

COMMUNICATING IDENTITIES AMONG “OTHERS”: EXPERIENCES OF INDONESIAN GRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

One of the features of today's globalised living is multiculturalism and the growing internationalization of education that has resulted in greater movements of student population across various cultural boundaries. Most sojourner studies tend to focus on the experiences of immigrants, refugees, and the business communities while the experiences of the growing number of international students have been downplayed. Economic conditions and political situations in the late 1990's have created educational opportunities for many developing countries including Malaysia. There was an increase in the number of students from developing countries with collectivist cultures studying in more similar cultural environments. Malaysia is the 12th most popular educational destination. It has been assumed theoretically that similarities in the cultural framework between the host culture and that of the international students will allow for a comfortable and more natural adaptation process. However, it is during sojourn that these students claim cultural group membership in the local context. It is here that the cultural identities of a group are negotiated, reinforced and challenged through everyday communication practices. This paper presents focus group findings with 30 Indonesian graduate students that explore their daily living experiences in an effort to unravel their process of enacting and engaging their identities through daily communication. Through their issues, challenges, and strategies for learning, living and adapting in a presumably similar cultural setting, this paper presents an account of their adaptation that reveal the unpacking of labels and norms that distinguishes them

from the locals and affirms their cultural identity as Indonesians.

Keywords: *Sojourn, adaptation, identities, Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory, Indonesian students*

KOMUNIKASI IDENTITI DI KALANGAN “YANG LAIN”: PENGALAMAN PELAJAR PASCA SISWAZAH INDONESIA

Abstrak

Salah satu sifat kehidupan global masakini adalah kepelbagaian budaya serta perkembangan pendidikan yang telah mencetus peningkatan pergerakan pelajar merentas sempadan budaya. Kebanyakan kajian berkaitan penghijrahan menjurus kepada pengalaman imigran, pelarian dan komuniti perniagaan sementara pengalaman pelajar antarabangsa yang kian meningkat telah diketepikan. Keadaan ekonomi dan situasi politik di akhir 1990'an telah membentuk peluang pendidikan bagi beberapa negara membangun termasuk Malaysia. Terdapat peningkatan dalam bilangan pelajar dari negara membangun berbudaya kolektif yang memilih untuk belajar di negara yang mempunyai lingkungan budaya yang hampir sama. Malaysia adalah destinasi pendidikan yang ke 12 paling popular di dunia. Andaian teoritis adalah bahawa persamaan dalam kerangka budaya antara budaya tuan rumah dan penghijrah akan memudahkan proses adaptasi. Namun demikian, semasa penghijrahanlah para pelajar akan menuntut keahlian budaya dalam konteks tempatan. Di sinilah identiti budaya sesuatu kumpulan itu akan dirunding, dikekalkan dan dicabar melalui amalan komunikasi seharian. Kertas ini membentangkan dapatan kajian daripada temubual fokus bersama 30 orang pelajar pasca siswazah Indonesia dan meninjau pengalaman kehidupan seharian mereka sebagai usaha untuk mengenalpasti proses pelaksanaan serta penglibatan identiti mereka di dalam adaptasi antara budaya. Melalui isu, cabaran dan strategi bagi pembelajaran, kehidupan serta adaptasi dalam persekitaran budaya yang hampir sama, kertas ini mengemukakan kisah adaptasi pelajar pasca siswazah Indonesia dengan pendedahan label dan norma yang membezakan mereka dari warga tempatan serta mengesahkan identiti budaya mereka sebagai warga Indonesia.

Kata kunci: *Penghijrahan, adaptasi, identiti, Teori Penyelarasan
Pengurusan Pengertian, pelajar Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

The growing internationalization of education has become a feature of globalised living. It has resulted in greater movements of student population across various cultural boundaries. Some of these students reside outside their countries only for the duration of their education while others have chosen to remain permanently in their new environments. The UNESCO statistics for 2014 revealed that Malaysia is the 12th most popular country of choice by international students (The Guardian, 17th July, 2014). Malaysia is said to have the highest proportion of international versus local students with the average ratio of 1:10. By 31st December 2014, there was a total of 135,502 international students from 160 countries studying in Malaysia. Out of these, 27, 812 of them are postgraduate students studying at both public and private institutions of higher learning (The Sun Daily 20th Jan 2015)

Currently, Indonesian students make up the third largest group of international students after Iran and China. There are about 11,000 Indonesian students pursuing higher education in Malaysia (MOHE 2014). This paper aims to explore the experiences of a group of Indonesian graduate students currently residing in Malaysia in an effort to discover their process of enacting and engaging their Indonesian identity or way of being through daily communication among themselves and with the locals. Through their challenges, issues and strategies for learning, living and adapting in a presumably similar cultural setting, this paper presents an account of their adaptation. And as such, reveal the unpacking of norms and values that constructs their identity as Indonesians.

