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# Half-Men, Tricksters and Dismembered Maidens

## The Cosmological Transformation of Body and Society in Wemale Mythology

Michael Prager

IN 1937, the German anthropologist Adolf E. Jensen (1899-1965) undertook ethnographic fieldwork on the eastern Indonesian island of Seram as a member of the so-called *Frobenius expedition to the Moluccas and Dutch New-Guinea* (1937-1938). Jensen's research focused mainly on the ethnic group of the Wemale, an Austronesian speaking society living in the Western part of the island of Seram (Central Maluku, Eastern Indonesia). Although his fieldwork among the Wemale was rather short<sup>1</sup>, the outcome of his researches was surprisingly comprehensive. One of the results was his attempt at a full-fledged ethnographic description of the Wemale (Jensen 1948a). Another even more important contribution was the publication of a voluminous collection consisting of 433 myths from Western and Central Seram which appeared in 1939 under the title « Hainuwele » (Jensen 1939).

In his later work Adolf Jensen explicitly had singled out two Wemale narratives from this collection which seemed to have called his whole attention : firstly, the myth of Hainuwele which tells about the birth of a young girl from a coconut tree who is ritually killed during a *maro* dance and whose body transforms into edible plants ; secondly, the myth of half-body Taunala who travels to the upperworld in order to search for his second half and thereby brings the first rice corn to the earth. Adolf Jensen repeatedly pointed out that there is a close connection between the two

1. Jensen's fieldwork lasted only four months, from 1st April to 31th July 1937 (Jensen 1939 : VII).

\_\_\_\_\_ I thank the convenors of the colloquium « Les Moitiés d'Homme » (Journées du laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale, Paris, 1999), Prof. Françoise Heritier and Dr Stephen Headley, for their critical comments on an earlier version of this text.

myths. This connection, however, he mainly considered to be a historical one, since the two myths in question would represent different culture-historical periods. The myth of Hainuwele he classified as a variant of the world wide motif of the « killed deity » whose body is transformed into plants or other culturally valued objects (Jensen 1948b), whereas with the myth of the half-body he was convinced to have discovered the more general topic of the « mythologeme of Prometheus ». The latter type of narratives are usually dealing with a kind of culture hero who undertakes a journey to the upperworld, tricks out the gods and deprives them of objects or the types of knowledge which Mankind did not possess before (Jensen 1950 ; 1963a).

Since Adolf Jensen was basically concerned with culture-historical problems he never ventured to undertake a systematic comparison of the two mythical motifs concerned. Instead he engaged himself in a life-long endeavour to determine which of the motifs was the older, the more « archaic » one. In an article which was explicitly dealing with the mythical motif of the Half-Man, Adolf Jensen (1950) stressed the wide distribution of the theme in the mythologies of the Asian, Pacific, African and Amerindian societies. In reconsidering the myth of the Half-Man from Western Seram which dealt with the theft of rice, he argued that this motif should be considered as « culturally alien », since it was not the rice which constituted the main source of food for the West Seramese peoples, but the tubers. However, the Hainuwele myth would clearly demonstrate, that a very different mythical origin was attributed to these tubers (*ibid.* : 27). Adolf Jensen therefore was convinced that the Hainuwele myth represented the core of the worldview of an old cultural layer of « Malay planters », whereas the myth of the Half-Man with its motif of the theft of rice had been brought to the area by the immigration of peoples from a « younger middle-Malay » layer who had introduced the cultivation of rice (*ibid.* : 28).

Adolf Jensen himself rather unwillingly refuted this diffusionist theory in the context of his attempt to explain the world-wide distribution of the mythical motif of the Half-Man. He emphasized that myths tend to describe the present condition of Mankind as the result of a gradually evolving creative process. Actions in the mythical past thus are often considered as representing the inversion of the order which is experienced in the present (*ibid.* : 31). When Mankind becomes aware of the symmetrical shape of the human body, this would automatically lead to the mythical idea of asymmetric or one-sided beings which are contrasted with the living beings of the present (*ibid.* : 31). What Adolf Jensen basically argued in this context was that the image of one-sided bodies or persons

almost naturally evolves from the nature of mythical thought as such. This argument, however, rendered the diffusionist hypothesis – according to which the motif had been introduced by later immigrants – superfluous.

Apart from such contradictions, Adolf Jensen's culture-historical reconstructions became widely refuted by German anthropologists from the end of the 1950s onwards (Schmitz 1960 ; Mühlmann 1962). The overall rejection of his culture-historical approach by the international anthropological community became finally evident when the English translation of his *Myth and Cult among Primitive Peoples* (Jensen : 1963b), in which he had repeated many of his former theories, received a devastating critique in a long review section of one of the leading anthropological journals (CA Book Review 1965).

Adolf Jensen's method of using myths to reconstruct cultural migrations and prehistoric « archaic » worldviews definitely, and justly, belongs to the past. What remains unsolved, however, and what was never taken up again, is Adolf Jensen's hypothesis concerning the existence of a « close connection » between the two mythical motifs which he somewhat generalizingly labelled « killed deity » and « Prometheus » respectively and which had found their origin in the Wemale myths of Hainuwele and Taunala, the Half-Man. In the following analysis I shall demonstrate that he correctly stressed the close connection between the two myths, but that he was right for the wrong reasons. The « connection » which I shall address is not a historical but a structural one. As shall become evident, both myths can be considered as perfect mirror images, that is, as systematic inversions of each other, so that only by focusing on the logic of their transformation can we arrive at an understanding of their meaning.

In reconsidering and comparing these myths, I will refrain from Adolf Jensen's global comparative procedure of tracing the presence of mythical motifs in a Frazerian style through time and space. Neither shall I compare the Seramese myths with the numerous variants collected in other Moluccan (let alone Western Indonesian) societies. For the time being, these Seramese myths pose enough questions to warrant a mere focus on an intra-cultural comparison.

