and methods, size, floor plan, and interior contents, the new *sa'o* was more or less the same as the old one, and the same as other *sa'o* I saw or entered around Ngadhaland. Many *sa'o* buildings stand alone, but this one, and the others that ringed Bogala's central plaza, was tidily integrated into the center of a larger, concrete home, whose roof it shared, but from which it was otherwise structurally independent—a form of *sa'o* architecture that is now the norm across Rara Ele, Langa, and many other parts of Ngadhaland.



Plate 20 Above the hearth, wooden walls give way to concrete and a corrugated metal roof.

When I came to Bogala in early 2016, about six months after the dedication of the new building, the wooden planks of the old Molo Modhe were stacked up out the back of the new

⁵ BN *ngani lewa*

place, next to the outdoor kitchen area. According to Bart, those old planks were some 200 years old. All of them bore the marks of the hatchets used to smooth them. Some were decorated with carved reliefs. That house had survived a great fire in the early 1960s, which gutted the old village of Bogala. When the village moved locations, over the course of several years, the family dismantled the old house, carried it two kilometers or so to the new village site, and put it back together. Now, the old, seasoned planks were gathering dust, providing homes for spiders, and awaiting an uncertain future.

The dedication of the new *sa'o* was an important moment in the lives of the members of *sa'o* Molo Modhe. From the moment in 2002 when the family declared its plan to upgrade their traditional house, they had been tied down to that intention—it was serious to speak such a thing out loud, like making a promise in front of the ancestors. Over more than a decade, members of the family contributed money and labor to the project, helping to accumulate materials, conduct the necessary ceremonies, and manage and fund the work of design, construction, and decoration. While the new *sa'o* was functionally identical to the old one—consisting of little more than an open floor, a hearth, and a rack for firewood—it was socially different, placing its members in a higher social stratum. It was also symbolically different, more complete, and closer to an idealized, apical form.

Every Ngadha *sa'o* sits somewhere along a chain of such gradations, from the most basic to the most ornate. Every link of the chain has a name. And every family is understood to be in the process, actively or latently, of moving or preparing to move their house structure along the chain, toward the next iteration, the next upgrade. Participation in the incremental improvement of the house structure is an obligation involving multiple generations, which may span hundreds of years. When I spoke to people around Ngadhaland about development, prosperity, and their plans for the future, they gave upgrading their *sa'o* the same, or even higher, priority than educating their children or investing in their businesses. Bringing their *sa'o* up to the apical level was among their highest aspirations, and they planned their lives, in part, around the houses to which they would someday contribute, to which they would be proud to belong, and which they would entrust to their descendants.

As many people told me, every *sa'o* group should be in a continual process of upgrading the physical house. The progression between phases of house construction is a progression to

ever more durable materials, starting with bamboo, and ending with hardwoods, even (depending on the house) *hebu*⁶, the same tree used for *ngadhu* posts, which takes the chisel well, and can last for hundreds of years, even withstanding full exposure to the elements. It is also a progression towards more ornate and complete forms of decoration, particularly woodcarvings on the interior and exterior of the building.

The lowest level of *sa'o*, the first to be established, is the BN *sa'o keka*,⁷ built from bamboo. This is followed by the BN *sa'o mola*,⁸ built from wood. Last comes the highest level, called a BN *sa'o mere* (great house) or BN *sa'o ngara* (named house)⁹, in which the wooden house is carved and decorated, and given a name, such as Molo Modhe. Houses must be upgraded in the correct order, graduating from *keka* to *mola* to *mere*, without skipping steps. It is not impossible that there are higher steps, but nobody would tell me about them, because to name them would be to set the upgrading process in motion.

There are a fair number of named houses around Ngadhaland, but they make up only a small proportion of the total number of houses. Most houses were established too recently, or have inhabitants too poor to attain named house status. It is common to look around the interior of a house and see, for example, that its carvings are asymmetrical, with blank sections remaining on each wall. This sense of incompleteness is pervasive, but so, too, is a sense that this incompleteness is temporary, contingent only on the passage of time and the sufficient accumulation of resources. This is the sense of the house in flow; the house as an evolving process, a placeholder standing in for a perfect and apical house.

I took a description of house construction, and the progression of house types, from Bram, a farmer, and also a carpenter, specializing in the construction of traditional houses. Bram was married to a younger sister of Maria, which initially made him a member of Molo Modhe, her house.¹⁰ Since then, he had split off from Molo Modhe, building his own *sa'o* in a coffee

⁶ Also referred to as BN *kaju pemali* or “taboo wood”

⁷ BN *keka* translates as “hut” or “field house” (Mopa 2004: 269).

⁸ BN *mola* means “uniform,” “plain,” or “undecorated” (Mopa 2004: 331; Arndt 1961: 335)

⁹ These spellings reflect the dialect most commonly spoken in Rara Ele. Other common spellings of these words would change the Rs for Zs, rendering *mere* as *meze* and *ngara* as *ngaza*.

¹⁰ Following the dominant marriage pattern in Rare Ele, he had not paid bridewealth, and had joined his wife’s house, a form of marriage called BN *di'i sa'o*.

grove about a hundred yards from the center of Bogala, beside a gravel access road. He also had another, simpler house built near his agricultural lands a few kilometers away, a non-traditional house built from wood and tin. It was in this field house that we had this conversation, over a shared meal of maize porridge¹¹ and palm wine, while the electric light flickered on and off.

First, Bram told me, comes the planning. Anyone that intends to build a new *sa'o* already belongs to another *sa'o*; and so before the new house can proceed, the key figures of the existing house meet to discuss the manner of the split. The plans are not determined in a single meeting, but over a series of meetings, say three to five. When members of one house depart to found a house of their own, the new *sa'o* is called a BN *sa'o dhor*, a “descended house;”¹² the original house from which the *sa'o dhor* descended is referred to as a BN *sa'o mere*, a “great house.” Descended houses remain affiliated with, and subordinate to, the great houses from which they descended, in a manner similar to the relationship between older and younger siblings (Molnar 1997: 394-5). In practice, that largely seems to mean that members of descended houses must supply labor and resources for ceremonies held by their great house, a topic that will be addressed further in chapter 9; and joining delegations led by the head of the great house when he attends ceremonies elsewhere, a topic that will be addressed in chapter 6. According to Bram, more houses ultimately meant more labor, resources, and human numbers available for performing and attending ceremonies, so house leaders almost always permitted members to split off from the great house.

Once the decision has been reached to build a new *sa'o*, the next step is to dedicate a new measuring stick, called a BN *kolo*, which will be a practical tool for the construction of the new house. Each *kolo*¹³ is particular to a given house; in the absence of standard units of measurement, the *kolo* is vital to determine standards for each house before it is built. A *kolo* is made of wood, and is roughly an arm's breadth or one meter in length. Before planks or pillars are cut or measured for the house, the new measuring stick is dedicated in a small ceremony

¹¹ BN *bose*

¹² BN *dhor* means “to descend” in the sense of genealogical descent, and physical descent, as in climbing down the steps of a house. One of its everyday usages is “to go to the bathroom,” in the sense that, before relieving oneself, one must go out of the *sa'o* by climbing down its three-step staircase—like saying, “to step outside” or “to go out back.”

¹³ The *kolo* or measuring stick is a common metaphor in Ngadha poetic couplets, standing especially for a wife—see appendix II.

called BN *repa kolo*, or “arm’s-breadth measuring stick,” during which a chicken is killed, and its blood is touched to the *kolo*. A *kolo* is important in its moment, and is even considered the “source”¹⁴ of the house; yet no one suggested to me that *kolo* were saved or reused, or considered to be important objects after construction was complete. In almost a year spent snooping around, finagling opportunities to view and chat about important objects, I never saw one. *Kolo* moved quickly through their life cycles as ceremonial objects, and returned to the rank of everyday things as soon as their function was completed.

The first, lowest form of *sa’o* was the *sa’o keka*, built from planks of split bamboo. Bram himself had a *sa’o keka*, which stood immediately behind a non-traditional concrete house in which his family did most of their living. Like more developed *sa’o*, such as Molo Modhe, from which his own *sa’o* had descended, it had a square layout, with a hearth beside the door. Also like Molo Modhe, Bram’s *sa’o* contained a set of symbolic objects, called BN *fi’i riti more gili*, in the interior of the house. These *fi’i* will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Unlike Molo Modhe, which was built of wood and elaborately carved, many elements of Bram’s house were essentially placeholders, made from unadorned bamboo, a cheaper, less-durable, essentially temporary material.

In our discussion, Bram skipped over the steps of constructing a bamboo house, and placed much greater emphasis on the next phase of construction, in which the bamboo frame and planks are replaced with wooden ones. The greater emphasis he placed on later phases of house construction conformed with the general view that *sa’o keka* are holding space for the more substantial wooden houses that will replace them. The specific details of their construction were of little interest or importance to him. The function of a bamboo *sa’o* is to provide living space for the immediate needs of its inhabitants, to shelter and display their *fi’i*, and to hold symbolic space for the house that they have yet to build.

The second phase, when the bamboo structure is replaced with wooden pillars and planks, is called BN *sa’o mola*, or “blank/uncarved”¹⁵ house.” Using this term to describe the house marks it explicitly as incomplete, evoking the carvings that are not yet there, and its

¹⁴ BN *pu’u*

¹⁵ BI *polos*

inhabitants as caught in an in-between, obligated to move the house step by step toward its finished, apical form.

When the decision is reached to upgrade from *keka* to *mola*, the first step is to go out and cut trees. Ideally these trees will come from land owned by the *woe* to which the house belongs.¹⁶ In some cases—for instance BN *maghi* trees,¹⁷ which are needed for particular elements of the house, but grow only in hot coastal areas—you need permission from the landowner, which often requires the payment of a pig. (I also heard many stories of people taking wood from state-owned nature preserves, which is illegal.) Before cutting the trees, the builders must break a chicken egg on the tree and ask that the wood not split or fall the wrong way, especially into a ravine. If the ceremonies to cut a tree are not right, then when it is cut it will be found to be full of holes.

Each *woe* has its own rules and traditions when it comes to specific materials. In Bram's family, BN *oja*, BN *fayi*, and BN *sulu* wood are used for planks, and BN *nia* or BN *maghi* for the frame. BN *hebu*, BN *poni*, or BN *dhalu* are used for pillars. Of these, *hebu* is the most appropriate. Bram had recently built a *sa'o mola* for another family, using planks of *oja* and *fayi* cut from trees that were some 40-50 years old, and grew on *woe*-owned land.¹⁸

The planks are prepared where the trees fall. When the planks are ready, a ceremony called BN *gebhe pu'u* is performed, meaning “close the base of the tree.”¹⁹ This involves killing a chicken or pig, and reading the entrails for signs; then sprinkling coconut water on the planks, asking that they don't break, and requesting a blessing from “lord of the stones lord of the earth,”²⁰ the gods and spirits that are the original owners of the land.²¹ Often there is no road to the worksite, and the wood has to be carried out of the forest by hand. This takes a lot of people, a lot of manpower. Feeding these people, fueling their labor, requires the provision of a large

¹⁶ The groups of affiliated houses called BN *woe*, most commonly translated as “clans,” will be the subject of chapter 4.

¹⁷ The lontar palm, *Borassus flabellifer*

¹⁸ While I'm uncertain of the scientific names of most of these tree species, I include the Ngadha names here in the name of ethnographic thickness.

¹⁹ Yoosneem said that *gebhe pu'u* is done the first tree only.

²⁰ BN *mori watu mori tana*

²¹ Bram referred to the *mori watu mori tana* as “gods,” BN *dewa-dewa*.

number of animals, especially pigs. These pigs can be bought, instead of raised personally by the organizing family, but in either case, it's an expensive undertaking.

The process of collecting materials—planks, pillars, money, animals—can take many years, and Bram said that it was common for five or six years to pass between any two phases of construction. These periods are called BN *tore ngani*, or “collecting materials.” In many cases, the materials are stored near the current house, where they are more or less visible to neighbors and passers-by. Bram described the process of building up resources with this couplet, which evokes the process of slowly winding string into a ball:

Moe lelu dhiko neka like yarn, collect strands

In the process of undertaking the construction of a new house, or another major project such as the erection of a *ngadhu* pole, much more time passes in phases of accumulation and delay than in phases of work and expenditure. The most common state of Ngadha house construction is latency, slowly building up to moments of punctuated activity and change.

Once the materials are collected, there follows a string of named steps, each preceded by a ceremony called a BN *soka*,²² involving the sacrifice of a chicken and a young coconut. One *soka* is done before bringing the pillars for the *sa'o* into the village, and another before digging the holes into which the pillars will be placed. The house is framed, a phase called BN *foke loki*, “the end of the log.” Next comes BN *gose wisu*, “set the pillars²³,” when the four pillars of the house are set into the ground, followed by BN *foke ube*, “setting the wall planks.” Next is BN *sape remi*, “close off neatly,” where the wall planks are framed by a beam across the top. (Bram did not specifically describe the roofing process.) As construction concludes, a site cleaning called BN *goro ngia*, “tidy the area,” is performed. A first ceremonial meal is eaten inside the house, called BN *moru wua maki*, “let fall the rice grain.” The earthen hearth area, called BN *lika*, is prepared in a phase called BN *lege lapu*, “circumference of the fireplace.”²⁴ The *fi'i*, symbolic objects obtained from the great house from which the new house descended, are installed on the interior wall in a phase called BN *tege ngani* or BN *pegi fi'i*, “attach the *fi'i*.” At

²² Arndt's definitions of BN *soka* include “a workplace for craftsmen,” and “a dance with a specific purpose” (1961: 512). (Mopa 2004 has no entries for the letter S.)

²³ For the word *gose*, Bram offered as translations the BI words *Pasang*, *tusuk*, *pegi*, *tikan*

²⁴ BI *lingkar tungku*

this point the house can be referred to as a *sa'o dhoru*, a “descended house.” A common ceremony called BN *kela nio*, “split coconut,” is performed, in which a coconut is split and its water sprinkled around, spiritually “cooling”²⁵ the house. Finally, in a ceremony called BN *ngedhe dhoru*, “ask permission to descend,” the separation of the old and new houses is formally completed. Although this ceremony marks the formal request to descend from the main house, the structure of the new *sa'o dhoru* is already complete. A chicken or pig is killed, and its blood touched to the *fi'i*, to make the split official. At this point, the *sa'o mola* is complete.

In the past, Bram said, only two or three craftsmen did the main work of building a house. (Housebuilders, according to Bram, are all men. There is no taboo on women helping, he said; it's just the custom. Women apparently support the process mainly by cooking food for the workmen—in addition, of course, to their everyday contributions to the household, such as earning money and tending animals.) Now, it is common for many people to pitch in.

Further stages of house improvement, and the gradual elevation of a *sa'o mola* to a *sa'o mere*, do not usually require construction, unless the planks used in the *sa'o mola* building were made from inappropriate types of wood; in that case, they are placeholders for the correct planks, and will be replaced over time. Once all the correct planks are in place, house advancement is based on the addition of woodcarvings to the interior and exterior of the building. In addition to Molnar (2000), Smedal (2000) goes into some depth on the aesthetics and symbolic meanings of woodcarvings on Ngadha houses. My focus is not on the specific motifs or their meanings, but on the progressive additions of decorative elements, and the substitutions of certain material elements for others.

Interior woodcarvings are set on horizontal planks called BN *ngani lewa*, which run along the tops of the vertical wall planks, on all four walls of the house. On each wall, the *ngani lewa* is divided into three panels; one on the left, one in the center, and one on the right. These panels are referred to as BN *nai*, the same term that describes panels of cloth in a sarong.²⁶ The first panel to be filled in is on the left; the second to be filled is on the right; the third is in the

²⁵ The adjective for “spiritually cool” is BN *fa*; “spiritually hot” is BN *rara*, a word that can also mean “hot and sweaty, like you want to open your shirt.”

²⁶ The tubular sarongs worn in Flores may consist of anywhere from one to four panels of cloth. *Ngadhu* posts are carved wearing three-panel sarongs.

center.²⁷ During my time in Ngadhaland, I visited *sa'o* in all three phases of interior carving. In all of those houses, the three panels on each wall were clearly separated by a column of carved chevrons or other motifs, so that even a frieze that was already complete, with all three panels on each wall filled with carved and painted motifs, made clear that it was the sum of component parts, which were added over time. The final composition of the woodcarving on the *ngani lewa* is not unified, but additive, compartmented.

The carvings on the exterior face of a *sa'o* are made up of two major components: a carved frieze called a BN *dawu*, which runs along the bottom edge of the house front, and an elaborate entrance, consisting of the door, a small exterior entranceway, and a three-step staircase. Taken together, these elements of the entrance are usually referred to as BN *kawa pere*.²⁸ The *kawa pere* taken as a whole was regarded as something of a mascot or a guardian of the house, and each one had its own name; the *kawa pere* of *sa'o* Molo Modhe, for example, was named BN *molo masa* or “all is well.” Both the *dawu* and the *kawa pere* are subject to successive rounds of carving and decoration, which indicate the successive phases of house improvement.



Plate 21 The carved front of a great house, Bomadha village, Rara Ele

The *dawu*, the carved register along the lower edge of the *sa'o* face, consisted of a single horizontal plank, spanning the full width of the house. In addition to the gradual addition of carved motifs, *dawu* were marked by the addition of piercings: places in the design where holes

²⁷ These phases are called BN *weti senai*, *weti nai rua*, and *weti nai telu*. BN *weti* means “carving.” The BN prefix *se-* indicates a singular. BN *rua* means “two,” and *telu* means “three.”

²⁸ Arndt defines BN *kawa péré* simply as “carved threshold of the front door” (1961: 235).

were drilled all the way through the plank from the front to the back. A *dawu* with these holes was called BN *dawu gobo*, “pierced baseboard.” These holes were not added all at once, but gradually added over years. At one particularly advanced house, a sketch of whose front is included here, the *dawu* was pierced in six places along its length. I was given no explanation for these piercings, or any function or symbolism they might carry.

A fully developed *kawa pere* consisted of three main sections. The bottom section was called the BN *peni*, and included the platform in front of the door, the round-cornered board behind the steps, and the steps, called BN *tangi*. There were always three steps in a *tangi*.²⁹ Attached to the outer edges of the steps were BN *tangi teo*, rods with five carved ridges, ending in a knob. These knobs were places to rest your hands as you climbed or descended the steps. The middle section, which seemed to have no individual name, was fully carved, with columns depicting golden wealth objects: BN *taka* or “axes,” BN *bela* or “ear ornaments,” and round objects, which could stand for metal nuggets called BN *wea bhoda*, or circles of porcelain called BN *mako*, commonly made from shards of modern floor tile, but notionally made from Chinese trade ceramics,³⁰ themselves representing nuggets of gold. These were interspersed with images of humans or horses, and with motifs in the form of chevrons,³¹ and vegetal S-shaped motifs called BN *sawa*,³² which may have stood for the vines of the yam plant,³³ or what one man called a “magical snake.”³⁴ The topmost section, similarly decorated to the middle section, was called BN *lebe gake*.

The addition of carvings probably marks the final phases of house upgrading—although it remains possible that there were more phases that nobody wanted to discuss, because to name

²⁹ I heard many explanations of the numerology in *sa’o* architecture. Sometimes the number three was said to refer to the stages of evolution of a given *sa’o*: *sa’o keka*, *sa’o mola*, and *sa’o mere*. Sometimes the number three was said to refer to the holy trinity of Catholic tradition, or something else entirely. Sometimes I got the feeling that people were making it up as they went along.

³⁰ It was suggested that BN *mako* derived from BI *mangkok*, meaning “bowl.”

³¹ When I asked for the name of the chevron-shaped motifs, I was told they were called BN *weko meo*, “cat’s balls,” or simply BN *riti*, “serrations.” They may not have known the real name for them, or there may not be a real name. It’s also a salutary reminder that “informants” often take some pleasure in playing games with self-serious ethnographers such as myself.

³² Arndt translates BN *sawa* as a kind of generic designation meaning “plant.”

³³ BN *uwi*

³⁴ BI *ular ajaib*. I did hear references to supernatural snake-like beings in the wilderness, sometimes with feet or wings. These were either a kind of earth or water spirit called BN *nitu*, or else closely associated with those spirits.

them would be to commit to undertake them. When Bart showed me around Molo Modhe, a *sa'o mere* with advanced carvings, he mentioned that there was at least one more phase the house had yet to attain, but that he wouldn't tell me about it, because to talk about it would commit him to beginning that phase of the upgrading process. He used the phrase:

<i>Woro ge'e foro</i>	Look first for <i>foro</i> [a type of wild ginger]
<i>Gae ge'e ranga</i>	Look first for pig fodder ³⁵

In other words, they needed to seek some prosperity first, and build up the resources to undertake the next phase, before setting it in motion. This was a problem I ran across when discussing several different areas of progression, and will come up again in chapter 5, on Ngadha villages. These flows are difficult; they are obligatory; they are desirable; they can be delayed; they cannot be ignored.

A Ngadha person would be able to look at a *sa'o* and discern from a few cues what phase of house development its inhabitants had achieved, and what they should be preparing to do to it next. In that sense, there is an understanding that the house as it is in any given moment is either undergoing or about to undergo a change. That change might come decades in the future. Or the house could become stagnant and abandoned. But the state of the house is never complete; it implies the previous phases through which it has evolved, the apical house it will someday become. It signifies the cohesion, the prosperity, the past and the future of the social group responsible for its advancement. It is a building in flow.

In addition to the transformations that physical *sa'o* buildings undergo as they are built and rebuilt, *sa'o* can also be dismantled and moved from one place to another. After the fire that destroyed much of Bogala in the 1960s, Molo Modhe was among a handful of surviving buildings to be taken apart, plank by plank, and carried to the village's new location. Fifty years later, the planks of the old house were dismantled again, replaced with the newer construction, and set in a moldering stack; not abandoned, but not particularly cared for. Members of the family had no special plans for these planks, which were hand carved from forest hardwood trees, and still in fine condition, if blackened by age, and by exposure to kitchen fires and the elements. The movement of the physical house from one location to another did not impact on

³⁵ BN *ranga* describes leaves that make up the bulk of pig feed; the term is used as a shorthand for the fruits of labor, and as a metaphor in particular for the contributions a man makes to the economy of his household.

the lands or other possessions held in common by the house, or the personal possessions of its inhabitants. It did not impact on the membership of the house, as its inhabitants moved with it to its new location. The house's relocation had no more impact, socially or symbolically, than its reconstruction with new materials in 2015. It moved across the land like a boat traveling from one harbor to another; ontologically unmoored to one place or another, and undiminished for being detached.

Some aspects of Ngadha traditional architecture were relatively fixed—such as the floor plan, and the general proportions. Below is a floor plan of the interior of *sa'o* Molo Modhe. In this drawing, the door (BN *nuke sa'o*) is at the bottom of the image, and the rear wall, where the *fi'i* are displayed, is at the top. Following Molnar's (2000) convention, which itself follows Ngadha emic convention, I will begin the description in the center of the rear wall, and continue in a counter-clockwise direction, ie “rightward,” according to the perspective of a person sitting in that position and facing outwards from the wall, across the floor and towards the door of the house.

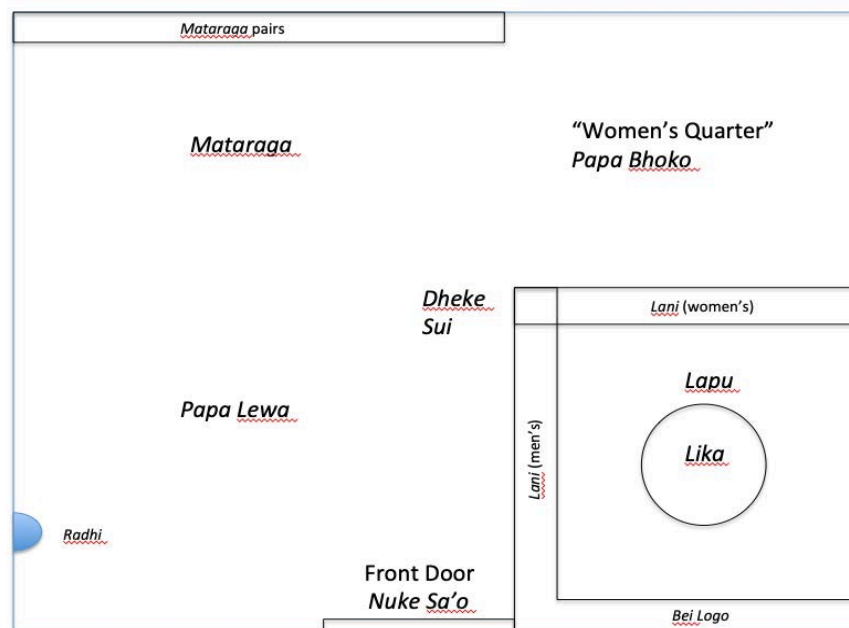


Figure 1 Layout of a *sa'o* interior

The floor is divided into four areas. Beginning at the top of the image, in the center of the rear wall, is the patch of floor called the BN *mataraga*. This extends counter-clockwise, just past the rear corner. This is the space for the most honored men of the house, with the place of most

esteem being the center of the rear wall. From that point of origin, the prestige of the people seated along the wall generally decreases counter-clockwise, or right to left. The rough quadrant of the room in front of the door is called BN *papa lewa*, and is the space for lower-ranking men and predominantly male guests. The next quadrant, called BN *lapu*, contains a fire place, over which are suspended racks for firewood. This space, which is floored with pounded earth and sits slightly higher than the level of the floor, is enclosed by three seating areas: BN *bei logo*, against the house's front wall, and two seating planks called BN *lani*, including one generally for males adjacent to the *papa lewa*, and one generally for women adjacent to the BN *papa bhoko*, the fourth quadrant, which is reserved for women. Within the *lapu* section of the house, the fire ring itself is called BN *lika*, and consists of three stones embedded in the clay of the floor. At the corner of the *lapu*, near the center of the floor, is a pillar called BN *deke sui*. This pillar took different forms in different houses, depending on the style of architecture. In older houses, which were free-standing, the *deke sui* was sometimes suspended from the ceiling, and did not reach the floor, ending instead in a carved finial at roughly head-height. Molo Modhe, like the other *sa'o* in Bogala village, was built within a larger concrete house, and its roof, supported by the walls of that larger house, was too high for it to make practical sense to suspend the firewood racks from the rafters. Instead of hanging from the ceiling, the *deke sui* came up from the floor, and rose as high as the firewood racks themselves, to approximately 2 1/2 meters in height. The *papa bhoko* is alongside the *mataraga*, but also in the lowest position in the right-to-left hierarchy. By this scheme, it is possible for the man and woman of the highest rank within the house to sit side by side, yet for the man to occupy a place of honor that excludes the woman.

I observed a range of variations in architectural forms. Most *sa'o* had only one room, but a few had an adjoining storeroom accessed from the inside.³⁶ Some were built entirely of local materials, such as wood, bamboo, and thatch,³⁷ while others had roofs made of corrugated metal, walls of brick, or floors of concrete.³⁸ In some cases, *sa'o* belonging to the two most prominent

³⁶ For instance in Teni, Hea Wea.

³⁷ For instance in Bela, Langa.

³⁸ Corrugated metal roofs were very common. I encountered a *sa'o* of brick and concrete in a home in Borani, belonging to a woman who had split from her natal house following a dispute over inheritance. Her *sa'o* was a small room at the back of her house. It was hastily constructed, and much smaller than a conventional *sa'o*, with no pretensions to being a separate building. It did however have a hearth in the usual place beside the door, and a single set of *fi'i* symbols on its inner wall.

houses of a *woe* were conjoined.³⁹ In others, whole rows of houses shared platforms of bamboo.⁴⁰

In Bogala, every *sa'o* on the village plaza was built inside the interior of a larger, cinderblock house.⁴¹ These houses most commonly consisted of a front porch, a front reception room, a number of bedrooms, and an interior space in front of the carved wooden face of the *sa'o*, all contained under a single, metal roof, which was shaped to resemble the high peaked roof⁴² of a stand-alone *sa'o* building. Some cooking would be done on the fire inside the *sa'o*, but most would be done in a kitchen area outside the concrete house, either set against an exterior wall or in an outbuilding. There might also be other rooms, such as a TV room or workshop. I don't have a strong history of how *sa'o* came to be incorporated into larger structures, but many people told me that concrete buildings started appearing in the 1980s, and quickly became common. These buildings enclosed the *sa'o*, turning it from a standalone building into a single room, and replacing the inner porch⁴³ with a large room where guests were often received (Susetyarto 2019: 2; see also Molnar 2000: 168-169).

Molo Modhe was typical of this style of architecture. The *sa'o* of Molo Modhe—the one dedicated in September, 2015—was basically an elevated room inside a larger concrete house. It was not miniaturized, being no smaller than *sa'o* that were not encompassed within larger buildings, though it did lack a front porch, its front steps descending directly from its carved *kawa pere* onto the concrete floor of the house interior. This *sa'o* was a locus of much everyday activity, and may even have been the primary sleeping space for Paulus, Bart's father, who was the oldest man of the house. Its interior was much the same as any other *sa'o*, with a fireplace, racks for firewood, storage baskets, and other elements one would normally find in a traditional house.

³⁹ For instance in Bomadha. The “trunk rider” and “tip rider” houses, which will be explained more in chapter 3.

⁴⁰ For instance in Nage, Jerebu'u—see image A in this chapter.

⁴¹ These were sometimes referred to as BI *rumah batu*, “stone houses.”

⁴² BN *ubu*. This term was also used when describing the number of *sa'o* in a village. The number of *ubu* in a village did not include non-traditional houses.

⁴³ BN *teda*

Concealing the *sa'o* inside a concrete building complicates one of the house's main functions: telegraphing the wealth and social status of its inhabitants. Occasionally I entered a house in Bogala and was astonished by the ornately decorated facade of the *sa'o* hidden inside it. These decorations indicated large investments of money and resources. Many were large, not only carved but lavishly painted in black, white, red, and gold, and inlaid with circles of porcelain. And yet they remained out of public view—known, no doubt, to the regular denizens of the village, but hidden nonetheless.

Not all, but some concrete *sa'o* retained an element of public display, when inhabitants placed the horns of buffaloes and the jaws of pigs—remnants of previous sacrifices—on their outer porches. The pigs jaws were commonly strung onto wires, which were hung from the eaves of the porch like bunting. The buffalo horns were often placed on sets of stones called BN *ulu watu* or “head stones.” These consisted of sets of vertical stones, representing male ancestors, and horizontal stones, representing female ancestors; these were analogous to the “head stones” found at *loka* shrines, discussed in chapter 4, and were sometimes considered part of the “keepsakes of the ancestors” discussed later in this chapter.



Plate 22 A large concrete building containing a *sa'o*, Bogala.



Plate 23 A *sa'o* in the interior of a concrete house.



Plate 24 Buffalo horns on head stones, on a front porch.

Houses that are not physically renewed can decay. In a Ngadha myth recounted by Djawanai, some villagers are warned to replace any rotten pieces of their houses; those that refuse see their houses destroyed (Djawanai 1983: 92-4). Houses built of bamboo or softwoods are vulnerable to rot or insect damage. Grass roofs—rare now but ubiquitous until the 1980s, when metal roofing became common—decay and need periodic replacement. In Nage, the high cost of upkeep can lead some families to abandon their traditional houses (Forth 2004: 77).

While I did not observe this in Ngadhaland, the frequent destruction of villages by fire, or their relocation for one reason or another, made this a distinct possibility.

In conclusion, the physical structure of a *sa'o*, as one encounters it at a given moment, is a snapshot of several processes in motion. The physical make up of the house changes over time, along a linear progression, from bamboo to wood, from plain to decorated. At times, the house can progress improperly, either upwards along the chain, by skipping steps, or downwards, by being destroyed or falling into decay. Houses can also move through space, physically dismantled and carried across the landscape to new locations. The house one encounters is merely the house as it appears at one instant, caught at a moment of particularity as it moves along multiple axes of change.

Circulating through the social house: reversals and ambiguities in house membership and hierarchy

Ngadha people commonly said to me that each person belongs to only one house, and that membership in a house, and thus rights to possession and inheritance of house property, followed the female line of descent, a system Yoosneem and others described as “matrilineal” (Tonda 2014, Mere 2014, Wio 2013). In practice, there is a certain amount of ambiguity and contingency in house membership, and in the authority to determine the rights of those who claim membership in a house. Questions about house membership and authority are largely tied to issues surrounding marriage.

Throughout central Flores, marriages tend to be virilocal.⁴⁴ The house of the bride receives from the house of the groom a series of gifts, commonly referred to in anthropological literature as bridewealth, bride-price, or marriage payments (for use of these terms in regard to Flores, see e.g. Allerton 2004 & 2007; Arndt 1954; Barnes 1972 & 1980; Curnow 2007; Djawanai 1983; Forth 1998 & 2004; Gordon 1980; Howell 1989 & 1996; Lewis 2010; Molnar 1994; Smedal 2000, 2002, 2011, & 2016; Tule 2004; Williams 2007).⁴⁵ Pursuant to these payments, the bride’s affiliation is transferred from her natal house to the house of her husband;

⁴⁴ Exceptions exist, notably among Ata Tana ‘Ai people, who live between Sikka and East Flores. “Marriage in Tana Wai Brama is marked neither by feasting nor by the exchange of bridewealth, in contrast to the celebrations that accompany marriages in central Sikka... When a man and a woman decide to marry, the man simply leaves his mother’s house and takes up residence with his wife in his wife’s mother’s household” (Lewis 1988: 205-206).

⁴⁵ The term “bride-wealth” was apparently coined by EE Evans-Pritchard in 1931, to avoid the suggestion that wives were purchased (Barnes 1980: 94).

children of the marriage are likewise affiliated with the house of their father (Smedal 2011: 284, Molnar 1994: 126). In many parts of Flores, including in some parts of Ngadhaland, the payment of bridewealth is considered mandatory.

In much of Ngadhaland, however, and particularly in Rara Ele, the opposite has become the norm. Instead of bridewealth marriages, which are virilocal, nearly every marriage in the area is of a type called BN *di'i sa'o*, or “sit inside the house.”⁴⁶ The person remaining in place is the bride, who remains in her home, while her husband leaves his natal house to join the house of his wife, making *di'i sa'o* marriages uxorilocal. In Bogala, for instance, out of over 40 houses and the extended families they contained, there were currently only two or three couples whose marriages involved bridewealth payments and were virilocal. The most common reason to pursue such a marriage today is because a family has given birth to only sons (or have married off their daughters in other bridewealth marriages), yielding a house with no women. Marriages where bridewealth is paid specifically to ensure that a woman is affiliated with a house are called BN *pasa*. It is likely that the current prevalence of *di'i sa'o* marriage is a relatively recent phenomenon. Many people told me that even in Rara Ele, where it was now nearly extinct, bridewealth payments had been the norm until recent decades; the most common timeline I was given was “about three generations ago.” According to Arndt, in the first half of the 20th century it was the norm across Ngadhaland for bridewealth to be paid (1954: 42). Today this may remain true only in Were. By 2016, the time of my own research, *di'i sa'o* marriages were so prevalent that in Rara Ele, at least, virilocal bridewealth marriages were extremely rare—there were reputed to be none, for example, in the entire western half of Rara Ele. In fact, some men from other parts of Flores sought out (or joked about having sought out) Ngadha brides specifically for the purpose of avoiding bridewealth payments. This was the case with my neighbor Theo, who grew up among Nage people near Boawae, and married a woman from the Ngadha region of Jerebu'u. Upon their marriage he became a member of her *sa'o*, but they did not reside in her village, living instead with their five children in a non-traditional house on the edge of Bogala, closer to Theo's job in Bajawa. And of course, there are exceptions. Bart's wife Nora came from Manggarai, where bridewealth payments are mandatory, but he did not pay bridewealth, and she still came to live with him in Bogala. She participated in the ceremonies of his *sa'o*, of which

⁴⁶ Compare with the Sikka marriage term *mé deri lepo*, “child remains in the house,” in which children remain affiliated with the house and group of their mother (Butterworth 2008: 40 fn 24).

their children were members. Regardless of this apparent breach, Bart was on good terms with his wife's family; when he and Nora had a new baby, Nora's mother came to stay with them for four months.

Ngadha women—specifically each house's eldest daughter—are the owners or guardians of lands and treasures belonging to the house. As one Ngadha scholar has written, “the role of a woman is to protect and manage all the heirloom objects of the house that were left by her parents, whereas her brother leaves the house and resides with his own wife” (Tonda 2014: 39). This protection and management is sometimes construed as “control”⁴⁷ (Mere 2013: 23) or “ownership”⁴⁸ (Tonda 2014: 39).

But the “control” and “ownership” exercised by Ngadha women does not reliably translate into actual power for women to dispose of these assets and objects. A husband in his wife's home has no right to decide the fate of these assets; his role in the house “is regarded as that of an immigrant⁴⁹ or a guest⁵⁰ (BN *ngodho mai*)” (Tonda 2014: 38). While men lack rights in the homes of their wives, they retain rights in the houses of their sisters (Tonda 2014: 38)—houses with which those men, having married out, were no longer technically affiliated. Married women had precedence and rights in property before their husbands, but not before their brothers, uncles, or other male relatives. As Smedal notes, in discussions within the *sa'o*, the interests of a woman are unlikely to prevail if they are contested by her uncles and brothers (Smedal 2011: 292). Instead, the role of a woman is captured in the phrase,

<i>no papa bhoko</i>	remain in the women's quarter
<i>nara mataraga</i>	sister's brother at the place of honor

(Tonda 2014: 39)

The internal hierarchy of a Ngadha house is not topped by a woman, but by a man, who holds the title of BN *mori sa'o*, or “lord of the house,” responsible for leading ceremonies inside the house; leading delegations of house members to ceremonies held by other houses, and

⁴⁷ BI “*hak warisan sepenuhnya dikuasai oleh wanita*”

⁴⁸ BI “*Hak perempuan/istri adalah semua harta warisan dari keluarganya menjadi miliknya.*”

⁴⁹ BI *pendatang*

⁵⁰ BI *tamu*

obtaining pigs to exchange at such events; negotiating bridewealth payments with the lords of other houses; and managing the disposition of property held by the house, including land. This title is passed from father to eldest son. The “lord of the house” is always male, yet the position is described in terms of relationship to the eldest daughter of the house: that is, as BN *pame*,⁵¹ the uncle of the “nominal female master of the house,” or BN *nara*, her brother (Smedal 2009: 287).

In practice, the final authority of either men or women over heirloom property appears not to be universal, but instead to be contingent on the dynamics of each particular family. The prevalence of *di'i sa'o* marriage “does not foreclose the possibility that heirlooms may also be owned by men if there is agreement within the house” (Mere 2014: 24). At the same, in discussion within the house, “elder women in particular speak out loudly and decisively. Their opinion cannot be said to be marginal and they have great influence on all decisions pertaining to the affairs of their kin group” (Schröter 2005: 329-330). Neither men’s nor women’s ownership or authority is fully assured. Rather, power ebbs and flows with age, distance, and the nature of personal relationships.

Molo Modhe offered an example of the common, unclear state of hierarchy within a house. Yoosneem, Bart’s uncle and the eldest brother of Maria, became “lord of the house” when his parents died. When Yoosneem married, however, in a *di'i sa'o* marriage, he became a member of his wife’s house. His affiliation with Molo Modhe ended, and he held no special status in his new house. But his new house was only about a hundred meters away from his old one, and Yoosneem remained a constant presence at Molo Modhe. When he was there, he retook his role as lord of the *sa'o*, seating himself in the place of honor, and conducting ceremonies on behalf of the house. Maria’s husband Paulus, the oldest man who actually lived in Molo Modhe, took a seat to Yoosneem’s right, placing himself in an inferior position to the former lord, even though Yoosneem was some 25 years his junior, and technically had not belonged to this house since his own marriage decades earlier. When Yoosneem was not there, however, Paulus himself stepped into the role of lord of Molo Modhe, despite himself being a member of Molo Modhe only by *di'i sa'o* marriage—an immigrant or a guest. At the same time, Maria, as the eldest woman, was the inheritor of the house’s lands and treasures. I was not present for any conflicts

⁵¹ Arndt translates BN *pamé cema* as “part of the brideprice” (1961: 400).

in the house, and Maria passed away⁵² before I could speak to her about such matters. I don't know how a conflict between Maria and her brother, or between Maria and her husband, might have played out. What is clear is only that the house was not egalitarian, but layered with hierarchies; and those hierarchies were ambiguous, ambivalent, contingent on historical shifts and personal relationships, and subject to reversals.

This ambiguity regarding gender, ownership, and hierarchy has led to some debate among anthropologists as to the appropriateness of the term “matrilineal.” I agree with Smedal's assessment, that Ngadha descent is neither strictly patrilineal nor matrilineal—that it is ambiguous, with “no incontrovertible descent dogma, no principle, no ideology, no doctrine which dictates that a Ngadha house”—or ownership or control of its corporate possessions—“is perpetuated by women only, or by men only” (Smedal 2011: 296). Citing Levi-Strauss (1983: 1222), he argued that Ngadha houses could be described as “*pseudomorph*:’ social formations which appear to be either patrilineal or matrilineal but on closer inspection turn out to be neither” (Smedal 2011: 296-297).

However, many Ngadha people do use the term “matrilineal.” Molnar noted that people in her research area, not far from Rara Ele, learned anthropological terms from visiting researchers and deployed them for social differentiation and identity (Molnar 1994: 145). It may be that, by taking possession of the term “matrilineal” (and thus placing themselves in relation with Indonesia's other “matrilineal” societies, notably the Minangkabau [see e.g. Hadler 2008]), Ngadha people are staking some sort of political or social claim. The uses to which Ngadha people put this term, and its effects on Ngadha society in the future, will be a subject for another researcher. The point of this discussion of gender and hierarchy in the house is to highlight the ambiguities and ambivalences of those hierarchies.

Apical demotion, lateral expansion, and the instability of hierarchy between houses

Ambiguities in hierarchy extend beyond the internal workings of a single house. The relationships between houses—specifically, between BN *sa'o mere*, or “great houses” and BN *sa'o dhoru*, the “descended houses” that broke off from them—can also be subject to disruptions and reversals.

⁵² I will discuss Maria's sudden, tragic passing in chapter 6.

Ngadha houses are continually subdividing. These descended houses, called BN *sa'o dhoru*, are *sa'o* in their own right, but are lower in status than the houses from which they descended; as mentioned above, the relationship can be likened to that between older and younger siblings (Molnar 1997: 394-5).

The maintenance of this hierarchy depends in part on the fact that the great house, being older, is likely to have reached an advanced stage in its progression—more advanced than any of its newer descendants. Great houses policed the advancement of their descended houses in several ways. The ability to upgrade depends on access to resources, needed to feed workers and hold sacrifices. The great house is entitled to draw on the labor and resources of houses that descended from it for such purposes,⁵³ and members of descended houses are obligated to attend the ceremonies of the great house in support of its leaders.⁵⁴ Such borrowing both supports the progression of the great house, and prevents the progression of the descended house. Another method of policing was to stress that house improvement must proceed in a proper order, without skipping steps. And in fact, nothing but social disapproval or a lack of resources prevented anyone from moving directly from a bamboo *sa'o keka* to a fully carved and developed house, bypassing the intermediate steps. But it is possible for a *sa'o dhoru* to upgrade on its own, without support—and even to surpass the great house that begot it.

Policing the proper progression of house improvement was a prerogative of more powerful and established houses, which was only possible as long as the house lower in the hierarchy continued to connect with and submit to its progenitor houses. Occasionally, however, these ties were severed. In such cases, reversals of hierarchy became possible.

In 1984, over 30 years before I arrived in Bogala, a new *sa'o* descended from Molo Modhe, settling in Wako Menge, a village on the edge of Bajawa. Soon after the move, for reasons I never learned, members of the new *sa'o* stopped returning to Molo Modhe for ceremonies. They severed ties. By 2016, many of their members did not even know the origin of their own house.

⁵³ I am referring here to a practice of borrowing called BN *sogo*, which will be discussed further in chapter 9. *Sogo* borrowing can be used to support feasts connected to house upgrades, funerals, and other ceremonies related to the house or *woe*, but not business or gambling.

⁵⁴ This will be discussed further in chapter 6.

When Maria passed away, however, members of the prodigal house responded by sending a delegation,⁵⁵ to pay respects, break the ice, and restore ties. Over the next several months, members of the Wako Menge house attended traditional new years' ceremonies⁵⁶ at Molo Modhe, and invited Yoosneem, Paulus, and the Molo Modhe family to their own *sa'o* for a meal. Yoosneem said that the members of this house were delighted to reconnect. They had achieved some success, and needed to anchor it in family. When large ceremonies were held in their community, they were frequently on the outside—not invited in support of any superior house, and without descended houses to invite in support of themselves. They were uncomfortable in their success, and felt rootless.

The new *sa'o* in Wako Menge turned out to be a brand new, elaborate building, slightly smaller than typical traditional houses, in the back yard of a new, non-traditional concrete house. The two buildings were constructed by the roadside, and not in the circle of a traditional village. It was Yoosneem's uncomfortable duty as the lord of Molo Modhe to inform this family that their new, advanced *sa'o* building was out of line. The motifs were wrong, he said, and its carvings were too advanced for its place in the inter-house hierarchy. He informed the Wako Menge family that their *sa'o* would need to be demolished, and that they would have to pay a restitution to Molo Modhe, in the form of a series of pigs. On the upside, he said, if they did their duty and assumed their proper place, they could be fully included in community life as an affiliate of Molo Modhe. They could find greater support and attendance at their own ceremonies, and receive more invitations for participation. They wouldn't feel left out of the ceremonies going on all around them. They would know who their ancestors were, and be in good standing with them.

Yoosneem delivered this news near the end of my field research period, and I didn't get to see whether the Wako Menge house complied with his demands. (Demolishing their *sa'o* was a tall order.) But as long as the new *sa'o* building remained intact, it was not possible for the family that built it to remain in "proper," hierarchical relationship with Molo Modhe. To defy the order would be to establish independence, which was what the house effectively did when they

⁵⁵ BN *wailaki*. These delegations will be discussed in chapter 6.

⁵⁶ BN *reba*, the most important annual celebration for Ngadha people.

severed the ties that bound them a generation earlier. To claim a place in familial relation to Molo Modhe also meant accepting a place in hierarchical relation.

Today, there are many named *sa'o*. In order to assume the status they enjoy today, these great houses must have descended from other houses, then ceased to acknowledge that relationship, or seen the earlier generation of houses pass away. The potentials for competitive upgrading and subdivision lend *sa'o* social organization the same sense of flow that one feels in the physical structure of the *sa'o* building. Inside and out, in its social relations, the house is in flow, moving in or out of sync with the social structures that surround it.

Fox (1995) named two, non-exclusive methods by which members of Austronesian societies tend to maintain systems of precedence. In one, which he termed “apical demotion,” precedence and status invest in a single line, or a single individual; “all other individuals are automatically demoted and thus lose status relative to a single apical point. Unless they can manage to reunite their line with that of the highest status line, they continue to decrease in status” (Fox 1995: 238). The second method was “lateral expansion,” in which individuals of lower status can take advantage of “opportune line[s] of fission” offered by their society; rather than remaining as an inferior member of their current group, they can separate, and become a founding member of a new group in a new system of local precedence (Fox 1995: 237-238). “Apical demotion” has a relation to the system of physical house progression, specifically in the manner in which the final levels of development were never discussed. This cloudiness granted houses of the highest rank the ability to add some new level of development at any time. A house that added such an incremental improvement would automatically demote all other houses in relation to it. While descended houses would be subject to such demotion, they also retained the ability to sever those relationships, and undertake “lateral expansion,” forming the head of a new line of descent. In either case, precedence is not set, but is contingent on the efforts of high-ranking houses to maintain the existing order, which can be subject to disruptions or reversals.

“Keepsakes of the Ancestors:” shifting assemblages of house objects

More than anything else, what makes a house a *sa'o* is the installation of a set of objects called BN *fi'i riti more gili*, usually shortened to *fi'i*, a catchall term for a class of objects that were displayed on the rear, interior wall of the house. These objects represented generations of ancestors of the house, and gave those ancestors a material presence. *Fi'i* were fed. Some were

vectors for great spiritual power. They took the names of specific individuals, and were linked to the achievements of those individuals, by remaining linked to the lands and treasures amassed by that person for the house. But the number of *fi'i* in a house, the ancestral names assigned to those *fi'i*, and the collections of lands and *fi'i* that came together in a single house were always in flux. Like the physical and social house, this symbolic element of the house was also in a state of flow.

When I asked for the literal meaning of the term *fi'i riti more gili*, I was told that it was untranslatable. It is certainly possible that the people I was speaking to did not know the meaning of the term; the vocabulary of ritual speech was sometimes obscure, and many people did not know how to directly translate it. It could also have been a brush-off, from people tired of answering my questions. In either case, while *fi'i* were of central importance to the constitution of a *sa'o* and the disposal of *sa'o* property or property rights, and were spoken of often, I never collected a definitive translation. Arndt's dictionary defines *fii* (spelled without an apostrophe) as "a board or boards obtained when building a house, which hangs on the *mata raga*, keepsake of the ancestors"⁵⁷ (Arndt 1961: 152; Mopa 2004 has no relevant entry). *Riti* has many meanings, but the most relevant one is probably "carved" or "serrated," which does describe the staves that are the central element of the arrangement of objects (Arndt 1961: 467; Mopa 2004: 403). *More* also has many meanings, but the most likely is "beloved" (Arndt 1961: 337; Mopa 2004 has no relevant entry). *Gili* also has many meanings, mostly having to do with circling, surrounding, and fullness, such as the round fullness of a full moon (Arndt 1961: 183; Mopa 2004: 197). The best I can come up with, from these sources, is that the phrase *fi'i riti more gili* means something like, "carved/serrated boards, keepsakes of the ever-present/most fully beloved ancestors."

The carved or serrated boards of Arndt's definition were central to the *fi'i* assemblage, but they were far from its only components. What follows is a description of the *fi'i riti more gili* of *sa'o* Molo Modhe. This house was in many ways typical, but no two house interiors were ever completely identical. This schematic depicts the rear wall of Molo Modhe, facing the door.

⁵⁷ In German, "Stück Brett, Brettchen, das man beim Bau eines neuen Hauses erhält und am *mata raga* aufhängt, Andenken an die Ahnen."



Plate 25 *Fi'i* in a *sa'o*.

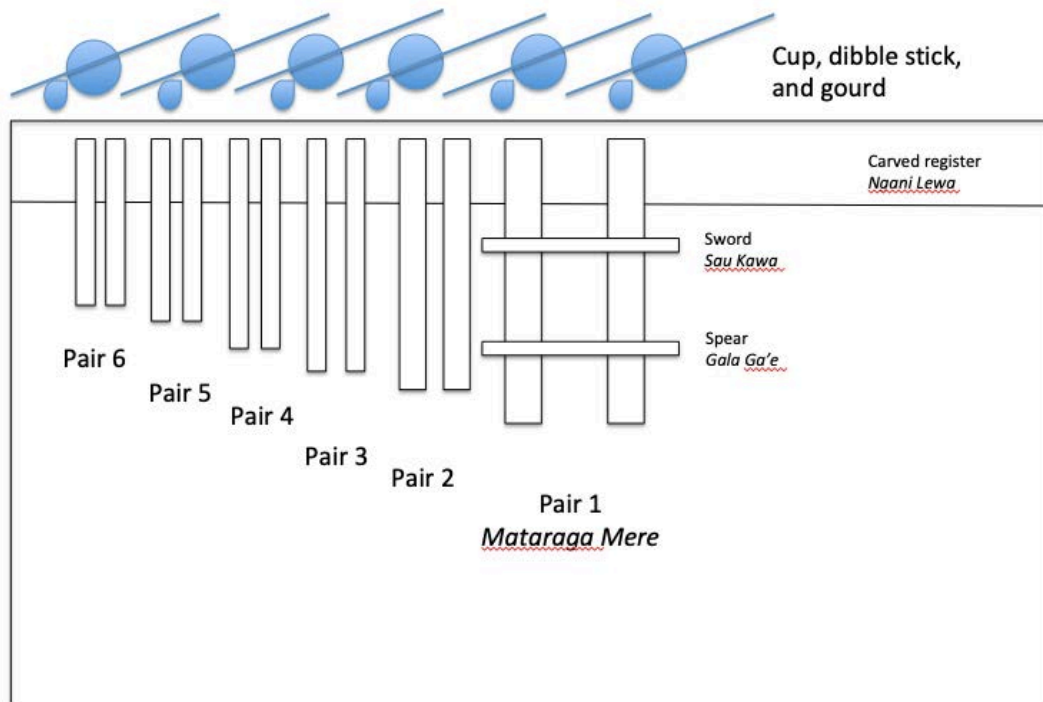


Figure 2 Basic schematic of *fi'i* on *sa'o* wall

The primary element of the *fi'i* is the BN *mataraga*, a pair of carved staves that together constitute a rack, on which are displayed a sword (BN *sau kawa*) and spear (BN *gala ga'e*). Together, the two staves represent a married pair of ancestors of the house. Molnar records the

rack as the “horn hook” (BN *zegu raga*), and the space in front of the wall as “eye of the hook” (BN *mata raga*) (2000: 175-6). I always heard *mataraga*, given as a single word, applied both to the racks and to the floor space. The largest, main pair is called *mataraga mere* (BN *mere*, “big”). Further pairs, progressively decreasing in size, are arrayed rightward from the center (from the perspective of a person sitting at the *mataraga*; left on the image), representing subsequent generations of ancestors. The maximum number of pairs, according to my informants, was six.

Whenever a ceremony is performed inside the *sa’o*, the man performing that ceremony sits beneath the *mataraga mere*, facing across the room, towards the door. Other attendant men sit to his right, in order of descending rank, putting them in a counter-clockwise order called BN *kago wana*.⁵⁸ Important women sit to his left, putting them close to the *mataraga*, but also at the far end of the *kago wana* counter-clockwise progression, making them both high- and low-status at the same time. The highest-ranking woman’s position—simultaneously closest to, and farthest from, the position of authority—underscores the ambiguous relationship of gender and power within the *sa’o*.



Plate 26 The *mataraga* in a brick *sa’o*, Bomari village, Langa.

⁵⁸ “rotate rightward.” This counter-clockwise rotation represented a movement from right to left, from greater precedence to lower. In ceremonies that see dancers move around a village square, the direction of their movement is *kago wana*. This is inverted in the case of ceremonies meant to subvert normal order, such as the “dance of the witch drum” (BN *ja’i laba polo*) described in Smedal 2016.

An ideal *mataraga mere* is used to display a sword and spear, but these items are not always present. In Molo Modhe, for instance, there was a sword on display, but no spear. This was not because the members of Molo Modhe did not include a spear in the ideal set of *fi'i* for their house, but because the spear was absent. The reason for that absence was never explained. While it's tempting to assign genders to this pair of implements, both are associated with male activities of warfare and hunting, and both are associated with other male symbols: the *ata*, a small effigy of a man holding a sword and spear, which is placed on the roofline of certain high-ranking houses;⁵⁹ and the *ngadhu* sacrificial post, which has, on its crown, two tiny arms that brandish a sword and spear.

Also displayed on the *mataraga mere* are two betel nut bags, called BN *lega ebu* and BN *bere ebu*: betel nut bags for grandfather and grandmother. The kinship term BN *ebu* can refer to either male or female grandparents. The genders of the bags are clearly visible, however: the man's basket (BN *lega*) is flat and rectangular, and the woman's basket (BN *bere*, which is more of a catchall term for woven baskets) is round-bottomed. In Molo Modhe, these were hung from pegs set in the wall between the staves of the *mataraga mere*, but in many houses they were hung on the *mataraga* itself. In some houses, the smaller *mataraga* were also hung with miniature *lega ebu* and *bere ebu*, but in Molo Modhe this was not the case, and the tiny racks were unadorned.

Above the rows of *mataraga* racks were sets of objects hung in groups: BN *hea*, a coconut-shell drinking cup; BN *sua*, a dibble stick; BN and *bhoka*, a drinking gourd, all objects that bear some association to the work of farming. For each pair of *mataraga*, there was a set of cup, stick, and gourd. In Molo Modhe, which had six sets of *mataraga*, there were also six sets of these implements.

In addition to these objects, there were elements included in *fi'i* that were not on the rear wall of the house. One was BN *radhi*, a vertical bundle of bamboo sticks, which stood near the door. These were especially used for hanging tubes of palm wine, but could also be used for hanging coats or other objects. The number of sticks in the bundle was the same as the number of sets of *mataraga* on the rear wall. BN *pedho kobho* was a large basket hanging along the wall in the women's quarter, used to store ceremonial eating implements, and special treasures, such as

⁵⁹ I will describe these roofline ornaments, and their reversible relationship with gender, in chapter 4.

gold. BN *bhoka bu'u*, or “the gourds of war,” was a cluster of dried gourds suspended from the ceiling, which Paulus indicated to me as standing in for a cluster of enemy heads.

Fi'i are not the same in every house. Differences between houses were due to differences in the progression of those houses; differences in house rank; differences in wealth; whether the house was free-standing or built into a larger, non-traditional house; local cultural variations; the personal preferences of inhabitants living and dead; and unique characteristics of particular houses or lines of descent.

Sometimes, elements that were supposed to be present were missing. The sword, the spear, or both the sword and the spear were absent from most houses I visited.⁶⁰ *Fi'i* in some houses had features the inhabitants acknowledged were unique to their own *sa'o* or *woe*. The BN *bhoka bu'u*, the cluster of “enemy heads,” I saw in only one other house besides Molo Modhe. I visited some houses where the *fi'i* included a bundle of bamboo tips wrapped in black arenga palm fiber, which was present only in houses claiming descent from an ancestor named Dhangi.⁶¹

A completed set of *fi'i* included six of everything. In practice, few houses had that many. That was largely because of the practice of subdivision. Every time *sa'o* subdivided, spawning off new descended houses, the new, lower house would receive some of the *fi'i* from the upper house.⁶² These *fi'i* acted as symbolic links between the two houses, carrying with them the names of their common ancestors. They also acted as deeds of property, linking the house in which they were displayed to the lands and treasures amassed by the ancestors whose names they bore. New *fi'i* were physical symbols of pieces of property, especially lands, bamboo clumps, and pieces of golden treasure acquired by members of the house. The addition of *fi'i* was a sign of prosperity, and as such, an indicator that the house was likely to subdivide. The tension in this set of symbols was between the quest for completeness, and the subdivision that was a likely result of that completeness. Any house with an incomplete set of *fi'i* bore that sense of being-in-progress. Any house with a complete set bore the sense of imminent dispersal.

⁶⁰ Swords were available for purchase or order at Mataloko and other markets for around Rp. 750,000, so people could get them if they wanted to.

