Negotiating Transnational Identity: A Study of the Digital Diaspora

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Abstract- This study is entitled "Negotiating the Transnational Identity: A Study of the Digital Diaspora. This study is a uses the qualitative approach with ethnography method. The object of this research is the Indonesian diaspora who has been living in Malaysia as students and workers. Diaspora is a person who is living in a location that is geographically far from their home culture. The Diasporas are exposed to the new culture and may causes the process of cultural identity negotiation. The concept of negotiation is defined as the process of transactional interaction in which individuals in an intercultural situation try to impose, define, change, challenge, and or support the desired self-image of them or others. Thus, identity negotiation is a communication activity. This research findings sees how the informants continued to negotiate their identities as part of diaspora as being discussed based on the identity negotiation competence. Most of the informants also stated that while they experience some major changes in their lives during their stay in Malaysia, they managed to feel the same as who they are back then in their homeland. These findings add that the cultural ethnic, personal situational variability influence how individual perceive the meaning of cultural symbols, interpretation and in the end impacted how they evaluate their lives.

Keywords— Identity Negotiation theory, ethnography, Indonesian diaspora, Malaysian culture

I. INTRODUCTION

Research on the diaspora has been one of the government's concerns in recent times. The reason is that diaspora have an important contribution in supporting the development of their country [1]. Living as diaspora in the digital age and media convergence brings many changes in global society. Digital media and mobile technologies have allowed migrants to stay connected with the rest of the world which means that moving out of a homeland is no longer associated with isolation. This gave birth to the concept of Digital Diaspora where the members of which can certainly allow themselves to be much more open-minded and flexible. Due to the flexibility and the simple process of communication in modern society, scholars argue that Diaspora are now defined not by territorial location, but rather by their mentality and set of values [2][3]. New developments in information and communication technologies are transforming the experience of migration with implications for sociality, identity, and political and cultural involvement [4].

Indonesian diasporas are in great number in several countries. Data shown that Malaysia host the biggest Indonesian diaspora with 35%, followed by Saudi Arabia (13%), UAE (11%), Netherlands (5), Singapore (5%), Bangladesh (5%), China (Hongkong (4%) [5]. This enables multicultural to take place anywhere in the world and at the same time a challenge faced by almost all the world today. This process cannot be separated from the role of media itself. Media is considered as spaces where minorities increasingly communicate interests, make claims and mobilize identities [6].

The existence of differences in the diversity of society reinforces the human need to be able to identify themselves in their environment. Identity becomes an important thing for humans to provide clarity on their role and position in establishing relationships with other human beings and in the community environment [7]. Although in a multicultural society based on the ideology of diversity in diversity, negative practices such as racism, discrimination, and stereotyping on the basis of differences can still be found. A research by Wardana argue that Indonesian and Muslim immigrants generally, regardless of their ethnic, racial, national, religious or sectarian differences have tended to coalesce due to sharing Islamic faith and hence the fate of being marginalized and negatively stigmatized as a (security) threat by the receiving society in the West[8].

The hopes and fears of technological changes are not new and arguments such as the above fall within the utopian and dystopian analyses of the Information Society: technologies can overwhelmingly change cultural and political life with consequences for identity and citizenship [9]. Diaspora challenges national ideologies, but it often finds itself trapped in them. The nation-state of origin requires loyalty and commitment, so does the nation-state of settlement. In current times, the nation-state forms its own

project of progress and harmony based on social, economic and, inevitably, cultural assimilation of its population. It is in this context that cultural difference – as often expressed in diaspora cultural ideologies and practices – becomes associated with minorities that are seen as incompatible with the national mainstream.

Identities are not shaped only through positive and creative processes of participation and communion, but also through experiences of exclusion, marginalization and exposure to regressive ideologies – as these are expressed in the mainstream ideologies of the country of settlement or of the country of origin, but also voiced from within diaspora communities. Dubinksy examines the cyberactivism of Eritrean asylum seekers in Israel where it adopts the concept of digital diasporas to probe the role of Internet in members of the community [10]. The result found that the digitalised diaspora enables the Eritrean diaspora in Israel to create a political sphere that cannot exist outside the web, maintain the cohesiveness of the community, make informed decisions concerning their future, and preserve individual identities. The issue of identity, hybrid, and diaspora in the world of multiculturalism has been always an interesting thing to be investigated [11].

