

Precarity Amidst ‘Ad-Hoc’ Access to Education for Second Generation of Youth Immigrants in Kudat, Sabah

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ABSTRACT

While migration literature is littered with studies on stateless and undocumented children in Malaysia, there is scant focus on the second generation of stateless and undocumented immigrants who were born in Sabah. What happened to the second generation of IMM13 holders and what kind of life condition they tread since? This paper investigates the situation of children of IMM13 holders who were given access to school before 2003, though remain undocumented, and how they make sense of their lives as young adults. Based on in-depth interviews and observations from a broader study conducted in 2013-2016, youths aged 20-30 years old from Kudat, on the west coast of Sabah, it is our contention that for the undocumented, temporary or ad-hoc access to education remains a palliative route without social inclusion of immigrants into the mainstream society.

Keywords: precarity, migration, second-generation immigrants, Sabah, access to education

INTRODUCTION

The focus on the second generation of children of IMM13 visa holders tends to be glossed over in many research initiatives. Research studies, government reports, the nongovernment organisation commissioned studies or undergraduate final year projects often lumped children in one category without taking into account the temporal framework, age, gender or geographical location of the stateless and the undocumented. Then, there is conceptual ambiguity of the terms migrants, immigrants, undocumented and stateless that also reduces and weakens the imagination that each label or categorisation means or implies. For this short paper, we view immigrants as non-citizens who by force of social, economic and political circumstances have settled in Malaysia without any intention of leaving the country in the near future. Specifically, it refers to the second generation of immigrants whose parents were identified as holders of IMM13 refugee visas in the 1980s through the 1990s.

A brief historical background of the Filipino refugee community in Sabah

Filipinos in the Philippines have been crossing the Sulu Sea and the South China Sea even before the formation of Malaysia as a nation-state (see for example, Sather, 1971; Warren, 1985), primarily for economic and social reasons. Both borders have been involved in the social and economic exchange that even with the creation of an independent state such exchange has continued. These social and economic linkages have produced as well cross-border marriages (Lumayag 2016), labour migration, human trafficking, legal and illegal trading activities (Warren 2007). Certainly, pre-independence Malaysia has never adopted a border strategy where people can only cross if they show a certain form of travel documentation, in the same manner people from Sabah can travel to the neighbouring islands