From Tribal Hut to Royal Palace:

The Dialectic of Equality and Hierarchy in Austronesian Southeast Asia*

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Abstract. In this paper I will compare and contrast the Austronesian symbolic elements of the two social formations within which I have conducted extensive ethnographic and archival research, that of the highly egalitarian Buid of Mindoro, Philippines and that of the equally hierarchical Makassar of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. I will demonstrate both that their cosmological structures are built out of common symbolic elements and that these structures could be used to legitimate vastly different political systems. The common symbolic elements included a gendered cosmos inhabited by a series of parallel societies composed of animal, human and spirit subjects; the conceptualisation of human sociality as generated by shared experience within a nested series of bounded spaces; and the ability of certain agents to move between these spaces by way of specialised training, vehicles and portals.

Keywords: Philippines, Indonesia, animism, shamanism, spirit possession

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Indonesia. I will demonstrate both that the cosmological structures of these two societies were built out of common symbolic elements, and that these structures could be used to legitimate vastly different political systems.

Due to the unequal distribution of fertile volcano soils and mineral ores in Southeast Asia, a long-distance trade in such staples as rice and metals developed as early as the second millennium BCE (Bellwood 1995, Christie 1995). In the "centrist zone" of Island Southeast Asia where the dependence on long-distance trade was the most intense, social organisation ceased to be based on unilineal descent groups, which were replaced by bilateral kindreds (Errington 1989). Unlike the ideology of shared substance transmitted from parent to child that lies at the heart of unilineal descent, the bilateral systems of Austronesian Southeast Asia were based on an ideology of shared activity within social spaces of varying scales. These ranged from the wombs shared either simultaneously or in succession by sibling sets, to houses shared by succeeding generations of humans and animals, to the tombs shared by male and female ancestors, to endogamous regions, and so on up to the cosmos as a whole (Bloch 1971; Macdonald 1987). Ethnographers have long commented on the symbolic centrality of the house as an idiom of social organisation throughout Southeast Asia (Cunningham 1964; Tambiah 1969), as well as on the centrality of relationships between siblings that are created within the house (Boon 1977, McKinley 1981).

Other common symbolic elements included a gendered cosmos inhabited by a series of parallel societies composed of animal, human and spirit subjects and the ability of certain agents to communicate with nonhuman subjects and to move between cosmologically demarcated spaces by means of specialised training, spirit familiars, vehicles and portals. All of this is reminiscent of what a number of students of Claude Levi-Strauss have identified in recent years

as a form of animism, or "animic ontology" (Turner 2009). Philippe Descola and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro have argued that the peoples of the Amazon basin do not draw a sharp distinction between the social and cultural world of humans who are viewed as intentional subjects and the natural world of plant and animals who are viewed as natural objects. In the animistic ontologies of these peoples, the world is experienced as filled with a variety of nonhuman subjects with whom they are engaged in social relations. These authors argue that the concept of a natural world devoid of subjectivity, agency and sociality is the product of a uniquely Western form of ontology they call naturalism (Descola 1996; Viveiros de Castro 1998).

Other proponents of the "ontological turn" in anthropology, including Tim Ingold, Nurit Bird-David, and Rane Willerslev, take their inspiration from Martin Heidegger's phenomenological approach to the question of being. They approach ontology as a matter of practical engagement with the world in the first instance rather than as a set of abstract cognitive schemes through which perception is subsequently filtered as (post)structuralists tend to do. According to these authors, recognition of the subjectivity of nonhumans spontaneously arises in the course of interactions between hunters and their animal prey, or between predatory animals and spirits and their human prey (Ingold 2000; Bird-David 1999; Willerslev 2007).

In a recent collection of papers on animism in Southeast Asia, it is clear that in this area local ontologies are closer to Amazonian "animism" than to Western "naturalism" (Arhem and Sprenger 2016). But there are also important differences between animism in Southeast Asia and in the Amazon. Kaj Arhem introduces a contrast between the egalitarian animism of the Amazonian peoples and what he views as the hierarchical animism of most indigenous Southeast Asian peoples. Most of these people keep domesticated pigs, chickens and buffalo that are used

in animal sacrifice to spirits who are superior to humans in the same way that humans are superior to their animals. The hunting of wild animals is of secondary importance for most groups, and the latter are often viewed as the domesticated animals of spirits anyway. Unlike the members of hunting societies, who are involved in a practical exchange of perspectives between predators and prey on a daily basis, Southeast Asian peoples are involved in a ritual exchange of perspectives with superhuman spirits on an episodic basis. Where animal forms of consciousness are accessed by shamans in the Amazon, spirit forms of consciousness are accessed by spirit mediums in Southeast Asia, whose bodies are temporarily occupied by more powerful spirits. More generally, all beings are considered to have greater or lesser degrees of potency, which flows down from the ancestors dwelling in the afterlife to the living beings of this world (Arhem 2016, 16-26).[1]

While the Buid and Makassar shared the view that social relationships are built up through social interactions within shared spaces and a form of the hierarchical animism outlined by Arhem, the differences between these societies were equally striking. They represented in a heightened form a contrast found throughout Southeast Asia between the hierarchical polities of the lowlands that were based on irrigated rice, kingship, and a world religion, and the egalitarian societies of the highlands that were based on shifting cultivation, kinship and an indigenous religion.

