

Hybridization and How It Takes Place

(The Case of Batak Students in Jember)

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Abstract

This research aims to understand the process of identity formation among regional students in Jember District. The subjects of this study are Batak ethnic regional students from North Sumatra who have resided in Jember District for more than two years. The theoretical framework employed for analyzing this phenomenon is Stuart Hall's theory of hybrid identity. Employing data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and documentation, the findings reveal that the process of hybrid identity formation among Batak ethnic regional students in Jember District is shaped through interactions within public spaces, such as campus environments and surrounding environments. Cultural differences between the objects and the local Jember community frequently result in dynamics within the adaptation process. Consequently, these students must open themselves up to accept and adopt certain elements of the Pandalungan culture, which represents a form of hybridity of the local multicultural Jember community. This leads to a blending of identities, producing a hybrid identity that is reflected in language, etiquette, and culinary. Nevertheless, Batak ethnic regional students in Jember Regency maintain aspects of their authentic identity, such as their clan (marga), Batak language, mardebata (rituals or prayers), and martutur (kinship relationships). This study expounds that the hybrid identity of regional students is continually in a state of 'becoming.'

Keywords: Hybrid Identity, Regional Students, Batak Ethnic, Jember

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Introduction

Jember is one of the regencies in East Java and is home to several public and private universities. Consequently, many students from across Indonesia choose to migrate and pursue their education in this city. These students reside in Jember for an indefinite period, depending on the duration of their studies. They come from various regions, including Sumatra, Kalimantan, Papua, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, and Java. This diversity has resulted in a student population in Jember that possesses varied identities and cultural backgrounds.

The majority of Jember's population is of Javanese and Madurese ethnicity. In addition, there are other ethnic groups such as the Chinese and Osing. Culturally, the people of Jember are situated within the Pandalungan structure. This term refers to a new or hybrid culture formed through the fusion of the two dominant cultures: Javanese and Madurese. The representation of Pandalungan culture can be found in the daily language use, characterized by informal speech (ngoko) and mixed language varieties (Sutarto, 2010). The cultural values upheld include mutual respect and appreciation, solidarity, non-prejudice, tolerance, and cooperation (Arrovia, 2021).

Having identities and cultures different from the local community presents unique challenges for migrant students in adapting effectively. Migrant students from outside Java generally face more difficulty in adjusting, due to language differences and limited proficiency in the Javanese language (Niam, 2009). This experience is similarly encountered by Batak migrant students in Jember Regency.

This study focuses on the experiences of Batak migrant students in their interactions with various cultures, particularly the so-called Pandalungan culture. Although numerous studies have been conducted on Batak migrants (Hutabarat & Nurchayati, 2021; Sumule, 2022; Corry et al., 2022; Siregar, 2022; Widiastuti et al., 2024), few have paid specific attention to how their intercultural experiences in migration settings have led to cultural intersections that eventually give rise to hybrid cultures. Therefore, this research seeks to fill that gap by exploring the intercultural experiences of Batak students with other cultural entities through the lens of Stuart Hall's (1990) concept of hybrid identity.

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the Batak are one of the largest ethnic groups in Indonesia (BPS, 2010). North Sumatra is the ancestral homeland of the Batak people, who are comprised of six sub-ethnic groups: Batak Toba, Batak Simalungun, Batak Angkola, Batak Pakpak, Batak Karo, and Batak Mandailing (Simanjuntak, 2012). A distinctive feature of the Batak ethnic group is the use of clan names (*marga*), typically placed after a person's given name and inherited patrilineally (Simangunsong, 2013). The fundamental principle observed by the Batak in practicing their customs is *Dalihan Natolu*. This principle encompasses the values and norms that guide the Batak people in their behavior and social interactions. It teaches that all individuals hold equal status, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or social standing (Tinambunan, 2013: 6–7).

The University of Jember is one of the state universities in Jember Regency with a diverse population of migrant students, including those of Batak ethnicity. The encounter of two distinct cultures presents the potential for the formation of a hybrid identity. A hybrid identity is a new identity formed as a result of the interaction

between a person's original culture and the local culture in a new environment (Hall, 1990). In the case of Batak migrant students in Jember Regency, hybrid identity emerges when Batak culture interacts with the local culture of Jember. This hybrid identity can support Batak students in adapting to both the local community and fellow students in Jember Regency.

