

# Indonesian Identity in Indonesia-Malaysia Border Community

Adolfo Eko Setyanto<sup>1</sup>, Ignatius Agung Satyawan<sup>2</sup>, Sri Herwindya Baskara Wijaya<sup>3</sup>, Salieg Luki Munestri<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,3</sup>Department of Communication, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

<sup>2,4</sup>Department of International Relations, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

**Abstract** - This article described the Indonesian identity in Indonesia-Malaysia border area. The method employed in this study was qualitative one with phenomenological approach. The goal of research was Indonesian citizens residing in Sebatik Island, North Borneo. This study viewed the extent to which the integration of Indonesian and Malaysian cultural identity occurs. Indonesians residing in border area had encountered Indonesian crisis as characterized with the emergence of double nationality. The factors leading to the emergence of Indonesian identity crisis were economic, political, and social-cultural. Variety of attempts had been taken by both government and civilians to solidify Indonesian identity in border community.

**Keywords:** Identity, nationalism, border area

## I. INTRODUCTION

Land border between Indonesia and Malaysia includes a sufficiently long borderline (about 2000 km) encompassing three provinces: West Borneo, East Borneo, and North Borneo, consisting of 8 regencies and 23 sub district (Rozi, 2014). General description along the border line, on average, shows the condition of Indonesian areas far left behind compared with the Malaysian area.

To catch upto that, many attempts have been taken by Central Government. Nevertheless, the government's attempts through various programs to develop border area apparently have not been fruitful. The wish to change nationality still arises. Indonesian citizens in border area with Malaysia have encountered Indonesian identity crisis. They attempt to change their nationality into Malaysians. Being Malaysians means getting opportunity of being guaranteed for their livelihood, compared with when they became Indonesians. Although they do not change their nationality, they experience split of identity because there is a popular jargon among them: "*Garuda (Indonesia) didadaku namun harimau (Malaysia) di perutku*" meaning that *Garuda* (Indonesia) is on my breast but tiger (Malaysia) is on my stomach" (Rozi, 2014).

This Indonesian identity is a serious problem to be solved immediately recalling that Indonesia-Malaysia border area encompasses a very wide area and a large number of populations. Moreover, this border is Indonesian's face showcase. Indonesia-Malaysia border area has multiple gaps viewed from economic level, infrastructure, and public service aspects. Indonesians' social-economic life is

dependent on their neighbors. It results nationhood identity crisis among Indonesian citizens.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity is an all-present problem every individual or group faces. If corresponding individual is the member of a larger group, in addition to having individual identity, it also has its group identity. Every individual must have a larger group, nation. Therefore, the individual will appear nationality identity from inside, and when the nation is Indonesia, it will have Indonesian identity. Because Indonesia is a political construction envisioned, the Indonesian identity level among individuals are varied.

Individuals living within certain politic community, particularly national politics, will involve historical fact, experience and self actuality, so that they can find their self-identity affected by the community tone in the nation. Individuals were born, grows and are raised in national identity, are shaped and absorbs values creating self-character in-depth against the national identity. Political community accommodating national identity also creates strata layer and spatial structure providing a variety of colors and intensities, thereby creating the same common bound (Parekh, 2000).

In its development, the political community moves forward to be a modern state. Therefore, a reciprocal and mutually strengthening relationship will be established between political community and its members. In this interrelationship, a national identity is created to be maintained through trivial daily activities and more serious activities. For example, these activities can range from sport competition in peace period to competition for area during war period. The state has symbols maintained based on mutual agreement and individuals maintain it based on the bond growing strongly with their state (Parekh, 2000).

National identity contains an important aspect, serving as a differentiation element to distinguish something from another and as "control" with others. It contains many interrelated elements including territory, language, history/experience creating common understanding, tradition, credo-religion, law, and political institution.

Just like individual identity, national identity is a complex layer of individuals unified and driven by common awareness of a variety values understood at different degree.

An individual's understanding on collective common awareness of those various elements is not as same as another's. Therefore, those layers are often overlapping and even colliding in a national identity system (Parekh, 2000: 60).

There are many definitions about the meaning of identity. Gelisli (2014) mentioned that a unique concept identity is inherent to human beings. In a concept, identity contains two components: recognition and differentiation, while another component is belonging. Recognition aspect makes it identified and the factor distinguishing individuals from individuals of other group are language and culture. Meanwhile, belonging aspect can be attained when individual is acceptable to its group.

