Rice as Symbolic Capital: Knowledge, Practice and the Struggle for Social Recognition in an Indonesian Transmigration Site

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Abstract

Dengan menggunakan konsep Pierre Bourdieu mengenai 'modal simbolis' (*symbolic capital*), tulisan ini mengkaji perubahan pertanian di salah satu pemukiman transmigrasi di Pulau Halmahera, Maluku Utara. Pada musim kemarau panjang tahun 1997, para transmigran dari Desa Bicoli di Halmahera Tengah mulai menanam padi untuk pertama kali. Merupakan kelompok transmigran satu-satunya di antara kelompok-kelompok transmigran lokal di daerah transmigrasi yang sebelum memasuki daerah transmigrasi diacu oleh penulis untuk mempertahankan faktor-faktor yang mendorong orang Bicoli mengadopsi pengetahuan pertanian dari transmigran asal yang lebih awal bermukim di wilayah ini. Orang Bicoli yang bertransmigrasi ke Halmahera merupakan kaum ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji adopsi pengetahuan bercocok tanam padi ini sebagai strategi untuk memperoleh modal simbolis (*symbolic capital*) dan pengakuan sosial (*social recognition*) sebagai mana dikemukakan oleh Pierre Bourdieu. Dalam uraian ini, penulis mengemukakan argumentasinya bahwa pengetahuan (*knowledge*) tidak dapat dipisahkan dari isu-isu kekuasaan sosial (*social power*), praktik (*practice*) serta perebutan yang konstan untuk memperoleh modal simbolis (*the struggle for symbolic capital*).

Introduction¹

Five years after they joined the integrated

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transmigration site in Miaf on the North Malukan island of Halmahera, most local Bicoli transmigrants have begun initiating their fellow Javanese transmigrants and have planted wet-rice on their house plots (pekarangan). Among all the local transmigrants from Halmahera, Bicoli people are the only ones to do so. This paper tries to show how this change happened and reflects on its possible causes. Why are Bicoli people as the only local group so interested in rice-farming? What are the reasons behind their interest? The transfer of knowledge about wet-rice farming from Javanese to Bicoli transmigrants

appears to be a tangible success of the transmigration program. The eagerness of Bicoli farmers to shift from a traditional reliance on cassava and sago to wet-rice agriculture (sawah) seems to be proof of the social evolutionary premise of the transmigration program. The implicit assumption of the program thus appears to be that transmigration by introducing Javanese sawah farming methods in a swidden or horticultural environment in the Outer Islands will cause local farmers to adopt this supposedly more advanced and productive form of agriculture through a process of socio-cultural osmosis (see Dove 1985). What appears to be a simple transfer of knowledge about agriculture dissolves, however, when one examines in more detail the socio-cultural background of the Bicoli people who adopted sawah farming methods. The scenario of a 'trickle-down' effect of farming knowledge from more developed to less developed on which the transmigration program is premised becomes instead the story of how local farmers seek to change their social status by growing rice—as it turns out not primarily because growing rice is economically profitable but more importantly because it is symbolically charged activity. Rice acts as a source of symbolic capital in Halmahera, a source which Bicoli people tap into in their search for social recognition from their neighbours in Halmahera.

A line of argument such as this necessarily involves an engagement with the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his notion of 'symbolic capital' which one critic describes as Bourdieu's 'theoretically most cogent concept' (Lash 1993:200). Although Bourdieu's interest in the struggle for social recognition and coinage of the term 'symbolic capital' grew out of his studies of Kabyle society in Algeria with its cultural emphasis on honour and shame, symbolic capital has always been

at the centre of Bourdieu's search for a general science of 'the economy of practices' (Bourdieu 1977:183; Jenkins 1992:40). In emphasising the centrality of the notion for his general oeuvre, provides a useful first definition of 'symbolic capital':

For instance, in my earliest work on honour... you find all the problems that I am still tackling today: the idea that struggles for recognition are a fundamental dimension of social life and that what is at stake in them is the accumulation of a particular form of capital, honour in the sense of reputation and prestige, and that there is, therefore, a specific logic behind the accumulation of symbolic capital, as capital founded on cognition [cognition] and recognition [reconnaissance] (Bourdieu 1990a:22).

Symbolic capital is the recognition or prestige one receives for certain practices or acquisition of certain goods that carry special value within a specific field or domain of power and knowledge. To obtain symbolic capital one generally has to expend other forms of capital, such as economic capital (money or goods), cultural capital (educational knowledge) or social capital (social connections). Or rather, symbolic capital is 'the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate' (Bourdieu 1987:4). Without wanting to go into a detailed definition of Bourdieu's other central concepts—concepts such as *habitus*, field, *doxa* and practice—it is still necessary to briefly outline the theoretical landscape into which Bourdieu places the notion of symbolic capital. For Bourdieu much of social life consists of struggles for recognition through unconscious and uncultivated strategies that seek to convert one form of capital to another. These strategies of conversion take place within a complex social space structured in overlapping fields. Within these social fields different types of capital take on specific value. The conversion of

forms of capital is only possible because people misrecognise or misunderstand the effects of their own actions—hence the uncalculated and unconscious character of their strategies. It is, furthermore, only possible because actions, goods and forms of knowledge have different meaning and value to different people in different situations—hence the division of social space into fields. To be more concrete, it is only because Bicolí people deny that their adoption of rice farming has any relevance for their social status that rice and rice farming work as forms of symbolic capital. The fact that rice is more than a food staple but also has cultural significance in different ways to Javanese, Bicolí and local Halaherans makes the adoption of rice farming meaningful and worthwhile.

