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# MILLET, RICE, AND THE CONSTITUTION OF SOCIETY IN CENTRAL INDIA

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*ABSTRACT.* This article discusses rice and millet in relation to two principal modes of being as conceptualized by the Gadaba of central India, namely consanguinity and affinity. As a value representing eternal sacrificial brotherhood, consanguinity is superior to and encompasses affinity, which, however, signifies the value of reproduction. Grown on dry fields, millet is considered to pertain to the village and is thus consanguineal, whereas the most important and paradigmatic rice is grown in paddies, classified as outside and affinal. Moreover, as illustrated in myths, consanguinity in its abstract, pre-social form is prior to affinity, alterity being camouflaged identity. However, even if consanguinity is the generic form of being, on the ground it has to be constructed too, usually by a process that entails the appropriation of affinal elements. Consanguinity depends on the inclusion of affinity. The sacrificial brotherhood, for instance, can only be reproduced by including affinal rice in the meal in combination with the consanguineal blood of the sacrificial victim. By analysing life-cycle rituals and some related rituals, the present article shows the different contributions of rice and millet to the constitution of society. Rice, which in particular is part of the uniquely important sacrificial food, creates and maintains affinal as well as consanguineal relationships. Millet, in contrast, is not about structure but about being. Rituals regulate this flow of life, which traverses externally different forms of beings such as humans, animals, plants and the earth.

Recent discussions of animism – a metonymical way of relating to nature by ascribing personhood, subjectivity and agency to non-human beings – have revealed at least two things. First, such conceptions are very widespread and not only confined to the Amazon or circumpolar regions.[1] Secondly, the different ontologies distingushed by Philippe Descola (2013) can be regarded not as exclusively different types, but rather as variants of the same principle that can also occur in combination in certain communities (Sahlins 2014). Thus, Piers Vitebsky has argued that the Sora of central India fall squarely into Descola's category of animists, while also showing 'traces of analogism' (2017b:9). The neighbouring Gadaba with which the present article is concerned also combine elements of two ontologies, namely animism and totemic classification. That is, they make use of natural phenomena to distinguish 'clans' in the totemic fashion, while at the same time their rituals in particular manifest ideas of existential continuities between humans, animals, plants and the earth. Therefore, one should take seriously, for instance, the fact that in their indigenous Austro-Asiatic language of the same name

[1] See, e.g., Århem and Sprenger (2016), Bird-David (1999), Hardenberg (forthcoming), Vitebsky (2017a).

the Gadaba refer to themselves as 'Gutob*', meaning 'earth-creatures'.[2] It is likewise significant that, on the more concrete level of the social structure, the original inhabitants of villages call themselves 'matia', which means 'earth people'. I have previously dealt with this two-fold way of relating to nature and the environment and argued that, on the one hand, in their ritual system the Gadaba paradigmatically (or metaphorically) relate rice to a bride, while on the other hand, humans and plants are syntagmatically (or metonymically) related. The life-cycle thus merges into the agricultural one – human life into plant life (Berger 2003, 2010, 2015:444–474).

The present article will discuss the most important cultivated plants of the Gadaba – rice and millet – as resources and show how they contribute to the construction and maintenance of the two principle modes of social being, namely consanguinity and affinity.[3] In so doing, I deal with a specific case of a much more general phenomenon, one to which all other contributions to this special section also testify – namely the construction of both identity and alterity through cereals as resources. In the present case it is difficult to discuss rice and millet without considering consanguinity and affinity and vice versa. The last three words are important, as I do not regard any one of these poles as primary. The social order itself is not regarded as primary either, nor is nature the model for conceptualizing society. In the ritual process certain plants contribute to constituting society, while members of this society contribute to the reproduction of plants.

In contrast to both the north and south Indian kinship systems, Georg Pfeffer (1997, 2004) has pointed out the specific tribal value of affinity in central India that relates collectives diachronically, a value that he argues implies equality and thus contradicts that of seniority, which is the specific central Indian way of conceptualizing hierarchy. With regard to the Gadaba and their 'secondary death ritual', called 'go'ter*', he further suggests that, while marriage guarantees physical regeneration through the exchange of brides, this death ritual and its exchange of 'souls' (in living water buffaloes) – an 'intra-clan marriage of the spiritual type' (Pfeffer 2001:121) – brings about metaphysical regeneration. While I do not endorse the distinction between physical and metaphysical regeneration for reasons that will become apparent below, Pfeffer's view draws attention to the superiority of the value of consanguinity over affinity. Likewise, I have argued before that consanguinity and affinity, or 'brotherhood and otherhood' (Gregory 2009), are hierarchically ranked, whereby affinity represents the potential of

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2 Griffiths (2008:675). Gutob is an Austro-Asiatic language of the southern Munda branch that is only spoken by the senior or Boro Gadaba, on whom my research is focused. When I speak of 'Gadaba' in the following, I refer to the Gutob Gadaba. I will refer to 'Gutob Gadaba' only where I am making a contrast to the Ollar Gadaba (or junior Gadaba). In the following, Gutob words will be marked with an asterisk (like 'sa'mel*', 'finger millet'); all other indigenous terms are from Desia, the Indo-European *lingua franca* of the Koraput plateau.

