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The Construction of Toraja Cultural Identity in the Short Story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* by Faisal Odang

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to analyze the construction of Torajan cultural identity in Faisal Odang's short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon*. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with the short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* as the material object and the construction of Torajan cultural identity through cultural representation as the formal object. Stuart Hall's theory of representation and cultural identity serves as the primary analytical framework, while Koentjaraningrat's seven universal elements of culture are employed as an initial categorization tool for the cultural data found in the short story. The data consist of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, narratives, character actions, and events that represent Torajan culture. The data were collected through reading and note-taking techniques and analyzed interpretively. The findings indicate that Torajan cultural identity in the short story is constructed through four main forms: social-hierarchical identity, ritual identity, ecological-spiritual identity, and negotiated identity. Social-hierarchical identity is represented through the divisions of Tokapua, Tomakaka, and Tobuda, as well as marriage and burial practices. Ritual identity is constructed through Rampanan Kapa, Rambu Solo, and pemali practices. Ecological-spiritual identity is constructed through the relationship between humans, the Tarra tree, the body, the mother, death, and the afterlife. Meanwhile, negotiated identity emerges through the encounter between sacred cultural values and economic and tourism interests, particularly in the commodification of corpses. Thus, Torajan cultural identity in the short story is not merely presented as a collection of cultural elements but as a construction of meaning continuously shaped through social relations, rituals, nature, spirituality, and negotiations between cultural values and social change.

Keywords: construction, Toraja cultural identity, short story

Kontruksi Identitas Budaya Toraja dalam Cerpen *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* Karya Faisal Odang

ABSTRAK
Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis konstruksi identitas budaya Toraja dalam cerpen *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* karya Faisal Odang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan objek material berupa cerpen *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* dan objek formal berupa konstruksi identitas budaya Toraja melalui representasi kebudayaan dalam teks. Teori representasi dan identitas budaya Stuart Hall digunakan sebagai landasan analisis utama, sedangkan tujuh unsur kebudayaan universal Koentjaraningrat digunakan sebagai perangkat kategorisasi awal terhadap data budaya yang ditemukan dalam cerpen. Data penelitian berupa kata, frasa, kalimat, dialog, narasi, tindakan tokoh, serta peristiwa yang merepresentasikan kebudayaan Toraja, yang dikumpulkan melalui teknik baca-catat dan dianalisis secara interpretatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa identitas budaya Toraja dalam cerpen dikonstruksi melalui empat bentuk utama, yaitu identitas sosial-hierarkis, identitas ritual, identitas ekologis-spiritual, dan identitas yang dinegosiasikan. Identitas sosial-hierarkis direpresentasikan melalui pembagian Tokapua, Tomakaka, dan Tobuda serta praktik perkawinan dan pemakaman. Identitas ritual dibangun melalui praktik Rampanan Kapa, Rambu Solo, dan aturan pemali. Identitas ekologis-spiritual dikonstruksi melalui relasi antara manusia, pohon Tarra, tubuh, ibu, kematian, dan kehidupan setelah kematian. Sementara itu, identitas yang dinegosiasikan tampak melalui perjumpaan nilai sakral dengan kepentingan ekonomi dan pariwisata dalam praktik penjualan jenazah. Dengan demikian, identitas budaya Toraja dalam cerpen tidak hanya tampil sebagai kumpulan unsur kebudayaan, tetapi juga sebagai konstruksi makna yang terus dibentuk melalui relasi sosial, ritual, alam, spiritualitas, serta negosiasi antara nilai budaya dan perubahan sosial.

Kata kunci: konstruksi, identitas budaya, cerpen

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INTRODUCTION

Culture is not merely a collection of social practices, traditions, or customs passed down through generations; rather, it serves as a space for a group to negotiate and shape its collective identity. Consequently, cultural identity is not fixed; it is continuously produced and constructed through social practices, language, and values, and is represented through history (Hall, 1990:34-55). In this context, examining cultural identity is significant because identity does not simply identify a group—it also reveals how that group is represented and how meanings concerning that group are formed.

Representation is not merely the transposition of reality into a text; it is a practice of meaning-making that allows something to be recognized and understood through a specific system of representation (Hall, 1997:23-30). Therefore, culture as it appears in literary works should be understood as the result of selection and narrative construction, rather than as a direct copy of social reality. In this regard, the short story serves as a literary form that enables cultural experience to be presented through events that are concise yet dense with symbols and meaning.