Due to the limitations of Adolf Jensen's fieldwork and the resulting lack of data, I can only briefly touch upon the relationships pertaining between the myths and the rituals of the Wemale, and particularly upon the question whether in the rituals the mythical order is re-enacted or reversed. Nevertheless, I am convinced that by focusing on the myths proper we are provided with a series of basic ideas which give us an insight into the conceptual framework of the local ideology. This shall be accomplished firstly

by comparing the myth of the Half-Man with the creation myth, secondly by comparing the former with a series of rice myths, and finally by comparing the myth of the Half-Man with the myth of Hainuwele.

## The Image of the One-Sided Body

The question whether human beings should be one- or two-sided is encapsulated in the Wemale origin myth right from the start. This myth can be summarized as follows :

When Duniai had created the world it was not yet decided what bodily shape Humankind would assume. The banana tree and the stone were quarrelling about this issue. The stone said that human beings should look like and command the same strength as himself, that is, consisting only of a right half with one arm, one leg, one eye and one ear. As a result human beings would not die. The banana tree, however, argued that human beings should take his shape, that is, having two arms, two legs etc. and that they shall beget children like himself. The fight became so fierce that the stone jumped upon the banana tree and destroyed it. The next day, however, the children of the banana tree were standing there. Again the stone managed to crush the banana trees, but not much later new trees were emerging, and so it went on until the stone gave up and agreed that human beings should take the shape of the banana tree, under the condition that Mankind should be subjected to death.

The myth goes on to describe how Tuwale (or Duniai), the highest spiritual being, creates the first nine families (nine pairs of men and women) at the mountain of Nunusaku out of nine clusters from a banana tree. From a tenth unripe banana he creates the girl Mulua Satene who is assigned the task to be the ruler of Mankind (Jensen 1939 : 39-41).

In the Wemale<sup>2</sup> origin myth the question whether human beings should consist of one or two sides seems to be linked with two possible forms of existence. The stone is associated with a principle of eternity which is not subjected to processes of life and death, of birth and decay, and which is visually expressed by the image of human beings consisting only of a right side. However, as the myth stipulates, if human beings would take the shape of the banana tree, they would comprise both sides, but, as a consequence,

2. Throughout this text I use the ethnographic present to describe various aspects of the Wemale worldview. B. Grzimek (1991) in his study on social change in Western Seram, however, has pointed out that the Wemale have abandoned almost all of their traditional rituals and representations due to the influence of Ambonese Christianity. Although such a statement may appear somewhat premature, judged by the personal information I was able to obtain from the late Indonesian anthropologist Urbanus Tongli who undertook ethnographic research among the Wemale in the second half of the 1980s, one should be aware of the fact that some of the social institutions, rituals and cosmological representations described by Jensen have been subject to wide-reaching changes and transformations. Unfortunately, B. Grzimek does not analyze the way in which the traditional rituals and representations were replaced – and thereby transformed – by the more recent Christian ideological framework (Platenkamp 1993).

they would be subject to death. It is finally the banana tree which shows its superiority over the stone, by demonstrating the capacity to procreate. Individual manifestations of the tree are perishable, and yet as a species the tree clearly supersedes the stone, for it can multiply. In consisting of a right and a left side simultaneously, the banana tree, eternal as species yet mortal as specimen, seems to encompass the principle embodied by the stone. These contrasts can be ordered in a preliminary set of basic oppositions :

| Stone            | Banana tree             |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| Undifferentiated |                         |
| Singularity      | Plurality (Procreation) |
| Eternity         | Life and Death          |
| Right side       | Left (and Right) side   |

A comparable set of oppositions emerges from the Wemale myth on the Half-Man :

An unmarried woman cursed the rain while working on the field. Soon she begot a son whom she gave the name Taunala. He consisted only of a right side with one ear, one eye, one leg, etc. In his daily work Taunala was much hampered since he could only walk very slowly. One day Taunala told his mother that he was going to search for his other half. After travelling around Taunala finally met Duniai (the highest deity) in the upper-world. Dunai showed him his other half (the left side) which was suspended from a rack. Duniai put Taunala and his missing left side into a pot and prepared a stew by cooking the ingredients over the fire. From the stew Taunala was modelled anew and Duniai breathed into his nose until he came to life again. Thus Taunala was completed. Duniai informed Taunala he should tell his mother that she should not curse the rain. After having returned to his mother, Taunala undertook a second journey to the upperworld where he was welcomed again by Duniai. Taunala was offered food and Duniai asked him whether he preferred to have the food of animals or the food of human beings. Taunala chose the food of human beings whereupon he was offered a human leg. Having rejected the human leg, Taunala received the food of animals. When Taunala finally left the upperworld he was hiding a rice corn in a wound on the bottom of his foot. This rice corn he planted in his house until the rice plant multiplied fastly. After having realized that Taunala had stolen the rice, Duniai became so angry that he send mice down on earth on a coral rope. Taunala, however, who saw the mice coming, cut the rope and the mice dispersed in all directions. These are the ancestors of the mice (Jensen 1939 : 83-84).

An almost similar version was collected two decades earlier by the colonial officer G. De Vries (1927 : 182-183). In De Vries' version of the myth the hero is called Haumala :

Having cursed the sun, a woman called Tunsewa begot Haumala, who is born as a half-body. Since Haumala was mistreated by the people due to the shape of his body he decided to travel to the upperworld where he met Tuwale, the sun deity. Tuwale showed him a tree where the other part of his body was hanging. After having glued

the two parts together, Tuwale showed him gardens which were planted with the bones and the hair of human beings. Duniaï also showed him many *kalongs* (bats) which were hanging on a tree and explained that these *kalongs* were representing human « souls ». Whenever Tuwale is hungry he consumes one of these *kalongs*, and, as a consequence, a human being dies on earth. Haumala was finally sent back to earth with the task to inform the people that they should not question Tuwale's decisions and deeds.

