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## YOUTH AND NATIONALISM IN AN INDONESIAN BORDER COMMUNITY

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### ABSTRACT

The spirit of nationalism in youth groups is still in the question due to globalization awareness. Since there has not been many studies discussing youth nationalism in border areas, this research aims to identify the nationalism dynamic of youth groups in Sebatik Island, a border area with Malaysia's territory in North Kalimantan Province. The study used survey and interview methods with 115 twelfth-grade students of four senior high schools as the subjects. The numbers of respondents represented four sub-districts in Sebatik Island. Using purposive sampling methods, the researchers selected students who have obtained the right to vote to address their political view. The result indicated that the youths of Sebatik Island tended to have traditional rather than liberal nationalism.

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### INTRODUCTION

Young generation is commonly defined as the group of people between fifteen to thirty years old and widely perceived as the critical group in a population as well as the

most productive element in social and economic demography. As a fundamental element of the population, they are expected to be critical in social and economic development with the spirit of nationalism. Youth and nationalism are essential concepts which represent dynamic identity. These notions face many challenges in the current globalization era due to huge transnational flow of people and ideas through immigration and refugees, information and communication technology, and transnational crises, such as global warming, financial crisis, and terrorism.

In addition, the globalization phenomena also affects the way young generation see themselves as a part of national or trans-national communities. The phenomenon of youth nationalism influenced by globalization has been a common issue. For example, study of Nancy (2016) indicates that most young people in Europe have impression that they have been marginalized and excluded by social and economic life due to crisis. However, despite the feeling of exclusion, most of them (51 percent) are willing to participate in the European Union (EU) election to show their best contribution. Unfortunately, the participant number of young voters in 2014 EU election was 42.61 percent. The data indicated that most young Europeans were unsatisfied with the performance of the EU in responding to crisis, resulting in the decline of respect to the EU (ibid).

Another example, Chinese young generation is less nationalistic and more skeptical to the government (Johnston, 2017). Compared to the time of the elders, the anti Japan and United States sentiments among these young people are not as strong (Ibid). The data show that young Chinese people are more critical to their government although the government controls media flows and internet usage into the country. This is to ensure that the youth consumes nationalist media produced primarily by Chinese agencies and companies. Moreover, Chinese young people are more cosmopolitan and open minded as they show less hostility to Japan and the US.

The above studies show that young generation in both liberal and authoritarian countries transforms to be worldlier and also tend to be cynical to the government.

However, there have not been many studies discussing the youth nationalism in border areas as they are more prone to split nationality. Hence, to make people aware of this specific issue, this study aims to examine the nationalism of young generation in border communities.

From a few studies of youth nationalism in border areas, most of them address multiple youth identities such as ethnicity, language, and other local custom, between two nationalities in the border areas that influence their nationalism identity (Bejarano,2005; Meadows, 2014). This study focuses on youth nationalism in a border society which have similar language and culture but distinguished by nationality which is Sebatik Island. This island is separated by border between Indonesia and Malaysia territories where majority of citizens are Buginese and daily speak Melayu and Bugis languages.

In order to investigate the youth nationalism in this border society, this paper proposes the following research question: How do the Indonesian young generation people in Sebatik Island perceive nationalism dynamic?. The next section elaborates brief history and theories of nationalism employed as analysis tool in this study. Research method, results of the study, and discussion are explained in the later sections.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a state was always founded based on the belief and the clan ties (Kohn, 1965; Ignatieff, 1994; Özkirimli, 2010). Hence, in pre-modern perspective, individual loyalty based on the spirit of a community which is based on shared common backgrounds, such as local history and local tradition, to establish territorial authority (Kohn, 1965). By this period, citizens were loyal to the faith (church) or the kinship system (the ruling family) which became fundamental elements of the state.

By the nineteenth century in Europe and America and the twentieth century in Asia and Africa, people started to identify themselves with the nation based on national civilization and the life and survival on nationality (Kohn, 1965; p.11). As the modern perspective, 'nation' is acknowledged as a new meaning with more positive associations

which referred to the process of citizens' aspirations in their social, economic, and cultural issues (Kohn, 1965; Ignatieff, 1994).

