

## Conference Paper

# Hybrid Marriage Breakdown in Hamka's Novel *Merantau Ke Deli*

Pardi, Ikhwanuddin Nasution, Syaifuddin, and T. Thyrhaya Zein

University of Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

## Abstract

The two main characters in the novel, a man from Minang ethnic and a Javanese woman, meet and unite in a hybrid marriage institution, referring to the concept of combining two objects in one unit, part of a cultural hybrid and then analyzed through descriptive qualitative method reviewing the existence of marriage of different ethnics, part of a social problem in accordance with the function of literature as a medium for disclosure of social problems. Data and sources of data obtained are novels and words, phrases and sentences in the novel pointing to the discussion points. Tolerance, mutual understanding, solidarity, mutual support and not disputing cultural background are the main requirements in carrying out a hybrid marriage and all these requirements do not exist enough in the male character of this novel and eventually the marriage experiences a severe shock and ends in divorce. Disclosure of causal factors is the purpose of this study and the results are the norms of cultural traditions conveyed by a group of people and self-centeredness triggers the breakdown of the marriage.

**Keywords:** hybrid, cultural tradition, self-centeredness, marriage breakdown

Corresponding Author:

Pardi  
pardi@sastra.uisu.ac.idReceived: 1 July 2019  
Accepted: 18 July 2019  
Published: 31 July 2019Publishing services provided by  
Knowledge E

© Pardi et al. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the AICLL 2019 Conference Committee.

## 1. Introduction

Hybrid is a combination of two different objects producing a unification. Hybrid is not only found in the scientific field but also in social and cultural fields. In connection with this research, the term hybrid is used to refer to marriage between two individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Marriage is also a union between two individuals, a man and a woman, each of whom, consciously, has a sincere will to form a unit of union termed the marriage institution.

Hamka (full name: Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amarullah), an Indonesian writer, in his novel *Merantau ke Deli*, gives an overview of hybridization through two main characters, a Minang man and a Javanese woman forming a household. The man with high confidence and optimism in far-away region, namely Tanah Deli, feels that he could beatify his beloved woman and he is also sure to live happily with the woman, even though he realizes that the woman he marries is not from his clan. He never questions

## OPEN ACCESS

the cultural status of the woman because basically all humans are the same; and this is a strong encouragement for him to take action to marry the woman.

At first everything goes nicely. With the business capital provided by his wife while working in plantation company, they are able to run a shop and gradually, their lives improve until finally they have got economic stability. But hope and reality are always different and everyone must experience the ups and downs in life.

In a time that is not too long, the happiness they have slowly begins to diminish with the absence of a child; while a child is the main hope in eastern marriage. This problem can trigger other problems, which in turn can disrupt the harmony of marriage institutions that have been fostered for many years.

Their marriage life experiences a severe shock when the husband's big family in the hometown gives a push that he has to marry a Minang woman, in addition to having no child for many years. Then Leman, the main character, is remarried to a native Minang woman, Mariatun. Consequently, patience, sincerity, and loyalty are tested here, especially when the second wife comes and occupies their house. The promise that the husband once states to the Poniem, the first wife, that he would make her happy and protect his wife all the time now becomes an emptiness and there is no more harmony between them, they finally get divorced.

This novel is a classic novel written by Hamka in around 1939 and published around 1940-1941, raising the issue of the Minang customs of the time, polygamy and social habits in the far-away region. This novel is inspired by the social conditions of the time in Deli area, which is a city that has sufficiently advanced in economic activities making it a magnet for migrants, especially men from Minang, supported by a tradition that there was a tradition that a Minang man must migrate and succeed overseas, to prove that he is a Minang man deserving to be respected and furthermore proved to be given a mandate to take responsibility for all matters relating to his village, including being considered eligible to be a husband.

This research is focused on the causing factors of the failure of a hybrid marriage with two points of discussion: norms of cultural tradition and self-centeredness. The two points of this discussion refer to the analysis of the factors causing the failure of a marriage institution. Hybrid marriage, the term used in this study, is not easy to carry out. Tolerance, understanding, and mutual support and not easily affected by cultural issues are things needed, basically in all marriage institutions.

