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Young Migrants and Education-to-Work Transitions in Pontianak, West Kalimantan

Wenty Marina Minza

A majority of youth in tertiary education in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, are migrants from other districts. This paper presents results from a small survey of these migrant youth. Most of the students came from lower-middle-class families. Both lower- and lower-middle-class youth have access to tertiary education in provincial cities, even though many feel that tertiary education in provincial cities is of lower quality compared with education in Java or abroad. This paper describes how most migrant youth see Pontianak as a ‘transit’ city—a stepping stone for upward mobility through schooling and temporary work before going back to their hometown to find a stable job. These migration decisions are often affected by ethnic identity. Many youth express the ambiguity of social mobility in their transition from education to work.

Keywords: Education-to-Work Transition; Migrant Youth; Ethnic Identity; Social Mobility; Malay; Dayak; Chinese; Madurese; West Kalimantan; Lower Middle Class

Introduction

After three decades of relatively steady but unevenly distributed economic growth, in 1997 Indonesia was severely hit by the economic crisis. This led to the downfall of President Soeharto in 1998 and his thirty-two-year centralistic regime, and in 1999 to decentralisation measures which in West Kalimantan became an important cause of social change. Decentralisation shaped the perception that local people should hold the newly acquired local power, in response to the long period of what had been perceived by inhabitants of the ‘outer islands’ (such as Kalimantan) as Javanese domination. Ethnic identity emerged as an important factor for social inclusion in positions of power. How ethnic identity matters in West Kalimantan is shown
through the official motto, ‘Harmonis dalam Etnis’, which means ‘maintaining harmony in ethnic diversity’. There are four main ethnic groups: Malay, Dayak, Chinese and the Madurese. The ‘original’ ethnic groups in the province are considered to be the Dayak but also the Malay, while the Chinese and Madurese are considered as migrant ethnic groups (Wawa 2000) due to their relatively recent migration in comparison to the Malay who arrived in West Kalimantan in the 1770s (Government of Pontianak 2007). The Chinese came to West Kalimantan between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Heidhues 2003, p. 27), while Madurese first came to West Kalimantan in the early twentieth century as workers for the Malay sultanate (Sudagung 2001, p. 93).

West Kalimantan society was segregated along ethnic divisions prior to decentralisation. There were segregated settlement areas and continuous ethnic conflicts from the 1960s until 1999 (Wawa 2000). However, the division of regions after decentralisation through the process of pemekaran—a way of power sharing between the ‘original’ Malays and Dayak groups—has sharpened this fragmentation with the establishment of ‘Malay districts’ and ‘Dayak districts’. Thus, pemekaran is a political change, associated with territorial claims and access to resources, which has increased the importance of ethnic identity. Though focusing on different issues, the intersection between these factors in the process of identity construction has also been noted by other scholars. Alqadrie (2001), Schiller (2007), and Davidson (2003) emphasise the role of elites in Dayak ethnic identity construction, while King (2001) shows how formation of the Dayak, Iban and Maloh identity were constructed in relation to Dutch colonial rule and the development of Malay economic centres. The importance of ethnic relations and violence in forming ethnic identity through struggle for natural resources and territoriality is also noted by Peluso (2008).

This paper explores how the changes in West Kalimantan are affecting young people’s education to work transition, mediated by ethnic identity. Pemekaran has affected how young people perceive their chances of access to resources and upward mobility, since ethnic social networks have always provided an important resource for employment opportunities in Kalimantan (van Klinken 2003, pp. 22–23). Youth often refer to the occupational structure to imagine their future prospects. In the province’s occupational structure Malays generally occupy the civil service positions, Dayak occupy the agricultural sector, Madurese work in informal sectors, and Chinese in trade (elaborated in Achwan et al. 2005, and Alqadrie & Sastrowardoyo 1984). In Pontianak, the capital of West Kalimantan, a slightly different dynamic in ethnic occupational position can be seen: there are many Chinese farmers (especially in Pontianak Utara sub-district); a large portion of Malays also work in the urban informal sectors; while a few Dayak are in middle-level civil servant positions.

