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Contesting boundaries in the Riau Archipelago

The fall of the New Order and the implementation of the regional autonomy laws have provided fresh opportunities for the local elite to promote and consolidate their own sphere of influence. As has already been the case in a number of provinces and districts, instances of conflict have spread, often in the context of power struggles and highly complex social and political restructurings (H. Schulte Nordholt 2002). In many cases, these conflicts are popularly articulated through the language of ethnic and religious identity politics. Similarly, ethnic and religious sensitivities which were consciously repressed during the period of the New Order, are now exposed. The Riau Archipelago (or Kepri from Kepulauan Riau) had been so far largely spared from acute tensions and mounting violence. However, among the urban middle class and between generations ideological polarization has taken place. The different attempts to conceptualize 'Masyarakat Kepri' – the society of Kepulauan Riau – by politicians and public intellectuals seems to demonstrate how an increasing emphasis on regional identity has gradually superseded a more general concern with the nation. The discussion about the character of the newly formed province of Kepri has oscillated over the past years between the aristocrats' ideal of reverting to the era of the sultanate, and an image of an industrial oriented pluralistic society, advocated by business people, which is strong and autonomous enough to compete economically with Singapore and Malaysia.

The proximity to Malaysia and Singapore has created an interesting paradox. On one hand, Singapore and Malaysia have been a source of identity for the Malays in the Riau Archipelago as important economic and cultural power bases. On the other hand, precisely because of the geographical proximity to Malaysia and in particular to Singapore, the islands of Batam, Bintan and Karimun have attracted the highest number of Indonesian migrants of the whole archipelago, to the point now that Malays are there in minority. Tanjungpinang's population has grown dramatically in the past years – from 98,871 in 1998 to 134,940 in 2004 – which resulted to a dramatic urbanization

Map 18. Riau Archipelago (above) and detail (below)

and incorporation of large groups of immigrants.¹

This chapter investigates how the idea of 'Masyarakat Kepri' is imagined with a specific focus on the role of the urban middle class. I first examine the recent political developments which have resulted in several cases of *pemekaran* (or administrative fragmentation) since the fall of the New Order, at both district and provincial levels. Then I explore the problems different groups encountered in trying to formulate a model that would foster a sense of belonging to the Kepri province. Finally I look at the role of education and the efforts put forward to revive ethnic pride within the context of a wider Malay identity. To what extent is the young generation ready to accept a historically rooted sense of Malayness? Or does it prefer a modern and globalized identity which is linked with nearby Singapore? I will focus on the city of Tanjungpinang on Bintan Island because it has been the most important administrative centre of the Riau Archipelago. It also comprises the greatest number of Malay-Bugis aristocrats in the archipelago and forms as such a centre of Malay identity politics.

From Kepulauan Riau (Kepri) District to Kepulauan Riau Province

Until the formation of a separate province, Kepri was a district consisting of a cluster of islands located at proximity of Singapore, including the islands of Bintan and Karimun but excluding Batam. Tanjungpinang on the island of Bintan was until 2001 the district capital. Soon after the fall of Suharto and the beginning of the decentralization process, the *pemekaran*-virus affected local leaders in Tanjungpinang as well, where the first thoughts of a split between mainland Riau, with its capital Pekanbaru, and the Riau Archipelago were articulated in public.

Soon Tanjungpinang became an autonomous city (Kota Otonom) and the district of Karimun, which covered the western part of the Riau Archipelago was created. These stimulated stiff competition between the two districts of Kepri and Karimun and the two municipalities of Tanjungpinang and Batam in order to develop economic relations with Singapore and, to a lesser extent, Malaysia. During the same period, Huzrin Hood, then district head of Kepri district, launched his idea of forming a distinct Malay province in the Riau Archipelago. The governor of Riau, Saleh Djasit, opposed the project at a number of occasions. Interestingly it was his most vocal critic, Tabrani Rab – who was also known as the leading figure behind the Free Riau Movement – who criticized the idea of a separate province of the Riau Archipelago because he saw it as a strategy by the government to weaken the independ-

¹ www.kotabestari.net.

ence movement of larger Riau (in other words mainland and archipelago) (*Jakarta Post* 21-5-2003).

