Performing the state: Everyday practices, corruption and reciprocity in Middle Indonesian civil service
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Chapter III

How to become a civil servant: Money, connections, and ethnic preferencing

Entering the ranks of civil service is the surest way to a steady income, job stability, and status in state dependent Kupang, and is, therefore, crucial in gaining and maintaining political class membership. The desirability of civil service jobs and all the benefits that accompany them became abundantly clear when holding an impromptu discussion with first semester political science students at local university Nusa Cendana. Having asked this question many times before, the collective enthusiasm of the students should not have overwhelmed me as much anymore. Still, I was slightly surprised at the amount of hands that went up when I asked which of the students wished to become a civil servant. Unable to quickly count all hands, I rephrased the question and instead asked who did not plan to enter civil service. Out of thirty students only three raised their hands.

As mentioned, I should not have been so surprised. Although some aspects of the civil service, such as the military style of disciplining, the repeated emphasis of form, and the strategic seeking of office alliances I describe in the next two chapters, may be off-putting to some, they are not to most in Kupang. During my interviews with civil servants I was often told how badly one had wanted to become a civil servant and that, in fact, obtaining a civil service position had been a life-long dream. For instance, a middle-aged male lower-level civil servant recalled how as a young boy in a Rotenese village he would compare his ragged filthy shirt and bare feet to the clean clothes and shoes worn by state-officials visiting his village, and how he would then longingly daydream about one day having such a job that would enable him to look equally sophisticated.

An upper-level civil servant at the Department of Public Works, additionally, recollected the admiration and respect he had for civil servants when he was a child. Growing up in sub-district Fontein as the youngest of eight children in a poor household, he recalled how his parents took on all sorts of odd jobs to get by. He remembered a party held long ago in his neighborhood. Both of his parents were in ‘the back’ gathering fire wood, getting water from the well, and washing dishes. In the guest area –‘the front’- people were dressed up and seated on chairs in neat rows. In front of these people was a small stage on which people would give speeches. His parents presumed these people were civil service officials, since they were the only ones thought important enough for such a role. His father, then, expressed his wish for his son, which was that one day he would be respected enough to be sitting ‘in the front’ instead of having to occupy himself with ‘the business in the back’, as his parents had.
His father did not envision him to be speaking on stage at a party as an important civil servant—merely to sit among the others ‘in the front’ was all this father wished for his son. Much to his parents’ surprise, however, he managed to get a university education and build a career in civil service. He is currently a regular speaker at parties and ceremonies. He, therefore, did not only move from the ‘back’ to the ‘front’, he also moved ‘up’, making his parents proud beyond expectation.

A civil service position is thus a highly desirable one, but not one that is easily obtained. Job openings are not plentiful, and whenever a department advertises available positions, applicants come from far and wide to sign up. It is not uncommon that for a mere handful of positions over a thousand applicants apply. Many civil servants I interviewed were not hired the first time they joined the testing procedure for a job-opening. Rather, it took them countless attempts to pass the various testing procedures. Some would take up menial jobs in the private sector, meanwhile still applying for civil servant positions whenever an opening was announced. Those who did find a reasonably steady and respectable job also eagerly exchanged their position for that of a civil servant after having been accepted into civil service. In the next two chapters I will look more closely at the benefits that are gained from having obtained the much coveted civil service position and from adhering to proper civil service form. Some benefits are unsurprising—salary, pension, credit at banks, status, whereas other are less anticipated—supporting the formation of new clientelist office networks that seem to counter proper civil service propriety. In this chapter I wish to focus more closely on the process of entering civil service: how does one become a civil servant?

There, however, is no unambiguous, straightforward answer to this question. To return to the Nusa Cendana University students who were so eager to join the civil service ranks, there is a ‘formal’ as well as an ‘informal’ answer. When I asked them about the process of getting a civil service position they, initially, quickly explained the official procedure, correcting each other along the way. First, vacancies are made public through newspapers and radio channels. Then, applicants sign up and hand in documentation for an administrative selection. Consequently, there are various tests depending on the position, for instance, a general knowledge, English, or math test. After having made it through the testing rounds some applicants are invited for an interview.43 According to the students’ account of the official procedure—which resembled the accounts of this procedure civil servants themselves gave me, those applicants with the highest test scores are the ones that ought to get the positions. To prevent tampering with test results, the tests are not related to applicants’ names, but to their given test number. The tests are not corrected in Kupang, but instead sent to Jakarta. After checking the tests, the test results are sent back to the region where they are published via radio broadcasts and on print-outs put up on the wall in the various Departments.

43 During my civil servant interviews some older civil servants remembered that their interviews also contained questions about possible connections or affiliations with the old banned communist party PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia). Interviews these days do not include such questions.
Whether omitting applicants’ names from the tests and having the tests checked outside the region is enough to prevent informal ways of securing a job was something highly doubted by the students. In response to my question if there were any ‘informal’ ways to make it through the application procedures – a question prompted by the many previous civil servant interviews I conducted, various students asserted ‘envelopes’ (with money) as a ‘smoother’ (pelicin) would help you get an advantage. Others stated that family members or in-laws in high enough positions could also facilitate the process. A third suspicion - not named explicitly by the students, but, nevertheless, one that came to the fore repeatedly in my interviews- was that oftentimes jobs are given out based on ethnic favoring.44

The assumption that informal processes – money, connections or ethnic favoring- play an important role in obtaining civil service positions is one that is widely held and hardly contested. Conversations about this with anybody in Kupang from whatever background – students, café owners, lower-level civil servants, market vendors, friendly neighbors- tend to confirm the importance of money, connections or ethnic preferencing when wanting to get a civil service job. These assumptions are apparently also commonplace in Indonesian academic literature, to the extent that the few sources concerning accessing civil service merely place paying for civil servant positions in the wider context of a ‘lack of transparency’, ‘culture of rent-seeking’ and ‘corruption’ without taking a more detailed look at the actual practices of getting a job in civil service.45

It is these assumptions regarding ‘informal’ ways of getting in that I want to take a look at more closely while addressing the question of how to become a civil servant in Kupang. With regards to the importance of intra-office networks, as I will discuss in Chapter Five, it is interesting to see to what extent connections matter in trying to get a civil service (or civil service related) position in Kupang. In relation to Kupang’s 2008 reputation as Indonesia’s most corrupt city (Jakarta Post 2009), the question, furthermore, arises how easily one can ‘buy an income’ (Kristiansen and Rahmli 2006). Perhaps surprising, I hope to show that – although instances of informal preferencing using social or economic capital can

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44 The students did not mention ethnic favoring as an informal means of civil servant recruitment. However, this is an assumption that is quite popular in Kupang and one I often heard when asking about informal favoring. After having asked this question, a heated debate did ensue about the question whether civil servant positions should only be occupied by ‘sons (and daughters?) of the soil’ (putra daerah). Some students thought one of the perks of regional autonomy was that locals should be favored for civil service positions, whereas others vehemently protested this. The debate turned more problematic when we tried to define who those ‘sons of the soil’ would be. There was agreement that those outside of the East Nusa Tenggara province did not count as locals (but what if they would be Protestant or Catholic?), but once within the province, who could still count as a local. And in which context?

