Chapter 3: The Maritime World of the Bajo

The Bajo are a landless people who live in a physical landscape dominated by sea and islands (Sather 1997: 92). In the words of one Bajo, ‘laut merupakan dasar hidup’ (‘the sea forms the basis of their life’). The marine environment also constitutes ‘living spaces’ (Chou 1997: 613) for the Bajo since they spend their entire life in the vicinity of the sea, living either in pile houses built over the water or on boats. Their connection to the sea is more than physical: they also have a marine cosmology based on belief in, and causal relationship with, the spirits who inhabit the sea. The Bajo depend almost exclusively on exploitation of the marine environment and associated maritime activities for their subsistence needs and economic livelihood. Bajo commonly recite the following statement to illustrate their economic dependence on the sea: ‘kita punya kebun di laut’ (‘our garden is the sea’). They hold an intimate knowledge of the various maritime zones and coastal ecosystems, as well as the seasons, winds, currents and tides, the lunar cycle, stars and navigation. They have specialised boat building knowledge and skills, and different types of types of watercraft are essential to the way in which they interact with the marine environment. The social and economic domains of the Bajo extend well beyond the Tukang Besi Islands to other regions of Indonesia and the neighbouring countries of Southeast Asia. These domains are constructed through networks that link the Tukang Besi Bajo with other Bajo communities in eastern Indonesia.

Bajo World Views

Bajo religion is a syncretic system in which elements of Islam are fused with Bajo indigenous cosmology and ritual practice. This syncretism can be observed in various manifestations of Bajo ‘practical religion’ — in their cosmology, their life cycle rituals, and other rituals to do with boats, fishing, housing, and health (Pelras 1996:197). Some Bajo are more ‘syncretically inclined’ (Acciaioli 1990: 217) than others. The Bajo follow Sunni Islam but adhere to the faith with varying degrees of observance, both while at sea and in their villages. During Ramadan, the fasting month, some fishing and sailing activities are still undertaken but most Bajo prefer to rest in their home villages and fast. 1

Supernatural Beings

The sea is the home of mbo madilao (the ancestors of the sea), who are believed to be descended from the prophets (nabbi). There are seven original mbo

1 In 1995 there were 10 haji (including 3 women) living in Mola who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Haji are usually the wealthiest and most highly respected members of the village, owning large numbers of boats, providing financial capital, and buying and trading in marine products.
madilao: Mbo Janggo, Mbo Tambirah, Mbo Buburra, Mbo Marraki, Mbo Malummu, Mbo Dugah, and Mbo Goyah. The leader and most powerful is Mbo Janggo. These ancestors are considered to be like humans and each possesses a different power. According to the Bajo, at some time in the past, the ancestors were all on one boat that somehow became lost at sea and were never found again.

The word mbo also means grandparent, and is a term applied to senior village members both living and dead. In this latter sense, the notion of an ancestor is not a genealogical one (Sather 1997: 316). The ancestors are considered to be sacred and the Bajo are generally reluctant to speak of them outside the appropriate time or place; it is generally forbidden to mention their names in casual conversation.

The Bajo have sought to incorporate their own cosmology into their Islamic faith. The position of the ancestors is ranked lower than the prophets, and the ancestors are said to work with and for the prophets. One village elder stated that the prophets gave the ancestors the control over the sea and described the ancestors as ‘assistants to the prophets’ (personal communication, Si Mbaga, 1995). In the political hierarchy of Malay societies, ‘Allah whose domain is the universe is superior to the prophets … [who are] lords of the … natural realms, [and] who in turn rule the more localized spirits within those realms’ (Endicott 1970: 177). Si Kiramang, a ritual expert, provided a more detailed version of how the ancestors came to be lost at sea. It is a Koranic version of the Flood Myth, where indigenous cosmology is combined with Islamic teachings.

At the time Nabbi Nuhung [Noah] built a boat on the top of the mountain. Mbo Janggo, Mbo Tambirah, Mbo Buburra, Mbo Marraki, Mbo Malummu, Mbo Dugah, and Mbo Goyah did not believe that it was possible that the boat could descend to the sea. Afterward, the big water came up to the top of the mountain and the boat entered the water. Maybe because they did not believe it could happen, they were cursed and thrown into the sea and became lost.

Ritual experts in Mola say that each prophet is associated with a particular domain: Nabbi Hilir rules over the sea and fish for all Muslim people, but mbo madilao rule over the sea for the Bajo people alone. In the scale of things, the ancestors have a direct line to God through the prophets and therefore act as intermediaries between God and living Bajo (Sather 1997: 314). Further insight into the role of the ancestors was explained by Si Kiramang:

Mbo madilao have control of the universe of the sea and all the creatures in it for Bajo people, for it is their place. Mbo madilao are like the rulers of the sea… Because it is known by Bajo people that mbo madilao have authority over the sea, the sea is the property/possession [milik] of Bajo
people as the place where they live and as their place where they search for their livelihood. **Mbo madilao** live wherever there is sea, and wherever Bajo people search for a living, even if outside the country of Indonesia, they will be accompanied by **mbo madilao**.

This description provides a powerful insight into how the Bajo perceive their marine world. It also highlights some differences between indigenous and Western perceptions of the marine environment, for the latter ‘tend not to recognise these spaces as culturally defined’ but as ‘watery voids’ (Pannell 1996: 28). For the Bajo, the marine environment is not just the source of economic bounty. The belief is that guardian ancestors are not confined to any particular location but live ‘wherever there is sea’. Given the wide geographical area in which they fish, the spiritual maritime domain of the Bajo has no boundaries; it is infinite. It therefore encompasses the whole of the Timor and Arafura seas and the Australian Fishing Zone.

The Bajo cosmic world is also one populated by diverse groups of spirits (**jeng/jin**). Spirits manifest themselves in many forms — as human beings or as land or sea animals. They may be visible or invisible, resident in one place or wandering around. They may dwell in the sea or on the land, or they may inhabit specific localities such as an island, a reef, a rock, or a tree. They may talk or appear in dreams, and some can enter people’s bodies. Most of the spirits are generally evil or malevolent (**setang**) and can cause illness or misfortune. Usually, relationship with spirits is through propitiation by prayer (**baca doa**) and offerings (**rempo-rempo/kasih turun pinang**). Protection from evil and sorcery by spirits and humans can be sought through the wearing of amulets and charms. Each house and **perahu lambo** (long-distance sailing boat) has a bottle filled with water (**sampa**) hanging just inside the entrance that offers protection from evil spirits and acts of sorcery. There are also invisible spirits (**duatta/roh halus**) that may come to the aid of Bajo in times of need, especially to help find lost kin. Communication with these beings requires the service of a spirit medium (**sandro**).

