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**Education, Pedagogy, and Identity: The notion of historical, political, and sociopolitical experiences of Indonesia in educational research**

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**Abstract**

Schooling and education are situated contexts to understand issues of identity, culture, representation, and agency (Giroux, 1996). Schools are shaped by specific cultural practices and values which reflect the norms of a particular society for which they have been developed (Hollins, 1996). For example, education and schooling in Indonesia is one of the situated contexts to scrutinize the concept of 'Indonesian young girls' and 'Indonesian schoolgirls' (Muthali'in, 2001; Blackburn, 2004; Smith-Hefner, 2005). Using the conceptual frameworks of gender, identity and schooling, the schoolgirls identify themselves of being Indonesian girls shaped by their ethnic and religious affiliations. The inextricable link between ethnicity and religion in Indonesia has been continuously shaped within the historical, cultural politics in Indonesia, from the ancient time, the Old Order, New Order, Reformation and Post-Reformation Era. Within the Indonesian context, religious values and social norms hold by the society is important because cultural development contributes to the image of Indonesia as a country (Junarsin, 2009).

**Keywords:** *Indonesian schoolgirls, academic achievement, identity, education*

**INTRODUCTION**

The use of the term pedagogy in its broad sense include not only issues pertaining classroom strategies, instructional materials, curricular objectives, and evaluation measures, but also a wide range of historical, political, and sociocultural experiences that directly or indirectly influence issues in education (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). This means that historical, political and sociopolitical experiences of a particular community in a particular setting is necessary as insights and complicates the issues of classroom strategies, instructional material, curricular objectives and evaluation measures within the education field.

Similar to Kumaravadivelu's idea above, many scholars state that schooling and education are situated contexts to understand issues of identity, culture, representation, and agency (Giroux, 1996;

p. 60; Joseph, 2008; Shain, 2003; Srimulyani, 2012). Schools are shaped by specific cultural practices and values and reflect the norms of a particular society for which they have been developed (Hollins, 1996; Joseph, 2008; Srimulyani, 2012). A specific example of is that the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language focus on the formal status and curriculum of schools in Indonesia. The curriculum, headmasters, teachers, students and school facilities are involved within this process of teaching and learning in postcolonial Indonesia. With regards to pedagogy and identity, it is crucial to acknowledge the diverse cultural backgrounds as well as gender differences of Indonesia and Indonesian in looking at the curriculum and/or observing headmasters, teachers and students involved in the teaching and learning process. Within the Indonesian

context, cultural background with regards to the notion of gender, ethnicity and religion portray the complexity of different local cultural identities in a specific setting which is the Postcolonial Indonesia.

In this article, I attempt to explain the historical, political, and sociocultural experiences within the Postcolonial Indonesian context necessary to understand how the pedagogy or the teaching and learning process in Indonesia operates. In the first section, I explain about the cultural politics in Indonesia which underlies the historical, political, and sociocultural experiences of the Indonesians. In the second section, I describe the importance of ethnicity and religion in the Postcolonial Indonesian Context. In the third section, I elaborate on how gender influences the Postcolonial Indonesian context. Then, I discuss the inextricable link among ethnicity, religion and gender within the field of education and schooling important as insights within the Indonesian context.

### **Cultural politics in Indonesia: New order era/Suharto's regime (1965 – 1998) and the reformation era (1998 – present)**

With more than 13,000 islands, 200 million people, approximately 50 ethnic groups, 5 religious affiliations, and 2000 regional languages, Indonesia has remarkable cultural, linguistics, ethnic, and religious diversity. Two major historical and political events namely the New Order Era under Suharto's regime and the Reformation Era have shaped and continue to shape ethnic, religious and gender identities of Indonesian in contemporary Indonesia.

The New Order started when General Suharto took control of an attempted coup, killing six of Indonesian military senior officers in September 30, 1965 whereby President Sukarno was replaced by General Suharto. President

Suharto then ruled Indonesia for more than thirty-two years (1965 – 1998) and introduced the concept of New Order. One of the key concepts of the New Order society was 'its obsessions with securing a certain kind of social orderliness, hierarchy, and centralized control which intend on propagating unitary narratives of Indonesian nation, history, culture, and individual identity' (Bodden, 1999).

