

SOCIAL RELATIONS IN THE FRONTIER: ACQUIRING STATUS HONOUR IN THE MARGIN

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ABSTRACT

We explored the formation of the social stratification of ethnic groups in a frontier area in Sulawesi, Indonesia. In-depth interviews with informants from all ethnic groups were conducted. I stayed and embedded into everyday life for almost a year. In the frontier place, people began as commoners and were poor in their places of origin. Certain residents were able to rise in power and status over time through their own economic and political efforts, whereas others have not been able to or have not aspired to do so. In everyday life, evidence of social stratification can be observed in many rituals, trading practices, and government activities. To improve their status, people with determination in this frontier place look for and take advantage of every opportunity. Characteristics that are stereotypical of each suku become evident in many of their livelihood pathways. If Bugis are considered brave and have a spirit of adventure, Toraja is said to have an eye for agriculture and skilled herdsmen. Tolaki tends to prefer administrative detail, which can lead to power and control. However, economic success is simply insufficient for one to be accorded with high status. Economic success must be combined with a display of good behaviour in everyday life. The distinction in economic and social achievements determines the ups and downs of the social status of people in Routa

Keywords: Education, Elder, Patron-Clients, Political Position, Social Stratification.

INTRODUCTION

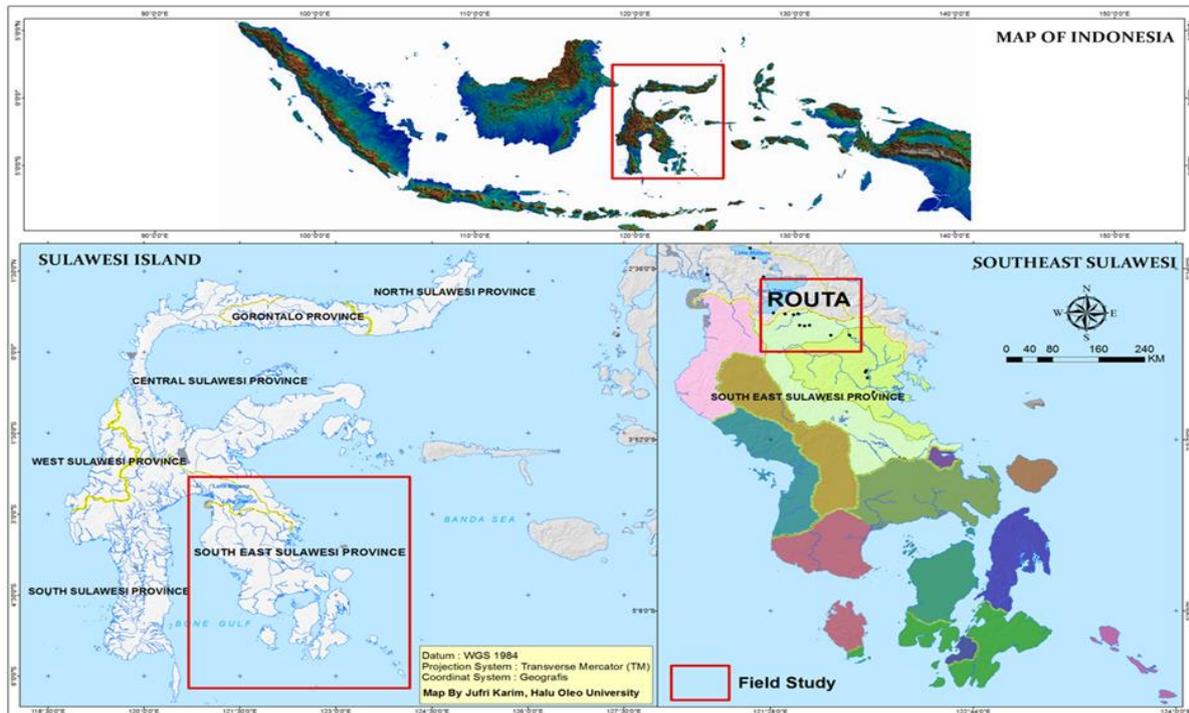
In the last decade, a fundamental renewal in social class has occurred on the basis of various empirical facts about wealth and income, as well as various social and cultural indicators (Bennett et al., 2008; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2008; Dorling, 2011; Hills, 2010). Many of which discuss the formation of social class in developed countries. Saunders (2001: 1-2) explained that certain people own more economic assets than others or are held in high esteem. In every community, politically powerful elites and comparatively powerless groups exist. Marx ([1976] cited in Saunders [1990: 5]) explained that the emergence of capitalism has promoted class societies. He emphasised that in every society, groups of people who own and control the means of production exist, whereas other groups own less and therefore have less power and control.

