Growing up and being young in an Indonesian provincial town
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Contextualising Pontianak, Conceptualising Youth and Adulthood

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will describe the research site of this study, Pontianak, West Kalimantan. It will focus on the historical, social and economic contexts of the city. It will also bring into perspective the position of Pontianak and West Kalimantan in relation to Indonesia as a whole. The second part of this chapter discusses how young people in Pontianak construct the meaning of youth and adulthood. The ways in which young people construct what it means to be young or an adult are influenced by the social context in which they live – in this case, a provincial town.

On the Margins: Locating West Kalimantan within the National Context

After three decades of relatively steady but unevenly distributed economic growth, in 1997, Indonesia was one of the Asian countries that was most severely hit by the economic crisis - leading to the downfall of President Soeharto in 1998, ending a 32-year centralistic and authoritarian regime. Centralisation was seen to fail in developing regions outside of Java, therefore, decentralisation was introduced in 1999. The main idea of decentralisation was the handover of power
from central government to regional governments to bring public services closer to the people, in hope that it would bring better development processes, especially in the outer islands such as West Kalimantan.

The term ‘outer island’ is related to the geographical location of the province, and refers to islands outside of the Java mainland. Dutch rule in Indonesia placed Java as the centre of development in the country. The focus on Java (in particular, Jakarta), continued throughout the process of nation building and has resulted in a relatively wide gap between development in Java and that of the outer islands (Jacobsen, 2002: 2-4). Though the gap between Java and the outer islands has diminished and inequality between urban and rural areas is now more prevalent (Cameron, 2003: 6), the gap between Java and the outer islands remains. For instance, the ten poorest provinces in 2009 are located in the outer islands (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010).
West Kalimantan’s capital is Pontianak, which is located on the west coast of the province. To the north, this province shares borders with Malaysia, specifically the state of Sarawak. West Kalimantan is bordered by Central Kalimantan to the east, and by East Kalimantan to the northeast, while the Kalimantan Strait and the South China Sea form its western border. Many big rivers run through the province, the Kapuas River being the main one. This river is the longest in Indonesia, extending from the Mueller Mountains in the north east, to Pontianak in the west. It remains an important mode of transportation, especially for the movement of people and goods between the districts.

West Kalimantan is inhabited by around four million people, most of whom reside in the coastal areas of the province, running from
north to south. The interior part of West Kalimantan has fewer inhabitants, the fewest being in Kapuas Hulu district, where the population density is only six people per square kilometre. This is very low in comparison to the coastal areas where the average population density is 38 people per square kilometre (West Kalimantan Statistics Bureau, 2010). A majority of its land consists of forests and shrubbery. Its major income is from the agriculture, trade, and service sectors. In the agricultural sector, this province is known for its (limited) fruit production (such as oranges), forests (and rapid deforestation), rubber, and expanding palm oil plantations, which now dominate the agricultural sector and much of the rural landscape. It has lower rice production than Java does, as there is usually only one harvest every eight months in one year (West Kalimantan Statistics Bureau, 2010).

Its historical experience of detrimental engagement in development has left West Kalimantan behind on some social indicators of development in comparison to other regions of Kalimantan and the national average, despite the implementation of decentralisation policy (see Table 4). In comparison to other provinces within Kalimantan, West Kalimantan’s poverty rate is the highest. Its HDI (Human Development Index) is also below that of other provinces in Kalimantan. The average number of years schooling is only six, fewer than in other provinces on the island, and in particularly stark contrast to East Kalimantan where eight years of schooling is the average. West Kalimantan has a lower poverty rate than Indonesia as a whole, yet West Kalimantan’s HDI, and years of schooling all fall below the national figure. This means that lower poverty rates do not necessarily reflect well-being, including having better access to education.
Table 4 Social and economic indicators of provinces in Kalimantan

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<td>Central Kalimantan</td>
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<td>Indonesia</td>
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Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (2009)

There is also a large gap in social development between urban and rural areas within West Kalimantan, illustrated, for example, by school participation rates. In 2009, two of its new rural districts (Kayong Utara and Kubu Raya) were recorded to have very low school participation rates, even among 7-12 year olds. In Kayong Utara, only 55 percent of children in that age group are in school; while in Kubu Raya, which shares borders with Pontianak, only 68 per cent of 7-12 year olds are in school. This is in stark contrast to Pontianak where the school participation rate for that age category is 97 per cent (Ministry of Education, 2012).

\(^{33}\) The poverty line is based on average household consumption per capita per month in each province.
Ethnicity and Decentralisation in West Kalimantan

As mentioned above, the change from centralistic to decentralised power in Indonesia is assumed to accelerate regional development processes through improved local governance, especially at the district (kabupaten) level. Though this assumption remains contested, the handover of some powers from central government to local government has shaped the belief that the state is now capable of accommodating local interests. However, local interests are also diverse, and struggles at the local level concerning who takes on these new powers have been a major issue in many regions (Van Klinken, 2002; 2003). The end of a long period of what the people of the outer islands perceive to be Javanese domination, has created a perception that ‘local people’ have the freedom to take hold of these newly acquired powers. This also holds true for West Kalimantan, where ethnicity has become an important factor for social inclusion in positions of power. The meaning of ‘local people’ is often associated with a particular ethnicity or ethnicities within the area. How ethnicity matters in this province is also demonstrated by the official slogan or motto of West Kalimantan, ‘Harmonis dalam Etnis’, which basically means ‘harmony in ethnic diversity’. To understand the dynamics of ethnicity within the context of decentralisation in West Kalimantan, a brief historical background of the province will be elaborated.

Tirtosudarmo (2002: 4) states that West Kalimantan’s history is a ‘history of migration, or in other words, a history of interaction between migrants and the local people (or those who had arrived earlier) in this area.’ The Dayak inhabited the province before the arrival of the Malay, who arrived around the 1700s. When Arab immigrants came, they
established what would then be known as Malay Sultanates and introduced Islamic influence (Government of Pontianak, 2009c). Though different Malay sultanates existed in West Kalimantan, the Kadariah Sultanate, established in Pontianak in 1771, was among the most prominent. During this time, some Dayak embraced Islam and were considered a part of the Malay ethnic group. A territorial divide within the province between the Malay and the Dayak came into existence, with the Malay inhabiting the coastal areas, and some Dayak moving further into the interior (Adri, 2007).

The Dutch arrived seven years after the establishment of the Kadariah Sultanate, introducing Christianity to the Dayak. Since the Christian Dayak maintained their ethnic identity (unlike the Dayak Muslims), it facilitated the construction of an ethno-religious identity that paralleled the Dayak with Christianity (Rosdiawan, et al., 2007: 22-23). The arrival of the Dutch changed the pattern of relations between the Malay and the Dayak. The Malay Sultanate cooperated with the Dutch and provided access to resources (including land) that served the interests of the Dutch (Government of Pontianak, 2009c). This Dutch-Malay partnership strengthened the political and social standing of the Malays. Through the Malays, the Dutch practiced a form of indirect rule, which also facilitated the colonisation of the area (Siahaan, 1974: 32). The partnership further marginalised the Dayak, who were already under the political and economic influence of the Malay Sultanates, and were the *ulun* or slaves of the Malay Sultans (Tangkilisan, 2005).

After Indonesia won its independence in 1945, the system created by the colonial government continued and helped the Malay

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34 Muslims from other ethnic groups are also considered Malay, with the exception of the Madurese.
maintain respected positions (including access to civil servant positions) in the community, and excluded the Dayak from political and economic benefits (Peluso and Harwell, 2001: 84). The New Order regime exacerbated the Dayak’s low position in society by restricting the practice of some of the main customs that bind the Dayak community together. For example, the New Order government (1966-1998) banned the *Dewan Adat* which is an important neo-traditional institution for the functioning of the Dayak community. Through Law 5/1979, which merged traditional villages and restricted the building of Dayak longhouses, the role of the community leader (*tumenggung*) was removed, along with other Dayak customs (SMERU, 2001).

