UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES THROUGH STORYTELLING WITHIN A POSTCOLONIAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

This study provides an account of my doctoral research with respect to the methodological choices that I have made. It focuses on the heuristic value of storytelling for English teachers within a postcolonial setting like Indonesia to construct meanings and understand their experiences 'consciously within and against accepted forms' (Miller, 1995, pp. 25-26). It inquires into the finding of ourselves - to understand who we are, who we have been and who we will become for the benefits of the young people in our care. First, I write and construct my autobiographical narrative and then solicit further stories from my teacher interviewees. Our stories allowed us to understand how our professional identities have been influenced and shaped by the social, political, cultural and historical contexts that surround our lives. Placing my study within a postcolonial framework, I was prompted to investigate the 'heteroglot' nature (Bakhtin, 1984) of Indonesia as a language community shaped by the history of colonization and the globalization of English. Our stories highlight our efforts to 'speak back' to not only our own habitual practices but also to the hierarchical structure of power perpetuated in English. They are not simply told in response to the 'imagined communities' of Indonesia as they shape the struggles of those who fought for independence from Dutch rule but are also in conflict with the New Order attempts to impose an 'official nationalism' (Anderson, 1991, p. 83) on Indonesians at the expense of any recognition of their regional languages, dialects and cultures.

Key words/phrases*: storytelling, professional identities, English teachers, postcolonial framework, habitual practices,*

A. INTRODUCTION

My study is an interpretive work which involves different protocols than 'scientific' inquiry of the kind that Hamilton (2005, p. 288) critiques, when questions are posed and answers sought, as though I can simply stand outside the field of the inquiry without engaging in it. This is why I use storytelling to deliver my thesis and obtain my research data because it matches the content of my study, writing stories about my education, upbringing and professional work and then soliciting further stories from my interviewees who also teach English in universities in Padang. I use the stories I solicited from them to explore deeply the ways they situate themselves within the multiple contexts in which they operate, their immediate institutional setting, the policy context that mediates this setting and the history of Indonesia as a

postcolonial society. This is in order to answer the main question that my study asks: "*What does it mean to be an English teacher in a postcolonial society like Indonesia*?"

My study concerns the identities of English teachers within such a polyglot society – identities that are inevitably mediated by the conflicting ideals and values that characterize a postcolonial society, the national 'imaginings' (Anderson, 1991) arising out of Indonesia's history as a colony and then an independent nation. The form taken by my research inquiry arises out of this situation, and might be said to represent my attempt to articulate a standpoint vis-à-vis the way Western knowledge and culture have sought to define the situation of people like me. My aim here is to explain my approach to my inquiry, justifying it as one that is suited to the complexities of the socio-cultural situation in Indonesia, and specifically Padang, the region to which my interviewees and I belong. Our autobiographies intersect without completely merging into one another. Crucially, what they have in common is that they can all be read as responses to the history that has produced each of us.

B. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE QUESTION: SITUATING 'SELF' IN CONTEXT

Beginning research in education with 'one's self' has been viewed by many scholars as a legitimate starting point for inquiry (Said, 1991; Miller, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I, too, have constructed an autobiographical text, attempting to develop an understanding of the history of the making of myself as an inescapable framework for engaging in my larger inquiry. Jane Miller (1995) views 'an autobiographical project' as an inescapable context for research and scholarship for teacher educators. It is thus that educators can address the issue of the absence of 'their voice' from academic debates about education that is shaped by so-called scientific knowledge. Miller's aim is to rescue 'the particularity of what teachers know' based on their experiences from traditional understandings of 'objectivity', 'validity' or 'reliability' that fail to respect the irreducible character of an individual's experiences (Miller, 1995, p. 26). Through cultivating a reflexive awareness of one's autobiography, one becomes conscious of the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity, between one's stance as a writer or researcher and the social conditions that one might be investigating.