As an example, the Indonesian identity within the official social and political discourse is seen as homogenous unitary. The awareness towards the diversity of ethnic groups, religion and languages stated in the beginning of this section was acknowledged within the New Order Era which becomes the slogan of the country was 'unity in diversity'. This national identity conformed to the rules of centralized control which is the government. An example of the implementation of this key concept, according to Hoon (2006), is that Indonesian citizen irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, and language were all imagined within 'a constructed homogenous national identity called Pancasila to maintain order and stability'.

As the implementation of 'unity in diversity' was acted for the lives of Indonesians, discriminations toward the Chinese ethnics still occurred. In 1967, a special regulation concerning the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia was enacted (Tan, 1991, p. 116) which marginalized and discriminated the Chinese population. The regulation included the following: (i) those with Chinese names were urged to change them to Indonesian names; (ii) Chinese religious behavior should only be expressed privately; and (iii) the government decided to close Chinese schools because some of these Chinese schools used Chinese, instead of Indonesian, as the medium of instruction (Tan, 1991, p. 117).

Albeit the discrimination and marginalizing of the Chinese citizens

during the New Order regime, the role of the Chinese in the Indonesian economy was still acknowledged and accepted by the majority of the Indonesian people, creating the stereotype that the Chinese were wealthy and benefited from many facilities provided in the New Order era (Tan, 1991). For example, unlike the Arab and Malay traders who could assimilate with the natives because of similar traditions such as the practice of Islam in their daily lives, Chinese traders were perceived as aliens because of the different traditions (Coppel, 2002, p. 102). As stated above, the 'unity in diversity' slogan under the New Order era meant silencing ethnic and religious differences. This way, the Chinese were able to maintain their domination in the trading sectors in Indonesia whereas the Arab and Malay traders assimilated well with local traditions.

The success as well as the failure of the diversity management using *Pancasila* which means the five pillars (of a state) as the national principle and the slogan 'unity in diversity' as the media to unite the Indonesians also had an impact on the success and failure of the implementation of the decentralization system. This system, which was devised during the Old Order Era, was implemented in the local government of every province in many sectors such as health, trade, social, cooperatives, and industries; including education. Some functions were transferred from the central government to the local governments (Devas, 1997; p. 360). With regards to the education sector, functions such as the administration/supervision of primary schools, community education, sport activities, youth activities, and cultural activities became the responsibility of the local government (Devas, 1997; p. 360).

The year 1998 was marked by the big change popularly called the Reformation (Budiman, 2008; Choi, 2004;

Hasan, 2008; Nordholt, 2008). In this year, Indonesians witnessed the downfall of President Suharto (Budiman, 2008; p. 73), marking the downfall of the New Order regime and the beginning of the Reformation era (Nordholt, 2008, p.2). B.J. Habibie, who had been vice-president, took over the presidency and ruled Indonesia for one year before an official election was held in 1999. Abdurrahman Wahid won the election and became the next president. However, Wahid's presidency did not last a whole presidency period of five years because a special session of the National Congress impeached him. He was replaced by Megawati Sukarno Putri, formerly vice-president, the first female Indonesian president. She ran for a re-election in the 2004 presidential election but was defeated by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. She sought a rematch in 2009 presidential election, losing again to Yudhoyono.

During the Reformation era, *Pancasila* began to lose its hegemonic authority and was challenged by a wave of alternative religious, ethnic, and regional identity politics (Nordholt; 2008, p. 2). This era opened up new challenges such as 'the resurgence of identity politics across Indonesia' (Hoon, 2006, p. 150). It also brought the possibility of opening up new alternatives in managing pluralism in the country. For example, the acknowledgement of the centrality of local customs in village-level reforms showed that the Reformation Era opened up political spaces for the replacement of the once nationally-uniform institutions (Acciaioli, 2001, p. 88). This meant that there was an alternative challenge towards the centralization system implemented during the Old Order and New Order eras. For example, it is a general fact that the majority of ethnic-religious group in Bali is the Balinese-Hindu. Therefore the local policy takes into account Balinese-Hindu practices such as the implementation of Hindu prayer in schools and institutions.

