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Defining (Multiple) Selves: Reflections on Fieldwork in Jakarta

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Abstract

The 'Self' in late-modernity is never singular but multiplies across different discourses, practices and positions. It is constructed through difference. It is only through a relation to the 'Other' that the 'Self' can be defined. This paper endeavours to map the endless negotiations of my 'Self' as male Australian academic of Chinese descent, a Malaysian citizen, a Bruneian resident, and an Indonesian specialist, over a period of fieldwork in Jakarta in 2004. It discusses how I defined my multiple 'Selves' to different individuals and communities, how they in turn defined me, and how these constructions were always shifting. Depending on the situation, it was my Australian 'Self' that defined me, or my Chinese, or Malaysian, or Bruneian, or even a local Indonesian 'Self' acquired over the period of fieldwork. Using the practice of self-reflexivity, this paper problematises the various dichotomies between the researcher and the researched, Self/Other, insider/outsider, native/foreign and home/away.

This paper is the product of field research upon which I embarked concerning ethnic Chinese identity in contemporary Indonesia.¹ The Chinese minority in Indonesia has suffered a long history of persecution since the first ethnic cleansing carried out by the Dutch in Java in 1740. Ever since, they have been rendered convenient targets of social hostility, culminating in the large scale anti-Chinese violence of May 1998 (for details, see Yang, 2001). Despite the fact that Chinese have lived in the archipelago for many generations, some with lineages extending back to 1600, most Indonesians continually view and treat the Chinese Indonesians as outsiders or foreigners. While for most nations, citizenship connotes a legal status that differentiates

a citizen from a foreigner, in Indonesia it has been internally contestable.² In Suharto's Indonesia (and to some extent even now), 'national identity' required more than proof of birth in the country. Among citizens, there were official categories of *pribumi* (indigenous) and *non-pribumi* (non-indigenous such as Chinese, Arabs, Indians and resident foreigners) — classified based on 'race' and 'indigeneity' — with the former being regarded as the 'authentic' (*asli*) inhabitants of the land (Hoon, 18). The term '*pribumi*' was as much an artificial national construct as the term '*non-pribumi*' as they both assume identity as fixed, singular, mutually exclusive. This assumption ignores the internal diversity within both *pribumi* and *non-pribumi* collectivities, and dismisses the possibility of boundary crossing between them. In the Othering process of the ethnic Chinese as *non-pribumi*, they have been objectified and essentialized as what Chirot and Reid refer to as 'essential outsiders', or in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's words, as 'foreigners who are not foreign' (54).

The study of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia had been limited during the New Order era due to the official prohibition of discussions of issues related to SARA (*Suku, Agama, Ras, Antargolongan*, or ethnicity, religion, race and inter-class differences). My field research forms the core of my endeavour to unpack the complexities underlying the *pribumi* and *non-pribumi* divide and highlight its implications for the post-New Order reconstruction and reinvention of Chinese identity in Indonesia.

In order to understand and document the fluidity and dynamics of Chinese (or any other) identities, it is not sufficient to engage only in theorisation. My study of Chinese-Indonesian identity would hardly reflect the richness and complexity of the situation if I were to only engage in conceptual and abstract deliberation in my ivory tower and not conduct any field research. Caglar suggests that the theorising of hyphenated identities 'remains an empty programmatic statement' (170) unless effective ethnographic research is conducted.

Fieldwork in Jakarta was an enriching experience for me — both personally and academically. It not only added insights to my research, but also enabled me to experience for myself what anthropologists like Clifford and Narayan refer to as 'going native', or in my case, becoming (Chinese) Indonesian. I use the term 'native' in this paper not only to refer to the *pribumi* (indigenous

Indonesians), but also the Chinese-Indonesians – who, through many generations, have lived and died in Indonesia – even though under the New Order definition of Indonesianness, the Chinese were considered as the non-native Other. In observing, engaging, experiencing, living and subsequently writing the stories of Chinese-Indonesians, I have embarked on a journey to rediscover and renegotiate my own identity. Hence, to borrow Margery Wolf's words, 'I do not speak for them but about them, even though I occasionally use their voices to tell my story' (11). As demonstrated in the writings of Abu-Lughod, Kondo, Narayan and Ryang, self-reflexivity is a crucial exercise to show how informants related to the researcher at different points in time, as the researcher's identity changed, as well as how the informants constructed the researcher at different periods of his/her fieldwork and how this construction, in turn, shaped the researcher's identity.

