

Revisiting tradition in Ahmad Fuadi's *Anak Rantau*

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Article Info

Article History:

Received
14 December 2022
Approved
1 April 2023
Published
30 April 2023

Keywords:

Minangkabau,
modernity,
outmigration,
rearticulation, tradition

Abstract

Paradoxical as it may be, *Anak Rantau* both problematizes the practice of outmigration tradition in Minangkabau culture, yet campaigns for the perpetuation of Minangkabau tradition at the same time. By highlighting the darker side of the impact of outmigration, the novel advises returning to the religion-based tradition which works through the revitalization of the *surau*, as a learning center, and less-materially oriented outmigration for remedy. Although it is apparent that the meaning of outmigration is being rearticulated in the novel, it is also inevitable to notice that the novel perceives the ecological destruction, the waning tradition, and the spiritually corrupt village as a failure of modernity, creating a learning loss among the Minangkabau's youngsters. This paper uses Bhabha's perspective of modernity and his theory of the Third Space of enunciation to reveal how the meaning of outmigration has been rearticulated in the novel and how it intersects with the powerful discourse of modernity. This paper tries to show that, first of all, in the attempts to rearticulate the long institutionalized outmigration tradition of Minangkabau people by questioning the virtue of its materialistic orientation, and problematizing the concept of 'home' and '*rantau*', the novel actually tries to closely adhere to the Minangkabau tradition. Secondly, it also tries to show that the problem of learning loss is pronounced well in the anxieties over the undermining of Minangkabau traditional values.

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How to cite (in APA Style):

Wardani, E. D., Adi, I. R., & Pujiharto, P. (2023). Revisiting tradition in Ahmad Fuadi's *Anak Rantau*. *Rainbow : Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Culture Studies*, 12(1), 12-19. <https://doi.org/10.15294/rainbow.v12i1.63277>

INTRODUCTION

One of the major ethnic groups in Indonesia which has institutionalized outmigration in its social system is the Minangkabau people, who are widely claimed as one of the most mobile ethnic groups in Indonesia (Naim, 1984). Minangkabau's people outmigration narrative is informed by a long tradition based on the cultural mission to enrich the homeland through wealth and knowledge transfer, as well as preserving the honor of their homeland (Yati & Simanihuruk, 2016). However, later practice of this tradition reveals that the discourse of modernity and progress has gained

predominance over the cultural mission narrative, leaving doubts on the perpetuation of this important determinant of Minangkabau's outmigration tradition. After World War II was over, Minangkabau migrants were likely to stay permanently in the *rantau*, and rarely returned home (Kato, 1978). Returning home becomes a temporary visit, and this change of journey has altered the concepts of 'home' and '*rantau*' for those Minangkabau migrants. With the expansion of the capitalist market and the inventions in technology and transportation modes, "mobility increased exponentially across Indonesia", implying new meanings of outmigration, from "a

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p-ISSN: 2252-6323

e-ISSN: 2721-4540

circular movement” of migrating, returning to the home village, and sharing of experience, to “a one-way, linear journey of migration” (Salazar, 2016). Minangkabau’s people outmigration is no exception to this phenomenon.

Some researches on Minangkabau outmigration tradition practice and narration revealed that there have been negotiations and adaptations of Minangkabau tradition in the *rantau* in terms of the inheritance laws and the role of the *mamak* (Fauzi, 2012; Widiastuti, Wulandari & Nurhayati, 2019). Other studies show that the concept of outmigration in contemporary Indonesia apparently intersects with the discourse of progress as people enter new social contexts, and getting less attached to the older social system and tradition which some novel writers criticize as burdensome (Downes & Kobbe, 2017; Sudrajat & Muslimah, 2014; Wahyuni, 2017). Therefore, a story of outmigration which reverses migrating-out into migrating-in Minangkabau homeland narrated in Fuadi’s *Anak Rantau* is worth studying, especially when the tradition of outmigration has been considered to underpin the perpetuation of the matriline system in Minangkabau society as it particularly concerns with the property and inheritance rules (Downes & Kobbe, 2017; Kato, 1978; Salazar, 2016). Ahmad Fuadi’s *Anak Rantau* laments the failure of tradition in making people attached to older social ties, yet it campaigns for a return to tradition as a solution for many social problems. In doing so, the novel may risk being taken as an adversary of outmigration tradition which has been so much part of the perpetuation of the Minangkabau matrilineal system of culture. Therefore, it is interesting to discuss how the negative impacts of modernity presented in the novel, such as environmental destruction, pollution, and drug trafficking, can highlight the urge to revisit the outmigration tradition by returning to spiritually-based, rather than materially-based, outmigration tradition itself.

