

# National Identity and Mixed-Race Public Figures: A Critical Discourse Analysis Study

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## Abstrak

Identitas dan nasionalisme individu berdarah campuran sering dipertanyakan. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mensintesis identitas nasional dari Bryan Domani, Cinta Laura, dan Aurelie Moeremans, sebagai figur publik yang berdarah campuran, dengan menggunakan pendekatan *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA). Metode deskriptif kualitatif digunakan untuk menyajikan data ini, di mana peneliti menganalisis wawancara di podcast dan memeriksa postingan Instagram. Sintesis penelitian ini dibagi menjadi, konteks historis dalam menyesuaikan keterampilan bahasa mereka, mengevaluasi penerimaan budaya, dan menganalisis preferensi mereka terhadap Indonesia. Sebagai hasil, mereka sempat mengalami kesulitan dengan kemampuan bahasa Indonesia karena aksen mereka yang terdengar orang asing. Selain itu, mereka juga menunjukkan identitas nasional melalui kontribusi yang mereka berikan kepada Indonesia.

**Kata kunci:** Identitas, bahasa, darah campuran, nasionalisme

## Abstract

The identity and nationalism of mixed-race individuals are frequently questioned. Therefore, this study aims to synthesize the national identity of Bryan Domani, Cinta Laura, and Aurelie Moeremans as mixed-race public figures using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. A descriptive qualitative method was used to interpret this data, wherein the researcher analyzed podcast interviews and examined Instagram posts. This study's synthesis is divided into the background context of adapting their language skills, evaluating their cultural acceptance, and analyzing their preference for Indonesia. As a result, they experience difficulties with Indonesian proficiency due to their foreign-sounding accent. Additionally, they also demonstrate their national identity through their contribution to Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Identity, language, mixed race, nationalism.

## INTRODUCTION

Languages play a role in expressing national identity, negating and responding to societal dynamic movements. National identity, a concept frequently rooted in racial homogeneity, culture, and history, is persistently questioned and redefined. In transitioning from traditional to modern society, globalization influences the national identity (Liu & Turner, 2018). As communities become interconnected, the set boundaries of national identity are challenged by diverse cultural exchange and mixed-race individuals, contributing to a more adaptable and evolving perspective of national identity.

Previous studies mentioned that Mixed-race individuals often are racialized by the communities because they are unable to fit into monolithic racial and ethnic categories (Campion, 2019; Metcalfe, 2024). Moreover, these individuals are often questioned about their identity because people often see them as foreigners (Rodríguez-García et al., 2021). Mixed-race children often experience language challenges when they come to their native parent's country, which is

not their first language. This suggests that children are dominant in communicating with a language they are used to (Van Dijk et al., 2022). This context examines the highly significant experiences of Cinta Laura, Aurelie Moeremans, and Bryan Domani.

Unlike previous studies, this study focuses on uncovering the national identity of public figures, Cinta Laura, Aurelie Moeremans, and Bryan Domani, as mixed-race individuals. The researcher analyzes their identity and language use through critical discourse analysis to demonstrate their national identity. Cinta, Aurelie, and Brian face the societal challenge of carrying over their first language accent when communicating with Indonesians because they are not fluent in Indonesian at that time. Their public discourse and experience provide valuable data for understanding how individuals with mixed racial backgrounds manage and express their identities in diverse cultural contexts.

Wodak (2015) stated that discourse is robust because it is used by powerful people, suggesting a correlation between a person's ideology and their discourse. Fairclough (1995) stated that text and speech can interpret cognitive paradigms. He introduced a three-dimensional conception to discover critical discourse analysis, encompassing text, discursive practice, and social practice. Herzog (2016) further argued that critical discourse analysis performs controlled interpretation and analyzes the socio-historic context of people's interpretations. Critical discourse analysis provides a transformative perspective into the correlation between language, national identity, and mixed-race public figures. This approach allows the interpretation context of social practice to present an individual's identity. It aligns with Block's (2013) assertion that identity should be understood as a social process instead of a determined and fixed product. Indicates that identity is constantly formed and reformed through social practice.

