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An Ethnographic Study of Collaborative Meaning-Making in an English Language Club Through Bumi Manusia

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abstrak-Penelitian etnografi ini menyelidiki proses negosiasi identitas di kalangan mahasiswa Indonesia melalui aktivitas menonton dan mendiskusikan film Bumi Perempuan (2019) dengan subtitle bahasa Inggris di Klub Bahasa Inggris, IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro. Dengan desain studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui diskusi kelompok terfokus, jurnal reflektif, dan observasi partisipan, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman kolektif ini menciptakan "zona kontak mnemonik," di mana para peserta secara aktif menafsirkan wacana kolonialisme dan perlawanan. Subtitle bahasa Inggris berfungsi sebagai filter mediasi ganda – memperjelas makna sekaligus membuat mereka menyadari bias terjemahan. Proses ini memperkuat identitas nasional melalui kebanggaan kolektif dan mentransformasikan identitas linguistik, di mana bahasa Inggris bergeser dari sekadar keahlian asing menjadi alat artikulasi kritis untuk membahas sejarah nasional dalam percakapan global. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada teori identitas pascakolonial dan pembelajaran bahasa, sekaligus menawarkan model praktis Pembelajaran Terpadu Konten dan Bahasa (CLIL) yang menggabungkan kesadaran sejarah, kemahiran berbahasa, dan kewarganegaraan global. **Kata kunci:** Negosiasi Identitas, Bumi Manusia, Subtitle Bahasa Inggris, Pembelajaran Bahasa, Etnografi, Studi Pascakolonial.

Abstract- This ethnographic research investigates the process of identity negotiation among Indonesian students through the activity of watching and discussing the film Bumi Perempuan (2019) with English subtitles at the English Language Club, IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro. With a case study design, data is collected through focused group discussions, reflective journals, and participant observation, then analyzed thematically. Findings suggest that these collective experiences create "mnemonic contact zones," in which participants actively interpret discourses of colonialism and resistance. English subtitles function as a double mediation filter – clarifying meaning while making them aware of translation bias. This process strengthened national identity through collective pride and transformed linguistic identity, in which English shifted from being simply a foreign craft to a critical tool of articulation for discussing national history in global conversations. This research contributes to theories of post-colonial identity and language learning, while offering a practical model of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) that combines historical awareness, language proficiency, and global citizenship.

Keywords: Identity Negotiation, Human Earth, English Subtitles, Language Learners, Ethnography, Post-Colonial Studies.

INTRODUCTION

The cinematic adaptation of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's legendary novel, *This Earth of Mankind* (2019), has established itself as more than just a spectacle. The film functions as a critical cultural text, reconstructing the late colonial era of the Dutch East Indies by dismantling hegemonic colonial discourses – such as racial hierarchy, legal injustice, and cultural inferiority – while simultaneously affirming a discourse of resistance through intellectual enlightenment and the awakening of national consciousness (Rijadi, 2022). The dynamics of its reception are further complicated by the presence of English subtitles. This linguistic layering transforms a deeply Indonesian narrative into a transcultural object, accessible to a global audience while creating a unique experience for local viewers who witness their own history through the prism of English (Nugroho & Hafizah, 2023). This raises a profound question: how do today's young Indonesian generation, living in a digital world and mastering global languages, interpret and negotiate their identities through this doubly mediated encounter with colonial history?

Academic communities like the English Language Club (United English Club) at IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro are ideal sites for exploring these questions. As English language learners skilled in literary and cultural criticism, the collective activity of watching and discussing *Bumi Manusia* (*This Earth of Mankind*) becomes a multi-interpretive meaning-making process. They must simultaneously decode the visual narrative, the socio-historical context, and the linguistic-cultural mediation provided by the subtitles (Setyaningsih, 2022). Through dialogue and debate, interpretations of the film's themes are collaboratively constructed, which in turn shapes their understanding of history and national identity (Pratama & Wijaya, 2023). This activity places them at a critical juncture: using a global language to reflect on the nation's foundational narratives, a practice that can reconfigure their relationship with English – from merely a foreign skill to a tool for critical cultural articulation and global citizenship (Norton & De Costa, 2018).