His strong stand against the split of Riau was primarily directed at Huzrin Hood whom he publicly accused of nepotism and corruption. Despite protest from mainland Riau the bill that established the new province was passed in September 2002 by the Indonesian Parliament, but it took almost another two years to see its official implementation. After almost six years of heated debates and intensive lobbying, the new Kepri province became eventually finally operative on the first of July 2004 when H. Ismeth Abdullah, chairman of the Batam Industrial Development Authority (BIDA), was appointed caretaker governor. In 2004, just after the official nomination of the caretaker governor, it was the turn of Lingga to form a new district.²

But by that time Huzrin Hood was officially no longer in function. In November 2003, he was sentenced to two years in jail following a Rp 4.3 billion corruption charge.³ Apart from being district head of Kepri, Huzrin Hood was at that time also the chairman of the Badan Perkerja Pembentukan Propinsi Kepulauan Riau (BP3KR, the Working Committee for the Development of Kepri Province) and the most likely candidate for the position of caretaker governor. Huzrin's arrest was publicly displayed as part of a new policy to show that reforms were really taking place, even far away from Jakarta.

Old dreams, new concerns

For many local Malays regional autonomy offers an opportunity to revert to the period when Tanjungpinang formed the heart of the Malay world and it was well entrenched in the regional economy. The act of breaking away from the provincial control of mainland Pekanbaru by forming a new province that only consists of the Riau Archipelago seemed, at the first glance, to be the best response to a long-standing ideological divide about Malay identity (B. Andaya 1997; Adhuri and Rachmawati 2004). Although it looked at first sight as if Huzrin Hood and his allies wanted to create a province along ethnic lines which would benefit the Malay, in reality a large part of the population of the islands of Batam, Karimun and Bintan consists of migrants. It is therefore even more difficult to emphasize local Malayness as an identity marker for the new province. In order to overcome this problem

² For a couple of months following this last *pemekaran*, the district head of Lingga was hesitating between remaining in the Riau (*daratan*) province and joining the new Kepri province. He finally opted for the second option.

³ Huzrin Hood was first sentenced to six years. This sentence was reduced to two years after appeal and then to one year in jail and one year under city arrest.

the Malay elite and local academics in Kepri try to revive a trans-national Malay solidarity, or *serumpun*. This elite consists to a large extent of high ranking bureaucrats of Bugis-Malay aristocratic descent who enjoyed many privileges during the Suharto era.

At the same time, however, mixed marriages are extremely common, especially in urban areas, making questions of ethnic identity even more complex. In public high schools of Tanjungpinang, for instance, the number of students of mix parentage outnumbers the ones who claim belonging to a particular ethnic group. Taken together the ethnic make-up of Kepri is very uneven. While the Malay form a majority in the rural areas – 85% in Lingga – in urban areas, such as Tanjung Balai and Tanjungpinang, they do not count for more than 40%. In Tanjungpinang Javanese form the second largest group with 25%, while ethnic Chinese make up the third largest group with 13%.⁴ If we add to this picture the recent inflow of migrants one could argue that at least in Tanjungpinang a multi-ethnic pluralistic framework had been created at the eve of decentralization. The dominant image of Kepri being predominantly Malay was a New Order construction – meant to serve both the interests of the Malay elite and the state – which was mobilized and manipulated when regional autonomy required a reordering of regional relationships.⁵

Despite the fact that the Dutch and the British had already in 1824 officially divided their respective territories in the Malay world, the Riau Archipelago remained until recently a relatively open border zone.

During the Japanese Occupation, the Riau Archipelago was placed under the administration of Singapore and many Malays, including aristocrats, were taken to Singapore to join the Imperial Army (B. Andaya 1997).

During the 1950s and until the *konfrontasi* in 1963, the Riau Archipelago was a duty-free zone where the Strait Dollar of British Malaya was the main currency (Wee 2002; Lufti et al. 1977; Faucher 2005). Tanjungpinang constituted for Indonesians the principal port of entry into Singapore. Migrating to Tanjungpinang was, in fact, the most difficult step; anyone who intended to do so needed a local sponsor. The proximity of Singapore and the use of the Strait Dollar were no doubt important incentives for Malays from mainland Riau to migrate to the Riau Archipelago. Once residing in Tanjungpinang, it

⁴ Adhuri and Rachmawati 2004. This paper cannot account for the Lingga and Natuna perspectives because this research concentrates mostly on Bintan. However, informants born in Lingga pointed out to me that the islands of Lingga and Singkep have always suffered from lack of support and from disregard of the part of Malays in Bintan.