45 See for instance S. Kristiansen and M. Rahmli (2006) Buying an Income: The Market for Civil Service Positions in Indonesia, based on survey data from Bima and Mataram, where the authors note first of all that all of their respondents had to pay for their civil service position and secondly, that the ‘entrance fee’ had risen after decentralization reforms. They do not investigate the process of entering civil service any further and thus don’t question the assumption that paying a fee is a prerequisite. I will describe how the demand for payments are in some instances cleverly played tactics from civil servants used on applicants, using exactly this assumption that there is an entrance fee, while the applicants would find no obstacles entering the civil service workforce would they choose not to p(l)ay.
certainly be found and will be addressed— we should not too hastily dismiss the importance of education and skills—cultural capital. As I show in subsequent chapters, even in the practice of balas jasa\textsuperscript{46} those whose ‘favors are returned’ need to have the appropriate cultural capital to match a promotion. In this chapter I, therefore, claim that although social and economic capital facilitate access, cultural capital weighs much heavier than is popularly assumed.\textsuperscript{47} If more aspiring civil servants would know that obtaining a civil service position does not just depend on money and connections, they might feel more hopeful about applying. If more successful applicants, who receive a sudden phone call from an official of the Department of Human Resources asking for some smoothing money to make sure the final stages of the hiring process will be completed without difficulties, would recognize the hoax perhaps they would not bother paying an ‘entrance fee’.

More important, perhaps, than the role of money and connections in assumptions regarding ‘getting in’ informally are suspicions of ethnic favoring. With this in mind, when wanting to know how to become a civil servant in Kupang, it is necessary to consider whether informal favoring in Kupang’s civil service is based on ethnic preferencing. It is not surprising that ‘ethnicity’ (suku) has become the social marker of difference suspected to be at the base of informal favoring in Kupang. As discussed in the previous chapter, although located on the island of Timor, Kupang’s over 300,000 residents originate from all islands of the East Nusa Tenggara Province and beyond. Being an immigration town historically, ‘ethnicity’, as implying ties to an island or region of origin, is an obvious marker of difference in social discourse.\textsuperscript{48} Additionally, the ‘Kupang incident’ and local understandings of this instance of communal violence in terms of ethnic friction only fuel suspicions of inter-ethnic competition in informal favoring in local civil service.

I would, however, want to caution against a too readily acceptance of ‘ethnicity’ or ethnic preferencing when analyzing informal favoring in civil service. Using ethnicity in explanations and analyses can have deadly serious, reifying consequences.\textsuperscript{49} Therefore, before presenting three cases to propose viewing informal preferencing in terms of balancing and exchanging various forms of capital I first want to turn to the assumption that informal preferencing in Kupang’s civil service is based on ethnic favoring. This requires looking at

\textsuperscript{46} Balas jasa translates as ‘answering a service’ and refers to the post-elections practice of newly elected district heads giving out coveted positions in civil service to those that showed support during the elections.

\textsuperscript{47} Fully realizing, nevertheless, that the accumulation of cultural capital hinges on the accumulation and exchange of other forms of capital, as the example of the Raga family, described in the previous chapter, shows.

\textsuperscript{48} For a more elaborate historical overview of migration to Kupang see C.R. Boxer, The Topasses of Timor. Koninklijke Vereeniging Indisch Instituut, Mededeling no. 73. Afdeling Volkenkunde no. 24 (1947); or J.J. Fox, Harvest of the palm. Ecological change in Eastern Indonesia (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977).

\textsuperscript{49} For instance, see Van Klinken’s careful analysis of instances of ‘communal violence’ throughout the Indonesian archipelago in the first few post-Suharto years (Van Klinken 2007). Instead explaining these instances of violence in deceptively self-evident terms he outlines broader particular geographical and economic characteristics of the towns he describes that account for the ‘susceptibility’ to communal violence. A ‘communal’ explanation is thus not helpful in his case. Yet, communal explanations are popular in explaining such instances of violence, which is why I caution against an uncritical, reifying use of ‘ethnicity’ in informal favoring in civil service.
what ‘ethnicity’ means in Kupang and why it is such a popular social and political discourse for difference there. After critically considering ethnicity as an analytical concept I will address scholarly examples of ethnic reification, everyday ethnic joking and stereotyping. I will then consider a case that argues that informal preferencing in Kupang’s civil service is, indeed, based on ethnic preferencing. I, however, claim that a focus on ethnicity is more obscuring than analytically helpful. Ethnicity in Kupang, I claim, is a social-political discourse, a way of thinking and talking about differences. In the remainder of this chapter I will therefore argue that viewing the process of becoming a civil servant in terms of balancing capital is analytically more useful.

**Problematizing ‘ethnicity’**

It is somewhat ironic that while ‘ethnicity’ has gained increased explanatory power in local lay and scholarly accounts in Kupang a growing unease has surrounded the concept in anthropology. As Gerd Baumann aptly notes, as long ago as 1912 Weber already proposed to dismiss ethnicity as a topic of analysis finding it, ‘unsuitable for a really rigorous analysis’ (Baumann and Sunier 1995; Weber 1978: 395). Ethnicity as a primordial concept, therefore, no longer holds analytical value. However, dismissing ‘ethnicity’ as an analytical topic has become difficult since it has left the realms of social science and has been, ‘styled into a “fact of life” … that appeals to supposedly “natural” distinctions, such as ethnos or descent, to explain “cultural” differences’ (Baumann and Sunier 1995: 3). In other words, ‘ethnicity’ has been subjected to processes of reification, giving a guise of naturalness to social differences. A response to this popular reification of the concept of ethnicity in the 1990s was to de-essentialize it (see for instance Turner 1993; Sahlins 1994; Barth 1994). Baumann, similarly, proposes to de-essentialize ethnicity against the well-known anthropological agendas of social cohesion, collective commitments, and the comparative project (Baumann and Sunier 1995). Important to an approach to ethnicity as an analytical topic is a processual view on ethnic cohesion, and a recognition of the cross-cutting nature of social identities and the role of renegotiation in ethnic categorizations.

