

Indonesian rural youth transitions: employment, mobility and the future of agriculture

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Introduction

This chapter reflects on the dynamics of Indonesian rural youth transitions.¹ As in other countries, Indonesian rural youth's transition to adulthood is being prolonged as they remain longer enrolled in education, their average age at first marriage rises, and their entry into the labour force is postponed. Each new generation of rural young men and women has grown up better educated than their parents. This however has not been matched with expansion of employment opportunities for educated youth, and one-third of Indonesians aged 15-24 in rural areas are openly unemployed. In such situations the young may be forced to improvise their own survival strategies. It is not surprising, then to see increasing emphasis on promotion of 'entrepreneurial' skills in national youth policy, education policy, and World Bank and ILO policy discourse. There is little evidence that these policies increase employment prospects or earnings.

One important strategy in negotiating transition is young people's mobility, which now extends to all social classes and both genders. Despite urbanization and diversification, agriculture is still Indonesia's biggest employer (Manning 2011) and by far the biggest single rural employer. At the same time, young people seem increasingly uninterested in agricultural or rural futures, but this should not be taken for granted. Secondary education contributes to a process of de-skilling of rural youth in which farming skills are neglected and farming itself downgraded as an occupation. Today's rural young men and women, even if interested in farming, are confronted by the narrowing or closure of access to land. This reflects both demographic, generational and political-economic factors.

The next section considers the processes by which adulthood is formally and socially postponed. We then pass to issues of 'generation' as a key dimension in understanding the construction and experience of youth. Next we discuss problems of youth 'transition', in particular the contours of un- and underemployment of rural, relatively educated young men and women and the broader crisis of social reproduction

¹ Parts of this paper draw on Naafs and White (2012) and White (2011).

which this reflects. Finally we consider young rural people's mobility and their apparent turn away from rural and farming futures.

Indonesian youth and the postponement of adulthood

Young men and women in Indonesia are key actors in most important processes of economic and social change. If we take some simple examples, two important themes in macro-studies of social change are the processes of *urbanization* (spatial movement of population) and *de-agrarianization* (sectoral shifts in employment). It is often forgotten that both these shifts are largely made by young people. It is young rather than old who move to towns in search of employment, and young rather than old who decide their future no longer lies in agriculture.²

One important change that has been happening to youth in Indonesia, as in many other countries, is its prolongation. As young people remain longer enrolled in education, as their average age at first marriage rises, and as entry into the labour force is postponed, they remain longer in the state of partial or complete dependency on the parental generation which for many is part of the defining characteristic of youth: biologically mature, but with (social) adulthood postponed. Youth boundaries are also class-specific. For example: urban middle class men or women in their late 20s, still single and living with their parents, completing an advanced degree and not yet having entered professional employment would consider themselves (and be perceived as) 'youth', while other men and women in their early 20s, having left school at age 15 or even earlier, already working as a labourer or market trader for many years, married with two or three children, would consider themselves (and be perceived as) 'adult' in their communities.

While UN definitions of 'youth' usually place it in the age range 15 – 24 (overlapping awkwardly with 'child' which covers age 0 – 17), recent Indonesian law-making (as in some other Asian, African and Latin American countries) now prolongs the formal boundaries of 'youth' to an advanced age. In the new Law on Youth enacted in 2009, 'youth' the persons (*pemuda*) are defined as 'Indonesian citizens who are entering an important period of growth and development and are aged between 16 and 30 years' (UU no 40/2009, article 1.1). The reasons for extending the boundaries of 'youth' to 30 are not clear, and are not explained in the Law or the 'academic text' which accompanied it in its journey through the legislature. The Academic Text, like the Draft Law, had originally set the age range as 18 - 35 years, in line with many other

² In that sense the common perception of 'peasants giving up farming and moving to cities' is inaccurate: it is more a question of sons and daughters of peasants who decide not to follow their parents' occupations and to move to the city in search of non-farm work.

developing-country governments which define the upper boundary of youth as 35 or even 40 years.³

This extended definition of youth can lead to confusion for those who look to statistics for indicators of the state of the nation's youth. For example, using the same data from Central Bureau of Statistics but with different age-ranges, the Ministry of Youth – using still the 18-35 year definition in the draft Law - finds that only 12 percent of urban and 20 percent of rural youth are unemployed, while ILO using the UN definition of 15-24 arrives at much higher levels of 23 (urban) and 33 percent (rural) (Menpora 2008; Indonesia Youth Employment Network 2004). Indeed, the extended definition identifies an age-group most of whose members seem already to have passed the main markers of 'transition to adulthood': using the Ministry's definition we learn that only 7 percent of the nation's youth (18-35) are still enrolled in education, 70 percent are already employed in the labour force, and 50 percent of male and 69 percent of female youth are already married. This suggests that the main basis for the extended definition is a political one. The same Law on Youth defines 'youth' in its other sense (*kepemudaan*, i.e. the state or condition, equivalent to 'childhood' or 'adulthood') as 'various matters relating to the potential, responsibility, rights, character, capacity, self actualization and aspirations of youth' (UU no 40/2009, article 1.2).

