

INDO AND INDON: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRAK

Banyak orang Indonesia yang saya temui, dari orang awam hingga orang yang berpendidikan tinggi, tidak suka ketika mereka mendengar kata "Indon". Hal ini tidak berlaku ketika mereka disebut "Indo". Beberapa mempercayai bahwa "Indon" tidak tepat digunakan sebagai ekspresi dalam komunikasi. Apakah keyakinan itu benar? Apakah ada pembenaran terhadap keyakinan yang benar? Atau sekedar pendapat? Kebenaran, keyakinan, dan justifikasi adalah tripartit yang membangun pengetahuan. Pembangunan ini membawa kita untuk menganalisis dua kata dari perspektif epistemologis sebelum kita masuk ke dalam studi etimologis.

ABSTRACT

Many Indonesians that I met, from laymen to highly educated people, have a hard feeling when they hear the word "Indon". It is not so when they are called "Indo". Some believe that the former is not appropriate to use as an expression in communication. Is that belief true? Is the true belief justified? Or is it an opinion? Truth, belief, and justification are the tripartite that construct knowledge. This construct brings us to analyze the two words from epistemological perspective before we go into an etymological study.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many people used to saying some words without understanding the meanings. On the other hand, many people have a hard and even bad feeling without justification when they hear some particular words. Why? Because they have a belief, even though not a justified true belief and not even a true belief, that leads them to a certain perception and imagination [1, 2]. It is the perception and imagination that become the source of their expression and action.

There are three kinds of imagination. First, imagination based on scientific axioms, where according to Hawking [3], scientific axioms also called theoretical reasons are a necessary condition for believing something. In Plato's doctrine [4], this one will guide us to the absolute, the good, and the transcendent forms. Second, imagination developed based on local tradition. Globally, this one might lead to something detrimental. The last one, which might be dangerous, is that developed based on psychological factors such as, for example, emotional desire [1]. That danger can only be avoided by knowledge.

The first kind of imagination is what we discuss in this paper. As an example of the second, is my own experience. When I was studying mathematics and statistics in France in 1975 – 1979, one day an Italian friend of mine asked me for help to solve a problem. After I had finished solving that problem for him, he said to me: "*Tu as grosse tête*". Suddenly, right after having heard what he said, I had a very bad feeling. Why? Because, in Indonesian language, that short sentence is synonymous to a very bad expression. In my imagination someone in my country said: "*Kamu besar kepala*" meaning "you are arrogant" whereas actually "*Tu as grosse tête*" means "you are smart". Such imagination automatically appears in the mind because of local tradition. Examples of the third kind can be found easily in everyday life in non-

scientific knowledge community. Let say, because a member of the community said that a person A performs bad conduct, in the name of communal solidarity, some other members believe that A is as said so and then they take negative action.

Since the role assigned to perception and imagination is so important, and only knowledge that will guide us to a justified or, equivalently, verified [2] true belief, this paper will be focused on an epistemological perspective and a brief etymological study of the terms "Indo" and "Indon" with the hope that this study will be useful for the development of mutual understanding among two cognate nations, Indonesians and Malaysians (alphabetically ordered). It is the author's hope to see that mutual relationship among them grows up and reaches high level of maturity and more beneficial for both sides.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, the words "Indo" and "Indon" will be considered as a form [4]. This will bring us in Section 3 to see the theoretical background that will be used to analyze those words. Before we start with the etymology of them, in this section a historical background of ethnic and geographical grouping of islands in the Pacific region, summarized from [5], will be presented and discussed. Later on, we try to understand how those two terms were born. This paper will be closed with an afterthought in the last section.

2. "INDO" AND "INDON" AS A FORM

In 2008, when I stayed in Kangar the capital of Perlis, the northern-most federal state in Peninsular Malaysia, for several months and living around villagers, an interesting phenomenon had caught my attention. I witnessed an old friend of mine, Indonesia born Malaysian, reminded a person who called me "Indon" (or "Indone"?). Really, I was not disturbed with that term; I had no reason to have such feeling before

scientifically justified. But, I did not really understand why my friend was not happy. On the other hand, his feeling was unchanged when someone called him “Indo”. So, what is that beyond the character “n”?