Residents in Rounta, South East of Sulawesi, Indonesia, currently consist mainly of migrants. Some of them earned power (class power) not because of a pre-existing system that affords unequal access to the means of production but because of the hard work in trading activities or achieving notable success in establishing their farms. They receive support from their families and friends particularly in providing labour and sometimes capital. Many of these migrants are Bugis who learn trading skills from their forebears. They gradually accumulate assets and persuade people to be their clients. The more clients they have, the more power they can use. Thus, each patron continually works to increase the number of clients they have.

Class power arises because of unequal access to material resources. The power that generates from a high status in a particular community can create social power. When a particular group dominates others because of its position in the state, such domination is an evidence of political power (Weber [1968] cited in Saunders [1990: 20 - 23]; Gerth and Mills [1946: 180-195]). Certain residents in Rounta are accorded greater respect not because they have inherited a status but because they are older and have lived longer in Rounta than others. They have progeny who live in many villages. These progeny pay tribute to their forebears and most importantly, to those who are still alive. They have a more advanced status than low-status people in this frontier region. Manstead (2018: 267) and Savage et al. (2013: 220-247) argued about the place of people who grow up and live to determine the way they think and make decisions for their lives. Stephens, Markus, and Phillips (2014: 615) emphasized that those who grow up in low-income households tend to have an understanding of the self and behaviour as interdependent with others and the social context.

Understanding social relations and stratification is pivotal for countries such as Indonesia, which consists of many ethnic groups. Lack of understanding of the culture of each ethnic group may lead to social conflict, horizontally and vertically. Social problems have worsened with the booming of investment in mining, palm oil companies and other development activities in the last decade. Rounta has been designated as a mining site of a multi-national mining company. The coming of foreign people may lead to the distortion of social relations within communities or between communities and the operator of economic activities. This

study explored the formation of the social stratification of ethnic groups in a frontier area in Sulawesi, Indonesia.



Picture 1. Map of Indonesia and Routa location

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE

For archipelagic countries, such as Indonesia, which comprises various ethnic groups, understanding critical issues about the meaning of social class, which influences community relations and status honour, is important. Social relations are the most basic thing in understanding society. In this sense, relations among communities result in the totality or complexity of social relations (Shaw, 2000). Savage et al. (2013) and Manstead (2018) emphasized that the differences among social classes is not only about financial circumstances but also about the social networking and extent of engagement with different cultural activities. Living in different social and economic contexts in the frontier where people tussle to achieve status honour, such as in Routa, can have a considerable impact on people's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. The subjective class identity determines the differences in socio-political attitudes. The low subjective social class is also low in its sense of personal control. Those who grow up in an upper class environment have more material and psychological resources available to them than others. Therefore, they have confidence and thus are motivated to produce their own social prestige. Conversely, those who grow up in a lower-class environment have few resources available to them, even lesser than they need (Evans and Mellon, 2016; Kraus et al., 2012; Kraus, Piff and Keltner, 2009; Clerly, Lee