## 2. Literature Review

Along with the concept of globalization, hybridization also develops, as a discourse beginning to shift the position of multiculturalism. In multiculturalism, every individual in a community can provide an attitude of tolerance and mutual respect; but it remains separated in view or ideology. In hybrid perspective, the main concern is directed at the relationship among people from different cultural backgrounds regardless of differences. This hybrid concept is a key feature in the direction of a true democratic society, along with the concept of one world, where everyone feels ownership and mutual care and this certainly can eliminate, at least reduce the various forms of conflict found in society today. The concept of hybrid begins with an idea that basically every culture is a blend of various cultural concepts that have already existed. (Gomarasca: 2013)

The same thing is conveyed by Jawich (2015) that hybrid is a culture in its own right, which is a combination of two or more different cultures without seeing differences because basically differences can lead to a conflict, especially those related to cultural conflict. Hybrid is not merely caused by globalization, immigration or colonialization, but rather from a constant environment in the development of a culture. Warner in Jawich (2015) states that hybrid refers to the process of the emergence of a culture, in which its elements are being continually transformed or translated through irrepressible encounters. Hybrid offers the potential to undermine existing forms of cultural authority and representation.

Hybrid is an inevitable social phenomenon that is, especially in democratic societies because all social activities are carried out together and with this togetherness there will be an attraction that does not touch cultural traditions or self-centeredness and if touched causing obstacles to attain harmony as pictured in the novel that traditions have a big role in the forming the mindset of respective people.

Tradition is a cultural feature inherited from one generation to the next and intended to provide direction to individuals or groups of people about their cultural identity having values and norms. Pardi and Siregar (2018) convey that a tradition of course is performed to maintain the sustainability of local wisdom. Local wisdom itself is often conceived as local policy, local knowledge, or local genius. But to be kept in mind tradition is rigid and cannot be changed; tradition can be adapted to the circumstances and development of the times. Traditions to be used as guidelines are of course flexible.

Shils in Yadgar (2013) states that tradition is not the dead hand of the past but rather the hand of the gardener, which nourishes and elicits tendencies of judgment which

would otherwise not be strong enough to emerge on their own. In this respect tradition is an encouragement to incipient individuality rather than its enemy. It is a stimulant to moral judgment and self-discipline rather than an opiate.

Shil in Alexander (2016) states that tradition is that which is handed down, including material objects, beliefs about all sorts of things, images of persons and events, practices and institutions. It includes buildings, monuments, landscapes, sculptures, paintings, books, tools, machines. It includes all that a society of a given time possesses and which already existed when its present possessions came upon it and which is not solely the product of physical processes in the external world or exclusively the result of ecological and physiological necessity.

And according to the realm of Indonesian language, tradition means everything such as customs, teachings, or stories passed down from ancestors. Tradition also means everything transmitted, inherited from the past to the present. Based on these two sources it is clear that in tradition, the point is the legacy of the past that is preserved, carried out and trusted today. Traditions or customs can be in the form of values, social norms, patterns of behavior and other customs which are manifestations of various aspects of life.

The next point triggering obstacles in hybrid marriages is self-centeredness.

By self-centeredness, we mean that the self takes on a central point of reference with regard to many psychological activities (i.e., conation, motivation, attention, cognition, affect/emotion, and behavior). The exaggerated importance given to the self emerges mainly from self-centeredness and refers to the increased degree with which the individual considers that his own condition is more important than that of others and this takes unquestionable priority. Self-centered psychological functioning includes characteristics such as biased self-interest, egoism, egocentrism, and egotism. (Dambrun: 2011)

This is in line with Tien (2012) stating that self-centeredness here means to view the world exclusively and excessively from one's own point of view.

The novel *Merantau ke Deli* also provides an overview of the traditions of Minang ethnic putting forward the matrilineal concept in their daily activities.

Getting married with women from outside Minang ethnic is not favored because it can damage the custom institution as a child does not have ethnic identity; on the contrary, with men outside the clan is not a dispute, because it does not affect the cultural organization and a child still has a ethnic identity from the line of a mother. (Ariani: 2015)

The same thing is conveyed by Asmaniar (2018) that marriage with outsiders, especially marrying women outside the clan is seen as marriage that could damage their traditional structure as a child born from the marriage is not a Minangkabau ethnic. In addition, the life of the wife will be a burden on her husband, while every man is in charge of the interests of his relatives, people, and homeland. Therefore, the presence of a wife who is an outsider is seen as a burden on the whole family as well.

### 3. Research Method

The research is a qualitative with descriptive method. Moleong (2002) states that qualitative research is a study conducted by not using numbers but using the depth of appreciation of interactions between concepts that are being studied empirically. Data that are parts of the study are linked to the causing factors of hybrid marriage breakdown. Data are obtained from novels and data sources from words, phrases and sentences referring to hybrid marriage breakdown. Additional data are then obtained from library research through various sources or references relating to the items discussed in this study.

