

***Teungku* from Different Worlds in Aceh: An Analysis of the Trajectory of Their Hybrid Identity Construction**

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of *teungku*, another term of *ulamâ* (Islamic scholars) in Aceh, from different worlds (e.g., lecturers of natural sciences) has been a growing phenomenon in recent years, which affects their academic identity. However, research on this issue has been scant. This study attempted to fill in the gap by examining the trajectory of the academics' hybrid identity reconstruction. Drawing upon social learning theory, this study purposively selected two academic-*teungku* for in-depth interviews. Narrative inquiry was employed as it best captures their detailed life stories or experiences. The results show that the factors behind their identity reconstruction are more or less similar, including their awareness of the individual Muslim obligation to do *dakwah*, their good ability and experiences of reading the Quran publicly, their past religious activities during their study in Western countries, and their commitment to improving their ability to be able to participate in the community of practice of *teungku* world. In conclusion, their identities have been revised, refined, and renegotiated to align with the academic needs and their religious obligation.

Keywords: Academics, Aceh, different worlds, identity reconstruction, Islam, *teungku*

INTRODUCTION

Identity reconstruction, revision, strengthening, and renegotiation occur in many contexts. In Aceh, an Indonesian province in the northern tip of Sumatra

Island, several academics teaching non-religious disciplines in many universities have reconstructed their identities into *teungku*. At the same time, they keep their existing professional identity as academics who teach at a university. Consequently, they now hold hybrid professional identities, *teungku-academics*.

Teungku is a unique social and professional identity in Aceh province. The identity commonly belongs to local

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 16 April 2019

Accepted: 03 December 2019

Published: 19 March 2020

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Islamic scholars who have graduated from a *dayah* (a traditional Islamic boarding school). Called *teungku*, they are believed having a high knowledge of Islam and abilities to serve people with several Islamic religious rituals. Their roles range from being a *dai* (preacher) or *khatib* who gives a sermon before Friday afternoon prayer, leader (*imam*) of five-time-a-day prayers, to the reciters of the Quran in several community rituals. They are endorsed to do so because of their religious competencies after completing their study in *dayah*. Differently, the academics come into the university world and continuously construct and reconstruct their identities.

Understanding an individual's identity and identity development is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, identity influences what one does (Crow & Møller, 2017). Secondly, it can help shape our beliefs and aspirations (Morrison, 2013). Identity also provides "directions, aspirations, and images of oneself that guide the shaping of the trajectory going forward" (Wenger, 2010). Especially for teachers, thirdly, it can help them "construct the nature of their work on a daily basis (motivation, satisfaction, and competence)" (Bolívar et al., 2014). Through understanding their narrative as teachers, for instance, they know how suitably they dwell where they already are (Aoki, 1992; as cited in Phelan, 2000). Fourthly, as Wrench (2017) concluded, personal narratives can be used as resources for understanding one's experiences and the process of becoming a certain kind of person. Concerning this,

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) stated that by understanding our lived story, the connection between what we believed and how we practiced it could be strengthened.

In researching the change of identities in a variety of disciplines, a narrative approach has commonly been used (e.g., Alsup, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Farnsworth, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2005; Nelson, 1993; Nghia & Tai, 2017; Søreide, 2006; Watson, 2006). Using a narrative approach, they found that identity was not static; it was changeable and involved a trajectory. They also found that people have multiple identities in their lives.

Despite the abundance of the studies on identity, there has been less attention to the trajectory of *teungku* identity that transforms from their different worlds, such as from non-religious or secular departments, in the Aceh context. Researching the emergence of *teungku* identities through narrative inquiry can bring to the fore a multitude of complex life stories, including their influential factors, that motivate them to negotiate and renegotiate their identities. According to Sfard and Prusak (2005), through understanding the past experiences, we can make sense of the present.

