



Prestige, *Malu*, and *Adat*: Reading Narrative Silence in Ismet Fanany's *Hadiah dari Rantau*

Yulhenli Thabran¹, Imelda²

¹Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia

²Balai Bahasa Riau, Riau, Indonesia

Correspondence email: yulhenli@unja.ac.id, meldakia03@gmail.com

Article Info

Submitted: 22nd January 2026

Revised: 25th March 2026

Accepted: 30th July 2026

Publish: 30th September 2026

Keywords: *adat*; *malu*;
Minangkabau culture;
narrative silence; *rantau*;
reader-response theory

Corresponding Author:
Yulhenli Thabran,
email: yulhenli@unja.ac.id

DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.24843/JH.2026.v30.i02.p03>

Abstract

This study aims to examine how narrative silence functions as a culturally productive interpretive strategy in Ismet Fanany's short story *Hadiah dari Rantau*. Drawing on reader-response theory, it explores how textual gaps invite readers to construct ethical meaning through culturally situated frameworks rather than explicit narration. This study employs a qualitative interpretive design using close textual analysis. It integrates Iser's concept of textual gaps and Fish's notion of interpretive communities, with interpretation grounded in Minangkabau cultural concepts of *rantau*, *malu*, and *adat*. The analysis identifies three interrelated silences: the moral ambiguity surrounding Samsir's overseas success, Khadijah's restrained response to moral threat as an enactment of *malu*, and the narrative resolution through Khadijah's marriage to Basir, which restores ethical order through *adat*. The study demonstrates that ethical meaning in the story emerges through readerly engagement with silence, contributing to reader-response criticism and Indonesian literary studies.

INTRODUCTION

The Minangkabau tradition of *merantau*—the practice of leaving one's homeland to pursue education, economic opportunity, or social prestige—has long occupied a central place in ethnographic, sociological, and literary discussions of West Sumatran society. Scholars have examined *merantau* as a mechanism for social mobility, a marker of masculine achievement, and a means of negotiating identity within a matrilineal system that restricts men's inheritance rights (Naim, 1971; Navis, 1984; Ahmad & Zulfidar, 2023). In literary contexts, *merantau* functions not only as a physical journey but also as a symbolic axis through which questions of honor, moral authority, and cultural continuity are negotiated. However, while its cultural significance has been widely acknowledged, less attention has been paid to how literary texts invite readers to construct its moral meanings through omission, ambiguity, and silence.

Ismet Fanany's short story *Hadiah dari Rantau* (A Gift from Afar) provides a productive site for examining this issue. The narrative centers on Samsir, a Minangkabau man returning from overseas with academic prestige, and Khadijah, whose restraint becomes the ethical pivot of the story. Although the plot appears straightforward—Samsir's elevated status, circulating rumors, the collapse of an

engagement, and Khadijah's eventual marriage to Basir—many of its most consequential moments remain undernarrated. Samsir's moral decline is conveyed through hearsay, Khadijah's emotional response through restraint, and the role of *adat* through implicit resolution. These silences are structurally significant, requiring readers to actively participate in constructing meaning.

Reader-response theory offers a useful framework for analyzing this dynamic. Rather than locating meaning solely within the text, it emphasizes the reader's role in negotiating ambiguity and filling textual gaps (Iser, 1978; Fish, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1994). Iser's concept of textual "gaps" highlights how indeterminacy invites inference, while Fish's notion of interpretive communities underscores the role of shared cultural frameworks in shaping interpretation. From this perspective, narrative silence functions not as absence but as a strategy that activates culturally informed reading practices.

In *Hadiah dari Rantau*, such interpretation is closely tied to Minangkabau cultural concepts. *Malu* (moral restraint), *adat* (customary law), and the prestige associated with *merantau* operate as shared knowledge that informs ethical judgment. As Navis (1984) notes, *malu* functions as a social mechanism regulating behavior and preserving collective honor, while *adat* provides a framework for restoring social balance. These values are rarely stated explicitly in the story; instead, they emerge through what is left unsaid—through Khadijah's silence, Samsir's diminishing credibility, and the understated resolution.

Existing scholarship on Indonesian literature has tended to prioritize thematic, sociological, or psychological approaches, often treating cultural values as stable content rather than as interpretive resources. Recent reader-response studies have foregrounded emotions, subjectivity, and empirical reader data (Ahmadi et al., 2024), but they often overlook how narrative form—particularly silence and indeterminacy—structures ethical interpretation prior to observable response. Similarly, studies of *merantau* in literary texts have focused on social consequences and ideological tensions (Allen, 2000; Asri, 2014), with limited attention to how narrative strategies shape readerly judgment.

