Educated young people and un(der)employment in rural Flores, Indonesia

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Western Australia
School of Social Sciences, Disciplines of Anthropology & Sociology and Asian Studies
2016
Abstract

Education is considered by governments, NGOs and supranational organisations as key to national development and personal upward mobility. Due to this development discourse, rural educated young people are expected to act as agents of change, mainly by means of leaving ‘backward’ agrarian livelihoods and obtaining white-collar jobs. However, in Indonesia, many educated young people who return to their rural natal communities after graduating from their urban tertiary institutions are confronted by a dysfunctional local labour market. The central questions that my thesis answers are: what happens to these young people, and how do they relate to the rural communities in which they live?

Based on ten months of fieldwork in Ngada district on the island of Flores (eastern Indonesia), I argue that educated young people reproduce common local cultural practice, but also formulate alternatives and generate novel practice. There is an inherent tension between cultural reproduction and production that causes these young people to feel and act ambivalently towards their communities.

Educated young people in Ngada are part of vibrant communities. Since the early twentieth century, the Catholic Church and the state have permeated daily life by means of education, the cash economy, and improved communication and infrastructure networks. Yet, webs of socio-economic interdependence are still operative, organised through extended families and manifested in customary practice, celebrations, and day-to-day socialising. Educated young people rely on these networks of interdependence, which house them and feed them, as they are confronted by a tight local labour market, rendering many of them unemployed. Many more educated young people become underemployed, as they take on volunteering jobs at community health posts or underpaid teaching positions at Ngada’s schools. Others volunteer for the local government or for the Church, help with work in the fields, and in the household, or do temporary low-skilled jobs. They remain positive and active, hoping to gain experience and expand networks, but also to contribute to the well-being of their community and its webs of mutual dependency.

However, educated young people also critique local cultural practices, in particular the ‘passive mindset’ of the villager, the existence of networks of interdependence, and the resulting ‘culture of requesting’ (kebudayaan minta). Many young people see it as their ‘educated’ duty to be agents of change and promote development in Ngada. According to them, villagers need to be more independent and prioritise individual well-being above collective expenses. One can therefore question whether educated young people will be prepared to contribute to these networks of interdependence if they finally obtain properly
salaried employment. Meanwhile, they contest customary organising principle for marriage. As they are educated and feel modern, they prioritise their potential partner’s educational background and employment over customary social strata. More importantly, due to their un(der)employment, they prolong their status as young people and their ‘youthful’ socialising. Hence, they have time to develop ‘close friendships’ and romances in which love and trust matter. They question the customary dynamics of the marriage system which forms the pivot of social organisation, underlying webs of socio-economic interdependence.

Despite the disjuncture between their modern aspirations and the labour market reality, young people remain optimistic and active. Though an education is not always the vehicle of progress and development that is imagined, and young people may challenge the reproduction of local cultural practices, young people, their parents, and the larger community are pragmatic. Their rural situatedness gives these young people a strong community backing, which enables them to present themselves as ‘good community members’, which, in turn, explains their easy absorption into their communities. Still, there is much ambivalence in the way educated young people navigate their lives and engage with their communities. Sometimes, it seems educated young people are struggling to conform to dominant norms, especially gender norms. At other times, young people are contradictory in their statements, taking pride in feelings of communality in Ngada as expressed in practices of sharing, yet also critiquing these practices. These critiques are rather ironic, especially because educated young people depend on these networks for their relatively expensive tertiary educations, as well as during their troubled education-to-work transitions, and may indicate that, in the future, educated young people might be less easily absorbed into community networks of interdependence.
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Acknowledgements

A massive ‘thank you’ to all the people who have helped me throughout the years with this project. In particular, I want to thank all the educated young people in Ngada who shared with me their dreams, aspirations, hopes, frustrations and disappointments. Your stories and life’s trajectories show tremendous commitment, and persistence, and have been a major inspiration for me. Also in Ngada, Lipus, Evi and Renee, I treasure our friendship. Yiiiihhhhhaaa

My supervisors, Lyn Parker and Greg Acciaioli, have been amazing. They have been my ‘dream team’ from the start. Not only did they combine their respective academic stardom into a perfect mix of expertise, their ongoing support, encouragements and questions were invaluable for the progress of this thesis. Though giving complete ownership of this project to me, their wisdom, patience and understanding have had a major influence on me and this project. Their kind hearts fully understood my personal situation, and they supported my move back to Amsterdam after I had spent two years away from home. I have very few regrets in this project, but I wish I had spent more time with you at the UWA. I really can’t imagine a better supervision team.

In Amsterdam, I’d like to thank Rosanne Rutten, not only for ‘sponsoring’ me at the University of Amsterdam, enabling me to spend the last two years at the UvA’s Anthropology Department, but also for having a true interest in my personal and academic endeavours. Already during my master’s thesis I learned the enormous added value of her questions and comments, for which she has a talent to make them seem to be mere suggestions, encouraging me to rethink concepts and rephrase my argument. Without you, Rosanne, I wouldn’t have had the courage to write my own research proposal. Your positive encouragements not only helped me to shape my research, but also to connect to many Indonesia scholars in Amsterdam, Leiden and The Hague. You are a wonderful scholar, with a unique gift to motivate people.

I’d also like to thank Jacqueline Vel, who basically came up with the topic of this thesis – the problem of educated youth in east Indonesia – when I visited her right after I had finished my master’s thesis. While I transformed this ‘problem’ into a proper research proposal during the following year, I had the luck to meet with many people who believed in my project, and who have helped me in shaping the research. In particular, Susanne Naafs, Wenty Minza and Gerry van Klinken were of great help. Gerry was also the one who suggested me to go to Australia, and connected me with Lyn and the UWA, which worked out pretty nice.
Fieldwork in Indonesia was kindly sponsored by Professor Yekti Maunati. For this research I received a scholarship from the University of Western Australia, for which I’m the UWA most thankful. I also received funding in the form of a UWA Postgraduate Student Association Conference Travel Award, an EASA 2016 Travel Fund and the RAI/Sutasoma Award. I’m grateful to all funding bodies for supporting this research.

During my PhD, I had the luck to be part of two extended postgrad teams. First, at the UWA in Perth, I want to thank all the anthropology and sociology PhD candidates, as well as the Asian Studies postgrads, who welcomed me and with whom I shared, for six months only, a pretty intense period of my life. In particular, I want to thank Kara, Lara, Crystal, Vanessa, Marco, Hariyadi, Irma, Angelika, and, of course, Wenwen. Danau, without you my time in Perth would have been even more boring ;) Thank you for being a friend and my drinking partner. I’ve learned much from you, and I enjoyed our discussions about race, ethnicity and gender very much, even though we ended up ‘fighting’ every time. Now come to Amsterdam, quickly!

After I decided to return to Amsterdam and my alma mater the University of Amsterdam, I was kindly adopted by the Moving Matters Programme Group via Rosanne Rutten. They provided me with a working place and an academically stimulating and encouraging environment. I thank all MoMat-members for their support, besides Rosanne, Erella Grassiani, Leo Douw, Gerben Nooteboom, Laurens Bakker, Barak Kalir, and Olga Sooudi.

The MoMat PhD Crew has been amazing: Sanderien, Vita, Willy, Retna, Oil, Arnoud, Busarin, Lisa, Tanina, Lieke and Prio, without you life at the UvA would’ve been less awesome. Thanks for all your support and for sharing our PhD misery :) Outside the MoMat Crew, I’d like to mention Tjitske Holtrop, who spent the last half year sitting at the desk across me, finishing her thesis in almost the exact time frame as I did, and with whom I could share the small victories and huge frustrations that are part of submitting a thesis.

Upon my return to the UvA, things quickly became pretty hectic and intense, as the ‘Rethink UvA’ protests erupted in early 2015. The critical engagement displayed by many of the students and staff of the Humanities and Social Sciences made me proud to be at the UvA again.

Outside the UvA, I would like to thank my friends Ariadne, Wouter and Lieke, Steven and Lutien, Timo (thank you for the maps!) and Betty, Anne and Sanne. Our lives have been changing quite radically the last few years, yet I treasure our still often somewhat studentikoże evenings and nights. Let’s drink to that! Also, special mention goes to the ‘Rode Hoed’ gang, who kept me relatively sane in the years prior to my PhD. Sanne, Silke and
Adriaan, my ‘judo’ buddies, it was great to share with you my first teaching experiences back in 2011. Because of you I loved it.

There is family that I need to thank, too. First, I want to thank my extended family, including the in-laws and the Amsterdam cousins. Teun, broer, because you’re a faffie and couldn’t care less about these acknowledgements; Nienke, because you keep my brother in check. Miss you guys. Pa and ma, you are special, and I love you dearly. Thank you for your unconditional love and support.

And finally...Mathilde. I promise: I’ll never leave again without you. Now, a little over two years since I returned home, and after an epic wedding (our wedding!), a new house, a renovation project, two theses, and a pregnancy (OMG, almost a baby now!), I now know what I’ve always known....Life is beautiful. With you.
Note on pseudonyms and non-English words and sentences

All personal names in this thesis are pseudonyms, as are the names of villages and hamlets, except for the names of main towns (e.g. Bajawa, Aimere and Riung), as well as in those cases where no people are involved, or they cannot be linked to specific places.

Non-English words and sentences are written in italics. Without any specification, these words and sentences are Indonesian, whereas the specification ‘D’ indicates the word or sentence is translated from Dutch. Words that are in italics and underlined are from the local Ngada language, and its associated dialects.
Candidate’s Declaration

This thesis does not contain work that I have published, nor work under review for publication.

Student signature:  

Date: 19 August 2016
Glossary

Adat
Adat
Customary law/practice

Arisan
Arisan
Rotating credit groups

Bebas; lebih/kurang bebas
Bebas; lebih/kurang bebas
Free; more/less free (or controlled)

Bemo
Bemo
Mini bus; ‘public’ transport

Bengkel
Bengkel
Motorcycle workshop

Bhaga
Bhaga
Representation of female founding ancestors of uwé; a miniature house

Budaya
Budaya
Culture

Budaya minta
Budaya minta
A culture of asking/requesting

Disiplin
Disiplin
Discipline

Guru honor
Guru honor
Teacher on honorarium basis

Kampung adat
Kampung adat
Ancestral hamlet/village

Kampung
Kampung
Hamlet

Keluarga besar
Keluarga besar
‘Large family’; extended family

Kemajuan/maju
Kemajuan/maju
Progress/advanced

Kios
Kios
Little roadside shop; kiosk

Mandiri
Mandiri
Self-sufficient/independent

Ngadhu
Ngadhu
Representation of male founding ancestors of uwé; a sacrificial post

Ojek
Ojek
Motorcycle taxi

OMK (Orang Muda Katolik)
OMK (Orang Muda Katolik)
Catholic Youth Movement

Pembangunan
Pembangunan
Development

Pergaulan bebas
Pergaulan bebas
‘Free socialising’; often associated with premarital sex (see also seks bebas)

PNS (Pegawai Negeri Sipil)
PNS (Pegawai Negeri Sipil)
Civil servant

Prestasi
Prestasi
Performance

Ramai
Ramai
Lively; bustling with activity

Rang
Rang
Social rank

Reformasi
Reformasi
Reform

Sa'o
Sa'o
‘Great’ House; ancestral house

Seks bebas
Seks bebas
‘Free sex’; often associated with premarital sex

S1 (Sarjana satu)
S1 (Sarjana satu)
Bachelor degree
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SMA (Sekolah Menengah Atas)</td>
<td>Senior high school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMP (Sekolah Menengah Pertama)</td>
<td>Junior high school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVD</td>
<td>Societas Verbi Divini; Catholic missionary organisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Sukses</td>
<td>Success team; campaign workers for a political candidate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Map 2: Map of Flores (map made by T.J. de Geus, August 2016)
1

Introduction

Johannes (44) is a carpenter and a gambler, and is known as an alcoholic. He is married to Maria (43), who takes care of the household, their little kiosk, and a few small plots of land. They have a daughter and a son. Their son – still in high school – lives with Johannes and Maria in their small wooden house at the margin of the village. Beatris (20), their daughter, is studying in Makassar to become a nurse. Johannes is not often hired as a carpenter, and other sources of income are limited. Johannes’ gambling and drinking weigh heavy on the family. In order to pay for Beatris’ studies, Johannes and Maria have had to sell plots of land.

During the Ngada New Year, reba, I visited Johannes and Maria and shared a meal with them. ‘Where is Beatris?’ I asked. I knew it was custom for people living away from Ngada to come home for reba. Johannes replied with a sniff, ‘Ha, do you know how expensive that is?! She can only come back to Ngada when she’s done with her degree and is able to work. Next year she’ll be here, and we’ll have better food!’

A few days later, I had to think of Beatris as I sat in Ibu Yanti’s office. We talked about the hiring freeze that the District government had installed more than a year ago, and how this affected educated young people who returned to Ngada. Ibu Yanti, a senior administrator at Ngada’s Ministry of Health, seemed unsure: ‘Yes, I know there are volunteers, sukarela, working at the local health posts because fixed positions are not available. But how many? I really don’t know...Shall we go and have a look?’

From the Ministry of Health offices, it was only a short drive to the closest health post. This health post, being located in the District’s capital Bajawa, was relatively well staffed. Nevertheless, the head of the health post – who was rather surprised by our unannounced visit – told us he relied heavily on sukarela, young educated volunteers, who worked similar hours as the health post employees on fixed contracts. There were seventeen of them: three nurses and fourteen midwives. At the same time, there were only four paid midwives active at this health post. Without the sukarela, the number of patients would be overwhelming.

One of the sukarela was filing some records in a cabinet. While she kept on putting records away, I asked her about her experiences. ‘Yes’, she was happy that she was able to work, but she had not expected to become a volunteer. ‘When I went to university four years ago to study nursing, I already knew I had to come back to Ngada. But this wasn’t supposed to be a problem, as my sister also had returned about two years before me, and had easily found a job.’

The problem of rural educated young people

This thesis is about the troubled education-to-work transitions of young people in Ngada district on the island of Flores in east Indonesia. It is about people like Beatris and her
educated peers, and their prospects of obtaining a paid job in such fields as nursing, their parent’s expectations, and whether or not they will be able to contribute to their parents’ household. It is about their ambitions, opportunities and the way they navigate their precarious labour market position. At Ngada’s health posts, scattered all over the district, there were hundreds of educated young people working as volunteers, unable to obtain a paid job. At schools, young people – of whom most had recently returned to Ngada upon graduating from their universities in Indonesian cities – had similar trouble securing properly salaried employment. Though many of them managed to obtain a teacher’s job, they were hired as guru honor: positions paid with an honorarium only (a quarter of a teacher’s salary) and without many of the advantages of a teacher’s contract (e.g. job security, access to healthcare, and a pension). Nevertheless, sukarela and guru honor were considered to be lucky: there were so many educated young people applying for unpaid and under-paid ‘jobs’ that there were waiting lists for even these positions. Many educated young people thus remained unemployed.

I do not know what has become of Beatris, but considering the presence of sukarela, guru honor and unemployed educated young people, it is likely that she too had trouble obtaining a paid job upon her return to Ngada. The plight of Beatris triggers the question: what becomes of young people who go to study in cities far away from Ngada and cannot obtain desired white-collar jobs upon their return? Why do they return anyway, and what do they aspire to? How do they deal with parents who have invested heavily in their education – like Johannes and Maria did, by selling land? And how do parents and the community at large react to the presence of educated young people who cannot find properly salaried work? These are the central questions of this thesis.

Relevance: why study educated young people in Ngada?

In Indonesia, as in many other countries, an education is generally considered to be vital for achieving upward social mobility and developing the community. Especially in rural areas, like Ngada, popular discourse dictates that development and progress are still in the making. Due to troubled education-to-work transitions, educated young people cannot fulfil personal desires, ambitions and dreams, and fail to live up to the expectations of parents, their communities and society. There is thus a disjuncture between expectations and reality, as exemplified in the above vignette.

This study of educated young people in Ngada, their experience of disjuncture, and the questions that derive from this experience, is guided by an understanding that ‘young

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1 Sukarela is used in daily speech to refer to volunteers; however, the proper noun for volunteers is sukarelawan, while sukarela is an adjective meaning voluntary.
people ... produce and negotiate cultural forms’ (Bucholtz, 2002, p. 526; see also Durham, 2004; Jeffrey, 2010a; White, 2012a, p. 9). This implies that ‘youth, childhood, and adolescence are historically contingent ideas’ (Durham, 2004, p. 591). Modern Western constructions of ‘youth’ – mainly imagined as a transition from dependence on parents to independence as salaried white-collar workers, capable of constructing a life of well-being – have spread across the globe alongside capitalism, and are powerful and attractive images, in Ngada as elsewhere. Johannes imagined Beatris as educated, working and no longer dependent on her parents. However, the actual experience of ‘being young’ is shaped by inequalities that exist between and within countries (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005; Jeffrey & McDowell, 2004, pp. 137-138).

Far from being a homogenous experience, ‘youth’ is creatively navigated, and young people proactively appropriate the ‘global’ and ‘local’ as they deal with the constrains they face (e.g. Ibold, 2012; Jeffrey, 2010b; Kirmse, 2010; Martin-Iverson, 2012; Nilan, 2011). I, too, argue that Ngada educated young people navigate complex ensembles of ideas, expectations, and opportunities, often with ambiguous and contradictory results.

Ambiguity and contradictions, though not necessarily perceived as such by young people themselves, are important themes in contemporary youth studies. These themes are closely connected to experiences of stagnation and exclusion due to young people’s marginalisation within global capitalism. Youth unemployment is a huge and growing problem, not only in Indonesia (e.g. Hayo Aswicahyono, Hill, & Narjoko, 2011), but also in countries like India (e.g. Jeffrey, 2009) and Iran (e.g. Salehi-Isfahani, 2011), across Latin America (e.g. Saraví & Makowski, 2011) and Africa (e.g. Honwana, 2014; Soares, 2010), and indeed globally. Due to this marginalisation, young people are frequently associated with boredom and waiting, not going ‘anywhere’ and spending excessive periods of time on doing ‘nothing’ or ‘timepass’ (e.g. Assaad & Ramadan, 2008; Jauhola, 2015; Jeffrey, 2010b; Mains, 2007; Masquelier, 2013; Schielke, 2008), sometimes to the extent that ‘being young’ becomes a permanent state (e.g. J. Cole, 2005; Honwana, 2014). During these extended periods of waiting, young people are not devoid of agency, and their ‘timepass’ should not be conflated with idleness. Their waiting often contains subtle forms of resistance. For example, young people are visible and claim space, and are associated with extended socialising in which they come to novel practice (e.g. Beazley, 2002; Jauhola, 2015; Jeffrey, 2010b). In myriad contexts, young people negotiate with senior kin, engage with neighbourhood politics, create translocal networks, or mobilise as part of global networks (e.g. Demerath, 1999; Honwana, 2014; Jeffrey, 2012, 2013). These studies raise questions about the extent to which young people in Ngada practise resistance and political
engagement, or initiate novel practices (e.g. do they challenge local normative gender norms or practices of mutual socio-economic interdependence?).

Popular discourse often treats young people as the ‘bearers of Great Expectation’, but that at the same time this discourse renders them as ‘stand[ing] for trouble’ (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005, p. 20). There is a contradiction between these two images, which has since the beginning of modernity (i.e. the Industrial Revolution) been a major influence in the global expansion of education. Schools were generally considered as places where the ‘Great Expectations’ could be nurtured, and ‘trouble’ could be corrected (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005, p. 23). Nowadays, an education is considered to be empowering (e.g. Da Costa, 2008; Jakimow, 2016; Jeffrey & McDowell, 2004) and as a way out of ‘backward’ agricultural lifestyles (e.g. Morarji, 2010). Access to education has hugely expanded, in Indonesia as well (Naafs & White, 2012, p. 10), to the extent that young people in their twenties are better educated than their parents, including in Ngada.

Becoming educated in Ngada is considered to be vital in achieving progress and development. This idea is intimately connected to a development paradigm promoted by governments, NGOs and supra-national organisations. In this paradigm, young people are considered as ‘human capital’: investment in them is deemed to generate benefits for the future, after they have become adults. Thus, development initiatives are often ‘adult-centric’ (Huijsmans, forthcoming), considering young people as future-oriented, transforming in linear fashion from dependent youth to independent adult. Though this transition might be part of the actual experience of some young people, we should not forget that young people are mainly ‘busy in the here and now, developing youth cultures and identities in their own right’ (White, 2012a, p. 10).

A complex picture emerges from these youth studies: young people, particularly when they are educated, are generally considered to be the vanguard of positive societal change, yet are confronted by unfavourable economic circumstances and dysfunctional labour markets. In their precarious situation, young people initiate novel practices, as they reinterpret local and global repertoires of being successful, and by doing so challenge development paradigms and become associated with social trouble and instability.

This complex picture – the ‘here and now’ of young people – has so-far been studied largely in urban areas: rural areas are often only mentioned as the places where young people do not want to be (e.g. Cuervo & Wyn, 2012, p. 1). In Indonesia, youth studies have followed this general practice and focussed mainly on male (upcoming/lower) middle class urbanites (Naafs & White, 2012, p. 4). Recent studies have been overwhelmingly placed in Java (e.g. Barendregt, 2008; Martin-Iverson, 2012; Naafs, 2012; Nilan, 2008; Smith-Hefner, 2009b; Wright Webster, 2010), or in urban areas outside Java (e.g. Amin,
There are some studies that consider young people in rural areas, yet even these studies tend to focus on the mobility of young people and their time spent in cities (e.g. Munro, 2009). The paucity of youth studies from rural Indonesia does not mean that there are no young people in rural Indonesia any longer. In fact there are many (McDonald, 2014; cf. Sorge & Padwe, 2015), as I, too, have experienced during my research. This is relevant, considering the growing youth unemployment in rural Indonesia (Sienaert et al., 2014, p. 34) and the growing inequality between urban Indonesia, and rural Indonesia (World Bank, 2014c).

By way of these more general considerations, we thus come back to Beatris and her peers. I argue that these young people are familiar with global repertoires of being young through television, social media, and the internet in general. This means not only that young people are up to date with a global pop culture and associated patterns of consumption, but also with connected ideas of what constitutes ‘success’. Like their peers around the globe, educated young people in Ngada desire jobs and consumer goods. However, their experiences are coloured by the specific Ngada context, which poses specific opportunities and constraints (e.g. imposed by family, tradition, geography and other factors). In particular, I argue that un(der)employed educated young people are, upon their graduation, welcomed in and re-integrated into their natal communities. This leads to ambivalent and contradictory reactions amongst these young people. As educated persons, they feel modern and consider that the community networks of interdependence still operative in Ngada are backward. However, they themselves depend on these networks, not only for their education – as their degrees are relatively expensive and enabled through collective efforts – but also during their troubled education-to-work transitions.

As young people are absorbed by community networks of interdependence, they do not need to worry about housing or a livelihood. Instead, young people can volunteer or take on underpaying positions. Through such volunteering and underemployment they can contribute to – albeit in limited fashion – these networks. However, the ambivalence they exhibit towards networks of interdependence suggests that they might not reproduce these networks once they obtain a properly paid job and become socially accepted adults. This is problematic as the problem of rural educated young will not be likely to decrease.

**Operationalisation: who are rural un(der)employed educated young people?**

In this thesis I focus on ‘rural un(der)employed educated young people’. The notion ‘young people’ is used to avoid terms like ‘youth(s)’, ‘adolescent’ or ‘(young) adult’, or their Indonesian counterparts pemuda (youth), remaja (teenager/adolescent) and dewasa (adult), for three reasons. First, terms like youth or adult are often used to address chronological age
cohorts differently, causing confusion as to their exact meaning (Bucholtz, 2002, pp. 526-528). For example, the UN defines youth as ‘all those between the ages of 15 and 24’ (United Nations, 2013, p. 2), while Indonesian law defines pemuda as those between 16 and 30 (Naafs & White, 2012, p. 5). In Catholic circles, membership of the Indonesian Catholic Youth Movement is capped at the age of 35 (or with marriage). There are remarkable age differences between these definitions, especially when one considers that the average age of marriage in Indonesia is from early to mid-twenties for both genders (Utomo, 2014), official adulthood in Indonesia is set at the age of 17, while marriage is legally allowed at the age of 16 and 19 for females and males respectively. So, while official definitions extend youth far into the twenties, people in Indonesia are by law adult while still in their teens. This is quite confusing.

Second, the term ‘people’ is used to emphasise individual experiences of education-to-work transitions, instead of using group classifiers like youth, adolescent, or adult, which have a more anonymous feel. With the word ‘people’, I wish to stress ‘the here and now of young people’s experience’ (Bucholtz, 2002, p. 532), and their situatedness within unique social and cultural contexts. This relates closely to the third reason I prefer ‘young people’ to youth, adolescent or adult – namely that these latter terms are often used to cover those who are engaging in (or have passed through) a process of becoming adult, transforming from ‘incomplete’ into full-grown responsible people (Bucholtz, 2002, pp. 528-529; Cieslik & Pollock, 2002, p. 8). This seemingly transitional character of youth is also recognised by Indonesian law by indicating pemuda as ‘Indonesian citizens who are entering an important period of growth and development’ (Law no 40, quoted in Naafs & White, 2012). Although these experiences of transition are often real and will be studied as such, these experiences alone cannot be used to define a category of people. Transitional processes are messy, and markers of change are blurry. Transitions are fractured and disconnected, placing individuals at the same time in different cohorts. Moreover, a focus on transition embeds ‘youth’ in notions of becoming adult, while instead young people are often just being young, concerned with being successful amongst peers. Young people should be treated as a social cohort on their own. Hence, my research defines young people in regards to their actual social situation. This situation is characterised by four elements: ‘being young’, ‘being educated’, ‘being un- or underemployed’ (i.e. un(der)employed), and in this context, ‘being rural’.

To avoid strict age-defined categories, and to stress that age alone, or an educated status, does not imply adulthood, I refer with ‘being young’ to those who have not yet reached social adulthood and still live with their parents. In Indonesia, marriage is the principal marker of social adulthood for both sexes (Nilan, Parker, Bennett, & Robinson,
‘Being educated’ refers to those who have finished a tertiary degree, mostly at diploma or bachelor level. ‘Being un- or underemployed’ refers to those who do not have employment (i.e. they are unemployed) or those who work below the minimum wage or below what qualifications would entitle them to, and/or in casual employment (i.e. they are underemployed). Finally, ‘being rural’ refers to those who live in a rural area. Here, I define rural in terms of emic perspectives on rural and urban. People in Ngada unanimously consider Flores to be rural, except for its major cities, particularly Maumere, Ende, and Ruteng. Towns like Bajawa (about 15,000 inhabitants) are considered to be less developed and small in relation to these bigger cities, yet compared to their surrounding villages they still have an urban ‘feel’. The area around Bajawa, within close driving distance of town, can therefore be considered as peri-urban, also because many people in this area commute between their community and the offices of the District’s government located in town. Indeed, the peri-urban character of Bajawa was an important reason for me to select this area as a research location (see below). However, the notion itself is meaningless to Ngada people. Due to historical reasons, they see clear boundaries between Bajawa and their own communities, particularly when geographical features (e.g. forests, rivers, gorges and fields) separate their village and Bajawa. In my research I lived in one such community, Ronaga (consisting of about 3,000 inhabitants), though I travelled around much, too. To the Ronaga people, their community – though located a 10-minute motorbike drive away from Bajawa – was distinctively rural, as many community members rely on agriculture for their livelihood. Also, all families, regardless of their livelihood, have access to land, which is located around the villages. The many connections between the people and the land, as celebrated in regular rituals and ceremonies, trace the history of families back to their agricultural origins.

Rural un(der)employed educated young people are thus defined as those who have finished a tertiary degree, but are not yet married. These young people live in, or are closely related to, their rural natal communities. This definition roughly covers young men and women between the age of 20 and 30.

(Not) a village study

Research for this thesis was conducted by means of long-term and intensive fieldwork, mainly through participant observation. Between August 2013 and May 2014, I lived for ten months in Ronaga, a rural community not far from Bajawa. Research and fieldwork were approved by Menristek-dikti (Kementerian Riset Teknologi Dan Pendidikan Tinggi), who

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2 Peri-urban refers to an area adjoining a city or town, which is neither urban nor rural.
granted me a Foreign Researcher’s Permit, and kindly sponsored by Professor Yeki Maunati from LIPI (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia), Jakarta. This research also had approval from the UWA Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number RA/4/1/6025.

Conducting fieldwork in central Flores was a wonderful experience. Quickly upon my arrival, I bought a second-hand motor bike – a GL Pro, Honda’s best model ever, according to the person who sold it to me. That seller was, not coincidently, the brother of my host, Philip. The motorbike made a wonderful roaring sound: not too loud, but certainly not too soft. I spent many hours driving up and down the main road bisecting Ronaga, looking for familiar faces, stopping for short chats with neighbours out on an errand, and honking and shouting out greetings to children, women and men at the side of the road, who laughingly replied to my shouts with raised hands and occasional invitations for coffee or a meal. I felt comfortable and at home in Ronaga and Ngada, and, as I thought my driving behaviour mimicked common male practice, I felt like I was developing ‘a feel for the game’, blending into Ngada village life.  

Of course, I was not blending in at all. I was a ‘bulé’, a ‘white foreigner’, and until the very end of my fieldwork I remained subject to social curiosity and scrutiny. Villagers to whom I had not spoken before knew about my whereabouts and my personal life. Neighbourhood children, who I saw each day passing by on their way to school, kept on staring at me as I wrote my notes in the morning sun, and kept on calling ‘bulé! bulé!’ and ‘hello mister!’ My practice of eating bread in the morning was ridiculed at the nearby kios (little roadside shop), as I routinely went there to get two cardboard-like, ‘chocolate’-filled bread rolls, wrapped in plastic from a faraway factory; two home-fried donut-like pastries with colourful sprinkles; and a package of clove cigarettes, Surya Enam Belas.

Most of the time, I did not mind the curiosity and scrutiny. They often led to casual contacts which gave me the opportunity of inquiry. Sometimes, when I felt I needed to talk to people, I coincidently met new people at the kios, on the road, or at the hot springs. I was also often introduced at rituals and celebrations to educated young people, who invited me over to talk about their experiences. I generally felt enmeshed in ‘webs’ of sociality: everywhere I went, buying water at a little roadside store, or filling up my bike with petrol, people checked where I was from, where I lived, and what I was doing in Ngada.

And so I spent my days, driving around on my Honda, chatting, accepting invitations for drinks and meals, attending weddings, funerals, and rituals, visiting friends or family of my hosts, going for regular baths in nearby hot springs, and enjoying the

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3 In 2010, I had already spent three months in Ronaga, conducting fieldwork for my MA thesis.
relatively cool climate of Bajawa and its surrounding highlands. And as I became enmeshed in Ngada’s webs of sociality, I slowly gained insights into the Ngada experience of being young, educated and un(der)employed.

**Research location**

Ronaga is not a proper village but a parish. It consists of four desa (villages), which share one Catholic church. The villages, which themselves consist of several kampung (hamlets), are built along a bituminised side road from the main west-east connection on Flores. Most houses that are situated directly on this road are made of brick and/or wooden walls and zinc roofs; behind these houses one can find the kampung adat, or traditional hamlets, where houses often have thatched roofs and wooden and bamboo walls.

Ronaga is distinctly rural: adjacent to the villages lies the productive dry garden land, where people grow coffee, maize, yams, fruit, small green pumpkins, beans and red rice. (The latter two are often mixed with white rice, which is a staple, but is bought from elsewhere, as in central Ngada there is no wet rice cultivation.) Almost every family has access to land, which is organised through extended families. These families have their ritual and ceremonial centres in the kampung adat. However, not everyone is dependent on agriculture: some work in construction or own a kios. Many others work as civil servants in nearby Bajawa.

Thus, Ronaga is relatively sizable and distinctively rural. It is a major ritual centre, and it is close enough to Bajawa and its District Ministries that returning educated young people can aspire to jobs in town. It is this combination that makes Ronaga an ideal research location to study the dynamics of un(der)employed educated young people in their rural natal communities.

My immersion in Ronaga village life does not mean that this is a classic (holistic) village study: instead, it is a study of educated young people at village-level. That is because I acknowledge general critiques of such village studies, as portraying communities as static, harmonious and closed-off entities (e.g. Sorge & Padwe, 2015). Therefore, I explicitly connect this study to global flows of people, ideas and goods. Moreover, I was mobile, rendering this thesis more than a study of young people in Ronaga. I frequently visited young people in nearby villages and Bajawa, and followed them to places further afield (e.g. Manggarai, Nageko and north coast Ngada). These visits have enriched my understanding of rural educated young people.
Participant observation and its limitations

During fieldwork, I lived with Philip (41) and Fenny (38), their two daughters, Angel (13) and Merin (2), and Philip’s nephew, Herman (13). Next door lived Philip’s parents, whom I called opa and oma (grandfather and grandmother), their unmarried daughter, Julia (33), and her two children, Jenni (10) and Christiano (6). Fenny was a PNS (Pegawai Negeri Sipil, civil servant) working at the District’s Department of Finance, while Philip worked as a tour guide. Philip’s family was of the highest customary rank, and lived in an (unfinished) customary house of his extended family (see Chapter 3). Fenny was from north of Bajawa, and not originally from Ronaga, but was a respected community member. The family was relatively well known in Ronaga and in Bajawa, which facilitated introductions to people.

The coming and going of family members between these two houses, as well as the daily visits of family living further afield, neighbours, friends and acquaintances, and neighbourhood children playing with Angel, Herman, Jenni and Christiano, rendered the house and its yard rather ramai (lively; bustling with activity). Moreover, the house was located near the village green and the church, as well as near several kios, a billiard hall, and the road connecting Ronaga with Bajawa. By being in and around the house, walking in its neighbourhood, and socialising with the people I encountered in my role as Philip and Fenny’s guest, I became part of dense webs of sociality.

I had similar experiences of liveliness in other parts of Ronaga and in Ngada, for example when I went along with educated young people to their church-based activities, visited them at their parents’ homes, or accompanied them to celebrations, rituals, funerals, and leisure time at the village green, in Bajawa or the hot springs. It is through such activities, and the socialising they involved, that I learned about what it means to be part of Ngada networks of sociality.

The data from participant observation and the many informal conversations and discussion I had with a multitude of people (young and old, educated and uneducated) were complemented with data from semi-structured interviews. I had interviews with numerous civil servants, the District Head, senior administrators of District Ministries and educational institutions, journalists, entrepreneurs and politicians. I also talked with parents, both those of educated young people who were still studying, as well as those of educated young people who were already finished, but had not yet found salaried employment. Finally, I interviewed un(der)employed educated young people living in Ngada’s villages. These young people often were from relatively poor backgrounds for reasons outlined in this thesis. Most times, I met them through the Catholic Church (in

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4 I had lived with Philip and Fenny before in 2010.
particular through its youth organisation ‘Orang Muda Katolik’, or OMK), in my neighbourhood, or while visiting schools and health posts in the area. I visited schools with young people already working there and with whom I was familiar, while I accompanied senior administrators on work visits to health posts. These health posts were frequently located outside Ronaga; most other young people I spoke to were from Ronaga and nearby communities.

I interviewed a total of 24 educated young people. (See Appendix C for an overview of these interviews with young people, their level of education and their current activities). I started most interviews by asking why they had returned to Ngada. This I connected to questions about their life histories and their education (and those of their siblings and parents). Besides these questions, I queried them about their daily pursuits, but also about their aspirations and dreams. Interviews lasted often two hours or more and were semi-structured (i.e. they did not follow a strict order). Although pre-arranged, these interviews were informal, regularly interrupted by family and friends passing by or meals. Also, the interviews were often preludes to visits to other people, where we continued to talk and eat and drink. I did follow-up interviews with thirteen of the young people specified in Appendix C, or saw them on a regular basis. For this reason, these thirteen young people feature by name in this thesis, while the stories of the other interlocutors are intertwined with my descriptions.

There are limitations to participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Gender has affected the scope of this research. As a young man, I was able to talk easily to (educated young) men, but young women sometimes seemed to be shy, not readily responding to my questions. I managed to interview educated young women, but it was less easy to talk with them casually (e.g. during celebrations and rituals).

Language is another limiting factor. I could manage day-to-day conversations in Indonesian, and conducted interviews in this language as well. However, I did not master any local languages. Almost all people in Ngada have good oral proficiency in Indonesian (except for the very old). They are also multi-lingual. In Ngada, there are many languages and dialects, often differing from one village to the next. Within a village, people speak their own language and dialect. However, when various people from mutually exclusive languages are together, they easily shift to Indonesian (or, to be more precise, a local dialect of that). Due to the small catchment areas of languages and dialects, such situations were common, and I could follow conversations. When I could not, there were often people nearby who could help me translate or explain the conversation.

**Thesis outline**
In the chapters that follow, Chapters 2 and 3 provide background information and contextualise the empirical Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. In Chapter 8, I provide a conclusion.

Chapter 2 introduces a theoretical framework for the study of educated young people in Ngada. I discuss theories of late modernity and show how an education shapes young people’s lives. Subsequently, I link this discussion to a literature review of contemporary youth studies in Indonesia. I show how young Indonesian people increasingly need to deal with an individualised ideology of being responsible for their own life courses, yet are confronted by constraining structural inequalities (e.g. gender and poverty) and cultural circumstances.

To better understand these circumstances for Ngada young people, as well as the structural inequalities they face, in Chapter 3 I introduce the ethnic Ngada. I give a historical overview of some of the forces that have shaped current livelihoods. I focus on the influence of the Catholic Church and the state. I also discuss three social domains that I deem important for the current study: family and marriage, religious beliefs and customary practices, and the community economy. I argue that un(der)employed educated young people are part of complex webs of interdependence, in which membership of a House establishes descent and stipulates ritualistic and socio-economic obligations.

Chapter 4 is an introduction to the actual un(der)employed experience of educated young people in Ngada. I provide three vignettes, life stories, of young people who recently returned to their natal communities and struggled to find appropriately salaried employment. Through these vignettes I introduce some of the recurring themes of this thesis. Educated young people expressed their strong connection to local cultural practice and its communal values. However, many of them also explained that socio-economic practices of interdependence hinder progress, as it limits entrepreneurial incentives due to a socially enforced obligation to share one’s gains in extended kin networks. They saw it as their educated duty to change local mindsets in which these practices are rooted. These two points are contradictory and imply that there is much ambivalence in un(der)employed educated young people’s views on rural life.

In Chapter 5, I further explore this ambivalence. I argue that a higher education is considered necessary to achieve upward social mobility, but is also expensive. By means of various tactics (e.g. sharing the costs within extended families and tactics of delaying one’s enrolment) large numbers of Ngada young people are currently able to pursue a tertiary degree. These tactics mean that educated young people are firmly embedded in Ngada networks of interdependence. Moreover, as they are un(der)employed, they remain dependent on these networks for extended periods. This is rather ironic, I argue, as young people often gave as their motivation for their return to Ngada the need to develop the
community and change practices of interdependence, which they conceptualised as a ‘culture of requesting’ (*budaya minta*).

In Chapter 6, I discuss how educated young people navigate the tight local labour market. I show that educated young people are not idle and are actively creating networks and learning skills. Many become *sukarela* and *guru honor*, mainly through activating their social capital through webs of interdependence. Meanwhile, they are easily absorbed by these networks, which feed them and house them. Un(der)employed young people thus do not need to worry about their livelihoods, and they consider themselves to be contributing to the wellbeing of their communities. However, I argue that they do so as ‘young people’: their un(der)employment renders them financially dependent, and as a result they cannot marry and thus remain ‘young’. They delay the reproduction of networks of interdependence on which they themselves depend, as their un(der)employment means they cannot contribute with money or agricultural produce to these networks. More importantly, they are educated, feel modern, and consider networks of interdependence as rural and backward. One can therefore wonder: to what extent will young people reproduce Ngada networks of interdependence, once they have a job and are able to contribute to these networks?

In Chapter 7, I look at the social lives of un(der)employed educated young people. As noted, they are embedded in networks of interdependence, which are constituted in Ngada’s rich social life. People connect to each other and continuously activate networks of interdependence, e.g. during rituals, weddings, funerals and general socialising. I show that un(der)employed educated young people also participate in these rituals and attend weddings and funerals. Educated young people’s social life interweaves with more general community socialising, and young people engage easily with Ngada’s larger sociality. In doing so, they reproduce the social foundations of Ngada village life. However, in their socialising – especially when they are with friends alone – young people come to novel practice, too. In particular, they challenge existing marriage practices, partly due to their increased mobility and their prolonged socialising as ‘youth’. As marriage determines social, ritualistic and economic obligations, challenging these practices may have major effects.

In Chapter 8, the Conclusion, I bring this thesis together. I argue that, after tertiary education in cities far away, educated young people are welcomed back into their rural natal communities and reintegrated into community networks of interdependence. In turn, educated young people are active and positive, even though they cannot find properly waged work. Nevertheless, due to their education they are also ambitious, eager for change, and eager to develop their communities. It therefore remains to be seen if they are
prepared, once they obtain a job and become socially adult, to contribute to Ngada’s interdependent sociality.
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Late modernity, education and Indonesian young people

Introduction
Education in Indonesia, and indeed globally, is generally considered to be a vehicle of progress and development. However, in many places the absence of work for the young and educated challenges this assumption. There are growing cohorts of young people who do not enjoy the benefits of their education in terms of a stable income and a rewarding career. Instead, they are confronted with precarious labour relations and income (e.g. Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000, pp. 306-309; Jeffrey, 2009; Jeffrey & Dyson, 2008; Minza, 2012; Naafs, 2012). There is a disjuncture between ideas of progress and educated young people’s actual economic opportunities. Obviously, the implications of this disjuncture for societies are much wider than young people’s actual experiences of labour and income precariousness alone. There are further ramifications, for example, in the realm of family and marriage, and in rural contexts, young people’s position within their villages.

By implication, the focus in this thesis on un(der)employed educated young people in contemporary rural Indonesia presents an opportunity to critically assess ideas of progress and development. It provides new perspectives on the value of education and exposes localised experiences and grassroots reactions to young people’s prolonged education-to-work transitions. In order to do so, in the first part of this chapter, I develop a general theoretical framework based on a mostly Western-centric body of literature. I divide the treatment of this framework into three sections. First, I consider the position of contemporary young people in late modern society, and discuss experiences of individualisation within pervasive structures of long-standing inequalities. Second, I discuss young people’s agency in contemporary precarious times. Third, I describe the ‘cultural production’ of the educated person (Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996). I discuss, in particular, how educational institutions are both places of cultural production and reproduction.

In the second part of this chapter, I link these theoretical insights to Indonesia. In seven short sections, I give an overview of young people and the issues they face in contemporary Indonesia. Together, the first and second parts of this chapter enable us to
understand the complexities educated young people face in their troubled education-to-work transitions in rural Indonesia.

Young people: being educated in late modern and precarious times

Studies of youth are mostly Euro-centric and often concern ‘the restructuring of youth labour markets ..., the insecurity of employment ..., the expansion of post-compulsory education and training ... and changing patterns of family formation’ (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002, p. 8). These trends have engendered processes of ‘individualization, reflexivity and detraditionalization’ (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002, p. 7), which mark what has become known as ‘late modernity’.

Though the extent of individualisation and detraditionalisation in central Flores, especially in relation to Western contexts, is limited, the concepts related to late modernity are useful for the current research. In fact, the central concept of this research – troubled education-to-work transitions – fits well within late modern parameters and resonates with research from the West. That is because Flores is very much part of regional, national and global economic, political and social flows. Wider events have had, and still have, their effects in a seemingly isolated place like central Flores. Many of the experiences of educated young people in Flores resemble those of young people in the West. For example, both in Flores and in the West, young people are better educated than ever, increasingly marry at a later age than was the norm before, and are financially dependent on their parents longer, as getting an appropriate entry-level job is difficult due to unfavourable macro-economic circumstances. To understand these developments, and how they shape the lives of Indonesian young people, I first consider the structural changes associated with late modernity.

Young people in late modernity

The contemporary state of socio-economic life in Western societies is frequently referred to as late modernity (Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Cieslik & Pollock, 2002; Côté, 2000; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Giddens, 1990, 1991). Late modernity is the result
of profound cultural, political and economic restructuring of previously existing socio-economic arrangements. Whereas modernity – or industrial society – was characterised by ‘the weakening of traditional ties, the depersonalization of relations and the growing obscurity of factors which structure patterns of exploitation’ (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p. 2), late modernity is defined through the ‘restructuring of the key institutions of welfare, employment, family and community as well as developments in information and communication technologies’ (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002, p. 1).

In late modern society, the individual is the basic social unit of reference: collective identities such as class, gender, family or community have lost appeal and coherence. Late modern individuals are less bound to traditional guidelines than before, yet still have to deal with the demands, controls, and constraints of modern institutions (e.g. job markets and the welfare state). However, they import these into their biographies themselves (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 2). This implies that ‘self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 5) as people need to choose between a multitude of options as they navigate their lives. Late modern reflexivity is further enhanced due to increased risk sensitivity, as former structures of security have become restructured, and the individual now faces numerous risks alone. Risks have become anonymous (e.g. Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982), which means that individuals not only need to be reflexive regarding their personal options and choices, but also must be wary of external risks and the day-to-day negotiations of these.

Through historical processes of reforms in, for example, educational institutions, job markets and welfare policies, traditional, communal and familial values have been restructured, and the self-providing individual has become the dominant unit of reference. For young people, this implies that adulthood is no longer marked as deeply by shared social norms, but by personal choice (Côté, 2000, pp. 30-32). Former markers of adulthood, such as marriage, work or age, used to be linked in a more or less linear way, but have become decoupled. Therefore, they are no longer the main determinants for adulthood. Instead of adulthood as a social status, currently adulthood is experienced as a psychological state and revolves around notions of feeling adult and responsible (Côté, 2000, pp. 30-31).

Notions of feeling adult and responsible evolve through processes of choice, and in late modernity opportunities of choice are abundant. Choices need to be made in relation

‘not yet modern’, and still progressing in development. I wish to refrain from such discussions. In this thesis I am just reflecting on the leading theories within Western-based youth studies. Although discussions regarding the hegemonic nature of ‘modernity’ are necessary and rewarding, it is neither the aim nor within the scope of this thesis to expand and contribute to these discussions.

I consider late modernity, as characterisation of contemporary global society, thus as a continuation of the modern era (by contrast, postmodernism implies a break with modernity).
to education, work and social engagements, and increasingly come to people through socially ‘disembedded’ information channels (e.g. through the media or internet, or ‘anonymous’ institutions). These channels have massively increased in availability and importance in recent decades (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p. 3). Nowadays mobile phones and smartphones, tablets, laptops and other communication devices, are omnipresent in people’s lives. Through these devices, people are bombarded with advertisements, and continuously seduced to be part of a global culture of consumption. Images in the media and in public places create desired products and lifestyles and fight for attention. Individuals are connected to each other by virtue of their potential as consumers. However, choices about what to consume are made individually (though subject to processes of manipulation). Hence, people in late modernity seem to live within a paradox: through disembedded information channels, they are connected to the ‘outside’, but they are increasingly self-reliant as well. This paradox increases the individual risk-experience.

Increased self-reliance has prompted some academics to argue that young people have so-called ‘biographies of choice’ (see, for example, Anderson et al., 2005; Chisholm & Du Bois-Reymond, 1993; Du Bois-Reymond, 1998). This suggests that young people see ample opportunity for the exercise of choice and that they feel in control of these choices. However, these opportunities make them responsible for their choices and create a need to justify decisions; young people need to be reflexive. This implies that if they fail to comply with dominant values in society about success, contemporary young people increasingly feel that they themselves are responsible for their position. This means a radical shift from former life course transitions according to shared social norms – e.g. the subsequent stages of school, work, and marriage – to transitions based on choice.

The validity of ‘biographies of choice’ theory has been much criticised. Critiques include feminist studies that question the scope of detraditionalisation and emphasise the pervasiveness of gender patterns and the impact of uneven distribution of economic, social, or cultural capital upon young people’s life courses (Brannen & Nilsen, 2007; Te Riele, 2004; Threadgold & Nilan, 2009; Woodman, 2009). Others emphasise the lasting role of families in shaping young people, particularly young women, contrasting with the individualisation discourse of biographies of choice (e.g. Andres & Grayson, 2003; Wyn, Lantz, & Harris, 2011). All this implies that although young people might experience individualised pressures in their education-to-work transitions, the systems within which they act still constrain the scope and direction of these transitions.

Late modern processes of individualisation have de-structured social transitions in Western societies, yet have not led to a total disintegration of social organisation (Woodman, 2009). Furlong and Cartmel (1997, p. 4) propose that the idea that people
nowadays have so-called biographies of choice is based on an ‘epistemological fallacy’: there is a ‘growing disjuncture between objective and subjective dimensions of life’. (Young) people can experience individualism by means of their ability to reflect on their own actions, but the actual experience is still formed through long-standing objective inequalities (like class, gender and race).

Young people and precariousness

A development associated with the rise of late modernity is a global trend of increased labour ‘precariatisation’. The concepts of precarity and precariousness have been buzzing around social and labour sciences for a while now – but especially since the publication of Guy Standing’s book *The Precariat* (2011). According to Susan Banki (2013a, p. 2),

The notion of precarity describes the condition of being vulnerable to exploitation because of a lack of security. Precarity suggests the potential for exploitation and abuse, but not its certain presence. Thus precarious work is not the fact of consistent unemployment, but the looming threat, and perhaps frequent fact, of it.

Precariousness – the term most fashionable in contemporary academic circles – is used to describe a plethora of insecure and vulnerable labour conditions rooted in global neoliberal discrepancies (e.g. Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013) or the absence of legal documentation in labour migration (e.g. Banki, 2013b), often disproportionately affecting women, also in the West (e.g. Fantone, 2007).

Precarious working conditions are intricately linked to the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s. Neoliberalism, as a macroeconomic doctrine, established a steady decline in government interference in – and reduced regulations for – markets, which increased competition between these markets and enhanced international flows of capital and goods (Ferguson, 2010, p. 170). Due to these processes, ‘contemporary production effectively demands that states compete for highly mobile investments and that workers compete for decent jobs globally’ (Hewison & Kalleberg, 2013, p. 396, Italics in original). As result, labourers have experienced a relative decline in their bargaining power, which, in turn, has resulted in more flexible and informal labour arrangements (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013). Neoliberalism is thus a ‘regime of policies’, in which the market model penetrates all domains of economy and society, serving ‘a class project’ by favouring capital owners at the expense of labourers (Ferguson, 2010, p. 170). By implication, neoliberalism can be considered as a specific form of Foucauldian government (Ferguson, 2010, p. 171), in which the individual is shaped into a self-disciplining and responsible subject (note here the
connection to late modernity). Indeed, precariousness is often considered as disciplining force, a point to which I will return shortly.

In urban Indonesia, experiences of rapid labour flexibilisation have also become common, and growing numbers of workers are stuck in precarious working conditions (Tjandraningsih, 2013). However, one can wonder how relevant a concept like precariousness is in rural Indonesia. Analyses of precariousness deal with labour conditions within neoliberal constellations, and therefore do not seem to apply to places like Ngada, where until the 1970s the organisation of production was based on kinship (and, to a large extent, still is; see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, precariousness is relevant to the situation of un(der)employed educated young people in central Ngada, too, as it points to a cohort that is ‘expecting a life of unstable labour and unstable living; ‘having a level of formal schooling that is well above the level of the job he or she is expected to do’; and ‘must do much more unpaid “work-for-labour” relative to paid labour’ (Standing, 2014, Italics in original). As will become clear, the latter two characteristics, in particular, are valid for educated young people in rural Flores.

Why does it matter that un(der)employed educated young people’s experiences in Ngada link up to global trends of precariatisation? It matters because it makes explicit that young people are not only confronted by unfavourable dynamics of the local labour market, but also by their marginal position in global flows of money and goods. Young people in Ngada are part of a global culture of consumption: they are, through the media, constantly confronted with images of the ‘good life’ in terms of desirable products and lifestyles. Hence, young people are targeted as consumers, and, by means of their education, they expect to be able to act as consumers. They imagine themselves as the educated vanguard of (national) development and positive change within their community. Yet, as will become clear in the following chapters, young people cannot act as such due to the absence of appropriate jobs. Through their connections to global flows of money and goods, and the links they have with global labour regimes, their position in their rural natal communities is precarious and potentially problematic.

Thinking about Ngada’s educated young people in terms of precariousness also accommodates a theoretical discussion about workers’ attitudes towards flexible labour. Explanations of the individualism of the ‘precariat’ often use Foucauldian approaches (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008; Pedaci, 2010; Ross, 2008). In these approaches, flexibility, and thus insecurity, are considered as ‘disciplinary devices’ (Pedaci, 2010, p. 253). Labour market flexibility infuses the individual’s consciousness through experiences of daily practice, time and place. Due to this encompassing quality, precariousness means that individuals no longer need to be subjected to external forms of coercive power to be
submissive. Rather, individuals become self-disciplining subjects as they impose restrictions on their own body through their own subjective disciplined conscience. That is, people need to keep their jobs and so act accordingly. They exhibit individualised risk-averse behaviour, which explains the absence of popular, coordinated resistance against precarious labour conditions.8

A Foucauldian approach has its focus on the self-disciplining individual who internalises socio-economic power differentiation through daily practice, time and place. Such an approach leaves little room for the capacity of individuals to be creative and critically reflect upon the networks in which they are caught (see, for a critique of Foucault, Parker, 2005, pp. 72-76). Because this capacity (i.e. agency) is at the centre of the current research – namely, how young educated people experience un(der)employment and how they position themselves in this respect to other villagers and vice versa – I use a practice theory approach (e.g. Ortner, 1984). This approach acknowledges that the system – the assemblage of institutionalised, materialised and symbolised governing principles under which actors act – shapes and constrains practice to a certain degree, limiting freedom of action, yet also emphasises that the system provides people with resources, which they can deploy strategically. People – as social beings – are culture-producing actors (Bucholtz, 2002, p. 526; MacMillan, 2007, pp. 8-13; Ortner, 1984, 2005). As people actively engage in social relations, they make plans and decisions, albeit often without the ability to oversee the long-term consequences of their actions. They are not mindless self-disciplining characters and are aware of the impact of their choices, although within the limits of their circumstances.

There is an intimate relation between the actor and the system in which it acts. Actors are at the same time both shaping and responding subjects within the system (Ortner, 2005). Subtle forms of power influence this process of ‘shaping and responding’. For example, individual experiences of precarious labour conditions create unique emotional responses to these conditions. These responses can be understood as critical reflections on labour flexibility. Still, it remains difficult for workers to overcome the barriers of late modernity’s institutionalised individualism – also due to personal anxieties and insecurities shaped by this same individualism. Due to subtle forms of power closely connected to the processes of internalising, precariousness has different meanings for workers in different sectors and circumstances and with different characteristics (e.g. gender). As a result, the level, or intensity, of reflexivity upon one’s position within the

8 For a similar, albeit more historically informed, explanation regarding the relative lacuna of class-based reactions to precarious working conditions, see Comaroff and Comaroff (2000, pp. 301-304).
system differs, leading to fractured and mostly individualised reactions to labour conditions.\(^9\)

Precariousness refers to being vulnerable to exploitation, yet it also challenges people to be determined and resourceful (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008, p. 52). Even when personal choice is limited, due to the constraints of flexible labour conditions, we should acknowledge that people engage with these choices as social, creative and resilient beings.

**The cultural production of the educated person**

On a global scale, young people have experienced increasing opportunities for formal education. The effects of education on young people have been much studied.\(^10\) Levinson and Holland (1996, p. 4) argue that the effects of education are contradictory: formal education encourages young people to be competitive and makes them aware of other persons’ achievements, but it also reproduces collective socio-economic inequalities (i.e. class identities). Education defined in the former terms is linked to ideas of upward social mobility based on presumptions of meritocracy. The latter effects have more to do with the pervasiveness of long-standing inequalities. In line with the critiques of biographies of choice outlined above, the rule of merit within schools has been critically assessed in educational studies from the 1970s onward (Collins, 2009). These assessments have led to an understanding ‘that schools are not “innocent” sites of cultural transmission, or places for the inculcation of consensual values’ but rather places which ‘actually serve to exacerbate or perpetuate social inequalities’ (Levinson & Holland, 1996, p. 5). Particularly important in this regard has been the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 1995 [1977]; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Bourdieu defines social inequality as a derivative of differences in one’s capital (economic, cultural, social and/or symbolic). In its basic form, economic capital is one’s command over economic resources such as cash and other assets (often the result of one’s labour, though it could also be inherited from kin). Economic capital can be converted into social, cultural and symbolic capital (note that the direction of this conversion can be reversed). Social capital is formed by strategic networks of ‘mutual acquaintance and recognition ... which provide each of its members with the backing of collectively-owned capital ... in the various senses of the word [economic, cultural or symbolic]’ (Bourdieu,

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\(^9\) Here, it is interesting to note that in the Global North, labour union membership has declined steadily over the last decades. Apparently, the collective character of unions has made them appear less relevant in late modern labour-arrangements (see, for example, Putnam, 1995).

\(^10\) While the influence of education and educational institutions on young people is central to this section, in later chapters education is considered as firmly embedded in communities. Thus, ‘the educated person’ is not only ‘culturally produced’ at school, but also within its own community, and takes to school cultural, social and symbolic capital.
Cultural capital has three ‘states’: the institutionalised state represented in formal educational qualifications; the objectified state which includes the appreciation of things like paintings, architecture or literature; and the embodied state that enables someone to (unconsciously) display context-appropriate behaviour. The latter two states are related because the level of appreciation for cultural production – or how one ‘consumes’ it – depends on the amount of accumulated embodied cultural capital one has. In that sense, embodied cultural capital is an expression of taste (in terms of objectified cultural capital) in such a way that it radiates social standing. Finally, symbolic capital is based upon accumulation of moral credit, which bypasses rational cost-benefit analyses. Acciaioli (1981, p. 43) mentions, for example, how guarding the honour of one’s women, or maintaining clientele relations through the investment of time, are important mechanisms for amassing symbolic capital in Mediterranean societies. Through such actions and investments, people gain honour, reputation, and status, and improve their position within hierarchies established by social codes.

With regards to the social reproduction of inequalities, the concept of cultural capital is particularly useful. Expressions of taste, but also clothing, bodily posture and even notions of intelligence, are all ‘coloured’ by social hierarchy. These expressions therefore enable ‘social distinctions’ (Bourdieu, 1984). That is, cultural capital is acquired through the investment of time, but also through processes of socialisation. The acquisition of cultural capital is limited by the economics of time and class: cultural capital acquired through investments of large sums of money and long periods of dedication (e.g. a university degree) is more highly valued than cultural capital that requires less money and is less time-consuming (e.g. a degree from a vocational school). In turn, highly appraised forms of cultural capital – such as university degrees – can, in theory, be used to gain economic capital through higher salaries or higher solvency. Moreover, according to Bourdieu, elitist notions of intelligence, as expressions of cultural capital, have been institutionalised within the education system as an index to measure success. This is disadvantageous for students from low-class backgrounds, as they do not possess the same amount of ‘starting’ capital as students from high-class backgrounds. Although non-elite students can gain cultural capital through hard work, their early childhood socialisation will generally not let them be

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11 I would like to note here that this latter form of conversion is contested in the current study.
12 Typical of the often non-meritocratic nature of education are the experiences of Papuan Dani students in Indonesia, as described by Jenny Munro (2009). Through their tertiary education they hope to achieve ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’ for themselves and their communities, yet during their study in Indonesian educational institutions they are subjected to racism and stigmatisation. These experiences inform complex and ambiguous reactions, for example towards their own background (e.g. Dani people are backward, yet Dani people are also taking care of each other) and with regard to their own position within these education institutions (e.g. they feel excluded, yet feel empowered through their association with other Dani and Papuan highlander students).
elite. Their ‘habitus’, ‘the durable installed generative principle of regulated improvisations’ (Bourdieu, 1995 [1977], p. 78), makes their actions, unconsciously, a reflection of their low positions in the system of social inequalities.

