

Sincerity, "Modernity," and the Protestants

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The project of religious conversion commonly proposes a more or less dramatic transformation of the person. To the extent that this project succeeds or fails, it may offer more general insights into the practices by which human subjects are constituted. This article looks at the subject proposed by religious conversion in the context of certain common ideas about "modernity." Drawing on the 20th-century Dutch Calvinist missionization of Sumba in eastern Indonesia, it concerns Protestant efforts to define the subject, especially as it is supposed to transcend this world, and thus to distinguish it from that which might threaten its relative autonomy. My focus is on changes in signifying practices and ideologies within what can be called a representational economy.¹ The article begins with a brief discussion of the effort to reform the subject by redefining its distinction from objects such as material goods. It then turns at greater length to the normative ideal of sincerity in speech as another component of this reform. The concept of sincerity is of particular interest here because of the links it forges among language, social interaction, personal character, freedom, regimes of truth, and some narratives of modernity. I would suggest, though I cannot argue it here, that these links are part of the taken-for-granted background for the liberal tradition out of which have emerged many of the questions, methods, politics, and worries of anthropology and related disciplines at both the epistemic and ethical levels. I draw on the ethnographic example of Sumbanese Calvinists as one illustration of some general problems faced by the effort to produce and sustain a relatively autonomous subject. The trouble is partly due, I argue, to the inescapably social and material character of the representational practices by which that ideal autonomy is meant to be inhabited.

As a form of self-understanding, the subject is likely to require some contrastive terms—those objects against which its distinctiveness can be defined. Such "objects" may comprise not only material things, but also institutions, rituals, social others, and the language one shares with those others. For instance, we need look no farther than familiar, sometimes trivial anxieties about plagiarism, quotation, cliché and originality, truth telling, keeping one's word,

mimicry, and finding one's own voice, to find hints of how thoroughly language can trouble the boundaries of the subject. This linguistic trouble with boundaries, the sense that heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981) might pose a threat, however, is hardly confined to minor questions of style and everyday ethics. Religious traditions abound with worries about the slippery, corrupting, or deceiving effects of language (and, signs, more generally) and efforts to control them (Keane 1997b). In many cases, these worries center on the perceived external and material or objectlike character of language. Early English Puritans, for instance, considered rhetorically elaborate styles of language to be "fleshly" distortions of God's truth (Bauman 1983:2). Their insistence on plain style and even silence seems to have been, at least in part, a response to an intuition that language is external to that spiritual component defining what is most valuable in the human person, that which would transcend the material world. To the extent that their worries about fleshly language articulate with their worries about other aspects of the "external" world like showy clothing, the forms of etiquette, liturgical rites, architectural ornament, or religious icons, they are part of a more general representational economy.² As this article attempts to show, language ideology, that is, people's assumptions about language (Kroskrity 2000), may be linked to ideas about material goods through their respective implications for the presumed nature of the human subject.

The 17th-century Puritans were not isolated in their reformist interest in words and their relation to the material and social world. Their contemporaries, the scientists who founded the Royal Society, promoted a "naked, natural way of speaking" (quoted in Bauman 1983:2). They aspired to language so transparent that it would do no more than refer to those things intended by its speaker, thus serving as a proper vehicle for objectivity. The convergence of Puritan morality and scientific objectivity at a particular historical moment, in a similar language ideology, would seem to be no accident. In their conjunction, I suggest, we can see themes that have come to be characteristic of some common ideas about the proposed subject of modernity. Briefly put, this is the subject whose distinction from the domain of objects is produced not only in the norm of sincerity, but also in its sharp distinction from material goods and in a related aversion to the supposed excesses of ritual, idolatry, and even courtesy—an aversion that the historian Peter Burke (1987:13, 224) has suggested is characteristic of modern Europe.

Protestant Conversion and the Project of Modernity

One ethnographic site in which the links between the moral and historical dimensions of the subject become especially apparent is the missionary encounter and subsequent early generations of converts. A focus on proselytization and conversion has played a crucial role in the historical self-definition of Protestantism, which often understands itself as having produced a rupture with corrupt traditions or, on the mission frontier, as having brought the unsaved into a new historical trajectory. Even when Protestants insist they are only returning to the original church, in historical context their actions are

commonly understood to institute a new beginning. The new beginning is often reproduced in more immediate terms as well. For those sects that consider backsliding a perpetual threat, conversion anew is demanded even of those born into the church. In conceptual terms, the aspirations of conversion give rise to a host of commonplace ideas and assumptions about iconoclasm, spirituality and materialism, conscience, agency, worldliness and transcendence.

The example of the Puritans' doctrinal kin among present-day Sumbanese converts suggests that Protestant visions of the subject may be deeply but also problematically involved with the concept of modernity.³ Of course it has long been conventional to identify modernity with a mechanistic worldview, scientific method, the rise of capitalism, the growth of the bureaucratic state, and (in association with them all) inexorable secularization. Even Max Weber (1958) portrayed the Protestant Ethic eventuating in an iron cage of distinctly *nonsecular* construction.⁴ But the project of becoming self-consciously "modern" can resemble that of religious conversion in certain respects. Both projects often propose to transform the human subject, disabused of earlier errors and abstracted from the constraints of former social entanglements. For example, 19th- and early-20th-century Christian missionaries across the colonial world often thought they were confronting varieties of animism and fetishism (see Pietz 1985). That is, the unenlightened were confused about the true distinctions among humans, things, and divinity: imputing spirit to dead matter, divine agency to ordinary creatures, and so forth. In effect, when the missionaries attacked animal sacrifice, the worship of carvings, or magical language, they took the side of science—at times unwittingly, at others quite purposefully—in disenchanting some part of the world. For the transformation of the subject would seem to be inseparable from the redefining of its distinction from the world of objects. The task of bringing converts to a proper understanding of their spiritual nature required convincing them that rocks, trees, animals, or, in some cases, even words, were not similarly endowed (Keane 1998).

My immediate concern here is not with the economic effects of the "Protestant ethic" nor the entire range of disciplinary practices that implicated missions in new regimes of power, but the representational economy that helps underwrite them. For Protestant missions have offered some of the representational practices and ideologies by which certain features of the concept and promises of modernity, however ambivalently, have entered into nonelite discourses, everyday habits, and commonplace demeanor across the globe.⁵ Its conceptual world has become available to all sorts and manners of people in ways that more esoteric concerns of literature, philosophy, political thought, and science have not. Moreover, because Protestantism commonly aims to embed itself in everyday practices, rarely considering "mere" ritual form to be sufficient, it creates a wealth of means by which new concepts—including "modernity" and "the sincere person"—can be self-consciously inhabited in concrete terms by the most ordinary of people. To be sure, there is great variety among kinds of Protestantism, and antimaterialism or an emphasis on the speaker's own voice are not found in all cases (e.g., Coleman 2000; Harding

2000). But for the issues I raise here, the orthodoxy represented by the Sumbanese Protestant Church seems in many respects exemplary of the varieties of Protestantism that predominate today.

