

Can we Apply Class Analysis to Indonesian Youth?

by

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Introduction

Most studies of Indonesian youth are not sociological but written from within the disciplines of: anthropology (Smith-Hefner 2006), human geography (Beazley 2003), demography (Utomo 2002), political science (Juliastuti 2006) or cultural studies (Baulch 2007). The concept of ‘middle-class youth’ is often employed, yet not defined. This paper seeks to explore the trends between ‘class position’, educational opportunities and life aspirations using survey data from 3327 Indonesian youth¹. The term ‘class’ here refers to a discrete group of people defined in the general sense by their relationship to the means of production, and in the specific sense by the amount of control they have over various forms of capital, especially economic and cultural capital.

Claims for the ‘death of class’ (Pakulski and Waters 1996), and arguments that class is a ‘zombie category’ (Beck and Willms, 2004: 24) are popular. Certainly in western countries social stratification often eludes traditional class definitions. In the ‘risk society’ (Beck 1992) - the contemporary borderless ‘space of flows’ (Castells 1997) - our subject positions in life are not fixed, but constantly reinvented and constructed within a relentless discourse of choice (Giddens 1991: 81; Tulloch and Lupton 2003: 61).

Accordingly, contemporary youth tend to understand setbacks in the life trajectory as individual inadequacies, rather than as outcomes of social and economic processes that sustain inequality (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 4). Yet lack of recognition of one’s class

position does not mean that one does not have a class position (Atkinson 2007). There is a ‘remarkable persistence of class-linked inequalities and class-differentiated patterns of social action, even within periods of rapid change’ (Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992: 393; Goldthorpe and MacKnight 2006) like those in urban Indonesia.

The survey instrument is similar to that used by Threadgold to obtain data about Australian youth (Threadgold and Nilan 2008). That study found unequal class divisions still strongly shape the perceptions of life chances of young urban Australians. This paper explores whether a similar premise holds for urban Indonesian youth.

Methodology

The data here was collected as part of the *Ambivalent Adolescents in Indonesia* project. The project incorporated a qualitative and a quantitative research component. The quantitative component (a survey) aimed to establish some contemporary trends for Indonesian youth in educational institutions across a number of regions. Perceptions of life chances and expectations for the future in a rapidly globalising Indonesia constituted an important survey focus. The purposive sample of youth in educational institutions means that the data findings here must be viewed as limited to youth from families on at least adequate monthly incomes. The data here does not address young people from poor or marginalised families, since they almost never progress beyond a few years of primary school. The survey took place in Indonesia in 2007/2008. 29 questions invited responses on school-to-work transitions, popular culture tastes and visions of the future. 18

questions matched the original Australian youth survey (Threadgold and Nilan 2008).

Data was analysed using SPSS Version 15.

Respondents

3327 students in 8 regions completed the survey:

- Bali: 645
- Banjarnegara: 285
- Bukittinggi: 454
- Jakarta: 366
- Lombok: 164
- Solo: 612
- Yogyakarta: 498
- Flores 303:

Mean age of respondents was 16.4. 51.3 per cent of respondents were female. 66.1 per cent were Muslim. 74.4 per cent were still living at home while they attended educational institutions as follows:

- 39.6% state secondary schools
- 21.1% Muslim schools
- 14.2% Christian schools

- 14.6% technical secondary schools
- 7.4% state universities
- 3.1% private universities

Fathers' occupations were coded using Erickson and Goldthorpe's (1992) classifications. Members of these occupational groupings are assumed to share relatively similar: levels of income; levels of economic security; chances of career advancement; scope of authority and control; and levels of work autonomy (Pakulski 2004: 98)

64.3 per cent of fathers of respondents were 'white-collar workers' - implying middle class status:

- 36.3% private enterprise
- 19% public servants
- 4.5% para-professional occupations
- 4.5% professionals

17.5 per cent of fathers of respondents were 'blue-collar' workers:

- 16.6% farmers
- 5.4% unskilled or semi-skilled workers
- 4.9% petty shopkeepers, small traders
- 0.6% tradesmen

In summary, over 65 per cent of fathers were in middle-class occupations and presumably took home middle-class salaries, as one would expect from the fathers of a cohort of young Indonesians pursuing post-primary education, which is relatively costly. 45.5 per cent of mothers were housewives, and 31.5 per cent worked in ‘white collar’ occupations. The socio-economic status of families is still primarily derived from father’s occupation.

