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## Flows of words and flows of blessing

### The poetics of invocatory speech among the Sa'dan Toraja

*Introduction: Prayer as a distinctive form of communication*

Prayer, as a distinctive form of utterance (Bakhtin 1986) or illocutionary act (Searle 1979), is a puzzling and peculiarly human phenomenon. Notwithstanding an already existing anthropological literature on this topic, one may well object that a term so culturally laden is a dubious starting-point for any comparative exploration, so let me offer a preliminary definition. I begin with Van Baal's carefully considered definition of religion as pertaining to 'all explicit or implicit notions and ideas, accepted as true, which relate to a reality which cannot be verified empirically' (Van Baal and Van Beek 1985:3); as a starting-point, then, I define 'prayers' simply as a class of utterances addressed to this non-empirical realm, or to what the Toraja of highland South Sulawesi (Indonesia) refer to as 'the unseen' (*tu tangdikitta'na*). It is this urge to address the unseen that I wish to explore here. While Pascal Boyer (2001), in his splendidly-titled *Religion explained*, puts forward a most thought-provoking thesis about the ordinary attributes of mind that enable the human propensity to be religious, he gives remarkably little attention to questions of communication. Yet this dimension deserves further exploration and should, it seems to me, be integral to any theory of religion.<sup>1</sup>

As for difficulties of translation, or the question whether 'prayer' need necessarily display any specific features such as praising, supplicating, asking for things, and so forth, I wish to set these aside for the moment, without dropping entirely the category of 'prayer', if only because that would make it

<sup>1</sup> Boyer 1994. Boyer's focus is the nature of representations and ideas, rather than activities; but religions are never made up of ideas without actions. Others have of course discussed the linguistic aspects of ritual, but not so much from the point of view of cognitive fundamentals which is Boyer's concern.

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difficult to discuss the extant comparative literature that does use this term. 'Invocation' presents itself as a more neutral alternative, though it does not solve all the problems since what I wish to explore here are precisely the ambiguities involved in some Toraja examples as to what exactly is being done or who, if anyone, is being addressed. The answers shed some comparative light on what Schefold (2001) has suggested is a pervasive cosmological concept in Austronesian societies, the notion of 'flows of blessing' and their various possible sources. The instances of invocatory speech that I consider here drew my attention partly because of the intensity of their poetic imagery, which I argue is part of their illocutionary force. In addressing the poetics of Toraja invocations, then, I am talking not only of poetics in Jakobson's sense (1960:350) of 'What makes a verbal message a work of art?', but in the sense of *poiesis* as creative action, and the intended efficacy of the verbal performance.

The communicative impulses of the 'self born in intersubjectivity' (Trevarthen 1993), beginning from the very moment of birth, are so powerful that nothing short of extreme deprivation can suppress them. Trevarthen presents a carefully argued thesis, supported by an array of cross-cultural data, about the primacy of relationship in the infant's developing sense of itself in the world. It is the pattern of early 'proto-conversations', conducted with an affectionate other, and well-developed long before language itself comes into play, which is eventually internalized to become the older person's private monologue. These insights resonate with Martin Buber's more philosophical treatise (1952:78) *I and Thou*, in which he likewise proposes that 'the longing for relation is primary'. Buber defines two possible orientations to the world, represented by the word-pairs I-You and I-It; one establishes a relation, the other objectifies. We are caught forever in the paradoxical movement between these two orientations; we cannot help objectifying the world around us, at the same time as we yearn for communicative relationships. Within the monotheistic traditions, Buber suggests (if I have understood him correctly) that there is a strong tendency to distort the nature of God, 'the eternal You', by personifying and thus reifying Him; yet believers find it impossible not to personify, in order to communicate at all. On the other hand the secular worldview, in which everything in the cosmos is objectified, leaves a communicative void which, it appears, individuals are still strongly tempted to fill.

Bakhtin (1986) is another thinker for whom relationship is intrinsic to how we position ourselves in the world. Any utterance is a link in a complex chain of others that have preceded it. His proposition of the dialogical relationship inescapably underpinning every utterance, even if only implicitly, leads him to conclude that 'addressivity, the quality of turning to someone, is a constitutive feature of the utterance; without it the utterance does not or cannot exist' (1986:99). For Bakhtin (1986:127), the listener must be a responsive partner and participant, even if the response is delayed; in his view, '[f]or the word (and,

consequently, for a human being) there is nothing more terrible than a *lack of response*'. Bakhtin's idea of the 'superaddressee', as an always implicitly presupposed higher audience, over and above the one most directly sought in an utterance, one 'whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed', might seem a tempting concept to deploy when considering the human compulsion to address the non-empirical world. But is it in fact the product of somebody already brought up in a monotheistic culture, and hence too culture-bound an idea to be anthropologically useful? It would seem almost impossible not to think of 'God' in connection with this notion, though Bakhtin (1986:126) does qualify that implication by specifying that the superaddressee may at different times and places 'assume various ideological expressions' apart from God, including 'absolute truth, the court of the dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history, science, and so forth'. But who could the source of this imagined ideal interlocutor be, if not those same giants who once dandled us on their knees and entered with us into the delight of the proto-conversation? Then, perhaps, our parents really did seem to understand our needs and feelings without having to be told in words.

Yet words have their limitations, and humans, predisposed to feel that something might have been left unsaid, are apparently not satisfied to address only what is in front of them. Utterances addressed to the unseen might be judged an effort to overcome this sense of lack, but they take so many forms that we should be justified in asking whether they do indeed share features that can distinguish them as a class. Minimally, we can say that there are certain universal properties of language which make such communication possible in the first place. These include, in Hockett's terms (1977), the features of openness (endless potential for new statements), displacement (the ability to talk about things that are remote in time or space from the site of communication), prevarication (the possibility of lying or constructing meaningless statements, without which the formulation of hypotheses, including those about a non-empirical reality, would not be possible), and reflexiveness (the ability to talk about anything that we experience, including the fact of our own consciousness).

Problems of translation are exacerbated in dealing with religious concepts. This did not prevent a special issue of *L'Homme* (no. 132, 1994) being dedicated to the analysis of 'prayer' in Southeast Asian societies. Its editor, Stephen Headley (1994:7) offers a definition of 'prayer' as 'invocation', 'to address oneself to a god', a surprisingly incautious formulation for a comparative religionist, and one which must surely betray the influence of his own beliefs.<sup>2</sup> Shorn of any monotheistic or even deistic implications, however, the idea of 'invocation' may serve as a starting-point for comparative discus-

<sup>2</sup> As his website reveals, Headley is a convert to, and a priest of, the Orthodox Church.

sion. Macdonald (1992), writing of the Palawan of the southern Philippines, distinguishes 'invoking the spirits' here as a speech event having verbal and visual traits (announcing, praising, requesting, offering, specific gestures, and a turning of the body deliberately away from the human audience present) that set it apart from 'story-telling', marked by the predominance of descriptive statements and distinctive small hand movements, as well as a facing toward those present. The contrast with narrative, however, does not hold everywhere, if we take as an example the Bugis practice of chanting parts of their great epic, the *La Galigo*, in the context of rituals, as a form of prayer (Hamonic 1987, personal communication; MacKnight 1993:32). At 6,000-8,000 verses, *La Galigo* is the longest epic in the world, though nobody owns the whole of it. Fragments written in Old Bugis script have been in use from the tenth century, and extracts are typically chanted aloud at weddings, house ceremonies, and after harvest. Sometimes, according to Hamonic, only the subtle shift between scansion of five or of eight feet to a line might indicate whether a *bissu* priest is 'narrating' or 'praying'; in this case it would be preferable to think of invocation and narration as poles of a continuum, rather than separable categories.<sup>3</sup> The epic itself begins with the story of a meeting of all the gods from the upper and underwater worlds, at which the principal deity voices the opinion that 'we are not gods if nobody worships us'. They therefore decide to send a delegate to earth to teach humans to pray. The dialogical relationship of prayer, in this view, has a constitutive effect upon the deities, being even more necessary to them than it is to humans themselves.