METHODS

This study employs a postcolonial approach because it provides a rationale for the analysis of

the rejection of the bad impact of modernity in the novel. Postcolonial approach argues that modernity’s foundational ideas about “Man, reason, progress and the nation” are flawed because they are developed from the constructed Other, non-West people (Bhabha, 1994). This rejection opens up a discussion on the floating meaning of outmigration, both in the novel and in other narratives about Minangkabau outmigration. Homi Bhabha’s theory of the ambivalence of discourse is very useful because it discloses the discursive strategy of a dominating discourse. Ambivalence refers to the vacillation between the fixity of what is already known and the anxious repetition of it, revealing the undecidedness of its ideological construction (Bhabha, 1994). The liminal space where contestations of meaning occur is a space where the discursive strategies of a certain narrative can be analyzed in terms of its often unrealistic or opposing qualities.

Dominant discourse, such as colonial discourse, in Bhabha’s perspective, has a goal to justify the subjugation. Because discourse requires authorization, it must be repeated over and over again. It is in this anxiety of establishing the discourse and the contradiction within the discourse that resistance toward the discourse can be produced. It is also because of this resistance that an investigation into and a rearticulation of a hegemonic discourse is made possible. The theory of the ambivalence of discourse is very useful to understand the hegemonic material-oriented discourse of Minangkabau outmigration. To address the issue of modernity and its negative impacts, this study uses Bhabha’s perspective on progress as a signifier of modernity which is often made as a justification of cultural subjugation of traditional values. The discussion of the predominantly materially-oriented representations and stereotypes in the stories of *merantau* is based primarily on some previous studies and essays which are either field research findings or cultural essays as secondary sources, while Fuadi’s *Anak Rantau* serves as the primary source where Minangkabau’s outmigration is rearticulated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Despite the continuity of the outmigration tradition which features Minangkabau culture, the very meaning of outmigration for Minangkabau people has changed over time. Changes have been particularly overt in terms of the destination of the migration, the reasons to migrate, and the increasing participation of females in outmigration. Since the end of the nineteenth century, outmigration has developed from an individual, seasonal, short-duration mobility into a long, extended, and even permanent movement of the whole nuclear family (Chadwick, 1991; Naim, 1984; Yati & Simanihuruk, 2016; Downes & Kobbe, 2017; Iman & Mani, 2013; Kato, 1978). In most cases, the outmigration tradition is materially oriented in terms of its goals, and it has also been the concern of the novel *Anak Rantau*. Success is materially signified by the outmigrant's ability to own cars, good business, good jobs, or education. Simultaneously, the economic and physical progress of the village is perceived as similarly important, although there is always the issue of the Jakarta-centric or Java-centric development programs. In addition to that, the novel also shows how progress and modernity have transformed the village to the worse due to the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources and the tendency to employ more modern lifestyle. The novel proposes that the failure of modernity should lead to a revitalization of tradition and a rearticulation of outmigration tradition.

Intersection between Modernity and the Narrative of Minangkabau Outmigration

The contribution of the Minangkabau migrants is not limited to, but is predominantly material. Successful migrants earn more respect in their home village than those less successful, let alone those who are left behind to stay in the village (Navis, 1984; Salazar, 2016). In modern times, material success is no longer about the possession of lands but is manifested in ownerships of money, shops, restaurants, and cars. Leaving the homeland in pursuit of land possession or wealth is also important for young males who have a marginal position in the social structure of Minangkabau. They are obliged to bring honor to

the family by thriving in the *rantau*. This materialistic obligation is quite obvious in *Anak Rantau* novel. Although the reasons for Hepi's father to outmigrate is to run away from home, the drive for material establishment is clearly seen in the proud narration of his success journey, which is signified by small business ownership, a private car, and plane tickets.

