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The idea of ethnicity in Indonesia

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THE IDEA OF ETHNICITY IN INDONESIA¹

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Abstract

Ethnicity is now a ubiquitous social category in Indonesia which typically points to a community living in a particular region of Indonesia who speaks a particular language. Even so, this was not always the case. In this paper I look at the genesis and circulation of the idea of ethnicity from early colonial times until the late 2000s and how it has become intimately linked with language. In doing so, I take inspiration from scholarship in the broad area of language ideologies coming from linguistic anthropology. I will be especially concerned with describing how schooling and bureaucratic practices and policies, political discourses, mass media and nation building activities have contributed to the linking of region, linguistic form, and person to form the idea of ethnicity.

Keywords: Ethnicity; Indonesia; Language

Introduction

With some 17000 islands, all of the world's major religions, around 1000 communities with over 400 languages, and a large portion of the world's biodiversity, the archipelago nation of Indonesia is often talked about as one of the world's most diverse nations. Even so, this diversity has been ordered through the social category of ethnicity. Ethnicity is now a ubiquitous social category, which either points to Chineseness (e.g. Coppel, 1983; Purdey, 2006) or more commonly a community living in a particular region of Indonesia who speak a particular regional language (*bahasa daerah*). Ethnicity has not always been such a natural category and in this paper I look at its genesis and circulation from early colonial times until the late 2000s. In troping on Elson's (2008) work "The Idea of Indonesia", I take inspiration from scholarship in the broad area of language ideologies coming from linguistic anthropology (Agha, 2007; Inoue, 2006; Kroskrity, 2000; Schieffelin, Woolard, & Kroskrity, 1998). A recent take on this work argues that to understand how linguistic forms become associated with particular types of speakers and particular places we need to take a historical look at the circulation of semiotic forms in one-to-many participation frameworks (Agha, 2007). One-to-many participation frameworks (hereafter also referred to as "frameworks") include education and media consumption settings, and essentially any type of setting where the sender of semiotic information is outnumbered by receivers. Thus, a teacher is the "one" of a classroom, while the students are the "many" or a broadcast is the "one" while the "audience" is the many.

In looking at these frameworks we also need to keep in mind their relationship with different waves of technology which contributed to the speeding up and massification of the circulation of ideas and people – that is, the comprehension of time and space (Harvey, 1989) – while also creating new social domains for contact with and commentary about "the other" (e.g. Weidman, 2010). I start by fleshing out work on language ideologies and how they can

inform our understanding about community and identity more generally. I then use this model to examine how linguistic forms, place, and person have been linked over the last 150 years or so to form ethnic communities in Indonesia.

Community and one-to-many participation frameworks

There are many ways in which community (as one type of identity) has been theorized and investigated. Some scholars see community as something that is constructed through interaction with others (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Barth, 1969; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Irvine, 2001). Others point out that ideas about communities, their linguistic and other practices become sedimented through routinization (Bourdieu, 1984; Giddens, 1984). In both cases ideas about community are typically local specific and small scale. Ideas about community become more widely circulating through the repetition of these ideas via one-to-many participation frameworks (Agha, 2007).

While we need to keep in mind critiques of such a hypodermic model (e.g. Ang, 1996; Spitulnik, 1996), nevertheless these frameworks play an important role in the genesis and circulation of ideologies about community. This is so because the way meaning is contested is different to how it is done in face-to-face encounter. Orienting behaviour is carried out in another time and space and typically via another one-to-many participation framework (Agha, 2007). For example, orienting behaviour to representations of a community and/or their language take the form of letters to the editor, radio talkback sessions, parodies, curriculum and policy reviews, memos, student feedback on teaching, and so on (e.g. King & Wicks, 2009; Loven, 2008; Miller, 2004). The act of commenting on or evaluating representations not only recirculates some of the semiotic information contained in these representations, but it also helps these semiotic fragments to become associated or “indexed” with other moral dispositions, places, times, and so on. Through this process of repetition,

ideas about a particular community become naturalized or “enregistered” (Agha, 2007) to the extent that someone can be recognized as a member of a particular community if they engage in behaviours, activities, or consumption patterns that have become associated with these stereotypical communities.

Whether and to what extent communities are widely recognizable is also reliant upon changes in infrastructure (e.g. transportation, communications, and schooling) that facilitate the massification of people and idea circulation. As some scholars have pointed out (Barker, 2008; Eisenlohr, 2010; Harvey, 1989; Inoue, 2006; Weidman, 2010), the waves of new infrastructure introduced since the nineteenth century have facilitated the circulation of people and ideas while creating new social domains for encounters with difference. These encounters generate commentaries, which with the expansion of print capitalism (and then other forms of mass media) were also able to be circulated at an increasing rate and on larger and larger scales.