The strategies of conversion of one form of capital to another are fundamentally social for Bourdieu, rather than being based on individual rational choices (Bourdieu 1990b:50). The 'habitus' has an outspoken strategic tendency but one that is always firmly located within a particular social field as both structured and structuring. The question then becomes one of defining the social and cultural background that motivates a particular type of conversion; for, as Craig Calhoun has noted, Bourdieu's theory implies that the principles of convertibility of capital by necessity must be historically and socially specific (Calhoun 1993:68). The logic of conversion cannot be universal but must be in tune with the particular 'rules of the game' that exist within a particular field or assembly of overlapping fields in a given society. In what follows, I will try exemplify this point. The conversion of economic over symbolic to social capital that occurs in the Bicolí adoption of rice farming follows specific principles that have specific historical and social roots.

The floundering of transmigrant ideals

Six hundred transmigrant families arrived to Maf during 1992 and 1993. Of these, 300 families came from Java and another 300 families came from villages throughout North Maluku.² The local transmigrants came predominantly from nearby villages in Central Halahera. The largest group of local transmigrants came from the villages of Bicolí (85 families). Another 50 families came from ten villages in Central Halahera, while the rest came from a variety of villages in Ternate, North Halahera, Central Maluku and North Sulawesi. Finally, ten families from the nomadic forest-dwelling Tobelo population that inhabits the interior of Central Halahera had also joined the estate as transmigrants. During the first four years of its existence, this demographic composition began to shift as the Javanese transmigrants deserted the estate in large numbers. From a position of demographic majority over any other group, in 1993, Javanese transmigrants were in 1997 technically a minority. By the middle of 1997 only 134 Javanese households were left on the estate. The houses of the departing Javanese families had to some extent been offered to local transmigrants from Morotai and Sangir, who now made up the two largest local groups after Bicolí people.

The transmigrant site in Maf consists of two settlements (SP). In 1997, SP1 had 73 Javanese families—down from 150—and 170 families of 'local' origin, mainly Morotai, Sangir, Ternatan, Tobelo and Maba people. In SP2, which bore the grandiose name 'Jakarta

² Roughly half of the transmigrants from the island of Java were Sundanese from West Java. About 100 transmigrant families came from Central Java, while a minority of about 50 families came from East Java. I use the term 'Javanese' as a convenient short-hand for all three groups.

Baru' (New Jakarta), the change had been even more dramatic. From an original 150 families in 1993, Javanese families accounted for only 61 households in 'Jakarta Baru' in 1997. Instead the settlement was now dominated by Bicolí families—76 in total—with an extra half dozen families from other Central Halaheran villages. Despite the influx of new local transmigrants, more than 100 houses remained empty in each of the two settlements. While they were unoccupied and untouched in SP1 (mainly because their former owners still made claims to them), the empty houses of 'Jakarta Baru' had all been stripped and 81 of the garden plots on which the houses were placed were being farmed by either Bicolí or Javanese transmigrants.

While many Javanese families planted profitable cash crops like onions, tomatoes, or water melon on at least part of their plots, the Bicolí families were interested in planting one thing only: rice. This interest was somewhat of a fad. No one had experience in rice farming, let alone wet-rice farming. Central Halahera has no traditional dry-rice farming (*ladang*), in contrast to most cultural groups of North Halahera. Nevertheless, a handful of Bicolí families had just had their first harvest. The harvest had not been large, due in part to the El Niño-induced drought that hit the whole country in 1997, but persistent rumours in the Bicolí community would have it that the profits had been considerable.

To get to an understanding of the Bicolí faith in rice, I have to contextualise their decision to plant sawah by describing the overall economic and productive arrangement under which the transmigrants live as well as the social and cultural background of the Bicolí people and their reasons for joining as transmigrants. Along the way, I shall also suggest an explanation for the Javanese exodus.

