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Résumé de l'article

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Inverted Archetypes: A Comparative Study of the Foundation Myths of two Southeast Moluccan Societies

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This essay describes the ways in which two eastern Indonesian societies move meaning in different directions so as to distinguish themselves from each other. An attempt is made to uncover the laws of this motion, and thus account for the particular form which each society takes. It is shown that the differences between the societies of the Kei and Tanimbar Islands may be enucleated in terms of the operation of a limited set of laws or principles of collective ideation, such as inversion, opposition and invagination.

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The comparison of cultures requires not that we reduce them to platitudinous similarity but that we situate them apart as equally significant, integrated systems of differences. (*Boon, 1982: ix*)

Introduction

This essay is about how cultures situate themselves apart, and about the difficulties which ensue when they attempt to communicate across the distances they have set up. It concerns "how meaning gets moved" (Geertz, 1983: 154) both around within cultures as they attempt to articulate themselves in counter-distinction to each other, and between cultures as they continue to converse.

The problem of cross-cultural communication varies in direct proportion to the degree of cultural diversity. This is the point of Lévi-Strauss's well-known version of the passenger in a train analogy. "We know that it is possible to accumulate far more information about a train moving along a parallel path at a speed similar to ours (one can see the faces of the passengers, count them, etc.)" than about a train which goes in another direction at a different speed. Indeed, it may be that the latter "*signifies* nothing anymore", that it is "reduced to a temporary blurring of the field of vision" (Lévi-Strauss, 1978: 341).

As with passengers in trains looking out their windows so with each of us as culture-bearers since

From the day we are born, our environment penetrates us through a thousand conscious or unconscious processes, with a complex system of references consisting in value judgments, motiva-

tions, and centers of interest. ... We literally move along this system of references, and the exterior cultural realities can only be observed through the deformation imposed by it (*Lévi-Strauss, 1978:340*).

There cannot exist any more forceful evocation of the idea of cultures as systems of meaning in motion than the above.

But what is it that motivates cultures to move at different speeds, or head off on different paths? Lévi-Strauss has addressed this question as well. After noting that there are limits to diversity, i.e., thresholds beyond or below which no culture can go, he concludes:

we must recognize that, to a large extent, this diversity results from the desire of each culture to resist the cultures surrounding it, to distinguish itself from them—in short, to be itself. Cultures are not unaware of one another, they even borrow from one another on occasion: but, in order not to perish, they must, in other connections, remain somewhat impermeable toward one another (*Lévi-Strauss, 1985: xv*).

As the above passage suggests, cultural diversity and cultural integrity are different aspects of the same phenomenon: ethnocentrism.

By thus arguing that we must give ethnocentricity its due, Lévi-Strauss has provoked the charge that he belongs to the “relax-and-enjoy-it” school of cultural relativism (Geertz, 1986:108)¹. But we question whether this charge is justified in view of what Lévi-Strauss states elsewhere to be the objective of anthropology. That objective is: “To describe the diversity of customs, beliefs, and institutions as the result of choice, exercised by each society in an ideal repertoire where all possibilities are set down in advance” (*Lévi-Strauss, 1985:157*). What interests him, therefore, is the architectonics of a transcendental combinatorics. The implication is that once one has grasped the composition of this ideal repertoire, one can look back down at the range of human societies and see how each one arranges and rearranges the elements at its disposal so as to distinguish itself from its neighbours. As Boon points out, all societies “conceptualize themselves as select (in both senses) arrangements, valued against contrary arrangements that are in some way “objectified” (1982:52). Cultures are permutational at base. Our task as anthropologists is, accordingly, to arrive at an understanding of what Needham calls the “relational constants” and “regular types of transformation” which “serve as invariant types of connection in the variable articulation of symbolic categories into systems of classification” (1979:31).

What are these “relational constants” and “regular types of transformation”? The principle of

opposition would be an example of the former, and inversion an example of the latter. We will also be considering the principles of “hierarchy” (Dumont, 1978), homology, graduation, rotation, and “invagination” (making the outside inner). In the next part, a preliminary account is given of how these principles inform the differences between the two eastern Indonesian societies, Kei and Tanimbar, which it is the purpose of this essay to compare.

Meaning in Motion

The Kei and Tanimbar archipelagos are situated in the Southeast Moluccas, one of three regions making up the Province of the Moluccas in Eastern Indonesia. They are separated by about 120 kilometers of open sea, although in this part of the world, as Barraud points out, “the sea is not considered as separating islands but rather as linking societies to one another” (1985:118). This linkage is reflected in the name of the southernmost island of the Kei archipelago: Tanebar-Evav (or Tanimbar-Kei). It is also reflected in the name of the northernmost island of the Tanimbar archipelago, which is officially known as Molu but also called Tnébar-Kei (Drabbe 1940:4). As the above cross-references attest, the two societies conceive of themselves as belonging to the same “whole” (*Lévi-Strauss, 1985:158*). It is to be expected on these grounds that they would display a number of similar institutional structures. As we shall see, the institution of asymmetric affinal alliance is one such point of congruence. From this it may be inferred that one of the principles that governs the arrangement of the selections each society makes from the repertoire of eastern Indonesian cultural forms is that of homology.

Another link is provided by language. A single language is spoken throughout the Kei archipelago. This archipelago consists of the islands of Kei Besar, Kei Kecil, Kei Dulah, and Tanebar-Evav, among others (see *Figure 1*). The Kei language is also spoken on the three northernmost islands of the Tanimbar group: Tnébar-Kei (or Molu), Fordata, and Larat. The inhabitants of Yamdéna, the principal island of the Tanimbar archipelago, speak a different language, and yet a third language is spoken on Selaru. While all three languages are closely related, and have been classified by Chlenov (1980) as belonging to the same sub-family, it is significant that those who do not speak the Kei language regard those who do as their superiors (Drabbe, 1940:4).

What this implies is that the peoples involved perceive their cultures as disposed along a graduated continuum, with Kei-speakers being of a “higher culture” than the others. Thus, insofar as linguistic facts are concerned, it is the principle of graduation

that figures foremost in the local ordering of them into a system.

