

violence, sacrifice, and divination: giving and taking life in eastern Indonesia

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Sacrifice is a classic topic in the anthropology of ritual, but one which has suffered the fate of many other classics, in that it is often known secondhand and through familiar formulas. We know that Tylor saw sacrifice as a form of gift-giving (1889), that Smith saw it as a communion through a meal with invisible spirits (1894), that Hubert and Mauss saw it as a way for sacred and profane to communicate (1964[1898]), and that Evans-Pritchard saw it as a surrogate offering of life (1957). We are familiar with famous descriptions of the identification of ox and man among the Nuer and Dinka, as well as with the ways in which the animal serves as a metaphor for social community (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Lienhardt 1961). The classical emphasis on religious symbolism has, however, created a somewhat etherealized, "theological" view of sacrifice (Bourdillon and Fortes 1980) which stresses the fact that sacrifice implies power over life and death but which has little to say about the reality of death itself.

What is missing in much recent anthropological writing about sacrifice is the sense that killing animals publicly is a violent act. Scholars of antiquity and philosophers have emphasized the violence of the destruction of life much more than anthropologists have, although paradoxically they have not been able to witness actual performances (Detienne 1989; Vernant 1974, 1989). The most detailed treatment of the theme of sacrificial violence is based not on ethnographic materials but on a theory of psychological universals with little or no relation to existing cultural practices (Girard 1977).¹ New ethnographic accounts are needed to refocus attention on the victimization of the beast and its meaning in a performative context.

Sacrifice is an important part of the ritual life of most of the indigenous people of Southeast Asia, and a number of recent accounts (Condominas 1977; Forth 1989; Onvlee 1980; Volkman 1985) have shown how significant violence is in these traditions. Many of the accounts focus

Classical theorists have focused on the "gift of life" in sacrifice and its reinforcement of hierarchical divisions, but have paid little attention to the violent "taking of life" and the divinatory significance of the body. This case study from the Kodi people of Sumba examines what is at stake in the bloody struggle between sacrificers and their animal victims. Social relations between juniors and seniors are dramatized by the subjugation and killing of water buffalo that have been contributed by junior members. When these usually meek, docile animals suddenly turn on their slaughterers in a final desperate battle of resistance, the young men who sacrifice them identify with the animals they kill and praise their courage and manliness. The violent death of the animals is part of a contested process that moves from metonymic bonds to metaphoric transfers, taking symbolic associations and giving them a performative significance. After death, the "reading" of the liver and storing of the horns turns the buffalo into a visual medium of communication and memory, returning the "voice" that a myth says was lost at domestication. [sacrifice, violence, divination, man/animal symbolism, Indonesia]

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on the relations between people and water buffalo, the largest and most expensive of the domesticated animals. In central Flores and highland Sulawesi, the killing of buffalo is deliberately protracted, so that the earth will be “drenched with blood” and the final human victory will be vividly remembered. The spirits in buffalo may be seen as competing with humans in a struggle for life (Forth 1989:514), sharing their souls as an alternate animal identity (C ndominas 1977), or substituting for slaves in sacrifices (Scharer 1963). The requirements of buffalo sacrifice in “feasts of merit” define hierarchical relationships of debt and dependency in a ritual economy, where poorer men are obligated to provide animals for slaughter in return for land, military protection, or bridewealth contributions from their wealthier superiors (Kirsch 1973; Leach 1954).

Geertz’s famous analysis of the Balinese cockfight (1973) demonstrated how notions of status, risk, and danger were implicated in the struggle of two roosters, whose death shared the characteristics of the ritualized violence of sacrifice. The elements of identification and destruction are also found in other animal combats, such as the staged fights between bulls, buffalo, and tigers that have been common to many parts of Southeast Asia for the past 500 years (Reid 1988). Rodeos (Lawrence 1982), bullfights (Marvin 1986), and lion taming acts at the circus play out similar themes in contexts more familiar to most Westerners.

In the present study, I elaborate a model for interpreting buffalo sacrifice in an eastern Indonesian society, a model that focuses on the ritual drama of death and the divinatory interpretation of the body. I stress both the explanatory power of violence in expiatory sacrifice and the complex relations between beasts and men, differing from classical theorists in treating the body as something more than simply the flesh shared in a communal meal.

Anthropologists have long followed Lienhardt’s observation that “the people are put together as the bull is put together” (1961:23), using the coded distribution of body parts as a key to social distinctions and the hierarchizing functions of sacrifice. Other uses of the body, focused on the liver, entrails, tongue, and horns, can be at least equally significant. The less meaty sections are at least as “good to think” and as important in terms of the logic of sacrificial exchange, even if they are not always as “good to eat.” Specifically, the use of horns to measure ages and remember events, and the interpretation of internal organs as divinatory texts, add a significant dimension to the effectiveness of the sacrifice as a ritual act.

Sacrifice is an attempt to escape death by defeating undesirable aspects of human life—mortality, servility, and the uncertain control of land and possessions. It involves the violent subjugation and conquest of an animal, but also the ambivalent feelings which follow from that conquest. Brutality is present, but also laughter—especially the nervous laughter of seeing oneself, however briefly, in the victim’s eyes. After death, this half-identification and half-denial continue in the examination of the insides of the animal’s body. Through divination, an inner geography of human troubles is mapped onto the organs of domestic animals. Sacrificers come to “recognize themselves” in the bloody entrails of their animal victims and to understand certain social problems differently as a result.

In the analysis I combine a symbolic approach, based on relations of metaphor and metonymy, identity and differentiation, with a performative one, which looks at sacrifices as ways of transforming the relations of sponsors (“sacrifiers”), ritual functionaries (“sacrificers”), spirits, and the human audience. Ritual power and efficacy are realized against a background of mythological traditions that explain the origins of sacrifice in the act of domestication and compare human subjugation to that of the buffalo. The agonistic dimension of buffalo sacrifice is accentuated in Kodi, and the reasons for this must be understood both in terms of a particular cultural tradition and in relation to the more general themes of violence, separation, and surrogacy involved in blood sacrifice.

Kodi ritual slaughter

The climax of ritual feasts among the Kodi people of Sumba in eastern Indonesia is the sacrifice of large numbers of buffalo. After several days of singing, oratory, and dancing, hundreds of

guests gather for a final ritual meal and the spectacle of the slaughter. The central village plaza is prepared by groups of dancers, men in horned headdresses and women wearing cloth tied in birdlike crests, who trample the ground energetically to the beat of gongs and drums. A line of priests holding spears and swords speak the final invocations, dedicating each animal to a specific spirit. Once the intentions of the sponsors are clear and all the witnesses have been assembled, the first bull is led out by a single strand of rope attached to his nose.

A young man approaches him, brandishing a bush knife at shoulder level and waving it menacingly at the animal. His first strike is always to the neck, but the animal is unrestrained and usually dodges the blow, escaping with a cry of pain and a superficial wound. Enraged at his attacker, the normally docile beast bellows and bolts across the circle of bamboo thatched houses. Spectators scurry onto the higher ground of stone tombs or raised verandas, urging the sacrificer to return to the kill. "Go back and cut to the heart!" they yell. "Stick him before he turns!"

The bull is pulled back into the center by his nose rope and faces his adversaries again. This time, another young man advances on him, striking at the hindquarters or crippling him with blows to the legs. The sacrificer shows his own daring and skill by coming dangerously close to the furious animal but avoiding his horns and hooves. Sometimes, the buffalo manages to stab at one of the young men with the tips of his horns, tear up the bamboo slats of the house walls, or break away from the rope that holds him. When he does so, the group cheers in excitement and praises the "virility" and "spirit" of the animal, who tests his killers to a display of manliness.