and Kunz, 2013). Power determines the distribution of goods and services, and power can bring in privilege which ultimately shapes class and stratification in a society (Mayer, 1966). Stratification is a universal feature in society. It is obtained from the interaction of social differentiation and social evaluation (Ely, 1957). Furthermore, Simpson (1956) asserted the importance of special talent and the scarcity of qualified personnel. Marx ([1844, 1845, 1859, 1867, 1875, and 1885]; Marx and Engels [1848] cited in Bowles [2013]: 33) emphasized that wealth is an important point which can derive power and status. Bowles (2013: 33) accentuated how Durkheim contradicted that social status and income ultimately regard wealth as derivatives of social status. Weber (1921) and Lensky (1966) placed great emphasis on power dimension. Kerbo (2000) concluded that social stratification can be briefly defined as the systematically unequal distribution of power, wealth and status.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Routa, a frontier sub-district between three provinces (i.e., Southeast, South and Central Sulawesi) in Sulawesi Island of Indonesia. The remoteness of this area leads to the malingering of government attentiveness. This paper outlined the change and development of social statuses and relationships in Routa. We combined the history and the contemporary social stratification of people to collect information concerning the changing of their social status from the beginning of the formation of livelihoods in Routa. We deliberated the selection of the informants with the consideration that they represent each ethnic group, they are the longest-living people in Routa and that they master information about the development of its ethnic group. The informants consisted of men and women who are considered the founders of the formation of Routa's sub-district, have led Routa for more than 30 years, have a large family connection, are influential, have great and affluent traders, are religious leaders, are traditional figures, and are village officials. We engaged in local rituals and ceremonies for almost one year with combined observation. Data for analysis were obtained from the histories and information shared by the informants. The in-depth interviews that were conducted involved the everyday life of the informants who discussed the history of their livelihood and the way they achieved their social status. All relevant information was gathered in a note combined with a digital recording device and photographs to record observations. Subsequently, all information was coded and triangulated for validation and verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Stratification in Routa

The Bugis, Toraja and Tolaki family members dominate particular villages in Routa through marriage, business expansion and government positions. A few people from these families married more than once. Naum (2010: 104) suggested that a frontier is a place between two or more culturally different groups, and Routa certainly fits this definition. The Bugis, Toraja and Tolaki second family has now spread to several villages in Routa's sub-district. Many of the people in Routa can speak three main languages (i.e., Bugis, Toraja and Tolaki), regardless of their suku. In certain cases, relationships enhanced because of the intermarriage

between groups of people. Davis and Moore (2008)) declared that no society is ‘classless’ or ‘unstratified.’ Although Routa seems fundamentally egalitarian, persons who receive more respect than others exist, suggesting that forms of social precedence are strong in this community. Being a founding father, orang tua engenders respect from everyone.

Being a patron engenders and requires respect from its clients; and being a successful trader engenders respect from its customers. Although traders receive respect from many people, their position is fluid and mutable. A trader’s position of status and power can decline during a business slump. Tolaki civil servants likely engender respect from other Tolaki, but Bugis traders likely respect the position, not the person. For them, trading holds more importance than government administration, which they consider marginal compared with their business. Social power for Tolaki arises because of the particular status accorded by government positions. From their execution of administrative matters, their social standing, personal profile and family influence increases.

People receive respect from within their own family. Over time, their wide social profile can be heightened. Some people may even be accorded the position of orang tua. Their respect becomes increasingly widespread as their family extends because of intermarriage with other groups of people. To an extent, the increasing mobility of people from Routa to cities in South and Southeast Sulawesi province; the increasing number of migrants; the influx of electronic media, such as radio and television; and the advent of palm oil plantation and mining employees have opened the eyes of many people in Routa regarding the benefits of education. Some young people who are lucky enough to be sufficiently educated are government officers. The last category is that of ordinary people, many of whom still work as forest gatherers. Others are old men who either have no family members in Routa or are widowers. People in this category have few aspirations. They struggle for the subsistence of their lot with the help of their patrons.