Despite being greatly helpful in countering a conception of ethnicity as reifying social differences, the question remains whether there is anything left of ‘ethnicity’ to carry out analytical work. This is a question Roger Brubaker and Frederick Cooper pose as well in relation to the broader concept of identity (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Similar to Baumann, they caution against what they call too ‘strong’ or essentializing uses of the concept. Nevertheless, they are also critical of too ‘weak’ constructivist approaches to the concepts that Baumann seems to lean towards when he emphasizes the processual and cross-cutting aspects of ethnicity with other types of social identity. Although the concept reviewed in this chapter is ethnicity and not identity, I, nevertheless, propose that insights from Brubaker and Cooper are useful in order to look critically at ethnicity as an analytical category. Therefore, according
to Brubaker and Cooper, constructivists’ attempts at ridding the concept identity of the notion that it is something all people or groups have -even when unaware of it, has made it into a fragmented, multivalent, contingent, and constructed notion. This makes it unsure why that which is constructed is still ‘identity’ and furthermore renders the concept too weak for useful theoretical work (Ibid.: 10).

A second problem regarding the concept of identity is the use of identity as both a category of practice -meaning categories of everyday social experience, and categories of analysis -as used by social analysts. Even though everyday identity talk and even identity politics are ‘real’ phenomena, this does not necessarily require its use as a category of analysis. In line with Baumann’s cautions, Brubaker and Cooper thus call for analysts to account for this process of reification instead of reproducing this reification themselves by uncritically adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis (Ibid.: 4-5). Due to the ambivalence of the concept of identity they propose three alternative terms that can do the work identity is supposed to do without its confusing and contradictory connotations (Ibid.: 14). First of all identification and categorization are processual, active terms that can focus on the process of identifying and on possible identifiers without assuming this will result in some ‘identity’ – however, unlike Baumann, Brubaker and Cooper thus do not link this processual view on identity to a cross-cutting of social identities. Secondly, self-understanding and social location can be used to focus on particularistic understandings of self and social interests, as a situated subjectivity. Thirdly, commonality, connectedness, and groupness can cover the emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive and bounded group, and the felt solidarity with that group and felt difference with certain outsiders (Ibid.: 14-21).

To return to my concept under scrutiny –ethnicity, I wish to suggest that Brubaker and Cooper have offered a useful way to study ‘the work that ethnicity is supposed to do’ in analyzing informal preferencing in Kupang’s civil service. This is especially so since attempts to study ethnicity in Kupang have led to an uncritical reification of a category of practice than to a questioning of this concept. This might obscure how aspiring civil servants actually obtain their positions. The advantage of using suggested terms instead of ‘ethnicity’ is, therefore, that it opens up all sorts of other possibilities of looking at inter-group relations and, specifically, informal preferencing in offices. Before turning to the actual process of getting a civil service job –and the role of ethnic preferencing in it- let us first look at scholarly reifications of ethnicity in Kupang and at ethnic stereotypes I encountered in Kupang as a category of practice.

**Stereotypes and ethnic favoring**
That ‘ethnicity’ is a useful analytical category is not often questioned by scholars focusing on Kupang. If anything, the outburst of ‘communal’ violence that took place in November 1998 following the Ketapang tragedy in Jakarta, only brought the importance of ethnicity to the fore.
Years before the Kupang incident, current dean of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of Kupang’s Nusa Cendana University Alo Liliweri (1994) already measured the effectiveness of inter-ethnic communication in Kupang, and concluded that this inter-ethnic communication is influenced by social prejudice resulting from ethnocentrism present in all ethnic groups. According to Liliwery, social prejudice is exemplified by the ethnic composition of neighborhoods -where there is usually a certain ethnic majority, the concentration of particular ethnic groups in certain occupational fields, ethnically segregated boarding houses and social organizations, and finally, latent ethnic competition (especially for civil service jobs). Due to social ethnic prejudices all ethnic groups have a high sense of discrimination against other groups –with the exception of the Alorese and Sumbanese who tend to incorporate all ‘others’ as kin or members of their social groups. Of all ethnic groups, the Rotenese tend to be discriminated against most. Tule (2000), in contrast, modifies Liliweri’s view on inter-ethnic relations as problematic and frictional, by stressing the ability of local kinship cultures, built up around a cult house to incorporate various people into a tolerant and harmonious society. Whereas Liliweri sees ethnocentrism negatively influencing inter-ethnic communication, Tule views kinship as a unifying force in interaction. Commenting on the Kupang incident a few years earlier, Tule asserts that this and other instances of communal violence in Indonesia had nothing to do with inherent social friction, because they ran counter to the ‘traditionally tolerant culture of Indonesia’, but were instead the result of political manipulation (Ibid.).

What is striking about these accounts of inter-ethnic relations -with Tule focusing more on religious differences than Liliweri- is the uncritical acceptance of problematic analytical concepts. Liliweri nowhere questions the added value of using the concept of ethnicity. His entire conclusion concerning how social prejudice stemming from ethnocentrism influences inter-ethnic communication is based on the a-priori assumption that it is useful to use ‘ethnicity’ for categorization. Such an uncritical use of a concept used in everyday practice for analytical purposes is not without hazard. As Elcid Li (2000) notes in his analysis of the Kupang incident, it remains unclear how the process of social prejudicing is shaped. This echoes Baumann (1994) and Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000) spurring for the need to account for the process of reification instead of uncritically adopting it. Without attention to this process, Li claims, social prejudice becomes somewhat of a belief. Ironically, perceptions of social prejudice based on inter-group generalizations are turned into something ‘true’ and as a basis for communication, without any confirmation to purify this prejudice (Li 2000). Equally, Tule’s conception of Indonesian culture as inherently tolerant and incorporating also does nothing to understand why occurrences of conflict and friction take place, how processes of social prejudice are shaped, and –specific to this chapter- what underlies suspicions that ethnic favoring takes place within Kupang’s civil service. As Brubaker and Cooper noted in relation to ‘identity’, the use of ethnicity generates more confusion than analytical clarity.
The appeal of ethnicity, however, not only seduces scholars focusing on Kupang but also the Kupangese themselves, judging from the many ethnic jokes and stereotypes I encountered during fieldwork. For instance, while trying to access political parties’ campaign teams during the 2008 East Nusa Tenggara’s gubernatorial elections I hung out one afternoon at one of political party PDI-P’s offices from which campaign members coordinated their grass-root campaigning. Discussing the various candidates for the positions of governor and vice-governor, the conversation quickly turned to the ethnic backgrounds of the candidates. Chris, the head of this campaign team, asked me if I knew what to do when walking in a forest and suddenly encountering both a snake and a Rotenese: who or what would I kill? Having heard this joke many times before I knew the answer: of course I would kill the Rotenese, because they are far more licik (tricky, sneaky, slimy) than snakes! Chris then asked me if I knew why this joke about Rotenese existed, which I did not. He explained this to me through what he called a ‘folk story’, telling about how the Rotenese managed to get so much land in Timor, especially along the coast:

At a certain point after the Rotenese had begun to arrive in Timor, the Timorese got fed up with this Rotenese immigration, and requested the Rotenese to put a halt to their migration to Timor. In response, the Rotenese came up with the following suggestion: the land of Timor should belong to whomever had the capacity to dry up the land. They proposed to meet up at the beach the following day, where they would both try to dry up the land. The Timorese agreed and returned to the beach the next day. A few of them –those with natural magical powers- sat down in the sand and attempted to force back the sea by making big and impressive gestures. Unfortunately high tide was just beginning to set in, something the Timorese were unaware of since they weren’t sea people. Despite their pompous gestures, the Timorese could not stop the waves from coming in, and ran back up the mountains scared. In the afternoon a Rotenese sat down on the beach. In a relaxed and slow manner he made some hand movements, signaling the sea to move back. Indeed, the sea receded because low tides were setting in. Impressed with the Rotenese ability to dry up the land, the Timorese agreed that the Rotenese could stay.

Chris told me that although this was just a folk story, the cleverness of the Rotenese should not be underestimated. Before the existence of official certified property borders, Rotenese would mark off their areas by using kapok trees. Since these trees’ seeds spread far and wide and new trees would grow wherever the seeds landed, the land owned by the Rotenese expanded inconspicuously. This is why one has to kill the Rotenese instead of the snake, when suddenly encountering them in the forest. Chris himself was Rotenese.

The snake comparison is one often heard when asking about people from Rote, as is their knack for politics and pretty girls, ‘they are trickier than snakes.’ ‘They are so much like snakes: they never get to the point, but just keep on sliding around and around it.’ ‘Rotenese,
yeah they are talkative.’ ‘They always say “yes, but...” They are real politicians.’ ‘Sneaky in politics.’ ‘Hard-working people those Rotenese.’ ‘They have a good-working brain.’ Furthermore, ‘Rotenese girls are the prettiest of East Nusa Tenggara!’ The Timorese are stuck with less flattering stereotypes: backwards, lazy, rude, stupid, weak, not brave, afraid, shameful, black. The Timorese tend to be typified as honest, straightforward, but hopelessly stupid and easily aroused in anger. ‘They are stupid, but honest.’ ‘They are rude and have “high emotions”, but a good heart.’ ‘Timorese are easy to fool.’ ‘They always say yes, even when they think differently.’ The Savunese are known for their famous, conflict-solving kisses, girls that outshine the Rotenese in beauty, fondness of family relations, work ethic, funny ways of speaking and love of cock fights. ‘You know why Savunese girls are so pretty? Savunese descend from Indian people, which is why they are so good-looking.’

Good looks are not traits associated with Alorese, ‘they are very black, with curly hair.’ Their many languages and magic prowess are known far and wide, however, ‘in Alor, every two hundred meters a different language is spoken!’ ‘There are many suanggi (black magicians) in Alor. They can even fly.’ ‘Alorese people do not live in one world, like you and I. They live in two worlds at the same time. They are known for their magic.’ When asking about ‘ethnic traits’ in relation to people from Flores, non-Florenese will immediately claim that Florenese have very 'high feelings of ethnicity'. ‘People from Flores are really fanatic about ethnicity and religion.’ Florenese, however, will immediately point out that there is no such thing as a 'Florenese ethnicity', ‘Flores consists of many ethnic groups: Manggarai, Ende, Sikka, East-Flores and so forth.’ ‘Manggarai people eat a lot.’ Florenese might not be known as great warriors but they are very smart and good at politics. I did not often hear about the Sumbanese, except that they give livestock as bride wealth, are talkative, and ‘eat a lot, especially meat.’

Ethnic groups from outside the province that are sometimes mentioned are the Javanese and the Buginese. On the whole they seem to be perceived similarly: they are both ‘newcomers’, excellent traders, and Muslims. A group which deserves special attention, but never seems to pop up in 'ethnic joking' are the Chinese, ‘the Chinese are businesspeople.’ ‘They are very stingy.’ ‘Chinese? They keep to themselves, they do not mix with locals (pribumi). And locals not with them.’ ‘They like to marry their own kind. I want nothing to do with them’, said a young male civil servant who deeply wanted to marry his Chinese ex-girlfriend, but was refused by her family.

Such jokes, stereotypes and folk stories are not mere laughing matters or means for an anthropologist to show off her localized comedy routine. Joking becomes serious when a young woman claims she will never marry her Timorese suitor, because Timorese are too black and too stupid for a Savunese like herself and that she could never have ‘ugly’ Timorese kids. Its significance shows when the eldest son of the last ruler of Kupang laments the inherent laziness of ‘his (Timorese) people’ in trying to climb in local and provincial power
structures, as opposed to the Florenese who are by nature hard-working and clever. Its seriousness also emerges when conflicts, such as the Kupang incident of 1998, are labeled as ‘ethnic’ conflicts. Similarly, ethnicity ceases being a joke when local governments want to implement ‘ethnic quota’ in departments. Finally, it becomes serious when candidate couples for district head elections consist of candidates of strategically disparate islands of origin, as we will see in Chapter Seven.

It also becomes serious when scholars write about inter-ethnic frictions and differences, without realizing the reifying effects its uncritical use has, such as we have seen at the beginning of this section. When ‘ethnicity’ affects people’s practices or scholars’ analyses of those practices, ethnic jokes and stereotypes are more than just comedy. Certainly, some of these stereotypes can be traced to an actual reality in Kupang: there are quite a number of Rotenese in the civil service. Until the current vice-governor there had never been a Timorese regional leader, while Florenese have been abundantly represented in provincial leadership positions. This does not mean, however, that inter-ethnic joking and stereotyping easily translates to inter-ethnic prejudices, as Liliweri sketches in his article. In everyday talk and thinking about ethnicity a crude dividing of people in certain categories with certain character traits and behaviors is generally readily scrutinized. As one head of a department put it,

\[
\text{my father is born in Sumbawa in West Nusa Tenggara, but he is originally (asli) from Sulawesi and my mom is from Kupang. What am I then? Ethnicity (suku) is not always clear for people.}
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Or as another civil servant explained,

