

# Construction and Deconstruction of Indonesian Migrant Identities in Contemporary East Malaysia: Some Preliminary Notes<sup>1</sup>

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## *Abstract*

*This paper attempts to view the problem of Indonesian migrant workers by stressing on the identity formation of Indonesian migrant labours themselves delimited to those who live in East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). It emphasizes on how recent political factors in Malaysia, especially racial politics related to the nation's identity building and its resulting contexts in East Malaysia (Sabah-Sarawak) has different implications on the narrative of Indonesian migrants and the construction as well as deconstruction of their identities as migrants.*



## **Background and Focus of research:**

The issue of migrant workers has long been a key aspect for Indonesia-Malaysia diplomatic relations and in the last three years, this problem had caused a tension between both states. The intensity of the issue itself had drastically increased during the financial crisis of 1997. In the mid December 1997, over 6,000 illegal migrant workers were detained by the Malaysian immigration authority. Throughout 1997, the Malaysian government had deported over 38,500 Indonesian illegal migrant workers, followed by another trend in 1998, whereas the number obtained another tremendous increase. From January to April, the figure was around 30,000, and followed by a greater number in August, reaching approximately 200,000 workers. In the year 2001 Malaysian authorities continued to deport over 1,600 illegal workers, followed with the handling issue of Nunukan a year later, in which over 450,000 Indonesian illegal migrant workers in their massive deportation process, were put in Nunukan,

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<sup>1</sup>Fieldwork was conducted on March 2004 in two locations of Sabah and Sarawak, East Malaysia. Paper is presented in the panel of Cross-Border Movements in Southeast Asia, Identity Politics and Citizenships (panel coord. Riwanto Tirtosudarmo and Johanis Haba), the 4<sup>th</sup> International Symposium of Jurnal Antropologi Indonesia: Globalisation and Partnership and the Changing Context, 12-16 July 2004, University of Indonesia, Depok. Research was funded by Toyota Foundation. Not to be cited without permission of the authors.

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East Kalimantan.

In the Malaysian context, many studies on migrant workers have been conducted with political economic approaches, by highlighting the attractiveness of Malaysian economy and some push factors from the countries of origin (See, for instance, Hj. Johari and Goddos, 2001; Hollifield, 2000; Pillai, 1999). However, the reality of Sabah & Sarawak is often forgotten in the context of international migration studies even though it has the largest number of foreign migrants especially from Phillipines and Indonesia.<sup>3</sup>

This research attempts to view the problem of Indonesian migrant workers by stressing on the identity formation of Indonesian migrant labours themselves delimited to those who live in East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). It emphasizes on how recent political factors in Malaysia, especially racial politics related to the nation's identity building and its resulting contexts in East Malaysia (Sabah-Sarawak) has different implications on the narrative of Indonesian migrants and the construction as well as deconstruction of their identities as migrants.

Data was gathered trough two main research activities; fieldworks and literary research. Field research was conducted in Sabah, East Malaysia (Kota Kinabalu, Tawau, Sandakan) with some highlights from Sarawak rural areas. In Sabah we focused on Bugis settlements around Kota Kinabalu (Kampung Bakau Likas, Kampung Lembaga Padi) as well as Bugis market-town in Menggatal. However, since Bugis people are distributed loosely around the city, observation<sup>4</sup> and interview<sup>5</sup> sometimes were carried out outside of their Kampung.



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<sup>3</sup> 44 percent of total foreigners in Malaysia live in Sabah. Non-Malaysian citizens who reside in Sabah were 614,824 or 23 percent from total population in 2000. However this number excludes foreign workers who temporarily came to Sabah using business visa. Approximately 400,000 migrants entered Sabah illegally and remain unrecorded in many slots of jobs plus 53,000 refugees from Phillipines who entered Sabah in 1994 (Kassim, 2003: 29-31).

<sup>4</sup> Observations were conducted by means of examining and recording the life of Indonesian migrant communities at their social and geographical contexts. Working environments, markets, and residential complex where daily activities were performed are our primary concern. Additionally, rituals, community gathering and possible cultural performances are recorded to grasp the whole idea of Bugis migrants' social interaction within their community and outsider.

<sup>5</sup>We gathered migrant's narrative expressions through several interviews, which can be classified as collective biography, and oral histories of important events related to the migration history from origin to destination. Two kinds of interview methods were performed: a thematic interview and unstructured interview. 'A Snowball sampling technique was used in selecting informants based on ethnicity and citizenship.