In line with Gelisli, Castells (2010) argued that identity is a social construction running through a long process. Identity construction employs material structure of history, geography, biology, productive and reproductive institution, collective memory, personal fantasy, and ruling state or apparatuses, and God's revelation. However, even individual, social group and community pass through some processes in all of those material forms and rearrange the definition of individual based on social condition, cultural project originating from social structure, and spatial and temporal frame of community. Furthermore, Calhoun (1994) mentioned that identity is individual definition's reference to its surrounding world. He said:

*We know of no people without names, no languages or cultures in which some manner of distinctions between self and other, we and they, are not mad....Self-knowledge –always a construction no matter how much it feels like a discovery—is never altogether separable from claims to be known in specific ways by others (Calhoun, 1994, 9-10).*

Identity, according to Gilisli is a dynamic social formation process. It involves so many agents contributing to building identity construction through socialization process. Those agents include family, school, play group, mass media, and etc.

### III. METHODS

This article was prepared based on a research using qualitative method with phenomenological approach. Phenomenological approach attempts to reveal and to study a phenomenon as well as its typical and unique context encountered by individual (Herdiansyah, 2010). The typical phenomenon is Indonesian identity of people residing in two-state (Indonesia and Malaysia) border. Techniques of collecting data used were observation and literature study relevant to the focus of study.

### IV. DISCUSSION

This study focused on Indonesian identity of people in Sebatik Island. Geographically, Sebatik Island is divided

into two states: Indonesia and Malaysia. Its north hemisphere is 187.23 km<sup>2</sup> wide, belonging to Sabah area, Malaysia. Meanwhile its south hemisphere, 246.61 km<sup>2</sup> wide, belongs to Indonesia's area. About 375.52 hectares of this width become conservation area. Sebatik Indonesia Island administratively belongs to Nunukan Regency, North Borneo Province. Sebatik Island is the foremost and outermost Island in Indonesia. Its position located in Indonesia-Malaysia border area makes Sebatik Island a strategic area in cross-countries traffic map.

Despite an awareness of the community's sufficiently good Indonesian identity construction, Indonesian behavior is performed difficultly by Sebatik people amid the complexity of problems they face. Such problems as access, infrastructure, poor health and etc often trigger their confusion of Indonesian identity. Therefore the split of identity occurs, the mix of Indonesian and Malaysian identities as the form of identity negotiation. The authors found some double nationality cases assumed to be win-win solution to Sebatik people to survive in the two-state area.

In addition, there is a difference of orientation between old adults and young adults in border people in Sebatik. To some of young generation, Indonesian crisis has been strong enough when they were born and raised in Malaysia as they follow their parents working in neighbor country. Thus, when they are asked to choose, they prefer living in Malaysia. The deprivation of historical Indonesian memories among the young generations in border area triggers the emergence of Indonesian crisis. Meanwhile, the old adults on average remain to go back to Indonesia after they wander outside. Their historical memories still bind them strongly to their homeland as their birth and death place.

#### *Factors causing Indonesian Identity Crisis*

In border areas like Sebatik Indonesia, state vacuum is often found. It means that the state is considered as not present amid their struggle of life in border area. The factors triggering this are poverty problem, poor human resource, disadvantage in many things, poor infrastructure, and fundamental problems such as inadequate supply of daily needs, access to health facility, and etc. Thus, it is unsurprising that in turn the construction of Indonesian identity becomes loose. Although the government keeps attempting to deal with it today, many factors still trigger Indonesian identity crisis in border areas. Sebatik people's access to outside islands also constrains the distribution of their crops. Therefore, willy-nilly they should sell their crop to the affordable areas, Malaysia.

Wellbeing problem also often triggers the Indonesian identity crisis. Many people consider that living in Malaysia is more prosperous than surviving in Indonesia. In addition to economic factor as fundamental matter, Indonesian identity crisis also results from political factor. Malaysian political elites have also ever utilized the opportunity, when some of Sebatik people wanted to change their nationality, to be vote

pouch in the election. Thus, some people got Malaysian IC easily. In addition, there had been a Bugis-descent official in the Kingdom government making IC for some people previously.

