

Self-Narrative and Identity of Tengger Indigenous Teenagers

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Abstract:- Tengger people have lived in the highland of Bromo for more than one thousand years. Mt Bromo is located in East Java and it has become one of the world tourism destinations in Indonesia. They offer fascinating sceneries as well as amazing local traditions and cultures. This co-existence of the agricultural way of life and the tourism industry eventually influence each other and may threaten the identity of Tengger people. Tengger people have more and more exposure to tourists. The holy land of Bromo mountain must also give way to the development of tourism infrastructures such as roads, hotels, and restaurants. This paper is a report on the community development project conducted by the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga in SMP4 Tosari (Secondary High School). The program aimed to help the students to improve their competency in producing their own stories to strengthen their identity as members of the Tengger indigenous people. The participants were students from SMPN 4 Tosari Pasuruan East Java (Public Secondary High School 4, Tosari) from years 7,8, and 9 with a total number of 84 students. They automatically became participants because of their status as students of SMPN 4 Tosari. The total number of photos collected was 280. This activity has helped the students of Tosari Secondary High School to improve their capability in generating photos and producing narratives. This is important because this helped the students to create their own stories and reinforce their own identity as a member of Tengger indigenous society.

Keywords:- *Self-Narrative, Identity, Indigenous People, Tengger.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tengger people have lived in the highland of Bromo for more than one thousand years. Mt Bromo is located in East Java and it has become one of the world tourism destinations in Indonesia. They offer fascinating sceneries as well as amazing local traditions and cultures.

They are Indonesian Indigenous people who strongly connect with their land and culture. They are willing and have a strong commitment to maintain their culture and tradition.

Tengger people consider themselves as “people of the mountain” or ‘highlanders’ who are different from those who live in lower geographical lands. Being a farmer is their

most important identity who take care and cultivate the highland of Bromo. However, the socio-cultural dynamics have brought about challenges against the preservation of Tengger culture.

Some Tengger people live in Taman Nasional Bromo Tengger Semeru (National Park of Bromo Tengger Semeru). Bromo and Semeru refers to Mt. Bromo and Mt. Semeru, while Tengger refers to Tengger people and culture. As a National Park and main tourism destination, the place has invited million of tourists. Thus, the way of life of Tengger people as farmers must live side by side with tourism industry.

At certain points, Tengger people do participate and contribute to tourism; such as by being a guide, selling souvenirs, or jeep operators. However, until today most of them still maintain their way of life as farmers. In the meantime, those who are highly involved in the tourism industry are from outside Tengger community and especially those with adequate capitals.

This co-existence of the agricultural way of life and the tourism industry eventually influence each other. Tengger people have more and more exposure to tourists. The holy land of Bromo mountain must also give way to the development of tourism infrastructures such as roads, hotels, and restaurants.

Cohrane in 2003 reported that intensive exposure to tourists could threaten the local Tengger culture. One example of the threat is the commodification of Tengger culture (Febriani and Riyanto, 2021).

This paper is a report on the community development project conducted by the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga in SMP4 Tosari (Secondary High School). The program aimed to help the students to improve their competency in producing their own stories to strengthen their identity as members of the Tengger indigenous people.

II. STORYTELLING AND INDIGENOUS SOCIETY

This section discusses three main concepts: storytelling, photography, and identity. All of them are discussed in relation to indigenous people.

Storytelling is a primary way to share knowledge, values, and traditions across generations, and is critical to maintaining indigenous culture and identity. Oral traditions are not just entertainment; it is an important way for indigenous peoples to convey their history, faith, and world perspective. The narratives told in these communities have rich cultural meaning. These stories often teach lessons about morality, community principles, and nature, thereby creating a collective identity among community members.

Storytelling is critical to cultural preservation because it can convey complex ideas and experiences, which are an important part of Indigenous people's identity. For example, stories can be used to record historical events and cultural customs that may be lost as a result of modernization and globalization (Asamoah-Poku, 2024). To maintain a sense of belonging and identity among indigenous peoples, the process of cultural continuity is essential. This is especially true when their cultural practices are marginalized or suppressed (Caplan et al., 2020; Chan, 2021). Storytelling is very important in the epistemology of indigenous peoples, according to Iseke (2013), because it can validate the experiences and knowledge systems of those communities.