Witnessing that phenomenon, I immediately realized that I was in the Plato’s cave allegory [4]. What I saw may be just a shadow, a **perceptual seemings** [1]; a perceptual experience in which it seems to me as though proposition p (used by my friend that makes him unhappy), but p might be false. Thus, that phenomenon contains a proposition that must be analyzed whether or not it is a justified true belief. In terms of epistemology, this is about “knowledge that” or propositional knowledge.

The process of knowing something in a propositional knowledge is an intellectual adventure in a never visited space. It is proven that only scientific laws would allow us to predict everything including human behavior that would happen [3]. Science would be able to guide human how to enter and play in that unknown and uncertain (random) space with great success. Science guides us to go forward in random space with confidence. The process in that space like, for example, random walk or Brownian motion or other models of process is irreversible. Its irreversibility is like an ink drop movement in a cup of water; the movement may not be the retreat to return to a drop of ink [6].

However, scientific theory is characterized by falsifiability. More specifically, according to Popper [7], falsifiability is a necessary and sufficient condition (NSC) for a theory to be considered scientific. This characterization, most probably, comes from his theory that: “Scientific theory and human knowledge generally are irreducibly conjectural or hypothetical and are generated by creative imagination in order to solve problems that have arisen in specific historico-cultural

settings.” The key words in this proposition of scientific theory generation are creativity, imagination dan culture. In this context, the use of the terms “Indo” and “Indon” can be considered as a product of local creative imagination and may be of local culture. Thus, globally, their falsifiability is subject to scientific discussion. In other words, those terms are an object in Plato’s world of forms [1, 4].

During the last six years I often visited many places in Peninsular Malaysia to understand Malaysian culture especially in terms of the way people enjoy their life and the way they communicate with each other. The prime goal is to have a better understanding about the forms of special words they use in everyday communication.

3. THEORITICAL BACK GROUND

Is a proposition justified? Or is it just an opinion? In [1] we learn that knowledge of **propositions** refers to the schema “ S knows that p ”, where “ S ” stands for the subject who has knowledge and “ p ” for the proposition that is known. According to this schema, S knows that p if and only if p is true and S is justified in believing that p . This is an NSC for S to know that p that led Steup [1] to come up with a corollary that the three conditions – truth, belief, and justification – are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for knowledge.

According to **evidentialism** [1], what makes a belief justified is the possession of evidence. The basic idea is that a belief is justified to the degree it fits S 's evidence. And, S is justified in believing that p if and only if S believes that p while it is not the case that S is obliged to refrain from believing that p . Justification is to ensure that a true belief is not true merely by accident. On the other hand, when beliefs originate in sources like psychological factors such as, for example, desires, emotional needs, prejudice, and

biases of various kinds, they do not qualify as knowledge even if true. For true beliefs to count as knowledge, it is necessary that they originate in sources we have good reason to consider reliable. These sources are perception, introspection, memory, reason, and testimony. See again Steup [1] for further discussion.

With those axioms in mind, the relevant questions in our discussion are: what are the evidences of using the terms “Indo” and “Indon”? To what extent are those evidences justified or, equivalently, verified [2, 7]? These are what we want to discuss in the two following subsections from etymological point of view.

3.1. Ethnic and geographical grouping

The world is not always as it appears to us in our eyes, ears and even perceptual experiences. It is so with the terms “Indo” and “Indon”. According to **direct realism** [1], when we heard those words, **what we perceive** is the words themselves. However, according to **indirect realism**, when we heard and thus know those words, what we really heard is not the words themselves but also their forms which are absolute, perfect, good, unchangeable, and transcendent. The latter leads us to enter into etymological study about those words.

Let us start with the ethnic and geographical grouping, registered in *Société de Géographie*, Paris, where the study depends on. Austronesia, Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, Indonesia and Malaysia are the six ethnic and geographical groups in the Pacific region. Those names have the same last three characters “*sia*”. But, unlike Austronesia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, the names Indonesia and Malaysia are related to the inhabitants in these two regions. On the other hand, if the first five regions originate from Latin and Greek (*nêsos*) only, Malaysia could originate from

Tamil (“Malai” and “ur” meaning “mountain” and “city” or “land”, respectively) and Greek (*nêsos*) and could also originate from those Tamil words with “*si*” being added in honor of the three joining states Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak in 1963. See [5] and some references therein and also the appropriate links for the details.

