

# From *Pengusaha* (Businessperson) to *Penguasa* (Ruler): Migrant Traders and the Politics of Hospitality in Indonesia

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This article discusses how Eastern Indonesian merchants maneuver into politics to expand their networks, while on the other hand they have to grapple with being perceived as foreigners. In Maluku Province, Eastern Indonesia, traders are considered *orang dagang* (foreigners, migrants) who do not belong to the local culture, even though they may have lived in the Malukan islands for centuries. *Orang dagang* are mostly migrants from Sulawesi Island (Butonese, Buginese, and Makassarese). Using a still undertheorized concept of hospitality, conveying cordial gestures toward potentially dangerous strangers to oblige them into a manageable relationship, this article elaborates on how hospitality and distributive activities come into play when traders navigate their tricky circumstances. Traders, often consisting of a few select ethnic groups in Indonesia, indeed occupy ambiguous and precarious positions in their locales. Their ambivalence has also been utilized, whether by ethnic groups, themselves, or others. This article also discusses the limits of hospitality. Despite traders trying to change their circumstances, there are still prejudices and societal structures that are consistently unchanged at the very core.

**Keywords:** trader, post-conflict society, entrepreneurial politicians, hospitality, migrant-local communities

## Introduction

This article depicts how migrants (Butonese, Buginese, and Makassarese) from the island of Sulawesi have finally turned to the political field in the province of Maluku. It aims to update classical and common arguments that traders care only about their business and move beyond to see how politics is a step for traders to further show their unboundedness, and yet also their interconnection with mutual benefits with people

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from different backgrounds. For the purpose of this article, I argue that traders offer hospitality not only to build their sense of belonging and reputation among local Malukans, but also with the political interest of expanding their power in the aftermath of religious conflict and decentralization in Maluku. Even though hospitality has its limits, it has allowed the upward mobility of some successful Butonese entrepreneurs in getting social-political recognition in the eyes of native Malukans.

Historians have found that people from Sulawesi fled to Eastern Indonesia as a result of two events. The first was during the mid-seventeenth century, as Sulawesi expanded throughout the Malukan archipelago when the Dutch East India Company (VOC) initiated a thorough *Hongitochten*, an inspection and protection of spice markets using traditional Malukan seafaring fleets. The aim of *Hongitochten* was to restrict the production of spices from Maluku in order to control their price as a global commodity (Muridan 2009, 24–26, 34–38). Bugis sailors from Sulawesi helped smuggle spices from Maluku to sell in the Makassar entrepôt; the spices were later exported to Singapore markets. The waves of migration from Sulawesi increased with the VOC's invasion of Makassar, culminating in a war from 1667 to 1669 that led many people from Makassar and Bugis to leave (Andaya 1995, 120–121; Sutherland 2021, 155–157). The arrival of these Sulawesi migrants was accompanied by Arab and Chinese traders who introduced various commodities from outside (Andaya 1991; Clarence-Smith 1998; Ellen 2003; Swadling 2019). In addition to exchanging the new commodities for forest products, the Arab and Chinese traders settled in various coastal areas that would become the main ports in Maluku, such as Ambon, Banda, Geser-Gorom, and Tehoru.

In the next century, migrants from Sulawesi occupied Maluku, especially Seram Island, since colonial plantations needed cheap labour following the prohibition of the slave trade in the mid-1800s (Ellen 2003; Goodman 2006). Migrants from Sulawesi, especially from Buton, came to live in Seram Island. They finally built villages around colonial plantations (Geger 2020, 327). In the twentieth century Sulawesi migrants exploited both marine and terrestrial resources by becoming key players in the expansion of marine commodity exports, as well as distributing imported goods from the West for rural Malukans (Palmer 2009; Sutherland 2021).

When religious conflict broke out in the province of Maluku during the Indonesian transition to democracy in 1999–2000 (Sidel 2007; Sumanto 2016), these Sulawesi migrants became the target of riots due to negative perceptions of their economic success in both rural and urban Maluku (Adam 2010). The natives were often left behind, with the migrants dominating markets and bureaucratic networks that used to be the domain of native Christian Malukans (Chauvel 1990).

One of the crucial concerns in post-decentralization, post-conflict Maluku is the

issue of migrant traders who have experienced upward economic mobility and have turned into new patronage players in politics. Since the dawn of decentralization in 2001, democracy has provided equal opportunity citizenship status for migrants to be as involved in politics as local people. There have been increasing cases of migrant traders getting involved in politics after succeeding in business. Migrant traders, especially those with origins in Sulawesi, realized that the way to strengthen their social position in Maluku was to enter politics, where they could not only gain a legal bargaining position in the government but also enhance their citizenship status in the eyes of native Malukans.

