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Globalization and the Transformation of Social Structure: A Sociological Perspective on Cultural Identity Change in the Era of Global Connectivity

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ABSTRACT

Globalization the intensification of cross-border economic, political, cultural, and informational flows that has accelerated dramatically since the late twentieth century has generated profound transformations in social structures and cultural identities across the globe, with particularly consequential effects in rapidly developing societies like Indonesia. This article develops a sociological analysis of globalization's impact on social structure transformation and cultural identity change in the era of global connectivity, integrating four major theoretical perspectives: Anthony Giddens's theory of reflexive modernity and the transformation of intimacy and trust; Ulrich Beck's risk society framework and the individualization of social biography; Manuel Castells's network society analysis; and Arjun Appadurai's global cultural flows and 'scapes' framework. Through systematic qualitative literature review and secondary analysis of national survey data and social indicators from Indonesia (2019–2024), the study examines how globalization is restructuring four dimensions of Indonesian social life: class structure and mobility patterns, institutional trust and social cohesion, family structure and kinship formation, and cultural identity construction. The analysis reveals a characteristic pattern of 'reflexive globalization' in the Indonesian context: rather than producing either cultural homogenization or defensive cultural nationalism, globalization generates a field of creative and contested social transformation in which Indonesian actors selectively appropriate, resist, and hybridize global social forms in ways that reflect their specific cultural, religious, and national contexts. The findings contribute to comparative globalization sociology by demonstrating the specificity of Indonesian social structure transformation and challenging universal models of globalization's social effects.

Keywords

Appadurai; Beck; Castells; cultural identity; globalization; Giddens; Indonesia; reflexive modernity; social structure transformation



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1. Introduction

On March 2, 2020 the day Indonesia confirmed its first two COVID-19 cases the pandemic's arrival catalyzed a dramatic and accelerated demonstration of what sociologists had been theorizing for two decades: the collapse of the distinction between 'global' and 'local' that had defined the era of

manageable globalization. Within weeks, Indonesian families were navigating the intersection of a virus that originated in Wuhan, China; economic disruption driven by the collapse of global supply chains; information ecosystems saturated with globally circulating misinformation; and government responses calibrated partly to international health guidelines from the Geneva-based WHO. The pandemic forced Indonesian society to confront simultaneously its deep global interdependence and the profound inadequacy of national social structures for managing the consequences of that interdependence (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

Yet what was arguably most sociologically revealing was not the crisis itself but the transformations it accelerated. The rapid expansion of remote work restructured labor relations, household organization, and urban spatial patterns. The explosion of social media use from 150 million to 212 million active users between 2019 and 2024 restructured how Indonesians form relationships, consume information, construct identities, and participate in collective life. The pandemic-driven collapse and recovery of the middle class contracting from 46.8 percent to 43.2 percent of the population in 2020-2021, then recovering to 51.7 percent by 2024 revealed the structural fragility of the consumption-based class formation that globalization had constructed over two decades. All of these transformations are expressions of the broader dynamics of globalization and social structure change that this article seeks to analyze.

The sociological literature on globalization has generated multiple competing and complementary theoretical frameworks for understanding its social structural effects. Giddens (2018) emphasizes the disembedding of social relations from local contexts and the reflexive character of identity construction in late modernity. Beck (2022) highlights the emergence of global risks that transcend national boundary management and the individualization of social biography. Castells (2021) focuses on the restructuring of power through the network form and the new identities emerging from network logic. Appadurai (2019) theorizes the disjunctive flows of people, technologies, finance, media, and ideas that characterize globalization and the role of imagination in constructing deterritorialized cultural identities. This article integrates these frameworks into a comprehensive analytical lens for examining the Indonesian case, arguing that each captures a distinct but real dimension of the social structural transformations underway.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Giddens's Reflexive Modernity

Anthony Giddens's theoretical framework of 'high modernity' or 'late modernity' developed in *The Consequences of Modernity* (2018), *Modernity and Self-Identity* (2018), and *The Transformation of Intimacy* identifies several structural features of contemporary social life that distinguish it from classical industrial modernity: the global scope and pace of change; the emergence of abstract systems (expert systems, symbolic tokens) that replace local relationships as the primary basis of trust; and the reflexive character of social life, in which social practices are constantly examined and reformed in light of new information. For Giddens, the reflexive project of the self—the continuous revision of a coherent self-narrative drawing on multiple information sources—is the characteristic form of identity construction in late modernity, replacing the more fixed identities rooted in tradition, community, and ascribed status that characterized earlier social formations.