This paper is an auto-ethnography that maps the endless negotiations of my identity as male Australian academic of Chinese descent, a Malaysian citizen, Bruneian resident, and Indonesian specialist, over a period of fieldwork in Jakarta in 2004. Identities are constructed through difference—it is only through a relation to the 'Other' that the 'Self' can be defined. The 'Self' constantly repositions itself in relation to the 'Other' in that particular time and place. In this way, it multiplies across different positions, discourses and circumstances (Hall, 4). Dorrine Kondo conjectures,

I attempt to avoid positing in advance the unproblematic existence of a unified, rational, coherent, bounded subject, looking instead to see 'selves' as potential sites for the play of multiple discourses and shifting, multiple subject-positions (44).

For Kondo, the essentialist notion of the 'Self' should be rejected, as the 'Self' is conceptualised as a positionality defined by ever shifting discourses. In this light, I do not wish to assume in this paper that the 'Self' can be regarded as a singular, neat and unproblematic entity. However, Romit Dasgupta argues,

While it is important to appreciate the multiplicities, contradictions, ambiguities and fluidity inherent in the configurations, in the ‘crafting’ of selves [as suggested by Kondo], there is a (shifting) limit to the extent to which identity can be a free-floating, dislocated signifier... Inherent in this line of thinking is a notion of the ‘ever-shifting’ self that is continually crafted and re-constituted but is still connected (however tenuously) to some concept of a life-path/trajectory. This life-path/trajectory is itself subject to wider historical, social, cultural, economic, and other structures and processes (42).

As such, although I relentlessly write about my shifting and multiple ‘selves’ in this paper, there are, nevertheless, aspects of me that endure across contexts which define my ‘identity’. One example of this could be my religion as a Christian – an aspect of me that does have continuity and stability across contexts – despite the fact that religion, like culture, is not static and unchanging.

The first part of this paper sets out to problematise and analyse the complexities and dynamics between the researcher’s ‘Self’ and the researched ‘Others’. It will discuss how I defined different fragments of my ‘Self’ and multiple positionalities to different individuals and communities in the field, how they in turn defined me, and how these constructions were always shifting. Then I move on to destabilize the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘field’ as spatially bounded categories and question the often taken-for-granted ‘home’ vs. ‘field’ dichotomy.

(Dis)locating the Researcher’s ‘Self’

This section interrogates the epistemological dichotomies of researcher/researched, Self/Other, insider/outsider and native/foreign. These dichotomies are not fixed and unproblematic. Quite the opposite, they are constructed and shaped by specific temporal and spatial contexts, and are always shifting. Peter McLaren argues that through participant observation, ‘field-workers engage not just in the analysis of field sites but *in their active production*’ (Italics in original, 150-151; see also Kondo, 24). This ‘active production’ of meanings could not be achieved without an active participation and engagement of the researcher in the field. McLaren also states that as fieldworkers, we ‘actively construct and are constructed by the discourses we embody and the metaphors we enact’ and this renders us

'both the subject and the object of our research' (152). In this regard, we can argue that the ontological distinction between researcher and researched is no longer intact. On the other hand, Kondo argues that informants are not 'inert objects available for the free play of the ethnographer's desire, [as] they themselves were, in the act of being, actively interpreting and trying to make meaning of the ethnographer' (17). In the process of participant observation and interviews, my informants questioned me about my identity as much as I questioned them about theirs. Hence, this section will demonstrate and discuss how the researcher's 'Self' was constructed and transformed through negotiating the field and traversing various boundaries, at the same time describing how this influenced the dynamics of the field study.

The presentation of my identity in Jakarta did not take place in a vacuum, but was shaped by the people in the setting with whom I interacted. After arriving in the field, my identity – in terms of age, appearance, ethnographic practices, education, academic affiliation, ethnicity and language – was all subject to constructions and contestations. Many informants found my relatively young age (twenty four years old) unconvincing for a PhD researcher and a visiting scholar at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Jakarta. Apart from my age, it was my attire that defined my identity. According to Kees Van Dijk,

Clothes ... may reflect differences in status and political or religious outlook. As such, the manner in which one chooses to dress can serve as a statement, as a means of showing that one belongs to a specific group sharing a certain set of ideals (39).

