



## Bui Hangi – The Deity’s Human Wife

### Analysis of a Myth from Pura, Eastern Indonesia

Susanne Rodemeier

**Abstract.** – For the last 70 years Protestantism and governmental influence have been the main factors contributing to change in the Alor archipelago. Consequently people’s thinking and acting is today strongly influenced by Christianity, which makes a study of the suppressed local traditions difficult. When a myth was used as the main theme of a documentary film on that area, a quasi-experimental situation arose in which an in-depth observation of traditional beliefs and their conflict with Christianity became possible. The selected myth deals with one aspect of the traditional marriage rules that may put even a deity under obligation to help people. As such, it challenges the Christian way to approach and understand the sacred. [*myth, religion, tradition, acquiring nature, Alor-Archipelago, Java, Islam in Indonesia*].

**Susanne Rodemeier**, PhD (Leipzig University, 2006); the doctoral dissertation: “*Tutu kadire* in Pandai-Munaseli. Erzählen und Erinnern auf der vergessenen Insel Pantar (Ostindonesien).” – Until recently research assistant at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies at Passau University. So far her interests have focused on women’s traditional knowledge and on gender relations in the Alor archipelago as well as on the relation between religion (Christianity and Islam) and the local tradition. – Currently works as assistant at the Institute of Anthropology / Cluster of Excellence “Formation of normative orders” at Goethe-University Frankfurt, Germany. Her research concerns now Islam and everyday life on Java, Indonesia. – Online publication: “*Lego-lego* Platz und *naga*-Darstellung. Jenseitige Kräfte im Zentrum einer Quellenstudie über die ostindonesische Insel Alor” (master thesis).

Marcel Mauss (1990 [1950]: 169, 269) points out that deities are always of higher status than human beings. This is only possible because their gifts are of such a high value that people can never give back anything equivalent. David Hicks (2007: 39f.) upholds Mauss’ argument by pointing to the deities’ gifts which usually are life, fertility, and abundance.

Nevertheless, Hicks also identifies an important difference between his research results from Timor and Mauss’ more general considerations. The difference between Mauss and Hicks becomes relevant when Hicks analyzes narratives in which a divinity becomes dependent upon a human being. In the narratives Hicks collected, the divinity of highest rank in the realm of the world under the sea has a sickness which only a human being could cure, as it is the young man’s fishing hook which sticks in the deity’s cheek.<sup>1</sup>

When doing research in another area in eastern Indonesia, on the island of Pura (Alor archipelago),<sup>2</sup> I was able to collect a narrative which goes even further than Hicks’ narrative. On Pura a man was able to secure permanent commitment of a deity through a marriage alliance. The deity’s obligation guarantees that the man’s family and his descendants have a never-ending supply of water and food, i.e., of life and fertility. The observation of different ways of dealing with deities calls for an analysis of the symbolism of this narrative from Pura. This will be accomplished as the first step. Then I will continue my analysis by looking

1 A variety of this story from Timor is known in the village Alor Kecil on Alor Island. My knowledge of this very story triggered the narration of the story from nearby Pura, which I will analyze here. In both stories a red fish is of relevance, a detail which seems unknown on Timor. This is remarkable as otherwise the story from Alor Kecil shares many details with the one Hicks collected on Timor.

2 For one year, from June 1999 until May 2000, I conducted ethnological field research in the Alor-Pantar Archipelago.

at the situated storytelling. The following considerations include the way how people handle their local tradition while trying to adapt themselves to “new times.” When recording oral tradition in the Alor archipelago, I was told the story of a girl known as Bui Hangi – “Bui, the chicken.” It is the story of a girl from Pura who was married to the mountain-water deity (BI<sup>3</sup>: *dewa gunung – dewa air*). However, it is also recalled in other areas of the archipelago. This is especially remarkable if one bears in mind that starting in 1910<sup>4</sup> the Calvinist missionaries forbade any spirit worship, including material heirloom as well as oral tradition.

Thus, there are not many narratives left which people dare to recall and narrate to the local community. Particularly creation myths are rarely told. The same is true for historical and political myths, which are regarded as legal texts. Nevertheless, it is not only because of the Protestant missionaries that people hesitate to tell myths. They are also afraid of the magic power these narratives supposedly possess. It is believed that two things might happen while narrating. First of all, by listening people remember the old times. At the very moment, they become aware that similar events might take place again. This adds up to the somewhat frightening idea that a story’s protagonists might join the storytelling as invisible listeners. It is assumed that ancestors are very critical listeners. They might punish the storyteller or his closest relatives, if the story is told in a wrong way. Consequently, the biggest human desire is to control the world of the supernatural beings. Since full control cannot be gained, one can only follow some safety measures. One such measure, which is regarded particularly efficient, is to have the “owner” of a story tell it. The owner in this case is a male descendant of the story’s main protagonist, ideally the protagonist’s firstborn son of any generation.

The Bui Hangi story is one of the few remaining stories being still told without restrictions. Anyone can tell it in any situation without taking any preparatory measures. Fathers like to tell this story to their children as bed-time stories, or men narrate it to entertain women who are bored after doing

their daily work. Nevertheless, this narrative also has an “owner.” He is the most senior living male member of the Olangki family in the village Dolabang Atas (Upper Part of the Village on the Hill) on the island Pura. When I recorded the oratory, this very old man passed on his responsibility for the narrative onto his eldest son. The son was given the task to tell the story to me and a German film crew. Therefore, he became responsible not only for the story but also for anything which might be connected with his storytelling. Thus, he had to look after us, the visitors, while we made the documentary film on “his” story.

## Research

My idea was to make a documentary film on Pura, which was triggered by the Bui Hangi narrative. When I recorded the narrative for the first time in the year 2000, a schoolteacher (Selfius Lelangwulu) told me the story in Kalabahi, the archipelago’s capital. Some years later, I asked him to join me in making a documentary inspired by the story. As he himself originates from another village on Pura, he is not the “owner” of the story. Therefore, he preferred to accompany me to Menase Olangki in Dolabang. After Menase Olangki had told the story himself, he and the teacher wrote it down by using the local language, Bahasa Blagar, and finally the teacher translated it word by word into Indonesian. Only then, the teacher regarded it as the right moment for me to ask for permission to film the story. The permission was given and the three of us wrote the film script and determined the cast of actors. Two weeks later, the film crew arrived to put our plans into action.