Most older bulls are strong enough to reel around the slaughter field for five or six minutes before they are brought to their knees. They lose great amounts of blood and exhaust themselves in a desperate resistance, until they are eventually immobilized. The moment of surrender is accompanied by a final wail, which is the signal for the young men on either side to move in for the kill. A quick stab to the neck finishes off one animal just as another is being brought in. In the middle of a particularly fierce struggle, one of the sacrificers may raise his bloody sword in the air and strut in a brief war dance to summon the cheers of his supporters. Then he moves in again and continues the attack until his victim is too seriously wounded to escape.

The gruesome spectacle can last most of the day, as from five to over a hundred animals are killed. Their huge carcasses litter the slaughter field, and it is forbidden to remove them until the whole series is finished. Many onlookers are covered with the spurting blood, and the dust raised by the thrashing hooves is colored dark by the end of the day.

The number of animals killed, the size of their horns, and the manner in which they died will be discussed for years afterward, as the several hundred guests return home, carrying meat and stories of the sacrifice. They may narrate the events with a certain gallows humor, sometimes imitating the animals' movements or laughing derisively at people who scrambled to escape their path. The best bulls, they will agree, were the fiercest ones, the ones who resisted most violently. These animals showed that they were "real men" (*kabani*) who could make their masters proud.

After the slaughter, the body of each animal is opened up and inspected by ritual specialists, priests, and diviners who examine the liver, lungs, heart, and gall bladder to ascertain whether the sacrifice has been received by the spirits to whom it was dedicated. They seize the saddle-horn-like lobe of the liver and check that it stands tall and upright, resting securely on the "mat" of the other organs. Then they give instructions for the meat to be carved up and divided among the guests, according to an elaborate protocol based on seniority, clan membership, and participation in earlier feasts. They carefully sever the head, with horns still intact, and set it aside on top of a tombstone to await a later rite to "send away the souls of the buffalo" and guide them to the heavenly corral where they will reside. The order of the sacrifice is remembered and reconstructed, four nights later, when the horns are arranged in a line from the village altar toward the gate. This is the "ladder" that human messages will go up as they travel, tied to the

horns of the buffalo souls, to the spirit world. Their arrival is confirmed with a chicken sacrifice, and then the horns are removed and hung in the house that sponsored the feast, to be displayed for future generations.

What is the relationship between the ritualized violence of sacrifice, presented as a battle between man and beast, and the serious respectfulness of divination, in which the beast is honored and thanked for serving as an important intermediary? Closer attention to these matters allows us both to refine the theory of sacrifice and to come to a better understanding of apparently gratuitous acts of violence.

people and animals in Kodi society

Kodi is the arid western coastal district of Sumba, an area well suited to pastoralism because of its high, rugged grasslands but too poor in rainfall to offer a reliable subsistence from mixed gardens of corn, tubers, and dry rice. The 50,000 Kodinese live in hamlets scattered throughout the interior, keeping pigs and chickens near their homes and herding horses and buffalo to the surrounding pastures.

Garden lands are owned by patrilineal clans, whose members gather periodically in an ancestral village near the coast for ceremonial feasts. The feasts are sponsored by a particular house, which is both a physical structure within the village and a patrilineage, identified with the cult of particular ancestors and sacred objects. The larger lineages are made up of over a hundred households, and at major feasts each of these households is supposed to contribute to the sacrifice. Major feasts are held when a lineage house is rebuilt, when a megalithic tomb is finished, and when an important person is buried. They can also be held to fulfill an ancestral promise, to celebrate the overcoming of misfortune, or to crush one's rivals in another house or village with an extravagant display of meat. The competitive system of feasting is associated with the pursuit of renown (*ngara*), which requires the sponsor of a particular feast to enlist the help of all of his clan brothers and get them to agree to participate in an inflationary spiral of pig and buffalo feasts.

Buffalo and horses are raised not only for sacrifice but also for exchange. Livestock are the common standard of value for all prestige transactions, which include alliance negotiations, land purchases, and the payment of fines and bloodwealth. At least five buffalo and five horses are required for a minimal bridewealth payment to transfer a bride and her children to a new village, and important families often exchange as many as 50 or 100 head. These are usually not presented at one time but gradually given to the family of the wife-taker when they are needed for particular occasions. When a feast is planned, members of the sponsoring house and village may take animals from their own corral but are more likely to seek assistance from their wife-takers, who will be obligated to provide whatever animals they have. Holding a major feast puts a strain on the whole region, as several hundred people must find some way to come up with animals for slaughter. An elaborate reckoning of earlier gifts made at funerals and marriages determines who is in a position to expect more contributions and who will be able to provide them.

Although only about 40 percent of all households have enough livestock to maintain their own corral, each household needs to have horses and buffalo for particular occasions. It may trade pigs, goats, and horses for buffalo or may borrow them from wealthier relatives, assuring a high degree of fluctuation in the ownership and location of livestock. The standard for estimating the worth of all finely crafted objects is their value in horses or buffalo. Thus, a betel pouch embroidered with bark cloth is said to be worth one horse. A man's cloth with fine indigo designs tied into the threads is worth a young buffalo. Even a simple family will trade what is necessary to obtain the animals it requires for sacrifice or exchange.

Most buffalo offered for sacrifice are males, while females predominate in bridewealth and other exchanges. Cows are sacrificed only after they have become sterile and can no longer

help to reproduce the herd. In the ceremonial economy, an animal's value is reckoned by its horn length, which is measured along a man's arm. Yearlings are described as animals with "only a knuckle's worth" of barely budding horns, and it is not considered appropriate to call an animal "mature" (*malupu*) until its horns have grown past a man's wrist. The best animals for feasting are older bulls with horns at least as long as a man's forearm. Such animals are 10 years of age or older, and the ones with horns that stretch as wide as a man's handspan are well over 20. The longest horns belong to castrated bulls (*mandopo*), whose heads become so heavy the bulls cannot lift them. The horns must be artificially "turned out" in a heating and twisting operation so that they will not grow into the animal's skull.

The use of horns to determine exchange value in effect measures the age of the animal and the time invested in raising it.² Since the horns are stored in the lineage house after the slaughter, the age is more important than the quantity of meat on the animal's body. A plump 8-year-old male buffalo usually has considerably more flesh on his bones than a long-horned bull of 15, but two younger animals would have to be traded for the scrawny older one because of the prestige value of the horns. The meat on certain old bulls is so tough that it is nearly inedible. This fact, however, is of little importance to Kodi feast-givers, who repeat a traditional adage: "A man's fame rides along on his buffalo; his renown is tied to its horns."

Kodi buffalo are raised exclusively for sacrifice and exchange. In much of Southeast Asia, including the Sumbanese highlands, herds of buffalo trample the soil of wet rice fields to prepare them for cultivation. But Kodi is too dry to permit much wet rice cultivation, so the animals live a life of leisure wandering from pasture to waters and returning to their corrals at night. The animals are not milked or bled; unlike many pastoralists, the Kodi derive no food from them while they are alive. Buffalo are not part of the means of production, but they circulate in a prestige economy that makes them a "means of reproduction" that legitimates access to women and the claiming of descendants. There is no indigenous use of the wheel, cart, or plow, so the buffalo is never used as a draft animal and only very rarely as a beast of burden. The buffalo serves as a repository of value and a sacramental animal, creating bonds between groups and between people and their ancestors.