The structure of the integrated transmigrant and timber plantation program

The transmigrant site in Maf is not part of the general transmigrant program (*transmigrasi*). Instead the transmigrants are linked to a timber estate (*HTI-Trans*) a new offshoot on the overall Indonesian transmigrant project. The timber estate is a plantation of commercial tree crops on which the transmigrants are supposed to work as wage labourers. They are expected to derive a substantial part of their cash income from this work, enough to fulfil most of their basic needs. In contrast to the general transmigrant program (*transmigrasi*) where agriculture is supposed to be the basis of transmigrant livelihood, the transmigrants on timber estates are expected to derive only a minor part of their income from farming. As a consequence, each family receives ownership of a quarter of a hectare of farming land only, compared to two hectares per family in the general transmigrant program. To compensate for the lack of owned land, each family on the estate is given access to one hectare of plantation land for intercropping (*umpang sari*). On this piece of plantation land, called 'diversification land' (*lahan diversifikasi*), the family is allowed to plant annual crops between the plantation trees in return for tending for them. Ideally, the income of transmigrant families on the *HTI-Trans* thus derives from three sources: their wage labour in the plantation, their agricultural work on their house plots and their work as share-croppers on a plot of diversification land. In effect, however, these sources had not been tapped by the transmigrants to the extent the timber estate program proposed. In Maf, the diversification land was only made available to the transmigrants five years after the timber estate opened. Even after it was allotted, however, virtually no

transmigrant families began tending the land. They objected that the land was controlled by the estate and ultimately remained state land. Without private ownership of the land (or of the plantation trees on the land), people did not feel that the land provided any long-term security or profits. The whole issue of ownership of diversification land was clouded in misunderstanding and confusion and was a major cause of anger and frustration in the transmigrant community.

While a few local transmigrants took up work on the diversification land, the majority of the transmigrants, especially the Javanese transmigrants, refused to begin work before they were given official ownership titles to the land, thereby cutting off access for themselves to land when they were in fact in dire need of it. The land shortage was felt most acutely by Javanese transmigrants because they had no access to land outside the estate, unlike most local transmigrants who initially joined the estate because it bordered on their coconut groves on the coast. The land shortage among the Javanese transmigrants led to a general sense of deprivation that was compounded by the fact that they found the paid work on the plantation exceedingly hard and often, as a consequence, preferred not to work on the estate as wage labourers. Javanese transmigrants participated significantly less in plantation wage labour than local transmigrants.³ Thereby many Javanese transmigrants were deprived of the two major sources of livelihood on the timber estate: plantation wage labour and share-cropping. This left them wholly dependant on the quarter hectare *pekarangan* plot.

³ Only twenty-eight per cent of the Javanese transmigrants reported having worked on the plantation at one time or another, while 42 per cent of local transmigrants reported to have participated in plantation labour.

Exodus and the growth of new opportunities

The exodus of Javanese transmigrants should be seen in light of these limitations in their economic activities. Without additional income from wage labour or share-cropping, life on the estate was considered far too tough and unprofitable by most Javanese.

The main source of the hardship felt by the Javanese transmigrants was a lack of owned land. As has been observed also by Satrio Satrio among plantation workers in Sumatra, ownership provides a sense of security and calm (*tenang*) (Satrio 1996). Limited to a plot of land only an eighth the size of the plot of land an ordinary transmigrant family receives, many Javanese transmigrants felt deceived by the estate and the Department of Transmigration. They had expected to get ownership of two hectares of land just as ordinary transmigrants do and they felt unprepared for the hardship of plantation work in mountainous terrain. While local transmigrants often had gardens bordering the estate on which they could rely for additional income, land was now scarce and no possibility of access to gardens outside the plantation existed for the Javanese transmigrants.

However, the exodus that depleted the Javanese transmigrant community also opened up new opportunities for those who remained. While the estate management accused the fleeing Javanese of being lazy and failed to assuage the situation for the transmigrants that held out on the estate, the departure of 55 per cent of the Javanese transmigrants produced an alternative source of land and income. This was especially evident in 'Jakarta Baru' where the empty house plots left by the departing Javanese were occupied and tiled by Javanese and Bicolí transmigrants. The remaining Javanese transmigrants showed a great deal of interest in acquiring extra plots

of land to expand their land base. Of the 61 Javanese households in 'Jakarta Baru', 23 families acquired either one or two extra plots. In this way, 16 families obtained a total of three quarters of a hectare of farming land, while eight families by acquiring one extra plot and got a total of half a hectare of land enough to sustain a living and making them independent of plantation work. 38 Javanese households did not acquire extra plots and indeed showed little enthusiasm for staying on the estate.⁴

The Bicolí transmigrants in 'Jakarta Baru', however, moved into the empty plots of land with a vengeance, even when compared to their Javanese neighbours. Thirty-four out of 76 Bicolí families acquired an extra plot of land. Initially, this does not appear to make much sense. The Bicolí were not pressured by a shortage of land or by a lack of cash cropping opportunities. The majority of Bicolí transmigrants had coconut gardens on the coast near the transmigration site. Bicolí transmigrants, furthermore, were the most active wage labourers on the plantation.⁵

Some Bicolí people reserved the house plot for family members who planned to join the estate or for children who were expected to

⁴ Indicative of their plans to leave the estate was that eleven of these 38 households who did not acquire extra plots had only one occupant, namely the husband. His wife and children had in many cases already returned home while he remained behind to sell the house and otherwise try to work up a bit of capital in order to return to the home village with the required gifts (*oleh-oleh*) and a semblance of dignity.

