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CLASS AND THE MAKING OF SOCIAL ADULTHOOD
IN PONTIANAK, WEST KALIMANTAN

Wency Marina Minza

Introduction

Didin (24) is a young man from the district of Ketapang in the southern part of West Kalimantan. I met Didin while he was at his "office". He is the head of a local NGO which focuses on life skill learning for the surrounding community. His father is a farmer while his mother taps rubber. When he was in junior high school, he moved to Sintang (a district in the interior part of West Kalimantan), to be raised by his uncle who works in the army. He describes how he had to carry out domestic tasks for his uncles' family as a form of exchange for his uncles' kindness for taking him in. "Every morning I have the duty to clean my uncle's motorcycle, sweep and mop the floor. (When my uncle) has to go to work at dawn, really early in the morning or at night before going
people in West Kalimantan between the ages of 19-24 who are still in school live in Pontianak (Central Statistics Bureau, 1990). With rapid urbanization to the city by young migrants from other districts in the province to study, this number is assumed to have increased. This, in addition to the already existing portion of young people, makes Pontianak a city that has a high proportion of youth.

Globally, there have been influential social and economic changes that have largely influenced how the present youth are experiencing their transition to adulthood (Saraswathi & Larson, 2002). Different from their previous generation that have a clearer and relatively fixed pathway into adulthood, the present youth are facing multiple pathways into adulthood, partially becoming an ‘adult’ in some domains while still “youth” in others (Furstenberg, 2000). This change has been happening between the 1960s (Modell, Furstenberg, & Hershberg, 1976) and 1970s (Furstenberg, 2000) in Western countries, but has become more intense with the onset of globalization. For Southeast Asian youth, this rapid change is noted to have happened later, around the 1980s, which came along with rapid economic growth. Within this rapid change, youth in Southeast Asia “continue to rely on tradition while embracing the possibilities of modern change”. (Maria, 2002: 175)

**III. Decentralization, Ethnicity, and Modernization**

In Pontianak, rapid change has been happening with the introduction of decentralization in 1999. Along with global ideas of local empowerment, decentralization has re-surfaced “traditional” beliefs and systems related to ethnicity. It has provoked a rise in ethnic sentiment (Wawa, 2000), and ethnicity is now regarded as an important factor for social inclusion in positions of power. It has brought to the floor the concept of ‘local people’, in which, local people is often associated to a particular ethnicity or ethnicities within the area. In Pontianak (and West Kalimantan in general), the Malay and Dayak are perceived to be the local people, even though recently the Chinese have also becoming recognized as part of the local people.
Occupational segmentation based on ethnicity is quite common in the area, but the role of ethnic (and familial) social networks have also recently become even more important as a resource for employment opportunities and occupational positions in Kalimantan (Klinken, 2003: 22-23). At the provincial level, Malays generally occupy the civil servant positions; Dayak occupy the agricultural sector; Madurese work in informal sectors; and Chinese in trade. In urban Pontianak, a slightly different dynamic in ethnic occupational position can be seen. A large portion of Malays also work in the urban informal sectors aside from working as civil servants (competing with the Madurese), while a few Dayak are in middle level civil servant positions (Achwan et al, 2005). But with the change of political power in the province, there may be some changes in this occupational segmentation happening. In the case above, Didin is a Malay (often associated with Islam). His NGO is based in a Malay (and Moslem) village. It has made it easier for him to access the social networks that have helped him attain his current job. Being a Malay in Malay dominated areas is often seen as an advantage in accessing various resources. Most of his social network in the high schools where he teaches scouting and karate are also Malays. Thus, he feels that being a Malay has benefitted him in accessing these job opportunities. For some Dayak youth (as I will show in the case of Lina later on in the paper), having a Dayak governor has brought new hopes of accessing the civil service job in Dayak “districts”, since the Dayak have recently obtained various important political positions.

