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Article

# How a travelling society totalizes itself: Hybrid polities and values in Maluku, Eastern Indonesia

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Anthropological Theory  
0(0) 1–18

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DOI: 10.1177/1463499614534117

ant.sagepub.com



## Abstract

This article applies Dumont's view of ideology to an Eastern Indonesian society with intense trade connections to other ethnic groups and the larger political economy. In spite of their commercial importance, these connections are framed as long-distance kinship. My question is whether this encompassment of economic by social values is part of a totalizing ideological order. I discuss the values of personhood and exchange to show that long-distance commerce is the source of social differentiation expressed in them. Ultimately, however, the test of Dumont's methodology is not whether it helps explain the resilience of local social orders, but whether it can deal with historical complexity and change. I argue that Dumont's answer – hybrid ideology – is a good description for the encompassment of both kin-based totalities and political-economic stratification by universalizing, Islamic values in my ethnographic context.

## Keywords

Hybrid ideology, hybrid polity, Indonesia, migration, totalization, value

Totalization – the sense in which society is more than a sum of its parts – is a precondition for valued human existence. In western social theory, this means that the liberties, rights and rationality of the human individual are recognized when this individual is a member of a political society. For Louis Dumont, however, this is an exceptional and somewhat unique ideological model of true humanity. In his argument, it obscures another dimension of humanity (Dumont, 1986: 216): the personal and collective obligations which are manifested as the diverse relations

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and actions of concrete social life. Dumont claimed that proper sociological analysis cannot be limited to the empirical system of such relations and actions (Dumont, 1980: 37). Only an analytic emphasis on their ordering, ideological values could reveal that they amount to a holistic, socially grounded recognition of humanity.

'Social whole' in Dumont's sense has nothing to do with the outdated anthropological focus on localized, homogeneous cultures – except that the holistic study of concrete societies is a condition for knowing and comparing their ideology. This became clear from my village-based ethnography in the Kei Islands of Eastern Indonesia in 1994–6. My research site, a coastal village called Banda Eli, was founded by Muslim immigrants who integrated in the society of their local hosts politically but only married among themselves and outsiders, turning their Keiese clients and protégées into a lower caste of their village. From any partial, empirical point of view, this village always appears to be a part of some larger system or society. The reason for considering it in the Dumontian framework is that its 'universe of discourse' (Dumont, 1980: 241) – language, oral history, religious and ritual life, and social classification – affirms it as the source for a particular kind of social humanity which cannot be reduced to encompassing political and economic structures.

The question I address in this article is how well Dumont's concepts apply to an ideology which combines the very features which were opposed in his original, comparative agenda. Inequality in Banda Eli is structured in a similar way as that of Indian societies. At the same time, the Islamic affirmation of the value of each human individual is reminiscent of western modernity. Is this merely a political conjuncture of values? Or is it possible to affirm with the people of Banda Eli – nobles as well as commoners – that their society is totalized by value?

In their recent appreciation of Dumont, Knut Rio and Olaf Smedal (2008: 234) suggest that his comparative perspective should be revised into a more realistic one in which the ideological process moves towards one of two possible totalities: either ideological values or what Rio and Smedal call 'social matter': individuals, groups, or political entities. With their call to 'realism', Rio and Smedal ask us to recognize the atomizing effects of modern state power. The pure power of the state appeals to people who are deprived of socially grounded values and recognition. People deprived of self-worth turn into 'social matter' when they imagine some dislocation of their world – moral decadence, economic collapse, or 'enemies of the people' – as the underlying force of total, personal experience.

Rio and Smedal claim that the possibility of such atomization is inherent in all ideological processes. The question is how different ideologies recognize and handle the 'space of force' (Tcherkezoff, 2009: 324) looming outside the world of respect. Can socially grounded values extend to the world of economic and political power? And is this world always one of dialectic struggle between holistic thinking and universalizing concepts of humanity?

Banda Eli is a privileged site for reflecting on these questions. During my fieldwork in the 1990s, its 2200 inhabitants were engaged in a vivid, internal debate

about the political, ethnic and emotional displacement of their ancestors almost four hundred years earlier. The founders of the village had left their ancestral home in the Banda Islands when this centre of nutmeg production and trade was colonized by the Dutch East India Company in 1621. High-status Bandanese are still widely recognized as members of the Muslim trade aristocracy which controlled large, pre-colonial networks of spice trade. Their language has only survived in two villages in the remote islands of Kei, which only saw an active colonial presence in the late 19th century.

Banda Eli is a patently historical and yet hierarchical society. Its people follow similar reproductive rituals as their Keiese neighbours. Their cosmology of personhood stresses the encompassing category of house as the source and destination of each human life. At the same time, their society is centred around a number of mosques, and Muslim holidays are its most important collective events. The presence of Islam in this society invites looking at it as a hybrid ideological formation, comparable to German ideology which Dumont discusses in his later work.

