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**RIGHT AND LEFT AS A HIERARCHICAL
OPPOSITION: REFLECTIONS ON
EASTERN SUMBANESE HAIRSTYLES**

RECENT remarks by Professor Dumont on the subject of hierarchical opposition (1979; 1980) have in large part been directed against English-language writings on the topic of dual symbolic classification and the related notion of complementary opposition. In this regard Dumont has focussed in particular on the analysis of the opposition of right and left—deriving ultimately from Hertz—as carried out by Rodney Needham and others (see especially Needham, ed., 1973). Dumont's main criticism of this latter body of work is that it involves a separation of fact and value by assuming an *a priori* equality of the two sides upon which an ideological asymmetry is then imposed (1979: 810), so that the right-left contrast is then treated as a 'distinctive opposition' or 'a simple "polarity" or "complementarity"'. Against this view, Dumont argues that the hierarchical aspect of right and left is inherent in the distinction itself, since it is definable only by reference to a 'whole', namely the human body, and that the two sides are not related in the same way to this whole.

My objective here is to analyse certain usages and ideas of the Rindi people of eastern Sumba which relate to the contrast of right and left in the light of Dumont's framework of hierarchical opposition. In so doing, I hope to show that this notion can indeed illuminate and add to our understanding of the operation of lateral symbolism in this ethnographic setting. More particularly, I shall be concerned with a problem in Rindi symbolic classification arising from the way men and women are said to arrange their hair, which seems to involve a contradiction between stated rules and what appears to be done in practice.

Before outlining the evidence pertaining to this matter, however, I would point out that my use of Dumont's ideas does not mean that I accept his position

regarding hierarchical opposition in its entirety. Especially problematic is his claim that with hierarchical opposition—which he of course defines as a relation between a whole and a part, or encompassing and encompassed—the part is at one level ‘identical to’ (or, elsewhere, ‘consubstantial’ with) the whole (1979: 809; 1980: 240). It is difficult to see how this statement could ever be true, unless it is taken to refer to something like metonymy or synecdoche (using these terms in an extended sense, to include relations beyond figures of speech), where some part or element stands for, takes the place of, or represents a whole.¹ This seems to me an important point, for it suggests that hierarchy, as Dumont defines it, refers broadly speaking to a symbolic, rather than a strictly logical, relation; and this is certainly so with the instances of hierarchical opposition involving right and left described below, which as I shall show are a function of a particular system of symbolic classification.²

I

The significance of right and left in eastern Sumbanese culture is discussed in various places in my monograph on Rindi (Forth 1981). In general, the right is connected with masculinity and with life, and the left with femininity and death. The two lateral terms are further employed to define two opposed rules of order expressed respectively as *palua kawanangu*, ‘to move, proceed to the right’, and *palua kalaingu*, ‘to move, proceed to the left’.³ In anticipation of what follows, it should be noted at the outset that where the rules apply to motion or spatial order, ‘movement to the right’, considered as a progression from left to right,

1. In this regard it is interesting to note J.D. Sapir’s recent observation that ‘synecdoche, like metonymy, draws its terms from a single domain; however, one term always includes or is included by the other as kind for type, part for whole’ (1977: 4), a formulation which directly recalls Dumont’s conception of hierarchy.

2. Another reservation concerning Dumont’s thesis relates to the noticeable disparity between the several relations he cites as examples of hierarchical opposition, viz., ‘animal’ and ‘vertebrate’ (1979: 809), Adam and Eve (1980: 239–41), and right and left. Not only is it questionable to what extent these different relations can be assimilated to a single type, called hierarchy or hierarchical opposition (see, for example, the distinction Sapir [1977: 13] draws between ‘taxonomic’ and ‘anatomical’ modes of hierarchy in his discussion of synecdoche), but it would seem to follow from the differences between them that the ‘identity’ which Dumont postulates between whole and part refers to something different in each instance.

