

The Narrative of Identity in the Coverage of Aceh's Flag

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Abstract After the governor of Aceh signed the Bylaw no 3/2013 on Aceh's flag and symbol, the dispute between the local government of Aceh and the government of Indonesia over the adoption of the former separatist group's flag as the provincial flag erupted. Unlike other studies investigating the way media frame the dispute, the study aims to examine how *Serambi Indonesia*, the most prominent newspapers in Aceh, used symbolic language in the Aceh's flag coverage to give meaning to a collective identity within Acehnese society as a flag is regarded as an identity symbol. The sample of news articles was gathered from <http://aceh.tribunnews.com> within the period from December 2012 to May 2013. The total of 17 news articles was analysed with Gamson and Modigliani's framing devices. Findings reveal that *Serambi Indonesia* delivered a conciliatory representation of Acehnese political identity by using flag metaphors, nationalist exemplars, middle ground catchphrases, and ethnocentric depictions.

Keywords: Media Representation, Identity, Local Newspapers, Framing, Aceh.

INTRODUCTION

Aceh has a long history of the independence movement. The separatist insurgency in Aceh led by The Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM) had been fighting for Aceh independence from Indonesia for about 30 years. The struggle for independence ended with the signing of the Helsinki MoU (Barron & Burke, 2008, p. 5), authorizing 'self-government' for Aceh within the Indonesian state.

The Helsinki MoU has enacted special authority for Aceh to have self-government within the Indonesian state, guaranteed by the 2006 Law on the Governing of Aceh. Also, the agreement has stipulated that Aceh has the right to have its own legislation and by-laws (*Qanun*), to establish Aceh-based political parties and a monarch institution (*Wali Nanggroe*), and to use regional symbols, including a flag, crest, and hymn (MoU, 2005). Such privileges are not afforded to other provinces in Indonesia. However, the privileges thus could relate to the polemic of dual sovereignty between Aceh administration as a local government and Indonesian Government as the national government of Aceh.

The polemic of dual sovereignty was obviously manifested in the 2012-2017 Acehnese government under former separatist group leaders, Zaini Abdullah and Muzakkir Manaf, who were sworn in 25th June 2012. They contested the 2012 governor election with the strong support of the local party, the Aceh Party, which is the political manifestation of the former separatist group after the Helsinki MoU. Moreover, the Aceh Party had 33 seats from a total 69 seats available in the Aceh Parliament, as it won the 2009 parliamentary election. This means that the executive and legislative branches of the provincial government in the period of time were led by the former separatists.

The first controversy erupted when the governor of Aceh signed the 2013 Bylaw on Aceh's flag and symbol enacting the use of the GAM flag as the provincial flag of Aceh. The local government of Aceh on one side and the government of Indonesia on the other side were contesting the adoption of the GAM flag as the provincial flag of Aceh. The central government warned the Aceh administration

over the adoption of GAM flag as it violates a law banning separatist symbols. Conversely, the Aceh administration refused to change the flag as it cannot be regarded as the separatist flag since the signing of the 2005 peace agreement between GAM and the Indonesian government in Helsinki.

A flag is commonly perceived as a symbol of identity of a particular nation (Pål Kolstø, 2006; Bornman, 2006; Elgenius, 2011). Thereby the issue coverage surrounding the current Aceh flag could be asserted as having clear-cut identity issues in relation to Indonesian state. The coverage of the 'provincial flag of Aceh' was currently predominant in local media in Aceh, as well as in Indonesian national media. The previous study has documented that the most significant theme was the dispute over the official flag of Aceh which accounted for 63% of the overall news coverage in local newspapers, *Serambi Indonesia*, since the end of March 2013 to May 2013 (Nurrahmi, 2013). The coverage is often about the dispute over the adoption of the GAM flag as the provincial flag.

According to Schneeberger (2009, p. 87), media representation delivers a narrative of identity which defines the boundaries of one identity to another (Schneeberger, 2009, p. 87); in this context: Acehnese and Indonesian identities. The representation of a particular group of people delivers a narrative of identity which is surrounded by symbolic codes in opposition to other identities. It then provides audiences with the symbolic codes for distinguishing between self and other (Schlesinger, 2003, cited in Schneeberger, 2009, p. 87). It can be concluded that media takes part in the identity formation process through the representation of the mediated notion of difference. Thus, media representation is influential in the shaping of our perception of self and others.

