Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum. 24 (3): 1223 - 1239 (2016)

PERTANIKA JOURNALS

SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

Journal homepage: http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/

The Dynamics of Makean Ethnic Identity in North Maluku, Indonesia: A Possible Collaboration of Competing Approaches

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ABSTRACT

In studying ethnic identity, researchers frequently have to choose one among the three main approaches seen as competing in social sciences and ethnicity studies, namely primordialist approach, constructivist approach, and instrumentalist approach. This article attempts to examine whether the three competing approaches should be treated as mutually exclusive or on the contrary, be jointly used to contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon of ethnic identity. By using an ethnographic method with a phenomenological style and the relevant documents, in the context of the dynamics of Makeanese ethnic identity, the three approaches were found to support each other instead of competing. In this article, the elements of ethnic identity are shown to be partly primordial or given in a socio-cultural sense while others are socially constructed in accordance with the social transformation experienced by the Makeanese. The others - although based on primordial attributes and socially constructed processes - are made politically significant by the elite in the context of political competition. The theoretical implication of this finding is that all the three approaches - primordialist, constructivist and instrumentalist - should not be seen as competing or mutually exclusive approaches. In contrast, all the three approaches can jointly contribute to uncover the complex dynamics of Makean ethnic identity. This fieldwork supports the conclusion made by Chin and Lee (2010) that various theories of race and ethnicity should be seen as complementing instead of competing or substituting one another.

Keywords: Collaboration, constructivist, ethnicity, identity, instrumentalist, Makeanese, primordialist

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received: 30 September 2015
Accepted: 30 January 2016

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ISSN: 0128-7702 © Universiti Putra Malaysia Press

INTRODUCTION

Following the so-called "reformation movement" in Indonesia which overthrew president Soeharto in 1998, state and provincial authorities throughout the country suddenly became weak and unstable. As a result, primordial-based conflicts flared up in many provinces (Tadjoeddin, 2001). In October 1999, a new province of North Maluku, where 29 ethnic groups live, was established by the central government of Indonesia. In the same year, ethno-religious violence broke out between the Muslim and Christian communities which lasted until June 2000 (Wilson, 2005). Following the incident, another ethnic conflict broke out,as a result of the local gubernatorial election, which lasted from 2007 to 2009. This appeared to be the longest governor election-related conflict in Indonesia.

Initially, the conflict in the gubernatorial election involved the supporters of two candidates, namely the Thaib Armain camp and Abdul Gafur camp. Armain, the incumbent, was seen as representing Makeanese while Gafur was seen as representing Patanese, Tidorese, Ternatens and others. The conflict later involved wider public sentiment from different ethnic backgrounds and took the form of non-Makeanese versus Makeanese. Anti-Makeanese sentiment spread among non-Makeanese communities who saw Makeanese as a common enemy. It was a battle between all fights against one or one fight against all. There were accusations of *Makeanisasi* (a local ethno-political term used to depict the increasing number of Makeanese taking over and dominating key positions in local government bureaucracy) in North Maluku and pleas not to choose a Makeanese as a governor. During the conflict, crowds from the Gafur camp stoned houses belonging to Makeanese. The crowd also once burned down a house that belonged to a Makeanese bureaucrat. This fact clearly concerns a broad issue of ethnic identity. In dealing with ethnic-based contests and conflicts, particularly in the post-Soeharto era, many researchers have concluded that the contests or conflicts, to a significant extent, were engineered by the elite (Aragon, 2007; Mietzner, 2009; Klinken, 2010). The same instrumentalist view, to various degrees, was also used to investigate the election-based conflicts in North Maluku (Smith, 2009; Ahmad, 2012). It seems that the instrumentalists as well as the constructivists dominate the discourse on ethnicity studies. Both approaches, called the situational approach, often criticise the primordial approach for not being able to explain the dynamics of ethnic identity and therefore, the primordial approach is treated as inadequate in ethnicity studies.

