





Exploring Memory, Spice Aromas, and Indonesian Heritage Food in Leila S. Chudori's "Pulang" Novel

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Abstract. The protagonist of Leila S. Chudori's work, *Pulang*, is centrally portrayed as Dimas Suryo. The individual in question, who experienced and was subsequently forced to leave during the significant event of the cataclysm in 1965, skillfully utilizes traditional Indonesian cuisine and spices as tools for memory retention, allowing him to maintain a sense of control over his memories of Indonesia. This study employs a descriptive analysis approach to elucidate the symptomatic and factual aspects of his complex association with Indonesian heritage food and spices. The empirical data derived from this investigation shed light on many objectives for which he utilized Indonesian cultural cuisine and medicinal plants. Establishing the Tanah Air restaurant was a commercially feasible endeavor that offered a vehicle for him to alleviate his longing for Indonesia, showcasing his culinary versatility. Furthermore, Dimas astutely utilized these culinary and olfactory components in a deliberate manner to impart to his daughter, Lintang Utara, a deep admiration for the Indonesian culture and its lasting customs. A comprehensive analysis of the interconnection between Dimas and Indonesian cultural cuisine and spices highlights the significant significance of exploring these culinary traditions in order to safeguard personal and collective memories.

Keywords: Exile, Indonesian Food Heritage, Memory, Spices.

1 Introduction

The enchantment of Indonesian spices extends beyond mere culinary delight; it carries an aura of mystique akin to both arcane incantations and lucky charms. This captivating influence of spice transcends geographical, national, and continental boundaries [1], [2], [3]. The pursuit and acquisition of these botanical treasures have sparked a genuine curiosity, compelling individuals to delve into an extensive repository of informational and literary sources dedicated to spices. Indeed, spices have left an indelible mark on the annals of world classical literature. Renowned figures such as Alfred Lord Tennyson, Walt Whitman, and Plato have extolled spices as fragrances that stimulate the appetite and kindle intellectual fervor, spurring adventurous inclinations towards exploration and colonization. Notably, spice is a multidisciplinary lens, drawing insights from diverse fields, including history, geography, natural sciences, humanities, and medicine [1], [4].

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The integration of spices into literary works finds vivid expression in various narratives from Indonesian authors. For instance, Azhari Aiyub's novel, *Kura-kura Berjanggut* (2018), unveils the intricate tapestry of the spice trade in the Aceh region, chronicling how the pepper evolved into a hotly contested commodity, driving the narrative forward. Similarly, Erni Aladjai's *Haniyah dan Ala di Rumah Teteruga* (2021) recounts a tale of a bloody tragedy amidst clove gardens intertwined with the monopolization of the clove trade system by the New Order government in 1992. Ari Ambarwati's poetry collections, *Bocah Rempah* (2021) and *Rempah Berkisah* (2022), trace the historical trajectory of spice hunting, a catalyst for colonialism, and illuminate the role of processed spices as both culinary heritage and cultural touchstones within a community [5], [6]. The allure of spice has captivated authors, compelling them to encapsulate its essence nuancedly within their literary creations.

In *Pulang*, the story adeptly integrates spices and food with the unwavering determination exhibited by its protagonist, Dimas Suryo. Dimas' expatriate status resulted from his suspected sympathies for the illegal communist movement during the 1965 tragedy, resulting in the revocation of his Indonesian citizenship. Upon establishing residence in France, the individual in question collaborated with other displaced individuals to establish an Indonesian restaurant. This endeavor involved a deep engagement with the diverse array of Indonesian culinary traditions and the utilization of various indigenous ingredients and spices. Dimas, who was refused re-entry into Indonesia, sought consolation for his profound yearning for his birthplace within the aromatic boundaries of his restaurant's kitchen and private residence. Previous scholarly works [7], [8] have examined the interconnectedness of food, resilience, and nationality as depicted in the *Pulang*. As mentioned above, the study explores the creative prowess demonstrated by Dimas, which originates from the evocative recollection of Indonesian flavors. The preceding scholarly investigations have elucidated the portrayal of nationalism as exemplified through the culinary fabric interwoven within literary texts.

While previous research has delved into the role of food in shaping resilience and embodying nationalism within his character, a comprehensive exploration of the symbiotic relationship between Indonesian heritage food, spices, and the preservation of his homeland memories remains a terrain yet to be fully charted. It is incumbent to acknowledge that memories exert a profound emotional influence, permeating the fabric of human existence [9], [10]. The regulation of the emotional resonance of memories presents a formidable challenge in emotional regulation. The traumatic exile resulting from the 1965 tragedy in his native Indonesia intersects with his intricate web of memories, interwoven with Indonesian heritage dishes and spices such as yellow rice, *pin-dang serani*, cloves, and turmeric. This intriguing dynamic prompts a rigorous examination of how Indonesian culinary heritage and botanicals contribute to preserving Dimas' evocative ties to his homeland.