This study addresses that gap by examining how *Hadiah dari Rantau* mobilizes narrative silence to guide culturally situated interpretation. Drawing on Iser's concept of textual gaps, Fish's interpretive communities, and contemporary reader-response theory (Tyson, 2023), the analysis focuses on three interrelated dimensions: the moral ambiguity surrounding Samsir's success, Khadijah's restraint as an enactment of *malu*, and the restorative function of *adat* in the narrative resolution. These silences are approached not as absences but as sites where meaning is co-constructed by text and reader.

At the same time, interpretation is not assumed to be uniform. Readers unfamiliar with Minangkabau cultural frameworks may interpret silence as passivity or indeterminacy rather than as ethical agency. This variation highlights the importance of interpretive communities in shaping meaning and reinforces the relevance of reader-response theory for culturally embedded narratives.

This study aims to (1) examine how narrative silence is constructed in *Hadiah dari Rantau*, (2) analyze how these silences invite readerly interpretation, and (3) explain how Minangkabau cultural concepts—*rantau*, *malu*, and *adat*—shape ethical meaning-making.

By integrating reader-response theory with Minangkabau cultural hermeneutics, this article contributes to Indonesian literary studies in two ways. First, it demonstrates

how the narrative critiques the assumption that *merantau*-based prestige guarantees moral legitimacy. Second, it shows how silence functions as a culturally specific ethical strategy, reinforcing values of *malu* and *adat* through restraint rather than explicit moralization.

METHOD AND THEORY

This study employs a qualitative interpretive design grounded in close textual analysis to examine how narrative silence functions as a culturally productive meaning-making strategy in Ismet Fanany's short story *Hadiah dari Rantau*. Such an approach is appropriate for literary inquiry that explores interpretive processes, ethical negotiation, and culturally embedded meaning rather than measurable variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The text is treated not as a repository of fixed meanings but as an interpretive structure that guides reader engagement.

The data consist of narrative passages, dialogue, and descriptive segments characterized by ambiguity, omission, or indirect representation. These were identified through iterative close reading to locate instances of narrative silence. The analysis proceeded in three stages: (1) identifying textual gaps and silences, (2) grouping them according to thematic and cultural functions, and (3) interpreting them using reader-response theory in conjunction with Minangkabau cultural frameworks. The findings are presented through analytically grounded discussion supported by textual evidence.

This study does not involve empirical data collection from actual readers. Instead, the "reader" is conceptualized as a theoretical construct informed by reader-response theory, particularly Iser's implied reader and Fish's interpretive communities. Interpretation is therefore examined as a culturally situated process structured by the text rather than as observable reader response.

The analysis focuses on how the narrative organizes readerly attention through omission, restraint, and indeterminacy. Accordingly, it does not prioritize authorial intention, biographical context, or historical reception, but examines how meaning emerges through the interaction between textual form and culturally informed reading practices.

Research Design and Analytical Procedure

The study adopts an interpretive textual analysis informed by reader-response criticism. The text was examined iteratively to identify moments where moral evaluation, emotional response, or narrative motivation is withheld or indirectly suggested. These moments are conceptualized as narrative silence—not as absence, but as a functional device that structures ethical interpretation through reader inference.

The analytical procedure involved three stages. First, segments marked by ambiguity, ellipsis, hearsay, or indirect representation were identified, with particular attention to key episodes involving Samsir, Khadijah, and the narrative resolution. Second, these silences were organized into three thematic clusters: prestige and moral ambiguity, restraint and *malu*, and restoration through *adat*. Third, each cluster was interpreted using reader-response theory alongside Minangkabau cultural frameworks to examine how ethical meaning is negotiated.

This procedure emphasizes analytical transparency, theoretical coherence, and sustained engagement with textual evidence (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Rather than producing a single authoritative interpretation, the analysis demonstrates how the text both constrains and enables culturally grounded reading.

Reader-Response and Reception Theory

The primary theoretical foundation of this study is reader-response theory, particularly the work of Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish. Iser's concept of textual gaps or "blanks" provides a central analytical tool: literary texts are structured to leave certain elements indeterminate, prompting readers to construct meaning through inference, anticipation, and retrospection (Iser, 1978). Meaning thus emerges through interaction between text and reader rather than residing exclusively in either.

This framework is especially relevant for analyzing narrative silence. Silences do not merely withhold information; they direct interpretive activity by prompting ethical judgment, emotional projection, and cultural inference. In *Hadiah dari Rantau*, gaps surrounding character motivation, moral evaluation, and narrative closure are integral to meaning-making rather than deficiencies to be resolved.

