

6. Acehnese or Indonesian?

Post-conflict representation of identity in a local newspaper

Abstract: To what extent does a local newspaper in the Indonesian province of Aceh construct Acehnese identity as distinct from Indonesian national identity? In this article, the authors examine the representation of Acehnese identity post-civil conflict and in relation to Indonesian national identity by drawing on a content analysis of Aceh's local newspaper, *Serambi Indonesia*. There are few studies of representations of local ethnic groups in their local newspapers, let alone the representations of ethnic groups with a history of separatist movements. Therefore, this study sets out to bridge the gap in the literature on how a formerly separatist ethnic group is positioned vis-à-vis its nation-state in its local media. This study examines the representation of Acehnese in the local newspaper in terms of Anderson's (1983) 'imagined community', Billig's (1995) 'banal nationalism', as well as 'media representation and identity'. In doing so, this study attempts to give a more comprehensive approach to show that the local newspaper continues to be a means for the reproduction of 'imagined communities' and the delivery of the narrative of collective identity through the everyday representations of the nation.

Keywords: Aceh, community, content analysis, culture, framing, identity, Indonesia, media, media representation, nationalism, newspapers, post-conflict

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Background

THE FREE Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) fought for Aceh's independence from Indonesia for about 30 years. During this decades-long separatist insurgency in the resource-rich province, between 10,000 and 30,000 people were killed (Amnesty International, 2013). The insurgency officially ended in August 2005 after the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Indonesian government and GAM in Helsinki, Finland.

Since the Helsinki peace talks, the Aceh peace process has been viewed as a promising model for peace implementation in other conflict areas (Ahtisaari, 2008; Lingga, 2007; Barron & Burke, 2008). However, Aceh faces what Rajasingham-Senanayake (2009, p. 213) describes as continuity and stability to consolidate the peace. A key post-conflict task for reconciliation is to create mutual trust among formerly conflicting parties. Self-identity can play an important role in ensuring the establishment of a respectful relationship that is necessary to determine the reconciliation process. We argue that the Acehnese perception of their identity determines the viability of the reconciliation process in Aceh. Following the Helsinki agreement, there has been a wealth of studies investigating the reconciliation process in Aceh. However, previous work placed emphasis on the role of the Indonesian national government, civil society, development agencies and international involvement (Feith, 2007; Lingga, 2007; Barron & Burke, 2008) rather than on that of the role of local media in representing Acehnese identity. In considering identity as a cornerstone of the reconciliation process, it then becomes important to interrogate Acehnese identity after the signing of the peace treaty. An anti-essentialism view maintains that cultural identities are not fixed but are culturally produced phenomena (Barker, 2012, p. 217). Cultural identities are discursive constructions of meanings, continually being produced over time (Hall, 1996, p. 4; Barker, 2012, p. 229). In this regard, media are central to the discursive construction of cultural identities, and therefore cultural identities are constructed within media representation (Hall, 1996, p. 4; Barker, 2012, p. 216). 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.

Our focus is on local newspapers, because of the potential of these publications to set agendas within communities as they are specifically directed towards their own regions. Local newspapers are implicated in the construction of local identity (Richardson, Hucklesby & Williams, 2008). 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. Anderson (1983) emphasises 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. According to Anderson (1983), these imagined communities developed along with the rise of mass communication or 'print capitalism'. Anderson's central thesis was that the search for a market under 'print capitalism' led to a standardisation of vernacular languages being disseminated, hence enabling a number of people within particular geographical boundaries to understand each other through a common print language. This provided the conditions for the emergence of a national consciousness, a sense of being part of a nation. Likewise, using the concept of banal nationalism, Billig extends the

idea of the newspaper as a vehicle for the reproduction of imagined communities (1995). Banal nationalism refers to the everyday representations of the nation which builds an imagined sense of nationalism amongst the inhabitants of a particular territory. In this process, newspapers significantly contribute to the reproduction of national consciousness where nationalism has become embedded and naturalised in the disclosures of its everyday life (Billig, 1995).

