

on losing and getting a head: warfare, exchange, and alliance in a changing Sumba, 1888–1988

JANET HOSKINS—*University of Southern California*

At the end of the 19th century, the Eastern Indonesian island of Sumba was torn by warfare, headhunting, and slave raids. Hundreds or even thousands of Sumbanese were captured and sold overseas, and others were brought back as captives or killed in ritual vengeance (Needham 1983). Among those who perished in such raids was Rato Malo Umbu Rangga,¹ an important nobleman from the traditional domain of Rara. He was traveling from his home in the highlands of the interior down to the coast where he hoped to sell ten of his slaves. His party was ambushed sometime around 1888 by a band of mounted warriors from the neighboring region of Kodi. His head was cut off, and his body left by the roadside, where local people who recognized him prepared a simple earthen burial. The head was carried, along with the captured slaves, in a triumphant procession back to the ancestral village of Ratenggaro, where it was greeted with a victorious celebration of singing, dancing, and sharp, ululating battle cries. The flesh was boiled from the skull in a special ritual pot, then the skull was hung on a tree altar (*katoda*) in the center of the village, and the loose hair of the scalp hung in the right front corner of the house, to rest “within the sight of the spirits” (*ela mata marapu*).

For some 50 years, the head would remain as a trophy of war, displayed in the House of Silver Heads (*Uma Katakū Amaho*) and remembered by its proud owners as the head of an important man. When Dutch colonial forces gained control of the island 30 years later, they prohibited warfare, headhunting, and the slave trade, ushering in a new era of exchange, alliance, and trade between former enemies. One of the most prominent figures of this new age was Yoseph Malo, Rato Malo’s son, who had been sold into slavery after his father’s death but later rose to become a traditional ruler and official of the Dutch colonial administration. As his own career flourished, he remembered the early sorrow and humiliation of his father’s death and his own sale into slavery, so he decided to recover his father’s head and rebury it in a

The taking of bloody heads in vengeance raids on neighboring peoples defined the parameters of leadership and political relations on the Eastern Indonesian island of Sumba a century ago. After pacification in the 1920s, exchange values of fierceness, military skill, and violent conquest were transformed into modern ones of rivalrous diplomacy, feasting, and alliance. Yoseph Malo, a prominent figure in these transformations, decided to negotiate with his former enemies for the return of his father’s head. Details of this negotiation bring into question the relations between systems of headhunting and alliance, the status of exchange as a transformative activity, and the analytical definition of persons and objects, gifts and commodities. The biography of an important figure in Sumbanese history is linked to the “biography” of a severed head, as well as the “life histories” of persons and objects on which he bestowed ritual names. Through a reevaluation of the role of exchange in determining value, a new perspective is suggested on how persons and things change their identities as they move through time. [history, exchange theory, headhunting, alliance, Eastern Indonesia]

splendid stone tomb where all passers-by could gaze on a monument to the restoration of his family honor. To do so, he began an elaborate series of negotiations with the House of Silver Heads. The head had to be redefined from its former status as a trophy into a new one as an exchange valuable, and Yoseph Malo chose to do so by proposing a marriage alliance to his former enemies. Earlier exchange values of fierceness, warfare, and vengeance were transformed into modern ones of rivalrous diplomacy, feasting, and alliance.

This exploration of the events that led to the return of Rato Malo's head also probes the wider historical processes that made such a transaction possible.² The career of an individual historical actor, his life path, is studied alongside the "path" of his father's head, which takes on the attributes of an object, a part of a person, an exchange valuable, and finally a kind of grave goods. Over the last century, Sumba has moved from emphasizing violence and conquest as the arena for defining social accomplishments to alliance and competitive exchange. It is possible that pacification has produced a distorted picture of indigenous political leadership, emphasizing entrepreneurial feast-givers ("Big Men") who held center stage during recent periods of ethnographic investigation over headhunters and feuders, whose power and prestige may have equaled or surpassed them in the past (Keesing 1985:237). Although we cannot fully reconstruct the role of these divergent activities in an earlier era, we can use the life history of a prominent man as a window onto more widespread historical transformations.

The puzzles we seek to unravel can be posed as three key questions: (1) Why did Rato Malo's head come to carry such great symbolic weight? Most heads stored as nameless trophies of war have never been ransomed or extensively negotiated for, and remain anonymous counters in a system of competitive raiding. Before pacification, skulls could be bought and sold with livestock as ornaments for important cult houses, in a macabre trade in prestige commodities that recalls the contemporary circulation of antiques or art objects. This head, however, was not acquired in order to be displayed and paraded by the enemy, but as the reclaiming of an ancestor by his descendants. Its transfer through an alliance negotiation offered a new pattern for regional exchange in a form now well known throughout the western part of the island. Its recovery and the feasts and grave-building that followed helped to define a new form of prestige activity in a transformed Sumba. (2) What were the indigenous relations between headhunting and alliance that permitted a shifting of the vocabularies and strategies of warfare to another form of exchange? How could human heads—once the mark of an unending enmity between houses—be transacted for as if they were part of the class of valuables normally exchanged at marriage? Could the two really be considered to be part of the same system of ideas? (3) How does the head as an object fit into the wider category of objects whose exchange histories help to define personal identity? What modifications are needed in our analytic approaches to encompass the career of an object considered at various points in time as both a person and a thing, and finally given an exchange value at the very moment that it is withdrawn from exchange?

The argument is structured to provide an overview of the historical content for these events and then an assessment of their meaning. In conclusion, I suggest how this case can shed light on recent debates about the relative status of "gifts" and "commodities," "persons" and "things," and the transformative power of exchange.

Sumba before pacification: slavery and headhunting

Dutch colonial interests in the outer islands of Indonesia were formed primarily by the economic potential that these isolated regions afforded for trade in exotic products (spices, sandalwood) or as efficient centers for the production of coffee and coconuts. Sumba, an arid and sparsely populated island a bit off the trade routes leading east to Timor, seemed of minimal interest. Although given the early name of the "Sandalwood Island," it was soon almost com-

pletely deforested of the limited number of fragrant sandalwood trees it possessed. Arab merchants organized the sale of lively, small horses raised on the high grasslands, and there was also some interest in fine textiles produced in the eastern districts. But the main resource West Sumbanese had to sell to traders who came into their ports during most of the 19th century was people: Slaves, usually war captives from nearby regions, seem to have been the prime local product which left the island, often in the hands of Endeheese merchants who took them to other ports in Flores and Bali (Needham 1983).

The extent of the slave trade may have intensified regional warfare, perhaps also spurred by an increased demand for metal weapons, gold valuables, beads, and gongs among important families in the coastal areas. Permanent relations of enmity between highlanders and lowlanders were institutionalized in ritual headhunting. More haphazard slave raiding, murder, and robbery were also common within the same district, where the first Dutch observers reported no security of any persons or goods. Although there were locally recognized chiefs, they did not seem to have much authority over the people, and were always provoking new wars with their neighbors (Roos 1872:89).¹

Such was the political climate at the time Rato Malo set off on his ill-fated journey to the coast. When his head was taken as a trophy, his third son, Kuri Bili, was a boy of about nine playing unguarded by the house. Knowing that his older brothers would be away seeking immediate revenge on the killers, slave raiders came to kidnap the boy. They planned to take him to the northern port at Waikelo, where Endeheese traders often stopped. On the way, he was recognized by Sario Luku, a nobleman who had known his father and grandfather and who warned the raiders about his background. He gave the boy a fine cloth and a blessing, promising him that he would someday be restored to his rightful position if he continued to pray to the spirits of his powerful ancestors. His kidnappers decided to dispose of him hastily, leaving him with an important family in the Laura district near the site of the first Catholic mission on the island.

the blessing of the foreign god

German Jesuit priests first came to Pakamandara in 1866, deciding to build a mission center there because of its proximity to the northern port and the availability of white limestone for building. Their efforts in early years were focused on recruiting the sons of various important families into their schools, baptizing them with Catholic names. Hundreds of small children were baptized during those years. Sometimes a single name was used for a whole village, but since the priests could not speak any of the local languages, they could not communicate much about the meaning of conversion. They remained under the protection of the district chief, who spoke some Malay and was more hospitable to foreigners than other indigenous rulers. Proximity to the port, however, also put them too close for comfort to the center of the slave trade. Thirty years after their arrival, repeated threats and security problems drove the Mission away in 1898, and the Catholic Church would not return to Sumba for another generation (Haripranata 1984; Hoskins 1987a).

Bili was educated for a few years at the mission school, and learned to speak Malay with the priests, but he never finished his studies. Some Sumbanese said that his first owners sold him to the Jesuits for the price of a corrugated iron roof, while others say he was simply transferred without payment to work as the mission shepherd. Recognizing a parallel to the Biblical story of the shepherd boy Joseph sold as a slave to Egypt, the Jesuit priests baptized him in 1891 with the Catholic name of Yoseph. In the official history of the Catholic Church on Sumba, Yoseph is listed as the first of the "mature" converts who had received religious instruction, although his age at the time was estimated as only ten (Haripranata 1984:134).

Some years after the ambush, Yoseph's brothers heard of his whereabouts and came looking for him. He asked the permission of the priests to return to his family home, agreeing to leave

behind two replacements: one of his younger brothers, who eventually traveled away from the island when the Mission was called back, and a boy slave that he had purchased himself and given the name Gabriel (“angel who brings good tidings”). Having thus bought back his own freedom, he returned to his mother’s house and resumed his family obligations.