However, apart from some flaws inherently in primordialist assumptions, we believe this particular approach in some points remains important in contributing to our understanding of ethnicity, in addition to the insights contributed by the two situational approaches. By taking all the three perspectives into consideration, we will not only locate the position of the primordialist's contribution, but also show

the possible collaboration of the competing approaches.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The central concept in this conceptual framework is ethnic identity. The issues concerning ethnic identity have long been discussed and debated in the academic domain. There are three main approaches in the study of ethnicity: primordialist, constructivist and instrumentalist. Each approach has its own ontological view on ethnic identity. The primordial approach treats the attributes of an ethnic identity as a *given* social reality, and which essentially continues to shape the behaviour of members of an ethnic group (Shils, 1957, 1960; Che Man, 1990; Lewis, 1998). Some researchers have rejected the primordial standpoint because the outcome revealed that ethnic identity is not *given*, but is socially constructed (Barth, 1969; Poyer, 1988; Prelic, 2011), and constantly changes (Barth, 1969; Salamone, 1975 pp. 22-24; Schultz, 1984; Beckerleg, 2010, pp. 139-159). Basically, this constructivist approach considers the social reality of ethnicity as fluid and context-based reality and emphasises more on the social mechanisms that form and maintain the boundaries between "us" and "them", and not something that is essential in the contents of ethnic groups (Barth, 1969). Several other researchers who adopt the instrumentalist approach although admitting that ethnic identity is socially constructed like the constructivist approach, emphasise the intention of elites in the construction of ethnic identity and the use of the identity by the elite to serve their pragmatic purposes for political and economic gains (Cohen, 1969; Brass, 1996).

The ontological differences between the three above approaches on ethnic identity do not hinder the possible collaboration among them in this study. The only possible problem in bringing together the different theoretical perspectives appears to be on how to reconcile the priomordialist view that treats identity as a given social reality, with the two close perspectives, namely constructivist and instrumentalist which believe that identity is a socially constructed reality. To reconcile the three different approaches, it is important to highlight here of certain misunderstandings toward the primordialist stance. Although the primordialists range from those who treat identity as a biological and genetic phenomena (van den Berghe, 1981; Shaw & Wong, 1989; Thompson, 1989, pp. 21-48) to those who treat identity as a product of cultural phenomena (Shils, 1960; Geertz, 1963; 1973, p. 89; Huntington, 1996), most of the critics treat the primordialist as a single, rigid biological-biased people. In this article, we define those who adopt the primordialist approach as those who consider ethnicity as a sociocultural phenomenon with some given attributes rather than purely a biological one. This sociocultural phenomenon, certainly includes a sense of identity, in the Geertzian sense, and is historically transmitted and inherited through symbols (1973, p. 89), and it forms primordial attachments to the community who own these symbols (Geertz, 1996).

By treating the primordial approach in this way, we can bring the three perspectives together into considering ethnic identity as a socio-cultural phenomenon. At this point, the three perspectives can collaborate in our effort to understand the dynamics of Makean ethnic identity. Each perspective contributes to our understanding of ethnicity. The primordialist perspective contributes to our understanding of some *given* 'objective' indicators of ethnic attributes such as place of origin and uniqueness in language and folk arts. The constructivist approach contributes to our understanding of the construction of identity in daily social interactions among people from different backgrounds, and the instrumentalist approach contributes to our understanding of how ethnic identities become politically important in a contesting environment. Since the unique contribution from each perspective deals with different aspects of ethnic identity, bringing them together can, indeed, result in a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of ethnic identity, while relying on any single perspective can lead to partial and misleading conclusion on the dynamics of ethnic identity.

The important point that needs to be highlighted here is the concept of ethnic identity, as it has some implications on the method used in this study. In general, ethnicity is seen as a group's consciousness of the uniqueness of its culture which makes it different from the cultures of other groups. Ethnic identity arises from the awareness of the uniqueness of the group and this uniqueness is also recognised by members of other groups (Schultz, 1984, p. 46), or it needs internal awareness and expression and external validation (Barth, 1969). This definition clearly shows that an ethnic identity is a product of an inter-subjective process.

Since the boundary between the concept of ethnic identity and some related concepts (ethnic prejudice and ethnic stereotype, among others) are very thin, overlapping and intertwining, to ascertain the differences, we highlight some points here. Both stereotypes and prejudices are a matter of judging the other groups and they therefore, mostly contain negative judgement towards the others (Berghe, 2004, pp. 414-415; Cashmore, 2004, pp. 329-330;) and are not inter-subjective. On the contrary, ethnic identity is not a one direction judgement of one group of the other, but rather, a socio-cultural consensus between internal and external perceptions on the attributes of an ethnic group. In an ethnic identity, perceptions held by members of an ethnic group on their ethnic attributes are along the lines of the perceptions held by outsiders towards them (Barth, 1969; Schultz, 1984, p. 46).