### 4. Result and Discussion

Tradition is the result of creation, human feeling and intention towards material objects, beliefs, fantasies, events, or institutions inherited from one generation to another, such as customs, arts and property used. Something inherited does not mean that it must be accepted, valued, assimilated or saved all the time. The accepted tradition will be a living element in the lives of its supporters, becoming a part of the past that has been maintained until now and has the same position as new innovations. Tradition is a description of human attitudes and behaviors that have been processed for a long time and carried out for generations starting from the ancestors. Cultured traditions will be a source of one's character and virtue.

Tradition is often paired with culture so that the term cultural tradition is formed; basically there is a slight difference between the two. Culture is a way of life that develops and is shared by a group of people and is passed down from generation to generation. Culture is formed from many complex elements, including religious and political systems, customs, languages, tools, clothing, buildings, and works of art. The differentiating basis between tradition and culture is, if a certain tradition is not carried out at a time, then there will be an outbreak problem in the usual place where the

tradition is carried out; however culture is not necessarily so. In practice tradition and culture become one as they support each other.

In this study, the unification of the two main characters of the novel in a community institution is termed hybrid marriage because the couple comes from different cultural backgrounds. By commitment to support, love and protect each other, at first they can live happily and in peace as well as good financial standing. However, along with the course of their household life, a new problem arises, namely the pressure of cultural tradition norms conveyed by Minangkabau community leaders to Leman that he must marry a Minang woman so that his cultural status is not lost. Leman who is also a selfish person, forgets the history of his life in Deli and finally yields to the norms of the cultural tradition.

#### 4.1. Norms of cultural tradition

Minangkabau ethnic is mostly fond of migrating. They are hard fighters who are not afraid to touch new areas for survival. When they meet unknown people, their minds will certainly open up. This makes Minang people of today unaffected by the paradigm of mixed marriages as they know that mixed marriages in not prohibited in religion as long as the marriage is established on the same faith. But the conservatives mixed marriages are harassment for the cultural traditions.

Significant norms of cultural tradition in Minangkabau society can be seen in the procedure of marriage. A Minang man must marry a Minang woman because the matrilineal law is applied to Minang customs. The child will inherit his mother's line. If the mother is non-Minang, then her child does not have an ethnic line, and no one continues the the line, because the line of the father will not be inherited to the child. So according to the Minang custom, if a Minang man is married to a non-Minang woman, he obscures the lineage of a child in the cultural tradition. Traditionally a child cannot be accepted in Minangkabau realm because there is no Minang lineage. But the problem will not be complex if Minang woman marry non-Minang man.

The following data show how the norms of cultural tradition influence, the male main character, Leman.

According to the customs of the Minangkabau, the one who holds the household is the wife. Her husband is only "Sumanda", meaning, a man coming to the house as an outsider, being taken by the customs. Children born from the marriage do not enter the clan of the father but that of the mother. Even though the marriage has been going on for a long time or those tied to

the marriage go to other regions, the wife's position is not in the husband's power, but still in the mother's protection from the wife and if the wife lives in difficulties in another region, the mother can bring his daughter home letting her husband leave behind. (Hamka, 1982: 24)

This shows that the Minangkabau cultural norms favor the women or in other words, Minang community carry out the matrilineal concept. In Minang customs and culture, love and respect towards women should always live in the souls of men as the cultural norms establish genealogies taking the lineage of the mother, termed the matrilineal system. This matrilineal system is difficult to refute because this is a proposition that has lived, grown and developed in Minangkabau. This then makes Minang women unique and distinctive.

Minangkabau cultural norms emphasize that women have a high degree. Important and significant rights are obtained by women, those are concerned with material and moral rights. For the Minang community, mother is termed *Bundo Kanduang*. The presence of a woman in a family is very important because as already stated, in matrilineal kinship the line of harmony follows the mother's lineage. If a descendant is of no female, it can be stated that the family line is cut off. Thus it is clearly illustrated that *Leman* cannot take actions that are contrary to cultural norms.

*Poniam* is not from Minang tribe, so if *Leman* continues to ignore the demands of people in his village, to remarry a Minang woman, then he can lose his cultural status and this can have a bad impact in the future. He will not be recognized by his relatives as well as his children later, even though until now he has no child with *Poniam*; then the only thing that must be done is to remarry a Minang woman.

The next data also show how *Leman* must submit to Minang cultural norms.