What emerges from the myth of the Half-Man collected by Adolf Jensen is the idea of the necessity of a basic transformation, of a process by which a one-sided human being must be completed first before the rice, originating from the upperworld, can be introduced and planted on earth [male half-body (right side) → complete body (trickery, theft) → origin of rice]. In addition, Adolf Jensen's version yields two other important motifs, that of the « wrong food » which is offered to and rejected by the hero, and, as indicated in the transformational process above, that of the « trickery » and « theft » by which the rice is brought to earth. In the version collected by G. De Vries, however, the motif of the theft of rice and the offering of the « wrong » food is completely absent. On the other hand, the myth stresses the fact that the highest spiritual being seems to consume the « souls » of human beings.

The way in which these motives are structurally linked within the framework of an overall socio-cosmic order becomes clearer if one compares both versions of the myth of the Half-Man with a series of other West-Seramese rice-myths, in which the theme of the one-sided body is absent, however. Adolf Jensen collected two versions of such rice-myths (1939 : 76-77, 82). In both rice-myths, the hero is accompanied by a spiritual being to the upperworld. In the first version, after having reached the upperworld, the hero is offered the « wrong food » which he immediately rejects. So he is given the food of « animals ». After having eaten, the hero falls asleep and breaks a wind. Smelling the stench, the people of the upperworld say « that this human being must have died, since it reeks ». One day a woman from the hero's family dies on earth. The hero hears the people of the upperworld saying : « We are longing for pig meat ; let us hunt for a pig ». Not much later he sees them coming back with the dead body of the woman.

On another day he sees the people eating rice. Since he is explicitly forbidden to bring the rice down to earth, he ponders about possible ways to steal it. First he tries to swallow a rice corn, and after having returned to earth, he pulls the corn out of his fecies and tries to plant it. The rice, however, does not grow. Finally he returns to the upperworld, hides one rice corn in his penis, and plants it. Now the rice starts to grow very quickly. As a consequence, the hero is not longer allowed to travel to the

upperworld. Not much later he dies from the poison of a snake while trying to plant the rice on the field.

In the second version it is stated that while the fecies of human beings have a terrible stench for the people in the upperworld, their own fecies consist of beautiful plates. After the hero has stolen and planted the rice in his garden, the people of the upperworld take revenge by sending birds down along a rope. The hero, however, cuts the rope and the birds disperse (Jensen 1939 : 82).

### The Meaning of Food

If one compares the rice-myths with the two versions of the myth of the Half-Man collected by Adolf Jensen and G. De Vries, it is evident that they have very much in common. One theme concerns the recurring motif of « proper » and « wrong » food in the context of the upperworld. When the hero has entered the upperworld, he is offered food which he considers as « wrong », whereas the people of the upperworld conceive of that food as « human ». In the Half-Man myth collected by Adolf Jensen, Taunala is offered a human leg after having chosen the « food of human beings ». When he rejects the food, he is offered the « proper » food, the « food of animals ». In the first version of the rice myths, the hero receives the « food of dogs » after having rejected the food which is usually consumed by the people of the upperworld. In G. De Vries' version of the Half-Man myth it is finally stated that the food of the highest spiritual being consists of the « souls » of human beings

The contrast between the « food of human beings » and the « food of animals » becomes clearer if one conceptualizes the relation between the spiritual beings of the upperworld and the people dwelling on earth as one between hunters and prey. In one of the rice-myths mentioned above, the death of a human being on earth is qualified as resulting from the upperworld people's appetite for « pig »-meat. In Adolf Jensen's version of the Half-Man myth, it is also obvious that the people in the upperworld consume human flesh (Taunala is offered a human leg), and in the version collected by De Vries Haumala is informed by the highest spiritual that whenever he is hungry he consumes the « souls » of human beings (*kalongs*). Moreover, his fields are planted with the bones and the hair of human beings.

It is obvious that in the context of the upperworld, the local inhabitants must be considered as representing the true « human beings », whereas earthly humans are classified as « animals ». The latter are the « pigs of the gods » as Adolf Jensen's informants stated in another context (Jensen 1950 : 30). This



explains why the guest from earth is first offered the « wrong » food, *i. e.* the food which is consumed by the people of the upperworld, and later provided with the food of the « animals ». The hero is first classified by the people of the upperworld as representing one of themselves until they realize by smelling the stench of his fecies that he is a human being from earth.

In this context one finds a parallel between the former Wemale praxis of head-hunting and the hierarchical relation pertaining between the people of the upperworld and the human beings on earth. As the first rice-myth indicates, the people of the upperworld classify human beings in the same way as the Wemale metaphorically denoted their victims. Head-hunting raids were usually opened with the words that the hunters have « appetite for pigs or coconuts » (Jensen 1948a : 178). This is mirrored in the rice-myth, when the death of the hero's female relative is declared to result from the upperworld people's « appetite for pig meat ». Thus in the Wemale socio-cosmic order animals and human heads relate to human beings as human beings relate to spiritual beings of the upperworld.

Adolf Jensen's version of the Half-Man myth and the second rice myth end with the motif that the theft of rice is punished by the sending down of mice and birds, that is animals which later feed on the rice plant. What therefore becomes evident from the comparison of these myths, is the idea of a cosmological chain of consumption in which spiritual beings, human beings, plants, and animals are inextricably linked. The spiritual beings of the upperworld feed on human beings, human beings feed on the rice – once owned by the spiritual beings –, and the mice and birds feed on the rice of human beings. In this « great chain of being », to borrow Lovejoy's term, mice/birds and human beings resemble each other insofar as their relation to the rice is associated with the idea of theft and trickery.

### **Fecies and Smell**

Another code which characterizes the myths in question operates with the motifs of fecies and smell. In the first version of the rice-myth, the stench of the hero's fecies is equated with « death ». In the second version it is explicitly stated that the fecies of the people of the upperworld consist of « beautiful plates », that is objects to which the Wemale and other Seramese societies attribute a foreign origin and which are usually transferred from the wife-taker to the wife-giver<sup>3</sup>. Such plates could also substitute a human

3. Among the neighbouring patrilineal Alune Chinese plates and other « foreign » objects serve(d) as important items of the bride-prize. The matrilineal Wemale, however, form an exception from this rule, since after marriage men became a member of the matrilineal clan (*nuru*) of their wives. Therefore no gifts are transferred from the wife-taker to the wife-giver. Among the Wemale .../...

head (*ibid.* : 160). The cosmological meaning of these objects will soon become clearer in the context of the analysis of the myth of Hainuwele.