The history of inter-island trade is crucial for understanding the ideological as well as political and economic existence of the Bandanese society. I begin by placing the Bandanese in this larger historical context and ask how they draw the boundary between local gift economies and commercial activities. The ideological importance of overseas travel for the Bandanese gives grounds to argue that this boundary is not simply a division between different domains of economic circulation. The boundary emerges when individual persons travel outside the local domain of reproductive social relationships. By affirming the value of such absent, circulating individuals, the Banda Eli ideology foregrounds its social relations as the site where value is created. I argue for the relevance of Dumont's methodology for understanding the significance of this totalizing figure, even if it centres on the value of individual human existence.

## The Banda Zone

The village of Banda Eli did not begin as a distinct, bounded society. The Bandanese escaped their Dutch conquerors to several locations in Central Maluku where they were assimilated among their Muslim allies. The only sites in which their language was maintained, however, were the villages of Banda Eli and Banda Elat in the Islands of Kei. These villages are still widely known for their Bandanese background, and their inhabitants have continued to visit *tanah dagam*, the regional 'lands of trade', in their own boats. At the same time, the Bandanese villages have been integrated in the Kei Islands polity through alliances with local elite groups. For centuries, they have been sites of interaction between a kin-based and commercially organized society, or 'centers of cosmological mobility', to use the phrase of Jonathan Friedman (1994: 33).

The common opposition between state and society is complicated by such sites. Leonard Andaya (1993a: 25) has argued that Maluku consists of neither 'political states nor stateless societies'; its island communities 'eschew any unities based on

political force or a common ethnic identity'. This account refutes a mistaken view motivated by Dutch colonial interest in which the small, pre-colonial system sultanates and kingdoms found in the centres of spice production used to be in territorial control of the vast archipelago. Instead, according to Andaya, the state-like features of local societies are due to shared myths of sovereignty and a sense of common cosmological origin. Andaya (1993b) speaks about the 'world of Maluku' as a global system which began to intersect with the 'world of Europe' in the early 16th century when the first Portuguese visited the area.

A slightly different view emerges from more recent historical studies of Maluku and some comparable areas in Southeast Asia. Timothy Barnard's (2003) ethnographic history of 18th-century Riau, the island world near the Malacca Straits and Singapore, describes a maritime world in which intense trade and competition between minor states was complicated by the arrival of Europeans. In this archipelago, Barnard argues, political authority did not have one single source or centre but justified itself with reference to different genealogical and ethnic narratives. During a few years after the murder of Johor's sultan, the sea nomads who were essential for constituting his power supported a leader who claimed to be his magically born heir, raised among Minangkabau foreigners in Sumatra. This crisis in the overall political system was at least partly a result of the destabilizing effects of European colonialism which caused the relocation of the Sultan of Malacca to the island which was to become Singapore. In *negara kacu*, which Barnard translates as 'hybrid polity', charismatic leaders relied on support from mobile, multi-ethnic followers in challenging weakened and vacated centres of sovereign power.

Roy Ellen's (2003) and Tom Goodman's (2006) recent studies show a parallel between these late 17th-century developments in Riau and slightly earlier conditions in Maluku. The Dutch East India Company was initially content with capturing the centres of spice production which, however, were already dependent on a large surrounding area for food imports (Ellen, 2003: 12). Ellen speaks of the 'Banda Zone' in reference to the coast and islands around eastern Seram – the largest island of Central Maluku – on which the Dutch continued to depend for a supply of sago to the nutmeg-producing islands of Banda, as well as of slaves needed in their plantation economy (Ellen, 2003: 83, 139). This area was also the first refuge for the indigenous Bandanese who escaped the Dutch (Van der Chijs, 1886: 162). Europeans in Banda were visited yearly by boats from Eastern Seram as well as the Kei Islands, another site of new Bandanese settlements (Miller, 1980: 51). For more than a century after their exile from their ancestral home, the Bandanese operated a long-distance trade network with access to nutmeg, tree resins, sea cucumbers and other global commodities produced in remote eastern islands and the New Guinea coast (Swadling et al., 1996; Goodman, 2006).

How did the political economy of inter-island trade affect the structure of localized societies? Compared to European agents of trade, the Bandanese had a decisive advantage in accessing remote trading sites in Maluku and the New Guinea coast. These sites were known as *sosolots*, or 'trade franchises', in which specific

Muslim groups had a privileged relationship, often constructed as kinship, to local middlemen (Ellen, 2003: 126). Whereas the Dutch attempted to control these places with the help of allied Sultans in North Maluku, the Sultans did not have real territorial control over the area which the Dutch recognized as their domain. Trading communities located in the islands near Eastern Seram were protected from Dutch intervention by mangroves and reefs. *Sosolots*, the trade franchises in the New Guinea coast, were likewise hostile to visiting European ships, and only consented to trade relations with visitors who had local middlemen in place. These mediators were Muslims and intermarried with groups which visited them regularly. The Kei Islands, including the two Bandanese villages there, fell into this pattern, and outside traders could only visit Kei with the consent of local chiefs until the late 1800s.