\[
\text{you must understand that these are just jokes you know. Basically all East Nusa Tenggara people are all the same. We can marry each other, though we might have to make some adaptations in bride wealth. We can also marry people from other religions if the families agree.}
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Furthermore, the more than thirty interviews I conducted with lower-level civil servants show that, although intra-ethnic marriages occurred frequently among their parents, they themselves often marry partners with a different ethnic background. Ethnicity as an explanation -for the occurrence of the ‘Kupang incident’ or to typify informal favoring in accessing and climbing in civil service- becomes even more obviously problematic when there are many other kinds of distinctions that can be made, such as Islam versus Catholicism or Protestantism; those from within the province of East Nusa Tenggara versus from outside; this island versus the other islands; the Florenese district of Manggarai versus that of Ende; this ‘clan’ (marga) versus that one; this family versus that family; there are ample possible ‘Others’. Even though 'ethnicity' –as well as 'religion'- has a deadly serious side and there are undoubtedly people who view certain characteristics as inherent to an ethnic or religious group, everyday
stereotyping and perceptions on ethnic differences should not thoughtlessly be transferred to ‘categories of analysis’ when wanting to analyze how favoring in civil service is played out. Nevertheless, ‘ethnicity’ appears to be a readily accepted explanation for analyzing informal preferencing. Therefore, we should look at an example of suspected ethnic preferencing in civil service hiring.

Informal favoring: it is an ethnic thing

Thomas Didimus Dagang, nevertheless, tries to make a case asserting the assumption that Kupang’s ethnic heterogeneity makes for ethnic preferencing in its civil service (Dagang 2004). He uses detailed and lengthy information about the educational and ethnic background of civil service officials (pejabat) and newly recruited employees in the early 2000s. Dagang’s main topic of interest is if Kupang’s city level civil service is indeed as neutral and free from political influences and ‘group-influences’ as is propagated by, for instance, Good Governance ideology or Law No 43/1999.\footnote{Law No. 43/1999 is the new Civil Service Law, which is a revison of the previous Civil service Law No. 8/1974, and which emphasizes the duties of civil servants, propagates and anti-KKN stabce, and stipulates an objective evaluation of performance and competitive processes (for hiring and promotions).} His conclusion is that it is not, and that primordialist sentiments are decisive in civil servant recruiting and giving out higher level positions.

Dagang characterized Kupang’s civil service as a patrimonial bureaucracy, in which hierarchy is based on familiar or private relations as in father-child relations, not unlike my descriptions of Kupangese intra-office relations in Chapter Five. Higher level (jabatan) positions are used for private interests related to family and group, and promotion systems are not based on meritocracy, seniority or competency tests. An interesting, and to me recognizable, case is made for the importance of closeness and relations: Dagang claims bureaucracy is based on personality, ‘like-dislike relations’, and family connections (Ibid.: 24-27). Recruitment is not an open process, rather, civil service officials tend to fill positions with people with whom they have something in common, be it a close friendship or a school connection. What puts people in their civil service positions is the influence of closeness (pengaruh kedekatan) -such as ethnicity, descent (keturunan), language, religion and so forth (Ibid.: 65-73).

Dagang prefers to view this importance of closeness and connections as an ethnic influencing of the neutrality of bureaucracy. His main arguments supporting this claim are an overview of the ethnic composition of the higher-level bureaucrats and of the newly recruited civil servants. Of the 527 upper level bureaucrats (pejabat), a third is Rotenese, 17.10% is Florenese, a sixth is Savunese, 13.4% are Timorese (3.04% Atonimeto, 10.1% Dawan), 5.5% Sumbanese, 3.8% Javanese, 3.04% Alorese, and 8.2% of other ethnic background (Ibid.: 40). In his analysis, the Rotenese thus outnumber all other ethnicities in higher-level civil service positions. Dagang sees this same pattern when looking at the newly recruited civil servants for
2003: 40% of the 110 new civil servants were Rotenese, followed by Savunese (26.3%) (Ibid.: 68-69). Coincidentally, the two people in charge of accepting new recruits, the head of Personnel and the Regional Secretary, also happened to be of Rotenese descent. According to Dagang, primordialism and instrumentalism shape Kupang’s recruitment and promotion systems: jobs are given out purely because of a sharing of blood, region of origin or customs (but also apparently because of sharing a religion, school, and close friendship), or because ethnicity is easily manipulated politically.

Whereas Dagang does a great job sketching an image of Kupang’s civil service as a patrimonial bureaucracy in which connections and closeness matter, something I found very recognizable, his justification for why this is ‘ethnic’ remains unclear. When looking at the ‘ethnic’ composition of the city of Kupang it is not surprising that Rotenese will comprise a sizeable part of bureaucracy, since they are a significant presence in Kupang. Furthermore, when taking into account the historically advantageous position the Rotenese have had in education and civil service, their ‘accumulated capital’ also helps explaining their current dominant position in bureaucracy. I suggest, instead, that the importance of relations and closeness which Dagang also recognizes explains far more clearly how neutrality is influenced than does ‘ethnicity’.

In this case of understanding how jobs and promotions are obtained, I contend that the use of ‘ethnicity’ as an analytical useful concept obscures more than it enlightens. First, the concept is too ambiguous to do any clear analytical work. Is ethnicity family, language, customs or also other forms of ‘closeness’ (kedekatan)? Second, the concept masks the way in which favoring in civil service actually takes place. Thirdly, as Elcid Li (2000), Baumann (1995), and Brubaker and Cooper (2000) already warned, using ethnicity as a means to analyze preferencing unjustly supports existing stereotypes and jokes, and therefore reifies them. Based on my own fieldwork in lower-level civil service, I claim that a balancing of different types of capital is what constitutes informal favoring. Ethnicity in this respect is solely useful insofar as it can be transformed into social capital. To support my claim, I want to present three cases to exemplify this.

**Informal favoring: not an ethnic thing**

The first case I will present describes how an ‘office extra’ -the owner of the canteen next to the mayor’s office- managed to get her job. The second case discusses documents confirming a young woman’s acceptance as a temporary worker in a department while the young woman in question was still in high school –something that contradicts office regulations. The final case entails the story of another young woman trying to get a job at the local branch of the national radio station *Radio Republik Indonesia* (RRI). The assumption underlying these stories is that if ethnic favoring is common practice, an ‘ethnic connection’ can be discerned in these cases, in particular in the first two examples which lack an official testing procedure
that can get in the way of informal favoring. Based on these cases I maintain that informal preferencing in Kupang’s civil service is not based on ethnic favoring.51

What does become clear is that relations and closeness play a significant role. The role of closeness is also noticed by Dagang, and was often considered crucial by my informants, as I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. The third and more detailed case, nevertheless, also deals with another known suspect of informal ways of getting a civil service position – ‘smoothing money’, and, additionally, reveals the importance of education and skills. This is why I prefer to analyze obtaining civil service positions in terms of Bourdieuan ‘capital’ and conversion of capital (1986). Capital –social, economic, cultural- offers a language in which to talk about informal preferencing and informal ways of becoming a civil servant in more neutral terms than ‘ethnic favoring’ does. This opens up the possibility of discussing civil service favoring in ways that do not needlessly reify ethnic stereotypes. It also allows for a conjunction of several factors that facilitate civil service acceptance, therefore, preventing a too readily stereotyping of hiring processes as ‘KKN’ –thus solely hinging on social capital or economic capital, which dismisses the importance of cultural capital.

