“We the various races”

Developing Role theory: The Bakun dam case

By Summer Isaacson

Fall of 2019
Uppsala University
Bachelor of Social Science in Development Studies
Thesis supervisor: Johan Nordensvärd
Word count: 12,681
Page count: 41
ABSTRACT

This descriptive essay aims to develop constructivist Role theory. Specifically, it examines the potential of applying role analysis to a case of two types of actors; marginalized citizens and their state decision makers. There has previously been little role analysis applied to domestic political settings, as opposed to internationally between states. Therefore, research has been encouraged in this area. The selected empirical case is the controversial Bakun hydroelectric dam project in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. It involves the resettlement of the marginalized indigenous Orang Ulu people and is driven by the Sarawak state government. By analyzing the role conceptions and norms of these actors, together with the concept of power, a new perspective on their relationship is developed. The successful application of Role theory in this new setting and case is a contributing point of the study. The role analysis is conducted using a qualitative critical text analysis method; an analytical framework is established with which the actors’ roles are retrieved from the text material. The results are then analyzed, and the conclusion of the case study is that the actors have incoherent conceptions of their roles and norms, leading to a conflict between the two in which the government has the upper hand due to (illegitimate) power structures.

Keywords: Role theory, Constructivism, Power, Bakun dam, Indigenous people, Sarawak
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 4
  1:1 THEORETICAL RESEARCH PROBLEM ................................................................. 4
  1:2 APPLICATION: AN EMPIRICAL CASE ............................................................... 5
  1:3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ......................................................................................... 7
2. THEORY .............................................................................................................................. 9
  2:1 WHAT IS ROLE THEORY? ....................................................................................... 9
  2:2 POWER ...................................................................................................................... 10
  2:3 PREVIOUS USE OF ROLE THEORY ................................................................. 11
  2:4 THE BAKUN DAM CASE .................................................................................... 12
  2:5 CONCEPTS .............................................................................................................. 13
  2:6 TRANSPARENCY OF ASSUMPTIONS .................................................................. 14
3. METHODOLOGY .............................................................................................................. 16
  3:1 METHOD AND DESIGN ......................................................................................... 16
  3:2 MATERIAL ............................................................................................................... 17
  3:3 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK .............................................................................. 19
4. RESULTS .......................................................................................................................... 20
  4:1 SARAWAK GOVERNMENT ACTOR ..................................................................... 20
  4:2 INDIGENOUS ORANG ULU ACTOR .................................................................. 24
5. ROLE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION ........................................................................... 29
  5:1 ROLE CONCEPTIONS ............................................................................................. 29
  5:2 LIFEWORLDS AND POWER .............................................................................. 31
  5:3 CONCLUSION ......................................................................................................... 33
  5:4 CONTRIBUTIONS AND ANSWERS ..................................................................... 34
6. FINAL REMARKS ........................................................................................................... 36
  6:1 CRITICAL REFLECTION ....................................................................................... 36
  6:2 FUTURE RESEARCH ............................................................................................ 37
7. REFERENCES .................................................................................................................... 39
“The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the Government, and I'm here to help.”
- Ronald Reagan, 1986

1. INTRODUCTION

In this section, the theoretical research problem will be presented, followed by how it will be applied to an empirical case. Afterwards, the explicit purpose and research questions guiding the essay will be further explained.

1:1 THEORETICAL RESEARCH PROBLEM

In international relations, Role theory is used as an analytical approach within Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), employed to better understand social relationships e.g. between two states. Developing from its roots in sociology, it emerged during the Cold war and was useful in how it could map behavioral patterns bridging and transcending traditional levels of analysis, which were often limited to individuals or states. Were there different ways to measure power? How do actors truly affect one another? What were the social roots of this? From the social constructivist perspective, the importance of social interaction and use of language were highlighted in order to understand these matters. By looking into how actors see their own and each other’s’ roles, together with the norms affecting those perceptions, the approach can map out social dynamics guiding certain actions (Harnisch, Frank, & Maull, 2011, p. 7).

Today, Role theory is an established approach in FPA. It problematizes seeing the nation-state as a unit and has brought to sociology the importance of analyzing a state’s decision-making actors. With the perspective that “state action is the action taken by those acting in the name of the state” (Stuart, 2008, p. 580), one may begin to wonder if these state actors truly represent their citizens’ wishes. This conclusion led FPA Role theorists to increasingly compare the decision makers of states with each other, as opposed to comparing nation-states as units. But an alternative conclusion, widely unexplored in the field but which this essay draws from this, is that a state actor not representing its citizens needs further role investigation in itself.

As the reader will see in this essay, a decision-making actor not working in coherence with their citizens’ interests can pose a great threat to marginalized groups who lack political influence.
Argued here is that a new way to tackle vulnerability of marginalized groups could be by employing analytical approaches which go beyond the “unit” and offer role distinctions between actors who share national borders. Domestically applied Role theory may thus be able to offer a new analytical platform with more space for different voices within that social setting and importantly perhaps highlight why the differences appear in the first place and continue to exist.

This brings us to the current unmet challenges and explicit research recommendations found in Role theory literature; exploring *differences between state decision makers and their citizens*. Specifically, how these two actors in a society see their respective roles (Breuning, 2011, p. 27). This would potentially develop Role theory to something used when examining domestic issues in addition to foreign affairs. The potential usage this essay explores in particular is if it can offer marginalized citizens a more equal voice next to decision makers in political analysis, highlighting possible discrepancies of opinion. This could also help understand in which direction matters are likely to unfold in the future. Naturally, developing the theory in a setting and case which have not been role analyzed previously entails that there is no guarantee of it proving as fruitful as when applied on its usual international scale.

In order to explore Role theory in this way, an empirical case of a marginalized citizen-actor and a state decision making-actor has been selected: The indigenous Orang Ulu people and their state’s government.

1:2 APPLICATION: AN EMPIRICAL CASE

For those who do not know, located on the equator slicing through Southeast Asia lies the third-biggest island in the world; Borneo. This is where the essay’s case takes place, more specifically in the northwestern part of the island, in the Sarawak state. Sarawak is a state of Malaysia separated from their mainland peninsular territory, and they share the island with Indonesia and Brunei (Ray, n.d.). The Sarawak state government shall be referred to as “the government”, and the focus of the case will lie on them as one main actor, and the Orang Ulu indigenous people of Sarawak as the other main actor.

Though it should be made clear that no project, people nor case is identical to another, the resettlement case of the Orang Ulu people due to the construction of the Bakun dam in Sarawak
has been argued by affected communities and NGOs to be far from a rare example of indigenous vulnerability when facing their state’s industrial development. Both the United Nations Development Programme and Gabungan (a.k.a. The Coalition of Concerned NGOs on Bakun) discuss the dangers of the global vulnerability of indigenous people, expressed through lack of political power/influence, marginalization, discrimination, and having different cultural values than that of their state authorities ([UNDP], 2019; 1999, p. 3). Based on this, the existence of a political rift between indigenous communities and their government appears common, along with the marginalization of the former. Thus, it seems appropriate that a case of an indigenous actor vulnerable in the face of their government is selected to develop Role theory. With that said, this is a theoretically focused essay, and the empirical case is not claimed to be representative so much as suitable.