This research was carried out to fill in the gap by exploring the reconstruction of the secular academics to *teungku*, and grasping the processes associated with the development of them. Specifically, this study focused on the identity reconstruction of the academics-*teungku* through the ways they talk about themselves and their work. As Goodson (1992) claimed that listening

to teachers talk/talking about their work should be all the proof scholars needed to understand that the autobiographical was of utmost importance to teachers even when discussing policy and practice. For this purpose of the study, several questions were addressed, including:

1. Why do they reconstruct their identities?
2. How do they negotiate their identities of being a *teungku*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity

Despite considerable research studies on identity, the concept of identity is still used with such a variety of meanings over the last century (Day et al., 2006). Some characterize personal, some social, and some professional identities. This supports the divide of identity into three types, including personal identity, social identity and professional identity (Burke & Stets, 2009), even though criticism on the divide exists. Thoits and Virshup (1997), for instance, viewed the distinction of identity was misleading as the three interact with one another.

According to several theorists (e.g., Gee, 2010; Wenger, 1998, 2010), identity can be generally defined as how we feel about ourselves and how we are recognized by other people. However, Crow and Moller (2017) reminded that "Identities are not simply who we say we are, but reflect the motivation, drive, and energy connected to our actual practices". In this regard, Beijaard

(1995) stated that identity was "the various meanings someone can attach to oneself or the meanings attributed to oneself by others". In terms of professional identity, Adams et al. (2006) defined it as our sense or perceptions about our professional capacity, responsibilities, and relationships. Other scholars, Scribner and Crow (2012) defined professional identities as "identities which individuals use to make sense of and enact (their) roles".

However, it has been reminded that roles are different from identity even though roles determine one's identity. With respect to this, Wenger (1998) contended that roles could be designed, but not the identities; it is through the roles identities are manifest. In a different way, Ryan (2007) stated that "roles are scripted, deterministic, and static, while identities are improvisational, stress human agency, and are dynamic" (p. 345). Hence, two academics may have similar roles but have different identities.

Furthermore, Gee (2010) argued that identity was not single, but multiple, hybrid and conflicting. One may have more than one identity at the same time. This is in line with Ryan's (2007) argument that an individual may "take on different and sometimes contradictory identities in different social contexts". For instance, a Malayan in terms of ethnicity may be professionally a teacher who is a constructivist active learning implementer and personally self-sufficient. Moreover, a teacher may be a constructivist or a behaviorist or both as she or he may mix the ways of teaching at the same time.

Literature also underlines that the sense of identity matters for everyone, especially professionals. For instance, teachers' sense of their identity can motivate them to invest their efforts, shape their beliefs and influence their future actions (Kelchtermans, 2005; Morrison, 2013). Moreover, identity is a key influencing factor in teachers' sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, and effectiveness (Day et al., 2006).

However, identity is a never ended process. It is ongoing and dynamic (Bauman, 2004; Beijaard et al., 2004; Giddens, 1991) and constructed through interactions (Mead, 1934; as cited in Canrinus et al., 2011). It is influenced by our past and present experiences (Josselson, 1996; Sugrue, 2005; Wenger, 2010) and 'socialisation' (Adams et al., 2006). Sugrue (2005) argued that our habit and routines were prone to change due to the influence of external factors, which suggested that identity involved contexts. Identity is socially negotiated (Gee, 2001). Gee's (2001) view suggests that negotiation with others and being recognized by others are essential parts of identity formation, which means that one's identity cannot be simply chosen.

Another important thing discussed in the literature is the philosophical controversy between the two philosophers about one's identity formation. According to Crow and Møller (2017), philosopher Hegel (1977) contended that identities did not develop in isolation, but were influenced by where we lived, worked, and played in cultural

and historical contexts. On the contrary, philosopher Kant (1966) argued that one's identity could be chosen by an individual. Lave and Wenger are among the scholars who seem to agree with Hegel's perspective as they argue that identity construction is culturally influenced and our engagement in communities of practice reshapes our identities.