Young people's own conceptions of youth – as far as can be gleaned from the few studies that have asked about this – seem to link the transition from 'child' (*anak*) to 'youth' (*remaja, pemuda*) to the ability to exercise judgement about right and wrong, and the transition from 'youth' to 'adult' (*dewasa*) with economic independence from the parental generation.⁴ The search for greater autonomy (and its converse, frustrations and generational tensions about young people's lack of autonomy) are in my view important factors in understanding young people's turning away from agriculture, and from rural futures.

Generation

The idea of 'generation' as a key element in social change processes, highlighted in Karl Mannheim's classic essay *The problem of generations* (1952, orig. 1928) has inspired much work on youth studies in relation to social change. It was one of the ideas guiding Koning's pioneering dissertation on 'generations of change' in a Javanese village (Koning 1997 and 2004). There are in fact three important, distinct but related

³ Among other Asian countries, Thailand defines youth as up to age 25, The Philippines to age 30, India, Vietnam and Papua new Guinea to age 35 and Malaysia up to age 40. Indonesia's Draft Law on Youth and the 'Academic Text' which accompanied it had originally set the age range as 18-35 arguing reasonably that it should not overlap with 'child' (0-17) which is covered by another recent law (on Child Protection), but without argumentation for the 35-year end point (Menpora n.d. 30, 36).

⁴ This tentative generalization is derived from the reports by Sano 2012, White and Margiyatun 2009, and Naafs 2012 (all from Java).

meanings of 'generation'. The first is the purely demographic notion of a (biologically-defined) age cohort, not in itself of great practical or theoretical relevance, but perforce the basis for all statistical data on youth. The second highlights the relational dimension, as youth are defined not only by the differences between them and adults but also by particular forms of youth-adult relationship (Alanen 2001). 'Generation' like 'gender' is a relational term and a social construction rather than biological fact; 'generation' in this second sense is a fundamental concept for the study of youth, as more than a descriptive category but as a structural phenomenon – on a par with concepts of class, gender, ethnicity etc. in the social sciences. This provides a way to capture the structures that set young people apart from other social groups, and constitute them as a social category through the working of particular relations of division, difference and inequality between this and other categories.⁵

Unlike gender, class and ethnicity however, 'generation' is by definition a moving target; we pass into and out of generations, and when we speak of changing generations or generational relations we are not talking of changes happening to a defined group of people, but of changes between one generational group and those that succeed it. Consider for example the fascinating and rapid changes in the experience, lifestyles and identities of *kampung* youth which Patrick Guinness observed over three decades in the Kali Code neighbourhood of Yogyakarta (Guinness 2009: Ch. 5). It is not young people who are changing, but youth itself as succeeding generations follow each other into, and out of, the 'youth' slot.

The third meaning of 'generation', and one with great historical relevance and political traction in Indonesia, is Mannheim's notion of a generation that becomes a meaningful social category (only) when significant numbers of young people develop and express a consciousness of themselves as 'youth' by first, living through the same historical and social events and experiencing these as significant for themselves, and second, by acting upon this consciousness, crossing various lines of division by regional, gender, class, ethnicity, education and so on (Mannheim 1952). This notion is reflected in the Indonesian notion of '*angkatan*' as applied to the generation of young people who have been active in all major political convulsions (the national revolution, and the downfall of both the Sukarno and Suharto regimes, as well as lesser convulsions like Malari): the Angkatan 45, Angkatan 65-66, Angkatan 98 and so on. The *Angkatan Muda* of 1945, for example, gave the "once innocent word *pemuda* ... an aura of remorseless terrorism" for the returning Dutch and their allies, but for Indonesian nationalists "an exultant consciousness of the sudden emergence of youth as a revolutionary force in those critical times" (Anderson 1972: 1).