Media representation and national or cultural identity

By referring to Anderson's (1983) conception of imagined community and Billig's (1995) notion of banal nationalism, it can be argued that newspapers are the vehicle for the reproduction of imagined communities through reading and the use of language. Local newspapers significantly contribute to the process of local identity formation and reproduction to form what Anderson (1983) defines as an 'imagined community'. Local newspapers provide the everyday representations of the imagined community, building a collective identity among the inhabitants in the local area (Billig, 1995).

Beyond playing a key role in the formation of identity, the media significantly contributes to construction of meaning by informing the ways in which we make sense of the world. O'Shaughnessy and Stadler argue that the media significantly influences how people perceive themselves and their surroundings (2012). Through representation, the media facilitates a process 'by which signifying practices appear to stand for or depict another object or practice in the "real" world' (Barker, 2012, p. 487). Barker further contends that representation does not reflect objects in 'a direct "mirroring" mode' (2012, p. 487). This supports the argument that representation is not reality, but the construction of reality, suggesting that there is no objective representation of the world, particularly through media representations (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2012, p. 76). Representation is constituted by a particular person or group. As a result, culture, meaning, and knowledge of the person or the group are involved in the process of representation.

In relation to identity as a collective identity, a broader concept of identity is cultural identity defined as a description of people with groups they identify with (Barker, 2012, p. 476). Moreover, cultural identity links to all social categories, most notably class, gender, race, ethnicity, nation and age (Barker, 2012, p. 476). In this regard, it takes into account two forms of cultural identities: ethnic identity and national identity. Ethnic identity according to Phinney and Ong (2007, p. 271) is derived from a sense of peoplehood 'within a group, a culture, and a particular setting'. It relies on shared cultural symbols and practices which are created in political and socio-cultural contexts. Meanwhile, 'national identity is a form of imaginative identification with the symbols and discourses of the nation-state' (Barker, 2012, p. 252).

In this regard, media and mediation is central to the discursive construction of cultural identities. As Georgiou argues, ‘media as means/technologies/contexts for communication in specific locations and beyond, have become institutions and organised mechanisms of great significance for constructing identities in local, national and transnational contexts within modernity’ (2006, p. 11). The media plays a significant role in influencing the way people see themselves and others. In doing so, media provides a wide range of representations which is part of a complex process involved in the formation of identity. It is argued that identities are constructed within, not outside representation (Hall, 1996; Barker, 2012).

Media representation, as described by Schneeberger, ‘defines the boundaries of one identity to another’ (2009, p. 87). 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, as cited in Schneeberger, 2009). 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.

Constructing Acehese/Indonesian identity

Studies of national identity suggest an overriding identity affiliated with the nation-state and promoted by the media, which includes ethnic identities encompassed by that one nation-state. Theoretically, national identity should unite people within a particular territory in spite of their differences. However, this is not the case with Aceh, where there is an ongoing struggle between different concepts of national identity amongst individuals and particular political groups in Acehese society. The independence movement (and how it is represented) underlines the differences between Aceh and Indonesia as a whole. In the context of Indonesia as a multicultural country, whose motto is ‘*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*’ or ‘unity in diversity’ (Suparlan, 2014) it is unrealistic to have a homogenised national identity overriding various ethnic identities. Instead, it is preferable to have a national identity which acknowledges the cultural diversity within the Indonesian community. However, by asserting cultural differences from Indonesia, distinctive and separate identities (such as Javanese, Minang, Batak or Acehese) are maintained. Acehese identity is recognised as either an ethnic or national identity among Acehese society. In this regard, Acehese 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 Aceh province, becomes the agent of the construction of Acehese group identity through the ritual of reading and the use of language. It shares a common local identity amongst the Acehese within

the area of Aceh province. 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. The representation of the Acehnese highlighting the notion of difference from Indonesia leads to the construction of Acehnese identity (in addition to Indonesian identity).

