

Rantau and Minangkabau Women: A Global View of the Postcolonial Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

Discussing the greatness of the Minangkabau ethnic group globally, almost every expert always connects it with the migration culture of the Minangkabau people. Historical facts reveal that merantau is synonymous with men or the patriarchal world. It is a paradox with the kinship system adopted by the Minangkabau society, which is matrilineal and matriarchal. This paper aims to: (1). Reveal the place of women in the Minangkabau migration culture; (2). This research uses the historical method combined with the literature method. This article is supported by the oral history method to sharpen the analysis. This approach is similar to the interview method in qualitative research, which consists of surveys of those who are active and experienced in implementing the Minangkabau tradition. They are analysing the global view of the postcolonial perspective in the Minangkabau people's migration culture. This study uses the historical method combined with the literature method. The results of this study indicate that the matrilineal culture of the Minangkabau people in the colonial period was very thick with patriarchal perspectives and gender bias. Unlike the postcolonial period, there was a significant paradigm shift and historical reality. During the postcolonial period, Minangkabau women were allowed to migrate to develop their potential in the public sphere.

Article History

Received: 31 October 2022

Accepted: 28 March 2023

Published: 28 March 2023

Keywords

Minangkabau Women, Patriarchy, Postcolonial, Rantau,

How to cite:

Fatimah, S. (2023). Rantau and Minangkabau Women: A Global View of the Postcolonial Feminist Perspective. *Humanus: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Humaniora*, 22(1), 28-37. DOI: 10.24036/humanus.v22i1.119939

Introduction

Minangkabau is one of the unique ethnicities in the world, especially in terms of the form of kinship system that it has. It is the ethnicity that adheres to the matrilineal system in Indonesia. In contrast, other ethnicities adhere to the patrilineal and parental kinship system. According to the chairman of Bundo Kanduang Minangkabau, Prof. Dr Raudhah Thaib, in several lectures she delivered, the Minangkabau community no longer needs to be taught gender issues because in the Minangkabau kinship system, according to her, it has placed women on an equal position with men, but in reality, this is not the case.

Historical facts in some fields prove that there is still gender bias in the Minangkabau world up until now (Fatimah, 2012).

In the context of gender studies in Minangkabau, Hanani (2018) has conducted a study on women's newspapers that were initiated by women during the colonial era. Substantially, the major themes of these newspapers were the feminist movement against gender discrimination and inequality. Hence, the publication of these newspapers became the medium for the feminist movement in Minangkabau. At the same time, Narny (2016) attempted to examine women's experiences in the events of 1965–66 from a life course perspective and focus on their efforts to adapt in the following years in West Sumatra. Many of these women displayed considerable resilience in overcoming the social constraints that resulted from being labelled a Communist or Communist sympathizer. Besides, Fatimah (2012); Zakia (2011) review that adat Minangkabau has the values of equality and gender justice. Based on status and function, men and women are given rights, obligations and responsibilities in proportion—fairness and equality of cover sako and pusako heritage, as well as participation in decision-making. Women such as Bundo Kanduang have domestic and public roles. From several studies above, the discourse of gender equality yet become a struggle for all these years.

In addition to having a matrilineal culture, the Minangkabau people have a global culture called the merantau (Kato, 1982; Naim, 2013). Merantau is a unique form of migration found in the Minangkabau society, which has a matrilineal kinship system (Murad, 1980). In practice, the merantau culture of the Minangkabau people has become an essential part of life in the Minangkabau community (Salazar, 2016). According to the Minangkabau people, migration has always been a means to improve personal living standards as well as lineages at home, educate oneself and become an adult in personality (Naim, 1984). It is evidence that two-thirds of the people of the Minangkabau ethnicity live outside the Minangkabau region, both within Indonesia and outside Indonesia (Azra, 2017). It has become an anecdote for other ethnicities in Indonesia, "if there is a village on the moon, the Minangkabau people must have come first to Padang restaurant". There is almost no province in Indonesia that is not occupied by the Minangkabau ethnicity.

