CHAPTER III

Tradition, leadership and power

> Sumba is still relatively unknown to tourists. It is one of the last bastions of surviving native cultures in the fast changing world; an unspoilt land with ancient culture and colourful traditions. Travelling across Sumba, we are greeted by its strange beauty: vast, rolling savannahs and large tracks of steppe where cattle and horses roam freely. The people of Sumba share the unique quality of their island. Their ancestors can be traced back to the Neolithic Age. A proud and happy people, the Sumbanese embraced the Christian religion in the sixteenth century. Reluctant to abandon ancient beliefs, they blended this new faith with animistic belief called 'Marapu', which they still practice even today, with colourful and spectacular rituals. Tall, traditional peaked-roof houses dominate the horizon. These unique houses surround enormous megalithic tombstones, as the Sumbanese believe that the departed ancestors continue living protecting their descendants. (Source: website Newa Sumba Resort.)[1]

The website of Newa Sumba Resort which is close to West Sumba's harbour Waikelo, presents this text as the information about Sumba. The exotic and pure otherness of the Sumbanese is a tourist attraction. The image of 'unspoilt land with ancient culture and colourful tradition' is also in the minds of many Indonesians outside Sumba. The initial owner of the Newa Sumba Resort was a very successful Sumbanese businessman, who left his home island when he was young. He made his career in international logging business and owned one of the largest beer-companies in Indonesia. He built the resort in his old age, both as a private holiday home and for developing tourism on his home island. After he passed away his children inherited the resort. They live in Jakarta and the USA and occasionally visit their resort.

Of course this image of 'tradition' is highly romanticized. The text is even blatantly wrong where it says that the Sumbanese embraced the Christian religion in the sixteenth century; in fact some of them only did so in the twentieth century. Yet, it is true that people on Sumba practice their *marapu* rituals even today. The sound of the beating of the gong that announces those rituals can be heard daily, sometimes in the main villages in more remote areas, sometimes in town, and often along the road. Sumbanese call this time consuming activity *'urus adat'*, which cannot be translated well, but means 'doing things in the sphere of the ritual obligations'. They have many expressions to refer to all the different rituals and the successive phases within such rituals. All Sumbanese adults frequently occupy themselves with activities of *urus adat*, for example, men spend many hours discussing strategies for adat negotiations, specialists spend even more time on this. The younger men travel about gathering livestock and other materials that will be used in adat exchange. When there is an adat event due, women spend days gathering and preparing food and drinks, and younger men put up party tents, arrange seats and slaughter the animals for the guest meal. Adat is the basic form of local politics on Sumba, and adat rituals are instances of performing political skills, by telling the most convincing narrative about the link to the ancestors and by negotiating the best deal for adat exchanges.

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[1] http://www.newasumbaresort.com/sumba.htm (accessed 23-8-2007).

This is the context in which state politics take place. 'Politicians on Sumba who aspire to be *bupati*, have to know about Sumba, have to understand the ways we use here' was one of the slogans of Umbu Bintang, who was running for *bupati* himself in the elections of 2005.[2] They have to understand how people communicate, how social relations are mediated through material exchanges, how adat idiom is used as a language of politics, how *marapu* belief and its rituals affect the ways in which politicians can construct their authority as leaders. This chapter addresses those questions by describing kinship structure and social organization, traditional social stratification, ethnic divisions and characteristics of traditional leadership. In the second part of the chapter I discuss traditional concepts of legitimacy and power. The conclusions of this chapter summarize how Sumbanese tradition can be seen and used as a reservoir of social and cultural capital for local leaders and district politicians.

Traditional cultural capital

When I asked several people in Anakalang just before the election campaign in March 2004 who the people whose names were on the list of candidates for the regional Parliament were, they responded by telling me about place of origin or birth, about the candidates' well known close relatives, their religious adherence, and about their present or former position (for example 'teacher', 'former village-head'). Local candidates would not be called *'orang Anakalang'* (a person from Anakalang) but the explanation about place of origin would be more specific, referring to the hamlet in which their House of origin is located. Others are indicated as *'orang Kodi'* or *'orang Waijewa'*, referring to the traditional domains on Sumba. The different criteria for explaining a person's identity reveals that in this setting of contemporary regional politics, the actors have multiple identities, as members of their family or clan, original inhabitants of a specific domain, members of the Protestant or Catholic Church, and with positions that indicate their present rank in government bureaucracy. Traditional identity is a position in the kinship structure, social rank and geographical division in traditional domains.

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[2] See Chapter VIII.

Kinship structures usually begin in the nuclear family: wife and husband and their children. In Sumba, this is not self-evident since the husband may have more than one wife, since children often do not live with their parents and since parts of several nuclear families sometimes co-reside in one house. In my study of the Sumbanese (rural) economy, I chose the Uma (house) as basic social unit instead or the household or the nuclear family (Vel 1994b:78-80). *Uma* in the Sumbanese language means house, and it also refers to a group of people who belong to that house. Uma, in the latter sense, is part of a patrilinal clan, *kabihu*, and its members share their relation to the ancestors. *Kabihu* literally means corner pillar, and the patrilineal clans are the corner stones of Sumbanese society. Identification with a specific house connects people to the biographies of these houses and their objects – heirlooms, bones, graves – through which they trace connections to each other and the landscape (Gillespie 2000:16). Uma members do not necessarily reside in the house, but they will always come back, and perform their rituals there, especially those marking the stages of life, such as marriage and funeral. The members of an Uma share a relationship of general reciprocity, which means that they can always ask for each other's help (moral support and material assistance), can always stay at each other's houses and are always able to come and eat in each other's house. Outsiders can be incorporated in an Uma, as fictive kin, after performing the necessary rituals and the consideration of their willingness to obey the rules of reciprocity. Thinking in terms of reciprocity is crucial to understanding Sumbanese communication.