My autobiographical narrative is, indeed, a tool for inquiring into my ideological standpoint as a product of my education and upbringing. I do not simply present my life as if it had lived in isolation from everything around me, but as it has been shaped by larger social and historical relationships (as conceptualized by world's leading theorists like Benedict Anderson [1991] and Edward Said [1991]). My self-narrative is my means to 'speak back' to the 'center', constructing representation of my experiences on my own terms. I do not submit myself 'to an externalizing secondhand definition' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 58). This is not an exercise in nostalgia but an attempt to explore my 'standpoint *within* the world' (Doecke, 2013, p. 13) which means trying to understand the reasons for thinking and feeling the way I do. This is an inquiry that acknowledges my position within a larger set of relationships (Smith, 2005). My aim is to actively give shapes to the policy and practice within my university instead of just responding to them submissively (Doecke, 2014). I do not intend to present myself as a 'romantic hero' who has succeeded in solving all the problems that she has faced (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 18).

My decision to engage in my autobiographical narrative as a way of beginning my research derives from my belief of its 'worldliness' for my study and my willingness to try to understand what Gramsci (1986) calls 'thyself' in order to obtain 'a consciousness of what one really is' at a particular moment in time (p. 324). This is in

order to better understand what Gramsci characterizes as 'the common sense' of my everyday life, opening up my habitual practices and beliefs to scrutiny, rather than simply accepting them as a given. This should not, in other words, be taken as some kind of attempt to identify my essential self, as though it is ever possible to be completely at one with who I am. Instead of revealing my essential self, my autobiographical narrative reports 'where I am now on my journey' (Doecke, 2013, p. 14). This in turn is in line with Ricoeur (1984), who remarks that 'the world unfolded by every narrative is always a temporal world' (p. 3), always involving a play between past, present and future, between my memories and my hopes as I try to live my life in a fully conscious way.

My early engagement with storytelling through the writing of my autobiographical narrative has not been free of conflict. Initially I was concerned as to whether telling my personal story could really have a place within my PhD thesis. Was it acceptable to write as 'I' instead of adopting a more 'objective' standpoint? But I put these doubts aside, and in the process of telling my stories I began to realize that my own life represented a legitimate focus for my inquiry, that my 'I' was not simply something that I could take for granted, and that an investigation into my education and upbringing could provide a generative framework for my research on the teaching of both the English language and literature in Indonesia. "Why had I become a teacher of English? Why did I think it was valuable to teach English literature?" I told myself many stories, and I eventually chose to re-craft only a few of them for the purpose of this inquiry. In these 'unfamiliar waters' (Miller, 2005, p. 147), I made my best efforts to swim 'deep into the writing's ocean' (Rohmah, 2008, p. 61).

To some extent this process has meant disengaging from my previous understanding of storytelling. My education and upbringing have told me that storytelling, which in Bahasa Indonesia means *bercerita,* involves the act of 'retelling' a story, mostly in the form of legends and fables verbally by an audience, often by improvisation or embellishment as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation, and instilling moral values. That use of storytelling remains vitally important to me, but such an activity is quite different from using storytelling as a vehicle for inquiring into the issues that are of concern to me in this study. The process of storytelling might at first seem to be something that is free from significant constraints. But I began to realize that by writing stories about my life I was faced with a different set of challenges.

Writing an autobiography is more than just relating or putting together a sequence of events with a beginning, middle and an end, as though the events of one's life are simply there to be told. Rosen (1986) gives some idea of the intellectual and imaginative effort involved in reconstructing one's experiences in story form:

> *To tell a story is to take a stance towards events and, rather than reflect a world, to create a world. To begin a story is to make a choice from infinity of possibilities, selecting one set rather than another. That is why it is not just fiction, which is an exercise of the imagination; it is any construction of narrative coherence. (p. 231).*

And instead of just telling about my life as though it is my personal story, the writing of my autobiography has been *politically* situated. This has been inescapable. If, when preparing for the routine visit of the state officials for the accreditation of our English Department I find myself grappling with official expectations and values, so my storytelling has involved an ideological struggle, but this time one that has involved critically engaging with the beliefs and values of the society around me. Doecke et al.