2. Method

This study uses a descriptive analysis method to illuminate the symptomatic and factual facets of his intricate affiliation with Indonesian heritage food and spices. It focuses on Indonesian heritage food, an indelible marker of the nation's cultural identity. It is an

integral component of intangible heritage [11], [12]. As a multicultural nation endowed with unparalleled biodiversity, Indonesia rightfully earns the distinction of being hailed as a bastion of culinary heritage. Food heritage transcends mere ethnic identification; it embodies a society's geographical and ideological ethos. The narrative woven through the tapestry of food encapsulates the saga of a nation's journey and civilization [13]. The present study employs a descriptive analysis approach to shed light on the symptomatic and factual aspects of Dimas' complex association with Indonesian heritage food and spices.

3. Finding and Discussion

3.1 Engaging Spices, Evoking Nostalgic Memories

In the aftermath of the 1965 tragedy, which led to his exile and subsequent revocation of citizenship, Dimas Suryo found himself precluded from re-entering Indonesia due to perceived affiliations with a proscribed political faction. This particular historical juncture in Indonesia was marked by a vehement political strife culminating in the targeted persecution and demise of individuals identified as affiliates, kin, or proponents of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) [14], [15], [16]. At the time of the crisis, Dimas, who was stationed as a journalist in Santiago, Chile, saw his Indonesian passport rescinded on account of purported involvement in the alleged insurrectionary endeavors attributed to the PKI. After these events, Dimas was compelled to adopt a life of seclusion and withdrawal from public life.

(1)... *No one can read this situation. But we knew we had to live in seclusion for some time...*(page 79, Novel *Pulang*)

Dimas Suryo possesses a profound comprehension of the post-1965 landscape in Indonesia. During that epoch, the ruling government pursued him with the intent to apprehend him. Were he to repatriate, his life would be imperiled, and his familial entourage would be safe. Consequently, he decided to establish residence in France, entering into matrimony with Vivienne Deveraux. The reverberations of the 1965 tragedy extended far beyond its immediate temporal confines, perpetuating trauma and inducing an atmosphere of pervasive suspicion among the populace. A relentless campaign persisted, targeting individuals associated with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), their adherents, and their progeny who bore the ignominious label of being implicated in the PKI [17], [16]. He navigated the capriciousness of his existence and that of his kin amid and after the events 1965.

In collaboration with his compatriots, Tjai Sin Soe, Risjaf, and Nugroho, Dimas Suryo established a restaurant in Paris, specializing in the culinary offerings of Indonesia. This endeavor serves as a poignant testament to Dimas' enduring aspiration to eventually return to his homeland, with the aromatic symphony of spices acting as a conduit through which he channels his yearning for Indonesia.

(2)... *"crushed cloves," I said, trying to suppress the longing for the smell of cloves and everything Indonesian. "You should be sipping civet coffee." All of a sudden, I said that dangerous name. Longing for something exotic*

in the middle of Europe in a poor state is tantamount to tearing the heart. Indonesia and everything related to it I should close and bury – even if for a while – so that I can continue living... (page 28, Novel Pulang)

The olfactory sensation of cloves, encountered through the consumption of *Kretek* cigarettes, evoked vivid imagery of his native Indonesia. This profound yearning for his homeland, experienced during the nascent phase of his sojourn in France, engendered a poignant sense of melancholy juxtaposed with an innate affinity for Indonesia, stemming from the redolence of cloves permeating his surroundings. Empirical studies have underscored the potent impact of olfactory stimuli on human memory [18], [19]. The olfactory modality, it is posited, catalyzes the retrieval of individual affective states and recollections bound to both personal and communal affiliations. The fragrance of cloves serves as a poignant mnemonic cue, rekindling poignant reminiscences of his homeland. However, as time elapsed, Dimas deftly harnessed the redolence of cloves as a potent coping mechanism to assuage his yearning for Indonesia.

(3)... My father knew the Indonesian government rejected him, but his country did not. His homeland did not reject him. That is why he put a kilo of cloves into a big jar and a few handfuls of turmeric powder in the second jar in the living room to taste the Indonesian fragrance... (page 196, Novel Pulang).

Lintang recounted his father harbored an ardent aspiration to repatriate to Indonesia. However, in light of the political mandate instituted by the Indonesian government, which precluded exiles from the 1965 tragedy from re-entering their native land, the prospects of Dimas's return dwindled. He engaged in the olfactory experience of cloves and turmeric powder, carefully stored in distinct vessels to evoke recollections of his homeland. It is well-established that fragrances of a pleasant nature possess the potential to elicit specific affective states in individuals [18]. However, this predilection for the redolence of Indonesian spices engendered discord with Vivienne, Dimas' spouse, culminating ultimately in their marital dissolution. Vivienne perceived Dimas's expenditure on this sensory endeavor as a fiscal extravagance, deeming it a means by which he expended resources to inhale poignant memories of Indonesia.