To analyze the national identity of mixed-race individuals, the study aims to explore the broader implications of these findings for contemporary theories of national identity, using the critical discourse analysis approach. By setting the experiences of Cinta Laura, Aurelie Moeremans, and Bryand Domani within the context of mixed-race experience, the research seeks to contribute a more detailed understanding of how national identity is constructed in mixed-race individuals. The data were collected through Instagram posts and YouTube videos.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative methodology. Natural language data is utilized in a descriptive qualitative analysis to understand the diversity and individuality of every human experience (Sevilla-Liu, 2023). This study took data from interviews on podcasts and Instagram. The data were analyzed by collecting data, data condensation, data display, and conclusions drawn. (Miles. M.B et al., 2014) The method for collecting and analyzing data involved watching videos on YouTube and seeing Instagram posts, taking notes on the sentences related to the national identity and mixed-race experience, classifying the data, and analyzing the data. In brief, this study's entire data collection process is represented in Figure 1.

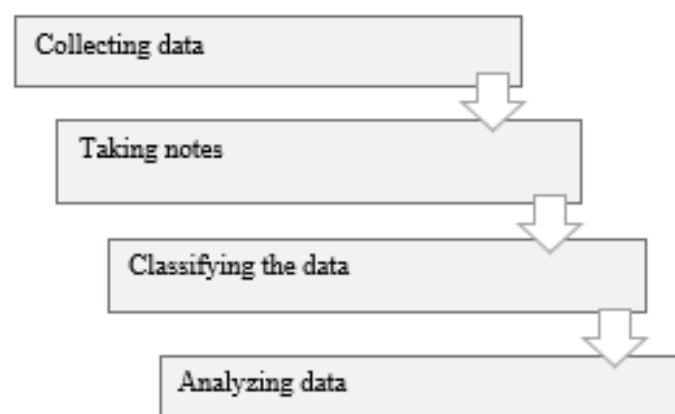


Figure 1. Process of data collection

The subject of this research is public figures who have lived abroad and moved to Indonesia since they were children. They are Bryan Domani, Cinta Laura, and Aurelie Moeremans, who also built their career since they were children.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mixed-race children are receiving considerable notice from communities due to their appearance, which may be perceived as atypical or foreign. In many cases, they are offered to step into the entertainment industry. In 2005 and 2006, Starvision Plus produced soap operas or films with mixed-race actresses' faces. It makes Indonesian filmmaking overflow with oriental faces because people get attracted to them (Lasido, 2022). Bryan Domani, Aurelie Moeremans, and Cinta Laura are mixed-race children who have entered the entertainment industry since children. As the public figures, they have the power to influence the society. This power in society, language, and ideology connects with discourse (Septiani Munandar et al., 2021). Therefore, background context and social practice are used to analyze mixed-race individuals' identities.

### Background and Challenge in National Identity

Mixed-race individuals frequently face the complexity of the concept of national identity. For instance, Chinese Indonesians had unpleasant experiences though they lived and were born in Indonesia (Azaria, 2022). Bryan Domani, Cinta Laura, and Aurelie Moeremans experience living abroad before they move to Indonesia. It can be seen through their statement that overview in the table below.

Table 1. Living abroad statement.

| Data  | Actor             | Source  |
|---|-------------------|---------|
| "Dulu aku sekolah di Belgia."<br>(In the past, I studied in Belgium).                                       | Aurelie Moeremans | YouTube |
| "Setiap 4 tahun pindah negara."<br>(Moving to another country every four years).                            | Bryan Domani      | YouTube |
| Dari kecil sampai remaja, dia tinggal di luar negeri.<br>(From childhood to her teenage, she lived abroad). | Cinta Laura       | Article |

The statement provided by Aurelie revealed her experience with different cultures and languages. By spending 14 years in Belgium, she develops a diverse perspective and cultural perception. On the Net Family YouTube channel, she was entitled, "Wow! Aurelie Moeremans menguasai 4 bahasa." She said she can speak in Indonesian language, French, Dutch, and English. Although she is losing her Dutch since she rarely uses it because of the subtractive language learning (Vandeyar & Catalano, 2020), she continues to gain diverse perspectives on culture and language through her proficiency in multiple languages.

