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## ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE IN NOVELS: THE EXAMPLE OF MARAH RUSLI'S ANAK DAN KEMENAKAN [CHILDREN AND NEPHEWS]

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### Abstract

In this article, the researchers want to find out whether novels written by local authors can be a source of anthropological knowledge. The researchers analysed the novel *Anak dan Kemenakan* [Children and Nephews], that was written by Marah Rusli. The main objectives were to find out what kind of anthropological knowledge it contains and whether it can be an anthropological source. It was detected that it gives a good impression of the Minangkabau kinship system. Furthermore, the novel also includes anthropological knowledge that describes part of the Minangkabau culture in West Sumatra, like the culture-specific terminology or the importance of discussing in order to achieve a consensus. The researchers concluded that the book *Anak dan Kemenakan* describes the cultural situation of West Sumatra at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, Marah Rusli used the perspective of the upper class during that time.

**Keywords:** Anak dan Kemenakan, Literary Anthropology, Marah Rusli, Minangkabau Novels

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## Introduction

Marah Rusli is a well-known Indonesian author. His major work *Sitti Nurbaya* is one of the first modern Indonesian novels (Rusli, 2013)<sup>1</sup>. It was published in the year 1922, and it became a classic work both in school and society. Many movie versions and even telenovelas thematised this tragic love story. However, Marah Rusli also wrote other novels that are less famous. One of these novels is *Anak dan Kemenakan*, and it will be analysed in this article. The title itself indicates an essential element of the Minangkabau society in West Sumatra, namely the function of the children (*anak*) and the nephews and nieces of the matrilineage (*kemenakan*).

In this article, the novel of Marah Rusli will be analysed, and it will be checked whether it can serve as a source of anthropological knowledge. Some anthropologists support the idea that novels provide useful anthropological information. Els Postel-Coster focused on various Minangkabau novels and how far these could serve as a significant source of knowledge (Postel-Coster, 1977)<sup>2</sup>. In this research, one novel will be checked in detail in order to detect ‘typical’ features of the Minangkabau society.

In the field of anthropology, the social behaviour of different cultures is described and explained. Therefore, anthropologists travel to various places and collect data. They live amongst the people of a specific culture and conduct ethnographic fieldwork. Afterwards, after they return to their home, they publish their data, but what happens is quite strange:

A strange thing happens to cultural events and behavior on the way to an ethnographic monograph. The wholeness and vividness of life, the immediate experience the anthropologist knew in the field – the people, their environment, their needs, and their everyday problems – all these are often lost, and in their place, we find abstract categories and relationships among them (Spradley & McDonough, 1973)<sup>3</sup>.

Anthropologists are aware of this situation, and consequently, there are some who try to change the situation, and novels seem to offer a way how to create a more vivid picture of a society. However, in this article, the researchers argue that even stories written by local novelists can be a kind of source that enables social scientists to get specific information about a certain culture. In this case, the novel *Anak dan Kemenakan* is exemplary.

This article also argues that local novelists provide an emic perspective which differs from an etic point of view. An emic perspective can be defined as follows:

Emic: relating to a way of studying or describing a language or culture from the point of view of the people who use the language or live in the culture. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023)<sup>4</sup>.

The book *Anak dan Kemenakan* by Marah Rusli will serve as an example, and the researchers want to ask whether novels written by local authors can help to attain anthropological knowledge. It will be argued that novels can help to get emic knowledge as the novelists originate from the local culture.

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## Biographical Information about Marah Rusli

In this chapter, a brief biography of Marah Rusli will be outlined. The major dates were taken from the homepage of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023)<sup>5</sup>.

Marah Rusli was born in the year 1889 in West Sumatra. He was from a noble family. He is one of the famous authors of Minangkabau origin who published in *Balai Pustaka*. masterpiece was the novel *Sitti Nurbaya*. It is one of the first 'modern' Indonesian novels (Aveling, 1970)<sup>6</sup>. However, he also wrote other novels like *Anak dan Kemenakan* or *Memang Jodoh* [Soulmates indeed].