The construction of identity based in difference occurs elsewhere—for example, Schneeberger (2009) looked at how Turkey serves as an important reference point against symbolic boundaries to define European identity. Negative media representation of Indonesians, and the Indonesian government in particular, can make it hard for the Acehnese to identify themselves as Indonesian. Bruter identified that positive or negative news coverage can impact on the construction of collective identity when he found that positive news coverage about Europe ‘clearly influences’ the likelihood of identifying with Europe and vice versa (2005, as cited in Schneeberger, 2009, p. 87). Another study which explicitly shows the dual roles of the media in conflict is that of Şahin (2011) who found that the changes in the characteristics of national identity in North Cyprus are influenced by the representation of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots in newspapers. When Turkish Cypriots were constructed as a separate group in opposition to Greek Cypriots, it created a distinctive national identity; yet when the cultural similarities of both communities were highlighted and their differences were suppressed, the construction of a common Cypriot identity was facilitated. Previous research into the role of *Corse-Matin*, the only local newspaper in Corsica, where tension between French and Corsican identities intersected within the community (Richardson et al., 2008) revealed that while implicitly suggesting that Corsica should be a part of France with a limited degree of autonomy, *Corse-Matin* successfully negotiated political tension by constructing conciliatory representations of Corsicans (Richardson et al., 2008). Such a finding helps to contextualise the dilemma faced by a local newspaper representing the local community but intersected historically by a separatist movement.

The implication of such similar studies for this research is that the way in which a local newspaper covers tension between Acehnese and Indonesian identities represents both a substantial means of promoting peace as well as escalating conflict in Aceh. Furthermore, these studies suggest that the local press has significant power in the process of identity integration post-conflict, and can contribute to the integration of Aceh through the representation of Acehnese with a positive allegiance to Indonesia. Our argument is that each media outlet promotes their distinct natures, with respect to globalism and localism. While television is much more global, newspapers are local in their scope of coverage which is implicated in their ways of thinking about nationalism. Unlike television, newspapers are concerned with traditional ways of thinking about nationalism which is restricted to certain geographic territories, which emphasises how news-

papers are the vehicle for the reproduction of ‘imagined communities’ through the everyday and naturalised representations of the nation.

Methodology and sample

This study looks at the daily Acehnese newspaper, *Serambi Indonesia*. Due to the impact of a long period of violent civil conflict, it is extremely hard to make a profit in the media industry in the province of Aceh (Bahari, 2005). However, *Serambi Indonesia* has succeeded in surviving in a largely unprofitable industry. It is part-owned by one of the largest national media groups, Kompas Gramedia (Kahar, 2009). *Serambi Indonesia* was first published in 1989 and it is the only local newspaper in Aceh. Besides its print version, *Serambi Indonesia* has digital and e-paper formats. It is the most prominent media outlet among other local media platforms in the province. The newspaper is distributed throughout Aceh, read by different segments of Acehnese society and often forms the basis for discussion among Acehnese people (Bahari, 2005). The circulation of the newspaper is approximately 48,000 a day (Bahari, personal communication, 20 May, 2012). Eighty-five percent of the daily copies of the newspaper are bought by permanent subscribers—institutional and individual subscribers (Bahari, personal communication, 20 May 2012). Income from advertisements is high, accounting for approximately 50 percent of revenue (Din, 2009).

The Helsinki memorandum of understanding enacted special authority for Aceh to have self-governing status within Indonesia, guaranteed by Indonesian law number UUPA11/2006 (on ‘the Governing of Aceh’). Also, the agreement stipulated that Aceh has the right to have its own legislation and bylaws (*Kanun*), to establish Acehnese-based political parties, and a monarch institution, *Wali Nanggroe* and to use regional symbols, including a flag, crest, and hymn (Memorandum of Understanding, 2005). Such privileges are not afforded to other provinces in Indonesia and relates to the polemic of dual sovereignty from the Indonesian government and the Acehnese administration. In this regard, *Serambi Indonesia*, through the coverage of the aforementioned issues, inevitably constructs Acehnese identity in relation to Indonesian identity. Therefore, issues of nationalism are best considered in light of the news frames of the relationship between Aceh and Indonesia, with reference to the implementation of the memorandum of understanding.