An obvious objection at this point would be to observe that many of the claims I make for Protestantism, such as an anxious concern to distinguish subject from object, the associated critiques of materialism and language, and the urge for sincere and inner-directed conversion on the part of even the most humble believers, are characteristic of a wide range of contemporary religions (see, e.g., Eickelman 2000; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). But first, where the insistence on inwardness has been found in the pre-Reformation and non-Christian world, it was typically confined to elites or religious virtuosi. Second, these characteristics seem to be spreading, in part, in response to the pressures of the contemporaneous globalizations of Protestantism, the nation-state form, and other institutions of modernity (Asad 1993; van der Veer and Lehmann 1999). As one reader of this article, who was raised in a very different tradition, put it (if with some rhetorical exaggeration) "We are *all* Protestants now." If so, one might speak of a world-historical configuration that exceeds particular doctrinal identifications. But it is Protestantism above all that has staked its claims to a distinctive identity in having first articulated these particular concerns as a *historical* intervention. Like other reform movements, it looked backward to a purer past; but it also helped define and identified itself with the new era.

Modernity is, of course, a highly contested and problematic word. In using it here, I take it above all to be a term of self-description. Whatever else one might want to claim about it, modernity exists at least as an idea and a conceptual orientation for actions, as what people who think they are modern (as well as those who are not, or soon will become, or never will be modern) think it is. However much we may want to doubt the analytic purchase or descriptive adequacy of the concept, its ubiquity in popular as well as in official and expert discourses is empirically undeniable (see, for instance, Gaonkar 1999). Of particular relevance here are those features stressed by Marshall Berman (1982) and Charles Taylor (1989). These are, first, the privilege accorded the individual's agency, inwardness, and freedom; second, the expanded vision of the possibilities for individual self-creation (for *everyone*, not just elites);⁶ and third, a historical self-consciousness that places a high value on social as well as individual change, in contrast to a relatively devalued "tradition." At the heart of this version of the modern is the conjunction of personal and historical self-transformation with a vision of the self, abstracted from material and social entanglements.

One component of this vision of the self is the normative ideal of sincerity in speech. In the second half of this article, I will argue that the idea and practices of sincerity reveal certain core dilemmas for the self-conscious project of becoming a modern subject. Religious conversion characteristically demands changes in assumptions about material things and language, at least in part because, by virtue of their semiotic and pragmatic properties, both words and

things are implicated in the general condition of human sociability. To the extent that words and things circulate among persons, requiring acceptance or uptake by them, the very conditions for people's objectification, self-knowledge, and identity necessarily involve other persons. To the extent that certain varieties of Protestantism entail a project of fostering and authorizing autonomous, individual selves, this embeddedness may pose a threat.⁷ But to the extent that even the project of transcending the carnal world requires some material activity, this embeddedness is an inescapable condition of representational practice. This article, therefore, will track two problems: first, the Protestant character of certain ideas about the modern subject, and, second, the ways in which representational economies form links and distinctions among language, material things, and persons. Thus, that which can be called "Protestant" about the modern subject is a function of how a particular representational economy articulates these links. To illustrate the material as well as linguistic character of this representational economy, I look first at the problem of material goods before turning to sincerity in speech.

Interiority and Material Values

Protestant conversion invokes an ambivalent historicity. On mission frontiers, as in triumphant church histories, it marks a specific moment of historic rupture across an entire social world. But for many Protestant sects, conversion can never be assured. At the individual level it entails an ongoing process of self-examination, potential backsliding, and reform. In the 1980s and 1990s, for example, the emerging Protestant majority on the island of Sumba in eastern Indonesia experienced conversion at both levels.

Following short-lived efforts by Catholics late in the 19th century, a permanent mission to Sumba was set up in 1904 by Orthodox Calvinists (*Gereformeerde Kerken*).⁸ These represented one offshoot of the secession movements (eventually unified by the "Protest" of Abraham Kuyper) against elite-led liberalizations of the Dutch Reformed Church in the mid-19th century. One of the main distinguishing features of this movement was the rejection of centralized church hierarchy in favor of small, self-governing congregations. Despite the largely populist character of their following, however, the Orthodox churches required their missionaries to hold university degrees, unlike many other Indies missions. The Sumbanese church continues to be marked by the resulting combination of doctrinal orthodoxy, relative organizational autonomy, and the somewhat rationalistic scrupulousness of many of its leaders. This combination may have contributed to the slow progress the mission made in winning converts. Ancestral ritualists formed a majority across most of the island in the 1970s and in some places have remained so—their presence a constant reminder of the historical recentness of the church. Only in the 1980s and 1990s did the mission's postindependence successors in the indigenous Sumbanese Christian Church (*Gereja Kristen Sumba* or GKS) become assured of their eventual dominance over the ancestral ritualists and smaller groups of Catholics

and Pentecostals (Islam having made no significant inroad among Sumbanese).⁹

One important factor in the perceived modernity of Protestantism, especially in recent years, is state religious policy. Although Indonesia is largely Muslim today, the postindependence state has always accorded formal recognition to Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. In the last decades of the 20th century, the state increasingly treated membership in one of these religions as a condition for citizenship, for instance, by requiring it of civil servants and insisting that an affiliation be declared on identity cards. In some parts of Indonesia, this, along with the strong church presence in schools and development projects, had the effect of identifying Christianity either with the state or with the West—or both. In either case, Christianity is commonly associated with modernity.

Activists of the GKS combined a sharp awareness of historical rupture with wary alertness to individual weakness and the persistent temptations of ancestral spirits. In Sumba, the latter temptations were prompted in particular by the vicissitudes of marriage exchange. In the 1990s, Sumbanese marriage exchanges were still politically salient, socially consequential, very expensive, and hard to disentangle completely from the powers of the spirits who are commonly supposed to underwrite them. Although there is considerable local variation across the island, in general Sumbanese marriage exchanges mediate the gift of blood (thus of life and spiritual protection) from the bride's lineage to her husband's, creating a debt that forms the basis of a larger political and kinship alliance. The pattern is broadly familiar from the classic literature on ceremonial exchange since Mauss's *The Gift* (1990). The exchange itself can be very expensive, as the husband's lineage draws on as many supporters as it needs in order to give "male" valuables of cattle, horses, and gold to the wife's lineage and their supporters, who reciprocate with the "female" valuables of cloth, pigs, and ivory. The resulting chains of debt that result have wide-reaching economic, political, and ritual consequences, and the core alliance should create political and ritual obligations and informal ties over several generations (see Keane 1997a).

One of the chief problems that ceremonial marriage exchange commonly poses for reformers in Sumba and elsewhere is its apparently misplaced materialism. Ever since Marcel Mauss (1990) argued that the gift is binding on the recipient because it is an extension of the giver, ceremonial exchange has commonly been understood to act by virtue of some sort of identification between persons and things. For Mauss, this identification of persons and things had both moral and historical implications. The extension of the giver's personality to things was characteristic of "archaic" societies, whose particular moral character was lost as the modern world came to disarticulate persons from a more object-like world. The intuition that modernity is characterized by a certain way of distinguishing subjects and objects is persistent. Thus, for instance, Bruno Latour (1993) has asserted that it is this very refusal to recognize "hybrids," which threaten to blur the distinction between persons and things, that

defines the modern. It should therefore not be surprising if observers from the Euro-American West, whether conservative missionaries or progressive feminists, have often felt what Gayle Rubin (1975) dubbed the "traffic in women" to be a scandal, because it seems to dehumanize the subject. On the one hand, it is indisputable that the articulation of persons and objects in exchange has commonly mediated, and sometimes obfuscated, profound relations of domination, not only of women by men, but also of juniors by seniors and the poor by the rich. On the other hand, as an intuitive response, the Euro-American's sense of scandal is sometimes provoked by more problematic ontological assumptions. The first of these is a tendency to assume that the equivalence between persons and things in ceremonial exchange is similar to the alienating effects of commodity exchange. The second assumption is that the value of the human is defined in its distinctiveness from, and superiority to, the material world. The former assumption shows its origins in capitalism, the latter, I am suggesting, in Protestant notions of transcendence.