Traditional houses are built in groups around a square, and this hamlet is called the *paraingu* (Indonesian: *kampong*). In the past *paraingu* were preferably built on top of a hill, and they used plants and stone walls as fences. Within the *paraingu* there are several houses which all have a specific ritual function. The Uma Bakul (The Big House) is the main house of the *kabihu*, it is where the temporal ruler resides.

Within the patrilineal clans there is a distinction according to social rank. Nobility is hereditary, and confirmed by the possession of slaves. These slaves are the lowest class in traditional Sumbanese society. Their owners treat 'slaves of old' (*ata bokulu,* or *ata ndai*; Kapita 1976a:48; Forth 1981:215) as house servants, and assign specific tasks to each of them; they are the owner's

Uma: a traditional house

possession, in the sense that the nobleman can give his slave to another *kabihu* as part of the dowry, give him or her in marriage, and decide that the slave will be killed to enter the grave alongside him, so that in the land of *marapu* the two can still be together. The category of minor slaves (*ata kudu*) used to comprise was formerly made of persons acquired by purchase or capture before the abolition of slave trade and the suppression of internal wars by the Dutch (Forth 1981:216). In 2004, this class distinction is not as clear and sharp as it used to be at the start of the twentieth century, but it has not completely disappeared and it is much more relevant in East Sumba than in West Sumba.[3] Many contemporary leaders are of noble descent, and people of slave descent will usually still be member of the lowest class in present day social and economic terms. Members of the middle class in the traditional stratification, who are referred to as *tau kabihu*, the commoners, are more or less still subordinates of the noble rulers. At least they could be called upon to fight along side them, and to provide labour and materials for the renovation of noble houses and the harvesting of paddy fields (Forth 1981:229). The model of noble rulers who call upon their slaves and commoners to fight along side them, and to defend the rights of their domain, whether territorial or in terms of honour, is very alive in contemporary Sumba politics.

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[3] See Twikromo (2008:50-4, 59-78) about slaves in Mangili.

Social ranks are important with regard to marriage, and it is still the norm that a Sumbanese man marries a woman of at least equal social status. The size of the accompanying dowry is an indication of the status of the married couple and the children they will have. A marriage links two *kabihu*, because on Sumba all marriage partners have to be found outside one's own *kabihu*, and men prefer to marry their cousins, particularly a mother's brother's daughter (Forth 1981:329). A *kabihu* is either bride-giving or bride-receiving in relation to another *kabihu*, but cannot be both at the same time. Marriage alliances on Sumba can be regarded as the cement between the various *kabihus*, outlining the rules and extent of social, economic and political solidarity.[4] Marriage alliances in Sumba are asymmetric, which means that a long chain of clans are tied to each other though marriage bonds. In this chain the bride-givers, *yera*, have special leverage over their bride takers, *ngaba wini*:

> *Yera* are the source of life for their *ngaba wini* and this should command great deference, reinforced in material terms by the debts fostered and renewed in recurrent exchange. In return, *yera* should foster and protect their affines. Along with this protection goes the threat that it will be withheld: a *yera*'s curse may cause the woman to be infertile or her children to be sickly. Expectations that *yera* will be protective are much greater in the case of old marriage alliances, in which the allies have in a sense proven that they are worthy of one another and reliable'. (Keane 1997:54.)

Although this quote might sound out of date, it is still very real in twenty-first century Sumbanese society. All present political leaders in West Sumba have a known identity in terms of marriage alliances, and are interconnected in this sense. All the Sumbanese actors mentioned by name in the stories in the next chapters are connected by kinship and marriage alliance, including Sumbanese living in Jakarta.

A person's position in terms of these traditional social distinctions is extremely important for his or her internal Sumbanese identity. It indicates where 'home' is; the rights and obligations in the reciprocal Uma economy are derived from this position; it is the entry point to the kinship network in which mutual social security is organized and which accounts for all the ritual needs a person faces during his or her lifetime. Loyalty, solidarity and dependency within kinship (and alliance) networks are important assets for local politicians. The kinship structure is therefore an important source of social capital. A person's position in the kinship hierarchy is a component of his traditional cultural capital.

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[4] See Webb Keane (1997:51-6) where he describes the 'Value and challenges of affines' in Anakalang.

There is a strong gender component in the idea of the traditional cultural capital on Sumba. Women traditionally never occupy positions of political leadership or ritual specialization. Adat negotiations – and by extension politics in general – are regarded as part of the male domain (Forth 1981:237). Yet, women are very important in the kinship structure. They embody the alliances between clans. They are also the *yera* in person, the sources of life for their husband's Uma. Sumbanese believe that blood is mainly passed down the generations through the mother. A child's social rank is therefore determined by the rank of the mother (Kapita 1976a:41). After the wedding the bride belongs to the clan of the husband. When she has given birth, especially to sons, her status in the kinship hierarchy will rise. The oldest generation of women can be very influential because they have reached senior positions, as mothers of their sons, as oldest women in the Uma, and head of the bloodline. For a Sumbanese man traditional the preferred marriage is with his mother's brother's daughter (Onvlee 1973:45), and in this way his mother has large influence in accomplishing that ideal marriage.