⁶¹ I was told these bundles were called BN *gua mole*. This seems to translate as “traditional ancestor symbol,” and so the term may not be specific to this object (Mopa 2004: 202, 330).

⁶² Ata Tana 'Ai people, in east Flores, sometimes divide ritual goods between old and new houses, a form of split called *ma'a hadat*. These objects carry their own histories of movement, which record relations between houses and clan branches (Lewis 1988: 122-3).

Houses with incomplete sets of *fi'i* added new sets periodically, in ceremonies called BN *nulu neku* or BN *tege ngani*.⁶³ These were meant to take place only after the ancestor being honored, plus all of their siblings and children, have already died. Members of the house made these new *fi'i* themselves, from pieces of wood, basketry, and other everyday materials. It is important to note that the objects that make up the *fi'i* are mundane, everyday objects, with everyday applications, made from ordinary materials. Given how often Ngadha houses and their contents may have been destroyed by conflict or by fire, and the *fi'i* within them lost, it is clear that this loss does not constitute “a fate worse than death” (Tusinski 2016). The connection with the ancestors was severed by the destruction of these normal, unremarkable, and easily replaceable things. They are not now, and do not appear ever to have been made of gold, ivory, or other prestige goods traded from outside Flores, the materials of many potentially symbolic “history objects” in southeastern Indonesia (Hoskins 1993: 40). Further, the objects that make up a set of *fi'i*, and which are hence associated with the name of a particular ancestor, were crafted and brought together as an assemblage long after the ancestor in question passed away. That is, the objects were not made or handled by the person they commemorate. In this way, *fi'i* differ powerfully from the “biographical” objects described by Hoskins (1998) in Sumba. In houses that already contained the full six sets, the names attached to particular *fi'i* could actually rotate; a new set of names, from the latest grandparents to be honored, could be assigned to the smallest pair, pushing other, previous names towards the center, until the names of the oldest ancestors dropped off. I did not collect many genealogies in my research, but those I did collect stretched back through the six generations commemorated by the *fi'i* in the house, then jumped directly to original ancestors from centuries earlier. The movement of names across objects, which themselves are continually coming together and dispersing, suggested a picture of the house as a fluid conjunction of people and objects, gathering, developing, and coming apart—a circulation without end.

Conclusion: The house as process

The *sa'o*, the traditional house, is fundamental to the sociality, the built landscape, and the symbolic construction of Ngadha life. People flow into and out of the house, through birth, marriage, and death, contributing their labor while they live, their protection after death, and

⁶³ A *nulu neku* ceremony, and some controversy surrounding it, will be described in more detail in chapter 8.

eventually dropping away, as their names are pushed from the *fi'i*. The inhabitants of a house are always working to move it along the chain of social and symbolic progression, while simultaneously hiving off new, descended houses, and beginning those progressions again from scratch. The hierarchies within houses ebb and flow as people marry and move. The hierarchies between houses ebb and flow as well, as people seek belonging, independence, and a place in the broader social and material circulations that make up Ngadha life. Over time, houses change their forms, their locations, and their compositions. They strive to reach apical forms that are elusive, and perhaps illusory, always holding the potential for further social and symbolic differentiation. People take it as a solemn obligation to contribute to that progress, and the collection of resources and execution of the necessary steps are structuring factors in everyday planning and life.

The progression of the *sa'o* is interlinked with similar, step-by-step progressions at larger scales: the BN *woe*, groups of related or affiliated houses, which are the subject of chapter 4; and the BN *nua* or village, made up of one or multiple affiliated *woe*, the subject of chapter 5. Like the house, the *woe* and village are both subject to ambiguities and reversals in hierarchy, the potential for sub-division, and the gradual accumulation and elaboration of symbols, moving towards an ill-defined, often distant apical form. Where groupings and structures are always under development, it is the processes themselves, unfolding over time, that remain the same. In that context, it is productive to examine how these ongoing processes of circulation and progression enable Ngadha people to make and remake their claims to social affiliation and hierarchy.

CHAPTER 4: The Ngadha *Woe*: registering affiliation

Every Ngadha house belongs to a group of affiliated houses called a BN *woe*, a term most commonly, if imperfectly, translated into English as “clan.”¹ A *woe* is a network of houses derived from a single ancestor or pair of ancestors, under the authority of an original *sa’o*. This network may be limited to a single village, or be spread across multiple villages. Every Ngadha house is part of one *woe*, and every Ngadha person belongs to one house; therefore, every Ngadha person belongs to one *woe*. In practice, a *woe* may include houses that are not related to the others by descent. A *woe* can form segments, as members found or move to new villages. Rarely, a *woe* can also divide in two. Like a house, a *woe* is not a stable and immutable form of social affiliation. Rather, each *woe* is composed from individuals, who group and regroup, creating and recreating an image of social solidarity, in balance with the centrifugal force of those individuals’ interests and ambitions. Relations between more than one *woe*, or between segments of a single *woe*, ebb and flow as the members of those groups remember and repeat their past agreements and exchanges, or decline to repeat them, and allow their relations and affiliations to lapse. Each *woe* maintains a separate area outside the village called the BN *loka*, which must be continually renewed. And the most potent symbols of the *woe*—assemblages of people called BN *wailaki*, the group actions they undertake, and the words that identify and accompany them—must be instantiated over and over again, in order to have substance and meaning. As a result, the *woe* is less a category of kinship, and more like the name of a set of overlapping processes of growth, segmentation, division, and circulation.

Defining *woe*

Arndt translated the word *woe* in numerous ways: as a verb, it was “befriend, engage;” as an adjective, “unanimous, of one heart;” as a noun, “bond, alliance, union, association, band, group.” “The meaning of the word is hazy, unclear, and thus too are its usages,” he wrote. Most commonly, though, it was used for “the entirety of a family, originating from one original male or female ancestor” (Arndt 2009: 256). According to Arndt, each *woe* was associated with a place, where the houses of the original ancestors, or of their children, were located (Arndt 2009: 257). Molnar devoted an entire chapter of her 2000 book to describing the concept of *woe*, and titled it, “Clan: a minimal definition,” highlighting the difficulty of nailing down the nature of

¹ The term BN *woe* can be either singular or plural.

these groups. The additional characteristics of *woe* noted by Molnar include derivation from common ancestors; that the members of a *woe* often hold lands in common, rights to which are managed by the *woe* hierarchy and are inalienable from the *woe*; and that each *woe* has a name (2000: 89). In addition to the ancestor or ancestors that are publicly named as progenitors, each *woe* may also have a set of ancestors whose names are held secret.²

Each *woe* consists of a minimum of two houses, referred to as the “trunk rider”³ and “tip rider”⁴ houses.⁵ These names refer to the moment when a *ngadhu* post is carried into a village to be erected. When the post is carried in, lying horizontally on a bamboo bier, two men stand astride it: the head of the “trunk rider” house, who stands at the post’s base, and is himself referred to as the “trunk rider;” and the head of the “tip rider” house, who stands at its tip, and is himself referred to as the “tip rider.” In addition to their roles in the installation of the *ngadhu*, the trunk rider is responsible for erecting and maintaining the *bhaga*, the tip rider for maintaining the *ngadhu*.



Plate 27 The trunk and tip rider atop a *ngadhu* post, Eko Hetu village, Rara Ele.

² I became aware of this only near the end of my research, when I sat down with Yoosneem to review what I had learned. When I ran the names of two *woe* ancestors by him, his demeanor darkened. “Who told you those names?” he asked. Realizing that the answer could get another member of the community in trouble, I told him that I wasn’t sure. “You aren’t supposed to know that,” he said. I promised him that I would not share the names, and I will not.

³ BN *saka pu’u*. BN *pu’u* also means “tree;” it can also be translated as “source” or “origin,” as in the common phrase *pu’u de*, “from where [are you coming]?”

⁴ BN *saka lobo*.

⁵ It is unlikely there were any *woe* or *woe* segments with only two houses.

The *woe* further consists of all the houses that have descended from this original pair, which remain divided into two “branches,”⁶ with the trunk rider house and its descendants known as the trunk rider branch, and the tip rider house its descendants known as the tip rider branch.⁷ The men who head the trunk and tip houses form the leadership of the *woe*. Because the trunk of a tree grows before its tip, the trunk rider house and its branch are considered superior to the tip rider house and its branch, and the trunk rider has a superior position to the tip rider. This follows the pattern in eastern Indonesia of valuing precedence (e.g. Fox 1996; Graham 1991; Vischer 2009). Trunk rider and tip rider houses can be recognized by symbols attached to their roofs, called BN *ata* and BN *ana iye*. The *ata*, which translates simply as “person,” consists of a miniature effigy of a male figure brandishing a sword and spear. *Ata* are gendered as male; in Rara Ele they mark trunk rider houses, which are superior. *Ana iye* are ornaments in the shape of a miniature house, and are gendered as female; they sit atop the roofs of tip rider houses, which are inferior. That gendering is unique to Rara Ele.⁸ Elsewhere in Ngadhaland, the symbols are reversed: trunk rider houses are marked by *ana iye* and regarded as female, and tip rider houses are marked with *ata* and regarded as male. Nobody could explain to me how this reversal came about, but I heard it confirmed by enough different sources that I accepted that it was actually the case. Interestingly, I heard similar phrases to justify both arrangements; in Langa, someone said, “the woman is first, because how can man come before woman?” In Rara Ele, Paulus said just the opposite: “how can woman come before man?”⁹

⁶ I recall no Ngadha word for these two parts of the *woe* other than *pu’u* and *lobo*. Molnar uses “branch” (2000: 90), and I will follow her usage, which fits with the tree-like imagery of trunk and tip.

⁷ Botanic metaphors, such as the trunk and branches of a tree, are widespread in the region. See e.g. Barnes 1974, Fox 1971, Lewis 1988: 122, Sugishima 1994

⁸ Within Rara Ele, only the village of Beiposo holds that the trunk rider is female and the tip rider is male, following the norm set in the rest of Ngadhaland.

⁹ It is often remarked that gender, as applied to people, objects, and institutions in eastern Indonesia, is deeply complex, defying easy categorization (Hoskins [1998: 16] cites Adams 1969, Fox 1980, Howell 1989, McKinnon 1991). Howell argues that Lio people, in central Flores, can find themselves operating within multiple discourses of gender simultaneously, and that those discourses of gender can come into conflict with one another. Gender, in Lio and in Ngadhaland, is a meaningful category. But there is no clear universal hierarchy between male and female, and gender roles and gender hierarchy can, and do, change (Howell 1996: 256-257). While I was unable to learn a historical or ideological reason why the trunk and tip should be gendered differently in Rara Ele than elsewhere in Ngadhaland, the fact of the difference is evidence that the *woe*, as a social structure, is not constructed in accordance with any one unifying ideology.



Plate 28 An *ata* before installation, Manubhara village, Inerie.



Plate 29 An *ana iye* is visible atop the red roof, Eko Hetu village, Rara Ele.

The status of trunk or tip rider houses derives from the roles those houses play in the establishment of the *woe* segment and its monuments. But if a house is no longer capable of fulfilling its role—if it can no longer marshal the resources to renew or maintain the monument for which it is responsible—it may yield that role, and the title that comes with it, to another house. The apparent stability of *woe* hierarchy based on precedence and descent, and the apparent clarity of village social structure provided by the visible symbols of ancestor shrines and rooftop symbols, can belie a more complicated reality.

In Bogala, those visible symbols confused me from the outset. Bogala had three *ngadhu/bhaga* pairs, and so I looked for three *ata* and three *ana iye* on the roofs of Bogala's houses. To my surprise, I found that they were not all there. Instead of three *ata*, indicating trunk rider houses, there were only two, belonging to *woe* Manu and Bhalu. And instead of three *ana iye*, indicating tip rider houses, there was only one, belonging to *woe* Manu. Of the three *woe*,

only Manu had both symbols on display. *Woe* Boba, I was told, had a trunk rider family living in Bogala, but they hadn't erected the symbol; their tip rider house was in another village altogether. When it came to *woe* Bhalu—a founding *woe* of the village, and owner of two of the three plots of land on which Bogala was built—the situation was murkier. For the best part of a year, when I asked which house was the Bhalu tip rider house, I was told that the answer was “hazy.”¹⁰ Only towards the end of my research period did Yoosneem tell me: we all know which house it is. Only they claim that it isn't them, to get out of their responsibility to care for the Bhalu monuments—a situation Yoosneem described with the phrase,

*Wati*¹¹ *ngabhi ne'e kula*¹² *ngewa* Torn dish and shattered bowl

The phrase denotes a person or house that has inherited goods or position, but is unwilling to undertake the responsibilities—ceremonial participation, leadership, and expenditures—that come with it. This refusal invites misfortune, including failed harvests, broken relationships, and even unnatural deaths.¹³

Yoosneem also said, though I did not confirm it, that *woe* Bhalu's true trunk rider house was also hazy, and the *ata* that was displayed by the house that ostensibly claimed that title was erected only following some unknown negotiations within the family, known to no one else. The churn of *woe* Bhalu's internal politics demonstrates the possibilities of claiming or shedding titles, even ones that appear to be set by blood descent or membership in a physical house, adorned with a physical marker. The role, the title, and the prestige and authority associated with them, arise from actions taken in the present.

Woe grow, primarily, when houses belonging to that *woe* beget new descended houses. *Woe* could also grow due to the exigencies of war. Historically, Ngadha *woe* could more closely resemble military alliances than descent groups. These alliances gladly absorbed refugees from violence elsewhere in Ngadhaland, in order to swell their numbers and their strength. War

¹⁰ BI *kabur*

¹¹ BN *wati* is a plate woven from lontar palm leaves.

¹² BN *kula* is a food bowl made from a dried gourd.

¹³ BN *golo*, a category of violent or unnatural deaths that includes illness and accident, which requires the performance of a group of ceremonies called BN *keo rado*. I had some information regarding *keo rado*, though I was excluded from one held in Bogala during my research. For more information (if slightly different from mine), see Smedal 1996.

captives, if not ransomed by their families, could also be absorbed into the *woe* of their captors, either by joining their captors' houses, or by founding their own houses with *ho'o* rank. And orphans who were taken in by a house of another *woe*, or who drank the milk of a mother of who belonged to another *woe*, would change affiliation (Arndt 2009: 267). It was also possible for people living and working on the lands of another *woe* to join it, and found new named houses within it (Smedal 2002: 498).

Because the *woe* is more or less, but not entirely, an alliance of houses that claim common descent, anthropologists are divided on the question of whether to use the term "clan" to describe it. Molnar uses the word clan "for the sake of convenience" (2000: 89), as do Curnow (2007, 2008, 2012), Cole (2007), Daeng (1988), Djawanai (1983), Schröter (2005), and Susetyarto (2019). Smedal avoids the word clan, arguing instead for the emic BN term *woe*,¹⁴ and suggesting the alternative English term "House¹⁵ coalition network" (2002: 495). Banda (2017) and Bhara (2011), writing in Indonesian, use BI *klan*. Some Ngadha authors refer to *woe* using the BI term *suku* (Titu 2016: 45; Dhone 2011: 26), which is usually translated into English as "ethnic group;" and indeed, others use the word *suku* to mean all Ngadha people, and not a specific *woe* (Ngewi 2014: 34).

A Ngadha *woe* is neither endogamous or exogamous. According to Arndt, they were once strictly endogamous, a) to retain wealth in a tight circulation, b) for the reproduction of the refinements or particularities of particular *woe*, c) to preserve blood purity, and d) so that young men knew their potential brides from a young age (1954: 19-20). While this may have been the case in the past, it is no longer so now. A Ngadha *woe* also does not constitute a "wife-giving group" or "wife-taking group" (Smedal 2011: 288), such as form the basis of marriage patterns in so much of the rest of Flores (eg Allerton 2004, Forth 1998 & 2004, Graham 1994, Erb 1994, Howell 1989 & 1996, Lewis 2010, and Tule 2004). There are no requirements that members of a given *woe* must marry either within the *woe*, or only members of another specific *woe*. Ideal marriage in Ngadha is structured only by class stratum, and not by house or *woe* membership.

¹⁴ Smedal spells the word with an accent: *woé*. I have chosen a Ngadha orthography without accents, because almost no one who provided me with language information used them, and for the purposes of comparison with other authors, most of whom do not use accents. Yan Mopa used accents when writing by hand, but not when typing.

¹⁵ Smedal capitalizes the word "House," to indicate that he is talking about the *sa'o* as a social unit and not an ordinary domicile.

Some *woe* are limited to a single social class, but many contain houses from all three social strata: BN *ga'e* or “great,” a kind of nobility; BN *ga'e kisa* or “middle,” meaning commoners; and BN *ho'o*, meaning “slaves,” or the descendants of slaves.¹⁶ Arndt suggested that the nobles descended from the trunk rider branch, and commoners from the tip rider branch (Arndt 2009: 260); in my own research, however, nobody offered any firm explanation for the separation between *ga'e* and other ranks. While *ga'e* rank cannot be achieved by people who are not born to it, those who do hold *ga'e* rank can lose it in a number of ways, mostly involving infractions against law or dignity, or by marrying members of lower classes. As a result, the number of *ga'e* families seems to be declining (Smedal 2016). Generally speaking, *ga'e* rank carried no connotation of wealth or power in excess of ordinary people, and *woe* did not seem to require *ga'e* members in order to exist. As Smedal notes, “Ngadha social life does not hinge on the existence of a class of nobles. The total social order does not depend on it” (Smedal 2016: 116). As the noble class declined, I found it was not the commoner class but the slave class that was making up the ground. People frequently used the term *ho'o* to describe themselves, though they were a little uncomfortable using it with me; Yoosneem said that the word was “too precise.”¹⁷ Yet that was the class to which most people I met claimed to belong. Curiously, nobody who spoke to me ever claimed to be *kisa*, a commoner. This is in opposition to Smedal’s claim that “there are a few individuals in scattered settlements known to be descendants of former slaves, but they play virtually no role in what is a vigorous socio-ritual life, and they never feature in House genealogies” (Smedal 2016: 117). It is possible that people were not being honest with me, and preferred to downplay their class status, possibly to deflect my interest away from their affairs and their wealth objects.¹⁸ Even if that were the case, they chose to claim slave status, rather than commoner status.¹⁹

¹⁶ In Teni-Lopijo, on the western slope, there may be a fourth social class called BN *ga'e dhiri*, below *ga'e kisa* and above *ho'o* (Eko 2015: 40). My own informants mentioned only three. I have not seen *ga'e dhiri* mentioned in any anthropological literature, and have no information regarding it beyond this passing mention in Eko 2015.

¹⁷ *BI terlalu tepat*. I wonder if there’s some parallel with the N-word, or other reclaimed terms that should properly be used only by insiders. On the other hand, I often passed a signpost by the roadside, which marked the way to Wolo Ho’o, “Slave Hill.”

¹⁸ It was frequently assumed that, as an anthropologist, I wouldn’t be interested in women or low-ranking people, and should spend my time only with men of special status or rank.

¹⁹ See Smedal (2016), which argues that, due to the shifting weight of coeval value systems, the freedom that comes from abandoning *ga'e* rank outweighs the value of retaining it.

Some *woe* are small, with houses in only one or two villages. Others are large, with thousands of members, and houses as far away as Manggarai and Nagekeo (Arndt 2009: 257). A *woe* can expand its presence beyond a single village when houses belonging to that *woe* relocate to other villages, or take part in the foundation of new villages. These houses may remain affiliated with the *woe* segment from which they originated, in which case they would continue to return to that village for ceremonies linked to the leading houses, or to the *ngadhu* and *bhaga*, of their *woe* segment; or they may form a new segment, based in the village where they now reside, and establish their own *ngadhu* and *bhaga*. The Ngadha term for a *woe* segment, according to Arndt, was BN *ili-bhou*, a “cluster of sprouts.”²⁰ I heard this term used exactly once; most of the time, if someone used the term “*woe*,” they were referring only to their own village segment. When members of a *woe* relocate to a new village, the question of whether they remain affiliated with their previous segment of the *woe* or form a new, autonomous segment hinges on the creation and maintenance of ancestral monuments: the BN *ngadhu*, the sacrificial post, and the BN *bhaga*, the miniature house. Should two houses of a *woe*, having moved to a village where their *woe* has no monuments, gather sufficient resources, they can erect *ngadhu* and *bhaga*, thus establishing themselves as trunk and tip rider houses. Those houses, and the subsidiary houses descended from them, make up one *woe* segment. As long as people remain tied to monuments in another village—returning there for ceremonies, at the behest of the houses that manage those monuments—they have not formed an autonomous *woe* segment.

According to Arndt, each *woe* was headed by a single “great house,”²¹ whose leader bore some authority over its various segments (2009: 260). If it happened that the segments of a *woe* “forgot” the precedences determining hierarchy between them, Arndt wrote, these relationships could be reestablished by performing divination in this original house (2009: 258). I encountered only one house, in Langa,²² which appeared to have some authority over segments of a *woe* across multiple villages. I never heard mention of such “great houses” in Rara Ele. In practice, village-level *woe* segments appeared to be functionally autonomous from one another. There were never two segments of one *woe* in a single village.

²⁰ BN *bhou* meaning “a group, gathering, or collection” and BN *ili* meaning “sprouts or stalks.” This most often seemed to refer literally to clumps of giant bamboo, BN *ili betho*, which continually sprout new stalks from a single, conjoined root system.

²¹ Arndt gives the BN terms *sao mongo*, *sao puge*, *sao ulu*, and *sao gae* (2009: 260).

²² House Maja Pahi, in Bone Waru, was called the BN *sa’o kebo wisu* of *woe* Langa.

Groups of houses or *woe* segments can also, potentially, break away, and form entirely new *woe*. Unlike descended houses, which are bound to the named houses from which they split, new *woe* are not hierarchically inferior to the *woe* from which they originated. Sometimes the name of a *woe* might suggest such a relationship; for example, one of the *woe* that shares Rara Ele with *woe* Manu is *woe* Ngadha Ana Manu, or “Ngadha child of Manu.” However, these two *woe* are not bound in a hierarchy of parent/child or older-sibling/younger-sibling precedence. A new *woe* is the equal of an old one, and not inherently subject to its political control. While there is no definitive count of the number of Ngadha *woe*, people surmised to me that the total is probably around 100, an estimate supported by Arndt (2009: 257) and Barnes (1980: 110). If the number has in fact remained more or less consistent since Arndt’s time, in the first half of the 20th century, it would suggest that *woe* are reasonably durable and resistant to extinction, and that subdivisions are reasonably rare. To found a *woe* is to take on the responsibility to erect and maintain named houses and monuments, and to continually stage expensive ceremonies and redistributions around them. Houses whose members are not willing to take on the expense, or who cannot call on networks of affiliated houses broad enough to cover those expenses, will not be willing to break away. Perhaps as a result of these constraints, which may make the cost of establishing a new *woe* “economically prohibitive” (Smedal 2002: 498), I never saw *woe* subdivide.

Renewing “registration” in the *woe*: the yam feast and the drinking house

Many people suggested to me that *woe* membership was not something that could be established once, and then persist. Rather, it had to be renewed periodically, through continual action. People had to show up, over and over again, and take part. By showing up, requesting and receiving recognition, houses renewed not only social membership, but legitimate access to lands owned by the *woe* (Smedal 2016: 292). These renewals and renegotiations were particularly visible at the annual BN *reba* ceremony, celebrating the yam harvest. *Reba* is one of the largest and most visible ceremonies of the Ngadha calendar, and has been described in great detail by other authors (e.g. Arndt 2007: 40-89; Djawamaku 2000; Schröter 2000). *Reba* in Bogala included elements designed to elicit public declarations of affiliation by each house with its *woe*.



Plate 30 Dancers circling Bogala at *reba*.



Plate 31 *Fi'i* on the granaries of Bogala at *reba*.

Reba in Bogala took place on February 5, relatively late in the year.²³ In the evening, after some parts of the ceremony and before others, two members of each house were delegated to take their *fi'i* down from the place of honor inside the *sa'o*, carry them through the village plaza, and hang them from the outside of one of the granaries that flanked the entrance to the village. One of these granaries belonged to the Bogala segment of *woe* Manu, and the other to the Bogala segment of *woe* Bhalu;²⁴ all the Manu houses hung their *fi'i* from the Manu granary, while the Bhalu houses hung theirs from the Bhalu granary. Among the delegations present was one from the house mentioned in chapter 3, which had recently restored relations with Molo

²³ Different parts of Ngadhaland celebrate *reba* at different times. The first *reba* is held in Bena, Jerebu'u, on December 26. *Reba* in Langa is held on January 15. Rara Ele's date of February 5 may be the latest of all.

²⁴ A third *woe*, Boba, had *ngadhu* and *bhaga* in Bogala, but no granary. Nobody could tell me why.

Modhe, and was performing the reestablishment of their relationship by participating. The role of *reba* as a time to declare affiliations was driven home when another house used it to announce an upcoming wedding, delegating the bride and groom, whose engagement was not yet public, to carry the *fi'i* together. A simple meal of rice and meat, supplied by participating houses, was prepared before each granary for the members of the *woe* to share. We waited a long time before eating, until one of the leaders of *woe* Manu finally declared the cause of the delay: three houses, part of the *woe* segment, who lived a few kilometers away, had been invited, but had not shown up. As the food was distributed, and we began to eat, it was easy to reflect on the way different houses had chosen to observe the moment. By coming, or by not coming, they had strengthened or weakened their affiliation to the *woe* segment. And while both *woe* Manu and *woe* Bhalu were merely segments, no part of *reba* of which I was aware required them to participate in such displays of affiliation to any “great” or original house elsewhere.

Not everyone is permitted to make such displays. According to Yoosneem, people who have married into the *woe* in the past year do not join in the *reba* of their new group. This suggests a contingency in their membership, which, though determined by marriage and the payment or non-payment of bridewealth, has not yet been solidified by a year of participation in family life. In fact, participation at *reba* was described to me as a kind of “registration,”²⁵ in which people or groups put their names forward for recognition and inclusion. When people from descended houses attend the *reba* festivities of their *woe* segments, headed by the trunk or tip rider houses that are their progenitors, it reaffirms their membership in a shared social structure, and assures recognition of their claims to land or social inclusion. When they do not attend, their affiliation with the *woe* is no longer secure. This was the case with the descended house described in chapter 3, which re-established its affiliation with Molo Modhe by sending representatives to *reba*, after many years of absence. Affiliation requires periodic registration and renewal.

Registration and renewal are key qualities of a set of physical structures associated with *woe*, which are hidden, rather than public: a pair of miniature houses with a stone seating area, situated near stands of palm wine trees, in forest or field, generally hidden from view, without a path that leads to it. This concealed complex is called the BN *loka*. BN *loka* means “outside” or

²⁵ BI *registrasi*.

“the outside world,” and is contrasted to the interior world within the *sa’o*, described with the word BN *one* (Susetyarto 2019: 4).²⁶ While *loka* is the opposite of *one*, *loka* complexes were also hidden—I never saw one that had a path to its door. The purpose of that separation was to permit *woe* leaders to meet in private, for the conduct of ceremonies, but also for political discussions. The results of these discussions could then be announced in public places, such as the house in the case of house affairs, the trunk rider house in the case of *woe* affairs, or the stone platform in the village plaza in the case of village affairs. The importance of having a separate space for private discussion was stressed on a practical level many times.

While *loka* were hidden, most were not secret. Some were easily visible from the roadside, only partially obscured behind a screen of trees or a field of maize. Occasionally, *loka* were the sites of public ceremonies, to which all kinds of people were invited. For example, one of the *woe* of Eko Heto had a new *ngadhu* post carved at their *loka*, which stood in a field alongside a coffee processing facility. When it was time to carry the post into the village, hundreds of guests came to the *loka* to bring gifts, share a meal, and enjoy the pageantry as *woe* members, accompanied by the music of gongs and drums, bore the post away.



Plate 32 A *loka* complex with twinned miniature houses for the trunk and tip branches of a *woe* segment, near Bomadha village, Rara Ele.

²⁶ According to Susetyarto, BN *loka* or *kisa loka* is the opposite and counterpart to BN *one*, “the small world,” contained within the house. In my research, BN *one* was used to describe things that were hidden from view, either because they were enclosed, like the space within the *sa’o*, or because they were distant. The prime example of this was the description of a distant land, which occasionally came up in myths and origin stories, named Jawa One. Jawa can mean the actual island of Java, but it is also cognate with the BI word *jauh* meaning “far.” This yields a translation of BN *jawa one* as “the hidden distance.” In addition, Sina One or “distant China” was sometimes named as a stopping point in the travels of original ancestors.



Plate 33 An open feast at a *loka* before a new *ngadhu* is carried to Eko Heto village, Rara Ele.

Arndt dedicated several pages of his 1954 monograph to these complexes, which he called BN *loka tua*, or simply “places for drinking palm wine” (Arndt 2009: 483-489). In his description, they are unconnected to *woe*. Rather, they were places where the owners of the palm wine trees assembled groups of people to drink together. These groups, which usually numbered between twenty and thirty people, were not limited to kin, but included relatives, friends, and especially old people, who came at the invitation of the landowner. Women could drink at *loka tua*, but most members were men, excepting some women who were made “honorary members.” Such locations were considered “sanctified,”²⁷ and were host to ceremonies dedicated to the gods and spirits²⁸. Stone altars were added to *loka* to facilitate these ceremonies. Many *loka* also included small huts called BN *keka lela*, where male circumcisions were performed—a practice that was once common, but now seems to have disappeared from Ngadhaland.²⁹ The *loka* was not only for drinking, but for discussion and negotiation, and reaching important decisions. “Often the *loka* functions as a school, where the elders instruct the young about the practicalities and obligations of a good Ngadha person” (Arndt 2009: 489). To deter people who were not members from drinking there, members blocked the path with lengths of bamboo hung with pigs’ feet, dogs’ feet, or a chicken’s wing. These gatherings were seasonal, and lasted only as

²⁷ BN *rii*

²⁸ BN *dewa zeta nitu zale*

²⁹ Circumcision is mentioned in several of Arndt’s works (1956, 1958, 1959, 1960), and Bader’s 1953 “Die Reifeiern bei den Ngada (Mittelflores, Indonesien)” was largely concerned with circumcisions. Yet the only time I heard the practice mentioned was at Teni, when old men lamented the loss of a circumcision practice called BN *hoga loka*, which involved sending young men to a field hut for several weeks.

long as the sap in the trees continued to run. When a new season began, new invitations were issued, and the groups were reconstituted from scratch.

Loka as I found them were, physically, much the same. The first key element of a *loka* was the presence of arenga palms.³⁰ These trees supply a trickle of white sap, which tappers collect in bamboo cups. The sap quickly ferments through a natural process, yielding a beverage that is sweet, lightly carbonated, and mildly alcoholic, known as BN *tua bhara* or *moke*.³¹ The presence of these trees was a necessary precondition for a *loka*, as the beverage they produced was considered essential for lubricating discussion.

The built components of a *loka* consisted of miniature versions of the trunk rider and tip rider houses, roughly two meters square, or large enough to squeeze in about a half-dozen people. These were usually rough constructions of bamboo or untreated timber with corrugated metal roofs, with an interior layout identical to a full-sized *sa'o*. Whereas *bhaga*, another miniature house of similar scale to the *loka*, were often ornately carved and decorated, *loka* were rarely carved, and any carvings I saw were rough and unpainted. *Loka* buildings did contain miniature *fi'i*, the “keepsakes of the ancestors,” normally simplified down to the pairs of staves only. The two miniature houses of the *loka*, like *ngadhu* and *bhaga*, are built and maintained by the two branches of a *woe* segment. Like trunk and tip rider houses, the two *loka* buildings could be separate from each other, or they could be twinned on a single platform, with the trunk rider on the right and the tip rider on the left, right being superior to left.

In most cases, each *woe* built its *loka* on its own land, separate from the *loka* of other *woe* segments in their village. Occasionally, *loka* were built together. In the case of Bogala, *woe* Manu and Bhalu built their *loka* in a single clearing surrounded by coffee trees, just a few minutes walk from the village plaza. This was a testament to the close entanglement of the two *woe*, a relationship which Yoosneem demonstrated in a gesture, by clasping his hands together

³⁰ BN *pu'u enau*; Latin name *Arenga pinnata*.

³¹ Palm wine was central to Ngadha food identity; people often described the Ngadha as people who ate toasted maize flour (BN *wu'u hae*) and raw leaves, and drank *tua bhara*. BN *tua* is cognate with BI *tuak*. BN *bhara* means “white,” and the drink is indeed white in color. *Tua bhara* was contrasted with BN *tua ara*, the clear liquor distilled from palm wine, cognate with BI *arak*. I’m unclear on the origin of the word *moke*, which I have also heard used in West Timor. Many people tapped their own palm wine, either from trees on their own land, or from trees owned by others, to whom they may or may not have paid rent or passed on a portion of their production. There were personal tastes and regional variations in how people enjoyed their palm wine. In Rara Ele, it was common to flavor the wine with a bitter bark of a certain tree that grew in hotter areas, such as Kurubhoko, north of So’a. Around Mataloko, it was common to flavor the wine with the leaves of the soursop tree.

tightly and intertwining his fingers.³² *Woe* Boba, the third *woe* with *ngadhu* and *bhaga* in the village, had its *loka* elsewhere, and I never saw it.

In addition to the miniature houses, each *loka* had a small rectangular stone platform called a BN *loka lanu*.³³ These were used for internal *woe* discussions; or in the case of the joint *loka* at Bogala, between leaders of the two *woe* whose *loka* shared this clearing.³⁴ These decisions reached in private discussion would be promulgated publicly later, at the drum stone³⁵ platform in the middle of the village.

The following paragraphs describe the *loka lanu* used by *woe* Manu and Bhalu at Bogala. The *lanu* was a rectangular seating area of flagstones, set directly onto the ground, similar in style and function to the drum stone platform at the center of the village, but on a smaller scale. One edge of the *loka lanu* was lined by a row of standing stones called BN *watu sedhe*,³⁶ which represented male ancestors. They were complemented by the horizontal flagstones of the seating area, which were called BN *watu weka*,³⁷ and represented female ancestors. At each end of the row of standing stones, one stone stood taller than the rest; these were called BN *lengi loka*. The center of the row, between the *lengi loka*, was occupied by lower, rounder stones, each wrapped in a layer of black arenga-palm fiber pinned down with bamboo pegs. These stones were called BN *ulu watu* or “head stones;” the black fiber represented the head cloths worn by the ancestors when they were still alive, a suggestion made more salient by Yoosneem when he suggested that before the introduction of cotton, the earliest clothing in Ngadhaland was made from black palm fiber. These stones were also mounted by tiny miniature staircases with three steps, similar to the ones at the front of a traditional house. Behind the row of standing stones, there was a rail of bamboo, ostensibly for the men to hang their chest cloths while seated. In some cases, particular plants grew beside *loka lanu*, such as BN *ra’a beka*, a medicinal tree with red flowers and

³² Bogala was founded by members of *woe* Manu; two of the three plots of land on which it was built were owned by *woe* Bhalu.

³³ There were different varieties of *lanu*; named houses had their own, on house lands—in Bogala, there were seven houses that had their own *lanu*. The *lanu* attached to a *loka* is called a *loka lanu*.

³⁴ Yoosneem referred to these *woe* leaders as BN *dela one woe*, the “elders from within the *woe*.”

³⁵ BN *watu laba*

³⁶ BN *watu* means “stone.” Mopa’s 2004 dictionary has no entries under the letter S. Arndt 1961 has *sedhe* as “to pull in; to work or walk in the heat.” This leaves me uncertain how to translate *watu sedhe*.

³⁷ Mopa 2004 has *weka* as “water bird,” and *wēka* as “to spread out.” Following the second sense, I would guess that *watu weka* then translates as, “laid-out stones.”

leaves,³⁸ and BN *ngusu*, another shrub with red leaves, which is frequently used as a boundary marker between plots of land.



Plate 34 A *loka lanu* with head stones near Bogala.



Plate 35 A *loka lanu* near Langa Gedha village, Langa.

Loka were central to the project of “registering” the membership of houses in the *woe*, because the *loka* buildings, and the black fiber on the head stones, were all meant to be renewed annually; participating in this renewal, through contributions of labor or resources, was an essential element to renewing the inclusion of a house in the *woe*. As Paulus said, it was

³⁸ BN *ra'a*, “blood.” BN *beka* was translated for me as BI *cinta* or “love;” Mopa (2004: 43) includes that translation, as well as “emotion; pity; to overflow.” Arndt (1961: 21) translates *beka* as “have mercy, love, render a service through gifts.” According to Bart, *ra'a beka* leaves can be eaten raw, but it’s used more as medicine: boil the leaves, then bathe in the water, and it gives you a feeling of lightness. When I took part in a ritual called *bui manu*, in which male members of *woe* Langa assemble at their *loka*, then sweep down out of the hills to raid the nearby villages and steal away their chickens and produce, many raiders adorned their headcloths with *ra'a beka* flowers.

necessary to plant stones at the *loka* to be counted in the *woe*. And each year, when men from the houses of the *woe* showed up to tear down the buildings, and replaced or reassemble their materials,³⁹ they were reaffirming their desire to remain within the *woe*. This process was probably never frictionless. The day before *reba*, I attended a gathering of the *woe* elders at the *loka lanu* of *woe* Manu and Bhalu, and watched as the old men vaguely harangued their followers, chiding them that they had not contributed enough money or labor to renew the *loka* this year, and demanding that they do better, invoking this phrase,

*Pibe*⁴⁰ *pu'u pibe lobo* Support the trunk, support the tip

Kaka pu'u kaka lobo Help carry the trunk, help carry the tip

Unfortunately, the elder who exhorted the gathering most vehemently was plainly drunk; he kept forgetting what he was saying, and needed to be reminded, until eventually the gathered crowd began to chuckle amongst themselves. As such, just as *loka* can be sites for *woe* to reify and unite themselves, they can also be sites of failure. In fact, some *loka* were neglected and overgrown, either forgotten or abandoned. These sites were markers of the disintegration of the *woe* segments charged with maintaining them. They were also signals that the politics of inclusion or exclusion practiced by *woe* were complicated. Invitations to join could be refused, as with the houses that did not come to *reba*.

While most *loka*-based activities I was aware of focused on *woe* segments, a few *loka*-based activities brought multiple *woe* segments together with a unity of leadership and purpose that gave the *woe* real meaning as a unified, cross-village social structure. I witnessed only one example of this: a complex ritual, based at a *loka* belonging to *woe* Langa, in the Langa subregion of Ngadhaland. This *loka* was well and truly hidden: about a 15 minute walk out from Langa Gedha, over streams, through bamboo groves, up and down steep slopes, to a clearing in the forest at the base of a high ridge. This took place the day before *reba*,⁴¹ and was an opportunity for the *woe* to claim rights and perform responsibilities that made their *woe* unique. The ritual was called BN *bui manu*, which means “burnt chicken;” and the centerpiece of the day

³⁹ Metal roofing sections and any carved pieces of wood were likely to be reused.

⁴⁰ I also encountered the word BN *pibe* in the term BN *pibe kaba*, or “support/answer/respond to/balance/complement the buffalo.” At ceremonies where a buffalo is sacrificed, attending *wailaki* delegations each bring pigs; many of these are slaughtered in unison, as an “answer” to the slaughter of the buffalo.

⁴¹ *Reba* in Langa was held on January 15.

was a series of mock raids on the surrounding villages, during which members of *woe* Langa stole vegetables, fruit, and especially chickens from their neighbors, before retreating to their *loka* to consume the spoils together.⁴² The raids touched on the eighteen villages that make up the ambit of the cultural subregion currently referred to as Langa. With these raids, the men of *woe* Langa were re-enacting raids by BN *ybu ngiu*, the mountain men who were among the original inhabitants of the Bajawa plateau; at times, they said “today we are *ybu ngiu*.” Only members of *woe* Langa were permitted to participate.⁴³ Yet the small clearing was crowded with men, women, and children, over 100 in total, gathered to cook and eat, sing and dance, and witness a series of divinations regarding the weather and fortunes of the coming year.⁴⁴



Plate 36 The *bui manu* raiding party leaves a village, Langa.

⁴² For more detail on this complicated ceremony, in which I was fortunate to be included, see appendix III.

⁴³ There were two non-members present that I was aware of: myself, and a university student from Bali, who had been invited by a classmate from Flores University in Ende. I joined the raiding, but I think the student stayed behind at the *loka*.

⁴⁴ The proceedings were sequestered at the *loka*, but they were not secret. Many people recorded sections of the ceremony on their phones. When I introduced myself and described my work to the leaders of the ceremony, they invited me to join a ritual meal inside the *loka* itself, and helped me transcribe some of their ritual speech.



Plate 37 Sharing the *bui manu* meal at the *loka*, near Langa Gedha village, Langa.

While the raids of *bui manu* were inflicted on the greater community, the *loka* was the site on which *woe* Langa performed their unique identity for one another: a connection to the past through the *ybu ngiu*, the land's earliest inhabitants, and to one another in the present as a band of raiders, preying on those who did not belong to their own group. The site of this annual renewal was not a house, nor a village, but a separate *woe*-specific space, itself subject to annual renewal. Indeed, on *bui manu* day, the head stones of their *loka lanu* were wrapped in fresh layers of black palm fiber; the miniature bamboo staircases that leaned against them, and the bamboo rail behind the platform, were green and freshly cut. While most other major ceremonies concerned the house—or concerned *woe* segments, in which great houses are supported by chains of descended houses, and could really be assembled without reference to an over-arching *woe*—*bui manu* gave membership in *woe* Langa a substance I never encountered from other *woe*.

The ceremony also indicated a basis of affiliation for *woe* Langa that was different from other groups: a claim of descent from the pre-Ngadha inhabitants of the land. It attacks the concept of precedence, in that it acknowledges that Ngadhaland is a colonized space, under the general dominion of settlers, but with one day of ritual reversal each year. It's a kind of indigeneity, distinct from the silent “lords of the land” and speaking “stranger kings” found elsewhere in southeastern Indonesia, in which earlier inhabitants have higher status, if not greater authority, than the descendants of later arrivals (Lewis 2010).

The *bui manu* ceremony above was the only instance I witnessed in which *woe* members from multiple villages gathered together under unified leadership for a single purpose. Without rituals like *bui manu*, there is very little to give a “*woe*,” as an over-arching, multi-village structure, any meaning. The only thing remaining is mutual recognition, something that is built over repeated encounters. These encounters, ritualized through the formation of delegations to attend ceremonies under the leadership of a tip or trunk rider, were far more common than the annual ceremonies of *reba*, and provided more everyday opportunities for people to re-register themselves with their *woe*, through participation in ceremonial events. This is the topic of the coming section.

***Wailaki* delegations: the social circulations that give *woe* substance**

During the year I spent in Ngadhaland, I was invited to join a large number of delegations to ceremonies. These delegations were called BN *wailaki*. *Wailaki* were hugely important in my research. Assembling them, joining them, and acquiring the pigs to accompany them were common concerns in the community. It seemed like *wailaki* were being put together all the time. Weddings called for them. Funerals did, too. Large ceremonies—especially during the dry season, when monuments and houses were dedicated—were attended by dozens of *wailaki*, each led by a trunk or tip rider, and each consisting of dozens or even hundreds of individuals, who together represented the trunk or tip branch of the *woe* segment for their home village.

A *wailaki* was a grouping of men and women, called together by a house leader, to travel as a delegation to attend a ceremony at another house or in another village, bearing the gift of a pig.⁴⁵ Members of a house were obligated to join the *wailaki* called by their own house; they were also obligated to join *wailaki* called by the leader of the great house from which their own houses descended. So a *wailaki* assembled by the leader of a minor descended house might have only a few participants, while a *wailaki* assembled by the leader of a trunk or tip rider house would therefore—ideally—bring together every man, woman, and child in their branch of the *woe* segment.

The term *wailaki* doesn’t appear in Arndt’s 1961 dictionary, or in Mopa’s incomplete first edition dictionary, from 2004. Mopa told me himself that the word had no alternate translations or component parts; Yoosneem and others I relied on for language information

⁴⁵ The circulation of pigs will be the subject of chapter 6.

agreed. I have not found the term *wailaki* in any other anthropological literature on Ngadha, except for Banda 2017, where it is defined as “a consanguineous kin group, supporters of a ritual” (Banda 2017: 128).⁴⁶ Without a definitive definition, I propose this simple etymology: that *wailaki* is a combination of BN *fai*, meaning “woman,” and BN *haki/laki*, meaning “man;” that is, *fai laki*, or “women and men.”

Although I belonged to no house or *woe*, I was invited to join many *wailaki*, at varying levels of size and formality. On occasion, these *wailaki* were of the largest, most formal kind, called by the trunk rider of *woe* Manu in Bogala. These were among the only occasions, other than *reba* or the installation or repair of a *ngadhu* or *bhaga*, when the *woe* was called upon to act in concert or represent itself. On these occasions, every member of the *wailaki* dressed in full Ngadha traditional clothing, traveled together to another village, waited in formation as our leader announced our arrival with a ritual speech called BN *sangara*; then we danced together around the village plaza, before settling in for a full day of food, drink, and dancing.

Wailaki were temporary groups, formed in each case to attend a single event, then disbanded. New events required the formation of new *wailaki*. It was common for people to shirk their other tasks—particularly their office jobs⁴⁷—in order to take part in *wailaki*, considering it part of their family responsibilities. But people also frequently declined to join *wailaki*, claiming to be too busy, or even as a matter of personal preference, not wishing to spend the entire day eating. Many *wailaki* were composed at a moment’s notice, often at dawn on the day of the event, and people with other commitments were unable to join. Because of this, no *wailaki* was ever complete, and each one was composed differently from the one before. Each *wailaki* was a synecdoche; some part of the *woe*, standing for the whole, to a greater or a lesser degree of perfection. Yet these imperfect moments were just when the *woe* became meaningful. When people responded to the calls of their leaders, to provide mutual support, and to represent their *woe* in the context of dozens of similar self-representations, that was when the *woe*, an otherwise

⁴⁶ BI *keluarga kerabat, pendukung ritual*.

⁴⁷ It was a given among many people I spoke to that if you wanted to concentrate on work, it was best to leave Bajawa and get a job elsewhere; otherwise you would be summoned to join so many *wailaki* that you would never get any work done. Anecdotally, at least, Ngadha people serious about work all moved to Ruteng, a four-hour drive away. Likewise, every serious job in Bajawa was filled by people from Ruteng, who were making the same journey, for the same reason, in the opposite direction.

slightly abstract layer of social affiliation, could do real social work. The *woe* emerged in the process of its own representation: a circulation of people and goods, repeated again and again.

One day in October, towards the end of the dry season, I was invited to join a *wailaki* headed from Bogala to a feast in Eko Heto, a village on the far side of Rara Ele, where one of the resident *woe* was celebrating the erection of a new *ngadhu* post. The feasting had been going on for days, and would continue in days to come. But this was a special day, when *wailaki* from around the region would present themselves, announce the names of their ancestors, publicly recall previous gifts and exchanges, and contribute live pigs for sacrifice and redistribution.⁴⁸ This would renew the formal relationships between these visiting *wailaki*, and the *woe* segment responsible for the new post and the ceremonies surrounding its installation.

The *wailaki* I joined was assembled by the trunk rider of *woe* Manu for Bogala. I joined the group at around 10 am, when the *wailaki* assembled in the trunk rider house to eat a meal. The house was one of three large *sa'o* at the top of Bogala's village plaza, which faced down the slope and overlooked the rest of the village.⁴⁹ Its roof bore an *ata*, which marked it as a trunk rider house.⁵⁰ Many dozens of men and women were gathered there to eat. I could see that this *wailaki* was larger than any other in which I had previously taken part. In addition to the pig we would bring to Eko Heto, the trunk rider had killed another pig just to feed this entourage. I was invited because of my association with house Molo Modhe, which was descended from *woe* Manu's trunk rider branch. However, many members of Molo Modhe decided to sit this ceremony out, including Bart, his father Paulus, and his uncle Yoosneem.⁵¹ Meanwhile, in another house, the tip rider branch of *woe* Manu was assembling their own *wailaki*. While the two houses represented two branches of the same *woe* segment—the trunk and tip of *woe* Manu in Bogala village—they formed their own groups, under separate leadership, and entered Eko Heto separately from one another.

⁴⁸ The redistribution of meat and rice at such events, known as BN *meghe*, will be the subject of chapter 9.

⁴⁹ The spatial organization of Ngadha villages is discussed in detail in Molnar (2000), and will be mentioned again in chapter 5. House size (bigger is better) and location (higher in the square is better than lower) are loosely indicative of the social status of that house.

⁵⁰ Again: in most parts of Ngadhaland, an *ata* denotes a tip rider house. In Rara Ele, the symbols are reversed.

⁵¹ Yoosneem was technically a member of *woe* Siga, but as the *mori sa'o* of Molo Modhe he might have been expected to join this *wailaki*.

I went to this meal wearing a black-and-yellow Mbay sarong from the neighboring district of Nagekeo, which Paulus had given me on my arrival in Bogala. Mbay sarongs were popular and inexpensive, and were accepted as formal wear at most ceremonies. Today, however, everyone else was dressed in full Ngadha gear,⁵² and when I sat down to eat people ribbed me. “You can’t dance in that!” they said. As soon as I finished eating, I was whisked into Molo Modhe, where Paulus dressed me up in his own set of Ngadha clothes: a chest cloth and sarong in the blue-and-white Ngadha style, with a woven belt and red headcloth.⁵³

Soon the *wailaki* left Bogala in a caravan of pickup trucks and motorbikes. We trundled along country roads towards Eko Heto, past the end of the asphalt, up a rutted track of gravel and sand. Dozens of pickup trucks, motorbikes, and minibuses clogged the narrow road, all trying to muscle past each other to reach the village gate.⁵⁴ The vehicles of our own *wailaki* convoy found parking, and the members gathered together, but we did not enter the village. Instead, we waited at the village entrance, where we jostled for space with thirty-one other *wailaki*—some larger, some smaller, all dressed in Ngadha clothes for dancing, and all waiting for an opportunity to go in. A few members of our *wailaki* let the organizers know we had arrived, and brought in our pig, which was tied to a stake near the *bhaga* at one end of the village plaza. All the other *wailaki* had brought in their pigs as well. By midday there would be more than thirty of them.

Outside the village gate, the crowds milled around, chatting and laughing. A loudspeaker inside the village called in the *wailaki* one by one. As each group was announced, its members assembled behind its leader and processed through the gate into Eko Heto. When our turn came—“up next, it’s the *wailaki* of *woe* Manu, trunk rider, Bogala village”—we also grouped behind our leader, and followed him into the village plaza. Behind him, we formed into lines, men in the front, women behind. The men carried swords in our right hands; many carried scarves in their left hands, or tied them around their left wrists.⁵⁵ The women held yellow or

⁵² See appendix IV for a brief summary of Ngadha traditional clothing.

⁵³ There are many ways to tie a headcloth, and trends in headcloth tying are a long-standing form of Ngadha male fashion.

⁵⁴ BN *bata nua*. This is not a literal gate, but an opening in the ring of houses, flanked by granaries belonging to the village’s prominent *woe*. I will say more on village structure in chapter 5.

⁵⁵ The scarves worn by men on their wrists were an unexpected touch which I tried to explore. These scarves were never Ngadha in style, and most frequently were Mbay or Riung—patterned by supplementary weft, a technique brought to the north coast of Flores by migrants from Sulawesi, rather than *ikat*, the technique used in Ngadhaland, in a color scheme of yellow on black with long yellow fringes on either end. I saw other scarves in the style of Roti,

white handkerchiefs in both hands. Behind the dancers crowded the rest of the *wailaki*, who did not intend to dance. Above us, in the center of the village plaza, the leaders of the *woe* that were hosting the day's feasts stood facing us, dressed to dance and bearing swords. The MC on the megaphone announced our *wailaki*. And as the rest of us stood in silence, the leader of our *wailaki*, the trunk rider for *woe* Manu in Bogala, shouted out a ritual greeting known as BN *sangara*, a formal declaration of the name of the *woe*, its origin, and its ancestors. He stepped forward and back as he recited the words, entering and retreating one step at a time, and waving his sword. The hosts in the village square did the same, dancing in place, waving their swords, and calling out in response. When the call and response ended, the *wailaki* was permitted to enter, and we advanced with a quick-stepping traditional dance called BN *ja'i*,⁵⁶ accompanied by the music of gongs and drums, played by a small ensemble on the raised flagstone platform at the upper end of the village plaza called the "drum stone."⁵⁷



Plate 38 After *sangara*, a *wailaki* dances into Eko Heto village, Rara Ele.

Ende, and Savu. While I was always interested in the incorporation of non-Ngadha textiles into Ngadha rituals, it seemed particularly salient here, because of the emphasis placed on Ngadha textiles as the only garments suitable for traditional dancing. I never quite got satisfactory answers, however, as to the origin or meaning of these scarves in dancing costume. On that day, someone told me that they used non-Ngadha scarves only because Ngadha people were too lazy to weave scarves themselves, and so were forced to buy them from outside the area. This was not true; Ngadha-style scarves were easy to find in local markets. It would be tempting to attempt an explanation involving ancient trade routes, or the textiles as indicative of *woe* alliances stretching beyond Ngadhaland, but the real reasons may be practical and aesthetic: a touch of variety in the traditional costume was considered welcome, and Ngadha cloth was expensive, while Mbay cloths were cheap, plentiful, and popular.

⁵⁶ For a description of Ngadha traditional music and dance, see appendix V.

⁵⁷ BN *watu laba*

The term *sangara* is derived from BN *sa*, meaning “to announce” or “to summon,” and *ngara*, or “name.”⁵⁸ Every *woe* has a unique *sangara* (Banda 2017: 130). I witnessed many *sangara*, but never collected the text of one. Banda includes the following version from *woe* Tiko Sawa, which was delivered in the Wogo subregion of Ngadhaland in 2012.⁵⁹ This one was delivered by the son of a man whose father, at 80 years of age, was too weak to declaim it properly:

<i>Oh ja'o Hoga</i> ⁶⁰ <i>Tiko</i>	O I am the youth of Tiko
<i>Ja'o Hoga Sawa</i>	I am the youth of Sawa
<i>Dia ja'o tuku mumu nunga lema</i>	Now I extend the mouth, supplement the tongue ⁶¹
<i>Ema ja'o Watu Ule, Watu Dhogo.</i>	Of my father Watu Ule Watu Dhogo.
<i>Itu ne'e Gale da bheka gha</i>	Itu and Gale ⁶² have already broken off
<i>pu'u mena Nesi Leza</i>	Split from their source, Nesi Leza
<i>Dheke dia sa'o Watu Wea</i>	Entered into house Watu Wea
<i>Wi toro papa bhoko</i> ⁶³	For the inhabitants of the women's quarter
<i>wi mite mataraga.</i> ⁶⁴	For the guardians of the <i>mataraga</i> .
<i>Wi tuku moe tuku mumu</i>	Continuing as the extended mouth

⁵⁸ BN *ngara* is “name” in the Rara Ele dialect; in the BN dialects of Nua Lima Zua, Langa, and many other parts of Ngadhaland, the word is BN “*ngaza*.” Banda calls it “Sa Ngaza” (Banda 2017), as does Molnar (2000).

⁵⁹ The dialect appears broadly similar to that of Rara Ele. I am noting its origin in case there are differences I am unaware of.

⁶⁰ BN *hoga* was consistently translated for me as “youth” (BI *pemuda*), but it also figures into phrases, particularly BN *hoga woe*, which was translated for me variously as “a single guest,” “a young friend,” and “anybody” or “whoever.” The overriding sense was that *hoga woe* meant an indeterminate person toward whom one was well-disposed, and would treat as an insider.

⁶¹ The sense is, “I act as an extension of the voice of my father; I speak in his place, with his voice.”

⁶² Two ancestors.

⁶³ BN *toro* means “red;” BN *papa bhoko*, the “short planks,” indicates the quarter of a *sa'o* floor reserved for women. The “red women's quarter” suggests red betel-nut saliva. Banda translates the line as BI *penghuni papa bhoko*.

⁶⁴ BN *mite* means “black.” The phrase “black *mataraga*” suggests the *fi'i* black with the blood of many ceremonial feedings. Banda translates the line as BI *penjamin mataraga*. The previous line and this one indicate the men and women of the house by naming the locations where they sit.

<i>Wi nunga moe nunga nai</i> ⁶⁵	Lengthening as the lengthening cloth
<i>Ele sogo wi tolo jogho</i> ⁶⁶	[We shall] Go up and borrow freely
<i>na'a kena tolo go</i>	place it atop the gong
<i>Ele tana kapa-kapa</i>	Take up the sum of [our] debts
<i>na'a kena wawo laba</i> ⁶⁷	place it atop the drum.
<i>Hoga hama</i> ⁶⁸ <i>miu tau laba</i>	Players, strike the drums!

(Banda 2017: 131-132)

In the first section, the speaker declares the original ancestors of the *woe* he is there to represent, who gave their names to the *woe*; then, he establishes his right to speak, as an extension of his father.⁶⁹ In the second section, he further clarifies his direct ancestors, the house from which they descended, and the house with which the lineage is currently affiliated. This is the house for which he speaks, and whose members—including the members of houses descended from his own—stand behind him. In the final section, he speaks to the relationship between the *wailaki* he leads, and the hosts of the ceremony,⁷⁰ to whom he is announcing himself. This relationship is defined in terms of exchanges: loans to support previous ceremonies, and the resulting debts, placed on public view.

The proclamation of a *sangara* by a *woe* leader standing at the head of a large group of people is a political act. To recite these names, and cite past debts; to be welcomed by the village hosts, and have a new gift, the pig brought by the *wailaki*, accepted; for a speaker to declare the

⁶⁵ This phrase evokes a length of cloth still on the loom, growing longer as the weaver works.

⁶⁶ Versions of the phrase BN *sogo tolo jogho* recur, and will get a closer look in chapter 8. Literally translated, BN *sogo* means “to borrow,” in the way that affiliated houses will seize or borrow each others’ goods for the purpose of staging ceremonies and ritual exchanges (*sogo* could also mean “to borrow” in a formal, contractual sense). BN *tolu* means “to carry off,” specifically atop the head or over the shoulder (BI *pikul*). BN *jogho*, according to Yoosneem, also meant “to borrow,” but to borrow at any price, without regard for the eventual burden of repayment. The sense of the phrase is, “whatever you need, just take it!”

⁶⁷ These lines may suggest not placing objects upon a gong and drum, but acknowledging the obligations of past debts at the drum stone (BN *watu laba*), a large stone platform at the upper end (BN *ele*) of every village plaza, where important announcements are made, and where the drums and gongs that accompany traditional dancing are played.