In contrast to the ethnic composition of the province, roughly one-third of urban Pontianak’s population consists of Chinese. However, Islam is the religion followed by the majority of the population in the province (Government of Pontianak 2007). It is the religion of the Malay, the next largest ethnic group with about a quarter of the population, and also of other ethnic groups such as the Bugis, Javanese and...
Madurese. While West Kalimantan’s major income is from agriculture (especially rubber and palm oil plantation), trade has been the base of Pontianak’s growth since it was founded. The trade and service sector absorb the majority of working people; the industrial sector is not prominent. The Chinese are the dominant players in these large trade and service sectors, while non-Chinese are mainly positioned as workers.

The rapid movement of young people to Pontianak from other districts in the province to pursue tertiary education in the city is a form of rural-urban migration. The government has maintained a constant effort to build up tertiary education facilities in Pontianak to make them more accessible and lower the dependency on Java for further education. The most popular levels of tertiary education are: a one-year diploma (D1), a two-year diploma (D2/Akta II), a three-year diploma (D3), and a full undergraduate program (S1, D IV or Akta IV). Employment opportunities requiring some kind of tertiary education (regardless of its level) are mainly in the (low-end) service sector and include sales promotion girls at the mall or as staff in various companies, hotels or restaurants. Currently, state jobs require at least a D2 to apply. The only position offered for a D2/Akta II graduate is a position as an elementary school teacher (Mayor Announcement 2009). Some rural districts have started refusing D2 applicants, requiring at least a D3 education level (Tribune Pontianak 2010).

Methodology

The general characteristics of migrant youth studying in Pontianak were obtained from a small survey conducted among university students. The questionnaires were circulated in two state universities and two private universities. The universities were purposively selected based on the assumed ethnic backgrounds of the students studying in each university (see Table 1), since people commonly categorise which universities to attend based on ethnic backgrounds of the students enrolled there. The departments or faculties were randomly chosen, as were the classes in which the questionnaire was distributed. All students who were present during those classes filled out the questionnaire. In total, 369 students in nine faculties or departments filled out the questionnaire (one class in each faculty or department).

I used qualitative methods to complement the survey in order to better understand the experience of school to work transitions. In-depth interviews were carried out with forty-six students. They were purposively chosen based on ethnic background and comprised fifteen Malay, fifteen Dayak, ten Madurese and six Chinese.

Migrants constituted around 66 per cent of my total sample (244). Most of them came from the ‘old districts’ (districts that have existed before pemekaran) such as Kabupaten Pontianak, Ketapang and Sanggau. This may be because there are limited education facilities to support young people from the new districts; for example, when Singkawang was formed (originally a part of Kabupaten Sambas), migrant students from Kota Singkawang who wanted to stay in the Kabupaten Sambas
boarding house, were no longer allowed to do so. Students from Singkawang who were already in the boarding house before the *pemekaran* were allowed to stay until they graduated.

Almost half of the sample of migrant students were young women (46 per cent), indicating that many young women now undertake tertiary education. A majority of the migrant students self-identified as Malay (43 per cent), while the Dayak respondents comprised 14 per cent and the Chinese around 15 per cent of the total sample. There was a relatively low number of Madurese students (only 7 per cent). This strengthens the notion that there is variation in access for different ethnic groups or that they opt for particular universities, faculties or departments, and of the Madurese lagging behind in their access to tertiary education compared to the other ethnic groups in West Kalimantan.

Malays had the highest access to tertiary education. Their privileged political position during the period of Dutch colonial rule, continuing until today provides them with a relatively good position in the social structure. Geographic location has also put the Malays in an advantaged position to access tertiary education, especially compared with the Dayak. The majority of the urban population is Malay (including in the capitals of coastal districts) where most tertiary education is provided. In contrast, the majority of the Dayak live in the rural areas where tertiary education is more difficult to access. Though there are many Chinese in Pontianak, many elite Chinese seem to prefer sending their children to other cities for tertiary education (such as Jakarta), while those that stay tend to be Chinese in the lower middle class. Many Madurese live in urban Pontianak and the nearby district of Kubu Raya (especially after the forced migration from other districts due to ethnic conflict). However, they are still a small number in comparison with the population of other ethnic groups. This might partially explain the low number of Madurese students, but their migration history as uneducated, working-class people has added to the

<table>
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present marginality of the Madurese youth. Many Madurese youth marry at a young age or work full time to help their household economy; this is also a reason why it is difficult for Madurese in other districts to access tertiary education. However, caution must be taken in analysing these data based on self-reported ethnicity: many Malay may actually be descendents of other ethnic groups, even though they identify as Malay and account for the high percentage of ‘Malays’ in tertiary education. Unfortunately, the questionnaire did not ask for parent’s ethnicity.