Fish's (1980) concept of interpretive communities complements this perspective by situating interpretation within shared social and cultural frameworks. Readers' judgments are shaped by communal norms, assumptions, and interpretive strategies, particularly in culturally embedded narratives where ethical meaning depends on familiarity with local values.

Reception aesthetics further informs this approach. Jauss's concept of the horizon of expectations emphasizes that interpretation is historically and culturally contingent, shaped by prior knowledge and literary conventions (Jauss, 1982). While this study does not undertake a diachronic reception analysis, the concept supports the view that narrative silence acquires ethical force within specific interpretive horizons.

Tyson's (2023) synthesis of reader-response theory provides an operational framework for applying these concepts in literary analysis. Her emphasis on culturally situated interpretation supports readings grounded in local ethical frameworks, provided they remain textually and theoretically accountable.

Cultural Framework and Interpretive Positioning

The analysis is grounded in Minangkabau cultural concepts—*rantau*, *malu*, and *adat*—which function as interpretive resources rather than external explanatory variables. These concepts represent shared ethical orientations likely to inform readerly inference. In Minangkabau society, *rantau* signifies prestige and social aspiration (Junus, 1984), *malu* regulates conduct through moral restraint (Navis, 1984), and *adat* structures social legitimacy and communal balance (Junus, 1984).

Integrating these concepts into reader-response analysis allows narrative silence to be understood as ethically meaningful rather than merely ambiguous. Interpretation is thus treated as culturally mediated, shaped by shared moral sensibilities while remaining open to variation. These concepts are approached as interpretive tendencies rather than fixed determinants.

This study adopts a culturally informed but critically reflexive stance. It does not assume a homogeneous readership or uniform interpretation. Instead, it examines how the text guides readers toward culturally recognizable readings while allowing for interpretive plurality. Narrative silence is therefore approached as a form of guided openness—interpretively productive yet ethically constrained.

Analytical Scope and Limitations

The analysis focuses on a single short story, enabling depth rather than breadth. While this limits generalizability, it allows for a detailed examination of how narrative form, cultural ethics, and readerly interpretation interact within a specific textual context. The findings are therefore offered as situated insights rather than universal claims.

Methodologically, the study adopts a text-centered reader-response approach rather than an empirical investigation. It does not rely on surveys or interviews but examines how the text structures possible interpretations through culturally recognizable values and expectations. The “reader” is thus a theoretical construct informed by interpretive communities.

The study is also limited in cultural scope. While it draws on key Minangkabau concepts, it does not claim to represent the full diversity of interpretive practices. These concepts are treated as resources activated within the narrative rather than as fixed cultural essences. Comparative research across Indonesian or Southeast Asian literary traditions could further illuminate the broader applicability of narrative silence as an ethical mechanism.

Finally, the analysis prioritizes literary ethics over historical reception or authorial intention. It does not reconstruct how the text was received or seek to establish the author’s personal views. Instead, it focuses on how ethical meaning emerges through readerly engagement with narrative form.

Methodological Reflection: Why Narrative Silence Requires a Reader-Response Approach

Narrative silence requires an analytical approach capable of accounting for meaning that emerges through absence, omission, and indeterminacy. Approaches that prioritize thematic content or sociological representation tend to treat silence as lack or underdevelopment, often relocating meaning outside the act of reading. In contrast, reader-response theory treats silence as a constitutive feature of literary communication.

From this perspective, meaning is not hidden behind the text but generated through reader engagement with what remains unresolved. This orientation is particularly suited to culturally embedded narratives such as *Hadiah dari Rantau*, where ethical values are implied rather than explicitly articulated. Concepts such as *malu* and *adat* function as tacit interpretive frameworks that guide inference.

Reader-response theory also provides a way to address interpretive plurality without reducing interpretation to relativism. By drawing on interpretive communities, the analysis acknowledges shared frameworks while allowing for variation in reading.

More broadly, this approach contributes to qualitative literary analysis in Indonesian studies by demonstrating how narrative silence can be examined as an object of inquiry. It shows how reader-response theory can be adapted to analyze culturally embedded meaning-making processes in texts that rely on restraint, ambiguity, and ethical indeterminacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the qualitative textual analysis by examining how narrative silence functions as a central meaning-making strategy in *Hadiah dari Rantau*. Guided by reader-response theory and grounded in Minangkabau cultural

frameworks, the analysis explores how ethical meaning emerges through what the narrative withholds rather than explicitly states.