The genesis of ethnic communities

While categories of difference among people living in the Indonesian archipelago existed well before the nineteenth century – especially through contact among royal courts, between merchants, traders, sailors, soldiers, pirates, and between royalty and their citizens (e.g. Goethals, 1959; Hefner, 2001; Ricklefs, 1981) – it seems that only after the arrival of the Dutch did ideas about geographically anchored communities start to circulate on a much larger scale. With each successive introduction of technology, circulation of these ideas increased.

Initial bible translation activities by missionaries and the production of word lists and dictionaries by early Dutch settlers initially associated regions, groups and linguistic forms (Errington, 2001; Moriyama, 2005; Smith-Hefner, 1989; Steedly, 1996). Dutch-based literacy

and schooling practices, and machine-printed material emerged in the 1800s after parts of the Indonesian archipelago became the Dutch East Indies and as the need to manage and administer coffee plantations increased (Moriyama, 2005). These practices and materials were underpinned by ideas that an ethnic group had a distinct language, culture, and geographic space. By the early 1870s the archipelago had been divided into distinct ethnic groups (e.g. Sundanese, Javanese, Maduranese), each with their own languages, cultures, and literary traditions and these languages along with a variety of Malay become taught in indigenous bilingual schools (Moriyama, 2005). These ideas about community were repeated in the legal system through the Dutch idea of *adat*, which encompassed ideas about custom, law, tradition and territory (Burns, 2004; Fasseur, 1994).

While schooling was initially restricted to members of the local elite, by the late 1800s increasing numbers of school children from a commoner background (i.e. not royal or wealthy) were allowed to enter Dutch schools (Moriyama, 2005, pp. 56–59). This change in schooling policy thus helped to spread the idea of linguistic forms being anchored to particular regions and groups of people from a small group of local elite to a large group of locals. The administrators, educators, and printing press owners responsible for the formation and dissemination of ideas about ethnic communities were also often responsible for the formation and dissemination of ideas about a variety of Malay and literacy in Malay (Moriyama, 2005, pp. 71–72; Sneddon, 2003, p. 87). The school textbooks, training manuals, novels and short stories that were produced as part of this process (Errington, 1998; Moriyama, 2005; Sneddon, 2003; Teeuw, 1994) helped to repeat ideas about ethnic communities. This was also the case in the newspapers and periodicals that circulated in an ever-expanding newspaper industry (Moriyama, 2005, p. 88; Sneddon, 2003), which among other things printed commentaries about encounters with ethnic others (Cohen, 2006. p. 182). These commentaries about ethnic communities and ethnic others were a reflex of broader

technological change – e.g. the building of road, rail, tram, telephony, telegraph and electricity networks between 1810 and 1900 (Å Campo, 2002; Dick, 1996; Mrázek, 2002) – which facilitated more regular encounters with the other by larger numbers of people.

Ideas about ethnicity in the late colonial period

Associations or indexical links between linguistic forms, region, and ethnicity continued to be recirculated in the early twentieth century. This recirculation occurred as part of continued colonial practices that related to the administration and running of a plantation economy as well as the continued introduction of new technologies during this period: each which seemed to speed up the rate at which encounters with sameness and difference occurred. For example, Mrázek (2002, pp. 17–18) points out that after WWI, lorries, motor vehicles, and buses that were increasingly common in Java also increased the speed in which encounters happened when compared with older horse and cart technologies. This was also the case for electric trams in the cities, steam-powered boats and trains, and importantly their stations and stops. In addition, travelling theatres, circuses (Cohen, 2006), radio, phonograph, and colonial expeditionary engineering surveys (Mrázek, 2002; Suryadi, 2006) were all sites of encounter with sameness and difference. These encounters resulted in printed commentaries of one type or another, which recirculated ideas about the links between linguistic forms, place, and social type.

In the case of the travelling theatres of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they not only regularly attracted audiences from all walks of life, but they also attracted commentaries and debates about social types and their language use. Newspapers increasingly had commentaries about the (in)appropriateness of performers' language usage, commentaries about these shows' representation of ethnic and stratifiable "others", and commentaries about the moral characteristics of their audiences (Cohen, 2006). In the case of travelling

intellectuals who promoted modern gadgets, such as the phonograph, their reproduction of indigenous music also attracted commentaries in newspapers that linked these songs with region and social type (Suryadi, 2006, p. 296) to form the idea of ethnicity. By 1932 the first indigenous radio station was established, and by 1941 there were twenty local radio stations with subscriber numbers growing to 100,000 (Mrázek, 2002, pp. 165–182). These stations often played material associated with the ethnic other. For example, Mrázek (2002, pp. 186–189) points out that in 1942 the sounds of Javanese shadow puppets and gamelan music performances were regularly aired on radio. Thus, within these social domains the idea of a social type speaking a particular language was recirculated, while also being associated with clothing and music and ultimately recirculating the idea of ethnicity.