## **Preliminary Findings**

### ***Sarawak***

During first week of our field working activities, the relation between Indonesia and Malaysia is worsening by Ambalat dispute. Malaysia claims the sea, which according to Indonesian nautical border law is part of its sovereignty. Since Malaysia has not ratified United Nations Conference on Law of Sea (UNCLOS) they started to drill for oil in this region, which very near to Sabah. Interesting to see how most Indonesian is psychologically affected by this incident by rallying political protest against Malaysia and even some of protestors burnt Malaysian flag in front of its embassy in Jakarta; while Sabahan and Sarawakian (Eastern Malaysian) are not easily get provoked. Why? There is a different perspective to see this problem for both Malaysia and Indonesia. For Indonesian, the sovereignty is mostly understood in terms of national dignity, a sort of psychological and ideological so it seems. While for Malaysian, they see this as mainly diplomatic disagreement between two governments. Additionally, for the case of Sarawak and Sabah, who joined later in Malaysia in 1963, a historical and cultural connection to Indonesia is inevitable. Sarawakian with more or less 30 percent population of Iban and Kenyah (sub-categories of Dayak ) people has been maintaining family or kinship relationship with Indonesian (Kalimantan Borneo) Iban and Kenyah long before the presence of modern nation: Indonesia-Malaysia.

The complexity of Sabah and Sarawak can be “reduced” by showing these figures as a wide picture<sup>6</sup>:

- Sarawak has 42.6 percent of Christian population adherenced by Dayak and Chinese, while Islam as the religion of Malay is 31.3 percent. This somewhat portrays a sheer difference of political and cultural aspiration comparing to all districts in Malaysia peninsular where Muslim average percentage is 65.36 percent for each district and undoubtedly Malay race).
- Sabah has 23.6 percent non-Malaysian citizen and half of it is Bugis.

The ‘ragged’ relationship between East and West Malaysia is often articulated in daily conversation with them. Malay ethnic is portrait as ‘different’ since they are historically control the rest of Malaysia ‘from a far’. Malay ethnic is also axiomatically Muslim which does not fit with contemporary Sarawak and Sabah realities. The Ambalat incident is not significant enough to boost the national sentiments for Sabahans and Sarawakians to go against Indonesian protesting who were broadcasted in national television.

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<sup>6</sup> Compiled from Malaysian statistics 2000.



A sense of belonging to Indonesia is a matter of horizontal comradeship which work beyond politics and ethnicity as we often heard that Sarawakian Kenyah are familiar to the illegal migrants from Bugis, Jawa, Tator and Sambas (Indonesian) which regularly ask for protection each time they are raided by Malaysian immigration police. Again this is identity that matters. But how this operates? Upon the journey to upriver Baram to locate Indonesian irregular migrants, we settled at Long Mekaba village, one of the most remote Kenyah settlements in Sarawak. This is an entry point to Jerenai (Camp E) logging camp where many undocumented Indonesian working as timber worker, located on the bank of Silat's river. Many of Kenyah elder in Long Mekaba originally came from Long Nawang (Indonesia) and they are very helpful for illegal workers (including 'non-Dayak') from Indonesia. Tracing back to their oral histories, it is evident that migration plays a significant part in their historical identities. Long Mekaba has long historical and cultural relationship with Long Nawang (Apo Kayan region in East Kalimantan, Indonesia) and both shared common geographical origin that is Usun Apau area, now is part of Sarawak, Malaysia<sup>7</sup>. At the early of 19<sup>th</sup> century, they originally lived there as single community until they moved and split into two directions. One migrated to Apo Kayan basin at East Kalimantan and became the origin of Long Nawang, the other moved to upriver Baram river at Sarawak and founded Long Mekaba. The reason beyond migration and splitting was mainly caused by avoiding conflict between Kenyah and Iban<sup>8</sup>.

Borneo was once a fluid space even when Dutch and British government agreed to mark the land which at present becomes international border between Malaysia and Indonesia. Long journeys to Sarawak, Brunei, and Dutch Borneo (Kalimantan) back forth are carried out by Iban and Dayak as part of their rites of passage and economic activities to seek either social or economic advantages. For Kenyah, *peselai* is performed by males as they followed their destiny. Literally means 'to walk', *peselai* metaphorically can be seen as 'opening up the door' which take months and years of voyage of experience in achieving identity. Crossing over borders, cruising numerous rivers, living in the camps, encountering different cultures,

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<sup>7</sup> Long Nawang is claimed by informant to be the core of Leppu Tau culture giving an example of the origin of Jatung Utang and Sampé musical instruments which is believed as an authentic example of Leppu Tau culture.

