

Being Indonesia: Imaginations of the Nation among Young People in Jakarta, Banda Aceh and Kupang

Stefani Haning Swarati
Asia Research Institute PhD Scholar
National University of Singapore
shaningswarati@nus.edu.sg

ABSTRACT

The ongoing study aims to obtain a better comprehension of how young people (age 17-26) in Jakarta, Kupang and Banda Aceh construct the idea of Indonesia and how they experience “being Indonesian”. Indonesia’s unity despite its vastness and diversity has puzzled scholars (i.e. Brown, 2003; Emerson, 2005; Elson, 2008) and numerous studies have shown how its trajectory is shaped by scores of contestations regarding what “Indonesia” is and how it should be. During the New Order the imagination of “Indonesia” was indoctrinated through a rigid top-down approach, but after its end a little over a decade ago many of the identities and narratives of Indonesia that had been previously suppressed came to the surface. What is of interest is how amidst this plethora of narratives and possible identities, young people understand, experience and give meaning to “Indonesia”. What does “Indonesia” mean to them? What are the other narratives that inform their narrative of the nation? To take into account the diverse and different imaginations of Indonesia, three cities (Jakarta, Kupang and Banda Aceh) have been chosen as research sites, each with their own particular historical and socio-cultural structure.

To obtain imaginations that are not merely drawn from official discourses while at the same time facilitating talks about an issue as abstract as the nation, interviews were conducted by asking informants to comment on or tell stories about a set of photos, a method also known as “photo-elicitation”. By doing so, there is a tangible centre of attention, whereas the polysemic nature of pictures avoids questions with value-laden words such as “nation” or “nationalism” and so somewhat decreases the chance of interviewer bias. Pictures chosen are those depicting scenes that potentially elicit commentaries related to the nation (for example; a komodo dragon, advertisement for a football match where Manchester United’s players are portrayed wearing batik, Timor Leste’s flag, a classic “classroom photograph” of Suharto etc). Some photos that depict specific scenes found in one site were shown to the interviewees in that respective city only. Using this method, at least 25 young people in each city have been interviewed.

Aside from a description of the background and methodology of the research, tentative conclusions will be presented. Comparing the narratives obtained in the three cities, it is relatively safe to infer that the nation is imagined differently in different “communities”, spatially as well as in terms of its history. In Jakarta, unsurprisingly, the idea of Indonesia as a cohesive nation is stronger and more uncontested than elsewhere. The international world is often used as the point of reference to define what “Indonesia” is. In Kupang, “Indonesia” is

viewed as consisting of a center on which the peripheries depend, with Kupang perceived as positioned in the latter. Youngsters in Kupang as well as in Jakarta have similar constructions of Indonesia's recent history. It is among young people in Aceh that "Indonesia" as a historically and culturally justifiable entity, is most problematic.

Keywords: Indonesia, Jakarta, Banda Aceh, Kupang, youth, nation, discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the study

In a work that traces back the historical course through which the idea of Indonesia was constructed, Elson (2008) noted how several integrative elements common to many nations (e.g. similarity in language, culture, religion, historical experience or an intense sense of common destiny) were missing from Indonesia. The trajectory of the nation-state has been plotted by dissents and contestations between ideologies and definitions of what Indonesia is or should be. The first decades after independence were turbulent as different ideas about the form and identity of Indonesia were in abundance. Contestations took place regarding the extent to which Indonesia should compromise with the demands of the international world (see for instance Anderson, 1971 on differences between Sukarno's and Tan Malaka's visions of the young nation), federalism was chosen for a brief period only to be rejected and dubbed as a Dutch import, schism between Java and the "outer islands", and disagreements about the state's relation to religion continued to call into question Indonesia's integration for years to come.

During New Order however, a relatively strong, unitary perception of Indonesia was enforced. Indonesia was ordered in a top-down manner with little contestations among ideologies. Suharto preferred to see himself as "*bapak pembangunan*" (father of the development) and so practices of militarism were combined with (Javanese) familism and the Indonesian people were submitted to the role of his children (Shiraishi, 1997). The young generation was fully exposed to New Order's master narrative of Indonesia and "being Indonesian", involving the unquestionability of Indonesia's unitary existence, the sacredness of Pancasila, the importance of military and the superior and teleological qualities of the New Order.

The strong hold of the state on the definition of Indonesia and being Indonesian loosened following the start of *era reformasi*. Transformations unfolded at a high speed on all fronts of life. Scholars suggest that an unstable, volatile and 'loose' atmosphere haunts the Indonesian society (Spyer, 2003; Kusno, 2004). Each of the five presidents in the first seven years of *reformasi* left substantial impacts in the way Indonesians perceive themselves. At the same time, the younger generation have the chance to question the taken for granted idea of Indonesia as a predestined unity. Many of the explorations take place in the field of popular culture. It has been the battlefield of alternative identities and narratives related to nationhood. What is of interest to this research is then how amidst this plethora of narratives and possible identities, young people understand, experience and give meaning to

“Indonesia”. What does “Indonesia” mean to them? What are the discourses that inform their narrative of the nation?