Habitus, as ‘the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history’ (Bourdieu, 1995 [1977], p. 82). This suggests a rather closed system, in which history informs new practices which then again reaffirm history. Bourdieu’s main concern is with the reproduction of class-based distinctions, rather than with transformation. Through socialisation within the family these historical distinctions become internalised in the individual: they become habitus. People’s practices are generated within their habitus and, as a result, their actions become part of historically created distinctions. Because education has institutionalised these distinctions, students’ habitus to a large extent determines how students pass through their education. Thus, education reproduces socio-economic collective inequalities because it favours those whose habitus is the product of relatively large capital conversions (Levinson & Holland, 1996, pp. 6-7).

Bourdieu’s analysis of education downplays the creative and critical actor. Although he acknowledges the strategic capabilities of people (for example, he gives great prominence to strategic timing of the counter gift in gift-giving practices amongst the Kabyle peasants in Algeria (Bourdieu, 1995 [1977])), the generative principle of habitus, as a historical product, suggests that Bourdieu’s main concern is with social reproduction.

As a response to these models of reproduction, an alternative scholarly interest brought to the fore a more dynamic process, in which ‘scholars sought to understand how “reproduction” could be both contested and accelerated through actions by the same people, in the same educational institute’ (Levinson et al., 1996, p. 9). An important example of this interest is Paul Willis’ (1977) study of working-class ‘lads’ in school in the UK and their attitudes towards education, authority, their peers and middle-class students. Willis acknowledges that class background is a legitimate predictor of a student’s life course; generally working-class kids will opt for working-class jobs. However, he denies that this is a mechanical and institutionalised process. Instead, he stresses the students’ own role in reproducing social inequalities through their own consciousness and creative abilities. These abilities allow people to socially connect and to become part of a social group. Actions are performed in line with the conventions of this group and thus reproduce collective identities (here, Willis comes near to Bourdieu’s habitus). However, this occurs not through constraint or absence of free will, but rather through choice of personal affiliation (Willis, 1977, pp. 171-176).
Bourdieu and Willis’ theoretical foci are not mutually exclusive, and rather intertwined. Bourdieu provides useful tools (i.e. forms of capital and habitus) to understand how structural inequalities shape young people’s post-educational trajectories, while Willis shows how young people’s actions are limited by available repertoires of possibilities, but these can also be used creatively to come to novel practice and to critiques of inequalities. In particular, through Willis, we are able to understand how young people navigate their education-to-work transitions.

**Young People in Indonesia**

The socio-economic context of Indonesia is quite different to the contexts in which theories of late modernity and precariousness have been developed. For example, though successive regimes in post-Independence Indonesia – first Sukarno and his Guided Democracy, later Suharto and the New Order – have invested much in establishing ‘modernity’, the associated developments hardly resemble the processes of (late) modernity in the Western context. In this latter context, late modernity refers to a societal state in which the basic features of modernity – mass production, mass consumption and industrial class organisation – have been restructured, and as a result, the individual, rather than collective identities, has become the basic reference in society. In Indonesia, due to specific historical trajectories of guided development fashioned after traditional (Javanese) modes of governance, collective identities remain important. For example, villages and cooperatives, as vehicles for development in the second half of the twentieth century, have been reproduced through large government bureaucracies. Nowadays, these collectives and bureaucracies coexist with even older forms of organisation, such as kin and village groups. Hence, Indonesian modern societal elements (e.g. large bureaucracies and collectives) cannot be analysed as mere transplants of Western processes of modernity (which were primarily capital-driven).

Despite the specific historic conditions of Indonesian modernity, and their prominence in contemporary society, late modern influences are discernible, too, even in relatively remote areas like Ngada. Through their education, mass media and the internet, and the dynamics of (global) labour markets, young Indonesians are confronted with opportunities and constraints. They are increasingly consumption-minded, and personal success in Indonesia has become structured upon notions of becoming ‘someone’, based mainly on consumption (for the connections between consumption and becoming a religious ‘someone’, see C. Jones, 2010; for a more general take on the relation between
young people and a consumption culture, see Naafs, 2012, pp. 49-50; Price, 1998). Also, large cohorts of (young) people nowadays feel comfortable communicating through and with socially disembedded information channels.

Nevertheless, the underlying assumptions of theories of youth from the West need to be adjusted for the Indonesian context. The meaning of social adulthood differs across the globe, as do schooling systems, opportunities of choice, and economic constraints (see, for example, Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005; Morrow, 2012; Nilan, 2011). Specific socio-economic and cultural constellations remain defining elements of education-to-work transitions (see Honwana (2014) for examples from across Africa, Ibold (2012) and Kirmse (2010) for examples from the former Soviet South, and Jeffrey (2010b) and Morarji (2010) for examples from India). Also, in Indonesia, ‘young people still derive “a strong primary identity” from place, kinship and religion, especially those living outside capital cities’ (Nilan, 2008, pp. 67-68). This means that these transitions need to be placed within their specific ethnographic context. Before I do so for the Ngada context in the following chapters, below I introduce some of the main themes in Indonesian youth studies. I start with some general observations about education and young people in Indonesia. In particular, I consider education in relation to modern life-stage models and nation-building. Subsequently, I discuss educated young Indonesians as part of the global and national economy, in relation to social mobility, migration, issues of gender and sexual morality.

The cultural production of the educated person in Indonesia: modern life-stage models

In Indonesia, there are two important elements of education that must be considered in order to understand the cultural production of the educated person. First, in post-colonial states like Indonesia, the expanding education system introduced modern Western life-stage models to unprecedented numbers of students. Second, in Indonesia education is a pillar of post-Independence nation-building, and is designed in such a way that young people are instilled with notions of citizenship (see, for example, Parker, 2002, 2003).

With regards to the first element, Western life-stage models are linked to ideas that distinguish between the school-going cohorts of children and adolescents on the one hand, and adults who have successfully finished education and subsequently have found work and started a family, on the other (Jeffrey, 2010b, pp. 467-468). In these ideas, there is a clear boundary between child/adolescent and adult, which is mainly marked by finishing education and being successful in the labour market. This implies that in many pre-modern

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13 To be sure, becoming a modern ‘someone’ by virtue of one’s consumption is not unique to Indonesia. See, for a discussion of the links between consumption, modernity, and the fabrication of the self within the global context Comaroff and Comaroff (2000, pp. 294-300).
societies the notion of adolescence (and youth) did not exist, as these notions are associated with mass education and modern (urban) employment.

Western life-stage models are thus modern perspectives on time, and have become ‘hegemonic temporalities’ (Jeffrey, 2010b, p. 468). These temporalities are based on abstract notions of progress and being successful in school, in the labour market, and with starting a family. (Note here the connections with individualised risk experiences, as people feel responsible for their own ‘success’.) These notions include time perspectives that are linear, as opposed to indigenous temporalities which are much more connected to ecological processes (e.g. the changing of the seasons), which represent, in the words of Tim Ingold (2006, pp. 11-12), the ‘continuous birth’ of the world: time has no direction, and in the moment events come into existence, in a continuous process of renewal.

Hegemonic life-stage models, and the linear progress they represent, are the result of direct state interventions, which are aimed at social reproduction. In the West, such interventions range from policies regarding education, the regulation of labour and welfare projects, and programmes that range ‘from direct policy legitimating where and how children [can] be raised, to subsidies like low-interest mortgages for young couples and tax breaks for young parents, to direct support of elderly retirees who no longer [have] a place in the new homes [built] by their children’ (J. Cole & Durham, 2007, p. 11). These interventions affirm life-stage models through which one can progress (i.e. from children, to young couple and young parents, to elderly people).

In the Global South, similar state interventions can be distinguished, as new elites of decolonised states tried to modernise their country, and close the alleged gap between developed and underdeveloped states through implementing programmes inspired by Western state interventions. In Indonesia, state interventions were largely limited to the introduction, spread and promotion of Western-style educational institutions. These institutions had profound implications. They introduced young people to a prolonged experience of ‘being young’ and instilled students with ideas of linear progress. As young people progress from one year into the other, their merits are constantly ranked, and they move from school to school with progressing age (kindergarten, primary school, junior high school, senior high school, and tertiary education), until finally they graduate (if not having dropped out). This creates a sense of getting somewhere (e.g. a job and social adulthood), while simultaneously leaving something behind (childhood/being young).\[14\]

\[14\] The idea of linear progress through school resembles the notion of ‘the ladder of progress’, as utilised by Jason Price (1998). ‘The ladder of progress’ relates to continuous, predictable, and assumed experiences of progress. It shapes one’s life course planning and goals, one’s ambitions, and one’s notion of what constitutes success. Price develops ‘the ladder of progress’ in relation to middle class Indonesia, yet it resonates with the experiences of educated young people in rural Flores. That is, a notion of success is each
In the West, during the course of the twentieth century, interventions became less class-based and helped to establish a society in which individuality and reflexivity became dominant elements of life. Nevertheless, while modern fixed life-stage models have lost relative relevance in the West, within individualised experiences of late modernity the linear consecutive life-stages of child/youth (school and dependence upon parents) and adult (work/success/independence) remain powerful images. Also in Indonesia, being successful reaches beyond education: it not only includes high marks, or high rankings in class, but also refers to post-educational achievements. Getting a paid job is nowadays an important marker of success, particularly for men.

The cultural production of the educated person in Indonesia: nation-building

In Indonesia, education had, and to a large decree still has, a major role in (post-Independence) nation-building and in modernising the State (Leigh, 1999, pp. 37-38; Munro, 2009, pp. 45-47; Parker, 2003). In particular during Suharto’s New Order regime (1966-1998), individuals were expected to distance themselves from pre-modern collectives like tribes, or archaic practices, and to become modern citizens and contributors to Indonesia’s general welfare. To achieve this, ‘the principal and explicit aim of the Indonesian education system under Suharto was the creation of good Indonesian citizens’ (Parker, 2002, p. 3). Textbooks were designed to disseminate state ideology, and teachers fervently adhered to them. Consequently, students learned to self-identify with the newly established state and to become pursuers of success in service of the nation (Parker, 2003, pp. 205-208).

The New Order’s ideological construct of the good citizen was intimately connected to the themes of pembangunan (development) and kemajuan (progress) (Heryanto & Lutz, 1988; Langenberg, 1986). These words had featured in official discourses since the foundation of the post-Independence state, yet it was especially during the New Order that they became an omnipresent key to political legitimacy (Langenberg, 1986, p. 7).

The New Order was a political system that advocated ‘modernization and de-emphasized divisions in society’ (T. Jones, 2013, p. 120). Cultural diversity was subject to government scrutiny, subsequently de-politicised, and, if needs be, ‘cleansed’ and perfected, in order to propagate economic development (see, for example, Acciaioli, 1985, 1997). Modernisation functioned ‘as [an] essential underpinning to the authoritarian,
developmentalist state” (Langenberg, 1986, p. 18). A new urban middle class was envisioned as the ultimate bearers of modernisasi, consuming their way through new shiny malls, and developing Indonesia towards economic powerhouse status.

This modernisation discourse seems to contradict elements of the pembangunan ideology that are more cultural in nature, and which stressed “mental”, “moral” and “spiritual” development’ (Langenberg, 1986, p. 19). In this latter sense, development is an abstract goal that, based on something bigger than the individual, appeals to humanity’s morals. As such, it opposes individual consumption for the sake of consumption, or modernity for the sake of modernity. Such ‘mindless’ consumption, or modernisation, would threaten precious norms and values, often associated with ‘the village’.

The New Order’s development approach was thus rather ambiguous: in terms of the economic it rendered pre-modern collectives and archaic practices obsolete; in terms of cultural development, these collectives and practices became something that needed to be preserved (though, not before being depoliticised and ‘perfected’), and formed the very essence of Indonesia. For example, Koning (1997, pp. 30-34) describes how ‘the’ Javanese village is constructed in popular discourse as egalitarian, homogenous, and as if it is placed out of time. It is a place people can dream of, where life is tranquil and devoid of modern day-to-day hassles.

Images of the village as a beautiful, harmonious and protective environment are transmitted in schools to students through their textbooks. Parker (2002, p. 10) notes: ‘The beauty of the village was a constant: the air was always fresh and clean; the views were green (except when the rice crop was yellowing) and extensive (implying that there was lots of empty space); and it was always quiet and peaceful’.

The ‘traditional village’ was thus not only perceived as pre-modern and obstructing progress. Instead, the image was often also pragmatically invoked for development. As New Order’s ideology included the motto ‘unity in diversity’, it could appropriate state-sanctioned, purified and apolitical expressions of tradition (e.g. the notion of gotong royong) in name of development (Acciaioli, 1985, 1997; Bowen, 1986; Hitchcock, 2005). Jan

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16 Here, the Taman Siswa organisation’s influence is noticeable: central to its ideas was that the Indonesian educational system needed to be both modern and distinctively Indonesian (i.e. Javanese). With regards to the former, it introduced Western-style progressive (for that time) elements in its curriculum (e.g. children were supposed to learn self-expression). With regards to the latter, and as response to modernising (i.e. Western) influences, the organisation was organised ‘on a “family basis” that ‘served to justify paternalism’, but which also reflected a sense of loss of the pre-colonial community (McVey, 1967, p. 137). In this respect, the rural village was considered to be the ‘unspoiled bearer of the culture’, and thus distinctively Indonesian, as ‘reservoir of ... culture’ (McVey, 1967, p. 138).

17 See Breman (1988) for a critical discussion of the colonial origins of this image of the village.

18 Parker gives numerous other examples of textbook images of peaceful village life. Villages are depicted as safe, clean, moral, and healthy. Such views of village life contrast with notions of a modern, industrial and consumer-based economy.
Newberry (2014, pp. 273-275) notes how through this appropriation of tradition and the image of the ‘the romantic village’ women were mobilised, providing free labour for community work and taking care of husbands and children, ensuring they could contribute to modernising the country.

*Pembangunan*, despite its many ambiguities, was a pillar of the New Order’s state ideology. It permeated all levels of administration, and infiltrated the social and the personal realms of Indonesians throughout the archipelago. As Heryanto (1988, p. 2) writes, ‘It is incalculable how many speeches, textbooks, seminars, kinds of propaganda, meetings, or high-level diplomatic sessions there have been in this era with the theme “Development”’. Consequently, it became ‘a universal truth’.

Since *Reformasi* (the post-1998 reforms), not much has changed with the modernity discourse of Indonesia’s educational system. The New Order’s strong centralism in education began to weaken through the 1990s, with the tentative introduction of local content to the curriculum, but this had limited effect (Bjork, 2004, 2005). In order to improve the performance of the education sector (and to reduce its costs), the idea was to appeal to local actors – teachers and bureaucrats – and to give them the opportunity to develop course programmes more suited to local situations and constellations.\(^{19}\) However, the shortcomings of these decentralising regulations soon emerged: teachers were not accustomed to create content themselves and thus preferred to stick to ‘the old way’, while bureaucrats had difficulty delegating control of the curriculum to the schools. Despite its lack of success, these early attempts of shifting power from the national to the local were just the beginning of much larger decentralisation programmes. With the collapse of the New Order, *Reformasi* brought a new phase in education.\(^{20}\) In 2002 the Ministry of Education and Culture issued Degree No. 044/U/2002, to reform the sector and increase community involvement in managing the schools. In 2006, new curricula were introduced, and school-based management was propagated. However, its success has not been overwhelming (for an overview of current issues, see the edited volume by Suryadarma & Jones, 2013). Education remains a modern state-led project, aimed at creating an educated human resource base and producing the appropriate natural citizenry.

Thus, regardless of *Reformasi*, students keep learning that they have to contribute to the well-being of their country. To achieve this, sacrifices and achievements are required, both from parents – in terms of finance – and the students: they have to display *prestasi*

\(^{19}\) For example, in 1994 the Local Content Curriculum was implemented in NTT (decision No.9/121/1194), allowing 20 per cent of the curriculum to be developed by the schools (though within limits set by the district) (Butterworth, 2008).

\(^{20}\) In particular Laws 22 and 25 in 1999 were landmarks in the deconstruction of Indonesia’s former centralist policies. These laws regulated that, beginning in 2001, many political rights and obligations, together with revenue collecting, were transferred from Jakarta to the provinces, districts, and sub-districts.
(academic performance) and disiplin (discipline), and be mandiri (self-sufficient) (Parker & Nilan, 2013, pp. 92-101).\textsuperscript{21} Through their education, young people from Ngada are instilled with ideas about development, progress and good citizenship. They learn about the virtues of their villages, but also their shortcomings. Often, young people echoed the ambiguities of state discourse: ‘yes, we live in a beautiful village’, but they also told me: ‘our village is so backward’. Others stated that ‘our culture is great’, and minutes later went on a rant, criticising customary practices. Educated young people often have the feeling that they have to transcend the backward village, perform well in schools to be able to attend (public) universities, and subsequently contribute to Indonesia’s economic development. Yet, students are not mindless recipients of state ideology, but interpret it, reflect on it, and strategically deploy it. Sometimes students stick to official ideologies – fervently discussing their beneficial features – while at other times they bend the rules, trying to get by, or opportunistically create new opportunities and chances. Humans are not machines, but filled with emotion, motivation and ambition.

\textit{Young people and the Indonesian economy}

Young people’s lives all around the world have become enmeshed in rapid societal change due to global processes of neoliberal integration (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000). Simultaneously, on a global scale formal education opportunities have expanded, altering ideas and ambitions about future possibilities amongst young people, their parents, and wider social networks. Nowadays, these ideas and ambitions are often directed at (individual) upward socio-economic mobility. At the same time, people are increasingly made responsible for their own fortunes, and the self as project is a common good (e.g. Edwards, 2014, pp. 40-41; Strathern, 2014, pp. 24-28; Trnka & Trundle, 2014). As a result, ‘young people in many areas, and particularly the poor, are trapped between declining state support and increasing familial and personal ambitions’ (Jeffrey & McDowell, 2004, p. 132).

In Indonesia, contemporary education-to-work-transitions are part of quickly changing political, social and economic realities. According to Naafs (2013, p. 233), ‘In Indonesia ... changes related to economic restructuring, state provision of education, and family life are often happening in conjunction with one another, creating new opportunities, dilemmas, and contradictions for young adults’. As young people navigate these opportunities, dilemmas, and contradictions, they are at a crucial point in their lives: transforming from young people into socially accepted adults. In Indonesia social

\textsuperscript{21} Parker and Nilan collected data mainly in senior secondary schools.
adulthood comes with marriage and family life, yet gaining financial independence is a crucial prerequisite for this adult life-style. Hence, prolonged education-to-work transitions are not mere economic problems; as these transitions ensure young people remain ‘young’, they are social issues, too (Nilan et al., 2011, pp. 710-712).

In Indonesia, education-to-work studies so far have been primarily located in urban and Muslim-dominated areas (mainly Java), and have focused largely on (lower/upcoming) middle-class young people (Naafs & White, 2012, p. 4). These studies must be understood in the context of rapid socio-economic and political change in the last fifteen years. Democratic reforms were introduced in 1998/1999 after Suharto resigned amidst an economic crisis and after months of social protests, and economic development since then has been relatively strong. Despite a global financial crisis, economic growth in 2012 was for the sixth consecutive year above six per cent (Olivia & Yamauchi, 2012, p. 143; World Bank, 2012c, p. 2). Since then the economy has slowed down, mainly because of a decline in global commodity prices (Armstrong & Rahardja, 2014; Howes & Davies, 2014).

Indonesia’s slowing economic growth is bad news for the 2.3 million new young workers who (are trying to) enter the labour market each year (Armstrong & Rahardja, 2014, p. 18). Already, youth unemployment is a serious problem in Indonesia. In 2010, unemployment for young people (ages 15-24) was three times as high as it was for the total working age population (21 per cent versus 7 per cent) (Manning & Purnagunawan, 2011, pp. 322-326). Meanwhile, some observers have noted that while unemployment numbers have decreased over a longer period, the creation of new jobs is still lagging behind actual economic growth, prompting them to label Indonesia’s economic development as ‘jobless growth’ (Hayo Aswicahyono et al., 2011, p. 114). One indicator of this jobless growth is that there is a massive informal labour sector in Indonesia. Though a problem in the cities, it is particularly in the outer provinces that workers have trouble finding secure work, and thus find themselves in informal positions (Sienaert et al., 2014, p. 34), where they lack benefits like a fixed income, fixed contract hours, pensions, and access to healthcare. Even if formal sector jobs can be obtained, most such jobs are in ‘low-productivity, non-skill-intensive sectors’ (Sienaert et al., 2014, p. 35) with remunerations that resemble informal positions. Hence, in Indonesia, underemployment is a bigger problem than unemployment.

While we realise that these are dire prospects for anyone in the labour market, it is important to notice that it is mostly a problem for young people. As Naafs and White point out (2012, p. 4):

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22 Since 2010, unemployment has continued to decline in Indonesia. In 2012 only 6.1 per cent percent of the labour force was unemployed; in 2013 it went down to 5.9 per cent. However, these numbers do not represent the complete picture; the presence of a large informal sector distorts official labour statistics (Sienaert et al., 2014, p. 32).
Young people are key actors in most important processes of economic and social change. If we take some examples from Indonesia, two important themes in macro-studies of social change are the processes of urbanisation (spatial movement of population) and de-agrarianisation (sectoral shifts in employment).

We see massive shifts in labour from the agricultural sector to other sectors, in particular the service sector. Between 1980 and 2010 the share of people aged 15 and above who were working in agriculture declined from almost 60 per cent to 40 per cent (Purnastuti, Miller, & Salim, 2013, p. 217). Generally, it is thought that de-agrarianisation equals urbanisation. Though this might be partly true, it does not mean that the countryside has been depleted of its labour force. Currently, 55 per cent of Indonesians live in non-urban areas; it is estimated that in 2035 between 45 per cent and 35 per cent of Indonesians will still live in rural areas (McDonald, 2014, p. 46).

Much research has been done into young people’s migratory endeavours, their new urban lives, and the effects migration has on the community and on its members who stay behind (for a perspective from the global South, see Cohen, 2011; for Indonesia, see Hugo, 2004; Juárez, LeGrand, Lloyd, Singh, & Hertrich, 2013; Minza, 2012; Silvey & Elmhirst, 2003; Utomo, Reimondos, Utomo, McDonald, & Hull, 2013). How educated young people, returning from their studies to their native villages, manage their lives and entry into the labour market is less studied, a shortcoming that this study tries to remedy.

Young people, education and social mobility
Access to education has expanded dramatically over the last few decades in Indonesia. The number of schools increased over the years, and young people tend to attend them longer. For example, in 1984 only six years of compulsory education were required (starting at about age 7); since 1994 students have been required to go to schools for nine years. There has been a steady increase in student numbers of both primary and secondary education. Also in tertiary education, an increased number of students find their way to the higher education institutions (mostly at diploma and bachelor level). For example, between 1992 and 2012 the enrolment rates in primary education increased from 88.7 per cent to 92.4 per cent; in the same period enrolment at junior secondary education increased from 50.0 per cent to 70.8 per cent; in senior secondary education nowadays there is an enrolment rate of almost 50 per cent, up 14.6 per cent since 2001; and finally, in tertiary education the enrolment rate went up from a mere 2 per cent in 1975 to 19 per cent in 2012 (Purnastuti et al., 2013, pp. 213-215). These are impressive results, but access to tertiary education is

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23 To be sure, processes of de-agrarianisation in Indonesia predate the 1980s.
still set to expand. Partly that is because young people want to increase their level of education, even though the quality and funding of tertiary education are a major concern (Hill & Wie, 2012, pp. 234-235; Naafs, 2013, p. 238). Also, due to the successes at primary and secondary level (see, for example, Negara & Benviste, 2014, pp. 19-22), and the upward credentialing of the labour market, young people increasingly feel the necessity to enter the labour market with a tertiary degree (Parker & Nilan, 2013, p. 35).

With increased levels of education, expectations about the future returns of education increase as well. Many young people frame their expectations in terms of developing and modernising the country. In that sense, young people in Indonesia are often considered to be ‘the vanguard of political and social change’ (Naafs & White, 2012, p. 7). For example, during the twentieth century, young people, referred to as pemuda, denoted the generation that had fought against oppression and for social change and justice (in 1908, 1928 and 1945-1949 against the Dutch; as the generation that saved the nation from Communism (1965); and in 1998 against the New Order regime. Pemuda as a concept was therefore charged with a notion of heroism, and was characterised by a strong political consciousness. However, their political activism also meant that pemuda were conceived ‘as a dangerous threat to social and political stability’ (Naafs & White, 2012, p. 7; see also Parker & Nilan, 2013, pp. 18-34).

Currently, the concept pemuda has lost much of its appeal in popular Indonesian discourse, while the term remaja (teenager, often younger than 20, but also applied to young people up to 25) has become the norm. After the Reformasi, young people in Indonesia became a less politically united collective than was the case during the anti-Suharto protests. Idealism, too, became less a defining factor for young people as a generation. Instead, pragmatism, individuality, and concerns about education and jobs have taken over– an indicator of the late modern circumstances for young people growing up in present-day Indonesia. Nowadays, remaja are often associated with consumption of glamorous, cool lifestyles (for an overview of this shift in discourse see Parker & Nilan, 2013, pp. 18-39).

Increased individuality and reflexivity are closely connected to late modern notions of success, typically framed as ‘becoming someone’ (Naafs, 2012, p. 50). It is a typical

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24 However, during the 2014 presidential elections, there was a surge in young people’s political activism, in particular in support for Joko Widodo, the eventual winner of these elections.

25 The central cohort of this research does not fit exclusively within the pemuda/remaja parameters as I also focused on young people who approached their thirties. Therefore, during fieldwork (and in this thesis), I used the words orang muda (young people) to delineate the cohort in which I was mostly interested.

26 This ‘someone’ is very different than pre-modern notions of individuality. For example, Hoskins (1986) describes how rich and influential male Kodi (on the island of Sumba) build themselves huge megalith graves, even when they are still alive. These graves, which are expensive by virtue of the number of people involved and the number of required animal sacrifices, are built to showcase the builders’ individuality and to safeguard
reply to queries regarding personal aspirations amongst many urban young people. It refers to an individualised endeavour, in which modern lifestyles are achieved through consumption, and owning specific items becomes the embodiment of modernity. For example, having a mobile phone – or even better, a smartphone, to access the internet – or owning a motorbike signifies success according to young people’s worldviews (e.g. Amin, 2012; Barendregt, 2008, 2009). Meanwhile, new vocabularies are developed by (urban) young people to create alternative social norms and to stress their modern, cosmopolitan world view (Barendregt, 2008; Djenar, 2012; Smith-Hefner, 2007). Young people in Indonesia are targeted as consumers, making them part of a global culture of consumption. Yet, due to troubled education-to-work transitions, being one is rather problematic (Naafs, 2012, pp. 53-54).

Young people and migration

In their search to become someone, young people often migrate to cities or other parts of the archipelago, or the world. However, not everyone leaves their rural area. Large numbers remain in, or return to, their rural natal community. It is therefore interesting to consider some of the forces/reasons that prevent young people from leaving their natal community. This implies that we question the hidden assumption of many developmental narratives that migration is inevitable and necessary in national processes of modernisation (Li, 2010; Morarji, 2010, pp. 50-52). Too often, young people are depicted as eager and able to migrate, focussed solely on money and life in the city. Obviously, socio-economic circumstances can sometimes be so severe as to necessitate migration, yet young people and their families might opt for alternative strategies (e.g. sending children to family members or other related houses nearby).

Besides personal reasons not to migrate, there are other factors that have a negative influence on outmigration. For example, the Catholic Church on Flores often opposes migration in its pastoral advice, as migration can have dramatic effects on family life (c.f. Elmhirst, 2007). Local governments, too, tend to discourage migration, as it stimulates a local brain-drain: not because the migrants themselves are highly educated – almost all outmigration from eastern Indonesia is by low-skilled labour – but because remittances are invested mostly in education for siblings in other parts of Flores, or Indonesia. Moreover, migration is a selective process in which geography and personal relations matter: Hugo (2004) estimates that two thirds of the total outmigration from the East Nusa Tengara a future memory of their accomplishments. This kind of individuality is directed towards the community and therefore has much to do with symbolic capital. Late modern notions of individuality, however, are more concerned with plain economic capital and personal success, and are directed outward as they often include a desire to belong to a global culture of consumption.
province originates from the two easternmost districts of Flores (Sikka and Larantuka) – and even there from a select number of villages – due to historical links between these parts of Flores and the receiving area of labour migration (mainly Malaysian Sabah) (note that this concerns mostly low-skilled workers). Personal relations, or relations between pioneering migrants and their villages of origin, are essential in these migration processes. Pioneering migrants have established the right contacts (e.g. middlemen, harbour officials, etc.) and know the way to (illegal) border crossings. They enable large numbers of young men to travel from eastern Flores to Malaysia. Bajawa and surrounding districts are less embedded in these historically generated migration networks than places in eastern Flores. Having said that, during fieldwork I found that virtually every family had at least some family members in other parts of Indonesia, or even further afield. Moreover, the vast majority of people told me it is easy to obtain low-skilled work in, or get to, places like Makassar, Kalimantan, or Java. Apparently, interconnectedness between the islands, and between Flores and other parts of the world (mainly Malaysia), has increased, stimulating migration (for labour, but also for study).

For educated migrants, who aspire to white-collar jobs, social capital remains a limiting factor, as it is vital in the process of obtaining such jobs. Often social capital is expressed in terms of family, clan, ethnicity or island origin. Due to their mobility, these migrants lack sufficient social capital to gain access to desired jobs in their new towns of settlement (Minza, 2012; Naafs & White, 2012, pp. 11-12; Tidey, 2010). Indeed, for educated young people in Ronaga and other villages in central Flores, not having these networks in the cities of their studies was often mentioned as a reason for returning to Ngada. They considered their chances of getting desired white-collar jobs much higher in Ngada than would be the case in the cities of their studies. As they told me, there is much more work in the cities, yet this is mostly for the uneducated. For the ‘good’ jobs, young people need the right connections – connections these young people from rural Flores often do not have.

**Gender, work, and underemployment**

Besides social capital, gender is a significant influence on careers. Whether someone is a man or a woman limits – and often determines – the range of jobs one can pursue. This is true for both genders, but in practice women have a relatively weak position in the labour market. In Indonesia, ‘social and religious constructions of ideal womanhood’ are still relevant (Ford & Parker, 2008, p. 13). Official state-sanctioned gender ideals, such as the notion of *kodrat* (natural destiny, or inherent nature) during the New Order regime, have been stressed for decades in Indonesia. In official speeches and state-controlled media,
women were continuously projected as the keepers of stability and the caretakers of new generations, while men were often depicted as responsible breadwinners in their families (Blackburn, 2004, pp. 25-26; Newberry, 2014; Nilan, 2009, pp. 330-331). In reality, these gender ideals and practice rarely coalesce perfectly, and popular ideas about the gender order started to shift quickly after the fall of Suharto and his regime. The effects of this shift have been quite contradictory, with pro-equal rights attempts being matched by (religious) conservatism. Nowadays, women are still more limited in their choice of career than men. Social and religious constructions direct women to jobs that are related to the domestic sphere or which are not too public (Naafs, 2012).

In contrast to these dominant ideas about female careers, young women often want to be modern and socially mobile (Naafs, 2012). In a large survey conducted amongst high school children (aged about 16) in different parts of Indonesia (Nilan et al., 2011), all girls indicated their desire to pursue a career. Moreover, these girls seemed to consider marriage not as the end of this career, but rather envisioned their future in dual income households. Seemingly in contradiction to this dual income ideal, the same girls considered material prosperity less a priority in their imagined future life than a harmonious family and religion. There thus seems to be a tension in preferred life course development: on the one hand, girls envision themselves in careers that transcend generally accepted gender ideals; on the other hand, they incline to these ideals when talking about the priorities in life. In another study, conducted amongst young Indonesians aged between 15 and 22 (and thus a little older than in the previous study), similar views concerning marriage were expressed: ‘beyond the obvious desire for good health, faith and family/love were consistently the two highest ranked elements of the “good life” for both sexes’ (Nilan, 2008, pp. 70-71).

Girls and young women appear to live in a late modern paradox: they prolong education to fulfil aspirations and ambitions about consumption, autonomy and upward social mobility, but remain subject to gender ideologies, which promote their domestic roles. Men are less subject to such a paradox, and are less restricted in their choice of career than women in Indonesia. In popular discourse, they are generally thought of as the breadwinners. Though this ideal can turn into severe social pressure, too, they are less bounded by domestic chores and constructions of modesty and chastity. Young men, before they assume their responsible tasks in society, are even allowed to have some ‘play-time’, in which they are ‘ruled by passion, rather than reason’ (Nilan, 2009, p. 333). This

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27 Much research about women and careers, such as that of Naafs (2012) and Ford and Parker (2008), refers to Islamic constructions about preferred jobs for women; the current project studies young Catholic people.
does not mean that their activities are just ‘play’; for example, many young men perform quite active roles in activist politics.\(^{28}\)

Prior studies on un(der)employed young people elsewhere tend to focus upon men, mainly due to the socially constructed role of the male provider. Greg Jeffrey (2010b), for example, connects educated young men in urban North India to the activity of ‘timepass’. He followed several young men who all have one or more university degrees, but are unable to get jobs that match their education. They hang around, occupy street corners, play cards and joke around. They feel useless and left out of modernity. Occupying the street gives these young men a new sense of identity: they are seen by other people, often feared, and get a sense of solidarity from their peers, which transcends class and caste boundaries. Hence, these young men, despite their marginality vis-à-vis mainstream society, are able to become ‘someone’ nonetheless. Basri Amin (2012) describes similar practices by young ojek (motorcycle taxis) drivers in Ternate, North Maluku. He describes how the motorcycle is used by relatively marginal young men to carve out a new and modern identity. This ‘carving out’ is not only a matter of buying a bike and driving around in search of customers, but also by physically claiming parts of the street as pangkalan (stations) (see also Spyer (2016) for a photo-essay on these stations). These stations are fitted with all kinds of electrical appliances (radios, TV’s or computers) with the help of (political) patrons, and have become the centre of social action for young men. In return for these appliances, the young ojek drivers become the agents of their patron, as a tim sukses (success team; a group of campaign workers supporting a political candidate) during political campaigns.

In the city of Bandung (Java), young people (mostly male university graduates), who feel left out of mainstream society, have formed an underground music scene. Martin-Iverson (2012) describes how these young men, through hard rock music and by virtue of connecting to a global creative music scene, find alternative channels of becoming modern. In another study, Ian Wilson (2012) describes how socio-economically marginal young men from Jakarta can still gain a sense of identity and honour in their community by becoming a jago (literally a cock/rooster), an historical construction of the defiant young man who struggles to be masculine. The real jago is admired, for he is violent, but also socially just, distributing the gains he makes as a gangster amongst his networks. The jago thus needs to be careful: he cannot simply be violent, as this would decrease the respect he gains in his networks. Without this respect, he would just be an ordinary criminal. The jago has to

\(^{28}\) Similar observations have been made in other parts of the Global South; see Jeffrey (2009) and Honwana (2014) for examples from India and Africa respectively.
carefully balance his actions: his honour and prestige are constantly on the line, and he has to perform his masculine role with ‘a certain feel for the game’.

Such ambiguity in the construction of masculinity has the potential to push young men in violent directions. Within the domestic sphere, violence (against women and children) is a serious issue within Indonesia. This violence is often considered an expression of failed masculinity, especially as a man cannot realise the status of breadwinner (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000). Within the public sphere, un(der)employed young men often act – or are used – as political brokers or gangsters. In the aftermath of Suharto’s resignation as President in the late 1990s, young men formed violent militias (e.g. Amin, 2012; Klinken, 2007; Tadjoeddin, 2013). As noted above, this is a pattern that goes back in time much further, for example, when young people (pemuda) were important as guerrilla fighters during the Independence struggle. Even today, young men can be active in organisations like Pemuda Pancasila (Pancasila Youth), a paramilitary organisation, and in less formalised organisations, through which young men are hired by political leaders to form mobs in political rallies (the so-called preman).

While the major role young men have played in violent episodes in (Indonesian) history can hardly be obscured, it is not my intention here to portray this violence as a logical consequence of their often de facto redundancy in relation to the modern economic system. Nevertheless, a combination of increased opportunities of education, commercialised ideals of late modern life styles, and jobless growth makes a growing cohort of people not only ‘surplus in relation to its utility for capital’ (Li, 2010, p. 68, Italics in original), but also makes them feel as surplus. Young people – surely not only young men – often feel unable to perform according to idealised consumer roles. This may result in violence, but also in less dramatic ways shape their understanding of gender and identity.

Young people’s transitions and sexual morality

Young people’s precariousness affects their understanding of normative gender roles (e.g. the man as breadwinner), and their place in local social hierarchies, as well as challenging existing socio-economic and cultural practices. For example, it shapes the way young people feel about marriage and family life. Currently, in Indonesia young people increasingly marry at a later age (G. W. Jones & Gubhaju, 2008; Nilan, 2008; Smith-Hefner, 2005). They postpone marriage due to prolonged enrolment in educational institutions, and due to increasing difficulties in fixing a (stable) job and income.

Besides being ‘young’ longer, postponement of marriage also means that young people are dependent on their parents (economically) for a longer time than before. How this affects the relationship between parent and child has not been studied in Indonesia
explicitly before. There are clues implied in existing studies of other locales. Morarji (2010), in her study of North Indian education-to-work transitions, describes how parents rather ambiguously conceive education as both the source of material prosperity and as a source of social anxiety, especially when economic prospects fail to materialise. Education, in this regard, fails to empower young people (and via them their families). While education nowadays is relatively easily accessible, and conceived to be the key to upward social mobility, it comes with pressures to convert the investment in education into actual economic gains. These pressures not only come from parents and wider social networks, but increasingly from the young people themselves, as they, too, wish to comply with ideals of modernity (see also Munro, 2009).

When an education does not lead to actual upward socio-economic mobility, the results may have grave effects in rural communities. For example, in Morarji’s Indian village study, young people deal with their un(der)employed status by acting as if they have become alienated from village life. This is not due to their actual socio-economic status, but by virtue of their education. They consider themselves to be modern, and to them there is a disjuncture between this feeling of modernity and local customary practices. However, this disjuncture challenges previously strong socio-economic ties within the community, threatens social cohesion, and endangers socio-economic safety nets. Morarji’s account is thus a reminder that nowadays, in many areas around the world, education might have unexpected and unwanted results.

Morarji makes explicit connections between education, (late) modernity and the relations between rural un(der)-employed educated youth and their parents and other villagers. Such studies are yet to be done in Indonesia (with the notable exception of Munro, 2009, 2012, 2013). However, what does become clear from the available literature is that in Indonesia young people and older generations alike often show ambivalent and mixed attitudes towards work, leisure, family, religion and tradition. In particular when gender is involved, we see that these attitudes between young people and the older generations diverge. Naafs (2013), for example, describes how parents think differently about the transitional period of their child(ren) depending on social background and gender. Young men and women in Cilegon (Java) who can afford to do so typically try to take some ‘relaxing time’ after graduation (senior high school or tertiary education). Especially young men use this period to enjoy time with their friends, and wait for the job-opening they want (see also Manning & Junankar, 1998). Young women from a similar social background can also wait, but have less opportunity to enjoy their time freely: parents and the community generally expect them to help in the household or to stay inside. That is because gender ideals are compromised when young women experience too
much leisure time, or so general discourse dictates. In a similar vein, Julliette Koning (1997, pp. 182-189) describes, with regards to migrating children from a small Javanese village, how (grand)parents particularly worry about their (grand)daughters’ whereabouts, and less so about their (grand)sons. Whereas sons enjoy relative autonomy in regard to where they want to go, young women are expected to come back after some time and marry and settle in the village of their parents.

Though gender ideals can often differ between the generations – potentially causing conflicts – both Nilan (2008) and Smith-Hefner (2005) describe how faith and modesty are still important to contemporary young people in pre-marital courtship. In general, young people do not seem to stray from what can be considered traditional values. Concerns of parents are often shared by the young people themselves, too. As Parker and Nilan (2013, pp. 104-126) note, in Indonesia these concerns are primarily about seks bebas (free, pre-marital sex) amongst young people (see also Wright Webster, 2010). There is a ‘moral panic’, shared amongst parents, teachers, religious leaders, government officials and young people (of both genders), about deteriorating sexual morals (Parker, 2014). This moral panic is directed mostly at young women (note that young women are often doing this targeting, too). Traditional morals are under threat of growing Western influence, constituting a risk to older values and ethnic, cultural and religious ideals (see, for example, Bellow, 2003).  

Chaste and decent morals are disseminated through magazines, newspapers, books and government regulations (e.g. pornography is prohibited in Indonesia, though still easily accessible through the internet). These initiatives are a strong message to young people to abstain from premarital sex. Indeed, young people seem to echo this discourse, claiming a general decline in morals, too. As well they seem to blame the West for their ‘own’ dissolute behaviour (Parker & Nilan, 2013, pp. 115-117).

Official and popular discourses render pre-marital sex and pre-marital pregnancies traumatic in terms of stigma and social exclusion (particularly for women). For young people still in pursuit of tertiary education, these discourses dictate that pre-marital sex and pregnancy waste young people’s talents and potential for the country. Accordingly, young

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29 This moral panic is not only phrased in relation to sexual morals, but to other ‘Western’ influences as well, such as consumption patterns, technology and music. To challenge these influences, there are various (mostly) Islamic movements that try to appeal to a modern, yet distinctively Muslim identity, by appropriating ‘Western’ technology, and turn it into an expression of Muslim identity. For example, there is a Muslim iPhone, and there are SMS-services with religious content (Barendregt, 2009). Also, Western-style pop music is appropriated by hugely popular Islamic boy bands, singing about piety and chastity (Barendregt, 2011). These developments constitute a ‘commodification of piety’ (C. Jones, 2010, p. 618), and are highly contested: in what way do these appropriations of ‘Western’ technology and consumption really differ from the original? To some Muslims, appropriation does not sufficiently counter the harmful Western influences. For example, currently some former pop- and rock stars have denounced music altogether, labelling it haram (forbidden). These ex-musicians have joined ‘The Strangers’ (Al Ghuroba), a recently found Sunni organisation. This organisation uses (rather ambiguously) modern mass media (e.g. YouTube) and promotional materials which resemble concert posters to share their message of piety (Thee, 2015).
people often mention that it is preferable to *kuliah/selesai dulu* (study/finish first) (Munro, 2012). However, although the message that pre-marital sex is wrong might have come across to young people, it would be naive to believe it is not happening in Indonesia. During my time in Flores, it was common amongst (un)married young men to talk about sex, watch pornography together, and to be *nakal* (naughty) towards young women. Given the number of pre-marital pregnancies in Ronaga and other places in Flores, it was obvious that actual sexual behaviour does not always correspond with prevailing sexual values and discourse. Moreover, it is not a simple matter of breaking or adhering to prevailing traditional morals. Often, agency is involved, which means that young people might feel constraints, subsequently reflect on them and act accordingly, but also willingly act against such constraints, knowing their behaviour does not correspond with dominant discourses and moral ideals. As Leslie Butt and Jenny Munro (2007, p. 386) argue:

> Young people may be constrained by a range of conditions, but they seize upon sexuality and sexual expression in particular as a means of articulating their own interests, manipulating economic and cultural conditions around them and deflecting negative cultural ascriptions or structural constraints.

In another article, Munro (2012) describes the pre-marital sex behaviour of ethnic Papuan Dani students while doing their studies in Manado (North Sulawesi). They often do not comply with dominant Indonesian sexual morals, and do not refrain from pre-marital sex. They frame this behaviour in terms of a contribution to indigenous cultural and political agendas, and as a form of resistance against Indonesian ‘colonialism’. Amongst Dani students, decisions regarding pre-marital sex are embedded in their historically marginal position within society. To legitimise these decisions, not only in terms of an ethnic cultural agenda, the young urban Dani consider these sexual engagements amongst themselves as marriages. This circumvents the traditional brideprice and Christian practices, challenging the very same cultural norms for which these young people stand up.

> We thus see that young people are aware of a dominant sexual morality. They might opt to follow these morals because pre-marital sex and pregnancy often prevent young people from being successful, both in the eyes of their peers, as with regards to their social environment. Other young people might choose to follow alternative pathways, and engage in pre-marital sexual relations to achieve personal goals, or advocate collective 

30 Here, I am not going into the complexities of Papua-Indonesia relations, and associated racism, discrimination and stigmatisation. Jenny Munro, however, analyses Dani students’ practices largely in term of reactions to their marginal position within Indonesian society. In another article she explains the large sacrifices many Dani parents make to get their children to schools. She argues that Dani people see ‘education as a way of overcoming alleged backwardness …; and education as a way of gaining access to knowledge and material benefits that could be used to resist Indonesian dominance and restore indigenous control of land and social life’ (Munro, 2013, p. 33).
interests, as in the Dani situation. Another example, though not quite the same as the above ones, but similar in that traditional values are vehicles for agency, is the practice of *kawin lari* on the island of Lombok. *Kawin lari* as a ‘socially sanctioned form of elopement which marks women’s transition from adolescence to adulthood’, is still conducted in rural parts of the island (Platt, 2012, p. 77). This practice is deeply embedded in *adat* (customary law/practice) and supported by senior members of society. This implies that young people are still firmly embedded in customary networks and practices. However, *kawin lari* is not solely a relic from the past. It has actual meaning to young men and women who struggle with real issues in a changing society. For young women with a desire to be modern, it is a chance to escape the restricting environment of their parents’ place and become relatively mobile. For young men, *kawin lari* enables them to establish their masculinity through violent threats towards their future bride. Especially for socio-economically marginal men, it is a legitimate way to gain honour and ‘face’ within the communities in which *kawin lari* is practised. For couples, it is good way of circumventing arranged marriages, makes a brideprice obsolete (or significantly lowers one), and enables a couple to marry even when parents object.

The *kawin lari* example and the Dani case are very different from the Ngada context, where people are mostly Catholic – whereas they are Muslim in Lombok – and not subject to ‘colonialism’ and exclusion from the nation state – as are the Dani. Nevertheless, both examples clearly indicated young people’s agency with regards to their sexuality.

**Conclusion**

Prolonged education-to-work transitions in rural Flores are part of complex global processes in which large socio-economic processes – such as economic integration, detraditionalisation, and expanding educational opportunities – collide and create new chances and challenges for young people. Young people have to navigate contradictory social and cultural constructions. Moreover, young people’s actions themselves (and their justifications for these actions) are often contradictory. There is a plethora of attitudes and strategies towards a complex reality of modernity, tradition, education and associated opportunities and pressures.

We have seen that young Indonesians increasingly experience individualised pressures to become successful, while gender identities and social collectives remain important. Young people have internalised discourses regarding development, the village, and sexuality. However, young people are reflecting, culture-producing actors, too.

Young people in urban Indonesia have been studied before. The rural circumstances of being young – in particular for the educated – are still a relative lacuna of
Therefore, it remains largely unclear which issues educated young people encounter after they return to their rural natal communities. This study adds a new, rural, perspective to studies about Indonesian young people. In order to do so, the next chapter provides an introduction to the Ngada people and their land.
3

The Ngada: an introduction

Introduction
The experiences of un(der)employed educated young people in Ngada are strongly embedded in their specific cultural context. In my conversations with young people, they often made reference to Ngada as the place where they belong, and they proudly remarked how their ‘culture is still strong’ (budaya masih kuat). However, these young people also complained that Ngada cultural practices are backward and hinder economic progress. ‘Culture’ – often referred to with the words adat or budaya – matters to the Ngada people. Consequently, this chapter provides background information about the Ngada, their culture and their history.

Un(der)employed educated young people worry about economic practices, their faith, and their ancestors. They are concerned with gendered social responsibilities and are preoccupied with love and marriage. These are important elements of young people’s experiences in their villages and are central to this chapter. To analyse these elements, I have divided them into the ‘social domains’ of family and marriage, religious beliefs and customary practices, and the community economy.

After a short introduction to the island of Flores and its people, I present the modern historical context, which enables me to trace developments and changes in Ngada practices. Subsequently, a theoretical and descriptive analysis is given of the social domains. The goal of this chapter, then, is to better understand what un(der)employed educated young people actually mean when they say that ‘culture is still strong’, or to what they are referring when they remark that Ngada culture is backward and hinders development.

The island of Flores
Flores is an island of stunning beauty. Steep volcanoes, covered in countless shades of green, dominate its landscape. Some of these volcanoes still lazily puff their sulphur-poisoned insides into the air; others are just ancient reminders of Flores’ violent geological

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31 The words adat and budaya have different translations into English (tradition and culture respectively). Adat refers to local and specific expressions of culture, and customary law, while budaya is generally used as an umbrella concept, and includes the arts, literature, folklore, theatre, etc. Nevertheless, the terms are often used interchangeably in daily conversations.

32 In practice these domains overlap. For analytical purposes, however, such a separation is heuristically useful.
past. It is a relatively narrow island, but long, and the sea is always close. On the south coast, azure water gently breaks onto black beaches or crashes into towering cliffs, before the land quickly rises into Flores’ mountainous interior. Going north, the interior’s sharp mountain ranges soften into rolling hills covered in lush tropical vegetation before reaching the Flores Sea. However, it is in the central highlands that my fieldwork was based. There, clouds and rain rule the day during the wet season, between November and April, hiding the towering tops of the volcanoes from sight. As the afternoon fog rolls in during these months, the highland bamboo forests become rather eerie, as wind gusts make the bamboo squeak and groan. It is cold in the Flores highlands during the wet season, and as evening falls, there is a sense of urgency amongst the highland people to get inside next to their cooking fires to warm up. Those villagers who are still out for some last-minute shopping, or returning from a visit to neighbours or family, are all wrapped up in their sarongs and seek their way through wind and fog, carefully stepping around puddles and mud. In the fog, the lights and sounds of passing motorbikes and the last bemo (minibus) are reminders of life elsewhere, as darkness sets in and the power supply fails – again. During these nights, the streets of the highland villages are empty, save for those returning from visits to kin further afield. Later, when most families are already asleep, some men can be seen returning home from the village billiard hall, or some late night gambling.33 Sometimes, they startle a pack of stray dogs that silently roam the streets. Their howls can be heard echoing through the night.

During the dry season, between May and October, the nights still belong to the dogs, as the villagers generally retire early. But during the day, the scenery is different. Volcano peaks can be admired above the green canopy of bamboo clumps and clove and candlenut trees, and with each turn of Flores’ twisting roads new vistas unfold. For the careful observer there is always a chance to see the sea in the distance.

Regardless of the season, people can be seen everywhere, working their fields full of coffee, corn, beans, bananas, or tomatoes. In little stalls on the side of the roads they sell their latest harvest, from little hot chillies and peanuts, to bottles full of freshly tapped palm wine. The acidic scent of the wine blends easily with the diesel fumes of passing lorries and the aromatic smell of clove cigarettes. A little further along the road, smells of freshly cut wood and fruit reveal, long before their stalls can be seen, people selling bundles of firewood and some fruits of the season, while others sell bamboo panels to use for floors or walls in simple houses or shacks.

33 Few women (and children) go out (alone) in the dark, as the night is generally considered to be dangerous due to roaming ghosts and spirits. Also, the billiard hall and gambling are strictly male affairs, though usually some women are present to serve drinks and snacks to the men. These women are either married (or related) to the male owner of the billiard hall or own the house where the gambling takes place.
All over Flores, the roads wind around mountains, traverse deep valleys, and make their way down to the sea, only to move up again, on to the next pass. Until not too long ago, there was only one road running directly from west to east Flores.³⁴ Starting in Labuan Bajo, the major port on the northwest coast that receives the large ferries from Sape (Sumbawa), the Trans-Flores Highway goes southeast, across rugged terrain, all the way to the south coast, before it goes back up to the mountains and Ruteng, the biggest city in west Flores. After Ruteng, the road goes back to the south coast, to the town of Mborong, before it tackles another mountain range, after which the road enters Ngada district (see Map 2 for an overview of Flores).

On clear days, long before you reach Mborong, you can see the majestic peak of Inerie Mountain in the distance: its perfectly shaped dome rises straight up from the Savu Sea on the south coast, signalling the home of the Ngada people. It cannot be missed as it towers above the rest of the landscape at 2200 metres high. For hours, that mountain will loom in the distance, as the road winds over yet another mountain pass, until at one point, quite suddenly, you reach the foot of Inerie and the coastal town of Aimere. Here, the road makes a sharp left, up the mountain again. From there it is only some 35 kilometres to Bajawa, the capital city of Ngada district, but it takes at least an hour and a half to get there, as the road snakes its way up the slopes of Inerie, making those cloudy highlands seem rather isolated.

From Labuan Bajo to Bajawa it is only about 250 kilometres, but it takes at least nine hours by car – more by bus – to get there. And the road goes on. After Bajawa – though located at 1100 metres still dwarfed by the looming presence of Inerie – the Trans-Flores Highway continues, meandering through rainforests, small villages and the occasional wet rice fields (sawah) in lower and flat areas. The road crosses the districts of Nagekeo, Ende, Sikka, and East Flores, all the way to the city of Larantuka, a major port on the east coast. The road runs along volcanoes, beaches and the big cities of Ende and Maumere, forming a vital transport link for all people in Flores. It is a magnificent road, not only as an engineering wonder that conquers extremely rugged terrain, but also because its 700 kilometres of bitumen tie together an incredible diversity of ethnic groups.

In the West, Manggarai is by far the largest ethnic group of them all, although its members are internally just as diverse as the rest of the island (Steenbrink & Steenbrink-Maas, 2007, p. 114). Other main ethnic groups on Flores are the Ngada, the Nage and Keo (mainly in Nagekeo district), the Lio (mainly in Ende district), the Sikka (mainly in the

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³⁴ Currently, the provincial government is making efforts to upgrade the inter-district road network on Flores. As part of the plan, coastal routes are getting an upgrade. Although not nearly finished, the north coast route will provide a faster alternative to the current west-east connection, as it avoids Flores' mountainous interior.
district bearing their name) and the Lamaholot people (around Larantuka and nearby islands). This list is far from complete, and its simplicity hides the extremely complex ethnic composition of Flores’ population. For example, with regards to Ngada district, the people there make distinctions based on language between the Ngada people (centred mainly around Bajawa and the south coast), Soa people, and the Riung (also called Remblong) people, although some would even make a distinction between Mountain Riung people and Coastal Riung people. These groups all live together in relatively close proximity to each other: from Bajawa it is a mere 25 kilometres north to Soa (30 minutes by motorbike), and from there it is only 40 kilometres to Riung (2 hours by motorbike). Moreover, the Ngada people themselves make even more distinctions in ethnic make-up by recognizing different Ngada groups (e.g. Bajawa, Langa, Mataloko/Golewa and Jerebuu). Though considered to be separate groups, they are intricately connected by custom and marriage.

Although Flores’ coastal areas are relatively narrow, most people on the island live there. All district capital cities, with the exception of Ruteng and Bajawa, are built along the shore. Apart from Ende and Larantuka, these cities do not have a long history as administrative centres, yet nowadays attract many people from all over the island. For example, Labuan Bajo is the centre of Flores’ tourist development due to its close proximity to the Komodo National Park, a world-class snorkelling and diving destination, and home to the fabled Komodo dragon. Ende, the biggest city on the island, has large government departments, a sizeable private sector and a large university (around 10,000 students), while Maumere has the biggest harbour on the island. These cities are the transit points of inter-island trade: here lorries bring in their cargo of bananas or coconuts, here most traders in cacao, candlenut, clove or vanilla live, and here rice and equipment are imported from Java, Bali or Sulawesi onto the island, and further distributed along the Trans-Flores Highway, supplying the inland towns and villages. Due to these developments and activities, many people leave the highlands and move (sometimes only temporarily) to the coast, in search of work or education.

The importance of these cities in terms of economic power and migratory attraction is undeniable. Recent research has tried to better understand the role of such (relatively) small (coastal) provincial cities in Indonesia, in particular as a place for the growing middle classes and societal change (e.g. Klinken & Berenschot, 2014). This does not mean that rural places beyond the cities are static. Instead, as I argue in this thesis, rural dynamism is just as undeniable (e.g. because many people, including educated young people, take the reverse trip, after having spent time in the city). Nevertheless, the majority of previous anthropological studies of Flores emphasise the more structural aspects of
upland mountain societies, instead of focussing on rural change (e.g. Forth, 2011; Lewis, 1988; Molnar, 2000). Such a structural emphasis represents a theoretical interest in sociocultural categories and cosmological order, which are analysed as an Austronesian inheritance, sometimes to the neglect of individual motivations, emotions and reasoning (Allerton, 2013, p. 7; Keane, 2004). They focus less on the mundane and everyday experience of village life, a shortfall that this study tries to address. Nevertheless, there is much we can learn from these studies, as they relate to the three social domains I outlined before.

**Ethnographies of East Indonesia: social structures and systems of classification**

Twentieth century anthropological research about the Ngada has focused upon complex symbols, myths, and social structure. This focus can mainly be traced back to the academic efforts of a small group from Leiden University in the 1930s. Amongst the main advocates of this so-called Leiden tradition were Dutch anthropologists J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong (1886-1964) and his student F.A.E. van Wouden (1908-1987). They believed, based on cross-cultural comparisons, that the people in the area bordered by Sumbawa in the west, the islands of Seram and Buru to the north, and Aru to the east (this area roughly covers the present-day Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur plus the South Moluccas) share similar social structures defined by clan systems and an ‘explicit preference for cross-cousin marriage in its restricted form’ (Wouden, 1968 [1935], p. 1). Based on this similarity, van Wouden concluded that Eastern Indonesia is a single ethnographic field, and should be treated as such. His thesis is one of the first cross-cultural examinations of social structures in this region.

Published first in 1935, van Wouden’s thesis is mainly concerned with ‘systems of classification’ (Fox, 1989, p. 426). According to van Wouden, cross-cousin marriages in Eastern Indonesia are crucial in these classification systems, for these marriages are ‘the pivot on which turns the activity of the social groups, the clans’ (1968 [1935], p. 2).

Following Durkheim and Mauss – who postulated that the ‘logical relations between things’ are taken from the ‘social relations of men’ (1963 [1903], p. 82) – van Wouden takes that ‘Cosmos and human society are organised in the same way, and through this there emerges the essential interconnection and similarity of the human and the cosmic’ (Wouden, 1968 [1935], p. 2). He thus studied ‘the relationship (…) between symbolic classification and social structure’ (Needham, 1963, p. xxxvi), which enables an analysis of singular social phenomena, while maintaining awareness about the connections these phenomena have to a larger entity (i.e. the unity of culture) (Schulte Nordholt, 1980, p. 233).
Previously only known to a small circle of mainly Dutch Indonesia specialists, van Wouden’s analysis of Eastern Indonesian social structures became influential after translation into English in 1968. Though essentially a pre-structuralist, Van Wouden’s ideas were easily incorporated into the structuralist debates of the mid twentieth century. Levi-Strauss had made an impact with his ideas concerning dual symbolic classification and its expression in social structure, and van Wouden’s thesis fitted these ideas well, ensuring a continuous concern with classification and structure in Eastern Indonesia.

Van Wouden’s pioneering efforts are nowadays considered less valid than in the 1930s. First, this is because most of his analysis is based on ethnographic material gathered by others, mostly colonial administrators. Although these administrators had received ethnological training, and many of them made many careful and sound observations about the people amongst whom they lived, others were colonially biased, lacked a solid scientific background, and often lacked the opportunities and time to commit themselves to long-term ethnographic research. Van Wouden was aware of this, as he notes (too negatively) that most available data ‘are of no more than middling value’ (1968 [1935], p. 3). Second, and probably more important, instead of ‘attempting to explain [structural] variations in terms of ecology or history, van Wouden attributed the wide range of variation to the differential breakdown of this [structural] order’ (Fox, 1980a, p. 4). Van Wouden had in mind a structural core that prevailed throughout Eastern Indonesia that could be reconstructed by means of analysing social classification systems. However, in doing so, he did not give social structural variation its due merit, but instead used ‘a model of predefined terms by which ethnography is tested’ (Lewis, 1988, p. 298).

Van Wouden (1956) himself abandoned the ‘a priori’ approach during later fieldwork, yet he remains best known for his early work. Despite its flaws, *Sociale Structuuren* inspired many anthropologists to do fieldwork in Eastern Indonesia, and to focus upon classification systems and the structural connections between myth, rite and social structures. This research produced a much better understanding of social structures in Eastern Indonesia. In doing so, it also showed that it is more rewarding ‘to study each society from within and in terms of its own social categories’ (Fox, 1980b, p. 330), than to focus on a regional structural core of classification.