3 This article is based on twenty-two months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 1999 and 2003. More ethnographic details and a description of the research process can be found in my monograph (Berger 2015). On the notion of resources, see Bartelheim *et al.* (2015) and the Introduction to this collection by Roland Hardenberg and myself.

reproduction (and not only in the physical sense), while consanguinity represents the encompassing value of an eternal sacrificial and commensal brotherhood (Berger 2010, 2017).

Also taking a cue from Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2001), in what follows I will build on these reflections on the relationship of consanguinity and affinity by applying them to rice and millet as well.[4] In this connection I will ask what potential or generic affinity (and consanguinity) might mean in the Gadaba case in contrast to specific affinal relationships. I also ask whether Viveiros de Castro's view that affinity is the generic given in Amazonia and that consanguinity 'must purposefully be carved out of affinity' (2001:26) and constructed as non-affinity can meaningfully be applied to the Gadaba. I shall argue that in the present case it is consanguinity, not affinity, that can be regarded as the generic dimension, the continual problem being to create alterity from a given identity. Difference is in some way always camouflaged sameness, and this tension manifests itself in myth and ritual. However, while consanguinity might be regarded as the generic principle and encompassing value, it also has to be actualized and realized on the ground. In the present example, both consanguinity and affinity have to be constructed in terms of concrete relationships – brotherhood is not a given on this level. In fact, consanguinity requires affinity in order to construct itself. I will show how affinity is appropriated or incorporated in order to construct consanguinity in various analogous processes: house sacrifices, village sacrifices, the process of marriage, and also in the final death ritual mentioned above. The most important category of food among the Gadaba (*tsoru*, *go'yang**), sacrificial food that is ubiquitous in various ritual contexts, is itself perhaps the most prominent example of the importance of incorporated affinity for consanguineal relationships.

In what follows, I will start with a brief description of the daily use of rice and millet and the way the Gadaba conceptualize and contrast the fields in which these cereals are cultivated. I will then introduce two myths to support my interpretation of 'potential' consanguinity and show how affinity is derived from it, only to revert to containing brotherhood. The main part of the present article will then address the significance of rice and millet for the life-cycle and related ritual practices in order to illustrate the different uses and potentials of these two crops as resources in the process of constructing persons and maintaining life and society.

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4 I thank Guido Sprenger for his insight that Viveiros de Castro's contribution might be relevant to my argument.

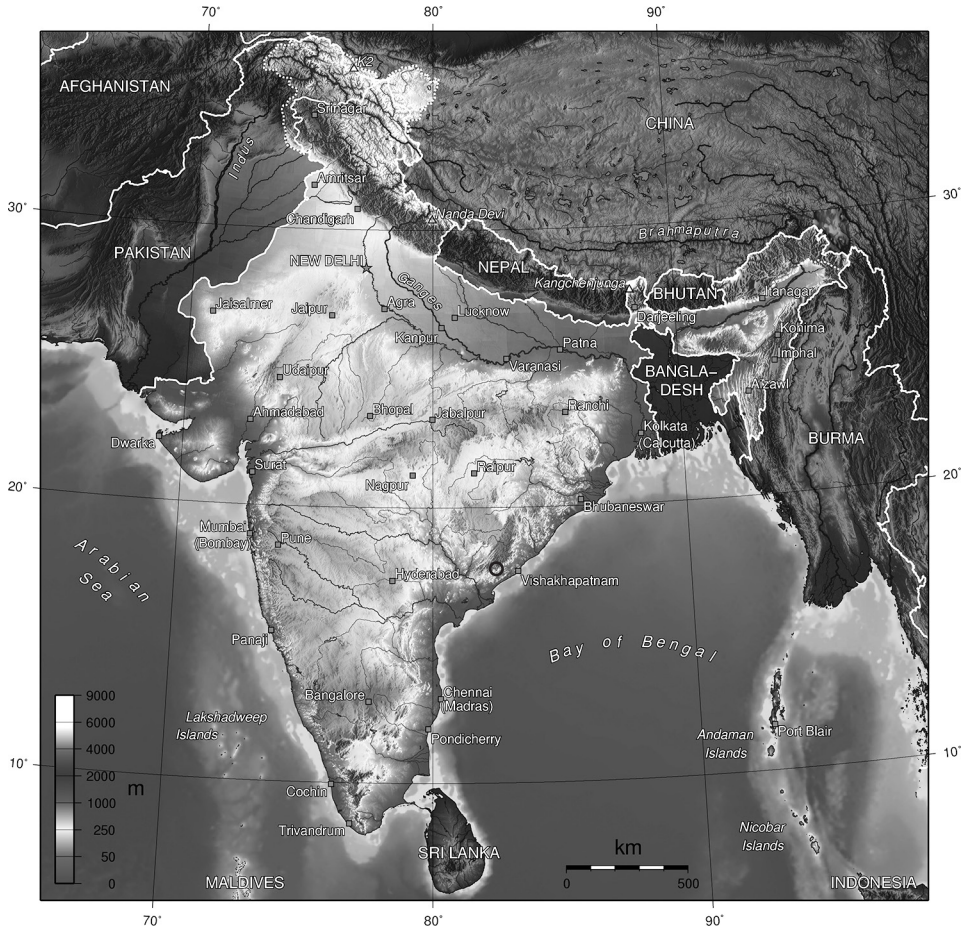


Figure 1: The circle shows the approximate location of the Gadaba in the Eastern Ghats of central India (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India#/media/File:India_topo_big.jpg).