Buffalo and horses are also a particularly public form of "wealth on the hoof." Herds are visible, and since many people may have claims on livestock because of kinship, marriage, or earlier gifts, a rich man is constantly under pressure to circulate his animals to others. If he does not respond to these requests, resentment on the part of his fellows may lead to attacks on the herd. The stealing or wounding of animals is extremely common, and when combined with the natural hazards of drought and disease, it makes wealth in livestock prone to dramatic fluctuations. Sponsoring feasts allows a wealthy man to display his possessions and redistribute them in the form of raw meat. Although he slaughters many of his finest animals, he assures himself of a renown that is of longer duration. Animals whose "blood is brought into the village" will forever remain associated with their master's name and can no longer be lost or stolen. In contrast, poorer members of the patrician may prefer to keep the herds alive, since they can be borrowed or claimed to pay bridewealth, purchase land, or bring to funerals. According to a Kodi expression, "A rich man feeds his fellows at a feast, but he feeds his own name more." The individual's striving for renown enhances the collective prestige of his ancestral village, but often his ambitions conflict with the interests of clansmen who want to sustain a common pool of resources.

a mythology of subjugation and speechlessness

The social and political conflicts that surround the ownership of livestock are reflected in mythological traditions. A man's rise from obscurity to ritual prominence can be chronicled as a passage from the status of cowherd to that of the owner of buffalo herds and thus as a spatial

movement from the pastures into the ancestral villages. A Kodi epic hero such as Hyaghu Ana Meha (Hyaghu Born a Poor Boy) or Ndelo Ana Lalu (Ndelo the Orphaned Child) begins his career as a rejected outcast who must herd the buffalo of wealthy kinsmen but then meets wild spirits who help him achieve riches and renown. Magical wealth comes the hero's way in the form of mysteriously reproductive herds, and his rise from rags to riches is complete when he can slaughter his own buffalo in his own name. Something is destroyed as he becomes a great feast-giver, and the buffalo epitomize that destruction. A boy's earlier, inferior status is associated with his tending the buffalo of his seniors. By acquiring buffalo to be killed on his own behalf, he overcomes this inferiority. These themes are also exemplified in a Kodi story that suggests reasons for the origins of sacrifice.

When the first heroic founders of the ancestral villages came into the land, they could speak with all the animals, including pigs and buffalo that lived wild in the forest. Buffalo were such friendly and gregarious creatures that they used to come as guests to Kodi houses and spend hours conversing with their human hosts. There is still a portion of each Kodi house that is called the "buffalo of the house." It consists of a high, raised central section in the rafters, resembling the somewhat curved backside of the animal. However, the buffalo took up more than this allotted space and proved to be poor house guests, because their large, clumsy movements often tore the houses to pieces. Bamboo poles could not support their weight, so the floors and walls collapsed. The buffalo were not able to build houses for themselves that would be sturdy enough to support them. They asked their human neighbors to provide them with a place to live that would be close to water and pastures, and so the corral was created. The buffalo were led to the corral by ropes that ran through their noses. Once they accepted the subjugation of the rope and the corral, the beasts also lost the power of speech. Exchanging autonomy and mobility for pastoral care and a comfortable place to sleep, the buffalo ceded their docile power to the service of human masters.

The buffalo's rope was later also used for human slaves and war captives and was hung in the right front corner of the ancestral house as a symbol of those beings subjugated to its control. The act of domestication destroyed an earlier equality among living beings and established a hierarchy that separated men from beasts. Horses and dogs came to occupy a middle rung of this hierarchy: they were domesticated animals who could be trained and could enter into a moral relationship with their owners. In mythological accounts, horses and dogs may still occasionally converse with their masters, and the departure of a beloved horse or dog may occasion a funeral ceremony and even a tender song of farewell (Onvlee 1980). The buffalo was reduced to a "dumb animal" (the Kodi term is *haranga kambanga*, a reduplicative insult) because he accepted slavery instead of displaying the human virtues of cleverness, virility, and speed.

The subjugation of domestic animals in a kind of "social contract" provides a justification for their ritual humiliation: after buffalo lost the power of speech, humans began to castrate them and raise them for sacrifice.³ Among the domestic animals, only the pig and the buffalo are neutered. The rampant sexuality of dogs and stallions, although often troublesome in public gatherings, is never disturbed, presumably because it would reflect on the virility of their masters. For the pig and the buffalo, a neutralized sexuality is replaced by a new value as an object of exchange and interpretation, as a mute message-bearer in a communication system between the human and the spirit worlds. The ritual attention given to the buffalo tongues in the final ceremony to guide the animals' souls to the upperworld expresses and reiterates the mythic theme of speechlessness.

Wild animals, by contrast, are believed to be still able to understand human speech. Hunters, knowing they can be overheard, use a special code of alternative words and images (*paneghe kalola*, "hunting language") to confuse their prey. When an individual forms a contract with a wild spirit, he or she speaks in ordinary language and is understood (Hoskins 1988). Wild animals have kept their autonomy and their own voices, so it is possible to negotiate exchanges

with them and arrange for a transfer of powers from the wild to the village and garden settlement. The domesticated animals that lost the power of speech, through the clumsiness of the buffalo, have been reduced to servants and sacrificial substitutes for persons, no longer acting as autonomous agents.

The myth justifying the hierarchy of the human and animal worlds is told as an amusing fable, a “just so” story, but its implications are serious. Disdain for the large, slow, docile buffalo is expressed in the sacrificial ceremonies, where these characteristics may also be extended to men.

the stages of buffalo feasts

Large buffalo feasts (*woleko*) occur only during the ceremonial season from July to October, after the harvesting of rice and before the rains that usher in the next planting. Feasts held in the garden villages focus on agricultural fertility and the removal of illness or misfortunes. Feasts in the ancestral villages involve a larger number of people and stress the reproduction of the ancestral community through human descendants. Differences of rank and precedence are highlighted in the ancestral villages, where the relative hierarchical positions of the lineage houses are made clear through the recitation of genealogies. In the garden villages, the focus is on more egalitarian goals, and the scale is smaller.

The first days of a feast are spent “inviting the spirits” with prayers and promises of a meal. On the first evening, priests sacrifice chickens to ascertain the willingness of the spirits to attend. If the entrails are favorable, a full night of ceremony will follow, alternating speeches with singing and dancing to the beating of drums and gongs. The priests trace the history of misfortune and reasons for the feast in paired couplets, dialoguing to identify the angry spirits who require sacrifices to placate them. After two nights, the priests work out a hierarchical ordering of topics on the “ritual agenda”: the first animals sacrificed will be dedicated to the most important spirits who are angry, and other, less important deities or disgruntled ancestors will receive later offerings. For smaller feasts, one animal may be made to “carry several spirits on its back,” but the most important deities (guardians of the clan or garden settlement) must each receive a large, separate animal.

Ritual couplets describe the sponsor of the feast as a horse or buffalo, bound to his obligations like one of the livestock he owns:

Ena a mori njara
Ena a mangu tena
Na deke a rahi rahi njara
Na taki a lodo kaloro kari
Maka a ndara dola koko na
Maka a karimbyo manundu ka
Na kapotoya ela toghona
Na kalepaya ela kaduna.

Here is the master of the horse
 Here is the owner of the boat
 Bound to the promise with a horse’s bridle
 Tied to the date with a buffalo rope
 So the horse turns to the pull at the neck
 So the buffalo follows obediently along
 He wears it bound to his forehead
 He carries it tied to his horns.

This passage reminds us that the master of the animals is still, in relative terms, the slave of the spirits. While able to command in his corral, he is himself commanded by a spirit who shepherds him around as he does his herd. The clan spirit, resident in the altar at the center of each ancestral village, is said to “take his [human] charges out during the day, bring them in at night, watching them from afar, herding them from a distance.” The pastoral metaphor indicates hierarchical levels, relations of superiority and subordination between the human, the animal, and the spirit worlds.

On the morning of the third day, guests from outside the village bring contributions. They arrive in a procession, the men wearing headcloths with two sharp, pointed peaks, called “horns” (*kadu*), and holding buffalo-hide shields. Their animals are decorated with cloths of the same color, which stream down from their horns and mark them as destined for slaughter.