One literary work that explores cultural identity is the short story "Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon" ("In the Body of the Tarra, Within the Womb of the Tree") by Faisal Odang. The story presents the cultural system of the Toraja people through characters named Runduma and Lola Toding, who, following their deaths, find themselves within a narrative space linked to the afterlife. The presence of the Tarra tree is a crucial element in the story, as it illustrates the interconnectedness between the human body, the natural world, the family, and beliefs surrounding death. The placement of an infant's body within a Tarra tree does not merely signify a burial practice; it reveals a specific conception regarding the relationship between humanity, nature, and the afterlife (Odang 2014).

This short story also illustrates the interplay between sacred cultural practices and economic or tourism-related interests. It demonstrates that culture is not necessarily static or entirely immune to change. On the contrary, the story highlights the potential for the negotiation of meaning when cultural practices encounter interests originating from outside the community. Through the lens of Stuart Hall's perspective, this tension can be understood as part of a process of "becoming"—a continuous development of identity shaped by change, encounters, and the negotiation of meaning.

Furthermore, Hall explains that cultural identity is not a finished product merely expressed through cultural practices; rather, it is an ongoing process of "becoming," formed through representation (Hall 1990). Thus, cultural identity is not solely defined by a group's shared history or experiences, but also by how that group is represented through language, symbols, cultural practices, narratives, and various other forms of meaning-making. In literary studies, this perspective is significant because literary works can serve as a space of representation where cultural identity is constructed, negotiated, and even contested.

Research on the short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon*has previously been conducted using various approaches. A study by Rakhmayanti, Pritanova, and Damayantie (2024) explores the meaning of death within Toraja society as depicted in the story, examining the symbolism of the *tarra* tree, the burial spaces for infants, and the concepts surrounding death among the Toraja people. Another study, by Ilma and Bakthawar (2020), investigates funeral rites across three selected short stories published by Kompas, focusing on the significance of these rituals within the framework of Indonesian local cultures. Furthermore, Widianti (2017) analyzes the short story through the lens of literary ecology, emphasizing the interconnectedness between humans, nature, custom, and belief. Thus, while *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* has already been examined from the perspectives of literary ecology and the significance of funeral rites, there is, as yet, no

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research that specifically focuses on the construction of Toraja cultural identity through the theoretical framework of Stuart Hall.

The research question is: how is Toraja cultural identity constructed in the short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon*? Consequently, this study aims to uncover how Toraja cultural identity is constructed through cultural representations within the narrative. This research differs from previous studies in its analytical focus; rather than merely examining the meaning of funeral rites or treating elements of Toraja culture as a static inventory, this study views them as part of a process of meaning production concerning cultural identity. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the construction of Toraja cultural identity in the short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* by Faisal Odang, utilizing Stuart Hall's perspectives on cultural identity and representation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method. A qualitative approach is used because the research focuses on the interpretation of meanings contained within the short story. Qualitative research is employed to examine data within its natural context and to understand the meanings constructed through the interplay between data, context, and theoretical perspectives (Creswell and Poth 2013).

The material object of this study is the short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* by Faisal Odang. This short story serves as the primary data source, as it presents various representations of the life and culture of the Toraja people. The formal object of the study is the construction of Toraja cultural identity, as shaped through the cultural representations within the narrative. The primary data source is the short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* by Faisal Odang; the primary data consist of segments of the text that illustrate Toraja cultural representations. Secondary data sources include books, scholarly journal articles, findings from previous research, and other relevant academic materials. These secondary sources are used to strengthen the conceptual framework and provide context for the data interpretation process.

Data collection was carried out using a "read-and-note" technique. This method involves obtaining research data through careful, repeated, and systematic reading of the text, followed by documenting the specific segments that align with the research focus (Endraswara 2013). The first stage involves a comprehensive reading of the short story to gain an understanding of its plot, characters, setting, conflicts, and the cultural context established within the narrative. The second stage consists of repeated readings to identify portions of the text that contain representations of Toraja culture. Relevant data are then recorded and categorized based on the specific forms of cultural representation identified.

Data analysis was conducted in stages, utilizing Stuart Hall's framework as the primary lens for interpreting the representation and construction of cultural identity, while Koentjaraningrat's concepts of cultural elements served as an initial categorization tool. The first stage involved the identification of cultural data; all information pertaining to Toraja culture was extracted from the short story. This data was then classified according to Koentjaraningrat's cultural categories to determine the specific cultural forms represented within the narrative. Subsequently, an analysis of representation was performed, applying Stuart Hall's concepts to examine how these cultural elements acquire meaning through language and narrative. This was followed by an analysis of identity construction, drawing upon Stuart Hall's understanding of identity as something constructed through representation—a process of both "being" and "becoming." The "being" perspective was used to examine the representation of shared values, practices, and cultural traits that serve as markers of Toraja identity, while the "becoming" perspective was employed to explore the negotiations and encounters that render cultural identity fluid rather than fixed.