Determinants of Social Status

In every village in Routa, some people are accorded distinction higher than the others. Those who are known as the founding fathers of villages are given this honour. Others are known as puutobu . In the Tolaki language, puu means ‘trunk’ or ‘pole,’ whereas tobu means ‘of a particular area.’ Before the Dutch arrived, Routa had long been popular as a destination for people from the South Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi and Southeast Sulawesi provinces of Indonesia, particularly Bugis, Toraja (from South Sulawesi), Bungku, (from Central Sulawesi) and Tolaki (from Southeast Sulawesi). Pelras (2000: 15-20) proposed that social stratification in the Bugis-Makassar society can be understood through patron-client relationships. He explained that although the patron-client system created the ‘subdivision’ of people into different groups, the system is distinct from a subdivision in ‘ranks’ and in ‘territorial units or kingdoms,’ which have absolute character. The membership is determined by ‘birth or residence.’ A patron-client relationship has ‘a voluntary basis,’ and the continuation of the relationship depends on the willingness of both parties. Nevertheless, the relationship can be categorized as a mutual obligation relationship between a superior (e.g., a patron or leader) and several subordinates (e.g., clients, retainers, agents or followers). These

relations are apparent in situations of sponsorship by following the invited migration, which is encouraged by successful traders and farmers to overcome labour shortages.

Early in Routa's development, individuals and families struggled to set up their livelihoods amidst limited infrastructure in the frontier. Over time, people began to acknowledge leaders within their group or in each settlement (i.e., kampung). Generally, they were the people who attained notable success in their fields (e.g., farmers, traders and government officials). They received respect from people who saw them as successful farmers and as leaders who could provide information or help in difficult situations by lending money and giving protection. They achieved such positions in the community through long-term endeavours. In terms of places of origin, a presumption that any particular suku is better than any other does not exist. Although each suku tends to choose to live in a different village (e.g., Toraja in Parudongka and Tanggola, Bugis in Tirawonua and Puuwiwirano and Tolaki in the three other villages), they still keep good avenues of communication with one another and operate as a single cultural, economic, social and political system.

Class Power through Patron-Client Relationships for Economic Opportunity

The Bugis in Routa are known as a group who seek economic opportunity. Many individuals and family groups of Bugis migrants in Routa operate as producers and entrepreneurs. Such an entrepreneurship was evident to Acciaioli (1998: 82-83) who emphasised the endeavours of the Bugis Migrantin in various fields, including itinerant dentists, gill-net fishermen, fish marketers, wet-rice farmers and kiosk operators, in his research on Bugis migrants in the Lore Lindu region of Central Sulawesi. Bugis migrants have shown similar initiatives in Routa.

Mattulada (1987: 5-7) explained that the Bugis-Makassar people usually establish three kinds of business; agriculture (i.e., *allaong rumang*), trading (i.e., *dangkangeng*) and sailing, including fishing (i.e., *pasompe*). The main 'capital' for agriculture is 'land,' whereas that for trading is 'confidence' and 'a big boat' (i.e., *pinisi*) for sailing. Mattulada underlined a three-tiered structure in each kind of business.

- First, the leader, *punggawa*, must maintain all equipment expenses. Sometimes, he is also called *punggawa lompo* (i.e., superordinate chief).
- Second, several subordinate boss, including *punggawa caddi* in trading boats, the *punggawa palaong* supervises agricultural activities, whereas *punggawa pajala* is in charge of fishing boats. These subordinate bosses usually have good skills in supervising.
- Last is the worker (i.e., *sawi*).