Case one: Mrs. Nur’s cafeteria
The first case I want to discuss is how an ‘office extra’ -the cafeteria manager of the mayor’s office- managed to get her position. Since there is no official hiring procedure for this position it is an excellent example of how informal ways of obtaining a civil service (related) position is obtained. For years the three-storey mayor’s office that houses several government departments and a few hundred civil servants did not have a proper cafeteria. There was a small kitchen located on the second floor but this was not large enough to provide all employees with lunches or midday snacks. Therefore, the Department of General Affairs decided that a new bigger cafeteria should be build. This task was left to the civil servants’ wives association Dharma Wanita. The wife of the Regional Secretary at the time was in charge of finding someone to run this cafeteria. Mrs. Nur heard about this from her younger sister, whose husband happened to have a friend in the Department of General Affairs, and offered to run the cafeteria. Mrs. Nur got accepted, and now gets up at 05:30 every day to go to the market with her assistant to do the necessary daily grocery shopping, then prepares various dishes and opens up the cafeteria around 10:00.

51 Even though these cases do not deal directly with becoming a ‘full’ civil servant –but instead with an ‘office extra’, temporary worker and civil service-like position- they are, nevertheless, useful. The first two cases offer ample room for informal maneuvering. If ‘ethnicity’ matters, these two cases should show it most clearly. The third case concerns the hiring process for Radio RRI which, although not typical civil service, is still a civil service-like organization. I chose this case, first, because the hiring process is similar to that of actual civil service and, secondly, because I had good access to this informant, which makes for a more detailed case. Furthermore, the time spent in Kupang’s government offices and the results from my (semi)formal interviews and many casual conversations support the claims stemming from these three cases that ethnic preferencing in Kupang’s civil service can be questioned.
Both the Regional Secretary and his wife are Rotenese. They are also both Protestants. If ethnic favoring would take place, one would expect Mrs. Nur to be Rotenese, and perhaps share their religion as well. Mrs. Nur, however, is clearly not a Protestant, as her jilbab shows. Furthermore, she was born in Surabaya and lived all over Java before ending up in East Nusa Tenggara. The reason she manages the cafeteria is not because of ethnic favoring, but by seizing an opportunity that was available through word-of-mouth information from family and friends. In this case, connections –social capital- matter.52

**Case two: a high-school girl in the office**

In the office of local anti-corruption agency PIAR53 I had an interesting talk about informal ways of giving out jobs in the civil service. Apart from steady civil service jobs that last until retirement, government offices sometimes also hire temporary (honorer) workers. Working as a ‘temp’ is often viewed as a stepping stone to a ‘full’ civil servant position, and at every new civil service recruitment phase at least some temps have to be hired as ‘full’ civil servants. Since the admission procedure for temps is less elaborate and less strictly checked than that for civil servants, this trajectory poses the best opportunities for preferential hiring, as became clear to me at PIAR. At PIAR, I was given two documents concerning young Lina. The first one was a photo copy of a certificate that stated that in 2003 Lina was hired as a temporary worker at the Department of Revenue. Requirements for temps are –depending on their task description- that they at least have to have finished senior high school. I was subsequently presented with another form which turned out to be Lina’s senior high school diploma. This diploma was dated in 2004. It just so happened that Lina was a niece of the then Regional Secretary. He conveniently arranged this temporary position for his niece. The Head of PIAR, Sara Lery Mboeik, suspected that Lina probably never actually set foot in the department’s office where the document claimed she obtained a temporary position while she was still in school, and most likely also did not receive any wages. However, having been registered as a temp did ensure her of steady employment as soon as she finished high school and, therefore, also gave her excellent chances of obtaining a full civil servant position.

When analyzing this second case, there seems little doubt that Lina obtained her temp position through informal preferencing. She was a close relation of one of the most powerful men in Kupang’s city level civil service at the time, someone who, as we will see in Chapter Five, has no moral qualms helping close ones get civil service positions –partly due to

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52 It is, however, important to note that office cafeteria’s are often run by Muslim Javanese - perhaps because their halal cooking is suitable for all civil servants. Nevertheless, the fact that Mrs. Nur obtained her position through this trajectory of connections instead of, for instance, via an advertisement in the newspaper or on the radio is telling of the way in which positions are given out informally.

53 PIAR (the Institute of Information and Advocacy for the People) is a non-governmental organization that was founded in 1997 by Sarah Lery Mboeik and some of her friends. This organization aims to investigate cases of suspected corruption and bring them to trial. PIAR’s office can be found on 74 WJ Lala Mentik Street, Oebobo, Kupang.
reciprocal family obligations and partly with the intention of creating a loyal network of political supporters. Moreover –since family relations per se do not have to signify informal favoring, Lina’s high school diploma, dated a year after her acceptance as a temp, indicates that her hiring went against formal office regulations. Therefore, it seems as if Lina’s case exemplifies a case of informal preferencing in Kupang’s civil service. Nevertheless, I refrain from labeling this case as an example of ethnic preferencing since another kind of closeness – via familial relations- took precedence of a shared ethnic connection. Lina –like Jonas- is ‘Rotenese’, but I contend that Lina’s familial relation to Jonas was decisive in her acceptance, especially since, in conversations with me, he stated his willingness to help out family members. Close connections –or social capital- thus help understand why Lina got hired as a temp.

Case three: Sinta on the radio
In Chapter Two I described the Raga family to exemplify the accumulation and exchange of capital over the course of generations, and to show the importance of reciprocal obligations in family networks. In my third case I return to Sinta, Mina’s daughter, to look at the application process she underwent for local radio station RRI (Radio Republik Indonesia). As we recall, Sinta attended Kupang’s best junior and senior high school, took extra English classes, and –with some help from her successful uncle- attended a university in Yogyakarta, Java, and completed a Bachelor’s Degree in International Relations.

