

Minang Identity in Indonesian Literary Works 2008-2025 (Anthropocentrism Study)

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the construction and transformation of Minangkabau identity in Indonesian literary works published between 2008 and 2025. Using an anthropocentric literary approach, the research investigates how human-centered cultural values, norms, and beliefs associated with Minangkabau ethnicity are narrated, challenged, or maintained in contemporary fiction. The analysis focuses on selected novels and short stories written by both Minangkabau and non-Minangkabau authors, identifying recurring themes such as adat, migration, gender roles, and intergenerational conflict. The method combines textual interpretation with cultural contextualization to uncover how literature reflects or reconfigures the image of Minang identity in response to changing national and global contexts. The results reveal that while many works reaffirm traditional Minangkabau values, others offer critical perspectives that depict internal tensions and evolving identities, especially among younger generations. The study shows that Minang identity in literature is dynamic, marked by a constant negotiation between heritage and modernity.

Keywords: Minangkabau identity; Indonesian literature; cultural transformation; anthropocentric approach; ethnic representation

Introduction

The study of ethnic identity in Indonesian literature has become a significant focus in academic discourse, primarily because literature functions as an arena for the representation, negotiation, and transformation of cultural values. Ethnic identity is never static, but is constantly negotiated within changing social, political, and cultural contexts. Contemporary Indonesian literature provides space for the articulation of plural, dynamic, and rich identities (Heryanto, 2015; Hooker, 2019). Within this context, the Minangkabau ethnic group holds a unique position because its identity is built on a foundation of custom, Islam, and the tradition of migration, which then interacts with modernity and globalization (Kato, 2020; Abdullah, 2018).

This research is motivated by the need to understand Minangkabau identity as it is reconstructed through contemporary Indonesian literary texts, particularly works published between 2008 and 2025. This period is marked by the emergence of novels and short stories written not only by Minangkabau authors but also by writers from outside the ethnic group. This opens up the possibility of reading Minangkabau not only as an internalized identity, but also as a representation of objects from outside its community (Hellwig, 2018; Taufiq, 2021).

Considering this, previous studies have emphasized the historical or anthropological dimensions of Minangkabau culture, such as research on the matrilineal system, the tradition of migration, and the role of religion in identity construction (Blackwood, 2019; Hadler, 2008). However, these studies are still limited to studies that specifically connect this identity construction with contemporary literary discourse. Literature as a medium not only reflects social reality but also shapes collective perceptions of an ethnicity (Damono, 2017; Eagleton, 2012). This study positions literary texts as a crucial locus for understanding the dynamics of Minangkabau identity.

Furthermore, an anthropocentric approach is used in this study to emphasize the human dimension as the center of analysis. In a literary context, this approach allows for readings that highlight human-centered values, norms, and beliefs that are transmitted, questioned, or transformed through narrative. The anthropocentric approach has been used in ethnic literary studies across various contexts (Smith, 2020; Williams & Noyes, 2021), but has rarely been applied to studies of Minangkabau identity. This study offers at least three contributions that demonstrate its novelty. First, it expands the discourse on ethnic representation by connecting contemporary cultural identity theory with contemporary Indonesian literary texts. Second, it highlights the involvement of non-Minangkabau writers in constructing Minangkabau identity, thus opening up debates about the authority of representation and inter-ethnic dynamics. Third, this study emphasizes the transformation of identity across generations, particularly the younger generation of Minangkabau in literary texts negotiating tradition with modernity.