Among lowland peoples such as the Makassar, group membership, property and social rank were inherited within a (nonunilineal) corporate descent group and marriage alliances were arranged by group elders with an eye toward the augmentation of the noble house's position within the overall social hierarchy. Elaborate noble genealogies were carefully recorded both in oral and written forms, as were the social and technological innovations, military conquests, and

religious conversions of great royal ancestors (Levi-Strauss 1987, 155; Brown 1988). Continual historical transformation was built into these systems by the competitive drive of rival kingdoms to acquire rare and exotic imports, both material and ideological. Copper drums, Roman coins, Chinese ceramics, Sanskrit priests, and Sufi adepts were drawn from across the Indian Ocean and South China Sea into the royal palaces of Southeast Asia and redistributed in their hinterlands for hundreds of years.

Among egalitarian peoples such as the Buid, every effort was made to prevent the formation of exclusive corporate groups, the accumulation of property, the development of social distinctions, and the glorification of ancestors. Although the Buid employed a writing system related to that of the Makassar, it was used almost exclusively for composing poetry and for brief ephemeral messages (Miller 2016). Trade with the outside world, in both material goods and ideological systems, was kept to a minimum. Every attempt was made to conserve a way of life seen as far superior than anything on offer in the lowlands, especially to the people at the bottom of the system who were enmeshed in relations of debt-servitude and chattel slavery. Temporal and geographic horizons were sharply limited. When I arrived in Ayufay in 1979, the local Buid still had no conception of the Philippines as a sovereign national entity, and very little idea about the neighbouring islands from which all the lowland peasants had come.

Ascribed Equality among the Buid

Mindoro was once an important way station on the maritime trade routes that linked Southern China to the spice islands of Eastern Indonesia. It is mentioned in Chinese texts as the island of Mai in 982; as Min-to-lang in the 1300s; and the Spanish encountered both Chinese and Muslim traders along its coast when they arrived in 1570 (Lopez 1976, 12-13). Three centuries of warfare soon broke out between the Spanish colonial government in Manila and the Muslims

they called Moros in Mindanao. By 1700, the coasts were largely depopulated and the indigenous people had withdrawn into isolation in the highlands.

Until the beginning of the American occupation of the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century, the indigenous peoples of Mindoro had most of the island to themselves. In 1905, American logging companies began clear-cutting the forests along the coasts; they were followed by Japanese logging companies in the 1930s (Helbling and Schult 2004). Logging opened the way for peasant settlers from neighbouring islands, and the Buid and other indigenous peoples were driven from the coastal plains into the mountains, where there was very little level land. Swiddens were made on slopes that could be quite steep.

The Buid Hut as Microcosm

Until the 1980s, most Buid houses were dispersed evenly across the mountainous landscape at intervals of one or two kilometres. They were built at the edge of a swidden underneath the branches of trees so that they were difficult to spot until one was almost upon them in order to evade the depredations of lowland settlers. The orientation of the house was determined by the local topography. Buid houses were built on four or more posts with a split bamboo floor that could be level with the hillside at one end and ten feet above the ground at the other, but which was usually about four feet from the ground. The external walls were made of woven bamboo or bark, and the roof of thatch. There were no partitions inside the house. Family members slept next to one another on mats woven from *buri* leaves. The only opening in the walls was a doorway that was reached by a simple ladder composed of a tree limb running diagonally from the ground to the level of the floor in front of the house. The hearth was built directly on the floor by covering a layer of leaves with soil. Cooking pots were placed on three stones. Most households maintained more than one house, especially after the community decided to establish

a permanent large-scale settlement. They would maintain their old house next to their swidden and build another in the new settlement. A house had to be abandoned whenever someone died in it, because the smell of the corpse would continue to attract predatory spirits long after the deceased had been buried.

But humble as it was, the Buid house served in ritual as a microcosm of the universe.[2] The roof was an analogue of the Upper World, above the sky. The space beneath the house was an analogue of the Under World, where the spirits of the dead dwelled. The doorway was an analogue of the portal at the edge of the world through which the sun and the moon passed as they travelled between the Middle World and the other Worlds. The benevolent spirits of the earth and the spirit familiars who aided the spirit mediums dwelled at this liminal cosmic site until called to the aid of the human community during rituals.