In particular, local newspapers possess the potential to set agendas within local communities as they are specifically directed towards their own regions. Local newspapers are implicated in the construction of local identity (Richardson et al., 2008). Anderson (2006) foregrounds the significance of

the print technologies as the creator of homogenous national identities. Anderson (2006) proposes the idea that specifically refers to the role of newspapers in connecting citizens through the ritual of reading newspapers to form what Anderson (2006) defines as an 'imagined community'. A nation's capacity to create and sustain their imagined communities is made possible by a number of processes, one of the most important being media and mass communication. The press enables people to imagine they belong to the same national community simultaneously. Anderson (2006) emphasizes that the ritual of reading newspapers has made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves and to relate themselves to others. When all fellow members in a particular geographic area are performing the same ritual of reading newspapers, it allows the communion being imagined in the minds of readers.

Likewise, using the concept of banal nationalism, Billig extends the idea of the newspaper as a vehicle for the reproduction of imagined communities (1995, pp. 93-127). Banal nationalism refers to the everyday representations of the nation which build an imagined sense of nationalism amongst the inhabitants of a particular territory. Billig (1995) explores how daily rituals and symbols, in the case of newspapers, can help to reproduce feelings of nationalism within various nations. Newspapers, through constantly repeated and subliminal semiotics, shape the ideological notion of 'nation' (Billig, 1995, p. 8). Newspapers reinforce nationhood through the use of implied togetherness, routine rhetoric and the presentation of the nation-centric news, for example, the use of terms 'here' and 'there,' 'us' and 'them', and 'domestic' and 'international' news. The symbolic use of language therefore provokes a strong awareness amongst the members of a nation, of the existence of their nation, and its position in relation to other nations.

In relation to this, Acehnese identity as a collective group identity is, as Barker (2012, p. 253) asserts, intrinsically connected to, and constituted by, their local newspapers. *Serambi Indonesia*. *Serambi Indonesia* is the

most prominent media outlet amongst other local media platforms in Aceh. The newspaper is distributed throughout the Aceh province, read by various parts of Acehnese society and often forms the basis for discussion amongst Acehnese people (Bahari, 2005, p. 3). The circulation of the newspaper is approximately 48,000 per day (Bahri, personal communication, 20 May 2012). Eighty-five percent of the daily copies of the newspaper is bought by permanent subscribers: institutional and individual subscribers (Bahri, personal communication, 20 May 2012). Income from advertisements is high, accounting for approximately 50% of revenue (Din, 2009, p. 127).

With respect to its importance within Acehnese society, *Serambi Indonesia*, through the coverage of the aforementioned issues, inevitably constructs the Acehnese identity in relation to Indonesian identity. *Serambi Indonesia* which is specifically directed towards people living in the Aceh province becomes the agent of the construction of Acehnese group identity through the ritual of reading and the use of language. It shares a common local identity amongst Acehnese within the area of Aceh. The representation of Acehnese in their own local newspaper influences the way Acehnese define themselves in relation to Indonesia and how they see other ethnic groups in Indonesia. Therefore, how *Serambi Indonesia* represents the issue surrounding Aceh provincial flag is a significant topic for further study.

There are few studies on the coverage of Aceh's flag issue. Unlike the study of Fahrimal et al. (2014) analysing the issue in national media, Kompas.com and Antaranews.com, this study conducted the framing analysing on the issue in its own local media, *Serambi Indonesia*. Other similar studies are placed more emphasis on the conflict frame around Aceh's flag dispute on local media using Entman's framing analysis so that they do not provide understanding on the consequences of such representation to political identity of Acehnese (Indaswari, 2014; Mahmuddin, 2015), while this study while the news orientation of this study is on the use of symbolic language to give meaning to a sense of collective identity. Drawing on

Anderson's imagined community, Billig's banal nationalism, along with the concept of media representation and identity, as well as using Gamson and Modigliani's framing, this study attempts to give a more comprehensive approach to show that local newspaper is a means for the reproduction of 'imagined communities' and the delivery of narrative of collective identity through the everyday representations of the nation.