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FINDINGS

1. Construction of Socio-Hierarchical Identity

The construction of a socio-hierarchical identity in the short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* is evidenced by the mention and differentiation of social statuses within Toraja society—namely Tokapua, Tomakaka, and Tobuda. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"I and the other children of Indo also apologize; as you know, we are merely Tomakaka—some of us are even Tobuda—so we hardly have the audacity to overstep our bounds before the noble class to which you belong." In the short story, the identity of the Tokapua (nobility) is also manifested through marital relations and the execution of the rampanan kapa (wedding ceremony), as evidenced by the following data:

"Your father, a Tokapua—much like your mother—naturally required that the rampanan kapa be held in a lavish manner at their tongkonan (traditional ancestral house)."

The status of the Tokapua is further demonstrated through the obligations surrounding marriage, as seen in the following excerpt:

"As a member of the nobility, your father was required to provide twelve adult buffaloes to marry your mother."

Social identity is also linked to how individuals of Tokapua descent are treated after death, as indicated by the following data:

"I suspected as much—you are of Tokapua lineage. Your final resting place must be situated in a high location."

2. Construction of Ritual Identity

The construction of ritual identity in the short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* is revealed through ceremonial practices—specifically the slaughter of animals—as well as regulations governing marriage. This is illustrated in the following data:

"Dozens of buffaloes will be slaughtered; there will surely be a great many pigs, too."

Beyond ceremonial practices, ritual identity is also expressed through the rules concerning the conduct of men and women prior to marriage, as shown in the following excerpt:

"Your parents were caught in an intimate act—lying atop one another—in the thicket behind the tongkonan before they were officially married."

3. Construction of Ecological-Spiritual Identity

The construction of an ecological-spiritual identity in the short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* is presented through the interconnectedness of the body, the mother (indo), the passiliran (burial tree), and the existence of the spirit. This is evidenced by the following data:

"From here, between heaven and the passiliran, my spirit hangs in uncertainty—for my body is no longer one with my indo."

4. Construction of Negotiated Identity

The construction of a negotiated identity in the short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* is presented through the act of turning a human corpse into an object of economic transaction with tourists. This is evidenced by the following data:

"He sold it for hundreds of millions of rupiah to the tourist he had been accompanying the day before."

DISCUSSION

Construction of Social-Hierarchical Identity

In the short story, Torajan cultural identity is primarily constructed through genealogical ties and social structure. The story introduces three social groups: Tokapua, Tomakaka, and Tobuda. The Tokapua are represented as the nobility or the upper class, the Tomakaka as the middle group, and the Tobuda as occupying a lower social position. This stratification serves as more than just information regarding the structure of society; it shapes relationships between characters, influences marriage, dictates social obligations, and even determines how the deceased are treated.

One such representation is seen in the relationship between Runduma and Lola Toding.

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Lola acknowledges Runduma's social standing as a descendant of the Tokapua and positions herself as belonging to a lower social group. This is reflected in Lola's statement:

"I, along with the other children of the indo, offer our apologies; as you know, we are merely Tomakaka—some of us are even Tobuda—and we lack the audacity to overstep our bounds before someone of your noble status."

This excerpt demonstrates that a character's social identity is determined not only by their individual self but also by their genealogical position. The terms Tokapua, Tomakaka, and Tobuda establish social boundaries that distinguish one group from another. From the perspective of Stuart Hall, identity is always linked to the process of marking differences. The identity of "Tokapua" acquires meaning not merely through the possession of specific traits, but also through its positioning in relation to the Tomakaka and Tobuda groups.

Consequently, the cultural identity constructed within the short story is not a homogeneous Torajan identity. Instead, the story reveals that Torajan cultural identity possesses a multi-layered internal structure. Individuals may belong to Torajan society while occupying different social positions and having distinct experiences based on their genealogy. Thus, cultural identity operates simultaneously at both a collective and a differential level: there exists a shared identity as members of Torajan society, yet within this, there are distinctions based on social status and lineage. This construction of social identity is further evidenced in marriage practices. In the short story, Runduma's parents belong to the Tokapua group, and their marriage is depicted as one that must be celebrated lavishly at a tongkonan (traditional Torajan house). This is illustrated by the following excerpt:

"Your father is Tokapua, as is your mother; naturally, their rampanan kapa (wedding ceremony) had to be held in a grand manner at their tongkonan."