(2000, p. 336) argue that 'telling stories always involves negotiating issues of community membership and identity'. Telling stories means reconstructing experiences that are mediated by social and historical contexts. Instead of just learning about my own self, the writing of my autobiography had prompted me to try to understand and reflect critically on the people and the values that have shaped my life- 'reconstructing a web of social relations of a larger dimension' (Budianta, 2012, p. 257).

When I began writing my stories, I faced another major challenge, in that I was required to find my own 'voice' in English. The fact that I have been obliged to write in English, means that I have to comply with the language norms enforced by this language. Ashcroft et al (1981) remark in their landmark study of postcolonial literature that 'language is the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated (p. 7) imposing 'Western' understandings of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' that delegitimize the experience and knowledge of people in the 'East' and other regions colonized by European powers (Said, 1991). However, the story that Ashcroft and his co-authors tell is more than one of continuing oppression of formerly colonized people through English and globalization. Their study celebrates the capacity of colonized people 'to speak back' to the center. Through the very fact of writing in English, I resolved to 'speak back' to the 'center', appropriating English for my own purposes. Writing my autobiographical narrative in English became my way of negotiating a space between English and the other languages I speak. In doing this, I follow Phan Le Ha (2009) who writes in English but in her 'own voice(s)' (p. 137). This means that I present my representations of my experiences and beliefs predominantly in English, but through combining words and phrases from Bahasa Indonesia and even Minang. I try to tap into this 'plurality of consciousness' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6, Ashcroft et al., 1989). Thus I hope to convey not only a sense of my 'voice' and 'identity' through my writing in English, but also 'a sense of wholeness, richness, connectedness and belonging' (Phan, 2009, p. 137) that stretches beyond the Anglophone world as it is narrowly conceived. This is a generative way of speaking and writing about my life, always mindful of the interface between languages, and of the interface between the worlds those languages represent. Doecke et al. (forthcoming) argue that 'not everything in the world happens in English or can be explained in English.

My autobiographical narrative is my 'personal investment' (Said, 1979, p. 25) in this inquiry, resulting from my consciousness of being an 'Oriental', learning and then teaching English language and literature in a postcolonial setting like Indonesia where the status of English is a foreign language. It describes my efforts to restore 'my voice' which has been reduced and suppressed by the privileging of English. To do this, I locate 'the East' at 'the center of attention' (Said, 1979, p. 26), overturning the hierarchies that structure academic discourse in the Anglophone world. There is a 'worldliness' (to borrow from Said, 1991) about my personal investment in this study. I do not live in a vacuum, but I am the product of an ensemble of social, political, cultural and historical relationships. I place my autobiographical narrative alongside the stories of my interviewees. My inquiry into aspects of my personal life and professional work has also brought me to a new understanding about the importance of reforming not only the ways I teach English language and literature to my students but how I treat my students as unique human beings who have their own stories to tell about negotiating their identities in a polyglot postcolonial society like Indonesia.

The deeper I became immersed in the writing of my autobiography, the better I came to understand how my life has been shaped by contexts that extend beyond the immediacy of my world in Padang. As Sikes and Gale (2006) remark:

> *Human beings are storying creatures that make sense of the world and the things that happen to them by constructing narratives to explain and interpret events both to themselves and to other people' (p. 1).*

In addition, Sikes (2010, p. 13) argues that the 'use of "I" explicitly recognizes that such knowledge is 'contextual, situational and specific'. In this vein, Denscombe (2010) claims that:

> *We can only make sense of the world in a way that we have learnt to do using conceptual tools which are based on our own experiences. We have no way of standing outside these to reach some objective and neutral vantage point from which to view things 'as they really are' (p. 86).*

What we can learn from the remarks above is that the construction of my self-narrative has indeed heightened my awareness of not only my 'self', but also the multiple selves that constitute 'me': I am not only an Indonesian, but also a Muslim, a Minang a woman and a mother who is obliged to teach English to students whose daily lives are shaped and colored significantly by Islamic, Indonesian and Minangkabau values. Within this space in my classroom, there is no 'objective and neutral vantage point' available to any of us (to borrow Denscombe's words), only the possibility of reflexively engaging with the languages and cultures that have made us. This is what writing my autobiographical narrative has done for me.