In this study, the “reader” is conceptualized as a theoretical construct informed by Iser’s implied reader and Fish’s interpretive communities. Reader response is therefore understood as a culturally situated interpretive process structured by the text rather than as empirical data.

The discussion is organized into three thematic subsections: the moral ambiguity surrounding *rantau* and prestige, the enactment of *malu* through Khadijah’s restraint, and the restorative function of *adat* in the narrative resolution. Across these subsections, ethical interpretation emerges through the interaction of textual structure, cultural values, and readerly engagement.

Rantau, Prestige, and the Moral Gap of Returning Success

The opening movement of *Hadiah dari Rantau* establishes *rantau* as a powerful marker of prestige within the Minangkabau marriage economy. The narrator explicitly foregrounds this cultural logic:

“To them, it had one very clear purpose. It increased enormously the value and status of a young person who returned home to enter the marriage market” (Fanany, 2015, p. 13).

This statement functions not merely as exposition but as a framing device that directs readers to adopt local evaluative criteria rather than external sociological explanations. *Rantau* is thus constructed as a socially recognized form of symbolic capital within the village context.

Samsir’s return is similarly framed through prestige:

“Every family with a daughter of marriageable age was considering the possibility of making the young man with his doctorate from Harvard their son-in-law” (Fanany, 2015, pp. 13–16).

The narrative positions Samsir at the apex of a prestige hierarchy in which overseas education translates directly into marital desirability and social value. However, this elevation is immediately accompanied by a critical absence: the narrative offers no explicit moral evaluation of how *rantau* has shaped his character.

This absence is not incidental but structurally significant. By withholding moral commentary, the narrative creates a gap between visible achievement and ethical substance, requiring readers to infer whether Samsir’s success reflects genuine moral maturity or merely symbolic status. Prestige, in this context, remains socially legible but ethically indeterminate.

This tension is intensified by the narrative’s refusal to anchor Samsir’s success in any clear ethical transformation. Rather than affirming the value of *rantau*, the text destabilizes the assumption that modern education or global mobility automatically confer moral legitimacy. *Rantau* thus emerges not as an inherent virtue, but as a condition whose ethical value must be assessed relationally and retrospectively by the reader.

The narrative further develops this ambiguity through Samsir’s behavior. It first establishes his awareness of customary norms:

“He also knew it was the bride’s family that would have to approach him” (Fanany, 2015, p. 14).

Yet despite this awareness, he departs from convention:

“On the plane coming back from America, Samsir had decided to take matters into his own hands” (Fanany, 2015, p. 14).

This shift signals not merely individual initiative but a reorientation away from *adat*-based regulation toward personal autonomy. Crucially, the narrative refrains from explicitly judging this decision, leaving readers to determine whether Samsir’s actions represent cultural adaptation or ethical deviation.

This ambiguity becomes more explicit when Samsir justifies his behavior:

“You know, even people in the village date nowadays... We’re not doing anything we shouldn’t” (Fanany, 2015, p. 20).

His reasoning privileges individual intention over communal evaluation. However, the narrative does not validate this logic; instead, it presents it without commentary, thereby transferring the burden of ethical judgment to the reader.

This transfer becomes particularly significant in relation to *malu* and public perception. Khadijah’s concern is expressed in the line,

“But people might not see it like that” (Fanany, 2015, p. 20).

This statement foregrounds the communal dimension of moral evaluation. The contrast between Samsir’s confidence and Khadijah’s caution produces a moral gap structured around competing ethical frameworks: individual intention versus social perception. Readers must negotiate this tension through culturally informed judgment.

For readers familiar with Minangkabau norms, Samsir’s behavior may signal an erosion of *adat*-based restraint. For others, it may initially appear as a form of modern self-assurance. The narrative sustains this ambiguity, foregrounding the interpretive work required to evaluate *rantau* ethically.

The ambiguity is further intensified through indirect characterization. Rather than depicting Samsir’s ethical decline directly, the narrative relies on rumor:

“Everybody in Padang knows Samsir has a girlfriend in the city... Like he’s satisfying his desires before marrying Dijah” (Fanany, 2015, p. 21).

By presenting this information as hearsay rather than confirmed fact, the narrative withholds authoritative judgment. Readers are thus confronted with an interpretive dilemma: whether to accept communal rumor as moral evidence or to suspend judgment in the absence of verification.

From a reader-response perspective, this strategy structures interpretation rather than merely illustrating ambiguity. The text activates culturally situated reading practices by requiring readers to supply ethical evaluation where the narrative remains silent. Meaning thus emerges not from what is stated, but from how readers respond to what is withheld.

