



## Feeding Gods, Feeding Guests

### Sacrifice and Hospitality among the Gadaba of Highland Orissa (India)

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**Abstract.** – The study of food in Indian tribal societies merits more attention than it has received. The example given here concerns the Gadaba of Highland Orissa (India), and particularly two contexts are compared: sacrifice and hospitality. Sacrificial commensality during annual festivals stresses agnatic relationships, unchanging hierarchical group relations, and strictly prescribes social action. Hospitality, by contrast, mainly involves affinal relations and highlights equivalence while also expressing temporary status difference. The hospitality situation leaves room for idiosyncratic behaviour and rivalry that are expressed in competitive feasting and force feeding. Hospitality also entails the notion of “shame” that is absent in sacrificial contexts. [*India, scheduled tribes, Gadaba, food, sacrifice, hospitality*]

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They stopped completely [with these sacrifices]. That is the reason why the earth goddess (dorti mata) got a little angry and, therefore, all over the world the new diseases come up, you understand? She does not receive sufficient blood ... Therefore we do have the many new diseases ..., the earth goddess is sad, the blood is not sufficient for her and the new diseases come up ... If you do not provide food for her, she gets angry, or not? Now, I drink liquor, eat meat, fine. When someone invites me and offers liquor but no meat,

wouldn't I be a little sad, a little angry? I wouldn't tell you, but I would be a little angry, wouldn't I?

Food continues to be a central concern for anthropologists working in India. Throughout the various shifts in research themes and theoretical perspectives food always offered a key to the crucial mechanisms, meanings, and cleavages of Indian society and culture. However, rather than to speak of “Indian” we should say “Hindu,” since the overwhelming majority of contributions refers to this socio-religious context.<sup>1</sup> Considering the “minority” of tribal<sup>2</sup> populations numbers about 100 million people, we have to admit that we know distressingly little about the cultural relevance of food in these societies.

1 Some of the main contributions are Babb (1970), Dumont (1970), Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (1977), Khare (1976a, 1976b, [ed.] 1992), Khare and Rao (1986), Marriott (1968, 1976), Mayer (1960, 1997), Osella and Osella (2008), Parry (1985), Saunders (2007), Strümpell (2008), Toomey (1994). For an overview of the literature, see Berger (forthcoming).

2 The terms “tribe” and “tribal” are contested in the discipline in general and within India, or more generally South Asia, some scholars (e.g., van Schendel and Bal 2002) would prefer not to use them or only within inverted commas. However, the notion of “tribe” or an equivalent like *adivasi* is a social and political reality in India today. More importantly, beyond the administrative classification of “Scheduled Tribes,” the communities in question display social patterns and values that are markedly different from – though certainly not unrelated to – the basically Hindu cultures of the plains. Therefore, I shall refer to tribes or tribal society here without inverted commas or further discussion (cf. Carrin and Tams-Lyche 2008; Hardenberg 2010; Parkin 1992; Pfeffer 1997).

If we look at central India, for example, food is mentioned here and there in old as well as recent ethnographic contributions to the region,<sup>3</sup> but hardly anywhere it is itself the focus of attention.<sup>4</sup> This negligence is academically unjustified. Admittedly, tribal societies did not develop “cuisines” comparable to what we find in many regions in Hindu India; their food appears to be very simple. But as Mary Douglas (1977: 1) has argued, there is not necessarily a correspondence between the development of “gastronomic arts” and the density of cultural meanings for food. In the case that I will discuss here, the food, in fact, is prepared in a simple way, with few ingredients. Innovation and artistry in culinary concerns is neither displayed nor valued. The social significance of food, however, can hardly be overestimated.

The general division in anthropology between systemic and actor-centred perspectives that can be traced back to the founding fathers of the discipline, such as Durkheim and Malinowski (cf. Kuper 1992), is much in evidence in studies on food. Many scholars, especially in the 1970s, followed Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas in “deciphering” (Douglas 1975) the – mostly latent – meanings of food. Others were more interested in what individuals actually “do” with food and stressed agency and strategy (e.g., Appadurai 1981). In the present case the focus will be less on nouns such as “food” and more on verbs indicating alimentary processes or actions; thus feeding rather than food. The title of my monograph, rendered into English as “Feeding, Sharing, and Devouring,” is also an evidence of this focus.

However, the fact that I am talking about alimentary processes and actions does not necessarily imply a stress on what is commonly understood by agency; i.e., the strategic freedom and the power of action of an individual in a particular cultural setting. Rather, feeding, sharing, and devouring are, although dynamic, the main aspects of an encompassing ritual structure of that particular society. These terms have several referents. They indicate ritual domains, specific types of relationships as well as values. I will be referring to two of the processes here, namely feeding and sharing, and shall leave out the third, devouring, which relates to the domain of illness and healing.

Although feeding and sharing are, as actions, part of a ritual system that leaves relatively little room for agency, the strategic manoeuvres of actors (individuals or groups) have their place in specific

contexts. Therefore I distinguish and contrast two contexts in this article in which alimentary actions are crucial but have different implications: sacrifice and hospitality.

The prefixed quotation is from a Gadaba man who was already considered relatively old by Gadaba standards, maybe forty-five years of age, when we had this conversation ten years ago. He had a say in all public affairs in the village and is still referred to as *memor* (ward member), although it has been years since he held this position in which he represented the village in the local *panchayat*. Here he comments on the fact that a certain communal cattle sacrifice (*urukuda biru*, Berger 2007a: 368) held in the rainy season had been discontinued in his village for many years already. It was not one of the major village sacrifices and plenty of other sacrifices are currently performed in his village, including ones for the earth deity. However, in the dramatic tone that is typical for this man, he mentions some crucial aspects I want to develop here.<sup>5</sup>

It is evident from his comments above – and I will provide more evidence below – that alimentary actions involving meat, blood, and liquor, more generally food, both express and constitute social relationships. The “illness” referred to is the consequence of precarious relationships, of relationships that have gone wrong. Illness, in the words of Piers Vitebsky, is a “reminder of a relationship” (1993: 89). Bad relationships between humans expressed in terms of “sadness” (*duk*) or “anger” (*risa*) may lead to noncooperation or even misfortune caused by sorcery. Bad relationships between humans and deities, however, are sure to prove fatal. The word commonly used in this context is *bipod*, which refers to disaster including illness, death, infertility, hunger, or madness. Transactions of meat, blood, rice, liquor, and beer are the most crucial mechanisms for keeping things “good and even” (*bol so-man*), the opposite of *bipod*.