⁵ An emphasis on 'Malayness' also helped to erase the role of the economically strong Chinese in Kepri.

⁶ Jobs in the civil service and education were given to Malays or at least to individuals who would identify themselves as such (Faucher 2005).

was possible to travel to Singapore without passport.⁶ Even up to 15 years ago, it was still relatively easy to travel to Singapore but the situation has significantly changed over the past years.

Since the mid-1990s, there have been accounts of Malays from Kepri who were refused entry permits by Singapore immigration officers. Based on these experiences many people in Kepri assumed that any first attempts to enter Singapore were automatically bound to fail. According to respondents the sentiment of alienation from Singapore and Malaysia could be traced back to the early 1990s when the SIJORI Growth Triangle, was implemented, which links the economies of Singapore, Johore and the Riau Archipelago. The agreement between Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia suggests an open zone which facilitates free interaction. Instead the Growth Triangle embodies a new trans-national hierarchy in which Singapore capital takes the lead and the Riau Archipelago forms, as a provider of cheap labour, the bottom (Perry 1998:87).

The Riau Archipelago was incorporated into Singapore's global project through the opening of two major industrial parks operating under Singapore management, Batamindo in Batam and Bintan Industrial Park on Bintan Island. Compared to the 1950s, when the same currency was used in the whole region the Growth Triangle is an unequal configuration. Furthermore Christopher Tremewan (1994:43) argues that:

the implication that the Singapore-Batam-Johor triangle is a relationship of mutual growth is called into question by the absence of substantive mutual investment between Batam and Johor. Rather than triangular, the initiative is more likely to develop as two bilateral relationships with Singapore, leaving one side of the triangle missing.

Thus, the agreement gives Singaporean firms access to cheap supplies of land and labour in Indonesia. In 2002 the Singapore influence over Kepri's economic relations was reinforced through the signing of a free trade agreement with the USA that involves part of the Riau Archipelago as well.⁷

Since the implementation of the Growth Triangle, social representations of Kepulauan Riau have become more and more disparaging in popular discourse in Singapore and Malaysia. The term 'Indon', which has been used as a derogative term for Indonesian migrants in Malaysia during the 1950s, is now used again to refer to any Indonesian in Malaysia and Singapore and appears relatively frequently in the print media of these two countries.

⁷ This FTA should largely benefit Singaporean firms because under this pact, components – such as electronics, made offshore of Singapore – which means in Batam or Bintan, will be regarded as if they originate in Singapore, which means that the final products will also qualify as Singaporean (*Far Eastern Economic Review* 18-12-2002).

The increase of criminality in Singapore has been attributed to Indonesian crime syndicates whose members are believed to enter Singapore via the Riau Archipelago.⁸ For these reasons, and due to the more recent terrorist threats following 9/11 and the Bali bombings, immigration procedures in Singapore with regard to Indonesians have been tightened.⁹ Yet, the bulk of Indonesian visitors entering Singapore through the ferry terminal checkpoints are Malays or ethnic Chinese from Riau who visit their relatives. The tightening of immigration procedures is perceived as offensive by the Malay, even more so since the Singapore immigration officers who are Malay themselves have the reputation of being harsher with them in comparison with immigration officers of other ethnic background. As a result, Malays from Kepri feel that they are cut off from their relatives and alienated from a world they were supposed to be part of.

Relationships between Malaysia and Indonesia came under pressure when the Malaysian government initiated operation Tugan in order to evict some 100,000 illegal Indonesian workers, while the two countries had also a dispute over two rock islands in the oil rich Sulawesi Sea.¹⁰ The harsh portrayal of Indonesia that has been circulating in the Singapore media since the beginning of the Reformasi has further affected cross-border relations and foster a climate of mutual distrust. These tensions made many Kepri Malay ponder about their loyalty towards the wider Malay world. Part of the idea of the autonomous province Kepri was the desire to be treated as equal partners and full control over its own resources. As summarized by the secretary of a local NGO who is a fervent supporter of the *serumpun* ideology:

We are Malays and should continue to promote and foster cultural and economic relations with Malays in Malaysia and Singapore. However, it is also important to understand that we have our own identity. We need to be diplomatic, but if a *konfrontasi* would happen again, I would definitely side up with Indonesia.