This article is a micro-perspective within the broad picture of mass democracy in Indonesia, which allows wealthy entrepreneurs to access politics and disburse their money to win elections as well as gain social legitimacy (Aspinall and Berenschot 2019). The phenomenon of businesspeople occupying local and national legislative seats, as well as positions within executive institutions, is generally widespread in Indonesia (Warburton 2018; Tempo 2019). With the high cost of politics, businesspeople use their powerful economic resources to stand for election to political seats. By combining approaches rooted in history, political cultures, and ethnicities, this article attempts to contribute to the original ideas on the emerging phenomenon of entrepreneur politicians in Indonesia. It focuses on two questions. First, what kind of historical and cultural conditions exist to enable migrant traders to get involved in politics and even win over native Malukans, despite being considered “foreigners”/“strangers” with no political rights in the eyes of Malukan customary laws? Second, how do these migrant traders, who are often seen as guests, turn into entrepreneurial politicians? Furthermore, what kind of hospitality methods enable migrant traders to successfully make the transition from mere traders to elected political representatives?

To answer these two questions, research was conducted in two different locations. From December 2018, research was conducted in Ambon; and from March to April 2019, as well as January to February 2020, it was in Masohi, South Seram. During the research, I interviewed 35 urban migrants living in Ambon City, as well as 20 inter-island traders around south Seram Island. My research interviews focused on many migrant traders involved in politics. I engaged in informal interactions with selected key informant store owners who sold home appliances and kitchen and plastic wares, and some who also had grocery stores that received spices and cash crops as payment from smaller kiosk owners around Maluku. I conducted semi-structured interviews with several successful Sulawesi traders, especially those from Buton and Bugis, who became involved in politics after gaining success in business. During 2018–20, I also gathered historical and anthropological reflections from migrant traders who were involved in politics and used

to serve on the local council. I went to the Rumphius Library in Ambon City and to the Balai Pelestarian Nilai Budaya Maluku (Center for the Conservation of Malukan Cultural Values) to copy files on seminars and conferences on culture and society held in Maluku. I also gathered the track records of migrant traders who entered politics from the local newspaper *Ambon Ekspres*.

My trader informants identified me as Muslim, which allowed me to get more data about traders and politicians with the same religious background. This identification was advantageous for me as almost all migrant traders were Muslim, which made interlocutors more open with me. The same religious background also allowed me to conduct informal interviews and follow migrant traders' daily activities. Christopher Duncan (2013), who conducted research in post-conflict North Maluku, was in a similar situation as he was identified as Christian. This permitted him to live in Christian communities, and his interview tapes were filled with Christian informants. However, this did not rule out his ability to collect data from Muslim informants. The method likely involved structured interviews with selected Muslim informants in a conducive place.

### **Indonesian Traders: Transformation from Strangers to Entrepreneurial Politicians**

This article contributes to updating classical and common arguments that traders care only about their business and financial profit, and that their business is kept separate from politics (Sutherland 2021). Through politics, traders try to reconstitute themselves as part of the native society. This article attempts to move forward to see how politics is a step for traders to further show their unboundedness, and also their interconnectedness and mutual benefits with people from different backgrounds. My concern is specific to migrants who focus on their work as successful entrepreneurs and later go into politics. In this section, I argue that a deep history of sociality living in Maluku has allowed traders to participate in contemporary politics despite the negative stereotypes still often directed at them.

In many societies in Indonesia—and other parts of Southeast Asia—local people comprise the majority but do not dominate market exchanges, while despite their status as minorities, ethnic traders dominate the market (Hefner 1998; Nonini 2015; Landa 2018). Traders are members of ethnic or religious minority groups considered strangers because they are not originally descended from the host society (Geertz 1963; Evers 1988; Ellen 1996). Sulawesi traders came from the outskirts of the sultanates of Bugis, Makassar, and Buton. They migrated out of the Sulawesi area, perhaps motivated by

their exclusion from inherited nobility status had they remained in their home area (Errington 1989; Palmer 2009). The system of dynastic “apical demotion,” where transmission of status is based on the mode of exclusive genealogies, hinders upward social mobility for common people. Migrant traders, therefore, are usually descendants of common people who were long mapped into lower-class rankings in their home areas. They decided to leave Sulawesi Island to change, to take a risk, and to reinvent themselves. Migrant traders build their own moral codes that are distinct from those of aristocratic communities, which are old and static and based on a charismatic status given by others (Freeman 2014).

The historian Anne Booth (2001) points out that in contrast to societies in the West, where capital can develop from within the community, capital in Indonesia is generally brought in by people from outside the local community. Ample studies argue that traders from outside the community are able to increase their scale of business for two main reasons: they are not part of the community, and they have the courage to circulate credit and debt. The traders’ position as outsiders enables them to circulate credit and debt more efficiently than local people entangled in kinship obligations (Landa 1994; Gudeman 2001; Whitehouse 2012). It is easier for migrants, who are not considered local people or part of the community, to develop credit, lend money at high rates of interest, buy local people’s crops at a very low price, bring money, and supply prestige goods for local societies during the harvesting of forest and agrarian products as well as sea products, without being burdened by social pressures that can restrict traders’ capital circulation (Hospes 1996, 234–235; Henley and Boomgaard 2009; Chou 2010). However, as Chris Gregory (1997) points out, the movement of capital in migrant networks is ultimately dependent on certain types of kinship and sociality. I will combine these phenomena in a section discussion on how entrepreneur politicians cannot rely solely on their wealth; they also need hospitality and cooperation with the local traditional leader, referred to in Maluku as *raja*.