Theoretically, this research positions itself well within the notion that the nation is “imagined” (Anderson, 1991) though not only fabricated within discursive institutions like the media or government with their “pedagogic narrative”, but also through the performative (Bhabha, 1994), i.e. routine practices of ordinary people, performed daily, or what Billig termed “banal nationalism” (1995). This research focuses more on national identities at the performative plane although the dynamics with pedagogic discourses of nation building cannot be disregarded.

Fieldwork has been undertaken in capital cities of three provinces; Jakarta, Kupang and Banda Aceh. The choice of sites is aimed at maximizing differences in ethnicity, religion historical and political positions, and so maximizing the possible discourses that might play a part in the construction of the imagination of “Indonesia” and “being Indonesian”.

B. Methodology and Research Method

Involving three cities, this is a multi-sited research. Its multi-sitedness is hoped to “...do justice to differences and to point at unities that exist across differences.” (Saukko, 2003:178) Multi-sited research is especially suitable to re-question the nation because “(T)he juxtapositions among sites embedded in multi-sited strategies of following leads and making connections tend to offset naturalizing categories and their bounding of the world commonsensically.” (Marcus, 1998: 17).

Interviews are generated by a series of photographs pre-chosen by me based on the assumption that the scenes portrayed potentially elicit informants’ stories of Indonesia and their experience of being Indonesian. Informants were shown the photographs and asked to freely comment on them. Photo-elicitation interview, as this method is also known, is considered by its proponents to facilitate conversations about abstract concepts (Hurworth et al, 2005). As signs, pictures are more polysemic than words and hence it can be assumed that the narratives obtained will be less structured and unrestricted compared to when they are elicited as answers to verbal questions. Subjects interpret and create their own narratives of the photograph according to perceptions, concerns and discourses salient to them. Without the interviewer having to utter explicitly the words “Indonesia” or “nation”, the danger of interviewer bias is minimized to a certain extent.

The choice of photos used draws from the knowledge of recent issues in Jakarta as well as in Kupang and Aceh (e.g. the komodo dragon, advertisement for the cancelled MU match displaying MU players in batik, Putri Indonesia and Miss Indonesia 2009, etc), and historical events related to Indonesia (e.g. the photo of Suharto that used to be displayed in every classroom, a flag of Timor Leste, students on the roof top of the parliament building in May 1998 etc). A common critique against photo-elicitation method is the argument that by having authority over the selection of the pictures, the researcher framed the reality for the subjects. However, Becker (1979 in Emmison and Smith, 2000) argued that photography is as biased

as any other means of data generation. Indeed, even the most rigid of questionnaires are designed by the researcher. Altogether, I think the advantages of photo-elicitation interview outweighs the disadvantages, especially so in the context of the research topic. Additional data in the form of newspapers and locally produced books, films and music recordings has been obtained although the analysis on the latter set of data is beyond the scope of this paper.

In terms of approach, the proposed study puts an emphasis on the Foucauldian notion of discourse. Informants' comments on the photographs are treated as texts provided by the subjects that are interwoven from personal interpretations of different discourses. Analysis will focus on the way these texts are constructed and the extent to which they do or do not reveal informants' perception, belief, attitude –in short, imaginations- of the nation, “Indonesia” and being Indonesian. To this end, particular themes have been identified, exclusions or absences noted and people's positioning within their stories are paid attention to. Subsequently, the informants' stories are related to discourses at the macrolevel to see how the latter are being reproduced or resisted.

DISCUSSION

A. Jakarta

Fieldwork in Jakarta was done in about three months. Some interviews were conducted individually while others were done with groups of close friends or siblings. The latter method was not done in Kupang and Aceh due to the subsequent difficulty in transcribing group interviews conducted in very public spaces (i.e. cafe's or restaurants). Compared to the reception of the interview method in Kupang and Aceh, I could say that informants in Jakarta have been the most receptive. Many interviews lasted well over two hours as they elaborated and associated the photographs to other issues and stories that are not explicitly depicted in the pictures. Several informants seem to enjoy freely commenting on photographs, expressing disappointment because I “only” showed 16 photos. They did not have perceivable difficulty in giving comments, indicated by the short amount of time lag between the sight of the photograph and the start of their storytelling. This could be due to our common background, resulting in a set of pictures that is more in tune with their/our lives and guaranteeing smoother processes of rapport building.

With the nationhood being constructed within popular culture and significantly facilitated by the internet, it is an issue “ordinary” young people in Jakarta are familiar with. It is no longer necessary to read newspapers to know what is going on in Indonesia and to form an opinion, Jakarta's middle class youth can simply wait for updates on Twitter and Facebook and construct their opinion based on what other Twitter and Facebook users are saying. Moreover, in the past few years the feud with Malaysia over a number of cultural artefacts and geographical boundary has significantly fired up a nationalist attitude among Jakarta youth, resulting in the re-labelling of batik as trendy. Having identified a clear external threat,

endorsed by many celebrities and the most hip online social networks, caring about the nation becomes something cool.

A.1 Indonesia and its Others

Being at the social, political and economic core of Indonesia, the sense of belongingness of young people in Jakarta to Indonesia is solid. This is indicated by the use of the plural first person pronoun “*kita*” to refer to Indonesia/Indonesians.