Previous research by Cooke, Nordensvärd, Bin Saat, Urban and Siciliano on the case suggests that one main cause for the vulnerability of the Orang Ulu people can be found in the Bakun dam’s social policy; “[…] The problem lies in the actual implementation of resettlement and compensation schemes. [If improved], projects could be implemented with less opposition and less negative social implications” (2017, p. 442). While the implementation of social policy is highly relevant for understanding the process and outcome, the conclusion could perhaps be developed by applying Role theory to highlight underlying ideas and power relations present in the actors’ roles. The authors mention a need for new approaches exploring the deep and worrisome factors “breaking the bond between Indigenous people and their ancestral land” (Cooke et al., 2017, p. 448). As concluding remarks, they claim that the Bakun dam case of the indigenous people in Sarawak should be understood as a colonization and commodification of their land, cultures and people (ibid, 2017, p. 437). Meanwhile, the government of Sarawak claim that their people should not be suffering, since the policies they design must be implemented to benefit them (Sarawak Chief Minister’s Department, 2010, p. 50). This thus seems to be a case of a marginalized citizen-actor suffering vulnerability, due to a discrepancy in their own and their decision makers’ understanding of the situation. If the application of Role theory proves able contribute with a developed understanding of the case, there would be support that the role analysis was successful.

Having now understood that Role theory needs developing, in which new setting it could be useful, and having identified such a setting, why settle for this one? One reason the Bakun dam case becomes relevant is in how well the two actors’ behavior encompasses the reasons for why
this analytical approach is needed. Today in 2019, the international community has a more inclusive global focus than ever regarding issues like human rights, inequality and environmental protection (United Nations, n.d.). Though these movements have considerable upsides, they can also make it more difficult for political analysts to discern possible underlying intentions of actors who may not actually prioritize these matters over e.g. economic growth. If we analyze state decision makers based on the assumption that they represent their citizens’ wishes, in an international setting where human/environmental rights increasingly appear to be the goals of many state decision makers, why are there still human rights abuses and environmental damage?

The Sarawak government claims that their people should not suffer since policies are designed to benefit them, yet despite nearly half their population being indigenous these communities continue to be marginalized, vulnerable, and forcibly resettled away from their land. Borneo’s nature and rainforests, much of which is indigenous ancestral land, is rapidly being lost to industrial development and climate change (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). Bakun is the biggest dam project in Asia outside of China, and it has been on a controversial journey since its introduction in the late 1980’s. The project was a part of a development plan called Vision 2020 (Gabungan, 1999, p. 4), a year which at the time of this writing is only days away. Beyond being interesting, the Bakun dam case is therefore timely, relevant, and useful for developing Role theory at this point. Successfully investigating this could offer analytical tools scrutinizing the underlying currents which push and pull modern domestic and international relations.

Worthy of mentioning is that this humble essay does not claim to solve any powerful issues like the marginalization of indigenous people. But Role theory is highly adaptable in its approach (Breuning, 2011, p. 24), and if successful in this study, it may open doors for new application usages which could contribute such issues in the future.

1:3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Can Role theory contribute to understanding domestic political issues of marginalization by examining state decision makers’ and marginalized citizens’ role conceptions?
More specifically, 1.1. *Can Role theory contribute to understanding the Bakun dam case by examining role conceptions of the Sarawak government and the indigenous Orang Ulu people?*

These research questions will guide the essay. Question 1 shows the broader field to which the sub-question aims to contribute. Question 1.1 in turn encompasses the reasonable answering range of this essay in particular.

As a study seeking to *develop a theory*, done by adding new plausible explaining factors to a case (Esaiasson et al. 2017, p. 112-114), this can be labeled as a qualititative essay of a descriptive nature. This is appropriate since in-depth analysis of a select few materials/actors is notably more suitable for case study designs (ibid). Worth mentioning is that descriptive and explanatory essays are rarely entirely separate in nature; the former wishes to show *how*, in which way, or of what sort something is, while the latter tries to show *why* X has the consequence Y. Developing Role theory is hence a descriptive essay purpose, showing *how* and *if* it could be applied in a new setting, which in turn may lead us to better understand the relationship between the citizens and the decision makers (ibid p. 27-29). The study has a basic generalizing ambition on a theoretical level, as it applies the theory to a small sample of a larger population in order to contribute to the “bigger picture”. Of course, this always carries the risk that what is observed in this study cannot be applied to other situations (ibid, p. 156-157). In a qualitative case study, the value lies in contributing with new or developed insights that can challenge or complement current understandings of the subject (McCombes, 2019), which this attempt at developing Role theory arguably aims to.

Lastly, in a clarification effort, this essay does not aim to suggest how treatment of indigenous people or land should take place, nor to say how industrial development projects should be conducted. It simply wishes to develop the potential of Role theory in domestic politics scenarios, executed here through investigating the existence and effects of the social roles of the Orang Ulu indigenous people and the Sarawak state government in the context of the Bakun dam project.
2. THEORY

In this section, Role theory and a previous example of its use will be discussed. This is followed by a brief introduction to the Bakun dam case, a table of concepts central to the study, and a discussion on assumptions.

2:1 WHAT IS ROLE THEORY?

In order to grasp the basic premises of Role theory, central concepts will be first be explained as defined by Harnisch et al. In organized social situations, e.g. a society or a family, there will be patterns of expectations on what one’s purpose in that social situation is. This social purpose becomes one’s role and determines how one is likely to act and be treated. The expectations shaping one’s role are a combination of what you think your appropriate role is and what others think your role is; that is, ego and alter expectations. These alter expectations by others may be expressed explicitly or implicitly and will either complement or counter the ego expectations. Once an actor has a perception of their own role in relation to another actor, as well as a perception of the other actors’ role in relation to them, they will finally have established role conceptions, which manifest themselves in language and actions (2011, p. 8).

Thus, studying linguistic and social interactions between two actors should provide a researcher with the four role conceptions held between the actors. But why would this be useful to study? Naturally, there is much room for two actors to have differing conceptions of themselves and of each other, which can often be a contributing cause for conflict. If they do not share the same view of their own and the other’s role, there is a lack of role cohesion (Harnisch et al. 2011, p. 14). Potentially, role analysis could thus help explain actors’ peaceful or adversary behavioral patterns in a given social situation.

Role theory functions as an umbrella term containing several sub-branches (Harnisch et al., 2011, p. 7). This essay works from its constructivist branch, investigating the reasons behind actions and decisions based on social encounters and language. This approach is partly based on Habermas’s work on communicative action, which argues that actors have social/linguistic interactions in order to assess their roles. This phenomenon is called normative persuasion and can be summarized as a push and pull of establishing acceptable behavior. It is this push and pull that continually reproduces roles (Harnisch et al. 2011, p. 13). When normative persuasion
has not led the actors to share a common stock of basic understandings about what is acceptable or “normal”, they do not share a lifeworld. A shared lifeworld sets a basic foundation upon which trust and communication can be enjoyed; it limits which opinions are considered reasonable or legitimate. The lack of this lifeworld-foundation for reasonable debate is likely to cause conflict, and often occurs paired with a lack of role cohesion (ibid, p. 13).

The constructivist approach flows as a central current in this, manifested in the effort to “[…] reach beyond the observable material characteristics of states – such as size, military capability, or economic performance” (Breuning, 2011, p. 20) instead exploring an actor’s *interpretation in a certain context*. For example, a decision maker will work based on what they interpret to be the goal of their state, supposedly representing the citizens’ goals (ibid). But is this always the case? Simply put; how do state decision makers interpret their state’s role, and how does that view differ from the citizens’? These role conceptions held by decision makers may be built upon a variety of personal factors, such as their own cultural heritage, history and relationships. (ibid, p. 23-24).

According to Breuning, through mapping patterns in how an actor tends to present a political problem (2011, p. 28), e.g. always calling homeless people “lazy”, one can illuminate the continuous recreation of their own role as non-lazy, and the role of homeless people as lazy. If this actor who calls homeless people lazy happens to be a powerful state decision maker, this may affect the homeless directly – despite them perhaps being or seeing themselves as hard-working.