Marah Rusli married a lady who was of Sunda origin. His family strongly opposed this marriage, and he wrote about that part of his life in his autobiographical novel *Memang Jodoh* (Rusli, 2017)<sup>7</sup>. He became quite critical and focused on his career as a veterinarian doctor and also on his interest in writing novels. He became a lecturer in different places, for example, in the city of Klaten.

The conflict with the traditional system makes Marah Rusli's work fascinating. However, his own point of view is not always clear. Johns wrote about this fact when he analysed the book *Sitti Nurbaya*:

The personal attitude of Marah Rusli to his character is somewhat puzzling, and his own standpoint appears confused. If we read the book correctly, he appears as a moderate representative of modernist Islam: ready to accept what appears of value from the West, tolerant towards Christians and interested in the reform of marriage. Yet the moral basis of the book is irrational and self-contradictory. We mentioned earlier that the theme of the book could be summed up as a dialogue between a man and his fate (Johns, 1979)<sup>8</sup>.

Marah Rusli had to accept his fate, and he could express his feelings in his novels. In the year 1956, his book *Anak dan Kemenakan* was published. Interestingly in this novel, the main protagonist, Mr Yatim, visited the grave of Sitti Nurbaya. It seems that the major topic of his main work still was crucial for him.

Together with his other significant works, Marah Rusli was widely recognized as one of the outstanding Indonesian writers. Many critics praised his work, and he was awarded a literature prize. Marah Rusli passed away in the year 1968.

## A Brief Overview of the Minangkabau Society

In this part, there will be given a brief overview of the traditional Minangkabau social structure. Such an overview will help to understand the specific terminology of the kinship system and the tasks that are ascribed to the respective roles. It became even more significant in the field of literature as the Minangkabau tradition and customs (*adat*) had to face influence from outside (Teeuw, 1967)<sup>9</sup>.

There are a number of social scientists who look into different features like social criticism or historical events, but everyday life seems to be in a shadowy existence. Regarding the

Minangkabau society, the reader knows that it is a large matrilineal society and that there is an inherent conflict between customs (*adat*) and Islam (Abdullah, 1966)<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, the reader learns that inheritance follows the matrilineal system (Benda-Beckmann, 1979)<sup>11</sup> and that the local people like to move outside the land of origin to look for their income (Naim, 1985)<sup>12</sup>. This kind of emigration has an influence on the daily life of the villagers (Kato, 1982)<sup>13</sup>.

The Minangkabau reside in different areas of the Malay-speaking world. West Sumatra and Negeri Sembilan are two provinces in which the Minangkabau are the majority. However, the origin of the Minangkabau culture is the three regions in the interior of West Sumatra.

The matrilineal social structure is of importance for the Minangkabau culture. In traditional society, there are traditional houses (*rumah adat*) that comprise two major parts. At the entrance, there is a kind of free space. In this part, the visitors can sit and talk to the household members. At the back, there are rooms (*bilik*) that belong to the female members of the household. If they marry, the husbands move to the place of the wife. This means the Minangkabau society is matrilocal.

The oldest brother of the mother (*mamak*) takes care of the well-being of his nieces and nephews in the traditional understanding. At a certain age, the male members of the matriclan or the subclan move to the local prayer house (*surau*) and stay there.

The ownership and the inheritance rules follow the matrilineal social structure. The matrilineage owns the land as communal property. However, the core family can also have individually acquired property which will become communal property after a certain period of time (after some generations) (Evers, 1975)<sup>14</sup>.

### **Plot of *Anak dan Kemenakan***

In this part, the main story of *Anak dan Kemenakan* will be described. This procedure is necessary so that further analysis can be understood.