Data was gathered from the digital version of *Serambi Indonesia* (<http://aceh.tribunnews.com/>), a form of electronic archives of the print format within the period from December 2012 to May 2013. Data were analysed using a Gamson and Modigliani's framing analysis. Gamson and Modigliani's framing was employed because it refers to frames as "a set of interpretative packages that give meaning to an issue" (1989, p. 3).

Gamson and Modigliani further differentiate 'framing devices' from 'reasoning devices' (1989, p. 3). Framing devices suggest how to think about the issue, while reasoning devices justify what should be done about it (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). "The framing devices are metaphors, exemplars (i.e., historical examples from which lessons are drawn), catchphrases, depictions, and visual images" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). "The reasoning devices are roots (i.e., a causal analysis), consequences (i.e., a particular type of effect), and appeals to principle (i.e., a set of moral claims" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). Gamson and Modigliani refer to Gamson and Lasch (1983) for a detailed description of each symbolic device (1989, p. 4). Although these symbolic devices enable a comprehensive analysis to unpack news articles, as Kwan and Graves suggest, it is necessary to acknowledge that not all devices can be found within a text and many elements of devices could overlap and intersect one another (2013, pp. 14-15). By taking into account the orientation of this study, Gamson and Modigliani's four framing devices were devised for this framing analysis: metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, and depictions. Visual images were excluded

from the analysis since the sample of news articulated did not contain any images.

Table 1.
The Sample of News Articles for Framing Analysis

No.	Date	Type of Article	Title
1	19/12/2012	Hard News	<i>Bendera bukan milik kelompok</i> (The flag is not for certain groups)
2	25/03/2013	Hard News	<i>Mualem: Aceh tetap di bawah NKRI</i> (Mualem: Aceh remains the Unitary Republic of Indonesia)
3	26/03/2013	Hard News	<i>Bendera Aceh kagetkan Jakarta</i> (Aceh's flag surprises Jakarta)
4	29/03/2013	Hard News	<i>TA Khalid: Bendera marwah perdamaian Aceh</i> (TA Khalid: the flag is the symbol of peace in Aceh)
5	05/04/2013	Hard News	<i>Demo bendera meluas</i> (Flag rally escalates)
6	07/04/2013	Hard News	<i>Wagub bersedia bahas ulang qanun bendera</i> (Vice governor is willing to re-examine the flag by-law)
7	12/04/2013	Hard News	<i>Bintang bulan dalam NKRI</i> (Crescent-Star within the Unitary Republic of Indonesia)
8	15/04/2013	Hard News	<i>Polemik bendera gusarkan perantau Aceh</i> (Flag controversy provokes Acehnese expat)
9	17/04/2013	Hard News	<i>Wiratmadinata: Bendera Aceh bentuk kekerasan budaya</i> (Wiratmadinata: Aceh's flag is a form of cultural violence)
10	22/05/2013	Hard News	<i>Tim Aceh tawarkan opsi referendum</i> (Aceh Team offers a referendum)
11	02/04/2013	Opinion Piece	<i>Mengapa harus bendera 1976?</i> (Why the 1976 flag?)
12	08/04/2013	Opinion Piece	<i>Aceh; Antara Bintang Bulan dan Merah Putih</i> (Aceh; Between Red-White and Crescent-Star)
13	24/12/2012	Editorial	<i>Pilihlah bendera yang minim potensi pergesekan</i> (Pick a flag with a minimum conflict potential)
14	26/03/2013	Editorial	<i>Belum saatnya kibarkan bendera baru Aceh</i> (It is not time to fly new Aceh's flag)
15	15/04/2013	Editorial	<i>Damai harus jadi acuan dialog bendera</i> (Peace should be the key to flag dialogue)
16	06/04/2013	Letter to the Editor	<i>Mengapa takut dengan bendera Aceh?</i> (Why afraid of Aceh's flag?)
17	09/04/2013	Letter to the Editor	<i>Merah Putih vs Bulan Bintang</i> (Red-White vs Crescent-Star)

Source: <http://aceh.tribunnews.com/>

The sample for this study included hard news stories, opinion pieces, editorials, and letters to the editor. The total of 17 news articles (see Table 1) was selected to represent different types of articles.