When I arrived in Jakarta, I dressed in t-shirts, shorts and sports gear, sometimes with a sports cap – clothes that Australians (even some academics) wear during summer. It did not take me long to realize that this dress code was not acceptable in Indonesia, because it failed to reflect my status as an academic. With my casual clothing, I was refused entry to my affiliated institution (CSIS) by, first, the receptionist, then, the security officers – none were convinced that I was a visiting scholar. It also explained the offensive look that government officials and Indonesian academics bestowed on me. Hence, clothing was not free of contestation; it defined my identity

as a researcher through my outward appearance. No wonder Henk Schulte Nordholt asserts that 'an individual's "free choice" is also embedded in a variety of social conventions, which prescribe or recommend certain ways of dress in particular contexts and make other choices unlikely or even risky' (Nordholt, 1997, 1). After learning my lesson, I changed my clothing practices and started to wear business shirts and trousers, with leather shoes. I was able to earn back some respect by repressing aspects of my Australian persona and compensate for my youthful appearance by wearing mature attire and behaving with appropriate decorum and etiquette (see Narayan, 674; Clifford, 76).

My 'Oriental' look and fair (yellow) skin was another site of contention. I remember that I was mistaken for a Taiwanese pop star when I went to the police headquarters (*Mabes Polri*) in Jakarta in my friend's Mercedes Benz. I sat at the back, with my friend and his driver sitting in front. The security officers who stood under a tent outside the police headquarters checking all vehicles entering the building paid a military-style salute to me and made a remark like, 'I saw you on TV yesterday'. My fair complexion (together with other factors such as fashion, class and language) had somehow marked my identity as ethnic Chinese. Therefore, I was always advised by my informants and friends not to take public transport or go to certain places because of my appearance. However, this racial type-casting based on biology and appearance was not always consistent. One high-profile Indonesian professor once said to me, 'You can survive here because you look Indonesian. You don't have slanted eyes'. He was referring to the ethnic Menadonese who are commonly perceived to have fair skin and almond-shaped eyes (*mata belo*). I was only able to shed some of my 'foreignness' and be perceived as a Chinese-Indonesian when my Indonesian language improved and I could speak fluent Jakartan slang, after about two months of fieldwork. This shift from 'foreign' to 'native' was enhanced by my 'Asian' appearance (which a white researcher lacks, for instance)³ as well as my willingness to 'go native' – for example, eat in a roadside *warung* and take public transport (which was seen as 'low class', dangerous and dirty). In other words, to some degree, I could fit in to the conceptual schema of the intertwined 'native' race, language and culture that Kondo described (11).

Even though the idea of insider/outsider and native/foreign is often associated with authenticity and place of origin of the person concerned, they are not permanent watertight categories.⁴ Kirin Narayan articulates, '[P]eople born within a society can be simultaneously both insiders and outsiders, just as those born elsewhere can be outsiders and, if they are lucky, insiders too' (678). However, a researcher such as myself could never be a complete and permanent insider (Mayer, 33). I shift between being part-insider and part-outsider at different times, or both insider and outsider at the same time, depending on the context and the prevailing power relationships (Narayan, 676).⁵ I was sometimes perceived by Indonesians, both Chinese and *pribumi* (indigenous Indonesians), as an 'insider' who was 'more Indonesian than Indonesians' because of my expertise on, and my rich experiences in, Indonesia. It was common for my friends (especially middle class Chinese-Indonesians) to introduce me to others in this way: 'CY is more Indonesian than us! He takes all sorts of public transport that I wouldn't even dare to try.' However, this 'insider' recognition could be easily stripped from me when I had a different opinion from them. For instance, when I told these friends that riding local buses was fun and safe, they would reply: 'What do you know about Indonesia? You have not lived here long enough to know what it is like to experience racial discrimination and violence on public transport. *We* have lived here all *our* life, *we* know the problems of *our* country!'⁶ In fact, the very statement that claimed that I was 'more Indonesian than [real] Indonesians' sardonically marked my inherent 'foreignness', because of my inability to authenticate as 'real Indonesian' – which was presumably determined by citizenship and other factors.

These comments became especially real to me when I was confronted with a daunting pickpocket experience in a local bus after living in Jakarta for almost five months. By this time, I thought I had already become a 'native'. Below is an excerpt from the notes that I wrote after the event:

I used to tell everyone that buses are safe and tried to breakdown stereotypes about the danger in buses. I used to enjoy riding in buses and observing the 'lifestyle' in them brought by the *pengamen* (buskers), beggars and petty traders. I used to boast to my friends about my knowledge of bus routes and my mobility

with this transport system. I used to be very complacent in buses and thought that all stories about *preman* (hoodlums) were groundless.

... After being physically pushed around by the pickpockets and losing my mobile phone, I was utterly disappointed with Jakarta and with the bus system that I had trusted and defended vigorously. I suddenly felt ashamed of myself for not listening to my friends' advice. I felt as if my trust had been broken. Just when I was comfortable (*betah*) with Jakarta, I was confronted with crime and my physical space was being invaded. I was traumatized. I was betrayed by a city that I was just about to call home....