These Batak migrant students originate from various regions, such as North Sumatra. The Batak are typically identified by their distinctive dialect, characterized by a loud and fast manner of speaking, as well as intense eye contact. These traits often lead to the perception that Batak individuals are harsh or aggressive (Anggraini, 2014). Furthermore, cultural elements such as art and customs of the Batak differ from those of the local Pandalungan culture in Jember.

One of the most striking differences in interaction between Batak students and the local Jember population lies in language use. While Indonesian is generally used as the medium of instruction in academic settings, Javanese is frequently spoken both in and outside the classroom (Hutabarat & Nurchayati, 2021). This presents a challenge for Batak students in adjusting to their new environment. Additionally, the language and intonation commonly used by Batak students may often lead to misunderstandings when interacting with non-Batak individuals, especially those of Javanese and Madurese descent.

The relocation of migrant students from their place of origin to Jember Regency involves more than just a physical move; they also carry their identity with them. Identity refers to the characteristics or traits that define a person and can serve as a marker of similarity or difference. Identity encompasses various aspects including physical traits, family background, culture, religion, and values that influence one's behavior, thinking, and attitudes. When students migrate, they are exposed to new environments and cultures. In order to thrive, migrant students need to develop effective adaptation strategies. The easier their adaptation process, the more likely they are to be accepted in their new environment (Guritno, 2018). The aim of this research is to understand the process of hybrid identity formation among Batak migrant students in Jember Regency.

The study of hybrid identity among migrant students in Jember Regency will be analyzed using Stuart Hall's theory of hybrid identity. In his essay "*Cultural Identity and Diaspora*", Hall positions cultural identity in two distinct ways. First, cultural identity is viewed as representing the essential and foundational identity of individuals or groups who share a common cultural background (essentialism) (Hall, 1990: 223). Second, cultural identity is not solely based on elements of 'sameness' but also takes into account elements of 'difference' (non-essentialism). In this latter view, difference is seen as what makes cultural identity unique. Identity, in this context, is always in the process of 'becoming'. It refers to a label assigned to a person based on how they position themselves and are positioned by others in relation to the past (Hall, 1990: 225).

Hybrid identity is formed as a result of the blending of distinct cultural elements. It is a manifestation of non-essentialist identity. Within this non-essentialist framework, hybrid identity emerges as a new identity derived from the experience of intercultural interaction in the process of becoming. The differences between the two cultures mix and give rise to a new and unique identity. Like non-essentialist identity, hybrid

identity is dynamic—it can evolve over time and adapt to cultural changes (Hall, 1990: 235).

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research method, using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is one of the approaches within qualitative research that aims to provide an in-depth description of experiences lived by an individual or a group in relation to a specific phenomenon or concept. According to Moustakas (as cited in Creswell, 2014: 105), this description includes both *what* was experienced and *how* the individual or group experienced it. The focus of this approach is to describe the shared essence of experiences encountered by the participants in relation to a particular phenomenon.

The research is limited to migrant students at the University of Jember. This university was selected because it hosts a large number of migrant students from various regions, including Batak students. The subjects of this study are Batak migrant students from North Sumatra who are currently pursuing their education at the University of Jember. Informants were selected using the snowball sampling technique, where the initial participant helps identify subsequent participants through their social network. Although snowball sampling was used, the researcher established specific criteria for selecting informants to ensure the data aligned with the research objectives. The criteria required that participants be Batak migrant students who have resided in Jember for more than two years, as such individuals are considered to have sufficient interaction experience with the local population. The study involved a total of seven informants.

Data collection methods used in this study included interviews, observation, and documentation. First, interviews were conducted either in person or remotely via WhatsApp with the selected Batak migrant student informants. These were semi-structured interviews aimed at exploring the informants' experiences, perspectives, and the meanings they attach to their time in Jember. Second, non-participant observation was conducted. The researcher observed informants' responses during interviews, including their manner of speaking and the terms they used. Third, documentation involved recording notes throughout the data collection process and archiving interview materials.