## *Rice and millet*

The Gadaba live on the Koraput plateau of the Eastern Ghats, roughly nine hundred metres above sea level (Fig. 1). In this region rice and millet both constitute the staple diet, a fact that is reflected in the rituals and cosmology of the various indigenous communities that populate the plateau. For a very long time, as linguistic evidence also suggests (Zide and Zide 1976), the Gadaba have been cultivating rice (*dan*, *kerong**) directly in terraced riverbeds. The sources of these rivers are very close to their villages, and the waters flows continually but slowly, providing a very secure basis for subsistence. Down

Figure 2: Gadaba village and fields. 1999. The houses of this Gadaba village are invisible, hidden from view by the big trees (among them, mango, jackfruit and tamarind). The village is divided by a river in which the wet-rice fields are constructed in terraces. The millet has just been harvested and stacked in a conical shape on a scaffold next to the fields (all photos: P.B.).

the centuries the rivers have carved themselves deeply into the ground, so that one has to climb down to the paddies (*bera*, *lion**). Conceptually, the rice fields are considered to be outside and affinal. The river gods have an affinal relationship with the village, the latter being conceived as a unified sacrificial brotherhood. The whole process of rice cultivation is considered to be like making a suit for a bride (like rice, human brides come from the outside), and the harvest especially is celebrated as a wedding. A small basket represents the totality of the harvest and is brought to the house like a bride. Months later, the people of each house ritually reconstitute themselves as a community by cooking and consuming sacrificial food from this rice during the most important village festival of the year (the 'April festival').

When I subsequently mention millet, I refer to finger millet (Eleusine coracana), called 'mandia' or 'sa'mel*' by the Gadaba. While they also cultivate little millet (Panicum miliare) on the same fields, they eat this grain as if it were low-status cooked 'rice'.[5]

5 See the contribution by Hardenberg in this collection.

Only finger millet is used to prepare the much more highly valued thick gruel. Every full meal has two parts: a dish of cooked rice with some kind of vegetable or (rarely) meat, followed by a huge quantity of millet gruel. Along with little millet and rapeseed (Guizotia abyssinica), the latter grown as a cash crop, finger millet is cultivated on the dry fields surrounding the village and on the hill slopes. These fields (*poda*, *langbo**) are thought of as belonging to the village and have a close relationship with the local consanguineal earth deity, represented in the central village shrine. The crops from these fields, of which finger millet is the most important, are accordingly also considered consanguines, and a special relationship with the earth goddess, present in each house in the form of its central pillar, is ritually enacted during annual rituals.[6] As the rice is regarded as a bride, particularly during the harvest period, so likewise millet plants are regarded as the children of the village in the 'millet ritual' discussed later.

## *Consanguinity and affinity: the creation of society in myth*

A very common central Indian myth (henceforth Myth 1), of which I recorded several variants, always starts with the same situation, a brother and sister floating on water (Berger 2010, 2015:194–196). Suspecting incest due to their proximity, the Great God Mahaprabu asks the siblings, 'Are you brother and sister?', to which they answer 'yes'. Shocked by the answer he asks them again, with the same result. He then strikes them with smallpox, disfiguring their faces so that they do not recognize each other and are turned into husband and wife. They then found a 'house' from which twelve brothers are born, from which descend the twelve tribes of the region, of which the Gadaba are one.

The general and original state according to Myth 1 is consanguinity, but unconnected to 'society' – just as a 'potential' or 'virtual' state, as Viveiros de Castro would say. Due to divine intervention alterity and affinity are created by camouflaging identity and consanguinity. The consanguineal units that result, the twelve brothers, also contain affinity again, even though this is not commented on in the myth. All the brother tribes share the same descent structure, a set of totemic exogamous patrilineal descent categories (*bonso*). Some communities make use of only two (like the Bondo), while others use eight (like the Ollar Gadaba). The Gutob Gadaba distinguish four totemic categories (cobra, tiger, sun and monkey), membership in each being completely unequivocal. A man or woman receives *bonso* status from his or her father and retains it throughout life. Humans belonging to the same category are *bai*, brothers, a word that also refers to the idea of brotherhood, including women born to the clan. A Gadaba

6 A temporary taboo on the consumption of millet gruel during certain festival periods, when the village is closed and the earth surface may not be injured, may be interpreted as a sign of the close relationship between the local earth deity and millet.

village ideally consists of members of one clan (e.g. only 'monkeys'), so that the abstract *bonso* categories materialize in the form of villages, such village-clans being specific local actualizations of the abstract clan category or brotherhood (Berger 2015:102–108). All those with a different descent category are 'related ones' (*bondu*), that is, potential affines. This distinction between *bai* and *bondu* cuts across ethnic groups (the twelve brothers in Myth 1), and intermarriage between, for example, Gutob and Ollar Gadaba is not uncommon. This might appear as a repetition of the primordial incest. However, in terms of the *bonso* categories, marriage partners always are 'others'.