The impact of being portrayed as criminals and the experience of being subordinated to Singapore's economic interests have incited new hopes and ideals which are not exclusively restricted to notions of regional autonomy. For, 'Singapore' and 'Malaysia' are currently the geo-political entities against which a sense of national pride is rapidly emerging in the urban settings of the Riau Archipelago. For people in Tanjungpinang, regional autonomy

⁸ According to James Warren (2003), these crime syndicates often operate from Batam under the leadership of Chinese from Hong Kong or Singapore.

⁹ The arrest in early 2003 of Mas Selamat Kastari, the head of the Singapore branch of Jama'ah Islamiyah in Tanjungpinang further aggravated the reputation of Kepulauan Riau as a source of criminals and terrorists (*Jakarta Post* 6-2-2003; *Strait Times* 6-2-2003).

¹⁰ Meanwhile Singapore and Indonesia had a conflict over the transfer of sand from Kepri meant for construction work in Singapore.

ideally implies better control over relations with their closest neighbors, especially Singapore, which would ideally prompt greater respect for them. The Reformasi, however, has also brought new hopes for fresh vitality and strength within the boundaries of the Indonesian nation-state. Paradoxically, as I will elaborate below, especially urban youth of Kepulauan Riau seems to turn itself towards the nation, when leaders in many provinces and districts are trying to redefine their identity on the basis of an exclusive regionalism.

Often cultural politics are considered to be marginal compared to 'hard core' issues concerning purely political and economic interests. However, Joel Kahn (1998:1) correctly reminds us that 'contrary to the impression generated by the majority of observers of contemporary Southeast Asia – of a region whose peoples are dedicated entirely to the single goal of economic development – matters cultural are never very far down anyone's agenda'.

As part of the decentralization process, each region is expected to enhance its own exclusive traits. This is accelerated by the process *pemekaran*, which requires a further exclusive emphasis on difference in terms of *bahasa* (language), *adat* (customary laws and customs), *budaya* (culture) and *pahlawan daerah* (local heroes). At the basis of these particularities is often a territorially defined notion of ethnicity. In Kepulauan Riau leaders promote a consensus that 'Malayness' is the basis of its territorial identity. As I have indicated above, in the urban context of Tanjungpinang this notion is being contested by migrants from other regions and local Chinese, but also by young middle class Malay who do not want to be portrayed as belonging to the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy in the region.

Speculating on the Riau leaders' agenda following the beginning of the decentralization process, Vivienne Wee (2002:12) once asked 'Who owns Riau?' According to her, 'the cultural revitalization movement sustained the idea of the Riau Sultanate as a cultural reality within a temporal past-in-the-present. This further legitimated the everyday practice of customs and rituals derived from the time of the Sultanate' (Wee 2002:15). As I have argued elsewhere, the revitalization of the Riau Sultanate in the Riau Archipelago has been frowned upon by commoner Malays all over the Riau Archipelago (Faucher 2005). The question of Riau's 'ownership' is complex in the sense that political leaders cannot restrict themselves to an exclusive Malayness, if they do not want to alienate large sections of the non-Malay population. It is particularly the case in the Riau Archipelago. Therefore there have been lately some attempts to redefine the Kepri identity within a non-ethnic framework. This approach primarily defines Kepri as a 'maritime province' and tries to link economic activities with issues of identity. In this context, ideas to further develop industrial fishing and bio-marine research – with investments from Singapore and Hong Kong – are currently subject of discussion which was also stimulated by Huzrin Hood.

The territorial aspect of the common identity is underlined by recent attempts to knit the archipelago closer together by the building of expensive and prestigious bridges. In 2004, a series of bridges linking the islands of Batam, Rempang and Galang was completed. The region is now known as 'Barelang', reminding us of 'SIJORI', which also refers to an economic linkage between these islands. A few months after the completion of the Barelang bridges, an even more ambitious project has been announced: The so-called 'Babin' bridge – estimated costs Rp 3 trillion, offering employment to 5,000 workers and planned to begin in January 2006 – will link the two politically and economically strong islands of Batam and Bintan.¹¹ Regional autonomy has increased internal competition between Batam and Tanjungpinang over the question where the new provincial capital will be located. Batam holds a negative reputation in the popular imagery of Tanjungpinang middle class dwellers and the prospect of the Babin bridge raises fear that criminals and prostitutes of all sorts who are believed to plague Batam will now be given the opportunity to carry their activities to Bintan.