Birsa Sisa (all personal names are pseudonyms), the Gadaba I have quoted above, stressed the similarity between sacrifice and hospitality: if you do not give meat and blood to the gods, they will be angry; if you invite me for a meal and you do not provide meat, I will be angry. The two contexts certainly have a lot in common, and hospitality frequently follows sacrifice in a single ritual process. However, in this article I will argue instead that sacrifice and hospitality also have contrasting features. The sacri-

3 E.g., Elwin (1950), Hardenberg (2005), and Vitebsky (1993).

4 The exceptions to the rule are Walker (1992) and Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (1975).

5 Research was conducted in southern Orissa for 22 months between 1999 and 2003 and was financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Fazit Foundation. Recent research was conducted for two months in 2010 supported by the University of Groningen.

ficial consumption of meat transforms relationships or reconstitutes clear-cut relationships of seniority and leaves very little room for competition between actors or the articulation of tension. Hospitality, by contrast, is at times very competitive, ambiguous, and a question of potential “shame” (*laj kota*). While relationships between hosts and guests formally stress equality and balanced reciprocity, hospitality gives the host the opportunity to boast and to subjugate the guests by feeding them. The atmosphere of hospitality situations is mostly enthusiastically friendly. At times, however, it may entail a certain antagonism.

In the following, I will first briefly introduce some features of Gadaba society and then deal with food in the context of sacrifice. In particular, I will highlight the meanings and implications of the sacrificial food known as *tsoru*, which is of the utmost social relevance. I will describe the sacrificial process and the hierarchy it entails. I will distinguish between two types of *tsoru* consumption: feeding *tsoru* to people versus sharing it. Subsequently the focus will be on hospitality and I will highlight, on the one hand, how status equivalence is ritually established and, on the other, how it is challenged through the enforced consumption of food. Before summarizing the argument in the conclusion, I will emphasise some main features of an extreme form of hospitality, namely feasts.

### The Gadaba of Highland Orissa

The Gadaba are a section of the indigenous Desia population, literally “people of the land,” who inhabit the Koraput plateau of south Orissa, which lies about 900 meters above sea level.<sup>6</sup> All Desia, although heterogeneous in many other ways, share a *lingua franca* of the same name that belongs to the Indo-European family. They further employ the same set of totemic exogamous descent categories

(*bonso*) that divide the social cosmos from the perspective of any particular group into “brothers” (*bai*) and “others” (*bondu*), who are potential affines. This social classification thus cuts across the ethnic boundaries.

This article deals with the Gutob or Boro Gadaba. Gutob, probably meaning “creature of the earth” (Griffiths 2008: 675), simultaneously signifies the ethnic unit and its particular language (of the Austro-Asiatic language family), but the people are commonly referred to as Gadaba in the literature and by Indian officials, and the word is also used by the people themselves. The second designation of “Boro” Gadaba refers to the seniority of this social segment vis-à-vis its junior part, the Sano or Ollar Gadaba. *Sano* literally means “junior” (or “small”), while Ollar again refers to the specific language of this particular community, i.e., Ollari (belonging to the Dravidian family). This pairing of social segments in terms of relative seniority is extremely widespread in Middle Indian societies, as has been demonstrated by Pfeffer (1997).

There are around 15,000–20,000 (Rajan and Rajan 2001: 9) Gadaba who speak Gutob, while those who speak Ollari are more numerous. Other immediate neighbours are the Joria, Parenga, Bondo, and Didayi, each to be found only in a certain area and most of them speak, in addition to the ubiquitous Desia, a language of their own. All are cultivators and classified as “Scheduled Tribes” by the government. Other inhabitants of the Koraput plateau only speak Desia and are dispersed over the region. They are associated with particular occupations that do not generally include cultivation (Berger 2002). For example, the Dombo, found in some numbers in almost every village, are musicians, weavers, and petty traders; the Sundi are distillers; the Mali gardeners; the Kumar potters; and the Kamar blacksmiths. The Dombo are registered as “Scheduled Castes” and the others as “Other Backward Classes” by the government.

A crucial unit in all respects is the village (*ga, ungom*<sup>7</sup>). The descent categories mentioned above materialise on the ground in the form of villages. The Boro Gadaba use four categories (cobra, tiger, sun, and monkey) of the set of eight that are found in the region (in addition fish, cow, bear, and vulture). Each original village is occupied by a majority that belongs to one descent category, e.g., cobra, and who are regarded as earth people (*matia*). Each of these original villages has a Gutob name of its own and a specific identity that derives from a com-

6 The ethnography of the Gadaba began with a contribution by von Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) on “megalithic rituals.” The few ethnographers after him were also mainly interested in the “secondary burial” of the Gadaba called *go’ter* (Izikowitz 1969; Pfeffer 1991, 2001). Among the ethnographers of the region only Pfeffer had a sustained interest in the Gadaba and also published an article on their relationship terminology (1999). Noteworthy is also a contribution by Mohanti (1973/74) on “bond-friendship.” Some useful information can also be found in a contribution by the Anthropological Survey of India on the Ollar Gadaba (Thusu and Jha 1972), a development “handbook” (Nayak et al. 1996) as well as in an account by a trained biologist (Kornel 1999). My monograph (Berger 2007a) on the Gadaba presents the first comprehensive description and analysis of their society and religion.

7 Gutob words are marked with “\*”; all other indigenous terms are Desia.

bination of sacrificial commensality (which I will discuss below), village territory, and totemic descent category. I call this feature of the social structure “village clan” (Berger 2007a: 104 f.; 2009). Any village is inhabited by a core group of agnates, who have “brothers” of the same clan in different villages, as well as affines in yet others. Women usually leave the village for marriage. However, in every original village there are also small groups of internal affines of the earth people, as will be seen in the examples given below. Alongside the earth people there are thus different kinds of “latecomers” (*upria*), Gadaba as well as other social categories mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

The Gadaba<sup>8</sup> use ploughs in their wet paddy fields, which they construct into the riverbeds and in the dry fields on the gentle slopes of the hills where they grow rice, millet, and oil seed. They keep chickens, pigs, goats, sheep, cattle, and water buffalo as domestic animals and use all of these animals as sacrificial victims in various ritual contexts. The Gadaba do generally consume beef. However, by now most of the young Gadaba have discontinued this dietary practice because they visit Hindu temples and they have been trained in their primary school education to believe that beefeating is incompatible with learning. A point I want to stress is that although this article frequently mentions meat consumption, it would be misleading to assume that Gadaba consume a lot of meat in their everyday life. In fact, compared to most Europeans and middle-class Indians, the Gadaba eat very little meat.

## Sacrifice

Much of the ritual activity in and between Gadaba villages centres on a type of sacrificial food called *tsoru* or *go'yang*\*. The cultural significance of this food can hardly be overemphasised. The division of Gadaba society as it exists today is said to be the result of a primordial sacrifice, when the cooked sacrificial food was only sufficient for twelve within a group of brothers who had just come to the area where the Gadaba have lived ever since. Today these Twelve Brothers take the form of twelve villages and represent the most encompassing level of *tsoru* commensality. Ideally, the Twelve Brothers should assemble, sacrifice, cook, and share *tsoru* when *niam* – “tradition” or “law” – is at stake, as in the case of marriages. Empirically, the Twelve Brothers only rarely act as a group. However, they are con-

stantly evoked as a category in invocations when reference is made to Gadaba society as a whole.