Indonesian youth have often been in the forefront not only in all of Indonesia's major national political convulsions, but also in routine national and local election campaigns. When such campaigns and convulsions are over, young activists often face

⁵ Paraphrasing Alanen (2001:13) on childhood as generational relation.

the reality that they have failed to achieve major social changes, improvements in corruption, the justice system, etc. This highlights the key paradox of young people's involvement in political process. Ryter notes that 'according to their self-representations, the *pemuda* of the generation of 1945 [...] and the nominally civilian *pemuda* of the generation of 1966 were both *pemuda* precisely because they were bold enough to advance the popular will by challenging authority' (2002: 73). The problem is, of course, that when defined as a group who by their nature challenge authority as the 'vanguard of change', once authority has been successfully challenged and a new regime installed, the new authorities consider further change superfluous and youth are supposed to transform themselves into a vehicle that no longer challenges but now legitimizes and defends the new regime, and whose critical activism is no longer welcome (Ryter 1998: 58, Baulch 2007: 19).

On the one hand, the role of *pemuda* provided an ideal way to legitimate the new regime [...] On the other hand, too much emphasis on the role of *pemuda* left open a possibility of an undesirable repeat performance [...] the question became how to contain the excess of youth (Ryter 2002: 134).

Most attempts to steer youth in this direction have produced quite ugly modes of youth organization, such as the Indonesian National Youth Committee (KNPI) established in the early years of the Suharto regime in 1973, or the *Pemuda Pancasila* which by the 1980s had become an important political presence throughout Indonesia, with 'a physical headquarters at every level, from the national and provincial down to the neighbourhood, each coordinating the levels below it' (Ryter 2002: 5)

These two dimensions of Indonesian youth – as the vanguard of political and social change, and at the same time as dangerous threat to social and political stability – coexist uneasily in both popular and academic understandings of youth. Indonesian contemporaries of Anderson writing in the early 1970s highlight also the importance of generation. Taufik Abdullah observes how notions of "youth" and "the young generation" are often value-laden: : " 'youth as the hope of the nation, 'youth are owned by the future', or 'youth must be guided' and so on, show how loaded are the values attached to '*pemuda*'." Noting in terms reminiscent of Mannheim that social scientists and historians should define youth not by age but by 'social perceptions and shared historical experience' he observes that 'social change is characterized by tension in intergenerational relations, which disturbs effective communication between them' (Abdullah 1974: 1, 3).

Tensions between generations are nothing new, although each succeeding adult generation may think they are. But they may well become more accentuated in many regions of Indonesia where since the late colonial period – thus roughly for the last three generations - the general pattern has been that each new generation of men and women typically grows up better educated than their parents and community elders (in terms of formal education), though often less equipped with the livelihood skills that are

normally acquired outside formal education. Almost 40 years ago, writing in the early Suharto period, Nurcholish Madjid (1973) observed that the “generation gap” (in family relations and in broader society) “is not necessarily based in open revolt, but in the perception of the young generation that the previous generation has lost its relevance, is outdated and rigid in its ideas” (1973: 49).

More generally, youth is also a key life-course period in which identities (including political identities) are shaped. Identities are produced collectively and in this process class, ethnicity, religion and sexuality intersect in varying combinations, whether we are talking of organized political, occupational or religious organizations (such as Ansor, KNPI, HPMI, Pemuda Pancasila) or more underground organizations such as urban street gangs and radical religious sects, or the various organizations that fall somewhere in between, such as Jakarta’s Forum Betawi Rembug (Leksana 2009).

For other young people, political pessimism and disillusionment together with the new consumerism have promoted a new, non-political cultural identity:

We could argue that since 1998, the generation of young people in Indonesia has lost the definable sense of a generation ‘for itself’ (*pemuda*) and has become more of a generation ‘in itself’ (*remaja, ABG*) linked mainly by temporal similarity rather than by shared political knowledge and purpose (Nilan 2004: 190).

In understanding government and societal preoccupations and practices relating to youth, is it useful to apply notions of neoliberal ‘governmentalities’ (Li 2007) to the governance of young people, and particularly to the attempt to manage and promote successful and non-risky youth “transitions”.

Youth as transition

We have noted above that Indonesian youth, if seen as a period of “transition to adulthood”, is being prolonged as young people remain longer enrolled in education, as their average age at first marriage rises, and as entry into the labour force is postponed, remaining longer in the state of partial or complete dependency on the parental generation which for many is part of the defining characteristic of youth; biologically adult, but with (economic, social, political) adulthood postponed. We should also be aware, however, that while transition (as the “becoming” dimension of youth) may be uppermost in the minds and practices of government and adults towards young people, for young men and women themselves the “being” dimension – the focus on enjoying youth itself, and being ‘successful’ youth in the eyes of peers – is equally important, even if it may sometimes stand in the way of smooth and successful transitions.