CHALLENGES IN ADAPTATION

In academic literature, international students are part of the sojourner community. Most sojourner studies tend to focus on the experiences of immigrants, refugees, unskilled workers and the business communities while the experiences of the growing number of international students have been downplayed and in some instances ignored (Hughes, 2004;Latiffah, 2000, 2007). Also, available studies on international students tend to focus on the experiences of students from developing countries with collectivist cultures in developed and individualistic cultures and in particular the United States. However, given the changing economic conditions, political situations and educational opportunities in the late 1980's and more so after September 11, 2001 and the Arab Spring of 2010-2012 have brought more students from developing countries with collectivist cultures to study in more similar cultural environments. It has been assumed theoretically that similarities in the cultural framework between the host culture

and that of the students will allow for a comfortable and more natural adaptation process (Martin & Nakayama, 2013; Zuria Ahmad et al, 2010; Hofstede 1984; Hall, 1964,). Such an assumption fails to acknowledge the diversity of cultural patterns within each cultural dimension and the uniqueness of each group's experiences.

Adaptation is the term that encompasses culture shock, assimilation, adjustment, acculturation, integration and coping (Kim, 2008) It is a complex and dynamic process that is part of intercultural interactions. The adaptation experience which is a transitional condition whereby change and difference is inevitable for the sojourners. Mansell (1981) identifies four emotional and affective states that sojourners experience to some degree or other. These states include feelings of alienation, marginality, acculturation and duality. The results of a number of studies have shown that, sojourn is a new living experience often involving observation, participation and overt instructions. It is undeniably affected by a number of variables including interpersonal relationships and living conditions. It has been shown that having close interpersonal relations with the local community contribute to the creation of positive attitudes toward that country. In addition, the local community's efforts at intercultural contact have a significant effect on whether or not the sojourner has a meaningful, uneventful or unsuccessful intercultural experience. Also, the sojourner's motives prior to arrival in the foreign country can sometimes result in a self-fulfilling aim (Williams, C.T,2011; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006; Kim 2001; Berry, 1997).

Subsequent studies revealed that the anxieties associated with immersing oneself in the social environment of the local culture led many sojourners to form enclaves of fellow nationals that largely determined their living arrangements, friendship patterns, and organisational affiliations. Such enclaves allowed the sojourner to re-establish primary group relations and maintain familiar, traditional values, and belief systems while minimizing psychological and behavioural adaptation. A protective function was served whereby psychological security, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging were provided while anxiety, feelings of powerlessness and social stresses were reduced (Nasirudeen et. al.2014; Mastor et al, 2010))

Such enclaves also serve as reference groups where the new environment is discussed, compared, and interpreted. In some instances inaccurate pre-arrival perceptions and rigid cultural patterns are maintained and conformed to as a result of restrictive in-group cultural patterns. Despite the acknowledgment by researchers of the benefits of such enclaves, the majority of them also felt that restrictive social interaction with the local nationals led to superficial encounters that were self-defeating in the long run. These interactions inhibited learning the language, values, and customs of the new culture and could reinforce a sense of alienation (Melly & Latiffah, 2011; Bonazzo & Wong, 2006; Befus, 1988; Chen and Starosta, 1998; Nishida, 1985).

Findings in several studies often made a reference to "cultural distance" and suggested that the greater the similarity between the home and host culture, the greater the likelihood of feelings of acceptance, positive attitude and close interpersonal relations with nationals of the host country. Significant cultural differences between the sojourner's own country and the host country subsequently resulted in culture shock and the sojourner's perception of these differences were pertinent to effective cross-cultural communication (Knutson et al, 2003; McEnergy & DesHarnais; 1990; Brein & David, 1971; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963).