In Ayufay, a house was typically occupied by a married couple and their immature children. Boys began building their own houses at the age of about fifteen, and unmarried adolescent girls often lived with an elderly grandmother. Households ranged in size from one to six members, depending on where they were in the developmental cycle, but most contained just two or three human members.

A traditional household always included non-human members as well. Dogs were often treated as pets and slept inside the house with the family. They were never eaten. Domesticated chickens roosted in baskets hung on the outside of the walls under the eaves. Domesticated pigs lived beneath the house and ate whatever vegetable waste was pushed through the slats of the floor, although piglets were sometimes also treated as pets and kept inside the house. Domesticated animals were only killed and eaten as part of a ritual sacrifice that required interaction with the spirit world. Whenever a pig or chicken was killed, its meat had to be shared

out in exactly equal portions among all the living members of the local community as well as with the dead. In this distribution, no significance was attached to a recipient's age, sex, length of residence in the community or genealogical tie to the sponsor of the ritual. This sometimes resulted in minute shares of meat. The sharing of meat in this manner constituted the most frequent form of material transaction between households, occurring about once a week in the settlement of Ugun Liguma, which contained about eighty people. One was entitled to a share of meat by virtue of one's membership in the community, not because of previous transactions one may or may not have had with a particular household. In animal sacrifice, all social distinctions within the community were symbolically dissolved in a communal meal.

Pigs and chickens had their wild counterparts in the forest, and domesticated animals could always go wild. For pigs and chickens to become and remain members of the domestic group, they had to be fed and socialised into it in much the same way as its human members. "Wild" pigs and chickens were in fact regarded as the domesticated animals of the *andagaw*, a category of humanoid spirit that lives in mountain peaks, which to them appear as houses. Capturing a pig that belonged to the *andagaw* put one into a social relationship with them that could culminate in one's absorption into the spirit world and marriage to the owner of the wild animal. A hunter thus had to pay the same sort of compensation to the spirit owner of the wild pig that one paid to terminate marriage to a human spouse to avoid entering into a long-term relationship with them.

The Exile of the Ancestors from the House

A living person was made up of three components: a body (*abilugan*), a soul (*falad*), and a mind (*fangayufan*). The *falad* was common to humans and animals. It was the seat of the emotions and desires, and was inherited from the parents in much the same way that the body

was inherited from them. At death, the soul left the body and made its way to the Under World, while the mind, which was a product of an individual's social interaction with other living humans, dissipated. The souls of the dead, *labang taw*, were thus thought to be governed by their emotions and desires in a manner similar to small children.

When a person's soul left their body at death, the body began to decay, giving off a stench that smelled delicious to a range of predatory spirits, who were said to regard all living humans as their pigs. The smell drew them toward the corpse, on which they feasted in large numbers. The corpse was therefore buried as quickly as possible far from human habitation in a graveyard on top of a mountain peak, along with various items the spirits could use to pursue an autonomous existence in the Under World. A small house complete with bamboo floor and a thatched roof was built over the grave. Mourners purified themselves of the stench of the corpse by bathing in smoke on their way home, and took circuitous routes to prevent the *labang taw* from following them. The predatory spirits that were attracted by this smell could also attack the living, and it is for this reason that the house in which a person died was immediately abandoned and the survivors built a new one elsewhere. I was told that in the past those who were on the point of dying were sometimes abandoned in the forest so that they would not contaminate the house with their smell.

The *labang taw* lived in the Under World, which was thought of as a mirror image of the Middle World occupied by the living. They walked around with their feet facing upward towards the Middle World and their heads pointed downward away from the World of the living. They were awake when it is night in our World and could see in the dark the way the living see in the light. Conversely, they slept when it was day in the Middle World. The *labang taw* lived together in communities and grew their own crops, they had no domesticated animals. When they

developed a craving for meat, they had to return to the Middle World and beg their living kinsmen to kill a pig and share it with them. Because they have literally lost their minds at death, they were capable of causing their living relatives to fall ill or even die if their requests were ignored. A pig was therefore sacrificed to appease them if one was available. The *labang taw* received a small share of cooked meat taken from all parts of the animal, which was placed in a small spirit house constructed at the boundary between the cleared area around the house and the forest. They were never invited inside the house, but were sent on their way back to the Under World as quickly as possible.