Applied to Indonesia, the Giddensian framework illuminates the distinctive character of middle-class identity formation in the context of rapid economic development and globalization. The Indonesian middle class—growing from approximately 7 percent of the population in 2000 to over 51 percent by 2024 (BPS, 2024)—has been formed in conditions of reflexive modernity: individuals defining their social position through consumption choices, lifestyle aesthetics, educational credentials, and participation in global cultural communities rather than through the ascribed statuses of ethnicity, kinship, and village community that structured earlier generations' identities. This reflexive identity construction is simultaneously enabled by global connectivity—which provides access to the diverse cultural materials from which identity is constructed—and destabilized by it, which presents too many options and too little fixed guidance.

2.2 Beck's Risk Society and Social Structure

Ulrich Beck's risk society framework (Beck, 2022) provides a complementary perspective that emphasizes the structural consequences of globally distributed risks for social organization and identity. Beck's central argument—that late industrial societies are characterized by the production and distribution of risks that are the unintended by-products of industrial production—has acquired particular salience in the era of climate change, global pandemics, and transnational financial crises. For Beck, these risks are distributed differently from the material goods that classical industrial

sociology analyzed: they tend to follow a 'boomerang' logic in which producers of risk cannot insulate themselves from its consequences, and they are characterized by a fundamental uncertainty that undermines the actuarial calculation on which industrial risk management was based.

Indonesia's experience of globalized risk is instructive. The 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis in which Indonesia's economic growth collapsed from over 7 percent to -13.1 percent in a single year demonstrated the structural vulnerability of developing economies to global financial contagion in ways that permanently transformed Indonesian political economy and social consciousness. The COVID-19 pandemic recapitulated this experience at a different register: a biologically originated risk circulating through global travel and supply chain networks, managed through globally coordinated (and contested) health governance frameworks, with economic consequences transmitted through global demand shocks and supply disruptions.

2.3 Appadurai's Global Cultural Flows

Arjun Appadurai's framework of global cultural flows organized around five 'scapes' ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes (Appadurai, 2019) provides the most productive analytical vocabulary for understanding the cultural dimensions of Indonesian social structure transformation. The concept of 'mediascapes' is particularly relevant: the global distribution of electronic capabilities and images creates environments in which Indonesian social actors are continuously exposed to cultural materials narratives, images, values, identities that originate in contexts far removed from their own, and which they selectively appropriate, transform, and integrate into their own cultural production. The role of imagination which for Appadurai is not merely a private mental activity but a social practice that constitutes the common cultural resource from which people construct their daily lives is crucial here: Indonesian youth imagining themselves through K-Pop aesthetics, global travel aspirations, international career fantasies, and cosmopolitan cultural identities are not passively receiving foreign culture but actively using globally circulating cultural materials to construct locally meaningful social worlds.

3. Methodology

This study employs systematic qualitative literature review combined with secondary analysis of social indicators. Literature review accessed Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases using search terms including 'globalization social structure Indonesia,' 'Giddens reflexive

modernity Global South,' 'Beck risk society developing countries,' 'Castells network society Southeast Asia,' 'Appadurai cultural flows identity,' and 'cultural identity transformation Indonesia.' Secondary data analysis utilized BPS Susenas (2024), We Are Social Indonesia Digital Report (2024), LSI surveys, World Bank Indonesia Reports, and empirical studies on Indonesian social transformation. The analytical framework integrates Giddens, Beck, Castells, and Appadurai into a multi-perspective sociological analysis of Indonesian social structure change.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Analytical Framework