Why would I have to be proud of someone else (i.e. other countries), I was born here and I think, mmm, human beings are simply never satisfied. If you want to say that Indonesia is awful, it’s awful. But then again, it’s us who caused the awfulness. ¹ (Female, 25 yr, administrative officer in a transnational company)

The quote clearly suggests a personal identification as being Indonesian and of Indonesia being an entity in regards to other entities/nations. Like nationalist sentiments in general, there’s a sense of responsibility in regards to the course of one’s nation. However, a sense of insecurity in regard to other nations is traceable. The questions posed to me and to each other during interviews reveal a strong desire to be recognized or considered equal as informants use other countries as points of reference to measure Indonesia against: Do students in other countries have flag-raising ceremonies too? Are there street children too in the US? Do Singaporeans look down on Indonesians? Would Manchester United really have let their star footballers play in match against Indonesia, had it not been cancelled? By gauging differences and similarities with other nations and by trying to decipher the reflections in other nations’ eyes, Jakarta’s young people try to outline “Indonesia”.

A more complicated imagination is one that encompasses Indonesia’s diversity. Informants have been found to also use the term “*kita*” to distinguish the self from regions within Indonesia that harbour discontents towards the nation.

“We did not really care about these regions. If we want them to stay with us, we must care for them, like improving their education or something.” (Female, 25yr, administrative officer in a transnational company)

“If I were a Papuan...I would think that breaking free would be a sad thing to do, but then again Papua is not being cared for. How could we expect they’d like us if we’re cruel to them? That’s how we treat them, despite the fact that we take their natural resources. The Indonesian government is to blame.”² (Male, 21yr, officer)

The use of “*kita*” in this context implies an othering of people from other regions to whom the possibility to separate from Indonesia is imaginable. This reveals all the more the strength of Jakarta’s youth’s identity as Indonesians because “our” separation from Indonesia is simply unthinkable.

¹ Kenapa juga gue harus membanggakan orang lain, orang gue lahirnya juga di sini dan menurut gue apa ya, mmmm, banyak kalo dibilang apa ya, manusia nggak ada puansya, mau dibilang negara Indonesia jelek ya jelek. Tapi ya itu, jeleknya juga karena diri kita sendiri kan.

² kalo saya jadi orang Papua, mau lepas sayang tapi...emang nggak di...disayang lho itu. Gimana mau...gimana kita mau berharap dia mau sayang sama kita kalo kita tuh jahatlah? Kita tuh masih kayak gitu, padahal kekayaan alamnya kita ambil. Salah, salah pemerintah Indonesia sih mbak.

However, the self formed by using other regions as contrast is more problematic as “*kita*” is positioned higher than the others; as being more knowledgeable and in control of improvement and development, thereby taking for granted Jakarta’s superiority over other regions. The imagination of Indonesia consisting of a “center” and the “peripheries” continues to be (re)produced among the young generation. Only one perceptive informant was aware of this bias

“...so I think my ‘nationalism’ is more about Jakarta not Indonesia, because what I see is limited to Jakarta. It’s actually wrong for me to be like this, all I see is Jakarta” (Female, 19yr, student)³

To young people in Jakarta, “Indonesia” is defined by using other countries as well as regions within Indonesia as points of reference, shaping shifting images of the nation. Despite the flux one thing is for sure; for Jakarta youth Indonesia cannot not exist as it is the place they belong to, where they were born and live now.

A.2. Constructions of the recent past

Many of the changes in the way the country has been run during the last decade aimed at dissolving New Order’s centralized structure (i.e. through decentralization, freer election, free press, etc), this is why I am especially interested to understand whether and how it resonates with the way young people construct the recent history of Indonesia. To this end, a number of pictures were used that depicts elements from the New Order, like a photograph of Suharto that used to be displayed in every classroom and one of students taking over the Parliament building in 1998.

Based on the narratives elicited, it appears that twelve years after his resignation, Suharto remains a positive figure in Indonesian history. Most informants remember his ability to maintain peace and economic stability as the good qualities that are lacking in subsequent presidents. One could argue that this perception is present because the informants’ were still very young during the New Order, however most of their “memories” on the Suharto period are based on stories they heard from their parents or elder relatives suggesting that the sentiment is spread over different cohorts.

At the same time, what was once perceived as anti-theses to the New Order’s authoritarian regime, like the 1998 student rally and the separation of the long-oppressed Timor Leste is no longer a salient part of the collective memory. The informant quoted below only found out about the events of 1998 after -unbeknownst to her- she entered the university that had served as the meeting and escape point for students, and where two deadly clashes with the military took place.

³ jadi kalo saya bilang nasionalis saya itu nasionalis Jakarta, bukan nasionalis Indonesia karena memang ...ya udah saya selalu liat lingkup Jakarta. Sebenarnya saya salah gitu, karena saya terlalu, yang saya lihat itu hanya Jakarta

I was still a child and did not know what happened in 1998...I only found out about it in Atma (her current university). A lecturer told us during the introductory days. A documentary film was screened and the lecturer told us that in 1998 Atma served as a stronghold. I found out just then, I was surprised, Atma?⁴ (Female, 22yr, student)

This suggests that little is discussed within the formal school curricula and family about at least these two issues.

At the other side of the coin that made it possible for young people to explore identities and ideas about nationhood, the reformation era has been experienced as very transitional and somewhat chaotic, and the certainty given by New Order's overarching truth-system is felt to be missing.