"We also don't want you to divorce her, because her way of speaking to us is very beautiful and polite. But there is also something that must be considered. If we are married to people who are not our village people, it is very difficult, the difficulty lies in the future". answered the women. "And if you bring her to the village in your old days, where will you leave her and where will she take you? You could make her a house, but there is no land for her. Our land is narrow, our rice fields have turned to housing areas, because there is not enough land. After all according to the message of the elders, if a person from another clan is put into our land, the person would be staying for good and our own tribe would be extinct. If you remain staying with her outside there,

you will lose contact with us and you will have no more cultural standing; this is the thing we are struggling for.” (Hamka, 1982: 51)

The data show that Leman has no choice but to marry a Minang woman. All forms of causation have been conveyed by people in their villages; they feel concerned about Leman’s condition. They show deep sympathy with Leman and his wife because the final path to be taken is divorce and all this has to be done for the good of Leman and relatives and to maintain the customs they have lived from time to time.

## 4.2. Self-centeredness

Humans are social beings. As social beings, humans do not only rely on their own strength, but need other human beings in certain ways. Humans cannot achieve what they want by themselves. Humans cannot realize individuality, except through the medium of social life and the views of those around them. Through the cycle of events in human life, self-centeredness has become an ordinary phenomenon. Giving priority to oneself and always thinking of personal safety is a feature of self-centeredness.

Apart from the existence of the cultural norms that Leman cannot avoid, Leman himself basically has got a self-centeredness, and this can be seen from the following data.

Leman never includes his wife in his business affairs. He never tells his wife about the benefits or losses he experiences in his business. He feels confident in his own-self, with the potential he has, so that he does not realize that he has shown self-centeredness. He actually does not have enough capital to trade, because he has spent most of the money on wedding expenses. So over time the business slackens and he enters into a critical time, and he still does not want to tell his wife. (Hamka, 1982: 27)

Self-centeredness is a bad attitude and if left uncontrolled will grow into pride. Generally selfish people are arrogant; not caring about the environment or the people around them. Likewise with Leman who feels that he does not need anyone including his wife. He has shown his arrogance and pride on his self-centeredness by his failure in the business field.

The next self-centeredness is shown through the following data.

”How?” asked Bagindo Kayo too.

”It’s a pity..... the letter has been sent to grant the request of the family and relatives in the homeland.” Bagindo Kayo was surprised to hear that.

”Have you sent the letter for a long time?”



"I think it has arrived in the village," Lemman answered

"If your heart is reluctant to take another wife, that's a simple case, as the rope between Medan and Minangkabau has not been cut off by the wind, "said Bagindo Kayo as well. (Hamka, 1982: 64)

The conversation between Lemman and Bagindo Kayo shows that Lemman has significant self-centeredness. He does not tell anyone, including his wife, that he has decided to be willing to remarry a Minang woman in his hometown. He always feels that all the decisions he makes are the best so he does not need to consult anyone. He forgets that Poniem, his wife has sacrificed a lot for him. He also forgets that Poniem has made him a prosperous man; but all of Poniem's goodness is forgotten because of his self-centeredness.

The following data then show how Lemman in his self-centeredness drives Poniem away from his house.

Then you're here, I don't like you anymore. "...If you are not happy anymore, you can simply throw me away", said Poniem..."You go away from here! you are Javanese! You can join the Javanese, you can go back to the plantation company! I never think or regard you anymore. Get out of here, from now on I drop you three strikes of divorce once. Go away! " (Hamka, 1982: 107)

Lemman really has lost a heart. He drives Poniem out of his house, a woman who has helped him a lot, a woman who has elevated him, a woman who truly loves and respects him. Everything has gone apart. Lemman appears as a terrible monster. He also insults Poniem with the word "Javaness", a racial abuse.

When he first gets acquainted in his loving relationship with Poniem, Lemman never questions ethnicity. He does not care about Poniem originating from Java. Everything is going well and beautifully. He seems to love Poniem so much; termed "seems" as now Lemman has changed completely, from a lover to a hater. All of this is certainly triggered by his self-centeredness. He wants to be comfortable and safe, and from the provisions of cultural norms, he feels that he will get into trouble in the future if he stays with Poniem, so to obtain safety in his future, he dumps Poniem.

## 5. Conclusion

Merantau Ke Deli is a story that raises inter-ethnic issues in Indonesia. The emergence of a new culture can be caused by intercultural contact. This intercultural contact is sometimes accepted by a culture and not infrequently also rejected.