*Tsoru* is always part of a sacrificial process which introduces a hierarchy in terms of seniority. Animals are usually killed by severing the head from the body and this creates a hierarchical division between two types of meat, two types of food, and two types of consumers of the food. *Tsoru* is also referred to as “head meat” (*munso manso*, *bob cheli*\*), because it consists of the animal’s head eaten together with rice, blood, and liver. This food is only eaten by an “in-group”, which varies according to context, that is regarded as “senior” (*boro*, *moro*\*). The complementary category of food is called *lakka*\* or “body meat” (*gonso manso*, *gonso cheli*\*), as it consists of the meat of the body. Those who consume *lakka*\* are signified as “junior” (*sano*, *me'en*\*) in this specific context. While *tsoru* consumption generally is strictly regulated, *lakka*\* food can be shared within a wider social radius. Furthermore, in contrast to *tsoru*, *lakka*\* food can be eaten at a different place: it can be cooked first and distributed as so-called “walking rice” (*bulani bat*, *alal lai*\*) or it can be distributed raw. While *tsoru* commensality is strictly prescribed in terms of group membership, commensals of *lakka*\* food may, to a certain extent, belong to different groups. I will provide a concrete example below.

## Feeding Sacrificial Food

Two types of *tsoru* consumption may be distinguished: *tsoru* is fed to others and *tsoru* is shared. I will first describe some important aspects of *tsoru* feeding. In the context of life-cycle rituals such as name-giving, marriage, and death, *tsoru* is fed to the persons undergoing the transformation (cf. Berger 2007b). In other words, the transformation is actually brought about by feeding *tsoru* to the baby, the bride and groom, or the dead. It could be said that relationships are added to and subtracted from a person by feeding him or her.

Different kinds of social categories feed *tsoru* to others, but the most important category is the mother’s brother of the person involved and his or her *tsorubai*. *Tsorubai* literally means “sacrificial-food-brothers” and signifies a permanent relationship between two local groups of the same *bonso* or descent category (i.e., brothers) who reciprocally sacrifice, cook, and feed *tsoru* to each other on various occasions, particularly during marriage and death. By way of metonymy these *tsorubai* also represent the Twelve Brothers, i.e., Gadaba society conceived as an agnatic whole. During the two-day wedding cer-

<sup>8</sup> When speaking of Gadaba in the following, I am referring to the Boro/Gutob Gadaba.



emony the bride and groom are fed *tsoru* by different relatives: the agnatic village community of the groom (called the “four brothers”, *chari bai*), the couple’s maternal uncles, the father of the bride (if he is not the same person as the groom’s maternal uncle), and most importantly by the Twelve Brothers (mostly represented by the *tsorubai*).<sup>9</sup> By feeding *tsoru* to the bride and groom, these agents are also feeding them the quality of a particular relationship. Each person who feeds the marital pair cooks *tsoru* on a separate fire and then feeds it to the bride and groom. Although the food prepared by the *tsorubai* and the maternal uncle consists of the same ingredients, it is nevertheless not the same.

These feeding processes transform the bride and groom into husband and wife and further into ritually complete persons. This is most conspicuous in the case of the groom, who now is eligible to share *tsoru* at the collective shrines of the village from which women are excluded. An informant summarised the effect of *tsoru* in the context of marriage in the following way:

The Twelve Brothers ... perform the ritual and feed them [bride and groom] the rice from one plate; this *tsoru* has been fulfilled. No matter to which shrine (*maphru gor*, “god-house”) he goes, he can eat the rice: He will eat the head meat.

However, the woman also has a new ritual status and all married men of her husband’s group now accept *tsoru* cooked by her.

### Sharing Sacrificial Food

This leads me to the second form of *tsoru* consumption, which is sharing. As I have just indicated, the feeding process of the life cycle “produces” ritually complete males who are then full participants in the context of *tsoru* sharing. In the realm of life-cycle rituals, such as the wedding mentioned above, sharing *tsoru* also frequently follows feeding it to specific persons. However, most pronounced are the contexts of sharing during festivals of the annual cycle when local agnatic groups share *tsoru* with the various deities of their village. In these contexts, the emphasis is not on the notion of the transformation

<sup>9</sup> The *tsoru* for the Twelve Brothers is governed by strict rules and only married men of the same clan (*bonso*) may share it. If anyone who is not eligible to eat it participates in *tsoru* communion, he will lose his Gadaba status and has to “buy back” his membership (*jati kiniba*) by giving a feast and being fed *tsoru* by his own *tsorubai*, who thereby “restore *niam*” (*niam korbar*).

of ritual status but on confirming and reproducing the relationships between the deities, “their” people, and the territory, as well as between the different groups of the village. The expression of seniority in terms of head meat versus body meat or *tsoru* v. *lakka*\* is more prominent here than in the feeding situations of the life cycle. To provide a concrete example I will briefly summarise the proceedings I observed in three successive years (1999–2001) at one of the most “senior” village shrines during the most important festival of the annual cycle: the one in the month of April (*chait porbo*).

The sacrifice takes place outside the immediate village boundaries at a shrine called *pat kanda*. This shrine is associated with the supreme Sun-Moon deity and is complementary to the shrine of the Earth deity in the village centre. As with all collective sacrifices, two Gadaba men lead the proceedings: the village sacrificer (*pujari*) and his junior partner, the sacrificial cook (*randari*). Both belong to the dominant group of earth people (*matia*), whose distant ancestors founded the village and contrasts with the latecomers (*upria*).

A cock and a goat are sacrificed for *pat kanda* by the sacrificer and the cook, and the severed heads of the animals are immediately placed in front of the stone representing the deity. The “life” (*jibon*) is the first gift. The cook then prepares a small amount of *tsoru* from a piece of the gullet, some blood, and parts of the liver. When everything is ready, all the Gadaba present offer food to the deity. Only then are the heads removed and “head meat” or *tsoru* prepared for those men among the earth people who are ritually married and have fasted during the day. While the cook prepares the *tsoru* in the immediate vicinity of the shrine, the body of the goat is dragged some fifteen metres away. First the neck (*gala*) is cut off and given to the internal affines of the earth people residing in the village. They start preparing it a little further away from the shrine than the latter. The rest of the body is cut up according to the different categories of meat and distributed equally into more than a hundred portions for all households of the village who contributed to the sacrifice, i.e., generally every household. The shares of body meat are spread out on leaves on the ground and are distributed in a way that resembles an imaginary walk through the village; each household is mentioned and a male representative then takes away his share and cooks it as *lakka*\* food together with his local group (*kuda*) on fires just outside the village boundary – a couple of hundred metres away from the shrine.