It is important to stress the fact that in the myths which connect the idea of the theft of rice with the image of the Half-Man, the motif of the stench of the fecies is completely absent. The missing passage of the stench of the fecies is not absent by accident, however, since the Half-Man and the hero of the rice-myths differ with regard to an important detail. Whereas the latter enters the upperworld as a complete human being, the former consists only of a right side. In the first version of the rice myth, the hero who consists of a complete body seems to have entered the realm of death after having reached the upperworld. The stench of his fecies qualifies him as dead, implying at the same time that he must have been « alive » before. The Half-Man, however, is neither dead nor alive, he is betwixt and between. Consisting of a right side only, he resembles the stone in the Wemale origin myth whose existence is eternal but who cannot procreate and multiply, since he is not yet subjected to the process of life and death. In contrast to the complete hero of the rice myths, the Half-Man has no fecies, he has no smell, for he is not complete. Resembling the stone, he does not seem to belong to the category of human beings yet.

The Half-Man myth collected by Adolf Jensen lays emphasis on the fact that Taunala consists only of a right side. In the origin myth discussed above, the right side was embodied by the stone whose existence was linked to ideas about eternity and non-procreation. In order to understand the differential values which the Wemale attribute to the right and the left side of the body and the person, we are dependent on the few comments that Adolf Jensen put forward in his ethnography. According to his informants every human being is composed of a right and left side (*leini wanane* ; *leini ukale*). The right side is provided by the parents, whereas the left derives from somewhere « beyond » (*ibid.* : 211). Adolf Jensen did not pursue this issue further, but in the context of the myth of the Half-Man it became evident that the left side is provided by Duniai (*i. e.* by the cosmos), since it is the cosmic upperworld to which the Half-Man has to undertake his journey in order to be completed. Recalling the narrative about the stone and the banana tree : if the right side is associated with the stone, with the parents and the local society, the domain of the social as such does not seem to provide human beings

[suite de la note 3] such objects were kept, however, as inalienable possessions in the ancestral houses of the *mataluma* into which the *nuru* were further segmented (Jensen 1948a, Grzimek 1991). It is likely that these objects entered the interior of Seram as early as the 13th century through various intermediate links with the spice trade (Andaya 1993).

with the capacity to procreate and to die. It is only in conjunction with the left side, the cosmic principle, which allows human beings and the society to multiply<sup>4</sup>.

### Theft and Trickery

A last comment concerns the motifs of theft and trickery. Taunala, the Half-Man, in his state of betwixt and between, of being neither dead nor alive, resembles a trickster, for the gift of completion rendered by Duniai he grants with the theft of rice. In connection with the motif of the theft of rice Adolf Jensen drew a parallel between the Half-Man and the myth of Prometheus. These alleged similarities between the two mythical figures should be specified, however, by stressing the fact that Prometheus was punished for his trickery by a continuous fragmentation of his body, whereas the Seramese Half-Man must be completed first, before he is able to steal the rice. Moreover, Adolf Jensen was wondering about the reason why the one-sided mythical being is endowed with such « a specific form of power » which even allows him to become the opponent of gods and to consciously oppose their will. According to him one would rather assume that the myths stress the disability and the lack of strength of the uncompleted body (1950 : 32). He forgets here that the Half-Man obtains his special power only after having been completed. He is powerful and becoming dangerous for the spiritual beings not in his state of one-sidedness, but due to his completion.

If one were to draw a parallel with Greek mythology at all, it is Platon's myth of the « Half-Man » rather than the myth of Prometheus which bears a striking resemblance to the West-Seramese narratives. Platon narrates in his *Symposion* that in the beginning each human being was a rounded whole, with four hands and four legs, and two identical faces. These beings commanded such a strength that they even dared to attack the

4. The Wemale Half-Man myth thus provides for an example which shows that the image of unilaterality is not necessarily linked with ideas about the differences between the sexes, particularly with the « superiority of male procreation » (Héritier 1996). The right side does not derive from one of the sexes alone, but from both parents, *i. e.* from the domain of the social. The Wemale Half-Man is incomplete not because he is lacking a male but a *cosmic* component. In this context one should mention an additional information about the Wemale birth ritual that Jensen provides in his ethnography, without drawing any connection to the myth of the Half-Man in this respect. When a child has been born, the father has to pluck a coconut which is cut into two halves. Afterwards the flesh of the coconut is taken out and mixed with water. In this liquid the child is ritually bathed whereupon the two parts of the coconut are joined together again and hung in the house (Jensen 1948a : 127). If one would assume that the coconut represents the child, it is evident that the child – being imaged by the two halves of the coconut – is completed in the course of the ritual. This is obviously achieved by bathing the body in the liquid. One might even argue that every human being is born as a half-body which has to be completed in the process of the ritual of birth.

gods. As a punishment Zeus decided to cut these beings into two halves in order to make them weaker. From now on they had to walk upright on two legs. In case that they would oppose the gods again, Zeus threatened to bisect them for a second time, thus forcing them to hop on one leg.

One of the focal points of Platon's narrative is the strength which is attributed to the human beings during their former state of bodily perfection. In their completeness they almost resemble the gods. In the Seramese Half-Man myths the image of the complete body is also associated with the idea of power and strength, a power which finally allows the hero to become an opponent of the spiritual beings of the upperworld. Thus in Wemale mythic thought, the idea of completeness, resulting from the conjunction of the right (social) with the left (cosmic) side, seems to be linked with the value of self-consciousness and cunning intelligence which can be even directed against the gods. Being « complete » thus not only means to be able to procreate, to digest, and to be subjected to the processes of life and death, it also refers to the capacity to go to the domains beyond the local society, to hunt for heads, and to deprive the outer world of the objects which the society needs for its own reproduction.