Most of these more recent studies have shown that Van Wouden was largely correct in that there are many striking continuities across the region in dual classification. However, like the Leiden tradition in the 1930s and 1940s, these modern studies have mostly ‘ignored or trivialised the messy and contradictory aspects of what eastern Indonesian people say and do in everyday life’ (Allerton, 2013, p. 7). Focussing on the cosmological order tends to make the researcher susceptible to explanations by (male)
experts, privileging them over trivial everyday ‘taken-for-granted, implicit notions’ that are shared amongst all, which ‘can be linked to shifts in conceptions of culture – no longer seen as coherent or unified’ (Allerton, 2013, p. 7).

A focus on mundane practices is attractive for this study. It exposes the dynamics of everyday experiences of educated young people. Thus, to mention van Wouden within the parameters of the current project does not mean I wish to reignite structural debates about Eastern Indonesian classification systems. Rather, I wish to explore the continuing impact of van Wouden, and later structural academics such as Needham, Fox and Lewis, on contemporary researchers who (have) work(ed) in Ngada, such as Stephanus Djawanai (1983), Olaf Smedal (2000, 2002, 2011), Susanne Schröter (1998, 2000, 2005, 2010), Andrea Molnar (1997, 1998, 2000) and Jayne Curnow (2007, 2008, 2012). Their work shows that social classification systems, myths and rituals remain relevant in Eastern Indonesia. Ceremonial occasions are critical in determining affiliations, social hierarchy and access to land. Through ritual and metaphor, participants in ceremonies are linked to histories of myth, the cosmos and present-day social regimes (Lewis, 1988, p. 45). These links are relevant for the current project: they place rural un(der)employed young Ngada people within larger social structures. Therefore, a review of existing literature on Ngada is useful to better understand the social domains identified before: family and marriage, religious beliefs and customary practices, and the community economy. We start, however, with an historical sketch, to better ground our understanding of these domains.

Historical setting

Not much is known about the Ngada people before they became enmeshed in Dutch colonialism in the early twentieth century. There are, of course, origin myths and theories, but none of them is clear or comprehensive (see, for example, Arndt, 1954, p. 272; Molnar, 2000, p. 10; Staveren, 1916, p. 120).35 The arrival of the Dutch had a critical impact on the Ngada people, as they introduced two institutions that would have far-flung implications for indigenous society: the state and the Catholic Church. To appreciate the impact of these institutions, this historical overview stresses the early decades of the twentieth century. It makes clear that although Ngada people might seem isolated – in time and place – they are also truly part of national and global networks.

35 See Sudarmadi (2014, pp. 104-107) for an overview of debates concerning archaeological evidence of Ngada origins in terms of migratory flows.
'Pacification' of Ngada

The part played by Flores in Dutch trading ambitions was for a long time quite modest, and the island did not receive much administrative, scholarly or popular attention during the centuries of colonial presence in the East. Due to the limited financial gains the Dutch (and other colonial powers, like the Portuguese or English) could make on Flores, there was a strict onthoudings politiek (D: non-interference policy) 36 which lasted to the end of the nineteenth century (Dietrich, 1983).

In 1855, P.J. Veth (1855) introduced Flores to a broad Dutch public for the first time with an account of the island in Tijdschrift voor Neerland’s Indië (D: Journal of the Dutch East Indies). At that time, the eastern part of Flores was still (in name) connected to the Portuguese in Dili, 37 while the western part of the island, Manggarai, was subject to the sultans of Bima 38 (Sumbawa) and was therefore administered from the Dutch offices in Sulawesi and not from Kupang (Timor), like central Flores. The south coast was governed by the rajahs of Ende. A posthonder (D: low-ranking colonial administrator) was installed in Ende. This Dutch representative was a Christian Timorese who could not speak Dutch, and his specific assignment was to observe, and not to interfere with, local politics (Vries, 1910). Hence, actual Dutch influence was limited in Flores: present-day Ngada, then called Rokka (or Roka), was not directly administered at all (Jobse, 1980).

Due to the minimal Dutch interference, little was known about inland Flores. Most of Veth’s account was compiled from sailors’ reports about the coastline. About the indigenous inhabitants of the island Veth is clear: they were mainly occupied with slavery and cannibalism (see also Anonymous, 1848, 1907c). He saw them as distinct (with Melanesian features and therefore taken to be less civilised and more savage) from the coastal villagers (mainly coastal Malay people of Makassarese, Bimanese or Bugis descent).

In 1889 and in 1890, two mining expeditions tried to verify claims about large tin ore deposits north of Mount Rokka (currently called Mount Inerie). 39 Both expeditions failed: they were ill-prepared, without prior knowledge about geography or local adat and politics. Unsurprisingly, the expeditions met with local hostility, and clashes occurred between Rokka fighters and hastily summoned Dutch military reinforcements. Despite

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36 The non-interference policy implied that the Outer Islands were administered by the Dutch through contracts with local rulers who remained in full power conducting their own affairs.
37 Portuguese influence in the region was officially contained after the Tractaat van 1859 (D: Treaty of 1859), in which Portugal distanced itself for f 200,000 from any claims on islands in the East Indonesian region, except for the area now called Timor L’Este. However, before that, the Dutch had already taken over Larantuka in 1851, as guarantee for a loan of f 80,000.
38 Since 1667, with the treaty of Bongaai (Bungaya), Manggarai had been an area of conflict between the Sultans of Bima and Makassar. In 1822 this conflict was terminated by the Dutch, and Manggarai became subject to Bima. For a history of the Manggarai, see Van Bekkum (1946b).
39 These claims were made superficially, and unsupported by any proof, in a travel report for the Dutch general public, written by J.P. Freijs (1860, p. 507), a trader in East Indonesia.
superior military equipment and training, Dutch military success was minor due to several military blunders and the absence of any diplomatic tact. At the same time there was a growing negative public and political opinion in the Netherlands about the legitimacy of the expeditions (there was debate about whether or not Rokka was subject to any official treaty). Consequently, the tin expeditions were terminated in 1890 (Anonymous, 1890; Jobse, 1980). Decisive information about the presence of tin ore had not been collected.

In the late 1800s, non-interference policies were increasingly criticised, leading to the so-called Ethical Period of the Dutch colonial administration. Local policies reflected this larger framework of interventions, and the uncontrolled power of the rajahs of Ende (though nominal outside their town) and reports about the slave trade and the exploitation of the Manggarai by the sultans of Bima (Freijss, 1860; Vries, 1910) were issues with which the Dutch administration in Timor (to which most parts of Flores belonged) felt it had to deal, if necessary with displays of military force. Meanwhile, stories about tin ore deposits in Rokka kept circulating (Anonymous, 1907b). A new opportunity to deal with these issues came in 1907. A party opposed to the Rajah of Ende sacked and burnt the town of Ende. The Dutch Resident (D: high-ranking colonial administrator) of Kupang acted swiftly: an elite battalion of the military police, headed by Captain Christoffel, was assigned to ‘pacify’ Ende and the surrounding land, including Rokka. With his small band of men, Captain Christoffel brutally succeeded in six months where hundreds of troops had failed before in 1889/1890 (Anonymous, 1907a).

The area known as Rokka, named after the Bugis term for Mount Inerie, soon became known as Ngada, after the dominant clan from the Bajawa plain, where Captain Christoffel first made camp in the area. This name did not correspond with the ethnic makeup of the area. The initial district was actually much larger than the area inhabited by the Ngad(h)a: it included land occupied by the Nage, Keo, Rembong, and other ethnic groups. To complicate matters further, the Ngada themselves form a heterogeneous group. Fontijne – a Dutch administrator and one of the first to make a meticulous study of the people in Ngada – mentions various ‘complexes’: he writes about people from the Naru,

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40 Until today, no tin deposits have been found in Ngada, nor in the rest of Flores.
41 Captain Christoffel was a highly decorated soldier. Previous to his campaign on Flores he had fought in Aceh and Sulawesi. He was known for his ruthless tactics.
42 There is a debate here: the Ngada from the Bajawa plain are actually known as Ngadha. Other anthropologists use this spelling to refer to a larger Ngadha ethnicity – to which groups from Mataloko/Golewa, Jerbubu and Langa belong as well – as opposed to the administrative name for Ngada district (see, for example, Schröter, 2005, p. 319; Smedal, 2002, p. 495). However, when confronted with this view, Ronaga villagers told me they considered themselves to be Ngada – or, to be more precise Ngada from their own clan – instead of Ngadha, which according to them is a clan from Bajawa (see also Schröter, 2005, p. 318). Thus, one of my friends considered himself to be orang Ngada (a person from Ngada), from Ronaga, from the clan Neri. Similar expressions were recorded by Andrea Molnar in her study amongst the Hoga Sara, an ethnic group directly neighbouring the Ngada in the southwest (2000, p. 25).
Mangulewa and Wogo complex (2004 [1940], p. 106). (Ngada people consider these ‘complexes’ as separate groups, too.) Without the existence of prior larger political entities in the region, it thus seems arbitrary to name a whole district after the Ngad(h)a, as was done in 1908 (Staveren, 1916, pp. 117-118). However, actual short term effects of these new administrative borders were limited, as local rule was left to indigenous administrators (Fontijne, 2004 [1940], pp. 104-110).

Early Dutch administrators stationed on Flores from 1907 were aware of the specific cultural traits of the people amongst whom they lived. They wrote extensive reports about a broad range of cultural expressions (see, for example, Anonymous, 1912, 1916; Fontijne, 2004 [1940]; Staveren, 1916; Vries, 1910). These reports mention the Ngada as a politically fragmented society: according to one such report there was an absence of any formal title for political leaders (Staveren, 1916, pp. 120-121). Leaders were the senior members of the woe (House coalition network, see below), but whether they could exert any influence wholly depended on personal capabilities. Typical in this respect was that in 1913 (six years after the pacification of Flores), the Resident of Timor mentioned that all was quiet and calm in Flores, but that the situation in Ngada should be monitored continuously because effective inlandse bestuur (D: native rule) was nearly absent (Rietschoten, 1913).

The Church

The relative stability of Flores encouraged the Catholic Church, stimulated by the colonial administration, to expand its presence on the island. Since the 1600s, eastern Flores had been a centre for Portuguese Catholicism, as promulgated by the Dominican order. After the Dutch effectively took over Flores from the Portuguese in 1860, control of the island’s religious affairs was initially granted to the Jesuits, although in 1879 a Franciscan nunnery was founded in Larantuka (Steenbrink, 2003, pp. 74-75, 111). In 1913 Flores’ religious administration was passed on again. This time oversight of religious affairs on the island

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43 I do not wish to downplay the effect of the introduction of colonial administrative borders on indigenous communities. I merely wish to reflect Fontijne’s analysis of those early years of colonial presence. According to him, the colonial administrators were often right in designating leaders to specific areas, as it reflected previous power arrangements. Hence, according to him immediate Dutch influence was limited.

44 Actual Dutch presence in the Timor Residency throughout the first decades of the twentieth century was quite modest: in 1905 there were 19 officials; by 1915 there were 43 (which stayed stable after that until the 1940s). The administration’s enthusiasm for the Catholic mission can be seen as a method to extend Western rule beyond the colonial efforts. For that reason the Catholic mission in East Flores could operate in relative autonomy: the mission acted as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the Resident. Moreover, the mission acted as an oppositional force to the relatively large coastal Muslim communities in the western half of Flores (Bekkum, 1946a, 1946b).
was assigned by the Dutch administration to the Dutch-based (but with German roots) *Societas Verbi Divini* (SVD) (Steenbrink & Steenbrink-Maas, 2007, p. 7).

Catholic presence in Ngada only came after pacification: in 1911 and 1912 two Catholic schools were established in Bajawa and Boawai respectively. The schools were established to target the sons of native rulers, and to create an obedient class of rulers (Hens, 1916, p. 82). Teachers were mostly Florenese trained in the Catholic seminary of Larantuka, as World War I prevented German priests from travelling. Initially, there was also a shortage of Dutch priests. Hence, it was only in 1920 that the first permanent parish was opened in Ngada in Bajawa. After that, the number of priests rose quickly to fifteen, and in 1930 five expatriate Catholic sisters arrived and opened a girls’ school in the region. It is estimated that by 1940 around 60,000 Ngada had been baptised, a number that gradually increased: in the 1970s 80 per cent of the population was reached by the Church (Steenbrink & Steenbrink-Maas, 2007, pp. 112-113). Currently almost 100 per cent of the population in Ngada’s highlands considered themselves Catholic – except for Muslim migrants, mainly living in Bajawa.

Nevertheless, in those early years of missionary activity, Ngada was often still considered to be an area of traditionalists. Jan Smit, a seminary teacher in eastern Ngada, noted in 1930 that the Rajah of Bajawa ‘was still a full-blood pagan (…) but very sympathetic towards the mission and its activities’ (1930, p. 210). The latter part of this remark is rather characteristic of the general attitude of SVD missionaries in the field. Inspired by the Austrian Father Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954), the missionaries considered indigenous belief systems to be part of a global monotheist tradition. Schmidt advocated a practice of combined mission work and anthropology (Dietrich 1992). This so-called missiological anthropology had several aims. First, it was established as a defence against claims that the Catholic Church was anti-intellectual. To counter these claims, and achieve intellectual rigour, Schmidt created the scientific-religious journal *Anthropos*, which has remained until today active in publishing ethnographic research. Secondly, Schmidt advocated an alternative approach to anthropological theories of religion that excluded supernatural revelations. Instead, Schmidt defended the position that ‘reason and revelation cannot contradict but must support each other’, and he preferred ‘to rely on reason in the defence of supernatural truths’ (Dietrich, 1992, p. 114). Such a position enabled Schmidt and his SVD colleagues to construct a scientific tradition that included the metaphysical.

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45 General policy of the Dutch administration was to allow one missionary organisation in any region. Nevertheless, transitions from one religious order to another were not always quick and smooth. For example, only in 1920 did the last Jesuit priests leave Flores and the SVD take over the island fully. Changing the designated Order for an area was generally an affair for the colonial government, often triggered by unsatisfactory results, excessive costs, or shortage of qualified and willing missionaries.
Another important anthropological contribution from Schmidt was his anti-evolutionist idea of *Urmonotheismus*. This idea posits a basic connection between humans and a single Supreme Being and that this connection is the foundation of every religious system. The task of the missionary was therefore ‘not to destroy tribal religion but to purify it’ (Steenbrink & Steenbrink-Maas, 2007, p. 143).

The efforts to understand local religions and societies were less used to increase the rate of conversions than to strengthen the Catholic claim to intellectual rigour and to battle evolutionist ideas about religion in Europe (Dietrich, 1992). For example, one of the first SVD-trained priest-scholars, Paul Arndt (1886-1962), arrived in Flores in 1922. He wrote extensively about the Ngada (e.g. Arndt, 1929, 1937, 1954). However, missionaries on site, who were more concerned with the daily operations of the mission station, ‘complained that he did not communicate his experiences with his colleagues and refrained from drawing practical conclusions based on his findings’ (Steenbrink & Steenbrink-Maas, 2007, p. 144). Nevertheless, Schmidt, Arndt, and others like Bader (1953) were the leaders of a religious community that prioritised pragmatic pastoral care in the form of education and medical assistance above a stringent attitude towards pagan beliefs. Not surprisingly, the missionaries were much admired by local people in Flores.

The introduction of the Church shaped new world views amongst the indigenous people of Flores. By means of establishing schools (in 1910, education in the Outer Islands became the official domain of the mission), the Church became part of the local economy: it trained people, owned workshops, land and farms, and created trade and communication links (Steenbrink, 2013). The Church gained influence in the moral sphere: as a provider of education, medical and pastoral care, Church leaders became moral exemplars. Subsequently, with the ‘indigenisation’ of the Church in the 1970s, the Church became even further rooted in Ngada society (Curnow, 2007, pp. 52-54).

*The state*

The state too, first in its colonial form, later as post-Independence nation state, has had a major impact on Ngada. Initially, projects in the fields of education, health, agricultural production, and general socio-economic development were the responsibility of the

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46 Although the SVD had been training a ‘native’ clergy since the early 1900s, up until the late 1970s most priests were expatriates, a practice that became limited by Law 77/1978. This law stipulated that: (1) Overseas aid can only be executed after the approval and through the office of the Minister of Religious Affairs; (2) Overseas workers for the propagation and development of religion should be limited; and (3) Religious education has to prepare successors of the expatriate priests within a maximum of two years (Steenbrink & Aritonang, 2008, p. 213).
Church,\textsuperscript{47} yet the state – in particular after Independence, first as the Orde Lama (the Old Order, the period of Sukarno’s administration), later, after Suharto’s take over, as the Orde Baru (New Order)\textsuperscript{48} – enforced administrative borders and opened up Flores’ interior to the world. Trade links were established, cash money was introduced, and from the 1960s migration networks proliferated. Subsequently, government involvement grew, a growing bureaucracy started to introduce programmes for development, and the government started to provide work for the Ngada people. A large bureaucratic system evolved during the second half of the twentieth century, such that today it is the single largest provider of work in the region.\textsuperscript{49}

A rational and technocratic bureaucratic system seems to imply a system that is apolitical. However, due to the growing bureaucracy, official politics permeated local life on all levels. Village Governance Law No. 5/1979 eliminated adat leaders and traditional governance arrangements in favour of centrally determined administrative structures, such as the Javanese desa (Bebbington, Dharmawan, Fahmi, & Guggenheim, 2006, pp. 1960-1962). As a result, Jakarta – and to a lesser extent Kupang as provincial capital – became the new centre of power, with its power represented by civil servants being active in even the smallest villages. Hence, the state transformed: from an abstract idea of a distant external entity into a daily presence with which people interact on a regular basis. Today it ‘reaches into the daily lives of people in Bajawa through elected officials and public servants who administer local government policies and programs through various departments in charge of the military, police, law, infrastructure, health, education, taxation, and subsidies’ (Curnow, 2007, p. 54).

\textsuperscript{47} After the Japanese capitulation on 2 September 1945, Flores first became part of the semi-independent State of East Indonesia, until 1950, when it became incorporated in the centralised Republic of Indonesia. The Catholic Church in Flores, previously closely connected to the Dutch administration, had to deal with this new political reality. Still, as John Prior (2011b, p. 312) notes, until the mid-1960s the Church basically remained a ‘state within a state’. There were many Catholic mass social organisations for farmers (Ikatan Petani Pancasila), workers (Ikatan Buruh Pancasila), fisher folk (Ikatan Nelayan Pancasila), women (Wanita Katolik), youth (Pemuda Katolik), as well as for teachers (Persatuan Guru Katolik) and tertiary students (PMKRI). These organisations were affiliated to the Catholic Political Party (Partai Katolik). However, from the 1950s onward, the Church had to deal with quickly changing political circumstances, too from a policy of NASAKOM (Nasionalisme (nationalism), Agama (religion), and Komunism (Communism)) during Sukarno’s era, to anti-Communist and nationalist policies of Suharto (and the dramatic events of 1965/66; see footnote 52), to the Reformasi in the late 1990s. Strong centralist and nationalist tendencies in the state demanded the indigenisation of the clergy. As a result, the Church’s near monopoly in education and health care was increasingly challenged by Jakarta (Steenbrink, 2015, pp. 237-295). The Church displayed remarkable flexibility during these events, and managed to grow in size in Flores during the second half of the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{48} Both terms, the Old and New Order, were invented by the Suharto regime, used to contrast the two periods.

\textsuperscript{49} The current state of these large bureaucracies can be traced, in particular via the New Order’s technocratic tendencies, all the way back to the Dutch Beamtenstaat (the state as an apolitical and efficient bureaucracy) in late colonial times (Schulte Nordholt & Klinken, 2007, pp. 3-6).
The influence of centralist tendencies concerned more than just departmental policies – Jakarta-centrism also entered the realm of culture. As noted, the New Order regime was rather ambivalent about *adat* and associated practices (Acciaioli, 1985, 1997). In general, the authorities considered *adat* as a threat to the ‘national project’. Customary practices in the Outer Islands were seen as relics of primitivism, representing a backward part of Indonesia that should have no place in a modern country. To that end, drastic developmental programmes were introduced, like the ‘Healthy House’ (*rumah sehat*) programme in the early 1970s, which stimulated people to move from isolated bamboo and wood dwellings to newly constructed brick houses with tin roofs near main roads. Other government initiatives promoted individual land ownership – as opposed to collective ownership as is common in Ngada – while credit organisations supported new business initiatives and facilitated the growth of agricultural output (Curnow, 2007, pp. 56-58; Davidson & Henley, 2007a, pp. 9-13).

These programmes and initiatives help to explain the current state of village society in the Ngada highlands. The Church and the state have exerted a major impact on Ngada society. Flores truly became part of (inter)national developments in the twentieth century. Significant historical events (e.g. the Japanese Occupation (Curnow, 2007, p. 53; Webb, 1986b), the 1965/66 massacre of (alleged) Communists (Klinken, 2013; Prior, 2011a), and the turbulence of the post-Suharto *Reformasi* period (International Crisis Group, 2002)) have impacted Flores as well. Unfortunately, little specific information is known about Ngada during these dramatic events.\(^{50}\) We do know that during the Japanese Occupation soldiers were stationed in Bajawa, and that many Ngada men were marched off to Mbay (north Flores, the current capital of Nagekeo district) to work on an airstrip and sulphate deposits (Curnow, 2007, p. 53). Many old Ngada people still have memories of this period: for example, old men happily showed me their ability to count to ten in Japanese (but then cursed the Japanese Occupation in Dutch!), indicating that they had been instructed in both languages.\(^{51}\) Also, I was repeatedly told about Dutch forces – regaining control over

\(^{50}\) For example, the quoted reports about the 1965 killings and *Reformasi* turbulence are from Maumere in eastern Flores.

\(^{51}\) During the Japanese Occupation, most schools remained open, even though they were Catholic-run and therefore the responsibility of a predominantly Dutch clergy. In school, it seems that children were mostly occupied with singing Japanese patriotic songs and gymastics, but after hours, religious lessons were allowed as well. In fact, the Catholic Church remained remarkably sovereign in its actions, and came through the Occupation relatively untouched (in particular when compared to the Catholic and Protestant clergy on the islands of Sumba and Timor). For example, though many European priests, Brothers and Sisters were interned on Sulawesi – and experienced many hardships – many also remained free in order to care for their communities. The Japanese even supplied the Dutch Bishop of Ende with four Japanese missionaries, and as a result, Catholicism continued to grow on Flores throughout the years of war. The rationale behind this politics was that the Japanese did not want to deploy too many troops to Flores, and considered it too much of a risk to intern all European missionaries, many of whom were much appreciated on Flores (Sato, 1957; Webb, 1986b).
the island quite quickly after the Japanese Occupation – shooting down ‘insurgents’ hiding in a massive tree not far from the house in which I lived. Such stories are personal reminders of much larger events in this relatively isolated place and make clear the myriad connections that exist between Flores and the rest of the world.\footnote{With regards to the 1965 mass killing of alleged Communists, I could not obtain much information from the villagers. During fieldwork, Joshua Oppenheimer’s documentary The Act of Killing (2012) circulated widely on the Internet, even though the movie, which is about the 1965 events, was banned in Indonesia. Motivated by the movie, I started asking whether anything similar had occurred in Ngada as well. I did not get satisfactory replies – except for some unspecified approval (i.e. ‘It was good what happened then’). In general, little is known about the campaigns of late 1965 and 1966 in Ngada following the alleged Communist Coup in October 1965. Webb (1986a) notes that in Flores Communism had not been a major political force, due to the strong presence of Catholicism on the island (Communism is presumed to be atheistic in nature). Webb argues that when people claimed to be Communist, mostly this was motivated by personal political ambitions, and a desire to gain political influence. Most Flores villagers who claimed to be Communists were followers of such influence-seeking individuals, mainly because these individuals were traditional power figures. Villagers were often unaware of Marxist theory, and merely followed its rhetoric, either because their leader did so or because it addressed issues of poverty and social injustice. As a result, these villagers had no problem combining Communist discourse with expressions of Catholicism. Despite Communism’s marginal political influence, people were killed in Flores as well. There are few reports from Ngada containing any details, but reports from the Maumere area mention 800-2000 people were killed in February-April 1966. The people killed were mostly not so much Communists as victims of local political issues and quarrels of post-Independence Indonesia – in particular after 1950, when Flores was incorporated into the centralised Republic (Klinken, 2013; Prior, 2011a).}

Despite these outward connections, however, Ngada people often still rely on communal resources and power structures. Previous academic efforts have mostly focussed on these resources and structures. The following sections are a review of these efforts within a framework of the three social domains previously identified.

**Marriage and kinship**

Van Wouden (1968 [1935]) theorised that marriage and associated kinship systems are the pivot of social activity and determine myth, ritual and symbolic categories, Therefore, I start this review of the Ngada social domains with an analysis of marriage and kinship practices.

With regards to the latter, Schröter (2005, p. 321) notes that each member of Ngada society simultaneously belongs to a set of ‘social, political, and ritual institutions that affect his or her status as well as providing a framework for action’. While Schröter employs the terms clan, sub-clan and lineage to describe these various institutions, within the micro-cosmos of ‘Ngada-studies’, there is debate about the applicability of such terms. For example, Smedal (2000, 2002, 2011) speaks about ‘House’\footnote{Following Smedal, I use House spelled with a capitalised ‘H’ to refer to a social construct, whereas house spelled without capitalised ‘h’ is used to refer to a physical construction.} and the ‘House coalition network’, instead. The root of this disagreement lies in the analysis of ethnographic data within the context of structural theories. I would like to avoid such structural discussions, as the argument of this project is not centred on cross-cultural comparisons of social
structures, but instead on rural un(der)employed young peoples’ agency and their interaction with other villagers. Therefore, a descriptive version of Ngada social structure will suffice here.

Both Schröter and Smedal attach great value to the House (sa’o; also saka) in Ngada social organisation. According to Smedal, the sa’o ‘are simultaneously dwellings, corporate estates, ancestral abodes, ritual centers, origin points, repositories of heirloom sacra ..., and units in more encompassing formations’ (2000, p. 107). One encompassing formation is the woé, which is translated by Smedal as a House coalition network, and by Schröter as a sub-clan. The House is the focal point of the lineage, and several of these make up the woé, which ‘is an important social unit whose members are obliged to provide mutual support. They share ceremonial obligations, particularly in case of death, during the annual cycle, and in ancestor worship’ (Schröter, 2005, p. 321). In contrast, the overarching clan is less relevant in Ngada life and is a more loosely structured affiliation.

According to Schröter, each woé is divided into three lineages which in turn are divided into a female and male half. Within a woé there are thus six lineages, which each belong to a named House. These lineages are organised hierarchically, with the highest rank being the saka (divided into a female saka pu’u and a male saka lobo). The lower ranks are the kaka and dai Houses, each divided into the binary pu’u and lobo. Pu’u can be translated as the trunk or source, while lobo means tip or offspring. Access to land originates with the saka pu’u, but is divided into a ‘trunk’ and ‘tip’ part. The saka Houses transfer access rights to the ‘lower’ named Houses. These latter Houses are relatively autonomous in land use affairs, but cannot sell land without the explicit permission of the trunk House.

Each lineage thus belongs to a ceremonial ‘great House’ (sa’o) (whether of the saka, kaka, or dai rank), which in turn is part of a woé. The House has important social implications as it determines affiliation in terms of place and history, and is central to rituals, important life occasions, and conflicts (Schröter, 2005, p. 327). Due to demographic changes (such as population growth), government programmes (e.g. the rumah sehat initiative), and increased prosperity, most people nowadays live in ordinary brick houses, colloquially called baru (new). These families are still connected to a House and woé.

Entering the old villages of Ngada – nua in the local language, but mostly referred to as kampung adat (traditional/ancestral village) – one notices immediately the raised roofs of the sa’o (also referred to as rumah adat; ancestral house) and at least one pair of

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54 Given the centrality of the House in Ngada’s sociality, I find Smedal’s translation of woé more appropriate than Schröter’s translation.
wooden/bamboo constructions on the rectangular village square (kiia-nata) (see figure 1). These constructions represent either the female founding ancestor of a woe, or the male founding ancestor of the woe, and are called bhaga and ngadhu respectively (see figures 2 and 3 respectively). These representations form a couple, and by counting the number of ‘couples’ one can count how many woe belong to that village. The number of gendered pairs also corresponds to the number of houses that carry a representation of either the bhaga or ngadhu on their raised roofs. The bhaga, being itself a small house, is represented on the roof of the saka pu’u (itself a representation of the female side of the woe) by a miniature house, while the umbrella-like construction of the ngadhu is represented by a male-figure on the roof of the saka lobo (itself a representation of the male side of the woe). However, due to economic circumstances – erecting bhaga and ngadhu is a costly affair – and the movement of people – sa’o méze can be moved, woe can break apart or be adopted into another woe (these events involve large cost as well) – the number of woe in the nua is not always clear.

Figure 1: A nua (traditional village). In the centre of the kiia-nata (village square) are three pairs of ngadhu (the umbrella shaped posts) and bhaga (small houses). The houses on the right are sa’o houses, characterised by their raised roofs. (Photo made by T.Schut, January 2010)

Whereas Schröter clearly states that the inner sanctuary of named Houses (oné sa’o) represents the feminine side of a structural binary male/female opposition – one that is

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55 In Ronaga, a relatively flat area, these old hamlets are located directly behind the rows of baru houses built along the main road, while in more remote and rugged parts of Ngada, the hamlets are located further from the main road. The original hamlets are constructed as a single line of houses enclosing a rectangular village square, on which the bhaga and ngadhu are located.
common in East Indonesian societies, and which can be deduced from the *woé* structure, too – and traces access to land and House membership through the maternal line, Smedal opposes such a neat and ordered matrilineal descent system. He defines Houses as ‘androgy nous’, as both male and female representations of the House are kept in the *woé sa'o* (such as ritualistic spears, digging sticks and baskets for carrying food – the latter being associated with female work/ancestors, the two former being associated with male work/ancestors). Smedal also questions the unilineal character of descent, just as he questions Schröter’s evidence for uxorilocal practices. The ethnographic data Smedal presents cover a much more complicated system, in which men frequently remain in their House or *woé* after marriage, because either they are involved in intra-House/ *woé* marriages, or the marriage includes virilocal arrangements (a point to which I return shortly).

Figure 2: Bhaga in the village of Bela. (Photo made by T. Schut, January 2010)

Smedal admits that most children routinely trace descent through their mothers, and men in general go to live with their wives. However, he also stresses that these are not fixed cultural norms. Moreover, access to land, and hence control over land, is based on collective ownership, instead of ownership by the stewardess of the named House, as Schröter argues. According to Smedal, this implies less control for women (the stewardesses) over resources, and more control for men, who are favoured in collective discussions and decisions. Although women, especially senior members of the House, also participate in these discussions and decisions, and it is normal for them to share their opinion regarding House issues, brothers/uncles are considered to be the final decision
makers (Smedal, 2002, pp. 291-292). Another difference between Schröter and Smedal is that, according to the latter, there is no fixed number of lineages (kaka Houses) in a woé. Smedal even adds another hierarchical layer to the House organisation – the wna sha’o (a cadet house, the ‘child’ or ‘fruit’ of the main house) – though Smedal does not mention the rank of dai houses. Nevertheless, both Smedal and Schröter conclude that the pu’u houses are considered higher in rank, with the saka pu’u the main house of the woé.

Figure 3: Ngadhu in the village of Bena. (Photo made by T. Schut, January 2010)

Ngada social organisation is complex and far from easy to grasp from a single account. The differences between Smedal and Schröter’s analyses could well be caused by their focus on different geographical areas: whereas Smedal did most of his research halfway between the Bajawa highlands and the South Coast, Schröter spent most time closer to the District’s capital, in the area where I did my field research. This may explain why I did not encounter the wna sha’o houses, but did hear frequent mention of dai houses. On the other hand, like Smedal, I noticed that a woé is not limited to six lineages only. In fact, there can be many more kaka or dai houses. Moreover, the way Smedal describes exceptions to the rules, as well as the variations on uxorilocal practices he mentions, resonates much more with my own experiences, than does the social structure Schröter describes. Therefore, with regards to Ngada marriage practices, I will draw more frequently upon Smedal than upon Schröter.
Ngada marriage practices are ordered by three main characteristics.\textsuperscript{56} The main characteristic is that neither \textit{woé} nor Houses are strictly exogamous. This makes the Ngada an anomaly amongst most other East Indonesian people (Smedal, 2002, p. 499). Second, Ngada marriages are ordered by principles of social strata. \textit{Woé} are internally ranked into three strata: the nobles (\textit{ga’ê mežé}), the middle people (\textit{ga’ê kíía}) and the descendants of former slaves (\textit{bo’o}). Ngada people assured me that these strata have lost importance over the course of time, yet careful observers can still note that general rules of hospitality are strata-dependent: \textit{bo’o} people receive food and drink last instead of first (Curnow, 2007, p. 99). Besides this, it is nowadays hard to notice any hierarchical order based on prescribed social strata. People did not like to talk about social strata, and it was therefore not invoked in day-to-day affairs. Nevertheless, these strata still have relevance, for example in ceremonial activities, during which people from lower strata refrain from partaking in main activities. They need to occupy themselves with lesser jobs (e.g. serving, cooking and cleaning).

Strata also remain regulators of marriage practices. The general rule is that women should not marry down. If there is a case in which a woman does marry – or even have sex with\textsuperscript{57} – a man from a lower stratum, she is demoted to the man’s stratum. This violation of rules is called \textit{la’ê sala} (misstep; heading down the wrong path) and has implications for the woman: her role during rituals changes, as a lower stratum implies new ascribed tasks and certain spatial restrictions. For example, she may no longer be allowed to enter a \textit{sa’o} through the front door. This seems a rather mild implication, particularly compared to the capital punishment of such ‘missteps’, which was allegedly administered in pre-Catholic times. Indeed, in daily practice \textit{la’ê sala} seems to have few implications. However, for families who adhere strongly to their rank, \textit{la’ê sala} can still be reason to expel a daughter or sister. More importantly, the practical relevance of \textit{la’ê sala} demotions might be limited to ritual practice, yet it is upheld nonetheless. Though a subject not much talked about, people were well informed about other people’s strata. It is through the quiet social invocation of space- and activity-limitation that strata in general, and \textit{la’ê sala} in particular, is made felt as shameful, as a silent mark of exclusion.

\textsuperscript{56} Smedal actually makes reference to four characteristics of Ngada marriage. The fourth practice, which I do not mention, is the practice of cousin marriage. I only mention it here in a footnote because Smedal himself notes that the Catholic Church has forbidden such marriages (2002, p. 500). Despite the potential cross-cultural analytical importance of cousin marriages, it has lost relevance for the current study due to its rarity.

\textsuperscript{57} As will become clear in later chapters, rules about sex are not always strictly applied, in particular for (young) men. Young women are much more restricted in their sexual choices than their male peers. Nevertheless, I have not encountered cases of women who had been demoted solely based on sexual intercourse. However, as sex leads to pregnancy – as is often the case in Ngada, due to the absence of contraception and basic knowledge about human reproduction – the sexual act functions as reason for demotion, whether there is a marriage or not.
The final characteristic of Ngada marriage practices is that it affects descent affiliation. Whether one belongs to the *woé* of one’s father or mother depends on whether full bridewealth (*bélis; ngalu anu*) is raised in order to marry. Bridewealth, a transfer of goods from the groom’s family to the bride’s family, is part of larger symbolic practices associated with marriage, but ‘also have their economic functions, ... as ways of redistributing property’ (Goody, 1973, p. 1). Smedal’s analysis of bridewealth amongst the Ngada makes clear that virilocality, and thus affiliation with the father’s *woé*, is practised in areas where a large amount of bridewealth is involved. This has a certain internal logic, since bridewealth is a transfer of economic resources (mainly animals, but nowadays increasingly expressed in money) from the husband’s family to the wife’s family. However, this also means the husband becomes indebted to his own kin. Most men can only repay this debt if bridewealth is received for their own daughters. In these arrangements it is thus important that the daughter belongs to the *woé* of her father, and virilocality is therefore practised. In areas with smaller amounts of bridewealth (but which still require significant accumulation), or no bridewealth at all (as with intra-*woé* marriages), debts are smaller or absent, and there is no need to practise virilocality. Hence, uxorilocality is practised in these areas. Subsequently, each pattern directs choice for future marriage partners: the economic rationale dictates that one’s partner should come from an area in which the same bridewealth regime is practised as that under which one’s parents are married (Smedal, 2002).

Smedal does not explain the co-existence of these two bridewealth patterns. He states: ‘How these very diverse practices have come about is not clear to me ...’ (2002, p. 502). However, he is sure that these two patterns do not present themselves as options from which to choose (i.e. they are not practised simultaneously). With regards to Ronaga, uxorilocal practices are the norm. Nevertheless, I also noticed that there are marriages outside the bridewealth system, or with a partner from other cultural groups. These marriages are frowned upon, and require flexible arrangements to which the whole *woé* must consent (if the marrying couple wishes to remain connected to the House). For example, it is not always clear how partners from outside Ngada fit within the rank system (note that there are no rank-raising rituals in Ngada). Especially in older days, when travelling to and communicating with the ‘outside’ was rather difficult, the actual rank of

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58 According to Curnow, citing a senior man from Bajawa, uxorilocality is practised solely in Bajawa, Golewa, Jerebu’u and Aimere. According to her interlocutor, these areas were up until the 1930s virilocal too. Around that time, however, ‘as life expectancy increased due to improvements in health care and a reduction in inter-clan warfare, it became less crucial to attract women to the house to work and procreate. Hence the desire to pay bridewealth reduced and families allowed men to leave the house and join other clans, thereby reducing bridewealth exchanges’ (Curnow, 2007, pp. 58-59). Besides whether this claim is true, or not, the explanation does not account for why, in other Ngada areas (e.g. Were and Mataloko) patrilocality remains the norm.
future partners was hard to decide. Nowadays, however, with improved communication techniques, and better road access to all areas of Flores, these issues are circumvented, and ‘outside’ marriages are considered less problematic.

Marriage, descent and House affiliation are rooted in complex rules, long-held knowledge and mythical origin, and resemble the ‘social structure’ of van Wouden’s original thesis. This implies that when young people, who are in the process of becoming socially accepted adults, cannot or do not want to comply with such ruling principles, they directly affect the social structure of their communities.

**Religious beliefs and customary practices**

In an early section of her book on the Hoga Sara, an ethnic group located closely in place, time and practice to the Ngada, Molnar comments: ‘Due to the limited effects of Catholicism on Hoga Sara society, in this work I make only very brief reference to Christianity’ (2000, p. ix).\(^5\) This comment seems to imply that Catholicism might be a nominal force amongst the Ngada. However, it certainly is not: the Catholic mission on Flores has been very active, and is very successful. Yet, Molnar’s comment does imply that the ‘structural core’ is minimally affected by Catholicism. Catholicism is a separate belief system next to indigenous ideas about the cosmos and ancestors. Therefore, it is possible that the truth of Molnar’s assertion coexists with the facts of Schröter’s statement that ‘Flores is today the largest coherent settlement area of Christians [i.e. Catholics] in Indonesia, with more than ninety percent of the population avowing themselves to Catholicism’ (2010, p. 142).\(^6\)

Catholicism was first introduced to Flores by the Portuguese Jesuits in the sixteenth century. However, it is due to the efforts of the SVD missionaries in the early twentieth century that currently the vast majority of Ngada people think of themselves as Catholic.\(^7\) The early missionaries were quite sympathetic towards the Ngada belief systems, as they considered these beliefs a form of primitive monotheism (Schröter, 2010). For example, the missionaries incorporated many manifestations of pre-Catholic belief into their own practices and initially tried to translate the Bible and religious practices into local

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59 Note that the Indonesian term *Kristen* (meaning Christian) refers to Protestants, which is different from *Katolik* (Catholic). These are considered two distinct religions by the Indonesian government.

60 There are many Muslims on Flores; they mainly live in cities and villages along the coast. Most of them are long-term residents of Flores, descendants from Bimanese, Makassarese and Bugis migrants who came to Flores from the sixteenth century onward.

61 Indonesia’s official state philosophy, *Pancasila*, obliges everyone to adhere to a world religion. The six state sanctioned religions are Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Protestantism, Catholicism and Confucianism. The implementation of *Pancasila* implies that caution is needed when judging religious statistics. Despite this ‘mandatory’ character of religion in Indonesia, most Ngada would, without doubt, identity themselves as true and good Catholics.
languages. They also took into account local categorisations and applied these to Catholic schemata. For example, Dewa, the pre-colonial name for divinity, is also used to call on God today (alongside Tuhan). The attitude of most missionaries towards indigenous beliefs had a positive impact upon the rate of conversions.

Expressions of Catholicism can be observed frequently: most notable are the signing of the cross before eating or drinking, and attending the Sunday mass and prayer groups (kelompok doa). Besides these observances, Catholicism is important during birth and baptism, communion, marriage and death, although during these events indigenous spiritual elements are evident, too. All other religious and spiritual public displays, however, like harvest festivals and other agricultural festivals, are dominated by expressions of indigenous beliefs. These expressions are interlaced with prayers directed towards a Catholic God, or Jesus or Maria.

The Ngada cosmos is divided into three parts: ‘the sky, the physical plane of the human habitation, and the invisible realm of the ancestors’ (Molnar, 1997, p. 398). The sky is considered to be the dwelling of Dewa, but this Divinity is rarely addressed directly. Although considered as Creator of all and everything, Dewa is only called upon in severe distress, or when taking an oath. Originally, this was due to notions of fear and danger associated with direct dealings with Dewa. However, these notions have been altered by Catholicism, and Dewa is nowadays more easily invoked (as is Tuhan). Nevertheless, the Ngada have a much more intimate relation with their ancestors, and in ritual life mainly rely on blessings from their forebears, instead of from a (Catholic) divine entity (or Catholic Saints).  

Reverence for ancestors is generally conceived by the Ngada as a ‘guarantee for continued well-being (...), fertility and proliferation of the members of a house’ (Molnar, 1997, p. 399). Rituals are regularly performed to ensure ancestral blessing, mainly in conjunction with the annual cycle of crop production that determines the local calendar. Since the early 1970s, crop production has changed from a focus on yams to a more diversified production. This challenges the existing connections between religious, agricultural, ceremonial and household activities, and hence challenges the general idea of livelihood. Therefore, to maintain relevance, rituals have changed as well (Molnar, 1998; Schröter, 2000). Still, ritualistic anomalies are prevalent, and often the ceremonial meaning

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62 Due to the Ngada patchwork of languages, variations in indigenous beliefs and diverse spiritual conceptualisations, these translations and incorporations were often flawed. Therefore, in the 1930s the Church started to use Malay in their services – and inadvertently contributed to subtle nation-building processes (see, for example, Steenbrink, 2013, p. 126). These processes were enhanced by Ngada’s incorporation into an archipelago-wide Church organisation, which contributed to the idea that Ngada Catholics were, in fact, Indonesian Catholics.

63 Reliance on ancestral blessings is common in many Austronesian societies, as these societies share a preoccupation with origin and source (Fox, 1988a, 1988b; Lewis, 1988).
of spiritual displays does not reflect contemporary social or economic realities. For example, the ritual climax of the year, reba – a three-day festival starting in the village of Bena at the end of December, and then performed throughout the months January to February in other Ngada villages, such as Ronaga – is a commemorative event of the ties that exist between humankind, the soil, and the ancestors. It also commemorates humankind’s dependence on nature for their resources, in particular yams (uwi). Although uwi are still eaten – often at a social event (ngalo; people share plates of baked yam, chilli and greens, and share a glass of either palm wine or palm gin) – yams have lost their everyday significance for Ngada people. Currently, rice is their staple food (which needs to be imported from other – flat – parts of Flores, or from further away). Therefore, it seems only logical that rice has been incorporated into ceremonial activities as well, most prominently in sacrifices made to ancestors. Nevertheless, uwi remains prominent during the festivities, especially during the misa reba, the opening mass of the festival. This mass starts with a loud ‘ooooooooo....uwi’, shouted out by one of the adat leaders of the hamlet where the celebrations are held. With this one shout, the yams are celebrated, and through it the soil and the ancestors who worked it before the current generation.

Comparable, conflicting explanations can be found between Catholicism and indigenous belief systems. For example, the origin of the Ngada concept of ‘soul’ (maé) differs between the two religious traditions: where Catholicism attributes the origin of the soul to God, in the Ngada cosmos the soul originates from ancestors. Through name-giving, it is believed that ancestors can become ‘part’ of people. Conflicting explanations are circumvented by avoiding discussions of the roots of these practices, but sometimes, for example with cousin marriages or polygamy, the Church doctrine directly opposes indigenous practices. Yet, conflicting explanations of soul, or conflicting ideas concerning marriage, do not lead to mutually exclusive belief systems. For example, misa reba is the opening mass of reba itself. It is clearly a recent Catholic addition to older rituals, as it combines the singing of psalms and sermons with Ngada dances and adat practices of

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64 Palm wine (moche putih/tuak) is made from sap obtained from the cut flower of several species of palm trees (e.g. palmyra tree or the coconut tree). Through natural fermentation it contains about 4 per cent alcohol. When freshly tapped, it is sweet and slightly sour. Palm gin (moche/arak) is distilled palm wine. Distilleries are small family-run operations, mostly found in coastal areas (e.g. Aimere and Maumere are known throughout the island for good quality arak).

65 In Ngada, name-giving practices prescribe that the baby chooses its own non-Christian family name. Soon after birth, names of known wœ ancestors, or older family members, are whispered to the baby. The first name after which the baby makes a sound is ‘given’ to it – though in Ngada vocabulary it makes more sense to describe that the baby ‘takes’ the name. This ‘taking’ is considered to be a conscious act that represents specific characteristics of the baby. Therefore, people within a House or wœ with the same name are considered to share certain qualities not only with each other, but also with their ancestor from whom they took their names.
blood sacrifice and ceremonial speech, implying that Catholicism has become an integrated part of pre-Catholic celebrations.

Indigenous beliefs, Catholicism and changing livelihoods have complex connections, and lead to religious practices which have ambiguous meanings. There is flexibility in the meaning, importance and practice of religious systems. Most Ngada people do not seem to be bothered by the complexity of moral codes. For them, Catholicism is their agama, while ancestral beliefs remain vital for their family’s good fortune, for tracing descent, and for access to land and social affairs. Therefore, knowledge about ancestors is highly regarded, and can gain villagers authority. Elder members of Houses who are known to have mastered this specific knowledge are referred to as mosalaki (adat specialist; only men are referred to with this title) and can have actual power during conflicts, or in issues that concern the wae (Molnar, 2000, pp. 109, 153). Moreover, they are often consulted as specialists of traditions, e.g. in cases of marriage or matters of inheritance. The mosalaki are also the persons who establish the annual calendar for rituals, and are the keepers of ritualistic speech needed in ancestral invocations. They are the indigenous counterpart of the Catholic priests. (These roles are not necessarily conflicting; I know cases of mosalaki who were previously trained in the seminary, though I never heard of any priest being simultaneously a mosalaki.)

Ngada young people have to navigate complex and ambiguous sets of religious moralities. Many of these moralities have changed as agricultural cycles and crop production have changed, too, in recent decades. Moreover, many people who are no longer dependent on agricultural activities for their livelihoods, including educated young people, have lost touch with the agricultural cycle. Hence, they feel less connected to the cycle’s associated rituals. This changes perspectives on religious beliefs and customary practices, and has wider implications for general ideas regarding local livelihoods.

The community economy
In 2012, Ngada district scored well in the provincial Human Development Index. Based on average life expectancy, literacy, average income, and the number of years inhabitants went to school, Ngada ranked second of all districts in the province Nusa Tenggara Timur (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013a). Still, many people in Ngada consider their district to be backward and in need of development. In school, young people are constantly reminded that the area needs to modernise. Instilled with this idea, young Ngada people repeatedly used the acronym NTT – which is normally used to refer to Nusa

66 Note that NTT is one of the lowest-scoring provinces on the national Human Development Index.
Tenggara Timur – to refer to Nanti Tuban Tolong (later God will help), implying that people from NTT are passive and rely on God for their livelihoods. Though told as a joke, young Ngada people used it also to critique socio-economic practices of interdependency, to which they referred as ‘budaya minta’ (a culture of requesting). Thus, while performing relatively well in terms of ‘Human Development’, in (young) people’s perception – in line with state discourse, as reflected in educational curricula – Ngada needs to modernise, and be less concerned with tradition and ritual.

Indeed, many Ngada people depend for their livelihoods on the myriad connections that exist amongst people and between people and their land. Collective arrangements of land ownership are the norm (i.e. via the wai and the House), and adat remains an important organising principle, as it traces descent and access to land back to ancestral achievements. There is a ‘community economy’ (Gibson-Graham, 2005, p. 16) amongst the Ngada, in which “[p]roviding necessities for all is central to Ngadha identity, actively endowing individuals with an immutable sense of being-in-common. Labouring together brings individuals into each others’ lives, homes, and fields ensuring physical and spiritual sustenance’ (Curnow, 2007, p. 141).

Through the notion of the community economy we are able to ‘explore the dynamic social, cultural, spiritual, and political relationships and activities that along with economic relations (re)create economy’ (Curnow, 2007, p. 36). The community economy is dynamic, and includes both hegemonic capitalist notions of what an economy should consist of, as well as alternative perspectives on economies (including transactions that might be reciprocal or labour that is unpaid) (Gibson-Graham, 2005). In Ngada, ‘webs of interdependence’ (Curnow, 2007) are the norm and are vital for people’s livelihoods and their wellbeing. Socio-economic interdependence and taboos concerning large surplus accumulation and material desire are still relevant in Ngada (Curnow, 2007, 2008, 2012). Even though money has become widely accepted since the 1970s, extended families and neighbours often still pool labour for major agricultural events, like harvesting, and the fruits of labour are redistributed amongst House members and fellow villagers. Redistribution is thus vital and livelihoods depend on instances of ‘reciprocity, exchanges, pooling, gifting, and sharing’ (Curnow, 2007, p. 111).

The community economy and its webs of interdependence are expressions of ‘moral order and ... manifestation[s] of cosmological connectivity and the spiritual

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67 The budaya minta resembles what others have called ‘demand sharing’ in small-scale communities, for example amongst Australian Aborigines (e.g. Peterson, 1993). In these communities, demand sharing is essential in maintaining social relationships and mitigating scarcity and risk.

68 See also Jenny Munro (2009), who describes how Papuan Dani students in school learn about their own ‘backwardness’.
commons’ (Curnow, 2007, pp. 109-110). Through ritual and ceremony, people are connected with God and the ancestors, the woi and the land, stipulating a responsibility towards the extended family and community, ensuring one another’s subsistence livelihood. Weddings and funerals are large events in Ngada with critical meaning for formulating the relations between people and woi, and between people and the ancestors. Family and community members share the responsibility for costs and preparations, just as during rituals and ceremonies. Through arisan (rotating credit groups) and prayer groups, modernity (i.e. cash money and new consumption ideals) and the Church have become interlaced in the many connections that together make up the totality of webs of interdependence.

A multitude of collectives exist (e.g. the House, the woi, neighbourhood and Church groups), often overlapping in function and composition. During regular formal meetings people’s contributions to arisan, family member’s weddings and funerals, rituals and ceremonial gatherings, and Church praying groups, are discussed, noted down and guarded. Informally, networks of interdependence are activated via continuous efforts to connect, mainly through house visits that imply reciprocity. Houses are permeable by sound and vision, providing few barriers to casually checking whether someone is in, and catching up on gossip and news, often related to the various networks to which one is committed. Courtesy visits to family, neighbours or affluent village people are common, and when one travels, visits to family afar are common, consuming much time. Though these visits might seem random, they are often opportunistically inspired, and accompanied by giving gifts (oleh-oleh), requests for help or work, or a reconfirmation of existing, but too long neglected, (family) ties.

Ngada life is extremely social: there are weekly prayer groups (in May and October, tribute months to Mary, these prayer groups are every night), weddings and rituals take months of preparation, while funerals take many days, too. When houses are built, people help each other or invite family and neighbours for regular rituals and sacrifices, just as when ‘new’ cars or, more commonly, motorbikes are consecrated (see, for an expanded list of reasons to perform rituals and sacrifices, Smedal, 1996, p. 45). These social relations embody the Ngada networks of interdependence.

Within the community economy, agriculture is dominant. In 2012, it provided almost 64 per cent of the people in Ngada aged fifteen and above with work (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013a, p. 62). Subsistence farming is important to the majority, with nuclear families working small plots of land (aided by family in harvest or sowing season); though some families make use of day labourers. Families are often able to sell a little agricultural surplus at the market, providing a little cash. Or, they have additional
activities, sometimes working in construction or as agricultural day labourer (this is mostly a male affair).

Access to land, and thus often access to food and income, is through the House (but ultimately comes through the woe, as the saka pu’u transfers land to the other Houses). However, various regimes of land ownership have become intertwined. Though rural production, including ownership of the means of production, continues to be largely a matter of customary management of common resources, more modern regimes of individual ownership are increasingly normalised (e.g. private landownership). These regimes were introduced as state initiatives to increase rural efficiency and outputs. From the early 1970s onward, Ngada increasingly became subject to such initiatives, for example the village cooperative units (Koperasi Unit Desa-KUD) (see, for example, Curnow, 2007, pp. 183-187).

The state and its initiatives, as well as the Catholic Church and market entities, have shaped Ngada’s community economy. Through the introduction of new moralities, cash, access to prolonged education, enhanced transport links (and the growing availability of motorbikes and cars), and the growing presence of mass communication media, Ngada customary practices and beliefs have become enmeshed in globalising economies and technologies. Nowadays, products such as televisions and mobile phones are readily available in Ngada, and they are very desirable products. Since the late 1970s, cash has gained in importance, and a little later, since the 1980s, tourism and salaried labour for the government have provided steady incomes for a growing number of people. Other labour opportunities include casual unskilled day labouring in construction or as agricultural day-labourer, in transport and in petty trade (more substantial trade in and from Bajawa is mainly controlled by ethnic Chinese). The daily market of Bajawa and the weekly markets in small towns in Ngada’s sub-districts are dominated by women, who sell their families’ agricultural surplus (Curnow, 2008, p. 375).

People often trade within contemporary capitalist relations (e.g. at the market or at the kios). However, in the community economy, they may also barter within predefined sets of relations (e.g. coastal people who trade fish with mountain people from a preferred village; e.g. people from Ronaga often trade with people from a specific group of coastal communities, such as Paupaga), or perform transactions that imply reciprocity. These latter transactions mainly occur within the House and woe, or with direct neighbours, and also include the pooling of food and livestock in case of life-cycle celebrations (e.g. weddings and funerals). Labour-arrangements are diverse, too: they include wage-labour (mainly for the government, but casual labour in construction work or agriculture is possible, too), self-employment (mainly in agriculture, in subsistence farming, but also as a small trader, ojek
driver, or weaver; these jobs are frequently combined), or voluntary and reciprocal labour relations (e.g. working on family land and cooking for a family member’s life-cycle celebrations).

The community economy has become permeated by cash.\(^6\) It is needed to pay for services like education and medical care, agricultural products like insecticides and fertilisers, electrical appliances, and consumables such as cigarettes, sugar, and petrol. These services, products and consumables, especially expensive electrical appliances, require a certain amount of accumulation. There seems to be a gap between adat notions of economic practice (where cash has no precedent, and wealth accumulation is a taboo), and (global) notions of consumption and desire. Also, the introduction of cash and consumer goods in the 1970s established (partial) shifts in control over wealth – previously expressed in land possession or livestock – from household seniors to the individual. Cash gives the individual relative autonomy, particularly to the growing cohort of people who have a job and income, and hence are less dependent on family and land.

Shifts in resource control and ideas about wealth accumulation are potentially problematic, particularly when people become less firmly rooted in the agrarian economy than older generations (e.g. Molnar, 1998) and aspire to wage work. The situation of educated young people who are unable to find work is, in this sense, a relative novelty and an anomaly. They aspire to jobs with a fixed income, rather than (the insecurity of subsistence) farming. However, they are caught in troubled education-to-work transitions, and need to rely on Ngada webs of interdependence. Hence, within the Ngada community economy, troubled education-to-work transitions are not merely personal issues: they are social problems too.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a context for further analysis of un(der)employed educated young people in rural Ngada. It moved from an introduction to the island to an historical overview that enabled better understanding of the three social domains that I demarcate in this study: family and marriage; religious beliefs and customary practices; and the community economy.

We have seen that young people are part of a society in which membership of a House, and subsequently a *nog*, is an important social signifier. Membership determines

\[^6\] The need for cash money is closely related to the ‘Green Revolution’ in the 1970s, a centrally organised attempt to increase Indonesia’s agricultural output (in particular for rice). Central Flores, due to its mountainous interior, is less suitable for wet rice production. Nevertheless, new dry rice and maize varieties were introduced in Ngada. These new varieties required investments in seed and fertiliser (Curnow, 2007, p. 81). Also, around the same time, cash money became also needed to pay for schooling, petrol and cooking oil.
access to land – for many families their most important capital. Nevertheless, agriculture has lost importance in relation to wage labour. For example, casual construction work, or fixed work for the government, is nowadays an important source of cash. Still, networks of interdependence remain operative in the villages of Ngada. Through myth, history and ritual, people are tied together to a larger social structure, in which social responsibilities are determined by kinship. These responsibilities are linked to communal activities and agricultural events, and to marriage, death or ritual festivities.

Although the Ngada lived in relative isolation for a long time, their livelihoods have become part of regional, national and global developments due to the establishment of the state and the Church in the area. New influences, like cash and formalised education, change people’s beliefs and ambitions and orient Ngada people towards the future. Educated young people are at the forefront of these changes. Their education inspires a desire to be modern, but their troubled transitions into social adulthood limit their opportunities. The next chapters will use the data of this chapter as a context for further analysis of these young people’s actions, motivations and ideas, in particular in relation to their social environment.
Vignettes of the precarious: being young, educated and un(der)employed in Ngada

Introduction
The experiences of un(der)employed educated young people in rural central Ngada are central to this thesis. During the course of my fieldwork, an incredible diversity in individual ambitions, future outlooks and attitudes towards local practices emerged. At an analytical level, however, there are three themes that can be distinguished in these experiences, which I have labelled ‘Being Ngada’, ‘Wanting change’ and ‘Feeling bingung (confused)’.

To introduce these themes, I present three stories of educated young people who had just returned from studies outside Ngada, and had trouble securing a stable job and income. Many of them expressed their strong connection to local cultural practices and how it is a good thing that ‘Ngada culture is still strong’ (budaya masih kuat). They were proud of Ngada’s communal values as expressed in rituals and tried to connect themselves to these values by participating in these rituals (i.e. ‘Being Ngada’). However, many educated young people also expressed a desire to contribute to local progress (kemajuan). Often they explained to me that local socio-economic practices of socially sanctioned interdependence hinder progress. Hence, the young people I spoke to saw it as their duty to change what they called the local mindsets (mindset petani/kampung), in which these practices are firmly rooted (i.e. ‘Wanting change’).

There seems to be a tension between the idea that Ngada socio-economic practices, and the mindsets in which these practices are rooted, hinder economic development and the cultural pride so often expressed. Though this tension was rarely discussed openly, un(der)employed educated young people and I talked about ‘Feeling bingung’ (confused), especially with regards to personal ambitions in relation to parents’ wishes, indicating they were, indeed, experiencing this tension.

In the first half of this chapter, the stories of Mako, Echiel and Jane will be presented as examples of how educated young people experience their lives in Ngada and

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70 The English word ‘mindset’ reflects actual discourse in rural Flores. Sometimes the word otak (brain, or, more loosely, mind) was used as well.
how they balance ideas about personal progress, ambitions and social obligations. This balancing act will then be analysed to introduce the subsequent chapters.