Masyarakat Kepri, Malayness, putra daerah and the Chinese

The use of the Indonesian concept of *masyarakat* suggests that Kepri is populated by a social and cultural coherent group of people, and Masyarakat Kepri seems to refer to Malayness. In practice, however, this Malayness is only accepted when it is expressed in artistic terms, that is to say culture as performance. Ironically, however, one of the prominent Malay performing arts groups in Tanjungpinang, counts in fact only one local Malay among its 70 members. And when the mayor of Tanjungpinang supported the festival for the Revitalization of Malay Culture (Revitalisasi Budaya Melayu) in July 2004 she was criticized by the Chinese in Senggarang for ignoring the pluralistic nature of Tanjungpinang, and in particular the Chinese presence. In response a special event took place in Senggarang, called 'Revitalisasi Budaya Pluralistik', which included performances by non-Malay groups like Balinese and Chinese opera performances (*Kepri Pos* 25-7-2004).

Hence, a hybrid 'Masyarakat Kepri' and a mixed 'Budaya Kepri' are the blurred but sensitive issues local political leaders try to deal with.

The economic priority of the new province was from the very beginning focussed towards industrial development in Batam, Bintan and to a lesser degree Karimun, while the other districts of Natuna and Lingga, where the

¹¹ *Media Kepri*, April 2005. Both projects have been initiated by BIDA (Batam Industrial Development Authority) in a bid to facilitate the transport of natural gas, water, and electricity between the islands.

majority of Malays actually live received less attention. In Lingga job opportunities remain rare and poverty is wide-spread. However, as a Malay high school teacher remarked, the district of Lingga is seen as a region where Malay traditions and *adat* are still strong and where the Malay heritage is truly preserved. However, it is also widely believed that Malay traditions do not co-exist along with development and urbanization. In other words, where Malayness is strong, economic developments remain stagnant. Consequently, defining Masyarakat Kepri in terms of Malayness is met with ambivalence in urban circles as it is associated with economic stagnation.

There are a growing number of non-governmental organizations in Tanjungpinang which openly challenge the way ethnic classifications operate in Indonesia. These organizations advocate that a more inclusive notion of Malayness should provide the framework for a Masyarakat Kepri identity. One of the most outspoken organizations, Kekerabatan Keluarga Besar Melayu (KKBK, The Extended Family of Malay Kin), promotes a Malay identity which resembles the Malaysian idea of *bumiputera*. In order to be included as a 'Malay' in their own Masyarakat Kepri ideal framework, one has to speak Bahasa Melayu, be a Muslim and follow the *adat* Melayu. This interpretation offers room for many local politicians who advocate a revitalization of Malay traditions but who are themselves not from a 'pure' Malay background.¹² However, the chances that the Malay identity of Kepri will be officially recognized are small because Indonesian legislation prohibits the kind of ethnic categorization which is practised in Malaysia and Singapore.

Meanwhile, aristocrats have been reluctant to give up ideas of Malay revivalism which is connected with the old sultanates. Regional autonomy has in many parts of Indonesia been accompanied by a revival of local aristocracies and this was the case in Riau as well (Pratikno 2005). As I said before aristocrats occupied influential positions during the New Order and enjoyed considerable privileges. In an effort to restore their former glory members of the Malay-Buginese aristocracy were initially among the most prominent supporters of the establishment of a separate Kepri province. They were especially attracted by the idea of a regional autonomy defined by ethnic and territorial boundaries. In their view nobody can refer to Kepri as a Malay province without referring to the local rajas of Pulau Penyengat. Moreover, members of the aristocracy are well respected for their scholarship, especially in relation to history and to the Malay language (Faucher 2005).

Defining Masyarakat Kepri according to a strict Malay identity framework will be opposed by the economically strong Chinese minority, which appears less inclined to remain politically passive in the new administra-

¹² This interpretation of Malayness was also articulated by Tabrani Rab when he addressed the issue of an independent Riau (Colombijn 2003).

tive setting. In October 2004, Bobby Jayanto (alias Bu Hui) of Partai Patriot Pancasila was elected as the chairman of the DPRD (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, Regional Parliament) of Tanjungpinang for the term 2004–2009. This election was vehemently opposed by various groups, among others the Islamic Forum Komunikasi Masjid Mushola (FKMM, Masjid Mushola Communication Forum). This group organized a series of demonstrations and exposed Bobby's business activities related to gambling and prostitution.¹³ The fact that Bobby Jayanto was elected came as a surprise for many and was shocking for Malays. Only a few months later he was put under house arrest pending his trial in a murder case. The election of Bobby J., however, illustrated the potential role of the Chinese on the political scene in 'Malay' Kepri.