These relationships develop into patron-client relationships over time. Pelras (1981: 395) explained that the words 'patronage' and 'clients' originated from a model of social relationships, which existed in ancient Rome. A patronus was a nobleman who had several citizens of inferior rank as followers called clientes. These clientes were officially free but were not fully independent. The relationship between patrons and clients in ancient Rome was established on the basis of the reciprocity of rights and duties, which were usually hereditary. Patrons protected their clients from enemies and legal prosecution and provided

them land for sustenance. In return, clients had to support their patron in terms of reparation and contribute to the dowry of their patron's daughter upon marriage.

Chabot ([1950] cited in Pelras [1981: 397]) pointed out that the patron-client relationships in Bugis and Makassar societies are initially formed between a 'lord' or a master (i.e., *karaeng*) and several retainers, whom he refers to as his children (i.e., *anagna*) or his men (i.e., *taunna*). Although retainers are controlled by the lord, both parties need each other.

The patron-client relationship in Routa is not identical to the relationship between patronus and clientes in ancient Rome. Specifically, the relationship between patrons and clients in Routa is not limited to economic activities. Traders who act as patrons or *bos* often also act as advisors or consultants for a range of matters. Sometimes, clients come to discuss education for their children; other times, they come to discuss agricultural technology regarding types of fertilizer and seed, which can increase the quality and quantity of their harvest. Clients often come to them only to find out the latest information from outside Routa. Clients respect their patrons and on many occasions, clients defer to their patrons because they receive help from them. Another reason is because certain patrons act as religious leaders or civil servants (e.g., the headmaster of a school) or they have close family ties with the people of standing.

A Bugis merchant, Kandar, told the researcher that he expanded his business by encouraging community leaders in almost every village to be his agents. Lawi, a former Routa village head who lives in Parudongka and Ma Faruk and a trader in Routa village who is also the wife of their headmaster, are two of his agents. Kandar lent them money to buy cash crops from people in their villages. He also supported their kiosks. Through the implementation of this strategy, Kandar became a popular trader and has rapidly increased the number of his clients in almost every village. Kandar became successful and well-known in Routa. Most Bugis traders directly deal with their clients, but Kandar has refined his business strategy to include a middle stratum of agents to make it a 'patron-agents-clients' strategy.

Acciaioli (1989: 6) noted that Bugis always makes 'efforts to achieve a position of economic control and exploit untapped resources.' In the beginning, Bugis bought dammar resin and sold staple goods to dammar resin gatherers in Lengkobale, the small port on Lake Towuti. Thereafter, others began to gather other forest products, particularly rattan and timber, to open new farms and to cultivate staple foods and cash crops.

Pelras (2000: 52) pointed out the importance of kin relations in patron-client relationships in Bugis and Makassar societies. Such relations often lead to the formation of political power. Haji Sadar (Haji Kadir's elder brother) has a large cacao farm, wet-rice fields, a rice mill and hand tractors for hire in Tirawonua village. People then regard Haji Sadar as an elder (i.e., *orang tua*) and show their respect by always inviting him to sit in the front row at every ritual, wedding ceremony, rural and sub-district meeting. The head of Routa sub-district also appointed Haji Sadar as *puutobu* in Tirawonua. Pelras (2000: 26) explained the well-known tenet about 'the three points' (i.e., *tellu cappa*), which men can use to rise in status in the Bugis society. These points are as follows:

- The point of his dagger (i.e., *cappa kawali*), signifying prowess to wage war;

- The point of his tongue (i.e., cappa lila), symbolizing diplomatic ability; and
- The point of his penis (i.e., cappa lase), for the importance of an advantageous marriage.

According to Bugis thinking, diplomacy (i.e., cappa lila) is an integral part of good business. The Bugis use diplomacy to have a good effect on their clients. In addition to using the point of his tongue in business, the success of Haji Sadar's appointment as puutobu is an example of how Bugis traders can link to social and political power. One of Haji Sadar's family members married Nasir, a Tolaki who was the former head of Walandawe village. This marriage is advantageous for both families because Haji Sadar is acknowledged as the community leader in Walandawe. He also has a large extended Tolaki family. Acciaioli (1998: 81-82) emphasized the important role of kinship and affinal relations in migration and marketing channels in the Bugis community. Bugis families use kinship and affinal relations not only to establish new businesses but also to reorganize their businesses.