In conclusion, the central concept of this theoretical framework is ethnic identity. Three different perspectives, which emphasise different aspects of ethnic identity, have been discussed and brought into the socio-cultural domain through which they can support each other. Ethnic identity in this study is treated as socio-cultural consensus between internal and external perceptions of the attributes,

both objectives and perceived, of an ethnic group. The consensus, arrived at following ethnographic fieldwork, could be based on some objective attributes such as uniqueness of place of origin and language or some perceived attributes such as education. As an inter-subjective phenomenon, ethnic identity is taken as a qualitative entity which relies heavily on the shared views expressed by Makeanese and non-Makeanese of the Makeanese based on both objective and perceived attributes.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In the previous section, we have argued that ontologically, the primordialists consider ethnic identity as a *given,* relatively unchanged, and a solid social reality. Apart from the differences between the constructivist daily social process in identity formation and the instrumentalist's emphasise on political motives and intentionality of elites in constructing and using the identity for their pragmatic purposes, ontologically, both the constructivist and instrumentalist share the idea that ethnic identity is a constructed, not given, and a fluid social reality. This implies that the primordialists work in objectivist epistemology in the sense that the researcher considers an ethnic group has its objective and unique characteristics, whereas the constructivist and instrumentalist work in subjectivist-interpretivist epistemology in the sense that reality (ethnic identity) is constructed and interpreted subjectively by the social actors, and the researcher's interpretation is based on these actors' subjective interpretation. This approach seeks to uncover the inter-subjective meaning.

Instead of stirring the differences between the primordialist and the other two approaches, by untying the primordialist approach from its biological-biased and endorsing its sociocultural dimension, this approach not only can work smoothly along the lines of constructivist and instrumentalist but also contribute to addressing a more objective attribute such as uniqueness in language or place of origin, something treated by other two approaches as merely a subjective phenomenon. In this sense, ethnic identity is based on both the objective and perceived attributes of a group of people. By defining ethnic identity as a consensus between internal awareness and external recognition of the attributes (both objective and perceived) of an ethnic group, it demonstrates that awareness of ethnic identity is in the realm of inter-subjectivity between people from different ethnic backgrounds.

The methodological implication of the above stand point is the need for a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to uncover the inter-subjective world between different social actors from different ethnic backgrounds. In brief, this study used a descriptive qualitative ethnography method with a phenomenological approach that is supported by document analysis. The key informants were chosen through purposive sampling based on preliminary information about their knowledge on the identity of Makeanese, and followed by snowball-

sampling to trace relevant information. The supporting informants were chosen randomly. The total number of informants is 33 people. They are from different ethnic backgrounds (Makeanese and non-Makeanese), different socioeconomic classes, and different profession among others government bureaucrats, politicians, university lecturers, housewife, and different social position such as local elites and ordinary people.

Data is collected through interviews and observation. Document analysis is employed to support this data. Interview questions were centred on: Who is a Makeanese? What makes someone a Makeanese? What are the prime attributes of Makeanese in the past and in the present? What are the achievements made by the Makeanese? How has their lives changed (using life-history mode of interview)? How do the elite portray the Makeanese majority among the government bureaucrats? What issues appear to be involved in the resistance to Makeanese? How do the Makeanese elite interpret the resistance? Observation is conducted of their agriculture activities, the condition of their home land in Makean Island, their conversation in their own language, social situations in which they are involved, and others. Document analysis is used to gather data from government offices on the number of Makeanese in key bureaucratic posts as well as the articles and books written on Makeanese in the past and present. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data display and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of the use of ethnographic method with a phenomenological approach, we found a number of variations or differences in the views of non-Makeanese as well as the Makeanese about the characteristics of the Makeanese ethnic identity. We also found the same set of views between the Makeanese and non-Makeanese about the characteristics of the Makean identity. The differences, which mostly containing negative judgements, are categorised as part of ethnic prejudice and stereotypes, not ethnic identity; hence, these are not taken into account as part of the Makean ethnic identity. In contrast, the shared opinion on the attributes of the Makean identity was taken as part of the Makean ethnic identity as they were born through a process of inter-subjectivity between the Makeanese and non-Makeanese. Some aspects of the shared opinion on the characteristics of the Makean people by both the Makeanese and non-Makeanese are elaborated in the subsequent section.