Additionally, stories have the potential to strengthen relationships between generations. In this way, parents can impart cultural teachings and wisdom to the younger generation. This transmission of knowledge ensures that younger members of society have the understanding and ability to navigate their cultural landscape, which is critical for the survival of indigenous cultures (Briant et al., 2016; Gabel et al., 2016). Storytelling itself can cause communal events, strengthen social relationships, and reinforce group identity (Friskie, 2020; Beltrán & Begun, 2014). Storytelling, therefore, is not only a way to preserve culture but also a practice that increases community solidarity and resilience.

Storytelling in Indigenous culture is not just entertainment; it is an important mechanism for transmitting knowledge, values, and traditions between generations. According to Iseke (2013), storytelling has the ability to sustain communities and validate the experiences of indigenous peoples. This is the main focus of the epistemology and methodology of indigenous research. This narrative method is equipped with visual components, such as photos, which can enhance the storytelling experience by providing a direct depiction of the story being told. For example, digital storytelling initiatives have developed into an effective way for Indigenous peoples to challenge stereotypical representations and reclaim their narratives (Cueva et al., 2016). Community members can create and share their stories through this project, increasing their sense of agency and gaining control over their cultural representation.

Photos are a way of telling stories. Cultural practices, storytelling traditions, and the preservation of knowledge determine the relationship between photographs and narratives. By using photographs as a powerful tool to tell stories visually, indigenous peoples can articulate their

histories, experiences, and identities in ways that fit both modern and traditional contexts. In this analysis, we see how narratives and photographs interact within an indigenous framework. This emphasizes how important stories are as a means of cultural expression and resilience.

Additionally, the use of photos in telling stories can help build stronger ties to the land and environment. These relationships are an important part of indigenous people's identity. This connection is demonstrated by the Digital Storytelling Grease Trail project, which combines local land-based learning with indigenous storytelling and digital media (Sam et al., 2021). Through this project, Indigenous pre-service teachers record and describe their history and memories. This project shows how important place is to shaping narratives. This method strengthens ties to identity, land, and community and preserves cultural knowledge.

In indigenous narratives, the role of photographs also extends to health and well-being, where visual storytelling can function as a therapeutic tool. The dissemination of digital stories encourages culturally respectful health education, allowing Indigenous peoples to share their experiences and knowledge in ways that resonate with their communities (Cueva et al., 2016). This method not only empowers storytellers but also increases public awareness of health issues in indigenous communities, demonstrating the ability of photographs to enhance story depth and emotional resonance.

A story can convey identity and its formation in various ways and story forms. Cultural heritage, intergenerational relationships, and the dynamics of modern society influence the multifaceted process of identity formation of indigenous youth. The focus of this process is how traditional cultural practices interact with the problems posed by modernity. These interactions can create a complex landscape for identity development. Indigenous youth often overcome these problems in various ways, such as telling stories, participating in cultural activities, and participating in the community. All these methods help strengthen their cultural identity and sense of belonging.

The identity of indigenous youth is strongly influenced by cultural practices, especially land-based activities. Engaging in land-based activities can increase young people's cultural knowledge and increase their involvement. This is crucial for their mental health and identity formation (Walker et al., 2021; Hatala et al., 2020). Young people not only connect with their cultural roots through these activities, but they also have the opportunity to learn about their heritage in a meaningful context. There is evidence that incorporating traditional practices into educational curricula has improved young people's perceptions of their cultural competence and identity (Walker et al., 2021; Barnett et al., 2019).

The identity of indigenous youth relies heavily on intergenerational relationships. The transmission of cultural identity and collective memories relies heavily on relationships with family members, especially older people

(Reinschmidt et al., 2016; Wexler, 2011). Younger generations gain a better understanding of their place in the community and the wider world through the stories told by their parents. The tradition of storytelling helps unite generations, providing a sense of belonging and continuity to the younger generation in addition to providing insight into their cultural heritage (Friskie, 2020; Bujold, 2023). Additionally, it has been proven that programs that encourage intergenerational conversations can increase young people's cultural understanding and resilience, and help them strengthen their identities in the face of external pressures (Wexler, 2011; Wexler, 2013).

The importance of the project is to help the teenagers in Tengger Indigenous community to express more about themselves using photos. Their life as farmers in a 'holy land' is being threatened by the extensive development of tourism.