Muhammad Yatim (called Mr Yatim) returns from his studies in law. He has obtained a doctorate, and when he arrives in Padang, many people wait for him, his parents, the high-ranking official Sutan Alam Shah and the rich merchant Baginda Mais. A huge reception is organized. Baginda Mais intends that his daughter Sitti Nurmala should marry Mr Yatim. However, Sutan Alam Shah informs him that Mr Yatim will marry his niece (*kemenakan*) Puti Bidasari. Mr Yatim and Puti Bidasari grew up in the same household, and they like each other. Baginda Mais is not satisfied and visits the parents of Puti Bidasari (Puti Renosari and Sutan Baheram). Puti Renosari is upset and takes her daughter back home. She says that Mr Yatim is not from a noble family background, and therefore, she will not allow that he is going to marry Puti Bidasari. Puti Renosari and Baginda Mais think Sutan Malik is a suitable candidate for Puti Bidasari despite having no job. When there was a firework competition at the end of Ramadan, Sutan Malik lost and was upset. He set the house of his competitor on fire.

Marah Udin is the son of Sutan Pamenan, the *mamak* of Sutan Malik. He was maltreated by Sutan Malik. Marah Udin witnessed that Sutan Malik was responsible for the big fire, and Sutan Pamenan and the *dukun* (traditional medicine man) decided to kill him with magic. Marah Udin dies and he tells Dr Aziz the secret that Sutan Malik is the culprit. Dr Aziz loves

Sitti Nurmala and wants to prevent that she marries his friend Mr Yatim. Therefore, he tells the story to Sutan Pamenan just before the wedding, and as a consequence, the marriage between Sitti Nurmala and Mr Yatim is cancelled. Dr Aziz can even marry Sitti Nurmala.

One day, Sutan Ali Akbar from Indrapura, arrives in Padang. He looks for his twin brother Sutan Ali Rasyid who left Indrapura many years ago. It was discovered that Mr Yatim and Sutan Ali Akbar have the same type of ring. Therefore, they decide to research the origin of Mr Yatim. In Payakumbuh, they meet Malim Batuah, who tells them that Mr Yatim is the grandson of Sutan Ali Rasyid and that both his grandparents and his mother already passed away. However, Sutan Pamenan is the father of Mr Yatim.

Sutan Pamenan repents his former behaviour and becomes pious. He accepts his son Mr Yatim. However, Sutan Malik poisons Sutan Pamenan so that he dies. Later Sutan Malik was imprisoned and dies too.

Sutan Ali Akbar and the family of Mr Yatim ask Puti Renosari if she would agree that Mr Yatim and Puti Bidasari marry. Finally, they marry, and after that, leave Padang as Mr Yatim had applied for a job in Jakarta.

## Literature

In this chapter, there will be a discussion of the literature on the question in how far Indonesian novels include anthropological information. However, there will also be a view on the publications that thematize the novel *Anak dan Kemenakan*.

Els Postel-Coster wrote an article with the title *The Indonesian Novel as a Source of Anthropological Data* (Postel-Coster, 1977)<sup>2</sup>. In this article, she makes some statements about how far novels could give anthropological data. First, it is possible to look at the novelists and their biographical backgrounds. Most of the Minangkabau novelists during that time originated from the educated middle class. Therefore, we can state that the perspective that is given is somehow limited as the other classes of society cannot share their views. But this is often the case in anthropological fieldwork as many informants originate from the so-called educated class. Second, Postel-Coster also stressed that most of the novelists were schoolteachers. This point is not always the case. For example, Marah Rusli was a veterinary doctor. Third, most of the novelists are men. This point is interesting as the Minangkabau society is a matrilineal society. It is even more intriguing that most of the Minangkabau novelists thematized the women's viewpoint (Postel-Coster, 1977)<sup>2</sup>.

An influential work which differs from the scientific publications was written by Muhamad Radjab (Radjab, 1995)<sup>15</sup>. He described his childhood in a village community at Lake Singkarak. So, actually, it is not a novel. However, it should be mentioned as Muhamad Radjab gives an impression of the way of life in the Minangkabau highlands. The reader gets an idea of the way how a boy grew up in the prayer house (*surau*) of his matrilineage. Furthermore, there are things explained that cannot be found in ethnographic reports, like the instruction of magical practices, which are an element of the folk religion.

