

Asian MetaCentre
for Population and Sustainable
Development Analysis,
Asia Research Institute,
National University of Singapore

Department of Sociology
National University of Singapore

Cordially invite you to a joint public seminar on

Changing Indonesian Childhoods: A Three-Generation Study in a Javanese Village

By

Dr Ben White *

Co-Director, International Centre for Child & Youth Studies
Institute of Social Studies, The Hague

Chairperson:

Dr Judith Ennew

Senior Research Associate, Centre for Family Research,
University of Cambridge

Date : **Monday, 18 October 2004**

Time : **2.30 pm to 4.00 pm**
(Registration from 2.20pm)

Venue : **ARI Seminar Room**
Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore
5 Arts Link, AS7, Shaw Foundation Building, Level 4,
Singapore 117570

Synopsis

During 1999-2000 I returned to the Javanese village of Kali Loro where I had lived for 15 months as a young PhD researcher in 1972-73. Besides planning to write a social

history of this village, I was specially interested in changes in the lives of children and young people and in particular in what some authors call 'the prolongation of childhood': the postponement of adult status and responsibilities through longer school enrolment, rising age at first marriage and later entry into (full-time) employment.

Many signs of material improvement were obvious: better roads, housing, electrification, irrigation, education, etc. However, these rural development efforts had generated little or no new rural employment opportunities, or at least none that are attractive to secondary-school leavers. Many of the children of today's landless and land-poor households move out of the village to work in factories in West and Central Java, while others join earlier generations of migrant relatives now established in commercial farming or small-scale enterprise on other islands.

Using oral history and two detailed time-allocation studies I tried to trace changes in child work over a period of roughly three generations. Relying on the memories of our older informants (through interviews in 1972-3 and 1999-2000) and some secondary data, it was possible to reconstruct the childhoods of those who are now the grandparents of today's children. Then, using detailed data on children's time allocation in 20 small-farm and landless households (collected in 1972-3), I analysed the activities of the next generation of children, i.e. those who are now the parents of today's children. Finally, in 1999-2000 we traced the members of the same 20 households and in each case found at least one of the children from the 1972-3 sample, now 27 years older, still resident in the village, married and living with his/her own children. We repeated the time-budget study with both adults and children in these second-generation households. The young people we studied in 1999 are thus, literally, the children of those we studied in 1972-3.

How have the activities of children changed in the past few decades? Many of those who are now grandparents (those born in the late 1930s or early 1940s) attended the village school, but only for three years and only for a few hours each day, completing school at about 10 years of age. There was plenty of work to do, and both boys and girls were involved in work of many kinds, both helping their parents and also earning money in the farm and non-farm labour market. The next generation – those born in the early 1960s, who were of school-going age during my field research in 1972 – mostly stayed in school until age 15, but school had not yet become drastically disruptive of children's work; they remained familiar with day-to-day work, both inside and outside the household, most had experience of earning money and often used these earnings for their own needs such as clothes, school fees, snacks and tobacco. By 1999, nearly all children were staying in school until at least completion of lower secondary, and in most cases until completion of upper secondary school; the new generation of children spends between 30 to 40 hours per week in school and home study, and correspondingly less time in work. Although their parents tend to complain that children don't help them any more, they are actually still quite busy, but in a different set of activities; gender differences have sharpened, with girls more confined to domestic chores and boys still having some involvement in directly productive work, but with both boys and girls hardly involved at all in any activities which earn them money. One father explained proudly how he had never allowed his daughter to miss a day of school to work in the fields, even if he had to hire workers in her place; the girl herself complained that she would like to help on the farm so that the money saved could be used to pay for school fees, to get her into a better secondary school. Here we see a concrete example of the way in which older children are increasingly identified as not involved in the production of value: paradoxically, as

children's needs for a greater and more sophisticated variety of consumer goods grows, they are increasingly isolated from the kinds of activities which might have earned them some money to pay for them, and increasingly dependent on their parents for these needs.

These shifts raise many questions. Is the work that children formerly did no longer necessary? What explains the determination of children to stay in school (and, the sacrifices made by their parents to keep them there) as long as possible, despite the lack of any evidence that this will open for them better opportunities in the labour market? Does it help to see school attendance in the modern world, as a (growing) form of obligatory work? Or, as it may be seen by many teenagers themselves, as basically a way to postpone 'real' work?

* Ben White is Professor of Rural Sociology and co-Director of the International Centre for Child & Youth Studies at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague

About the Speaker

Ben White (1946), originally from Britain, is Professor of Rural Sociology at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague and Professor in Social Sciences at the University of Amsterdam. At ISS he is the Chair of the Ph.D. Programme and Director of the new *International Centre for Child and Youth Studies* (iCCYS), a collaborative effort of the Institute of Social Studies and International Child Development Initiatives in Leiden.

He has a B.A. from Oxford University (1968), M.A. and M.Phil. in Anthropology from Columbia University (1971) and a PhD in Anthropology from Columbia University (1976).

His main research interests focus on the long-term study of agrarian change processes (particularly in Indonesia), and the anthropology and history of childhood and youth, particularly in the area of child work and education. Books and edited volumes include *Agrarian Transformations: Local Processes and the State in Southeast Asia* (University of California Press, 1989); *In the Shadow of Agriculture: Non-farm Activities in the Javanese Rural Economy, Past and Present* (KIT Press, 1991); *Understanding Child Labour* (Special Issue, *Childhood* 1999); *Forests: Nature, People, Power* (Blackwell, 2000); *Child Workers in Indonesia* (Akatiga, 1998) and *Child Labour: Policy Options* (Aksant Academic Publishers, 2001).

He is coordinator of the four-year research project *Coping with Crisis in Indonesia: Comparative, Local and Historical Dimensions*, funded by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences, in which several Dutch and Indonesian universities are working together.

He is Chair of the Editorial Board of the journal *Development & Change*, and a member of the International Advisory Boards of the Bangkok-based NGO *Child Workers in Asia* and the Bandung-based NGO *Akatiga* (Centre for Social Analysis). He recently joined the scientific committee for the *Ethnography of Childhood Workshop Asia-Pacific Childhoods* to be held at the National University of Singapore in mid-2006.

Admission and Enquiries

Admission to the seminar is free of charge and is open to the public on a first come-first-serve basis. For enquiries and attendance, please contact:

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Please RSVP by 15 October 2004.

ALL ARE WELCOME