DISCUSSION

The Flag Metaphor

Gamson and Lasch define metaphors as analogies and symbols depicting the frame that describes an object through a reference to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to the object (1983, p. 4). In this regard, a metaphor always has two parts: "the principal subject that the metaphor is intended to illuminate and the associated subject that the metaphor evokes to enhance our understanding" (Gamson & Lasch, 1983, p. 4). This study documented the use of metaphor in the news coverage of the provincial flag of Aceh.

In brief, the choice of words to describe the provincial flag has been changed according to political circumstances. When the draft by-law on Aceh's flag and coat of arms was still in discussion in the Aceh parliament, there was no use of metaphor to describe the flag, though the proposed flag was already recognized as the GAM flag at that time. Instead, the word 'flag' was used to refer to the proposed flag; it was evident in the news article headlined 'Flag is not for certain groups'.

However, since the local government passed by-law 3/2013 which has allowed the flag used by the former rebels to be the provincial flag, *Serambi Indonesia* explicitly devised the term 'Aceh flag' to describe the flag. This term was first used in the news article headlined 'Aceh flag surprises Jakarta', published a day after the flag by-law passed. Yet, this term was no longer used as the rising controversy over the use of the separatist flag as the provincial flag.

Serambi Indonesia has employed 'crescent and star' to call the flag because of the flag's design bearing the crescent and star image. In this regard, crescent and star could be argued as the metaphor of the Aceh flag in which the crescent and star act as 'the associated subject' that has a

similar characteristic with and intended to signify the Aceh flag as 'the principal subject', as Gamson and Lasch argue (1983, p. 4). Further, crescent and star has second layer meaning for Acehnese as it is well known as a reference to the GAM flag. Similarly, in one opinion piece, another flag metaphor was discovered, namely 'the 1976 flag' in which 1976 denoted the establishment year of GAM. In addition, during the coverage of the Aceh flag, *Serambi Indonesia* also employed the metaphor 'red and white' to mention the Indonesian official flag.

The metaphor 'crescent and star' was first introduced in the editorial 'Pick a flag with minimum conflict potential'. This metaphor was later perpetuated in hard news stories, opinion pieces, and letters to the editor.

In the midst of the dispute over the adoption of the GAM flag as the provincial flag, the use of the flag metaphor 'crescent and star', rather than the Aceh flag or the GAM flag, by *Serambi Indonesia* was regarded as a neutral stance. For the Indonesian Government that rejected the adoption of the GAM flag, the use of the Aceh flag could be confronting, while the use of the metaphor indicated that *Serambi Indonesia* acknowledged the flag as the disputed flag since the Indonesian Government has not yet approved the flag. On the other hand, the use of the term 'the GAM flag' could be offensive for the Aceh administration that has insisted on the claim the flag was no longer the GAM/separatist flag, but the Aceh flag. Hence, by employing such flag metaphor, *Serambi Indonesia* could represent both the positives and negatives surrounding the flag.

Nationalist Exemplars

The second framing device is exemplars. Gamson and Lasch define exemplars as events or historical examples used to exemplify the frame; they are not found either in news stories, in editorials, or in letters to the editor (1983, p. 4). Exemplars were only employed in opinion pieces.

The opinion piece 'Why the 1976 flag?' attempted to argue why Aceh should adopt the GAM flag as the provincial flag through a historical reference to the rebellion period led

by GAM where thousands were killed, as the writer argued, to defend the flag for the sake of Aceh.

“Thousands of lives lost for the flag and efforts to defend it in seeking for justices, prosperities and sovereignty as an independent country in the name of Acehnese.”
(*Serambi Indonesia*, 2 April 2013)

The writer went further by referring to the profile of Hasan Tiro, the founder of GAM as well as the creator of the flag to assert that the acceptance of the 1976 flag as the official flag could be regarded as the commemoration of Hasan Tiro’s merits and sacrifices for Aceh.

Another opinion piece ‘Aceh; between red-and-white and crescent-and-star’ discussed the controversy surrounding the Aceh flag through a citation to the history of Aceh. The writer argued that the Aceh flag was already recognized in the history of Aceh since the Sultanate period.