After decentralization, local governments were also able to re-arrange or revitalize the local government system to provide better access for investment opportunities (Setiadi, 2010). Local governments are able to directly negotiate investment opportunities with other parties. One of one of the prominent investments in Pontianak is the A Yani Mega Mall that was opened in 2005.\(^2\) The presence of the Mega Mall has created various contractual and (low-skilled) jobs for the young local people.\(^3\) The role of the Mega Mall in providing these job opportunities is quite important, considering that Pontianak is a trade and service city without much industry (Government of Pontianak, 2010). Though some youth like Didin was not interested in working at the mall, his neighbor Rina, was very enthusiastic (at least in the beginning) about working at the Mega Mall after finishing her 3 year diploma. Rina’s parents are elementary school teachers. Rina worked at the Mega Mall as a Sales Promotion Girl for a syrup company. But she only worked for two months. She felt that working at the mall was too tiring and the money she earns is not worth the effort. Nonetheless, it has provided her some working experience that she felt has helped her adapt more easily in her current job as a librarian at one of the private universities in Pontianak.

The modernization process in Pontianak was also noted by a local writer. He notes that modernization in Pontianak was evident in the beginning of 2000 when he came back after studying in Yogyakarta. “Various symbols of modernity can be seen in every corner of the city. Communication towers for mobile phones, internet cafes, the Mega Mall, luxurious cars, play stations, cafes, bistro, etc.” (Sujarwo, 2008: 16-17). While creating job opportunities, the Mega Mall has also further expanded a consumer economy that was previously dominated by smaller scale recreation facilities (such as smaller size malls, and small cafes or warung kopi). Though these smaller recreation facilities are still important, the Mega Mall is now the prominent economic and recreational facility in the city. The big success of the Mega Mall cannot be separated by Pontianak being a city inhabited by a large proportion of youth, since youth in Indonesia are susceptible towards what Gerke (2000: 146-147) calls “lifestyleing.”\(^4\) It has influenced a new lifestyle in the city such as hanging out in the mall without consuming anything, buying goods at Hypermart instead of small shops (even if it just a bottle of shampoo or some small snacks), and eating out at the fast food restaurants at the mall (even if it just for a cone of ice cream) instead of at small diners or warungs. Rina, the young woman above who used to work at the Mall admits that she enjoys being a consumer of the Mall rather than a worker. She often goes to the Mall with her boyfriend to eat or simply hang out if eating is not affordable. She says that eating and hanging out are the two main activities carried out by young people in Pontianak for entertainment, and in that sense, the Mall becomes an important place for young people in Pontianak.
Aside from enabling local governments to seek investment that can provide job and recreational opportunities such as the Mega Mall, decentralization has also affected the structure of the youth job market in other ways. The establishment of new districts after decentralization has resulted in the expansion of bureaucracy and the need for election of the head of the districts. More bureaucratic jobs means higher demand for civil servants and ongoing elections of district heads has opened opportunities for youth to be a part of the ‘success team.’ Though the latter type of job is a contractual job (often even without contracts), it has created a temporary job for unemployed youth (especially young men). Many young men start working in these success teams, sometimes with the hope of getting a quota to become a civil servant in the newly formed districts. Didin, is one example of many young men who have used various political momentums as a temporary job market. He became a member of the success team for one of the candidates for the head of newly formed district. However, he only stayed as a member of the success team for a couple of months. He was involved in a conflict of interest with another member of the success team. He actually hoped that by joining the success team, he would have better social networks with people in important positions if his candidate won. His main target was to get in touch with the future head of the education office, hoping that he will be recruited as a teacher with a civil servant status. But since his candidate lost and he resigned from the success team, he will have to rely on his existing social networks in the schools that he has been teaching in to pave his way towards being a teacher in one of the state schools.

**Youth Transition in Pontianak**

The above changes have resulted in a similar trend of longer transition into adulthood as in “Western” countries. To indicate the longer transition to adulthood i conventional markers of adulthood, such as finishing school, getting a stable job, and getting married are often used. Basing on these markers of adulthood, Didin’s case shows an example of a young man who is experiencing a longer transition into adulthood.

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At the age of 24, he is still in the process of finishing education, and even just enrolled as a new student at another university. He is also unmarried, and has not yet attained a proper job in the civil servant. The longer transition to adulthood is often termed as an extended period of youth or postponed adulthood. However, an extended period of youth or postponed adulthood seems to refer to a particular period of life (life phase). I prefer using the term “longer transition to adulthood” to focus on the process of transition rather than pointing to a particular life phase. By using these conventional markers of adulthood I will show that in Pontianak, there is also a general trend towards a longer transition to adulthood.