Results from previous studies suggest that attitudes toward the host country appear to change over time in a U-curve pattern. This pattern consists of initial excitement, followed by more critical attitudes toward the host nation, that change to more positive attitudes and finally re-appreciation before returning home. It was also found that an inverted U-shape curve is more typical of sojourners' coming from less developed countries. This is due to their inability to adjust to the drastic changes in material comforts and facilities encountered in the initial phase that often left these sojourners with a feeling of inadequacy. However, this inadequacy was replaced with heightened expectations once they integrated those changes into their everyday lives. Finally, there is a regression or less enthusiastic phase created by the impending return to a social environment that may lack the material comforts or that is resistant to their newly acquired living habits (Abdul Latiff et al, 2014 ; Latiffah, 2000; Surdam & Collins, 1995; Deutsch & Won, 1963; Oberg, 1960; Trifonovitch, 1977).

As for sojourners from developed countries, Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963), Surdam and Collins (1995) and Trifonovitch (1977) took into account the period of readjustment after returning home and proposed an extension of the U-curve into a W-curve. Their curve suggested that the sojourner's feelings and attitudes regain strength upon arrival home. However, the U-curve and the W-curve have not been observed consistently in empirical studies. There are also marked differences in the time parameters of the curve, thus making it a less useful tool for describing sojourner adaptation (Abdul Latiff et al, 2014; Kim, 1989).

Adler (1975, 1987) viewed the adjustment of the sojourner as a transitional experience that reflected "a movement from a state of low self and cultural awareness to high self and cultural awareness" (p.15). Adler described five phases of encompassing the progressive changes in identity and experiential learning. The contact phase is characterized by excitement and euphoria during which the individual views the new environment ethnocentrically, is more attuned to cultural similarities and perceptually deselected cultural differences. The disintegration phase is marked by tension, confusion, alienation, depression, and withdrawal-during which cultural differences become increasingly noticeable, and the ability to predict outcomes of interpersonal encounters is deflated. The reintegration phase is characterized by a strong rejection of the second culture, defensive projection of personal difficulties, limitation of relationships to fellow

nationals and an existential choice to regress to earlier phases or to move closer to resolution and personal growth. Increasing sensitivity, skill and understanding of the prevailing culture marks the autonomy stage, and perhaps a feeling of overestimated expertise. A cherishing of cultural differences and relativism with behaviour that is expressive, creative, mutually trusting and sensitive marks a final independence stage. Most important is the increased self-cultural awareness that enables the individual to undergo further life transitions and to discover additional ways to explore human diversity. Adler's five phases of adaptation offers a schema to understand a sojourner's adaptation process. However, it is a general schema that failed to take into account the various categories of sojourners, their diverse background details, goals and experiences that may or may not describe their adaptation process according to the listed five phases (Chong & Amli, 2013).

As for sojourners and identities, Giddens (1991) described identity as a reflective process that is constantly reordered against the backdrop of everyday experiences and the tendencies of modern institutions. Hall (1996) suggested that "identities are about the using of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we come from". So much as what we might become, how we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (p.4)

Meanwhile, Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of communities of practice is useful as the extent to which individuals participate in communities of practice and the quality of that participation can affect their identity development. However as Kim (1995, 2001) noted that in some cases, cultural differences are tolerated within a society but in some countries the sojourner is forced to adapt or change to fit into the dominant culture which makes the enactment of their national identities problematic.

INDONESIAN SOJOURNERS: METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The analysis presented here is data gathered in an on-going study of various cultural groups of international students in Malaysia. The methodological framework for this study consisted of 6 focus group interviews with 30 Indonesian graduate students. The students both male and female were between the ages of 23 and 35 and are currently studying in four local Universities. All the graduate students are Javanese and they belong to the predominant ethnic group in Indonesia. They came from small towns in Sumatra and Java.

In this study, sojourn is rendered as an experience that is situated and interactive. The focus group discussions and subsequent follow-up interviews provided a closer look into the lived experiences of these group of sojourner students. Through this method the researcher was able to identify and make connections between the array of situated acts that make up each sojourn experience. The aim of this research was thus not to test hypotheses or to collect statistical data

about the international students but to elicit and to compile the minuscule details in the episodes of the sojourner's everyday life that would reveal the richness, diversity and profoundness of a sojourn. The discussions in the focus groups and subsequent interviews allowed the informants to narrate and to unpack the meanings of their lived experiences in their own words.

The focus group discussions were guided by thematic questions such as the following: how do the sojourners (re)create their daily episodes in the host culture? What are the initial emotions that enmeshed the early patterns of living? Does the company of others from their homeland allow for an easier re-enactment of their Indonesian selves? How do they communicate that they are Indonesian among locals (Malays) who share physical similarities? Does prior sojourn experiences contribute towards better adaptability? Do similarities or perception of similarities in cultural patterns allow for a more ready adaptation and minimize culture shock? These questions provided the focus for this study.