Almost a century after this initial baptism, Yoseph Malo’s son interpreted the course of events that began his father’s struggle out of adversity as “a testimony of God’s love to Yoseph Malo and those who came after him. . . . who were called to the Catholic faith through a strange and extraordinary way—slavery” (Djakababa 1988:i). In spite of this early calling, few of the events of the next 50 years showed much direct influence from the foreign god that the Jesuits had spoken of.

tribal warfare, chiefly succession, and a brideprice of blood

Returning to his family home in Kamauta, Rara, about 1894, Yoseph Malo became identified by his ability to read and write Malay, and was given the nickname Kuri Dawa (Kuri the foreigner). Fatherless and with little personal wealth, he wandered around trying to charm girls by playing the *dungga*, or traditional fiddle, and narrating short personal poems (*lawitti* and *tenda*) in ritual couplets. He seemed unlikely to make a good match until he demonstrated his own bravery and restored a portion of his family honor by taking a head on his own.

Then a war party from Manola raided several villages in Rara, killing most of the men and capturing the women and children as slaves. The whole region went into mourning: Widows and orphans placed ashes on their heads, and could not bathe until the wrong was avenged. An official war party was sent out to seek revenge with elaborate songs and sacrifices, but returned empty handed. At the same time, Yoseph Malo sneaked out with his elder brother Bora and staged an ambush on an isolated couple from Manola, who lived just at the edge of the forest. Attacking them after dark as they slept beside the almost extinguished fireplace, the brothers managed to steal away with both heads before anyone realized what had happened.

Their arrival back in Rara was not greeted with a fitting reception ceremony, because no one knew where they had come from. Yoseph Malo and his brother announced their own arrival by singing victory songs (*paowowe*) and swinging the bloody heads around, finally heaving them at the feet of Rato Kurri, the chief of the region at the time. A celebration began immediately, as the mourning period was lifted and Rato Kurri announced his willingness to allow Yoseph to marry his daughter Ndairo. No other brideprice was paid at the time. Two possible explanations of this have been suggested by commentators: One, advanced by rivals in Kodi and various others, was that “blood was the brideprice,” and Rato Kurri had offered his daughter to anyone who could avenge that wrong. The second, put forward by his son and descendants, was that Rato Kurri recognized that the success of the raid “was a clear sign from the ancestral spirits regarding his choice of a successor in later years” (Djakababa 1988:12).

The raid probably occurred in the last years of the 19th century, and in 1911 Rato Kurri sponsored a major feast to install Yoseph Malo as his adopted son and successor as chief of Rara. He referred to him as the “child of my nights, the child of my days, who speaks with my lips and mouth, whose liver is my own, and whose voice is my voice” (Djakababa 1988:17). As is fitting for someone whose honor has been challenged and avenged, a white bull with a black head was sacrificed, and its meat distributed raw to announce this fact to all the lineage heads in the region.

For many years, Yoseph Malo rarely used his baptized name, and was most often referred to with honorific titles taken at feasts in his new home at Puukarudi. Such names are chosen by the individual concerned, and attached to prized possessions displayed on public occasions. Most lineage heads and chiefs take horse names, such as Yoseph Malo’s name Ndara Dangadora, “the horse which rushes here and there.” But he also gave personal names to his dog

(*bengga ndaingo ate*, the dog that consumed its own liver (in suffering)), his knife (*keto ate lara*, the one found in the road), his spear (*nombu nda kamakku*, which attacks without hesitation), and his shield (*tonda kere mata*, glanced from the edge of the eye). Naming these objects after elements of his own biography turned them into vehicles of his personal reputation, and showed his intention of creating a record of his presence in the circulation of livestock and valuables. As his fame grew, he coined couplet names derived from his own experience for his house and village, and later the domestic animals of most of his eight wives.⁴

In 1912, Dutch colonial control became a reality in West Sumba, and a civilian administration based on existing traditional territories was established. Chiefs of districts the size of Rara were recognized as local rulers (Dutch *onderbesturder*, Malay *raja kecil*), under the authority of a larger territory, in this case first Kodi Bangedo and then Waijewa. The local rulers were given a silver staff of office, and asked to serve as intermediaries with the colonial officials, judges and mediators in criminal and civil cases, and keepers of the peace. In effect, their traditional position was buttressed by the recognition of the “foreign mother and stranger father” who represented the government of the Netherlands Indies. Some of the first rulers suffered heavily for these responsibilities, such as the first *raja* of Kodi who died in a Dutch prison after an early insurrection against Dutch control (Hoskins 1987b). But a wily and diplomatic ruler who did not alienate the foreign commanders stood to gain immensely from the “stabilizing effect” colonial administration had on a highly unstable earlier political system of warfare, raiding, and military leadership.

Yoseph Malo remained the *raja* of Rara and Ede from the time of the first Dutch installation of native rulers until his retirement in 1950, after the achievement of Indonesian independence. He was instrumental in convincing rebels who killed two Dutch soldiers in Waimangura to surrender to the authorities, and he also helped negotiate an end to the insurrection in Kodi. During this period of rule, he decided to emulate the heroes of traditional narratives who traveled to distant kingdoms to seek their wives, and journeyed throughout the neighboring regions of Kodi and Waijewa marrying the daughters of important men. He was also active in traditional religious ceremonies (feasting, divination, oratory), since his Catholic “conversion” held little meaning in the complete absence of any church or clergy on the island. In the 1920s, he decided to use his already well-developed skills at negotiating difficult and prestigious marriage alliances to try to recover his father’s head from the village of Ratenggaro.

heads for tails: redefining warfare through alliance

It was his widowed mother who reminded Yoseph Malo of his obligations to his murdered father, since husband and wife are usually buried together within a single tomb and she did not want to go off alone to the afterworld. In the world of the 19th century, the only acceptable course of action would have been to raid the village of Ratenggaro and recapture the head, killing several village members in revenge at the same time. For a colonial official who had to respect the Dutch ban on regional warfare, this was no longer an option.

Yoseph Malo sent representatives to ask for the hand of Tari Ndendo, the daughter of Rato Poka, who was currently in possession of the head. When they presented the family with an initial offering of a fine gold pendant (*hamoli*), they were instructed to repeat these couplets:

There is something I also want
Which drifted like millet in the flow
Which fell like spoiled goat’s stew
A fruit tossed away carelessly
A vegetable thrown from place to place
Tossed in the fierce waves
On the cliff where Maya came
Turning in the flooding river sand
By the incline of the Gaura man’s grave

*Nei kingo pa kambu atenggu
Na mila a bale hada
Na mbogho a wei kawimbi
Na wu kabete mbyule
Na wu kamangge ndikya
Pa la wotini a mbanu nale
La taheku ngamba maya
Pa la halaiyo wango loko
La tawada rate nggaro*

The final couplets, containing the couplet name of Ratenggaro (*taheku ngamba maya, tawada rate nggaru*), signaled that he was aware that the people of that village also had something which he had “lost” and wanted to recover. Consistent with the modest idiom affected in ritual speech, the lost item was presented as insignificant and of little worth, in the hopes that its owners will not ask very much for it. However, perhaps fearing that they would not take this request seriously, he also added another couplet that proposed a different view of the object’s value: “I don’t ask for anything special, but there may be an old heirloom jar that you have, there may be a sacred room” (*uru no di kingo a ghuro njana, a koro hari*).

These last lines suggested to his potential affines that the head could be considered not as a trophy of war, but as an exchange valuable. In particular, it could be considered part of the highest class in the hierarchy of valuables exchanged at alliance as part of the *lipyoko* or counterprestation given from the bride’s side to the groom. In return for a brideprice paid in “tails” (that is, equal numbers of buffalo and horses, usually from 10 to 30), the bride’s family was expected to give a pair of men’s and women’s cloths for each “tail,” a long tusked pig for each ten, and an item of jewelry. In the most splendid marriages, the bride was transferred with heavy ivory bracelets on both arms (*lele*), a half-moon shaped headpiece of gold (*tabelo*), a fine riding horse trained to “dance” underneath her (*ndara nenggo*), and a personal slave to attend her. The amount of the counterprestation, however, was never established before the bride’s family had looked over the amount of livestock brought by the groom. Much finery was set aside, but its transfer was contingent on the conclusion of alliance negotiations. A groom who came with a special request had to assume the responsibility of overwhelming his hosts with an impressive initial payment in horses and buffalo, since their assent was never certain.

Rato Poka and his brothers received the gold pendant and speared a pig for the representatives from Rara to bring back, along with a length of man’s cloth. In this way, they indicated that they would entertain his request—but they warned him that

He must prepare to bump foreheads	<i>Tondo koba mata nani</i>
With the sons of red crocodiles	<i>Ana woyo rara</i>
He must come ready to smash kneecaps	<i>Ta kataku kundo nani</i>
With the sons of fierce sharks	<i>Ana tongga mbani</i>

Through reference to the totemic ancestors who watch over the welfare of Ratenggaro, they sent a warning that he had to deal with important people, former enemies and dangerous warriors. He had better bring a larger brideprice and be prepared for antagonistic negotiations. The bumping of foreheads and smashing of kneecaps is a couplet used to describe confrontations both in warfare and at alliance negotiations. Their remarks could in fact be construed as meaning that he should prepare for a tense encounter, whose orientation toward marriage or a military resolution was still uncertain.