After having spent a few months of leisure after graduation and her return to Kupang, Sinta started looking for a job. Sinta found out that RRI, the radio station her father worked for, had job vacancies. RRI is not quite a government institution, yet not wholly independent either, since it is a public body owned by the state (Badan Umum Milik Negara). As with regular civil service, RRI offers a steady salary, a pension, and possibilities for credit. The application process for RRI is very similar to that of regular civil service, and, therefore, it is interesting to see how Sinta did after having decided to apply for the RRI position.

Along with eighty-eight others, Sinta signed up for six available positions. After the first administrative selection, all applicants had to take a general knowledge and English language skills test. In the end –after all tests and interviews- the boss decided which applicants would be joining RRI. According to Sinta, these weren’t necessarily those that passed the test with the best results, which is why you never see the test scores on the lists with names of those that passed. Sinta, drawing on her experiences in Java, said that in Java you always read the applicant’s number, name and test score. In Kupang just the number and name are stated. That is ‘KKN’ according to Sinta: never disclosing the score because, ‘if it turns out “stupid” is picked it is clear there is KKN.’ Now no one is in a position or has any grounds to ask about injustice. The boss’ decision is indisputable.
Upon entering the testing procedure, Sinta had different forms of capital in her possession. First of all she had valuable cultural capital, namely her Bachelor’s degree from a Javanese university and a good command of English. Second, she had strong social capital, since her father already worked at RRI. Moreover, her father happened to be good friends with the boss, and someone with whom he used to share stories about Sinta and her brothers when they were growing up. When asked, Sinta said that the boss, like herself, was Savunese. Third, since both her parents had steady employment, there was the possibility of economic capital. A little while before signing up for the RRI position, Sinta had considered working for a local court. According to her mother Mina, it was ‘common knowledge’ that a position there costs about IDR40,000,000, which she was more than willing to pay. Money was thus available in case necessary.54

After the testing procedure Sinta got the happy news that out of all the applicants, she was one of the six lucky ones to get hired. Reflecting on what facilitated her success Sinta couldn’t quite point out what type of ‘capital’ was decisive in her hiring. If it would have merely been cultural capital, the test results would have been published along with the names and numbers, she thought. Many of the other applicants also had family members or close acquaintances working at RRI, but they failed to pass, therefore social capital did not seem to be the most vital element either. Sinta’s father had forbidden his wife to give any money to the boss or hiring committee, therefore, apparently economic capital did not play a role at all. Sinta did comment that all new broadcasters hired were fluent in English. Cultural capital, therefore, seemed to be most valued in RRI positions. Still, it remains difficult to assess if Sinta would have gotten her job had her dad not been so close to the head. Judging from experiences at the local court, one can also wonder if giving some money would have been unnecessary had Sinta not had such an abundance of social capital.

I was not the only one wondering to what extent Sinta’s connections had helped her. Mother Mina urged me to visit Sinta soon at work and speak English with her so all her colleagues could see that Sinta got hired because of her command of English and not because of her father. Even though it is not entirely possible to discern which form of capital was

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54 It should be noted, as mentioned in the previous chapter, that at the time of interviewing Sinta’s mother Mina was contemplating what to do about her youngest son Leonel’s tertiary education. Leonel had recently graduated from senior high school and wished to enter the local police school in Kupang. Mina supported her son’s wish, but worried about ensuring his acceptance into the school. Entering the police academy, she told me, is very expensive. She claimed it was somewhat of a ‘public secret’ (*rahasia umum*), but in order to get into the academy one has to pay. According to her estimation, it would take at least IDR50,000,000 to stand a chance. She would not pay the entire amount in advance, but instead only give a percentage beforehand and pay the rest afterwards. One of her friends, namely had paid for her child to get accepted, yet the child did not get into the police academy. The money given, however, was not returned. Getting this amount of money, which roughly compares to 25 to 50 months of salary for an average civil servant, posed another problem. In two years Mina would retire as a civil servant which meant she could no longer take out loans at the bank. In case she would not be able to get a big loan, she planned on complementing the money with material gifts. While pointing at Leonel’s big shiny motorcycle she said that would be worth at least IDR25,000,000. Perhaps the police would accept that and take the rest in cash. In other words, Mina had no problems with paying an ‘entrance fee’, and put some thought into how to collect and pay the money.
most decisive in Sinta’s acceptance into RRI, it does become clear that getting in was not a matter of mere ‘ethnic preferencing’, giving money or depending solely on connections. Rather, we see a careful balancing of cultural, social and economic capital and a certain degree of uncertainty among the actors using it –Sinta as well as Mina- as to how effective they were. This uncertainty and Mina’s urging of Sinta to show her coworkers she got in fairly, due to her good command of English, and not because of informal preferencing indicates that assumptions regarding informal favoring are commonly made: Mina herself is not quite sure to what extent ‘informal’ connections helped Sinta, but, more importantly, she seems quite certain that Sinta’s coworkers will have such suspicions, which is why she urges Sinta to show off her English skills.

Indeed, as mentioned previously, the civil servants I encountered generally assumed that not all jobs and promotions are given out in accordance with official rules and regulations. When inquiring how this informal system of giving out jobs works however, examples like Sinta’s are given: knowing somebody is what is important. Having connections facilitates access. Furthermore, depending on how close relations are, social capital at times needs to be complemented with economic capital. Offering ‘thank you money’ or ‘smoothing money’ to very close relations however is considered to be very offensive, which is why Sinta’s father forbade Sinta’s mother to offer money to the boss of RRI. Social capital can consist of all sorts of connections: family relations, neighbors, alumni from the same high school or university, fellow church members or friends. With a certain dose of imagination some kind of connection can be made to anyone in Kupang. In this sense it mattered less that Sinta’s father’s friend who was in a position to make decisions on hiring new staff was Savunese like Sinta. What mattered, instead, was that he was a friend of her father and thus a connection that could potentially be used. What Sinta’s and Lina’s cases also show is that cultural capital –a good command of English and a high school diploma- cannot be overlooked. In Sinta’s case it was a prerequisite to get accepted, whereas in Lina’s case the irrefutable proof of her lack of appropriate cultural capital was reason for PIAR to build a corruption case.