After securing the permission to film the storytelling, we also planned to film a performance of some scenes mentioned in the story. The performance was to be filmed at locations where important events, being mentioned in the story, had taken place. At first, this was fully accepted, regardless of the fact that the idea to perform the story was felt to be a little strange, as there is no local tradition of dramatic performance. After some time it became obvious that the performance would bring up some problems which no one had expected beforehand. This probably had its reason in nightlong dances accompanied by songs when the old times were collectively remembered. The songs’ verses recalled certain ancestors as well as events which supposedly had taken place during the ancestors’ lifetime. By singing and dancing in a long queue forming a circle, the community felt strengthened

3 BI refers to Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of Indonesia, which is spoken as foreign language on Pura. The local language of the island is Bahasa Blagar, one of about nine Papuan languages of the Alor-Pantar Archipelago.

4 The majority of the archipelago’s inhabitants accepted Protestantism in the beginning of the 20th century. Much earlier, in the 16th century, a minority converted to Islam with the intention to avoid Portuguese Catholic mission. A further, very small group converted to Catholicism in the aftermath of 1965.

and reunited with their ancestors. – No one knew for sure whether a comparable unification might take place, too, when performing the narrative.

It was not surprising that our interest in the story, combined with our request to film it, brought up the discussion on how to handle this issue in accordance with *adat*. This was further complicated by my request to tell the story in the local language, Bahasa Blagar.<sup>5</sup> Storytelling in Blagar and not in the national language, in Indonesian, was regarded as a good idea, as it is only in the local language where important details can be told. There are many words and expressions which do not exist in Indonesian. Therefore, narrating in Indonesian always requires that one tells only the “big lines” (Bl: *garis besar*) of a story. Nevertheless, to use Bahasa Blagar in the situation of filming was regarded as strange, because we as foreigners did not understand much. Yet, we were able to secure the consensus. Our intention was to preserve the local tradition, and the local language, and to make both available for a national and international audience. As we were regarded as experts in “the modern world,” it was not only accepted but even expected that we made the rules on what and how the project should be carried on.<sup>6</sup>

This situation made it possible to observe many aspects of *adat*. Moreover, it made some church officials fear<sup>7</sup> that we foreigners might initiate a revival of ancestor worship; whereas the storyteller Olangki used our interest to emphasize that he follows the Christian demand to honor the family’s forefathers. Obviously enough, the differing interpretations of the same situation by the Church and *adat* brought a smoldering competition to the surface. An ongoing process became observable, the process of construing indigenous modernity (Schröter 2000: 463).

5 Bahasa Blagar, the Blagar language, is a non-Austronesian, unwritten language with approximately 5,000 speakers. It is spoken in most villages on the island Pura and in some villages on Pantar (cf. Kratochvíl 2007: xv).

6 The whole project was a success mainly because of our assistant Christina Malua-Lahal who lives in Kalabahi but originates from Malal on Pura. Of equal importance was Selfius Lelangwulu. He motivated Menase Olangki to cooperate with the film crew and then he translated the narrative from Bahasa Blagar into Indonesian. I would like to thank all of them, as well as Menase Olangki and his family for their help and hospitality.

7 Willemijn de Jong pointed out to me that this fact is remarkably different to the situation on the nearby island Flores. In this case Catholic priests cooperate with *adat*-leaders. This is especially the case in the Ende/Lio area in the centre of Flores. During seminars which are organized by the Church they discuss whether or how *adat* and Catholic religion might be compatible (per. correspondence).

Finally, in the year 2005 I had the opportunity to go back to Pura for further investigation into the meaning of motifs of the myth. When returning again in 2007, I showed the film to the actors. This performance was a disaster, due to the breakdown of the electricity supply for several times. Nevertheless, many people of Dolabang enjoyed watching themselves and their relatives on TV screen. Unfortunately, the storyteller Menase Olangki himself was not able to join the performance, since in his house the generator burned down all his electronic equipment. When we went to another village area where stable electricity supply was guaranteed for some hours, he did not join us either. Going there would require a present for the owner of the place, a relative of his wife. As he was not able or willing to fulfill the obligation, he preferred to stay at home. But even without watching the film, he was sure that in the recorded version his talk in Bahasa Blagar was mixed with many Indonesian words, which he did not like.

### The Myth on Bui Hangi

Once, during the yearly hunger season Olangki from Dolabang went to the village Reta, where he borrowed some rice. A year later he went to Reta again, to pay off his debt. On his way back home, he walked across the island, passing Gunung Maru. Somewhere, near the top of the mountain, Olangki ferret out a huge wild boar, which he tried to shoot with his bow and arrow, but never succeeded.

Because of running around in the heat of the day, Olangki became incredibly thirsty. This is why he asked the mountain deity for help. In order to do so, he pushed his arrow into the earth while saying: “If I get enough water to drink at the very moment and it will be enough for the fields also, I promise to give my daughter in exchange.” Unexpectedly, at the same moment water started to emerge out of the earth, clouds came, and heavy rain began. There Olangki understood that his mouth did say something wrong, and he hurried home.

Arriving at home, a huge landslide already became a threat for his home village. In order to ward off a disaster Olangki ordered his wife to bring their daughter Bui uphill the next day. This was regarded as their only chance to stop the all-devastating landslide. That very night, Olangki, his wife, and their daughter ate the last meal together. The next day, mother and daughter went uphill. The rain stopped wherever they were walking. As soon as they approximated the mountain pool, which lies in the plain of Gunung Maru, Bui pretended to see fire and smoke on the surrounding slopes. Her mother was astonished to hear this, since she could not see any fire. While she tried to find what Bui was pointing at, the girl disappeared in the nearby pool.

At the very same moment, the mother felt that she

had lost her daughter forever. So she sat down and sang a song of mourning. Before she could go back home, she needed a walking cane because of the wet path. Therefore, she took one of the bamboo sticks which suddenly were floating on the pool. At home, she pushed the stick underneath the housefloor and went to sleep.

The next morning, her husband recognized a sacred sword<sup>8</sup> being at the very same place where his wife had put the bamboo the evening before. Then Olangki understood that his last night's dream was true. He had dreamt that the wood, which was floating on the pool, was the bride-price of the mountain-water deity. Luckily, the mother had at least taken one stick. Overnight this stick had changed to a magic *klewang* whose owner could stab into the earth and fresh water ran or stopped just as he liked.

A year later the harvest ritual [BI: *makan baru*] was planned. Olangki asked his wife to go uphill and invite their daughter. Bui followed the invitation. She arrived together with her newborn baby, which she carried in a textile. Therefore no one could see it. Before she went off dancing, she hung the textile with the baby in her mother's house and instructed her not to look into the textile, even if the baby might cry.

