

# Chapter 9. Precedence Among the Domains of the Three Hearth Stones:

## Contestation of an order of precedence in the Ko'a ceremonial cycle (Palu'é Island, Eastern Indonesia)

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### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The island of Palu'é,<sup>2</sup> located off the north coast of Flores, covers seventy square kilometres and consists of a population of approximately 10,000. It is divided into fourteen separate territorial, political and ceremonial domains known as *tana*. One of the remarkable features of the island is the absence of accessible drinking water. During the long dry season its inhabitants rely mainly on the juice of the lontar palm (*Borassus flabellifer* or *Sundaicus*) for their daily intake of fluid. Water for cooking is tapped from banana trunks, bamboo and from a number of trees, and in some places volcanic steam is trapped in earth catchments and condensed in bamboo poles.<sup>3</sup> The circular island consists of an almost nine hundred metre high mountain and of a number of active volcanic vents which are slightly to one side of the mountain top. Everyday life on Palu'é is overshadowed by the constant threat of eruptions which can shower fields and settlements with rocks and hot ashes.<sup>4</sup>

Equally remarkable from a cultural standpoint are the ceremonial cycles of the island's domains. Of the fourteen domains, seven maintain ceremonial cycles culminating in the sacrifice of water buffalo<sup>5</sup> whereas the other seven domains conduct cycles involving the sacrifice of pigs. At the opening of a new cycle water buffalo are purchased on the neighbouring island of Flores and brought back to Palu'é. There the animals are raised over a period of five years at the end of which they are sacrificed in a large-scale ceremony. Considering the lack of water on the island raising these animals represents a considerable achievement. More often than not water buffalo fail to adjust to the dry environment and die before the prescribed five-year period is up. In such a case another ceremonial purchase must be carried out in order to open up the cycle as soon as new resources are available.<sup>6</sup>

The individual ceremonial cycles of each domain provide an arena for the contestation of an order of precedence.<sup>7</sup> By employing specific strategies aimed at enhancing its prestige a given domain can emerge from a cycle in a new position of precedence among its allied domains. After the cycle has been completed this new position is often consolidated through warfare. In the

following such a process will be illustrated by means of a case study of one complete ceremonial cycle. Precedence is invariably subject to contestation and understanding the dynamics of contestation is essential for understanding the social life of these societies. Some aspects of the process of contestation of an order of precedence at the level of traditional domains will be analysed here by applying a set of analytic tools<sup>8</sup> to a number of key events surrounding the cyclical ceremonies of the domain of Ko'a. In societies with a "hierarchical" use of dual categories, such as those found throughout eastern Indonesia, an order of precedence involves the conjunction of several analytical features, the most important of which are recursive complementarity, categorical asymmetry and categorical inversion.<sup>9</sup> These features are exemplified in this paper.

Before proceeding to the description and analysis of a number of key events that occurred during the last ceremonial cycle of the domain of Ko'a some general information on Palu'é categories of social order will be given as well as an outline of the ceremonial cycle and an overview of political and ceremonial alliance.

### **Some Categories of the Social Order**

Society on Palu'é is House-based.<sup>10</sup> In each domain two separate groups of Houses trace their origins through a succession of men and place names to two different sets of primordial ancestors. Members of these two groups of first settling Houses are referred to as "father people" (*hata hama*) whereas members of subsequently settled groups of Houses are referred to as "child people" (*hata hana*). Within each group of Houses, one House assumes a position of seniority. Such a House is called "elder sibling" (*hata ka'é*), whereas all the other Houses are referred to as "younger siblings" (*hata hari*). The most senior male member of a House of "elder brother" status is himself classified as "elder brother" (*ka'é*) and the most senior male members of Houses of "younger brother" status as "younger brothers" (*hari*). The two priest leaders of a domain are recruited from the two Houses of "elder sibling" status of the domain's two first settling groups of "father people". Although all male members of Houses of "father people" status can be referred to as "strong men" (*lakimosa*) in practice only the most senior male member of the senior House of each of the two groups of "father people" is addressed as such. They are the two political and ceremonial leaders of the domain. These two priest leaders maintain separate spheres of ritual influence within the domain and separate ceremonial centres, whereby the priest leader of one group of "father people" always takes precedence over the priest leader of the other. The position of this lesser priest leader varies. In some domains he functions primarily as a ceremonial leader and much of his political authority has been transferred to the main priest leader and in other domains he no longer exercises his ceremonial office and only nominally maintains "strong man" status.<sup>11</sup>

## The Ceremonial Cycles of the Domains of Water Buffalo Blood

The fourteen domains of Palu'é are distinguished by their adherence to one of two ceremonial systems. The seven domains employing pigs as their main sacrificial animals are referred to as “domains of pig blood” (*tana laja wawi*) whereas the seven domains practicing the sacrifice of water buffalo are referred to as “domains of water buffalo blood” (*tana laja karapau*) (Table 1). The domains of Palu'é are listed here according to their adherence to a ceremonial system (for their respective locations refer to Map 1). The present investigation is mainly concerned with relations among the first three of the “domains of water buffalo blood” — Tana Ko'a, Tana Cawalo and Tana Tomu.

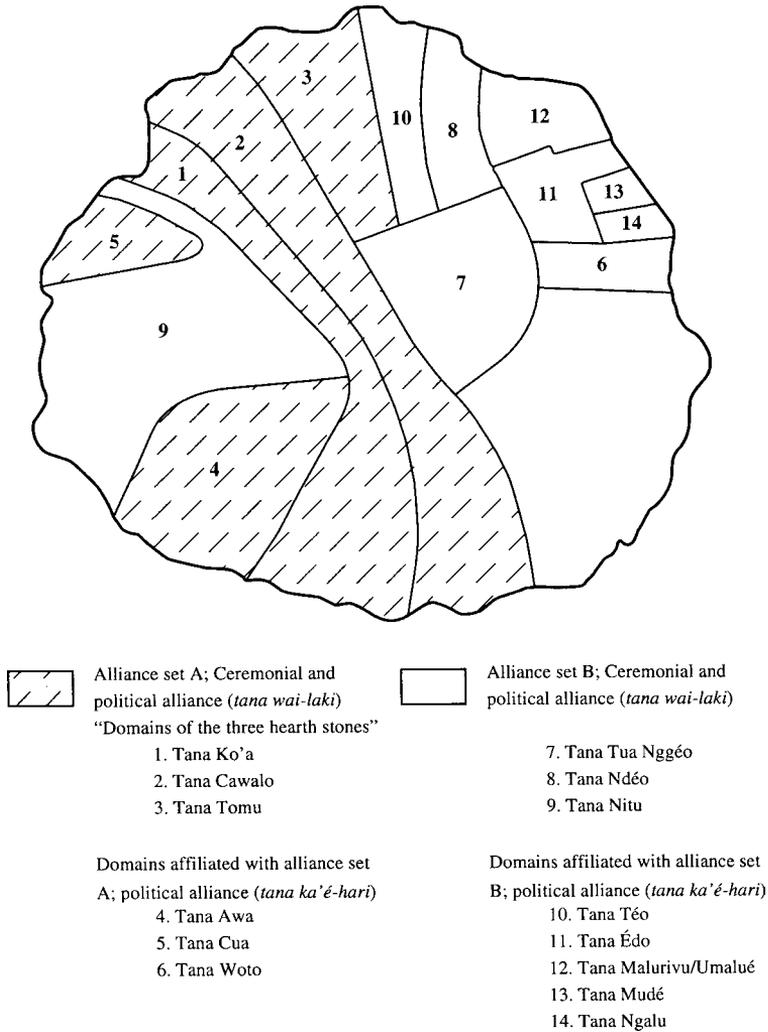
**Table 1. Domains of water buffalo and pig blood**