Placing offerings to God in front of most houses in Bali is also another example of Hindu practices among the majority Balinese-Hindu.

This transition, however, has its own weakness of creating new uncertainties and insecurities. Taking advantage of these uncertainties and insecurities of the political characteristics of the transitions, formerly marginalized or excluded groups were mobilized to make bolder claim for inclusion, or at least greater access to resources. As such, the contests led directly to a series of violent conflicts (Davidson, 2008; p. 6). For example, in February 1999, a native-foreign clash happened in the district of Sambas, West Kalimantan, a place which boasted two major ethnic groups of natives: Dayaks and Malays Muslims and a foreign Chinese ethnic group. A widespread riot between Malay-Muslim and Muslim migrant communities from the island of Madura also broke out.

The dynamic political changes during the New Order Era and The Reformation Era influenced socio-cultural changes during postcolonial Indonesia. In fact, political changes within postcolonial Indonesia also influenced socio-political changes in which broad influence was felt by the Indonesian people.

### **Theorizing ethnicity and religion in the postcolonial Indonesian context**

As stated in the introduction, schooling and education are situated contexts to understand issues of identity, culture, representation, and agency. Moreover, the teaching and learning in the postcolonial context involves the acknowledgement of the cultural politics in Indonesia; in this case the New Order Era/Suharto's Regime (1965 – 1998) and the Reformation Era (1998 – present). The issues of cultural politics in Indonesia, such as the importance of ethnic and religious experiences, have shaped and continue to shape Indonesian including

the experiences shared by those involved in the teaching and learning process.

The Indonesian scholars illustrate the complication of differences of ethnicity and religion among other dimensions within the plurality of Indonesian cultures as follows:

Ethnic and religious differences are hardly limited to the regions that have experienced violent conflicts during the past few years. As Hildred Geertz famously noted, "There are over three hundred different ethnic groups in Indonesia, each with its own cultural identity, and more than two hundred and fifty distinct languages are spoken... nearly all the important world religions are represented, in addition to a wide range of indigenous ones..." (Malley, 2002).

From the excerpt above, it can be seen that ethnicity and religion are two prominent dimensions of cultures in the Indonesian context. To conceptualize the politics of 'ethnic-religious collectives' for Indonesians. Construction of various ethnic-religious differences as collective and individual identities is constantly negotiated by the Indonesian people during the ancient, colonial, and postcolonial times. Stekelenburg (2013) refers to one of the prominent definition of collective identity conceptualized by Melluci (1989) in defining a collective identity as a process of:

an interactive, shared definition of the field of opportunities and constraints offered to collective action produced by several individuals that must be conceived as a process because it is constructed and negotiated by repeated activation of the relationships that link individuals to groups (p. 793).

In the definition above, collective identity is a process of meaning making which is constructed and negotiated in the interactions of daily lives. A collective identity identifies an individual's attachment to a certain group, having a shared sense of belonging to a group. Stekelenburg (2013) adds that, identity is

studied at the collective level for a 'contentious politics' purpose, an action that disturbs the normal activities of the society such as demonstrations and riots.

The explanation above is useful as the basis of how a collective identity is used to unite and, at the same time, create conflicts within political, socio-economic, and educational practices and politics in a country. Within the context of the postcolonial Indonesia, demonstrations and riots occur among the numerically majority and minority ethnic and religious collectives in regions of Indonesia. These majority and minority groups differ from region to region. For example, the numerically-majority ethnic-religious collectives in Central Java and Yogyakarta Province are the Javanese-Muslim; in Manado, the Minahasan-Christian; and in Bali, the Balinese-Hindu. Regarding power and authority, within the national circumstance, the Javanese-Muslim holds most government post and political leadership, however, locally such as in Manado, the power and authority rests with the Minahasan-Christian and in Bali with the Balinese-Hindus. This is due to the change in the Indonesian identity politics from the Old Order Era to Reformation whereby local custom is regarded as a crucial element which should be acknowledged in the lives of the Indonesians.