Importantly, the story does not reject *rantau* itself; instead, it critiques the uncritical association between prestige and moral legitimacy. The silence surrounding Samsir’s

inner transformation exposes a fundamental tension: achievement without ethical grounding remains unstable.

Through this first narrative silence, the text positions readers as active participants in moral evaluation. Samsir's return from *rantau* appears triumphant at the level of social recognition, yet remains ethically unresolved. Rather than resolving this tension, the narrative sustains it, compelling readers to negotiate the relationship between prestige, morality, and cultural expectation within the interpretive space created by silence.

Malu, Silence, and Khadijah's Moral Agency

If Samsir's return from *rantau* is marked by moral ambiguity, Khadijah's presence in the narrative is defined by silence. This silence should not be interpreted as passivity or narrative marginalization; rather, it functions as a culturally grounded form of moral agency. In *Hadiah dari Rantau*, ethical authority is expressed not through verbal assertion but through restraint, emotional discipline, and adherence to the ethical logic of *malu*. The narrative thus relocates agency from speech to silence, requiring readers to interpret restraint as meaningful action rather than absence.

From her first appearance, Khadijah is positioned as socially exposed within a tightly knit village environment. She is described as very young and embedded in a community where reputation circulates rapidly and publicly (Fanany, 2015, p. 17). The narrative constructs a social context in which moral perception carries heightened consequences, particularly for women whose conduct reflects not only individual character but also familial and communal honor.

This dynamic becomes evident when Samsir initiates private meetings and justifies them through modern dating norms. In contrast, Khadijah consistently foregrounds communal judgment:

“But people might not see it like that” (Fanany, 2015, p. 20).

This statement encapsulates the ethical logic of *malu* as a socially oriented principle. Khadijah's concern is not whether the relationship is privately justified, but whether it is publicly interpretable within communal norms. Her response reflects an ethical framework in which moral legitimacy is determined through social recognition rather than individual intention.

The narrative intensifies this ethical contrast through its treatment of focalization during the journey to Bukittinggi. Samsir's interior perspective is briefly foregrounded, emphasizing his desire and imaginative projection, while Khadijah's interior response remains unarticulated. This asymmetry functions not merely as a narrative technique but as an ethical positioning. By granting access to Samsir's desire while withholding Khadijah's internal state, the text creates an imbalance that readers are compelled to evaluate.

This imbalance becomes particularly significant in relation to the unrepresented Panorama incident. The narrative does not reconstruct what occurs; instead, it marks the aftermath through Khadijah's distress and silence. Such omission functions as a form of ethical containment. Rather than explicitly narrating potentially transgressive events, the text relies on readers to infer their gravity through culturally informed judgment. Silence here operates not as evasion but as a mode of representing what exceeds the boundaries of public articulation.

The contrast between Khadijah's silence and Samsir's verbal confidence further sharpens this ethical tension. Samsir asserts:

"We're not doing anything we shouldn't" (Fanany, 2015, p. 20).

His statement reflects a moral framework grounded in individual justification. In contrast, Khadijah offers neither counterargument nor accusation; her ethical stance is expressed through hesitation, withdrawal, and restraint. The absence of verbal response is itself meaningful, signaling adherence to a different ethical system in which restraint carries moral weight.

The narrative reinforces this interpretation through its treatment of rumor and social perception. When gossip about Samsir begins to circulate, Khadijah's response is not dramatized through confrontation or emotional disclosure. Instead, the text reports her withdrawal in understated terms (Fanany, 2015, p. 20). The omission of interior monologue and explicit reaction is structurally significant, requiring readers to interpret her silence as a response shaped by cultural expectations rather than psychological opacity.

Within Minangkabau ethical frameworks, this silence is intelligible as *malu*. Here, *malu* operates as a form of ethical self-regulation that does not require verbal defense. Khadijah's refusal to publicly justify herself or denounce Samsir can therefore be read as an act of moral discipline rather than submission. Silence functions as a culturally legitimate form of action that preserves dignity while avoiding social escalation.

At the same time, such an interpretation is not universally available. For readers outside Minangkabau cultural frameworks, Khadijah's silence may initially appear as passivity, suppression, or lack of agency. From this perspective, the absence of confrontation or self-expression may be read as a limitation imposed by social norms rather than as a form of ethical strength.

This divergence is central to the narrative's operation. The text does not resolve whether silence signifies agency or constraint; instead, it sustains this ambiguity, foregrounding the role of interpretive communities in shaping ethical meaning. Readers bring different assumptions about agency, gender, and morality, which in turn influence how silence is evaluated.