Thus, we have the following commensal pattern in the context of the *pat kanda* sacrifice: the



**Fig. 1:** The village sacrificer and the village cook are the first to eat *tsoru* next to the *pat kanda* shrine (© Berger 1999)

earth people start eating head meat or *tsoru* first, beside the shrine. Then the affines start consuming the neck of the animal some meters away. Significantly, their food is also referred to as “junior” *tsoru* (*sano tsoru*) in contrast to the “senior” *tsoru* of the earth people, although seen from the sacrificial logic this has to be regarded as a euphemism (because it is not cooked in a new earthenware pot and does not contain blood or the liver). Finally, the third and most heterogeneous group of *lakka*\* consumers commence eating body meat sitting furthest away from the shrine. This group consists of unmarried earth people or those who did not bother to fast during the day and other non-Gadaba groups of the village, such as the weavers (Dombo), the blacksmith (Kamar), and the herdsmen (Goudo).

In principle, each local group (*kuda*) should jointly cook and eat *lakka*\* food together. In practice, I observed considerable variation, which the people did not regard as a violation. Some Gadaba belonging to the earth people shared their food with their affines and some Gadaba of the affinal (latecomer) groups shared theirs with the blacksmith (who is married to a Gadaba woman). The criteria of commensality here was obviously spatial proximity of houses, i.e., belonging to the same neighbourhood (*sai*). However, there are clear limits to trans-group commensality. No Gadaba would share his *lakka*\* food (or any food) with the Dombo because of their junior status. Conflicts represent another source of variation in the commensality patterns. There are two local Dombo groups in the village and in one year commensality of *lakka*\* food actually complied with this division. In another

year, however, due to internal conflicts the Dombo split into five commensal groups and the quarrelling parties used separate fires. In contrast to these variations of *lakka*\* consumption I observed absolutely no variations of *tsoru* commensality. No matter what the personal relationships were, and they were strained between many households, all earth people shared the food cooked on one fire by the sacrificial cook of the village.

To summarise the main aspects of the usage of meat in relation to sacrifice and *tsoru*: the division of the sacrificial animal and the resulting opposition of head meat versus body meat signifies the seniority of the earth people of the village vis-à-vis all others and actually reconstitutes this ritual superiority and the earth people’s closeness to their deities. In the context of the *pat kanda* sacrifice, the earth people constitute on one level a contrasting group to that of their internal affines, who consume the intermediate portion of the sacrificial victim, the neck, as “junior” *tsoru* in the vicinity of the shrine, but who are spatially further removed from it than the earth people. On another level, however, all Gadaba are united in eating “*tsoru*” (senior or junior) near the place of sacrifice and they are senior to all the non-Gadaba groups of the village who consume *lakka*\* food at some distance from the shrine. The social structure of the village is thus reflected and reproduced in the prescribed way in which the sacrificial food is consumed, which leaves very little room for variation or agency.

However, there are differences in how strictly the rules are applied. On the one hand, the rules that apply in principle to *tsoru* consumption are not ob-

served in practice at every shrine to the same extent. In some sacrificial contexts of lesser importance, for example, people do not bother much about the marital status of the participants or about fasting. On the other hand, there is an important difference between *tsoru* and *lakka*\* food when it comes to how much variation is permitted in observing the rules. Only particular people share *tsoru* and the state of their actual interpersonal or intergroup relationships is irrelevant. They may love or hate each other, but they share *tsoru* in only one way and there is no room for variation. The only option is that some men do not show up at all. By contrast, there is much more room for idiosyncratic behaviour on the level of *lakka*\* consumption. General commensal barriers, such as those between weavers and Gadaba, are upheld, but people can choose their commensals more freely and other considerations such as neighbourhood may become relevant. Furthermore, people can use the commensal setting to express internal conflicts<sup>10</sup> and the distribution of body meat itself may lead to quarrels and individual tricks.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the fact that there is an intermediate category of meat in the particular sacrifice for *pat kanda* that is not found in other contexts is evidence of the fact that the sacrificial scheme of *tsoru* consumption can also be transformed or extended to convey particular messages. However, the sacrificial pattern of head, neck, and body seems to be a relatively stable and prescribed exception to the usual two-fold head/body division, because it has remained unchanged for years.

## Hospitality

If someone is invited to someone else's house, he or she is "called" (*dakiba*) to the house of the host. In Birsa Sisa's remark quoted at the beginning, it is apparent that a guest has certain expectations. The guest (*gotia*, *kunia*, *killom*\*) first expects to be served homemade beer or liquor together with some meat as a "snack" (*tsakana*). This not necessarily has to be meat and, in fact, frequently it

is not, but meat clearly is the ideal snack. Following drinks and snacks the guests are served cooked rice with meat. Birsa says that if no meat is served, bad feelings may result. The host (*saukar*) in return expects a certain behaviour from his guests. A good guest consumes large quantities of beer, rice, and meat. After the first round of beer and meat he or she should allow his bowl to be filled at least one more time with rice and meat. Otherwise the host may feel resentful. To refuse an invitation outright or not to invite someone who should be invited is rude and negates the relationship.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the hospitality situation is potentially a tense affair, as has been remarked in other ethnographic contexts as well (Ortner 1975).

While the sharing of *tsoru* mostly takes place between agnates, and women are excluded from all collective sacrificial occasions, guests are generally affines and women are always included. Accordingly, the word *kunia* refers to guests and affines at the same time. The fact that guests are mostly – but certainly not only – affines does not make the hospitality situation any easier. The relationships between affines may be very close. Frequently, the villages into which one's "daughter-sisters" (*ji-bouni*) are marrying are the same villages as those from which one's daughters-in-law come and this may have been so for generations. Further, affinal relations – excluding the MB-ZS/ZD – are joking (*kiali*) relationships, where immoderate behaviour is at times allowed and expected, as will be seen below. The sphere of joking and license, however, sometimes involves a certain tension or antagonism. This tension is, of course, also related to the challenges and difficulties affinal relationships are subject to in general: a bride has been promised but is finally not given; bride wealth is not given or is delayed; the bride-takers do not formally show up to take a daughter to their village; a husband beats his wife, does not work enough, drinks too much, and so forth. This blend of mutual closeness and potentiality of conflict between affines is also reflected in the relationship between host and guest. Since it is during the process of marriage that affinal relations are most prominently at stake, I will provide examples of hospitality from this context.

<sup>10</sup> This situation is confirmed in other contexts as well. For example, when *tsoru* has been prepared on the household level, *lakka*\* food is distributed as "walking rice" throughout the village. Here, food exchange is also an expression of good relations.

<sup>11</sup> For example, if someone should try to reserve an extra piece of meat by sitting on it, while the animal is cut up, or by throwing it in the bush to collect it later. In addition, on one occasion, the man who took the skin of a sacrificed cow had to unfold it again before he left to assure others that he had not wrapped any meat up in it.

<sup>12</sup> As a consequence of serious quarrels, the breakup of a relationship between two households is marked by the breaking of an earthenware cooking pot. The *tsorubai* are needed to reconstruct the relationship by ritually making a new pot.