(4)... These events occur repeatedly. Dimas changes the contents of the jar once a year if the aroma of cloves and turmeric has begun to disappear. Sometimes, he received shipments from friends in the Netherlands; sometimes, he gets souvenirs from Jakarta. Sometimes, he was forced to buy it at a great price in Belleville. It only happens occasionally after argument after argument because I disagree with using money to breathe memories... (page 214, Novel Pulang).

The data (4) quote is a narrative about Dimas' behavior towards Indonesian spices stored at home through Vivienne's point of view. She witnessed Dimas spend money to breathe cloves for his memories of Indonesia. Even Vivienne convinced Dimas to deliberately maintain the scent of cloves so that his memory of his old lover in Indonesia, Surti Anandari, was eternal.

(5)... It was also then that I knew why he always wanted to go home to the place he loved. In the corner of his heart, he always has Surti with

all his memories. Which he then immortalized in the jar. Surti is the epitome of turmeric and clove aromas. It is all one in Indonesia...(page 216, Novel *Pulang*).

In addition to his reminiscences of Indonesia, Dimas meticulously preserves recollections of his past association with Surti. Prior to their estrangement, Dimas and Surti shared an intimate bond, eventually severed when Surti chose to align herself with Hananto Prawiro, a venerable journalist whose presence elicited reverence and antipathy. For Dimas Suryo, inhaling cloves and turmeric powder is a poignant endeavor to sustain his existence as an exile.

Hulbert and Anderson assert that memory manipulation is contingent upon experiential encounters, positing that individuals endowed with richer life experiences demonstrate enhanced proficiency in regulating unwelcome recollections [20]. This standpoint elucidates Dimas's coping mechanism in the face of psychological trauma incurred by his exilic status, marked by a succession of repudiations in his quest for repatriation. Proficiently, he has mastered the art of employing Indonesian spices to evoke a spectrum of affective responses, encompassing both gratifying and disconcerting recollections. The redolence and aroma of these spices serve as a sustaining force for him, fortifying his optimism and the fervent desire to reclaim his native land. Ultimately, he achieves a symbolic return to Indonesia, albeit one confined solely to the corporeal realm.

3.2 Indonesian Heritage Cuisine: Ideals, Economic Imperatives, and Intergenerational Transmission

Nutrition transcends its utilitarian function as a mere physiological necessity, assuming a pivotal role in satiating economic imperatives [13], [21]. This symbiosis between sustenance and economic vitality finds resonance in the portrayal of Dimas Suryo, where his culinary proficiency is underscored. Demonstrating a deftness in preparing traditional Indonesian fare, Dimas leverages this culinary acumen for pecuniary gain, manifesting in establishing an Indonesian eatery in Paris. This establishment serves as a conduit for disseminating quintessential Indonesian gastronomy, featuring an array of cherished heritage dishes, including the iconic yellow rice, *rendang padang*, *gulai*, *gulai anam*, *urap*, and *pindang serani*.

*(6)... Actually, I prefer my homemade yellow rice, complete with kering tempe, yellow fried chicken, urap, and sambal bajak. I know my yellow rice, in addition to rendang padang, gulai, and gulai anam, is a popular dish in Indonesian restaurants that achieves the highest number of orders. Mas Nug's work is often too experimental. He was too busy giving poetic names to forget the taste... (page 95, Novel *Pulang*).*

(7)..... "It's not just fried rice, it's not just sunny side up. They also have a complete and delicious Indonesian menu. There are rendang padang, paru goreng, sambal goreng udang, yellow rice complete with dried tempeh and teri balado and urap. There are also gulai anam and even pindang serani fish which are extraordinarily delicious, so the

restaurant is always full every lunch and dinner hour. Full!" (page 358, Novel Pulang)

Quote (6) illuminates Dimas's perspective, presenting him as a romantic chef deeply invested in preserving the authenticity of Indonesian culinary offerings within restaurants, eschewing the mere adornment of dishes with poetic nomenclature. The narrative in quotation (7) underscores the diverse palate of Indonesian delicacies relished by patrons, extending beyond the ubiquitous fried rice to encompass delectable options such as rendang *padang*, *paru goreng*, *sambal goreng udang*, complete yellow rice, *gulai anam*, and *pindang serani*.