Data validation was conducted using source triangulation. Source triangulation involves cross-checking data obtained from multiple sources (Sugiyono, 2013: 274). To ensure data accuracy, the researcher verified the information provided by the seven informants. The collected data were analyzed, described, and categorized to identify similarities and differences in the participants' statements. The researcher also compared data across informants to identify consistent responses and important variations.

The data analysis in this study follows Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological analysis technique, as developed by Creswell (2014: 268–270). The first step is to describe the researcher's own experience related to the phenomenon, to set aside prior biases. The next step involves data reduction to compile a list of significant statements. Irrelevant statements are eliminated, while relevant ones are grouped into meaning units or

themes. The subsequent steps include writing a *textural description* of “what” the informants experienced, and a *structural description* of “how” the experience occurred. Finally, these two descriptions are combined to provide a comprehensive account of the meaning of the phenomenon. This step aims to capture the “essence” of the experience, highlighting the core aspects of the phenomenological inquiry.

Results and Discussion

1. The Portrait of Batak Migrant Students in Jember Regency

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Jember Regency, the population of Jember in 2023 reached 2,600,663 people (BPS Jember, 2024). One of the most distinctive cultural features of Jember is the Pandalungan culture—a hybrid cultural identity formed through the dominant Javanese and Madurese cultural influences within the region. This cultural identity is reflected in the language, customs, norms, cuisine, and interaction patterns practiced by the local population.

The presence of migrant students in Jember contributes to the region’s cultural diversity, including Batak students from North Sumatra. When migrating to Jember, these students bring with them their cultural identity, including clan names (*marga*), language, and other cultural elements. As migrant students, they are faced with the challenge of adapting to a new cultural environment that includes different languages, values, and norms compared to those in their place of origin. Consequently, both their habits and outward expressions may change as they enter the multicultural context of Jember. Naturally, they begin to open themselves to change and adjust their behavior in accordance with their new surroundings.

The hybridity experienced by Batak migrant students in Jember emerges from the dialectical engagement between two distinct cultures: Batak culture and Pandalungan culture. However, this interaction does not completely erase their original Batak identity; in some cases, it leads to transformations of certain aspects of their original culture. The points of convergence—or shared spaces—referred to in this discussion are the contexts in which they engage intensively with other cultures, especially the Pandalungan culture of Jember society. This section also discusses the forms of hybrid identity that emerge as a result of such interactions. Additionally, it explores the original cultural identity of Batak migrant students to understand which cultural elements retain their authenticity during their time in Jember.

2. Hybridity Among Batak Migrant Students

The interaction between Batak migrant students and the local community has created spaces of cultural intersection. These intersections refer to arenas where Batak students encounter and engage with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, particularly the people of Jember. Conceptually, these points of contact occur within what Jackson (1974) describes as the public space. In that space, According to Jackson, there is the publicness where individuals or groups can engage in general social interaction (Prasetyo).

However, the notion of “local culture” is not always understood in the same way by the Batak migrant students who participated in this study. The concept of Pandalungan culture, as used in this research, is understood in a more conceptual framework. In

practical terms, the informants did not necessarily have a clear or direct understanding of the definition of Pandalungan. Instead, their perception of Jember's local culture was more commonly associated with either Javanese or Madurese culture—especially among those who had never previously interacted with Javanese or Madurese individuals.

In the context of hybrid identity formation among Batak migrant students in Jember Regency, the public space refers to the arenas in which they interact with Pandalungan culture and other cultural influences present in Jember. According to Hall (1990), the presence of difference within a group of individuals is what ultimately gives rise to identity. Both the campus environment and surrounding community serve as spaces where Batak migrant students interact with Jember's local culture. Through these interactions, they engage in a process of adaptation and negotiation regarding which cultural elements are appropriate to adopt, ultimately resulting in the formation of a hybrid identity.