A close reading of the work of Indonesia area specialists highlights the existence of many other social domains where discourses of difference circulated along with the processes that led to their genesis. For example, Elson (2008, pp. 7–18) observes that during the period 1912–1922 a handful of Dutch intellectuals, Dutch educated Indonesians, Indonesian student groups studying abroad, and political parties started to discuss different unification systems, ethnic groups, and independence. As he notes, part of this was made possible through the formation of self-help groups amongst overseas students. Through interactions with other students these sojourners discovered that there were other groups living in the Dutch East Indies (Elson, 2008, p. 21). Ethnicity as a category was thus reproduced through such dialogues, which differentiated ethnic states and regional based ethnic groupings from the idea of Indonesia. By 1920 these students were also involved in writing for and publishing their own journals (Elson, 2008, pp. 25–26). In much of the writing found in these journals, the term “Indonesia” and “Indonesians” started to be used and these were contrasted with ethnic groups, such as Javanese, Minahasan, and so on.

While from 1912 there were many ethnic associations formed – including associations of people from Ambon, Sumatra, Jakarta, Sunda, and Madura – nevertheless by 1920 thinking and writing about ethnic groups gave way to ideas about one people and one nation through discourses that noted the need to put an independent Indonesia on the political agenda (Elson, 2008, pp. 31–32). As Elson (2008, pp. 38–46) goes on to note, these ideas were actually more widespread than just intellectual circles. By 1918 ideas about different ethnic groups were circulating in newspapers, while at the same time Indonesia was constructed as a grouping of ethnic regions. These ideas could also start to be found across the political spectrum with figures from the nascent Indonesian Communist Party (*PKI*) also reproducing ideas of ethnicity through writings that noted that a new Indonesian state would best be built upon autonomous local communities (Elson, 2008, p. 51).

Ideas linking social type, region, and linguistic form to produce ethnicity could also be found in some of Indonesia’s first “modern” novels, which were published by small private publishers and the colonial publisher, *Balai Pustaka*. One such novel – which according to Teeuw (1972, p. 117) later became the most loaned library book in pre-WWII Dutch East Indies – was *Sitti Nurbaya* written by Marah Roesli and published in 1922. In terms of ethnicity, the heroes of the story Samsu and Sitti were geographically anchored to an area called Minang, located in Sumatra. While most of their represented talk amongst themselves and with other characters was in literary Malay (as would be expected given Balai Pustaka’s explicit goal of standardizing and propagating this variety of Malay), there was some use of other linguistic forms that were anchored to place throughout the story.

For example, at the start of the story the young 18 year-old Samsu grumbles at his carriage driver, Ali, who is late picking up Samsu and Sitti on this occasion. The carriage driver replies referring to Samsu as *engkau muda* “you” while referring to himself as *hamba* “I” (Roesli, 1965 [1922], p. 6). Roesli footnotes the term of address, *engku muda*, as a local

term of address for persons of high social position or title. We can also see the use of the self-effacing term of reference, *hambah*, which although not specifically Minang, was different to other terms of reference used in other parts of Indonesia. Both terms of address and reference used above were also regularly differentiated from how Samsu and Sitti addressed each other. Typically, reference to the co-present other would be through the use of a shortened first name, *kau* or a suffixed form *mu*, while self-reference was *aku* or a suffixed form *ku*. Just as importantly, however, is that regional social types were explicitly tied to language in one of Samsu's letters to Sitti. In one of these letters, which was written when he first started studying at the Javanese Doctor School in Jakarta, he notes that there are Sundanese, Javanese, Batak, Ambonese, Palembangse, Maduranese, Menadonese, and Jakartan students who sing all types of songs in all types of languages (Roesli, 1965 [1922], p. 108).

The idea of ethnicity continued to circulate in the 1920s and 1930s, while also being indexed with new ideas, especially nationalism (in the case of Indonesian) and a bounded geographic area increasingly talked about as Indonesia. At the same time, slightly negative associations were being made with ethnicity. Elson (2008, pp. 59–64) points out that from 1926 onwards more radical nationalist anti-colonial groups had solidified and part of their discourse related to the way provincialism held back unity and an independent Indonesia. These groups became political parties whose membership increased toward 20,000 by the mid-1930s (Elson, 2008, pp. 84–85). With increases in membership and meetings there was also a widening of the social domain of these discourses.

At one such meeting, the 1928 Youth Congress, participants proposed that Indonesian should be the language of Indonesia and proposed it as the language of a growing anti-colonial movement and of an independent Indonesian state (e.g. Abas, 1987; Alisjahbana, 1976; Anwar, 1980; Dardjowidjojo, 1998; Foulcher, 2000). Just as importantly, this pledge contrasted with an implied set of regional languages and their associated ethnic social types.

At subsequent congresses and meetings involving some of the participants of the 1928 congress a variety of Malay was increasingly seen as the appropriate means of public address (Foulcher, 2000). In 1938 the Greater Indonesia Party (*PARINDRA*) instructed its members to use only Indonesian when making public statements (Mrázek, 2002, p. 33). This distinction implied regional languages and thus also indirectly helped recirculate the idea of languages being spoken by regional ethnic social types.