While Bui was dancing, her mother felt asleep. Suddenly she woke up by a strange sound coming out of the textile. It sounded not like a baby but more like a fish, making *puk-puk-puk*. She was confused; looked inside the textile where she saw a big red fish with its tasteful eyes. Without further thinking, she removed an eye and ate it.

At the very same moment, Bui had a hurting feeling in her breast. She ran back to her mother's place, where she found the wounded fish. She was very angry, as her mother had seriously hurt her own grandchild. Now Bui could no longer stay with her parents and also could never visit them again. The relationship ended for good. Bui walked uphill to the border of Dolabang. There is a cave, Bitu Era, which she closed from the inside with a huge stone. Again, in a dream Bui explained the situation to her father and promised that all future generations of the Olangki family will never have to suffer hunger or thirst.

## Interpretation

The following interpretation of the myth mainly goes back to my research done during recording and filming the myth. The interpretation will focus on three subjects: (1) the credibility of the myth as it is seen by the local people; (2) the symbolism of the myth as far as the local people interpret it as explanation of the social order and as a guideline for

proper behavior; (3) my observation of the people's effort to deal with tradition (*adat*) without losing their reputation as good Christians.

### “Credibility” of the Myth

No one on Pura is in doubt that all details mentioned in the myth once existed or happened exactly in the way they are told today. This is mainly due to the fact that a well-known situation is described: the life-threatening lack of water as well as its equally dangerous abundance. Sufficient water supply is only guaranteed during rainy season, three or four months a year. Otherwise there is no permanent fresh water on the whole island. The only exception is the small pool in the caldera of Mount Maru – a 1,000 m high volcano – where water remains even during the dry months.

Today, people on Pura are not afraid anymore to die of thirst, as they know which plants store water permanently: the trunk of a certain banana tree as well as some segments of a certain bamboo. Recently, even this knowledge has lost its importance, as the island's lack of water has been ameliorated through the construction of several wells which the government helped to drill near the coast. In these wells water is available all year round, but often has a brackish taste.

The island's villages are all situated on the mountain slope near the sea. There is no settlement on top of the mountain. The people from Dolabang regard the caldera as an area where one goes hunting, and where only the people of the village Reta<sup>9</sup> have their fields. Here is the only area of the whole island where fertile soil and frequent rain guarantee a good harvest every year. This puts people from Reta in a special position of being the only ones who don't know any hunger season. Therefore, people from all over Pura know that it is possible to borrow food in Reta. In such a case, a man might have to leave a pawn for some time or even permanently. This had to be an item of very high value, such as a bronze kettledrum (*moko*),

<sup>8</sup> In many areas of the Alor-Pantar Archipelago a sacred sword is part of a clan's heritage. In Bahasa Blagar it is named *aring* and translated to Indonesian as *klewang*.

<sup>9</sup> Reta is the only village on the island Pura where people don't speak Bahasa Blagar. They speak Bahasa Reta. In their myths Reta people refer to their origin on the small island Ternate, which is located nearby also in the ocean's current between Alor and Pantar. According to Emilie Wellfelt, who did field research for her Master's Thesis on Ternate, on that island there are four villages where people speak Bahasa Reta and only one village where they speak Bahasa Alor (pers. correspondence with Emilie Wellfelt in May 2008; cf. language map by Kratochvíl 2007). Why and when people from Ternate moved to Pura still remains uncertain.

which is known in the region as the main part of a bride-price, or a girl – usually the man’s sister or one of his daughters. If the man is not able to pay back his debt during the following year, *moko* or sister/daughter becomes property of Reta people forever.

This is the background of the situation described in the myth. Enormously long dry seasons are given as the explanation for a man’s despair that brings him to the point to offer his daughter in exchange for food or water. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the mountain deity is identical with the water deity. This in fact is not surprising, if one looks at the terrain and its influence on rainfalls. When mountain and clouds merge, rainfall starts. At the very same moment water comes out of the earth and only then runs downhill in creeks. Obviously enough, water is imagined as coming out of the ground (not out of the sky!) on the top of the mountain. Only then it fills up rivers and clouds, before rain starts in the villages at the slope of Mount Maru. Therefore, in pre-Christian times, there was no doubt that it is the mountain deity who regulates water flow and initiates rainfall.

There is another aspect connected to the people’s notion on water and its origin. Drinking water and seawater are not regarded as being of the same origin. This distinction is also clearly expressed lexically. *Jar* (drinking water) originates in the mountain and is controlled by the mountain-water deity, sometimes becoming visible as a boar and his wife Bui Hangi. The seawater, *tang*, is inhabited and controlled by the deity *hari* (or *harimau*)<sup>10</sup> who might become visible in the shape of a shark. The personalization of water deities as well as their differentiation in one deity for drinking water and one for seawater is common knowledge on Pura.

This knowledge demands different behavior on the shore and on the mountaintop. The shore is regarded as part of the village where people (women as well as children) come to fetch freshwater. It is considered as a relatively safe area for human beings. The situation changes when one moves uphill. Bui Hangi and her invisible family supposedly live up there. The huge boar, which Olangki tried to hunt without success, is regarded as an incarnation of Bui’s husband. Their child, a red fish, is sometimes visible in the small mountain pool. Boar and fish symbolize both the mountain area, where only wild animals live, and the water, where fish live.

10 *Hari* (in most languages in the Alor-Pantar Archipelago) is the deity of the ocean. *Mau* is a honorific suffix to a person’s name. After conversion to Christianity it came in use as a family name.

Both realms – mountain and water – are guarded by the same deity. Only the ancestor of human beings, Bui Hangi, has a *mesbah*, a ritual dancing ground,<sup>11</sup> up there. The place is covered with rattan, which no one dares to harvest. There, as well as on a flat stone (BI: *batu pelat* which is regarded as an ancestor’s table) located near the small pool, human beings (not only Bui Hangi’s relatives) can offer a chicken and ask the deity for any kind of help.

All in all, the whole area is regarded as the realm of the deity and ancestors, a centre of supernatural power. Here it is possible to ask for help; but it is also expected that unconscious behavior might cause an uncontrollable or even dangerous situation for all people living on Pura. Therefore, whenever it is necessary to walk uphill, only men will leave the village’s precinct in this direction. Women might go there too, but have to be accompanied by a man. Sometimes, when going up to fetch wood or bamboo, women just walk up on their own, but then they behave as if they don’t know anything of a deity.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, when the rainy season is overdue, people see the reason of the lack of water in the fact that someone had stolen wood or bamboo in the realm of Bui Hangi. This transgression can only be corrected by making a sacrifice at Bui Hangi’s stone, at *Hangi Jar* (Blagar: chicken water) near the pool. Nowadays, people might be exempt from this obligation, as they often receive help from relatives who earn money in town or get governmental aid. People might also communicate with transcendental realms by praying in churches. Nevertheless, it is still possible to make a sacrifice in order to ask the mountain deity for rain or for stopping too heavy rainfall.