The campus environment serves as the primary arena in which the interaction between students' original culture and the Pandalungan culture of Jember, as well as other cultural influences, takes place. In addition to being a space for pursuing academic education, the campus also functions as a site where students come to understand and internalize the values and norms prevailing in Jember. Within the campus, several specific settings become sites of cultural dialectics between Batak migrant students and the local Jember culture—most notably, the classroom and student organizations.

There are several spaces on campus where cultural intersections frequently occur. The first is the classroom. As the primary setting for the learning process, the classroom is where Batak migrant students interact with lecturers and fellow students from different cultural backgrounds. Informants indicated that the classroom was their first site of contact with Jember's local culture, particularly through the use of the Javanese language. One major challenge in adapting to the local context was language. As students from outside Java who do not speak Javanese, Batak students often faced communication difficulties, especially when local students frequently used Javanese in everyday conversations.

In addition to peer interactions, some lecturers also occasionally used Javanese during lectures. This created further barriers for the informants, as they were unable to fully grasp the material being presented. To overcome this challenge, some informants asked their fellow students to relay messages to lecturers, requesting them to refrain from using Javanese. Another strategy was to learn Javanese by asking for help from local students or others who were familiar with the language.

Beyond the language itself, dialect also emerged as an important element in their communication. Different cultural backgrounds often manifest in distinct dialects. This was particularly evident for Batak migrant students in Jember, who characteristically speak in a distinctive Batak dialect and with a higher vocal tone. In their home environments—where Batak culture predominates—this speaking style is considered normal. However, in Jember, it was often perceived as unusual or even inappropriate. Speaking in the Batak manner was sometimes misinterpreted by non-Batak peers. Through these experiences, the students came to understand that in Jember, speaking gently and politely is part of the local etiquette.

The stereotypes imposed by local or non-Batak students contributed to changes in the way informants communicated. The way they were perceived by others had a direct influence on the identity they projected outwardly. The second is student organizations. Through participation in these organizations, students learn to build cooperation with other members from diverse backgrounds. Working within heterogeneous teams helps them gain an understanding of the values and norms inherent in Pandalungan culture and fosters the development of cross-cultural communication skills. However, it is important to note that not all informants in this study participated in student organizations.

Some informants reported that, in addition to the classroom setting, the use of Javanese was also present within the organizations they joined. These differences in language and interaction styles made it difficult for them to connect with other members of the same organization. One practical solution they adopted was to rely on friends who spoke Javanese to act as interpreters, helping them to navigate communication barriers.

Furthermore, the experience of being involved in student organizations provided Batak migrant students with exposure to local terms and expressions unique to Jember's cultural context. For example, the word *mad*—a Jemberan expression used as a greeting—was one such term they encountered. Beyond language acquisition, participating in campus organizations also helped them to better understand local norms, such as appropriate ways of sitting in social settings.

In navigating these new environments, the students often limited how much of their original cultural identity they expressed during interactions. This self-regulation was intended to avoid discomfort for both themselves and others and to facilitate smoother social integration.

The surrounding community environment also plays a significant role in shaping the hybrid identity of Batak migrant students in Jember. Beyond the campus environment, they experience cultural friction during interactions with the local community outside the university. The surrounding environment here refers to the interactions conducted with local residents beyond the campus setting. These interactions provide a deeper understanding of Jember's local culture.

Through their engagement with the surrounding environment, Batak migrant students come to understand that the local people of Jember are characterized by their friendliness. Receiving warm treatment from the local community serves as a motivating factor that helps them adapt well. Additionally, interaction with the local environment also helps these students appreciate the strong sense of solidarity and family values that are upheld by the people of Jember. Manners such as speaking softly, refraining from making loud noises, and dressing politely are some of the social etiquettes they learn from their surroundings.

The students feel well accepted and welcomed by the communities they now live in. Beyond understanding values and norms, these interactions also provide insight into the unique use of the Jemberan language, which is exclusively spoken by the people of Jember. Although the students do not fully grasp the conceptual framework of Jember's local culture, through these engagements they recognize that the local population possesses its own distinct identity, which is conceptually referred to as *Pandalungan*.