![Graph 1: Number of Students Enrolled in University in Pontianak](image)


**Finishing School**

The growth of a service economy in Pontianak has resulted in higher awareness on the importance of education, since promising jobs in the service sector requires a minimum level of education. Even low skilled jobs, such as being a sales promotion girl at the Mega Mall, require some kind of tertiary education. Rina, in the example above, applied for the job after finishing her three year diploma program. This, in combination with the increase and access of tertiary education institutions have
contributed to the longer time it takes for young people to finish education and get married. Since the 1980s, there has been an increase and accessibility of education institutions – in particular of tertiary education. Private universities started to be built around that decade, such as Panca Bhakti University, STKIP PGRI and Widya Dharma - almost 30 years after the first state university, Universitas Tanjungpura, was established (Universitas Tanjungpura, 2008). In the graph below, it is seen that there has been a sharp increase in enrollment of young people to tertiary education in the past decade.

Finding a Stable Job

Finding a stable job is also a challenge for young people in Pontianak. After finishing tertiary education, there is no guarantee that a stable job can easily be obtained. There is a trend towards contractual work which does not offer much security for young people. In a small survey that I conducted among 296 university students from four different universities in Pontianak, more than half of the students (67 percent) predicted that they will get a stable job only after being involved in various contractual work, *ikut orang* (literally following someone or helping someone else in exchange for a certain amount of financial support), or become unemployed first. It seems that they base their references on their senior's experience, where almost half of them claim that most of their seniors work in contractual jobs before getting a stable job. About a quarter of the students say that most of their seniors become unemployed after graduation, and only fourteen percent of them say that most of their seniors *ikut orang* before entering a stable job. This means that in Pontianak, there is a longer gap between graduation and finding a stable job in the process of school to work transition.

Delay in Marriage

Like in Indonesia in general, there is also a pattern that shows a delay in age of marriage is also happening among youth in Pontianak. For example, in 1998 only 37 percent of youth in the 24-29 age cohort remained unmarried. About a decade later, 44 percent of youth in the same age cohort remained unmarried (Pontianak Statistics Bureau, 1998, 2008). The delay of marriage seems to be more prominent in urban areas rather than rural areas. In the statistical data that shows age of marriage among women living in urban areas of West Kalimantan (such as Pontianak), the trend towards delay of marriage among women is similar to the trend of delay in marriage among women in Indonesia in general.

Class and the Making of Social Adulthood in Pontianak

While the macro trends provide a general picture of the longer period of transition to adulthood, it obscures how these longer transitions are experienced by young people from different social categories. This shift of focus from looking at the macro trends to focusing on the real experiences of youth has raised two important issues in the discussion of youth transition to adulthood. First is how institutions guide the pathway in reaching adulthood (structure-agency issue) or whether youth are now relatively free to choose how they want to experience their transition (free-choice perspective). I will try to address this issue
by focusing on the concept of “circularity” versus “identity exploration” in the domain of education and work. Second, is the issue whether to see youth’s lives at present (the issue of being) or to see transition as merely a passage towards adulthood – in other words, the issue of becoming (Wyn and White, 1997; Hamilton and Hamilton, 2009). Focusing on the conventional markers of adulthood seems to negate the experience of simply being young (for example through various processes of “lifestyling” at the Mega Mall) as mentioned above. However, by looking at class, I will show that class influences the relationship between the “being” and the “becoming” in the process of transition.

**Circularity of Transition or Identity Exploration?**

One of the criticisms that arise from using the definite markers above to understand transition to adulthood is that it assumes the existence of a linear transition – from youth to adulthood – and that these markers are the gateway in which adulthood is achieved. In fact, many youth go in and out of these markers. This was also observed in Didin’s account of his transition. From exclusively being in school during his childhood, he has had to work throughout his junior high school until his university years. Youth transition theories often argue that lower class youth will experience circularity more often than youth from more privileged backgrounds due to structural conditions. However, structures not only inhibit opportunities, it also provides opportunities for youth to reach adulthood. In Didin’s case, coming from a lower class family (for example) has forced him to become a “domestic worker” in his uncle’s household and work for his tuition fee in university. But at the same time, his uncle is a form of social network, which has also provided him the opportunity to continue his education until high school.

