


1990

The Infusion of Teachers from Eastern Indonesia into West Kalimantan

Jay H. Bernstein
CUNY Kingsborough Community College

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Follow this and additional works at: http://academicworks.cuny.edu/kb_pubs

 Part of the [Educational Sociology Commons](#), [International and Comparative Education Commons](#), [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#), [Rural Sociology Commons](#), [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#), and the [South and Southeast Asian Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bernstein, Jay H. (1990). The infusion of teachers from West Kalimantan into Eastern Indonesia. In *Patterns of Migration in Southeast Asia*, ed. Robert R. Reed, pp. 182-190. Occasional Paper no. 16. Berkeley, Calif.: Centers for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

This Book Chapter or Section is brought to you for free and open access by the Kingsborough Community College at CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications and Research by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact AcademicWorks@cuny.edu.

The Infusion of Teachers from Eastern Indonesia into West Kalimantan¹

*Jay H. Bernstein**

INTRODUCTION

The problems of education in rural and remote parts of Indonesia were often on my mind as I conducted a study of traditional medicine among the Taman people in the Putussibau district of the Upper Kapuas regency of West Kalimantan. Far more than is the case in central and metropolitan parts of the nation, there is a need for Indonesia to combat backwardness in education in places like West Kalimantan. A variety of factors combine to discourage the pursuit of education in such areas. Since most of the older generation are not educated, parents cannot usually instill a value of learning in their children. And the fees and other expenses related to school make it difficult for the parents of large families to keep their children in school, despite constitutional provisions for mandatory and universal education from the ages of six to sixteen. In general less value is placed on educating girls than boys (a fact which the girls accept with resignation). Shortages of teachers and materials sometimes cause teachers to put together two or more grades and manage the pupils rather than teach them. Finally, in villages that have not yet been electrified children must study by the light of dim lanterns.

West Kalimantan is dominated by the capital city of Pontianak, a rapidly growing city with a plurality of Chinese who are often more sophisticated and wealthy than most native Indonesians. The interior is much more sparsely populated, and although the Chinese still control much of the economy, the population is composed mostly

*Jay H. Bernstein is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley.

of Malays and indigenous tribal peoples, known collectively as Dayak. The most significant minority is composed of Madurese spontaneous (i.e. unofficial) transmigrants, although Javanese and others from all over Indonesia are also present.

Statistics from 1985² indicate that of the total population of West Kalimantan over the age of ten, 546,920, or 27.8 percent, had no education, while 87,303, or almost 4.5 percent, had completed senior high school or higher programs. Broken down into rural vs. urban terms, however, a great difference can be seen. Of the rural population over the age of ten, 31.6 percent (489,670) had no education, while only 2.0 percent (31,578) had completed senior high school or above. Of the urban population over ten years old, 13.9 percent (57,250) had no education, while 13.5 percent (55,725) had completed high school or above. Looking further into the rural pattern, we find that of persons under 35, the majority had had some elementary education but no diploma, while of those over 45, the majority had had no education (Table 1).

Table 1

DEGREES OF EDUCATION IN WEST KALIMANTAN
1985

	Rural	Urban	Total
West Kalimantan	2,266,643	552,853	2,819,496
Age 10+	1,550,652	413,179	1,963,831
No education	489,670	57,250	546,920
Elementary grad.	242,024	104,075	346,099
High school or above	31,578	55,725	87,303

Source: Adapted from *Penduduk Kalimantan Barat: Hasil Survei Penduduk Antar Sensus 1985*, pp. 1, 37, 40.

Among the Taman people with whom I conducted fieldwork, some men in their fifties had been educated up to the fifth grade at the *Standard School* (elementary school) in Putussibau, several kilometers from their home villages, and some even older men had been educated in three-year programs in the villages. *Normal School* (teachers' preparatory school) following elementary school was apparently available only to the children of headmen and chieftains (according to informants who were unable to enroll).