Drums and gongs sound as the men stomp about and roll their eyes, miming the “dance of death” (*ore mate*) the buffalo will later perform in earnest. Female dancers tease the men with fluttering arms and gentle, beckoning movements, trying to coax them into charging fiercely across the dancing ground. Songs describe the girls as cockatoos and parrots, while the boys are “the colts who frolic in the gardens, the calves who lock horns in the fields.”

Invocations begin with the offer of “water to drink and rice to eat” to all the invisible spirits in attendance and with the promise that they, as well as the several hundred spectators, will soon be rewarded for their patience. Hulled rice is scattered over the tethered animals as they are circled by a junior priest. A special offering is made to designate the first bull to be killed, the sponsor’s own buffalo, who is called the *ghobo iru deta* (highest nose) and is the one most closely identified with the sacrificer. This animal is by convention the oldest and largest of them all, with a horn span as wide as a man’s handspan. He is led forward and a chicken egg is thrown at the center of his forehead, the seat of the *hamaghu*, or “vital force.” When life is taken, the vital force is detached from the head and lost, while the ancestral soul (*ndewa*) remains and does not leave for the afterworld until later. The gift of the egg designates one specific animal as the sacrificer’s messenger, who will lead the others as they travel up through the sky.

The death of the sponsor’s bull is closely observed. This is the only case in which violence or resistance on the part of the animal is not desirable. The sacrificer will strike directly at the carotid artery, hoping for a quick kill and an auspicious fall on the right side. Other buffalo brought onto the slaughter field have been contributed by someone else, so they must meet different expectations. If the former owner of a large bull sees him bowing humbly before the knife and accepting death without resistance, he will be disappointed. He wants the beast to lift his head, to roar with rage at the first blow, and to show his “spirit” by fighting back to the best of his ability. A show of strength in pulling away and skill at dodging blows is praised, and many onlookers will seem to be cheering for the buffalo as they cry out comments to the sacrificer: “Watch his horns! He’s a wild one!” or “His feet will move faster than you can!” or even “He’ll slip away from that blow! You’ll have to strike again!” The dramatic tension underlying sacrificial performances requires that the struggle be a violent and protracted one to be satisfying.

roles in sacrificial performances

In their classic analysis of the logic of sacrifice, Hubert and Mauss distinguished between the sacrificer, the person who owns the animal and offers it for his own benefit, and the sacrificer, who holds the knife and actually kills it. The distinction is valuable, but it operates only to clarify formal roles concerned with the “cosmological” dimension of ritual (Tambiah 1985), ritual’s significance within wider systems of explanation. It does not address the “performative” dimension of how complex social relations between persons (represented through animals) are transformed in the rite. In a society like Kodi, these roles are much more complex than the simple opposition of sacrificer/sacrificer suggests.

In an ideal formulation, the sacrificer and sacrificer are related as wife-giver and wife-taker and as senior and junior. The sponsor invites young men who have taken women from his village, and each of them will be expected to bring a contribution, usually a horse or a buffalo. Many of these men are still paying installments of a brideprice owed to their wife-giver. Marriage to the daughter of an important man involves a commitment to pay somewhere between 10 and 50 horses and buffalo, and usually no more than half the amount is paid at the wedding. It is understood that the rest will be given over the years at feasts, funerals, and marriages. All those who have once taken a wife from a village recognize a debt for the gift of life, a debt that endures even after payment of the formal sum.

The young men asked by the sponsor to serve as sacrificers are proud to do so, because the request shows respect for their courage, skill, and control over animals. At the same time, they

may have complex and ambiguous relations to the sponsor himself and the animals he wants killed. The sacrificer may be either a former owner of the animal or someone who had claims upon the animal through traditional exchange. He is almost always in some social sense the inferior of the sacrificer—usually younger, indebted to the sacrificer as a patron, and obligated to perform this ritual task for the latter's benefit. So when one sacrificer told me he wanted to "see a good fight" and hoped the animal would show a "manly spirit" in battle, his motivations were complex. The buffalo about to be killed is called the adversary (*nggaba*), the same term used for a dueling counterpart, and as in duels, the honor of the killer and that of the killed are linked in the struggle. The aggression the sacrificer displays toward the buffalo can be interpreted as a displacement of the resentment he feels toward the sacrificer who has forced him to contribute to the feast.⁴ He may applaud the animal's resistance because it expresses his own resistance, even though he knows the buffalo will eventually succumb. The violence of the animal's death represents a struggle between juniors and seniors and debtors and creditors that is emotionally involving, although the result is predetermined.

The complex relations between the person who brings the buffalo to the feast, the sacrificer who receives it, and the sacrificer who kills it can be modeled in a schema showing how they change over time. In the procession that enters the village, the young male dancers in horned headdresses and the buffalo with colored streamers on their heads are identified. Their strength, masculinity, and courage are accentuated and displayed visually, establishing an apparent equality between the sacrificers and the sacrificed.

The sponsor/sacrificer is identified with his own bull and described in terms that make it clear he too is bound by debts and obligations to the spirits. In a chain of obligations, he pays the invisible ones, and his subordinates in turn may pay him. However, only one animal—the sponsor's bull—is presented as an agent in the chain of exchange transactions. The egg crushed on the head of the sponsor's bull establishes a hierarchical differentiation between the *sacrificer's animal* (which should die quickly and willingly) and the animals brought by all the others, whose resistance is celebrated by their former owners. While the sacrificers try to kill the animals, they also want them to struggle before they die.

The formal rules of sacrifice specify that the sacrificers will dispatch all the animals the sacrificer chooses to send to their deaths. In each dramatic performance, underlying tensions between the sponsor and the young sacrificers make the docility of many prospective victims problematic and even humiliating for their killers. Buffalo seem to have no awareness of what awaits them when they wander obediently out to a bloody field strewn with the bodies of their fellows. While pigs protest vociferously whenever they see the sacrificial spears, buffalo remain silent and docile until they are actually cut by the knife. When this usually silent mass of accumulated economic value finally chooses to speak, the tension between the human master and the animal slave is broken. The buffalo bellows in anger at his subjugation and imminent death, and his voice is cheered by the spectators, who laugh with joy at this final expression of rebellion.

Why is the spectacle of buffalo sacrifice a comic one? I argue that the laughter which accompanies the animal's suffering betrays the suppressed resentment of the young sacrificers against the older sacrificer, as well as (at another level) the somewhat similar resentment that the human community may bear toward the spirits who demand such sacrificial performances. The fact that the buffalo is allowed the freedom to strike back at his murderers suggests there is a need to demonstrate his hidden power before it can be assimilated. The buffalo is humiliated and abused so that he will admit to a truth that lies concealed in much ritual communication: the "life" given by senior men is "taken," at some level, from their subordinates—from junior men, most obviously, but also from other members of the society who benefit only indirectly.⁵ The Kodi "theater of violence" dramatizes a complex shift from identification to distinction at consecration and final immolation.

feasting, laughter, and violence

Three possible reasons can be suggested for the bloodthirstiness of Kodi sacrifice. First, it is part of the logic of expiatory sacrifice that the object destroyed and discarded must be treated with some loathing. After the intense identification between men and buffalo displayed in the dancing, consecration marks a separation, permitting young male sacrificers to act in an apparently cruel and detached manner. The buffalo die to rectify some error on the part of their masters, to reopen the pathway of blessings that should flow between spirit and human worlds. The large, dumb beast epitomizes strength, so human strength is emphasized by the ability to manipulate and finally kill him. The buffalo is typified by his silence, so he must be forced to speak before he dies. The voice that he gives up in death allows his body to bear mute testimony to divine intentions. In admitting to his victimization, the beast is placed under human power, marking his subjugation as the condition for human power to prevail. The laughter of the spectators codifies a hidden aggression, aimed at other powers but defused by being refocused from the sacrificer to the animal killed.