The Chinese came to West Kalimantan between the 18th and 19th centuries (Heidhues, 2003: 27; Siahaan, 1974: 20), arriving in the northern part of West Kalimantan, around the same time as the Malays, and settled down as farmers. The discovery of gold in the area encouraged further Chinese migration to the region. To protect their economic interests, the Chinese established their own organisations called *kongsi* which facilitated the accumulation of capital and Chinese cultural practices. These strategic moves facilitated Chinese domination of the trade sector in West Kalimantan, though some remained in the agricultural sector (Siahaan, 1974: 23-25). Most of the Chinese in West Kalimantan are either Buddhist or Confucian.

The Madurese came last to West Kalimantan. They migrated voluntarily from the island of Madura, East Java. The first Madurese migrants arrived around the early 20th century as low skilled workers for the Malays (Sudagung, 2001: 93). Some Madurese further migrated to the province (including to Pontianak) in the 1920s and 1930s due to the areas opened up by the Dutch (De Jonge and Nooteboom, 2006: 258).
The Madurese are Muslims, like the Malays. While Muslims from other ethnic groups are considered Malay, Madurese religious and cultural practices created a Madurese identity separate from Malay.

The main ethnic groups in West Kalimantan, therefore, are Malay, Dayak, Chinese and Madurese. This history has shaped the political construction of the Dayak and Malay as the ‘original’ ethnic groups in the region, while the Chinese and Madurese are seen as ‘migrant’ ethnic groups. However, as the political position of the Chinese has become stronger, they are now also recognised as ‘original’ inhabitants of West Kalimantan. As previously mentioned, Malays are often associated with Islam and Dayaks with Christianity. The Malay are also assumed to be more educated, urbanised, and of higher social status than the Dayak. Conversely, the Dayak are assumed to come from rural areas, and to be of lower status than the Malay. The large gap in development between rural and urban areas of the province reinforces the perception that the Dayak (most of whom live in the interior of the province) are of lower status than the Malays. The Chinese are associated with exclusivity and economic wealth, while the Madurese are assumed to be from poor economic backgrounds, uneducated, violent, and strongly attached to religious leaders from Madura. However, this common discourse in the region does not necessarily

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35 The ‘migrant’ category attributed to the Chinese does not reflect the realities of Chinese migration to West Kalimantan, especially in relation to the Malay. As previously mentioned, the Chinese arrived in West Kalimantan around the same time as the Malays.

36 The practice of ‘exclusivity’ is actually not confined to the Chinese. The Madurese are also ‘exclusive’ in the sense that they often have their own settlement (kampong) with their own mosque, and practice a particular stream of Islam that differs from the mainstream. The Malay and Dayak are relatively more open, but also tend to interact within their own groups.
portray the real circumstances. For example, not all Chinese are wealthy (Sikwan and Triastuti, 2004). Currently, many Dayak Muslims are rejecting the Malay identity and promoting the existence of Muslim Dayak identity (Alqadrie, 2002: 6)

Ethnic conflict has recurred throughout the history of West Kalimantan since the 1800s, including conflict between the Chinese and the Malay Sultanates in Sambas District over gold mines. Since the Dayak were hired to protect the gold mines in the interest of the Malay Sultanates, the Chinese’s war against the Malay Sultanates resulted in the killing of many Dayak workers. This then escalated to a Dayak-Chinese ethnic conflict. No major ethnic conflicts involving the Dayak and Malay were recorded, though political competition between the two ethnic groups heightened after decentralisation, as will be discussed later. In the district of Sambas, a major conflict between the Malay and the Madurese occurred in 1999, resulting in the massacre of Madurese in Sambas. The Madurese survivors were forced to migrate out of Sambas (Surata, 2001: 74-78).

Most ethnic conflicts in West Kalimantan have involved the Madurese and the Dayak. Twelve ethnic conflicts between the two groups have been formally recorded in the years 1952-1999 (Wawa, 2000). The earlier conflicts, from 1952 to the early 1980s, were triggered by Madurese crimes against Dayak. Most involved the murder of a Dayak by a Madurese; the only exception is one that was triggered by a theft by a Madurese. Starting in the early 1990s, while killing of a Dayak by a Madurese remained one of the triggers of ethnic conflicts, youth fights also began to light sparks of ethnic conflict. For instance, in 1996, in one of the interior parts of the province (Sanggau Ledo), an assault on two Dayak youth by Madurese youth escalated into ethnic conflict. A year
Later, a major Dayak-Madurese ethnic conflict started in Sanggau Ledo, which spread to other areas such as Pontianak. This conflict was again triggered by the murder of a Dayak (Surata, 2001: 78-81).

This historical sketch of West Kalimantan shows that its society was segregated by ethnic divisions even before decentralisation. However, the division of regions through the realignment of administrative boundaries as a way of sharing power between Malays and Dayak in political arenas has sharpened this fragmentation. Known as pemekaran, this process involves the establishment of new districts by dividing existing districts into smaller areas. Its intention is actually to bring public services closer to the people by making smaller geographical government units. But in West Kalimantan, it also serves another purpose – power sharing. For example, the district of Sanggau is a majority Dayak district. However, in part of the district (the Sekadau area), the majority of the population is Malay. To share power, Sanggau was divided into two districts, Sanggau and Sekadau. The latest new district to be established, in 2008, was Kubu Raya, previously part of Pontianak district.

Through these territorial splits, the coastal areas are ‘officially’ claimed by Malays and the interior of West Kalimantan up to the Mueller highlands is claimed by the Dayak. This official territorial divide is based on the existing historical territorial division between the two groups. As a consequence, the heads of the districts in the Malay districts are expected to be Malays, and the heads of the districts in the Dayak districts are expected to be Dayak. At the root of this struggle for power is competition over resources, land, access to education and employment, and to political and bureaucratic positions. All of this has led to a strengthening of primordial ties. As such, while decentralisation
has brought more opportunities to certain local people to take part in the development of the region, it has also heightened ethnic fragmentation there.

In West Kalimantan, occupational segmentation based on ethnicity is quite common. However, ethnic (and familial) social networks have recently become even more important as a resource for employment opportunities and occupational positions in Kalimantan (Van Klinken, 2003: 22-23). At the provincial level, generally Malays occupy the civil service positions; Dayak occupy the agricultural sector; Madurese work in informal sectors; and Chinese in trade. Opportunity for social mobility is structured within ethnic-based domains. Together with a strong patronage system, decentralisation has intensified competition for entrance to the bureaucracy. It has also enhanced the opportunity for elites to provide access to government jobs to family members or to people within their ethnic circle (Berkat, 18 December 2008). Family networks are often considered the most important capital for accessing jobs in the civil service. Family members of local elites are usually also members of the same ethnic circle. This is why many people in West Kalimantan see ethnic and family networks as inter-changeable concepts, as mentioned by Pak37 Is (57), a Malay retired civil servant who was once a member of a recruitment team. He explained how these elites would have a special paper (katabelece) shown to the recruitment team in order to guarantee that their family members were recruited. He mentioned that aside from family members, elites prioritise members of their own ethnic group.

37 Pak is short for Bapak (meaning father), commonly used to address an adult male; similar to the use of ‘Sir’ or Mister.
In general a *katabelece* is used by those in power, because otherwise nobody will help them (the job applicant). My own experience of selecting elementary school teachers proves this. For example if the quota for teachers was 100, and 200 or 300 applied, we couldn’t announce which of the 100 were recruited based solely on merit. Why? Because there would be a written note, a *katabelece*, from an assistant to the Regional Secretary, head of office, and other influential persons. If A (an applicant who is related to the influential person), is recruited solely on merit, no problem. But if not, it would be a major headache for the team. We would have to sacrifice an applicant who was accepted based solely on merit. But who? Sometimes these influential people would send a *katabelece* for another person, from their own ethnic group. They would claim that this person was their nephew or niece, when they may actually only be a distant relative or a neighbour. (*Pak Is, 57, a Malay man*)

The Malays have dominated the bureaucracy, but the appointment of a Dayak governor in 2008 brought new hopes of accessing civil service jobs for Dayak youth. This change has made some Malay youth anxious. Such anxiety was expressed by my Malay assistant who was also trying to find a secure job in the civil service while she was helping me with the research. One morning, she exclaimed to me,