Brotherhood thus operates at different levels, at times including affinity. While in the myth consanguinity and affinity are confused, affinity being camouflaged incest, on the social level the categories of *bai* and *bondu* are unambiguous with regard to *bonso* membership. However, identity and alterity can be made to appear and disappear in different ways. While the notion of 'twelve brothers' refers to the different tribal groups of the region, as in Myth 1, it may also refer to Gadaba society as a totality (as in Myth 2, introduced below), in which case the twelve units refer to the different village-clans. Two villages may be identical in *bonso* status (e.g. both cobra) but constitute different village-clans, that is, different actualizations of the general clan category, which enables an exchange of the dead between them, same, yet different (Berger 2010; Pfeffer 1991, 2001). Further distinctions within the brotherhood of the village can also be made if necessary. Brotherhood therefore has a telescoping quality, including 'others' of different kinds. Even though the encompassing nature of consanguinity may be specific to the case discussed here, the relativity of identity is reminiscent of the situatedness of belonging discussed by Katharina Graf with reference to Morocco (this collection).

Another myth (Myth 2) explains the origin of specific consanguines and affines in a different way. Here it is not divine intervention but sacrificial action that is the generating force. Coming from their place of origin, the Godaveri River, the Gadaba, then supposedly a consanguineal unit (the myth does not specify this, consanguinity being generic or unmarked), performed a sacrifice and prepared sacrificial food (*tsoru*). However, the food was only sufficient for twelve of them, who thus became the 'twelve brothers', while the others, who did not receive any of the food, turned into their affines. Much closer to actual ritual practice than Myth 1, in Myth 2 sacrificial food has the capacity to create a specific brotherhood out of generic, potential consanguinity, creating affines as a by-product, as it were. This power of *tsoru* to create (and maintain or dissolve) relationships will be encountered repeatedly in the discussion of life-cycle rituals below.

Significantly, in itself *tsoru* is already a combination of affinal and consanguineal principles, an example of the appropriation of an affinal element (rice) that, in combination with consanguineal elements (blood, liver, head of the sacrificial animal),[7] is used to

[7] Based on the logic of sacrificial substitution, the blood (also heart, liver) of the victim is identified with that of the person (or group) performing the sacrifice, for whom the animal is a substitute.

create (maintain or dissolve) specific consanguinity. But not only that, in the process of this construction, as in Myth 2, affinity is also co-created, both identity and alterity being produced at the same time, in one sacrificial-cum-commensal act. Sacrificing means making distinctions, of food, of people, of place and time. The act of killing a goat, for instance, creates 'head-meat', from which *tsoru* is prepared (plus blood, liver and rice), and 'body-meat', from which a subordinate category of food is produced, consumed by contextually inferior people such as affines. Although the sacrificial process therefore always produces both identity and alterity, the emphasis may be on one dimension in specific situations, either consanguinization or affinization,[8] as when an in-marrying woman is incorporated into her new ritual community or, conversely, a sister leaving the village for marriage is transformed into an 'other'. This will become evident in the life-cycle – and associated rituals – to which I now turn.

### *Rice and millet in the life-cycle and related rituals*

A living person is made up of a life-force and a body. The body is said to be provided by the King of Death, who also takes back the bodies after cremation. Bodies have strong consanguineal associations, as can be seen from their connection with the cremation ground, where all the ashes of the bones of generations of consanguines are piled up. Moreover, the fact that only clan brothers may eat the dead in the form of buffaloes and create new 'bodies' representing the ancestors in the form of memorial stones also indicates corporeal consanguinity. The case of the life-force is not so equivocal; even though it is connected with millet and blood, both are associated with consanguinity. A life-force has an agency of its own and cannot be ritually manipulated. Generally, however, it is said that it returns in alternate generations,[9] that is, the person is reborn in the body of a grandson or granddaughter. The life of the person (*jibon*) 'attaches' itself to a pregnant woman, who gives birth to the child containing the life-force of the woman's classificatory mother-in-law or father-in-law. Thus from the perspective of any village the path of the life-force goes via affines (in-married women).

The first thing that a new-born human touches, and in fact is coated with when it leaves its mother's womb, is ground millet, which is smeared all over the infant's body by the midwife at the place behind the house where the 'flower' (umbilical cord and afterbirth) has just been buried before. A few days later, in the 'ending impurity' ritual, the infant will receive its first sacrificial food, along with a name. This feeding with *tsoru* (in fact it is placed on the infant's cheek) is the first significant transformation in its process

Hence, from the perspective of the person (or group) who sacrifices, blood is 'own' (consanguineal) and rice 'other' (affinal).

8 See Viveiros de Castro (2001:34–38).

9 See also Parkin (1992).

of becoming a person.[10] The birth impurity then ends at this point, and as the child is now a human person (albeit incompletely so) and is potentially the target of sorcery, he would be eligible for the normal funeral rituals in the case of death. Before this time the infant is identical to his 'flower' beneath the earth and would just be buried next to it in the case of death. A new-born infant has an ambivalent status, pertaining to the worlds of both the living and the dead. Even though the infant becomes a person after the ritual to end the birth impurity, this ambivalence persists until a moment about six months later, when the child eats food other than its mother's milk for the first time. This non-ritualized step significantly reverses the usual sequence of daily meals, as the infant is first fed with millet gruel, then with cooked rice. With this meal the infant's relationship with the realm of the dead is finally ended.

The child then continues to eat rice and millet daily like everyone else, being able to participate in the sacrificial community of his parents' house. On several occasions throughout the year a married man performs sacrifices, and his wife cooks the sacrificial food in the inner room of the house, right next to the central pillar representing the earth within the house, as the village shrine does for the village as a whole. The most significant of these occasions is during the 'April festival', when the 'bride' of the previous harvest (i.e. the first basket of that harvest that has been brought to the house) is consumed by the occupants of the house (the married couple, their unmarried children, perhaps a widowed parent). No one else is allowed to share this sacrificial food, which, I argue, is a clear indication of its alimentary efficacy in actually creating or regenerating this community. *Tsoru* is always eaten by an in-group that varies depending on the context, and eating *tsoru* one is not entitled to eat constitutes a transgression with severe consequences (blindness, for instance).