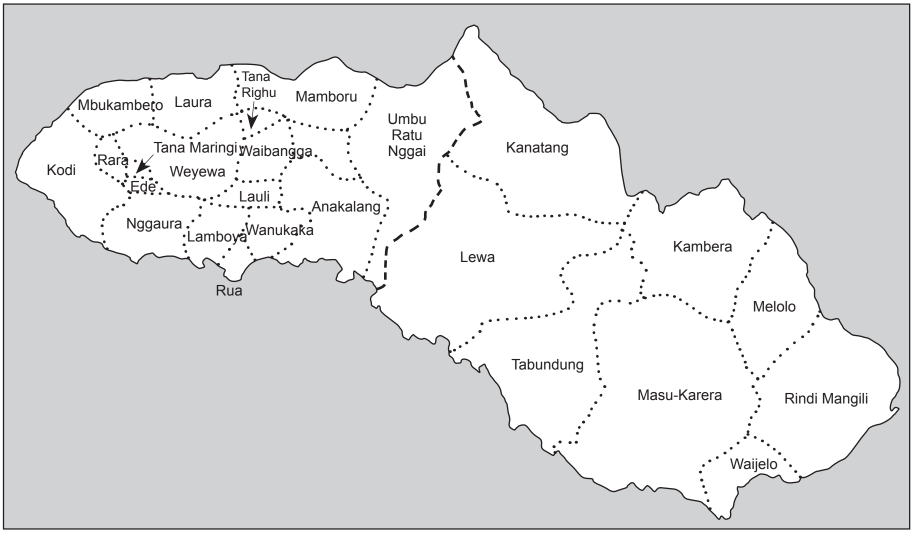
A Sumbanese man who marries a woman from another island and from a social group with whom no prior marriage alliance can be traced, pollutes the blood of his children and causes loss of cultural capital for the future generation of his Uma. For those Sumbanese who still adhere to these norms, status of an election candidate is discredited by the fact that he is married to a woman from elsewhere, no matter how successful or wealthy that candidate might be in other respects.

Ethnicity and traditional political organization

When a Sumbanese are explaining another person's identity to a third party, they refer to them as people from a particular traditional region, which in anthropological literature is called domain. Needham (1987:6-8) described the characteristics of a domain on Sumba:

> The integrating force within a domain is the hegemony of the main village and of the leading clan of that village. This clan owed its power to its ancestral spirits and the unity of the district or domain was manifested in the attendance at sacrifices and ceremonies performed at the main village by the dominant clan.

Before the colonial period, domains were the territories distinguished by initial occupation by certain ancestor. The clan of that ancestor was therefore


Tana
Righu
Mbukambero
Laura
Mamboru
Umbu
Ratu
Nggai
Kanatang
Tana Maringi
Waibangga
Rara
Kodi
Weyewa
Ede
Lauli
Anakalang
Nggaura
Lamboya
Wanukaka
Rua
Lewa
Kambera
Melolo
Tabundung
Masu-Karera
Rindi Mangili
Waijelo

Map 3.1 Map of 'traditional' domains on Sumba

mangu tana, the lord of the land (Onvlee 1973:125). Louis Onvlee has argued that unity within a certain domain is determined by the ties to the *mangu tana.* Clans with a clear and acknowledged link to the *mangu tana* identified with the domain in virtue of social organization and territory. Onvlee notes the custom of referring to the people from Mangili by the names of the four dominant clans, and not with 'Mangili', which was later the name of the *zelfbesturende landschap* ('self-governing region, in the colonial period). The *mangu tana* would divide ritual performance functions among various clans in the domain; for example, one clan would do the rituals for fertility, another for rain, a third for blessing and protection in case of war, one for purification and a fifth, those who command lightning, for punishment in case of theft or other offences (Onvlee 1973:126-7). The cooperation between these clans would protect the wellbeing of all who lived in the domain.

The colonial government selected one of the clan leaders within a domain to be raja, *zelfbestuurder,* in their system of indirect rule. There were no clear criteria for determining who were the most eligible candidate for the position of raja. The Resident of Timor and surrounding areas wrote in 1877 that when the contracts with Sumbanese raja were signed (in 1862), the Dutch Indies Government did not know whether the Sumbanese men who signed it, had the authority as leaders in their own communities (Esser 1877:168). Onvlee wrote (1973:127) that the selection of a raja also depended on other factors which determined the influence of clan leaders, such as, wealth, eloquence, knowledge and individual qualities. Some domains were merged into one *zelfbesturend landschap*. By the end of the colonial period there were 16 *landschappen* in Sumba. As time went on those 16 areas were increasingly seen as traditional domains (Goh 1991:x), and used by Sumbanese to answer questions about identity.

At the present, people on Sumba refer to other Sumbanese as a person from one of the traditional domains, such as '*orang Loli*', '*orang Waijewa*', and so on. They do not refer to the current administrative division, *kecamatan* (sub-district), when it has another name than the traditional domain. Addressing people and analysing events in terms of domain identities is a Sumbanese custom that can easily be utilized for political purposes and winning elections.