In Ambonese Malay, the term “trader” has two meanings. The first is outsider, or *orang dagang*, which refers to strangers “not from around here”; and the second is trader, or *pedagang* or *pengusaha* (entrepreneurial people), who exchange commodities. To begin with, the term “trader” as outsider refers to people who do not belong to local traditions and ceremonies. Malukans have commonly used the term *orang dagang* for people who journey from outside Maluku for the sake of economic survival. Raymond Kennedy (1955) points out that since the 1950s, Malukans have viewed as outsiders the ethnic Butonese from Sulawesi who lived in several districts in the Ambon Islands. From my interviews with older local Malukans in Ambon City and South Seram, it appears that they have popularly used the term *orang dagang* since the 1960s. *Orang*

*dagang* has the same definition as *orang rantau*: people who were originally from outside Maluku and journeyed in search of economic success by running small businesses as entrepreneurs.

The second meaning refers to *pedagang* or *pengusaha*: middlemen, moneylenders, and traders who come from outside the local society and stimulate the local economy. As these people mostly work in the market, harbours, and fishing docks and deal with cash, *pedagang* has become a derogatory term for outsiders who have different cultural values and ethics from the locals. This condescending view of traders was promoted by the New Order state. The specialization of particular ethnic groups as traders is also related to how they have been classified and regulated by the state, specifically by excluding them from owning land (Peluso 2012, 90–92). In Maluku, the negative feelings toward migrants do not stop at stereotypes. In customary law, all migrants, especially in rural Malukan areas, are denied the right to own land and the right to be elected as traditional leaders. They only have the right to vote (Lee 1997; Kadir 2019b).

During my research, I often heard Ambonese describe *orang dagang* as individualistic, greedy, dirty (*pankotor*), lazy, and uncivilized.<sup>1)</sup> *Pedagang* are seen as dirty since they work in the marketplace, which is literally filthy and muddy. Marketplaces, metaphorically, are also places for greedy people who cannot control their desire for money, i.e., avarice (Brenner 1998; Kadir 2019a). These negative views were strengthened into feelings of jealousy when middlemen and traders from Sulawesi and ethnic Chinese migrants controlled almost all the clove trade in rural Maluku, when the clove price boomed from the 1970s to the 1990s (Hospes 1996).

This article tries to debunk such old stereotypes and classical research to go beyond depicting migrants as foreigners who have a problem mingling with local people (Evers and Schrader 1994). The second-class treatment of traders and migrants in the face of customary laws has often led them to become the vanguard of state modernity in the marginal areas of Maluku (Spyer 2000). Jacques Bertrand (1995), who conducted research in Maluku during the New Order era, shows that compared to natives Malukans, traders and migrants frequently comply with governmental policies and programs. Learning from the state-endorsed development initiatives from which they benefited under the New Order government, capable migrants have turned their entrepreneurial wealth into political power in the post-New Order era. In addition, migrant traders play the role of patron,

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1) Tsuchiya Kenji and James Siegel (1990, 61–76) have observed that Butonese migrants in Banda were despised because they did not speak Bahasa Indonesia (the Indonesian language) and mostly lagged behind in terms of education. However, this argument was valid only in the 1970s. Lately, the Butonese have achieved higher educational accomplishments, and most of them can speak Bahasa Indonesia.

middleman, or moneylender, even sometimes emulating the administrative functions of the state, specifically in frontier areas. Migrant traders develop regions where the state fails to do so (Timmer 2010, 707). In some cases, migrant traders—as entrepreneurs—play a role in the center as non-state actors who emulate the role of the state in cases of regulating justice, especially by arranging natural resources and sharing them in the midst of environmental depletion. As patrons, migrant traders play a role that resembles that of state agents by providing financial assistance and lending money to clients, but also taking care of basic infrastructure and their clients' educational and health needs. Traders also take risks by buying the harvest in advance during uncertain seasons. The more successful they are in business, the more these traders are seen like the state since they share money when they have it. Jaap Timmer's (2010) argument is consistent with my research findings in Seram, which are discussed in the section below in the case of Haji Ahmad, Huang, and Sadikin. However, while Timmer's study shows that migrants struggle for their rights as citizens by legalizing tenure arrangements, this article illustrates that the dynamic of self-making by many successful migrants has improved their status through their political involvement.

After the sectarian conflict of 1999–2004, migrant traders benefited from the implementation of decentralization, which allowed them to be involved in local elections and even to express their cultural and religious traditions in politics (Bräuchler 2015). However, Nils Bubandt (2004) argues that the regional political and cultural map of Maluku was not shaped solely by the effects of decentralization. The new local politics were also influenced by cultural and historical conditions before the advent of decentralization. Long before decentralization, Phillip Winn's (2008) study on Butonese living in Banda Island showed that the definition of custom (*adat*) specifically belonged to land rather than to people. Accordingly, the Butonese often used this as an excuse to participate in local rituals and ceremonies by using their bodily performances. The Butonese in Banda perceived that *adat*, as a relevant body of practices, would be maintained in exile (Winn 2008, 96–97). In contrast, Geger Riyanto (2020) shows that Butonese migrants can claim to be indigenous people through shared cosmologies and reproduced myths, as they have been living in Seram Island for many generations. This allows the elder migrant generations to share their history and tie their folk stories into the beliefs and rituals practiced by native Malukans. Similar to Geger, Timo Kaartinen (2009, 61–65) shows that migrants from outside Maluku learned from internal Malukan migrants how to frame themselves as insiders: for instance, migrants from Banda Island (Central Maluku) who moved to Kei Island (Southeast Maluku) due to the VOC genocide in 1620. The Bandanese constructed a shared history and proved ancestral kinship and alliances between their ancestors and power holders. One of the aims was to legitimize access to



land on Kei for the Bandanese.