<sup>8</sup> It was recorded that headhunting expedition, was a desperate menace for both Kenyah and Iban as they targeted each other. The British Rajah (Charles Brooke) and Dutch Controlleur then initiated peace among Iban and Dayak mainly to secure the trade route [Baleh and Rejang?]. However, it was stated that some hostility was "agreed" by Brooke to win Iban's heart, for example the Iban settling of scores against Kenyah who killed 234 Kenyah (*Sarawak Gazette*, 1958). In 1925 the third Rajah settled of Roman Catholic Iban converts on the Pila Rejang, just above Baleh with hope that they would react as a buffer and prevent the still warlike Iban Balleh people from migrating further upstream to areas inhabited by Kenyah (Pringle, 1971:67). This was done echoing the Kapit Peacemaking Agreement which officially banned headhunting.



maintaining allies and confronting enemies, continuous living and get killed were a matter of fate. However once the door was open the horizon gets wider. Kenyah in Sarawak was historically maintained relationship with official government and developed mutual relationship as trader and this experience provide much chance to learn about outside world. The historical transition from colonial era to a new nation state however had a greater impact. This is the very first event when the concept of nation-state as a political community ruled by the state was imposed to them. International border became a recent reality and experience and it promoted the 'the much larger community' which extend their understanding of geographical space, ethnic composition, and of course, identity formation. Many of elder Kenyah were recruited to join the Indonesian army during Confrontation Era (1963-1965).

Our informants G:

I was at Indonesian's side back to 1963 because I was born in Nawang Baru, Indonesia and I was recruited as *sukarelawan* (volunteer) to defend Long Jawe<sup>9</sup> from the enemy as instructed by Jauhari and President Sukarno. Those who joined the army, probably 4,500 of Kenyahs had no rifle. We were so proud and I still could remember the song: "*Pasukan TNKU (Tentara Nasional Kalimantan Utara) sumber nyawa, sampai Sabah-Sarawak telah bersatu, pasukan TNKU sumber nyawa*" [roughly translated: National Army of North Kalimantan will sudden takes one's life up to Sabah-Sarawak reunification].

Interested to hear how informant bluntly saying that he, by today Indonesian standard, was politically stigmatized as a communist supporter: "I was a PKI because I helped, or get involved with Sukarno and Jauhari [probably Syekh Azhari] from Brunei together with 4,500 fellow Kenyah recruitments." But put his confession on early 60s context, communist or not, that statement indicates his thick sentiment towards Indonesia as he vaguely remember the lines joyful and pride:

"...Negara Indonesia berjaya, bersatu pertahankan Indonesia melambangkan Negara (sic!)...Kami dari Indonesia, bukan Indonesia punya tentara, tapi TNKU..." [ great Indonesia, be united and defend your state..]

His destiny to become Malaysian Kenyah which somehow scares him to think back that he was by historical accident positioned as Indonesian enemy, but his 1970s *peselai* from Long Nawang to Long Mekaba created his new shelter which serving as a place of safety if not a sanctuary. His deep horizontal comradeship with fellow Indonesian is proven by his service and treatment to every illegal worker from Indonesia (mostly Javanese, Tator, and Bugis) who was in trouble such as difficulties to get insurance, pay the doctors, and helping with papers.

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<sup>9</sup> At that time (1963), Indonesian Army (ABRI) assisted by TNKU (Tentara Nasional Kalimantan Utara) elements, as part of a united front opposing the formation of Malaysia, were sent to Long Jawe to ambush the British Gurkha outpost troops during the beginning of the *Konfrontasi*.



Nationality (or should we say nationhood) takes form as sentiments rather than officially inscribed on papers. Here the 'nation-hood' is not only defined by formal status and citizenship (every Malaysian is Malaysian passport holding) and a sense of common historical and geographical origin (Indonesian Kenyah and Sarawakian Kenyah), but also encompassed by the imposition of national identity through historical moment. This explains why as remotest villager in Sarawak with limited access to Indonesia can be so familiar and helpful to their new friends: Indonesian illegal workers.

The connection to Indonesia is also maintained through language which shares a similar dialect and vocabularies with contemporary Indonesian language<sup>10</sup>. While the way of using Malay language in peninsular has been continuously changing and becoming different from Indonesian Malay (*Bahasa Indonesia*) today, Long Mekaba people speaks entirely the same as Indonesian. This is obviously noticeable by us, as native Indonesian speakers who surely would find Malay peninsular way of speaking as simply hard to be understood. The S.I.B. protestant church in Long Mekaba uses "a very Indonesian" in both grammar structure and vocabularies since they use the same translated bible.