3. The two phrases comprise *lua*, ‘to go, move, travel’, and *kawana*, ‘right’ (see PAN **vanan*, Dempwolff 1938: 164), and *kalai*, ‘left’, respectively. As I shall show below, by no means every case in which these rules apply involves physical movement or even a spatial orientation, so the phrase *palua kawanangu*, for example, could perhaps be more comprehensively translated as ‘to proceed, do something, right’ (see Section IV below). Other possible contextual translations are ‘to make (something) go right’ and ‘like a rightward movement, procedure’. With these qualifications in mind, however, I shall continue, for convenience, to gloss *palua kawanangu* (or *kalaingu*) as ‘to move, movement to the right (or left)’.

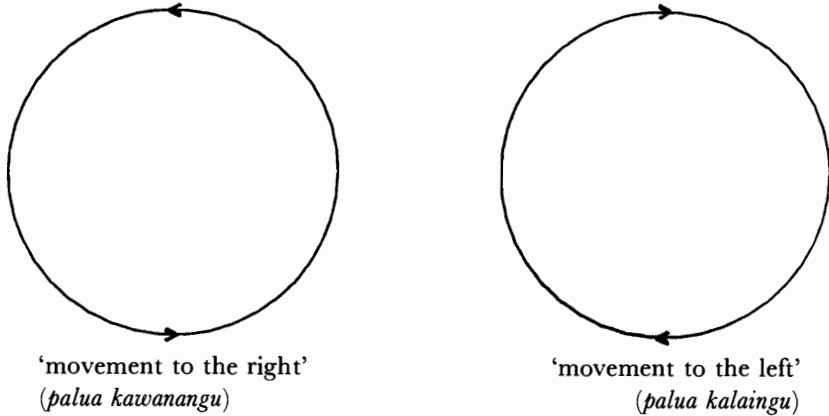


Figure 1: Movement to the Right and to the Left

normally denotes an anti-clockwise direction or sequence around a given focus as viewed from above and, so to speak, from the outside, while 'movement to the left' refers to the reverse direction (i.e., clockwise) as determined in the same way (see Figure 1). Unless otherwise indicated, therefore, whenever I refer below to movement to the right or left it is these two sorts of motion or sequence respectively that are intended.

One reason for stressing this point is that in some parts of Indonesia (see, for example, Howe 1981: 228 concerning Bali) a rule of 'movement to the right', as an expression of proper or auspicious order, denotes on the contrary a clockwise direction. Such a difference between related cultures therefore indicates that, as regards the notion of moving to the right—which seems to be widespread in Indonesia (see also Barnes 1974, *passim*)—it is not actual direction or arrangement, that is, the physical manifestation of the principle, which is primary but rather the symbolic values attaching to the categories of right and left.

The Rindi state that the rule of movement to the right governs all matters connected with life (*lii luri*) and defines correct order among the living. The principle is thus applied to such diverse concerns as, for example, the sequence in which house-posts are erected around the centre of a building; the manner of encircling a sacrificial fowl over an offering of betel and areca before dedicating the bird to an ancestor; the direction in which buffalo are driven around a rice field, and bales of new thatch are carried around a house just prior to the completion of a renovation; and the order in which different houses of the Rindi noble clan each provide a pig for slaughter at the annual renewal rites performed in the chief village.⁴ In addition, whenever cooked food is offered to some

4. In this case the rule is that in any given year the animal should be supplied by the lineage group whose house is situated to the right (as one faces outwards from the front of the building) of that belonging to the donor in the previous year.

spiritual being, the latter is requested to receive this 'to the right' (*kei palua kawanangu*).

The Rindi also use the expression 'movement to the right' to describe the manner in which women should pass between groups in marriage, as defined by their system of asymmetric alliance. This application of the idea, then, reveals an instance where the rule does not refer to spatial relations in any concrete sense. Nevertheless, the implication of its appearance in this context is clear enough, since it refers here to a procedure which if properly followed secures the continuance of life, while its contravention would have deleterious consequences. Indeed, adherence to the rule of movement to the right is deemed essential to the successful outcome of all the activities mentioned above, and for obtaining and securing prosperity and well-being in general.