⁵ In the month of August 1997, for instance, 171 Bicolí people had worked on the plantation out of a total of 331 Bicolí people in 'Jakarta Baru'. A staggering 51 per cent of all Bicolí people in 'Jakarta Baru' - old and young - thus worked on the estate in one particular month. Compare this number to the fact that only 28 per cent of Javanese transmigrants or 41 per cent of the local transmigrants when taken as a whole had worked on the plantation - ever.

marry in the foreseeable future. But most intended to plant rice, although none of them had any experience in rice farming. To plant rice they therefore needed the help, advice and labour of the Javanese transmigrants and they were willing to pay for it. The decision to plant rice and thus depend on rented Javanese labour was curious because there had been a history of distrust and animosity between Bicolí and Javanese transmigrants since the opening of the site in 1992. But I stray ahead of myself. Let me backtrack a bit and outline the background of the Bicolí transmigrants in 'Jakarta Baru'. Except for two families all Bicolí transmigrants in 'Jakarta Baru' are descendants of slaves, and this is a major factor in their reasons for joining the estate. It is also an important element in explaining the Bicolí willingness to shift to rice cultivation. In order to explain the social origin of the Bicolí transmigrants it is necessary to digress slightly into the history of the sultanates of North Maluku.

Slave origins

Originally, North Maluku was ruled by four kingdoms: Ternate, Tidore, Bacan and Jailolo (Makian). The intervention of Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch merchant warships and troops meant that the traditional enmity between these domains could be settled more decisively and for all intents and purposes two sultanates were left by the early seventeenth century. The sultanate of Jailolo had been destroyed when the sultanate was besieged and sacked by a joint Ternate-Portuguese force in 1551 (Andaya 1993:130). Bacan had similarly been politically insignificant since the sixteenth century (*ibid.*:53).

Of the two remaining sultanates, Tidore and Ternate, Tidore was the smallest and the least known, but it nevertheless claimed to control the Papuan islands - the eastern and

northern coastline of what is today Irian Jaya. This 'control', the extension and intensity of which was no doubt exaggerated to inflate the importance of the sultanate in Dutch colonial eyes, was exercised indirectly through the Tidore vassals of Central Halmahera: Maba, Patani, Gebe, and Bicolli. These domains regularly organised raids to the 'Papuan lands', whence they brought back tribute in the form of tortoise shells, ambergris, birds of paradise and, most importantly, slaves (*ibid.*:192). Slave raids on the Papuan coast escalated during the eighteenth century as Dutch demands for slaves for their Banda nutmeg plantations increased (Andaya 1991), and Tidore became a major market in slaves within an overarching colonial need for labour. The slaves also became important within the local economies of North Maluku and were integrated both into the sultanate court on Tidore and into the local economies on Halmahera.

With an absence of tight administrative control and no full agreement from the 'subjected' people about their political status, tribute expeditions were often no more than occasions for raids by the Halmaheran *kora-kora* war boats on coastal villages for booty and slaves (Kamma 1972:215). The slaves obtained independently during these raids were integrated into a three-tiered Halmaheran society, ordered according to status. The noble or 'named' lineages occupied the top of the village hierarchy. They were families that bore sultanate titles and had office within the sultanate hierarchy. Commoners or 'ordinary people' formed the main body of village society. Commoners were autochthonous Halmaheran villagers without ritual or political office. The Papuan slaves acquired during raids occupied the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. Easily recognisable by their darker skin, frizzy hair

and Papuan features, their physical traits became synonymous with low social status. Thus in some central Halmaheran languages the word for 'slave' is also the word for 'frizzy hair'. The precise social relationship between slaves, commoners and nobles in Southeast Asia in general has been discussed at length (e.g. Reid 1983b). However, the general evidence suggests that slaves in Southeast Asia traditionally suffered less stigmatisation, physical abuse and social isolation than their counterparts in European and American hands. Cambier who visited Bicolli in 1825 condemned with usual nineteenth century moral outrage the slavery he encountered but added that 'to their credit I must affirm that they treat their servants more like children than like slaves' (Cambier 1872:258).⁶

The difference in status between nobles and slaves was nevertheless significant with important social implications for the Papuan slaves. In Bicolli, the central Halmaheran village with the largest number of Papuan slaves, a slave was obliged to crawl or walk bent forward past a noble. No slave could wear a hat or anything but specific clothes considered suitable for slaves. A slave could not deny a work task demanded by a noble or refuse a request and no slave could marry a noble or a commoner.

Modern oppositions

An initial ban on the import and trade in slaves had been introduced in 1815, but in 1860 the colonial government in the Dutch East Indies decided to abolish slavery com-

pletely (Furnivall 1939:181).⁷ 'Completely' is not quite the right word here for a number of local rulers were allowed to maintain their slaves. Amongst these were the sultanates of North Maluku. When the sultanates were finally forced to free their slaves by colonial decree in 1879, a reported 3,078 slaves were released from the sultanate court in Tidore (Kamma 1948:49-268). At the same time, slaves in the Halmaheran villages under sultanate rule achieved their formal freedom. The freed slaves of Bicolli moved from the village of their former masters to settle in an adjacent hamlet of their own. The hamlet was named in the Bicolli language after the ochre colour of the stream that flows through it: Kasuba. Kasuba is now the name people use to circumscribe descendants of Bicolli slaves. The name is also used by Kasuba people themselves when they wish to highlight a difference to their former masters. The issue of their former slave status is now silenced in public by the rhetoric of national egalitarianism under which Kasuba people assert their formal equality. In practice, however, the memory of their former status continues to impact on social relations.

