Growing up and being young in an Indonesian provincial town
Wenty Marina Minza, W.

Citation for published version (APA):
Minza, W. M. (2014). Growing up and being young in an Indonesian provincial town

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (http://dare.uva.nl)
In the previous chapter, I have shown how participation in tertiary education becomes a part of growing up, of respecting family expectations and trying to fulfil them. I have also illustrated how tertiary education provides space for the existence of youth *mahasiswa* cultures which form the identity of being an educated young person. Tertiary education often facilitates (or in some instances is used to stall) the process of growing up. Here, I will explore how young people try to secure a smooth transition from education to work. The first section will explore what meaningful work means for young people in Pontianak. The second section will show how young people engage in alternative work domains, outside mainstream white-collar work. The last section will show young people’s active agency in ‘waiting’ for meaningful work to come their way.

This chapter will show that finding meaningful work is a central issue for young people. Meaningful work in this case is about finding work that is meaningful not only for them but also for their family. Many young men and young women share the same work aspirations as their parents. Those who do not share the same aspirations as their parents often have difficulties pursuing their pathway when it comes to negotiating the tensions between their own aspirations and their parents’. Young people
who are unable to secure meaningful work try to cope by reconstructing what meaningful work means, and try to find work they consider meaningful through the temporary work domain they engage in.

**The PNS: Defining Meaningful Work**

The growing up perspective views transition from education to work in a linear fashion, assuming that the move from education to work will turn a dependent individual into an independent one through acquisition of financial resources. However, for many young men and young women in Pontianak, successful transition to work is not only about acquiring the financial resources to become independent from the family. It is also about entering work that is meaningful, which relates to the value one attaches to a job (Johnson, 2001: 298-299). In Pontianak, work is meaningful when it enables contributing to the financial, social, and psychological welfare of the family.

Many Indonesian youth in provincial cities such as Pontianak aspire to what Nilan calls the ‘1980s dream of being employed in the civil service’. She believes that the aspiration to join the civil service is a thing of the past.\(^7\) Professional jobs are what young people in Indonesia aspire to (Nilan et al., 2011b), even though she also recognises that many young people with civil servant fathers aspire to become civil servants themselves (Nilan, 2008: 10). However, among the majority of the young people that I studied, being a civil servant – commonly known as PNS (*Pegawai Negeri Sipil*) – is the kind of work that young

---

\(^7\) Quoted from Pam Nilan’s comment during my presentation in the “Growing up in Indonesia: Experience and Diversity in Youth Transitions” Conference, Canberra, Australia (29-31 October 2009).
people find meaningful, no matter what family background they come from. This career aspiration is chosen regardless of whether it suits their personality or even matches their educational background, as stated by a young man during the early period of my fieldwork. When I met him, I explained that I was trying to understand what kind of jobs young people in Pontianak are interested in after graduating from university. He replied, “You don’t need a year (to carry out a research to answer that question)! Everybody here knows that everybody wants to be a PNS.”

The small survey that I carried out among Pontianak youth (N=369), supports the above statement. The majority of young people in my small survey said that they aspired to a job in the civil service. Tables 5 and 6 show the work aspirations of young people in Pontianak by gender and ethnicity.

71 An interview with the mayor of Pontianak, Sutarmidji and a staff at the Pontianak Regional Staff Bureau (Badan Kepegawaian Daerah Pontianak) seems to confirm that young people aspire to becoming a PNS without considering whether their educational background is suited to the position offered. In the past couple of years, fresh university graduates have tended to dumb down their educational level to apply for positions offered for high school graduates. This has caused various problems within the system, because these applicants are often dissatisfied with their job once they are hired as a PNS. This practice is said to no longer exist, as starting 2008 the government no longer offers positions to high school graduates. The interviews with the mayor and the Regional Staff Bureau were done separately, but they both referred to the case of ‘English teachers’. At the time of interview, temporary school teachers, mostly still in their 20s and 30s, were pushing the government to accept them as PNS teachers. They come from various educational backgrounds, but have all been teaching English in those schools as temporary teachers (guru honor). The government is reluctant to comply with these demands, as it insists on there being consistency between the positions offered and the applicant’s educational background.

72 For this question, the option ‘other’ was followed by a blank space where respondents were asked to specify their answer. Nineteen (19) respondents chose ‘other’, and their answers included programmer, systems analyst, and graphic designer. These answers were then re-coded and included in the option ‘worker in private company’. Nine respondents, however, did not specify their answers, so their answers were not re-coded.
### Table 6 Primary work aspiration by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PNS</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker in private company</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100)%</td>
<td>(100)%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 6 and 7 show that 61 per cent of all young men and an even higher proportion of all young women (82 per cent), and the great majority of young people in all ethnic groups except the Chinese, aspire to becoming a PNS as their first preference. The gender difference may be due to the low number of Chinese young women that were included in the survey sample (13 young women as opposed to 43 young men). If a more balanced number of women in the Chinese sample were attained, the gap between young men and young women who aspire to become a PNS may not be that high. Although it is true that the majority
of all groups, except Chinese, aspire to become a PNS, the per centages are considerably higher among Malay (87 per cent) and Javanese (85 per cent) than among Madurese (79 per cent) and (the least) Dayak (68 per cent). The numbers give the impression that the Madurese and the Dayak were not as interested in becoming a PNS as the Malay and the Javanese were. Yet, further interviews with some of the Dayak and Madurese respondents of the survey revealed that there was a difference between their true work aspiration and the work aspiration expressed in the survey. The work aspiration expressed in the survey was work they assumed within their reach. Thus, there may actually be a higher number of Dayak and Madurese who aspire to become a PNS, were the work aspiration expressed in the survey parallel to their true work aspiration. In the latter section, I will further explain the work aspirations of the Chinese and why theirs differ from those of the other ethnic groups in Pontianak, despite the fact that they define meaningful work in the same way. Thus, the young people that I refer to in the first section of this chapter are non-Chinese youth (Malay, Dayak and Madurese).

73 Becoming a PNS is sometimes considered an out of reach dream for some Dayak youth who are unable to provide bribery to enter the bureaucracy. The relatively low network of Madurese in the bureaucracy is also assumed to lower the chances of Madurese youth to become a PNS. I have explained this in Chapter 2.
My in-depth interviews with 106 young people show that most young people in Pontianak feel sure about wanting to become a PNS, but rarely mention what specific branch of the civil service they want to be in. Some have not thought about it, and some just do not care. Their sole main goal is to enter the civil service. The following section will try to explain why this is so.

74 Column totals may not add to exactly 100 due to rounding of decimals.
Material Benefits: Stability, Opportunity, and Security

Material benefits are often the first answer that comes to mind when young people are asked why they want to become a PNS in the future. First of all, becoming a PNS means that there is a guarantee of income stability. Regular monthly income is considered an important aspect of creating stability in a person’s life, as stated by Bani. Bani currently works on construction projects, but has always wanted to become a PNS.

A PNS is (about) having a clear (future), you feel settled, your life is guaranteed. Not like in (construction) projects, (you earn money) when there is a project, if not, well...(People) like us want income every month, for next year, and the next, and so on into the future. (Bani, 30, a Malay man)

The idea of the income stability provided by civil service jobs often outweighs the reality of the absolute monthly income. Some of the young people admitted that PNS salaries are not very high, and the low salaries of PNS are regularly ridiculed in local media. For instance, in an edition of Berkat, a story starts with two PNS who meet at a coffee stall. One of them starts the conversation by asking how his friend is doing. His PNS friend answers, “You ask how I am doing? It’s like you’ve just met me. Every day we go to this coffee stall and you still ask how I’m doing? This is how life has always been for us PNS. I only have money on the first (of the month). Even that doesn’t stay around for long, cut for loan repayments…”. The first PNS then replies, “You and I share the same fate. My salary is always cut for loan repayments, too. It gives me a headache…even salary increase can’t solve the life problems we low-level PNS have” (Berkat, 31 March 2009a).
Even though young people recognise that they would get a low salary working as a PNS, they know that the job provides the opportunity to earn money on the side\textsuperscript{75} and gives them access to credit schemes (in addition to their monthly income). This is also one of the reasons why becoming a PNS is important for these young people. Being a PNS in itself is seen as guaranteeing access to these credit schemes since credit schemes are usually only available to those who have a steady income. This was expressed by Lian.

First, a PNS job is guaranteed. The (official) salary is not high, but you can get money on the side. Sometimes even more than your (official) salary. Second, you get (access) to credit. You can get a motorcycle; (you) know how important a motorcycle is to get to places here. That is why people are competing to enter the PNS. (Lian, 27, a Malay man)

Though Lian’s interest in credit only goes as far as getting a motorcycle on credit, being a PNS also means a person has access to other types of credit schemes that involve more money. A house mortgage scheme is one of them. The importance of house ownership for a PNS was acknowledged by the mayor of Pontianak, resulting in a policy in March 2009 stating that the city would no longer consider loan applications from PNS that required repayments exceeding more than 40 per cent of their monthly salary – except in the case of mortgages (Berkat, 31 March 2009b).

\textsuperscript{75} Money on the side includes bonuses or gifts from clients, which usually involves money changing hands (bribes) for administrative services provided by a PNS. It can also take the form of bonuses and commissions from institutions that secure government projects with the help of the PNS, as briefly explained in Chapter 2.
Pensions are another material benefit that guarantee lifetime security. Since Indonesia is not a welfare state, having a civil service pension ensures life-long security, which young people feel they need for their future. Even though the pension received is very small, it is still better than nothing. Tina is a daughter of a deceased police officer. She feels that her father’s pension has really provided as a safety net for the family.

A PNS, even though their income is small, (and) they live modestly, at least they have a future. During bad times or good, you still get money. If you’re a businessman, you get millions of rupiahs, but you don’t know (what) the future (holds).... (If you’re) a PNS, even though you’re retired, at least you have money for your children to eat. For example, my deceased father, even though he has passed away, I still enjoy the benefits (from his pension). I want that for my children, I want to become a PNS. (Tina, 24, a Dayak woman)

Civil service pensions also function as a buffer against stigmatisation in old age. A Madurese young woman mentions that a PNS pension is crucial for safeguarding herself in old age and cannot see herself living in an old people’s home (panti jompo) in the future.

If I cannot get a job in the civil service (therefore, receiving no pension), or if I can no longer work, who will take care of me? I would probably live in an old people’s home, but I don’t want that. People will pity me; I don’t want that. (Wati, 28, a Madurese woman)

---

76 Pensions of a deceased PNS still go to the widow or widower.
77 She is referring to free retirement homes subsidised by the Ministry of Social Affairs
Status in Society

All three aspects of the PNS job that ensure stability (through regular income), opportunity (through side money and credit schemes), and security (through pension schemes) make the civil service jobs attractive to young people in Pontianak, particularly in comparison to other job sectors in Pontianak. But another added value of becoming a PNS is related to status. This was mentioned by Aas.

The motivation to join the PNS is to acquire a position or social status. (Aas, 26, a Malay man)

In my small survey, many young men and young women emphasised the importance of societal recognition of their job, especially from their parents and from society in general. For those who chose working in the civil service as their first work aspiration (N=259), parents were the most significant source of recognition, followed by society. The extended family is also an important source of recognition, though less so than parents and society. However, in the last column of Table 7, which presents the total responses for a specific source of recognition, 244 responses mention parents and 229 responses mention extended family as their top three main source of recognition (compared to only 152 responses mentioning ‘society’). Thus, becoming a PNS is often about fulfilling the need for social recognition that will enhance one’s social status, without rendering the family unimportant.
Table 8 Source of recognition of aspired PNS jobs by priority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of recognition</th>
<th>First Priority</th>
<th>Second Priority</th>
<th>Third Priority</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Family</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future husband/wife</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future husband/wife’s family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>259</strong></td>
<td><strong>259</strong></td>
<td><strong>259</strong></td>
<td><strong>777</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access to state facilities is a common indicator of the social status acquired from working in the civil service. State facilities in this case include the privilege of wearing a PNS uniform. In everyday life, the status of a PNS is displayed in public via the uniform. The significance of the PNS uniform is so engrained in the lives of Pontianak society, that it has generated a debate on who is entitled to wear the uniform (Berkat, 27 March 2009).

This debate was sparked by the fact that temporary workers (tenaga honor) in government offices are wearing PNS uniforms, even though they have not yet ‘entered the system’. It has always been taken for granted that even temporary workers were entitled to wear a

---

78 Respondents were asked to rank the source of recognition towards their aspired job. Only the responses that show the three main priority sources of recognition are presented in this table (from the responses of six sources of recognition listed in the questionnaire).
uniform, until the mayor recently regulated the use of the uniform. This was expressed by Lia when I showed her the mayor’s new policy limiting the wearing of the uniform to permanent PNS only.

I often meet my friend, riding her motorcycle when I am on my way (home). I have always thought it was all right. She is a temporary worker (tenaga honor), but she wears the brown uniform. Yes, really, she wears a uniform. Maybe (the policy) is still new. That is why (she is in uniform), even though she is actually not allowed to (wear the uniform) yet. (Lia, 24, a Malay woman)

I asked her what she thought was so important about the uniform that it became a debate in the local media. At the time, we were having lunch at a small canteen, in front of a government office. She asked me to look around,

Look around, see those PNS in that corner? Many of the PNS come here to eat. We feel, I don’t know, (gimana gitu – indicating reluctance) when we see them. They are so confident, and proud in their uniforms. They know everyone knows they are civil servants. (Lia, 24, a Malay woman)

From the above description it is obvious that a uniform has an effect on those wearing it and those who see it. Uniforms are considered one of the bases of power for those who wear the uniform, expecting a form of compliance from others (Bickman, 1974), especially those who are not entitled to wear that uniform. The importance of the uniform in creating social power over others has made the uniform ‘sacred’ and valuable. As
entitlement to wear this uniform is becoming even more limited by the state, its value is perhaps increased. Following this logic, jobs in the civil service (with the uniform) are now even more desirable.

Another type of state facility that civil servants enjoy when holding a particular position is access to motorcycles, cars, or houses. Unlike the uniform which can be worn by all PNS, these state facilities are not available to all PNS. The more valuable the object a PNS has access to, the higher the rank of the PNS is assumed to be. Because these objects indirectly show one’s position within the civil service, it is also a source of prestige in society. This was mentioned by Dino, who wanted to be the head of a local government office one day. He not only wants to get a job in the civil service, but aspires to attaining a certain position within the civil service that would give him access to state facilities.

I want to be the head of a district government office (Kepala Dinas). They have (access to office) cars, sometimes civil service housing. People know (what your position is) if you live in civil service housing. I think that is achievable. If (a person obtains an) S1, he will enter the service at level IIIa. It is easier to climb up (the career ladder) from there. (Dino, 21, a Malay man)

Having a house or car is also considered a source of prestige that young people assume they can obtain by being employed in the civil service. Rather than merely being interested in having access to civil service housing or an office car that show off their rank within the civil service,
they stress the importance of a job in the civil service enabling them to buy and show off a ‘proper’ house⁷⁹.

For us, success is...success is about achievement, (having) material things...a house, a car, or a new car. People will judge us, people are considered successful if they have those things (a house and a car). Usually it is those in the civil service that are able to afford them. I don’t know what they have to do (to get the money to buy those things), I don’t know. But that is how people see success, from large (conspicuous) material wealth. With a car, you can also display (your success in public) more (than you can with a house). (Lany, 24, a Dayak woman)

Lany’s statement also shows that even though ownership of a house is significant in young people’s perception of success, a car is more displayable in public. Thus, the car serves the same function of bringing social prestige, but in a different way. A car is more mobile than a house, allowing a person to show off his/her financial success in public places.

**Family’s Social Expectations**

The above description explains how civil service jobs are seen to provide present and future security and upward mobility, and how they offer symbolic power in society. The security and symbolic power offered by a

---

⁷⁹ In Pontianak, a proper house is usually seen as a house with brick walls (rather than the commonly used concrete blocks or wood) and a tile (rather than wood) floor. This image is a very Java-centric view of what a proper house is supposed to be, and in many cases unsuited to the unstable peat land that Pontianak has. Having a brick house and a tiled floor means that one has to put in more money to lay a solid foundation, and this adds to the impression that it is an expensive house to make.
civil service job means being able to fulfil the family’s social expectations, which for many is the key to achieving adult status.

Regular Financial Assistance to Parents

Among Pontianak youth, being able to provide regular financial assistance to their parents is a question of responsibility in achieving adulthood. Arnett (1998) claims that in the Western world, responsibility often refers to being responsible for oneself. Similar to youth in India (Seiter, 2009), China (Nelson, et al. 2007) and Bolivia (Punch, 2002: 23), Pontianak youth feel that their responsibilities go beyond that. Adulthood is achieved when responsibility extends to include others – especially parents and the family.

Young people also note that financial responsibility (especially when it is sustainable and regular) can also enhance their bargaining power within the family.

I have more say in decision making in the family if I can support the family each month. (Hendar, 22, a Malay man)

Parents’ idealisation of civil service jobs is most common among people who have experienced the insecurities of life outside the civil service, as described by Ibu El. Her eldest daughter has just graduated from university and is looking for work. She has other children who are still studying in university. She told me,

I think about (what) my children (will do) when they have finished, finished university. But if she (my daughter) becomes a civil servant, then she has
achieved the height of success (*sukses penuh*, literally full success)...I think in the past, civil servants already had high (status). They can ensure a stable income for their families, not only for their wife and children, but also for their parents. That is why (I expect) my children to become civil servants. (*Ibu* El, 50, a Malay woman)

*Ibu* El then added that her father was an employee in a private company. When she was in junior high school, her father was fired and her family were left penniless. For her, it was a traumatic experience, the fall from being a well-to-do family to a family that had to struggle against poverty. That is why she views the civil service jobs in a positive light. Her father’s experience has made her emphasise the importance of stability that she feels she could have got if her father had worked as a civil servant.

**Mortgages**

In the previous section, I have shown how a house serves as a basic need and also as a symbol of social status which a job in the civil service is assumed to confer. In addition, having a house is also considered the start of a new mode of relationship with one’s parents. According to these young people, ownership of a house (usually after marriage) symbolises one of the often mentioned indicators of adulthood – being independent. Since these youth are from lower middle class families, most will not inherit a house. Therefore, if ownership of a house is ever accomplished, it most probably will be from their own income. This is why mortgage schemes are crucial in the making of an adult identity, since it gives a feeling of independence from parents. Even so, ambivalent attitudes are often expressed with regard to this matter, as
stated by Awan. He seems to idealise having an independent house when he is married, yet also states that temporarily living with parents after being married does not make a married couple less of an adult.

(Living with their parents) does not mean that they (married couples) are less of an adult (than those who live independently)....It may be that they need to share for the time being because people start (a new life) from zero, so they live with their parents first while they save money to build a house. But a PNS can get a mortgage to buy a house. They don’t have to wait too long (to save money for a house). A PNS can become an independent (adult) sooner. (Awan, 24, a Malay man)

Aside from symbolising financial independence from one’s parents, a house is also believed to facilitate independent decision-making and thus, less parental control.

If you are away from your parents, you become an adult faster, because when you are with your parents, it is ‘Mum! Mum!’ ‘Dad! Dad! all the time. ‘Dad, mum I can’t do this, I can’t do that’. When you’re alone, like you are when you have your own place, you have to try (to solve your own problems). (Mimi, 25, a Dayak woman)

Pension and Safeguarding the Family’s Future

Aside from being able to provide regular financial assistance to the family, another indicator of adult identity is having responsibility for the long-term future. In this case, the concept of the family embraces not
only the ‘present family’ but also the ‘future family’. This is why pensions are crucial in the formation of adult identity. By envisioning having the capacity to safeguard one’s future family, some of the young people feel that they will be confident enough to move on and think about marriage once they enter the civil service.

I also tried to see whether pension was a significant factor motivating parents to encourage their children to enter the civil service. While it is not surprising that young people themselves see a pension as important for safeguarding their own future, parents are most likely not motivated by self-interest when encouraging their children to enter the civil service and get a pension. I met an old Malay man who is a retired PNS teacher with three grown children, all three are in civil service jobs. Pak Alip asked me where I worked. When I was doing my fieldwork, I was working as a lecturer at a private university, and he immediately asked,

Then you are not a PNS? Then you don’t get a pension, right? I have two daughters in the civil service, and my son is also in the civil service. I am a lucky man, I know that my grandchildren will be secure. That is why (a pension is important). (Pak Alip, 65, a Malay man)

So for parents, knowing that their children will be able to secure their grandchildren’s future is reason enough for them to encourage their children to enter government service.

*Raising Family Status through the Uniform*

I have mentioned above that the PNS uniform brings status to those who wear it. However, the ‘power’ of the uniform is not limited to the individual. In societies such as Pontianak, where an individual’s success
and power also extends to the family, a family member wearing the uniform means that he is providing a basis of social power to the whole family.

If you wear a uniform, the whole family will be proud. Other people will know that someone (in the family) is a PNS...they know that we can perhaps help with this and that, like giving information and stuff. Like I was offered a civil service job by another PNS. People know, that a PNS can do all that. (Arjan, 20, a Madurese man)

Arjan’s story shows that the uniform symbolises the power one has to access limited state resources – in this case, access to help jobseekers get into the civil service. Even a low-ranking civil servant has the power to negotiate a place in the civil service recruitment process, provided that he/she has developed good relationships with a high-ranking bureaucrat who can influence the recruitment process. A network of middlemen usually offers this service.\(^{80}\)

Since informal negotiation of access to these state resources often runs through family members (not necessarily the PNS him/herself), other family members related to the PNS also feel that they can also exert a certain amount of power over others. This was mentioned by Wawan who graduated from the Faculty of Forestry in 2008.

If I am a PNS, in the eyes of society, I have standing. If I am not a PNS, then I have less standing, unless I am really successful (at what I do). My family will also have

\(^{80}\) An example of how this works has already been described in Chapter 2.
status, because here if you are successful, your family is also (successful) in society. And people notice that when you wear the uniform. (Wawan, 30, a Malay man)

**Ethnicity and Meaningful Work**

This section will focus on Chinese youth, who do not necessarily associate meaningful work with civil service employment. Their job aspirations are shaped not merely by personal preference, but the opportunities that are open to them. Siahaan (1974: 41-43) shows that in 65 years (1905-1970), there was a remarkable increase in the Chinese population in West Kalimantan. However, until the 1970s, most Chinese in West Kalimantan remained foreign citizens. The New Order’s discrimination of the Chinese resulted, among others, in a costly bureaucratic process of naturalisation which many poor Chinese could not afford. This, coupled with their attachment to cultural ties, deterred them from taking citizenship. As a consequence, they have always had to find ways to survive outside the state’s domain. Thus, trade became an important source of livelihood among the Chinese, as accessing work in the trade sector is not subject to the same degree of state control as jobs in the bureaucracy are. This history has influenced how young Chinese choose what they would like to do. First, Chinese seem to be sceptical about their chances of entering the civil service. How Vanka, who comes from a small village, feels about becoming a PNS illustrates this scepticism.

I heard that if you want to apply for a job in the civil service, only local (indigenous) people (*putera daerah*) will be considered. Non-indigenous people (*non-*)
Meaningful work for Chinese young people is about earning a decent income in the private sector and being able to construct their own pension schemes. Private pension schemes are believed to provide higher benefits than the civil service pension scheme. A Chinese young woman explains,

Among the Chinese, the kind of work that parents are proud of is trade. Very few Chinese parents demand that their children become civil servants. There is an assumption that there is a time limit to being a PNS, but if you are involved in trade, no matter how old you are, you are still allowed to run your business. Chinese parents also say that if you are a PNS you cannot work (when you reach the statutory retirement age). If you are a PNS you get a salary of only 1 million rupiahs; it is better to trade, because when we are old, we never know what illness we will have. And with only one million, what will we eat? (Dylna, 19, a Chinese woman)
The importance of self-reliance often means that parents place less pressure on Chinese young people to support them financially. Most Chinese youth emphasise the importance of giving financial support to parents, but only when their work earns them enough income to be self-sufficient.

Recent social and political reforms, however, have opened up more space for the Chinese to fully exercise their rights as citizens (Berkat, 2 February 2009), including to enter the civil service. The opportunity to obtain citizenship may partly explain why not all Chinese youth reject the idea of becoming a PNS, though a job in the civil service is just one of several jobs that young Chinese people aspire to. Hutomo (25) is a Chinese young man from the district of Singkawang who is now a PNS. He is actually the only Chinese civil servant I met during my research. For him, it just so happened that out of all the job applications he sent out, this one passed muster, and was for a position that matched his educational background. Unlike many non-Chinese youth, who would take any position in the civil service regardless of whether it matched their educational background, Chinese people tend to think the contrary. Ipin, who is currently studying information technology, says that a match between his educational background and the job is a must if he were to apply for a position in the civil service.

If there is an opening for a civil service position that matches my major, I will then apply to become a civil servant. But my intention of becoming a PNS is only 20%. For the most part (80%), I want to have my own business or work in a private company, but in a high position (if I choose to work for a private company). (Ipin 20, a Chinese man)
Playful Work

The previous section has elaborated the reasons why young people aspire to a particular kind of work, especially to work in the civil service. Work aspirations are shaped by what work they (and their family) consider meaningful work, within the (ethnic) opportunity structure, rather than by their own personal identity. In this section, I focus on young people who have graduated from tertiary education who choose to engage in what they view as playful work. What I mean by playful work is work that offers them freedom, pleasure, and fun. The youth described in this section are those who enjoy their involvement in work domains outside the civil service.

Business and Pleasure

Sometimes young people in Pontianak have their own small businesses, most linked to youth cultures that develop in an urban context, such as the fashion business. In Pontianak, Muslim gear for women is one business sector that is quite attractive for young women like Ipur. While at university, she started doing business selling women’s accessories such as brooches, barrettes, socks, and headscarves. With the help of her former lecturers and her networks in a religious group that she is involved in, she managed to open a shop selling Muslim gear near campus. I asked her what it was about this business that she enjoys most. She replied that she enjoys being able to provide fashion advice to her customers, especially youngsters who are always keen on keeping up with the latest fashions. When I bought a piece of clothing from her shop, I could sense that Ipur was indeed fashion-savvy, patient, and
attentive to her customer’s needs and tastes. She guided me through several pieces of clothing, describing in detail their positive and negative aspects, relative to my fashion preferences.

Young men also see fashion as a potential business opportunity that also develops their interests. According to Hendra, young men today like to go to distro, a term that usually refers to a fashion outlet for young men and women. However, most young people in Pontianak define distro as fashion boutiques for men, perhaps because most shops selling young men’s fashion explicitly use this term. Distro is definitely a growing business in Pontianak, with most importing their clothing lines and accessories from Bandung (Berkat, 14 October, 2008). Some of Hendra’s male peers have their own distro, while others work in one. Despite the potential business opportunity a distro provides, Hendra was more interested in opening an internet café because he wants to provide a space for him to hang out with his friends. His parents have supported him in the setting up of his internet café by providing the capital and buying the building where it is located. So far, he is happy with his business. Aside from providing a place to hang out while running a business, the financial gains that he gets from the business also enable him to buy ‘luxuries’ from these distro that his parents are not willing to pay for.

(I decided to open an internet café) because it is important to hang out, to talk to other people, forget our stress. (When I hang out with friends), no campus topics are talked about. So opening this internet café provides a space to hang out, and because this is an internet café, the topic of discussion is (online) gaming. We also sell drinks here, juice or alcohol, but only so people stay longer and chat with friends. Sometimes I
give (the drinks) for free, but usually they pay (for them). (Hendra, 22, a Chinese man).

Being involved in business does not have to mean working in a tangible market, but may take the form of MLM (Multi Level Marketing) business. MLM is a system where the selling of products and service is distributed along a network of distributors. The recruitment of new distributors (called downliners), will earn the recruiter a share of the income generated by these new members. Thus, without actually having to work, a recruiter with several levels of downliners may manage to earn a significant income.

Many young people in Pontianak are involved in this business, some since they were in university. For example, Any is a young woman who is involved in an MLM business located in China. She joined the group when she came back to Pontianak after graduating from a university in Java. Even though her parents were insistent on her entering the civil service, she was more interested in getting involved in an MLM business. She admitted that she once tried out for a job in the civil service just to keep her parents happy. She succeeded in getting a position in one of the offices, but she decided not to take up the job. One of the main reasons why she decided to work in MLM and has been able to maintain her involvement in the business is that she feels that the MLM business provides space for playful work; meaning that she is able to spend time with her boyfriend, who is also in the MLM business. Their shared interest in this business has helped them develop a better relationship with one another. She admitted that she once quit the MLM business, but then decided to join up again because she realised that she could spend more time with him if she worked in MLM. They spend
time together, for instance, searching for new downliners, giving presentations, and discussing books on business and popular psychology that enhance their performance in this business.

Aside from that, she wants to have money to maintain her fashionable look. She compares her childhood experience of being the daughter of a PNS and finding that her father’s income was just enough to get by. She wants to have more than ‘just enough’. From the income that she obtains from her MLM business, Any is able to dress sophisticatedly for a young woman. When I met her, she was wearing a formal suit, consisting of matching blazer and trousers. She also had a nice pair of high-heeled shoes. I made a remark about how good she looked, and she laughed and replied,

There is a lot of money (to be made). I can afford nice clothing, like this. There is not really a specific dress code, or uniform (like in the civil service). I just have to dress smartly (because) I deal with people. (Through MLM), some people have even managed to buy a Mercedes, a vacation on a cruise ship, or a luxury villa. But for now, (the ability to buy nice) clothing and the freedom to wear what I like is enough for me ha ha ha (laughs). (Any, 23, a Dayak woman)

Seeking Freedom through Arts

Another alternative work domain that often attracts young people, but is looked down upon by adults, is the arts. Young people involved in the arts usually consider it a job for life, while parents often think of it as a hobby. Parents expect that one day their children will find a ‘real job’. Liana, for example, is a young woman who takes her work as a dancer
seriously. Liana has always loved dancing since she was in elementary school. Dancing began as an activity to pass the time in between studying. It was only after doing regular dance performances, that she felt that she had been ‘freed’ from the mainstream constructions of what work is supposed to be. She became passionate about her dancing, and is trying to enjoy it as much as she can. She has tried to deal with the conflict with her parents about her decision to become a dancer by prolonging her study in university. She is buying time to convince her parents of her career choice.

I was unemployed for a year after high school…that was when I really got to know the world of art. I’ve always loved arts, especially dancing. But I had thought of it as a hobby and not real work. Now it is different. (Even though) people may think it is not work, I think differently. My uncle says all I do is dance, dance, dance. But here I have friends who think the same way (I do), that dancing is liberating. (Liana, 24, a Dayak woman)

Awan is also involved in creative arts. Awan told me that he holds down two jobs: as a temporary lecturer in a private university and as an artist. He considers being an artist his main job and lecturing as a sideline. This is unusual for a young person to place his work in the informal sector above his job in the formal one. He is currently making Dayak musical instruments (sape) and Dayak carvings. For him, this is more important than his job as a lecturer. If he had to choose between his work as a lecturer and arts, he is confident that he would choose the latter. He explains that he had been invited to become a permanent lecturer, but he turned the offer down. His art work is much more inspiring and
emotionally satisfying. He graduated from an arts institute in Yogyakarta, majoring in wood craft.

Like most parents in Pontianak, Awan’s parents have encouraged him to enter the civil service. He applied last year, just to satisfy his parents. However, he was not accepted, and was actually glad that he did not make it. His parents think that he has always been ‘playing around’ and not taking life seriously. He admits that he gets enjoyment from his work and that he has more time to hang out with his peers because of his flexible working schedule. However, he emphasised that he is not playing around with his work. He does not know what will become of him in the future, but he knows that he is happy doing what he is doing.

To be honest, I am still exploring where I will go (with my work). When I’m bored, I can just hang out with my friends. But I am serious about this. If I were not serious (about my work with the Dayak culture), I would have stayed in Jogja. Jogja is the centre for arts education, and I could easily hold an art exhibition there. It is so easy (to do that in Jogja). I could become popular or whatever. But I cannot abandon my (calling) to develop my ethnic group’s arts and culture. So I am also making sacrifices. How could that just be playing around? (Awan, 30, a Dayak man)

**Writing and Romance**

Pri is another young man who rejects the idea of being a civil servant as the ultimate career ambition, despite his mother encouraging him to do so. He went to a university in Yogyakarta and dropped out in his sixth semester because he was too busy participating in theatre
performances. He now identifies himself as an ‘independent travel writer’. Most of his work is based on his travel experiences, especially in remote areas of West Kalimantan. His passion for both travel and writing has strengthened his intention to focus on expanding his career as a writer.

Like every parent here, my mother wants me to enter the civil service. (But) I am not a person who wants to apply for (office) jobs. I don’t know what else to do, but write…(Pri, 27, a Malay man)

As a writer, he crosses paths with all kinds of people, but his influential network seems to consist of journalists and NGO workers. Being able to connect with a variety of people is also a source of esteem and status that comes with his work. What he seems to enjoy most about having this network is being able to form short-term romantic relationships with young foreign women, traveling to the countries where they live and then writing books about his travel experience. While I was conducting my fieldwork, he was going out with Stacy, a young Canadian woman. When she was transferred to another country, the relationship ended. A couple of months later, he was involved with a young woman from Eastern Europe who invited him to come to her country. He stayed there for a couple of months (supported by his girlfriend), wrote his book, and then the relationship ended. He re-lived the same story with a young woman from Western Europe, wrote another book, and terminated the relationship.81

81 While this may seem like ‘playful work’ for Pri, it is also a rather extreme example of the instrumental dimension of sexual/romantic relationships, a topic that I will discuss in the next chapter.
Youth Cultures of Waiting: Making Work Meaningful and Finding Meaningful Work

I have described how young people grow up through finding meaningful work, and also how they construct their identity of being young by expressing the pleasures they find in the alternative work domain they are involved in. This section will go a step further by showing how young people understand themselves as being in both processes. Young people who are ‘waiting for (meaningful) work’ also construct an image of their work as playful work. Even so, unlike the young people described in the previous section, they do not really find pleasure in their line of work they have chosen. As these young people ‘in waiting’ are expecting to find other forms of work, they try to re-construct what meaningful work means in relation to the alternative work domains that they are currently involved in. Because they are well aware of their inability to fulfilling family expectations through their current job (because of the low social status attached to it, its temporary nature, and sometimes the low earnings), they try to emphasise the playful side of their work. At the same time, they are actively searching for networks to access work their parents find meaningful and to get ahead in their line of work.

Working at the Mall

Favourable alternative work options outside the civil service usually involve formal work sectors, including those under private management. These formal work sectors are assumed to offer more job security and status than work in the informal sector. One of the formal
private work domains that are accessible and attractive to young people in Pontianak is working at the Mega Mall. Young people see working at the mall as working in a place that is glamorous, chic, and modern.

Working at the mall makes you proud, it is a trendy place and not everyone gets to work here. The building is modern and grand. You also see a lot of young people, so you can also *cuci mata* (literally ‘wash your eyes’, meaning entertain yourself watching the people go by). (Yuli, 24, a Malay woman)

It is also a place where young people are free to see and be seen by others. Dressing up is more acceptable when people are working at the mall. For some young women, including the Malays who do not wear a headscarf on a daily basis, the mall uniform is considered liberating rather than constraining. The dress code justifies their desire to look pretty, not only by wearing relatively tight clothes and short skirts, but also by using make up. Izza, for instance, started working in the mall when she was in her last semesters of university. When I met her, she was applying for a job as a sales promotion girl at a cosmetic counter in the mall while also working as a sales promotion girl for a mobile phone company in Pontianak. She had just been rejected in the last round of civil service recruitment. So, she wanted to go back to working in the mall, which she feels is more prestigious. She also wants to work on the cosmetic counter, because it will give her more of a reason to put on make-up and look pretty.

We work with people our age a lot and we get to look pretty with make-up and all. We don’t get to look pretty (in daily life), putting on that much make-up. (It
Izza used to work at a restaurant at one of the malls in Pontianak. This restaurant serves ‘Western’ food, such as pizza, pasta, and chicken wings. For many young people in Pontianak, tasting different kinds of food (especially Western ones) is a privilege that not all young people get. Since these restaurants usually allow their workers to have a taste of the food they serve, Izza was excited to have got a job at this restaurant. She confirmed that she was allowed to try some of the food the restaurant serves. She explained that they were allowed to take chicken wings during meal breaks (all they could eat). However, she said that she had quit the job at the restaurant after working there for a year, and thinks that it is time to start another job. At first she said that the reason she left was that she was a bit disappointed because the job was exhausting and she felt that her position as a waitress did not allow her to be ‘pretty’. However, it turns out that her main reason for quitting was the rule in that restaurant that allowed its workers restaurant to eat only chicken wings, but not other items from the menu. She says that she really wanted to be able to have the pizza, not only the chicken wings. For young people like Izza, having access to certain foods and not others might be perceived as unfair treatment by the employers. This was reason enough for her to quit the job.
Figure 6 Working and looking pretty at the mall

We were only allowed to eat certain items. Sometimes we wanted other things from the menu so badly that we secretly stole (the food we wanted), ha ha ha (laughs)....See we are only allowed to eat the chicken wings, but not the pizza or other ‘Western’ food. (Izza, 24, a Malay woman)
Like many other young women in Pontianak, changing jobs at the mall might be easier for Izza than it is for young men. The global expansion of the service sector has affected the structure of labour markets in various parts of the world, resulting in the feminisation of work (McDowell, 2001: 449). The same phenomenon is happening in Pontianak, and also in other provincial towns in Indonesia such as in Cilegon, Western Java (Naafs, 2012b). Sometimes the idea of jobs in the service sector as being too feminine has resulted in reluctance among young men to enter these types of jobs, frightened that it would have impact on their masculinity (McDowell, 2001). However, this is not so among young men in Pontianak. A young man I interviewed, Udi, stated that young men are as open to working in the mall as young women are. At the same time, he also recognises that young women have a better chance of securing a job at the mall than young men do. He has tried several times for a job as a technician at the mall, but has always been rejected. In contrast, many of his female friends have managed to get a job at the mall.

Despite young men’s view that it is easier for young women to become workers at the mall, the opportunity that young women have to stay on as workers in the mall is quite limited. Age (the maximum limit is 25), marriage, and pregnancy all limit young women’s chances of securing a long-term contract at the mall. Ami, for instance, is a sales promotion girl for a shoe business at the mall. She has a regular six-month contract that is extended after each contract has expired. However, entering her fourth year, she has not got a new contract. She feels insecure, as she has been waiting for two months for an extension of her contract. Ami’s anxiety about her contract has led her to now
think about trying to get a permanent job, even though she feels that she is still eligible to ask for an extension of the contract.

I am actually frightened that (without a proper contract) I will suddenly get laid off. I actually want to extend my contract, but when I asked, there was no answer. Maybe it’s because I am getting older. When a woman is 24, usually her contract ends. Also (when they) get married. But I am not 24 yet. I don’t know. (Ami, 22, a Malay woman)

Ikut Orang in Informal Work

During my fieldwork, several elections were held at the district level. I noticed that many young people (especially young men), were involved in these political campaigns, including Anto. Anto had recently graduated from a university in Yogyakarta and immediately applied for a position as a PNS in the district of Kubu Raya. He was greatly disappointed when he did not get the position. He then decided to join a political party, which was in the process of campaigning for one of its members to become the head of district in the area. He was asked to join by Rai – an old neighbour who is only a couple of years older than Anto. Anto explained that they had known each other since they were children and that they were quite close childhood friends. When Rai knew that Anto had come back to Pontianak, he asked permission from his own superior in the political party, Pak Dar, to involve Anto in their activities. Pak Dar agreed, on the condition that Rai would ‘supervise’ Anto and make sure that Anto ‘got what he needed’. This means that Rai would take care of all costs incurred during the political activities –
meals, transportation, payments, getting him around to meet people, etc. Anto was quite happy being involved in politics.

This (involvement in politics) is for experience. I get to meet new people, eat for free...like in seafood restaurants which are too expensive for me ha ha ha (laughs). I also get to hang out with old friends like Rai and stay out until really late at night (since political parties usually have meetings or visits to constituents past midnight). It’s better than being unemployed...but I wouldn’t join in if Rai wasn’t there. (I would) probably stay at home and watch TV. (Anto, 27, a Malay man)

Anto’s case shows that he sees his work as an opportunity to engage in ‘playful’ activities after failing to be accepted into the civil service. Like Izza (the young woman working at the mall), joining the political party for Anto is about having access to meals he could otherwise not afford and engaging in youthful activities. These youthful and fun activities include hanging out with old friends and not having to obey his parent’s curfew, because his late working hours are supposedly a part of his ‘job’.

Anto’s participation in the political party started with a process that is locally known as the *ikut orang* system, *ikut-ikut* or *bantu-bantu* (literally, following or helping someone in a higher position). *Ikut orang* is a system in which people access pathways to social mobility through networks that provide the opportunity to do so. These networks are usually familial, but may also be regional, ethnic or religious. Young people often view jobs attained through the *ikut orang* system as a
training process before getting a ‘real job’ in the future. Jobs attained through this system are quite a popular option for those who are not able to enter the civil service or any other relatively permanent jobs.

The *ikut orang* system is applied in various domains, including education (Minza, 2012) and work, as in the case above. It also includes both intra and intergenerational relations. There are no formal contracts and agreements, so the working relationship is usually based on trust. Usually the *ikut orang* system involves an adult (having a higher position) recruiting a young person to work for him/her. Other times, young people also help an adult recruit their peers (as in Anto’s case above). In these cases, the hierarchy of the relationship becomes layered. The friend who provides access will not have much power, but nonetheless, does exert some kind of control over the new ‘employee’. Peers are influential in the *ikut orang* system because they often provide information and access to the jobs that use the *ikut orang* system. The idea of working with friends also makes these types of jobs more attractive to young people. As Anto also acknowledged, his friend was the reason he joined the political party – even though he is not really interested in politics himself. Entering the *ikut orang* system through peers serves as an entry point for young people to get work experience in the informal domain, which also allows more flexible working arrangements than the formal sector offers.

---

82 This is similar to the Indonesian term *magang* (literally, ‘apprenticeship’). However, the term *ikut orang* emphasises the key role of social networks in attaining the job, and the mode of relations (patron-client) between employer and employee.
**Finding a Path to Meaningful Work**

Young people not only actively re-construct what ‘meaningful’ means in their period of waiting; they also seek networks, as they are aware that networks are crucial resources to gain entrance to the civil service. Young people who have not succeeded in entering the civil service and do not have family networks in the bureaucracy often try to break through this structural constraint by forming their own social networks through the alternative work domains that they are currently engaged in. These networks often comprise both intergenerational and intragenerational relationships.

Didin (24) is a Malay young man from the district of Ketapang in the southern part of West Kalimantan. I met Didin when he was at his ‘office’. He is the head of a local NGO which focuses on life-skills learning, located in a Malay based community. He obtained the job from the former head of the NGO, who is the father of his girlfriend.

He not only works at this place, but he also lives there. Next to the main room of this simple NGO office is a small bedroom. Together with his Malay friends from the neighbourhood, he also runs various courses through his NGO (such as computer, English, auto repairs, Paket B⁸³ and Paket C⁸⁴). While I was there, he was with a friend who was helping him run the NGO.

This is my friend, Rony. He has been helping me here, we spend many evenings together, also with other friends. Sometimes discussing our problems, our (daily) lives, everything. I like (working) here. I have

---

⁸³ Official junior high school equivalent.
⁸⁴ Official senior high school equivalent.
time to hang out with friends, but work (at the same time). (Didin, 24, a Malay man)

The above quote shows how Didin enjoys the ‘hanging out with friends’ part of his job. Unlike Anto’s relationship with Rai in the ikut orang system, in this case, the relationship between Didin and Rony is more equal. Didin sees Rony more as a friend rather than a subordinate. The office, which also functions as his home, has also enabled him to spend time with his friends there. Being a director at this local NGO is not Didin’s only job. He is also involved in other jobs. He teaches scouting and karate to high school students, something that he also enjoys doing. Being able to relate to the younger generation through his interaction with them has been one of his sources of enjoyment.

He also explicitly pointed out how his job has helped fulfil his own material needs. He tried to prove his point to me by explaining how people in the surrounding community regard him as successful, especially now that he has his own car. This means that he has not only been able to fulfil his primary needs, but has also managed to procure ‘luxury’ goods. He has also managed to provide some financial assistance to his parents, though it is very small. Thus, he feels that he has achieved some aspects of adulthood, but not others. He says that his work cannot provide other things that can make the job in the civil service meaningful, such as regularity of income, access to credit, pension, and social status. Thus in his family’s eyes, his adulthood is still questioned.

That is why Didin feels that he still needs to become a PNS. He aspires to becoming a high school teacher in the next round of civil servant recruitment. After starting university (majoring in agricultural
studies in 2006), he decided to move to a private university in 2008 (now majoring in education). Some of the money he gets from working at the NGO is used to finance his studies. Despite putting effort into enhancing his cultural capital, Didin knows that this additional education will mean nothing as far as his work prospects are concerned if he does not have the appropriate social networks. In this situation, he acknowledges the benefits of being a Malay for getting the job that he has longed for, because many of the orang dalam at the local education office are Malays. With his experience in teaching scouting and karate at a state high school, he hopes that his prospects of getting in will be quite high. His education-based NGO also provides reasons to pay frequent visits to the education office at the district level.

Another effort to expand his network is by becoming a member of the campaign team for a candidate running in the election for district head. He actually hoped that by joining the success team, he would have better social networks with people in important positions if his candidate won. By being a member of the campaign team he imagined that he would have easier access to the future head of the education office. He also assumed that he will be able to make political deals with the future head of the education office to ensure that he would be able to become a PNS teacher. However, his candidate lost, so he now intends to concentrate on graduating from university and will have to rely on his existing social networks in the schools that he has been teaching in to pave his way towards becoming a PNS teacher in a state school.

Every time I have spare time, I participate in various activities, youthful activities like scouting or karate…I have always liked them since junior high school. (I do
them) because I like them and so that I have links…(I have) many links (meaning, connections), I meet this and that person… from scouting, from politics, karate…(I even) know many teachers. Some of my friends do not have links. So that’s the problem, they waste an opportunity for future prospects. Since I was appointed as the (new) director here, I have been trying to build better communication with the people up there (higher level decision makers). The teachers that I know help (me network with people in the district/municipality education office). (Didin, 24, a Malay man)

Didin feels that becoming an adult is not just about finding meaningful work in the civil service, which he believes will make him better off financially and enable him to better assist his family. It also means having the capacity to build one’s own social networks to actually get there.

Forming ethnic-based networks to progress in the domain of work is not exclusive to Malay youth such as Didin. The Dayak, like the Malays, stress inter and intragenerational ethnic networks as crucial to getting into the civil service. On the other hand, Chinese and Madurese youth emphasise the role of intragenerational relationships in accessing work. Most Chinese young men and young women I met already had prior working experience, are currently working in formal sectors, or setting up their own business while studying. They work in private companies as sales representatives, marketing/administrative staffs, or tutors. These opportunities to find a job are usually obtained through peer networks. Thus, the Chinese prefer forming networks with people of the same generation within their own ethnic group.
I like to hang out in cyber (internet) cafés. Sometimes I go online with my Chinese friends. It’s like hanging out together, but online. Having Chinese friends has a lot of positive aspects to it, they are very easy to socialise with. Most of my friends work, so I can share things about work with them. Sharing experience and knowledge, so we accumulate (experience and knowledge). At the same time I also expand my knowledge through the internet, like knowledge that’s useful for work. Information on work also circulates among us...so it is good to have friends who can help us develop. (Valen, 25, a Chinese woman)

When Valen refers to ‘friends’, she always means friends who have the same (Chinese) ethnic background as herself. Having same-ethnic friends is perceived to be easier and more comfortable for the Chinese young people in Pontianak, especially considering that most of them have been working since they were at school. Work then becomes a topic that can easily connect them when they are ‘hanging out’ online. These friends will also be a source of information about work opportunities in the future. For young women like Valen who look forward to working in the private sector, this kind of information is considered valuable.

Same-ethnic peers are important in building a sense of belonging and identity among young people, even more so for those who feel excluded and discriminated against (Reynolds, 2007: 395). While this may be true in the case of the Chinese, it does not explain why some Madurese youth cite the significance of engaging in networks with young people from other ethnic groups. One of the explanations might be that the Madurese feel a stronger sense of marginalisation,
and thus need to form alliances with peers from dominant ethnic groups to find meaningful work, as expressed by Aji below.

I have many Malay friends. It makes me feel like one of them, and working with them is also good (for me)...getting out of my own community. I am also starting a business (with my Malay friends). Young people should be creative and have fun, but productive. I imagine having my own distro, I have a distributor in Jakarta that produces clothing. I will raise the capital (to open the business), but I have to go into business (ber-join) with local people, the Malays. Because if I carry out the business by myself, people might look down on me if I distribute (the clothes myself). So I will rely on my Malay friends to do that. That way we can help each other out, maintain good friendships, and work, and stay stylish, ha ha ha (laughs)....(Aji, 23, a Madurese man)

Aji has a one-year contract as an accountant at a private company. His education in Java exposed him to inter-ethnic relationships, which he finds more fluid in Java. He feels that the experience was very beneficial for him to understand how to relate to people from other ethnic groups, without having to feel inferior. When he came back to Pontianak, he put in more effort into expanding his circle of friends (or ‘getting out of my own community’, as he puts it) while he waits for an opportunity to become a PNS teacher. He imagines that he will have to have direct face to face interaction with young people from other ethnic groups when he starts this distro. Assuming that his customers will immediately categorise him as a mere ‘Madurese’ if he interacts directly with them, he feels including his Malay friends would be good for his business.
Conclusion

This chapter reinforces the conclusion of the previous chapter, by demonstrating the significant influence that families have in young people’s life, especially in growing up. Through families, young people define meaningful work for their future. Thus, rather than seeing work as a process of individual self-achievement, work becomes meaningful only when it facilitates young people’s ability to fulfil family expectations. Similar to viewing a sarjana diploma as a pathway to adulthood, entering meaningful work becomes an important process of growing up for many young people.

Many young people share the same work aspirations as their parents, which is to work in the civil service. Young people in waiting, or those who feel that they failed at accessing civil service work, try to make the work they are involved in meaningful. This is done by constructing the image of playful work, which emphasises the playful side of their work in an alternative domain, while finding ways to find better work opportunities in mainstream state jobs. Playful work is also constructed to justify young people’s passion in a chosen line of work outside the civil service, rather than to compensate for their failure to enter their aspired work domain. Usually, playful work in this situation is constructed by young people who have a different idea from their parents of what constitutes meaningful work. These young people try to find alternative work domains and challenge mainstream notions of meaningful work that their parents have tried to instil in them. They form a youth culture of resistance towards adult-made notions of meaningful work, similar to the freeter youth in Japan who are pursuing jobs that are different to their parents’ expectations (Masahiro, 2001).
Some of these young people may continue resisting their parents’ expectations, while others eventually submit to their parents’ demand and try out their chances in the civil service. It may also be the other way around. First they submit to their parents’ demands, and eventually find out that being in the civil service is not what they want. Thus, these young people try to balance their own aspirations with their parents’, finding different ways of negotiating the tensions in various periods of their life time.

How young people make meaning of work is ethnically influenced, as also noted by Borjas (1992). Non-Chinese youth tend to pursue jobs in the civil service, while Chinese youth see meaningful work in trade or in private companies or by opening their own business. The reason for the differences in work aspirations among these groups of young people can be traced back to the history of West Kalimantan that I have elaborated in Chapter 2. Young people are aware of the opportunity structure that exists in the ethnic constellation of the province, which also influences the socialisation process in their families, and further shapes their own work aspirations.

For Malay and Dayak young people who want to access mainstream work in the civil service, intergenerational networks within their own ethnic community are considered more crucial than intragenerational ones. This is because access to the civil service is in the hands of adult civil servants, often those with positions in the bureaucracy. On the other hand, intragenerational relations are especially significant in providing support for young people trying to work in alternative work domains (either out of choice or because they are ‘waiting’ for work in the civil service) and for those who come from relatively marginalised ethnic groups (in this case, the Chinese and the
Madurese). While the Chinese rely on intragenerational ties within their own ethnic group in pursuing meaningful work, the Madurese rely on intragenerational relations outside their ethnic community. This may be due to the economic structure that enables young Chinese to attain meaningful work through ethnically established businesses. On the other hand, the Madurese still need to establish their role in economic sectors dominated by non-Madurese.