... Now I did not even dare to walk on the street with my backpack. I was paranoid of anyone walking in front of or behind me. I felt insecure with the public space that I had to share with others. After all I did not belong here, I was just another foreigner in Jakarta. I needed time to rebuild my trust with Jakarta. I needed to reexamine who I am and what am I doing here (Fieldnotes 28/06/2004).

After the event, some friends told me that it was my 'Oriental' appearance that had induced the crime. They resorted to the 'race' theory to explain the attack, i.e. *pribumi* versus Chinese rather than native versus foreign. However, some people told me that I would not be a 'true Jakartan' if I had never experienced a pickpocket. Regardless of what others thought, this experience forced me to rethink my position and legitimacy in the field.

My ability to speak Mandarin and other Chinese dialects also bestowed upon me different identities that were sometimes to my advantage, but not always. Being able to communicate in Mandarin gave me 'insider' access to the Chinese-speaking community in Jakarta, to which few Indonesian scholars and international Indonesian specialists had access. Since most young Chinese-Indonesians do not have this language capability, the Chinese-speaking older generation (*totok*) and Chinese culture gatekeepers perceived me as 'Us', juxtaposed against 'Them' – both non Chinese-speaking Chinese-Indonesians (*peranakan*) and *pribumi*.⁷ I usually phoned these informants using Mandarin to make an appointment before meeting them for an interview. Most of them had never met me in person before the interview. Many of them constructed me as a middle-aged or senior researcher because I could speak Mandarin. It was not uncommon for me to see an expression of surprise when we finally met because I was so young. The first thing these informants would ask me was to write down

my Chinese name, and then they would ask where my ancestor's village in China was. They were also eager to find out about the experience of the Chinese in Brunei after they knew that my family lived there. The effort to trace my genealogy and diasporic experience was satisfying for this generation, whose members not only enjoyed the diasporic identity that we 'shared' but also saw young people with an extensive knowledge of their roots and language as a rare treasure (cf. Roth, 334-5). The process of interviewing was usually not one-directional, but rather, through interaction, the researcher sometimes became the researched, and created knowledge with his informants. On a few occasions, before I finished the interview, they would pat me on my shoulder and tell me how much they appreciated my 'help' in hearing their voice, speaking for them, telling their stories, and urge me to join their 'mission' to pass on the Chinese language to their younger counterparts. In these cases, the race, language and roots that we shared transcended the age difference.

However, identification with 'Chineseness' could also work against me and create distance from my informants, especially the Indonesian-speaking younger Chinese. While my young Chinese informants admired my ability to speak Mandarin, they unwittingly 'Othered' me when we encountered something exotically Chinese. For instance, a young Chinese-Indonesian informant (who did not speak any Mandarin) took me to visit his uncle's apartment, which was located in an apartment block largely inhabited by Taiwanese business expatriates. He said to me, 'You will love this place because they are like you, they all speak Chinese' (Fieldnotes 11/02/2004). By positing me as similar to the Taiwanese expatriates, I was 'Othered' from my Indonesian-speaking informants, and thus deemed an outsider after all, no matter how much Indonesian I spoke and how similar my age, fashion, religion and hobby was to theirs.

This 'Othering' of me based on language also occurred in a church at which I visited on a particular Sunday for its worship service. The construction of my identity by individuals in this church reflected their confusion with my status. Consider the following account from the field recorded on 02 May 2004:

Today I attended a bilingual Indonesian/Chinese church service in a Chinese-Indonesian church in West Jakarta. The pastor was a middle-aged male Chinese-Indonesian who could not speak Mandarin. His sermon was translated into Mandarin by a female Chinese-Indonesian woman who graduated from Beijing. After the sermon, the pastor made some announcements. He asked newcomers to raise their hands so that he can welcome them. It was my first time in that church so I raised my hand. Then a middle-aged man came to me and handed me a form to fill in. The form had four sections: name, age, address and phone number. It was printed in both Chinese and Indonesian. I filled out my details in Chinese. The form was then collected from me and handed over to the pastor. When the pastor saw my name in Chinese characters, he assumed that I was from China. So he announced to the congregation that I was from China.

After the service, the man who handed me the form came towards me. He spoke to me in Mandarin and asked me if I had a few moments to chat with them. He took me to a meeting room and introduced me to a very friendly old lady and a few teenagers who happened to be in the room. The man told them that I spoke Chinese and I was from China. The old lady and the teenagers panicked because they could not speak Mandarin and they did not know that I could speak Indonesian. They spoke amongst themselves in Indonesian: 'What should we do? We can't speak Mandarin...Can anyone translate...?' Some teenagers exclaimed flippantly: 'wo bu zhi dao' (which means 'I don't know' in Mandarin, but whether deliberately or not, they pronounced it in 'funny' inaccurate tones).