B. Kupang

Fieldwork in Kupang was done in one and half months during which I interviewed 30 young people, collected local newspapers and conducted observations in gathering-spots popular with young people. Each interview lasted between 40' to 90'. The interviewees come from different backgrounds, in terms of ethnicity, religion as well as social class. With two exceptions all of them were born and spend most of their lives in NTT (Nusa Tenggara Timur or East Nusa Tenggara) and use Indonesian as the main language. The set of pictures used in Kupang to elicit stories during interviews is not entirely the same as the one used in Jakarta. I replaced photos that I think will be less useful (i.e. of a flooded National Monument and street children in Jakarta) with photos of objects specific to Kupang (i.e. of their local transport vehicle; the *bemo*⁵).

The province East Nusa Tenggara has been one of the most disadvantaged in Indonesia. The percentage of families living in poverty is 56.75% for the whole region, and 23.96% in the capital, Kupang (BPS in Kompas, 2009). Whereas the average of years of schooling in Indonesia is 7.9 years, in NTT it is 6.6 years for men and 6 for women (BPS, 2008). From the existing workforce, 74.88% have not completed senior high school (Pos Kupang, 2009). For

⁴ Nah ini waktu kecil itu belum tau 98 itu kejadiannya kayak gimana... Nah itu baru tau pas lagi di Atma...Diceritain sama dosen kak, oh pas masuk ini kak, eh...perkenalan fakultas. Nah dipasangin ..film documenter gitu... sama ada dosen gitu dikasih tau kalo 98 itu Atma kayak jadi apa namanya, benteng...Baru tau sih, ya kaget gitu, ih jadi Atma?

⁵ Their public transport; mini-vans with sophisticated sound systems and elaborately decorated with stickers (of international surf ware brands, national TV shows, romantic sentences, religious signs etc) and airbrush painting. Each of them is distinguishable by a name. According to interviewees there's a certain pride in riding on the coolest *bemo* (i.e. those who play the latest Western or Indonesian pop songs out loud in "ful bas", a local rendering of "full bass"). Groups of students have their favourite *bemo* and would rather arrive too late at school than riding on a "quiet" *bemo* that "looks aged" for the fear of being made fun of by their friends. Even with the influx of motor cycles, it is still very common for teenagers to stop a *bemo* and subsequently decline getting on it once they realize the vehicle does not fulfill any of the aforementioned criteria of "coolness".

those with a university degree, the common job market would be governmental offices or non-governmental organizations (Elcid Li, 2009). In the last few years, working abroad as menial workers became an additional option for the lower class in society. In terms of religious identity, NTT is one of the few in Indonesia, as 56% of the population is Catholic and 35% Protestant⁶.

2.1 Indonesia as a State

To young people in Kupang, Indonesia is an entity that consists of a centre (Java/Jakarta) surrounded by peripheries of which their region is part. Those who have lived outside East Nusa Tenggara easily recount people's ignorance of Kupang; from not knowing its geographical location, to stereotyping Kupang people as identical to Papuans⁷ and to asking whether there are food joints in their hometown. However, people tend to implicitly agree with the peripheral attributes of Kupang. This is for instance implied in the habit of sending one's offspring to places outside the province to obtain a better education. Unlike Timor Leste where marginalization and oppression drove the region to separate itself from Indonesia, the common strategy of people in Kupang is to align oneself with the state to gain personal benefits. Indeed, many of my informants clearly argue that Timor Leste's desire for independence despite the attention and funds allocated to them by the central government is incomprehensibly irrational. Timor Leste's independence in 2002 is considered to have a positive impact on Kupang.

When Timor Leste was still part of Indonesia, all the funds for development, school and economy did not reach Kupang. They went straight to Timor Leste, the youngest province. After the separation, the funds were allocated to Kupang. That's how Kupang got its malls, a nice shopping centre. The conditions of our roads were improved, after the separation of Timor Leste (Male, 27yr, student and cafe manager)⁸

One of the most popular ways to align with the state is by entering the civil service. Young people in Kupang strive to be accepted into the state's bureaucratic system. Working as civil servant guarantees lifelong income and is considered less demanding and less risky compared to working for the private sector. An officer of the Kupang branch of an established company lamented her lack of luck,

⁶ (<http://www.nusa-tenggara.com/east/html/general.html>).

⁷ In the minds of Kupang youth, the inhabitants of Papua are dark-skinned and curly. They do not want to be thought of as similar to Papuans, the region stereotyped as being less developed.

⁸ Karena selama Timor Leste masih gabung dengan Indonesia, semua, semua anggaran kayak pembangunan, sekolah, terus ekonomi semua kan nggak sampai ke Kupang. Langsung ke Timor Leste, provinsi termuda. ... Setelah pisah, dana-dana semua itu dialihkan ke Kupang. Makanya Kupang juga bisa ada mall, bisa ada perbelanjaan yang bagus. Terus fasilitas jalan juga diperbaiki (*ini baru?*) setelah pisah dari Timor Leste

“Working in the private sector is hard, you have to use your brain, your energy or otherwise you’ll get fired”⁹
(Female, 24yr, officer)

A young civil servant underscored the advantages of being a civil servant as opposed to being an entrepreneur when talking about the changes that rocked the state at the end of the New Order.