The life of the people told by Hamka is a fact of human products and construction, reality, events, and experiences that are complex, always flowing, and formulated by the treasures of human thought through motion, action or language. So it cannot be denied that literary works are a medium for conveying ideas, thoughts, criticism, entertainment, messages and phenomena caught by the senses of the author.

Hamka highlights a small part of the life phenomena of the Deli community and at the same time criticizes the chauvinistic and egocentric attitude of the Minangkabau people. The storyline is centered on two main characters in the novel: Leman, the Minang nomad living as a trader and Poniem, a Javanese woman working in Deli plantation. The cultural differences between the two people do not become a barrier for them to live a married life.

Leman's decision to remarry Minang woman because of the pressure of the elders, and family in his homeland, causes new problems in his household. Marrying a woman outside the clan changes the custom structure because a child born from the marriage will not inherit anything from the family and Leman, also driven by his self-centeredness finally decides to attend the customary tradition.

By this it is clear that the norms of cultural tradition and self-centeredness are the causing factors of the hybrid marriage breakdown between the two main characters of the novel. Customary provisions cannot be changed and must be obeyed. Cultural ties in a person affect how he expresses himself in society. Likewise with Leman, he could not possibly leave the Minangkabau culture. The attitude towards the adopted culture forces Leman to choose one of the women he has married and finally Leman and Poniem get divorced.

## References

- [1] Alexander, James. (2016). A Systematic Theory of Tradition. *Journal of the Philosophy of History*. No. 10. Retrieved from <http://yoksis.bilkent.edu.tr/pdf/files/7966.pdf> on 27 April 2019.
- [2] Ariani, Iva. (2015). Nilai Filosofis Budaya Matrilineal di Minangkabau (Relevansinya bagi Pengembangan Hak-hak Perempuan di Indonesia). *Jurnal Filsafat*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Februari 2015. Retrieved from <https://docplayer.info/49044656-Vol-25-no-1-februari-2015-p-issn-jurnal-filsafat-universitas-gadjah-mada-yogyakarta.html> on 10 March 2019.
- [3] Asmaniar. (2018). Perkawinan Adat Minangkabau. *Binamulia Hukum*. Vol. 7 No. 2, Desember 2018. Retrieved from <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/>

275410-perkawinan-adat-minangkabau-f56c5427.pdf on 10 March 2019.

- [4] Dambrun, Michael, et.al. (2011). Self-Centeredness and Selflessness: A Theory of Self-Based Psychological Functioning and Its Consequences for Happiness. ResearchGate. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232521833\\_Self-Centeredness\\_and\\_Selflessness\\_A\\_Theory\\_of\\_Self-Based\\_Psychological\\_Functioning\\_and\\_Its\\_Consequences\\_for\\_Happiness](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232521833_Self-Centeredness_and_Selflessness_A_Theory_of_Self-Based_Psychological_Functioning_and_Its_Consequences_for_Happiness) on 12 April 2019
- [5] Gomasasca, Paulo. (2013). Multiculturalism of Hybridisation? Culturing Mixing and Politics. *DIVERSITIES*. Vol. 15, No. 2. Retrieved from [www.unesco.org/shs/diversities/vol15/issue2/art6](http://www.unesco.org/shs/diversities/vol15/issue2/art6) on 11 April 2019
- [6] Hamka. (1982). *Merantau ke Deli*. 8th Edition. Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas.
- [7] Jawich, Rihan. (2015). Hybridity and Multi-Culturalism in Zadie Smith's White Teeth. Philosophische Fakultät der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/12932058/Hybridity\\_and\\_MultiCulturalism\\_in\\_Zadie\\_Smiths\\_White\\_Teeth](https://www.academia.edu/12932058/Hybridity_and_MultiCulturalism_in_Zadie_Smiths_White_Teeth) on 12 May 2019.
- [8] Pardi and Rabiatal Adawiyah Siregar. (2018). "Nganggung as a Local Wisdom in Andrea Hirata's Dwiologi Padang Bulan" in *The 1st Annual International Conference on Language and Literature, KnE Social Sciences*, pages 653–658. DOI 10.18502/kss.v3i4.1974
- [9] Tien, David. W. (2012). Oneness and Self-centeredness in the Moral psychology of Wang yangming. *Journal of Religious Ethics, Inc. JRE*. 40.1:52–71. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/3148192.pdf> on 15 March 2019.
- [10] Yadgar, Yaacov. (2013). Tradition. *ReserachGate*. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258162679\\_Tradition](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258162679_Tradition) on 15 May 2019.