⁶⁸ Arndt (1961: 587) translates BN *xoga xama* as “drummers who accompany *dzai* (sic) dancing.” Banda translates the phrase as “faithful drummers” (BI *penabuh yang handal*). In this phrase, *hoga* suggests a plural.

⁶⁹ Banda calls the rightful deliverer of this speech the “lord of the *sangara*,” BN *mori sa ngaza* (2017: 128)

⁷⁰ Banda calls the role of the host BN *mori ngalu*, a phrase Arndt translates as, “originator of a process; warmaker” (1961: 373).

identity of his own group, affirming that identity for all who follow him, and also his own legitimacy to lead; and also to elicit a public declaration of the friendly relations between this group and other groups—in an era without military partnerships, and largely without the circulation of bridewealth prestige objects, this is what remains of Ngadha alliance networks. Yoosneem described the *sangara* in these terms: as “a statement of fact we must make when we come bringing a pig.” This emphasizes the complementary roles of exchange and recognition: what is being recognized is a history of relationships underlined by repeated instances of peaceful exchange.

Recalling past relationships—manifest in the debts left by exchanges between ancestral generations—is central to this effort. Relationships can be forgotten. Arndt noted that *woe* branches sometimes forget their relationships with one another, and must resort to divination, a consultation with ancestors who have died and are absent, to refresh their memories and provide structure to the social relations of the living (Arndt 2009: 258). I also described an instance of forgetting in chapter 3, when one of Molo Modhe’s descended houses sent emissaries back to re-establish connections that had been broken and forgotten. These relations must be enacted and reenacted, spoken and spoken again. If they are not renewed, they lapse. The politics of inter-*woe* relations depends on acts in the present, contextualized within a recounting of history. The history alone is not enough. It must be deployed.

By invoking the ancestors, and tying the present-day *woe* to the great deeds of those ancestors, the *sangara* presents the *wailaki* as a part representing a whole: the *wailaki* leader who calls the *sangara* represents the unbroken chain of ancestors, who may be present in some form, for example through the treasures worn by the leader. The speaker above even presents himself metaphorically as a physical extension of the mouth and tongue of his father. The *wailaki* itself is a representative part of the entirety of the *woe*. The words of the *sangara* emphasize that the *woe* includes members who have died, whose membership did not cease at the moment of their death; and that those dead *woe* members are present alongside their descendants, and ready to take part in the ritual exchange of hospitality which was initiated by those ancestors, and is now carried on by the living. The physical presence of the *wailaki*, in conjunction with the rhetorical or spiritual presence of the ancestors through the *sangara*, constitute the *woe* as a complete and perfect family, joining mythical time to the present, and including both the living and the dead. The *sangara* describes multiple circulations: the movement of lineages between houses and *woe*, as

individuals move and marry, and segments subdivide; also the circulation of individuals through the institution of the *woe*; the circulations of goods within *woe*, that allow their leaders to present the necessary gifts; and the circulation of goods between *woe*, as those gifts are offered by *wailaki* and accepted by *woe* that receive them.

No *wailaki* in which I took part, however, actually included every living member of a *woe* branch. Families that had recently suffered a death, for example, were not invited. And it was normal for some number of people to beg off, citing urgent work, illness, or some other excuse. But maximizing the size of the *wailaki* was an important concern for the men who led them. A small *wailaki* could indicate a new *woe* segment with a small number of houses, either because it had recently broken off from another segment, which could be a sign of spiritual favor, following the establishment of new monuments; or because the prosperity or fertility of its members was lacking, a sign of spiritual disfavor. A small *wailaki* could also indicate a leader who lacked the personal prestige to attract the participation of the individuals in lower houses, or who had failed to prevent his *woe* branch from subdividing. Leaders with large, active networks could also attract participants who were not part of their *woe*, including visitors like myself, as well as former members of the *woe*, who joined other *woe* by marriage, but continued to participate in the activities of their natal groups. The status of *woe* leaders was manifest in the number of invitations they received to take part in large ceremonies hosted by other *woe*, which were markers of prior relationships.⁷¹ The moments when *wailaki* announced themselves and danced into town were perhaps the only opportunities that *woe* leaders had to compare their own followings to those of other such leaders. This made the *sangara* and *ja'i* dancing like a kind of “deep play:” a “dramatization of status concerns,” in which the status of participants doesn’t actually change, but the prestige associated with their status is affected—perhaps temporarily, perhaps permanently—by the display of their ability, or inability, to summon followers (Geertz 1972: 18). The sense of play was depend because *wailaki* leaders were high status individuals, of roughly equal status to one another, displaying their different *wailaki* in direct juxtaposition, and thus inviting comparison between them (Geertz 1972: 22). As the size of *wailaki* ebbs and flows, so too the prestige and authority of *woe* or house leaders, and the state of relations between *woe*

⁷¹ It was also possible to bring a *wailaki* to an event, especially a funeral, without a specific invitation (see chapter 6).

and villages. The performative nature of *wailaki* is central to the fluid dynamic of relative status between *woe* and villages.

After we danced into the village, our *wailaki* entered one of the houses on the rim of the village plaza. Then, the group began splintering apart. First, the genders separated. I sat with the men in the front of the house, where we were served a meal of pork and rice. The women went to the back of the house, where food was being prepared. After the meal, the group splintered further. Some people broke off to feast in other houses. Others returned to the village plaza to dance.

Unlike our first entrance into the village, when the dance was unequivocally led by our trunk rider, groups of male and female dancers formed and reformed as they moved around the square, gathering behind new leaders. These groups processed counter-clockwise in a circle around the central part of the village plaza.⁷² Dancing groups of men and women formed separately, each behind a leader, and jostled for room as they circled around the dance area. These leaders were not necessarily *woe* or house leaders. The right to lead a group of dancers appeared to be open to anyone—including children—who could gather up a few people to follow them. I could see why you would want to be part of a large group, in order to claim some space. I was invited to join various groups, each of which lasted for five or ten minutes before breaking apart, as the dancers tired, and went to find food and drink in one of the surrounding houses. Groups were constantly forming, reforming, and dispersing.



Plate 39 Several groups of dancers in the plaza of Eko Heto village, Rara Ele.

⁷² BN *kisa nata*, between the *ngadhu* and *bhaga*.

These temporary dancing groups, constantly forming and reforming, mirrored *wailaki* on a miniature scale: they allowed ordinary people to test out their leadership ability in a space without stakes. In fact, both dancing and feasting provided space for individuals to deepen their own social connections, separate from their leaders. As Smedal argued, “what may rightly appear as consolidated units from the outside, and from the analytical point of view as transacting corporate groups”—in the present context, *wailaki*—“dissolves into the diverse obligations and strategies of individual persons as soon as one’s attention is directed to the processes within any one of them” (Smedal 2002: 503). This is certainly the case with mass feasting, of the kind that each member of the *wailaki* pursued in a more or less independent manner as they peeled off from the group. Everyone has eaten at everyone’s houses before; everyone has some kind of relations with everyone else.⁷³ If people from this village ate in Bogala before, visiting house after house to eat and drink, then people from Bogala expected reciprocal treatment. In other words, joining a *wailaki*, with the promise of eating food in many houses, is caught up in the reciprocal return of past hospitality at an individual level, and also in the initiation of new reciprocal hospitality relations. Each time I managed to extricate myself from the dance, I was waved into a different house to feast. In this way I ended up eating in a number of different houses, each time with a different group of men (women usually ate in the kitchens behind the houses, and served the men, who ate in the front rooms). Occasionally, as we were eating, another person would stick his head in the front door and issue a blanket invitation: when you’re done here, everybody come over to my house! In this way, stopping at some houses and being invited en masse to others, I and the hundreds of other guests in the village that day wound up meeting and sharing food with many new people, provided to us by a large number of hosts. In each house, at each meal, some guests were being fed by these hosts for the first time. This opened the way for them to expect an invitation to feast in your house, next time there is feasting in your village. The exchange of hospitality was not terminated by reciprocal return, but extended, without end. The initiation of additional such relations means that the circle of hospitality is constantly expanding. By declining to join in any *wailaki* whatsoever, a person could in theory avoid incurring new hospitality exchange relations; but this would be rendered

⁷³ Curnow recorded that when houses put on feasts in support of ceremonies hosted by their neighbors, this kind of hospitality is called BN *vai tua* (2007: 75). Curnow collected her data in the Nua Lima Zua subregion, which is adjacent to Rara Ele and has a slightly different dialect. I did not encounter this term, but that doesn’t mean people didn’t use it. A note on orthography: my participants did not spell anything with the letter V, but did pronounce the letter W as V.

moot the next time your own village held a ceremony, and you found yourself hosting strangers in your home, and initiating hospitality relations that way. Might as well make the relationship two-way, instead of always being on the giving side.

In much the same way that the success of a house or a *woe*, its expansion and prosperity, increases the likelihood that it will subdivide, a leader who assembles large *wailaki* increases the possibility that someone from their group will cultivate strong enough networks to break away, form their own groups, and diminish the support of the leader who brought everyone together. It's a constant cycle, dependent on continual renewal and maintenance. To put it in more classically anthropological terms, the *wailaki* is the basis of a kind of ceremonial exchange, in which groups negotiate membership; individuals and groups hash out internal and external hierarchies and relationships; food is provided and accepted; past hospitality is compensated and future hospitality promised. Each group involved in such exchanges requires an organizer. The organizer is backed in these exchanges by the size of his delegation. What is exchanged is hospitality: food and drink; betel nut and cigarettes; a respectful invitation and the gracious acceptance of that invitation; the reproduction of past relations of hospitality; the expansion of those relations to include new people; and the extension of those relations into the future, to the time of the next feast.

Like an ocean wave, *wailaki* gathered together, crested in the performance of the *sangara*, then dispersed, fading away as they retreated. A *wailaki* was a representation of the *woe*, not as a stable entity, but as a process, unfolding in time. Beyond the deep play of elites, for whom these events are among their only opportunities to gather and display their *woe* to one another, participating in *wailaki* was a way for ordinary people to proliferate their own relationships, experiment with leadership, and build their prospects for social advancement. The larger the *wailaki*, the greater the opportunities. *Woe* segments were the largest type of *wailaki*, and the social benefits they could produce were a great inducement for ordinary people to participate. This was true for women, as well as men; for although *wailaki* could be led only by men (as far as I know), women who routinely participated in *wailaki* and in the food preparation and other work that went on behind the houses, were able to produce significant social and material circulations in their own right, a topic I will examine further in chapter 6.

At a time in history when military alliances between *woe* or villages are no longer necessary, the social circulations made possible by large, *woe*-segment-level *wailaki* help explain why *woe*, as a form of affiliation beyond the house, continue to be relevant in Ngadha life. Participation in a *wailaki* is caught up in relations between just about everyone: between leaders and participants; between leaders and other leaders; between leaders and hosting *woe*; between participants and hosting *woe*; and between leaders, participants, and the non-host-*woe* inhabitants of the hosting village, who also offer hospitality on feast days.

Conclusion: clan, alliance, or “sacrificial collective?”

The *woe* is a difficult structure to define, and like Molnar, the best I could attempt in this chapter was a minimal definition. Because *woe* are not purely descent-based, but can absorb new members who are not kin, it would be misleading, in my view, to call these groups “clans.” *Woe* affiliation was not an immutable characteristic of individuals or houses. Rather, *woe* affiliation arose from a set of actions that people performed together. Curnow describes the Ngadha clan as a network of mutual support; an in-group defined in part by the willingness to extend one another loans and gifts in support of life-cycle ceremonies, a form of exchange called BN *papa ti'i*⁷⁴ (Curnow 2007: 74-75). Forth, writing of Nage (where this level of affiliation is also called a *woe*), calls it “a ceremonial, and especially sacrificial, cooperative” (1998: 7); in a system where collective rights to land must be ritually renewed every year (1998: 33), a person who does not contribute to these renewal ceremonies may be excluded from the use of collective lands (1998: 313-314). Tule, writing of Keo, speaks of clans largely in terms of corporate land ownership or land guardianship; that people draw collective identity from the land on which they live, which they manage and protect, and which is their true parent (2004: 56-58). All of these suggest a basis for clan membership rooted not in blood, but in the continual performance of certain actions, particularly the stewardship of collective property, participation in exchange on favorable terms with other members of the group, and contribution to collective ceremonial endeavor. *Woe* is a name given to the repeatedly instantiated, yet temporary groups that assemble

⁷⁴ Curnow’s research was in the subregion of Nua Lima Zua, which includes Bajawa town. While the distance between Rara Ele and Nua Lima Zua is negligible—Bogala and the village where Curnow was based are only a few minutes drive apart—there are differences in culture and dialect between them. I did not encounter the term *papa ti'i* myself.

to undertake these actions. The symbolic structure of the *woe*—its representation, through *wailaki* and *sangara*, of unity across generations and unanimity in the present—belies the churn of individual striving by every person who participates. *Wailaki* contain blossoming social potentials, one of which is the *woe* itself.

This chapter has pointed to ways physical objects can provide nodes around which the *woe* can assemble. One of these objects is the pig, the exchange of which is a core function of every *wailaki*, and which is the subject of chapter 6. The role of physical structures like the *loka* will be taken up in chapter 7.

CHAPTER 5: The Ngadha Village-in-Progress

Some Ngadha villages project an image of antiquity. Tololela, Maghilewa, Belaraghi, Watu, and Gurusina (unfortunately destroyed by fire in 2018), with their stone terraces and thatch-roofed houses, are among those regarded as especially ancient. The village of Bena is the Bajawa area's major tourist destination, prized for the image of untouched originality that it presents¹ (Cole 2007, 2008). But to remain in one place, generation after generation, may be the exception, rather than the rule, for Ngadha villages, and not only on the vulnerable fringes of the plateau like Teni and Lopiyo. Most Ngadha settlements have, at one time or another, been moved. Their buildings have been dismantled and rebuilt in new locations, their monuments transported or abandoned. Valleys and hilltops are littered with the remnants of now-vanished villages, and the spiritually powerful, sometimes dangerous objects left behind. When villages relocate, their compositions can change. Some houses or *woe* make the move, while others don't. Some houses or *woe* take on new roles, and claim new titles. Like houses or *woe*, villages too can subdivide; one contingent can decamp to found a new village or join another existing one, and leave another contingent behind. By founding, relocating, and dividing their villages, Ngadha people can reconfigure their social space and their place within it.



Plate 40 The wood and thatch houses of Tololela village, Jerebu'u.

Like the building of a *sa'o*, or the recurring assembly and invocation of a *woe*, the establishment of a village is a progressive process, requiring the exercise of leadership, the

¹ As Cole argues, when it comes to tourism, the “underdevelopment” of these villages is their resource (2008: 215).

assembly and disposition of resources, and the expression of a variety of affiliations. Like the construction of a house, the establishment of a village is continually ongoing, spans generations, and is seldom, in practice, completed. And if powerful people in the village feel compelled to make a move, the whole process could come to a halt, just to start again in a different location. The village, and life within it, is both settled and unsettled. Ngadha villages flow across time and space, and these flows shape the everyday lives of Ngadha people.

What is a village?

The BN term for a traditional village is *nua*. The term implies a collection of specific elements, arranged in a particular fashion. The BI words that would offer appropriate translations are *kampung*, which usually denotes a small village or residential area, or *dusun*, commonly translated as “hamlet.” The word BN *nua* should not be confused with BI *desa*, commonly translated as “village.” The *desa* is an administrative area with a particular political structure, part of the Indonesian local government apparatus. The *desa* is a part of political life in most parts of Ngadhaland, including Rara Ele, which was composed of a combination of *desa*, BI *kelurahan* (an administrative unit at the same level as a *desa*, located near or within a city or town), and unincorporated state lands under the administration of the Department of Forestry. I do not refer to *desa* in this thesis. Any time I use the word “village,” I am referring to a *nua*.

While no two Ngadha villages are identical, most follow similar guidelines in their elements, layout, and orientation. In short: the ideal Ngadha village is made up of a square or rectangular plaza, ringed with houses that face toward the center. A village is home to at least one *woe* segment—usually more than one. The number of *woe* segments that reside in a village is reflected in the number of pairs of *ngadhu* and *bhaga* in the village plaza. The trunk rider and tip rider *sa'o* of those segments, plus their descended houses, make up the bulk of the houses in that village. Prestigious and powerful families live in *sa'o* that are larger, and generally clustered at the uphill end of the village plaza. The size and arrangement of houses, and the visible symbols displayed on and around those houses, serve as a guide to the social hierarchy of the village's families and *woe*. Villages are often built on lands belonging to a single house or *woe*, which lend their names to those villages. Villages have names; the most common type of village

name in Rara Ele connects the prefix BN *bo-*, or “granary,” with the name of a *woe*. Examples include Bowio, Bomadha, Bogisi, Boloji, Bomanu, and Bogenga.²

The space in which a village is built has been set apart through the conduct of a series of ceremonies, intended to render that space safe from illness, misfortune, and incursion by wild or undomesticated spirit beings. It has also been placed under the protection of ancestral beings, whose spirits are contained within the monuments in the village plaza, particularly the *ngadhu* post.³ In all, villages are centers for the performance and reproduction of social and cosmological order. That means security, hierarchy, safely mediated access to the spiritual world, and display of the objects and performance of the rituals that establish rights to land. A village is where *sa'o* and *woe*, as social, physical, and symbolic structures, come into relation with one another. The *nua* space is a representation of an ideology of spatial order, which correlates with cosmological and social order: hierarchy descends from top to bottom, large to small, and every element is a component of a totalizing whole.

In practice, the boundaries of *nua* were blurry. It was not unusual for villages to add more houses than could fit around the edge of the plaza, leaving *sa'o* jostling for space in a second, outer ring, or along the edges of roads running into or around the village. Sometimes *sa'o* were built well beyond the perimeter of any established village—for example, in the North Bajawa valley, off the Bajawa plateau, where occasionally one could spot a single *sa'o* standing alone, where no Ngadha village had ever stood before. Many people also did the bulk of their everyday living not in *nua*, but in non-*sa'o* residences called BN *baru*.⁴ Those *baru* might be located on their agricultural lands—convenient bases for the mundane, everyday labor of farming—or in Bajawa or another city, close to jobs in commerce or government. But while *baru* are common, living patterns are changing along multiple axes, and villages are hardly being abandoned. Improved transportation has made it easier for more people to do their living in town, but also easier for farmers to live in comfortable homes in their villages, rather than in basic field houses near their crops. In Teni-Lopijo, for example, it is only in the last 20 years or so that most

² When Curnow (2007) and I chose pseudonyms for the villages where we did our research, we both built village names along those lines—Bomolo in her case (BN *molo* meaning “good” or “well,”) Bogala in mine (BN *gala* meaning “spear”).

³ *Ngadhu* posts will be described in detail in chapter 7.

⁴ Arndt defines BN *baru* as a “large or European-style house” or a “jail” (1961: 15).

residents have begun living in the village full-time, rather than splitting time between their *sa'o* and their field houses.⁵ *Nua*, however, required *sa'o*. A group of *baru* did not make up a *nua*.



Map 4 An aerial view of multiple *nua* near a road in Langa. Image © 2020 Maxar Technologies.

Certain encounters and events happen only outside of villages. These include activities conducted at the *loka*, discussed in chapter 4; some ceremonies, such as the BN *hoga loka*, a coming-of-age ceremony for boys;⁶ and also encounters with non-human beings such as BN *nitu* or BN *ybu ngiu*, who dwell in the wilderness. An exception to this rule is BN *polo*, normally translated as “witches” or “demons.”⁷ These are beings of inversion, who turn what is a space of

⁵ The Ngadha word for “agricultural field” or “forest garden” (BI *kebun*) is BN *uma*, which means “house” in a host of other languages in the region. Among many examples, see Clamagirand 1980: 142 for the Ema language in Timor; Tusinski 2016: 14 for Tetum; and Onvlee 1980: 195 for Sumbanese. Ngadha is not the only language in which *uma* can mean “garden,” however. For example, in the language of Tana ‘Ai, in eastern Flores, *tana uma* means “garden land” (Lewis 1988: 25).

⁶ I heard about this in Teni, though even there it is no longer performed. The ceremony involved boys going to stay in field houses or *loka* huts for three to four weeks without leaving, and also circumcision.

⁷ Arndt wrote extensively about *polo* in Ngadhaland (1956, 1958, 1959a, 1959b, 1960, 2005), and Forth wrote about them among the Nage (1998). *Polo* came up at two moments in my research. I was told that the back road on which my residence was located was sometimes the site small bursts of flame, like fire tornadoes, called BN *mata polo*. These indicated that someone had been murdered or buried on that spot. Rumors of these *mata polo* caused some visitors from other villages to avoid our road, and mistrust the people who lived along it. After Bart’s mother Maria passed away (discussed in chapter 6), our weaver friend Ana instructed Caroline not to go outside at night, because encountering these flames might cause her to become infertile. And once, when Caroline and I were walking over the ridge of Mt. Lobo Butu to Teni-Lopijo, we got lost; our guide, Tomas, said BN *polo biu*, “a witch has blinded us.” *Polo biu* is caused by a person, living or dead, who confounds the traveler for some reason, causing them to think they in the wrong place, or that their destination is hidden, even if it’s in plain sight; a given house in a village, for instance. *Polo biu* is an experience like sleepwalking, or dreaming while walking.

human life by day into a space of spirits and death by night (Forth 1998: 56). Some spirits are intentionally brought into the village space, but are ritually constrained, as protectors. The prime example of this is the *ngadhu* post, which contains a powerful male ancestor spirit. Before the post is erected, the spirit within it is liable to rape and impregnate women and girls who wander too close to it. Before such a spirit can be part of village life, it must be ritually contained and domesticated.⁸

Other activities take place only within villages, most notably the ceremonies surrounding the establishment and maintenance of houses and *woe* monuments. In an important sense, the *nua*, with its set elements and spatial organization, is a stage for these important group-making events.

How *nua* are established

A legend tells that the very first Ngadha village was built on Mt. Inelika, at the far northern corner of the Bajawa plateau, by Oba, an ancestor who belonged to the first generation of humanity (Arndt 2009: 447). Oba either received or originated all the necessary ceremonies for the foundation of a village. The establishment of a *nua*, and its separation as an orderly, human space, distinct from the wilderness and protected from the non-human beings that populate it, depends upon the execution of these ritual steps, and the construction of the physical and social structures that define the village.

First, a site must be selected through BN *bui tibo*, a “burnt divination.” (It was unclear to me whether sites are selected by house or *woe* leaders, or whether they employ ritual specialists called BN *lima mali*, “skilled hands.”) Bamboo twigs are placed in a fire until they pop; the cracks are read for signs, indicating whether a proposed site will be safe, and whether its inhabitants will be healthy and prosperous.⁹ Next, before anything is built on the site itself, the *woe* that will form the new village should build their BN *loka*, the small complexes belonging to *woe* branches, which were described in chapter 4. *Loka* were described to me as the source¹⁰ for all other *woe* and house symbols, in a metaphoric, not literal, sense. But the symbols found in

⁸ More on this in chapter 7.

⁹ For descriptions of this form of divination, see Ngewi 2014: 37-38, and Arndt 2007: 137-158. This is just one of many types of divination practiced by Ngadha people, more of which are described in Arndt 2007.

¹⁰ BN *pu’u*

sa'o—fi'i, ulu watu, lanu—all have analogues at the *loka*, and the construction of the *loka* precedes the construction of other elements of the house or village. Occasionally, a village that is not moving far from its current site can continue to use the same *loka*. This was the case with the *loka* of *woe* Langa from Bone Waru; they moved their village from a mountain ridge to a new site near the road, but kept rebuilding their *loka* in the same place as before.

Next, the village site itself is protected through a process called BN *tere lengi*, literally “to emplace oil.”¹¹ *Lengi* refers literally to the oil of candlenuts (or coconuts); because this oil is used medicinally, the term *lengi* more broadly refers to good health, and protection from illness¹². Most commonly, the first translation of *lengi* that Ngadha people offered to me was “goodness” or “good things”¹³. In this case, *lengi* refers to a quality of the village as a protected space; and to a stone, called BN *watu lengi* or “oil stone,” that must be procured and then buried at the village site. As healing oil protects the body from illness, the “oil stone” protects the village. The *watu lengi* and other important stones had to be found in the earth, and not in rivers or streams. Someone seeking such a stone should approach the landowner, offering him conciliatory words and possibly payment. On removing the stone from the ground, there should be an offering of, at the minimum, a chicken, made to the spirit owners of the land.¹⁴

Three roles were key to undertaking the process of *tere lengi*. These roles could all be played by a single individual, or be distributed among two or three different people. Whether taken by one person, two, or three, these roles were played by the leaders of the houses that initiated the move, or on whose land the new village would be built. They could come from one house or several, and from one *woe* or several.

A) *Tudha raja sese kera*. BN *tudha* was translated for me as “a person with the ability to attract many followers;”¹⁵ *raja* means “king” or “lord.”¹⁶ BN *sese* means “yellow,” and

¹¹ BI *meletakkan minyak*

¹² This property is most clearly described in a common phrase:

Lengi dhedhi ge'e weki Spread oil on the body

Feo Folo wi koma ge lo Candlenut of Folo (a place in Manggarai) spread upon the body

¹³ BI *sesuatu yang baik*.

¹⁴ BN *mori watu mori tana*, “lords of the stones, lords of the earth”

¹⁵ BI *orang mampu merangkul/mengundang banyak orang*.

BN *ker*a is a pale-skinned fruit known in English as *langs*at. This phrase refers to the person's skin, and indicates their beauty and propriety.¹⁷ This person is the head of the *woe* that owns the land on which the village will be built, who wields the sword and spear of the house responsible for founding the new village. It was explained that the *tudha raja* may have bought this land; they need not have inherited it or claimed and cleared it personally.

B) *Mori gha'o*¹⁸ *lengi*, “the lord who cradles the oil [stone].” This is the person who can recruit followers to clear and prepare the village site, possibly by offering compensation to the people who undertake this service.¹⁹

C) *Mori dhor*o *bo toka bo*a,²⁰ “the lord who descends from the granary and uproots the elephant grass.”²¹ This is a figure of enormous respect, who remains a chief authority in the village, in cooperation with the heads of the village's *woe* segments.

All of these titles are related to the foundation of the village itself. They do not predate the moment of action; and while the ability to attract and direct followers, and possibly to compensate them, would depend on the title-holder having significant social pull and/or access to resources, these titles do not imply membership in the nobility, or any other kind of previous social status. These titles describe actions taken, rather than an immutable identity. The first two are held by the people who undertake these tasks, but are not passed on to their descendants. The last, *mori dhor*o *bo toka bo*a, is theoretically heritable, passing to the eldest son of the original founder. I will return to this later in the chapter.

¹⁶ Mopa (2004: 439) gives BN *tudha* as “to invite, to muster,” and the phrase *tudha raja* as “an order from a superior, a king's edict” (BI *perintah atasan, maklumat raja*).

¹⁷ Colors are tied to hereditary class; nobles (BN *ga'e*) have black blood, commoners (BN *kisa*) have yellow blood, and slaves (BN *ho'o*) have white blood (Smedal 2016: 123).

¹⁸ This verb BN *gha'o*, “to cradle,” is also used to describe carrying an infant in one's arms.

¹⁹ BI *kasih imbalan jasa*

²⁰ I got a few different spellings for this phrase; *bo* could be *boo* or *bo'o*, and *boa* could be *bo'a*. The dictionaries of Mopa (2004) and Arndt (1961) didn't provide obvious answers as to the correct spelling, so I have selected the simplest one.

²¹ I was given this translation, which evokes the preparation of a site by clearing away wild plants, by Yoosneem and others. Neither Arndt nor Mopa translates BN *boa* as “elephant grass,” however. Arndt translates BN *dhor*o *bo toka bo*a as “to establish a settlement,” but suggests that BN *toka* can mean “to tear out” (1961: 547). Mopa gives BN *toka* as “to eliminate entirely” (2004: 434). Both translate BN *boa* as “a small settlement (Arndt 1961: 29; Mopa 2004: 54 [Mopa added this translation in a marginal note to himself, a reminder to include it in the next edition]).

During this phase, the key figure or figures live on the new village site, in a simple field house, or in a *bhaga* or a simpler structure standing in for one. The oil stone is planted as part of an all-night ceremony with *ja'i* dancing and drum and gong music; a pig is killed, and eaten around midnight, and food is offered to the ancestors, referred to in this case as BN *uge*²² *olo ema ulu*,²³ “the old mother and the head father”—a term that encompasses all ancestors, stretching back so far in time that their names are forgotten. The *watu lengi* should be buried with a live baby chicken and a young coconut,²⁴ an object often used for “cooling” spaces and buildings and rendering them habitable.²⁵ The location of the stone should be unmarked, but lie somewhere between the drum stone and the *ngadhu* posts.

Next comes BN *sebhe ture*, meaning “to cover [or enclose or complete] the stone altar.” *Ture* is a generic term referring to a cairn, or to any of a number of types of stone altar or platform. In this case, *sebhe ture* refers to the construction of the BN *watu laba* or drum stone, the centerpiece of the village square. This work should be completed over three days, and conclude with a feast, *ja'i* dancing, and music. Many drum stones are backed by a row of standing stones; these are analogous to the “head stones” at the *loka lanu*, and to the *mataraga* in the house of the village’s founder. All of these objects share the names of the same ancestors. But as one ritual specialist put it to me, these stones do not commemorate ancestors per se, so much as “people who obtained gold, and who killed buffaloes for the poor.”²⁶ They commemorate people who performed great acts, not simply those who continued the lineage.

²² The kin term BN *uge*, “mother,” may have been specific to Rara Ele. Elsewhere in Ngadaland, the term was BN *ine*.

²³ BN *ulu* or “head” could frequently refer to the upper or uphill part of something, such as a village, a territory, or a watercourse, or to something that is earlier or older, as in this case.

²⁴ BI *nio*

²⁵ Evidence of a ritual called BN *kela nio*, “split coconut,” in the form of the husk of a coconut split nearly in two, was visible in a variety of places around Ngadaland: for example, in the rafters of homes, or atop *ulu watu*. Coconut water has “cooling” properties, and coconut oil, like candlenut oil, is used for healing. I also want to offer a contrast to the notion that traditional villages are “cool.” On my first visit to Flores, in 2007, I traveled to the traditional Lio village of Tendabhera. There, I was told, most people found the traditional village itself too “hot” for habitation, crowded as it was with the spirits of deceased ancestors. Many of the living found dwelling there stressful and dangerous, and preferred to move into non-traditional houses outside the ambit of the village. Designated ritual practitioners, usually old people, continued to dwell in the traditional houses of the village.

²⁶ I will return to the issue of killing buffalo for the poor in chapter 9.



Plate 41 The drum stone of Eko Heto village, Rara Ele, with a Catholic chapel behind it.

The next step is BN *dhewu kabu ker*, or “destroy the roots of the alang-alang grass.”²⁷ This term refers to the final clearance of wild plants from the village site, establishing it as a human space, distinct from the wilderness, spiritually “cool” and safe for habitation. This is achieved by conducting a ritual known as BN *lola kaba*, or “chasing the buffalo.” In this ritual, a buffalo, provided by the *mori dhor* or purchased through a collection among the members of the new community, is set loose in the village square. The people of the village²⁸, armed with spears, array themselves in a ring around the village perimeter. Then the *tudha raja*, who may or may not be the same person as the *mori dhor*, brandishing a spear of his own, stabs the buffalo, causing it to run away. But the buffalo is trapped; wherever it runs, all around the edges of the village, escape is prevented by a villager with a spear, who delivers another strike. As the buffalo runs around, seeking an opening, it is meant to sprinkle its blood around the entirety of the village space, “cooling” and protecting it. Finally, the bleeding buffalo should be coaxed to the drum stone to die. Then the carcass is butchered, part of it is cooked for a public feast, and the rest of the meat is divided, still raw, amongst all the houses of the village and visitors present

²⁷ Latin name *Imperata cylindrica*.

²⁸ Most likely it was only men, and not all inhabitants of the village, but this was not explicit.

at the ceremony. This meat is eaten without rice or other accompaniment.²⁹ Afterward, the buffalo's horns are displayed at the village gate.

There was some inconsistency in the information I was offered about the next step. One man, who was in the process of guiding the foundation of a new village himself, declined to discuss further steps in village construction with me, not because it was secret knowledge, but because uttering the names of these steps out loud would be to declare, before the ancestors, that he intended to undertake them straight away.³⁰ According to another person, the next step was to begin the construction of *sa'o*, which he called BN *sa'o mere tangi lewa*, or "great *sa'o*, long stairs." According to Yan Muga, a ritual specialist from Bogala, more steps were required before this or other *sa'o* could be built.

Next came the construction of the *ngadhu*, *bhaga*, and *pe'o*, three *woe* monuments in the village plaza. These were the responsibility of the particular *woe* that were making up this village, rather than the village as a whole. The role of these monuments was summed up for me in this phrase:

<i>Wake ngadhu ngaza</i>	Erect a named <i>ngadhu</i>
<i>Wi rada kisa nata</i>	that it may protect the village plaza
<i>Ne'e fao kedhi banga</i>	and shelter the little children

Arndt translates BN *fao* as "the folds of a dress under the bent knees of a woman," and also as "to help" (1961: 142). *Fao* here seems to evoke a sense of the ancestors, through their monuments, sheltering their descendants as a mother might hide and comfort her children in the folds of her sarong.

The first of these to be built is the BN *pe'o*, a small, single stone planted in the ground in front of the drum stone.³¹ The *pe'o* was described to me as the "father" of the *ngadhu*; therefore, the *pe'o* must be built before the *ngadhu*. After the *pe'o*, the *bhaga*, a miniature house

²⁹ BI *daging kosong*. This distribution of meat is referred to as BN *meghe*, though it is different from the practice of *meghe* described in chapter 9; for instance, the houses and visitors who receive this meat do not provide rice for collection and redistribution (BN *zo*).

³⁰ I encountered the same problem when collecting information on phases of *sa'o* construction.

³¹ *Peo* is the name of the forked sacrificial post found in some Nage villages. These are more similar to Ngadha *ngadhu* than to Ngadha *pe'o* (Forth 1998a: 7-9).

representing and carrying the name of a female ancestor of the *woe*, is built, followed by the *ngadhu*; that is, the construction of the female symbol of the *woe* precedes the construction of the male symbol, the *ngadhu*. Of course, there are exceptions in practice. In Lopijo, on the western slopes of the Bajawa plateau, as mentioned in chapter 2, a number of *ngadhu* were built prior to *bhaga*, and stood facing temporary *bhaga*.



Plate 42 Three sets of *ngadhu* and *bhaga* with *peo* standing stones, Bomari village, Langa.

These monuments—the *pe'o*, *bhaga*, and *ngadhu*, along with the *loka*, which is outside the village—are the responsibility of the houses and *woe* segments that erect them, not of the “village” as a whole. The house that erects a monument becomes its caretaker, earning a title, earning the ability to organize future labor events, and also taking on the burden of expenditure and resource management required to maintain effective leadership.

After the monuments are in place, and the *sa'o* have been built, there are a few more phases that complete the establishment of a traditional village. The penultimate step was called BN *le'u leku*, or “closed gate.” This term described villages that have closed themselves off to the erection of new *ngadhu* and *bhaga*, either by houses already present in the village seeking to form new *woe* segments, or by houses from new *woe* seeking to enter the village. This step was also described with the couplet:

Usu ele ulu

Closed above the head

Reaching this stage requires agreement from the *mori dhoro bo* and the heads of the village's *woe* segments, standing in for general village agreement.

The final step in village establishment was a large public feast called BN *ka nua*, the “village feast.” To my knowledge, no *ka nua* was held anywhere nearby during my fieldwork year, and my understanding was that they were, and always had been, rare. Bogala, for instance, had not yet held one, despite being in its current location for some fifty years. This feast was regarded as fully closing the process of village establishment. My initial question was, why had Bogala not done one? The next question was, why would they? The answer to the first was clear: lack of leadership, lack of resources. The answer to the second was hazy: it's done for the prestige of the organizer. If the standing to execute such a feast were hazy—if the title of *mori dhoro bo* were contested—then it would be difficult to pull together. This was the case in Bogala, as will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The processes that accompany the establishment of a village are similar to those regarding the house: they are ongoing, moving through phases. The complete cycle can last for decades or generations. These phases require the assembly of people and resources, and the assumption of roles with titles and great prestige attached to them. These phases are understood to be always in progress, even if no active preparations are underway. The progression of these phases can be interrupted by subdivision of the village, or by a wholesale relocation, requiring the process to begin anew. And few villages today have reached the final stage and become complete.

The village in practice: communal activity, politics, and the shifting social order in Bogala

Molnar, on entering the village of Hobo Sara, was told by her interlocutors to stand in the village square, and to “take a careful look, because all that you see here is our culture” (2000: 67). The village—its organization, the details of its layout and its physical structures, and the symbols on display there—served as a visual representation of the social relations of its inhabitants, a kind of text, that was easily legible to the people who lived within it. While she was wary of this description at first, she concluded that “the traditional village (*nua*) does appear

to serve as a map of Sara Sedu clan organization” (2000: 86), and went on to dedicate a chapter of her book to the description and explanation of that map.

The physical arrangement of houses in Bogala, however, was not a clean guide to social relations. While the village was first built in accordance with such an ideological connection between space and social hierarchy, social relations in Bogala were not as stable as the physical arrangements of houses. As discussed in chapter 3, the status of houses in a single chain of descent can be severed or inverted; as discussed in chapter 4, the houses atop a *woe* branch can relinquish their status, and new houses can take on those roles. In both cases, the social relations changed, but the physical arrangement of houses remained the same. In that sense, the “text” or “map” of spatial arrangement in a village may be misleading. Social status did not become fixed when the buildings were put up.

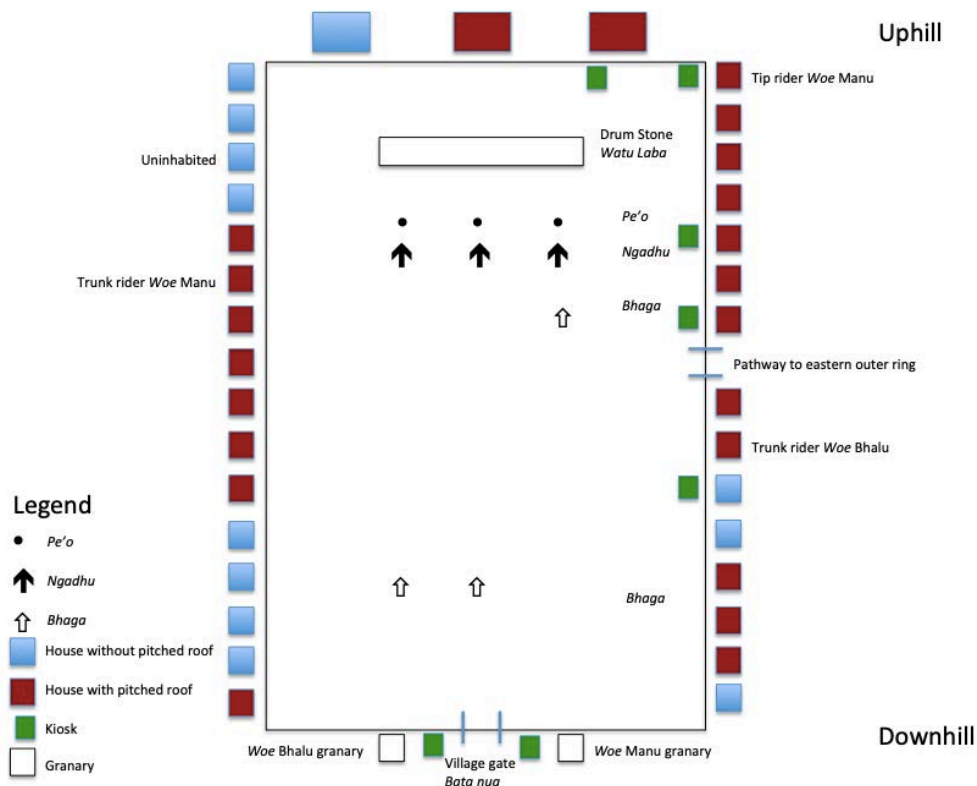


Figure 3 The layout of Bogala

Bogala was arranged in the form of a long rectangle, approximately 200 meters long and 80 meters wide. The rectangle was aligned with the slope on which it was built, with one end straight uphill from the other. This rectangle was edged with houses, which faced inwards

towards a grassy town plaza. This space was called the BN *kisa nata*, literally “middle square.”³² In some villages, particularly in lower, drier areas such as Jerebu’u, village squares frequently were bare and dusty, with no grass or other vegetation. Indeed, Smedal reported that in Were, plazas were ideally devoid of grass, wild plants being the domain of *nitu*, spirits of water and the wilderness (2009: 287). In Bogala, however, as in many other villages around Ngadhaland, there was a fair amount of grass in the village square, cut through by slim paths around the edges, where the frequent passage of feet or motorbike tires had worn the grass away. There were also bare patches in front of people’s homes, where they laid out maize, coffee, or other crops to dry in the sun, laid out the materials for home-improvement projects, or hosted ceremonial gatherings, and between the *ngadhu* and *bhaga*, where the community frequently gathered to play volleyball or conduct ceremonies. In the rest of the plaza, however, the grass could grow knee-high, even—or especially—in the center, where people didn’t walk much. At the bottom, downhill end of the plaza, a road led out of town through a gap called the BN *bata nua*, or “village gate.” This gap was flanked by two granaries, belonging to *woe* Manu and Bhalu, the owners of the lands on which Bogala was built. These granaries were apparently empty, and saw action only at *reba*, when the houses of Manu and Bhalu brought their *fi’i* to the granaries for display. Forth noted that in Nage villages, even the village square is not a commons, but privately held (2004: 120). This is also true in Bogala, which is built across three plots of land belonging to two *woe*. But the space was treated as a commons as far as I could tell, down to the grazing of livestock. People often tethered cows in the plaza to eat down the grass, not necessarily in front of their own homes, but wherever the grass was thickest. The plaza was regularly visited by traveling merchants: pickup trucks stocked with plastic kitchen goods or children’s clothes, men on motorbikes selling fish or meatball soup,³³ and women traveling by motorbike taxi,³⁴ selling textiles from nearby Langa, or from more distant Manggarai, Mbay, or Lio. These traders tended to enter the plaza and drive around until someone on a front porch

³² People translated BN *nata* for me as “betel pepper vine.” But many Austronesian languages use variations on *nata* or *natar* to mean “village” or “village square,” such as Sikka (Pareira & Lewis 1998), Kédang (Samely et al. 2013), Rembong (Verheijen 1977), Lio (Verheijen 1967), and Tanimbar (McKinnon 1991: 298). For more comparisons, see Tryon (1995: 528-529).

³³ BI *bakso*

³⁴ BI *ojek*

invited them to stop in front of their house. Textile sellers in particular had client houses, whom they regularly visited, and who permitted them to use their yards or houses as showrooms.



Plate 43 A mobile shop visits a village.

A total of 34 houses lined the edges of the rectangle on three sides. Of those, 22 had pitched roofs,³⁵ indicating that they contained *sa'o* inside their structures. Bogala had no *sa'o* buildings that stood independent of larger, concrete houses. All the houses had roofs of corrugated metal, with small bundles of roofing grass called BN *roka iki* or BN *pose* affixed to their sides, as a kind of symbol of the grass from which roofs were traditionally made.³⁶

One house was half-built, with no one living inside, and had clearly been uninhabited for some time.³⁷ Every other house was involved in storing, drying, and some processing of commodity and subsistence crops; one house in particular doubled as a commodity processing and wholesale facility.³⁸ Seven had small kiosks in front of them, five of which were active businesses, selling basic goods such as soap, matches, candy, beer, sugar, and small amounts of

³⁵ BN *ubu*

³⁶ BN *roka iki* was translated for me as BI *tolak burung gereja* or “sparrow repellent.” Houses that failed to at least make a nod towards traditional materials in this way invited disaster—apparently mental illness was an expected result of forgetting or declining to put up *roka iki*. The grass was *alang-alang*.

³⁷ Unfinished building projects like this will be discussed in chapter 8.

³⁸ BI *unit pengolahan hasil* or UPH. This one focused on coffee, cinnamon, and vanilla.

kerosene or rice.³⁹ Most, but not all, houses had at least one grave in their front yard, built from concrete with varying levels of decoration. Behind each house was a fenced area. Most of these contained, in some combination, a kitchen outbuilding, an outhouse, a pig sty, a chicken coop, space for washing and drying clothes, and often some storage, usually containing sacks of rice or building materials. Some houses had granaries, but not all.

Three houses at the top end of the plaza were the largest, with the one in the center being visibly larger than the others. This was the house of the founders of the village, who carried the title BN *mori dhorō bo toka boa*. Of these three houses, only two had peaked roofs, and none bore trunk or tip rider symbols.

Near the upper end of the plaza stood the drum stone, a large stone platform backed with standing stones called BN *ulu watu* or “headstones.” The drum stone was where village meetings might be held, a dais from which important men could announce decisions reached in the inner sancta of *sa’o* or the relative privacy of *loka*. It was also where musical ensembles sat to play the drums and gongs that accompany *ja’i* dancing; this was the source of the platform’s name. The drum stone was also the burial site of the original *mori dhorō bo toka boa*. Recent changes in the law prohibited the burial of human remains in village plazas, but exceptions were still made for these cases.⁴⁰

Just below the drum stone, on the downhill side, were three assemblages of monuments, the markers of the three *woe* whose houses made up the bulk of Bogala. Each assemblage consisted of a *pe’o*, a *ngadhu*, and a *bhaga*. In most villages, the *ngadhu* and *bhaga* of the village’s various *woe* stand close together, facing each other in ranks. Some very large villages have two or more sets of *ngadhu* and *bhaga*, at the upper and lower ends of the village plaza. In Bogala, unusually, the three *ngadhu* stood together, but the *bhaga* did not; two were at the lower end of the plaza, while one stood directly opposite the *ngadhu*. I will discuss the confluence of social and spiritual necessities and potentials that brought about this particular arrangement—and describe *ngadhu* and *bhaga* in more detail—in chapter 7.

³⁹ The goods sold at village kiosks more or less fall within under the heading of BI *sembako* or BI *sembilan bahan pokok*, the “nine basic commodities.”

⁴⁰ I attended part of the funeral of a *mori dhorō bo* at Bomadha village. The drum stone had been excavated to receive him.

The village plaza also had a patch of abandoned concrete, which had once served as the foundation of a small Catholic chapel. I saw chapels in the plazas of several villages, sometimes built in the style of *sa'o*, and adorned with concrete “carvings.” I don’t know much about the story of this one—how it came to be, and how it came to be no more. Bart told me that the community decided it was unsightly, and in any case there were plenty of other places to attend services nearby. Caroline and I, for example, occasionally walked to Sunday services at the OCD⁴¹ monastery a few hundred yards away, and Bajawa, with its cathedrals and other houses of worship, was just a few minutes’ drive away. In either case, there was apparently not much need for the chapel, and it was demolished.



Plate 44 The front of the concrete chapel in the plaza of Eko Heto village, Rara Ele.

Politically, the *nua* of Bogala did not make up an administrative unit. Rather, it was part of a BI *kelurahan*, or urban sub-district,⁴² called Susu, taking the name of an ancestor of one of the local *woe*. Susu district contained a handful of *nua*, including Bogala, which was split into

⁴¹ The Order of Discalced Carmelites, Latin *Ordo Carmelitarum Discalceatorum*. Other monastic orders with a presence I was aware of in or near Bajawa included the SVD and the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

⁴² Apparently the Bajawa government had decided to incorporate Susu into the town order to secure access to permanent water sources there.

two administrative “neighborhoods.”⁴³ These were headed by elected officials, neither of whom were trunk or tip riders, or held other positions in the traditional hierarchy.

In terms of social activity, the *nua* can be understood along multiple axes, including as a group of allied, but distinct, *woe* or *woe* segments; as a group of mutually supportive houses; and as a larger area, including spaces outside the *nua* proper, where a number of individuals reside. Looking at the *nua* as a group of *woe*, there are several of *woe*-focused activities that take place in the village plaza. The most prominent of these are the celebration of BN *reba*, the yam feast, at which different *woe* carry their *fi'i* to their separate granaries by the village gate; and the installation of *ngadhu* posts and *bhaga* miniature houses. The *nua* is the site of numerous forms of mutual support across *woe*. Curnow noted in particular a practice called BN *papa do'o*, a kind of group labor in support of large ceremonies, the construction or repair of a house, or the maintenance or renewal of a monument. According to Curnow's interlocutors, *papa do'o* felt like an extension of the obligations one owes to one's immediate family, outward to the *nua* community. “In Bomolo,” the name Curnow gave to the village in Nua Lima Zua where she conducted her research, “it was described as a taken-for-granted assumption, an unexamined response, to assist other in some way when requested. The degree to which people contributed and how they worked was the topic of much discussion as judgments were passed on the particular situation and (in)correct behavior. Failing to participate when invited to contribute labour did occur and, in the absence of a reasonable excuse such as ill health, the transgression would attract anger and ire” (Curnow 2007: 124). Curnow further argues that the exchange of mutual support across a village community was “part of the commons of being-in-common, which goes to the heart of what it means to be Ngadha” (Curnow 2007: 124). In other words, the exchanges of labor and resources facilitated and directed by the *nua* as a social unit were central to the self-definition of the Ngadha people she encountered.

In addition to these activities—in which residents of the *nua* or people affiliated with the *woe* segments that made up a *nua* were obligated to participate—there were a large variety of other activities in Bogala that neighbors undertook together, simply because they lived close to one another. Many were related to the Catholic Church. Every October and May, for instance, a group called Doa Rosario rotated from house to house around Bogala, spending an evening here

⁴³ BI *rumah tangga* or RT

or there singing hymns and praying.⁴⁴ Yoosneem was the head of a group called Memento Mori, tasked with managing Bogala's funerals.⁴⁵ With help from Bart, who used his laptop and his university education to help write the proposal, Yoosneem secured a government grant of 10 million rupiah to support funeral activity in the *nua*. While from the perspective of the Indonesian state there was no unit called Bogala, *nua*-level groups could be a productive way to engage with the government.

The social arrangement of the houses in Bogala had some surprises. As noted in chapter 3, whereas the presence of three sets of *ngadhu* and *bhaga* would suggest the presence of trunk rider and tip rider houses for three *woe* segments, only two trunk rider houses and one tip rider house were apparent. None of these were among the three large houses at the top end of the plaza, where spatial hierarchy would suggest the most powerful houses would be located. While in some villages, trunk and tip rider houses are twinned, built alongside one another on a shared foundation, this was not the case in Bogala; the trunk and tip rider houses of *woe* Manu, the only *woe* in the village with both houses clearly marked, were on opposite sides of the village from one another. While the presence or absence of a peaked roof made clear which concrete houses contained *sa'o*, in no case was the *sa'o* front, with its particular level of decoration, actually visible to an observer standing in the plaza. To see the level of carving, and to grasp the level of advancement of each *sa'o*, one would have to be invited into the concrete house that contained it.

In addition to the three *woe* that had erected *ngadhu* and *bhaga*, Bogala was home to one house from *woe* Naru and two from *woe* Siga. Bogala was described to me as closed to the addition of new monuments. This was a necessary step on the way to the BN *ka nua*, the final feast, yet to be held or even discussed, that would mark the completion of the village. I do not know if there was a ritual or ceremony involved in the closing of the village, or how the decision to “lock the gate” was taken. Clamping down on the establishment of new *ngadhu/bhaga* effectively curtailed *woe* segmentation within the village. The upshot was that these houses from

⁴⁴ BI for “prayer of the rosary.” In Sikka, these groups are called BI *gabungan kontas*, and are made up of almost exclusively women and children (Lewis 2013: 320-321). While I certainly heard male voices in the choruses of Doa Rosario, I have no further evidence regarding them.

⁴⁵ In Latin, “a reminder of death.” Such groups may be common in Catholic societies, but I gathered little evidence regarding them, nor did I find any in other texts on Ngadha society. Forth mentions that Nage people are mostly Catholics, and include Catholic elements in their mortuary rites; yet in two articles on Nage mortuary practice, he makes no mention of Memento Mori groups (1993, 1998b).

woe Naru and Siga were affiliated both with the *nua* of Bogala, where they were located, and also to *woe* segments and monuments in other villages.

Seventeen of Bogala's houses, across *woe* Manu, Bhalu, and Boba, belonged to the hereditary nobility, the BN *ga'e* class. Apparently the house of the *mori dhoru bo* was not among these. While Bogala was established by families of low rank, according to Yoosneem, *ga'e* families were "invited for balance." Now, he said, these families were flipping the facts, and making claims to land rights on the basis of their supposed precedence in the village.⁴⁶ Bart put it to me a different way: Bogala is "like a thermos," he said. "It looks cold, but it's hot on the inside"—that is, filled with conflict. The relative size and location of Bogala's houses was set, but social competition continued. And while a village's founders may have found cause to ally their *woe* and build a village together, their descendants may not wish to continue that alliance, yet retain their houses, as physical structures, side by side.

In addition to the main plaza, there was a second loop of houses off the eastern side of the village. The center of that loop was not a grassy commons, but a group of fenced gardens, planted mostly with sweet potato vines used for pig fodder. Houses also lined the road out from the village gate; another road that passed just above the village, which was built for access to nearby fields; and yet another road about 100 meters east of Bogala. Some of the houses on those roads, away from the village plaza, were *sa'o*, though most were not. There were also field huts, other non-traditional houses, graves, *loka*, economic buildings such as agricultural processing centers, brick factories, pigsties, auto mechanics, and kiosks, and house *lanu* in the surrounding gardens. There was also a graveyard with a disused chapel off the northwestern side of the Bogala village plaza. Now that most burials within the village plaza are prohibited by law, villagers are expected to inter their dead in this graveyard. Many did, but not everyone; when Maria, the matriarch of house Molo Modhe, passed away, she was interred in a private grave, surrounded by coffee trees, on lands owned by her family.

This section illustrates the ways that social relations can shift in a village after it has been established; that social hierarchy does not become fixed when the buildings are constructed, but continues to flow, and the symbols that would seem to make it into a legible "text" can be missing or misleading.

⁴⁶ I will come back to these claims in chapter 7.

On top of this, villages can be periodically remade, their spatial organization reordered to reflect changing social reality. This happens when a village moves to a new location, as Bogala itself did, some 50 years earlier.

Moving old villages, founding new villages, and remaking spatial and social order

A Ngadha *nua* is a demarcated space, marked out by the protection of blood and oil; but this space can be relocated. Ngadha villages moved, for a number of reasons: if illnesses were common, leading to the conclusion that the current site was unhealthy; if bad signs appeared, especially involving snakes; if the presence of witches⁴⁷ or their servants was suspected, or it was determined that black magic was being practiced in the current village; or if there was an unusual number of violent or unnatural deaths⁴⁸ (Arndt 2009: 448). This process described by Arndt comes across as an exercise in power by village elites:

When a village leader wanted to move, he called everyone to his house. He asked whether everyone was there. “Yes,” they replied, “if you want to say something, say it!” He said, “Too many people from this village have died. The earth under our village already contains too many old bones. Every time somebody digs a grave, they find bones, which must be thrown away. For this reason, we must leave this place as quickly as possible” (Arndt 2009: 449).

In addition, both Dutch (Molnar 2000: 55) and Indonesian (Molnar 1994: 102) authorities forcibly relocated villages, removing them from protected forests, or from ungovernable reaches to sites that were easier to control.

Bogala moved to its current location in the early 1960s, following a catastrophic fire.⁴⁹ Fires do not always precipitate a move. Gurusina, in Jerebu’u, which burned down in 2018, is rebuilding in the same place. Watu, on the southern slope of Mt. Inerie, has a reputation for suffering fires on its middle tier every fifty years or so, but its inhabitants continue to rebuild in

⁴⁷ BN *polo*

⁴⁸ Such deaths were called BN *golo*, and required the performance of a ceremony called *keo rado* (see Smedal 1996).

⁴⁹ According to Arndt, the house in which a destructive fire originated is then required to provide two buffalo, ten pigs, and rice for a feast to be attended by the village. If they ask, “where can I get all of that?” they are told, “borrow.” If they do not own enough animals, they must sell or pawn their heirlooms, including gold, if they have it. (Arndt 2009: 491).

place.⁵⁰ Bogala too had suffered a number of fires over the years without moving; but many villages were moving in the 1960s, generally leaving inaccessible locations, chosen for their defensibility, to come closer to roads, water sources, and services such as schools or markets.

Yoosneem was a boy at the time, and he told me the story of the fire and the relocation as he led me on a walk up to the site of the old village, not more than two kilometers from our homes in the new Bogala. I took great pleasure in practicing the Ngadha language sentence BN *ja'o la'a ele nua olo*—"I am going up to the old village"—repeating it over and over to myself, as Yoosneem chuckled and corrected my pronunciation. Our path veered off the road, and Yoosneem led me between clumps of giant blue-green bamboo,⁵¹ through what had once been the site of Bogenga, another village that relocated around the same time. I slipped and slid on the litter of papery bamboo leaves, but Yoosneem took off his sandals and carried them, finding better purchase with his bare feet. As we walked, he pointed left and right. "These bamboo clumps belong to our house," he said, meaning not the house of his wife, which he joined in a BN *di'i sa'o* marriage, but Molo Modhe, his natal house, of which he was the lord. "Already for hundreds of years." Moving the village from one place to another had no effect on land ownership. People didn't give up rights to land when they moved a little farther away from it. The *ngadhu*, symbol of a *woe* and its possessions, and the *fi'i*, symbols of a house and its positions, changed locations. The lands whose ownership was symbolized by those objects remained unchanged.

We walked on through coffee orchards, divided into plots by lines of BN *mesi*⁵² trees and red-leaved BN *ngusu* plants, traditional markers of land boundaries.⁵³ After a few minutes more, Yoosneem said, "We're here." It was only then that I realized I was standing atop a grave. I noticed more graves all around us, under a litter of coffee leaves. Beside them, here and there, were solitary flagstones, the former doorsteps of now absent houses.

⁵⁰ The latest fire was a few years ago; one resident told me that the fire sprang spontaneously from the ground, and moved among the houses like a snake, sparing some and consuming others.

⁵¹ BN *betho*

⁵² BI *dadap*, Latin name *Erythrina variegata*.

⁵³ Land boundaries can be fudged by moving the plant boundaries, or planting new plants. This can be done as an act of trickery, or as a forceful kind of claim making, for instance in restitution of a debt.