Additionally, role analysts can apply a variety of “outside” concepts specific to their case. Thus, one may be able to reach deeper with Role theory than with other methods of analyzing actors and decisions, by taking into account the interpretations and context in which they work.

2:2 POWER

In this essay the concept of power will be applied, though not in depth for reasons of necessary research limitations.

Constructivist thought challenges traditional understandings of power and often highlights ideas of authority and hierarchy. These refer to a system in which actors stand next to each
other in relations of *super-* or *subordination* (Hurd, 2008, p. 308). Authority hence implies that among actors, there is a power relation between those with legitimated power (e.g. an accepted leader/government) and their subordinates, which naturally brings a social hierarchy. The understanding is that the subordinates follow the directives of the superordinate authority (ibid, p. 309). This phenomenon is not inherently good or bad, but it is likely to affect political relationships strongly, making it relevant for the Bakun dam case.

Jürgen Habermas elaborates on the legitimacy of certain power relations. In a very simplified understanding, he claims that *legitimate power* should not be confused with *force*, which is *illegitimate* and often mistaken for the former. “In a relation of force, because one can assert one’s will over others even against opposition, coercion is implied” (Wong, 2009, p. 36). He suggests instead an idea of power based on *communication*; that when power is linked to communicative action and free agreement, it can finally be separated from force and considered legitimate. Furthermore, he asserts that legitimate power cannot be generated only from “above” but must arise as a consensus among those who participate (ibid, p. 34-37).

2:3 PREVIOUS USE OF ROLE THEORY

In order to develop and apply Role theory to the Bakun dam case it may be useful to first consider an example of how it has been used in Foreign Policy Analysis. Bengtsson and Elgström have conducted research that other Role theory scholars refer to as a good example of “inductive analysis of texts to recover roles” (Harnisch et al. 2011, p. 8), from which this essay derives some inspiration.

In one article, they seek to highlight the relationship between the EU and other regional actors or states. They do this in order to better understand and map the relationships between the actors, by analyzing the *degree of coherence* in the actors’ *different role conceptions*. They see that the EU aspires to have the role of a leader and move on to analyze how the EU acts on that goal, comparing that result with how other actors (e.g. Russia) see the EU’s role. Using material like official policy documents, press releases, scientific articles, official statements and interview quotes, Bengtsson and Elgström map out the actors’ differing role conceptions that affect their relationships. Using a clear analytical logic, they review the possibility of the EU to reach/maintain their goal of leadership by showing how the lack of role coherence may endanger that goal. If Russia does not see them as a leader, how can they be (Bengtsson and
Elgström, 2012)? By defining central concepts, together with their analytical foundation of various reliable sources, they establish a credible role analysis. When evaluating role conceptions of actors, transparency is vital, since “observation is always selective” (Breuning, 2011, p. 34). An effort to conduct a similarly transparent and credible study has been made and will be elaborated upon throughout the essay.

2:4 THE BAKUN DAM CASE

In 1998, the government was responsible for the resettlement and compensation of indigenous families (Orang Ulu) consisting of circa 10,000 people. This was due to the construction of the Bakun dam on indigenous ancestral land in Belaga, Central Sarawak. They were relocated to the downstream town of Sungai Asap, where the families had been promised 10 acres of farmland each but only received 3. The plots of land they received were unsuitable for farming, and/or several hours away from their new housing, which itself many could not afford to pay, resulting in widespread debt. Additionally, much of the land surrounding Sungai Asap was licensed to companies growing palm oil, so any expansion potential was limited from the start. This, among other things, created much dissatisfaction and vulnerability among the communities that is still going on today (International Rivers, n.d.).

On the other hand, the Bakun dam is considered a good industrial development investment by the government. The current Chief Minister of Sarawak, Abang Johari, has claimed that the project will become a source of reliable income and self-governed energy for Sarawak, bringing social and economic development benefits for the state (The Borneo Post, 2017). This essay will explore these differing perspectives by using Role theory analysis to uncover how the actors see the situation, themselves and each other.
In this table, some central terms and concepts discussed above are explicitly defined. Theoretical concepts are described as understood in Harnisch et al. (2011) and Breuning (2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical concepts</th>
<th>Empirical concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roles</strong>: Social positions constituted by expectations regarding the purpose of an actor in an organized group.</td>
<td><strong>Indigenous</strong>: Based on the <em>UN Indigenous Voices factsheet</em>: A people are indigenous if they 1. Identify as such, 2. Have distinct culture, language(s), and beliefs which belong to non-dominant groups of society, 3. Hold a historical continuity with pre-colonial society, and 4. Maintain their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, n.d.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role conception</strong>: An actor’s perception of their role vis-á-vis others, manifested in language and actions.</td>
<td><strong>Orang Ulu</strong>: The name used by most of the indigenous ethnic groups of the interior of Sarawak to describe themselves, e.g. in Belaga (World Directory of Minorities, n.d.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role cohesion</strong>: The <em>shared</em> view between actors of what their respective roles are.</td>
<td><strong>Vulnerability</strong>: The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors making an actor more susceptible to threats and hazards (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Norms</strong>: Generally expected and accepted behavior; what is considered <em>normal</em> in a certain social setting.</td>
<td><strong>The government</strong>: The Sarawak state government, in this essay limited to the Chief ministers who have served during 1998-2019. These are Abdul Taib Mahmud, Adenan Satem, and Abang Johari. None of these belong to the indigenous ethnic groups of the other actor (Wikipedia, n.d.). Statements made by them will be included in and complemented by government publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power</strong>: The relative super/subordination of an actor.</td>
<td><strong>Alter expectations</strong>: Implicit or explicit demands by actor B regarding their expectations on actor A’s role. Signaled through language and action, either complementing or counteracting the ego expectations of actor A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ego expectations</strong>: An actor’s expectations as to what their own appropriate behavior/purpose is and what that implies.</td>
<td><strong>Normative persuasion</strong>: When actors engage in linguistic interaction to assess the appropriateness of their own and each other’s roles in situations of uncertainty; a push and pull of establishing norms. <strong>Lifeworld</strong>: A common stock of shared understandings about what is considered “normal”, within reason and legitimate. This sets an important platform for communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vulnerability</strong>: The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors making an actor more susceptible to threats and hazards (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2017).</td>
<td><strong>The government</strong>: The Sarawak state government, in this essay limited to the Chief ministers who have served during 1998-2019. These are Abdul Taib Mahmud, Adenan Satem, and Abang Johari. None of these belong to the indigenous ethnic groups of the other actor (Wikipedia, n.d.). Statements made by them will be included in and complemented by government publications.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2:6 TRANSPARENCY OF ASSUMPTIONS

For reasons concerning transparency, the following section will briefly go over certain basic assumptions made during the study.

*Theoretical assumptions*
First and foremost, when working within the sociological and constructivist worldview, one sees societies as *social constructs*. This entails among other things that groups and individuals in a constructed setting like society create norms and roles, that these in turn can be studied, and that they may change over time (Hurd, 2008, p. 300). Naturally, there are differing perspectives on the ways in which societies function – the constructivist world view can only allow insight into a certain range of possibilities and relies heavily on personal interpretations. Making transparency of assumptions and process accessible to the reader hence becomes essential not only for role analysis but for reliability in general (Esaiasson et al. 2017, p. 64).

Despite being foundational for the approach, it should also be noted that an assumption has been made in that it would at all be possible to retrieve roles from the selected material that reflect reality.