The date for their meeting was set by representatives after further negotiations and sacrifices, and the people of Ratenggaro sent back another somewhat cryptic message:

We will not specify the number of livestock	<i>Njama rekeni danga haranga na</i>
We will not count the gold pendants	<i>Njama rekeni piri hamoli</i>
But surely he knows for himself	<i>Enga peghe manu wu banika</i>
The cost of crossing the pastures	<i>Ba na palango marada</i>
But certainly he recognizes himself	<i>Enga tanda mangu wu banika</i>
The price of coming through the forest	<i>Ba na dowango kandaghu</i>
His heart must beat with the thought	<i>Kubako maniki nja nani</i>
Of the sacred room	<i>A koro hari</i>
Which was tossed in the fierce waves	<i>Ha mai kyonggolo la mbariu nale</i>
His pulse must race with the idea	<i>Ku hababa malara mangu</i>
Of the heirloom jar	<i>Uru ndo nani a ghuro njani</i>
Which was carried off by flooding rivers	<i>Ha mai wyoti wyango loko</i>

These lines served to remind him of the higher expectations for brideprices that involved distant locations (across the pastures/through the forest), and indicated that they were well aware of the potential value of the head in their possession, which had great emotional importance for him.

On the appointed day, the Raja of Rara set off for Kodi with 40 head of livestock (20 buffalo, 20 horses), as well as four gold pendants and three large buffalo to be slaughtered in the course of the negotiations. They were received by the sound of drums and gongs beating, and there was dancing and feasting all the first night, before the formal meeting began. Thirty of the horses and buffalo were presented immediately, along with the *lara hari* or “sacred path” of precious metal goods (a spear, a knife, and silver ear pendants), and the people of Ratenggaro agreed to transfer the girl. She was brought out with 20 pairs of fine cloths, two pigs, a riding horse, and two buffalo to replace the slaves who should have come with her. The head, however, was still withheld.

Yoseph Malo’s ritual spokesman stood to make a final plea, asking them to “soften their hearts and assuage their livers” with a final act of generosity toward these people they had now received as wife-takers. The people of Ratenggaro agreed, saying:

This fulfills the destiny of the sacred room	<i>Tutu nanikya a koro hari mono</i>
This is the path of the heirloom jar	<i>Lara nikya a ghuro njana</i>
There is no more reason to stand firmly	<i>Njaingo pa leheko pandende</i>
There is no more to count out with red beads	<i>Njaingo pa kira ma maraka rara</i>
There is nothing planted too deeply	<i>Njaingo pa pahi pya hamula</i>
There is no more to measure with cat rings	<i>Njaingo pareka ma taghuro wodo</i>
So let him return with the upright drum	<i>Maka ta halako waingo kataku</i>
(in a procession)	<i>lende bendu</i>
So let him get up to the beat of the gong	<i>Tana na kede waingo kadenga</i>
(signaling victory)	<i>landa tala</i>
So he can cross his legs to sit	<i>Tana na mbara bica witti</i>
So he can fold his arms to rest	<i>Tana na hangga mbara limya</i>

The head was brought down triumphantly, greeted by singing and dancing from both sides. Rato Poka provided a man’s loincloth, another cloth for the neck, and a headcloth—complete ceremonial dress, which expressed his restored respect for Rato Malo, and the restored honor of the whole family. The head, which had been stored for so long as a trophy, was restored to its former status as a part of a person. The “cooling” gift of cloth expressed the recognition on both sides that his death would not be avenged. Ten livestock and a gold pendant were given as additional gifts by Yoseph Malo to his affines, and there were more animals slaughtered on both sides. Once the head was victoriously brought back to Rara, its arrival was announced to the *marapu* spirits through several nights of songs and prayers.

The successful conclusion of Yoseph Malo’s “alliance strategy” was marred by only one fault. Rato Poka’s daughter had been divorced earlier and returned to her father’s house before this splendid negotiation had taken place. After he had taken her, and his father’s head, home in a magnificent procession, Yoseph Malo was to know the real cause: She was epileptic, and subject to terrifying fits classified locally as a kind of insanity. Within a few years, she returned again to her father’s village. To keep the head (which he planned to rebury under a huge stone grave) and maintain the alliance, Yoseph Malo had to return some years later to negotiate another alliance with Ratenggaro to marry Dita Horo, his seventh and last wife, and the mother of his only surviving son. His adversaries were, in fact, cleverer than they seemed, but the alliance was ultimately a fruitful one, and provided a dynastic link between two of the most powerful families of rival domains.

when is a head not a head? analytic commentary

The rhetoric of the negotiation provides clues to the wider history of social transformations taking place in Sumba at the time, and within which these events provide a particularly dramatic enactment of more enduring changes. Enemies can be turned into affines when, in effect, the heads taken from them are no longer considered as heads. Three historically established “alternate identities” could be suggested for the head: an exchange valuable, a commodity in ordinary trade, or a prerequisite for ritual feasting and grave-building.

redefining the object: heads as valuables

The most crucial decision taken by the people of Ratenggaro—the one that opened up the way for all future negotiations—was the decision to accept Yoseph Malo's description of the head as a *valuable*—stored in the “heirloom jar or sacred room.” The couplet is a metonym for the head, kept out of sight in the right front corner of the house, and identified with a class of female prestige goods (such as ivory bracelets or bronze ankle pieces) that also take the form of empty receptacles. After pacification, heads could no longer be publicly displayed, and were often incorporated into the ancestral treasure. Rules concerning their transfer and exchange were derived from placing them within a category formerly restricted to male valuables (weapons, staffs, insignia of office) or female ones (gold jewelry, cloth, gongs). In treating the captured skull as part of a set of traditional valuables, the possibility of a more peaceful exchange between domains was established.

In pre-Dutch times, heads captured and stored in enemy houses were believed to generate “heat” for their descendants, who were afflicted with fevers, poor harvests, and disease until the death was avenged. The public display of the head on the skull tree caused the skull tree altar of its rival village to seethe and steam with rage, boiling with poisonous vapors that would not stop until a war party had “fed” the tree with a new victim. Other heirloom goods were also sometimes described as “hot” if they had been improperly treated, stolen, or disposed of, and ritual baths with coconut milk were required to “cool them down” and prepare them to be stored in bundles of cloth. When suppression of warfare made revenge raids impossible, similar techniques seem to have been used to “cool the heads” and neutralize their power at least temporarily so that they could be treated as movable wealth.

The category of valuables has several important characteristics, relevant to the fate of Rato Malo's head: (1) It defines a class of objects that are *exchangeable*, and can be transferred within the general framework of affinal payments and obligations. (2) It also recognizes that some of the most valuable of these objects may, for reasons of sentiment or high value, be withdrawn from the exchange system and set aside as family heirlooms. There is thus an implicit dynamic whereby objects increase in value through a lack of movement and visibility, and this immobilization may be manipulated by the owners of objects to further invest them with prestige and importance. Weiner has described this aspect of gift-giving as the creation of a category of “inalienable wealth” (Weiner 1985). (3) Gold jewelry, beads, ear pendants, and imported weapons can also become grave goods, used to ornament the body for its final journey to the afterworld. Although such objects are withdrawn from circulation for burial, they can be reclaimed by direct descendants when graves are opened to add new bones or bodies. Rato Malo's head, although similar in some respects to other grave goods, was more definitely withdrawn. Once reunited with his body, it changed its status from a trophy of war to a part of a person. It will never henceforth be permissible to disinter his remains and bring the head back into the exchange system.

In this context, we note that while, in precolonial conditions the supply of human heads was in principle unlimited (depending solely on the willingness of raiding parties to go off to seek new conquests, at considerable risk to their own lives), since pacification newly severed heads could no longer be introduced into the system. After 1920, human heads became relics of an earlier era, like gold coins and Chinese water jars, and were no longer counters in a game of deadly vengeance but trophies of a vanished age of heroism and military accomplishments. Thus, the head, which had a ritual importance in the past through its generation of “heat” and urgent call for revenge, could now sediment historical processes of change, and participate in a new and different system of values.

After redefining the head as a valuable, it was necessary to establish whether or not the valuable was “heavy” (*mboto*)—one that could not be moved without ancestral sanctions—or “light” (*halewa*), destined to travel the exchange paths that bind houses together in alliances.

Certain members of the House of Silver Heads whom I interviewed in the 1980s felt, in effect, that Rato Poka had been wrong to agree to the transfer. They said he was too eager to marry off his mad daughter to a prestigious suitor, and did not think of the loss of spiritual power the house would suffer through the alienation of a portion of its ancestral treasure. The most sacred objects in Kodi are characterized by their absolute immobility, such as the heirloom urn of governmental authority centered at Tossi, called the “urn which cannot be moved, the plate which cannot be lifted.” Kept out of the precarious game of exchange, these objects represent an unchanging authority, while the more mobile pieces allow for challenges and upsets in the existing order through strategic manipulations. In the past, when a junior house (*ana uma*) earned the right to set up its own skull tree and perform war rituals, heads were purchased from its more senior house with livestock so that invocations of enemy anger would “heat up” the warriors and prepare them for battle. Once the Dutch gained control, this ritual function became obsolete, and most heads were hidden from sight inside the attic, or concealed underneath tombstones, since it was believed that if white people saw them they would take them away.