My self-narrative also explains the standpoint from which my study is located. It reflects on my experiences of learning English language and literature both as a local student in Indonesia and an international student in Australia and on how these moments have in turn influenced and shaped my life significantly as a teacher and researcher. My learning and teaching experiences of English language and literature have continually raised questions about the values of what I have been doing. This may seem paradoxical, but it is nonetheless true. I have been repeatedly challenged to reflect on the choices that I have made- why I decided to major in English as both an undergraduate and a postgraduate student and later to choose teaching English as my professional career. What relevance does English really have for my life and the lives of other people living in Padang? My autobiography opens up contradictions and complexities that might be identified as typifying the situation of people in postcolonial societies that are now subject to further globalizing pressures in the form of corporate capitalism and the spread of English.

C. OBTAINING OTHERS' STORIES FROM OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEWS

Vis-a-vis the spread of English and its privileging in the academy, I tried to cultivate sensitivity to other voices. My autobiographical narrative is then to be read alongside the other stories that I have solicited from my teacher interviewees who, like me, also teach English language and literature in universities in Padang. Through three rounds of open ended interviews with my interviewees, we share stories about the making of ourselves throughout our journeys of both learning English and then teaching English in universities in Padang. Our stories reveal our struggles 'to give meaning' to our work in a post-colonial society like Padang. Taken together, they

reveal our attempts to respond to the 'imagined community' of Indonesia as it had shaped the struggles of those who fought for Indonesia's independence from Dutch rule. Just as importantly, they show our efforts to speak back to Suharto's New Order and their remaining legacy and attempt to impose an 'official nationalism' (Anderson, 1991, p. 83) on Indonesians at the expense of any recognition of the regional languages, dialects and cultures that make up our lives.

The stories that my interviewees and I shared with each other reveal how each of us is closely bound to the historical, sociological and philosophical contexts in which we have grown up and lived our lives. More importantly, they provide starting points for trying to understand the ways our work as teachers of literature is caught up in a process that challenges the universalizing pretensions of 'the Western knowledge' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 13) – this is despite the fact that some might view us as having been co-opted as willing agents in globalization and the spread of English. This is not to say that, taken together, our stories embody some kind of 'truth', as though they can all be collapsed together and treated as saying exactly the same thing. The stories that comprise this study should be read as being in dialogue with one another. What I mean by the word dialogue is what Parr, drawing on the work of Bakhtin (1981,1984) calls 'a dynamic, unstable but ongoing interchange of ideas, meaning, values and cultures' that can 'inhere between speakers (or within a single speaker), between texts (or within a single text) and between communities (or within a single community)' (2010, p. 14).

Our stories are part of an ongoing dialogue. Nor are they victory stories, representing some kind of cultural identity or 'an imagined community' (Anderson, 1991) that gives meaning to our lives. Rather, my interviewees and I might be understood as asserting our 'story telling rights' (Rosen, 1985. p. 2) as part of an ongoing struggle to better understand ourselves and our work for the benefit of the young people we teach. Our stories are vehicles for asking questions about our identities; about how we are located within Indonesian history and culture, and about how we might relocate ourselves if we are to provide our students with a meaningful education. In this respect, while our stories do not provide the 'truth', they give 'a reason to be hopeful' (Turvey et al. p. 26) of a better change.