There was progress in public elementary education after independence, when many three-year village schools (*Sekolah Rakyat*—Public School) were opened, and especially in the 1970s when a presidential mandate greatly expanded education.³ In villages some schools (*Sekolah Inpres*—presidentially mandated school) had free tuition. In 1975 there were eighty-eight elementary schools and 380 elementary school teachers in the Upper Kapuas. By 1977 there were ninety-nine elementary schools and 477 teachers in this regency, and by 1982 there were 210 schools with 914 teachers. In West Kalimantan as a whole the number of elementary school teachers grew from 10,978 in the 1980–81 academic year to 14,450 in the 1982–83 academic year. By the time I conducted my fieldwork (1985–88) every Taman village had an elementary school (though the school in one small village provided tuition only up to the fourth grade).

The awareness within Taman villages that education is necessary for personal advancement is potent. One village was established in recent years by homesteaders who split off from another village. This new community is not recognized by the government as an entity because it does not have its own headman, and as a result it does not receive any government subsidies. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of this village petitioned the government for teachers and a school building.

In former times one needed very few qualifications to become a teacher in Indonesia. As more specific standards evolved, elementary school teachers (especially in public schools) were required to have graduated from teachers' education school (*Sekolah Pendidikan Guru* [SPG]) in order to be certified. These are three-year high schools that one enters after graduating from junior high school. The severe shortage of teachers from West Kalimantan can be seen in the fact that in the 1982–83 academic year there were in all West Kalimantan eight SPGs with a total enrollment of 3,165. This constituted a decrease from the previous year in both schools and students.

A one-year certificate from a teachers' college is preferred for teachers of junior high school, while a two-year certificate is required for teachers of senior high school. I found during my fieldwork that a number of classes in junior and senior high school were being taught by instructors who were not qualified to teach them. Some English teachers, for example, did not have a sufficient grasp of the language to convey the subject matter to pupils.

TEACHER MIGRATION

When I started my research on the Taman in the interior of West Kalimantan I found that many teachers in village elementary schools originated from the province of Nusatenggara Timur (NTT), the lesser Sunda archipelago in southeastern Indonesia encompassing Sumba, Flores, West Timor, and many smaller islands. I did not conduct research specifically about these teachers; however since I studied and became involved in village life, I came to learn about the phenomenon of teacher migration in an anecdotal way. A true sociological study of this migration would be rather difficult to perform since the teachers are scattered throughout villages in many of the most remote parts of the province.

A sense of the dimensions of this phenomenon is provided by data from the Subdistrict Office of Putussibau, which break down the population of the subdistrict by ethnic group; these data also record the number of persons from NTT. In 1981, out of a population of 18,045, the number from NTT was 23; the number may now be slightly higher. Even though related figures for the rest of West Kalimantan are not available, it is clear that the quantitative effect of this migration is virtually nil.

The qualitative effect of the teachers' presence, however, is highly significant. It must be realized that the program to bring in certified teachers from such a far-flung part of the archipelago was a response by the government to a dire shortage of teachers. Most of the teachers I knew came to Kalimantan between 1978 and 1980. Before the program of importing teachers from NTT was started, teachers from Yogyakarta and Bali had been brought to West Kalimantan, but virtually all returned within a short amount of time. In all my time in the Upper Kapuas I met only one teacher from Yogyakarta and none from Bali. These teachers obviously could not adjust to the village conditions in Kalimantan. It is noteworthy that many police and military personnel stationed in Putussibau are from Java, Sumatra, and, to a lesser extent, Bali; probably none are from interior West Kalimantan. Most office managers and other skilled personnel have also been brought in from Pontianak, Java, or Sumatra. Putussibau, a regency capital, is urban compared to the surrounding villages.

ADJUSTMENT TO CONDITIONS IN WEST KALIMANTAN

The teachers from NTT come from both cities and rural areas. They had signed up with the program to send young teachers to West Kalimantan upon graduation—at the age of about 19 or 20. Because of an oversupply of SPG graduates in their home province, many would have faced long waits had they sought placement there.⁴

They underwent orientation and training in Pontianak, during which they established networks that endure to this day. The teachers were then placed in villages where they were needed. Possibly in reaction to the experience with the teachers from Yogyakarta and Bali, their diplomas and certificates were held in safekeeping by the department of Education and Culture in Pontianak to discourage them from breaking their contracts. Simple houses were built for the teachers in the villages. These houses are whitewashed and have toilets, but they are far from the river and the rest of the village; as often as not, teachers built their own houses in preference to the ones specially built for them. As a result the teachers live in virtual isolation from village activities. (The most interesting case of teachers living far from the village is in Lunsar. Lunsar actually comprises two villages—Upper Lunsar and Lower Lunsar—about two kilometers apart. A school and a Catholic church were built in between, and along with them the teachers' houses. A few other families live there, mainly in temporary field houses.)