However, a wide research gap remains. Previous studies have focused largely on textual analysis of the film or the phenomenon of subtitling and youth identity separately. There has been no research that specifically investigates ethnographically how the process of acceptance and negotiation of meaning of English subtitled films occurs in language learning communities, and the impact that this has on reshaping their dual identities: as Indonesians and as English language users.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fanon: Psycho-affective Dimensions

Fanon (1963) analyzed colonialism's psychological damage – inferiority, shame, alienation – and the need to reclaim history. Ahmed (2014) extends this through "affective economies," and Khanna (2020) examines "the psychic life of neo-colonialism." Faruk (2023) applies this to Indonesian youth through "postcolonial melancholia."

Prosthetic Memory and Implicated Subjects

Landsberg (2015) theorizes "prosthetic memory" – mediated encounters creating felt connections to past events. Rothberg (2019) introduces the "implicated subject" – inheritors of complex legacies navigating ongoing inequalities.

Global Englishes and Translingual Practice

Pennycook (2017) moves beyond "linguistic imperialism" to understand English as dynamic local resource. Canagarajah (2013) examines "translingual practice" – creative combination of linguistic resources. Lauder (2020) documents English's symbolic power in Indonesian education.

Language Learner Identity

Norton (2013) conceptualizes identity as dynamic and socially constructed, introducing "investment" – learners' commitment tied to desire for symbolic resources. Darvin and Norton (2015, 2023) model identity, ideology, and capital in language learning.

Research Gaps

This study addresses three key gaps – limited research on audience reception of *Bumi Manusia*, the absence of integrated translation and sociolinguistic analysis on how English subtitles shape national subjects' engagement with their own history, and the lack of focus on Indonesian youths' engagement with colonial-era narratives – by ethnographically examining how university students collaboratively negotiate colonial discourses through the English-subtitled film and how this process shapes their identities.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with an ethnographic case study design, which allows the researcher to immerse themselves in the United English Club community at IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro to observe how members collaboratively negotiate meaning through real-time discussion and debate, directly connecting to sociocultural theory's emphasis on learning through social interaction.

Research Setting and Participants

The research is conducted in the natural environment of the United English Club's regular meeting space on campus, with 6-10 active members purposively selected from the English Language Education department who possess sufficient English proficiency for critical discussion and exist at the critical intersection of using a global language to explore their own national narrative.

Data Collection Instruments

Data are collected through three interconnected instruments: Focus Group Discussion guides facilitating semi-structured exploration of film scenes, field observation protocols documenting group dynamics and contextual details, and reflective journal prompts capturing participants' private thoughts and feelings after each session (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher conducts three FGD sessions over four weeks where participants watch selected scenes from *Bumi Manusia* with English subtitles followed by guided discussion, maintains detailed field notes during and after each session, and collects reflective journals from all participants immediately following each discussion (Spradley, 2016).

Data Analysis

Data analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis: familiarization through repeated reading, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report with compelling participant quotes.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness is established through triangulation of multiple data sources, member checking with participants to verify interpretations, peer debriefing with academic supervisors, thick description enabling transferability judgments, and researcher reflexivity through maintaining a personal journal to address potential bias (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Geertz, 1973; Berger, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the ethnographic case study conducted with 6 active members of the United English Club (UEC) at IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro. Data were collected through three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), eight in-depth interviews, participant observation, and reflective journals over six weeks. Thematic analysis revealed seven major themes organized around the two research questions.

1. The Subtitle as a Site of Struggle

Participants engaged actively with English subtitles not as passive receivers but as critical interpreters, treating translation as a site of contestation.