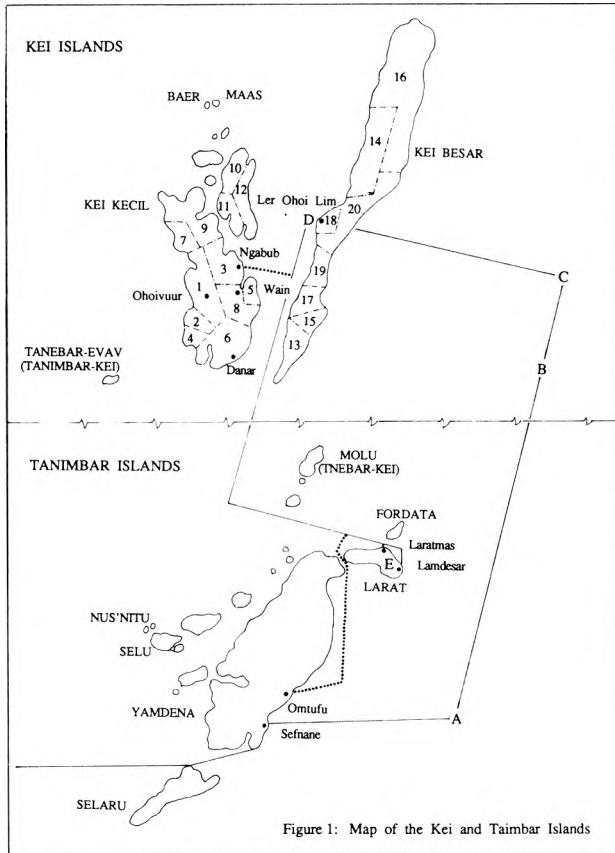


Figure 1: Map of the Kei and Taimbar Islands

KEY: Districts in "lor five" territory are always grouped in triads, those in "lor nine" territory are always arranged in pairs. On Kei Kecil, the names of the districts in "lor five" territory are: 1. Ohoivuur, 3. Ibra, 5. Rumat, and 7. Rumadian; 9. Fan, and 11. Tual (ie, two triads). The names of the districts in "lor nine" territory are: 2. Somlain and 4. Madwaer; 6. Danar and 8. Wain; 10. Dulah and 12. Ohoi Tahait (ie, three pairs). On Kei Besar the names of the districts in "lor five" territory are: 13. Fer-Ohoitil, 15. Tabab Yamlim, and 17. Maidoan; 19. Nenung had yet to split in three. The districts in "lor nine" territory are: 14. Mun and 16. Watlaar Borer; and 18. Yamtil and 20. Ohoinangan.

The capital letters signify different events in the course of Atuf's odyssey: at A, he meets the old woman with no mouth and no anus, at B, he comes across a mango-tree growing upside-down, at C, he spears the sun, at D, he recovers his spear, and at E, he turns to stone. The dotted line represents the route taken by Luk Balsaran in his attempt to "bring civilization" to the people of Tanimbar.

The idea that Kei-speakers are of a "higher culture" than the others agrees quite literally with the system of spatial orientation in place in Tanimbar (given that Kei is situated to the north). In Tanimbar, north is "up above" (*das*) and south is "down below" (*bab*) (Drabbe, 1940:264). In Kei, however, it is the other way round: "south is also referred to as "up above" ... north as "down below" (Barraud, 1979: 50). Thus, the world turns upside-down at some point mid-way between Kei and Tanimbar, which means that to pass from one society to the other always involves navigating the inversion of the world. As will be shown, this transvaluation of the north—south axis is but one of the many differences between the two societies which may be accounted for by reference to the principle of inversion.

The east-west axis is conceptualized horizontally as opposed to vertically (Barraud, 1979:50-51). In Tanimbar, houses are normally arranged in rows on

either side of the main walk of the village, which runs east-west (Drabbe, 1940:289; Howes, 1984:27-28), and the isles of the dead, Selu and Nus'Nitu, are situated in the west (Drabbe, 1940:403-4). In the Kei archipelago, by contrast, the isles of the dead, Baer and Maas, are situated in the north, and most villages would seem to be disposed along a north—south axis, at least on Kei Kecil (Planten and Wertheim, 1893:12, 105, 338, Pl. 33). Thus, the arrangement found in Tanimbar has undergone a 90 degree rotation. It is as if the two societies had deliberately set themselves at right angles to each other.

To sum up, we have seen how the societies of Kei and Tanimbar move meaning in different directions so as to differentiate themselves from each other. By situating ourselves between, as opposed to within, their respective systems of references, we have also been able to see how the differences and continuities which they display can be accounted for in terms of the operation of a limited set of combinational principles: rotation, inversion, gradation, and homology. (The principles of hierarchy, opposition and invagination will be introduced presently). Following Lévi-Strauss (1985), these principles may be said to belong to the "combinatorics" of Southeast Moluccan society. Our objective in what follows is to describe how these principles structure the actual configuration of what each society regards as select (in both senses) about itself. The analysis will begin with a study of the social institutions of Kei and Tanimbar, move on to an examination of the metaphors characteristic of their respective ritual languages, and conclude with an interpretation of their foundation myths.

Structure and Content

According to F.A.E. van Wouden, writing in 1935, it is in the Tanimbar Islands that the "archaic relationships" of the "original system" of Indonesian society—namely, asymmetric alliance, double descent and socio-cosmic dualism—"have been maintained the longest and in their purest form". Here, the "social organization is characterized by a triple classification: *mirwan'awai*, one's own clan; *nduwe* (lord, master), the clan from which one takes wives; and *uranak* (sister's child), ... the clan to which one gives one's daughters and which is regarded as inferior" (van Wouden, 1968:9-10). Hence the notion of "asymmetric connubium". Van Wouden goes on to argue that "dual organization of the tribe", though not required by the above system, can very well accompany it. He hypothesizes on this basis that the "tribe" must originally have consisted of four patrilineal clans "divided into exogamous phratries by the system of unilateral affinal alliances" such that "clan 1 takes wives from 2, 2 from 3, 3 from

4, and finally 4 takes from 1” (van Wouden, 1968:88). He also suggests that a set of four matrilineal groups may lie hidden behind the patrilineal clan system given that asymmetric connubium “functions in exactly the same manner with either [a patri- or matrilineal] rule of descent” (van Wouden, 1968:90). Hence the notion of “double descent”. Finally, he relates the fact that there are five principal dignitaries in each Tanimbarese village, four of whom “present themselves in pairs”, to “the influence of a preference for triads brought about by the unilateral alliance system” (van Wouden, 1968: 136, 103). The pair of dignitaries that includes the *pnuwe nduan*, “lord of the village”, has a secular-administrative or “social function”, while the pair including the *mangsombe*, “sacrificer”, has a ritual or “cosmic function”. These pairs are associated with earth and sky respectively. Hence the notion of “socio-cosmic dualism”.

We could go on to describe how van Wouden shows exactly the same system to be in place in the Kei Islands. But this would be misleading because the two societies are not mere replicas of each other, as we have already seen. The motivation behind van Wouden’s treatment of the two societies as identical therefore calls for some explanation.

It is noteworthy that van Wouden worked under J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong, the father of structural anthropology in the Netherlands. It was de Josselin de Jong’s aim to constitute Indonesia as a “field of ethnological study”, that is, as an area having the same over-all homogeneity and uniqueness as, for example, Australia (de Josselin de Jong, 1977:167-68). It was therefore expected of his students that: “One looked for resemblances. When there were imperfections to the resemblances (as was often the case), one had a. to explain the imperfections, and b. to find data which would outweigh them” (de Josselin de Jong, 1984:4). Van Wouden consequently saved himself a lot of work by demonstrating that the “structural core” (consisting of asymmetric connubium, double descent, and socio-cosmic dualism, among other traits) of Keiese society was identical to that of Tanimbarese society.