The move unfolded over the course of several years, as each house took stock of what remained, and gathered the resources and the will to rebuild. Not every house in Bogala was destroyed in the fire. Some of the old buildings were dismantled and moved to the new site; *sa'o* with wall planks hand-smoothed with hatchets, and rough, unpainted carvings blackened by decades—in some cases, purportedly, centuries—of kitchen fires. Relocating the entire village required a general agreement among the inhabitants of Bogala, but moving each physical house was the responsibility of its inhabitants. Bogala's three *ngadhu* were also all uprooted and relocated from the old village. Moving those monuments was the responsibility of the individual *woe* segments that maintained them. Bart told me that Bogala's three *ngadhu* posts were over a hundred years old, and their artistic style was certainly different from the *ngadhu* being carved today: the faces of the ancestors they depicted were elongated and warped, with filed teeth, and eyes inlaid with the shells of sea snails. Old *ngadhu*, I was told, had histories of movement, having been uprooted, transported, and replanted many times.⁵⁴ Paulus told me the *ngadhu* in Bogala had such topogenies, but he did not share them with me. The fact of such histories, however, suggests that *ngadhu* posts do not fundamentally connect a group of people and a place—after all, these connections are frequently broken, each time a *ngadhu* is relocated. Rather, the *ngadhu* is a site for people to enact their relationships to one another, in the context of a given location. Wherever the *ngadhu* stands in this century, is where we have our base.

In the center of old Bogala, among the coffee trees and abandoned graves, stood one more *ngadhu* post. Its carvings were gone, but it was still immediately recognizable: a post of dark wood, just over two meters tall, with a fork at the top. I was astonished to see it there: a *ngadhu*, one of the most important Ngadha monuments, abandoned. All of Bogala's other *ngadhu* had been moved, with the rest of the village, to the new site. Yet this one was left behind.

"The carvings must have burnt off in the fire," Yoosneem said. "But the post didn't rot." He leaned against it and gave it a shove. It didn't budge. "Still strong," he said.

"Is there still a spirit in there?" I asked.

"Yes, the spirit is still inside," Yoosneem said.

⁵⁴ The oldest *ngadhu* in Rara Ele, I was told, was a 300-year-old post in Bogisi.

“Whose *ngadhu* was this?”

“*Woe* Kutu, I think.”

I was confused. Bogala today included houses and monuments belonging to *woe* Bhalu, Manu, and Boba, plus two houses from *woe* Siga, and one from *woe* Naru. But I had never heard of *woe* Kutu. “What became of them?” I asked. “Why didn’t they move this *ngadhu*?”

“Maybe they went extinct,” he said. “Why else would they leave this behind?”



Plate 45 The abandoned *ngadhu* in old Bogala.

Clearly, not every house and *woe* had chosen to make the move to the new location. Perhaps they did go extinct, as Yoosneem suggested. Perhaps the devastation of the fire rendered the survivors unable to marshal the resources to move their *ngadhu*. Perhaps they simply decided to relocate to another village, rather than remain a part of Bogala. Whatever happened to *woe* Kutu, two things were clear: nobody was still living at the old site. And the process of moving—from destruction to reconstruction—had fundamentally changed Bogala’s social composition, by removing at least one *woe* from the mix. The new village contained no traces of this. New Bogala, and its arrangement of houses and monuments, was a record of the social composition of the village at the moment of its construction. The remnant—still endowed with a spirit, but ambiguous in its power or orientation—was left behind, one leafless tree in the coffee orchard.

In a region littered with abandoned village sites, there were countless such remnants, creating a landscape of ruins, rife with spiritual presences. These presences were not always

dangerous—at old Bogala, Yoosneem encouraged me to touch, or even, like he did, to push against the abandoned *ngadhu*, assuring me that it was harmless—but they did hold the potential for harm. I encountered one example of this in Teni-Lopijo, the isolated hamlets on the outer, western slope of the plateau. On my first trip to the villages, I passed by an enormous backhoe lumbering up the path, which had been hired using village funds⁵⁵ to help build a road. On my second trip, I learned that no progress had been made, and the road was no closer to completion than before. Apparently, part of the work program included widening the path as it ran through a site, now abandoned and overgrown, that was the former location of the village of Teni. While on the site, the backhoe had knocked over a pile of stones, then immediately broken down. No one was able to fix it. The cairn, it turned out, was the drum stone of old Teni, which had been left behind, even as the *ngadhu* and other monuments were moved to the new village site. The ancestors of Teni had not been asked for permission to dismantle the cairn, and had exacted their revenge on the offending machine.



Plate 46 An abandoned drum stone from a former village site.

Encountering abandoned spaces and objects created, in me, a sense of unmooring. These objects were everywhere, reminding those who came across them that the villages and monuments of today, too, were temporary, contingent, potentially moveable, and vulnerable to abandonment. The abandonment of stone platforms was one thing. But confronted with an

⁵⁵ BI *dana desa*, a government program introduced in 2015 as part of the 2014 Village Law (UU No. 6 2014).

abandoned *ngadhu* post, Yoosneem found it easier to conceive of the extinction of an entire *woe* than to believe that the connection between a group of people and their monument could be severed.

Old Bogala had stood on land belonging to *woe* Bhalu, and after the move, the land reverted to their ownership; the coffee trees on the land today belonged to them. Bogala's current location spanned three plots of land, two belonging to *woe* Bhalu, and one to *woe* Manu. The BN *mori dhoro bo toka boa*, the founder of the village, originated from *woe* Manu. That title was supposed to pass to his eldest son. But in Bogala, a generation after the village had moved to its current location, the title was in dispute. There were no specific powers that came with the title, so the dispute wasn't brash or violent, but everyone in the founder's family was striving for it, trying to speak well and act strongly and impress the community. Not that it mattered so much, Yoosneem said. In Bogala, the *mori dhoro bo* wasn't respected today like previous holders of the title were in the past, when even the rich had to bow to him. Whoever bore the title today was not the man himself, who rallied the people of Bogala and led them to this site some fifty years ago.

The title of *mori dhoro bo* is technically heritable; that is, the sons of the original village founder are supposed to inherit the title, and with that title, the respect due to their father. But while the title is still in circulation in Bogala, it has been diluted by its passage to a new generation. Contested and doubtful in its legitimacy, the title has become something less than it was. So what appears to be a stable intergenerational hierarchy, determined by the deeds of past generations and passed on to their children, is in fact not stable, and dissolves quickly. Blood, in this case, is not a strong vector of value. The title, and the social position indicated by it, must be recreated through the action of assembling followers, amassing resources, and actually undertaking a move. The need to recreate the title creates an incentive for descendants of an original title-holder to move the village again, in order to reestablish their claim to a social position that is in danger of lapsing.

Moving a village allows its inhabitants to reform its social and spatial organization, while retaining certain fundamental elements of its character. But sometimes, villages break apart in acrimony, and groups depart to found an entirely new community. This was the case with the recent foundation of a village not far from Bogala.

One day, I was hanging around on the porch of a house in Wawo Wae, a few kilometers from Bogala in Rara Ele, with Robby and a friend of his, who went by the nickname Metro, while they tinkered in the guts of a truck. Metro told me he was helping to found a new *sa'o* with his uncle, who had been persuaded to join a brand new village, called simply BN *Nua Muri* or “New Town.”⁵⁶ The site had no water yet, he said, and as an engineer and mechanic he had been tasked with setting up some kind of pipes to deliver water from the river valley nearby.

The new village was just a few minutes' drive away, and the three of us went over together. The site was on a broad piece of flat land, just on the rim of the steep river gorge that ran through the middle of Rara Ele. As the crow flew, they said, it was only a kilometer or two to Bogala and my own house. The area was dense with *nua*—some even abutted one another, such that you could walk through an alleyway from one village plaza to the next—and the families that had committed to live in New Town were drawn from those communities.⁵⁷

There wasn't much to see. The site was dusty and windswept, roughly 150 meters square, ringed by trees, without the green grass that carpeted the squares of some other, established villages. There were not yet any *ngadhu* or *bhaga*, but there was a drum stone, with one small *pe'o*, maybe one foot high, planted erect in front of it. The frame of one large *sa'o*, still under construction, stood at the square's upper end. Around the edges were temporary houses of bamboo with dirt floors, which would have to do for the families inside until they found the resources to build traditional houses.

⁵⁶ It was also sometimes called *Nua Mere*, or “big village.”

⁵⁷ To be clear, this is a new *nua*, and not a new administrative village (BI *desa*). New Town was within the borders of *desa* Wawo Wae.



Plate 47 The empty plaza and non-*sa'o* houses of Nua Muri village, Rara Ele.



Plate 48 The drum stone and first *peo* of Nua Muri village, Rara Ele.

Robby led us to a house alongside the village entrance, where the buffalo horns from *lola kaba* were on display on top of a slender post, and introduced me to the man inside: his younger brother, Evan, a soft-spoken man with a gentle demeanor and dreadlocks that hung to his waist. Robby and Evan were the first and second of five brothers, and grew up in the village of Borewu, just a few minutes away.

Evan ran down some of the practicalities of joining a new village. The houses were built on 11 x 25 m plots, which were obtained for payments of Rp. 15 million to a committee charged with organizing the necessary ceremonies. This was far less than the real cost of the land, he said, and was referred to as “betel nut money,”⁵⁸ a term that was frequently used for small amounts of money handed out as a courtesy, or as a way of separating a service or good from the payment for it, so that they were seen not as transaction, but as exchanges of gifts.⁵⁹ The money wouldn’t even be paid all at once, but in three installments of Rp. 5 million each. The cost did seem cheap. Plots of land alongside my own house, in Bogala, had recently sold for Rp. 60 or 80 million. Those plots were not even located on a village square, but on back roads. They were, however, close to power lines and water pipes. Here, there was nothing.

According to Evan and Metro, it was the haughtiness of the noble families in some of the villages around here that had spurred a few families to break away, and start a village of their own. “In Bogala it’s more egalitarian these days,” Robby told me, “but not over here.” The old families still tried to throw themselves around. There was conflict over the foundation of Nua Muri, but they had gone ahead and done it anyway.

Founding a village created new titles and changed relationships. A new village meant new opportunities for social advancement, and not only because you weren’t under the thumb of village aristocrats. When new *ngadhu* and *bhaga* were built, the families that put them up would become trunk and tip riders in their own right. Evan was a second son with little money, but by joining the new village he put himself in a position to become the founder of a new *sa’o*. And most of all, the man who founded the village would carry the title of *mori dhoro bo toka boa*. Whatever your class—*ga’e*, *kisa*, or *ho’o*—and however rich you were, that was a title that demanded respect. Perhaps for that reason, the owners of the land (I don’t know if it was Leonardus or someone else) was willing to offer plots for low prices to cash-poor locals such as Evan. By coming together, by moving their families just a few hundred yards, by dedicating their resources to the construction and dedication of new houses and monuments, the “pioneers” of Nua Muri could remake their social positions.

⁵⁸ BI *uang sirih pinang*

⁵⁹ A similiar term was “cigarette money” (BI *uang rokok*).

Later, Yoosneem introduced me to the *mori dhorō bo toka boa* of the new village, an older man with a white toothbrush mustache. As he talked me through the process of founding Nua Muri, describing the sacrifices, the music and dancing, he spoke often of the ancestors. “We mention their names and invite them, all of them,” he said. He himself, in his old age, was doing something his ancestors had not done: earn the title of a village founder, the lord who descends from the granary and uproots the elephant grass. But, he said, the honor did not belong to him alone. “All achievements in this world are due to the support of the ancestors.”

Conclusion: The social village in flow

The traditional village, or BN *nua*, is a social entity undergoing constant change. Villages are built to reflect their social compositions and hierarchies at a specific moment in time. As years and generations pass—as houses and *woe* engage in social competition with one another, some lose the will or ability to retain their positions, and titles earned by ancestors fade from relevance—the social reality of the village can drift away from that initial depiction. As a result, villages are flawed “texts,” full of revisions and obsolete passages; they may not provide clear maps of their social makeup.

Many villages are remade periodically through moves to new locations. These moves provide an opportunity for holders of lapsed titles to reassert themselves. Moves also provide an opportunity for the village to recreate itself, and more accurately reflect the social reality of the current moment, rather than the moment at which the old village was founded. Moves can also be moments of rupture, where villages can come apart, as some segments move on together, while others go their separate ways. A village of the same name, in a new location, can be composed differently than its earlier incarnation. Moves break the bond between a group of people and a place of residence, as houses, *ngadhu* posts, and other buildings are dismantled, transported, and re-erected in new locations. The stories of villages are stories of movement, embodied in *ngadhu* moved many times, remembered—or forgotten—by ritual specialists. In that sense, a village and its monuments stake a claim to the space they occupy not on the basis of precedence or “firstness,” but on the basis of “lastness,” in which the power to hold a space in this moment supersedes the claims of those who have lost that power. The landscape is shaped by these movements, as areas gain and lose the status of “coolness,” spirits are domesticated and

undomesticated, and relations between the living, the dead, and particular locations are transformed.

The founding of new villages provides opportunities for ambitious people to take on roles and earn new titles. In addition to minting a new founder, or *mori dthoro bo*, a new village will require new monuments for each *woe* that inhabits it. This presents opportunities for houses to elevate themselves to the rank of trunk and tip rider. Each family joining a new village will have a house plot on the village plaza, rather than on a back road; and each family head will have the chance to erect a *sa'o* under his own leadership, no longer being (like Evan) the second brother of his natal house, or being without rank in the house of his wife. It is an opportunity to reconfigure relationships between houses, *woe*, and class strata (Smedal 2002). Villages are not egalitarian—they are filled with various layers of hierarchy. But the people in them have an equality of opportunity to change their relative social position, even within the apparently fixed spatial ideology that defines traditional villages (Jolly 1994: 381). Moving or founding a village is difficult and expensive. Yet the potential for such moves must be understood as underlying village social relations.

The first half of this thesis has sought to paint a picture of the ebbs and flows, progressions and circulations, that define Ngadha social life. The history of Ngadha people is a history of motion: arrival, settlement, expansion, and flight; group formation, dispersal, and reformation; ecological and economic transformation. This history is visible in the conduct of social life today. Villages continue to grow, to move, to split, and to shrink. Ngadha society is stratified; hierarchies are based on a combination of inherited traits and achieved status, and are subject to competition and reversal. The domination of “original” peoples by later settlers illustrates that, while precedence is an important component in determining hierarchy, it is far from the only one. The house and the *woe*, the more-or-less kin-based units of affiliation to which Ngadha people belong, are flexible in their ability to absorb people who are not related by blood, as well as their potential to segment on good terms or splinter on bad terms. Connections and hierarchies can be “forgotten” or deactivated, then remembered or reactivated, following the prosperity of the houses and the personalities of the people involved, and their desire to be independent or interdependent. Hierarchy within these groups depends on the willingness and

ability of current title holders to lead necessary ceremonies. Any who hope to rest on the achievements of their ancestors may find themselves and their houses stripped of their titles and community standing, and the links between precedence and hierarchy overturned. Even hereditary class is not immune to inversion, as many Ngadha people choose freedom from restrictions over noble status (Smedal 2016).

This flexibility, and this instability, reveals that the basis of Ngadha forms of affiliation lies in action—in labor, contribution, and participation—rather than in innate, immutable characteristics such as descent. Social affiliation arises from continual circulations of people and resources, and social hierarchy depends on access to the goods and sacred objects that enable a person of means and ambition to enact and recreate their titles and roles. These flows, these circulations and progressions, are the subject of the second half of this thesis.

CHAPTER 6: Circulations of Pigs, the “Basis of Life”

The layers of social affiliation and hierarchy described in the first half of this thesis depend on the consistent movement of goods and people. Anthropologists of southeastern Indonesia have often described these circulations using the metaphor of a “path,” created by the continual movement of people and objects between houses and villages. Allerton (2004) compiled many such references: Needham (1980) spoke of Kodi “paths” of exchange goods, Barnes (1974) and Forth (2001) refer to “alliance paths,” McKinnon (1991) to “alliance pathways,” and Barraud (1990) “movement” in the relationship between alliance groups (Allerton 2004: 340). These paths, Allerton argues, are not merely a reflection or image of an actual path (McWilliam 1997); rather, “the action of travel creates both a physical trail and an alliance relationship: the two are fundamentally intertwined” (Allerton 2004: 347-8). It’s the constant circulation of people, gifts, and perhaps commerce, that keeps the alliance alive, and paths must be continually traveled to maintain them. If the circulation is interrupted, the physical path itself may become overgrown,¹ and the alliance may fray or unravel.

Most commonly, these circulations begin with a marriage, and the movement of bride or groom to a new house, and the exchange of bridewealth goods between the two families. Such exchanges seldom terminate when the wedding is over, but continue over the life of the couple, and often beyond. In most parts of Flores, marriages follow the paths established by many, many generations, between so-called wife-giving groups and wife-taking groups: women traveling from one wife-giving group to its wife-taking group, year after year (eg Allerton 2007 for Manggarai, Lewis 2010 for Sikka, Tule 2004 for Keo, Forth 1998 for Nage). The circulation of people, wealth objects, and animals between wife-givers and wife-takers form what has been called “circulating connubium” (Van Wouden 1935 from Tule 2004: 172) or “the flow of life” (Fox 1980): asymmetrical alliances that order social groups into pairs with stable hierarchies, such as form the basis of dualistic ritual systems around the region (Fox 1988).

Ngadha people, however, do not structure marriage along the lines of wife-giving and wife-taking groups. Despite a historical preference for endogamy within a house or a *woe* segment (Smedal 2002: 499), Ngadha people today marry both inside and outside of their own

¹ This was the case with the footpath joining Teni-Lopijo to the Bajawa plateau.

houses, *woe*, and villages. People long restricted themselves to marrying within their stratum of the three-tiered class system (Smedal 2002: 299), but today many people marry across class lines.² Romantic preference seemed to provide the main structuring force of Ngadha marriages—and it is a force far more unpredictable than the staid exigencies of class, clan, or alliance. As a result, the flow of gifts between Ngadha houses and *woe* is relatively unstructured. Whereas houses in most parts of Flores pass “male” goods to only one wife-giving group, and “female” goods to only one wife-taking group, Ngadha houses may give and receive people and goods in many different directions. Whereas wife-giving and wife-taking groups know the next preordained marriage will provide an opportunity to renew their alliance, Ngadha houses cannot be assured of such future events, and renewal depends on finding and creating those opportunities more intentionally. New alliance paths may form as marriages link houses in new ways, and old alliance paths may fade as houses grow socially distant, or new obligations swamp a house’s ability to meet old ones. The social relations between Ngadha groups ebb and flow, based on the ability and desire of individuals in those groups to produce, procure, and circulate the resources that will sustain those relations.

The key objects that underpin these exchange relations today are not gold, ivory, textiles, or the other key wealth and prestige objects that make up the core of “male” alliance exchange goods elsewhere in Flores (e.g. Howell 1989: 429, Molnar 1994: 141; Forth 1998: 307; Tule 2004: 171). Buffalo, the most ritually important animal in Ngadhaland, were not being produced in the reforested upper plateau, and horses only rarely; and while live buffalo were purchased for slaughter and redistribution, people who spoke to me couldn’t think of any recent examples of a live horse or buffalo being exchanged, either as a fine³ or for bridewealth.⁴ Gold objects, once at the core of marriage exchanges, were no longer circulating among houses—at least, that’s what people told me.⁵ Gifts and counter-gifts of rice, vegetables, coconuts, and so forth were so ubiquitous, so pervasive, that people barely mentioned them. Chicken exchange could be useful

² When a noble woman marries a non-noble man, a ceremony may be performed that brings her class status down to his level (Smedal 2016). However, I met couples of this type in which the wife had not bothered to do so, making her class status ambiguous. It didn’t seem important to them.

³ See e.g. the discussion of BN *piko milo* fines in appendix II.

⁴ Even in the rare cases of bridewealth marriages, money was exchanged in lieu of buffalo or horses. See appendix II.

⁵ It was common for people to deflect questions about gold objects, as they distrusted my motives.

to examine; but while chickens to a certain degree raise themselves—being some of the last domestic animals that are not penned—pigs were central to people’s everyday labor practice. The key product, rather, is the pig. The value of pigs, in terms of market price, emotional attachment, and the social product of their exchange, was much more substantial. As one Ngadha student wrote, it is pigs that are “the basis of life”⁶ (Ngewi 2014: 42). Their production, circulation, and consumption, and their transformation into markers of debt and relationship, makes for a productive locus of attention. Their movement make social networks material; their movement is produced by, and reproduces, the social. Networks are made of the movement of pigs.



Plate 49 A *wailaki* delivers a pig.

Pig production in Bogala

Pigs contain within their bodies a variety of different values. Practically, pigs are a key food resource, essential for feeding groups of the kind that is likely to feel like a crowd in a single home—a number of people too large to be fed with the meat of a dog, but too few to justify killing a cow.⁷ Pigs come in a variety of sizes, depending on their breed, age, and feeding.

⁶ BI *sandaran hidup*

⁷ The ranking of animals in terms of the number of people they feed, from largest to smallest, was buffalo, cow, pig, dog, civet, chicken/duck. Porcupine was eaten, but I never heard of it being served to guests. Deer was eaten, but only on the rare occasions that somebody caught one, and rules concerning the division of hunted meat are far too

A person with enough experience could eye up an animal, and estimate how many people it could feed, or look at a crowd, and determine the size of pig that would be necessary to feed them all. Pigs are no longer allowed to run free, and require significant labor to keep them fed and healthy, but they perform a valuable service by consuming uneaten food and converting it into new meat, conserving value that could otherwise be wasted.⁸

Ritually, pigs are part of a hierarchy of animals whose blood can be applied to *fi'i* and other objects in order to feed the ancestors. The hierarchy of bloods, from most to least valuable, goes: buffalo, pig, chicken. (Excluded from this list are cows, dogs, and ducks, and other animals.)⁹ In addition to its value as a medium for commensality with spirits, its place in this hierarchy gives ritual practitioners the option of substituting pigs for buffalo—a substantial cost-saving measure. At such moments, a pig might be referred to as BN *kaba ranga*, a “buffalo [that eats] pig feed.” There are many, many ritual occasions that call for the slaughter of a pig, including weddings, funerals, the dedication of *fi'i* or other important objects. Contracts, particularly land sales or transfers, are sealed with the slaughter of a pig before witnesses, who then consume the pig together, in a ceremony called BN *ria ulu ngana*.¹⁰ As Erb described in Manggarai, attending the killing and sharing the meal makes one “a witness” to the promise made at the ceremony; the ritual and the meal constitute “a binding, enduring event” (Erb 1996: 30). This was also the case in Ngadha. A local lawyer told me that in cases where official land titles contradicted the word of witnesses to a *ria ulu ngana*, judges were liable to side with the witnesses over the document. After a ritual killing—marked by the recitation of ritual speech, and the particular form of killing blow, in which the pig’s crown is split vertically,¹¹ ideally in

complicated to include here. Civet was served to me only once, at a large ceremony, late in the day, after the meat of the pigs and chickens was exhausted.

⁸ I will pick up on the topic of waste and value conservation in chapter 9.

⁹ One person suggested that human blood ranked above buffalo, but I can’t guarantee he was serious. Forth (1998) does suggest that for the Nage, buffalo and humans are deeply interlinked and can be substitutes for one another; or that humans are the buffalo of spirits, a noble creature subject to sacrifice and domination by a higher power (Forth 1998a: 154).

¹⁰ Yoonsneem translated this as “to ask permission with a pig’s head.” Mopa (2004: 399) and Arndt (1961: 463) have several disparate translations of BN *ria*, none of which are “ask permission.” They agree that the word can mean “good, safe, beautiful.”

¹¹ BN *wela*. There were specific verbs for many forms of killing, including forms specific to different animals.

fewer than three blows—the pig’s liver was examined by a ritual specialist, who looked for signs that the ancestors had approved of the occasion, and omens for good or ill fortune in the future.¹²

Besides their use as a ceremonial good, pigs were also a commodity. I never saw anyone kill a pig in a village setting simply because they wanted to eat pork, but it was possible to buy pig meat in the markets around Bajawa, and to eat it at restaurants in town. There appeared to be some export of pigs from Ngada regency to other parts of the country, though it’s difficult to tell exactly where in the regency the pigs come from.¹³ However this trade appeared to be the aggregate product of numerous family sties, rather than any kind of professional pig-rearing operations. I never encountered any sort of large-scale businesses, or even medium-scale businesses, dedicated to the propagation of pigs for sale. Rather, pig production seemed to be solely in the hands of families, a supplementary activity rather than a primary one. According to the 2015 Village Profile for *kelurahan* Susu, which included Bogala at that time,¹⁴ from a total of 2024 individuals, comprising 443 families,¹⁵ 675 people were listed as owning pigs—nearly one third of all inhabitants, with an average of just over 1.5 pig-owners per family. The total number of pigs they owned was 1426. That means that there was an average of more than one pig-owner per household, and each owner had an average of only 2.1 pigs (Kelurahan Susu 2015: 12). This pattern was supported by my observations. Every household in Ngadhaland, it seemed, was involved either directly or indirectly in the production of pigs. In villages, there were pigsties behind nearly every house, usually with just one or two animals inside. Some people kept their pigs in pens a bit farther away, or tied them up in larger pens or garden plots. In town, there were

¹² Haruspicy was also performed on the intestinal loops of chickens, and on a particular lobe of the liver of buffalo, called BN *lodo kaba*. Divination was the job of ritual specialists. It was common for several old men to look at a liver together and argue about the signs and their interpretation, before onlookers who did not know how to see the future in an animal’s organs. It was suggested to me that a diviner might see bad signs and, unknown to anyone else, choose not to communicate them; for instance, at a wedding, if he did not like the couple, he might let the bad signs ride, dooming the marriage to failure. Alternatively, bad signs could be cause for the diviner to call for another animal to be killed, in hope of finding more auspicious omens. The ontology of causation here—that the future is *caused* by the signs found in the last liver read—made me a bit confused, by my concerns were laughed off, and not taken seriously by anyone.

¹³ Official statistics from 2012 show an outflow of either 279 pigs (BPS 2012: 287) or 146 pigs (BPS 2012: 289). In 2016 I heard rumors that Ngada was sending pigs to Sumba out of Aimere on the public ferry, at a rate of 500 animals per week. I was not able to confirm this.

¹⁴ A BI *kelurahan* is an administrative unit similar to a BI *desa*, but located in or near a city or town, and led by a leader called a BI *lurah*. Kelurahan and desa can both be part of larger sub-districts called BI *kecamatan*. Since the time of research, Bogala has split off from *kelurahan* Susu and formed part of a new *desa*.

¹⁵ Rather than families, the census data counted “family heads,” or BI *kepala keluarga*. These “families” would not be *sa’o*, but more like nuclear families.

fewer sties; but town-dwellers still had stakes in pigs raised and housed by their relatives in surrounding villages.

The labor of pig rearing was complex. In Ngadhaland, as elsewhere in Flores, pigs are traditionally considered “feminine” animals (Molnar 2000: 293), in contrast with buffalo, which are masculine (Schröter 2005: 325). However, pig-rearing was not a women’s activity. I observed both men and women engaged in caring for pigs, preparing their food, building and cleaning their pens, transporting them from place to place, and marketing them. (Only men slaughtered pigs, but men slaughtered everything, including other “feminine” animals such as chickens. Women did not normally slaughter anything.) In fact, collecting pig food is a key duty of men; when they marry into their bride’s house, they are expected to provide BN *kaju ranga*: wood (BN *kaju*) for the cook fire, and sweet-potato leaves (BN *ranga*), which are chopped, cooked, and fed to pigs. The phrase *kaju ranga* is used as a sort of shorthand for a man’s entire economic contribution to his house, and even for his place in the *sa’o* as a member in good standing. At the moment of a BN *di’i sa’o* marriage, when a man enters the house of his bride, the following words are spoken:

<i>Wimai polu,</i> ¹⁶	<i>uge ne’e ema</i>	come to [your new] parents, mother and father
<i>Ne’e kaju dhu maru</i>		with firewood for every evening to come
<i>Ranga dhu zia</i>		Pig feed forever after ¹⁷

Given the importance of labor around pigs for defining membership in a family, and the importance of pigs themselves—their meat, their blood, and the alliances facilitated by their exchange—the production of pigs is essential to the production of kinship.

Pig rearing occupies a place in Ngadha labor organization alongside other forms of animal husbandry; since the near disappearance of horses and buffalo from the upper plateau, that especially includes the breeding and fattening of cows. Cows, like pigs, are raised by many families, owning one or two cows each. Unlike pigs, cows are not penned, but tied up in a different location each day, usually by a roadside, where they munch the grasses that grow along the verge. The work of raising cows is largely limited to moving them between such sites twice a

¹⁶ BN *polu* literally means “carer” or “guardian,” as in BI “pelihara.” In bridewealth exchange, the term refers to “an adult who helped raise the bride,” most likely an aunt.

¹⁷ For more on the marriage process, see appendix II.

day. Far less time is spent gathering food for cows than food for pigs, and cow feed is not cooked, as pig feed often is. Cows' blood is not used to feed the ancestors, and the slaughter of cows is not ritualized with formal speech or ceremony. Beef is sometimes eaten at large events, but the animals are not exchanged other than as commodities, and their meat is not part of the mass redistributions of food called BN *meghe*, which will be discussed in chapter 9. As a result, cow production does not carry nearly the weight and meaning that pig production does.

For Bart and Nora, my landlords and neighbors, pig-raising was a constant focus of activity. The pigsty – three pens on a concrete floor, walled with cinderblocks and roofed with corrugated metal – stood about 15 meters behind our houses, behind a screen of coffee trees. The pigs consumed kitchen scraps and leftovers from both houses, and also got a steady diet of chopped vegetable matter, usually *ranga*, or the trunks of banana trees, taken from a clump that grew beside the sties. (The chop-chop-chopping sound of the preparation of this pig food was a sure sign of the presence of a pigpen nearby.) They cooked these coarse greens in a large, round-bottomed pot over a fire. Gathering and preparing enough *ranga* to keep a pig fed could be labor intensive, but people found ways to cooperate to manage the work. *Ranga* itself was traded between neighbors at minimal cost, or even for free; our neighbor Theo made the *ranga* that grew on his property available to Bart for free, if Bart would gather it himself. In addition to *ranga*, pigs consumed all manner of household scraps, from leftovers to kitchen scraps, even bones. There was no food waste in a house that owned a pig. All scraps and remnants, including bones and even the flesh of other pigs, were fed to pigs without hesitation, their energy recycled back into the food chain, to be consumed by humans at some later date, when the pig was slaughtered. I will talk a bit more about this form of energetic circulation in chapter 9. Later in my time there, following an increase in the family pig holdings after the death of Bart's mother Maria, Bart invested in 40kg sacks of pig feed, handfuls of which were stirred into the chopped greens as they cooked.¹⁸

¹⁸ The pig feed was composed of a mix of maize bran, rice bran, peanuts, soybeans, fish meal, and a few other ingredients.



Plate 50 Chopped greens for pig feed.

The most visible moments of pig exchange were when *wailaki* attended ceremonies, such as weddings, funerals, or the establishment of houses or monuments. In between these moments of punctuated circulation between houses, however, pigs circulated vigorously between members of a single house. Over the time I lived in Bogala, a number of pigs moved in and out of Bart and Nora's pens. Some of these pigs did not belong to Bart and Nora, but to Bart's siblings. Sometimes these pigs were lodged with us temporarily, especially pigs belonging to Bart's brother Ricky, who lived in a *baru* on lands cleared and claimed by their father, Paulus, in the North Bajawa valley. Other pigs stayed in the sty for months at a time, fed and tended by Bart and Nora.¹⁹ Bart occasionally sold pigs for cash, though never at a scale to make a business of it. He also traded them, for instance trading one large pig for several small piglets. The pigs that came and went from Bart's sty crossed and recrossed the line between good, gift, and commodity over and over again (Appadurai 1986: 13).

Pigs were not Bart and Nora's main source of income. Bart worked a salaried job as a civil engineer with a firm under contract to the local government and also took on private

¹⁹ I'm not 100% certain, but I don't believe money changed hands for this service. I never saw such payments in the spending diary I asked Bart to keep, and which I subsequently forgot to collect from him before leaving Bogala. I did, however, see payments made to Bart by his sister for the use of a kiosk in front of the family *sa'o*, suggesting that if his siblings were paying Bart for lodging their animals, he would have made note of it.

construction jobs, while Nora worked part-time in the town clerk's office,²⁰ and baked buns for sale on the side.²¹ Bart was not the lord of a *sa'o*, and his children were far too young to get married, so he was never called upon directly to furnish pigs for *wailaki*. Given that pig production was not central to Bart's or Nora's own personal economic or social position, they devoted a great deal of time, effort, thought, and expense to the endeavor. The reasons for this—their place, and the place of their pig-rearing labor, in the larger life of the *sa'o*—will be explored in detail later in the chapter.

Outflows: the right pig at the right time

One morning, as my partner Caroline and I sat on the porch of our home, enjoying our tea and the view of the misty valley below, a neighbor called to us from the pathway. She had come to fetch us, she said. Bram, her father, was putting together a *wailaki* to attend a funeral in another village, and had requested that we join his group. Caroline demurred, but I agreed to go, and after breakfast I changed into an Mbay sarong and walked through the coffee trees to Bram's house.

I found him in the back room of his *baru*, and sat down with him to wait for more members of the group to gather together for a pre-departure meal. I offered Bram my condolences, but he waved me off. The deceased person whose funeral we were about to attend was the father-in-law of Bram's son, and they hadn't known each other well. The marriage had been without bridewealth,²² and so the son had left his natal house, and taken membership in the house of his wife, under the putative authority of the now-deceased father-in-law. The marriage, and the exchanges of pigs and other food and drink that had accompanied the wedding ceremony, had started a relationship between the two houses, which meant Bram, as the head of his *sa'o*, was now obligated to lead a *wailaki* to the funeral, bringing a pig as a gift. The pig Bram provided would be either slaughtered and eaten at the funeral; slaughtered and

²⁰ BI *kantor lurah*

²¹ She took significant time off from both of these income-generating activities when her second daughter was born. She had her eye on other such activities as well, such as using the freezer in my refrigerator, once I was gone, to produce ice for sale. She and Bart were upset when I told them that Ana, another key informant, had already asked for my refrigerator, and I had agreed to let her have it. She and her sons came to collect it the very night I left the field.

²² A BN *di'i sa'o* marriage, as described in chapter 2.

redistributed to guests at the funeral; or gifted, still alive, to the *sa'o* of the dead man, depending on the needs of the moment.

The relationship between Bram's house and the house of the deceased began with the marriage of Bram's son and the dead man's daughter, which marked the first exchange of pigs between the two *sa'o*. The first pig had been brought by Bram, incurring a debt with them to someday return a pig to him. The term for this situation was BN *madi muri*, which translates literally as "new hoe." By this construction, Bram was lending a hoe to the family of the deceased man, which they would return at some future date. The return gift, which would take the form of a pig at some undetermined ceremony in the future, would be termed BN *madi olo*, or "old hoe." The return of the "old hoe" would not terminate the relationship. Rather, every time Bram gave a pig to this particular family, that pig would be a "new hoe," and every time they returned one to him, that pig would be an "old hoe." The return gift, Bram said, might not arrive for decades. These debts all used to be remembered by old women, but now it appeared to be men who held this information, not in their memories, but in notebooks.



Plate 51 Men record the names of *wailaki* leaders and the sizes of pigs at a ceremony.

In the circulation of "old and new hoes," not just any pig would do. Pigs in these exchanges should be as big or bigger than the last one, according to a set of loosely standardized measurements, which describe the distance from the pig's breastbone to its spine against a

human arm.²³ The first, from a person's fingertips to just above the wrist, is BN *sigho lima*. The second, from the fingertips to about two inches below the elbow, is BN *bile*. The third is from the fingertips to just above the elbow, and is called BN *tigo*. Next is a finger-width above the elbow, which is BN *gaso seneka*. Two finger-widths above the elbow is BN *gaso rua*. Three finger-widths above the elbow is BN *gaso telu*. Four finger-widths above the elbow is BN *gaso wutu*. Just below the shoulder is BN *pia buku*. And the soft area between the shoulder and the neck, where you would rest a bamboo container full of water, is BN *sa'a wae*, "to carry water over the shoulder." Fast-growing pigs, a white variety, can reach *gaso seneka* in a year and a half. The local black pigs grow more slowly, and would still be *bile* at that age.²⁴ People used these terms constantly, placing fingers against their arms as illustration.

The last time Bram exchanged pigs with this family, the animals had been *gaso rua*, a market value of some 3 million rupiah. This time he would have to do as good or better. Luckily, although Bram owned just one pig at the moment, it happened to be the right size.

This death was, as deaths often are, unexpected. But as a family head, Bram knew that he could be called on at any moment to provide a pig and lead a *wailaki*. The possibility that one will be hit by an unexpected demand for a pig is a constant presence in Ngadha social life, and the basis for maintaining a steady level of effort in pig production. Some phrases given to me by Yan Mopa described the wisdom of raising pigs or other animals consistently:

Lewu bodha ne'e beku

The animal pen must have feces

Feces here is a metaphor for the animal that produced it, the animal's waste standing for the animal.

Peni²⁵ ne'e manu, loka²⁶ ne'e lako²⁷ Feed the fowl, feed the mid-size animals

²³ This measure was supposedly made with a string, though I never saw anyone actually measure a pig; it was an judgement drawn from consensus and experience rather than direct measurement. One could also describe the length of buffalo horns against the arm, but people more commonly talked about horn in terms of centimeters.

²⁴ 30-40 years ago, when Yoosneem, who first taught me these terms, learned them, it would take 5-6 years for a pig to reach *sa'a wae* size, but these days you can buy special feed in the town to make pigs grow faster, so he couldn't say.

²⁵ A verb meaning "to feed," specific to fowl (BI *unggas*)

²⁶ A verb meaning "to feed," specific to mid-sized animals such as pigs and dogs.

An animal cannot be fed only once and thrive; it must be fed the right amount, every day. The thrust of this saying is to urge people to cultivate their work, including animal husbandry, consistently and correctly. The same could be said of the tending of social relationships. Bram could not simply give this family five pigs, and hope that would put an end to things. The relationship had to be tended continually, through steady repetition and sustained circulation.

The need to have access to a pig of the right size at the right time leads people to vary their pig-rearing strategies. It doesn't make sense to hold onto a pig as long as possible, growing it to its maximum girth. Making a gift of such a giant would doom both partners to procuring such inflated pigs at every future exchange; the gift could be taken as a sign of bad faith, by obligating similarly oversized returns. And there is always the risk that a pig could die, obliterating its value in an instant. But because nobody can do the work of raising more than a couple of pigs at a time, it is important to maintain ways to access a variety of pigs of different sizes raised by other people, just in case you suddenly need one.

If Bram didn't have access a pig of the right size at the right time, he said, he would have to borrow one, or buy one. Neighbors and friends frequently sold a pig or two to one another, as they were often caught short of a pig, or short of a pig of the proper size, at the right moment—or exchanged them for future considerations or payments, a kind of credit. But while various payments can be delayed, a pig must be provided at the moment it is called for, as I saw on a day when I accompanied Robby's brother Evan to a wedding down in Bajawa. Evan had recently moved his family to the new village of Nua Muri. He hadn't yet built a *sa'o*—he currently lived with his family in a temporary bamboo home with a dirt floor—but by setting himself up in the new village he assumed the role of a head of a household, and thus found himself on the hook to provide a pig he didn't have. Evan did not have a lot of money to spare, having just bought his plot in the new village. In the end, he borrowed enough money just to buy a small, BN *bile*-sized pig. This pig wasn't for any official ritual exchange, or even to feed the main gathering. It was just to help feed the members of his family before they even went to the wedding. But he was obligated nonetheless. If his household had been raising pigs of their own, he could have supplied one without the sudden cash expense.

²⁷ Literally “dog,” BN *lako* here stands for mid-sized animals: dogs and pigs. Larger animals, i.e. buffalo, horses, and cows, are called BN *ngawu*, though this term, which glosses more generally as “wealth,” can also be applied to smaller livestock, and also to gold, heirloom objects, and even motor vehicles.

If Bram was unable to provide or purchase a pig, he did have the option of bringing money in the place of a live animal. This is informally called giving a BN *ngana saku*, a “pocket pig.”²⁸ While this option did have some clear advantages—saving the trouble of locating an appropriate animal, and giving the receiver the option of disposing of the money any way they wished—it also had disadvantages. As Bart explained to me, the amount of money given in place of a pig must be equal to the market value of the pig at the time of the exchange. The price of pigs is perceived to be rising faster than the pace of inflation, even as the labor required to produce pigs remains the same. “If we give a *gaso rua* [pig] today, and it’s returned in five years,” Bart said, “the price will definitely be higher; but if they give money, they must give the market price of a *gaso rua* in five years, not the price of a *gaso rua* at the time that we gave one.” This created a big incentive to raise your own pigs. Having your own supply of animals to draw from created opportunities to profit from the cash exchanges initiated by others.

If Bram owned a pig, but it wasn’t the right size, it was possible to arrange a swap, something I witnessed Bart do, as mentioned above, when he traded one large pig for several small ones. Or he could, as members of Molo Modhe did, maintain interests in a number of pigs cared for by various members of his family. This strategy could provide him with claims on a wider variety of pigs, to better ensure that when the need arose, as it had this day, he would have access to a pig of the correct size. Of course, pigs of this sort could be subject to many competing claims. Timing was key. If he sold or traded his interest in a given pig one day, then needed a pig of that size the next, he would be out of luck.²⁹ Even without maintaining interests in this way, the lord of a *sa’o* had the ability to borrow the pigs of members of the house—if they had any—and leaders of high-ranking houses could borrow pigs from their descended houses. These requests, which go by several different terms, are difficult or impossible to refuse; they will be explored further in chapter 8.

The fact that purchasing or borrowing pigs is perfectly acceptable illustrates that, for all the role pigs play in the mutual recognition of groups and status of the individuals that lead them, they are not deeply entangled with the identities of the people who raised them. Pigs are not “biographical objects” (Hoskins 1998); their value is not as an extension of the personhood of

²⁸ Alternately, BN *ngana amplop* or “envelope pig,” for the plain envelopes often used to deliver money.

²⁹ I’m not certain that Bram maintained stakes in a number of pigs in this way, but because the members of Molo Modhe did so, and he was married to a member of that house, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he did.

the person who raised them. The key value of pigs for the Ngadha is rooted in exchange, not in biographical association with a single owner or herder. Animals are given and received by individuals who are acting on behalf of social groups: houses, *woe*. Pig rearing is communal, and pig consumption is also communal; no one person sits down and eats an entire pig. The exchanger is a conduit for the collective effort and identity of a social group, be it an individual, a house, or a *woe*, represented by a *wailaki*. He is the presenter, the organizer, the conduit of the action of exchange.

Bram made it clear to me that, if he felt he had a choice, he would have disposed of this pig in a different way. Bram had recently built a *sa'o keka*, the lowest form of traditional house, with walls and floor of split bamboo planks. Like most Ngadha people I spoke to, Bram aspired to upgrade his *sa'o*, for example by installing more sets of *fi'i*, and by replacing the bamboo with hardwood boards. For any step in this process, he could make good use of a pig, either by selling it and using the proceeds to purchase materials, or by slaughtering it, using the blood to sanctify the tools and materials, feeding the meat to the house-builders who helped with the construction or the guests who attended its dedication, and displaying its jawbone on a line on the front porch. Or he could have sold it, to a neighbor, a family member, or a trader in the market, and used the money for other needs—the most commonly named uses for money, outside of construction, were education, health care, and investment in financial schemes, such as savings and credit groups,³⁰ which provide access to larger lump sums of money.

Now, the labor and materials that Bram and his family invested in caring for his only pig were being seized. He had always known this was likely to happen, but still it was a cause for frustration. One day in the future, his gift of a “new hoe” today would be repaid with the return of an “old hoe.” But when? It could be decades before that happened. And when it did come back, it would be in the context of a ceremony that would most likely lead to the slaughter of that future pig. It may even come at Bram’s own funeral, when he himself would be unable to benefit from it. “What a waste!”³¹ he groused. His pig—the store of labor, materials, skill, and care that it represented, and the potential goods and services he might have exchanged it for—were essentially lost to him.

³⁰ BI *koperasi*

³¹ BI “*Boros, boros!*”

And yet, Bram did not refuse this obligation. Bram wanted to preserve the relationship. Strategies for coming out ahead in pig exchange were certainly in play, but the desired outcome was not to dominate or outmaneuver his exchange partner, or to escape or terminate the debt, but to maintain the circulation, the back-and-forth movement of pigs, successfully and indefinitely, even if the cost felt steep.

When the leader of a *wailaki* presents a pig to a host in the context of a ceremony, as Bram was about to do, the gift recalls previous, similar gifts between the two groups represented by *wailaki* leader and host. Through the formal presentation, the *wailaki* leader asserts the validity of the present group as a reproduction of the previous one, which brought the last pig; the host, accepting the gift, recognizes the group and the history of inter-group relations.

Every house in Ngadhaland was caught in the current of these circulations; the pigs coming in and going out again, as gifts, loans, or commercial sales, fulfilling obligations inherited from the distant past, or part of the formation of new relationships. Smedal argued that Ngadha communities were suffused with what he called “floating value:” numerous unclaimed debts that people can call on at the appropriate moment (Smedal 2002: 503). In most cases, he wrote, these relate to bridewealth, the costs of which are so exorbitant that no individual can afford them on their own; therefore they make loans to others when they are making their own bridewealth payments, then call in the debts when their time comes. In areas where bridewealth is costlier, such as the Were subregion, the amount of value that is “floating” around in this way is greater; where bridewealth is less costly, as in Jerebu’u, the amount of floating value is less (Smedal 2002: 503-504; 2011: 282). In Rara Ele, bridewealth payments are unusual. But pig exchange, and the circulations of debt surrounding the production, procurement, and return of pigs, is universal.

When objects or animals in your possession can be called on at a moment’s notice; and when you know that you also have the ability to make claims on the objects and animals of other people around you; then the objects and animals in your possession are both yours and not-yours. A pig loaned out is more your own than a pig you do not loan: now secure, to be called on as necessary. It is a form of “keeping while giving,” grounded in the need to secure permanence, in a world of loss and decay (Weiner 1992: 7). It secures the value of the pig to the person or house

that gifts it away, even when the pig itself is long gone. That wealth is manifested in an ever-deepening array of debt relationships.

Inflows: the funeral of Mama Maria

The problem of providing pigs at short notice is only one side of the equation. What about the house where someone dies, spurring the arrival of *wailaki* bearing pigs? These moments represent a sudden reorganization in the distribution of pigs across a community, both on the side of pig-bringers—who must raid their sties, or buy or borrow from neighbors or family members—and pig-receivers, whose sties are unexpectedly filled, and who must decide how best to manage this sudden inflow. These moments of sudden accumulation, which can accompany a wedding, a funeral, or another ceremony that attracts the participation of outside *wailaki*, illuminate the economic and social opportunities that arise in Ngadha systems of circulation. At the same time, what might appear to be an accumulation within a *sa'o* also reveals the dispersal and disposal of resources among the individuals and households that make up that *sa'o*.

The following section concerns the movement of pigs associated with the funeral of Bart's mother, Maria, the eldest woman of *sa'o* Molo Modhe. The three days from Maria's death to her burial formed a period of intense mourning, during which *wailaki* from around the area came to Molo Modhe to grieve, bring gifts, pay respects, and eat. For those few days, friends and neighbors largely took over the house, cooking, cleaning, and freeing up the family to mourn and receive visitors. It was a difficult, emotional time, and even revisiting my notes from those days was a bit of a struggle for me. Out of respect for the members of the Molo Modhe family, who lost a mother, a sister, a wife, I will try to stay narrowly focused on the flow of resources—money, food, and especially pigs—that surrounded this tragic event. Hopefully the ethnographic details I omit will not cause anyone to come across as stilted or unemotional.

Mama Maria died suddenly during the night, apparently from complications of asthma. She was 61. Caroline and I didn't know Maria terribly well, but she had been kind and welcoming to us since our arrival a few months earlier. Just a day or two prior, she had helped us recover a pair of Caroline's sandals after a dog carried off them into the forest. The news of her passing was brought to us early in the morning by Theo, our downhill neighbor, and a close friend of Bart's. Caroline and I immediately threw on some sarongs. I grabbed some cigarettes,

some money, and an envelope, to make a donation to the family. We poured all our rice into a bag, and carried everything over to the *sa'o*.

We approached Molo Modhe from the back, and so the first thing we saw was an enormous water tank, which had been rented for the occasion and filled up by a tanker truck. A crowd of women from the village buzzed around the rear kitchen area, preparing hot water, a big tun of it, cooking rice in enormous drums, and stewing pork in giant, round-bottomed pans. Men, also from all around the village, were chopping bamboo, both for firewood, and to build a temporary awning in front of the house, to shelter the guests who would come to pay their respects. This work—the feeding and shelter of an unknown, but assuredly large, number of guests—was being managed as much as possible by neighbors and friends, allowing Maria's family to attend to her body, receive mourners, or grieve in private. They had pulled all this together in just a few hours, before first light.

Caroline handed our small sack of rice to someone in the kitchen. We saw that others had brought entire 50-kilo sacks of rice, as well as kilos of sugar, and bags of betel nuts.³² Big sacks of rice came and went from the store room as food was cooked and guests were fed, and as people brought more supplies. All the surrounding houses had sent over extra plates and glasses. Behind the house, about fifteen women were pounding rice, in preparation for cooking it. They invited Caroline to join them. About six women in the kitchen peeled garlic, pounded spices, and so on, contributing to food preparation. One of Bart's cousins was opening coconuts, cracking them with the back of a machete, inserting the blade into the crack and working it through, and dumping out the water.

The inside of the house was crowded. Friends, neighbors, and relatives were streaming in, to visit the body and pray with the family. I found Bart sitting in the room by the *sa'o* face, with a few close friends. I gave him a long hug, and sat with him. "She was an excellent carer for others," he said. "Whenever anybody passed by the house, she called out, 'come chew betel,'³³ even if she had no betel nut to offer. If there was money, she would send someone to buy some. If there was no money, she would send someone to get it on credit."

³² I noticed that nobody was carrying personal betel nut bags (BN *lega*) that day. I wore my own that morning, but when I saw that no one else had one I took it home and left it there.

³³ BN *mai ngeu*.

Most of the family members were inside the inner room of the *sa'o*. The *sa'o* was full of keening. Weeping. Cradling each other's heads. Everyone was wracked with grief. Caroline and I cried as well. A group came to conduct Catholic prayers: a hymn, two short speeches, and a string of Hail Marys. They spread a flag with saints' names on it over the body.³⁴ Maria was laid out with her head at the *mataraga*, feet pointing to the door, already wrapped in at least two sarongs, the visible one being Langa with dark motifs, and a slender woven scarf over the face.³⁵ Mourners cradled her feet, or touched her hands, which were folded on her chest under the sarong. Some peeled back the scarf to look at her face, then gently laid it back again. There was a box by her feet, covered in wrapping paper, with a slot for receiving envelopes filled with money. This was a legitimate form of contribution for families that didn't bring rice, or *wailaki* that didn't bring pigs. There was a Manggarai sarong folded up at the foot of the body, brought by one of Maria's daughters-in-law, who was from Manggarai; another Mbay cloth, brought by I don't know who, was stacked on top of it. This reflected the practice of people from those places.

I took no photos. Note taking felt very rude. Caroline told me to stop it. We tried to be quiet and blend in.

Each guest or group of guests entered the *sa'o*, wailed for Maria's passing, greeted, consoled, and prayed with the family, and then stepped out, to make room for the next group, and to receive a meal of rice and pork, plus palm wine, water, and heavily sweetened coffee or tea. Hundreds of guests were fed that day, and accepting a meal was part of the substance of their visits. The husband and siblings of the deceased were forbidden to eat food that Maria owned, so food for them was prepared in a different house, and they ate separately from the guests, in a side bedroom. All of the logistics for this were handled mere hours after Maria's passing.

Later that evening, as neighbors helped clean up, friends and relatives kept the body company in the *sa'o*,³⁶ and men from around the village played cards for small stakes by the TV, a large contingent of the extended family of *sa'o* Molo Modhe met in the kitchen. Inside, it was

³⁴ They were from a group called the Great Family of St. Anna and St. Joachim, dedicated to maintaining the grounds and gardens of the OCD monastery down the road. Maria had been a member, and ignored her husband Paulus' grumbling about it.

³⁵ Bart said she had received a post mortem injection of formalin, to slow decay until she could be buried.

³⁶ The body was accompanied all night; it could not be left alone. But its minders were allowed to sleep, as long as they stayed there, in the *sa'o*, with the body.

very subdued. I counted about fifteen men, and about seven women,³⁷ and four young girls, sleeping in the laps of their mothers or aunts.

Yoonsneem opened the proceedings. He and another man, whom I recognized as a leader from a higher house in the *woe*, did most of the talking, but other men I didn't recognize spoke up as well. It was older men who generally spoke—Bart and his brother Ricky were silent. There was also input from one of Maria's granddaughters, who was probably about twenty, and from another woman I didn't know, so women were allowed to speak. The discussion was mostly in Ngadha, mixed with Indonesian, so I couldn't follow all the details. I did not have an impression of men of authority issuing orders, or of ritual language being leveraged to extract concessions. The meeting appeared to be consensus driven. Bart and Ricky were there, but their two sisters were in the *sa'o* with their mother.³⁸ Their father, Paulus, was not in the meeting or inside the *sa'o*. I'm not sure where he was. Poor guy. He was twenty years older than Maria. I'm sure he thought he would go first.

My impression of the conversation in the kitchen was this: we need at least 200 kg of rice for Friday. We may need as many as 300 kg, but if there's extra left over, that's fine; it's better to have too much. We will need some pigs also. There will be a meeting of the close family to determine the divisions: who'll pay for what, provide for what. The term used was BI *patok*, meaning boundary markers, to indicate what each household's contribution would be. The costs will be spread among the various members of the *sa'o*.

Numbers were floated, and then there were long silences, as everyone waited for someone else to be the first to speak, waited for someone else to claim the responsibility. It was like pulling teeth. By that time some of the attendees had left the room, and it sounded like there was agreement on the need for a second meeting. I'm sure everyone had to go home and discuss with their families. Nobody asked me for a contribution. I tried to make myself small and humble, though I was given a proper chair to sit in, while some members of the family sat on the floor. I said nothing, and took no notes in the meeting.

The *sa'o* provided the pigs that were eaten that first day, and would probably have to supply more pigs tomorrow. Someone attached to the *sa'o* will have them, Yoonsneem said, "just

³⁷ The numbers are uncertain because people came and went over the duration of the meeting.

³⁸ Their fifth sibling was en route from his home in Jakarta.

take them;”³⁹ people just need to be prepared for this possibility, and have the pigs on hand. It was raised that some *wailaki* may come bringing pigs on the day of the burial, but nobody knew how many to expect.

To recap: a sudden death put a strain on family resources. Within hours, a huge portion of the family wealth was redirected away from future plans, toward the immediate provision of food. The *sa’o*, whose membership was spread across several households, came together to negotiate how those costs would be shared. An underlying fact of the negotiation was that the lord of the house, Yoosneem, was prepared to seize anything he felt was required, particularly pigs. There was already a groundswell of community support, in the form of sacks of rice, other food and drink, and labor, focused on the preparation, service, and cleanup of food. I didn’t know it at the time, but Yoosneem was also the head of Memento Mori, which would take responsibility for some jobs and materials, such as the erection of the temporary awning in front of the house. There was an expectation that more support would arrive, particularly in the form of *wailaki* and the pigs they would supply, but nobody knew how many would come. Maria was the female elder of a named house, but she was not a noble, and she did not hold a title in her *woe* or in her village. We knew she was well-loved. Soon, when the pigs were brought and the envelopes slipped into the box that sat by her feet in the *sa’o*, we would find out how that love might be expressed.

The next day—the day after Maria’s death, and two days before her burial—two more pigs belonging to the *sa’o* were slaughtered. When Caroline went to feed our kitchen scraps to the pig behind our house, she found Bart’s sty empty. But *wailaki* were beginning to bring pigs of their own. Today, it was *wailaki* from the neighboring houses in Bogala. The next day, at the burial, *wailaki* from outside the village would come—though still, nobody knew how many to expect. One of Bart’s cousins walked around with a notebook, recording the incoming pigs: the name of the *wailaki* leader, the name of his *sa’o*, the size of the pig, and whether it was a new hoe or an old hoe. The notes meant that next time someone in another family died, someone from Molo Modhe could consult the book and see what sort of pig they needed to bring. They brought a pig of such-and-such size to us? We’ll bring one back to them. None of the new, incoming pigs were slaughtered that day. Rather they were held over, stashed temporarily in sties belonging to

³⁹ BI *tarik*. Just that word: “*tarik*,” he said, a complete sentence in itself.

Paulus or to Bart or his siblings, waiting to see how many guests would come on burial day, needing to be fed. *Wailaki* also brought rice, though this was not recorded. *Wailaki* that did not bring pigs brought “pocket pigs,” slipping their envelopes into the box inside the *sa’o*. This money was not counted until after the burial, and was recorded on a different page of the book.

On the morning of the third day, Caroline and I sat on rented chairs under the awning in front of the *sa’o*, watching *wailaki* arrive. The inside of the house rang with cries of grief and Hail Marys, recited in quick succession. As each group of mourners left the house, they were escorted to one or another of the houses around Bogala, to be fed. The kitchen area behind Molo Modhe was running full tilt, cranking out food, which was then delivered to those other houses to feed the guests. Caroline and I insisted we wanted to help. She joined the women in the kitchen, where she was set to stirring great cauldrons of rice with a bamboo paddle.⁴⁰ I got myself assigned to a group of young men, delivering baskets of cooked rice and steaming buckets of pig meat to other houses around the village. When we came to one of the houses that was supporting the day’s feasting, we went straight back to the kitchen, where we scooped individual servings into bowls for the guests.⁴¹ The food served in all those other houses was cooked in the mourning house. This continued until the food supply in that kitchen ran out, at which point supporting houses cooked their own food for any additional guests. For all the hundreds of guests who needed to be fed, and the dozens of pigs they brought with them as gifts of their *wailaki*, only five pigs were slaughtered that day.

Three days after she passed away, Maria was laid to rest in a grove of coffee trees on family land, in a tomb of concrete, glass, and tile constructed by Bart, his close friend Robby, and other friends and family members. A monk from the OCD monastery presided over the burial, which was somber and beautiful; prayers, hymns, and speeches, love and loss.

Some weeks later, Bart came over to my house to talk with me about the ways that pigs, money, and other resources circulated around this funeral. Not satisfied with using a notebook to record the gifts of visiting *wailaki*, Bart had compiled the information in an Excel spreadsheet,

⁴⁰ There were larger cauldrons that cooked 35kg of rice at a time, and smaller ones that cooked a mere 25kg.