Most of the migrant youth in the sample were from the lower middle class. I used three main variables to determine class: parent’s job and education and their estimates of their parent’s incomes. The median estimated income of the students’ parents was Rp 2,000,000 per month (about US$180), while the annual per capita income in Pontianak is Rp 16,394,774 (about US$1460) or an average income per month of Rp 1,366,231 (US$122). The students’ backgrounds tend to be slightly more privileged than those of the average family, but not enough to suggest that they are from the upper (middle) class. Most of the youth in my survey answered that they would need between a minimum of 2–3,000,000 rupiah (US$180–270) to make a living with family support.

The fathers of migrant youth worked in trade (40 per cent), the civil service (30 per cent) and agriculture (21 per cent). Across ethnicity, 58 per cent of fathers working in the civil service were Malay, compared to 14 per cent Dayak and 3 per cent Madurese. No Chinese fathers worked in the civil service. There was a difference based on ethnicity in access to particular jobs, but most importantly, in access to the civil service ‘dream’ job. Around half of the mothers were housewives. Working mothers, regardless of ethnicity were usually in trade or the civil service.

Within the same ethnic group, a majority of the Malay fathers graduated from high school (39 per cent), while 17 per cent had tertiary education. About a third of the Malay mothers graduated from elementary school and another third graduated from high school. Only around 5 per cent received tertiary education. High school attendance was similar among Malay fathers and mothers, but tertiary education was lower for mothers.

A higher percentage of Dayak fathers (21 per cent) had a university diploma compared with Malay fathers. Only 32 per cent of the Dayak fathers had a high school diploma while 35 per cent of the Dayak mothers finished high school. The Dayak have always regarded education as important, regardless of gender (Alqadrie 1990, p. 115). Most of the Dayak fathers worked in agriculture and men are expected to contribute a higher share of their labour to the household economy, which may have encouraged young men into work rather than continuing high school education. In one interview with a young Dayak man, he mentioned that for Dayak men of his parent’s generation, earning money for the household was considered more important than education. High school was usually seen as a ‘waiting stage’ for women until they were old enough to get married. Like Malay mothers, only a small proportion of Dayak mothers had access to tertiary education (6 per cent).
The lowest education level was among the Madurese: most fathers and mothers had only graduated from elementary school. Only around 20 per cent of Madurese fathers had graduated from high school, none from university. None of the mothers of the Madurese students had access to high school. Most Chinese fathers (48 per cent) and mothers (54 per cent) had graduated from elementary school, while only one Chinese mother had graduated from university. Twenty-six per cent of Chinese had graduated from high school. This shows that among the Chinese younger generation studying in Pontianak—like the Madurese—there has been a large rise in the education level attained.

Most of the Madurese parents of the sampled students worked in agriculture and trade, had a relatively low income, and had lower education levels than the Dayaks and Malays. Therefore, the Malay, Dayak and Chinese students attending tertiary education in Pontianak mostly came from the lower middle class, while the Madurese were largely part of the lower class. Middle and elite youth tend to choose other destinations to study, mainly in big cities in Java such as Jakarta, Bandung and Yogyakarta.

**Studying in Pontianak**

In this section, I discuss how social networks influence the decision to migrate and how ties to the hometown are maintained through imagining Pontianak as merely a ‘transit city’. This imagination is based on recent political developments (pemekaran) where ethnic identity provides a basis for perceived livelihood opportunities. Because Pontianak is considered a transit city, most youth who actually start working in Pontianak often refer to these jobs as temporary jobs which are assumed to facilitate acquiring more permanent jobs in their hometowns.