In the 1950s, the missionary linguist Louis Onvlee (1973:117-9) pointed out that the concept of 'a Sumbanese people' as opposed to more localized identities based on territories, clans or linguistic distinctions did not make sense. 'The idea of a people (Indonesian, *bangsa*) was fundamentally nationalist in character. In effect, a Sumbanese people does not become imaginable until after people come to think of themselves as Indonesian. Sumbanese is not an aggregation of all the clan and village identities but rather a historical precipitate of this larger category' (Keane 2007:89, note). For politicians in Sumba who want to use ethnicity to create a political constituency, identity related to traditional domains was the only avenue. In the past identities based on traditional domains were used many times to divide rather than to unite. In 1836, Kruseman, trade commissioner of the Timor area, recorded that the Sumbanese he encountered drew a very sharp distinction between outsiders, people from beyond their own island or domain, and insiders, those who shared their feasts (Hoskins 1993:43). 'There is such enmity between these domains, that whenever someone crosses the borders set by the ancestors, armed or unarmed, man, woman or child, they must be captured and are put to death immediately' (Kruseman 1836:75-6, quoted by Hoskins 1993:45). In 1998, rivaling district politicians used ethnic identity politics to invoke mass violence in West Sumba's capital as a part of their power struggle (see Chapter V). From 2002 up to now in 2006 there has been a political campaign for creating new districts in West Sumba, and privately ethnic arguments are often voiced as a reason to demarcate both Central Sumba and Southwest Sumba (Sumba Barat Daya) (see Chapter VIII). In these cases ethnicity is turned into political identity by politicians who delineate the boundaries that separate 'us' from 'them', and (re-)construct stories about those boundaries (Tilly 2003:32). Chapter IX contains examples of ethnic strategies in election campaigns.

Traditional leadership

One of the main questions which the Dutch colonial government faced when they wanted to apply indirect rule to this area was ‘who are the traditional leaders on Sumba?’ It is also a relevant question in contemporary politics because the criteria for such leadership indicate which factors determine socially accepted legitimacy of leaders. From Onvlee’s description of pre-colonial political organization it appears that there was no single leader on Sumba nor within domains (Onvlee 1973:125). Leadership was a matter of different functions and there was a distribution of tasks with regard to each of these functions over the various clans. Within clans, there is a division between spiritual and political leaders.

The *ratu* are the clan elders who engage in priestly duties (Forth 1981:237). They receive knowledge of the ancestors concerning every aspect of life and convey that knowledge to the audience in ritual speech, poems of paired sentences, and in rituals. The *ratu* know the procedure for each ritual and have the ability to indicate the auspicious time for each staging and the objects required to fulfil the ritual. The *ratu* were not the political leaders of their clans. The nobility, *maramba*, held temporal power within each *kabihu*· (Forth 1981:237), but this leadership was not a hereditary attribute of all noblemen. The leader in charge was someone of noble descent with excellent rhetorical skills (Kruseman 1836, quoted by Hoskins 1993:44), and wealthy enough to be able to organize large feasts. According to Gregory Forth, the *ratu* and *maramba* exercised dual leadership:

> it seems that in general the *ratu*, by virtue of their authority and expertise in customary and religious matters, informed decisions formally taken by the two leaders together, which were then expedited by the *maramba* (Forth 1981:242).

The *ratu* hold a higher position in the traditional hierarchy than the *maramba*. They are like ‘elder and younger brother’ (Forth 1981:238). The *ratu* are concerned with vertical relations between men and spirits, and the maramba horizontal relations among groups of men (Forth 1981:242). When the colonial government was looking for traditional leaders to occupy local positions within their system of indirect rule, they selected a number of *maramba* to become raja. These *maramba* received access to more sources of power than they had had before, and relative to other *maramba* in the same domain, so they became more powerful. They were backed up by the colonial government’s ability to use violence, and they were responsible for tax collection, which also was a source of income for them. With those resources they had the means to attract more followers than their traditional clientele. The raja were appointed to govern *landschappen*, the administrative parts of the state of the Dutch Indies.

In that way a patrimonial system was created. This system was defined by Weber (1964:341) as a system in which:

> The object of obedience is the personal authority of the individual which he enjoys by virtue of his traditional status. The organized group exercising authority is, in the simplest case, primarily based on relations of personal loyalty, cultivated through a common process of education. The person exercising authority is not a 'superior', but a personal 'chief'. His administrative staff does not consist primarily of officials, but of personal retainers. [...] What determines the relation of the administrative staff to the chief is not the impersonal obligations of office, but personal loyalties to the chief.

The patrimonial state is the governmental apex of a society characterized by traditional patron-client relationships (Brown 1994:115). With their new functions and privileges the raja had the means to change their status from one among the *maramba* to patrons. Not all raja were of noble descent, as the example in Chapter II about raja Horo has shown. He was chosen by the colonial government because he was a very bright student of the missionaries' school with excellent administrative skills.