In the decades since 1935 (the year van Wouden’s magnum opus was published), Dutch structuralism has undergone a radical transformation, if not an aboutface. Now, rather than attempting to reconstruct the “structural core” of a hypothetical “original system”, Dutch structuralists are more concerned with analyzing the system with regard to the differences between one Indonesian society and another. And instead of regarding difference as “imperfect resemblance”, it is now thought that “resemblance has no reality in itself; it is only a particular instance of difference, that in which

difference tends toward zero” (Lévi-Strauss, cited in de Josselin de Jong, 1984:6-7).

This shift in the focus of the Dutch version of the comparative method strikes us fundamentally correct but we question the retention of some of the elements of the older “structural core” model of Indonesian social organization. Calling them “basic elements of comparison” instead of “core elements” does not really change much (Barnes 1985), and the assumptions which these “elements” import remain grossly misleading. For example, even the notion of patrilineal descent (never mind that of double descent) is of the utmost impertinence to Tanimbarese social organization:

Family names (a “van”) are completely unknown in Tanimbar, and only in recent years have the few who can write tried to give themselves a “family-name” in imitation of Ambonese, Keiese, etc. They would choose their house-name for this (which name, however, extended further than an ordinary “family-name” and by no means always indicated consanguinity (van der Kolk, cited in Howes, 1984).

As has been shown elsewhere (Howes, 1984), the “house-name” is indicative of more than consanguinity due to the rule that any persons who come to reside in the same house are henceforth classified as “brother” or “sister” regardless of the circumstances of their birth. Thus, to borrow D.H. Turner’s (1978) terminology, it is “locality”, not (patri- or matri-) “lineality”, that determines group membership (Barraud, 1984).

If there is one respect in which the societies of Kei and Tanimbar can be said to resemble each other, it is with respect to the cadre of village organization. Each village is divided into a series of named wards. Each ward is composed of a number of subdivisions. Each subdivision contains an assortment of named houses, and finally, each house consists of two “sides”, or “rooms”, which are often (though not exclusively) occupied by a group of “brothers” and their dependents (Barraud, 1979; Howes, 1984).

Now it is true that what we have called a subdivision can sometimes look very much like a patrilineal clan (Drabbe, 1940:188), but this is nothing more than a reflection of the virilocal marriage rule. Indeed, the manner in which the Keiese and Tanimbarese themselves conceive of their social order is as a series of containers which fit one inside the other. For example, the Yamdéna term for village, *pnuwe*, also means “sheath of a sword”; the Fordata term for ward, *arun*, also means “basket containing fish”; the Keiese term for subdivision, *ub*, has among its many connotations the image of “an earthenware jar containing water or millet”; the terms for “house”, *rahan* (Fordata, Kei) and *das*

(Yamdéna), mean just that (rather as we speak of the “House of Windsor”); and on Yamdéna, as elsewhere, the term for the smallest social unit is *tambil dalam*, “insides of a room”. Thus each level of the social order is conceived of as a container, and the people who reside within it are represented as the alimentary (or other) contents of that container. All of this imagery is consistent with the emphasis on locality (as opposed to lineality) noted above.

The most fundamental respect in which the two societies differ is with regard to the cadre of extra-village organization. This is best approached through Barraud’s discussion of the relation between the values of *lor* and *haratut* in the Kei Islands. Both of these terms mean “village-society”. However, while *haratut*, “the thousand catches”, refers to the internal organization of a village, its specific structure and content as described above; *lor*, in addition to meaning “whale”, designates “the society in its relation to the exterior” (Barraud, 1979:60-74, 126). As Barraud explains elsewhere:

lor designates a multi-village social unit ruled by a *raja*. The whole of Kei society is thus divided into two coalitions called “*lor* five” and “*lor* nine”, names which refer to the myth recounting the introduction of rules and rulers from Bali. Each coalition groups together a number of *raja* who were traditionally wartime allies (1985:121).

The myth referred to above is the Dewa cycle (see “Foundation Myths” below). It is the story of how the Kei Islands came to be divided into territories and districts (Barraud’s “coalitions” and “multi-village units”) where previously there had existed only villages grouped in domains. This restructuring, which was accompanied by the dissemination of “the Law” that Dewa brought from Bali, is remarkable for its symmetry. As Admiraal (1939:20-22) points out, if the autochthonous domain fell in what would become “*lor* five” territory, it was split into three districts each composed of three villages. If the autochthonous domain lay in “*lor* nine” territory, it was divided into two districts made up of two villages each. A glance at the disposition of territories and districts as portrayed in *Figure 1* will confirm the pertinence of the following remark to the over-all structure of society in the Kei archipelago: “the society presents a constant play between an obvious tripartition and a dualism which surfaces at every moment as the other side of this tripartition” (Barraud, 1979:86).

The division into territories and districts is absent from the social structure of the Tanimbar Islands. According to Drabbe, “the title of King [*raja*] is unknown to the Tanimbarese other than in myth and from the trips they have made to other islands”

(1940:426). This absence of an over-arching political structure may be related to the failure of the mission led by Luk Balséran to “bring civilization” (that is, Dewa’s teachings) to the Tanimbarese, as we shall see. But we prefer to advance a structuralist interpretation of this lack.

That interpretation runs as follows: If, as was shown earlier, the world turns upside-down at some point mid-way between Kei and Tanimbar, then it is reasonable to suppose that the ideologies of the two societies also represent inversions of each other in certain particulars. It follows that if Keiese ideology is structured hierarchically, as Barraud (1979:235) affirms: “the two concepts [*lor* and *haratut*] are hierarchized; the society in its relation to the exterior, ... that is to say *lor*, encompasses *haratut*, the society of the interior,” then, Tanimbarese ideology must be structured in a converse fashion. We propose the term “invagination” to describe this reverse ordering: that is, the Tanimbarese concept of “the interior” invaginates that of “the exterior”². This explains why in the language spoken on Yamdéna there is a term which corresponds to the Keiese *haratut*, namely, *inarut*, “the thousand fish” (Drabbe, 1940:50), but no term which corresponds to the Keiese *lor* (Drabbe, 1932), the latter having been “swallowed up”, as it were.

Numerous other differences between the two societies can be accounted for on the basis of the above hypothesis. For example, the face which Keiese society turns toward the external world is a peaceful one, manifesting an acceptance of, and submission to, the “more fundamental and universal law” thought to have been brought from Bali (Barraud, 1979:235). Similarly, the Keiese are a trading nation, famous throughout the Moluccas for their boat-building skills (Barraud, 1979:20). The Tanimbarese, on the other hand, are a warring nation, best known for their head-hunting raids. The Keiese live in terror of them (Geurtjens, 1912). Nor do the Tanimbarese know what it means to submit to anything more universal than the law of their particular village, a fact reflected in the plethora of languages in the archipelago, and in the absence of a national cult the likes of the Keiese cult of Dewa, as will be shown below. Put another way, the Tanimbarese place a premium on independence, whereas the Keiese value interdependence; from which it follows that each Tanimbarese village is inward-looking and outwardly violent while each Keiese village is inwardly violent but outward-looking (Barraud, 1979:65).

