

Strengthening national identity partnerships through community participation in border areas

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the participation of border communities in maintaining national identity in the border areas between Indonesia and Timor Leste. The research approach utilized in this study was a case study, and data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The study focused on border communities in East Kopalima District, Malaka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. The findings revealed that border communities participated in maintaining the spirit of nationalism and national identity in three ways. Firstly, they participated in Technical Guidance (Bimtek) on Border Guard Management and capacity building activities for border communities, including the maintenance of national boundary markers such as National Boundary Pillars (PBN) and Border Sign Posts (BSP) along the national border. Additionally, they preserved local culture. Secondly, the community actively participated in flag ceremonies to commemorate the anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Indonesia and National Education Day. Thirdly, they participated in preserving the national language in border areas to communicate with fellow Indonesians and citizens of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste (RDTL).

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Introduction

The process of establishing a state must fulfill at least three essential elements: the existence of people or communities who form groups and wish to unite, possession of an area with clear boundaries (covering land, sea, and air spaces), and availability of a government with clear boundaries of sovereignty to regulate relations and maintain order in society. Hadiwijoyo (2009, p. 11) explains that "a fixed state territory generally has clear, firm, and measurable boundaries. The determination and affirmation of the territorial boundaries of a country are important and urgent requirements". It is due to the rapid growth and development that necessitate new space for activities, which affect changes in the boundaries of a country. Additionally, the sovereignty of a country is explicitly and implicitly visible from its territorial boundaries (M. A. N. Arifin et al., 2022; Broich et al., 2013). Without territorial boundaries, a country may face difficulties in gaining recognition of its existence in the international world and recognized as a subject of international law (Okhonmina, 2017).

The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia shares borders with ten neighboring countries. Six provincial areas border other countries: Riau, East Kalimantan, West Kalimantan, North Sulawesi, Papua New Guinea, and East Nusa Tenggara. For land borders, Indonesia shares borders with Malaysia, Timor Leste, and Papua New Guinea. Meanwhile, the sea border covers the territories of Malaysia, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, the Philippines, Australia, Vietnam, India, Thailand, and the Republic of Palau (M. A. N. Arifin et al., 2022).

Article 25 of the 1945 Constitution states that the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is an archipelagic state characterized by an archipelago with territories whose boundaries and rights are stipulated by law. Indonesia's border areas have unique characteristics that are influenced by culture, ethnicity, local wisdom, and the natural potential in the area. A group of people or individuals living in one border area who share common interests and culture, local wisdom, customary law, norms, and various regulations that they are ready to obey are known as border communities.

Indonesia faces a significant challenge: maintaining the spirit of nationalism and national identity. National identity is a local genius that can withstand the influence of foreign cultures in the globalization era (Parameswara et al., 2021). National identity can be interpreted as a dynamic view of life and national identity to achieve the ideals and goals of the state. Indonesia must still have a binding force that can strengthen national unity and integrity, namely nationalism and pride in maintaining national identity, to preserve the sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. The rapid flow of globalization has been able to influence national identity. It has the potential to diminish the nation's cultural values. Cultural communities no longer pay attention to their own culture, let alone have the desire to preserve it. They tend to adopt and apply foreign cultures while disregarding their own culture. The original culture is considered ancient compared to foreign cultures deemed more modern (Sebayang, 2020)

The territorial boundaries of a country occupy an important position in terms of geographical, legal, and political aspects. Border communities tend to have a higher level of mobility and come into direct contact with other communities of different backgrounds and nationalities (Sigalas, 2010). They interact socio-culturally, economically, and politically, which stimulates the emergence of different tendencies from non-border communities. For example, foreign languages (bilingual or multilingual), foreign currency, consumption of foreign products, and living and working in neighboring countries. Thus, safeguarding national identity in border areas is an urgent action to take, not only to strengthen nationalism but also to preserve the country's cultural values. Consciousness as a citizen of the nation is a source for the birth and development of national identity. Therefore, the nation-state is an imagined community, and national identity is generally abstract and develops over time (Asmorojati & Risti-P, 2018). In this context, citizens must be willing and loyal to support national identity, which must be continuously implanted, built, and developed.

Timor Leste is a relatively new neighboring country that directly borders on land with Indonesia. After Suharto's resignation as the President of Indonesia and under international pressure, President BJ Habibie announced in early 1999 that the province of East Timor (now the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste) was allowed to conduct a public opinion ballot to determine whether it still wanted to join the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) or choose to separate and become its own country. Finally, on August 30, 1999, 78.5% of registered voters voted to leave Indonesia and become a separate state (Kingsbury, 2003)

Some of the main problems that must be addressed immediately can be broadly identified as follows: First, the government should prioritize developing border areas through welfare rather than a security approach. Second, the management of security issues at the border should not solely rely on international law but also consider the socio-cultural background of the Timorese, who have close

relationships and the community's interests. Third, security issues at the Indonesia-Timor Leste border require more serious attention and must be resolved in the short term (Dupont et al., 2002)

Moreover, East Kobalima Subdistrict is one of the priority locations (Lokpri) in Malaka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, and it was chosen as the site of our study. This sub-district is classified as an underdeveloped area due to its limited access to government resources, leading to the inadequate development of the area compared to other regions. This condition also triggers the illegal smuggling of goods sold in Timor Leste to support the family's economic situation. Various border issues related to economics, social, cultural, political, and security impact the decrease of nationalism spirit and national identity, primarily related to Pancasila as the fundamental and instrumental identity (Nurdin, 2017).

