

Creole Identity in Postcolonial Indonesia.

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Jacqueline Knörr's *Creole Identity in Postcolonial Indonesia* is a thoroughly insightful consideration of collective identity formation in a contemporary setting. By investigating how various groups and categories are perceived, interpreted and experienced in the bustling capital of Indonesia, she explores the question of how ethnic, local and national identity is constructed through social and cultural interaction.

Knörr's anthropological research is comprised mainly of participatory observations and in-depth interviews and conversations in diverse venues, combined with materials concerning their historical and social context. Its strength lies in her description of the lively and dynamic particularities of collective identity in an urban environment. Her nuanced interrogation of identity consciousness urges scholars in Asian studies and related fields of inquiry to embrace how people in Jakarta describe themselves and navigate identity categories in various and creative ways.

After a relatively brief but inspiring discussion on the term "creole", Knörr puts forward a comparative concept of creole identity, emphasizing its indigenizing and ethnicizing process rather than its hybrid quality. Creolization is commonly associated with Caribbean societies, used to denote dissolution of the existing boundaries and creating mixture, thus getting close to transnationalism. Knörr strongly criticizes these usages as ignoring the historical and social context the term evolved from, and instead stresses the need to draw attention to the new sense of belonging created in the process of creolization, the emergence of a shared identity that could also be heterogeneous and transethnic at the same time.

In the following chapters, she demonstrates how creolization in this sense is taking place in Jakarta, mainly focusing on the ongoing reconstruction of the category "*Betawi*" or "*Orang Betawi*". While "*orang*" means "human being" or "category of human being" in the Indonesian language, the word *Betawi* comes from the Indonesian term for Batavia, the historical designation for Jakarta under the Dutch colonial rule. Knörr unpacks the complicated interaction surrounding *Betawi* in relation to various other existing categories, such as "*Orang Jakarta*" (Jakartan) and "*Orang Indonesia*" (Indonesian).

Historically, *Betawi* emerged as a category to include a mixture of people who were drawn to the city under various circumstances during colonial times. They were heterogeneous in origin, including Chinese merchants and also those from former Portuguese colonies, but mostly slaves and their descendants from all over the archipelago. This resulted in social marginalization which continued even after the Republic of Indonesia declared independence.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a new turn. State sponsorship was provided for the *Betawi* to promote their tradition and culture, in line with the national movement to ascribe to each province one authentic ethnicity in a form suitable for touristic attention. The border between *Betawi* and *Orang Jakarta* is constantly being negotiated, *Betawi* identity in some cases rejected because of negative stereotypes of being poor and uneducated ("I am *Orang Jakarta* but not *Betawi*"), and in other cases providing a transethnic link that makes the inhabitants of the megacity more comfortable about themselves.

The reconfiguration of the *Betawi* category happens both inside and outside the group border. From within, the differences between the three subcategories are strengthened to secure the socio-political status of *Betawi* as a whole. The three subcategories—" *Betawi Kota*" possessing economic and political power, " *Betawi Pinggir*" as masters of Islamic knowledge, and " *Betawi Udik*" as performers of traditional culture—require each other to build and maintain a respectable public image for

Betawi people. In addition, some groups which were until recently not recognized or considered as Betawi are cultivating closer ties with the category. The Tugu people in northeastern Jakarta, for a long time not regarded as Betawi because of their Christianity, are now beginning to place their culture as part of Jakarta's heterogeneous tradition.

And the most controversial and effective element that relates to the Betawi in manifold ways is the Indonesian Chinese population. The *Peranakan*, in particular, people of Chinese origin to a large degree Indonesianized in language, religion and other dimensions, are in an ambiguous position. The politically active Betawi are eager to incorporate them as another version of Jakarta's cultural variation, and some Peranakan actually choose to convert from Buddhists to Christians to join the Betawi. In other cases they prefer to call themselves Jakarta Asli, genuine Jakartans, resisting the ethnic implication altogether.

This heterogeneous and transethnic characteristic allows the Betawi also to function in close connection with "Orang Indonesia". Perfectly compatible with the national motto "unity in diversity", the Betawi are now enjoying growing significance in the national context as a miniature of the Indonesian population. Particularly in the campaign before the elections for the governor of Jakarta in 2002 and 2007, it was widely debated whether the governor of Jakarta should be a Betawi or not, and what it meant to be a Betawi in the first place.

The interest here may be more on connecting the Indonesian case study to other localities, as already done in other works by the same author, but one is also reminded of other categories negotiated within Indonesia. If criticism directed toward Javanization lies behind the promotion of the Betawi in Jakartan culture and politics, eventually pushing the Betawi to become the symbol of national identity, it would gradually become difficult to reject the shared characteristics the Jakarta locality carries with it as the historical center of Javanization. As territorial consciousness lies at the heart of Betawi identity, the anti-Jakarta sentiment that works against the Betawi embodying national identity might also be worthy of attention.

Another aspect that could have been explored in greater detail is the advantage of the term "creole identity" as an analytical tool, which is already mentioned by Jenkins¹ in response to Knörr's related article preceding this book.² Although the significance of the term "creole identity" as an analytical tool is argued in the introductory chapter, there is still scope left to receive the impression that it has proximity with the term "ethnicity". The indigenization and ethnicization feature, or the creation of a new identity through integration and differentiation, seems to play an important role in ethnic identity politics, which have been under debate. More discussion on the use of creole terminology would have been theoretically illuminating, although in order to understand and analyze social and cultural interaction, the Jakartan case is a felicitous and compelling example.

Overall, this work provides a nuanced and convincing account of what is happening in Indonesia and many other parts of the world. Scholars and students of identity formation, ethnicity, postcolonialism, and of course all those interested in Indonesia will greatly benefit from reading this engaging book.

1 Richard Jenkins, "Comments," *Current Anthropology* 51:6 (2010), pp. 750–51.

2 Jacqueline Knörr, "Contemporary Creoleness, or: The World in Pidginization?," *Current Anthropology* 51:6 (2010), pp. 731–59.