In fact, people who engage in marriage exchanges usually take them to *exemplify* rather than *threaten* the distinctiveness of human self-worth. Thus, one elderly Sumbanese woman was shocked when I told her that Americans do not carry out marriage exchanges. To her, this meant we thought of ourselves as no better than animals in all their sexual promiscuity, something demonstrated by our anarchic freedom from both ancestral regulations and material obligations to our immediate and affinal kin. Sumbanese marriage exchanges, at the very least, are a vigorous working through of the implications that people are, or should be, embedded in social relations with others (both living and dead) and (more to the point I want to stress here) that these relations are inseparable from their material entailments (see Keane 1997a, 1998).

Sumbanese express this sense of embeddedness and the work needed to sustain it with reference to the palpable effects of exchanges on the spirit (*dewa*) of persons. In the vocabulary common to many Sumbanese, one man told me (drawing, like many non-Christian Sumbanese, on language introduced by the church): "If we push away good fortune [in exchange], it's not a fellow human whom we push away, but God. So He withdraws [his support]." The efficacy of one's *dewa* both affects and is also affected by exchanges and extends to any and all of the material conditions of production and micropolitics that lie behind exchange, from drought and disease to feuding. Thus each particular exchange takes its place in a career, a trajectory of success or failure, of strengthening or weakening ties to others, as the outcomes of exchange record the state of one's *dewa*.

Ceremonial exchange thus raises serious difficulties for Sumbanese Protestants. Few are willing to reject exchange out of hand, for even the best Protestants, if they possess but a shred of respectability, are enmeshed in politics, obligations to kin, relations of dependence or patronage, and so forth. Yet if they take their Christianity (and their modernity) seriously—and most do—they cannot accept the world of ancestor spirits and rituals at its foundations. Those who celebrate modernity and economic rationality must have some

explanation of the respective values of ceremonial exchange and its alternatives, both economic (purchase and sale) and ritual (church weddings). For example, exchange valuables should have no alternative destination as sacrificial offerings and the outcomes of exchange should have no interpretive or practical bearing on the self's relations to ancestral spirits or its future powers.

This is where Protestant discourses of interiority and materialism come into play, helping to express shifting distinctions between subject and object. An especially pressing question that Sumbanese Protestants, along with other Christians, must often face is: What is the value that is transacted in marriage exchange? The general response is exemplified by this excerpt from an essay by a high school student, published in a local newspaper in 1997:¹⁰

Bridewealth in the form of traditional valuables like ivory, gold, buffalo, is at base only a symbol in order to raise a woman's value and dignity. Demands for bridewealth show that a woman must be honored, valued. . . . Bridewealth is only a symbol of the woman's self-respect. . . . It is proper that bridewealth be retained, on the basis of its essence as a symbol of woman's own value and dignity—and not tend towards business or "trade" in daughters. On the part of women themselves, the most important problem is as far as possible that she be able to guard her self-respect so that the demand for bridewealth, which is to be discussed by her family, doesn't put her to shame. One should value oneself by way of one's patterns of thinking, attitude, and praiseworthy behavior, before one is valued by others, especially the groom, by way of the bridewealth that will be discussed. [Witin 1997, my translation]

As in many anthropological analyses of exchange, here the author assumes a clear opposition and hierarchical relation between material and social values. The author dematerializes exchange to treat material objects as being merely signs of an immaterial value to which they are subordinate (it is not supposed to be the buffalo that is of value in this exchange, but the bride's dignity—her dignity cannot "stand for" the buffalo as the buffalo "stands for" her).

There are several things to observe about this article. First, the subject is supposed to be clearly separated from its objects. To the extent that these objects are alienable, they have lost that integral relationship to their owners and transactors that helped define the Maussian gift. The relationship has instead become one of representation—the object stands for the person on the condition that they stand apart. In effect, they act much like the linguistic sign as described by Saussure: their significance determined by social convention and their material substance having only an arbitrary relation to that significance. Second, in the process, the exchange value of those objects is supposed to be abstracted fully from any causal articulation with concrete practices and material forms. Not just the labor but also the social ties, political efforts, and ancestral powers that lie behind one's ability to obtain goods for exchange (see Keane 1997a) should cease to have any bearing on the meaning of those goods. Instead, they take their place in the world of alienable commodities and abstract value (Keane 2001). As Marx remarked, there is a good fit between the abstract values presumed by commodity production and "Christianity with its

cultus of abstract man, more especially in its bourgeois developments, Protestantism, Deism, &c." (1967:79). In both cases, he argues, the concrete comes to be subordinated to the abstract. In Marx's sardonic comparison to the elevation of spirit over the carnal individual, "just as the sheep's nature of the Christian is shown in his resemblance to the Lamb of God" (1967:52), so too it is only the abstract human labor represented by linen that makes it exchangeable for a coat. In the case of the Christian reinterpretation of marriage exchange, the separation of the person from things and of concrete things from their symbolic value entails a dematerialization of the person (who comes to be defined by "value and dignity," as well as, presumably, by an immortal soul) and concomitant despiritualization (and subordination) of the material object. Only in these terms may persons and things properly be brought into relation with one another.

Finally, the author shifts the focus of the exchange from the groups who enter into it to the individual bride, whose spiritualization is implicitly bound up with her social separation from social bonds—facilitated, it seems, by the treatment of exchange as a circulation of signs.¹¹ The individualism of modern ideas of marriage is, of course, well recognized in Euro-American history as well as elsewhere (and it is a common theme in early Indonesian novels). Note, then, how the shift in the understanding of material goods reinforces the shift in focus to the individual. For the kinds of self-consciously modern Christians represented by the quotation here, the bearing of goods on the formation of social persons, where material utility ought not to be at issue, should be "merely symbolic." As prestations thus shift in their commonly understood semiotic status from being indexes (which causally link signs to their referents) to arbitrary and conventional symbols, they seem increasingly to be under the control of, and direct expressions of, autonomous human intentions. Circulating as a sign, for example, of respect for "tradition" or for the bride, the marriage prestation of cloth, ornaments, or cattle becomes the bearer of messages. The recognizable and legitimate costs and material consequences of exchange become increasingly reduced to the status of incidentals.

In this context we can see how changes in how people view material objects articulate with changing assumptions about language. The "messages" sent in marriage exchanges are being understood in terms of the intentions of the sign users. So too, speakers' words are taking their meaning from intentions and the objects of reference, rather than, say, their aesthetic or magical power, the flawless repetition of ancestral words, or dialogues leading to convergence between different speakers (for fuller discussion of these alternatives see Keane 1995, 1997a; Kuipers 1990). As a result, a Protestant who wants to account for the value those objects hold for the subject is left with little but the desires of a willful (individual) subject as its source. In non-Christian views of Sumbanese exchange, people manipulate objects of value in deference to ancestors, the ultimate agents of ceremonial action, whose agency is manifested in long-term material consequences. But when Sumbanese Protestants deny that the materiality of objects is meaningful, they are transforming the representational

economy in which they circulate, rendering them into signs wielded by relatively abstract sign users, pointing to invisible and abstract values such as “social solidarity,” “tradition,” or “self-worth.” This change in one part of a representational economy shows how the modern subject must be the source of its own value, standing apart from ancestral agents, social others, and material things. Behind these signs stand the abstract subjects whose intentions they express. But where do *they* (these subjects) stand?