With regards to ethnic preferencing I, therefore, disagree with Dagang’s conclusion that, since a large part of the newly recruited civil servants are Rotenese, as are the head of the Human Resources Department and Regional Secretary, recruitment must be colored by ethnic favouring. My first case most clearly refutes an ‘ethnic’ connection. In short, I contend that when wanting to understand how informal preferencing is played out, a focus on relations or social capital –balanced with other forms of capital- is far more helpful than the concept of ‘ethnicity’. What this third, more detailed and in-depth investigated case shows is that ‘getting in’ is a matter of accumulation and careful balancing of various forms of capital. Additionally, while ‘smoothing money’ and helpful connections surface every now and then, getting accepted into civil service ultimately hinges on acquired education and skills. Cultural capital therefore, rather than economic or social capital, weighs more heavily than popularly assumed
in getting a civil service position, even though its accumulation is greatly facilitated by other forms of capital.

**Getting in: questioning informal preferencing**

Whereas it is not too difficult to circumvent official rules in the process of hiring temporary workers—as Lina’s example shows— or ‘office extras’, it is much more difficult to tamper with the hiring of actual civil servants. Nevertheless, widespread belief in Kupang holds that even official hiring procedures are open to informal negotiations. In short, social capital and economic capital were widely assumed to facilitate obtaining a full civil service position informally as well.

However, having spent nearly a year in various government offices and having interviewed civil servants on how they managed to get their civil service position, I now question how much social and economic capital actually influence getting in, and how much assumptions that they matter, matter. What fascinated me about some of the accounts of getting in given by civil servants was their surprise at having been accepted despite their lack of connections. A male civil servant, for instance, told me about the pessimism he felt every time he joined a new testing procedure. He had tried many times, yet failed. He had heard that having connections would help one get accepted, but he did not know anybody. His pessimism grew as he got the impression that others who were less smart than he was got accepted over him. Still, he kept on applying, convinced he would get in on his own power and by praying hard. Much to his surprise, he eventually got hired without knowing anybody on the inside, and has been working at the Department of Governance for a number of years as a ‘full’ civil servant. Other civil servants’ accounts similarly express a certain degree of astonishment over their acceptance: they did not know anybody in upper echelon positions, yet they managed to get in.55 This at least suggests that connections—although useful for temporary workers— is not a prerequisite for getting accepted as a ‘full’ civil servant.

The effectiveness of ‘smoothing money’ in getting in informally can also be questioned, as became clear to me during my time spent at the Department of Human Resources. As mentioned before, all applicants’ tests are checked in Jakarta, after which the list with test numbers is sent back to Kupang. The list with test results passes by Human Resources because all new recruits have to be entered into the database. One of the older civil servants, who had been working at that department for a long time, told me how sometimes a little extra money is made from these lists. Some employees would call the newly accepted recruits and let them know they are very close to being accepted, but that a little bit of ‘smoothing money’ would help seal the deal. Apparently, most new recruits receiving this phone call hastily comply. After all, it is not worth letting a chance at a steady income,

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55 I am aware that a certain amount of social desirability has crept into some of my informants’ answers, and that perhaps I have missed some accounts of civil servants that did get in with a little help from connections.
pension, credit, and status slip away when it’s within reach over something as futile as refusing to pay some ‘smoothing money’. What these recruits do not seem to know, however, is that the Human Resources employees have no authority -or even possibility- to delete recruits’ names from the lists of newly accepted civil servants. Money, therefore, is paid, but it is not a given that not paying would lead to not being accepted.

So far I have thus tried to question some common assumptions concerning informal ways of obtaining civil service positions. With regards to ethnicity, and in particular ethnic preferencing in civil service, my aim was to not uncritically use this concept as a category of analysis in order to prevent unnecessary –and possibly dangerous- reification of a popular category of practice (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). As I hope to have shown in my three cases, ethnic preferencing was not decisive in the most informal examples of hiring. Furthermore, in relation to the use of social and economic capital in obtaining a ‘full’ civil service position, I attempted to modify popular assumptions that one can only get hired when in possession of ‘smoothing money’ or connections.

There is, nevertheless, one side note I wish to make after having said all this. So far I have argued that money, connections, and ‘ethnicity’, instead of being helpful in analyzing informal favoring, are analytically incomplete or obscuring. Viewing informal favoring as a balancing of various forms of capital has a greater explanatory value than ethnicity as far as the lower-level civil service is concerned: getting a first steady job, a temporary position, or the position to run a cafeteria. When looking at obtaining positions and promotions in upper-level civil service, as we will see in the next chapters, social capital and ethnicity –in Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000) sense of ‘commonality, connectedness and groupness’ as well as ‘identity politics’ come into play more clearly (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 14-21). We will see in the Chapter Five how Valentino’s strategic use of his social capital -in the form of closeness to the mayor and STPDN networks- helps him create alliances as well as avoid having to make alliances in order to facilitate his steady moving up in Kupang’s civil service. As we will see in Chapter Seven, furthermore, candidates in East Nusa Tenggara’s first gubernatorial elections strategically play with ethnic affiliations to attract voters and even incorporate promises to an (imagined) ethnic constituency in post-election balas-jasa. I, therefore, want to make a distinction between ‘getting in’ and ‘getting up’. Although I claim that ethnic favoring is analytically unhelpful, and assumptions regarding the role of money and connections should be nuanced when discussing how to become a civil servant, we should reconsider social and economic capital as well as political practices of ethnic reification when discussing moving up in civil service.

**Concluding**

This chapter attempts to address the questions of how to get a civil service position, which by extension helps understand how to enter the ranks of the political class. Since the concept of
ethnicity takes such a prominent position in many scholarly writings on Kupang, I considered it necessary to specifically address the possibility that ethnic favoring colored much of this informal preferencing. This chapter, therefore, also dealt with the concept of ethnicity as an analytical concept. With regards to this, I have tried to explain that the way ethnicity tends to be used by scholars focusing on Kupang is unnecessarily reifying, and I have suggested other ways in which ‘ethnicity’ can be studied, for example, by using Bourdieu’s concept of various forms of capital (1986). With regards to my main question, I am not convinced that ethnicity, whether as identification, self-understanding or groupness (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) is useful in understanding how lower-level civil servants obtain their jobs. Instead, I contend that social capital -at times balanced with other forms of capital- facilitates informal favoring. Commonality, connectedness and groupness are, however, useful when analyzing upper-level civil service and politics dynamics that take place during elections. For instance, due to their balas-jasa reciprocal obligations, candidates use a sense of groupness based on island of origin solidarity as a means to create a constituency. Voters appear to vote based on this solidarity. However, as ‘ethnicity’ in lower-level civil service is solely useful insofar as it can be transformed into social capital, ‘ethnicity’ in elections is only useful insofar as it suggest an expectation of reciprocal returns. There are many ways to create social capital, as there are many ways to create reciprocal obligations. To explain informal preferencing in terms of ‘ethnicity’ in either lower- or upper-level civil service is missing out on many intricacies that take place behind the guise of ethnicity.