

The Construction of Cultural Identity in Local Television Station's Programs in Indonesia

Yuyun W.I Surya *

The implementation of regional autonomy since 2004 has brought the recognition of local diversity in Indonesia. Within this policy, local broadcast television stations flourished with 90% local contents. They are the answer of a long destroyed traditional wisdom and cultural identity of local society under the New Order regime. Barker (2000) argues television is the source of the construction of local identity and cultural competence.

This study aimed at exploring the construction of cultural identity in Jawa Timur Television (JTV)'s programs. Several programs with local setting, issue and local language were examined through a textual analysis using Ricoeur's translation-interpretation of cultures approach. For Ricoeur, there is no way to understand society except through the interpretation of the expressions of the self-society's actions, symbols, and texts. Further, these texts are coming from traditions that continue to be maintained alive through transmission, translation and interpretation.

It reveals that JTV has constructed "new" cultural identity for East-Javanese. The identity of *Suroboyoan* culture (Surabaya is the capital city of East Java province where JTV is located) has been translated into several symbols such as the use of specific language and the use of particular *kampung* icons as the setting of talk show program (*Cangkru'an*, a Javanese language with Surabaya dialect means hang out) and dubbing Asian serials with Surabaya dialect of Javanese language. JTV thus has transmitted, translated and interpreted the face of Surabaya by developing what Ricoeur said as dynamic narrative identity: an intercultural exchange shown through crisscrossing influences—between traditional, transitional and modern society.

Keywords: cultural identity, interpretation of culture

The Rise of Local Televisions in Indonesia

The history of television in Indonesia is the history of contestation among political power, economic investments and professional interests (Sudibyo, 2004: 96). It started when *Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI)* owned by the government was established in 1962, aimed at supporting nation's existence and identity. TVRI was born to support Asian Games event held in Indonesia as well as to develop country's image-building internationally. It also intended to boost technology competitiveness as previously there was only Japan who embraces television technology since 1950s. In 1953, the

* Lecturer in Communications Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Airlangga University
INDONESIA

government decided to own this technology (Sen, 2000). A decision that was supported by US, England, Germany and Japan as they intended in providing the hardware.

Throughout the New Order, TVRI remained expressly geared to the promotion of national integration, encapsulated in the motto: TVRI *menjalin persatuan dan kesatuan* (weaves together our unity and the union). Since its existence, TVRI played a central role in each New Order's political communication activities. Beyond its function as the history-documentation medium, TVRI became tools of propaganda (Kitley, 2001). It monopolises information and perpetuates government's interests.

TVRI domination comes to an end when in 1988, *Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI)* established as the first private television. Began to operate as pay-television in Jakarta, RCTI got the permit to broadcast free to air in 1990. Respectively, private television mushroomed, such as *Surya Citra Televisi (SCTV)*, *Televisi Pendidikan Indonesi (TPI)*, *Andalas Televisi (ANTV)*, *Indosiar Visual Mandiri (Indosiar)* between 1989 and 1995. Later, there were five other private televisions (MetroTV, Trans TV, Lativi, Global TV and TV7) established. Their existence was said as not only because of a more democratic climate and information openness within the country since reformation era in 1998, but also due to the political access possessed by the owners (Sudibyo, 2004).

This situation, however, do not bring a significant changes in information and entertainment services provided by these television stations, particularly for the audience outside the capital city, Jakarta. They offer uniform programs and mostly *Jakarta-minded* ones. It is not only due to the fact that they are all located in Jakarta, but because of their economic orientation which put society as consumers. What have been consumed by audience in Java is similar to them who live in Papua, Kalimantan and Sumatra. Thus, cultural, sociological and economical differences have been ignored for almost three decades. Local cultures and identities have been ignored as the result of the state intervention through its policies and regulations that disregard diversity.

Local broadcast industries in Indonesia developed in line with the emergence of the discourse of decentralisation, regional autonomy, public-owned frequency and broadcast democratization. Decentralisation along with democracy is said as an opportunity to develop a more civilized nation state and an open space for local community to build their own identities (Eko, 2004). Further, the implementation of regional autonomy has brought the recognition of local diversity in Indonesia. This policy is a governmental system restructurisation that considers region's distinctiveness (geographically, economically and culturally). Thus, there has been recognition of local diversity; promote local society to reconstruct their identity. This policy indirectly also supports a more democratic broadcast regulation that has been applied since 2002.

Broadcast Act 2002 (no.32) allows the existence of local television along with public television and community television. Within this regulation, there have been around 65 local television stations spread throughout Indonesia. The existence of local television becomes more significant with the establishment of Indonesian Local TV Association/ATVLI in July 2003. According to ATVLI, these local television stations are said exist to respect pluralism and diverse local wisdom. They are the answer of a long destroyed cultural identity of local society as they accommodate local contents that have been avoided and ignored by private television stations. Local identity that previously only plays as the additional object as the result of the disrespect ness toward diversity of local cultures, becomes primary materials in local televisions.