### **Specific Notes on Sabah Case**

In the context of Sabah, the official 'Malay-ization' of migrant workers defies the commonly practiced 'foreign-ization' of migrants in other parts of Malaysia or other recipient countries of foreign labour. The presence of Bugis migrants presents a unique and rare situation where migrants play a vital part in the consolidation of the national identity. As mentioned before, this is partly caused by their adherence to Islam as the religion of the Malay majority represented by UMNO which for a long time has dominated Malaysian national politics notably in West Malaysia or 'peninsular Malaysia'. In contrast, East Malaysia (Sarawak and Sabah located in Borneo) provides a more fluid picture where the relationship between the migrant and native populations is more liquid, and the distinctions among them often blurred on account of geographical proximity, common historical experiences, and ethnic compositions. According Pelras (1996: 319-320), the rational motive behind the Bugis migration cannot be understood through a simply economic 'push and pulling' factors. The resolution of personal conflicts, political insecurity or the desire to escape either

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<sup>10</sup> Though Malay language has been used as lingua-franca, and both Indonesian-Malaysian share the same lexicons, both new generation of Malaysian peninsular and Indonesian have different way of speaking. Back in early 1960's the difference was negligible as today Indonesian can understand every single words from every P. Ramlee movies, but not new Malaysian TV sinetrons and talk shows.



unsatisfactory social conditions or undesirable repercussions of an act of violence committed at home were playing a major causal for migration. This is however related to Bugis 'cultural values' locally called as *siri*, equally means to 'dignity' for male and his family as a matter of life and death. One is socially obliged to defend his self and family' *siri* especially in case of land, women and local struggling for political achievement which lose or win are part of the social risk. Loss sometimes can only be redress by moving away to different place for years. Migration then can be seen as permanently moving away and developing new strategies of living at the new homelands.<sup>11</sup> Generally Bugis migrants will choose a new homeland by four characteristics: low dense population, located at coastal area to make them easier to "dominates" the coastal line, wet or swamp area with a so it possible for rice cultivation, and has easy access to seaports. These abovementioned criterions signify the basic character of trader as expansive trader (Pelras, 1996, Acciaioli, 1998). But also, Bugis migrants are well-known as very adaptive Muslim hard workers who share the Malay culture. Sabah has been seen as the new land of opportunities for Bugis long before the creation of Malaysia in 1963. It was stated on a book published by PERKISA (Bugis Organization in Sabah) that according to Islamic values of *Khafillah*, means 'leader', it is an obligatory for Bugis to go on journey and opening new lands as it is inscribed in Al-Qur'an that every Muslim should be a leader on Earth (Perkisa, 1995: ? )

The demographic composition in Sabah has to be explained by focusing on the dynamics of transnational migration between neighboring countries since the British colonization era. If we look back to Sabah political economic history, the large wave of migration from Indonesia marked the colour of this state's history. During the early development of Sabah under the British North Borneo Company (BNBC), most of the Javanese were forcefully recruited and placed to open the land and work in the rubber plantations as well as constructions<sup>12</sup> (Kaur, 2004: 89). Nowadays, we can still find communities in Sabah who apparently Javanese descendant in some part of Sabah.

The mass recruitment of Javanese labour migrant into Sabah by the company was on the year

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<sup>11</sup> Up to 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bugis community had settled in various locations at Sumatera Island such as Bengkulu, Riau Isles, and Malacca peninsular. In Borneo, Bugis settlements are found in Pontianak, Mempawah, Laut Island, Pagatan, Pasir, Kutai (mostly Samarinda), Bulungan and Gunung Tabur. At Eastern part of Indonesia, Bugis clusters were found in Sumbawa while, Batavia, Surabaya and Gresik were chosen to move south.

<sup>12</sup> This indentured Javanese labour migration were also were also recruited by trading agency houses which expand their networks to Sabah. Most of the Javanese were placed to open and work in the rubber plantation and small population in the construction. Nowadays, we can still find a small amount of the Javanese worker descendant in some part of Sabah.



of 1907. Although according to 1891 population census in Sabah, there were already 962 Javanese people living in Sabah. Between 1907 until 1931 (when the recruitment process were stopped) the total population of the Javanese in Sabah was around 10.000 worker, which account 42 percent of total 33,4 percent population of migrant worker that had been employed in the plantation sector (Haba et. al, 2002: 30). The migrant worker that had not gone back to their 'homeland' after finishing the 3 years contracts stay would automatically be a Sabahan.