Some research papers look at different perspectives regarding the novel *Anak dan Kemenakan*. Ihsan Hadi stresses that there is a conflict between modernists and traditionalists

(Hadi, 2014)<sup>16</sup>. Mr Yatim represents the first group, while the parents of Puti Bidasari stand for the second group. In a descriptive method, Ihsan Hadi outlines the different levels of the conflict. Some elements are considered to be external, for instance, the traditions that affect the wedding plans of Mr Yatim and Puti Bidasari. On the other side, there is also an internal conflict in the main character Mr Yatim. He wants to marry but cannot follow his plans as many factors interfere.

Another interesting article was published by Daratullaila Nasri (Nasri, 2017)<sup>17</sup>. She looks at oppositions in the book *Anak dan Kemenakan*. In the book are some pairs of oppositions. However, the opposition between the old and the new is probably one of the most dominant.

In the literature review, it can be seen that there is not so much literature that thematized the book *Anak dan Kemenakan*. It can be said that it never reached the same popularity as the story of *Sitti Nurbaya*. More than 40 years after that major work became famous, *Anak dan Kemenakan* was published. However, the conflict between modernists and traditionalists was no longer that dominant. Furthermore, there is no tragic ending in the story of *Anak dan Kemenakan*. Probably, Marah Rusli wanted to describe the ‘problematic’ elements of the traditional society in West Sumatra in greater detail. Therefore, the book is exciting, and it can be looked at how far anthropological knowledge is important.

## Research Method

In this research, the authors used an approach that is comparable to a hermeneutic circle. With this approach, the authors want to narrow the knowledge gap that exists at the initial reading. There were different readings of the text (see Figure 1).

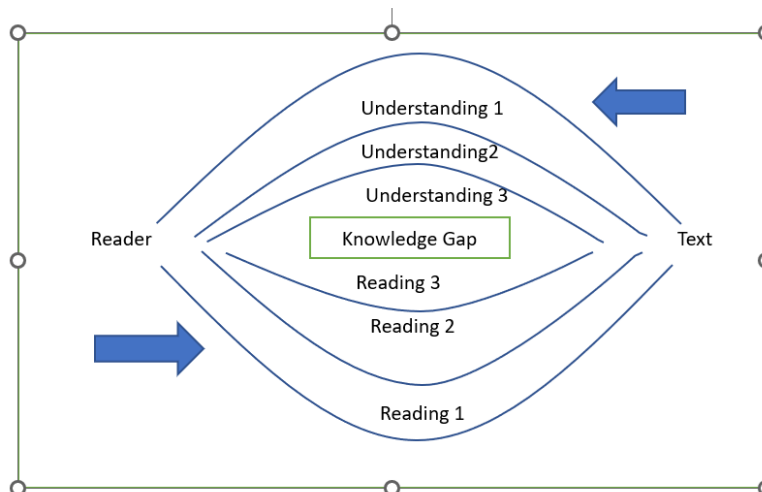


Figure 1. The Research Approach

At first, there was a great knowledge gap between the understanding of the text and the reader. In the first reading, there was just the aim to get a general picture of the plot. The researchers read the book for a second time and carved out the necessary information that was related to anthropological knowledge. Finally, the researchers read the book for a third time in order to detect content that might be neglected.

The research objectives are as follows:



- 1) To describe the cultural components that are mentioned in the book *Anak dan Kemenakan*.
- 2) To find out whether novels could be used as an anthropological source.

## Literature and Anthropology

Literary anthropology consists of three major branches:

The first is the use of literary texts as ethnographic source material, particular for historical anthropologists. The second is the use of literary modes of writing ethnography, ranging from the incorporation of metaphorical language and the subversion of conventional ethnographic structures to the production of fiction as ethnography. The third is the anthropological examination of literary and cultural practices (Wiles, 2018)<sup>18</sup>.