D. STORYTELLING WITHIN A POSTCOLONIAL FRAMEWORK

My storytelling operates at the intersection between autobiography and history, helping me to develop an awareness of the social and historical conditions that have surrounded and shaped my life. This kind of reflective writing is important for me in order to better understand the roots of the dilemmas that I face in my teaching career. My self-narrative helps explain and interpret events both to myself and to other people, most notably my English teaching colleagues in Padang. The process of story writing has given my experiences a status that they would not have otherwise had, enabling me to affirm my existence as a 'self', as a particular individual living within a specific social and cultural context who is trying to understand the meaning and purpose of her life.

I cannot imagine how it would be possible for us human beings to get by from day to day without telling our stories to others. Whenever I get home from work, I know that stories are awaiting me; to be listened to as my children are always eager to tell me stories about their school days. I enjoy listening to their stories and value them as not only a way to strengthen the bond between us, but also as a means for me to understand their emerging identities. Their stories also prompt me to reflect on my own self - on the kind of person that I am and the parent that I have been to them. Like my children, I, too, have the impulse to tell others about how my life is going. And just

as I want to share my stories with others, so they want to share their stories with me. The narratives of the world, as Roland Barthes has remarked, are truly 'numberless' (Barthes, 1978, p. 79).

By reflecting on the way stories 'form the fabric of our lives' (Doecke, 2013, p. 12), we can appreciate the role that storytelling can perform for researchers who seek to investigate issues of language education within a postcolonial framework. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) argue that in order for educators to have meaningful communication in their classrooms, it is necessary to 'think narratively'. This can be done by respecting the histories that each student brings to class. In the context of doing research, again it is also important for researchers to 'think narratively' when they approach their interviewees to share their life experiences with them. Storytelling in a research context allows the interviewer and the interviewees to talk 'from the general to the particular' (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007, p. 21) and back again, thus revealing a standpoint 'within' the world rather than vis-à-vis it, as though they are standing outside it. This does not presuppose that 'our life experiences' are isolable from the social and historical contexts that mediate them. To the contrary, my consciousness of the specific situation that my interviewees and I share as English teachers in Padang has made me very aware of the larger contexts around us.

Anderson (1991) uses his concept of 'imagined communities' to name the metanarratives that people in colonial societies have constructed in order to give meaning to their lives. The relationship between these larger stories and the stories that people share on a day-to-day basis is very complex. It is not as though they fold into each other, or that people all identify with the story of the 'imagined community' (the myth of national identity that becomes so important in the struggle for independence) in the same ways, or that this story always remains exactly the same, serving the same purposes. Yet within the context of these larger stories, the attempts by individuals to find a voice and tell their personal stories remain crucially important. The Indonesian struggle for independence can be explained in terms of large historical developments, such as the emergence of print capitalism, which helped communities in the archipelago to engage with the idea of belonging to one nation – this is what Benedict Anderson teaches us (Anderson, 1991). Another commentator draws out the significance of the smaller narratives, the more personal struggles to tell the story of one's life within this context. Indeed, Watson (2000, p.1) believes that the growing circulation of autobiographies in Indonesia during Dutch colonization had helped 'sympathetic readers to develop a different perspective' of what is really meant by the history of Indonesia 'from those currently available to them in the form of, for example, standard histories'. According to Watson, what matters is not whether the writers of the autobiography can be considered wholly representative of the society or not (p. 8) but how they constituted 'a dialogue' between the writers and their nation (p. 3). It is this kind of 'dialogue' that I imagine my interviewees and I conduct when we tell our own stories.

By grappling with personal experiences, we can begin to realize how our lives have been influenced and shaped by the political and social conditions around us. To develop an understanding of one's personal experiences within a postcolonial setting like Indonesia is to become aware of one's location within the meta-narratives of Indonesian history (or the competing histories surrounding the regimes of Sukarno and Suharto) and thus to confront the colonizing legacies that are still operating at all levels of society in Indonesia, including the institutional settings in which my interviewees and I work.