I have argued above for the fundamental importance of dialogical relationship, as an orientation from which humans hardly desire to escape; but in actual ethnographic contexts it is not always clear whether invocations need take an overtly dialogical form. Even the question of who is being addressed may be unclear. Is the invocation always a form of request, supplication, or expression of desire, or might it be better viewed simply as a means of placing oneself in relation to the non-empirical reality, opening the channels of communication between this world and the unseen?<sup>4</sup> The degree of hierarchical distance between humans and non-empirical beings represents one obvious dimension of variation. While in some religions, Divinity may be a concept so abstract that any visual representation is considered blasphemous, in oth-

<sup>3</sup> A similar argument can be made for the more complex ritual recitations of the Toraja. The recitation of epic narratives in a ritual context can also be witnessed in Hindu temples where the Ramayana and Mahabharata are treated as sacred texts.

<sup>4</sup> The ethnographic record presents such an array of conceptualizations that, from a comparative perspective, the model of 'prayer' as it has developed in the world religions, as a duty enjoined upon each individual to maintain an internalized personal dialogue with an Almighty deity, at once remote and interfering, must appear as a historical oddity. Space prevents me from exploring this issue here.

ers the deities regularly manifest themselves in the bodies of spirit mediums, enabling their clients to speak with them face to face. Postures and styles of prayer can be expected to differ accordingly. A strong contrast with the attitude of submission characteristic of the monotheisms is presented by the Navajo relationship to deities. According to Reichard (1944:17-8), Navajo consider it a mistake to humble yourself when invoking the help of a deity, nor is it seen as necessary to give thanks, since the point of the prayer is to compel the deity, in exchange for the correctly made offering, to protect you by identifying with you; and why would they wish to identify with you if you humiliate yourself? Reichard's account makes clear that from the Navajo point of view it is not only the making of the offering, but the sacredness and beauty of the prayer itself – embodied in its imagery, and the tight structure and rhythmic patterning of repetitions within the utterance – that lends the prayer its compulsive force.<sup>5</sup>

A variety of orientations, then, are possible, and these may be expressed as much through bodily practice as in the type of language used.<sup>6</sup> Prayer is an activity as much as a verbal genre; and whether or not it involves a highly elaborated technique of the body, as in Islam, or a repertoire of symbolic acts as in Judaism, or a more subtle assumption of postures and gestures, it is likely to produce some physiological change in the person who performs it. From the ethological point of view it may be argued that the resulting shifts in sensation, attention, and state of mind are the most direct benefit that humans derive from praying as an activity – a very significant reason, quite separable from matters of belief, for why people may be disposed to find such activity rewarding (Wijeyewardene 1987).

In Toraja indigenous religion, invocations are the speciality of priests (*to minaa*, literally: 'knowledgeable persons'), uttered in the ritual language of which they are masters. This higher register of language, rich in its efflorescence of poetic imagery, has so few individual carriers as to constitute a 'scarce resource' (Keane 1997:54). By contrast, when ordinary householders make offerings (such as those connected with rice cultivation), they may do so without any accompanying utterance. Such offerings are termed *dipapore*, 'considered complete [without words]'; the intention of the person performing the offering suffices to make communication effective. But a *to minaa's* offerings are always accompanied by prayers; in the most impressive rituals his verbal performances may continue for hours, even an entire night. At smaller rituals, the *to minaa* may pray quietly in an introverted manner, while those present

<sup>5</sup> Compare Sebeok (1964:356, 363) on the tight texture of charms among the Cheremis of eastern Russia.

<sup>6</sup> Tedlock (1983:181-5) analyses the role of stress, pitch and delivery in Zuni prayers, some of which are pronounced emphatically to ensure the deities get the message, while others are 'said with the heart' inaudibly because secretness is part of their potency.

continue their own conversations and are not required to pay attention. By contrast, longer ritual chants are declaimed as public performances, often amplified these days with the help of a microphone, and intended to be heard and enjoyed by the audience. Although some of these long compositions have been recorded (Van der Veen 1965, 1966; Coville 1988; Panginan 2000), little has so far been written about the genre of invocatory speech among the Toraja. In what follows, I examine the verbal content of some Toraja invocations, which strike me as raising interesting questions about what it is that, as speech acts, they are intended to accomplish, and how.

*The Sa'dan Toraja and the cosmology of Aluk To Dolo*

The homeland of the Sa'dan Toraja was known until recently as the Kabupaten (Regency) of Tana Toraja in the northern highlands of South Sulawesi. As part of the ongoing process of political devolution in Indonesia since the fall of Suharto, in November 2008 this was split into two, the southerly Kabupaten retaining the former name while the northern part is now known as Toraja Utara. The Toraja are one of the very few Indonesian peoples who succeeded, under Suharto's 'New Order' régime, in gaining official recognition of their indigenous religion, Aluk To Dolo ('Way of the Ancestors') (Waterson 2009). This involved its administrative classification under the umbrella of Hinduism, one of the five officially approved religions, to one of which all citizens are expected to profess allegiance.<sup>7</sup> This was one of the last areas of Indonesia to come under Dutch administration, in 1906, and the first missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church arrived not long after, in 1913. Although they made very few converts in the decades preceding World War II, the long-term impacts of modernizing institutions (schools, hospitals, and a health service), in the establishment of which the Mission played a decisive role, were far greater than this initially 'glacial' pace of conversion might lead one to suppose (Bigalke 2005:129; Plaisier 1993). From the 1960s until the present, the pace of conversion has accelerated; today, perhaps less than 5% of the population still maintains the Aluk To Dolo.

I was led to reflect more closely on the nature of invocatory speech in the process of making a documentary video portrait of *To Minaa Sando Tato' Dena'*, a special priest of the Aluk To Dolo (Waterson 2007). He officiates solely at Rites

<sup>7</sup> The first of the Pancasila, or 'Five Principles' of the Indonesian constitution, to which all citizens must give their allegiance, is 'Belief in one God'. After the massacres of alleged communists that brought Soeharto to power in 1965-1966, not to avow a religion was to risk accusations of being a communist. The officially recognized religions are Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Hinduism/Buddhism. On how Indonesia's indigenous religions have responded to state pressures, and their labeling as 'Hindu', see Ramstedt 2004.

of the East, or 'Smoke of the Rising [Sun]' (*Aluk Rambu Tuka*'), those that have to do with life and fertility (as opposed to mortuary rites, the Rites of the West or 'Smoke of the Setting [Sun]' (*Aluk Rambu Solo*')), and he has often helped me in translating ritual verse. This register of the language is distinguished by its rich use of metaphor as much as by its unusual, sometimes archaic vocabulary. As in other eastern Indonesian societies, parallelism (the pairing of lines, and of the words and syntax within them) is a pronounced feature (Fox 1988; Kuipers 1990). Toraja religion focuses principally on ritual performances involving offerings to ancestors (*to dolo*) and deities (*deata*). Relatively prominent among the deities of the traditional cosmology is Puang Matua, the 'Old Lord' of the heavens, who created humans, animals, trees, iron, rain, chickens, buffaloes, rice, cotton, and various other items in his forge in the sky.<sup>8</sup>