At the present, criteria of traditional leadership are still important for authority in the village. Candidates for the positions of village-head or members of parliament have more chance of being elected if they are of noble descent. This legacy of leadership criteria is an impediment for women to participate in politics. Traditionally, politics is the realm of men. The binary oppositions of traditional culture associate 'male' with politics and spiritual matters and with the front side of the house where guests are received, whereas 'female' is the back side of the house, where everyday matters take place, water is brought to the house and food is prepared (Forth 1981:44). The two binary poles cannot function without each other, and women have always played a role in politics as spin doctors active in the background, discussing them with men, exerting pressure on and giving advice to those who act openly as the leaders.

Legitimacy and adat

Who is the most legitimate leader according to Sumbanese tradition? The short answer to this question is that there is no single person or type that is the most legitimate leader in general. As described above, there are rules from the past and recognized customs which prescribe that the *maramba bokulu*, the high nobility, should be the temporal leaders. Among this group relative importance increases with age and seniority of descent (Forth 1981:163). This could be called traditional legitimacy based on the authority of the 'eternal yesterday' (Weber 1921:396). Yet, even in the past, political power of *maramba* also depended on personal characteristics, and there was competition between leaders within domains. The main traditional repertoire of rules, customs, symbols, rhetorical techniques to fight such competitions is found in what is called adat.

Adat has multiple meanings (Li 2007:337). In the scholarly debates the term 'adat' is often used to refer to the traditional normative order in a specific part of Indonesia. But critics worry that the term is either too much associated with Dutch invention and codification of tradition (Kuipers 1998:9), or it is reduced to ceremony domesticated by the Suharto regime into 'traditional art' (*kesenian*) (Pemberton 1994:12). Farmers, women, men, youth, rich and poor, elite and ordinary people on Sumba are all involved in adat, and they use the term in various situations and for different purposes.

Van Vollenhoven and his staff in Leiden University recorded customary law in Indonesia in the late colonial period, and preserved the adat in many volumes of the *Adatrechtbundels*.[5] It was the type of law used in villages to settle disputes among the villagers. The main motivation for Van Vollenhoven's project was to protect the land rights of the village population. Adat in this form is largely associated with colonial rule, since it was only after the colonial state was installed on Sumba that a need emerged for having locally accepted legal system that could be relied upon to maintain order where the colonial bureaucracy was not sufficiently present. After the meticulously recording of adat laws, a body of written laws was created that could be used as an alternative to Dutch-Roman state law. Snouck Hurgronje, who studied adat anthropologically during the colonial period, noted in 1924 that 'the extraordinary thing with each type of indigenous adat or customary law is found in its fluidity, in the easiness with which it can be adjusted and moulded to fit changes in society whenever they occur'.[6]

European missionaries in Eastern Indonesia were confronted with adat in a different way than the bureaucrats. Where adat could be helpful as an instrument in indirect colonial rule, it was also a collection of customs that were partly in conflict with Christian rules. Marriage customs such as polygamy, cousin marriages and dowry payments were particularly problematic. Onvlee wrote that among the Dutch Protestant missionaries on Sumba there were two major positions. The first was that Christians were to strictly obey the rules and instructions of the Bible and live accordingly. The second position was more flexible, and it left room for those social rules that were not prohibited by the Bible (Onvlee 1973:134). The majority of missionaries held the second position, although there were always fierce discussions on practical matters, such as the question of whether it was allowed to eat the meat of ritually slaughtered animals (Van den End 1987:342-6).

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[5] For the late colonial debate about adat see Fasseur (1992:237-56).

[6] 'Het eigenaardige van ieder inheems adat- of gewoonterecht ligt in zijn vlottend karakter, in de gemakkelijkheid waarmee het zich voor maatschappelijke toestanden, waar deze zich wijzigen, weder pasklaar laat maken', (C. Snouck Hurgronje, 'Advies over de codificatie van Adatrecht', *Verspreide geschriften* IV, I, 1924:257, quoted by Onvlee 1973:135).

Colonial administrators and Christian missionaries were both trying to understand and use adat and to prohibit some aspects of it. The problem scholars have with defining adat is not shared by Sumbanese, because there is simply no single translation for the word, and the concept is perceived so naturally that it is like asking a fish to define water. Onvlee wrote that *huri memangu* (or *pata mema* in West-west Sumbanese) is the expression for 'the customs and rules of life that are followed of old, that assign each group and each individual an appropriate spot in the world and in life; and it prescribes how to deal (communicate, behave) with people and objects' (Onvlee 1973:115). In his dictionary of the Kambera-Dutch (Onvlee 1984), he presents four words in Kambera that approach the Dutch(!) word adat: *uku, huri, pata* and *kalaratu.* The word *huri* or *pata* means 'the right way of behaving, or custom', *uku* means 'law, custom or way to do things'. The latter word can also mean 'tactics' or 'trick'. *Kalaratu* means 'rule or custom'. This combination comes close the range of processes gathered under the umbrella of adat on Sumba. I find it impossible to make a one-sentence definition of adat. My description is that adat is the word in Bahasa Indonesia that refers to the laws and rules of a community pertaining to all aspects of community life, including marriages, funerals, division of land and the rights to cultivate land, inheritance, rules of proper conduct, indications on how to celebrate, and the ways disputes in the community are settled; the rules, the procedures and the communities to which it pertains are not fixed and thus open for negotiation, a process full of tactics and tricks. In everyday usage, adat pertains to holding rituals to mark important events and resolving interpersonal disputes (Li 2007:354).