In the 1980s, the House of Silver Heads no longer displayed its trophies, but portions of human skulls and jaw bones could be seen near the tombs of important warriors. Some members of the village were proud of them and believed they should be photographed. Others insisted that the still-wandering ghosts of those murdered in another age would be stirred to seek revenge if this were done. Present-day heads seem to have slipped out of time, anachronistically lingering in a world that no longer knows what to do with them. Yoseph Malo, a creative entrepreneur in manipulating the changing prestige system, had transformed his father’s head into a depository of history and meaning. But since most of the remaining skulls are anonymous bits of bone, it will be difficult—though not impossible—for others to follow in his footsteps.⁵

alliance, warfare, and trade relations

A material basis could be suggested to motivate the reinterpretation of previously warlike relationships in the new idiom of alliance. Ecological and economic differences between regions provide a background for both peaceful and hostile relations. Kodi is a coastal region, which traded and intermarried with other coastal peoples, such as those of Laura, the home of the Catholic mission. Rara is a highland area, with wet rice instead of the mixed swidden garden of dry rice and corn, and the enmity between lowlanders (*tou wawa*) and highlanders (*tou deta*) was supposedly eternal. While feuding often occurred within a single region, heads were not taken, and murder was compensated for with payments of bloodwealth (*tapo*), which restored friendly relations. Bloodwealth was paid in livestock and gold, and so if such a negotiation were to be attempted between the two regions, it should logically have been the people of Rateng-garo who offered a peace payment to Rara—and not the other way around.

Yet, while this match between Kodi and Rara seemed to violate precedent, Yoseph Malo’s initiative allowed him to redefine the relationship to reach a resolution with benefits for both sides. Having already contracted marriage alliances with Kodi, he knew that in peacetime the prospect of acquiring affines in the more fertile highlands was attractive to Kodinese, because of the lean “hungry months” the region experiences from September until December. During this period, supplies of rice are already depleted from the previous year’s harvest but the new crops of corn and tubers are not yet ready to be eaten. Rains come earlier to places like Rara, which normally produce a surplus of rice and eat their first fall crops by early October. The end of the dry season had been the traditional season for headhunting (known locally as *wulla kambohi* or “the months of fear”). Thus, war parties were often motivated by real need as well as the desire for revenge, and raided highland villages to steal rice, corn, pigs, and chickens as well as slaves. The imagery of headhunting verses and songs attributes a cannibalistic desire

for human flesh to the ancestors and greedy spirits of the skull tree and head-boiling implements, who say that “their bellies are still not full, their throats are not yet quenched” when they demand new victims. This metaphoric hunger had a human counterpart, which encouraged later generations of Sumbanese to establish a basis for peaceful trade once warlike looting was prohibited.

Traditional interdistrict circulation of trade goods occurred through a quest on horseback, called *mandara*, in which Kodi parties offered fine indigo-dyed textiles and domestic animals in return for foodstuffs from inland hamlets. Indigo did not grow in the highlands, and livestock did not reproduce as quickly along their damp hillsides as they did on the high pastures which line the Kodi seashore. The people of the interior usually had more to eat, but less access to prestigious wealth objects such as imported metal and weapons. While the 19th-century economy depended on the “negative reciprocity” of warfare for certain basic subsistence needs, simpler peaceful exchanges in the border areas established a precedent for regional exchanges that was developed after pacification.

In the period from 1912–45, many of these informal trading relationships were formalized into the more enduring obligations of wife-givers and wife-takers. By taking wives from Kodi, highlanders like Yoseph Malo assured themselves of a permanent supply of fine textiles and pigs, at the same time that they agreed to reciprocate with foodstuffs and gifts of horses and buffalo at feasts. Transactions for the recovery of the head, which fixed a simple price in livestock, would not have had the additional social benefits of a marriage alliance. In the 1920s and 1930s, only wealthy noble families were able to afford such far-flung alliances, but since the development of secondary schools and improved communications in the 1950s and 1960s, young people from more distant regions meet and form matches that increasingly unite former enemies. The expansion of the population (doubled since 1930, according to government census figures) and the opening up of interregional trade through alliance have had two immediate consequences which reflect the logic of competition and rivalry that still informs these relations: an inflation of brideprices (many have soared to over 100 livestock), and an inflationary spiral of feasting activities. Both of these suggest that we are dealing with ways of “fighting with property” that have long been familiar to anthropologists (Codere 1944; Rosman and Rubel 1971).

potlatch, parity, and feast names

Headhunting in Indonesia has been identified by J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong as part of the social-religious complex of potlatch, because it used violent attacks to restore a sense of parity between two competing groups: “The intrinsic value of the head itself is not due to its being laden with ‘soul’ or with ‘power,’ but to its being the supernatural means of redressing the balance between the groups concerned or even turning the scales to the advantage of one’s own group” (1936:164; see also Downs 1955:70).

If we accept this idea, it follows that after pacification new modes of “redressing imbalances” between these groups had to be found. Competitive feasts, which bring together more distant rivals from neighboring regions, have become more frequent in the last few decades, in a development that closely resembles the classic potlatches of the Northwest Coast. Alliance remains a primary focus for the competitive exchange of food and valuables, but there are also stone-dragging rites to build megalithic tombs, reburial rites, and celebrations held to consecrate a house or take a new title.

For Yoseph Malo, the return of his father’s head allowed him to begin a new cycle of feasting and grave-building. First, a divination and singing ceremony had to be held to “call back” Rato Malo’s soul from its wanderings in the heavens, where it had remained since the time of his violent death (Hoskins 1988a, 1988b). Then, he planned to pull a huge megalithic tombstone

for his parents' grave as the "most enduring and impressive symbol of family importance and renown" (Djakababa 1988:53). The stone was cut from a mountain many miles away, and placed on a wooden platform named for the ship of the ancestors (*tena*). Pulled by several hundred people, it took nine months to arrive at its destination. Each day pigs and buffalo were sacrificed to feed the workers, who competed against each other in "teams" from each of the surrounding districts (Kodi, Rara, Laui, and Ende). Yoseph Malo used older animosities from the times of warfare to shame his own people into greater activity.

Feasts and stone-draggings establish a whole system of titles, honors, and distinctions, which came to be extended to all members of the community who could organize such events and afford the expense. A chain of obligations stretching back through the generations means, however, that a son cannot pull his own gravestone until he has finished his father's tomb. Rato Malo's reburial was the starting point from which Yoseph Malo could launch his own feasting career. The highest title, Rato, is reserved for a man who has built his own house, pulled his own stone, and feasted in his garden hamlet and ancestral village (Hoskins 1986). Before his death, Yoseph Malo had followed each of these "stages of the ancestral spirits" (*katadi marapu*) and earned the title himself. As a particularly flamboyant ritual impresario, however, he invented new ritual names for each of his accomplishments to preserve them for posterity. The stone that he pulled for so many months was called *watu wila wala*, "the stone that rested along the way," and the finished tomb was called *hondi tana kupa* ("the tomb from a foreign land") because it was the first in the area to be covered with cement. His house received couplet names for each of its pillars, and he gave horse and dog names to his wives and the gold valuables that they brought with them.⁶ His biography was cut up and redistributed, so to speak, among various objects, women, and animals that he collected, so that nothing would be forgotten.

Each name was announced to the public at a feast, and then added to the list of praise names in couplet form that could be recited in invocations of the ancestral spirits (*li marapu*). For the Sumbanese, ritual names are a kind of "living history," which keep the memory of feasting and other accomplishments alive for their descendants.

heads as ritual objects and political targets

We can now return to some of the questions asked at the beginning. First, it is clear that the symbolic weight of Rato Malo's head grew "heavier" with the rising political career of Yoseph Malo, as did the shadow cast by his early experience of slavery. With passing years, this head became a political football for local rivals and commentators, making it necessary to remove the dishonor from the family.

Motivations for returning the head were not merely political, however. There was also a religious reason within the traditional system of *marapu* beliefs. No man who has not been properly buried can be called to serve as an ancestor and benefactor in the house of his descendants. The souls of those who die a violent death fly off into the sky, where they "ride on the hand of the sun, sit astride the feet of the moon" (*kalete limya lodo, kahonga witti wyulla*)—hostages of the deities of the upperworld until their kin recall them with singing and sacrifices. A provisional burial is arranged outside the village until the proper ceremony can be held. If, however, their heads remain in enemy hands, then the soul cannot be brought back, as it is captive to human as well as spiritual agents. The house of Yoseph Malo and his descendants could not receive full ancestral protection and the cooling waters of blessings until his father's soul had come to rest there as well.

The issue of supernatural sanctions for a failure to fulfill obligations to the dead reveals an interesting ambiguity between the force of the indigenous *marapu* and the foreign god. Of Yoseph Malo's eight wives, all but two bore children, a great many of whom died before reaching

adulthood, leaving only a single son and three daughters at the end of Malo's life. Twice during his childhood, Djakababa, the only heir, had serious illnesses during which his mother dreamt that he was helped by ghostly benefactors. In the first, a tall, imposing man in warrior dress offered her a spinning top and seed discus "for the boy to play with," and shortly afterwards his dangerous fever broke. These objects are used by the heroes of mythological narratives to achieve wisdom and endurance, and they were interpreted as coming from his grandfather. On the second occasion, it was the god of the white man (*marapu dawa kaka*) who came to assist her son and guide him through a passageway. She interpreted these dreams as showing that once her husband had discharged his duties to his murdered father, the foreign god would come to her son's assistance. And, in effect, the son who was conceived shortly after Rato Malo's head was returned and reburied later received a scholarship from the Catholic mission to study in the Philippines.