**Magic and Ritual**

Interactions with the spirit world and ritual activity require the use of magical or esoteric knowledge (**pangatonang/ilmu**) (Southon 1995). A number of different categories of knowledge are found among the Bajo, including knowledge of sickness and healing, life cycle rituals and spirit mediumship (**pangatonang sandro**), sorcery (**pangatonang bebelau/ilmu jahat**), construction of houses (**pangatonang ruma'/ilmu rumah**) and boats (**pangatonang lambo/bidu/ilmu perahu**), sailing, controlling the marine world and fishing (**pangatonang a’nakoda/pangatongang punggawa/ilmu juragon**). Not everyone can acquire knowledge. It can be passed down through generations or acquired through
study from a teacher. Esoteric knowledge is considered to be secret, thereby maintaining its power. Those with *ilmu* are afforded status and prestige within the community.

The basic elements of Bajo ritual are the recitation of prayers to spiritual entities by a ritual officiant or a person with *ilmu*. Prayers are not fixed in form and vary depending on the ritual. They can be in the form of propitiation (*malaku poppor/minta doa*) to apologise or ask for forgiveness, or a request to enlist the assistance of the spirits to avoid misfortune or escape danger (Sather 1997: 267). Depending on the particular ritual, accompanying items and the composition of offerings may vary. The basic offering (referred to generally as *pinah* or *sirih* after the components) consists of four folded leaves (*leko/sirih*) from the betel pepper vine (*Piper betle*), each containing a piece of betel nut (*pinah/pinang*), with lime or tobacco inside, placed on a plate. This can be accompanied by four hand-rolled cigarettes and sometimes coins. For more complex rituals, particularly boat and healing rituals, there are more substantial offerings of food, such as coloured rice, bananas, chicken and cakes. It is believed that the spirits ‘partake in the spiritual essence of the offered foods’ (Acciaioli 1990: 215).

**Concepts of the Soul**

In many Southeast Asian societies ‘the navel is associated with ideas about the soul’ (Southon 1995: 103). Three main terms — *semangat*, *nyawa*, *roh* and their cognates — are widely used in Indonesian and Malay societies to refer to different aspects of the soul (Endicott 1970: 48). There is a commonly shared concept of ‘a vital force which suffuses and animates the universe’ (Waterson 1990: 115), which is variously referred to in the literature as a ‘vital principle’ (Endicott 1970: 47), or ‘cosmic energy’ (Errington 1983: 545), or ‘invisible force’ (Southon 1995: 136), and is associated with notions of ‘potency’, ‘soul-stuff’ and ‘spirit’ (Errington 1983: 545). In Malay and Indonesian languages, the concept is commonly represented by the word *semangat* and its cognates. There are local variations in the meaning and usage of this word, but there is general agreement ‘about a pervasive life-force which may attach itself in differing concentrations not only to living things but also to inanimate objects’ (Waterson 1990: 115).

Endicott (1970: 48) draws on previous work by Wilkinson (1901: 400) to distinguish between *semangat* as ‘the spirit of physical life’ or ‘vitality’ and *nyawa* as ‘the immortal essence or soul’ or ‘the breath of life’. Verheijen’s (1986) dictionary of the Sama language defines *sumangaq* (equivalent to *semangat*) as ‘spirit’ or ‘zest’ and *nyawa* as ‘life’ or ‘soul’.

*Sumangaq* and *nyawa* are both thought to be attached to the navel of the human body. In Mola, at the moment of birth, a child’s *nyawa* is said to travel from the placenta, along the umbilical cord, to enter the stomach and live...
permanently at the navel. After the birth of a child in Mola, one local midwife said that while the placenta and umbilical cord are still moving, the nyawa is still in the process of entering the child. Once it has ceased moving, the nyawa has entered, and it is then safe to cut the umbilical cord of the newborn. While it was not clearly stated at what moment sumangaq attaches itself to the navel, Endicott (1970: 51) noted that ‘the semangat of a person makes its appearance at the moment the umbilical cord is severed’.

An important aspect of Bajo spiritual life is the idea of a sibling represented by the placenta of a newborn child. After a child is born, the placenta (tamuni) is washed and wrapped inside a woven mat with salt, tied to a rock, and with the recitation of prayer, thrown in the water next to the house by the midwife. The tamuni is said to be received by three prophets. The Bajo believe the tamuni becomes Kaka, the child’s supernatural twin brother or sister, depending on the sex of the child, who inhabits the sea along with other spirits and accompanies the Bajo on their travels.

If at any period during the precarious early months or years of a child’s life, or at any time during adulthood when a person suffers from ill health or sickness, it is believed that the person has lost their sumangaq because it has detached itself from the navel. As a result, the person becomes sick with hot or cold fevers, or a headache, or a condition of weakness, faintness, exhaustion, or lack of enthusiasm (maluntu). A person who is maluntu is said to be lacking in sumangaq (kurang ada semangat). In this case, it is necessary to call on a healer to perform a healing ritual to restore the person’s sumangaq and hence their health and well-being. This ritual is directed at Kaka and is called kasih makan Kaka or pengobatan Kaka. In Mola the ritual was performed by the sandro, and consists of a series of prayers and offerings beginning in the house, followed by an offering with prayers to Kaka in the sea. Here, a half coconut shell, filled with rice, betel nut (pinah), nine lit candles and a cup are lowered into the sea. As the coconut receptacle sinks, and the cup fills with water, the sandro removes the cup. Inside, the cup of salt water is believed to hold sumangaq which is caught using a thread (di pancing semangat dengan benang). Back in the house, further prayers are made and this thread is later tied around the wrist of the sick person and the sumangaq is restored in exchange for ‘food’ (see Plate 3-1).

The concept of a sibling symbolically represented by the placenta, which protects a child throughout its life, is widespread in Malay and Indonesian societies (Warren 1993: 38). Amongst land dwelling communities, the placenta is most commonly disposed of by burial or stored in the house. Some groups, such as the Bugis of Luwu in South Sulawesi, occasionally dispose of it by sending it out to sea (Errington 1983: 551). Amongst Sama-Bajau speakers in the Southern Philippines and eastern Borneo, the placenta may either be buried on land or set adrift at sea (Nimmo 1990: 184–5; Bottignolo 1995: 225; Sather 1997: 276). The Tukang Besi Bajo dispose of the placenta exclusively in the sea.