As movement to the right defines correct order in matters that concern the living, so the dead are governed by the opposite rule, 'movement to the left' (*palua kalaingu*). Consequently, the Rindi conceive of arrangements and procedures in the world of the dead as being ordered inversely to their counterparts among the living. Thus the dead are said, for example, to be left-handed, to build their houses in the opposite manner from the living, and so on (see further Forth 1981: 200-2); and it is consistent with these ideas that funerary usages in Rindi reveal numerous examples of practices carried out in accordance with the principle of movement to the left.

One area in which this inversion of right and left as between the living and the dead is most clearly expressed is the manner of wearing clothes and binding the hair. Whereas living persons should arrange their hair and clothing in conformity to the rule of movement to the right, the dead are said to do so in the opposite fashion, so as to effect a movement to the left. This idea is given concrete expression in the way clothes are placed on a corpse in preparation for burial, in the manner of binding the deceased's hair, and moreover in the way the hair and clothing are worn by the specially costumed functionaries (*papanggangu*) who attend a noble corpse (see Forth 1981: 199). Such usages thus illustrate how the right-left opposition is used in eastern Sumba to represent the relation between the living and the dead, and more generally the opposition between life and death considered as antithetical states of existence. Yet the appearance of the contrast in this context also gives rise to a problem with both ethnographic and analytical implications. For while the Rindi expressly state that, in contrast to the dead, living persons of both sexes should arrange their hair and clothing so as to move to the right, in actual practice a difference of this sort is also observable between (living) men and women. Specifically, I found that women wind their hair in a clockwise direction (as viewed from above) in a way which contrasts especially with the men's method of wrapping clothes around the body, and which therefore suggests a *de facto* movement to the left (see Barnes 1974: 187 for a comparable situation in another eastern Indonesian society).

Here, then, we appear to be confronted with a discrepancy between statement and practice whereby two procedures that in other contexts are distinguished as movement to the right and left respectively are both represented as movement to the right. As to how this situation might be accounted for, I suggest that we

would do well to consider the relation of right and left in this instance as a hierarchical opposition since, viewed from a certain perspective, the right can here be seen to subsume or encompass the left. In order to elucidate this relation, however, it is necessary first to examine more closely the evidence relating to the wearing of clothes and the arrangement of the hair in Rindi.

II

The basic item of men's dress in eastern Sumba is a loin-cloth (*hinggi pakalambungu*). This is wrapped round in an anti-clockwise direction (as viewed from above), by holding the outstretched cloth behind the body, then placing one end at the centre of the abdomen with the left hand, and finally winding the remainder of the cloth one-and-a-half times around the waist, and tucking it at the front, with the right hand. A man's head-cloth (*tera*) is wound in the same direction around the head. In contrast, no female garments are actually wrapped around the body. The basic item of female attire is a tubular skirt (*laui*) which is often simply held up with the hand, or under the arm. When necessary, a woman may fold the skirt at the front and tuck it over. But while I was told that this too should be done 'to the right', I am not sure whether any particular arrangement is consistently followed in practice, nor, indeed, whether the contrast of clockwise and anti-clockwise movement is in any way relevant in this connection.

The inclusion of manifestly opposed arrangements under the principle of movement to the right is therefore most clearly observable in the case of men's clothing and women's hair, since as noted, the latter is actually wound clockwise around the head. At this point, the question naturally arises of how Rindi men wind up their hair. Unfortunately, the evidence I have on this question is inconclusive. In part, this is because in contrast to women, the vast majority of men of middle age and younger nowadays wear their hair short, while those who do retain long hair normally cover it with a head-cloth. Yet even in those few instances where I was able to make direct observations, my findings were inconclusive, and my records do not show whether any particular order was consistently followed in practice. Looking back, it now seems that I may have been so assured by informants' statements that both men and women wound their hair 'to the right', and that the dead did so 'to the left', that the question of how people actually wore their hair did not concern me as much as it should have; and although I was not altogether unaware that the arrangement of women's hair differed from the way men put on their clothes,⁵ I may simply have assumed that any discrepancies I encountered derived from incidental divergences from traditional rules.