*Look, the governor just announced the heads of the provincial offices…all of the second echelon staff. Look, they’re Dayak! Now that the governor is Dayak, all of the important posts are held by Dayaks…next*
thing, all the civil servants at the provincial level will all be Dayaks.\(^{38}\) (Lia, 24, a Malay woman)

I was puzzled because I did not understand why this was so important. It turned out that this announcement was a big issue, because people want to know the ethnic map of the provincial government. My assistant explained that there were several posts that were considered lucrative (basah), especially the head of the West Kalimantan regional staff bureau. It is common knowledge, that in addition to his/her main salary, a civil servant, known as a PNS (Pegawai Negeri Sipil), also receives money (often more than their main salary) from other sources. This money is usually known as uang sampingan (literally, money on the side, which may - but not necessarily – include income from bribes). Certain offices, such as the regional staff bureau, public works, education, and health offices, are considered to bring in more of this extra cash than other offices. A position at the regional staff office, for instance, is considered lucrative because of the role it plays in the recruitment, transfer, and career advancement of individual civil servants. This opens gates to acquiring side money in various stages of those processes. The public works office is also lucrative, as companies competing for infrastructure projects often bribe officials at the public works office to win tenders for infrastructure projects.\(^{39}\)

Of course my assistant’s statement is an assumption and perhaps a bit of an exaggeration. Other factors such as commonality, closeness, and group membership may better explain how people

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\(^{38}\) Second echelons in this quote refer to civil servants that are promoted to head of provincial offices.

\(^{39}\) This is also noted for Kupang by Tidey (2012).
obtain these positions rather than pinpointing ethnicity (Tidey, 2012: 119). However, this ‘ethnic map’ means a lot to young people because they know that ethnicity is a form of capital (Borjas, 1992) in seeing what kind of opportunities they perceive are available for them in the future and how they would have to strategise now if they wanted to enter the bureaucracy. Because of this commotion, the governor had to state in the local newspapers that he had tried to balance the composition of his cabinet and claimed that ethnicity did not matter in the recruitment (Berkat, 15 January 2008).

My assistant did not believe it, since it was obvious that more Dayak were appointed. Since the Dayak have recently obtained various important political positions in ‘Dayak’ districts, many Dayak youth are optimistic about getting into the bureaucracy in those districts. The same applies to the Malays in the ‘Malay’ districts. The optimistic view among Dayak youth was obvious in a statement expressed by Oren, who was only months away from graduating from the Faculty of Law in Pontianak.

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 do not fulfil the requirement, there should be effort in getting them certain positions... why not? Because before it was very difficult. (Oren, 23, a Dayak man)

Oren’s statement seems to suggest the need for affirmative action for the Dayak. He expresses that the difficulty the Dayak have had in
accessing opportunities for upward social mobility in the past should be compensated in the present. Opening more posts for Dayak people is a must, even when they do not necessarily fulfil all the requirements.

While my Dayak respondents were quite optimistic about their chances of getting into the civil service, the Madurese were pessimistic. They believe that seeking state jobs requires an ethnic social network. In the case of the Madurese, such a network is basically non-existent within the state bureaucracy. Aziz explained that the newly appointed deputy mayor of Pontianak (at the time this research was conducted) is a Madurese. I asked whether this would mean that there would be more opportunities for the Madurese to join the bureaucracy. He was uncertain that this would be the case, because the deputy mayor would be unable to run a one man show providing Madurese youth access to civil service jobs.

There are only around five Madurese who have a master’s degree, and now a deputy mayor. But I am not sure he will be able to help that much, not because he doesn’t want to. The Madurese are just not strong enough. (Aziz, 24, a Madurese man)

With few of their own working in state institutions, the Madurese are aware that it will not be easy for them to enter the civil service. Despite their pessimistic view with regard to job opportunities in the civil service, this does not inhibit them from aspiring to work as civil servants. This is perhaps because opportunities for decent jobs outside the civil service are not as widely available to the Madurese, as they are for the Chinese. As I have noted elsewhere, the major players in the economic sector, from trading to service provision, are Chinese. Therefore, there
are more opportunities for Chinese youth to find work in these sectors. On the other hand, the Madurese are mainly confined to small scale trade or informal sectors. Thus, they still feel that having a civil service job is their only ticket to upward mobility.

**Figure 2 Announcement of the clean recruitment process into the police force**

Though some Dayak youth are optimistic about their chances of becoming a civil servant, not all of them are. Merely being a Dayak is not enough. Readying money for bribes, or ‘smoothing money’ (Tidey, 2012: 14) is also crucial if one wants to enter the civil service. When a person does not have a family member within the system, he or she has to
know someone (*orang dalam*, literally, an insider) who is willing to take the bribe. When this research was conducted, one of the newly formed districts in West Kalimantan started recruiting civil servants. There was enormous controversy over practices of bribery. In this case, there were several *calo* or middlemen. First were the wife of a regional legislative board member and her sister. They asked another person (outside the civil service), to find information on people interested in applying for the job. This middleman was occasionally paid between 100,000 and 200,000 rupiahs, depending on how generous the two sisters were feeling. This middleman worked together with ‘insiders’ working in the office (most likely a high rank officer and lower rank administrative staff) to ensure that the applicants who bribed them pass the recruitment tests. The middleman admitted to the police that he had given 750 million rupiahs to the two sisters (Berkat, 17 November 2008).

In my conversations with local people, the police force was cited as one of the state institutions in which, to secure a job, both networks and bribery are a must. This idea is so engrained in people’s minds, that the local police explicitly made an announcement outside the provincial police office that entrance to the police force is ‘open’ (meaning that there is no need for an ‘insider’) and free (see Figure 2).

Even so, some Dayak youth such as Bernadus, are pessimistic about this clean recruitment as announced by the police office. Bernadus applied to enter the police force when he graduated from high school, but he was not accepted. He strongly believes that it was because his farmer parents did not possess the networks and money to bribe an insider.
Most of my friends got into the police force using money, I hate that, I hate those kinds of policemen...but I really, really want to be a police officer...when I applied after high school, I did not use any connections (insiders). Connections...who? I don’t have any. Even if I had one, I would need to have a lot of money. 40 million, 50 million, 60 million, (do you think) I am capable (of providing that money)? (Bernadus, 20, a Dayak man)

**Pontianak: Modernity in a Provincial City**

In the previous sections, I have described the dynamics of West Kalimantan, especially in relation to ethnicity. Here I will introduce Pontianak, the changes it has experienced, and how they relate to young people’s identity in a provincial city.

**Introducing Pontianak**

Pontianak is located on the intersection of the Kapuas River, Landak River, and Lesser Kapuas River. As mentioned previously, Sultan Abdurrahman Alkadrie (an immigrant of Arab descent), founded the city in 1771. This is also commonly regarded as the date of the first migration of the Malays to the area. Pontianak grew to become a city of trade, which historically has been the base of its growth since it was founded. The role of the Chinese in the city's development is very strong. Currently, the trade and service sector in Pontianak absorbs the majority of working people in Pontianak (Pontianak Statistics Bureau, 2008a).
Figure 3 Map of Pontianak
At the moment, Pontianak is divided into six subdistricts, but due to population growth there are plans to further divide the existing subdistricts into smaller subdistricts. From the ‘heart of the city’ or the city centre (mainly consisting of Pontianak Barat, Pontianak Kota, Pontianak Selatan), Pontianak Utara and Pontianak Timur are located across the Kapuas River. These are the two poorest districts in Pontianak, Pontianak Timur having the lowest population figures, but having the highest population density compared to the other subdistricts (Pontianak Statistics Bureau, 2008a) and the highest youth crime rate. A psychological boundary associating those two subdistricts as being remote and backwards exists, as education, work, and recreational activities for young people are quite limited in these two areas in comparison to those in other subdistricts within the city. This negative perception of the two subdistricts has encouraged many young people from Pontianak Timur and Pontianak Utara to seek education opportunities and recreational activities in the other subdistricts across the river. Thus, there is frequent youth movement from ‘across the river’ to the city centre.

