

## Research Article

# The Identities of Second-Generation Indonesian Diaspora Communities

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**Abstract.** Indonesian emigrants and their descendants are important actors in developing Indonesia and their new home countries. These diaspora members have advantages such as intercultural and language skills as well as networks for economic activities. Digitalization increases and accelerates the bilateral influence of this group on personal networks, economic contributions, knowledge transfer, and political engagement. This article draws from social identity theory and the culture cycle to explore the sense of belonging of second-generation Indonesian diaspora members in Germany. The aim is to understand how the relationship of the Indonesian diaspora changes due to birth and socialization in Germany and cross-cultural parenting. The findings of this thesis suggest that members of the second-generation Indonesian diaspora have a strong sense of cultural belonging to Indonesia and tend to separate themselves culturally from Germany.

**Keywords:** social identity, diaspora, sense of belonging, model minority myth, culture and the self, Germany, Indonesia

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The research field of this thesis was considered relevant due to three primary reasons: 1) a literature and research deficit on the identity construction and understanding of identities of second-generation diaspora community members 2) a growing interest of the Indonesian government in the meaning and perception of identity needs and fears of Indonesian diaspora community members 3) a growing and current discourse in German politics and society about diasporic communities. The researcher is a participant in the discussion about migration in Germany and its object.

There is little research on Southeast Asian immigrants in Germany. Indeed, the research field of East and Southeast Asian diaspora communities in Germany exists primarily in the context of model minorities, which can lead to academic myopia and legitimizing myths and stereotypes [1, 2]. Consonantly, there is little to no scientific publication on second-generation Indonesian diasporic community members.

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Besides, there is little to no consideration of diaspora communities' members by the Indonesian government in foreign policies and international relations. However, the Indonesian government intends to utilize diaspora communities' capacities and integrate diaspora communities' needs into foreign policies [3, 4]. The diasporic identity [5] needs to be understood by policymakers to formulate concrete and sustainable policies to protect and represent diaspora communities abroad. The psychological concept of place identity considers place an essential aspect of identity construction; who we are depends on where we are [6].

Migration aside from globalization processes like the trade has proven to be an essential factor for the German economy and positively impacted society [7, 8]. Simultaneously, nationalism, constructive patriotism, and xenophobia increase in political debate and impacts attitude towards immigrants [9]. This discussion also takes place on a global scale.

The importance of considering the issue of identity self-construction of Indonesian diaspora members is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the identity of second-generation members of diaspora communities [10], protection, and identification of discrimination [11] of this group [12, 13, 14, 15, 16]. This paper focuses on the former Hanseatic city of Bremen as it has a historical relationship with Indonesia due to colonial trade and has an active and represented diaspora community [17, 18].

There is a gap in literature and research on constructing diasporic identity and perceiving the lives of the second-generation Indonesian diaspora members. Drawing from place identity theory, social identity theory, and the premise that the primary group of interest perceives a bicultural influence while growing up in Germany, the goal is to answer the question; How do second-generation Indonesian diaspora members understand their identity?

## 2. METHODOLOGY/ MATERIALS

The researcher chose in-depth semi-structured interviews [19] as the data collection method as the study aimed to capture participants' perceptions and understandings of social identity. These interviews were recorded, and verbatim transcribed [19]. This method was chosen to adapt not only to the research question but also to the participants. The assumption was that the more private, the more open and honest can participants express themselves. This assumption was simultaneously the reason why a focus group was not the data collection method.

Participants were asked open-ended questions [19] without implicit assumptions about their social identity construction and nature. Furthermore, the questions explored how the participants perceived the influence of their social world.

All participants signed a consent form at an appropriate reading level [20] before the interviews. Therefore, participants were fully informed about the purpose and process of confidentiality anonymity and their right to withdraw consent [19, 20]. The interviews were conducted and recorded online in zoom meetings due to contact restrictions to contain the Covid-19 pandemic and a geographical distance between researcher and interview participants. The recordings are kept securely on the researcher's computer until completing this study and deleted after completing the study. The voluntary sample participants were three women aged 18-29 years recruited through approaching organizations [19]. For this purpose, a cover letter prepared by the researcher was forwarded to members of the Diaspora Indonesia in Bremen e.V. and students of the study program "Global Management Indonesia" at the University of Applied Sciences Bremen, who voluntarily contacted the researcher.

The group of primary interest grew up in Germany, in a bicultural household with one Indonesian parent. The group interest forms their social identity under different cultures and groups in private and public spaces. Possible culture-specific characteristics and possible psychological aspects of diaspora community members are researched and considered. Therefore, the literature on cultural communication patterns [21] and the cultural syndromes' interdependence and independence [21] were examined in advance.

## 2.1. Ethics and Reflexivity

The physical and psychological wellbeing of both participants and researcher was a priority outweighing the purpose of the data collection in case of doubt. No additional incentives were offered to participate in an interview. Participation was based on the participant's free will to communicate their own subjective opinions, beliefs, and values during an interview. In the preliminary stages of the interviews, no significant ethical issues were identified that could have prevented this study.