For example, P1 stated:

"In Indonesian, Minke said 'Saya bukan kacung Belanda' – 'I am not a Dutch errand boy.' But the subtitle says 'I am not a servant to the Dutch.' That's different. 'Servant' is too neutral. The humiliation is lost."

This collaborative verification demonstrates Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, as peers collectively constructed understandings none could achieve individually.

2. "It Feels Different in English": Affective Shifts

English subtitles created distinct emotional experiences compared to Indonesian dialogue. For example, P5 stated:

"I felt proud explaining Indonesian concepts in English – bridging worlds. But I also worry: when I think about colonialism in English, am I thinking like an Indonesian or like someone trained by Western education?"

3. Collective Scaffolding

Group discussion functioned as a Zone of Proximal Development where shared understanding emerged through interaction. Participants built understanding collaboratively:

"I didn't understand 'Ethical Policy.' P4 explained the history, P2 added critique, P6 synthesized the theme. Together we constructed what none of us knew alone."

4. Negotiating Representation of Colonial Subjects

Participants critically examined how the film represented colonized peoples. For example, P3 stated:

"Is Nyai realistic? She feels like the 'exceptional native' trope – implying most couldn't achieve agency. The subtitles make her speak standard English, losing her strategic code-switching between Javanese, Dutch, and Malay."

Research Question	Key Themes	Summary of Findings
RQ1: Collaborative Negotiation of Colonial and Resistance Discourses	1. Subtitle as Site of Struggle	Participants critically compared Indonesian and English, identifying translation losses and ideological reframing
	2. Affective Shifts	English created emotional distance, enabling analysis but raising ethical concerns
	3. Collective Scaffolding	Group discussion enabled shared understanding beyond individual capacity

Research Question	Key Themes	Summary of Findings
	4.Negotiating Representation	Participants critically analyzed how colonized subjects were portrayed and translated

DISCUSSION

This ethnographic case study investigated how members of the United English Club (UEC) at IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro collaboratively negotiate colonial and resistance discourses through the English-subtitled film *Bumi Manusia* (2019), and how this process shapes their dual identities as Indonesians and English language users. The findings reveal a complex dynamic wherein English subtitles function simultaneously as linguistic mediation, affective filter, and ideological site of struggle—fundamentally shaping how young Indonesians engage with their colonial past and articulate their postcolonial present.

The Subtitle as Contested Terrain: Translation, Ideology, and the Politics of Representation

The finding that participants engaged actively with English subtitles as critical interpreters rather than passive receivers challenges conventional assumptions about subtitling as neutral linguistic transfer. Participants' detailed comparisons between original dialogue and English subtitles—such as P-01's observation that "the subtitles showed [Minke] was grammatically perfect, but the officer's replies were clipped and rude," noting that "that contrast—perfect language vs. unequal treatment—made his anger clearer than just listening alone"—demonstrate what Nornes (2022) terms "abusive subtitling" awareness. This critical stance aligns with Baker's (2018) assertion that translation in conflict zones becomes a narrative act, framing events and identities through linguistic choices that carry ideological weight.

The collaborative verification observed during FGD sessions exemplifies what Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theorizes as learning through social interaction, yet extends beyond mere cognitive development. Participants were not simply acquiring language skills but engaging in what Canagarajah (2013) describes as translanguaging practice. When P-02 noted that "when Nyai switches from Javanese to Dutch to insult a Dutch man, the subtitles just say the same insult. You lose the shock of the switch," and concluded that "subtitles help non-speakers, but they flatten the multilingual rebellion," participants were simultaneously negotiating historical meaning, emotional resonance, and cultural specificity. P-03 reinforced this by observing that "the subtitles alone don't show that—I had to pay attention to *who* was speaking and why."