After World War II, between 1950s, Sabah again becomes the destination of migrant worker to get a better life. Indonesian migrant worker (mostly Bugis), Javanese and Timorese again entering Sabah using the traditional sea route via the harbour city of Tawau. What makes this era different from the previous era is most of the migrant worker that came to Sabah is based on their own initiative to see Sabah as a land of opportunities. Most of them work in the logging and plantation. Most of this migrant were succeeded in gaining their Malaysian citizenship (Haba et.al, 2002). This then made Sabah called the land of migrant workers, where identity and citizenship is only a matter to gain a better life. Although they were historically came to peninsular Malaysia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the largest wave of migration happened during the 1970s when the Malaysian government endorsing the migrant worker from around the region (mostly from Indonesia, specifically Bugis) to be the backbone of early development in Sabah. At that time many Malaysian peninsular workers (Malay people) who were firstly recruited to work in Sabah as rubber planter and plantation worker refused to continue their job due to harsh environment of Sabah. Government had no choice except to open new recruitment to neighbouring country, anybody who fit the character of Malay people (Ongkili, 1972). The plausible preference is Bugis and Javanese who are Muslim and compatible with Malaysian politics to create Muslim bufferstate at the final frontier of its Malay Kingdom.

This policy of 'importing' a migrant worker into Sabah from the neighbouring country was more stressed during the early rise of Mahathir as Prime Minister. In Mahathir plan, Sabah will support the Malaysian industrialization plan by providing their raw material to the peninsular. To do so, realizing the shortage of labour in Sabah, importation of 'low class migrant' is the short cut. This large wave of migration is also used by the Malaysian government to add their Malay constituency in Sabah, by giving an easy process of becoming a Malaysian citizenship for the migrant communities. According to the early research, based on the population census in Sabah in the early 1990s, one third of Sabah's population is based





on migrant workers (Uesugi, 1998 cf Haba, 2002).

What matters today is the changing context of Malaysian political view on migrant policies. Migrants are seen as problematic due to the increasing criminal rate. Malaysian (mostly peninsular) media point their finger at Indonesian migrants and labeling them as “indon” worker, a disturbing predicate for every Indonesian live in their homeland. However, in Sabah and Sarawak, at the grass-root level, the term “indon” does not degrading Indonesian migrant’s dignity as for them “indon” is commonly used as shortcuts for Indonesian people (orang Indonesia). Interesting to see how Kadazan people who claiming themselves as the native people of Sabah portrays Indonesian migrant as their good partner since they work harder than any Malay from peninsula.

If I am being asked about my impression towards orang Indon, I would say that they speak better (*halus*) than Kadazan or Sabahan. Indon speaks so polite and poetic, not like us. Often we use the term “*Kau*” while Indon prefer “*kamu*”. Also Indon works harder than peninsular Malay who only works for money. We have three cooks here from Java and as you see they are good at cooking.

This is also true for Muslim Kadazan (or Dusun people) who still refuse to be called Malay, feel their existence as “The Other” of peninsular Malaysia and disagree with repatriation policy for illegal Indonesian migrants since they knew that the first developer of Sabah was Indonesian who had been working very hard over generations.

Finally, the most puzzling question is to define Malay identity itself which is ambivalent. On the one hand, the Malay identity purely refers to Islam since all of Malay people embrace Islam. In speaking of the meaning of Malay:

If I am being asked Am I Malay? My response will be like this: You cannot Malay-nised (*Memelayukan*) me only because we speak the same Malay and we both Muslim. For me, there is nothing important in Malay culture and I always have no interest in their culture. I am a Kadazan and I am worried that soon Kadazan children speak the language through dictionary. I want the children to be modern and scientific, but do not forget where they come from.