Then I told them I knew Indonesian and they were very relieved. They asked me where I was from. I explained my complex transnational identity to them. They did not understand how a Bruneian could be born in Malaysia, schooled in Australia and could still speak Mandarin. One of them asked me if all indigenous Bruneians were very dark. Then they asked about my occupation. I explained my PhD project to them but they did not seem to understand. They asked what faculty I was working with. I replied Social and Cultural Studies and they thought I was a social worker and asked if I was interested to join their prison ministry, or mission trip to the heart of Kalimantan.

Despite the fact that we share the same Christian faith and religious identity, I was still subject to secondary Othering and my identity is still subject to their construction.

In this case, my ability to speak and write Chinese rendered me as an exotic 'Other', who spoke an exotic (un)familiar language, from an 'exotic place' with which their ancestors used to have a connection, and engaged in a type of academic work that was incomprehensible to them.

These informants' inability to understand my occupation as a field researcher was not unique. My friend's mother, with whom I lived for the first two months of my fieldwork, was concerned that I was *nganggur*, which means unemployed. In her words, I was always 'wandering around'. She (and many others) did not understand that 'the work routines of a field-worker...are rather unnatural or at least unusual ones in most settings – hanging around, snooping, engaging in seemingly idle chitchat, note taking, asking odd (often dumb) questions,...and so forth' (van Maanen, 32). Sullivan argues that the very role of fieldworker and the tasks that they perform differentiate them from their informants, and reinforce their positions as outsiders in that social setting (5-6). Thus, it almost became an expectation that I, as a responsible 'researcher', would go to the office (*ngantor*) at CSIS every day during 'office hours', like any other professional.

As mentioned earlier, the friendships that I established in the field allowed me to access certain knowledge that I would not otherwise have obtained, and facilitated entry to social circles that would otherwise have been difficult to enter (see Burgess, 51-52). However, these relationships created a dilemma about how to balance personal and academic interests. 'When does a friend become an informant? When does casual conversation become field notes?' remain as questions waiting to be answered. In his study on young Japanese 'salarymen', Dasgupta comments, 'I really did not want to tap into or 'exploit' these networks of friends and turn them into ethnographic research fodder' (56). However, Mayer argues that '[t]hese friendships could never quite be divorced from my role as observer' (35). It is inevitable that ethnographers will draw upon relationships and intimacies with friends or neighbours as investigative tools because this practice is quintessential to the methodology of participant observation (see Amit, 3). As much as I would have liked to refrain from playing the role of 'twenty-four-hour-a-day researcher' (Dasgupta, 56), I found it either impossible or undesirable to 'turn off my anthropological eye, ear or mind' (Dyck, 44). This also highlights the very strength of the methodology of participant observation,

as information was not just obtained when the tape recorder was rolling, but was obtained through an ongoing investigative process.

However, while the techniques of observation and participation were sometimes deployed instinctively, they were not bestowed on me naturally – like other skills, they were learned rather than given. In the early stage, I operated mostly as a passive observer (see Sullivan, 6). Then after rapport with the subjects and familiarity with the field were established, I became more involved as an actor. Observation became ‘less self-conscious, deliberate, and "formal"’ (Sullivan, 7). Mayer argues that his role as an ethnographer ‘was that of an "observer as participant" rather than that of a "participant as observer"’ (Mayer, 1975, 33). This difference was not always that clear to me because the line between participant and observer became blurred after a while. What was clear, though, was the inevitable measure of ‘role playing and acting’ while participating (Shaffir, 77). Shaffir asserts:

In order to be granted access to the research setting and to secure the cooperation of his or her hosts, the researcher learns to present a particular image of himself or herself. The proffered image cannot be determined in advance but instead reflects the contingencies encountered in the field. Moreover, as fieldwork accounts attest, the kinds of roles that are assumed are hardly static, but are evolving constantly (77).

The different fragments of my identity (age, appearance, gender, status and ethnicity discussed above) could be also strategically used to my own benefit.⁸ While my age was usually the first obstacle to gaining respect and trust from my older informants, it could also be an advantage when these informants saw me ‘not as an aggressor, but a victim of my circumstances, seeking assistance to ameliorate my situation’ (Yano, 291). Once over the hurdle of age, they started to appreciate my work and to perceive me as a ‘hope’ for the future of Chinese-Indonesians because compared to them, I was still young. However, it should be stressed that this appreciation and hope invested in me would not have been possible had I not been a male Overseas Chinese, who shared the same gender and ethnicity with many of my (older) informants. Nevertheless, some of my younger informants saw me as a competitor because of my age and academic status. My age and gender were also an advantage in my host institute in Jakarta. Most of the female

researchers (my seniors) saw me as their younger brother to whom they lent guidance and help.