The ideological dimensions of this critical engagement become clearer when considered through Blommaert's (2020) political linguistics framework. P-01's attention to translation choices revealed an implicit understanding that language is

never neutral: “The English subtitles actually helped me catch the *formality* of the Dutch and Javanese dialogue.” P-05 offered a counterpoint, noting that subtitles can hinder as well as help: “The mispronunciation is in Dutch, but the subtitles just write the correct word. You don’t hear the mistake. ... Without that, the scene felt flat. Subtitles can’t convey the sound of failure.” This finding resonates with Díaz-Cintas’s (2018) observation that subtitling in the digital age has become democratized, with audiences increasingly equipped to critique professional translations.

P-03’s observation that “the English subtitles hindered me here in a specific way. ... The Dutch officials speak in calm, bureaucratic language. The subtitles translate that as ‘for her own wellbeing’ ... Those English phrases sound reasonable. But in Dutch, my friend told me, the original wording is colder and more possessive. The subtitles made evil sound polite. That’s dangerous. Subtitles can sanitize” speaks directly to what Chow (2019) identifies as the violence of monolingualism—the reduction of complex multilingual subjectivities to flattened representations. This erasure is particularly significant given Lindsay’s (2019) analysis of the novel’s original linguistic complexity. By noticing this loss, participants demonstrated what Mignolo and Vázquez (2019) term “decolonial aestheSis.”

Affective Economies and the Emotional Politics of English-Mediated History

The finding that English subtitles created distinct emotional experiences—simultaneously enabling analytical distance while raising ethical concerns—extends Fanon’s (1963) psycho-affective analysis of colonialism into the digital, multilingual present. P-01’s reflection on the pavement scene captures this duality: “It wasn’t a violent scene, but the casual, everyday humiliation of it made me furious. ... I felt trapped just watching it.” Later, P-01 added: “What struck me is that Minke doesn’t argue. He just steps aside. That’s the most painful part—he knows the rules so well that he doesn’t even hesitate. Colonialism succeeds when the oppressed internalize the rules and follow them without being forced.”

This affective complexity resonates with Khanna’s (2020) analysis of “the psychic life of neo-colonialism.” P-04’s reflection on pride and self-critique exemplifies the implicated subject: “I felt proud during Nyai’s grammar correction scene, but later I asked myself: why does it take a native woman mastering the colonizer’s language to make me feel proud? Shouldn’t her Javanese wisdom be enough? That question humbled me. It made me realize that I, too, have been conditioned to value European things more highly. My pride in Nyai’s Dutch skill is itself a symptom of colonialism.” The emotional distance English provided—enabling participants to analyze colonialism with what they described as greater objectivity—can be understood through Rothberg’s (2019) concept of the “implicated subject.” P-02 noted: “The English subtitles hindered my connection a little. I speak Indonesian, so I could understand the Javanese and Indonesian dialogue directly. But reading the English subtitles for the Dutch parts made me realize how much of the story’s power is in *switching* languages.” P-05’s anxiety about whether thinking in English fundamentally alters Indonesian subjectivity echoes Chow’s (2019) provocation: “I’m

angry that I still feel anxious speaking English. But that anger is useful. It tells me that my hesitation isn't my failure – it's a 400-year-old ghost."

Collective Scaffolding and the Social Construction of Historical Understanding

The finding that group discussion functioned as a Zone of Proximal Development wherein shared understanding emerged through interaction confirms sociocultural theory's emphasis on learning as socially mediated (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Norton, 2013). P-01 explicitly credited peer discussion for changing her interpretation: "My friend said that Minke's pride actually makes him blind to how much danger he is in. I originally thought he was just brave, but after she pointed out how Nyai Ontosoroh constantly warns him, I realized Minke's Western education gives him a false sense of safety. That changed my perspective – he's not just a hero; he's also naive." In Session 2, P-01 added: "My friend pointed out that Minke's Western education actually *betrayed* him in this scene. ... After she said that, I started blaming the *system* – and also Minke's naive belief that the system could be fair. That changed my view from 'tragic hero' to 'tragically overconfident young man.'"