This interpretive openness is retrospectively addressed through the narrative resolution. When Khadijah later accepts Basir's proposal, the event is presented without emotional excess. The approval of her relatives is conveyed quietly, emphasizing communal legitimacy rather than individual desire. This resolution confirms the ethical validity of Khadijah's earlier restraint within a Minangkabau interpretive framework. Her silence is not erased but recontextualized as a form of moral continuity.

At the level of reader-response, this outcome invites retrospective reassessment. Readers who initially interpret Khadijah's silence as weakness may be prompted to reconsider it as ethical strength, while those who recognize its cultural significance find their interpretation reinforced. *Malu* thus emerges not as static cultural content but as a dynamic interpretive resource that gains meaning through reader engagement with narrative silence.

In this way, *Hadijah dari Rantau* challenges dominant narrative expectations that equate agency with speech and confrontation. The text offers an alternative ethical model in which silence operates as a form of action, inviting readers to engage with culturally specific modes of moral reasoning.

Adat, Narrative Resolution, and Ethical Restoration

The closing movement of *Hadiah dari Rantau* resolves its moral tensions not through confrontation, confession, or psychological transformation, but through the quiet reassertion of *adat*. The narrative shifts the locus of ethical resolution from individual redemption to communal realignment. Rather than presenting *adat* as a static cultural backdrop, the text enacts it as a lived moral system that regulates social order through recognition, restraint, and reintegration.

After Samsir's moral unreliability becomes evident, the narrative does not pursue his interior conflict or provide an explicit moral reckoning. Instead, his presence gradually recedes. This withdrawal functions not as narrative omission but as an ethical resolution in itself. By removing Samsir from the center of the story without explicit judgment, the text signals a loss of moral legitimacy without resorting to confrontation or punishment.

Such a strategy challenges conventional narrative expectations that equate justice with dramatic closure. Samsir is neither redeemed nor condemned; rather, he becomes narratively irrelevant. This quiet marginalization functions as a culturally specific form of ethical consequence in which social recognition—rather than verbal judgment—determines moral standing.

In contrast, ethical closure is achieved through Khadijah's reintegration into socially sanctioned structures. Her marriage to Basir is presented without emotional excess or narrative dramatization. Rather than highlighting conflict or resolution through explicit narration, the text shifts toward a quiet depiction of social continuity, allowing readers to infer the restoration of moral order through her reintegration into communal life (Fanany, 2015, p. 24). The understated nature of this resolution is itself meaningful: the absence of spectacle suggests that ethical restoration does not require narrative emphasis, as alignment with *adat* is sufficient to re-establish moral order.

Here, *adat* operates as a system of ethical calibration rather than juridical enforcement. Moral order is restored not through punishment or confession, but through the redistribution of social legitimacy. Individuals are repositioned within the communal structure according to their ethical alignment, with Samsir's disappearance and Khadijah's reintegration functioning as parallel outcomes within the same moral framework.

Basir's role further reinforces this logic. Unlike Samsir, he is not associated with symbolic markers of modern success or *rantau*-based prestige. His significance lies precisely in his ordinariness: he represents ethical stability, social embeddedness, and conformity to communal expectations. The narrative does not celebrate him; it normalizes him. This normalization functions as implicit evaluation, where ethical consonance with *adat* outweighs exceptional achievement.

From a reader-response perspective, this resolution restructures earlier interpretations. The ending prompts readers to reassess prior assumptions about prestige, agency, and moral value: Samsir's earlier status is retrospectively revealed as ethically unstable, while Khadijah's silence is reinterpreted as moral clarity. Meaning thus emerges through a process of revision, in which later narrative developments reshape earlier readerly judgments.

At the same time, this mode of resolution may be interpreted differently across cultural contexts. For readers familiar with Minangkabau ethical frameworks, the quiet restoration of order may signify moral completeness and social harmony. For those shaped by narrative traditions that privilege confrontation, explicit justice, or

psychological resolution, however, the absence of dramatic closure may appear unresolved or anticlimactic.

This divergence is not a limitation of the text but a central feature of its interpretive design. By refusing to provide overt moral judgment, the narrative foregrounds the role of cultural frameworks in determining what counts as resolution. Ethical closure is therefore not universally defined but emerges through culturally mediated expectations of justice, legitimacy, and social order.

This perspective also opens a comparative dimension. Similar narrative strategies can be observed in other Indonesian literary texts shaped by *adat*-based moral systems, where ethical resolution is achieved through reintegration rather than confrontation. *Hadiah dari Rantau* thus participates in a broader narrative logic in which silence and restraint function as mechanisms of ethical closure rather than signs of narrative incompleteness.