This is the dominant discourse of politics-religion on the eyes of Peninsular Malay. On the other hand, in Sabah, especially for Kadazan Muslim (Dusun), their being-ness as Muslim does not correspond with their “Malay-ness” since for Kadazan Muslim, Malay also refers to an orthodoxy and aristocracy, a ruler capacity which they do not have<sup>13</sup>. Consequently,

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<sup>13</sup> We should make a difference between Malay as a “neutral” cultural category which is commonly used in defining Malay culture which less political (like Indonesian perspective in imagining Malay <melayu>), and Malay as a colonial construction which was originally created by white supremacy (Raffles and later predecessors) in the efforts to place native race into “their place” in concordance with Chinese and Europeans (see Ooi, 2003:167, Shamsul A.B, 2004).



instead of being “othered” they prefer to exclude Malay category as the Other for them. Malay is just an outsider Muslim who ideally lives in peninsular. However, further investigation indicates that their identification with Malay is inevitably or even ambiguous. If they are being asked about the history of Sabah and its people, they can only explain it through peninsular perspective of becoming Malaysian, which is very Malay and parallel with Mahathir concept of “ideal Malay” and Malay nationalism.

Have you ever heard Hang Tuah? He was **our** famous hero, once he sworn that no Malay ever perish from this earth. He was true, we should not be perished and let ourselves drifted away, becoming a too western minded. That I would call as charismatic spirit, a sort of identity... we should not talk about this, but Sabahan had been living in a very difficult way for 15 years when PBS ruled, because [lowering his voice] there were no development until UMNO came here.

The presence of Malay-based peninsular party (UMNO) since 1994 signifies the continuing effort of Kuala Lumpur to embrace the non-Malay *bumiputera* as as new political partner. However, for Muslim Kadazan, being a Malaysian does not automatically fit them as the member of Malay culture<sup>14</sup>. If we imagine that identity is constructed in sediment layers, it seems that the core of becoming Malays is still problematic and unfinished for Kadazan although the peninsular project of endorsing national sentiments slowly penetrates hegemonically as illustrates here when he was asked about Ambalat case: “we have border, but I know that oil does not spread along the tiny lines, so why Indonesia has to drill in our territory?” Hegemony works through media, of course, interesting to see how informant represents Malaysian phobia towards political freedom in Indonesia: “...I can not understand your people, who speaks so poetic, can be so barbaric, why you forced Bapak Suharto down and treat him with no respect?..”

Or, when he was asked about illegal migrants from Indonesia:

I think we don't want to throw out people (kami tidak buang orang), as long as Indon has a legal documents, they are welcome to work here, we never shutdown the gate. Don't use our backdoor, and I think it is also same in your country [Indonesia] that you don't accept people without papers. Sorry, I don't mean to be harsh but I feel like there is not much air to breath here.

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<sup>14</sup> After Malaysia was formed, Donald Stephens had succeeded in uniting the non-Muslim indigenous population and enjoyed strong support for his party: The United National Kadazan Organisation (UNKO). After Singapore (which is predominantly Chinese) left in 1965 Stephens became more and more concerned that the Kadazan Dusun (and all other non-Malay peoples) would play a subordinate role in the new state. After the 1967 elections, when Stephens's United Pasok-Momogun National Organisation (UPKO) fell back somewhat, the more Muslim-oriented United Sabah National Organisation (USNO) and its leader Tun Mustapha gained power in the state. Stephens then dissolved UPKO, asking its members to move into USNO and create a truly multiracial party. Tun Mustapha did not seem to agree, but embarked on an intense malayisation campaign, which was continued by his successor, Datuk Harris Salleh of the Berjaya party (Chief Minister 1976-1984). The Kadazan Dusun language (then Kadazan) ceased to be taught in schools, to favour the adoption of Malay, or Bahasa Malaysia. The Kadazan Dusun had effectively become a rather powerless group in the state, lacking leaders and organization (Åsgård, 2002: 12).



For Bugis migrant however we captured inconsistency in their narrative expression in referring their identity as “ideal Malay”, Sabahan, Malaysian, and Indonesian. It portrays a multilayered identities or intersection between many realms, let say ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship as part of their identity formation. On the one hand, in relating to the concept of “Ideal Malay” they wholeheartedly embrace it as it has been historically proved that their migration history is written by golden ink due the relation with Bugis aristocracy (Pelras, 1996) in peninsular which make them feel secure as part of Malay who has the same right in claiming Malaysia as their homeland as their fellow indigenous race, namely Kadazan. Dahlan who left Indonesia in 1980 illustrates his anxiety as if he is questioning his identity as Malaysian Bugis:

Bugis is Malay, as for me, I feel belong to this soil, no matter where I step in this land, this is my country. But however, I still do not understand why the government let Indian and Chinese to be their cabinet member. To this point, I feel that Indonesia is more Malay than Malaysia.. I am worried.