COMMUNICATION OF IDENTITIES: THE ANALYSIS

Cronen and Pearce's (1992) Theory of Coordinated Management of Meaning with its nested hierarchies of lived and told stories in the form of episodes of everyday acts, relationships, autobiographies and cultural patterns was the theoretical framework as well as the scheme of analysis.

In this scheme of analysis, episode refers to the context of everyday acts. Relationship organise the relational orientations, authority and positional role behaviour. It is the story that is implicit and makes the collective "we" in a communication episode. Autobiography looks at the conceptions of individuality, age, gender and activities. They represent the stories that a person knows about himself/herself that was a consequent of interaction with others. Lastly, the cultural patterns are the broad patterns of social order and the relationship of people to that order. They obligate, legitimise and prefigure certain ways of doing and acting in various situations for a group of people. The analysis of focus group discussions are presented according to the themes of episodes, relationships, autobiographies and cultural patterns.

Episode

Early experiences

In these episodes that make up their accounts of early experiences all of the informants mentioned that they had prior information on Malaysia. Being good students, the informants had prepared for their study in Malaysia. They had enquired about living and studying in Malaysia from friends and also from the Internet. They were in their words "*bersedia*" or "*ready*". In other words they knew enough about life in Malaysia that made them feel confident.

"a developed rich country"

"Islamic community just like us"

“ a country that is better developed than Indonesia ”

“education system is cheap and structure the same”

“ways of living similar life...”

“similar to Indonesia but stable with plenty of opportunities and easy to live”

However, they found the information to be almost *fully correct except for some things... ”*. These unexpected *things* included the difficulty in the Malay language which although appeared similar to Indonesian is actually very different. This is true of the academic language. This was the beginning of unexpected difficulties and a realization that they *“are no longer in their homeland...”*

“way of doing daily things are different and so I have difficulties”

“can’t understand where and what to do academic matters in the beginning”

“ its hard to lose my cultural posture when they tell me to speak their way”

“ Bahasa Melayu is the standard language expected of us be it written or spoken”

“ language and customs were problems before”

“read about it and learned from others who have been here but still face problems with locals here”

“ stressful and tense situation and make me anxious”

In narrating their early experiences the Indonesian graduate students noted that they had entered the local community with an initial sense of commonality with the Malay population through the sharing of a similar Malay language but their early encounters revealed a diverse communication pattern. The informants remarked that their initial encounters brought dismay to them for they found difficulty in pursuing conversations. A sense of alienation soon developed as they were unable to move the conversational topics away from the usual question and answer routine as to their place of origin and subject of interest. The locals especially the Malays for whom they had identified themselves with spoke Malay with a mix of English almost all the time or they would insert local slangs and dialect words and pronunciation that make no sense to them. The Malays are *“so assertive and rude for they disregard our loss of the conversation flow”*. *“We are expected to follow them and this is new to us for are proud of who we are and at home this is how we speak...”*

Here was the beginning of a sense of loss of national identity when they had to change their way of speaking. Not just in the words and pronunciation but also in topics and posture. In Indonesia, everybody spoke the Bahasa Indonesia the national language regardless of their ethnicity. In all daily conversation and governmental dealings the Indonesian Malay language is the lingua franca. The national philosophy that held them united is "*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*" which means that although they may originally speak a different mother tongue and are of differing ethnicities they are still united as one. The common national language, use of Indonesian names and sharing of cultural patterns are ways that have kept them together as one cultural group with one identity: Indonesians.

Since the informants are all graduate students it is expected that they should experience a change in the education format. Many of the Indonesian students remarked that the facilities were not as they had expected. They complained of the lack of coordination between the administrative and academic units at the various Universities. Hence, they were pushed from one unit to the other and often times back again without their problems solved at all. All the informants admitted that to a great extent their initial frustration and anxiety were related to their slow understanding of the way academic life is carried out here. There appeared to be too many things that they had to learn, including, how lectures, assignments, classes, social interaction with peers and academic staff are conducted and even how to move to and from the University.

Episode

After two years

The informants, both young men and women mentioned that after being in Malaysia for almost two years they realised that the similarities in cultural patterns were superficial and that the differences between them and the locals were far greater than anticipated". The local community have shown subtle discrimination or revealed an awareness that they are "*Indons*". A term that they find to be condescending and without respect for them. This word "*Indon*" was originally used by the Dutch colonialists and it was a derogatory term that liken an Indonesian to a dog. It was an insulting word used to refer to an Indonesian. And here today, the Malays whom they regard as their "*saudara dan adik kecil*" are using this insulting word to describe them.