Nevertheless, categorization of Indonesians into natives and foreign citizen still exists. The importance of this categorization causes Indonesian individuals to belong to certain ethnic collectives to be classified as indigenous or non-indigenous based on their 'foreignness' towards the nation (Bertrand, 2004). For example, during the Dutch colonization, the Indonesian society is divided into 'white' foreigners, 'oriental' foreigners, and natives. Originally, this classification is a racial one to discriminate Chinese Indonesians against native Indonesians (Coppel, 2002). The

Indonesian native category comprises many indigenous groups across the archipelago, with the Javanese being predominant (Tan, 2001). The Malays are classified into native Indonesians. They are regarded as native because they are 'related' to the indigenous Indonesians, sharing the major religion of Islam and making them 'own a homeland' in Indonesia (Suryadinata, 2004).

Those who are non-native, such as the Chinese and Arabs, are classified into non-indigenous, thus having a sense of 'foreignness' towards the Indonesian nation. There are no similarities which make these ethnic collectives 'related' to the native people. Coppel (2002) compared the two ethnic minorities within the majority society of the Javanese in that these two minorities have different senses of 'foreignness'. Meanwhile, the Arabs are considered less 'foreign', because the Arabs and most Javanese are Muslims, while the Chinese are considered as more foreign because of their own characteristics. Politically, because of the conflicting ideologies between the Chinese Government in China and the Indonesian Government, there is suspicion on the Chinese minority as a source of subversion. In contrast, the Arabs, as their native countries are relatively distant and disunited, are not seen as a threat to the Indonesian security. Meanwhile, an economical factor where a bipolar competition occurs between the Chinese, on the one side, and the Arabs and Javanese, on the other, also contributes to the different senses of 'foreignness' of these two ethnic collectives (Coppel, 2002, p. 100).

There is no coincidence between membership of the Muslim collectives and ethnic affiliation in Indonesia (Fee, 2001; p. 876). History has shown that the entrance of the Muslim through trading in the ancient Indonesia influenced a strong development of Islam within the nation. However, the majority of the Indonesian

Muslim do not support a nation based on the Islamic religion.

In summary, the manifested ethnic-religious collective categorization of Indonesians in all official, political, social, and educational documents and policies during the postcolonial Indonesia suggest that within the *Pancasila* and ‘unity in diversity’, the strong sense of ethnic-religious collectives is united within the overarching national identity of being Indonesians. This national identity brings complications to different ways of being a certain ethnic-religious collective because of the emphasis of the importance of the national identity. Thus, in 1963, for example, Sukarno proposed the concept of an ‘ethnic’ in Indonesia by stating the following metaphor (Suryadinata, 2004; p. 8):

“Suku” means “leg”. The Indonesian nation has many legs, just like a centipede, which are Javanese leg, Sundanese leg, Sumatran leg, Irian leg, Dayak leg, Bali leg, Sumba leg, mixed-Chinese leg. The mixed-Chinese leg is one of the Indonesian national legs.

The word ethnic itself has two meanings: ‘ethnicity’ in Indonesian, and ‘leg’ in Javanese. By using the two languages, Indonesian and Javanese, it can be said that ethnic means *leg*, a part of the body for standing, walking, and running. This concept of ethnicity is taken for granted among the majority of Indonesian nationalists even for the reason that Sukarno includes the mixed-Chinese as one of the ‘national legs’. According to Suryadinata (2004, p. 20), the exclusion of the Chinese ethnicity by the Indonesian nationalists is because they have no homeland in the Indonesian archipelago; after centuries of settlement, it is not considered enough for the Chinese to call Indonesia ‘home’. In comparison, the descendants of Ibran immigrants from Sarawak or descendants of Malay immigrants from the Malayan Peninsula are readily accepted as members of the

Sumatran leg in the centipede metaphor above (Suryadinata, 2004; p. 20).