During the dry season people easily forget water’s destructive power. The Bui Hangi myth might be told as a remedy against forgetting. It helps to keep in mind that the village Dolabang was once almost destroyed by a landslide caused by heavy rain. This is also remembered in the village’s name: *dolabang* means “village on the hill” (*dol*: hill; *abang*: village). All these efforts preclude thoughtless human behavior, which, one day, might cause the need for another human sacrifice. Furthermore, people

11 It is remarkable that the place is associated with a woman. In pre-Christian times every clan had an own *mesbah* to perform ritual dances and make sacrifices. This place was situated in front of the clan’s main house, the *uma lopo*.

12 When I once wanted to walk uphill and pass Mount Maru, I was advised to talk only very normal things, never mentioning the realm of the deities. This behavior would guarantee that I did not get into trouble, since the supernatural beings would not make themselves visible in front of a “new face” (BI: *muka baru*).

seem to believe that their ancestor, Bui Hangi, is strong enough to influence her husband. Therefore, in case of anything concerning the island's water supply, people know that they have the opportunity to ask Bui Hangi for help by making a chicken sacrifice near the mountain pool. It is worth noting that Bui Hangi receives the offerings, although her husband is regarded as the one who has the power to regulate the island's water supply. Obviously enough, it is female power which makes a husband to follow her intention.

The behavior of the ancestors and deities is usually followed as an example for proper human behavior. Therefore, it makes sense to look for parallels between the myth and concrete situations in the husband/wife or male/female relationship. The myth is an example of absolute power a man might have. A father or husband can order his wife as well as his daughter to do whatever he likes and they have no right to disobey. Today, some girls do refuse anyhow by running off and, therefore, cutting the ties to their parents. Only after a girl has found a husband and has given birth to a child she might contact her family of origin again. If she did not do so, she would possibly have the same fate as Bui Hangi, whose father decided that she had to marry a deity. Also a man's wife cannot act independently from his will, just like Olangki's wife who had to be obedient when he ordered her to deliver their daughter to the deity. It is commonly agreed that a wife cannot oppose her husband's orders as soon as he paid the bride-price for her. From that time on, he owns her and she has to follow his will.<sup>13</sup> Divorce is only possible if her relatives are able to pay back the bride-price or the couple's children stay patrilocally with their father.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, some wives flee from their husbands before they give birth to the first child. In this case they have to leave the area and move to another island.

Another interesting observation is that on Pura only women have to fetch water. Women have to carry heavy water tanks for about 20 minutes from the coast up the steep hill to their homes. In the village of Dolabang the rule is followed quite strictly.

This is remarkable as in most other situations men and women share hard work. Only in this case, the custom requires that women walk and carry water. Men, on the other hand, don't walk but talk – sometimes in connection with an offering – to make sure that the well is always full of water.

The power of Bui Hangi and her supernatural husband is regarded as permanently present. This is still the case even after many generations and more than 70 years of Christianization. When we asked for permission to film on top of Mount Maru, it became very clear that the belief in the ancestors' and deities' existence is still present. To film uphill was not possible at all. The narrator was afraid that his daughter, the actress of Bui Hangi, might disappear in the lake, too. Yet, it was acceptable to film on the shore. Again it became obvious that a connection between mountain- and seawater was only of little importance. Perhaps it was even not realized at all.

### Symbolism of the Myth

Olangki's longing for drinking water made him dependent on the water deity. Therefore, after he had taken an oath, he was forced to fulfill his promise and deliver his daughter to the deity.<sup>15</sup> What happened then was that a girl was given away for the sake of her father and of the village. In the myth it is stressed that the girl was not given away just like that, but as a bride. Therefore, the night before her departure, her parents took a last meal with her and dressed her up in a way a bride is dressed. The next day, her mother led her uphill. This again was in accordance with the local marriage custom: the bride's female relatives<sup>16</sup> accompany her to the new virilocal place of residence at the groom's home.

Up to this point the narrative has obvious parallels to marriage rules, but it also shows patterns of slave trade, in which women and children were bartered for food and other goods. Olangki managed to borrow food from Reta without giving his daughter in exchange. But ironically enough, a short time after he had paid off his debt and was on his way home, he nevertheless traded his child

13 Nowadays, there are more and more girls disobeying the marriage obligation, as they don't want to become dependent on a husband who might drink alcohol, beat up his wife, and force her to sexual intercourse. This refusal is especially strong, as the girls know many examples of married women who have to accept their fate because divorce is not socially accepted.

14 The interpretation of divorce is different if a husband leaves his wife and children. This can set the wife free of her obligations and she might be allowed by her husband's relatives to go back to her parents or brothers and sisters.

15 In this case the narrator's words are of special importance: "Olangki's mouth said something wrong." This metonymical trope (the relation between the mouth and person) gives us the impression that Olangki cannot be judged for the words spoken by his mouth.

16 The group of female relatives (BI: *pihak perempuan*) is guided by the bride's mother's brother (BB: *pukong*) who next to her parents is the most important relative. His obligations are very similar to those of a godfather.

for something equally essential as food, for water. At this point the myth alludes to slavery and slave trade. Today this topic is regarded as something shameful, therefore, no one is willing to talk about it.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, this myth and some old women’s biographies<sup>18</sup> show that they were sold as young girls, regardless of any international condemnation of slavery.<sup>19</sup> I was able to conduct interviews with some women who remembered the time when they were still small enough to fit in a basket. Their brothers swapped them for food in a neighboring village where some of these girls later on were married and gave birth. In this case, obtained food was regarded as the bride-price. With or without marriage, most of these women, in fact, lost contact with their families of origin.

It is quite probable that men sold relatives into slavery only because they could not see any other way to secure the survival of their families. To avoid this embarrassing step forever, many villages established a mechanism to prevent it: a brotherhood relation (BI: *kakak-adik*) with areas in the Alor Archipelago and even the Solor Archipelago in the west of Pantar (Rodemeier 1995).<sup>20</sup> Brotherhood is a kind of relationship which guarantees mutual help whenever needed, without being under

the obligation to pay for this help. Therefore, whenever one partner is in need, anyone living in the partner’s area receives assistance without payment. This is true in relation to food as well as women. The exemption from the duty to pay a bride-price is effective for all members of the two communities. Therefore, the exchange of women between two brotherhood partners is regarded as preferred marriage alliance and, therefore, strengthens the relationship.