Although Huzrin Hood and the mayor of Tanjungpinang have always been keen to acknowledge the multi-ethnic aspect of Kepri and Tanjungpinang, the public role of the Chinese are still by and large ignored. But, Chinese-ness could also be incorporated in the 'maritime' identity of the region due to the longstanding role they have played in trade networks (see J. Warren 2003). Today, most of the hotels, golf courses and expensive restaurants in Bintan alone are owned by local Indonesian Chinese, or in partnership with Chinese Singaporeans. Interestingly however, in the narrative of their common dream of reverting to the prosperous 1950s, my aristocrat and commoner respondents unanimously omit the presence of the *taoke*, the Chinese middlemen who played a crucial role in the circulation of trade goods between Kepulauan Riau and the Singapore port (*Kepulauan Riau* 1999).

Educating identities in the context of decentralization

The political rhetoric of a cross-border Malay identity framework would have the potential to survive and expand in Kepri only if it was truly able to replace – or at least to compete with – the state discourse in the local school system. It is therefore interesting to investigate to what extent administrative decentralization offered more autonomy to educate particular regional identities, and what forms this took in Kepri. Decentralization of education was officially implemented in 2003 but this occurred only in 2004 in the Riau Archipelago.

Decentralization caused major changes including the implementation

¹³ *Batam Pos* 1-11-04. Bobby Jayanto has been one of the suspects in the murder of the local treasurer of Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN, Party of the National Message) in 2001. In 1999 he was suspected of harassing a *Tempo* journalist who was investigating the Singapore-based gambling ring, Elephant.

of the new school curriculum, Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi (KBK, Competency Based Curriculum), which involves completely new ways of teaching and learning, as well as the decentralization of funding. Provincial governments are expected to play an active role in terms of monitoring, among others, the providing of teaching materials and the organization of training courses, while educational management, local curriculum development, planning, funding, maintenance, and appointments are under the responsibility of the district government (Asian Development Bank 2001).

Seen from the perspective of headmasters and teachers decentralization results in a complex situation. In general they still see themselves as part of a highly centralized bureaucracy, which involves a curriculum that emphasizes national unity. At the same time, however, headmasters are confronted with district committees and local leaders, whose agenda is determined by regional priorities. Hence contradictory claims are laid on teachers. Standards of competence are still evaluated in Jakarta. This means that an adequate syllabus must be designed according to national norms, detailed by Puskur (Pusat Kurikulum, Curriculum Development Centre), and that an emphasis on regional autonomy is necessarily limited in scope as the curriculum must primarily promote national unity. According to the guidelines of the Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi 'the nation has become even more important in the larger context of globalization, information, communication and technology and free market' (Puskur 2002).

Within this centralized framework three subjects of 'local content' (*mua-tan lokal*) are allowed to be included in the curriculum. These three 'local subjects' are decided on by the district and are compulsory for all students. At the SLTP and SLTA in Tanjungpinang these subjects are 'Computer Science',¹⁴ 'Home Economics' and 'Arab Melayu'. The first two subjects are new but Arab Melayu had already been an elective at the SLTA level under the former curriculum. We see here that decentralization has not led to regional autonomy in education.

Due to the limited scope of the 'local curriculum' very little attention is paid to local Malay history. Moreover, textbooks that deal explicitly with the local Malay heritage are scarce as well. Recently a few history textbooks dealing with local history and written by Malay aristocrats are used on a modest scale at some SLTP and SLTA. It must be emphasized here that in this case alternative histories do not represent the voice of the powerless. As Gregory Forth (1994) remarks, alternative cultural representations and historical narratives often represent elite perceptions, be it in a regional context. This is illustrated by the textbook for the SLTP, *Kedatangan Upu Tandru Daeng Rilaka*

¹⁴ SLTP: Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Pertama, Junior Secondary School; SLTA: Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Atas, Junior High School.

ke-Riau (The arrival of Upu Tandru Daeng Rilaka at Riau), which was first published in 2002. The book traces the journey of the Buginese ancestors of the Riau rulers, who left Sulawesi to join the Melayu royalty and form the Johore-Riau-Lingga realm. Throughout the textbook, the Indonesian character of these ancestors is emphasized. During their journey they visited various Indonesian ports, including Batavia, which is illustrated by the *Syair*, poems, written by Raja Haji Ali, one of the most prominent historical figures of Bugis ancestry.¹⁵ This text reinforces a more general idea that Malay language and culture belong to the founding elements of Indonesia. Students have already learned in school that the Malay language is at the origin of the current Bahasa Indonesia, and that the local national hero (*pahlawan nasional*), Raja Haji Fisabilillah (1727-1784) was a fierce warrior who resisted Dutch colonialism (Barnard 1997).