Domains of water buffalo blood	Domains of pig blood
1. Tana Ko'a	1. Tana Malurivu
2. Tana Cawalo	2. Tana Édo
3. Tana Tomu	3. Tana Woto
4. Tana Kéli	4. Tana Awa (formerly water buffalo blood)
5. Tana Nitu	5. Tana Téó (formerly water buffalo blood)
6. Tana Cua	6. Tana Ngalu
7. Tana Ndéo	7. Tana Mudé

Blood offerings that accompany every major ceremonial event are ranked according to the ritual potency of the blood employed. In such a ranking only the blood of the water buffalo is considered to be “big blood” (*laja ca*), that is, of the highest ritual potency. The blood of pigs and chicken and in some cases the blood of dogs is also considered to have ritual potency, but only to a lesser extent. On the basis of this ranking all of the “domains of water buffalo blood” consider themselves to be superior to the domains practicing the sacrifice of the pig.

The killing of the main sacrificial animals takes place at the two central ceremonial courtyards (*tupu*) of the domain, each of which usually consists of a number of named monoliths set on top of a circular mound at the centre of each of the two main villages. In terms of cosmology the central ceremonial courtyard is the place of connection with the multilayered universe. From here access can be gained to both the terrestrial layers and to those of the firmament. By sacrificing the “big blood” of the water buffalo at the central ceremonial courtyard the Supreme Being can be reached. In ritual speech the Palu'é Supreme Being is referred to by the couplet sun-moon, stone-earth (*era-wula, watu-tana*). The sacrifice of water buffalo ensures the support of the Supreme Being for the well-being of the people, the proper sequence of the seasons, a plentiful harvest and good fortune in warfare. Establishing contact with the Supreme Being by sacrificing “big blood” thus results in prosperity for the domain. This in turn

ultimately reflects upon its status among the other “domains of water buffalo blood”.



**Map 1: Political and ceremonial alliance among the “domains of water buffalo blood”.**

The ceremonial cycles of both groups of “father people” of a domain run parallel to each other. Each group purchases its own sacrificial animal, raises it in the domain and stages the sacrifice on its respective ceremonial courtyard. However, every stage of the cycle is always initiated by the group of the main priest leader. Different ceremonial offices are assigned to individual Houses of each group. The location of the dwellings of their holders surrounding the ceremonial courtyard reflects the order of these offices. A number of Houses located at the upper half of the circle are referred to as “uphill people” (*hata*

*réta*) as opposed to those of the lower half who are called “downhill people” (*hata lau*). The latter are in charge of the purchase of the animals and in that context they are also referred to as the “purchasing people” (*hata puané*), whereas the former who carry out the final sacrifice are called “sacrificing people” (*hata patiné*).

A complete cycle ideally extends over a period of five years. The “purchasing people” initiate the cycle by the exchange of yearling animals against golden ear-pendants, ivory tusks and harvest goods with allies of the sacrificing domain on the neighbouring island of Flores.<sup>12</sup> The purchasing voyage is highly structured and begins with the construction of the “large sitting platform” (*woga ca*) next to the ceremonial courtyard. For the duration of the cycle ceremonial gongs and drums are hung from the ridgepole of its roof. At night the water buffalo is usually tied up in the space beneath the raised platform. This structure is also referred to as “the House of the water buffalo” (*nua kerapau*).

During the voyage all members of the fleet of the purchasing party are subject to strict rules of conduct. Participants are not allowed to sit in the shade, no food or drink is consumed on the boats, and smoking and chewing of betelpepper and areca-nut is only permitted at brief moments between chants. The voyage across the straits to Flores follows a prescribed route, each stage of which is marked by the chanting of a fixed set of ritual chants. Most of these chants contain sexual allusions that refer to a man coming to Flores for the purpose of finding a spouse. At the end of the fifth chant the purchasing party lands on Flores where it is received by its allies. A stall for the buffalo is built on one of the boats of the purchasing fleet. After the exchange with the allies has taken place the animals are taken aboard and penned up. On the return trip another set of five chants is recited.<sup>13</sup> Some of these are addressed to the sacrificial animal which, in order to keep it calm, is told (lied to, as it is put) about the life of abundance it will be leading back on Palu'é. The landing is marked by a metaphorical inversion. As soon as the animal lands at the shores of the domain the metaphor of its being a bride which is brought back to the island to be wed changes to one whereby the animal becomes the groom who will be married to one of the daughters of the priest leader of the purchasing party. During the five-year period preceding the sacrifice she is responsible for his welfare. At the end of this period the animal is handed over to the “sacrificing” people. There again an unmarried woman takes charge of the buffalo. After the sacrifice both ceremonial virgins are subject to restrictions similar to those applied in mourning for a spouse.

The sequence in the handing over of the tether of the sacrificial animals serves to illustrate the precedence the main priest leader takes over the lesser priest leader. Upon disembarking the holder of a ceremonial office whose group of Houses is said to “stand in the middle” (*téi rora*), i.e. in a position serving both

ceremonial courtyards, takes the ropes from both priest leaders. He leads the animals along a specific path up the mountain to the boundaries of the village of the main priest leader. There he hands over both animals to the main priest leader who then enters the main village. After his animal has been installed in the "house of the water buffalo" he leads the second animal up to the boundary of the village of the lesser priest leader where he hands it over to him. At every stage at which the rope changes hands the recipient reciprocates with a prestation of gold or ivory.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the entire cycle this precedence of the main priest leader is expressed by his "going first" (*nolo*). Any ceremonial activities are first carried out by him or by officiants associated with his ceremonial centre. Although these activities are paralleled at both centres, there is always a brief delay between the two.