In addition to the houses teachers draw a salary, usually between Rp.60,000 and Rp.80,000 per month, and an allotment of rice of between 20 and 50 kilograms per month depending on the size of their family. More experienced teachers can make up to Rp.100,000 per month. The rice allotments have created some dissent because the government calculates the value of the rice at a level higher than its price in the market, and because some people feel the rice does not taste good enough. It is also a fact that the salaries are meager. Sixty thousand rupiah is not enough to support a family's basic needs for a month. (After the devaluation of the rupiah in September 1986, Rp.60,000 was equivalent to \$36.58.) Many prices have risen, but teachers' salaries had not gone up by the time I left the field in January 1988. The cost of living is substantially higher in the interior of Kalimantan than in many other parts of Indonesia because of the cost of transporting consumer goods to relatively inaccessible markets.

The teachers, like most civil servants, were dissatisfied with their low salaries, and one teacher noted that an able-bodied man could make more money tapping rubber. There is also a problem with receiving the salaries. Salaries are paid once a month, but in very distant villages it is not possible to travel to the city more often than once in two or three months. Added to this is the usual problem of the corruption of officials and the consequent erosion of salaries. However a sense of frustration or of despair has not developed, because these teachers are essentially well-adapted to life in the villages.

A crucial point is that these teachers have saved their money, putting it into land deeds and building materials for houses in town. One teacher made extra money by raising chickens for sale at the market, and others had similar enterprises. It can be inferred that the teachers have long-term plans for transfer and promotion to schools in the bigger town. They have further advanced themselves by participating in various teaching improvement workshops.

Most teachers lived very frugally on their income, spending no money on luxuries (the exception being a teacher who was known to spend extravagant sums on lottery tickets). For the most part they lived on a simple diet of rice, dried fish, and whatever vegetables they could grow, only a few indulging the preference for dog meat that is common among East Indonesians. A few teachers complained to me about the bad quality and high price of food in this area.

In addition to saving for eventual relocation to the city, some teachers saved for trips to their home province to be taken during their sabbatical year. Even by the most economical means such distant travel with a family in tow is a huge expense. I heard of one teacher from NTT who had actually gone on such a trip with his family and returned: if true, this is a testimony to their thriftiness and far-sightedness.

As diploma-holders and paid government employees, these teachers may command great respect within the village. They are usually the most highly educated people in a village, and they have the prestige of holding civil service jobs and wearing government uniforms; once they are established no one will counter or question them. I was surprised to discover that teachers had brought children to their fields on school time to perform basic agricultural labor, giving them only coffee. Such abuses are tolerated and not considered wrong.

The teachers have, however, had problems establishing identity because of their youth. I cite data from the Taman villages I studied, but the problems are probably pertinent as well to many rural communities in West Kalimantan and beyond. In a traditional society the headman, his deputies, and the elders—who traditionally make decisions in cases of disagreement or uncertainty—might look askance at a youthful outsider ignorant of the village's customs seemingly encroaching on their own powers; the teacher might well become *persona non grata*. Differences in custom and language, not to mention homesickness, have also caused great difficulty for the young men at first. The racial difference between these men, many of whom are phenotypically Melanesian, and the local population, is also worth mentioning as a factor potentially adding to their difficulty in integrating with society. In recent decades the Dayak tribes have overcome traditional intertribal hostilities. Presently religion is considered more important than tribal origin in determining how much an Indonesian villager will trust an outsider. Nevertheless, these young men must have appeared peculiar at first to villagers who had had little or no contact with more cosmopolitan places or with people different from themselves.

The men had other problems as well adjusting to village life. Some of the teachers were involved in peccadilloes or petty disputes, or were teased by children. Eventually, however, all married within the village, either to fellow teachers or to one of their pupils. (It is interesting to note the possible political implications of some of these marriages. In a number of instances a widowed mother-in-law lived with the young family; however, I know of no cases of teachers joining the uxorilocal family unit.)