## The Myth of Hainuwele

Up to this point, the narratives of the Half-Man have been compared with the rice-myths and the origin myth. It became obvious that these myths, in particular the origin myth and the myth of the Half-Man, reflect a specific set of ontological ideas about the completeness of the human body and the person, ideas which are linked in turn with representations about death, procreation, and the relation to the cosmological domains situated beyond the local society.

At this point, the myth of Hainuwele should be brought into the discussion, since it provides for a narrative in which a body is not completed, as in the case of the myth of the Half-Man, but fragmented into parts. The comparison of the myths of Hainuwele and that of the Half-Man shall yield further insights into the cosmological meaning of the two sides of the body, particularly about the way in which the idea of the bisection of a female body converges with basic cosmological assumptions about the meaning of the « inside » and the « outside » in the Wemale socio-cosmic order. Moreover, with the myth of Hainuwele the preconditions of the exchange relationship between the « inside » and the « outside » are set. The following is a synopsis of the myth of Hainuwele as rendered by Adolf Jensen :

[The myth of Hainuwele begins at the point when Dunai (or Tuwale) had created the first nine families from a banana tree, and the girl Mulua Satene who emerged from an unripe banana and was supposed to be ruler of the nine families. Later the nine families moved downwards from the mountain to a place called « Tamene siwa » (the place where the so-called maro dance is performed)] One day a man called Ameta, who was unmarried and childless, went hunting with his dog. The dog was attracted by the scent of wild boar and chased it to a pond where the pig drowned. Ameta dragged the pig out of the pond and was surprised to find a coconut impaled on its tusk. Ameta wrapped the coconut in a cloth (*sarong potola*) and planted it in his garden. After six days a coconut palm had grown to full height and flowered. Ameta while trying to retrieve some of the fruit cut his finger and his blood dripped on the blossom and mixed with the sap. Nine days later a young girl grew from the blossom. Ameta covered her with a sarong and took her to his house. He named her Hainuwele. After three days Hainuwele was fully grown and had developed into a marriageable woman (*mulua*). Her fecies consisted of valuable objects, such as Chinese plates and gongs. At this time the nine families were preparing for a *maro dance* to take place during nine days and nights at the Tamene siwa. When the dance was performed Hainuwele stood in the middle of the dance ground offering betel to the dancers. On the second night, Hainuwele was again standing in the middle, but when the dancers asked for betel she gave them coral. On the third night she handed out Chinese plates, and from the fifth to the eighth night bush knives and gongs. The people became more and more suspicious and angry about the gifts of Hainuwele and decided to kill her. They dug a hole in the middle of the dance ground, and on the ninth night they threw Hainuwele in and danced the ground firm on top of her. Ameta, however, dug her up and cut the corpse in two parts<sup>5</sup>. The right half of the corpse he further dismembered into parts which he buried in the vicinity of the dancing place. From these parts emerged the first tubers, the basic form of food on Seram. When Mulua Satene became aware of the killing of Hainuwele she was so angry that she created a huge gate at the dancing place. In front of this gate she put the trunk of a tree. The nine families were commanded to assemble at the front side of the gate and Mulua Satene told them that due to the killing of Hainuwele she was going to withdraw from this world. The people were now commanded to walk through the gate. Those who did not manage to walk through the gate were transformed into animals and spirits. Those who entered the gate by passing the trunk of the tree at the left side became the *patalima* (the five people), and those who entered from the right side became the *patasiwa* (the nine people). Mulua Satene told them that from this moment onwards Man has to die first before he can reach her again. With these words she withdrew to the mountain of Salahua, the mountain of death, where the « soul » has to travel after death. Since then the people are divided into the fractions of *patalima* and *patasiwa* (Jensen 1939 : 59-64).

The myth begins at the point when the nine families had been created at the mountain of Nunusaku. In this context the local society has witnessed a first level of segmentation (nine families consisting of pairs of men and

5. The motif of cutting Hainuwele's body into two parts derives from a second version of the myth of Hainuwele. In the first version it is only stated that her body is fragmented into parts without specifying their number (Jensen 1939 : 66).

women), but with that level being achieved, the creation process seems to have come to a premature end. There is no procreation, neither birth nor marriage, neither death nor exchange, no food, and therefore, no digestion. It seems that the local society is still missing a basic relationship which would allow for procreation and further internal social differentiation.

This is the state of affairs at which the Hainuwele myth opens. It stipulates how in the framework of an ongoing process of incorporating and transforming an element from the « outer world », the local society itself is finally transformed and thereby reverses its original relation to the outside. The various steps of this process of incorporation and transformation can be differentiated as follows. The first step is indicated when Ameta plants the coconut in his garden. This is followed by the conjunction of Ameta's blood with the sap of the blossom of the coconut tree out of which the girl called Hainuwele evolves. Her « father » covers her with a *sarong* and takes her into his house. This is the second step of incorporation. There is a third, when her body is thrown into the pit of the dance ground, a fourth when her body is cut into two halves of which the right side is further fragmented and « planted », and a fifth when the parts of the corpse develop into plants and, as a consequence, Man becomes mortal and achieves the capacity to procreate and to digest.

Before discussing the possible meaning of that transformational process, it should be mentioned that Adolf Jensen himself put forward some explanatory remarks which were basically directed towards the correspondences between various elements of the myth and the ritual life of the Wemale. In the myth, for instance, Hainuwele is covered with a sarong and taken by Ameta into his house. A similar action could be observed during the ritual of birth, when the newly born child also was covered with a sarong and carried from the menstruation hut, the traditional place of birth, to the house of the parents (Jensen 1948a : 128-129).