Characteristics of Identity

In Wenger's (1998, 2010) theory, a person's identity is described to have three characteristics, including a trajectory, a nexus of multiple memberships, and multiscality. Firstly, by trajectory, Wenger (2010) meant that identity "incorporates the past and the future into the experience of the present", "accumulates memories, competencies, key formative events, stories, and relationships to people and places", and "provides directions, aspirations, and images of oneself that guide the shaping of the trajectory going forward". He also emphasized that trajectory was a "continuous motion" of our experiences, not a predicted track to be followed. This aligns with Morrison's (2013) argument that the trajectory of identity formation is complex. Secondly, one's identity is a nexus of multi-memberships, as an individual has been involved in a variety of communities of practice. Thirdly, identity is shaped at multiple levels all at once. A teacher, for instance, can identify the teachers at various levels, ranging from school, district, to world levels.

Moreover, Wenger (2010) argued that learning plays an important role in shaping one's identity. Learning is not an individual but a social process, which is arranged in cultural and historical settings (Lave & Wenger, 1991; as cited in Farnsworth et al., 2016). Learning is achieved when an individual participates in the practices of social communities through which his/her identity is constructed (Wenger et al., 2002). That is why Wenger et al. (2002) introduced the construct of a community of practice into his identity theory, by which he meant "a group of individuals participating in communal activity, and experiencing/continuously creating their shared identity through engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities." He argued that we not only acquire skills and information through learning but also become certain persons (identity). Learning is regarded as "a journey through landscapes of practices" (Wenger, 2010).

Furthermore, Wenger (2010) argued that one's involvement in a community of practice might be accepted or rejected, which had an impact on one's identity development. It was found that the identity of marginality would be developed by members if their practices and experiences were considered not relevant in a community (Wenger, 2010). Differently, Wenger also found that a central identity would be developed by those whose practice received acceptance in a community and whose experiences were valued.

Wenger (1998, 2010) also stated that identity development involved identification

and negotiation. Identification can be done through three modes, including engagement, imagination, and alignment. Engagement in a certain practice is very crucial in the process of learning because it gains "a lived sense of who we are" (Wenger, 1998). Besides, it is also important to have imagination, which means that an individual creates images of the world. One needs to imagine him/herself when being part of the community. Wenger (1998) stated, "We use such images of the world to locate and orient ourselves, to see ourselves from a different perspective, to reflect on our situation, and to explore new possibilities". The last mode of identification is alignment, meaning an individual attempts to align what is practiced in the larger community of practice so as to become part of the community (Wenger, 1998).

Identity (Re)construction

Identity construction and reconstruction have been increasingly researched in various and with various approaches and theories. Torres et al. (2009) found all theories on identity development had some similar themes. Among them are identity development moving from simple to complex, socially constructed and reconstructed identities, and contextually influenced identities.

Nghia and Tai (2017) researched the teacher identity formation of student teachers when they did teaching practicum at school. It was found that their teacher identity had been shaped prior to studying in teacher education and was continually shaped during their study at university

and defied when they dealt with realities at schools during their practicum. This suggests that identity and professional identity be not static; it always changes.

Morrison (2013) in his longitudinal research on the trajectories of identity formation of fourteen early career teachers found three trajectories, including emergent, tenuous, and distressed. Eight of them showed emergent teacher identity, as they felt hope and promise within themselves. They were also optimistic about their future career and felt suitability for the job. Differently, one of them showed distressed identity as she was unable to cope with the tensions in her job. Finally, she left her teaching job. Another teacher exhibited tenuous teacher identity due to the complex tasks she dealt with daily.

To some extent, all the research findings suggest that identity construction is a complex process. It has multi-facets and involves a social process and is influenced by social contexts.

METHODS

This study is by nature qualitative. Narrative inquiry was employed so as to be able to illuminate details life stories of the two academics. Narrative inquiry, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000; as cited in Creswell, 2009), refers to “a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives”. It is a vital methodology in researching “human being” and “becoming”

(Zimmerman & Kim, 2017). Hence, narrative inquiry is relevant to use in illuminating the lived stories of academics.

