



Cultural Discourse of Migrant Workers in Mahfud Ikhwan's *Dawuk: Kisah Kelabu dari Rumbuk Randu*

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Abstract. Being a migrant worker is a complex experience that is differently represented from one to another, which is well represented in Mahfud Ikhwan's novel, "*Dawuk: Kisah Kelabu dari Rumbuk Randu*". This novel narrates the life of people living at remote area. Poverty due to generational conflicts of forest management that made limited economic access, force people to migrate to other cities and neighbouring country, Malaysia. This paper is aimed at discussing the complexities of migrant workers represented in the novel. The method of analysis used in this study is Fairclough's CDA, which covers the three levels of analysis, micro, meso and macro. The study shows that the discourse of cultural ambiguity dominated the motive of the characters. In one side, freedom is the biggest motive of the migrant workers represented in the novel, in which they feel more freedom to make choice of living and working in other country, they feel free to make their way of life, not bounded with tradition. They can make money in neighbour country, Malaysia, which is contrary to the situation at home in which they have limited economic access. On the other hand, they are bounded to their home village, feeling peaceful living at home as their goal after they have enough money. The research is limited to the discourse of cultural ambiguity, so that there are many other areas of discourse that can be explored for further research.

Keywords: Culture · Dawuk · Discourse · Migrant workers · Socio-economic issues

1 Introduction

Migrant worker is a social economic phenomenon that is important to understand, because being a migrant worker is a complex experience that is differently represented from one context to another. According to the World Migration Report 2020, Indonesia is one of the ten biggest countries in Asia that get the remittance from the migrant workers. In 2017 the remittance reached US \$ 8,78 billion, and it increased into US \$ 10,97 billion in 2018, equal with 6,91 percent of the 2019 APBN [1].

The women migrant workers dominated the number of migrant workers in Indonesia, which is then called as feminization of migrant workers implying the increasing numbers

of migrant workers from Asian countries [1]. As the migrant workers, women commonly encounter the complexities of life at home and at the host country, and this has been discussed in many scientific papers. Literary works in many cases, represent people's problems in daily life [2]. One of literary works presenting the problems of migrant workers is a novel written by Mahfud Ikhwan entitled, "*Dawuk: Kisah Kelabu dari Rumbuk Randu*" [3]. The novel presents the narration of migrant workers from remote village in Java, of which its problems is intertwined with the local social economic issues of local-global relation. The novel tells the readers about the life of people living in a small village, located near a forest in Java. The poverty due to generational conflicts of forest management had made limited economic access for the community in the village. They were forced to migrate to other cities and neighboring country, Malaysia. The migration not only brings better economic situation, but also give the social political impacts.

This paper is aimed at discussing the complexities of migrant workers represented in the novel. The main characters in this novel, Mat Dawuk and Inayatun are the people from the village who have to do migration to Malaysia to make a living. The issue of migrant workers represents the realities of migrant people's life. So that, the objective of this study is formulated into a question, who is the cultural discourse of migrant worker represented in the novel "Dawuk". To answer the question, the present study deployed Fairclough's CDA theory [4, 5]. The CDA covers the three levels of analysis, micro, meso and macro. At the micro level, the language aspects are examined to get the meaning constructed in the novel, while the meso level of analysis examined the discursive practice of the text, relating a text to the other text. The macro level of analysis deal with the sociopolitical context of the discourse.

2 Literature Review

Many studies have explored the issue of international migrant workers from many perspectives [6, 7]. The studies have suggested a range of the issues of migrant workers, such as the legal and political aspects of migrant workers [8] and social and political aspects of migrant workers [9]. Those studies can be classified into two groups, the socio-economic aspect and law-political aspects of the migrant workers. Another study dealing with the issue of feminization of migrant labor stating that there is an increasing number of women migrate alone from poor countries in order to work in the domestic and care sector of wealthier countries [10]. This phenomenon is closely related to the growing demand for domestic and care workers' labor—an estimated 53 millions of transnational and internal female migrants around the world are involved in domestic and care work (ILO 2013).