Importantly, the story does not depict *adat* as coercive or oppressive. Khadijah's future is framed not as sacrifice or loss, but as continuity. Here, *adat* operates as an internalized moral orientation rather than an externally imposed constraint. Ethical restoration occurs without visible resistance, suggesting that communal values are sustained through recognition and alignment rather than enforcement.

In this way, *Hadiah dari Rantau* redefines narrative justice. Rather than centering individual transformation or moral confrontation, it presents ethical resolution as a process of quiet realignment within communal structures. *Adat* thus functions not only as cultural content but as a narrative principle that shapes how stories resolve moral tension.

Ultimately, the story's conclusion affirms silence as a productive ethical mechanism. By withholding explicit judgment and relying on culturally grounded interpretive frameworks, the narrative invites readers to recognize that moral order can be restored without articulation. Ethical meaning emerges not through what is said, but through how social relations are reconfigured within the silent logic of *adat*.

Implications for Reader-Response Theory and Indonesian Literary Studies

The findings of this study have several implications for reader-response theory and for the study of Indonesian literature more broadly. At the theoretical level, the analysis demonstrates that narrative silence should be understood not merely as indeterminacy or stylistic economy, but as an active interpretive mechanism that structures ethical judgment. By showing how meaning in *Hadiah dari Rantau* emerges through what the text withholds, this study extends reader-response criticism beyond its traditional focus on reader affect or interpretive plurality toward a more ethically oriented account of readerly engagement.

Methodologically, the study illustrates how reader-response theory can be productively combined with local cultural hermeneutics. Rather than treating cultural values as thematic content, the analysis approaches *rantau*, *malu*, and *adat* as interpretive resources mobilized by readers when negotiating narrative gaps. This approach offers an alternative to sociological or representational readings of Indonesian literary texts, which often explain meaning by reference to cultural norms without attending to how narrative form activates interpretation. By foregrounding silence as a site of readerly labor, the study provides a replicable model for examining culturally embedded narratives in which ethical meaning is conveyed indirectly.

For Indonesian literary studies, the findings highlight the need to attend more closely to narrative strategies grounded in restraint, omission, and understatement. Many Indonesian texts, particularly those shaped by *adat*-based moral systems, do not articulate ethical positions through overt moralization or psychological exposition. Applying interpretive frameworks that privilege explicit statement or character interiority risks misreading such texts as underdeveloped or evasive. A reader-response approach attentive to silence allows critics to account for culturally specific modes of ethical communication without imposing external narrative expectations. In this context, narrative silence can be understood not as an isolated stylistic feature, but as part of a broader cultural logic of ethical communication within Indonesian literature.

More broadly, this study contributes to discussions of non-Western narrative closure. The resolution of *Hadiah dari Rantau* challenges dominant literary assumptions that moral justice must take the form of confrontation, confession, or transformation. Instead, ethical restoration is enacted through quiet realignment within communal structures. Recognizing this mode of closure has implications for comparative literary studies, where culturally grounded narrative logics are often evaluated against universalized models of plot and character development.

Taken together, these implications underscore the value of integrating reader-response theory with culturally specific interpretive frameworks. Such integration enables a more nuanced understanding of how literary texts generate ethical meaning through narrative silence and opens productive avenues for analyzing Indonesian literature as a site of dialogic interaction between text, culture, and reader.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined *Hadiah dari Rantau* as a narrative that constructs meaning not through explicit moral instruction but through strategically deployed silence. By integrating reader-response theory with Minangkabau cultural frameworks, the analysis has shown that the story's ethical force emerges from the interaction between textual gaps and culturally situated interpretation. Meaning is not fully articulated by the narrator; instead, it is co-produced by readers who bring shared knowledge of *rantau*, *malu*, and *adat* to bear on what the text withholds.

Across the three analytical subsections, the study has demonstrated that *rantau* functions as an unstable marker of prestige. Samsir's overseas success initially commands admiration, yet the narrative withholds moral validation, inviting readers to question the assumption that educational or cosmopolitan achievement necessarily entails ethical maturity. The silence surrounding Samsir's inner transformation creates a moral gap that exposes the fragility of prestige when detached from communal accountability.

The analysis has further shown that Khadijah's silence constitutes a form of moral agency rather than narrative passivity. Her restraint, withdrawal, and refusal to engage in public justification are intelligible within Minangkabau ethical frameworks as expressions of *malu*. Through narrative omission, the story redefines agency as ethical self-discipline rather than vocal resistance, thereby challenging interpretive expectations shaped by individualist narrative traditions that equate agency with speech and confrontation.