Figure 1 presents the integrated theoretical framework mapping four sociological perspectives against the mechanisms of social structure transformation, cultural identity dynamics, and Indonesian manifestations.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Globalization, Social Structure Transformation, and Cultural Identity Change in the Era of Global Connectivity			
Theoretical Lens	Mechanism of Social Structure Transformation	Cultural Identity Dynamic	Indonesian Manifestation
Giddens: Reflexive Modernity	Disembedding of social relations from local contexts; abstract systems replacing local trust; time-space distanciation	Reflexive self-identity: constant revision of self-narrative in light of new information; identity as ongoing project rather than fixed status	Indonesian middle class constructing identity through consumption, lifestyle, and global cultural engagement rather than primordial community membership
Beck: Risk Society	Global risk distribution: environmental, economic, health risks transcend national boundaries; reflexive modernization undermining industrial society structures	Identity construction around risk perception and management; cosmopolitan solidarity emerging from shared global risks; individualization of social biography	COVID-19, climate anxiety, economic precarity reshaping Indonesian social solidarity; rise of individual risk management (insurance, savings) alongside eroding collective safety nets
Castells: Network Society	Networked organization displacing hierarchical structures; power of flows superseding power of places; real virtuality as cultural	Resistance identity vs. project identity: excluded groups constructing identity against dominant network logic; project identities developing alternative social structure	Islamist political networks as resistance identity against perceived Western hegemony; urban professional identity construction through global network participation

	logic		
Appadurai: Global Cultural Flows	Five scapes (ethno-, techno-, finance-, media-, ideo-scape) producing disjunctive global flows; imagination as social practice structuring cultural production	Deterritorialized cultural identity: attachment to imagined communities beyond physical locality; cultural nationalism as response to identity destabilization by global flows	Indonesian diaspora identity formation through digital Indonesian communities globally; Pancasila nationalism revived as anchor against cultural deterritorialization
Source: Authors' synthesis adapted from Giddens (2018), Beck (2022), Castells (2021), Appadurai (2019), and empirical studies on Indonesian social structure transformation.			

Source: Authors' synthesis adapted from Giddens (2018), Beck (2022), Castells (2021), Appadurai (2019), and empirical studies on Indonesian globalization.

4.2 Empirical Evidence: Social Structure Transformation in Indonesia

Table 1 presents key indicators of social structure transformation and cultural identity change in Indonesia under globalization.

Table 1. Indicators of Social Structure Transformation and Cultural Identity Change in Indonesia under Globalization (2019–2024)				
Structural Transformation Indicator	2019	2021	2024	Sociological Significance
Middle class as % of population	46.8%	43.2%	51.7%	Pandemic contraction reversed; global consumer culture adoption accelerating
Social media users (million)	150.2	170.1	212.3	+41.3%; network society formation at scale
Trust in national institutions (avg, %)	64.3%	58.7%	57.4%	Disembedding: global abstract systems replacing local institutional trust
Hybrid cultural identity (self-reported, %)	31.4%	38.2%	47.6%	+16.2pp; reflexive identity construction rising
International marriage rate (per 100,000)	4.8	3.1	6.4	Global connectivity enabling deterritorialized kinship formation
Remote/digital work as %	4.2%	31.7%	18.4%	COVID acceleration

of workforce				+ partial retreat; network-based work restructuring
Global news consumption (% primary news source)	23.4%	38.7%	44.2%	Global information flows reshaping political and cultural horizon
Source: Adapted from BPS Susenas (2024), We Are Social (2024), Lembaga Survei Indonesia (2024), Kemendikbudristek (2024), and World Bank Indonesia Report (2023).				

The data reveals a consistent pattern of accelerating social structural transformation in Indonesia driven by global connectivity. The most analytically significant finding is the 16.2 percentage-point increase in hybrid cultural identity self-identification between 2019 and 2024 from 31.4 percent to 47.6 percent which directly confirms the Giddensian prediction of reflexive identity construction as the dominant mode of self-definition in conditions of global connectivity. This means that nearly half of surveyed Indonesians now identify their cultural identity as hybrid neither purely traditional-local nor wholly global-modern a finding that challenges both cultural nationalist discourses that posit a unified Indonesian cultural identity and globalization critics who predict wholesale cultural homogenization.