Toraja ancestors form a generalized category into which individuals of both sexes merge after death; the deities are not much personified either, being mostly unnamed and of indeterminate gender. Immanent in nature, they are closely associated with named features of the local landscape such as mountains, rivers and springs, from which they may be summoned in ritual chants. Unexpected encounters with the *deata* (most likely to occur in wild, forested areas or on mountain tops) can be dangerous, causing illness, amnesia, or total disappearance into the 'unseen' realm. It is therefore unwise to call them at any time without an offering; but, properly engaged with, they are a source of vitality and fertility. Ancestors are also thought of (at least in some regions) as becoming deified eventually with the aid of rituals held by their descendants. They are described in chants as becoming one with the stars, returning to earth as rain to make the rice flourish. The realm of the unseen, then, is parallel or coterminous with the seen. Rituals are a means to tap the life-enhancing powers of the unseen, and draw good fortune or blessing (*tua'* or *kamarendengan*) from it. The exact source of this blessing is hard to establish, but prayers often seem to be summoning it from far away, or from distant regions representing all points of the compass, or describing its journey across oceans and mountains to reach those who are making an offering.<sup>9</sup> The term *deata* also signifies 'spirit' or 'vitality', in a way that parallels the widely occurring term

8 Although he is one of many deities, and not responsible for the creation of the entire cosmos (there is much diversity in the origin myths of different districts), Puang Matua received a promotion when Van der Veen, the talented Dutch linguist who translated the Bible into Toraja, chose his name as the translation of 'God'. By now the influence of Christianity, and the Indonesian state's aggressive promotion of monotheism as a national principle, have undoubtedly influenced conceptions of Puang Matua within the Aluk To Dolo.

9 *Tua'* appears related to Proto-Austronesian \**tua(q)*, 'lucky, happy', via a borrowing from Malay *tuah* ('luck') (R. Blust, personal communication 1-10-2008). The Iban also use the word *tuah* to mean fortune or blessing (Masing 1997). *Kamarendengan* denotes well-being, especially in the sense of 'long life' (Tammu and Van der Veen 1972:477).

*semangat* and its cognates in Austronesian languages (Waterson 2003), reflecting an animist cosmology (Benjamin 1979) in which power is seen as diffused throughout the cosmos, potentially concentrating itself in certain features of the landscape, living things or even manufactured objects.<sup>10</sup>

A leitmotif of Toraja religion is the theme of 'expectation' (*pelambean*). In the most spectacular life-enhancing Rites of the East, everything expresses the expectation of bounty and fertility. Expectation was the driving force that once propelled people to invest extraordinary communal effort in elaborate rituals. This theme is reflected in the words for 'prayer'. To pray is termed *mangando*, which has the sense of 'to hope, ask or wish for', also 'to call a chicken to you with the intention of catching it' – an image that resonates with the metaphor of 'hooking' good fortune, which I shall discuss later. Another term is *mempala'* (literally, to stretch out one's hand as though asking for something, though this is used especially in the context of asking forgiveness for faults), or *mellambe*, from the same root as the noun *pelambean*. To recite ritual poetry during the making of offerings is also called *mangimbo*, or in western districts, *ma'mammang*. For Toraja, it is quite possible to make an offering without a verbal performance, but not vice versa. That would be 'to recite dry' (*mangimbo marengke*); words without the social lubrication of offerings would be unproductive or even dangerous. Thus, communication must be initiated by some form of exchange.<sup>11</sup> Betel leaf and areca nut constitute the smallest of offerings, and are always part of larger ones, which involve the sacrifice of varying numbers and colours of chickens, pigs, or buffaloes. The sharing of betel is here, as in other Indonesian societies, a fundamental element of human social interactions, thus its association with talking is especially close.<sup>12</sup>

Longer prayers on formal ritual occasions are structured in three segments. The first invokes the deities and/or ancestors; the second asks forgiveness for any faults wittingly or unwittingly committed in the community (*massarrin kundun*, 'to sweep away misfortunes')<sup>13</sup>; the final part is termed *pelambean*. This expresses the hope or expectation of abundance, well-being, and wealth, that crops should grow well, animals reproduce, and humans enjoy longevity and have many children. This part is also called the 'hooking

<sup>10</sup> Toraja sometimes use the word *sumanga'* interchangeably with *deata* to mean a person's 'spirit' in this sense.

<sup>11</sup> This is a major point of contention with the Toraja Church (Gereja Toraja), which uncompromisingly rejects the making of offerings as idolatrous.

<sup>12</sup> Likewise for the Weyéwa of Sumba, to pray is 'to exchange betel with the spirits', equivalent to paying them a social visit (Kuipers 1988:109).

<sup>13</sup> *Kundun* also has the sense of an obstacle, disturbance or hindrance to one's well-being. Aluk To Dolo includes a wide range of ethical strictures (*sangka'*) and prohibitions (*pemali*). Infractions of these may cause misfortune or natural disasters, but they are not like 'sins' in Christian theology, in that they have consequences even if committed without intention. If offences were not 'swept away', they might get in the way of the flow of blessing.



of good fortune' (*ma'kadang tua'*) or drawing down of blessings (as mangoes or other fruit are plucked from tall trees by means of a long, hooked pole).<sup>14</sup> The longest recitations are those associated with the largest Rites of the East, the *ma'buu' pare* and *merok*. At *merok* the performance is called *massomba tedong* ('sanctifying the buffalo' that is to be sacrificed). It begins late at night and continues for hours until dawn, its core being an account of the creation of the cosmos and everything in it. The entire narrative is addressed to the buffalo, explaining, ultimately, why it has been destined for sacrifice; it is said that if performed well enough, the buffalo will weep, thereby demonstrating its consent. The length of this recital, while partly dependent on the performer's skill, is commensurate with the supreme importance accorded to the rite in the districts where it is traditionally performed.<sup>15</sup>

At Rites of the East, the unfolding of precious heirloom textiles (*maa'* or *ma'wa'*) is a form of invocation in itself. A variety of types of *maa'* exist; some are antique Indian cloths, while others were the work of anonymous local artists. A striking feature of Toraja *maa'* designs is their filling of the entire field with images of fertility and abundance – a tree, a giant betel vine, a swarm of flying ants hatching out of a hole in the ground, or a rice field full of water weeds or urgently swimming tadpoles. In many cloths, a central roundel represents a fish pond or buffaloes' wallowing-hole in the rice field, with buffalo cows and their suckling calves being led through it by their herdsman, surrounded by ducks, fish, or tadpoles. These humble motifs drawn from nature are powerful images of abundance and reproductive energy, often executed with great rhythm and verve. Tato' Dena' explained that these images are themselves intended as a vehicle of *pelambean*, or expectation, evoking the desired abundance of life and the wish for many descendants.

It is worth noting here the prominent place that Marcel Mauss awarded to 'expectation' as a simultaneously sociological and psychological phenomenon, in his exploratory essay on 'Real and practical relations between Psychology and Sociology' (1979:29). Mauss declared the study of expectation to be 'most urgent', as a social fact which presupposed a consideration of humankind in its totality, involving both mental, emotional and bodily dimensions, as much as social ones. He pointed out the dual role of expectation in both holding a social order in place (people's expectations of rights, of the law, or of the acceptability of money, for instance, not to mention their moral expectations of relationships), and further, of providing an impetus

<sup>14</sup> The house carving design *pa'kadang* likewise expresses the hope that occupants will 'hook' good fortune. Compare Sather (1992) on the use of 'hook' symbolism in Iban agricultural ritual.