After the conflict and during the decentralization era, migrants have been expanding their business in both Muslim and Christian communities. The increasing ability of traders to enter post-conflict politics began with Muslim migrants taking over businesses in Christian parts of the island (Adam 2008). With these businesses as a starting point, migrant traders could build social capital to develop their political reach among Christian voters.

Migrant traders' ability to reach voters in Christian-majority villages has a history. Well before the conflict of the late 1990s, native Malukans, both Muslim and Christian, provided a place for the Butonese to live in vacant hamlets (Grimes 2006; Kadir 2019b). Accordingly, when migrant traders entered politics, they pragmatically tried to reach out to their brothers and sisters (*basudara*) in Christian villages. To do so, some also joined nationalist and modern Islamic pluralistic parties such as Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (National Awakening Party) and Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandate Party). The main expectation in joining these political parties was to be accepted by both communities, Muslims and Christians.<sup>2)</sup> One of my informant traders, La Ridho, was first elected to the local legislature when Seram Bagian Barat (Western Seram Regency) was established in 2013. This, La Ridho said, was despite the fact that he had joined Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (Prosperous Justice Party; PKS), a party known for its exclusive ideology. Similar to the nature of traders, who must be open to any customers, La Ridho changed the course of identity politics in Maluku to become more pragmatic. He not only merges ethnic and religious sentiments to attract both migrants and native Muslim Malukans, but he also uses nationalistic populist jargon to gain Christian voters. When he runs a campaign, in order to broaden his appeal among voters in both Muslim and Christian communities, he changes the political jargon of PKS from "serving the *ummah* (Muslim brotherhood)" to "serving the *rakyat* (the people)." *Ummah* refers only to Muslim communities, both natives and migrants, while *rakyat* can embrace Christians too.

A successful pharmacy businessman in Seram Island, La Andi, who joined the nationalist Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Great Indonesian Movement Party; Gerindra), emphasized:

Money has no sex nor religious identity. It can be exchanged and cross over to both Muslims and Christians. I learned that from my experience selling medicine during the conflict. Everybody needs medicine regardless of their religious background. Even far before the conflict, we, the Butonese, lived alongside the Christians.

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2) Christians have preferred nationalist parties since President Soeharto fused Parkindo (Indonesian Christian Party) into PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party) in 1977. Since then, from the perspective of many Malukan people, PDI has been synonymous with Christianity.



Well before the conflict, migrants' decisions on where to dwell were not only determined by the kindness of native Malukuans but also based on where rural migrants saw the potential for clove, nutmeg, and coconut commodities to be exchanged for labor and cash.

The way migrant traders are involved in open politics, with no religious or ethnic boundaries, reflects the logic of commerce. Commercial activities make it possible to create friendships and trusting relationships, even under differing ideologies (Marsden 2012, 119, 127). Magnus Marsden (2018, 135–136) has shown that being a trader requires social interactions beyond conventional boundaries. In the Southeast Asian context, migrants are mostly traders with high mobility beyond religious communities and national and geographic boundaries. This flexible, cross-cultural interaction ability helps to mobilize their commercial activities and trade networks. However, trade history is not only about searching for land and customers and facilitating commodities, but also about sharing practices and cosmopolitan ideas (Ho 2002; Kahn 2006). My research has shown that it is especially this sociality talent that later helps migrant traders to develop their political activities that cross religious communities.

Marsden (2012, 121) notes that the condition of traders as guests who cross regional boundaries gives them the capacity to rearticulate their identity according to the space they live in. However, traders who do business across regional and state boundaries offer their hospitality as a pragmatic mechanism. The versatility of hospitality provided, as well as moral ethics, is part of a calculated strategy targeting the host. Hospitality can serve very useful, and even profitable, ends. Beyond economics, it also provides commercial ground for gaining advantage over stronger competitors in both everyday social life and politics.

### **The Politics of Hospitality**

My original contribution in this section is to argue that one of the reasons the Butonese traders were accepted and able to succeed in politics was because of their hospitality. Matei Candea and Giovanni Da Col (2012) show that hospitality emerges and is entangled with gift and material exchanges. Likewise, Sian Lazar (2004) in Bolivia and Lauren Bonilla and Tuya Shagdar (2018) in Mongolia demonstrate in their research that material gifting from a patron is a potential instrument for cultivating personal affection between citizens and political figures. For guests, being social helps to shift their position from dangerous stranger to familiar face (Candea and Da Col 2012, 14; Shryock 2012). For Marshall Sahlins (2009), hospitality serves a political purpose: to incorporate a new affin-

ity into the giver's own kinship circles. It also maintains the trade relationship, reinforces hierarchical differences, and establishes leadership. Similarly, Sherry Ortner (1978, 62) argues that hospitality is an arena for enacting social drama. As a display of virtues, hospitality mediated through rituals is commonly seen and becomes a public conversation. In contrast to acts of selfishness and greed, the act of hospitality is the most generalized form of being social.