During most of his life, Yoseph Malo could not have been said to have "returned" to the Catholic Church of his boyhood conversion, since he did not attend Mass or renounce traditional practices such as divination, the reading of auguries, and feasting. When missionaries returned to build new mission stations in the 1930s, Yoseph Malo made several friendly visits, and agreed to have his son baptized in the faith. The priests respected him as a local leader and early friend of the Church, so they never challenged him to renounce any of his marriages. As his own death approached, however, he chose to perform a new alliance rite for the foreign god: He proposed to baptize and marry his last wife in a Catholic ceremony. This could be seen as a more final endorsement of the social transformation that happened during his own lifetime from the violence and conquest of his boyhood to alliance and the integration of outside powers in Sumba of the 20th century. At the age of 80, "Yoseph" and "Maria" were married in the presence of many relatives and grandchildren. When they died shortly thereafter in the 1960s, they were given provisional burials to await the completion of a permanent grave by their son, who finally finished the tomb in 1983. The flexibility of hierarchy in Sumba means that the final evaluation of any man's career is delayed until after his death—when responsibility for that evaluation must be borne by his descendants. As Yoseph Malo had finally justified his own social position by the splendid reburial he gave to his father's head, so his son would do the same.

male or female heads?

A second question is what previous links between headhunting and alliance could have prepared the way for the historical transformation of enmity into marriage. Particularly puzzling is the identification of the head with a *female* valuable ("an heirloom jar/sacred room"), given along with the bride as part of the counterprestation of women's goods (*lipyoko*) in alliance transactions. Its character as a cavity, a chamber that could hold the secret to precious descendants, was stressed in the rhetoric of the negotiation, thus placing it within a category of objects that embody and potentialize female fertility.

The temporary "femininity" of the head is most surprising when examined in a comparative perspective, since so many other writings about headhunting have treated the trophy heads as preeminent symbols of masculinity and virility. Freeman (1979:237) most clearly identifies the head with the phallus, seeing the Iban taking of heads as the equivalent of genital mutilation (with the important difference that the bony skull is durable, stays hard, and can be preserved for long periods). Among the Ilongot of the northern Luzon, the act of taking a head is a ritual expiation that "casts off a weight" from the heart, usually as a response to insult, grief, or a masculine sense of inadequacy. It can serve as prelude to marriage or social adulthood, but the head itself is discarded and not used for ceremonial purposes (M. Rosaldo 1977, 1980; R. Rosaldo 1980). In many Borneo societies, heads have remained the subject of extensive cults even

after pacification, and are ritually addressed, coddled, and nursed like children, causing one commentator to argue that headhunting ends in the “ritual incorporation of enemy as friend” (McKinley 1976:94), and the particular focusing on the face as a personal symbol.

Sumbanese headhunting differs from these traditions in that heads do not receive either the “ritualized friendliness” of Borneo nor the casual disposal of the Ilongot. Heads were stored in lineage houses as a kind of prestigious wealth, but they were not ritually fed or addressed. Since the flesh was immediately boiled away, the features of particular individuals were effaced—and in only a few instances are their identities even known. Acquiring heads was associated with the more familiar Southeast Asian themes of the promotion of human and agricultural fertility, however, as is demonstrated in portions of the headhunting songs and prayers remembered today. Returning war parties were asked whether they had brought a “sheaf of freshly cut paddy” (the newly severed head of an important man), and they answered with a humble reply to ensure that the *marapu* would continue to support future raids:

We return from twisting with rage	<i>Yama douka wali pa kalango lango mbani</i>
We return from avenging cut throats	<i>Yama douka na wali pa koko ngole helu</i>
From parting long grass to hunt pigs	<i>Wali pepeya a kahumbu la kalola wawi</i>
From crossing meadows to chase monkeys	<i>Wali dodoya a marada la nggeha koki</i>
But we killed no large boars	<i>Ma njana heda wawi ryongu</i>
But we massacred no large monkeys	<i>Ma njana mate koki njuka</i>
We didn't get the bells in the center	<i>Njama deke moko nggoro</i>
of the land	<i>puhu tana</i>
We didn't cut through the trunk	<i>Njama ngole moka tamboro wu</i>
of the round banyan tree	<i>kapaka</i>
Only a batch of worthless shrubs	<i>Di moka a mangabu pola bola</i>
Only a bunch of yellow-eyed weeds	<i>Di moka a manengge rara mata</i>

Images from hunting and gardening are used to suggest that their victims are low-ranking and insignificant (even if they have included noblemen), so that their hunger will not be considered to have been satisfied. They continue:

Hear this—the steaming stone circle	<i>Rongo baka—wyahako kalele</i>
Hear this—the smoking skull tree	<i>Rongo baka—nyawaho katoda</i>
We wear the loincloth of silence	<i>Ma wyanggenggo ha mumu</i>
We still hold onto ignorance	<i>Ma ketengo pango kambanga</i>
Without water to quench our thirst	<i>Njama wei kanduka koko pango</i>
Without rice to fill our bellies	<i>Njama ngagha mbahu kambu pango</i>
The four skins of those killed lying prone	<i>Halighico kalulla a mate ndenga</i>
Have not been fully avenged	<i>Njama ndelu mate ndenga pango</i>
The seven bones of those massacred	<i>Pitu mbu ri'ina a mate</i>
lying supine	<i>ndoba</i>
Have not been replaced	<i>Njama hepa mate ndoba pango</i>

The party of warriors insists that their hunger is still frustrated, so that they will be able to complete the full series of revenge killings needed to restore a sense of fullness and satisfaction.

Sumbanese headhunters do not say that they search for “soul stuff” of magical substances hidden in the head (cf. Needham 1976), nor that they capture the “spirit of the beheaded” (M. Rosaldo 1980:173) through the act of killing. But they do insist that they must seek revenge in order to eat, since the harvest will not be good as long as there are unavenged ghosts wandering through the skies. Agricultural prosperity is perceived as something of a “limited good.” The abundant rice and corn that they remove from the gardens of their enemies by taking heads is believed to find its way into their own crops. These beliefs are consistent with other ideas that rice souls can be coaxed and cajoled to leave the fields of their proper owners, and harvests can be “stolen” through warfare and negative magic before the young plants are even mature enough to be cut.

The enemy group can be a source of human descendants as well as abundant garden crops, in a fashion that brings us closer to the patterns of alliance. Once an ancestor's death is avenged, then the flow of “cool and refreshing waters” (*wei myaringi, wei malala*) is unblocked within a woman's body and she can conceive a “replacement” or reincarnation of that ances-

tor. In the case we are considering here, the application of this rule was somewhat controversial. Yoseph Malo may have felt that he had avenged his father's death at the end of the 19th century, when he took the head that he presented to his father-in-law before marrying. However, others noted that the son born to his first marriage and also named "Malo" did not survive to adulthood. It was only after the return of Rato Malo's head had been negotiated that the second wife to come from Ratenggaro, Dita Horo, bore him an heir who lived to maturity. Descendants of Rato Poka, the original owner of the head, take credit for giving a greater "gift of life" to Yoseph Malo because they consider that the physical return of the head was necessary to provide lineage descendants.

This linkage to human reproduction and the continuity of the house provides a clue to unravel the puzzle of the head's apparent femininity.⁷ The identification as a female valuable was dictated partly by the directionality of the alliance path along which the head was destined to travel (from the wife-giver to the wife-taker), but also by cultural notions of a residual, passive class of objects that can change their gender associations as they move onto the plane of action. While Rato Malo himself was a famous warrior, after defeat and beheading, his skull was emptied of its masculine identity and turned into a passive object that could be transferred from house to house. Passivity is identified with both dead souls and brides (cf. Hoskins 1987c), who are detached from their natal houses and moved to a new home. The voyage of the dead soul is elaborated in women's funeral dirges, where the singers reflect back on their own experiences of separation and loss as they reenact this detachment through mourning practices and the metaphors of bereavement. In order to escape the anonymous pool of dead souls (*ndewa tou mate*), someone who has died a violent death must be rescued by his descendants, who call back his soul and hold feasts to return him to his proper place as a named ancestor in the house.

The return of Rato Malo's head to his skeletal remains, and his reburial in a magnificent stone sarcophagus beside the road at Puu Karudi completed the process of restoring his honor, thereby enabling the restoration of a masculine identity in future generations. Rato Malo's head was only apparently "female" because it was an empty receptacle, incomplete as long as his soul was still wandering in the heavens. The owners of the head recognized the fact that it was destined to be reinstated as a person by "dressing" it in full *male* clothing at the time of the transfer, instead of simply handing over the "cooled" female bundle of an heirloom object wrapped in a sarong.