## Equivalence and Status Difference

Affinity is conceptualised by the Gadaba as an exchange of “milk”; “we eat their milk” (*ame tar kir kailu*) is a usual expression referring to an affinal relationship. As already indicated, marriage is a symmetric exchange in theory and in practice, too. I recorded nearly equivalent ratios of giving and taking “daughter-sisters” at village level. However, the Gadaba do not engage in accounting these transactions. Wife-givers enjoy a senior status until the wife-takers reciprocate with one of their daughter-sisters at a later date. Nevertheless, exchanges that accompany the process of marriage stress the equivalence between the two groups. For example, the bride-wealth should include a female calf (*bachuri*), which is given “for drinking milk” (*kir kaiba pai*) and is thought to be the equivalent of the bride. On the occasion of marriage or death, gifts of livestock (previously cows, nowadays usually goats) are brought by affines and raw meat (a foreleg) is returned to them on the following day, before they leave the village. These transactions of livestock and meat have to be exactly reciprocated on a similar occasion some time later. Thus, in many respects, equivalence between affines is ritually expressed.

In the following, I do not intend to describe in more detail one of those occasions in which equivalence is unequivocally expressed, but rather one where, paradoxically as it may first seem, equivalence is, on the one hand, especially pronounced while, on the other, an element of asymmetry is introduced or maintained. The sequence concerns two reciprocal visits during the marriage process. This process usually includes a period of courtship (*raibadi*) of about a year or so after which the bride is formally introduced to the new house of her husband.<sup>13</sup> After some time – sometimes years, in some cases not at all – the wedding (*biba*) will take place in the groom’s village, in which the feeding of *tsoru* is central, as mentioned above. The reciprocal visits may take place before or after the wed-

ding. The visit of the wife-takers usually takes place once the bride has lived in the new village for some time.

This was also the case in an instance that I witnessed recently. The bride had arrived in the household of her husband some three months before the wedding took place in February 2010. The two groups concerned, the Challan of the village of Gudapada and the Sisa of the village of Auripada, had regularly exchanged their *ji-bouni* in past generations.<sup>14</sup> Only recently the Challan had given two girls to Auripada for marriage. This time the girl came from Auripada and the Challan of Gudapada were the wife-takers. The reciprocal visits were directly scheduled after the wedding in Gudapada and the last members of the wife-giving group had hardly left the groom’s village when they had to receive the wife-takers as hosts in their own village, Auripada. This first visit is called *pani chinchini*, “to sprinkle the water,” which refers to the formal greeting in front of the house when water is sprinkled and poured on the roof to drip down on the people below.

Particular ritual attention in these reciprocal visits is paid to the gift of husked rice. Before the groom’s party (some 40 people) left for Auripada, the husked rice was ceremoniously measured in the house of the groom’s father. That is, it is preceded by an invocation of the gods, accompanied by burning incense, and closed with the *juar* gesture of reverence. One measure (*man*, ca. 2.5 kg) was poured into a white cloth, then two handfuls were added, plus two times one handful. This sequence was carefully observed and watched over by all those present, it was a matter of “tradition” or “law” (*niam*), as one man remarked in the conversations that accompanied the process. On top of the measured rice in the cloth two earthenware mini pots (*kondi*), one with beer and one with liquor, were placed. One of them contained 1 rupee, the other 1.5 rupees. These pots are referred to as “midwife beer” (*bondki pendum*) and “midwife liquor” (*bondki mod*). The bundle was then carefully tied and carried by a young girl of the Challan group to the village of the wife-givers, accompanied by the other members of the group. After the formal greeting in front of the house in Auripada the men sat down immediately in the bride’s father’s house to measure the rice. One measure, plus two hand-

13 In this process of exclusion from the original house and village and inclusion into the new one feeding is also the crucial feature. A daughter is fed with “daughter *tsoru*” before she leaves the village for marriage. After this she is ritually excluded from her native community and may neither share *tsoru* with them nor enter the sacred room of her father’s house where *tsoru* is prepared. In the new village, on the day of her first arrival, she is fed with rice and bamboo shoots (*kordi*). The feeding of *tsoru* during marriage completes this transition. Though a woman remains a member of her descent category (*bonso*) a lifetime, socially and ritually she belongs to her husband’s group and they have to take care of her funeral ceremonies later.

14 Challan and Sisa refer, on the one hand, to status categories (*kuda*) that are employed throughout the region and which people bear in their names. On the other hand – and this is the meaning referred to here –, the terms refer to local agnatic groups that are important social and ritual units (cf. Berger 2007a: 85 f.; Pfeffer 1997).



**Fig. 2:** *Pani Chinchini*: Measuring the rice in the house of the bride-givers (© Berger 2000)



fuls, plus two times one handful was poured into a basket and kept, what remained of the rice was put into the cloth again, which the visiting group was to take back home later.<sup>15</sup>

Just two days later the reciprocal visit of the bride's group took place, which is called *handi bau-rani*, "returning the earthenware pot," which arguably refers to the bride. Again, the first thing that happened after the guests had arrived in Gudapada was the measuring of the rice that they had brought, which should be their own rice and not that previously received from the wife-takers. The hosts – this time the wife-takers – also accepted one measure, plus two handfuls, plus two times one handful and returned the rest.

What is expressed here in a standardised way sanctioned by tradition or *niam*, framed in a formal setting including the attendance of deities (burning of incense and invocation), is the equivalence of the two groups concerned. The particular way of adding four handfuls to the single measure only emphasises the exactness with which the gift has to be reciprocated. Thus, the formal aspect of the hospitality situation highlights what is generally expressed through other exchanges between affines as well.

Yet, this ritualised display of equivalence occurs only in one medium, namely the husked rice. The "midwife beer" and "midwife liquor" – a gratification for the work of the midwife, who in the first

place helped to make the "milk" gift possible – are not reciprocated. What is at stake here, I think, is, on the one hand, the expression of *general* equivalence between affines through the meticulous measuring of rice and, on the other hand, an acknowledgement of the *particular* situation in which the actual wife-givers are senior, as is signified by the unilateral gift of the midwife liquor and midwife beer.

In the ceremonial exchanges that accompany the visits a certain ambivalence within affinal relations is therefore expressed: (general) equivalence versus (temporary) status difference or "oscillating hierarchy" (Pfeffer 2004: 404). This equivocality – which I already mentioned in the relationship of closeness and potential conflict – is not an aberration within affinal relations. Rather, contradictions and ambivalence are at the core of affinity. Without pursuing the matter further here, it should be mentioned that the ambivalence between consanguinity and affinity is at the heart of a creation myth common throughout Middle India, wherein incestuous siblings are made unrecognisable by the Great God (Mahaprabhu) and thus turned into the primordial couple. This theme of tension and equivocality in affinal relations is also taken up in the famous *go'ter* ritual of the Gadaba, the last stage of the death rituals, when affines behave like agnates (Pfeffer 2001) and challenge the generally established equivalence (Berger 2010). Finally, this contradiction between symmetry and hierarchy, equality and status difference is according to Pfeffer (2004) a general feature of affinity in middle Indian societies and also reflected in their relationship terminology:

<sup>15</sup> I thus have to correct the description in a previous publication (2007a: 241 f.) where I stated that only one measure is accepted and the four handfuls returned.