Another way at looking at the circular motion of youth transition is proposed by the emerging adulthood theory, which basically points to the fact that there is a life phase between adolescence and adulthood (usually between 18-24) in which young people want to explore options during the long transition to adulthood. Arnett (2000; 2004; 2006b; 2007) proposes that emerging adulthood is characterized by a period of identity exploration (trying to answer the who am I question), self focus (not too much parental control), instability (changing majors, changing work, or romantic partners), optimism, and feeling of in-between (feeling not yet an adult but no longer a youth). This process of identity exploration is a process that shows how young people today have more autonomy over their life to choose from various alternatives and explore whether these alternatives fit their ‘identity’. Though Arnett proposes five characteristics of the emerging adulthood period, I find that identity exploration is actually an umbrella in which all other characteristics work. It is during identity exploration that a person becomes self focused, instable, believes in possibilities and feels in between. Thus, I will use the concept of identity exploration as parallel to the ‘circularity of transition’ – though seen from a more ‘individualistic’ perspective.

Arnett explains, for example, that in the work domain, emerging adults usually go in and out of temporary jobs before settling down because they want to find which job fits their identity best. In the terms of schooling, many emerging adults change majors before figuring out which major fits who they are. Even though this perspective acknowledges the ways structures, such as class, may influence how youth in the “emerging adulthood” phase experience transition, it puts much more emphasis on the transition to adulthood as a relatively free-choice experience. Thus, identity exploration is seen as more of a choice rather than a structured condition.

**Where do I Belong?: Identity Exploration among Lower Middle Class Youth**

In my opinion, identity exploration is experienced and generally most intense during the youth period, regardless of social background. But the way identity exploration is experienced seems to be related to one’s social background. Thus, instead of merely looking at structure and the different ways it influences the way transition is experienced, I will use class to put structure into a more specific and individualistic
perspective of seeing youth transition – in other words, how identity exploration is structured. I believe that all youth want to explore their options, experiment, have fun – but not everyone gets to freely choose where, when and what identity exploration is about. This critique towards emerging adulthood theory on the lack of discussion on ‘structure’ (Cote & Bynner, 2008; Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Hendry & Kloep, 2010) has been addressed by Arnett. Arnett responded to these critiques by saying that the influence of structure may not be the same in intensity in all domains. But he acknowledges that in the domain of education and employment, structure such as class, does play an important role in how youth make the transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2006a). Despite this awareness, specific discussion on the role of class in identity exploration has not been thoroughly discussed.

The importance of class position in youth’s future life chances was mentioned by Nilan (2008) in her survey among 3327 Indonesian youth. I will try to show in this paper that class is indeed an important factor that structure identity exploration. In Pontianak, the increase in access to tertiary education has also resulted in the variation of class backgrounds that university students come from. Not all youth that are going for tertiary education are from wealthy families – especially considering that the tuition fee at the state university is only Rp 400,000 per semester. Most of the youth who come from wealthy families receive tertiary education at universities in Java (especially Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta). Based on the data that I collected, youth who are studying in Pontianak are often from relatively lower and lower middle class families, especially migrant youth from other districts in the province. In the same small survey that I conducted among university students in four different universities in Pontianak, it is found that most of their parents are civil servants (Pegawai Negeri Sipil or PNS) in the lower echelons of the bureaucracy or teachers (38%) and small traders (32%). Most of their fathers are high school graduates (34.8%) or elementary school graduates (25.7%), and most mothers are also high school graduates (32.8%) or elementary school graduates (32.8%). The median income of these students’ parents is Rp 2,000,000.

For youth from lower and lower middle class families, identity exploration is not just about the quest to answer the “who am I” question as proposed by Arnett. A more crucial answer that they seek is the “where do I belong” in the process towards social adulthood. Achieving a “middle class” identity through symbols of the middle class becomes an important step in achieving social adulthood. Gerke (2000) also notes that “lifestyleing” in the form of symbolic consumption usually happens among those in the lower and middle-middle classes. This lifestyle does not only happen in the “entertainment” domain, but also involves trying to achieve other middle class symbols, such as obtaining tertiary education and getting into a civil service job.