#### *The attempt taken to solidify Indonesian Identity for border communities*

Indonesian identity or the role of *nasion* (nation), according to Mochtar Pabottingi (in Jati (ed), 2017), is closely related to the attempt of presenting the *nasion* (nation) and Indonesian essence throughout country. Its basic objective is merely to create and to distribute more concrete and dignified justice and civility throughout archipelago.

Pabottingi (in Noor, 2017) mentioned that nation is a commitment to living together and obsession to realize the shared interest from which Indonesian idea and identity results. Nation needs a set of systems, institutions, and agents that can attenuate the meaning contained inside and realize it well all at once. Basic principles of nation including solidarity, inclusiveness, civility, mutual trust and plurality can be realized through government's hand and others competent.

The attempts taken by stakeholders to solidify Indonesian identity in Sebatik Indonesia are explained below. This attempt mapping also identifies the weaknesses to which the strategy of strengthening Indonesian identity in border communities refers.

Table 1.

Mapping of the Attempt of Solidifying Indonesian Identity

Concept	Analysis
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Although parents work in Malaysia, children keep studying in Indonesian schools.</li> <li>- Many children are enrolled in universities out of Sebatik by their parents. Then, they enter into a North Borneo student association dormitory and establish an organization. It can grow their critical spirit against their homeland condition created through campus habitus. One of them can be seen from the presence of an organization in Sebatik initiated by student alumnus domiciling in Sebatik.</li> </ul>
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The use of ringgit money is prohibited in school area</li> <li>- Free school for the children whose parents work as Indonesian Workers such as <i>Sekolah Tapal batas</i> (schools in border areas) and school in Lourdes Village.</li> <li>- The school provides civic education subject</li> </ul>
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- People with double nationalities are told to choose one of them only.</li> <li>- Founding a variety of Indonesian organizations such as <i>Forum Bela Negara Sebatik</i> (Batik State Defending Forum)</li> <li>- Building Indonesian discourse and material symbol using monument or artifact with Indonesian element such as <i>Garuda</i> sculpture.</li> <li>- Constructing infrastructures in border area frequently becoming the reason for Sebatik people to compare Malaysia with Indonesia, in which Malaysia is more developed than Indonesia.</li> <li>- Supplying consuming materials previously supplied by Malaysia as the basis of life for Sebatik people</li> </ul>

Mass Media	- Media should contribute to supporting Indonesian discourse by highlighting such cases as the change of nationality in border areas. Despite hyperbolism sometimes, it can attract the attention of central government and people out of Sebatik.
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Source: Author's Analysis (2017)

Considering the mapping of attempts above, it can be concluded that the attempts taken are still in surface domain and have not reached yet the essential stage. The essence intended includes the internalization of Indonesian values into Sebatik people, particularly the young generations. For that reason, a more in-depth strategy is required to internalize Indonesian values into border communities.

In addition to the emergence of Indonesian identity crisis in some of border communities, friction cases and Malaysia's claim over Indonesia instead can be the factor triggering the reinforcement of nationalism identity. For example, the inverse Indonesia's (red-white) flag in Sea Games book in which Malaysia became the host in fact ignited some of Sebatik people's emotion. Such problems instead can strengthen Indonesian identity. The definition of "common enemy" becomes important to generate the spirit of nationalism. If the common enemy was colonialism in the past, then the threats shaking Indonesian identity should be formulated collectively today including radicalism and narcotics perceived by Sebatik people. Tiny paths border areas such as Sebatik have been the entrance to those threats not only to Sebatik people but also to Indonesians.

## V. CONCLUSION

Indonesian identity crisis has occurred in Indonesia-Malaysia border area due to such factors as wellbeing, economic gap, and infrastructure problems considered as poorer in border area compared with those in Malaysia. Some people in Indonesia-Malaysia border have double nationalities, as indicated with the ownership of double identities such as *Kartu Tanda Penduduk (KTP) Indonesia* (Indonesian Identity Card) and Malaysian Identity Card (IC). A jargon "*Garuda (Indonesia) didadaku namun harimau (Malaysia) di perutku*" meaning that *Garuda* (Indonesia) is on my breast but tiger (Malaysia) is on my stomach appears there. Indonesian people in border areas are highly dependent economically on Malaysia, so that the split of identity occurs. Nevertheless, Indonesian identity instead is getting stronger when they find "common enemy" threatening Indonesia homeland.

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