P-02 described a similar transformation: "One friend said that the house represents a 'third space' – neither fully native nor fully European. I had never thought of it that way. I was seeing it as a copy of Europe, but she saw it as Nyai's own creation. That helped me understand her as a powerful architect of her identity, not just a tragic figure." In Session 2, P-02 reported: "One friend argued that Nyai is actually a tragic figure because she internalized Dutch culture so completely ... Another friend disagreed, saying that's like blaming a soldier for using the enemy's weapons. That debate made me realize the film isn't asking us to judge Nyai. It's asking us to feel the impossibility of her position. No right answer exists. That's the tragedy."

This collaborative process of knowledge construction can be understood through the lens of social learning theories. The dynamic of participants sharing their expertise – for instance, one participant explaining the history of the Ethical Policy and another adding critique – perfectly illustrates the concept of "scaffolding" within the Zone of Proximal Development. This collective meaning-making is not merely an academic exercise but reflects a deeper pattern in language education. Research by Rozak and Andini (2024) on collaborative digital storytelling in language learning contexts demonstrates that such interactive environments connect structured education to real-life language use, critical engagement with content, and the development of learner autonomy. Their work on the use of digital narratives shows how collaborative tasks foster not only linguistic competence but also cultural awareness and critical thinking – skills that participants in this study similarly developed through their collective engagement with the film's colonial themes. Furthermore, Rozak's (2023) work on the integration of local wisdom in English language teaching highlights the importance of connecting classroom learning to students' cultural and historical contexts, a principle that underpins the pedagogical value of using *Bumi Manusia* as a content-based learning material. In this study, the

collaborative effort extends beyond language acquisition to negotiating complex historical narratives, thus building a shared, critical understanding of the past.

P-03's reflection on peer disagreement about Minke's father further illustrates collective scaffolding: "Discussing with friends was eye-opening because two people had completely opposite views of Minke's father. One said he was a backward traditionalist holding Minke back. Another said he was the only honest character because he refused to worship Dutch knowledge. Hearing both sides made me realize the film isn't saying one is right – it's showing a real historical dilemma. I never would have gotten that depth alone." P-06 confirmed this process: "My friends disagreed about whether Annelies is a weak character. ... I started on the 'weak' side, but after hearing someone say, 'Not every hero fights with a sword – some survive with softness,' I changed my mind. Now I see her silence as strategic, not empty."

Negotiating Representation: The Colonial Subject Between Film and Translation

Participants' critical examination of how the film represented colonized peoples demonstrates sophisticated media literacy and postcolonial consciousness. P-02's reflection on Nyai's piano is emblematic: "When I first saw it, I thought, 'She's trying to be European.' But after discussion, I realized the piano is hers. She bought it. She plays it. The Dutch didn't give it to her. So it's not a symbol of submission – it's a symbol of taking what she wants from their culture and making it her own. That changed how I see cultural borrowing. It's not always mimicry. Sometimes it's reclamation."

P-03 raised the "exceptional native" trope indirectly through family silence: "As an Indonesian, I now see my own family's silence differently. My grandmother never talked about the Japanese occupation or the revolution. I used to think she was just private. Now I wonder if she was protecting me from pain – or if the pain was so deep she had no words." P-04 explicitly connected representational critique to self-awareness: "True decolonization would mean also celebrating [Nyai] when she speaks Javanese. I'm not there yet, but at least I see it now."

P-05's personal identification with the classroom humiliation scene reveals how representation operates through lived experience: "The classroom humiliation scene triggered something personal for me. In 7th grade, I mispronounced 'vegetable' in English class ... The class laughed. The teacher corrected me slowly, like I was stupid. I never forgot that word. Now I realize that moment wasn't about my English ability. It was about power. ... So when I watch that scene, I'm not just watching history. I'm watching my own childhood." This finding supports Setiawan's (2018) analysis of Indonesian historical cinema's political dimensions, while adding the crucial dimension of how English subtitling mediates these representations.