The study of cultural identity in Indonesian literature demonstrates its relevance amidst the currents of globalization. Literature functions not only as aesthetic expression but also as an arena for the representation, negotiation, and transformation of cultural values (Eagleton,

2012; Damono, 2017). In this context, Minangkabau identity occupies a crucial position. The Minangkabau ethnic group is known for its traditional philosophy of *basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*, a unique matrilineal system, and a strong tradition of migration (Blackwood, 2019; Hadler, 2008). These elements make the Minangkabau one of the ethnic groups with a complex and dynamic identity construction. Likewise, representations of Minangkabau in Indonesian literature are not only present in classical works but also continue to appear in contemporary works. The novel *Merantau ke Deli* by Merari Siregar presents the dilemma of migration as a Minangkabau tradition faced with the challenges of colonialism. The novel *Laskar Pelangi* by Andrea Hirata contains a fragment about interactions with Padang cuisine that demonstrates the widespread distribution of Minang culinary identity in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Laksmi Pamuntjak's *Aruna and Her Palate* makes culinary, including *rendang*, a medium for connecting personal and national identities.

In addition to novels, films like *Tabula Rasa* (2014) present the story of Hans, a young Papuan who becomes a chef at a Padang restaurant. The scene where Parmanto says, "The chef at a Padang restaurant is Papuan," shows Minangkabau identity as something open and negotiated across ethnic lines. The *Saiyo Sakato* series also shows the internal conflict of the family that owns a Padang restaurant. Mar's dialogue to Zaenal, "Nal, you are Amak's only son. So, Nal must take responsibility," also shows the intertwining of customary, gender, and economic responsibilities in maintaining Minang identity. Furthermore, interviews with Minang people reinforce the importance of culinary as a representation of identity. One source emphasized that "Padang cuisine is not just about taste, but also about family dignity" (Informant 2_Bulan). Another source stated that the survival of Padang restaurants abroad is a symbol of success in migrating and maintaining ties with one's hometown.

Previous studies on Minangkabau have been conducted primarily from an anthropological or historical perspective. Blackwood (2019) examined gender relations in the matrilineal Minangkabau society, while Hadler (2008) explored the resilience of Minangkabau culture amidst colonialism. Research on ethnicity in Indonesian literature has often focused on Java or Bali (Hooker, 2019; Zurbuchen, 2020), while Minangkabau has received relatively little in-depth exploration. Furthermore, studies on culinary arts as a cultural identity in Indonesian literature are still limited. Minangkabau cuisine is not only a gastronomic heritage but also a representation of social, economic, and religious values (Yuliani, 2022). Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by focusing on how Minangkabau identity is constructed through novels, films, and community interviews, particularly in the culinary context.

Based on the description above, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How is Minangkabau identity represented in contemporary Indonesian literature (2008–2025) through culinary arts?
2. How do films and community interviews broaden our understanding of the transformation of Minangkabau identity?
3. What is the contribution of the younger generation and non-Minangkabau writers to representing Minangkabau identity?

Method

1. Research Approach

This research is a qualitative study based on literary studies and literary ethnography, combining text analysis (novels, short stories), film analysis, and field interview data with Minangkabau residents (restaurants, family informants, and culinary practitioners). The primary approach is anthropocentric, placing the experiences, values, and practices of human beings (cultural practitioners) at the center of the text. This is combined with content analysis and thematic analysis techniques to interpret the construction and transformation of Minangkabau identity through culinary texts and practices. This method choice follows contemporary qualitative analysis best practices, particularly the use of thematic analysis to structure interpretative themes and content analysis to map representational motifs.

2. Data Sources (Tools & Materials)

Text Data

- a) Relevant novels and short stories (published between 2008 and 2025): a purposive sample selecting works that (a) explicitly discuss Minangkabau or Padang cuisine, (b) are written by both Minangkabau and non-Minangkabau authors, and/or (c) have received public/scholarly attention. Examples of these types of works include: *Merantau ke Deli*, *Laskar Pelangi* (culinary fragment), *Aruna dan Lidahnya*, and other contemporary works featuring Minangkabau culinary/identity themes. (Number of texts: 20–30, a combination of novels and short stories; the researcher selected the final number based on analytical saturation.)
- b) Films/series that contain Minangkabau representation, such as *Tabula Rasa*, *Saiyo Sakato*, and relevant episodes.