The arrival of the animals on the island and their naming is honoured by all the allies of the purchasing domain by their attendance at the circular dances at the ceremonial centres. These dances extend over a period of several weeks and during this time of celebration everyday rules governing sexual relations are considerably loosened. At both ends of the cycle, at the purchase and at the final sacrifice, the whole network of social relations of every House in a domain is fully activated and relations are acknowledged and reinforced by the exchange of pig meat and harvest goods.

The passage of each year after the purchase of the water buffalo is marked by a ceremonial dance which is again attended by the allies of the sacrificing domain. During a five-year period the economic activities of the Houses of a domain are directed towards accumulating the large number of pigs and harvest goods required for the ceremonial exchanges that accompany the final sacrifice and for the feeding of the numerous guests. Because undertakings within the domain that involve large-scale ceremonies and ceremonial exchange, such as the construction of houses and boats or the setting of mortuary monoliths, must be completed before the sacrifice, a concerted effort must be directed towards finalizing these matters. Following the sacrifice the skull of the buffalo is tied to a wooden pole which is then erected on the ceremonial mound. Until this pole has decomposed and fallen over no new sacrificial animal can be purchased and no large-scale undertaking can be commenced. Thus the five years devoted to raising the buffalo are characterized by a great economic effort by every House of the domain to meet the demands entailed by the final sacrifice. After the sacrifice the domain is virtually stripped of resources.

Five years after the purchase of the buffalo, at the beginning of the rainy season, the preliminary ceremonies for the sacrifice begin. Once again the allies come and dance. A fixed set of traditional chants are recited, an important one of which is referred to as the "carrying and dragging (of) the black patola stone" (*titi cēi watu mité patola*). In this chant the voyage of the mythical ancestors of

the domain is recounted. The chant consists of a chain of hundreds of paired place names marking stages of the ancestral voyage through symbolic space from a mythical place of origin in the far west. It tells of how the ancestors carried with them on their boat “the stone and the soil” (*tana watu*), a metaphor which stands for the island. Once they had reached their destination this primordial “stone and soil” grew to become the island as we know it now. In the last section of the origin chant actual place names of the domain (*tana ngarané*; lit. the names of the domain) are evoked, beginning at the four corners of the domain and leading to its centres, towards the two ceremonial courtyards (Map 2). Then in a ceremony called “erecting the ceremonial courtyard” (*kota tupu*) a large stone is set on each of the two ceremonial mounds and soil is taken from the lower and the upper part of the domain and placed around it. This “stone and soil” is then believed to grow in size just as the mythical “stone and soil” from which the island originated.

Following the fixed set of ceremonial chants both allies and hosts create new chants in poetic language which allude to any unsolved conflicts or outstanding debts between the participants. Those targeted then attempt to settle the issue by chanting a response. The chanting and counterchanting goes on until a satisfactory solution has been found. In every cycle a different allied domain is chosen as the guest of honour of this final stage. All members of the sacrificing domain travel together to the domain of the chosen guest and in a mock battle they conquer their ceremonial centres. On the day before the sacrifice the guest domain in turn attacks the sacrificing domain and in turn conquers its two centres. The actual day of the sacrifice is referred to in ritual speech by the couplet “to make the trunk fall, to cut off the tip” (*poka bu’u, supo ngalu*). Here the botanic metaphor describes the life of the buffalo which is to be sacrificed to the Supreme Being. Most of the population of the allied domains as well as numerous individual groups from all over the island come to attend the sacrifice. A sacrifice is said to have been good if the cuts of meat offered to the guests are large and the palm gin flows copiously. Another criterion is that of how long the cutting down of the buffalo is drawn out by skilful slashing before the animal finally collapses.<sup>15</sup> This is referred to as “the dancing of the water buffalo” (*coka kerapau*).

Finally, an important criterion of the success of the sacrifice is that of reciprocity in exchange. At a number of stages of the ritual cycle ceremonial exchange takes place. Prestations and counterprestations of raw pig-meat against rice and harvest goods (mung-bean, cow-pea, tuber, maize) reach their grandest scale during the days preceding the sacrifice. This is a time in which the total social network of each House is activated. Not only do the various groups of Houses of wife-givers and wife-takers engage in exchange but individual Houses of quasi-consanguineal kin status from all over the island also participate. The specifics regarding the amount and kind of exchange are based on exchanges

effected on similar occasions in the past and great care is taken to reciprocate accordingly. Finally, on the last day before the sacrifice, members of the allied domains and large numbers of individuals visiting from all other domains make prestations of harvest goods that must be reciprocated with pig-meat. At that stage the reputation (*ngara ca*, lit. the big name) of each House of the sacrificing domain hinges on whether or not it was capable of reciprocating to all of these prestations. The larger the cuts the more the recipients will praise the individual Houses and the sacrificing domain as a whole upon returning to their villages.<sup>16</sup>

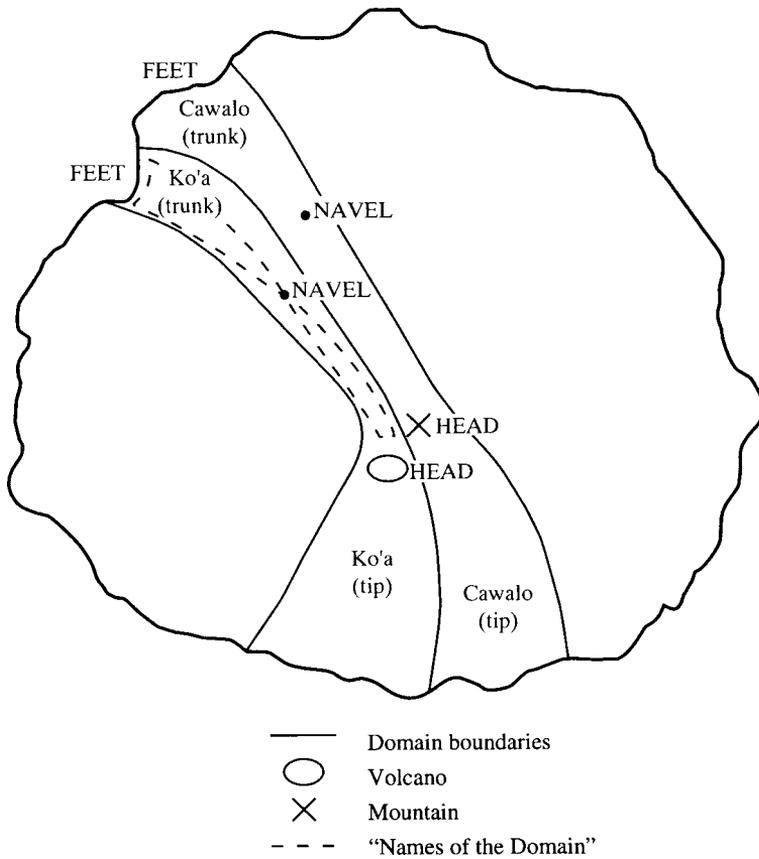
Before the animal is entirely disposed of<sup>17</sup> there is a final night of chanting attended only by the sacrificing domain. In these chants the history of the animal is recounted from the initial purchase through the years during which it was raised on the island to its final sacrifice. In the early morning the ceremonial objects, gongs and drums are put back into storage until the next cycle can be opened. The closing of the cycle is marked by the setting of offerings along the boundary lines of the domain. This is said to be the most auspicious moment to make war on a non-allied domain.