In this research, the first branch is significant. The problematic point for many social scientists is that a fictive text could produce ideas about the 'real world'. The question is whether a novel gives a concrete idea about a social situation in the past. For example, when Joseph Conrad travelled to the East Kalimantan region of Berau and wrote his famous novels like *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, he was inspired by the local situation (Visser, 1993)<sup>19</sup>. Whether his novels can be used as an ethnographic source remains the question.

Els Postel-Coster emphasized that novels could serve as a source of anthropological data. She looked at the Minangkabau novelists too. For her, Minangkabau literature is a mirror of society (Postel-Coster, 1977)<sup>2</sup>. She mentioned two major reasons for that: a) The culture shaped the thinking of the author, and b) the writers are not extremely individualistic (Postel-Coster, 1977)<sup>2</sup>. Postel-Coster argues here in the way of sociology of knowledge. The writer is bound to his or her culture, which forms the thinking and the way how a person interprets the world. Different spheres influence the thinking of a person. However, intellectuals like Marah Rusli could travel outside, which changed the perspective. He could see his own society in a more critical light. In his autobiographic novel *Memang Jodoh*, he describes the conflict between him and his greater family. They could not accept a bride from outside. A novel gives the reader the impression of the local society in the way the novelists see it.

## Findings: Anthropological Information in *Anak dan Kemenakan*

### A. The Kinship System and Marriage

In the title of Marah Rusli's Novel, the traditional kinship system is outlined. It looks as in Figure 2.

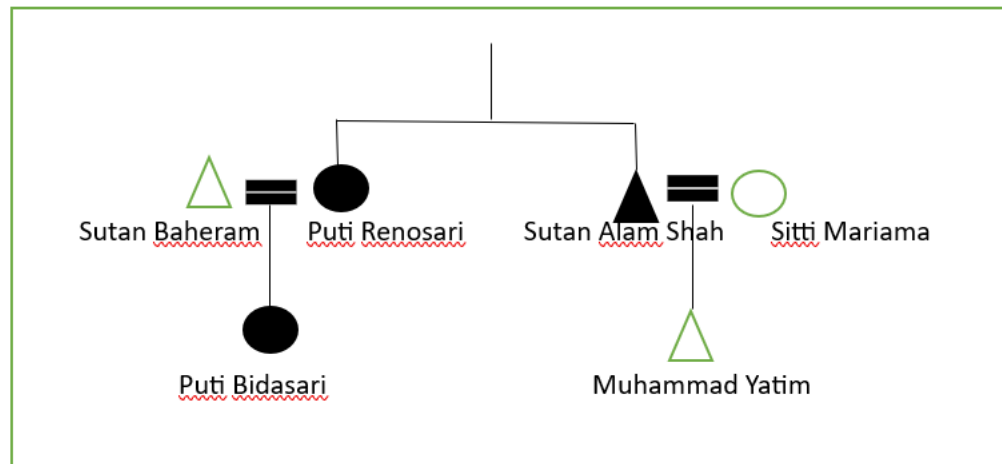


Figure 2. The Kinship System of the Main Protagonists of *Anak dan Kemenakan*.

The triangle stands for male persons, while the circles represent female characters. The black colour shows the persons who belong to the same matrilineage. In the traditional understanding, the uncle of the matrilineage, the *mamak*, takes care of his nieces or nephews (the *kemenakan*). Furthermore, it must be known that the inheritance of communal property will remain within the matrilineage. This fact means that Mr Yatim would not inherit parts of the communal property from his father. Therefore, traditional society prefers the so-called cross-cousin marriage. In this case, the son of the *mamak* should marry his niece.