The same belief is found amongst the Bugis of Luwu in South Sulawesi (Errington 1989: 52). Among Bajau Laut it is said that this is a result of a person being shocked or startled (kaget) (Sather 1997: 294–5).
As we shall see, rituals conducted during phases of a boat’s construction liken it to the conception and birth of a child, and boats are given ‘ritual navels’ (bebol) which act as the point of attachment for their semangat. Houses, kinship groups and kingdoms also have navels which are a source of power that must be guarded and protected from harm (Errington 1983: 547).

Plate 3-1: Healer restoring the sumangaq of a sick person.

‘Custom’ (Adat)

Bajo voyages and fishing activity are governed by adat practices. The meaning of the word adat varies considerably between ethnic groups in Indonesia, and there is an extensive anthropological literature on this subject (Acciaioli 1985; Warren 1993). However, adat has become the generic term for describing local customary practice and institutions throughout the Indonesian archipelago. Its conventional translation as ‘customary law’ fails to convey the vision of a necessary correspondence of cosmic and human relationships towards which it is directed (Warren 1993: 3), or its capacity to encompass ‘the entire governance of society’ (Acciaioli 1985: 151). For the Bajo, adat encompasses more than just customary law; it embraces institutions and rituals that are connected with customary practices, as well as social norms, rules, and sanctions that apply to almost every aspect of life and provide a complete code of behaviour. When Bajo talk about ‘following the custom of our ancestors’, they include all forms of behaviour associated with sailing and fishing. Adat is passed down from one generation to another and younger crew members are instructed by their elders on fishing voyages.
Maritime Livelihoods

Mobility underlies Bajo social and economic life. People move regularly, and may spend short or extended periods of time in different settlements. Strong kinship ties exist between all Bajo villages in the Tukang Besi Islands as well as with other Bajo communities in eastern Indonesia. A crew sailing from Mola to Pepela (on Roti Island) is likely to stop at the village of Wywuring in Adornara, or at Sulamu in Kupang, to get supplies, rest, and visit relatives. The wider Bajo community provides ‘fixed points of localized reference’ (Nadjmabadi 1992: 340) which facilitate the migration and movement of Tukang Besi Bajo around the eastern Indonesian archipelago.

Although there are five Bajo communities in the Tukang Besi Islands, it is predominately fleets of boats owned by Bajo from the villages of Mola Selatan, Mola Utara and Mantigola that seasonally engage in fishing and sailing voyages to the northern Australian waters. However, because of the close kinship ties between all Bajo communities in the Tukang Besi Islands and with other Bajo communities in eastern Indonesia, perahu crews are often drawn from other Bajo villages. In Sampela, most of the population are engaged in locally based fishing activities around Kaledupa and on the outlying coral reefs. In 1994, the majority of watercraft in Sampela were canoes, with only a few small motor boats. Because there was only one perahu lambo, the Sampela Bajo were less inclined to voyage to the Timor Sea, but some men would join Mola and Mantigola perahu as crew members. The small Bajo community at La Hoa and La Manggau was also predominantly engaged in local fishing activities. There were no perahu lambo from La Hoa or La Manggau engaged in long distance voyaging to the Timor Sea, but a number of families from La Manggau were some of the earliest Bajo from the Tukang Besi Islands to settle in Pepela with their perahu in the 1980s.

The Monsoon Regime

Bajo sailing and fishing activities are dominated by the east and west monsoon wind regimes. The monsoonal weather patterns produce periods of strong and light wind conditions and dry and wet seasons.

The east monsoon (salatang/musim timur) begins in April and ends in November. The beginning of the east monsoon is characterised by strong easterly winds (sangai banga/angin timur kencang) lasting until July. These winds bring light rain between the months of May and July. This is followed by a period of light south easterlies and then a period of calm or no winds (sangai teddo/sangai matai/angin mati/angin teduh) between September and November. The latter part of the east monsoon is the best time to fish in the Timor and Arafura seas. At the end of the east monsoon there is a transitional period of changing wind directions (sangai taputar/angina pancaroba) that leads to the beginning of the west monsoon (barra/musim barat). The west monsoon starts in late November.
or sometimes early December and lasts until March. It is a period of strong westerly winds, heavy rains, high seas, storms and squalls. The end of the west monsoon in March is another transitional period with winds that may blow from the southwest, northeast or northwest. This is followed by the doldrums, a period of light variable winds and smooth seas usually lasting for a week or two, which is ideal for fishing, but there is still the possibility of intermittent squalls or cyclonic activity in the waters of northern Australia. Then the strong easterlies return and the cycle begins again.

The Local Fishing Economy

The ecologically rich inshore, coastal, and offshore ecosystems, and deep open waters of the Tukang Besi Archipelago are fertile grounds for the high marine biodiversity that provides a life support system for the Bajo. Modes of exploitation of these habitats are diverse. Technology ranges from simple hand-made gear such as traps, hooks and lines, and spears, to more costly store-bought equipment such as nets and longlines. Diving with hookah, a relatively inexpensive form of breathing apparatus, has become popular in recent years. This enables men to fish at greater depths for reef fish, lobster, trepang and trochus. Blast fishing, involving the use of dynamite on coral reefs, was fairly common in the past but the authorities have made it illegal and regular patrols of the marine park appear to have reduced the practice.

Bajo build and use a range of types of watercraft to carry out their diverse fishing activities and to transport people and cargoes. This includes a number of types of dugout canoe (lepa/lepa kaloko/sampan) propelled by paddle, a simple sail, or sometimes with an outboard motor (jonson); small 5–10 tonne planked boats (soppe/sope); small planked wooden boats with engines (bodi/motor); sail-powered and motorised perahu (perahu lambo, perahu layar motor) and larger motorised boats (kapal layar motor) (see Plates 3-2 and 3-3).

Bajo classify their fishing activities into four main types: nubba (gleaning), pali libu (inshore coastal fishing), pongka (reef fishing), and lama (long-distance, nomadic fishing). The distinctions between these activities depend on the environment fished, the technology used, and the distances travelled. The first three of these are mentioned briefly here, while lama is discussed in more detail in a later section.

Women and children undertake nubba in order to meet domestic needs. This activity covers the beach and the littoral zone, including sandflats, shallow waters and fringing reefs, during daylight hours. The products include trepang (bala), sea urchins (tetehe), edible seaweed, shellfish, crustaceans, hard corals and sponges.
Plate 3-2: A *perahu lambo*. 
Plate 3-3: A *perahu layar motor*.