Any one of the “domains of water buffalo blood” can lose its ability to sacrifice the “big blood” of water buffalo. When it does, a general decline in its prosperity is believed to follow. According to one myth the first water buffaloes were brought to the island by a domain called Awa located near the volcano. Awa had purchased eight animals from its allies in the Lio region on the island of Flores. These yearlings were to be raised in Awa and then sacrificed. However, shortly after their arrival, the animals fled Palu'é and swam back to Lio. Since that time Awa has never again attempted to reinitiate a water buffalo sacrificing cycle but has resigned itself to the sacrifice of pigs. By supplying pigs and rice it now actively supports the water buffalo sacrifice of Ko'a, a domain to whom it stands in a relationship of younger to elder sibling (*ka'é-hari*). This classification by Ko'a is a metaphor for Awa's subordinate position within the political and ceremonial alliance between the two domains. Its population has remained small and its territory has continuously been encroached upon by its neighbours so that now Awa virtually perches at the edge of the volcano. Unlike Awa the domain of Téó actually used to sacrifice water buffalo, but when several animals died during the prescribed period preceding the sacrifice Téó renounced its claim to be a “domain of water buffalo blood” and has since only sacrificed pigs. Like Awa, Téó has become small and insignificant and now supports in a subordinate position the sacrifice of the neighbouring domain of Ndéo. However, Awa and Téó are the only two of the five “domains of pig blood” that stand in a relation of ceremonial alliance to any “domain of water buffalo blood”.

## Political and Ceremonial Alliance

It lies beyond the scope of this paper to provide an overall view of ceremonial and political alliance on Palu'é.<sup>18</sup> Here I shall restrict my focus to three domains:

Ko'a, Cawalo and Tomu. Within the system of ceremonial and political alliance that encompasses all fourteen domains of the island these three make up the core of one alliance bloc (Map 1). This core is set against a nonallied grouping made up of three other "domains of water buffalo blood": Kéli, Ndéo and Nitu.<sup>19</sup> Ko'a, Cawalo and Tomu are referred to as "the domains of the three hearth stones" (*tana liga telu*). Their alliance is both political and ceremonial. It is political in that every appointment of a new priest leader is subject to confirmation by the priest leaders of the two allied domains and in inter-domain warfare, which until very recently was endemic on Palu'é, these three domains are ideally expected to lend each other their unconditional support. Open warfare against each other is prohibited by a mutual non-aggression pact (*tura caji*). The alliance between these domains is ceremonial in that at all stages of the water buffalo sacrificing cycle the allies are the guests of the sacrificing domain. By their presence they enhance its prestige and contribute to the success of the sacrifice. According to popular interpretation, the designation of the three domains as "three hearth stones" implies a notion of equality. It is said that "no stone may be higher than the other lest the pot breaks".



**Map 2. Tana Ko'a and Tana Cawalo: the "domains of the coconut palm tree".**

At another level, this notion of equality is overridden by a system of dual classification. In a recursive and complementary mode each domain classifies the other as either conceptually male (*laki*) or conceptually female (*vai*). Categorical asymmetry is achieved by defining male as being superior to female. This form of male-female classification is a relative one and it is crucial to note that the category to which a domain is assigned varies according to the standpoint of the classifier.

An important criterion of maleness is the size of the population. Another one is the notion of the "head" (*taba*) and "feet" (*va'i*) of a domain. Thus, if a territory reaches from the sea up to the mountain top, its "feet" are at the sea and the "head" at the top of the mountain. Only if a domain has both "head" and "feet" is it ritually complete and can exploit the whole range of ritual manipulations that are based on the concept of the domain as a living body (Map 2).

Finally, the actual size of the territory claimed by a domain may also be an important factor in its classification. In the chanting of "the names of the domain" preceding the sacrifice, place-names are evoked that trace lines from the four

corners of the domain towards its ceremonial centre. In terms of the body metaphor applied to the domain this chain of names corresponds to lines reaching downhill from the “head”, or rather from both its “shoulders” (*baja*), to its “navel” (*busé*) and from its “feet” uphill again to the “navel” (Map 2). This movement towards the “navel” is referred to as “taking in the names of the domain” (*nala tana ngarané*). In structural terms the domain contracts during the ceremonial cycle towards its two centres, the ceremonial courtyards. After the cycle is completed the centres are believed to have the potential to increase in size. In an expansive movement its “sides” (*ka*) can grow outward. It is these expanding “sides” that constitute the boundary lines towards the neighbouring domains. By setting offerings to the Supreme Being at intervals along the “sides” of the domain claim is laid over the space delineated by them. When these lines conflict with those of the neighbouring domain then, unless there is a pact prohibiting armed conflict the boundaries are redefined by means of warfare.<sup>20</sup>

### The “Domains of the Three Hearth Stones”: Pre-Sacrifice

I now turn to the situation among the “domains of the three hearth stones” as it presented itself before 1985, when Ko’a initiated its last ceremonial cycle.

With respect to the criteria of population and size of territory Cawalo is clearly the first among these three domains. It has a population of approximately 1,200 people and claims a territory of more than ten square kilometres. Ko’a, its southern neighbour, has a population of only 380 people and at present its territory is less than eight square kilometres. Finally, the population of Tomu to the north of Cawalo numbers approximately 600 people. Its population is larger than Ko’a but Tomu claims a territory of only two and a half square kilometres. Only the domains of Cawalo and Ko’a are ritually complete in that they have both “feet” and “head”, their territories reaching from the sea up to the mountain top. The domain of Tomu only has “feet”, the “head” section being occupied by the domain of Kéli.

Cawalo and Ko’a are also known as the “domains of the coconut tree” (*tana nio bu’uné*) (Map 2). At one level this designation is an allusion to the shape they make up together. Both territories run alongside each other from the sea up to the mountain, whereby the actual mountain top is part of Cawalo and the neighbouring volcano part of Ko’a. Together these sections of their territory make up what is referred to as “the trunk” (*bu’u*) of the coconut tree. Past the mountain top and the volcano their territories stretch in two long strips again all the way down to the sea. The two strips represent the fronds or “the tip” (*ngalu*) of the coconut tree. Because of the proximity of the volcano “the tip” is at present not habitable. Implicit in this botanic metaphor is the same notion of equality we have encountered in the image of the “three hearth stones”. At this level both domains are considered to be of the same size, or as they put it, “like the two halves of a coconut tree”.