In his book, Liu, R (2015) stated clearly that the strong state-led and pro-market reforms and urbanization have served to enhance the State's competitiveness [11]. As a consequence of the rising competitiveness is the rising of the quantity of migrant workers, coming from the other countries or the rural areas. It is important, therefore, not only to build a nation with high competitiveness but also build a healthy economic and social environment for the workers. In China, migrants and their welfare are dependent on their residency status. It is crucial to consider and in applying the concept of the 'Right to the

City', as a citizen's right. This right means that people from rural areas have the right to "access" the city, both in the form of the urban renewals and the relocation process.

Indonesian migrant workers are spread in many countries, from America, Middle East countries up to East Asian countries like Japan, Korea, Hongkong. Constable (2007) in her study state that there is a specific pattern that repeated in the issue of migrant workers. Migrant workers are increasing in numbers when there is a social economic problem in their original countries [12]. For example, Constable stated in her study that in the 1980s, as the economy in the Philippines worsened, there were many Filipinas, mainly between the ages of twenty and forty, with college degrees or high school diplomas, left their families to work in homes in Hong Kong and other parts of Asia and the Middle East. According to Constable's data, the migrant workers from Indonesia surged in the 1990s, when the Indonesian economy worsened, rural Indonesian women, who were mostly single, younger and less educated than Filipinas, showing the similar pattern. On the other side, since the 1980s, the situation in Hong Kong is that there was increasing wealth of upper and middle-class Hong Kong Chinese and the decreasing of local workers. This situation brought about the reasons for the permission of the foreign domestic workers permitted to enter the colony with short-term visas and two-year work contracts to meet the need of the jobs.

The social political context of the migrant workers, both in the original countries and the host countries, lead to the interest in exploring the cultural issues of the migrant workers in the novel. Therefore, this paper aims at discussing and exploring the problems that the migrant workers going through, especially Indonesian migrant workers in neighboring country Malaysia, as represented in the literary work. Many other researches have discussed many aspects of migrant workers, dominated with socio economic perspective. Therefore, this study focuses on the socio-cultural aspects of the migrant workers, as represented in the novel, *Dawuk: Kisah Kelabu dari Rumbuk Randu*. It is argued that the issue of cultural discourse of migrant workers is affected by social political situation of the workers in the home country (in Indonesia) and particularly, in the village, rural area where they came from, and the host country (Malaysia). The discussion elaborates the cultural historical aspects of the migrant workers.

3 Method

The object of study is the novel entitled *Dawuk: Kisah Kelabu dari Rumbuk Randu*, written by Mahfud Ikhwan, published in 2017 [13]. The novel was published by Marjin Kiri. The novel has been awarded Khatulistiwa Literary Award in the category of prose in 2017. This award made the author, Mahfud Ikhwan as one of the most taken into account writers. The novel narrates the life of people who live as migrant workers in Malaysia, and the people in the rural areas in Java where they are from. To discuss the issue of migrant workers, the study applied sociological perspective in literary criticism to address sociocultural issue of migrant workers. There are two main characters in the story, Inayatun and Mat Dawuk, both of them are migrant workers from rural village Rumbuk Randu. They have different motivation of migration but get together for some certain reasons, but then they encountered tragic events that end Inayatun's life, and Mat Dawuk is not clear whether or not he died. To answer the question of the socio-cultural

discourse of the migrant workers in the novel, it employs the method of critical discourse analysis.

In this current paper, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis is used as the method of analysis [14]. The method provides three levels of analysis to explore and reveal the cultural discourse of migrant workers. In the first level, at the micro-level of analysis, it discusses the language use like words, metaphor, and syntax and analyzes them as the language in use, in the socio-cultural context. Second, the meso-level analysis dealing with the production and consumption of the text, considering that the text and people are mediated through the discourse practice, in which a text is produced and consumed. In the second level of analysis, it goes to the intertextualities, where a particular text refers to and is produced. In the macro-level analysis, it discusses the socio-political context of the issue, that is the socio-political context of the rural villages that lived in around 1980s in Java, Indonesia.