5. I was subsequently able to confirm my impressions concerning the arrangement of women's hair from photographs (see, for example, Forth 1981, Plate 3b).

Obviously, the question of how men actually arrange their hair could not be settled by asking informants, since the answer can only be given in terms of movement to the right or left, and as we have seen the former principle may be manifest either in an anti-clockwise or a clockwise direction. Nevertheless, there is some reason to suppose that men should wind up their hair anti-clockwise, and thus in the opposite manner from women. First of all, if the sexes were contrasted in this way, this would accord with the general association mentioned earlier between the right and the masculine and the left and the feminine. Secondly, there is conceivably some practical advantage in men winding their hair anti-clockwise, as this is what they do with their head-cloths. Thirdly, the lateral opposition as between the sexes can be referred to another contrast that has symbolic value with regard to the hair. Thus once, when I remarked on the discrepancy between the arrangement of men's clothing and women's hair, my informant stated that while men's clothes were disposed so as to result in a movement to the right as seen from above, women's hairstyles followed the same principle *as seen from below*. In effect, then, with this interpretation a difference of direction is transformed into one of perspective, so that instead of the contrast of right and left we have that of above and below; and since in eastern Sumba male and female are generally associated with above and below respectively, it would not be surprising if this opposition also found expression in men's and women's hairstyles. In fact, this opposition is expressly linked with another aspect of men's and women's hair; for the former, wound into a tight knot at the centre of the head, is described as 'up, above' (*dita*) while the latter, wound into a low, flat and looser bun further to the back of the head, is described as 'down, below' (*wawa*) (Forth 1981: 158).⁶

Although it does not bear directly on the question of how men should wind up their hair, another indication that men are associated with the anti-clockwise, and women with the clockwise direction is an implicit equivalence between a woman's hair and a man's head-cloth (*tera*).⁷ Whereas a man's top-knot is called *kawuku*—a word which refers more generally to a knot or joint—a woman's bun of hair is called *kawuku tera*, a phrase that can be glossed as 'head-cloth knot' and interpreted to mean 'a knot or bun of hair that resembles, or serves as, a head-cloth'. And as we have seen, these two 'head-coverings', one masculine and of woven fabric and the other feminine and of hair, are further contrasted by being wound in opposite directions around the head.

6. The women's style mostly referred to in this paper, in which the hair is wound around the head just above the temples, is what might be described as the standard or formal style. Occasionally, when working, women also wind up their hair in a higher bun—though not so high and tight as a man's top-knot—and one sometimes sees younger women with their hair swept back into an oval bun at the nape. The latter is possibly a newer fashion and a departure from the traditional style.

7. Only rarely do women wear head-cloths and, when they do, the cloth, about a metre in length, is simply draped over the head with the two ends crossing at the front. A woman's head-cloth is called *tera tamali* (*tamali* is 'veil'). As the same term is applied to a veil that covers a corpse, this is one of a number of usages consistent with the symbolic femininity of the dead in Rindi (see Forth 1981: 205–7).

III

From here on, then, I shall assume that as regards the proper arrangement of a man's hair the rule of movement to the right is to be understood in the normal way, as illustrated in Figure 1 above. But whatever the actual procedure may be, there is still the question of why, in regard to the women's hairstyle on the one hand and men's clothing on the other, two manifestly opposed arrangements should be represented identically as two instances of movement to the right. In other words, we need to consider why the arrangement of a woman's hair is not described as a movement to the left, particularly in the light of the numerous associations between females, and what is symbolically feminine, and the left side.