The most practical meaning of adat for ordinary Sumbanese is: the rules and material obligations connected to funerals and weddings. '*Adat belum diurus*' (the adat is not arranged yet) is a normal and often heard answer to the question 'are you already married?'. The sighing expression '*adat masih berat*' means that that the material obligations are hard to meet, that still a number of horses or buffalo have to be paid before the exchange is made. For politicians adat prescribes a desired way of behaviour, defines appropriate symbols, creates social events, indicates how to create reciprocal obligations, and presents an appreciated style of rhetoric. In the most recent edited volume on the subject, adat is defined as follows:

> At the first level of abstraction adat is a complex of rights and obligations which ties together three things – history, land and law – in a way that appears rather specific to Indonesia. [...] At the second level of abstraction, adat also represents a vaguely defined but powerful set of ideas or assumptions regarding what an ideal society should be like (Davidson and Henley 2007:2).

When adat is used as a political term, it refers to a powerful set of ideas. Adat can be used in different contexts and interpreted in different ways by different actors (Li 2007:337-66). Adat is also associated with 'the ideal society' in the context of nationalist struggle or advocacy for the rights of indigenous people. Locally on Sumba, specialists use narratives of the past and the 'ways the ancestors taught us' to strengthen their position and interests, referring to a society with its rules that existed in the past without being romantic about it. Yet, both outsiders and insiders use adat to strengthen their political claims.

Traditional concepts of power

What makes a person powerful? What is power? The most common sense of political power derives from Weber's widely used and popular notion that 'power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance' (Kurtz 2001:22; Weber 1964:157). Anderson's classic article about 'The idea of power in Javanese culture' points at the cultural differences one encounters when trying to understand what power is, who is powerful and why. 'The contemporary Western concept of power is an abstraction deducted from observed patterns of social interaction; it is believed to be derived from heterogeneous sources; it is no way inherently self-limiting; and it is morally ambiguous'. By contrast, 'the Javanese see power as something concrete, homogeneous, constant in total quantity, and without inherent moral implications as such' (Anderson 1990:22-3). Anderson suggests that a discussion on these concepts from the Javanese side might start with the observation that 'Westerners have a concept of *kesakten* quite different from ours: they divide it up into concepts like power, legitimacy and charisma' (Anderson 1990:20, note 8).

D.K. Wielenga touched upon this matter in a short essay in which he described the similarities between the philosophy of Edison, the nineteenth century American inventor of the electric light bulb and phonograph, and 'the Sumbanese' with regard power, life and energy. In summary, this view entailed that all life on earth is identical and goes on because it is infused with what may be called power, life, or energy, which in Sumbanese language (Kambera) is called *ndewa*. According to Edison, this power originates from outside the human atmosphere, as a glowing ball of energy, from which tiny parts are scattered and cause life where ever on earth they land. According to the Sumbanese, the souls of the deceased forefathers will finally reach the ultimate God, who crushes the souls and sprinkles them out over the earth, returning *ndewa* to the earth and bringing life strength and vitality to whatever it touches, including trees and stones. Vitality and fertility are signs that a human has received *ndewa*. If a person dies and his relatives organize a very good funeral, slaughtering a fair number of livestock and providing him with a proper tomb, then the living can expect to get more *ndewa* than they would if they had not cares for the deceased (Wielenga 1925:33-8).

Wielenga's reflection relates to the subject matter of this book, which is political power and leadership in contemporary Sumba, although at the first look it may not seem that way. Umbu Dingu, the secretary general in 2004 of the Christian Church of Sumba, member of Anakalang's aristocracy, told me that he had been invited by several political parties to be a candidate in the 2004 elections for their party. Since he is the highest official of the most important Church on Sumba he would appeal to many voters as the leader of their Church. When I asked him whether he has any other special qualities that would make him a good candidate he told me that he can make tomb stones move:

> *Umbu Dingu's charisma*
> One day in April 2002, Umbu Dingu went to his home village in Anakalang. The name of this village is Gallu Bakul and it is one of the ancestral villages in the Anakalang area, home to major nobility. Gallu Bakul is famous and even mentioned in the Lonely Planet Guide of Indonesia's Eastern islands for its huge tombs. Umbu Dingu's father was the head of this ancestral village. He was a respected and strict nobleman, well known for his skills as a leader in rituals. One of these skills pertains to acting as leader in dragging tombstones from the place of quarry to the village where they were used in making tombs. In earlier days these operations took months, and thousands of people could be involved in dragging.
>
> Nowadays tombs are usually made of cement, but once in a while there is exceptional case of a nobleman who still prefers a carved stone. That stone is dragged from the place of quarry to the road, transported by truck, and then dragged from the truck into the village. In April 2002 such a stone was used for tomb of Rocky Umbu Pekudjawang's father.[7] Rocky himself is a successful business man. He is in his early forties and lives on Bali, where he owns a large tourism enterprise, and a Hotel in Kuta. By preparing a huge tomb for his father, who was getting old, he displayed his wealth in his home village, and increased prestige for his father and the entire extended family. As a business-

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[7] In the elections of 5 april 2004 Rocky ran for Golkar as candidate for the National Parliament (DPR-RI) for the area Nusa Tenggara Timur II. His official name on the elections' list was: Rocky Wisuda Praputranto Pekudjawang, SE.