Even though exemplars used in both opinion pieces were different, they were similar in the sense of using the history of Aceh. As Gamson and Lasch argue that such exemplars aimed to ‘frame the principal subject’, in this regard the current Aceh flag, that the adoption of the GAM flag as the provincial flag was already appropriate and it thus should not be contested (1983, p. 4).

Middle Ground Catchphrases

Gamson and Lasch refer to catchphrases as theme statements, titles, taglines, or slogans that capture the frame’s central message – in short, “attempted summary statement about the principal subject” (1983, p. 5). In this case, opposite to the opinion pieces which used exemplars, news stories, editorials, and letters to the editor preferred to employ catchphrases.

During the coverage of the Aceh flag, *Serambi Indonesia* employed a wide range of catchphrases to illuminate the controversy over the flag. The catchphrase ‘Aceh flag surprises Jakarta’ was intended to capture the tension between the Indonesian Government and Aceh

administration over the adoption of the GAM flag as the Aceh flag. 'Aceh could ask anything from Indonesia, except independence' was another memorable catchphrase to counter dissidence from the Indonesian Government towards the Aceh flag, found in an opinion piece and letter to the editor.

Moreover, *Serambi Indonesia* also used another catchphrase, 'the flag is not for certain groups', to suggest controversy surrounding the flag within Acehnese society. The catchphrase was meant to clarify the assumption that the flag belongs to a particular group, namely GAM.

In contrast, editorials seemed to take a neutral position in this matter. Through the use of the catchphrase 'a flag with a minimum conflict potential' in two editorials, before and after the Aceh administration passed the by-law on the provincial flag and coat of arms, the editorials managed to advise the government of Aceh to select a flag which was more likely to be accepted by the Indonesian Government as well as all parts of Acehnese society. Other catchphrases 'it is not time to fly the Aceh flag' and 'Peace should be the key to flag dialogue' were also used in the editorial after the enactment of the by-law for the similar purpose. In this regard, the editorials were explicitly intended to accommodate the dispute over the flag through the exercise of such catchphrases.

In addition, *Serambi Indonesia* specifically addressed the tension over the flag in connection with Aceh-Indonesia relations through the use of the catchphrase 'Crescent and star within the Unitary Republic of Indonesia' in the title of the news article. Previously, in the news coverage of the inauguration of the Aceh Party, *Serambi Indonesia* implemented such a catchphrase with a slight modification in the title 'Mualem: Aceh remains under the Unitary Republic of Indonesia'.

In the same way, an identical catchphrase was found in the news article 'Flag rally escalates', recorded the statement from the supporters of the flag that 'Crescent and star flag is Acehnese identity within Indonesian state'. Those catchphrases encapsulate the idea that the adoption of the

former separatist flag as the Aceh flag was not meant to build a separate political identity from the Republic of Indonesia.

Ethnocentric Depiction

Gamson and Lasch explain depictions as characterizations of relevant subjects of the frame through 'metaphors or exemplars or simply through some colourful string of modifiers' (1983, p. 5). Depictions were employed across different types of news articles.

Serambi Indonesia repeatedly underlined that the flag was not meant to either replace the Republic's Red-White flag or turn up separatism issues. Instead, the flag was often depicted as a symbol of identity for Acehnese within the Unitary Republic of Indonesia. Correspondingly, the news article 'Vice governor is willing to re-examine the flag by-law' explicitly stated that the flag was intended to distinguish Aceh from other provinces in Indonesia.

Besides, the flag which adopted the GAM flag was depicted as the peace flag since the Helsinki agreement between GAM and the Indonesian Government has brought peace to Aceh. In a similar sense, the flag was portrayed as a spirit of peace implementation to strengthen reconciliation between Aceh and Indonesia because the flag was a political mandate of the Helsinki peace agreement and the law on the Governing of Aceh.

In one of the opinion pieces 'Why the 1976 flag?' the flag was seen as the movement flag in which historical, political, and social values were embedded in it. The flag was a symbol of the struggles and sacrifices for Acehnese. Hence, the flag was viewed as a collective belonging to Acehnese, not only GAM. Similarly, the news article 'Flag is not for certain groups' stated that not only the flag, the provincial emblem and hymn, as well as the institution of Wali Nanggroe were deemed representatives of the whole civilization of Aceh.