In Indonesia and many regions of the global south, for at least three generations the general pattern has been that each new young generation of men and women is typically better educated than their parents. This development however has not been matched with expansion of the kinds of employment opportunities that formal

education is supposed to prepare young people for. Meanwhile, as in many other countries (see Tomasevski 2003: Ch. 8), secondary and tertiary education continue their progress from “right” and free or heavily subsidized public service to freely traded commodity; secondary and tertiary education in both the public and private sector is becoming a business, in spite of much vocal criticism of this trend (for example Irawan et al. 2004; Kartono 2009; Darmingtyas et al. 2009). There are continuing problems of poor quality of education, and un- or under-employment of secondary and tertiary graduates. With the rapid spread of tertiary education – one hundred new universities opening their doors every year during the 1990s, according to Dhanani et al. 2009: 69 - the supply of college graduates in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s has increased far faster than the economy’s demand for them. The economy – whether flagging or growing - fails to generate the new modern-sector jobs for which they are formally qualified and large numbers, after years of unsuccessful job searches, find a reluctant and frustrated existence in the urban informal sector. First-time job seekers spend on average eight months before finding a job (Dhanani et al. 2009: 54) and for many this period extends to years rather than months. The imbalance between supply of and demand for educated workers means that graduates at each level are compelled to take jobs that previously were filled by those with lower education levels; this “pushdown effect” also means that the wage premium for education (the earnings differential between higher and lower levels of education) has tended to decline in Indonesia (Keyfitz 1989).

Survey research suggests that many young people leave school and start their job search well before they would have liked to enter the labour force, while others leave secondary or tertiary education early because they do not like it, or believe that furthering their education will be of little use in their job search (Sziraczki and Reerink n.d.: 51). Above, we noted that rates of recorded youth unemployment – no matter how “youth” is defined age-wise – tend to be markedly higher in rural than in urban areas (reaching one-third of all rural young men and women when the standard UN 15-24 definition is used); for Indonesia, when conventional (UN) definitions of youth and conventional employment statistics are used, almost one-quarter of all young people aged 15-24 in urban areas, and one-third of those in rural areas, are openly unemployed. These estimates, while staggering in themselves, mask additional numbers of young people who have given up the search for work, or are under-employed in the sense of having not enough work, having accepted jobs far below their qualifications, and/or working long hours at unacceptably low returns below established minimum wage levels.

Where will the needed jobs for young, relatively educated rural young people come from? Contemporary forms of agrarian transition in Indonesia involve investments and dispossession that expel people from agriculture without absorbing their labour in manufactures or elsewhere in the economy, and create an “agrarian question of labour” (Bernstein 2004) involving large “surplus populations” of the dispossessed (Li 2009 and 2010). “Surplus population” here has nothing to do with Malthusian or neo-Malthusian theories absolute overpopulation (the notion that human populations have some

natural tendency to grow until they outstrip the limits of subsistence) but a historically-specific relative surplus population, itself the result of capital accumulation and technical progress, which is “surplus” not to society’s capacity to provide subsistence but to capital’s requirements for labour, resulting in low wages of the employed and poverty of the un- and underemployed, even in contexts of rapid economic development such as currently experienced in Indonesia. Nowadays it is not only agriculture, but also many other sectors whose ‘development’ through capital investment and technical change involves the shedding, rather than the absorption, of labour; as one example, many clerical and blue-collar occupations previously available to secondary or tertiary graduates are now disappearing with mechanization, automatization, digitalization, internet banking and so on.

Faced with these problems of youth un- and under-employment – which in “youth governance” terms are seen as threats to both economic development and political stability - the policy discourse has shifted increasingly from strategies to “provide employment” for young people, to an emphasis on the promotion of entrepreneurial skills among young people, i.e. the idea that young people should create their own jobs. To understand these relations and their dynamics we are helped by the broader notion of “social reproduction” as the material and discursive practices which enable the reproduction of a social formation (including the relations between social groups) and its members (Wells 2009: 78). The contemporary world of Indonesian young men and women may be seen as reflecting, if not a crisis, then a serious fault line in social reproduction, as the state retreats from this aspect of social reproduction and throws it back, in neoliberal mode, on individuals, families and social groups, while making available fewer resources to support that work, weakening the capacity of communities or whole societies to maintain functioning social relations and to provide for dependents (Wells 2009: 79). In such situations the young may be forced to improvise their own survival strategies, including both more and less legal avenues of “self-employment”.