⁴¹ The term for sharing out rice in this way is BN *kopi*, while the term for sharing out meat is BN *bhai*. This task, which is male, and stratified by age and experience, will be covered in more detail in chapter 9.

which he shared with me. Bart's spreadsheet recorded *sa'o* expenses, incoming gifts of cash, and the movements of 24 pigs. The first three were supplied by three of Maria's five children. These three animals, which were made available before any visiting *wailaki* had brought pigs, were killed, and fed to mourners. A fourth pig was purchased from a neighbor using money given by visiting mourners, and fifth was given by one of Maria's sons-in-law.

Three more pigs were supplied by Maria's siblings: two from her sisters, who lived in other nearby villages, and one from her brother Yoosneem. These three animals were killed and fed to mourners. Unlike the animals provided by Maria's children, who were members of Molo Modhe, the three pigs brought by her siblings were listed as 'new hoes,' indicating that they came from people who were outside of Maria's *sa'o*.⁴²

Sixteen more pigs were brought by visiting *wailaki*, consisting of eight 'new hoes' and eight 'old hoes'.⁴³ Of these sixteen, only two were killed. The remaining fourteen animals were redistributed, alive, among the members of Maria's family. All the members of the family who supplied pigs received replacements, or were paid for their pigs out of money received in envelopes, except for Yoosneem, who was the lord of Molo Modhe, and took extra responsibility. After the funeral, Bart's sties were full of pigs, including several belonging to his siblings, who gave him and Nora an ownership stake in the animals in exchange for looking after them. In place of the five pigs they supplied on the initial day, Maria's children now possessed fourteen.

Large amounts of cash also circulated around Maria's funeral, both in terms of initial outlays handled by the family, and in the envelopes that visitors slipped into the box by Maria's feet. The initial costs were split evenly between Maria's children; buying food, drink, renting chairs, and so on. Some of them could cover these out of pocket expenses, just as some had the necessary pigs on hand. Bart, in particular, could not; he told me that when he accompanied Maria down to the hospital on her final night, the only cash he had on hand was Rp 16,000 in small bills in his pocket—essentially lunch money, nothing more. He accepted a loan from a friend to cover his end. A page of Bart's spreadsheet was devoted to cash donations, notated as

⁴² It is unlikely that these "new hoes" were the first pigs exchanged between Molo Modhe and the houses of Maria's siblings. The first pigs were most likely exchanged when the siblings married.

⁴³ In two cases, the donor of a pig was marked as "deceased" (BI *almarhum*).

“envelopes.”⁴⁴ Bart recorded the receipt of 76 donations, plus an unknown number lumped together as “nameless,” containing a total of Rp. 30,083,000. After expenses, the family was left with a windfall of Rp. 9,367,000. Paulus wanted to divide the money among his children, but they told him to keep it.⁴⁵

In some other villages, all pigs brought to a funeral by *wailaki* would be killed, and the uneaten meat redistributed back to the guests. When I attended the funeral of an important man in Bomadha village, this was the case. The meat of dozens of pigs brought by *wailaki* was mixed with the meat of a buffalo provided by the man’s family, and then handed out to guests to take away.⁴⁶ In another nearby village, it was still the practice to redistribute pig meat in this way, even without the initial input of a buffalo.⁴⁷ In Bogala, however, about 15 years prior to my arrival, Memento Mori, the Catholic group charged with managing Bogala’s funerals, made the collective decision that families should kill only as many animals as were needed to feed the day’s guests, and keep the rest alive. If the leader of a *wailaki* requested it, the pig he brought could be killed, and the top half returned to him to share back in his home village. But this was rare. At Maria’s funeral, the family fed all comers, but there was no buffalo, and no redistribution of food to take home. So pigs that came in entered the practical calculations of the family, to feed guests, reimburse their initial expenditures, and redistribute amongst themselves in accordance with their ability to take on the work and expense of pig rearing.

Maria’s children were overwhelmed by the showing at her funerary events. Most funerals are not as widely attended as this one was. Usually after one or two days, Bart told me, the house is quiet, just family, the neighbors all gone home. Not this time. For the funeral mass,⁴⁸ they ordered 165 chairs, and still needed to raid all the neighbors’ houses for chairs as well. Bart was unsure as to why this should be. But, he said, we always involve ourselves in the ceremonies of others. We just go, see what needs doing, and help out. He believed that the unexpected

⁴⁴ BI *amplop*

⁴⁵ Maria’s oldest daughter inherited her mother’s place in several rotating savings groups (BI *arisan*).

⁴⁶ These redistributions, called BN *meghe*, are the subject of chapter 9.

⁴⁷ Apparently, whenever people from Bogala attended funerals in that village, they forgot to bring baskets to receive the meat, having given up the practice themselves; and so, to save face, rather than stick around and be caught unprepared, they always left without saying goodbye before the distribution took place.

⁴⁸ BI *ekaristi*

outpouring of donations, and the number of pigs received, was due to his mother Maria's assiduous attendance, during her lifetime, at the ceremonies of others.

Now, *sa'o* Molo Modhe was in exchange relationships with new houses, on the hook to send back 'old hoes' in acknowledgement of the 'new hoes' they had received. This was regarded not as an onerous and unlooked-for set of new obligations, but as a boon, a gift, and a blessing. The new pigs represented a range of exchange potentials. Depending on the timing, they could be sold, and the money used for health or education costs; they could be traded for piglets to fatten up, to enable the next round of *wailaki* pig exchanges; they could be called for should someone in another house or *woe* pass away, and the family feel that the gift of a pig was warranted; a higher-up in the clan could ask to borrow them, in support of a large ceremony, with the promise of a larger but unscheduled return; or the family could decide to initiate pig exchange with another house for the first time, as recognition of a lifetime of friendship and support, just as other houses had done at the death of Mama Maria.

Conclusion: Expanding the flow

Ngadha people manage social flow—the instability and contingency of alliance paths, and the relative shifts in status and hierarchy among individuals, houses, and *woe*—by means of material flow: exchange, illustrated well by the production and movement of pigs, the 'basis of life.' Pig exchange illustrates the way material flow produces social affiliation.

The movement of pigs represents a flow of resources that is constant, but of variable and unpredictable intensity. This flow is governed by social rules, but these rules are flexible. Social standing is built on the ability to manage these flows effectively, so as to reaffirm old ties within groups and between groups, while also creating new ties. And these flows are so intensive that they require recourse to a variety of strategies for accessing the right pig at the right time. Small pigs yield bigger pigs (at an unknown date); small gifts, of labor, rice, or care, yield bigger returns; new personal relationships evolve into new relations between *wailaki*.

Assiduous participation in the exchanges of others can result in material inflows, which provide the means to proliferate social ties. As pointed out in chapter 4, participation in the *wailaki* of others provides individuals with opportunities to improve their own social standing. By her frequent gifts, Maria positioned her house to benefit from a windfall of the chief medium for extending social ties, excess pigs.

Each pig in a family sty was the product of the labor and care of multiple people, possibly not including the animal's primary owners. Pigs could then be subject to multiple competing claims. Furthermore, the value of a pig changed over time as the animal grew. This value could be assessed differently in different arenas; for instance, a pig at its maximum size might be the most valuable in the marketplace, but might be difficult to offer as a gift, as it would inflate the size of the pig that must be offered in return. Due to the pressures of time, the demands of particular exchange relationships, and the potential for competing claims, who had access to an animal at a given moment was important. Managing these circulations—these inflows, outflows, and cycles of growth, all while attempting to enlarge one's exchange network at a measured and deliberate pace—was central to Ngadha social and economic life.

I close this chapter by bringing attention to one of the key metaphors in pig exchange: BN *madi*, the hoe. Hoes are not part of the 'flow of life' set of exchange goods that are considered essential for the reproduction of the human essences of blood and semen (Fox 1980: 12). But they are essential for the production of food. The loan of a hoe is a loan of the means to plant crops—to put a seed or a yam in the ground, where it will grow and proliferate, yielding more than was planted, growing and expanding a resource of basic, utilitarian value. Hoes are humble tools, but they are productive, and so too are pigs. The hoe and the pig both carry with them potentials for future increases in the production of the necessary elements of life: sustenance, and the social affiliations enabled by circulations of food. The movement of new and old hoes is not mere reciprocity, but a reproduction of the essences of material and social life (Weiner 1980: 73).

CHAPTER 7: Circulations of, and around, Ceremonial Goods

Because the structure and membership of houses, *woe*, and villages arise from patterns of repeated action—particularly the instigation of large gatherings and circulations of goods—Ngadha social life is largely concerned with the question of who can organize these gatherings and circulations, and under what circumstances. At the heart of this question is the issue of access to particular important objects. These objects are more durable than the span of a human lifetime. They are difficult or expensive to produce or procure. They are not owned, so much as they are held in trust. And those who possess or control such objects can use the fact of that possession to maintain and enhance their place in their house, *woe*, or village. These objects provide nodes for the organization of collective, cooperative action, a key element of the production and reproduction of group affiliation. Material objects provide pretexts for calling groups together, on a repeated basis, to perform defined activities at the direction of a legitimate organizer. Like a hoe, a tool for growing food, a treasure or a monument provides the means for producing mass action, which in turn produces the social groups that create and maintain these objects; they causally constitute social attachment (Tusinski 2016: 18). Because Ngadha social groups frequently change their composition, as people weave in and out of houses, *woe*, and villages, the ability to constitute and reconstitute the group through cooperative ritual action is essential. This affordance is central to the value of these objects (Keane 2014: 7).

A non-exhaustive list of these objects would include the *sa'o* itself, and the *fī'i* inside it; the *loka* complex, graves, and house-specific field altars;¹ the public monuments of *woe* segments, such as *pe'o*, *ngadhu*, and *bhaga*; and house treasures, such as gold chains² or pendants,³ swords and spears,⁴ and certain textiles. The circulations of people and resources around those objects, the circulations of the objects themselves, and questions of legitimate access to social affordances they provided are central to the production of both social affiliation and differentiation. *Ngadhu*, and some of the other objects described in this chapter, map closely

¹ Described with the slightly generic BN terms *ture* and *lanu*

² BN *loda wea*

³ BN *taka* and *bela*

⁴ BN *sau* and BN *gala*

onto the term “goods,” as described by Gregory: “sacred property,” inalienable from the social group whose borders it symbolizes and helps to define, bound to the memory of ancestors, and of the foundational acts committed by them. These goods begin their lives as ordinary objects, or even as commodities, but acquire value by submitting to a culturally specific notion of scarcity. “Ideally, a good is a priceless non-commodity whose value as a good is to be explained with reference to historically specific relations of consanguinity.” These objects are not subject to ownership by individuals, but may be “under the control of trusted guardians,” who may not dispose of them as they wish—for example, by selling them for personal profit—but are charged with the responsibility of protecting them for future generations (Gregory 1997: 73-75).

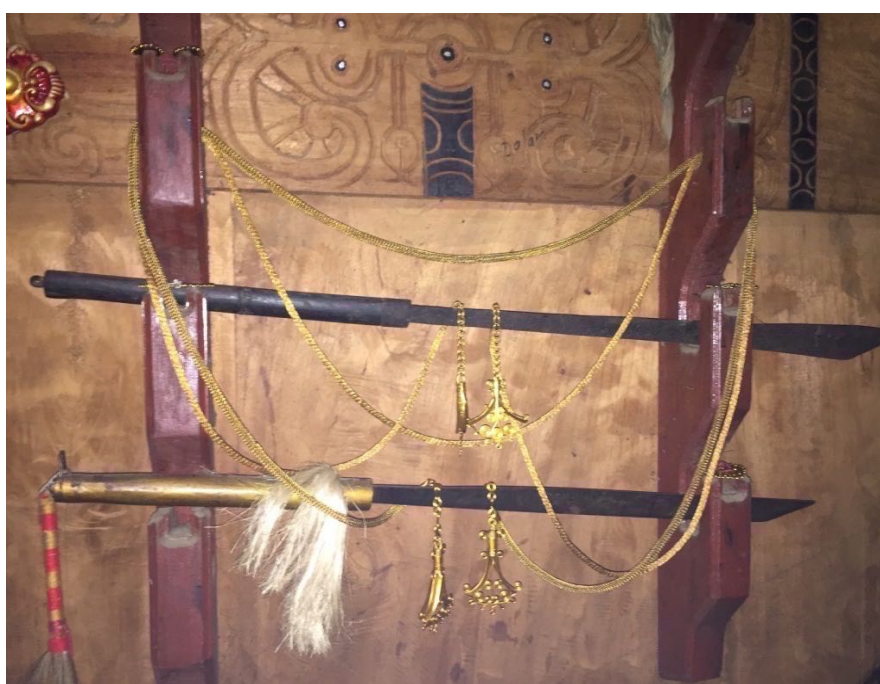


Plate 52 Swords and golden heirloom objects on display in a *sa'o*.

The “guardianship” concept comes up often in the anthropological literature of the societies of Flores, frequently in connection to land. Among Keo people, clan-held lands are subject to collective ownership overseen by guardians, who deal with issues of distribution and access among clan members (Tule 2004: 65). Ancestral heirlooms, such as textiles or gold, are “held,” not “owned” (Tule 2004: 192). Among Lio people, heirloom property belongs to the house, rather than to any particular member, but is in the custody of the house leader (Howell 1989: 427). Among Nage people, land guardianship is primarily a ritual or religious status, but that status is inseparable from other, more mundane forms of authority. Land guardians

sometimes leverage that status to seize lands from other families within the *woe* without payment; Forth argues that this is “an expression of power rather than entitlement” (Forth 2004: 127). Among Sikka people, durable objects with links to the ancestors are heirloom property, and are subject to guardianship rather than ownership; the value of these objects “is determined by their constant exchange between affinally related groups and circulation in the marriage exchange network” (Lewis 2010: 139-140). Inheritance and marriage alliance paths determine the routes by which these goods circulate, and the specific individuals between whom their guardianship passes. The circulation of these objects makes up the material substance of the “flow of life.” But not all goods follow such smooth courses; and the establishment or transferral of guardianship can be rocky. The circulations of guardianship play an important part in the production of Ngadha forms of social affiliation and differentiation.

The *ngadhu* post

Ngadhu—carved wooden posts, topped with a conical roof and miniature arms brandishing weapons—stand in the plazas of every Ngadha village. These are public, visually prominent objects, which feature in spectacular rituals, and (perhaps as a result) they have received a great deal of attention from anthropologists, going back to Arndt, who declared them “the most interesting and important cultic objects in the village” (Arndt 2007: 6). Not coincidentally, *ngadhu* are coded as male, and so fall into the main realm of knowledge of the male ritual specialists who tend to talk to anthropologists. Many of my male interlocutors were eager to talk to me in particular about the work and ceremony surrounding the establishment of *ngadhu* posts. I learned much less about *bhaga*, the female-coded miniature houses that are the counterparts to *ngadhu*. This may be because so little of my information concerning ritual practice came from women. The prominence of *ngadhu* in this chapter is not meant to suggest that these monuments necessarily have a greater prominence in Ngadha life or thought than *bhaga* do; only that my data collection methods produced a clear bias towards information about *ngadhu*. I also want to avoid repeating arguments that have been made elsewhere about *ngadhu* and their symbolic or spiritual meaning (e.g. Arndt 2007, Schröter 2005, Molnar 2000). *Ngadhu* are complex, polysemic objects. I wish to interrogate *ngadhu* as one example of a class of objects that affords a particular opportunity to produce and reproduce authority, and the formation of group identity, through collective and repeatable action. I want to stress the value that resides not

in the object itself, but in the affordances the object provides, as a material pretext for repeatedly gathering groups of people and directing their actions toward a collective goal.



Plate 53 Volleyball by the *ngadhu*, Bogala.

As described in chapter 5, a *ngadhu* is part of an assemblage of objects in the plaza of a village, produced and maintained by the two branches of a *woe* segment. The type of tree used for *ngadhu* posts is called BN *hebu*.⁵ Another term, which was frequently used to refer to the tree and its wood, was BN *kaju pemali*, or “taboo/forbidden wood,” indicating its special status. Each *ngadhu* is made from the trunk of a single *hebu* tree, with a three-pronged root buried underground, and a Y-shaped fork at the top. It is carved in the likeness of a male ancestor of the *woe*, whose name is given to the post. The *ngadhu* is topped with a round roof of grass, which is adorned on its crown with two tiny arms bearing weapons. *Hebu* wood is extremely resistant to

⁵ According to Forth (1998: 599), *hebu* is *Cassia fistula*, though I never saw one myself, and cannot confirm the identification. The H in *hebu*, as in many Ngadha words, is pronounced deep in the throat, similar to the CH in “challah.” Today, this sound is interpreted as an H pronounced with a thick Ngadha accent. Arndt (1961), however, treated this sound as its own phoneme; in his orthography, the name of the tree is rendered as *xebu*.

rot and insect damage; once built, a *ngadhu* can last for a century or more (Smedal 2002: 496). The roof, however, must be replaced periodically, as the grass weathers and wears away.

Like the construction of a *sa'o*, the erection of a *ngadhu* proceeds in phases. The activities of locating the tree, felling and transporting it, carving it, and erecting it may be separated by years of preparation and delay.⁶ These phases, which will be described later in this chapter, require the participation of more than just the patron and a handful of workers and artisans. Like a *wailaki*, the erection of a *ngadhu* post should be attended by the broadest possible assemblage of *woe* members. Feeding those people, and fueling their participation, is a significant cost on top of the procurement of materials and skilled labor. These costs, and the difficulty of assembling the largest possible group, are a significant brake on *ngadhu* production. They lend the *ngadhu* an additional representational value, as a symbol of the wealth, size, cohesion, and organization of the group that produced it. Occasionally I saw *ngadhu* that had fallen into disrepair, their roofs battered nearly away by sun and rain. Some *ngadhu* could even be abandoned, like the *ngadhu* of *woe* Kutu in old Bogala, described in chapter 5, which had no roof at all, and had lost its carvings entirely. Just as the renewal and maintenance of a post can indicate the strength and unity of the group that attends to it, such a post, forlorn and decrepit, reflects damage to the social group, and its failure or inability to remediate that damage. In either case, as markers of ascendancy or of decay, sacrificial posts stand as “material symbols of group identity” (Molnar 2000: 182).

Each *ngadhu* carries the name of an original male ancestor of the *woe* branch responsible for erecting and maintaining it. These ancestors are not the same as the original ancestors of the *woe*. Their names are public knowledge, unlike the “secret” ancestors of each *woe*. They are also not the same ancestors as the founders of the village, as it was the village founders themselves who likely erected those *ngadhu*, and named them after someone several generations removed from themselves. These male *ngadhu* are matched by *bhaga*, which carry the names of their wives, original female ancestors of the *woe* segment.

Not all *ngadhu* are the same. The artistic style of the carvings, particularly the faces, had at least two extremely different forms. On every *ngadhu* of recent vintage that I saw, the face of the male ancestor was oval-shaped, with realistic, if simplified, features. On other, presumably

⁶ For a complete description of *ngadhu* construction in Foa, see Ngewi 2014.

older, *ngadhu*, faces were often enlarged, distended, or distorted.⁷ Many *ngadhu* are inlaid with various materials, which have undergone various rounds of substitutions; seashells and metal ingots, replaced with Chinese trade porcelain, itself later replaced by ceramic tiles. Each of these materials represents the material it substituted, ultimately standing for gold, all of which share the property of “never fading.” Many old *ngadhu* are scarred by divots where golden ingots are thought to have been pried out by thieves. Today, *ngadhu* carvings are decorated with red, black, gold, and silver paint, and given a layer of stain or varnish. Some *ngadhu* are not carved at all, as their *woe* use living trees instead of posts.



Plate 54 A *ngadhu* with abstracted features and filed teeth.



Plate 55 A *ngadhu* with seashell inlays.

⁷ I implore some future researcher to undertake a systematic review of *ngadhu* posts, to record their topogenies, and interpret their art-historical content. I suspect that less realistic carving styles are older, but I have no evidence for this.



Plate 56 A *ngadhu* with porcelain inlays.



Plate 57 A *ngadhu* with modern ceramic inlays.



Plate 58 A new *ngadhu* ready for installation, Eko Hetu village, Rara Ele.

In addition to its material properties, a *ngadhu* can be considered either to “be” the ancestor himself; to contain the ancestor’s spirit within its wooden material; or to represent the man or his spirit. As Arndt wrote, “among the Ngadha the sacrificial pillar is not only a monument for, and mind image of, the ancestors and forebears to whom it is consecrated, but it is the ancestor himself in person.” (Arndt 1958: 109 in Smedal 2009: 293 footnote 20). Ngadha people, discussing *ngadhu*, frequently mixed together concepts of the post as a spirit; the abode of a spirit; a symbol of a specific male ancestor; a symbol of a group; and a medium for communication with ancestors and gods (Eko 2015: 40). These elements cannot be teased apart from each other, and it is best to accept that these posts can be both complex beings endowed with agency, and material symbols simultaneously. Howell argues, in the context of Lio people, for an expansive view of “society” that permits for the possibility of a hybrid consideration of people as things and things as people, or for an allowance that things may be elevated to the level of people, rather than people demoted to the level of things (Howell 1989: 422). *Ngadhu*, as both spirit and symbol, fall into this area of categorical difficulty, which might appear to be a problem only to people who, like myself, are coming from a non-Ngadha conceptual background (Strathern 1985, Keane 2003). Ontological issues concerning *ngadhu* posts are beyond the scope of this chapter. Whatever their nature, *ngadhu* were everyday presences in the village square, and did not have a rarefied or exalted status. Children hid and played among them. Volleyballs bounced off their conical roofs. And I was permitted, without hesitation, to approach, touch, sketch, and photograph them.

Ngadhu are stages for the ritual slaughter of buffalo, which is why they are sometimes called “sacrificial posts” or “sacrificial poles” (e.g. Curnow 2007: 61; Smedal 2011: 293⁸). Ritual buffalo slaughter is performed only at *ngadhu* posts (Smedal 2009: 280). When a buffalo is led to the post for slaughter, the rope that runs from its nose is passed through the fork at the top of the *ngadhu*, and tied to the *pe’o*, as if it were the *ngadhu* itself that held the rope in its up-stretched hands. Yan Mopa suggested that the person who delivers the fatal blow is, in some sense, an embodiment or representation of the spirit in the post, who is holding the rope in his

⁸ The “sacrificial post” is also a fixture of villages in Keo (Tule 2004), Nage (Forth 1998a), and So’a.

hands.⁹ Before the killing blow is struck, several men pull the rope taut, forcing the buffalo to raise up its head and expose its throat in the direction of the *ngadhu*; and so, after the blow is delivered, the blood of the buffalo—the most valuable type of blood, more than the blood of chickens or pigs—sprays from the wound in its neck directly onto the post. Men then smear the blood all over the *ngadhu*, daubing it into every nook and cranny of the post.

Ngadhu feel ubiquitous, but they are actually scarce; they can be built only under very specific circumstances, when a *woe* segment establishes itself in a village. This severely limits the proliferation of *ngadhu*. Just because there is a *ngadhu* in the village plaza does not mean that just anyone can sacrifice a buffalo there; access to *ngadhu*, and the value production that *ngadhu* enable, is also strictly limited. The ways people define these limits, police them, assert them, and transgress them, outline the competitive struggle for access not just to particular objects, but to the means of value production—the affordance offered by these objects, to produce social gatherings under the direction of an organizer. By the same token, those who have access to these objects, but fail to utilize them properly, can fail to reproduce their privileged access, and lose their legitimate standing. This potential suggests that one real value of social standing is access to goods, which constitute the means of value production; and one real social value of objects is the ability they grant their guardians to justify and reproduce their affiliations and authorities. Pre-existing social value flows onwards, enabling its own reproduction.

Ngadhu fit Gregory's description of "goods" neatly. They are pieces of timber, transformed through the application of specific artistic conventions into complex symbols of ancestors and the (more or less) consanguineous groups—the *woe*—that descended from them. The installation and maintenance of these symbols are entrusted to guardians—the tip riders—who do not own them, but are charged with utilizing their power to bring the community together, and transferring guardianship of them safely to the next generation. Unlike many goods held by people around Flores, the value of which "is determined by their constant exchange between affinally related groups and circulation in the marriage exchange network" (Lewis 2010:

⁹ In theory, the person who delivered the killing blow was the trunk rider or tip rider of the *woe* segment that maintained the *ngadhu*, or the *mori dhoru bo* of the village. In practice, these figures usually made a ceremonial wave of the blade towards the animal, then stepped back and let someone else deliver the blow—in which case, the killer stands in for the leader who stands in for the ancestral spirit. Only men who had reached maturity and had children were eligible to slaughter buffalo. Some men told me that the right to kill buffalo was granted to them by ancestors who appeared in their dreams.

140), *ngadhu* are not part of marriage exchange. To my knowledge, they are not exchanged at all. For instance, I never heard of a *ngadhu* being bought or sold—although old *ngadhu* did get replaced, and it was not clear what happened to the original posts. Given how many heirloom objects have ceased to be “inalienable” (Weiner 1992: 6) and have entered the art market, I can’t exclude the possibility that they were sold. Guardianship of *ngadhu* is supposed to pass from father to son, retaining the role, and the title of “tip rider,” within a single house. This orderly passage of guardianship cannot be taken for granted. Guardians who fail to enact their guardianship can see their roles, and their access to the good with which they are charged, pass away from them.

Becoming guardians and enacting guardianship

One day, Yoosneem took me to a *loka* outside the village of Eko Heto to witness the carving of a new *ngadhu* post, a multi-day project called BN *rika wiku ne’e dari wai*, “to carve from shoulder to foot.”¹⁰ The *loka* was a hive of activity. Men and boys were playing drum and gong music in short bursts and rotating in and out of the ensemble. Women cooked on fires among the arenga palms, while men twisted black fiber from the trees into lengths of twine, which would be used to lash together the platform on which the *ngadhu* would be carried into Eko Heto. And beside the *loka lanu*, four men with mallets and chisels were chipping away at a large wooden post.



Plate 59 Carving the new *ngadhu* outside Eko Heto village, Rara Ele.

¹⁰ Compare with BN *rika ngia ne’e weko logo* (carve face and back), which describes the carving of a traditional house.



Plate 60 The *wuli* necklace made from seashells and rattan, and patola cloth.

The unfinished *ngadhu* lay across a pair of sawhorses, under a tarpaulin sunshade. At each end of the recumbent post, slender staves of bamboo had been driven into the ground, and adorned with heirloom objects: an antique Indian trade cloth called a patola,¹¹ and a necklace called BN *wuli*, made from rattan cords decorated with large seashells. At the base of each staff was a live rooster tied with a string by one ankle, and a pair of unsplit coconuts. The staff by the base of the pole held objects and offerings from the trunk rider branch of the *woe* segment, and the staff at the tip of the pole held objects and offerings from the tip rider branch of the *woe* segment. The *wuli* and other heirlooms on display had been “fed” with chicken blood when they were removed from their storage baskets, and the dark daubs of blood were clearly visible. In addition to the two staves, a third pole flew a small Indonesian flag.¹²

¹¹ A common object in treasuries around eastern Indonesia. See e.g. Hamilton 1994: 31; Forth 1998a: 67-8; Lewis 2010: 198-9; Tule 2004: 192; Barnes 1996: 136; Ellen 2003: 133; Elmberg 1968: 126.

¹² At the base of the trunk rider staff, a ceremonial sword (BN *sau*) was stuck into the ground; at the base of the tip rider staff, instead of a sword, there was a spear (BN *gala*). The patola cloth on the trunk rider staff appeared to be a real old Indian trade cloth, not ikat-patterned, but printed or mordant-painted; it had been divided lengthwise at some point, and only one part of it was present. The patola cloth on the tip rider staff appeared to be a brand new, store-bought *batik* printed cloth, such as could be purchased for a few dollars anywhere around Bajawa, or indeed around

The image on the trunk was a roughly life-sized representation of a man, with an oval face, a mustache, and a whiskery beard. Around his neck, the carved figure wore a *wuli* necklace and a looping golden chain.¹³ He wore a three-panel sarong,¹⁴ though the vegetal motifs of the woodcarving bore no resemblance to the motifs on Ngadha textiles, which tend to depict horses, elephants,¹⁵ or simple geometric patterns (Hamilton 1994: 106-7). The three panels of the sarong were separated by horizontal strips inlaid with disks of white ceramic, cut from square bathroom tiles. These disks of ceramic tile were substitutes for disks of Chinese trade porcelain, themselves substitutes for ingots of gold or other yellow metal, or for seashells like the ones used on the *wuli* necklaces. The name of the new *ngadhu* was Grandfather¹⁶ Su'a. The master roughed out each motif freehand with his own chisel,¹⁷ then moved on, allowing the other carvers to step in and finish the work. He told me that masters, such as himself, called BN *lima pade* or “skilled hands,” always carve without drawings; and while Ngadha woodcarvers generally draw on a limited range of motifs (Smedal 2000; Eko 2015), the manner in which he should arrange those patterns on this particular post was delivered to him in a dream.

A simple barrier fence of twine marked off a perimeter of three or four meters around the post. This line indicated a safe distance for women and girls to keep away from the unfinished *ngadhu*. The reason for this distance was that the post contained a powerful spirit, who was, as yet, unrestrained by the rituals that would accompany the post's planting in the village square. This unbridled spirit was baldly, aggressively masculine, and liable to force itself sexually on any women who came too close—a story I heard on several occasions (Smedal 2009: 287; Arndt 2007: 11).

Indonesia. Its dominant color was red, the tip rider himself assured me that this quality made it suitable for the purpose.

¹³ BN *loda wea*

¹⁴ BN *nai telu*

¹⁵ Horse (BN *jara*) and elephant (BN *gaja* or *nggaja*) motifs look identical, only the elephants are larger. It is contested whether they refer to elephants at all; the BN term *gaja*, which is cognate with BI *gajah* or “elephant,” may simply mean something “superlative or extraordinary” (Smedal pers comm in Hamilton 1994: 107).

¹⁶ BN *Ebu*

¹⁷ In addition to the chisels, the men used markers, pencils, glue, a handsaw, and a power drill to work the *ngadhu*; they sharpened their chisels with a power sander. I can't remember if the power tools were battery-operated or connected to a generator.

Yoosneem and I sat on the porch of the *loka*, and shared in the meal given to the carvers and other workers at the *loka*.¹⁸ During the days of carving, the organizers were responsible for providing food for everyone contributing to the preparation of the *ngadhu*, such as the men winding twine, the musicians, and the women in the back of the *loka*, who performed the work of cooking and cleaning.¹⁹ After we ate, I (but not Yoosneem) was invited into the *loka* itself. Inside were three men: the trunk and tip riders of the *woe* this *ngadhu* would represent, who would ride this *ngadhu* into their village, and the *mori dhorō bo toka boa* of Eko Hetō. The trunk and tip riders ate a different meal than the one offered to the people working on the site.²⁰ They stressed that they could not eat the food that they, as organizers, were providing to the men and women working outside the *loka*. They also would eat no part of the buffaloes they planned to sacrifice when the new *ngadhu* was planted. I asked if the buffaloes had already been procured, and they said yes, they had bought them from Boawae, in the neighboring regency of Nagekeo. I asked where the animals were, but they said it was a secret.

The trunk and tip riders had inherited their positions as heads of their *woe* branches, and also their titles. These titles are named for an action—the action of riding (BN *saka*) atop a new *ngadhu* when it is carried into the village to be planted. These men had never performed this action before. Indeed, most people never got the opportunity to ride a *ngadhu*, without founding a new *woe* segment. By inheriting their titles, these men had inherited the opportunity to ride a *ngadhu*; it was up to them to actually create an opportunity to do so. If they didn't, they could lose their titles altogether, as in the *woe* described in chapter 4, where the title of trunk rider passed to another house, and the title of tip rider was muddled and unclear. By renewing their *ngadhu*, the trunk and tip riders had created for themselves an opportunity to assert their claims to titles they had merely inherited.

In addition to renewing their inherited titles, these men were taking the opportunity to display house wealth objects of which they were the guardians. As Forth argues, these articles legitimate themselves: wealth that endures in one house long enough to be inherited “is by

¹⁸ Dry field rice (BN *maki wolo*), pumpkin shoots stewed with chicken, and palm wine.

¹⁹ It's an aspect of the gender-imbalance of my data in this context that I don't know who those women were. At ceremonies, I was invited to sit with the men. Most of what I saw and heard was what they showed and told me.

²⁰ Chicken and pork, red dry-field rice cooked in bamboo tubes, and no vegetables.

definition considered fully legitimate” (Forth 1998: 277). A person’s possession of such objects is, in itself, evidence of the legitimacy of that person to possess them.

Right of inheritance, however, does not ensure that the role of guardianship of such a good will pass to its inheritor. It is possible for inheritance to fail. There was a common myth, recounted to me in several versions, of a man who didn’t like his children, and so hid his treasures in a cave, preventing his sons from inheriting them. After his death, and the subsequent death of the offending children, the ancestor appeared to a descendant in a dream, telling him where to find the hidden treasure, thus reestablishing the chain of inheritance. Tomas told the story to me and Caroline as we walked from Lopijo down towards the coast, pointing out a cave on an inaccessible cliff face, and claiming such a treasure was hidden there. Yoosneem told the story as well, though he personally doubted that this sort of thing had ever actually happened. The moral of the story, in his view, was to persuade children to honor their parents, lest they find themselves disinherited. At the same time, the story points to the self-legitimizing nature of guardianship. If someone possesses the wealth objects held by their forebears, it must be because they deserve to. By the same token, a loss of these objects is a sign of spiritual disfavor or moral failure. Moral failure could cause goods to flow away from their inheritors, or could lead to the destruction of the goods themselves. Tule writes of a house in Keo that burned down with sacred paraphernalia inside, which the title-holder was unable to rebuild—and so the paraphernalia were “restored” in another house. This transfer of objects, and the titles that go with access to those objects, to a different house represented a failure of the “duty” of guardianship (Tule 2004: 104).

The men in the *loka* that day, presiding over the carving of their new *ngadhu*, had successfully inherited, with their titles and their heirloom goods, one form of legitimate access to the *ngadhu* and the value creation it afforded. But to enact their guardianship, they also needed economic access; the money and resources that draw people together, attracting and fueling their participation. As among Nage people, the maintenance of an inherited social position in Ngadhaland depends on the level of ritual activity a person is able to maintain (Forth 1998: 277); without wealth, a leader cannot sacrifice, and thus cannot lead (Forth 1998: 282).

The installation of a *ngadhu* is expensive. By the time the raw trunk reaches the organizer’s village, it has already been the focus of a large number of events.²¹ The organizer has

²¹ For a complete description of the events surrounding the creation and installation of a *ngadhu*, see Ngewi (2014).

sponsored numerous meetings, and numerous divinations, each requiring the provision of live animals and other food. He²² has marshaled a number of people together to harvest and transport the tree. He has marshaled the resources to perform the necessary rituals, mostly in the form of animals, but also of rice and other food, much of which will be paid for in cash. He has supplied this food to the gathered group of people, in order to provide the energy to fuel their collective labor. If trucks were used to transport the tree, access to these trucks would have to be arranged through cash rental or donation of time by a truck owner, and the necessary fuel paid for. These resources may have come from his own pocket, but he may also have had to draw on the resources of his extended network, for instance through borrowing, a topic that will be addressed further in chapter 8. It was not unusual for the organizer's resources, in cash, kind, and recourse to the labor and other resources of his network, to be seriously depleted, and the trunk still uncarved and unplanted. In that case, it might go unused for years. Even with these delays, the establishment of the new *ngadhu* post is still considered to be "in process." Should the original organizer pass away during that time, the process, like the finished object, becomes the responsibility of a new generation, providing a common and unifying purpose to the house and its network across a broader span of time. The monument-in-progress is as much a part of life as the house, *woe*, or village-in-progress. And because even a finished *ngadhu* must still be renewed, with the periodic replacement of its roof, or its eventual demolition and replacement, it is possible to view a *ngadhu* at any point in its existence as an instantiation of an ongoing process—and the good that is inherited, not as the material object itself, but as the processes that surround it, larger than any individual guardian, flowing on, ideally, without end.

When everyday objects are transformed into ceremonial goods, the people in possession of them are themselves transformed, becoming the guardians of those objects. The transformation of things into goods requires the intercession of spiritual beings, and so guardians of those goods are understood to carry the sanction and support of those beings. This confers a power on guardians, who, through their association with the goods they possess, can infer that they are themselves supported by spiritual beings.

²² I must emphasize again the rather extreme male-ness of my data.

One day, Bart's father Paulus told me a story. A few years earlier, he was collecting wood to use for the reconstruction of his *sa'o*, Molo Modhe. He had found an appropriate tree growing in a hot lowland forest. He wouldn't say where—the strong implication was that he took the wood illegally, from a protected area. He lacked legal permission to take the wood, but he was careful to conduct all the proper ceremonies, including one, before cutting, that ensured that the tree would be solid and not filled with holes, and another, after the tree was felled, called BN *gebhe pu'u*, or “close the trunk,” which secured permission from the spirits of the land²³ to remove the tree. The closure is summed up in the couplet:

<i>Gubhu wi mu</i>	Cover over for warmth
<i>Gebhe wi melé</i>	Close up for completeness ²⁴

He loaded the wood into a truck and started driving it back to Bogala, but was pulled over by the police, who threatened to confiscate the wood. But once *gebhe pu'u* has been performed, Paulus said, interfering with the progress of the wood can be spiritually dangerous. Paulus told the police that he had already done *gebhe pu'u*. “So take the wood,” he told them. “It's your risk.” The policemen thought this over. Then they let him, and his wood, go free.

In other words, when Paulus obtained permission from invisible forces to cut this wood, transforming it from a commodity to a ceremonial good, Paulus, too, was transformed, from the dubious owner of some timber planks to the guardian of *sa'o* heirloom property. When the police submitted to the power of the spirits who had condoned the taking of this timber, they were also submitting to Paulus, whose actions carried the spirits' imprimatur. In effect, his guardianship of this wood granted Paulus temporary contingent power over the police. This story has served his prestige ever since.

The spiritual support that transforms objects into goods, and people into guardians, cannot be taken for granted. While successful rituals confirm the support of spirits and ancestors, failures of ritual or divination can put this power in doubt—and with it, cast doubt on the transformation of the person who possesses those objects into a guardian. In one case, I attended a ceremony to install two new sets of *fi'i riti more gili* inside a *sa'o*.²⁵ I watched alongside the

²³ BN *mori watu mori tana*

²⁴ BI *tutup supaya hangat // tutup supaya baik/berkecukupan*

²⁵ This ceremony was called BN *nulu neku* or BN *tege ngani* or BN *pegi fi'i*.

heads of the family and the various visiting *wailaki* as the lord of the house attempted to secure the approval of the ancestors for the day's event by spinning a coconut, a form of divination called BN *kili mata nio*.²⁶ He uttered some ritual speech, and spun the coconut. It came to rest pointing the wrong direction, towards the door, instead of towards the *mataraga*. Something wasn't right. A murmur went around the room. The lord of the house picked up the coconut again, and spoke to it quietly, then spun it a second time. Again, it settled pointing in the wrong direction. The lord of the house picked up the coconut for a third time. He held it close to his lips, and spoke to it for a few, long moments, negotiating with the invisible ancestors. The *sa'o* remained quiet. This time, when he set the coconut down to spin it, the tension was palpable. A cry of relief went up as the coconut came to rest, pointing in the proper direction. The tension was lifted once the legitimacy of the new *fi'i* and of their guardian was established, and the ceremony continued.



Plate 61 The new *fi'i*.

The potential for sudden, temporary status transformations, such as from normal person to guardian and back again, seem to underlie all aspects of Ngadha ritual life. It is a three-way relationship, between a subject, like Paulus, the man spinning the coconut, or the tip and trunk riders of Eko Hetu; an object, like the planks of wood, the new *fi'i*, or the new *ngadhu*; and outside observers and supporters who judge the legitimacy of the subject, the object, and the

²⁶ "Spin the eye of the coconut," referring to its stem.

relationship between them. Those who choose to acknowledge the relations between goods and their guardians, who accept the spiritual, familial, and economic claims of the people who hope to be recognized as guardians, may then partake in the group-making opportunities afforded by those objects.

Producing monuments, producing social groups

The pageantry and expense of erecting monuments such as a *ngadhu* post serve more than the interests of narrow elites bent on maintaining their precarious social positions. The circulations of labor and resources extend to entire communities, tying people together, and providing a basis for claims of affiliation.

According to Ngewi (2014), participation in the collective labor of *ngadhu* building was a central element in the making of a *woe* and a village.²⁷ Merely accepting food at the feast was not enough to establish one's place in the group; "young and old, men and women, widows and widowers join together and give their energy²⁸ to produce such a ceremony." Producing a *ngadhu* requires "solidarity, unanimity of will from all members of the *woe*²⁹ to take part, and the provision of money and resources"³⁰ (Ngewi 2014: 50). Participation in *ngadhu* building can play the same role as bridewealth payments, cementing the ties of people who marry in to the *woe* (Ngewi 2014: 50-51). Like BN *kaju ranga* or "firewood and pig feed," the shorthand for the economic contribution of a man to the house into which he marries, participation in *ngadhu* building shows another way that labor can effect group affiliation.

²⁷ Ngewi was writing about his home village of Warupele I in Foa, on the southern slope of Mt. Inerie.

²⁸ BI *tenaga*

²⁹ Ngewi here used the word BI *suku*, normally translated into English as "ethnic group."

³⁰ BI *kekompakan, kebulatan tekad, dana dan harta benda*. Unfortunately, I found this same phrase, word for word, plagiarized without attribution in another thesis, written the following year. It makes me sadly question whether Ngewi was the originator of the phrase, or if he plagiarized it from someone as well.



Plate 62 Shifting a new *ngadhu* into place, Eko Hetu village, Rara Ele.

Ordinary people involved in a project like the erection of a *ngadhu* can also end up spending quite a lot of money. The erection of a *ngadhu*, for example, is expensive not only for the organizers, but also for other houses in the *woe* segment, who contribute money and animals, and for other houses in the village, who support the days of ritual and celebration by putting on feasts of their own, called BN *vai* (or *wai*) *tua* (Curnow 2007: 75), for the members of visiting *wailaki*. In this way, the event provides similar affordances to the non-elites of the community that a *wailaki* does for its non-elite participants: the opportunity to build independent social and exchange networks. Because of the mass applications of labor and resources that go into its creation, a *ngadhu* serves as a sign of the acts that produce it: the labor, the sacrifices, the performances, the expenditures. Its physical presence in the village plaza constitutes a “qualisign” (Munn 1986: 17), a mark upon social space, indicating that a group of people with sufficient numbers and means have been active in that space; good maintenance indicates that the group of people charged with caring for the object remains active.

While participation in *ngadhu*-centered activities is a path into group membership, it is also possible for factions to attempt to exclude one another from group membership, by controlling access to the *ngadhu*. I did not witness any moments when access to a *ngadhu* was contested, but Curnow (2007: 94-97) recounted such an event. One day, she was invited to join a

wailaki of men and women going to repair a *ngadhu* post for their *woe* segment, which stood in another village. She joined, though she noted with some surprise that most of her neighbors, who belonged to the same *woe*, decided to stay home. When the *wailaki* arrived in the village where the *ngadhu* stood, the inhabitants, far from welcoming them with music and feasting, blocked access to the *ngadhu*, and attempted to drive them off with insults and abuse. The incoming *wailaki* threatened the locals with machetes, forced their way to the *ngadhu*, and began repairing its roof. Attempts to defuse the situation ultimately failed. That evening, violence erupted between the visiting *wailaki* and the villagers, resulting in the death of one man and the hospitalization of several others.

Curnow later learned the details of the dispute. The *wailaki* she joined was made up of families who had left their *nua*, though without separating from their *woe* segment. Leaders from the old village then denied their departed relatives access to *woe* lands. A judge in Bajawa ordered the *woe* leaders to relent, but they refused to recognize the court's decision. The "expatriate" members of the *woe* (to use Curnow's term) chose to assert their membership in the *woe* by contributing their collective labor to the repair of the *ngadhu*, advancing their claims to rights, by taking on responsibilities. The *ngadhu* in this situation was more than a symbol of the group. It was the means for enacting affiliation. Group membership, with all of its rights and responsibilities, belonged to those people with permission to act upon the *ngadhu*. The *ngadhu* was the means by which the action of a group of people translated into their affiliation with one another. In that sense, the *ngadhu* does more than symbolize the group: it is the means of group formation.

Ngadhu posts and *fi'i* carry the names of ancestors long dead; before a name is assigned to an object, the person, all their siblings, and all of their children should already have passed away. *Ngadhu* carry their names permanently, but *fi'i* and headstones may not be permanently attached to the initial names they are given. In houses with complete sets of *fi'i*, the names assigned to the pairs of staves are the names of the previous six generations of ancestors. When another set of ancestors meets the criteria for the use of their names, their names are applied to the smallest pair of *fi'i* staves. This pushes the names of their parents one space towards the center, which pushes the names of their parents one space towards the center; and so on, until the

names of the oldest pair of ancestors, six generations back, are bumped from the *fi'i* entirely. This cycling of names across the objects—and the fact that neither *fi'i* nor *ngadhu* are named after the people who created or installed them—further emphasizes that these goods are not “biographical objects,” immutably associated with particular ancestors (Hoskins 1998).

People often looked at objects, from *ngadhu* or *sa'o* to smaller things, and reflected upon the agents, acts, and conditions that caused those objects to be present. Perhaps most frequently, people pointed out the jawbones of pigs and buffalo horns, remnants of past sacrifices, displayed on the front porches of *sa'o* buildings. These remnants could inspire either joy or resentment. In both cases, the people experiencing those emotions were drawing a line from past acts and the agency of past actors, to the conditions under which people were acting in the present. Past sacrifices could be interpreted as having established social standing and secured prosperity, or, alternatively, as having robbed the current generation of the means to pay the bills for health and education. The objects were cause to project the intentions of absent actors into the present, and to model current action in alignment or opposition to them. They were also reminders that acts in the present would be looked upon by future generations, as far as physical instantiations of those decisions remained to be observed and reflected upon.



Plate 63 Pig jawbones on the porch of a house, Borewu Village, Rara Ele.

Ngadha people struck a curious balance between honoring and remembering individual persons and their individual deeds, and subsuming those persons and their acts into the greater

being of the house as a social group. Individuals were not erased, but they elided into the social group. Names flowed across *fi'i*, which multiplied when new sets were added, and divided when houses split apart. *Ngadhu* and *sa'o* flowed across the landscape, moving from settlement to settlement, rearranging, renewing, and progressing. Individuals flowed through their social groups, passing through several forms of affiliation over the course of a lifetime, moving from a phase of life to a phase of ancestor-hood, and then passing from the specificity of remembered names, into a realm where the separation between individuals and groups, between human and object, is less distinct. Curnow has argued that Ngadha people strove for a form of being-in-common or being-with that started from the collective, not from the individual (2016: 162-164). The place of ceremonial goods, which are linked strongly to groups and weakly to individuals, supports this view. At the same time, the story of the contested *ngadhu* illustrates how the tools of group-making can also be turned to exclusion. Determining who has legitimate access to a ceremonial good, like a *ngadhu*, comes down to an interplay of various forms of legitimacy—the self-proving legitimacy of long association, usually exemplified by inheritance; the spiritual legitimacy of ancestral affirmation; and economic legitimacy, enabling the provision of food and animals—in combination with the power to press forward, overriding the objections of others.

Legitimate and illegitimate access

It is possible to be wealthy, and still be excluded from the means of value production, because money or resources alone do not guarantee access to objects such as a *ngadhu*. Just because the post is there, and just because a person possesses a buffalo and wishes to sacrifice it, does not entitle them to access the object—the sacrificial post—that would give that sacrifice social and spiritual efficacy. This access can be predicated on rank; in Nage, the lower ranks are excluded from the ritual sacrifice of buffalo at the sacrificial post, and their buffalo cannot be converted into social value—they cannot exercise “legitimate” disposal of the wealth built up in the bodies of those buffalo (Forth 1998: 277). While wealth plays an undeniable role in the maintenance of a ritual role, wealth and status are separable, and can come into conflict with one another.

Just as the value of a buffalo, a different kind of ceremonial good, is fully realized in the context of a *ngadhu*, goods like *ngadhu* realize their value when they are activated as a pretext for organizing collective actions. There was an episode in Bogala that made clear the affordance

that monuments provide to produce value for those who have access to them. It occurred about a year before I arrived, when two of the town's three *woe* segments decided to move their *bhaga* from one end of the plaza to the other.

Bogala seemed like a peaceful place, but in Bart's words, the village was "like a thermos:" cold on the outside, but hot on the inside. Social competition was intense. As described in chapter 5, all three *woe* in Bogala faced questions about their leadership. In one *woe*, the trunk rider had married into another *woe*, but still claimed rights in the *woe* he had left. The tip rider had recently died, and no one had yet claimed the title, a failure of inheritance that was causing the role to float loose. A second *woe* had a *ngadhu* in the village square, but apparently its trunk and tip riders both lived in another village. In the third *woe*, both trunk and tip rider houses had withdrawn from their responsibilities to care for their *woe* monuments. This left the monuments themselves unmoored, with their futures, and the futures of the group that circulated around them, uncertain. A new house had stepped up to be trunk riders, but no one was clear on who the new tip rider should be.



Plate 64 A *bhaga*, Bogala.

Dala wula, Yoosneem said: "moon and stars."³¹ In the past, he said, leaders were like the moon: there was only one, and he was big and bright. Now leaders are like stars, he said. There are many, they are small, and they burn. Claimants were constantly trying to speak well and act strongly in order to bolster themselves. Contenders waxed and waned and battled each other,

³¹ This is probably a shortened version of a longer phrase which I do not have.

over years. In a situation like this, where leadership was privately contested and publicly uncertain, it was essential to assert authority through action. Access to the *ngadhu* and *bhaga* was key: claimants used them as rallying points, trying to boost their own legitimacy by organizing events. Such action required private coalition building and invited public declarations of support—the most important of which was simply showing up, to participate in the work, and to witness.

The three *bhaga* in Bogala's village plaza, dedicated to the original female ancestors of the local segments of *woe* Manu, Bhalu, and Boba, invited such action. The one belonging to *woe* Manu stood directly opposite the three *ngadhu*, which stood together in a line at the uphill end of the plaza. But the other two *bhaga* were all the way at the far end of the plaza, roughly 150 meters away. Until 1981, the three *bhaga* had all been together at the far end of the plaza. That year, all three *woe* decided to move them further up, closer to the line of *ngadhu*. Yoosneem gave two reasons why they were moved closer to the *ngadhu*: because the *ngadhu* and *bhaga* were a married couple and should be near one another; and because, before a buffalo can be killed at the *ngadhu*, it is somebody's job to throw an egg and cup of water in the buffalo's face, then run and hide inside the *bhaga* until the butchering is complete. Moving the monuments closer together, he said, would spare that person from running the full length of the plaza.³² The three *bhaga* remained together until 2015, when Bhalu and Boba moved theirs back down. All they wanted, Yoosneem said, was some project around which they could rally people, so that they could direct an act of group labor. "Just so that the leaders could say, 'this was done because I said so.' The arrogance!"³³

Yoosneem's anger pointed to an imbalance of factors of legitimacy involved in the moving of the *bhaga*. The families involved may have been recognized as holding the appropriate titles, so that their community allowed them to use the *bhaga* in this way. They also had the economic resources to fuel the necessary labor. But they lacked, in Yoosneem's view, legitimate spiritual backing. He was certain that the only reason for the move was to shore up the authority of the leaders involved, by allowing them to organize an event, and not because the ancestors had requested it. The disagreement was strong enough that it caused a schism among

³² I witnessed this several times, but never got a full explanation of the reason for it. The runner was always male.

³³ BI *sombong*!

Bogala's three *woe*, resulting in the odd layout of the village today, with one *bhaga* standing apart from the other two, and it damaged the legitimacy of the prestige that resulted from the move. In other words, the value of the act was affected by the flaws in its premise. At the same time, the relocation of the *bhaga* was clearly a valuable action for the leaders of Bhalu and Boba; valuable enough for them to ignore the objections of the third *woe* in town. For claimants, securing a title and realizing its value required them to enact the roles named by those titles.³⁴ This could not be done without recourse to material, publicly recognized, ceremonial goods. In this way, material objects are integral to the definition both of groups and of individuals, their guardians. Like rocks in a current, these objects provide a toe-hold, and a reference point, for the people flowing around and over them.

Producing social class: the case of the contested textile

The next section of this chapter moves beyond issues of house and *woe*, to examine a case where an heirloom object was leveraged to create or recreate social class: the noble, *ga'e* rank. This case hinged on questions of legitimate possession and guardianship, and the possibility that such an object could act as a bulwark against change; a rock in the river, for one noble family to cling to.

In Nage, rank and wealth normally go together (Forth 1998: 277), but for Ngadha people, they may not. As Smedal (2016) argues, little about noble rank is considered valuable by Ngadha people today: "Among the Ngadha, nobility entails neither riches nor particular social functions, political offices, or economic privilege, nor does it confer prerogatives such as the right to command commoners. So while nobility is known by all Ngadha as a superior status, one that is inherited and can never be otherwise achieved, it is difficult to point to any advantages nobles might have. Indeed, nobles themselves would readily point to certain disadvantages they endure (marital restrictions on their women being one)." In addition, he argues, "Ngadha social life does not hinge on the existence of a class of nobles. The total social order does not depend on it." (Smedal 2016: 116). As a result, many Ngadha nobles willingly engage in ceremonies to strip themselves of noble rank. My research supports Smedal's view that the *ga'e* class is dwindling in size and importance. But I did encounter one case, in Bogala, where members of the *ga'e* class argued that they were in fact necessary to the social order. The control and display of an

³⁴ Possibly collapsing any distinction between "roles" and "titles" (Strathern 1985: 193).

heirloom object—a women’s textile, with BI *ikat* patterning, called a BN *lawo butu*—³⁵ was a key part of their strategy to persuade the broader community of their importance.

I love Indonesian textiles, enough that I put weaving at the core of my original research proposal, and I was particularly interested in *lawo butu*. These three-panel women’s sarongs, decorated with beadwork, were supposedly created to be *woe* heirlooms. If a *woe* leader commissioned one, and after his death the cloth was known by his name; as a result, such cloths were sometimes referred to as BN *lawo ngaza*, “named sarongs” (Hamilton 1994: 109). (There was no comparable men’s textile.) From the moment I arrived in Bogala, I asked people about the heirloom textiles in their homes, hoping to see a *lawo butu*. It wasn’t long before Rini, a friend of Maria’s, herself the eldest daughter of a named house, told me that her family had one, and that if I waited for *reba*, the annual celebration of the yam harvest, when heirlooms are all taken out of their baskets and fed with blood, then I would have a chance to see it.

When *reba* day came, Bart and I went together to Rini’s house, hoping to see the textile. Rini was there, along with her father-in-law, her brother Raul, who was lord of the house, and a few other members of their family. Bart and I brought a chicken with us,³⁶ and before the *lawo butu* was removed from its storage basket, Raul killed the chicken, and he and his father-in-law read its entrails for signs. The omens were good, indicating that my intentions in wanting to see the textile were sincere.³⁷ Then the cloth was removed from its basket, touched with the blood of the chicken,³⁸ and spread out on the *sa’o* floor. The *lawo butu* was made from three panels sewn together,³⁹ but it seemed longer than a normal textile of that structure. The colors were pale blue on dark blue, made from natural indigo. The center panel had stacks of complex horse motifs.⁴⁰

³⁵ BN *lawo* is a woman’s sarong. BN *butu* literally appears to mean “beads,” but is also shorthand for all variety of wealth objects, including gold. The myth of BN *lobo butu* recounts the growth and destruction of a tree bearing golden objects on its branches. A peak on the western edge of Rara Ele was the site of this mythical tree, and bears its name today.

³⁶ It was Bart’s chicken, and I paid him Rp 50,000 for it.

³⁷ BI *ikhlas*. Unfortunately, people who go around asking to see heirlooms in eastern Indonesia are often dealers, trying to locate antiques. Such dealers have a reputation for either inciting family members to steal from their house treasuries, or waiting until families fall on desperate times, then extracting their treasures from them at bargain prices. As a result—and in addition to Ngadha practices of modesty (BN *kedhi weki*)—most people demur when asked what treasures they possess.

³⁸ *Lawo butu* are the only Ngadha textiles that are fed with blood.

³⁹ BN *nai telu*

⁴⁰ BN *jara*. There was no mention of BN *[ng]gaja*, elephants.

The rear hem had gold earring⁴¹ motifs and a fine sawtooth pattern. The beads were arranged in two types of pattern: large diamonds with two strands coming out from each corner, and smaller diamonds with three strands coming from each corner. Each strand ended in a sliced cowrie shell. I'm no expert on beads, but they appeared to be of mixed age and origin. Many were definitely glass, and others may have been made from coral, stone, or ceramic. The colors of the beads were red, white, yellow, dark blue, and black with white stripes.

I took a number of pictures and examined the cloth closely, then sat back to take the *lawo butu* in, simply sharing its space. It was a powerful work of art. The more time went by, the more overwhelming it became. I don't know what it was. I was so happy to see this treasure.



Plate 65 Examining the *lawo butu*.

Rini's family talked about how proud they were to own it. Rini's brother, the lord of the house, said he had been approached many times by people who wanted to buy it, and also by relatives who wanted to sell it, but no one can trade the *lawo butu*, he said, not for wealth or for land. Parting with the *lawo butu* would risk bringing disaster on the house. He asked those who wanted to sell it, "do you want to be rich and dead?"

Few people these days were entitled to wear a cloth such as this, the family said. They themselves were *ga'e*, and proudly *ga'e*. Only *ga'e* people could wear *lawo butu*. Even the women who wove them rarely had the standing to wear them. Any non-*ga'e* person who put it on

⁴¹ BN *bela*

was risking BN *golo*—an unnatural death, with an ultimately spiritual cause. It was true, they said, that the noble class was dwindling in number. There were many ways to lose the rank,⁴² and no ways to gain it. But like a monument that needed to be utilized to be valuable, *lawo butu* had to be worn, and so each community needed to include *ga'e* people who could wear them. According to them, *ga'e* people were needed for all sorts of ritual roles. They recalled to me the story of a grandfather of theirs, who had been invited to another village to ride a *ngadhu* there. It wasn't his village, and he wasn't their tip or trunk rider. They just needed a *ga'e* person to play the role.