In this study, two academics who have long engaged and done their service in various religious activities and been called *teungku* were involved after having their consent. They were interviewed separately at their convenience. The interviews were carried out to understand their lived stories in reconstructing their identities and the ways they negotiate their identities. To do so, a collaboration with them was made as a way to understand and inquire into their experiences (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The interviews began with less structured questions beginning with the change in the participants’ lives. The questions were oriented to three commonplaces of narrative inquiry, including temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Drawing on their own life stories, the participants make sense of their lives and themselves. Their identities are theorized in the process of telling and retelling of their stories.

Their stories were transcribed and given back to them for checking and rechecking and ensuring that the aspects of their lived experiences’ representation. The data was then analyzed by using the identity approach, focusing on “how people construct themselves within institutional, cultural, and discursive contexts” (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The data was then interpreted by using narrative chronology by relating the significant events in their stories based on the time order they occur (Fraser, 2004).

RESULTS

In-depth interviews were carried out with the two academic-*teungku* (pseudonyms are used throughout this study) briefly depicted in Table 1.

The narrative data was analyzed and is presented below by initially addressing the narrative of each academic-*teungku* in turn.

Table 1
The two academic-*teungku* respondents

No	Academics Names	Education	Work Experiences	Job	Disciplines
1	Buh, Ph.D	MA from the US and Ph.D. from Australia	27 years	English language teacher educator	Linguistics
2	Dr. Ham	Doctoral degree from Germany	20 years	Engineering educator	Engineering

Tgk Buh, Ph.D.: Using Islamic Text in Learning English

Pak Buh is an English lecturer at a public university in Aceh, Indonesia. He narrated that his early education started at an Islamic primary school (MI), secondary (SMP) and senior high schools (SMA) in Aceh in which he took several Islamic religious subjects as well as secular subjects. As well, he has a good ability to read the Quran as he had learned from local *teungku*. Besides, he used to take part in several competitions of reciting the Quran, locally called *Musabaqah Tilawatil Quran* (MTQ). He often won the competitions at several levels, ranging from village level, sub-district level, to district level. However, he never won the MTQ at the provincial level. As such, he could not proceed to a higher level of competition, such as national, regional and international levels. Yet, his failure to win MTQ at a provincial level did not make him discouraged from learning the Quran because winning the MTQ was not

his main focus at that time; he focused more on studying at school.

Upon completing his senior high school, he continued his study to a public university to undertake a bachelor program majoring in English for education and teacher training. He chose that department because he aspired to be an English teacher. While studying at university, he sometimes took part in several competitions of reciting the Quran. He was also frequently invited to read the Quran in opening or closing social activities on his campus.

Having completed his undergraduate program, he served as an English teaching assistant at his university and the language development center. Then he received a Fulbright scholarship to study in the United States of America, majoring in linguistics. During his study in the US, he felt that the Muslim community on his campus and in the community where he lived had a lack of Islamic religious resource persons that served as *khatib* or preacher to deliver

an obligatory sermon as an integral part of Jumah Prayer in the mosque. He then attempted to serve as a *khatib* on Friday prayer at a mosque. He successfully made in his debut as he had public speaking skills, good Quran reciting, and existing basic knowledge on Islamic. Since then, he was requested to do that again and again. The opportunities to practice it significantly made him more confident to do Islamic sermon publicly.

He did similar things when he took a Ph.D. program in linguistics in Australia, which made him recognized among the Indonesian Muslim society as a well-capable person in Islamic religious sermon. He also participated in fundraising for building an Indonesian mosque for the Indonesian Muslim society in Melbourne. He was also invited to do religious speech following prayers during his whole life in Australia.