Jensen also pointed to the parallels between the mythical killing of Hainuwele and the former Wemale practice of head-hunting. In his view, head-hunting among the Wemale was nothing but a dramatized ritual reenactment of the killing of Hainuwele by which the first death had been introduced to the society (*ibid.* : 253). As evidence he emphasized the fact that Hainuwele was killed during a maro dance and that she was placed in the middle of the dancers, as it happened with the severed heads. The emphasis on the parallelism between the myth and the Wemale ritual of head-hunting, however, is only partly correct. It is true that the Maro was performed after a successful head-hunting raid. The head was placed in

the middle, and men and women were dancing nine evenings around the head by forming a spiral of (ideally) nine rows. Afterwards the head was hung in the *suane*, the communal ritual house (*ibid.* : 65, 176).

In contrast to Adolf Jensen, however, who mainly stressed the similarities between myth and ritual, one has to be aware of the fact that Hainuwele's attitude to the dancers is marked by a clear inversion compared with the proper ritual relation pertaining between the severed head and the dancers. In former times, after a severed head had been successfully brought to the village, it was provided with gifts such as *sirih* and *pinang* (betel) or tobacco (Stresemann 1923 : 318 ; Jensen 1948a : 245). Such gifts, as Valerio Valeri has shown in the case of the Huauulu of Central Seram, served to « ashame » the head in order to ritually subordinate it to the own society (Valeri 1990 : 71). Hainuwele, however, behaves in the opposite way. During the nine nights she gives the dancers first *sirih* and *pinang*, later her own fecies, that is Chinese plates, gongs, etc. Instead of receiving and being ashamed by gifts, it is Hainuwele who ashames the dancers, for they have nothing to reciprocate. Hainuwele gives them the gifts from « abroad », that is gifts which are qualified as *harta*, the highly valued objects which should be reciprocated by the transfer of local products, but there are no exchange relations and local objects yet. Hainuwele's « fecies » are thus gifts without value.

If one assumes that the difference between Hainuwele's behaviour and the usual treatment of the head during the ritual of head-hunting plays a significant role in the myth, and if one further argues that head-hunting is not a dramatic repetition of the myth as such, but a means to uphold a cosmological order which first has to be created by the mythical action, it is becoming evident that with the myth of Hainuwele the Wemale try to solve an ontological paradox. After the nine families had been created at the mountain of Nunusaku, it would have required the presence of exchange items to establish relationships with the « outside world ». These items, however, can only be produced if the society is « complete », incompleteness being indicated by non-procreation and the lack of digestion and death. The completeness in turn, as the myth makes clear, is itself dependent on already existing relationships with the outside world, on elements or items which have to be incorporated into the society, in order to transform them into local cultural objects which can be exchanged against the value objects from abroad. The internal preconditions for exchanging with the outside world thus can only be established by the violent appropriation of something from this outside world which cannot be obtained in exchange yet.

As her origin in the forest and the nature of her fecies indicate, Hainuwele is clearly associated with the « domains beyond » the local society, with the « wilderness », the foreign, or even with the upperworld, since her fecies

resemble that of the spiritual beings of the upperworld in the rice myths. As indicated above, in the course of the myth of Hainuwele, the foreign is incorporated through various steps of incorporation :

Planting of the Coconut in the garden → Incorporation of Hainuwele into Ameta's house → Incorporation of Hainuwele during the maro dance → Incorporation of Hainuwele into the local earth

The successive steps of incorporation describe a process by which Hainuwele gradually is removed from the outer domains to the inside, until she reaches the very centre of the society during the maro dance where she finally unites with the local earth. This process of incorporation in turn is accompanied by various stages of transformation by which the foreign element is turned into a local product :

[Planting of] Coconut → Tree [Blood + Blossom] → Hainuwele/Fecies [Incorporation into the House] → Chinese Plates, etc. [Incorporation in the Earth/Bisection of the Body/Right Half] → Plants → Digestion/Procreation/Death

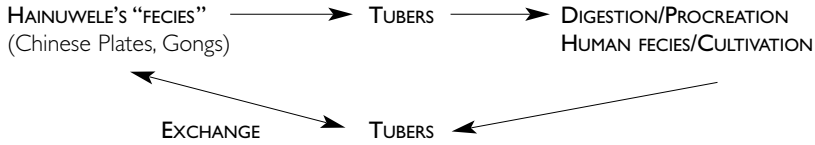
The ultimate killing of Hainuwele can be interpreted as representing only one possible form of transformation. As the Hainuwele myth stipulates at the end, the successive transformational process does not only lead to the origin of edible plants but also introduces death and the capacity of procreation. The latter capacities in turn effectuate the further differentiation of the society into the two « moieties » of the *patasiwa* and the *patalima*, the nine- and the five-people<sup>6</sup>. As Hainuwele's body is fragmented into two halves, the society as a whole becomes divided into its two basic components.

With the final step of the transformational process being reached, the local society has achieved the capacities of procreation, death, and the production of plants. From now on it can communicate with the outside world by exchanging its local products against the value objects from abroad.

6. In former times the societies of the central and southern Moluccas belonged either to the *siwa* or the *lima* fraction. The *siwa* people were associated with the numerical index nine, the *lima* people with the number five. On Seram these two numerical indexes were prefixed by the word *pata* (« trunk », « tribe »), whereas in Ambon and the South Moluccan islands of Aru, Kei, and Banda the notions of *siwa* and *lima* were connected with the word *uli* (*uli siwa*, *uli lima*), or *uri*. During the time of Jensen's fieldwork the majority of the Wemale villages belonged to the *pata-siwa* fraction (Jensen 1948a : 18). A sophisticated analysis of the siwa-lima system has been put forward by Valerio Valeri (1989).



## TRANSFORMATION



In other words, before the killing, Hainuwele's fecies could not be reciprocated because Man had no digestion himself due to the lack of plants. With the inversion of that order, achieved by the killing of Hainuwele, Man is able to produce plants and fecies himself, but from now on he is bound to obtain the value objects in communication with the domains abroad, that is, in exchange for – one could even say – his own « undigested » raw products. By transforming Hainuwele's right half into plants which can be exchanged against the objects from abroad, the ashaming nature of her original gifts has been eventually transformed : asymmetry has changed into symmetry.