Judging from a German report twenty years after their release, the relationship between the former slaves and their one-time masters was at this time, if not amicable, at least peaceful (Kükenthal 1896:96). Relations between the two former status groups began to sour rapidly after Indonesian independence in 1949, however, when the discourse of modern egalitarianism backed by new Indonesian authorities and the ideology of

Pancasila provided Kasuba people with a conceptual alternative to the now 'feudal' attitudes of the Bicolli nobles. A particular bone of contention was the discussion about who could lead the Muslim community in prayer as *imam* and who could occupy the position as village head (*kepala desa*), an office which had substituted the sultanate-appointed title of *gimataha*. These positions had traditionally been the sole entitlement of the nobles. In fact, their nobility was enshrined in these and similar titles. For the nobles it was therefore unthinkable, even long after the abolishment of the sultanates of North Maluku in 1914, that a person from a lineage of low status, let alone a former slave, should occupy an office, the prestige of which derived ultimately from the symbolic power of the Sultan.

Kasuba had remained part of Bicolli village and as the population of Kasuba grew to outnumber the other inhabitants of Bicolli, pressure mounted from Kasuba to be represented in village leadership yet to no avail. Today the total number inhabitants in Bicolli is about 2,500, seventy per cent of whom reside in Kasuba. Till this day however, no Kasuba person has served either as a village head or as an *imam* in Bicolli or elsewhere. During the 1980s Kasuba people began to look to government-sponsored project as a way of escaping the problem of their political subjugation in Bicolli. Added to the political tensions were an acute overpopulation and a dire shortage of land among Kasuba people. In former centuries, agriculture had been performed exclusively by slaves, just like most forms of fishing and gathering activities were the duty of slaves (Cambier 1872:261). This pattern holds true even today. With a few exceptions the only people with extensive gardens of subsistence crops in Bicolli are Kasuba people. The possibility of expansions

⁶ By 'servants' Cambier meant both Papuan slaves of war and indigenous debt slaves that he also encountered in the village, a dual source of enslavement that characterised much of Southeast Asia (Reid 1983b:8-13).

⁷ As Anthony Reid notes, the Dutch abolition of the slave trade in Indonesia in 1860 was less the result of a sudden moral sensitivity to the excesses of bondage and more a response to institutional and economic changes that made the exploitation of wage labourers a cheaper option (Reid 1983a:33).

of their gardens to feed the rising population was blocked by mountains and swampy terrain, while their attempts to enlarge their hamlet to house a growing population were obstructed by the refusal of Bicolli nobles to grant land for this purpose. During the 1970s and 1980s many Kasuba people established gardens far from Bicolli along the coastline near Mial.

It was many of these people who decided to join the transmigration site in 1992 to be closer to their coconut gardens. Roughly 100 Kasuba families had already in 1984 joined a Ministry of Agriculture project nearby in the village of Lolashita that aimed at growing high-yielding coconut species. Despite the trickle away from Kasuba, the hamlet remained hopelessly overpopulated. In 1987 disaster struck, when a cholera epidemic hit the overcrowded hamlet killing 300 people. While Kasuba people attributed the deaths to sorcery and killed the man suspected of poisoning their wells in a collective assault, Bicolli people from a background of nobles were quick to point out that the disease had not struck in their section of the village and they swayed between attributing the deaths to divine will and to the unhygienic habits of Kasuba people.

The large presence of Bicolli people among the transmigrants should be seen, then, as an extension of the strained relationship between Kasuba people and the descendants of noble and commoner lineages which included tensions over the right to hold political office, access to land for gardens and village extensions as well as muted recriminations. Out of earshot Kasuba people accused Bicolli nobles of arrogance and haughtiness. The nobles, in turn, denounced Kasuba people as careless, obstinate, unduly rebellious and backward. The past slave-master duality remained silently but no less forcefully present

in their relationship in the transmigration site and continued to inform the actions of both parties, particularly those of Kasuba people. An illustration of this may be gained from the dispute between Javanese and Kasuba people in 'Jakarta Baru' over who should occupy the position as village head—a repetition of the dispute Kasuba people had faced back in Bicolli over the previous twenty years. The first village head had been Javanese, but Kasuba people argued that the village leader should be from their ranks since they were by the end of 1996 in the majority over the Javanese. The struggle was eventually won by the Kasuba majority but when they appointed a village head, they chose a twenty-four year-old man from one of the two households of 'noble' descent in 'Jakarta Baru'. Apart from the two 'noble' families in 'Jakarta Baru', ten Bicolli families of noble and commoner descent had joined the estate but settled in SPI, a safe 3 kilometres from Jakarta Baru. It was partly for their benefit that later accumulations of symbolic capital were enacted. The Kasuba choice of a man of noble Bicolli descent as their new village head was a clear indication of the continuing significance of the relationship between former slaves and nobles, despite rhetorical disclaimers of its present relevance.