“As civil servants, servants of the state we’ve been pretty well off. My parents are civil servants too. This might be different for business people, I don’t know, there must be differences. The welfare of civil servants has always been fine, even after he (Suharto) stepped down. There were no major impacts on us, but maybe there were some for business people.”¹⁰ (Male, 24yr, civil servant)

This attitude, a tendency to rely on the state, is pervasive enough to make Yamaha and Suzuki¹¹ call their price reductions for motorcycle purchases “subsidy”, a term usually reserved for financial incentives provided by the state and suggests an unequal relation between the giver and receiver. This is not to say that people are helplessly dependent on the state. According to the informants several capitals are of advantage in the race for a place in the state’s bureaucratic system; like having a family member inside the system and/or be willing to pay millions of rupiah. Very logically, in the last regional election many young people cast their votes for family members and relatives.

The whole family voted for the same candidate (*what did you base your vote on?*) the candidate knew my father personally, so we kind of knew the candidate too (female, 21yr)¹²

The pattern to associate civil service with upward social mobility has been firmly established in provincial towns since the country’s independence (Klinken, 2009) and seems to persist in Kupang. Even to those without relatives among the candidates, to a certain extent, the election serves as a battle ground where common people have more power than what is usually at their disposal though not in the sense of “people’s voice” implied by the discourse of democracy. Several informants confided that candidates would approach them and offer favours in return for their vote. The favour varies, from hard cash to raising street lamps in front of their houses. However as girl told me,

⁹ Seperti inilah kalau kerja di swasta...harus pakai otak, pakai tenaga, harus kalau enggak bisa dipecat.

¹⁰ Mungkin kita sebagai PNS ya, pegawai negeri sipil, abdi negara ya. Sejahtera sejahtera saja dari dulu. Kan kita punya orangtua juga dari sipil. Beda dengan, ya kalo memang pengusaha ya tidak tahu, kan ada beda-beda. Kesejahteraan sipil dulu sampai tahun itu juga, beliau lengser juga baik baik saja. Dampak-dampaknya itu kita tidak terlalu rasa. Yang rasa itu kan mungkin pengusaha

¹¹ i.e. “Subsidi s/d Rp.750.000,- untuk pembelian Suzuki New Smash 110 Seres” (a pamphlet distributed at a Suzuki outlet)

¹² kita serumah sudah kompakkan gitu (*milihnya berdasarkan apa?*) ya kan ada yang kenal dengan papa begitu, kenal dengan bokap jadi tau gini gini.

“We can promise them anything but in the end, we’re the ones who decide who to vote for. We have to be smart when dealing with them, otherwise they’ll outsmart us”¹³. (Female, 24yr, sales promotion girl for a toothpaste brand)

It is through small and seemingly insignificant acts like these that young people in Kupang conform to and yet unsettle the state at the same time.

Whereas in the two other study sites (Jakarta, and Aceh as will be shown below) young people heavily exploit their “traditional” and “cultural” symbols to counter their perceived peripheral position (in regards to Indonesia and/or the world) and put their respective regions on the relevant map, this is less observable among youngsters in Kupang. The Komodo dragon, a relic species that live exclusively in an island in NTT, is vying for a spot as one of the seven world wonders but this does not generate genuine interest among the youngsters I have interviewed¹⁴. Similarly the controversial plan to move several dragons to Bali (eventually cancelled) was not an issue spontaneously brought up by most, and their opposition to the plan is often backed up by arguments drawn from the natural sciences (i.e. the dragons would not survive in an environment that is not their natural habitat) instead of evoking arguments on the loss of potential income the province would suffer or on how the move will weaken NTT’s identity in the country and the world. If anything, my informants tend to emphasize that Kupang people could be “represented” by the colourful and loud *bemo*’s signifying how highly they value a leisurely and laid-back life. Oftentimes, this self-image is positively seen in contrast with people in Java, who in their view prioritize time and efficiency.

...the music that is played on the road is the music we like...it’s good...In Java what is more important is time, time is money, time is the most important thing. You get on any vehicle, what is most important is to get to your destination safely. (Male, 24yr, civil servant)¹⁵

Related to the perception about Kupang’s identity in the wider world, the almost-yearly Sail Indonesia that passes through Kupang with many -if not all- participants coming from Australia, generate little interest among the youth. The indifference regarding an event that could potentially put the region on the international/national map is very different from the enthusiasm shown by youngsters in Aceh and Jakarta in pinpointing their regions’ capitals considered worthy of international/national acknowledgements. Very tentatively it could be concluded that Kupang’s standing in the wider world is not high on the priority list of youngsters there.

¹³ “*Kita* bisa bilang apa aja ke mereka (calon legislatif) tapi pas conteng kan *kita* yang tau. *Kita* harus pinter-pinter kalau sama mereka mbak, kalo nggak mereka yang bohongin *kita*.”

¹⁴ Ironically, young people in Jakarta showed more interest in the candidacy.