In addition to schooling opportunities in Jakarta and representations of these in novels, encounters with difference between mobile Indonesians increasingly became the object of extensive social commentary. Brief reference to Teeuw's (1994) work on literature during this period shows at least three novels. The novel *Kintamani* published by a private publishing house in 1932 and written by Iman Supardi is about a romance between a Javanese boy and a Balinese girl (Teeuw, 1994, p. 77). Many of the novels written in the 1920s and 1930s also had Minang people travelling to Java and/or marriage between people from different regions, as in the novel *Salah Asuhan*, written by Abdul Muis and published in 1928 (Teeuw, 1994, pp. 69–71). An example that also has an extensive focus on language use is the novel by Aman (1971[1932]), *Si Doel Anak Betawi*, which was published by the colonial publisher, Balai Pustaka.

Loven (2008) points out that Aman, who migrated from West Sumatra to Jakarta, was fascinated by the different lifestyle and language of his “Betawi” neighbours and noted that the source of his story were observations of one of his neighbour's children and their language usage (Loven, 2008). Indeed, Aman (1971[1932], p. 5) specifically notes in his foreword to the novel that the dialogue involving the hero of the story, Doel, was in “Betawi language”, and that he used these linguistic forms as a way of acquainting readers from outside of Batavia (now Jakarta) with the language of the Betawi community. For example, he provides the following orthographic conventions: an open “a” becomes an “e” so that

words like *ketawa* (to laugh) become *ketawe*, the use of suffix “kan” becomes “in” so that *sediakan* (to prepare) becomes *sediain*, the verbal prefix “ber” becomes “be”, the time adverbial *udah* (already) becomes *ude*, and so on. There also appears to be specific vocabulary that is also regularly used in represented dialogues. These include words, such as *tidak/tak* (no) which becomes *kagak*, and kin terms, such as *Babe* (father), *Engkong* (grandfather), *Njak* (Mother), and *Mpok* (older sister). Characters are indexically anchored to this neighbourhood through reference to birth or reference to their status as original inhabitants of this neighbourhood, and all are represented as speaking in “Betawi”.

Just as importantly, and in line with broader colonial policy on the need to imbue characters with colonial-sanctioned ideas about morality (Moriyama, 2005), the characters in the story are associated with particular types of “demeanours” (Goffman, 1967), as well as economic abilities, social practices, and educational backgrounds. For example, Doel, his neighbourhood peers, his late father, and his grandfather are all represented as hard-working, quick tempered, and never afraid of getting into a fight. Doel and his late father are additionally represented as social types, who are valorous, especially when defending their friends’ honour. Doel’s grandfather is represented as an “old-fashioned” Muslim and an “unkind” and “stingy” social type, who will not allow his daughter to work in a shop where men will come to buy goods. This is despite him not being willing to support his daughter financially after her husband’s death. All people living within this neighbourhood are also represented as poor and uneducated, but reasonably pious Muslims. This is especially the case for Doel, his parents, and grandparents. Both Doel and his mother were also represented as persons who obeyed the wishes of their parent’s even when these wishes were unreasonable.

There are a number of other contrasts throughout the story, which also build upon this ethnic social type. For example, during the fasting month Doel was represented as diligently

fasting and studiously reading the Al-Quran while other Muslim neighbours did not. Doel's stepfather is also described as an outsider who speaks Malay, but whose accent is hard to place, possibly from Banjarmasin or Medan. The attitude of Doel's stepfather also contrasts markedly with that of his deceased biological father and his grandfather. The former encourages and supports Doel in his wishes to attend school, while the latter two see no utility in attending school. In summary, these types of stories not only helped recirculate ideas linking place, language and person to form ethnic social types, but they also helped link these ethnic social types with other social practices and dispositions. This differentiation was also further enhanced through the story-telling mechanisms used by the author whose representation of everything but the speech of characters was done in Malay.

Ideas about ethnicity continued to be recirculated throughout the 1930s via one-to-many participation frameworks. For example, Suryadinata and colleagues (2003, p. 12) note that the 1930 census divided population into sixteen ethnic groups, others, and Chinese. Those responding to the census would have been reminded of these categories. Discourses about how to best go about forming a new nation also recirculated these ideas. Elson (2008: 66–7) points out that by this time it became increasingly clear to nationalist leaders that regional organizations were a manifestation of colonial policies of divide and rule. Yet, as he notes, there were also fears of unequal treatment at the hands of a Javanese majority in a new Indonesia. Citing a Minahasan reporter writing in 1938, Elson (2008, pp. 68–70) points out how this reporter wrote about the importance of maintaining Minahasan language as a way of distinguishing Minahasans and their history from other Indonesians. At the same time, there were also calls for a federalist model that would recognize the differences within Indonesia and allow each region to govern themselves. Groups of intellectuals and members of a new literary movement (*Pujangga Baru*) also engaged in dialogue about how to make an Indonesian culture (Elson, 2008, p. 72). These dialogues also allowed for essentialising

contrasts between Indonesian and regional culture. Some Islamic movements were also active in talking about an Indonesian unity that was above place-based groupings. For example, in Islamic schools in Aceh a conscious decision had been made to use a variety of Malay as the language of schooling rather than a local language (Elson, 2008, p. 82).