The buffalo is wealth-on-the-hoof, the rich man's repository of value, and he incarnates the power that older men have over younger ones because they control the crucial social resources used to pay brideprice and acquire wives. The buffalo is wounded and tortured not by the older men who own herds and sponsor feasts but by younger ones, who have recently left behind the status of herdboys and messengers of their elders to lay claim to social adulthood. In mocking and killing the buffalo, the symbolic replacement for his master, younger men may also be mocking and attacking (obliquely) the authority structure in which they are themselves caught.

The asymmetry between junior and senior members of a single descent line is important, but more important is the asymmetry between the human world and the invisible world of the deities. The spirits do not need presents from men; they require signs of submission. Their worshipers may try to deceive the angry deities, but they have no way of compelling divine compliance. Humans are as helpless before the deities as the buffalo are before the sacrificers. The tension that results from this powerlessness is expressed in the derisive treatment of sacrificial buffalo as they die. They are honored in prayers and invocations before they are pulled into the ceremonial field, and their souls are guided upward to the heavens respectfully—but at the moment that they make the crucial transition from living companions to dead surrogates, they are humiliated in a public discharge of fears and tensions.

Death is comical in Kodi sacrifice because many participants identify with the slaughtered animals, setting themselves against the sponsor. In doing so, they implicitly acknowledge that they are also subjugated and would like to resist. In his classic study *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1960), Freud noted that comedy requires empathy; to laugh, it is necessary to place oneself in the psychic state of the ridiculous person and to compare him with oneself in the same situation (Valeri 1981:21). Laughter escapes the censorship of the conscious mind and reveals the fear of human mortality that surfaces when human beings put other animals to death. Tension is released by being displaced onto another object, since the animals die so that their masters can live longer and more prosperous lives.⁶

In these moments of violence and derision Sumbanese sacrifice comes closest to the "scapegoat" model of sacrifice proposed by Girard, who sees sacrifice as a public purging of collective sins (1977). There is indeed a sense of "unanimous violence" directed against innocent victims at this stage, as well as a sense that human beings are trying to get back at both wealthy sponsors and the spirit world for hardships and deprivations they have suffered. But Girard believes that this violence exists a priori, as a psychological universal, concealed by "the awesome machinery of ritual" (1977:19) in primitive societies and the judicial system in more developed ones. I argue instead that comic elements and violent ones are linked in a *single process* of identification and separation in Kodi sacrifice, a process that involves only certain sacrificial animals. The buffalo, as the domestic animal whose role plays on men's fear of their own subjugation,

is appropriate for expiatory sacrifice, while the horse, associated with manly renown, is reserved for funeral sacrifices where man and beast are united on a common journey.

We can develop this contrast with a few comparative considerations from the horse sacrifice. The death of the horse is never associated with mockery and derision, as is that of the buffalo. After the buffalo is dead, his body is opened up to reveal a text, his liver is "read," and his flesh becomes the raw material for the payment and establishment of feasting obligations. The horse, on the contrary, is not publicly dismembered and his flesh is not distributed.⁷ The severed head is presented to the wife-givers and taken home, so that the horse, like his master, returns to his origins after death, while the buffalo is divided into parts and transformed into a message (in the liver), a food (in the flesh), and a memory (in the horns).

The ritual killing of a horse at his master's funeral is conjunctive, in that man and animal are believed to travel together to the afterworld, companions in death as they had been in life. The killing of a buffalo in sacrifice is disjunctive, emphasizing the distance between the man who offers the animal for slaughter and the victim who dies to fulfill the man's obligations and promote his renown. The subjugation of the buffalo is emphasized in the priests' invocations (which describe the animals as "just a bit of hair on the hide, just the skin clinging to the bone"), presenting an insubstantial image to the deities so that they will not be disappointed at what they receive. Buffalo feasts thus reestablish hierarchical relations between the human and the spirit world precisely at the point where their relations could be subverted: humans show themselves to be "great" in sponsoring elaborate ceremonies, but they apologize profusely for their inability to feed the spirits as lavishly as they should, acknowledging the still greater glory of the invisible world.

how dead bodies speak to the living: the art of divination

My informants explicitly compared the interpretation of the bodies of buffalo and other sacrificial animals to the study of written texts. The interpretation of an animal's organs was called a kind of "reading" and a "way for spirits of the dead to send letters to the living through animal victims." And what form, I wondered, did these letters take?

"They are like your own notebooks and scribblings," one man answered, "made of straight lines and carved grooves, creating a message which you can read with your eyes rather than hearing with your ears. They are also like the printed orders that we receive from the regency office, in that they speak with an authority which cannot be refused." His response isolated four dimensions of augury: the contrast between verbal and visual communication, the similarity between the authority of the dead and that of the government, the role of the animal victim as intermediary, and the use of a specialized technique of interpretation, applied to the body in much the same way that scholars apply their own analytic tools to the study of texts.

The speaker was a priest and diviner, a member of the pagan majority on Sumba, now the only Indonesian island where conversion to world religions has not yet captured the majority of the population. As a ritual specialist, he was able to explain the main techniques for reading the entrails of chickens or the livers of pigs and buffalo, as well as to outline the principles used for interpreting lines on the palm, swirls of hair on a human head or an animal's haunches, and coils of rope tossed for divination. All were classified as forms of *urato*, divining the will of the spirits through visual signs.

The local term for books or letters (*hurato*) is probably derived from the Indonesian *surat*, but Kodi associate it with *urato*, linking the signs of writing with the signs of divination. The folk etymology confirms that when the new art of reading first came to Sumba, it was classified as an occult art. Looking into the open bodies of sacrificial animals was a way to discern whether or not offerings had been received by the spirits and whether or not there were continuing problems to be resolved. In a similar fashion, books were mute in themselves but could be

“made to speak” by a spokesman who understood their content as a message from a particular spiritual power. This was the role taken by the first evangelical religious teachers when they traveled around the island with the Malay Bible, bringing both literacy and Christianity to the villagers (Hoskins 1987b).

The Kodi people now have a more mundane notion of reading, which they have come to recognize as a record-keeping device of the school and government. For the 25 percent who have converted to Christianity, the new magic of book and pen has proved appealing. But for the three-quarters of the population who remain followers of the older religion—the worship of ancestors, local deities, and spirits (*marapu*)—the corpses of dead humans and animals remain the most important kinds of “texts” that are regularly deciphered in discourse between the human and the spirit world.

The dead body is transformed when it becomes the medium of augury, an arrangement of mute flesh and blood submitted to cultural interpretation. The elaborate verbal code of names for the lobes and sections of the liver provides an exegetic commentary on the social relations between men and beasts and a basis for understanding why an inner geography of human troubles is mapped onto the organs of domestic animals.

The liver is the seat of emotion, knowledge, and intentionality in Sumba. As in many Austronesian languages, emotion is described in terms of the liver (generosity is “wide livered,” cowardice “small livered,” and happiness a “beautiful liver”). The liver is the organ of sincerity, where it is not possible to dissimulate. A man’s conscience and self-awareness are found “inside his liver” (*ate dalo*), and a speaker’s true intentions, veiled in public declarations, reside “beneath the liver” (*pa kambu ate*), only slowly finding their way up to the lips. Opening up the bodies of sacrificial animals opens up secrets normally hidden from humans by the invisible spirits, whose intentions only become visible and tangible once an animal life has been offered to provide a medium for their expression.⁸

The interpretation of pig livers uses a system of iconic representation that is closer to the one used in reading chicken entrails than to the interpretation of buffalo livers. Both pigs’ and chickens’ bodies are dismembered to reveal a microcosm of the village and the social groups that inhabit it, while the buffalo’s liver is identified solely and exclusively with the personality of the sponsor.

