

Nusantarazation: Liberating Malaysia and Indonesia through Decolonization and Indigenization of the Societal and Environmental Paradigms

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ABSTRACT—Against the backdrop of the Nusantara Malay Archipelago's history, the colonial legacy and the hegemony of colonial paradigms continue to dominate the present trajectories of social and political-economic realities. If this were to persist, Indonesia and Malaysia as a community of communities will continue being subjugated by these shackles of the colonial masters and can never be truly liberated to re-imagine and to realize their fullest potential based on their own mold. In this article, I examine three societal and environmental paradigms — namely the paradigm of space and property, the paradigm of knowledge, and the paradigm of development — critically examining the colonial legacies in each. I propose Nusantarazation as a discourse of decolonization and indigenization to counter the subjugating constructs by reintegrating solutions and practices from local wisdom and indigenous heritage, especially from socio-environmental ecology. In opposition to the Westphalian world-order, capitalist definitions of property, privatization and exploitation of resources, concentration of wealth, and epistemicide, I call on Nusantara perspectives of stewardship, shared and common spaces, cultural heritage and local wisdom.

Introduction

The Nusantara Malay Archipelago has played a vital role in international trade, cultural interchange, and colonial conquest. Nusantara is a civilizational space with a diverse patchwork of cultures, languages, and ecosystems which historically and geographically extends from what is now Indonesia to the Philippines in the east and parts of Indochina to the north. Malaysia and Indonesia have felt the deep effects of colonialism, which continues to influence their current realities.

The notion of Nusantarazation, which is explored in this article, aims to decolonize these countries by eradicating harmful colonial paradigms and reinstating local knowledge and indigenous traditions. Nusantarazation is a philosophy and a process of unearthing civilizational paradigms that help heal and re-develop society along the values of societal and environmental sustainability. In essence, Nusantarazation is about decolonization and indigenization. This article looks at how Nusantarazation might challenge colonial assumptions that have long dominated knowledge, development, and

space. Specifically in this article, three paradigms are being re-examined: the paradigm of space and property, the paradigm of knowledge, and the paradigm of development.

Paradigm of space and property

In stark contrast to the communal land stewardship practiced in traditional Nusantara, the British and Dutch colonial eras in Malaysia and Indonesia introduced Westernized concepts of private ownership and borders (Hickling 1961; Peluso and Vandegeest 2001). Colonization resulted in the deconstruction of shared spaces and properties. The concentration of land and resources in the hands of a small number of, frequently foreign, companies harmed local communities and their relational and behavioral connections with the environment. For instance, land reclamation in Penang, Malaysia, and Jakarta Bay, Indonesia favored private interests over the needs of the community and the environment (Firman 2016; Yeo 2003). Fishing communities suffered. Food security was lost. Marine ecology was impaired. Space, property, and environment were removed from public or communal stewardship and were privatized or exploited.

By supporting sustainable fishing methods and the preservation of coral reefs and drawing on the traditional knowledge of coastal people, Nusantarazation can help safeguard the rich marine biodiversity of Malaysia and Indonesia (Clifton and Majors 2012; Teh et al. 2015). The Nusantara local wisdom recognizes and protects common or shared spaces and resources through the concept of stewardship of the land and the sea. Nusantarazation can contribute to cultural diversity and food security by preserving and promoting traditional culinary culture and practices in Malaysia and Indonesia (Tan and Khoo 2019; Bellwood 1997).

Nusantarazation promotes a return to traditional indigenous methods of land management in the forests. For instance, the Bidayuh community in Sarawak, Malaysia, and the Baduy community in Banten, Indonesia, both have strong ties to their ancestral lands and use them in environmentally friendly ways (Sujarwo et al. 2016; Cramb 2007). The Bidayuh forbids entering the forest and hunting on certain days. The Dayak communities in Kalimantan have a strong bond with their ancestral lands and engage in environmentally conscious land usage (Dove 1993). These practices prevent or mitigate deforestation.

In Indonesia, the Baduy people have developed a typology of forests as part of their practice of environmental conservation and agricultural cultivation. Some forest is considered sacred and is completely forbidden from entry or exploitation, creating an ecological sanctuary. The colonial paradigm of private ownership can be challenged, and environmental care encouraged by recognizing and honoring these customary land rights from the Nusantara paradigm of space and property. In Wae Rebo Village in Flores, indigenous land rights are recognized in an effort to meld tradition and modernity harmoniously (Maharani and Sulastri 2019). By encouraging the sustainable use of forest resources and acknowledging the rights of indigenous groups to their ancestral lands, Nusantarazation can help preserve the forests of Malaysia and Indonesia (Lye 2004; Potter 1997).