Establishing Class Location

Father’s occupation and educational enrolment status

All 3327 respondents in this survey were students, yet their education did not point to the same life outcomes. In the sociology of education, father’s occupation is commonly taken to be a key marker of a pupil’s socio-economic status and life prospects because it affects: access to, and length of time in, education; provision of learning resources; and the status of the educational institution. Moreover, according to reproduction theory the socio-economic status of parents is passed on to children. Parental privilege (or the lack of it) is passed on to children ‘via the route of educational attainment’ (Andres and Grayson 2003: 181), and the educational institution is central to this process.

Indonesian technical secondary schools train pupils for trade and service jobs. Although student grades must be high enough for entry criteria, such schools do not normally attract the children of white-collar workers as they are associated with manual work. Of 460 technical school respondents, nearly a quarter of fathers were farmers:

- 22.8% agriculture
- 9.6% semi-skilled or unskilled labour
- 4.8% petty trade or shopkeeping
- 8.9% public service

Indonesian Muslim schools are generally poor, with few academic resources (Raihani 2007: 173), or provision of 'skills needed to participate in a competitive job market' (Guerin 2006: 4). *Pesantren* graduates cannot readily gain entry to prestigious state universities - secular or religious (IAIN Sunan Kalijaga 2005). Of 666 respondents at Muslim schools, over a quarter of fathers were farmers:

- 25.8% agriculture
- 9.2% semi-skilled or unskilled labour
- 8.3% petty trade or shopkeeping
- 14.6% public service

In contrast, Indonesian state secondary schools are prestigious. Of 1252 respondents attending state secondary schools, less than a tenth of fathers were farmers. Over a quarter had public servant fathers, in contrast to the low percentages of public servant fathers for technical and Muslim school respondents:

- 8.3% agriculture

- 2.2% semi-skilled or unskilled labour
- 3.8% petty trade or shopkeeping
- 25.2% public service

Of the 120 respondents with professional fathers:

- 56.3% attended state schools
- 25.2% attended Christian schools (prestigious and expensive)

In short, the socio-economic position of fathers indicated by occupation tends to determine the kind of school their children attend, and by inference, their life chances.

Number of books in the home

The number of books in a pupil's family home (Freebody 1993), is an indicator of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1986) - important in the process of class reproduction. Respondents could select from 1-500 books.

- of 322 respondents claiming 1-10 books, 31.1% of fathers in agriculture or semiskilled/unskilled work
- of 717 claiming 51-100 books, 40.4% of fathers in private enterprise

- of 426 claiming 101-200 books, 46% of fathers in private enterprise

The majority of those claiming over 100 books had professional fathers.

Computer Access

Having a computer at home is viewed as a new form of cultural capital, even though it probably acts as an amplifier for existing cultural capital – ‘the benefits of having a home computer were substantially greater for children from more affluent and educated families’ (Attewell 2001: 257). Only 6.7 per cent of respondents with fathers in agriculture, and 16.9 per cent in semi-skilled or unskilled labour had computers, while 69.5 per cent of respondents with public servant fathers had one.

In short, class appeared to be a significant factor in determining educational outcomes (Collins, Kenway and McLeod 2000). Accordingly, a weighted ‘class’ indicator was established using the variables: father’s occupation (.6); books in the home (.2); and computer at home (.2). This allowed the identification of four discrete ‘class’ locations: from lowest [0] to highest [4]. The lowest class location assumes very modest family income and not much cultural capital. The highest assumes a prosperous income and significant cultural capital.

Job and Career Ambitions

Responses to a question on future job were coded using the same classifications as father's occupations.

Insert Table 1.1 here.