Symmetric affinity means exchange between equals while relative seniority implies hierarchy. The expressed tribal social values as well as the “messages” in tribal relationship terminologies *oscillate* between these two contradictory directions (Pfeffer 2004: 404, original emphasis).

Exchanges between affines take the form of balanced reciprocity and express the dominant value of equivalence of the groups concerned: the transfer of “milk”, exchange of livestock, and meat as well as rice. Also, the visits as a whole and the hospitality involved are reciprocal. Nonetheless, status difference is also articulated ritually through the unilateral gift of “midwife liquor” and “midwife beer.” This status difference differs from the hierarchical relations in the sacrificial context that I described above in two ways. Firstly, the status difference is temporary and is inverted with each new transaction. Overall equivalence prevails. Secondly, the status difference is implicitly contested in an arena of competitive hospitality. It is this aspect of hospitality I shall now refer to.

### Challenge and Rivalry

The hospitality situation has an inbuilt mechanism that challenges the balanced relationship between affines that is ritually established through the equivalent transactions, as well as the temporary status difference that is also formally expressed, actually experienced and verbally articulated by the actors concerned; there is room for “cooking pot politics” (Crystal 1974) or “gastro-politics” (Appadurai 1981). In the sacrificial context of *tsoru*-sharing people can eat as much they like. The *tsoru* has to be finished, but there is no pressure on specific persons to eat more than they want. In addition, during life-cycle rituals people are fed *tsoru* without any use of force. By contrast, guests are frequently forced to consume more beer, rice, and meat than they can bear, making alimentary victims of them: “eat or leave” (*ka nohele ja*) is the slogan. Force takes the form of verbal pressure but also hand-to-mouth feeding. Pots of beer are held in front of the guest’s faces, and rice and meat are stuffed in their mouths. Accordingly, this practice is called “to beat the mouth” (*tond mariba, rik’tom\**). As one informant stated, in such situations one can pay the affines back. For example, he said, echoing Birsa, “if you have not been offered enough beer and meat when you have been a guest, as a host you can provide more than enough food and drink to make them feel ashamed.”

This notion of shame (*laj kota*), which, signifi-

cantly, is irrelevant in contexts of *tsoru* consumption, is crucial in hospitality situations.<sup>16</sup> It is the inability to extend hospitality in an appropriate way which is the cause of shame, also known as being “empty handed” (*kali hate, dio titi\**). Beer and meat are vital ingredients for hospitality. Hospitality in general has to be planned, because beer has to be made and animals bought or borrowed. The sudden appearance of people whom the host will have to treat as guests can cause him distress. He will immediately run through his village in search of beer, liquor, and possibly a chicken. The predictable times for hospitality are either life-cycle rituals or village festivals, when each house is prepared to “call” people for special treatment. The possibility of humiliating a host by suddenly appearing means that certain kinds of ritual “friends” (*moitr, dissel\**),<sup>17</sup> who have to be treated with the utmost respect and extended hospitality, never appear spontaneously.

I have chosen the example of the reciprocal visits of affinal groups in the process of marriage, which I observed again recently, to illustrate the aspect of equivalence (and status difference) that is part of hospitality situations. The same occasion will be used in the following to point out the features of challenge and competition.

As wife-givers the people of Auripada were of a senior status for the moment, but as the Challan of Gudapada were the hosts of the wedding, the wife-givers were their guests and as such had to comply with their obligations of consumption. Although the first day of the wedding is mainly concerned with *tsoru* preparation and consumption by the couple, beer is continuously drunk by all and the first day ends with a big feast (*boji*) for everybody. During the night and the first part of the second day beer consumption continues, the supply being literally unlimited, since it is brought by many guests as a gift. Hence the guests from Auripada had already had their share of food and drink, when at around noon of the second day of the wedding the sequence called “feeding the affines” (*somdi kuaibar*) started.

Although, as the title of this sequel indicates, the feeding is particularly referring to the affines, all

16 In the mythical commensal situation mentioned above, where *tsoru* is not sufficient for all the brothers, the stress is on the differentiation between the Twelve Brothers and the rest, and the idea that insufficient food would be a matter of shame does not arise.

17 Cf. Berger (2007a: 173 f.); Mohanti (1973/74); Pfeffer (2001).

18 The term *somdi* refers to an actual marriage relationship between groups, in contrast to *bondu* which indicates a difference of *bonso* (descent category) membership and of potential affinity.

**Fig. 3:** “Feeding the affines” (*somdi kuaibar*) during a wedding (© Berger 2010)



guests present sit down in rows and are mouth fed with two dishes as well as a round of beer: bamboo shoots (*kordi*, fed by women), which is the typical food for rites of passage and considered to be auspicious (*sub*), and goat meat (fed by men). The scenes that I had seen many times before also occurred on this occasion. While some guests succumbed quickly to the demands of the hosts, others declined to be mouth fed. They argued, turned their heads away, and held their hands up in front of their face in a defensive gesture. Some of the feeding hosts for their part quickly abandoned their attempts to feed and put the food into the hands of the guests, so that they could eat it themselves. Other hosts were less easily discouraged and – alone or in groups – held the hands and heads of the guests and forced the food into their mouths. Some guests ran away, the hosts racing after them. At the end of the day, after the “mud joking” to which I will refer to later on in my conclusion, the affines were accompanied out of the village as is appropriate. The Dombo musicians, who were playing throughout the two days of the wedding, also went along and after a few hundred meters the whole group stopped, danced, and drank the beer that they had brought along. In this way – the hosts feeding them for the last time “halfway” (*oda rastare*) – they bade farewell.

The next day, the visit of the wife-takers to Auri-pada (*pani chinchini*) was scheduled. The group of about 40 people arrived in the village in the late afternoon, as is usual. Since the group included several young boys and girls who were participating in

such an occasion for the first time, Sukro Challan, a senior who was one of the main figures within the wife-taking group, addressed the group just outside the village to remind the youngsters of a few



**Fig. 4:** “Feeding the affines” (© Berger 2010)



principles for the occasion: 1. Stay in the group, do not wander off anywhere. 2. Remember that they are senior, obey their demands. 3. Whatever they give, we eat. What they do not give, we don't eat – we cannot say anything, a question of “shame” (*laj kota*). 4. Don't have an “axe attitude” (*tengia buddi*, i.e., to be aggressive).