Marah Rusli also describes a wedding (Rusli, 2020)<sup>20</sup>. The bride and the groom sit on a seat that is nicely decorated. The clothes should symbolize a king and a princess. The clothes of Mr Yatim (who should marry at the place of Baginda Mais) are described in detail:

*Mr. Yatim memakai dasar saluk yang bertabur emas, yang rupanya seakan-akan mahkota; bajunya baju roki dari beledu merah yang leher, tangan, dan pinggirnya berpasmem emas; kemejanya dari sutra berkancingkan emas pula. Celananya dari beledu yang serupa warnanya dengan warna bajunya, pendek, sesak, dan pinggirnya serta sisinya bersuji berakam pula. Kakinya tertutup kaus putih yang halus dan bersih sedang kasutnya yang amat permai pula pada waktu itu tiada dipakainya karena ia duduk bersila di atas tempat kedudukannya.*

*Di pinggangnya yang berpeding emas tersisip keris yang bersarung emas berukir-ukir dan berhulu emas pula yang bertatahkan permata yang mahal-mahal* (Rusli, 2020)<sup>20</sup>. [Translation: Mr Yatim wears a gold-studded *saluk* head cover that looks like a crown; his dress is a red velvet cloth with gold medallions on the neck, cuffs and edges; his shirt was silk with gold buttons too. His trousers were made of velvet that matched the colour of his shirt, short, tight, and the edges, and on the sides, they were also covered with tarnish. His feet were covered in white socks that were smooth and clean, while



his very beautiful shoes were not worn at that time because he was sitting cross-legged on his seat.

He wore a golden belt around his waist with the hilt of the *keris* that was beautifully crafted, and its golden hue with gemstones that complemented the belt.]

The detailed description of clothes also comprises the bride, who wears a *Baju Kurung*. On her head is the typical *sunting*. Furthermore, Marah Rusli also describes the people who surround the bride and groom and sit in different places. By making such a detailed description, the reader gets an impression of a Minangkabau wedding. It is also remarkable that the marriage party is at the place of the bride, which indicates that the society is matrilineal.

## B. Other Elements of the Minangkabau Culture

The novel *Anak dan Kemenakan* describes other important elements of the Minangkabau society. In this chapter, the cultural traits Marah Rusli described will be listed:

i) *Mufakat*: Puti Renosari, the mother of Puti Bidasari is upset and rejects the marriage plans of Sutan Alam Shah. One of the reasons is that he did not consult her and discuss his plans. He neglected an essential matter of Minangkabau culture, namely *mufakat* (reaching a consensus through discussion). It is a significant feature of Minangkabau society to discuss important matters (*musyawarah*). The main aim is to reach a consensus (*mufakat*). Society wants to prevent conflicts, and therefore, they assemble to reach a solution that satisfies all parties.

ii) *Merantau*: Leaving the village and looking for a way to get income or knowledge is a well-known feature in Minangkabau society. A good example is Mr Yatim, who went to Holland in order to further his studies. Another person in the novel is Malim Batuah, who moves to different places to find his livelihood. The novel *Anak dan Kemenakan* shows that the living conditions are not that easy. Even persons that are of noble descent must strive hard to get their income. Therefore, education becomes more and more important to get a good income. In the novel, Mr Yatim and Dr Aziz are members of the newly educated generation that are successful.

iii) *Etiquette*: In the Minangkabau society, etiquette (*budi*) is an essential part of society and also for an Islamic way of life (Hamka, 2019)<sup>21</sup>. In another book, Marah Rusli described Sitti Nurbaya as a girl with refined etiquette (Stark & Zakaria, 2022)<sup>22</sup>. She is obedient to her father and knows that she has 'debts' (*hutang budi*) as he enabled her to get a good education and a good way of life. When he gets into financial trouble, Sitti Nurbaya is obedient and marries an elderly man. In the book *Anak dan Kemenakan*, the children behave similarly. They follow the wishes of their parents, and Mr Yatim and Sitti Nurmala accept their decision to marry each other. However, the marriage was cancelled at the last minute. Mr Yatim also has a refined character. When he was informed that he was adopted by the poor worker Malim Batuah, he was grateful and supported him. In a similar way, Sitti Nurmala supports her father, Sutan Pamenan, even though his behaviour is quite problematic. Later, Sutan Pamenan reflects on his life, repents and becomes pious. Marah Rusli illustrates the good etiquette in the behaviour of Sutan Alam Shah, Sutan Ali Akbar and others. On the other side, he juxtaposes rude behaviour like the way how Sutan Malik acts. He is impatient and aggressive, and even murders his uncle Sutan Pamenan.