¹⁵ Tapi selera music yang kita lihat di jalan-jalan, kan music-musik seperti yang kita suka juga... senang, bagus.....Kalo di Jawa kan mungkin yang penting waktu, waktu adalah uang, waktu nomor satu. Mau naik apa aja yang penting sampai tujuan dengan selamat ya

2.B Temporal Imaginings of the Nation

Similar to the result in Jakarta, the stability during the New Order is perceived as desirable by youngsters in Kupang. The former president Suharto is perceived as an excellent, fatherly leader. Some informants have memories of lining up along the main road, welcoming him several times during their childhood, waving small flags. One of the interviewees recounted how Suharto would wave back and smile at them. At the sight of his photograph during the interview with me decades later, they still spontaneously utter “*Bapak Pembangunan*” (Father of Development) or “*Bapak Bangsa*” (Father of the nation). He is considered a strong leader, and the nation was socially and financially better under his control. Compared to his successors, Suharto was decisive;

“With *pak Harto*, once someone makes a mistake, the person will be shot and killed, and it’s over. Now they’ll go on trial, go through a series of procedures until people lose sight of the case. And most of the cases won’t be solved anyway¹⁶.” (Female, 25yr, radio announcer)

Pak Harto unified the minds, the views of Indonesians since they are young...As children, each time we were told to draw a landscape, we drew mountains and the sun. All over Indonesia children drew the same. At a very young age one vision, one perception was instilled in us. Values were instilled. One thought, one imagination about that, a landscape (male, 24yr, civil servant)¹⁷

The underlying reason for this view could be the same as the one in Jakarta. There seems to be a fatigue with the plethora of intricate state-related legal cases and socio-cultural issues that endlessly linger. The desire of young people in both places for a leadership as strong as Suharto’s might be an effect of what Aspinall (2005) identified as a lack in the ability to formulate alternative leadership and ideology on the part of the opposition in 1998.

Unsurprisingly, demonstrations and rallies are considered by Kupang’s youth as futile endeavours. Retrospectively, the same impression is received from a picture of the 1998 student rally outside the parliament building. The idea of students being the people’s voice and conscience is not traceable in present day Kupang.

This is a grim view of Indonesian students in general. It seems our students want to look smart, this might be...this is not a small number, but maybe the majority of the student...they want to achieve democracy but the democracy turns into anarchy (Male, 23yr, student and manages the family business, graduated from a college in Australia)¹⁸

¹⁶ “kalau pak Harto kan begitu salah, tembak, mati, selesai, gitu... Kalau ini pakai naik ke pengadilan hukum, ini, ini, ini akhirnya sampai kasus itu tidak terlihat publik lagi. Bahkan nggak selesai malahan (Female, 25yr old, radio presenter)

¹⁷ Dulu kalo pak harto itu menyatukan pikiran, menyatukan satu pandangan warga Indonesia dari kecil...Dulu kita disuruh gambar pemandangan pasti gambar gunung, matahari. Di seluruh Indonesia pasti seperti itu, dari kecil ditanamkan satu pandangan, satu persepsi. Ditanam nilai-nilai dari kecil. Satu pikiran, satu imajinasi tentang itu, pemandangan. (Male, 24yr, civil servant)

¹⁸ ini potret buram mahasiswa mahasiswa Indonesia pada umumnya. Sepertinya mahasiswa-mahasiswa kita...apa ya, kelihatan mau, kelihatannya sepintas pintar. Tapi ya mungkin ya, ini sebagian...bukan sebagian

C. Aceh

Fieldwork in Aceh was done in a period of two months (June-Aug). Within the period I interviewed 27 young people, most of them students coming from different parts of the province. A photo of a young man making coffee in one of Aceh's many coffee houses is added to the set. Many of my informants come from other parts of the province and left for Banda Aceh to work or study. Indonesian and Acehnese are the languages used daily by most.

C.1 In Search for Acehnese-ness

Whereas for Jakarta and most parts of Indonesia the end of the New Order has been a historical turning point, the impact of the episode was considerably less felt in Aceh. Although its status as Military Operation Zone (*Daerah Operasi Militer*, DOM) was invalidated in 1998, violence not only continued but also escalated. Each of Suharto's successors tried in their own way to ease Aceh's discontent but none of them achieved complete success. For people living in Aceh, the conflict between Aceh independent forces and Indonesian armed forces that have seemed irresolvable for decades came to an abrupt halt when giant waves swept over and destroyed the region in 2004. The tsunami killed 128,000 people, left 37,000 missing and 550,000 without a home (World Bank 2005 in Prasadjo, 2005). At the same time, it instantaneously put Aceh on the map and ended the indifference of the outside world (including other Indonesians) to their sufferings. Aid came in from Indonesian and foreign governments and non-governmental organizations alike. The 'foreign forces' not only carried out the tangible restructuring of Aceh's infrastructure, but also stimulated intangible restructuring to the conceptual universe of many Acehnese.

Six years into the rebuilding of Aceh, many people are engaging in the (re)construction of Acehnese-ness. Cultural products are in abundance. Fiction and non-fiction books about Aceh have been published in the past few years with topics covering the conflict years to classic children's stories, and locally produced films and serials in Acehnese are distributed in the form of video compact disc, whereas traditional and war-themed folk songs are re-arranged by local music groups. Coffee houses, of which young people are proud, have been part of Aceh socioscape and have traditionally served as refuge for grown up men to share information especially during the conflict years. Interestingly during the past 5 years, coffee houses have been "modernized" and appropriated by the youth; providing free wireless connection and television sets tuned to international channels, offering "modern" beverages going by the names of "cappuccino" or "latte", welcoming young men as well as women indiscriminately and yet keeping the signature elements, the symbols of "Acehnese-ness" i.e. the "pulling" process through which coffee is prepared, the respect bestowed on the skill of coffee-maker and of course, the central place of the coffee house within the society,

kecil, sebagian besar ini sebenarnya ini...mau, mereka mau menuju ke arah demokrasi, tapi demokrasinya jadinya anarkis.

preserved. These are just a few cultural objects through which the process of (re)constructing Acehnese-ness is manifested.