In the absence of territorial polity, the system of inter-island trade could only be organized as an ethnic hierarchy in which more mobile people dominated those who stayed in place. But the notion of *sosolot* also implies that each local society has the power to exclude outsiders who cannot demonstrate their lasting relationship to it. In this sense, the alienating effect of commodity economy was ideologically denied. This can be seen as a case of asymmetric recognition, as defined by Chris Gregory (1997: 65–7). But trading groups do not seem to have been in complete control over local polities. Enterprising people took initiative in launching their own trading expeditions. The Kei Islands used to be famous for building seagoing boats and travelling out for trade. In the Kei and Tanimbar Islands, long-distance maritime travel used to have a profound cosmological significance, and it was accompanied by rituals which involved entire villages (Geurtjens, 1910; Barraud, 1979; McKinnon, 1991). In some respects, these voyages are comparable to the famous Kula expeditions. They were the means of expanding the spatial and temporal range in which local people could be recognized by outsiders, and the very activity of travelling – not only the wealth acquired through it – signified value (Munn, 1986).

## Gifts and commodities

I have suggested that local societies in Maluku have denied the alienating effects of trade and defined themselves as gift economies. But there is also evidence that these gift economies have periodically extended beyond the ‘local whole’ defined by ideology (Dumont, 1980: 37). To complicate matters even further, increasing colonial presence from the 1860s onwards has relativized the boundaries of the gift economy. We should be wary of exaggerating the effects of this ‘modern’ development. The domination of each local society by powerful visitors, colonial agents and the markets and administrative structures was felt in transitory events, not as a lasting presence. Patricia Spyer (2000: 7) calls this ‘entanglement’ with modernity: a condition which does not offer local peoples a stable discursive or political position in the larger reality which surrounds them. Cultural modes of totalization remain a valid ethnographic concern, as long as we recognize that they are produced by the historical conditions outlined here.

In Cécile Barraud's account, the Kei society is constituted by the values of the 'outside' and 'inside': actions which recognize order in the external world are needed to atone for the violent appropriation of foreign things which society needs to reproduce its life (Barraud, 1979: 52). The underlying unity of these ideological levels is symbolized by the sailing boat, a vehicle which is able to direct its own movement in the external world. In the terms suggested by Knut Rio (2005: 405), the figure of the boat represents 'thirdness', the outside point of view which makes subjective awareness of the social whole possible. Such totalizing figures make it easier to understand why holistic categories continue to prevail in localized sociality. Even if they leave 'no value whatsoever for the individual subject' (Barraud et al., 1994: 119), they point to a totalizing perspective grounded in the outside world.

The 'outside point of view' can be understood in two ways. We should be careful to make a difference between the totalizing 'gaze' of the state, which invites people to recognize themselves as individuals, and the imagined point of view from which society appears as a meaningful whole. In the travel-related rituals and discourses, the people of Banda Eli often refer to an elevated point with a view to the sea, an open site in which people gather to look for news about absent, travelling relatives (Karttinen, 2010: 55). This is a hierarchical trope because the traveller is not the source of recognition to his individual relatives but to society as a whole. He, as a personal being, is invited to belong to the society he sees from afar. Ultimately his facial features confirm his identity to relatives, and their recognition reconstitutes him as a person.

Where does this hierarchical perspective leave political economy, which Dumont (1980: 39) considers as a secondary or 'residual' aspect of holistic societies? Political economy basically means an orderly way of producing, buying and selling goods. It is both an extension of domestic 'economy' and a legal, 'political' order which encompasses the personal, moral relations of domestic life. The traditional Keiese ideology does not make this connection. The Kei Islands people use old cannons and other antiquities in their marriage exchanges. These objects have obviously been acquired through trade and warfare, but the people of Kei represent them as the origin of their history (Barraud, 1979: 211). In Banda Eli, an openly trade-oriented community, ancestral objects which are used to objectify social relations and make them visible are often described as 'booty' from ancient wars. In a parallel with Serge Tcherkezoff's (2009: 323) observations of Samoa, we may say that the world of trade is simply a space for violent confrontation where 'force' replaces 'rank'. Again, the world of individual existence and action is recognized, but not valued.

At the same time, the Kei Islands world of belonging can extend itself to the external market. The key to this is the imagination of pre-existing relationships in the idiom of debt. A Banda Eli man who made his living by manufacturing antique cannons for urban people in Kei never said a word about 'selling' them: instead he said he visited the city to 'collect what people owed him'. If we can speak about a gift economy in this context, it is one that denies and conquers its opposite: the



anonymous market in which the circulation of goods hides personal relations and specific values. The long-distance traveller approaches distant trade partners as his (imagined) debtors, reversing the power relations which are likely to prevail in foreign places.