Symbolic capital and the struggle for social recognition

It is in light of the continuing, if ambiguous, relationship between descendants from slave lineages and noble lineages that the Kasuba decision to plant wet-rice should be seen. What benefits could a low status group like Kasuba people derive from a decision to plant wet-rice, a crop with which they were completely unfamiliar?

First, one should note that Kasuba people are enterprising farmers, a fact that was al-

ready remarked upon a century ago when the German traveller Willy Krickenhoff compared the laziness of the ordinary Bicolli population to the diligence of their slaves who did all their work for them (Krickenhoff 1896:96). The same distinction is applied today. The estate management laments that Kasuba people are too violent, too emotional and that they eat indolently.⁸ Nevertheless, the management also lauds Kasuba people for their hard work and active engagement in plantation labour and contrasts their diligence to the indolence of other local transmigrants as much as to the laziness of Javanese transmigrants.⁹

But neither inherent cultural aptitudes for work or economics in the strict sense of the word can account for the Kasuba interest in rice. The first rice harvest by a Kasuba man had not been altogether promising, and yet it was this harvest which had started the Kasuba venture into rice farming. With the hired help of Javanese transmigrants, Mustafa had sown rice on two *pekarangan* house plots. From

⁸ These complaints suppose a lack of bodily and spiritual comportment in Kasuba, in contrast to the mental and physical self-discipline of the refined and the developed. For another illustration of the close ideological link between development and the reorganisation of eating habits that imagines 'unstructured' eating habits to be an expression of backwardness, see Tsing 1993:93.

⁹ This pejorative view of Javanese indolence is a curious reversal of the ordinary myth of the lazy primitive so current in the Indonesian development ideology. This 'development myth' usually labels indigenous peoples, especially those with a sago-based economy, as lazy. The colonial roots of such prejudice are, of course, unmistakable (see Atlas 1977). In this case, however, the laziness of Javanese transmigrants was not attributed to a supposed primitivity but on the contrary to their modernity. The argument of the estate management was that Javanese transmigrants were decadent and spent from lives of comparable ease back in Java, which made them unable and unwillingly to put up with the toils of forest work. The myth of the lazy primitive was thereby substituted by the myth of the lazy modern.

these plots he had derived just over 1,000 kilos of husked rice, a respectable if not large harvest. After selling 640 kilos of rice to pay for the labour of his helpers and the cost of husking, Mustafa was left with 360 kilos of rice for himself. The Javanese transmigrants spoke to regarded this as hardly worthwhile, when one considers that he paid a similar amount of rice in labour costs for each of the two plots of land.

To Mustafa and his Kasuba neighbours, however, the result was promising enough. The reason for this must be sought in issues of cultural logic rather than in purely pragmatic reason (cf. Sahlin 1976). The Kasuba farmers expected at some stage to be able to dispense with the rather expensive labour of the Javanese transmigrants but the ability to hire Javanese labour in full view of other transmigrants who tended to have a rather low opinion of Kasuba abilities was in itself an emblematic victory of some magnitude. By hiring the labour of Javanese transmigrants who, the above misgivings aside, were generally regarded all round by both local groups and estate management as the most highly developed, Mustafa dramatically reversed a long tradition of labour. The financial and practical ability to hire of Javanese was a strategic triumph since no one among the other local transmigrants, particularly those of noble descent from Bicolli, would ever dream of accepting such hire. Here a group with a prestigious status as highly developed and modern in local eyes accepted hire from a low status group, something no local would ever contemplate.¹⁰ The irony was not lost on the

¹⁰ For their part, the Javanese transmigrants preferred the work as hired labourers in Kasuba rice fields to wage labour in the timber plantation. The temporary nature of the former labour arrangement furthermore fitted their short-term plans for the future on the estate. Instead of acquiring their own fields, working for cash and a share of the harvest seemed to the Javanese

locals. As one man from a village close to Bicolli commented: 'Previously, these people were ordered about; now they hire people themselves'.

Aside from the prestige involved in showcasing Javanese hired hands in his rice fields, however, Mustafa gained a second payment of symbolic capital when he transported his 300 kilos of rice back from the husking machine. Central Halmahera is not traditionally a rice-producing area, in contrast to the northern Halmaheran areas of Tobelo and Sahu (Platenkamp 1988; Visser 1989). Rice is nevertheless an important ceremonial food and is nowadays associated with the rice allotments (*talak*) that accompany the privilege of government office. Being a food with ceremonial status and associated with positions of administrative privilege (*pegawai*), rice has been making inroads in the local Halmaheran diet for several decades to the detriment of local staples like cassava and sago. However, the necessity of acquiring rice commercially has put a natural limit to consumption, rice generally being reserved for important guests or special occasions. Rice is thus often referred to as *makanan camat* (the food of the district leader). Mustafa scored double symbolic capital by his shift to *sawah* agriculture because it generated an ostentatious shift in consumption from a low prestige staple like cassava to a high prestige staple like rice. The shift in consumption from cassava to rice has been marked among the Kasuba transmigrants in Maf, whereas it has not been nearly as noticeable among the Kasuba people who remained in Bicolli. The shift to *sawah* is thus clearly testimony to the well-established anthropological notion that consumption—especially ostentatious consumption—inevitably acts as a strategy of impression management and social identity (Friedman 1994; Mauss 1970).