**Pali libu** refers to fishing in coastal waters near the village, or in offshore open waters and on coral reefs, but still returning home on the same day. This type of activity includes handlining (*missi*), trolling (*tonda*), and spearing (*sapa*) from canoes to catch reef fish or pelagics such as tuna, mackerel, squid and octopus. Various netting methods are used, some of which involve small groups of people using different types of throw net (*ringgi, tokong, jalla*) or engaging in fish drives (*ngambai*). Spear gun fishing (*pana*) for lobster and fish is also undertaken either in the night or during the day. Women also fish from canoes using handlines, often go netting with family members, and accompany their husbands on nocturnal spear fishing expeditions.

**Pongka** refers to fishing in the sea or on a reef for a few days or a week, or sometimes several weeks, with a day or two travelling to reach a destination or return home. In the past, *soppe* or *perahu lambo* were the main craft used to carry out this activity, but nowadays small motorised vessels are also used. These expeditions can be all male affairs when they involve fishing for shark fin using longlines, netting reef fish, or collecting turtles around the Tukang Besi Islands. However, voyages may include whole families — even extended families — travelling to the offshore reefs in the Tukang Besi Archipelago and staying either on their boats or in small pile huts built over the reef. These huts are used as sleeping areas and as places to dry and process trepang, clams or reef fish.

Marine products are utilised in three main ways: for food and domestic use; to supply the local market through sale or barter; or being sold to traders who
supply external domestic and international markets. Local fishing is conducted all year round, weather permitting. At certain times, notably during the west monsoon and rainy season, it is restricted by poor weather conditions and this results in a general shortage of fish for home consumption. The best time for harvesting the offshore reefs is during the latter months of the east monsoon when weather conditions are calm and the sea is like glass.

Although fishing is the basis of the Bajo economy, income is also derived from other maritime activities. Men engage in boat building and the associated trade in timber and canoe blanks. Both men and women trade in marine products other than fish, including the collection of coral rocks from local fringing reefs for sale as building material. Women engage in daily economic activities to help with the household income, and in some cases they provide a more regular income than their husbands and sons. Small-time trading — especially the buying and reselling of goods from homes or kiosks — is the activity most popular with village women.

Distant Shore Fishing Activities

Tukang Besi Bajo also engage in nomadic fishing expeditions further afield. The term ‘nomadic’ here relates to the regular seasonal migration of individuals and households to distant regions (Lenhart 1995: 245). A large proportion of the male population of Mola and Mantigola spend weeks, months or years living on boats, making voyages around Indonesia and beyond to search for a living (mencari nafkah). The acquisition of sea-going watercraft enables Bajo to engage in long-distance voyaging to fish for a range of marine products including shark fin, trepang, trochus shell, turtle, and tuna. This kind of long-distance economic activity is called lama.

Lama is both a noun (‘sail’) and a verb (‘to sail’). The verb refers to sailing voyages or journeys made in boats to destinations both within and outside Indonesia for the purposes of fishing, carrying cargo, or buying and selling goods. These voyages can last for periods of months or even years. Lama includes fishing voyages to the waters of northern Australia but other destinations include West Papua, Maluku, Bali, Malaysia and Singapore. Nowadays, the term lama is also applied to voyages made with motorised vessels.

Shark fishing was traditionally conducted with handlines (koelangan tansi) consisting of a length of nylon line with a wire trace, a lead weight and hook, connected to a wooden reel with a flat wooden base. This inexpensive equipment, costing only a few thousand rupiah to make, is assembled by the fishermen themselves. Sharks are attracted with rattles called gogoro or gorogoro. These are made from a length of bamboo split at one end. Six half coconut shells are then threaded onto a piece of bamboo fitted horizontally into the split end of the stem. Shaken in the water continuously, the noise of the clacking coconut
shells attracts shark to the surface. They are then caught using a baited line and hauled onto the deck. The fins are removed and laid out to dry in the sun and in some cases the carcass flesh is retained, cut into strips, salted and dried.

In addition to shark fin fishing in the Timor and Arafura seas during 1994–95, men from Mola and Mantigola also undertook voyages of one to three months, in motorised boats with minimal sailing power (both perahu layar motor or kapal layar motor), to collect green turtle (bokko) (Chelonia mydas) from various other locations. These expeditions took them to the islands in Maluku (including the Aru Islands), to the coast of West Papua, and to some atolls and reefs in the Flores Sea. The turtles were brought back in the hull of the boat, transferred to holding pens, and then loaded onto a large motor boat and transported to the market at Benoa in Bali where they were finally sold. 4 Another alternative activity was tuna fishing, which might be regarded as a newer form of larger-scale commercial fishing for the Bajo, but is still essentially based on their flexibility and mobility. A number of motor boats from Mola worked for a Kendari-based Japanese fishing company. These vessels travelled to Kupang twice a year, using it as a base from which to catch tuna with hook and line in the Savu Sea in East Nusa Tenggara. Around the same time one or two Mola boats embarked on a trading trip to the Banggai Islands in Southeast Sulawesi to sell a load of cassava. Some men from Mola also joined vessels belonging to Tukang Besi Bajo on trading voyages to Singapore and Malaysia to buy second-hand goods which were then resold in Wanci.

Distant shore fishing activity is undertaken all year round. Travel is undertaken when there are breaks in the weather during the squally west monsoon months and the beginning of the east monsoon that also brings strong winds, but there is always a higher risk associated with sailing at these times. 5 Distant shore voyaging is commonly undertaken from July through December, although some voyages also occur at the end of the west monsoon. With the advent of larger motor boats such as those used to collect turtles, there is less restriction on travelling during unfavourable monsoonal wind conditions. The danger is partly due to the fact that no life-saving equipment is kept on board.

Most adult Bajo males have participated in a fishing or trading voyage to various destinations in Indonesia or beyond at some time in their life, and some from an early age. Sailing is almost a rite of passage for many young males. However, not all men voyage each season, nor do they necessarily travel to the same destination. Some men alternate between various activities. Shifts in

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4 Turtles are eaten by the Hindu population of Bali but generally not by Muslims in eastern Indonesia.
5 In January 1995, two motor boats laden with turtles and travelling back to Mola from Karompa in the Flores Sea were caught in a storm. Only one boat crew survived. With a failed engine, and pushed by winds to the southeast, they eventually ended up at Wetar Island, north of East Timor, seven days later. The crew of the other boat were never found despite search efforts throughout the southern Maluku region.
voyaging patterns can be the result of available finances, market prices and demand, restrictions on access to particular fishing grounds, and changes in social and cultural circumstances.