In order to frame controversy over the flag within Acehnese society, *Serambi Indonesia* used the depiction of the dispute flag through the use of two flag metaphors, 'Red-White' and 'Crescent-Star'. The depiction of 'Red-White' vis-

à-vis 'Crescent-Star' was obviously stated in the opinion piece 'between Crescent-Star and Red-White' and the letter to the editor entitled 'Red-White versus Crescent-Star'. The juxtaposition of both flags could be misleading since it positioned both flags as mutually exclusive. Yet the Aceh flag was not regarded as a sovereign flag nor meant to replace Indonesia's red-and-white flag.

Besides, Acehnese were regularly depicted as citizen or nation. In this case, citizen and nation were depictions of Acehnese as they were being used as modifiers to broaden the meaning of Acehnese. The use of citizen or nation to call Acehnese left a strong impression that Aceh is an independent country; yet, Aceh remains part of Indonesia.

The Symbolic Identity of Acehnese

The findings of this study reveal that in the construction of Acehnese identity, *Serambi Indonesia* has not constructed a separate Acehnese identity from an Indonesian identity. The newspaper embraces a distinct Acehnese identity, and it further attempts to construct the distinctive identity within the symbolic boundary of Indonesian identity; *Serambi Indonesia* has contributed to the notion of Indonesianised Aceh by using catchphrases which highlight the commitment of the head of Aceh administration that Aceh will remain in the Unitary Republic of Indonesia. Moreover, *Serambi Indonesia*, through the use of catchphrases in editorials, has explicitly endorsed the win-win solution for solving the dispute flag. In terms of metaphors, the use of crescent-star signifies that the paper attempts to acknowledge that the Aceh flag could not be considered as the official Aceh flag before approval from the Indonesian Government as required in the centre-local relations.

The findings also reveal the use of exemplars and depictions which signify ethnocentrism to the extent that they convey the idea that Aceh is more privileged from other provinces in Indonesia and thus it deserves special treatment from the Indonesian Government. These ethnocentric depictions and exemplars are mostly found in opinion pieces

and letters to the editor, which are written by members of society, not from the editorial staff of the paper. However, opinion pieces and letters to the editor are not published until proceeding through *Serambi Indonesia*'s editorial gatekeeping process. Hence, it could be argued that the selection of opinion pieces and letters to the editor should be aligned with the editorial position.

Such tendency of *Serambi Indonesia* to frame a distinctive Acehnese identity within the Indonesian state may result from several possible factors: ownership structure and the orientation of the news organization. Firstly, this newspaper is partly-owned by the Kompas Gramedia Group, one of the largest media groups in Indonesia. Moreover, as Bahari argues *Serambi Indonesia* has survived in the unprofitable media industry in Aceh as it enjoys the financial support of its owner (2005, p. 3). In this case, Kompas could exert more control towards *Serambi Indonesia* through financial influence. In regards to stories related to national security issues, such as separatism, national media networks, including Kompas Gramedia Group, might experience political pressure to clearly state their position—which is supposed to be on the Indonesian Government's side. As part of the national media network, *Serambi Indonesia* may have been imposed to produce news coverage supporting Indonesian nationalism. Therefore, it is less likely to see this newspaper supporting separatism issues.

Secondly, according to Bahari, the long history of violent conflict made it hard for media to survive (2005, p. 3). *Serambi Indonesia* which is the only survivor in the local newspaper industry may have suffered the negative effects of violent conflict to its own media business. In this regard, it may have its own financial interests for sustainable peace in Aceh, hence a conducive atmosphere for the media industry in Aceh is likely to continue. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that *Serambi Indonesia* stands for peace which is evident in the title of two editorials: 'Pick a flag with a minimum conflict potential' and 'Peace should be the key to flag dialogue'. In addition, as this is the only local

newspaper whose revenue relies on circulation and local advertising, *Serambi Indonesia* may be more audience-orientated adjusting its view of the political situation in Aceh to coincide with its core readership demographic. Considering the fact that Aceh is in the stage of conflict reconciliation with the Indonesian Government, the paper tends to act as an advocate to its readers by performing a sort of middle ground representation of Aceh.