## From Body to Plants

Finally if one compares the myth of Hainuwele with the myth of the Half-Man it is easy to demonstrate that both myths must be considered as representing logical transformations of each other, that the one is the mirror image of the other. The relational set of the homologies and inversions pertaining between the two myths can be illustrated in the form of two columns :

### The Myth of Hainuwele

A man, childless and unmarried  
goes for hunting  
chases a boar into a pond  
Conjunction : male blood  
and sap of the blossom  
Birth of Hainuwele  
Hainuwele develops very quickly  
Hainuwele visits the dancing ground  
Offers the wrong gifts (fecies : plates, gongs)  
The nine families feel betrayed  
Hainuwele is thrown into the hole  
Hainuwele's body is cut into two halves  
From the right half of Hainuwele's body  
develop the tuberous plants  
Due to the killing of Hainuwele Man  
becomes mortal (social segmentation and  
procreation) ; Mulua Satene withdraws to  
the mountain of death

### The Myth of the Half-Man

A woman, childless and unmarried  
works on the field  
curses the rain  
Non-conjunction of right and left half  
  
Birth of Taunala  
Taunala works and walks very slowly  
Taunala visits the upperworld  
Is offered the wrong food (human leg)  
Taunala betrays the people in heaven  
Taunala is put into a cooking pot  
Taunala is completed  
Hidden in a wound of his foot Taunala  
brings the rice to earth  
Due to the theft of rice the mice come  
down on earth

Space does not allow me to enter into a detailed discussion of all the homologies and inversions which are involved. What emerges, however, if both myths are contrasted in such a way, is a set of basic ideas about the consequences which result from the conjunction and disjunction of bodily parts. Both myths describe a process which leads to the origin of plants, but in the course of the two narratives the aim is achieved in the opposite way. Whereas in the Hainuwele myth the origin of the tubers result from the fragmentation of the right and the left half of a female body, in the myth of the Half-Man the origin of the rice is attributed to the conjunction of the right and left half of a male body. These processes of conjunction and disjunction are effectuated either by « cooking » the body (Taunala) or by « planting » it into the local earth (Hainuwele). The « cooking » of the two sides of Taunala's body comes close to the transformational logics that Claude Lévi-Strauss has described in *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969), when Taunala in his state of socio-cosmic « rawness » is transformed into a complete cultural being. The Wemale ritual of birth may be considered as representing a possible context here, with the child being completed like the two halves of the coconut and afterwards being ritually incorporated into the village<sup>7</sup>.

The trampling of Hainuwele's body into the earth, its bisection and the planting of the right half also indicates a transformational process. Here one finds a close parallel to a sequence in the Wemale ritual of death. Before the body of a deceased person is removed from the village, the men who carry the body assemble in the house of the deceased and prepare a certain amount of pinang nuts which are cut into two halves. Some of the nut-halves are put on the floor in the « direction of the land », the other halves in the « direction of the sea ». Afterwards the nut-halves are chewed by the carriers (Jensen 1948a : 150). Although Adolf Jensen did not propose any interpretation in this respect, it is a reasonable conjecture to assume that the dead person is bisected into the right (social) and the left (cosmic) half, so that the socio-cosmic components which had been conjoined during the ritual of birth are finally separated again in the case of death, the latter being indicated by distributing the two halves of the pinang nuts along the two opposing directions of the « sea » and the « land ». The act of chewing the nut-halves could be considered as referring to the transformational process as such by which the final separation of the two halves of the body and their ultimate socio-cosmic « recycling » is achieved<sup>8</sup>.

7. See n. 3 : pp. 110-111.

8. Such an interpretation would fit relatively well with the information that Adolf Jensen provides on the Wemale concept of the « soul ». As he stated, the Wemale conceive of the person as being constituted of two « souls » which are denoted as Walui and Tunui (1948a : 156). According to his assessment, however, the meaning of these terms is far from being clear, since the Wemale themselves .../...

Furthermore, both myths seem to be linked to two different values concerning the society's relation to the outside. At the beginning of the Hainuwele myth a local male element (male blood which cannot yet reproduce) mixes with a foreign element of the forest (blossom sap). The female being which develops from this conjunction is ritually incorporated and fragmented into a right and a left half. The right half transforms into plants and through that very process Man becomes mortal and starts to exchange with the outside world. This type of mythical action could be identified as referring to the value of reciprocity. The original asymmetry between the inside and the outside has been transformed into a relation of reciprocity :

Left Half / Right → Half Body Fragmentation → Origin of Tubers → Reciprocity  
[Former Body Symmetry → Body Asymmetry → Symmetry between Inside and outside]

In the context of the myth of the Half-Man there seems to another value at stake which refers to the image of the superiority of the « inside » over the « outside », and vice versa. In this context the former asymmetry of the Half-Man is transformed into symmetry which leads in turn to trickery and to the theft of rice from the domains beyond the local society. What is stressed here is a relation of non-reciprocity between the inside and outside, a relation which forms part of a cosmological « chain of consumption ».

Right Half (social) + Left Half (cosmic) → Completion → Theft of rice → Non-Reciprocity  
[Former Body Asymmetry → Body Symmetry → Asymmetry between Inside and Outside]

Thus in Wemale socio-cosmic thought, the body becomes a metaphor for the society as a whole and for its two modalities of relating to the outside world. The myths not only tell what components of the body are socially and cosmologically deemed necessary, so that the person and the society can « live », that human beings can violently turn to the outside and deprive it of its valuable objects (to subordinate the foreign to the local), but also how in another context the social whole has to be fragmented in order to allow for further internal differentiation and mutual communication and exchange with the outside world. Images of symmetry and asymmetry thus play a differential role in the two myths, and both images are connected with processes of transformations which effect the society as a whole. Whether one of the two

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[suite de la note 8] could not clearly differentiate between the two « souls » and were unable to put forward reasonable statements concerning the soul's fate after death. It is more likely, however, that Adolf Jensen himself was unable to obtain reliable data on this issue due to the shortness of his fieldwork. At least we are informed that one of the souls travels to the mountain of Salahua which is associated with the « direction of the sea », whereas the other soul remains in the vicinity of the village (*ibid.* : 166-167). Both « souls » may thus be connected with the right (social) and the left (cosmic) half of the body and the person.

images can be attributed the status of a superior value in the system of ideas and values of the Wemale (Dumont 1986) is difficult to assess at the present state of research.