Bart listened to all of their statements and assertions, saying nothing for our entire visit. Later, in the privacy of my house, he told me that he was deeply offended by the stories they told me. The textile in question, he said, didn't belong to Rini and her family. He claimed they had stolen it from another house, decades earlier. At that time, he said, *woe* Manu was planting a new *ngadhu*. The trunk rider house possessed the *lawo butu*; but the *woe* was of low rank, and so they sought out a neighbor of *ga'e* rank from a different *woe* to wear it on their behalf. At the end of the day, when the ceremony was done, the *ga'e* woman simply wore the textile home, and never returned it. He compared it to a jockey riding another man's horse deciding to keep the reins and saddle for himself. Yoosneem supported this story. He was relieved when Bart and I told him the *lawo butu* was still present in the village. It hadn't been seen in public for years, and Yoosneem was certain the other *woe* must have sold it long ago. Rini's house had woven the textile into their own story, either because the story of seizure was forgotten, or perhaps because they viewed the seizure as legitimate. But *woe* Manu had not forgotten.

The transfer of guardianship of the *lawo butu*, from commoners to nobles, was not a gift. It did not settle a conflict, or seal an alliance. It was involuntary, "an expression of power rather than entitlement" (Forth 2004: 127). Possession of the cloth was self-legitimizing, however; possession alone provided a kind of proof of spiritual support for their action, and perhaps even for the idea that all ceremonial goods should be transferred to the guardianship of nobles. Their power move in securing transferral of guardianship of the object lent justification to the very concept of nobility. They expressed their claim to special status, and their differential relation with the commoner family, by causing guardianship of the object to shift.

⁴² For example, they named stealing (BN *naka*) as one cause for losing *ga'e* rank. As another example, a noble seen to slip and fall in the village plaza had to sacrifice a buffalo or risk losing their status (Smedal 2009: 284).

This is a complex case regarding manufactured scarcity, the legitimacy of guardianship, and the contentious production of social class. It speaks to issues that only somewhat relate to the qualities of the specific object, or to the object's ritual or spiritual function. Rather, this case hinges on the social relations that arise from the circulation of ceremonial goods, and the uncertain social outcomes that result. It shows social competition as a main driver, with ambition, audacity, and the exercise of power layered onto questions of inherited right or cosmological reproduction. At issue is not objects themselves, but how their circulation can be exploited for social gain, and by whom.

Conclusion: The creative and disruptive power of circulations

This chapter has tried to bring a different angle to discussions Ngadha ceremonial goods, by focusing not on their symbolic or spiritual values, but the opportunities they provide to bring groups into being, define their edges, and lift up their leaders, particularly when they move. These movements can be in space, like the *bhaga* of Bogala; shifts in guardianship, like the *lawo butu*; or the movements of people and resources that circulate around them in repeating orbits. This is meant to build on analyses that see the *ngadhu* as spiritual and symbolic objects, and not to repudiate them.

The affordances provided by ceremonial goods, enabling collective actions and displays, are the source of much of their value. Goods such as *fi'i* and *ngadhu* are physical objects; the embodiments or containers of spirits; markers of the acts that produced them, or symbols of specific acts undertaken by ancestors; and symbols of solidarity for a larger, generalized group, joining the current generation to ancestors whose names have been bumped off the *fi'i* of their houses. These goods are also nodes for precipitating the collective actions that bring groups into being and reify them; for the collective actions that bring groups into relation with one another, for the mutual recognition of claims; and provide the pretexts for elites to lay claim to inherited status and spiritual support, by organizing such collective actions. The resources and labor that underlie these acts are not supplied by a single individual, but by groups. A person who is an organizer one day is a participant the next, and vice versa. Ngadha social life, with its layers of social affiliation, forces of inclusion and exclusion, and differentiation of roles and titles, arises “from creative action, but creative action ... that can never be separated from its concrete, material medium” (Graeber 2001: 54).

CHAPTER 8: Future Flows

Just as Ngadha people live amid the physical houses and monuments erected by their ancestors, they are born and live their lives amid the ongoing circulations initiated by previous generations. People inherit pig exchange patterns, old bridewealth debts, and even the rotating-credit-group memberships left to them by their parents, or their parents' parents. Mindful of the social world left to them by their forebears, Ngadha people today act with an eye towards the future results of their own actions—both within their own lifetimes, and for the more distant time when they, too, are ancestors, with a care for the well-being of their descendants. Far from merely reproducing the social and physical world as they found it, the people I encountered were concerned with the future, and how they might shape it to make it different, and better, than the present or the past.

At the same time, I was sometimes confused by what seemed to be disjunctures in the ways that Ngadha people spoke and acted in regards to the future. Ngadha people too sometimes professed confusion to me about apparent contradictions in the moral advice they received, from all quarters, about how to make the future better. Some important and commonly repeated Ngadha proverbs¹ seemed to direct people to be thrifty, while others directed them to spend, lend, and borrow freely. People put on lavish feasts, often more lavish than strictly called for by precedent, against the importuning of the government and the Church. They eschewed cash savings, preferring to spend or disperse any money they had as quickly as possible, sometimes to the detriment of their ability to pay the costs of education or health care. Curnow argued that for Ngadha people, “in material terms, to exceed the material wealth of your elders and Ancestors is to shame them” (Curnow 2008: 376). Yet people worked hard, built new businesses, opened new lands, educated themselves and their children, saying, as the founder of Nua Muri said to me, “all achievements in this world are due to the support of the ancestors.” Yet there was a consistency joining together apparently disparate elements in attitudes towards present property and future prosperity, through co-mingled logics of sacrifice, and of planting. These modes are not identical, but they follow a common theme, and a simple one, often reflected in sayings about farming: give a little; wait; get more than you gave; repeat.

¹ BN *pata dela*, “elder sayings.”

The logic of sacrifice

Signe Howell noted, in the introduction to an edited volume on sacrifice that included many scholars cited in this thesis, that “sacrifice” is difficult to define, and could be classed with other analytic concepts such as kinship, totemism, culture, society, or aggression, that anthropology might do better to set aside (Howell 1996: 3). I will avoid generalized arguments around the nature of sacrifice, and unwieldy, trans-global comparisons on the role of ritual language, blood, killing, and so on, and stay close to what is generally called sacrifice in relation to people around eastern Indonesia: the offer of shared meals with unseen spirits or ancestors, as part of an ongoing relationship between those beings and the living, who hope to win protection, achieve belonging, and receive material abundance. The relevant Ngadha word is BN *ba’u*, meaning “offering”² (Mopa 2004: 37) or “sacrifice to the ancestors”³ (Arndt 1961: 15).

A myth from Rajong, northwest of Ngadhaland, explains sacrifice like this: a man named Lalong caught a wild pig. When he roasted it, the ghost of his father appeared and asked to share it. Lalong divided the meat equally, but the ghost said, “Lalong, you should give me a little only. If you want to give meat to me, Lalong, don’t give me so much. It is enough to give me the ears, it is enough to give me the feet, it is enough to give me the liver. A little, a little only. If you give us a little, it becomes a lot for us. If you give what seems to be a lot to you, this is actually just a little to us” (Erb 1996: 31).

This sort of inversion is not an unusual trait of dealings with the dead or the spiritual world in Flores. Witches,⁴ for example, are marked for their inverse behaviors, such as acting by night, while normal people act by day (Forth 1998: 56), while the Ngadha BN *ja’i laba polo*, or “witch drum dance,” performed when nobles are demoted to a lower status, moves in a clockwise direction, instead of the normal counter-clockwise (Smedal 2016: 120). A meal with the dead is an exchange of like for unlike: the worthless for the valuable. As Erb later elaborated, “In ritual sacrifices, a few grains of rice, some blood, small bits of wings, or the liver is given to the residents of the supernatural world, sometimes with an explicit injunction, ‘we give you a little, in return give us a lot’ (Erb 1996, 2000)” (Erb 2013: 300).

² BI *persembahan*

³ Arndt spells it *bau*, without the apostrophe.

⁴ BN *polo*

I participated in any number of such offerings during my time in Ngadhaland. Most of them took place inside *sa'o*, and began with the slaughter of an animal, usually a chicken. The following description is from a typical occasion, which took place in the *sa'o* of the descended house that had severed its ties to Molo Modhe, and wished to repair their relationship.

As part of their reconciliation, they asked Yoosneem, the lord of Molo Modhe, to sit at the place of honor⁵ in their house and conduct the offering. Someone handed him a live chicken, and he plucked a few feathers from its head, and tossed them back at the bird, uttering a few quiet words of ritual speech.⁶ Then he handed the chicken to Bart, who killed it by inserting a blade into its beak and pulling back, nearly severing the top of the chicken's head from its body. The blood was caught in a cup, and someone daubed it with their fingers onto the *fi'i* on the *sa'o* wall. Bart and one of his sisters singed the feathers from the carcass over the fire in the *sa'o* hearth. Then, pulling back its thighs and wings, cracking the wishbone, and pulling away the breast, Bart opened the bird's body cavity, exposing its innards. Yoosneem took the carcass, and examined the loops of its intestines for signs, conferring with the trunk rider of *woe* Manu, from which Molo Modhe itself was descended. The main loop of the intestine was full, indicating good fortune; but the path to that good fortune, they declared, was obstructed.⁷ Next, a woman of the house handed Yoosneem a palm leaf bowl⁸ of rice and a glass of palm wine. He poured the palm wine from the glass into a coconut-shell cup.⁹ Then, holding the cup in his left palm, he dipped the tip of his right index finger into the palm wine, then flicked the drops of liquid back over his right shoulder, onto the *fi'i* that hung on the wall behind him. He spoke a few words, calling the ancestors, and explaining why we were here. He sipped from the cup, and ate a morsel of the rice. Then he passed the cup and bowl to his right; that person had a sip and a taste, and passed it rightward again, until the food had circled the entire *sa'o* in the proper counter-clockwise direction, and everyone had taken part. This token meal was then followed by a large, friendly, and much less formal meal.

⁵ BN *mataraga*

⁶ No one ever explained this feather-throwing to my satisfaction. Yoosneem said that it performed, for the bird and the ancestors, his complete possession and domination of the animal.

⁷ This was the same result they got up in the main house. Apparently, divination results started from the *sa'o mere*, then cascaded down through the descending houses below.

⁸ BN *wati*

⁹ BN *hea*

Offerings could differ from this example in several ways. These events could also take place outside a *sa'o*; I witnessed them in *loka*, in non-traditional houses that had no *fi'i*, and even before a regular meal in front of the TV, unconnected to any ritual. Sometimes the speaker incorporated Catholic prayers into his speech, or crossed himself. Some people said that participants had to finish the food in the basket—which sometimes included raw or barely-cooked chicken. Others said that passing the basket was enough, and nobody really needed to eat, and I did occasionally see people pass the cup and plate without taking anything. If a pig was slaughtered instead of a chicken, the two halves of the pig's head might be left atop a basket of rice for the ancestors' meal. Clear palm liquor could be used instead of palm wine. In all cases, the ancestors' share consisted of tiny portions, like the drops of palm wine, or parts of the body that were less desirable to eat, such as the blood or liver.

The words accompanying such events could vary wildly. At the most informal end, the speaker might simply say, BN *mai kita nenga ka inu, ka maki nari, inu tua teme*, “come now, we wish to eat and drink, eat delicious rice, drink sweet palm wine.” This is a plain invitation to commensality, to shared enjoyment and nourishment. At the other end of the spectrum are speeches like this one, uttered in the course of the installation of some new *fi'i* at a house in Bogala. The complete ritual cycle included the slaughter of a buffalo, which was then complemented by the slaughter of pigs brought by visiting *wailaki*.

<i>Ria ura ngana zia</i>	[<i>Ria</i>] ¹⁰ pig's liver now
<i>Zia da pibe kaba</i>	Now [we] complement the buffalo
<i>Gami wi nulu ebu gami</i>	For our grandmothers and grandfathers
Wunu Wona <i>ne'e</i> Nale Moi	Wunu Wona and Nale Moi ¹¹
<i>Ngata da wake wadho</i>	They would make great things ¹²
<i>Zia gami nenga dhegha miu</i>	Now we would remember you
<i>Bhuku si siku, lege si lima</i>	Retract your elbow, fold your arms
<i>Ma'e kama dawé da'e</i>	Do not hold [our] shoulder ¹³

¹⁰ This could be BN *ri'a*, expressing a request for permission and aid.

¹¹ These are the names of specific ancestors.

¹² The implication is, they would found/build a great *sa'o*.

¹³ These lines refer to the “hand” of illness.

<i>Masa ana ebu miu,</i>	All the children of our grandfathers
<i>Miu ti'i si feo folo</i> ¹⁴	May you grant us healing oil
<i>Bhai si lengi zawa</i>	Distribute the oil of distant origin
<i>Wi bho koko molo</i>	Let the betel saliva ¹⁵ stick on well
<i>Nitu rura ri'a</i>	Expectorate the healing saliva
<i>Ti'i si ana ebu, wi bo</i> ¹⁶ <i>woso</i>	Grant that your descendants multiply
<i>Fuku</i> ¹⁷ <i>kappa</i>	And strive greatly
<i>Segu zeu tebha dada</i>	Clear the way widely, hold off afar
<i>Masa sune bana</i>	All hot mucus ¹⁸
<i>Nua nata teme li'e seko</i> ¹⁹ <i>se gebu</i>	In the forehead's center a clump of <i>seko</i> seeds ²⁰
<i>Ne'e ketu gau todho ngedhu</i>	And may your <i>ketu</i> ²¹ stand erect
<i>weka rara</i> ²² <i>gau dhizi-dhizi.</i>	And the length of your path be smooth.

In the first section, the speaker described the occasion of the sacrifice, and invoked the ancestors by name, hailing their accomplishments, and identifying himself and his group with them and the house they established. In the second section, he made specific requests from the ancestors, asking especially for protection from illness. As the speech made clear, the ancestors

¹⁴ BN *Feo folo* was defined for me as candlenut oil; also as oil originating from a distance place named Folo. Anointing or rubbing afflicted parts of the body with oil is common medicinal practice in Indonesia. For this reason, to ask for oil is to ask metaphorically for healing and health.

¹⁵ The red paste of chewed betel nut is applied to wounds to assist healing.

¹⁶ BN *Bo* here means to sprout or branch off (BI *berkembang/bertunas*). Other meanings of *bo* include “a baby that wants to be born,” and “granary.”

¹⁷ Yoosneem translated *fuku* as BI *perjuangan*, meaning “struggle.” He clarified that the sense of this word was to strive to leave large bequests to one's descendants. He said that if he were the speaker, instead of *fuku* he would have used the word BN *mesa*, “to hatch from an egg” (Arndt 1961: 326; Mopa 2004: 325), which may relate it to the alternate translation of BN *bo*, “a baby that wants to be born.”

¹⁸ These words refer to a fever and runny nose.

¹⁹ BN *Seko* is a kind of plant, but I couldn't specify which one. I found the word in two other contexts: *seko* is the name of S-shaped vegetal scrolls carved onto *ngadhu* posts; and BN *pau seko* are small wild mangoes, about the size of a walnut.

²⁰ This “clump of seeds” refers to stones found in the innards of the sacrificial pig, which indicate the presence of the ancestors in the animal.

²¹ A section at the top of the pig's liver. If the *ketu* stands up straight, that's a good omen. If it is sticky and lies down, it's a bad omen.

²² BN *Weka rara* is a vein or duct in the liver, which should be free of obstructions.

had the power both to inflict illness, by reaching out to touch the living, and to guard against illness, by providing their descendants with healing oil and betel saliva. Finally, he referred to the body of the sacrificial animal, which was the vehicle for communication and the practical material of commensality between deceased ancestors and their living descendants. As with the reading of chicken intestines, special attention was paid to ducts and passages—in this case, a duct in the liver—which should show signs of healthy flow, full and unobstructed.

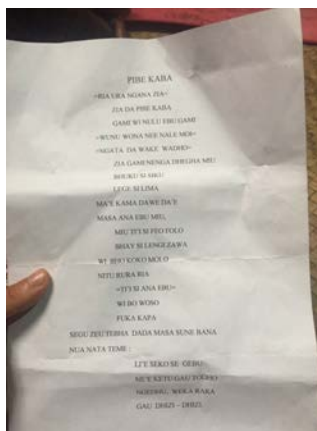


Plate 66 Ritual speakers sometimes need help remembering their lines.

In East Timor, Tusinski describes ritual meals with deceased ancestors as follows: “the food offerings bestowed to ancestral spirits in *se matebian* are already conceptualized as gifts received as the result of financial blessing or agricultural fertility bestowed by those selfsame ancestral spirits... the acts of eating (*haan*) and feeding (*hahaan*) are not separated, but rather mutually entangled in a dialectic of reciprocal exchange of the same consumable substance: the fed feed and the feeders are fed. In preparing and sharing food with the venerated dead, Timorese people reflexively experience sensibilities of co-presence, shared substantive quality, and derivation from a common house of origin” (Tusinski 2016: 25). These occasions in the Ngadha context share many of these qualities; the sense of co-presence, common derivation and identity, and dialectic exchange, a process that is altered, but not interrupted, by death. Yoosneem described these meals using the phrase BN *ka talo, inu resi*, “eat the leftovers, drink the dregs.” “We are the ones eating the leftovers of our ancestors,” he said. “That’s why we’re always remembering and inviting the ancestors to eat: it’s all one meal, and we’re sharing it.”

At the same time, this piece of speech suggests limitations to the relationship between living and dead, such that direct contact between them might be dangerous. The hand of illness is

the hand of the ancestors themselves. The relationship between people and their ancestors is not purely benevolent, but must be managed carefully. Otherwise, the relationship may fail; protection may be lifted, or retribution levied. This proverb collected by Yan Mopa marks the need for sacrifices that appeal to ancestors and spirits:

<i>Kabu role nitu</i>	The roots dig into the earth
<i>lobo soi dewa</i> ²³	The branch tips reach to god
<i>Ba'u wi faru</i>	The offering must be appealing
<i>Go ngo tau nenga bapu</i> ²⁴	To be desired by the spirits

If simply sharing food were enough to secure the future, a Ngadha person would not have complained to Arndt, in the 1920s, “*sara bau, bau, bau, mona wi tau me’a go apa, ngaku, wi ti’i go dheke wi ka*; ‘The ancestors never receive our sacrifices, it’s all in vain, as if we were giving them rats to eat’” (Arndt 2005: 95-6).²⁵ The potential for failure in the relationship suggests that merely following precedent in the provision of sacrifices is not enough to secure spiritual support. Ritual transactions are inherently speculative, because relations between the living and the dead must be negotiated and renegotiated, through successive acts of communication and prestation.

In one story, which I heard in Langa, Sili, a mythical ancestor, had a dream in which an ancestor demanded human sacrifice in return for an exceptionally good yam harvest. At first, Sili ignored this dream, but again the ancestor came to him, demanding that he kill a human being. Sili thought about whom he could kill, but could think of no one he didn’t know. When the dream repeated a third time, Sili protested to the dream ancestor, saying, I can’t kill any of these people I know. What if I kill a buffalo instead? The ancestor accepted this. Today, descendants of Sili continue this tradition, making blood offerings at the *ngadhu* in recompense for good harvests and prosperity. Over time, they have substituted the buffalo with chickens and pigs,

²³ BN *nitu* are earth or water spirits, and BN *dewa* are sky gods; they are often paired, as in the phrase BN *dewa reta nitu rale*, “gods above and spirits below.”

²⁴ BN *bapu* on its own usually indicates evil or mischievous spirits, like *nitu* connected to land (see Forth 1998a). Mopa translated it here as “higher spirits,” BI *roh-roh halus*.

²⁵ The quote originally appeared in Arndt 1929: 860. My translation comes from the 2005 Indonesian version, with this text: BI “*Leluhur selalu tidak menerima persembahan, rasanya sia-sia saja, seperti menyuguhkannya untuk dinikmati tikus-tikus*.” Smedal offers a slightly different translation: “Sacrificing always, sacrificing again, sacrificing yet another time, what is the use, it is all in vain, just give [the ancestors] rats to eat” (Smedal 1996: 45).

animals lower in the ritual hierarchy, abstracting even further from the original request for human blood. These repeated substitutions—human for buffalo, for pig, for chicken—are evidence of ongoing, continual negotiations with the ancestors, which can reach extremes; in Nage, people can actually substitute eggplant and pandanus leaf for buffalo and gold (Forth 1998: 178). Substitution has its limits, which may be communicated through the guts of animals killed for this purpose—bad signs can reveal a need to kill more animals, or to perform additional acts of sacrifice. But as one man in Beiposo said to me, “the ancestors have to feel remembered, but they also see the situation today and how it has changed.” In other words, the ancestors are sensitive, as the ghost Lalong’s father was, to the differential between values held by the living and the dead. Following the logic of this inversion, the less valuable the offering is to living people who make it, the more valuable it should be for deceased ancestors. The story of Sili above raises the question of whether sacrifice precedes good fortune, or follows it. But the clear answer is, it does both. The prosperity of today is both an inheritance, and also a kind of loan, like a ‘new hoe;’ a single sacrifice is one node in a chain of repeated actions, which have changed in form, but remained consistent in intent. How Ngadha people today make their future, in collaboration with their ancestors, depends on the outcomes of each successive round of communications, substitutions, and negotiations—a process that is always speculative, and carries risk (Chu 2010: 194). But over generations of repetition, as these substitutions gradually deepen and repeat, the relative value returned to each side by the exchange should grow and grow.

The logic of planting seeds

The most common sense in which people apply the “give a little, get a lot” method for making the future may be agricultural. Plant a seed, reap a harvest; give a little, get a lot. Each harvest is the result of several inputs: the labor of the farmer, who planted the seeds; the support of spirits and ancestors, who affect the growth of plants; and the outcomes of negotiations between those actors. As a gambler placing a bet, who must play to win, told Curnow “plant one seed, you may get ten beans, bet rp 1,000 on the lottery and you may get rp 10,000.” Human agency creates the possibility of future returns; then “variables beyond human agency can determine the outcome. It may be the will of God or Ancestors” (Curnow 2007: 155).

This logic is frequently expressed through metaphorical references to BN *uwi*,²⁶ the yam. Yams were once a starch staple in Ngadhaland, though rice, maize, sweet potatoes, and cassava have largely taken their place in recent decades. People remembered yams as an old food, and also as a wild food; something the ancestors ate, and which could still be found in the forest, but was eaten regularly only in the most remote or benighted communities. In my research, I noticed yam vines only on two occasions. Once was in Lopijo, indeed one of the most remote hamlets in Ngadhaland, and the only place I saw a whole field planted with them. The other time was actually in Bogala, my home village, in the front yard of a house there. I was so unused to seeing yams that, for months, I mistook it for a betel pepper vine. It's possible I saw yam vines in other places and mistook them for betel pepper.

Despite the near disappearance of yams from local fields and diets, the annual yam harvest festival, BN *reba*, remains the most important date on the Ngadha traditional calendar. According to Molnar, *reba* is one of a small list of cultural features that cuts across the diversity of the entire Ngadha cultural area (1994: 36). Djawamaku described *reba* as having a “totalizing character,”²⁷ arguing that “its meaning touches all aspects of life, including every element of culture, in a way that is universal, despite the simplicity of its form” (2000: 1). As a symbol, the yam is potent and frequently invoked. Dhiu (2004) describes it especially as a symbol connecting a line of descent to a location, and connecting a place's current inhabitants to the original ancestors who first planted yams there, while also connecting current generations to the future, given the yam's “power to generate descendants and new life” (Dhiu 2004: 25). Through the persistence of *reba*, the yam remains a potent symbol in Ngadha life, and worthy of attention.

I attended the *reba* meal in *sa'o* Molo Modhe, which began with an invocation of the ancestors similar to the scene described above. Members of the house took the *fi'i* down from the wall, and placed them in a round rice-winnowing basket²⁸, along with some leaves from a type of *uwi* called *wajo*, after an ancestor of the house; according to Yoosneem, this was a type of yam vine with climbing tendrils that reached for the sky, and connected sky with earth. A single yam

²⁶ Apparently cognate with BI *ubi*, meaning “tuber.” There are many varieties of *uwi*, with some considered wilder or more indigenous than others. The oldest variety I heard of was a forest plant with a thorny root, called *eje*, *sura*, *suja*, and *suza* in various local dialects.

²⁷ BI *sifat totalitas*

²⁸ BN *niru*

leaf was toasted over the fire, then ripped into shreds, which were handed out, counter-clockwise, to the family members around the room. The moment resembled many ritual meals I had taken part in before; so when a shred of toasted yam leaf was handed to me, I tried to do the right thing, and put it into my mouth. “It’s just a symbol!” came the cry from everyone in the room, followed by gales of laughter.



Plate 67 Inside *sa'o* Molo Modhe on *reba* day.



Plate 68 Inside *sa'o* Molo Modhe on *reba* day.

The ritual speech that accompanied this event was called BN *o-uwi*. Every house has their own version of the *o-uwi*, which acts as a kind of topogeny (Fox 2006) tracing the movement of the house, from the ancestors’ first arrival on the Flores shore to a triumphant arrival at the meal itself. Yoosneem, seated at the *mataraga*, intoned it in oratorical style, calling each line out loudly in the small chamber of the *sa'o*, and drawing out the vowels of the repeated

line, as he called out to the yam and to the ancestors who carried it, across miles and centuries, planting it everywhere they stopped.

<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Uwi go Teru uwi go Tena</i>	Yam of Teru, yam of Tena (two ancestors)
<i>Uwi go Wijo uwi go Wajo</i>	Yam of Wijo, yam of Wajo (two ancestors)
<i>Uwi lau wae mesi</i>	The yam is down in the sea
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Uwi ale bata mau</i>	The yam is up by the shore's edge
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Uwi ale mau</i>	The yam is up on the beach
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Uwi zia Leko Goko</i>	The yam is now at Leko Goko ²⁹
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Toka se alu³⁰ resi se alu</i>	Pour out one tube, save one tube
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Uwi zia boa Langa</i>	The yam is now at the granaries of Langa ³¹
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Mote ma'e weo</i>	A woman's hair bun shall not shake
<i>Gumu ma'e kedhe</i>	A man's scalp shall not tip ³²
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Uwi zia Watu Lewa</i>	The yam is now at Watu Lewa ³³
<i>Bela ma'e deké</i>	The water tube shall not be stood up

²⁹ Near Aimere, on the coast.

³⁰ BN *alu* (with the counting prefix *se-* indicating the singular), translated as BI *ruas*, meaning “segment” or “joint.” This indicates a tube of the large bamboo called BN *betho*, one joint in length.

³¹ On the southern edge of the Bajawa plateau.

³² The terms BN *mote* and BN *gumu* here refer metaphorically to the female and male heirs of the House. The couplet describes how their unrestrained actions might cause a kind of disorder, where the woman's hair shakes loose of its bun, and the man's headscarf tips off. The couplet instructs them not to speak ill or gossip about others.

³³ This is a term for a type of stone altar. It may refer to a specific location, but I don't know where.

<i>toke ma'e pe'i</i>	The water tube shall not be leaned ³⁴
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Uwi zia gha Wae Ri</i>	The yam is already at Wae Ri ³⁵
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Go ngara ngata da kadhi gha</i>	The names of those who have already crossed over
<i>Lana lange ma'e tolo mazi</i>	Across the border, do not speak them again ³⁶
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Uwi zia gha Wae Woki</i>	The yam is already at Wae Woki ³⁷
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Koe se nawa nea se nawa</i>	Dig up one row [of yams], leave one row
<i>Toka se alu nea se alu</i>	Pour out one tube, leave one tube
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Uwi zia gha bata</i>	The yam is at the village gate
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Uwi zia gha wawa³⁸ sa'o</i>	The yam has already unlocked the house
<i>Sui o- uwi</i>	Calling the yam
<i>Uwi zia gha pena</i>	The yam is already on the doorstep

At this point, the door was flung open, and everybody cheered.

Two key lines in this speech use agriculture as a moral model for the storage and reproduction of value: the ones that admonish the listener to “dig up one row, leave one row,” and to “pour out one tube, leave one tube.” The first of these refers to a field of yams, planted in

³⁴ BN *Bela* and *toke* are two different types of bamboo tubes used to carry water. To stand the tube up or lean it against something suggests that the person sent to carry water has set the tube down, presumably to dawdle or gossip at the spring. Yoosneem offered two interpretations: first, it is better to work quickly; second, sloth makes space for unwise speech.

³⁵ This sounds like the name of a river or spring, but I have not been able to locate it.

³⁶ According to Yoosneem, this couplet is about using restraint, even with true speech. Accusations must not be made without proof, even if they are true. An unsupported accusation will cost the accuser a buffalo.

³⁷ This may be the upper reaches of a river that flows from the northern side of the plateau to the north coast at Mbay, where it is called Ai Sissa.

³⁸ Mopa translates BN *wawa* as “to open, to reveal secrets” (BI *membongkar rahasia*) (2004: 465).

rows: dig one up to eat, but leave the other, so the yams can resprout. The second refers to bamboo tubes filled with rice.³⁹ Locally grown rice is stored unthreshed, and is suitable either to be planted, or to be pounded and prepared for consumption. The saying, then, means to pour out one tube to eat, but save the other, either to eat later, or to plant.

Versions of these lines came up a number of times, from a number of different people, and were parsed with two, slightly different meanings. The first was simply an admonishment to save, and referred to both money and material resources. This was the meaning promoted by the state, which has directed some emphasis and some oblique policy tools toward reducing the sizes of traditional feasts and ceremonies. To make sure these words were seen and honored, the government emblazoned them on a pillar in the middle of Bajawa, along with the Indonesian slogan *BI mari menabung*, “let’s save.” By this reading, the lines direct people to consume little and amass their resources.



Plate 69 A pillar in front of the regional assembly building in Bajawa, reading BN *toka sealu resi sealu*, “pour out one tube, save one tube.”

This reading has some difficulties in the Ngadha context, however, which were illustrated one day as I was chatting with some leaders of the Ngada regency Department of Forestry. BN *Toka se alu, resi se alu*, or “pour out one tube, save one tube,” yes, they said; it does reflect an ethic of savings. But at the same time, they acknowledged that saving was hard, because your resources were always vulnerable to requests and demands. One of them recalled his own parents

³⁹ Depending on context, this line could also refer to tubes filled with palm wine.

concealing their tubes of rice among the firewood in the *sa'o*. That way the granary was empty, and they wouldn't lose their rice to requests from borrowers.⁴⁰

The safer way to save was not storage at all, but replanting: not saving a tube, but leaving a row. This was emphasized to me over and over by my participants: the purpose of saving something wasn't to store it up, to build a stockpile. Rather, it was to plant something like a seed, and enable it to regenerate and multiply. This was only possible if the yams or the rice left your granary, and were planted in the ground. Seeds have to be planted to grow. Then as long as they remain in the ground, they remain a sort of "floating value:" a value potential, to which a person may stake a claim, but which is, as yet, fully possessed by no one.⁴¹ As long as it continues to float, its value potential increases, like yams proliferating beneath the ground, out of sight.

Borrowing, lending, and the planting of seeds: everyday material flow

One day, I was trying to service my motorbike in front of my house when my friend Tomas happened by and offered to help. Tomas was married to Bart's cousin, and lived in a simple house near his fields up the mountain. He went off and fetched his tools, then gave the bike a complete workover. When he was finished, I asked if I could pay him, and he said, "give whatever you feel." I offered him Rp. 50,000, more or less what I would have paid at one of the repair shops in town. His eyes grew wide, and he took it, exclaiming that it was too much. Over the next few months, Tomas dropped in periodically at our house with large boxes of passion fruits, carrots, sweet potatoes, and cassava from his gardens, in amounts that quickly eclipsed the original Rp. 50,000.

⁴⁰ Of course, this story recalls similar tactics to defend against demand sharing, described in Myers 2016 [1988].

⁴¹ Plants that are not yet harvested are vulnerable to competing claims, regardless of the legitimacy of those claims, as this saying collected by Yan Mopa attests:

La'a wai gala

Traveling along the road,

Tuku seda¹ toko sa'e wole Do not steal from trees or snap off ears [of maize]

Literally, this saying instructs Ngadha people not to help themselves to the produce they pass in the gardens of other people. More metaphorically, it addresses opportunistic thefts of all kinds. According to Yan Mopa, BN *seda* is a word for stealing that seems to be specific to taking from trees. An act of *seda* is silent. BN *sa'e*, on the other hand, is a kind of stealing that makes a sound: the sound of snapping an ear of maize (BN *sae/hae*) off the stalk.

This series of exchanges with Tomas was just one of many such circulations in which I became embedded during my time in Bogala. For instance, people in Bogala often had no cash on hand, which added a step to many everyday transactions; before they could buy anything, even something basic or inexpensive, they had to get the money for it. (People called this “indirect barter.”⁴²) I was useful in that regard; word got around quickly that the anthropologist next to Bart’s house usually had money on hand, and would buy most things that you brought to him. A neighbor who wanted to buy betel came by with a sack of mandarins. Another who wanted to buy rice came by with bananas. The amounts of money involved were very small, usually around Rp. 10,000 or 20,000, about \$1-2. In another typical case, one of Bart’s aunts came by with a dish of green beans and a bag of ground coffee. I offered her a little money, but she refused to take it, indicating, with smile and a tap of her finger on her temple, that she would remember the occasion, and implying she would request the money at a later time. This was not barter, but a form of value storage. The value was now “floating.” Like a “new hoe” in pig exchange—an agricultural metaphor, linked to yams—it could be claimed at any time. Or, I could take it on myself to make a return gift.

All of these transactions were embedded within broader relationships, involving kinship and community. They constituted small parts of a “material flow,” each of which made up “a momentary episode in a continuous social relation” (Sahlins 1972: 185-6). Taken collectively, these circulations of money, food, perishable objects, and durable objects perpetuated themselves, and underwrote, at an everyday level, the social processes of inclusion and boundary-making. Like pig exchanges, these circulations were meant to grow, but at a rate that wouldn’t put anybody out. Also as with pig exchanges, people were bent on proliferating the number of such relationships into which they entered, because the more circulations they were involved in—the more hoes they borrowed or lent, or the more seeds they planted—the more people they could call on as necessary, and the more small gains they could hope to make.

When I paid Tomas too much money, I inflated the exchange too quickly, so he “repaid” it, with further inflation, across several gifts. The delay enabled the inflation, because it gave the plants time to grow. Normally, Tomas told me, when he found himself in need of a dollar or two, he took his bundles of produce to a cluster of vegetable stalls on the edge of Bajawa and sold

⁴² BI *barter tidak langsung*

them to the shopkeepers there. He always got the price before picking things. If the price was good, he'd head up the hill and harvest, then come back. If not, he left his carrots in the ground, where they could continue to grow. Dig a row, leave a row.

Because people tended to keep all their money or resources in the hands of other people, they were operating on very thin margins in their personal lives, and could easily wind up in emergencies. At such moments, access to the value stored in others was paramount, and the ability to turn loans over with velocity was essential.

I spent a great deal of time during my research with a woman in Langa named Ana, who was a prolific weaver, a mother of eight, and a prominent figure in earlier versions of this thesis. One day, as I watched her work, our conversation turned to the subject of money. Ana told me how her adult children sometimes called her, in tears, needing money, and she had to find help for them. She took on extra work, or borrowed from whomever would lend to her, or took the title of her motorbike to the neighbors as collateral and asked them for Rp. 600,000, for just one day, for two days. Tears rolled down her face as she told me. "Rich people can pull money from ATMs," she said. "For poor people, it's different." Poor people, like Ana, who can't store value in banks or stores of cash, have to store value in people, and in relationships that can (hopefully) be drawn on as necessary.

There are a range of words in the Ngadha language for borrowing,⁴³ but the weightiest of these is BN *sogo*. *Sogo* appears to have two meanings. One meaning is, simply, to borrow, with the implication of a formal contract. It is possible to *sogo* from anyone, including from a bank, and to *sogo* for any purpose. But *sogo* can also refer to a specific practice of intra-group exchange, specifically for collecting the resources to put on a major ceremony. "Whatever a person has, take it!" Yoosneem told me. "*Sogo* means borrow. Food, animals, anything. Not borrowing for gambling, but for feasting. Promise your land, or your bamboo clumps if necessary." This bears some relation to BN *papa tii*, which Curnow called "the exchange or provision of goods without calculating the market value. Reciprocity is implied but there is no direct or explicit expectation of return. The practice generally occurs between members of the

⁴³ BN *Woli*, "to borrow and return as quickly as possible;" BN *Eki*, "to take opportunistically, like from a person not at home; to steal;" BN *Eki dhue*, "to take without expecting to repay. Between people with an established connection, like relatives or neighbors;" BN *Ala*, "to take without giving back; to steal;" BN *Naka* "theft, the name for the act after *ala*"

same family or *woe*,⁴⁴ and may be as simple as exchanging rice for maize, or contributing to a life-cycle celebration for a relative” (2007: 74-5). Leaders may take *sogo* loans from members of their own houses, and great houses⁴⁵ may take them from the houses that split or descended from them.⁴⁶ It is possible to deflect these requests, but refusal is socially dangerous. While people who want to host ceremonies can invoke claims from times when they assisted other members of their house or *woe* (Arndt 1954: 43, Smedal 2011: 282), Yoosneem emphasized that *sogo* is different from regular debt; in requesting *sogo* assistance, the host may not simply call in old debts. And, he emphasized, the period of repayment is undetermined.⁴⁷

Borrowers are generally slow to return these debts, or lenders to claim them, content to let the indebtedness ride. But a *sogo* debt leaves the borrower extremely vulnerable. As long as the debt remains unpaid, the lender may ask village leaders to intervene; in such a case, the village leader can grant the lender anything the borrower possesses. The lender may later seize some of the borrower’s land, and “forgive” the debt⁴⁸. (Regarding the seizing of property by lenders, Bart told me, “Nowadays, if you did that, you’d be reported to the police for theft.”) Similarly, interest can run rampant. A loan of one buffalo, after ten years, might balloon into a demand for ten equivalent animals. In this way, the rich get richer: those who make *sogo* claims do so out of necessity, so the likelihood they will be able to repay it in a timely fashion is minimal. Those with the resources to lend in the first place can enrich themselves enormously through interest claims. At the same time, families at the top of the hierarchy, who are responsible for staging ceremonies related to objects and monuments, might find themselves deeply indebted to houses to which they are socially superior. The ability of lower-ranked houses

⁴⁴ BN *woe*

⁴⁵ BN *sa’o mere*

⁴⁶ BN *sa’o dhoru*

⁴⁷ A host who wants to assemble resources for a great ceremony will visit particular targets in their homes, to let them know his plans. Normally, the news will be given a chance to reach the target before he arrives. The host will tell the *sogo* target about the ceremony, but will not ask for a contribution directly. In response, the lender will make a very modest statement about what he can bring. These statements drastically understate the assets the lender owns, but are understood to have different, non-literal meaning. In these exchanges, if the lender says, “I can bring a baby chick” or “I can bring betel nut,” the borrower will understand what he means. Yoosneem explained the system of understatement with these examples: baby chick = buffalo, betel nut = pig or buffalo, pumpkin or chayote = pig, egg = buffalo. “Small words” are used, so that the giver does not seem to be arrogant. But the actions must always be larger than the words. A person can’t agree to bring a “pumpkin,” then actually bring pumpkins.

⁴⁸ The method for seizing land is to plant new boundary plants, commonly BN *mesi* trees (*Erythrina* sp.) or a red-leaved plant called BN *ngusu*.

to press their claims on the property of their superiors in practice is uncertain. But the fact remains that a “rich” house might be completely in hock to the “poorer” houses it outranks, on whose resources it has made claims in the past. The emotional and economic burdens of indebtedness are expressed in a common phrase,

<i>Su’u pau wai ulu</i>	Carry for now upon your head
<i>Dheko pau wai logo</i> ⁴⁹	The bag hanging down your back

This phrase evokes a BN *dheko*, a type of basket that hangs down the back, suspended by a cord across the forehead. It is used by people who wish to delay repayment of a debt, and is often associated with bridewealth payments. It speaks clearly to the burden of those who struggle to maintain their material flows, which weighs on their minds and adds to their worries, following them everywhere they go.

People who buy and sell, borrow and lend from each other over many years can see a gradual transformation in their relationships, which can approach the links of kinship. This was especially visible in the long-distance trading journeys undertaken by Ngadha people, particularly people from the Langa subregion, famed around Ngadhaland as traders.⁵⁰ As a girl, Ana had accompanied her mother, also a weaver, on trade journeys to sell and trade textiles. These journeys were conducted on foot, and followed familiar paths; Ana learned them from her mother, who learned them from her own mother, and so on.⁵¹ Their path led through Rara Ele and Naru to So’a, off the northeastern edge of the Bajawa plateau. These journeys lasted for days, and required safe places to eat, sleep, and conduct trade. To this end, Ana’s lineage, like other trading families, established networks of houses, in village after village, where they were known, and could sleep, eat, and do business, in exchange for in-kind “gifts” of the trader’s wares. Ana referred to her network as BN *ngo’e*, a word meaning “guest.” *Ngo’e* relationships were not-quite-kin; Ana did not use kin terms to refer to the people who hosted her, but said they were “like family.” Over time, houses linked by trade *ngo’e* relationships took part in each other’s ceremonies, including traveling some distance to join *reba* celebrations. And the

⁴⁹ The phrase is usually abbreviated to BN *su’u pau dheko pau*.

⁵⁰ BN *dagha* means “trader” or “to trade.” A person who tricks or takes advantage of someone else might be cursed with the phrase BN *dagha ze’e!*, “Damned shitty trader!”

⁵¹ According to old traders I spoke to, Ngadha trade networks extended roughly from Reo to Ende, and were overland, not maritime.

networks were reproduced over generations, as traders brought their children with them from very young ages.

While circulations of resources are essential to the production of Ngadha kinship, as discussed in chapters 3 and 6, I would not argue that economic relations subsume kin relations, or are subsumed by them. Trade did not cause people to change house or *woe* affiliation, nor were two houses in a trader's *ngo'e* network necessarily linked to one another by anything more than the movement of their common guest; *ngo'e* and their hosts did not quite rise to the level of "long-distance kinship" (Kaartinen 2014).⁵² And yet, even as modern transportation has enabled traders like Ana to make their journeys and still return home each night, without staying over at the homes of their former hosts, *ngo'e* networks persist. When one of Ana's daughters went to study in Kupang, in West Timor, she lived rent free for two years in the home of a family from So'a, whose home in Flores was part of the *ngo'e* network Ana inherited from her mother. The original grounds of the relationship were gone, but the kin-like relationship lived on, growing to a new and greater value, supporting a future Ana's ancestors may scarcely have imagined.

The agricultural logic that underlies Ngadha material flow—of planting seeds, allowing them to grow, and seeking to harvest them at the right moment—is linked to a similar logic that deals with money: the logic of investment, the strategic deployment of capital to seek returns, avoid devaluation, and grow.

Currencies have been circulating in southeastern Indonesia for centuries, including Dutch rijksdaalders and florins, Spanish dollars, Indian rupees, English sovereigns, and French francs (Needham 1983: 44-5), guilders and pounds sterling (Hoskins 1993: 211), and cloth currencies, swatches of colored silk, linen, or cotton, which were used by traders from Buton from at least the 17th century up to the 20th (Barnes 1996: 148). Metal currencies were melted down and turned into jewelry (Hoskins 1993: 221), or sometimes worn, in coin form, as ornaments (Needham 1983: 46). Gold stocks in Sumba, and probably in Flores, are likely to have come almost entirely from the slave trade (Needham 1983: 46). Gold coins were the source of the golden heirloom wealth objects that anchored Ngadha house treasuries, and constituted a major

⁵² Perhaps this was because travelers or guests could turn out to be non-human beings in disguise—a recurring theme in Ngadha myths, in Catholic teaching, and in many traditions around the world (Pitt-Rivers 1977).

component of bridewealth. Yet throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Dutch observers noted the unfamiliarity of most people around Flores, Timor, and Sumba with money, especially away from the coasts, and remarked that most trade was carried out in kind (Barnes 1996: 148). In the colonial period, the Dutch attempted to extend their power by extending the reach of their currency, hitting Flores with a head tax and a commodity tax (Metzner 1982: 141, 186), and banning trade in kind (Barnes 1996: 390). In practice, the spread of currency was hampered by a lack of actual coins, especially of extremely small denominations (Barnes 1996: 148). In 1916, the main medium of exchange and standard of value in western Flores was still cloth (Barnes 1996: 148). In Ndona, near Ende, cloth-for-food was still the standard form of market exchange until the 1960s (Hamilton 1994: 50). In the 1970s, the medium of exchange in the markets of Keo were earthenware pots, which came in a wide variety of sizes (Tule 2004: 51). In northeastern Manggarai, taxes could be paid in kind until 1973, and even then, cash amounts were assessed in units of cloth (Erb 1994: 202). Ngadha people themselves told me that cash was rare on the plateau before the 1970s, and clay pots, grain, and cloth remained essential media of exchange.

Ethnographers of Flores over the last several decades have noted the encroachment of money into both everyday and ritual exchanges (e.g. Arndt 1954: 42, Metzner 1982: 87, Webb 1990, Tule 2004: 211, Curnow 2007: 133, Lewis 2010: 141). While, as Curnow observed, “cash has neither replaced nor superseded exchange relationships” (2007: 133-4), I found people readily substituted cash for the gifts of bridewealth,⁵³ for the pigs brought by *wailaki*, and small gifts around funerals, Catholic confirmation ceremonies, and so on. Money easily crossed whatever boundaries might have been posited between “spheres of exchange” (Bohannon & Bohannon 1968; Gudeman 1986: 125). In one example, before a ritual meal, I was asked to give money equal to the value of a chicken. The ancestors don’t receive money, I was told, but they do receive blood, and money was the promise of future blood, something the ancestors’ living descendants found acceptable.

⁵³ See appendix II on marriage practices



Plate 70 A cash payment made as part of a bridewealth exchange, Bone Waru village, Langa.

Before cash was common, Ngadha people commonly invested resources in “cloth, gold and sacred items stored or displayed on the *mataraga* ritual altar” (Curnow 2008: 376). As explored in chapter 7, these objects were not inert stores of value, but afforded vital access to processes of social and spiritual production, which were expected to secure growth. This affordance is expected from the methods used to store value today, be it in money, in objects, or, as above, in relationships.

Ngadha people are used to money now, but money carries risks of its own. Ngadha people told me all the time that they did not like to have money on hand. It wasn’t a safe store of value. Fluctuations in the value of Indonesia’s currency following the Southeast Asian Monetary Crisis of the late 1990s caused farmers to distrust banks, and regard money as an unreliable store of value (Curnow 2007: 154-5). Money accumulated in public attracted constant requests for loans and gifts. A common saying went, BN *dhoi jia sama hobho tana*, “money is like peanuts;” if you have a bowl of peanuts in your house, you snack on them idly throughout the day. Everyone who comes in takes a few. Before you know it, all your peanuts are gone. Much like the occasional seizure of pigs, *sogo* loan demands, or the wheedling for rice that caused a man’s parents to hide their stores among the firewood, requests for gifts and loans were so common that money in a person’s possession evaporated quickly. People may accumulate money in private, hoping to avoid these requests and preserve social equilibrium (Dheidae 2001: 126). But while money can be hidden from the living, it cannot be hidden from the dead; concealing wealth invited sanction from the ancestors (Curnow 2012: 109-110). Rather than dealing from large

stores of money, many people were more comfortable engaging in “indirect barter,” securing tiny amounts of money for immediate expenditure on an as-needed basis.

At the same time, people valued objects and services that could be bought only with money, such as health care, education, and buffalo, which were no longer locally raised and had to be purchased. How could people access the benefits of money while reducing the risks of holding it?

One of the only safe ways to store one’s money was in debts—by lending it out, and treating the debt claim as an asset. “Debt is good,” Bart told me. This did not mean only the “floating value” of debts between family and friends, which were always present and available to be claimed, or the “old/new hoe” debts of pigs, which would come back but at a timing outside of anyone’s control. Many of my informants took enthusiastic part in a range of financial schemes, which seemed explicitly designed to keep their own money out of their own hands, and ensure that whatever money was in their hands was not their own.

I was in the car with Robby one day when he asked me to lend him money. “For my mother,” he explained. Some time ago, she had purchased a share in a *koperasi*, which gave her the option to borrow Rp. 10 million, a larger sum of money than she had put in. This she did, immediately. She would never have repaid the money, either; except that a new option had become available. If she repaid the loan now, she would become eligible to take out an even larger loan. Robby asked if I would lend her the Rp. 10 million to repay the original loan. “You’ll get it back right away,” he said, “when she borrows more.” (He took it well when I declined.)

Robby had a complex financial life himself, with three loans currently active, including one from Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI), and two more from two different savings and credit unions (BI *koperasi*), small financial institutions that are common across Indonesia (Henley 2007). He once explained to me how one of these *koperasi* worked; it was fresh in his mind, because he and Bart had just spent the day attending meetings there, hoping to buy in. People held individual accounts, into which they were expected to make regular deposits, monthly, weekly, or even daily. Many people skipped these deposits, putting money in more haphazardly, as it came to hand. In practice, *koperasi* accounts were less like savings, and more like shares.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ BI *saham*

That's because you couldn't withdraw your savings whenever you felt like it. The *koperasi* didn't keep any capital on hand. Your savings weren't there. Instead, all of its capital was constantly lent out. "It's seed capital,"⁵⁵ Robby explained. And what good was an unplanted seed? In the meantime, the money that Robby's mother and other customers of the *koperasi* had at home with them was not their own collected savings, but a loan. Her method to repay this loan was to seek new loans, allowing her to obtain new loans, and so on. All money that would pass through her hands would be encumbered by multiple claims. Managing her finances was the business of managing the timing and intensity with which those claims could be answered, while also attempting to reap dividends from loans and gifts she had made to other people.

Another way to handle money was to participate in *arisan*, the rotating savings clubs that are ubiquitous around Indonesia (Fessler 2002), in which members meet, pool money, and send the sum home with a different person after each meeting. Bogala was rife with *arisan*, including some that met weekly (with contributions of Rp. 50,000 from each member), monthly (Rp. 200,000), and yearly (Rp. 1 million). These groups usually had about 20 members; so members of the annual *arisan* got a payout about once every 20 years, a sudden windfall that people referred to as BI *uang kaget*, "surprise money." Bart was a member of one of these, which stipulated that members use the money for construction.

While the money that goes into *arisan* contributions does not have the potential to grow, like money loaned to *koperasi* does, at least it is protected from the forces of erosion that beset money that a person holds onto themselves. The large, sudden influxes of money that *arisan* brought people shared some qualities with a gambler's winnings as described by Curnow: "an individual who has had a big win does take home a large amount of cash—but this is socialised cash. It is open and public knowledge that the person has had a windfall and they can expect to receive loan requests" (2012: 112). The value invested by the other participants, however, is safe from such requests for as long as it continues to float, unreturned, as an unrealized future potential.

Koperasi and *arisan* are not unique to Ngadhaland. But they illustrate how logics of social investment that predate the widespread adoption of money have been adapted to finance. Ngadha people may not regard cash as something to save (Curnow 2012: 111), simply because

⁵⁵ BI *tanam modal*

the value represented by cash is better stored in other people's hands, where at best it has the potential to grow, and at worst it is protected from dissipation and dispersal.

Mundane and spiritual flows are not separate

The flows of resources that are managed through sacrifice, and the circulations of resources that are managed by more mundane, everyday means, are not separate from each other. Both of them are means of influencing the future, through attempts to turn a little into a lot. And both rest ultimately on supernatural influence, as the ability of kin and neighbors to return or enlarge circulations ultimately rests on their own level of support from spirits and ancestors. The interactions and negotiations Ngadha people make with their ancestors, and the ways they direct the material flows around them, are expressions of personal autonomy. But the risks of planting seeds—spiritually, socially, or economically—are determined by “variables beyond human agency” (Bloch 1951 in Curnow 2012: 105).

When I arrived in Bajawa to begin my fieldwork, my first task was to find a particular kind of house for Caroline and myself to live in. My partner, Caroline, had never lived in Indonesia before; and while she was keen for an adventure, we both recognized that a house with certain comforts—a western toilet, a hot shower—would enable her to stay with me for longer stretches. I came to Bajawa a month early to search for a house that suited us.

A few days into my search, I became convinced that the house I wanted to find didn't exist yet. What I did find was a house that could become perfect. The owner of the Bajawa guesthouse where I was staying spoke to an old schoolfriend about me. That schoolfriend was Robby, who knew about Bart's house, and drove me up to Bogala to meet Bart and see the place. It had three bedrooms, an indoor bathroom, and a large common room. It stood on a high concrete foundation, with a fine view over the valley below. The only problem was that it was unfinished.



Plate 71 The unfinished house.

The house belonged to Bart, who was building it as a home for his own growing family. Bart was an engineer by training (he was the first member of his family to attend university), and while most of the construction was done by hired workmen, he had done as much of the work as he could in his spare time, and enticed his family members to pitch in when possible. The structure of the house was built, and the roof had been attached. But the walls and floor were rough and raw; the windows and doors were empty holes; there was no water tank; the bathroom fixtures were not yet bought or installed; there was no furniture. Bart said that ceremonies had been performed to prepare the house for human occupation, “cooling” it with coconut water and inviting the ancestors with an offering of chicken blood. But in material terms, the house was not ready to be lived in.

What’s more, Bart was out of cash. He worked extra side jobs, on top of his full-time role designing water systems for the local government. His wife Nora worked too, normally, but she was heavily pregnant, and had taken leave from her part-time work in an office and her side-job selling buns until well after her baby was born. They had taken out loans from multiple banks and financial cooperatives. But it wasn’t enough. As an engineer, Bart had quite a high income for the area, but he was constantly strapped for cash, sometimes to the point of being unable to purchase the day’s pack of cigarettes. With no more money to spend, their credit lines maxed out, and all their new income needed for daily expenses, family responsibilities, and debt servicing, Bart and Nora had no idea how they were going to finish the house. In the meantime, they were living with their toddler in a temporary bamboo shack with a dirt floor and a leaky roof, next to the building site.

Bart knew from the planning stage that this house that was beyond his means to build, but he started building anyway, without knowing where the money would come from. I soon discovered that everyone seemed to build their BN *baru* (non-*sa'o*) houses in this way: piecemeal, without a plan for how the house would be completed, or where the resources would come from. Everywhere I went, I saw pieces of houses—a roof with no walls or floor, say, or a foundation and pillars. Sometimes, I was told, years passed between the erection of a few pillars and the addition of a roof. There was a clear relation here to the progressive construction of *sa'o*, discussed in chapter 3; *sa'o* were always undergoing progressive improvements, with each phase pointing to the next. But *sa'o* were upgraded in discrete phases, and work began only when all the materials were ready. On these *baru* projects, however, people got started, expended all the resources at their disposal, then let the buildings languish, unfinished and unusable. Builders relied on future events, future flows, to provide the means to continue. Sometimes, so much time elapsed between opportunities to add on to a house that the elements took charge, decaying the site so badly that the first rounds of progress were ruined.

Bart and Nora were visited with an unexpected windfall—me—that made all the difference. I appeared out of the blue, offered to pay a year's rent up front,⁵⁶ and not to take residence for a month. It was enough money to make the house weathertight and put in the bathroom⁵⁷, and enough time to get the work done before I moved in. All I asked for was the use of the house for one year. It was perfect. Later, Bart described my arrival as a blessing, a gift from God, and the fulfillment of a dream.⁵⁸ My arrival was not caused by the specific needs of the house-building project. Bart had not invested in finding someone like myself—the possibility did not occur to him. What he had invested in was good relationships with the ancestors, his family, and his broader social network. The arrival of a sudden inflow of resources was part and parcel of Bart's overall involvement in spiritual and material flows. My intercession was spiritual in cause, and financial in effect. Erb has argued that the logic of dealing with ancestors has frequently been applied to outsiders, such as missionaries, “who materially have asked for very

⁵⁶ I paid the year's rent in three installments over a few months.

⁵⁷ I also bought some furniture, which I gave it to the family when I left, and a small refrigerator, which I agreed to leave to Ana, over Nora's objections.

⁵⁸ Immediately after I agreed, and Bart and I shook hands, Bart's father Paulus walked by. Bart introduced me, and told his father that this foreigner wanted to rent the unfinished house. Paulus looked at me skeptically and said to Bart, “don't force him.”

little, while in exchange they have built schools and churches, given medicine and many other kinds of assistance,” and even tourists (a category that could arguably include myself) (Erb 2013: 300). The outflows attracted new inflows. My arrival in Bart’s life made little practical sense, but perfect spiritual sense.

Conclusion: “Rich as a running stream”

By the logic of sacrifice, Ngadha people “give a little and get a lot” by negotiating with spiritual forces, changing the parameters of their exchanges, experimenting with substitutions and formulations of ritual language, sharing meals and making trades across the boundary that separates life, death, and the regimes of value that differentiate the living from the dead. Each step in that negotiation is informed by the results of past exchanges—the results achieved or not achieved by previous sacrifice. A successful negotiation will shape the future for living participants, who may prosper or starve by the intercession of spiritual forces, and will also shape future sacrifices, which build on previous results.

By the logic of reproduction, Ngadha people “give a little and get a lot” by planting seeds, then permitting them to grow or proliferate. This is true in an agricultural sense, and also in a social sense; people pass on gifts, loans, and exchanges with one another, in the hope and expectation of achieving larger returns in the future. Just as yams left in the ground will proliferate, yielding a greater harvest the longer they are undisturbed, Ngadha people try to leave their debts with one another unclaimed for as long as possible. And just as planting more seeds will yield a greater harvest, people try to enter into as many exchange relationships as possible. This is a strategy for growth, because each exchange has the potential to yield a larger return, and also a strategy for savings: because assets in their possession are liable to be claimed by others, it is safer to lend assets out quickly, then claim them back as necessary. As Ana said, rich people have ATMs, and the poor have each other. These circulations allow a person to manifest wealth in a spreading array of relationships, based on repeated, gradually enlarging flows of loans, debts, gifts, and business exchanges. By storing value in a flow of resources rather than in material or financial form, and in the hands of others rather than in their own possession, Ngadha people protect it from decay, theft, and the risk of seizure by others. It’s keeping while giving, grounded in the need to secure permanence in a world of loss and decay (Weiner 1992: 7).

These logics of planting and sacrifice may appear separate, because they occur on opposite sides of the divide between the living and the dead. In practice, Ngadha people are engaged in streams of exchanges with both the living and the dead, and can hope to profit from both in similar ways, giving a little, and getting a lot. Just as the possession of heirloom goods is both evidence of the right to possess them, and also of the responsibility to feed and care for them, financial success is evidence of spiritual support, and also carries the responsibility to perform further sacrifices; offerings must be made before the harvest, and also after. Future prosperity demands participation in this flow of resources. That means maintaining, broadening, and strengthening social ties, which are unstable and depend on the consistent movement of goods and people. This flow forms a recognition of the good things that have been received, and also as a stimulus for future good fortune. The flow can take the form of ritual participation, hospitality, and generosity. The flow can also take the form of engaged participation in extended networks of exchange, when it would be perfectly possible to do otherwise.