The preceding analysis will receive further confirmation later. For the time being it is important to relate it back to what was said earlier regarding the cadre of village organization. The image of a

container and its alimentary content (fish, water, millet, etc.) was found to be implicit in a number of the terms used to denote different levels of the social order. Now, a container may be used to store things, as in the case of an earthenware jar, or to capture them, as in the case of a fishing weir. The first use implies a disposition which is “passive, pacific”, while the second use implies an “active, violent” attitude (Barraud, 1979:65). The opposition between these two dispositions corresponds to the contrasting reputations of the societies of Kei and Tanimbar, which compels us to rethink the meaning of container-content imagery in relation to village social structure. Could it be the case that in Kei a container (or social unit) encompasses its contents (or members), whereas in Tanimbar it invaginates them?

Properties of Exchange

The Keiese love to exchange. Indeed, so passionate is their love of exchange that they practise symmetric affinal alliance alongside asymmetric alliance (Barraud, 1979:72-77). It is as if the thought of only one type of relation (the asymmetric kind) obtaining between two groups when, after all, there exist other possibilities, were somehow distasteful to them.

Barraud has made a very interesting observation in connection with the Keiese alliance system: “Anthropological theory has conditioned us to think in terms of exchanging units, of lineages or of groups which exchange women. Here [in the Kei Islands], that perspective is completely inverted: the exchanges themselves create the units” (Barraud et al., 1984:478). This idea of the anteriority of exchange is a difficult one to grasp. It is, perhaps, best approached by way of two myths belonging to the Dewa cycle which centre on the figure of Did Sakmas (Dewa’s granddaughter).

The first myth concerns Did Sakmas’s odyssey in search of Ar, the man who was ordained to be her husband. On her way, she encountered Neraha of Wain. He asked her to stay and marry him, but she had to refuse. “Nevertheless”, she said, “take this sago cake and these fish and let us be brother and sister” (Cappers, 1924:174-75). Whereas anthropological theory would incline us to regard the creation of this brother-sister relationship as an example of the formation of a “fictive kinship bond”, in the Kei Islands that perspective is completely inverted—the exchange itself creates the unit.

The second myth concerns the origin of property. It involves Did Sakmas’s father, Tabtut, and her husband, Ar, who lived in the interior and on the coast respectively. Each wished to supply the other with what he lacked: fish in Tabtut’s case, sago flour in Ar’s, and Did Sakmas was their go-between. But

each time she set out for the other’s village, the prestation she bore was intercepted by a band of villains. Tabtut finally decided to take legal action:

[He] bound a coconut branch split lengthwise around the rim of [Did Sakmas’s] basket, which was the sign established by Dewa, or *Duad Hukum*, God Law: anyone who should presume to violate this signature would be punished by God. ... This was the first prohibition sign, or *hover Bal-warin* (Geurtjens, 1921:181).

Never again was Did Sakmas molested by the brigands. It can be said that what this myth implies is that exchange between the parties to a matrimonial alliance can have no meaning unless certain other parties (thieves) are excluded from the transaction. Thus, for the Keiese, the origin of property lies in the impossibility, otherwise, of effecting an exchange. This myth, then, also exemplifies a propensity to conceive of relations as prior to things.

In the Tanimbar Islands it is the other way round. Here, where only asymmetric alliance is practised, exchange relations are subsumed under (or “encompassed” by) property relations. Consider the following ritual expression: “Hunting grounds enough but no pigs”. What this phrase means is that a wife-giver has wife-takers enough (i.e. hunting grounds) but they are poor and so have no valuables (i.e. pigs) to offer him (Drabbe, 1940:286). Similarly, when a wife-giver goes to discuss bridewealth with his prospective wife-takers, he will: “See to it that his stone weir makes a good catch on the reef”. Those who are well-versed in Tanimbarese ritual speech would know that “ivory and gold are called *in* (fish) because like fish, they come from one’s [wife-takers]” (Drabbe, 1940:273). Hence the further association between stone weir and wife-taker; the latter is instrumental to one’s making a good catch.

We hesitate to call this style of representation an incipient form of “commodity fetishism” (Taussig 1980:28-38), but what else can one call it? Note how the other party to a transaction is regarded as inanimate—as one’s hunting grounds—while the objects that other party has to offer, gold and ivory, are portrayed as if they were animate—as game. It must be emphasized that this tendency to “thingify” the human parts of an exchange system is unique to Tanimbar. In Keiese ritual speech the first bride-wealth object is called “the keel gold” (*mas ngaban tenan*): “just as in the building of a boat one begins by laying out the keel, so in the payment for a bride must one begin with this piece” (Geurtjens, 1921:299). The Keiese do not, therefore, confuse persons and inanimate objects the way the Tanimbarese do. Significant as well is the fact that a boat is a vehicle of communication with the outside world, hence a far more suitable symbol of and for exchange than a fish or pig.

Then again, perhaps the reason the Tanimbarese think more of hunting and eating (than boating and trading), when it comes to symbolizing alliance relations, is that they would prefer to do away with having to enter into exchange relations in the first place. This suggestion is certainly consistent with the fact that in their ritual speech they represent what is in reality an act of exchange as an act of production, and with the dominant “motivation” of their culture: “Total Consumption” (Howes, 1984; cf. also Pauwels, 1985). The business of treating the other party to a transaction as a means, or implement, to an end, at least symbolically, is also consistent with the striving towards independence (as opposed to interdependence, which entails the recognition of the other’s humanity) which we noted earlier to be one of the principal contrasts between Tanimbarese and Keiese ideology. In the next three parts, we shall examine how all of the above contrasts find expression in the foundation myths of the two societies.

Foundation Myths

Ohoivuur is a village in the middle of Kei Kecil. It is here that the cult of Yut Tomat Dewa, “the man of the prohibition sign”, is centered. According to legend, Dewa and his female consort, Did Ratngil, came to Kei from Bali when the world was still in darkness. At that time, none of the indigenous inhabitants wore any clothing, the institution of marriage was unknown, and there was no respect for property. It was Dewa who taught the Keiese to attire themselves, he who instituted marriage, and he who first laid down “the Law” (*Hukum*) (Cappers, 1924: 173; Guertjens 1921: 180).

Dewa may thus be regarded as a culture hero, but he was and is more than this as well. According to Cappers (1925: 81), the priest who tends Dewa’s shrine beseeches the latter to: “Help all the people of the Kei Islands ... for they all subject themselves to your judgment: *Larvul* and *Ngabal* have you to thank for their existence”. The inference to be drawn from the above imprecation is that Dewa was the creator of the Spirit(s) of the Law, and that he remains a protector of the Keiese people as a whole. He is also represented as being the force behind the Law: “Make our women chaste and of unquestionable conduct. Let no one be schooled as an *howange*” (witch) (Cappers, 1925: 82).

Nothing more is known of Dewa. It was his son, Tabtut, who took it upon himself to “spread the new *adat* over the whole land” (Geurtjens, 1921: 180-81). The myths which tell of Tabtut’s peregrinations each depict him installing a new *raja*, granting the latter dominion over a series of villages, and ordering the freshly appointed regent to promulgate Dewa’s covenant. These peregrinations were far from ran-

dom, for as we saw above, they resulted in a strict partition of the pre-existing (or autochthonous) domains into districts, and the regrouping of the latter into territories.