Or Muha (60 years old), migrated to Sabah in 1971:

Bugis is not foreigner here in Malaysia, because there are three provinces who have Bugis origin Kings [Sultans] in Johor, Selangor, and Trengganu. They still speak Bugis for daily conversations.... But look, since three years ago, the number of Bugis everywhere in Sabah has become lesser, because Malaysian government now so fuss about us<sup>15</sup>”

On the other hand, when it comes to present realities of how they maintain their cultural ties with ‘authentic’ homeland (Indonesia), “becoming part of the Malay world” is not sufficient enough due to Malaysian immigrant policies which become stricter to Indonesian migrants in the last ten year. Even successful Bugis who already has citizenship feel psychologically marginalized. Insecurity is expressed through their narrative which often vague and inconsistent. Indonesia is portrayed as better, civilized and tolerant but very weak in diplomacy. Malaysia in contrast is too strict, too discipline but a good place for seeking fortune. To conclude, Indonesian identity is inscribed deeply rooted in their blood and Malaysian identity is a matter of high achievement. They cannot be a ‘true’ Malaysian using their citizenship, and bitterly speaking their “ideal Malay” is ironically illusive. Ambivalence is part of their formation of identity.



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<sup>15</sup> Muha also sadly told us that some grammar school students were forbade by teachers to come to school since their father is Bugis, Indonesian passport holder, not Malaysian citizen.



## **Closing Remarks<sup>16</sup>**

The discourse of globalization and localization has been widely explored since the early 1990s. Globalization stands for the emergence a world economy, a world polity, and perhaps a world culture, in short, for the emergence of a world society in the widest sense of them (Giddens, 1991). Localization stands for the rise of localized, culturally defined identities, sometimes within, sometime transcending, the boundaries of a state (Kloos, 1991). In the dialectical nature of globalization and localization, the problems of identities emerge as an important theme. How do social, political and economic relations in certain countries influence the identity formation amongst migrant communities? In other words, how do the dynamic relations between state, society and market construct and deconstruct migrant identities? It is important to formulate discourses on migration theories in the context of globalization's divergent effects. The Southeast Asian context, where cultural and nation-state boundaries have not always intersected in a neatly fashion and globalization's divergent effects are dynamically at work, is a significant starting point in characterizing migration dynamics and migrant identities and finding new discourses for migration theories. Many scientists believe that international and internal migration are part of the same process, they should be analysed together. Many cases show that international migration may be over short distances and between culturally similar people such as between the Southern Philippines and Sabah in Malaysia, while internal migration can span great distances and bring together very different people (e.g. movements of Ulgar 'national minority' people from the western provinces of China to cities in the East) (Castells, 2000: 270).

Migration is not a new phenomenon in the annals of human history, particularly in the Southeast Asian context. In the context of contemporary Southeast Asia, issues of human migrations have increasingly gained attention. The post-colonial creation of nation-states and the impact of free-flow capital driven by global economic movement (liberalization) had led to various economic disparities and inequality relations between various nation-states. However, as most Southeast Asian nation-state boundaries are basically colonial creations, the national, cultural, political and economic boundaries never really intersect in a neatly fashion. This is complicating the analysis of human migration, as current transnational mobility is not always purely driven by economic factors alone. Some movements are culturally driven, others might be related to the ambivalent partition of communities into different nation-states

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<sup>16</sup> This section is purely theoretical review of globalisation, identities, place-making and how these manifest in constructing identities. The purpose of this theoretical review is as a soft-guidance in understanding the richness of the issue. At this stage we have not yet made deeper analysis using the framework and we are open to discussion. Thank you.



creating 'transnational' homelands, some are driven by repression on minorities falling victim to nation-state projects. In the discourse of International Relations, international migration is categorized as transnational activity, which is defined by Keohane and Nye (1972) as the movement of information, money, physical objects, people or other tangible or intangible items across state boundaries, when at least one of the actors involved in this movement is non-governmental (see also Basch, Schiller, and Szanton, 1994, and Bali 2001).