Another case in which the outside point of view is encompassed **are** the historical trade practices which appear to have been common throughout Maluku. In the past, the skipper of a trading boat calling in a village had to make a gift to a chief or harbour-master who would settle the terms for trade; at that point, people would know what local products to offer in exchange for the things sold on the trader's boat (Ellen, 2003: 128). Hein Geurtjens (1921: 240), a Catholic missionary who worked in Kei from 1900 to 1940, relates that customers would enter a visiting trader's boat, tie a line around the object they wanted, and rush home to find something they could barter it for. Instead of flowing freely as commodities, trade objects were literally 'tied' to persons even before the moment they changed hands. Unconcerned with the comparison and calculation of the value of trade articles, buyers allowed an item of merchandise to seize a part of themselves, as if the foreign object had a Maussian power of attraction over the hastily found payment. One can only speculate what took place in the buyer's house: whether he or she might, for instance, have turned to another person for something to barter with.

Geurtjens's sketch of trading in Kei suggests that trade relations are integrated in the value system through a totalizing gesture. The gift received by the chief (sometimes called Captain) establishes a similar rank between him and the captain of the boat. The outside world of trade is not exactly denied, but the encompassment of the village by external powers is clearly reversed. In the absence of this totalizing act, the boat would be a legitimate object of plunder, an unmediated access to its contents by ordinary people. Again, the external market is not recognized as social order but as the domain of force: the trader who wants to enter the village must belong to its gift economy.

We could argue that the ultimate power differential between the trader and the villagers allows the trader to ignore this gesture. Gregory (1997: 165) claims that this power differential arises from the mobility of the trader. There is no need of territorial state authority to maintain power in places like the Kei Islands, as long as seagoing traders maintain themselves as a superior ethnic group. But in the Banda Eli case, such categories are curiously mixed. The people of Banda Eli are **also** self-conscious traders who access the larger world through kinsmen in other places. Why, then, do they hold on to an enchanted view of the external market when they sell fake antiquities to the people of Kei? Why do they represent trade as warfare, instead of recognizing their trading partners as human beings?

### **The values of Banda Eli society**

Sea voyages are a central concern of Banda Eli oral traditions. Their stress is on the travellers' desire to be recognized by foreign others and their difficulty in being



recognized by close relatives back home. One of the traditional songs in Banda Eli describes a long voyage by two brothers who share a clan name. At the destination, one brother proves his identity to strangers by displaying several gold valuables. The other only carries a straw hat as a token of his relationship to his famous ancestor. The hat exemplifies objects which are distributed at funerals (Kaarinen, 2007: 160): even if it fails to impress the hosts, it is still effective for demonstrating a relationship to the dead ancestor because it signifies the ancestor's affection to his favoured servant, a member of the subordinate group who is still recognized as his elder brother. In this song, the ultimate success of the long-distance voyage lies in revitalizing the ancestral unity of the house.

In the reading suggested by Gregory, this song seems to be juxtaposing commercial and social values and expressing a subaltern perspective on the travelling man's virtue. But placing the song in the context of other expressive genres reveals that each kind of recognition is a potential failure. Other songs dramatize the moment at which the traveller returns home as a stranger, pleading in vain that his mother should recognize him as her son. The boundary of gift economy and the commercial world is neither here nor there: instead, we find a radical gap between the perception and recognition of personal virtue among kinsmen and strangers. In fact, the whole enterprise of sailing abroad is motivated by a wish to change the terms in which one is recognized as a person by social others. There is no generalized other in the village: at each ritual of birth, marriage and funeral, individuals are made aware of some collective category which is the source of their differentiated existence. For each person, two important contexts of differentiation are the house of one's birth and the house into which one has married. Travelling away is the only condition which collapses these contexts of belonging and creates the horizon of distinct, personal existence.

In this sense, travelling is the means by which people of Banda Eli achieve a totalizing awareness of their social life. But this is entirely different from saying that mobility and commercial activities create a cosmopolitan, individualistic perspective which eclipses hierarchy. Migrant work, which has replaced joint trade voyages from the early 1960s onwards, typically falls in a certain phase in a young, married man's life. Although overseas travel in Banda Eli is motivated by quite different psychological and aesthetic factors than the crisis of adolescence in western modernity, it may be helpful to compare the two as culturally organized experiences. In *German Ideology*, Dumont discusses Goethe's famous novel *Wilhelm Meister* as an effort to 'hybridize' the basically collective, German consciousness with the French value of political individualism. Against his parents' wishes, Wilhelm declines to become a shopkeeper and pursues a career as an actor. A travelling theatre group becomes the source of his formative experiences: Bohemian life, several love affairs and the aesthetic self-sufficiency of nobility (Dumont, 1994: 153). Ultimately, however, Wilhelm is something of a failure as an actor: his apprenticeship is complete when he finds a 'reasonable way to self-accomplishment' (1994: 161) and gives up art for ethically oriented life (1994: 176).