It is true the Dutch colonial rulers have officially left my country, but the legacy of their rule remains. Suharto and his authoritarian New Order regime effectively perpetuated this legacy through their 'official nationalism' (Anderson, 1991) for thirty-two years. No wonder that despite seventy years of independence from the Dutch colonialism, Indonesian people are still grappling with a similar kind of a hierarchical society to that imposed by the Dutch colonizers. That is why it is often said that colonial mentality is still ruling the nation. This 'die-hard mentality' as Anggraeni (2001) puts it, has now been passed down from one generation to another and is now becoming even more visible in the challenges faced by English teachers in Indonesia in their efforts to provide education for their students vis-à-vis the globalizing economic, social and cultural pressures that are now 'crossing national boundaries with increasing ease' (Parr et al. 2013, p. 19).

Applying storytelling as the accepted mode of conversation with my research participants, I allowed them to present versions of their stories, by switching between English, Bahasa Indonesia and even Minang. This means that I allowed them to use Bahasa Indonesia or even Minang without having to provide me with an English translation. This is an effective voice of speaking back 'to the hierarchical structure of power' perpetuated by the use of English (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 7). Although I did my best to make a faithful translation of the interviews from Bahasa Indonesia and Minang into English, I must admit that my efforts to do this were often in vain. This is in accordance with what Bakhtin (1981) writes about a 'living' language, when he argues with respect to a national language that it can 'never' be unitary:

> *It [Language] is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it, and in isolation from the uninterrupted process of historical becoming that is a characteristic of all living language. Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems; within these various systems (identical in abstract) are elements of language filled with various semantic and axiological content and each with its own different sound (p. 288).*

The difference between my situation and the situation that Bahktin describes is that the language environment that I and my interviewees experience is a polyglot one, where speakers typically choose amongst a range of languages available to them in order to represent their experiences (their 'historical becoming') and to negotiate a pathway from day-to-day. Translating the interviews from Bahasa Indonesia and Minang into English means working on the border where two to three languages intersect, without every fully merging with one other. My translation occurs at the 'contact zone' (Pratt, 1991, p. 37) between Bahasa Indonesia, Minang, and English. As a result, I cannot avoid traces of the Indonesian and Minang systems of values and worldviews, which resist being completely translated into another language. The words *bule and kampung* (not *kampong*), for example, are left without their English translation because there are no exact words in English that can fully explain details of the sense, sound and structure of these words.

E. SAMPLES OF EXCERPTS FROM MY SELF-NARRATIVE AND MY INTERVIEWEE'S STORY

Below are some excerpts of the stories that I have told (my self) and constructed from my conversations with one of my interviewees followed by my reflection on how they reveal our emerging professional identities.

- **excerpt from my autobiographical narrative**

Finding myself in someone else's land

Feeling hopeful that I would learn some new methods about teaching English literature and have access to current English literary materials to bring home before attending a short course as a part of a non-degree training I was assigned to join in 2008, I was, however, disappointed when I found that the unit I was observing was focused on Shakespeare's works. More importantly, the way the teacher taught was mostly lecturing. Since there were only ten students in the class, I was able to observe how each student responded to the class with boredom. I did not despise Shakespeare's works and other so-called the classics, but my educational journey as an undergraduate student in English was already replete with material of this kind. I wanted something different.

I requested for an opportunity to observe a unit other than Shakespeare. I was then offered an opportunity to attend a unit called 'Asian Cultural and Literary Expressions'. Instead of enthusiastically seizing this opportunity, I was at first doubtful whether the class would be able to offer me new insights. After travelling miles away from home, I felt that it would be quite a waste of time to end up in a class that would likely read Indonesian literature in English translation. However, I was wrong about what this class finally could offer me. Being exposed to stories that provided insights into the lives of the Indonesian people in the English language, the class became a vehicle for me to imagine my country in a different way. I found the words and phrases that were left in Bahasa Indonesia in the texts resonated in a very special way with me. Even a single word like 'bubur', which means porridge, could bring me to a halt in my reading, prompting me to imagine myself in a world of thought and emotion centred on a particular situation in my home country – engulfing me in a sense of home with its particular sound, smell, taste and customs. And this was more than a matter of nostalgia. Through maintaining some of the Indonesian words and phrases, such as 'Putu, Rambutan, bubur, tahlil, Assalamualaikum, sayur lodeh, sarung, kenduri and Idul Fitri', the stories 'A Roast Chicken' by Soethama and 'Abus' by Winarno, challenged me to think more deeply than I had ever done before about realms of experiences that could not be captured by the pretensions of 'global' English. These words both heightened my sense of belonging to the cultural life represented in the stories and made me conscious of how that life nonetheless existed in relation to the Anglophone world by virtue of the very fact of occurring in English translations of these stories. Rather than nostalgia or homesickness, the translations had an estranging effect on me –not in a negative way, but in a way that heightened my awareness of my beliefs and culture in relation to other beliefs and cultures- other way of imagining the world.