*Empirical assumptions*
A fundamental empirical assumption is that there is, in fact, a difference between the two main actors. The indigenous population of Sarawak and their government belong to different groups in terms of race, culture and history, but they do share national borders. Depending on context, when compared to another state like Italy for example, they could be seen as a unitary actor, and as this view is a norm there are those who would argue for this. Though building off the UN and NGOs consensus of indigenous vulnerability (seen as separated from the government), the division of the actors for the sake of the study is both reasonable and relevant. Additionally, this essay accepts the established UN norm that this vulnerability is something to be thwarted.

One could also argue that the influence of corporate actors should be more significant than that of the state government in industrial development projects like the Bakun dam. Despite the government being responsible for the resettlement of the affected indigenous people, they did not have full authority over the project itself at all points in time. But the research problem we wish to solve regards a state decision maker and citizens, so this is arguably a relevant choice.
of actors for this study. The Orang Ulu of the Belaga area, where the dam was built, are additionally the most relevant indigenous group on the island, as their communities were the ones most affected by the Bakun dam.

Lastly, there was the choice of distinguishing the Malaysian peninsular state from the Sarawak state on Borneo. Although they share certain frameworks and goals, this was a necessary distinction due to the geographical division of land, since it was the Sarawak state’s government on Borneo rather than the peninsular one that was in charge of the treatment of the indigenous people in the project.
3. METHODOLOGY

In this section, the method employed will be presented, followed by a discussion on the selection of material, and lastly the analytical framework for the results.

3:1 METHOD AND DESIGN

As mentioned above, previous successful role analyses have used inductive analysis of texts in order to retrieve the roles of actors. This essay will more specifically be employing critical text analysis as a method, which takes a critical position – not in terms of criticizing opinions, but rather the underlying meaning behind statements. Research using this method aims to bring forth the hidden sentiments in social linguistic actions, on the basis that ideas are a product of human interpretation. Whether or not the sentiments are “good” or “true” is not of much importance, but rather the sentiments themselves and what they entail for the actor/situation (Esaiasson et al. 2017, p. 214-215). This seems highly appropriate for role analysis, as social and linguistic interactions lie at the core of the theory. Both Role theory and critical text analysis are also very compatible with a qualitative case study design, as mentioned in Introduction. This method and design rely much on the mind of the researcher, leaving much of the result to subjective interpretation. Good ways to fight possible negative effects of this is to along with transparency show critical reflection over one’s findings (ibid, p. 225-231).

There are a variety of ways to conduct a critical text analysis, but normally one must identify certain parts of the material as more valuable for analysis than others. The way to find these parts is by using analytical tools within a set framework, made up of questions continually asked to the texts (Esaiasson et al. 2017, p. 211). The answers to these framework questions should then be what provides the researcher with the solutions to their research problems and questions. In this case, the questions should provide the role-relations of the selected actors. This method tends to be fruitful when identifying power relations between actors within certain contexts (ibid, p. 213-216). When these are asked in a systematic way and the essay can provide an answer to the framework- and research questions, the validity increases (ibid, p. 58). Therefore, the questions asked to the material will be open-ended, as opposed to closed-ended. This means that their structure will allow room for differing formats of answers, stemming from which one can establish a more authentic, valid analysis (ibid, 222-223).
3:2 MATERIAL

In idea-centric studies, like this one, the main point of departure is not so much who wrote a certain text or in what way, but rather the content of it. How did the actor express their ideas? What was the underlying meaning of those ideas? Of course, this still requires conscious reflection of who produced the material (Esaiasson et al. 2017, p. 224-225).

Ergo, the material to be examined should reasonably fill the criteria; a) to provide the framework questions with answers, b) to justifiably represent the actor, and c) to fit into the relevant timeline for the study starting in 1998 and ending in 2019. In an attempt to fill these criteria, three texts each will make up the material from which the two actors’ roles will be retrieved. The first text should be of an institutional source, e.g. a scientific article or official publication summarizing experiences or goals of the actor. The second text should be a press/media source expressing an actor’s view of the case, themselves and/or of the other actor. Finally, the last text should include individual quotes by members of the group, e.g. from speeches or interviews. These three may overlap freely, but all three levels of source material – institutional, press/media, and individual - must be covered in some way in order to provide roles for analysis. Furthermore, the material chosen should to some extent cover the timeline of the Bakun dam project, as each actor’s sources were written spanning the relevant decades of the late 1990’s until today. Although the goal is not to measure how the actors may have changed over time, this offers a more long-term credible sample of their roles than if all material was written in e.g. 1998. These material requirements, based in part on Bengtsson and Elgström’s (2012) layout, should provide sufficient role material.

Finally, seeing as linguistic interactions lie at the heart of this study, the fact that English is an official language in Sarawak (Francis, 2019), and there thus existing sufficient material in English on the subject will help minimize the risk for linguistic misunderstandings during the research, consequently increasing validity (Esaiasson et al. 2017, p. 58). With that said, the indigenous Orang Ulu actor’s particular access to writing and producing texts that would be available to a researcher in Sweden is extremely limited. Thus, their material is mainly made up of NGOs or researchers interviewing them and summarizing their situations, which can of course affect the results.
### Material: The Sarawak government


3. Sarawak Chief Minister’s Department [CMD]: “Development Synergy” (2010). Government publication on the philosophy guiding the Sarawak state and their civil service’s vision, development mission and core values. Mainly consisting of transcribed official speeches by former Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud.

### Material: The indigenous Orang Ulu people


The questions were first applied in a pilot study, after which improvements and clarifications were done. These open-ended questions make up the analytical tools needed for discerning which parts of the texts are most relevant for role analysis.

### Roles

1. How is the actor in question portrayed?

2. How is the other actor portrayed?

*Questions 1 and 2 provide expressions of ego and alter expectations, and the basic role conceptions of the actors.*

### Norms

3. What goals does the actor (seem to) have?

4. Who/what is portrayed as an obstacle to the actor’s goals? Who/what is the solution?

*Questions 3 and 4 provide a view of the actors’ goals and norms.*

### Lifeworlds

5. How are industrial development projects like the Bakun dam portrayed?

6. What factors in society does the actor (seem to) consider obvious, based on the actor’s statements?

*Questions 5 and 6 provide a greater understanding of the lifeworlds and norms of the actors, as well as their view on the Bakun project, illuminating potential role incohesion.*
4. RESULTS

The results will be presented divided into the two actors. The findings of the six framework-questions will each be summarized according to personal interpretations (*italics*) supported by empirical evidence, consisting of a mix of quotes from the actors’ respective texts 1-3. Lastly, the answers will be briefly summarized in a table.

4:1 SARAWAK GOVERNMENT ACTOR

1. How is the actor in question portrayed?

*The government is portrayed as a motivating leader for change, working to bring prosperity through development (economic growth). They are portrayed to care about and represent the people, proud of having gotten them out of the poverty and powerlessness of the colonial period.*

“The state represents the people and their aspirations, articulate their wishes, and help them realize their potential” (CMD, 2010, p. 5).

“During the colonial period, government workers were dedicated to a standard which had been set for them, they were administrators rather than managers. The country was poor. This has changed because the current governments have brought progress and prosperity for the people and country” (CMD, 2010, p. 26).

“The government has played the role of motivator in order to facilitate changes [toward development]” (CMD, 2010, p. 27). “The government cannot abandon its roles to ensure healthy growth of the economy” (CMD, 2010, p. 30).

2. How is the other actor portrayed?

*The indigenous people (occasionally referred to by the government term “Bumiputera”) and the areas they live in are described as a key to fair economic growth, while also being grossly underdeveloped, and ignorant if they reject (the mainstream of) development. They are not always explicitly included in the quotes but are arguably included in groups like “the people”*
or “the countryside”. This interpretation is partly due to the statement that the people are “one”.