Amongst the Mola and Mantigola Bajo some broad distinctions are evident in modes of livelihood. There is a specific core group of Bajo from Mantigola, Mola Selatan, and to a lesser extent Mola Utara, who embark on voyages regularly every year. However, some prefer to remain in Mola and fish the local coastal waters and offshore coral reefs for their main source of income, only occasionally joining a *perahu* on a fishing expedition outside the region to pay off debts or because of lack of other local alternatives.

An indication of the diverse maritime activities and differences between the types of fishing activities pursued by Bajo from Mola Selatan and Mola Utara is given in Table 3-1. This shows three main types of boats and their distribution by ownership in Mola Utara and Mola Selatan.

### Table 3-1: Number of boats according to type in Mola Selatan and Mola Utara, 31 May to 5 June 1994.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boat type</th>
<th>Mola Selatan</th>
<th>Mola Utara</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>perahu lambo</em></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perahu/kapal layar motor</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>soppe</em></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results show that nearly all *perahu lambo* and *soppe*, and even a majority of motorised vessels, are owned by people living in Mola Selatan. They also indicate a general distinction between the types of fishing activities pursued by the two communities. Mola Selatan Bajo generally still use *soppe* to fish around the Tukang Besi Islands, whereas Mola Utara Bajo do not. It would appear that Mola Utara Bajo used to own just as many *perahu lambo* as their counterparts in Mola Selatan, but they decided to adopt motorised vessels to pursue other activities such as turtle collecting, carrying cargo, and tuna fishing. The majority of the Mola Selatan Bajo originally came from Mantigola, have been voyaging to the north Australian region for many decades, and are said to have a preference for sailing to Australian waters. In contrast, the original Mola Utara Bajo generally do not have a documented history of voyaging.

### Ngambai Net Fishing

Bajo from Mola and Mantigola have been using a net fishing technique known as *ngambai* on reefs in the Timor Sea since the early decades of this century, and this is probably the earliest type of gear which they used in that area. While

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6 One *haji* in Mola Selatan owns 10 motorised vessels.
long-distance fishing methods and target catches have changed in recent years, this netting technique is still practised by Bajo from Mola Selatan and Mola Utara on outlying reefs in the Tukang Besi Islands to collect fish for local sale. In 1995 there were five ngambai fishing groups operating out of Mola, and when I visited Pepela in 1994, I found that one perahu had used ngambai gear at Scott Reef after engaging in shark fishing and returned with a catch of dried reef fish which they sold to local Rotinese buyers. Occasionally, a group of Bajo from Tanjung Pasir used this gear on the reef in Pepela Bay, but the catch was relatively poor.

The technique can be described essentially as a fish drive requiring around 8–11 people and requires a range of equipment: two lengths of rope (tali ambai) (300–500 depa in length) with pieces of wood (tangkal) attached along the rope at intervals; up to seven nylon nets (ringgi ogah) joined together, with floats (patau) made from foam and old thongs attached at intervals along the top, and tiger cowrie shells (bolle) spaced at intervals along the bottom; another type of drawstring net (bandong); wooden stakes (ballas); a scoop net (bandre); at least two canoes (lepa); spearguns (panah); and goggles (kacamata). According to Akmad, a full set of ngambai nets and ropes costs approximately Rp 1,500,000.7

A ngambai crew will depart Mola in a small motor boat around three or four o’clock in the morning and travel for two or three hours to Kapota or Kaledupa reef. On arrival there, a fishing spot is chosen, usually in about 1–2 metres of water, the boat is anchored and all the gear is loaded into the two canoes. Both canoes, with half the crew in each, row to the place chosen under the guidance of the leader and set up the gear. The fish are scared towards the net and eventually trapped. All the gear is then disassembled and transported back to the boat. The entire procedure takes around two and a half hours and is usually undertaken twice in a day. The fish species caught in this way include Scaridae (parrot fish), Labridae (wrasse), Acanthuridae (surgeon fish), and Siganidae (rabbit fish). On the trip back to Mola the captain supervises the division of the fish catch on the deck of the perahu. On arriving in Mola women sell the catch either in the village or at the market.

According to Si Akmad, an unidentified species of timber (kayu pijarang) was formerly used instead of thongs and foam to make the floats on the nets, while the bark of another tree species (bagu) was beaten, treated and made into twine to weave the nets themselves.8 Since the bagu tree is not found on the Tukang Besi Islands, the material was purchased from traders or from other Bajo

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7 Similar types of fishing gear are apparently used among the Bajau Laut in Semporna, Sabah (Sather 1985: 201, 203) and by Sama people from Sitangkay Island in the southern Sulu Archipelago in the Philippines (Nagatsu 1995: 7).
8 Verheijen (1986: 47) identifies bagu as Agave sisalana on the basis of information supplied by a Bajo man from Wuring in Flores.
living in Southeast and Central Sulawesi. The drawstring net (bandong) has only been used to take the fish from the net-pole encirclement since the 1970s; before that, the Bajo used tuba (Derris or Milletia spp.) to stupefy the fish. 9 According to Si Akmad, the catch from ngambai fishing in the Timor Sea was divided in much the same way as it is today: one share for each crew member, one share for the owner of each piece of net (ringgi), one share for each rope (tali ambai), half a share for each canoe and three shares for the perahu.

Maritime Technology

Bajo fishing voyages to the Timor and Arafura seas are undertaken in unmotorised wooden hulled craft known as perahu lambo. The term perahu lambo refers to a number of similar types of Indonesian sailing vessel which feature design elements influenced by and derived from small European fore-and-aft rigged vessels (Horridge 1979: iv; Burningham 1996: 9). The Bajo lambo are of the Butonese type.

The class of vessel that has become known in the literature as the Butonese lambo is built and sailed by a number of ethno-linguistic groups from islands in the region of Southeast Sulawesi and as far west as the Taka Bonerate atoll and smaller neighbouring islands in the Flores Sea. The Tukang Besi Islands, Buton and Bonerate are regarded as the ‘centre’ of the lambo building tradition (Nootbooom 1947: 220; Burningham 1989: 179). Over much of the past century the lambo has facilitated the migration of people from Southeast Sulawesi, particularly from the Tukang Besi Islands, to other areas of eastern Indonesia. Thus lambo are built and sailed in many of those areas where Butonese and Bajo have settled, including parts of of Maluku and Irian Jaya, and on many of the islands in East Nusa Tenggara, including the village of Pepela on Roti Island (Horridge 1979: iv, 1985: 69; Burningham 1989: 179).