Sincerity as a Metadiscourse

The subject, to the extent it aspires to modernity, as I have been describing it, seeks to act as the source of its own authority.¹² In many Protestant versions, at least, this source cannot be the physical body, material goods, or social standing, but rather the character and condition identified with its own interiority.¹³ And crucial to the concept of interiority, and the practices that promote it, is language. To make sense of this, I want to turn for a moment to the notion of “sincerity,” beginning with its underpinnings in familiar common English-language ways of talking. That is, I want to bring out an implicit linguistic ideology, a native model (see Kroskrity 2000; Sweetser 1987) that seems to be embodied in widespread common sense understandings of sincerity. Against this background, I then want to return to Sumba to illustrate how the materiality of representational practices is both condition for *and* constraint on the possibility of becoming one kind of person rather than another.¹⁴

As Lionel Trilling (1972) put it, sincerity is a way of characterizing a relationship between words and interior states. To be sincere, in this respect, is to utter words that can be taken primarily to express underlying beliefs or intentions.¹⁵ Carrying Trilling’s observation further, we can call sincerity a metadiscursive term. As such, it is a component of linguistic ideology, that is, of local assumptions about how language functions.¹⁶ This ideology posits a specific sort of relationship between speech and its imputed sources in the speaker’s self: Sincere speech makes that interior state transparent. Sincere speech adds and subtracts nothing in *words* that was not already there in *thought*.¹⁷ This is linked to the historical emergence of language ideologies that stress the referential and predicational functions of language over, say, social pragmatics such as indexing social deference (Silverstein 1998)—to say nothing of language that produces supposedly “magical” effects (Keane 1995). It is therefore also associated with the understanding of “religion” that centers on truthful propositions rather than, for example, ritual activities or bodily disciplines (Asad 1993). The idea of sincerity also seems to propose a hierarchical relation between these two (words and thoughts), since the thought seems to come first and thereby determines and imposes a limit on the words. The concept of sincerity thus seems to assume a clear distinction between words and thought, as parallel discourses (interior and exterior) such that they either could or could not match up. Should they indeed match up, language would thereby become transparent, nothing significant would remain of the material forms or social origins of words, allowing the unmediated thought to reveal itself. Moreover,

as linguistic ideology, the concept of sincerity also seeks the *authority* of words in that relationship of matching. To take words as insincere is to cast some doubt on them at least. If I characterize your praise or promise as insincere, I am suggesting that I take the thought to hold primacy over the word, discrediting the latter. Moreover, sincerity seeks to locate the authority for words in the speaker as a distinct and self-possessed self as the responsible party (Rosaldo 1982).

Insofar as the concept of sincerity assumes that words could reflect inner states, it involves us in the linguistic questions about intentionality. Insincerity typically involves an intentional divergence between expression and thought: This, for example, would be the difference between a lie and an error. What about the reverse: Can one be unintentionally sincere? I suppose it might be possible to think of examples of unintentional sincerity, but the heart of the concept lies elsewhere. As I understand it, sincerity is a matter not just of imputed alignment between expression and interior state but also a product of one's desire to make one's expressions aligned in this way. That is, sincerity says something not just about speech, or about speech and thought, but also something about the character of the speaker. That is why one also hears of persons, and not just particular acts of speaking, being described as sincere. As Trilling observes, sincerity in its fullest form demands "arduous effort" (1972:6).

Thus, the concept of sincerity seems to link ideas about language to moral questions. I think we should take the concept of sincerity to be inseparable from some kind of judgment—it is hard to make sense of a neutral concept of sincerity. And the speaker's efforts at producing sincere expressions would likewise seem to be a function of that judgment. The concept of sincerity weds metadiscourse with the sphere of moral evaluation. It is a guide to the linkage between linguistic ideology and other cultural values. And this leads me to the third aspect of the concept of sincerity: It is interactive. For in being sincere, I am not only producing words that are transparent to my interior states but am producing them *for you*; I am making myself (as an inner self) available for you in the form of external, publicly available expressions.¹⁸ At the same time, the words I make available to you, to the extent they are sincere, display their freedom from any external compulsion: I do not say them merely out of deference to you, nor am I parroting the words of someone else, for instance. Thus sincerity is a certain kind of public accountability to others for one's words with reference to one's self. And it is in this aspect that sincerity most evidently cannot be understood as only ideological, since the interactive dimension presupposes concrete practices.

But there remains a hierarchy in which the self is the ultimate foundation, since it is an accountability that presupposes a self that knows itself. To be sincere, for words to match thoughts, those thoughts must be no more ambiguous or opaque than the words that express them. Moreover, both thoughts and words must be fully under the control of the speaking self: It doesn't seem to

make sense, for example, to speak of the sincerity of dialogues as such apart from the respective sincerity of each participant separately.

Now obviously one should not project this account of an English or American (or perhaps even more local) ideology too far.¹⁹ Rather, I offer it here as a way of provoking two sets of ethnographic questions: First, as an element of a metadiscursive vocabulary, what linguistic ideology does the concept of "sincerity" (or any of its relatives) presuppose? And what specific ways of speaking does it envision? What does it assume about the normal relations between speakers and speech? Second, as an element of a cultural value system, what is the moral load of the concept of sincerity? What does it assume about the value and authority of the relations between speakers, their speech, and other persons? What does it say about the self and its relations to others?

These are separate sets of questions in part because it is at least possible that historically one could change and not the other: Members of a given society, for example, might maintain a certain view of language and its speakers but alter how they evaluate them. This is precisely the sort of thing that might happen in a case of religious conversion, to the extent that the relatively *tacit pragmatic* assumptions underlying interaction are less susceptible to intentional, self-conscious, ideologically motivated change than are *explicit moral and ideological* evaluations.

Sincerity as Freedom

As Trilling (1972) showed, the semantic and moral load carried by the concept of sincerity for contemporary speakers of English bears strong traces of a religious genealogy in which Protestantism plays an important role. Or at least the implicit individualism, the specific ways of distrusting language, and the authority granted to interior states find especially strong and influential expression in those strands of popular thought associated with the Protestant Reformation and its effects on Euro-American cultural and political formations (Burke 1987). Moreover, in many parts of the colonial and postcolonial world, this particular concept of sincerity, as formulated by Protestant churches, has often had its most direct impact on non-Western ways of thinking about language, selves, and interaction. For people to take sincerity as a measure of one another entails certain views of language. But this concept cannot remain at the level of belief alone, there must be some practical means of taking it up.