**Mako**

Since early childhood, Maria Dolores Rego (25) has been called Mako by others. She does not really know why, but she rather likes it. She was unemployed when I met her in early November 2013, but two weeks later she started working at the local SMP (Sekolah Menengah Pertama, Junior High School) as guru honor, a job she obtained through her social network. The job does not pay her a proper teacher’s salary and comes without any of the benefits teachers enjoy when they are recruited through official government channels. Nevertheless, Mako is happy with the job: she feels she can contribute to the development of her students and help her village ‘advance’ (*maju*).

Mako has poor health: she is unsure about what exactly is bothering her, but she coughs all the time, and she frequently has a fever. Her parents therefore wanted to have her close by, in case they needed to take care of her. Her parents’ wish entailed that Mako had to study on Flores. Initially, she had wanted to go to nursing school in Makassar, South Sulawesi, but her parents did not give her permission to go there. Therefore, she had to apply for the nursing school in Maumere. Unfortunately, she failed the psychological test (she does not really know why, but she thinks she failed because it was the first time she did this kind of test). Disappointed with the result, she decided to go to Ende, the biggest city on Flores, and follow the language programme of Universitas Flores (UniFlor).

After obtaining her S1 in English (*Sarjana Satu*, bachelor degree), she worked in Ende for about two years in an administrative position at the local government telephone service (Telkomsel) office. According to Mako, this was a boring job, not at all satisfactory after four years of university. She had studied English, and while working for Telkomsel she felt she started to lose her proficiency. Therefore, Mako decided to go to Jakarta for a three-month course to get a teacher’s permit (*Akta4/Akta Mengajar*). In early October 2013 she obtained her permit; soon after she returned to Ronaga.

In Ende, Mako met a boy, and they fell in love. Of similar age, they were both enrolled in UniFlor’s language programme. They even became co-workers at the Telkomsel office. According to Mako, it was a serious relationship. There was a problem, though: the boy is of Lio ethnicity (Ende), while Mako is Ngada. One fundamental cultural difference between these two ethnic groups is the post-marital residence practices: amongst the Ngada the married couple generally resides with the wife’s parents (uxorilocality), while in Lio the married couple goes to live with the husband’s parents (virilocality). According to Mako, the boy’s family therefore never fully supported their relationship. On the other
hand, Mako’s parents were less rigid. After all, marriage customs are often not too strictly practised, and many mixed ethnicity marriages occur.

While living away from Ronaga and her parents, Mako had been feeling rather independent. Although her parents paid for her study, and she initially made only Rp.170,000 (A$17) per month at the Telkomsel office, in the end she could easily live off her salary – by that time around Rp.1.7 million (A$170) per month. Mako is smart: during high school she was almost always ranked number one or two in her year, and she studied without any noteworthy difficulties. At Telkomsel she was soon trusted with the financial administration. At that time Mako shared a house with a female friend in central Ende, and very much enjoyed going to the beach, the fish market, or meeting with friends at the sports field. Nevertheless, after being away from Ronaga for about six and a half years, Mako’s parents wanted her to return to Ronaga. And so she did.

Mako is the oldest daughter of the house, and with advancing age her parents felt they needed their daughter nearby in order to take care of them. According to them, Mako should start to build a future in Ronaga, close to her family and her ancestral lands. This implied that though supportive of Mako’s relationship, their support was based on the understanding that after marriage Mako and the boy would live in Ronaga. However, the boy could not leave Ende: his father had gone to Malaysia for work, but did not send any remittances to Flores. Hence, as the sole breadwinner in his family, the boy had to take care of his sick mother and pay for his younger brother’s education.

In one of our first discussions, Mako was ‘sangat bingung’ (really confused). She understood that her boyfriend could not leave Ende, but also understood that her parents wanted her to be in Ronaga. They had taken care of her in times of sickness; was it therefore not her duty to take care of them now? Yet, when I asked her, ‘What do you want?’ she told me that she just does not know. She felt that she could not leave her parents because that would mean she had abandoned her budaya (culture), and ‘well...being here...it’s just as it should be: it is adat...’ As a result, she had not seen her boyfriend for months. They sent each other daily text messages and occasionally talked to each other on the phone. According to Mako, her boyfriend had said that they had to be patient, but she did not really feel that the relationship was going anywhere. Nevertheless, she kept hoping that their problems could be solved, somehow.

Meanwhile, she was adjusting to her new lifestyle in Ronaga. Mako felt she was less bebas (free) than she was while in Ende. Her parents prevented her from going out at night, and, besides her work at school, she either helped her mother at home or was active with the Church kor (choir) and OMK (Orang Muda Katolik, Catholic Youth Movement). These latter activities were a way out of daily routine and relationship issues, but also created new
problems with her parents. Her parents did not always appreciate her busy social life and required her to help with chores, weaving activities, or the kios that her parents have. Though not in a continuous state of disagreement with her parents, Mako felt she was being controlled and would have preferred to be more in charge of her own time.

Still, Mako enjoyed her new life. It was good to have family around, and she appreciated her Church activities and OMK friends. Besides going to choir practice, she went to (and organised) social activities at the Ronaga Church, went to regular OMK personal development seminars, and participated in a small OMK arisan. Through Church, it was easy to reconnect to old friends and make new ones. As my fieldwork progressed, Mako began to get more comfortable with her Ronaga life: her parents were getting less strict, while Mako was getting used to her household responsibilities. In some way, these responsibilities made life easy for Mako: talking about her guru honor position, she told me that for the moment it did not really matter that she only earns Rp.650,000 (A$65) a month. ‘What do I need the money for? I already have a house, and my parents pay for my food. And if I need something, I can always get some money from my parents or my older brother.’

Mako’s mother has land, but due to her poor health and her choice of career, Mako was not really interested in it. She would prefer a career as a PNS teacher (Pegawai Negeri Sipil, civil servant). Maybe that would also enable her to get enough funds to potentially start her own company. ‘In what?’ I asked her. She did not really know yet, but she was sure that starting such a company would be difficult: ‘Too many people want to take advantage of successful people, so why bother starting one’s own business?’ Therefore, she was not even sure she wanted to start a company. ‘Anyway,’ she continued, ‘I still have time’, she laughed, ‘mave-mave (take it slowly), kerja dulu (first work some more), save some money, and then I want to start a family.’ At that point I still believed she felt heartbroken about her boyfriend in Ende, but she surprised me by telling that they, in fact, had split up not too long ago. As she explained: ‘After I had moved to Ronaga, he started to drink lots more than he did while I was still in Ende. And he started gambling too! I really feel he has changed and that I don’t know him anymore.’ This conclusion made her hesitant about the intentions of any suitors that approached her now that she was single again. She told me: ‘Often guys come to the house, or they give me small gifts, but I don’t know…Mathias, when can you start trusting someone? Will you ever really know somebody?’

During fieldwork, people called me Mathias instead of Thijs, as it better fitted the Catholic names common in Ngada.
Not much later I started having trouble contacting her. It appeared that one of her suitors had given her a new SIM card, and thus her former phone number was out of service. ‘Her new boyfriend?’ ‘Maybe,’ Mako said, and then she smiled…

**Echiel**

During SMA (*Sekolah Menengah Atas*, Senior High School) Echiel (26) and Mako were a couple. However, they broke up after graduation because Echiel decided to go to seminary, a theological college. He told me this one afternoon when we were discussing love and sex amongst young people in Ronaga. ‘No, we definitely did not have sex back then...but yeah, we kissed... But we made it secret, because nobody can know. People gossip too soon and too much here in Ngada.’

Since graduating from the seminary, Echiel has lived with his parents and three of his siblings in his mother’s family *rumah adat*, right in the middle of one of Ronaga’s many *kampung adat*. His father is already retired, but used to work as a civil servant at sub-district level, while his mother still does the daily chores in the house and in the nearby *kebun* (productive dry garden land; often also a place for pig pens). Echiel is the fourth of six children: three of them have attended university. Echiel’s decision to go to the seminary came from a deep admiration he had as a child for local priests. He told me: ‘They [priests] were like saints to me…really.’ He still more or less thinks like this, although he confided to me many times that even priests are only human after all. Nevertheless, he admires his former classmates who have continued their seminary studies: ‘They have such a huge drive to help people...to sacrifice themselves.’

It is not easy to get accepted into a seminary. There is a high demand for relatively few positions, and entrance tests are difficult. However, once you are accepted you have access to what is generally considered to be the best education possible on Flores. Echiel especially appreciated the focus on personal development and the training in interpersonal communication skills. One time he told me that he even went through extensive counselling, as a required part of his studies, in order to learn to be reflexive with regards to his own thoughts and behaviour. Seminary was for Echiel a wonderful time: he lived in a boarding house, made friends and enjoyed a privileged training. However, to the end of his studies, he started to realise that the sacrifices one has to make to become a priest were too much for him. Although certainly not the sole reason to doubt his future as a priest, to me Echiel mentioned celibacy as a primary cause of his quitting the seminary and returning to Ronaga.

I met Echiel early in October 2013. He had been back in Ronaga for about five months, but he still had the feeling that he was resettling in his village. Of course, a fair
number of his former high school friends were still living in Ronaga – or had returned to the village after studies – and it had been easy to reconnect to them, particularly through OMK. Nevertheless, Echiel said to me that most other villagers did not remember him anymore, or only knew him from Facebook.

Seminary training provides students with an S1 (bachelor’s degree) in Philosophy. Echiel could not find a job easily after graduation. He did not really want to apply for a government job, but in the private sector there are few opportunities in Ngada. He tried to work in a hotel for a while, but realised that cleaning the floor or making beds was not something he wanted to do. Instead, his ambitions are more geared towards positions in which he is able to improve the performance of people and institutions. ‘Yeah I know, that’s pretty idealistic,’ he told me, ‘but I guess I’ve always been like this. It is also the reason I would have liked to become a priest, helping people, creating a better world.’

Echiel asked for work at various places. It was a stressful period, but finally he got accepted at a Ronaga-based not-for-profit foundation that is concerned with the socio-economic development of Ngada communities through the introduction of new agricultural regimes and techniques. The foundation is sponsored through international parties on a project basis, which means that if there are no projects, Echiel does not get a salary. Although he gets Rp.1,000,000 (A$100) per month when there is funding, about half the time I was in Ngada he did not have an income. Those months he still had to work, though, as projects were not always finished within time, and new projects had to be initiated. He repeatedly stated that becoming financially independent is his principal goal for the coming years. Nevertheless, he is happy with his job: he gets to meet many people from different areas and backgrounds, is required to work independently, and is able to directly contribute to the socio-economic development of Ngada.

Echiel is a proud orang Ngada (person from Ngada). He sees his ethnic background and the associated cultural practices as an essential part of his life. Often he praised the unique features of these practices, as well as how Ngada people are ‘rich’ in social contacts, as opposed to ‘city people’. A few times, Echiel told me that he wants to learn more about Ngada culture, for example about the poetic usage of language in ceremonies. ‘There is much wisdom in those words,’ he used to say. He also told me about his love for the Ngada highlands and its patchwork of green fields, the cool mountain climate, and how Mt. Inerie dominates the landscape. ‘This is my land, this is where I belong,’ were his words to me one night.

However, Echiel also feels that Ngada is lagging behind in its socio-economic development. According to Echiel, Ngada’s underdevelopment has many facets and is due to many causes, such as geographical isolation, corruption, and inefficient government
policies. He is also critical of Ngada people and their ‘mindsets’. For Echiel, the social character of village life is a factor of special concern, ‘People rely too much on each other; there is a budaya minta, a culture of requesting’, that provides little encouragement for economic progress, as economic gains need to be shared amongst family and neighbours. ‘And, you know Mathias, you really have to put up with it, because there is just too much gossiping here.’ The social norm is maintained through the threat of social ridicule and even social exclusion. ‘But’, said Echiel, ‘things would already be better if people started to bring a little money to the bank in case of emergencies…so they don’t have to go around asking for help... You know, it’s just a matter of mindset.’

About his own opportunities to change people’s mindset, Echiel said: ‘Well, it’s about small steps. Maybe I can encourage people to start to think a little differently. Who knows?’ Therefore he is happy with his job, as it enables him to potentially contribute to change. Also, he is an active member of the OMK, and participates in its regular personal development seminars to keep improving himself, and to help others to do so. And he even thinks about becoming politically active, inspired by the latest elections in Indonesia. Meanwhile, his other goals for the future lie in a different direction: ‘Yeah, try to get a stable job and income, and then find a girl to marry.’ That is, if he decides to stay out of priestly training. Seminary allows former students to return within two years after they have left. For Echiel this term is too long, and he has given himself a year to decide whether his future would be in the Church or not. When I last saw him that year was almost up, and he still was not completely sure. However, at my farewell dinner he came up to me, and whispered: ‘You must know, Mathias…I actually just courted a girl at the OMK camping trip…’ Last time I checked, he was still out of seminary.

Jane

Jane (25), short for Juliana, was born in Mataloko, but lived most of her childhood in Bajawa. Her father had died a few years ago, aged 78. He was a teacher, and also kepala suku, the head of a south coast extended family network. Her mother was Jane’s father’s second wife, and is also from the south coast. She still has land over there. However, it is more than a two-hour drive by bus (they do not own a car), and neither Jane nor her siblings are making any claims to it. Instead, some cousins cultivate the land now, or so Jane thinks. Jane has two older sisters and one older brother.

The first times I met Jane she had just returned from Yogyakarta with a fresh bachelor’s degree in International Relations. In a copy shop she was printing her resume and other application documents for some job applications: one for a local branch of a national bank conglomerate and another for a position through a provincial programme at
the local KPU (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, Electoral Commission). During the course of my fieldwork we kept meeting regularly. While waiting for the results of her applications, she did underpaid, boring (bosingan)\(^{72}\) and short-term work at the local Telkomsel office. However, she did not worry about her career too much; she gave herself another year to get settled: 2014 would be the year she got a ‘real’ job, and she would definitely get engaged… and after marriage maybe even pregnant?

Jane did not really like being back in Bajawa. For a long time she had considered ‘Yogya’ to be her hometown. Already in her first year of SMA, she had spent one year there, when she accompanied her sister to Yogyakarta for studies. The second and third (last) year of SMA Jane did in Bajawa again, but it was not hard to decide where to pursue further education. Just like her sisters and brother, she chose Yogyakarta. Yogyakarta also was convenient in terms of finance. Like other people who had studied there, Jane reasoned that Yogyakarta was the cheapest city in which to study. Not that financing her studies was an issue for her: her father’s income (and later, pension) proved to be enough to finance all his children’s education. Moreover, Jane did some part-time work as tutor in English for high school students. This enabled her to enjoy some ‘Yogya living’.

According to Jane, Yogyakarta is an exciting city: it is cheap, there are malls, bookshops, cafes, and she had many friends there, even from Ngada. Nevertheless, when she finished studies in May 2013, she returned to Bajawa. This seemed to contradict her ambitions: she expressed a strong desire to go abroad, preferably to Australia, and work for a large foreign NGO on development issues in Indonesia. Therefore, she had chosen to study International Relations.

‘So why had she returned to Ngada?’ was my obvious question after we had dinner one time at her mother’s place. The answer was simple: ‘Because my mother really wanted me to…’. Consequently, Jane now lives with her mother, her (unmarried) oldest sister and her daughter (Jane, aged 5), and her brother in Bajawa. Does she like it? ‘No! It’s boring!’ To me, Jane complained about a lack of coffee shops, bookshops, or any place where young people could spend some time. ‘Yeah, now and then I go to the hot springs, but that’s mostly with family. With friends there’s no real place to hang out. We just sit with each other in our parents’ homes, where we talk, cook, eat and drink coffee…’

The first time we met, Jane did not have a job. She was bored: after six years she had just returned from Yogyakarta, and initially had difficulty reconnecting to old friends. The old friends she still had in Bajawa were either busy with work or had already established families of their own. She spent her days helping her mother with the daily

\(^{72}\) In everyday language, people often use bosingan, meaning bored, when the more complex form, membosankan, meaning boring, is called for. Here, and elsewhere, I would like to reflect everyday language.
chores, or cared for her little niece. Money was not something with which she was concerned, as she had some savings from her work as a tutor in Yogyakarta. Her mother covered most expenses. Jane also occasionally got some money from her brother to buy credit for her Blackberry mobile phone. Nevertheless, she was eager to find a job to get out of the house more often, and to start a career.

The second time I met Jane she was excited: she had been accepted into the selection process of both jobs for which she had applied. Unfortunately, the selection procedure for the KPU job required her to be in Kupang within a week of the notice, which turned out to be impossible. Nevertheless, she was able to enter the second round for the bank job, for which she had to do a capacity and personality test. More than 100 people were invited for this test, and with fewer than ten vacancies it was an exciting time for Jane. Luckily, she made it through, although she had to wait for almost two months before she received the news. The next steps in the selection process took even longer, and after eight months she was still awaiting the results of the interview that followed the test. It was a frustrating time for her, and in the meantime Jane decided to take on an administrative job at a local Telkomsel office. Though certainly not the job she desired, she told me: ‘I’m glad I’m at least doing something. And my colleagues are fun!’

When I asked Jane about life in Bajawa, she told me that she preferred places like Yogyakarta, or even Jakarta. However, she felt she had to stay in Bajawa, and Jane was hesitant to clearly express her own desires. As she explained to me: ‘It’s culture here, adat, that I’m supposed to live with my mother.’ Yet, as I probed her ideas with regards to adat, she often told me that she does not really see the point of it. With regards to rituals and ceremonies, Jane complained about the huge costs of the necessary arrangements, which often include food, drinks, and livestock. She would even go as far as saying that ‘It’s just too much money…for nothing!’ She wants to keep her distance from anything that has to do with Ngada adat. She had even converted from being a Catholic to being a Protestant (Indonesian Reformed Church), as she believes that the local interpretations of Catholicism give too much room to adat, and even ‘black magic’ (ilmu hitam). Jane told me that ‘there is only one God,’ and that Ngada practices of ancestor worship undermine this critical principle. She admitted to me that she was rather alone in her spiritual views: most of Jane’s family and friends do believe in ilmu hitam and support adat beliefs and practices. To explain her own views, Jane used to say to me: ‘I guess I’m a liberal, and a realist.’

Jane considers herself to be a devout Protestant. For example, her first salary (Rp.800,000, A$80) she donated in its entirety to the Church, because ‘it just felt right to do so’. Normally, Jane would give a quarter of her monthly income to the Church. Another quarter goes to her mother, and the rest she saves at the bank, for her future wedding. One
time she told me that she thinks that weddings in Ngada are too expensive. ‘It’s because of adat’, she explains, ‘which requires insane amounts of food and pigs…and for what?’ Luckily for her, she had a male friend who was just as liberal as she was with regards to adat. Her possible boyfriend? ‘We’ll see’, was all she said.

One of Jane’s big wishes is to go abroad and continue studying for a Masters degree abroad. Together we looked for scholarship opportunities to study in Australia. That same night, after we had Googled for courses in International Relations, she suddenly told me that she might soon move to Ruteng. ‘Wow,’ I said, ‘that’s unexpected. Why?’ She confided to me that she had been feeling really fed up with her boring job at the Telkomsel office for a while now, and that in Ruteng – a far bigger city than Bajawa – there would be many more job opportunities. A friend of hers already had found her an administrative job at a small insurance company. ‘But what about your mother’, I asked, ‘did she not want you to be in Bajawa?’ ‘Oh, she’s fine with it…’ Jane replied. ‘And what about the guy who you thought you might marry, you know, the one who was just as liberal as you were?’ ‘Ahhh, well, yes, you know…I met a new guy via Telkomsel. He’s from Ruteng…’

Ruteng is the nearest big city to the west of Bajawa, and it takes only four hours by bus to get there. According to Jane the place is not too hot, and close enough to visit her mother now and then. Therefore, her mother has allowed her to go. Besides, she tells me, for her mother, Jane’s happiness is the only thing that really matters, right? Jane even had introduced the guy from Ruteng to her mom already as her boyfriend and had received her blessing. Jane is really excited to leave town. She tells me that she has had enough of Bajawa’s stifling social environment: ‘Too many people do too much gossiping’. Two weeks later she had moved in to her friend’s place in central Ruteng.

‘Being Ngada’

The stories above reflect the situation of many educated young people in Ngada. We see, for example, that many educated young people in Ngada now postpone marriage due to their prolonged education and their transitions into work, which make them remain financially dependent on their parents or siblings. Hence, young people postpone social adulthood, something Mako, Echiel and Jane endorsed, as they expressed a clear desire of ‘work-before-marriage’. Nevertheless, they were also remarkably active with their love lives.

The interrelated themes of social adulthood, love, marriage, work and un(der)employment will be further explored in the following chapters. For now, we will focus on three other elements that Mako, Echiel and Jane share in their experiences, namely ‘Being Ngada’, ‘Wanting change’, and ‘Feeling bingung’.
Feelings of pride about ‘Being Ngada’ are – within the context of the stories above – about guarding an existing status quo and ‘doing things the same’. Echiel, in particular, exhibits a strong appreciation for Ngada practices. Contradicting his criticism of peoples’ passive mindsets, he feels proud that people still rely on each other and that communities are still sharing their burdens. During one of our discussions, he told me that for him the essence of being Ngada is the strong connections amongst community members and that these connections are embodied in adat practices. Hence, he feels that he has to know more about adat, as this would deepen his ‘Ngada-ness’.

Mako is also proudly Ngada: though she questions Ngada ways sometimes, she sees her teacher’s job as an opportunity to be part of and contribute to the Ngada community. Moreover, as she began to feel more comfortable in Ronaga, she started to praise Ngada for being aman (peaceful) and santai (relaxed). Like Echiel and Jane – and most other people to whom I spoke in Ngada – Mako expressed strong connections to Ngada’s rugged beauty (though some also mentioned it in terms of geographical isolation) and its cool mountain climate, as well as how these features had shaped Ngada people in unique ways, with specific qualities that should be maintained.

Besides feelings of pride, people act within the status quo because it is just as it is supposed to be. To me, it was interesting to see how young women, like Mako and Jane, justified their return to Ngada in terms of gendered patterns of culture and adat. Even when I felt they were about to critique their perceived cultural obligations and pressures towards family, they returned to the logic of culture: their obligations are just part of life. Hence, they just followed a path that they explained as ‘culture’, doing things the same as they thought had been done for a long time now. However, it is not just a matter of following culture; young people have agency and do not always follow conventions. In fact, Jane and Mako expressed a strong sense of agency in their dealings with these issues, which explains their desire to change, and their experiences of ‘confusion’.

‘Wanting change’

Most explicit in his views about the necessity for change, in particular in village mindsets, is Echiel. Clearly he states several times that Ronaga villagers rely too much on each other, discouraging economic progress. He believes that local business cannot succeed due to social practices of sharing. Not only do villagers depend on extended family networks, neighbours, or neighbourhood groups in times of need, there are also norms that prescribe the sharing of excess resources. The presence of such a budaya minta makes socio-economic development through capital accumulation a less successful strategy. Echiel feels that the mindsets of people need to change, in order to change the budaya minta into a more
competitive, productive and developed economy and society. Echiel realises that such a process of change is slow, and requires small step-by-step adjustments of socio-economic behaviour. To him, villagers starting to save a little, and hence becoming more self-reliant, would already be a great advance.

Jane too has strong ideas about change: she thinks that Ngada’s adat ceremonies are too costly and have negative impacts on people’s welfare. Jane does not believe in the sacred elements of these ceremonies – a major reason for her to convert from Catholicism to Protestantism – and thus sees adat mainly as a waste of accumulated wealth.

Mako’s worldviews are less clearly connected to ‘Wanting change’, though she too questioned the economic practices of Ngada people. For example, she said: ‘Too many people want to take advantage of successful people, so why bother starting one’s own business?’

Another element of change in Mako’s story is her reluctance to work her family’s land. This was a recurring theme in my conversations with educated young people in Ngada. Jane, too, has clearly lost interest in her mother’s family land, and while Echiel mentioned he did not mind working on the land as a child, he too has no desire to work his family’s land again. Strikingly, this reluctance was not considered much of a problem to older generations: to them it seemed a logical consequence of young people’s educated status. Nevertheless, changing ideas with regards to farming could have far-reaching consequences in a rural area, especially as these ideas correspond to changing attitudes towards socio-economic practices and local interpretation of adat.

‘Feeling bingung’
‘Feeling bingung’, or confused, does not imply that young people are unsure about appropriate actions and what is expected of them. Instead, it points at ambivalence and suggests that young people navigate social conventions, reflect on them and balance perceived obligations with personal ambitions.

Confusion and ambivalence emerge due to a plethora of reasons, ranging from individually motivated doubt to dealing with external pressures (e.g. conforming to gender norms). We have seen that Jane had doubted her faith, wanted to go abroad for further studies, decided to live with her mother, and then chose to move to Ruteng for work and her newly found boyfriend. Also, she shows rather inconsistent behaviour with regards to money and its connections to rituals and faith: expenses in the context of adat are a waste of money, but with regards to the Protestant Church it ‘just felt right’ to donate a full monthly salary. Echiel, too, has doubts: leaving the seminary was a difficult decision that
still occupies his mind, although finding a new girlfriend certainly made future decisions easier.

Confusion and ambivalence also emerge when personal motivations and ambitions collide with parents’ wishes and decisions, especially with regards to love/marriage and gendered responsibilities. In one of our first conversations Mako nearly cried when she talked to me about what she called ‘her secret.’ She felt miserable, because she just could not envision an acceptable solution to her fractured love life. She knew that leaving for Ende – only four hours by bus – would be an easy solution. However, Mako felt she could not leave her parents, even though they were only in their late forties and still strong, and she had two brothers living with them. The whole situation made her doubt her loyalty towards her parents, cultural background, and her then-boyfriend.

Jane, too, is sometimes confused with regards to her cultural responsibilities: she feels Bajawa is boring and would prefer to live in Yogyakarta or go abroad to continue her studies. However, she also feels she cannot leave her mother alone. Therefore, she explained her decision to return to Bajawa after studies in terms of adat, yet also admitted that she was eager to leave Ngada.

The doubts Echiel experiences are less informed by pressures from his parents, family or larger social environment. This does not mean educated young men do not face culturally constructed and socially enforced responsibilities (e.g. dominant notions of the male breadwinner). However, educated young women have to deal more with such responsibilities.

**Conclusion**

The stories of Mako, Echiel and Jane exemplify educated young people’s experiences in Ngada. We see that their day-to-day affairs are dominated by issues associated with their education-to-work transitions. These issues connect to late modernity, cultural (re)production, and a state-sanctioned development and progress discourse. Ngada young people’s life courses are affected by objective social dimensions (e.g. gendered expectations), yet they also experience life in subjective terms (i.e. they face individual life-choices). They incline towards neoliberalism, and express concerns about budaya and adat as obstacles to progress. They feel responsible for their own life-trajectories, and want to change networks of interdependence. Yet, they have internalised state discourse with regards to precious village-life, too. These contradictions and complexities surrounding educated young people’s troubled transitions are further explored in the following chapters.
5

The Promise of Education

Introduction

Crucial in understanding un(der)employed educated young people’s experiences within their natal villages is that we come to terms with what it means to be educated (terdidik). Education comes with a promise of upward social mobility. However, if this promise is not converted into such mobility (e.g. through a suitable job), then education can have potentially negative effects, such as social pressures and feelings of uselessness (Jeffrey, 2010b; Mains, 2007; Morarji, 2010; Soares, 2010).

In this chapter I dissect the ‘promise of education’. I will argue that, indeed, people in Ngada attach great value to education and that they consider it as a primary means to escape, what they consider, agrarian ‘backwardness’. Often, the significance of education is expressed in terms of being able to ‘develop’ the community. In particular, young people feel – due to their educated status – the need to change the villagers’ ‘mindsets’ and the associated budaya minat in favour of a more individualistic and entrepreneurial spirit. They thus display traits of the self-constructing and responsible neoliberal subject. However, tertiary education is considered an expensive asset and often only obtained through careful planning, hard work, and financial offers made by larger networks.73 Educated young people thus exhibit an ironic ambivalence: they are critical of practices and structures associated with the community economy, yet themselves depend on these practices and structures during their education and their transitions from education to work.

Below, I first consider the significance of education for young people, as well as for their parents and other villagers. Then, I describe the educational trajectories of former students: in particular, I consider how these trajectories are funded, and what social arrangements enable them. Finally, I explain the motivations behind young people’s return to Ngada after they finish their education in towns and cities far away. These motivations reveal how young people themselves view their education, and the ‘promise’ it entails.

73 These networks are mainly organised through the House and involve extended families, often referred by the term keluarga besar (literally ‘big family’).
The significance of education

People in Ngada consider education as a vital and indispensable asset for the development of the individual and the society. This is common in Indonesia (Leigh, 1999, pp. 43-44; Munro, 2009; Parker & Nilan, 2013, p. 85; Robinson, 2016), as it is in many other parts of the world (see, for example, United Nations, 2013). In particular, Ngada people refer to education as a necessary condition for future prosperity, as it is seen as the gateway to paid work – often for the government – and as a prerequisite for initiatives that can modernise Ngada.

In this section, I will exemplify the significance of education for Ngada people, and how people in the community think, talk and act in regards to it. In particular, I will highlight education as a way out of agricultural livelihoods and education as an achievement. I will also discuss people’s scepticism regarding the significance of education.

Education as a way out of agrarian backwardness

One morning, I walked home with Ronald (44), one of my neighbours in Ronaga, from the fields where we had inspected the coffee trees and collected tubers for his pigs. Ronald is the village secretary (sekretaris desa) of Wena, one of the villages of Ronaga. Once a week he walks in the morning, in his oversized and worn-out government uniform, to the small village office. There he has meetings, and works on some reports. In the afternoon, as well on the other days, he sits at home, works in his fields, or goes out to immunise pigs and goats in the villages of Ronaga. He earns about Rp.750,000 (A$75) per month from his work as a secretary, while his immunisation activities bring in about Rp.30,000-50,000 (A$3-$5) per week. Once a year, Ronald and his wife, Josefina (44), harvest coffee from their land; last year they were able to sell 100 kilos, which fetched them Rp.1,700,000 (A$170). Ronald and Josefina (44) have one child, Christiano (10), who is still in primary school. That morning, while we were descending from the field to Wena, Ronald told me: ‘We’re planning to replace the roof... When I was a boy we had a roof made of grass...Now, I need to replace the zinc plates of the roof. But one day, when Christiano has finished university, he can have a proper house, and then he can have someone else do the roof...’

To Ronald, as to many other villagers in central Flores, education, especially tertiary education, mattered: for him it indicated the good life of a government-supported income that easily exceeded his own salary (he did not consider his work as village secretary as a proper civil servant position, as his work was part-time). A high income would enable him to consume more, build a ‘proper’ house, and would mean fewer worries for him and his

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74 Ronaga consists of four separate desa (villages), which each consists of several kampung (hamlets). Ronaga is often referred to as a singular entity because the four desa share a single church.
wife about, for example, school fees or healthcare costs. Not that Ronald was an uneducated man. In fact, he had finished secondary education himself, and had followed some post-senior high school courses. He came from a humble background though, and as a young boy he had to sell firewood at the side of the road to help his family. Still, he managed to finish vocational training in animal production. After high school, he went to Surabaya for work and further studies. He followed an immunisation course, and finished some programmes on pig and chicken breeding. To bear the costs of these courses and programmes, he worked in a shoe factory. Some twenty years ago, he came back to Flores for his brother’s wedding in the village of Ronaga. It was at this wedding that he met his future wife, Josefina, and decided not to return to Java.

Ronald came over to visit many times – it was ‘whispered’ in the village billiard hall that he tried to escape the house and his demanding wife and parents-in-law – and often we smoked karetik together. He smoked the cheapest brand there was, and I served him coffee with sugar. The house where I stayed, that of Fenny and Philip, was significantly bigger, and better built – less wood, more stone and plaster – than his own house. I remember vividly how Ronald one time suddenly made a sweeping gesture to take in both houses, and asked me: ‘Mathias, you know what the difference is between my house and this house? It is anak petani (child of a farmer) versus anak guru (child of a teacher)’. His meaning was this. Fenny, as the daughter of a primary school teacher, had been much better educated, and had therefore secured a job as administrator in the District’s Auditing Department. Hence, she had been able to afford the construction of a better house. In Ronald’s analogy, the difference between his and Fenny’s educational trajectory is thus their different backgrounds and associated financial resources.

Through Ronald’s comments education’s significance comes to the fore. His story represents how education is considered to be a vital step in securing work and an income, and to escape the perceived backwardness of a farming lifestyle (i.e. having a thatched grass roof). These ideas are shared widely in Ngada: often people confided to me that without educated people Ngada would never be able to develop itself. Therefore, young people should devote all their energy towards the goal of becoming educated. This was a rather uniform answer to queries into matters regarding education. People talked about education as if it were the only mechanism to alleviate poverty and bring prosperity to Ngada.

It seemed that people had a reflex to blame issues of underdevelopment upon a general state of ‘uneducatedness’. For example, at the yearly sub-district junior high school championship, held at Ronaga’s village green, children in the debating programme recited complex accounts about the virtues of being educated. Sentences like ‘We are the generation that must work hard for the benefit of our country’ and ‘Through study we can
develop our beautiful community and country’, were met with enthusiastic applause from the audience. However, to many people, the question of how education should contribute to the well-being and prosperity of the country seems to be a tough one: students’ speeches did not account for how young people should develop their country or what their specific contribution should be. In fact, their rhetoric can easily be traced back to government discourse. Yet, to portray people’s views on education simply as naive and as mere reflections of this discourse would not do justice to the way education is valued in Ngada, as well as to the commitment and dedication necessary to obtain a degree. Education – in particular a tertiary degree – remains an expensive asset in Ngada, often obtained through careful planning, hard work, and with the financial help of extended social networks.

_Education as achievement and status_

Besides a focus on the future potential of education (i.e. development), the significance of education can also be framed in terms of achievement and status. With regards to achievement, an education often requires large investments – in terms of time and money – and much dedication and commitment. For example, Alfons (31), a son of a primary school teacher, was in his fifth year of study in Information Technology at the private Catholic university of Atma Jaya in Yogyakarta when the city was hit by a massive earthquake in May 2006. Due to the earthquake and the devastation it caused, he was unable to finish his graduation project that year. The next year his parents could not support his studies any longer, as his younger brothers were also at university and required funding. Alfons therefore moved to Jakarta:

_I had decided to work for my studies, because my parents could not afford my studies any longer... But in Yogya, at that time, there was not much paid work due to the earthquake. There are also way too many students in Yogya, so I decided to go to Jakarta...there is an Atma Jaya campus in Jakarta too. But university is expensive! It costs millions....And Jakarta is also expensive...especially compared to Yogya. So I started working....first as a _tukang parkir_ [parking man], later I found work with a book publisher. This paid 1.8 million a month, and I could save some money. I could easily get a job because of my computer skills, but I also wanted to finish my studies as I felt I could not return to Flores without a degree. I had always wanted to return... In 2009 I started university again, part-time, until 2012. It was the same study as before, but I had to do some courses again, as I had taken too much time to enrol again...but, yeah...in 2012 I finished and then I returned to Ngada. I’m the first of my family who studied in Java..._

Alfons’ educational trajectory shows the determination and commitment required for a degree. Currently, he lives in a small isolated village with his mother, two brothers and
some of the children of his older sisters, about an hour and a half from Bajawa. There, he has no formal occupation, and works mainly on his family’s fields. He had bought a truck, with the help of his extended family, in order to transport building materials between Bajawa and his village, but it broke down rather frequently.

Alfons’ trajectory is an account of tremendous achievement, dedication and resilience, and thus represents the significance of education. Yet, it is also an account of an unsuccessful conversion of an educational degree into secure employment and income. Unfortunately, such failed conversions have become common. Nevertheless, nowadays few people in Ngada doubt the necessity of education in the pursuit of a career outside agriculture. Partly, this can be explained in terms of the upward credentialing of the labour market due to increased access to education; yet, it is also due to the effective dissemination of government discourse in Indonesia, so well represented by the children’s speeches in the junior high school tournament.

In Indonesian schools, young people are instilled with a notion that they need to contribute to the well-being of their community and country. This is intimately connected to the strong centralist tendencies of New Order Indonesia and its ideology of *pembangunan* (development), which still resonate in Indonesia. Sacrifices by students and parents alike are needed, and students are encouraged to display *prestasi* (achievement), *disiplin* (discipline), and aspire to be *mandiri* (self-sufficient) (Parker & Nilan, 2013, pp. 92-101). As a result, I heard many young children easily recall their position in class rankings. Frequently, they boasted about their top ten position, and that others were in the lower echelons. Of course, such boasting is part of children’s repertoire globally, yet – on a theoretical level – it signals that they had become modern subjects, performing self-surveillance and evaluation.

Educational achievement is monitored from a young age onward. Besides having meaning inside schools, it also has significance in daily life. Many times when I open Facebook, my Ngada friends have posted pictures of their long past graduation ceremonies, or mention anniversaries of such ceremonies. Moreover, top performing students receive financial benefits (e.g. cuts to school fees), transforming intellectual achievements into actual economic gains. The connection, here, between economic capital and education (i.e. cultural capital) is evident, but, in a less material way, rankings and graduation ceremonies instil notions of success and the relative value of that success.

Educated people embody development and modernity. Other villagers consider them as being sophisticated, organised and knowledgeable of the world, and to be the opposite of *kampungan* (village-like/backward). Often, educated people, due to their status, assumed superiority over uneducated people. According to Jasinta – whom I shall further
introduce below – less educated (young) people are less open to the world. They lack, so Jasinta explained to me, an ‘outside’ perspective, and therefore lack creativity and entrepreneurial skills. This hinders prosperity, development, and progress, both on a personal level, as well as on the community level.

An education thus entails symbolic capital, which entails more than just a knowledge transfer (from teacher to student) and proof of one’s capabilities (i.e. cultural capital). For example, the Bupati (District Head) of Ngada proudly showed me a book that he was reading at the time of my visit (it was titled ‘Logika’) for a course at the Open University of Indonesia (as a young man, he had only finished senior high school). As he was already the District’s highest civil servant, his training at the Open University had little to do with career planning (though, without a tertiary degree, he probably could not aspire to provincial-level positions), and rather was an attempt to acquire an educated status. Pak Mike, a senior advisor at Ende’s university, valued his education in terms of acquiring prestige and status by means of transcending backwardness and becoming someone through learning virtues, such as honesty, discipline, and a love for his culture. Indeed, Echiel (see Chapter 4), talked about his seminary training in comparable terms: his education had transformed him into a different person.

Educated (young) people feel ‘different’ in relation to their less educated fellow-villagers. This difference was seldom clearly visible and had few direct social implications; for example, I did not encounter problems between educated and less educated people. Though people like Jasinta felt relatively cosmopolitan due to their education, they had not become alienated from rural life, and felt connected to their families and village. Moreover, the difference between being educated and being less educated is less clear than might seem. For instance, Ronald considered himself to be uneducated, while he has more qualifications than many other people in Ronaga, whereas Philip (my host) often remarked that he was well-educated despite his lack of a proper degree. Nevertheless, educated young people are different in terms of their status: as educated persons they consider themselves to be modern and the vanguard of positive socio-economic change. Hence, they were critical about what they called a village mentality (mentalitas kampung) or village mindset. In particular, educated young people commented that Ngada was lacking development due to the prevalence of a community economy, which contains, according these young people, a budaya minta.

Alfons, for example, was very critical about networks of interdependence. He told me that he had wanted to return to Ngada after his studies to initiate a fundamental change of the otak pasif (‘passive mind’) of the villager. According to him, villagers did not maju
(progress) because they are not thinking ahead and have no financial reserves, particularly for health and education. As Alfons said:

An ill person is rarely given any proper medicine, mostly because there is no money. But when he dies, suddenly there is enough money for a big funeral. And although parents struggle with the costs of their children’s education, there is always enough money to buy a pig for a ritual.

The idea that Ngada people prioritise collective expenditures (e.g. for funerals and rituals) above expenditures centred on the individual (e.g. an education or medicine) relates to the budaya minta. Like Alfons, many educated young people critiqued the reliance on others. As families often need to contribute to networks and collectives, their obligations weigh heavily, subsequently making them reliant on these networks, too. Moreover, as being responsible for the collective is such a priority, asking for help from one’s family and neighbours is considered reasonable. This, in turn, makes any planning for future expenses less a priority, or so Alfons and many other young people told me. Alfons wanted to fundamentally change this budaya minta into a system in which people, or nuclear families, would be much more self-reliant.

This thinking relates closely to being mandiri, which Parker and Nilan (2013, pp. 99-101) mention as an important feature of the educational experience. Young people often made comments like: ‘Why would someone be creative and look for money (cari uang), when you can also ask for it?’ Or, ‘How come people here can live and eat while they don’t have a job?’ The answer to these rhetorical questions was, for many of them, the budaya minta.

We thus see that young people, through their education, exhibit traits of reflective neoliberal subjects: they attach value to private responsibility and individual resourcefulness, and consider their biographies as self-constructive. Educated young people view the budaya minta as hindering development. Yet, their stance towards these communal practises is ambivalent; though critical of these practices, often they themselves depend on them during their troubled transitions from education to work.

**Education and scepticism**

Most young people and their parents think about education as a necessity. However, parents do not necessarily exert pressure on children to finish senior high school. Some young people, with a tertiary degree, told me that their parents had doubted their plans to

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75 We should be aware that these self-constructive biographies are subject to objective inequalities. People experience individualism by means of their ability to reflect on their own actions, but actual experience is formed through long-standing structural inequalities.
pursue that degree. Meryn (24), for example, told me that her father, a small-scale farmer, was not too sure whether to allow (and pay for) her to go to Kupang for her business studies. She told me her father used to say: ‘Why do you want to study? There is only one president, so why bother trying? Or do you think you can be president?’ In the end, she convinced her father she had to continue her studies. Now she is back in Bajawa with a degree, but unemployed.

In another family, two children were already enrolled in tertiary education, and a third child was in his last year of senior high school vocational training. To support their children, the father and mother had already sold several pieces of private land (as opposed to communally owned land). They reasoned that their children, once they had finished education, would not need the land for a livelihood any longer. They valued their children’s education and believed in their future careers.

Despite this family seeming to ascribe great value to education, not long after I met the family, their fourth child, a boy called Vinnie (13), dropped out of junior high school and started to work as a day labourer. His parents were fine with his decision and apparently supported his social transformation from a school boy to a labourer by giving him kretek cigarettes and alcohol at social gatherings.

‘Scepticism’, or a less supportive environment for one’s education, can be related to a relative lack in economic capital. Parents are concerned about school costs – they sometimes need to sell land to pay for their children’s education – and therefore challenge the necessity of a degree. Yet, scepticism can also be related to concerns about the quality of education. For example, the District Head voiced some serious concerns about the usefulness of education. His concerns had mostly to do with the added value of education, in particular when students only learn from books, instead of learning practical skills. Strikingly, he voiced these concerns in relation to the opening of the Bajawa campus of the Kupang-based UnDana University, about which he said: ‘Students read hundreds of books! For what? Only for work in the government! You don’t learn anything that is valuable for outside the government’.

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76 People often have strong emotional ties with land, and selling land is, in general, not done lightly. However, I heard several times that people sold their land in order to support their children in school. People assured me they did this as a last resort (which meant a weaker bargaining position, and hence a drop in land prices).
77 And a lack in cultural capital – a point to which I shall return shortly.
78 How his own efforts to read ‘Logika’ related to his concerns I, unfortunately, have not queried.
79 Officially Universitas Nusa Cendana; it is the major state education institution for the province.
80 During our talk he mentioned the opening of the UnDana campus branch in Bajawa as his biggest political success. He told me: ‘Look, there are 1,000 students this year [2013/2014], and those students need rooms, food and clothing. All these students spend money in Bajawa – money that normally is spent outside Bajawa’. He referred to this several times as the ‘multiplier effect for Bajawa’.
Not much later, bureaucrats from the Ministry of Education in Bajawa told me that they had trouble finding suitable teachers for a newly opened vocational senior high school in Jerebuu. Not that there was any lack of well qualified candidates. However, almost all of these candidates lacked the practical knowledge required for teaching at a senior vocational school. As a result, the Education officials told me, there was too little differentiation between general and vocational training in Ngada.

These critiques link to more general critiques of the Indonesian educational system (see, for example, Bjork (2004); Hill and Wie (2012); G. W. Jones and Hagul (2001); Kristiansen and Pratikno (2006)), which concern the quality of textbooks and teachers, and funding of education. Hence, education is not always considered to be the ‘magic’ tool for development. Instead, some people, both parents and bureaucrats, questioned the practical relevance of an education. However, the vast majority of people, through effective dissemination of government discourse, acknowledge that education is the key to an income. Though it is by no means guaranteed that education will deliver on its promise, this promise legitimises the large investments necessary for a degree. Education is considered an expensive, yet indispensable, asset. How education is funded and what social arrangements enable young people to go to university are discussed in the next section.

Students’ trajectories
To put in perspective the current opportunities young Ngada people have to acquire an education – that is, the unprecedented access they nowadays have to education – it is helpful to look at several people’s educational trajectories. The similarities that can be abstracted from these trajectories are discussed in the next section.

Pak Mike – Post-Independence Indonesia
Pak Mike (Michael) is in his early 70s, and he still works. He has an advisory position at the University of Flores (Universitas Flores, or UniFlor) in Ende. He is originally from Bajawa, but Pak Mike has lived and worked most of his life in Yogyakarta. There, he was a professor at UGM (Universitas Gadjah Mada), one of the most high-ranking universities in Indonesia. Since his retirement, some years ago, he has worked in Ende.

Pak Mike was born during the Japanese Occupation. His father, now 96, used to work for the Dutch administration (and, after Independence, for the local government), but, as Pak Mike recalls, his father only worked part-time. In the mornings, Pak Mike’s

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81 See also Peter Demerath’s (1999) discussion of how parents (and other senior community members) in rural Papua New Guinea, under pressure of decreasing resource availability and shrinking opportunities for senior high school graduates, question the extent to which educational investments are worth the effort.
father went to the office, while in the afternoon he worked on the land. There, Pak Mike’s family grew maize, bananas and coffee: as a result, food was always plentiful in their house. According to Pak Mike, this enabled his father to send his children to school, as hardly any income was spent on daily necessities. While Pak Mike’s father was uneducated, Pak Mike, like his siblings, was able to go to primary school and subsequently to junior and senior high school. These two latter schools were missionary-led. The SMP was located in Mataloko, a small town not far from Bajawa; the SMA in Ende. After Pak Mike finished his studies in Ende, he wanted to go to UGM in Yogyakarta, one of the few public universities in the country at that time (late 1950s). Entrance tests at UGM were and still are notoriously difficult. When I asked him about these entrance examinations, he told me:

Not at all! In fact, I found it easy, and that is because the school in Ende was very, very good. Did you know that last year this school celebrated its 60th anniversary? ... It was a very strict school. If you did something wrong, or did not know an answer...well, the missionaries didn’t hesitate one minute to hit you, or punish you with menial jobs. But it was... Ha! I learned three important virtues there. Yes of course, knowledge, but more importantly, honesty, discipline, and a love for my culture...nowadays, so many young people in Ngada don’t have these virtues anymore...

At UGM, he studied English, and after he obtained his bachelor’s degree, he returned to Bajawa, and started to teach at the local junior high school. ‘Not only English, mind you!’ he told me in his office at UniFlor, ‘But also gymnastics! And that while I had such poor health and body...haha’. He laughed many times during our talk. He was also generous with his time: for hours we sat in his office, and as he explained to me how he obtained a missionary scholarship to return to ‘Yogya’ after three months in Bajawa, I nibbled on freshly fried bananas that his assistant brought us. With the scholarship, he could do his master’s degree, after which he became a lecturer at UGM. After ten years, he moved to the United States in 1975 aided by another scholarship, this time from the Rockefeller Foundation. He went to the University of Michigan and did his PhD in linguistics, after which he returned to UGM until his retirement.

During the interview, he often repeated how important his formative years with the missionaries had been. Now, in his leading position at UniFlor, he realised all the more that his determination, which he attributed to his missionary education, to get to Yogyakarta, and later to the USA, had been decisive in his career. Pak Mike was aware that he had had his share of luck, but, nevertheless, his dedication, honesty and discipline were, according him, the defining factors of his life. In particular, he referred to these factors as if current
students lacked them, although UniFlor, of course, still managed to deliver very capable students to the labour market.

*Ibu Matilda – New Order Indonesia*

Ibu Matilda (46) is the second child of a primary school teacher and his wife, who took care of the household. Ibu Matilda has nine siblings, and was born in the late 1960s not far from Bajawa, in the small town of Mangulewa, where her father was a teacher at the local primary school. However, she did not spend much time in Mangulewa, as her father had to move to other schools regularly. She told me, ‘Because I was the eldest daughter, I had to help my mother with caring for my little brothers and sisters. Still, my father, as an educated man – he was a teacher, you know – always wanted all his children to finish at least junior high school. But at some point, I don’t know, I must have been 10 or so, I decided to learn more than just junior high school. I wanted to continue my studies and become a teacher!’

Ibu Matilda’s father and mother, who at that time lived in a small and remote village, first sent her to junior high school in Mataloko (the same village where Pak Mike went to school), after which she went to senior high school, first in Kupang in Timor, later in Bajawa. In Kupang she stayed with her aunt. For Ibu Matilda, this was a hard time: ‘I had to help my aunt care for the kids. This was really difficult, I mean, studying and doing all this labour in the house’. Her studies were negatively affected, to such an extent that she asked her parents if she could come back to Ngada. They agreed, and for the last two years of senior high school she stayed in Bajawa in an *asrama* (dormitory).

Ibu Matilda’s father paid for her education, including when she moved back to Kupang to do her bachelor’s degree in English. This time she did not stay with her aunt, but lived in a *kos* (boarding house). Her goal was to become a teacher on Flores and, subsequently, contribute to her siblings’ education. Ibu Matilda admits that, because she was the second child, but the first one to finish senior high school, she was able to pursue a university degree without any delay. Nevertheless, she felt responsible for her younger brothers and sisters, too, and therefore tried to finish her studies as quickly as possible. As her parents could not afford to pay for multiple children at university at the same time, some siblings had to wait until Ibu Matilda was finished. To relieve the financial burden for her father, Ibu Matilda did all sorts of extra jobs to earn a little money: ‘I played volleyball and got some money for that, raised the flag several times a week at university, which also earned me a little, and I sold cake in my neighbourhood... You see, I tried to be creative, a skill most young people here in Ngada lack...’ Still, most of the time she was focussed on her studies, and she was able to finish her study in good time, with high marks. In fact, her
work at the university was of such quality, that she was offered a TID scholarship 
(Tunjangan Ikatan Dinas, bursary tied to government service) to continue her studies for a 
master’s degree. This degree, too, she finished swiftly, after which she started working at a 
school in Kupang, a job she had intended to do temporarily, as she eventually wanted to 
return to Bajawa. However, in the late 1990s, through a newspaper advertisement, she 
came into contact with AusAid. Ibu Matilda was recruited by AusAid and started working 
as interpreter (English-Indonesian), in what was then a turbulent time for Timor, due to 
the secession of Timor Leste. With the money she earned, Ibu Matilda was able to support 
four of her younger siblings in their academic training.

Currently, Ibu Matilda still occasionally works for large international relief 
organisations, such as Oxfam, or the UNHC. She also has a business in animal husbandry 
(mainly goats and poultry), where she has ten people working for her. When I spoke to her, 
she had become involved in politics, too, and was standing for election to the national 
parliament. She was committed full-time to her campaign, but in the end failed to be 
elected.

Jasinta – Post-Reformasi Indonesia

On a rainy afternoon – it was February and still the wet season – Jasinta Lusi (25) 
welcomed me to her house. Technically, it was her mother’s house, but because Jasinta was 
unmarried, she lived there with her parents. It was also the house in which she had been 
born, just like her four sisters and three brothers. Jasinta was the fourth child, and up until 
now the only one who had finished university. Except for her youngest brother, who was 
still in junior high school, all other brothers and sisters had finished at least senior high 
school, while one of her sisters was still in university (Bogor). Jasinta’s oldest brother had 
undertaken studies in Java too, but had stopped due to a lack of funding. While the rain 
poured down on the already muddy village square of one of the traditional hamlets of 
Ronaga, we drank coffee on the veranda, and looked out on the bhaga and ngadhu of her woé. 
There she told me her life story, and how much she felt connected to her family, and to 
Ronaga and Ngada in general. She also told me that, for her, the sole reason to return to 
Ronaga after her studies in Java was that she really felt she has to build up the community 
(‘saya sangat mau membangun masyarakat’).

Jasinta’s parents were ‘not rich’. Her mother earned some money with weaving, and 
both her father and mother worked on the family’s fields. Though her parents considered 
education to be vital for their children’s future, there was not much money available for 
education. Luckily, Jasinta was a bright student, and was highly ranked in her class. As a 
result, she had won a bursary and her fees were lowered: senior high school in Bajawa
officially costs Rp.980,000 per semester (approximately A$100), but her fees were about half that amount (Jasinta’s senior high school was a state school).

In 2007, Jasinta graduated from senior high school. At that time, her older brother struggled with his funding, and as a result, dropped out from university in Jakarta. Fortunately, Jasinta received an invitation from the Malang municipality (East Java) to continue her studies at the State University of Malang. Together with 20 other high school graduates from Ngada, Jasinta was enabled to study in Malang by a scholarship that paid her fees.

My parents were happy, as they couldn’t afford university for me. No, they had no problem letting me go to another city. I stayed in de kos, in a house only for girls, so why would they object? And they know I’m a serious girl, focussed on my studies. And they also knew I wanted to come back to Ronaga.

Indeed, she was a diligent student, and within four years, mid-2011, she was back in her village.

Malang is a city with many universities, and, consequently, there are many students. Though her university training was free, her parents had to pay for the kos. ‘You see,’ she told me, ‘just as in Kediri or Yogya, there are just too many students, and there is not much paid work that students can do...’ She occasionally received some money from her older brothers and sisters, too, who all lived in Ngada and worked either as farmers (brothers and sisters) or weavers (sisters). Through them, Jasinta was able to finish her studies in Journalism.

I started with ‘Communication’...I liked to talk...haha...so I thought, this might be something for me. I liked it. In the third semester we had to pick our specialisation. We could pick between Public Relations, Television, or Journalism... I picked Journalism, because the other specialisations would not be very useful in Ngada. There is no television, and there are no companies in need of PR, so why pick those specialisations?

Currently, Jasinta has multiple jobs, mostly volunteer positions at the Church, in community organisations (e.g. election watch) and at the local radio station. It took her a while to get these jobs, and she is happy with the work she does, as she feels enabled to contribute to the development of Ngada. However, Jasinta feels she needs to develop her skills further and make a more profound impact than she does now. Therefore, she wants to focus on her career first, before she makes any decision regarding marriage. For her, it does not really matter that she does not have an income. Living with her parents is free, and though she now receives a small salary for her work at the radio station, she spends
only a little on clothes and petrol for her motorbike. Most of what is left of her salary, which is less than Rp.1,000,000 (A$100) per month, she gives to her sister in Bogor, in order for her to finish her education.

Themes in educational trajectories
Despite the different historical contexts of the three educational trajectories, the stories of Pak Mike, Ibu Matilda and Jasinta foreground three interrelated themes that are common in such trajectories in Ngada. First, access to education is hampered due to financial limitations. Second, these limitations are circumvented by strategies of sharing financial burdens and by tactics of delaying, in which birth order matters. Third, parent’s livelihoods matter, not only in terms of economic capital, but also in terms of cultural capital.

These three themes imply that young people build up both financial and social debts while at university. People accept these debts because they consider education an indispensable asset. Through a discussion of the three themes we can better understand why a degree can become problematic when it does not deliver on its promise of upward social mobility. We start, however, with two other factors that potentially limit access to education: gender and geography.

Access to education: gender
I had expected to find gendered differences in access to education, hypothesizing that boys would be sent to university more often and for longer than girls. However, trends in national statistics show us that since 2005 more women than men have been enrolled in Indonesian universities (Suharti, 2013, p. 26). This means a substantial improvement upon previous numbers: in 1994, the ratio of females to males in tertiary education was only about 80:100. At other levels, the ratio of females to males varies: at primary level the ratio has been consistently 100 (i.e. gender equal), at junior secondary level above 100 (i.e. more girls than boys); and at senior secondary level the ratio has been fluctuating from below 100 in 1994 to above 100 in 2000, when it started to decrease again (Suharti, 2013, p. 26). In general, one can say that there is a trend towards gender equality in Indonesia’s schools and universities.

To investigate whether gender equality was the norm in Ngada as well, I asked many times during my conversations and interviews whether or not gender had an effect

Here, I deal not with the specific differences between these historical contexts. Though these contexts mean different opportunities and constraints for one’s education, the aim here is to explore how educational trajectories are enabled, and in particular how limitations of capital – in terms of Bourdieu’s categorisation – affect these trajectories.
on the educational trajectories – in particular on tertiary level – of young women. The answer to this question was, again and again, a basic and simple ‘no’.

Though ‘no’ as an answer was the norm, it was often quickly qualified, and people explained to me that access to education had not always been equal. Up until the 1990s women were less encouraged to pursue schooling than men. The reason was mostly that women’s lives were confined to the domestic sphere, and that they would not benefit from schooling. Currently, however, young women enjoy as many opportunities to become educated as young men, and in Ngada access to education is gender neutral, too – or, at least is approaching such a state. (See Appendix A for an analysis of the available statistics from Ngada about education in relation to gender.)

**Access to education: limiting geographies**

Another factor potentially limiting access to education is the number of schools and their geographical spread. In Ngada, in 2012, there were 72 kindergartens, 165 primary schools, 47 junior high schools, 10 general senior high schools, and 7 vocational senior high schools. In total, there were 1,898 children attending kindergarten, 23,861 students in primary school, 9,214 students in junior high schools, 4,950 students in general high schools, and 1,276 students in vocational high schools (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013b, p. 107). These absolute numbers correspond with the following percentages: in Ngada, 98.69 per cent of all children aged between 7 and 12 are in primary school, 81.69 per cent of all children aged between 13-15 are in junior high school, and 57.78 per cent of all children aged between 16-18 are in senior high school (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013b, pp. 117-119). These numbers suggests large improvements can still be made in enrolment rates, in particular in senior high school.

The negative relation between enrolment numbers and education level – i.e. reduced numbers of students that proceed to the next level of education – is mainly due to

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83 These numbers largely correspond with national percentages. In 2010, 98.32 per cent of all girls and 97.74 per cent of all boys between 7 and 12 went to primary school, 87.41 per cent of all girls and 85.15 per cent of all boys between 13 and 15 went to junior high school, while 55.12 per cent of all girls and 56.86 per cent of all boys between 16 and 18 went to senior high school (Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and the Protection of the Child, 2011).

84 However, if we consider the data from Appendix A, in particular Table A.1, we are able to fully appreciate the magnitude of changes in enrolment rates in the last few decades. This steep increase in enrolment numbers is mirrored in a huge increase in the number of schools. For Ngada there are no data available with respect to the development of schools throughout the years. However, on a national level, we see that the number of primary schools increased from 65,569 in 1972 to 146,826 in 2011/2012 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2013). Even more impressive, we see in the same report that the number of junior high schools in Indonesia increased from 7,540 in 1972 to 33,668 in 2011/2012. If we look at numbers available per province, than we see that the number of primary schools in Nusa Tenggara Timur increased from 2,450 in 2003 to 2,836 in 2011, and that the number of junior high schools nearly doubled from 577 in 2003 to 1059 in 2011 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2012). In the same period, the number of general senior high schools increased from 157 to 289, while the number of vocational senior high schools nearly tripled, from 48 in 2003 to 147 in 2011.
educational costs and geographical isolation. With regards to isolation, most villages have a primary school, or have one very near, due to the 1973 Presidential Instruction Primary School (INPRES SD) Programme. However, junior high schools are less easily accessible, while senior high schools are even more thinly spread. The District government aims to have at least one senior high school (either vocational or general) in each sub-district, yet vocational schools are generally considered to be of a lower quality than general senior high schools. It is therefore noteworthy that three sub-districts – there are twelve in Ngada – do not have a general senior high school, possessing only a vocational high school. Most other sub-districts have at least one general senior high school (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013b, pp. 111-112).