Bryan Domani's experience of "moving to another country every four years" indicates the periodicity of his nomadic life. Moving every four years navigates him through different cultures and environments. Furthermore, Cinta Laura faces a similar situation, as written in an article, "From childhood to her teenage, she lived abroad." Exposure to her experience of frequently moving to other countries every few years. Both of them experienced the nomadic life prompted by their fathers' jobs. The migration experience can shape the sense of adaptability and help people get through the lack of social networks (Sime & Fox, 2015). Therefore, they face societal and practical challenges, such as language struggles.

**Table. 2 Have a struggle with the Indonesian language.**

| Data   | Actor             | Source     |
|--|-------------------|------------|
| "Dulu aku kesulitan bahasa Indonesia"<br>(In the past, it was hard to learn the Indonesian language.)                        | Aurelie Moeremans | YouTube    |
| "Jadi permasalahannya, artikulasinya kurang jelas, aku rasain."<br>(So, the problem is the unclear articulation, I feel it.) | Bryan Domani      | YouTube    |
| "Aku ngga mau jadi bule doang"<br>(I do not want to be a foreigner.)   | Bryan Domani      | YouTube    |
| "Menurut aku bahasa Indonesia aku semakin membaik."<br>(I think my Indonesian language is getting better).                   | Cinta Laura       | YouTube    |
| "Hujan becek ngga ada ojek."<br>(It is raining, there is no taxi motorbike.)   | Cinta Laura       | Soap Opera |

The data above asked them if they ever had difficulty with the Indonesian language. Bryan chose the word *permasalahannya* (the problem), which means he struggled with articulating the Indonesian language. He previously mentioned on the TalkPod YouTube channel that the first time he embarked on his career within the entertainment industry, a film director cursed him because he used a thick English accent when reading a script. It is common for L2 speakers to perceive a foreign accent (Hopp & Schmid, 2013). Furthermore, due to his accent and skin shade, he asked to play the role of a foreigner. People often make skin color perceptions in which the mixed individual with white skin will identify as European (Doornbos et al., 2022). With the development of the film industry, he can play the role of an Indonesian.

It is similar to what Aurelie Moeremans said about *kesulitan* (difficulty), which implies she struggled with language in the past (*dulu*). She lived in Belgium until she was 13 years old, making her more fluent in French than the Indonesian language. During her acting audition, she acted out using French because she could not speak Indonesian.

Cinta Laura uses the word *semakin* (getting), which implies that her Indonesian language has been poor. She has been bullied after saying, "*Hujan becek, ngga ada ok.*" It was her utterance playing a soap opera, but someone made a remix song with it, and it went viral because she used a thick English accent when saying it. Uzal et al. (2015) said that language use factors can influence the utilization of someone's accent. German is her first language; therefore, she communicated with a German accent at that time. However, due to this, Cinta experienced bullying by Indonesian citizens because of her accent. After that, she migrated to the United States for a university education and returned to Indonesia after eight years. Within years, she has improved her Indonesian language, as proven by her choice of *semakin* (more) in her statement.

The experience above expresses how significant race is in the self-construction of the mixed race. People construct a massive distinction between mixed-race people's physical appearance and the process by which they pronounce the words they hear, like Westerners. O'Malley (2022) found out about the discrimination of Irish mixed-race young people, which was saturated by racialized "us-them." It presents the distinctions faced by mixed-race children.

## Identity Preference

People often ask mixed-race individuals about their identity preferences (see Doornbos et al., 2022). The idea of identity preference among mixed-race individuals is seen in Bryan Domani, Aurelie Moeremans, and Cinta Laura's statements on several YouTube videos.

**Table 3. Preference nationality**

| Data  | Actor             | Source  |
|---|-------------------|---------|
| <i>Kalo masalah orang-orang, aku lebih suka di sini.</i><br>(If I talk about the people, I prefer it here.)     | Aurelie Moeremans | YouTube |
| <i>Jujur, lebih nyaman bahasa Indonesia.</i><br>(Honestly, I am more comfortable with the Indonesian language). | Bryan Domani      | YouTube |
| <i>I am happy that I chose my Indonesian passport; I am proud of it.</i>  | Cinta Laura       | YouTube |

Aurelie Moeremans conveys her significant attachment to Indonesian people, as depicted by her statement, "If I talk about the people, I prefer here." Indicates that she feels more secure in Indonesia. The choice of national identity is influenced by the interaction and sense of being part of the Indonesian community (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2020). It indicates that after living and having a career in Indonesia, she revealed her national identity preference to Indonesia. Likewise, Bryan said, "more comfortable with the Indonesian language." His preference for the Indonesian language emphasizes convenience in conversing using the Indonesian language. This indicates that his national identity is not shaped by her appearance but is formed via reflected appraisals in that interaction (Sims, 2016). Although he uses English when talking with his father, it does not change his preference for using the Indonesian language in daily life.