The Japanese occupation, independence, and the Soekarno period

During the Japanese occupation the policies, practices, and discourses of the Japanese and Indonesians working with them helped to recirculate ideas that associated language with region and person, on the one hand, and nation with language on the other. As in the earlier colonial years, this was not of course in any way uniform and was partly a result of the Dutch East Indies being occupied by different sections of the Japanese military (Elson, 2008; Reid & Akira, 1986; Ricklefs, 1981). During this period one-to-many participation frameworks came in many forms. As the war drew to a close Japanese administrators sought to actively encourage Indonesia independence. This was facilitated by helping independence leaders, such as Soekarno and Hatta, travel to the outer islands, with Soekarno famously giving a speech in Bali where he noted that he was half Balinese (Shibata, 1986). In doing so, Soekarno's speech helped to recirculate ideas about ethnicity.

Japanese policies and practices also helped recirculate ideas about ethnicity. For example, the administrative rule of thumb was to use existing organizations and structures, while also respecting local customs, religions, and feudal dynasties (Shunkichiro, 1986). Thus, while they were opposed to most things Dutch, ironically they tended to recirculate ideas of *adat* that closely resembled those of the Dutch (Bourchier, 2007, p. 116). These ideas linked *adat* with history, customs, locale, and authenticity (Bourchier, 2007, p. 116). While print-based media was censored during this period (Teeuw, 1994, pp. 107–108), it is worthwhile pointing out that some of the short stories and novels published during this period

reproduced ideas of ethnicity. For example, Teeuw (1994, p. 108) points to a book entitled *Djangir Bali* written by Nur St. Iskander and published as a serial in a newspaper *Pandji Pustaka* in 1942. It was a story of a romance between a young Maduranese teacher who worked in a school in Bali and a Balinese woman.

Leaving aside the important issue of reception, political discourses also continued to play a role in the recirculation of ideas about ethnicity, especially those linking region with social type. As Elson (2008, p. 103) point outs, after September 1944 the Japanese premier announced Japan's intentions to grant Indonesia independence. In May 1945 deliberations at the committee for the investigation of independence (*PBUPK*) recirculated ideas about ethnicity through discussions about whether an independent Indonesia should be a federation of regions (Elson, 2008, pp. 105–106). News of the declaration of Indonesian Independence on the 17th of August 1945 – an Indonesia that was to be made up of Java and the regions – was quickly circulated throughout the archipelago via the telegraph and radio network which had become heavily utilized during the Japanese occupation (Vickers, 2005, p. 97).

The 1945 constitution, which was drawn up during this period respected and protected the traditions and rights of the regions (Elson, 2008, p. 114). This not only recirculated links between a new named language, Indonesian, and a new Indonesia, but it also repeated ideas linking social type, region, and linguistic form. For example, Chapter 11 of the constitution was about regional governments, Chapter 15 (Article 36) was about the national language, and an addendum to Article 36 related to the preservation of regional languages. Although these ideas were now enshrined constitutionally, it was only in force for around half of the period that Soekarno was president of Indonesia (Ellis, 2002, p. 8).

During the four year period in which many autonomous groups of Indonesians fought their former colonial masters for a new independent Indonesia, ideas of ethnicity continued to circulate. In the social domain of elite political discourses, ideas about what form a post-

Japanese Indonesia would take came from Indonesian nationalists and the Dutch who wanted to re-colonize Indonesia. In so doing, there was often a recirculation of older ideas about regions and with this, ideas about ethnic social types. Some of the earliest and most concrete manifestation of these ideologies included the formation of the *Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat* “Central Indonesian National Committee” charged with advising President Soekarno and his cabinet. According to Kahin (1970 [1952], p. 140), this committee included leaders of ethnic groups from the regions outside of Java because of concerns about representation. In addition, the predecessor of this committee (the Independence Preparatory Committee) decreed on the 19th of August 1945 that Indonesia be divided into eight provinces. These events and the subsequent administrative and military units that emerged as a result of this decree also contributed to the recirculation of earlier ideas relating to region (Kahin, 1970 [1952], p. 141). As issues of representation within the Central Indonesian National Committee re-emerged in late 1946, Soekarno oversaw a fivefold increase in the number of members from the outer islands (Kahin, 1970 [1952], pp. 200–201). This helped keep ideas of region and ethnicity circulating in bureaucratic domains.