The key to this problem, I suggest, is to be found in the idea that the dead in the afterworld wear their hair in accordance with the principle of movement to the left, thus in a manner opposite to the living. In the light of this idea, the statement that (living) women wind their hair 'to the right' can be understood as pertaining specifically to, and as stressing, the contrast between the living and the dead, while at the same time suppressing, as it were, the apparent difference between the two sexes and hence the implicit suggestion that living women might wear their hair in the same way as do the dead. In this area of symbolism, therefore, the eastern Sumbanese might be said to be faced with a classificatory dilemma arising from the simultaneous application of the contrast of right and left to male and female on the one hand and to the living and the dead on the other, and moreover from their identification of life with the male principle, and death with the female. Put another way, since the living include both males and females, it would seem necessary to decide whether living women are to be classed as living and thus opposed to the dead or as females and thus opposed to males. But this is a decision which the Rindi have, so to speak, refused to make. Thus it would appear that while the contrast of gender is given expression in practice, at the level of representations it is only the contrast of life and death which is recognized, since at this level the difference between women's hairstyles and the arrangement of men's clothes (and, as I have suggested, their hair as well) is in effect disguised by the statement that women wind their hair to the right.

Situations similar to the above are discernible in other areas of eastern Sumbanese life. One concerns the disposition of horizontal components of the house, which also should be positioned anti-clockwise around the building so as to 'move to the right'. In this instance, the rule means that the 'trunk end' (*pingi*) of a piece of wood should be on the left, as one faces the building from the outside, and the 'tip end' (*kapuka*) on the right (see further Forth 1981: 32-4, 421; and, for a similar rule in Kédang, Barnes 1974: 68). However, with the various rows of roofing slats, for example, the pieces alternate in this respect from the eaves to the top of the roof, so that half the slats are actually placed the other way round. As the trunk end of a piece of wood is considered more durable than the tip, this is done in order to create a balance of strength within the building. Yet, even though odd- and even-numbered rows of slats are thereby arranged in opposite

directions, informants denied that one set moves to the left; and the reason given for this was that movement to the left governs correct order only among the dead, whereas the house is a place of the living.

In a similar vein, Rindi informants disagreed as to whether the piece of metal placed in the mouth of a corpse should always be put inside the left cheek, or inside this cheek only if the deceased were female (Forth 1981: 172). Clearly, there is here the same sort of classificatory dilemma as is implicit in the case of the women's hairstyle. Interestingly, though, it presents itself in the inverse manner, for this disagreement (which is between two conflicting rules rather than rule and practice) suggests a subordination of the right to the left in death rather than a subordination of the left to the right in life (see Section IV below).

IV

From all that has been said so far it seems obvious that the significance of right and left in eastern Sumba is contextually variable, in that different associations (male/female, life/death) of the two lateral terms pertain to different contexts.⁸ Yet it is equally apparent that native thought does not always keep these contexts apart. Thus in the case of the women's hairstyle, what appears to be a leftward disposition would seem to connote death, even though its occurrence here is perfectly consistent with the association of the left with the feminine.⁹ Indeed, one could say that this failure to separate contexts—or to regard meanings as contextually specific—is precisely the reason for the suppression of the contrast of movement to the right and to the left as regards the women's hairstyle. But more importantly, because this suppression is effected by representing an apparent movement to the left as an instance of movement to the right, the absence of a distinction between contexts also gives rise to a hierarchical opposition between the two lateral terms.

This relation can best be illustrated by a diagram as in Figure 2. From this it can be seen how the hierarchical opposition, an encompassing of the contrary, exists only by virtue of the combination of two levels in such a way that the opposition of right and left at the lower level is assimilated to one term at the higher level.¹⁰ The diagram also shows how these two levels coincide with the two contexts in which the right-left opposition is relevant. Thus the difference

8. This is, of course, a point that has often been made with regard to dual classification based on analogy (see, for example, Needham 1973: xxv–xxviii; also Schulte Nordholt 1980: 247).

9. As shown just above with regard to the practice of placing a metal object in the mouth of a corpse, the left can also connote femininity where its main purpose is apparently to symbolize death. It is worth noting as well that the opposition of right and left does not always signify both life and death and male and female. Thus, for example, in the Rindi house the left side is the feminine side, but it has no particular association with death. In fact, corpses are prepared and kept for burial on the right, masculine side of the building.