As a place for a temporary stay, particularly to acquire tertiary education, youth find the city an attractive destination to study, firstly because of the social networks they have there, which mostly they do not have in cities outside the province. Many migrants are from the lower and lower-middle-class families, and having adult social networks in the city is an advantage. Hugo (1981, pp. 200–2) and Tukiran (1986, p. 88) argue that social networks are especially significant in the migration process in developing countries, especially in providing assistance in financial and employment information, for example.

The support these migrants receive, however, comes with costs which are often based on a principle of reciprocity. For some youth, staying with one’s relative is considered a temporary arrangement, even though some eventually end up staying with their host for the rest of their time in Pontianak. Migrant students who stay with a host family usually say that they are following the *ikut orang* (literally ‘follow someone’) system. There are various arrangements, but it is common to find host families supporting the education of the migrant youth, especially when the migrant is from a lower-class family background.13 In return, the migrant carries out domestic
chores before and after school (macam jadi pembantu, ‘like being a servant’, says one informant). Dedi described what the ikut orang system meant for him:

[When my uncle took me in] ... [I had to make sure] his house is clean, then his motorcycle, I have to clean it every morning ... every morning there are always things I have to do, after wiping his motorcycle, I swept the floor, mopped it, washed the dishes, everything. If I can’t [wash the dishes] in the morning, then I do it at night. (Dedi, young migrant Malay man from Ketapang).

Carrying out domestic chores is not the only way to return the host family’s favour. In cases where the host family had a business, the migrant youth also helped out with the enterprise. Sometimes they worked in other ways to help the host’s household economy, for example, Yulius (a Dayak young man from the district of Landak) used to sell vegetables at the market to help out when he was living with his cousin.

Opting to follow the ikut orang system was not just about economic considerations, since some youth from middle-class families also follow the system. Parents feel secure about their child(ren) living in an urban context if they live under the supervision of a relative or adult. Migrants from better economic backgrounds were usually not pressured to carry out domestic chores or help bring income to the host family. School expenses were also sometimes provided by the migrant’s family rather than the host family.

Not all youth are lucky enough to have someone in the city to take them in. Public buildings, such as schools, can also function as a temporary place to stay. Arik, for example, was able to stay in one of the school buildings in Pontianak through his high school teacher who had a teacher-friend there. Like those in the ikut orang system, Arik was also responsible for ‘domestic duties’ at the school, such as cleaning the classrooms and making tea for the teachers. He functioned as a security guard for the school at night.

Pontianak provides a range of tertiary educational institutions (Table 1). Since many of the migrant youth are from lower-middle-class families, low-cost universities (usually state universities) in West Kalimantan are an attractive force driving the youth to migrate. Some migrants initially chose to start short-term tertiary education (such as D1, D2 or D3) before deciding whether they were capable of affording a full undergraduate diploma. Others chose diploma courses because they wanted to start working instead of spending too many years in university.

Pontianak also attracts youth to study because it provides the urban experience. Urban settings are assumed to provide opportunities to prolong the period of youth and avoid being stigmatised, especially for rural young women. Like young women in general, three possibilities—marriage, work or tertiary education—are available to rural young women once they have finished high school. Rural young women perceive urban society as more accepting of young women hanging around having fun in the recreation facilities like the mall, where they can hang out with their friends while enjoying their leisure time without attracting negative comment. Thus, tertiary
education provides the means of working within the cultural constraints of their rural origins, while living their own choices.

However, for some migrant youth the urban setting is not always an easy place. The relatively homogenous social environment in the rural areas immediately changes when they come to the city. They become more aware of income and status differences and this can cause them to want to keep up with their well-off peers. Ruri, a young Dayak girl living in Pontianak, described her migrant friends’ experiences in the city:

Their aim [of studying in the city] is actually their interest in city [life]. The kinds of friends they meet [in the city] change, and their social status also changes. Social status (status sosial), I mean, in the rural areas simplicity is valued, most come from modest backgrounds (keluarga yang biasa biasa) or [their parents are] teachers ... [and social status] does not have much influence. But here, they meet children of high-ranked civil servants and merchants (anak pejabat, anak pedagang), they meet people who dress smartly (perlente), coming to campus with a car or motorcycle, while they only walk ... it makes them feel ‘down’ and beneath them [the upper class youth]. Their parents who tap rubber can send them money, only enough to eat, and here they want to buy credit for their mobile, they want to hang out in the mall ... in the end they become frustrated and some, who are tempted, end up selling themselves to oom-oom or tante-tante.14

This case shows one of the ways that young people try to fulfil their ‘urban needs’. Most of the migrant youth I interviewed tried to cover their expenses by combining school and work.