Having experienced the enjoyment of reading something that I was quite familiar with, the story I share above shows us how I was constructing meaning on the basis of my own experiences and the language that I speak in order to make meaning better. I became convinced that the kind of literary works above had to be included in my syllabus in Padang. I wanted to bring them home. By allowing my students to experience 'a sense of home' in their English literature classrooms, I believed I could

help them to not only accomplish their reading task more easily but more importantly to recognize their sense of themselves and how they might negotiate a pathway in the world that was being opened up to them through both the political changes in Indonesia and global developments, such as the spread of English.

My decision to teach Indonesian literature in English reflects what Ashcroft et al. (1989, p. 204) write about the role of translation in postcolonial settings in opening up a space for 'creating readership'. This argument rings true to the nature of my own teaching context. Instead of shrinking my students' polyglot world, I had to open up more access for my students to see a bigger world - their own world which was already so complex and rich in diversity and those of others from various cultural backgrounds around the globe through English. This is the way I want to enable them to experience a sense of their cultures in a different way. I had relied long enough on the notion that sees non-native English literature as 'a threat to the standard version of the English language' (Talib, 1992, p. 51). The Ashcroft quotation appears to refer to the value of translation into English as a way of facilitating communication between people in post-colonial settings – as a vehicle through which we might begin to understand the culturally specific experiences of people in societies that have been shaped by their colonial pasts. In the context of postcolonial Indonesia, the English translations of Indonesian texts provide a vehicle through which Indonesians might grapple with their own colonial history, developing a heightened sense of the relationship between their own cultures and beliefs, and the culture and beliefs associated with global English.

Ashcroft et al. (1989) also add that 'the translation of a large body of indigenous writing into English can be used as a cultural resource and then be fashioned as a vehicle of cultural communication, and perhaps a mode of cultural survival' (p. 205). For the Indonesian context, this means that the translation of Indonesian literary works will help create not only wider readership but also raise and promote the status of the Indonesian literature within the international world. These are some of the ways I believe I can help my students find themselves in my English literature classrooms.

- **excerpt from my interviewee's account**

(Giring) "Reading was not that important for Suharto. Hey! We are building a country!"

It is one of my concerns….These days more and more people neglect reading because of TV, because of comics, internets, Facebook. Ugghh!!! I don't think we have entered that modern stage yet when everybody is reading. That reading is not only for preparing for an exam. When you are reading, people will usually ask you, "Besok ada ujian ya?" So, that's a part of the tradition. That's the way people see reading. People see reading as hmmm…I don't know…to get a title maybe? It is not for pleasure. It is the long history I guess, the pragmatism of Suharto's regime. And reading was not that important for Suharto. Reading is only for developing your skill. Hey…we are building a country!!! And parents don't give good examples. They read newspapers a lot, but they don't read anything else. That's a long tradition and I think the only Faculty responsible to change everything is the Faculty of Humanity, The Faculty of Letters, or whatever we call it, Faculty of Arts and Education? and I think one of the reasons why I'm here to teach is to change people's habit…This is the way I think I can improve the education in my English Department.