(1). *The name “Indonesia”*

The name “Indonesia” derives from the Latin “*Indus*” and the Greek “*nêsos*”, meaning “island”. The word “*Indus*” itself is borrowed from ancient Greek “*Indós*”. This is a name used for the mighty river crossed by Alexander the Great (20/21 July 356 – 10/11 June 323 BC), a king of Macedon [5]. That’s perhaps the reason why Indonesians are usually called “Indo”. As for the name of Indonesia, it came into use in the 19th century when in 1850 George Windsor Earl, an English ethnologist, proposed the terms “*Indunesians*” for the inhabitants of the Indian Archipelago. After 1900, Indonesian nationalist groups adopted it for political expression. It was Ki Hajar Dewantara the first Indonesian scholar to use the name in 1913 [5].

(2). *The name “Malaysia”*

The word “Melayu” was used as the name of the Melayu Kingdom, which existed between the 7th and 13th centuries in Sumatra [5]. “*Malayadvipa*” was the term used by ancient Indian traders when referring to the Malay Peninsula. In modern era, there are two versions about the origin of the name “Malaysia”. First, is for scientific reason. Together with the terms Micronesia and Melanesia, to distinguishing those Pacific cultures and island groups from the existing term Polynesia, it was invented by French navigator Jules Dumont d'Urville following his expedition in Oceania in 1826. He proposed those terms to the *Société de Géographie* in 1831.

Second, is for historio-political reason. At the time of Federation of Malaya, 1948 – 1957, other names were considered; among them was Langkasuka, after the historic kingdom located at the upper section of the Malay Peninsula in the 1st millennium CE. Nowadays, the name “Malaysia” can also be considered as originated from Tamil words with “si” being added in honor of the three joining states. Thus, when we heard that name, it could refer to an ethnic and geographical group and also to a historio-political purpose [5].

3.2. Where “Indo” and “Indon” come from?

The term “Indo” is closely related to the ancient Greek “*Indós*” used for the name of mighty river crossed by Alexander the Great and also for the inhabitants around that river. That’s perhaps the reason why Indonesians’ feelings are not disturbed when they are called “Indo”. On the other hand, the term “Indon” was seemingly born as a consequence of the use of Aristotelian syllogism by Malaysians where, for them, Malaysia (consists of the terms “Malay” and “sia”) is the land of “Malay” (*tanah Melayu*).

Theoretically, by using that mind set, according to Aristotelian syllogism, for some Malaysians, Indonesia means the land of “Indone” which is heard as “Indon”. Therefore, from epistemological perspective, the word “Indo” (or “Indon” for some Malaysians) refers to the inhabitants in the *nesos* called Indonesia. Since Malay-sia meant “*tanah orang Melayu*”, analogously, Indone-sia is meant by them “*tanah orang Indone* (heard as *Indon*)”

4. Afterthought

Epistemologically [1, 5, 8, 9], there is nothing wrong in the use of the terms “Indo” or “Indon” to refer to the inhabitants in the *nesos* called Indonesia. Etymologically, the

origin of the former is the word “*Indós*” while the latter is the consequence of Aristotelian syllogism used by some Malaysians. The use of those terms is a matter of taste of local tradition. Furthermore, from etymological point of view, it is then very logical if for many people the name “Indonesia” has the same root as “India”.

As an ancient French proverb said: “*Le gout et la couleur, on ne peut pas discuter* – The taste and color, we cannot discuss” scientific knowledge is not enough in any communication practices. Mutual adjustment and goodness of fit are among the key factors to build mutual tolerance to grow up with harmony any mutual relationship among two subjects. Scientific knowledge-based tolerance will ensure higher and higher level of maturity and fruitfulness of that relationship for the benefit of both sides. Only with mutual understanding, mutual respect will be ensured.

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