In the early stages of our research, we easily obtained the elements which are considered as the Makeanese identity markers including the elements of geography, language and art. These elements show that the Makeanese originate from the Makean Island, speak the Makean language and have *Togal* as their folk art. Geographical element becomes a clear identification in the imagination of the local community since the Makean Island is geographically separated by sea from other islands. Uniqueness in language is

also an important feature of identity marker since their language called *taba* is different from other local languages. Although the language consists of two different linguistic groups, both are considered the Makeanese language (Watuseke, 1976; Collins, 1982). Similarly, the art element, the *Togal*, is unique and commonly viewed as a distinctive art due to the fact that only the Makean people have it.

The above features - the place of origin, language, and art - are the most fundamental elements that mark the Makean ethnic identity. They are described as the most fundamental elements because these elements are the basic points of identity reference and are relatively sustained. Even the descendants of Makeanese who were not born in the Makean Island will identify or are identified by others as the Makeanese because their parents or grandparents came from the Makean Island. Even if they do not speak Makean or are no longer involved in the *togal* art but when listening to them, they realise that those are the language and art belonging to their ethnic group.

Unlike the three elements that are relatively durable and more objective in the sense that their existence and uniqueness can be seen and heard directly, other attributes that form the Makean identity as discussed below are more flexible in nature. They grow, evolve, disappear and are being replaced in accordance with the development of the Makeanese social transformation. These are the attributes the Makeanese see and are being seen as educated people and as bureaucrats. These elements have a very high fluidity and are very much dependent on the social development of the Makeanese in North Maluku. These attributes, together with the three basic elements previously discussed, are held in the consciousness of the Makeanese and the local non-Makeanese.

From Backward to Educated People

One of the important Makean identity markers is that the Makeanese see themselves and are being seen by others as the most educated people in North Maluku nowadays. This was expressed during the interviews and in written materials. In the past, however, the Makeanese were cultural, geographical and political periphery of the Sultanate of Ternate (Andaya, 1993). Therefore, when many Makeanese started coming to Ternate since the mid-20th century, and after Indonesian independence, they were considered as backward and hick by the people in the town of Ternate. We can trace some of the mockeries widely circulated among the Ternatenese in 1960s to 1980s depicting the Makeanese as backward when they came to the town of Ternate.

These backward attributes were then amplified by the inferior status of the Makeanese child migrants who came in great numbers to the Ternate city to continue with their studies in the 1940s onward. As they generally did not have relatives and houses in the city of Ternate, the Makean child migrants struggled to find Ternate citizens of any ethnic background who could accept them to stay in their houses

in exchange for doing any housework that would not be paid by the families to them. The children are locally called *anapiara* while the family who own the house is known as *pengampung*.

The relationship built between *pengampung-anapiara* is asymmetrical where a *pengampung* is very powerful while the *anapiara* only follow the will of the *pengampung*; thus, the anapiara are powerless. A lot of Makean children who had just graduated from elementary school in their villages migrated to the city of Ternate to enter junior high school in Ternate. At the age of around 12 years old, they had to work hard serving the *pengampung* family by doing their housework such as cooking, gardening, taking water from the well for the entire water needs in the *pengampung* house. They also had to wash the clothes, clean the house and yard, sell fish in the market, work as child labour, sell cakes for the *pengampung* and perform many other chores besides attending school. Although school-going children who came to Ternate and became *anapiara* were from different ethnic backgrounds, the interviews conducted with both the Makeanese and non-Makeanese in this study showed that the Makeanese was prominent in number. The Makeanese *anapiara* were known to be diligent and obedient so the *pengampung* in Ternate generally favoured the Makean children coming as their *anapiara*.