The restoration of his father's honor and identity was announced to the *marapu* in a prayer recited by Yoseph Malo when he visited the grave of Sario Luku, the nobleman from Elopada who had recognized him when he was captured as a slave and prophesied his eventual triumph over adversity. He offered his early benefactor a fine man's cloth and these words (Djakababa 1988:56):

Cousin, following your words to me
spoken years ago
I have reached my birthplace
I have returned to my home village
Brought back from the flooding waters
Lifted from the waves of the rains
My father's head stands again
At the home of the elegant ram with a
snail shell horn
And sits again by the base of the round
banyan tree
I stand beside the outreaching cape of
the land
I sit high on the round cheeked horses
from Lewa
Standing among the high plumes of
rooster feathers

*Anguleba, hetti pa panaukimungga
wainangge
Ka, ku dukki bana tana
Ku toma bana wannongge
A waleka bangga wango loko
A konggola bangga bonnu nale
A kataku amangge
A pandende bali bangga nee
pandouna kere bukku
A manddi bali banga nee pandouna
tambola puu kapaka
Ku ndende bali ba nee pandouna
ngundu ngora tana
Ku mandii bali be nee pandouna
papo ndara lewa
Ku ndende bali ba nee pandouna
wullo wailo mandeta*

Sitting with black horsehair tufts
on my headdress
Once again in a noble stance
Once again in a lordly seat

*Ku mandii bali ba newe pandouna
pandi mete katowa
Ku ndende bali ba nee pandende konda
Ku mandii bali ba newe pamandii rato*

His son added this explanation:

Yoseph Malo's sentimental trip to Elopada, as reigning *raja* and chief, plus the return of his father's complete remains to Rara with fitting rituals and ceremonies, had finally completed the reverse cycle in the destiny of Yoseph Malo's family, i.e. from helplessness and agony into triumphant return to fame and honor [Djakababa 1988:56].

conclusions: heads, exchanges, and value

How can the career of Rato Malo's head be used to challenge our analytical categories for dealing with the historical transformations of "things" and the role of exchange in determining value? Could the head be considered as having a "biography" of its own (Kopytoff 1986; Morin 1969), as being traded as a commodity (Appadurai 1986) or "sacralized" as a relic (Geary 1986) in the course of its peregrinations from the highlands to the coast and back again? What does one man's idiosyncratic adventure reveal about wider processes such as the shift from violent conquest to alliance, the ways in which persons are tied to things, and the importance of remembering and acquiring names?

Recent works on exchange and the circulation of wealth objects suggest a number of different responses (Ferguson 1988). All expand Mauss's early insight that exchange involves "bonds between things which are to some extent parts of persons, and persons and groups that behave in some measure as if they were things" (Mauss 1967[1925]:11). Mauss's sociological emphasis is then balanced by a critical re-reading of Marx's work on commodity fetishism, Baudrillard's analysis of the implicit "system of objects" in modern consumerism (1968), and Bourdieu's argument that interest and strategies emerge in the temporal dynamics of gift exchange (1977). One of the most important insights of this recent work is that "objects cannot be understood as finished products with a significance and efficacy that is given once and for all" (Spyer 1985:18). Instead, they must be studied as parts of a process, in which the events of individual lives and mythological precedents become attached to them, serving both as a testimony to past value and a promise of future creative potentiality.

Appadurai suggests that many objects classified as gifts or wealth objects may have a "commodity phase" within their social lives, defined as "the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature" (1986:13). Moving the focus of attention from systems of production to systems of exchange, he argues that we should study the life histories of objects, the "paths" that they travel, and the "diversions" or "metamorphoses" that can bring even objects not produced for exchange into a temporary "commodity situation" (1986:16). By erasing conventional distinctions between the commercial market of commodities and gift-giving transactions, he is able to bring different kinds of objects exchanged into a single analytical framework, and to ask more daring questions about their interrelations. Within a range of stimulating comparisons of such widely separated phenomena as kula exchange, the modern art market, and the circulation of parts of saints' bodies, even a severed head merits reconsideration for its peculiar life history.

This recent search for general principles that regulate "the social life of things" suggests that the place of an object within a moral economy of cultural standards of value and equivalence is the trickiest problem. Appadurai follows Simmel in arguing that value must be defined through an exchange of sacrifices, in terms of subjective judgments of desirability and scarcity rather than inherent properties. However, the essence of many famous anthropological "tournaments of value" (such as kula, potlatch, or interregional alliance feasts) lies in the social ties forged through the medium of objects, rather than the objects themselves. In the case that we

consider here, the only culturally and socially approved “path” for the acquisition of heads in the past was the warpath, but a transfer to alliance paths was possible for a particular head because of the special value it had for its descendants.

I argue that the locus of the symbolic construction of the value of the head in this new context lay not in scarcity or sacrifice, but in its identification with a specific name and personal history. After pacification, the greater “scarcity” of severed heads would seem to make them automatically more desirable. But since historical changes removed their earlier function of measuring the gruesome balance of reciprocated acts of war, their importance was diminished when violence was no longer central to indigenous prestige systems. In the 19th century, heads were not seen as spiritually powerful in the same sense as other heirlooms, and their ritual use was restricted to documenting successful raids (as *tanda mbani*, “proof of courage”) and the generation of “heat,” which kept the cycle of vengeance killings going. In the modern world, some owners of the heads argued that they should be immobilized as ancestral treasure. Others decided that it would be a more successful strategy to release this particular head into circulation as part of a prestigious alliance transaction, since the politics of marriage were emerging as more significant than those of warfare. Yoseph Malo’s success as a symbolic entrepreneur lay in his ability to capitalize on the emerging value of interregional alliances *through the medium of his father’s head*.

The head came to epitomize a complex concerning the identification of names, objects, and reputation that built on the earlier precedent of naming possessions and developed it into a new form of prestige activity. In traditional Sumbanese society, the line between persons and things was crossed both through detaching and hoarding parts of persons as trophy-objects, and through naming and ritually consecrating objects and animals to take on the attributes of their owners. Yoseph Malo innovated by giving elaborate names to his house, village, knife, spear, and shield, which condensed the memory of his achievements into short celebratory verses, in a mode reminiscent of the ancestral naming of heirlooms but more focused on his own personal biography. In order to evaluate his achievement, we must first examine its relation to the traditional “system of objects” and its role within the exchange system.

Names differentiate possessions into the categories of companions and equivalents (possessions that share their owner’s name, and can be used as substitutes for him in a ritual context), heirloom valuables named for the conditions of their acquisition by a cult house, and alliance valuables whose name signals the “paths” that they follow and their exchange histories.

The most common honorific title used to address or refer to a prominent person is his horse name, which links him to a stallion specially dedicated to the *marapu* spirits in a divination to determine that the two “share the same spirit and the same destiny” (*ole ura, ole ndewa*). The horse is thereafter excluded from the realm of ordinary exchange, cannot be sold, and will not leave his master’s house until four days after his master’s death, when he is led out beside the open grave and sacrificed to bear his soul on a final journey to the afterworld (Hoskins 1987c). Other possessions that are so closely identified with him that they must be destroyed at death include his betel pouch, his plate and drinking gourd, and a specially named dog. If the ritually designated horse or dog dies before its master, it can be buried beside his tomb, or its name can be affixed to a replacement animal.

Imported weapons, Chinese water jars, gold breastplates, and other ancestral heirlooms have a lifespan that extends beyond that of their owners, so they are named for the heroes who first obtained them or the ways in which they came to be passed down through the generations as part of the sacred patrimony linked to the house and lineage. Their immobility fixes the status and rank of a particular house by centering its most important possessions within the confines of the descent group. When objects that are normally withheld from transactions (such as heads) are allowed to enter into them, their exchangeability is foregrounded and becomes the focus of heightened interest.

Gold ear pendants, ivory bracelets, beads, and other alliance valuables travel the paths that link important houses and regions by the exchange of women. Naming these objects does not restrict their exchangeability, but it reveals how the process of exchange leaves accretions and sedimentations of the prestige of past owners, since the object is said to acquire a "memory" of its previous homes. Sumbanese anthropomorphize the finest valuables in the belief that they will "remember and return" to the source of their names in subsequent generations. The gold ear pendant that Yoseph Malo received from Kodi as an ornament for his second wife was named *hamoli mbali mbiku*, "the pendant that goes back and forth." It went back to Kodi when a man from Rara married a girl from Mehang Mata, then passed into the hands of my Kodi teacher Maru Daku for the brideprice of a classificatory daughter in Balaghar. It has now returned to Parona Baroro in Kodi. But since such objects "like to travel the same paths again and again," it has been proposed as the gift to "re-open the way" for a future marriage to Rara. The negotiations concerning the transfer of these objects proceed as if the objects had their own volition, and were not subject to the whims of their owners. Thus (like the head) their exchangeability cannot be directly requested, but can only be obtained as a "sign of the love" (*tanda manawaro*) between new affines once the brideprice has been determined and paid.

As a general principle, we may observe that naming bestows attributes of personhood onto objects, permitting them to acquire individual histories. Although many of these objects once passed through a "commodity phase" (acquired through barter, trade, or purchase), they are transformed into new entities whose identity is consciously molded to enhance and commemorate the glory of their previous owners—a social value transferred (with "interest") to future owners. Rato Malo's head was distinguishable from other heads that served as simple trophies of war because *his name had been remembered*. It was not reduced to an anonymous bit of bone in the attic, and retained the potential for moving back into the category of a person. The recovery of Yoseph Malo's family name and honor (*kandaba ngara*) became contingent on his ability to convince others that his father's head remained an ancestral presence, part of a human being, instead of moving ineluctably into the category of "things" whose named attributes were no longer significant.