In the development process of nationalism, the questions regarding the basic perspectives of its form rise. The first perspective refers to mapping ethnicities of countries, also known as ethno nationalism. This perspective is based on the assumption that human existence in the concept of biological kinship becomes the fundamental value in the concept of nationalism. In other words, nationalism is a natural value and roots in every community since the beginning. This value later transforms into *ethnie*, a social community that has a cultural identity which consists of a collective history, values, rituals, and symbolism (Smith, 1988). Smith (ibid) explains that *ethnie* becomes a concept which further defines the boundaries of culture differentiating one nation to another as it is today. This perspective has implications on the assumption that nationalism is a cultural phenomenon and not a political one. From this notion, Hutchinson (1987) highlights that political movement of nationalists is the process of revitalizing ethnic value as the basic capital in nation development based on common culture.

Having said the above, ethno nationalism perspective can only explain the phenomenon of nationalism in homogenous culture countries, such as Germany, Italy, and Japan. This perspective, however, is not suitable to explain nationalism of countries having heterogeneous culture.

Another perspective proposed by Ignatieff (1994) explains that there are two fundamental motives for a nation to develop the spirit of nationalism. The first motive is the desire to be free from the suffering of imperialism. Most minorities believe that they will only be safe if they can control the power level in the country. Another motive is the desire to maintain the rights of a community in order to always make it bigger than their own existence, either as an individual or a group. The people identify common values, such as language, group identity, and history of the community as their identities to be the part of a particular community. By having a nation and the spirit of nationalism, one

will have a sense of security, understanding, and independence to build their future as they wish.

In line with Ignatieff (Ibid) regarding the motive to defend community rights, Anderson (1991) offers a perspective that is in accordance with the phenomenon of nationalism in the post-colonial countries. Many countries fought for their right of freedom from colonization. Anderson (Ibid) argues that nationalism is an idea of imagined communities where every member of a nation, even the smallest nation, will never know, hear, or even meet the other fellow members of the nation. Nationalism spirit rises based on an imagined community that present in the mind of every member of a nation which becomes a reference of their social identity.

In addition, in order to deeply analyze the degree of nationalism in a country, some classic studies offer the categorization of nationalism, such as Hayes (1926) and Wirth (1936). Özkirimli (2010) cited Hayes (1926) in categorizing forms of nationalism as an expression of human sociality. This paper focuses on two main forms of nationalism as proposed by Hayes: traditional and liberal nationalism.

Traditional nationalism refers to inherited identities formed by traditional value with history and tradition as its frame of reference. Several studies show that some scholars categorize traditional nationalism as similar to ethnic or religious nationalism which may apply in homogeneous country (Ignatieff, 1994; Hayes, 1926). In modern perspective, however, traditional nationalism also affects one's political side that leads to patriotism. Druckman (1994) identifies three main characteristics of traditional nationalism: (1) "become sentimentally attached to the homeland," (2) "gain a sense of identity and self-esteem through their national identification," and (3) "are motivated to help their country" (p: 44). In this sense, traditional nationalism leads a person to two groups of identifications in which they are connected to we-group and different with they-group.

The second form is liberal nationalism, also known as civic nationalism, defined as a spirit of nationalism regardless of race, gender and ethnicities (Ignatieff, 1994). This

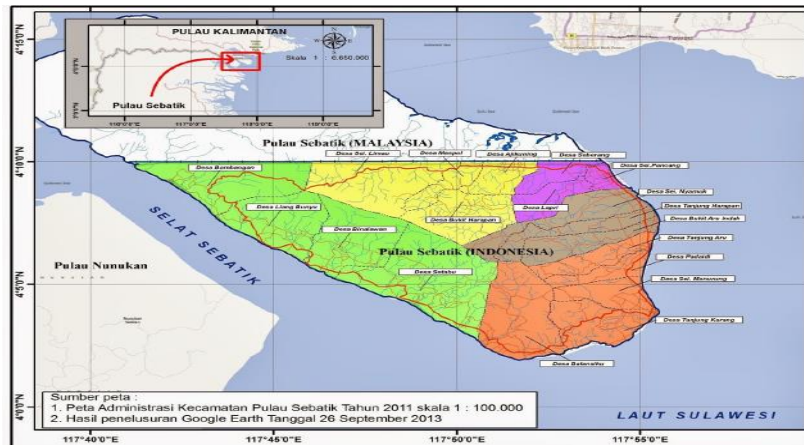
form is also compatible with values of equality, tolerance, and freedom. In addition, Ignatieff (ibid) identifies four main characteristics of civic nationalism: (1) the development of society based on law or constitution instead of common inherited roots; (2) ability to choose citizen membership by immigration; (3) governed by pluralist democracy; (4) the creation of nation by individuals.