The defining features of Butonese lambo are a straight stem and stern post set at an angle to a straight keel, with a median rudder and gunter sail rig (Burningham 1989: 179). In contrast, the stem and stern posts of the traditional Indonesian hull form are curved end to end into the keel (Horridge 1985: 12), while traditional Indonesian sail layouts for craft larger than canoes are generally rectangular (layar tanja) or lateen (layar lete) (Horridge 1979: 10) (see Figure 3-1). While the lambo hull exhibits European design elements, the method of building follows the traditional Indonesian method of shell construction, where short planks of timber carved to shape are fitted edge to edge with wooden dowels and the ribs are fitted afterwards. This is in contrast to the Western method of boat building, where planking is added after the rib frame is constructed (Burningham 1989: 181; Horridge 1985: 69). Nevertheless, perahu lambo have

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9 These plants are widely known by this or some cognate term in Indonesia (Hickey 1950: 5).
been described as ‘the most westernised and amongst the most recently evolved trading sailing vessels in Indonesia’ (Burningham 1989: 179).

*Perahu lambo* are generally between 10 and 40 tonnes in weight (Horridge 1985: 66) and between 10 to 16 metres in length. Three types of stern can be distinguished on *perahu lambo*, and some *lambo* building communities show a preference for a particular type. In the past, *perahu lambo* were either gaff or ketch rigged (single or double masted). The gaff and ketch rig (*lama cangking*) was replaced by the gunter sloop rig (*lama sande*/layar nade) from around 1960 (Horridge 1985: 10). According to Hughes (1984: 155), who carried out fieldwork in the Tukang Besi Islands in 1982, there were no more two-masted *lambo* left in Wanci or Kaledupa in 1982. Hughes (1984: 156, 162) also reported that by the early 1970s, all *lambo* in Wanci had been converted from gaff to gunter rig. Since the 1970s many *lambo* have had auxiliary diesel engines installed, and some *lambo* have undergone structural modifications, transforming them into *perahu layar motor* (motorised sailing boats).

Figure 3-1 shows six different combinations of hull and rigging: (a) *perahu pajala* with the traditional Indonesian hull form and *layar tanja* rig; (b) *perahu lete lete* with similar hull form and another version of *layar tanja* rig; (c) *perahu lambo* with gaff rig; (d) *perahu lambo* with ketch rig; (e) *perahu lambo* with counter-stern and gunter rig; (f) *perahu lambo* with double-ended stern and gunter rig.

10 The most common form is the distinctive elliptical counter-stern (*pantat bebek*). Counter-sterned vessels are steered with a tiller connected to a single rudder hung on a stern post in the European style. The rudder stock passes through the stern of the vessel. Some *perahu lambo* are also built with transom sterns (*pantat puppa*), but these are less common. The other style of *perahu lambo* is double-ended with a wooden platform built upon beams laid across the stern. This form of stern is called *pantat kadera*, where *kadera* comes from the Portuguese word for chair and *pantat* means buttocks (Horridge 1985: xvi). On double-ended *perahu*, the rudder is hung externally and connected directly to the stem post. Members of the trading community at Lande in Buton (Southon 1995) appear to build and sail only *lambo* with counter-sterns, whereas in Mola *perahu* with all three types of stern are built and sailed.
Figure 3-1: Types of Indonesian *perahu* hull forms and rigs.

Sources: Hawkins 1982, Burningham 1996.
Many of the newer lambo are designed for shark fishing. In the case of the Mola lambo, vessels were normally built with a hatch located in the middle of the aft deck. In more recent years, some of the newer lambo have hatches closer to the end of the stern or to the entrance of the cabin so that the deck is flush and there is greater working space to process newly caught sharks hauled onto the deck (Burningham 1996: 141). The hulls of perahu lambo built for Mola Bajo appear to have less beam than other lambo in Southeast Sulawesi since they are not engaged in cargo carrying activities. Platforms replacing the traditional toilet box are now added to the stern as an additional space for cooking and storing fishing gear, and the toilet box is then built into one corner. This appears to be related to the adoption of longline fishing gear (ibid.: 51). The design of the counter-stered lambo is an Indonesian version of a small European trading sloop or cutter (Horridge 1979: iv). The counter-stered lambo only appeared in the twentieth century (Burningham 1996: 11), but the European prototype from which the lambo was copied is still the subject of conjecture. The design could have been copied from a number of European boat types found in Southeast Asia towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries (Horridge 1979: 7–8; Horridge in Southon 1995: 40–1; Burningham 1996: 15, 111). The first modern usage of the word lambo found in records so far is recorded by Kriebel (1920: 217), who listed the types of trading perahu (including lambo) built and used by the people of Bonerate (Burningham 1996: 15). The Bonerate villagers were noted as expert builders of lambo in the 1930s (Collins 1936: 147; Nootboom 1947: 220) and 1940s (Gibson-Hill 1950: 133). By the late 1930s, the lambo was already quite widespread throughout eastern Indonesia and was slowly replacing earlier trading vessels such as the perahu palari (Nootboom 1947: 219, 220).

Much of the discussion in the literature has focused on the history and design of the counter-stered lambo rather than the double-ended lambo. Burningham (1996: 11) says that ‘some of the double-ended lambo from the Tukang Besi Islands have a hull form that is more closely related to that of an indigenous type called sope or soppe than to any western model’, and claims that double-ended lambo may have been the ‘original type’ of lambo in the Buton region (ibid.: 21).

It is possible to determine when the Bajo living at Mantigola in the 1930s and 1940s first adopted the lambo because the oral history of past voyages to the Timor Sea through much of the twentieth century indicates the range of that were boats used. Dating from sometime in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Bajo sailed to Ashmore Reef in a double-ended perahu that carried a tilted rectangular sail (lama tanja). By the 1930s and 1940s, voyages to the Timor Sea were undertaken in perahu lambo, some double-ended and some with counter-sterns, with a single rudder and gaff rigged in the European fashion.
The majority of *perahu lambo* in eastern Indonesia are used as cargo carriers or trading vessels. Studies of changes in their design focus almost exclusively on their use in trading activities, and Horridge (1979: iv) goes so far as to say that the *lambo* ‘was brought into use as a trader and was never a fishing boat’ (see also Hughes 1984; Horridge 1985; Evers 1991; Southon 1995; Burningham 1996). However, the Bajo of Mola, Mantigola and Pepela use *perahu lambo* almost exclusively for collecting trepang and trochus, and for shark fin fishing voyages to the Timor and Arafura seas. This suggests that the *lambo* was adopted by the Bajo as a fishing vessel some time before the middle of the twentieth century.