Here I accept Talal Asad's (1993) claim that the universalizing definitions of religion characteristic of ideologies of modernity have shifted attention from power and practices to beliefs, or as he puts it, to sets of propositions that command assent. But even so, this shift itself depends on the existence of certain kinds of concrete practices. This is both because propositions themselves depend on the materiality of semiotic mediation and because (as Blaise Pascal recognized long ago) that second-order understanding, according to which belief statements are the heart of religion, requires some embodiment in a concrete semiotic and pragmatic form if it is to be a plausible and possible way of "having" a religion. At the same time, Asad is right to point out how strongly

this embodiment has been denied, which leads me back again to the question of modernity and transcendence.

One of the critical obstacles with which Protestant missionaries and converts have had to contend in Sumba is the power of local discourse pragmatics and their underlying assumptions. For example, Sumbanese Protestants are very concerned about the problem of authentic speech in prayer. They are highly critical of both Sumbanese ancestral ritual, which makes use of formulaic couplets supposed to have been handed down unchanged from the first people, and Catholic ceremonies, in which people rely on printed prayer books. By contrast, Protestant prayers should come from the heart, spontaneous and truly felt; that is, they should be sincere. (Therefore, Sumbanese Protestants ostentatiously close their eyes when they pray.) But the problem is that these words remain in the form of human language. And so, to the extent that words always bear with them some trace of their origins elsewhere, beyond the individual speaker (in society or wherever one imagines particular languages to come from), they seem to challenge the ideal that one should claim one's own words. It turns out to be difficult even for purportedly spontaneous speech to abolish all traces of its externality to the speaker.

At issue is the autonomy of the human subject in contrast to the world of objects. To the extent that language is experienced as originating (at least ontogenically) outside and circulating beyond the speaker, it can seem to confuse the distinction between interior and exterior or challenge the individual's control over that distinction. This is one way of interpreting the sharpness of Sumbanese Protestant criticisms of "pagan" and Catholic prayer (see Keane 1998). But the stakes appear in slightly different terms for those who may be less theologically inclined. For many ordinary Protestant converts, sincerity is inseparable from other aspects of agency and autonomy that are functions of modernity's promise of more concrete and immediate forms of freedom. First, as Marcel Mauss observed, the "gift" includes not just material goods but also "acts of politeness" (1990:5). One implication is that as goods come to be distinguished from persons, so do certain forms of social interaction. Etiquette, for instance, may come to seem external to the actor, a matter of "mere forms" (see Burke 1987), and even as external constraints on one's agency. Thus, as both Asad and Taylor have pointed out, sincerity emerges in European discourses as part of an account of how the individual's interiority is the chief site of that which might elude political coercion. By extension, sincere speech is that which is compelled by nothing that might lie "outside" the speaker, whether that be, for example, political authority, written texts, or social conventions.

For example, in Sumba the act of Christian conversion, among other things, gives substance to the idea that, upon entering modernity (*masa moderen*) one enters the free (or liberated or independent) age (*masa merdeka*). The church, that is, offers a concrete way of understanding of the word freedom (*merdeka*) that identifies the postcolonial era across Indonesia and situates that understanding in the supranational, world-historical context of a transcendent

church. In particular, this freedom is expressed in releasing oneself from the ritual obligations imposed by ancestral mandates in order to join a voluntary organization in response to consultation with one's own conscience—a freedom that also acts as the guarantee of one's sincerity.²⁰ Or, at least, this is how public ceremonies stage the acts of entering the church and reconfirming one's faith. Indeed, this very willfulness is precisely one of the things that the recalcitrant complain of, in contrast to their assertions that they remain faithful to an often oppressively demanding ancestral order that lies beyond the self. Being voluntary—as people around the globe have found variously to their distress and delight—church membership can cut across and undermine the ties of marriage, sibblingship, villages, and clans, challenging the authority of ancestors, elders, and in some cases, males. In the process, as some Sumbanese quite explicitly recognize, the practices of adult baptism and confirmation provide ways by which one can flamboyantly insert oneself as a newborn subject into a particular historical trajectory, declaring oneself to be part of the modern or rejecting it. Indeed, one thing these performances enact is the very fact of change itself and its positive evaluation, which is, as many have said, a defining feature of modernity.

Conversion and the Performance of Sincerity

One small yet telling step into Protestant modernity is the taking of a Christian name (or, for those who practice infant baptism, its bestowal). The national identity card requires a personal name in a form the state will recognize. Increasingly, that name is the one assumed in baptism rather than given in clan rituals, bestowed as teknonyms and nicknames, or assumed by adults as they ceremonially change their status (Keane 1997a:129–133). A friend of mine, whom I will call Edy, explained the virtue of Christian names this way: Kids, he said, change their names all the time. You might be called “Jon” at home and “Lord Jon at school. Later you might decide to be called something else. Only the baptismal name is permanent, because it's registered ‘up there.’” Note here the tension between willfulness and inscription. Edy portrays the social existence of Sumbanese names as prone to the vagaries of individual whim and local interactions. Yet the Christian name itself is the mark of a voluntary act of self-transformation. And it is precisely this apparent assertion of one's own will that scandalizes many non-Christians, who themselves are supposed to displace the agency of naming through divinatory procedures that put the matter into ancestral hands. So how can Edy claim the Christian name is permanent? In two respects, it seems. First in theological terms, the stability of individual identity is a function of some sort of transcendent plane of record-keeping, “up there.” And second, in concrete terms, that transcendent record is embodied in visible forms of inscription: the Bible from which the names are taken, the birth and death certificates, the marriage registry, the church rolls, the school enrollment lists, the national identity card. Now we might argue that the notion of heavenly record keeping transcendentalizes the disciplinary apparatuses of the state. Certainly these inscription practices are an important point

of articulation between the person's religious and civil status. But for someone like Edy, the relations are reversed, for what makes these state practices possible is the prior existence of the heavenly record book. His perception captures how both state and church work to resolve the semiotic problem of making a transcendent and abstract authority work in concrete terms that can become part of ordinary everyday experience.

Given Protestant notions of self-transformation, baptism cannot in itself be sufficient to make one a Christian, for that would be a kind of magic—good enough for Catholics and other heathens, perhaps. And this brings me back to the problem of sincerity as contingent upon practices. Adults must confirm their true faith in a public performance, one of an endless series of socially grounded affirmations. And such confirmations are themselves a discursive pedagogy, as they work to transform individuals, in Susan Harding's (2000) astute observation, from listeners into sincere speakers of the language of faith.

The confirmation of faith involves standing before the congregation while the minister delivers a sermon (*chotbah*). The sermon is a distinctive—and highly authoritative—kind of speech event that, while unprecedented in pre-Christian Sumba, is strikingly parallel in form to the speeches (*pidato*) by which the Indonesian state periodically addresses its subjects. Like the speech, the sermon is pedagogical or exhortatory in nature. It aims to instruct and improve its listener through the disembodied authority of the public official as the representative of an abstract entity. One of the most prominent formal properties of the Sumbanese sermon is that it is broken into short, evenly spaced segments by direct address to the congregation. Like the speech, the sermon uses a highly marked form of address (literally, fathers, mothers, and siblings *bapak-bapak, ibu-ibu, dan saudara-saudara*), through which the listener is repeatedly constructed as the abstract addressee of national language. The sermon itself takes linguistic forms that provide the speaker with an authority that derives from beyond the here and now. It makes use of a linguistic style that is far from everyday speech. The minister, at one moment, addresses the congregation on behalf of the Lord and then, in the next, addresses the Lord on behalf of the congregation. His use of pronouns that mark the minister as one with the congregation as he faces the Lord then shifts as he gives voice to the Lord's words. Spoken prayer and quotations from the bible offer a wide range of registers and voices, oscillating between transcendence and immediacy. And almost all of this is carried out not in the local languages of Sumba (which everyone present would understand), but in the national language (which not all members of the congregation are likely to understand easily), as if anyone in the nation might potentially be eavesdropping.