“[Economic progress] must mean a fair balance with regard to the participation and contribution of all our ethnic groups – including the Bumiputeras of Sabah and Sarawak – in the high-growth, modern sectors of our economy” (PMO, n.d.). “Nobody can deny the fact that today the people of Sarawak have become one” (CMD, 2010, p. 57).

“It will take huge number of people to transform the countryside, now grossly under-developed, to bring [the workforce] to the mainstream of development” (CMD, 2010, p. 74). “Regrettably, sometimes, the people, whom we want to serve, oppose us out of ignorance of what the government wants to do to help them […] But road development is the only way to bring progress or development to their area; if they do not want the road to be built, they are depriving themselves of development” (CMD, 2010, p. 57-58).

3. What goals does the actor (seem to) have?

The goals of the government appear to be establishing an integrated society free of absolute poverty, loyally dedicated to its economic growth and development (declared in Vision 2020). A claimed key to this growth is “human capital development”, which in the texts refers to things like access to education, infrastructure, energy, jobs etc.

“Establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny. […] With political loyalty and dedication to the nation” (PMO, n.d.). “[…] The eradication of absolute poverty -regardless of race, and irrespective of geographical location” (PMO, n.d).

“I believe that we should set the realistic (as opposed to aspirational) target of almost doubling our real gross domestic product every ten years between 1990 and 2020 AD. If we do this, our GDP should be about eight times larger by the year 2020 than it was in 1990” (PMO, n.d.)

“The number of jobs in Sarawak will more than double by 2030, and so the State wants to push for human capital development; preparing local people to play meaningful roles in the process of development” (CMD, 2010, p. 14).

4. Who/what is portrayed as an obstacle to the actor’s goals? Who/what is the solution?
The goal of strong (economic) development for Sarawak held by the government faces issues like communication and needs a mental and cultural transformation. The actor is portrayed as willing to rise to the task; dedicated. The actions they portray as solutions can be divided into economic; investing in infrastructure and industry, and social capital; unifying their state and people. They want a society with people “of quality”, defined as people who follow the same norms, and who regardless of their varying races belong to the government “we”. Implied in these ideas is that the indigenous (Bumiputera) people of Belaga need to conform to the government’s norms, rather than the other way around.

“’I am very much aware of the communication problem here,’ he said, adding that Belaga District needs a systematic development plan to overcome the issues” (Sarawak Government, 2017).

“There is a need to ensure the creation of an economically resilient and fully competitive Bumiputera community so as to be at par with the NonBumiputera community. There is need for a mental revolution and a cultural transformation” (PMO, n.d.)

“We will try to preserve what is most valuable in each of our community but at the same time allow change to bring about interactions between them because we the various races have got to meet each other, […] we the various races have got to eat on the same table with each other and learn to take of course the different kinds of food” (CMD, 2010, p. 9-10).

“[A society where] Malaysians of all colours and creeds are free to practice and profess their customs, cultures and religious beliefs and yet feeling that they belong to one nation” (PMO, n.d.).

“The quality of people, based on social discipline or religious or moral consciousness should conform to the normal norms, which could be lumped together to become social capital “(CMD, 2010, p. 37).

5. How are industrial development projects like the Bakun dam portrayed?

Dams and other industrial development projects are spoken of as carrying promising potential, e.g. for sectors like tourism. The control of the Bakun dam is mentioned as “now” being in the hands of the actor (rather than the federal government), implying that it was less in their control before, and that this now should improve the situation. Their increasingly successful development projects in central Sarawak (i.e. Belaga, Bakun area) are leading to better relations with private investors. Further, the actor includes the indigenous (Bumiputera) people in their plans for industrial development, in how healthy development will require a
commercially and industrially strong indigenous community. Personal identity traits must not take priority over unified harmony, which better helps the state’s development.

“Now that Sarawak has full control of the dams including Bakun dam that was acquired from the federal government earlier this year, the state is able to manage these lakes and the hundreds of islands which have good potentials as tourist attraction” (Sarawak Government, 2017).

“Undoubtedly, the integrated development of the Central Region of the state, through SCORE [Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy], will help to convince investors that any bigger investments are justifiable; they can be expect [sic] to yield big profits” (CMD, 2010, p. 72).

“We must ensure the healthy development of a viable and robust Bumiputera commercial and industrial community” (PMO, n.d.). “Abang Johari called on all people regardless of their race and religion to be united, saying ‘it is only with good understanding among themselves that the people would be able to live in peace and harmony which augurs well for rapid development of the state’” (Sarawak Government, 2017).

6. What factors in society does the actor (seem to) consider obvious, based on the actor’s statements?

The way in which the government discusses how surviving and having a better life naturally seems to entail things like participation in the globalized world, increasing a market-focus, and the people acquiring technological skills for new jobs, should be highlighted here. This is language used by an actor whose “normal” is to live in a monetized economy seeking growth, assuming that strong contact with the globalized world is desirable, and that prosperity should and could be measured in the general wealth of the population. They wish to enter/remain in the mainstream of development.

“What is obvious now is that if we want to survive and keep better way of life by participating in the globalized world, we must brace ourselves to do some re-adjustments to our life in response to the market; we re-orientate ourselves towards the customers” (CMD, 2010, p. 36)

“New technologies entail more people to operate them and technical transfer of skills from foreign to local workers. Therefore, the local people must acquire such skills to enable them to fit well with the jobs” (CMD, 2010, p. 19) “If we do succeed [with Vision 2020], and assuming roughly a 2.5 per cent annual rate of population growth, by the year 2020, Malaysians will be four times
richer (in real terms) than they were in 1990. That is the measure of the prosperous society we wish and hopefully we can achieve.” (PMO, n.d.)

4:2 INDIGENOUS ORANG ULU ACTOR

1. How is the actor in question portrayed?

*The way in which the indigenous Orang Ulu actor is portrayed in their material could be divided into two categories. In the first, indigenous people (including the Orang Ulu) make up nearly half the population of Sarawak and have been there longer than the other actor, they are diverse but share cultural values. They do not exploit their land, they are spiritual, they care about their future generations. In the second category, they are portrayed also as victims; vulnerable, displaced, and having little power over their own security.*

“The people in Sungai Asap have become socially and culturally vulnerable; dispossession of their territorial domains is akin to removing the foundation of their economic, social and cultural security” (Choy, 2004, p. 62) “Most of them had been there for many generations. In the 1980s, when the Bakun HEP [Hydro Electric Project] had first been mooted, the majority of these people had clearly declared their reluctance to move. But in the end, they have had little choice” (Gabungan, 1999, p. 4).

“It is worth recalling that in Sarawak, the indigenous population comprises some 48% of the total population of the state […] Each [ethnic] group has its own social structure and mores, but all share a culture at whose base is land. Land supplies not just food and resources, but is the spiritual home of the community” (Gabungan, 1999, p. 3). “[…] The community is entrusted the responsibility for preserving and nurturing the land so that it can be passed on to future generations, intact.” (Gabungan, 1999, p. 3)

2. How is the other actor portrayed?

*The government is portrayed as disrespectful, abusive and as exploiting people and nature. They are accused of not keeping promises, hypocrisy, of not following their own laws and of theft. These can be summarized as quite negative traits. The perception is that the government is working against the actor rather than with them in their push for development.*
“The government promised that the Bakun dam would bring job opportunities, improved standard of living and development however, they remained as empty promises” (SAVE Rivers, 2019).
“In effecting the move, the state authorities have continually demonstrated their lack of respect for indigenous peoples and their culture, their lack of concern in involving and supporting the indigenous communities in the trauma of the resettlement and their lack of respect even for their own laws and procedures” (Gabungan, 1999, p. 10).

