Globalization and Nationalism: Perceived Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security (An Analysis of the Identity Negotiation Process of Expats in Jakarta)

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Abstract

The modernist notion of the self as unitary, stable, and transparent has come under criticism by postmodernist who proclaim that each person is fragmented and contiuously changing in both large and small ways. (Powell, 1996). Individuals are always in the process of constructing and reconstructing themselves. (Hall, 1996). Each of us has multiple selves, all of which are shaped by complex conditions of our lives. Ethnic identities are not pure or static. The globalization of economics, politics, and human affairs has made individuals more ontologically insecure and existentially uncertain. One main response to such insecurity is to seek reaffirmation of one's self identity. (Kinnvall, 2004). This research analyses how individual expatriate perceived Self and negotiate his/her identity in the interaction process with local or fellow expatriates during their stay in Indonesia. Data are gathered by conducting indepth interview with a number of active expatriates, focusing on the ways how each of them perceived Self and negotiate his/her identity in the new circumstances and/or by sharing social space with other heritages to reduce insecurity and existential anxiety.

Keywords: globalization, nationalism, perceived self, identity negotiation, insecurity

1. Introduction

Increasingly in the twentieth century, the modernist notion of the self as unitary, stable, and transparent has come under criticism (Powel, 1996). Postmodernist thinkers reject the modernist idea of a stable, coherent, autonomous self. Instead, postmodernists proclaim that each person is fragmented and continuously changing in both large and small ways. Each of us has multiple selves, all of which are shaped – though not wholly determined – by complex conditions of our lives (Wood, 2004). Subjects are always in the process of constructing and reconstructing themselves (Hall, 1996).

Subjectivity of self-security always involves a stranger-other, because the self is not a static object but is part of a larger process of identity construction. This larger process is ultimately intersubjective, implying that internalized self-notions can never be separated from self/other representations and are always responsive to new interpersonal relationships (Ogilvie & Ashmore, 1991, p. 286). This raises two questions: (1) What happens to notions of self, other, and identity in this process? (2) Why is it that certain collective responses, such as nationalism and citizenship, are more likely than others?

New cultural practices, especially to do with the family and religion, skin color, identities, place of origin or cultural community continue to shape the personal lives and relationships. Ethnic identity, like gender and sexuality, has become politicized and for some people has become a primary focus of their politics (Young, 1990). There is an ethnic assertiveness, arising out of the feeling of not being respected or of lacking access to public space, consisting of counter-posing 'positive' images against traditional or dominant stereotypes. It is a politics of projecting identities to challenge existing power relations; of seeking not just toleration for ethnic difference but also public acknowledgement, resources and representation. Moreover, these identities are of different sorts and not stable.

Ethnic identities are not 'pure' or static. Rather, they change in new circumstances or by sharing social space with other heritages and influences. Emmanuel Levinas, as cited from Bergo (2007), argued that the encounter with the other person is provocatively called a "failure of communication". Reconstructed from within the face-to-face experience, a self feels itself answerable, spontaneously, to another. Yet that self, that "me," is not answerable in the sense of being called to identify itself, converse, or even listen to the other. This is failed communication only in the sense that it is not concerned primarily with setting out the groundwork for a philosophy of dialogue or communication. (Bergo, 2007, p.113).

Thomlinson (1999), as cited from Liu et al. (2014), argued that 'Globalization lies at the heart of modern culture; cultural practices lie at the heart of globalization'. This quote raises questions about the challenges that we face living in a global village. Thus, this research will focus on the analysis of the challenges individual, particularly expats (diaspora), face while living in a global village.

2. Theoretical Perspective

2.1. The Self in appearance and actions

Sensuous vulnerability, according to Levinas, is a property of our being creatures with skins, with flesh. Sceptically Levinas's argument

bring about questions of the kind: Is that really what happens when "i" am face to face with another person? These questions are legitimate, because the gap in time between the actual event of the encounter and its being re-experienced for the sake of philosophical insight is never wholly bridgeable. It is a reflective approach on the division between subjective experience and objective experience. In this, phenomenology's work is not so dissimilar from psychoanalysis, which itself attempts to approach consciousness as multilayered and constituted of sedimented, modified memories. However, Levinas focused on and unfolded the complexities within the face-to-face "moment."