In comparing the connotations which are associated with the notions of symmetry and asymmetry Roger Caillois (1973) once argued that images of symmetry usually refer to unchangeability and the rigid order of things, whereas asymmetry tends to stress ideas of change and movement. Such a qualification is at best applicable to ideas reflecting the canon of Western aesthetics. In the case of the Seramese myths discussed, however, symmetry and asymmetry are both connected with ideas about « movement », the latter being indicated either by the introduction of the rice and the breaking up of the communication between the human beings and the people of the upperworld, or by the ritual incorporation and transformation of a foreign element which leads to the introduction of death, procreation, and the segmentation of the society.



Myths dealing with the image of the half-body, including the version from Western Seram, usually not only narrate the incidents which lead to the partial constitution of the protagonist's body, often they also stipulate the necessary transformational processes by which the body and the person is finally completed (Platenkamp 2004). Dealing rather with the question of ontological completeness than with the problem of fragmentation, the narratives in question come close to what Marcel Mauss once called the « total social fact ».

On the other hand, not all the myths about half-bodies and unilateral beings collected to date are structured in such a way that they immediately can yield an overall insight into the society's ideology. Sometimes it is only in comparison with other mythical motifs that such insights can be achieved. In this context it appears as a special problem that myths about the half-body were often treated by various scholars as if they would constitute a specific category of narratives which could be set apart from other types of myths, and thus being immediately scrutinized in the framework of an intercultural, or even cross-cultural, comparison (Szabo 1941 ; Jensen 1950 ; Needham 1980). More than anyone else, Claude Lévi-Strauss, however, has taught us that no single myth, no singly category of myths can stand alone. Myths form part of multiple chains of transformation. In the case of the Wemale, for instance, it would be difficult to single out the myth of the Half-Man and to compare it straightforwardly with other myths about the half-body, be it in the context of other Moluccan societies, or in the wider context of Indonesia. The key to the

understanding of the Wemale myth of the Half-Man lies not so much in the other versions collected among neighbouring societies, but in the myth of Hainuwele (and vice versa).

The emphasis on the « close relationship » between the two myths, however, does not imply that the final step of the analysis has been already reached. If one recalls, for instance, the opening passage from the myth of Hainuwele where the pig is said to have drowned in the pond, it is obvious that this incident is mirrored by Hainuwele's own fate when she sinks into the ground. This would lead us to a number of Seramese myths which describe how pigs are transformed into human beings. Moreover, the myth of the Half-Man could be compared with another narrative of the Wemale which does neither deal with the bisection nor with the completion of a human body, but in which Duniaï, the highest deity, has to rebuild the body of a protagonist who suffers from the monstrous length of his penis (Jensen 1939 : 371-372). This in turn would lead to the analysis of myths in which other protagonists are introduced who suffer either from a surplus or lack of specific bodily functions. By undertaking such a comparative procedure one would probably arrive at the conclusion that the Seramese myths discussed are embedded in a much wider and complex network of transformations. The unveiling of this transformational network, however, is a task which I hope to achieve elsewhere.

MOTS CLÉS/KEYWORDS : *mythe/myth* – *demi-corps/half-body* – Hainuwele – Wemale – Seram – Moluques centrales/*Central Moluccas*.

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Michael Prager, *Moitiés d'hommes, « tricksters » et vierges démembrées : la transformation cosmologique du corps et de la société dans la mythologie Wemale*. — Cet article propose une analyse de différents mythes qui ont été collectés chez les Wemale de l'ouest de Seram (Moluques, Indonésie orientale). Deux récits servent de mythes de référence : le premier est axé sur l'image d'une moitié de corps et l'origine du riz tandis que le second parle d'une jeune fille (Hainuwele) qui naît à partir d'un cocotier et dont les parties du corps se transforment en tubercules. On raconte que ces deux mythes seraient chacun l'inverse, c'est-à-dire la transformation, de l'autre. Ils expriment tous deux une modalité spécifique de la relation qu'entretient la société avec le monde extérieur : l'une fondée sur l'image de la complétude du corps et l'appropriation non réciproque d'objets étrangers par le biais de la violence, du vol et de la filouterie, et l'autre sur l'image de la fragmentation du corps et la transformation rituelle de l'asymétrie en échange réciproque entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur. D'après l'analyse des idées qui sont liées à ces processus mythiques de conjonction et de fragmentation de parties du corps, et de leur relation avec les représentations de la mort, de la reproduction, des excréments et des objets de valeur, il est évident que, dans les conceptions sociocosmiques des Wemale, le corps constitue une métaphore pour la société dans son ensemble.

Michael Prager, *Half-Men, Tricksters, and Dismembered Maidens. The Cosmological Transformation of Body and Society in Wemale Mythology*. — This article presents an analysis of various myths which have been collected among the Wemale of western Seram (Moluccas, Eastern Indonesia). Two narratives serve as reference myths : the first myth is concerned with the image of a half body and the origin of the rice plant, the second with the birth of a young girl (Hainuwele) from a coconut tree whose body parts transform into tubers. It is argued that both myths should be considered as inversions, *i. e.* transformations, of each other. Both narratives articulate a specific modality of the society's relation with the outside world, one which is based on the image of body completion and the non-reciprocal appropriation of foreign objects by means of violence, theft, and trickery ; the other being based on the image of body fragmentation and the ritual transformation of asymmetry into reciprocal exchange between the inside and the outside. By analyzing the ideas which are linked with such mythical processes of the conjunction and fragmentation of body parts, and their relationship with representations about death, reproduction, fecies, and value objects, it is becoming evident that in Wemale socio-cosmic thought the body becomes a metaphor for the society as a whole.