"I have often complained about this term but nobody cares"

"...even their media here used it in referring to our people"

"perhaps its because they have no respect for us since they feel we are beggars in their rich country"

"...but do you know that it is you people who really need us to build your country?"

“they lump all of us together, the students, the engineers, the labourers and the illegals. They don’t see us as individuals just those mengemis Indons!”

In the local night market where they frequent purchasing for food and other essentials they found that they local community appeared to make a distinction between these groups of foreigners.

“I think its because we look just like Malays but speak rather stronger”

“ some know we are students PhD but they still treat us like illegal labourers!”

“ we like the fact that we can blend in”

“of course you can tell we are Indonesians by the way we speak and also dressing at times”

“I noticed people here stare at the Africans, Arabs or even the Westerners but not at us. With us they look scared like we are about to rob and kill them!”

“I think its because of the negative media coverage of crimes committed by our people but what about the other nationals? They too do crimes. Even Malays”

“...me and my friend we mix around a lot with other Malays and we have similar activities but we know that though we look alike we different. It is the way we think of our future and our plans in life. Also our values”

It seemed that their eager integration into the Malaysian community and in particular the Malays has not been well received by the host community. As such, they tend to retreat to their enclaves of Indonesians. However, since they can adapt readily to daily ways of living, norms and routines they appeared to have assimilated into the local communities. Yet, on a more deeper level they remained apart residing within their enclaves with Indonesia in their hearts and minds.

Relationship

The Indonesian graduate students kept close contact with their families and friends in Indonesia either through phone calls, sms, whatsapp, facebook or e-mail. They also joined the local Indonesian student association and were introduced to other Indonesian nationals residing in Malaysia. These Indonesian nationals were either professionals in multinational corporations, conducting business or

workers. Although they found it easy to make friends with other Malay students they tend to keep company with other Indonesians. They are also part of the larger international student community at their Universities.

" have no problems making friends when I got here as people are friendly"

"I am a Muslim so I met new friends at the mosque"

"Being a Indonesian Muslim I have many Malay friends and they welcome me although I cannot speak in the local Malay well"

" in close touch with family and friends in Riau and it helps me to feel comfortable being here"

"talking to my friends at home makes me feel not so homesick"

This group of Indonesian graduate students are typical of international students who are in frequent contact with their families and friends in their native country. These continued relationship either through phone calls, messaging or email helped them to adjust and to overcome initial feelings of displacement and loss of familiar routines such as conversations with close ones. Lately, sending pictures through instagram has become a popular past time of these students. Evidently, these continued close contact with old ties in their native country have not impeded the development of new relationships in their local environment. Although these students are in close contact with other Indonesian nationals through cultural and social associations many have ventured to develop a fair network of acquaintances among the Malaysians as well as other foreigners, *"..just as teman biasa not akrab..."*

Autobiography

"although many people here have mistaken me for a Malay when I talk they know I am Indonesian by my style. I think we are more polite than Malaysians especially the Chinese"

" I let people know that I am Indonesian because I am Christian and I don't want them to think I am Malay"

"I feel like an Indonesian person when I am speaking the language, talk with friends at home or just be with other Indonesians"

"My name makes me feel Indonesian although I am Muslim and have same religion with Malays"

“ in trying to learn to live like people here...it creates problem for me to be my Indonesian self. Even my friends say I am Malay dipped.

“I am Indonesian but I just do my academic interactions in the Malay way just so that I get along better with the Professors. Have to survive why resist their ways.”

“I know that I am Indonesian when I am with other Malaysians, hard to say but in the style, thinking and values of life”

Although these informants have adapted well into the Malaysian community either at their Universities or in their local neighbourhood, they always knew that they are not Malays what more Malaysians whenever they are in interaction with other Indonesians or with Malaysians. The sense of identification as an Indonesian is commonly felt by the informants in the familiarity of the Indonesian language, customs, reference to events, rituals, personalities common among the Indonesians.

Cultural patterns

Although these informants are young that is between the ages of 23 and 35 years of age they are able to practice the Indonesian daily norms and rituals as well as all religious practices in their homes. It is not just in the preparation of meals but more so in the daily social customs. Such as in the manner dinner is organised for friends and celebration of religious and cultural events. It is also not problematic to continue their cultural practices and activities since objects, essential food ingredients and places of tradition can be found readily in Malaysia.