II. Literature Review

A. Identity Theory

Identity is a construction that can change and can adjust to circumstances. In other words, identity is flexible. The concept of identity applied in this study refers to the concept of identity as follows: "It is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture [12]. Identity concerns positional problems that are influenced by self-awareness and social interaction [13]. In that case, identity is related to how humans position themselves and how humans are positioned by others.

The term identity in the Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) refers to an individual's multifaceted identities of cultural, ethnic, religious, social class, gender, sexual orientation, professional, family/relational role, and personal image(s) based on self-reflection and other-categorization social construction processes. According to Ting-Toomey, the 2005 INT version consists of the following ten core assumptions, which explain the antecedent, process, and outcome components of intercultural identity-based communication competence [14]:

1. The core dynamics of people's group membership identities (e.g., cultural and ethnic memberships) and personal identities (e.g., unique attributes) are formed via symbolic communication with others.

2. Individuals in all cultures or ethnic groups have the basic motivation needs for identity security, inclusion, predictability, connection, and consistency on both group-based and person-based identity levels.

3. Individuals tend to experience identity emotional security in a culturally familiar environment and experience identity emotional vulnerability in a culturally unfamiliar environment.

4. Individuals tend to feel included when their desired group membership identities are positively endorsed (e.g., in positive in-group contact situations) and experience differentiation when their desired group membership identities are stigmatized (e.g., in hostile out-group contact situations).

5. People tend to experience interaction predictability when communicating with culturally familiar others and interaction unpredictability when communicating with culturally unfamiliar others. Interaction predictability tends to lead to either further trust (i.e., within the optimal level) or become rigidified stereotyped categories (i.e., beyond the optimal level).

6. Persons tend to desire interpersonal connection via meaningful close relationships (e.g., in close friendship support situations) and experience identity autonomy when they experience relationship separations--meaningful intercultural-interpersonal relationships can create additional emotional security and trust in the cultural strangers.

7. Persons tend to experience identity consistency in repeated cultural routines in a familiar cultural environment and they tend to experience identity change (or to the extreme, identity chaos and turmoil) and transformation in a new or unfamiliar cultural environment.

8. Cultural-ethnic, personal, and situational variability dimensions influence the meanings, interpretations, and evaluations of these identity-related themes.

9. Competent identity-negotiation process emphasizes the importance of integrating the necessary intercultural identity-based knowledge, mindfulness, and interaction skills to communicate appropriately, effectively, and adaptively with culturally dissimilar others.

10. Satisfactory identity negotiation outcomes include the feeling of being understood, respected, and affirmatively valued.

B. Co-cultural Theory

According to Rahardjo, the Co-culture is a theoretical thought that explains cultural equality [15]. It shows that in a society no culture is superior towards other culture. In its most basic form, a nonassertive approach is one in which communicants are non-confrontational, inhibited, and place the needs of others before their own. One preferred outcome, assimilation, involves attempts to fit in with the dominant cultural norms, eliminate cultural differences and minimize distinctions between groups [16].

Culture contributes in creating thought, ideas, perspectives, while rational identities provide patterns of interaction and social patterns that shapes the way individual projects his character based on his experience in connecting with other people or dominant culture [17].

Thus, identity is defined as a reflexive process that is visible, constructed and communicated in certain cultural context. Meanwhile negotiation means a transactional interaction where individuals process the concept of others and their own self-concept in a multicultural situation. The theory of identity negotiation presented by Ting-Toomey assumes that this theory emphasizes the conception of self-reflection that works during the intercultural communication process [18].

C. Transnationalism

The concept of trans-nationalism refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of nation-states [19]. Leading transnational, multi-sited lives means that exchanges and interactions across borders are a regular and sustained part of migrants' realities and activities [20]. Such activities may be conducted by relatively powerful actors, such as representatives of national governments and multinational corporations, or may be initiated by more modest individuals, such as immigrants and their home country kin and relations. These activities are not limited to economic enterprises, but include political, cultural and religious initiatives as well [21].