The unmotorised *lambo* used primarily for fishing purposes in eastern Indonesia belong to Mola and Mantigola Bajo and the mixed Bajo/Rotinese population of Pepela and Oelaba on Roti Island. One reason for the continued use of unmotorised *perahu lambo* in the area permitted to Indonesian craft within the Australian Fishing Zone is that the regulations under the 1974 Memorandum of Understanding state that boats must be ‘traditional vessels’, which means that engines are not permitted. These regulations have contributed to the continuing use of *perahu lambo* by the Bajo and certainly stalled the widespread adoption of engines. However, most other Indonesian fishing populations, such as other groups of Bajo, Butonese and Bugis fishermen, use motorised boats to engage in illegal fishing activities in the northern Timor and Arafura seas. 11

We have already noted that there were 37 *perahu lambo* owned by Bajo from Mola Selatan, and seven owned by Bajo from Mola Utara, in 1994 (Table 3-1). Another ten were owned by Bajo from Mantigola. Of these 54 vessels, 20 were located in Pepela at the time of the survey. A few boats from Mola and Mantigola were not used for shark fishing voyages in the Timor and Arafura seas in that year because they were not fully operational and could not put to sea when the fishing season began in August. Some Bajo had by then borrowed *perahu* from other areas, some of the boats had been sold in Pepela, some Bajo had purchased new vessels and some *perahu* were apprehended over the course of the following months.

The provenance of Bajo *perahu lambo* enables us to distinguish those which have been inherited from those purchased second-hand, either locally or from other parts of Indonesia, and those new *perahu* built in Mola, Mantigola or in other villages such as Langara. The average cost of having a new average-sized counter-stermed *perahu lambo* built by a boat builder in Mola or Langara is in the range of Rp 7–10 000 000. Smaller *lambo*, including double-ended vessels, are considerably cheaper to build. In the Tiworo Islands a new double-ender can be purchased for approximately Rp 4 000 000. The time taken to build a

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11 Other exceptions would be the Madurese who sail *perahu leti leti* and commonly remove their engines in Kupang before sailing south to enter and fish in the MOU area (personal communication, Dan Dwyer, 1999).
**Boats to Burn**

*lambo* can vary from a few months to a few years, depending on the pace of work and the availability of money and timber. Second-hand *perahu*, depending on their condition, can cost Rp 2–5 000 000. In many cases a second-hand boat will require some repairs before it can be sailed. Depending on the condition of the vessel, these can cost another Rp 1–5 000 000.

A *lambo* may last for many decades if it is well maintained. Most boats undergo minor and major repairs to the hull to keep them workable during their lifetime, and after 20 or 30 years very few parts of the original hull remain. The oldest remaining working *perahu* from Mola are those built in Mantigola prior to the migration of Mantigola Bajo to Mola during the Kahar Muzakkar rebellion in the 1950s.

**Rituals of Boat Construction**

*Perahu lambo* have a particular cultural value and symbolic significance within the Bajo community, and there are a number of specialist boat builders (*sandro*/*tukang perahu*) in Mola who are also recognised for their ritual expertise. These men have acquired the esoteric knowledge that permits them to conduct the various rituals associated with different phases of boat construction — the joining of the stem and stern posts to the keel, the drilling and regular strengthening of the navel in the keel, as well as the final launching of the boat. A series of rituals is also conducted before a crew embarks on a fishing voyage and moves the *perahu* from the confines of the village to the harbour. All human actions must be synchronised with the cyclic phases that underlie the movement of nature or the cosmos (Southon 1995: 134), and on all such occasions, ritual experts consult lunar and other calendars (*nginda allau*/*kotika*) to determine auspicious times and days on which to conduct the rituals. However, ‘knowledge is not uniform’ and in Mola there are ‘different versions of the meaning of a ritual and different understandings of how a ritual should be performed’ (ibid.: 132).

One of the most respected *sandro* was Si Gunda from Mola Utara who died in 1996. A head boat builder with a number of men working for him, Si Gunda learnt the skill of boat building from his father and grandfather. He had recently built two *perahu lambo* that were still being used in shark fishing — Tunas Muda and Berkat Nelayan — and performed rituals for a number of boats departing Mola on fishing voyages in 1994. Si Adam, from Mola Utara, was also a well-regarded *tukang perahu*, and during 1994–95 he was engaged in building large motor boats for Mola and Wanci clients. Si Adam was skilled in boat ritual, but because Si Gunda was senior to Si Adam, it was Si Gunda who was called upon to conduct the rituals for boats built by Si Adam. This was common practice in Mola. Si Mahating, a *tukang perahu* from Mola Selatan, was recognised for his ritual knowledge but was generally thought to have poor craftsmanship and not to be as skilled at boat building as Si Gunda. Si Mahating worked on his own
with some assistance from his son, building lambo for his own use or for later sale, but rarely working for a wage or commission. Si Nurdin, a tukang perahu from Mola Selatan had built a number of boats in Mola. He had then been living in Pepela for some years and was engaged in shark fishing, but in 1996 he returned to Mola and in January 1997 began to build a new boat.

There was also a handful of older men, former boat builders, in Mola who were still summoned to carry out rituals associated with fishing fleet departures from the village. Si Mbaga, from Mola Selatan, was usually called on to conduct the ritual for perahu departing Mola on fishing expeditions, but by 1995 he was too ill to continue and he died in late 1996. Another man, Si Gudang, was usually called on to perform the same ritual but he also died in 1996. This meant that younger boat builders such as Si Adam, Si Mahating and Si Nurdin would have to be called upon to perform such rituals more often.

### Joining the Keel, Stem and Stern Posts

The construction of a lambo begins with the laying of a single plank of timber which is selected for the keel (lunas) by the builder and owner. According to Si Gunda, if the plank of timber has a knot or eye in it, this brings good luck and good fortune (dalle/rezeki).

The length of the keel is the most important dimension of the perahu, and is determined by the builder or owner. According to one method, starting with the right foot, the builder walks along the length of wood, placing left and right feet end to end, one after the other, until he reaches the end of the keel. But he must finish with the right foot, not the left. Where the last right foot ends, a line is drawn exactly between the base of the toenail and the first joint of the big toe, and the keel is then trimmed to this length. Any deviation from this measure can bring misfortune to the perahu and its owner (personal communication, Si Gunda, 1995). Si Nurdin would take a measurement from the owner’s body by winding a length of string a number of times around his belly. Whatever method is used, the measurement of the keel by reference to the human body means that perahu are ‘individualized’ or ‘customized’ (Southon 1995: 100).