### **Culture, Place, Space and Identity**

As noted by Kalb and Van Der Land (2000), culture is deeply and thoroughly implicated in the social shifts associated with international migrations, and it is so in multiples and manifold ways. In the heart of the cultural body, the problem of identity is of central importance to understand deeply the nature of migrant communities in several parts of the world. Place and space are, of course, constituted by sedimented social structures and cultural practices. Sensing and moving are not presocial; the lived body is the result of habitual cultural and social processes. This means recognizing that place, body, and environment integrate with each other; that places gather things, thoughts, and memories in particular configurations; and that place, more an event than a thing, is characterized by openness rather than by a unitary self-identity. Space and cultural identity are intertwined and the 'disruption' of the space configuration will disturb the embedded configuration of existing cultural identity. (Escobar, 2001: 142). Parallel with the migrant cultural identities, migration simultaneously affects migrant's configuration of identity since the ties between culture and space are put into question. Anthropologically, the sense of location, place and belonging of migrants are always in the process of reconceptualization following their recurrent mobility. Here the focus is on the relation between identity, place and power—between "placemaking" and "peoplemaking" where locality and community cease to be obvious, and certainly not inhabited by rooted or natural identities but very much produced by complex relations of culture and power that go well beyond local bounds. (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). The task of anthropology becomes to recover the bodily, place-based, and practical aspects of social life (Escobar, 2001: 150) and to certain extent questioning what Ferguson and Gupta called as "isomorphism" of place, culture, and space which has already taken for granted (Gupta & Ferguson, 1999: 66). Here we deal with "sensing the place", perception, and experience of place and the local constructions of particular localities as something which are continuously constructed, contested and given multiple meanings. We learnt that it has become axiomatic today, owing to Fredrik Barth's seminal social constructionist framework in examining identity formation, to view the process of identity construction as being contingent, dynamic,



responsive, permutable, and constantly reconstructed or reinvented. (e.g. Barth 1969; Clifford 1988; Gupta and Ferguson 2002; Jenkins 1997), as well as being constructed in webs of subjectivities and narrative processes where it is assumed that, “social action can only be intelligible if we recognize that people are guided to act by the relationships in which they are embedded.” (Somers and Gibson 1994).

Lastly, there are two kinds of identity, identity as being (which offers a sense of unity and commonality) and identity as becoming (or a process of identification, which shows the discontinuity in our identity formation.). The first position defines cultural identity as something fixed, shared among members with an essential past as a point of reference. Within this term, cultural identities not only reflect common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, but also assume that culture and identity are stable, pre-given and unchanging (Hall, 1994: 393). The second position characterizes identity as something fluid and emerging. The historical past is not regarded as an absolute reference, and needs to be rediscovered and is waiting to be found, but rather as a source of re-telling to produce identity in the context of present<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, a constant transformation of cultural identities brings two significant consequences. First, cultural identities are actively constructed not only through a set of relations between powers, but also through its relation to the Other. Not only, in Said's 'Orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes, but also they had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as the Other. Secondly, cultural identities are seen as unstable points of identification which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning which is unifying us through difference.

Identity is realised through language as a process that we do rather than something that we are, and however it needs to be articulated (and represented). Gramsci described this articulation as 'the starting point of critical elaboration': it is the consciousness of what one really is, and in 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory'. Identity marks the conjuncture of our past with the social, cultural and economic relations we live within. 'Each individual is the synthesis not only of existing relations but of the history of these relations. Individual as a historical subject is a precis of the past (Rutherford, 1990: 19). Since it articulates through

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<sup>17</sup>It has histories, but like everything which is historical, it undergoes a constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, identities are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power (Hall, 1990: 394).



language, the construction of identity takes form of narrativity, or mode of telling. It is, either, processual and relational which time, place, and space are embedded within. In other words, we can, first, understand that the actual event of telling experience through stories cannot be separated from time and spatial relationships. Secondly, the articulation of identities through narrative is a kind of action which performed in specific diachronic context where either speakers or storytellers (performers) are temporarily beginning his/her presencing as well setting their social positions. It is within these temporal and multi-layered narratives that identities are formed; hence narrative identity is processual and relational (Somers and Gibson 1994: 58-67). Since the nature of time is narratively structured through language, the analysis of time as a linear series of “nows” hides the true constitution of time, or in other words, he makes a distinction between linear time (historical) and the way time is experienced (human time) in what he calls as “within-time-ness” (Ricoeur, 1981:166). Historical time becomes human time “to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence (Ricoeur, 1984:52). History (in terms of scientific and objective study) is different from story. Ricoeur opposes this anti-narrative approach and proposes the way to understand history and time by stressing the importance of re-telling history, rather than historical accuracy. In this sense, history can be fictional using various forms of expression like oral history. Narratives combine fact and fiction. Narrative identity occupies a central position between historical narratives and narratives of literary fiction. Moreover, the cross interplay of these two types of narratives is the mode of how narratives are articulated (Ricoeur 1987, 244-9, Johnson, 2003:120).

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