During the late years of the fight for Independence from the Dutch, ideas of ethnicity continued to be recirculated. For example, the Sultan of Yogyakarta promoted the use of Indonesian rather than Javanese as the language of official communication (Ricklefs, 1981, p. 208). Legge’s (1961, p. 29) account of governance also shows that in bureaucratic and legal domains, the promulgation of Law 22 of 1948, which related to powers of governance and autonomy at the provincial, district, and village levels also helped keep recirculate the idea of ethnicity. Indeed, this law was specifically designed to accommodate feelings of regional and cultural identity, while reducing grounds for fearing Javanese dominance in the fledgling state (Legge, 1961, p. 35).

During the 1950s ideas about language and regional ethnic social types also continued to circulate within political parties and the bureaucracy. For example, regional leaders saw shared language as a sign of ethnic group membership that could be used to gather support for their efforts to gain more autonomy vis-à-vis the Jakartan political elite, while the Jakartan political elite (including Soekarno and the then Colonel Soeharto) saw ethnicity as a threat to the fledgling Indonesian state (Elson, 2008, pp. 179–180; Feith, 1962, p. 522). Regionalism and ethnicity became matters for serious and sustained debate within the central government during the 1950s (Legge, 1961, p. 3). Within the provisional constitution of 1950, for example, a wide ranging autonomy was given to the regions (Legge, 1961, p. 9). In 1956 sustained debate culminated in Law 1 of 1957 that related to revisions of earlier regional autonomy legislation and laws (Legge, 1961, pp. 60–61). This law remained in force until September 1959 when Soekarno officially blamed liberalism and democracy for regionalism and ethnic tensions and instigated a period of guided democracy (Elson, 2008, p. 218).

Liddle's (1972) account of the party system in Northern Sumatra in the early to mid-1960s also shows how ideas of ethnicity were not only recirculated as part of party politics, but how these ideas became associated with particular political parties. For example, Masjumi the modernist Islamic party attracted many South Tapanuli Bataks, the Christian party (Parkindo) attracted and represented the interests of the North Tapanuli Bataks, while PNI and PKI attracted many of the Javanese migrants. As the Indonesian communist party (PKI) continued its rise to political ascendancy in Java in the early and mid-1960s, ideas about ethnicity and region were also circulated through their congresses and in literature published by those associated with this party. For example, in his 1964 book, the party leader, Aidit, pointed out that a unitary communist Indonesia would be made up of many nationalities (Elson, 2008, p. 202).

As with the pre-war period, literature and the arts continued to circulate ideas that associated region, linguistic form, and social type to form the social category of ethnicity. For example, there were novels that used regional languages when representing the talk of some of the characters, such as Firman Muntaco's series of newspaper short stories set in Jakarta in the 1950s and republished in the early 1960s as *Gambang Djakarté* (Tadmor, 2009). More generally, the import of ideas about the links between linguistic forms, region and social type continued to be recirculated in the print media, especially as the circulation of Indonesian language newspapers, novels, serialized short stories, and poetry increased (Dardjowidjojo, 1998; Ricklefs, 1981; Teeuw, 1996). For example, in the six year period between 1950 and 1956 daily newspaper circulation increased from 500,000 to close to one million and periodical circulation trebled to over three million (Ricklefs, 1981, p. 226), although from 1959 to 1961 newspaper circulation dropped to around 700,000 as political censorship increased (Ricklefs, 1981, p. 255).

While the amount of novels written in a regional language, such as Javanese and Sundanese, decreased during the Soekarno period (Quinn, 1992; Teeuw, 1996), what did circulate nevertheless explicitly linked language, region, and social type forming the category of ethnicity. Within some organizations – such as LEKRA, which supported socialist and communist leaning arts in their broadest sense – there was support for regional literature, arts, and culture, and support for research into these areas (Foulcher, 1986). In addition, there was the formation in 1947 of a government sponsored language centre that was eventually to be housed at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta (Dardjowidjojo, 1998, p. 39–40). Under the direction of various ministries with education and culture in their portfolio, this language centre was responsible for the planning and production of materials in regional languages, such as Javanese, Sundanese, and Maduranese.

While access to schooling in the fledgling republic of Indonesia was not uniformly available throughout the archipelago (Bruner, 1959, p. 53; Geertz, 1959, p. 28; Goethals, 1959, p. 20; Palmer, 1959, pp. 47–48), nevertheless participation rates increased rapidly – both in Islamic (*pesantren* and *madrasah*) and government schools (Ricklefs, 1981, p. 226; Soedijarto et al., 1980, p. 62) – and this too helped increase the recirculation of ideas of ethnicity. Although absenteeism, statistic reliability, and variability in the quality of local schooling practices invites caution when viewing these figures (Soedijarto et al., 1980), between 1945 and 1960 the number of primary school and lower secondary school students increased by at least a factor of four, from 2.5 million to 8.9 million and 90 to 670 thousand respectively (Bjork, 2005, p. 54). In these schools ideas about ethnicity and difference were circulated, often implicitly through discourses of nationalism. Palmer (1959: 48), for example, points out that tolerance of other groups was promoted in schools through children’s performances of other ethnic groups’ dances. In schools in Bali and Sumatra, on the other hand, it was distinctions between local ways of doing and being and newly introduced ideas of Indonesian ways of doing and being that helped in the circulation of ideas about ethnicity (Geertz, 1959).