Data was gathered from the digital version of *Serambi Indonesia*, a form of electronic archives of the print format as direct access to the print news data was difficult, particularly from outside of Indonesia. The time span for data collection was after the peace accord from September 2005 onwards. However, as the data collection was reliant on the digital news, it was subject to the limitation of online data availability; data became available from 29 July 2011.

Our preliminary look at the trends of news coverage from July 2011 to May 2013

showed that there was little or no news coverage involving issues between Aceh and Indonesia during July 2011 to June 2012, as news coverage in Indonesia as a whole was dominated by issues surrounding the Jakarta gubernatorial election of 2012. Data collection thus fell within the period of July 2012 to May 2013. The selected time span represented the current Acehese government under former separatist group leaders Zaini Abdullah and Muzakkir Manaf, who were sworn in on 25 June 2012. They contested the 2012 Acehese gubernatorial election with the strong support of the local Aceh Party, which is the political manifestation of the former separatist group after the Helsinki agreement. Moreover, the Aceh Party retained 33 seats from a total of 69 seats in the Aceh Parliament, as it won the 2009 parliamentary election. This meant that the current executive and legislative branches in the provincial government were led by former separatists. As they are representatives of the former separatist group, it was assumed this study would find issues of nationalism under their governance, featuring in the local newspaper coverage.

The terms ‘GAM’ for *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*—the term by which the separatists were known throughout Indonesia, ‘MoU’ for the memorandum of understanding reached in Helsinki, and ‘*Kanun*’ (local Acehese bylaws) were employed in the data selection process. The sample for this study included hard news stories, opinion pieces, editorials and letters to the editor. The selection of hard news stories was restricted to politics and national sections, which were assumed to have a more local-national perspective. All articles included were also checked manually to make sure that they contained the appropriate Aceh-Indonesia dimension. The total sample was 88 articles, consisting of 60 news stories, 18 opinion pieces, seven editorials, and three letters to the editor. We drew on content analysis techniques, combining content analysis with framing analysis. These mixed analysis techniques were expected to increase the validity and reliability of the findings, as well as to inform a better understanding of how Acehese identity is organised and portrayed in the local newspaper.

As Weerakkody explains, ‘content analysis is a systematic, objective, and quantitative research method for analysing texts’ (2009, p. 144). This definition refers to content analysis as a form of quantitative method. Weerakkody defines quantitative content analysis as a technique of ‘counting to describe the manifest content and measure the amounts of the categories of variables empirically and systematically’ (2009, p. 146). This technique uses ‘coding manuals’ with ‘clear operational definition of the categories’ (2009, p. 144). After the coding completion, it was suggested that there was a need to perform inter-coder reliability to then test the categories (Weerakkody, 2009, p. 158). Inter-coder reliability refers to ‘the extent to which two or more independent coders agree on the coding of the content of interest with an application of the same coding scheme’ (Cho, 2008). The inter-coder reliability is a crucial part of content analysis, as Neuendorf (2002, p. 141) explains.

given that a goal of content analysis is to identify and record relatively objective (or at least inter-subjective) characteristics of messages, reliability is paramount. Without the establishment of reliability, content analysis measures are useless.

The minimum acceptable level of agreement between coders should be 80 percent (Weerakkody, 2009).

As previously mentioned, newspapers construct a sense of nationhood among community members through the use of symbolic language, the use of implied togetherness and the presentation of nation-centric news. Therefore our considered coding categories for this content analysis spans:

- the use of 'labels' to describe Aceh and Indonesia, including references to people, government, body, legislation, symbols, etc;
- the depiction of Aceh-Indonesia relations; and
- a framing perspective.