The installation of a new *raja* was normally effected by the transfer of some article associated with Dewa or his progeny. The most famous of these insignia is the spear *Ngabal* (from *nganga Bali*, “the Balinese spear”). Dewa brought this spear from his homeland, and Tabtut gave it to the headman of Ler Ohoi Lim on Kei Besar as “a pledge of good relations and a security for the application of the newly introduced *adat*” (Geurtjens, 1921: 182). Another such signature of authority is the staff *Larvul* (from *lar vul*, “blood red”), which Tabtut gave to his son-in-law, Ar, when he appointed him Raja of Danar (Cappers, 1924: 198-99). Whether the article transferred is the original or a replica, it is always indwelt by one of the spirits of the covenant (*Larvul* or *Ngabal*), who both punish such offenses as incest, adultery, or murder, and protect (Barraud, 1979: 238-44).

After Tabtut’s death various other figures came to the fore to spread the Law which Dewa brought from Bali. One of the most adventurous, if least successful, of these was Luk Balséran. Balséran set out from Ngabub, a village in the interior of Kei Kecil, to “bring civilization” (i.e., Dewa’s teachings) to the people of the Tanimbar archipelago. The first place he stopped at in the Tanimbar Islands was the village of Laratmas on Larat. But the people there told him that the real “war sick folk” he had heard of lived at Omtufu on Yamdéna, so he travelled on. When he arrived at Omtufu, he went up to “the biggest scrapper of the lot” and presented him with a Balinese spear (*Ngabal*), saying: “You must desist from this killing and uphold order in your *kampung*; take this spear as a sign and be virtuous from now on. Omtufu [the man] took the spear and would have become *raja* had they [the other villagers] not murdered him” (Drabbe, 1940: 322).

The myth goes on to tell of the second person to come into possession of the spear. His name, as we later learn, was Atuf. Atuf decided one day, while drunk, that he wanted “a piece of the golden sun-disk for his patrimony”. He therefore set out for Ler Ohoi Lim on Kei Besar with the intention of spearing off a portion of the sun. However, he was prevented from carrying out this “foolish plan” by those present at his landing (Drabbe, 1940: 322).

It will be noted that the above myth concerns an attempt to communicate a sign (the spear) from one culture to another, and how that sign was misinterpreted. The spear was meant to be used to regulate society, but the only use the man of Omtufu (Atuf) had for it was with respect to conquering the sun. Why this transvaluation? Why was the sign of the

spear misconstrued? In order to answer this question we must turn to consider the myth of Atuf (also known as Tufa), the principal culture hero of Tanimbar, as told on Yamdéna as opposed to Kei. What follows is a combined version of the several versions of the Atuf cycle recorded by Drabbe (1940: 315-27).

It is said that Atuf and his three sisters belonged to the highest nobility of Babar, an island situated just over 120 kilometers to the southwest of Tanimbar. Everything Atuf and his sisters ever desired was provided for them by their fellow villagers. But there eventually came a day when the latter grew tired of supporting them and they were expelled.

Atuf and his sisters travelled first to the island of Selaru, where one sister remained behind, and then to the southern tip of Yamdéna, where the second sister, Inkélu, disembarked. Atuf himself landed at Sefnane on Yamdéna, where he was adopted by three brothers belonging to the house of Reresi.

At that time the sky was still low, so low that the sun could not rise. Sometimes it would appear on the horizon in the East, but it was much larger than it is now and, the sky being so low, it had to remain there on the horizon ... [The] people made use of this time to eat, and lay in a store of water and firewood, for later the sun would go away again; there was still no moon nor were there any stars then (Drabbe 1940:317).

It was Atuf who first conceived of the plan that would correct this situation by causing the heavens to expand and the moon and stars to be born. The plan called for a spear. This spear is known as the *Ngane-Batin*, "the germ (or seed) of the vagina". It was procured for Atuf by his adoptive brothers. The culture hero then set out, together with his slaves, for the spot where the sun appeared on the horizon.

Atuf had numerous adventures along the way. The most salient of these for present purposes are: (1) his harvesting of the gravity-defying fruit of a mango-tree which grew upside down in the air above the sea, (2) his encounter with an old woman with no mouth and no anus who lived all by herself on a reef, and (3) his having to keep cutting off the top of the mast of the boat he was in since the sky got lower the nearer he came to the sun. When Atuf and his slaves finally reached their destination, he proceeded to run the sun through with his spear. Half of the sun is said to have fallen into the sea and later risen to become the moon (the splinters became the stars). The other half immediately began to describe an arc across the sky, pushing back the heavens as it went.

Apparently, Atuf's spear remained stuck in the sun only to fall out when the (now) heavenly orb was over the beach at Ler Ohoi Lim on Kei Besar. Atuf

pursued the sun in order to recover his spear, but the men of Ler Ohoi Lim would not relinquish it until he taught their women how to weave. This he did, and in return he was given a golden earring.

While on his way back to Sefnane, Atuf stopped at the cape of Lamdesar on Larat despite the fact that he had been warned by the old woman not to do so: "that is *momoli*" (dangerous, prohibited). Atuf told his slaves that he had to relieve himself, but this was a ruse: he meant to search for gold. When the great separator sat down on a rock to defecate, however, he found that he could not get up, and that his body was gradually turning to stone. He called out to his slaves to sail for Sefnane, and that was the last anyone ever heard of him, though it is said that one can still see his silhouette in stone on the cape of Lamdesar.

Confusion and Impoverishment

With the Atuf myth in mind, it becomes apparent that the Myth of Balséran did not do the man of Omtufu justice insofar as it portrayed him as a laughable sot bent on a "foolish plan". Atuf was perfectly serious, at least from a Tanimbarese perspective, and he conferred an inestimable benefit on the people of the latter archipelago: an expanded horizon. Besides, are not Atuf and Dewa really rather similar, both being spear-wielding foreigners who regarded themselves as noble-born? It is as if they were struck from the same mould or archetype (Jung, 1969).

Atuf and Dewa may indeed be regarded as archetypal figures, but only within their respective cultures, not across. We insist upon this point for the simple reason that even in what appear to be the most extreme cases of resemblance, "difference is never completely absent" (Lévi-Strauss, 1981:38). It follows, Lévi-Strauss goes on to argue, that it is remiss to make "empirical inventories" of resemblance (in the manner of Jung or Joseph Campbell), and that what is required is a "critical analysis" of "those conditions in which a resemblance can have a wealth of meaning far surpassing what might be implied by a random coincidence, an effect of convergence or a common origin".

What, then, are the conditions which make the resemblance between Atuf and Dewa meaningful? As we shall see, these conditions are the "regular types of transformation" (Needham, 1979) which relate them to their respective cultures; i.e. their dissimilarities in other particulars. For example, whereas Dewa came to Kei from Bali, a distance of just over 1800 kilometers, Atuf came to Tanimbar from Babar, a distance of no more than 130 kilometers. Similarly, whereas the sky is said to have been closer to the earth in ancient times in Tanimbar, this notion is

absent from the mythology of the Kei archipelago (Geurtjens, 1924)³.