Thus prepared they walked into Auripada and soon after the rice measuring the mouth feeding began right in the house of the bride's father, where the measuring had taken place. All persons present were served with beer and fed with bamboo shoots and pork from two separate plates, accompanied by the same scenes of surrender and resistance. It was already dark, when the guests were called to the next house, where the feeding of the same items was accompanied by jokes, songs, and acted provocations: “Come on *somdi*, why are you sitting here if you don't eat” (*somdi, no kaila kai pai boslu*). In the fourth house cooked rice with meat that was brought by the groom's father was served after the guests had been fed in the manner described above. Two men from each affinal side received two plates and distributed this food to all other plates. This mixing of food is frequently done, as an expression of amity like the mixing of beer or liquor before consumption.

The next morning it became evident that most of the guests had made their way back to Gudapada during the night. Apart from some of the boys and girls, only a few of the socially relevant persons were left. The hosts were annoyed about this, being robbed of their opportunity to further extend their hospitality on the second day, as is common.

Again, just one day later “the return of the earthenware pot”, *handi baurani*, was scheduled, the visit of the bride's group to the wife-takers. As the afternoon went on, the hosts in Gudapada became increasingly nervous and watched out for the people from Auripada, but no one was in sight. One man from Gudapada who had stayed in Auripada during the second day of *pani chinchini* and had heard the complaints of the wife-givers all day long that the guests from Gudapada had left too early, said that they were angry and were not showing up for this reason. The situation grew tense among the wife-takers, people were worried and some accused the aforementioned Sukro Challan, who had also left Auripada in the middle of the night, of being responsible for the situation. This almost turned into a fight.

Finally, after dark, the bride's group came and the tension seemingly vanished. The guests were fed liquor, beer, bamboo shoots, and meat in four houses before they laid down on a veranda some-

where for the night. The next day they were “called” to twelve houses throughout the village before they finally came back to the house of the groom, where they were served a meal of rice and meat. Half of the group made their way back to Auripada that evening, the rest preferred to leave on the following day. Apparently, the untimely disappearance of the guests from Auripada did not prevent the bride's group from fully submitting to the demands of the hosts of *handi baurani* once they had arrived.

### Feasts of Burden

Feasts (*boji*) are an extreme, generalised form of hospitality. Gadaba consider rituals like a wedding that entail one or several feasts to be “senior work” (*boro kam*). I have frequently heard people saying that “the world” (*dunia*) is invited to such feasts, i.e., that everyone is welcomed as a guest. Feasts not only put a great strain on resources because several cows or goats are slaughtered, they are also a potential source of shame (*laj kota*). Guests complain about insufficient meat or beer and quarrel about various issues, more and more as they are getting drunk.

Hosts, therefore, experience a great burden before and during such occasions. For example, before the performance of a secondary burial (*go'ter*) I heard the eldest woman among the hosts exclaim “we have a mountain on our heads,” thus expressing the pressure she experienced. During the wedding described above, the groom's father and the main host (*saukar*) of the occasion cried bitterly on the day preceding the wedding. He felt the burden of the event and was distressed as he had no brothers to help him or to give advice and his father had also died recently. In fact, however, a wedding – the marriage process in general and all “senior works” – is a matter for the village as a whole: logistically and economically, ritually and socially.

On the eve of any “senior work,” two groups of helpers, whose members are recruited from all Gadaba groups in the village, are formally selected around a big pot of beer: the *kandasalia* and the *bandagoria*. The former is responsible for the cooking area where the food for the feast is prepared and for its distribution to all guests. The latter takes care of all items that enter or leave the house of the host. They note down all gifts that have been brought by the guests and hand out rice, salt, chillies, and pots to those whose duty it is to cook on the occasion. Economically, the whole village is concerned in that the burden of the preparation is distributed over many shoulders: rice for the feast is husked

by women of numerous households; wood is cut by many Gadaba men from the village.

Ritually, the occasion of a marriage like that described above is relevant for Gadaba society as a whole. In the case of the wedding, as is usual in all kinds of “senior work,” the *tsorubai*, as representative of the Twelve Brothers, initiated the whole system of cooking and consumption. The *bandagoria* ceremoniously measured the first amount of rice and handed it over to the *tsorubai* along with a new earthenware pot, a piece of turmeric, and an egg. The latter took everything to the cooking pit in an open garden space near the house, where the *kandasalia* were busy with their preparations. There the *tsorubai* dug a small hole and following an invocation he slit an egg, which he then buried in the pit. After the end of the wedding this was dug up again. He tied the turmeric around the earthenware pot and prepared the first rice on the spot, which later was mixed with the huge amount cooked for the feast. This rice of the “turmeric pot” should guarantee auspiciousness and plenty, i.e., avoid the horror of insufficient food.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the host of a senior work is socially backed by the whole village. All dignitaries of the village are involved in the process and the bridal couple and their parents are frequently not part of the many formal situations accompanying it. This makes very clear that marriages and feasts are a collective matter. Furthermore, as described above, a village is divided into earth people and latecomers. Among the latecomers are not only non-Gadaba groups, like the Dombo weavers or Goudo herdsmen, but also Gadaba of other clan categories who have settled in the village as internal affines of the earth people: those who receive the neck during the *pat kanda* sacrifice. During the wedding these two groups merge into one in opposition to the host’s affines. In the actual case of the marriage described above, the hosts of the wedding, the Challan, who belong to the fish descent category,<sup>20</sup> are the internal affines of the earth people of Gudapada who belong to the cobra category. These two groups are affines and regularly intermarry. The people from Auripada, who gave the bride to the Challan, also belong to the

cobra descent category and are, under usual circumstances, the “brothers” of the earth people of Gudapada. In the context of this specific wedding, however, the earth people of Gudapada socially merged with the Challan and their affinal relationship became latent for the moment. During the wedding and the reciprocal visits of *pani chinchini* and *handi baurani* there are only two groups, the wife-takers from Gudapada and the wife-givers from Auripada. Accordingly, the earth people referred to their Auripada “brothers” as *somdi* or affines.

I am elaborating this point to show that the marriage and indeed all kinds of “senior work” is a collective endeavour not only with regard to the sacrificial context of *tsoru* consumption but also as far as the aspect of hospitality is concerned. The room available for agency and strategic manoeuvres, that became evident in this case in form of the early return and late arrival of guests, should not mislead us into perceiving the hospitality situation as an individual affair. In fact, whatever is “senior” is collective. Actions of competition and challenge can take various forms that cannot necessarily be predicted. But they are confined to particular contexts within the marriage process and thus find their prescribed place within the overall ritual structure. The collective nature of hospitality and feasts does not, of course, prevent some individuals especially feeling the burden of the occasion. The whole “work” is in their “name” and all helpers act on behalf of their name. Potential prestige as well as shame will accordingly only redound on them.