The games for symbolic capital

In terms of pure economics, the shift to *sawah* cultivation was, at least in the initial period, a bad deal. However, the capital obtained in this change must be measured in terms other than agricultural output (for a critique of pure economics, see Bourdieu 1977). Mustafa's initial investment was money obtained from time-consuming and hard labour on the estate or in the privacy of his coconut groves outside the estate. In both cases this labour took place away from the eyes of other people, whether transmigrant or local. This capital allowed Mustafa to feed his family and give economic advances to the Javanese hired hands while the rice matured. In a sense then, Mustafa consciously converted economic capital into symbolic capital by hiring labour to work his house plots in full view of other transmigrants and by enabling his family to eat rice on a regular basis. Both in the field of labour relations and consumption, the shift to *sawah* cultivation was earning Mustafa highly visible symbolic capital.

The conversion from economic to symbolic capital may be represented as follows (see figure 1).

The conversion of cash to labour and rice is not self-reproductive but depends on a constant input of labour from the outside. Although economic considerations are involved in the struggle for symbolic capital that informs this entrepreneurial cycle of conversion, such economic considerations are made on the basis on cultural notions of work and time that disqualify labour intensity and length from the equation.

Figure 1

Still, the question remains why only Kasuba people engaged in this particular enterprise when no other local group seemed interested. Support for my argument that symbolic and social capital rather than economic capital is at stake here must sought in the sarcastic remarks made by other local transmigrants rather than in any statement made by a Kasuba transmigrant. The reason is that Kasuba people de-emphasised their slave past for the very reasons they were trying to escape their continuing position of low prestige through shifts in agricultural practice. Only by 'undercommunicating' their former slave identity and vehemently denying that it had any impact on current social practice could they ever hope to escape their position of low prestige.¹¹ Denial is here part of the same strategy that motivated the shift toward *sawah*. Confirmation cannot be obtained from Kasuba people, since part of the strategy of conversion necessarily involves denying (or misrecognising) that it is a strategy for social

¹¹ This use of impression management analysis clearly owes much to classics like Barth (1966) and Goffman (1959).

clear that they undermine the Kasuba attempt at achieving social recognition through wet-rice farming and rice consumption.

As noted by Pierre Bourdieu, recognition is a result of the symbolic capital one receives from the significant actors within one's social horizon (Bourdieu 1991:72). In the game for social recognition, agricultural practices have come to play a central role on the transmigrant estate in Maf. Instead of being restricted to agricultural calculus and the pragmatic knowledge of sowing and harvesting, wet rice farming has assumed a far wider significance to the actors in this game. What appeared initially merely as a matter of changes to agricultural practices and farming knowledge thus involves a long social history, complex relations between status groups, as well as strategies of consumption and identity where the prize to be won for Kasuba farmers is social recognition.

Bourdieu notes further that symbolic capital is a kind of advance or credence which a group gives to those with such capital (Bourdieu 1990b:120). We saw, however, how the other local transmigrants seemed adverse to giving Kasuba people credence or recognition for their rice-growing. They are reluctant to pay the symbolic dividends on the invested economic capital, as it were. As such the strategy for social recognition by Kasuba people is unsuccessful. However they play the game, Kasuba people are bound to loose vis-à-vis their Halmaheran co-players, since the latter refuse to grant them the symbolic capital they bargain for.

Although their struggle for social recognition fails in the short run, in the long run, the Kasuba strategy might throw off dividends. To see how, it is first important to note that the Kasuba attempt at rice farming has a larger audience than just local transmigrants. In fact, the only reason why rice growing can

be made into a strategy for the accumulation of symbolic capital is that rice has symbolic significance in the discourse of national development in Indonesia (cf. Dove 1985, 1988).

An important aim of the transmigration programme is thus to enlarge rice production by introducing it to the Outer Islands (see GOI 1994:422). The Kasuba turn to *sawah* was in other words in seeming conformity with the 'socio-agricultural evolutionism' of the transmigration effort in the Outer Islands. For this reason, the shift has earned Kasuba people a favourable reputation with the management of the plantation, and Kasuba people are held up as a model for the other local transmigrants. By adopting wet-rice farming Kasuba people showed themselves to be 'good' transmigrants willing to learn a superior form of agriculture. In this way they may in the end use the premises of the social evolutionist scheme against itself, since the dark-skinned, Papuan-looking Kasuba people are otherwise fighting pervasive evolutionist opinions about their supposed racial and cultural inferiority from all sides on the estate, including the management. The force of this 'national reasoning' may also eventually rub off on the local Halmaherans and make them acknowledge, for different reason than the ones Kasuba people gambled on, the symbolic capital invested by Kasuba rice farmers. The field in which the Kasuba struggle for recognition takes place may thus, by dint of its heterogeneity, give Kasuba people some of the credence their strategies bargain for in the long run.