“easy to live here since I can eat the same food and pray in any mosque”

“Malaysia is not much different than Indonesia maybe a little expensive only..”

“our values and customs are generally similar although different if you get into details so not difficult...”

“ I am a Muslim and my Malay friends make me comfortable in the fasting month”

“...Orang Melayu let us sell our food and live in our kelompok...”

Due to the similarities in the cultural patterns of both Indonesia and Malaysia these informants found it easy to continue their cultural practices here though at times the Malays have *“looked at them suspiciously”*. However they do not feel odd or that their cultural ways have been disrupted since there are Malaysians who are of Javanese descent. Some of the rituals are similar.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Kastroyono 2002 stated that "identities are not commodities and therefore difficult to negotiate" (p.4). It is inevitable due to the cultural norms in Malaysia that the Indonesians encountered some constraints in being "Indonesian" or in other words in their cultural identity development. However, the narratives in the study revealed that although these Indonesian graduate students faced difficulty with the locals who attributed negative identity traits to all Indonesians, they still enacted and constructed their cultural identity in all interactions. This is due to a great and deep sense of pride among Indonesians in general. They always remembered and relied on their ancient cultural heritage as being the oldest and well-established culture compared to any other groups in this region. Therefore Litowitz's (1993) claims that sojourners who are marginalized often passively identify with the host society and accept the identities that are negatively attributed to them are not true in this case. The findings here revealed that these sojourners did not conform but instead did whatever is possible to negate the overbearing local conformist ways and strive to maintained their "Indonesianess". They responded and acted in their social worlds with an Indonesian consciousness that brings out the fact that they are different than the Malays.

As it is, all interactions involving the "other" will create both anxiety and uncertainty. Anxiety is an affective process that creates physical strain and discomfort while uncertainty is occurs when there is a lack or doubt of what to do cognitively (Zuria et al, 2010; Gudykunst and Hammer, 1988). In this study, the Indonesian informants interviewed experienced varying forms of culture shock whether it is related to language, role, transition, culture fatigue, education, or culture distance (Guo and Starosta, 1998).

Hofstede (1984) assumed some commonalities between the traits of cultures that he had categorized as collectivist and similarly, Hall (1976) assumed similar patterns in cultures characterized as high-context. Admittedly, these taxonomies allow for an easier grouping of cultures according to various traits and patterns. Nevertheless, one cannot assume that the patterns of interaction between persons from these cultures are alike or that interactions between persons from within these cultural groupings are easier. There may be resemblances or recurring patterns but there is still diversity within each grouping.

In addition, the Indonesian groups under study experienced forms of culture shock that included language, education, role, transition and culture fatigue. This finding indicates that sojourners from cultures with similar patterns will still experience culture shock for this phenomenon has to do with more than just cultural change. The shift in culture is further affected by changes in landforms, climatic conditions and even political and economic situations and most importantly the attitude of the local or host community toward them.

The focus group discussions also revealed that the graduate students although able to interact with other locals especially the Malays preferred to reside in

enclaves that are comprised of people from their country. These enclaves gave them a sense of support and solidarity, and provided a reference point for their lived experiences with the locals. Inasmuch as these enclaves protected them and allowed them to affirm their identity as Indonesians of Javanese heritage the enclaves also prevented them from pursuing better relationships with the locals especially the Malays.

As Chen (2012) aptly pointed out that there is an increasing role of the new media especially social media which has been found to have a significant impact on the adaptation of sojourners. In the case of these Indonesian graduate students, social media especially sms, whatsapp and lately instagram has become a factor that facilitates their adaptation through constant and affordable contact with their families in Java and Sumatra.

CONCLUSION

It is in the communicative act of daily living and interactions that identities are constantly being shaped. As sojourners the process of intercultural adaptation is a transitional condition encountered by sojourners in the host culture. This experience is one that moves on a continuum from distress and incompatibility to acceptability and even transformation and acculturation. Life as an international student in a new cultural environment offers the individual student sojourner limitless possibilities that although stressful at times can be exhilarating and ultimately rewarding. The reward is often not just an academic degree but more so in the form of living experiences and lasting human relationships. Thus, in the adaptation process the Indonesian graduate student sojourners learn to develop and affirm their identities in daily communication with others. Here is also the moment when the enactment of one's cultural identity allows a person to deal, learn to cope and reconcile the differences so as to create meaningful everyday practices that continues to affirm his/her identity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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