In Indonesian history, some ethnic groups, such as the Bugis, Banjar and Minangkabau, also have a tradition of merantau (Vickers, 2013). Minangkabau ethnicity is considered the most go merantau among other ethnic groups in Indonesia. According to the classic work from Naim (1984), the matrilineal social structure makes men marginal in the social system and causes them to go merantau for young people. The unmarried Minangkabau men went merantau, as part of the custom, to make their fortune and feed their spirit, sometimes for extended periods (Salazar, 2016). Furthermore, Silvey (2000) pointed out that young single men could situate themselves within the state-sanctioned role of nomads, or migratory breadwinners, whether they provided remittances for their families. In the context of gender, Barbara Lenz's (2005) publication, unfortunately, seems to forget by many scholars from a discourse on gender study in Minangkabau. Her fieldwork found that merantau for women has been carried out, and to a small extent, women in Minangkabau have done it. However, the findings found that this merantau process was carried out within a certain number of times, after graduating from school until marriage.

This paper has novelty in terms of perspective and historical facts. Many writings about the merantau of the Minangkabau people are presented as part of the very constructive Minangkabau cultural philosophy. However, if one looks further, the construction of merantau culture looks very patriarchal, while on the other hand, the

Minangkabau ethnicity is glorified as an anti-patriarchal ethnicity. So far, there are a few works that have examined this merantau culture from a gender perspective. However, studies of the Minangkabau people as an ethnicity that adheres to the matrilineal system, with the division of property with matriachis benefits, have been found. Islam and customs have also negotiated the placement and distribution of heritage property (Abdullah, 1966; Ghofur, 2017). If one observes further, the merantau culture of the Minangkabau can be categorised as a global culture that can be seen and studied from a postcolonial perspective. As Lenz (2005) argues that merantau today is a widespread practice among Minangkabau women, some study also portrays based on the phenomenon conducted in previous time (Ilet, 2022; Nadia et al., 2022; Oktavia et al., 2015; Rahman, 2020).

In the philosophical view of the Minangkabau people, rantau is a part of the cosmopolitan life they believe in (Barendregt, 2002; Josselin de Jong, 1980). However, this differs from postcolonial thinking, which has recently become an important study in social science. Postcolonial emphasized the impact of colonialism and imperialism on society's culture and social and economic politics after the colonial period. It arose in response to the remissness of history and the consequence of colonialism on the culture of the world's peoples. It highlights endeavours to eliminate colonialism, including resistance to imperialism, attempts to recognize and rehabilitate cultures that have been reduced by colonialism (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). This view in the context of gender seeks to focus on the world of women to gain equality with men in all aspects of life (Lewis & Mills, 2003). This paper tries to present and simultaneously deconstruct views about the merantau culture of the Minangkabau people in the past, which was very partial to one gender. So far, only a few social science experts, especially gender studies, have revealed the existence of women in this merantau culture.

Method

This article employs the historical method (Herlina, 2020). The steps in such consist of (1). Heuristic, in history, is analysed as the first step in collecting data. In this study, data were obtained from several documents from literary sources in the form of texts, including Tambo and several other contemporary documents. As for oral sources, it was obtained from interviews with several informants, consisting of niniak mamak, religious leaders, penghulu, and bundo kanduang, as well as several women who experienced going merantau. In this process, the data collected can be in the form of documents excavated from various archives, whether private, public, or official. In addition, data can also be obtained from interviews, which in historical science are more popularly referred to as oral sources (Thompson, 2002). In this second step, the researcher conducts a test of the validity and reliability of the data. In historical science, it is called source criticism, known as internal and external criticism. In qualitative research, it is called a data validity test. (3) The next step is to conduct data analysis, which in the methodology of historical science is called interpretation, which is to provide meaning to the data obtained so that it becomes a series of narratives that describe the explanation and causality of a theme of the events studied. (4). Historiography is the last phase of the historical method step, the phase of presenting all research findings employing the scientific method of writing by following the historical writing structure.

Results and Discussion

Merantau culture for the Minangkabau Community in a global perspective

Cross-cultural values are known globally and can be examined from unique local life practices such as the Minangkabau people. The Minangkabau individuals hold a

specific value system derived from natural and Islamic values called pepatah adat. Minangkabau people use these values as a code of behaviour in intercultural matters (Moeis et al., 2022). It has a collection of traditional pedagogy in the state of proverbs and wise words handed down through the eras (Attubani, 2012). In Minangkabau culture, several pepatah related to the tradition of merantau are found. One example is the following quote that describes the philosophies of life for the Minangkabau people. This quote also shows the merantau culture of the Minangkabau community as a cultural part that has a global perspective.