**After Study: Staying in Pontianak or Going Back Home**

The decision to stay in Pontianak or to return to their hometown after graduating often involves comparing job opportunities in the two places. Many migrants in my small survey said that they intended to return to their hometown after graduating to find permanent work (60 per cent). Though many seek permanent work after graduating, most youth (74 per cent) believed that they would be involved in temporary work (either in Pontianak or their hometown) before settling into a permanent job. Forty-three per cent had started working in temporary jobs before graduating.

Non-Chinese youth seek permanent work in office jobs such as in the civil service. However, they are aware that the competition to enter the civil service is very high which is why many, especially those with the ‘right’ ethnicity (the group that is dominant in the district government after pemekaran), prefer to go back to their hometown to try out in civil service recruitment, believing that the competition will be less than in the city. There is a perceived rise of power of the Dayak following decentralisation and pemekaran. With an increase in Dayak district heads in ‘Dayak districts’, youth assume that there will be implementation of affirmative action policies for the Dayak in civil service recruitment:
The governor is now Dayak, the head of district [in the interior] happens to be Dayak, so there is a kind of policy to recruit Dayak people, those that found it difficult to get in [to the civil service job in the past], now easily get in... there still needs to be effort [in getting them in], even if they are a bit unfit, there should be effort in getting them certain positions [that fit their capability] ... why not? Why is it like that [nowadays]? Because before it was very difficult. (Yulius, Dayak, graduated from Untan).

A young ‘Malay’ woman of Dayak descent pointed to the ‘proof’ of her Dayak friends’ success in their hometowns:

My friends also applied for a civil service job back in their hometowns, and it turns out that my Dayak friends chose to apply for a civil service job. Especially [considering that] our governor is a Dayak, and they are wow... very persistent... and the ones that pass are Dayak again. I tried to read the [announcement] in the paper again, the ones that passed the test were all Dayak names (Iin, a Malay with a Dayak-Chinese mother).

The Chinese migrants are highly motivated to find work in Pontianak rather than go back to their hometown. They realise the importance of ethnic social networks in gaining jobs, and the dominance of the Chinese in Pontianak’s economy and industry may have shaped their positive work expectations that there are likely to be more opportunities in these sectors in Pontianak rather than in hometowns.

In some cases, migrant youth intend to stay in Pontianak because they have managed to ‘settle down’ via their ‘temporary’ job. Settling down does not always refer to having a permanent job, but it may also mean being able to have a house of their own and having a network that helps them to survive. This was the case of Lia, a young Dayak woman, who got a job in a Pontianak-based NGO after graduating from university. At first, she regarded her work as temporary because of its contractual nature. She planned to go back to her hometown. After working in the NGO for five years, she was offered a position as an elementary school teacher in a state school in Kubu Raya district, around ten kilometres from Pontianak. She was considering taking up the offer because she has a Dayak relative working in that school. She was even more optimistic about her chances of obtaining the job because many of her relatives are in the civil service in Pontianak. She is certain that her relatives are powerful enough to help her find a position as a teacher in the civil service.

Another reason why migrant youth decide to stay in Pontianak is because of disappointing experiences back home or because they receive information that jobs in various sectors are easier to access in Pontianak than other cities in the province. Ola, who now works at the Mega Mall in Pontianak, has no intention of going back to her hometown. Her uncle, an important man in one of the banks there, promised her a job at the bank if she finished her study. He said that he had a ‘quota’ (jatah) to recruit someone from his family. However, when Ola finished studying Economics at Widya Dharma, she found out that her uncle had already used his jatah to get his own daughter into the bank. She was so angry and ashamed that she decided never to...
go back to her hometown and to seek work elsewhere. She felt that the only way to prove to her uncle and her family that she was capable of getting ‘proper’ work was to stay in Pontianak where there is better access to information and more varied job opportunities.