## **METHODS**

The study was conducted in Sebatik Island, located in the border areas between Malaysia's city of Tawao in the northeast and Indonesia's Nunukan in the southwest. Thus, the island lies in the territory of two nations. It is separated by the border line roughly 4°10' north, in which the southern part of the island belongs to Indonesia's territory and the northern part within Sabah of Malaysia. Both countries do not build border wall or fence as the demarcation line, but instead buried concrete piles stretching from east to west along the border line. In addition, there are some Indonesian military officers as the border gate guards but there is no immigration office or custom units as usually found in border territories. The width of the island is approximately 452.2 km<sup>2</sup> of which the territory of Indonesia is about 246.6 km<sup>2</sup> (54.5 percent of total island). The island density can be considered high as there are 37,992 people live in the Sebatik Indonesian and around 25,000 people in Sebatik Malaysia area.

The administration of Indonesia's Sebatik is part of the Regency of Nunukan, North Kalimantan Province which consists of five sub-districts (*kecamatan*), namely Sebatik, West Sebatik, East Sebatik, Central Sebatik, and North Sebatik. Previously, in 1999, Sebatik Indonesia was divided into only two sub-districts, namely Sebatik and West Sebatik. In 2010, the area was re-divided into five sub-districts in order to improve the quality of public services in border communities.

Figure 1, The administration map of Sebatik Indonesia



Source: Indonesia Central Bureau of Statistic (BPS), 2017

In order to know the political dynamics and nationalism quality of border community in Sebatik Island, this study used survey with questionnaire as the instrument. The study employed an instrument to measure nationalism which is adapted from study of Kosterman and Feshbach (1989). The population of this study was the young people who live in Sebatik Island. Purposive sampling method was applied to select 12<sup>th</sup> grade high school students in four districts in Sebatik Island. The researchers chose the 12<sup>th</sup> graders because this age group has the voting right in both general and local elections. In other words, their political right as citizens of Indonesia is officially acknowledged. The researchers also selected four schools to represent three types of secondary school in this region. First, *Sekolah Menengah Umum* (SMU) or public school and is funded by the state. Second, *Madrasah Aliyah* (MA) represents the Islamic religious school and is managed by the community. Lastly, *Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan* (SMK) or vocational school and is also funded by the state. The research team interviewed 115 respondents which comprised of students from SMU in Central Sebatik, MA of Islamic Foundation of Sebatik Island (*Yayasan Islam Pulau Sebatik*) and SMK in West Sebatik.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to find out the types of nationalism Indonesian young generation in Sebatik Island belongs to: traditional or liberal. This section elaborates the types of nationalism based on the data gathered from questionnaires.

### **Traditional Nationalism**

The study measured the levels of traditional nationalism of the youth in Sebatik Island based on 10 statements related to the value of nationalism. Those statements were examined with intervals of 0-10 where 0 means "strongly disagree" and 10 means "strongly agree". In the process of data analysis, the researchers categorized three interval values: (1) interval 0-3 indicated a low value of traditional nationalism, (2) interval 4-6 indicated an average value of traditional nationalism, and (3) interval 7-10 indicated a strong value of traditional nationalism.

The statements used to measure the levels of traditional nationalism of respondents were as follows:

- I love Indonesia;
- I am proud to be Indonesian;
- When I see the Indonesia flag flying, I feel proud;
- The fact that I am an Indonesian is an important part of my identity;
- Indonesian flag is the best flag in the world;
- Indonesia is the best country in the world;
- I think Indonesians are the nicest people in the world;
- One who is willing to go to jail for defending the country is a good person
- I am emotionally attached to Indonesia and all actions taken by the country affect me

In the first statement, the results showed that all respondents, or 100 percent of them, agreed. The data suggested that students in Sebatik Island loved their country by choosing the high value interval in the questionnaire



The second statement was related to nation pride and associated with the perception of respondents being the part of Indonesia. The result also showed that all respondents chose the high value interval. The data revealed that Indonesia young generation in Sebatik Island was proud being the citizen of Indonesia

The third statement had a correlation to the level of nationalism based on the admiration of state symbol, specifically Indonesian national flag. The result of the study showed that 96 percent of respondents agreed that they took great pride in the national flag, whilst 2.6 percent were neutral and only 0.9 percent disagreed with the statement. These data indicated that most youths in Sebatik Island had a high emotional attachment with the national flag as a symbol of the nation.

The fourth statement referred to the status recognition as an Indonesian citizen that represents as an identity. The study indicated that most respondents (93 percent) recognized their status as a citizen of Indonesia and acknowledged it as their primary identity. However, 4.3 percent of the respondents or 5 people claimed to be not so proud of being Indonesian. Further, 2.6 percent of the participants or 3 people tended to be reluctant to use Indonesian citizenship as their main identity.