Saying the names of the dead could attract their unwanted attention, so it was very difficult for me to construct genealogies that went back more than three or four generations, even when the oldest generation could be persuaded to name the deceased elders they had known previously. Indeed, one of the few reasons the names of the dead ever came up in conversation was when spirit mediums were attempting to identify the *labang taw* that might be causing an illness. It was only then that I sometimes discovered that two living individuals might be half siblings whose mothers had engaged in sexual intercourse with the same man while pregnant with them, or cousins who shared a more distant common ancestor, and who had returned to afflict them both.[3]

The Human Mind and Spirits of the Earth

While the soul was common to humans and animals and was the seat of egoistic emotions, the mind was the product of social interaction within the human community. It developed as a child matured, and gradually brought the other elements of a person under control. Unlike the processes of gestation and childbirth, the act of sexual intercourse was viewed as a social interaction between freely consenting adults and was thus under the control of

the mind, not the soul. Different terms were used for sexual intercourse depending on which species was involved, and the Buid sharply denied that one could use the same term for both human and animal intercourse.

The Buid placed an extreme emphasis on the personal autonomy of all human subjects and minimised as much as possible the dependence even of children on specific adults. The freely chosen social relationship between adult spouses served as a counterpoint to the ascribed relationship between ancestors and descendants. According to the principle of individual autonomy in the choice of consociates, no one had the right to stop their spouse from leaving a marriage. Marriages tended to be highly unstable among the Buid, and the desire for one spouse to leave the marriage and form a relationship with someone else was the most common cause of social discord. It was accepted that the soul of an abandoned spouse might become so distraught that it could overwhelmed their rational mind and cause them to react to the ending of a marriage by committing suicide or in rare cases an act of violence directed against another person.

If a divorce case could not be resolved dispute amicably, the benevolent spirits of the earth withdrew their protection from the entire community. This made everyone vulnerable to attack by a whole range of predatory spirits, especially children. Continued quarrelling put innocent bystanders at risk, so it was in the interests of the community as a whole to intervene in marital disputes. A collective discussion of the matter was convened, and any member of the community was entitled to attend and to comment on the case in hand. Pressure was put on the recalcitrant spouse to see reason, and to accept a standardised compensation payment that recognised their distress, but also brought it to an end. While there was an inevitable factionalisation of the community in the course of a divorce hearing, some people taking the side

of one spouse and some the side of the other, the dispute was defined as being between the members of a single household.

The satisfactory resolution of a marital dispute was a necessary prelude to the restoration of the protection of the spirits of the earth. This was achieved by sacrificing a pig to them on the threshold of the house. As with offerings occasioned by visits from the *labang taw*, the meat was cooked and divided into equal shares for every member of the human community, with another share being set aside for the spirits of the earth. The share of the spirits was placed on a tray right on the threshold of the house. After the spirits of the earth had been invited to join in the meal, their tray of food was slowly drawn into the house to restore solidarity between the human community and the spiritual source of all plant, animal and human vitality. This was in marked contrast to the way that offerings to the ancestors were placed in a separate spirit house away from human habitation.

Seances and predatory spirits

The Buid maintained social relationships with a number of other nonhuman spirits in addition to their own ancestors and the spirits of the earth. This was done through a séance during which the mind of a medium left his body and rode on the back of its spirit familiar as it soared aloft, enabling the medium to perceive the otherwise invisible predatory spirits that infested the forest and occasionally invaded human territory during the night. Virtually every adult man and many older women possessed a spirit familiar which could be summoned at will by chanting. This practice is closer to the shamanism described elsewhere in the region than to spirit possession, in that the practitioner remains conscious of the movements of his spirit outside his body at all times. It differs in that his spirit does not go to a different cosmic realm and his experiences are shared by the other mediums participating in the séance. Buid mediums thus do

not claim the same sort of privileged access to the spirit world and the associated charismatic authority characteristic of shamanism in other societies.

Constant vigilance was required against the predatory spirits, and an individual medium often chanted by himself from time to time just to keep track of what was happening in the invisible world. When a predatory spirit actually bit a victim, however, more concerted activity became necessary. Groups of six to twelve mediums gathered to exert their combined forces against the predatory spirit. Each began by quietly chanting to establish contact with his own familiar and began to see the enemy spirits besieging the settlement. From time to time the mediums broke off chanting to describe to their colleagues what they were seeing, where it was and what it was doing. The group of mediums began to perceive the same spirits and to elaborate on each other's accounts. Gradually an intersubjectively validated picture of the spirit world was built up in this way.