Analogous to the constant core position of the coffee-puller despite changes of other elements surrounding him, for young people in Banda Aceh there seems to be more or less a consensus of a “core identity” of being Acehnese, signified not only by parentage but also by an understanding of the customs, familiarity with at least one of the province’s languages, history, habits, and a subjective sense of being Acehnese. However other elements, like manifestations of religiosity, discourses on Indonesia and perception of the international world generate interesting contestations. Whereas Aceh’s issues regarding religion are beyond the scope of this research, the imaginings of Indonesia and the international universe have been explored.

It is not a taken for granted truth to most of my informants that Indonesia is the larger entity to which Aceh belongs. Having spent their childhood in the most atrocious and violent years in the long string of conflicts in Aceh, they continue to be aware of possible alternatives to the region’s current inclusion in Indonesia. At one end of the continuum are those who argue that the ceasing of the conflict has played part in Aceh’s socio-economic improvement and so the quest for independence is no longer reasonable. At the other end are those for whom the discourse of sovereignty still reverberates. Unfortunately with the method of research I have been engaging in, it is not possible to know the percentage and the correlating demographic features for each side of the continuum.

Tentatively simplifying Aceh youth’s attitude on independence from Indonesia into the aforementioned two camps¹⁹, what is however highlighted by the methodology I am using is the construction of ideas that differentiates one camp from the other. Young people who believe that Aceh should no longer pursue independence tend to be more pragmatic and oriented towards the present or future. They consider the peaceful condition as facilitating the development of Aceh, and prefer maintaining this peace over redressing the injustices as it runs the risk of shattering the unseasoned stability.

For me and my family, also the people I know, we tend to favour staying with Indonesia over...I don’t know though about other people, because Aceh now is somewhat better, safer (Male, 24yr, student)²⁰

Their memories of the conflict are less personal and vivid; most of these youngsters say that they do not have direct, significant experiences of the excesses of war though when compared to the stories of those insisting on Aceh’s sovereignty the incidents are factually the same (i.e. the modification of flag-raising ceremonies in all schools in Aceh for fear of violent attacks from the Free Aceh Movement). Although to these group of young people Aceh’s inclusion

¹⁹ This is a very crude polarization. The fragmentation is far more complex.

²⁰ bagi saya karena, bagi keluarga saya, mungkin orang-orang yang saya kenal ya lebih penting mungkin ke Indonesia saja daripada...ngga tau mungkin pihak lain ya (lain ya). Ya karena, Aceh sekarang sudah agak lebih bagus, lebih aman

in Indonesia is conditional (as long as it is beneficial to Aceh's development), they do not have adverse sentiments towards Jakarta and perceive Banda Aceh as one among many cities in Indonesia. Similar to young people in Kupang and Jakarta, on a hypothetical question asking them to choose a representative of Indonesia at an international beauty pageantry, between Putri Indonesia '09 who comes from Aceh but does not wear a veil, and Miss Indonesia '09 who is half-American and does not speak Indonesian fluently they too would rather be represented by the "real" Indonesian one, that is, the girl from Aceh. Another point where their views somewhat converge with the youth of Jakarta and Kupang is the attitude towards New Order and Suharto. Although the elated praises are absent, so is the strong aversion.

The other "camp" on the other hand holds a highly idealized image of Aceh's past; of a rich, proud, sophisticated and inclusive people that easily turns into a fierce, solid army of fighters whenever faced with threats from outsiders. Aceh's trajectory is plotted by defensive wars against outsiders whereas any internal dissonance is absent. The relation with Indonesia is particularly painful; according to them Aceh supported the nation from its very inception by donating Indonesia's first aircraft and the gold used to cover the National Monument's crown. The young nation's request for aid implies Aceh's superiority. Yet, the country's leaders continue to betray them; Aceh was incorporated to the province of North Sumatra, the revenues of the mining industry were unequally dispensed among Aceh and Jakarta and successions of presidents continued to deploy ferocious armed forces to keep the dissents down. Even now the sense of being treated unfairly remains; a girl pointed out with irritation how the media would talk about "Acehnese terrorists" but never about "Javanese terrorists" even when the individuals in question are Javanese. As for Indonesia's representative at international beauty pageantry, most of them state that they do not care about representatives of Indonesia, as long as it is not the girl who represented Aceh but is only "Acehnese" by descent and nothing more. The reasons are plenty but very few are against her because of a doubt in her piety. Some would not like Aceh to be represented by a girl in bikinis and some argue that the girl could not be considered to be Acehnese at all thus the dislike is based more on issues of Aceh identity than on religiosity,

She said she is from Aceh. If she does, I think we should have been able to test her 'Acehnese-ness'. What does she know about Aceh? She has been living in Jakarta for so long...she's not apt to be Acehnese" (Female, 22yr, student)²¹

Furthermore, to those at this end of the continuum, Suharto is perceived as oppressive and authoritarian. They remember not being allowed by their parents to ask questions (like why the flag-raising ceremony is no longer allowed) for the fear of being overheard. Thus ironically, regarding New Order, among the three sites studied, it is the perception of Acehnese youth with feelings of resentment to Indonesia that is closest to the common view that led students in 1998 to protest in the name of "Indonesian people".