Conclusion

The empirical aim of this article has been to show that the adoption of *sawah* farming by Kasuba transmigrants cannot be explained in terms of economic rationality in the conventional sense. *Sawah* is neither an obvious

nor necessary choice for Kasuba farmers, given their lack of expertise and many other sources of economic income. Making a somewhat stronger claim I argued that wet-rice farming is even unprofitable because of the need to hire labour. The Kasuba choice to shift to *sawah* can only be explained by paying attention to the cultural logic that informs it. The paper suggested that the choice is firmly anchored in the local social history of Central Halmahera. Rice and the labour-intensive rice production operate as symbolic weapons in the battle for social recognition within a web of local power relations. Overall, the rationale for adopting wet-rice farming practices is an active and creative response to opportunities offered by the transmigration program rather than the passive reception of superior knowledge as imagined in the Indonesian development ideology.¹² The adoption of wet-rice farming by Kasuba people cannot be described merely as a transfer of ethereal technical knowledge, as if knowledge by a force of nature slides down an imaginary rational scale from top to bottom. Instead the adoption of rice techniques must be seen as a strategy that makes sense within a struggle for social recognition. This struggle engages both what one might call 'traditional' power relations—but 'traditional' relations with a specific, modern history—and the symbolic capital operative within the ideological field of 'national development' in Indonesia.

In terms of Bourdieu's idea of the conversion of capital, I have shown that the principles of conversion are distinctly social and part of a specific, historical context. As such, the example lends support to Craig Calhoun's

argument for the historical and social specificity of capital conversion in Bourdieu's theory, an issue on which Bourdieu himself is less clear (Calhoun 1993:82). This should not lead us into believing that the logic of conversion neatly fits within 'cultural boundaries'. The world is too complex for such neat boundaries. As we saw, the attempted conversion of economic capital to symbolic and social capital in the Maf transmigration camp must be interpreted against both a local history and a national ideology, for both act as settings for the field within which Kasuba people struggle for social recognition.

¹² This is, of course, a different way of stating the by now perhaps trite anthropological dictum that knowledge arises, takes shape and circulates only within a matrix of power relations (see Fardon 1985; Lindstrom 1990; Dirks, Eley & Ortner 1994).

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Introducing MIKS: A Methodology for the Utilization of Indigenous Knowledge

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Abstrak

Berangkat dari pengalamannya sebagai konsultan manajemen, penulis menggunakan argumentasi bahwa pendekatan terhadap pengetahuan lokal seharusnya mengikuti pendekatan yang dipakai seorang konsultan terhadap pengetahuan lokal yang ada pada sebuah organisasi bisnis. Penulis melihat organisasi bisnis sebagai klien sekaligus majikan, dan mempermasalahkan bagaimana konsultan melayani majikan dengan cara membantu mereka memanfaatkan pengetahuan mereka sendiri. Untuk itu ia menggunakan 'Methodology for the Utilization of Indigenous Knowledge Systems' (MIKS). MIKS mempergunakan pengetahuan klien untuk membantu mencapai tujuan-tujuan khusus, merancang atau menemukan jenis-jenis intervensi yang dibutuhkan. Metodologi ini didasarkan pada teori bahwa tingkah laku harus dijelaskan dengan mengacu pada himitan-himitan yang dimaksudkan oleh pelaku-pelaku yang dipandang mampu melakukan kontrol atas kehidupan mereka sendiri. Dalam upaya mencapai kondisi yang diinginkan, pelaku mengembangkan suatu 'mental model' tentang keadaan kini dan keadaan yang diinginkan. Namun tidak semua model itu merepresentasikan realita secara tepat. Menjadi tugas seorang konsultannya untuk memodifikasi model yang kurang atau tidak tepat tersebut, sebelum melangkah ke tahap berikutnya, yakni melakukan intervensi. Intervensi yang baik adalah intervensi yang cocok dan alamiah, 'adaptif, kreatif' tetapi 'katalitik', yakni memiliki efek yang lebih besar dari pada upaya yang dikerjakan.

Indigenous knowledge should be approached in exactly the same way a management consultant approaches the indigenous or expert knowledge in a business organization.¹ This knowledge is largely ephemeral, context-specific, and the property of the business organization. The task of the management consultant is not to record this knowledge just to use it as input for a future project. His task

is not that of an archivist, nor is he an equal partner in the development process. The partnership is not equal, in fact, the client is the boss, and the job of the management consultant is to serve his client.

Once this is clear, the big question is how a management consultant can assist his or her clients in using their knowledge? A methodology has been developed to do exactly that. I call it MIKS (methodology for the utilization of indigenous knowledge systems). It is a methodology of analytic reasoning that uses the client's 'expert knowledge' to assist him or her in reaching specific goals. This

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