The paths of brothers and sisters finally diverge at marriage. While the young women leave the village when they marry, the young men stay there. The transfer of a girl out of her father's house is again effected by consuming *tsoru*. It is actually a 'brother' (that is, any boy from the earth people group) who cooks *tsoru* and feeds his 'sister' with it,[11] subsequently being mouth-fed by her in return. While the consumption of *tsoru* described above – the consumption of the rice as a 'bride' by the people of a house – was clearly an instance of consanguinization, of the alimentary reproduction of consanguinity, this is also a case of affinization, to use Viveiros de Castro's terminology. Although her *bonso* status does not change, in every other respect she is thereafter

10 The rituals are the same for both sexes, but the male form will be mostly used here to enhance readability.

11 In every village one group is considered as founders. They are a group of brothers in the sense that they share the same descent category (either cobra, tiger, sun or monkey). This group of 'earth people' (also called the 'four brothers' because they are internally subdivided into four status categories) own most of the land and are responsible for the sacrifices to the deities of the village. In relation to this group all others are regarded as 'late-comers'.

treated like an affine, as she may no longer enter the inner room of her father's house, nor receive *tsoru* from it.

During the wedding rituals in the groom's village, the bridal couple are fed with *tsoru* by four different actors, two consanguineal, two affinal. In each case the host (the groom's father) provides the rice and the animals for sacrifice, while the alimentary actors sacrifice, cook and feed. The first *tsoru* is provided by the 'four brothers', that is the collectivity of the earth people who make up the village. The last *tsoru* is fed by the 'sacrificial food brothers' (*tsorubai*), who represent the twelve brothers of Myth 2, that is, all twelve village clans of their clan category, and ultimately Gadaba society as a totality. In between, the two mother's brothers (*mamu*) of the bride and the groom feed the bridal couple with *tsoru*.

However, the situation is not as unequivocal as it might seem at first sight. In fact it is reminiscent of Myth 1, in which alterity camouflages identity, affinity being a fragile construction. Different scenarios are possible empirically. The bridal couple's respective fathers and mother's brothers may all be from different villages and belong to four different clan categories. However, not only are MB, WF, HF and FZH equated in the Gutob relationship terminology,[12] but 'cross-cousin marriage' is common in practice. In that case only two men are involved, belonging to two different descent categories. However, these two men have a double relationship to the bridal couple, both as consanguines (as father of the bride and father of the groom) and as affines (as MB to their ZS or ZD respectively). In their function as *tsoru*-feeders their consanguineal relationship (as fathers) is eclipsed, and they only feed in their role as affines.

It is thus clear from the above description that, in the process of ritually making a person, it is rice in the form of sacrificial food that actually brings about the relevant transformations, not millet. Millet is crucial, however, in maintaining a person's *jibon*, as is evident at times of illness, unconsciousness or when nearing death. Millet is directly connected with human blood. If someone is ill and pale, it is said that the blood must have turned watery or whitish, and more millet gruel should then be consumed. Millet gruel is also used in making a last-ditch attempt to save those close to death. While millet therefore plays no role in the ritual transformations of the person, which is the function of sacrificial food, it is crucial in maintaining blood and thus life. Blood, in turn, has the capacity to 'enliven' objects of all kinds, for instance, the fields, or the anti-sorcery iron weapons used to fight spirits and demons.

Because of its transformative power, it is again *tsoru* that is crucial for transformations in the course of death rituals. Four stages are distinguished, of which the *go'ter** is the final ritual and significantly the only one in which *tsoru* has no role, as all the transformations of the person have already been effected. During the first three phases of the death ritual the liminal dead person is provided with *tsoru* at his house and on

12 The Gutob term is 'mamung*' (Pfeffer 1999, 2004). In the Desia terminology MB (*mamu*) and HF/WF (*satra*) are distinguished.

the cremation ground. The feeding of *tsoru* again has the double quality of exclusion and inclusion (with the stress on the former), as the spirit moves from the living to the community of the dead. Millet hardly figures in the post-mortem rituals. It is only during the third phase that a meal of millet gruel and beef is served to the senior people (consanguines and affines) present. By the end of the third phase the person has been fully integrated into the community of the dead, and his life-force is also assumed to have detached itself at that point, which means that the deceased is no longer active or dangerous. However, he or she is still considered to be present, a condition which it is the main aim of the last ritual, the *go'ter**, to change.

When performing a *go'ter**, a group of brothers decide to guide the recently deceased of their community to their final destinations. One such endpoint is the stone monuments that collectively and permanently represent the ancestors, in contrast to the individual liminal spirits. The other destinations are the stomachs of external clan-brothers and the dry fields. With the help of a healer the brothers resurrect the dead and provide each of them with the body of a living water buffalo, perhaps ten, perhaps a hundred (Berger 2010, Pfeffer 2001). Inside the village these buffaloes are then lined up at internal megalithic structures resembling those in the dry fields to be described below. The resurrected dead are wined and dined by consanguines and visiting affines. As Pfeffer (1991, 2001) was the first to note, different kinds of affines are involved in the *go'ter**, some only as guests, bringing cattle as the typical affinal gift on such occasions, while others may have different roles. Those who have brought the stone slabs to be added to the megalithic structures inside and outside of the village hosting the *go'ter** to represent the permanent ancestors are also those who finally take away the buffaloes. This exchange of the buffalo-dead for stone slabs is a purely intra-agnatic affair. As a general rule, clan-brothers exchange buffaloes and stones, affines exchange brides and cattle.