## Conclusion

Ideas and practices of Indian tribal societies relating to food and eating merit more scholarly attention than has hitherto been the case. In the case of the Gadaba of highland Orissa which this contribution has focussed on, ritual processes of feeding and sharing are the most important means to articulate and construct social relationships. Sacrificial food, descent, and territory are the interwoven key elements in this society. The dispersed comments and observations in diverse contributions to middle Indian societies already indicate that more ethnography and a systematic comparison would reveal that the issues that emerged from my research on the Gadaba are not unique. Roland Hardenberg, for example, noticed a similar connection between sacrificial food and clan territory among the Dongria Kond. In their case, in mythical times two iron instruments were given to each clan, a “hearth” (*halu*) and a “spoon” (*hetu*). Through this divine gift the

19 In addition, a healer (*dissari*) buries “medicine” in the earth below the spot where the cooked rice for the feast is stored to prevent sorcery being used to reduce the amount of rice. Nevertheless, animals bought at the weekly market to be slaughtered during the feast may be killed by sorcery before the feast commences, thus threatening the successful outcome and increasing the costs for the host.

20 They are Ollar Gadaba but have lived for generations as internal affines of the earth people in Gudapada. Like them they speak Gutob and not Ollari.



**Fig. 5:** Dignitaries of the earth-people are carried back into the village by their internal affines following the *pat panda* sacrifice (© Berger 1999)

clans can claim a certain territory, but they likewise have the duty to sacrifice buffaloes to the earth deity and cook sacrificial food called “forest food” (*bana paga*) at her shrine (Hardenberg 2005: 489 ff.). I would argue that the study of the ritual and religious practices surrounding food (as well as drink) should not be a sideline in the study of Indian tribal societies but could unravel its most distinctive features. Therefore, such an endeavour would contribute significantly to the anthropology of India.

In this article I have focused on two contexts in which consumption and feeding are crucial: sacrifice and hospitality. The two are frequently different aspects of one ritual process and, as the informant quoted at the beginning suggested, gods and guests alike demand food and drink if the relationship is to be maintained in a way the Gadaba describe as “good and even” (*bol soman*). However, sacrifice and hospitality have different implications and effects. The prototypical sacrificial food is *tsoru* and this always corresponds with a permanent and ideally unchanging hierarchy expressed in terms of seniority: a superior or senior group consumes the head meat whereas a relatively inferior or junior one consumes the body meat. The sacrificial process reconstitutes a group of brothers in relation to a deity as *tsoru* commensals and distinguishes this group from those who eat the body meat or *lakka*\*. This expression of seniority is very pronounced in contexts of annual village sacrifices, when such distinctions may be articulated on different levels: at one level including the affines and at another one excluding them. In rituals of the life cycle *tsoru* is fed to persons, whereby their ritual status is transformed and

stress is placed on this transformation. Yet, the opposition of *tsoru* and *lakka*\* is never absent and may only be less marked.

Furthermore, I have argued that the sacrificial processes that integrate the life of each individual, the annual cycle, in fact, Gadaba society as a whole, strictly prescribe ritual behaviour. These rules are complied with, and I could observe little room for individual idiosyncrasies or predilections. For example, there are many quarrels between agnatically related persons and groups (in fact, sorcery is said only to be common among agnates), but these conflicts do not find expression in the context of *tsoru* consumption.

The hospitality situation is markedly different and more multilayered. One’s guests tend to be one’s affines as well. The relationship between hosts and guests, as with affines (in nonsacrificial contexts), is one of delicate equivalence, not of prescribed hierarchy. Ritual transactions and ceremonial contexts like the measuring of rice display general equivalence between affinal groups. However, this latter sequence in particular also articulates *temporary* status difference. Therefore, the hospitality situation displays one core feature of affinity in particular: ambivalence.

In addition to friendliness and joking, the hospitality situation also provides an opportunity to express the tension in affinal relationships, challenge the ritually established equivalence as well as implicitly contest the temporary superiority of the wife-givers. Beer, rice, and meat are forced on the guest and the amount of food offered introduces a difference and a temporary alimentary conquest



**Fig. 6:** “Mud joking” (*kado kial*) during a wedding; after engaging in a mud-fight wife-givers and wife-takers enjoy the circle dance (*demsa*) (© Berger 2010)



over the guests, who generally have to comply with the regime of the hosts. Soon the situation will be reversed, however, and the former guests will force-feed the former hosts. While the position of the host thus gives the opportunity for dominance, it also involves the risk of shame, a notion absent in the context of *tsoru* consumption.

I would like to conclude with two illustrations that fully bring out the contrast between sacrifice and hospitality: the former emphasises inalterable hierarchy and difference in its stress on the agnatic value: a group of brothers who share sacrificial food and thus claim seniority and territorial precedence as earth people. The scope of action is strictly prescribed here. The latter, hospitality, highlights the value of affinity that entails equivalence and challenge. The ritual structure here partly prescribes latitude in the form of rivalry which are an aspect of affinal relations although not explicitly valued. The instances themselves are not examples of sharing or feeding but in both cases directly follow such alimentary contexts.

Sacrifice (see Fig. 5): After the head (*tsoru*), the neck (*sano tsoru*) and the body have been cooked and shared among, respectively, the earth people, their affines, and the rest, the Gadaba leave the *pat kanda* shrine and all assemble outside the village boundaries proper. There the dignitaries of the earth people – the village sacrificer, the village cook as well as the senior and junior worldly leaders – climb on the shoulders of their affines and are formally carried by them into the village.

Hospitality (see Fig. 6): The “feeding of the affines” on the second day of the wedding is followed by what is called *kado kial*: “mud joking.” This is part of the wedding charter as indicated by the necessary playing of the Dombo musicians. What is prescribed in this case is the licence. Water is heated and brought to the dung heap behind the house of the groom. Some men from both sides start taking off their shirts and ash, dung, and dirt begin to be thrown from all directions. Soon all the men and women standing near are engaged in a mud fight. Again, as with the force-feeding, acts can be rude. One woman suddenly makes a jump to the side and drags an inattentive person into the mud; others come on creeping from behind to smear the face of someone who thought he would be spared. People run away and are chased after. Another man has washed off the dirt from his body already three times when again a woman throws mud at him. I expect a bout of temper, but this does not happen. An old man is sitting in what could have been assumed to be a safe zone, when a much younger woman comes sneaking by and throws mud at him. He gets in a rage and gets to his feet to give her a punch. All the onlookers laugh. He is not being taken seriously; whatever is happening here is in the spirit of joking and joy, anger is clearly out of place. Yet tension is certainly present and revenge or challenge is possible, but in a joyful spirit; all antagonism must be disguised. At this moment all distinctions seem to have faded. They are nothing except *somdi*, and this does not seem to be a distinction as much as a

unifying relationship, reminiscent of the mixing of beer and food. Finally, mud-soaked men and women dance *demsa*, the Gadaba round dance, in the middle of the dung heap that has turned into a mud hole. This is the climax of the celebration of affinity.

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