Pig and chicken auguries are performed at the initial stages of rituals of healing and redress, when their diagnostic function is given the highest priority: the identification of the five lobes of the pig’s liver with possible sources of tension within and outside the village casts a wide net of representational flexibility, within which the participants and ritual specialists can negotiate an interpretation. As the priest examines the liver, the sponsor usually sits beside him and always joins him in shaping meaning out of a negative sign. He may therefore project some of his own fears and apprehensions onto the ambiguous visual evidence, “reading in” those messages that he expects to find. Case material from fieldwork over the past decade can provide some examples of this process.

In divinations I have witnessed, the “graspable lobe” (*ate pa deke*) at the top, representing the sacrificer, is examined first in relation to the other parts of the organ—their relative size, color, and orientation. In pigs as in chickens, the right side of the liver is associated with the living (or the groom’s side in an alliance). If the right half of the liver is larger, it is auspicious: blessings have been transferred from the spirits to the living or from the wife-givers to the wife-takers. If the left half is larger, it is inauspicious: the living may soon be forced to join the spirit world or may suffer the anger of disgruntled wife-givers.

Irregularities on the lower lobe are interpreted as “tears in the mat” (*na ma diryako a nopo*), or problems in affinal relations—unpaid brideprice, debts, unfulfilled promises. If they are combined with a swollen right lobe, the diviner may prescribe a special ceremony of affinal reconciliation called “holding out the metal” (*horongo bahi*) in which gifts of gold and cloth val-

ables are exchanged between the two parties to restore fertility to the wife-takers and reassure the wife-givers of their goodwill.

Notches or holes along the lower edge of the "lip" (*wiwi*) of the front lobe indicate that the priests have made errors in their invocations to the spirits or have disrupted proper ritual procedures. The sponsor must assume responsibility for correcting this problem by paying a fine to the other ritual specialists and asking forgiveness from the invisible audience of the ancestors. In situations of priestly rivalry or disagreement, such a diagnosis may be hotly contested by other priests. A "broken path" (*mbata lara*) in the communications sent to the spirits requires the repetition of certain crucial stages until they are properly performed.

Other relevant social groups who may have angered the spirits include members of the immediate household, represented by the lesser omentum, "the base of the water jar" (*kere pandalu*); the patriclan, represented by its banyan tree altar (*maliti*); the inhabitants of the pastures (*marada*) and corral (*nggallu*); and the village itself (*parona*). The gall bladder represents "bitterness" (*padu*) and indicates compliance with calendrical restrictions governing "bitter" and "bland" foods.

While the reading of pig livers diffuses the dangers and responsibilities of feast giving over a wide net of kin and affines, the messages found inside buffalo bodies focus the interpretation exclusively on the sacrificer. The lower two-thirds of the buffalo's liver are called the "silent" or "stupid liver" (*ate kambanga*) and are not subject to exegesis. Only the top lobe, the *karakona*, is held by the diviner, who checks that it stands up straight and evenly, so that the sacrificer himself could "sit" on it (*na kapendako a pandou londo*). On the inside of the lobe is the "upward path" (*lara deta*) while on the outside comes a "downward path" (*lara mburu*), both of which should be unobstructed and free of blemishes. If the lobe is sharp at the tip, the state of the sacrificer will be uncertain, balancing between hunger and sufficiency. If the mounted lobe is sloping or collapsed, he will fall ill. If the base is narrower than the tip, the sacrificer will have few descendants, and if it wobbles, his promises will not be kept.

Catastrophic buffalo auguries are rare, but one occurred at a feast that I attended and videotaped in 1986. The top lobe of the cosponsor's buffalo was almost completely flat, indicating extreme danger for the man if he did not seek out the cause of the spirit's anger. A divination revealed that an ancestor in his house was furious at the feast organizers and would continue wreaking havoc on his descendants until they made peace with members of a rival house in the same clan who had refused to attend. He demanded that his descendants reunite and resume work on a megalithic tomb prepared for his grave. The sponsor of that feast later admitted that chaotic disturbances throughout the events had heavily foreshadowed this sign of spiritual disapproval, but until he saw the visual evidence, endorsed by priestly exegesis, he could not confront his rivals openly about their disloyalty to a common clan ancestor. New generations could not thrive in the ancestral village until this problem was patched up, so the feast's benefits would be delayed for all participants.

The social consequences of the negative interpretation of a buffalo liver are most serious. Perhaps because of this fact the diagnostic clues are more nearly binary and less complex than those used for pig livers or chicken entrails, in actual practice producing fewer negative or ambiguous interpretations. Of over two hundred chicken auguries that I have recorded, a third were at least dubious, and 16 out of 80 (20 percent) pig auguries indicated that some of the spirits would require further attention. In large buffalo feasts, however, 85–90 percent of the livers are read as "positive." Undoubtedly because of criteria that stake a man's whole career on this outcome, only one animal was found irregular in two recent feasts where over a hundred buffalo were slaughtered. The much higher cost of buffalo feasts, which both display and destroy the most visible and public kind of wealth in the region, insures that sponsors and participants will try to work out minor disagreements beforehand. The reading of messages in animal bodies disguises shifts in the sponsor's assessment of his own obligations to his fellows by making them appear as responses to the interpretation of ambiguous visual signs.

Conformity to the moral order is enforced through divination on animal bodies and through ethnotheories of digestion in human bodies. Spirits can reject sacrifices that are inappropriate, insincere, or merely "infelicitous" (Austin 1962). Among the felicity conditions are the status of the animal within the exchange system and its adequacy for the purpose of fulfilling obligations and paying off meat debts. Thus, the spirits will not accept a stolen animal sacrificed at a feast, and their disapproval will be etched onto the liver. Moreover, receiving and consuming meat constitutes accepting a debt to be repaid. "You sign the contract with your teeth," one informant told me as he bit into a plateful of boiled buffalo. The meat itself may turn into poison in the belly if the obligation is not fulfilled. Negative sanctions operate over time through the distribution and incorporation of the animal's flesh. Digestion is conceived as a social process, which proceeds smoothly only if the tenets of the ancestors have been observed and is interrupted with occasionally fatal complications if they are not. The poisoning effects of meat eaten months or even years before may be delayed until the failure to fulfill the commitment becomes evident.

from viscera to virtue: morality and ritual closure

The reading of auguries determines only the *willingness* of the spirits to receive the offered buffalo. The animals' souls must still be guided on their journey to the corral of the upperworld by a second ceremony, held four days after the sacrificial slaughter. Called "feeding the buffalo tongues" (*panda lama karimbyoyo*), the rite releases the buffalo souls from the heads of the dead animals but sets aside the lips and tongues to be eaten by the priests and spirits. The speechlessness of the buffalo is reemphasized by the surrendering of speech organs to human intermediaries who become "the lips told to pronounce, the mouths told to speak" (Hoskins 1988).

Invocations to the spirits recited the night before this ceremony portray the buffalo as beasts of burden, traveling to the upperworld with charges "strapped on their backsides, secured on their haunches." These charges are the souls of all that has been "burned and boiled," all sacrificial offerings. A fine corral made of the same wood as the village tree altar awaits the souls of sacrificed animals when they travel up to the world of the spirits. There they will await another ceremony, some years hence, which will call their souls to return to the earthly corral in even greater abundance and prepare for another feast.

The buffalo horns and pig tusks are tied to a tree set up beside the gong stand in front of the village altar in order to dry in the sun. This tree evokes various other visual images, since an altar tree planted in the center of the village appears in Kodi traditional narratives as the ladder used by a mythic hero to climb to the upperworld, where he may seek a bride. The horns are lashed onto the tree in the order of sacrifice, with the sponsor's buffalo at the top and the co-sponsor's at the base.