The result of the development mentioned above is the emergence of a new group of educated Makeanese since the 1970s. Given the fact that many had enrolled as school teachers and Islamic school teachers since and prior to 1960s, many have become teachers and preachers since the 1970s. Since then, the Makeanese have become prominent in the education sector in North Maluku. This development has improved the general image of the Makeanese as educated people. When answering the question on which ethnic group is the most committed to education and therefore the most educated one, the answer given by both the Makeanese and non-Makeanese would be the Makeanese. Sahjad, a lecturer, a Ternatenese, said:

> *"The Makeanese have been the most committed to education since long time ago, that's why they become a leading group in education, whereas we, Ternatenese, just began to seriously continue our school to higher degree since around 1980s, that's why we are left behind in this sector".*

Wahdah, a Makeanese politician, confidently said, "Today, we the Makean people are the most educated in North Maluku. We reach it through uneasy efforts…". Smith also captures the same public image of the Makeanese when he writes, "By the 1990s, the Makian were reportedly the most educated and successful ethnic group in North Maluku" (2009, p. 96). Many other informants, both elite and lay people, share the same subjective perception as Sahjad and Wahdah. These subjective perceptions from different people

with different ethnic backgrounds reach inter-subjectivity when they share the same opinion about an issue. The attribute of being an educated people is an additional element for the identity of the Makeanese ethnic group. However, this does not necessarily mean that other local groups are not educated. In the eyes of the local people, the Makeanese are more prominent in this regard.

The above description demonstrates the fluidity of an element of ethnic identity. By fluidity, we mean a flexibility of an element of ethnic identity to change. In this sense, fluidity is a result of social processes which involves both the Makeanese with their social mobility and non-Makeanese in socially constructing the identity. As evidences of the fluidity, between 1950s and 1970s, the Makean people considered themselves and were being regarded by Ternate residents as inferior and hick in sociocultural and political senses. Since the 1970s, as a result of sociocultural transformation undergone through education by the Makean people, the inferiority and hick attributes of the Makean identity began to change and have been replaced with more superior elements and the education attributes. This is an element of identity that has recently emerged to replace the old element - the backwardness.

From Subordinate to Leading Government Bureaucrats

In the pre-colonial and during the colonial period, Makeans were subordinate and under the control of the Ternate kingdom until Indonesian independence in the mid-20th century (Clercq, 1890; Fraassen, 1994). The change took place soon after the independence. Since the 1940s, the Makeanese had migrated to the town of Ternate to attend schools and Islamic schools. Since the 1970s, many of them have become teachers. However, with the broadening of education orientation since the 1970s, many Makeanese have attended non-teacher training schools and non-Islamic schools. This has spawned many circles of educated Makeanese who are not teachers or preachers. They pursue other professions outside the religious domain such as clinical doctors, lecturers, engineers and government bureaucrats. These originally subordinated and lowly educated people are now educated and hold key positions in various government offices.

As there are many Makeanese holding key positions in provincial governments, both the Makeanese and non-Makeanese attach this attribute to the Makean identity. This further adds attributes to the Makeanese ethnic identity as bureaucrats. It is true that many key positions in the local government are held by the Makean bureaucrats while there are many Makeanese who are teachers, peasants, as well as labourers. However, this is the local people's perception of the Makeanese. They often show the success of the Makeanese by pointing to the fact that, at least until mid-2014 when we finished this research, majority of the key positions in the North Maluku government are held by the Makeanese. From 2002 until 2014, Thaib Armain, a Makeanese, was the governor of

the North Maluku Province. The regional secretary was also a Makeanese. Makeanese also had the highest percentage in heading local government departments (*dinas*). From 2002 to 2007, although Makeanese only comprised 9% of the total North Maluku population, they represented 33.33% of heads of departments whereas other main ethnic groups (Ternate, Tidore, Sanana, and Tobelo-Galela) represented only 10-20%. From 2009 to 2013 the percentage increased to 57.15% whereas other ethnic groups each represented below 10%. In September 2014 the representation of Makeanese still stood at 40%, the highest. After September 2014, however, the new governor and his vice-governor, themselves non-Makeanese, replaced many Makeanese from their top positions mostly with Tidorese and Tobelo-Galela bureaucrats.

When we asked about the characteristics of Makeanese, Ibu Ani, an ordinary Ternatenese, replied "Makeanese are hard-working farmers who send their children to higher education, these children [later] become important people in local government offices... many Makeanese are heads of the local government departments". Bibi Mima, a Makeanese housewife, said "Makeanese usually become bureaucrats". Syahril, a Makeanese lecturer, said "in the past we were *anapiara*, today we are educated and holding key positions in [local] government, that's because we successfully went through difficult times in the past". Similarly, a local famous Golkar politician, Hamid Usman, a Tidorese, stated:

> *"we have to admit the fact that Makeanese are majority in top rank of local government bureaucrats. We shouldn't get offensive with that because they deserve to get it. They have better human resources due to their great effort on education and their active involvement in Golkar (government political party during the president Suharto's New Order) which bring them to the present positions".*