The interactive conversational nature [19, 20] influences data collection. The researcher shared similar ontogenesis and ethnicity with the participants. During the interviews, the researcher was aware that many of the questions and themes concerning the participants' identity construction were identical. Thereupon, it was assumed that participants felt a sense of security and mutual understanding during the interview. Such

a sense of security and mutual understanding could increase participants' likelihood of sharing beliefs and opinions honestly. Simultaneously, the researcher is aware of their influence on the data collected through their identity and associated implicit and explicit psychological and behavioral patterns. Participants and the researcher shared culturally specific communication and interaction patterns. Indirect communication [22] was partly operationalized in the questions to allow participants to speak indirectly about themselves [23].

In the run-up to the interviews, it became apparent that participants aged 18 followed a script of social hierarchy and were tense during the first contact. These participants used the Indonesian phrase "kakak" for big sister, which comes with an implicit script of high respect due to age's social category. In this context, participants might try to give answers that please the interviewer instead of being valid. Therefore, the interviews with participants younger than the researcher required additional caution and warm-up questions. It proved surprisingly efficient to have a moment of vulnerability on the interviewer's side when the researcher got up to get a blanket to warm up during the first interview. It relaxed the relationship, and the interview participant had to laugh. Supposedly showing humanity and vulnerability could temporarily and temporarily interrupt these culturally specific social hierarchies in the interviews.

## 2.2. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis [19] was chosen as the data analysis method because it is flexible enough to identify the participants' perceptions, ideas, and opinions. The transcripts of the interviews were then reread and searched for themes to create a thematic map [19]. The approach was inductive data-driven coding. Besides, there was a constant evaluation of whether data was being read to produce the desired result. The resulting codes and themes were frequently compared with the transcript to avoid over-generalizations, confusing the principle of cause and effect, or confusing casualty with correlation [20]. A total of three themes were extracted from the coded data. A global theme emerged, which was then divided into three themes and nine sub-themes.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 3.1. Findings

The three main themes that emerged from the interviews are "social categorization" (sub-themes: culturally German, culturally Indonesian, and bicultural identity), "Success factors" (sub-themes: education, financial security, altruism), and "Interdependence" (sub-themes: the need for harmony, conflict avoidance, strong friendships, and family closeness). There were intersections between subthemes of success factors and sub-themes of interdependence and a prominent intersection in education's value between perceived Indonesian values and own goals.

### 3.2. Social categorization

Due to the different categories that participants ascribe to cultural Germans and Indonesians, two distinct cultural groups can be identified in participants' perceptions. The perceived difference between second-generation diaspora members and culturally German is more significant than of group categorized as culturally Indonesian.

Participants have attributed punctuality, organization, and "being without culture" in addition to cultural artifacts to persons belonging to a culturally German group:

B1: the image of German culture is always just so "nothing", you know? If I had to describe German culture... or just ask German friends, they couldn't think of anything either.

B3: Germans...they are on-time and strict. Beer drinker? (laughs) Yes, what else... nothing.

Negative feelings were expressed towards the group of cultural Germans:

B1: when I think of a German person, I always go for the negative. I don't even know why, but it's somehow... I think I always compare it too much with my Indonesian family or with Indonesian people, they're somehow all always too tense, too dry, too prejudiced. But they're still all very nice. Very polite. But still, I have to admit that I always go easily into the negative and then quickly just call people "Alman" (stereotyping phrase), like that.

The group of culturally Indonesian were attributed attributes such as openness, interpersonal warmth, and pride in cultural artifacts and practices:

B1: (Indonesians are) very open, very, very open. Well, they always welcome people and talk a lot and very gladly and are also interested in you. Well, they don't just talk about themselves, they also ask you and so on. And they are just very, very sweet and, yes, very loud. (laughs) And are also very proud of their own culture, so even the people

who have lived here in Bremen for a very long time, are still very, very proud of their tradition and their culture and also want to show that very much.

A person with cultural Indonesian influence and heritage living in Germany was attributed a strong association with the social categories of the group of culturally Indonesian persons and hardly association with culturally German persons:

B2: ...the person never loses ...where they come from, they never forget and they also do a lot so that the others also get something from the culture. For example, my mother usually cooks for her family, even if they don't come from Indonesia

B3: I don't think so (no perception of acculturation), at least not with my mother. She and I just try to stay very Indonesian.

A recurring attribute was the value that cultural Indonesians place on education:

B1: Well, my parents are definitely quite typically Indonesian or maybe even Asian, in that education is very, very important to them.

B3: And I think most Indonesians, in what they plan in life school is apparently very important for Indonesians. I mean university.