Hospitality toward strangers is part of both Islamic and Christian ethics. Thus, genuine hospitality is something that local Malukan people also show toward traders, not merely the other way around. From a historical perspective, local Malukans showed their hospitality and generosity by providing vacant land along the border between two large native Malukan villages (Grimes 2006; Adam 2010). Hospitality has its political goals. In East Indonesian social stratification (Wouden 1968; Adhuri 2013), Jos Platenkamp (2019) found that Malukans had a basic dualism structure that distinguished natives from migrants. Malukans are aware that migrants are strangers who have different ancestors and cosmological principles. These antagonistic characteristics have potentially violent consequences. To avoid conflict, the migrants have been given political power over communication with the outside world and military concerns, while the indigenous people are in charge of local resources and land. This structure provides an effective framework for local communities to incorporate new events (as well as new actor groups) into their worldview, such as in the past foreign traders and colonial intrusions. Both parts are necessary and fundamental for society. Platenkamp (2019) shows that local Malukans solve the problem of migrants who still remain strangers by incorporating them into the customary systems. Villagers in Maluku deal with migratory populations in varied ways. Migrants are assigned to specific village segments (*soa*), and thus they have representational rights (Bräuchler 2015).

Learning from the historical and cultural modalities above, a successful and wealthy migrant entrepreneur has the ability to turn their wealth into political patronage by providing exchanges in material goods or resources. One example of a successful Butonese merchant who turned to politics is Haji Ahmad. He was born in West Seram (Seram Bagian Barat; SBB), but his father was from Lapan Dewa, Buton. In 1965 he started a cement business, as his parents could not afford his middle school fees. After the conflict ended in 2004, Haji Ahmad's business grew very well. The demand for cement increased. Many developers built houses on lots that had been left vacant during the conflict, and this created high demand for housing materials. Haji Ahmad was appointed as one of the official distributors of Tonasa Cement, the biggest cement company from East Indonesia, based in Makassar, South Sulawesi Province. There are five official distributors in Ambon, three of them ethnic Chinese and the other two Butonese. As a major distribu-

tor, Haji Ahmad distributes cement to Ambon on a large scale three times a month. He also supplies ethnic Chinese metal shops in the town of Ambon. He does not tack on a high profit margin for ethnic Chinese. When selling a sack of cement at 65,000 rupiah, he makes a profit of only about 5,000 rupiah.

Haji Ahmad runs the trick of selling cement on a large scale, but cheap, so that ethnic Chinese merchants will not overtake his role as a major distributor in Ambon. Under his holding company, he has also opened several branches of metal shops and retail shops. His son takes care of several of his metal shops and mini-marts that have spread around the Hitu Peninsula. At the start of his business, Haji Ahmad had four big shops: three of them on the Hitu Peninsula in the districts of Hila, Negeri Lama, and Nania, as well as one in the town of Ambon. Unlike cement from other companies such as Tiga Roda and Bosowa, Tonasa cement comes to Maluku unpacked; thus, it requires more employees to pack and distribute it. In Ambon, Haji Ahmad's recruiting of 20 employees from among the local population is seen as contributing to saving young Malukans from unemployment.

In 2011 one of Haji Ahmad's sons, 34-year-old Ihsan, ran as a member of the local House of Representatives (Anggota DPRD Tingkat II) of SBB for one term. People were inclined to vote for Ihsan with the memory of Haji Ahmad's generosity. Long before the election, Haji Ahmad was known among the villagers for being generous in providing for material needs. He donated abundant materials from his metal shops, such as cement, brick, and zinc to build houses, bridges, mosques, and a health center, as well as materials to carry electricity, clean water supplies, and drainage facilities. This aid helped his son get elected as a member of the local council.

Traders' involvement in politics by using their hospitality is not unique to migrant traders. Ethnic Chinese Malukans, who have better-established trade networks, also do the same thing. Traders elected as political leaders are inseparable from the role of their previous generations who offered hospitality by creating patron-client networks in the villages. Huang, an ethnic Chinese Malukan merchant politician, inspires other Butonese merchants who have just risen in popularity during the era of decentralization. He is one of the biggest entrepreneurs in Seram Island. He was the largest supplier of electronic devices, but his shop was forced to close due to the economic crisis of 1998: the exchange rate of the rupiah weakened against the dollar, and all his products were imported. During and after the sectarian conflict that began in 1999, he turned his businesses into grocery stores, which continue to operate. Since his business developed well, he expanded into drinking water. He is the first entrepreneur with a water company in Seram Island.

In 2004 he joined a new national party, Partai Demokrat (Democratic Party; PD).