3. The Forms of Hybrid Identity Among Batak Students

The hybrid identities of Batak students residing in Jember represent the intersection of Batak culture and the local Pandalungan culture. In the formation of these hybrid identities, there is an exchange and adaptation between elements of two distinct cultures. The students' responses to the interaction between these cultures vary—some accept, reject, modify, or adapt—leading to the creation of unique new identities. Moreover, the production of meaning is a crucial part of hybrid identity formation, as individuals attribute meanings to their original culture based on personal experience.

Language

In addition to using Javanese and Madurese in daily interactions, the Pandalungan community in Jember has its own distinctive language, referred to as *Jemberan*, which is Javanese spoken with a local accent (Arrovia, 2021). In the process of linguistic hybridization, parents play a significant role, as informants noted that their parents encouraged them to adapt to Jember's culture—for instance, by discouraging the use of a high-pitched tone to avoid negative stereotypes.

Observations during interviews revealed that Batak migrant students tend to speak in a softer tone, unlike the typically assertive Batak speech. However, some still maintain their original Batak dialect. They also use linguistic markers such as *aku* and *kau* when recounting their experiences. Hybridization is evident when they use Jemberan expressions such as *rek*, *sek ta*, *iya ta*, and *ndek sini*, pronounced in a Batak accent.

The use of Indonesian also reflects hybrid identity, as it is spoken with a distinct Batak accent. Additionally, not all interlocutors are comfortable with the use of Indonesian, as some are not accustomed to it, compelling these students to learn Javanese to comprehend their peers. One informant mentioned a selective use of vocabulary—contrary to the Batak stereotype of being outspoken. Furthermore, while speaking Indonesian, they occasionally incorporate Jemberan terms, even if they do not fully master the language. They adopt commonly used Jemberan phrases in daily student interactions.

The terms *aku* and *kau* function as linguistic symbols of Batak identity but have undergone hybridization. According to the informants, in Jember, such terms are perceived as expressions of anger. As a result, students tend to use *aku* and *kamu* when interacting with non-Batak peers. One informant continued using *aku* and *kau* but adjusted the tone to make them more acceptable to others.

Etiquette

Another form of hybrid identity manifested by Batak students in Jember is etiquette, which emerges from their intercultural experiences. Etiquette reflects cultural norms and values governing social behavior. Tolerance and the acceptance of differences contribute to the development of hybrid etiquette within these students.

The majority of the Pandalungan population practices Islam, and Islamic principles are integrated into their daily lives (Arrovia, 2021). Similarly, the Islamic influence in Jember's Pandalungan culture shapes its etiquette and social norms. Batak students in

Jember have adopted local etiquette practices such as maintaining proper sitting posture, maintaining good relations with the surrounding community, dressing modestly, speaking in a calm tone, and greeting hosts upon visiting their homes.

Greeting etiquette illustrates this transformation. In their original, predominantly Christian communities, greetings like *Shalom* are customary. However, in Jember, where Islamic culture is dominant, greetings have shifted to *Assalamualaikum*. Students have also adapted their manner of addressing others. For example, while calling out loudly from a distance is common in their home environment, in Jember, it is customary to approach the person directly.

According to Hall's (1990) concept of "becoming," identity is continuously evolving and not confined to a single cultural element. The acceptance or rejection of local etiquette reflects the informants' agency in shaping hybrid identities. Some informants, aware that wearing shorts is frowned upon, continue to dress as they prefer. This choice illustrates the selective integration of cultural elements in forming hybrid identities.

Cuisine

Cuisine is a cultural element significantly affected in the formation of hybrid identities. Batak students in Jember encounter notable differences in food preferences compared to their home regions.

Hall's theory of hybrid identity emphasizes the transformation of identity through the integration of different cultural elements. Food, as a cultural symbol, plays a role in this process. The mixing of distinct culinary traditions contributes to the emergence of a unique hybrid identity. For Batak students, hybridization through cuisine is one way their identities evolve.

Mie gomak, a traditional North Sumatran dish, exemplifies this hybridization. When Batak students introduced the dish in Jember, it underwent several modifications to suit local tastes. Traditionally, *mie gomak* is prepared with thick coconut milk and *andaliman* spice, a signature Batak ingredient. To make it more acceptable to non-Batak students, they reduced the use of *andaliman* and used milder spices and less coconut milk. These adjustments altered the flavor, making it more palatable for the broader student community.