The distinction between gift and commodity can be rephrased in terms of a contrast of "biographical objects," which are in some ways endowed with the personal characteristics of their owners, and "distanced objects" where exchangeability is more important than identity. In doing so, let us accept that in gift exchange the emphasis is on quality, subjects, and superiority, rather than on quantity, objects, and equivalence emphasized in commodity exchange (Gregory 1982). Using such measures, Rato Malo's head represents an extreme of naming and biographical identification, since to his son it was irreplaceable. But other heads bought with livestock to "furnish" the cult houses of headhunting villages in the past were treated with the casualness of commodities, and bargained for with self-interested calculation. The story of the transfer of the head reveals, however, that the value of the head was not determined by the style of the negotiation but by its meaning.

The spirit of reciprocity, sociability, and spontaneity that is supposed to characterize affinal transactions was little in evidence at this tense meeting of former enemies, both concerned with maximizing their own family prestige and winning a victory over the others. Yet ultimately this "tournament of value" was an exchange event of such importance that the transaction itself produced a positive social effect. There was no "necessary sacrifice" in the reciprocal determination of value (Appadurai 1986:3) because of the asymmetry in the object's significance for the two sides. Both parties were allowed to feel generous by the recognition that whatever value the head could be assigned as an exchange commodity, its personal and spiritual value to Rato Malo's son was greater still. He acquired this object not in order to play for higher stakes in the traditional exchange market, but to withdraw it permanently from circulation and restore it to the status of personhood. The owners of the head acknowledged this fact in their counter-

gift of a ceremonial costume, dressing Rato Malo as a warrior when he left their village rather than sending his skull away like an object.

Yoseph Malo's story is exceptional, but it is also paradigmatic, in that it established a model for interregional alliances because it so dramatically represented the neutralization of tensions between former enemies in the idiom of marriage. As a silent witness to the reconciliation of his son with his murderers, Rato Malo's head became a locus of history and meaning which inaugurated a new era of peaceful (if still competitive and rivalrous) exchanges. At the present time, negotiations are under way for the return of ancestral skulls to their descendants in several other villages, although, without the prestigious involvement of high government officials, they may be doomed to failure. The postcolonial renewal of interest in severed heads can be compared in many respects to the early European traffic in saints' relics, since both share the strange property (also common to slaves) of belonging to the category of objects that are both persons and things.

In a study of the circulation of parts of saints' bodies in Carolingian and post-Carolingian Europe, Geary argues that these objects were often bought and sold, stolen and divided like commodities. They differed from other goods in that they could not really be said to be *destined* for circulation, and they were valued mainly for their magical efficacy as sources of personal supernatural power (Geary 1986:169). The severed head, like the saint's relic, is used to ritually validate a specific shrine or cult house, and gains its value from association with a person's biography and accomplishments, rather than its raw materials, form, or craftsmanship. Since saints were martyred and the victims of headhunting were murdered, the two systems indicate opposing symbolic representations given to the skulls and bones of victims of violence. The relic glorifies the victim, demonstrating the superior spiritual power of the saint because of his suffering, while the head shows the greater military prowess of the victors. Saints' relics were often stolen, as the successful theft of the bones of a powerful saint suggested that he must have come willingly, to favor his new host community. Transfer by stealth could legitimate and authenticate reliquaries, later "tested" through the production of miracles. Heads, captured by stealth, tested the strength and honor of the descendants of the victim, forcing them to avenge the wrong or suffer the disgrace of having their ancestor's remains exhibited as trophies.

The parallel with saints' relics suggests a motivation for the recovery of Rato Malo's head, because it demonstrates the possible movement away from the object-as-trophy and back to the head as a part of the human body, the focus of a posthumous cult of personality. The value of a saint's relic could be reconstructed even many years after his death in response to a popular movement that attributed miraculous cures and wonders to the intervention of the saint. In similar fashion, the political prominence of Rato Malo's son refracted some of his accomplishments back onto the power and position of his ancestors, especially his murdered father. Retrospectively, he was seen as a source of supernatural power, which could not be fully recovered until the head was returned and reburied. While the career of a relic begins with its elevation and continues with its exposure in a worthy and impressive shrine, the head lost its public visibility after it was recovered and came to rest hidden inside a magnificent stone tomb.

Comparing saints' relics to sacred images, icons, and slaves, Geary notes that "under certain circumstances, all these might be the objects of commerce, but under other circumstances they more closely resemble persons. The boundaries between object and subject are culturally induced and semipermeable" (1986:188). The relevance of these words to his father's biography is implicit in a statement made by Yoseph Malo's son Djakababa, a successful businessman familiar with the vocabulary and mechanisms of international markets. At our meeting in Jakarta, he told me: "I am not embarrassed now to say that my father was sold as a slave. Human beings were the commodities of the time, and he also had to go through a stage as a commodity. But he managed to pull himself out of it, and eventually to achieve a much greater and more glorious restoration of personal honor because of these hardships."

Using the processual approach suggested in more recent work on exchange, we can see that the head can be defined as a particular type of “biographical object,” one which was able to travel in both directions from person to object and then from object back to person. The life of Yoseph Malo, and in particular his efforts to recover his father’s head, offers a dramatic illustration of the processes that create value through exchange, transfer enmity into alliance, and cause these cultural values to be reassessed in new historical situations. The parable of his life shows that personhood can be achieved posthumously, through the mediation of one’s descendants, in a society like that of traditional Sumba where the line between subjects and objects is often indistinct and socially negotiated.

notes

Acknowledgments. Doctoral research in 1979–81 was supported by the Fulbright Commission, the Social Science Research Council, and the National Science Foundation, under the auspices of the Indonesian Academy of Sciences (LIPI) and Biro Penelitian, Universitas Nusa Cendana, Kupang. Return visits in 1984, 1985, and 1986 were funded by the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University and the Faculty Research and Innovation Fund of the University of Southern California. Six months of additional fieldwork in 1988 were funded by NSF Grant No. BMS 8704498. I would like to thank Joel Kuipers, Patricia Spyer, three anonymous reviewers for the *AE*, and especially Valerio Valeri for comments on an earlier version of this paper.

¹“Rato” is a title of noble rank and achievement in the feasting system, attached posthumously to the names of important ancestors. The man’s name was Malo Umbu Rangka, and this was also the name given to his grandson, in a common pattern of generational alternation. The grandson currently uses Malo along with the horse name given him by his father (Ndara Djakababa, “the horse who will not bow low”) as well as the Catholic baptized name Cornelius. Traditional Sumbanese names were binominal or trinominal without a patronym. The use of Malo as a last name, as in Yoseph Malo, is a modern practice introduced by the Church and colonial administration, and still largely limited to those who hold salaried positions.

²My first important source on these events was Martinus Maru Daku, a famous Kodi storyteller and my first research assistant, whose life I have written about elsewhere (Hoskins 1985). He had served as Yoseph Malo’s spokesman (*tou ketengo paneghe*) at alliance negotiations, and supplied me with a two-hour narrative, containing many of the passages in ritual couplets quoted here. After transcribing and translating this account, I visited the descendants of Rato Poka in Ratenggaro to get their side of the story, and they repeated many of the same couplets back to me and verified his version of the negotiations. Additional commentary on the historical setting came from H. R. Horo, raja of Kodi at the time that Yoseph Malo was raja of Rara.

A compendium of these materials was sent to Cornelius Malo Djakababa, Yoseph Malo’s only surviving son, in Jakarta, and we met after he had read them. Eventually, Dr. Djakababa produced his own manuscript of over 100 pages, which I quote at various places, and which provides a much more detailed view of his father’s life using some of his own records and journals. I am grateful to him for supplying this additional information, for correcting various errors in the earlier accounts, and for providing texts in the Rara dialect, which I cite here.

³In another piece, I have discussed the pattern of deadly reciprocities that bound various domains together, and ways in which earlier martial traditions have been interpreted within the modern discourse of nationalist “heroes” (Hoskins 1987b). Here, the focus is less on the creation of a shared “history” in response to outside models than local responses to pacification and their effects on indigenous exchange systems. The fact that the Sumbanese age of headhunting is remembered with some pride—and little shame or secrecy—remains an important aspect of its ideological impact.

⁴The names Yoseph Malo coined for his house, village, and wives were all composed in the traditional couplets of Sumbanese ritual language (cf. Fox 1988; Hoskins 1988a, 1988b) and the verses reflected on unusual qualities or events associated with the persons or objects. Thus, his house was *redda bonnu toko*, *pittu bangga uma* or “the tower with an ocean view, the seven house platforms.” His gongs and drums were called *ndendo ngara bendu*, *magho lete talla*, “a drum of noble name, gongs of the spirits in the hills.” His village was named

The hill of aren palms	<i>Lete puu karudi</i>
Home of the pig eating snake	<i>Pandouna kaboko oba wawi</i>
The valley of Taroma waters	<i>Tawada wee taroma</i>
Home of the horse eating python	<i>Pandouna dofa deke ndara</i>
Where (our ancestor) Lyeko Rangka stands	<i>Pandede Lyeko Rangka</i>

Each of the four main house pillars were also given a couplet name:

The pillar with hollow roots	<i>Kiobo kambo pongga</i>
The young one which started people	<i>Liera magho alli</i>

The pillar with burnt designs
 Feeding chickens near the kitchen
 The pillar with a round bracelet ring
 Feeding pigs across the fence

Miuttu lamba inna
A midda penni manu kere peita
Bindi kelo lele
A rammi pagha wawi mbali tonga

Three of the pillars are named by the functions of the space they demarcate, while the second pillar is recalled for an event that happened during the house-building: it fell in an unpredicted direction, forcing many people to scamper for cover.