²¹ "...dia bilang lagi, dia dari Aceh. Kalau dia dari Aceh, kita harus bisa menguji ke-Acehan dia kalau menurut Tatik kan. Tau apa dia tentang aceh... Lama tinggal di Jakarta...dia nggak pantas untuk jadi orang Aceh. "

However divided young people's stance towards Indonesia is, their view of Aceh's position in the international context is less divergent. This is a cohort that grew up in close proximity with humanitarian workers from every corner of the world. Their ideas of the global world are based on personal encounters with real people and not just drawn from a two dimensional screen. This results in a perception that the world is well within their reach, a view substantiated by significant amount of funding allocated to send students and professionals abroad to study. Furthermore, whereas "overseas" (*ke/di luar*) to young people in Jakarta appears to only refer to the US and Europe, youngsters in Aceh perceive it to be more varied; consisting of the Netherlands and France, as well as Japan and India²². Recent experiences with foreign workers resonate with a self-image of being descendants of people coming from different places on earth and who have always been comfortably interacting with strangers as long as they do not threaten or aim to change Aceh's way of living (religion being the most often mentioned element).

Among the countries, two stand out in young people's stories (especially among those questioning Aceh's inclusion in Indonesia); Turkey and Malaysia. With the former, Aceh has a diplomatic relation going all the way back hundreds of years ago, whereas with Malaysia people in Aceh seem to have a special relation. Many prefer to go to Penang for health services, exchange programs at the undergraduate level with Malaysia are plenty and there is an overall sense that Malaysia is a better country than Indonesia. Unsurprisingly Aceh youth could not relate to, and tend to make fun of Jakarta's anger about the "theft" conducted by Malaysia. Based on their narration about the wider world, it appears that with or without Indonesia, to its youth Aceh has a place in the international world.

CONCLUSION

In a much quoted book, Anderson (1991) defines the nation as an "imagined community". It is imagined as being limited, sovereign and most importantly, with a "deep, horizontal comradeship" between its members. Taking as start the formation of nations in Europe, Anderson attributed to print capitalism the central role of conceiving the embryo of national consciousness. By concentrating on the top-down mechanisms involved in the precipitation of a sense of nationhood, the possibility of discordances and differences in the imaginations is somewhat overlooked in his work.

Taking as its sample people in three different sites within one nation-state, this research has shown that understanding the discourse propagated by a powerful discursive institution like the media is far from sufficient to understand the discourse that result from meaning-making at a mundane level. The imaginations of youngsters in Jakarta, Kupang and Aceh about

²² At one point during field work a group girls took me to a lake surrounded by mountains. It was very interesting to see and hear them pointing out in different directions to show what regions of the province are on the other side of the mountains. This "imagining" of Aceh interchanged seamlessly into their "imagining" of the world as they spoke of how similar the view is with Switzerland's landscape that are used as sets of Indian movies, or how a certain species of tree looks like the cherry trees in Japan, and how they pretended to be in the deserts of America as they took pictures of themselves near a group of cactuses.

Indonesia are not necessarily congruent. They depend on the particular trajectory of a region where the subject is living vis-a-vis the nation-state Indonesia, the imagination of and interaction with the world beyond Indonesia, and personal experiences of the subject.

For young people in Jakarta, “Indonesia” is an entity amidst other similarly constructed entities. Its members must aim at making the nation known, accepted and respected by other countries; this is done mainly through “promotion” and “branding” practices taken over from the market discourse. Being oriented towards Indonesia’s place in the international world and taking for granted the nation, the “internal” condition of the country receives less attention from youngsters in Jakarta. If this is not altered, it could lead to continuing divisive tendencies within the nation-state.

Young people in Kupang imagine the nation-state as first and foremost a state, an entity with the rights to interfere, regulate, to which people depend on though its system opens up widely the possibility of negotiations. Whereas in Jakarta market discourses are pervading nationalist discourses, in Kupang notions from within state discourses permeate the market (i.e the previously mentioned “subsidy” as a term used in product promotion). Resistances to and negotiations with the powerful “centre” are done by aligning with them without completely surrendering one’s agenda.

Although similarly positioned at the periphery, Aceh’s reaction to it is different from Kupang although people in both places tend to define themselves in contradistinction to Javanese people. In Aceh a picture of Indonesia is portrayed where its existence is not as unquestionable as in other places. Zooming in on Aceh, interesting discussions could be generated on pragmatic and idealistic approaches in the construction of ethno-nationalism.

Twelve years after the fall of New Order, a fine line between one grand narrative of the nation that is controlled by the state, and incongruent narratives born out of everyday discursive practices of everyday people is still in want. This research has shown that young people in many places are actively restructuring ideas of the nation and/or their region thus in the long course of history, the present could be one of the pivotal moments to solidify a nation that for long has been considered unlikely.

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