Dumont argues that Goethe's writing is not merely driven by the aesthetic ideal of human improvement, derived from the French Revolution. In the novel's theatrical setting, the nobleman's freedom and bourgeois responsibility are recognized together as a harmonious totality (1994: 175). Collective belonging – the Society of the Tower which takes interest in Wilhelm's education – is essential for achieving a 'satisfactory relation of the subject to the world' (1994: 177). More generally, Dumont is arguing that the social world is in the *background* of experience. Unlike theatrical roles and the virtues they represent, society does not have to be an object of discursive knowledge in order to organize consciousness and action.

Goethe's account of Wilhelm's personal development and the Banda Eli practices of long-distance travel are comparable as discourses about value. In the Banda Eli case, travelling men are typically at a stage in their life in which they depend on their wife's family for support but anticipate full adulthood. As senior men, they will be addressed by the term *amakaka*, 'father-elder', in reference to their standing as members of the eldest generation of their male line. When such men address public meetings they tend to mix Indonesian and Bandanese expressions, affecting a reasoned, cosmopolitan stance to an imagined audience of outsiders (Collins and Kaartinen, 1998: 550). The assembly of elders is a totalizing image of society. It is not a sign of the men's emancipation from subordinate relations to their in-laws, but their existence as 'public persons'. In Dumontian terms, the distinct personality of senior men and the relationship of the young man to his in-laws represent different 'levels' in a hierarchical ideology.

Following Terence Turner (1984), David Graeber (2001: 74) argues that such analysis of values hinges on 'a cultural system in which productive labour is divided up according to standardized units of time'. The unit of time in this case is the domestic, reproductive cycle. After marriage, young men of Banda Eli usually reside for a certain period among their in-laws. It is from this house that they depart on lengthy trips to engage in trade and migrant work, and their work supports the in-laws' household up to a point. But in order to emerge as a fully differentiated adult, the man needs enough wealth to rebuild his father's house, which signifies his affiliation with his paternal relatives. Long periods of migrant labour (which replaced commercial activities in the 1960s) make this transition possible. All the while the young men anticipate returning to their male relatives and extracting their wife and children from the house of their in-laws. In spite of this scenario, young men often develop a close friendship with their father-in-law. They speak admiringly about the old man's industrious efforts to plant coconut groves and gardens which ensure that the family has enough to eat. The two men's complementary roles in the household cement their relationship, even though the old man wishes to retain his daughter in the house and the young man seeks to bring her away.

Such reproductive relations offer a good example of Dumont's (1980: 242) notion of differentiation. In the place of contradiction between two ideas and interests towards the household, we find a larger, imaginary notion of the *house* orienting the two men's activities. The in-laws' house represents the continuity of

life which extends from ancestors to future generations, manifested in the young man's own children. At first sight, each of the two men's interest in the domestic group would seem to lie in the group of children housed and nurtured in it. But later in life the group of children will appear as a sibling set which stands for the unity and totality of the house itself.<sup>11</sup> This underlying unity becomes visible in funerals in which the elder and younger siblings perform different services to the corpse. At their father's death men become firmly identified with their house of birth. At their own death, their lifetime achievements and their public recognition as elders are absorbed into collective categories and the flow of life through each house.

### **Human virtues and the lands of trade**

The point of the comparison I have made has been to defuse **some of the dualism** which is often attributed to Dumont. Both individualist and holistic ideology are about experience: neither is defined as 'collective consciousness'. The real issue is what kinds of totalizing interpretations of experience they support. Some of Dumont's formulations point to an opposition between politics and religion as the source of totalizing values (Dumont, 1980: 233). In the diffuse, unterritorialized world of the Banda Zone this may not be the most productive opposition. The notion of ideological hybrids, in which universalizing, individualist values are tempered by a holistic cosmology, are more promising. When Rio and Smedal (2008: 249) argue that the atomizing effects of modern politics tend to detotalize more holistic cultural forms, they seem to be saying that certain universalizing human values are also the victims of such effects. In their view we should not merely be concerned with ultimate values but with the way 'social process moves people and other social materials in certain directions' (2008: 234). As soon as we think of this process as happening within society, we risk limiting the object of analysis to a local entity, such as the Banda Eli village. My discussion in the previous section has aimed to avoid this problem by focusing on cultural categories, or what Dumont calls a 'universe of discourse'. But in order to explore fully how values orient action, it is necessary to go further and consider how people of Banda Eli interpret the effect of commercial relations and the nation-state in their lives.

Hegel argued that 'unhappy consciousness', the lack of intersubjective recognition, is resolved when people agree on the universal value of humanity. In holistic ideology, on the other hand, it is enough that different parties recognize each other's intentionality. This means that their intentions are organized within a shared, imagined unity of space and time. Gregory (1997: 166) sees the moving or fixed position of people in political and economic interactions as the key to such unity. Nancy Munn (1986: 11) argues that the unity of time and space which is the basis of 'sharing' is itself shaped and expanded by the actions of people who signify the very values they pursue. When people sail far away in order to attract valuable gifts from strangers, they turn the small, mundane, local world of their island into a well-known and generous place, adding to its value or 'fame' in other places.