As he was good with finance, the PD trusted him to be the party treasurer. Huang is from the first generation of trader politicians. His parents had only been involved in the spice business. As in the case of Haji Ahmad's son, Huang was easily elected as a member of the regional legislature because of the cultural reciprocities due prior generations: "My parents have a lot of credit (*jasa*) with the villagers who vote for me. We give a lot to both the community and to the *raja* (traditional village head) individually." Huang remembered his father, who brought fishing nets to people in Tehoru, the village his parents came from. He also procured labour from Waai, known for its good-quality construction, installing fishing nets in the open sea and constructing housing and mosques. Huang's father also donated money for building a big mosque in Tehoru, even though he was of a different religious background from the majority of voters. This kind of generosity on the part of traders helps them build a good reputation for themselves, which is an asset they can later bring into politics. When Huang ran for local elections in 2014, the majority of people in Tehoru selected him with the memory of his parents' generosity.

Huang pointed out that hospitality must fulfill society's desire for progress. Therefore, gifts that he donates to the people involve infrastructure that symbolizes modernity, such as electric lighting and clean water. He metaphorically said of constructing infrastructure, "It's like building a temple." People easily see the object, and it reminds them of the politician's performance. To follow in his father's footsteps during his tenure from 2014 to 2019, he built a telecommunications tower in Tehoru. This tower symbolizes the villagers' connection to the rest of the nation and the world. During his tenure he also built a bridge, and a seawall to defend against the ocean, and installed 24-hour electricity facilities. Then he extended electricity cables from Perusahaan Listrik Negara (the state electricity company) to illuminate the villages adjoining Tehoru.

Like Haji Ahmad and Huang, successful migrant traders believe that money is not the only means for earning the trust of native Malukan voters in selecting a leader. In offering hospitality, traders use two main strategies. The first is to blanket their hospitable intentions with varieties of local rituals, ceremonies, and even religious concepts, to neutralize the appearance of political interest. The hospitality should be consistent, with constant maintenance and performance. Like other politicians, traders have to show their presence by visiting people, attending important ceremonies, showing up for wedding feasts and funerals, and consistently providing money, even before the elections. In the case of those who end up not being elected even though they gave money, the reason is usually because they showed up right before the election.

As described in a previous publication (Kadir 2019b), many successful migrant traders gained favorable positions among the locals by exploiting traditions, customs,

and hospitality. Sadikin, a successful trader with Butonese lineage, for example, lived in Batu Merah, a Muslim-majority village in downtown Ambon, but his shop was in Passo, a Christian-majority village. When the government decided to move traders from the crowded and slummy market in Batu Merah to Passo, Sadikin supported it. To show his support and compliance with the government's suggestion (Bertrand 1995), Sadikin gathered Muslims and Christians, as well as traders and common people, before the move by organizing a traditional Ambonese food festival, *makan patita*, or sharing a meal together.

In addition to that, realizing that these two villages had a long traditional connection, Sadikin was actively involved in a ceremony to warm up the inter-village alliance (*panas pela*) between Batu Merah and Passo in 2010. *Pela* is a system of dyadic social relations that ties together different villages, often with different religious backgrounds. One village may have two or three *pela* relations with different villages. This system ties together villages through a commitment to support and help one another (Bartels 2017).<sup>3)</sup>

Sadikin absorbed and assimilated autochthonous customs such as *makan patita* and *panas pela* in order to create a sense of unity. Since migrants do not have the right to own customary land (*tanah petuanan*) (Winn 2008), the way these entrepreneur politicians make their presence felt is through active involvement in rituals and ceremonies so that their acts of hospitality can be seen by local Malukuans. Entrepreneur politicians are aware that rituals, ceremonies, and acts of hospitality can create social solidarity among migrants and the host society. Likewise, when entrepreneurs enter a state, they mold and reinforce attitudes and perspectives through ceremonies and special occasions.

Sadikin succeeded in turning into an entrepreneur politician when he moved to Buru Island. He ran for the local legislature in Buru Island with PKS, the Islamic party, and was elected in 2014 and reelected in 2019. He observed that the reason many successful migrant traders who were elected in politics for one term were not reelected was that they never visited or got involved by recognizing local rituals, events, and ceremonies in their own districts. Through being involved in local rituals, events, and ceremonies, Sadikin applied his hospitality by paying attention to urgent collective needs in the community besides water and electricity.

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3) The beginning of *pela* relations between Batu Merah and Passo is believed to date back to 1506, when the people of Batu Merah came back from paying tribute to the Sultan of Ternate. Halfway back to Batu Merah in their outrigger canoe (*arumbai*), they rescued people from Passo whose canoe and all of their goods had almost sunk off a peninsula on Buru Island. The people of Batu Merah shared their food, sago, smoked fish, and coconut with the people of Passo. In gratitude, the Passo people declared their village as the younger brother of Batu Merah and pledged to form a *pela-gandong* relation. According to the Raja of Passo whom I interviewed, the last *pela* before 2010 was in 1960.

Sadikin found that mosques and graveyards had become urgent collective needs. Since the conflict ended, Muslims have wanted their own sovereign graveyard separate from Christians. Land struggles for graveyards are important as the small islands of Buru and Ambon have limited land to allocate for graveyards. Likewise, mosques have become an identity requirement for the Muslim community. “Muslims also want to have a well-built mosque of strong construction as Christians have built a well-constructed church in the aftermath of conflict,” said Sadikin.