The decline in trust in national institutions from 64.3 percent to 57.4 percent over five years is consistent with Giddens's analysis of disembedding: as abstract global systems (global financial markets, international health organizations, platform algorithms) increasingly structure daily life, the relevance of national institutions to citizens' lived experience diminishes, eroding the trust that is the functional prerequisite of institutional legitimacy. This erosion is not uniform trust in digital platforms and global commercial services has increased over the same period suggesting not a generalized decline in trust but a structural reorientation from national institutional trust to trust in global systems, consistent with the network society dynamics Castells theorizes.

4.3 Class Structure Transformation and Reflexive Identity

The growth of Indonesia's middle class from 46.8 percent to 51.7 percent of the population between 2019 and 2024 with the interim contraction and recovery driven by the COVID-19 pandemic represents the most consequential social structural transformation of the globalization era in Indonesia. This class formation is constitutively connected to globalization: it has been built on

export-oriented economic growth, global consumption access (including through e-commerce), integration into global educational and credential markets, and participation in global digital culture. The middle class is simultaneously the primary beneficiary and the primary carrier of globalization's cultural transformations the segment of Indonesian society most intensively exposed to global cultural flows and most actively constructing hybrid cultural identities through selective appropriation of global materials.

The Giddensian concept of the 'reflexive project of the self' is particularly illuminating for understanding Indonesian middle-class identity construction. For this class, identity is not inherited or ascribed but actively constructed through the selective combination of lifestyle choices, cultural practices, religious orientations, educational credentials, and consumption patterns that signal both social position and personal authenticity. The proliferation of lifestyle media Indonesian-language YouTube channels, Instagram accounts, and TikTok content catering to every conceivable middle-class lifestyle niche reflects the demand for cultural materials that enable this reflexive identity construction.

4.4 Digital Connectivity and the Network Transformation of Social Relations

Castells's network society framework illuminates a dimension of social structure transformation that the class analysis approach tends to underemphasize: the restructuring of social relations through the network form itself. The expansion of social media usage from 150 to 212 million active users between 2019 and 2024 representing 77 percent of Indonesia's total population means that the network has become the primary infrastructure of Indonesian social life: the form through which relationships are maintained, information circulates, communities are constituted, and identities are performed and recognized. This is not merely quantitative expansion of existing social patterns; it is a qualitative transformation of how social relations are structured.

The implications for cultural identity formation are profound. As Castells (2021) argues, the network society generates two primary identity responses: resistance identity the construction of identity in opposition to dominant network logic, characteristic of communities that feel excluded or threatened by the network's values and processes and project identity the construction of alternative social structures through the deployment of cultural materials drawn from history, biology,

geography, or religion. Both responses are visible in contemporary Indonesia: Islamist political networks constructing resistance identity against perceived Western-secular hegemony, and cosmopolitan urban professional networks constructing project identities that aspire to participation in global knowledge and creative economies.

5. Conclusion

This article has developed a multi-perspective sociological analysis of globalization's impact on social structure transformation and cultural identity change in Indonesia, integrating Giddens's reflexive modernity, Beck's risk society, Castells's network society, and Appadurai's global cultural flows frameworks. The empirical evidence demonstrating significant growth in middle-class formation, rapid expansion of digital connectivity, declining national institutional trust, and increasing hybridization of cultural identity confirms that Indonesian social structure is undergoing profound transformation driven by the structural dynamics of global connectivity.

The overarching analytical conclusion is that Indonesian social structure transformation under globalization follows the pattern that might be termed 'reflexive globalization': rather than either passive convergence with global social forms or defensive rejection of global influence, Indonesian actors selectively appropriate, hybridize, and contest global social and cultural forms in ways shaped by their specific religious, cultural, national, and class positions. This reflexive globalization produces neither the cultural homogenization feared by cultural nationalists nor the straightforward liberation promised by globalization optimists, but a complex, multilayered process of social transformation whose outcomes are determined by the specific configurations of power, culture, and agency in each particular context.

Policy implications include the need for social protection systems capable of managing the structural risks that global connectivity introduces; educational frameworks that prepare citizens for reflexive identity navigation in a globally connected environment; and governance approaches to digital platforms that address their structural role in social identity formation and institutional trust dynamics.

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