The same view is also widely held by the people from different ethnic backgrounds in the region. Smith also found the same views expressed when an informant told her that if you want to meet a Makeanese, all you need to do is to go to the governor's office, and if you want to meet a Ternatenese just go to the Gamalama traditional market, and if you want to meet a Tidorese just go to the Bastiong traditional market (2009, p. 95). Our Ternatenese informant, Sahjad, told us that in Ternatenese's imagination, "the place of the Makeanese is in the government office, whereas the place of the Ternatenese is in traditional markets". Due to the public image that the government employees are better than the vendors in traditional markets, the above expressions portray how the Makeanese are identified as having a better life as government bureaucrats than the Ternatenese.

In the context of political contestation, ethnic identity becomes very important. When there was a local political election for governorship from 2007 to 2009 between

Thaib Armain and Abdul Gafur, identity became highly politicised. The element of ethnic identity as a bureaucrat is closely related to local political contestation in the name of the ethnic groups. During the political contestation, there was an allegation of *Makianisasi* of the bureaucracy (a local term used to depicts the increasing number of Makeanese holding key positions in local government bureaucracy), whereby the Makean people who were already dominant in bureaucracy made efforts to take over all key positions in provincial bureaucracy.

It is important to note that the "bureaucrat" component of the Makean identity, as expressed by ibu Ani, bibi Mima, Sahjad and others, is a new phenomenon that has become apparent since 1990s and strengthened since the early 2000s following the establishment of the North Maluku Province. This image was widely held by different people from different ethnic backgrounds, and therefore indicating an inter-subjectivity among different people. This element of identity is socially constructed that appears to follow the achievements of the Makeanese in education and followed by their success in taking up local top bureaucratic positions.

In a political contest, however, this bureaucrat element of identity is generated, strengthened and manipulated by elites for their political interests. Non-Makean groups frequently resisted the Makeanese majority positions in bureaucracy by using acronyms like ABOM (*Asal Bukan Orang Makean*), which means not to choose a Makeanese as the governor. They also use symbols such as a canary tree, which mainly grows in the Makean island, to symbolise Makeanese in their resistance. Amran, a Makeanese, told us "during the political competition between Armain and Gafur, the Gafur's supporters frequently expressed statements like "cutting all canary trees in North Maluku" meaning remove all Makeanese bureaucrats from their positions. A previous research also found expressions such as "pull up canary tress until the roots" (Ahmad, 2012, p.122). Because Armain was seen as representing Makeanese, these expressions were not only meant to attack him (the incumbent governor) and other Makeanese holding key positions in local government but also strike at the Makean identity, strengthening the boundaries of the ethnicity between the Makeanese and other locals. These phrases depart from the subjective perception that the Makeanese dominate the local government bureaucracy, and therefore need to be removed from the existing bureaucratic structure.

On the other hand, Armain, the incumbent governor at that time, considered the attack against the dominant Makeanese bureaucrats in provincial government during the high political conflict from 2007 to 2009 in governorship candidacy as an attack on Makean ethnic self-esteem (*harga diri*) (Ahmad, 2012, p.122). By doing so, he interpreted the attack on Makean bureaucrats as an attack on Makean ethnic identity. During the second half of 2014, a new governor, Kasuba, a Tobelo, and his vice-governor, Thaib, a Tidorese, replaced

many Makeanese top bureaucrats with non-Makeanese, mostly Tidorese and Tobelo-Galela backgrounds. This was seen by Makeanese as an attack on Makean ethnic group. A local informal leader of Makean group, Kasim, said "we as an ethnic group lost our power because we did not unite during the governor campaign, now we must watch how we are kicked out from top bureaucratic positions".

In short, bureaucrat as the element of ethnic identity is socially constructed in line with the development of vertical mobility of Makeanese from subordinate to government bureaucrats. The social actors involved in the construction of that element are Makeanese and other local people, who, in daily social interaction with Makeanse can see, talk, narrate, and experience the Makeanese social mobility. Due to the commonly shared knowledge and information, they share an inter-subjective meaning on this attribute of Makean identity. It is the inter-subjective meaning that facilitates people from different ethnic backgrounds to communicate about the attribute by referring to the same understanding. This attribute, however, in a political contestation, is strengthened and used by elites to promote their political interests. Although the elite have a shared inter-subjective meaning on the attribute, they tend to use it in such a way that can support their own political interests.