4 Findings and Discussion

The two main characters become the starting point to discuss the issue of migrant workers in the novel "*Dawuk: Kisah Kelabu dari Rumbuk Randu*" (which is abbreviated into "Dawuk"). The main female character, Inayatun, is a young girl who is considered as a martness. However, her beauty attracts many young boys and Inna was happy to receive such admiration, and she responds to it in a free manner. Her father and mother were angry of her and feeling ashamed of her "bimbo" attitude. The girl and the father are often arguing each other. In that situation, Inna made a decision to go away from home as an opportunity to make herself free from the father's norms. She went to Malaysia to get freedom and money for her own necessities. However, her journey in Malaysia made her tied with many different men that she feels unhappy, until she met Mat Dawuk.

On the other hand, Mat Dawuk was a broken-rebellious in her family, and she is not satisfied or not suited with the way her father educates and communicates with her. She is beautiful and smart in her young age, and at the same time rebellious. Her father is a religious leader in the village, and her mother follows her husband in the way they educated the girl. Inna was sent to the local elementary school, and religious school. The neighbors are all proud of Inna when she was a child, because of her beauty and her status as a home child, an orphan having none taking care of. Nobody knows exactly how he went to Malaysia, but the rumor that he becomes a thug, and a paid killer that many people are scared of. His meeting with Inayatun changed his life forever. He wants to go home, with Inayatun as his wife, to the village of Rumbuk Randu. The problem arises when there are many people who do not like the happy couple coming back to the village. Some people made a conspiracy to kill Mat Dawuk. The forest mandor "Mandor Har" helped by his friend, tried to rape Ina and Mandor Har was killed in the duel with Mat Dawuk.

4.1 The Discourse of Cultural Ambiguity in the Novel "Dawuk"

The cultural ambiguity dominated the motive of the characters. Ambiguity means the quality of being open to more than one interpretation [15]. There is ambiguity in perceiving the migrant workers, in this novel. The ambiguity that happened to the main

characters can be seen from the female character and the male character. Inayatun, the female character, at the beginning felt very happy to go to Malaysia in her young age. She felt free to get her own life without any control from her father and mother, nor the society in the village. She went to Malaysia as a young female migrant worker, through a PJTKI (a company that give the service of sending the migrant workers).

Inayatun was able to go to Malaysia, and like the other workers, people at the village have expectation to the migrant workers. They hope that the workers show their success by sending home the money or other things as the evidence of their success. However, Inna did not fulfil the expectation. *“Begitu berangkat, Inayatun tak pernah kirim uang seperti lazimnya perantau Malaysia. Tak jelas pula kerjaannya apa. (After she left for Malaysia, she did not send the money home, like the other migrant workers. It is not clear what is her job)”* (Ikhwan, p.18).

There is also another surprise that Inayatun brought home. Instead of bringing many valuable things or money, Inayatun brings different husband each time she visited her home.

“Inayatun sudah tiga kali pulang sejak keberangkatannya yang pertama, masing-masing dengan membawa pulang suami, atau lelaki yang diakunya sebagai suami, yang berbeda-beda. Mat Dawuk, katanya, adalah suaminya yang keempat. [Inayatun has visited her home three times, instead of sending money, surprisingly, she brought home her different husband each time. Mat Dawuk, she said, is the fourth husband] (Ikhwan, p.18).

The motive of getting freedom also occurs to the male main character, Mat Dawuk. When he was a child, he had been an orphan, and he went to Malaysia, without anyone knows how he did that. People just recognized him as Mat Dawuk after he was in Malaysia, popularly as a paid killer, a profession that is possessed by a particular person, having a certain skill and power. He got his freedom in Malaysia, because he could do whatever he wanted to do to build his own life. This was contrary to his life at home in the village, in which he has no family nor people who took care of him. His life in Malaysia shows that he got his freedom and built his existence.

The meeting of Inayatun and Mat Dawuk in Malaysia had been a turning point of their life. The couple met at the bus stop, in the situation of conflict in which Inayatun was searched by her ex-lover who was mad at her. Mat Dawuk was positioned as the saviour for Inayatun. With his ability, it was easy for Mat Dawuk to defeat the young man, Inayatun's ex-lover. Inayatun and Mat Dawuk were in love each other, and they plan to start their new life, building family in their home village.