The obligation to pay a bride-price can be humiliating for the groom; at least if he is not able to pay at all or his offered payment is rejected. In these two cases he is forced to work for the bride’s patrilineage and live uxorilocally. The situation is somewhat different if a man is able to make a down payment. Then he, his wife, and their children are allowed to live virilocally at the groom’s place. Nevertheless, husband and wife as well as their children have to work for the bride’s parents and their eldest male son. Their entire profit has to remain with the bride’s patrilineage until the bride-price is paid.

Obviously enough, this latter situation is mentioned in the Bui Hangi myth. The divine husband paid his bride-price with bamboo sticks which were floating in the pool. Olangki learned in his dream to understand the meaning of the sticks. He felt very angry that his wife has taken only one stick. On the other hand, by doing so she unintentionally created the situation where parents reject a bride-price payment only accepting a down payment. Therefore, Bui Hangi had to move into the deity’s realm, but the relationship with her parents did not cease. Furthermore, the deity – being the groom – came under the obligation to work for his parents in law and help them whenever needed. The deity’s down payment was a sword whose magic powers solved the water problems of his human relatives.

These considerations are important mainly for two reasons. First, people regard the mere existence of a bride-price as confirmation that Bui left the human realm as a bride and not as a sacrificial victim for a deity. These reflections are in accordance with local explanations regarding this myth as a story of “normal” village problems and not as a story of pre-Christian times, when sacrifices had to be delivered to deities and ancestors. Also for

17 There are more topics, which people don’t like to discuss. Most of these topics are regarded as superstition, but it is accepted that they were part of the own forefathers’ beliefs. Therefore it is commonly accepted to discuss these topics, after stressing beforehand, that the talk is on a topic which had been relevant only in “prereligious” times, and that no one of the persons present believes in this anymore. In contrast to that any discussion stops immediately as soon as the conversation turns to slavery (BI: *budak*).

18 So far, I did collect those stories on Pura only. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that the same happened in other areas of the Alor Archipelago, too. Syarifuddin Gomang (2007) comes to a similar conclusion in his article on “stories behind poems.” He quotes a poem from the Belagar area on Pantar, where a sister is sold to some foreigners from Java or China. The poem even mentions the bride-price payment given by these foreigners. This makes it obvious that selling a girl was possible but only if the foreigner accepted to pay in accordance with the local marriage rules. He had to pay a *moko* (bronze kettledrum) and sometimes also a high value textile, usually a *patola* (textile from silk made in the double ikat technique). Gomang concludes, that “to exchange a daughter for a *moko* as described in the poem is both natural and ideal according to local custom. It becomes clear from this analysis that slave trade in eastern Indonesia in the past was facilitated by local custom” (2007: 577). It also makes clear why in the small town Gresik on the north coast of Java a *moko* factory produced these high valued goods especially for trade with Alor (Huyser 1931/32: 279; Kempers 1979: 8; Vatter 1932: 239).

19 The Dutch colonial government tried to enforce this rule by installing a permanent “resident” and a military officer on Alor in 1906 living in the village Alor Kecil.

20 The best-researched *kakak-adik* alliance is the one of five coastal areas known as “Galiyao Watang Lema” (Barnes 1982; Dietrich 1984; Fraassen 1976; Rodemeier 1995) who have a *kakak-adik* alliance with “Solor Watang Lema,” five coasts in the Solor Archipelago.

the narrator it was important to make clear that it was really a marriage which took place. Interestingly, looking at local marriage rules allows a further step in the interpretation: by (accidentally) accepting only a down payment of the bride-price, the deity became indebted to human beings like a groom whose payment is refused.

This is in contrast to David Hicks' (and Marcel Mauss') discussion mentioned above. Hicks states that people in East Timor do not have much influence on that "generating source of life [which] ... reside[s] in the domain of the spirit" (2007: 42). On Pura this lack of influence started to change when Olangki thoughtlessly swore an oath. By speaking and at the same moment driving the point of his arrow into the earth, he got into contact with the water deity. This might not yet be interpreted as "influence." Only when later the deity<sup>21</sup> became his son in law, the situation changed dramatically, because his daughter's husband did not pay the full bride-price. It does not matter that the bride-price was not demanded. The important point is that most of the offered gifts were rejected, thus, putting the groom – the water deity – into the degrading situation of being in debt to his human relatives. Therefore, from now on the deity was urged to serve human beings. The narrator stressed, that the deity still knows his obligations. Thus, the Olangki family never suffers hunger or thirst. It is most remarkable that the myth mentions the possibility to reject a gift. This is in contrast to Mauss' argument that any gift demands a return gift.

### To Contact a Deity

In the narrative it remains unclear whether father or the mother should receive the bride-price. According to the myth, the mother was the one who

received it. The only problem was that she did not understand the meaning of the floating woods and, therefore, took only one stick. Today the mother gets a part of the bride-price. Her part is regarded as an inexpensive compensation for the pain she suffered when giving birth to the bride.<sup>22</sup> In the myth it is not explained whether the stick she took was the expected payment. It is only mentioned that after the stick had been transformed into a sword overnight, her husband learned in a dream how to use the sword in order to regulate the family's water supply. Furthermore, the mother benefitted from the magic sword in the sense that she was exempted from the burden to fetch water from the well. This burden came back, however, since Christian missionaries demanded break with the local deities and destruction of all magic objects. The magic sword was thrown into the sea and the struggle for water started again. This affected mainly women and children who carry the heavy water buckets.

In the narrative some remarkable abilities are mentioned. In dreams man can communicate with the world of the supernatural. Olangki's dreams are considered being explanations or orders from deities to the living. In a dream, Olangki learned that the wood, which had been floating on the pool, actually had been the bride-price. The deity expressed astonishment on the refusal of the offered payment. Then, Olangki became aware of the magic power of the single stick which his wife had brought from the lake to the village. He learned that the stick was transformed into a sword overnight. This sword could be used to regulate the supply of water. Additionally, Olangki was informed that his and his wife's relationship to their daughter would not be terminated. They only had to invite her to upcoming rituals, and then she would return. This was proven true during the harvest ritual (*makan baru*) one year later. It was again Olangki's wife who had to walk up the hill and deliver the invitation.