Layers of Identity and Collaboration of Perspectives

Data indicate that Makean ethnic identity has different layers. The first layer consists of consciousness of objective characteristics such as geographical origin and uniqueness of language and art. The three elements are the most basic markers of Makean ethnic identity. They are deposited deeper in the consciousness of the Makeanese as well as other local people and therefore, relatively more stable. Although many Makeanese have migrated to other areas (Lucardie, 1980), their descendants who were not born in Makean Island, no longer understand the Makean language, favour pop songs than *togal*, their awareness of the three elements of identity is still strong. All the three elements are primordial in a cultural sense, but not in biological sense. It is important to note that the basis of this consciousness is not a product of manipulation by the elite, as stressed by the instrumentalists (Sokolovskii & Tishkov, 2010, pp. 241-241). Even without any elite contestation, this awareness has been there. Elite involvements in political contestations simply manipulate the already existing awareness of identity, and not producing it, to a level that has a politically significant effect on pursuing their interests. By doing that, they also strengthen awareness of the existing ethnic boundaries, not create it.

The second layer of the Makean identity consists of attributes such as Makeanese being the most educated people and hold top government bureaucratic posts. Although these attributes of identity are shaped and maintained through sociocultural construction in the interaction between Makeanese and other local people, as emphasised by the constructionists (Barth,

1969), this consciousness actually departs from combination between the achievements made by Makeanese in social mobility and *raw materials* that are socio-culturally "given" or have already existed in the mind of the people such as the place of origin, uniqueness of language and distinctive art as well as. The notion that treats ethnic identity as "a concept which does not refer to actual situation, but to a subjective, and also contextual and historical, symbolic process of distinction between *us* and *others*" (Prelic, 2011, p. 241) entails risky assumption that ethnic identity could be constructed instantly without any primordial root on the existing objective socio-cultural reality. The socio-cultural construction of an identity, however, requires a basis of objective reality, at least in the mind and experience of the people involved. Therefore, the expression of identity does not take place in a vacuum, as argued by the cultural primordialists (Che Man, 1990; Geertz, 1996; Lewis, 1998).

In the third layer, the Makean identity contains an aspect of identity that appears to be prone to political use by the elite. It is a social reality that many Makeanese occupy key positions in the provincial government body. Therefore, bureaucrat has been socially constructed as an element in the identity of the Makeanese. This attribute has emerged since 1990s as a result of the long involvement of Makeanese in education, and it has been intensified since the early 2000s due to the installation of the new province which needed many educated people for the newly formed bureaucrat positions. However, when the elite started their contestation, the fact of Makeanese's "majority" in the key government positions was changed by the anti-Makean camp to Makeanese's "domination", which was a shift from a neutral term to political one to magnify the anti-Makean sentiments from various non-Makean groups. At the same time, Makean elite interpreted the resistance to their majority in top bureaucrats as an attack on Makean self-esteem. Both Makeanese and anti-Makeanese elite manipulate the same element of identity, namely, Makeanese is always bureaucrat or bureaucrat is always Makeanese, in such a way that serve their political interests.

The foregoing has illustrated the three layers of Makeanese ethnic identity and their relationships. The first layer is the basis for the second layer. Makeanese achievements through social mobility such as being seen as educated or bureaucrat cannot be socially constructed as part of Makean identity without linking this group of people to their objective attributes such as their geographical origin from Makean Island or their unique language.

The second layer is the basis for the third layer. In an environment of political competition, any particular element in the second layer of identity could be intentionally chosen by the elite to attract sentiment and support for their political interests. Since the element of identity in this layer can be easily manipulated for political purposes, it is very fluid and could change easily. Makeanese frequently become an important group in the North Maluku