During my fieldwork, role playing was performed within the framework of shifting power relations that allows me to assert my liminal positions of being both foreign and ‘native’, familiar and different (see Yano, 291). Language was the quickest way of asserting difference and familiarity. As discussed above, I would speak Mandarin with older Chinese-educated informants and Jakartan slang (*Bahasa Gaul*) with younger informants, in order to gain acceptance as ‘insider’ rather than ‘outsider’. However, I did not always use the language preferred by individuals whom I encountered in the field. For instance, sometimes I deliberately used English in government offices or other bureaucracies, so that I could assert the power of a ‘Western’ researcher and not be intimidated and subdued by officials who tend to give more respect to Westerners. Another example of shifting power dynamics through language was when I tried to make an appointment with the head of the Chinese department in a private university in Jakarta. Telephoning in Indonesian via her secretary, I was always unsuccessful and the secretary gave a series of excuses. I finally went to see the secretary, and decided to use Mandarin to talk to her. The power relations changed instantly, as she was not as fluent in Mandarin and felt intimidated by my language ability. As a result, she could not but allow me to meet with her head of department. The feeling of being ‘betrayed’ by her secretary was expressed by the head of department who met me with reluctance, but this expression was quickly replaced by her astonishment of Mandarin competency. The strategic use of my status and language in shifting power relations enabled me to gain respect and influence over my counterparts in a way that I would not have otherwise received, especially given my relative youth.

Destabilizing ‘Home’ and ‘Away’

The boundary between ‘field’ and ‘home’ has often been delineated by the act of travel and by a presumption that ‘home’ is fixed and immobile, while the ‘field’ is necessarily a journey away (Amit, 8). This point is illuminated by Noel Dyck in the following statements:

The people of the field are 'others' while, presumably, the denizens of home are 'us'. According to this admittedly simplified schema, the field constitutes a place for ethnographic enquiry while home may perhaps be taken for granted, at least with regard to establishing analytical and research priorities. In practice, however, where and what comprises 'home' and 'us' for an individual ethnographer may be less than obvious, and thus needs to be considered. (37)

The 'home' and 'field' dualism implies that the latter cannot possibly be where the former is – it has to be '*somewhere else*', in order for ethnographers to travel '*out in search of difference*' (Italics in original; Clifford, 85). This section problematises the notions of 'home' and 'field', which are often taken-for-granted as fixed and oppositional categories. It suggests a blurring of the boundaries between 'home' and 'field', and (re)conceptualises them as flexible, shifting and multiple, and reflects upon the researcher's own positions.

Home is often associated with a sense of belonging that is experienced by individuals (Sarup, 94; Knowles, 64).⁹ However, the sense of belonging that is central to the concept of 'home' becomes problematic when talking of people who have multiple places of belongings, such as expatriates, transnationals, migrants (first and subsequent generations) and people in exile.¹⁰ In such cases, it is not clear how people who are physically and spatially dislocated should locate their 'home'. To use Madan Sarup's questions: Is home 'where your family is, where you have been brought up? Is it where your parents [or ancestors] are buried? Is home the place from where you have been displaced, or where you are now?' (94). For some people, there is no simple answer to describe their multiple and complex sense of belonging(s) which, in Trinh Minh-ha's words, may be 'between a here, a there, *and* an elsewhere' (Italics in original, 9). Knowles conjectures that all places that one might belong to elicit a partial sense of belonging (64). Therefore, the concept of 'home' might sometimes be partial (65). I could certainly relate to this partial and multiple sense of belonging, because of my own 'multiple subjectivity' (Narayan, 676): as a person of Chinese descent who was born in Malaysia, raised in Brunei, educated and residing in Australia and doing research in Indonesia. Is 'home' Malaysia – the nation to which I am politically attached in terms of citizenship? Is it Brunei, where my parents, siblings and other relatives are? Is it Australia, the place where

I received my higher education and am in the process of establishing my academic career? Or could it be Indonesia, to which I am so passionately and emotionally attached, and whose language has become my second tongue?¹¹ This explains my ambivalence when I wrote emails to my friends and supervisor from the field, telling them that I was feeling 'homesick'. Inside me was a feeling of something lost and 'missing', but also a confusion about which 'home' this feeling was directed to.