<sup>15</sup> Tato' Dena' performed *merok* at Nonongan in 2005; part of his performance can be seen in Waterson (2007). A version from Kesu' was recorded by Van der Veen (1965). Sather (2001:120) notes a comparable addressing of the sacrificial fowl in Iban healing rituals, its spirit when sacrificed 'carrying the speaker's petition directly to the spirits'.

to action (as for instance in the economic sphere, in lotteries, speculation or investment, or in diplomacy). Above all, he saw the drama of expectations aroused and discharged as being played out vicariously over and over again, not only in the performance of magical acts, but in the arts, in games and in rituals. I have argued elsewhere (Waterson 2009) that the idea of *pelambean* expressed in Rites of the East is matched in the mortuary Rites of the West in the form of Mauss's more often celebrated insight: the expectation embodied in the powerful social obligation to repay a ceremonial gift, in this case gifts of sacrificial livestock, mostly made by affines to those hosting the ceremony. But since prayer, in the Aluk to Dolo, must be accompanied by offerings, in the context of communication with the unseen it would seem that humans, while showing respect through their prestations, also hope to compel the favour of ancestors or deities by indebting them. Any gift given now involves a projection into the future of a moment when it will be reciprocated, adding an element of compulsion to the hopes expressed in invocations.<sup>16</sup> The expectation of blessing thus contains a narrative element as much as a dialogical one, in its hope for positive outcomes to an as yet unfinished story.

### *Flowing water, flowing words*

Toraja ritual compositions are always arranged in the form of couplets in which the second line repeats, in often more elevated and obscure form, the meaning of the first. Sandarupa (2004:73-4) illuminates this scheme as a system of recursion in which (according to Tato' Dena'), the first line is female and the second, male. The female is the 'unmarked' part of the pair, the second with its more obscure and restricted usages being 'marked', and encompassed by the female. Toraja use the term *sibali* (to be a couple, as man and wife) to describe this complementary pairing. It reflects a fundamental feature of Austronesian cosmologies, in which the complementary pairing of male and female elements is essential to creative processes of all kinds. Sandarupa (2004:73) adds: 'This characterization of female/male parallelism is consistent with Toraja speech ideology that states the belief that the coming into being of something must commence [with] speaking about it (*dikalo'-kalaranni*). The power of speech is to bring into being fertility and reproduction.' So here at the heart of the Toraja poetic form we are at once dealing with poetics, in the more profound sense of creative action. Toraja express the magical power of the word in the term *balo'*, more specifically *balo' peossoran*, the power to bring

<sup>16</sup> Howell (1994:28) makes a similar point about how Lio ceremonial exchanges and offerings to the ancestors help to 'create the future'.

about/power of utterance.<sup>17</sup> I would add that the meanings of *osso'* include uttering things in the right order (as in *ossoran nenek* – a recitation of genealogy, or *ossoran badong* – the sequence of verses in the songs sung for the deceased at funerals). Intimately associated with this power is the imagery of the irrigation channel (*kalo'*). By digging a channel, water is made to flow into the rice fields; and speech metaphorically is described in the same terms, as 'digging a channel' (*dikalo'-kalaranni*) to enable the flow of desired things (wealth, livestock, valuables of all kinds, fertility, well-being) toward the community of the speaker. 'Thus speaking about the desired things...is first of all to create a mental state about such reality which can be persuaded, led and captured through *mangosso'* to enable them to flow (*ungkalaran*) into visible reality (*dipalessen'*)' (Sandarupa 2004:91). In what follows, I shall address further these key ideas of flow, persuasion and capture.<sup>18</sup>

Unbroken continuity is regarded as an essential feature of successful oral performance; incorrect pairing or a break in the flow of speech will result in 'crippled words' (*kada sondo'*) that lose their efficacy or may be positively dangerous. As Tato' Dena' explained to me: 'If the flow of words is halting (*tikadang-kadang*) it's no good. The words must be paired, and flow without a break (*siulang*); only then can you really call yourself a *to minaa'*. The performer maintains a continuous flow of sound, not using pauses for breath to articulate the segments of the verses, but always repeating a syllable after stopping for breath, as if to patch the gap.'<sup>19</sup> Rappoport (2011:86-7), who has extensively analyzed the genres of Toraja ritual song, notes their intended evocation of the sounds of flowing water. *Simbong*, a male chorus performed at the *ma'bua'*, means literally 'to dive into water'. Rappoport was taught by the now deceased *to minaa* Ne' Ambaa of Lo'ko' Lemo that at one time, it was considered necessary to 'purchase' the right to perform it (*unnalli simbong*) by making offerings at a waterfall, and singing:

*Sarambu indo'na simbong*  
*katituen-tuenanna*

Waterfall, source of song  
in its infinite rolling

<sup>17</sup> Sandarupa 2004:91. *Balo'* can take various forms, such as magical stones, said to enhance the reproduction of buffaloes or pigs, or to make the wearer invulnerable. Other forms of *balo'* include ancestral heirlooms, and certain inherited skills such as massage.

<sup>18</sup> Images of well-being connected with the flow of water can be found in ritual action as well as in verbal performance. 'Damming the river' (*ussapan salu*) is the name of a rite of cleansing held in the preparatory stages of the great Rites of the East, *ma'bua'* and *merok*. A pig or cockerel is sacrificed and offerings made at a customary place on a river bank (each *bua'* or ritual area having its own designated spot for this purpose), putting the community in a purified state before the main part of the ceremony begins.

<sup>19</sup> A variety of techniques involving the overlapping or repetition of syllables are used in different Austronesian societies as a way of 'patching over' pauses for breath so that continuity is conceptually maintained.

<i>Sa'tiko-sa'tiko le</i>	Hold yourself in peace
<i>Sarambu indo'na simbong</i>	Waterfall, source of song
<i>darra' tipasengo-sengo</i>	the rapids sing without interruption
<i>Gandang deatamo le</i>	It's the drum of the divinities

The guardian of the waterfall, recipient of these offerings, is Pong Pirik-Pirik, the deity of rain. The waterfall imagery, Rappoport suggests, evokes 'a principle of continuity, of permanence, of fecundity, of perpetual renewal of life, suggested by the musical aesthetic'. A common refrain in the songs of *ma'bu'a*, sung by both men and women, is the following: *Saruran letten lemo* (literally, 'waterpipe rolling lemon'), which was explained to me as meaning: '[Our song is smooth as] flowing water, as a rolling lemon.' Rappoport, however, discovered a further meaning, namely that the image of yellow lemons is intended to evoke the idea of gold nuggets, and of panning for gold in the rivers, as Toraja used to do in the remote northerly reaches of Baruppu' and Kalumpang. The singers performing *simbong* hold in their hand a wooden disk shaped rather like the conical hats sometimes worn in the rice fields, with small pendant rattles of beads and coins attached, with which they gesture from side to side. This gesture evokes gold panning; in Awan, Rappoport recorded a verse in which the imagery is made explicit:

<i>Letten lemo male mati'</i>	Lemons rolling to you
<i>Kanduang batu rara'ki</i>	Jumping aboard of our golden stones
<i>Kurre' kurre' sumanga'</i>	Come here, come here, vital spirit <sup>20</sup>

The *simbong* chorus with its oscillation between semitones is intended to have an effect of 'harmonic thickness', a powerful, all-enveloping sonority like the uninterrupted cascading of water over a fall (Rappoport 1999:147). The same kind of sensual effect is aimed at in the performance of the *ma'badong* chorus, *simbong's* 'pair' in the sphere of mortuary ritual. Again, there are multiple audiences. While *simbong* is intended to attract the deities and draw good fortune from far away, as well as entertaining the human audience, the night-long performance of *ma'badong* was said to have a contrary effect, in helping the *bonbo* or spirit of the deceased to depart on its journey to Puya, the land of the dead.<sup>21</sup> In both cases, the journey is made to happen by being described

<sup>20</sup> In Mamasa Toraja, west of Tana Toraja, Rappoport (personal communication) encountered women singing this same verse while weeding the rice fields, making the 'gold panning' gesture with their hats, so that the hats were actually in the water. This suggests a further link between water, fecundity, gold and rice (the 'gold' of harvested rice is often evoked in ritual poetry).