The couple who was at the beginning enjoyed freedom as migrant workers in neighbouring country, decided to go back home and built a new family. So, the ideal living for building a family is back in their small remote village. They felt that living at home in the village, in a simple life, is the most enjoyable thing for them. It was described, that Inayatun and Mat Dawuk only lived in a small hut, not a house in the village of Rumbuk Randu. Inayatun's father did not agree with the marriage, so that he did not give a feasible home for his daughter and her husband. He did not like Mat Dawuk. Finally, because of Inayatun's persistence, they can live in the hut a bit far from the village home. It was a cattle stall given by the father for the spouse. Nevertheless, the simple life in a hut in a remote village made the couple happy along the days.

The discourse of cultural ambiguity that happen to Inayatun and Dawuk, was that their seeking of freedom is not the only thing they pursue in their life. At the beginning, people go to other country as migrant worker aiming at getting money. Seeking freedom, socially and financially, is the biggest motive of the migrant workers represented in the novel, in which they feel more freedom to make choice of living and working in other country. They feel free to make their way of life, not bonded with the tradition in their home village. They can make money in neighbour country, Malaysia, which is contrary to the situation at home in which they have limited economic access.

On the other hand, they are bonded to their home village. Regularly they returned home, to visit their family, and shared their success story as migrant workers. Their bond to the home village is also seen from their ideal and goal of their life. They feel peaceful living at home as their goal after they have enough money. After working abroad for years, they will be back home, making a living at the village. In the case of Inayatun and Mat Dawuk, they made a turning point by making decision to live at their village. The life at the village is commonly perceived as life in a tranquillity, a peaceful life.

The reality of living in the village is in fact not as peaceful as they expect. Their living at home in the village where they were grown up, so that they have known people there and their history. It was told in this novel that the management of the forest was in the hand of the family of Sinder, the forest manager, up to now. The manager of the forest did not give any access for the people surrounding the forest. He monopolized anything as the result of the forest, so that people in the village were no access to the forest and they are all poor.

Because of the monopoly of the forest for many generations, the Sinder (Sinder means the boss of the forest) family have some opponents, such as those who do illegal logging. Many people steal the logs in the forest. When the authority of the forest knew the crime, they would catch the criminal and give the punishment. Interestingly, in the story, the opponent of the Sinder Harjo was Mat Dawuk's grand-father, The war between the two families run for three generation, and it affects the life of Mat Dawuk and Inayatun.

The social political context of the forest management in the village Rumbuk Randu has become the potential conflict that affect the social economic condition of the people in the village. The system of monopoly has run since the colonial times and up to now. The poverty of the people in the village forced them to migrate to other city or other country as migrant workers. Almost all of the people in the village of Rumbuk Randu have to go to neighbouring country to make a better living. Although they actually doing the same thing at Malaysia, as the workers at the plantation, they had different treatment. They got money that they did not get at home.

5 Conclusion

The plot in this novel centred on the life of Inayatun and Mat Dawuk, the couple who tried to make their new life as family at home village, after years of working as migrant workers in Malaysia. The social economic conflict between Sinder family and Mat Dawuk turns out to be the big conflict. The two family inherited the war between Sinder and the logger. The problems resulted in cultural ambiguity for the main characters.

The cultural ambiguity can be seen from the main characters that at beginning enjoyed the life as migrant workers. They got their freedom, money, and self-actualization as a

happy, self-sufficient migrant worker. Their turning point started when they decided to build a family, and living at home. They encountered social historical conflict between Sinder family and Mat Dawuk family.

In short, the ambiguity as migrant workers implies that being a migrant worker, although having freedom, money and self-esteem, they 'have to' return home to their village, and be ready to encounter the problems related to the social cultural conflict in the village. In the case of Mat Dawuk, he had to struggle to survive after the death of his wife, Inayatun. The research is limited to the discourse of cultural ambiguity, so that there are many other areas of discourse that can be explored for further research.

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