Another concern is the erosion of the spirit of nationalism and national identity among people in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area, especially as the State of Timor Leste undergoes rapid development. Job opportunities in neighboring countries can seriously threaten Indonesians, especially in border areas. This fact provides a special 'interest' for Indonesians to choose work in Timor Leste rather than in their home country, which could erode the sense of nationality, especially among people in the border areas, and have severe impacts on the sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Our study focused on strengthening nationalism and national identity for people in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area, particularly in East Kobalima District, Malaka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia.

Method

The study employed a case study approach and presented its results as a description of the role of the Border Management Agency of East Nusa Tenggara Province in strengthening the national identity of people in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area. The study was conducted in East Kobalima District, Malaka Regency, one of the priority locations in East Nusa Tenggara Province that border Timor Leste. The site was chosen because the people were vulnerable to the influence of the State of Timor Leste, which had the potential to diminish their sense of nationalism and pride in maintaining their national identity and the sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

The data analysis component began with data reduction. Since the researchers obtained a large amount of data from the field, they needed to record it in detail. Data reduction involves merging and standardizing all forms of data into a script (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were reduced and summarized. After reducing the data, the next step was to present it. This study presented the data from interviews, observations, and documentation as narration and description. The researchers then processed the data more concretely to make it easier to understand and draw conclusions. Finally, they concluded from the results of the field research that had undergone the process of data reduction and presentation. The conclusions of this study could answer the problem formulation for analysis.

Results and Discussion

When looking at the people in the country's border areas, border communities are often classified as disadvantaged groups. Issues regarding the dynamics of local communities living in border areas should receive serious attention from various parties (Carter & Poast, 2020).

Efforts to Strengthen National Identity for the People of East Kobalima District

The border is an imaginary line that prioritizes state sovereignty as a crucial element. This sovereignty demarcates the boundaries of a nation-state, which, in a formal context, operates smoothly with awareness. To bring Indonesian to remote areas of the country, efforts are required

to promote concrete justice, allowing individuals in remote parts of the country to experience it. These efforts enable the border community to cultivate a love for the homeland, community loyalty, brotherhood among fellow citizens, and a sense of security and comfort in maintaining the existence of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

Inculcating awareness of ideology, nation, and state can be achieved by practicing Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which includes the nation's view of life, the history of the national movement, and an integrated understanding of the archipelago and national resilience (Nurdin, 2017). Considering the condition of people in border areas, these efforts are crucial in realizing the life of the nation and state, thereby creating a society that upholds the ideology of Pancasila and implements its noble values.

As a border area, Malaka Regency has a strategic function in developing national strength to overcome all disturbances that endanger the nation and state's integrity, identity, and survival. Additionally, it plays a crucial role in the struggle to achieve national goals for the welfare of all levels of society, particularly in border areas. According to Arifin (2014, p. 51), "the border area is an area that plays a significant role in the political competition between two countries". The East Kopalima sub-district has four villages with a border with the State of Timor Leste, with a total boundary line length of 32 kilometers. Geographically, the East Kopalima sub-district is one of the four priority locations in Malaka Regency. East Kopalima District is the only sub-district on the land borders State of Timor Leste.

Regarding the context of building at the border, the focus is on the human aspect as a vulnerable entity in understanding contemporary nationalism, which contrasts with the classic statement regarding citizens' loyalty to their country. However, the state must fulfill every interest and serve the public's aspirations (Raharjojati et al., 2009). Priority Locations are sub-districts in the land and sea border areas as part of the development concentration areas stipulated in BNPP Regulation No. 1 concerning the Grand Design of Management of State Boundaries and Border Areas for 2011-2025. Thus, the East Kopalima sub-district is classified as a priority location on land. The sub-district borders directly with the state of Timor Leste on land and is included in the exit-entry point (Pos-Cross Borders) Motamasin. Infrastructure improvement has a significant impact on overcoming illegal acts. As Mansyah (2017) emphasizes, the government needs to realize the development of road infrastructure and other public facilities to reach isolated areas and provide convenience in meeting the needs of life to improve the welfare of people in border areas.

In Indonesia's context, Indonesians' national identity is rooted in the noble values of Pancasila, which are reflected in the implementation of social, national, and state life. This identity is manifested through symbols of national identities, such as the Indonesian language, the red and white flag, the national anthem 'Indonesia Raya', the emblem 'Garuda Pancasila', and the motto 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika'. To preserve this national identity, love for the homeland and national integration has become crucial (Semana, 2018). Local government activities are organized to strengthen national identity in border areas, including the Kopalima District in Malaka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province.