Dreams are often considered to be messages from the ancestors. They can be interpreted as a warning, as an explanation of exceptional events, as an instruction on how to behave properly, or as a prediction of upcoming events. Anyone can have a dream but only some people of high position can understand its meaning, know what steps are to be taken, and give appropriate advice. Some dreams are of importance for the dreaming person only, whereas others are important for the whole com-

21 It seems useful to distinguish deities from ancestors in this case. It is well-known in eastern Indonesia that after some time dead people become ancestors and even deities like on Pura. Nevertheless, there are also some deities who have never been ancestors before. These deities existed before humankind came into existence. They even might have created men. Part of this pantheon is the creator of the world as well as the deities who are regarded as personification of the forces of nature or realms outside the sphere of human influence, i.e., the underworld under the surface of the ocean or inside the earth as well as the inhabitants of the sky. Ancestors can intermarry with those deities and, therefore, themselves become similar to deities but they are not the same. They become mediators between their human relatives and the deities. Because of intermarriage of ancestors and deities, an indirect influence on deities is regarded as being possible, too.

22 Nowadays, it should be a small gong (*batu pelat*) in compensation for the afterbirth; a *sarong* and a *kebaya* compensating the skirt and blouse which became dirty when giving birth; and a small amount of money.



munity. This is why any dream has to be told and discussed with others. If one tries to manipulate a dream for one’s own advantage, this may have disastrous consequences – which is especially true for dreams of warning, and even more so for dreams considered to be an explanation why the ancestors are angry or unsatisfied. As soon as such a dream is communicated for the first time, the explanation is taken seriously. The ancestors have to be told that the human beings did understand their message and are going to correct the cause of their discontent.

Most of the men have some other abilities. The most powerful one is the “hot mouth” (BI: *mulut panas*), i.e., everything he says comes true right away. This special power is mentioned in the myth when water immediately appeared as Olangki asked for it. Also promising the daughter to a supernatural being was not without consequences. His family and even the whole village got into trouble. So he became responsible for the whole community and, therefore, had no choice but to keep his promise. Many people in the Alor-Pantar Archipelago are afraid of their *mulut panas*. They often warn each other to be careful when talking. It might be dangerous for themselves as well as for others. Therefore, in order to settle a conflict, people tend to close their mouth and “just keep quiet” (BI: *diam saja*).<sup>23</sup> Many myths illustrate the potential consequences of not watching one’s words. The Bui Hangi narrative is one of the most drastic examples.

Words of a woman can be as dangerous as a man’s words. Nevertheless, men can handle women’s words in a way that makes them less dangerous than their own ones. This often happens during *adat* situations, when women’s presence is of importance. Even then women are expected to stay in the background and not engage in the dialogue. However, during a nightlong talk a woman has to speak, and then she might actually address a problematic or sensitive topic. Then the men have the option to ignore it, which is what they usually do with women’s chatter, but they can also pick up on it, and some time later offer and accept it as if it was their own idea.

Men often told me that women may act in ritual matters in the position of a man. This in fact happens only when no man is present to fulfill the traditional duties. Such situations might occur when the responsible man as well as his brothers and his male descendants have died or moved away from their home village. During the 20 years of my research

on the Alor-Pantar islands only once I experienced such situation.<sup>24</sup> Women are usually kept out of any ritual responsibility, at least when spirits or deities are involved.<sup>25</sup> The Bui Hangi narrative might give an explanation again, as it becomes obvious that communication with deities – at least for women – is not an easy task. Bui Hangi’s mother was not successful several times. She did not understand the deity’s signs. First, she did not recognize all the pieces of wood floating in the pool as the bride-price. Therefore, she ignored them and went home with one piece only. When this piece of wood became a sword, her husband did not risk any further miscommunication with the deity. It was only men who used the sword as a magic water tap.

Unfortunately Bui Hangi’s mother made another mistake when she broke her daughter’s taboo and looked at her grandchild. She made things even worse by eating her grandchild’s eye, the fisheye. Again, the mother’s wrong behavior had consequences. But they were not as serious as the wrong behavior of the father when he promised his daughter to the deity. The mother’s mistake put an end to the physical contact with the daughter, the water deity’s wife. Nevertheless, the local marriage rules were observed. The not yet fully paid bride-price led to the obligation of the divine couple to help the bride’s human parents whenever necessary. Therefore, even after Bui’s mother had injured her grandchild, Bui and her supernatural husband help the descendants of her parents with food and water forever. Only the process of Christianization led to a situation that “Kulturkreis” anthropologists would term “secondary primitivity.” The golden times ended for good when some man threw the magic sword into the currents of the sea. Now women have to carry the water again; and the recent, unusually long dry seasons forced people into dependence on governmental aid. The awareness of being dependent on outsiders might be the reason

<sup>23</sup> There are further examples on the consequences of “not speaking” (cf. Rodemeier 2006: 332; Kistler 2005: 104).

<sup>24</sup> It was a situation which for sure was regarded of minor importance. It came up in Kolana, East Alor, when I asked for permission to visit the old village. It is regarded as village of the ancestors, where already for many years no one lives permanently. At this place it is most likely that ancestors and visitors meet. During these intentional or unintentional encounters it is possible that something happens which might be of importance for the whole community. As foreigners don’t understand the signs of the invisible world, someone who might be able to read the signs has to control the situation. Therefore, before going to the old village I had to ask for permission. And after returning home I had to report to the old lady on anything what happened.

<sup>25</sup> To avoid these situations means that either rituals are postponed or men in town are forced to come to the village, at least temporary, to lead the ritual.

why the storyteller Olangki thinks of recovering the lost sword. He is sure that a fisherman of a village downstream found it and now stores it in his house without knowing its magic. During our talks Olangki was wondering whether he should let the present owner know of the swords supernatural power.

#### A Girl's Metamorphosis into a Supernatural Being

In the narrative, Bui Hangi initially was a girl with the name Bui. As soon as she became the wife of a deity, a second name was added, now being in accordance with ritual names consisting of two parts (Fox 1974, 1988).<sup>26</sup> Her second name was *hanggi*, which relates to a chicken as well as to a girl who is looking for a groom from "outside." A groom is regarded as coming from "outside," if his family did not have marriage relations to the girl's family so far. The story of Bui Hangi focuses on the girl and not on her boyfriend, at whose place the girl in fact lives, even before being married. The girl is regarded as playing the active part, and as such she causes events which on initiative of her boyfriend's father have to be settled during the ritualized negotiations with her father. She becomes a *hanggi* (chicken) who is "looking for a new nest without asking its owner [her father] for permission beforehand".<sup>27</sup> The second name of the ancestor Bui indicates that she, as a young girl, ran away from her family to marry a man from outside. Nevertheless, the name obscures the fact that the groom was not of her free choice. On the contrary, she had to follow her father's arrangement to rescue her family and the village from the landslide, which was caused by her father's uncautiousness. However, her husband came from the outside and, therefore, she is regarded as being a *hanggi*.