In 2010, the total population of Pontianak was 550,297, including about 53,454 15-19 year olds, 57,707 20-24 year olds, and 53,045 25-29 year olds (Pontianak Regional Planning Development Agency, 2012). This means that around 30 per cent of Pontianak’s population is made up of young people aged between 15 and 29. This percentage is slightly higher than the all-Indonesia per centage of youth in the population, which was around 26 per cent in 2010 (Central Bureau

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40 Pontianak Timur, especially Kampung Beting, is well-known as the center for drug dealing in Pontianak, which targets young people. This information was given by one of the staff at Pontianak Statistics Bureau when I visited the office in February 2008, but no statistical data were available.
of Statistics, 2013). However, the number of university students has risen within the last 30 years, alongside the rapid increase in the number of higher education facilities in recent years, from seven in 1998 (Pontianak Statistics Bureau, 1988) to 25 in 2008 (Pontianak Statistics Bureau, 2008a). Education institutions have become more accessible to young people in West Kalimantan, though they are mainly centred in Pontianak.

As in West Kalimantan as a whole, Pontianak society is socially divided along ethnic and religious lines. The Chinese are the largest single group in the population (31 per cent), many of them living in a relatively isolated ethnic world, going to Chinese schools41 and working in Chinese-dominated economic domains.42 Pontianak’s population by ethnicity reveals that it is actually a majority Chinese city with Malays making up 26 per cent; these ethnic groups together account for more than half of Pontianak society. Next are the Bugis (13 per cent), Javanese (11 per cent), and Madurese (6 per cent) ethnic groups. In the statistics, Dayak were included in the ‘other’ category along with other minority ethnic groups, including Minangkabau, Batak, and Sundanese, which in total came to 13 per cent (Government of Pontianak, 2009d). As opposed to the large proportion of Dayak in the province, only a small

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41 The first Chinese school in West Kalimantan was established in Singkawang in 1892. It was a Catholic school built by Dutch missionaries specifically for Chinese students. In Pontianak, the first Chinese elementary school was built in 1938 by the Christian Church of West Kalimantan (Gereja Kristen Kalimantan Barat). The school, named Lak Kue, used Chinese (most probably the Mandarin dialect) as a media of communication. However, after independence, Chinese schools started to use Indonesian instead (Ahok et al., 1986: 41-49).

42 Even though the Chinese is the largest single ethnic group in Pontianak, I have chosen to focus this study on non-Chinese (especially Malays) for the reason explained in the methodology section: I had better access to non-Chinese (especially Malays) than I did to Chinese (see page 39).
number of Dayak live in Pontianak (Rosdiawan et al., 2007). Even though the largest ethnic group in Pontianak is the Chinese, Islam is the majority religion (70 per cent), because it is not only the religion of the Malays. Most Bugis, Javanese, and Madurese are also Muslims (Andaya, 2003; Koentjaraningrat, 1984: 310-311; Achwan et al., 2005: 12). Buddhists are the second largest group (18 per cent), while Christians, including Protestants and Catholics make up seven per cent of the population (Government of Pontianak, 2009a).

In Pontianak, there is a slightly different dynamic in ethnic occupational position than West Kalimantan as a whole. As well as being the dominant ethnicity in the civil service, Malays work in large numbers in the urban informal sector (competing with the Madurese)\(^{43}\), while a few Dayak occupy mid-level civil servant positions (Achwan et al., 2005). Jobs in the bureaucracy are a crucial resource, as the state has power to accommodate interests of certain ethnic groups. Many people believe that the more positions held in state politics and bureaucracy, the more power a group has over policy and local state budget allocations. For example, at a graduation ceremony at Widya Dharma University, I sat next to a Dayak mother whose son graduated that day. She told me how the current governor, Cornelis, who happens to be a Dayak, had managed to prioritise the needs of the Dayak in the implementation of government programmes. She talked of the new roads that have been built in the interior, and how that has facilitated young Dayak to acquire an education in the city. Her presence at the ceremony, she says, is also due to infrastructure development in her village.

\(^{43}\) The Madurese work in various domains in the informal sector, such as in the transport system (taxi, pedicabs, small boats) and small-scale trade (fruit and vegetables).
Hah, you know that the Governor is now Dayak? He made sure that roads are built in the interior. (If it weren’t for the governor), my son would not be going to university. I wouldn’t be here (to attend my child’s graduation ceremony). *(Ibu* Ita, 40, a Dayak woman)

**Pontianak, Change, and Identity**

I previously mentioned that in comparison to metropolitan cities at the national level, Pontianak can be seen as a provincial town. What is meant by this, and how is it relevant to a study of young people? Pilkington and Johnson (2003) and Kjelgaard and Askegaard (2006) illustrate the importance of seeing young people’s lives as embedded within spatial power inequalities. By using the term ‘periphery’ instead of locality, they emphasise the concept of power differentials in relation to the ‘core’ (the national or global) when contextualising young people’s lives. Basing their study on the same assumption, Kjelgaard and Askegaard (2006: 239-240) investigate youth culture in Denmark. They state that peripheral youth (in small towns) tend to have more global aspirations than young people in the capital (Copenhagen), because on the one hand, these youth understand the limits of being on the periphery, yet access to global information facilitates the formation of out-of-reach aspirations that the authors refer to as ‘a dream world rather than a local liveable reality’.

Kiem’s (1993: 20) research on young people in Ternate (the capital city of North Maluku, in Eastern Indonesia) shows how a study in provincial cities helps to illustrate that elements of global culture are not exclusively a metropolitan phenomenon, but have spread to what he

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44 *Ibu*, literally mother, is commonly used to address an adult female (as in Mrs or Ma’am).
calls, the ‘periphery of the periphery’ (that is, the periphery of the larger periphery of the Global South). Despite being on the periphery of the periphery, Ternate functions as the core for places that are even more peripheral (the surrounding islands of North Maluku). He argues the importance of studying these types of towns, as it is in these towns that accelerated social change has been happening in the 1970s. Integration of Ternate to a unified Indonesian economic and political sphere in the early years of the New Order regime facilitated a boom in infrastructure, transportation, education, and communication, providing a different way of living for young people compared to that of the previous generation. Young people in Ternate have become more connected to global forces, but are also becoming more connected to other smaller localities.

A similar process of increasing connectedness to global forces and smaller local localities has taken place in Pontianak. However, instead of accelerated change being caused by the integration into the national economic and political sphere as in Kiem’s study, the recent change in Pontianak is due largely to the dissolution of national power brought about by the 1999 decentralisation policy. I have mentioned the effects of decentralisation at the provincial level, especially in the political domain. Here, I will elaborate how decentralisation has affected economic life in the city, and how it intersects with issues of social mobility and ethnicity among young people.

In Pontianak, decentralisation has accelerated development of local infrastructure, communication, and transportation facilities, and has made Pontianak better connected with other district towns and bigger cities. These improved connections have allowed Pontianak to display its attractive urbanity to people living in smaller towns and make
its standing as the core in the periphery stronger (Maryuni, 2007: 141). At the same time, being better connected to bigger cities also means that people in Pontianak have become more aware of their limitations. For example, they are better exposed to the material wealth, modern facilities and lifestyles of Jakarta and Bandung. As such, while Pontianak has strengthened its position as a core in relation to its surrounding periphery, its position as peripheral to bigger cities in Indonesia and to Java has also become more obvious.

Another effect of decentralisation on the local economy is the greater access to investment opportunities. With decentralisation, local governments are able to rearrange or revitalise the local government system (Setiadi, 2010) and negotiate investment opportunities with other parties. A local writer noted Pontianak’s growing urbanity, describing how modernisation in Pontianak was evident at 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 cafés, the Mega Mall, luxurious cars, play stations, cafés, bistros, etc.’ (Suwarvo, 2008: 16-17). In general, national companies have started to make investments in Pontianak. However, these investments often rely on poorly educated and low skilled (female) workers rather than on an educated work force (Tribun Pontianak, 18 October 2008). This means that the increase in education opportunities in Pontianak has resulted in a relatively high supply of educated labour, for which there is not sufficient demand. Thus, it is no surprise that the majority of the un/underemployed in Pontianak are those who have a high school education or university
education, the majority (64 per cent) of whom are between the ages of 15-24 years (Pontianak Statistics Bureau, 2008a; 2008b).\footnote{There are 5783 high school graduates and 2935 university graduates aged 15 and above, who are recorded in census data as looking for work (Pontianak Statistics Bureau, 2008a).}

Investments in large shopping malls have also expanded a consumer economy that was previously dominated by smaller scale recreation and retail sales facilities. Access to malls and other recreation facilities in the city has become easier with the construction of new roads, the most influential being the extension of the Jalan Ahmad Yani main road which crosses through Kubu Raya district. The A Yani Mega Mall is now the trendy place to date and hang out, replacing the other smaller malls and older hang out places (such as the Korem square near the Kapuas River, coffee shops, and small cafés). Having a lifestyle associated with the mall is seen as one of the important aspects of being urbanised among young people in Pontianak. Pontianak’s position as the ‘student city’ in West Kalimantan has made the role of these recreation facilities even more important in the creation of an urban youth identity.