In the 1950s, Arndt wrote: “Of the very wealthy it is said BN *Ngai mocé*⁵⁹ *vae béré*, ‘rich as a running stream;’ his life flows easily as a running stream; everything that he wishes for comes to him” (1954: 458). People who engage in circulations like those described in this chapter may appear to have nothing, but have everything coming to them; by maximizing their “net outgoings,” they acquire a large network of people who are indebted to them, while also securing future inflows (Gregory 2015).⁶⁰ These flows cross the boundaries between kin and foreigner, between ancestor and descendant, and create the future for descendants yet to be born, when the actors of today have become ancestors themselves. Ngadha life points to a kind of encompassing circulation, which pulls all people into relation with one another, creating endless opportunities for connection and growth, as well as potentials for domination and entrapment. One such type of circulation is called BN *meghe*, and is the subject of the following chapter.

⁵⁹ In Arndt’s orthography, “c” indicates a glottal stop. I would have spelled this word, *mo’e*.

⁶⁰ https://haubooks.org/viewbook/gifts-and-commodities/10_ch03

CHAPTER 9: *Meghe* Distribution: an Encompassing Circulation

Between *ngadhu* installations, funerals, *reba* celebrations, and weddings, I attended a fair share of large public feasts during my time in Ngadhaland. These feasts involved traveling around a village from house to house, eating and drinking as many as eight or ten meals over the course of a day. On certain occasions, particularly following the slaughter of a buffalo, I and the other feasters received additional take-home portions of half-cooked meat and rice. This post-ceremony distribution of food was called BN *meghe*,¹ and it was meted out to all the guests at the feast—men, women, and children. *Meghe* distributions were concurrent with, but distinct from, feasting; it did not consist of leftovers from the feast, but was an entirely different pool of food, mixing meat and rice supplied by the organizers with food brought by visiting *wailaki* leaders and ordinary guests. I saw hundreds of kilograms of meat and hundreds more of rice served out in great double-handfuls to guests, who cheerfully received it in baskets brought from home for that special purpose. As displays of abundance, *meghe* distributions were spectacular. Yet many people confided to me that when they got home, they would throw most or even all of that food away, to be eaten by dogs, pigs, and chickens, not by humans.

Meghe was controversial. Participants called it wasteful, and the state tried to tamp it down with taxes and policy pronouncements. In other respects *meghe* was celebrated, as a form of charity, a fulfillment of inherited responsibilities, and the basis of a unifying experience that bound Ngadha people together, materially, spiritually, and emotionally. As a practice of exchange, *meghe* distributions operated on multiple levels. They gave elites a stage to compete with one another, and ordinary people a way to build their networks of circulation. They threw into relief the powers afforded by ceremonial goods and titles to borrow, stage mass events, assemble *wailaki*, and perform affiliation. They drew attention to an element of pig and buffalo exchange that is normally ignored by anthropologists focused on ritual and sacrifice: what happens to the meat after the animal is killed. And they seemed to illuminate a view of resource disposal beyond

¹ BN *meghe* was the spelling I was given consistently, by many people. Arndt (1961), however, spells it *megé*; Mopa (2004) spells it *mêge*; and Curnow (2007) spells it *mege*.

discourses of waste and surplus. *Meghe* distribution encapsulated the social and material flows at the basis of Ngadha life.

What is *meghe*?

The word BN *meghe* itself means, simply, “food” or “to eat;” further meanings can include food that fortifies a person before traveling or dying; food that fuels or rewards collective labor; or food used to host or entertain guests (Arndt 1961: 323). While the literal meaning of the word is mundane,² people used it to indicate a specific practice of sharing out take-home portions of meat and rice, following a large ceremony.

Meghe is distributed only at ceremonies that attract the participation of outside *wailaki*, whose members bring pigs and rice that contribute to the distribution pool, and who take the portions home afterwards. These ceremonies are usually linked to objects, such as the erection of a *ngadhu* post or the upgrading of a traditional house, but *meghe* can also be distributed at the funerals of rich or important people, like a *mori dhoru bo*.³

Meghe can be made with pig meat alone, but usually begins with buffalo meat. During my research year, every buffalo slaughter I saw led to *meghe* distribution, and every *meghe* distribution I saw included buffalo meat. Buffaloes are deeply meaningful all over central Flores, as they are around much of southeastern Indonesia. The animals are central to the “masculine” goods of bridewealth exchanges in Manggarai (Erb 1994), Nage (Forth 1998), Keo (Tule 2004), Lio (Howell 1989), and Ngadha (appendix II; Smedal 2000). In Ngadha myths, humans can transform into buffaloes (Arndt 1932 in Forth 1998: 166), or buffaloes into people (Djawanai 1983: 201), indicating that humans and buffaloes have a certain equivalence of status; they are “beings whose categorical membership is ambiguous” (Smedal 2000: 123). The meanings buffaloes carry for Ngadha people have already been described in exegetic detail by other anthropologists, particularly Smedal, whose 2009 chapter on value and the buffalo focuses on resonances in the language used to describe buffaloes and people, especially noble people; the

² BN *sogo* was another word whose meaning was mundane—“to borrow”—but also frequently referred to a specific type of borrowing practice.

³ The closed baskets containing *meghe* from funerals are sprinkled with powdered lime (BI *kapor*) before they are taken away; this protects the food from bad spirits. This is not required for *meghe* distributed after “happy” ceremonies.

exchange of living animals in marriage payments; and the spiritual values produced by killing the animals and extracting their blood.⁴ These analyses often focus on the role of buffaloes in exchange, and particularly marriage exchanges. But they seldom go beyond the point of sacrifice, where the animal is killed, to look at how the meat of buffaloes and other sacrificial animals is exchanged. When I did my research, the only way living buffaloes were exchanged in Rara Ele was for cash, when they were purchased from outside the district. In marriage payments (rare in any case), actual buffaloes were displaced by cash.⁵ In a year, the only kind of buffalo exchange I witnessed was the circulation of the mountains of meat produced by buffalo slaughter.

It is not possible to know exactly how *meghe* began, or how it has changed over the long term. But *meghe* practices today are rooted in the memories of living people, which were formed during a particular moment in Ngadha's history: the "buffalo boom," mentioned in chapter 2, which ran roughly from the imposition of Dutch imperial rule in the early 20th century until the consolidation of the developmentalist New Order government (Schröter 2005: 339). That period saw some epic slaughters. For example, when the village of Wogo in Golewa moved to a new location, 300 buffalo and untold numbers of pigs were killed (Arndt 1963). "The village's paramount objective on this occasion was to bring no shame upon itself through being unable to entertain its guests on a befitting scale or being unable to provide each of them with enough meat and rice to take home" (Daeng 1988: 255). The elders who run large ceremonies today were children during the boom time, and think back nostalgically to the great slaughters of yesteryear. I heard many stories of great ceremonies of decades past, at which dozens, even hundreds of buffaloes were killed, and where thousands of people feasted on site, then took portions away with them. This "boom" set a baseline against which modern buffalo slaughter is measured. When remembering such events, old people were liable to grouse that their ancestors, with their great herds and golden wealth objects, were richer

⁴ Smedal writes that the livers of buffaloes are never read for signs (2009: 285). In Rara Ele, however, I witnessed people looking for signs in a particular lobe of the buffalo's liver called BN *lodho kaba* (or *lodo kaba*, Arndt 1961: 300).

⁵ See appendix II. Smedal argued that buffaloes cannot be substituted with cash in marriage payments (2009: 288), but this was not my experience.

than the Ngadha community today. Now that the gold has been sold,⁶ and the pastures replaced with coffee trees, people may have the benefits of education, health, and employment, but no buffaloes. People who reminisced about the “richer past” tended to belong to the noble class.

While Curnow wrote that *meghe* is an excess, left over from the feasting (2007: 149), I found that *meghe* rice and meat are not left over from the day’s feasting, but come from a completely separate pool of food. The *meghe* pool begins with contributions from the organizers: the meat of buffalo and pigs slaughtered at the ceremony, and large baskets of half-cooked rice, which was called BN *zo*. When pigs brought by the heads of visiting *wailaki* are killed, they are divided below the ribs; half of the meat is added to the *meghe* pool, and the other half is returned to the *wailaki*, raw, for distribution among themselves. To the *zo* are added baskets of half-cooked rice brought by the women of each *wailaki*—not one basket of rice per *wailaki*, but one basket per woman, meaning each *wailaki* brought many baskets of rice. When the rice and meat are pooled together, men from the hosting village distribute it to guests. All portions are equal in size, including portions given to children. The organizers themselves (and perhaps members of their house or *woe*) do not partake in *meghe*, but all other guests are eligible to receive it.

Because the largest contribution to the *meghe* pool is made by the organizers of the ceremony, who do not take any *meghe* themselves, in one sense the distribution is a kind of gift, in which the rich share their prosperity with the poor. As recently as the 1970s, *meghe* was an essential supplement to the diets of Ngadha’s poor (Langadjawa 1978: 22), who dried the rice to recook, and smoked the meat, or else fermented it in bamboo tubes stuffed with toasted maize flour and salt,⁷ a process that kept it fit to eat for a year or more. *Meghe* today is still broadly understood by its participants as an expression of generosity. The prospect of receiving a portion is an incentive for ordinary people to participate in *wailaki* and attend large ceremonies.

⁶ Some families sold their gold objects, then feigned fury, as if the objects had been stolen. Others sold their gold objects, and replaced them with similar ones made of gilt or brass. Objects sold decades ago were still described as inalienable, and integral to the health and wealth of the house; selling them brought unnatural deaths (BN *golo*) on the house, one in each of three successive generations.

⁷ This dish is called BN *wu’u fui* or “toasted maize flour and meat.” (*Fui* is Rara Ele dialect; a more common rendering of the word for “meat” may be *sui*.)

But the gift aspect of *meghe* is complex. While the original buffaloes and other animals that make up the core of the *meghe* pool are presented by the organizers, they may not have raised those animals themselves. According to Daeng, most animals at large slaughters in the past were raised by *woe* members and merely claimed by their leader in advance of the ritual—this would be *sogo* borrowing, as described in chapter 8. *Woe* members who contributed animals in this situation were not compensated with replacement animals, but with quantities of butchered meat commensurate with the animals they contributed (Daeng 1988: 257). Today, when buffaloes are purchased, the money to buy them is raised from contributions from the whole *woe*, and not solely from the pockets of the organizers. Within the organizers' own *woe*, rank-and-file members whose animals are claimed are compensated with raw meat instead of a living animal, and may be construed as having made a gift or loan to their *woe* leader, who organized the slaughter.

Meat from pigs brought by *wailaki* also makes up an important part of the *meghe* pool, but the gift status of those animals is murky as well. Just as the organizers of the ritual can obtain animals for slaughter by *sogo* or purchase, *wailaki* leaders may also seize or borrow a pig for the occasion from lower-ranking members of their *woe*, or buy one using money contributed by lower-ranking members. Furthermore, no part of pigs brought by *wailaki* are given to the organizers of the event; half of each pig is returned to the leader who brought it, and its other half is added to the *meghe* pool, of which the organizers will receive no part. What is given, then, may only be a share of the spectacle—the addition of another squealing sacrifice, and an increase in the size of the distribution pool the organizers succeeded in marshaling.

At the same time, every household contributes rice, making at least some contribution to the overall pool. Nobody knows who takes their contribution home, or who specifically donated the rice and meat they take away with them. In other words, *meghe* is partly a gift, but a gift so complex that it is impossible to parse out who exactly is giving what to whom. It is not simply a redistribution of wealth from rich to poor. Rather, *meghe* provides an impetus to the circulation of money, animals, debts, and food, both within groups and between them. The organizers of a *meghe* distribution provide a nucleus around which a much greater exchange can grow.

Meghe is a circulation of food. It is not an exchange of prestige goods. The end result, therefore, is not one where the rich dominate the poor by offering them unreturnable gifts, creating an eternal obligation, as in Sikka, where gifts of ivory established the sovereignty of Sikka's rulers over the people who received them (Lewis 2010: 136-7). Organizers who seize animals for *meghe* are, in part, expressing their power over members of their own *woe*. By concentrating animals in their own hands, they deprive other members of their groups of the means for creating new social ties or improving their own social positions, thus protecting themselves from challenges (Gregory 2015)⁸. But distributing *meghe* does not grant the organizers any authority over the guests to their village who accept it.

While *meghe* shares some qualities with gifts, it is also an example of pooling. Sahlins argues that reciprocity, the hallmark of gift exchange, is a “between” relation, requiring sides defined as separate, while pooling is a “within” relation, with a social center and a social boundary; he cites Polanyi's term “centricity” (Sahlins 1972: 188-189). *Meghe* distribution clearly consists of the assembly and redistribution of a pool of resources, but it does not have a single center. Every group involved in *meghe* pooling—the *woe* of the hosts, the hosts and the other *woe* of the village, the *wailaki* with their leaders and participants—undergoes its own process of pooling, gifting, and lending. And *meghe* is, by its nature, a pooling that includes multiple groups—different *woe*, from different villages—not a single in-group. Furthermore, people are engaged in multiple relations that can yield *meghe* distributions; I received *meghe* five times in a six-month period, each time under different circumstances, with different hosting groups. Any group that organizes a *meghe* distribution will receive *meghe* at events organized by others. Unlike prestige goods, food is easily replaced, and food given in return for a gift is not more or less valuable than food given as an initial gift. Recipients of *meghe* distributions are temporarily unequal, but that inequality is reversible. And the reciprocities of *meghe* operate at multiple levels, from the interactions and exchanges of *woe* and villages at the highest level, to the exchanges of ordinary individuals, who contribute, mix, and receive. The number of sides is factorial; the affiliations are multivalent. If the economic is a

⁸ https://haubooks.org/viewbook/gifts-and-commodities/10_ch03

“modality of the intimate” (Sahlins 1972: 77), *meghe* distribution represents an expansive application of intimacy.

***Meghe* in practice: a feast at Beiposo**

One of the *meghe* distributions I attended followed the installation of two *ngadhu* posts in Beiposo, a village close to Bajawa, surrounded by coffee forests, maize fields, and stands of timber. Beiposo lay on the cusp of two minor cultural areas: Nua Lima Zua, the “seven villages” area that included Bajawa and its immediate surrounds, and Rara Ele, the “upward road,” which included Bogala, my own home village. Beiposo people spoke the Rara Ele dialect, but they marked their trunk rider houses with *ana iye*, the miniature version of the traditional house, like the villages in Nua Lima Zua. Beiposo was a more or less typical Ngadha *nua*, with a long, rectangular plaza oriented roughly up and down a slope, ringed by concrete houses with *sa’o* inside them. The plaza contained five *ngadhu/bhaga* pairs; a ‘drum stone,’⁹ a broad flagstone platform backed by a row of monoliths; and a large, pink-painted Catholic chapel in the form of a traditional house, with an ornate traditional doorway and lintel¹⁰ sculpted in concrete.¹¹

This event was a collaboration between two *woe*, which had both put up *ngadhu* in the preceding days. Two days earlier, the posts were carried in and set upright. This was followed by a dancing day, similar to the one described in chapter 4. This final day was for feasting, the slaughter of buffaloes, and the *meghe* distribution that would follow. Together, these three days of feasting and celebration made up a BN *ka ngadhu* or “*ngadhu* feast.”

⁹ BN *watu laba*

¹⁰ BN *kawa pere*

¹¹ I did not see the inside of the chapel, so I can’t comment on its interior layout.



Plate 72 Severed buffalo heads at the feet of *ngadhu* posts.

When I arrived in Beiposo, at 8 am, the three buffaloes that would form the basis of the *meghe* distribution pool had already been killed, and their severed heads were propped against the bases of the two newly-erected posts. The buffalo carcasses lay in pieces on a temporary, purpose-built bamboo platform by the side of the drum stone, where men with machetes—all men, mostly of middle age—smoked, talked, and chop-chop-chopped the meat, offal, and bone into small, more or less uniform chunks, which they tossed into metal drums. When the drums were full, they were topped up with water, and set on fires to boil. Men with bamboo paddles stirred the meat as it cooked. When the meat was still partially raw they tipped it out onto banana leaves to cool, then piled it up in a massive bamboo trough on the drum stone. This work of butchering and cooking had only just begun, and would take up much of the day.



Plate 73 *Meghe* meat cooking.

I didn't see anyone I knew, so I called Robby, who had invited me to this ceremony. "You just went straight there?" he chided me. "Come back. You have to go in with a *wailaki*." I got back on my motorbike and drove to Robby's village. When we had 15 or 20 men ready to go,¹² we loaded a large black pig belonging to the head of the *wailaki* into the back of a pickup truck and departed, with the truck up front, and a caravan of motorbikes following behind. The truck moved slowly, and I made a move to pull in front of it, but Robby stopped me. The pig, he said, and the man bringing it, had to lead us.

We arrived back in Beiposo around 8:30 am. Our pig was dragged screaming from the pickup truck, and tied to a stake in the village plaza beside 18 others. Robby and our *wailaki* went into a house and sat together in the front room. I handed out some cigarettes, and asked about the day's events. The two *ngadhu* being celebrated today belonged to *woe* Maghi, who killed one buffalo, and *woe* Ngadha Ana Manu, who had killed two. Why did one *woe* kill two buffaloes, and the other only one? I asked. No reason, came the answer. "There's no difference between killing one [buffalo] or ten," one man told me. "The meaning is the same." If the ancestors allow it, even that one buffalo, or BN *kaba*, might be replaced with a BN *kaba ranga*, a "buffalo that eats pig food"—that is, a pig—or even with a baby chicken. Whereas the buffalo would be tied to the *ngadhu* pole for sacrifice, the baby chicken would be tied to the stem of a coconut leaf.¹³ That kind of sacrifice would yield blood, but no shareable meat.

If it doesn't matter to the ancestors how many animals you kill, then any number beyond the minimum must serve a different purpose. I didn't get to meet the organizers, so I couldn't ask them in person, but I asked various people throughout the day: why did one *woe* killed two buffaloes, and the other only one? The commentary that resulted was a mix of two arguments that I heard many times, in many places, concerning the importance of slaughtering more or fewer animals.

¹² Normally, at least some women would come along with the men of the *wailaki*, but not this time; today they would come in the afternoon, bringing rice to be used in the *meghe* distribution.

¹³ BN *lidi*

There were two primary arguments in favor of killing more animals—of slaughtering two buffaloes instead of one. The first rested on precedence and memory. Like the circulations of pigs, which follow established precedents of size, buffalo slaughters followed precedents set at earlier iterations of the ceremony. Some people described the buffaloes slaughtered at ceremonies as debts to the ancestors, obligations that could not be reduced—replacements for earlier animals, sacrificed years, even generations before. To shrink the ceremony, to kill fewer animals, would violate those debt relations. Many people talked about the extravagance of past ceremonies with pride, and regaled me with stories of the slaughter of hundreds of animals—slaughters that are now impossible, as coffee trees have transformed the landscape and eliminated large herds. They held these past events up as a kind of ideal, and always noted the emotional satisfaction their ancestors felt at providing food to so many people. The other argument focused less on relations with the dead, and more on relations with the living. Providing more food enabled the hosts to attract a greater number of participants to their event—more people would contribute to the pool, witness the distribution, and carry portions home with them. This maximized the event’s potential to build affiliations—both between groups and their leaders, but between their constituent members, as described in chapter 4. It also presented a maximalist view of the status of the organizing *woe* and its leadership. People who joined large gatherings were both participants in the display of “manifest support of the living,” and also an audience for it (Daeng 1988: 255-257).

Mid-morning, several meals into the day’s feasting, a few hundred people gathered in the village plaza to witness the slaughter of twenty-four large, black pigs. Four of these twenty-four were supplied by the two *woe* hosting the event, with one from each trunk rider and each tip rider. The other twenty pigs were brought by twenty attending *wailaki*. Each pig represented an investment of some five years of labor and care, or a potential market price of Rp. 2-4 million. This part of the event was called BN *pibe kaba*, or “answer/complement the buffalo.”

Men, including younger men in their late teens and twenties, started to truss the pigs up for slaughter. Each pig’s front feet were tied together across its back; the rear feet were also tied together, and pulled straight back, forcing the pigs to lie flat on their bellies. The screaming! The screaming of the pigs. I felt it in my chest, in my guts, a

visceral pain and disgust, but no one else seemed bothered by it. Even the pigs seemed indifferent, snuffling around happily as their companions were tied down, then shrieking in surprise when their own turns came. A young boy calmed one of the pigs as it was tied, gently stroking it on the head and behind the ears. The pigs were all arranged in front of the drum stone, facing downhill towards the line of *ngadhu*. Each was attended by four men: two to hold the pig's hind legs, one to deliver the initial machete blow, and another to step in and take another hack, should the first man fail to finish his pig off cleanly. The method of killing was BN *wela*, “to split,” an apparent cognate of the BI word *belah*. The method requires a man (always a man) to straddle the prone pig, raise his machete high overhead, and bring the blade down onto the pig's forehead.¹⁴ This is a thick part of the skull, and does not always split easily. even when it does, the pig seldom dies from a single blow. Occasionally, men continue to pass the machete, giving friends a chance to enjoy the slaughter. Sometimes, if the killing isn't clean enough, it may be deemed necessary to try again with a different pig. When the skull has been sufficiently opened, the men flip the pig onto its back, and someone rushes in with a bucket to catch the blood and brains spilling from the wound, for use in cooking.¹⁵



Plate 74 A pig trussed for slaughter.

The leaders of two two hosting *woe* delivered some ritual speech, similar to the *pibe kaba* speech included in chapter 8, and their four pigs were dispatched. Then a

¹⁴ The verb BN *wela* can also be used to indicate the ritual slaughter of a buffalo, or the execution of a human being (Smedal 2009: 280).

¹⁵ Meat cooked with blood and grated coconut is called BN *ra'a rete*.

signal was given, and the twenty remaining pigs were killed. Members of the crowd held up their phones to film the slaughter. (Many ceremonies like this one had official videographers.) The young men heaved the carcasses of the pigs onto small fires, to burn off their bristles. Young men turned the bodies over with long levers of split bamboo, and stoked the flames with squirts and sashes of kerosene. When the four pigs killed by the two hosting *woe* were ready, the *woe* leaders leaned over each one and made two slices into the fat on its back, a symbolic nod to the work of butchering, which in practice they left to others. Butchers separated the heads and the necks of those pigs, and set them aside. The livers were removed and checked for omens. The rest was chopped up and added to the *meghe* pots. The twenty pigs brought by *wailaki* were cut in half below the ribs. The top halves went back to the pig owners, to be divided amongst the members of their *wailaki*, as a reward for their participation.¹⁶ The bottom halves were chopped up and added to the *meghe* pots. In sum, then, the meat to be distributed at *meghe* comprised the bodies of three buffalo (minus their heads), the four pigs supplied by the two hosting *woe* (minus their heads and necks), and the rear halves of twenty additional pigs. None of the meat of the three buffaloes or the twenty-four pigs was meant to be consumed in the day's feast.



Plate 75 The butchering platform.

¹⁶ I never sought or received this share, or saw it being distributed. I was just told that this was the practice.



Plate 76 The *meghe* trough.

Up by the drum stone, men spilled hundreds of pounds of steaming meat out of cooking drums and into the *meghe* trough, a large, low-walled bamboo platform lined with banana leaves.¹⁷ A man squatting in the trough worked fragments of bone out of the meat with his fingers and and tossed them onto the grass below. Large pieces of fat¹⁸ were held in reserve for the heads of the named houses of Beiposo, and for honored male guests from other villages. I asked the man how much meat he thought was in the pile so far, and he guessed 700-800 kg. Much more was still to come.



Plate 77 One of the *bhei* baskets, with a pig's head on top.

¹⁷ A bit about spatial organization: slaughter and meat distribution can happen in several different locations, depending on the village and the circumstances. If the ceremony is being done by a house of low rank—not a BN *sa'o mere*—it will likely all be done on the *ture* stone in front of the house. If it's a higher ranking house, but the village has not yet held a *ka nua*, then it takes place in the BN *keba*, the space between the *ngadhu* and *bhaga*. This might also be called the BN *keba maki*, as it is where the rice of the *zo* is gathered and distributed. If there has already been a *ka nua*, the meat is distributed from the drum stone, as it was in Beiposo.

¹⁸ BN *unu ngara* or BN *ulu ngara*.



Plate 78 Parading the *zo* around the village.

Each of the two hosting *woe* prepared two large baskets called BN *bhei*—one for each trunk rider, and one for each tip rider—filled with cooked rice called BN *zo*. The two trunk rider baskets were adorned with the heads of their pigs from the *pibe kaba* earlier, and the tip rider baskets were adorned with their pigs’ necks. The baskets were enormous, maybe a meter and a half in diameter, and nearly one meter high, packed solid with rice. In the early afternoon, the men of the trunk and tip rider houses paraded these baskets counter-clockwise¹⁹ around the village plaza, accompanied by groups of dancing women. This part of the ceremony was called BN *bhei bhotho*, “carrying the large rice-basket.” Each *woe* procession was made up of three groups: the dancing women, the carriers of the trunk rider basket, and the carriers of the tip rider basket, all dressed in full Ngadha clothing.²⁰ The two processions were simultaneous, but separate. Each procession was accompanied by a male singer, singing a call-and-response song that celebrated BN *sogo*, “borrowing.”²¹ Just as the processions of each *woe* were separate, the two songs were separate as well, and blasted from two different megaphones simultaneously, causing a mild cacophony. Each line was repeated twice by the main

¹⁹ BN *kago wana*

²⁰ See appendix IV. Most people at the celebration that day (including myself) wore Mbay sarongs. A handful wore Ngadha, Manggarai, Lio, Sikka, or other styles of sarong.

²¹ These songs included particular key lines, but clever singers improvised their own lines as well.

singer; each line ended with the word *sogo*; and each line was answered by the men and women in the procession with “*e-o, sogo!*” Later in the day I got some lyrics from Robby:

<i>Sogo lau tana ele, sogo</i>	Borrow above and below
(Response) <i>E-o, sogo</i>	
<i>Sogo tolo jogho,²² sogo</i>	Borrow, take, whatever you need
(Response) <i>E-o, sogo</i>	
<i>Na’a mata go, sogo</i>	Store it by the gong (the drum stone, where gongs are played)
(Response) <i>E-o, sogo</i>	
<i>Nale teke ngeme, sogo</i>	Nale ²³ (an ancestor) holds the gourd [plate]
(Response) <i>E-o, sogo</i>	
<i>Pa tolo leme, sogo</i>	Share out big handfuls
(Response) <i>E-o, sogo</i>	
<i>Toa²⁴ eko wonga, sogo</i>	Kill the white tail[ed buffalo]
(Response) <i>E-o, sogo</i>	
<i>Widhi²⁵ wela ulu pela, sogo</i>	drag [the pig from the sty] split its white-spotted head
(Response) <i>E-o, sogo</i>	

Yoosneem gave me these lyrics, which should be close to the ones I heard in Beiposo:

<i>Sogo tolo zogho</i>	Borrow and lend with easy words ²⁶
(Response) <i>E-o, sogo</i>	
<i>Wale pazu mame</i>	Taking slowly and calmly ²⁷

²² I got a couple of different translations for this phrase, but the sense is the same.

²³ This particular ancestor would be relevant to Robby and his *woe*.

²⁴ BN *toa* is a verb specific to the slaughter of buffaloes.

²⁵ The verb BN *widhi* was translated for me as specifically describing the action of dragging a squealing pig from its enclosure.

²⁶ The BI translation Yoosneem gave was “*sogo terpaksa [kata2] gampang*.” An example of the different translations offered for this phrase. Compare with the translation of *sogo tolo jogho* as “borrow, take, whatever you need” given by Robby above.

(Response) *E-o, sogo*

Pengi rili lego

See the pig sty there

(Response) *E-o, sogo*

Kiki papa weto

[The pigs] shake themselves and bite each other²⁸

(Response) *E-o, sogo*

Ka'e ne'e azi

Older and younger siblings

(Response) *E-o, sogo*

Ma'e papa e

Do not come empty handed

(Response) *E-o, sogo*

Gogu sa'o dado

Sit inside the great house

(Response) *E-o, sogo*

Kata woza goa

Speak proudly of abundance²⁹

(Response) *E-o, sogo*

After circling the village plaza, the men set the four baskets down on large woven mats in front of the drum stone. The trunk rider basket was set on the right side of each pair, and the tip rider basket was set on the left. Women from the two hosting *woe* sat in a line by the baskets, facing downhill.³⁰ The men sat above and behind them on the drum stone, joining a number of older men who in fact had been sitting there all day in the sun. More women brought out a number of very large woven baskets, perhaps one and a half meters high and another meter or more across, and set them up on the mats beside the four *bhei*. And then, hundreds of women from visiting *wailaki* began streaming out from the houses around the plaza—I counted around 255 women in all—carrying baskets on their heads or under their arms, packed full of half-cooked rice brought from home. The

²⁷ These two lines are a call for easiness around loan repayment. Speak easily about it; be relaxed about it.

²⁸ These two lines concern the wealth in place for borrowing: a sty full of pigs behind the house, so many that they bite each other and shake themselves for space.

²⁹ This is how Yoosneem told me to translate the line, but its literal meaning appears to be something like, “the vessel bubbles with foam,” suggesting a pot boiling over. This reminds me of one of the methods of divination where water boils over the tops of bamboo tubes; see appendix III for more detail.

³⁰ I asked later if these women were all nobles, but I was told that no, they weren’t, because “we’re more moderate now.”

women crowded onto the mats in the center of the village plaza, and dumped their rice into the huge baskets provided to receive it. Women with bamboo oars stirred the rice around, settling it into the baskets and making room for more.³¹ Rice spilled everywhere. The original receiving baskets weren't big enough, and someone fetched two more. After emptying their baskets, the women strolled back to the houses around the perimeter of the plaza, tapping the last grains of rice out onto the ground, and rejoined the hundreds of spectators crowding the porches of the houses. One onlooker estimated that the women carried 10 kg of rice each, meaning that a total of 2550 kg of rice was collected and redistributed. Another spectator guessed there were perhaps 500 kg of rice. The real amount was most likely somewhere in between. Regardless, it was a spectacular, breathtaking display of abundance.



Plate 79 Women prepare to receive contributions of rice.

³¹ Men brought and received the animals. Women brought and received the rice. Both meat and rice were redistributed by men.



Plate 80 The women bring their contributions of rice.



Plate 81 The rice baskets overflow.

The *meghe* was distributed later in the afternoon, after enough delay for everyone to try to cram in one more meal. When word went around that the food was ready, the guests all sat out in front of the houses where they had been feasting, and set out baskets brought from home. Only lidded lontar-leaf woven baskets³² were used to receive

³² BN *wati*

meghe—not plastic boxes or bags, or anything else. I was supplied with a basket by a member of my house from Bogala, who had come with a different *wailaki*.



Plate 82 Men distribute *meghe* to all comers.



Plate 83 Much rice ends up on the ground.

While the meals we ate throughout the day were served by women or men, *meghe* distribution was performed only by men. They circled the plaza in pairs, moving from house to house with buckets of meat and large baskets of rice, giving out food in great, two-handed slops to everyone with a basket.³³ Food dropped everywhere, including into my sandals; whatever hit the ground was left there for the dogs. There are several couplets related to the distribution of rice and meat:

ngaso maki, ngaso fui allot the rice, allot the meat

³³ It was permissible to bring extra baskets for your family members who couldn't make it that day.

The word BN *ngaso* was translated for me as “to manage like a budget.” People also translated the word, perhaps more literally, as “to scoop with both hands.” Yan Mopa gave me this saying regarding the proper method for distributing food:

<i>Dhi jiru-jiru</i>	Share out the drink in order
<i>wi take ana riwu</i> ³⁴	So a share goes to every kin
<i>Bhai ma’e kadhi</i>	Share out the meat without omission
<i>Kopi tuku laga</i> ³⁵	Share out the rice conscientiously

This saying contains three verbs for sharing out foodstuffs: BN *dhi*, for beverages; BN *bhai*, for meat; and BN *kopi*, for rice. These terms imply that every recipient receives the same amount. I heard on many occasions about the importance of meting out rice and meat such that everyone received an equal portion. This was a skill, honed by experience. At large ceremonies, boys could dole out rice, but only older men were trusted to serve meat, ensuring that no guest felt slighted. Yan emphasized the displeasure of a host who finds the food has been incorrectly distributed. The phrase BN *kopi bhai, mori nua*, or “sharing meat and rice, lord of the village,” emphasizes the relationship between hierarchy and hospitality. A hungry guest dishonors the host, and can lead to sanction for the server who portioned the food incorrectly. The desire for complete inclusion is made clear in this speech, which can accompany *meghe* distribution:

<i>Bhe se ngata mai masa</i>	Come one, come all
<i>Enga semori mai moli</i>	Come everyone without exception
<i>Mai ka ate kaba ulu kaba</i>	Come and eat the liver and head of the buffalo ³⁶ (Ngewi 2014: 47)

³⁴ BN *ana riwu* or “crowd of descendants” can be translated as “everyone.” Here I have emphasized the relatedness implied by *ana* or “child.”

³⁵ BI *Bagi moke/air berturutan*
agar dapat banyak orang
bagi daging jangan langgar
bagi nasi jangan melupakan

³⁶ This prayer is repeated until the men distributing the rice and meat call out the words BN *tako* or BN *sawe*, indicating that they are finished .

The next day, Bart and Yoosneem came over to my house, as they often did, to confirm or correct the notes I had been taking, and to try to answer some of my questions. Yoosneem gave me the *sogo* lyrics I included above, and told me that the song had two main “emotions.” The first was “admonition.”³⁷ Siblings, don’t come with empty hands and stay inside this house (which isn’t yours). Stay in the house (which we all built, to which we all belong, to which we all contribute) and feel the joy of abundance. That joy, he said, was the second key emotion. Yet Yoosneem’s own emotions, as he told me this, were harsher. “*Sogo* can completely impoverish people,” he said, “until they’re eating leaves.” Songs like this push people, even the poor, to borrow for ceremonies, exposing themselves to the claims of their debtors. Bart concurred: “it’s bitter for people to hear that song. It makes them laugh. But,” he admitted, “even if we choose not to go into debt, we still sing the song. It runs against every other instruction in life,” from the Church, and from the state. “Don’t borrow, be frugal, don’t be wasteful. Then the song comes along, and tells you, ‘*sogo, sogo, sogo! Poor, rich, sogo!*’”

I also asked them what I should do with the *meghe* portion I had taken home with me. I didn’t know how to finish cooking the parboiled rice without making it gloopy. And I was overstuffed from the feast, and wouldn’t want to eat meat for days. I kept my portion in a refrigerator, but power outages were frequent, and the *meghe* meat was only half-cooked to begin with. I wasn’t sure the meat would be hygienic when my appetite returned. I often asked people what they did with *meghe*, and their reports differed wildly. Everyone agreed that *meghe* either represented or embodied prosperity, good fortune, and ancestral protection. The question was whether simply accepting the *meghe* was enough, or whether a person actually needed to eat it—and if so, how much. A few people said the entire portion of *meghe* had to be consumed. Some insisted that “we all really eat *meghe*,” then hedged: you have to accept it, but you might not have to eat it.

³⁷ BI *sentilan*



Plate 84 Myself and Caroline at home with a *meghe* portion.

Bart's advice was to eat a tiny sliver of the meat—he made a pinching gesture with his thumb and forefinger, as if indicating a piece of meat the size of one half of his fingernail. Slice it thinly and stir-fry it with ginger, he said. That's enough to imply or symbolize full consumption. Then I could feed the rest to his dogs, or to the pigs in his sty out back. I followed his advice, to a point; I stir fried a bit of the meat and ate it, unsure whether it was buffalo or pig I was consuming. But I was ashamed to be seen throwing the rest away; the costs of this food had been borne by people so much poorer than I was. Instead of feeding it to the animals, I hid the rest of the meat and rice inside my backpack, drove into town, and furtively disposed of it in the public dumpster.

Waste and thrift

It was a given among people I spoke to at these ceremonies that the state opposed *meghe*. To learn about the government's stance toward *meghe* and similar practices firsthand, I sat down with members of the Ngada regency departments of Tourism and Creative Industry, Forestry, Development Planning (Bappeda), Culture and Archaeology, and Religion. Nearly all of these officials were Ngadha people themselves (one was from So'a, just northeast of the Bajawa plateau), and were sensitive to the spiritual and social demands that their communities were born to—the precedents, the debts, the negotiations with ancestors. The first takeaway, however, was that the government still regards large feasts, ceremonies, and food distributions as a development challenge. The price of the buffaloes that were sacrificed in Rara Ele varied, but usually fell in the area of Rp. 20 million, and that was on top of the cost of food for the day's actual feasting, bamboo and

other materials for platforms and pavilions, wages or food for workers, and renting water tanks and sound equipment. Other households in the village that supported the feasting could expect costs between Rp. 10-20 million. Meanwhile the annual per capita income of Ngada regency was Rp. 14.85 million (BPS 2016b: 32). These expenses were seen as diminishing the pool of resources available to pay for development priorities, particularly health care and education. “Families may struggle to pay school fees, but when there is a ceremony they always find the money,” a Bappeda spokeswoman said to me. Finding this money included taking out cash loans from family members, she said, and from *koperasi*. “Families that were rich before their ceremonies are poor afterward.”

All the government officials I interviewed stressed similar points in similar language, with a special emphasis on two Indonesian words: BI *penghematan*, meaning “cost-cutting,” “thrift,” or “efficiency,” and BI *pemborosan*, or “wastefulness.” This discourse of waste and efficiency was already in place in the 1970s, when regent Jan Botha railed against large slaughters, “especially those that are held for unhealthy competition and are oriented towards social position or social prestige, resulting in immeasurable waste of their own resources”³⁸ (Langadjawa 1978: 22). The government would try any and all approaches to redirect people’s thinking towards greater thrift in feasts, weddings, house rituals, and other ceremonies. In 1971, for example, Botha’s government set taxes on ceremonial slaughter well above those for commercial slaughter. The first buffalo killed at a ceremony incurred a tax of Rp. 2000, and every subsequent buffalo incurred an additional tax of Rp 5000.³⁹ By comparison, any buffalo killed in a commercial slaughterhouse incurred a tax of just Rp. 300. These taxes were intended to “reduce waste or prevent excessive slaughter”⁴⁰ at ceremonies, while enabling businesses to provide meat cheaply to the poor, who were currently receiving it for free, as *meghe* (Langadjawa 1978: 22-23). These taxes persist today, at a rate of Rp. 100,000 per buffalo and Rp. 50,000 per pig—though they are not rigorously enforced. If villagers wish to

³⁸ BI *pemborosan dengan tidak memperhitungkan akan kemampuan diri sendiri*

³⁹ Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I do not have access to the documents I copied from the Ngada regency archive, which might tell me the price of a live buffalo at that time.

⁴⁰ BI “*untuk mengurangi pemborosan atau untuk mencegah pemotongan hewan berlebih-lebihan*”

slaughter additional pigs, they simply do it out of view behind their houses, while tax officials, complicit, “shut their ears.”

Calls for efficiency were based on the claim that ceremonies had “basic forms.” These basic forms were irreducible, and came down to the spiritual purpose of these ceremonies: providing blood to feed the ancestors. One legitimate way to reduce costs was to negotiate with the ancestors, as discussed in chapter 8, reducing the number of animals required or substituting smaller animals for bigger ones, in order to reach a suitably efficient “basic” ceremonial form; to give the least, to receive the most. Another legitimate strategy for cost-reduction was consolidation, celebrating multiple events simultaneously. The organizers in Beiposo did this when they installed two *ngadhu* posts at the same time, instead of separately. If they held two celebrations instead of one, that would mean summoning every *wailaki* twice instead of once, asking them each to bring two pigs instead of one, and asking every house in the village to put on feasts in support of both events.

Beyond spiritual purposes, in the state’s view there were two other legitimate reasons to stage large ceremonies. One of these was to attract tourists, who were seen as an economic boon. For over a decade, Ngada’s government has made small interventions to Ngadha ritual life, such as fixing the dates of ceremonies in advance, in an attempt to market it more effectively (Cole 2007, 2008: 205). In this view, ceremonies could be economically productive, instead of destructive. Second, ceremonies were seen as tools for the production of social solidarity, community resilience, and the collective undertaking of development projects, generally known in Indonesia as BI *gotong-royong*. This term is linked to ideas of Indonesian citizenship (Bowen 1986, Suwignyo 2019), and has been injected into Bajawa discourse by the state (Curnow 2007: 123). But Ngadha people have deployed it to describe their traditions in a manner that makes them appear amenable to state interests. For example, the process of collecting resources for ceremonies, which is sometimes called *sogo* and decried as harmful, is sometimes called *gotong-royong* (Banda 2017: 127), as is *meghe* redistribution itself, which “arises from Bajawa people, who always advance the characteristic of *gotong-royong*” (Ngewi 2014: 45). From the perspective of the state, however, sufficient social solidarity, tourist

spectacle, and spiritual efficacy could be produced by “basic” slaughter. Anything in excess of that, or for any other purpose, is wasteful.

“Waste” is a conceptual category, most often associated in anthropological literature with garbage (Reno 2014). In this case, the concept of waste is a transformation of living animals with market value into dead ones without it; a squandering of economic potential. The sense of exasperation, even disgust, associated with this waste could be palpable. “Families spend this money to show off, for social status,” said the spokeswoman from Bappeda. “People can count the money that’s required for all this,” said the spokeswoman from Culture and Archaeology. “But the ceremonies must go forward. And for what? For prestige, so people say, ‘I am powerful!’⁴¹ People think more about the consequences of their projects, now. And yet they put on these ceremonies. They cannot neglect their ceremonies.” Even at *meghe* distributions, participants’ emotions were complicated, unsettled by the potentials that were now out of reach. One man in Beiposo told me that whenever he looked at the horns and jaws displayed on the front of local homes, he imagined the thoughts of the village schoolchildren who saw them every day. “Those children think, these animals could have been sold to pay for my schooling,” he said. “But they weren’t.”

The problem of waste was laid at the door of both the organizers of large slaughters, who converted their all-purpose cash into animals, and ultimately meat, in excess of anyone’s needs, and also the recipients of distributed food, who took more than they needed, or were too lazy or ignorant of traditional methods to preserve it properly, and threw it away. With *meghe*, which people disposed of in their homes, this kind of waste took place out of sight, but during feasting it was highly visible. No one could eat the amount of food pressed on them at a big Ngadha feast. Ngadha hospitality was not normal for Flores, as Bart’s wife Nora, from Manggarai, and my neighbor Theo, from Boawae, told me. They were both bewildered by the abundance of Ngadha feasts, the sheer number of meals they were expected to consume in the course of a single day’s events, and the prodigious amounts of food that went uneaten. On feast days, at meal after meal, almost everyone took full portions, ate about half of them, and left substantial

⁴¹ BI *gagah*

amounts of food in their bowls.⁴² These table scraps were then tipped into buckets, which soon brimmed over with rice and meat, to be fed to the pigs that were not on today's menu.⁴³

The outcome of mass slaughter, from this perspective, was wealth destruction: competitive, heedless, and detrimental to the development of a productive capitalist economy.



Plate 85 Unfinished portions at a feast.



Plate 86 A bucket of uneaten food from one feasting house, to be fed to pigs.

⁴² Robby was an expert at deflecting food. At meal after meal, I saw him decline meat and vegetables and take only rice and chili, claiming a balky stomach. Whether this was true, or just a tactic, I couldn't say.

⁴³ Pigs and dogs were often fed the meat of their own species. When I asked about this, nobody seemed too concerned.

Signifying abundance

“Although I doubt most Ngadha people would identify themselves as such,” Curnow argues, “it is my contention that they are, in Sahlins’ terms, an affluent society. Wants are few and means are adequate so people live in material plenty albeit with a low standard of living (Sahlins, 1972)” (Curnow 2008: 374). This view reflects the two competing discourses that flow so uneasily together through Ngadha speech and practice: the Indonesian development discourse of scarcity, waste, and efficiency, and a Ngadha ritual discourse, which emphasizes abundance and a dedication to social and material flow. Take for example this song, which I recorded before a different episode of *meghe* distribution. The noble women of the village sang it together, *ja’i* dancing in a circle facing inwards, stamping their feet and ululating. The first part was called BN *Tolu*, “solo:”

<i>O— go tua lau mai tore setoke</i>	O, go down and fetch another tube of palm wine
<i>Inu nalo</i> ⁴⁴ <i>kole</i>	Let us drink, eat and talk, lay back
<i>Nalo kole resi na’a ngo’e</i>	Eat and talk, lay back, keep some for our guests

The next part was called BN *dha’o*, meaning “to catch,” especially to catch a pig:

<i>Rili lego neno rili lego</i>	Look in the pen there, down in the pen
<i>O— go kaba go kaba’e</i>	O buffalo, O buffalo
<i>Wawi nuka</i> ⁴⁵ <i>sama lobhu</i> ⁴⁶ <i>mua</i>	The pigs come to the house, crowding like dolphins ⁴⁷
<i>Papa weto papa weto’e</i>	Stubborn and resisting, stubborn and resisting ⁴⁸
<i>O— go kaba go kaba’e</i>	O buffalo, O buffalo

⁴⁴ BN *nalo* means, more or less, “to sit together chatting and drinking palm wine.” When walking through the village, it was common to hear calls of BN *mai nalo le!*, “come hang out, friend!”

⁴⁵ BN *nuka* means specifically “to return home from the field or garden.” Contrast with BN *wado*, which means simply “to return home.”

⁴⁶ BN *lobhu* or “dolphin” was part of many Ngadha phrases about crowds (Arndt 1961: 300).

⁴⁷ This phrase evokes a pod of dolphins, their backs breaking the surface of the water as they jostle for space.

⁴⁸ This translation comes from Mopa 2004, which translates BN *papa* as “obstacle” (p. 363) and BN *weto* as “unwilling” (p. 464). Compare with the translation of BN *kiki papa weto* from the *sogo* lyrics given to me by Yoosneem: the pigs “shake themselves and bite each other,” suggesting a sty so full of pigs that they bite each other and shake themselves for space.

<i>Wawi nuka sama lobhu mua</i>	The pigs come to the house, crowding like dolphins

<i>Boga⁴⁹ toa⁵⁰ boga toa'e</i>	Pull up its head and strike, pull up its head and strike

<i>O— go kaba go kaba'e</i>	O buffalo, O buffalo

<i>Wawi nuka sama lobhu mua</i>	The pigs come to the house, crowding like dolphins

<i>Eko wonga⁵¹ wai da eko wonga</i>	The white-tailed [buffalo], the white-tailed [buffalo] paces back and forth

<i>O— go kaba go kaba'e</i>	O buffalo, O buffalo

<i>Wawi nuka sama lobhu mua</i>	The pigs come to the house, crowding like dolphins

The imagery of the song suggests sties bursting with animals—“too many to count,” as Yoosneem glossed it—jumping over one another for space as they are driven towards the village for slaughter. Regardless of the actual number of animals that meet their end on a given day, those animals are framed through ritual speech as part of a bottomless supply, to be shared with joyful abandon.

I collected another such song after the raids of *bui manu* in Langa. After eating the spoils, the men and women of the *woe* crowded in front of the *loka lanu* to dance, sing, celebrate, and ring in *reba*, which would begin the next day. The song below formed part of an opening invocation to *reba*, and was followed by the *o-uwi*.⁵²

<i>Uwi meze go</i>	Yam as big as a gong
<i>Go lewa laba</i>	as long as a drum ⁵³
<i>Koba rako lizu</i>	the vine stretches to heaven
<i>ladu wai poso</i>	(spills) into the wide field

⁴⁹ BN *boga* means to pull the animal so that it raises its head, exposing its throat for slaughter.

⁵⁰ BN *toa* is a verb specific to the slaughter of buffaloes.

⁵¹ BN *wonga* is cognate with BI *bunga*, “flower,” but in the context of a buffalo tail it means “white.”

⁵² I was told the invocation was called BN *kelo ghai*. Mopa translates *kelo ghae* as “group dance,” (BI *tarian masal*), “dance of invitation” (BI *tarian ajakan*), or “guide dance” (BI *tarian pemandu*) (2004: 270).

⁵³ *Uwi meze go* and *uwi lewa laba* were also described to me as two varieties of yam, the former with a bigger root and a smaller plant, and the latter with a smaller root under a larger plant.

Sui moki moki bha'i moli

Wild pigs dig and dig, and don't deplete it

Kutu koe koe ano ko'e

Porcupines dig and dig, and still it remains

In the words of the elder who gave me these words, their meaning can be glossed as: "Plenty! Plenty! Plenty!"⁵⁴ The crowd sang, voices swelling together, until they broke out into dance, shouting, singing, waving their hands and stomping their feet. The song speaks to the bounty of yams that have been left in the ground, and permitted to grow and proliferate. Whatever depredations are visited upon them, they cannot be depleted; they will resprout and multiply, rising to heaven and spilling across the land.

Songs like these highlight the nature of large ceremonies as performances, in which objects and actions signify the breadth and depth of Ngadha social and material flows. As McWilliam noted, "...the symbolic and stylized performance of ritual and sacrifice is similarly dependent upon the economic bounty of land and sea and the willingness of community members to provide the material resources for sacrifice and commensality...ritualized events are as much expressions of abundance and surplus production as they are of performative shared obligations among kindred and neighbors of intimate association" (2009: 172). In this case, material abundance is a sign of the confluence of lineages and social networks that have assembled to stage the event. The animals that meet their end at a large slaughter are the product of the labor, care, and investment of many people, and their presence signifies the health and extent of the groups whose labor came together to raise or purchase these animals. The meat in a *meghe* distribution pool is the product of many disparate social networks, from villages to *woe* to houses, who may be fulfilling ancient debt obligations or incurring new ones, brought together in a singular spectacle of overwhelming plenty. That plenty is itself a sign that those networks extend beyond the living, as successful harvests and the growth and fertility of animals depend on spirits and ancestors. The performance of abundance is a sign of spiritual support for the legitimacy of the leadership that organized the slaughter and ensuing distribution. The assembly of a massive pool of food performs a similar function to the display of ceremonial goods: as described in chapter 7, possession of these objects demonstrates that the possessor is supported by spiritual forces.

⁵⁴ BI *Banyak! Banyak! Banyak!*

While the performances surrounding *meghe* distribution include bringing the meat and rice into the village, pooling it together, and doling it out, they do not include the *meghe*'s consumption. Rather, it is the spillage of food that is part of the performance—the rice and meat that is tossed aside, slips through the fingers of servers or slops over the sides of baskets. What might be considered waste here forms a material sign, that the social and material flow that binds the living to each other and to their ancestors is strong. Like the yam, it may be consumed and consumed and never be depleted.

The process of *meghe* distribution defines the boundaries of numerous in-groups, who shuffle their resources about to provide the right animals for event organizers and *wailaki* leaders, and show up to contribute and participate, or perhaps stay away. It also defines the parameters of relations between groups, as *woe* circulate pigs and pig meat amongst one another, reproducing relations of reciprocity, a relationship that requires two sides (Sahlins 1972: 189). But it is difficult to parse the layers of reciprocity signified by the *meghe* portion itself, packed in a lidded lontar-leaf basket and carried away to a participant's home. If it is a gift, it would be impossible to say from whom. The rice, in particular, is pooled without recording who brought what—unlike the pigs, the size and source of which are recorded. *Meghe* is a material signifier of the complex circulations in which the participant is embedded. It is the result of a pooling between groups, not just within a group, a blurring of the lines that separate houses from houses and *woe* from *woe*.

Meghe is not actually eaten in public, nor is its consumption ritualized. It may not even be strictly required. In practice, most of the *meghe* is eaten pigs or dogs, not by the people who received it. But for people who are touched by *meghe* distribution—as organizers, contributors, or recipients—it is the performative process of circulation, as signified by the material portion, that does the complex social work of group-making, and the spiritual work of demonstrating the health of relations between the living and the dead.

Ngewi (2014), in his descriptions of feasts and *meghe*, repeatedly emphasizes the positive emotions that accompany the execution of the ceremony, the distribution of food portions, and the sharing of communal meals. “Bajawa people who participate in the *meghe* process share in the great joy felt by the organizers of the ceremony, and also feel the rice and meat has been blessed by the ancestors. Thusly the life of the community will always be blessed and

shepherded by the ancestors” (Ngewi 2014: 47). The product of this shared emotional experience, in Ngewi’s view, is solidarity, expressed in this piece of ritual speech:

<i>Kau bhodha ne’e nga’o</i>	You are obligated to me
<i>ja’o bhodha ne’e gau</i>	I am obligated to you
<i>Kita bhodha le ka’e azi</i>	We must be friends, older and younger siblings,
<i>doa ne’e da padhi</i> ⁵⁵ <i>loka</i> ⁵⁶	Form up as one to the outside
<i>kita bhodha le ka’e azi</i>	We must be friends, older and younger siblings,
<i>ne’e tangi</i> ⁵⁷ <i>padhi</i> .	And form one household

(Ngewi 2014: 51)

The joy described by Ngewi must be contrasted against the frustration felt by Ngadha people who would prefer to see their resources disposed of differently. While the actions producing *meghe*—both the food itself, and the remnants of the feast that create reminders of it—can evoke conflicting emotions, this emotional mix itself is part of a common Ngadha experience, tied to events such as *meghe* distribution. With the circulation of material objects and signs, comes also the circulation of a complex sense of moral obligation, both to the ancestors, whose precedents are being reproduced or violated, and to future generations, whose prosperity depends on striking the right balance between material circulation and the accumulations of financial capital that grant access to the benefits of modern health care and education. The events surrounding a *meghe* distribution make up the “production, distribution, circulation and use of moral feelings, emotions and values, norms and obligations in the social space” (Fassin, 2009: 1257, in Palomera and Vetta 2016: 414).

Meghe produces its key value simply by being pooled and exchanged, not by being consumed. The sign can do its work independently of its materiality; that is, you can throw the food away, and still live in the effect of having given or received it. But of course, materiality still matters. *Meghe* is food, and food has qualities and affordances specific to its material nature.

⁵⁵ Mopa translates BN *padhi* as “to form a rank; to take responsibility” (2004: 360).

⁵⁶ BN *loka* or “outside” here contrasts the outer world against the inner (BN *one*) world of the *sa’o*.

⁵⁷ BN *tangi* or “staircase” is a metonym for the *sa’o*. I have translated it here as “household.”

Howell, writing about Lio people in central Flores, argued that ritual meals are “food which is more than food as consumed on ordinary occasions; it is food which is like people or, rather, not separate from the giver.” A series of transformations leads to this: villagers give uncooked food to the priest-leader; he (or more accurately his wife) cooks it and gives back cooked food. The ancestors are offered both cooked and uncooked food, marking them as both the same and different from the living (Howell 1989: 428). *Meghe* is different, because so little of it is eaten. (Also, it is neither raw nor fully cooked.) What becomes of food prepared in a ritual fashion, if it is not consumed?

One day I was thinking over this problem on the front porch of Molo Modhe, quietly watching the neighborhood, as a neighbor spread out some new rice to dry in the sun on a tarp in front of her house. As she worked, a chicken came along—it could have been anyone’s—and started pecking at the rice grains. The woman didn’t chase it off, but kept on working, without a care that her rice, the product of so much labor in North Bajawa fields, was frittering away. I turned to the man beside me, an elder of *woe* Manu, and asked him, “why does she let the chicken eat her rice like that?”

“Because someone will eat the chicken,” he replied.

His answer put me in mind of a few words I heard in Teni-Lopijo, while discussing the construction of a *sa’o*: “Preparing just two or three planks for this house by hand would require killing dozens of pigs, just to feed everyone who supplied labor. Now, with machines, we don’t need so much energy; it’s more efficient. Now, with modern tools, you need less labor, so you need fewer pigs.” This was a common theme: that food was fuel, a store of energy. On dancing days, we ate more meals so that we had the energy to dance. When a tree for a *ngadhu* was felled and carried from the forest, the food given to participants provided the energy necessary for their labor. Energy, as any student of physics can tell you, does not disappear. It circulates; it changes form; but energy is always conserved. Because energy is conserved, it continues to circulate.

When the rice was eaten by the chicken, and the chicken was eaten by people, people were energized to produce food, build houses, speak, and so on. The same held true of uneaten portions of *meghe*. The analysis of food, feasting, and *meghe* should not stop at the moment when food is (or isn’t) consumed by people, because the *meghe* is

consumed by animals, especially by pigs. And pigs, as described in chapter 6, are the ‘basis of life,’ whose values in production, exchange, flesh, and blood are essential to the production of kinship and the reproduction of relations between houses and *woe*. When people fed *meghe* to their animals, the *meghe* was not wasted, but recycled, its energy conserved in a new form. The performance of *meghe* assembly and distribution is not a process that calls for efficiency, or the reduction to a “basic form.” Its function is expansive, inclusive; the greater the slaughter, the greater the potential for social circulation. Even when *meghe* is not eaten, it is not a waste of wealth. The acts of slaughter, and the discarding of uneaten food, might instead be phases in a flow of energies that circulates beyond the human sphere, taking in humans, animals, and spirits, leaving out nothing and no one.

Conclusion: an encompassing circulation

Meghe distribution is an encompassing circulation, which draws houses, *woe*, villages, animals, and ancestors into relation with one another. It combines elements of gift-giving and pooling, giving it qualities both of an in-group exchange and an inter-group exchange. It is not simply a redistribution of wealth from rich to poor. Rather, *meghe* provides an impetus to the circulation of money, animals, debts, and food, both within groups and between them. The organizers of a *meghe* distribution provide a nucleus around which a much greater exchange can grow. The reciprocities of *meghe* operate at multiple levels, from the interactions and exchanges of *woe* and villages at the highest level, to the exchanges of ordinary individuals, who contribute, mix, and receive. The number of sides is factorial; the affiliations are multivalent. If the economic is a “modality of the intimate” (Sahlins 1972: 77), *meghe* distribution represents an expansive application of intimacy.

The displays of material abundance at *meghe* distribution events are performative signs, indicating the confluence of lineages and social networks that have assembled to stage the event. The meat in a *meghe* distribution pool is the product of many disparate social networks, from villages to *woe* to houses, who may be fulfilling ancient debt obligations or incurring new ones, brought together in a singular spectacle of overwhelming plenty. That plenty is itself a sign that those networks extend beyond the living, as successful harvests and the growth and fertility of

animals depend on spirits and ancestors. The performance of abundance is a sign of spiritual support for the legitimacy of the leadership that organized the slaughter and ensuing distribution.

The *meghe* portion performs its social work regardless of whether the food is consumed by humans or fed to animals, indicating that it is the performative process of circulation, as signified by the material portion, that does the complex social work of group-making, and the spiritual work of demonstrating the health of relations between the living and the dead. Food given to pigs is “replanted” in the greater circulation of energies that tie people, animals, and the dead together.