Once chicken auguries have confirmed that the spirits are ready to release the souls from the horns, the horn tree is dismantled and the order of sacrifice is repeated in a "spirit pathway" of horns laid on the ground from the garden altar across the hamlet to the gates toward the ancestral village and clan tombs. The lips and tongues are offered to the drums and gongs, the garden spirit, and the ancestors who will guide the souls on their way; they are then eaten by the priests. As drums and gongs begin to repeat the rhythm used during the feast, a small procession forms, led by the musicians, who take the souls out of the village and point the way for them to travel to the ancestral village of the dead. Invocations are made at the upper and lower gates of the village, closing them off after the departure of the animals' souls and resealing the village from the outside. The horns are moved into the house and displayed near the divination pillar or main entrance.

The closing ceremony bears many resemblances to a human funeral, in which a rite is held four days after death to give the dead person a last meal and lead his soul out of the village.

Only the souls of buffalo are given this ritual guidance, never pigs or chickens. Only the buffalo is provoked to protest his own subjugation before death, so that his voice can be absorbed by mediators between the human and the spirit worlds. Priests consume buffalo lips and tongues to continue to communicate with the invisible world, but the animals themselves are mute. They carry messages like a burden on the back, unable to articulate them in language.

communication and exchange

The verbal eloquence of priests who communicate between the visible and the invisible world depends on the ingestion of the vocal organs of largely silent animals. Their authority to require additional ceremonies and offerings must be justified with reference to a visual text “read” in the liver and entrails of sacrificial animals. The final evidence that the ceremony has been performed, the “archive” that serves as a historical record of obligations fulfilled, takes the form of the dried buffalo horns and pig jaws hung along the house pillars. Thus, parts of animal bodies are used to signify the will of the spirits and to mark stages in a human process of expiation, redress, and recompense. Sacrifice is performed as a gift of the self, an offering of wealth that is severed from its owner, releasing him from an earlier inferiority and spreading his renown. At the same time, the gift reseparates the worlds of men and gods. It provides a bridge that is hastily withdrawn, and it tries to assure that the human community will no longer suffer the effects of the deities’ anger. The liver is asked to “speak,” like the dying buffalo, so that later it will be silent.

The opposition between communication through the “oral rites” of prayer or invocation and communication through the visual rites of sacrifice is best understood in relation to the myth of the buffalo’s subjugation. The buffalo lost his humanity when he stopped talking, and much of the violence of the kill is devoted to recovering his last cry of protest. In his final moments, the buffalo approaches the status of an ancestor. When they gave up the ghost, the ancestors also lost the power of speech, but the words they can no longer pronounce (those hidden intentions stored “under the liver”) now surface in the livers of sacrificial animals. The discourse of divination is another form of communication that dispenses with words. The spiritual affinity between the dumb buffalo and the silenced human voice indicates that muteness is a sign not only of subordination but also of superordination.⁹

The processing of the body, its reading and its division, brings both the cosmological and the exchange aspects of sacrifice into sharpest relief. At the dedication of the buffalo, the spirit is offered a symbolically complete animal. Everyone else’s social status must be less than that of the gods, but the exact cut of meat that is offered to each individual shows exactly how much less. Thus, the social exchange and redistribution of meat both maps out social relations and reinforces the division between the human and the spirit worlds. Social status, unstable and changeable in the arena of competitive exchange, is depicted in the allocation of shares of perishable flesh, which repays debts and reestablishes a temporary order of individual influence and economic credit. The enduring achievement, the memory of the feast, is enshrined in the horns, stored in the lineage house and preserved for future generations. The liver, “read” after the animal’s death, offered in part to the spirits and then consumed by the priests and sponsors, bridges the contingent world of the humans and the unchanging order of the ancestors. Messages travel along its fissures and sinews to make known the will of the invisible ones in the signs of the visible. Through an interpretation of the mute signs etched onto the liver, the two worlds touch, speak, and then retreat. As the meat is distributed, boiled, chewed, and swallowed, its message is incorporated into the human body and becomes the memory of an obligation, nourishing and sustaining if promises are kept, debilitating if they are not.

conclusions: sacrificial uses of the body

Anthropologists and others who have studied sacrifice could be said to be guilty of “hiding the body” in investigating the mysteries of animal offerings. Like the villains of detective fiction, they may thus have concealed crucial evidence that could lead to the resolution of some of the classic puzzles of sacrificial rites: the psychological basis of notions of identification and substitution, the violent killing of the beast as a dramatic enactment of other subjugations, and the ambivalence that stems from the double role of the victim as a repository of cultural value and a surrogate for human humiliation and animal vitality.

Others who have treated this problem have tended either to reduce sacrificial acts to unmediated primal murder (Girard 1977), with the destruction of a scapegoat taking precedence over all other meanings, or to argue that buffalo killing boils down to “almost eating the ancestors” as animal surrogates (Bloch 1985:644). While the parallels between animals and humans are important, so are the differences. I argue that the violence of sacrifice *explains* many of the more “classical” aspects such as substitution, atonement, and communication. The bloody subjugation of animals is a bridge between the “religious” rites of sacrifice and secular performances such as bullfights (Marvin 1986) and rodeos (Lawrence 1982), which are highly ritualized and emphasize animal vitality conquered by violence.

Leach has said, “The central puzzle about sacrifice centres around the metaphor of death,” adding, “What has the killing of animals got to do with communication between Man and Deity or with changing the social status of individuals?” (1976:81). Theorists who have tackled this problem have tended to point either to the gift of the animal in a reciprocal exchange relationship or to the linkage between the human and the spirit worlds in a “rites of passage” model. The first approach emphasizes the metonymic tie between owner and beast, since the owner gives a part of himself, which is severed and surrendered to a higher power. The second emphasizes the metaphoric transformation effected by the sacrifice, since the death of the animal transfers its life and vitality to the sacrificer. The transfer occurs within a carefully demarcated sequence of ritual acts, whose temporal structure leads participants into events and releases them once the ends are achieved. Metaphor and metonym come together in the body’s sacrificial uses, in which the flesh of the animal is exchanged with both humans and spirits to repay meat debts, the horns are guarded as a marker of temporal intervals and the history of feasting, and the liver is the locus of communication—the text that comments on the success or failure of the metaphoric transfer.

Hubert and Mauss’s classic account (1964[1898]) of how the consecrated animal links the human and spirit worlds can be reformulated as a contrast of metonymic and metaphoric transfers, permitting a more rigorous definition of the process of sacrificial representation. The identification between man and buffalo is established through both contiguity and distance: a man’s prestige is measured through his wealth in livestock, first acquired to permit his marriage and then raised in a faraway corral to fulfill his obligations to display and destroy that wealth to feed the spirits. The animal’s dual role as exchange value and as human surrogate gives this destruction its violent character: the host destroys an earlier inferiority by achieving renown through feasting, at the same time that the younger men who do the actual killing are forced to contribute to the ceremonial expenses as juniors and subordinates. In taking the animal’s life they participate in a feast held to restore collective fertility, a feast that also establishes unstable inequalities—with themselves on the losing side. The fierce aggressiveness of the male dancing that precedes the slaughter expresses this ambivalence. The horned dancers identify with the beasts they will soon attack, since they also stand to lose part of their own wealth and vitality to benefit a rival.

If metonymic links emphasize a bringing together through contiguity, the metaphoric transfer emphasizes separation in social time. Leach follows Hubert and Mauss in seeing sacrifice as a boundary marker, since “the separation of spiritual essence from the material body at death is

paradigmatic of the mechanism which 'causes' a change of social status among the living" (1976:92). However, spiritual benefits are not so easily separated from bloody carcasses. I have shown that the body itself need not be reduced to inert substance once the life of the animal is destroyed. On the contrary, it may continue to evoke complex metaphoric associations (most evident in the iconic representations of divination) and to act on the person through metonymic transfers (the flesh distributed and incorporated into the body as obligation, the horns remaining as a sign of authority or renown).