Trans-national communities represent a powerful challenge to the traditional ideas of nation-state belonging [22]. The increase in mobility and the development of communication have contributed to such relations, and has created a transnational space of economic, cultural and political participation [23].

D. Digital Diaspora

The older notion of Diaspora often related to the sense of isolation form the homeland. For example, the Russian aristocrats who were forced to leave after the revolution, could only dream about returning home [3]. Diaspora has been often used to denote religious or national groups living outside an (imagined) homeland and, more widely, to capture not only communities, but all sorts of social formations, such as transnationally active networks, groups and organizations [24], including trade Diasporas that of the Chinese, or labor migration Diasporas such as those of the Turkish and the Mexicans [25].

By contrast, newer uses often replace return with dense and continuous linkages across borders, as in the migration-development nexus [26]. Even wider uses speak of a diaspora experience of all mobile persons as 'trans-nation' [27]. A person can spend most of his or her time abroad, settle in a foreign country, acquire some property and close relations there, but still not consider themselves as an immigrant [3].

The recent flexibility and fluidity of structure and the borderless world is somehow perfectly fit the Diaspora community where they easily accomplished the task of integrating themselves into the world wide web [3]. Making them digital. Newer notions of diaspora emphasize cultural hybridity in the wake of 'disseminate-nation' [28].

E. New Media

The term "new media" is often connected with interactive media such as Internet. But "interactive" is simply wrong one nature of new media. other than interactive, new media have a number of other properties, namely: digital, audience generated, asynchronous, multimedia and narrow casted [29].

Most of the technology described as "new media" is digital, often having the characteristics of being manipulated, networked, dense, compressed, interactive and impartial [30]. Additional description of the characteristics of the new media including digital, activity, interactive, hyper textual, dispersal, and virtual [31]. Afdal Makkuraga in his research on Digital Democracy said that the use of new media is considered to enrich the participation of citizens in political socialization. The new media provides open access to information that is very diverse and numerous, as well as unlimited access that allows for direct dialogue between political parties and their supporters [32].

The subjects of this research are Indonesian students who live abroad or is studying in Malaysia which scattered in Melaka, Kuala Lumpur, and Penang. The data was obtained by email and direct in-depth interview. Each of the informant agree to keep the anonymity and applied "off-the-record" rules whenever is needed.

IV.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with Ethnographic methods. Ethnographic research requires the researcher to interacts with the people whose actions are sought to understand [33]. According to Hendrastiti, ethnography provides opportunities to create knowledge with non-rational content. The dynamics of relations between researchers and subjects also become important moments in the production of knowledge [34].

Data collection techniques in this study used the interview method with Indonesia Diaspora in Malaysia from three different cities namely Melaka, Kuala Lumpur, and Penang as the research population. This research interviewed 4 informants to obtain data. Those four people are Indonesians who stay in Malaysia in different time and duration. Three of them are students, and one person is a housewife.

No	Informant's code	Sex	Age	Occupation	Location	Duration of Stay in Malaysia
1	Informant 1	M	24 years	Student	Melaka	5 years
2	Informant 2	M	23 years	Student	Penang	5 months
3	Informant 3	F	24 years	Student	Penang	5 months
4	Informant 4	F	38 years	Housewife	Kuala Lumpur	6 years

Fig. 1.   List of Informants.

V.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The result will be categorized based on the Identity Negotiation Theory (INT).   The term negotiation in the INT refers to the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages between the two or more communicators in maintaining, threatening, or uplifting the various socio-cultural group-based or unique personal-based identity images of the other in situ. The 2005 Identity Negotiation Theory version consists of the following ten core assumptions [14], which explain the antecedent, process, and outcome components of intercultural identity-based communication competence:

The core dynamics of people's group membership identities

The topic discusses the cultural and ethnic memberships as well as the personal identities e.g., unique attributes that are formed via symbolic communication with others.