Having been dressed and decorated with personal items according to their age and sex, the buffalo-dead are led out of the village on the main day of the ritual and tied to the external megalithic structure in the millet fields, the so-called 'dry-field platform or post' ('poda munda', 'go'ter*').[13] This site consists of a combination of planted branches of *simli* and *palda* trees, as well as flat, upright stones brought by those external clan brothers who take away the buffaloes later.[14] Over the decades, from one *go'ter** to the next, stones are added and branches strike roots and grow into trees, at times literally embracing the stones planted at their roots. At the time of the *go'ter** these trees produce red blossoms. Here the women of the village wail for the dead for the last time. As already noted, agnates exchange buffaloes and stones, affines cattle and brides. Accordingly, the buffaloes tied to the platform will finally be taken away by clan brothers from

13 The term for 'dry field' is 'gotr langbo*' (Izikowitz 1969:136).

14 'Simli' is the red silk-cotton tree (Bombax malabaricum), while 'palda' refers to the Indian coral tree (Erythrina variegate).

Figure 3: The ‘dry-field platform’. 2001

Figure 4: Final fare-well. 2001

different villages, own one's, but also others from different village clans. However, one particular category of buffalo called 'purani', while representing a deceased person of the host's village, is an affinal gift and product. This requires a little more explanation.

In the weeks before a *go'ter**, the mother's brothers of the deceased persons for whom the ritual is being performed are told about the upcoming occasion. They have the right to bring a *purani* to the hosts' village on the main day of the ritual. The hosts do not always strongly encourage this, as it entails reciprocal prestations of wealth.[15] If a *mamu* decides to provide a *purani*, a process is set in motion that runs parallel to the events in the hosts' village. A buffalo is bought and transformed into the deceased person in the *mamu's* village. This means that this person now exists in (at least) two bodies, and at different places. While the buffalo 'is' the deceased person, he or she is also an affinal product and gift. For several days this buffalo is fed in the *mamu's* village, then dressed and finally taken to the hosts' village. The *purani* should show up exactly at the time the other buffaloes of the hosts are tied up at the dry-field platform, and the assembled crowd eagerly awaits their appearance.

The *mamu* arrives accompanied by a large group, including representatives of his own buffalo-takers (that is, those who take buffaloes when he hosts a *go'ter**), bringing the *purani* with them. Neither the hosts of the *go'ter** nor the *mamu* may be involved in what follows, unlike everyone else. In a melee the belly of the *purani* is sliced open, and its intestines are torn out while the animal is still alive. While the blood of the animal seeps away into the millet fields, the men struggle to get a piece of the intestines and also go for the tongue. Both are thought of to be highly fertile, being associated with general fecundity, well-being and wealth. It has been reported that the intestines are buried in the fields to ensure a good harvest (Izikowitz 1969:141; Pfeffer 1984:235, 1991: 82), but they are also eaten. It is this ritual killing on the dry fields which gives the whole ritual its name, 'go'ter*', meaning 'tearing to pieces' (Berger 2015:306). After this, the main spectacle of the main day, the 'tearing-to-pieces day', the other buffaloes are untied and taken by clan-brothers of the hosts to their villages to be slaughtered and eaten later.

The important point to stress here is that the circulation of life in the development and deconstruction of personhood traverses different forms of being: human, animal, earth and plant. After being 'fed out of' the community of the living through the repeated offerings of sacrificial food, the dead are transformed into ancestors represented by the stones and the branches planted next to them. However, while some of the living dead are digested by their clan brothers, others are torn to pieces on the dry fields, notably the millet fields. Their blood 'enlivens' the fields and thus provides the basis for the future growth of millet, which in turn, transformed into millet gruel, will sustain

[15] See Berger (2015:326) for an example of the negotiating process between the mother's brother's group and the hosts.

the life of human persons.[16] While this final death ritual is mainly an affair between clan brothers, the affinal element is crucial to this circulation of life. While other categories of buffaloes I have not discussed here are killed in a similar way, without affinal involvement (cf. Berger 2015; Pfeffer 1991, 2001), I argue that the appropriation of the affinal principle is crucial to this life-giving process. The *purani* is the repetition or completion of the earlier affinal gift, the bride. This time, however, the *mamu* is not giving his sister to be appropriated by the community of her husband so the latter can procure offspring. This second gift is an offering of a different kind, a provision for a human sacrifice that facilitates the reproduction of millet, not people (or only the sustaining of people through the reproduction of plants). But then again, millet and people – like maize and people in Mexico (see Bohnenberger in this collection) – are not so different in the first place, in other words, they are thought of as being similar in certain respects at particular moments. One such moment of ritual correspondences between cereals and human personhood is the rice harvest, celebrated as a wedding, when the rice is brought into the village as a bride. Another such instance relates to millet.