10. Cf. Dumont's statement that '...the clearest formulation of the hierarchical opposition is gained by separating and combining two levels. At the superior level there is unity; at the inferior level there is distinction...' (1980: 242).

between the women's hairstyle and the arrangement of men's clothing (and hair) exists at the factual level, its context being, of course, the contrast of male and female, while the difference between the arrangement of hair and clothes among the living and dead is located, in the first instance, at the level of representations, and pertains to the opposition of life and death. In this way, then, it can be seen that the conflation of contexts in this case is equivalent to the combination of two levels which is involved in hierarchical opposition.

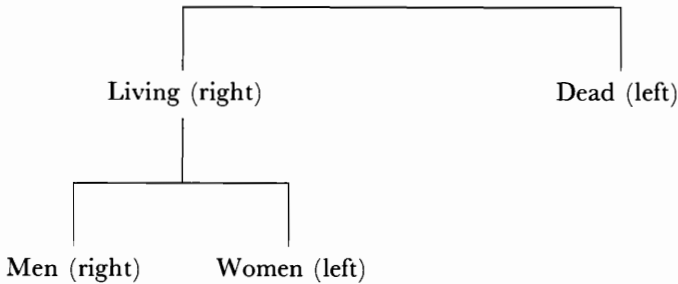


Figure 2: Contexts of the Right-Left Opposition in Eastern Sumba

The reader may have noticed a close resemblance between these two contexts and levels and the levels (or 'partial aspects') to which Dumont refers in his analysis of hierarchical opposition *per se*. Thus he states that, whereas at a lower level terms that compose a whole are contrary and distinct, at a higher level they are identical (see, for example, his interpretation of the relation between Adam and Eve, 1980: 239–41), and that the one term, the superior, is identical to the whole. In the example we are dealing with here, this higher level is identifiable with the level of representations, where right and left are equated by virtue of two manifestly opposed dispositions both being identified with the right. Accordingly, the lower level can be identified with the level of facts, where there is an observable difference between the sexes with regard to lateral arrangements.

It needs to be stressed, however, that while the observable facts in this case appear to be entirely subordinated to a cultural representation, it is necessary, in order to discern a hierarchical opposition between right and left in the first place, to ascribe significance to the difference which is manifest at the factual level—and not just significance for the analyst but for the eastern Sumbanese as well. In other words, this difference too has value and does not exist simply at a level of empirical reality devoid of meaning. The contrast between the living and the dead in the manner of wearing the hair, on the other hand, illustrates a situation which in most respects is the converse of the above. For in this case the opposition exists mainly as a representation which, in so far as it expresses a difference between the world of the living and that of the dead, would seem necessarily to exist in the absence of observable facts. Yet there are facts which bear upon this issue, and it is moreover possible that here also there is a discrepancy between practice and native statement. As noted, the rule in Rindi

is that the hair of a corpse should be wound so as to move to the left. However, if among the living the hair of men and women is wound in different directions, then it is quite conceivable that the two sexes might display differences in death as well. Indeed, such a difference is suggested by the disagreement noted above regarding the placing of a metal object in the mouth of a corpse. Unfortunately, though, since I never had the opportunity to observe the winding of a deceased person's hair, I am unable to confirm whether or not this is so.

Nevertheless, the more general point is that, just as the rule of movement to the right governs all matters connected with the living, so movement to the left is pre-eminent in death. Hence since the right, the superior side in life, appears in the instances discussed above to encompass the left, we should also consider whether in death the left might encompass the right. Rindi statements provide some support for this suggestion. Thus when I asked whether left-handed people might become right-handed after death, I was told that they did not, and that all the dead were without exception left-handed, a notion which, it should be noted, appears contrary to the principle of inversion that generally governs the representation of the relation between life and death. Furthermore, there is the idea, which is also expressed in funerary ritual (see Forth 1981: 205–7), that a dead person, regardless of sex, is received into the land of the dead in the same manner as a new bride when she first enters her husband's village. Here, then, we have an indication that, while in life masculine principles, of which movement to the right can be counted as an instance, can subsume the feminine, in death feminine principles, such as movement to the left, can subsume the masculine.