Bui Hangi did not disappear in the mountain pool at one go. In fact, she was transformed into a member of the supernatural world step by step. First, she acquired an ambiguous ontological status. She was still visible to her mother but at the same time she was able to see the world of the spirits, which is normally invisible for human beings.

Hence she noticed smoke of the slash-and-burn work done by people who have fields in the caldera of Mount Maru.<sup>28</sup> She tried to attract her mother's attention to what she has seen. But her mother could only see a forest where Bui recognized the traces of deities and spirits preparing their fields for planting – the work which has to be done during the extremely hot season of the year, in September and October.<sup>29</sup>

After Bui had disappeared into the water, she was invisible for a moment only. She was still able to meet her father in his dreams and give him advice. She could even physically meet her family during rituals. When she joined the yearly harvest ritual for the first time, she brought her supernatural relatives and her child with her. Her relatives are described as shadows that remained in the shade of trees. The humans sensed them more than that they could actually see them. Things were different with Bui's newborn baby that was carried in a baby sling. Because it was hidden, there was no proof that it really existed. When Bui's mother broke her daughter's taboo and looked at her grandchild, she got the final proof that Bui was really married. Her offspring being a fish,<sup>30</sup> it was evident that Bui was, in fact, married to the water deity to whom she had been promised. When Bui's mother looked at the spirit's baby, she did not only break the taboo, she also harmed the fish-baby by eating its eye. Because of her mistake, Bui had to carry out the final step in her metamorphosis into a full member of the supernatural world. Now she became invisible for human beings and would never visit them again.

The symbolism of a woman eating her grandchild's eye has to remain unexplained. It might only represent thoughtlessness. Or does it symbolize the glimpse into future, which gets lost after the eye was eaten? Nevertheless, it also might be a symbol for something that should take place after a marriage, whenever a woman shows her firstborn child to her parents. So far, I have never observed such a situation and my asking resulted in a very profane answer: the mother could not resist eating the

26 Nowadays, Christian and ritual names look similar after in the first half of the 20th century surnames had been invented. During this time, also the ancestor's name Olangki became a surname.

27 This case of a marriage arrangement is most interesting as it demands an elaborated way of speaking in order to make sure that the girl's father – her owner – does not feel humiliated by the groom's father – who has an extra chicken in his nest.

28 This part of the myth suggests that on top of Mount Maru there are different owners of fields: the people from Reta as well as deities and ancestors from Dolabang and other villages on Pura.

29 This is a further indicator to stress that the narrative took place in the way it is told. Extreme thirst only comes up during the hot time of the year when fields are prepared for the next planting season.

30 As this fish is still a baby, it has to be a "red fish," an *ikan merah* (BI). Would it be human, people would talk of a "red child," an *anak merah* (BI), because of the reddish skin of a newborn baby.

fish-eye because of its delicious taste. It is true that people love eating fish-eye; but then it has to be cooked. This is why guests who are served a meal always receive the fish-head. However, this custom notwithstanding, the lay actress who was playing Bui’s mother felt disgusted by the idea of eating the raw eye.

Bui Hangi totally withdrew from the visible world. Yet, the people in Dolabang believe that it is still possible to contact her, as it is believed that souls of people who die young violently, or after an extremely short sickness remain in the realm of the living (cf. Sell 1955). Therefore, they might interfere in the life of human beings anytime. This can be an advantage as it is possible to ask them for help by making a sacrifice and speaking out their names aloud and mentioning the reason why they are being called. The place where they died is considered as the place where one can contact them easily. The same is true for Bui Hangi. She is still around to guard the people but also her own belongings. Consequently, if someone takes wood or fruits from the mountain forest without asking Bui Hangi for permission, this might be sanctioned with a delayed rainy season. Only after the thief has made a sacrifice at Hangi Jar, to calm down the angry supernatural being, it will rain again. Besides, whenever needed, it is possible to ask Bui Hangi for help by offering a chicken by the mountain pool.

## Discussion

Menase Olangki told the Bui Hangi story to me and we started to make plans. Issues of casting and location were discussed. Added the government’s encouragement to revitalize *adat*, a situation was created that made possible a “thick description” (Geertz). Several dimensions of the importance of *adat* in a Christian community became observable. Olangki didn’t seem to be aware that his and the film team’s activities might revitalize the *adat*. Therefore, without any hesitation he proposed his daughter, who also carries the name Bui, as the actress for the character Bui Hangi. But then, the same night, he dreamt that during the recording the situation might change from narrating and performing a story into a repetition of history. He dreamt that his daughter might follow the ancestor and disappear as well in the mountain pool. His fear became even stronger when during the days of filming he was suffering from ongoing back pain. He interpreted the dream and the ache as a warning by supernatural powers. He feared that the spirits and deities might wake up because of our

talk, and that they might interfere in everyday life like they had done in pre-Christian times. At those times, the ancestors were not feared. But after spirit worship had been terminated, one is afraid of the ancestors’ being furious with the humans because of neglecting them for so long. Nevertheless, spirit worship might be revitalized as long as there are people who know how to “read” the signs from the invisible world. Furthermore, their reading also requires people who accept the interpretation of those signs, which might be recognized because of dreams, pain, sickness, or even sudden death.

The storyteller Menase Olangki has had constant back pain during the time we did the filming. This he considered as a warning from the supernatural beings. Like in all situations of warning, he felt somewhat insecure. There are different ways to handle such a feeling. In our case, first and for all, Christian prayers were spoken before and after the performance of certain scenes. The prayers were directed to God who is regarded as a being which is superior to the living people and exists next to the ancestors. For that reason, God has to be informed about anything that happens or that is decided. The same is true in “normal” life, where anyone in a higher position has to be informed about anything: plans, talks, events, and dreams. Therefore, any change in the village is accompanied by prayers which can take place at home or at church. Sometimes prayers even are spoken at places which are regarded as connected to the ancestors. At these places it is not God who is informed but the ancestors. To give an example, such prayer took place when I started my one-year research on Pura’s neighboring island Pantar. On Pura, however, during our filming it was considered more important to inform God of our project than to inform the ancestors. The ancestors were involved anyhow, which was known to Olangki because of his dream and the persistent pain. Nevertheless, as far as I know, he did not talk to the ancestors about the film project. This was only possible because we did not leave the village for the whole time. Christian prayers took place when we prepared the filming of Bui Hangi’s last meal with her parents. More prayers were spoken every evening after filming, when the film crew and the actors had a meal together at Olangki’s house. In these prayers it was always mentioned who was present, why these people came together, and why they were asking support.