**Perceived Social Mobility**

I wanted to know how migrant youth perceived their social mobility in comparison to their parents; whether they felt more or less successful. Since most of the older generation did not have tertiary education, most of the migrant youth felt that they were more successful than their parents in terms of education, but not necessarily in terms of employment. Youth with parents from the middle class usually felt that they were not as successful as their parents, while youth from lower classes felt that they were more successful:

> My father is in the civil service, he was successful even though he has gone through a hard time recently, not many projects and all. I don’t feel that I am successful like my parents, because [even though I have applied many times], I have not been able to enter the civil service.’ (Mulia, young middle-class Malay woman, graduated from university, unemployed since 2006).

> Maybe I am more successful than my parents in terms of education, that’s for sure. In terms of work, well, I don’t know. I think [I] will be more successful as a businessman, at least financially. At least in business there is room for growth. But at this moment, they are still successful as farmers, and more successful than me because they are able to educate and raise their children. (Ahmad, young lower-class Madurese man, just graduated from STAIN and is trying to start his own business).

While non-Chinese tended to see education as one of the dimensions for success, I had no Chinese informant use education as an indicator of success. Most of them referred to life experience and financial circumstances as a comparison of whether they were more or less successful compared with their parents. Education seemed to be more valued as an indicator of success if it transferred into capability to make a good livelihood:

> In comparison to my parents, I do not feel as successful as they are, because the income that I receive from [my job] as a marketing staff is not as high as my parents’ [income]. [My income] is only enough to support myself (Andre, a Chinese migrant from Kubu Raya, making Rp 1,400,000 [about 125 US dollars] a month from his job while studying).

**Conclusion**

Ethnicity has always played a significant role in structuring social mobility processes in Pontianak, and in West Kalimantan. However, *pemekaran* seems to have intensified the importance of ethnic identity in this process. Together with class, it has influenced
decisions and strategies in youth’s education to work transition, including in whether or how long they would stay in Pontianak. In comparison to their parents, many youth perceived that they had experienced upward social mobility in terms of schooling but not necessarily followed by upward mobility in terms of work. For these migrant youth, employment is perhaps a more relevant indicator of perception of upward mobility compared with education.

Notes

[1] Other ethnic groups, such as Javanese, are also important in West Kalimantan, particularly in relation to transmigration programmes arranged by the Indonesian government in the 1980s. However, they are often considered less prominent in the dynamics of ethnic relations in West Kalimantan (Alqadrie 1990, p. 62).

[2] *Pemekaran* is the establishment of new districts by dividing old districts into smaller areas.

[3] The Chinese are now also claiming to be part of the ‘original’ ethnic group and participating in competition for political positions.

[4] 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).

[5] As a ‘loser’ in the Sambas conflict in 1999, often the Madurese are not portrayed as part of the main ethnic groups in public events held by the government (Berkat 2009).

[6] Pontianak has two state universities and around twenty private ones. There are about 37,000 university students: 18,136 attend state universities (excluding those at the open university), while 19,115 attend private universities (Pontianak Statistics Bureau 2008) Migrant students from various parts of the province comprise around 15,000 students (Akim 2007).

[7] Diploma programs are ‘vocational’ tertiary education.

[8] Akta IV is a four-year undergraduate program for those interested in becoming teachers.

[9] Information on ethnic backgrounds of each university was acquired from interviews and informal discussions with youth.

[10] Among 38 Malay informants in my in-depth interviews, only 20 had Malay mothers and fathers. The rest were mixed between Malay and other ethnic groups, and a small number had no Malay parents, but felt Malay.

[11] The estimates of parents’ income are problematic, since most of the students do not know precisely how much their parents earn.

[12] In my interviews with students whose parents are farmers, there was a tendency to say that their mothers were not working since they were only ‘helping’ in the field. There may be quite a high number of working mothers in the agricultural sector not captured by the survey.

[13] I do not have much information on the arrangement of *ikut orang* system among Chinese migrants in Pontianak. In interviews with them, they tended to say that they do not follow the *ikut orang* system, even though they live with a relative in Pontianak.

[14] *Oom-oom* (uncles) and *tante-tante* (aunts) in this case refers to adults (usually already married) who are looking for sexual pleasure.

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