Interpretation of Culture: Cultural Identity in Local Media

Identity defines as the result of social construction through difference and exclusion in discourses, practices and positions (Hall, 1992). Further Sarup(1996) states that all identities, whether based on class, ethnicity, religion or nation, are constructed in many different ways. It is always constructed in the symbolic/language. Therefore, identity developed through social interaction and communication.

Identity comprises of values, norms and expressive symbols that play as the glue in forming social cohesiveness and solidarity. For local community, identity functions as

dignity and “weapon” to face outer power. Therefore, values, norms and expressive symbols embedded in local identity provide justification for the past, present and future behavior. Local identity is recognized the concepts of and differentiate between indigenous, migrant and foreigner. The formation of local identity is thus developed through contrasting the concept of us and them.

Barker (2000) argues television is the source of the construction of local identity and cultural competence. Television is an arena where the ethnic and national identity formation is of significance. It becomes cultural values doctrine instrument. Local media flourish as the opposite to the dominant and centralized media contents. It provides alternative culture for the society that has been dictated by standardized mainstream media moral and value. It then brings freedom and empowerment from all oppressive structure themes. It gives ideological voices so that audience believed and convinced to act (Ibrahim, 2006). Waltz (2005) concludes this nature of alternative media as the information for action orientation as oppose to the mainstream media’s information for consumption.

It has to be noted that local culture improvement through local media does not mean to put global or national culture through format replication to local media for the sake of profits commodification. Thus, local media need not to follow and translate “the taste of mainstream media” in their own local version. Local media need to find their own identity by exploring local cultures through their local taste.

Paul Ricoeur is one among philosophers who is interested in the question of culture. There is no way to understand society except through the interpretation of the expressions of the self-society’s culture, include actions, symbols, and texts. These are coming from traditions that continue to be maintained alive through transmission, translation and interpretation. For Ricoeur, culture can be best interpreted and understood in terms of “translation”. In its strict sense, translation means the transfer of verbal message from one language to another. To take the term in its broad sense, translation means the interpretation of a significant phenomenon within the same linguistic community. For

Ricoeur, there is nothing absolutely untranslatable. It transfers the meaning from not only one language to another but also from one culture to another culture.

With Ricoeur's idea in mind, it can be said that the existence of local television stations among mainstream/private televisions stations is actually can be best understood as the contestation between media interpretation toward what is and is not local culture. For example, if there are several local television stations in Java, then it will be interested in examining the way they interpret what is and is not Java as well as the way they translate the reality of the local culture into their television local programs.

Among several local television stations in Java that brought up their cultural identity is *Jawa Timur TV (JTV)* owned by Jawa Pos Group. It established in November 2001. With its local content, JTV claims to be "100 % East Java". It aims to be part of the dynamic growth of East Java by promoting local potentials; develop a cultural identity and local fanaticism. Variety types of programs offered to audiences throughout East Java region. From news program, talk show, serials to entertainment programs. JTV promotes its cultural identity through various forms. The use Javanese language with Surabaya dialect in the programs is the salient feature that the audience recognized.

Within the claim and the nature of the television as the ideological and cultural industry, as well as the existence of local televisions among mainstream televisions and their contesting local versus not-local identity, this paper aims to explore the construction of cultural identity in JTV by examining news program, serials and variety show program that use local setting, issue and local language.

100% East Java: Local Identity in JTV

Firstly broadcasted in November 2001, JTV is the 95th companies owned by Jawa Pos Group. It is not a surprise for Jawa Pos Group to establish a local television station. It is the fact that Jawa Pos is the only paper outside the capital to grow into a major media conglomerate by concentrating almost exclusively on provincial market (Sen, 2000). To

date, Jawa Pos has developed a network publication (Jawa Pos News Network/JPNN) throughout Indonesia.

JTV found the way to exist among the tight competition of television industries through its local character. The director of Jawa Pos Media Televisi, Imawan Mashuri states that locality is its identity. It claims to have 90% local contents, based on the fact that almost all of its programs use Javanese language with Surabaya dialect. JTV packages local cultures into self-producing programs. Its mission is that local identity needs to be promoted as it used to be very strong but now it is weak. Locality, thus, becomes the general pattern in developing its business as well as an icon of the station's identity.