The weakening of geographic and cosmic oppositions which the above comparison reveals (Babar is closer to Tanimbar than Bali is to Kei, and earth/sky becomes earth-sky) may be regarded as evidence of “impoverishment” in the terms employed by structuralists:

When a mythical schema is transmitted from one population to another, and there exist differences of language, social organization or way of life which make the myth difficult to communicate, it begins to become impoverished and confused. But one can find a limiting situation in which instead of being finally obliterated, by losing all its outlines, the myth is inverted and regains part of its precision (Lévi-Strauss, 1967:42).

Before deciding whether a “limiting situation” has indeed been reached in the instant case, a few words are in order concerning what it means for a myth to become “impoverished and confused”. A myth which substitutes an opposition between hill and plain for one between sky and earth is “impoverished” in relation to the original in the sense that a contrast has been diminished. A myth is “confused” in relation to some original if a word or symbol is mistranslated or put to some other use than the one for which it was intended.

The sense in which the Atuf cycle is an impoverished version of the Dewa cycle (assuming the latter to be the original) has already been noted. As for the Atuf cycle being a confused version of the Dewa cycle, it is instructive to recall the Myth of Balséran. Balséran meant for the spear to be used to regulate society; the only use Atuf had for it was with respect to mastering the world. Furthermore, as Drabbe (1940:322) has suggested, Atuf’s spear may originally have been called *Nta’Bali*, “the Balinese spear”, but then, for whatever reason, came to be known as *Ngane-Batin* (which Drabbe renders as “*granum vaginae*”, so as not to offend his readers).

This transformation in the name of the spear evidences a point already hinted at in the Introduction: meanings are never imported intact. Rather, they are always in some measure *transvalued* in accordance with the “system of references consisting in value judgments, motivations and centres of interest” of the culture of destination (Lévi-Strauss, 1978:340). In the instant case, the transvaluation takes the form of a shift in the level of reference of the sign from the exterior (Bali) to the interior (the vagina). From a Keiese perspective, it would appear as though the Tanimbarese had introduced “confusion” into the meaning of the sign of the spear. But from our own (external) perspective at that point in

mid-sea where the whole orientation of the world shifts, the change in meaning may be viewed as an inversion, a point to which we shall return presently.

The magical as opposed to legal use to which the spear was put by Atuf is consistent with certain other facts about his being. Offerings are made to him at the statues which commemorate him in order to control the rains and to “make our gardens bring forth fruit” (Drabbe, 1940:323). Thus, Atuf is associated with the domination of the world by means of magic; in short, he is a fertility god. Dewa, on the contrary, is associated with the domination of men by means of “the Law” (*Hukum*). Offerings are made to him in order to atone for transgressions. It is of interest in this connection to note that Cappers was informed by one of Dewa’s functionaries that “Yut Tomat [Dewa] or *Larvul* or *Ngabal* are not idols, but the personification of the law, as it were” (1925:83).

There exists a world of difference between being the personification of so abstract a concept as that of “the law”, and being a fertility god. This difference almost calls out for a Weberian interpretation. It is as if the society of the Kei archipelago were less “enchanted”, more “rational legal” than that of the Tanimbar archipelago (Peacock, 1975:82 et seq.; 1978). An evolutionary interpretation of this sort also derives support from the oft repeated reiterated observation that in Tanimbar one encounters the “original” or “pure form” of many institutions also found in Kei (Geurtjens, 1921:368).

But while the above interpretation might seem plausible, to subscribe to it would be to mistake an effect of inversion for an historical fact (Needham, 1979:69; 1983:105). The people of Tanimbar might seem more “primitive”, or less “dynamic”, from the perspective of a Balséran or a Geurtjens, but then Atuf could equally well have regarded the people of Kei as more primitive since they knew not how to weave. The point here is that all such judgments as to the “mobility” or “immobility” of cultures other than one’s own tend to be mutual, and unfounded, since they are only a reflection of the “deformation” imposed on “exterior cultural realities” by one’s own culture’s “system of references” (Lévi-Strauss, 1978:341). When viewed from the perspective of the “ideal repertoire”, however, all the apparent confusion and impoverishment in the other’s mythology disappears (Howes, 1985:402-3; 411-14).

Inverted Archetypes

Having purified our analysis of any evolutionary overtones, we may proceed with the question of whether what Lévi-Strauss described as the “limiting situation” in which a myth is inverted was not

given from the start in the case of the Dewa and Atuf mythical cycles.

The most clearly recognizable image of inversion is given in the motif of the mango-tree which grew upside down in the air. The explanation for this lies in the fact that Atuf must have recently entered Keiese waters since, as will be recalled, one cannot sail from Tanimbar to Kei without at some point navigating the inversion of the world. In other words, the mango-tree grew at the point where the orientation shifts.

A further example of inversion is given in the fact that Tabtut is said to have given the Balinese spear (*Ngabal*) to the village headman of Ler Ohoi Lim, whereas according to the Atuf cycle, Atuf was responsible for the spear falling into the possession of this village on Kei Besar. Thus, the direction in which the spear is said to have been transferred varies inversely (west to east/east to west) depending on which cycle one consults.

Atuf is also credited with having taught the women of Kei how to weave. But as we learn from Barraud (1979:212), the Keiese regard weaving, like ironworking, as something which pertains to the outside world, not themselves. Guertjens (1921:246-56) called this the “monopoly principle”: weaving is a monopoly which the Keiese have granted to the external world so as to create a need for themselves to enter into relations with that world. They value a kind of forced interdependence, or what we shall refer to as “exchange-in-itself”, whereas Atuf, dutiful to the logic of an alien system of references, taught them weaving so that they could become autonomous. Evidently, Atuf was no more successful at communicating his knowledge than Balséran was successful at conveying the teachings attached to the Balinese spear, for the Keiese still do not know how to weave.

A third example of inversion is that one of the “peculiar things”, according to Drabbe (1940:325), about the Atuf cycle, is that “Atuf and his sisters always remained unmarried, and only the descendants of the families into which they were adopted are pointed out”. They have remained, in other words, *wholly outside* of Tanimbarese society. Dewa, on the contrary, stood *at the very centre* of Keiese society (the village of Ohoivuur on Kei Kecil), and it was his progeny who disseminated the Law.

This contrast is in keeping with the picture which began to emerge earlier of two societies which, though they exist side by side, have mutually unintelligible ideologies because of the value ascribed to independence in the one and interdependence in the other. One of the most profound expressions of the value attached to independence in the myths of Tanimbar is contained in the words of a song attributed to Atuf's sister, Inkélu: “I sit in Tutun-

ressi, On the ridge of the roof, I take notice of no one, I present nothing to anyone” (Nieuwenhuis, 1914:8). The distaste for, and renunciation of, any semblance of reciprocity in human relations which is implied in this song is consistent with certain other facts about Inkélu. For example, she so alienated her fellow villagers that they eventually plotted to have her killed (Drabbe, 1940:316).