This study is an effort to shift from the urban and Java-centric focus that characterises most youth studies in Indonesia (as indicated in Chapter 1) to life on the periphery. One of the aspects that make provincial town youth different is the ambivalent position they assign themselves in relation to urban centres and district towns, which structures the process of growing up. They often feel inferior to youth from ‘core’, metropolitan cities; yet they feel superior to youth in the smaller district towns. In the case of Pontianak, this self positioning has made young people (and their families) reluctant to try their chances for
social mobility outside the province. However, they are confident enough to seek opportunities in the districts within the province. Thus, young people’s efforts for upward mobility remain limited within the social and economic structure of West Kalimantan society. In terms of youth identity, youth in provincial towns tend to be influenced by global youth culture from larger urban centres. At the same time, they also become significant social actors in negotiating the acquired youth culture and transferring it to smaller district towns. That said, we can see that youth transition to adulthood in provincial cities is challenging, and far from linear and definite. This also needs to be seen in relation to how youth negotiate their identity within this specific context.

Conceptualisations of Youth and Adulthood in Pontianak

This section will explain how young people in Pontianak construct the meaning of these terms within their local contexts. Young people in Pontianak tend to construct the meaning of youth and adulthood based on various dimensions, but they all relate to how social relations are developed. Social relations within the family are particularly emphasised, and adulthood is characterised by maintaining positive relationships with the family rather than trying to be independent from it.

General Conceptions of Youth and Adulthood

In the Indonesian language, different terms are used to refer to youth: remaja (adolescence) and anak muda/pemuda (youth). Remaja is usually an indicator of age, often within the age range of 13-18 years old. Within
the remaja category, there is a subcategory commonly called anak baru gede (ABG), which in most instances refers to those in early to mid-adolescence (13-15 year olds). A rather wide age range applies to the terms anak muda and pemuda, ranging from early teens to the late twenties or even early thirties, though in other instances these terms are used to refer to a period between remaja and adulthood. Anak muda is used to refer to young people involved in youth cultures and leisure activities, though it can also be used as a synonym for the term pemuda, which is a state and politically constructed term. In the latest Law on Youth\(^46\), the age range for pemuda is set at 16-30 years, whereas the first draft of the laws stated that pemuda are those aged 18-35 years\(^47\) (Vivanews, 15 September 2009). Age is not the only aspect used in defining pemuda. The term pemuda also implies a sense of the revolutionary (Vivanews, 15 September 2009), of having the spirit to challenge the status quo (Asmara, 2009).\(^48\)

While age and state constructions are influential in indicating who young people are, the term dewasa (adult) in Indonesian has more to do with maturity rather than age. Marital status is often used to indicate maturity and the transition to adulthood in Indonesia (Nilan et al., 2011b: 710). When a person is married, he/she is considered mature

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\(^46\) Official definitions of youth, including that in the Law on Youth 40/2009, are based on political considerations. This is evident from the fact that the definition of youth proposed in the ‘academic draft’ of this law was changed by the parliament to the current definition for no clear reason (Naafs and White, 2012: 5).

\(^47\) Even though the official law on youth states that the age range of pemuda is up to 30 years, the National Youth Organization (KNPI) has a maximum age of 40 years (Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia, 2005), again, underlying that official definitions of ‘youth’ are based on political considerations.

\(^48\) The term pemuda is often linked to youth movements in Indonesia’s history, starting from 1928 when the Sumpah Pemuda (Youth Pledge) was initiated. This pledge basically emphasised the importance of Indonesia’s unity – one motherland, one nation, and one language.
enough to take on the responsibility of a new family, and (is assumed) to have moved out of the natal home and achieved economic independence (Pakpahan et al., 2009: 2). In their study on adulthood in several developing countries, Eyetsemitan et al. (2003) describe Indonesians as having different indicators of adulthood, depending on which stage of adulthood is referred to. During early adulthood, marriage and parenthood are the main indicators of adulthood for women, while looking physically strong and starting work is an indicator for men. In middle adulthood, marriage, parenthood and work continue to be important (especially for men), but other indicators come into play, such as being able to fulfil one’s role in the community and providing for parents. Thus, while different indicators are used to define adulthood, maturity (physical, psychological, social, economic) is the main basis of adulthood.

When asking how young people construct the meaning of youth and adulthood in Pontianak, I used the term anak muda (for youth) and dewasa (for adulthood). For youth I used anak muda instead of remaja or ABG because I felt that anak muda covers a wider age range than remaja or ABG, and it has more neutral connotations than the term pemuda. Thus, it is not surprising that some young people use this term interchangeably with remaja, ABG, or pemuda. There are not many alternative terms for dewasa, so using this term was sufficient.

While the Malay terms for youth (anak muda) and adulthood (dewasa) are closely related to the Indonesian term (anak muda) and also have much the same meanings, there are other local dialects in

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49 The authors of this study did not define when early or middle adulthood starts. Theoretically, early adulthood is a life stage beginning around the early 20s-mid 40s, while middle adulthood starts around the age 45-60 (Dannefer, 1984: 102)
Pontianak that define youth and adulthood using other terms. The Madurese and the Dayak have the same way of defining youth, which is often parallel to the meaning of child. For instance, the term ‘rek kerek’ (child) was mentioned by my Madurese informant to refer to how adults in his community categorise those who are unmarried (regardless of age). However, finding a word parallel to adulthood in Madurese was quite difficult. An informant described the use of the term Cak to call a young adult male, who is defined as an adult once he is considered to be physically a man. No term parallel to Cak is used for young adult women. When a man or woman is physically seen as grown persons, the term rek kerek is rarely used. Another word close in meaning to ‘adult’ is sepoh (old). It mainly refers to a person with ample knowledge, especially of tradition and religion.

The same applies to one of the Dayak subdialects, Bekati. There is no specific term for adult or adulthood in Bekati. Unmarried people are referred to as are (for a boy or a young man) and ma-u (for a girl or a young woman). The closest term for an adult is the word bujang (young adult man) and dara (young adult woman), both indicated by physical maturity. However, both terms refer to unmarried men or women, and seem to denote the start of adulthood (early adulthood). Once they are married, they are no longer referred to as bujang or dara. Marriage seems to be an important indicator of ‘full adulthood’. For instance, when a dara is called ‘sister-in-law’ by her husband’s siblings, one knows that she is a ‘full’ adult.

In the Teochew dialect (one of the Chinese dialects used by the majority Chinese in Pontianak), youth in general is referred to as hou se. However, specific gender-based terms are also commonly used, ca bou kia means young woman and ta pou kia means young man. Both terms
refer to young people (*remaja*) who are unmarried. Sometimes a young person is also called *nong kia*, which emphasises the person’s child-like state or his/her social position in relation to his/her parents. An adult in this Chinese dialect is referred to as *tua nang*, normally used for people who have reached physical maturity, around the age of 18. As in the use of *bujang/dara*, physical maturity is important to define entrance to adulthood. *Tua nang*, as in the use of *Cak* in Madurese, is not defined by entrance to marriage. Thus, although marriage is often said to mark the separation between youth and adulthood, the use of those terms suggest that marriage refers to an established state of adulthood rather than the start of it. Physical maturity is a more important indicator of the start of adulthood (early adulthood).

**Defining Youth and Adulthood in the Eyes of Young People**

I have elaborated a general construction of youth and adulthood in the Indonesian language and in different local dialects in Pontianak. Now I will turn to how young people in Pontianak currently construct their own definitions and boundaries that denote youth and adulthood.