One aspect of nationalism is pride in national identity (Pamungkas, 2015: 151). In this context, the lives of people residing in the country's border areas are described. It is essential for those living in these regions to take pride in being Indonesian and to maintain their national identity for the sake of the unity and integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

Technical Guidance on Boundary Guard Management

The Technical Guidance of the Border Guard is an annual activity organized by the Border Management Agency of East Nusa Tenggara Province. Its purpose is to address the issues frequently

arising in the border region between Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste (RDTL). The participants of this program, known as cadres, play a crucial role as supportive elements that are aware of the importance of defending the country and preserving and safeguarding national boundaries and development in border areas. This activity also promotes public participation in maintaining national boundary markers, such as the National Boundary Pillar and Border Sign Post (BSP) along the national border in East Kobalima District.

Border Guard participants who have undergone technical guidance must be prepared to support sustainable development in border areas, improve people's welfare as national border guards, and strengthen the territorial integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. They should also be ready to support the development climate with a conducive environment in the border area and preserve the cultural values of the local community. The cultural values that are present in most communities in a country and are reflected in national identity should not be frozen in normative and dogmatic beliefs but rather be open to evolving, including in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, due to the Indonesian people's desire for progress (Rohman & Ningsih, 2018). Another way of participating is to protect the land and the entire territory of Indonesia, making Pancasila a unifying factor of the nation and state, preserving the noble name, and contributing to the nation and state's progress (Taher, 2021).

Raising the Great Red and White Flag

The Malaka Regency Government has implemented activities to strengthen national identity among the community, especially those in priority locations in East Kobalima. One of these activities was raising the Great Red and White flag on August 14, 2022, at the Motamasin Lighthouse. The flag, measuring 40 x 20 meters, was raised by the Regional Government represented by the Deputy Regent of Malaka, the East Kobalima Sub-district Head, Village Heads, and Community Leaders. On August 17, after the flag-raising ceremony, the Border Security Officer Unit (Satgas Pamtas) established the Red and White Flag at as many as 1072 points along the boundary line. Participants included the Border Security Officer Unit employees in Motamasin, the Representative of the Regent in Malaka, and communities of East Kobalima that actively participated in the activity.

These activities were not only to celebrate the 77th Anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia (HUT RI) but also had the theme "Our Action is Indonesia: Together We Instill the Spirit of Patriotism and Love for the Homeland from the Indonesia-Timor Leste Boundary for the Generation of the Nation." These activities aimed to foster a sense of love for the homeland, arouse the spirit of cooperation in social life, and promote the national identity of people in border areas.

Strengthening National Identity in School Environment

In addition to several activities to strengthen national identity, we also observed efforts to reinforce students' national identity at Junior High School Metamauk, one of the state junior high schools in East Kobalima District, located approximately 2 kilometers from the Motamasin Cross-Border Post. A unique habit at that school is students always sing national songs in the morning and participate in simultaneous Scout activities throughout Malaka Regency as a border district. Given the importance of national identity in the border area, students must be prepared and involved in activities that foster a spirit of nationalism as the younger generation. Border issues and the rapid influence of globalization must be acknowledged as an unavoidable part of life in border areas. Therefore, students in the border areas of East Kobalima must be involved and familiarized with such activities. The younger generation's involvement is the driving force for realizing a sense of belonging and responsibility, adding insight, and strengthening the nationalism of the younger generation.

Several activities aim to strengthen nationalism and the national identity of the people in the border areas, particularly those in the East Kobalima District. These activities are a form of a driving

force, especially for young citizens as the next generation, to understand nationalism and the national identity of Indonesia. Given current developments, with increasingly advanced technology, nationalism, and national identity are the primary factors in maintaining Indonesia's existence in the border area. The presence of nationalism and an understanding of national identity will create a solid national sovereignty.

The Use of Indonesian

The East Kobalima District is unique in its participation in preserving the national language in border areas for communication with both fellow Indonesian citizens and citizens of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste. As described by Villegas-Torres & Mora-Pablo (2018), language is an element that contributes to identity formation. Language is a symbol system formed arbitrarily from the sound elements of human speech and used as a means of interaction among humans.

The role of language as an identity of a community group can be used to strengthen group identity. Therefore, strengthening the national identity of Indonesians can begin with using Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian Language). Bahasa Indonesia has two positions: national language and state language. As a national language, it symbolizes national pride and identity, a liaison medium between citizens, regions, and cultures, and a unifying medium for tribes, cultures, and languages in the archipelago. Meanwhile, as a state language, Bahasa Indonesia serves as the official language of the state, the language of instruction for education, a means of communication at the national level, and a tool for developing culture, science, and technology.

Conclusion

This study identified three ways border communities maintain the spirit of nationalism and national identity in border areas. The *first* is through participation in Technical Guidance (Bimtek) on Border Guard Management and capacity building for border communities. It involves the community's participation in maintaining national boundary markers, such as the National Boundary Pillars (PBN) and Border Signs Post (BSP), along with the national border in East Kobalima District preserving local culture. The *second* way is through active participation in flag ceremonies to commemorate the anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Indonesia and National Education Day. The *third* way is by preserving the national language in the border area's communication processes, both with fellow Indonesians and citizens of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste (RDTL).

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