<sup>21</sup> *Ma'badong* traditionally was performed only at higher-ranking funerals where the deceased was represented by an effigy (*tau-tau*). This was placed in the centre of the *ma'badong* circle, so that the deceased's spirit, said to be still lingering around it, would be comforted and helped to depart.

in some detail. There is no doubt that a distinct aesthetic is involved in these performances, effectively inseparable from notions of efficacy.

*Invocatory poetics, parallel landscapes, and dream imagery*

Prayers are not necessarily poetic, but why should they ever be so at all? What is it that a poem is supposed to do, and how might this be supposed to lend force to a prayer? In the context of Christianity, Targoff (2001:57) notes that 'in the centuries preceding the Reformation, there was no obvious distinction between lay prayer and devotional poetry', and that all of the prayers in the *Lay Folks' Mass Book* were written in rhymed metre. One reason for this was the assumption that rhyme would assist memorization among a largely non-literate congregation. If the authors of new vernacular texts such as the Book of Common Prayer, introduced after the Protestant Reformation, abandoned verse and chose to write entirely in prose, this was precisely because they distrusted rhyme 'as symptomatic of an idolatrous relationship to language', in terms of which some magical force might be deemed to reside in the form of the prayer itself. What is it about poetry that could excite such suspicions?

Definitions of poetry by some Western literary critics draw contrasts with practical or scientific activity. For Paul Valéry (1990:140), poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking, a pleasurable end in itself. Oakeshott (1959:36) considers poetry to be playful or 'non-laborious activity', the creation and moving about among images, only for delight (Oakeshott 1959:31); poetry, in his view, is 'a sort of truancy', because of its purposelessness, its only purpose being to please the self (Oakeshott 1959:63). In this view, it would seem, poetry need be only indirectly pleasing to others. Such a definition of poetry as lyrical and private activity hardly suits the context of ritual poetry, which clearly does have work to do in providing pleasure to audiences both human and non-human. Eagleton (2007:28) likewise sees poetry as play, the very opposite of instrumental activity, and as being primarily 'about pleasure', while also making moral statements of value. 'Simply by existing, poetry fulfils a utopian function, testifying to a form of life which would be less in thrall to labour, coercion and obligation. Poets, like infants, relish sounds for their own sake. Poetry is a superior form of babbling' (Eagleton 2007:8). As he points out, the act of writing a poem in Western cultures may be 'desperately private', even though always 'potentially shareable'. In a Lacanian framework, play springs from desire, at root the infant's desire for recognition from the parental other - not a solitary activity, then, but ideally a playing with, in which the parent, entering totally into the game, satisfies the longing for recognition: 'It is in play that we come into our own as human subjects' (Eagleton 2007:58). That would seem to return us to the idea of the parent as the original partner in communication,

or superaddressee. Where ritual verse is addressed to the ancestors, as is often the case in eastern Indonesian societies, it does in fact continue, in sacred form, a dialogue that once took place face to face in the world of the living.

But what is it exactly that makes poetry pleasing? Many authors draw attention to the power of poetic images as resting in their ambiguity (Jakobson 1960:370-1; Oakeshott 1959:60). For Jakobson (1960:377), 'the supremacy of the poetic function over the referential function does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous'. The poetic is essentially about selection and combination, and through this process any verbal element may become poetic; thus the poetic, far from being merely a form of ornament, represents 'a total re-evaluation of the discourse and of all its components whatsoever'. The rhythms of poetry work on us by affecting our perception of time: 'Only in poetry with its regular reiteration of equivalent units is the time of the speech flow experienced, as it is – to cite another semiotic pattern – with musical time.' The poetic function thus exercises a coercive power upon the attention of the listener (Jakobson 1960:358). But it is not just rhythmical patterning that has this effect, it is what is done to the words themselves. Victor Schklovsky comes closest to the heart of the matter when he describes the language of poetry as essentially 'a difficult, roughened, impeded language', designed to 'defamiliarize' ordinary things. In this way the maximum effect is aimed for by slowing down the hearer's perception: 'Thus "poetic language" gives satisfaction', he concludes (Schklovsky 2004:19). In light of these insights, I define poetry here as an intensification or compression of language, whose density, difficulty, or unexpectedness (its 'roughness', in Schklovsky's terms), is designed to move the hearer.<sup>22</sup> Although this notion of 'roughness' might seem quite at odds with a Toraja aesthetic of smooth continuities, there is no doubt as to the density of ritual language, while parallelism itself, by the very fact of requiring everything to be said twice, literally enforces a slowing of the speech flow!

The invocations I want to consider here captured my attention because of the haunting beauty of their poetic imagery. But I am also struck by the fact that rather than supplicating, they are shaped as statements, designed to bring about a desired future state of well-being and abundance (or conversely, to rid the community of faults that might incite divine or ancestral retribution). This form gives them a distinctly instrumental quality, raising the question of whether they function more like spells. Tambiah (1968), however, has argued forcefully against any logical separation of prayers and spells, at least so far as Frazer's discredited notion of an evolution from 'magic' to 'religion' is concerned. He argues instead for a unitary analysis of the widespread human

<sup>22</sup> This is to exercise a kind of enchantment over the hearer. Although Gell (1998) was not considering the verbal arts, his ideas about enchantment as a sort of spell of technical virtuosity woven over the recipient of a work of art are of relevance here.

belief in the 'magical power of words' in all kinds of ritual contexts, pointing out that many complex rites exist in which myths, spells, and prayers are all combined in an ordered sequence. The disjunction between sacred and profane levels of language, he points out, and the existence of ritual specialists, is as widespread in oral cultures as it is in literate traditions. As for the efficacy of prayer or ritual language within the social context provided by the ritual event itself, he repeatedly returns to its effects on the human audience. While recognizing that, problematically, the content of what is communicated is not always comprehensible to the participants, he still proposes that 'all ritual, whatever the idiom, is addressed to the human participants and uses a technique which attempts to re-structure and integrate the minds and emotions of the actors' (Tambiah 1968:202). While this argument in itself is unexceptionable, rather than privileging this rationalizing explanation, I would insist that multiple putative audiences are involved and that we must pay careful attention to all of them. In the Toraja case, one can identify three distinct audiences for the prayer: not only the human participants, and the throng of deities or ancestors supposed to be present, but also the sacrificial animal itself, which is to carry the message into the realm of the unseen.

Crucially, for participants, invocations aim to affect unseen interlocutors. How? One very obvious way is by their evocation of the surrounding landscape, and a sense of the vast spaces stretching out from the Toraja mountains far away across the sea to the horizon in all directions. The parallel landscape of the unseen is there in the seen. Words and song are the instruments by which Toraja aim to bring about movements and effects in this parallel dimension. It is from the 'edge of the sky' (*randanna langi'*) that deities travel to receive their offerings, or from which good fortune can be summoned, or to which faults and misfortunes, or the spirit of the dead on its journey to the afterlife, are dispatched. Sometimes, chants include what Fox (1997:8) has called a 'topogeny' or reiteration of a named sequence of places in the landscape, tracing the path of deities as they travel to attend a rite, or calling them from the surrounding mountain-tops (Waterson 1997).<sup>23</sup> That this recitation is really supposed to accomplish their arrival is confirmed when some of those present fall into trance, as in the *ma'bugi'* healing ritual. Examples of this evocation of a journey through the landscape are to be found in the following prayers.