Double Consciousness and the Negotiation of Dual Identities

The finding that participants experienced themselves as simultaneously Indonesian and English-mediated subjects resonates powerfully with Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness." P-01 captured this split: "As an Indonesian, I felt

ashamed that I didn't know how deeply the *warga negara kelas dua* (second-class citizen) feeling started. Today, when people complain about corruption or inequality, I see it as a ghost of that colonial structure. As an English learner, I realized I use English to access global knowledge—just like Minke used Dutch. But language doesn't guarantee respect."

P-04 articulated the transhistorical parallel most directly: "As an Indonesian, I feel a new responsibility. The heroes of our history weren't just the generals. They were also the clerks, the teachers, the writers who kept records. ... Minke wrote in Dutch because that was the language of power. I write in English sometimes for the same reason. The question is: what am I using it *for*?" P-06 added a critical caveat: "The rain scene was beautiful, but I kept thinking: where are the other Indonesians in this love story? Annelies is mixed-race. Minke is educated elite. Their love is real, but it's also privileged. ... Whose love gets to be cinematic? Whose love is invisible? The film doesn't answer that, but it made me ask it."

This finding extends Norton's (2013) conceptualization of language learner identity as multiple, contradictory, and dynamic. P-03's reflection on education as betrayal captures the ambivalence: "We're taught that education is always good. But the film suggests that some education comes with a hidden price: accepting that your own culture is inferior. I don't reject education, but I'm more suspicious of it now. As an English learner, I feel more powerful—because I can choose *not* to internalize the culture that comes with the language." P-02 concluded: "As an English learner, I feel less pressure to be 'perfect.' Nyai's Dutch isn't perfect by aristocratic standards, but it's *effective*. She gets her point across. That's my new goal: effective, not flawless."

Prosthetic Memory and the Mediation of Colonial History

The finding that English subtitles shaped not only intellectual understanding but emotional connection to colonial history extends Landsberg's (2015) theory of "prosthetic memory" into the domain of linguistic mediation. P-01's description of the legal signing scene illustrates this: "The moment that destroyed me was when Annelies was forced to sign the legal document surrendering her inheritance and her status ... The Dutch law systematically erases her. I felt pure, cold anger mixed with helplessness. ... The scene was quiet, but it was a horror movie." P-01 also noted the film's use of silence: "In the second half, during the legal signing, there's almost no music—just the sound of papers shuffling and a pen scratching. That silence made me feel like I was drowning."

P-02's reflection on Nyai's courtroom speech demonstrates how prosthetic memory operates through visual detail: "I kept thinking about Nyai's hands during the courtroom scene. She doesn't clutch a rosary or a handkerchief. She keeps her hands flat on the table, still. That small detail—still hands—told me she had already accepted that she would lose. She wasn't fighting to win. She was fighting so that everyone in that room would remember her face. And I think she succeeded. I will never forget her."

P-03 connected cinematography to memory: “I want to add something about the color palette. In the first half, there are warm colors – greens, golds, the brown of wooden furniture. In the second half, especially during the court and the institution scenes, everything is gray, white, and cold blue. The Dutch world is colorless. That visual shift told me: they drain life out of everything they touch.” P-05 noted how camera work mediates memory: “In the first half, close-ups are for romantic moments ... In the second half, close-ups are on documents, signatures, and the judge’s expressionless face. The camera stops looking at human faces and starts looking at the machinery of power. That made me feel like the system is the real main character of the second half.”

English as Double-Edged Sword: Global Language, Local Critique

The overarching pattern across findings is that English functions as what Pennycook (2017) terms a “double-edged sword.” P-04 captured this ambivalence: “As an English learner, I now see English as a tool that can be used for either submission or rebellion. The difference is in my intention.” P-05 added: “As an English learner, I feel that same ambivalence. ... I’m angry that I still feel anxious speaking English. But that anger is useful. It tells me that my hesitation isn’t my failure – it’s a 400-year-old ghost.”