The foregoing observations call to mind Dumont's claim that hierarchy 'offers the possibility of reversal', so that '...that which at a superior level was superior may become inferior at an inferior level', and moreover, so that 'the left can become the right in what might be called a "left situation"...' (1980: 244). As the eastern Sumbanese show in manifold ways that they regard life as superior to death, one could therefore describe movement to the right as being superior (and hence encompassing) at the 'superior level' of life and inferior at the 'inferior level' of death, death being for the eastern Sumbanese precisely the sort of 'left situation' to which Dumont refers.

In fact, following Dumont we might go even further and suggest that for the dead, movement to the left is, in a sense, movement to the right. Support for this proposition can be found in the circumstance that, in a way similar to 'right' in English and the word for 'right' in many other languages, eastern Sumbanese *kawana* ('right') can also mean 'correct, true, valid, exact, proper' (see Kapita 1982: 110), so that the phrase *palua kawanangu* might be understood not simply as a reference to 'movement to the right' (i.e., the right side) but also to correct order in general, regardless of any lateral, directional, or spatial considerations. In a similar vein, *kalai*, 'left', has the further senses of 'erroneous, wrong'. However, since correct order among the dead—and, it may be worth adding, among the living as well, as regards the treatment of a corpse—is defined as movement to the left, if *palua kawanangu* is taken to apply to all instances of correct order, it follows that in this context *palau kalaingu* ('movement to the left')

must be counted as an instance of it. Clearly, this possibility is dependent upon the phrase *palau kawanangu* having two distinguishable senses, one of which includes the other. At the same time, though, it should be emphasised that, here as elsewhere, the hierarchical aspect of the relationship between right and left consists precisely in the absence of a rigid distinction between these two analytically distinguishable meanings.

V

As some of the above remarks suggest the applicability of the notion of hierarchical opposition beyond the limited instances of lateral symbolism previously described, it is worth briefly considering ways in which the eastern Sumbanese conception of the contrast of life and death can itself be interpreted as hierarchical. As I have shown elsewhere (Forth 1981: 201–5), in Rindi the relation between life and death is conceived in terms of two distinct and seemingly contradictory representations. On the one hand, death is represented as the antithesis and as an inversion of life; indeed, it is in this view that the opposition of movement to the right and movement to the left has relevance. But there is also a wider perspective, in which life and death appear as complementary stages of existence. The living are then seen ultimately to derive from the dead the means of life, and the dead, in a certain sense, eventually return to the living. In this respect, therefore, death can be said to be encompassed by life, as it is subsumed as one stage in a cycle of life, that is, a cyclical transfer of life-giving spirit. In Rindi, this single cycle of existence was never expressly stated to be governed by the rule of movement to the right. Nevertheless, such a notion would appear highly consistent with particulars of eastern Sumbanese symbolic usage; and in any case, it seems clear enough that, as regards the single, oriented movement of vital spirit, the contrast of movement to the right and to the left is no longer germane. In other words, at this level the duality of right and left is dissolved in a unity which, for the Rindi, is linked with the right, just as life and death are merged in a process which results in the perpetuation of life.

VI

My aim in this paper has been to demonstrate how Dumont's notion of hierarchical opposition can be applied to certain instances of the contrast of right and left in eastern Sumbanese symbolism, and in so doing I have gone some way beyond my initial point of departure, which was the apparent discrepancy between stated rules and common practice as regards the arrangement of

women's hair. In this final section I shall briefly discuss the limits of this analytical notion and its relation to other possible approaches.

Just above it was shown that, in so far as *kawana*, 'right', can refer both to the right side and to proper procedure in general, the hierarchical aspect of the right-left opposition in eastern Sumba is suggested even at the level of semantics. What is more, there are in this society other usages which indicate a relation of encompassing and encompassed between right and left, as for example the practice of reducing, in a very real sense, a house that is in need of repair to its superior right side (see Forth 1981: 40). Also, one could find a number of areas of eastern Sumbanese symbolism and classification, quite apart from the matter of laterality, where the notion of hierarchical opposition could be usefully invoked.¹¹