The coding variables were derived and adapted from Eurosphere's coding categories for European Print and Broadcast Media, namely, 'labels when referring to groups/individuals, depiction of persons/groups' belonging, and framing perspective' (Sicakkan & Tonnevold, 2008, pp. 2-5). This analysis also considered coding categories looking at the theme and type of article. Once the coding variables were completed, a pilot study of 10 articles was conducted to assess inter-coder reliability. The articles were coded with the help of an independent coder. It was found that the agreement percentage was in the range between 85 percent and 95 percent. Based on these results of inter-coder reliability, the categories can be said to be scientifically valid to use for this content analysis.

We combined the content analysis with framing analysis. There are several definitions of framing (Gitlin, 1980; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Entman, 1993). Gitlin defines it as 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol handlers routinely organise discourse' (1980, p. 7). Gamson and Modigliani (1987, p. 143) describe frames as:

a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue.

For Entman (1993, p. 52), to frame is to:

select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.

Given the news orientation of this study on the use of symbolic language to give meaning to a sense of collective identity, we drew on Gamson and Modigliani's framework because it refers to frames as 'a set of interpretative packages that give meaning to an issue' (1989, p. 3). Gamson and Modigliani's four symbolic devices for this framing analysis are metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases and depictions. Although these symbolic devices enable a comprehensive analysis to unpack news articles, as Kwan and Graves (2013) suggest, it is necessary to acknowledge that not all framing devices can be found within text and many elements of framing devices overlap and intersect with one another. Accordingly, this study focuses on the metaphors and exemplars found within the sample. The sample for framing analysis was selected to represent major themes within different types of articles discovered in the content analysis. We considered the percentage of different types of news articles as a proportion of the whole sample, to ensure the sample proportionately represented each type of news article, thus yielding a sample of 20 articles.

Findings

The sample of 88 news articles was analysed using these coding categories: themes, framing perspectives, labels for Aceh, labels for Indonesia and depiction of Aceh-Indonesia relations. Thus, the following quantitative results of the analysis are presented according to those categories in a row. Also, in order to give proportional representation of different types of news articles, the results are presented in the percentage of each type of news article.

The analysis uncovered several main themes in the news coverage in *Serambi Indonesia* from July 2012 to May 2013. Those themes were categorised thus:

- The most significant theme was the dispute over the official flag of Aceh which accounted for 63 percent of the overall news coverage. This theme has been predominant in this newspaper since the end of March 2013 to May 2013. Despite the fact that the Helsinki agreement provided special privileges for Aceh to have its own flag, symbol and hymn, controversy over this has erupted since the governor of Aceh signed bylaw number 3/2013 on Aceh's flag and symbol, allowing the use of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) flag as the provincial flag of Aceh.
- Unsurprisingly (given the time frame) another significant theme was that of the local elections (10 percent). Indonesian laws often conflict with each other; as part of this theme the issue discussed was conflicting national regulations faced by the Independent Election Commission in Aceh (KIP Aceh) for deciding on quotas for legislative candidates.
- The remaining themes included Aceh Governing Law (6 percent), *Wali Nanggroe* (5 percent), bylaws (3 percent), Acehnese development (2 percent), Acehnese history (2 percent), and miscellaneous (9 percent).

In addition, even though most of the themes discussed were based on laws and regulations, two—on Aceh development and Aceh history—were exceptions. Coverage of both themes took different positions from the others, capturing relationships between Aceh and Indonesia through the focus on the Aceh-Indonesia relationship in the past and in the future. Both themes were, however, only found in opinion pieces. The themes uncovered shared common ground, suggesting ongoing tensions in relation to the Aceh-Indonesia relationship after the Helsinki accord.