The keel, supported by wooden logs (kalang), is then joined to the stem post (pamaruh munda) and stern post (pamaruh bulli) with tenon and mortice joints (lesoang) (see Figure 3-2). According to Si Gunda, the stem post is joined first, followed by the stern post. The ritual offerings consist of a cluster of four leaves from the pepper plant, each containing a piece of betel nut with lime, four coins and four hand-rolled cigarettes. These objects are placed on a plate next to each of the two joints. According to Si Nurdin, the keel is the female and the stem and stern posts are male; the tenon joint in the stem and stern posts represents the penis and the mortice represents the vagina, so the joining of the keel with the posts represents copulation between husband and wife and
conception of the perahu. At the same time, the perahu is said to be created by God, and the prophets are said to reside in the joints, so prayers are recited at the time of the offerings.

**Figure 3-2: Stem, keel and stern post layout and order of joining.**

It is also said that ‘dua laki-laki dan satu perempuan; satu rumah tangga, satu perahu’ (‘two males and one female; one household, one perahu’), which conveys the idea of ‘the household as a metaphor for thinking about the perahu’ (Southon 1995: 140). When the posts are joined to the keel, a small piece of gold, sometimes wrapped in white cloth, is placed inside the mortice, and a square piece of white cloth 30 cm in diameter is placed over the tenon in both joints. When the parts are joined the white cloth protrudes on all sides so that:

the perahu has harmony like in the house, the perahu will be cold, the crew will be happy with the owner, no quarrels or disputes between the crew, and the perahu will always be successful (personal communication, Si Mbaga, 1995).

Gunda also said that gold and white cloth are used ‘so that the perahu is cold, the same as a house’. During the construction of a house in Mola, a piece of gold is inserted in the mortice of the centre post.  

The Drilling of the Navel and Ritual Launching

Once the major structure of a perahu lambo is completed, a ceremony is held in which a hole is drilled in the keel. The drilling of this ‘navel’ (bebol/pusat) is the most important moment in the boat’s construction.

The day selected by the ritual expert for drilling the navel and launching the perahu is a time of great celebration in the village. A large number of people typically assemble around the perahu to watch and take part in the proceedings and to help push the boat into the water after the navel has been drilled. Inside the hull, the ritual expert selects the place in the centre of the

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12 The cooling effect of metals included in house construction among the Giman of Halmahera is explained by Teljeur (1990: 70): ‘cool denotes a condition that promotes health, beauty and prosperity; while hot denotes the opposite condition, resulting in illness, misfortune and a short life’.

13 The practical function of this hole is to allow for drainage of water collected in the bilge when the boat has been beached.

14 The following account is based on my own observation of a ceremony that took place for a perahu motor at 2 pm (high tide) on a Sunday.
keel to drill the navel and positions himself behind it, with a group of men around him. Three trays of offerings of ‘tasty and sweet’ food are placed along the inside of the hull above the keel, and a cluster of betel nut (pinah) is positioned at the navel itself (see Plate 3-4). A live chicken is carried into the boat and a small piece of its red comb is pulled out, producing a flow of blood that is dropped onto the place of the navel. The chicken is then left to run around freely inside the hull. After prayers, the ritual expert begins to drill the hole into the keel while holding his breath (napas). Once the hole is drilled, it is plugged with a wooden dowel (pasa’) and a piece of cotton cloth. This is later replaced with a dowel made of stronger wood. The wood shavings (sampa) are collected on a plate situated beneath the keel, mixed with coconut oil and stored in a bottle. A final round of prayers is conducted and then the men descend from the boat and prepare to launch it into the water. The ritual expert stands behind the boat with his hand on the stern to protect the perahu as it enters the water. The other men then push from behind or pull on a rope connected to the bow and the perahu finally enters the water (see Plate 3-5).

Plate 3-4: Gathering for prayers before drilling the navel for a perahu motor.

15 According to Si Gunda, animals should not be sacrificed while boring the navel because that signifies death when the ritual is aimed at giving life (see Southon 1995: 104–5).
16 This is hung inside the cabin of the boat while it is at sea, or in the owner’s house when the boat is docked. It is said that the shavings offer protection from ill fortune and can also be used as medicine for a sick crew member during a voyage.
Plate 3-5: Preparing to launch the boat into the water.

At the moment the bebol is drilled, the perahu is given life by the expert. As in the case of the human body, the navel is the point of attachment for both the spirit (sumangaq) and the soul (nyawa) of the perahu.

If a perahu doesn’t have nyawa or a navel [bebol], then there isn’t a place where you can ask for good fortune, the perahu can get into danger at sea, or the perahu will not have enthusiasm or sumangaq to search for a living. In Sama language [the consequence of] this is called maluntu (personal communication, Si Mbaga, 1995).

Nyawa is permanent but sumangaq can be precarious, fleeting and even threatening. On the other hand, sumangaq is the source of a boat’s zest, enthusiasm or vitality. A perahu without sumangaq is maluntu, it has lost its vitality and must search for a living. A strengthened navel means a strong vital force which in turn is a source of good fortune. The navel of the perahu must be ritually restored and strengthened regularly in order ensure good fortune.

Si Nurdin observed that ‘perahu di anggap sebagai anak sendiri oleh pemilik’ (‘the perahu is the child of the owner’) and ‘di rawat dengan baik’ (‘it must be taken care of’). He also compared its parts to those of the human body: ‘perahu seperti manusia ada tanganya, ada kepalanya, ada mulut, ada matanya, ada kaki’ (‘a perahu is like a person, it has hands, a head, a mouth, eyes and feet’). The

*perahu* participates in a voyage as if it were a ‘person’, or more specifically three people, for when the costs and profits of the voyage are divided between the crew, the *perahu* (or its owner) has shares equivalent to those of three crew members.

If the *perahu* is conceived of as a living thing, what happens to its vital energy if it is destroyed? What of a *perahu* burned by Australian authorities? It is said that the boat builder and/or owner of a boat can feel if something bad has happened to a *perahu*. When asked what happens when a *perahu lambo* is apprehended and destroyed by burning, Si Gunda stated:

> When a *perahu* is apprehended and burnt until destroyed the builder experiences the feeling that the *perahu* is dead, it cannot return home since its *nyawa* has vanished.  

It must be assumed that the *sumangaq* is also extinguished at this time. The destruction of a boat is effectively the destruction of the owner’s child.

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18 In an early study of Malay ritual Endicott (1970: 65) also noted that ‘the removal of the *nyawa* is synonymous with death’.