These group séances were so common, taking place at times every night for weeks on end, that the invisible world came to seem comparable to the visible world. Spirit beliefs were thus legitimated through shared empirical experience, not through the belief in a charismatic specialist who claimed privileged access to a higher reality as in a shamanic or prophetic tradition, nor through differential mastery of a sacred tradition as in a priestly religion. This "mystical empiricism" of the Buid, the emphasis on collective ritual activity and experience, gave their religion an extraordinary vitality and flexibility. Beliefs were continually being submitted to the test of the séance, and being re-legitimated in the present. Among the Buid, ritual power and knowledge were thus distributed in an egalitarian way throughout the community.

Summary

In the course of certain rituals, the house became a microcosm of the universe as a whole. The roof was then brought into correspondence with the sky and the Upper World that existed beyond it, the floor to the Middle World inhabited by living beings, and the space beneath the house to the Under World inhabited by the dead. Pigs that lived under the house were sacrificed to propitiate both the spirits of the earth and the spirits of deceased humans. Chickens were sacrificed to maintain contact with the *lai*, spirit familiars who fly between the Middle and Upper Worlds, and who give their mediums the power to fly through night sky and fend off predatory spirits. The doorway of the house was brought into correspondence with the portals at the eastern and western edges of the Middle World through which the sun and the moon pass as they rise and set, and where the spirits of the earth normally dwell.

My general argument is that the way the Buid maintained such an extraordinary degree of autonomy, equality, and solidarity within their own society of humans can only be understood in the context of their interaction with a variety of neighbouring societies, including those of lowland Filipinos; of disembodied subjects such as the spirits of the earth, spirit familiars, spirits of the dead, and predatory spirits; and of embodied nonhuman subjects such as those dwelling in animals, plants, mountains, rivers and the heavens. Buid social values were systematically defined in opposition to the relations of predation, exploitation, debt, dependency, and hierarchy associated with the worlds of the predatory spirits, lowland settlers, and the Philippine state.

The Dialectic of Ascribed and Achieved Rank among the Makassar

Noble houses continued to occupy a central place in Makassar society into the post-colonial era. This was true both in the literal sense of the house as a physical structure and in the metaphorical sense of the house as a ranked noble descent groups that possessed a patrimony of

lands, titles, political offices, sacred objects, origin myths, and historical chronicles (Lévi-Strauss [1979] 1982).

Unlike the Buid, the Makassar have a long history of embracing warfare and trade with the outside world. Sanskrit influences, which reached the Java Sea in the eighth century, arrived in Sulawesi relatively late. The Javanese Empire of Majapahit introduced the worship of the Hindu God Shiva along the Makassar coast in the early fourteenth century. But this Hindu influence was short-lived, for by the beginning of the fifteenth century, a new maritime power appeared on the scene in the form of the great expeditions led by the Muslim Chinese Admiral Zheng He. These expeditions left behind several sailors in the ports of Java, who transformed the technology and religion of the region, reorienting it away from the Sanskritic world of India and toward the Islamic world.

The Indian Ocean was on the brink of an era of Chinese dominance when internal conflicts led the Ming dynasty to halt the expeditions. Zheng He had recognised the Muslim state of Melaka as the legitimate heir to the old tributary empire of Sri Vijaya in 1430, and it came to play a central role in regional trade until it was conquered by the Portuguese in 1512. The Portuguese conquest led Malay Muslims to scatter all across the Java Sea, and many received protection from the Makassar kingdom of Gowa. The rulers of Gowa adopted many Portuguese technologies in the 1500s and converted to Islam in 1605. They soon established a maritime empire over all of eastern Indonesia. This brought them into conflict with the Dutch East India Company, which forced Gowa to sign a treaty recognising Dutch maritime supremacy in 1667. But the Makassar and Bugis people have remained famous to this day for their aggressive pursuit of military and commercial opportunities (Cummings 2002).

The Makassar system of hereditary rank was anchored by genealogical distance from the local royal palace. According to a genre of myths found throughout the Java Sea, the founding royal ancestors of local polities were beings from the Upper World who descended to the Middle World in a bamboo tube (To Manurung). The heads of the local houses recognised the supernatural origin of these strangers and asked them to put an end to local factional rivalry by agreeing to rule over them as king and queen. The founding royal ancestors eventually disappeared, leaving behind a collection of androgynous objects called *gaukang* or *arajang* in which their royal potency inhered. In the largest Bugis and Makassar kingdoms, these *gaukang* were guarded and cared for by a cadre of androgynous priests called *bissu*. *Bissu* were individuals with male or androgynous bodies who dressed and lived as women (Hamonic 1987).