The rainy season is devoted to the dry fields, and therefore to millet in particular. Two rituals dealing with the protection of millet are connected hierarchically in the sense that the one performed first is performed on behalf of the village as a whole, which the second ritual relates to the parts, the individual households. In the collective ritual, the 'leaf-planting-ritual', the village sacrificer collects plants and leaves from the forest, and having sacrificed at his house and sprinkled the leaves with blood, turns to the dry fields where the millet is growing. There he digs a hole between the millet plants, buries some objects to protect the growing plants from sorcery and the evil eye, and plants the forest leaves upright in the hole. Significantly, this ritual is regarded as the 'ending impurity' ritual for the dry fields. As mentioned earlier, it is also the first decisive step in the process of becoming a human person. In this case, it is said that it is only after the completion of the ritual that the products of the gardens and forest may be consumed. As in the case of the 'ending impurity' ritual for humans, it is the consanguines who are affected by the pollution and the corresponding prohibition.

In fact pollution only ends a week later, after the individual houses have also performed the ritual, these rituals explicitly being called 'millet ritual'. Here also, the man of the house fetches leaves from the forest and plants them in a hole between the millet plants in the dry fields. He also ties a banner to a plant in order to ward off harmful influences again. This banner stays with the millet after the plants have been harvested and stacked to dry next to the threshing ground. They are kept there until the harvest is brought in, thus protecting the millet from the day of the millet ritual until the harvest is taken to the house. After tying the banner the man takes two crabs and, holding them in his hands, mutters an invocation, then ties one animal to a millet plant and sets the

16 Among the Dongria Kond too, finger millet has a particular connection with the dead. See the contribution by Hardenberg in this collection.

other one free. He then puts down some crumbs of a millet-cake he has brought along as an offering and finally walks through the field and, alternately eating some crumbs and scattering others, calls on the other recipients, the spirits of the dead, evil spirits (*duma daini*) and 'mother-father' (*mata pita*), which could refer either to ancestors or the village earth deity. He then returns home.

Brief though they are, these rituals are revealing, as they demonstrate the consanguineal status of the millet plants. Gadaba explicitly told me that at this stage the millet plants are like children, as they do not yet bear ears of grain. Like the children of the village, the plants receive an ending-impurity ritual, and as in the context of the analogous ritual for humans, it is consanguineal villagers who are affected by the pollution. But this is not all. One aspect of the 'ending impurity' ritual is that the child receives a name and from that moment on is a potential target for black magic. Human children receive threads with 'medicine' tied around their neck and hip to protect them from such attacks. In parallel fashion the millet plants also experience this transition during their 'ending impurity' ritual. Before the ritual they had no name, and all plants – whether dry rice, rape seed or millet – were just referred to as 'young plants'. In the millet rituals, as in the human 'ending impurity' ritual, the millet plants receive a name, a social identity and – a striking similarity with the understanding of young maize in Mexico (see Bohnenberger in this collection) – are from that moment on in danger from sorcery attacks, hence the measures of protection.

Finally, there is the question of what the crabs signify. These animals are only sacrificed for the spirits of the dead, usually the day before any major ritual event. In the context of the millet ritual, however, they are not killed, but rather one is tied to a millet plant and the other is set free. As in the *go'ter**, therefore, during the millet ritual animals associated with the dead are tied to branches of some kind in the millet fields, the former after the harvest, the latter before, roughly two months after sowing. The additional and truly significant point is that the *go'ter** is also performed with crabs. While in the eastern part of the Gutob Gadaba area buffaloes represent the 'living dead', in the west of the area crabs are used for this purpose. This *ungon go'ter** (crab *go'ter**) was first mentioned by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1943), and I witnessed one occasion myself in which crabs were tied to the branches of the *simli* and *palda* branches. In my view, therefore, the millet ritual is a clear reference to the *go'ter**, as crabs are not killed, as in the usual crab sacrifice performed in front of a house, but tied in the dry fields and then let loose. Both *go'ter** and the millet ritual are clearly connected through their relationship with millet and the dead. During the *go'ter** women mourn the dead for the last time when they are tied up in the millet fields, sometimes feeding them as well. During the millet ritual spirits of the dead are also invoked and are fed with crumbs of millet cakes.

## *Conclusion*

In central India, consanguinity and affinity are ubiquitous principles of classification. As such, their relevance not only extends to the structuration of what is commonly understood as the human domain, it also informs the ontologies of fields, revealing the social order as being inherently implicated in the natural environment, and vice versa. In particular, the two most valued staple crops – rice and finger millet – and the fields in which they are cultivated are clearly associated with affinal and consanguineal relationships respectively.

Inspired by Viveiros de Castro, I have asked which of the two principles, if either, is regarded as primary, unconstructed or unmarked. In contrast to Amazonia, as examination of the myths shows, it is not affinity but consanguinity that is taken for granted, the zero-state before society comes into existence, affinity being camouflaged identity. The case of the disfigured siblings turned into spouses vividly illustrates this situation, which resurfaces in the ritual domain when the mother's brothers' consanguineal identity is eclipsed when feeding the bridal couple. Consanguinity is prior to affinity, which it encompasses hierarchically in nested sequences of brotherhood. Even so, the Gadaba case suggests that, in their concrete, empirical manifestations, both consanguinity and affinity must be constructed, their constitution occuring in ritual processes that cross-cut the domains of the life-cycle and the annual cycle. In other words, the sociocosmic order of which consanguinity and affinity are the two fundamental modes of relationship is (re)generated in rituals that focus on the growth of human persons and the growth of rice and millet. As the rituals indicate, personhood is also assumed in the latter case, rice being the (affinal) bride and millet the (consanguineal) children. The question, then, is not only is what is given and what is constituted, but also, and more specifically, how rice and millet contribute to the constitution of consanguinity and affinity while conversely also being generated by them.