Even so, it is not at all clear that a hierarchical relation, or an encompassing of the contrary, is present in every instance where the right-left opposition is symbolically significant in eastern Sumba, or that the right side can always be shown to be equated with some larger whole. The point is, then, that hierarchy as defined by Dumont is an aspect of the lateral opposition which is discernible only in certain settings in which the contrast appears. According to Dumont, the inequality of the two sides is not only a matter of value but also one of 'actual fact', or 'of nature', and this he claims is because '...the right-left pair is not definable in itself *but only in relation to a whole...*' (Dumont's emphasis), which is ultimately the human body (1979: 810). The question is, however, whether this inequality, and the necessity of defining the two terms with reference to a body, must always be expressed in a hierarchical relation in Dumont's special sense. In addition, since he employs the contrast of right and left as just one illustration of a more general phenomenon of hierarchical opposition, we must also ask whether all instances of dual classification (and complementary opposition) can be interpreted as instances of hierarchical opposition.

If this is what Dumont is claiming, then so far as the eastern Sumbanese data are concerned his thesis is cast in some doubt. Here, a large part of the problem stems from his identification of the 'distinctive opposition', to which he opposes hierarchy, with equality and complementarity, and then equality and complementarity with one another. For in this way Dumont implicitly excludes the possibility of a middle term, namely inequality without an encompassing of the contrary, or what might be called 'non-hierarchical inequality'. It is difficult, moreover, to see why viewing opposites as complementary should involve treating them as equal. Complementarity may be said to entail equality in so far as the relation between complementary terms is symmetrical and reversible: that is, if x complements y , then y must complement x . But this of course does not mean that the two terms are in every respect equal; in fact, in the

11. See, for example, the relation between the eastern Sumbanese noble rulers (*maràmba*) and the highest religious authorities (*ratu*), which in fact recalls that between king and priest in Hindu theory (see Forth 1981: 246, n.17). The notion of hierarchical opposition is also suggested by the fact that many paired terms in ritual language refer to entities related as whole and part.

most commonplace instances of complementarity that one could call to mind, they are palpably unequal.¹²

In other words, therefore, complementarity is but one aspect of the total relationship between terms that can enter into a complementary relation. Hierarchy is another such aspect;¹³ and in this regard I would furthermore suggest that hierarchy, particularly as it can be seen to apply to the right-left opposition, may best be viewed as a function of complementarity, and more specifically as a situation in which the manifest inequality between certain pairs of complements can be referred to their differential relation to the whole which they together compose. It will be apparent here that my main disagreement with Dumont concerns the way in which he opposes hierarchy and complementarity (by identifying the latter with the distinctive opposition) and the radical distinction he wishes to draw between analysis in terms of hierarchical opposition and analysis based on the notion of complementary opposition, or 'binary classification' (1979: 810). Indeed, in this respect Dumont's thesis is somewhat self-contradictory, for in another place (1980: 241-2) he admits 'complementariness' as an aspect of both distinctive and hierarchical opposition. Moreover, as indicated at the beginning, in the primary case considered here hierarchy appears as a concomitant of a particular system of binary classification, in that the subsumption of both right and left under the former term is bound up with the fact that both the opposition of male and female and that of life and death are analogically associated with the lateral contrast. The hierarchical relation, I suggest, is something that may be 'added to' a relation of complementary opposition, as indeed in the instances of eastern Sumbanese lateral symbolism described above. But if we are not to go too far beyond the data, then it must be admitted that not always is it clearly present, that is, not invariably does it find expression in cultural usage. Otherwise, by taking the notion of hierarchical opposition beyond a point where it can be sustained by the evidence, one is in danger of weakening a potentially useful analytical concept.

12. Dual symbolic classification based on analogy in fact presupposes an inequality, or asymmetry, between paired elements. Thus as Fox (1971: 247) has correctly observed, 'a dual cosmology is characterized not by a simple pairing of elements but by the analogical ordering of elements within pairs according to some criterion of asymmetry' (emphasis added).

13. See Dumont's statement that 'in saying that the right-left opposition refers to a whole we are saying that it has a hierarchical aspect...' (1979: 810).

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