The fifth statement is still associated with the national symbol, the Indonesian flag. The result of the study revealed that the majority of respondents (91.3 percent) were proud of the national flag. Nonetheless, about 7 percent of respondents chose to be neutral on this statement. Only one person, or 0.9 percent, stated to have low pride of the national flag. The data pointed out that most young people of Sebatik Island had a high pride in Indonesian flag as the national symbol of the country.

The next traditional nationalism indicator was in relation to the perception of respondents of Indonesia being the best country in the world. There were 54.8 percent of respondents agreed with this statement. In other words, the participants had a high level of traditional nationalism. Meanwhile, 21.7 percent of respondents were neutral and the other 20.9 percent did not agree that Indonesia is the best country in the world. The data

depicted the variation of emotional patterns and rationality of respondents on their pride as the citizens of Indonesia.

The further traditional nationalism indicator was associated with personal justification of Indonesians being good people. The study indicated that about 86.1 percent of respondents believed that Indonesian people were well behaved. Meanwhile, there were 7.8 percent of respondents who chose to be neutral and 5.2 percent disagreed with this statement. The data revealed that Indonesia young people in Sebatik Island had high confidence that Indonesians were nice people.

The last indicator on traditional nationalism was the perception of respondents in the emotional ties with Indonesia and a degree of influence to the respondents regarding actions taken by Indonesia. The result suggested that most respondents, about 54.8 percent, acknowledged their existence as Indonesian to be important in their daily activities. Meanwhile, 21.7 percent of respondents were neutral and the last 20.9 percent was not emotionally attached to Indonesia and any actions taken by the country did not have emotional effect to them.

### **Liberal Nationalism**

Liberal nationalism is associated with the concept of specific citizenship recognition with the people being more rational and open to perspective. The study measured the degree of liberal nationalism of young generation in the border area of Sebatik Island, Nunukan Regency in comparison with the traditional nationalism.

The study examined the degree of liberal nationalism of youths in the Sebatik Island based on the following statements:

- The young generation is to honor Indonesian history and heritage;
- It is important that Indonesia win international sports competition, such as the Olympics or the ASEAN Games;
- We must have freedom of speech, including the freedom to criticize the government of Indonesia;

- Generally, the more influential Indonesia to other countries, the better Indonesia will be;
- Indonesia is just an institution, it is big and powerful, but it is just an institution;
- Someone who does not salute to Indonesian flag will remain a true Indonesian;
- Someone who is not a religious person, remains a true Indonesian;
- Although at times I may not agree with the current government, my commitment to Indonesia always remains strong;
- It bothers me to see children made to pledge allegiance to the flag or being taught to adopt such strong nationalistic attitude

The first indicator on liberal nationalism was the perception of the respondents in relation to history and heritage of Indonesia. This indicator is the rational element to measure the concept of liberal nationalism. The result of the study figured that that majority of respondents, 92.2 percent, agreed to improve history understanding of younger generation in border areas. However, 3.5 percent of the respondents were neutral and the other 3.5 percent had an opposite view of this statement. These data indicated that the majority of young people in Sebatik Island had the desire to apply nationalism with historical understanding.

The second indicator of liberal nationalism referred to the importance of Indonesia's victories in international sports competitions. The study showed a significant result where 98.3 percent respondent agreed with the statement. Nonetheless, one person or 0.9 percent chose to be in the neutral stance. The data suggested that nationalism of youth group in Sebatik Island was profoundly affected by the achievements of Indonesia in various international sports competitions.

The next indicator was related to the basic value of liberalism, which is freedom to express opinions and criticize the government. The study showed that 78.3 percent of respondents agreed with this opinion. Further, about 15.7 percent respondents were

neutral and 6.1 percent of respondents stood on the opposite side of having freedom to criticize government. The data indicated that the youth in the Sebatik Island tended to be critical and rational although few of them were reluctant with this attitude.

The later indicator of youth liberal nationalism in the border area was associated with the influence of Indonesia in the global arena. The study showed that 65.2 percent of respondents agreed with this opinion. However, 18.3 percent of them were neutral and 14.8 percent respondents did not agree with the statement. The data suggested that the young people lived in the border area had a high expectation for Indonesia to be influential in global network as it can enhance their nationalism.