At Pangrorean in Mengkendek, in December 2004, I attended a small ritual, *ma'sissing ba'ta'* ('mending the rice field dikes'), which marks the begin-

<sup>23</sup> Compare the invocations of Iban bards, narratives of great journeys across the ocean to the 'land across the sea' and up into the sky to invite the deities to attend longhouse rituals. With the description of their eventual arrival at the feast, the longhouse is charged with their presence, such that everyday social space is merged with that of the unseen (Masing 1997; Sather 1993, 2001).

ning of the agricultural cycle. On a hillside outside the village, five chickens were offered. The local priest of the Aluk To Dolo, To Minaa Ne' Bubun, performed the invocation (*mangimbo*) to accompany the offerings. Although I filmed his performance, I am unable to provide a complete translation because Ne' Bubun is frail and of advanced age; his performance at first did not rise above a barely audible murmur. However, as he continued, his voice became stronger, and I was later able, by reviewing the footage with the help of Tato' Dena', to make a slightly compressed translation of at least part of it. This part intrigued me since what is personified here is the blessing itself (here referred to as *tu mantaeanan* – literally, 'every sort of wealth'; note the fusion in this term of bounty and well-being), which is described as travelling from far away to arrive at the community which is making the offering:

... By this prayer, blessing that may be at the edge of the sky, whether to the north, south, east or west, let it arrive here. We are here in a cleansed state in Pangroean. We beg for blessing, so that we may live to a great age. Blessing departs from all the directions, it is crossing the ocean to come to us. It cannot sink in the great ocean, it will not be lost in the deep water. It will come and bless the buffalo-herder. The blessing asks: 'Where is the settlement called Pangroean?' It crosses valleys and mountains without meeting any obstacles along the way. It arrives in this territory, it comes to this village, so that the crops flourish and the rice-stacks are heaped up in rows. Even the new-born children will be healthy, nothing will bother them. People who come here will ask: 'How is it that all flourishes so well? Why are the people of Pangroean never sick, their heads don't ache and their hair never falls out? Why is the wealth of Pangroean like water overflowing?' I am here facing a row of chickens which we have prepared for the ritual, just as once was done by Pong Mula Tau, the first human on earth. These rites have been performed since the beginning, rituals as numerous as ants on the face of the earth...

This personification of good fortune, autonomously existing in nature, and able to be summoned from far-away places, is graphically enacted in another Rite of the East, the *maro*, typical of northern Toraja districts. A fragment of the ritual poetry of *maro*, poetry that takes many forms and is known collectively as *gelong*, is described by Zerner and Volkman (1988). This was part of a performance they witnessed on the slopes of Mount Sesean in 1977, in which a group of *to minaa* gathered to chant for six entire nights, building with greater and greater intensity toward the final day of trancing on the ritual field. The presence of the deities is confirmed for participants as some of them become possessed or 'taken' by the spirits (*naala deata*) in a whirling dance in which they then become able to perform extraordinary feats without injury. The poem they recorded, on one of the nights leading up to this climax, is called *ma'pakumpang*, 'to cause [something] to lean, incline toward, or be sympathetic'; what is de-



scribed in the poem is an imaginary tree or bamboo laden with precious things, like the *kayu bilandek* or world-tree of myth, a 'tree of desire', which came into being as the three layers of the cosmos first separated out of chaos, and which has its roots in the underworld and its branches in the heavens. It is described in ritual verse as having seven kinds of leaves made of different varieties of precious textiles. This tree is also represented physically during the ritual by a tall triangular construction called the *bate*, made from bamboos interwoven with heirloom cloths and swords. The image of a tall, swaying tree is described as bending low first in one direction and then another, its branches becoming laden with valuables (Zerner and Volkman 1988:298):

<i>Ia kumpang langan Bone</i>	It bends like a tree-top toward Bone,
<i>Ia kumbaya baya</i>	It sways for a while,
<i>Ia mentangkan pindan</i>	It becomes branches of white porcelain bowls,
<i>Mendaunan sanda sanda</i>	Becomes leaves of all kinds,
<i>Angga dipokalalanna</i>	Everything that is used,
<i>Mintu' dikande kandena...</i>	All that is eaten...
<i>Kikaloran komi sae</i>	We make a water channel for you to come,
<i>Kitetean batuan komi</i>	We build a stone bridge for you,
<i>Kisaruran bulayanni</i>	We make a golden water[pipe]
<i>La rampe indo mo tende</i>	It will arrive here,
<i>La tasik lengkoi lino</i>	[It will fill the whole land] <sup>24</sup>
<i>Tang la kalimban-limbanan</i>	[It will not flow away].

The poem's image of the tree as it bends here and there creates a topogeny of named places, within and beyond Toraja, evoking a historical landscape of trade in which every location is known to yield a different sort of valuable: gold from Mamasa to the west and iron from Seko to the north, buffaloes and coins from Duri and Enrekang in the south, gold daggers and salt from Palopo in the east, and on a more modern note, cars from Makassar, the provincial capital. From nearby villages more humble goods are summoned: fish, palm wine, vegetables, tubers, baskets, and pots. Note that the poem is not phrased as a petition, nor apparently addressed to the deities as such, but takes the form of affirmative statements; the laden tree of desire is paired with the all-important image of wealth and well-being as flowing water, channelled so as to flood the rice fields and be firmly held there by the raised dikes of mud that

<sup>24</sup> Zerner and Volkman render these lines as 'The sea will encircle the world/ There will be no brokenness', but *tasik* ('sea') here is being used as a verb, with the metaphorical meaning of arriving in great quantities. *Kalimban-limbanan* refers to the breaking up or crumbling of hard earth; the image here is of prosperity like a flow of water flooding the rice fields, safely retained by the dikes so that it will not flow out. The term they translate as 'waterworks', *saruran*, means a bamboo pipe used to channel irrigation water into the rice fields.

will not crumble to let good fortune escape. The poem concludes by evoking the image of the extended family as a 'bamboo clump', gathered to snatch all this wealth and not let it go; the whole performance is likened to a dream (Zerner and Volkman 1988:305). This is significant, as I shall show in a further example, since dreams themselves are interpreted as portents of the future:

<i>Sundun tindo bonginna</i>	Complete are the dreams of the night,
<i>Sola mamma' karoenna</i>	With the sleep of the late afternoon,
<i>Anna barana' kalando</i>	So that the banyan tree is tall,
<i>Anna lamba' paonganana</i>	So that the <i>lamba'</i> tree gives shade.
<i>Inde to ma'rapu tallang</i>	Here is the family bamboo clump,
<i>Mintu' ma'limbo kaluku</i>	The whole cluster of coconuts.

Just as blessing can be summoned to arrive at the speaker's location, in a contrary movement through space, ritual verse can also be deployed to expel misfortune toward the far horizon. Tato' Dena' recounted for me some verses of an invocation designed to rid the community of sickness or misfortune which might be brought on by breaches of prohibitions:

<i>Lendu' lako randanna langi'</i>	It will pass to the edge of the sky
<i>Mengkara'pa lako lelean uran</i>	It will be carried away to the place where
rain can be seen falling on the far horizon	
<i>Tibungka' randanna langi'</i>	The clouds will clear at the edge of the sky
<i>Tikini' lelean uran</i>	The rainclouds will lift on the distant horizon
<i>Lendu' lako tangditondokkinna</i>	It will reach a far place where no-one lives
<i>Tang di pembanuainna</i>	Where there is neither house nor village to
be seen	
<i>Tangna salimbanna tau mata</i>	Where no people have ever reached
<i>Anna sikabu'tuan posi' tana lambe'</i>	A place uninhabited by human beings
<i>Na sisombo' garanggang malolongan</i>	Where a gaping ravine opens up
[ <i>posi' tana</i> - literally: 'navel of the earth']	
<i>Tibollo barra' mi rokko posi' tana</i>	Where a vast abyss yawns
<i>lambe'</i>	It will be spilt like rice into the navel of the
vast earth	
<i>Tiboke amboran rokko garanggang</i>	It will be thrown away into the yawning
<i>malolongan</i>	abyss
<i>Mintu'na aluk pakundun batu</i>	All our faults and offenses
<i>Makalima'na sangka' patande uaka'</i>	And every kind of misfortune.