Some researches reveal that the increasingly important "self-acquired property" gained through trades or other economic efforts can now be willed to a member of one's nucleus family instead of a man's maternal nephews or nieces, revealing "the evolution of the economy" and "a long-term evolution in Minangkabau property and inheritance rules and practices" alongside the growth of commerce, cash crops production, and urbanization (Keddie, 1987). This inclination toward private property is very much a characteristic of a modern society which undergoes transitions from customary relations, religion, and common property to legal status and contracts, freedom of thought, and individual ownership (Keddie, 1987). Likewise, this characteristic of modern society is also changing Tanjung Durian village. This is seen from the reluctance of the villagers to take care of community houses like *surau* and *rumah gadang*. The novel tells how some ancient *rumah gadang* have been abandoned, and *surau* has also been closed down.

Some recent studies on the Minangkabau outmigration tradition reveal that the amount of financial support given by the migrants to their family who stay in the home village determines the social status and respect they gain (Salazar, 2016; Downes & Kobbe, 2017). In addition to that, a returning migrant is considered as a showcase of modernity, development, change, and progress which is epitomized by modern symbols such as cars, fashionable outfits, and gadgets. Recent social imaginaries about modernity in Indonesia includes not only technology but also mobility, which distinguishes the people who venture outmigration from those who remain immobile, staying in the home village (Salazar, 2016; Downes & Kobbe, 2017). In several cases, the determinants for Minangkabau outmigration tradition are not

confined to financial quest or social mobility, but is also linked to the idea of modernity which is based on the desire to “break from an out-of-date past” and the willingness to “progress into an improved future” (Iman & Mani, 2013; Salazar, 2016). Breaking out from the past and a yearning for progress or an improved future correlate with the varied motivation of *merantau*, which ranges from an attempt to flee from persecution during the *PRRI* outbreak, a need for higher education, hope for social mobility, a need for informal entrepreneurship training, or even to run away from personal problems (Downes & Kobbe, 2017; Iman & Mani, 2013; Salazar, 2016; Yati & Simanihuruk, 2016). However, in the novel *Anak Rantau*, some characters who venture on an outmigration are not always positively connoted with development, progress, financial success, and honor. Although living in the home village is still imagined as boring, some outmigrants who return to the village are troubled characters who bring disasters to the village later on. Therefore, despite the varied motivation of *merantau*, material gain and the idea of self-development or progress remain the predominant social imaginings of *merantau*.

The Resistance towards Modernity

Pre-modern societies are collective in character and cosmocentric, as they do not separate their material realm from their spiritual realm, or Subject from Object, and perceive history as a cycle or repetition (Hardiman, 2003). Therefore, pre-modern societies would rather embrace than distance themselves from external forces around them (Hardiman, 2003). The modern consciousness, on the other hand, distances an individual from nature and creates an awareness of the thinking Subject. Nature is no longer the primary reality of the Subject but is dependent on the absolute Subject for its being. Modern societies are characterized by progress, which implies that time moves forward, not repetitively, and that there is a necessity to improve the quality of the present and the future. Modern consciousness creates an awareness of an autonomous individual and inherent basic human rights, detaching modern individuals from their

pre-modern collectivity. Individuation as emancipation places doubts on tradition because it sees tradition as a hindrance to progress and social justice. Modern consciousness also brings about secularization or consciousness which distinguishes the sacred from the profane, resulting in emancipation from the confines of religion and structural power in social reality (Hardiman, 2003).