The descendants of the local commoners formed a *hadat*, or council of commoners, which was responsible for installing each new generation of rulers from among the descendants of the original royal couple. Installation rituals re-enacted the primordial encounter and contract between the local people and the divine being. Upon the death of a ruler, a new one was chosen from among the descendants of the original heavenly beings by the current members of the *hadat*, who were themselves descended from the members of the original *hadat.* The new ruler stood on the stone where the royal ancestors first appeared, holding the regalia they left behind, and repeated the same reciprocal oath with the current members of the local *hadat* as the ancestors did. This stone was the point at which the Middle World is linked to the Upper World. There was another sacred spot in each local realm called the *possi tana*, or navel of the earth, which can be a well, spring or meadow close to the water table, that linked the Middle World to the Under World.

The founding royal ancestors were said to have white blood in their veins. Because kings tended to marry several wives of different ranks, their white blood was mixed with the red blood of commoner wives in the offspring of these marriages creating a finely graded hierarchy of noble rank (Acciaioli 2009). Nobles tended to marry their lowest ranking wives first, and took a wife of the highest rank after consolidating their social and political position. For this reason, younger siblings were typically of higher rank than elder siblings, and the terms for younger sibling, *andi'* and *daeng*, also served as titles for those of noble blood before they were invested with titles of higher rank as they matured.

The Makassar Noble House as Microcosm

As was true among the Buid, the attic area of a Makassar house served as an analogue for the Upper World in ritual. Unlike the Buid, the Makassar viewed their ancestors as a source of blessing and fertility and installed their spirits in a shrine that held their material relics. The area beneath the house was an analogue for the Under World and for future generations of the household.

The rank of the family occupying a house was indicated by the number of horizontal panels across the triangular gable at each end of the roof, so that one could tell at a glance the status of each household. The highest-ranking house in the Makassar Empire of Gowa, the palace of the Sultan, had five horizontal panels in this space. In Ara, the owner of the highest-ranking house possessed only the lowest noble title, that of *gallarrang*, and was entitled to just three of these panels.

Noble rank was cross-cut by gender dualism, which was seen as a feature of the cosmos as a whole. According to a Makassar myth recorded in the seventeenth century, the world was generated by a violent collision that occurred when the primordial male sun caught up with the

female moon. This created an unstable androgynous whole that burst apart and left in its wake the sun, the moon, and an androgynous remnant, the earth. Over time, the couplings of the sun and moon became regularised and new worlds continued to be produced in an orderly manner. Similar ideas informed the cosmogonic myths of the Ngaju Dayak in central Kalimantan and other peoples around the Java Sea (Schärer 1963; Ras 1973).

In the village of Ara, noble houses were structured around a pair of central posts that were regarded as male and female twins. When a house was first constructed, it acquired its animating spirit at the moment the crossbeam that connected one of these posts to the other was put into place. The macrocosmic couplings of the sun and moon were mirrored by the microcosmic couplings of husbands and wives in the *wili'*, the space between the male and female house posts, leading to the conception of children in the womb of the mother. A new house was only considered to have been completed when a resident couple had given birth to a full sibling set, defined as consisting of at least one brother, one sister and a third sibling of either sex. At this point an elaborate ritual was performed in which the brother and sister were dressed in the costumes of a bride and a groom and the household members circled the outside of the house seven times, paralleling the circling of a new-born infant seven times during the ritual to seal its navel and fontanel.

Childbirth took place on a layer of cool banana leaves in the centre of the *wili'*. It was conceptualised as the manifestation in the Middle World of seven spiritual siblings, each of which was housed in a different material container. The first sibling to emerge was the amniotic fluid, *ere*. It was allowed to fall through slats in the floor and penetrated the earth/Under World beneath the house. This meant that an individual born at home would be destined to die and be buried in the soil of the local realm, and to leave behind descendants. The first sibling thus

represented the role of the new-born as a descendent of the house and prefigured its future role as an ancestor. The water then arose from the earth in the form of vapor and entered the body of the child once it was born as its breath, *nyaha*.

The second sibling to emerge was the blood, *rara*, which in this uncontained form was highly vulnerable to external agents, including both malevolent forces from the Under World and benevolent forces from the Upper World. It was thus carefully protected from the former and deliberately exposed to the latter. It was collected in banana leaves that were placed in a basket attached to a bamboo tube planted in the ground outside the house. The cool wet leaves repelled the chthonic spirits from below, while the basket was left open to the sky to collect the blessings that descended from the heavens.

The next four siblings to emerge were the body of the child, *tubu;* the flesh, *daging;* the caul, *bohon*; and the umbilical cord, *lai*. The umbilical cord was the seat of the individual's life force, *sumanga'*. It was dried and preserved in a bottle of oil and used in healing rituals when an individual fell ill. All of these siblings were identified with the Middle World of inhabited by human beings living in the present. The seventh and last sibling to emerge was the placenta, *tahoni* or *ari-ari*. This spirit served as a companion to the child during the first few months of life and was stored in a large coconut placed in the attic/Upper World alongside the relics of the ancestors.