Figure 1. With posters and banners (below) the fishing community in southern Penang protests against a reclamation project which will destroy the ecosystem underpinning their healthy work-life balance (photos by Internship team at CenPRIS-USM and I-WIN Library <https://waqafilmunusantara.com/>)

Boundaries drawn by the colonial powers divided people, fragmented identities, and overrode the idea of shared space. In order to overcome this division, Nusantarazation as a philosophy promoting common and shared spaces to embrace inclusivity and cultural interaction, even in urban contexts. The common space of Indonesia's traditional markets (pasar), where people from various backgrounds interact, exchange commodities, and celebrate their cultural heritage, serves as a shining example (Suganda 2018).

The artificial borders drawn by colonialism tore Indonesia's social fabric apart. The Nusantarazation paradigm honors Indonesia's nautical legacy and seeks to build a bridge between the past and the present. The Coral Triangle Initiative aims to safeguard marine biodiversity in the shared waterways between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines (Horigue et al. 2017).

In essence the Nusantara constructs of stewardship or custodianship of ancestral or sacred spaces can form a shield of environmental conservation.

Paradigm of knowledge

Phaedra Haringsma (2021) describes colonial epistemicide as "the process of killing and erasure of indigenous knowledge." In the Nusantara Malay Archipelago, British and Dutch colonialism brought about colonial epistemicide, or the systematic erasing of indigenous knowledge systems in favor of Western-centric values and schooling. The education systems of Malaysia and Indonesia today have been significantly influenced by British and Dutch educational techniques (Alatas 2006; van Langen 2002). Local and indigenous knowledge is often seen as non-scientific and at best taught in cultural studies, if at all. Mainstream education has generally forgotten indigenous knowledge, or retains only a vague recollection, and does not consider promoting study of these matters as a branch of science and wisdom.

Colonialism imposed an educational system primarily intended to generate submissive subjects. Local knowledge and languages were suppressed, resulting in the loss or deterioration of indigenous wisdom. By combining local knowledge and languages and developing a sense of cultural identity and pride, Nusantarazation aims to reinvigorate traditional educational institutions (Parekh 2006).

Nusantarazation aims to reverse this colonial epistemicide. For instance, the indigenous knowledge of the Orang Asli (indigenous people) in Malaysia on forest management and medicinal plants must be included into formal education. The traditional knowledge of the Javanese in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, on arts and crafts should be similarly recognized and nurtured. Promoting a knowledge paradigm that is anchored in the rich cultural history of both nations of Nusantara will foster a sense of identity and belonging (Alatas 2006; van Langen 2002).

Paradigm of development

The legacy of colonial economic systems, including capitalism, commodification, and wealth concentration, has had a significant impact on the development paradigm of Malaysia and Indonesia, resulting in the rapid industrialization and urbanization

that frequently results in economic inequality and environmental damage (Jomo 2004; Robison and Hadiz 2004).

This development paradigm should be replaced with one that is both egalitarian and sustainable, according to the philosophy of Nusantara. The concept of stewardship promotes an economy that values regional resources, a fair distribution of wealth, and a culture of caring for the environment. For example, encouraging community-based tourism in locations such as Sarawak, Malaysia, and Sebatik Island, Indonesia can reverse the monetization of nature and culture in favor of preservation and sustainable use (King 2008; Spencer 2016). By encouraging ideals of community, respect for nature, and cultural diversity while opposing the individualistic and consumerist values pushed by colonialism and capitalism, Nusantara can have an impact on social norms and behavior in Malaysia and Indonesia (Amster 2015; Geertz 1960).

Conclusion

Nusantara is captured in the Malay proverb, *buang yang keruh, ambil yang jernih*, meaning “removing the muddy and saving the clear.” It aims to restore indigenous wisdom and traditions while challenging the destructive colonial paradigms of knowledge, development, and ownership in order to promote a more sustainable and just future. The framework provided by Nusantara for decolonization in Malaysia and Indonesia is both ethical and crucially urgent. Reimagining a future that is grounded in the rich cultural legacy and wisdom of Nusantara is a key step on the road toward a society where the environment is conserved and the people can live productively and peacefully.

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