Praying to God and speaking with a “hot mouth” are two practices with a similar background. Praying to God usually takes place at church, or at

home when taking a meal; but it can also happen at any other place. Only special situations require a pastor to say the prayer, and it is also possible to pray alone or in small groups. The same is true for *adat* situations. Yet, there seems to be a small but important difference concerning the addressee. The prayers to the ancestors are ideally spoken at the ritual place of the village or the one devoted to a certain ancestor,<sup>31</sup> or at the spot where house-protecting spirits supposedly stay. At these places a male descendant or a man in a high position should deliver the prayer.<sup>32</sup> In difference to Christian prayers, speaking to the ancestors is considered effective only if it is accompanied by an offering. However, any person has a “hot mouth”, and, therefore, it is most likely that anyone’s words will reach the ancestors. Only children’s words can be innocent and sometimes women’s words can remain unheard. This is only possible if the other people sitting around behave as if they did not hear anything. For saying (not doing) something wrong anyone fears the ancestor’s punishment.

Back in the pre-Christian days, people were not afraid of the ancestors, as they knew how to calm them down with offerings and promises. But Christianization forbade these offerings. Consequently, knowledge on how to handle the supernatural has faded away. What is left now is insecurity. Olangki’s fear was especially strong when we asked him for permission to do the recording at the places which were mentioned in the narrative. Obviously enough, these places are regarded as sacred and, therefore, when visiting them – with or without filming – certain taboos have to be respected. It is most important to speak at these places only when there is the intention to ask the ancestors for help. This might happen also nowadays; but it needs some preparation and an offering, and has to be done by a person who is able to understand the signs given from the invisible realm. Foreigners, including our film crew, are regarded as “new faces” (BI: *muka baru*) at the place and, therefore, they should avoid speaking to protect themselves against supernatural power. – All beings of the unseen realm, be it ancestors, spirits, or deities seem to be blind but not deaf. Therefore, being quiet is regarded as protection. – Alarmed by the dream and his pain Olangki did not want to risk anything.

31 This is usually the place where the ancestor once lived or died.

32 This might be because of his kin relation to the ancestor or because of his position as the eldest member of his clan or his family.

As he was the protector of all people staying in his house, he felt responsible also for the film crew. To protect all of us, he ordered to do the recording only inside the village.

Filming a narrative on oral tradition and its performance triggered discussions on the revitalization of tradition. The members of the film crew were regarded as Christians and also as coming from the famed Europe where, according to the local prejudice, ancestor worship does not exist anymore. We emphasized the worldwide uniqueness of the local tradition of Dolabang on Pura. We also stressed our interest in local traditions and the local language, both of which are considered to be of very little importance by the Church and government likewise. This made the people of Dolabang reflect upon some aspects of their identity, especially those which had been repressed by the Church and government for decades.<sup>33</sup>

Olangki wanted to make sure that he does not provoke conflicts in the village by telling myths and accepting to perform parts of the story for filming. Therefore, he often stressed that by telling and performing the story no spirit worship took place. Instead, he emphasized that his intention was to honor the forefathers by remembering their deeds. He tried to speak about the forefathers as if they were dead people with a story. He pretended that the ancestral status did not imply any spiritual dimension. Yet, he remembered situations which were interpreted as proofs that the ancestors, who had died violently and, therefore, were still staying in the immediate vicinity of the living, interfered with the life of the people. In pre-Christian times they had helped the living. Today they might be angry because of having been neglected for a long time. Nowadays, people are afraid of them, but in situations of serious crisis they still might ask them for help. The supposed proximity of the ancestors and their power was probably the main reason why the actors spoke very little when playing. They seemed to be afraid of slipping into an ancestor’s role and of shifting from their human identity into the identity of a supernatural being.<sup>34</sup> This most probably caused the insecurity, which became visible when we wanted to film the Bui Hangi narrative.

33 The Indonesian Government now encourages the people to honour their *adat* again. But there are no actions demanded. Therefore, only step by step people try what may happen when they do things which were forbidden during the last decades.

34 I don’t have any proof for that. Nevertheless, it harmonizes with Cora DuBois’ (1961) impression that people on Alor are afraid of falling in trance and of not finding their way back into the realm of the living.

Before the filming started, different people recounted the narrative to me. It was only when filming and performing made the situation of narrating more complex that the “owner” of the narrative had to handle our demands. He was the one who was considered to be able to understand warnings from the world of the ancestors, in his case dreams and constant pain. And he was the one who knew which behavior was appropriate for protecting his family and also his guests.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the myth of Bui Hangi as well as the analysis of the somewhat unusual research situation during filming a documentary brought up several remarkable results. First of all, contrary to Marcel Mauss, the main theme of the myth is the possibility to influence nature, whose elements are imagined as deities. The deity becomes subject to human marriage rules when a human sacrifice is interpreted as the beginning of a marriage alliance between a deity and human beings. This alliance forces the deity to accept the local system of rules. Concerning the humans, this system includes the possibility to refuse an offered gift, i.e., the bride-price. Refusing a gift is a quite unusual habit in a community whose economy is based on exchange (cf. Mauss). Nevertheless, now again in accordance with Mauss, as long as the return-gift is not yet delivered (or accepted), the debtor has to demonstrate that he knows of his debt. Therefore, he constantly has to deliver gifts of little value. Because of that the male water deity cares for the descendants of his human wife by guaranteeing sufficient food and water supply forever.

Myth interpretation leads to a deeper understanding of a local culture. Furthermore, I was able to show that the situation of filming as well as its preparation and the accompanying discussions might be regarded as an exceptional fruitful research method in anthropology. My research on Pura was made possible because of different reasons: local people and foreigners shared a project, and, therefore, worked together on its realization. Furthermore, filming a myth was regarded as a very serious and interesting project by all participants. The myth became the script for the performance and was the topic of many discussions during the time of filming. The situation was comparable with Geertz’ research on the Balinese cockfight. In both cases the “deep play” offered special insight into the local culture and made a “thick description” possible. The cockfight as well as the performance

of the myth took place during a quite short time with high intensity of emotions of many members of the local community. The situation was seen as being very serious. This could happen because everyone knew the myth and regarded the story as a truth which might affect everyday’s and any person’s life. Therefore, many members of the community felt involved in the film project. Thus, an excellent research situation was provoked by making a myth the focus of everyday life during our work on this project, i.e., for about two weeks. It made the in-depth analysis of this article possible.

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