Finally, the study has argued that the story's resolution enacts ethical restoration through *adat*. Moral order is re-established not by punishing transgression or redeeming failure, but by quietly reallocating social legitimacy. Samsir's narrative disappearance

and Khadijah's reintegration through a socially sanctioned marriage affirm *adat* as a lived moral system that operates through recognition, restraint, and continuity rather than confrontation. The ending thus retroactively reorganizes readerly interpretation, confirming silence as a productive ethical mechanism rather than a narrative deficiency.

Taken together, these findings contribute to reader-response criticism by demonstrating how narrative silence functions as a culturally specific interpretive strategy. Rather than treating silence as absence or indeterminacy alone, this study shows how it can operate as a positive ethical resource within particular cultural horizons. Methodologically, the article illustrates how reader-response theory can be productively combined with local cultural hermeneutics to account for meaning-making in non-Western literary contexts, where ethical communication often relies on understatement and restraint.

It is important to note that this study does not present empirical reader responses. Instead, reader response is understood as a theoretical and interpretive process structured by the text and shaped by culturally informed interpretive frameworks. The "reader" in this study is therefore conceptualized as an implied or culturally situated reader rather than as a participant whose responses are collected in the field.

At the same time, the study acknowledges that narrative silence may be interpreted differently across cultural contexts. For readers unfamiliar with Minangkabau ethical frameworks, silence may appear as ambiguity, indeterminacy, or even narrative absence rather than as a form of ethical agency. This interpretive variation underscores the central claim of the study: that ethical meaning is not fixed within the text, but emerges through the interaction between narrative form, cultural knowledge, and readerly engagement.

More broadly, this study suggests that attention to narrative silence can enrich literary analysis beyond the present case. In texts shaped by communal moral systems, silence may function not as a lack of articulation but as a deliberate ethical mode that invites reflective judgment. Recognizing this function encourages critics to reconsider analytical frameworks that privilege explicit moral discourse and to remain attentive to culturally grounded narrative logics.

In conclusion, *Hadih dari Rantau* invites readers to participate actively in moral evaluation not by supplying explicit answers, but by negotiating what remains unsaid. Through this invitation, the story demonstrates that ethical meaning is dialogic, culturally mediated, and interpretively open—emerging at the intersection of text, culture, and reader.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, K. B., & Zulfidar, F. (2023). Understanding the concept of *merantau*, *tau jo nan ampek* and *ninik mamak* in Minangkabau culture in West Sumatra, Indonesia. *Asian Journal of Arts and Culture*, 23(2), e256669. <https://doi.org/10.48048/ajac.2023.256669>
- Ahmadi, A., Darni, Yulianto, B., & Hariyati, N. R. (2024). Contemporary Indonesian literature and the psychological reader-response perspective. *The International Journal of Literary Humanities*, 22(1), 61–79. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7912/CGP/v22i01/61-79>
- Allen, P. (2000). *Reading matters: An examination of plurality of meaning in selected Indonesian fiction, 1980–1995* [Doctoral thesis, University of Tasmania].

- University of Tasmania Open Access Repository.
<https://doi.org/10.25959/23211380.v1>
- Asri, Y. (2014). The sketches of Minangkabau society in Nur St. Iskandar's and Hamka's novels. *Humaniora*, 26(3), 285–291.
<https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v26i3.6187>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). Sage.
- Fanany, I. (2015). *Hadiah dari rantau* [A gift from afar]. In H. Tejalesmana (Ed.), *Hadiah dari rantau: A gift from afar* (pp. 13–25). CV Angkasa.
- Fish, S. (1980). *Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities*. Harvard University Press.
- Iser, W. (1978). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Jauss, H. R. (1982). *Toward an aesthetic of reception* (T. Bahti, Trans.; P. de Man, Intro.). The Harvester Press.
- Junus, U. (1984). Kebudayaan Minangkabau. In Koentjaraningrat (Ed.), *Manusia dan kebudayaan di Indonesia* (pp. 241–258). Djambatan.
- Naim, M. (1971). *Merantau: Causes and effects of Minangkabau voluntary migration* (pp. 1–15). ISEAS Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814380164-002>
- Navis, A. A. (1984). *Alam berkembang jadi guru: Adat dan kebudayaan Minangkabau*. Grafiti Pers.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1994). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Tyson, L. (2023). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide* (4th ed.). Routledge.