**Orientation and Identification**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the characteristics of youth and of adulthood are seen as contradictory. For instance, youth are often seen as being present oriented, and adults as future oriented. As a consequence, young people are assumed to be emotional, and self oriented and focused on leisure activities. Conversely, adults work hard, are rational, and oriented towards others. According to some young
people in Pontianak, one of the important aspects of being ‘rational’ is the moral capability to distinguish good from bad rather than simply making judgments out of context. This line of thinking is close to cognitive and moral developmental theories that place hedonistic and instrumental orientations at the lowest stage of development – reflecting child-like capabilities that are inferior to those of adults. On the contrary, an orientation emphasising social contexts and universal moral values is considered the highest level of development (Santrock, 1996: 441-442), associated with adult capabilities.

*ABG* don’t think about what’s good and bad, they walk straight ahead, without looking left or right. When you’re 21 and above (adult), you are capable of thinking what is good and what is bad. (Udin, 23, a Malay man)

Being future oriented is also related to how young people make appropriate plans to lead a life framed within the normative human life cycle and keeping pace with it. Seigner and Halabi-Kheir (1998: 310-311) term this type of future orientation a ‘prospective life course’ orientation. This life course orientation focuses on ‘practical domains’ of the transitions, assuming that people move from the education domain, to the work domain, to the marriage domain. The importance of the prospective life course orientation in the construction of adulthood was mentioned by a young man, Ben. Ben thinks of himself as a young person, despite being in the mid-thirties. Being unmarried at an age when most of his peers have settled down into a family of their own has made him feel that he is not following and keeping pace with the normal life cycle of society. Ben has also chosen to work in the field of
creative arts instead of settling into an office job, and this further signifies his social position as being young. Choosing an alternative lifestyle, as Ben has done, is often considered to be contrary to the life choices an adult would make. Adults would choose to follow the normative life course, as described by Ben below.

Of course, I’m still a young person. Adults think ‘I have to form a family, I have to have children’. To tell you the truth, I don’t know whether that is good or bad. But I’m still searching what it is (I want to do). So if I’m bored, I like to hang out with my friends. I still think about developing new ideas, young people are like that. Adults (on the contrary) only look straight forward and get married. (Ben, 35, a Dayak man)

In order to stay within the time table of this idealised cycle, making the necessary preparations to enter adult life is considered crucial. According to Arnett (2004), young people who actively make preparations for the future are considered to be emerging adults. These preparations into adulthood often refer to how young people make use of their time. For instance, being able to manage time between school and work is a key issue for Eny, a young woman from Sanggau, in preparing for her future. Eny started combining school and work in her second semester in university. She admitted that her grades went down during the first months of combining school and work, though she later managed to improve her academic performance.
The difference between young people and adults, is that young people do not think about their future, they only think about having fun (bersenang-senang). Working makes a person mature, because working is for the future. Going to university and working at the same time prepares us for the future. I consider myself an adult because now I am able to use my time wisely for the future. (Eny, 19, a Chinese woman)

Linus, also from Sanggau, emphasises making appropriate preparations for marriage as indicating a future orientation. For him, the time used for dating should not be wasted by continuously changing partners. Instead, it should be used wisely by seriously getting to know one person who is expected to be one’s future spouse.

I am an adult. Young people like to change their dating partners, but that kind of dating is very immature. It is a waste of time. Dating someone should end in marriage, I don’t like to do that (change partners). (Linus, 22, a Dayak man)

In other instances, what differentiates youth and adulthood is related to how resources are used, especially money. Young people are assumed to use money in a careless way for the sake of fashion and preserving their image instead of saving up for the future. Being in style seems to

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50 This statement somehow contradicts the national or historical image of pemuda, in which it is the pemuda who are portrayed to be the ones who thought seriously about the nation’s future and put their lives on the line for it. The term Angkatan 45, Angkatan 65, and Angkatan 98 all refer to different young generations of the era, who struggled to fight for the nation’s future. Angkatan 45 were young people who were active in the struggle for independence, Angkatan 65/66 were young people involved in the establishment of the New Order, while Angkatan 98 were youth who contributed to ending of the New Order and paving the way towards the era of reform.
be related to youth identity in many developing countries, despite the lack of financial capacity to keep up (Scheld, 2007). This was mentioned by Tari, who has been working at her father’s small restaurant to contribute to the family economy. Her involvement in the restaurant seems to back up her identity as an adult. By working, she understands the value of money and how to wisely spend it instead of using it for unnecessary purposes.

I’m not a young person, but an adult. Young people tend to waste their money (berfoya-foya), for example for buying the latest fashions, or the latest motorcycle. If they (young men) have girlfriends, they don’t want their girlfriend to look down on them (jatuh gengsinya), so they buy their girlfriends stuff, even though they actually don’t have the money. (Tari, 25, a Malay woman)

The difference between youth and adulthood is also indicated by how people use space, which is still linked to an individual’s time orientation. Young people in Pontianak point to the use of space for leisure activities as an indicator of youth, in contrast to adults, who are assumed to use space for serious matters that will be beneficial for their future. Young people in Pontianak, such as Mahmud, refer to the Mega Mall in constructing the difference between youth and adulthood. This shows the central role the Mega Mall has in young people’s lives, especially among migrant youth such as Mahmud, who come from places where entertainment facilities are quite limited. Mahmud categorises himself a young person who is now in the process of entering adulthood. Mahmud’s identification is similar to Arnett’s notion of emerging
adulthood, where young people subjectively think of themselves as being between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2004).

(the mall) is for ABG to hang out. I am a young person (anak muda), not an ABG. But I am starting to enter adulthood (mulai masuk dewasa). (For me, the mall) is still important for keeping up with global trends; that’s what young people do. But now I go to the mall to buy or read books (not to hang out). I like to read books on Corel, Photoshop, and politics. (Now I) use the mall for more beneficial things, (to prepare) for the future. (Mahmud, 23, a Malay man)

Some Madurese youth, on the other hand, seem to focus on an existential future orientation to indicate adulthood. Existential future orientation is related to a ‘philosophical domain’ concerning the relation between the self, others, and collective groups (Seginer and Halabi-Kheir, 1998: 310-311). Siti is a Madurese who happens to be the only one in the family to go to university. Her father is a farmer, who was evicted from Sanggau with the rest of the family when a Dayak-Madurese conflict erupted out in 1997. She and her family have stayed in Pontianak ever since. In between schooling, Siti helps with the household responsibilities of a Malay family and uses some of the money she earns for her education. Madurese youth such as Siti referred to adults as those that have a social orientation, and have the capability to redistribute resources and empower the community. According to these youth, adulthood extends beyond psychological maturity, and tends to focus on one’s capability to contribute to the achievement of social justice. This is similar to the argument of Eyetsemitan et al. (2003)
that one’s role in community is an important indicator of entrance to mid adulthood in Indonesia.

An adult is a person who brings benefit to others. I am an adult when I am capable of opening new job opportunities for other people. I want to make a change in my village. I was born in Pontianak, I want to build Pontianak. (Siti, 21, a Madurese woman)

When defining ‘youth’, some Madurese youth tend to draw upon the state’s definition of youth as being ‘revolutionary’ or ‘agents of change’, but translate this to the individual capability of being creative to make that change. Creativity is seen as a trait that young people have to challenge the status quo, as stated by Aji. Aji has lived in Pontianak all his life and has no direct experience of ethnic conflict like Siti has. However, he is well aware of the marginal position the Madurese have in West Kalimantan.

In principle, youth are those who are highly creative. (Youth are) those between 20 and 40 years old, (because) 40 is the maximum for a person to maintain (his or her creativity). Men and women who still have strong spirit (for creativity), are youth. Being creative enables change in society. (Aji, 23, a Madurese man)

In the context of Madurese youth, using existential future orientation to indicate adulthood and using the state’s definition of ‘revolutionary youth’ to categorise young people may reflect their need and desire for change. Being marginalised in various sectors and continuously being negatively stereotyped, these existential future orientations are constructed in the hope of better integrating into Pontianak society. The
above notion of adulthood and creative youth demonstrates their efforts to try to make that happen.