Karatau madang di hulu
Babuah babungo balun
Ka rantau bujang dahulu
Di rumah paguno balun

This proverb means “the youth go merantau first because in the hometown they are not yet useful.” This saying is already part of the Minangkabau people's cosmopolitan and globally nuanced view of life. In this case, merantau represents their social system as part of culture and tradition (Salazar, 2016). However, without realising it, the proverb expressed in the stanza is gender biased, including in its implementation, especially in the colonial period.

In the text and context of the proverb, merantau is strictly addressed to men, not women. As a result of merantau, Minangkabau people can be found everywhere in this part of the country. Uniquely, of course, only some of those who merantau returned to their hometowns/rantau cino (Hadler, 2003), even though they had been successful in the place where they went merantau. Because part of them are married and have a family with women, not from the Minangkabau ethnicity, some of those who married non-Minangkabau girls were Moh. Yamin, Sutan Sjarir, Tan Malaka. The love story of these figures is interestingly presented in his biography (Mrazek, 1996).

Merantau has positive and negative consequences on the Minangkabau community itself. Few internal frictions in the family and people emerged in Minangkabau, especially in the early 20th century, because many Minangkabau males who went merantau were married to ethnic outsiders in the rantau. One example of the author's research resulted unintentionally when studied the biography of Bagindo Aziz chan (2007); it turned out that he went to Surabaya initially to continue his education at MULO (Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs) after completing his school HIS (Hollandsch Inlandsche School) in Padang in 1926. However, his mamak (the brother of his mother) ceased his tuition when Bgd. Azizchan was found to have chosen a Sundanese lady to marry him. Because at that time, the entire cost of Bagindo Azizchan Education was given by his mamak, named Buyuang Putih, who became a successful merchant in Pasa Gadang, Padang City.

So far, the current study on this issue stresses the causes of the Minangkabau people's go merantau (Angelia, 2017; Aprial, 2020; Asmon & Adri, 2021; Zulfikarni & Liusti, 2020). The exciting thing about the study results is that Minangkabau men merantau because they avoid internal conflicts in their people and families (Yuli, 2019). However, the contrary occurred, as depicted in various literary works of the pujangga lama era that Wahyuni (2022) found; almost all literary works caused internal conflicts after their young man went to merantau and married the woman of his choice in the region. One of the classic novel that portrayed the same story is *Memang Jodoh*, written by Marah Roesli (2017).

Regardless, this paper focuses on aspects of gender habits in discourse built on the conception of merantau. Historical facts show that after ethical politics, especially during

the movement, the intensity of Minangkabau youth went merantau to seek knowledge and attend school outside their hometown (Bruhn, 2018). It can be seen from Several national figures from Minangkabau have emerged because tanah perantauan (overseas) has provided a global perspective that has benefited men. An index of young people from Minangkabau who took part in the national and even international stage, including Tan Malaka, Syahrir, Haji Agus Salim, Moh. Yamin, Natsir, Moh. Hatta, Hamka, St. Takdir Ali Shahbana, HB. Yasin and other local figures also have experienced the influence of rantau to create their way of thinking (Hadler, 2010). However, the exact impact does not apply to women. Only some female names were found successful and stood out due to the consequence of rantau. Therefore, a kind of anti-thesis can be drawn that rantau only benefits Minangkabau men in many ways, especially in expanding their potential. In contrast, their latter position as heirs to family titles, lands and houses, women are deeply tied to their homeland regarding social space, while males are made easier to leave at certain stages of life (Lenz, 2005). The Minangkabau women are not allowed to evolve because of the label pinned on them as owners of gadang house properties – which remains a symbol now.

This type of ideological construction associates with the structure of colonial ideology and hegemony in forming the Minangkabau matrilineal society (Hadler, 2010). In contrast to the contemporary period that began precisely in the 1970s, marked by the emergence of postcolonial discourse, there was a cultural transformation. It can be seen from the emergence of many women who also get to go to merantau to continue education, which opens up opportunities for women to participate in the public sector (Lenz, 2005). In addition, another factor that causes women's work in the public world starts to reveal is that the rumah gadang as a female power no longer functions as it used to. Almost all of the treasures (harta pusaka) that used to be a symbol of prestige became extinct in the Minangkabau. External factors affecting women's work are globalisation, transportation and more accessible communication technology nowadays.