Back to Aceh after having completed his doctoral program, Tgk Dr. Buh returned to his work at university as a tenured English lecturer. Since then, he had also been frequently invited to be a *khatib* for Jumah prayers in several mosques and as a *dai* in Banda Aceh municipality and Aceh Besar district. He felt that being a *dai* was an individual obligation of Muslim, besides doing his main job as an English teacher educator. He frequently wore several attributes or markers of *dai*, such as wearing *peci* (Muslim hat) almost the whole day, and *gamis* dress when joining Islamic rituals in the society. Because of his active participation in such activities, he is currently called Tgk Dr. He has frequently been invited to a jury for MTQ at many

levels in Aceh. Hence, he currently has multiple social identities, such as an English lecturer and *teungku*.

More importantly, Pak Buh also often used Islamic related teaching materials in teaching English to his EFL students at university. He believed that in that way he could make his students gradually familiar with English vocabularies related to Islamic religious terms and more attached to Islamic knowledge and practices. In that way, he expected that they would be able to speak about Islam in English and at the same time improved their understanding of Islam.

To improve his confidence in participating further in such social and religious activities in his society, he continued investing in learning Islamic knowledge and the Arabic language. He believed that these have been barriers to participating fully in Islamic religious activities and understanding the books written in the Arabic language.

Tgk Dr. Ham: Using Sciences in Preaching Islam

Dr. Ham is currently a lecturer of natural sciences in a public university in Aceh and voluntarily works as *imam* (prayer leader) of a local mosque. His participation in Islamic activities is inseparable from his childhood experiences. When he was a child, his father, who had good knowledge of Arabic and the Quran and worked as a math teacher, taught him to read the Quran in the correct manner and explained its contents. While studying at primary through senior high schools, he often participated in MTQ.

As he was able to read the Quran, he was also employed while studying at university. He was also frequently invited to read the Quran in an opening or closing of locally held social activities. Besides, he worked as a radio anchor and tutor at a private course that prepared prospective students to enter a university. He also served as a master of ceremony (MC) in various social activities.

During his Ph.D. study in Germany majoring in the natural sciences, he was often visited by non-Muslim missionaries to spread their religion to him. However, he did not convert into their religion because of his good knowledge and strongly ingrained beliefs in Islam. This challenged and encouraged him to improve his existing knowledge of Islam and to become a novice preacher of Islam religion in his Muslim community in Germany. He wanted to strengthen the Islamic knowledge and religious beliefs of his community members, especially students and other Indonesian Islamic communities living in the western country.

Once he had completed his Ph.D. program, he returned to Aceh and chose to devote his time to engaging in Islamic religious activities. His confidence as a novice Islamic preacher then grew gradually. He has dedicated his time to be a volunteer member of a mosque while doing his daily routine as a lecturer of natural science at a public university. He has frequently been invited to serve as a *khatib* or preacher of Jumah prayer and during Ramadhan month, indicating that he had been accepted to do the roles in his society. When the interview

was done, he stated that he has been fully booked for the whole year for delivering preaches in mosques in Aceh.

He had enjoyed being an Islamic preacher and had a commitment to do so while being a lecturer of natural sciences at university for several reasons. Firstly, he could use scientific findings and theories in explaining Islam. He stated that Islam and natural sciences could be mutually supportive because natural science provided proofs and theories to explain further about the verses of the Quran and prophetic traditions (*hadits*). He stated that because of his combination of Islam religion and sciences in his speech, his preaching became interesting. And he had frequently received invitations to do sermons in both regular and one-off daily social activities. Secondly, he felt that learning and engaging in religious activities were obligatory for him even though he was not a graduate of Islamic traditional boarding schools, like *dayah* or *pesantren*.

However, he felt that his involvement in religious activities was hampered by his lack of ability in the Arabic language. To anticipate this, he had invested his time and effort in learning the Arabic language by himself through any printed and online learning resources and communication with the community members of Islamic preachers. Besides, he was sometimes criticized for not wearing *teungku*'s clothes in his daily life. He preferred wearing casual clothes as he reasoned that Islam necessitated every Muslim to wear clothes that cover one's body, especially the *awrah*

parts. He also argued that our understanding of Islam and the degree of our submission to Allah were not determined by our clothes.