The term *lelean uran* in line two, which pairs with *randanna langi'*, 'the edge of the sky', is a good example of the poetic intensification so characteristic of Toraja ritual verse. This term, requiring many words of English to translate,

conveys a typical experience when moving through the mountainous Toraja landscape, where from high places one can enjoy views in all directions to the horizon, of seeing a distant cloud raining on some far mountainside.

Another *to minaa*, Ne' Buttut of Simbulan in Ulusalu, recounted to me an invocation which is recited at the conclusion of the *ma'tetean bori'*, a ritual divination of dreams which forms part of the rites for inauguration of a newly built (or rebuilt) house. By means of this prayer the members of the house and community are 'cooled' (*dipasakke*) or brought well-being. In it, the house members are described as entering deep sleep together, in the darkest part of the night. The sleepers swim in an abundant sea (*tasik mapulu'*), which in dream-imagery represents a fertile rice field full of water weeds and plants. They will dream of rows of standing stones on the sea shore, which represent the tall stacks of newly-harvested rice, called *patuku* or *lappo'* (*lappo'* in the Saluputti dialect), made by the reapers on the rice field banks at harvest time:

<i>Kumapu' mo bonginna, Puang</i>	The night is already far advanced, O Lord
<i>Pasapa' madaruma' mo makaruenna,</i>	Evening has turned into night, O Creator
<i>To Pagaragai</i>	
<i>Ma'din matangai lalan mo matindo</i>	They may be half way through their dreams
<i>Maeru' kalambunanmo mamma'</i>	Almost there, crossing over into deep sleep
<i>maya-maya</i>	
<i>Uppemandappi' lepongan tondok</i>	Approaching the circle of the village
<i>Uppemareke' pa'kalemba to bunga'</i>	Striking the path that leads to the place [of prosperity]
<i>Lasitodo' tappo diongmai batu</i>	Rows of stones support the rice field dike
<i>Dantalasia siapi' bala batu</i>	Tough grasses have been laid in between
the stones	
<i>Ladisolan dokko mamma'</i>	They will be sleeping close together down in their dreams
<i>Ladirondong dokko matindo</i>	Dreaming all together down there,
side by side	
<i>Ta ma'tindo lan tangana bongi</i>	We shall dream in the middle of the night
<i>Mangimpi lan pesekong malillin</i>	Dream in the darkest part of the night
<i>Unmorongi ki' tasik mapulu'</i>	We shall swim in an abundant sea
<i>Tindona uma kadoke-dokean</i>	Dream of a rice field full of <i>doke-doke</i> plants
<i>Mamma'na ma'kambuno lumu'</i>	We shall dream that it is full of water weeds
<i>Ma'pata'dung doke-doke</i>	Covered all over with <i>doke-doke</i> plants
<i>Batu ma'dandakan dio biring tasik</i>	Stones in a row at the edge of the sea
<i>Tindona patuku ma'dandan</i>	To dream of them means you will have rows
of rice-stacks	
<i>Sola lappo' sielongan.</i>	And heaps of newly-harvested rice all in
a row.	

Although this verse appears to invoke Puang Matua, the creator deity, he is mentioned as though in passing only in the first two lines. The remainder is actually the description of a dream. It expresses the wish for an auspicious communal dream that has yet to be dreamed by the house members. The wish is a projection into the future, and the dream itself is an auspicious portent of the abundance that will come to the house and its descendants. So far I have only encountered one comparative example, from the Paku Iban: Sather recorded a long narrative prayer which was customarily sung by an Iban bard at a couple's marriage, in which their not yet conceived children have a dream signifying their achievement of great renown. The children are given poetic names and compared to spirit heroes and heroines.<sup>25</sup> This dream, however, is quite explicit in its imagery, whereas what is especially intriguing about the Toraja example is that it really does have the strange, surreal quality of dream imagery. For we have all experienced dreams in which we seem to enter another element, and feel as if we are swimming, or flying. The metaphorical qualities of the dream imagery follow Freud's rules (1978:383, 414-9) of condensation and displacement, in which meanings are compressed onto an object which actually stands for something else. And just as Freud maintains in his analysis that dreams are wish-fulfillments, here too the dream represents a wish. But there is something else remarkable about that imagery: when I asked Tato' Dena' to explain what he understood by the mysterious image of 'stones in a row at the edge of the sea', he insisted that what was meant were standing stones, the tall menhirs that traditionally are erected on a community's funeral ground (*rante*) as memorials for deceased aristocrats. The appropriateness of the imagery lies in the way the tall, rounded stones echo the shape of the rice-stacks (*lappo'*) made by harvesters when they pile bunches of cut rice into tall heaps on the rice-field banks.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, this mingling of an image from the realm of mortuary ritual with that of harvest and fertility, the predominant themes of Rites of the East, must strike us as unexpected; it serves perhaps as a reminder that the ancestors, too, contribute to fertility for their descendants. According to the ritual poetry, they pass eventually beyond the afterlife to become one with the stars and rain: 'We shall meet them at the edge of the spring'. Reunited with nature and recycled to earth, they too come to have an association with life-giving water.

In these examples, then, ritual speech works to project desires through both space and time, calling blessing or sending away faults across the far landscapes of the imagination, and projecting into the future the accomplishment of desired ends.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Clifford Sather, personal communication.

<sup>26</sup> The same imagery is repeated in the greatest Rite of the East, the *ma'buu' pare*, acted out there in the making of tall cones of sticky rice, also called *lappo'*, representing the hope of tall rice-stacks at harvest time (Waterson 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Keane (1997:54) discusses the use of ritual language to project desired actions in time, but not its intention to achieve movements through space.

*The flow of blessings as an Austronesian concept*

*Metua'* in Toraja means 1. to make sacrifices at a funeral and 2. to pour out. My acquaintances explained it to me as a symbolic 'pouring out' of resources in sympathy with the bereaved, or to show respect and love for the deceased; but Tammu and Van der Veen's Toraja dictionary (1972) states as the primary meaning: 'to seek *tua'*, or blessing, from the dead person by sacrificing. That fits with what some Toraja say about the benefits to be gained from making funeral sacrifices. At the same time, the image of 'pouring out', which presumably is going in both directions as a sort of exchange, fits with the notion of 'flows' of blessing, explored by Schefold (2001) as a specifically Austronesian idea. Schefold maps a set of three culturally salient ideas about the sources of blessing, which recur in many Austronesian societies: these are firstly, wife-givers; secondly, ancestors, especially those of an autochthonous population in relation to a later, immigrant one; and thirdly, spirits or power of the wilderness itself.<sup>28</sup> The prominence of the idea of a flow of blessing in the Toraja context compels a comparison; but what we find here fails to accord with Schefold's schema. Toraja bilateral kinship does not produce the pattern of asymmetrical alliance which creates clear groups of wife-givers and wife-takers, such as typify many societies of Sumatra and eastern Indonesia. Nor do Toraja share the kind of mythical history common in eastern Indonesia, that distinguishes an older, autochthonous population from an immigrant group establishing a later claim to political dominance. Lastly, the relative density of population in the Toraja highlands has resulted in such extensive deforestation that there is hardly any forest left; although the 'thick forest' (*pangala' kamban*) is a turn of phrase occurring occasionally in ritual poetry, 'wilderness' is not a category that has retained particular salience.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, as he elaborates, Schefold's three sources of blessing all carry implications about precedence. But this is a theme which, while certainly present in Toraja society, finds its expression, as I have argued elsewhere (Waterson 1984, 2009), in mortuary ritual. The Rites of the East contrast with these, in their strongly communal orientation; although the aristocracy took a lead in sponsoring their performance, the resulting benefits were supposed to be shared by all participants in the community, however humble.