III. METHOD

Tengger Indigenous Teenager's Self Narrative is a community development project by the Master Program of Literary and Cultural Studies Faculty of Humanities Universitas Airlangga. The program was conducted at the secondary school in Bromo high land where Tengger people have lived for more than one millennium. The project aimed to help secondary high school students as teenagers of an indigenous tribe able to produce their own stories, especially using photos.

The participants were students from SMPN 4 Tosari Pasuruan East Java (Public Secondary High School 4, Tosari) from years 7,8, and 9 with a total number of 84 students. They automatically became participants because of their status as students of SMPN 4 Tosari. The total number of photos collected was 280.

➤ The steps of the Program are as Follows:

- Preparation: this includes establishing contacts with the headmaster of SMPN 4 Tosari, conducting some meetings, establishing schedules, and brainstorming.
- Focus group discussion to determine the theme, time frame, and other conditions of the photo
- Announcement and the theme: the organizer created flyers, brochures, and videos to raise awareness among the students regarding the photo collection and other technical requirements.
- The photo taking and administration: the students were given four weeks to browse around, consult, and determine what photo they wanted to produce.
- The revision: some students need to revise their photos or take other photos.
- The online workshops: There were two online workshops to help students write their narratives of the photos.
- The final workshop. This last workshop was done face to face at SMP 4 Tosari.

- The pictures taken by the students then analyzed based on themes showing what aspects of the students' identity are expressed in the pictures.

IV. RESULT: THE NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY OF TENGGER TEENAGERS

Based on the photos taken, the narrative of Tengger produced by their teenagers can be categorized three main aspects of Tengger identities:

A. Children of farmers

Being a farmer is one of the most important identities of Tengger people. This is expressed very well in pictures 1 and 2 below.

The bond between land and its people is the most vital essence of Tengger culture. The Tengger people view the land of Bromo where they live as sacred. The land has been their source of life as farmers for more than 1000 years.

Bromo is a highland 1000 meters or more above sea level so the climate is very much suitable for farming vegetables such as cauliflower, cabbage, potato, leek, and celery. Picture number 1 taken by the student of SMP 4 Tosari is a bunch of leek plants.

A leek is an edible vegetable and a member of *Allium Ameloprasum*. Other members of *Allium* include onion, garlic, shallot, scallion, chives, and Chinese onion. However, unlike onion, leek does not form a bulb. Its stalk is thick and fleshy. The leaves are flat, green, and fresh.

The picture shows fresh and green leeks. In Tengger, leeks are planted in many areas such as in a special field dedicated to leeks. In Tengger leeks are often found planted in some flowerpots or polybags and placed in house yards.



Picture 1: Leeks Plants, Taken by a Student of SMP 4 Tosari

From a closer look, Tengger people still use traditional agricultural methods. As seen in the picture, the soil around the leek plants does not seem to have good drainage. There is no adequate bedding. However, this photo shows the closeness of a junior high school student to the world of

agriculture around him. This is in line what the report proposed by Sam et al (2021) that pictures can show a strong connection between the land, the environment, and the Indigenous people's identity.

Another photo in picture 2 shows a farmer preparing to take home the grass he has collected to feed his livestock. This activity is called 'ngarit', from the word 'arit' (a sickle). A sickle is usually designed with several types of curved blades and used for harvesting, cutting grass, reaping grain crops, and so on. 'Ngarit', or looking for the grass', is a very important activity for farmers who have livestock.

The photo shows some important features; the clothes, the grass, and the motorbike. First, the clothes worn by the farmer appear to cover the entire body. This illustrates the need for whole-body protection from cold climates and temperatures. Tengger people need to adjust themselves to the temperature in Bromo Highland which is cold, foggy, and rainy.



Picture 2: Going back from 'ngarit', taken by a Student of SMP 4 Tosari

The volume of the grass brought by the farmer is so small that it is enough to be taken by a motorcycle. This is

common in Tengger where a farmer raises only two or three cattle. This limit is caused by several factors, such as:

- The capacity of a farmer to provide grass and other greenery for food
- The availability of land for the cattle
- Most importantly, the fact that raising cattle is a side job since their main job is cultivating land and nurturing plants in a field.