> man he also organized a tourist excursion to give foreign guests the opportunity to be part of this rare traditional event.
>
> When Umbu Dingu was on his way home in 2002, he passed a stone dragging in Wai Bakul, not far from his village. For three days a large crowd of people had been trying to drag and make the stone move, but the stone would not move a single inch. Umbu Dingu was asked to try and lead the dragging masses. That means he had to scream out the ritual yell that calls the masses to pull and drag, indicating both the right rhythm and inspiring people to give all their strength. He remembered his father's words, saying that he should only yell to lead stone dragging if he was fully confident of himself. The stone is not merely a stone. Once it is carved into a tombstone it becomes a living object. It has a spirit, *ndewa*. It commands the draggers and it can be dangerous, killing a few men on its way from the quarry to the village. The proper lead singer has the power to command the spirit of the stone and subsequently to make the draggers succeed in their effort to move the stone. Umbu Dingu tried, and yelled, and the draggers replied with their '*yewaungu*' confirmation yell. In as little as ten turns of yelling and dragging, the stone was transferred into the truck. Similar things happened while trying to unload the stone from the truck. Only after Umbu Dingu sang his leading yell, the stone moved and could be dragged to the proper spot in the village.
>
> Umbu Dingu is not an adat expert, nor a priest of the traditional *marapu* religion. By contrast, he is Protestant Christian reverend and since 2002 he has been for the second time elected as General Secretary (or Head) of the Protestant Christian Church of Sumba. He refers to his ability to lead stone dragging as merely a skill he inherited from his father. 'Or', he said to me, 'you can call it *karisma* (charisma)'.[8]

This story indicates that people with special skills are able to command and control *ndewa*, which makes them in traditional terms extremely powerful. Yet, it is another matter whether people on Sumba associate this type of power with modern political leadership. It does suggest that Sumbanese are still susceptible to ideologies in which signs of possessing a large amount of *ndewa* are an attribute for (political) leaders. Not many Sumbanese are able to explain their traditional concepts of power in these abstract concepts. These are part of an elitist perspective of ritual specialists. Yet, obvious and visible 'powers' as Umbu Dingu's skills with stone dragging appeal to the spectators and fills them with awe. His skills reflect a specific type of traditional cultural capital.

Anderson's indigenous concepts of power reveal that there are different perceptions on the origin, amount and ways of distribution of power. In this effort to understand the contemporary political culture on Sumba it is helpful to be aware of traditional philosophical concepts, like *ndewa*. Other parts of this theory are not so readily applicable on Sumba. Hoskins comments in this respect that: ‘Both asceticism and mystical concentration of power in a single centre are alien to the Sumbanese symbolic world’ (Hoskins 1993:322), although these are vital parts of Andersons’ Javanese model.

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[8] Interview with Umbu Dingu, Waingapu, 28 February 2004.

In line with the arguments that will be presented in the next chapter on legal pluralism in village dispute settlement, I argue that the Sumbanese conception of goes beyond the dichotomy of either adhering to the traditional concept or adopting more modern ‘western’ concepts which see power as a force derived from various sources. The Sumbanese have mastered combining elements of various normative orders; a consequence of this attitude is that those who want to be the most legitimate, powerful and charismatic leaders should control as many types of resources possible in a quantity as large as possible. Power can be understood as accumulated capital: a combination of traditional and modern cultural, social and economic capital. Chapter IX presents a rough assessment of the 2005 election candidates’ capital portfolio as an indication of their political power.

Power resources

Power on Sumba has always been a matter of control over resources. In general, these include human resources, material resources, and ‘ideational resources’ including ideology, symbols and information used by leaders to convince others of the legitimacy of their authority and to enhance their ability to acquire additional material and human resources (Kurtz 2001:31). The human resources are the clients, followers, supporters and benefactors of the leaders, and material resources are most of all money, and on Sumba food, livestock, and I would also add government employment. Ethnographic stories about politics do not distinguish so neatly between the resources. What politicians do is to use the resources, and manipulate the process to acquire more resources, and ultimately more power. Keane sheds light on the way the resources are perceived on Sumba, when he describes the popular perception of leaders (nobles, *maramba*) in Central Sumba:

> When people talk about nobles, they often talk about their wealth and by extension, their generosity and protectiveness – and their danger when angered. […] The activities that most distinguish a noble in practice – setting up great tombs, holding feasts, maintaining dependents, negotiating dynastic alliances, and sponsoring the marriages of others – require not only supporters but wealth as well (Keane 1997:58).

The supporters who were referred to in the quote are people who benefit from the noble’s generosity and protection, and those who are dependent on the noble, receive material contributions and help for their ceremonies, and are invited to attend the noble's feasts and be member of his group. The activities mentioned here all belong to traditional life on Sumba. In essence, Sumbanese who are or want to be leaders today still gather supporters in the same traditional way. Supporters are the human resources of power; no leader can do without a constituency.