The development of science and technology has precipitated the growth of western capitalism which grows to be perceived as a ‘rational’ form of economic life, which is predominated by capital accumulation, as opposed to the traditional way of life or pre-capitalistic labor culture which is based on the principle of living and earning as much as is necessary only (Bocock, 1992). Modernity invents the idea of progress which creates a possibility for a subjugating cultural hierarchy as it gives privileges to the dominant culture to justify its superiority claims (Bhabha, 1994; Nayar, 2015). Consequently, enthusiasm over modernity, rationality and technological development started to turn into a deep concern, skepticism, and even criticism towards the claims of progress, civilization, and rationality by the end of the nineteenth century (Jedamski, 1998). This theme of disappointment over the excess of modernity is also expressed in Ahmad Fuadi’s *Anak Rantau* which tells about the adventure of a metropolitan boy named Hepi during his forced sojourn in his father’s home village. Hepi’s misbehaving at school results in his banishment in his father’s home village, which he just found out the day his father flew back to Jakarta without him. His father had secretly planned this in the hope that Hepi would learn to grow up and become more responsible for his own life and schooling. As Hepi was left in the hands of his grandparents, he had to go to the local Junior High School and live in the *surau*. Hepi’s attempt to make his own money to buy a ticket back to Jakarta got himself and his gang into trouble with a vicious drug dealer’s band.

Throughout the story, the traditional values of Minangkabau are introduced in phrases such as *alam berkembang jadi guru* (Natural world is the mentor of life), *tungku tigo sajarangan* (the tripartite

leadership consisting of the tribal authorities, the religious authorities, and the intellectuals), *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah, syarak mangato adat mamakai* (customs and laws are based on the Koran and they must coexist harmoniously), and the slogan *kembali ke surau* (the return to the surau). The urge to revive indigenous wisdom had its justification in the adverse effect of modernity and development, which was evident in the environmental destruction, and social affliction by illegal drug trades. The novel reveals that modernity's project has failed, through the ecological disaster which befalls the once clear and blue Lake Talago, among others. Hepi's grandfather blames illegal logging for the decreasing lake water level and the overfeeding of fish farming for the lake sedimentation, turning the lake smelly and murky (Fuadi, 2017). The weak control of the local government creates a lack of supervision, making the large-scale fish farms on the natural lake owned by big investors seem to be beyond reproach. Overfeeding has created a lot of waste, feces, and chemicals which pollute the lake water, creating inhabitable conditions for fish and other living creatures. The dead fish floating on the surface of the lake water further creates an irritating smell, forcing a temporary closure of any economic activities around the lake until the matter is taken care of by the government or the parties responsible. The village which has already been afflicted by drug trades and other crimes related to it must yet suffer from the chronic environmental problem. Fuadi's critical inquiry into modernity is expressed by his situating modernity as an ideological formation that rests upon the pursuit of progress and development whose project relies on reason and natural sciences to create a better and more civilized world. Ironically, in making a better living condition, technology and refined knowledge have created environmental disaster as its corollary damage.

The idea of progress has often been bound with material progress such as the belief in expanding capital, productivity, and consumption. Postcolonial scholars point out that one of the paradoxes of modernity is colonization. The drive to expand the capital, assisted by the development

in technology, has blighted the world with colonialism, racism, and natural resources exploitation or destruction in many parts of the world, generating a skeptical attitude towards the idea of progress (Nayar, 2015). This skeptical attitude towards the idea of progress in the context of what colonialism after the decolonization finds its expression in Fuadi's *Anak Rantau* as it shows that the drive for material progress for the sake of expanding capital and productivity has damaged the village of Tanjung Durian.

In addition to environmental disaster, the village has also been adversely affected by social malaises such as illegal drug trades, theft and crimes related to drug trades, and villagers or officers who act as accomplices in the drug trades by covering up the crime. An emigrant and former prisoner convicted of murder who returns to Tanjung Durian village upon his release is the main player of the illegal business. The drug trade has also triggered several thefts in the village, claims the life of a socially respectable man who dies of a drug overdose, and almost takes Hepi's life during a confrontation with Lenon's syndicate. The surging crime rate usually happens when the lake water poisoning is at its worst state, forcing many businesses to temporarily close down and depriving villagers of their livelihoods. Luckily, strong family bonds in the village have prevented them from starving or committing crimes, except for those trapped in drug addiction.