⁵This example has inspired others to begin negotiations, however. In the headhunting village in Bongu, the descendants of another warrior from Rara have made inquiries about the return of an ancestral head, and negotiations have been under way for some time between houses in Laura and Weyewa for another named skull (Joel Kuipers, personal communication).

⁶His wives were named by Yoseph Malo with four-line verses, including names for their houses, dogs, and pigs. The first wife, Lede Dario, was called:

Lovely Lady Dario who doesn't work
 Even her horse doesn't do garden work
 The barking dog that has no equal
 Even the dog is unequalled

Ndara njari nja manerio
Nja manerio ndara
Bangga nggoko nja pa ole
Nja pa ole bangga

The second wife, Nini Makku, from the Kodi village of Kere Tana, was called:

Makku who cannot be matched
 Whose horse is also unmatched
 The dog with burnt fur
 The pig with no liver [that is, innocent]

Makku ndapa doda
Ndapa doda ndara
Muttu lada bengga
Ndapa ate wawi

The fourth wife, Lali Ngedo, was called:

Lali who cannot be contained
 The uncontainable horse
 The dog named long life
 The rooster with beautiful wings
 The pig with a black belly

Lyali nda pakada
Nda pakada ndara
Lyolo ngailo bengga
Njuli gheda manu
Myete bengga wawi

The sixth wife, Ambu Kaka, was called:

The white skin on top of a red skin
 Riding a handsome red horse
 The dog that cursed noblemen
 The rooster with a loud crow

Kyaka nggadi rara
Nggandi rara ndara
Patyola rato bengga
Malendu kuku manu

Yoseph Malo once cursed a Dutch assistant controller for killing his pet rooster without asking permission, so these names recall the incident. His seventh wife, Leda Ndiri, was named:

Leda with a marked forehead
 Like the blaze on her horse's head
 The dog that gets past all obstacles
 The pig that is without a pair

Lyeda ndiri mata
Ndiri mata ndara
Deke loddo bengga
Dya pamera wawi

The eighth wife, Maria Dita Horo, was named:

The Kodi woman who needs no testing
 The horse that cannot be tested
 The Kodi woman who must be taken seriously
 The dog that cannot be teased

Kyodi ndya pakangga
Ndya pa kangga ndara
Kodi ndya pa nunni
Ndya pa nunni bengga

His third and fifth wives did not receive ritual names: Tari Ngendo was divorced and returned to her father's house, while Tora Kalanda died soon after her marriage. In order to expand his political influence, he took one wife from Kodi Bokol (Nini Makku), two from Kodi Bangedo (Tari Ngendo and Dita Horo), one from Ede (Lali Ngedo), one from Balaghar (Ambu Kaka), one from Karendi (Tora Kalanda), and one from Weyewa (Leda Ndiri)—all of the traditional domains that border on Rara.

⁷Closer parallels seem to exist with Atoni headhunters on the neighboring island of Timor, who identified the heads with a wild, female energy that had to be tamed in a drama resembling that of marriage by capture (Middelkoop 1963, 1969; Spyer 1984). Here, the "head" was used to designate objects that made up part of brideprice or bloodwealth, and a freshly taken head was offered by the ritually "female" sister's son to his mother's brother and "wife-giver" in a rite of passage that defined the young man as a mature male, ready to marry his mother's brother's daughter. Prescriptive affinal exchange between wife-givers and wife-takers may serve to "tighten" the series of associations between headhunting and alliance among the Atoni. Although the people of Kodi and Rara have more open alliance systems, with no predetermined directionality of exchange, a similar system of ideas informs the relations between headhunting, alliance, and harvest offerings. The hooked implements used to gather "heads of corn, heads of maize" in Atoni first-fruit

rites were also used for hitching human skulls in headhunting rites—recalling Kodi linkage of warfare and agricultural fertility as the “harvest of death and harvest of life” (*deke a mate, deke a mopi*). Both systems tie the cycle of vengeance to the renewal of garden crops and the birth of descendants in succeeding generations.

references cited

- Appadurai, Arjun
1986 Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value. *In* *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. A. Appadurai, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baudrillard, Jean
1968 *Le système des objets*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Bourdieu, Pierre
1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Codere, Helen
1944 *Fighting with Property: The Potlatch System of the Northwest Coast in Historical Perspective*. New York: Museum of Natural History.
- Djakababa, Cornelius Malo
1988 The Saga of Yoseph Malo, Raja of Rara and Ede. Manuscript received from the author.
- Downs, R. E.
1955 Head-hunting in Indonesia. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 111:40–70.
- Ferguson, James
1988 Cultural Exchange: New Developments in the Anthropology of Commodities. *Cultural Anthropology* 3:488–513.
- Fox, James J.
1988 *To Speak in Pairs: Essays on the Ritual Languages of Eastern Indonesia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Freeman, Derek
1979 Severed Heads That Germinate. *In* *Fantasy and Symbol: Studies in Anthropological Interpretation*. R. H. Hook, ed. New York: Academic Press.
- Geary, Patrick
1986 Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics. *In* *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. A. Appadurai, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gregory, Chris A.
1982 *Gifts and Commodities*. London: Academic Press.
- Haripranata, H. (S. J.)
1984 *Ceritera Sejarah Gereja Katolik Sumba dan Sumbawa*. Ende: Percetakan Offset Arnoldus.
- Hoskins, Janet
1985 A Life History From Both Sides: The Changing Poetics of Personal Experience. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 41(2):147–169.
1986 So My Name Shall Live: Stone-Dragging and Grave-Building in Kodi, West Sumba. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* 142:31–51.
1987a Entering the Bitter House: Spirit Worship and Conversion in Kodi, West Sumba. *In* *Indonesian Religions in Transition*. Susan Rodgers and Rita Kipp, eds. pp. 136–160. Tucson: University of Arizona.
1987b The Headhunter as Hero: Local Traditions and Their Reinterpretation in National History. *In* *American Ethnologist* 14(4):605–622.
1987c Complementarity in This World and the Next: Gender and Agency in Kodi Mortuary Ceremonies. *In* *Dealing with Inequality: Analyzing Gender Relations in Melanesia and Beyond*. Marilyn Strathern, ed. pp. 174–206. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
1988a Etiquette in Kodi Spirit Communication: The Lips Told to Pronounce, the Mouths Told to Speak. *In* *To Speak in Pairs: Essays on the Ritual Languages of Eastern Indonesia*. James J. Fox, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
1988b The Drum Is the Shaman, the Spear Guides His Voice. *In* *Social Science and Medicine, Special Issue on Healing in Southeast Asia*. C. Laderman and P. van Esterik, eds. 27:819–828.
- Josselin de Jong, J. P. B. de
1936 *Studies in Indonesian Culture 1: Oirata, a Timorese Settlement on Kisar*. Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut.
- Keesing, Roger
1985 Killers, Big Men and Priests on Malaita: Reflections On a Melanesian Troika System. *Ethnology* 24:237–252.
- Kopytoff, Igor
1986 The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization As Process. *In* *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. A. Appadurai, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mauss, Marcel
1967[1925] *The Gift*. New York: W. W. Norton.

- McKinley, Robert
 1976 Human and Proud of It! A Structural Treatment of Headhunting Rites and the Social Definition of Enemies. *In Studies in Borneo Societies: Social Process and Anthropological Explanation*. G. N. Appell, ed. Special Report No. 12, pp. 92–126. Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University.
- Middelkoop, P.
 1963 Headhunting in Timor and Its Historical Implication (Timorese Texts with Translation). Oceania Linguistic Monograph. Sydney, Australia: University of Sydney Press.
 1969 Tame and Wild Enmity. *Oceania* 40(1):70–76.
- Morin, Violette
 1969 L'objet graphique. *In Les Objets: Communications*. Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes 13:131–139.
- Needham, Rodney
 1976 Skulls and Causality. *In Man* 11:71–88.
 1983 Sumba and the Slave Trade. Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, Working Paper 31. Melbourne: Monash University.
- Roos, S.
 1872 Bijdrage tot de kennis van taal, land en volk op het eiland Soemba. Batavia: Verhandelingen van het Bataviasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen 36.
- Rosaldo, Michelle Z.
 1977 Skulls and Causality. *Man* 12:168–169.
 1980 Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosaldo, Renato
 1980 Ilongot Headhunting 1883–1974: A Study in Society and History. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Rosman, A., and P. Rubel
 1971 Feasting with Mine Enemy. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Spyer, Patricia
 1984 Hunting Heads for Alliance: The Recreation of a Moral Order in Atoni Exchange. M.A. thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.
 1985 Objects, Exchanges and History in the Aru Archipelago of Eastern Indonesia. Unpublished manuscript.
- Weiner, Annette
 1985 Inalienable Wealth. *American Ethnologist* 12(2):210–227.

submitted 29 November 1988
 revised version submitted 3 March 1989
 accepted 14 April 1989