Recently, many new labels have been attached to Minangkabau women, including; “ayam batino lah bakukuak” (Jendrius, 2011). There is also a proverb, “dilantiak ayam batino”, which occurs in a family where the daughter is more successful than the boy. It is also in schools when girls dominate achievements at various levels of education. Furthermore, in education, Minangkabau women are not a few who have obtained the highest level of education, and even many have become professors in various universities in Indonesia. However, taking a role in practical politics and bureaucracy has needed to be more attractive.

The emergence of opportunities for females to go to merantau from outside West Sumatra has given birth to many of them having achievements beyond the prestigious given to them as Bundo Kandung, who is glorified in a matrilineal society. Finally, it can be concluded for the Minangkabau ethnic, merantau culture is a global perspective closely correlated to the colonial and postcolonial dimensions, in line with the fundamental changes to the conception and fact of merantau itself as a global dimension of the culture of the Minangkabau individuals.

Women in the construction of Minangkabau matrilineal culture and their position in the merantau culture of the Minangkabau people

From several previous studies, there have been many works that discuss how Minangkabau women are constructed from various scientific perspectives. Previous researchers have also conducted studies on Minangkabau women from the aspect of inheritance law (Hanani, 2013). Likewise, it relates to the position of women in customs

and matrilineal systems viewed from historical, cultural, and sociological. Nevertheless, reviewing the position of Minangkabau women in transition and constantly undergoing change is a study that can always carry on. In matrilineal culture, economically, Minangkabau women are considered to be benefited (Fatimah, 2012). However, lately, harta pusaka no longer has its ideal meaning and function because much of it has been sold out by individuals and the community itself (Hanani, 2013; Mutolib et al., 2016). In the tambo alam Minangkabau, matrilineal women are presented with the following characteristics:

1. descendants are calculated according to the maternal line;
2. tribes are formed according to the maternal line;
3. exogamy marriage, meaning that everyone is required to marry a person outside his tribe;
4. vengeance (?) is an obligation for the whole tribe;
5. the dominion within the tribe, according to theory, lies in the hands of the mother, although it is rare;
6. the ones who rule are brothers; marriage is matrilocal, that is, the husband visits the wife's house;
7. Inheritance Rights Passed on to Women Based on Maternal Lineage (Radjab, 1969: pp. 210-211).

From the data in the tambo text, it can be interpreted that Minangkabau ethnic women have a favourable position in the matrilineal system, especially in economic access. Minangkabau women are the owners of property in their people, while men are supervisors in property ownership. However, in making decisions, men and women have the same position (Siregar & Amran, 2018). According to our interview with H. Masoed Abidin, Minangkabau women are called rang kayo, rich people. Some individuals who use the title are Rang Kayo Rasuna Said, Rang Kayo Ummi Salamah, and Rang Kayo Cik Ramah. Based on the perspective of postcolonial theory, the term rang kayo is referred to as hegemony, which ultimately gives rise to a kind of pseudo-consciousness in these women (Habermas, 1975). The postcolonial theory deconstructs colonial viewpoints that tend to depart from a single unilateral interest and gender bias.

Among many literatures, the cause of Minangkabau men going merantau because men do not have access to anything in their birth place, especially in the economic field. For this reason, Minangkabau men went merantau, mainly to find new prestige, as merchants, politicians, scientists and others, therefore by obtaining a new prestige, Minangkabau men would obtain further compensation. This statement contradicted some of the studies that have been conducted. Unwittingly, the merantau culture's construction aligns with the highly gender-biased colonial construction. These things have given birth to injustice in the actual historical facts.

Meanwhile, Minangkabau women in the colonial era experienced much segregation, especially since the intervention of colonial discourse. One concrete example is how Bundo Kanduang was used as an institution that could be used as an extension of colonial hands in Minangkabau. It lasted until the New Order period, perpetuating colonial construction (Fatimah, 2012).