4. The Forms of Authentic Identity

Despite the hybridization process, certain aspects of Batak students' cultural identities remain unchanged. These elements represent their original cultural identity, which is preserved throughout their adaptation in Jember. Hall (1990) argues that the identity most frequently expressed is the one aligned with external expectations, while the original identity is shown primarily to those from the same culture or close relationships.

One such unchanging identity marker is the *marga* (clan name), which is passed down through the paternal line and cannot be altered (Simangunsong, 2013). The *marga* holds significance not only as an identity symbol but also in social, familial, and legal contexts.

Another enduring cultural element is the use of the Batak language. According to the informants, they do not use it frequently—mainly when speaking with their parents or older Batak individuals. In interactions with peers, they generally use Indonesian.

The principles of *mardebata* (belief in God) and *martutur* (kinship) remain central to the lives of Batak students in Jember. *Mardebata* relates to their religious beliefs. Historically, even before Christianity arrived in the Batak region, the Batak people were devout and began and ended rituals with prayer (Tinambunan, 2013: 2–3).

Martutur involves identifying familial ties through the exchange of *marga* information. Upon meeting, Batak individuals typically inquire about each other's *marga* to determine their relationship, which influences how they address one another (e.g., *Amangboru* and other kinship terms). Informants shared that they are often asked about their lineage by other Batak individuals in Jember.

5. Ongoing Identity Production

The multicultural and Pandalungan society of Jember provides ample space for Batak migrant students to engage with diverse cultures. In such spaces, they face various dynamics resulting from cultural differences. For these students, adapting to a new environment becomes a necessity. Consequently, they often adopt and integrate aspects of the local Pandalungan culture to facilitate acceptance and adjustment. This process underlies the formation of hybrid identities.

The formation of hybrid identity among Batak students in Jember is not limited to cultural adaptation but also involves deep intercultural interaction. According to Hall, hybrid identity cannot emerge without interaction across cultural differences. However, such identities should not be seen as fixed outcomes, as identity is non-essential and subject to continuous change. Hall describes identity as a process of “becoming.”

In this sense, Batak students' identities in Jember remain open to change and development, shaped not only by past experiences but also by ongoing social and cultural interactions. The hybrid identity formed from the convergence of Batak and Pandalungan cultures is not static. It continues to evolve in response to social contexts and cultural differences. This hybrid identity does not erase their Batak heritage; rather, it incorporates selected cultural elements from their new environment.

In line with Hall's concept of cultural identity, the informants recognize that their current identities are shaped by their present environment and are subject to future transformation. They understand the role of “difference” in the development of identity, suggesting that their identities may shift again if they return to their place of origin or move to another culturally distinct region. Even so, several informants expressed their intention to retain certain Pandalungan norms, such as etiquette, considering them positive values worth preserving

Conclusion

The formation of hybrid identities among Batak migrant students in Jember Regency occurs through interactions with the local multicultural culture, particularly the Pandalungan culture. The university environment and the surrounding community serve as arenas where these students engage with local society. Through these interactions, they strive to adapt to their new environment in order to gain social acceptance. The challenges they face in the process of adaptation provide them with a deeper understanding of both the prevailing values and norms in Jember and their own cultural identity. This serves as the foundation for the blending of Batak and Pandalungan cultures, resulting in the emergence of hybrid identities.

Language, etiquette, and cuisine are among the manifestations of hybridity observed in Batak migrant students living in Jember. However, the formation of hybrid identities does not entail the complete abandonment of their original culture. Certain elements of their Batak identity remain preserved and are still practiced, such as the use of clan names (*marga*), kinship principles (*partuturan*), the Batak language, and the concept of *mardebata* (belief in God).

In line with Hall's theory of hybridity, the hybrid identity formed within these Batak migrant students should not be understood as fixed or permanent. Rather, identity is a dynamic and evolving construct, continually shaped by ongoing social interactions and experiences. Consequently, the hybrid identity they embody is not a final state, but part of a continuous process of becoming, shaped by their engagement with cultural differences

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