Cinta Laura demonstrated her identity preference by stating, "I am happy that I chose my Indonesian passport." This represents her deliberate decision to choose the Indonesian passport over the German passport, which has numerous advantages. This decision emphasizes her pride and commitment to her Indonesian identity, demonstrating the legal and formal elements of nationality, such as passport selection. Following the rule that Mixed race children will choose their identity minimum at 21 years old (Agustin, 2023). It can reveal her identity preference through Indonesia. She wants to be a part of Indonesia and build her career here. By saying it, she admits her national identity is Indonesia.

They show that identity preference is shaped by societal interaction and the environment. As mixed-race individuals, they emphasize their significant preference for Indonesia. It does not indicate that they do not like their other parent country, but they feel Indonesia is their home.

## Participation in The Country

**Table 4. Taking contribution in Indonesia.**

| Data   | Actor             | Source    |
|--|-------------------|-----------|
| <i>Bersama WWF-Indonesia, aku melihat upaya keras masyarakat Desa Pantanlah.</i><br>(With WWF-Indonesia, I see the hard work of the Pantanlan village community) | Aurelie Moeremans | Instagram |
| <i>Kami mulai melihat kemajuan dalam kesadaran dan aksi pelestarian.</i><br>(We begin to see the move in awareness and preservation action)                      | Aurelie Moeremans | Instagram |
| <i>Nyoblos di New York, let us go to Indonesia.</i><br>(Voting in New York, let us go Indonesia)   | Cinta Laura       | Instagram |

The data above presents an interpretation of the nationalism portrayed by Aurelie and Cinta through their public statements on social media platforms. Aurelie Moeremans joined WWF-Indonesia, as revealed in her statement, "With WWF-Indonesian, I see the hard work of the Pantanlah Village community," reflected by her active participation in the local environment

community. This statement indicates her relationship with Indonesia and her dedication to national conservation.

Cinta Laura's statement, "Voting in New York, let us go Indonesia," indicates the nationalism among mixed-race individuals by participating in the presidential election process and expressing support for Indonesia. As part of the diaspora, she reveals her Indonesian identity through her Instagram post. According to Nedashkivska (2018), diaspora is a migrant community where members reconstruct their profiles and negotiate between identities and cultures. Cinta presents her national pride to Indonesia through the voting process.

The study's conclusion revealed that mixed-race individuals like Brian Domani, Aurelie Moeremans, and Cinta Laura experience the complexities of choosing their national identity in Indonesia. Critical discourse analysis was used to examine their identity through their discourse. Furthermore, their backgrounds of living abroad influence their accents, which impact their social interaction. Moreover, they participate in social activism, revealing they are committed to dedicating themselves to Indonesia. Despite being mixed-race individuals, they present their actions to enhance Indonesia's developmental outcomes. It shows that race does not influence the national identity of an individual.

In conclusion, mixed-race individuals construct their national identity through social interaction. The environment and their comfort with Indonesian culture leads them to identify as Indonesian. This is evidenced by their discourse, which is revealed through their podcasts and social media statements.

## CONCLUSION

Aurelie Moeremans, Bryan Domani, and Cinta Laura are depicted in the relation between language and national identity within mixed-race individuals. Due to their international background, they navigated diverse cultural environments and experienced challenges and opportunities in defining their Indonesian identity. They reveal how language can present their integration into Indonesian society. Although they face struggles within Indonesia and their accents and even get bullied, they still dedicate themselves to improving their Indonesian proficiency and active participation in national actions. This study discovered their desire to be part of Indonesia and their preference for the culture, language, and participation in Indonesia.

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