“Development does not mean stealing our land, our culture and our dignity as human beings. That is not development, but theft” (Gabungan, 1999, p. 15). “[…] The state view on natural resources is one of commercial and economic exploitation.” (Choy, 2004, p. 53)

### 3. What goals does the actor (seem to) have?

*In the material there is a comparison between what is portrayed as a good situation (in Long Lawen) and a bad one (the Orang Ulu community’s situation in Sungai Asap). The portrayal of the better situation implies their goals. These include living in an indigenous ancestral area, living off the land rather than simply on it, not having a monetized economy, and these factors bringing spiritual satisfaction. Another possible goal is the matter of “proper” compensation; the actor wishes to be compensated more extensively, based on their own land values rather than the government’s ideas.*

“[In Long Lawen] Extensive land and forest as well as hunting grounds are available to enable the local people to continue their subsistence economy and traditional way of life.” (Choy, 2004, p. 62). “I am happy to live here because this is part of our ancestral land. […] I don't have to worry about my food supplies or water/electricity bills as compared to those who are living in Sungai Asap. We get most of the things from the forest free of charge. We can survive easily even without money.” (Choy, 2004, p. 62)

“The communities are concerned not only with economic progress but also with their spiritual satisfaction, which is reliant on satisfying the non-use values of the Bakun forest ecosystem” (Choy, 2004, p. 67) “If proper respect is to be paid to the affected indigenous communities, and due compensation paid, then all such land should be recognised for what it is and what it is worth” (Gabungan, 1999, p. 10)

### 4. Who/what is portrayed as an obstacle to the actor’s goals? Who/what is the solution?
The actor seems to fear losing parts of their cultural identity, due to lacking the time and resources which once upheld their cultural practices. This fear is in line with their goals of living like they want and used to before the Bakun resettlement. Obstacles to this appear to be very limited access to affecting the project itself in terms of feedback or participation, along with inevitable dissociation from the natural environment vital to their culture.

“[…] Fieldwork clearly indicates that once the indigenous communities are forced to dissociate themselves from nature, their socio-economic structures and cultural identity will be adversely affected” (Choy, 2004, p. 64). “[…] The dam was conducted with no public accessibility to vital feasibility studies, no process of public feedback […] and extremely limited consultation procedures with the indigenous peoples who have had little idea of exactly what was to happen to them” (Gabungan, 1999, p. 2).

“It is also feared that some of our cultures may become extinct. […] Everyone is too busy looking for money in order to survive” (Choy, 2004, p. 61).

5. How are industrial development projects like the Bakun dam portrayed?

Referring to the UN declaration of indigenous rights, the actor points to how economic objectives should not compromise social and environmental wellbeing. The actor claims having been treated like an object, used for a development agenda whose goals they do not agree with nor reap benefits from. The government is portrayed as a culprit in pushing for the Bakun dam project, hurting them despite complains.

“In any mega project which is affecting the environment, properties and people the Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as stated in the United Nation Declaration on Right of the Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) must be seriously observed. Any social and environmental wellbeing must never be compromised by economic objectives” (SAVE Rivers, 2019).

“[…] Saying that “Sarawak is reaping the benefit” from the controversial Bakun dam is a lopsided remark. […] Without taking into account the longstanding problems and complaints of the indigenous peoples affected by the project” (SAVE Rivers, 2019). “[…] indigenous peoples have been treated like objects in a process that has excluded them from input and debate and has basically reduced them to follow an agenda and a definition of ‘development’ that has been written for them” (Gabungan, 1999, p. 9).
6. What factors in society does the actor (seem to) consider obvious, based on the actor’s statements?

*Factors and norms that from the indigenous actor’s point of view seem obvious are disinterest in development goals like tourism, which becomes further prevalent in how they do not assume that economic development naturally brings positive social effects. An important “obvious” norm to be highlighted is the significance of Land and one’s connection to it. This culturally, materially and spiritually valuable factor is related to the significant norm of a non-cash economy. It is implied that monetary wealth does not indicate wellbeing.*

“Whilst these kinds of [tourist] benefits may sit well with the state government’s priorities for development, they are a little outside the experience of indigenous communities and hardly relevant to indigenous culture” (Gabungan, 1999, p. 4). “A project, especially a large dam project which is considered economically viable, will not necessarily contribute to the social development of a society” (Choy, 2004, p. 51-52).

“Each part of this land serves a particular purpose in sustaining the spiritual and economic health of the community.” (Gabungan, 1999, p. 10). “[…] The communities have been thrust immediately into a wholly cash economy, spending significant sums (for them) on purchasing food and materials which had previously been obtained for free” (Gabungan, 1999, p. 13).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUMMARY OF RESULTS</th>
<th>Government Actor</th>
<th>Indigenous Orang Ulu Actor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How is the actor in question portrayed?</td>
<td>Leader for the people, for modern prosperity and economic growth.</td>
<td>Vulnerable, strong cultural and spiritual people who have been wronged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How is the other actor portrayed?</td>
<td>Ignorant, under-developed, not knowing their own good. Holding key resources.</td>
<td>Disrespectful, abusive, exploiting people and nature for their own agenda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What goals does the actor (seem to) have?</td>
<td>An integrated society free of absolute poverty, loyally dedicated to Sarawak’s economic growth and development.</td>
<td>Living off their ancestral land, spiritual satisfaction, not being worried about money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Who/what is portrayed as an obstacle to the actor’s goals? Who/what is the solution?</td>
<td>Communication issues, a need for a mental and cultural transformation. Everyone needs to join the 2020 development agenda; integration.</td>
<td>Fear of extinction of culture and access to resources, the community is occupied with modern worries like money. A need to get back to ancestral land and ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How are industrial development projects like the Bakun dam portrayed?</td>
<td>Personal identity traits must not take priority over unified harmony and development. This is good for Sarawak and for the people.</td>
<td>Industrial development like the Bakun dam is harmful, a push by the government which is not to their benefit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What factors in society does the actor (seem to) consider obvious, based on the actor’s statements?</td>
<td>A monetized economy seeking growth, strong contact with the globalized world is desirable, prosperity should and could be measured in the general wealth of the population.</td>
<td>The culturally, materially and spiritually valuable connection to land. No money in economy. Practice of secluded, separate culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. ROLE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results will be juxtaposed and examined through the lens of constructivist Role theory in order to establish role conceptions. Once role conceptions have been identified, the actors’ lifeworlds and level of role cohesion will be analyzed, taking into account the concept of power. Lastly, contributions and research questions will be discussed.

5:1 ROLE CONCEPTIONS

By using the analytical tools made up of framework-questions, the results have been compiled and prepared for analysis. Beginning by looking mainly at the first two framework-questions regarding the portrayal of self (ego) and other (alter), one can discern the implicit and explicit expectations that make up the actors’ role conceptions. Each actor’s role conceptions will be given appropriate labels, based on the results. Highlighting the actors’ role conceptions by labeling them may offer easier distinctions for the reader and will be displayed in a table below.

There is a significant lack of role cohesion. By the government themselves, they are portrayed as representing the people; they are a motivating force for the economic prosperity and fundamental development of Sarawak. The role conception of the government in relation to the indigenous actor may thus be labeled Dedicated Prosperity Leader. Meanwhile, the indigenous actor portrays them as exploitative and abusive, working towards goals differing strongly from those of their citizens. Already, there is evidence for quite differing perceptions of the government’s role. Based on the alter expectations of the indigenous actor (how they perceive and expect the government to act), the government’s role label would rather be Exploitative Power Abuser. These expectations have been expressed explicitly through verbal and formal complaints as well as organized efforts by the indigenous communities to gain more influence over the Bakun dam situation. Meanwhile, the Dedicated Prosperity Leader thinks that the people should be happy that their government has worked so hard to get the state out of colonial-time poverty, and that they are continuing to do so. And their way to do so is by continually investing in the development goals of the state.