The rituals of the life-cycle and annual cycle repeatedly enact appropriations of affinity by consanguinity. *Tsoru*, the sacrificial food of the utmost importance that actually has the power to transform social relationships, is itself an example of this pattern of the inclusion of the affinal principle for consanguineal ends. This food is prepared, fed, shared and consumed on many occasions, and the rice it contains must come from the wet-rice fields, thus being of affinal origin. On one occasion in the annual cycle, the cooked rice as a 'bride' represents the whole of the harvest of a particular household. In this particular instance, as in all others, the rice is complemented by the consanguineal products of the sacrificial process (blood, liver, animal's head) that represent *jibon* and 'enliven' the food, hence its potential. These products are consanguineal, as the animals are sacrificed on behalf of – in fact as a substitute for – those people who are performing the ritual. Blood and rice combine to reproduce and generate consanguineal relationships. In the present case the sharing of *tsoru* constitutes the house community in the context of the April-festival.

Marriage and death are other examples of the same pattern of appropriation. The bride is given as 'milk', and the mother's brother is generally regarded as a 'milk-giver', his gift being incorporated into the new household to produce – from the perspective of the bride-takers – consanguineal progeny. The ritual integration of the bride and the completion of personhood of both bride and groom require multiple feedings with *tsoru*. In this context the consanguineal categories of *tsoru* represent both the village community and Gadaba society as a totality, indexing the mythical construction of society (Myth 2). The other *tsoru* that is fed contains the affinal principle in two forms, in the material substance that is fed (rice), and in the producer and feeder of the food, the mother's brother, whose consanguineal identity as a father is hidden.

The mother's brother (*mamu*) of the deceased also plays an important part in the death rituals. In the final stage, called 'go'ter*', a *mamu* – or rather one of his descendants – can repeat the original gift of his sister by bringing one of her deceased offspring back to life in the form of the *purani* buffalo and taking him or her to the hosts' village to be torn into pieces, which is what the term 'go'ter*' actually means. The *purani* is an affinal product and gift but, unlike the sister given previously, has a consanguineal identity from the perspective of the receivers. The buffalo is a deceased person from the group hosting the *go'ter** who has been revived. The killing of that person occurs in the millet fields, where the blood of the buffalo-person seeps into the ground and (consanguineal) human life is transmuted into (consanguineal) millet plants – children of the village – who will not only nourish its residents, but also maintain their lives if they are in danger. Given the particular importance and status of the *purani*, I argue, it is especially the appropriation of affinity that is again crucial to the processes of reproduction. Just as human brides are incorporated into the community to generate offspring, so the affinal *purani* is killed on consanguineal land to regenerate consanguineal forms of being.

Affinity thus helps constitute actual consanguinity (humans, millet), even though the latter can be thought of as primary in precedence and value. As alterity, affinity is constructed in the sacrificial process, mythical (Myth 2) or actual. Being an integral part of sacrificial food, (affinal) rice contributes to the generation of all social relationships and is itself regenerated in exchange processes between house or village and the river gods as the 'parents' of rice. Millet, in contrast, which is also produced in ritual exchanges, as described above, has much less ritual value.

In its main and most significant form, which I have focused on here, rice, as part of sacrificial food, has a high structuring and social function. Performing a sacrifice means creating distinctions, most specifically hierarchy, such as those between consanguines and affines or men and women, even though the sacrificial process at the same time also unifies,[17] gods and humans, for instance, being commensals. As a living and vitalizing

[17] Hierarchy does this too. See Dumont (1986:233).

material, sacrificial food also transforms status and not only creates society as a totality but also contributes to the maintance of the socio-cosmic order.

Millet is much more inconspicuous than rice, less structuring but no less relevant. In ritual contexts millet figures much less frequently than rice. After birth the infant is immediately coated with ground millet, and half a year later, after the first millet (and then rice) is consumed, the connection with the dead is finally severed. Then millet does not feature in life-cycle rituals until death. At the end of the third phase of death rituals, millet gruel is offered to seniors as gruel, and after this ritual the deceased is thought to have merged into the community of the dead. Millet, then, is not about structure but about life and death, in other words, about being. Perhaps in the same way that generic consanguinity, as described in Myth 1, is pre-social, millet is non-structural. Millet facilitates humans' entry into the world of the living and out of it again, while millet gruel, being closely connected to the blood of the living, is used to maintain life and avert death. This existential link between human life, death and millet is dramatically enacted in the last stage of the death ritual, when a human being (albeit in the body of a buffalo) is killed, and the blood fuses with the earth on which millet will shortly grow to nurture the living again.[18] Millet and rice thus appear as two complementary but hierarchically related dimensions of life, much like consanguinity and affinity, but while rice as an integral part of *tsoru* provides structure to life and as such regenerates the distinction between consanguines and affines, millet, although associated with consanguinity, does not facilitate distinction, but being.

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18 On the idea that the blood of Jesus created the first wheat, see the contribution by Jeanine Dağyeli in this collection.

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