Whereas the presence of the local is weak, the impact of the nation-state is strong. SLTA students in Tanjungpinang have all been thoroughly socialized through the centralized Indonesian education system. They are also the first generation which is fully exposed to Indonesian media, notably television and popular music. When I asked SLTA students why they prefer to watch Indonesian television programmes, they answered that Singapore and Malaysian channels were boring and moralistic, that they cannot identify with them and that, most of all, the language used (Malay) was foreign to them. This is not surprising as the Bahasa Melayu spoken by the older generation in Kepri is different from the Malay used in the Malaysian and Singaporean media. But, speaking local Malay is a symbol of backwardness, and only students from the surrounding small islands and fishing communities are said to use it in their daily conversations. Yet, as the Javanese headmaster of a primary school in Penyengat mentioned to me, only two years ago he had great difficulty in understanding his pupils but since Indonesian popular culture and the Indonesian media have reached the island, things have changed very rapidly. According to him, many of them now can speak Indonesian and even prefer to talk Indonesian with their classmates.

What significance does Malayness have for the youth? An SLTA student remarked that she was at a loss about what Malay culture (*kebudayaan*), apart from literature and performing arts, could mean. Malayness in Kepulauan Riau and, particularly, in Tanjungpinang represents a number of different meanings varying from a folklorized representation of literature and arts to political interpretations that fit particular territorial claims.

Barbara Leigh (1999:37) wrote that 'the spirit of Reformasi is allowing young people greater freedom to legitimately explore what were previously

¹⁵ Because of its costs and the limited space for local content in the curriculum this relatively 'innocent' book is not widely used.

taken as 'out-of-bounds' thoughts. This process is in turn making transparent boundaries that were previously unacknowledged'. In actual practice, however the production of homogenized national knowledge remains the ultimate goal of primary and secondary school education throughout Indonesia. The space of contestation remains extremely limited, even in the new context.

Apart from the fact that local history emphasizing Malayness does not reflect the actual ethnic make-up of Kepri, local and national history are to a large extent intertwined, which makes it difficult to identify with a particular local history. Moreover, schooling under the New Order has moved students' orientation away from family, home and village towards the prosperity and comfort of modern Indonesian city life (Parker 2002). Indonesia is for many young people in Tanjungpinang synonymous with Jakarta and represents an urban culture. Singapore, in the other hand is a familiar place where many relatives live, but it represents also a regional hierarchy in which Kepri is situated at the very bottom end. Students pointed out that, although they speak Malay at home, they cannot properly understand television programmes from Singapore. Tuning in to Indonesian media does not pose this problem. As a result the cultural taste of most young people in Tanjungpinang navigates between Tanjungpinang and Jakarta and disregards the wider Malay world, including Singapore.¹⁶

Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have argued that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to define a persuasive provincial identity for Kepri. Elitist Malay notions based on the history of the old sultanates is not supported by commoner Malays, while more in general the idea of Malayness is contested by Chinese and various groups of immigrants, and undermined by strained relationships with the surrounding Malay world, that is to say Malaysia and Singapore. The irony is that the 1950s facilitated more coherence in the Malay world compared with the SIJORI growth triangle in which Kepri labour was subordinated to Singapore capital. An interesting and often ignored aspect of decentralization is that the school curriculum is still to a large extent focussed on the unity of the nation state. Together with education the recent penetration of Indonesian mass media in Kepri invited young people in Tanjungpinang in search for a comfortable and accessible modernity to turn

¹⁶ Chinese students on the other hand eagerly consume Chinese popular culture produced in Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong, but they also share the desire to move away from Singapore's dominance.

to Jakarta. The irony is that, whereas the older generation tried to revive, invent and rephrase notions of Malayness which served their interests in the framework of regional autonomy, the younger generation recently discovered Jakarta as a source of identification.