iv) *Traditional Medicine*: Even though there were modern doctors like Dr Aziz, some people consulted traditional healers (*dukun*). Marah Rusli illustrated one example of how fever was treated. The family of the patient looks for a green coconut and palm sugar, and they pass these

ingredients to the healer. He will make a hole and put the palm sugar inside. After that, he will read an invocation and cover it with smoke from benzoin. The patient should drink the water from the coconut.

v) Society in Padang at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Marah Rusli describes that there was an internal conflict between traditionalists (*kaum tua*) and modernists (*kaum muda*). Mr Yatim and his family belong to the second group, while the mother and father of Puti Bidasari are traditionalists. Modern ideas became widespread. For example, the conflict of a male adult, whether he should be more focused on his position as a father or *mamak* becomes more significant. The story of Sutan Pamenan illustrates this: He neglects his son and spoils his nephew Sutan Malik. He even wants to protect his *kemenakan* and kills his son by sorcery so that he cannot be a witness.

vi) Traditional Entertainment. There are a number of traditional ways of entertainment. There is the traditional form of martial arts (*pencak silat*) that attracts many spectators. Sometimes there are more mystical elements that serve as entertainment, like the so-called *lukah gila* (crazy fish trap):

*Di atas sebuah meja diletakkan sebuah lukah oleh seorang hobatan, lalu dibacakannya mantera. Lukah ini bergerak dengan sendirinya, mula-mula perlahan-lahan, tetapi kian lama kian kencang dan cepat, ke kiri dan ke kanan, seakan-akan orang ratib dengan tiada berhenti-hentinya. Penonton heran dan geli melihat keganjialan ini.*

*Seorang penonton disuruh menahan gerakan lukah ini, tetapi tak dapat. Lukah ini terus bergerak, walaupun dipagut oleh orang ini. Kemudian disuruh-suruh orang menahan lukah itu; seorang di kanan, seorang di kiri. Itu pun tiada dapat (...). Dengan 4 orang pun tak dapat dihentikan pergerakan lukah itu. (Rusli, 2020, p. 39-40)<sup>20</sup>.*

[Translation: A healer placed a fish trap on a table, then recited the mantra. This fish trap moved on its own, slowly at first, but gradually became stronger and faster, to the left and to the right, as if a person was running without stopping. The audience was surprised and amused at this strangeness.

A spectator was told to stop this movement of the fish trap but to no avail. This fish trap continued to move, even though this person has patched it. Then people were told to hold the wound, one on the right, one on the left. Even that was not possible(...). Even four people could not stop the movement of the fish trap.]

Marah's Rusli description of this type of entertainment is quite detailed, and usually, these 'exotic' forms are not described in many ethnographic publications. The reason is probably that many anthropologists focus on the kinship system.

There are other descriptions of forms of entertainment, like, for example, the race of hansom cabs (*bendi*). Marah Rusli juxtaposed this widely accepted forms of entertainment with others that are widespread in the underworld. Amongst these are the descriptions of gambling and cock fights. This second element is also remarkable as many foreigners might not get into contact with such types of entertainment.

### C. Minangkabau Terminology

Marah Rusli used a specific Minangkabau terminology in his novel (Table 1).

Table 1. Minangkabau Terms in the Novel *Anak dan Kemenakan*.

Minangkabau Term	Explanation
<i>Anak Pisang</i>	This term is used for the nieces and nephews of the patrilineal family side.
<i>Bako</i>	This word denotes the paternal family side of the family.
<i>Datuk</i>	This word can mean ‘grandfather’, or it refers to the head of a matrilineage.
<i>Kemenakan</i>	The nieces and nephews of a matrilineage,
<i>Mamak</i>	The brother of the sister of the matrilineage.
<i>Perewa (Parewa)</i>	The <i>perewa</i> is a group of gangsters. Often, they live outside their village community and follow their way of life. By doing so, they do not threaten the traditional lifestyle (Errington, 1984) <sup>23</sup> .
<i>Udo / Uda</i>	Form of address to an older male person. Usually, a wife calls her husband <i>uda</i> .