Young people living in and around Bajawa and Golewa, two towns with relatively good accessibility by road, do not experience much trouble getting to school. However, many other young people have to travel large distances to attend either junior or senior high school. These journeys, even short ones, significantly increase the costs of education. For example, each morning, dozens of girls and boys take the minibus from Ronaga to Bajawa, a relative short trip of approximately fifteen minutes. Children of parents who opt for Bajawa’s state junior high school – instead of the private junior high school in Ronaga – have to take the first buses at 06:30AM, while the senior high school students take the bus half an hour later. Each day, a round trip like this cost students Rp.4,000 (around A$0.40), and thus Rp.24,000 (A$240) a week (schools are six days a week). In Ngada, the average income per capita is approximately Rp.630,000 (A$63) per month (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013b, p. 391). This means that about 15 per cent of an income is spent on travel costs.

Ronaga is almost directly adjacent to Bajawa, and benefits from easy access to Ngada’s main town. There are fourteen minibuses driving all day up and down to Bajawa’s central market. Due to Flores’ rugged terrain, most villages do not have such easy access to

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85 On the national level, the Ministry of Education had the intention of having a ratio of students enrolled in vocational secondary school to those enrolled in general secondary schools of 70:30 by 2015. Though this intention highlights the government’s firm belief in the benefits of vocational training, in general, people consider vocational training to be of a lesser quality than general secondary schooling. For example, critiques concern the quality of teachers, coverage of the general curriculum, and a lack of relevance of vocational training (Di Gropello, 2013). Currently, the 70:30 goal seems to have quietly disappeared off the table.

86 Ronaga, as part of the Bajawa sub-district, has no senior high school, but two private primary schools and one private junior high school. The nearest senior high school is in Bajawa.

87 Parents from Ronaga sometimes choose to send their children to the state school in Bajawa because state schools are considered to be better than private junior high schools, and cost less too, even though the state school in Bajawa comes with the added costs of travel for Ronaga children. Most children in Ronaga go to the local private Catholic junior high school.

88 In the 2013 statistics, the 2012 average income per capita was estimated at Rp.7,598,154. This means a per month average income per capita Rp.633,180. If we consider a month as four weeks, than this would mean that Rp. (24,000x4) = 96,000 is spent on travelling to school, which would be (96,000/633,180) = 15.16 per cent of the average income per capita.
major towns and high schools, and travel costs and time increase dramatically. It is therefore quite common that children from isolated villages board with relatives who reside relatively close to high schools. In Ronaga (with one junior high school and easy access to Bajawa and its senior high schools) many cousins, nieces and nephews, and even more distantly related children, live with relatives. Also in the house where I stayed, there lived a young boy, Herman (13), whose parents are from a remote village. The boy was the second son of my host’s sister. Her first son was in a seminary. On Flores, seminaries are considered to be top schools, but as private institutions, these schools are also relatively expensive. As a result, Herman’s parents could not afford to send him to the seminary as well, or to another boarding school (there were no schools close-by). Hence, his parents sent him to his uncle in Ronaga.

Other parents opt to send their children to schools with dormitories, or have them board in a kos close to a high school. Obviously, these schools, or the kos, come with extra costs (as compared to normal high schools), but these costs might be less than the price of daily busses – if a daily commute is possible at all. Often, then, the difference between sending a child to a boarding house or kos or sending the child off to relatives (if this is an option) is that those relatives take on part of the living costs, school fees and costs for school uniforms, books, utensils, etc. In return for this ‘help’, children are often required to do certain tasks. Like Ibu Matilda in the story above, Herman had to help in his uncle’s household: he often cooked, cleaned, and fed the pigs directly after school. Herman was able to enjoy free time as well, mainly at the nearby soccer field. And, unlike Ibu Matilda who returned to Ngada as her tasks hindered her studies, Herman was always at the top of his class.

Access to education: financial limitations and strategies of sharing

In Herman’s story we see that, besides geographical isolation, his parents’ decision to place him with his uncle was motivated by the costs of his education. Though access to education has expanded dramatically, schooling is still considered to be expensive. For example, in Ronaga, kindergarten for children in my neighbourhood was about Rp.250,000 (A$25) a month, while private (Catholic) primary school was approximately Rp.250,000 (A$25) a semester. Private junior high school was about Rp.800,000 (A$80) a semester, while senior high school (state school in Bajawa) was Rp.980,000 (A$98) a semester. These costs exclude additional expenditures for obligatory school uniforms, books and utensils, as

89 Parents who send their children away also often give some money, or supplies, to their relatives who take care of their children. For example, the parents of Herman were wet rice cultivators, and occasionally sacks of white rice were delivered to the house in which I stayed. These sacks were sent from East Manggarai to Ronaga by public transport, via intricate networks of long- and short-distance buses.
well as extracurricular activities. It must be noted, though, that educational costs can be mitigated by government programmes, in particular in the case of state schools. A young man told me his boarding house for senior high school costs Rp.100,000 a month (A$10; including food). A secondary seminary education is much more expensive, and costs several million rupiah a year (several hundred dollars). With respect to universities, costs varied greatly across private and state institutions, and informants often included the costs for a kos, and the added costs for living (food, clothes, books, etc.), when describing the cost of a university course. The newly opened campus of UnDana in Bajawa cost Rp.2,500,000 (A$250) a semester, while a semester at, for example, a private university in Yogyakarta starts at Rp.1,800,000 (A$180). However, this includes only administration: due to additional costs for attending classes and exams, these costs can increase to as much as Rp.4,000,000 per semester (A$400). A kos in Ende is about Rp.500,000 (A$50) a month, which often includes food as well.

These costs featured prominently in my discussion with young and old people. Many of them mentioned the costs of education as the reason why they had not pursued a tertiary – or even a secondary – degree. And when they had pursued a degree, the costs explain why they had studied subjects that, according to them, were easy to convert into a stable income once they were back home in Ngada. Such subjects often link to government jobs, such as teachers, healthcare workers, or administrators. This is a sensible thing to do, as young people not only rely on parents for their funding of their academic endeavours, but, as the examples of Ibu Matilda, Jasinta and Herman show, also on larger networks of siblings, uncles and aunts. Young people in schools are thus part of the larger community economy. These arrangements are crucial for the success of finishing (or starting) a higher level of study. They can be formal, as Pak Mike, Ibu Matilda and Jasinta show: they received support from official organisations (the Church, university and government respectively), but more often they are also informal and include support from family members. For example, Ibu Matilda, during senior high school, was supported by her aunt, while Jasinta, besides the money from her parents, continuously received support from her

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90 The Bantuan Siswa Miskin programme (BSM; Scholarships for the Poor Student) is the Indonesian government’s main programme for providing cash transfers directly to (poor) students. Primary school students can receive Rp.360,000 (A$36) per year, while university students can get Rp.1,200,000 (A$120) per year. However, access to BSM is in many areas rather poor, infrequent, and not targeted at the right cohorts (e.g. dropouts who only would be able to return to school with a scholarship). See, for an analysis of BSM, World Bank (2012a).

91 Seminaries, as private schools, used to supply scholarships in the past, as Pak Mike’s story shows. However, during conversations with current seminary students, such scholarships were not mentioned.

92 See Chapter 3 for an overview of the community economy; see Chapter 6 for how educated young people relate to the community economy.
older siblings while studying in Malang. Moreover, helping their siblings in turn was a natural thing for Ibu Matilda and Jasinta to do.

Jobs that are generally thought of as guaranteeing an income are a way to become part of Ngada networks of interdependence. In Ngada, from a young age young people are instilled with the idea that it will be their (future) responsibility to contribute to the well-being of their family and social networks. That is why Ibu Matilda and Jasinta mentioned that they had wanted to return to Ngada after their studies; it also explains why they both (have) helped their siblings pursue their degrees. This sharing of the fruits of labour, though often still minimal, is an essential part of the labour/income experience in Ngada. I encountered countless examples of sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, close friends, or neighbours, who were approached on a regular basis by family members or fellow villagers for a small gift, ‘loan’, or a little bit of ‘help’.

Access to education: strategies of delaying and birth order

Besides sharing the costs of education, some families practise a strategy of ‘delaying’ their children’s educational enrolment in order to mitigate budgetary pressures. This strategy is necessary to secure enough funds for one’s degree, for example, when parents can only afford to pay for a single child at a time to attend tertiary education.

‘Delaying’ can be brought into practice in various ways. In some cases, young people who have older siblings who are already enrolled at university start working first in order to acquire funds, which later can help them when they enrol themselves. Others enrol at a cheaper tertiary education institution first, for example at diploma level, accumulate extra funds, and apply for entry into a more expensive bachelor’s degree the next year (where they, due to the diploma-level years, can enrol in a senior year, reducing costs). Others take occasional gap years, in which they work, in order to ease their parents’ financial burden. The key element of this ‘delaying’ is, therefore, flexibility. In some cases a family can afford to put three children through university, but not a fourth, who has to wait until one of the older siblings has finished. In other cases an older sibling had already finished, enabling the third and fourth to do their studies, while the second child may have already given up academic training and migrated in search for work (to help her/his older sibling finish a degree). Some students take time off from university to work a while, sometimes necessitated by illness or misfortune suffered by supporting parents or siblings. In other cases, young people might benefit from a rise in one’s family’s income, perhaps enabled by older siblings who could not go to university, and started to work on the land instead.
Of course, these delaying strategies depend on a child’s intellectual capabilities and aspirations, too: sometimes young people do not wish to go to university, enabling a brother or sister to go instead. Moreover, as less educated young people earn money, often they start to sponsor younger siblings who want to study and, as a result, speed up the education of their siblings. However, in general, there is ‘a logic of birth order’: first-born children who want to go to university can go without too much difficulty, while the ones next in line have to wait. Then, as the first child graduates and obtains paid work, she or he can help their parents and enable younger siblings to go to university sooner.

In poorer families that cannot afford to pay for a first child’s education, the logic of birth order is reversed. For example, while Jasinta could only study with a scholarship, and her brother had to drop out from university due to a lack of funds, Jasinta’s youngest sister did not lack funds for her study in Bogor, as her older siblings (including Jasinta) supported her. Ibu Matilda, too, could only go to university with a scholarship, but could subsequently help her siblings. Had there been no scholarships, the first born children would have had to work in order to enable younger siblings to pursue a tertiary degree.

Access to education: the limits of capital

Financial limitations to one’s educational attainment can thus be overcome by strategies of sharing and delaying. These strategies are related to the livelihoods of parents. In terms of Bourdieu’s categorisation (1986), their economic and social capital largely determines their children’s educational trajectory.

This means that, for example, subsistence farmers – due to their relatively limited economic and social capital – can send their children less easily to tertiary education institutes than, for example, high-ranking government officials with relative abundant economic and social capital. Nevertheless, currently even small-scale farmers, such as Jasinta’s parents, enable their children to have a tertiary education. This is truly progress: while only a generation or so ago, university was hardly an option for young people whose parents did not have a stable job and secure income, nowadays a university degree has become much more accessible (also due to the increase in the number of educational institutes). In that sense, Jasinta’s accomplishments mark a watershed moment in Ngada: the current generation of young people is the most highly educated generation ever, and more young people than ever can experience the sensation of being better educated than their parents.

Though limitations of parents’ economic and social capital can be overcome, differences in these forms of capital remain important identifiers of one’s educational trajectory. Cultural capital matters, too. For example, the differences between families with
(relative) long histories of university training and families whose children are better educated than their parents are quite conspicuous. For the sons and daughters of educated parents who work in stable government jobs, attending a seminary or universities further afield, for example in Java, is much easier than for young people from poorer, and less educated, backgrounds. This is not only due to fewer financial constraints, but also because better educated parents with stable jobs are familiar with their children’s educational trajectories: they know which schools are better and how to get there. And even when these parents are unfamiliar with a specific city or university, they are often connected to networks that can help, and provide information and support. Most family members of Pak Mike have studied in Java, and some even have had the opportunity to study in Europe.

By contrast, young people from poorer backgrounds are often first-generation university goers and are unaware about major differences in the quality of universities or unaware of channels to arrange their studies in places like Yogyakarta or Jakarta. Though they might have family or other networks in these cities, these networks are unlikely to be aware about the specifics of university policies and entrance tests. Universities in these cities are largely unknown territory, which is a major complicating factor.

A related effect of these differences in economic, social and cultural capital is that educated young Ngada people from affluent backgrounds can find jobs more easily in the city of their studies than educated young people from poorer backgrounds, who are therefore more inclined to return to their rural natal communities. Therefore, most un(der)employed educated young people in Ronaga are first-generation university goers.

We thus see how cultural capital, like economic and social capital, limits educational trajectories. For example, Jasinta initially had only vague ideas about what to study. Her family was inexperienced in these matters. Hence, Jasinta chose communication, just because she liked ‘talking’. Also, that the vast majority of young people from Ngada study health- or education-related subjects is no coincidence. These subjects relate to clearly defined jobs – e.g. nurse or teacher – with which students and their families are familiar. For young people, these studies are thus easily converted into a job or, at least, that is the expectation. Young people have little idea of what else to study: they have little knowledge about what studies are available and what the benefits of these studies can be. Moreover, they have difficulties accessing correct and appropriate information.

93 I will return to this point in the next section.
94 One would expect that agricultural-related subjects are popular too, as these seem relevant in this rural district. Indeed, young people in secondary vocational training often studied such subjects. However, I was not familiar with young people with tertiary degrees in agricultural-related subjects. In general, young people and their parents consider agricultural livelihoods as unrewarding; tertiary degrees are intended for service sector jobs only.
The limits of capital touch upon Ronald’s comment – made at the beginning of this chapter – about the difference between anak petani and anak guru. Whereas Ronald’s comments were primarily directed to differences in parents’ economic capital, they also relate to the non-economic support a child receives during the pursuit of an educational degree. This support can expose itself in negative ways: Meryn and Vinnie were less encouraged by their parents to do a degree than was Alfons (the IT graduate). That is because, to use Jasinta’s words, educated parents already experienced the much valued ‘outside perspective’ and know better about the benefits education can bring. Even though Alfons, as the son of an educated man (primary school teacher), was not financially supported by his parents in his later years at university, he still felt supported by them to finish his degree. He also told me that he ‘... could not return to Flores without a degree’, expressing ideas about the necessity of an education not only in terms of a career, but also, and mainly, in terms of what he is supposed to do – what he thinks is good, and is expected of him.

These pressures are part of most young people’s educational experiences: due to educational costs, strategies of sharing and delaying and hence their ‘embeddedness’ in the community economy, many young people feel they need to finish a degree. Following state discourse regarding dropouts as wasted talent (e.g. Munro, 2012; see also Chapter 2), they experience a moral necessity to graduate. For Alfons, too, his education was considered expensive and linked him strongly to the community economy. However, when we consider his experiences from a Bourdieuan perspective, we can also trace back his commitment to his education to his abundant cultural capital and – closely related to that – his habitus. Education is part of his socialisation and through his cultural capital Alfons is more determined to cope, as compared to people from less educated backgrounds, with educational setbacks and barriers. His resilience links to notions of gengsi (prestige) and bangar-diri (self-esteem). He wants to become educated like the rest of his family, and be of similar status as they are (note here the link with symbolic capital); failure to become educated would inflict feelings of shame (malu).

Prestige and self-esteem are also important to young people with uneducated parents, however, not always to a similar degree, and not always in a way fully endorsed by their parents. For example, Vinnie – the boy who dropped out and started to work as a day labourer – was less persistent in finishing his education. While his parents showed great dedication to the education of his older siblings, they seemed equally supportive of Vinnie’s decision to drop-out. We should therefore not forget that while education has a profound place in national development and government discourse, many people in rural Flores get by without being educated at higher levels. Uneducated people, or those with only primary
or junior high school graduation, are still the majority in Flores. Therefore, Vinnie dropping out was not something unusual and fitted rather well within the life course trajectories of many people in Ngada, including those of his parents. In fact, for Vinnie’s parents, dealing with the educational trajectories of their first three children was a much more novel experience, one that led them to – atypically – sell their land.

Meanwhile, Meryn – whose father was rather sceptical regarding her education – had to convince her parents that tertiary education was an appropriate continuation of her earlier educational trajectory. Although Meryn persuaded her parents, it was not an easy ‘victory’. Other people told me about reluctant parents, too. Philip, for example, together with Fenny, my host in Ronaga, was not allowed to go back to school by his father after the devastating 1992 earthquake near Maumere in east Flores. At the time of the earthquake, Philip had been going to school in Ende (three hours by car from Maumere, and severely hit by the earthquake), but quit school – he thought temporarily – to escape the chaos of the post-earthquake situation. However, his father reasoned that it would take too much money and time to send Philip back to school the year after. Instead, Philip was pushed to find work, and, as a result, Philip has never advanced beyond primary school level. Here, too, we see a difference between two families in the significance ascribed to education, and how it affects one’s educational trajectory. After the 2006 earthquake in Yogyakarta, Alfons quit university, but then felt he could not return home without a degree.

These examples show what it means to be educated in Ngada, and how educational trajectories are enabled. It has become clear that limiting geographies and the limits of economic capital can be (partly) overcome by strategies of sharing and delaying. Through these strategies, young people become firmly embedded in the community economy, mainly because education comes with a promise of upward social mobility. Yet, the limits of cultural capital – and, to a lesser degree, social and symbolic capital, too – are more difficult to overcome and are important identifiers of young people’s educational trajectories.

**Returning to Ngada: being rural, development, parents and feelings of belonging**

To think about the significance of education in Ngada requires that we come to terms with how educated young people themselves view their education and the ‘promise’ it entails. Important in this respect is a discussion about the motivations behind young people’s return to Ngada, once finished with their education away from their natal villages. I distinguish four main reasons for educated young people to do so: a lack of jobs and limited capital in the city; a strong desire to contribute to the development of their
community; their parents; and, feelings of belonging. These reasons tell us something about how educated young people themselves consider the significance of education and the promise it entails.

In Chapter 2, I described several reasons and forces that prevent (young) people from permanent outmigration: personal reasons, Church and government, limiting geographies, and a lack of social capital. Young people’s return migration is linked to these reasons and forces. For example, personal reasons link to feelings of belonging, while Church and government policies link to notions of development, and again, to feelings of belonging (i.e. due to these policies young people are instilled with ideas of being an agent of positive change in their community). Whereas these reasons and forces concern migration in general, below I focus more specifically on young people’s return migration.

**Being rural: the limits of capital in urban areas**

The limits of social and cultural capital impact one’s educational trajectory, and also affect one’s career after graduation. For example, most educated young people from places such as Ngada have problems obtaining a job in the city of their studies. They are ‘too rural’ and besides having a relative lack of relevant social and cultural capital, they lack symbolic and economic capital, too.

In Indonesia, getting a job far away from one’s family and social networks is rather difficult. As Sylvia Tidey (2010) explains with regards to obtaining a civil servant position in Kupang (a city where many young Ngada people choose to do their studies), social capital is vital in application processes. Without the proper social capital getting a civil servant position is difficult (see also Minza, 2012; Naafs & White, 2012, pp. 11-12). Marcus (27), a graduate in Indonesian Literature from UniFlor (Ende), explained to me his return to the town of Riung along similar lines: ‘There are many more graduates like me over there [Ende], and they’re probably much better connected. Besides, here [in Riung] I feel I can have a much bigger impact on society’.

Educated young people from relatively poor backgrounds are not only poorly connected to useful networks; it is also likely that they do not have networks on which they can fall back for advice. By contrast, young people whose parents and other family members are already educated and work for the government are more adept at fulfilling the prerequisites of a government job, and are more likely to be connected to useful networks.

Besides limiting social capital, cultural capital – both in terms of degrees (i.e. coming from a well-known and respectable university), as in terms of context-specific appropriate behaviour – also affects one’s career. Educated young people coming from relatively poor backgrounds – and who are thus mostly first-generation university goers in
their family – are unfamiliar with job entrance tests, interviews, and general procedures during applications. Symbolic capital is important in this respect, too. For example, Marcus’ comment about him potentially having a bigger impact on society in rural Flores than in urban Kupang implies he considers the status of his degree relative to his social context. His self-representation differs therefore between rural Flores and the city, making it less likely for him to be successful in urban application procedures. Finally, rural young people’s relative deficiency in economic capital matters, too, as bribes are often necessary to be granted a passing mark in job-application tests.

There is much more work available in cities than in rural communities. However, educated young people noted that this work is mainly for uneducated people. For the ‘good’ jobs there is much competition in the cities. Young people need the right connections, degrees and prestige; yet, their social, cultural and symbolic capital were often limited. Hence, they considered their chances of getting a desired white-collar job much higher in Ngada – where they could benefit from their own networks, and where the relative value of their degrees and urban training would be higher than that it would be in the cities of their studies. Indeed, though it is increasingly difficult for young people to be hired in government positions in Ngada, see the next chapter for the state of the Ngada labour market.,95 being educated gives great status. Moreover, because Ngada is a relative small district, most people are familiar with people working for the local government. For example, many of the volunteers at health posts, or the guru honor working at schools, told me they had obtained their position through their network (at the health centres, a striking number of young volunteers had family working there as an official). Hardly any vacant positions were advertised openly, as most of these volunteering or honor jobs were not considered as regular formal positions (i.e. they were ‘created’).

Development
Young people’s inability to find a job in the city of their studies was rarely mentioned as a reason for young people to return to Ngada. It might therefore seem that returning to Ngada – due to one’s inability to find work in the city – links to notions of failure, and that therefore it is rarely mentioned as reason for one’s return. However, this is not the case. Though having a desired white-collar job in the city means educated young people are less inclined to return to Ngada – hence, I have placed it first as motivation for young people to return – the limits of capital are so pervasive that it is considered normal for young people to return to their natal community.96 In fact, most educated young people, without much

95 See the next chapter for the state of the Ngada labour market.
96 Contrary to returning without a degree to Ngada, returning to home due to unemployment in the city is much less connected to notions of shame.
hesitation, replied to my queries into the motives of their return with a straightforward: ‘I really want to develop my community’ (saya sangat mau membangun daerah/masyarakat). Here, I discuss what membangun means to these young people.

The local OMK branch organised regular seminars, workshops and social gatherings at the Ronaga Church, close to my house. These meetings often had a pedagogic character, and one day I attended a meeting aimed at improving leadership qualities and capacity building. Together with about 25 other young people, supervised by a young priest from the diocese, I embarked on a full day of interactive exercises, games and discussions. Though we started the day with musical chairs, and at some point we even played a game in which young men and women were supposed to sit on each other’s laps – with much shy laughter as a result – the whole day evinced a progressive, comforting and open atmosphere. The participants, aged between 19 and 29 and about evenly spread across both genders, were encouraged to talk about their virtues and to share their dreams and ambitions with the group. In one of the exercises, the challenge was to select one’s priorities for a successful life. As the young people explained their selection to the group, it was clear that for most of the participants making a positive contribution to society was one of the pillars of a successful life.

The conviction that educated young people have the moral obligation to be agents of positive change is widely shared amongst young people in Ngada. However, the notion of positive change is rather vague – i.e. defining it can be tricky. Yet, to educated young people this was not a problem. In fact, many of them could easily recount their activities that were in line with their desire to do good within their community. Jasinta, for example, volunteered at the Church (amongst others, she participated in the organisation of the Church children’s groups), sang in its choir, and worked for the District’s Election Watch. Also, she had a weekly show on the local radio station in which she discussed local political and social issues, for example, child abuse and waste of government funds. Finally, she worked as a volunteer for a new, bimonthly, newspaper, called Cermat (Accurate/Careful), initiated and published by two local journalists who had previously worked in Kupang and Jakarta. This newspaper, published in the districts of Nagekeo and Ngada, aimed to provide critical impetus for policy making and to showcase positive examples of entrepreneurship. Several times farmers were prominently featured in the paper due to their successes as, for example, vegetable growers.

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97 The actual slogan of the day, Latihan Kepemimpinan Tingkat Dasar dan Pengukuhan Kapasitas, was prominently printed on a large banner hanging in the hall where we met. This slogan can be translated as ‘Basic leadership training and capacity support’.

98 Other priorities included ‘finding work’, ‘continue one’s studies’ and ‘starting a family’. The participants did not expand on what would constitute a positive contribution.
Mako, whom we met in Chapter 4, was also serious about contributing to the community: she sang in the choir and went regularly to the Bajawa hospital to pray with friends for the sick and wounded. Maxi (29), an educated young man living in a village between Bajawa and Mataloko, even tried to be elected to the District’s Parliament. He said his move to run for election was a deliberate attempt to maximise his impact on society. In particular, he boasted that his ‘youth’ implied a more open approach to change and fewer connections to old networks contaminated with corruption and nepotism. His attempt failed, which others attributed to his youth.\footnote{The notion of ‘youth’ should here be understood as a relative deficiency in his types of capital.}

These young people were just a few of many who actively tried, within their limits, to give shape to ideals of being an agent of positive change. The actual actions that connected to these ideals varied enormously; for Mako going to the hospital and praying for patients was an expression of her wish to develop her community,\footnote{In Indonesia, religion (\textit{agama}) is considered important. It is a cornerstone of Indonesian identity as \textit{Pancasila} stipulates belief in one God. Mako, who identified as a Catholic, believed that through her religion she could encourage others to develop moral behaviour (note that in Chapter 4, she had been very disappointed with her then-boyfriend who had started to drink and gamble in her absence).} while Maxi and Jasinta were more concerned with political change. The impact of these actions varied as well. For example, Vera (29) wanted to \textit{maju} (progress) on a personal level, and thereby contribute to society’s progress. About the ‘how’, however, she was less clear; in the end she mentioned \textit{belajar bergaul} (‘learn to network’) and \textit{belajar disiplin} (‘learn self discipline’).\footnote{Vera echoes notions that are common amongst young people in Indonesia; see Parker and Nilan (2013, pp. 95-101).}

According to Vera, in Ngada ‘\textit{faktor politik dan faktor keluarga}’ (politics and family) greatly impact on one’s career trajectory. As she explained, politics and the bureaucratic system often hinder progress in, for example, business or other creative ways of making money, due to bureaucratic barriers, corruption and nepotism. At the same time, families are too used to sharing the fruits of labour with each other, due to networks of interdependence. According to Vera, there is a \textit{budaya minta}, and when one has success, benefits need to be shared with larger networks. This sharing is a waste of money, resources and incentives to be successful. Young people need to socialise and network, in order to support each other outside the traditional networks of government and family. Moreover, young people need to show discipline and dedication, and through self-determination overcome the barriers of government and family.

Echiel, the graduate from the seminary, had similar ideas about how the community should change. Though he told me that he was ‘too much in love with Ngada’ to stay away from Ronaga for long, he was very critical of social networks of mutual dependency, which he mentioned as barriers to development. He followed the same logic as Vera: due to
socially enforced norms of sharing there is not enough incentive to be successful. Therefore, according to Echiel, Ngada people need different mindsets, rely less on networks of interdependence and a *budaya minta*, and be more individualistic. He told me that people should save a little money in the bank, in order to become self-sufficient, even in times of stress and need.

These examples show that many educated young people considered themselves to be agents of modernity. Some of them were actively engaged with politics, or went out to contribute to the livelihoods of their fellow-villagers (e.g. *sukarela*, or *honar* teachers). However, most of the young people did not talk much about concrete change (even when I queried them about this), but rather complained about people’s mindsets and attitudes. This complaining contained a discourse of ‘self-discipline’, ‘networking’, and ‘overcoming barriers of *budaya minta*’. As markers of identity, these ideas are fundamentally different from those that connect to the community economy. They link to a neoliberal world order, though it is also an extension of the state’s discourse to which children from a young age onward are subjected at school. Ideas about progress and development are inculcated and endlessly repeated in the public domain.

When educated young people talk about the need to be creative, or the need to overcome hindering practices of sharing the fruits of labour, they privatise problems of underdevelopment and make the individual responsible for overcoming barriers that sustain these problems. They tend to consider the individual as a self-constructing subject, whose actions directly oppose the dynamics of the community economy and networks of interdependence. Yet, educated young people depend on these networks, too (e.g. for their education, and during education-to-work transitions. There is thus much irony in the way educated young people consider the community economy. Their dependence on community networks does not match their educated and modernity-informed discourse.

*Parents*

Young people’s modernity discourse is not only ironic, but contradictory, too. It combines repertoires of individual responsibilisation and a focus on the collective. That is, educated young people centre the individual in their modernity efforts: it is about changing attitudes and mindsets. However, if we consider their actual efforts, then the focus is on the collective. They volunteer for the Church, at health posts, in the community, and at schools. Moreover, educated young people showed a remarkable responsibility towards

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102 Despite the positive contributions one can make to the community through these positions, the way young people obtain these positions (i.e. through their networks) is, rather contradictory in relation to their modernity discourse, a manifestation of the *budaya minta*. 

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their parents. For example, during a discussion with two young female sukarela – Amy (23) and Rosa (24) – at a small health post, they assured me several times that they had wanted to return to Ngada and their small village to help and develop the area:

TS: Why have you returned to Ngada, to your village?
Amy: Because we want to help to develop our community.
TS: I hear this many times from other young people. What do you mean by it?
Amy: Well, we must be part of the change of our community. Help to make it modern.
Rosa: Yes, we feel we have to be here, and help people in the health post.

TS: And before, where did you study to become a nurse?
Amy: We studied in Kupang.
TS: Did you like it there?
Amy: Yes, very much! At the end of the day we always got together with friends near the beach. Or we went to the malls and had coffee there. Or just walked around, visited our friends. Of course, we studied hard, but life in Kupang is less complicated: less family and more friends. Here, we just live with our families, and we can’t go out much. On Sunday we go to the beach that’s just around the corner. That’s it. So therefore we don’t really mind being sukarela. We have something to do now, and we can help people too.

TS: So, why did you come back? Why didn’t you stay in Kupang?
Rosa: Well...it’s adat Mathias. We had to go back. Our parents wanted us back here... So what can we do?

We see that two factors conjoin in Amy and Rosa’s motivation to return to Ngada. First, Amy and Rosa return because they want to develop their community. Therefore, they are happy to be able to work at the local health post and contribute to the well-being of their fellow-villagers. (This does not mean that they returned to Ngada because they wanted to end up in a volunteering position; rather, they hope their volunteering will lead to a fixed position.) Second, they use a cultural explanation for their return. Their parents desire their presence in Ngada, so they have come back to their natal community.

With regards to the latter factor, many other young women – like Mako (from Chapter 4), Jasinta, and Vera – mentioned that their culture (adat/budaya) required their return home, too (or, in the case of the many uneducated young women, their continued presence in Ngada villages). Also in other health posts, young women told me that their parents were the main force behind their return to their natal villages. In these returns, we see that gender, and – again – birth order matter. Vera, for example, is the only daughter amongst four sons. She therefore had to return home, according to common Ngada
uxorilocal residence patterns and inheritance and house stewardship practices. Mako, as well, was the oldest daughter of the house, and though she lived happily in Ende, her parents required her company, even though an older and younger brother already lived in the house. By contrast, Fenny is the third daughter of her house, and she has a much younger sister. When Fenny was in university, her younger sister remained at home, and when that sister moved out due to studies, Fenny’s older sister already had returned home. Consequently, Fenny felt less pressure to return to her parents, and started living and working in Bajawa, two hours from her parents’ village. Ibu Matilda, whom I introduced in the previous section, was also under pressure from her parents to return home after finishing her studies in Kupang, but because several of her younger sisters remained in the house, the pressure was mild. In another family, living not far from Ronaga’s village green, two sisters took turns, one going to Jakarta for work, while the other took care of their mother, their land, and the children of their brothers who worked in Kalimantan.

Therefore, despite the fact that during fieldwork most of the young women to whom I talked were educated unmarried young women who had returned because of their parents, I heard many stories about older sisters in Jakarta, or about younger sisters who remained in their city long after graduation. These young women also told me that their brothers had much more opportunity to roam around after graduation, in search of a job. Indeed, young men mentioned their parent’s desire as motivation of their own return to a much lesser extent. As Fenny told me: ‘Parents just always worry more about their daughters’.

Worrying about, or having a larger concern for, young women resembles general ideas in Indonesia about gender and preferred careers (see, for example, Koning, 1997, pp. 182-188; Naafs, 2012). Young men are much more free in their quest for a job, or an education (e.g. they can take on casual jobs with a public character, such as in construction, which are more plentiful). Alfons, for example, moved from Yogyakarta to Jakarta in search of work (he initially was a parking attendant) and to finish his study. He stayed on Java for about eleven years. To stay away this long is much harder for young women.

Feelings of belonging

Finally, young people return to their Ngada natal village due to feelings of belonging. For example, Echiel told me many times about his profound connection with Ngada, as we looked out over Flores’ magnificent landscape. Similar feelings were expressed by most

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103 In these two cases it matters, too, that Fenny and Jasinta were able to find work in Bajawa and Kupang respectively. Had they been unable to do so, they probably would have had to return to their natal houses as well.

104 In Ngada, this worrying was not frequently openly discussed.
other educated young people. Often, they told me they felt as if they really belonged in Ngada, and expressed the beauty of existing socio-economic practices, the strong feeling of collectivity, the practice of ancestor worship, and the intimate connections between land and people.

Feelings of belonging to the Ngada collective are clearly at odds with educated young people’s discourses of development and the criticism they expressed so many times concerning the budaya minta. Yet, during the yearly festival of reba – the climax of the Ngada agricultural cycle, in which the ties between humankind, ancestors and the soil are celebrated – young people joined the festivities as happily as the older generations. They joined dance groups and choirs performing at the opening service of the festival, while others joined the teams that handed out food to the hundreds of attendees. Later, all dressed-up in their traditional outfits, the young people came together in houses of friends and family, sharing food and drinks with the ancestors.

As reba continued throughout the night and into the following days, young men and women joined dances, rituals and social gatherings. People from far away returned home to be part of these festivities, and family ties were tightened. Also at other ritual events, such as the renewal of the thatched roofs of the bhagha and ngadhu, or the inauguration of a newly constructed ancestor house, young men and women eagerly joined the ceremonies,
and engaged with age- and gender-defined tasks behind-the-scenes (e.g. preparing of food and drinks). Young men usually cooked meat, while young women, together with their mothers, cooked rice and served drinks. During these festivities, (educated) young people rarely sat apart as a separate group. Instead, rituals and ceremonies were highly dynamic social places where various generations easily mixed. While young women had many more responsibilities than young men – e.g. cooking, cleaning, and making coffee – these festivities were very social and inclusive. One could easily understand why young people often said they had missed their family – and Ngada in general – while studying in cities far away from their natal villages.

The social connections within the villages are much praised by educated young people. They also like the quiet, peaceful character of Ngada, and its cool mountain climate, as compared to the heat in coastal cities where they did their studies. I found it remarkable to hear these feelings of belonging represented in many pop or hip hop songs about the island, and its cities. One can do a random search on YouTube with the words *lagu daerah Bajawa* (Bajawa regional song) and dozens of locally produced music videos will appear.105

Not all aspects of village life were appreciated by the educated young people. Besides aforementioned critiques of the community economy, young people mentioned gossip as something they disliked. In that respect, the anonymity of the city was appreciated. Nevertheless, mostly they expressed a strong commitment to their culture. For example, women often had little difficulty defending post-marital uxorilocal residence practices and the associated pressures on young women to return home after studies. Though some expressed resentment regarding their return, for example Mako and Jane from Chapter 4, they also expressed pride about the central role women have in kinship and inheritance practices.

Though proud of their culture, young people considered their knowledge about *adat* and associated practices and language limited. Often they told me that they had not yet grasped its encompassing character. Most educated young people explained ‘Ngada-ness’ by referring to the *woé*, the practice of post-marital uxorilocal residence patterns, and the specificity of Ngada Houses with their raised roofs, but they could not answer questions

105 For example, local hip hop groups, singing in Indonesian and sometimes in English, are Expose Bajawa Community/Mosalaki Ngada Sound and Bajawa Hip Hop. Other, more traditionally oriented performers, for example Lucas Group or Boney Zu’a, sing in the local language, while their music videos typically contain shots of Ngada’s mountains, and men and women dancing *ja’i* – a local dance – while wearing traditional clothing (more about *ja’i* in Chapter 7). Besides these local performers and songs, Ngada young people have quite a cosmopolitan taste in music: English boy bands and Brazilian house music, together with the ubiquitous mainstream Indonesian pop songs, American rock classics and country music are also local favourites.
regarding ancestors, social rank, and the precedence of certain rites. Many of the young people to whom I spoke told me that they had to learn more about *adat*.

Hence, it is difficult to come to terms with what *adat* actually means to educated young people in Ngada. This is further complicated by processes in which *adat* is made highly contentious and ambiguous: though *adat* in Indonesia is used as a discourse of authenticity, it is simultaneously highly politicised (Allerton, 2013, p. 144). In Chapter 2, we saw that local cultural expressions were politically sanitised during the New Order regime. *Adat* was subject to processes of ‘aestheticisation’, rendering it politically harmless, and useful in promoting unity in diversity, or implementing specific policies (Acciaioli, 1985, 1997). After the New Order’s collapse, Indonesia experienced a renewed interest in *adat*, inspiring some to claim the ‘revival of tradition’ (Davidson & Henley, 2007b). Although this revival was often conceived as the re-enactment of pristine, timeless traditional practices, the renaissance of these ‘traditions’ was frequently merely a variation or elaboration of existing power constellations, useful in bolstering local power vis-à-vis external forces (Bourchier, 2007). Moreover, as Erb (2005) noted, renewed enactment of *adat* still followed the New Order custom; that is, culture was mainly seen as something to display.

Whereas ‘culture had to be “tamed” for the sake of nation-building and national unity’ during the New Order regime (Erb, 2005, p. 324), nowadays it has come to represent ‘what is “traditional” in the sense of no longer regularly used but necessary to “preserve” as a mark of cultural identity’ (Allerton, 2013, p. 144). These processes of preservation have been reinforced by tourism and the ‘creation’ of artefacts. Stroma Cole (2003, 2007), for example, shows how Ngada megalithic sites are appropriated as ‘traditional’, often imposed by political organisations and departments. As *obyek pariwisata* or *obyek turis* (literally ‘tourist objects’), they ‘become’ traditional and something from the past, and as money-making entities. *Adat* thus becomes commodified.

The idea of culture and tradition as ‘displayable’ manifests itself in many ways. Frequently, the dozen or so tour guides in Bajawa told me about the late SVD anthropologist Paul Arndt and his books. From these books (available in Indonesian), these tour guides told me, they had learnt much about their own traditions, which enabled them to explain Ngada *adat* to their foreign guests. Echiel too, like other young people, mentioned he had to learn more about his culture, but that he had not had the time yet to read Arndt’s (and others’) books.

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106 Tourism is a growing sector on Flores.
Adat in Ngada was thought of as something that can be ‘possessed’, more or less as a ‘cultural fact’, ‘waiting’ to be explained to the outsider. If only one listens well enough, or observes well enough, culture can be acquired. People in Ngada often seemed to have the ‘urge’ to explain their culture to me, as if it had a ‘displayable’ character. Young people, too, liked to explain to me that something was ‘culture’: for example the House-networks, or the need for women to return home after studies. It was what defined them as Ngada, and therefore it made young people proud that adat was still strong in their village.

Young people feel connected to adat, often in its commodified and displayable form. These feelings contradict young people’s ideas of development and associated critiques on the budaya minta. This contradiction makes sense: both their ideas regarding transforming Ngada’s community economy into a more modern entity and their fondness for adat, the associated community economy, and networks of interdependence, are continuations of national tendencies to treat tradition with ambivalence. That is, ritual, ancestors, networks of interdependence, and feelings of communality have long been depicted as hindering development, yet also as the very essence of Indonesia. Moreover, though generally tradition has been seen as obstructing modernity, in practice young people are benefitting from community networks that are maintained through ritual and ceremony. Hence, their actual experiences make them, rather ambivalently, firmly embedded in – and supporters of – the community economy. In the next chapter, this ambivalence will be further discussed.

Conclusion

In Ngada, educated young people’s attitudes towards village life are ironic, contradictory and ambivalent. This, so I believe, can be traced back to the promise of education. Education is considered to be key to upward social mobility (e.g. a government job). However, for many Ngada families, tertiary education is an expensive asset, often only obtained through careful planning, hard work, financial offers made by larger networks, and pragmatic arrangements that tie young people firmly into community networks of mutual help and reciprocity.

Young people return to Ngada due to the limited relative value of their cultural, social, symbolic and economic capital in the cities of their studies. Also, they want to develop their community, mainly by dismantling community networks of interdependency, in favour of entrepreneurial mindsets. Attentiveness to parental demands and expectations, too, and feelings of belonging are important motives for Ngada young people to return to their natal communities. In these motives we see a tension between young people as educated modern subjects and their strong connection to family and Ngada culture.
This tension might seem rather harmless with regards to ‘displayable’ and ‘commodified’ expressions of adat. However, young people’s criticism of the community economy rejects much on which they themselves are dependent. This rejection is potentially problematic. Education entails a promise of upward social mobility, which, in turn, implies that young people become indebted due to arrangements that circumvent the limits of economic capital. Hence, the promise of education does not only apply to the individual, but also to the family, and the community at large. Un(der)employment challenges the assumption that education can contribute to the well-being of society and disturbs networks of interdependence. This is further complicated by young people who are critical of these networks and advocate less dependence on networks of mutual help.

Education thus has the potential to become a problematic resource: as young people and parents alike are inculcated with ideas of empowerment through their education, not achieving upward social mobility while drawing on the community economy can have negative effects, such as social pressures and feelings of uselessness. Luckily, I did not notice any such potentially disturbing forces at work. In fact, young people’s un(der)employment was not considered a pressing issue (yet). This is remarkable, as literally hundreds of educated young people in Ngada either worked in precarious labour conditions, or did not work at all. In the next chapter I will explain how and why this condition can be sustained.
Becoming un(der)employed, being vulnerable and feeling disjuncture

Introduction
Practically all educated young people who return to their Ngada natal communities want to work upon their return. However, the reality of Ngada’s labour market is that many educated young people become either un- or underemployed. The circumstances that underlie this un(der)employment, as well as the precariousness these circumstances cause, are central to this chapter.

To understand how educated young people become un(der)employed in Ngada, in the first section I evaluate the national macroeconomic context in which Ngada is situated. Then, in the second section, I examine the roots of educated young people’s un(der)employment in rural Flores. I discuss the limited opportunities these young people have in the local labour market, and how they navigate these opportunities. The main questions that guide this section are: how do educated young people search for jobs and what kind of jobs are they looking for? In the third and final section, I discuss what un(der)employment means to these educated young people and the effects it has on Ngada’s communities. In particular, I argue that these un(der)employed young people have to postpone social adulthood. They are unable to become financially independent and as a result they postpone marriage. As marriage is the ultimate marker of social adulthood, un(der)employed young people thus ‘remain young’.

The main argument of this chapter is that un(der)employed, educated young people are precarious. This makes them socially vulnerable, as they depend on networks of interdependence longer, due to which they prolong their youth. I argue that this fits long-standing vulnerable living conditions in central Flores, and that un(der)employed young people are easily absorbed by networks of interdependence. Hence, educated young people rarely have to worry about their direct needs (e.g. food and housing). Un(der)employment is therefore often less an issue than one might initially expect. However, educated young people’s precariousness is also informed by an experience of disjunctures. They feel modern and desire social upward mobility, yet are confronted with a rural reality in which they depend on networks of interdependence. This experience is relatively novel and largely due to young people’s higher education. Both social vulnerability as well as the experience of
disjuncture hamper cultural reproduction, but it is the notion of disjuncture in particular that potentially disturbs the principles of the community economy.

**Issues of the Indonesian labour market**
The current state of Ngada’s labour market – that is, its lack of labour-absorbing capacity – is closely connected to larger macroeconomic developments in Indonesia. To understand educated young people’s un(der)employment in Ngada, these larger developments must be taken into account.

**Labour market performance: the formal and informal sectors**
The Indonesian economy shows a rather mixed picture. Since the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-1998, Indonesia’s economy has grown significantly, and ‘has gone from a low middle-income country in political, financial and economic crisis to a democratic, stable and confident member of the G-20’ (World Bank, 2014b, p. 26). Since the turn of the millennium, the Indonesian economy has continuously outperformed many economic forecasts, and it survived the 2007-2008 Global Financial Crisis – and its aftermath of global economic slowdown – relatively untouched (World Bank, 2014b, p. 26). However, since 2012 economic growth has slowed down (Haryo Aswicahyono & Hill, 2014, p. 23), mainly due to declines in global commodity prices (Armstrong & Rahardja, 2014; Howes & Davies, 2014; Sienaert et al., 2014; World Bank, 2014a). As a result, there has been a decline in the rate of poverty reduction. Though the overall poverty rate in Indonesia has declined from 24 per cent in 1999 to 11.4 per cent in 2014, in the last two years only a 0.7 per cent reduction was accomplished, which is the smallest reduction in the last decade (World Bank, 2014e).

According to the World Bank (2014c, 2014d), 28 million people still live in poverty in Indonesia, mostly on Java. In Nusa Tenggara (i.e. the two provinces of Nusa Tenggara Barat (NTB) and Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), the latter of which includes the island of Flores), 19.2 per cent of the population lives in poverty. Meanwhile, 68 million people in Indonesia (27.4 per cent of the total population) are vulnerable to poverty. This means that these people can easily slip back into poverty due to unforeseen situations, such as bad

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107 This assertion can be contested. Greg Accaioli (personal communication) mentions how some urban business people who had lost work since the Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) in 1997-1998 thought they were getting back on their feet in the early 2000s, yet came unstuck again with the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

108 For Indonesia, the World Bank defines the poverty line as the ‘expenditures for basic food needs equivalent to 2100 kcal daily consumption and basic non-food needs. It is different for every region, and the weighted national average for 2013 is approximately Rp.1,080,000 per month for a family of 4’ (World Bank, 2014d).
harvests, a health crisis within the family, or job layoffs. Thus, getting above the poverty line is far from being an irreversible accomplishment.\(^{109}\)

Meanwhile, inequality in Indonesia is on the rise: the country’s Gini coefficient\(^{110}\) increased from 31 in 2001 to 41 in 2011, an increase that exceeded the increases in the Gini coefficients of many other Southeast Asian countries. This is alarming, as inequality in wealth correlates with many other inequalities, including unequal access to health services and education. These issues are specifically relevant to East Indonesia, as this region lags behind the rest of the country in relation to the incidence of poverty and poverty rate reduction (World Bank, 2014c).

Slower economic growth, less poverty reduction, and increasing wealth inequality pose threats to the well-being of many Indonesians. Young people are particularly afflicted by these less favourable economic circumstances, as they are central to processes of social change, most notably the ‘spatial movement of population’ and ‘sectoral shifts in employment’ (Naafs & White, 2012, p. 4). That is because these processes do not come about due to ‘the old’ quitting farming and moving to the city, but rather through ‘the young’ who do not follow their parents into an agricultural livelihood and migrate to urban areas (Naafs & White, 2012, p. 17). As young people move (back-and-forth) between places, or as they opt for service sector jobs instead of agricultural jobs, they are vulnerable to economic setbacks.

Indonesia has an abundance of labour, providing the country with opportunities for increased productivity and growing welfare (the so-called demographic dividend).\(^{111}\) However, its economy has a weak labour-absorbing capacity (World Bank, 2010, p. 5).

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\(^{109}\) Poverty lines are much contested, and are defined in many ways. They can be defined in terms of budgetary needs – as the World Bank does with regards to Indonesia (see previous footnote) – or as monetary poverty lines (mostly US$1.25 per person per day for extreme poverty, and US$2 per person per day for poverty) (Priebe, 2014).

\(^{110}\) The Gini coefficient measures inequality, where 0 represents the equal distribution of income, and 100 represents a state in which one person holds all income. An increase in a country’s Gini coefficient thus equals a decline in income equality.

\(^{111}\) The demographic dividend refers to a period of time – often multiple decades – when fertility rates have fallen, while older cohorts of the population remain subject to relatively short life-expectancies. As a result, the proportion of the population that is young and dependent decreases over time, which results in cuts on spending on them. The demographic dividend pays out as at some point the productive proportion of the population increases rapidly, as the latest cohort before fertility rates fell enters the labour market. At this point in time, women too enter the labour market (due to decreased numbers of dependents), making the ratio of productive to non-productive population better for a country's increased productivity and growing welfare. (Note that there must be jobs available for these large numbers of labour market entrants; there is no dividend if they cannot find jobs.) The demographic dividend thus refers to a period of time in which demographic shifts enable low spending on dependents, stimulating rapid economic growth. However, the demographic dividend is transient. Due to increases in the unproductive proportion of the population (i.e. people of the last large cohort will get older and leave the workforce). This is currently happening in Japan, and large parts of Western Europe. An increased dependent proportion of the population poses serious issues for (the sustainability of welfare) states, and often requires major adaptive policy reforms. In Indonesia, the demographic window of opportunity (i.e. benefitting from the demographic dividend) is closing soon; the growth in elderly dependents is currently larger than the growth in the workforce, making job creation in the coming decade a critical endeavour for the national government (World Bank, 2010).
Although unemployment numbers have decreased steadily over a long period of time, the creation of new (and sufficient) formal jobs is lagging behind actual economic growth, prompting some observers to label Indonesia’s economic development as ‘jobless growth’ (Hayo Aswicahyono et al., 2011, p. 114; see also Chowdhury, Islam, & Tadjoeddin, 2009). This is largely due to decreased investments in manufacturing (traditionally the sector that absorbs most labour, after agriculture), in favour of the commodities sector (mainly oil and ore). Regulatory and policy uncertainties, labour market regulation, infrastructure constraints, and exchange rate appreciations result in continuous relatively low investment in the manufacturing sector. Consequently, job creation in the formal sector remains a major concern for Indonesian policy makers (Hayo Aswicahyono et al., 2011; Chowdhury et al., 2009; World Bank, 2010, 2012b).

Due to a lack of formal sector jobs, entrants to the Indonesian labour market are likely to fall back onto informal labour. In 2010 the informal labour market absorbed about 60 per cent of all employment (Manning & Purnagunawan, 2011, p. 323). This affects mostly young people. In 2010, unemployment for young people (ages 15-24) was three times as high as it was for the total working age population (21 per cent versus 7 per cent) (Manning & Purnagunawan, 2011, pp. 322-326; see also Tadjoeddin, 2014).

Meanwhile, educated people are overly represented in the unemployment statistics. There is an increased proportion of tertiary-educated young people amongst those who are unemployed, which is an undesired side-effect of the improved educational enrolment numbers (Tadjoeddin, 2014, p. 18). Young people have invested time and money in their education and are instilled with the promise that education will bring a decent and secure job. For rural educated young people, this means they opt for alternative careers to agriculture and prefer non-manual service sector careers. However, as the service sector cannot absorb all new labour, many people end up in informal employment.

It is particularly outside the major cities that workers have trouble finding secure formal work, and mostly (educated) *rural* young people who find themselves in a vulnerable and precarious condition (Sienaert et al., 2014, p. 34). This relates to massive shifts in

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112 After 2010 unemployment continued to decline steadily in Indonesia. In 2012 only 6.1 per cent percent of the labour force was unemployed, in 2013 it went down to 5.9 per cent. However, these numbers do not represent the complete picture; the presence of a large informal sector renders official labour statistics unreliable (Sienaert et al., 2014, p. 32).

113 In Indonesia, the official definition of informal labour adopted by the national statistics agency (BPS; *Badan Pusat Statistik*) is complex and requires detailed information about one’s main occupation. According to the simplified definition of informal work ‘all family workers and self-employed workers without family workers ... are informal. Self-employed with family workers are formal if working in non-agriculture, but informal if in agriculture. All employers and employees are formal’ (World Bank, 2010, p. 61). According to this definition, the majority of the informal sector workers (more than 70 per cent) lives in rural areas, is (near-)poor, low educated and often self-employed. Women are more likely to be informal workers. Besides agriculture, men often work in transportation while women work in small shops or as traders. (World Bank, 2010, pp. 60-63).
labour out of agriculture. In Indonesia, between 1980 and 2010 the percentage of people aged 15 and above who were working in agriculture declined from almost 60 per cent to 40 per cent (Purnastuti et al., 2013, p. 217).¹¹⁴ This does not mean, however, that areas like Ngada have been depleted of labour. Though generally it is thought that de-agrarianisation equals urbanisation, still, many Indonesians call non-urban areas their home. Currently, 55 per cent of Indonesians live in rural areas; it is estimated that in 2035 between 45 per cent and 35 per cent of Indonesians will still live in rural areas (McDonald, 2014, p. 46). This means that, even though processes of urbanisation continue, in the future tens of millions of people will still live in the countryside.¹¹⁵

It is in these rural areas that people are likely to end up in informal sector jobs, especially in East Indonesia (World Bank, 2010, p. 60). Though one might argue that informal labour is better than no labour at all, we should not be too optimistic about these informal jobs. Informal sector jobs lack the many protections and benefits of formal sector jobs, which include a fixed income, fixed contract hours, pensions, and access to healthcare. Informal labour often entails casual, low-quality jobs, with unpredictable hours of work and pay (World Bank, 2010) and makes people vulnerable to exploitation. Nevertheless, in poor societies there is often not much choice; people simply cannot afford to be unemployed (Tadjoeddin, 2014, p. 11).

Linear development ideals and ‘surplus people’

Unemployment and underemployment (which often includes informal sector employment)¹¹⁶ challenge educated young people’s understanding that education will lead to upward social mobility. It thus challenges the promise that they would be the vanguard of positive social change. Nevertheless, the promise of education remains a strong ideal to adhere to, both for young people and their parents, as for Indonesian society at large. This is because it connects to a pervasive discourse of linear development. To understand this discourse, and the effects it has, I make use of Tania Li’s (2010) analysis of ‘surplus populations’.

¹¹⁴ To be sure, processes of deagrarianisation occurred long before the 1980s and continue until today.
¹¹⁵ The concepts of rural and urban – and, related to these, peri-urban – are contentious and difficult to define. McDonald realises this, in particular because he wishes to compare data between countries in Southeast Asia, all of which use different definitions. Strangely, he decides to gloss over these issues of definition (McDonald, 2014, p. 46). Therefore, the numbers above are merely an indication of future migratory flows between different places in Indonesia. For an operationalisation of ‘rural’ – as used in this thesis – see Chapter 1.
¹¹⁶ To be sure, some people in the informal sector are very successful, and can hardly be called underemployed (e.g. businessmen with firms that are not registered). Nevertheless, the majority of people working in the informal sector have work that lacks the benefits of formal sector jobs, rendering them underemployed, also in Ngada.
In her analysis, Li (2010, p. 69) foregrounds the pervasiveness of ‘... narratives about agrarian transition that assume a linear pathway’, which predict ‘... sooner or later – a transition from agriculture to industry, country to city, and peasant to entrepreneurial farmer or wage worker’ (see also Gibson-Graham, 2005, pp. 4–6). These narratives have a long history and relate to early explanations of capitalist development in England and Western Europe. Both in Marxist theory, and in modernisation theory, as well as in more recent neoliberal developmental discourse, the idea of linear ‘progress’ features prominently.\(^\text{117}\)

Transition narratives that assume these linear pathways share a discourse in which developing (export-oriented) industries are assumed to require a pool of cheap labour in order to be internationally competitive. With regards to Indonesia (and many other countries with a (previously) rural-based economy), cheap labour comes about when vast numbers of people become redundant in rural areas due to increased efficiency of agricultural modes of production. Accordingly, these redundant rural workers function as an army of mobile and flexible cheap labour capable of partaking in the country’s push for development. Such a push is mostly an urban and industrial affair, and the redundant rural population is thus supposed to move from their country villages to the city.

According to Li, thinking about integrated processes of de-agrarianisation, urbanisation and development is dominant in ( supra-)national organisations. Li (2010, p. 69) points to the World Bank (2008), which advises governments of countries in transition from an agrarian-based economy towards industrialisation ‘to manage transitions out of agriculture for rural populations whose labour is surplus to the requirements of a more efficient agricultural sector, and to supply targeted “safety nets” for a residual few who cannot make this transition, namely the old and the infirm’. There is a problem with this kind of reasoning. Though capital has currently relatively few global boundaries – it is easily and quickly transferable across borders, in search of profitable circumstances – labour is certainly not free to move internationally.\(^\text{118}\) Therefore, a national approach to redundant populations – as the World Bank proposes, in its suggestion that national governments need to provide mere ‘safety nets’ for the residual old and infirm – neglects that whole areas and, indeed, whole countries are not experiencing an influx of capital, simply because

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\(^{117}\) Considering societal development strictly as a set of irreversible steps through various consecutive stages is also part of thinking related to unilinear evolutionism, and was, amongst others, a major justification of colonialism’s civilising mission.

\(^{118}\) For centuries, production processes have been dependent on regional, national and global flows of migration (E. R. Wolf, 1997 [1982]). Also in the current global neoliberal constellation, many producers rely on (cheap) labour from elsewhere. Nevertheless, the speed at which money can be moved around the globe exceeds that of labour. Moreover, migration is often limited by geographical barriers and political borders, though some initiatives exist to accommodate cross-border labour flows. In Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Economic Community, established in late 2015 and of which Indonesia is a part, is such an initiative.
the relative profitability of such an area is low. Moreover, despite massive shifts of labour from agriculture to other sectors, Indonesia has not depleted its rural population. Though Indonesia is experiencing rapid urbanisation, many people remain in rural areas – not only the old and the infirm – or return to these once their education is completed. Sadly, in such rural areas, Li argues, investment remains scarce, or finances mainly mega-plantations that require relative little labour. Hence, the population in such areas become ‘surplus in relation to its utility for capital’ (Li, 2010, p. 68; Italics in original); these people have no function in their country’s push for development.

I propose that rural central Flores is one such area for capital. It would therefore make sense for many (young) people to leave this rural part of Indonesia and move to, for example, Java. Indeed, de-agrarianisation and urbanisation are processes that often coincide, and much research has been conducted into young people’s migratory endeavours (see for a Global South perspective Cohen, 2011; and, for Indonesia, Hugo, 2004; Juárez et al., 2013; Minza, 2012; Silvey & Elmhirst, 2003; Utomo et al., 2013). However, Li’s account focuses on those who do not drift to other parts of the country, or the globe, to fulfil their potential as cheap labour. Instead, it makes us aware that there are places, such as central Flores, where young people with quite a different potential – namely, that promised by their education – follow ‘atypical’ pathways that go against ruling ideas of inevitable urbanisation. This, then, is Li’s main argument: an integrated model of development with de-agrarianisation and urbanisation as markers of economic development rarely corresponds with reality, but instead leads to exclusion from the nation state, dispossession and poverty. These consequences can either be mediated by government policies (‘making live’), or be ignored (‘letting die’) with devastating effects for the surplus populations as a result. I do not fully endorse Li’s analysis, as her approach renders rural people too subject to globalised flows of capital and gives them little agency. However, I, too, believe that places like central Flores are structurally marginalised within contemporary macroeconomic constellations.

Transition narratives that favour deagrarianisation and urbanisation as markers of modernity conjoin with ideas of education and its promise as a catalyst for development. Education is considered to be the gateway out of agrarian ‘backwardness’. Therefore, Indonesia’s educational system is expanding, and young people are inculcated with a moral obligation to be an agent of positive change. As a result, educated young people express

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119 Indeed, there are places in the world, for example in Java, where industrialisation does not take place solely in urban areas, but in rural areas, too. In these areas, the connection between de-agrarianisation and urbanisation is less prominent, as the ‘redundant’ agricultural workforce can find work in local factories, and does not have to leave rural areas in their quest for work. See, for example, Diane Wolf’s (1986) analysis of young female factory workers in rural central Java.
critiques regarding networks of interdependence in Ngada’s community economy and what they call a *budaya minta*. These critiques are rather ironic because young people depend on these networks of interdependence as they struggle in their education-to-work transition. Here, I would like to add another layer of irony: educated young people share a modern notion of progress inspired by development paradigms, yet their troubled transitions in rural Flores are (partly) a consequence of that same paradigm, which favours processes of deagrianisation and urbanisation (and thus renders Flores a marginal place in global flows of capital).

Tania Li reminds us that development ideals have their practical limits, and that simply educating young people – and thus facilitating getting them out of agriculture – does not suffice to establish development. Many young people remain in, or return to, their rural native communities, where labour markets are problematic.