DISCUSSION

The narratives from both Tgk Buh, Ph.D., and Tgk Dr. Ham are discussed by drawing upon Wenger's (1998) identity development theory through participation in a community of practice, as also adopted by many researchers (e.g., Nghia & Tai, 2017).

Identification Process

Wenger (2010) viewed that the identification process involved engagement, imagination, and alignment. The identity of both of the non-religious discipline lecturer-*teungku* had developed since their early childhood. However, the process they experienced was different from one another. Dr. Ham's hybrid identities of academic-*teungku* were initially constructed through his intensive interactions with his father as a religious person with high competence in the Arabic language and the Quran, his participation in the community of practice of MTQ, and his experiences during his studying at several universities in Indonesia and abroad. A little bit different in his hybrid identity formation Dr. Buh experienced during his participation in MTQ and his study at teacher education and overseas. Put differently, both of them used their existing competencies of reading the Quran and public speaking as the important requirements to enter into the new professional identity as a *teungku*.

Both of their identities were also shaped by the imaginations. Their imagined identities

make them construct and reconstruct their identities. For instance, during their childhood, they imagined being able to read the holy Quran professionally and win the Quran reading competitions at many levels. Later on, especially during their study abroad, however, their imaginations were challenged and reconstructed to be *dai* or Muslim preachers. Both their exiting ability to read the Quran and their confidence to speak publicly are highly supportive. Their imaginations to be more professional *dai* motivate them to learn more and further about Islam, the Arabic language, and the Quran.

Both Dr. Ham and Dr. Buh had attempted to align their practices, such as by continually learning the Quran and Arabic language and participating in the activities of the community. This is called legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which refers to "learning by immersion in the new community and absorbing its modes of action and meaning as a part of the process of becoming a community member" (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017). Hence, they need to master knowledge in order to move towards full participation in the community. However, Dr. Ham was not willing to align with the way the members of the community practiced value and saw clothes. He kept wearing casual dresses as he believed that knowledge and submission to God were not on the dress. Nevertheless, he always wore dresses that fulfill the requirements in the Islamic dress code, which was to cover *awrah*, which was commonly defined as the parts of the body that must be kept covered.

Negotiation Process

According to Wenger (1998), the process of identity formation also includes the negotiation of meanings, or practices, which determines the extent to which we can contribute to and shape the practices that we invest in. In terms of the negotiation process, Dr. Buh and Dr. Ham's participation in studying the non-religious disciplines of study and religious-related Indonesian community activities overseas had provided them opportunities to negotiate their practice of the teaching and preaching contents. While Dr. Buh had negotiated his teaching contents, such as by relating them to Islamic religious worship practices, Dr. Ham had done so by incorporating the contents of the natural science into two main Islamic sources, such as the Quran and hadiths. Both of them had different arguments regarding the reasons behind the combinations. Dr. Ham argued that the integration of natural sciences contents to his speeches made it more interesting, more logical and scientific, and received high attention from the educated audience. Differently, Dr. Buh argued that the integration of Islamic religious contents into his English teaching made his students better understand religious knowledge and practices. In other words, while Dr. Buh had challenged the existing practices of teaching English in his community of practice, Dr. Ham had challenged the commonly practiced Islamic religious speeches.

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings, several conclusions can be made in understanding the trajectory of the hybrid identity reconstruction of the two universities lecturer-*teungku*. Firstly, they have reconstructed their identity to meet the individual obligation of Muslims to do *dakwah*, regardless of their discipline respectively. Secondly, they have enjoyed joining the *teungku* world as their practices have got good acceptance in the community. Thirdly, the community acceptance has encouraged them to strive to move from peripheral participation to center, such as by learning further about the things necessary in the process of alignment with the practice in the community. Fourthly, their intensive interaction and engagement in the community of practice also contribute to the hybrid identity reconstruction. Overall, the trajectory of identity reconstruction of the academic-*teungku* in the Muslim world confirms Wenger's (1998) social learning theory.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mary Dixon of Deakin University Australia for her constructive comments and suggestions to this article.

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