On the basis of these main criteria, Cawalo, in the years preceding 1985, regarded itself as conceptually male with respect to both of its allies, Ko'a and Tomu. This view was not challenged by either of their main priest leaders and they largely accepted their conceptually female status with regard to Cawalo. In past times, however, the population of Ko'a was proportionally larger. Due to warfare, bad harvests and disease, numbers have declined, hence its smaller population in relation to Cawalo. Furthermore, Ko'a territory was almost identical in size to Cawalo until 1972 when Ko'a lost about a third of its "trunk" in a war against the domain of Nitu, its neighbour to the north. In that unfortunate war all of its villages were burned to the ground and its ancestral treasures and most of its livestock were lost. This was the last of a series of wars which Ko'a had lost and only recently had the domain begun to recover. From the point of view of Ko'a, Cawalo was regarded as its conceptually male counterpart. However, at least some of the Ko'a elders who had seen better times maintained that this need not always remain so. Ko'a still had enough "maleness" to maintain this position with respect to Tomu and might one day even be able to challenge Cawalo.

The priest leaders of Tomu, the third ally, were never very explicit about their domain's position with regard to Ko'a. Relations between the priest leaders of the two domains were cordial and visits between them frequent. At such occasional meetings the rhetoric displayed by the priest leaders in ritual speech never touched upon their respective maleness and femaleness. However, if questioned separately both would consider themselves to be conceptually male with respect to the other. A recurrent topic of discussion at such meetings was the deteriorating relations of the priest leaders of both domains to the main priest leader of Cawalo. Tomu could come up with a number of misgivings directed against Cawalo and so could Ko'a. At the bottom of these misgivings lay the fact that the main Cawalo priest leader was an ambitious younger man and a Christian who showed little respect for the two considerably older main priest leaders of Ko'a and Tomu. The Cawalo priest leader's father, the former priest leader, whom those of Ko'a and Cawalo may not have been fond of but whom they respected, had failed to teach his son all the intricacies of ritual speech and, therefore, communication with him was always felt to be unsatisfactory and prone to misunderstandings. Such was the situation before the Ko'a ceremonial cycle was opened in 1985. Table 2 brings together the relative positions of the "Domains of the Three Hearth Stones" at that point in time.

**Table 2. Categorical asymmetry and recursive complementarity: pre-sacrifice (m = male, f = female; male > female)**

Ko'a perspective:	Ko'a :	Cawalo	= f : m
	Ko'a :	Tomu	= m : f
Cawalo perspective:	Cawalo :	Ko'a	= m : f
	Cawalo :	Tomu	= m : f
Tomu perspective:	Tomu :	Ko'a	= m : f
	Tomu :	Cawalo	= f : m

One event that created misgivings between the three allied domains deserves mentioning because it sheds light on the strategies employed by the Cawalo main priest leader to manipulate internal tensions between the two groups of "father people" of Ko'a. A number of years earlier the Cawalo priest leader had offered an ivory tusk to the two Ko'a priest leaders in order to get them to accompany his purchasing party to Flores to obtain water buffalo. At the time the main Ko'a priest leader had refused this traditional prestation that secures the following of the allied domain because of some unresolved conflict between him and the main Cawalo priest leader. The lesser Ko'a priest leader, however, had accepted the tusk and instead of the main Ko'a priest leader one of his "younger brothers" had accepted the prestation on behalf of the main ceremonial courtyard. In doing so he had assumed the position of a House of "elder sibling" status. Also, because the Cawalo priest leader had given the tusk to a person of "younger brother" status the position of seniority of the main Ko'a priest leader had come to be questioned. Rumours were spread that he was not really the rightful main priest leader and that his grandfather, the father of the former main Ko'a priest leader, had originally been adopted from outside the domain into a Ko'a family. Furthermore, the fathers of the "elder" and of the "younger brother" had in the past exchanged their infant sons for a period of time. Eventually, however, both sons had returned to their natal Houses. Because of this interrupted process of child transfer the status of these sons with respect to inheritance was somewhat unclear. After the death of both of their fathers they engaged in a series of litigations over a contested piece of land. The end of these litigations had not yet been reached at the time when the "younger brother" was offered the ceremonial prestation of an ivory tusk by the Cawalo priest leader.

### **The Ko'a Ceremonial Cycle, 1985-1988: Categorical Inversion**

By the very fact that Ko'a during its ceremonial cycle of 1985-1988 was acting as a host to its allies, these were placed, at least for the duration of the final sacrifice, in a subordinate position.<sup>21</sup> In terms of categorical asymmetry this signified that Ko'a temporarily became male with respect to all of its guests. However, the crucial question was whether Ko'a could maintain precedence beyond the day of sacrifice. If Ko'a indeed remained male with respect to both

of its allies, it would be in the position to rally their support against Nitu and reclaim the lost territory. A victory against Nitu then would doubtlessly reconfirm the precedence of Ko'a. Table 3 indicates the instances of temporary categorical inversion in the relative positions among the "Domains of the Three Hearth Stones" brought into effect by the sacrifice.

**Table 3. Categorical inversion: duration of sacrifice**

<b>Ko'a perspective:</b>	Ko'a :	Cawalo	= m : f	<b>(inverted)</b>
	Ko'a :	Tomu	= m : f	(unchanged)
<b>Cawalo perspective:</b>	Cawalo :	Ko'a	= m : f	(threatened by inversion)
	Cawalo :	Tomu	= m : f	(unchanged)
<b>Tomu perspective:</b>	Tomu:	Cawalo	= f : m	(unchanged)
	Tomu :	Ko'a	= f : m	(inverted)

Events such as the "conquering" of the ceremonial courtyards by the guest of honour indicate, however, that the relation between guest and host is not one of unconditional temporary submission but that strong tendencies to maintain a position of superordination are involved.<sup>22</sup> In the course of this mock battle between guests and hosts men on both sides act out a display of aggression by scaling and defending the fortifications of the village, shouting loudly and shooting peas and seeds at each other by means of blowpipes or carved wooden toy guns. According to accounts of Ko'a elders, this "conquest" was not always playful. Until the district government prohibited it, weapons were used to kill the ally's livestock and physical fights resulting in bodily harm were frequent. In order to curtail physical violence agreements were reached between the priest leaders of the "domains of water buffalo blood" that in case of an injury the conquering domain would immediately return home without consuming any of the food prepared by the host.

In December 1985 Ko'a decided to initiate a water buffalo sacrificing cycle. On two occasions in previous years water buffalo had been purchased and both times the animals had died shortly after their arrival in Ko'a. For the upcoming purchase resources were scarce and there was great concern in the domain as to whether this time everything would go well. The death of a third purchased buffalo might entail such a loss of prestige for Ko'a that it might have to resign itself in the future to the sacrifice of pigs.