**Ngada’s labour market and becoming un(der)employed**

A discussion about the Ngada labour market could be facilitated by examination of available local statistics. However, these statistics are unreliable, vague and contain categories that are not (or ill) defined, and represent a short time series. In Appendix B, I have included three tables, together with a discussion of the statistics. Despite the vagueness and inconsistencies of the numbers, these tables suggest that many people in Ngada (of the population 15 years of age and above) – in particular women – are either economically inactive, unemployed, or are considered unpaid workers, and that agriculture absorbs most labour in the area. The statistics do not tell us much about the fates of educated young people specifically. Therefore, to complement these incomplete statistics, and in order to understand the opportunities educated young people have in terms of employment, here I give a description of the Ngada labour market. I focus on three important fields of potential work: the agricultural sector; formal jobs in manufacturing and the private service sector; and the public sector. I finish this section with a discussion of migration and entrepreneurship as alternatives to these sectors.

*(Educated) young people and agriculture*

Small-scale agriculture is the single biggest employer in many rural areas, including in Ngada (see Appendix B, Table B.2). Therefore, it could have a major role in mediating

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120 Statistics are available over the period prior to 2008, but they include data from the now separate Nagekeo district, directly to the east of Ngada. Nagekeo, before 2007 part of Ngada district, is thus a relatively new district. It is currently one of the poorest districts of NTT, itself one of the poorest provinces of Indonesia. Including the available statistics about Ngada district prior to 2008 would bias our understanding of the current state of the Ngada economy and labour market. Though unfortunate, there seems little alternative to this relatively short time series.
issues of young people’s un(der)employment. Unfortunately, currently several processes conjoin to render (small-scale) agricultural jobs an undesirable option for young people. According to Ben White (2012a, p. 9), these processes include: ‘the deskill ing of rural youth, and the downgrading of farming and rural life; the chronic neglect of small-scale agriculture and rural infrastructure; and the problems that young rural people increasingly have, even if they want to become farmers, in getting access to land while still young.’

The deskill ing of rural youth – together with the structural downgrading of farming and rural life – is latent in ‘the promise of education’. Education is considered by young people and their parents as the gateway to a paid job. Agrarian livelihoods are considered backward, a notion closely related to the development discourse as described by Li (2010). This discourse, disseminated, amongst others, through government rhetoric and educational programmes, directly impacts on young people’s motives to pursue a degree, just as it impacts on parents, as well as the community at large. Young people, through their education, are stimulated to opt for careers outside agriculture (while de facto denigrating an agricultural livelihood). Moreover, schools’ curricula have little room for agricultural skills, propelling processes of deskill ing, while young people’s investment of time in their educational endeavours aggravates these processes. Hence, it less likely for them to become skilled by means of learning-by-doing.

On a global level, another process that renders agriculture a less attractive career-option to (educated) young people is the chronic government neglect of small-scale farming and rural infrastructure. In Indonesia, despite dominant development ideals of urbanisation and de-agrarianisation, the government invests in rural areas through various programmes and laws (e.g. the 2014 Village Law). However, these investments are inadequate, as infrastructure is rudimentary in large parts of Flores, water and electricity supplies are unreliable, and storage facilities remain scarce. These factors hamper transport, trade, and development.

Finally, demographics obstruct young people’s choice of an agricultural career in Ngada; currently, older generations are able to work the fields longer, while a rising birth rate makes the division of land amongst siblings increasingly difficult. Also, mechanisation (though to a minor extent in Ngada, e.g. some people own hand tractors and chainsaws) has increased the amount of land one can work. As a result, for large numbers of young Indonesian people, getting access to land while young is problematic.121 These are not new issues; for example, Geertz (1963) notes how population pressures on Java – related to 19th

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121 Unfortunately, the statistical surveys of Ngada district do not, rather unfortunately, include any information regarding population growth, birth numbers, or the ratio of birth to deaths. It is likely that Ngada, just as Indonesia as a whole, in the last few decades experienced population growth.
century colonial policies – resulted in a system of shared poverty by fragmenting land holdings into ever smaller pieces (so-called involution) (for a critical analysis of involution and shared poverty, see White (1983, 2007)). Yet, what is new is not so much general population growth and associated pressures on the land (i.e. sharing the land between siblings becomes increasingly difficult), but that the older generations keep hold of the land longer than before (inter-generational sharing is increasingly unlikely). Hence, in places where population growth until recently was not considered a pressing issue (e.g. in Ngada), it currently is.

Thus, it is increasingly difficult for young people in Ngada to become (small-scale) farmers. Other agricultural jobs are scarce, too. There are few agribusinesses that are of a scale that extends the family-based farm, and while agricultural day-labourers are common in Ngada, few educated young people aspire to such jobs. This is because agriculture work is physically hard and low paying. Moreover, educated young people in central Flores are not – according to themselves, their parents and families – supposed to work in agriculture.

Manufacturing and private sector jobs
In line with their parents’ ideas and general notions concerning development, all educated young people to whom I spoke aspired to non-agricultural jobs upon their return to Ngada. This is common in Indonesia (see, for example, Koning, 1997, p. 200; Nilan et al., 2011; Parker & Nilan, 2013, p. 156), as elsewhere in the Global South (White, 2012a), and certainly not unique to the current educated generation. For example, Parker (2003, p. 252) shows how Balinese secondary school students in the early 1990s aspired to 'modern occupations' in tourism and in health, but not in agriculture. So, if educated young people refrain from taking up agricultural jobs, what other jobs are there in Ngada? How easily can such jobs be attained? And how do the answers to these questions relate to educated young people’s un(der)employment?

There is virtually no manufacturing sector in central Flores. There is no industry in the area, except for one water-bottling factory that employs fewer than a dozen employees and a stone quarry that provides informal, dangerous and arduous work. Other private sector jobs, for example at banks or other private companies, are also rare, in particular for educated people. Few positions become available for clerical employees at, for example, banks, travel agencies, or at the few larger stores operating in Bajawa. Though the banking system, as well as other service sectors like telecommunications, is currently expanding in

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122 Similar ideas about future careers were also common in Bali in the 1980s (Branson & Miller, 1984, p. 277).
Ngada, this still provides only limited work to Ngada (young) people.\textsuperscript{123} For example, in October 2013, seven positions became vacant at the local branch of the national banking conglomerate Bank Negara Indonesia (BNI); more than 100 applicants were invited to take the application test, the first step in the hiring process. Other wage labour opportunities in the area include some small-scale trade with migrant traders, mainly in agricultural goods, while tourism remains a niche industry, creating a little work only in Bajawa (Curnow, 2007, pp. 70-71).\textsuperscript{124} There is some casual day-labour available (e.g. in road construction work), and self-employment is an option (e.g. selling agricultural produce in the market, owning a \textit{kios}, or operating transport activities). These jobs are not considered suitable to educated people. Positions as guards or as vendors in stores are similarly unattractive. Moreover, this kind of ‘wage labour and regular market trading are open to a small minority’ only (Curnow, 2007, p. 71).

\textit{Civil servant jobs: the PNS dream}

As agricultural jobs are not desired by educated young people, and manufacturing and private sector service jobs are rarely available, then what career aspirations do these young people have? This question I posed to many people in Ngada. All of them, including educated young people, replied that a civil servant position (\textit{Pegawai Negeri Sipil}, abbreviated as PNS) is the desired career option. Many of these replies were nuanced by stressing this was the case for everybody else, not for the respondent him- or herself.\textsuperscript{125} People mentioned four associated benefits of a PNS career: a fixed position and associated pay, a

\textsuperscript{123} In Bajawa there are bank offices of Bank Negara Indonesia (BNI), Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI) and Bank Nusa Tenggara Timur (Bank NTT). Indonesia’s largest telecommunications service company, Telkom, also has an office in Bajawa, which functions mainly as a service point for people wanting to use the internet.

\textsuperscript{124} Flores has recently been hailed in tourist brochures as the next ‘Bali’. In particular, west Flores has experienced a rapid increase in tourist numbers, especially since the late 2000s (see, for example, Erb, 2013). These tourists, either coming by plane or by boat from Bali (few make the overland trip Bali-Lombok-Sumbawa), mostly come for superb diving in the pristine waters of Komodo National Park, just off the coast from Labuan Bajo, the capital city of West Manggarai district. Komodo National Park also offers the only place in the world to spot the famed Komodo dragon in the wild. However, few tourists dare to take the infamously twisting road further inland, to Ruteng, Bajawa all the way to Kelimutu, and instead fly back to Bali after some days in the national park. For those who are a little ‘braver’ (or have more time to spend), and go further than Labuan Bajo, a ‘typical’ itinerary would probably look as follows: after a few days in Labuan Bajo, they move on to Bajawa (either with an overnight stop in Ruteng, or making the trip in one long day, an arduous trip over small, twisting and pot-holed roads). There, the tourists typically stay two nights, allowing them one day to explore the Ngada villages to enjoy the typical traditional architecture, as well as paying a visit to some warm water springs. Subsequently, travellers move on to Moni, a small village halfway between Ende and Maumere, where they stay overnight in order to wake up early and enjoy the sunrise over the fabled three-coloured lakes at the summit of Mount Kelimutu. After sunrise, travellers are able to take a plane back to Bali the same day through either Maumere or Ende airport. All in all, most travellers only stay a few days on Flores, and tourists typically combine some time on Flores with a more extended trip to Bali (and Java). Most tourists follow this Flores-itinerary by car with a private guide and sleep in hotels in the main towns. As a result, few tourists venture off ‘the beaten track’: hence, their economic impact is rather marginal. Besides a few hotels, there are some restaurants that benefit from the influx of tourists. Indeed, Bajawa is far from being ‘the new Ubud’ of Indonesia.

\textsuperscript{125} I return to this point shortly.
pension, access to cheap and good healthcare, and the work was considered as not too arduous (compared to manual labour).

To many of the villagers to whom I spoke, the benefits of these formal government jobs were embodied in the uniforms civil servants wear to their office. For example, when talking about (educated) young people’s career preferences, often people mentioned that young people want to look fancy and love to wear such a uniform (‘orang muda hanya mau pakai baju PNS’), as opposed to the dirty clothes associated with manual labour. Moreover, the uniform was associated with extended financial means, not only in terms of a fixed and relatively high salary, but also in terms of one’s solvency. Many people mentioned that a position as PNS would enable them to get a loan at the bank more easily than without such a position, especially when one would enter a bank wearing one’s uniform. Some even told me that being a PNS is a desired position because it can be a part-time job, and that – with a bank loan – businesses could be created as side-projects. For example, I was acquainted with several civil servants who either had a small kios, or an agricultural business. For example, they bred pigs or chickens or acquired land on which they employed day-labourers; only a few families owned large land holdings. Some of the nurses and midwives I knew also had side-jobs, and were consulted privately in return for a little money.

Civil servants were often content with their position, as they considered that their pay was relatively good, though it could be more, of course. They complained to me that young people nowadays are too much focussed on getting PNS jobs. During a discussion about educated young people and their career options, some PNS from the District’s Ministry of Agriculture told me that young people are scared ‘to get dirty’ (takut menjadi kotor). They were referring to young people who refuse to work in the fields any longer, but instead prefer office-based jobs, as these jobs pay well and do not involve manual labour. Therefore, in general, young people currently only want ‘instan’ (instant), a term these civil servants used to refer to typical instant drinks and food, meaning that young people opt for an ‘easy’ choice and want their desires fulfilled instantly, without doing much labour for it. Consequently, young people show few entrepreneurial skills, and do not contribute to the development of the district.¹²⁶

Adults not working for the government had rather ambivalent opinions about PNS positions. Frequently, they were critical of civil servants and depicted them as lazy, corrupt and nepotistic.¹²⁷ These adults used to refer to these characteristics to suggest that young people should search for jobs outside government institutions. Yet, at the same time, they

¹²⁶ The critique that young people are instan – i.e. opting solely for a PNS-career – is rather strange, as those making this critique are themselves are PNS.
¹²⁷ Such comments were also made towards (close) family members who were PNS, though merely as small talk and not when these PNS were working (i.e. wearing a uniform).
concluded that there was not much else to do in Ngada, and that being a PNS is a good career, as they associated it with the aforementioned benefits. Though these adults mentioned that young people do not want to work on the land, lack disiplin, and cannot work hard anymore, they nevertheless supported young people’s educational trajectories and their search for PNS careers.

Educated young people were also ambivalent about PNS work, and often made contradictory statements regarding PNS jobs. While they often told me they had no interest in taking up such jobs – unlike all the other young people, or so they told me – at other times they confided to me that being a PNS was their ultimate goal. This positive evaluation stems from the associated benefits of civil servant jobs, while the negative aura comes from a general critique of the government. With regards to the latter, corruption, nepotism and perceived mismanagement of projects – e.g. the poor state of the roads or lack of sufficient facilities at village-schools – were frequently mentioned as examples of poor government performance. Moreover, young people, for example Echiel, Jasinta and Alfons, also explained to me that they thought PNS positions were ‘boring’ (bosan) and less ‘free’ (kurang bebas) of opportunity to develop oneself and the community.

Despite these explanations, most young people admitted that they wanted to apply for a PNS position. This is mostly due to the financial benefits and security of such careers. Moreover, agricultural jobs are not an option, while manufacturing and private sector jobs are virtually absent in Ngada. It therefore makes sense that these young people aspire to government work: there is not much else. For example, many people answered my queries about young people’s career priorities with the remark, ‘They all want to become a PNS because there is no other option’ (tidak ada pilihan). Hence, while disliking PNS jobs, young people ambivalently aspire to such positions. However, civil servant positions are increasingly difficult to obtain in Ngada.

In Ngada, issues of un(der)employment amongst educated young people are closely related to a hiring freeze by the local government. Since 2011, the District’s government has not announced any new job openings in its institutions. The reason for this, as some administrators told me, is that the local government lacks sufficient financial resources

128 The suggestion that young people in Flores are reluctant to apply for government jobs – and only do so because there are so few other options – is supported by a study done amongst 3565 high school girls and boys (about equally distributed over both genders with median age of 16) in nine locations across Indonesia (Bali, Central Java, Ende (Flores), Jakarta, Lombok, Solo, South Sulawesi, West Sumatra and Yogyakarta). With regards to job aspirations, only a minority of the respondents (7.6 per cent) desires a career as civil servant. Of all research locations, only in Central Java did young people consider government white-collar jobs as most desirable, as there were virtually no other job opportunities in the region. In other research locations, respondents rather wanted to become a professional (33 per cent; e.g. a doctor or accountant). As can be expected, less than 1 per cent of the respondents wishes to become a farmer, even though 16 per cent of the children’s fathers were farmers (Nilan et al., 2011).
from ‘Jakarta’ to hire new employees. These administrators, including high-ranking officials from the local Ministries of Health, Planning and Education, as well as the District’s leader, complained to me about the lack of financial support, as Jakarta-based departments have established that the ratio between Ngada’s population and the expenditures on PNS-salaries implies that no further investments in the bureaucracy are needed.\footnote{Despite Indonesia’s decentralisation (e.g. otonomi daerah, or ‘regional autonomy’) since Suharto’s fall in 1997, human resource management remains remarkably guided by centralist tendencies. These tendencies mainly stem from inconsistent and contradictory laws implemented since Reformasi (see, for example, Turner, Imbaruddin, & Sutiyono, 2009). These laws create confusion at the local level, obstruct transparency about budget allocation and provide incentives for nepotism and corruption.} As a result, un(der)employment of educated young people is an increasingly pressing issue in Ngada.

Un(der)employment of educated young people is a rather recent phenomenon in Ngada. Up until recently, it was relatively easy to obtain a government-supported job when one had finished a university degree. This was partly due to there being fewer applicants with university degrees, but also due to a burgeoning civil service, in particular in the early years of Reformasi.\footnote{Here, I refer to – what is generally known as – pemekaran (blossoming): the splitting of administrative units into smaller new ones, in an attempt to decentralise the formerly heavily centralised New Order state. The 1999 decentralisation laws (Law 22/1999 on Regional Government and Law 25/1999 on Fiscal Balance between the Central Government and the Regions) were implemented in 2001 and had a massive effect: between 1998 and 2012 the number of provinces increased from 27 to 34, the number of districts from 249 to 399, the number of sub-districts from 4,028 to 6,793, and the number of villages from 67,925 to 79,075. Due to this increase, government expenditures also increased. Currently, subnational government expenditures take up half of all government expenditures (Hill, 2014, pp. 2-4). The increase in administrative units and expenditure indicates an increase in personnel during these years as well.} The expanding local government was the direct result of a quickly changing national political landscape, in which many government tasks were transferred from the central to the local level. Consequently, many jobs on a district level became available throughout the 2000s.\footnote{In 2012 there were 4357 civil servants working in Ngada (1890 male; 2467 female), of whom 1296 had university degrees and 1453 had diploma-level degrees (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013b, p. 90).} During that same time, the Ngada health and education system expanded too, with several new health posts and schools being opened, creating work for nurses, as well as other health professionals, and teachers.\footnote{During the same time, the Ngada health and education system expanded too, with several new health posts and schools being opened, creating work for nurses, as well as other health professionals, and teachers.}

The expanding bureaucracy explains the following quote, made by a young female volunteer at a Bajawa health post:

When I went to university four years ago to study nursing, I already knew I had to come back to Ngada. But this wasn’t supposed to be a problem, as my sister also had returned about two years before me, and had easily found a job.

Currently, the District’s civil service is considered full, and with many PNS positions only (relatively) recently having been filled, the prospective personnel turnover (and thus the potential for vacant positions) is unfavourable for recent graduates in Ngada. Only through national and provincial hiring procedures, or via external funding (such as from
international NGOs) do fixed positions occasionally become available at local government departments. For example, while I was in Ngada, such positions became vacant in the Electoral Commission (these were temporary), in health (e.g. doctors and dentists), or via internationally financed projects (e.g. by Plan International and AusAid; these projects had mainly to do with health-related issues, such as maternal mortality and the effectiveness of local health posts). Since 2011, no new fixed contracts have been offered to, for example, teachers, nurses and midwives, or administrators. It remains unclear when new budgetary allocations will become available to expand the civil service again. The prospects for educated young people in Ngada are, therefore, rather bleak.

Despite this negative outlook, educated young people are often quite active and refrain from being idle. This is obvious amongst the honor teachers (and honor administrators, though there are few in such a position) and sukarela workers (e.g. nurses, midwives and dietitians). Even though most educated young people without a proper job, or without a honor or sukarela position, consider themselves unemployed (because they do not have their desired white-collar job), many are engaged in some form of (casual) employment, either unpaid or underpaid. Young people typically obtain such jobs through their social networks, activated – ironically – through the principles of budaya minta. Some of the young honor teachers told me they obtained their jobs through friends who already worked at that particular school, while most volunteers at the health post had siblings, aunts, or friends already employed at those same health stations. I heard multiple stories from senior administrators at Ngada’s Ministry of Health about how they were approached by villagers who tried to arrange positions at health posts for spouses, siblings or sons and daughters. Other young people told me how they went to visit all their family members engaged in government work, hoping to get a job at the government through them. As a result, many young people managed to get volunteering positions at their local health post or at the hospital (in particular, young women). Others had volunteering positions at the Church, or engaged in some casual employment for the local government, or took on construction work. Some helped their parents (or family) with work in the fields, gardens, or worked as ojek or bemo drivers, or as mechanics, repairing these ojek and bemo. None of these jobs comes with the financial benefits and security of a PNS job. Most educated young people thus become underemployed.

Obtaining work, either unpaid or underpaid, thus requires a network. Obviously, young people whose parents already work as civil servants (in particular in high-ranking positions) have more opportunities to secure desirable positions than young people without such networks (e.g. parents who work as small-scale farmers). Yet, as the labour market conditions have recently deteriorated in Ngada, good connections (i.e. social capital) are
less useful than before. Still, I heard many young people complaining about nepotism and corruption. According to them, relatively affluent people arrange favourable positions for their family, while young people from less affluent backgrounds are stuck with honor or sukarela jobs, or worse. As honor and sukarela positions have become desirable due to the absence of vacant PNS positions, I heard various stories of wealthy villagers taking care of younger family by arranging such positions. Due to these stories, the District’s Ministry of Health started to register all sukarela staff in order to keep track of the number of volunteers at the District’s health posts; at some point this resulted in a hiring freeze of sukarela workers at most of these posts. Similar policies were implemented in the District’s Ministry of Education, where anyone wishing to become an honor teacher at a public school needed to be centrally registered. However, Indonesia scores poorly on many corruption indexes (see, for example, the Corruption Perception Index from Transparency International (2014), in which Indonesia ranks 107th out of 175 countries). Corruption in accessing jobs exists, and social capital matters, even for positions that render educated young people de facto underemployed.132

Not becoming un(der)employed? Migration and entrepreneurship

To escape un(der)employment in Ngada there are two options for educated young people: they can either migrate, or they can become entrepreneurs. However, the latter option does not necessarily or immediately remedy precariousness associated with un(der)employment. Start-up businesses, after all, often resemble the conditions of informal work: they require hard work against low income, are insecure and without the benefits and protections of formal work. Yet, assuming that such businesses can be successful, entrepreneurship seems to be a good alternative to (waiting for) an honor or sukarela position (let alone a proper job). On a larger macroeconomic level, this idea of entrepreneurial spirit as a key to development is shared by many (e.g. Schoof, 2006; World Bank, 2006). Also in Ngada, people – including the young and educated, influenced by a dominant development discourse – consider entrepreneurial skills as the solution to educated young people’s un(der)employment, as new businesses create work not only for the entrepreneur, but also for others. However, these same people often remarked that young people failed to set up new businesses because young people have – what the civil servants of the Ministry of

132 Due to the hidden and illegal character of corruption and nepotism, and the (often) employed status of people favoured by it, these activities remain largely outside the scope of this thesis. However, I did ask about any need for bribes in order to obtain a government position, or passing government exams. The vast majority of the responses denied such bribes were currently necessary, though they had been in the past (during the New Order). One can question the truth of these answers based on the experiences of researchers in other areas of Indonesia. For example, Greg Acciaioli (personal communication) notes that in Sulteng (Central Sulawesi), bribes are essential to pass the PNS exam.
Agriculture had called – the mentality of instan: young people opt for the ‘easy’ choice, and want their desires fulfilled instantly, without doing much labour for it. These ideas were shared widely, including amongst young people talking about their peers.\textsuperscript{133}

Despite critiques of young people’s lack of entrepreneurial skills, in general, people did not blame them for this lack. Instead, they referred to four separate issues as underlying young people’s inability to be entrepreneurial. First, people blamed the education system for not teaching students to be creative and entrepreneurial. Second, people often referred to what they called the mindset of the Ngada economy (i.e. the buday minta) as not providing incentives to be successful. This critique was mostly expressed by educated young people, but regularly by villagers and civil servants too. To provide a contrast to this Ngada mentality, some people used to refer to Javanese or Chinese people, who were widely regarded as much more rational with regards to money and businesses.\textsuperscript{134} Third, people mentioned that government procedures obstructed the creation of businesses. This critique is backed by the World Bank ‘Doing Business’ report (2013, p. 198); in it, Indonesia ranks 120\textsuperscript{th} out of 189 countries for doing business. For the parameter ‘Starting a business’, Indonesia scores worse, and is ranked 175\textsuperscript{th}. Finally, people referred to their personal finances as hindering entrepreneurship. Many times, young people mused about getting a business started and becoming rich, though without getting concrete about what kind of business they wanted to start. Older people sometimes did the same. Yet, each of them ended their musing with the simple remark: ‘alas, there is no capital’ (tidak ada modal). Clearly, this is a reference to a lack of economic capital in Bourdieuan terms. However, this remark also articulates the inability of (educated young) people to overcome the issue of money: it was used as a way of putting things in perspective – ‘I’m just poor’ – and as if to say that there will never be enough money to create a business. In that way, it refers to people’s limited knowledge in relation to creating a business, as well as a lack of confidence that people can overcome money issues. Moreover, most people had no idea what kind of business to start, lacked social networks willing to provide relative large amounts of capital, and lacked prestige and status to attract fellow investors. Hence, tidak ada modal links to cultural, social and symbolic capital, too.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{133} Note that this critique on ‘the mentality of instan’ resembles young people’s critiques of the budaya minta.
\textsuperscript{134} In Bajawa, Javanese people owned several restaurants, while Chinese people owned the largest stores in town, just as they did several hotels.
\textsuperscript{135} I was acquainted with very few young people who had successfully opened a business. There were some exceptions: Alfons, for example, the IT-graduate from a Jakarta-based university, had bought a truck with the help of his extended family and had started a transport business. This shows that social capital is a vital aspect of overcoming issues of modal. Also, young (wo)men from affluent families in Bajawa sometimes work as contractors (kontraktor), but this was only profitable with the right status (symbolic capital) and connections (social capital) to the government, the main commissioner of projects in the region. I also met with a young man who had opened his own photocopy shop in Bajawa. He was quite successful, but really was the exception. In the villages around Bajawa, such entrepreneurship was absent.
This lack of capital is illustrated by a male sukarela from an isolated health post in the north of Ngada. When I asked him what other options there would be for him, if being a sukarela were not satisfactory any longer, he answered: ‘Then I will open a kios or a bengkel (motorbike workshop)’. On my way out of the village, home to a few hundred inhabitants only, I noticed there were already at least a dozen kios, and I saw some bengkel too. Aspiring to add yet another kios or bengkel to this arsenal of small shops or workshops – all selling basically the same goods or service – makes some sense, because in villages like these, people only spend money on a few selected items (e.g. cigarettes, instant noodles, phone credit, sugar, and maintenance of one’s motorbike). Kios or bengkel are risk-aversive entrepreneurial options and indicate that the business attitudes people show follow quite narrow and ‘traditional’ patterns. These local perspectives on entrepreneurship do not match hegemonic perspectives on development in organisations such as the World Bank, or at the national level. Hence, one can wonder how viable entrepreneurship, in terms of hegemonic neoliberal ideals, is in places such as rural Ngada.

Besides entrepreneurship, educated rural young people wishing to avoid un(der)employment have the option to migrate.136 Yet, we should not forget that these young people already have a history of migration: for their studies they went to cities away from their natal villages and, upon getting their degree, migrated back to these villages. Various motives underlie the young people’s decisions to return to their natal villages (see the previous chapter), and these motivations do not often lead to yet another migratory move. For example, often parents exert pressure upon their children (in particular on young women) to return to their natal villages. Though young people sometimes migrate, again, without their parents’ or family’s consent, this pressure, nonetheless, inculcates in many young people a moral obligation to stay at home. For example, Mako, whom we met a few times before, felt she could not leave her parents behind, though initially she really wanted to go back to Ende, where her then-boyfriend lived. Agus (24), a young man from Ngada’s isolated and impoverished north, told me most other (uneducated) young people from his village stayed in Makassar and Java. Responding to my question as to why he had not moved to these places, he told me: ‘I can’t leave my mother and sisters alone here...’

Nevertheless, migration is common from Ngada. Virtually every family has some family members in other parts of Indonesia, or even further afield. Nowadays, both young men and women travel to cities in Java and South Sulawesi, whereas a few generations ago women were much more restricted than today. Others go to Bali, Kupang, or even abroad, to Malaysia and Hong Kong. The decision to migrate is often not an irreversible decision,

136 One can argue that migration is entrepreneurial in nature too.
but rather has a temporary character (White, 2012b). For example, young people are encouraged by parents to move away from their village to seek further education or work. Often these people return, either compelled by their parents, or on a voluntary basis. They can do so to get married, raise children and take on an agricultural livelihood when land becomes available. Or they convert manual skills, learned in other parts of Indonesia, into a small (informal) workshop (e.g. woodcutter, carpenter, or a bengkel) in their natal village. Hence, I encountered many people with a history of migration in Bajawa and its surrounding villages. For instance, I met sisters and brothers (mostly without tertiary degrees) who took turns working in the city in order for one of them to care for the land, house, or parents. Others I met had just returned from time spent in Bali or Java and were planning their next move, still undecided as to whether and where to go. Also, educated young people who had returned from their studies in cities away from Ngada were not always sure they wanted to stay indefinitely in central Flores; many, for example, thought about going back to university in order to pursue a master’s degree.

Migration is a real option to young people, and many do seek their fortune in other places, often referred to as mencari uang/duit, seeking money. However, besides pull (work and education) and push (un(der)employment) factors, there are forces and reasons that prevent (young) people from migrating. These are the limits of capital, a moral obligation to contribute to the development of their community, parents, and feelings of belonging. With regards to capital, this is particularly relevant for desirable white-collar jobs. Manual jobs (i.e. jobs that do not require a (tertiary) degree) are easier to obtain in cities away from Ngada, yet educated young people do not feel content settling for a lesser job in the city. Hence, migration is mostly an endeavour in which uneducated people engage.

### Being un(der)employed: the implications

In this chapter’s final section, I will make three points. First, I exemplify what un(der)employment looks like in practice to these young people. I focus specifically on health post volunteers and honor teachers. Second, I explain how their un(der)employment is mediated by Ngada networks of interdependence. I argue that un(der)employed educated young people are absorbed by these networks, which also enable them to be active and contribute to the wellbeing of their communities. This might seem unproblematic, yet, and this is my third point, it is not. In fact, young people’s extended dependence on community networks makes them ‘remain young’, which delays the reproduction of these networks. Meanwhile, their precariousness is informed by feelings of disjuncture between their actual experiences in which they are dependent on their extended families and other community
networks, and their ideals of upward social mobility. These feelings imply that young people might not be inclined to reproduce the very networks on which they depend.

*Underemployment in practice: the case of the sukarela and guru honor*

In September 2013, I discussed underemployment with a high-ranking official in the District’s Ministry of Health. She mentioned that a few dozen volunteers (*sukarela*) were active in the District’s health posts and the Bajawa-based hospital. Several months later, around May 2014, this number had increased to almost 270. The official (rightly) anticipated that this number would expand even further. After hard negotiations with the District’s leader, she had arranged that from 2015 onward, honoraria (approximately Rp.650,000 per month; A$65) would be paid to 500 semi-volunteers.\(^{137}\)

The case of the *sukarela* makes clear that underemployment is an issue that is both profound and urgent in Ngada. Almost all *sukarela* had a recently acquired tertiary degree – more than half had a bachelor’s degree, others had a diploma-level degree – and their number increased rapidly. Until 2011, *sukarela* were virtually absent from Ngada health posts.\(^{138}\) Between 2013 and 2014, their number had tripled over the course of a few months, and almost doubled in the consecutive half year. Honorarium payments are now provided to 500 of such *sukarela*, a major improvement that is the result of the hard labour of a committed health officer.

Honorarium positions do have not have the benefits that permanent positions have; they do not provide security, a pension, and are significantly lower (about a quarter) than proper PNS salaries. Honorarium payments, thus, do not solve issues of underemployment. In fact, though it certainly eases the issue in the short term, in the long run, giving 500 *sukarela* an honorarium payment institutionalises underemployment. This is because hiring 500 *honor* implies a ‘pushdown effect’ (Keyfitz, 1989, pp. 46-48): as young people take up jobs below their standard (or expected salary), ‘the wage premium for education (the earnings differential between higher and lower levels of education)’ declines (White, 2012b, p. 7). This is a self-enforcing mechanism: as educated young people engage in jobs that represent a lesser premium for their education, fewer appropriate jobs will become available. After all, due to the pushdown effect, labour is cheap, providing less

\(^{137}\) Before January 2015, the number of *sukarela* had been frozen at the May 2014-level, rendering *sukarela* positions scarce and desirable. The January 2015 increase in available positions (and their promotion to *honor* level) created new opportunities for graduates (albeit limited, considering the speed at which the number of *sukarela* had previously expanded). These new positions were created mainly in the Bajawa-based hospital, while hardly any new positions were created at village-level health posts.

\(^{138}\) *Sukarela* are not new to Indonesia. Though they do not feature prominently in the literature, other scholars working in Indonesia have indicated that they were present in villages (e.g. in Bali in 1981 – Parker, personal communication). However, the current numbers (in Ngada there are hundreds) extend beyond the numbers most other scholars previously encountered.
incentive for governments to create the much needed properly paid positions. The pushdown effect also affects the premium of lower levels of education. As educated young people take up jobs below their standard, lesser educated young people have to take a lower premium as well. Increasing numbers of honor employees thus aggravates underemployment, not just amongst educated young people, but for any entrant onto the Ngada labour market.

In Ngada’s education sector, the pushdown effect was discernible as well. At the various schools I visited, honor teachers made up the majority of the staff. One school even had only one PNS-teacher, while the other ten teachers had honor contracts. Meanwhile, in 2013, more than 100 young people, all with bachelor’s degrees, were registered at the District’s Ministry of Education, hoping for an honor contract at a public school (they were thus not working, waiting for a position that would render them de facto underemployed). At the many private schools in the area the situation was not much different.

Remarkably, young people often had little problem with their underpaid and insecure position at health posts and schools. When I asked Mako, an honor teacher, whether she was searching for a non-honor position, she looked at me puzzled: ‘Why would I do that? I already have a job!’ Clearly, she did not consider her honor contract an issue. When I asked her about her limited salary (Rp.650,000; A$65),¹³⁹ she told me: ‘What do I need the money for? I already have a house, and my parents pay for my food. And if I need something, I can always get some money from my parents or my older brother’. Other educated young people, either working as a sukarela or as a honor teacher, were less happy with their salary (or the absence thereof), and complained to me that it was not enough. Nevertheless, like Mako, they often did not consider themselves to be underemployed. Myra (24), for example, a young woman from Ronaga who volunteered as a nurse at the Bajawa hospital was quite surprised when I told her I wanted to know more about her situation: ‘Why Mathias? I have a job!’ Similarly, though Fenny – together with Philip, my host – was very aware of my project, its topic and goals, I found out only weeks before I left that one of her younger brothers was an honor teacher in a remote village in the north of Ngada. It appeared that Fenny had not really realised that he – though we had talked about him several times – could fall within the scope of my research as well.

Of course, Mako and Myra are right: honor teachers and sukarela have jobs. The un(der)paid character of these jobs is not considered much of a problem in Ngada. However, it should be noted that Mako and Myra, as well as Fenny’s younger brother and most others working in such positions, are relatively recent graduates. Often these young

¹³⁹ ‘Similar to nurses and midwives, teachers sometimes have access to other sources of income, for example from giving private tuition. I had no indication this was the case for Mako.’
people are thrilled at least to have a job. Myra, for example, told me several times that she thanked God for her *sukarela* position. Here, we see the pushdown effect: (educated) young people were aware of the current tight conditions of the Ngada labour market and, as a result, were relatively satisfied with a lesser premium on their education. However, these educated young people were still living with their parents; they had recently returned from their studies away from Ngada, and did not have concrete plans to get married, yet. Therefore, in a manner similar to Mako, these young people did not really need a PNS salary, as they could rely on their parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, and other family members. Their first steps in the labour market were, thus, supported by the same networks that had enabled them to obtain an education in the first place.

*The mediation of un(der)employment*

Underemployment at schools and health posts was rather visible, just as it was amongst the *honan* contract workers at Ngada’s government offices, though there were few in this latter category. Other forms of underemployment include young people working on temporary contracts for NGOs, mainly in the field of agricultural livelihoods and health (in Ronaga there were two such NGOs), the government (e.g. in the 2014 Election Commission), or for the Church (e.g. administration or facility management). When jobs such as these were unavailable, young women often stayed in and near the house, helped their mothers with household tasks, and worked on their family’s land. Men, too, stayed close to the house, helping with jobs around the house and on the land (though, to a lesser degree than their female peers). Also, they worked as *ojek* driver, in construction – sometimes further afield (e.g. for road maintenance) – or temporarily moved to other towns and cities, staying with family and doing some work there (e.g. helping to build a family member’s house). Hardly anyone could be called unemployed, or idle – even though educated young people considered all work that is not (or does not resemble) a white-collar job as unemployment.

Though educated young people could often been seen ‘hanging-out’ with friends and peers, family and neighbours on the street (*nongkrong* or *main-main*; see next chapter), this was not atypical practice, as such socialising forms the very fabric of the Ngada community. Moreover, through their socialising and networks – activated through courtesy visits, drinking coffee and doing small errands for relatively affluent family members and neighbours – educated young people (particularly young men) tried to organise and arrange new (temporary) jobs. In short, they made use of Ngada’s community economy.

The community economy and the networks of interdependence it entails are crucial in understanding the position of un(der)employed educated young people in Ngada. These networks are mainly organised through the House and the *weid* (and, to a lesser extent, other
village-based networks, such as arisan and weekly prayer groups with neighbours), and often referred to as keluarga besar. In societies such as Ngada, which are (formerly) based on subsistence farming, these networks play a vital role in securing one’s livelihood. They are part of what Scott (1976, p. 3) has called the ‘social arrangements’ of the ‘moral economy of the peasant’. These arrangements include ‘patterns of reciprocity, forced generosity, communal land, and work-sharing’ (Scott, 1976, p. 3) and, together with technical arrangements, such as certain food production methods, primarily function as a ‘subsistence insurance’ (1976, p. 5). These arrangements help to ensure that community members survive in times of deprivation.

Rural poverty, social security and networks of interdependence have been much debated over the years. With regards to Indonesia, the locus of these debates has often been Java (e.g. Koning & Huskens, 2006), and these debates concern mostly a ‘discussion on inequality and poverty versus sharing and support’ (Nooteboom, 2015, p. 94). The notion that rural Indonesians are part of networks of sharing and support comes from a line of research that stresses the relatively egalitarian social structure of ‘the village’ (e.g. Geertz, 1963); others have strongly argued against such a position (e.g. White, 1983). In line with this latter argument, more recently, scholars have discussed how New Order policies, globalisation, migration and financial crises (most notably the Asian Financial Crises) rendered ‘[a]ccess to … communal institutions … increasingly exclusionary and limited’ (Koning & Huskens, 2006, p. 25). This means that local networks of interdependence may provide support in times of setbacks, but that this support is often restricted.

Also in Ngada, the keluarga besar and other networks of interdependence are entangled in rapid developments. Currently, most Ngada farmers are not solely producing for their household any longer. Though remaining mostly small-scale farmers, they have been producing for the market too; coffee, cloves, chillies, candlenuts, cacao, and vanilla are being farmed for external markets, besides vegetables and fruit for one’s own and local consumption. Ngada cultivators are part of global flows of commodities. Moreover, in Bajawa and surrounding villages (and, to a lesser extent in places such as Aimere, Riung and Golewa, the other main ‘towns’ in the district) families increasingly supplement their agricultural income with income from wage labour. Also, remittances from family members working elsewhere are an important source of income in Ngada. Nevertheless, a ‘subsistence ethic’ (Scott, 1976, p. 2) and its associated social arrangements are still discernible. This is mainly due to the House remaining an important organising principle in arranging access to land and rural production (Currow, 2007, 2008). Nowadays, many people still (partly or indirectly) depend on agricultural production, and perceive that they
rely for their wellbeing on their ancestors’ blessing. Due to this dependence and reliance, a collective responsibility towards each other’s livelihoods remains more or less the norm.

As we have seen, Ngada social arrangements enable young people to pursue a tertiary degree. This has some ambiguous results: to young people and their parents, an education is an important mechanism for transcending the level of the small-scale farmer, getting a PNS job and helping to create a more developed community. Yet, the achievement of these goals will potentially untie the complex connections and arrangements upon which these social networks are based. That is, educated young people are critical of mutual dependency, as they consider that these relations hinder entrepreneurial development. One can wonder whether in the future young people will still be able to rely on networks of interdependence during their education-to-work transitions.

For now, it seems that un(der)employed educated young people in Ngada still can. They are using the subsistence insurance these networks entail, while they wait for a suitable job to open up. They use their networks and the mechanisms of the *budaya minta* to arrange a volunteering or a *guru honor* position. They are ‘absorbed’ by their networks, which feed them, house them, and help them to get the odd job, or better. They live with their parents, have dinner with uncles and aunts, work temporarily for neighbours and family further afield, and run errands for affluent neighbours. They do not need to worry about socio-economic and ritualistic obligations towards kin and the community, as their un(der)employment exempts them from contributing money, agricultural produce, or livestock to rituals, weddings, funerals, *arisan* and prayer groups.

Networks of interdependence enable young people to take the time to develop themselves. In Ngada, many young people feel that without knowing the right people and having the right experience, a job in, for example, a health post or hospital would be out of reach. A position as *sukarela*, until recently still easily obtainable, provides the opportunity to achieve both (creating a network and work experience). At the same time, such jobs give these young people the feeling that they contribute to their community’s wellbeing. Instead of frantically searching for some casual work from which they would have to eke out a meagre existence, educated young people can either volunteer at Church or at a health post, or work as a *guru honor* at a local school. These young people frame their work in terms of being a positive force within the community. Moreover, young people can invest time in, for example, personal development through Church-supported seminars, or help out local NGOs.

All of this does not mean that young people refrain from aspiring to a permanent job and associated income. Indeed, volunteering at health posts, government institutions, the Church or private organisations, and participating in personal development seminars,
are all opportunistic attempts of young people to become more successful in Ngada’s tight labour market. As an educated young man explained to me once, while we discussed his volunteering activities for the Church (he organised the yearly soccer tournament for Ronaga’s primary schools):

It’s good that people know you through your activities for the Church, or that you help organise some sporting events for the local primary school. Then people know you have ‘spirit’ (*semangat*) for the community. People know you’re a good person, and they know that you want to contribute to the development of the community. People will talk about you, and that can help you get a job.

Volunteering and working on an honorarium are intended to be temporary activities, and as a step-up to a proper PNS position. However, due to the absence of any open PNS positions, in Ngada, the ‘temporary’ is increasingly becoming extended. Accordingly, educated young people extend their dependence on others as well. This extended dependence has major ramifications, most notably educated young people’s postponed transition into social adulthood, and feelings of disjuncture.

*The precariousness of un(der)employment: social vulnerability and feelings of disjuncture*

To understand the effects of young people’s un(der)employment in Ngada, I utilise the notion of precariousness. It conveys a powerful message of vulnerability within a global system in which declining government interference in – and reduced regulations for – markets has increased competition within and between these markets, and has enhanced international flows of capital and goods. Due to these processes, ‘workers [need to] compete for ... jobs globally’ (Hewison & Kalleberg, 2013, p. 396, Italics in original). Initially used to refer to the flexibilisation, casualisation and informalisation of labour arrangements in Europe (e.g. Neilson & Rossiter, 2008; Pedaci, 2010; as discussed in Chapter 2, these authors utilise the notion of ‘precarity’), precariousness is currently also used to discuss the global dimensions of labour exploitation, but even more so the looming threat of it (e.g. Banki, 2013b; Standing, 2011). As people – or whole areas, such as Flores – become (are) peripheral to dynamic global flows of money, workers have relatively little bargaining power vis-à-vis employers, rendering them precarious.

In Ngada, many educated young people are without formal employment, or are underemployed (e.g. as *sukarela* or as *honor*). They are exploited in terms of wages (i.e. often they do much unpaid work), their work does not offer the benefits of formal positions and they are prime targets for lay-offs if budgetary pressures demand it (this is particularly valid for the *guru honor*). Un(der)employed educated young people in Ngada are thus precarious
(though, to be sure, their position is quite different from, for example, precarious migrant workers in export-oriented factories in mainland Southeast Asia). They are confronted by unfavourable dynamics of the local labour market, but also by their marginal position in global flows of money and goods. This marginality informs feelings of disjuncture. As discussed, educated young people imagine themselves as the vanguard of (national) development and positive change. They have internalised a feeling of responsibilisation, and failure to live up to their modern expectations – due to the absence of appropriate jobs – is a major feature of the experience of precariousness.

The precariousness of un(der)employment is mediated remarkably well by Ngada social networks of interdependence. This is not unproblematic. Due to their un(der)employment, educated young people prolong their dependence on these networks and ‘remain young’. That is because in Ngada, as in the rest of Indonesia, social adulthood is associated with marriage, while marriage, in turn, is associated with financial independence – in particular for men. For example, while at an isolated health post in the north of Ngada, I asked some sukarela (three young women, one young man) at what point their volunteering position would not be satisfactory any longer. Their reply was, ‘When we want to get married.’140 I heard similar replies often. They imply that dependence on extended family networks is accepted for an unmarried person, but that marriage requires financial independence. Young people are thus ‘young’ longer than in times when jobs were plenty and educational degrees – more or less – guaranteed financial independence.

As Scott (1976, p. 5) notes, ‘It is all too easy, and a serious mistake, to romanticize ... [the] social arrangements [of the moral economy]’. In Ngada a subsistence livelihood is more or less guaranteed to all community members, yet dependence on communal resources implies a significant loss of status and autonomy. With regards to educated young people, it is not so much loss of status and autonomy, as the postponement of autonomy and independence, and hence of social adulthood. Moreover, gossip and envy are the main operators and guardians of systems of reciprocity, making such systems less comfortable than one might expect (Scott, 1976, p. 5).141

140 These four sukarela were 23 and 24 years old and had already volunteered for at least two years at this particular health post.

141 Ngada people – including the young and educated – often complained to me about gossip. Young women, in particular, were subject to gossip, mostly from senior females (family and neighbours) about proper behaviour or about the need to get married. Young men, too, complained about gossip, and how it made courtship difficult (e.g. due to gossip it was difficult for these young men to get close to young women). This gossiping, however, was not directed at them due to their educated status, but rather because they were young. More generally, gossip is common in Ngada, and features prominently in most conversations. It concerns many topics, ranging from the way men treat their wives, to how families work their land and protect their ancestors’ heritage. Also, gossip is closely related to envy. In particular when families gain wealth and influence, it is common that they become subject to gossip and conspiracy theories of corruption, nepotism and black magic (ilmu hitam).
Thus, un(der)employment renders educated young people in Ngada socially vulnerable. However, parents and other community members did not often blame young people for their inability to find work. Multiple times parents remarked to me, when I asked about their un(der)employed children, ‘tidak ada pilihan’, ‘there is no other option for them, but to become un(der)employed’, or ‘what can they do, there is no work?’ They were pragmatic with regards to their children’s inability to obtain properly salaried employment, also due, I believe, to people’s familiarity with vulnerable conditions that are inherent in (former) peasant subsistence economies. Educated young people’s underemployment, as well as their resulting vulnerability, fits these arrangements.

However, the vulnerability inherent in subsistence and small-scale farming is fundamentally different from the experiences of un(der)employed educated young people. Despite being enmeshed in global flows of capital and subject to pervasive images of modern consumption, government policies, increased mobility, and mass education and communication, the Ngada community economy is bound to a local cosmology and morality. Its principles connect to indigenous temporalities which are connected to the agricultural cycle. Original Ngada temporalities are sophisticated and include the movement of the sun and moon, the stars, the coming and going of wet and dry periods and garden stages. These notions are cyclic (Djawanai, 1983, pp. 238-245). They relate to the unity of ancestors, land and the community. These links are commemorated not only in ritual, but also by such mundane activities as working the land and eating and sharing the fruits of labour. Indigenous Ngada temporal perspectives relate to a feeling of communality, making people collectively responsible for the well-being of the community.

Modern temporalities, by contrast, are based on abstract notions of individual progress and being successful, for example, in school and in the labour market. These notions include time perspectives that are linear. Linear notions of time and associated life-stage models are intricately connected to one’s experiences at school, as one progresses from one year to the next, and moves from school to school with progressing age. It creates an individualised sense of getting somewhere (e.g. there is an expectation of ‘becoming someone’ by means of obtaining a job), while simultaneously leaving something behind (childhood/being young) (e.g. J. Cole & Durham, 2007; Jeffrey, 2010b, pp. 467-468).

Educated young people are instilled with notions of individualised progress, being successful and responsible. Moreover, due to a strong government discourse of pembangunan (development) and kemajuan (progress), educated young people feel they need to contribute to the development of their community. In particular, they wish to change
what they see as the passive ‘mindset’ of the peasant and the budaya minta. They wish to do so because to them rural practices represent backward agricultural lifestyles.

Young people’s social vulnerability contests reproduction: by delaying their social adulthood they fail to become contributors to Ngada networks of interdependence, while they depend on them for longer. Though problematic in the short term, this delay may not necessarily be an issue in the long term, assuming that this delay is not unduly prolonged, and that these young people will reproduce the community economy once they become socially adult (i.e. when they obtain a properly paid job – or, in some cases, are absorbed into the agricultural sector – and get married). However, one can wonder whether they will. That is, the experience of precarity is not solely characterised by social vulnerability, but is also informed by a disjuncture between an individualised desire for upward social mobility, and the un(der)employed reality. Educated young people do not consider agriculture – the foundation of networks of interdependence – as an option. They also critique the budaya minta and practices of interdependence. As a result, the networks that together constitute the totality of webs of interdependence lose validity as organising principle for production and safeguarding livelihoods in the future. The experience of disjuncture thus implies that un(der)employed educated young people, once they reach social adulthood, may not be inclined to reproduce the very networks on which they now depend.

This may sound rather dramatic and problematic. However, in Ngada I found most educated young people – though critical of the peasant mindset – rather active, positive, and hopeful about their futures in rural Ngada. By contrast, prior studies into un(der)employed young people have often found worrying trends, most notably intense boredom amongst young urban men. For example, in Banda Aceh, the capital of Aceh province, young male punks gather each day in public spaces, becoming visible, and defying Islamic moral codes by drug usage, ‘consuming’ pornographic material through their mobile phones, and flirting with young women. Due to the public nature of these acts, young punks become easy victims of state-sponsored violence, rendering them marginal, yet resilient enough to occupy the city with their public display of boredom (Jauhola, 2015).

In Craig Jeffrey’s (2010b) study of young men in urban India, many of whom are hyper-educated (having multiple degrees), the activity of ‘timepass’ is the central concept.

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142 Little contemporary research has been done in Indonesia with regard to educated young people in rural areas, but similar ideas about education ‘closing off’ rural livelihoods have been noted in India (Morarji, 2010). See also Parker (2003, p. 252) and Branson and Miller (1984, p. 277), who found that young people in Bali had no aspiration to work in agriculture in the early 1990s and 1980s respectively.

143 See also Parker and Nilan (2013, p. 147), who also found that young people in various parts of Indonesia were remarkably positive, despite negative socio-economic outlooks.
Though educated, these young men are unable to find appropriate work, and, as a result, feel themselves frustrated as they are unable to comply with hegemonic temporalities (e.g. getting a job). Therefore, they just ‘pass the time’, hang around on the streets and meet with other young men who are in similar situations. In these gatherings, young men from different backgrounds come together, create new solidarities and transcend ethnic, class and social boundaries. Hence, we see that, despite challenges in converting cultural capital (educational degrees) into economic capital (a job), young men deploy agency and create alternative modes of socialising and new identities. Nevertheless, their shared experience remains one of uselessness, inability to fit in, and feelings of boredom.

In Egypt and the Middle East, young men are engaged in ‘waithood’, as they ‘wait for the pieces of their lives to fall together’ (Assaad & Ramadan, 2008, p. 1; cf. Honwana, 2014). In particular, young men are confronted by increased costs for their marriage due to rising prices for houses – owning one is an important condition for marriage – so they postpone marriage and, accordingly, protract their youth. In urban Mali, relatively well-educated but unemployed young men are referred to as thé-chomeur (French; literally, the ‘unemployed tea’), as they sit all day around portable charcoal stoves preparing and drinking sweet green tea, passing time (e.g. Soares, 2010, p. 246). As Soares notes, the thé-chomeur is a recent phenomenon due to developments similar to conditions in Indonesia, namely, too many educated young people for too few government jobs. The thé-chomeur is largely an urban phenomenon: young people are mostly educated in cities, and their hoped-for jobs should be there too. Besides, in rural areas, young men – such as the thé-chomeurs – are less likely to come to such novel practice, as they are expected to engage in agricultural labour.

This latter observation is true for Ngada as well: educated young men and women obviously had little interest in agriculture, yet often they accompanied their families to the field. They did this reluctantly, and only when they were not engaged in other activities, such as working as sukarela or honor, or when they did the odd job at home, or with their family, or when they did construction work, filled their days being an ojek or bemo driver, or engaged in activities that might evolve into some work (e.g. volunteering at the government, at the Church, or at village gatherings). Thus, though these young people often considered themselves unemployed it is important to note that they were not idle.

In fact, un(der)employed educated young people are ‘good’ community members: they might be prolonging their ‘being young’ and they might challenge the reproduction of networks of interdependence in the long run, but at the moment they are part of the

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144 To be sure, these activities were seen by young people and their parents as temporary, though I suspect in some cases they will not be.
community economy. I would argue that their non-idleness, often involving voluntary or underpaid work, is a manifestation of this community economy, as this work is arranged and enabled through an activation of the budaya minta. Moreover, in a way, through volunteering or underpaid work, young people are contributing to networks of interdependence: they are ‘giving back to society’, a desire so often and strongly stated by these educated young people. They feel responsible towards their community, which explains why the community feels responsible for these young people, too (i.e. it eases their absorption into networks of interdependence).

Why, then, are troubled education-to-work transitions in other parts of the developing world often connected to concepts like timepass, waithood, or the thé-chômeurs, while Ngada young people are relatively active and optimistic and enmeshed in the community economy (though in a qualified sense, as they critique this community economy and through various mechanisms both delay and challenge its reproduction). What is the difference between young people in Ngada, and those from aforementioned examples (India, Egypt, and Mali)? The answer, I think, lies in the rural situatedness of these Ngada young people. Most other studies are urban-based, focussing upon educated youth in cities and towns who are displaced from their rural natal communities. Indeed, Ngada social networks of interdependence ensure that underemployment does not necessarily lead to deprivation of subsistence or of social activity: social networks accommodate them as active, and – despite their social and job market vulnerability – give them a place within the community economy and social order.

Young people’s absorption in the community economy is not an automatic result of the existence of the community economy. Their role in networks of interdependence, specifically their voluntary and underpaid work, is mainly due to the young people themselves; they want to be active, as they have just finished a degree. Young people want to convert their degree into a job, an income, and into an opportunity to bring ideals of development into practice. However, without networks of mutual help, their activities might go in a completely different direction. For example, they might sooner migrate in search of (low-skilled) jobs that can provide a livelihood, or they might voice their discontent about their un(der)employed status and their inability to comply with hegemonic life-stage models in ways that are rather negative. Rural social networks prevent young people from doing so; they are backed-up by family and the community at large, and as vulnerability is not unfamiliar to these networks, pressures of un(der)employment are mitigated.
Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, I have described the current state of the Indonesian and Ngada labour market. A worrying picture emerged: obtaining a job in Ngada is difficult for educated young people, especially when they aspire to properly paid and fixed positions. Hence, educated young people in Ngada experience troubled education-to-work transitions, and many take on volunteering or underpaid positions, for example at schools and health posts.

In many places in the Global South, young adults’ un(der)employment has rather negative connotations (e.g. boredom, timepass and waithood). Indeed, in Ngada educated young people are precarious, too, rendering them socially vulnerable. Falling back onto networks of extended family means lower status and less autonomy. They cannot marry and cannot become socially accepted adults. However, this vulnerability enables them to be ‘good’ community members. As they remain young, they are relatively easily absorbed by community safety networks, and are enabled to act responsibly towards the community (i.e. they frame their volunteering and underpaid work in terms of contributing to the wellbeing of the community).

Nevertheless, their un(der)employment remains problematic. Whereas the delay of social reproduction and the postponement of social adulthood is problematic in the short term, the challenge un(der)employed educated young people pose to networks of interdependence – informed through their feelings of being educated and modern – is problematic in the long term. Educated young people critique networks of interdependence, the budaya minta, and do not aspire to agricultural livelihoods any longer. They wish to change what they consider backward and passive village mentalities.

As educated young people’s precariousness establishes that they remain young, the actual challenge they pose to networks of interdependence is limited. That is, they might not contribute to these networks once they become socially adult, but at the moment this is irrelevant due to their ‘being young’. And as their ‘being young’ is mediated by networks of interdependence, it seems that educated young people are firmly enmeshed in their communities. To check whether this is also valid in terms of being immersed in Ngada webs of sociality, in the next chapter I discuss how ‘being young’ relates to young people’s social lives. Through a discussion of un(der)employed educated young people’s friendships and peer relations, I discuss whether they tend to reproduce Ngada’s dense webs of sociality that underlie the community economy or they generate novel practice.
Socialising, peer relations and friendships

Introduction
The discussion regarding the promise of education and un(der)employed educated young people’s vulnerability and precariousness has highlighted the complex, sometimes contradictory and ambivalent ways these young people are connected to processes of cultural production and reproduction, in particular within the domain of the community economy, one of the three domains I have demarcated before. Here, in this chapter, I focus on young people in relation to the other two domains, ‘marriage and kinship’ and ‘religious beliefs and customary practices’. I do so by focusing on educated young people’s socialising, their peer relations and their friendships. That is because I argue, in line with Paul Willis (1981), that within these relations – particularly close peer relations (i.e. friendships) – cultural production and cultural reproduction occur. As Jane Dyson (2010, p. 495) notes, there is a ‘complicated relationship between friendship and dominant social and cultural ideas’. In this relationship, friendship has the capacity ‘at some moments to generate critique and novel practice and at other moments mirror and reinforce dominant structures’ (Dyson, 2010, p. 484). This means that we can investigate, through a discussion of peer relations and friendships, not only how young people engage with each other and act in regards to village life, but also whether or not they trigger change in these villages.

In rural Ngada, there are few sites where young people can socialise amongst themselves. Hence, peer relations and friendships are closely related to, and part of, general (i.e. non-peer) socialising. There are thus three interconnected levels of sociality: general socialising, peer relations and friendships. A focus on peer relations and friendships thus implies we embed educated young people within larger social contexts. For example, young people and their peers not only frequently talk about topics such as family, love, marriage and customary practices; these conversations often take place within or close to spaces where families live and where weddings and other rituals occur. A descriptive approach to peer relations and friendships within specific places (sites) enables me to discuss un(der)employed educated young people in relation to their family, weddings, religious beliefs and customary practices.

In Indonesia, the word teman (friend) is used for both peers and friends. Also in Ngada, un(der)employed educated young people seemingly do not differentiate between
friends and peers when they use the word *teman* (though, below, I argue that there is a difference). This makes it difficult to disentangle the various levels of sociality. Still, my main concern is with friendships (and friend-like close peer relations), as these relations are linked closest to theories of cultural production and reproduction. Therefore, below, I first expand on this understanding of friendship. Then, I explain how friendships relate to (close) peer socialising, and how they connect to general socialising. I do so by specifying sites and discussing how peer relations and friendships are enacted in these sites. Subsequently, in the final section of this chapter, I link peer relations and friendships to being un(der)employed and educated, and discuss in what way educated un(der)employed young people’s friendships and peer relations relate to either the reproduction of dominant social structures or to novel practices.

A remark regarding the fieldwork pragmatics of gender is in order. Because I am a male I had relative easy access to groups of male peers and friends, as well as to mixed gender peer and friend groups. However, it was difficult for me to be part of groups of female peers and friends. Hence, in my discussion the gender representation is not always balanced.

**Unpacking friendship**

Intimate human relationships, such as friendship and love, have only recently become a mainstream subject of ethnographic study. This relatively recent interest is linked to increasing individualisation in Western societies. Due to an assumed decrease in the significance of kinship, social class and religious identities in contemporary late modern societies, friendship and love have been theorised as new anchors of personal security and identity (Giddens, 1992; Lindholm, 1998, p. 243). I, too, will argue that peer relations and friendships in Ngada are increasingly important to the lives of young people. Due to increased mobility – particularly the circular migration of young people between their natal communities and the cities of their studies – alternative ways of communicating (e.g. by means of mobile phones), and new ways of thinking about existing family networks of support (as discussed in the previous chapters), friendships and socialising have gained in relative significance to educated young people.145

In the West, up until the 20th century, friendship was considered to be a relation between equals based on free choice and affection (see, for example, Montaigne, 1972 [1603]), as opposed to commercial and casual instrumentalist relationships (Strickland, 2010). However, contemporary research connects friendship to people’s interests, relations

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145 Note that in Ngada, especially when compared to Western societies, kinship and religious identities remain relatively important.
of power and social inequalities. In this research, two directions stand out. First, much research has focussed on friendship’s ‘empowering potential’ (Dyson, 2010, p. 483). Instead of thinking about friendship solely as a personal and non-politically motivated relationship, this approach considers friendships also as channels to formulate alternatives to, or critiques of, dominant social structures. This empowering capacity of friendship has particularly come to the fore in research about young people who face declining state support, unfavourable economic circumstances and changing social structures. For example, Craig Jeffrey (2010b) notices in his study of the daily experience of unemployed educated urban men in Northern India that their acts of friendship transcend kinship ties, or religious, caste and class identities. Amongst artisanal gold miners in West Africa, friends mitigate poverty by means of sharing income, and friends overcome ethnic and regional backgrounds, reducing risks in highly diverse and fluid social constellations (Gratz, 2004). Friendships have also been central to studies about street children, for example in Accra (Mizen & Ofose-Kusi, 2010), Moscow (Stephenson, 2001) and Yogyakarta (Beazley, 2002), where young people find ‘solace in one another’ in a hostile world (Beazley, 2002, p. 1667).