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion of her 2007 thesis, Curnow wrote how an initial interest in the economy led her, ultimately, to write an ethnography of Ngadha cosmology, community organization, and ethics (Curnow 2007: 226). I, too, set out to write about the economy, particularly the production and exchange of Ngadha textiles. What I found was that production, exchange, and consumption were inseparable from the most fundamental elements of social life. Social affiliation and boundary-making, not just material needs such as cloth or food, were the ultimate products of Ngadha economic life; it was a human economy, focused on “the creation and mutual fashioning of human beings,” and the reconfiguration of relations between them (Graeber 2012: 411-412).

I have used the term “flow” throughout this thesis in order to recall “the flow of life,” a familiar phrase to any anthropologist working in the Lesser Sunda islands. In the classic 1980 volume that established the term, Fox defined it as a transmission of the essences needed to produce the human person: namely, female blood and male semen. The term described systems of asymmetrical marriage alliances, predicated on the idea that a group that gives too much to one exchange partner, who is superior, will receive too much from another exchange partner who is inferior, thus replenishing their own supply of essences, and enabling the group to reproduce itself (Fox 1980: 12-13). In practice, these exchanges involved the movements of women, and of gendered goods, with the male gifts especially reliant on wealth objects like ivory and gold. But the deeper importance of the “flow” Fox and others have described is only partially dependent on alliance prestations. Fox acknowledged that the importance of “the flow of life,” as a concept, was less in “an adherence to specific organizational structures,” but rather in “a continuing preservation of similar metaphors for living:” metaphors of growth, root and tip, complementarity, and circulation (Fox 1980: 333). My interest has been in exploring the manifestations of flow in realms of life beyond marriage, linking those metaphors to the variety of Ngadha social experience.

I found much in this description that resonated with my experience in Ngadhaland, even where specific organizational structures were quite unlike those described in the 1980 volume. I found flows operating on similar logics; just not in bridewealth exchanges. Instead, I found these concepts and metaphors in operation in the exigencies of pig exchange, the iterative formation of social groups, and even everyday barter and financial transactions. Many of the terms that are

most meaningful in this thesis, such as *wailaki*, *sogo*, and *meghe*, are not metaphors at all. The metaphors that do seem most meaningful to me—BN *madi* or “hoes,” BN *uwi* or “yams,” and BN *kaju ranga* or “firewood and pig feed”—are earthbound, tied not to remote essences, but to the energy to work and live. It is these everyday circulations of food and animals that produce Ngadha kinship; they are no less essential to the reproduction of human life than blood and semen. They are material, and they are signs; they stand for the capacity to reproduce energy and life, and embody that capacity simultaneously (Keane 2003).

The anthropological study of southeastern Indonesia has largely compartmentalized the region into subsets of comparable peoples, what has been called the Field of Anthropological Study (de Josselin de Jong 1984). This approach—layered on top of the Dutch tendency to carve its colonial possessions into perceived ethnic enclaves, a legacy that survives in modern Indonesian administrative boundaries—has led many of us to view the cultures and peoples of Flores as a set of centers, separated by interstitial, transitional spaces inhabited by people with interstitial, transitional cultures. In this thesis, I have attempted to complicate the picture of “Ngadha” as such a cultural center. With a focus on the region’s history of human circulation, and by emphasizing distinctions between cultural subregions such as Rara Ele and Langa, I have attempted to portray what has been viewed as “Ngadha culture” as an assemblage of parts, no different from the so-called “transitional” cultures found at different points along Flores’ cultural and linguistic linkages. Indeed, my interlocutors largely seemed to view their own society in this way: as a collection of lineages, individuals, physical structures, and material goods, circulating around an unbounded territory as they fled the slave trade, pursued new alliances, and opened new lands. With their frequent relocations and incorporations of roving *woe*, Ngadha villages demonstrate that the connections that bind one house or *woe* to another are easily reconfigured, and that the connections between any group of people and the place they inhabit is contingent—that when a group of people loses the power to hold a space, they can uproot their houses and monuments and start anew somewhere else, starting the processes of constructing houses, villages, and monuments over again. In this context, Ngadha people put stock in human and material assemblages that could change shape over time and move through space. All of them depend on repeated acts of physical renewal and symbolic self-representation to continue to exist.

The *sa'o* or house, the fundamental unit of Ngadha social organization, is a perfect example of this. As physical buildings, Ngadha *sa'o* are always either undergoing or about to undergo progressive developments, as their materials and decorations are shepherded toward more perfect forms. The house that one sees is largely understood to be a stand-in for the house as it will someday become. Many houses are dismantled and moved over time, maintaining relevance as social units while severing the connections between people and the place they inhabit. Houses can segment, forming two houses with hierarchical relations based on precedence. But hierarchies between houses can be severed, if their members stop renewing them; new localized systems of precedence can be established, or old ones recalled and reinstated. These changes and potentials for change mean that the *sa'o* as it is encountered at any given moment, as both physical building and social unit, is merely the present instantiation of an unfolding process in motion.

The assemblages of symbolic objects housed within *sa'o*—the BN *fi'i riti more gili*, or “keepsakes of the ancestors”—are seldom stable for long. More symbols are added when houses add to their lands or treasures, and others are taken away, when new houses calve off from old ones and those lands or treasures are divided. The names of ancestors rotate through these objects, connected to each set for the length of a generation, before finally dropping away, fading from specificity into a generic spiritual category. The house is a vessel whose materials, membership, social position, and physical context change continuously.

The shape and hierarchy of *woe*, the clan-like groups of affiliated houses, also form from patterns of repeated action. Like houses, *woe* grow, segment, and even divide completely, depending on the ambitions and resources of their members. Also like houses, the hierarchy of a *woe* is subject to reversals, depending on the ability of top houses to maintain necessary levels of ceremonial expenditure and leadership. Leaders must catalyze the individuals in a *woe* to continually group and regroup, performing their affiliation in *wailaki* delegations. *Wailaki*, and the *sangara* speeches of common descent and unity that announce them, create and recreate an image of social solidarity, in balance with the centrifugal force of the interests and ambitions of the individuals who compose the group. *Wailaki* contain blossoming social potentials, one of which is the *woe* itself: a level of affiliation ultimately rooted not in blood or marriage alliance, but in the continual performance of certain group actions, particularly the stewardship of collective property, and the contribution of labor and resources to collective ceremonial

endeavor. It is less a category of kinship than a set of overlapping processes of circulation, growth, segmentation, and division. Relations between *woe*, or between segments of a single *woe*, ebb and flow as the members of those groups remember and repeat their past agreements and exchanges, or decline to repeat them and allow their relations and affiliations to lapse.

Villages present an image of a fixed social order, inscribed on social space in the arrangements of buildings and monuments, but they too offer potentials for social circulation. Villages are built to reflect their social compositions and hierarchies at a specific moment in time. But as years and generations pass, houses and *woe* engage in social competition with one another, and as some leaders lose the will or the ability to retain their positions, the social reality of the village can drift until the image of social order depicted by that village's spatial arrangements becomes untethered from the facts of the matter. Beneath a village's smooth surface, social flows may continue unabated.

Throughout Ngadha's history, villages have been moved, remade, split apart and joined together, and every moment of change has been a moment of social opportunity. For elites, relocating houses, *woe*, and villages provides chances to assert inherited titles and roles, which can lapse if they are not regularly renewed. For ordinary people, a new village is an opportunity to move up, and become a householder or a title holder. And for everyone, these changes present opportunities to sever old alliances, forge new ones, and form new localized systems of precedence. Moving or founding a village is difficult and expensive, but it happens, and when it does it can remake social space. New allegiances form, old ones rupture, and physical structures are moved, rearranged, replaced, or abandoned. Like the construction of a house, the project of reconfiguring the boundaries between a village, its neighbors, and the world of non-human beings is always in progress, generation after generation. It requires the exercise of leadership, the assembly and disposition of resources, and the expression of a variety of affiliations.

The progressive establishments of houses, *woe*, and villages are reset periodically by moves and segmentations, but can, in theory, reach conclusions. But these processes are generated by circulations that are not meant to end, but are imagined as repeating and enlarging endlessly. Where groupings and structures are always undergoing reorganizations, it is the processes themselves, unfolding over time, that remain recognizable.

The instability and contingency of alliance paths, and the relative shifts in status and hierarchy among individuals, houses, and *woe*, constitute a pervasive social flow, which Ngadha people manage by means of material flow, illustrated by the production and movement of pigs, the ‘basis of life.’ The outflow of pigs is constant, but of variable and unpredictable intensity. Assiduous participation in the exchanges of others can result in substantial inflows of pigs, which provide the means to proliferate social ties. Social standing is built on the ability to manage these flows effectively, allowing people to reaffirm old ties within and between groups, while also creating new ties. Pigs are subject to multiple competing claims, and their value changes as they grow, requiring people to employ a variety of strategies to ensure they are able to access the right-sized pig at the right time. Small pigs yield bigger pigs (at an unknown date); new personal relationships evolve into new relations between *wailaki*, meaning more pigs will be called for in the future, and more pigs will also be returned. Managing these inflows, outflows, and cycles of growth, all while attempting to enlarge one’s exchange network at a measured and deliberate pace, is central to Ngadha social and economic life. The essential metaphor of pig exchange is BN *madi*, the hoe. Hoes afford the ability to plant crops—to put a seed or a yam in the ground, where it will grow and proliferate, yielding more than was planted. Because pigs are both food and the primary “social currency” (Graeber 2012) that makes social relations possible, the movement of ‘new and old hoes’ is a reproduction of the essences of both material and social life (Weiner 1980: 73; Forman 1980: 153).

Because Ngadha social groups frequently change their composition, as people weave in and out of houses, *woe*, and villages, it is essential to constitute and reconstitute these group through cooperative ritual action. Treasures and monuments provide foci for producing these mass actions, which in turn produce the social groups that create and maintain these objects. This affordance is central to the value of these objects (Keane 2014: 7). These ritual events provide groups with the means to define their edges, and also provide individuals in those groups with opportunities to differentiate and elevate themselves. Because ceremonial goods carry the imprimatur of spirits and ancestors, guardianship of them is self-legitimizing: a person’s possession of an object is regarded as proof of the support of their ancestors to possess and utilize that object. Most ceremonial objects are more durable than the span of a human lifetime, and so legitimate access to ceremonial goods and their affordances must be transferrable. Inheritance and marriage alliance paths determine the ideal routes by which these goods should

circulate, but not all goods follow such smooth courses. The establishment or transferral of guardianship can be rocky, and it must be maintained, like house or *woe* membership, through repeated action. If a guardian does not display, feed, repair, or renew the objects in their care frequently or properly, guardianship can pass to another person or group, and with it those valuable rights and roles. People eddy and flow swiftly around these ceremonial goods, and the goods themselves are also caught in the current.

Far from merely reproducing the social and physical world as they found it, Ngadha people are concerned with how they might shape the future to make it different, and better, than the present or the past. Their actions are guided by co-mingled logics of sacrifice and planting, which follow a common theme: give a little, get a lot. By the logic of sacrifice, Ngadha people “give a little and get a lot” by negotiating with spiritual forces, changing the parameters of their exchanges, experimenting with substitutions and formulations of ritual language, sharing meals and making trades across the boundary that separates life and death, and across the regimes of value that differentiate the living from the dead. Each step in that negotiation is informed by the results achieved—or not achieved—by previous sacrifices. A successful negotiation will shape the future for living participants, who may prosper or starve by the intercession of spiritual forces, and will also shape future sacrifices, which build on previous results.

By the logic of planting, Ngadha people “give a little and get a lot” by planting seeds, then permitting them to grow or proliferate. This is true in an agricultural sense, and also in a social sense; people press gifts, loans, and exchanges on one another, in the hope and expectation of achieving larger returns in the future. Just as yams left in the ground will proliferate, yielding a greater harvest the longer they are undisturbed, Ngadha people try to leave their debts with one another unclaimed for as long as possible. And just as planting a greater number of seeds will yield a greater harvest, people try to enter into as many exchange relationships as possible. This is a strategy for growth, because each exchange has the potential to yield a larger return, and also a strategy for savings: because assets in one’s own possession are liable to be claimed by others, it is safer to lend out assets quickly, then claim them back as necessary. These circulations allow a person to manifest wealth in a spreading array of relationships, based on repeated, gradually enlarging flows of loans, debts, gifts, and business exchanges. By storing value in a flow of resources rather than in material or financial form, and in the hands of others rather than in their own possession, Ngadha people protect it from the risk of seizure by others. People who engage

in these circulations maximize their “net outgoings,” acquiring a large network of people who are indebted to them, while also securing future inflows (Gregory 2015¹). It is keeping while giving, grounded in the need to secure permanence in a world of loss and decay (Weiner 1992: 7).

Just as the possession of heirloom goods is both evidence of the right to possess them, and also of the responsibility to feed and care for them, financial success is evidence of spiritual support, and also carries the responsibility to perform further sacrifices; offerings must be made before the harvest, and also after. Future prosperity demands participation in this flow of resources. That means maintaining, broadening, and strengthening social ties, which are unstable and depend on the consistent movement of goods and people, crossing boundaries between insider and outsider, and between ancestor and descendant.

The most spectacular of these circulations—the ritualized redistribution of *meghe* portions of meat and rice following feasts—encapsulates the social and material flows at the basis of Ngadha life. Combining elements of gift giving and pooling, *meghe* gives elites a stage to compete with one another, and ordinary people a way to build their networks of circulation. It throws into relief the powers afforded by ceremonial goods and titles to borrow, stage mass events, assemble *wailaki*, and perform affiliation. It produces these values even when the majority of the food distributed as *meghe* is not eaten by humans; affiliation is produced by the circulation of feelings and signs, arising from the materiality of the food, whose energy may pass into people or into animals. In the process, *meghe* reveals the breadth of the system of circulations that underlies Ngadha economic and social life, including animals, spirits, the living and the dead, leaving out nothing and no one. Like a stream of electrons dancing on a wire that produces a magnetic field, it is the flow itself that emanates value.

The “flow” I have described dovetails in various ways with what McWilliam called the “spiritual commons” (2009), and what Gibson-Graham called “community economy” (2006). By “spiritual commons,” McWilliam refers to “ideas and practices that inform and guide the spiritual elements of social life,” such as sacrifice, mutual labor exchange, gift obligation, and indebtedness—the values that “nurture and protect the wellbeing of a community and its

¹ https://haubooks.org/viewbook/gifts-and-commodities/10_ch03 [accessed 30/07/2020]

households” (2009: 164) and “sustain networks of cultural intimacy” (2009: 167). Curnow, in a similar vein, draws on Gibson-Graham’s “diverse economies” framework (2006) and Nancy’s concept of “being singular plural” (2000) to argue that “interdependence is a dominant feature of everyday Ngadha life and organisation. Ngadha people’s views of their own society involve a sense of self that questions the conceptual separation of the self from others” (2016: 160). My own analysis has emphasized the agency of individuals, clearly visible when they acknowledge each other as exchange partners, a relation in which “the social fact of sides is inescapable” (Sahlins 1972: 189). The networks of interdependence described by Curnow are central to Ngadha social and economic life; but the “plural” to which each Ngadha person belongs is a shifting assemblage that is reconfigured over time, requiring active maintenance, and inviting expansion. People hope to proliferate both their affiliations and their material returns, and short-term considerations are embedded in longer-term hopes. Where Curnow saw cooperation, I tended to see a play of strategies in which the interests of individuals and the groups with which they were affiliated often aligned; *wailaki*, for instance, aligned the desire of elites for manifest social support with the desire of non-elites for a platform on which to build their own exchange networks. Ngadha practices of non-market exchange, pooling, and labor cooperation undoubtedly did engender feelings of solidarity; the labor of ceremonial participation and the cost of material contributions could be compensated in “love, protection, emotional support, and companionship” (Gibson-Graham 2006: 62). They also reproduced hierarchies and class divisions, and occasionally drove houses, lineages, and villages to split apart. Ngadha society is not egalitarian, and Ngadha people have multiple axes along which they differentiate themselves from one another. The cultivation of social and material flows binds them together.

Many people who spoke to me in the course of this project hoped that, by sharing their knowledge, they could help to slow what they viewed as an inexorable erosion of knowledge about Ngadha history, tradition, and practice in their own community. They were certain that the rituals, the formal speech, and the fundamental respect for the ancestors on which they were raised were all disappearing. People blamed each other—the laziness of the young who refused to learn, the pride of the old who refused to teach—but they also blamed themselves. Many felt helpless. They felt certain that cultural expressions they valued would soon disappear, as if they had no choice in the matter. Over and over again, I found myself reassuring dejected interlocutors that they did have a choice, and that they could contribute to a future on their own terms. I want

this thesis to reflect their agency back to them: both their powers of refusal, and the impact and moral weight of their choices.

As I write this, Ngadhaland may be on the brink of devastating changes. The world is gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ngada has been lightly hit, as far as I know,² but lockdown measures have devastated families there, severely hampering both their ability to work and to draw on the networks of floating value that might be their safety net in normal times. Ngadha migrants in Singapore, Malaysia, or elsewhere in Indonesia, who normally send remittances to their families, have found themselves locked down or unable to work, and must now request money from home. People are selling or eating livestock they would normally have saved for exchange purposes. Outbreaks of African swine fever have also been confirmed in East Timor.³ If this disease reaches Bajawa, it could decimate the pig population there, with unpredictable consequences for the future of pig rearing and exchange. This is not the first crisis to hit Ngadhaland; the slave trade, internal conflict, colonization, and famine have all struck before. In each case, Ngadha people have explained the situation to their ancestors, activated their networks as they could, and adapted to the new situation. They acted to bring a better future upon themselves. If the substance of Ngadha practices changes, that commitment to action and adaptation will surely continue.

Ngadha people, as I encountered them, did not value rote repetition or a backward-looking reproduction of social categories or roles. They believed in their powers of negotiation with invisible forces, and that anyone with spiritual and social support could win the opportunity to build a prosperous house. They held a humane presumption that human relations would thrive and grow; that networks would expand, encompassing new people, and reaching new places, mushrooming in size as the land filled with houses and villages bound together by ever denser networks of affiliation and exchange, trading bigger pigs, slaughtering more buffaloes, building more monuments. The houses, the villages, the unpeopled woodlands, were all stand-ins for the Ngadha world that is yet to be: the world that will encompass people of all backgrounds in an ethos of mutual indebtedness, relatedness, and support, and a massive, ungovernable flow of

² <https://regional.kontan.co.id/news/kabupaten-ngada-ntt-masih-nihil-kasus-positif-virus-corona-covid-19> [accessed 30/07/2020]

³ <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-diseases/vetsource/biosecurity-advisory/african-swine-fever-timor-leste> [accessed 30/07/2020]

value from all to all. This is the means by which the Ngadha world bursts beyond its current banks, or by which the world becomes Ngadha.

APPENDIX I: Subregions: geography and dialects

Besides Rara Ele, the focus of the main text, these are some additional subregions of Ngadhaland:

Nua Lima Zua: meaning “seven villages,” this was roughly the area now occupied by the city of Bajawa. The “seven villages” were Bhajawa—where the Dutch-era rajas resided—plus Bokua, Boseko, Bongiso, Wako Menge, Boripo, and Piga Sina.¹

Langa: the shoulder of the plateau, from the Trans-Flores highway where it passes Bajawa, to the point where the land suddenly drops away toward Jerebu’u valley and Mt. Inerie, including the villages of Lena Zia, Tiwo Lina, Bowaru, Bogesa, Sopo Wara, Bela, Suka Tei, Namu, Boradho, Bojawa, Bonewaru, Bomari, Borani, Bopati, Bolengu, Bomuzi, Langa Gedha, and Bokolo. Historically, many Langa people were traders and light manufacturers, having access as they did to both lowland and highland products. Langa today remains the home of most Ngadha weavers. The region is named for one of the area’s largest groups of affiliated houses (BN *woe*). Arndt defines BN *langa* as “to claim a debt” (1961: 278). Fox has noted that in Rotinese, *langa* means “head,” and that Roti island is conceived as having a “head” (*langa*) and a “tail” (*iko*) (Fox 2006: 91), which could help make sense of the following phrase, which was meant to describe the full sweep of Langa:

Ulu Langa meze at the head (top), greater Langa

Eko pale mala At the tail (bottom), broad pastures

Wae Ghole/Hea Wea/the “western slope:” The first name means “tumbling water,” and the second means “golden cup,” a reference to the myth of Lobo Butu, a tree that stood atop a mountain of that name that bore golden objects on its branches. This area makes up the vast slope to the west of the plateau, from the ridge of Lobo Butu to the Wae Mokel river. Only the hamlets of Teni and Lopijo are located there. Because this region goes by several names—Keli Kombos was another, possibly historical—I refer to this region as the western slope.

¹ The list I heard in the field included Watujaji and Bowejo, and left out Bongiso and Boseko. I have amended the list following information from Djawanai 2016: 406-407.

Other subregions that were mentioned to me, but are less central to this thesis, included Foa, on the coast east of Aimere; Jerebu'u, a valley south of Langa and east of Mt. Inerie; Wogo, near Mangulewa; Were, south of Wogo; and Boba, on the coast south of Were.

I often heard that Ngadha speakers could be divided into two groups, between those whose word for “you” was BN *gau*, and those whose word was BN *kau*. *Gau/kau* areas were roughly contiguous. Yohanes Mopa broke down these *gau/kau* areas like this:

<i>Gau</i> areas (mostly north and west of Bajawa)	<i>Kau</i> areas (mostly south and east of Bajawa)
Bolonga	Jerebu'u
Susu	Mangulewa
Naru	Wogo
Fui	Langa
Gou	Aimere
Inelika	So'a ²
Pape	
Faobata	
Bejo	

Within these areas, this G/K mutation was then more or less consistent across a number of words. Most of the other regional variations, he said, were also consistent with *gau* and *kau* geographic areas. Below are examples of three of the most common of these mutations:

	<i>Gau</i> areas	<i>Kau</i> areas	Meaning

² So'a is generally considered outside the bounds of Ngadhaland; So'a people consider themselves to belong to a different ethnic group, and to speak a different, but closely related, language.

Addition of Z	ili	zili	“above”
R/Z mutation	ngara	ngaza	“name”
F/S mutation	fui	sui	“meat”

Not all mutations follow such easy geographic boundaries. The word BN *hae* or *sae*, meaning “maize,” for example: different parts of Jerebu’u use each, and the village of Beiposo, on the cusp of Rara Ele and Nua Lima Zua, uses a variant different than all of its neighboring villages.

APPENDIX II: Marriage With and Without Bridewealth

Di'i sa'o marriage

The process of *di'i sa'o* marriage was described for me by Yoosneem as consisting of three basic stages:

1) BN *dhoma oka ne'e radho bako*, “regularly coming by to chew betel and smoke,” in which the girl’s parents, having noticed the boy hanging around, ask him his intentions. This becomes an extended period during which the suitor socializes with the family of his potential bride, whose house he hopes to join. This phase was also described with the phrases BN *beti tei moni neni*,¹ “peek and see, watch from a distance,” and BN *beku mebhū tana tigi*, or “grass worn away, earth beaten hard,” suggesting that the man has “beaten a path” to his beloved’s door. During this phase, the man brings gifts of wood and pig food to the bride’s house; this is called BN *kaju dhu maru, ranga dhu zia*, or “firewood all night, pig feed all day.”

2) BN *nata tada ne'e heu ru'u*,² “marking the betel vine and claiming the betel palm.” This couplet suggests the process of placing a private, exclusive claim on a wild-growing plant; you mark it, so that others recognize your claim. In this phase, the groom presents the bride with a gift called BN *suru nenu*, or “comb and mirror.” In the past, the comb would be made of bamboo, and the mirror might be any shiny (metal) object. The gift can be public, but it is usually made inside the woman’s *sa'o*, in front of her parents. This is meant to be a public declaration of the intent to marry. This gift can be returned if the potential bride or her family changes their mind, but this incurs a fine to the suitor of one piece of cloth or one horse.

¹ The BN verbs *dhoma*, *oka*, *radho*, and *bako* all appear to mean some variation of “to see.” In addition to these, *beti* is “to sneak a look,” *tei* is “to look and investigate,” *moni* is “to watch,” and *neni* is “to spy on from afar.” In addition to these, Mopa gave me the words *ngira*, “to see from afar,” *péngi*, “to look down,” *ngada*, “to look up,” *iso*, “to look with some intention,” e.g. to improve, reorder, witness, or correct; *kiti*, “to peep at or spy on,” e.g. a pretty girl; *ghiri*, “to peer through a slit,” e.g. between floorboards or wall planks, again to spy on a pretty girl; and *biru*, “to investigate secretly.” The number of words for spying on women makes me wonder if the language I collected—not just in this instance, but generally—was more male than I realized, and whether women’s vocabulary is significantly different.

² BN *ru'u* is a difficult and complicated word, suggesting an exclusive claim, but also a hex, a curse, or a kind of black magic.

3) BN *tua kele ne'e ripi dheko*,³ “hanging palm-wine tube, dripping through the channel.” This metaphor describes white palm wine, trickling from the cut stem into a receiving tube, evoking the transfer of semen from penis to vagina. It also refers to the traditional marriage ceremony for *di'i sa'o* marriage, held at the bride's house, and usually involving 20-30 participants. This could also be called *bere tere*, though that term was more frequently associated with bridewealth marriages, and BN *buri peka naja, logo be'i ube*, which means something like “butt on the floor, leaning on the wall” of the *sa'o*, making it home.

For this celebration, the woman's family supplies all the food. The groom sits in the place of honor at the *mataraga*. A pig, provided by the bride's house, is killed by a man from her family, is killed and eaten inside the *sa'o*. Its liver is read for omens about the marriage, and its blood is touched to the *fi'i*, feeding the ancestors, and to the back of the groom's neck (or to the hands and forehead of both bride and groom), a gesture called BN *kago*, which inducts him into his new *sa'o*. As part of the ceremony, these words are recited:

<i>Ri'a ulu ngana zia</i> ⁴	Now we [ri'a] the pig's head
<i>Basa lima</i> [groom's name]	and wet [with blood] the groom's hand
<i>Zia wimai boka doa</i>	Now he joins us as older and younger siblings
<i>Ne'e tebu pibe</i>	And a pride arises
<i>Wimai polu</i> , ⁵ <i>uge</i> ⁶ <i>ne'e ema</i>	come to parents, mother and father
<i>Ne'e kaju dhu maru</i>	with firewood for every evening to come
<i>Ranga dhu zia</i>	Pig feed forever after
<i>Zia nenga loa wai uma</i>	Now you wish to go to the fields

³ This phrase was difficult to translate literally, as it is rather overwhelmed by its metaphorical meaning, particularly BN *ripi dheko*. Yoosneem translated BN *ripi* as “vagina,” and BN *dheko* as “to carry [a basket] by hanging over the shoulder or forehead,” and said that it stood for the penis. Mopa translates *ripi* as “the channel through which palm wine flows” (2004:402), and *dheko* as “to hang from the head, descend” (2004: 136). For coherence, I have given a literal translation of *ripi*, and stuck with the sense of *dheko* as something descending or moving downwards.

⁴ Animals are killed in special ways for sacrifice, and there are special words to describe those methods of slaughter. In the case of pigs, that method is BN *wela*, to split in two (cognate with BI *belah*). It involves straddling the immobilized animal, and bringing a blade down vertically across its forehead, splitting the brain case. When the pig is dead, the head is removed and split fully in two, into its left and right halves.

⁵ BN *polu* literally means “carer” or “guardian,” as in BI “pelihara.” In bridewealth exchange, the term refers to “an adult who helped raise the bride,” most likely an aunt.

⁶ Across Ngadhaland the more common kin term for “mother” or “older woman” is BN *ine*, while in Rara Ele it was BN *uge*.

<i>Nuka</i> ⁷ <i>wai sa'o</i>	and bear the harvest home to the <i>sa'o</i>
<i>Roba damai wengi rua</i>	If tomorrow or the day after
<i>Mali da kolo molo molo</i>	You desire a fairer measuring-stick
<i>Piko</i> ⁸ <i>milo milo</i>	A more beautiful bird
<i>Waja 75 centi kerbau</i>	You shall be fined a buffalo with 75 cm horns

Once this fine for breaking fidelity is agreed upon, the pig is killed. The liver and its bile ducts are checked for marks or wounds. If the signs are bad, the man who reads it can remain to remain quiet, or he can ask for another pig. It is the responsibility of diviners to share what they see, but Yoosneem was clear that in some cases they choose not to; for instance, if they do not like the couple, and are willing so see them fail, they may decline to report bad omens. Also, if getting new signs, changing out bad omens for good ones, can change the future, it has strong implications for the ontology of causality. A rich enough family, with enough pigs to spare, could in theory keep killing them until it found the signs it wanted. The ceremony closes with the words:

<i>Nua nata teme</i> ⁹	The village vine is marked
<i>Ne'e rara kau badhizi-dhizi</i>	and the path is clear
<i>Ne'e ketu ba todho ngedhu.</i>	And the request is straight and true

A church wedding may still be to come, with negotiations between the families as to how the reception will be run; but at this point, the traditional marriage is complete. The man enters the woman's house, and his labor all accrues to his new house, which is what is meant by the phrases about the firewood and pig feed he will bring back to the house day after day. The couple is also now permitted to have sex, and to have children. No more goods are exchanged.

⁷ BN *nuka* means specifically "to return home from the fields," as compared with BN *wado*, which means "to return home" in a generic sense.

⁸ BN *piko* is some sort of flightless forest bird, which I was unable to identify.

⁹ I have provided Yoosneem's translation of this line above, but am a bit unclear about it. BN *nua* is "village," *nata* is "betel vine," and Yoosneem translated *teme* as "marked," as in the marking of the vine above. BN *kisa nata* or "middle vine" is a term for the village plaza, which makes me wonder if *nua nata*, "village vine," also forms a phrase. BN *teme* also means "sweet" or "delicious," and is used to describe palm wine.

In the above piece of ritual speech, consisting of 13 lines, the first five concern the composition of the new family; the next four describe the groom's role in the house, as a provider; and the last four concern the possibility that this arrangement could dissolve.

Marriages with bridewealth

Yoosneem gave me this description of bridewealth payments as practiced in Rara Ele, and specifically in Naru, Bolonga, and Wawo Wae. Yoosneem was a *mori sa'o*, and was expected to negotiate such payments for women in his house. Two of his sisters lived in the houses of their husbands, so it is possible he negotiated bridewealth arrangements around their marriages. For other descriptions of bridewealth patterns in various times and places in Ngadhaland, see Arndt (1954: 42-47) and Barnes (1972: 85).

The first two phases, BN *dhoma oka ne'e radho bako* and BN *nata tada ne'e heu ru'u*, are the same as in a *di'i sa'o* marriage.

3) *Bere tere ne'e oka pale*, "request betel nut basket, stopper the lime container." BN *bere* is a woman's betel nut basket, with a round bottom. BN *oka* is a bamboo container for powdered lime, which is part of the betel nut chew. In this stage, a party representing the groom comes to the house of the bride. The groom's parents say:

kopi wini hae Let us take a maize seedling

la'a zoa zia uma kami Go and plant it in our garden

This represents taking the woman from her own house, and moving her into theirs. The groom comes, but waits elsewhere, maybe outside the house, pretending he doesn't know what's going on. The bride's representative answers:

molo male miu kopi wini hae Good, we permit you to take the maize seedling

zia uma miu kami hadho now to your garden, we agree

Agreement in this phase means that bridewealth will be paid.

4) *Tua kele ne'e ripi dheko*. This is the same as in a *di'i sa'o* marriage. It still takes place in the bride's house, and the groom is the one touched with blood. The groom's delegation speaks:

Dhepo go lulu poli ne'e loge mogo In accordance with our common agreement
and understanding

Ana kami zia ngede kopi wini hae Our son has already asked to take a maize
seedling

The bride's delegation responds:

Molo le — Very well, friends—

Mali miu lulu poli ga ne'e loge mogo If we have common agreement and
understanding,

Kami ema nara mona mazi go apa We the brothers and uncles of the bride
have nothing to add

Both bride and groom attend this stage, but do not speak. Each group has a spokesman, who can be any man, chosen for his knowledge, by a kind of acclaim, and not by divination. He should be an expert in ritual speech. The spokesman will be anointed by a previous elder, who licks his thumb and makes a cross on the speaker's forehead with the saliva.

Another mediator, a neutral dealer, now says:

Male miu kopi wini hae In regards to taking a maize seedling,

Zia kami tana ema nara Now we ask the brothers and uncles

Go ngawu eko¹⁰ pira of wealth and livestock, how much?

Then the marriage payments are negotiated. The structure consists here of eight named gifts, with a total of nine animals. Though the animals are set by tradition, their relative sizes are negotiated, as is the delivery schedule. If the first two animals are larger, the others can be smaller, and so forth. The eight gifts are:

¹⁰ BN *eko* is literally "tail," and stands for animals.

1) *Tune Uge*, “a walking staff for mother:” one buffalo with horns 75 cm long, received by the bride’s mother.

2) *Tune Ema*, “a walking staff for father:” one buffalo with horns 75 cm long, received by the bride’s father.

3) *Sa’o mere*, “great house:” one buffalo with horns 50 cm long, received by the trunk rider house of the bride’s *woe* segment. (This house also supplies a pig.)

4) *Maki nara*, “rice for the sister’s brother:” one buffalo with horns 40 cm long, received by bride’s eldest brother.

5) *Roru nara*, “a tree branch for the sister’s brother:” one buffalo with horns 35 cm long. Yoosneem didn’t know what this term meant.

6) *Polu*, “caretaker:” one buffalo with horns 40 cm long, received by “an adult who raised the bride,” perhaps an aunt.

7) *Poli ngeko*: one buffalo with horns 35 cm long, received by the bride’s father. I couldn’t find a good translation for this phrase. Arndt describes this payment as compensation for expenses incurred by other members of the bride’s family, and says it goes to the bride’s uncle (1954: 42).

8) *Wae susu*, “milk.” This consists of two horses, received by the bride’s mother. The horses are called BN *susu leu* and BN *susu wana*, the “left breast” and “right breast.” The horses themselves are large males. I forgot to ask the genders of the other animals.

Even if only the first two gifts are made, the marriage is considered legitimate. When each animal is delivered, its face is sprinkled with water, meaning the gift cannot be refunded or rejected; the transfer is accepted. You don’t have to kill these animals, but can keep them. In the past, buffalo could be replaced with gold in the *tune* or *sa’o mere* gifts. That is still possible today, but there is so little gold circulating now that this seldom happens. Money is also acceptable, with the amount determined by the market price of animals of the appropriate size. These are called BN *kaba saku* or *kaba lega*, “pocket buffaloes” or “betel nut bag buffaloes.” The bills can be old or new, red or blue, it doesn’t matter.

Each gift is answered with a counter-gift consisting of a pig, called BN *wela* or “to split,” referring to the manner in which pigs are sacrificed, by splitting the head. The pig is killed the moment each gift animal is delivered. This can be a reason to delay gift giving; the bride’s family may be short of pigs. No cloth is given as counter-gifts. The only cloth moving here is when the bride moves into the groom’s house, bringing her clothing with her, and accompanied by her relatives.

The first three gifts are paid by the groom’s family when the negotiation is concluded. The rest become the groom’s personal responsibility, though that responsibility is mediated by his family. For instance, if years go by, and the bride’s family wants to call in the debt, they send the groom’s parents a pig as a reminder. This is called BN *tugi ngeta*, which means something like “enter the pigsty too soon.” At this time, the groom’s father must sacrifice a chicken and touch the blood to his nose and forehead.¹¹ After the chicken has been eaten, he must tell the representative who brought the pig exactly when the remaining bridewealth will be paid.

The debts can take decades to repay; this is understood, though it is also understood that the debt is real, and will be paid eventually. There are grandmothers whose full marriage payments are not yet complete. Sometimes the payments are made after the original couple has already died, the animals supplied by their children to their grandparents. There are words concerning the delay:

<i>Buku watu tewe tana</i>	So much time to find the bridewealth
<i>Kobe wo’e ko’e leza wo’e latu</i>	so many nights, so many days

Yoosneem gave the meaning of this phrase as BI *masih berkepanjangan*, “prolonging further.”

I witnessed the final payment of a bridewealth exchange in Bogala. This took place shortly after *reba*, a common time for the settling of debts. The couple had already been married for some time; but because the groom had no sisters to inherit his house, he needed to bring his wife into the *sa’o*, so they negotiated new bridewealth for a previous marriage. I did not know this family, and so was not certain of the relationships between the people involved.

¹¹ BN *daru ngiru*

The payments began one year earlier, and consisted of two parts, BN *lu'e ema*, “a sarong for father,” and BN *lawo ine*, “a sarong for mother.” The gifts have the names of cloth, but did not literally include cloth. They were supposed to consist of horses, but now, because everything is “moneyfied,”¹² the horses have become “pocket horses.” This bridewealth exchange involved no animals or goods, only money. The total amount was set at the price of two horses, or Rp. 7.5 million each, for a total value of Rp. 15 million. That price was the result of negotiation, but it ended up right where everyone expected it to, it seems. So the negotiation must have been just a chance to speak, a form without a function. “These days we use only money, because people have no time to raise animals,” Paulus said. “We’ve switched to cash, but the prices are set: the price of a horse, price of a buffalo.”

Rp. 12 million was paid a year ago, when the negotiation was concluded; now the final Rp. 3 million are changing hands. The groom (or his representative) brought this money in an envelope, Rp. 3 million in 100,000 rupiah bills. He counted it publicly, and handed it over along with the envelope, not inside. The bride’s representative (her father or uncle) accepted the money, then immediately handed it to an older woman with him. Paulus, who sat with me, said (maybe facetiously) that this phase of bridewealth exchange was called BN *wea wega*, “opening the bag of gold.” Now, he said, the daughter had rights in both houses. The bridewealth cycle was to be closed with a ceremony a week later called BN *neku fu'u*¹³, at which a pig will be killed and its liver read for signs.

Yoosneem mentioned the phrase,

Nake jobhe-jabhe voracious for meat

Nipa kéki bei avoiding the disgusting snake

The phrase relates to people who reject their responsibilities, avoiding difficulty and overdoing easy or pleasant things. In the case of bridewealth, it refers to people who avoid paying their fair share, or families that shirk promised payments.

¹² BI *diuangkan*

¹³ BN *neku* meaning “feast” or “to feed the ancestors,” while I haven’t found a meaning for *fu'u*.

APPENDIX III: *Bui Manu*, a ceremony of *woe* Langa

Robby picked me up on the morning of January 14th, and took me over to Bone Waru. This was the day before *reba* for this part of Ngadhaland. We parked in front of *sa'o* Maja Pahi,¹ and followed some people off into the woods. After 10 minutes or so of walking, up and down a ravine, we reached the *loka* of *woe* Langa. It was located below a very high, steep ridge. Langa Gedha used to be up there, and when they moved the village down to the road, they kept using the same location for their *loka*.

The *loka* was like others I'd seen: the *lanu* had headstones wrapped in black arenga palm fiber, little staircases leaning against them, red-leaved BN *ngusu*² growing along the rear edge, and a new rail of green bamboo for men to hang their chest-cloths. Sitting on the *lanu* when I arrived were:

- A bundle of black palm fiber. This would be used shortly to replace the wrappings on the headstones.
- 2 large baskets of uncooked rice. More were to come, as more people arrived with their contributions, and more women winnowed it out. The rice was collected from all the member houses of the *woe*.
- 3 coconuts, with small chickens tied to them.
- 1 open basket of BN *fiso*, the leaves of a kind of forest ginger. This would be the vegetable for the coming meal.
- 1 small closed basket. Could be anything in there.
- A few coconut shell cups.

There's a second, smaller *loka lanu* behind the big one. It has only one headstone, with one *ngusu* behind it. This represents a branch of the *woe* that was born out of the leg of a male founding ancestor. There's a phrase related to this:

Bira lai laki lizu (man who gives birth from his thigh)

¹ Maja Pahi was an "original" house of the *woe*, but with concrete walls with "carvings" on them, and only 4 sets of *fi'i*. Its name is connected to the Majapahit empire, though the connection wasn't fully explained to me.

² *Ngusu* is a boundary plant, which often marks the edge between two plots of land. It's never supposed to die.

I couldn't get a word-for-word translation. The descendants of this miraculous birth now live in Boradho, Watu, Bogesa, and Beja.

When I arrived, I counted about 42 men and 6 women, and a mess of boys and girls. The men (and myself—Robby told me what to wear) wore Ngadha sarongs and head cloths with t-shirts, and without chest cloths³ or other trappings. Many use seatbelts from cars in place of traditional woven belts. A couple of the men had little strings of beads dangling from their head cloths. A few tied strips of leaf, around their foreheads, in place of head cloths.

We all tucked sprays of red flowers called BN *ra'a beka* or "blood of love" into our head cloths. The men chopped bamboo for firewood and eating troughs.

Because everyone is in sarongs, nobody has easily accessible pockets. Robby remarked that it was bad luck to carry money when hunting. You'll come back empty handed, he said, or at best with only a small catch. But he told me I could feel free to keep my wallet, and later confided that he had money himself, and that most of the people who ran with us probably carried some.

After an hour or so of standing around and chatting, I noted more baskets of rice, coconuts with chicks tied to them, and grown chickens sitting on the *loka lanu*. I also counted about 15 women and girls, and about 60 men and boys. The men helped each other get dressed, especially tying each other's head cloths. (I needed help dressing when I got here, and the old lord of Maja Pahi came out of the *loka* and tied my sarong, belt, and head cloth for me.)

I joined the elders inside the *loka* for a quick ceremony. The lord of Maja Pahi sat at the mataraga, spoke some words of ritual speech, flicked a drop of palm liquor from a coconut shell cup over his shoulder onto the *fi'i*, and passed the cup counter-clockwise, followed by a palm-leaf basket with a little parboiled rice and quite raw chicken. Everyone in the *loka* had a taste of the alcohol and the food. Someone says, "we have to finish all this," but another one replies, "no, it's just symbolic."⁴

³ See appendix IV for more on Ngadha traditional clothing.

⁴ For more on ritual meals, see chapter 8.

At 11 am, the men began walking out from the *loka* clearing in single file, counting off as they left. I was number 42, of what was probably a total of 60 men. First, we cut throwing staves called BN *bhole*, hacking into a stand of albizia trees that are probably somebody's property. Then we went a-raiding.

We stormed into the first village from behind, stretched out in a line, creeping up the bank. I was slow, but I saw what I could; men and boys racing around behind the houses, cornering chickens, clubbing them. A few people watched from their porches. When one man seemed to threaten to enter a house, an oldish woman snapped, "no entering houses!" She snatched up a staff of firewood and cocked it back, as if to strike him. Then they both broke into smiles, and he chuckled her granddaughter (I assume) under the chin, then moved along. After a few minutes in each village, somebody called BN *wado!*, "go home!," and we retreated.

We went from village to village, up and down. There weren't crowds out to watch, but some people were there. Occasionally one came out of a house to offer coconuts, glasses of water, and bottles of palm liquor. We grabbed fruit and vegetables from gardens and roadsides as we went, and just ate them: bananas, pineapples, sawo, sugar cane, maize, coconuts. Some kids made off with a bunch of bananas from a kiosk, and I saw Robby pay for it.

Before we reached Bomari I was handed a chicken to carry, and told to wait with it at the *ngadhu* in town, where no one could sneak up and snatch it from me. The other people carrying our spoils did the same. Once something was stolen, it was ownerless and up for grabs. In Borani, a local man with whom I'd been hiking recently sought me out and handed me a bottle of palm liquor.

The villages we raided (not necessarily in order) were Lena Zia, Tiwo Lina, Bowaru, Bogesa, Sopo Wara, Bela, Suka Tei, Namu, Boradho, Bojawa, Bonewaru, Bomari, Borani, Bopati, Bolengu, Bomuzi, Langa Gedha, and Bokolo. By 2 pm we reached Langa Gedha, and our circuit of Langa was finished. Everyone chuckled their throwing sticks up into the bamboo, where it clattered around; those carrying chickens started to pluck them. As we headed off back into the woods towards the *loka*, the men with chickens counted off: we have 24. Back at the *loka*, the men prepped the birds, plucking and singeing the feathers. Many open their headcloths. By now there were about 25 women and girls in the *loka* clearing. The gizzards and guts of the chickens were squeezed out, impaled on sticks, and grilled for immediate consumption.

Teenaged boys took turns chopping up the chickens, and scraping the flesh out of coconuts on special stools called BN *regu*. The *fiso* leaves were chopped while we were away, and were waiting in a basket. Some coconuts were apparently in excess, and were divided up and eaten. Yum.

It occurred to me that this was maybe the first ceremony I'd ever been to that didn't start with a meal. I guess they wanted us hungry. We were the Ybu Ngiu, after all, the mountain men, raiding from our secret stronghold and returning there with the spoils. Today's events were described as BN *rado manu* or "stealing chickens," with BN *rado* meaning "to steal," but in a positive sense, whereas BN *naka* is stealing in a negative sense. This would bear comparison with BN *keo rado*, the ceremony that follows unnatural deaths, which involves stealing palm wine.⁵

I chatted with another invitee to the ceremony, a Balinese university student in his third year at Universitas Flores, who had come with a local friend. He had not joined the raiding, and now stuck out like a sore thumb for his distro clothes and mini-tablet phone. There was another non-Ngadha man, a Javanese who had married a local woman, and so was a member of this *woe*. I believe the Balinese student and I were the only two outside guests.

The cooked meat and vegetables were ladled from pots and spread out on clean banana leaves and sprinkled with handfuls of the local sea salt. Some of the hot chicken broth from cooking was handed around in bamboo cups and troughs for us all to drink. Around now a children's meal was served and I got a taste as the kids all scrambled over a single trough of food. It was *uwi*, I was told, mixed with coconut. What I'm told is *uwi* looks to me like unripe banana.

At 3:30 pm, three green bamboo cylinders filled with uncooked rice, water, and a pandan leaf were set over a fire. If they bubbled over, it meant that big rain could be expected, but the next year would be abundant. If not, the next year would have a severe drought. Luckily the water bubbled over, and the crowd cheered.

At 4:30 pm, the lord of Maja Pahi and two men I believe were the trunk and tip riders of the *woe* stood on the *loka lanu* and intoned their *o-uwi*. It was long, and everyone remained

⁵ See Smedal 1996 for more on *keo rado*.

seated, breaking into a cheer at the end.⁶ Then we ate! All using our hands, eating from natural dishes: woven palm-leaf plates, bamboo troughs, banana leaves. No cups, plates, or cutlery have been used today. Men served with their hands as well. It was important to eat until you were completely full, my neighbor said.

At the end of the meal, the char was scraped from the outside of the three bamboo tubes, and they were split open ceremonially. The lord of Maja Pahi said some ritual speech over the cooked rice inside. Then he spun a coconut on the *lanu*, and it stopped pointing the correct direction, which garnered cheers and applause.⁷ Three coconuts were opened, and the meat was shared around, along with the rice from the tubes. The lord of Maja Pahi stood on the land and was anointed with water, which was then flung over all of us. Next the crowd sang all together:

<i>Uwi meze go</i>	Yam as big as a gong
<i>Go lewa laba</i>	as long as a drum ⁸
<i>Koba rako lizu</i>	the vine stretches to heaven
<i>ladu wai poso</i>	(spills) into the wide field
<i>Sui moki moki bha'i moli</i>	Wild pigs dig and dig, and don't deplete it
<i>Kutu koe koe ano ko'e</i>	Porcupines dig and dig, and still it remains

This was followed by exuberant singing and dancing, with both men and women crowding together in front of the *lanu*.

When the dancing was finished, we all left the *loka* and walked through the trees for a few hundred yards, reaching a big, impressive standing stone a bit higher on the hillside, called the BN *watu name*.⁹ This was a place for making announcements. The three leaders called out across the valley, in their biggest, loudest voices, that the ceremony was done, and *reba* was beginning. There was more dancing. Then we were done, and headed back to Bonewaru.

⁶ For more on the o-uwi, a kind of *woe* topogeny linked to the yam, see chapter 8.

⁷ For more on this form of divination, called BN *kili mata nio*, see chapter 7.

⁸ *Uwi meze go* and *uwi lewa laba* were also described to me as two varieties of yam, the former with a bigger root and a smaller plant, and the latter with a smaller root under a larger plant.

⁹ BN *watu* means “stone.” Arndt defines BN *namé* as “a metaphor, a figurative expression; to change the name of someone or something so as not to give it away” (1961: 346). Mopa translates *name* as “disguise” (2004: 339).

APPENDIX IV: Ngadha traditional clothing

A Ngadha men's sarong is called a *sapu*, and a woman's sarong is called *lawo*. The terms *sapu* and *lawo* refer specifically to sarongs in the Ngadha style: dark blue or black background, with ikat motifs in white. While Ngadha textile fashion has changed significantly in recent years, including the addition of new colors and color combinations, more elaborate motifs, and a democratization of who is permitted to wear textiles that were formerly reserved for high-ranking people, the style is still easily differentiated from Lio, Mbay, Sikka, Manggarai, Savu, and other styles, and is preferred wear for formal ritual functions, and especially for *ja'i*. For a description of the style and interpretations of Ngadha traditional clothing, and comparisons with other styles from around Flores, see Hamilton 1994.

Men

Sapu: a wide two-panel tube sarong, worn folded at the waist.

Lu'e: a wide two-panel open cloth, worn folded into a long strip and looped around the chest and shoulders, forming an H across the chest. This often shakes loose when dancing, and can be held in place with a safety pin.

Boku: a kerchief worn over the head, usually sappan-wood red. There are many styles for tying these headcloths.

Keru: a narrow woven belt, which helps to hold up the *sapu*.

Lega: a man's betel nut bag, which is rectangular and flat, woven from lontar palm leaf or plastic, and hangs by a red ribbon. For dancing, both men and women may wear a *lega jara* or "horse bag," decorated with goatskin and a fringe of horsehair. Apparently these are mostly manufactured in Bali.

Marengia: a red ribbon embroidered with gold sun and star patterns, used to tie the *boku* in place.

Women

Lawo: a narrow three-panel tube sarong, with a fringe of white string along the top, which is tied over the shoulder to hold the sarong up.

Keru: a narrow woven belt, same as the one used by men.

Marengia: a red ribbon tied around the forehead, embroidered with gold sun and star patterns. The women's *marengia* is narrower than the men's one.

Medo lado: Hair ornaments, consisting of a pair of small sticks tipped with tufts of horsehair, which are stuck into a woman's bun. (Yoosneem said, when a woman is dancing, and her head tips forward, and her *medo lado* tip forward a bit—that's when men fall in love with her.)

Kasa sese: yellow sashes that run over each shoulder and are tucked into the *keru* belt.

Butu bae: long strings of beads that hang from the back of the woman's hair. Some women buy artificial hair buns to hang these from.

APPENDIX V: *Ja'i* dancing and drum-and-gong music

Ja'i dancing was technically simple. The right foot stamped with every downbeat; the left foot made a short step on every off beat. The arms were kept close by the sides, elbows bent, as if holding something in each hand. The *wailaki* leader danced in front, with the men behind him waving their swords, and the women behind the men, waving their kerchiefs. Every so often, the group paused in its progress, the leader raised his hands, and rotated his body to the left, and then to the right, as the members of the group did likewise. I never got a handle on precisely how often this move should occur; there seemed to be no set number of beats or bars or steps, but only convention and the judgment of the group leader. It was probably done once every minute or so. The fast tempo of the music, around 250 beats per minute, caused the dancers to skitter forward fully upright on unbent legs; we almost appeared to advance without moving our feet, which were hidden by our long, ankle-length sarongs. In the rear, the non-dancing members of the *wailaki* walked together, following the train of dancers. Together, we shuffled into the village, moving around the square in the sacred counter-clockwise direction (BN *kago wana*).

Arndt described *ja'i* dancing as resembling the flight of the eagle (2009: 243-4). In my opinion, that could describe the movements of only the women, who moved their hands in a motion that could maybe be similar to the flapping of wings. To me, the male dancers rather resembled a war party, following their leader in formation, and brandishing their swords in unison. In Ngadhaland before the so-called Pax Neerlandica, when the region was riven with inter-*woe* and inter-village conflict, all outside groups were either hostile or, if had reached an alliance, formerly hostile. The interplay of *wailaki*, as vehicles for exchange between *woe* and village groups, backed by large groups of armed men, evokes that relationship (Lemonnier 1991); they appear as a war party at the village gate, bearing the gift of a pig, and announcing the names of their ancestors through the *sangara*, thus recalling the origins of the alliance that will be reproduced by common feasting. In the Dutch missionary film *Amorira*

[1930],¹ men went into battle dressed just the same as men dance *ja'i* today. The film's battles were staged, however. It is certainly possible that it is an aesthetic artifact more than an ethnographic record. Perhaps dancing costume and war costume were identical, but the film does not prove it one way or the other.

The women recall marriage alliances, carrying with them small offerings of cloth, in the form of the kerchiefs in their hands.

On sunny days, dancing in the heavy Ngadha clothes was hot work. The *lu'e* chest cloth kept shaking loose, and I tugged it tight again and again until someone fixed it in place with safety pins. Most of the dancers went barefoot, and I followed suit. Over time, I started to feel the physicality of the dance, and the kind of masculinity it was meant to project. At its best, *ja'i* was graceful. It was somehow not aggressive, even though the central motion was the brandishing of a sword. Our feet were in constant motion; the hips and orientation of the body shifted as we shuffled forward, giving the impression that our bodies were floating. Many men held their swords not by the handle, but by the blunt base of the blade, nearer to the fulcrum, so that they could wave them about more gently and gracefully. The dance didn't look effortful, but it was tiring, especially in the full sun. It was also fun, especially as the dancers became tipsy, and some began breaking off into male/female pairs.

The dance was not flamboyant, but enthusiastic dancers brought their own style to it. Bart's friend Robby was a strong presence in the dancing circle, with a particular way of holding himself: chest puffed out, hands limp from the wrist, advancing with his left hip thrust forward, rather than facing straight ahead. When I watched Robby *ja'i*, the term that popped into my head was "peacocking." There was a sense of joyful, masculine display about it, which made me want to be a part of his group, and when we danced together I imitated his style, in a smaller, less ostentatious way. Other groups also tended to imitate the style of the person leading them.

Besides regular *ja'i*, I was occasionally lured into a different variety of *ja'i* dancing called *lea*. This is a dance of courtship (BI *tarian meminang*, Mopa 2004: 294), but the BN word *lea* also means "ginger," and the spiciness of ginger more

¹ Available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/UCzcXf4RG14> [Accessed 13 Aug 2020]

accurately describes the risqué and sexual nature of the dance. Kunst, who observed Ngadha music and dance in the 1930s, described *lea* like this: dancers form a circle with a man and a woman in the center, who are replaced every so often. As they dance opposite each other, the man “has also to approach the woman now and again, and try to snatch some ornament from her” (Kunst 1942: 85).

When I found myself pushed into *lea*, the person who pushed me was Robby. We were dancing *ja’i* around the circle at a *ka ngadhu* when a middle-aged woman danced toward me. I didn’t know how to react, but Robby pushed me forward. I danced opposite her for a while, as she whirled around me, occasionally reaching out to brush my face with her fingers, drawing hoots and laughter from the crowd. Robby egged me on, and demonstrated with some other older ladies who came out of their groups to dance with us, showing me how to stab suggestively with the *sau*. I was uncomfortable with the whole thing, but played along; as long as it was older ladies dancing with us, I was confident that it was all in good fun, and there would be no misunderstanding. Nobody was trying to seduce me, and I wasn’t going to appear to be trying to seduce anyone else. The tenor changed, for me, when Robby started pushing me to dance *lea* with younger women, who appeared bashful and unwilling. I tried, clumsily, for a few moments. I wanted to endear myself to Robby more than anything. But I soon begged off, discouraged by the clear discomfort of the young women, and embarrassed by my clumsiness and cluelessness. I told Robby that I’d be braver to dance this way if my wife were there with us. He was disappointed, but the young women were clearly relieved. Robby himself kept making *lea* advances on a young French tourist who was watching from the sidelines, and I apologized to her in English on his behalf, explaining what was going on. (I asked myself, “whose side am I on?”)

I took part in drum and gong playing on several occasions, and collected some information about the ensemble, which consisted of three drums (BN *laba*) and five gongs (BN *go*).

All three drums sat upright on their bases, and were played with small bamboo mallets called BN *rogo*. Two of them were slender and about a meter tall; these were called BN *laba peghu*. One was made of PVC pipe, and the other from BN *betho*, the largest variety of local bamboo. A lower, broader drum, called a BN *laba dera*, was made from the trunk of an arenga palm. All three had heads made of cow-skin attached with an iron ring fastened with metal studs, and tightened with wire.

The five gongs each had different names: *wela goa*, *udo udo*, *bheme*, and a pair both called *ridho*. The gongs were played with round wooden mallets. Altogether, the ensemble consisted of seven people, with one on each of the three drums, one on each of three gongs, and one person playing the pair of *ridho* gongs. I asked where the gongs came from, and was told only that they were old, and nobody knew. Kunst (1942: 109) suggested that gongs in Ngadha probably all came from Java, carried by Buginese or Chinese importers. Whether this was true in the 1930s, and whether it remains true today, I can't say for sure.

The music was played in 4/3 count (three bars of four beats each before repeating). The notes, as I heard them, were roughly 1st, major 2nd, minor 3rd, 5th, and minor 7th. The gong music we played that day could be charted like this:

Gong 1 ² : High minor 7 th .	X - X - X - X	X - X - X - X -	X - X - X - X -
Gong 2: 5 th . "And" beats.	- X - X - X - X	- X - X - X - X	- X - X - X - X
Gong 3: Minor 3 rd .	-- Xx -- Xx	-- Xx -- Xx	-- Xx -- Xx
Ridho 1: 1 st .	X - X - Xx --	-- X - Xx --	-- X - X - - -
Ridho 2: Major 2 nd .	- - - - - x	- - - - - x	- - - - - -

Of course bars, time signatures, and the 8-note tonal scale are all Western musical frameworks. I'm using them descriptively, not analytically. The notes produced by the gongs were not perfectly tuned to the 8-note scale, and my designations (1st, minor 3rd, etc) reflect my own interpretation. While many Ngadha people are proficient in Western music and skilled in the use of Western instruments, I doubt that Ngadha people would describe gong music in this way. Kunst (1942) did

² I unfortunately failed to note how gongs 1, 2, and 3 correspond to *wela goa*, *udo udo*, or *bheme*.

describe Ngadha music in terms of Western musical concepts such as major and minor keys, and recorded Ngadha songs using Western musical notation, so at least there's some precedent here.

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