In the realm of politics, Sadikin gives funds to voters, especially those who come from the same background as him, and he uses various Islamic terms for giving such *sadaqah*. *Sadaqah* is a voluntary act of flexible generosity that can be given at any time with no minimum amount of money and/or material. It is a neutralization technique to protect against criminal charges under legal political terms such as money politics, bribery, and corruption. The act of *sadaqah* is in line with the classical theory of gifts from Marcel Mauss, where he closes his argument by quoting Qur’anic verses that advocate charity to the poor as not only giving to God but as an act that will be remembered by many societies (quoted in Shryock 2012, 21–22).

Sadikin likened business to cultivating plants and *sadaqah* to water. If both business and political acts lack water, they will die. The more one gives, the more one pours water on the plants, the more one gets in return. Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (2007), who conducted research in the Ambon Islands, stated that various Islamic giving systems, specifically *zakat* and *sadaqah*, are also useful as informal social safety nets for those who do not have a regular income. Based on this social system, traders develop the social safety nets into political interest.

Helping people to build infrastructure may seem altruistic, but behind it is an interest in long-term politics. A common belief among the traders I interviewed was that if wealth were distributed generously, it would be reciprocated. Entrepreneur politicians are aware that in order to expand their business from the economy to politics, they have to offer greater hospitality to their constituents. The housing materials in their shops become commodities and gifts at the same time. They become gifts during certain occasions such as conflict and political elections, but on normal days housing materials are a very lucrative commodity (Appadurai 1986).

In the second strategy of hospitality, migrant trader politicians build a close relationship with traditional village leaders, or *raja*. The collaboration between traders and *raja* is not a new phenomenon; it has existed since the precolonial era. Heather Sutherland (2021) has pointed out that *raja* control the flow of commodities, so their power is decentralized not only in politics but also in the economy. A *raja*’s power involves fluid alliances based on common interests between clans and outside traders.

In contemporary politics, when traders implement their hospitality strategies, they use *raja* as political brokers. Richard Chauvel (1990) and Ardiman Kelihu (2021) have pointed out the continuity of history, where *raja* play important roles in connecting the outside world with the area within their territorial rule. Migrant merchants cannot deliver their hospitality if they do not have a good relationship with the *raja* and his local customary council (*saniri*); the presence and support of a *raja* are crucial for traders' political success. Even during the Central Maluku local elections in 2012, 2017, and 2021, entrepreneur politicians of migrant descent paired with either native Muslim or native Christian Malukan candidates. The aim was to capture ballots from villages with a majority of Butonese residents. During the campaign, candidates recalled how warmly the *raja* welcomed them with the *cakalele* dance, a traditional war dance welcoming guests. The hospitality of the *cakalele* dance is usually followed by a *makan patita*.

A trader's reputation is linked to the local leader's respectability. Migrant traders generally do not come to a village and directly offer their hospitality. In customary institutions *raja* and their apparatus have been political brokers since the colonial period, connecting the political and economic interests of the colonizer with local communities (Chauvel 1990). This role continues even in contemporary politics in Maluku (Tomsa 2009). Thus, unlike in the world of commerce, where traders can directly become patrons by buying crops and providing loans, in politics they have to ask for permission from the *raja* and senior officials in the village system with the same ethnic background as the majority of voters. Approaching local leaders and their team members has become a more effective means of political consolidation for traders, since political parties have a limited ability to establish relationships at the village level (Aspinall and Berenschot 2019, 31–37). Traders' hospitality strategies and creating linkages with traditional leaders have cultural and historical origins, as described in the initial discussion, with traders being joined to the autochthonous society through mythmaking, rituals, and ceremonies (Kartinen 2009; Platenkamp 2019; Geger 2020). In my research, I show that migrant traders use these kinds of old historical and cultural practices in contemporary politics. However, despite migrant traders' attempts to become part of the native society, economic inequality and social suspicion remain. Following is a discussion on the limits of hospitality.

### **The Limits of Hospitality**

In this section, I problematize people's responses to the gestures of hospitality by entrepreneur politicians. The aim is to evaluate the theoretical concept of hospitality, but also



to describe the biographical profiles of merchants, their electoral strategies, as well as vignettes of Indonesian and local political landscapes.

Unlike Ortner (1978), Michael Herzfeld (2012, 212) perceives the hospitality offered by traders as being motivated by a desire to expand economic and political power rather than altruism or civic virtue. When seen from the people's standpoint, the political behavior of Haji Ahmad, Huang, and Sadikin with respect to the material cost of political engagement may be viewed ironically as a condition for the traders' social acceptance. On the surface, it may be seen as benevolence toward the villagers, which helps the traders to gain social acceptance. On the other, the traders' seemingly virtuous behavior is self-serving. It is a competitive strategy to mobilize voters as well as eliminate political opponents.

Therefore, hospitality has an ambiguous value. Herzfeld does not sugarcoat the phenomenon; rather, he examines how it indicates an ambiguous relationship between courtesy and threat. Displaying generosity and manners can be seen as hypocrisy as it may mask evil plans. The migrant givers create a dependency in their recipients, and their generosity signals a search for new class privilege and often bureaucratic power.