Ritual communication is a temporal process that does not simply lead into and out of the climactic destruction of the animal but uses the animal's body as a bearer of messages and a surrogate spokesman. Divination reveals tensions or problems that could develop over time, and it involves the participants in a projective diagnosis of social strife. The miniaturized universe of the sacrificial liver provides a mirror of possible conflicts and difficulties into which the subject stares and tries to recognize himself and his own problems. "Reading" the vital organs is a reflexive exercise and an act of political self-assessment: with the aid of the priests, the sponsor identifies threats to his assertions of leadership and unity. The interpretation of the visual evidence is also an exercise in the establishment of priestly authority, since expertise is needed to render these mute messages into words and then transform them into ceremonial imperatives. In divination, the priest assumes a privileged position as mediator with the invisible world and controller of the flow of information in both words and visual signs.

The immediacy of the metonymic identification with buffalo is transformed through metaphoric elaboration into a dramatic conquest of animal vitality and inferiority by human order and strength. These metaphors not only articulate certain salient aspects of Kodi notions of exchange and communication, they also represent the inequalities of an unstable, shifting system of prestige feasts in a socially motivated way: they create a veil of unity and consensus that rests on the submission of some to the authority of others. The violence done to the surrogate body of an animal stands for other kinds of social conquest and subjugation, which form a silent background to the noisy sacrificial drama. When the buffalo is finally made to cry out in anger, the sacrificers offer the most sympathetic ear to hear his pleas.

The "reading" of the victim's vital organs in Kodi ritual is at least as important as the eating of the flesh. Sacrificial rites are not only a "feeding of the gods" to secure their goodwill but also a "reading of the gods" to grasp their intentions and restore a sense of harmony of purpose. The reading complements the feeding, as the understanding complements the digestion of these facts and flesh into the material bases of human health and well being. These rites must be seen as part of a hermeneutic circle of mutual interpretation, not just a digestive cycle of vital resources.

Lives that are "given" must also be "taken": they are taken from human owners as well as from animal bodies. The metonymic transfer of giving must be paired with the metaphoric transfer of violent taking, so that the bloody conquest of animal vitality empowers human productivity. The coupling of metaphoric and metonymic aspects—the conquest and the gift, the vanquished other as well as the severed self—brings out the full meaning of sacrifice. The body is not simply the vessel left behind, emptied of the soul and quickly devoured, but part of a dynamic movement between polarities, from beast to man, from conquered to conqueror, from death to new life.

notes

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¹Maurice Bloch's recent book *Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience* (1992) attempts to compensate for the long neglect of violence in anthropological theories by reducing all ritual to forms of "rebounding violence" in which vitality is stolen from animals or human enemies. While his analysis works well for some animal sacrifice (as he elaborated in an earlier piece [Bloch 1985]), it is much less successful in treating marriage, initiation, and state rituals. My argument about the meaning of sacrificial violence treats it not as "the irreducible core of the ritual process" (Bloch 1992:1) but as part of a particular cultural complex whose meanings lie not in an essentialist opposition of vitality and transcendence but in specific social relations among the performers of the rite.

²The relation of buffalo to the measuring of biographical time and exchange cycles is examined at greater length in my book, *The Play of Time: Kodi Perspectives on Calendars, History, and Exchange* (Hoskins In press). Time units relevant to an individual's exchange career contrast with others used in the context of calendrical and historical time.

³Many other Southeast Asian peoples link buffalo to humans in a mythology of subjugation. Some cases suggest the possibility that buffalo might someday turn the tables and reconquer human society. The Nage of central Flores say that spirits keep buffalo and that the sacrifice of a spirit buffalo causes the death of human beings (Forth 1989:513). Among the Mngong Gar of highland Vietnam, each person has a "buffalo soul" that serves as his alternate identity until he himself goes off to the land of the dead (Condominas 1977). In East Sumba, according to an early Dutch report, buffalo were said to have originated in low-ranking people whose lords did not provide for them (Kruyt 1922:579), as was also reported from Savu (Van de Wetering 1926:567). Forth (1989:513) mentions these sources and also refers to the Ngaju of Borneo, for whom buffalo took the place of human slaves in sacrifice, and the Ngadha people of Flores, who compared buffalo to humans. In each case, the buffalo's loss of freedom was followed by the assumption of an animal identity. It is suggested that if these large animals ever reasserted themselves they could regain control and subjugate humans in their stead.

⁴Sacrificers allude obliquely to this resentment in the graphic detailing of their task:

When he told me to kill that buffalo, he saw I knew the animal well. I could make him turn on me, I could let him loose for a moment, so the crowd would see what was being destroyed. I might never get a chance to have a feast of my own with such a buffalo, but I could make sure that this one died like a man.

Another sacrificer told me that he wanted to leave the arena covered with the blood of an animal he had once raised, "so at least I would have that—the blood—to show for those years. We had to give up the bull because of our debt, but we wanted his blood to be spread all around, so our gift would be seen as one filled with fighting spirit."

⁵In sacrificial dramas, male actors and male animals are favored in an elaborate display of the values of virility. Women and children watch these displays but are not allowed to participate formally. The male world of sacrifice is strictly separated from the female one of weaving, childbirth, and household exchanges. Taboos forbid men to bring freshly slaughtered meat into contact with women who are dyeing cloth or giving birth, since the violence of male sacrifice is seen as antagonistic to female forms of creation. Women, however, seem to share the ideology of sacrifice and to enjoy the bloodthirsty display as much as men do.

⁶The idea that violence has a creative force and empowers human productivity is found in other domains of Kodi culture. The ideology of head-hunting and conquest (Hoskins 1987a, 1989, In press) holds that agricultural fertility and human reproduction depend on exacting revenge for head-hunting victims. An unavenged death gradually saps the group of its energy until it can no longer renew itself. The subjugation of war captives as slaves prevents them from communicating with ancestral spirits and seeking ritual redress. The vanquishing of a symbolic adversary in buffalo slaughter stands rather directly for the defeat of human enemies and for the overcoming of weaknesses within the self.

⁷Buffalo meat is served to guests and distributed raw to all participants, but horse meat is never served or divided. However, some people do scavenge the meat and eat it, usually outsiders (from neighboring islands like Savu, Flores, and Sulawesi) or people of very low rank. Most Kodinese deny ever eating horse meat. A favorite riding horse can even receive a quasi-human burial, being wrapped in a fine textile and placed in a separate chamber of his master's tomb. One of the most famous East Sumbanese textiles was used as the funeral shroud of Raja Horo's horse.

⁸The interpretation of the liver is extremely common all over Southeast Asia, but most published accounts (Condominas 1977; Gibson 1986; Kirsch 1973; Leach 1954; Suzuki 1959; Van der Veen 1965) give it scant attention, preferring to stress the division of the body and its role in creating or affirming hierarchical relations. A recent exception is Kuipers' *Power in Performance: The Creation of Textual Authority in Weyewa Ritual Speech* (1990:101, 103), which details the methods used in the interpretation of pig livers and chicken entrails but does not discuss buffalo sacrifice. The only comparative study of the symbolism and interpretation of the liver is an early work by Jastrow (1912), which focuses on the societies of Classical Antiquity and the Near East.

⁹This point was made by an insightful anonymous reviewer, who noted that the priest consumes the lips and tongues of the buffalo in order to enter into communication with the ancestors. The superordinate position of a silent ritual figure is an important theme not only in Kodi but in many other eastern Indonesian societies (Forth 1981; Lewis 1989; Traube 1986), where silence can signify knowledge and unspoken wisdom. It is important to stress, however, the great difference between "guarding one's words" and losing the power of speech.

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