It is not surprising, then to see the increasing emphasis on promotion of “entrepreneurial” skills in national youth policy, education policy (“life skills” in school curricula), and World Bank and ILO policy discourse. Actually, there is little if any evidence that these policies increase employment prospects or earnings, and some experts have voiced strong criticism of this approach:

Youth employment projects [...] should be directed at increasing their generic skills, such as written presentation, English language proficiency and computer literacy, to make them more attractive to employers [...] Youth employment projects should not be directed to entrepreneurship or self-employment, because the youth themselves are more interested in paid employment in the formal sector, do not have sufficient technical expertise in the field and are too young to start a business (Dhanani et al. 2009: 80) .

Survey research for all Indonesia (Dhanani et al. 2009: 64) and in another study of Jakarta, Central Java and NTT (Sziraczki and Reerink n.d.) shows that the biggest single job search method among young job seekers relies on “informal networks” (such as relatives, friends or other networks). This is confirmed by the experience and perceptions of young people in recent studies of Cilegon (Naafs 2012) and Pontianak (Minza 2012) that formal qualifications are necessary but not sufficient conditions for selection, which in the end is more likely to demand personal connections.

The developments described above have accentuated the Indonesian government’s long-standing practices in the field of the governance or management of the nation’s youth. The neoliberal logic extended to youth sees it as “human capital” (i.e. in terms of what it can potentially become), matched by a preoccupation with the prevention of what can go wrong, strategies of containment in the face of “risky behaviours”, delinquency and the impact of foreign cultures, aiming to protect young people from risks to themselves and society from the risks brought by youth. The new Law on Youth (Diatyka 2010), and other interventions such as the introduction of “life skills” in national school curricula (Ingriani 2010), embody these coexisting notions of youth as “hope” and as “risk” to nation and society. These combined strategies of incorporation and containment are encapsulated in the National Development Programme of 2004 which aimed

... to give a better opportunity for youth to strengthen their character and maximize their potential to make active contributions to development. The programme covers five targets:

1. encouraging youth participation in youth organizations and other social organizations
2. establishing a law to guarantee youth freedom to express their views
3. increasing the number of young entrepreneurs
4. to decrease the frequency of drug abuse among youth
5. to decrease the frequency of criminality among youth⁶

Rural youth migration and the turn away from agriculture

One important strategy of young people in negotiating transition is mobility. Young people’s mobility is nothing new; the ‘wanderings’ of young men in search of enlightenment and/or livelihoods are an established part of Javanese and Minangkabau culture, for example, while young women’s mobility was highly restricted. But this mobility now extends to all social classes and both genders. Both young men and women in rural areas are often encouraged (and sometimes compelled) by parents to move away from villages, whether in search of further education (see Wenty Minza’s study of Pontianak, 2012) or to seek work in urban or periurban factories (both genders) and malls (especially women), as and a variety of other jobs, including domestic servants

⁶ Law Number 25/2000 on The National Development Program, quoted in Diatyka (2010: 23)

(mainly women) and the entertainment and commercial sex sectors (see Atsushi Sano's study in Indramayu, 2012).

These migrations are not always permanent; we need to explore further the phenomenon of cyclical, part-lifetime migration. "Village" (and also "farm") can become, for young people, the place where you grow up, which you will leave in search of urban employment, but where you may later leave your children in the care of their grandparents, and where you may later return to be a farmer yourself, when land becomes available and urban work has provided some capital for improvements.⁷

Young people may seem to be uninterested in agricultural futures and all aiming to join the movement to the cities, (Koning, 1997 and 2005; White and Margiyatin 2009), as for Southeast Asia generally:

there is increasing evidence from across Southeast Asia that farmers would like to get out of agriculture themselves and, even more, that they hope their children will not become farmers (Hall et al. 2011: 118)

At the same time however, small-farmer organizations and movements in various parts of Indonesia campaign and lobby in defence of smallholder farming in the face of various external and internal pressures on smallholder land, in particular the rapid increase in large-scale corporate "land grabbing" in recent years in response to crop booms and other demands for land for mining, urban and industrial expansion etc.. These claims about small-scale alternatives for Indonesian agriculture assume (although the question is rarely raised) that there is a generation of rural youth who want to be the nation's future small farmers. If not, then of course small-farmerist proponents have no argument against a future agriculture based on large-scale, corporate, industrial farming. It is therefore quite important to ask what lies behind rural youth's apparent rejection of farming futures.