Unlike Haji families, Amba is a Bugis man who has not maintained high esteem in the eyes of the people. He was formerly a prominent Bugis in Routa who traded forest products, particularly dammar resin and rattan. The assumed main cause of the failure of Ambo's business in Routa is because he could not maintain good interpersonal relationships. Many considered him arrogant, and they felt that he did not respect their dignity as he often used harsh words that are considered insulting. Moreover, upward mobility to gain distinctive social status is not only about endowed capital but is also about social connection (Shrestha, 1989: 372).

To maintain their standing, people must continue to make every effort to be acknowledged and become more distinguished than others. People must also extend their success to their family members. Traders are most commonly the pioneers and those who try new things, such as new seed varieties or up-to-date agricultural practices. To an extent, the superiority of traders also influenced by their mobility and ability to travel back and forth to the market outside Routa. Such factors allow them an easy access to the latest information. The patron-client system can be creatively developed. It has been given a new business model by Kandar who added a middle layer (i.e., agents) through whom his clients deal with. These agents also have clients of their own. Kandar's system is complex and far-reaching, conferring a benefit to many who return him the favour either directly or indirectly and economically and socially.

Social Power Strategies

Davis (1942: 309) defined status as a position recognized and supported by the entire society rooted in the folkways and mores. Acciaioli (2009: 66-67) indicated that a person's position may be set by birth, an inherent status fixed unalterably and by the position of his/her father and mother in the rank system. Robinson (1986: 239-262) examined the role of race and ethnicity as factors that support class domination in the incorporation of local people into the capitalist mode of production in a mining town. Foreigners or expatriates always dominated the highest positions in the mining company in Soroako, followed by people from Java and only then by the local Sorowakans. The company observed that the local people only attained

low education, thus they were considered unskilled. The mining company also viewed the residents of Routa the same way.

In examining social stratification and how people earn distinguished status in remote places like Routa, dichotomies are evident, such as between old and young people, bos and followers/clients or distinguished persons (i.e., community leaders) and ordinary people. As with most cultures in Indonesia, respect is always given to elders by the young members of the community (Fox, 2009: 32). Loyal clients always respect their bos in the way a son respects his father. Those who have long been in Routa and are considered founding fathers, such as Haji Sadar and Lukas, are accorded distinguished status (orang tua).

Having met groups of people in several villages in Routa, certain families are more prominent than others in terms of status. The growth of many well-established families in Routa can be said to be similar to that of a clump of bamboo; fast-growing, strong, self-sufficient and widely influential. The resulting social networks and spheres of influence can expand over time as both are strengthened by marriages to people outside the clump. The growth may appear slow, but underground rhizome runners can stretch far away from the parent clump. The speed of a new plant establishing itself from the rhizome depends on the soil and climate conditions. Before a new plant can become self-sufficient, it must receive sustenance from the parent. After the new plant becomes self-sufficient, it retains the genetic material from the parent. Families grow and spread to take up lands and to widen their influence while always acknowledging their origins. This metaphor can be considered apt to describe the social networks and spheres of influence developed in Routa. McWilliam (2009: 111-126) described the common botanical idiom, 'trunk' and 'tip', when he found the expression of precedence in the island of Timor in Eastern Indonesia.

Lukas is one of the Tolaki who has many relatives in Routa. He was the headman in Routa for more than 30 years, and he married thrice. His progeny have spread into three of the seven villages under Routa's sub-district (i.e., Routa, Walandawe and Lalomerui). Lukas' extended families dominate villages where many Tolaki live. He is considered an orang tua for most Tolaki because of the domination of his extended family. A few Tolaki from outside this family are also considered orang tua. In every village, puutobu is also regarded as orang tua, but not all orang tua are puutobu because only one puutobu exists in every village. On the contrary, more than one orang tua can exist in a village.