Giring's account above is clearly dominated by his strong concern about the importance of nurturing a reading habit or love of reading among not only the young

people he teaches but in Indonesian society. It reflects his deep understanding about the language and literacy issues with which his country has been grappling. This is more than a concern about functional literacy, but about the human will and capacity to engage with language for purposes beyond such pragmatic purposes. For Giring, reading for pleasure is bound up with the imagination. This is where his passion to improve education in his English department stems from, and it is from here that his motivation to change his students' attitudes towards reading has emerged. Giring criticizes the way reading was viewed by people in Indonesia as merely an activity to fulfil a necessary condition for educational success, such as preparing for examinations. He explains that it is common to hear in Indonesia that whenever one is found to be reading a book, then she or he will be asked a question: "*Besok ada ujian ya*?" (Are you having an exam tomorrow? [my translation]). Giring learns that people rather than finding out 'what' one is reading, people are more interested in 'why' one is reading. This suggests that reading is still heavily associated with the act of compliance with formal requirements imposed from above, such as getting a good score or passing an exam. Reading is rarely appreciated as a cultural pursuit in which one engages voluntarily, as an act of the imagination that occurs outside the control of the educational sector, that is, outside the realm of the known.

The extent to which Giring values the culture of reading is reflected by his remark that reading is integral to a nation-building project as he sees it. Valuing reading as a signifier of modernity, Giring feels that Indonesia has not entered the 'modern stage' yet. Giring blames Suharto's long period of pragmatic leadership as a direct cause of poor reading habits among Indonesians.Valuing pragmatism as his hallmark, Suharto and his New Order regime were concerned with achieving their development project before anything else. Giring's concern over the literacy problems that Indonesia is still facing despite its independence and the New Order's downfall reveals that, in his view, Indonesia remains hampered by colonial legacy. His account is indeed a prompt to re-think who we are and who we might become.

F. CONCLUSIONS

As the conclusion, I put some lessons learned from our stories. My attempt to reflect on my upbringing and teaching journey through storytelling in the form of writing my autobiographical narrative and then placing it alongside the accounts of my research participants originated from my realization of the urgency to 'speak back' to the way English perpetuates a colonial legacy such as the privileging of 'standard English' in both my university and other universities in Indonesia. The excerpt from my autobiography and one of my interviewees above show us how my interviewee and I have negotiated the contradictions and complexities of our professional work and thus revealing our emerging professional identities. They reflect our understanding and awareness of the challenges and constraints that operate on our work and the choices that we have made to overcome them by negotiating a pathway between the claims and counter claims that have been made about the role of English education within a postcolonial framework. The colonial era might be over, but its legacy remains in the form of countries that are grappling with their pats, including the conflict between their traditional languages and cultures and those of their colonial masters. In the 21st century, however, the old colonial domination can also be felt in the globalisation of English, which has created exactly the same tensions.

Anderson (1991) credits the acts of storytelling as a vehicle for people in postcolonial societies to construct meaning and understand their experiences. This means that only by first understanding our own experiences can we understand the

political and social conditions that have affected and shaped both our daily lives and professional work. In the context of teaching English within a postcolonial setting like Indonesia this means that we can appropriate our storytelling rights to understand and then resist the perpetuation of 'colonial legacy' embedded within our classrooms such as the established norms of 'standard English' that has long surrounded the English Departments in Indonesia through 'official nationalism' and the globalisation of English. To value storytelling in this way means to respect and value the history that each of our students brings into the classroom.

The stories that I have constructed from my conversations with my interviewees and my self-narrative are not aimed at showing that we have found ways to resolve all the challenges that we face in our professional work through storytelling. This is why rather than working towards a set of conclusions, I decided 'to stage a conversation that remains open' (Van de ven & Doecke, 2011, p. 10). The open-ended character of my study means that 'the work is complete, but the identity journey is on-going' (Phan, 2008, p. 192). Just like the nature of the open-ended interviews that I had with my teacher participants, none of our stories attempt to represent 'the last word' (Doecke et al. forthcoming). Stories are after all not simply a form of knowing but a vital means of making the world human to us.

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