The idea of 'home', at least for me, can never be defined in simple terms. When I was in the field, especially in the first few months (when I presumably still 'looked' foreign), my origin and background were always a topic that my colleagues, friends, informants, and people with whom I came into contact on a day-to-day basis found fascinating to talk about. Sometimes, a simple question asked by Indonesians like '*Asal dari mana, Pak?*' (Where are you originally from, Mister?)¹², could put me into agonies. I did not know if I should list and explain to them one-by-one my multiple origins or should I just pick one to talk about? At first, I was patient enough to talk about the different fragments of my identity, but as time went by, I became tired of repeating myself. So sometimes I told a person that I was from Malaysia, and other times from Brunei, Australia and so on. These were, of course, genuine and honest answers, as they were part of my fragmented 'Self'. However, some people got confused, as they may have heard me claiming to be a Malaysian, while others said that my family was in Brunei. Thus, my integrity was sometimes suspected, forcing me to make clarifications. Also this confusion shows the discomfort that some people have with the concept of multiple 'homes'. Nevertheless, the longer I stayed in Indonesia and the more immersed I became in the culture, language and society, the less I had to explain my origins, as most people assumed that I was an Indonesian. This indicates a blurring of the home/field dichotomy, where the 'field' has become, and was assumed to be by others, the researcher's 'home'. For instance, after spending eight months in Jakarta, I went to visit my supervisor in West Sumatra, where she was conducting fieldwork. I was assumed by the locals to be a Jakartan (Chinese). Sometimes, I did deliberately utilize my Jakartan identity, speaking fluent Jakartan slang to bargain in a marketplace and to avoid being charged a 'tourist' rate when entering a park or making a purchase. However, sometimes this identification was not

self-conscious, as I felt Jakartan, spoke Jakartan slang (*Bahasa Gaul*) and dressed like an urban Jakartan youth, in contrast to the 'Others', namely my supervisor and the locals in Sumatra.

Technologies such as telephone, the Internet and email services also blurred the field/home divide (Caputo, 26). These technologies facilitated the crossings of the field/home boundaries by linking my field with my academic home (my university) and my home (in Jakarta) with my other homes (Brunei and Malaysia). For instance, email had served as the main communication tool for my supervisor and me when we were both physically in Perth. It continued to carry out this function even when I was in Jakarta and when she was in Perth, then later when she was in Sumatra. Email had created a real time virtual reality that seemed to have transcended the spatial distance between my supervisor and me: I did not feel that the 'field' was very far 'away' from 'home'.

The fluidity and ambiguity of field and home can be further illustrated in their impermanency and constant shifting, both to the researcher and the research subjects. Since many Chinese in Jakarta came from different provinces of Indonesia, Jakarta, though not their 'home' by birth, eventually became the 'home' of their children, and even themselves. Many of my informants who were more affluent had families overseas in the United States, Australia, Germany or the Netherlands, and also had once migrated or obtained permanent residence in these countries. The transnational context that both the researcher and the informants experienced further cast the ontological distinction between 'home' and 'away' into question (see Amit, 15).

Last but not least, the concept of 'leaving the field' was also theoretically (and emotionally) problematic. As argued above, the blurring of field/home boundaries enabled me to call the 'field', i.e. Jakarta, 'home'. Acciaioli (quoted in Hume and Mulcock, xvi) recognizes that the uncomfortable business of inhabiting interstitial social spaces is a common fate for many researchers who 'became caught between 'field' and 'home', belonging to both and neither'. On return to Perth, I suffered considerable reverse culture shock – an experience of disorientation and of being 'lost' (similar to the feeling of being 'lost' at the beginning of fieldwork that I described earlier) – which was probably a measure of the extent to which I had adapted to life

in Jakarta. Resuming my academic life in my academic home (Perth) does not equate to dissociation from the field. In fact, Caputo argues that one is never able completely to 'leave the field' (28). Amit explains that researchers 'cannot help but take it [the field] with them because the 'field' has now become incorporated into their biographies, understandings and associations' (9). I keep in regular contact with the friends (and informants) that I met in the field. Communication with them is enabled by the very technologies (email, Internet, telephone) that facilitated my communication with my supervisor when I was in the field. Further, I incorporate many examples from my field experience in the Asian Studies courses that I currently teach in the university, not only because they are 'original' firsthand knowledge, but also because in doing so I am able to nostalgically 're-live' the field. This really casts the question, '(When) Does fieldwork end?'