Bergo (2007) argued that communication, if understood as more than the exchange of signals or information, comes into existence for reasons often clearly more complex that the desire for communication, i.e. whether or not on the side of the one who desired to initiate communication. These are all ingredients in that moment of failed communication as what described by Levinas: *"Communication is none other than the unchosen and unwilled event by which a self's enclosure in self is momentarily broken and its self-directed movement is temporarily halted."* Levinas's philosophy of communication is a prolonged reflection on what an "I" receives, of its selfhood, from an other human being-election, if you will, but election as a call to answer for itself, not to converse. (Bergo, 2007, p.114).

2.2. Ontological security

Ontological security is a stable mental state derived from a sense of continuity about the events in one's life. Giddens (1991) refers to ontological security as a sense of order and continuity regarding an individual's experiences. In his contemporary awareness of changes in society, Giddens' view indicates that we are in a period of late modernity, in which tradition is declining and identities are fluid. Giddens says that in the post-traditional order, self-identity is reflexive. It is not a quality of a moment, but an account of a person's life.

"Ontological security" and "existential anxiety" are essential ingredients in Giddens'

(1991) theory of human existence. Ontological security refers to a "person's fundamental sense of safety in the world and includes a basic trust of other people. Obtaining such trust becomes necessary for a person to maintain a sense of psychological well-being and avoid existential anxiety" (Giddens, 1991, pp. 38-39).

2.3. Revisiting Culture & identity

People have undoubtedly always been more mobile and identities less fixed than the static approach of classical anthropology would suggest. As human beings, we are all cultured. In Clifford Geertz's words, "Culture is not just an ornament of human existence but an essential condition for it. There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture."

Identity is a core issue for most people. It is about who we are. The interpretive perspective of identity, as posit by Martin and Nakayama (2007), is more dynamic and recognize the important role of interaction with others as a factor in the development of the self. One must be a member of a community before consciousness of self is set in, and so the self is always in flux. Identity, as argued by Kinnvall (2004), is considered as an anxiety-controlling mechanism reinforcing a sense of trust, predictability, and control in reaction to disruptive change by reestablishing a previous identity or formulating a new one.

Factors that marked cultural identities, among other, are race, ethnicity, gender; however, the real locus of these factors is the notion of difference. The question of difference begins as we hear the ideas about 'us' and 'them', in-groups and out-groups, which define ourselves in relation to others, or the other. This notion will raise debate about: do we choose our identity, or is it beyond our control? As Simon (2008) questioned whether identity is a social construction or part of psychodynamic process or a complex amalgam of both.

Ting-Toomey (2009, p. 492) defined identity as the cultural societal, relational, and individual images of self-conception, and this composite identity has group membership, interpersonal, and individual self-reflective implication. Ting-Toomey conceptualized an individual's identity as comprised of both social identity and personal identity dimensions on the psychological level. Social identities can include cultural or ethical membership identity, gender identity, sexual orientation identity, social class identity, or social role identity, to name a few. Personal identities, on the other hand, can include any unique attributes that we associate with our individuated self in comparison with those of others.

Through interactions with others, people learn how to view themselves and the world (Mead, 1934; Schlengker, 1980). Thus, identity negotiation refers to the processes through which people reach agreements regarding "who is who" in their relationships; the questions of Who am I? And Who are you? The struggle to answer both questions is profoundly influenced by our cultural socialization, family socialization, and acculturation and identity change processes (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Kinvall (2004) argued that globalization challenges simple definition of who we are and where we come from. The globalization of economics and politics is, for many, being felt as time and space are being compressed and events, real or imagined, are becoming increasingly localized. It is a world of devoid of certainty, where many people feel intensified levels of insecurity when the life they once led is being contested and changed at the same time.