At this point, it is important to point out the concept of how ethnic-religious collectives are overarched by a national identity as a result of the ‘unity in diversity’ strategy within the postcolonial Indonesia because of its influence in determining how schoolgirls construct their ethnic-religious collectives within their lives. The concept of a national identity which should be acceptable to all ethnic-religious collectives in which all groups could feel an affinity (Omar, 1993) has been a unique and strong characteristic of the Indonesian nation building. For example, although strong ‘Javanization’ is found throughout the colonial and postcolonial era, only a few would support an Indonesian unity if it were based on ‘Javanization’. The same is true that, according to Omar (1993), had the Indonesians viewed unity based on the *Melayu Raya* dream (Greater Malay Race covering Indonesia Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam), which is based on the development of coastal kingdoms during the ancient Indonesian period. Few would have supported it.

### **Gender in the postcolonial Indonesian context**

The complex scenarios of historical and political events and global social forces have shaped and continue to shape gender, ethnic, and religious identities of Indonesian. In understanding Indonesian girls’ ethnic and religious identities, ways of being women as theorized by postcolonial feminists (Brah, 1996, 2002; Mohanty, 2007; Narayan, 2000) is important. Individual and collective experiences are important in understanding identities. Shared experiences of individuals historically and culturally located within a nation (Yuval-Davies, 1997). In the Indonesian context, shared collective experiences of belonging to a particular ethnic community and

religious affiliation are just as important as individual experiences.

Gender is one aspect of social dimensions holding significant roles in understanding ways of being women. Ways of being women/girls/females is located within the interplay of the individual/subjective and collective experiences which are historically and culturally located (Alcoff, 1988; Brah, 1996; de Lauretis, 1986; Joseph, 2003; 2014; Mirza & Joseph, 2010; Tsolidis, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997). The daily life practices of individuals who belong within aspects of social dimensions, including gender are linked to the construction and negotiation of their identities. In this section, these concepts of gender politics are discussed in relation to the context of this study.

Concepts of gender politics produced by contemporary scholars and the postcolonial state of Indonesia create an image of innate gender differences in which modern Indonesian women in most ethnic-religious collectives (Javanese-Muslim, the Javanese-Christian, the Chinese-Christian and so on) are oriented toward domestic and wifely tasks as well as career women and productive workers in a global economy (Blackwood, 2005, p. 869, Sears, 1996; Wieringa, 2001). During the New Order Era, women were constructed as having the nurturing and reproductive role in the private sphere (Asian Development Bank, 2002, p. 45, Marcoes-Natsir, 2000; Prawansa, 2002). In this New Order era, which lasted for more than thirty-two years, women had been 'instructed' to accept a single ideal type of femininity and masculinity in the domestic space of being a wife and mother. As an example, although the most powerful women's organizations established locally within districts in Indonesia, are supported by the government, women's issues still predominantly concern their position as wives and mothers (Prawansa, 2002, p.

71) thus this become politically a powerless organization of women which tend to re-subordinate women rather to emancipate them (Wieringa, 2001, p. 17). Muslim Women organizations in Indonesia named as *Aisiyah* and *Fatayat* which was formerly formed by Javanese-Muslim women before they spread to other parts of Indonesia, also follows the traditional gender division of labour where men relate to the public sphere which includes politics, organisational policies and issues of religious laws, while women are restricted to the home and to stereotypical activities of education and health (Marcoes-Natsir, 2000; p. 136).