Lina (24) is a Dayak young woman from a lower middle class family from Terayan Mali, about a 5 hour drive from Pontianak. Her father, a policeman in the lower echelons of the police force, passed away a couple of years ago. Her mother is an elementary school teacher in a district that is a four hour drive from Pontianak. When she graduated from high school, she wanted to enter the police force. But her parents rejected the idea because they wanted her to go for tertiary education. None of her family members have gone to university, and her going to university will uplift the family’s status. So Lina went to a private university in Pontianak like her parents had wished. She entered the Faculty of Economics because many of her friends were also applying to that faculty. Her uncle, an important person in one of the district offices, helped with her tuition fee. He also promised to help her enter the civil service when she graduates.

She stated that material wealth is the requirement to gain respect from society. She believes that a job in the civil service, though modest, will eventually lead her to obtain the material wealth that she needs to be acknowledged. In other words, social adulthood is achieved through obtaining symbols of the middle class. The road to social adulthood starts from obtaining tertiary education and later on hoping to get into the civil service. “(going for tertiary education) is important, at least getting a 3 year diploma (D3). But still, if we can afford going for a four year diploma (S1) and we have the brain to do so, why not. People with education is different (from the rest of society), especially the way
they talk, how they analyze other people's sentences. For us, success is... success is about achievement, like from the material (domain)... a house, having a car, or a new car. People will judge us, people are considered successful if they can obtain (a house and a car). Usually it is those in the civil service that are able to afford (a house and a car). I don't know what kind of effort is put in (to obtain the money to buy those goods), I don't know. But that is how people see success, from large (observable) material wealth."

I met Lina again a couple of days after her graduation. According to Arnett (2000), this is the time when youth feel optimistic about the various possibilities in the future. Indeed, Lina was very optimistic that she will be able to pass the civil service recruitment in her district that same year, with the help of her uncle. She perceives that with the 'rise of Dayak power' in her district, her uncle will be able to get her into the civil service job "(I want) to be in the civil service. Though the pay is small, (and civil servants) live in modesty, but at least we have a future... we receive an income. When we retire, our children will be able to eat. Like my father, even though he is gone, I still benefit from his pension. If my father were a trader, I would get nothing."

A couple of months later, I met Lina again. I found out that she had failed the civil service recruitment. She was very disappointed, and did not have much hope about getting into the civil service in the future. She said that there was a more powerful person who wanted his family member to take the position that her uncle had hoped to get her in. She eventually started to look for other work, going back and forth between Terayan Mali and Pontianak to look for job information or to go through several job interviews. By then, she was already working as a sales promotion girl for one of the cellular companies at a branch in her district. But she wants a better paying job at an office. She was optimistic that she will later find a job that she considers as the best alternative outside the civil service job. So she applied to several banks in Pontianak while waiting for the next civil service recruitment. Thus, even though Lina is constrained in getting the job that she really wants, she is exploring other job options other than her current job. This shows the instability aspect of identity exploration and the optimism that she holds in gaining better job opportunities in the future.

Identity Exploration: Connecting the Being and the Becoming

Another important issue discussed in youth transition theory is whether transition is merely the process of becoming an adult (a fixed and reachable status) or whether it should also focus on the present experiences of transition - and thus, see adulthood as an ongoing process (adulthood is not a reachable status, but goes on throughout life). Scholars on youth transition have started to argue on the latter (Wyn and White, 1997), which is in line with what Arnett claims that the emerging adulthood perspective focuses on. Emerging adulthood is not about adolescents wanting to become adults, but it is a phase that young people want to experience and enjoy because they want to explore who they are through identity exploration (Arnett, 2004). However, in the cases of Pontianak youth from the lower and lower middle class, I see identity exploration during emerging adulthood as a concept that connects the being and the becoming - rather than merely emphasizing the being. Finding a social identity that brings acknowledgement and respect from society during identity exploration becomes an issue which connects the state of "being" with the state of "becoming" - especially in the domain of work.

In the domain of work, identity exploration is about finding the next best alternative if the dream job in the civil service is not achieved. It may also be about paving way towards achieving that next best job - and at the same time having a bit of enjoyment in the process. For example, though Lina regrets having to spend much money on transportation and photocopy in her job searching process, she is happy to be in Pontianak. She likes the entertainment facilities it provides which she feels signifies her being young. "I like to be with my friends (in Pontianak), we usually hang out at a karaoke bar at M1, at the Mall. I love to sing. Sometimes I also hang out at a cafe at A Yani (street), where there is theatre like seats, dim lights and stuff. I don't
mind going to Pontianak if I look it that way. Within this state of being, she understands that it is only a small part of a more important plan for her future life. In my last communication with her a couple of months back, she informed me that she has finally landed in an administrative job at a plantation company in her district. She says that it beats being a sales promotion girl, though not as prestigious as having a job at the bank.