Thus, in the indigenous Toraja scheme of things, while sometimes ancestors and deities are requested for blessing, *tua'* is also envisioned as an autonomous force, immanent in the world/in nature/in all the four directions, with the

<sup>28</sup> Schefold's argument shows striking parallels with a quite independent work by Helms (1998), which is based on a broader cross-cultural survey.

<sup>29</sup> There is a contrast here with the Mamasa Toraja, in whose traditional religion the powers of the wild and the forest did feature much more prominently (Buijs 2006).

potential to be addressed, invited, 'hooked' or channelled from distant places through the power of words. But it has no ultimate, identifiable source as such. I propose that this conceptualization, as much as it embodies a vision of power immanent in the cosmos, also reflects the historical reality that luxury goods have for centuries filtered through to these remote highlands from dimly-imagined, distant locations in India, China and Europe. Helms (1988:114), in a wide-ranging comparative survey, has shown how frequently cultures integrate geographical space and distance into their cosmologies, such that geographically distant locations, 'virtually by definition', acquire supernatural or mystical connotations, and material objects deriving from them, especially if they must be obtained by exceptional effort, come to be viewed as charged with cosmic power. In the past, long-distance travel was indeed difficult and dangerous for Toraja, but the Sa'dan highlands have been since at least the fourteenth century a destination for imported luxury items, a terminal point in the long chains of trade relations that enabled aristocratic houses to acquire the textiles, beads, and porcelain dishes that served to enhance their status, becoming treasured heirlooms and items of ritual display.<sup>30</sup> The peripheral highland landscapes often evoked in ritual poetry were likewise the source of valuable items such as gold (discussed above), dammar, and blow-dart poison (*ipo*). One route by which luxury imports must have reached the highlands would have been through the coastal kingdom of Luwu', which rose to prominence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Given the blood ties and tributary relations which existed between Luwu' and some of the Toraja nobility, notably of Sangalla', some cloths might also have been received as gifts from lowland rulers in acknowledgement of those ties. The sustained demand for textiles in the Toraja highlands has much to do with their integration into ceremonial life, which provided the main context for rivalrous expressions of prestige. The dramatic display of cloths at rituals, as we have seen, was itself believed to attract the attention of the deities, expressing the hope of future blessing.

Today, travel is easy and many Toraja migrate to seek their fortunes and see the world for themselves; thus the mystification of valuable objects and their sources, and the idea of ritually attracting them across vast distances, no longer exercises the same hold on the imagination. Nor are aristocrats any longer the only ones with the means to procure durable wealth. In the past,

<sup>30</sup> New refinements to radiocarbon dating techniques enable tests to be done on tinier samples of just a few threads. These methods have now been applied to Indian cloths formerly held as heirlooms by aristocratic houses in Toraja, and now in museums or private collections. A good number have yielded dates in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Kahlenburg 2003; Barnes 2010). The Roger Hollander collection, recently acquired by the Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore, includes several fourteenth-century pieces; the oldest has a date range of AD 1285-1365, and thus may even be thirteenth-century. Imports of Chinese porcelain to South Sulawesi began from the early fourteenth century (Bulbeck and Caldwell 2000).

the performance of major Rites of the East centred around a sponsoring aristocratic origin-house, yet involved the participation of the whole community and promised a diffusion of blessing to all. The fact that some proportion at least of commoner families, as well as owing political loyalty, could trace affinal links to aristocratic houses might have lent some added plausibility to this scenario.<sup>31</sup> Today, migrants of all ranks return with cash to pour into the inflationary performance of mortuary rites, for which the Toraja are famous; while the Rites of the East, with their evocations of communal prosperity, in the face of Christian opposition have in large part withered away.

### Conclusion

I have argued here that if, like Boyer, we want to search for the cognitive fundamentals underpinning and shaping the human propensity for religion, our urge to communicate, with its entailment of an intersubjective orientation, is

a crucial feature that has so far been passed over in this discussion. This orientation, irrepressibly manifested from the moment of birth, is clearly a human universal; the conversations, both pre-verbal and verbal, in which we engage with affectionate others provide the basis for the interior monologue that we later learn to conduct with ourselves. But as well as this internalization of the dialogical impulse, we also share the potential for its projection outward into communication with the unseen. This sort of activity, puzzling as it appears to be, is so widespread in human societies that we must be obliged to admit as a historical exception the strictly disenchanting scientific worldview in which Buber's 'I-It' objectification ought to govern all non-human relations, rendering such communicative acts definitively futile. Boyer (1993:35-8) proposes that religious concepts typically display a combination of ordinary and extraordinary properties; non-empirical beings from different religious traditions display all kinds of mixtures of non-human and human characteristics, in differing proportions, yet some degree of personification may be necessary in order for them to be imagined as communicable-with at all. As much as the nature of the unseen interlocutor(s) may vary, so too do the intensifications of style considered appropriate for communication with the unseen. In this paper I have dwelt especially on the 'poetic' qualities of some Toraja invocations and suggest that elements of literary theory, combined with the idea of *poiesis* as creative action, may help us understand how Toraja conceive the efficacy of language as part

<sup>31</sup> Women could marry men of higher status, though there was a prohibition against their marrying down; men of noble descent frequently pursued informal liaisons with women of lower rank, even slaves.

of complex ritual performances. In the Toraja case, Schklovsky's 'roughening' or slowing down of the language to impress the hearer is ironically achieved through tropes intended to make it 'smooth' like flowing water. The pairing of lines literally slows things down, while achieving intensification through the use of obscure, elevated vocabulary and poetic imagery. To speak in this style is to lift language out of the mundane realm of the everyday, signaling the intention to communicate with the unseen which is the purpose of ritual.

In some examples I have examined, the 'flow of blessing', an idea which Schefold has defined as characteristically Austronesian, is invoked through verbal performances in a way that suggests that 'blessing' is being directly personified and addressed, while remaining an amorphous force whose sources are imagined differently than in the other Indonesian societies examined by Schefold. Schefold presents his three sources of blessing as an archetypal complex of ideas relating to the deep history of five millennia or so of Austronesian expansion through island Southeast Asia. As archetypes, albeit finding variable expression in different times and places, they might seem to be so deeply embedded in Austronesian cultures as to be almost out of history. But there is another important flow of blessing with a still deep but more traceable history: the flow of international trade over the past six hundred years. Such flows of wealth, we are reminded, are not a new phenomenon of our own globalizing age (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996), for a multicentric network of global commerce long predated the European world-system. Textiles were for long the main form of currency exchanged for spices (Barnes 2006:111), and so the flow of goods reached into the most distant islands of eastern Indonesia. More comparative work remains to be done on how the 'memory of trade' (Spyer 2000) has been woven into rituals and cosmologies in different Indonesian societies.

While rituals may appear to be carried out with the utmost conviction, most people might have difficulty answering an anthropologist's nagging questions about how exactly invocatory speech acts are supposed to 'work'. I have proposed here that some Toraja examples stand out as having a more declarative than supplicatory character, stating rather than requesting the desired future outcome, and even projecting it through the description of a dream, itself a portent of the future. As well as projecting desired outcomes in time, they also move things about in space, evoking the landscape of the known world through which unseen beings, or good and ill fortune, can be summoned and dispatched. Thus I propose that we need to be sensitive to nuances in the full range of invocatory forms of communication. As Howard Morphy (1994:129) has observed in another context, 'it is often difficult to determine if a particular ritual action ... is a poetic statement or an instrumental action.' In the Toraja case, I argue that the poetic and instrumental functions can hardly be separated, but paying close attention to how Toraja themselves perceive the power of poetry illuminates significant aspects of their indigenous cosmology, as well as their history.



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### Filmography

*When the sun rises: A Toraja priest of the Ancestral Way*. Director Roxana Waterson (2007). Video, 66 mins.