Initially the purchase was very successful even though some of the Houses of the "younger brothers" of the main Ko'a priest leader had not contributed the amount traditionally expected of them. Representatives of the priest leaders of Cawalo and Tomu, as well as a large number of followers from those domains had accompanied the purchasing party and the animals had been safely brought back to Ko'a. Things began to go wrong when one of the "younger brothers" of the main priest leader died just as the ceremonial dances were about to begin. As is customary in such cases the dances were not interrupted. There was general

relief about the fact that this “younger brother” who had not contributed to the purchase and who had not accompanied the party had died instead of the new buffalo. This reasoning is based on the notion that the sacrificial animal is closely in touch with the ancestors as well as with the Supreme Being. At the opening and at the end of the ceremonial cycle any conflicts between the Houses of the “father people” of a domain must be solved lest the sacrifice be negatively affected. If solutions are not sought, offenders are either directly punished by the ancestors, as was seen to be the case here, or punishment is indirectly inflicted through the water buffalo who can maim or even kill a culprit.<sup>23</sup> However, in some cases the animal can die in place of an offender, thereby bringing the ceremonial cycle to a halt and effectively forcing the “father people” to seek a solution to the conflict.

On the second day of the dances following the death of the “younger brother” the water buffalo of the main ceremonial courtyard broke loose and in a desperate search for water ran all the way up to the volcano where it eventually collapsed. That night, the main Ko’a priest leader called a meeting of all the domain in which he voiced his discontent about the lack of support given to the opening of the sacrificial cycle. The following morning the animal was found dead beneath the “large sitting platform”. Divination was conducted to determine the reason for this death and it became apparent that the same “younger brother” of the main priest leader who had once accepted the ivory tusk from Cawalo, had in the past committed incest with his classificatory sister. According to customary law he and his sister were to be put to death.<sup>24</sup> However, in order to stay within the confines of modern Indonesian law his sentence was converted into an obligation to purchase a water buffalo that was to be put to death in their place at a ceremonial courtyard located at the top of the mountain.

Even though at this point there were few resources left to stage another purchase the party travelled back to Flores to purchase two more animals. The second purchase was carried out according to the prescribed ways and Ko’a finally managed to open its cycle in the presence of all of its allies.

Because of previous unsuccessful attempts by Ko’a, it was decided to shorten the period of raising the buffalo to two years and so, in December 1987, preparations began for the sacrifice to take place in the following January. The two preceding harvests had been plentiful and the amount of goods brought back by seasonal migrants of the domain had exceeded all expectations. Even sons who had been working in Malaysia for many years for the first time had sent money back home and a group of about ten of them had returned to the island to witness the sacrifice. The prospects were judged to be favourable and some of the elders thought that this time, even though the population of Ko’a was smaller than that of Cawalo, Ko’a might maintain precedence beyond the sacrifice and become conceptually male in respect to both of its allies.<sup>25</sup>

About a week before the Ko'a sacrifice, there were indications that some of the "father people" of Cawalo were feeling threatened. Quite out of keeping with the ceremonial schedule, the Cawalo main priest leader purchased a young water buffalo from Flores. This was declared to be a preliminary sacrifice. At the sacrifice a letter in Indonesian was read out at the main Cawalo ceremonial courtyard. During the previous year this Cawalo priest leader had been chosen by the regency's Department of Education and Culture to represent the "domains of water buffalo blood" at a cultural meeting in Jakarta. As a reward for having provided information on the ceremonial cycle, the government had endowed him with a letter stating that Cawalo was to be the centre of the new "Organization of the Sun and Moon" ("Organisasi Era-Wula"). The ceremonial cycles of all of the "domains of water buffalo blood" were to be united into this one cultural organization under the leadership of Cawalo. In the future, the central government would pay for the costs of the ceremonies through its Cawalo chairman. Of course the allied priest leaders thought little of this proposal which went against the very nature of their system of alliance. Nevertheless, Cawalo had made its point and had reasserted its "maleness".

As the day approached when Cawalo was expected to be coming to Ko'a to attend the ceremonial dances rumours were heard that its main priest leader refused to come if Ko'a also invited Tomu. Upon hearing this, the main priest leader of Ko'a stated publicly that he did not care if Cawalo did not come and reconfirmed that Tomu had been chosen as the guest of honour of this cycle. When his position became known, the people of Ko'a pleaded with the same "younger brother" of the main priest leader who had earlier been found guilty of incest to negotiate with the Cawalo priest leader. This choice had doubtlessly been influenced by the fact that he had been the person who in the past had received the ivory tusk from the main Cawalo priest leader.

Against the will of his "elder brother", the "younger brother" together with the lesser priest leader went to Cawalo to talk. The outcome of the talk was that the priest leaders of the "Domains of the Three Hearth Stones", Ko'a, Cawalo and Tomu, were to hold a meeting in Ko'a in order to clear the air. The meeting took place the next day. At it very little of relevance was said. However, one point the Cawalo priest leader kept making to the large audience was that they should all stop following the orders of the two old priest leaders and that this was a new age and a time for the young. Since these statements were not made in ritual speech, the priest leaders from Ko'a and Tomu simply ignored them. But the very fact that the meeting had taken place in Ko'a strongly supported Ko'a's attempt to gain precedence over its allies. In the evening the dances were attended by the people of Cawalo, although its main priest leader did not come. The next day Ko'a was to go to Tomu to invite its main guest. Tomu was expecting large numbers of people from Ko'a and had been preparing food since the early morning. As the Ko'a mock war party was about to traverse the territory

of Cawalo, they were met by envoys of the Cawalo priest leader who warned that any Ko'a trespassers would be harmed. Once again the main Ko'a priest leader refused to negotiate. However, his "younger brother", who by now had not only redeemed himself in the eyes of the people of Ko'a but had gained a reputation as a mediator, went to negotiate with the Cawalo priest leader. After a few hours he returned and announced that Cawalo had granted passage, but only after he had agreed to pay a specific amount of goods to Cawalo. Apparently the Cawalo priest leader had demanded these goods as a collective fine for all the real and imaginary transgressions Ko'a had committed against Cawalo in the past. By giving in Ko'a had clearly lost its claim to precedence over Cawalo.

Two days later the actual sacrifice proceeded without any further complications. Everyone hailed it as an outstanding success. Tomu had been invited and had in turn come to Ko'a and conquered its ceremonial courtyards. Even the Cawalo priest leader and his people had attended. The water buffalo had "danced" well, large crowds had been amply fed, the palm-gin had flowed freely and prestations had been reciprocated in a satisfactory way. It is significant, however, that at the closure of the cycle no offerings were set along the controversial boundary between Ko'a and its longstanding enemy Nitu. Because Ko'a had not been able to assume precedence over both its allies, a war with Nitu, which might have been triggered by such offerings, would probably have had to be fought without the support of Cawalo. The main priest leader of Ko'a must have recognized that such a confrontation could not be risked and so he had cancelled the offerings. Finally, now that his "younger brother" had gained so much popularity with the people of Ko'a at the expense of his own authority it would have been doubtful if at this point his "child people" would have supported him in such a venture.