The resemblance between sermon and governmental speech is underscored by the similar spatial configurations in which they occur (podium facing rows of benches, the very rectilinearity of the audience's disposition), the peculiar public they command, and, as it happens, their insistence on cash over goods in kind. Let me briefly observe here how strange this emergent kind of public feels to most Sumbanese. This was clearly expressed by a woman whom

I will call Ina, when once we were talking about the feeling of embarrassment (*maké*). By way of example, she told me that is how she feels when she goes into the church, which she does almost every Sunday. Now Ina is not someone prone to timidity. One of the most highborn Sumbanese women I know, she is also a very tough character. "What," I asked her, "is embarrassing about entering the church?" "There are all these people you don't know," she replied. She feels them looking at her. As an aristocrat, she rarely goes to the market (a relatively recent institution in Sumba), so the church is virtually the only space in which she finds herself among other people who are not gathered together by virtue of specific ritual or kinship ties. Even if she recognizes most of the people she sees, she has the uncomfortable experience of being in "public." And this is a certain kind of public. To the extent that GKS churches are not supposed to be structured by social hierarchies (seating in pews, for instance, is not formally sorted out by social rank or gender), each person in it is exposed to the gaze of others who, at least in their capacity as fellow congregants, stand on an equal footing. Thus, being in public, she finds herself exposed as an individual: Her rank, clan, marital identity, and so forth, are all stripped away by both congregation and, perhaps, the eye of divinity. What, then, could be more public than a Protestant church?

I now turn to the public confirmation of faith. Typical of such performances is one I recorded in August 1993. A minor local official with a wife and several children set out to regularize his union and, in the process, take a crucial step in "following the age" (*ikut zaman*) with a church marriage. First, the official had to confirm his faith in front of the congregation, but most of the talking was done by the minister. Here, for instance, in a characteristic moment in the framing sermon, we hear the voice of the church, articulated by a single speaker (the minister), delivering itself to a split addressee: the official himself (as a single individual) and the congregation. At this moment the minister addresses the audience by naming the authority on whose part he speaks:

We [using the inclusive *kita*] are called . . . and at this moment we are called to implement the announcement of the Parish Council in successively implementing various kinds of activities. And the first opportunity we are called to implement the carrying out of is the declaration of the confession of faith by the brother whose name has already been mentioned in the announcement and we all are invited to follow him. And, before that, we are invited to listen to the reading of the declaration, which is connected with the aforementioned activity. Beloved brethren, congregation of God, at today's hour of religious service there is a brother of ours who desires to acknowledge and declare his belief before God and before his congregation here. He has requested and been received in an ecclesiastical manner to become a member with full responsibility in the congregation of God. He has been cultivated and educated [*dibina dan dididik*] to take a change of faith and promised this to his parents when he was baptized while still small.

The action to take place here makes explicit reference to a bureaucracy with all the appropriate forms of proper procedure. These include the preliminary announcement of the upcoming event and the retrospective reference to

those announcements, thus assuring the listener that what now occurs follows the rules and is not unexpected. In pragmatic terms, the minister's authority is immanent in the rational procedures of the church, as well as in the formal Indonesian language he wields, and the pedagogy alluded to by the words "cultivated and educated" (which also have strong associations with state discourses). The minister continues:

The regulations [*tata tertib*, another expression associated with the state] for the confession of faith are bestowed by our Lord Jesus Christ who always accompanies his community and helps us hold fast to the promise bestowed by God from generation to generation. So that our brother's confession of faith be evident before God and before the congregation, I invite [him] to stand before God and declare his faith to answer the questions that I am about to submit. I will read the questions in their entirety and then I will give [him] an opportunity to answer them. The first: Do you believe that the teaching of this Bible and the twelve articles of the confession of apostolic faith is teaching that is true and perfect for the purpose of your salvation? . . . Do you believe, acknowledge, and promise? [Answer] I believe, acknowledge, and promise. [Minister] Therefore you have become a member with full responsibility in the holy congregation of God.²¹

The minister then turns the man to face the congregation and tells them to receive him as a friend and sing a hymn.

The congregation here serves as a single collective witness. To the extent that the sermon is addressed to the man who stands before them, this witness overhears the summoning of an individual conscience. I would suggest that the church ceremony enacts a scene in which each individual member's conscience is subject to the overhearing of others. Each is kept true to his or her own conscience by this repetitious recalling of the moment of his or her own summoning by the church. Indeed, one of the formal promises is to listen to the advice and warnings of the vestry.

The sermon is supposed to address the listener's conscience. This doctrinal stress on interiority works in tension with the highly formalistic procedure that enacts not belief *per se*—there is no testimony, no cries of anguish or exultation here—but rather the discourse of belief. The church summons the man here to give an accounting of himself. He must reply in the language of belief. What interests me about this scene is precisely its schematic quality, its formality, its lack of apparent psychology. Nothing requires us to assume any belief on the part of the official who stands in front of the congregation. What is important here is rather that the one affirming his faith understands that he must stand ready to give an account of himself in the language of belief: He must at least be able to say, "I believe," if summoned to do so by the church. Such practices give concrete expression to Asad's notion that "religion," as a concept linked to the "modern," centers on propositions sincerely assented to. This initial performance opens up a lifetime of further practices (prayer meetings, Bible reading groups, the education of children, and so forth) that similarly stress concepts of referential truth, belief, and sincere speech.

The congregation is also constituted as those before whom this profession is witnessed. They form the public who provide the warrants for such acts of self-accounting. Indeed, they are owed such an accounting of this man's invisible interior state of belief. And they are given the right and responsibility in the future to call him to account if his acts should stray from this declaration of interiority. His sense of responsibility is not his alone; it is mirrored in that of the community.

Here two historically and ethnographically distinct pathways converge and, with them, come two explanations. On the one hand, this church ceremony remains within the parameters of certain interactive norms and conventions of Sumbanese society that limit the acceptable expressions available to the sincere conscience in locally specified ways. The church service, for all its appeal to, on the one hand, bureaucratic rationality and, on the other, the language of interiority and belief, also responds to persistent Sumbanese intuitions about how to act in the world. Long-standing assumptions embedded in the pragmatics of performance in Sumba require public recognition of the self in formalized interactions, as elaborated in everything from marriage negotiations to any dealings with the ancestral spirits (see Keane 1997a). As my experiences with the highly formulaic nature of more intimate family and village-based prayer and Bible study groups also suggests, even sincere speech, if it is to have any authority for Sumbanese, must take the form of a public performance and demand a public affirmation.