One of the extraordinary realities of living in the globalized world is that we all have multiple identities. Some of these identities take up only a small part of our lives, such as the associations we belong to. Others are part of our core identity, such as our family identity. Sometimes our different identities come in conflict with one another, and then we have role conflicts. Once we have moved past our own core identity in family and community, most of us let our national identity absorb the residuals of our sense of self. (Boulding, 1990, p.64)

3. Method

The research incorporated interviews with four informants consisting of three expatriates

working in Jakarta area and one international students. In the beginning this research is aimed to focus only to the expatriates, however, I found it also interesting to explore further on the young international students, from a reputable university in Jakarta, whose parents are expatriates and diplomat. They are a Korean, an Australian born Chinese, a Canadian, and an American born Indian. Purposively chosen, my informants are those who have been living in Indonesia for more than 3 years, whose jobs require them to also travel a lot globally. Their names are kept as anonymous. Data from interviews are applied to analyze the challenges the diaspora faced regarding their identities; and to know what processes rather than essences are involved in present experiences of cultural identity.

4. Result and discussion

Emerging from the data, from the very beginning of the interviews, I found that most of my informants spoke very freely about how they felt when asked about their perceived original identities and the challenges they faced, i.e. how they feel when perceived as otherwise. For example, my female informant M, aged 38, currently works in a multinational consulting company, when being asked about her feelings when her "Australianness" is being questioned because she looks very Chinese according to the counterpart she met, answered:

> *"It's quite annoying when people questioned about my identity. They do not believe that I am Australian. It was even worse when I visited China where people looked at me skeptically when I said I am an Australian. The case gets worsened because I look Chinese yet I do not speak Chinese, plus I was born in Indonesia. I find it hard for me to explain or I should say I give up explaining my identity to people."*

My other informant is L, a male Korean Executive, aged 58, who has been living in Jakarta for more than 20 years. He said that he feels more Indonesian than Korean. L happily identifies himself as *"Korenesia"* to say that he has a mixed self-identity between Korean and Indonesian. Very often when in Korea or in Jakarta he speaks Bahasa Indonesia to his fellow Koreans. He gave example

that when in Korea, he was in a lift, he politely said: *"Tolong lantai…"* asking other people to push the button in the lift directing to the intended floor. Or in other occasion he often times mixed up his language use between Korean and Bahasa Indonesia. However, apart from feeling as being *"Korenesia"* L strongly admit that he is still a Korean, though.

The same case is faced by my other informant, HS, a Korean girl aged 22, an international student of a reputable private university in Jakarta. She has been living in Jakarta for about 18 years. Her parents are Korean, and she goes to Korean School in Jakarta up to her high school. Korean language is her mother tongue. When being asked about her identity, she said that she feels more Indonesian than Korean. She does not even enroll in international class in that university, but she admits herself in regular class instead, which use Bahasa Indonesia as language of delivery. When in Korea, she often accidentally speaks daily Bahasa Indonesia to fellow Korean, for example she said: *"Minta tambah Kimchi"* to the Korean waiter, when she wanted to have more Kimchi a specific Korean food. She admitted that she feels more Indonesian than Korean. Although from her look and the way she speaks Bahasa Indonesia, it is obvious that she is a Korean.

Another result from the interview shows otherwise from C, my female Canadian informant, aged 33 years, works as a consultant in a reputable multinational company. Born in Canada, by nationality she is a Canadian, her mother is a Singaporean Chinese and her father is a Canadian born Chinese Indonesian. C, who does not speak Bahasa Indonesia, said that she feels more Canadian than Indonesian or Singaporean, yet her look is very Chinese and her English sounds very *"Singlish"* (a Singaporean English) as she learned it from her mother. However, she said that it is always hard to convince other people that she is not an Indonesian nor Singaporean nor Chinese. The feeling described by C shows that it is quite a struggling effort for her to describe her identity to others; while in many occasions she compromised what other people might think about her origin identity.

My last informant is LN, female, aged 20, an international student, has been studying in Jakarta ever since her high school (in Gandhi Memorial School Jakarta). Her father is an Indian born American, working as a diplomat stationed in Jakarta. By nationality she is American. She is quite a multilingual person. She speaks Bahasa Indonesia reasonably fluent with her peers, unavoidably, of course, with Indian accents. She speaks English with her Dad and she speaks English and a little bit Hindi with her mother. Especially when she wants to talk privately with her mom she uses Hindi language. She also mentioned that both of her grandparents are still in India. When asked about her identity, she said: *"I know I am Asian and Indian yet also American. My mom always wears saris and whenever I go out with her to the shops or in public; I know I, I should say we look different because of my mom clothes and culture."*.