Table 4 summarizes the order of precedence between the domains of the three hearth stones after the closing of the Ko'a ceremonial cycle. The individual positions are indicated with reference to the situation preceding the sacrifice. As it turned out, the Ko'a sacrifice of 1988 changed very little in the order of precedence among the "Domains of the Three Hearth Stones". The only lasting change in position was that Tomu recognized its femaleness with respect to Ko'a.

**Table 4. Categorical asymmetry and recursive complementarity: post-sacrifice**

<b>Ko'a perspective:</b>	Ko'a:	Cawalo	= f : m	(position unchanged)
	Ko'a:	Tomu	= m : f	(position unchanged)
<b>Cawalo perspective:</b>	Cawalo:	Ko'a	= m : f	(position unchanged)
	Cawalo:	Tomu	= m : f	(position unchanged)
<b>Tomu perspective:</b>	Tomu:	Cawalo	= f : m	(position unchanged)
	Tomu:	Ko'a	= f : m	(position changed)

## Conclusion

In the description of the categories which structure political and ceremonial alliance we have twice encountered Dumont's "scandale logique": at the highest organizational level the unity and equality of allied domains are expressed by the metaphor of the "three hearth stones". At that same level inequality is expressed by means of asymmetric recursive complementarity in the idiom of a male-female classification. In different contexts either one or the other metaphor is applied to the relations between the three allied domains. In our account of the events surrounding the Ko'a ceremonial cycle the metaphor of unity was evoked only at one instance, when the three domains came together in Ko'a in an effort to solve conflicts existing between all three of them. During most of the cycle, however, the dominant metaphor was either explicitly or implicitly that of inequality. The unity between Ko'a and Cawalo expressed in the metaphor of the "domains of the coconut tree" was repeatedly called upon by the Ko'a negotiators at their meetings with the Cawalo priest leader. However, for the main priest leaders of both domains, the male-female classification remained in the foreground throughout the cycle.

It is in the tension created between the two seemingly contradictory notions of equality and inequality that the potential of a categorical inversion is located which lasts beyond the period of the sacrifice. In this investigation of the Ko'a sacrificial cycle the potential was only realized in the relationship between Tomu and Ko'a in that Tomu came to recognize the precedence of Ko'a. The relationship between Ko'a and Cawalo was subject to influences originating at other organizational levels.

In contrast to Dumont's characterization of Indian society, in which one set of oppositions, pure and impure, is portrayed as hierarchically structuring and pervading society at all levels, the example of Ko'a has shown that in this case there is no such all-pervasive opposition but that several classificatory oppositions at various levels are involved in the process of contestation of an order of precedence. The male-female opposition has been shown to be the idiom of relations between domains that stand in a relationship of ceremonial and political alliance, whereas their relationships to other allied domains who participate in the cycle but do not practice the water buffalo sacrifice are marked by an opposition based on a distinction of relative age, i.e. elder and younger sibling.

At the intra-domain level the relationship between the groups of Houses of priest leaders and those of subsequently settling groups of Houses is marked by an opposition based on a generational distinction, i.e. "father people" and "child people". Here the possibility for categorical inversion is not given and the space for contestation is minimal. The asymmetric aspect of the "father-child" relationship between priest leader and population of a domain is stressed by a ritual speech couplet which states that "the *lakimosa* carries (his people) in the

folds of his loin-cloth, he cradles (them) in his lap" (*lakimosa tongo lae rongo, kai lae ka'i*). However, a contrasting couplet which is often evoked by both sides in decision-making processes at formal meetings of the whole of the domain modifies this asymmetry and emphasizes interdependence and complementarity by stating that "a father needs children (as much as) children need a father" (*hama tau no'o' hanané, hana tau no'o hamané*). It is this aspect of their relationship that permitted the "child people" of Ko'a to plead with the "younger brother" to mediate between Ko'a and Cawalo.

Interestingly the relationship between the two groups of "father people" of the same domain is not marked by a metaphorical opposition. As this case has shown both their priest leaders were considered to be equal by the Cawalo priest leader. In the account of the Ko'a ceremonial cycle a distinction was made between a main priest leader as opposed to a lesser priest leader (*lakimosa ca, lakimosa lo'o*, lit. the big *lakimosa*, the small *lakimosa*). However, these attributes are only employed in an informal context and do not constitute formal designations. The asymmetry of the relationship is most evident in the sequencing of ceremonial events. Once again we are confronted with an apparent logical contradiction in which the status of the priest leaders is both equal as well as unequal. Although the ethnographic record is not conclusive on this point there are indications that in the past the two positions have undergone inversions. Cawalo countered the Ko'a claim to precedence in part by exploiting the tension created by the two opposed notions for its own ends.

Relations within groups of Houses are marked by an elder-younger sibling distinction. Here complementarity is no longer recursive in that the marked categories consist of one single House that assumes a position of seniority which is opposed to all other Houses of the same group. Relative age with respect to original descent establishes the seniority of this House. Even though the opposition is not recursive, the intricacies and ambiguities of child transfer and succession can provide an opportunity for the playing out of claims to elder sibling status both within the same House as well as between Houses, as was the case with the main Ko'a priest leader and his "younger brother". Here again Cawalo managed to manipulate the situation and gain advantage.

The various sets of oppositions at all of these levels are involved in the contestation of an order of precedence between allied domains. This Ko'a case study does not presume to represent an exhaustive treatment of this process. It has confined itself to demonstrate by way of example and by focusing on a sequence of key events how the analytical features of recursive complementarity, categorical asymmetry and categorical inversion operate in such a process.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper represents a revised version of a paper presented at the conference on "Hierarchy" of the Comparative Austronesian Project held in Canberra in 1989. As such it reflects the state of research at that point in time. Versions of this paper were presented at seminars in Melbourne and Leiden and a German translation of it in Göttingen and Mainz. I would like to thank the participants at these seminars as well as the editors of this volume for their useful comments. Of course the usual disclaimers apply.

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<sup>2</sup> The endonym is Nua Lu'a. The official Indonesian designation is "Perwakilan Pulau Palue", "Subdistrict of Palue Island".

<sup>3</sup> Recently a number rainwater tanks provided by the government, the Catholic church and by an Indonesian NGO allow for water storage during the rainy season. This water is mainly used at feasts and ceremonial occasions.