Marriage is represented not merely as a personal relationship between a man and a woman, but also as a social practice that reveals an individual's position within the social structure. The obligation to provide twelve adult water buffaloes for the marriage of Runduma's parents further reinforces the link between marriage, social status, and material symbols.

"As a member of the nobility, your father was required to pay twelve adult water buffaloes to marry your mother."

In this context, water buffaloes are not simply animals; they serve as markers of social status and economic capacity. The practice of marriage functions as a space where social identity is displayed and reproduced. The status of the Tokapua (nobility) is affirmed through the nature of the wedding feast, the venue where it is held, and the number of water buffaloes involved. A similar dynamic appears in the representation of funerals. Lola identifies Runduma as a descendant of the Tokapua based on the location of his grave:

"I suspected as much—you are a descendant of the Tokapua. Your grave must be placed in a high, elevated spot."

This excerpt illustrates that social structure extends even into the realm of death. The placement of a grave serves as a signifier that communicates an individual's social identity. Thus, the short story constructs a representation in which genealogical identity not only shapes one's social life but also remains inherent even after death.

Based on these findings, the construction of a hierarchical social identity in the short story is established through three primary practices: marriage, relations between social groups, and funeral rites. Together, these demonstrate that Torajan cultural identity, as depicted in the story, possesses an internal structure. Stuart Hall's concept of "being" helps us understand how history, genealogy, and shared social practices form the foundation of identity, while his concept of "becoming" suggests that this identity is continuously produced through social practices enacted and recognized by the community.

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The Construction of Ritual Identity

Torajan cultural identity is also constructed through the representation of rituals. In the short story, rituals manifest primarily through the practices surrounding marriage and death. Rituals serve as more than just a cultural backdrop; they function as mechanisms that connect individuals to their families, communities, customs, and value systems. One such prominent ritual is Rambu Solo. The short story describes Rambu Solo as a funeral ceremony centered on paying respect to the deceased. The family of Allo Dopang, for instance, is depicted as preparing to hold a Rambu Solo ceremony for a family member who has passed away—a process that entails the slaughter of a large number of buffalo and pigs.

"Dozens of buffalo will be slaughtered; there will surely be many pigs, too."

This representation indicates that, within the short story, death is not framed merely as an individual event; rather, it becomes a social occurrence that involves both family and community. The performance of the ritual serves as a means to express respect, sustain social ties, and affirm the enduring presence of custom. Viewed through the lens of Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity, such ritual practices can be understood as a form of representation that fosters a sense of togetherness. Rituals provide signs that are recognizable to the community, linking individuals to a shared history and culture. Thus, cultural identity does not exist solely within the individual mind; it is also manifested through social practices carried out collectively.

In addition to Rambu Solo, the short story depicts Rampanan Kapa as a marriage practice. As previously discussed, marriage is linked to genealogy, social status, the tongkonan (traditional ancestral house), and water buffaloes. This indicates that marriage rituals serve as a space for the reproduction of social identity. Through these rituals, an individual's position within society—as well as the relationships between different groups—is solidified. Rituals are also tied to norms and taboos. The short story introduces the concept of pemali mapangngan buni—a prohibition against sexual relations prior to marriage. In the narrative, Runduma's parents are described as having violated this norm:

"Your parents were caught in the act—on top of one another—in the bushes behind the tongkonan before they were officially married."

This incident demonstrates that adat (customary law) in the short story functions as a normative system. Cultural identity is constructed not only through actions deemed correct but also through the boundaries that define what constitutes a violation of norms. In other words, cultural identity is formed by distinguishing between behaviors that are accepted and those that are rejected within a given cultural system. In this context, rituals and norms serve as mechanisms for identity formation, as both dictate how an individual relates to their community. Rambu Solo, Rampanan Kapa, and pemali mapangngan buni form an interconnected web of meaning, revealing that Torajan identity is expressed through respect for adat, kinship ties, and adherence to social norms.

The Construction of Ecological-Spiritual Identity

One of the most distinctive constructions of identity in the short story lies in the relationship between humans, the body, the Tarra tree, the mother, and the afterlife. This connection suggests that nature, within the story, does not merely serve as a backdrop for human life; rather, it holds a symbolic and spiritual significance. This is most evident in the Passiliran practice. In the story, the Tarra tree serves as a burial site for infants who have not yet developed teeth. Thus, the tree is not represented merely as an element of the natural world, but as a space that bridges human life and death. This concept takes on a more complex form when Lola Toding describes her state after her body has been placed in the pasiliran (burial tree). She states:

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"From here, between heaven and the pasiliran, my spirit hangs in uncertainty—for my body is no longer united with the indo (mother)."