The use of Javanese language with Surabaya dialect across many programs tends to be the trademark of JTV. Instead of following the trend of mainstream national media by producing programs such as talent show, gossip show, crime news, JTV tries to maintain its locality by making programs with local faces like *Ludruk* (traditional opera in East Java), *Kenstrung* (traditional music ensemble), *Pojok Kampung* (news program delivered in Surabaya dialect) and *Cangkru'an* (means hang out, a variety show aims to discuss current local issues).

However, the above distinctive feature offered by JTV does not instantly get audience attention. As of May 2005, JTV's rating and market share is considered as insignificant (ranging from 1.5 to 0.5 and 10 to 5 respectively). Audience's reluctance in consuming it is due to fact that their taste and consumption pattern has been constructed by a long tradition of using Indonesian language. Instead of showing social cohesiveness and equality, the use of Javanese language with Surabaya dialect tend to make audience feel discomfort and rude. The use of Indonesian in almost all formal situations seems to make the use of local language less formal and underclass.

When JTV launched variety show *Cangkru'an* and news program *Pojok Kampung* in 2003, there has been a controversy among society in Surabaya. Some argue that these programs are the reflection of the community (particularly in terms of the use of the

language), others think that raising locality does not always mean putting the whole reality into media. These arguments direct to particular notion that is identity. Identity is thus can be interpreted through taste, beliefs, attitude as well as life style. The interpretation of identity can be varied across different social groups.

***Cangkru'an*: A Local Public Sphere**

Literally, *Cangkru'an* means hang out. In its strict sense it is an event where *kampung* dwellers gather and discuss current issues. In a broad sense it is a public sphere where citizens can exchange information, debate and discuss public affairs as well as criticize the superior. It is similar to Habermas' notion of public sphere. Usually carry out by *kampung* dwellers at midnight, between 10 to 12 pm, *cangkru'an* also an arena where several elements of the community gather, ranging from the head of the *kampung* (*pak RW*) to ordinary citizen along with midnight security patrol and youngsters spending their leisure time by playing music instrument. It is an informal occasion aiming at broadening knowledge instead of only gossiping social, economic and political problems.

Assuming that *cangkru'an* is one of the local identities of Surabaya, JTV developed a program with similar name. Further, JTV considers the characters of Surabaya people who dynamic, curious, frank and expressive which suits best with the nature of the program that is interactive. Firstly broadcasted in September 2003, *Cangkru'an* gains good response from the audience. Each time it is broadcasted, there are up to 7 callers joining the discussion.

Local elements can be seen everywhere in the program. Ranging from the language to setting and costumes. The studio is set with cultural icons of Surabaya such as *warung* (foodstall) with traditional food as well as the street vendor, newspapers stands, *kentrung campursari* (East Java traditional music), comedian and *waria* (transsexual). It tries to portray the real situation of the *kampung*, including the use of the old train station building, *Wonokromo*, as the setting. According to the producer, the use of the old building is aimed at reminding the importance of preserving the historical sites as well as criticizing local government who prefer to replace historical sites with typical

metropolitan skyscrapers. It tries to deliver the message that destroying cultural heritage means destroying local identity at the same time. Street and informal vendors are selected as it is considered as unresolved problems in the city.

Of importance is the use of *waria* in the program. According to the Director of JTV, it aims at showing recognition of the existence of this marginal group within the society. Yet, *waria* only plays as the spice of the discussion and refresh the situation as they always make jokes. They appear in a very distinct make ups and costumes. Another distinct costume is also worn by the host. Considering that costume is one of the cultural identities, the host of the program wears a very typical clothes, a head band called *udheng*, a shirt and a *sarung*. Several actors play as street vendors also wear similar clothes, yet they put on *sarung* in their shoulder diagonally. It is actually representing a lower class. As noted by Giannetti (1996) that costume style can reveal class, self image even psychological states.

The purpose of maintaining cultural identity through the *kampung* icons as well as through language seems to be worked improperly. The use of Javanese language with Surabaya dialect mostly used by the host, and hardly used by the guests. Yet, it appears that the latter is the real portrait of the city. A community culturally influenced by traditional and modern elements. This is what Ricoeur said as the dynamic narrative identity.

***Pojok Kampung* and Love Talks (Serial Dubbing): A Translatable Culture?**

Unlike its counterpart program *Cangkru'an* which developed from and based on the local event, *Pojok Kampung* (means the corner of *kampung*) is a news program that is considered as the replication of the mainstream national television news program, except for the language that the anchors use to deliver news. And unlike other programs, this program gains the most controversy, particularly for the distinct feature of the program: the use of Surabaya dialect.

To differentiate this program from other news programs visually is uneasy. It is because *Pojok Kampung* sets in a standard news program. The setting is similar to other news programs, the anchor reads news the way others read, common formal clothes also worn by the anchor. Yet these familiarities suddenly disappear when it comes to the use of Surabaya dialect in delivering news.