#### Interdependence

Family closeness and belonging to a small perceived group were common to all. Covid-19 was mentioned as a modifying factor for social behavior and reducing the size of groups, and stronger family cohesion:

B1: that was also my goal this year, to stay at home and simply improve the relationship with my family in Indonesia because I kind of missed that. Otherwise, I think we all have a good relationship with the Indonesian community here.

B3: We (mother and person) talk on the phone or video-call via WhatsApp every evening. Three, four hours at least.

When confronted with a hypothetical scenario in which a teacher (for students) or a colleague/supervisor (workers) mistreats the participant, it becomes clear that conflicts are avoided or dealt with by talking:

B2: I think I try to avoid conflicts. Well, I'm not the kind of person who is so directly interested in disputes and yes, I always try to find a solution in a different way...Maybe talking to the person calmly somehow. So when the situation has cooled down a bit or to somehow get through to the person in a different way or through other people who understand the person better.

B3: ... now I would think about why they think that about me and what I did wrong. That's what I would do now. So I would think about it not to go into the argument, but

first to consider, so resigned/ and to think, what am I doing in the situation or to reflect on myself.

#### Success factors

Education appeared in the goals of the interviewees, without being directly asked about it. Education was the key to financial security or to achieving subsequent goals. Furthermore, the theme of group affiliation showed an intersection with success through follow-up goals. An in-group member was a motivation for personal success:

B3: ... But my goals are different now (than at younger age). I think the only thing I want is to do the best I can for my son. So that I can get him into a good school, and somehow to study in Germany.

B1: I would just start to become financially secure somehow and to gather a lot of knowledge in order to, not pour it all out (money), start something (orphanage) with it and so on.

B1: ... I want to help Indonesian children... So now I don't want to study so that I can somehow sell something to people, but so that I can work on things that help people.

## 4. Discussion

Identifying, categorizing, and feeling part of groups is fundamental to human psychology [24, 25]. As shown by the Minimal Group Paradigm [25], group affiliation can be purely cognitive. Social Identity Theory (SIT) connects the psychological and social by explaining why identities adapt to different contexts [26]. The three essential elements of the theory are 1) social categorization, 2) social identification, and 3) social comparison [24, 25].

The study showed that the participants clearly distinguished between culturally German and culturally Indonesian persons. Participants verbalized social identification with the culturally Indonesian group directly through clear personal demarcation from the culturally German group or described social categories previously defined as culturally Indonesian indirectly. Furthermore, group affinity was shown through intergroup with favorable in-group and negative out-group social comparison.

It exceeds this study's scope whether and how the participants' meta-level plays a role in their identity construction. An example would be, for example, excluding behavior from the culturally German defined group from which the participants directly or indirectly distinguish themselves.

How humans construct relationships and selves is highly dependent on the cultural context [27, 28, 29]. The four levels of culture are ideas, institutions, interactions, and individuals. These levels constellate interdependent factors and represent the socio-cultural context from which an individual is not separate [29]. The socio-cultural context is embedded and adapted to ecology or place [6, 30]. Therefore, cultures are constantly changing and also different according to different ecologies or places.

Members of individualistic cultures tend to define themselves primarily as autonomous entities, independent of others (independent self-construction). In contrast, individuals see their identity in collectivist cultures primarily in their connectedness with other people (interdependent self-construction) [27, 29]. There are strong notions of individuality in the participants' cultures based on individuals' fundamental interconnectedness. The emphasis is on relating to others, fitting in, and harmonious interdependence with them [29, 31].

In this manner, culture influences the self's conceptualization. The participants described close relationships with their families and a selective, narrow circle of friends. Covid-19 was reportedly an increasing factor for family and friendship closeness. Interconnectedness was evident in altruism as a factor for personal success and goals. This work is not representative but an impetus for further research into identity formation in Germany's Indonesian diaspora communities.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

A profound limitation of the data collected was the recruitment strategy. Since participants were recruited through a diaspora association in Bremen and a degree program focusing on Indonesia, those active in the association or studying in this degree program were not considered. Membership in a diaspora association and a course of study focusing on Indonesia could already indicate a degree of identification. The data can, therefore, not be generalized.

Moreover, a perceived need to keep face in front of others, not only in their interest but also in the family's interest, might have led to participants following a script and wanting to conform to an ideal image. Furthermore, the researcher recognized personal behavioral patterns that would not have become aware of without the interaction in this topic's context.

Furthermore, a possible difficulty that had to be considered while formulating interview questions was participants' possible lack of experience in verbalizing their perceptions or a lack of awareness of intersubjectivity and identity. The extent and nature



of transgenerational communication between Indonesian parents and children not born in Indonesia may have also influenced how participants engage with research.

It has been noticed that potential participants refused interviews with statements like "I do not know anything about Indonesia; I am as German as any German; I did not study like you". These comments suggest that the data is already biased, as not all people belonging to the primary group of interest felt invited. Although social identity and the model minority myth were the literature research subjects, the researcher was not aware of the meta-level of his representation of a model minority and the implicit prejudice internalized in others.

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