This excerpt reveals a symbolic connection between the body, the mother, the tree, and the spiritual realm. An infant's body is not perceived as an autonomous, standalone entity; rather, it maintains a connection to the mother through the medium of the Tarra tree—a connection that, in turn, determines the status of the spirit after death. From the perspective of Stuart Hall, such a representation generates specific meanings regarding the relationship between a society and the natural world. Nature is not constructed as something existing entirely outside of humanity; instead, it is integrated into the human system of ascribing meaning to life and death. The Tarra tree acquires cultural significance precisely because it is situated within a web of relationships involving the human body, the family, the mother, and spirituality. Consequently, the cultural identity that emerges in this short story can be termed an "ecological-spiritual identity"—an identity forged through the interplay between human beings, the natural environment, and beliefs concerning the spiritual realm. Nature becomes an integral part of the cultural system, while that same system, in turn, imbues nature with specific meaning. This relationship demonstrates that the cultural identity presented in the story is constructed upon a particular worldview regarding humanity's place within nature. Humans are not positioned as entirely separate from the natural world; rather, they exist within a symbolic and spiritual relationship with it. Thus, the representation of the Tarra tree serves as a crucial element in the formation of the Torajan identity as depicted in the text.

Negotiated Identity Construction

The construction of cultural identity in the short story does not stop at the representation of inherited traditions. It also reveals an encounter between cultural values and the interests of the economy and tourism. This encounter renders cultural identity something that can be negotiated. This is illustrated in the story of Lola Toding, whose remains—reduced to bones—are removed from the pasiliran (burial site for infants) and sold by Runduma's father to tourists for hundreds of millions of rupiah. Lola describes the state of her spirit as follows:

"He sold them for hundreds of millions of rupiah to the tourist he had been accompanying just the day before."

This event creates a tension between two systems of meaning. On one hand, a body placed in the pasiliran holds spiritual significance, as it is integral to the connection between the infant, the mother, the natural world, and the afterlife. On the other hand, the body is transformed into an object with economic value when it is bought and sold for the sake of tourism. From the perspective of Stuart Hall, this tension is significant because cultural identity should not be understood as something entirely fixed or complete. Identity is always in a process of "becoming"—continuously shaped through shifting social conditions and encounters with various competing interests. In the short story, the intersection of death-related traditions and tourism demonstrates a shift in the status of a cultural object: something that once held sacred meaning acquires a new identity as a commodity.

This negotiated construction of identity highlights a crucial distinction between identity as "being" and as "becoming." While "being" emphasizes the cultural experiences that form the foundation of a shared existence, "becoming" illustrates how identity is subject to constant change and negotiation. The short story presents both dimensions simultaneously: the pasiliran, customary practices, and beliefs represent cultural continuity, while the sale of the remains to tourists signifies an encounter with socio-economic conditions that give rise to entirely new meanings. Thus, the short story constructs Toraja identity not only through depictions of inherited traditions but also through the tensions between the sacred and the commodified, tradition and the economy, and

the local community and tourists. Within the text, cultural identity emerges as something fluid and subject to negotiation, rather than as a fixed or static entity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the short story *Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon* by Faisal Odang, Toraja cultural identity is constructed through four modes of representation: the socio-hierarchical, the ritualistic, the ecological-spiritual, and the negotiation of culture. Socio-hierarchical identity is manifested through the status-based divisions of Tokapua, Tomakaka, and Tobuda, which influence social relations, marriage, and funeral rites. Ritual identity is represented through practices such as Rampanan Kapa, Rambu Solo, and the pemali mapangngan buni taboo—all of which bind individuals to their customs and community. Meanwhile, ecological-spiritual identity is established through the Passiliran (tree-burial) tradition and the Tarra tree, which link humanity, the physical body, the mother, the natural world, death, and the afterlife.

Beyond representing the continuity of cultural values, the short story also illustrates the negotiation of identity when practices imbued with sacred meaning collide with economic and tourism-related interests—as evidenced, for instance, by the sale of human remains to tourists. Viewed through the lens of Stuart Hall's perspective, this demonstrates that cultural identity is not fixed; rather, it is constantly shaped through change and the negotiation of meaning—a process of "becoming." Consequently, the short story does more than merely use Toraja culture as a narrative backdrop; it serves as a space of representation that constructs, preserves, and negotiates cultural identity through social relations, rituals, the natural world, spirituality, and economic interests.

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