On the other hand, in this context and in certain respects Sumbanese expectations can find something familiar and acceptable in the performance styles produced by the doctrinal requirements of Orthodox Dutch Calvinism. For the congregation is supposed to monitor its members continually in formal professions of faith. As Weber pointed out (1946), for many Protestant sects this monitoring is a logical outcome of the combined emphasis on freedom and sincerity. Because membership in the church is supposed to be voluntary, nothing guarantees in advance that individuals are morally upright and genuine in their faith. Therefore they are on constant probation and subject to the ongoing scrutiny of other members. In Orthodox Calvinism, this scrutiny requires repeated public affirmations of faith. Their formality reflects a doctrinal suspicion of emotion (Troeltsch 1931:589) and assumes a sharp distinction between the spiritual and material worlds, such that one should not expect external signs to be automatic expressions of internal states. (And, in Indonesia, it is no doubt reinforced by a tendency to associate formality with the state's version of modernity as well.) This is one of many possible resolutions of the general semiotic problem of making transcendence available in practical terms. In this respect, the apparent disjuncture between the idea of sincere belief and the formality with which it is expressed is not simply a matter of an incomplete or "syncretic" transition from "traditional" to "modern" Sumba. Given this semiotic overdetermination, it may be impossible fully to disarticulate these two sources for this performance style.

Public performance is, of course, a highly marked kind of event and involves specific sorts of speech genres. In reflecting on these public objectifications of the believing self, offered for the recognition of others, we should ask not just who has sincerity but when it should appear, when it should *count*. For Sumbanese Protestants, the demand for the performance of sincerity is most evident at weddings and funerals. It is as if one should enact one's moral subjecthood and the freedom that sincerity should express at moments when one's being embedded in the world of other people is most apparent. Obviously we are not justified in concluding from events like this that *no* other expectations of or concepts of sincerity might exist across the full spectrum of interactive contexts offered by Sumbanese life. We may remain in doubt as to the exact psychological transformations underway, but at least we should attend to the most salient model available, the manifest transformation in representational economy and the means it offers for the production and constant reaffirmation of the norm of the sincere self.

Transcendence, Mediation, and Materiality

If a representational economy involves relations among such things as language ideology, habits of interpreting material things, explicit religious doctrines, and tacit expectations of interaction, there is no reason in principle to assume they all snuggle harmoniously together. And in circumstances of dramatic historical transformation, we should expect to find a clash between language ideology and religious doctrine, between the presuppositions of speech pragmatics and explicit, public concepts. At the same time, if we want to talk about different kinds of selves, we cannot ignore the possibility that such clashes between the tacit and the explicit, among different speech genres, and among presupposable selves, or, for that matter, between the workings of exchanges and the meanings of the objects that flow through them, are, in fact, commonplace, or at least an always lurking potential. And, if doctrine or ideology proposes an escape from semiotic mediation altogether, those clashes must be unavoidable, thus confounding some of the higher ambitions for the autonomous, sincere subject that modernity names.

The problems raised by these examples of ceremonial exchange and the performance of conversion have two things in common. One is that they both concern conflicting assumptions about the human subject that emerge in changes in its material mediations and objectifications. The second is that these conflicts ideologically align Protestant Christianity with the idea of modernity, referential language (as expressed in the values of transparency and truth) and the signifying practices that underlie abstract value (as expressed in money and commodities) in opposition to paganism, the past, performative and magical language, and ceremonial exchange. In this highly simplified conceptual alignment, Protestantism and modernity (and, one might add, capitalism) *alike, even conjointly*, seek to abstract the subject from its material and social entanglements in the name of freedom and authenticity. It is in this, I think, that we can see one suppressed link between modernist views of language and

things, and the more theological concerns expressed by Protestant and other religious reformers: the value of freedom and abstraction lies, at least in part, in their offer of transcendence. Gifts symbolic of intentions, words true to the heart and to the world of referents, actions taken without deference to other persons, and the abstract value represented by money are the quotidian forms of such transcendence.

At the same time, such examples suggest how, even in its most abstract and transcendent, the human subject *cannot* free itself from objectification (Miller 1987). It retains a material and social body, it continues to work on, transact, possess, and know itself through objects, it is surrounded by social others. And it cannot even be sincere without publicly recognizable, socially indexical, materially embodied forms of speech (as we look across the range of religious uses of language, even such limit cases as Quaker silence and "speaking in the light," Hindu mantra, and Pentecostal glossolalia do not entirely escape this condition [see Keane 1997b]). For agents continually constitute themselves through signifying practices that contain an irreducibly material dimension. They are dynamically involved in a full-fledged representational economy in which the various ways that words and things circulate have not only logical implications but also causal consequences for one another. People cannot free themselves from the practices by which they are embedded in the world of other persons: The tension between the projects of transcendence and abstraction, on one hand, and the inescapability of material and social mediations, on the other, will stubbornly persist.

These problems in turn resonate with certain foundational concerns of social and cultural theory, such as the relation of individual and society, autonomy, agency, and authenticity. The conjunction of Protestantism with scientific and political conceptions of modernity, however we understand their precise historical development, underlies the peculiar coexistence of a mechanistic worldview, a capitalist economic system, and the view that material goods are corrupting. Faced with this tension, social thought has often acted as if persons, words, and even things could be only totally reduced to or completely abstracted from materiality—in either case, a denial of mediation. If the rethinking of Protestantism in the contemporary world has any interest beyond the study of religion, it may be in challenging these dual reductivisms. If the idea of representational economy has any promise, it may be in offering a more realistic alternative

Notes

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1. The idea of an "economy" here is meant to capture the way in which practices and ideologies put words, things, and actions into complex articulation with one another. At various points below I also use the word "semiotic" to mean the whole range of modes of signification that are fully embedded in material practices. As such, signs must be understood as having causal (or indexical), not merely denotative, relations to their contexts and to other signs (see Keane 1997a, especially chapter 1). In particular, I mean to distance myself from the Saussurean tradition of semiology, with its focus on codes and decoding, its tendency to see signs as being intentionally wielded by fully self-aware users, its assumption that those "users" are united by their shared knowledge of the code, and its shallow understanding of practices (dating back to Saussure's [1983] original bracketing of "parole" from his analysis).

2. A concern with the materiality of language is pervasive in many religious traditions but takes particular force in the more ascetic kinds of Protestantism. See, for instance, the Primitive Baptists of Appalachia, whose concern for authentic speech focuses on material forms. They do not permit preachers to write their sermons before preaching them and consider even the Bible to be a dead letter unless the spirit is present (Peacock and Tyson 1989:122–126). For some general implications of the rejection of rhetoric in the contemporary United States, see Crapanzano 2000.

3. Of course Protestantism encompasses a large and constantly changing variety of sects, styles, and worldviews, from the privatistic individualism of modern liberal Quakerism to the highly public expressions of some evangelical churches (Harding 2000), from the ascetic early Calvinists to the gospel of prosperity (Coleman 2000), and so my use of it here invites the objections raised by any ethnographic generalization. But to insist too much in these differences risks in turn losing sight of the specificity and historical impact of the contrast, self-defined or otherwise, between Protestantism and its rivals. In this contrastive context, I would maintain that the Protestant emphasis on conversion entails *some* broad shared underlying vision of the subject to be converted.

4. For classic arguments that Protestantism was a crucial element in the development of modernity, see Troeltsch 1958 and Weber 1958. For recent efforts to make the case against the sociological tradition of identifying "modernity" with secularization, see Casanova 1994 and Van der Veer 1996. That missionaries themselves often had deeply ambivalent relations not only to the colonial projects in which they were embedded but to modernity is well known; see for example, Clifford's (1982) discussion of Maurice Leenhardt and Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) on British nonconformists in South Africa. As one historian of Dutch religion has argued, this ambivalence is rooted in the peculiarly modern character of the missionary endeavor that presupposed a separation of private and public spheres that the rise of mission societies had itself helped create (Van Rooden 1996).