In the education domain, seeking tertiary education is believed by many youth to enable better employment opportunities in the future. But for others, merely having an S1 degree is sometimes the main goal of going for further education. Many youth that I interviewed even admitted that they did not know why they enrolled in the major they are taking. Thus, in the domain of education, it seems that the “being” is not as connected to the “becoming” as in the domain of work. For example, in my small survey, more than half of the respondents chose the department/faculty they are in because they followed the suggestion of a friend.

**Being and Becoming:**

**Identity Exploration among Upper Middle Class Youth**

While youth from lower and lower middle class families seem to link their “being” to their “becoming” during their identity exploration in the domain of work, it is less so among youth from upper middle class families. The goal of achieving social adulthood becomes less important in the process of identity exploration. The next case below represents how youth from the upper middle class are similar to Arnett’s youth in the United States who try to answer the “who am I?” question in their identity exploration. The acknowledgement on the importance of social adulthood comes much later in their life compared to youth from lower and lowers middle class families.

Yuda (27) is an example an upper middle class youth whose experience in identity exploration is similar to those of Arnett’s youth. He comes from a family whose parents are both in the high echelons of the bureaucracy. Yudha used to be one of my students when I taught at a private university in Yogyakarta. In 2008, I met him when I was visiting a friend at the West Kalimantan boarding house (Asrama Kalimantan Barat) in Yogyakarta. By then he has graduated and was in a music band performing from one café to another in Yogyakarta. He did not want to go back to Pontianak, even though his parents say that they have provided him with a job opportunity in the civil service. At that moment, I thought he would be a nice example of a Pontianak youth who did not have the ‘civil service’ orientation. So I decided to interview him.

Yudha explained that after finishing high school in Pontianak, he wanted to go to an arts institute in Yogyakarta known as ISI (Institut Seni Indonesia). He wanted to get a degree in music. His father did not object to the idea, but his mother insisted that he enter a university that she considers more prospective for his future. Even though there was no definite university to enter, he set out for Yogyakarta and prepared himself for the national entrance test by enrolling in some courses in Yogyakarta. “I then decided that I wanted to enter the Faculty of Law, my priority is UGM. But my mother said that if I wanted to enter that faculty, why go so far if I wanted to go to a faculty that is provided in Pontianak. That is why I later on decided to enroll in psychology and in German literature. I was accepted in both faculties, but my father said that in Pontianak, psychology seems to be more prospective compared to German literature.”

However, after graduating from psychology, he decided to keep his dream of being a musician. He did not go back to Pontianak. His band was given a recording contract for one year by a company in Jakarta. So he migrated to Jakarta to try out his possibilities. I met Yudha a couple of months later after the first encounter at the boarding house. By that time, his parents were running out of patience. “My parents want me to decide whether to go back to Pontianak to enter the civil service recruitment or to continue my study in psychology. My mother says that she can provide a place for me in the civil service, and the chances of me getting in will be higher if I continue my study. I haven’t decided yet. There is still one year.”
A few weeks back (which means that almost 1 year has passed since I last met him), I got in touch with Yudha again through Facebook. He explained that he is now in Pontianak and looking forward to trying out his chances in the next civil service recruitment. The band’s album promotion was going nowhere, and he was getting desperate. He was no longer optimistic about his band’s future. “(I went back to Pontianak) to find a job. I am so tired of being idealistic all the time. I have finally given up. But the band’s contract still stands. It’s just the promotion that is stuck. It’s really giving me a headache. So while I am waiting, I will try to enter the PNS in the next recruitment. Hopefully there will be a change in my luck by choosing this path”

Yudha’s story is different from Didin’s and Lina’s process of identity exploration in several ways. First, in terms of the aim of identity exploration in the education domain, Yudha chose from several alternatives that is considered prospective for his future. His parents who both had a university degree were also able to give guidance to the decisions he made. This was less likely to be so among lower and lower middle class youth whose parents usually do not have a university degree. In this sense, in the education domain Yudha’s being and becoming is more connected compared to his peers from lower and lower middle class families. Yudha is also not too ‘fixed’ at social adulthood in the sense of achieving the symbols of a middle class identity that would win recognition and acknowledgement from the local society. His identity exploration is mainly aimed at doing what he likes - what he thinks suits who he is. The timing of identity exploration to find the answer to the “who am I” question is longer. Upper middle class youth have more time to decide what they want to do, often being subsidized by their parents. They also do not need to think about obligations of supporting their parents materially, like that of lower and lower middle class youth.