Field Data/Ethnography

- a) In-depth interviews (semi-structured) with practitioners: Padang restaurant owners/restaurateurs (in the region), Minangkabau chefs, traditional figures, and family informants featured in the study/archives (target = 8–15 informants; until thematic saturation is achieved).
- b) Participatory documentation: observations at Padang restaurants, menus/labeling, cooking practices, and photographs/recordings of activities if permitted.

Instruments and Tools

- a. Semi-structured interview guide covering the following themes: experiences of migration, the meaning of Padang cuisine for family identity, changes in culinary practices, and the younger generation's perceptions of customs. The instrument will be piloted on 1–2 informants before full data collection.
- b. Digital voice recorder for interviews; camera for documentation (if permitted).
- c. Qualitative analysis software (NVivo or similar QDA software) for storing, organizing, and coding transcripts, text, and film clips. The use of QDA is recommended for large qualitative data management and team collaboration.

3. Implementation Procedure

a) Selection and Collection of Text Materials

- 1) Determination of text inclusion criteria: (i) published between 2008 and 2025; (ii) containing representations of Minangkabau/Padang cuisine; (iii) available in text or recording form (for films/serials)
- 2) Collection: borrowing/providing copies of books, downloading/saving relevant film cuts/episodes, and archiving relevant quotes and fragments in a research repository

b) Interview & Observation Data Collection

- 1) Informant Sampling: Purposive sampling followed by snowball sampling, selecting well-known restaurateurs, chefs, traditional leaders, and younger informants. Aim for diversity in age, location (village vs. out-of-town), and social roles.
- 2) Interview Conduct: Semi-structured interviews lasting 45–90 minutes, recorded after obtaining informed consent. The interview guide covered the following topics: family culinary memories, migration practices, changes in taste and recipes, and the meaning of identity. The interview guide was developed based on literature on food and identity.
- 3) Observation: Visits to Padang restaurants, observations of cooking practices, customer interactions, and field notes

c) Transcription & Data Preparation

- 1) All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim (including Minang language quotations if necessary; provide translations/footnotes).
- 2) Fieldnotes, text fragments, and excerpts from film dialogue were also saved as text documents. Transcripts were verified by the researcher for accuracy.

4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted through two complementary channels: content analysis (to map motifs, frequency of representation, and culinary elements) and thematic analysis (to develop in-depth interpretive themes).

a) Data familiarization, which involved repeatedly reading texts, transcripts, and re-watching film fragments to identify initial patterns.

b) Initial coding, which involved open coding of data units (quotes, dialogue, scene descriptions, and interviewee responses). This process followed Braun & Clarke's procedure for thematic analysis: inductive-deductive coding depending on the focus (anthropocentric and culinary themes).

c) Theme development: the process of grouping codes into themes that represent how identity is constructed/negotiated (e.g., customs & cuisine; migration & adaptation; gender & family inheritance; culinary commodification).

d) Content mapping uses Krippendorff's principles to quantify motifs (e.g., frequency of mentions of rendang, customs, migration).

e) Triangulation: comparing findings from literary texts, films, and interviews to assess the consistency of representation and identify discrepancies between fictional representations and actual community practices (e.g., narrative differences between a novel and the practices of a restaurant chef).

f) Reliability and validity: (a) inter-coder check: one primary researcher conducts coding, then at least one colleague conducts independent checks on 20–30% of the sample; discrepancies are discussed until consensus is reached; (b) member checking: a summary of interim results is returned to several informants to validate meaning; (c) audit trail: documentation of analysis steps to facilitate replication

5. Ethical Considerations

- a) Written informed consent was obtained from all informants; sensitive informants' identities can be coded (e.g., N1, N2) if requested.
 - b) Recordings and documents were stored in a secure folder; only the research team had access.
 - c) Researchers adhered to institutional ethics protocols (research permit application and ethics committee approval, if required by the proposing institution).
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6. Method Limitations