The people of the Kei Islands are interested in overseas trade for very similar reasons. But instead of fuelling cycles of gift exchange inside their society, their sailing voyages result in the reproduction of collective, historical categories. The idiom in which Banda Eli people imagine their absent, travelling relatives suggests a certain ‘unhappiness’. The traveller is supposed to be lonely, unenthusiastic and cold among strangers. This kind of existence is in obvious contrast with ‘love’ – the warm, receptive ethos of reproductive relationships at home. But *inan lifan*, the idiom for ‘mother’s love’, also translates as a lasting debt of a young, married man towards his in-laws. It means that the man’s future social existence continues in his children: no amount of riches can pay back the concern and care spent on them by the wife’s family. In Munn’s terms the whole point of travelling is to expand and transform this sphere of reciprocal recognition without becoming alienated from it.

One result of the expansion is the possibility of recognizing personal value in the distant commercial world. As I have already pointed out, people of Banda Eli hope to be recognized as relatives in some faraway sites they visit. They might know the meaning of heirlooms, such as the ancestral hat, which remains obscure to people at home. But there is a more general sense in which travellers can manifest and embody exceptional virtue in the lands of trade. I first stumbled into the Banda Eli notion of human virtue when I asked what they meant by sorcerer, *suangi*. Sorcery accusations in Banda Eli often indicate the collapse of reciprocal relations and trust. Envy, ill-will and the wish to harm more fortunate people by offering them poisoned drinks and cigarettes are generally associated with corrupt character, typical of low-status people. But my inquiries as to the precise meaning of sorcery were met with more totalizing explanations. Instead of saying what sorcery is, people described its opposite. ‘If you run into me at the city market-place’, I was told, ‘and offer me a cigarette, or invite me to a coffee stall, or to eat some food, you are a good person.’

Long-distance travel creates a space in which people can demonstrate their intentions towards other people, instead of responding to conventional expectations. In the urban setting, minor generosity becomes a virtue whereas similar hospitality in the village setting is a matter of course. But when we consider this pattern in the broader context of commensal relations, it reveals food- and drink-related generosity as a template of value, an action which stands iconically for its own result. Someone who is travelling among strangers must constantly appeal to other people’s generosity and sense of debt; the good person shows a disposition for creating such attitudes as well as responding to them. Such a person signifies the value in pursuing it.

Food has a special significance in this setting. Danilyn Rutherford (2003: 47) points out several ways in which it enhances the mobility and circulation of people as well as objects among the Eastern Indonesian people of Biak. In Munn’s terms this makes food into a qualisign of value (Munn, 1986: 17). It is not especially valuable as such, but because it manifests people’s invisible potency to have their intentions recognized by others (Graeber, 2001: 45). The potential value of actions can be both positive and negative. ‘Do not accept motorcycle rides from other

people', I have been advised, 'because we cannot know their feelings.' Even in the context of benign activities, the unknown intentions of other people can be a source of anxiety. This anxiety is particularly great in situations which involve the sharing of food because its consumption leaves an internal trace of the event in the body: hence the careful attention paid to any signs of indigestion and discomfort after eating with strangers.

I have suggested that domestic, reproductive relations are mainly understood as lasting bonds of reciprocity and debt. At the same time it is true that people move between social positions and phases in life: the sense in which they 'belong' to each other is specific to context, for instance the domestic life of a newly married couple. From this perspective, the recognition and wealth gained from outsiders appears as an added personal quality – a kind of surplus. The added quality lingers in travellers who have returned to the village after a long absence, and they impress it on familiar people through performative acts. In Banda Eli, I was occasionally mystified by the sight of a strange man who stood, immovable and dressed in a fine sarong, on the veranda of his house of birth for an hour or so, looking into the distance without making eye contact or conversation with anyone walking by. These quiet self-displays took place on quiet days, on which most villagers were resting or working in their gardens. It was only later that the men introduced themselves to me and told of their long journeys. Their vigils recall Rutherford's (2003: 75) observation of 'random acts' in which people pursue recognition by not appearing as themselves. In the face of relatives, who might have spent years longing for their return, the men signalled the fact that they had changed.

Gestures of the type I have described do not transcend the domestic world of belonging completely. Rutherford (2003: 28) interprets them as a response to national ideology, which the people of Biak 'incorporate' in their bodily practices and dispositions, instead of 'introjecting' **them** as the reference point of self-definition. These people are dealing with the overlap of the 'topography' of meaningful social relationships and the 'geography' of power (2003: 26). When the distance between the two collapses, the individuating effects of the state are 'fetishized' into strange properties and behaviour. This is similar to the impassive men displaying themselves on verandas in Banda Eli. But owing to the cosmopolitan history of Banda Eli, its ideology contains categories and values which mediate the local and the foreign. In the last section I will consider Islam as a case of this in Banda Eli.