The expectation is that the young teacher will send money to his own family back home. As far as I know the teachers rarely found it possible to send money to NTT, though they maintain an attachment to and longing for their natal families. They do correspond with their families at home to an extent. Access to post office services is more limited, the more remote the village is from town. Indeed, these teachers may take on financial responsibilities in their wives' families. (One such teacher bought my bicycle for his nephew through marriage.) Consciously they consider West Kalimantan their permanent home, and they have done everything to put down roots there.

One teacher from NTT had married another teacher who was the daughter of a headman and built a house in the town of Putussibau, part of which he leased out. He had secretly applied for a transfer to a school in town, and eventually he was assigned to a Kantuk village very close to town. There was some talk about this man's political manipulations: it was said that he had used capital from his in-laws (claiming that he was building the house for the old people's retirement) to leap-frog through transfers to a head-teacher position.

These teachers from East Indonesia are important leaders in religious matters. They are called upon to lead prayers at funerals. In Sibau Hilir the teachers from NTT organized and led both Catholic and Protestant services and celebrations for Christmas. The village has six *kampung*, one strongly Catholic and another strongly affiliated with the Kalimantan Evangelical Church. Teachers from each of these denominations who lived in these villages orchestrated the ceremonies for Christmas, teaching songs and other materials to the children for presentation, soliciting donations, etc.

One Protestant teacher assigned to an overwhelmingly Catholic village married a Catholic woman. He converted to Catholicism and in 1986, after the birth of their first child, had their marriage confirmed by a priest. (Subsequently I discovered that when he was in town he worshipped at the Evangelical Church.) Another teacher in a Taman village was a member of the Mennonite Church (*Gereja Muria*); this religion was so little understood by the Taman that I was told by several informants that he was Jewish. Finally, there was a teacher from NTT who converted to Islam because he fell in love with a Malay woman. As far as I know, Christian teachers were not assigned to work in Muslim villages. Nevertheless, the Malays are a majority in the interior of West Kalimantan, and it is understandable that such relationships may occur.

CONCLUSION

The migration of teachers is clearly a part of Indonesia's plan to develop isolated regions and bring them into step with other parts of the country. As a very limited movement it is successful both because the individuals have sufficient incentive to adapt and because social

and physical conditions are not greatly different from those of their place of origin.

However, it may not be possible to enlarge the scale of this operation effectively. The success of such an infusion of immigrants into the population requires a measure of receptivity in the host society that cannot be taken for granted. Just as Protestant missionaries were forced out of a certain Taman village because an *adat* leader told villagers that they defiled village customs, it is likewise possible for village leaders to persuade their constituents not to accept newcomers sent in by outside authorities. Even if the newcomers cannot legally be banished, their lives can be made so hard that they are, in effect, forced to leave. In some Taman villages even teachers coming from other parts of West Kalimantan admit that they are made to feel unwanted.

I was impressed with the ability of these teachers to adapt to the physical and social conditions of village existence in West Kalimantan. The inaccessibility of the area, the difficulty of travel, the lack of variation, the closed-mindedness of the village mentality, and the stringency of their salaries could have been the source of considerable hardship, or at the very least culture shock, for many other Indonesians.

NOTES

1. I am grateful for the grant support from the National Institute of Mental Health and the Social Science Research Council that made possible my research in Kalimantan. I thankfully acknowledge as well the Center for Environmental Studies of Gadjah Mada University and the Indonesian Institute of Sciences for sponsoring my research.

2. *Penduduk Kalimantan Barat. Hasil Survei Penduduk Antar Sensus 1985*. Jakarta: Biro-Pusat Statistik (1987), pp. 1, 37, 40.

3. For more on the history of education among the Taman see Mudiyono Diposiswoyo, *Tradition et changement social: étude ethnographique des Taman de Kalimantan Ouest*, thèse de doctorat de 3ème cycle, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (1985), pp. 230-44.

4. It is ironic that nowadays SPG graduates from Kalimantan also face painfully long waits before they are placed.