Despite only 4.5 per cent professional fathers, 33.3 per cent wanted professional jobs. Although only 4.5 per cent of fathers were para-professionals, 19.1 per cent wanted para-professional jobs. In short, upward mobility aspirations were present. But these were shaped by class location

Insert Table 1.2 here

In summary:

- Professional father: more respondents want professional jobs
- Para-professional father: fewer respondents want professional jobs, more want para-professional jobs
- Public servant father: fewer respondents want professional and para-professional jobs, more want public service and private sector jobs
- Private sector father: fewer respondents want professional and para-professional jobs, more want private sector jobs
- Petty shopkeeper or small trader father: slightly more respondents want professional jobs, more want para-professional jobs, fewer want public service and private sector jobs

- Father farmer: fewer respondents want professional, para-professional and private sector jobs, more want public service jobs

Respondents with professional fathers named a higher status profession than their father's, while more respondents from lower socio-economic backgrounds were (probably realistically) aiming for the private sector or the public service. This suggests a modified form of social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) taking place.

Life Goals/Obstacles

Stated life dreams of respondents were coded by life domain.

Insert Table 1.3 here

The two significant dreams were 'work, specific job, career, higher education', and becoming 'rich, famous, independent'. While these showed little 'class' effect, class was certainly a shaping factor in the imagined or perceived obstacles to achieving those dreams. Responses to the open ended question: 'What would prevent you from achieving your dreams?' were coded into fourteen categories. 44.2 per cent of responses alluded to 'lack of money, resources or opportunities', while 18.9 per cent of responses alluded to 'laziness, negative personal traits'. Initial cross-tabulation of father's occupation with the

two main perceptions of obstacles indicated class-based differences. This was analysed further.

Insert Table 1.4 here

Insert Table 1.5 here

A Rho value of $-.324$ ($p = <0.01$, significant at the 0.01 level) indicates a small, definite negative correlation between class location, and the likelihood of writing about lack of money, resources or opportunities. This means that youth from more middle-class (privileged) families are less likely to have identified 'lack of money, resources or opportunities' as the primary obstacle. Given this was an open question, not one inviting choice from predetermined categories, the correlation is notable.

Insert Table 1.6 here.

Rho value of $.282$ ($p = <0.01$, significant at 0.01) – a small, definite positive correlation – indicates those lower in class location were less likely to write something like this. This means that those in a higher class location were more likely to nominate 'laziness, negative personal traits' as important obstacles to achieving their dreams.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data analysis above supports the proposition that life chances are still largely reliant on a young person's class position in Indonesia, affecting not only upward social mobility aspirations but perceptions of the future. While responses from middle-class respondents implied some measure of individual choice and control over getting a good job (thereby enjoying a prosperous adult life), respondents from lower class locations did not give this indication. Respondents from families lowest in cultural and economic capital envisaged a highly contingent future constrained by poverty.

Because the life dream of nearly all respondents was a job, this implies the major perceived future risk is unemployment and poverty. Higher on the class scale, it is implied that this risk can be dealt with reflexively, at least in part, through shaping oneself in the right way - self-discipline, honing personal qualities, diligence, application to task and so on. While personal self-improvement responses were sometimes present for youth lower on the class scale, most indicated their future life trajectories were much less negotiable because of structural disadvantage. In short, for Indonesian youth from poorer backgrounds aspiring to better lives, the 'prolonging of current calculable damages into the future' is still predicated on current woes (Beck 1992: 33). This confirms that for Indonesia 'living in a class-divided society means that not all young people have the same resources, experiences and opportunities' (White and Wyn 2004: 16).

Findings from this preliminary analysis of class in the Indonesian youth survey echo the Australian findings (Threadgold and Nilan 2008), but the picture of social class division

for Indonesian youth is grim indeed. Indonesia is not a welfare state and the risk of poverty (and poor health) through unemployment is high, even for those pursuing secondary education, and even for middle-class youth. To rephrase Bauman (1998: 86) - these young Indonesians may look forward to an adult life of choices, but not all of them have (or will have) the means to be choosers.

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