

Hickel, Jason & Naomi Haynes (eds.). 2018. *Hierarchy and Value. Comparative Perspectives on Moral Order* (Afterword by David Graeber). Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books. 170 pp. Pb.: \$27.95/£19.00. ISBN: 9781785339974.

Hierarchy and Value, edited by Jason Hickel and Naomi Haynes, is a continuation of the longstanding academic debate about the tension between structure and agency; this time, however, through the thought-provoking observation of those people who ‘seem to support and value illiberal – and specifically hierarchical – social formations’ (p. ix). Reflecting this, in the editors’ term, ‘uncomfortable’ topic in anthropological discipline, all the volume contributors refer to the works of Louis Dumont, particularly to his *Homo Hierarchicus* (1970), as a seminal but also a controversial book on the topic. Despite the fact that Dumont’s consideration of hierarchy, especially when unquestioningly contrasting ‘a prior state’ of Hindu caste system with the ‘imposed’ Western ideologies of egalitarianism and individualism, is already recognized as primordial and ahistorical, the authors tackle his arguments with great precision. In so doing, they identify the fields of (dis)agreement with Dumont’s pondering on the issue to better explain their ethnographic contexts in which hierarchy was observed as desirable.

Tackling the questions ‘Why should anthropologists be concerned with hierarchy?’ or ‘How have people leveraged ideas about hierarchy in order to challenge liberal models of the social good?’ (p. 3), Haynes and Hickel provide a theoretical framework in the Introduction, relating the topic of hierarchy to value and values. In opposition to Dumont, who refers to hierarchy as ‘encompassment of the contrary’ – an inextricable relationship between a whole and its parts in which the superior value encompasses the lower – their definition of hierarchy as a social form refers rather to ‘difference and asymmetry, and often also to rank’ (p. 4). The authors believe that based on this definition one may explain the co-existence of hierarchy with a certain kind of ‘ontological egalitarianism’ (p. 5) – that people who inhabit different ranks in one system may be regarded as an ontological equivalent in other circumstances. Making a further methodological distinction between ‘value as a noun’, referring to ‘ideas about a good social and relational world’, and ‘value as a verb’, referring to the ‘process of valuing’ (p. 10), the editors establish a comparative approach for exploring ‘hierarchical forms of social organization in the face of other options’ (p. 11). According to the editors, such a perspective enables observing comparatively when and where hierarchy is elaborated as socially desirable, and whether valuing hierarchy in certain social formations impedes non-hierarchical codes in others. Additionally, moving beyond Dumont’s understanding of hierarchy as the exercise of power in which powerful people subordinate those below them, the proposed perspective is also believed to enable understanding people’s affections for hierarchy or their conception of it as a shared value.

Within this framework, the volume’s contributors provide illustrative cases of people’s re-establishment of hierarchies in certain social arrangements, usually when they were confronted with alternative models of society and personhood. Already in the Introduction, Hickel discusses why many people in rural Zululand perceive liberalism

as a threat to hierarchies in their home, which they value and re-establish as a means to achieve health and good conditions for their social reproduction. In the same chapter, Haynes provides an example of unexpected but socially desirable hierarchical ties between leaders and laypeople in practicing Pentecostalism in the Zambian Copperbelt, often referred to as that of parents-generation. These hierarchical ties prove to be important to people as ‘a means of realizing local models of a good social world ... in which everyone is moving’ (p. 12).

Discussing the observation of Catholicism, which ‘has not got under the skin’ of the majority of the Lio people in Indonesia since its introduction in the late 1920s, Howell (chap. 1) analyses hierarchy both as a value schema and a mode of social organization. Despite the fact that a majority of Lio individuals are Catholic, Howell convincingly explains why the attempt of superimposition of Catholic values at the expense of *adat*, which is fundamentally a hierarchical and holistic tradition while promoting the social good, was met with rejection.

Similarly, Malara and Boylston (chap. 2) consider ambiguous understandings of top-down power as both ‘a moral good and a coercive force’ (p. 41) in contemporary Ethiopian Orthodox society. Yet by shifting attention from the classification of values to the practicalities, that is, to the ways of how people actually live with, manage, negotiate, build, maintain and change asymmetric relationships of virtue and injustice, love and mediation in their religious and family lives, the authors offer a more complete picture of the power-value relationship.

The relationship between destruction and hierarchy is reflected by Damon (chap. 3), who holds that ‘destruction everywhere centres social reality’ (p. 60), which means hierarchy. That humans use destruction and sacrifice to create their social life and continuity, Damon elaborates with the help of classic anthropological considerations of the Kula ring exchange activities, Gregory’s *Gifts and Commodities* and Lévi Strauss’s *Totemism*, and finally, he applies his point to modern circumstances – the contemporary West.

In chap. 4, Feuchtwang offers a conception of civilisation as a result of combining Mauss’s consideration on civilisation with Dumont’s conception on hierarchy. Criticizing Dumont’s use of ahistorical binary opposites in a form of purity versus pollution or *aegalis* versus *hierarchicus*, and leaning on Mauss’s theory of civilisation, Feuchtwang concludes that every civilisation is hierarchical, that is, ‘ideological and aspirational’ (p. 79). Moreover, Feuchtwang suggests his use of the word civilisation, which describes historically continuous and at once transformed ‘evaluational encompassment, ideology, aspiration, and self-fashioning’ (p. 86), as an analytic concept for exploring the history of specific civilisations. The latter he illustrates by the changing hierarchies in 6,000 years of China’s history.

The efforts of establishing the conditions for a good Islamic community in Pakistan by a transnational Islamic piety movement – the Tablighi Jamaat – are discussed by Khan (chap. 5), who analyses the Tablighi religious practices through their critique of contemporary Islamist political activism. Kahn discusses this ideological cleavage as a distinction between the Islamist modernist conception of religion and the Tablighis conception of sacred transformative practices like *dawat* (face-to-face preaching to fulfil

religious duties). His analysis shows that while the Islamists have adopted an ethics of egalitarian individualism, placing the ultimate value on individual agency, the Tablighis, on the contrary, perform *dawat* to create a world of 'pious sociality' (p. 98) through ethics of hierarchy and virtue of submitting to authority in order to counter the threat of moral chaos posed by egalitarian individualism.

Smedal's contribution (chap. 5) on 'demotion as value' is a credible example of how the social organization postulated on rank is diminishing among the Nghada in eastern Indonesia, where a noble woman who marries a common man is 'irreversibly demoted to the rank of her partner' (p. 118). Even though the demotion of noble women is performed through a symbolic but still humiliating ritual, Smedal holds that this practice is falling behind in the Ngada community because 'the nobles pose no threat to the more egalitarian ethos of the commoners' (p. 130).

In the Afterward, David Graeber provides a convincing explanation of 'what this [Dumont's] project really was, as well as its long-term political and theoretical effects' (p. 136). Locating the work of Louis Dumont, particularly his notion of hierarchy as a central tool of anthropological analysis, in the intellectual history of the anthropological discipline itself, Graeber makes the reader challenge the tacit assumptions that lie behind Dumont's project – his reducing the complex relations that used to be called power, dominations, stratification, inequality into a single uniform category of hierarchy, or presenting them as never being a contingent result of a play of forces. A first step in rethinking Dumont's project, Graeber states is represented in this volume, in which 'almost every author sets out to speak of hierarchy in a broadly Dumontian sense and ends up discovering some way that this standard approach is inadequate' (p. 147).

DUŠKA KNEŽEVIĆ HOČEVAR

The Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts