



## Abstract

### YOUTH, WORK AND LIFESTYLES IN AN INDONESIAN INDUSTRIAL TOWN

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of lower middle class youth and their education-to-work transitions in the Indonesian industrial town of Cilegon, Banten. The study examines how relatively educated young men and women (upper secondary school and tertiary graduates) navigate the contemporary opportunities and uncertainties of Cilegon's changing job market, in particular against the background of the upcoming privatisation of the town's biggest steel factory and the high rates of youth un(der)employment in the region. Cilegon experienced rapid economic growth and industrial development during the Suharto period (1966-1998), but is currently among the regions with the highest youth unemployment rates in Indonesia. Thus large-scale, corporate investment in Cilegon's heavy and chemical industries did not result in significant job creation for Cilegon's growing population of educated youth. Paradoxically, at a time when increasing numbers of lower middle class families invest in formal education for their children, their opportunities to economically benefit from schooling are declining (see also Jeffrey et al. 2008: 9 for the context of India).

The study illustrates how young people's attempts to secure a livelihood are thwarted by an overcrowded labour market and a range of challenges stemming from nepotism, the unfair logics of the market, and inequalities around class, gender and ethnicity. More specifically, the study analyses the gendered tensions and contradictory effects of economic restructuring, privatisation and a decline of jobs in heavy industries which produce a hostile and highly competitive environment for young men, while the rise of consumer culture and a shift towards service industries seems to favour young women who experience a more flexible working situation.

While many families value education as an avenue for upward social mobility, young graduates in Cilegon find that education is necessary, but not sufficient to get a job. Related to young people's difficulties in obtaining access to stable jobs are their experiences of un(der)employment. This study looks at both individual and collective strategies that young people use in navigating and inhabiting periods of underemployment. Many young men, even if qualified with the right education, find themselves channelled into an informal sector job in the transport, construction, trade, petty manufacture and repairs sector, which surrounds Cilegon's large formal industrial and port sector. Competition over jobs in the industries is fierce, with different neighbourhoods setting up local youth



organisations to lobby the industries for jobs and training opportunities. While such organisations offer local youth some level of support, at the same time these solidarities are undermined due to competition with similar youth groups from other neighbourhoods.

Apart from valuing education and work as part of their aspirations for the future, young people are also living in the present in which they want to pursue youthful lifestyles and desires. Young men and women need an income to support their lifestyles, attract a girl- or boyfriend, and fulfil obligations towards their families. The study explores young people's aspirations about work and lifestyles and their responses to economic exclusion as shaped by both their structural location in society and their subjective experience of being young. It pays attention to young men and women's fluid notions about work, and the distinctions they make between looking for a job and looking for money to support a lifestyle.

Keywords:

Youth, employment, education, gender, Islam, Indonesia, Banten