<sup>4</sup> A major eruption of the volcano Mutu (or Rokatenda as the volcano is referred to outside Palu'é) occurred in 1927. This has been followed by a series of relatively minor eruptions and gas explosions at almost regular intervals, the last of which took place in January and June 1985.

<sup>5</sup> There are some indications that these domains represent the oldest population of the island.

<sup>6</sup> Until recently the animals were left to roam about on their own every morning in order to lap up dew from leaves and grasses. Nowadays a limited amount of water from rainwater tanks is made available to them.

<sup>7</sup> Recently the usage of the term order of precedence has been traced back to Louis Dumont (Fox 1990:1) who in "Homo Hierarchicus" alludes to such a concept: "... *la hiérarchie, ou plutôt l'existence d'un ordre de prééance ...*" (1966:104). I would like to add here another author to share this claim to anthropological ancestry, the Dutch scholar H.G. Schulte-Nordholt, in whose thesis on the political systems of the Atoni of Timor the term is used to characterize relations among Atoni lineages based on the categorical distinction between elder and younger sibling. The thesis was published in the same year as "Homo Hierarchicus". In his original version Schulte-Nordholt employed the term "sociale rangorde" (1966:47). According to Jansonius (1971) the primary meaning is order of rank, the secondary meaning order of precedence. The English translation of his thesis (1971:104) actually employs the term order of precedence. Since Dumont and Schulte-Nordholt a number of authors working on eastern Indonesian material have employed the term in various ways in the analytical description of specific processes of social differentiation in the societies in which they had conducted fieldwork (Forth 1981; Lewis 1988; McWilliam 1989; Vischer 1992). However, none of these authors has found it appropriate to define the concept at a more abstract level. It is not the aim of this paper to do so either, mainly because I feel that an abstract definition at this stage may well have an adverse effect on the further experimental development of the concept.

<sup>8</sup> My analysis here is informed by the ongoing discussion of the concept of precedence in the "Eastern Indonesia Seminar" chaired by James J. Fox at the Australian National University of which I have been a long-term member.

<sup>9</sup> For a more general assessment see Fox (1989).

<sup>10</sup> In order to distinguish the house as a physical structure from the house as a social category I employ for the latter a capital H.

<sup>11</sup> For a more extensive overview of Palu'é society see Vischer (1993).

<sup>12</sup> These alliances (*tura caji*) go back several centuries and are founded on mutual assistance in warfare against the Portuguese and later the Dutch.

<sup>13</sup> In Palu'é thought the number five represents the notion of completeness.

<sup>14</sup> This prestation has recently been reduced to a nominal sum of money.

<sup>15</sup> The actual cutting is always carried out by members of two different Houses of the "sacrificing people". One House traditionally provides officiants who cut the animal at its shins (*pati witéné*) and another those who cut it at its throat (*pati pokéné*). Ideally the slashings alternate between throat and shins.

<sup>16</sup> During the Ko'a sacrifice of 1988 the thirty-eight Ko'a Houses of "child people" status effected an average of sixty individual exchanges. Fifteen of these were exchanges between groups of Houses of wife-givers and wife-takers and Houses of quasi-consanguineal status. Exchanges effected by each of the sixteen Houses of "father" people status averaged approximately twice that amount.

<sup>17</sup> Because the "purchasing people" are prohibited to eat their own sacrificial buffalo the two ceremonial courtyards each exchange a hind leg of their respective sacrificed animal. The head and neck of their own animal go to the "sacrificing people". Specific cuts of this animal are then divided between the Houses holding ceremonial offices and other parts are distributed to "child people" Houses.

<sup>18</sup> For a more extensive treatment of Palu'é alliance including alliances with outside groups see Vischer (1992).

<sup>19</sup> The position of Cua, the seventh of the "domains of water buffalo blood", is ambiguous. From the Ko'a point of view Cua used to be a traditional ally. However, during the last war between Nitu and Ko'a, Cua did not support Ko'a but appears to have sided with Nitu. It may well be that in this system of two times three allies the seventh domain maintains shifting loyalties.

<sup>20</sup> In recent years inter-domain warfare has been restrained by the establishment of a semi-permanently staffed police station on the east coast of Palu'é and by the installation of radio communications with the district capital on the mainland by means of which military support can be called in and deployed within two days. Following military intervention boundary disputes are usually referred to district courts.

<sup>21</sup> The subordinate position of a guest is a widespread phenomenon in eastern Indonesia and can be linked to the presence of the host's ancestors inside of his dwelling. In order to counteract this relation of inequality between host and guest and make him feel at ease the head of a Ko'a household will often be apologetic about his house and about the meal served and call his dwelling unworthy of the visitor and claim that his food is insufficient and of bad quality.

<sup>22</sup> The human ethnologist Eibl-Eibesfeldt refers to such behaviour as "rituals of friendly greeting" and observes that these always contain the combination of two antithetical elements, one of display and one of appeasement (1989:493-496). In Palu'é mock battles this element of appeasement is represented by women who partake in the conquest by throwing ceremonial rice kernels generally employed as ritual offerings. However, in the case of Ko'a this element is only on the surface an appeasing one. Some of these rice kernels are customarily mixed with a magical substance that is aimed at leading those who come into contact with it to commit acts of sexual transgression.

<sup>23</sup> Evidence of this can be found in nearly every domain that sacrifices water buffalo. Persons who have survived attacks as a consequence are often disabled and serve as living examples of the veracity of these admonitions.

<sup>24</sup> Of people who commit incest it is said that "their blood will rise and make their head swell up" (*laja tuka soko*) and this swelling will eventually lead to death. Incest among "father people", however, presents a special case because of their strong identification with the domain. A rising of their blood will also cause the "blood" running beneath the surface of the ground to rise and create a "swelling" at the "head" of the domain. The consequence of this "swelling" of the domain is that the "sea rises upwards and the mountain falls down into the sea" (*tai tuka reta ili pere lau*), i.e. a volcanic eruption, a landslide or an earthquake will ensue. In order to prevent this from happening ancestral law requires the incestuous couple to be buried alive head first in the ground at the top of the mountain and stabbed to death by means of digging sticks. By drenching the ground with their blood the "swelling" at the mountain top is released and disaster is averted.

<sup>25</sup> Only a few months previously I had the opportunity to implement a project for the construction of rainwater tanks in cooperation with the people of Ko'a. By the time of the sacrifice every second house in Ko'a had its own tank containing the water of the first rains. At the time Ko'a derived considerable prestige from having these tanks. Such a large amount of water had never been seen on Palu'é and in the past water for large ceremonies had had to be brought over from Flores and carried up the mountain

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in bamboo containers. Rainwater tanks had also been built in the domain of Awa that customarily supports Ko'a during a sacrifice and Awa was expected to express its gratitude by contributing substantially to the coming ceremonial events.