The next indicator was related to the perception of respondents whether Indonesia is a simple or complex organization as a country. The study showed that 36.5 percent of respondents agreed with this statement whilst the other 35.7 percent disagreed. Only 26.11 percent of respondents took the neutral stance. The data stated that the youths in Sebatik Island had various perspectives when it comes to acknowledge Indonesia as a simple organization. Although there was a small difference among the pros and the cons, the data described that the young generation in this border area tended to have low level of liberal nationalism.

Another indicator of liberal nationalism is the relation of one's emotional ties to the national symbols. In accordance with the indicator, the researchers made a statement of one who does not salute to the national flag but remains a true Indonesian. The result pointed out that the respondents had a diverse opinion in which 62.6 percent disagreed with the statement. Only 14.8 percent of respondents agreed whilst the 20.9 percent chose to be neutral. These data depicted that most respondents had a strong emotional bond with the symbols of the state, especially the national flag, also known as *Sang Saka Merah Putih*.

Beside state symbols, emotional connection to religion or belief values is also very influential in defining nationalism, especially in countries whose majority of the population follows certain beliefs, such as Indonesia. This study examined respondents'

perception regarding nationalism and religious obedience. The result revealed that 40.9 percent of respondents agreed that religious disobedience has no correlation with nationalism. However, there was about 39 percent of respondent who disagreed with this statement whilst around 19 percent chose to be on the neutral side. These data showed that there was a thin difference between the two groups who associated religion with nationalism. In other words, the religious issue is an important value in Indonesian nationalism.

The next indicator of liberal nationalism is related to being critical to the government. This is important since some people are difficult to distinguish between the political support to a regime and love of the country as the basic value of nationalism. The study showed that about 86 percent of respondents agreed with the statement. Meanwhile, there was a 1.7 percent of respondents disagreed whilst the other 11.3 percent was neutral on this statement. These data indicated that respondents tended to be more critical and can separate the position of the ruling government with the value of nationalism in the country.

The last indicator of liberal nationalism was associated with the perception of nationalism activities committed by others, especially children. The study indicated that about 87 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement. However, 7 percent of the subjects agreed and about 6 percent chose the neutral side. The data indicated that the majorities of respondents were bound by the state symbols and tended to have traditional nationalism.

To answer the question of which dynamic nationalism Indonesian young generation in Sebatik Island belong to, Table 1 below shows that they are more to traditional nationalists rather than liberal nationalists. Based on the field study in Sebatik Island, there were three main arguments to explain the data. Firstly, there was a quality improvement in local development and public services that have been delivered by the Indonesian local government to Sebatik Island community as the result of local autonomy. For example, the Indonesian government developed a vocational high school

(known as SMK) focusing on fishery and agricultural fields which fit with local community needs. In addition, there was also an Indonesian community which provided a special school to child labors in palm plantations located in Malaysia territory. They could not access education in Malaysia due to their illegal citizenship status. The local government also supported this community organization to ensure that no children are left behind.

**Table 1. Comparing Types of Nationalism of Youth in the Sebatik Island**

<b>Type of Nationalism</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Traditional nationalism	81.41	146.78
Liberal nationalism	57.18	332.439

Source: primary data

Secondly, community leaders of Sebatik Island played important roles in maintaining nationalism spirit throughout society members, especially for young generations. Based on the interview with some citizens in Sebatik Island, they acknowledged the great contributions of community leaders and all community members in commemorating Indonesia independence day, making all Sebatik citizens proud to be Indonesian.

Thirdly, inhabitants of Indonesia Sebatik area were homogenous with the majority came from the Bugis ethnic group (approximately more than 97 percent) whose origin is from South Sulawesi. Another ethnic group resided in the island was Timorese, also originate from other island, though they were only few in numbers. In addition, 97 percent of Sebatik people were Moslems (BPS, 2016). Accordingly, the data supported previous study that homogenous society tended to apply traditional nationalism which was also the case in young generation in Indonesian Sebatik Island territory.

## CONCLUSION

Nationalism value of youth group in most nations tends to transform to be more cosmopolitan and cynical to the government as it is affected by globalization. However, these global phenomena do not apply in all society, especially in border community. This study examined dynamic of nationalism of youth group in an Indonesia's border area, particularly the Sebatik Island. The result indicated that young generations in Sebatik Island tended to apply traditional nationalism. In other words, they considered inherited values, such as ethnicity and belief, as main components to identify their identity as citizens of a nation. This study showed that although some citizens in border areas may have split national identity but in one condition, some of them, particularly the youth group, tend to be proud to have single national identity. However, this study has limitation due to a small number of population and research of instrument was used is self-evaluation which may have some bias as effect.

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