In addition to Tolaki, several groups of Torajan people, who currently settle in Routa, are regarded as orang tua. Ahmad is one of them. He moved to Routa with his parents in 1971. Since then, he has only returned a few times to Toraja to attend funerals. He has also made a successful living in Routa. He owns a large cacao farm and paddy fields in Parudongka. One of his children graduated from nursing school and is married to a policeman. She is now living in the Moluccas. Another of his daughters is married to the head of Parudongka village who has the largest pepper farm in Routa. Moreover, people regard Ahmad as the orang tua of the Toraja in Parudongka. Although some Bugis have earned respect through great success in trading, others are acknowledged as religious leaders or even for bravery, such as the case of Lalu. He was one of Kahar Muzakkar's soldiers. Now that he is an old man, many people

acknowledge him as the former guerrilla who shot an Indonesian army helicopter. He married a Tolaki woman from Latoma and encouraged many of his wife's relatives to move to Rota. Almost all of his children have married local people. Therefore, his family is spread throughout the Rota area.

Upward Mobility through Education

Education is gradually being used as a vehicle for upward mobility in Rota. However, using education as the ladder to achieve a high social status is difficult for people in Rota. Education is an expensive and long-term commitment for parents because they must invest time and money long before their children graduate from university and possibly secure an advantageous job. Education is a gamble that capable parents are willing to take. The school system reproduces social inequalities by promoting norms and values which are only familiar to children with a middle-class background (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Darnon, Wiederkehr, Dompnier and Amrtinot, 2018). Such norms and values are not for those who are from the remoteness of Rota. People in this frontier are considered low-class.

Enhanced Power through Political Position

Weber (1968) (cited in Saunders, 1990: 20) explained that a particular group may take control of another under the umbrella of a state institution, whether by directly controlling it or by influencing those who do so. A group of Tolaki has controlled government positions since Rota was established as a village when it became part of the new province of Southeast Sulawesi in 1964. Lukas led Rota amidst the difficult situation during the Darul Islam rebellion and as the first village head. Now as an orang tua, he is considered the 'grandfather' of Rota. He told me proudly that he had succeeded in making all his sons-in-law civil servants. He spearheaded the formation of new villages, such as Tirawonua, Parudongka and Walandawe. Tolaki capitalizes on these villages to extend their occupancy of government positions. Ironically, although this group of Tolaki has not sought education as a path to occupational success, they still have access to government positions. Teachers, nurses, sub-district officials and village heads are affected. Other positions, such as police, including kapolsek (i.e., the head of police in a sub-district), are appointed by the central government. However, these positions are not dominated by Tolaki. Certain teaching positions and those for health officers in remote areas are filled on merit by the designated provincial and central government authorities. Not all these positions are necessarily filled by a particular family group.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The value of social relationships is construed differently by different suku according to their life path bias. No common yardstick exists with which to compare a prominent trader, a person who occupies the highest local government position or a landowner with large acreages of cash crops. Previous research (Evans and Mellon, 2016; Kraus et al., 2012; Kraus, Piff and Keltner, 2009; Clerly, Lee and Kunz, 2013) has emphasized that the subjective class identity determines the differences in socio-political attitudes as influence vehicles, which people use to choose and achieve status honour. Clerly, Lee and Kunz (2013)

found that people live in need (i.e., poverty) because of their lack of willpower or laziness and not merely because of social injustice. Determining how society construes their relationships and tussles to achieve status honour may help the government in creating harmonious relationships among different ethnic groups. This study did not further discuss the economic inequality between each ethnic group (e.g., livelihoods). The presence of large companies (e.g., mining and palm oil) may continue to change the nature of social relationships in this frontier area. Future research that will understand the impact inflow of large companies on social relations and economic inequalities will be noteworthy.

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