As revealed in the story, the numerous problems that befall the village has invoked an urge to turn to the abandoned teachings of Minangkabau ancient wisdom which is expressed in the principle of "*tungku tiga sajarangan*", the teaching of "*adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi kitabullah, syarak mengata, adat memakai*", and the crucial role of the *surau*. Hepi's grandfather is a strong advocate of the revitalization of the old way of life, and the initiator of the "*Berdirinya Surau Kami*" program which tries to revive the spiritual and social function of the *surau*, a specific place for Islamic worship and preaching.

Consequently, the return to Minangkabau's traditional way of life puts modernity under scrutiny. Modernity has once again failed to prove

itself as a solution for a better life through its endorsement of developmentalism, the pursuit of progress, capital accumulation, and secularization. In Hepi's grandfather's opinion, abandoning Minangkabau's philosophy of life is the beginning of all the setbacks and problems in the village. He believes that Minangkabau's philosophy which centers on the religious teachings of Islam through the institution of surau can restore peace and good life in the village. The Surau Revitalization Program shows that the people of Tanjung Durian are undergoing a transition to modern society. Unfortunately, the rapid changes have left the villagers unprepared and helpless.

Revisiting Minangkabau Outmigration Tradition

Modernity has been featured by its ambiguity because rationality had brought order to the world and made it more reliable, yet it failed to make the world more meaningful. Culture becomes a site of struggle, where meaning articulated through discourses can be challenged and even rearticulated. This is what Bhabha calls the "Third Space of enunciation" which intervenes as a site of struggle, constituting "the discursive conditions of enunciation" where even "the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha, 1994). The liminal, ambivalent Third Space of enunciation also makes possible the investigation of any hegemonic discourses by questioning any narrative which has been so perceptively described as authenticated by the "originary Past", or kept alive in tradition (Bhabha, 1994). In other words, the ambivalent Third Space has freed people to break away from any preserved cultural meaning by disrupting the perception of the linear progress of time. Bhabha contends that "The changed political and historical" conditions, such as decolonization, can transform cultural meanings of "the colonial inheritance into the liberatory signs of a free people of the future" (Bhabha, 1994). Instead of identifying themselves with the national culture, people may construct their culture which may be based on the national concept of culture, but one which has accommodated "modern Western forms

of information technology, language, dress" (Bhabha, 1994).

Bhabha has mentioned that not only material changes, contradictions, or cultural differences, but even the same signs can be articulated, and rearticulated or read anew in the liminal third space. The productive capacities of the liminal space have created instability and elusiveness of meaning. Kevin DeLuca quotes Laclau and Mouffe in explaining how antagonisms enable the investigation of a hegemonic discourse by showing the limit of the discourse, and by revealing that at a certain point "the relation of the discourse to the surrounding life world" can show "the impossibility of the discourse constituting a permanently closed or sutured totality" (DeLuca, 1999). Antagonism challenges hegemonic discourses by showing the limit of the order. These antagonisms mark "the limit of a discourse", and it happens when the discourse is perceived to conflict with real life (DeLuca, 1999). This explains what Bhabha means by the instability of meaning in the Third Space of enunciation, which reveals the inevitable openness of discourse, preventing it to be "permanently closed" or constituting any "sutured totality" (DeLuca, 1999).

In the case of Fuadi's *Anak Rantau*, the environment destruction issues and their related problems have provided an antagonism that challenges and even offers an opportunity to disarticulate this taken-for-granted modernity's agenda. Accumulation of capital through modern management such as investment was at first projected as a way to enhance the villagers' livelihood and income. However, the repercussions of the modern management of the village's highly treasured natural resource have their backlash. It shows the limit of the discourse of modernity which has been narrated as promising an orderly future and prosperity for the people of Tanjung Durian. It is within the Third Space of enunciation that the rationalization of modernity is questioned and its ambiguity revealed. In the context of the Lake Talago issue, two competing discourses, modernity and traditionalism, are at work. By revealing the antagonism of modernity, Fuadi is preparing the way for the other competing

discourse, traditionalism, to prevail. Pointing out the limit of the discourse has enabled Fuadi to subvert the hegemonic discourse of modernity by recognizing it as socially constructed which contradicts social realities. In Bhabha's words, modernity has been read anew and even enunciated as a failure in the Third Space of enunciation.