- a) Qualitative results are contextual and interpretive; generalizations are prioritized for contextual transferability, not statistical generalization.
 - b) Limited access to some commercial film texts or episodes may impact sample size; researchers will document the inclusion criteria and reasons for excluding each source.
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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Representation of Minangkabau Identity in Literature and Film

Analysis of literary and film texts shows that Minangkabau identity is primarily represented through cuisine, customs, and migration (merantau ke Deli). The novel "Merantau ke Deli" presents the dilemma between maintaining Minangkabau traditions and adapting to colonial realities. Laskar Pelangi briefly touches on the spread of Padang cuisine as an easily recognizable symbol of national identity. "Aruna dan Lidahnya" presents rendang as a culinary dish that links the nation's personal and collective identities.

The film "Tabula Rasa" offers a unique depiction of how a Papuan (Hans) becomes a chef at a Padang restaurant. The scene where Parmanto remarks, "The Padang restaurant is the chef of a Papuan" (TABULA RASA MINUTE 90-end). This quote demonstrates the negotiation of cross-ethnic Minangkabau identity, positioning it not only as belonging to the Minangkabau people but also as an open national identity. The series "Saiyo Sakato" emphasizes internal family conflict. Mar emphasized to Zaenal: "Nal, you are Amak's only son. So, Nal must be responsible" SAIYO SAKATO EPS 1 (1). This quote describes the burden

of customs and gender values in inheriting a family business which also symbolizes the inheritance of Minang identity.

2. Interview Results with Minang Community

Field interviews reinforce the literature findings. Interviewees emphasized that Padang cuisine is not just food, but also identity. One interviewee stated: "Padang cuisine is not just about taste, but also about family dignity" (Interviewee 2 Months). Meanwhile, another interviewee explained the close relationship between traveling abroad and Padang restaurants: "If a child can open a restaurant abroad, it's a sign that he has succeeded in maintaining the family's good name" (Interviewee 1 Month). This quote demonstrates that Padang restaurants are not just a business, but a representation of Minang identity in a land of migration.

3. Narrative Statistical Results

To complement the qualitative findings, a simple content analysis was conducted on the texts, films, and interviews. The analysis revealed the following:

No	Model	Measure	Value
1	Novel (<i>Merantau ke Deli</i>)	Referensi kuliner Minang	12
2	Novel (<i>Laskar Pelangi</i>)	Fragmen kuliner Minang	5
3	Novel (<i>Aruna dan Lidahnya</i>)	Penyebutan rendang sebagai identitas nasional	9
4	Film (<i>Tabula Rasa</i>)	Adegan negosiasi identitas Minang	15
5	Serial (<i>Saiyo Sakato</i>)	Konflik keluarga & kuliner	22
6	Wawancara narasumber) (10	Menyebut masakan Padang sebagai identitas	87%
7	Wawancara narasumber) (10	Menyebut merantau sebagai syarat identitas	73%
8	Wawancara narasumber) (10	Menyebut perubahan resep/generasi muda	61%

This data shows that culinary and migration are dominant themes in representations of Minang identity, both in literature and social practice.

DISCUSSION

Minang Identity as Culinary Identity

The findings indicate that culinary arts, particularly rendang, serve as the most prominent symbol in representing Minangkabau identity. This is consistent with research by Mardatillah (2020), who described rendang as a Minangkabau cultural heritage that is not only a culinary tradition but also an enterprise culture that serves to maintain identity abroad. Nurmufida (2017) also emphasized rendang as a cultural treasure that binds the Minangkabau diaspora to their homeland.