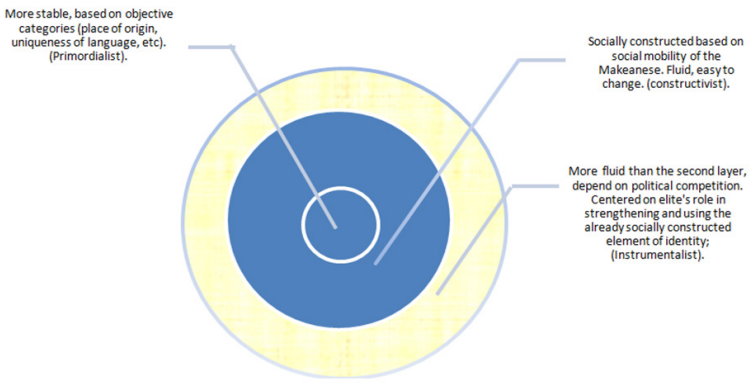

Figure 1. The three layers of Makeanese ethnic identity and their relationships

political contestations. For that reason, in studying Makeanese ethnic identity, we will not be able to comprehend its dynamics unless we take all layers of identity into account.

Since each layer is traditionally studied using different theoretical approaches, taking all layers into one study needs some steps to collaborate these perspectives. First, to some extent, we ease the ontological differences by bringing all theoretical approaches into dealing with a purely socio-cultural, not biological, domain. Second, at the epistemological level, we present the different epistemologies (objectivist in primordialist approach and subjectivist-interpretivist in constructivist and instrumentalist approaches) in order to show that they, along with each perspective, are dealing with different layers of ethnic identity, therefore employing any single perspective with its epistemology will not be able to comprehend all layers and dynamics of ethnic identity. Methodologically, we employ qualitative with a phenomenological style which allows us to collect data on elements of identity in each layer. This results in the development of a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of ethnic identity which cover all layers of ethnic identity.

CONCLUSION

It appears that the first layer of identity is more to do with primordial ties to socio-culturally "given" elements that are more sustainable. They become the basis or the "raw materials" for the second and the third layers of ethnic identity. The second layer consists of social construction based on the transformation undergone by Makean people. Therefore, the attributes in this layer can change, grow, or even disappear in accordance with the dynamic development of Makeanese. In this layer, we found a shift in attributes of identity from being backward migrants and helpless *anapiara* who initially depended on the Ternate residents to a high-status class of educated ethnic group. In relation to this, we also found a shift in identity as mass-subject, subordinate

people under the Ternate sultanate during pre-independence to leading government bureaucrats today.

The third layer contains elements that, although based on the perceptions of social reality that the majority of the government officials are Makeanese, the reality is uplifted becomes politically importance. In this case, the neutral demographic term "majority" is changed to a more political term "domination", which has an implication on the political image of all non-Makeanese about the threat posed by Makeanese to their ethnic group. In this context, the elite manipulate the identity markers as a political instrument, not create them. Depending on the political context, this element is very easy to change. It is clear that some attributes of identity are culturally more primordial in a Geertzian "primordial ties" sense, and therefore are relatively more stable, while some are constructed based on the social transformation undergone by the Makeanese, although others can suddenly change according to the elites interests in the political contestation context.

Finally, this study also reveals that each approach has its domain to explore. In the case of the Makean identity, the cultural primordialist can investigate elements that are deeply rooted in the primordial attachment of the Makeanese. Nonetheless, it is not fruitful to use constructivist or instrumentalist approaches to understand this area. A constructivist approach is more appropriately applied to uncover the construction of identity attributes such as the Makeanese who were originally seen as subordinates and backward and who shifted gradually to become an educated group of people who lead the bureaucrats. An instrumentalist approach can be used to uncover how the elite change the neutral social reality, whereby the "majority" of local government bureaucrats are Makeanese, to be more political , and the Makeanese "dominate" the local government bureaucrat positions. The shift of discourse from "majority' to "dominate" is not simply a shift from a noun to a verb but more than that, it is a shift from a non-political and more neutral sense to a more politically threatening sense for the non-Makeanese.

The main objective of this study was to examine the possibility of collaborating the traditionally-seen competing approaches in the field of ethnic identity studies. This study demonstrates that all three approaches in the study of ethnicity – cultural primordialist, constructivist and instrumentalist – should not to be applied separately from each other, let alone treated as competing approaches. Since each perspective has its unique contribution, to understand the whole dynamics of ethnic identity, relying on any single perspective can lead to partial and misleading conclusions about the dynamics of ethnic identity. When one studies dynamics of ethnic identity in a situation of political contestation among different ethnic-based groups, it is recommended that one should take all layers of identity into account. In the case of Makeanese identity, this study indicates the three approaches are complementary to each other in elucidating the dynamics of Makean ethnic identity in North Maluku.

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