The paradigm of heritage cuisine encapsulates three pivotal dimensions—heritage, people, and places—simultaneously evoking notions of cultural identity [22], [23]. The identified categories encompass heritage and the veracity of recipes interwoven with ancestral lineage. At the same time, the locational attributes of ingredients resonate with place—a discerning chef emblematic of the indigenous culture associated with a particular populace. In this regard, he emerges as an exemplar of seasoned Indonesian culinary artisans, possessing an intimate understanding of the quintessence of Indonesian gastronomy.

While conceptualizing an Indonesian restaurant, Dimas staunchly upholds his conviction, contending that the essence of Indonesian culinary establishments transcends the realm of practical fare. This contention arose during a spirited debate between him and his three associates. Undeterred, he ardently advocates for preserving the diverse tapestry of Indonesian cuisine, replete with the rich tapestry of aromatic spices, designed to be savored in situ—encompassing both accessible casual dining and a refined gastronomic experience.

(8)... "It's definitely not fast food!" I replied immediately. "Indonesian food is for casual eatery but also fine dining. We have to have a bar, this is Paris. I'll arrange the menu later," I said, feeling that this is my territory...(page 103, Novel Pulang).

The menu curation and the conceptualization of the dining experience within his restaurant are firmly under Dimas' purview, and he brooks no interference. While he eschews the adornment of dishes with fanciful labels, he casts himself as an individual enamored with the aesthetics of culinary artistry. His repertoire extends to the meticulous mastery of peanut seasoning for satay and engaging in discussions about poetic verses. He ardently adheres to traditional culinary techniques, eschewing excessive reliance on machinery akin to a painter deftly applying colors to a canvas. His culinary creations are imbued with a poet's sensibilities, deftly selecting and placing each element akin to a poet crafting verses in poetry.

The culinary domain serves not only as a creative outlet but also as a lucrative venture, one in which he staunchly upholds the integrity and distinctiveness of Indonesian cuisine, thereby safeguarding its authenticity and character. For Dimas, Indonesian spices and the heritage cuisine they represent become a conduit through which he imparts a sense of familiarity with Indonesia to his daughter, Lintang Utara. Through the culinary heritage of their homeland, he imparts a tangible connection to their roots, bridging the geographical and cultural distance that separates them from Indonesia.

(9) *that means I stopped my visit to the Indonesian restaurant. Thus, I have long parted with the atmosphere of gathering in a restaurant, the unique gamelan music, and the interior enlivened by shadow puppets, masks, and Indonesian maps on the walls. It is even more difficult to rarely meet my father's friends, Om Nug, Om Risjaf, and Om Tjai, who are like my own understanding. Another difficulty was parting with the aroma of Dad's goat goulash that no chef on European soil could match...* (page 138, Novel Pulang).

(10) *As soon as the movie finished, we raided Mom's wrapped food, which contained Dad's cooking: yellow rice, spicy sliced potatoes, and rendang kering. Usually, I will eat without crap...* (page 189, Novel Pulang).

Lintang's reliance on Indonesian cuisine engendered a hesitancy to depart Paris for Indonesia to pursue her film documentary project. The familiar ambiance of the *Tanah Air* Restaurant, where she imbibed knowledge about Indonesia from her father and his intimate circle of confidantes, held an indelible sway over her. For Lintang, dishes such as *gulai kambing* (lamb meat goulash) and yellow rice represented more than sustenance; they constituted a source of solace and emotional succor. It is well-established that food, particularly when consumed during moments of stress, can evoke positive affect and is intricately intertwined with pivotal social relationships [24], [25].

The Indonesian culinary heritage presented by Dimas to Lintang embodies his ardent endeavor to perpetuate a connection with a homeland he could no longer physically revisit, owing to the aftermath of the 1965 tragedy. Through the conduit of spices and the veneration of Indonesian culinary traditions, he seeks to evoke a profound sense of Indonesia within Lintang, ultimately inspiring her to undertake a figurative journey back home. This poignant experiment ultimately yields success, as Lintang Utara embarks on a sojourn to Indonesia, completing her documentary reuniting with his cherished family and friends in Indonesia.

4. Conclusion

Dimas Suryo employs Indonesian spices and culinary products as essential mechanisms for upholding his connection with the nation. In light of the circumstances that transpired in 1965, rendering his physical return home unfeasible, Dimas adeptly employs these cultural artifacts to evoke the essence of Indonesia, all the while generating financial gains. The individual achieves this by upholding a steadfast idealism while crafting Indonesian cuisine within the restaurant, imbuing each dish with profound cultural and ideological significance. The daughter, Lintang Utara, stands to gain from this undertaking as she will inherit a valuable legacy of culinary traditions indigenous to Indonesia. The findings of this research have significant implications for other studies in the field of literature, specifically concerning the role of specific cuisines as vessels for collective memory among communities that have undergone traumatic events.

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