Others, most notably Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1995 [1977]), have highlighted how friendships are also a ‘medium of unequal social reproduction’ (Dyson, 2010, p. 484). Friends are primarily selected based on taste and social class. This implies that friendship ‘serves as a prime site of social monitoring and social control’ (Dyson, 2010, p. 484). Acts of friendship are about displaying group and context-specific appropriate behaviour, which reproduce norms and values. In his later analyses, Bourdieu focussed on middle class France in the 1970s and ‘80s. However, friendship’s capacity to function as a vehicle of cultural reproduction has also been investigated in Indonesia (Parker, 2016a; Parker & Nilan, 2013). For example, amongst Muslim female friends (of high school age), daily acts of friendship include a strong element of moral guidance and social monitoring in relation to sexual behaviour, romantic relationships, and school performance (Parker & Nilan, 2013, p. 118). Beazly, too, in her study of young street girls in Yogyakarta, describes how ‘an individual child must conform to the expectations, norms and values of the group’, and is therefore subject to strict group hierarchies and ‘rigid surveillance from within’ (Beazley, 2002, p. 1667). Thus, young people have the capacity to reproduce, through their friendships, dominant ideas regarding gender, sexuality, morality and hierarchies.

To understand the connection between friendship’s potential for cultural production and reproduction, Dyson (2010, pp. 484-485), in her discussion of friendships amongst rural girls (aged 10-14) in the Indian Himalayas, utilises the cultural production framework of Paul Willis (1977, 1981). Cultural production, according to Willis (1981, p. 59), is ‘the creative use of discourses, meanings, materials, practices and group processes to
explore, understand, and creatively occupy particular positions in sets of general material possibilities. This creative usage may lead to opposition and critique of dominant social structures, as well as to novel practice. However, it often also leads to cultural reproduction, as processes of cultural production are ‘structured by complex ideological effects’, which limit what ‘is possible to be thought’, and hence ‘give new life to and reinforce general ideological and social beliefs’ (Willis, 1981, p. 59).

Dyson (2010, p. 485) nicely illustrates the existing links between friendship and cultural production and reproduction: ‘friendship provides girls in the Indian Himalayas with social and cultural possibilities but also draws them more tightly into certain systems of dominance’. For Dyson, these systems of dominance are strongly gendered. In her work she focuses on young girls and their friendships which are manifested in the daily activity of leaf collection (the leaves are used as bedding for livestock) in the remote forests of the Himalayas. Dyson maintains that in these friendships, young girls reproduce, but also creatively use, dominant ideas regarding gender. Through their play during work, young girls experiment with gender roles, or with age-specific behaviour (i.e. girls act younger or older than their actual age). However, young girls’ play during the collection of leaves also affirms dominant notions of diligence, competence and a general notion of appropriate gendered behaviour. For example, they challenge each other to carry heavy loads of leaves and to work quickly and efficiently. These young girls’ friendships are a ‘contradictory resource’ (Dyson, 2010, p. 485); they primarily function in regards to work, facilitate cooperation and through daily improvisation ease the perils of work, but also (re)affirm the gendered disparity in labour division between women and men, as well as the gender imbalance in general.

Young people engage in complex processes in which gender and morality, but also social class and ethnic and religious differences are subject to critique, but also lead to cultural reproduction. Below, I exemplify similar processes in Ngada. Before I do so, I first need to ‘unpack’ the Indonesian notion of ‘friend’ because, as noted, it is problematic. That is, young Indonesians use the word teman (friend) frequently and inclusively. For example, young Ngada people talked about OMK as if all active members were their friends, and at other times neighbours, colleagues and even family were introduced as ‘friends’, too. Parker (2016a, p. 98) noticed something similar in West Sumatra: ‘Indonesian words for friend, such as teman or kawan gloss a very large catchment group – people who are actually related in a very shallow way’. This is quite different from the Himalayan girls in Dyson’s account (2010), who are selective in their friendships. Nevertheless, the non-exclusive usage of the word teman does not mean young people do not have exclusive (friendship) relations. In
fact, they do: they just tend to use the same word to address people to whom they relate with varying degrees of 'closeness'.

In Ngada, the word *teman* describes a relation between people, regardless of gender, who are approximately the same age, and who have a similar status as ego. Besides *teman*, Ngada people have various local terms at their disposal, namely *doa, ghili, jou, robe, koba* and *ka’e* and *azi* (Smedal, 2002). The two latter terms differ from the five former terms in that they imply age difference and are therefore more formal (these terms are also used to address brothers- and sisters-in-law). *Doa* can be used by men to and about men, and by women to and about women. *Doa* is also used as a kinship term to address same-sex siblings. *Ghili* can only be used by men to and about men (but is not a kinship term), while *jou* is used by both male and female (similarly as *doa*), though in some villages people claim that it is for males only (Smedal, 2002). *Jou* is not used as a kinship term, either. *Robe* and *koba* are used to indicate closeness, too, and are used mainly by men to talk about or address other men. These local terms indicate that, despite the generic application of words such as *teman*, a Ngada notion of 'emotional closeness' exists. For example, one of my friends mentioned that ‘calling someone *ghili* or *doa* feels closer’. However, they rarely do so; instead, young people mostly use the word *teman* and the Anglophone words ‘bro’ (brother) and ‘sister’ or ‘sis’. To young people, these words feel more modern and cosmopolitan than local terms (cf. Smith-Hefner, 2007).

Despite the inclusive character of the words *teman*, ‘bro’ and ‘sis’, young people do distinguish amongst friends and peers and strangers. Young people socialise within larger groups at the roadside or at parties and other gatherings, yet within these larger groups, smaller, exclusive groups can be distinguished. It is this exclusivity that, to me, defines friend(-like relation)ships.

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146 Lyn Parker (2016a) notes that in Indonesian close friendships can be referred to with either *teman akrab* (literally ‘close friend’) or *teman curhat* (*curhat* is youth slang, and means ‘to pour out the contents of one’s heart’). Parker studied these close friendships amongst teenage girls in West Sumatra. In Ngada, studying a different age group, I did not encounter the notion of *teman curhat*. (Besides location and age-category, this can also be due to my gender: Parker notes that *teman curhat* is only used by girls.) The words *teman akrab* were used regularly, though referring to mixed-gender friends who were getting romantically involved. In Ngada, amongst educated young people, a *teman akrab* is a friend of the opposite sex with whom one is ‘more’ than just friends (*teman saja*), but not yet in a relationship (*pacar*).

147 In general, friendships between people of different ages are rare in Ngada. That is, friendly relations between different generations can appear as friendships, yet in practice have hierarchical implications. For example, Philip, my host, spent much time with younger men, drinking and smoking together, sharing stories and experiences. Though seemingly they were friends, the young men called him *Om Bos* (Uncle Boss), while he called them *adik* (younger brother) or *lasu* (‘fucker’; in contexts like these used teasingly). The word *lasu* is used by men – mostly amongst friends, but also to swear at strangers, for example on the road – to address younger men with whom one is friendly. The younger men are not supposed to reply with *lasu*. By addressing him with *Om Bos*, the young men implied an upward direction of deference, and dependence (as is common in these kind of hierarchical friendly relations, Philip provided occasional jobs to these young men, and paid for drinks and cigarettes).
In Ngada, educated young people build such exclusive relations mostly – yet, not exclusively – with other educated young people. That is because people’s friendships often ‘reflect and are built around their social locations and social identities’ (Allan 1996, 94, quoted in Parker, 2016a, p. 97). In particular, during fieldwork I noticed that educated young people tended to identify their close peers and friends through OMK, which is a popular venue, particularly for educated young people. This was not because they knew each other from OMK – they had known each other since childhood – but because OMK provided a relatively exclusive and safe environment for peer-to-peer socialising (nungkrong or main-main). These OMK relations were subsequently taken ‘outside’ the Church environment, and further developed in other relatively exclusive sites, such as in homes or in trips to places outside the village.

Below, I describe young people coming together and socialising within OMK and other relatively exclusive sites. I also include descriptions of sites, such as roadsides and weddings, which are less exclusive. I have selected these sites because they are important in the lives of the young people, but also because friendships in these sites tell us something about young people’s attitudes towards village life.

**Sites of peer relations and friendships**

Despite a theoretical focus on close peer relations and friendships, we should not forget that educated young people’s friendships are repertoires through which they enjoy life. They are about sharing experience and practice, such as driving around on a motorbike, taking an afternoon stroll, or going to the local hot springs on Sundays after church. And they are about laughing, flirting and, for the Ngada boys, getting drunk together (this was not considered problematic). Young people enjoy life together in different places, for example at Church, at road-sides, or at their homes. Below, I describe young people, their friendships and their socialising *within* these places. I do so because I believe that taking into account specific places, sites, tells us much about how these young people engage with their social environment.

Sites are not solely locations which form the backdrop of social interaction (Rodman, 2003, p. 204). They are social constructs and come about through acts of place-making. Sites have meaning beyond the site itself (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003). For example, place-making is often political, particularly in complex multi-ethnic social environments, where ethnic groups try to claim spaces as their own (e.g. Harney, 2006). Others have studied how people, through mundane activities, such as walking and day-to-day interaction, transform space into experience. There are intimate connections amongst
movement, memory and place, through which the landscape becomes ‘potent’, heavily laden with emotional, social, and spiritual meaning (e.g. Allerton, 2013).

The principal focus, here, is not on the implications of place and on (the politics of) place making. I focus on young people, how they are concerned with being young, and how they relate to each other and other community members. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that places affect these relations. Therefore, I use the concept of ‘site’. This concept has been primarily used in political analyses: why do certain events occur in certain areas, and how do sites enable, or limit, communication (e.g. Kuper, 1972)? I am less inclined to put emphasise on the political character of sites, yet the idea of ‘site’ stresses the ‘situatedness’ of social interaction. It makes clear that young people are part of a larger social reality. Young people are affected by the social conditions of a specific site, but affect the larger social reality, too. Moreover, to me, the concept of site is more open to alternative interpretations of spatial terms, and enables me to include secret and non-physical sites (e.g. telephone and internet communication) in the analysis.

Friendships, leisure and socialising have been studied before in Indonesia, mainly in (Muslim) urban areas and amongst (lower) middle-class youth (see, for example, Barendregt, 2008; Leeuwen, 2011; Nilan & Mansfield, 2014; Parker & Nilan, 2013; Smith-Hefner, 2007; Wright Webster, 2016). Most of these studies concern socialising within malls and internet cafes and are on the dynamics of mixed gender socialising, or the lack thereof. The authors of these studies emphasise that parents, teachers and others in authority express concerns about mixed gender socialising, as it is widely considered to lead to pre-marital sex. These concerns about pre-marital sex – often framed as seks bebas (‘free sex’) or pergaulan bebas (‘free socialising’, but often used to imply pre-marital sex as well) – are particularly directed at young women, and are shared in the public domain via government and public discourses, media representations and at schools. The expressions of concern constitute a ‘moral panic’, which blames seks bebas on Western influences (note the connection between these studies and the ‘modern’ sites in which they are placed, such as malls and internet cafes) that contradict indigenous and Muslim morals (Harding, 2008; Parker & Nilan, 2013; Smith-Hefner, 2009a). This moral panic is also shared by young people (of both genders) (Parker & Nilan, 2013, p. 129). Therefore, mixed gender friendships and socialising are subject to strict social control and scrutiny, and mostly framed in threats to ‘the self’, one’s virtue and marriageability, and social order (including the reputation of the family).

In rural Ngada, the situation is quite different. There is no modern urban infrastructure of malls and Western style coffee shops. Moreover, though pre-marital sex is strongly discouraged, there is no moral panic about young people’s sexual development.
Un(der)employed educated young people in Ngada can relatively easily hang out together in mixed gender groups. The principal place to do so is at the Church and on the adjacent village green.

*Church, OMK and the village green*

In rural Flores there are few places where educated young people can hang out by themselves, and few sites provide regular activities for young people. The local church is the exception: in Ronaga, there are regular choir practices, Bible reading clubs and religious meetings. Young people can participate in Church seminars, or in sports activities (e.g. badminton and soccer), and twice a year the Church organises camping trips, or other field trips, such as climbing Mount Inerie. Particularly significant in this regards is *Orang Muda Katolik (OMK)*, whose local chapter organises most of these activities.

Socialising within the context of the Church implies that young people are subject to Catholic morals of chastity and pre-marital sexual abstinence. Yet, I found the interaction between the different sexes quite relaxed in OMK-organised activities. For example, during a self-development seminar, hosted by the Ronaga Parish, young men and women danced the polonaise together, played games, such as musical chairs, and at some point were even expected to sit on each other’s laps, with much laughter as a result.

OMK is a popular site for educated young people in Ronaga; many un(der)employed educated young people are active OMK members. This is due to three reasons. First, most young people are devout Catholics and want to be active members of their Church community. OMK is the principal channel to do so, as the priest encourages OMK members to be active in choir, seminars and Bible clubs. Moreover, OMK members often organise sporting events for themselves, or for children (soccer for boys, volleyball for girls), volunteer for ad hoc jobs at the Church (e.g. general maintenance), and participate in major Church celebrations (e.g. the Easter pageant). These activities are not solely motivated by piety or altruism, but are also opportunistic attempts to gain some minor work experience, to establish a network, and to become known as a dedicated and ‘good’ community member. This makes young people more attractive for employers, and is therefore the second reason they are active Church and OMK members.

Third, OMK is popular because it provides an easily accessible site for meeting up with friends. The Church grounds and the village green are centrally located and are extensive. There is the actual Church, the parsonage, and some kitchens and sheds. There

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148 OMK is for all unmarried Catholic young people aged 13-35. In practice, the active members in Ronaga are usually aged 19-29. OMK is in other places also known as *Mudika (Muda-mudi Katolik; Catholic Youngsters)*.
are also some other large buildings, used occasionally for seminars or choir practice. Often these buildings are the meeting place for young people where they can hang out relatively undisturbed by other villagers. At other times, young people just as easily hang out in front of the buildings on the village green, mobile phones in their hands, playing soccer, or driving around on their motorbikes. The Church provides a focal point for young people’s friendships, a place where they can gather, meet and talk, play sports together, organise activities, sing together, or do the odd paid job for the parish.

The Church and OMK provide a great place for mixed-gender socialising. Because OMK activities take place within the confines of the Church’s ambit, these activities are considered a safe and acceptable place for young men and women to mingle and socialise (i.e. it is a site generally associated with social reproduction). This is important, because in Ngada, as in the rest of Indonesia, unmarried young women are rarely able to go out alone or to hang out privately with boys unchaperoned by family. Yet, with regards to OMK, some young women are even allowed to join overnight camping trips, as the local priest joins these trips too. Even when no Church staff is involved, OMK’s close connection to the Church makes it an ideal and favourite place for young people to come together and to make friends with whom they can also hang out when outside the Church context.

OMK is thus important to educated young people: it enables them to engage in mixed-gender socialising without much interference from senior generations. OMK provides a focal point for a small, relatively exclusive community of young men and women who have known each other since childhood, yet relate to each other primarily as ‘OMK-friends’ (teman OMK).

The road

Friendships and close peer relations are not bound to fixed sites. OMK members also socialise together outside the Church context, yet still identify their friendships as ‘OMK’. Friendships are mobile and connect places; through their friendships, OMK members connect their Church-based activities to other sites, such as houses and wedding parties. Central to these connections are roads. Roads form the links between different places, yet roads are also important social sites in themselves. Roads enable friendships ‘to travel’ – as people move from one place to the other – and roads enable friendships ‘to be’, as they are crucial ‘nodes’ in people’s social lives.

Ngada’s formidable roads traverse extremely rugged terrain and are vital transport links for people and goods. Yet, the roads are more than just convenient routes of transportation; they are the principal place for people to meet, particularly at the end of the day. Along the fringes of the road, villagers exchange the latest gossip, invite each other
over for coffee, and discuss the latest English Premier League soccer games. Children play on these roads as well, where they mingle with small groups of young women who go out for a late afternoon stroll. A little further down the road, in the late afternoon shade of a large mango tree, young men smoke their kretek while hanging out around their motorbikes. Now and then, one of the guys drives away on his poorly customised bike. With high speed, noise, and much smoke coming from the exhaust, he drives up the road and approaches the young women, calling out their names, making sure they have to get out of the way in order not to be run over. Meanwhile, ordinary travel continues, with drivers honking their horns and calling out to friends and neighbours as they pass by, contributing to the late afternoon liveliness of Ngada.¹⁴⁹

Most Ngada villages are built along thoroughfares, as stretched out ribbons of two rows of houses with front yards, bisected by the bituminised road.¹⁵⁰ Everything that goes by on this road, including inter-district lorries and busses on the main roads, or bemo, ojek and other local traffic on the back roads, passes these houses. It creates a dynamic ‘see-and-be-seen’ situation: people in their front yards curiously check out all passing traffic, looking for a familiar face, while the passing traffic has a peek into the villagers’ day-to-day affairs. The road enables little privacy, and little rest too, as the traffic’s liveliness easily enters the roadside houses through glassless windows, cracked walls, and thin zinc roofs. I could often see people walking up and down the main road of Ronaga, doing some shopping, going for work to Bajawa, or heading to the fields. I heard ojek drivers crisscrossing the village on their motorbikes in search of customers, or some bakso (meatball soup) sellers, with their wooden carts, tapping their iron bowls and calling out their wares. And I saw how people used the street for leisure, as young men and women, like other villagers, gathered, gossiped, played some badminton or volleyball, and exchanged news and invitations at the fringes of the road.

Street socialising comes about in a rather ad hoc manner. Unlike OMK, it is public and not exclusive. It is not much dependent on age, level of education, or even gender, but more on where someone lives. In general, street socialising is done close to home, and people tend to meet up with neighbours. Hence, educated young men and women do not solely hang out with other educated people, nor exclusively with close friends, but also with their less educated and/or working neighbours (who are often family too), whether they are old or young.

¹⁴⁹ Often, young people mentioned that they appreciate lively (ramai) environments. As Parker and Nilan (2013, p. 127) note, liveliness is highly valued in Indonesia, and young people appreciate lively environments. It is interesting to note the cross-regional, cross-ethnic and cross-religious appreciation for ‘ramai-ness’.
¹⁵⁰ In Ngada, the stretched out roadside villages are relatively modern, consisting of houses that are typically constructed with zinc roofs and brick and/or wooden walls. These houses are called baru (new), to contrast them with sa'o houses, which are considered to be traditional houses in the original hamlets (see Chapter 3).
Day-to-day socialising on the street is not strictly gender-segregated, and men and women can be seen sitting or standing together, or interacting with each other when they pass each other by. Still, most times men and women gather separately. Women often come together in small groups at roadside stores or at junctions where side streets lead off the main road to houses further afield. Or one can see small groups of teenage girls or young women strolling around their neighbourhood. Due to their household and care responsibilities, women have less leisure time than men. Consequently, they stay closer to the house, play badminton with direct neighbours on quiet backstreets, or do the grocery shopping as an excuse for an afternoon stroll with neighbours, peers or friends. More often, however, women visit each other in their homes, drinking coffee together while they help each other out with child care or cooking.

Men are much more present on the streets. They too like to come together at junctions and small stalls, but also socialise at the *bengkel* (workshops) or outside the billiard hall. Here, they come together and discuss topics such as the daily lottery, politics, soccer, money, motorbikes, and women. To understand how un(der)employed educated young men engage with village life, it is interesting to consider these topics and the way they are discussed – also because these topics are not solely confined to the streets. For example, with regards to the daily lottery (the Singapore-based *shio lotto*), a favourite topic for young and old men alike, men tell about their wins (but rarely about their losses) and their predictive dreams, sighted omens and calculations.\footnote{To buy a coupon in the *shio lotto*, people pick two two-digit numbers between 00 and 99. Each number belongs to an animal sign from the Chinese zodiac. People ascribe meaning to these numbers, which are represented on charts widely shared in Ngada. Some numbers represent death, while others represent illness, birth, children or sex. Many people think that dreams have predictive powers, and they select their numbers based on these dreams. Or, they have seen animals performing strange acts, and consider this to be a clue about the winning numbers. Bets start at a relatively modest level – a coupon can be bought for as little as Rp.2,000 (A$0.20).} These calculations are based on the previous month’s winning numbers, which some men meticulously note in carefully guarded notebooks, and in which they distinguish certain numeric patterns. The men fiercely debate whether these patterns are valid and boast about their predictive skills: their ‘magic’ (*ilmu*) or ‘third eye’ (*mata tiga*).\footnote{The third eye is considered to be a talent for discerning spirits, the true shape of nature (i.e. some animals are considered to be actually deceased family members or benign or maleficent spirits), or malign magic sent to hurt someone or a family. The winning numbers in the lottery are considered to be connected to this spirit world. Being right about the upcoming numbers means someone has the skill to ‘see’ this world of spirits. The third eye does not refer to an actual eye – it rather refers to the ability to see or sense what others cannot see. People pointed to their forehead to indicate where this ability is located.} Many of them make small bets. Some men ask neighbours, family or friends for small loans in order to buy a coupon (*kupon*) at the local lottery representative, in particular when they have a ‘strong feeling’ about their favourite number. And if there are any wins that night, they are often shared in the form of alcohol at the winner’s place, together with a group of friends and family.
Educated young men and women are rather sceptical regarding these discussions. Many young people like to listen to stories about magic, predictive dreams and sighted omens, but were ambivalent about these stories in private. When I asked educated young people about magic, they answered that they ‘did not know’ (saya kurang tahu), and refrained from making judgements about the efficacy of magic. In groups of friends, they often laughed at each other’s stories, yet also considered some accounts to be true, in particular those about ancestors and the way they can inflict bad luck, illness and accidents. With regards to the shio, I have seen few educated young people buying coupons. Educated young women considered gambling – including the lottery – a waste of money. Young men, too, refrained from buying lottery tickets for similar reasons, though they liked to play cards occasionally with friends. As un(der)employed educated young people do not have an income, this gambling is for small change only, and is more a pastime than an expression of a gambling addiction.

Another favourite topic for discussion is politics. Talk of politics is everywhere in Ngada. Discussions about politics – whether they take place at the side of the road, or in other settings – are rarely about ideological differences, but rather concern (local) issues, or – at election time – the potential of candidates to solve these issues. Men like to complain about the way village funds are distributed, about nepotism and corruption, or about the lack of development in Ngada. They discuss how one should deal with the government and the bureaucracy: ‘getting things done’ (e.g. permits for businesses or access to health care) requires networks and tact, and, as most people are familiar with civil servants, and government programmes increasingly are implemented at the village level, local politics are truly part of the day-to-day experiences of the villagers.

During elections, many men, including the young and educated, are part of a tim sukses. Often, in their roadside conversations, men advertise their candidates or talk about the campaign in general and consider the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. This political engagement cannot be considered ideologically motivated: in private, (young) men frame their political engagement mostly in terms of opportunistic attempts to gain

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153 Women, in general, despise gambling (e.g. playing cards and dice). Nevertheless, with regards to the lottery, I also heard women join conversations about winning numbers, considering whether to buy a coupon or not.
154 Playing cards is often done at events during which people have to wait a long time. In particular at funerals, which last for days in Ngada, young men, together with other male attendants, pass the time by playing cards for small amounts of money. Women do not seem to mind this kind of gambling, and provide the men with coffee and snacks. For a more elaborate take on gambling in Ngada, see Curnow (2012).
155 Gambling addictions are common in Ngada. Men often come together during the night to play cards for (relatively) large sums of money. These men are often senior and are well known in the village as problematic gamblers. Educated young men are not involved in this kind of gambling: they do not have the money, and consider gambling as hindering economic progress. To them, gambling is backward (kampungan), and related to unruly behaviour (e.g. cheating).
156 At the end of my fieldwork period, elections were held for parliament, both on the local as on the national level. Hence, there were political campaigns running during the course of my fieldwork.
influence, create networks and learn new skills. For example, many of them merely indicated that they would vote for people to whom they were related, either as family or in some other way (e.g. they would vote for community members). When I pointed out to one of my friends that this would mean that he would vote for candidates of at least three different parties, his laughing reply was: ‘Now you mention it...I hadn’t thought about it before, I guess, but you are right! Well... frankly, I don’t really care’.

The overall lack of interest of contemporary young people in (local) politics has been noted before (Parker & Nilan, 2013, p. 34; Tumenggung & Nugroho, 2005). However, in Ngada there were some who were politically active. They were eager to discuss politics, and some also wrote critical newspaper articles for the local papers, scrutinising government expenditures. Others volunteered at the local radio station, broadcasting interviews with politicians. One of them (Maxi, whom I introduced in Chapter 5) even tried to get elected for local parliament. These young men and women were, however, a minority.

Soccer, motorbikes, money and women are other frequently discussed topics amongst males. Soccer is very popular in Indonesia, and the national and international competitions – especially the English Premier League – are carefully followed. Through local newspapers, national (pay) television and the internet, scores are checked and matches watched. I enjoyed hours of conversation in which the strengths of players and clubs were compared. Similar conversations were held in relation to motorbikes: men clearly had favourite motorbike brands and could recount all the motorbikes they had possessed. Men also boasted about accidents they had had, the resulting scars, and how they had escaped police controls.

Talk about money is everywhere in Ngada. Men and women often discuss their income, being poor (*miskin*) and the costs of daily necessities (e.g. rice and wood), or luxury goods (e.g. motorbikes and mobile phones). People are very aware about their relative wealth – often they told me neighbours were much better off with a PNS income – and the financial position of others. Discussions about money are often connected to politics, people’s interests, and money’s negative impact on people and the community (e.g. corruption, gossip and jealousy (*iri bati*)). Young men and women join these conversations, and muse about buying motorbikes, going to Bali for a holiday, or about not having sufficient money to start their own business.

Finally, men boast about women, differently in various settings. In ad hoc roadside socialising, boasting was rather minimal and limited to occasionally commenting on, or calling out to, women passing by. Also, men occasionally shared pornographic material on their mobile phones. However, talking about women and watching pornography were
mostly confined to more private settings. Therefore, these two topics feature more prominently below.

Un(der)employed educated young men and women are part of vibrant rural communities. Though there are places where they can socialise amongst themselves, most times educated young meet up with friends within larger social contexts, reproducing ‘liveliness’.

Friendships, houses and yards

Young people develop their close friendships particularly in places where socialising does not occur ad hoc and where socialising has a sense of exclusivity (e.g. at OMK). Visits to places away from the village are also important, as these visits are made in specific groups. Here I first want to focus on house visits, and how houses and yards are important in fostering close friendships.157

In Ronaga, houses and yards are quite permeable by sound and vision; rarely are yards sheltered from the road, nor are windows and doors closed during the day. Kitchens are often open bamboo constructions attached to the main house, while the walls and roof of the main house are thin and never insulated. Thus, yards and houses give limited privacy; neighbours who pass houses regularly shout out or walk in to check whether someone is in or enter yards whenever people are there.158 Houses are not left unattended, and often one can see men and women sitting together in yards drinking coffee. Children play in these yards, too, when they return from school, while other yards are used as a workplace for motorbikes or as vegetable gardens.

For young men and women houses and yards are important sites, too. Un(der)employed educated young women often have household duties, and when they are not working at health posts or at schools, they often work in and around the house: they cook, wash and clean the house, sweep the yard or work in the (vegetable) garden. The

157 The notion that house visits indicate close friendships is also used by Parker, Hoon, and Raihani (2014), who, in a survey amongst 3,114 high school students in Indonesia (the surveys were collected in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, West Sumatra, Bali and Central Kalimantan), asked whether students visited the houses of friends of different religious backgrounds. 73 per cent of the respondents indicated they have friends with a different religious background to their own religion. Of them, nearly 80 per cent visited the houses of these friends. According to Parker et al. (2014, p. 473): ‘This indicates that the “friendships” were not limited to a mere knowledge of the presence of religious Others in the class, but that they were quite close relationships, though we do not know precisely how close.’ The qualitative data in this chapter suggest that house visits make friendships that transcend general same-age peer relationships.

158 The permeability of houses and yards is essential for maintaining the social fabric of Ngada communities. As had Andrew Beatty (2005), who studied village life in East Java, I noticed that the public character of houses and yards invites a form of casual socialising, a coming and going of people. These visits might seem random and ad-hoc, but Beatty argues that house visits are orchestrated through social norms and emotions of feeling ‘at home’. The house, and its yard, is not a closed-off entity within the village. Rather, houses and yards are nodes for ‘neighbourliness, an ethic of mutuality, patterns of visiting, extra-domestic kin ties, and ritual obligations [that] activate overlapping constituencies to create the loose-woven fabric of sociability that constitutes everyday village life’ (Beatty, 2005, p. 64)
house is also a principal site for leisure: young women told me they spent most of their free time in the house, either alone or with siblings and other family, watching television (mainly soap operas) or playing with their mobile phone, maintaining their digital social life on Facebook. Young men are also often busy with small tasks in and around the house, though significantly less so than young women. They, too, sit for long periods at home, watch television, play video games (if they have such a device), or sit in their sparsely decorated rooms, smoking, while checking their Facebook statuses.

For young people, houses and yards are not solely sites for spending free time in solitude or in the presence of (senior) family and neighbours checking in; houses are lively places for young people, too. Friends drop by and young women can be seen working together in the house and kitchen, drinking coffee and discussing day-to-day affairs, family business, or (potential) boyfriends while they cook. Or they watch television together and share the messages they receive on their mobile phones.

Young men also spend much time together at homes, working on a motorbike, watching television, or playing video games. Few young people actually own computers or video game devices. Therefore, young men visit friends who are in possession of such devices, and together they play soccer games all day and night. Similarly, televisions are ‘shared’ as well, though they are much more common than computers. However, in rural Flores few channels are readily available, and few people can afford the pay television subscription necessary for watching, for example, international soccer competitions. Therefore, young men often visit friends who have purchased pay television accounts and watch sports together. As pay television subscriptions can be bought for limited time periods (e.g. a week), young men (and their fathers) take turns in buying them.

Most interesting sport matches take place during the evenings, as well as popular soap operas, action series, talent shows and movies. These latter programmes are not behind paywalls and are liked by young and old alike, of both genders. Often, young people, together with their family, neighbours, friends, and friends of siblings, group themselves around televisions at night and debate the actors’ fighting skills as they face some malign or alien competition or sing along with songs performed in talent shows (e.g. ‘The X Factor’). When soccer matches are broadcast, women often leave the room, while men draw their chairs closer to the screen, trying to make out players and the ball on tiny screens, hoping no power black-outs will hit the village.

159 Popular in Flores are TV-series about historical figures (e.g. a young Gadjah Mada) or mythical creatures (mermaids disguised as contemporary schoolgirls) who are entangled in perpetual and mystical battles with malign and evil forces.
160 I witnessed fierce discussions about control over channel selection. Mostly, channel selection depended on the majority, though when soccer or boxing was broadcasted, men often had the deciding voice.
Not every night do (young) people come together to watch television or to play
video games: Saturday nights (malam minggu) are particularly popular, as well as evenings just
before weddings or other special events.\footnote{Several times when I joined male friends to attend weddings in other villages, we first went to the family of
one of my friends in that particular village, to drink coffee, eat a little, and watch television, prior to going to
the party. Such visits to family are primarily courtesy visits, intended to maintain the networks underlying
interdependence. See Chapter 3.} Sundays are popular for coming together during
the day, for sharing food and – for (young) men – drinking alcohol together. During these
get-togethers, men talk about gambling, politics, soccer, motorbikes, money and women.
With regards to the latter, men occasionally boast about visiting prostitutes or pubs with
female entertainers or about their sexual adventures in places away from Ngada. These
stories are often combined with accounts of excessive drinking and wild partying.\footnote{Stories like these were made less explicit when women and children or respectable people were close-by
(e.g. a high ranking government official). Nevertheless, I was surprised many times how easily men recounted
their visits to pubs and their alcohol intake in the presence of women and children.}
Meanwhile, men check each other’s mobile phones for pornographic material.

Explicit stories about women are mostly told by less educated senior men who have
spent time away from Flores (e.g. working in the Kalimantan timber industry) or who work
as a truck driver or as a tourist guide. Educated young men are far less explicit in their
accounts of women – though they listen eagerly to these stories – as they often lack the
experience to recount such adventures and are more concerned with whether or not they
can find a suitable girlfriend. Together with friends, they talk about young women and
whether they can be potential girl friends. However, talk about intimate feelings is reserved
for a few close friends only; in public young men rather make fun of each other’s love life
(or the absence thereof). Admitting a crush on someone is quite difficult and is rarely done.

Despite young men not talking much about love, it is currently fairly normal to
have a girlfriend (pacar, also used by women for boyfriends) in Indonesia. This is already
the case for young people in high school, though these relationships are mostly “belum serius
“not (yet) serious” and cinta monyet or “puppy love” and usually consist of little more than
innocent flirtation or teasing within a group of friends, sitting together on school trips or
just walking home together’ (Smith-Hefner, 2005, p. 451). For educated young people
having a boy- or girlfriend is a more serious affair. Though most would like to start a career
before they marry (kerja dulu), they are conscious about the possibility of potential boy-
and girlfriends becoming husband or wife. Educated young people are in their twenties, which
is considered by many – including young people – a good age to get married or at least to
start a relationship that leads to marriage. Therefore, un(der)employed young people take
relationships seriously.
Before relationships are considered serious, young men, and particularly young women, need to introduce their *pacar* to their parents. This is done at home, in a private setting. Hence, houses are important markers in relationships. There remain restrictions to these serious relationships: displays of intimacy are discouraged, and the young couple is not granted too much privacy. When a boy and a girl want to hang out alone (i.e. without other friends), this is allowed in the girl’s house only, with her family near. Therefore, when young people desire privacy and intimacy, they have to do so secretly during the night, or use the cover of group activities. These group activities, and how young people use them to get intimate, are discussed in the next section.

*Sites of leisure: on the road, Bajawa and the hot springs*

In villages such as Ronaga, there are few places educated young people can socialise exclusively with friends. However, there are places *away* from the village where young people can spend time relatively alone, most notably Bajawa and the nearby hot springs.

Going to Bajawa is fairly easy for young people from Ronaga: it is about 15 minutes by minibus and less by motorbike. The latter option is preferred by young men, and they can often be seen riding their bikes to town. Most times they visit Bajawa alone, to buy appliances or groceries for their family or to pick up family from the bus station or from work. Occasionally, however, they go to town with their male friends and spend time at the market or at the stadium, in particular when the local soccer team plays its matches. At other times, young men go to town to visit family and attend family celebrations (e.g. first communions) or just hang out on the main street with some friends from Bajawa or other villages.

There is not much to do in Bajawa for educated young people. There is a daily market, some motorcycle workshops and a few dozen small restaurants (*warung*), yet there are no bars or coffee houses. When the sun sets, shops and restaurants close, and the streets become deserted. Hence, despite Bajawa functioning as the District’s main commercial centre and having a certain buzz during the day, its appeal to educated people should not be overstated. They are rather underwhelmed by it, as most of them have studied in much larger cities away from Ngada.

For young Ronaga women, Bajawa is a place where they, in small groups, occasionally shop for clothes and accessories, buy Javanese snacks at food stalls, and where they can spend some time away from the village. They go there by minibus, as women in rural Flores rarely drive motorbikes. In town, on the streets or at food stalls, they occasionally meet with male friends from the village, or with young men from Bajawa whom they still know from high school. These meetings are often carefully orchestrated via
mobile phones, though they generally occur publicly and are therefore not subject to too much social scrutiny.

Visiting Bajawa for leisure does not happen often. Spending leisure time outside the village is subject to parental approval, particularly for young women. Young women are assigned many household duties and therefore lack time to go to Bajawa. Compared to these restrictions, young men are relatively free to roam, and can, without much trouble, visit Bajawa, the hot springs or the beach. They often have access to a motorbike – either their own, or a borrowed one, or they travel on the back of a friend’s bike – and can therefore easily travel outside the village. Young women have to join male friends on their bikes if they want (and are allowed) to travel further afield. For example, on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, one can see many groups of young men and women travelling together, either to the beach or to the hot springs.

For the educated young people of Ronaga, the hot springs near Soa – 20 minutes north of Bajawa – are a popular place to visit. To get there, women ride pillion behind their male friends on the back of a motorbike. For couples, or for newly developing romances, ‘sharing’ a motorbike enables them a surprising amount of intimacy. As women can straddle the bike if they are wearing jeans (which is most times in Ngada), they can press their knees and upper legs tightly to the young men driving the bike, meanwhile holding the men tightly from behind, leaning with their full upper body to the back of the driver. Intimacy – normally a strictly private affair – thus becomes public.

Public displays of intimacy between (unmarried young) men and women are normally discouraged. Holding hands is sometimes allowed (e.g. when the couple is around close friends), but other forms of physical contact are not. An easy way to circumvent such conventions is to ‘share’ a motorbike. Because women ride pillion on the back of motorbikes regularly, for example with ojek or with friends, sitting on the back of a bike is not necessarily connected to intimate physical contact. In fact, when I drove women around on my motor, I was surprised at how little contact they needed in order to remain stable and securely seated. Yet, when young men and women so desire, the motorbike enables them to hold each other more closely than is usually accepted. Some young men told me about widely used tactics to make a female passenger sit more closely, for example, by driving the motorbike fast and braking abruptly.

Riding their motorbikes, (educated) young people enjoy much more bodily contact than they are allowed in most other contexts. Due to the public character of such contact – which limits the degree of intimacy – and due to the mundane character of motorbikes and their ubiquity as a mode of transportation, motorbike intimacy is rather accepted. However,
motorbikes – or, rather, roads – as sites of intimacy can make obtaining parental permission to go to places such as the hot springs difficult, particularly for young women.

At the hot springs, intimacy between young men and women is less accepted. Sunday visits to the hot springs are popular with families, too, and finding a secluded spot is difficult and suspicious. It is not considered normal for young men and women to bathe together, and they tend to wash themselves in separate pools. Moreover, while young men strip down to their underwear, women keep their clothes on, even if they enter the water. Yet, young men and women also sit together, share food and drinks, and play sports together. During the day, the young people take many pictures with their mobile phones, and for weeks afterwards these photos are shared online.

The road, Bajawa and the hot springs are central sites in young people’s social worlds, as these are principal places to engage in mixed-gender socialising. Though mixed-gender friend groups go to Bajawa or the hot springs only occasionally, these places enable friends to escape the village’s social control for short periods of time. It is at these places that young men and women interact and learn to know each other. Sometimes, this leads to close friendships (teman akrab/dekat), a flirtatious relationship that involves much texting, picking up each other prior to going to OMK events, and meeting each other in Bajawa. These relationships are the subject of much laughter of friends, who like to tease each other, and may eventually lead to romantic relationships, which can then be ‘enjoyed’ on motorbikes.

Socialising away from the village is less subject to direct social control than socialising within the village. As these places are still public, educated young people keep within the socially accepted boundaries of gendered behaviour. Only on motorbikes are conventions of restrained physical contact circumvented, even though everyone can see it. Thus, what is special about socialising away from the village is not so much that it enables ‘free’ socialising, but that it defines ‘close’ relationships. That is because spending leisure time outside the village is done in exclusive, pre-defined groups (i.e. it does not come about ad-hoc). During trips to Bajawa or the hot springs, young people can develop their friendships into closer ones, or even possibly into relationships.

**Weddings and other parties**

I have used the concept of site to this point in a quite conventional manner. Below, I stretch the concept beyond a strict spatial analysis and include events such as weddings and other parties, as well as socialising using electronic media.

Wedding parties are not merely defined by place, but also by a specific set of practices (e.g. dancing and eating). They are moments of leisure that are more formal,
similar to other celebrations (e.g. engagements, first communions, and *adat* ceremonies). These parties and ceremonies are very popular amongst educated young people: they were often referred to as the Ngada equivalent of bars and clubs. In particular during the dry season (April-October), weddings occur regularly, at which young people join the other villagers to enjoy food, drinks and dancing late into the night.

Central to any celebration in Ngada, including traditional celebrations,\textsuperscript{163} is food. At weddings and many other celebrations, modern Indonesian food is served, while at customary gatherings the food is simpler and considered more traditional.\textsuperscript{164} What is similar, though, is the gendered way in which food is prepared. Rice, vegetables and poultry (chicken) are prepared by women inside the kitchen, while meat (pork) is the responsibility of men, prepared outside the kitchen, on open fires. The kitchens often belong to the organising family of the celebration and are mostly located behind the house. Sometimes, during larger celebrations, for which much food needs to be prepared, neighbouring houses – often family – offer their kitchens as places to cook as well.

Educated young men and women often participate in these preparations, in particular when the party is in honour of a family member or a neighbour. Together with their parents, siblings, uncles and aunts, and other senior family and neighbours, they spend whole days preparing the feast. While young women sit in the kitchen, grinding garlic, chillies, or turmeric with mortar and pestle, or stirring large pans of rice, young men stand outside or sit in the front room, smoke *kretek* and drink coffee (provided by the women), while they wait until the meat must be prepared. This preparing takes less time than cooking the rice and the vegetables, or preparing the seasoning (*bumbu*), and can be done with fewer people. For example, a pig is often killed by a senior or respected person, as it involves a ritual blessing, after which the pig is butchered by just a few men (this involves skill, too). Usually two or three men suffice, and young men either join other male participants observing the act of butchering or remain seated in the front room.

Of course, preparing food is a much more dynamic affair than presented here. For example, (young) men and women come and go, young children run around, and strict gender barriers are absent. Men often join the women in the kitchen, while women also join the men drinking coffee. Nevertheless, I remember spending many days with (young) men, either sitting drinking coffee and smoking *kretek*, or standing next to the fire, where pieces of pork were cooked in large frying pans on an open fire. At some point, as the young men began stirring the meat in order to cook it thoroughly, younger kids were sent

\textsuperscript{163} Rituals and customary practices are discussed in the next section.

\textsuperscript{164} The standard fare at customary celebrations consists of red rice and pork that is cooked in its own blood, together with grated coconut and chillies.
to fetch jerry cans of palm wine, and men (and, to a lesser degree, women too) started to drink.

Weddings and other celebrations often take place in large open places (e.g. village squares), which are covered with plastic sheets and ingenious bamboo constructions. Many rows of plastic chairs are placed in these covered areas, facing the stage on which the newlywed couple sits, together with their parents, or on which children and their mothers sit, after a child has received its first communion. These communion parties often start during the day (and continue into the night), as do most traditional celebrations, while wedding celebrations begin in the evening. Educated young people either join their family (and neighbours) to attend these parties or come in single-sex friend groups.

When people enter the site of a party, they are first invited to congratulate the couple or the child, then to take some food from the buffet, after which they are given some water and a glass of either palm wine or palm gin. Accordingly, they take their places on the chairs, eat and drink, and often continue drinking while they wait for the dancing to begin. Or, when there are not enough chairs for everyone – as is often the case – people need to make room for people waiting outside the tent. Outside, men and women wait together in small groups of neighbours and family, continue their drinking, smoke heavily, and wait until nine pm, usually the time the buffet is cleared, and the music begins.

Young people, joining friends to attend these parties, tend to enter late, and when they do, they prefer to sit at the margins of the marquee, behind their parents and neighbours. Outside and in the margins of the tent, they are less bothered by parental supervision. Often, when I joined my male friends going to weddings, we entered just before the buffet was cleared and most chairs were removed to make place for the dancing. Outside, while waiting for our time to move in, we shared small talk, drank and smoked together, and checked out the girls who were either outside in small groups or who had joined family and were already inside.

After the buffet is cleared, the bride and groom, together with their parents and some prominent family members, open the dance. Typically, they dance \textit{ja'il}, a central Flores dance that involves two rows of people, who slowly make their way through the tent, moving forward in short strides, bending the right knee, keeping their hands at shoulder’s height. Next, the \textit{ja'il} is open to everyone else and continues to be danced throughout the night. Other music is played as well by the DJ – who mostly uses an

\footnote{In Flores, it is generally accepted for (senior) women to drink alcohol. However, they rarely drink palm gin – a distillate of palm wine, that ranges anywhere between 20-70 per cent in alcohol – in public, and drink palm wine with moderation. Hence, though I have seen men drunk many times – which is, in general, not considered to be problematic – women usually stop drinking palm wine after a few glasses and refrain from getting drunk.}
improvised sound system and often has a wall of huge loudspeakers – including dero, which is the music for a circle dance where people hold each others’ hands, and Indonesian country-style music, which prompts either a sort of line dancing of two rows of people facing each other, dancing complicated routines, or couples dancing if the songs are slower. Pop music is also played and involves a much freer style of dancing of young people standing close to each other in groups.

In Ngada, educated young men consider drinking and partying with their fathers, uncles and other senior family members and neighbours completely normal. They dance the ja’i and dero with their mothers, aunts and other female family members and neighbours, too. Parties, weddings in particular, reflect how easily educated young people mingle with other generations and how much they are part of the community. Yet, for educated young men, parties are not only expressions of communality; these feasts are predominantly moments of fun, as well as opportunities to socialise with young women. Young men referred to this as ‘cari cewek’ (‘looking for girls’, used to refer to flirting). During the night, young men and women can be seen dancing together. And, as the dancing occurs amidst rows of chairs, such mixed gender dancing and socialising are accepted, but carefully observed by the other attendees.

Not all young men are brave enough to approach young women and ask them to dance whenever appropriate (slow dance) music is played. However, most music is aimed at group dances, and often the whole dancing area is full of men and women, young and old, causing much laughter when different groups of dero or ja’i dancing people cross each other, breaking up dance partners and routines. In other dances it is difficult to keep up with the complicated steps, as people deliberately try to distract the dancers from the routines, which is considered to be much fun. These dances are great opportunities for young men to hold hands with young women or to attract attention with one’s dancing skills. Between the dances, everybody returns to their seats, or to the margins of the tent, men and women separately, eying each other and waiting for the next dance. There, men refill their glasses with palm wine, and smoke another kretak, while they talk about the girls, the quality of the wine, the shio lottery and about soccer.

Wedding parties are important to young people; there is little other entertainment on a similar scale in Ngada. Often, hundreds of people come together to dance and to enjoy food and drinks. For young people, these are occasions for which they can dress neatly, come together with friends, and have fun. On the dance floor, young men can flirt with young women and hold their hands. It is also a place where young boys learn to drink palm wine from their brothers or where they share their first cigarettes with friends.
Rituals and customary practices

Rituals and customary practices are either big public events or take place within the confines of the (extended) family. In the latter context, they are less an opportunity to meet friends, but enable young people to give shape to their feelings of belonging to Ngada. Despite their ‘educated’ aspirations, they often talked with pride about existing socio-economic practices, the strong feeling of community, ancestor worship and the intimate connections between land and people. Therefore, they eagerly joined these celebrations, as they considered it a means to express their connections to the land and their family. Yet, they also often admitted that they could not specify the exact meanings of these *adat* expressions.

There are also customary celebrations that are public and celebrated on a large scale, such as the festival of *reba*, which is the climax of the Ngada agricultural cycle. *Reba* is celebrated for days in numerous villages simultaneously. From far and away, young people return home to be part of these festivities and to tighten family ties. During this New Year celebration, the ties between humankind and the land are celebrated, as well as the connections amongst the soil, the ancestors and the current generations. In Ronaga, these celebrations begin with a large Catholic mass, during which many educated young men and women, together with the younger and older generations, join dances and choir performances or join teams that hand out food to the hundreds of attendees. Later, dressed up in traditional outfits, the young people come together in houses of friends and family, to share food and drinks with the living and the ancestors. As *reba* continues throughout the night and into the following days, young men and women join dances, rituals and social gatherings.

Educated young people often looked somewhat out of place at these celebrations. Often, they did not wear the full traditional outfit – one young man told me that he felt ‘more free’ (*lebih bebas*) wearing only his sarong (*sapu*), leaving his upper body cloth (*lu’e*) and headdress (*boku*) at home – and seemed to be mere spectators of the rituals. Though young people know the basic dances and the accompanying songs of *reba* (they learn them at home and at school), they are unfamiliar with specific prayers and invocations to the ancestors, as well as with the sequence of ritual acts and their meanings. Therefore, they do not make blood sacrifices nor take the lead in discussions about procedures, nor do they start specific songs or dances. They merely follow. When I joined male friends during rituals, we often stayed in the back, observing rituals from a distance, while my friends filmed the proceedings with their mobile phones.

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166 *Reba* coincides with the coming of the west wind and the rainy season.
(der)employed educated young people often admitted that they had less knowledge about adat compared to their peers who had not studied in cities away from Ngada and had remained in their village, and that their role in rituals was limited. They did not contribute with food or money to ceremonies – as working people do – and while young women helped prepare the food, educated young men were rarely in charge of butchering a pig, or in assisting construction activities. For example, they were less skilled in using a machete and working with bamboo than their uneducated peers who worked the fields for their livelihoods.

Nonetheless, educated young people were not excluded from these activities. Sometimes, educated young men participated in making bamboo panels with a machete as well – though at a much slower pace – or asked about the sequence of changing the roof of a bhaga or a ngadhu. Most times, however, young men, like young women, just enjoyed the liveliness of these rituals and their preparations. They enjoyed talking, dancing, smoking, eating and drinking with their family, or, in case of larger celebrations such as reba, with neighbours and friends as well. In that regard, reba is a much loved celebration: though it is primarily about connections between (extended) families, it is also a feast of the community. Everybody joins these celebrations, and the squares of the traditional hamlets of Ronaga are filled with people dancing and singing.

For educated young people, rituals and customary practices are important because they facilitate feelings of belonging. Young people are able to connect with spiritual and mythical realities that are distinctively Ngada. Celebrations of these spiritual and mythical realities create liveliness – similar to weddings and other feasts – which young people, like the other generations, enjoy tremendously.

Mobile sites: socialising through the hp

Contemporary young Indonesians, similar to their peers all over the world, have little trouble connecting to friends online (see, for example, Barendregt, 2008; Lange, 2015; Nilan, 2012). Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are hugely popular in Indonesia. Also in Ngada, educated young people are much concerned with their digital social life.

Access to the internet – and thus to Facebook and other social media – is predominantly through the mobile phone (hp, hand phone). Major networks have coverage throughout Flores, and practically all educated young people are in possession of a mobile phone, many with internet connection (smartphones). Most people in Ngada own cheap smartphones (e.g. Mito, Evercross, or Cyrus). Better and more prestigious brands are Oppo (China), Blackberry (Canada) and Samsung phones (South Korea). These brands matter to young people. Like new motorbikes, or fancy clothing, the right smartphone brand gives
status. On Facebook, young people are often tagged by friends in advertisements from the newest gadgets (e.g. smartphones and cameras). Young people are bombarded on a daily basis through television commercials with images of successful urban consumers. These online and TV advertisements are directly aimed at young people and show the ‘good life’ in modern urban Indonesia. Young people in Flores are thus aware of a global (youth) culture of consumption.167

However, in rural Flores, young people’s principal concern is whether or not one has enough credit on their mobile device. Though targeted as consumers, young people often have a hard time acting as such. Young people do not have the income to buy premium smartphones or to buy the newest Honda motorbike: consequently, owning an Evercross hp or driving a rusty motorbike is not entirely backward in Ngada. Of course, people are aware of one’s rusty motorbike, and teasingly comment on each other’s mobile devices. Yet, in Ngada having a hp, or owning a motorbike is still not for everyone. Hence, young people are often very glad when they, at least, have a smartphone or a motorbike.

Young people use smartphones mainly for making phone calls, sending text messages, and accessing the internet – the latter predominantly for Facebook.168 Smartphones are also used to play music. The three former activities are limited by credit, and young people are constantly concerned about the credit left on their hp. Regularly they ask friends, close peers or family to transfer a little credit between two phones, or – when calling friends or family – they let the phone ring only once, then terminating the call in order for the receiver to return the call, thus saving credit. Phone calls do not necessarily need to be about pressing issues; many times friends called me and asked me whether I had had dinner already or asked me if I was watching television. For young people who spend much time alone at home, phoning and texting are ways to have contact with friends. Through their hp, they are able to maintain friendships, and to create new ones. Several times I witnessed a young man being called by an unknown number, which turned out to

167 Here, the connections amongst young people, their smartphones and global flows of information and images exemplify Appadurai’s notion of ‘mediascapes’ (Appadurai, 2005 [1996], pp. 33-36). Mediascapes refer to the rapid spread of images and information about commodities, politics and news. Smartphones (and the access to the internet they provide) are a relatively new medium through which young people can imagine themselves as part of real and fictional markets. Previously, print media, television and radio were the main bearers of mediascapes. With the advent of smartphones (and internet) the scale of distribution of these images and flows of information has increased enormously. Ownership of smartphones is widespread, enabling people to, on demand, seek information, digest news, and create large social networks. Crucially, contrary to desktop computers and laptops, both of which are much less widely spread in Ngada but which also provide access to internet, people can access internet through their smartphones wherever they are, and relatively cheaply, too. In a district where there are only some internet cafes in Bajawa, and home-access to internet is limited, mobile internet thus dramatically expands rural (young) people’s repertoires of being part of a global (youth) culture of consumption.

168 Social media usage is subject to changes. Not too long ago, Friendster was still the primary social medium. When I was in Flores, Facebook had taken over that position. Currently, Twitter is popular too, in particular in (urban) Java.
be a woman who had received the young man’s number from friends. At other times, I saw young men give each other telephone numbers of women. These calls are rather innocent, but can lead to a date, for instance in Bajawa on the weekend.

Young people are eager to connect to people, in particular from the opposite sex. Phones are used to flirt, and to turn casual friendships into close friendships (teman akrab), or even more. Some young men like to give a new SIM-card with credit to close female friends, enabling young women to return calls to their suitor, but also as a way to ‘guard’ her from other phone calls. Several times I had a hard time contacting a female friend, and it turned out that a close male friend had given her a new SIM-card with a new telephone number.

Phone calls and texting are rather private. Facebook, on the other hand, is extremely public. Most of my Ngada Facebook friends have thousands of friends and barely activated any of their privacy settings. Consequently, young people’s status updates have a huge reach in Ngada, and outcries of boredom, happiness, sadness, or desire are shared frequently. These texts are accompanied by simple emoticons.

Facebook-accounts are lively (ramai), as thousands of friends share their daily pursuits. It is a remarkably busy digital environment, with people sharing pictures and news. People constantly comment on each other’s pictures, and often compliment each other’s ‘selfies’ – using words such as cantik/ganteng (cute/handsome) or keren (cool). At other times, they tease their friends by commenting on pictures with words such as narsis (literally ‘narcissistic’) or sombong (arrogant). They use Facebook to celebrate each other’s birthdays and other major accomplishments and events, such as graduations and marriages, or just to wish each other a Happy Sunday or evening. From within the confines of their rooms, houses, or villages, young Ngada people are able take part in huge social networks.

Sometimes, short pornographic video clips appear on people’s Facebook ‘timeline’, seemingly posted by a friend. These clips typically contain a young woman who is, according to the accompanying text, a drunken student, who has been tricked into having sex, which is secretly filmed, and put online. These ‘posts’ hint at two important points. First, pornographic material is easily accessible in Indonesia, despite the 2008 government ban on it. Second, the pornographic posts serve as a warning for young women not too fall into morally reprehensible behaviour (e.g. drinking), for this might provoke (sexual) exploitation. Video clips such as these highlight general attitudes towards women as bearers of morality (see, for example, Wright Webster, 2016; see also Chapter 2).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Laura Bellow considers the Indonesian 2008 anti-pornography law as mainly directed at the female body ‘as loci of porno aksi, or pornographic action’ (Bellows, 2011, p. 209). This is due to the vague terms in which the Law is formulated: what counts as pornography or obscenity is left unclear, but potentially covers a wide
With regards to the first point, young men, but other generations, too, have ample access to pornographic material. Adult material is omnipresent in male peer and friend groups. Almost all mobile phones and computers contain sexually explicit images and videos. There is a lively exchange of ‘material’ via Bluetooth-technology and DVDs. Men regularly check each other’s smartphones’ ‘hidden’ files, and transfer any material which they like to their own phone. Sometimes, during the night and while drinking palm wine in a friend’s house, they watch downloaded sex movies in small groups, with the sound muted because often there are women and children sleeping nearby.

It might seem that consuming pornography is normalised and openly practised within male peer and friend groups. However, this is not entirely the case. Watching sex movies in groups does not happen often and only in small groups of close peers and friends. In general, pornography is not openly discussed, except when senior people complain about young people’s ample access to pornographic material and its corrupting power. Such complaining hardly resembles a moral panic, as it is merely small-talk between adults. Nevertheless, with regards to young people and their access to pornography, the general consensus is that porn might provoke pre-marital sex. Because sex is not openly talked about in Ngada – schools provide no sexual education and the Church remains silent on the topic – parents and other seniors worry that pornography encourages young people to have sex. It is in this context of sexual ignorance and fear of pre-marital sex that pornography is made problematic in the Ngada public debate.

Young men and women are eager to engage with each other, face-to-face, and through their smartphones. Smartphones provide new opportunities to engage with large networks, to be targeted as consumers, and to consume pornographic material. Hence, smartphones can be problematic. That is, (young) people’s mobile activities are limited by a lack of funds for credit, they are confronted by their inadequate consuming-performance, and pornography remains a moral threat to oneself and society. Smartphones and the digital sites of socialising they represent, are thus ambiguous sites, where young people have to navigate modern technologies, desires, and moralities.

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170 Range of cultural productions, such as images and illustrations, but also speech, movements and ‘other messages transmitted by various communication media’ (Bellows, 2011, p. 210). The general public is encouraged to participate in enforcing the Law, making implementation and interpretation of the Law vulnerable to general ideas of declining female morality due to Western influences. The Law thus enables those who want to act as ‘moral guardians’ for society to do so, which in practice renders mainly women and their bodies subject to scrutiny.

171 Not much research has been conducted about the spread of pornography and its consumption in Indonesia. An exception is the work of Thomas Barker (2006, 2015). He analyses Indonesian pornography and its adaptation for mobile phones as part of cultural production in the post-Suharto era. He explicitly does not go into issues of ethics, or into pornography’s morality, as do most other researchers, who discuss pornography mainly in relation to a general moral panic about seks bebas and pergaulan bebas.
I want to conclude this section with a discussion of what I call ‘hidden sites’: places to which young couples go to have sex. Of course, these places are not really ‘hidden’. Many people refer to isolated little field huts (pondok) in the hills behind the villages as loci of young people’s sex lives. What makes it ‘hidden’ is thus not the actual physical space, but the secrecy surrounding sex. Indeed, as one young man told me when I asked him how his peers manage to have sex while they still live at home: ‘Haha, yes, they make it hidden...’

The hidden character of these sites makes expanding on them problematic, yet their existence enables me to reflect on young people in relation to sex and sexuality. In Ngada, young men and women were often too shy to talk about sex. The few educated young women I dared to ask about their personal sex life refused to talk about it with me, and immediately denied any such acts, including kissing. Educated young men, too, resorted to silence or to shy laughter when I asked them about their sex lives (though they admitted they had kissed before).

There were, however, some friends (of both genders) with whom I could discuss sex and sexuality on a more general, non-personal level. Besides the hidden pondok, these discussions frequently revolved around issues of pre-marital sex. Unlike their parents, who linked pre-marital sex to (young) people’s easy access to pornography, they considered their peers’ taste for pornography and sex to be the result of an inherent human curiosity (‘mereka mau tabu!’). Still, they considered this curiosity problematic, particularly for women, due to strong gendered ideas about sexuality. That is, pre-marital sex damages a woman’s reputation, as she would become subject to fierce gossip (men much less so). Accordingly, if pre-marital sex leads to pregnancy – which is not uncommon due to the absence of contraception and basic knowledge about human reproduction – the effects are severe. When a young woman is enrolled in university or another educational institution, an unplanned pregnancy is often reason to be expelled. Even when young women are not expelled, shame, gossip and social exclusion are reason for young women to leave their tertiary education.