Since Indonesian independence, radio too was also becoming an increasingly important medium for the circulation of ideas about Indonesia, with over a million licensed radios in operation by 1965 (Sen & Hill, 2000, p. 82). This figure increased massively in the Soeharto years, where there were around 32 million radio sets sold by 1995 (Sen & Hill, 2000, p. 91). In closing this section, it is worth pointing out that one of the reoccurring themes of the political work done during this whole period relates to how to unify and keep unified such a diverse nation. While these ideas had many similarities with the earlier nationalist thought of the 1920s and 1930, as Elson (2008, pp. 105–108) points out the idea of “unity in diversity” became institutionally enshrined in the state ideology of *Pancasila* “The five principles”.

While, this ideology meant different things at different times during the Soekarno period, during this period and the New Order period that followed, this ideology also helped to imply that “diversity” pointed to ethnic diversity, among other things.

The New Order and reformation

During the New Order period (1966-1998) there was a large increase in one-to-many participation frameworks, which helped to further naturalize the idea of ethnicity while reinforcing its links with region and linguistic form. During this time there was another massification of education (Bjork, 2005; Soedijarto et al., 1980; Thee Kian Wie, 2002). For example, the number of primary school students in 1990 (24 million) was nearly three times that of 1960 (8 million), while the number of lower secondary school students increased from 1.9 million to over 5.5 million in this same period (Bjork, 2005, p. 54). During this period central and regional government departments attempted to deliver a number of languages in primary and secondary schools (e.g. Arps, 2010; Lowenberg, 1992; Nababan, 1985; Soedijarto et al., 1980). These languages included the language of the region where the school was located (*bahasa daerah*), Indonesian, and English. While the success of these efforts was patchy (e.g. Kurniasih, 2007), the one-to-many participation framework of schooling helped to continue associations between linguistic forms, regions and people to reproduce ideas of ethnicity.

Just as importantly, regional ethnic social types continued to be the focus of citizenship type classes and part of the reason for the use of Indonesian as the language of education. As students went through school and university they were introduced to many of Indonesia’s ethnic groups by reference to lessons about their housing architecture, dress, and folk tales, as well as other signs of region, such as car number plates, monuments, and accent (Cole, 2010; Parker, 2002). Ideas about “otherness” and how to identify others of a different ethnicity were

also found within the ideology behind the use of Indonesian as the language of education. Indonesian was not only represented in textbooks, grammars, and classrooms as the language of education and modernity, but its usage among Indonesians from throughout the archipelago was also ideologised as the penultimate “example of” and “vehicle for” doing unity in diversity (e.g. Abas, 1987; Alisjahbana, 1976; Dardjowidjojo, 1998; Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1993; Nababan, 1985).

This process of institutionalizing a language of inter-group communication, along with recognition and respect for other ethnic groups also came in the form of other frameworks. For example, in 1978 public servants started to receive official training about the need for inter-group and inter-region harmony (Elson, 2008, pp. 248-249). In 1975 the mini-Indonesia ethnic theme park (*Taman Mini*) was opened in Jakarta. This park and the activities within it also helped to familiarize park goers with Indonesia’s ethnic groups through displays of these ethnic groups housing architecture, customs, and dress (Hoon, 2006). The sounds and demeanours of these ethnolinguistic groups began to be introduced in the late 1980s through a rapidly evolving television network (Kitley, 2000; Sen & Hill, 2000). By the late 1990s a series of complex and inter-related political and economic events helped Indonesian ethnic soaps become one of the most popular and widely broadcast television genres in Indonesia (Loven, 2008; Rachmah, 2006). A common feature of these soaps was the use of fragments of regional languages along with enough semiotic information to anchor these fragments to particular regions (Goebel, 2010). In doing so, Indonesians who had a cursory familiarity with ethnic social types could now also claim familiarity with the sounds and demeanours associated with these stereotypes.

While ideas about the “ethnic other” and interaction among ethnic others was largely associated with positive social relations in Indonesia in the early 1990s, from the mid-1990s onwards the idea of ethnicity was increasingly associated with negative social relations, such

as inter-ethnic conflict. Prior to and during the early 1990s the appropriation of land for logging, mining and transmigration projects in the islands outside of Java brought with them economic migrants and these ethnic and religious others were increasingly perceived as unwelcome guests by receiving populations in places such as Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Aceh, and Irian Jaya (e.g. the papers in Davidson & Henley, 2007; Hedman, 2008; Manning & Van Diermen, 2000; Resosudarmo, 2005). They were unwelcome because they were perceived as not only taking part in the illegal or unfair appropriation of their land, but because they also did not wish to assimilate to local ways of doing things. These issues were compounded by the severe economic downturn that started in 1997 and continued for over ten years. This economic uncertainty produced social unrest across Indonesia leading to the fall of the Soeharto regime in May 1998 (e.g. Aspinall & Fealy, 2003; Forrester, 1999; Lloyd & Smith, 2001).