 "When I heard about the announcement that I got accepted for the exchanged program, I was immediately joined the student organization. They announced that one of the things that we should bring is Batik. I brought one batik and one kebaya, well, Kebaya, is actually the Indonesian signature costume, a national symbol of Indonesia. If I really want to represent my country then I wore kebaya for example for a cultural event where you needed to show your distinctive traditional costumes. Meanwhile for daily activity I

opted for batik because it is simple and it fits for any occasion formal or informal. If you bring kebaya, it has to be worn for a very formal occasion. Batik is more like a staple clothing" (Informant 3).

It argues about how confident they are on "being" the nationally of their own. The feeling of inclusion as a whole, predictability, connections, consistency on group and individuals. The four informants stated that they have no problem in adapting to the new environment which is quite different with the one in their home country. They consider that once they entered the new environment, they need to show their identity by attaching the national symbols. The all four informants said that "Batik" clothes are the one they use to show their nation identity. This kind of gesture is important due to the core dynamics of people's group membership identities are shown through cultural and ethnic memberships and personal identities (e.g., unique attributes) are formed via symbolic communication with others. It is also a way to communicate with new people whose cultural background are different with them.

Basic motivation needs for identity security

This competence discusses about the inclusion, predictability, connection, and consistency on both group-based and person-based identity levels. The informants explained about their identity security that they experienced both as a group member and personal relationship.
"I have no problem in adapting to a culture which is different than mine. We all know that Malay language sometimes considered as the same as Bahasa. Despite the fact that most Indonesian understand Malay but Malay people can't understand Bahasa. However, the language is quite different and that is what makes me a bit hard at first. I am not saying that learning Malay language is easier, and that helped me to adapt in a flash" (Informant 1).

The common sense of having strangers among might sparks a small fire of prejudice, stereotypes and eventually will cause discrimination. However, the four informants said that they're quite confident about who they are. They felt welcomed by the host country due to their openness to the new environment.

Identity emotional security and identity emotional vulnerability

This point discusses about how individuals tend to experience identity emotional security in a culturally familiar environment and experience identity emotional vulnerability in a culturally unfamiliar environment.
"Being inferior, well, not really. I don't have stereotypes experience like that. As I explained that I am quite confident about my identity as Indonesian. Maybe if I came to Malaysian in early 2000, I would feel like that, inferior, because at that time Malaysia's economic growth is quite better compare than Indonesia's. However, one thing that I feel inferior of and feeling a bit ashamed is the environment issues. We often discussed this and, in the end, I became well informed about such event from their stand point. They also don't blame fully to the Indonesian government. There are facts that some of the companies that are doing business there also contributed to the fire and, indeed, some of them are Malaysian companies. I also gave them different perspective about Indonesia compare to what they see through the television" (Informant 1).

The diaspora certainly has the power to influence, and in some cases even define both face ad structure of the national segment of the internet, thus surpassing the states capacities [3].

The feeling of "included" when their desired group membership identities positively endorsed.

This point includes the feeling in positive in-group contact situations. Also, the experience differentiation when their desired group membership identities are stigmatized e.g., in hostile out-group contact situations. There are various stories from the four informants. Informants 1 said that he felt that he belongs more to his Malays peers. Based on the observation during the research, the Malay fellows of informant 1 considered informant 1 as their leader. They were obedient to his suggestion and his order. This is unusual because most people do not trust a person that come from outside their group.
"I choose to live in a campus dorm where I got local roommates. This did benefit me to adapt faster By living with them and meeting them every day, like it or not, I need to able to speak with them in a language that they understand. I realize that language is important, so to be able to speak in the same language as the locals is very important if I want to stay in this community. I went to local events such as cultural or try local food and hang out with local friends, I also listened to Malay song. So, I can say that I am more receptive to Malay culture and, most of my friends are Malay people. Now I can use a bit of Penang language and accent, I can chat using Malay chat/slang language" (Informant 1)

According to Cupach and Imahori [17], there two dominant factors that influence the individual identity, they are culture and rational identities. Culture contributes in creating thought, ideas, perspectives, while rational identities provide patterns of interaction and social patterns that shapes the way individual projects his character based on his experience in connecting with other people or dominant culture. The case of informant 1 is interesting as he explained that during his four-year stay, he managed to project his character based on his experience and immersed to the local culture, resulting him of obtaining trust from his local peers. This is what is called as a whole or inclusion in which they feel the endorsement of other group members, or it's the other way round as they feel stigmatized or hostile by the out group.