The three main components of the individual, symbolised by the amniotic fluid, the body, and the placenta, were thus mapped onto the three levels of the house/cosmos and onto the past, present and future of the descent group. The divisions between these three components were bridged by the breath, *nyaha*, which descended into the soil at birth, arose to animate the body in the house/Middle World when an individual was awake, and which occupied the placenta in the

attic/Upper World when an individual was asleep. Individual human beings and their associated material vessels were thus a microcosm of the domestic group, of the house, and of cosmic space-time.

The Return of the Ancestors to the House

In Ara, almost all marriages were uxorilocal to begin with and houses were almost always inherited by the eldest daughter. The groom was only allowed to enter the central sleeping chamber, the *wili'*, when the girl's mother decided they were ready to consummate their marriage and gave her approval. Once the union was successfully consummated, they were installed together in the *wili'* and the older conjugal couple were displaced to an apartment located behind the female house post at the back. This was also the apartment in which unmarried maidens slept. This apartment was slightly elevated above the *wili'* and provided access to the attic, where the ancestors dwelled and where the seed grain was stored. Only female descendants of the ancestors were allowed to enter the attic.

The displacement of the senior couple from the *wili'* marked the first phase in a long series of transitions from their status as household heads to their status as *bohe*, grandparents and ancestors. Their bodies left the house altogether at death, when they are carried to the graveyard and buried next to one another in the same tomb. The *nyaha*, spirit, of a dead person was transformed into an *anja*, ghost, which retained the personality of the person during a prolonged transition period in which it wandered back and forth between its decaying body in the graveyard and the house in which it used to live. Eventually, as the memory of its individual personality faded among the living, the *anja* was transformed into an anonymous ancestor called an *alusu*, subtle or ethereal being, usually about the time that one of their *ampu*, grand children or great grandchildren, became the head of their old house.

An *alusu* indicated its desire to return to a house by afflicting one of their descendants with an illness. If a ritual specialist, *sanro*, determined that an affliction was caused by an *alusu*, a ritual would be performed to install it in a permanent shrine located in the attic between the male and female house posts and above the *wili'*. Once installed, an ancestor spirit would be regularly fed with 'complete offerings' of rice, meat and betel ingredients. These offerings were completely standardised, unlike those made to ghosts, which demanded highly idiosyncratic things that were their favourite foods when they were alive. The relationship between the *spirit* of an ancestor and the members of an ordinary house was thus one of a generalised, anonymous ancestor to an undifferentiated group of co-resident descendants.

The Achievement of Ascribed Rank

Because noble rank was inherited bilaterally among the Makassar and only men could marry more than one spouse at a time, female nobles had to be careful to contract marriages with spouses of at least equal rank. The rank of noble women was in theory fixed at their birth. For this reason, the higher their rank was, the more jealously their virginity was guarded. In order to protect their own claims to high rank, noble men were highly motivated to prevent their sisters from marrying men of lower rank. The surest way to do so was to arrange a marriage with a first cousin whose precise ancestry could be fully known. At the same time, noble men were also highly motivated to marry a chief wife of as high a rank as possible. Men who were able to acquire wealth, esoteric knowledge, or military renown through their own efforts were sometimes able to persuade men of higher rank to allow them to marry their daughters or sisters. Another option was to try to elope with a woman of higher rank (*silariang*), an act that was often framed as an abduction to protect virtue of the bride.

Noble weddings were the most elaborate and expensive life-cycle rituals performed in South Sulawesi, because they were the main event at which claims to high rank were made and either validated or rejected by the participation of the guests. The wedding ritual re-enacted the primordial encounter between the founding royal ancestors on a microcosmic scale who travelled between Worlds inside bamboo tubes. Bamboo tubes were the archetypal androgynous object, being both rigid tubes like penises and hollow receptacles like vaginas. Their use in life cycle rituals was reserved for the noble descendants of the founding royal ancestors. The claim to noble status was validated each time a household successfully used bamboo paraphernalia, while performing a birth, wedding or funeral ritual.

In the Makassar village of Ara, houses passed to the eldest daughter upon her marriage and the sons married into other houses. The highest-ranking women tended to marry a first or second cousin of equal rank. This meant that it was possible for a man to return to his father's natal house by marrying his father's sister's daughter, thus reuniting an opposite sex sibling set in the next generation. In this system, cousin marriages should not be seen as an exchange of men between houses, but as the return of the product of an out-married sibling to the source. It was enough for one grandchild (*ampu*) to return to an ancestral house and marry another grandchild of the original ancestors (*bohe*) in the third or fourth generation to complete a cycle of life.