The two actors’ conceptions of the government’s role are far from coherent. Moving on to the roles of the indigenous people; the Dedicated Prosperity Leader portrays the indigenous Orang Ulu as ignorant if unwilling to cooperate, depriving themselves of the pleasures of mainstream
development. At the same time, the government sees them as a key to the prosperity that lies within reach, but that they unfortunately have little knowledge of what lies in Sarawak’s best interest. The view is that the indigenous are in fact one with the Sarawak people, although they refuse to integrate themselves into society – which is explained by the gross under-development in their region, something the government in turn happily is responsible for improving. That way, the Orang Ulu people would get more access to infrastructure, healthcare, jobs, etc. and not be left behind by their rapidly changing society. The indigenous ancestral land is valuable because it holds much potential for profit and Sarawakian self-sufficiency, why would they not want to share that with their state? They need a mental and cultural transformation in order to fit in with Sarawak’s goals, which will soon be their own goals. The government role conception of the indigenous may thus be labeled Ignorant Under-developed Key.

The indigenous Orang Ulu’s portrayal of their own role was for practical reasons divided into two in the results, neither of which corroborate the government’s view of them. Culturally and historically rich, proud and spiritual, considerate of their natural surroundings yet being vulnerable victims in the face of Sarawak’s industrial development, their role conception of themselves may be summarized as them being Vulnerable Land Appreciators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE CONCEPTIONS</th>
<th>Role conception of government actor</th>
<th>Role conception of indigenous Orang Ulu actor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Held by government actor</td>
<td>Dedicated Prosperity Leader</td>
<td>Ignorant Under-developed Key</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Held by indigenous Orang Ulu actor</td>
<td>Exploitative Power Abuser</td>
<td>Vulnerable Land Appreciators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As this table illustrates, the role conceptions of the actors are in open conflict with each other. Though this may seem obvious, part of the constructivist Role theory approach is specifically not assuming the obvious - by locating underlying sentiments and causes for why this is in the next segment, perhaps a more advanced understanding can be reached.
5:2 LIFEWORLDS AND POWER

Role conceptions can provide important insight into conflicts between actors, and something that makes this case of role analysis interesting is how it relates to power. Looking at the table above, one can see that the actors have differing role conceptions, which leads to conflicting understandings both of one another and the reality they share. But something one cannot see as plainly is how one of them is winning. Both the actors have quite unflattering views of each other, both consider their own goals and arguments valid, so why are the indigenous Orang Ulu the ones who now have lost their land, historical context, and fear extinction of their culture? The answers lie in the concepts of power and vulnerability.

Referring to one’s society as “we the various races”, and in doing so effectively reducing an ancient human diversity to a unified development agenda, may be more appealing to someone who does not fear the extinction of their own race’s culture, as the Orang Ulu claim to. On the other hand, with the government’s proclaimed passion and dedication to the wellbeing of their state, they may not interpret this message of we in the same threatening way the indigenous communities seem to. No, the government simply wishes for their average citizen to live more comfortably, with increased access to the promise of a globalized culture and economy. This is where the later framework-questions of goals, norms and lifeworlds become relevant; the government claims to work in Sarawak and its people’s best interest, but the content of this interest is entirely dependent on what one happens to consider best or desirable; i.e. one’s goals, which are based on norms.

The actors’ perceptions of what is normal or desirable are not the same. In order to understand the government actor’s actions and goals, we must first look at their norms. The results indicate that their normal society is built upon a cash economy, relies on a functioning market system, in which people have jobs and work for money, and wish to partake in the globalized/developed world. This relates clearly to the goal of growth, human capital development, and explain the need for Sarawak’s human, monetary and natural resources to be invested in these things. Religious morality is also mentioned as a sign of quality in people; but the actors do not share a religion. This shows how the focus of the government lies on the other actor adjusting to their lifeworld, rather than on mutual understanding.
Placed next to the indigenous Orang Ulu, it becomes clear that the actors have challenging and separate sets of norms and thus lack any lifeworld to speak of, the shared foundation for communication upon which peaceful and shared understandings would have grown. The indigenous actor displays the norms of living in a secluded society, extracting spiritual and material use from their ancestral land, not needing nor wanting a monetary market system, finding well-being less in industrial development prosperity and more in the security of their own community practices. These norms are clear indicators of the actor’s goals, which mainly include securing the survival of their heritage and lifestyle, along with access to the comfort they derive from their communities’ traditional ways of life. Beyond the role conceptions, we can hence see that the actors’ goals and lifeworlds are in open conflict with each other, too.

Returning to the concept of power, after having established that the norms and goals of the actors are very different, it is again worth noting that one of them is clearly triumphing. The authority actor out of the two in the Bakun dam case is the government, whose members do not belong to the more vulnerable racial group (indigenous/Orang Ulu). They also have more access to the financial and social/physical resources needed to follow through with their goals. Furthermore, their super ordinance as government is a fact. With Habermas’s understandings of coercion and lack of communicative action, this power position can be considered illegitimate. The Orang Ulu resisted and claim to have had little choice regarding the resettlement, now deeply unsatisfied with their situation in Sungai Asap; this argues for the government’s use of force rather than legitimate power. The lack of consensus based on communication is important in understanding the power relations between the two; one must not assume that the hierarchy in place is legitimate. Instead, it may be e.g. an extension of colonial exploitation of indigenous people.

Following the logic of Role theory, the lack of role cohesion, illegitimate power and lifeworlds can help explain the conflict. The disparity in understanding of what the word we means, or potentially could mean, is a good example of what has led to the increased vulnerability of the indigenous Orang Ulu communities, and the simultaneous increasingly encouraged government. They do not share a lifeworld, so they have little platform for reasoning with each other in accordance with any logic, since they do not agree upon what is logical or desirable. Furthermore, their normative persuasion – the push and pull of establishing norms that would have supported a shared lifeworld – has been very limited since one of the actors holds such a power position, automatically supporting the government pull more than the indigenous push.
Communicative action is weak in the Bakun dam case. It appears that linguistic interactions have not taken place so much in conversation as in press statements and through institutions/NGOs. The government wants to secure the steady growth of their state without grasping the Orang Ulu’s sentiment of what land should and does mean, and the indigenous communities have little sympathy for the growth-desires of the government. Chief Minister Abang Johari points out communication problems himself, but his proposed solution is systematic development; again, a sentiment not based on a ground of consensus nor shared norms. The government finds decreased poverty and increased well-being in technological and industrial advancements, considering themselves hindered by ignorant citizens who do not understand what is best for them. This lack of normative persuasion, fueled by the illegitimate power and super ordination of the government, together with the already vulnerable state of indigenous communities, has led to the complicated and unbalanced situation of the Bakun dam case.