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the more subtle, but important, aspects of the researcher's 'Self' and negotiations in the field through self-reflectivity. The discussion highlighted a blurring of boundary between the researcher and researched, as both the researcher and the researched tried to make sense of, construct, and shape each other's identity throughout the research process. I posited my age, race, appearance, fashion, religion, language and status as potential sites by which individuals I encountered in the field defined me. I argued that by engaging and immersing in the field, I was also transformed into a 'native' or at least a Chinese-Indonesian, without necessarily being aware of it. It was only when I was 'Othered' in certain circumstances that I realized I had already, though partially, become one of 'them'. These shifting relations and identifications show that the dichotomies Self/Other, insider/outsider, home/away and native/foreign are constantly being negotiated, traversed and challenged in the field.

Notes

¹ I gratefully acknowledge the hospitality of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the support from my friends and informants, for the duration of my field research in Jakarta. My thanks also go to Dr Lyn Parker and Dr Romit Dasgupta, at Asian Studies, the University of Western Australia, for their critical reading and generous advice on my earlier draft; and to the editors and anonymous reviewers of this volume, for their comments and effort in editing this paper.

² Charles Coppel observed that the term 'Indonesian citizen' (*Warga Negara Indonesia*, WNI) is artificial and non-realistic. Paradoxically, if in everyday speech someone was referred to as a WNI, it was commonly understood to mean that s/he was of foreign (especially Chinese) origin and not indigenous (*asli*). WNI was thus understood to be an abbreviation of WNI *keturunan asing* (Indonesian citizen of foreign descent). The use of the word *asing* (foreign) underlined the foreignness of the Chinese Indonesians in Indonesian *asli* eyes (3).

³ In her article, Fechter examined the experience of white expatriates in Jakarta who are reified by the local as the 'racial Other' on the basis of their skin colour. Their whiteness has rendered them an uncomfortable but inescapable visibility.

⁴ Borrowing Abu-Lughod and Narayan's concept of 'Halfie' (i.e. people whose national cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage), Sonia Ryang problematised the ontological position of the so-called 'native anthropologists' necessarily as the only insiders. The complex relationship between the ethnographer and informants suggests the need to reconceptualise the notion of 'native' /foreign, and insider /outsider.

⁵ Hume and Mulcock recognized this partiality of the researcher. They assert that '[t]he ethnographer must be able to see with the eyes of an outsider as well as the eyes of an insider, although both views are, of course, only partial' (xi).

⁶ In a similar context, Kondo states '[c]onfusions, linguistic or cultural, were dealt with impatiently or with a startled look that seemed to say, "Oh yes, you are American after all." On the other hand, appropriately Japanese behaviors were rewarded with warm, positive reactions or with comments such as "You're more Japanese than the Japanese"' (16).

⁷ The terms '*totok*' and '*peranakan*' were conventionally used by academics to differentiate the Chinese who arrived in Indonesia at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century (the newcomers), from the earlier migrants who have assimilated with local communities (William, 13). The former spoke Chinese dialects while the latter only spoke Indonesian language(s) and/or Dutch. However, this historical distinction has little relevance in contemporary Indonesia because most Chinese were 'Indonesianized' after the closure of Chinese schools and Chinese press in Indonesia in 1966 (Suryadinata, 32). The Chinese in post-Suharto era tend to identify themselves as Chinese-Indonesians since the terms '*totok*' and '*peranakan*' can no longer represent the heterogeneity of Chinese identity.

⁸ Yano states, 'this notion of playing situations—even frustrating ones—to your advantage is basic to all fieldwork... serendipity does not just happen, but is partly bestowed, partly earned, and partly exploited' (292).

⁹ Sarup contends that this sense of belonging can be a result of pleasant memories and intimate relationships amongst parents, siblings and loved ones (94).

¹⁰ Trinh Minh-ha writes, '[t]he travelling self is here both the self that moves physically from one place to another, following "public routes and beaten tracks" within a mapped movement, and the self that embarks on an undetermined journeying practice, having constantly to negotiate between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture' (*Italics in original*, 9). It is this negotiation that highlights the ambivalent sense of belonging of 'travellers' (be it expatriates, migrants, transnationals or people in exile).

¹¹ Dyck argues that 'home' is far less a matter of birthplace or nationality than of continuing personal engagement in certain types of social aggregations, activities and relationships (48). In this regard, although I did not have a relationship with Indonesia based on nationality or birth, I could still identify it as 'home' because of the social and personal relationships I established.

¹² It should be noted that questions about one's origin (*tempat asal*) is not entirely uncommon in Jakarta (even between Indonesians themselves) because Jakarta is a city that hosts a huge population of workers, students and professionals from other provinces in Indonesia to either seek higher education or better job prospects.

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