The Makassar kinship system could thus be understood symbolically as an autonomous entity that reproduced itself over the course of four generations. In each generation, some members of the sibling set were sent out to marry, while the offspring of previous generations were brought back in. Over time, the in-marrying spouse was symbolically transformed into the sibling of his mate. The completion of the whole process occurred when next generation

produced a sibling set containing a brother, a sister and a supplementary sibling. Household ancestors were by implication recycled after four generations or so, when an individual might be given the same name as their great grandparent.

Conclusion

Despite the differences between the Buid and the Makassar social formations in scale, complexity and hierarchy, certain symbolic themes common throughout the Austronesian culture area are present in both societies. Shared social spaces such as wombs, houses and tombs are used to conceptualise the egalitarian relationships among siblings, cousins, and spouses, while shared bodily substances such as blood and semen are used to conceptualise the hierarchical relationships between ancestors and descendants. The cosmos is conceptualised as composed of several Worlds arranged along a vertical axis, and of a host of competing plant, animal, human and non-human societies arranged along a horizontal axis. Cross-species and cross-World communications are managed by ritual specialists who are able to uncouple their consciousness from their physical bodies under the right ritual conditions.

This shared symbolic system is flexible enough for societies like the Buid to assert a radical kind of egalitarianism by emphasising the sharing of space over the sharing of substance, and egalitarian relationships among friendly human and nonhuman beings over antagonistic relationships with predatory human and nonhuman beings in the Middle World; and for societies like the Makassar to assert a radical degree of hierarchy by emphasising the sharing of substance over the sharing of space, and ties of noble households to divine beings who descended from the Upper World or arose from the Lower World. The Buid exile their ancestors to the margins of human space and discourage them from interacting with the living; the Makassar install them in the attics of their houses and encourage them to return and bestow blessings and fertility on their

descendants. Makassar spirit mediums were passive vessels for the founding royal ancestors but acquired a measure charismatic authority through their association with otherworldly beings; Buid shamans retained their individual agency and autonomy while cooperating with their spirit familiars and their fellow shamans as equals.

In lowland Southeast Asia, Austronesian cosmology has been interacting with Sanskritic, Buddhist, Islamic and Christian cosmologies for many centuries. The members of egalitarian highland societies like that of the Buid often came to define themselves through their systematic rejection of these hierarchical cosmologies. During the twentieth century, this rejection has often taken the form of conversion to a world religion, such as Protestant Christianity, that differs from the one that has long been dominant in the lowlands, such as Roman Catholicism in the Philippines and Sunni Islam in Indonesia. By contrast, the rulers of hierarchical coastal polities like those of the Makassar embraced them as a means of further enhancing their wealth, power and prestige. Thus the rulers of coastal chiefdoms in South Sulawesi used their contacts with the Sanskritic empires of Java in the fourteenth century to refashion themselves as divine kings, with the Portuguese in the sixteenth century to establish land-based empires, and their contacts with Islamic sultanates in the seventeenth century to establish a maritime empire that came to encompass much of Eastern Indonesia. The introduction of modern schooling in the twentieth century enabled ordinary people to become familiar with a whole world of anti-colonial nationalism that spanned the Indian Ocean.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that the concepts of egalitarianism and hierarchy should always be approached as a dialectically related pair, and that neither can become a positive value without an awareness, and rejection, of the other. It is possible for this rejected other to exist at a purely metaphysical level, as a value system that rules the invisible world of

predatory spirits; at a purely physical level, as a value system that rules the world of predatory empires or anarchic savages; or as some combination of the two.

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[1] *Pace* Arhem, there are many groups in Southeast Asia whose ritual specialists do engage in shamanic journeys, including both the Buid discussed in this paper and the Wana of central Sulawesi (Atkinson 1989).

[2] The Makassar have a long history of literacy, conversion to a scriptural religion, and formal education (Gibson 2005, 2007). They were thus able to give me explicit exegeses of many ritual practices and to confirm or contest interpretations I came up with on my own. The situation was very different with the Buid, who had no previous experience with trying to explain the meaning of their practices to outsiders. My interpretations of these practices were pieced together through participant observation in a series of rituals, identifying parallels and oppositions, and testing my generalisations with a few informants who had more interactions with the lowland world than most. It is difficult to compress this sort of process in a journal article. The interested reader is referred to Gibson (1986).

[3] Recent research by Christian Erni among the Buhid of the Fay valley attributes a more central role to the *labang taw* and the authority of the ancestors. According to Erni, the numerous prohibitions that traditionally prevented the Buhid from interacting too intensively with lowland migrants were thought of as having been originally imposed and subsequently enforced by the ancestors (Erni 2008, 322).

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