The usage of specific Minangkabau terms creates an atmosphere that shows the readers that the way of life in West Sumatra is quite unique. The people have different responsibilities: A father has to look after his children and his nephews and nieces. Although the Minangkabau are a matrilineal society, the paternal family side still plays an important role (Stark & Yahaya, 2021)<sup>23</sup>.

Marah Rusli used Minangkabau terms mainly in the field of kinship. However, he also used terms that are related to some specific cultural features. For example, he mentioned a kind of ‘gangsters’ (*perewa*). Normally, the Minangkabau culture is well-refined and follows a polite form of behaviour (*baso basi*). However, this group of young men usually lives outside their villages and behaves ‘freely’ without considering any conventions. If society allows individuals who cannot adjust to refined behaviour to move outside, this will help to maintain the traditional way of life.

### Discussion

In this discussion, it will be elaborated on whether novels could be used as a kind of source for anthropological knowledge. The novel *Anak dan Kemenakan* has some content that shows typical features of the Minangkabau society at the beginning of the 20th century. The description is vivid and reaches a larger readership that gets essential information about the culture during that time: One of the major means of transport was the horse carriage. Marah Rusli also mentions that some local representatives were chosen to represent the colonial government. The best example is Mr Yatim, who served as a judge in the court.

The reader can imagine what the society of the main city Padang and its surrounding villages looked like. It is helpful to compare it with the scientific publications during that time. The first edition of the book *Minangkabau and Negri Sembilan: Socio-political Structure in Indonesia* by P. E. de Josselin de Jong was published in the year 1951 (Josselin de Jong, 1980)<sup>25</sup>. It was one of

the most influential books about the Minangkabau culture. It gives an excellent introduction of the Minangkabau social structure. The reader understands kinship and marriage rules in an abstract way. If someone is not an expert, he or she might not understand this system easily. However, if the readers read a novel like *Anak dan Kemenakan*, they might get a good impression of such regulations.

It is also possible to take some newer anthropological literature into consideration. Some of these publications write in an illustrative way about certain societal issues. For example, the book of Peggy Sanday describes her experience with a traditional medium healer (Sanday, 2002)<sup>26</sup>. Nonetheless, the novel of Marah Rusli offers an emic point of view. An outsider does not know about many things that are described in the novel. Marah Rusli mentions emotions that occur because of certain restrictions. So far, the novel gives the author ‘more freedom’ to describe a subjective perspective. In the so-called postmodern era, there was a huge discussion on how ‘the other’ can express his or her view. As a consequence, new approaches like dialogical anthropology or ethno-poetry appeared. Therefore, the consideration of local novels can contribute to specific elements of anthropological knowledge.

## Conclusion

In this article, the researchers want to examine whether novels could be used as a source for anthropologists. The novel *Anak dan Kemenakan* by Marah Rusli was used as exemplary. It was detected that Marah Rusli described some cultural elements of the Minangkabau society in detail. Furthermore, he illustrates a vivid picture of daily life in the city of Padang at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The reader gets a good impression and learns how the upper class lived and what was their major concern. Modern influences came up, and the younger generation got into trouble with traditional values.

The researchers also showed that the novel *Anak dan Kemenakan* offers an emic point of view that describes the wedding regulations, traditional forms of entertainment, dubious matters like gambling, and so. An anthropologist who originates from a society outside usually has no access to all these types of entertainment. Therefore, the book of Marah Rusli is useful as he gives an insightful perspective on how the people address each other and their major concern.

The book *Anak dan Kemenakan* should show in an exemplary way whether novels could be a source of anthropological knowledge. It can be concluded that novels could be one source of anthropological knowledge. However, the data that was gained through participant observation will be the most important data. The reason is that the researcher can check the how he got the data and whether it is reliable. Nonetheless, novels written by local authors can inspire the research process and offer a different perspective.

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