Meanwhile informant 3 felt a balance life between interacting with her local friends, international friends, and her fellow countrymen. Unlike informant 1 who avoided any kind of activities hold by his fellow countrymen, Informant 3 did join the Indonesian Student Association, voluntarily. She explained that her country mates gave her identity security because they support her in many forms such as mentally and academically. While during the class, she got no inferiority feeling as most of her class mates are familiar and curious about Indonesia in a positive way. She joined the class group to keep her update with the lesson. Meanwhile, the international friend gave her broader perspective as she interacted with them and their different culture.

"I joined Korean Language Club and, in that club, not only local people and Korean but exchange students may join. They welcome me a lot because the Korean students in the club was majoring in Indonesian language, so, they really appreciate me. All the members are blended together. I also joined the Indonesian Student organization (PPI). There were 15 to 20 Indonesian people and we were very close to each other, in term of emotionally and culturally. We interact though direct and through chat application like LINE" (Informant 3).

Experience of interaction predictability (with familiar culture) and unpredictability (unfamiliar culture).

People tend to experience interaction predictability when communicating with culturally familiar others and interaction unpredictability when communicating with culturally unfamiliar others. Interaction predictability tends to lead to either further trust (i.e., within the optimal level) or become rigidified stereotyped categories (i.e., beyond the optimal level). Constant interaction unpredictability tends to lead to either mistrust, or negative versus possible positive expectancy violations.

"I feel the differences in doing the class project. In Indonesia, we used to meet and discuss for the project and how to finish the project. In Malay, especially what I experience during my stay, the project was done separately. However, I once received a weird glare for the first three weeks. You know that when we attending the classes in Indonesia, we dressed up formally. In Indonesia, we are told to follow the rule to wear appropriate clothes when attending the lessons. So, when attending lectures in Malaysia, I dress the same way as I used to do in Indonesia. When seeing me like this, they said that I was too dressed up for a class.. But then after one months, I started to follow their style and become more locals" (Informant 3).

According to Samochowiec and Florack [35], individuals who experience an incidental affective state of anxiety are less willing to interact with a potential interaction partner they expect to be poorly predictable, than with a potential interaction partner they expect to be easily predictable, while the impact of predictability is reduced when individuals experience a more secure affective state. At this point, being under an uncertainty is very common to someone who just moved in to a foreign environment. As more people going abroad under student status, the chance of making contact with other culture is wide open. However, the rift of conflict might open up as well when it comes in building trust after interaction such as being stigmatized or stereotyped beyond optimal level.

Desire interpersonal connection via meaningful close relationship (close friendship in support)

Those who are far from their homeland tend to desire interpersonal connection via meaningful close relationships (e.g., in close friendship support situations) and experience identity autonomy when they experience relationship separations-meaningful intercultural-interpersonal relationships can create additional emotional security and trust in the cultural strangers.

"I have close friends that I considered as best friends. Most of them are Indonesians. Since most of us are housewives, our relationship helped us to live our lives here in Malaysia. While for local friends, I only have a few of them. In general, the way we interact is similar with the way we interact with others back in Indonesia. The activities that we do together are like having meal together for lunch or dinner with friends and their family. During Ramadhan we hold a breakfasting dinner together also during Raya (Muslim holiday). Sometimes our kids take turns in doing sleepover. We also do play date during the week. The last one is the weekly or monthly Quran recitation. All of these activities help me to develop into a person with new level of understanding in term of adapting with foreign cultures" (Informant 4).