The Minangkabau tradition of outmigration is also read anew by Fuadi within this Third Space of enunciation. The predominating narration of outmigration has been filled with the significance of material success and leaving the home village to learn about life. However, in *Anak Rantau*, the central character learns most about life by returning 'home', that is, returning to his father's home village in Minangkabau. Hepi, the main character, indeed worked hard to earn money for his savings which he will use to buy a ticket to Jakarta. Yet, he had also lost his entire savings twice. He lost his savings when a thief breaks into his grandfather's *surau* and stole the charity box, the sound system set, his grandmother's jewelry, and his bamboo coin bank containing money he had earned in almost half a year (Fuadi, 2017). The second time he 'lost' his saving was when he gave it voluntarily to Pandeka Luko, his grandfather's cousin who saved his life from a vicious drug dealer band. Through Hepi's loss of his hard-earned savings, money and material belongings are positioned as less important than happiness and peace of mind. This is contrary to the need for capital accumulation prescribed by modernity. For Hepi, capital accumulation is not his goal, but only a means to achieve another goal, which is to be united with his father and to get his full affection. Although his utmost goal is to get his father back, his willingness to sacrifice for Pandeka Luko, his "*guru lahir batimya*" or his psychic and physical mentor, proves that material gain is but a means, not a goal in life (Fuadi, 2017)

CONCLUSION

Hepi's adventure and 'outmigration' journey from Jakarta to his father's home village is a reversal of the long tradition of leaving

Minangkabau land to obtain material success as well as to learn about life. Changing social, political and historical conditions have invoked this breaking away from the preserved cultural meaning of outmigration. The established category of 'home' and 'rantau' is questioned in the productive, interruptive, and interrogative liminal space by reversing the rite of passage for young Minangkabau men. This reversal intervenes in "those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories" of *kampung* (underdeveloped villages) as contrary to the more sophisticated and affluent urban (Bhabha, 1994). The 'underrated' villages like Tanjung Durian are presented as better milieus for child-rearing, compared to big cities like Jakarta, because Tanjung Durian village life offers *alam berkembang jadi guru* milieu from which Hepi can learn to mature himself, and where he will also learn about religion and tradition (Fuadi, 2017). Martiaz, Hepi's father, added that Jakarta can ruin Hepi, although he admits that it is not Jakarta's fault. It is he who is to blame for being too busy with his business. Thus, Jakarta as the place for *rantau* is no longer seen as offering *alam berkembang jadi guru*, but on the contrary, it is presented as a negative milieu capable of ruining those unprepared. In Bhabha's words, the liminal space which marks the collision of modernity's values and traditional values forms the contradictions where the meaning of *merantau* can be rearticulated or read anew.

There is an ongoing negotiation between the cultural mission which underpins the outmigration tradition as what maintains the local matrilineal power structure on one side, and doubts about the virtue of the cultural mission, as it also brings about moral corruption into the home village on the other side. In *Anak Rantau*, the cultural mission of transferring modernity, progress, and prosperity from the *rantau* to the homeland is haunted by the failure of modernity in proving its claims to make the world better and more meaningful. Some morally corrupted returning migrants who spread the bad influence to the villagers and the environmental destruction are disavowals of

modernity's claims of order, development, and a better life. This rearticulation of the outmigration tradition shows that the novel avoids repudiating the long preserved Minangkabau outmigration tradition despite its objections to the corollary damages of the uncontrolled drive for progress. On the contrary, by presenting the gloomy side of the picture of the materially oriented outmigration tradition, the novel highlights the urge to adhere to Minangkabau institutionalized tradition by revisiting the religion-based tradition, to remedy social problems.

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