Several scenarios are possible after a young woman is expelled from the educational institution. Dramatic are instances in which the man does not take responsibility, particularly when there are no further connections between the young woman and man (i.e. they are not from the same area). Then, the woman and her family have little opportunity

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171 Here, I consider pre-marital sex to be sex either before church marriage, or before adat arrangements between the couple’s families are made (the latter comes first; the former is often postponed due to high costs of the adat-related bridewealth, and the large feast associated with church marriage).

172 Though in Ngada many young people are devout Catholics, my friends assured me that faith, similar to tradition and their parents’ desires, does not keep young people from being sexually active.
to arrange any compensation, and the young woman often returns to her natal village and her parent’s house. I met with several unmarried young women in Ngada who were once enrolled in a tertiary education, but who had dropped out and now lived with their young children with family. When the family of the father is from the same area, *adat* arrangements can be made (i.e. the man’s family pays the woman’s family a negotiated fine). If the young man’s family does not accept this responsibility, it is likely that animosity erupts between the two families. These two latter scenarios are also likely when premarital pregnancies occur within Ngada (i.e. not during one’s studies in cities away from central Flores). *Adat* arrangements can be necessary, too, when families do not endorse a romantic relationship. I knew a young man whose parents were not allowed to marry because of too close kinship ties between them. Other reasons could be status differences or issues of religion and ethnicity.

In these scenarios, it is the woman who carries the social burden, as it makes her an undesirable marriage partner. For example, one time I discussed with a young man his potential partners in his village. He concluded that these were limited, because in this specific village most young women had migrated. I mentioned a young woman who had remained in his village and with whom he seemed friendly. Yet, he grimaced, and commented that she was *hancur* (broken, damaged). It turned out that she was an unmarried mother, that the father of her little son was unknown in the village, and that she had been expelled from university, forcing her to return to her natal village. Here, she was not explicitly socially excluded, yet was stigmatised, nonetheless (see, for a more detailed account of stigmatisation in Indonesia, Parker, 2016b).

Marriage that follows a pregnancy is referred to as ‘MBA’ (Marriage By Accident). An MBA is often arranged under pressure of parents and the extended family. Marriage normalises the woman’s social position within the community, though, in case of an abandoned tertiary education, it practically means she cannot aspire to a white collar career any longer. The normalisation of MBA-relationships makes sense. Despite the modern and Anglophone terminology of MBA, ‘accidents’ (*kecelakaan*) have long been reason for marriage. I was familiar with many older couples who had married because of unplanned pregnancies. Thus, MBA-arrangements seemingly resemble constructive safety-valves for young people’s sexual adventures. However, MBA-arrangements are rarely smooth, often complicated and reason for great personal distress. I was witness to one such arrangement, and it took a long time, involving intense social pressure on the young couple, the threat of conflict between two families, and two young lives that, because of a careless one-night

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173 Young people in Ngada are aware that the acronym MBA refers in Anglophone countries to a desirable qualification (i.e. Master of Business Administration). Their use of ‘MBA’ is a reference to this qualification.
stand, were connected for life. It is not uncommon in these situations, in which romantic love is secondary (or absent) to social pragmatism, that men leave the house after marriage, finding work in places such as Java and Kalimantan. Or, instead of living with their wives and family, they spend much time with their own family. Several senior men, who I knew were cheating on their wives, explained their infidelity in terms of their unromantic marriages, which were sealed due to unplanned pregnancies. Thus, except for romantic couples for whom MBA is a strategic choice to ensure parental permission for marriage, MBA is rarely satisfactory for the ones involved.  

The young women and men who had finished their studies and who had returned to Ngada pitied their peers who had to leave university due to unplanned pregnancies. Many of them acknowledged that life in the city was less controlled than in the village and thus potentially dangerous for young women, their reputations and their bodies. Therefore, it sometimes seemed as if young people considered their own single status – while having achieved a degree – a feat worth mentioning. As one of them commented: ‘You see, Mathias, I have already experienced life in the city, and I decided to wait with sex until marriage. With God’s help, I will find a partner soon and start a family. But, first, I want to find a job’. To this young woman, MBA and premarital sex are thus related to a specific site and period: one’s studies in a city away from Ngada.

Despite the perceived moral danger of the city, it is the inevitable place to which to go in order to become educated and modern. Hence, few young people and their parents doubt the necessity to travel and reside there for one’s studies. Yet, it implies young people have a responsibility towards their families to finish their studies not only in relation to the financial support they receive from them, or in terms of the hopes families invest in their studying children (as discussed in previous chapters), but also in terms of refraining from sex and its potentially disastrous results. Hence, pregnancies and being expelled from university are traumatic experiences for all involved. Therefore, few people actually wanted to talk about the shame and stigma involved with these pregnancies. Yet, as mentioned, MBA normalises a woman’s social position, and even unmarried mothers are able to partake in village life. In a way, their adolescent mistakes are, like sex, made hidden.

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\[174\] Sometimes, MBA is a deliberate attempt to circumvent parental concerns with a relation – e.g. in ethnically mixed relations, or when the social status of one of the lovers is problematic – or to lower the bridewealth involved with marriage. See also Platt (2012) who discusses a form of socially sanctioned elopement in Lombok which enables a young romantic couple to avoid arranged marriages with others. We should be careful, however, not to romanticise the agency involved in such tactics. Elopement is often accompanied by violent threats, fear and stress.
Acts of cultural (re)production: family and marriage, and religion and *adat*

The discussion of socialising, peer relations and friendships within specific sites shows that un(der)employed educated young people are intricately linked to the everyday social life of the community. In myriad ways, on roads and at roadsides, in their homes, at parties and rituals, young people casually interact with their extended families, neighbours and other community members. Andrew Beatty (2005) argues, primarily in relation to house and yard visits in East Javanese village life, that such casual socialising is orchestrated through social norms and emotions of feeling ‘at home’. The house and its yard are (in various degrees) not closed-off entities within the village, but rather nodes for ‘neighbourliness, an ethic of mutuality, patterns of visiting, extra-domestic kin ties, and ritual obligations [that] activate overlapping constituencies to create the loose-woven fabric of sociability that constitutes everyday village life’ (Beatty, 2005, p. 64). Here, I stretch this ‘feeling’ beyond houses and yards and include streets and parties and rituals, too. By actively partaking in social life, young people activate networks of interdependence, a feeling of togetherness, and notions of communality. Even though OMK and trips outside the village appear relatively exclusive, the moral ambit of the Church implies that OMK and church activities constitute a morally safe site, while trips to Bajawa or the hot springs are still relatively public. Educated young people are thus ‘being good’: not only through their non-idleness (as discussed in the previous chapter), but also through their social lives.

In Indonesia, young people’s socialising and leisure time are often subject to adult scrutiny, mainly due to concerns about *pergaulan bebas*. Parker and Nilan suggest that one reason for this is that these ‘leisure practices ... take place in a space (physical, interactional or virtual) that is different from the space of the leisure practices of children and adults’ (2013, p. 130). In rural Ngada, young people are less actively carving out such an exclusive space. Except for ‘mobile sites’ and ‘hidden sites’, young people spend leisure time in the same (or similar) spatial dimensions as adults and children, rendering their socialising less susceptible to public scrutiny.

*Family and marriage*

In this section, I make three points. First, through their protracted youth, and the socialising this involves, educated young people contest the reproduction of social strata as the dominant organising principle for marriage. Second, they also contest marriage exchanges through a general critique of the *budaya minta*. Yet, thirdly, through their socialising, peer relations and friendships, young people reproduce gendered notions of sexuality and appropriate *adat* conduct.
Life trajectories of less educated and educated young people differ significantly. Utomo et al. (2014) found that young people in Jakarta who dropped out of school by age 16, marry, leave their parental homes and have children at a younger age than children leaving school at ages 17-19. This trend was also noticeable in Ngada and was mentioned frequently by un(der)employed educated young people (who are thus a little older than the 17-19 cohort) as the main difference between their lifestyle and those young people who had not finished a tertiary degree. That is because less educated young people (specifically young men) can take on jobs that are unsuitable for educated young people (e.g. in agriculture or as day labourers) and provide an income and pursue a livelihood deemed necessary to support a family.

Before higher education was more widespread, young girls and boys worked in and around the house and with family, and went more or less directly from childhood to adulthood with marriage. Education, particularly a tertiary degree, (partly) created ‘being young’ as a separate life stage, which in contemporary Indonesia is prolonged due to the absence of renumerated work. This prolongation enables educated young people to become, as young people, socially much more active than before (and much more so than less educated young people who have remained in their natal communities). This is evident with regards to their studies and time spent away from their natal communities. Young people told me that they maintained active social lives when they lived in the city. The scope of this city-socialising depended on gender and on whether one lived with family or in a boarding house. Still, it extended beyond the social world of those who remained within the village. As we have seen before, some young people considered that their study time had instilled an outsiders’ perspective, which they saw as necessary to promote development and progress. This perspective contains a strong social component. As Vera mentioned in Chapter 6, ‘young people need to bergaul’ (socialise/network). With this remark she suggested that through their socialising educated young people need to support each other while trying to overcome barriers of the budaya minta. In practice, however, the effects of this ‘networking’ were rather limited: young people are too enmeshed in networks of interdependence to overcome them.

Regardless of the fact that networking provides limited alternatives to the community economy, un(der)employed educated young people’s prolonged socialising does affect with whom they socialise and alters notions about desirable marriage partners. For example, socialising within the city of one’s studies may lead to cross-ethnic relationships, just as OMK camping trips may lead to relationships that do not follow the organising principle of social strata. Similarly, during choir practice, sporting events, or
simply when young people socialise away from their parents’ gaze (e.g. the hot springs), love relations outside common arrangements may evolve.

‘Learning to network’, spending time away from one’s rural natal community, and extended periods of mixed-gender socialising imply that educated young people’s social lives have hugely expanded. Through social media and their hp, their social lives are further expanded, as they can engage with – and maintain – networks outside their direct social environment. Meanwhile, through television and other media, young people are continuously exposed to images of the good life (i.e. in commercials, pop music and TV shows) that often revolve around notions of being successful consumers, but also emphasise romantic love, soul mates and trust. Combined with ‘being young longer’, these notions and developments challenge more traditional patterns of marriage partner selection.

Marriage is important in Ngada as it is central to networks of interdependence. Marriage determines ritual and day-to-day obligations towards one’s social environment, controls access to land, enables the redistribution of goods through bridewealth arrangements, and is the basis of social reproduction and key to systems of descent. Ngada marriages are traditionally organised through social strata. Though not-much-talked-about, whether one is a descendant of nobles (ga’é mézé), the middle people (ga’é kisa) or of former slaves (bo’o) is common knowledge in Ngada’s rural communities. It determines tasks and spatial limitations during rituals and affects how one fits in schemes of hospitality. It is important that a woman should not marry (or have sex with) a man below her stratum (this is called la’a sala, or a misstep).

Several times when I discussed social strata with young people, they showed ambivalent attitudes. Often, they started with commenting that it is not important, or that it should not be important, but continued by commenting that they preferred to marry along the lines of it, anyway. These latter comments were mostly made by high ranking young men – who are less burdened by restrictions in partner selection than women – and link to cultural reproduction. However, comments about the decreased prominence of social strata in marriage partner selection hint at novel approaches in deciding whom to marry. What matters most to educated young people now is notions such as trust, like-mindedness and attraction. Indeed, at various points in this thesis, most notably in Chapter 3 in Mako’s and Jane’s life histories, we see that feelings matter, and that these do not always follow along lines of social strata. For example, Mako, being bo’o, was explicitly appalled by its operating principle: ‘Why should it matter, we are all human aren’t we?’ Important to her was whether she could trust her boyfriend, and whether he was respectful towards her feelings. Jane, who was ga’é mézé, moved to Ruteng to be near her boyfriend,
who was not Ngada, and therefore did not properly fit Ngada’s social strata. For Jane, having a boyfriend who had similar perspectives on *adat* was more important than his social ranking. The cases of Mako and Jane suggest that social strata might not be as important as they were before.

Jane’s decision to move to Ruteng implies that mobility increasingly matters. Discussing whether mobility was problematic with regards to social strata and marriage, a senior high-ranking woman confided to me that this was not a problem any longer. Not only does increased mobility and prolonged periods of ‘being young’ enable romantic relations to develop outside Ngada’s strata principles, it also enables parents and family to travel and to evaluate the social position of their child’s (potential) marriage partner. According to this senior woman, similar systems of social strata can be discerned amongst other ethnic groups on Flores. Besides, she said, when strata are irrelevant to the potential partner’s ethnic group or when social strata are incompatible with each other, one can always consider the socio-economic status of the potential partner, by means of taking into account education, job and income, and other possessions. Indeed, to educated young people, consumption matters, and it is much talked about amongst peers and friends (e.g. they talked about clothes, mobile/smartphones and motorbikes). That it also matters in partner selection makes sense, as an education constitutes a promise of upward mobility manifested in consumption. In turn, consumption, and related concepts, such as an income and career, change notions about what actually constitutes one’s social ranking. Is it solely one’s heritage or do contemporary markers of wellbeing (e.g. an income) matter, too?

Whether one adheres to social strata principles largely depends on one’s actual stratum and on gender. Parents matter too: similar to young people, low-ranking parents might be less inclined to follow ‘traditional’ practice. There is thus much differentiation in the way social strata matter to young people and their parents. This largely explains why it was not often the subject of explicit debate amongst young people. The associated costs of marriage – mainly bridewealth, but also the costs of wedding celebrations – were much more salient in young people’s discussions. These were an easy target for criticism, as they fit more general critiques of the *budaya mina*. Specifically, together with costs for funerals and rituals, young people expressed a desire to be less dependent on collectives (bridewealth and celebrations are collective efforts of extended families and neighbours). Instead, in their discussions, educated young people favoured expenditures aimed at the individual (e.g. healthcare, and education). For example, at wedding celebrations, the young men whom I accompanied were often calculating the costs of the party, and disapprovingly discussed the relative large sums of money needed for the event.
Despite novel and alternative perspectives on marriage, educated young people are agents of cultural reproduction, too. They rarely questioned practices of postmarital uxorilocality. In fact, it was something in which they took pride, and it formed a defining element in their Ngada identity. I witnessed many young Ngada men claiming in inter-ethnic contexts that Ngada women are stronger and better (as compared to, for example, Manggarai women), due to uxorilocal practices. Also, at the OMK self-development seminar, several women expressed a desire to take responsibility for their families, and to start one, too. Young men expressed a similar desire, but as gender ideals ascribe more care and household tasks to women, a family imposes few limits to men’s mobility and labour-market opportunities. Typical in this regard was that during the seminar’s lunch, women were in charge — without much complaint — of cooking, food distribution, and cleaning, while the young men smoked and lounged on their motor bikes. At other moments, too, young women confirmed their gendered responsibility towards their family. For example, many young women, also in group discussions, remarked that they had returned to Ngada and their natal community because of their parents and *adat*.175

Educated young people’s gender norms follow quite traditional patterns; the same accounts for their norms regarding sexuality. Educated young men and women considered pre-marital sex and its consequences undesirable. Rather, they stressed that they wished to work first and gain experience before marriage. Hence, rarely were these norms breached in mixed friend groups. At the hot springs, young men and women bathed separately, the women fully dressed. Though romantic couples could hold hands, further intimacies were limited to ‘hidden sites’ (which are not a particularly new phenomenon in Ngada; i.e. premarital sex is not modern) or on motorbikes (albeit limited due to its public character).

In general, young women’s sexuality is subject to scrutiny by family and friends, and they are encouraged to act within accepted moral boundaries. On Facebook, short clips of drunken young women who are being exploited circulate, warning women not to fall into morally dangerous behaviour. In male friend groups, women were often denied a ‘positive sexuality’ at all. Through their porn consumption, the sharing of stories of visits to prostitutes, and taboos on discussing romantic sex, it seemed young men considered female bodies mainly as objects of male fantasy and desire. When women were considered to be promiscuous by men, they were subject to gossip and ridicule in male friend groups, and considered to be undesirable marriage partners. Some young women, too, pointed to these promiscuous women as *bancur* (broken, damaged) and immoral.

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175 Throughout Indonesia, as in most other parts of the world, young women have more care responsibilities, (e.g. for their ageing parents), than their male peers. In Ngada, in keeping with uxorilocal practices, this responsibility is often framed in *adat* terms.
Through their socialising, peer relations and friendships, young people contest some marriage practices, but affirm gendered notions of responsibility and appropriate behaviour. Contestation as cultural production is not a simple process and occurs slowly and non-lineally. Young people do not navigate complex moral norms and practices unanimously and consistently. With regards to social strata and adat responsibilities, as well as to sharing the costs and labour of bridewealth and wedding celebrations, educated young people share a desire to abandon what they considered traditional ways, yet at other times express a strong connection to it. This ambivalence points to changing practices and the re-interpretation of existing ways, yet also implies there is no clear break with previous practices. There seems to be a tendency, in line with more general developments, to favour the individual above the collective (the primacy of feeling over social strata), to focus on individual responsibilities (achieving an education and a job), to take up opportunities of choice (avoiding MBA), and to impose norm-confirming restrictions on themselves (this refers particularly to young women), in order to fall within what young people consider appropriate behaviour. Whereas individuality suggests cultural production, its effects – norm-confirming practice – largely constitute cultural reproduction.

Religious beliefs and customary practices
Here, I specifically look at OMK as both a site for cultural production and as a site for cultural reproduction. I discuss how un(der)employed educated young people’s collective experience of Catholicism links to customary practices. I argue that rituals and ceremonies may lose cultural relevance for these young people due to their limited connection to the agricultural cycle, yet that the social nature of these events makes them important.

Pujo Semedi has recently argued that the institution of Pramuka (Praja Muda Karana; the Indonesian scouts and guides movement) functions as ‘a moral movement’. Pramuka advocates traditional scouting values, such as loyalty to the state and patriotism. Its ‘members are bound by the promise to become exemplary [citizens] who believe in God, are loyal to the Motherland, are well-behaved and responsible, and care for the environment’ (Semedi, 2016, p. 118). Moreover, scouts ‘learn leadership, teamwork, management and other organizational skills’ (Semedi, 2016, p. 127). At the same time, scouting provides a place for young people to have fun and experience a remarkable degree of gender equality and mixed-gender socialising. Scouting enables young people to explore and develop new modes of socialising and connecting with each other (i.e. cultural production), but also shapes young people into responsible citizens (i.e. cultural reproduction). I argue that OMK can be considered in similar fashion.
Un(der)employed educated young people are devout Catholics. Most of them attend Sunday mass. The local pastor claimed that currently fewer people are coming to church than before, but he did not complain about educated young people. That is because OMK is a key node in un(der)employed educated young people’s social life (note that less educated people, due to them being young for a shorter time – i.e. they marry and work sooner than educated people – are less involved in OMK). It is a site where they can have fun in mixed gender settings, relatively autonomously. Yet, through OMK they are also activated as dedicated church members: it is a site where they learn to be good Catholics, can develop their organising skills, take responsibility for the community (e.g. by partaking in volunteering jobs at the church grounds), and are challenged to express ambitions and desires that are in line with more general ideals of development and progress. These latter characteristics explain why OMK is considered by parents and the community at large as a morally safe place for young people’s socialising. However, we have also seen that at OMK, particularly due to extended periods of socialising, romantic relations may develop that do not match more traditional practices.

The collective experience of Catholicism implies that young people are acting as moral guardians for each other (this is not exclusively a Catholic trait; see Parker (2016a) for an example from Muslim West Sumatra). Even though their socialising, peer relations and friendships do not necessarily take place solely within the Church’s moral sphere, most educated young people are strongly linked to each other via OMK. Hence, these friendships and peer relations are subject to Catholic moral scrutiny. Of course, this does not mean that, for example, young men do not act nakal (naughty; refers to unruly male behaviour towards women, but also to watching pornography or excessive drinking). Often, they do. Nevertheless, OMK stimulates young people to discuss regularly each other’s Catholic virtues and interpretations of the Bible, and provides opportunities to positively contribute to the community. Though I have not witnessed young people making direct appeals to their peers’ Catholic morals in relation to nakal behaviour, such behaviour was subject to gossip, including in the OMK context. For example, I heard young women, while they cooked lunch for the seminar’s attendants, complain about some of their male friends’ drinking and gambling. Such complaining reflects real concerns, and for some women these kinds of practices make men less attractive boyfriends or potential marriage partners. In Chapter 3, we saw that Mako finished her relationship with her Ende-based boyfriend due to his nakal behaviour.

Catholicism provides a moral compass to young people, whether they follow it or not. This is not only relevant with regards to being nakal, but also with regards to customary practices, which are intricately linked to the House, woé and the ancestors. In
Ngada, the Church does not oppose *adat* rituals and ceremonies. As a result, Catholicism and *adat* are not mutually exclusive, and on many occasions (e.g. during *ribu* or funerals) one can witness Ngada people both performing Catholic and *adat* rites. For most educated young people, this means they can both identify as devout Catholics, as well as express a strong connection to what they consider to be tradition.

Indigenous beliefs include more than just reverence to ancestors; there is a widespread belief in ghosts, spirits, mythical creatures and magic. The connections amongst *adat*, Catholicism, and these other beliefs are not part of this thesis; however, it should be clear that young people are rather ambivalent towards these beliefs. For example, educated young men were not strong believers in magic in relation to the lottery. Amongst themselves they laughed about these beliefs, as they considered them as superstitious and backward. Stories about mythical creatures were also laughed at, as were other people’s accounts of mysterious happenings (e.g. strange lights in the forests or strange noises). Nevertheless, as young people socialised, particularly at night in each other’s houses or at gatherings where young men sat down with older men, drinking and smoking, stories about ghosts, spirits, and mythical creatures were often recounted. It seemed a form of entertainment, with stories often changing in detail depending on context and alcohol consumption.

While young people many times told me of their scepticism towards magic and spiritual beings, they often also mentioned that they had experienced something that they could not explain without referring to magic or spiritual beings. For example, one young woman was tormented by continuous tooth ache. Dentists and doctors had not been able to cure her, after which she went to a local traditional healer (*dukun*), who diagnosed her as being a victim of someone’s envy and black magic (the young woman had just taken a new boyfriend). As cure, the *dukun* had given her a bottle of water on which the *dukun* had prayed (in Catholic fashion), and she had to drink a specific amount each day. The young woman told me: ‘I don’t know, people tell many stories and sometimes people want to hurt someone because they are jealous, so that’s why I take this medicine’. In this particular case, the young woman had been critical of villagers believing in black magic, yet the Catholic nature of her medicine allowed her to take it. We thus see that notions of (black) magic, traditional knowledge and healers, and Catholic faith are connected. These connections are complex, and interpreted by young people as they deal with misfortune, witness sudden illness, and hear stories of the inexplicable.

With regards to their ancestors, educated young people are far less ambivalent. They never laughed at people talking about ancestors or about rituals and ceremonies. They felt connected to their family, the House and the land, and, through this connection, with
their ancestors. With friends they talked about adat practices, and, though commenting on the budaya minta, they felt part of the community, a feeling that they appreciated very much. They visited major celebrations and talked about how important ancestors were to them, being aware that the collective experience was a celebration of the community in itself.

Young people enthusiastically took part in the many manifestations of adat, yet in limited fashion. Because they are educated and do not farm, they are often less familiar with the sequence and meaning of rites. Young women and men often refrain from ritual tasks, and occupy themselves with cooking, and socialising. To (educated) young people, socialising is a key element of such practices, rendering it a major leisure moment, similar to other parties (e.g. weddings). As I joined young people at major customary celebrations (reba), young people were happy to leave their parents and family and rather socialised in a friend’s house. They thus reproduced the liveliness, yet less so the sacred part of the ceremony.

Conclusion
Socialising, peer relations and friendships are important to rural un(der)employed educated young people. They are young longer and have plenty of free time (i.e. they do not have families of their own). Yet, in general, their position is not much different than that of their working peers, or their parents and neighbours. Similar to them, educated young people need to ‘feel’ their way through a dynamic set of sites and continuously reach out and connect to peers and friends, close family, neighbours, extended networks of kin, and other community members. They are reproducing agents of Ngada’s ‘liveliness’, and contribute to the very fabric of Ngada’s communities.

In the previous chapter, I concluded that young people, by ‘being young’, can be ‘good’ community members, mainly due to their rural situatedness, and the strong communal backing this implies. However, at the same time they challenge Ngada networks of interdependence with their (late) modern aspirations, particularly in the moment they become socially accepted adults. That does not mean they do not shape novel practice while being young. In fact they do. Hugely expanded networks – facilitated by modern (mobile and social) media – together with increased mobility and prolonged periods of ‘being young’ enable young people to be culture-producing actors. In particular, young people come to novel practice with regards to marriage and adat.

Processes of cultural production and reproduction are messy and rarely linear: young people actively move ‘back-and-forth’ within complex ensembles of social codes, gendered roles, and spiritual moralities. Young people at various points in life, in various contexts, might be critical of their natal community, ‘wanting change’, yet at other times
express a strong connection to ‘being Ngada’. They also might feel confused about what they want and where they belong, ‘feeling bingung’ [confused]. In the concluding chapter, I will take these three elements – which I demarcated before in Chapter 4 – to make concluding remarks regarding the central theme of this thesis: being young, educated and un(der)employed in rural Indonesia.
Conclusion: being young, educated and un(der)employed in Ngada

In June, 2016, Indonesian President Joko Widowo defended his government’s decision to eliminate one million civil service positions over the coming years by claiming that civil servant spending was getting out of control (Amindoni, 2016). Meanwhile, in 2014, a new Village Law (Law no 6/2014) had been approved, and is currently being implemented throughout the country. In the new Law, villages will see a significant increase in their budget, aimed at stimulating rural development. However, there are concerns that these increased budgets will strengthen patron-client relationships, decrease transparency, and reduce local democracy (e.g. Antlöv, Wetterberg, & Dharmawan, 2016).

These two macro-developments will greatly impact rural educated young people across Indonesia. While the government’s intention to eliminate large numbers of PNS challenges young people’s labour market opportunities, the Village Law may have more ambiguous effects. Strengthened patron-client relationships and decreased transparency may be problematic for educated young people entering the labour market, and they might become entangled in corruption, needing large sums of money to obtain a job. However, increased village budgets may also pose opportunities for communities to directly address educated young people’s un(der)employment. Moreover, educated young people might become brokers of transparency, and by means of their ‘educated potential’ (as vanguard of positive change) hold local politicians publicly accountable. This might provide them with work, yet might also lead to confrontation, as new power arrangements could challenge previously common arrangements (i.e. adat arrangements or arrangements controlled by a gerontocracy).

The impacts that the Village Law and the elimination of one million PNS positions will have are still largely unknown. However, both developments indicate that it is important to know about the current situation of educated young people in rural Indonesia. This thesis contributes to our understanding of these young people, their situations, and how they may shape the future of rural Indonesia.
Rural educated young people: a problem revisited

The basic premise of this thesis is that there is ‘a problem of rural educated young people’ in Indonesia (see Chapter 1). Due to their education, these young people feel modern and expect upward mobility. But upon their return to their rural communities, educated young people are confronted by tight labour market conditions, and become un- or underemployed. In this conclusion, I am revisiting this problem by bringing the chapters together, and mapping out how this ‘problem’ manifests itself in Ngada. I do so by returning to the three elements I distinguished in Chapter 4 – ‘being Ngada’, ‘wanting change’, and ‘feeling bingung’ [confused]. In particular, I discuss the extent to which educated young people reproduce local cultural practice (i.e. ‘being Ngada’), or formulate alternatives and come to novel practice (‘wanting change’). The tension between cultural reproduction and production leads to considerable ambivalence, and is discussed as ‘feeling bingung’.

‘Being Ngada’

In Chapter 2, I constructed a theoretical framework about young people in contemporary globalised, late modern societies. Young people in such societies, and in Indonesia, increasingly experience a sensation of individualisation and being responsible for their own life-course trajectories. However, they are also confronted with long lasting structural inequalities on which they have limited influence (e.g. Ngada’s marginal role in the global economy). I also discussed the ways in which an education empowers students, but also reaffirms social inequalities. These two related functions enable young people actively shape and navigate opportunities, while also constraining their life trajectories. I illustrated this with multiple examples from Indonesia about youth, especially in relation to how they deal with un(der)employment, gender constraints, and (failed) upward social mobility. They exemplify how young people have agentive power, but how their sociocultural context matters, too.

‘Being Ngada’ refers to the ways in which educated young people reproduce local practice, and conform to socio-economic practices and gender ideals. To understand what this means to young people in central Flores, I introduced the ethnic Ngada and their land in Chapter 3. In particular, I focussed on the introduction of Catholicism and the state in the early 20th century, the social domains of family and marriage, religious beliefs and customary practices, and the community economy. Currently, virtually everybody adheres to Catholicism, and the state has permeated daily life by means of the cash economy, education and improved communication and infrastructure networks. Yet, webs of socio-economic interdependence are still operative in rural Ngada, organised through extended
families and manifested in customary practice and ritual, celebrations, and day-to-day socialising.

In Chapter 5 I explained that educated young people rely heavily on these networks of interdependence, particularly in relation to their education, despite deriding them as manifesting a ‘culture of requesting’ (*kebudayaan minta*). An education is considered indispensable for individual upward social mobility, but also for the development of the community at large. However, tertiary degrees are relatively expensive, and families often need to share the educational costs within kin networks, or delay enrolments until enough funds are accumulated or released. Implementing such strategies of sharing and delaying means that young people become indebted to the kin networks that enabled their education. Therefore, upon graduation educated young people are expected to contribute to these networks. In Ngada, young people wish to do so by means of obtaining a government job. They therefore opt for study subjects that are mostly education- or health-related. Through these study subjects they also hope to be able to contribute to the development and progress of their communities, which is a major motivation for them to return to their rural natal community upon graduating. Though this ‘contributing’ is inspired by a modern notion of community welfare – a point to which I shall return shortly – educated young people feel connected to Ngada, and appreciate feelings of communality as expressed in ritual, but also in day-to-day socialising and interdependence. ‘Culture’ matters to these educated young people, implying some continuity of reproduction.

In Chapter 6 I described how young people are confronted by a government hiring freeze upon their return from their universities in the city, rendering many of them unemployed. Many more educated young people become underemployed. They take on volunteering jobs at community health posts or underpaid and precarious teaching positions at Ngada’s schools. Others volunteer for the local government or for the Church, or help family and neighbours with work in the fields, in household and care tasks – mainly young women – or work as *ojek* drivers or temporarily in construction – mainly young men. Meanwhile, they depend for their sustenance on the community networks of interdependence, which house them and feed them. Young people are exempt from contributing money or agricultural produce to these networks during rituals or weddings and other celebrations. Nevertheless, they consider their volunteering and their precarious teaching jobs as a way of contributing to the well-being of their community. Despite often denouncing networks of interdependence as constituting a ‘culture of requesting’, they reproduce mutual dependency, something their parents and the community at large recognises too, by absorbing un(der)employed educated young people without much trouble into their webs of interdependence.
Finally, in Chapter 7 we saw that young people not only contribute – perhaps in a limited way – to networks of interdependence, they also reproduce its underlying sociality. I described how un(der)employed, educated, young people’s social lives easily interweave with more general community socialising. They partake in rituals and in day-to-day socialising, attend weddings and funerals, and do so together with their parents, family and neighbours. Moreover, in more exclusive peer and friend groups, young people reproduce gendered notions of appropriate behaviour and *adat* conduct.

*Wanting change*

Whereas ‘being Ngada’ refers to cultural reproduction, ‘wanting change’ refers to the critiques and alternatives educated young people formulate with regards to local cultural practices. This was clear in Chapter 5 about the ‘promise of education’, in which I described how educated young people critiqued the ‘passive mindset’ of the villager, the existence of networks of interdependence, and the resulting *budaya minta*. According to them, this culture of requesting hindered development. Educated young people explained to me that villagers need to be more independent, prioritise individual well-being above collective expenses, and be more focussed on the future. Many young people see it as their ‘educated’ duty to be agents of change and promote development in Ngada. To many, this duty was the principal reason for their return to their rural natal community.

In Chapter 6, I discussed how educated young people are absorbed by community networks of interdependence during their troubled education-to-work transitions, but that they delay and challenge the reproduction of these networks too. That is, due to their un(der)employment, young people remain dependent on networks of interdependence longer than in times when desired white-collar jobs were more plentiful. Meanwhile, young people challenge the reproduction of these networks as they consider themselves modern, and prioritise the individual above the collective. One can thus question whether educated young people will be prepared to contribute to these networks of interdependence when they finally obtain properly salaried employment.

In Chapter 7 I described how educated young people contest the reproduction of customary social strata as the dominant organising principle for marriage. They are educated and feel modern, and therefore prioritise their potential partner’s educational background and employment above these strata, which they consider to be rather archaic. More importantly, due to their protracted youth and the socialising this involved, they have time to develop ‘close friendships’ and romances in which love and trust matter. These feelings are important to educated young people, also because they often feature in pop culture and commercial images of ‘the good life’ that come to them through television and
the internet. Besides contesting social strata as the organising principle for marriage partner selection, young people also question customary marriage exchanges (which are the result of a collective effort), mainly through their general critique of the *budaya minta*. They thus question the customary dynamics of the marriage system which forms the pivot of social organisation, establishing descent and ritual and socio-economic obligations.

*Feeling bingung*

Taking into account educated young peoples’ acts of cultural reproduction and production, there is clearly much ambivalence in the way they navigate their lives and engage with their communities. This ambivalence was expressed in multiple ways. Sometimes, it seemed educated young people were struggling to conform to dominant norms, especially gender norms. For example, Mako, who I introduced in Chapter 4, was ‘*sangat bingung*’ (really confused) when we talked about how she felt about her parents, as they wanted her to stay in Ronaga, while her then-boyfriend was still in Ende. Amy and Rosa, the *sukarela* in a remote health post whom I introduced in Chapter 5, similarly struggled with their gendered responsibility to be near their parents. Though they initially told me they returned to their natal community because they wanted to contribute to the development of the community, it turned out they found life in their small village boring, and had mostly returned because their parents had wanted them to do so.

At other times, young people were not so much struggling as contradictory in their statements. For example, they took pride in feelings of communality in Ngada as expressed in rituals and practices of sharing, yet also often critiqued these practices, claiming they hindered development. Moreover, while critiquing the collective nature of networks of interdependence – in favour of a more individualistic mindset – young people aimed to contribute to the well-being of the collective, too. These critiques were thus paradoxical, especially because educated young people depend on these networks for their education, and during their education-to-work transitions. Feeling *bingung*, and the ambivalence it represents, was therefore often rather ironic.

Despite the ambivalence un(der)employed educated young people exhibit, and the critiques and alternatives they formulate with regards to common practice, these young people are ‘good community members’. Though they might be delaying the reproduction of networks of interdependence, and they might be ambivalent and contradictory about gender norms and their rural lives, the impact of this delaying and their ambivalent and contradictory statements is limited. That is, as dependent young people, their contributions to cultural reproduction outweigh the challenges they pose to the community economy and its networks of interdependence. It is at the moment that they, as working social adults, are
supposed to contribute to these networks, that their critiques and ambivalence might have much more effect.

**A rural perspective on troubled education-to-work transitions**

Un(der)employed educated young people in Ngada have much in common with their peers all over the world. In many ways, they behave – due to their education – as late modern subjects: they favour individualism, expect upward social mobility, and connect, through their mobile phones and the internet, with a global culture of consumption. They feel responsible for their own life course trajectories and take pride in their degrees.

At the same time, however, un(der)employed educated young people are subject to global inequalities, declining state support, and Ngada’s marginal place in the Indonesian economy. Gender norms, in particular for young women, are a constraining factor, too. Similar to their peers in the West, educated young people in Ngada experience a disjuncture between ‘objective and subjective dimensions of life’ (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p. 4).

Despite their familiarity with a global, late modern discourse, the experiences of educated young people in Ngada are distinctively Indonesian, and, more specifically, distinctively rural in that national context. Through their education they have learned about the virtues of ‘the village’, as the timeless essence of Indonesian culture. However, students also learn that their village lacks development and needs to modernise. Through their education they are instilled with a moral obligation that they, as educated persons, need to develop (membangun) and progress (mejukarni) their rural communities. State discourse is thus ambiguous about rural life, and we see this reflected in the ambivalent, contradictory and paradoxical statements by young people.

Rural educated young people are, upon their return after graduation, confronted with a dysfunctional Ngada labour market. The resulting un(der)employment means that young people cannot contribute to the development and progress of their communities in the way that they – and their parents, the wider community and the government – had imagined. The disjuncture between the imagined contribution young people should make, and the labour market reality, is mediated relatively well by community networks of interdependence. As a result, they do not need to worry about housing or a livelihood. Instead of frantically searching for some casual work from which they would have to eke out a meagre existence, educated young people can either volunteer at Church or at a health post, or work as a guru honor at a local school. Meanwhile, they can partake in rituals and celebrations, without the pressure to contribute to them with money, agricultural produce or animals. They can enjoy, and contribute to, the liveliness of these events, and
expand their networks and gain experience with their activities, hoping that these will lead to a properly paid position.

Despite the ambivalence young people often display, and the way they sometimes feel conflicted and experience lack of fulfilment, they are not causing trouble in their rural natal communities, but are rather optimistic and active. This is quite different from the analyses of most other, mostly urban-based, studies from the Global South that deal with young people experiencing trouble obtaining properly salaried employment. For example, some key words that stand out from such studies are boredom (e.g. Mains, 2007; Masquelier, 2013; Schielke, 2008), waithood (Honwana, 2014), and timepass (Jeffrey, 2010b). Though these terms should not be conflated with idleness or with a lack of agency, they have a negative connotation and are framed in opposition to mainstream society. This contrasts with the attitudes of young people in Ngada.

The optimism and activities of un(der)employed educated young people in Ngada can be linked to a general state discourse of development and progress, which instils in young people the notion that they can be agents of change. One would assume that their un(der)employment challenges this discourse. Strikingly, it does not. In this thesis I argue that this is due to their rural situatedness, and the strong community backing of un(der)employed educated young people.

Nevertheless, young people do not appreciate all aspects of village life. They experience a disjuncture between their modernity-inspired aspirations and the labour market reality. They critique the budaya minta, struggle with gender norms and sometimes find social control stifling. In this thesis I posit that these less positive reactions to village life will possibly challenge cultural reproduction. The absorption of young people into community networks of interdependence does not constitute a long-term viable situation, partly because it is likely that the number of un(der)employed educated young people will increase. This is not only due to the increasing scarcity of civil service positions once government plans to eliminate a large proportion of the bureaucracy are implemented, but also because it is highly likely that the number of university graduates in Ngada will increase. The Universitas Nusa Cendana campus in Bajawa, opened in 2014, will deliver between 1,000 and 2,000 new graduates each year directly into the Ngada labour market. The effects of this huge increase in the supply of potential skilled workers are still unknown, but with already tight labour market conditions, the problem of rural educated young people will not be likely to decrease.

Education is thus not always the vehicle of progress and development that is often imagined by young people, their communities and governments. Due to their education, young people in Ngada experience tensions as they rely on the very networks of
interdependence that their late modern aspirations lead them to reject. However, we should not be too pessimistic. We have seen that young people, their parents, and the larger community, are pragmatic. Despite their troubled education-to-work transitions, un(der)employed educated young people are enabled to be ‘good’ due to the social backing of their rural community. Moreover, the educated young people *themselves* are active, as they try to gain experience and expand networks, but also because they wish to contribute to the wellbeing of their communities, avoid work in the fields, and because many of these activities are about socialising with peers and friends.
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Appendix A: Education and gender

Statistics regarding education and gender in Ngada are scarce, and the interpretation of the few extent statistics is tricky, making any conclusions based on these statics tentative. For example, the level of education in relation to gender has only been part of government reports since 2011. As Table A.1 shows, in 2010 all Ngada people were taken into account, while in 2011 and 2012 only the population ten years of age or over was included in the statistics. This accounts for the apparent steep decrease in 2010-2011, for example, in the percentage of the population who have had ‘no education’. Though the numbers for 2011 and 2012 could be converted into scores similar to those of 2010 (in the two latest reports the total population is given, also in terms of gender, as well as the distribution of people over the various age groups), such conversion distorts comparisons over time, as we cannot know how, in 2010, education is distributed over the age categories. In other words, from the 2010 numbers we do not know the proportion of the ‘below 10 years of age’ group in – what effectively would be – the categories ‘no education’ and ‘primary education (SD)’. This relates to a second problem, which is the method of calculating the percentages. These calculations differ, too, over the years: whereas in 2010 the cohorts ‘men’ and ‘women’ are separated (and thus both separately constitute 100 per cent), in 2011 and 2012 the cohorts are taken together to form a single cohort. These statistical inconsistencies make a comparison even over the short time between 2010 and 2012 difficult, though within the single timeslot of 2010, and over the years 2011 and 2012, Table A.1 gives a useful overview of the relation between education and gender.
Table A.1 Level of education in Ngada district in relation to gender in 2010, 2011, and 2012 in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>2010 Female</th>
<th>2010 Male</th>
<th>2011 Population 10 years of age, or over Female</th>
<th>2011 Population 10 years of age, or over Male</th>
<th>2012 Population 10 years of age, or over Female</th>
<th>2012 Population 10 years of age, or over Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No education</td>
<td>39.86</td>
<td>43.96</td>
<td>11.25</td>
<td>13.34</td>
<td>12.27</td>
<td>11.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school (SD)</td>
<td>35.83</td>
<td>30.67</td>
<td>23.37</td>
<td>20.86</td>
<td>24.30</td>
<td>20.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior high school (SMP)</td>
<td>11.33</td>
<td>8.60</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>8.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior high school, including vocational schooling (SMA)</td>
<td>9.34</td>
<td>13.28</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>5.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-bachelor level (diploma I/II)</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-bachelor level (diploma III)</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor level (diploma IV/S1)</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master level and above (S2/S3)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (percentage)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Besides the aforementioned issues with the statistics, two other problems arise when interpreting Table A.1. First, as education in relation to gender is not specified in age groups, it is hard to make any conclusion regarding whether, for example, young women are better educated than women in older age categories. Second, and in relation to the previous point, from Table A.1 alone it cannot be validated whether proportional differences in educational attainment in relation to gender are due to actual differences in this attainment or, for example, due to a surplus in one of the gender cohorts in a specific age group (which, in turn, might be due, for example, to labour migration). There are other demographic statistics available, however, and these indicate that females are slightly in the majority in the total population of Ngada: 50.96 per cent women (77,441) over 49.04 per cent men (74,185) in 2012. Of a total population of 151,716,\(^{176}\) there are thus 3,256 more women than men. In 2012, of the total population of 10 years of age and above (74.83 per cent of the total population, or 113,529 people) – which is thus represented in the table

\(^{176}\) Curiously, the numbers in the 2013 statistics do not match: the given data (77,441 women; 74,185 men; and a total population of 151,716) is wrong in that 77,441+74,185≠151,716, but instead =151,626. Why these numbers do not match is unaccounted for, but as I cannot guess where exactly the mismatch comes from, in further calculations 151,716 is taken as the total population (which thus, potentially, biases these calculations). Moreover, in further calculations, the sum of absolute numbers sometimes does not match. This can be accounted for, as percentages are presented up until two decimal points. On a total population of 151,716, 0.01 per cent represents approximately 15 people. As a result, due to the rounding up of the percentages and the rounding up to 'whole numbers' (i.e. there are no 'half' people), some discrepancies can be detected. However, these discrepancies remain small and do not affect the larger picture the statistics represent.
above – 51.72 per cent are women (58,717), while 48.28 per cent are men (54,812). In this age-category women outnumber men by 3,905 (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013b, pp. 72, 83). From Table A.1 it is clear that in 2012 there is a higher percentage of women than of men in nearly each level of education (except for the bachelor and junior high school level). The question, then, is whether this dominance can be explained in terms of women’s majority in general? To answer this question for 2012, I have recalculated the percentages from this year into percentages similar to the 2010 percentages. This means that the female and male cohorts each constitute 100 per cent, which enables us to see proportional differences in educational attainment (i.e. the surplus of women in Ngada is filtered out). These recalculations are represented in Table A.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>2010 Female</th>
<th>2010 Male</th>
<th>2012 Female</th>
<th>2012 Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No education</td>
<td>39.86</td>
<td>43.96</td>
<td>23.65</td>
<td>23.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school (SD)</td>
<td>35.83</td>
<td>30.67</td>
<td>46.84</td>
<td>42.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior high school (SMP)</td>
<td>11.33</td>
<td>8.60</td>
<td>11.74</td>
<td>18.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior high school, including vocational schooling (SMA)</td>
<td>9.34</td>
<td>13.28</td>
<td>11.62</td>
<td>11.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-bachelor level (diploma I/II)</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-bachelor level (diploma III)</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor level (diploma IV/S1)</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master level and above (S2/S3)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (percentage)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculated from Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada (2011, p. 80; 2013b, p. 85).

Unfortunately, we still cannot directly compare the numbers from 2010 and 2012 (in 2010 the cohort ‘population below the age of ten’ is included, while it is excluded in 2012), though the proportional difference can be taken into account. It is clear that there was a relatively larger difference between men and women in the category ‘no education’ in 2010 than there was in 2012. While a decrease in percentages from 2010 to 2012 is expected – after all, small children no longer are included in the data – the larger relative decrease of uneducated men is rather dramatic and therefore hardly credible in only a year's difference.

177 Similar calculations can be made for 2011, but as this would not overly extend our comprehension of historical trends – after all, data are only given for three years – I have kept the 2011 numbers out of Table A.2.
Other striking numbers in Table A.2 are women’s dominance in primary and the pre-bachelor levels,\textsuperscript{178} while male dominance in the junior high school level is quite conspicuous. Moreover, on the latter level, the relative proportion has been reversed between 2010 and 2012, which is actually quite strange (a small difference in the proportional distribution can be explained, but the difference is rather big and is not explained or accounted for in the statistical updates). Also, if we look again at Table A.1, we notice that there are more strange fluctuations over the years. These differences could be explained in terms of (re)migration or increased education. However, the proportional numbers appear awkwardly large, and thus seem a highly inaccurate fluctuation. For example, it is strange that on many levels, such as ‘no education’, ‘junior’ and ‘senior high school’, and ‘bachelor’, the proportional distribution between men and women gets reversed (e.g. in 2011, men outnumber women, in 2012 women outnumber men). Adding the numbers of 2010 only complicate matters further, suggesting that these statistical representations of education and gender, though useful, might be flawed and imprecise.

\textsuperscript{178} Young women’s dominance in the pre-bachelor level indicates that more women go into careers requiring a diploma at tertiary level (e.g. nursing, kindergarten teacher) than men, who are dominant in the bachelor-level cohort.
Appendix B: The Ngada labour market

Table B.1 gives a basic overview of economically active and inactive people aged 15 and above in Ngada in the years 2008, 2010 and 2012. Unfortunately, of the categories represented in the table, only ‘working’ is defined, yet in a vague way. The accompanying notes to the statistics state that working ‘means activity to earn income by doing work or helping to do work at least one hour continuously during the reference week (including unpaid family worker/s for any economic activity)’ (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013b, p. 68). This definition therefore includes informal work, and explains the exceptionally small unemployment percentages (nearly 4 per cent in 2008; 2.2 per cent in 2010; and 0.75 per cent in 2012), which are well below the national averages.

### Table B.1 Population in Ngada district, 15 years of age and over, by type of activity in the previous week, and specified by gender, in absolute numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economically active</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1,620</td>
<td>1,022</td>
<td>2,642</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically inactive</td>
<td>20,448</td>
<td>8,124</td>
<td>28,572</td>
<td>15,034</td>
<td>6,985</td>
<td>22,019</td>
<td>18,866</td>
<td>7,561</td>
<td>26,427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending School</td>
<td>2,928</td>
<td>3,625</td>
<td>6,553</td>
<td>4,247</td>
<td>3,684</td>
<td>7,931</td>
<td>4,784</td>
<td>4,468</td>
<td>9,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>14,151</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>14,713</td>
<td>8,010</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>8,307</td>
<td>10,713</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>11,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3,369</td>
<td>3,937</td>
<td>7,306</td>
<td>2,777</td>
<td>3,004</td>
<td>5,781</td>
<td>3,369</td>
<td>2,561</td>
<td>5,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48,998</td>
<td>45,957</td>
<td>94,955</td>
<td>47,117</td>
<td>42,730</td>
<td>89,847</td>
<td>49,042</td>
<td>44,994</td>
<td>94,036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


We see that the total of economically active persons remains stable throughout the period 2008-2012, but that the number of women slightly increases, while that of men remains relatively stable, despite a dip in 2010. We also see that there are more men economically active than women – even though women outnumber men by 3-5000 – while women dominate the housekeeping category. With regards to unemployment numbers, we see a steady decline through the time series, and in 2008 and 2012 specifically more women than men are unemployed. Why in 2010 men outnumber women in the category ‘unemployed’ remains unclear. An option could be that this reversal is related to the onset, or ending, of projects in the area with different gender employment implications. A steady increase in school attendance suggests that Ngada people increasingly attend school well into their 179 Statistics for the years 2009 and 2011 are available too. These numbers are not included in the tables below because, due to the limited time series, adding these numbers will make the tables needlessly complicated, while minimally contributing to our understanding of the state of the Ngada economy in relation to its labour market.

180 The original Indonesian definition is: ‘Bekerja adalah melakukan pekerjaan dengan maksud memperoleh atau membantu memperoleh pendapatan atau keuntungan dan lamanya bekerja paling sedikit 1 jam secara terus menerus dalam seminggu yang lalu (termasuk pekerja keluarga tanpa upah yang membantu dalam suatu usaha/kegiatan ekonomi)’ (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013b, p. 68).
teens. Furthermore, the ‘other’ category takes up a rather large part of the economically inactive part of the population (about 25 per cent in 2008 and 2010; and 22.4 per cent in 2012). What this ‘other’ category exactly entails is not quite clear, but could include, for example, elderly people and possibly volunteers at NGOs and at health posts (though these volunteers, like *guru honor*, could also fall within the ‘non-agricultural temporary workers’ in Table B.3, which implies that they are considered to be economically active).

Table B.2 Population in Ngada district, 15 years of age and over, by type of industry in the previous week, and specified by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural sector</td>
<td>20,775</td>
<td>24,832</td>
<td>45,607</td>
<td>23,903</td>
<td>24,737</td>
<td>48,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing sector</td>
<td>1,249</td>
<td>3,734</td>
<td>4,983</td>
<td>1,245</td>
<td>1,605</td>
<td>2,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service sector</td>
<td>4,906</td>
<td>8,245</td>
<td>13,151</td>
<td>6,268</td>
<td>8,568</td>
<td>14,836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26,930</td>
<td>36,811</td>
<td>63,741</td>
<td>31,416</td>
<td>34,910</td>
<td>66,326</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: The available statistics do not differentiate between different occupations, nor the geographical spread of these jobs.

In Table B.2 we see that the vast majority of the Ngada people who work – thus, the economically active (including the informal sector) minus the unemployed – are employed within the agricultural sector: in 2008 71.6 per cent; in 2010 73.3 per cent; and in 2012 63.9 per cent. Between 2008 and 2012, the number of people working within agriculture decreased (in particular the number of males), while the number of people working within manufacturing remained relatively stable (except for a peculiar dip in the number of males in 2010) and the number of people working within the service sector steadily increased – the number of women in particular. These developments are in line with what is happening on the national level (e.g. processes of de-agrarianisation). In fact, we see that especially young people opt for careers outside agriculture, though men much more than women (the number of females remains constant in the agricultural sector over the years). Because the absolute increase of people working within the service sector outweighs the decrease in people working within agriculture, we can infer that people who are not yet employed within agriculture – in practice young people – choose a career outside agriculture. Indeed, if we add the increase in people working within manufacturing to that in the services sector, the numbers suggest that fewer young people choose a ‘career’ in agriculture and work instead within the manufacturing or service sectors. It must be noted, however, that despite an increase in people working outside the agricultural sector, it remains the dominant sector in Ngada, while, in particular, the manufacturing sector remains marginal.

There is another element in Table B.2 that is worth noting, which is that men outnumber women in absolute terms in all sectors (though women have a higher rate of
increase in the service sector and have maintained their numbers in the agricultural sector relative to men’s decline in that sector). This is in accordance with Table B.1, where we saw that more men than women are economically active. However, though women might be less present in the Ngada labour market, they have managed to increase their relative share in all sectors between 2008 and 2012.

Tables B.1 and B.2 represent the divisions within the current Ngada labour market. However, they do not provide information about the quality of work and give no clues regarding underemployment in Ngada. Table B.3 is more instructive with regards to underemployment. In it, we see the working population of Ngada divided into various categories representing the type of employment in the previous week, specified by gender. Most noteworthy is the huge proportion of unpaid workers (these are thus counted as working, as compared to unemployed, or economically inactive, which includes, for example, housekeeping activities and – possibly – volunteers). Particularly women make up this part of the working population, though men also number in the thousands. In 2008, a little more than 38 per cent of the total working population were unpaid (of them, about 69 per cent are female); in 2009, almost 44 per cent were unpaid (of whom 72 per cent are female); and in 2012, 37 per cent were unpaid (72 per cent are female). These percentages are a clear indication that the concept of work does not equal an income in Ngada.

Unpaid work is one of the few categories defined in the statistical report: an ‘an unpaid worker is a worker who works as helper in an income- or profit-making activity, undertaken by someone who may or may not be a member of the same household, without receiving a wage or salary’ (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013b, p. 69). Thus, unpaid workers are mostly the spouses, children, family members or neighbours of the men and women from the category ‘employer assisted by temporary/unpaid workers’, and receive a livelihood (income) through them. However, despite the available definition, it remains unclear who exactly is included in this category (e.g. are a farmer’s family members included, too?).

The number of unpaid workers is reason for concern, as it may indicate that many people are in financially dependent positions. The statistics on temporary workers are worrying too and add up to the number of labourers working in (potentially) precarious

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181 The Indonesian definition of an unpaid worker is as follows: ‘Pekerja Tidak Dibayar adalah seseorang yang bekerja membantu usaha untuk memperoleh penghasilan/keuntungan yang dilakukan oleh salah seorang anggota rumah tangga atau bukan anggota rumah tangga tanpa mendapat upah/gaji’ (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2013b, p. 69).
182 Though potentially worrying, the percentage of unpaid workers can be also be explained by the agricultural nature of the Ngada economy. In an economy where most people work in agriculture, most people will call themselves ‘unpaid workers’ and only some of them (usually male) will call themselves ‘self-employed’ or ‘employer assisted by temporary/unpaid workers. Hence, this percentage is not necessarily reason for concern.
conditions. Finally, self-employed people and employers assisted by (temporary/unpaid, or permanent) workers, in Ngada mostly men, are also vulnerable. For example, such self-employed people could be small-scale farmers who are subject to occasional bad harvests, or shop owners who could experience a sudden fall in customers. Combined, the numbers in Table B.3 suggest a rather worrying picture of the Ngada labour market.

| Table B.3 Population in Ngada district, 15 years of age and over, by type of employment in the previous week, and specified by gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2008 | | | 2010 | | | 2012 | |
| | Female | Male | Total | Female | Male | Total | Female | Male | Total |
| Self-employed | 1,543 | 3,657 | 5,200 | 1,690 | 2,897 | 4,587 | 2,274 | 5,012 | 7,286 |
| Employer assisted by temporary/unpaid workers | 4,844 | 17,674 | 22,518 | 4,493 | 16,524 | 21,017 | 4,808 | 15,216 | 20,024 |
| Employer assisted by permanent workers | 555 | 1,062 | 1,617 | 72 | 688 | 760 | 191 | 1,465 | 1,656 |
| Employee | 2,615 | 5,877 | 8,492 | 4,284 | 6,242 | 10,526 | 4,187 | 8,033 | 12,220 |
| Agricultural temporary workers | 414 | 305 | 719 | - | 106 | 106 | 107 | 390 | 497 |
| Non-agricultural temporary workers | 62 | 605 | 667 | - | 190 | 190 | 107 | 342 | 449 |
| Unpaid workers | 16,897 | 7,631 | 24,528 | 20,877 | 8,263 | 29,140 | 18,042 | 6,923 | 24,965 |
| Total | 26,930 | 36,811 | 63,741 | 31,416 | 34,910 | 66,326 | 29,716 | 37,381 | 67,097 |


The numbers above are not further specified by age group, or by level of education. As a result, it remains unclear in which sectors the unpaid workers work or how precarious their socio-economic conditions really are. As suggested above, these unpaid workers are most likely active in family businesses, such as agriculture or in small shops (or a combination). For example, if the surveys count the head of the family as the employer – these are most likely men, as they vastly outnumber women in the categories ‘employer assisted by temporary/unpaid workers’ – then the unpaid workers are likely spouses, children, or other family members. Such arrangements, in which family members help in the businesses of the family, are common in agriculture or in small shops, though less so in medium-sized businesses or government agencies. People working in these latter organisations likely all fall within the ‘employee’ category. Though the numbers in this category increase between 2008 and 2012, in 2012 their number is only half that of unpaid workers, highlighting the issue of unpaid labour.
Combined, Tables B.1, B.2 and B.3 make clear that many people in Ngada (of the population 15 years of age and above) – in particular women – are either economically inactive or unemployed or are considered unpaid workers, and that agriculture absorbs most labour in the area. Despite these broad indications, the data remain rather indistinct about the actual state of the Ngada labour market.
## Appendix C: Interviews with un(der)employed educated young people

### Table C.1 Interviewed un(der)employed educated young people, with highest level of education and work status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Highest level of education</th>
<th>Work status/ current activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karlin</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>D3 Midwifery</td>
<td>Volunteers at a health post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mako</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>S1 English</td>
<td>Honorarium teacher at a junior high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echiel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>S1 Seminary</td>
<td>Works at a NGO. Works fulltime but is paid only when there is project funding; did not receive salary for several months during field work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>S1 International Relations</td>
<td>Worked as administrator at Telkomsel; works now at a small insurance company in Ende. Telkomsel job was on a temporary contract and underpaid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfons</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>S1 Information Technology</td>
<td>Owns a truck and transport business; truck frequently breaks down. Income from his transport business is limited and erratic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasinta</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>S1 Communication</td>
<td>Various: volunteers at Church, for community organisations, and at a local newspapers; works at the local radio station. The latter job earns her a limited salary (less than Rp.1,000,000, A$100 a month).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meryn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>S1 Business Studies</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>S1 Indonesian Literature</td>
<td>Honorarium teacher at a junior high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>D3 Agricultural Studies</td>
<td>Works at a NGO. Works fulltime but is paid only when there is project funding; did not receive salary for several months during field work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vera</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>S1 Public Administration</td>
<td>Honorarium administrator at the District’s government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>D3 Nursing</td>
<td>Volunteers at a health post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>D3 Nursing</td>
<td>Volunteers at a health post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yohannees</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>S1 Physiotherapy</td>
<td>Volunteers at a health post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agus</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>S1 Geography</td>
<td>Honorarium teacher at a primary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myra</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>D2 Midwifery</td>
<td>Volunteers at the Bajawa hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>S1 Dietetics</td>
<td>Unemployed; volunteers at Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinta</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>D3 Nursing</td>
<td>Volunteers at a health post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>D3 Midwifery</td>
<td>Volunteers at the Bajawa hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>S1 Midwifery</td>
<td>Volunteers at a health post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therese</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>S1 Nursing</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>S1 Nursing</td>
<td>Volunteers at a health post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josef</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>D3 Agricultural Studies</td>
<td>Unemployed; <em>bemo</em> driver (earns him some pocket money), volunteers for the village council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferdi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>D3 English</td>
<td>Honorarium teacher at a primary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mus</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>S1 Indonesian Literature</td>
<td>Unemployed; <em>ojek</em> driver (earns him some pocket money).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>