Inkélu's intensely asocial disposition stands in virulent contrast to the personality of her Keiese counterpart—Did Sakmas. As will be recalled, Did Sakmas was known for her outgoing disposition. It is significant in this connection that whereas Did Sakmas actively created brother-sister relationships (e.g. her association with Neraha), Atuf and Inkélu had difficulty maintaining a pre-existing one on account of their surly temperaments (Drabbe, 1940:316). It is as if the two heroines embodied the “modal personality types” of their respective cultures, to recur to the language of the Culture-and-Personality School.

Like Did Sakmas and Inkélu, Dewa and Tabtut (whom we shall treat as one) and Atuf also figure as archetypal characters within their respective cultures, but appear to be inversions of each other when compared cross-culturally. Our aim in what follows is to relate their differences to the differences in social organization and ideology examined previously, and thereby dispel any illusions as to the system of references of Keiese and Tanimbarese culture being identical (*pace* van Wouden).

Dewa can be said to have been primarily interested in the subordination of persons to an ordered pattern of relations (namely, “the Law”). Hence the institutions of symmetric and asymmetric alliance (in place of incest), the orderly movement of persons and goods between villages under his prohibition sign (in place of highway robbery), and the fact that people wear clothing which must be imported from elsewhere (instead of going naked) in the Kei archipelago. All of the above is consistent with the suggestion that the Keiese conceive of exchange as prior to the formation of social units, or relations as prior to things (Did Sakmas's kinship with Neraha being a prime example). In short, the Keiese inhabit a world in which the “identity, existence and natural properties [of persons, groups and things] spring from their *position* in an all-encompassing organic *pattern* of organization in which [all] things are understood as but partial expressions of a self-organizing totality” (Taussig, 1980:36).

In the Tanimbar Islands, that world is turned outside-in. As will be recalled, the “Balinese Spear” (*Ngabal*) becomes the “Germ (or Seed) of the Vagina” (*Ngane-Batin*); that is, “the Law” gets *invaginated*⁴. It is consistent with this inversion that

the Tanimbarese conceive of things and persons as prior to, or independent of, relationships. Consider the example of the old woman with no mouth and no anus whom Atuf encountered living all by herself on a reef. She had no need to enter into relations of production or, for that matter, exchange with anybody else because she was *wholly self-contained*—the image of “being-in-itself”. Think of what an abomination this “thing-in-itself” would seem to the Keiese! Atuf cured the old woman by offering her a container full (unbeknownst to her) of crabs. They bit her so viciously that her orifices blasted open when she screamed in agony and shit herself in fright (Drabbe, 1940:317). One wonders why he bothered though, since he never heeded her advice regarding the cape at Lamdesar.

At the opposite extreme from the old woman (but still within the same system of references) is the example which Atuf set for his slaves when their supply of mango-fruit had dwindled to one apiece. Atuf took his last mango, ate it, digested it, excreted it, reconsumed it (in fecal form), and then suggested that his slaves do the same (Drabbe, 1940:318). It should be apparent why the invention of this “self-regenerating cycle” would strike a responsive chord in a Tanimbarese audience: first, it meant an endless, effortless supply of food; second, it obviated the need to enter into exchange relations with the outside world. Considered in the light of the Keiese myth of Ar and Tabtut, however, it should also be apparent that a Keiese audience would not be able to appreciate the logic behind the desire on the part of Atuf and his slaves to achieve such autonomy both in relation to each other and the outside world.

As suggested above, the motif of Atuf’s “self-regenerating cycle” is the extreme opposite of the motif of the old woman with no mouth and no anus. Both of these motifs are variations on the theme of “being-in-itself”. However, neither of these characters remain in this position or state for long: the old woman is “cured” and Atuf becomes one with a rock. This outcome is typical of mythical thought. As Lévi-Strauss has pointed out:

Mythical speculations ... do not seek to depict what is real, but to justify the shortcomings of reality, since the extreme positions are only *imagined* in order to show that they are *untenable*. This step, which is fitting for mythical thought, implies an admission (but in the veiled language of the myth) that the social facts when thus examined are marred by an insurmountable contradiction (1967:30).

The contradiction in question is that you have to communicate with others to survive. Had Atuf heeded the old woman’s advice, and curbed his lust for property (i.e. gold), the great separator of sky and

earth would not have found himself, in the end, inseparable from a rock; i.e. the symbol of all that he had fought against—“being-at-one-with-the-world”.

But we are being moralistic. For is it not the case that in their ritual speech the Tanimbarese tend to represent the other party to a matrimonial alliance as an inanimate object such as a stone weir, while “certain lifeless things [such as gold] are seen as animate” (Taussig, 1980:33)? The language might seem odd, but if one changes the words “capital” and “people” around in the following quotation, the description fits: “capital and workers’ products are spoken of in terms used for people and animate beings” (Taussig, 1980:31). It is as if in Tanimbarese ideology, “the social relation is consummated in the relationship of a thing [or “person”] to itself and that ontology lies not in a relational gestalt but squarely within the thing itself” (Taussig, 1980:35). Thus, in Tanimbar it is not the law that persons are to be subordinated to an ordered pattern of relations (as in Kei). The subjugation is of a different sort, namely, the “subordination of men to the things they produce, which appear to be independent and self-empowered” (Taussig, 1980:37).

To sum up, the Keiese tend to fetishize exchange whereas the Tanimbarese fetishize production and consumption. This contrasting punctuation of what is in reality a cycle, the cycle of the *production, exchange or sharing, and consumption* of goods, is reflected in their respective mythologies as follows: Atuf is associated with the regulation of the natural world (the separation of sky and earth; controlling the rains), and the regulation of bodily functions (the digestive cycle; fertilizing the womb), but with respect to the intervening level (social relations) he contributes nothing. Enter Dewa (see *Figure 2*).

	DEWA	ATUF
REGULATION		
- of nature	-	+
- of society	+	-
- of the body	-	+
FETISHIZATION		
- of production	-	+
- of exchange	+	-
- of consumption	-	+
(+ = presence; - = absence)		

Figure 2. Contrastive Features of the Dewa and Atuf Mythical Cycles

It has also been shown that in the mythology and ritual speech of Tanimbar there is no middle ground

between the position of the old woman with no mouth and no anus, who represents “being-in-itself”, and the position of Atuf who, in the last analysis, represents “being-at-one-with-the-world”. In other words, there is no recognition of an in-between state in which persons meet each other as persons and enter into relationships—that is the stuff of Keiese mythology, with its correspondingly extreme emphasis on exchange, or “exchange-in-itself”. In the words of Inkélu, “I take notice of no one, I present nothing to anyone”. It is thus of little wonder that her relics, like Atuf’s, also turned to stone (Drabbe, 1940: 324).

To conclude, the preceding analysis of the foundation myths of Kei and Tanimbar has turned up three formulas (see *Figure 3*).