## **Islam, the state and time**

Soon after the beginning of my fieldwork I was invited to a meeting on the veranda of the mosque in Tuburlai. 'The men assembled here', the organizer told me, 'have all lost their father, which means each is *amakaka*.' This honorific, derived from the words *ama*, 'father', and *kaka*, 'elder sibling', indicates the right to address a public meeting on behalf of one's lineage. The organizer's words to me were also aimed at flattering other participants since the point of the meeting was to agree on how much each participant would contribute to the reconstruction fund of the mosque

by the end of the next season of migrant work, which most of the men prepared to spend away from the village.

During my fieldwork in 1994–6, there were seven similar projects in Banda Eli alone. A boat trip up and down the coast was enough to show that each Muslim and Christian village was rebuilding its house of worship. More than a sense of heightened religious awareness, this was partly a response to the state sponsorship of public piety during the Soeharto government (Hefner, 1997). Certain foundations advertised funding for mosque construction on the condition that the mosque should correspond to a certain architectural model; instead of the square roof typical of older mosques, it included a central dome and towers. This homogeneous aesthetic was accepted in Banda Eli, even if people at the same time emphasized the antiquity of the reconstructed mosques.

These architectural projects are my best example of hybridized value. They sum up the structural complexity of Banda Eli during the period dominated by migrant work to the cities. In fact the mosques were under reconstruction roughly from the early 1970s, when many people gave up cash crop cultivation in favour of harbour work, earning money in nearby towns. In this period, village chiefs lost their control over commodity flows in and out of the village. The only section of the village in which people of different classes worked together was that of the village head. Each project was delayed by disagreements over leadership and funding, which suggests that political authority in the village was weak even as external state authority was at its height. After the government fell in early 1998, village elders put these differences behind, and each mosque was finished within a few years.

As I have already suggested, the life of a community follows larger historical developments. Finishing the mosques speaks of renewed cultural confidence after a long period of political repression. But the question is why people should put their efforts into creating monuments of national hegemony when this hegemony is over. Their practical life never returned to older patterns: wage labour and out-migration have increased through the 2000s, and ever fewer people spend a majority of their time in their village. A new cultural totality must be built from new materials. When chiefly control over land, fertility and trade became irrelevant, the people who used to exercise it were the first to move into cities, preferably as civil servants. Those who were left inscribed the new geography of power in the village and made it into a centre of ritual life.

If it were not for the time lag between the success of these two efforts it would be easy to miss their connection. The mosques were partly funded by people who had become successful as engineers, lawyers, businessmen and politicians in the outside society. But the project was initiated and done by people committed to village life: their letters to urban relatives remind us of the plea to travelling husbands to come home. Different sections of Banda Eli villages and allied Keiese communities had specific tasks in the construction work. To paraphrase Rio and Smedal (2008: 234), the mosque 'drew in social matter': its dome was literally covered by the people who had the right to build it. But in spite of this enthusiasm each project was delayed by quarrels and lack of trust in the organizing committees. It was only after



the chaos and violence which reigned over Maluku after the fall of Soeharto that they swore off their disagreements and finished the work.

Islam is a totalizing value for Banda Eli society. When people of Banda Eli move elsewhere they regroup around their activities of worship. Each urban neighbourhood populated by Banda Eli settlers has built a small mosque with its own officials and public activities. But the Banda Eli society does not always replicate itself in the same form. People of the chiefly and commoner class have mostly stayed apart in urban areas: only in the village do they see the mosque as a symbol of their lasting ties. A group of common people who left Banda Eli after a marital conflict has built its own mosque in the new settlement. For them, Islam represents equality and coexists with the spiritual value of local origins. In the Banda Eli village, Islam coexists with a more complex set of values and ritual offices. The most complex case may be the harbour of Ambon where many people of Banda Eli have sought work since the 1960s. The small mosque at the harbour's gate is presided over by an imam from Banda Eli. In this context, the mosque mediates the relations between ethnic groups from Sulawesi and the Bandanese who, in this context, stress their origins in Maluku.

In spite of its universalizing view of humanity, the Islam of Bandanese is a perfect case of cultural modes of totalization. It is never a marginal value: it is possible that the universalizing, individualist category will always be the 'highest value' of an ideological hybrid. This, however, does not determine the other values included in it. There is certainly room for relaxing the rigid metaphor of hierarchy in which different levels of value are 'welded together into a whole' (Parkin, 2009: 59). A more useful figure is Joel Robbins' (1994: 28) description of hierarchy as a 'rather busy mobile with many separate and delicately balanced arms' which are 'coordinated in their movement by a central string'. This expands the concept just enough to allow us to think of the complexities of history in terms of values. We may sometimes be privileged to witness a momentous event which reveals 'the organization of the current situation in terms of the past' (Sahlins, 1985: 155). Until then we are confined to seeing and listening to how people anticipate that event and work towards it, only to find the totalizing figure outside their interactive life. As Dumont puts it:

There is little chance of finding elaborate ideas in matters of little interest, and, conversely, differentiation occurs at the same time as value is stressed. But everything looks as though beyond a certain degree, value concealed what normally it reveals: the fundamental idea, the mother of all others, often remains unexpressed, but its location is indicated by the proliferation of value-ideas in the very zone where it is hiding. (Dumont, 1986: 233)

## **Ideology**

Dumont has rarely got full credit for his attempts to deal with historical change. His approach is radically different from the common understanding of history as a



process driven by the totalizing effects of markets and the state. Maluku is an example of areas which have historically left a wide space for cultural modes of totalization. I have argued that such totalizing ideological formations do not lie outside history: the example of Banda Eli suggests that they develop in response to shifting historical conditions. Long-term commercial and political patterns are essential for analysing these historical systems, but the notion of political economy as such does not capture their localized, discontinuous forms of sociality.

One useful comparison for Maluku is Barnard's account of Western Indonesian hybrid polities in which political subjection must constantly be reproduced through ritual gestures. Although Barnard does not refer to Dumont, the kind of system he analyses can be usefully approached through Dumont's ideas of hybrid ideological formations. Political totalization is not absent, but the sources of its constituting power are imagined in cultural terms. Dumont's contribution was to show that universalizing cultural or religious values – in this case, Islam – do not undermine cultural specificity: they may, on the contrary, become emblematic of it.

On another, methodological level this article has explored Dumont's approach to the study of ideology. Recent scholarship of his work has followed his work back to the issues of dual symbolic classification (Parkin, 2009) and forward to the issues of self and subjectivity (Celtel, 2005). One suggested way of validating his method for approaching the issues of the present world has been to see it as one half of a missing whole, a theoretical interest in totalization (Rio and Smedal, 2008). Inspired by Sartre, Rio and Smedal argue that complete analysis must also take account of the moments of fragmentation and the absence of values which result when the activities of organized groups of people are frustrated by structures and routines created by their own history.

While I am in sympathy with this argument, it seems to suggest that all ideological processes, and the consciousness of history, are driven by the state-like presence of external power. In Sartre's dialectic view, old social forms crumble when they are faced with the rationality of newly organized and mobilized groups of people. Social movements are animated by the frustrations of existing society, but also the human capacity for freedom. James Siegel's (1997) account of Indonesian nationalism, however, suggests that people's ability to imagine a future political state is grounded in their ideas and experiences of familial obligations. When Indonesians began to struggle for civil and political rights, they imagined the substance of those rights in the idiom of filial and parental love between the colonizer and the colonized. This is not simply a case of revolutionaries conjuring up the spirits of the past, as Marx put it. The new human equality and unity promised by statehood was meaningless without the value of kinship which people *already* had before the state could do anything for them.

A 'realist' way to talk about ideology is to see it as a process in which people interpret their historical conditions in valued terms and recognize when these conditions change. In the conventional, dialectic view, this leads to subjection to different forms of power that repress the universal value of humanity. Dumont (1980: 243) points out that the totality produced in this model of history has no precedent.

For people who do not choose to ignore the value of social relationships, **this** view of change sounds unrealistic. ‘Political’ and ‘cultural’ totalization must happen in the same universe of discourse; one is always the articulation of the other, and the question is which of them defines people’s generally recognized place in the world.

The Banda Zone presents an interesting mixture of universal and particular ideas of humanity. The source of universal ideas – such as human equality under God, or the basic, pecuniary value of a slave – is the inter-island trade which went on centuries before the islands were connected to larger political units. Until recently, the peoples of the Banda Zone have mostly seen state power from a distance. The horizon of value which emerges from their visits to distant lands of trade and from their new urban, cosmopolitan settings is not simply the subjection to the state. An analysis which looks beyond stable cultural meanings could also usefully look at these settings and experiences as ‘unfilled spaces’, outside or at the edge of meaning (Kapferer, 2008: 219). These spaces offer the possibility for a general recognition of human values, but never in the abstract: it is only in the grounded context of social life that faces, bodies and mosques stand for a whole, rather than for partial, fragmentary self-experience.

### **Acknowledgements**

This article is based on fieldwork in the Kei Islands over 15 months in 1994–6, with funding from the Academy of Finland and the Väinö Tanner Foundation and the sponsorship of the University of Gajah Mada, Yogyakarta. In 2009, I did six months of fieldwork in Ambon and the Kei Islands as a senior scientist of the Academy of Finland, sponsored by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) at Jakarta and Ambon. I would like to express thanks to these agencies and the Banda Eli community for their generous support of my research. A version of this article was presented in the workshop on ‘Dumont and the Global Order’, organized by the Centre of Excellence in Global Government Research of the University of Helsinki in 2008. In addition to the organizers and participants of the workshop, I would like to thank the anonymous readers of this article for their encouraging and constructive comments.

### **Note**

1. Houses in Banda Eli form groups which recognize a common ancestry and call themselves ‘house of four people’, ‘house of seven people’, etc., in reference to their founding set of siblings.

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