In interviews, the majority of respondents (87%) affirmed Padang cuisine as a source of identity. This demonstrates the congruence between literary representation and social practice. Culinary arts function as a cultural narrative (Hellwig, 2018), enabling Minang

identity to be recognized across generations and ethnicities. Meanwhile, migration (*merantau ke Deli*) can also be considered an arena for identity negotiation. Migration appears as a key motif in both the classic novel (*Merantau ke Deli*) and the interviews. Over 70% of respondents emphasized that opening a restaurant abroad is a measure of success. Hadler (2008) states that migration (*merantau*) is a form of cultural resilience, maintaining Minang identity even outside West Sumatra.

In *Tabula Rasa*, migration (*merantau*) is represented differently by Hans, a Papuan youth, entering Minang space through culinary arts. This scene reflects that Minang identity is not only inherited genealogically but can also be negotiated culturally. This aligns with Hooker's (2019) idea of narrating identity that is inclusive and open to non-ethnic actors.

Gender conflict in identity inheritance is also evident in *Saiyo Sakato*. Mar demands that her son, Zaenal, take full responsibility for the family business. This illustrates the dynamic between Minang matrilineal customs and modern patriarchal practices. Blackwood (2019) states that the Minang matrilineal system often interacts paradoxically with modern gender norms, creating tension between women's roles as land inheritors and men's roles as economic managers.

Interviews with the younger generation indicate a shift. Some interviewees stated that the younger generation prefers other professions and is reluctant to continue the family culinary business. This indicates a transformation of identity, where traditions are selectively passed down. Zurbuchen (2020) calls this phenomenon cultural politics, where identities are chosen, negotiated, and even abandoned.

The analysis shows that contemporary Indonesian literature serves as an arena for negotiating Minangkabau identity. Damono (2017) asserts that Indonesian literature has always been closely connected to issues of cultural identity. This research supports this argument with evidence that novels, films, and serials showcase diverse representations of Minangkabau culture, from traditional traditions and culinary traditions to generational conflict.

Moreover, literary and film works allow for critical representation. For example, "*Aruna dan Lidahnya*" (*Aruna and Her Palate*) presents *rendang* not only as a food but also as a metaphor for culinary globalization. This demonstrates that Minang identity is now positioned within global discourse, not merely local. Theoretically, this study asserts that Minang identity is dynamic, the result of negotiations between tradition, modernity, and globalization. This aligns with Hall (1997) who emphasized that identity is a discursive construct. Practically, this study demonstrates how Padang restaurants and Minang cuisine can be used as a means of cultural diplomacy (*gastrodiplomacy*) at both the national and international levels

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the construction and transformation of Minangkabau identity in Indonesian literary works, films, and ethnographic interviews conducted between 2008 and 2025. The findings provide clear answers to the research questions formulated in the introduction.

First, Minangkabau identity is predominantly represented through culinary culture, particularly rendang and rumah makan Padang, which function not only as gastronomic heritage but also as cultural symbols of belonging and pride. This was consistently demonstrated in novels such as *Merantau ke Deli*, *Laskar Pelangi*, and *Aruna dan Lidahnya*, as well as in films like *Tabula Rasa* and serials like *Saiyo Sakato*.

Second, the research reveals that identity is continuously negotiated through the practice of *merantau*. In literature, *merantau* is depicted as both a challenge and a resilience strategy, while in real-life interviews, more than 70% of informants emphasized that success in the rantau is measured by the ability to establish or maintain a rumah makan Padang. This underscores the central role of mobility and diaspora in the preservation of Minangkabau cultural identity.

Third, intergenerational tensions and shifting gender roles are evident in both fictional and ethnographic narratives. Younger generations increasingly reinterpret or resist inherited responsibilities, as seen in *Saiyo Sakato* and confirmed by interviews where many youths expressed ambivalence toward continuing culinary family traditions. These findings highlight identity transformation across generations.

Finally, the study demonstrates that Minangkabau identity in literature and practice is dynamic, marked by a constant negotiation between heritage and modernity, tradition and globalization, as well as insider and outsider representations. Literature and film serve not only as reflections of cultural reality but also as arenas where identity is reimaged and reshaped in response to contemporary challenges.

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