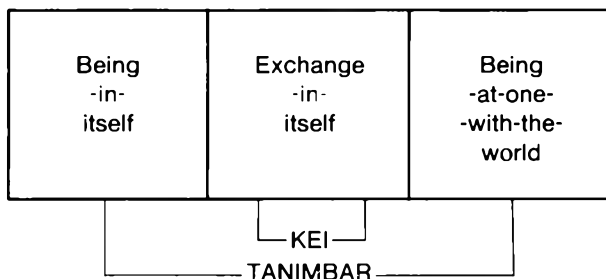


Figure 3. The Excluded Middle of Tanimbarese Ideology

The Tanimbarese “formulas, each illustrated by a variant, involve another formula, which can be deduced by a simple logical operation, but whose box will remain empty until [the Keiese] take on the task of filling it” (Lévi-Strauss, 1985:171).

Conclusion

The differences in social organization, in ritual language, and in myth, which have constituted the focus of the present study could conceivably be explained “in terms of ecology or history”, as James Fox (1980:4) suggests. While such an approach seems plausible enough, we have chosen instead to account for the differences and (seeming) resemblances in terms of such combinational principles as opposition, homology, graduation, rotation, invagination, and above all, inversion. The argument is that it is by recourse to such “relational constants” and “regular types of transformation” (Needham, 1979) as these that the cultures of Kei and Tanimbar came (and continue) to “materialize ... in counterdistinction” to each other (Boon, 1982:ix). It is as if each society presented itself as a “partial whole” (Barraud, 1985), since it is only in the multi-faceted mirror of its opposite that it completes itself. In what follows we shall focus on the significance of the principle of

inversion with respect to the constitution of these “wholes”.

As Needham (1979:40) has observed: “Inversion is frequently used in order to mark a boundary between peoples”. What we have seen is that inversion may also operate across a boundary: that is, it may be implicated in the articulation of the system of symbolic classification of a separate and distinct people. For example, whereas the type of connection between the categories of “north” and “south” and “up” and “down” in Tanimbarese ideology would appear to be one of proportional analogy (or complementary opposition) when viewed from within, this connection discloses itself to be one of inversion when viewed cross-culturally, for in Kei everything is the other way round. Thus, the articulation of these categories within the respective systems of symbolic classification to which they belong is *doubly motivated*: both from without and from within.

However, it should not be thought that all the contrasts classed as instances of inversion in the preceding analysis constitute a monothetic class of social (or better, inter-societal) facts. As Needham (1983:112) has stated: “The class of reversals is polythetic, i.e. constituted by sporadic resemblances”. This point may be illustrated by passing in review the various kinds of reversal that have been remarked upon in the preceding analysis:

1. Upside-down. The sea turns upside down at some point mid-way between the Kei and Tanimbar Islands given the inversion in the north—south axis which is implied in “north” being “up-above” in Tanimbar but “down below” in Kei.
2. Inside-out. In Kei the symbolic category of “the exterior” (*lor*) encompasses that of “the interior” (*haratut*) whereas in Tanimbar “the interior” (*inarut*) invaginates “the exterior”.
3. Directional. If Atuf was responsible for the spear falling into the possession of the village of Ler Ohoi Lim on Kei Besar it came from the east whereas if Tabtut was responsible it came from the west.
4. Lexical. In the language spoken on Yamdéna, Atuf’s name is “Atuf” whereas in the Kei language his name is pronounced “Tufa”.
5. Jural. Atuf and Inkélu were adopted whereas Tabtut and Did Sakmas were descended from Dewa. The former pair remained unmarried whereas the latter pair married out.
6. Dispositional. The mythical heroes of Tanimbar tend to be aggressive (Atuf) and self-centred (Inkélu) whereas those of Kei tend to be pacific (Dewa, Tabtut) and outgoing (Did Sakmas).

If we ask what is the resemblance between the six kinds of inversion listed above, we find that “connections can be traced from one kind of reversal to

another ... [but] there is no specific feature which is common and essential to all" (Needham, 1983:112). For example, the first three kinds involve a spatial operation: "what is imagined ... [is] a transposition of extremities ... which agrees in some respect or another with a change of 180 degrees in direction"; but to pronounce a name backwards is not to effect a reversal in a spatial sense since there is "no dimension or vector against which [the syllables] are set" (Needham, 1983:114). Furthermore, as far as the fifth and sixth kinds of inversion are concerned, "all that is involved is the determination of a variable difference" given that "jural norms and canons of civility" have no "*a priori* reverse" (Needham, 1983:116, 108). Thus, inversion is not "a single absolute mode of relation" (Needham, 1983:117). The fact that certain contrasts may be classed as kinds of inversion does not reflect an essential similarity among them but the relative paucity of differences between them. The class of reversals, therefore, is constituted by "sporadic resemblances", or, in another manner of speaking, it "has no reality in itself; it is only a particular instance of difference, that in which difference tends towards zero" (Lévi-Strauss, 1981:38).

To conclude, we have described the manner in which the societies of Kei and Tanimbar move meaning in different directions so as to differentiate themselves from each other. The principle of inversion was shown to figure foremost in this process of re-structuring. The repertoire of eastern Indonesian society consists, therefore, not simply in a series of arrangements which are replicated as J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong and van Wouden imagined, but also of a series of arrangements which are systematically inverted (rotated, invaginated, etc.). It remains to be seen whether this analysis may be extended to include the systems of symbolic classification of neighbouring cultures, such as Aru or Babar or Ambon. What we would expect to find is not only further instances of inversion but inversions of inversions, which may or may not precipitate closure in the total system of transformations of which each local system represents but a partial manifestation.

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NOTES

1. Geertz sees the aim of "the ethnography of meaning systems other than our own" (i.e. anthropology) as being to extend our mental reach by expanding the limits of our discourse (Geertz, 1986:113-14). This explains his opposition to Lévi-Strauss. The latter is more interested in describing the limits of mind (including our own). Hence, his investigations are of a higher, more "ideal" order than Geertz's.

2. How does invagination differ from the hierarchical relation of encompassment? In the latter case, "one works conceptually from outside inwards" (Allen, 1985:26) whereas in the first case one works from inside outwards. As Culler (1982:198) explains: "What we think of as the innermost spaces and places of the body—vagina, stomach, intestines—are in fact pockets of externality folded in. What makes them quintessentially inner is ... the space which they mark off and contain, the outside they make inner". Thus, to "encompass" is merely to contain whereas to "invaginate" is to make the outside inner.

3. The progressive reduction in the amplitude of mythological space as one moves from Kei to Tanimbar is not unique to the Southeast Moluccas. Maurice Leenhardt (1979:43-59) has pointed to the existence of a homologous system of differences in the Southwest Pacific. The significance of this homology has been explored elsewhere (Howes 1986 and 1987).

4. Were this study to be prosecuted to its logical (structuralist) conclusion, much more would have to be made of the arbitrariness of the signifier inherent in Luk Balséran's command: "Take this spear as a sign..." We also note in passing that while the primary meaning of the sign of the spear in Tanimbarese culture is that of a magical implement, there is one myth in which it figures as a legal instrument (Drabbe, 1940:319, 321, 438). Similarly—but conversely—there is one Keiese myth in which a spear is used as a magical implement (Smits, 1922). "This is a further sign that the social [or mythical] system adopted by a culture is [often] accompanied by a latent awareness of the opposite possibility" (Lévi-Strauss, 1985:160).

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