Minangkabau women between facts and myths in colonial and postcolonial construction

From the historical perspective, facts differ significantly from myths (Vansina, 2014). Facts are empirically tested truths because data support them. Unlike myth, it is

not a fact but only an abstraction from reality that contains particular messages. Furthermore, Barthes (2012) says the myth is one type of speech which can be categorized as a message or marker. Myth is more likely to be a sociological system than a system of facts. Thus, Barthes suggests that a dynamic approach to reading myths is to move from understanding semiology to understanding ideology by connecting those myths with history. That is, to what extent can the myth represent the interests of society (Yeats, 1998)? When connected with postcolonial construction, postmodern theories try to deconstruct the myths of the colonial period. One of the most developed postmodern theories is gender theory which examines how myths present women and men in social structures and dimensions of a society. In the culture of the Minangkabau people, not a few constructions of women and men were exploited for colonial political interests. One of them is the myth about Bundo Kanduang. Bundo Kanduang consists of bundo, which means mother, while kanduang means true. Thus, Bundo Kanduang can be interpreted as a biological mother. In Legend or Tambo Minangkabau – categorized into myths, Bundo Kanduang is symbolized as a wise and wise female leader (Abdullah, 1970). It is reflected in the text of the traditional proverb as follows:

- Bundo Kanduang limpapeh rumah nan gadang
(the mother who serves as a buffer from the extended family)
 - Umbui parui pegangan kunci
(Wealth Keyholder)
 - Umbun parui alun bunian
(source of all mandates)
 - Pusek kumpulan tali
(collection of all systems)
 - Sumarak dalam kampung
(making the village festive)
 - Hiasan dalam nagari
(decorator)
 - Nan gadang basa batuah
(powerful magnifier)
 - Kok hidui tampek banasa
(they live the source of all desires)
 - Kok mati tampek baniaik
(Their death became the source of all intentions)
 - Ka undang-undang ka Madinah
(Being a refuge to Medina)
 - Ka payuang panji ka sarugo
(being a big umbrella to heaven)
- Source; Dirajo (1979).

The text contained in this tambo, believed to be Minangkabau historiography, explains the vital role of the matrilineal system in Minangkabau. In fact, in this context, Minangkabau women are said to be the centre for making the final decision after it has been discussed in an open, deliberative forum. It shows how the Minangkabau woman, symbolized by the bundo kanduang, is a strong leader, including in the course of a government.

The following quote reflects that the myth is presented as a historical reality when Bundo Kanduang was asked for her decision.

"The meeting headed over by Rajo Alam has been going on since nine o'clock in the morning, Bundo Kanduang, Tuangku Romandung, Members of Basa Ampek Balai and Tuan Kadhi were present at the meeting. Bundo Kanduang showed her apprehension towards Tanjung Sungainyang's behaviour which can obviously damage the balance of nature with its contents. With precise speech and voice, controlled turmoil, Bundo Kanduang narrated the improper manners of the Tanjung Sungainyang leadership aimed at the end of damaging and ravaging the folks. At the end of the engagement, Bundo Kanduang proposed to crack down on parties that have harmed the image of Pagaruyung." (Rajo Penghulu, 1997)

From the quotes, it can be seen that Bundo Kanduang is a woman who has an intelligent, wise and courageous nature. In addition, it can be seen that Minangkabau women have access to make policies and decisions. Along with developing the postcolonial paradigm, the postmodern theory attempts to deconstruct the colonial paradigm, especially those inherent in the former colonies of western nations, especially Indonesia. This critical theory began to develop in the 1970s, but in Indonesia, it began to develop in the 1980s, increasingly grounded since after the New Order government (Tazid, 2017). This theory is better known as the theory of critical discourse. One closely related to this paper is deconstructing the Minangkabau community's merantau culture as a gender-biased discourse.

Conclusion

The study of texts and discourses is part of the deconstructionist model in the postcolonial era. Merantau is in the texts and discourse that can be seen from the point of view of changing history. In a colonial context, the conception of merantau is a very patriarchal and gender-biased discourse. It is shown by the philosophy of merantau built so that only men went merantau in the colonial era until post-independence. In the postcolonial era, there was a shift in the conception of merantau in the Minangkabau community. Deconstruction in the perception of merantau culture in the era of the 70s, accompanied by many Minangkabau women, began merantau, especially in studying knowledge to achieve higher education. It aligns with the development of postmodern or Postcolonial theory in Indonesia. It occurs due to external factors, such as globalization, transportation, and smooth communication. Meanwhile, the internal factor is that there has been a cultural distortion in the matrilineal system of the Minangkabau community.

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