In terms of framing, the most dominant framing perspective found in connection with Aceh-Indonesia relations was a local perspective with 68 percent. Other perspectives included national perspective (19 percent), followed by group perspective (8 percent) and individual perspective (5 percent). By investigating framing perspectives across news sections, it was evident that a national perspective was only found in news stories. Opinion pieces and editorials were fully immersed within local perspectives (despite opinion pieces being contributed by members of the public, while editorials were written by the senior editorial staff). Not surprisingly, an individual perspective was mostly used in letters to the editor. As far as framing perspectives are concerned, this local framing perspective may be justified as being part of the nature of a local newspaper. However, considering such perspectives were found within the reportage of Aceh-Indonesia relations, the use of a framing perspective could suggest a tendency towards the privileging or exclusivity of Acehnese identity.

Our framing analysis further attempted to uncover labels—words used in articles when referring to Aceh, such as *government*, *body*, *people*, *legislation*, and *symbols*. This study found that there were three main types of labels, namely: references to government, references to *people* and references to a flag/emblem. The references to government included *Aceh government* (32 percent) and the *local/provincial government* (12 percent), followed by the reference to the *head of administration as governor* (13 percent). Further, the references to people included *citizenry* (1 percent), *citizen* (13 percent) and *society* (17 percent). Finally, the references to flag/emblem included the *GAM flag/emblem* (4 percent) and *Crescent-Star flag/Bouraq-Lion emblem* (8 percent).

In terms of the use of labels for government, it could be seen that the use of ‘*Aceh government*’ was not always followed with that of ‘*the local/provincial government*’. The use of the local/provincial government to refer to the government of Aceh might be regarded as a referential word to Indonesia. It also applied to the governor and vice governor: when referring to the heads of administration in Aceh, *Serambi* frequently used the *names* of the governor and vice-governor, instead of using the labels *governor/vice governor* (which indicated references to Indonesia).

We also found three labels used to describe the people of Aceh. The most frequently used was *society*, followed by *citizen*, and finally *citizenry*. Interestingly, the

label ‘*citizenry*’ was only found in news stories. This finding suggests a particular meaning ascribed to these words—in Bahasa Indonesian, *citizenry* is a label mostly used to describe the group of people who live in a particular city, town, or province, while *citizen* is a label specifically used to denote the group of members of a particular nation-state. Therefore, *citizen* is used to describe the people of Indonesia, while people in a particular province or area in Indonesia are called *citizenry*. Hence, using ‘*citizen*’ to describe Acehese people might underscore ties with Indonesia, of which the Acehese are technically citizens. In addition, society was deemed the most neutral word to refer to people, unlike *citizen* or *citizenry*. Finally, the most significant labels to describe Aceh’s flag and emblem were ‘*Crescent-Star flag*’ and ‘*Bouraq (Lion) emblem*’. The use of these labels are considered neutral in referring to Aceh’s provincial flag and emblem, as the dispute over the current flag and emblem between the Indonesian government and Aceh administration still continues.

In contrast to labels for the government of Aceh, the words *central* or *national governments* were mostly used to mention the government of Indonesia, which accounted for 45 percent of the overall sample. Another significant label for the government was *Indonesian government* with 33 percent. Further, in relation to the head of the government, Indonesian labels also presented a converse finding to Acehese labels. Labels such as ‘*President of Indonesia*’ or ‘*Minister of Home Affairs*’ were employed to describe the head of the government of Indonesia or the authorised minister responsible, instead of using only the names of the president or the minister. The use of such labels, *central government* or *president*, unconsciously created a sense of Aceh as part of Indonesia. Comparing the use of labels for Indonesia in each news section, it was found that editorials showed obvious gaps between the use of the *central/national government* and *Indonesian government*. While other news sections did not show significant differences in the use of both labels, editorials employed the highest proportion of the use of ‘*central/national government*’ and the lowest proportion of the use of ‘*Indonesian government*’.