The centralism of the New Order regime was replaced with localism and the politicization of ethnicity, which picked up steam through decentralization. In May 1999 two new laws were introduced, Laws 22 and 25, which devolved political and fiscal powers to cities and districts, (Bunte, 2009, p. 116). More specifically, Law 25/1999 related to a new system of fiscal arrangements whereby districts and cities were to receive a much larger share of revenues earned within their borders (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003, p. 3). Law 22/1999 devolved political authority to these districts and cities in the areas of education, health, environment, labour, public works, and natural resource management (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003, p. 3). It is important to note here that decision makers chose to focus on autonomy at the district and city level rather than at the provincial level because it would set up districts as competitors for resources, while not making them large enough to think of separatism (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003, p. 4). This approach was seen as especially important because of Indonesia's history separatist movements (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003, p. 4).

Decentralization helped to recirculate ideas about ethnicity in a number of other ways too. Quinn (2003) notes that Javanese speaking Banten, which was originally part of the province of Sundanese speaking West Java, successfully became a new province in 2000. The reasons for this were based on economic grounds, claims of religious, linguistic, and cultural differences, and claims about political under-representation at the provincial level. In a number of districts there were also efforts to revitalize local languages and include these in school curriculum (Arps, 2010; Jukes, 2010). In some cases, feelings of localism turned into inter-ethnic or inter-religious conflicts between ‘indigenous locals’ and (trans)migrants in places such as Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, Aceh, and Irian Jaya (e.g. the papers in Hedman, 2008). These conflicts over land, rights and more generally contestations about authenticity regularly attracted the gaze of local and national media, as well as major political figures. Discourses about the potential problems of decentralization including localism, *adat*, and ethnopolitics circulated in 2001 and 2002 in local and national newspapers (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003, p. 7). Erb (2007, p. 268) points out that local *adat* disputes on the island of Flores were covered in the national media. In places such as Bali, there also seemed to be some audience for these news reports with migrants complaining that media reports relating to the push to strengthen Bali *adat* privileged Balinese while marginalizing migrants (Warren, 2007, p. 174).

Ideas linking region, linguistic form and person were also recirculated via national and local policies linked with the decentralization process. For example, a new broadcasting bill (No 32/2002, Article 36, point 2) stipulated that 60% of television broadcasts should contain local material and by 2004 there were 60 private local stations (Rachmah, 2006), many broadcasting in local languages (Yuyun W. I. Surya, 2006). From 2003 until 2009 when I recorded around four hundred hours of television broadcasts soaps continued to recirculate ideas that linked region to linguistic form and social type forming ethnolinguistic stereotypes.

Similar in many respects to the ethnic comedies of the 1990s, these comedies were geographically anchored to regions or framed as ethnic via shots of recognizable landmarks, material artefacts (e.g. car number plates), subtitles, narratives describing the region or combinations of these.

Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with using linguistic anthropological explanations about ideology formation to understand the genesis and recirculation of ideas about ethnicity in Indonesia from colonial times until the late 2000s. Linguistic forms and region have been a constant and key component of this idea. The formula of linguistic form + region + persons = ethnicity has become ubiquitous in Indonesian society and ethnicity as a social category has been naturalized via the circulation of elements of this formula via one-to-many participation frameworks. In the early colonial period these frameworks included school teachers (the one) and their pupils (the many), an increasingly large newspaper and novel readership complemented with the introduction of radio in the 1930s and television in the 1960s.

As much of the writing in the humanities and social sciences has led us to expect, different waves of technology tended to speed up and massify the circulation of people and ideas during this period, while at the same time also creating new domains for interaction with, and commentary about, the other. Some of these encounters become fodder for newspapers, novels, and soap opera which discussed encounters with difference and/or ethnolinguistic stereotypes. Novels and soap opera were especially adept at adding other practices and demeanours to these ethnic stereotypes. In a number of cases representations in soap operas generated more commentaries in newspapers and on the airwaves, helping to recirculate fragments of these ethnolinguistic stereotypes.

The idea of ethnicity was also periodically associated with negative, positive or neutral characteristics as political and economic events unfolded, often as part of the nation building process that started with the nationalist thought of the 1920s. Since the 1920s ethnicity has been a constant in political and bureaucratic discourse and more often than not these discourses have been generated because of inter-ethnic conflict or calls for separatism from the regions outside of Java. While there have been a number of centralization and decentralization processes aimed at alleviating inter-ethnic tensions and calls for separatism, ironically such processes tend to reproduce the social categories that are often at the heart of these problems. Presently Indonesia is undergoing a decentralization phase that started in 1999. In many areas school curriculum and media now have local content, often local languages, which continue to recirculate old ideas about ethnicity.

Notes

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