Young people's turn away from agriculture is certainly 'fact', but should not be taken for granted, until we understand better the reasons behind it. This requires us to take account of a number of problems. They include: the de-skilling of rural youth with regard to agricultural knowledge, and the downgrading of farming and rural life; the chronic government neglect of small-scale agriculture and rural infrastructure in many regions; the corporate grabbing of land; and the problems that young rural people increasingly have, even if they want to become farmers, in getting access to land while still young. Suppose that a new generation of rural school leavers and college graduates do wish to make their futures in the agrarian sector, what are their chances of acquiring a farm? Today's rural young men and women, even if interested in farming, are confronted by the increased narrowing and sometimes complete closure of access to land. This may happen under all kinds of land tenure systems, whether land is held in private title, under customary tenure (in which use rights to farm plots are allocated by

⁷ These new understandings of village and rural life are carefully described for Java in Juliet Koning's *Generations of Change* (2004).

family or clan elders or chiefs) or as 'state lands'. It may be the due to corporate or absentee acquisition of community land; the local micro-land grabs and 'intimate exclusions' resulting from internal processes of everyday accumulation, land concentration and dispossession (Hall et al. 2011: Ch. 5); or simply the local structures of rural patriarchy which give the older generation control of land resources, and make them reluctant to transfer this control to the next generation.

Ethnographic studies of 'traditional' rural ways of growing up provide examples in which children (mostly male, in some cases also female) who wish to farm are allocated a plot of land to farm themselves by parents or other adult relatives, or engage in paid work on the farms of others, and control to greater or lesser extent the product of their farming work. One interesting example is from Tania Li's research on the Lauje hill farmers of Central Sulawesi. She describes how in 1991

We were out on the platform behind the house when one of the girls began to pull out bundles of garlic and arrange them in the sun to dry. 'Who do they belong to?' I asked. 'That one belongs to my mother, those belong to my older brother, those belong to my sister, these here are mine, and those belong to my father', she replied. This was my introduction to the economic autonomy of household members, each of whom created personal property through their own labour ...⁸

In the Javanese village of Kali Loro, almost 40 years ago, a 15 year old boy from a share-tenant household told me proudly how he had used his own earnings (from farm labour and bamboo mat-weaving) to pay for his own school fees since the last years of primary school, and since entering lower secondary school at age 13 had paid for all his expenses except food, including school fees, clothes and even the purchase of his own goats. Nowadays, as a re-study in the same village a generation later has shown, such opportunities hardly exist (White 2012).

Where in Indonesia is it still possible for young people to slip themselves into independent agricultural production and earning in the way that these examples have shown? One reason why young people express a reluctance to farm may reflect not an aversion to farming as such, but to the long period of waiting that they would have to face before they have a chance to engage in independent farming. Even when land is available, young people may have to wait a very long time for it. Intergenerational tensions regarding the transfer of land or other assets from one generation to the next are, of course, not new. The tension between the desires of aging parents to keep the household together under their authority by retaining control of family assets, and the desire of children to receive their share of these assets, form their own independent households, and attain the status of economic and social adulthood, is such a common feature of agrarian societies that it is surprising how neglected it is in recent research.

⁸ Quoted with permission from Tania Murray Li's manuscript-in-progress *Land's End: Wealth and Poverty on an Indonesian Frontier*.

Who wants to wait in the village for 10, 20 or 30 years after leaving secondary school or college, working in a position of dependence on parents' or others' farms, waiting for the chance to be a farmer? Meanwhile the expansion of formal education and particularly secondary education contributes to a process of de-skilling of rural youth in which both farming skills are neglected and farming is downgraded as an occupation.⁹ In this light the drift to the cities is not surprising, even when urban livelihood options are uncertain and unattractive.

The problems I have touched on are likely only to worsen in the context of new patterns of land grabbing for corporate commercial food (and recently, agrofuel) production, and new pressures on the countryside from many other directions. As I hope to have shown, these developments raise many difficult questions about the future of Indonesian rural youth, and of Indonesian agriculture. These questions have no obvious or easy answers, and therefore deserve a place on research agendas in the coming years.

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⁹ This aspect of rural education has been well studied in South Asia but I have not yet found anything on the topic for Indonesia.

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