This typical image of a domesticated woman has changed over time and is different in present times is a central image of social order and stability (Brenner, 1999, p. 37) of the homogenous national identity (see Hoon, 2006) of Indonesia. Towards the end of the New Order, the notion of the Indonesian 'modern woman' emerged in the public spaces. This notion of the 'modern women' assigned to Indonesian women in the mid-1980s gives women a double burden of managing the family as well as handling a career outside the household (Adamson, 1997, p. 11). Besides being the nurturer of their family, women are still expected to maintain the domestic tasks and should not let their careers interfere significantly with these functions (Brenner, 1999, p. 24). However, this stereotypical image of 'modern women' is understood differently within different ethnic-religious groups. The Minangkabau-Muslim in West Sumatra still holds a strong matrilineal system where 'husbands are "guests" in their wives' houses' (Blackburn, 2004, p. 8). It is the wives who 'own' houses and at the same time become the host or the 'ruler' in their houses. Nevertheless, Minangkabau men still have their position because family and community decision are made by these men.

This notion of 'modern Indonesian woman' still appears in the Reformation Era (1998 until present) which brought about some significant policy changes in relation to women and development such as moving beyond the role of nurturing and reproductive activities in the private sphere. It also impacted on the educational and social opportunities for women. For example, the Reformation Era brought changes in the political arena where more well-educated, Javanese-Muslim women were available and they were more likely to form and lead parties such as Megawati (Blackburn, 2004, p. 109). Megawati became the fourth President of Indonesia. The *Rifka Annisa* Women Crisis Centre, the first established women's crisis centre in Indonesia, challenges the established tradition that position women at the behest of men (Mas'oed *et al.*, in Hefner 2001, p. 131). This group works to promote women's rights and work ethics. Thus, this women's NGO provides alternatives of the 'model women' created by the New Order, where being married or single, willing to have or not to have children, choosing a career or being a housewife, are all issues that should be resolved on the basis of women's own choices. Not even the husband nor the state has the right to assert control over a woman's body or mind (Dzuhayatin in Hefner, 2001, p. 265). This change brings about new alternatives for Indonesian 'modern' women in (re) constructing and negotiating their identities.

Gender politics in the postcolonial Indonesian context is inextricably linked with the discourses of ethnicity and religion. In the next section, I theorize the concepts of ethnicity and religion to define these two terms important to understand the identification process of Indonesian.

## DISCUSSION

### Gender, ethnicity, religion and schooling in Indonesia

Education and schooling in Indonesia is one of the situated contexts to scrutinize the concept of 'Indonesian women', 'Indonesian young girls', 'modern Indonesian women' (Muthali'in, 2001, Blackburn, 2004, Smith-Hefner, 2005). These young girls are located within contemporary Indonesia from the Old Order Era to the Reformation Era which have shaped and continue to shape ethnic and religious identities of Indonesians.

Schooling and education are situated contexts to understand issues of identity, culture, representation, and agency (Giroux, 1996; p. 60; Joseph, 2008; Shain, 2003; Srimulyani, 2012). Schools are shaped by specific cultural practices and values and reflect the norms of a particular society for which they have been developed (Hollins, 1996; Joseph, 2008; Srimulyani, 2012). To put these concepts in perspective, education and schooling in Indonesia is one of the situated contexts to scrutinize the concept of 'Indonesian women', 'Indonesian young girls', 'modern Indonesian women' (Muthali'in, 2001, Blackburn, 2004, Smith-Hefner, 2005). These young girls are located within contemporary Indonesia from the Old Order Era to the Reformation Era which have shaped and continue to shape ethnic and religious identities of Indonesians. The significant change from *Pancasila* during the Old Order Era and the New Order Era with its hegemonic authority and homogenous unitary was challenged by a wave of alternative religious, ethnic, and regional identity politics during the Reformation Era. This provides spaces for negotiating the complexity of different local cultural identities.

Studies which look into the interlinking relationship among gender, identity and religion in a schooling



context are for example a research on Asian schoolgirls in England (Shain, 2003). These young women as agents of 'change' in the construction and negotiation of ways of being Asian girls living in England challenging the passive stereotypes given to Asian young girls. These identity processes of construction and negotiation create new identities of young girls studying in England. Another study looks into the ethnic-identification of 16-years-old teenage girls in the Malaysian schooling context (Joseph, 2008). Within the discourse of ethnicity, these girls negotiate the complex ways of being Malay, Chinese and Indian Malaysian; between the official 'fixed', ethnic labellings from the government and the girls daily life experiences in relation to the past and present social and political events in Malaysia.