Based on the findings with regard to themes, it was obvious that the Aceh flag was a dominant and current issue in the coverage of Aceh-Indonesia relations. Therefore, the selection of the sample for framing analysis was mostly taken from the news article under this theme. A flag is commonly perceived as a symbol of identity of a particular nation, and thereby issues surrounding the current Aceh flag could be asserted as having clear-cut identity issues in relation to Indonesian state. 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). Our study documented the use

of metaphor in *Serambi*'s 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 bylaw 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 recognised 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 bylaw number 3/2013 which 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 bylaw passed. Yet this term was no longer used as the rising controversy over the use of the separatist flag as the provincial flag. Currently, *Serambi Indonesia* has employed 'crescent and star' to refer to the flag because of the flag's design bearing the crescent and star image. In this regard, 'crescent and star' could be argued to be 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 explain (1983, p. 4).

The second framing device is exemplars which can be defined 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 (Gamson & Lasch, 1983). 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. 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 recognised in the history of Aceh since the sultanate period. The exemplars used 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). Irrespective of the controversy over the flag, the use of Aceh history as exemplar was also found in other themes, such as '*Aceh development*' and '*Aceh history*'.

Conclusion

Our study suggests that in the construction of Acehnese identity, *Serambi Indonesia* has not promoted a separate Acehnese identity as distinct from an Indonesian identity, but in addition to Indonesian identity. The newspaper embraces a distinct Acehnese identity within the framework of Indonesian national identity, and it further attempts to construct the distinctive identity within the symbolic boundary of Indonesian identity; this is apparent in the editorials which are supposed to reflect the news organisation's stance towards particular issues. *Serambi Indonesia*'s editorials have used distinct labels for Aceh, including the 'government of Aceh' and 'citizen' which indicate the exclusivity of Aceh as a free nation. On the other hand, the editorials produce more referential labels for Indonesia, including the 'central/national government' which signpost Aceh as part of the Indonesian state.

The coding categories used demonstrated two concurrent constraining indications in favour of distinction and allegiance to the Indonesian state. A source of distinction was evident in themes capturing disputes between the Indonesian Government and Aceh administration, local framing perspectives, and the use of distinctive labels for Aceh. On the other hand, a source of allegiance could be found in the use of relational labels for Indonesia and the depiction of 'Aceh within Indonesia'. However, these findings needed bolstering through further investigation within a framing analysis. Our framing analysis revealed the use of exemplars and metaphors 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.

In comparison to similar studies, our findings confirm previous research that concludes that newspapers play a significant role in the construction of collective identity. In particular, this study shares some similarities with Richardson et al's (2008) findings on *Corse Matin*, to the extent of the construction of a conciliatory identity between cultural and national identities in local newspapers. The study conducted by Richardson et al. concluded that *Corse-Matin*, the only daily newspaper on the Corsican island, played a neutral stance by concurrently showing sympathy for the French state and the Corsican nationalists, while avoiding criticism of either (2008). We found that *Serambi Indonesia* goes 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.

The tendency of *Serambi Indonesia* to frame a distinctive Acehnese identity within the Indonesian state may result from several possible factors, including ownership structure and the orientation of the news organisation under which Serambi

operates. Firstly, this newspaper is partly owned by the Kompas Gramedia Group, one of the largest media conglomerates 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). In this case, Kompas could exert more control towards *Serambi Indonesia* through financial influence. With regard to stories related to national security issues, such as separatism, national media networks might experience political pressure to clearly state their position, and it is in their interests not to be seen supporting separatist movements. In addition to ownership factors, according to Bahari, Aceh's long history of violent conflict makes it hard for media to survive (2005). *Serambi Indonesia*, which is the only 'survivor' in the local newspaper industry is fully aware of the negative effects of violent conflict on its own business. In this regard, it is looking towards its own financial interests in pushing for sustainable peace in Aceh, and hence a conducive atmosphere for the media industry in the province.

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