Conclusion

The longer transition to adulthood is apparent in the lives of Pontianak youth. The longer time in which transition to adulthood occurs provides room for a process of identity exploration, including in the domain of education and work. However, identity exploration is structured, in the sense that youth from different classes show different aims of identity exploration. The making of social adulthood through identity exploration for many lower and lower middle class youth seems to be more directed towards the attainment of middle class symbols such as getting a university degree and trying to enter the civil service. Also, attaining social adulthood in terms of being acknowledged and recognized by societal standards is more apparent in the descriptions of youth from lower and lower middle class families. For young women and young men from lower and lower middle classes, the process of achieving social adulthood in the domain of education and work seems to be equally important.

The pathways in which this aim is achieved is also different, since instability for lower and lower middle class youth comes out of necessity, while for upper middle class youth is more of a choice (enabling some to prolong their transition out of choice). Within the issue of class, ethnicity is also influences how the pathway in identity exploration. Ethnic territoriality and network may work with or against the aims of identity exploration.

From examples of identity exploration among lower and lower middle class youth, identity exploration also connects the concept of being and becoming. The connection between the being and the becoming is more intense in the identity exploration of youth from lower and lower middle class compared to those from upper middle class families in the domain of work. The process of achieving a state of final and fixed social adulthood also seems to be more of an imagination than reality. Though some dimensions of social adulthood are more important than others, there are always some dimensions of social adulthood that cannot be attained. Thus, the process of transition to adulthood seems to be more of an ongoing process than a final, reachable status.
References


Endnotes

1) The Madurese work in various domains in the informal sector, such as in the transport system (taxi, becak, small boats) and small-scale trade (fruits and vegetables).

2) According to an informal conversation with one of the ex managers of the Mega Mall, The Mega Mall is said to be an investment made by a group of Chinese originating from West Kalimantan but who have now migrated to Jakarta.

3) Mostly non-Chinese youth work in the low skilled domains such as the cashier, while upper managerial positions are held by the Chinese.

4) Lifestyling is defined as “a superficial activity with no real consumption deriving from economic well-being.” (Gerke, 2000: 147)

5) As Wyn and White (1997: 94) put it, “the study of transitions focuses on the way in which institutions structure the process of growing up.”

6) Based on interviews in 2008 with 3rd year students at Tanjungpura University. In some private universities, the tuition fee ranges between Rp 1,200,000 – 1,800,000 per semester.

7) Youth from lower middle class families who study in Java often choose Yogyakarta (Jogja) as a place to study under the consideration that the living cost in Yogyakarta is quite cheap compared to other cities, as expressed by Andar. “I chose Jogja because the living cost is cheap, (even though) the tuition fee (at my university) is more or less the same as in (other state) universities in Indonesia. Here (in Pontianak), for Rp 10,000 I can only eat once a day, there (in Jogja) I can eat 3 times.”

8) I used basic markers of class location such as parents’ occupation, income and education to categorize the class location of these youth. However, the data on income is based on students’ knowledge of their parents’ income. Thus, the actual income of their parents may be under or overstated.

9) It is these youth that I call youth from lower middle class families. Youth from lower class families (whose parents are usually farmers) usually earn less than Rp 2,000,000. Most parents earn between Rp. 500,000 – Rp 800,000.

10) This is of course not the only way that social adulthood is achieved, but it is one of the most important one for many youth in my study.

Introduction

Migration is one of the most important economic, demographic and social phenomena in global world today, involving the transfer of millions of people from villages to cities where they hope they will find better economic opportunities (Davin, 1996). In Indonesia, especially during the New Order period, from 1967 up to the economic crisis of 1998, the focus of voluntary migration shifted to rural-urban migration. This was associated with the spread of development: increased rates of economic growth, and more investment, spending and job opportunities in urban areas (Effendi, 2009). In addition, the large expansion of rural infrastructure, particularly the improvement in