5:3 CONCLUSION

With this understanding, reached through Role theory, one can return to reviewing previous research. The view by Cooke et al., for example, that resettlement policy should be implemented differently for things to change, does make sense; inclusion of the affected communities in planning/implementation would likely make a big difference. Indeed also, there is still much room for further dimensions exploring why and how the bond between indigenous people and their ancestral land is continually being broken. Role analysis has here perhaps contributed to a more systematic view of exactly that breaking process, and importantly, why it does not seem likely to change any time soon. Things that could change it would be the establishing of a solid lifeworld between the actors or through balancing their uneven and illegitimate power relations. Another alternative could be if the government was under more pressure from the international community, whose role can be considered super ordinate in relation to the government, who wants to enter their internationally competitive playing field. This potential is strengthened by the indigenous actor’s referral to the United Nation Declaration on Right of the Indigenous Peoples, meaning that they recognize and perhaps would not mind the international influence of the UN. Though these speculations lie beyond this paper’s limited research range.
Based on the role analysis above, policy changes would not be enough to salvage the Orang Ulu communities’ lifestyles, nor would increasing compensation measures. This understanding is a contributing point of the paper and implies that Role theory could in fact be useful in domestic settings. Because of the role analysis, a new perspective has been developed, which in this case paints a somewhat dark picture of future events. Should the Bakun situation continue unfolding in the same direction, there are few indicators that the Orang Ulu communities’ cultures should not indeed slowly fade into oblivion through forced integration; into we the various races. Then again, it is to some extent up to opinion whether or not that situation would be a negative one.

To summarize the empirical findings now understood through the role theoretical lens, the two actors have very incoherent role conceptions of themselves and of each other. This is partly due to the differing goals and norms of their respective lifeworlds, and so there is little room for trust-inducing communicative action. The government actor is exercising illegitimate force and has the resources to reach their goals against the other actor’s will. Meanwhile, the Orang Ulu communities have little political influence and opportunity to challenge the already accepted super ordination of the government. This has led to the increased vulnerability of the indigenous Orang Ulu actor, and the increasingly powerful Sarawak government actor, who in a zero-sum manner benefits from the succumbing of the other party. These patterns show little sign of changing, unless lifeworlds are established or power is balanced between the actors.

5:4 CONTRIBUTIONS AND ANSWERS

This paper has explored the potential of Role theory in domestic political issues by applying it to the Bakun dam case. The research question was 1.1. Did Role theory contribute to understanding the Bakun dam case by examining role conceptions of the Sarawak government and the indigenous Orang Ulu people? Role analysis has indeed proven to be a quite fruitful approach in understanding cases and relationships between national actors like these, of which one is marginalized and the other is a decision maker. A strength in constructivist role analysis is the way in which it can place a term where one had only a feeling; it can contribute with the tools used to express what one may consider obvious. Do two actors seem to have different cultural values? Role theory then offers a systematic map of how and where they clash. Is one actor an accepted authority? Role theory can point to where they crossed the line from exercising legitimate power to illegitimate force. This is important in modern political analyses,
since we have just seen how different perceptions of the assumed “obvious” can be. The answer is yes, Role theory did to some extent contribute to understanding the Bakun dam case by analyzing role conceptions.

This brings us to the more general 1. Can Role theory contribute to understanding domestic political issues of marginalization by examining state decision makers’ and marginalized citizens’ role conceptions? Could this same analytical logic and methodology be applied to other similar cases? There is no guarantee, much like which this study, but there is certainly potential. If a researcher wants to investigate an issue but cannot easily identify the underlying currents which shape the setting in question, constructivist Role theory can be employed to better map the relationships between actors. This conclusion is a contributing point of the study.
6. FINAL REMARKS

In this section, critical reflections over the essay and its findings will take place, finally followed by recommendations for future research.

6:1 CRITICAL REFLECTION

Critical reflection is a vital element in Role theory, constructivism, critical text analysis and social science in general. Firstly, it should be acknowledged that the theoretical point of departure is both a strong and weak spot in the study. There are several good reasons for exploring Role theory between actors in domestic politics and not just internationally, but one way in which the approach loses some “edge” during that conversion of political setting is in how power relations quite certainly will affect the actors if one of them is a recognized decision maker. When analyzing international/foreign policy decisions, it may not be clear which of two actors is actually more influential or powerful, and so role analysis can highlight these hidden structures. In a decision maker vs. marginalized citizen setting, it is already quite clear. Although, by employing theories which are compatible with role analysis (like Habermas’s), one can develop also those understandings.

The exclusion of other factors possibly affecting the relationship between the actors can be seen as a more general weakness in Role theory. For example, corporate actors or internal structures within each party may be contributing to the tense relationship between the Orang Ulu and the government, something role analysis does not put enough emphasis on. With that said, I do still believe that Role theory applied in this way can strengthen current understandings of certain relationships confined within national borders; it maps the obvious and can display important differences in ways to interpret it.

Furthermore, the perspective presented in this essay is limited by my range of interpretations. As a young woman living in Sweden, I host my share of pre-existing beliefs. This affects the results and analysis, but as long as there has been no pretense at being objective, this should not be concerning. Rather, it should encourage further similar research in order to get a more well-rounded perspective on the matter. For example, the material was selected based on previous
role research, but another person may be able to e.g. conduct interviews with the actors in question and reach sharper results.

In order to conduct a role analysis, material from a variety of credible sources is needed. A bachelor’s thesis inherently has somewhat limited potential in this area, as a qualitative text analysis requires in-depth research of few materials and a quantitative method would not yield the type of results necessary for retrieving roles. Therefore, a qualitative critical text analysis was a suitable method, but the results of which could certainly be developed with more time and material. For example, the time span of the project as well as between the texts make the role retrieval more vulnerable to misunderstandings since it may have changed during that period. Although changes in role conceptions were not much detected in the results, it is worth keeping in mind.

The selected material has its limitations. The government’s material was published by them, which justifies its use as representation, but it was less explicitly focused on the Orang Ulu actor and the Bakun dam case than the indigenous’ material was. This may have led to distortions in the answers to the framework questions, since the content of the indigenous’s material was often quite centered around the topics in question, while the government’s was often more general in its addressed topics. The process of selecting specific segments as most relevant is a part of critical text analysis, which to some extent pardons this problem as the relevant quotes were often identified in the end, despite the government’s occasional vagueness of topic. Additionally, the indigenous material, although including direct quotes from interviews, was not written (or perhaps read) by themselves, which of course affects the content. But the specific interview questions and involved NGOs reporting on the Bakun situation offered answers conveniently relevant for role analysis. If the communities had released a publication on “development” themselves, which perhaps would not answer the framework questions as easily – like the government publications, published by an actor who easily can represent themselves – maybe locating answers would have been more difficult.

6:2 FUTURE RESEARCH

Moving on, the research problem presented in the introduction was taken from previous literature which recommended investigating role conceptions of decision makers and citizens. Role theory in FPA, albeit not limited to examining only policy but the social relationship in
question, is in fact centered around policy decisions. Bengtsson and Elgström, for example, did not base their research on policy documents alone – but in this case the option was removed entirely since the indigenous actor was not in a position to implement policy (due to being citizens). This takes FPA-Role theory out of the context it was developed in, which is a risk not reflected sufficiently upon in the beginning. As the study went on, this became relevant when searching for material in how policy documents could have been useful in content. But this ended up not being a great hindrance to understanding the sentiments of the actors, instead the texts were quite elaborate and “personal” at times, offering a more nuanced view.

In the future, continued development of domestically applied Role theory or even this essay’s case could as mentioned strengthen the field by contributing with more or new perspectives, complementing or countering the findings. Looking beyond that, other interesting research recommendations also abstaining from policy documents could be doing a role analysis of two citizen-actors. This could explore the functions of democracy and power. Perhaps analyzing one privileged citizen group with more power and another with less. Or, two citizen-groups with less power, and their role conceptions in the face of a democracy hosting a majority of the privileged citizens. These groups could be based on e.g. race or gender. That would develop Role theory in a way which could explore reasons behind cooperation or conflict between marginalized groups in society.
7. REFERENCES