Another highly visible feature in this photo is the vehicle used, the motorcycle. There is no registration number seen in the motorcycle. It shows that this motorcycle is used in a 'far from law' territory, that is the rugged mountainous terrain where the presence of police is very rare. The motorcycle is also highly modified. This is to adjust with the need to navigate and manoeuvre in a hilly highland.

B. Religious

Religiosity is the key to the life of Tengger people. Almost all aspects of life are associated with the existence of the gods. They consider the land they live on and cultivate as sacred and called "Hila Hila" (the Holy Land) where gods reside. The relationship among gods, nature, and people is cemented in the principle of 'Tri Hita Karana' or Three Good Causes. This explains the reason that almost all ceremonies in Tengger are related to god, nature, and the people.

Picture 3 shows a situation in the village hall where people gathered together to celebrate the closing of the series of events for the "Selamatan" of Yadnya Karo ceremony.

Selamatan berasal dari kata Selamat or safe or protected. Selamat is one of the most important word in Javanese culture. Selamatan ceremony menghubungkan upaya keselamatan manusia dengan penjagaan dari Tuhan. Keselamatan komunal desa dari ancaman famine, disaster, dan lainnya juga dihubungkan dengan god blessing.



Picture 3: Yadnya Karo Ceremony, taken by a Student of SMP 4 Tosari

Yadnya Karo is one of the most important ceremonies for Tengger people. Yadnya means a sacred ceremony, while karon literally means number two or the second, referring to the second month in Tengger calendar. Thus, Yadnya Karo is the sacred ceremony during the second month. The biggest ceremony is the Kasada (Kasada means the tenth) which is held in the tenth month.

A series of activities are held during Karo such as dances, praying, and a visit to cemetery. All members of the community should join the Karo ceremony regardless of their religions. It should be noted that most Tengger people are Hindu, however some of them embrace Islam and Christianity. Thus, Karo ceremony is more a cultural tradition rather than a religious ceremony.

Besides the communal and annual activities such as Karo, Tengger people connect themselves to god in daily basis. This picture shows a student is placing an offering package on a Padmasari. Padmasari is a special place that is built and erected mostly in the area of a home and other places which are thought to be the place where the spirits or gods dwell. These can be in a certain bends of a road, a graceful and cool height, or a cemetery. This activity is to make sure that human, god, and the nature are well connected and protect each other.



Picture 4: Morning Offering. taken by a Student of SMP 4 Tosari

The above narratives from pictures 1,2,3, and 4 serve as an important lens through which we can understand cultural change and continuity within Tengger indigenous communities. These narratives encapsulate the experiences, values, and challenges faced by Tengger youth as they navigate their identities in a rapidly changing world. By examining these narratives, researchers can glean insights into how cultural practices are maintained, adapted, or transformed in response to contemporary influences.

One significant aspect of teenagers' narratives is their reflection of cultural continuity. Most Tengger indigenous youth articulate a strong connection to their cultural heritage, often expressing pride in their traditions, languages, and histories. The narratives of being a member of farmers and being religious highlight participation in land-based activities and reveal how these experiences reinforce cultural identity and foster a sense of belonging (Walker (2023)Walker et al., 2021). Such activities not only serve as a means of cultural transmission but also provide a context for youth to engage with their heritage in meaningful ways.

Pictures 1,2,3 and 4 show how indigenous youth play a critical role as mediators between traditional and modern worlds, navigating the complexities of their cultural heritage while engaging with contemporary societal influences. This mediation process is characterized by their ability to blend traditional practices with modern lifestyles, thereby fostering a dynamic cultural identity that honors their roots while adapting to new contexts. In picture 2, Tengger youth display a motorcycle as a new transportation mean to bring the farmer to find grass and bring the grass home for the cattle.

V. CONCLUSION

From the discussion above it may be concluded that photos taken by the students of Secondary School in Tosari, Pasuruan can be seen as parts of the storytelling and identity of the teenagers of Tengger Indigenous people. The most vital identities are being farmers and religious.

As teenagers, the students took pictures showing the life of farmers, the plants, and the grass to feed the cattle. They also show in the picture how they connected to gods both in communal ceremonies and in private as well as in individual activities.

This activity has helped the students of Tosari Secondary High School to improve their capability in generating photos and producing narratives. This is important because this helped the students to create their own stories and reinforce their own identity as a member of Tengger indigenous society.

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