A study conducted in Java reveals that during the New Order Era Javanese-Muslim students in a state sponsored religious education were instructed 'proper' gender roles and behaviour such as an ideal wives/mother's primary responsibilities are at home whereas fathers' are the provider of the family (Smith-Hefner, 2005). Furthermore, interactions such as shaking hands or touching parts of the body with unrelated members of the opposite sex are sinful. These instructions were given in religious classes as well as religious extra-curricular activities that the students receive from school.

Several studies in the Indonesian educational context focus on the formal status and curriculum of schools in Indonesia. Several high schools in Indonesia are currently pioneering a program of being one of an 'international standard senior high school' to improve education quality and competitiveness in senior high school level, both nationally and internationally (Suwardani, 2009). This new program introduced by the government involves the improvement of

all elements of the institution from the policy to the implementation process. The curriculum, headmasters, teachers, students and school facilities attempt to advance towards the standard of an 'international high school'. Ongoing research (see Gaylord, 2008; Rohmah, 2009; Suwardani, 2009) have been conducted to find out how schools and institutions across Indonesia are dealing with this new program. One of the findings suggests that there are many problems regarding to the teaching of English within this new program in Surakarta, Central Java (Rohmah, 2009). Another finding from a research conducted in Bali reveals that headmasters and teachers should put more efforts in building networking, providing professional teaching as well as mastering new technologies such as using power points for presentation and using the internet in the teaching and learning process (Suwardani, 2009).

I, myself am located in the Indonesian educational system where I have been involved in since childhood. I have observed during my teaching days that Indonesian students come from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. For example, in a school in Yogyakarta, some students have Chinese-Christian background and some students come from Javanese-Muslim families. To add on to the research concerning identities and schooling, examining schoolgirls' different cultural background with regards to the notion of gender, ethnicity and religion is important. This will give insight on complexity of different local cultural identities as well as the aspiration of female students in the school towards the improvement of educational and schooling program in Indonesia. In relation to the schoolgirls' different cultural background, the notion of gender, ethnicity and religion are analysed from their individual and collective experiences within the schooling context.

In the approach of postcolonial feminism of identity and difference, the idea of essentialised understandings and difference of ways of being is used as the basis of how the girls perceive themselves and how others perceive them. This is a case of the girls drawing on different identity markers in a different context and at the same time creating new identities (Alcoff, 1988; Brah, 1996; de Lauretis, 1986; Joseph, 2003; Mirza & Joseph, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 1997). As I described in previous sections above, experiences of schoolgirls are shaped by both individual and collective forces. These experiences shape female adolescence identities which are receptive to similarities and difference within and between ethnic-religious categories. The schoolgirls set up binaries in their essentialised understandings and at the same time their own identity practices are not so neatly classified into binaries. These identity practices can be a mix of these understandings. This is seen through their schooling experiences.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction of this article, it is stated that historical, political and sociopolitical experiences of a particular community in a particular setting is also necessary as insights within the field of education and teaching and learning process. Schooling and education are situated contexts to understand issues of identity, culture, representation, and agency (Giroux, 1996; p. 60; Joseph, 2008; Shain, 2003; Srimulyani, 2012). Schools are shaped by specific cultural practices and values and reflect the norms of a particular society for which they have been developed (Hollins, 1996; Joseph, 2008; Srimulyani, 2012).

Construction of various ethnic-religious differences and gender differences as collective and individual identities is constantly negotiated by the Indonesian people during the postcolonial times. These constructions explain the

historical, political, and sociocultural experiences within the Postcolonial Indonesian context necessary to understand how the pedagogy or the teaching and learning process in Indonesia operates. It is important to take into account the ethnic and religious background as well as gender differences in research on the Indonesian education system as historical, political, and sociocultural experiences that directly or indirectly influence issues in education and schooling in Indonesia.

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