Identity consistency

Most people tend to experience identity consistency in repeated cultural routines in a familiar cultural environment and they tend to experience identity change (or to the extreme, identity chaos and turmoil) and transformation in a new or unfamiliar cultural environment. The informants explained that they gained new perspective when adapting to different culture. Informants 1 said he become more appreciative towards Malay people because he interacts more with them in daily basis.

Informant 2 and 3 stated that they learned new things. Meanwhile informant 4 said that she changed a lot from who she was before in term of religious issue. She said that being far from home, helped her to understand more about her religion that she decided to put on a headscarf while living in Kuala Lumpur. It was a major change for her. However, she stated that she feels the same as who she was back in Indonesia. In general, the more educated, open minded and technically savvy the homeland population is, the stronger is the ties between the homeland and the Diaspora [3].

Cultural ethnic & personal situational variability

Each people have their own preference and characteristic. These values also influence the meaning, interpretation and evaluation in term of intercultural interaction. When encountering foreign culture, we do agree that we will gain new knowledge if not losing our own identity. Based on the answer of four informants their cultural ethnic and experience do impact on how they decode the message and interpret it. Informant 1 who had prior experience of living abroad stated that he gravitates more towards the Malay culture. In his perspective, when encountering new culture environment, immersing with the culture is one mandatory act that an individual should do in order to survive in the society. Learning language is important as communication is needed to interact with the locals. Not only we will understand each other, it is also important to understand each other perspective in order to avoid misunderstanding and stereotypes. The knowledge of local culture is essential to navigate the daily life, especially if you plan to stay in the foreign environment for a long time.

From a stand point of Co-culture theory, the theory explains cultural equality [15]. The minorities use several communication approaches when interact with dominant group. In its most basic form, a nonassertive approach is one in which communicants are non-confrontational, inhibited, and place the needs of others before their own. Preferred outcome centers on the co-cultural group members' consideration of the eventual impact of their communication with others [16]. Mindfulness is one important key as we understand how the system works in the new environment, we will immerse more to the culture. Mindfulness in the implementation of a non-assertive approach in which the communicants are non-confrontational, inhibited, and place the needs of others before their own.

The final outcome in negotiating the identity is in form of satisfactory identity negotiation include the feeling of being understood, respected, and affirmatively valued [14]. As the "being" is out in both predictable and unpredictable interaction, in the end being accepted is the goal of all of those activities. As we all know that human is a social being, we cannot live alone and tend to search for another human companion. The need to be acknowledge is essential to give meaning to a human existence. Therefore, the possibility of being able to live side by side with another culture, while still holding on to our original culture without any conflicts, indeed is an ideal way of living for any human who upholds the concept of diversity.

VI. Conclusion

Digital diaspora is clearly not a monolithic structure and its connections with the Motherland are not always recognized. In the context of intercultural communication, any cultural contact which definitely involved interaction, carries the negotiation process of one's cultural identity. People tend to negotiate with themselves regarding the cultural identity that attached to them and other cultural identity. Thus, identity is defined as a reflexive process that is visible, constructed and communicated in certain cultural context. Meanwhile negotiation means a transactional interaction where individuals process the concept of others and their own self-concept in a multicultural situation.

During their stay in a foreign land, the four informants continued to negotiate their identity as part of diaspora as being discussed based on the identity negotiation competence. Most of the informants stated that they have no emotional vulnerability, they feel that they're able and confident in showing and maintain their identity as a group as well as individual. They also obtained the feeling of "included" when their desired group membership identities positively endorsed. Meanwhile each of informant experience different types of unpredictability from second class citizen, a culture shock on eating habit, and the usage of language. All of the informants also stated that having a close bond with their environment help them to survive in living in new environments. Most of the informants also stated that while they experience some

major changes in their lives during their stay in Malaysia, they managed to feel the same as who they are back then in their homeland. The conclusion is the cultural ethnic, personal situational variability influence how individual perceive the meaning of cultural symbols, interpretation and in the end impacted how they evaluate their lives.

This research was an initial for the fields. The results only show about the competence that needed to be possessed by anyone who desired to live in a new environment with different cultural background. This research can be used as a based on future research in the field of co-culture theory.

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