A person may also emphasise the situational context to identify whether he or she is a youth or an adult. Here, the situational context refers to which of the two one is relating to (youth or adult), as stated by Riko. Riko is an active member of a political party in Kubu Raya district. Though he referred to adults as those who are ‘wise’ (arif) and have control over their emotion, he repeatedly gave examples of adults as those who have a higher social standing in society than he does. This social standing is, among others, indicated by one’s access to positions of power. He refers to his friends in the legislative body as adults. On the other hand, he perceives his unemployed friends he usually meets at coffee shops as youth. The same applies to colleagues in the political party who have the same or a lower position than he does. The category he puts himself in (an adult or a youth) depends on who he is relating to.

I feel that I am a young person (anak mude) because I hang out with other young people. Youth and adulthood are not differentiated by age, but by looking at the kinds of social relationship one has with other people. Sometimes I feel like a young person when I hang out with young people, and sometimes an adult when I hang out with adults, like members of the legislative body. So it all depends on the situation.
(Riko, 33, a Malay man)

Like Riko, Eli identifies herself as a young person or an adult depending on who she is relating to. Eli defines the difference between young people and adults in the way they dress and behave. Adults are those that dress formally while youth are those that like to dress informally.
and stay up to date on the latest trends. That is why she expresses the importance of these two factors in her way of negotiating between being young and being an adult.

I am a young adult (dewasa awal). So I usually adjust, sometimes I can be a young person. When my friends (who are younger than me) ask me to hang out with them at a café, I will go with them out of respect. But that does not mean that I have to act like them, I follow them only in the style of clothing. Of course I can’t wear high heels like older women (mbak-mbak). I can still feel young, even though I don’t act in the way they do (Eli, 22, a Malay woman)

Adulthood as a Social Concept

The above section shows how youth and adulthood are defined by psychological capabilities (especially related to time orientation and use of resources) and social relations with others. Here, I will elaborate how constructions of youth and adulthood are embedded within social relations with the family. The notion of adulthood is often related to concepts of independence, especially independence from the family. In the cases below, mandiri is the local term used to indicate independence. Independence usually refers to financial independence, the capacity to make decisions without the support of an adult family member, and sticking to one’s own value in the process of decision making. For example, a Madurese migrant from the district of Pontianak, Didik, emphasises the importance of financial independence in indicating adulthood. Didik is currently an administrator at a private university in Pontianak. He used to give private lessons to children when
he was still studying. Didik feels that his income has always been small, but it has been more than sufficient to meet his daily needs in Pontianak.

(When one starts working), he is no longer dependent (financially), and one can claim that he is an adult. (Didik, 25 years old, a Madurese man)

Boy, who was also working as an administrator staff at an educational institution in Pontianak when I met him, focuses on the capability of making decisions without having to ask for an adult’s opinion or suggestions. Based on his own experience of studying in Java, he states that being away from parents facilitates the capability to make decisions independently.

Adulthood is about making one’s own decision, based on your own judgment. Young people usually ask their parents what they think before they decide on something. (Boy, 28, a Malay man)

For young men in Pontianak, independence also refers to being able to meet one’s own basic needs without the help of female family members, especially their mothers, as indicated by Bani. Bani remains unemployed and unmarried in the third decade of his life and is still living with both his parents. He considers that taking on domestic responsibilities to meet his own needs is a big step towards adulthood for many young men in Pontianak, including himself.

Sometimes we want someone to make our coffee, (or we yell to our mother) ‘Mak (mum)...food,
Mak...where are our side dishes?’ I don’t do that anymore, (I am an adult). (Bani, 33 years old, a Malay man)

In most cases, adulthood for young people in Pontianak is not only about trying to distance oneself from the family by lessening parental authority and committing to one’s own values without interference from external pressure (Kins et al., 2009) as often cited in Western youth’s conceptualisations of adulthood. Adulthood in Pontianak goes hand in hand with family responsibilities, shown in how young people attempt to reduce their parents’ economic burden. This often means being able to take care of one’s own expenses and making a financial contribution to the family (which applies to both young men and young women), as stated by Tris and Ila. Tris prioritises the importance of financing one’s own needs as the ultimate indicator of adulthood, but adulthood becomes even more meaningful when a person is able to provide for their parents. Tris’ statement is a common thread in many of the Chinese youth’s accounts of adulthood. Providing for parents is an additional criterion for adulthood rather than the main indicator in their concept of adulthood.

Adults think about ways to earn money, to finance their own life, and think about their family’s future. In addition, (adults) may also think of setting aside money specifically for their parents, but financing one’s own life is more important to be an adult (Tris, 23, a Chinese man)
On the other hand, Ila’s conceptualisation of adulthood reflects most of the non-Chinese youths’ accounts of adulthood. Adulthood is achieved only when one is capable of providing financially for his/her parents.

Adulthood is when a person receives one’s own pay check, and is capable of assisting his/her parents and siblings (financially). (Ila, 23, a Dayak woman)

Edwin had an even stronger opinion of the importance of financing one’s family. He said that people who think only of financing their own needs without providing financial assistance to their parents are categorised as youth.

Those who think financial independence only goes as far as fulfilling one’s own financial needs, I categorise as youth. Adults will think about their family; an adult might think ‘instead of buying a motorcycle, I should spend the money on my family’. (Edwin, 25, a Malay man)

One of the explanations for this difference between the ethnic communities in their emphasis on taking care of one’s family may lie in the socialisation processes within the family. That these processes are less emphasised among the Chinese might be related to the historical process of Chinese migration to Pontianak. Despite the importance of the family in the lives of Chinese youth, the value of self-reliance seems to be emphasised in their socialisation process. Parents are also less demanding in expecting compliance from their children, as I will further elaborate in Chapter 4.
Being responsible towards the family also includes being able to maintain the family's respect and status in society by behaving appropriately according to the norms of society. There is a wide range of ways in which young people can maintain their family’s respect, from staying in education, as expressed by Nata, to controlling one’s expression of sexuality in public, as stated by Eli. Nata’s father is a teacher in a small village in Sambas, and education has always been important to his family's social status. However, Nata dropped out of university in his fourth semester and decided to focus on working instead. After keeping his dropping out of university a secret for some years, his parents eventually found out what he had done. They came to Pontianak in hope of sorting out this matter. It was then that he came to understand how much grief his behaviour had brought his parents, and why they consistently told him he had dishonoured the family’s name. He admits that he has brought shame and frustration to his family. His parents are embarrassed when they meet other members of his extended family, especially considering that children are always the main topic of conversation at family gatherings.

Though it may not be ‘full adulthood’ (*belum sepenuhnye dewase*), the important thing (to be an adult) is that we have the intention of lessening our parents’ burden, of not bringing shame. In my case, this would mean going back to university and being serious about it. (Nata, 23, a Malay man).

For Eli, maintaining family respect means having self-control. She considers being able to control one’s sexuality crucial to prevent bringing shame on the family. Expressing sexuality through physical contact with dating partners, especially in public, is often considered offensive behaviour, even
for Elli who does not consider herself a religious person. For young women, controlling sexuality is even more important in safeguarding the family’s social standing. In Pontianak, dating practices are often controlled by the authorities through what is known as ‘razia’\textsuperscript{51} for ‘sexual misconduct’ at certain ‘high-risk’ locations in Pontianak\textsuperscript{52} (Suara Enggang Post, 2012). Elli explains the difference in dating practices between youth and adults.

Young people are more aggressive, they are bold enough...to hug in public, to kiss also. Adults may sometimes do that, but that is an exception. If parents knew (about this), they would be ashamed, especially if their daughter is involved. (Eli, 24, a Malay woman)

Similar to Eli’s description of youth, Bani, a young man who has just graduated from university, also stresses the lack of sexual control among young people.

The grown-up way of dating is not like those kids (budak-budak). You know how teenagers (anak ABG) hang out on Ahmad Yani (road), on ‘one-legged’ motorcycles\textsuperscript{53}, hugging and leaning against each other, like ABG. They are ‘free’ to date at the road side, or at UNTAN (Universitas Tanjungpura), or in dark

\textsuperscript{51} Police raids to capture ‘criminals’, who are then brought down to the police station for identification and questioning.