Kinship and marriage alliance are the lines along which Sumbanese traditionally find their political followers. When anthropologists discuss the politics of kinship, they usually refer to the very complicated schemes of the structural functionalist school, in which kinship structures and rules with regard to preferential marriages are codified (Kurtz 2001:81). I share such a fascination with the kinship identity of actors in Sumbanese politics, because it explains how they are situated in the kinship system with its hierarchies and reciprocity rules. When I think of the politics of kinship on Sumba, I refer to how hierarchies, rules and morality of kinship are used for political ends. Politics of kinship comprise a style and strategy which is not confined to relations with real kinsmen, but which also can be used to create a new 'we'-group in which rules of generalized reciprocity apply (Sahlins 1972:193-4). Attending a funeral on Sumba gives a good impression on how kinship politics are used to create constituency.

> *Funeral politics*
> Traditionally, funerals are the most important ceremonies, since they involve establishing relations with the divine ancestors. A good funeral, with a proper tomb and sufficient amount of livestock slaughtered for the deceased to 'take along to the land of the spirits' has significant consequences for the living: it will improve their welfare. It is the only ceremony to which people are not invited, but simply expected to come. A large crowd of guests contributes to the quality of the funeral. Funeral ceremonies last for days or longer, and there is plenty of time to linger and chat with other guests. Especially the night wakes before the funeral are perfect occasions for youth to gather and socialize.
> The incumbent *bupati* of East Sumba, Umbu Mehang Kunda, was very active in attending funerals in East Sumba in 2004 and 2005. When he attended, a line of jeeps would drive up to the site of the funeral, resembling a traditional party of guests (*rombongan adat*). He would always bring a contribution for the funeral, either money or livestock. Rumour told that he had a special budget item to use for these occasions, called 'the tactical fund' (*dana taktis*). The gift would be reciprocated, in the traditional form of a pig, but in election years more importantly, in political support for Golkar.

The style of conduct is that of kinsmen, as if the politician were a relative of the deceased person, and the strength of this type of politics lies in the reciprocal economy. On Sumba the large barter economy is ruled by the morality of exchange (Vel 1994:49), which in this example is used to create ties between people that put them in a relationship of mutual obligation. It only works when the corresponding norms are socially accepted and widely held. The morality of exchange as part of Sumbanese tradition is an ideational political resource.

Wealth on Sumba used to be measured and expressed in terms of livestock, such as, water buffalo, horses and cattle, and particularly in the humid rural areas of the island in the capacity to produce food (combination of paddy fields and labour). The size and shape of family's tombs were also very important indicators of wealth and status. Material resources are required to makes such tombs, and once they are built they are the ideational resources of power: strong symbols of strength and status. Modern indicators of material wealth and symbols of power are the size, shape and number of one's houses. A successful Sumbanese will have several houses: one in his home village, one in the Sumbanese town were he resides when he is on Sumba, and one in Kupang or on Java. The houses on Sumba are preferably built along the main road, and combine typical traditional Sumbanese style, including peak roofs, with modern and expensive building materials, such as, plastered stone walls, tiles for decoration, tiles on the floor. Clothing style is also a strong power symbol. The uniform is the symbol of State power. Those who wear a uniform are part of the network of people who have access to funds and jobs and other kinds of privileges that are out of reach of ordinary people.

Conclusions

Tradition is a source of capital that is still relevant and useful for contemporary political leadership on Sumba. This chapter discussed various components of traditional cultural capital.

A leader is classified locally in terms of traditional identity: a person's position in kinship structures, his social rank and the traditional domain of origin. Kinship structures along the patrilineal line compose hierarchies within a domain, with layers determined by rank. The highest position is that of nobility, and within the nobility the oldest of brothers within a House that can trace the shortest connection to the main founding father within the domain. Lower members of the same hierarchy form the natural constituency of the leader. Yet, personal characteristics, like eloquence and cleverness, can make a person more powerful than his position in the kinship hierarchy would imply.

Thinking in terms of reciprocity is an important component of Sumbanese traditional culture, and of present-day Sumbanese politics. The rules of reciprocity correspond with the relations in the kinship network. In addition, the network with which one gets connected through marriage alliance also sets the relations for reciprocity, and was often used as a strategy to widen the area of dominance of a leader. The object of reciprocity was primarily adat gifts, such as, horses, buffaloes, golden pendants, pigs and cloths. Relations of generalized reciprocity include assistance, loyalty, and support. Adat is the traditional repertoire of rules, customs, symbols, rhetorical techniques used to vie for leadership positions and to negotiate about the type and size of exchanges.

Economic capital is important to gain power, and it was even more so traditionally. A leader on Sumba can only live up to the traditional expectations of leadership if he has sufficient wealth. Participating in exchange networks in a way that is in accordance with the status of leaders requires money, food and livestock. Wealth is also indispensable for feasting, which is the way to show social status and increase the numbers of the constituency.

Charisma in the traditional sense, as in the story about Umbu Dingu, is also a source of power. Charisma convinces the audience that his leadership is legitimated by ancestral powers. The traditional concept of power, *ndewa*, is a personal attribute, which can be recognized by its effects and symbols. Charisma cannot be actively acquired by potential leaders, but they can practice and improve their performance. The core of that performance is transforming traditional cultural and social capital into contemporary political power, by manipulating the symbols that refer to this wealth of capital. The following chapters will give many examples of that transformation.

Separating the traditional parts of leadership, or making a sharp distinction between tradition and modernity is artificial. In contemporary Sumbanese society other spheres of life are equally important, and invented traditions are part of every day modern life. The next chapter focuses on the State and the Church as providers of alternative networks of social organization, and alternative normative orders on which rules of conduct and domination are based.