Moreover, LN added that, especially during her stay in Jakarta, people often times think that she is Indonesian Indian, particularly she knows that there are a lot of Indonesian Indian communities living in a particular area in Jakarta such as Pasar Baru or Sunter in North Jakarta. She finds sometimes it is difficult to answer when people questioned about her identity, or when people doubt it about her *"Americanness"* because of her look. Things get worse when her grandparents keep on reminding her that she is an Indian and should proud to be Indian, while insisting her to speak even in simple Hindi (one of the official languages of the Union of India) to them. This illustrates that in the certain period of time there has also emerged an 'Asian' identity based on a hybrid *Asianness*, rather than a regional, national, caste or religious identity derived from one's parents, and sometimes directly influenced by or modelled on forms of 'ancestors'.

Both social identity and personal identity dimensions influence our everyday behaviors in a generalized and particularized manner. The answer from M and my other informants shows that they might be considered as a profound sense of a loss of territorial roots, of an erosion of the cultural distinctiveness of place. However, they do not need to seek self-verifying evaluations from others. Individuals are said to be more likely to think of themselves as members of social groups under conditions in which that group membership maximizes the similarities between oneself and other group members at the same time as it increases the dissimilarities with other groups (Turner et al, 1987).

The feelings described by all of my informants are evidence of the destabilizing effects of the global-local nexus. Self-identity consists of the development of a consistent feeling of biographical continuity where individual is able to sustain a narrative about the self and answer questions about doing, acting, and being. However, maintaining such a narrative is not easy. This is frequently mixed with an acute anxiety about their new circumstances and strong feelings of homelessness. Thus, the findings of this research are clustered into two main headings, which are interwoven with or complementary to each other as follows:

a) Individual Ontological Security
Individual ontological security is maintained when home can provide a site of constancy in the social and material environment. This site of constancy, in this sense, constitutes a spatial context in which daily routines of individual existence are performed. It is a domain where people feel most in control of their lives because they feel free from the social pressure that is part of the contemporary world.

b) Home as secured base of identity construction
Home, in other words, is a secure base on which identities are constructed. In relation to this, Giddens' notions of ontological security and existential anxiety are fruitful for understanding the global-local nexus as psychologized discourses of domination and resistance. These global changes have meant that an increasing number of people now lack the protective cocoon of relational ties that shielded community members and groups in the past (Giddens, 1990).

5. Conclusion

In terms of speed, globalization involves a compression of time and space never previously experienced; in terms of cognition, there is an increased perception of the globe as a smaller place-that events elsewhere have consequences for our everyday political, social, and economic lives, affecting individuals' sense of being. It is this dispersed of time and space that affects daily life; the search for constant time- and space-bound identities has become a way to cope with the effects of modern life. Some of the less desirable consequences are manifest in increasing rootlessness and loss of stability as people experience the effects of capitalist development, media overflow, and other similar transformative forces. Hence, it is difficult to ignore how concerns about the economic, cultural, and social threats posed by people to make way to search for ontological security of their identity.

Nationalism or citizenship, or individual's look, as identity signifiers, are likely to increase ontological security while minimizing existential anxiety. This is aligned with Mathew's argument that:

If you believe that you can choose aspects of your life and culture from all the world, then where is your home? because we live through taken-for-granted social practices (as signified by the concept of habitus, referring to the processes through which self and social world ever shape one another. (Mathews, 2000).

The fact that individuals search for one stable identity does not mean, however, that such identities exist. Rather, we need to understand identity not as a fixed, natural state of being, but as a process of becoming. As argued by Hall (1992), "If we feel that we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative about the self' about our- selves" (p. 227). The focus on (in)security is understood as a thick signifier adds an important emotional dimension to the individuals. This need is likely to be heightened in uncertain circumstances brought about by forces beyond individual's control, such as globalization as well as the emotional responses to the feelings of existential anxiety or ontological insecurity.

I would conclude that issues of collective identity today do seem to take on a special character, when more and more of us live in a world where identities are increasingly coming to be, if not wholly de-territorialized, at least differently territorialize. In a world of diaspora, transnational culture flows. Where "here" and "there" become blurred in this way, the cultural certainties and fixities of the identity will always be negotiated.

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