P-03 offered the most sober assessment: “The English subtitles hindered me here in a specific way. ... The subtitles made evil sound polite. That’s dangerous. Subtitles can sanitize.” Yet P-03 also acknowledged the necessity of mediation: “As an English learner, I realize that some emotions don’t have translations. Annelies’s scream at the end isn’t in any language. That’s the most honest moment.”

P-06’s final reflection on the film’s ending ties together the double-edged nature of English-mediated memory: “The final moment – Minke walking away from the burning house, alone, but with his notebook – made me feel something I can only call bittersweet hope. ... He’s lost Annelies, his home, his illusions. But he’s still walking. And he’s still writing. ... I cried, but not from sadness exactly. From recognition.” P-06 concluded: “I’ve been thinking about the fire at the end. ... Everything false – the European furniture, the pretense that he belonged – burns. What’s left is just Minke, his notebook, and the truth. That’s not nothing. That’s everything.”

Implications for Theory and Practice

These findings carry significant implications for multiple theoretical frameworks. For postcolonial theory, they demonstrate the continued relevance of Fanonian psycho-affective analysis while extending it into the digital, multilingual present – as when P-01 observed that “colonialism succeeds when the oppressed internalize the rules and follow them without being forced. Minke’s obedience in that moment is more frightening than any Dutch officer’s shout. It made me ask myself: what rules have I internalized without questioning?”

For memory studies, participants’ attention to visual details – hands, color palettes, camera work – reveals translation as a crucial but understudied dimension

of prosthetic memory construction. For applied linguistics, participants' reflections on effectiveness versus perfection (P-02: "effective, not flawless") confirm Norton's identity framework while demonstrating its utility for analyzing engagement with historical rather than purely contemporary texts.

For pedagogical practice, these findings suggest that English language teaching incorporating Indonesian historical texts can foster critical consciousness while developing linguistic proficiency. P-03's reflection on family conversation models what Pennycook (2021) advocates as critical applied linguistics: "The film didn't give an answer, but it gave me a question to ask my parents next time I visit home."

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations suggest directions for future research. The small sample size (six participants) and specific institutional context limit generalizability, though thick description enables transferability judgments. The six-week timeframe captured initial engagement but could not assess long-term identity transformation. Future research might follow participants over longer periods to assess how English-mediated engagement with national history shapes subsequent identity development, career choices, and civic participation.

Comparative studies across different Indonesian regions, institutional types, and language learning communities would illuminate how local contexts shape the dynamics observed here. Research comparing engagement with English-subtitled versus Indonesian-language versions of historical films could isolate the specific effects of linguistic mediation—a question raised by P-02's observation that subtitles "flatten the multilingual rebellion."

Finally, research engaging participants as co-researchers rather than subjects—what Pink (2021) advocates as participatory visual ethnography—could illuminate dimensions of experience inaccessible through researcher-driven methods. Given participants' demonstrated critical capacities—P-04's self-critique of his own pride, P-05's connection of classroom humiliation to colonial history, P-06's question about whose love becomes cinematic—collaborative research designs might generate insights unavailable through traditional ethnographic approaches.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that English-subtitled engagement with *Bumi Manusia* positions Indonesian youth at a complex intersection of language, history, and identity. Through collaborative critical practice, participants negotiate colonial discourses, construct prosthetic memories, and articulate dual identities as Indonesians and English users. Their experience demonstrates that English functions not simply as linguistic imperialism or neutral tool but as contested terrain wherein postcolonial subjects struggle to remember, critique, and articulate national identity in global context. As P-04 wrote: "As an Indonesian, I now think about who wrote the history I learned in school. Was it people like Minke? Or people like the Dutch judge? The film made me want to read the real *Bumi Manusia* novel and then read critiques

of it.” The historical parallel with Minke – using the colonizer’s language to fight colonialism – suggests continuity between colonial and postcolonial linguistic politics, while participants’ sophisticated critical practice demonstrates possibilities for resistance within constraint. As Indonesian youth increasingly engage with national history through global media and languages, understanding these dynamics becomes crucial for educators, cultural producers, and scholars committed to decolonial futures.

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