\textsuperscript{52} Some of the locations include A. Yani Road, and the area surrounding GOR Sultan Abdurrahman and Kapuas II Bridge.

\textsuperscript{53} ‘One-legged motorcycles’ are motorcycles that are parked in an upright position on its centre stand (not on its side stand). This position makes the vehicle stable when two people sit on it, usually sideways. Dating on a motorcycle allows more physical contact that would otherwise be seen inappropriate in other contexts (for example while walking or sitting on a bench wide enough to have space in between two people). These ‘one-legged motorcycles’ are a common feature of dating practices among young people, not only in Pontianak, but also in other cities in Indonesia.
places. It is different for adults, they can control themselves. (Bani, 30, a Malay man)

Fulfilling the family’s expectations of growing up, usually framed within the notion of gender-based expectations of growing up is considered a form of interdependence between young people and their parents. Parents usually expect young men to maintain their role as family breadwinner, while it is assumed young women will take on their role as a wife and a mother, as stated by Ardi. Ardi is a young Malay politician who was campaigning for a seat on the regional legislative body when I was carrying out my fieldwork. He states that women are not obliged to work outside the household domain, but a woman has additional value if she does. He does not consider himself a full adult, because he has not been able to fulfil his role as family breadwinner. He admits that his income is irregular, and the nominal amount he receives is far from enough to support himself – let alone a family.

For (young) women to be an adult, parents expect them to have the characteristics of a mother (bersifat keibuan). Young men are adults when they are focused on earning money. (Ardi, 26, a Malay man)

However, there has been a generational change in the conceptualisation of what it means to become an adult for young women and young men. Some young women in Pontianak describe how the labour market has become more prominent as an indicator of adulthood for them, while some young men also express how marriage has become significant for them as an indicator of adulthood, as illustrated by the following two statements.
If my position at work were high, I would choose work over marriage. For me, marriage is not that important. Marriage is less important than work to become an adult. (Ifen, 19, a Chinese woman)

I would choose marriage, even if that means not working forever. Marriage is an expectation and a need. An adult will understand that if we try, good fortune will come our way (rejeki itu datang kalau kita berusaha). (Aam, 24, a Madurese man)

Various factors are assumed to contribute to these changing values, such as the increase in women’s education levels and feminisation of the workforce in Pontianak (Pontianak Statistics Bureau 2008a). Some young women in Pontianak, such as Yani, believe that it is change in the development of Pontianak’s infrastructure that has increased young women’s mobility in the public arena and enabled them to join the workforce.

Now there are many women who work. Before (during my mother’s time), it was embarrassing for women to work, as if their husband couldn’t support them. It was also difficult to work late, since it was dark everywhere. The woman’s role was to focus on her family and her children. (Yani, 26, a Malay woman)

In an interview with Yani’s mother, Ibu Mina (47), it was also obvious that young women during her time did not consider work an important life domain. Young women in those days had no intention of working, but focused on searching for a well-to-do man to marry. She described how her female friends in junior high school decided to marry rather than
continue their education to senior high school. Her friends’ husbands have become important bureaucratic elites, which she assumes is enough to make them happy. Her own decision to study until high school, and especially to enter a technical vocational high school (*Sekolah Teknik Menengah*), was not a popular choice among young women at that time. She is very supportive of her own daughters entering the work force, but still considers marriage as the most important indicator of adulthood for women.

Transition to adulthood is also indicated by a young person’s focus on understanding and fulfilling parents’ psychological and social needs, not only their parents’ financial needs. This includes fulfilling their parents’ need for self-esteem, by letting their parents know that they are still of use to their children. Ika said that showing a certain degree of dependence was one of the ways to fulfil that need.\(^5^4\) Ika, who had just resigned from a private company, draws upon her female colleague’s experience to explain her point.

Sometimes (young women) want to be independent after getting married, but sometimes their mothers love their daughters (too much), especially when their daughters give them grandchildren. So young women think ‘well, our parents just want to be close to us, they want to be close to their grandchildren. It is also nice to be with our parents’. Dependence is not bad. The important thing is that we make our parents happy, even though we actually want to be independent. (Ika, 26, a Malay woman)

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\(^{54}\) This kind of dependence should be differentiated from dependence that is enforced by certain conditions, such as financial conditions.
The above illustrations show how families are dependent upon the younger generation to fulfil financial, psychological, and social needs, but not much is expressed in relation to how the younger generation’s needs are also fulfilled by contributing to the family. Below is a quote from a young man who expresses the importance of making contributions to the family not only for his standing in relation to family members and the community, but also to safeguard his future.

I need a job to earn money, to help the family and for myself… but more importantly for my family, that is more important… Recognition from my parents, my older brother – but especially from parents – is important… My mother will tell neighbours, her friends that I (financially) support the family. People will respect me. If I don’t do it, I am also afraid that my parents will not be (emotionally) close to me. Who knows what the future holds? Maybe I will need support from them, advice, money, like for my child (when I have one). (Hendar, 22, a Malay man)

The above statement shows that contributions to the family enable young people to gain respect from their family and from society. Also, contributing to the family strengthens emotional attachment to the family. Creating stronger emotional ties brings feelings of emotional security and increases the possibility that family members will also be willing to provide support in times of need. In other words, adulthood is more about interdependence than it is independence.

The local conceptualisations of youth and adulthood above emphasise a state of in-betweenness in these two life stages, when young people talk about their own position. The interaction between
the different dimensions of youth and adulthood contributes to this feeling of in-betweenness. They may feel like an adult in some dimensions (such as being future-oriented), but a youth in others (they are not yet capable of fulfilling family obligations). This is reflected in the terms used by the informants, such as *dewasa awal* (early adulthood), *belum sepenuhnya dewasa* (not yet a full adult), *mulai masuk dewasa* (starting to enter adulthood). The feeling of in-betweenness among these young people provides empirical support for the notion of emerging adulthood that has been suggested by Arnett (2004). The difference lies in the indicators of adulthood, where Arnett’s youth often point to individual markers (independence, responsibility for oneself) rather than social ones (interdependence and responsibility towards others, especially the family).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has described how West Kalimantan’s development lags somewhat behind that of other provinces in Indonesia, and how development remains unequal between urban and rural locations within the province. Pontianak, the capital of the province, is a periphery to larger cores, such as Jakarta. At the same time, it is also a core to

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55 The notion of the early adulthood stage, commonly translated into Indonesian as *dewasa awal*, is also mentioned in developmental psychology literature (Santrock, 1996). Though the same term is used by some informants, it differs slightly from the developmental psychology understanding of early adulthood. Early adulthood in developmental psychology literature is considered a stage where young people have actually entered adulthood and are expected to progress to mid and late adulthood (see Eysetemitan, 2003). No mention is made of the state of ‘feeling in between’ in early adulthood in developmental psychology literature, as it is in the emerging adulthood literature.
other, more peripheral locations, such as cities in surrounding districts in West Kalimantan. This position, along with decentralisation and the history of ethnic segregation, has implications for how young people experience modernity and social mobility. As a core, it attracts many young migrants who want to be a part of the urban scene, especially as decentralisation has contributed to the city’s growth and opened up opportunities for marginalised ethnic groups to experience social mobility. Located on the periphery, Pontianak’s young people remain oriented towards larger cities in Java, especially when seeking education opportunities. Rarely do young people see themselves competing for work opportunities in these larger cities. Within this context, social relations in young people’s conceptualisation of youth and adulthood remain important. Having a social orientation (thinking, supporting, or helping others) is one of the first steps to entering adulthood. However, in order to reach full adulthood, a person needs to possess the capability to manage social relations (especially with parents), which includes fulfilling various family obligations. These family obligations are often related to making financial contributions to the family, safeguarding the family’s name by behaving according to societal norms, and having the capability to support a new family. Young people’s accounts of youth and adulthood emphasise a feeling of in-betweenness, as in some dimensions they feel they have fulfilled the criteria for adulthood, but not in others. This provides empirical support for the notion of emerging adulthood that emphasises this feeling of in-betweenness. The next chapter will elaborate in greater detail how the making of an adult and youth identity plays out in the context of tertiary education.