Although delivered in Surabaya dialect, the intonation of the sentences is read quite similar to Indonesian. The only element being translated into local character is the words. Yet, big gap is created as JTV has translated words into uncommon Surabaya dialect words. The uncommonness has doubled due to the fact that JTV translated words such as vagina, penis and prostitutes, words that considered as improper to be spelt even in mainstream media.

No matter what the controversy goes, the audience connects *Pojok Kampung* with a “love-hate relations”. Instead of switching off or turn to other channels, audience stay put to watch this program. One of the audiences confesses “its language is very coarse and improper, yet I love to hear those sentences” (Kompas, 12 June 2005). Other put this informational program as entertainment program. They just like to get “new vocabularies” rather than watching to get important current local affairs and feel the touch locality through the use of the Surabaya dialect.

This shows identity is not only a matter of language usage. Language can be translated yet it has to be noted that culture in general is embedded in the language cannot be easily translated as it needs the interpretation of the language users. The similar case is also happened to the serials program in JTV. JTV made a breakthrough by dubbed serials, mostly Hollywood and Mandarin later on, into Surabaya dialect. It started in May 2005 when JTV launched a program entitled *Film Asing Boso Suroboyoan* (foreign film dubbed in Surabaya dialect).

The dubbing phenomenon is dated back in the era of TVRI as the only television station in Indonesia. This technique introduced by TVRI when it broadcasted documentary film.

Later on several soap operas from Mexico and Latin America had been dubbed as well into Indonesian. Soon after the existence of private television stations, several serials mostly cartoon is dubbed. It generally aimed at making the audience easier to understand the serials.

The latest serial being dubbed in Surabaya dialect is Love Talks. This Mandarin serial, according to the President Director of JTV is chosen because it suits the characteristic of Surabaya people best. JTV does not want to have a classic romance or horror serials as they do not suit best with the society, particularly when considering the difficulty of the language dubbing. This serial is about the love life of young professionals in Shanghai. JTV thinks that there is similarity between Shanghai and Surabaya as they are both metropolitan cities.

The dubbing is mostly in Surabaya dialect though Indonesian is used in here and there. According to the JTV programmer, this reflects the reality within the young professional in Surabaya. They use Indonesian in a more formal context, whereas Surabaya dialect is used in a less formal one. Of special interest is the fact that youngsters in Surabaya are ashamed and reluctant to use Surabaya dialect and so this program aimed at reminding young generations to use it more frequent so that they do not lost their cultural root and be proud of it.

This, in fact, shows the way JTV through this program use its own interpretation on how to preserve the cultural identity. It transmits the importance of using Surabaya dialect, not through an explicit direction but through what the programmer said as a “different and fun” program to communicate the message to the audience. The use of Asian serial proves the need to stay close to the “locality”.

Therefore, JTV has constructed the cultural identity for East Javanese into several local symbols such as the use of specific language and the use of particular city icons. JTV has transmitted, translated and interpreted the face of Surabaya by developing what Ricoeur

said as dynamic narrative identity: an intercultural exchange shown through crisscrossing influences—between traditional, transitional and modern society

Reference

Books

Barker, Chris (2000) *Cultural Studies: Teori & Praktek*, Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana

Giannetti, Louis (1996) *Understanding Movies* (7th ed), New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Hall, Stuart (1992) "The Questions of Cultural Identity" in Hall, S, Held, D & McGrew, T (eds) *Modernity & Its Futures*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Ibrahim, Idi S (2006) "Media Alternatif: Giving Voices to the Voiceless" in Alfathri, Adlin (ed) *Resistensi Gaya Hidup: Teori dan Realitas*, Yogyakarta: Jalasutra

Kitley, Phillip (2001) *Konstruksi Budaya Bangsa di Layar Kaca*, Jakarta: LSPP, ISAI & PT Media Lintas Inti Nusantara

Sarup, Madan (1996) *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, Athens: The University of Georgia

Sen, Krishna & Hill, David (2000) *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press

Sudibyoy, Agus (2004) *Ekonomi Politik Media Penyiaran*, Yogyakarta: LKiS

Waltz, Mitzi (2005) *Alternative and Activist Media*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd

Newspapers

Retnowati, Desti (2006) "Kamus Bahasa Surabaya Tidak Perlu" in *Kompas*, 24 February 2006

"Wajah Kampung Halaman di Layar Televisi" in *Kompas*, 12 June 2005

Internet Sources

Eko, Sutoro (2004) Menuju Identitas Beradab in http://www.ireyogya.org/f15_editorial15.htm

<http://www.jtvrek.com/program.htm>