5. See, for instance, Coleman 2000, Meyer 1999, Robbins 1998, Schieffelin 2000, van der Veer 1996, and Viswanathan 1998.

6. Charles Taylor (1989), following Locke, takes the ability to stand back from, evaluate, and reform one's very desires as crucial to the development of the modern self (see also Note 13 below). Note that this capacity for "second order desires" (Dennett

1976) is a precondition for religious conversion in its most demanding Protestant forms. This highly cognized and agentive ideal of self-reform should be placed in the context of Foucault's portrayal of disciplinary self-inspection as a crucial component of the forms of power that he claims originate in Christianity's invention of the "pastoral power" derived from knowing what is inside people's minds (1983:214; see, e.g., Rafael 1993). Eventually, according to Foucault, the power of subjection passes to the state. One might then surmise that for Protestants, "pastoral power" becomes internalized. At least it is crucial to the ideology of conversion I am describing here that it is supposed not to be mediated by social others, such as priests or other authorities (see, e.g., Soeffner's 1997 account of Lutheranism).

7. See Troeltsch's early argument that the "thought of freedom, of personality, of the autonomous self" (1958:36) is a defining feature of modernity, derives ultimately from Protestantism, rather than, say, the Renaissance, and had an important influence on modern ideas of political freedom (1958:117; see also Troeltsch 1931:688-689).

8. The Gereformeerde Kerken, literally "Reformed Churches," is usually translated "Orthodox Calvinist" to distinguish them from both the more liberal Hervormde Kerk ("Dutch Reformed Church") and various more conservative and isolationist ultraorthodox groups. Always small in numbers, this group tended to appeal to artisans, small farmers, skilled laborers, and small tradesmen, and in principle rejected the authority of the state over other social spheres, such as the family or businesses (Wintle 1987). For Christianity in Sumba, see Haripranata 1984, Hoskins 1987, Kapita 1965, Onvlee 1973, van den End 1987, and Wielenga 1926.

9. Under Dutch colonial policy, Christian missions were discouraged in the Islamic heartlands of the Indies but permitted in those regions where Islam had not taken hold. As a result, certain areas, such as the province in which Sumba is located, Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), are now predominantly Christian. Many Sino-Indonesians are also church members. For Christianity in Indonesia, see Aragon 2000, Kipp 1990, Kipp and Rodgers 1987, Rutherford 2000, and Spyer 1996.

10. The essay appeared on the equivalent of the op-ed page. It is an instance of a common genre of journalism in the region, in which people struggle to rationalize "tradition," adjudicating between state and local pressures to "modernize" on the one hand, and anxieties about the moral perils of abandoning tradition, on the other. The same essay also attempts, rather tentatively, to reconcile exchange with the companionate marriage associated with the freedom, rationality, and individualism (it is commonly hoped and sometimes feared) that modernity will bring. The author is a Catholic from the island of Flores, but the ideas are thoroughly conventional among young Sumbanese Protestants, especially those with some church school education.

11. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer whose very astute comments helped me clarify the discussion of this reinterpretation of marriage exchange.

12. Of course in some sense one defers to the agency of God. But in practice, most Protestant groups tend to treat divine agency as an assumed background against which the person acts or seek divine sources for the radical assertion of the individual's own agency (see Troeltsch 1958:61). In either case, the actual consequences tend towards an emphasis on individual agentiveness. Note that in many cases even the original Calvinist emphasis on predestination eventually faded (Troeltsche 1931:690).

13. Taylor (1989) argues that responsibility for one's very desires and motives is distinctively modern. This might usefully be compared to Foucault's definition of modern forms of subjectification—and subjugation—by which the subject is "tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (1983:212). See also Note 6 above.

14. The idea of representational practice should keep us alert to both the semiotic-pragmatic requirements for and limits to possible transformations of the subject. If the "individuality" of the "Western self"—what E. Valentine Daniel (1996:189) has called "the impossible world of the Cartesian cogito"—has been overdrawn (cf. Battaglia 1995), this is no doubt in part because of the clash between ideologies and the constraints of semiotic-pragmatic possibilities.

15. I think we would say that nondiscursive actions are sincere only insofar as they can be translated into discourse or be treated as some sort of signification. A smile or a gift is insincere if we find a mismatch between the smile or gift and the invisible feelings we conventionally expect to produce them. That is, we treat them as external signs of an interior state. I am aware this narrows the definition of sincerity from those that would include internal states of single-mindedness or purity (e.g., Hampshire 1971; Walker 1978). One might respond to this model at two levels: One would be along the lines exemplified by Sartre's classic critique of the demand for sincerity as an act of bad faith, its fulfillment impossible: "Total, constant sincerity as a constant effort to adhere to oneself is by nature a constant effort to dissociate oneself from oneself" (1956:65) through an act of self-objectification—a sharp doubting, perhaps, of the possibilities for "second order desires" mentioned in Note 6 above. Another, more ethnographic, response would be to argue that a full-fledged and explicit concept of sincerity cannot be disentangled from the speech practices by which it could be pragmatically internalized and that would give public evidence for it.

16. Grice's (1975) account of the role of sincerity in speech pragmatics takes it to be one of the default assumptions of his proposed "conversational maxims." Whether or not such maxims are true universals, for the purposes of this article it is enough to observe that sincerity as either a fully explicit ideology or moral value is far from general.

17. On the ethnographic specificity of the notion that meanings depend on fully formed interior states prior to interaction, see the critiques of positions such as that of Searle (1983), initiated by Rosaldo (1982) and carried forward by Duranti (1988) and others. Derrida (1982), of course, has maintained that the very possibility of language already undermines Searle's claims in principle.

18. One might compare this to Sweetser's (1987) claims that the immorality of "lying" for English speakers consists not just in its untruthfulness but in abusing the addressee. In broader and more historical terms, Charles Taylor (1989) defines the "inwardness" that he finds characteristic of the modern self in terms of what one is able to hold back from others. And holding back implies one could have done otherwise, expressing oneself more fully, in contrast to, say, the notion that human interiors are fundamentally opaque, a view, for instance, that Annette Weiner (1983) attributed to Trobrianders. For a contrasting morality concerning the expression of publicly shared sentiments, see Appadurai 1990.

19. The most usual terms for sincerity in Sumba seem to be the Indonesian words *tulus hati* or the Arabic loanword *ikhlas*. And, importantly, these are sometimes used to refer to participants in exchange who give generously without having to be forced. Clearly this usage is quite different from the linguistic ideology I am depicting here. I take this to manifest the persistence of an old Sumbanese understanding of the relationship between persons and material things against which Protestantism is consciously exerting itself.

20. In this respect, to take religious conversion as paradigmatic of the historical and personal advent of freedom would seem to support Zygmunt Bauman's (1988) assertion

that the concept of freedom implies release from a prior and inferior condition of non-freedom.

21. The other three commitments are to believe that salvation lies only with Christ, to spread the Word, and to accept the authority and supervision of the congregation and its elders. Two of these are thus affirmations of belief and two are promises regarding future behavior.

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