Sometimes hospitable gestures by migrant traders can cause problems. Their purpose in investing in politics is not to foster social integration but to maintain the socioeconomic distance between migrants and Malukans. My conversations with people living in areas targeted by entrepreneur politicians show that they are aware that the traders entering politics are only enriching themselves. In the public's view, traders enter the world of politics only to make things easier for their businesses through political lobbying. The most visible deliverable for entrepreneur politicians is to expand their procurement projects. Entrepreneur politicians who sit on local legislative councils have a direct link to the Department of Public Works, which funds roads, bridges, and irrigation infrastructure. From local legislative councils, entrepreneur politicians use their own *persekutuan komanditer* (limited partnership) to win project tenders. Partnerships between entrepreneur politicians and the Department of Public Works enable goods for public works projects to be procured from shops owned by the political traders themselves. It is common knowledge in the villages in South Seram, for example, that council members who are also migrant traders are behind almost all the limited partnerships that build bridges, drainage systems, coastal reclamation walls, and roads.

Average citizens are aware that traders' hospitality has a political and economic purpose. Politics is an investment by migrant traders to get bigger profits later. It is generally known that in addition to a wider political network, entrepreneurs who successfully enter politics gain a significant increase in material wealth (Warburton 2014). Various political analyses show that growing numbers of entrepreneurs who became

politicians have facilitated corruption and collusion. Such discussion may be linked further to accounts about the devolution of political power in post-Suharto Indonesia, where the existence of a few groups of oligarchs has led to rising inequality, as a few cliques dominate economic resources (Hadiz 2010; Fukuoka 2012; Warburton 2014). Hospitality, indeed, requires traders to be flexible and adaptable to current social, economic, and political conditions. However, it does not change local communities' view of traders as *orang dagang*. The adaptability and dynamics of migrant traders cannot fully change local conservative views concerning *orang dagang*. Local people still uphold and reproduce the conventional position that a migrant trader's hospitality must be endorsed by local leaders with traditional respectability. In other words, the hospitality offered by traders does not significantly change either the social structure or economic inequality based on ethnic and religious differentiation.

Nonetheless, I believe that despite the limits of hospitality in preventing corruption, let alone economic inequality, it can become a way to maintain the agreement between two parties to live alongside each other without permitting resentment to degenerate into open conflict. In other words, despite hospitality creating ambiguous feelings, it is needed to neutralize the potential hostility between hosts and outsiders. It is needed to stabilize the relationship between the host community and strangers and to prevent expressions of conflict. As guests, migrants are aware that the hospitality they provide contains ambiguous values because their relationship with the host is also filled with tension and anxiety (Marsden 2012, 120–121), especially in Maluku, where the increased social mobility of migrants leads to their control over the political sphere.

## Conclusion

Political science studies reveal that the high cost of politics in Indonesia leads businessmen to get directly involved in politics. However, my original research contributes to the discussion of politician entrepreneurs, where the majority of them in Maluku are seen as strangers with different ethnic backgrounds from the local people. For migrant traders, plunging into politics is a way to handle the anxiety of being constantly treated as outsiders while attempting to expand their networks in accordance with their values. It has become an urgent need for them to practice hospitality, especially after the sectarian conflict of 1999–2004, because many Malukan people do not embrace the idea of reconciliation, even though Muslims and Christians coexist. The two communities continue to live separately, but they have many parallel political agreements and ongoing dialogues (Duncan 2016, 469–470). However, the political hospitality offered

by traders does not necessarily indicate assimilation between migrants and indigenous people. At least through hospitality, migrant traders manage to achieve a sense of belonging without assimilation.

Hospitality cannot fully integrate traders with the local community, but it does mitigate jealousy on the part of the local community. The hospitality offered by migrant traders puts local communities in an ambiguous position. The ambiguous feelings among local people arise due to two contrasting features of hospitality: on the one hand it shows generosity, but on the other it indicates self-interest (Parry and Bloch 1989, 9). The notion of hospitality based on purely altruistic motives is the other side of the coin from the idea of hospitality being a purely utilitarian exchange. In other words, hospitality is practiced due to a combination of the desire to build civic virtue to create a sense of belonging and an effort to build up a kind of savings and investment. Through the demonstration of hospitality, a trader's investment in politics advances their own economic interests and also gains them recognition from the host society.

In the end, rather than traders only bringing in capital from outside, they are also benefiting from the constrained market access and rent seeking enabled by the area's position in the periphery of the state. Without the support of the local leader (*raja*) as a patron, many political entrepreneurs remain purely businessmen. Local people and leaders, therefore, also play an important role in balancing local power with the power of entrepreneur politicians.

Despite the limits of hospitality and the materiality of giving, both parties—traders and local people—need each other to lubricate their sociality. Objects have a “history,” according to Arjun Appadurai (1986), and the same things are framed as gifts and commodities at various periods, depending on the situation and power relations involved. Gregory (1997), in his critique of Appadurai, points out that when two parties are in an unequal relationship, the same object might be viewed as a gift by one party but a commodity by the other. The distinction reflects the different abilities of local people and traders to circulate valuable things in larger markets. This explains why, specifically in the Maluku scenario, transactions motivated by evident pecuniary or political interests are frequently portrayed as “gifts” or “hospitality” by (and occasionally for the benefit of) relatively powerless local people. The latter require chiefs and traders to broker their interactions with markets and the state.

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