The complex interplay between both factors may result in this construction of Acehnese identity. *Serambi Indonesia* preserves ethnic chauvinism, on one side, but stands against separatism issues, on the other side. In other words, the distinctive cultural identity of Acehnese is developed and maintained by this newspaper as long as it does not show the intention of seceding from Indonesia. In doing so, this media outlet contributes simultaneously to the integration and dislocation of Acehnese within the Indonesian community. In brief, *Serambi Indonesia* has delivered identity narratives distinctly Acehnese within the Indonesian state.

Although such construction of identity seems somewhat paradoxical, it is in accordance to Indonesia's motto 'Unity in Diversity', meaning that different identities are welcomed provided that they remain under the Unitary Republic of Indonesia. In a vast ethnically and culturally diverse country such as Indonesia, maintaining and developing a cultural identity is acceptable, yet to ignite segregation from Indonesia is taken very seriously indeed as it will cause an unpleasant atmosphere in the central government as well as other areas of Indonesia.

These empirical results have confirmed theoretical considerations that newspapers contribute to the construction of collective identity to form what Anderson (2006) has called 'imagined community' through the representation of nation-state. In this case, *Serambi Indonesia* has contributed to the reproduction of national consciousness through symbol and discourse of Aceh and Indonesia in the matter of Aceh's provincial flag. With the symbolic use of language, as Billig (1995) argues, *Serambi*

Indonesia provokes a strong awareness amongst the members of a nation of the existence of Aceh as a nation, and its position in relation to Indonesia. It then delivers a strong impression that Aceh is a state in the Unitary Republic of Indonesia.

Acehnese identity as a collective group identity is, as Barker asserts, "intrinsically connected to, and constituted by, forms of communication" (2012, p. 253). Thus, it can be asserted that *Serambi Indonesia*, which is specifically directed towards people living in the Aceh province, becomes the agent of the construction of Acehnese group identity through the ritual of reading and the use of language. It delivers a narrative of identity for distinguishing between self and other and shares a common local identity amongst Acehnese within the area of Aceh as Heryanto (2014) argues that media industries have applied a range of strategies to establish the narratives of religious and ethnic identities in the post-New Order era. Therefore, the representation of Acehnese in their own local newspaper influences the way Acehnese define themselves in relation to Indonesia and how they see other ethnic groups in Indonesia.

This study discovered that *Serambi Indonesia* facilitated a conciliatory identity between Acehnese and Indonesian identities through simultaneously highlighting the specialty of Aceh, as well as the idea of peace and the political commitment, to remain in the Unitary Republic of Indonesia. In this regard, the speciality of Aceh which is a source of difference in Aceh-Indonesia relations is not suppressed, but Aceh's political commitment for peacekeeping in Aceh which acts as a source of similarities is maintained. In other words, this study showed that *Serambi Indonesia* went further by acting as a bridge builder for the Acehnese to manage the tension between their Acehnese and Indonesian identities through the overt idea of peace commitment and against separatism.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that *Serambi Indonesia* in the coverage of the issue surrounding Aceh's provincial flag has delivered a conciliatory representation for Acehnese in connection to Indonesia. It overtly legitimates Aceh as an Indonesian region while maintaining the specialty and uniqueness of Aceh in comparison to other provinces of Indonesia. The exclusive representation of Acehnese in relation to Indonesia was evident in the exercise of exemplars and depiction. The exemplars of Aceh history were utilized to exemplify the uniqueness and specialty of Aceh in relation to Indonesia. Moreover, the depiction of the flag and people, in general, indicated the interest of Acehnese to possess a distinctive identity from other provinces in Indonesia. However, such representation was intended to build a separate identity within Indonesia. It was apparent in the metaphors and the catchphrases which were employed to accommodate conflict surrounding the issue of Aceh's provincial flag. Although this representation may be considered the best possible representation to manage the tension between Acehnese and Indonesian identities, the tendency of ethnocentrism found in this paper should be taken with care as well. Such tendency could be the main driver of the construction of a separate political identity from Indonesia unless it is well-managed.

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