

MINANGKABAU WOMEN IN JAKARTA: THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF MINANG LANGUAGE, INDONESIAN LANGUAGE, AND MINANG CULTURE

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Abstract

Of the so many ethnic groups in Indonesia, the Minangkabau-or Minang-people have the strongest tradition of migration. This ethnic group is also known as the largest matrilineal society in the world (Wikipedia). This qualitative study looks at how the Minang women who live in the surrounding areas of Jakarta perceive the Minang language, Indonesian language, and Minang culture in their daily lives. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with four adult female Minang informants, aged between 39 to 55 years old. This study reveals that the four women no longer perceive the Minang language as important to be maintained. They prefer to use Indonesian in their daily communication, both in the family domain as well as the public domain. In relation to the Minang culture, the four women tend to maintain the egalitarian and democratic principles of the Minang tradition. In fact, the quality of maintaining and passing on the Minang culture to their children depends on the attachment of the women to the culture itself.

Keywords: Culture, Language, Minang Women, Perception,

INTRODUCTION

Minangkabau people, also known as Minang, are the indigenous ethnic group in West Sumatera Indonesia who has a long history to migrate to larger cities all over Indonesia. Of the so many ethnic groups in Indonesia, people from the Minangkabau ethnic background tend to migrate with greater frequency than the other ethnic groups in the country. For men, generally, it is believed that the tradition of *marantau* 'migrate' will give them the opportunity to seek for a better life and future. They believe that success in the "new place" is because they follow the concept of life reflected in their well-known proverbs *Alam takambang jadi guru* 'Nature becomes your teacher' and *Dima bumi dipijak, disinan langik dijunjuang* "Wherever you stand (on the land), that is when you should hold up the sky." This means that Minang people are very adaptable to the local custom or situation, and they think that migrating is an important process for them to open their views and to achieve a better life.

Arguably, in his study Kato (1982) noted that the number of women who migrated had increased since the middle of the twentieth century. One of the reasons was that more and more women wanted to pursue for higher education in the *tanah rantau*.

Apart from the tradition of *marantau*, the Minangkabau is also known as one of the largest matrilineal societies in the world. In this system, women play a very important role in the family and the society. A mother is considered as the leader of the family, and she is supposed to be responsible for important matters such as inheritance, *rumah gadang* 'traditional communal house', and many other things. Land and valuable properties are supposed to be passed down from a mother to her daughter(s). A man, on the other hand, is commonly encouraged to go out of the community to seek success, experience, and wealth.

Women are expected to manage inheritance and domestic issues, while men are expected to study, work, and establish an independent life.

Quite many studies have focused on the uniqueness of matrilineal Minangkabau social structure, among others Kato (1978, 1982), Stark (2013), Iman & Mani (2013), Erianjoni (2011), and Syahrizal & Meiyenti (2012). In particular, the studies look at how the matrilineal family custom and the system of inheritance can co-exist with a very strong Islamic tradition. The seemingly ‘contradictory’ authorities – the mother who is responsible for inheritance or property and the *mamak* or the brother from the mother’s side who is responsible for his nephews – have historically persisted through history (Stark, 2013). Kato (1982) explains the system of matriarchy in Minangkabau society as follows:

Ancestral property remains the most important foundation of the Minangkabau matrilineage. Although ancestral property, above all land (or more properly speaking, its usage rights), is now likely to be divided among **samandai** (or their corresponding nuclear families), it is inherited in a pattern that is essentially the same: it is transmitted according to the female line and is in principle inalienable from the matrilineage or sublineage (p. 2015). [Emphasis added]

samandai = mother and children

In relation to the Islamic tradition that co-exists with the matrilineal system, Kato (1982) continues his description as follows:

[...] all **adat** matters which deal with lineage of a corporate group are the concern of the **mamak**. Decisions related to the ancestral properties and the conduct of the lineage members are taken by the matrilineage or sublineage as a whole under the guidance of the **mamak**. Examples of such decision concern disputes over ancestral property and titles, infringements of **adat** customs and misbehavior of by lineage members. In these matters, the **sumando** may be consulted but final authority is unquestionably under the hands of the **mamak** (p. 211). [Emphasis added]

adat = custom; sumando = son-in-law; mamak = mother's brother

Although the matrilineal system is understood as the main traditional way of life (Stark, 2013), some researchers found that there have been significant changes on the matrilineal system (among others, Kato, 1982; Erianjoni, 2011; Stark, 2013). Kato (1982) described this situation as follows:

[...] there have certainly been significant changes in the Minangkabau matrilineal system. The increasing importance of the nuclear family as an economic and residential unit is undeniable. Concurrently, the bonds between husband and wife, and between father and children have been growing.

[...] Property is now given to children than to **kemanakan**, but it is only individually earned property. [...] The usage rights of ancestral lands are now more likely to be divided between **paruik** members, but people still uphold the principle that the ownership of ancestral land ultimately belongs to descent groups, not to individual users. Residential arrangements are now more uxorilocal than duolocal [...] (pp. 213-214). [Emphasis added]

Kemanakan = nephew or niece; paruik = extended family from one ancestral line

Kato’s view is also supported by Erianjoni (2011) and Syahrizal & Meiyenti (2012), who argue that there has been a shift in the Minang culture as a result of migration or

globalization. For Erianjoni (2011), ideally a Minang woman should follow the tradition of *Limpapeh rumah nan gadang* ‘A woman who lives in a *rumah gadang* is a respectful woman’. Nowadays, however, we rarely find women living in *rumah gadang*. In Syahrizal & Meiyenti’s (2012) observation, the matrilineal kinship system of the Minangkabau people has changed from extended family to nuclear family.

What about Minang language? Is there also a change in the use of Minang language in West Sumatra? Marnita & Oktavianus’s (2008) study in three different Minangkabau areas shows that there is a tendency that the younger generation, especially those living in Padang, prefers to use Indonesian rather than Minang language. These young people often do code switching and code mixing in communication. Although this may indicate a positive attitude towards the national language, there is an indication that Indonesian language is threatening the existence of Minang language.

However, a recent study by Permanadeli et al. (2016) indicates that despite the fact that many educated Minang families in Padang prefer to use Indonesian and are reluctant to use Minang language in the family domain, surprisingly the children can speak Minang language very fluently. Apparently, these children learn how to use Minang from their surroundings outside their homes.

Since Minang men are encouraged to migrate to other places for good, when they bring their family to a new place, how do their children learn Minang language and culture? Do they inherit the language and culture to the children who were born in places outside the Minang environment? Presumably, when they migrate to places outside West Sumatra, especially to a megacity like Jakarta with a totally different environment, cultural and language shift might be faster.

As the capital city of Indonesia, Jakarta is assumed to be a favorite place for migration by the Minang people. As a metropolitan city, Jakarta is known as a city of ethnic pluralism (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). It is also a place where people of economic, social, and cultural heterogeneity live. Different elements of people with different socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds can be found in Jakarta. Jakarta was chosen as the setting of this research for two simple reasons. First, the researchers live in Jakarta, and second, it would be interesting to know the perceptions of Minang women about their language and culture in this heterogeneous society. In the year of 2016 when this research was conducted, the heterogeneity of Jakarta was shown by the fact that Jakarta had a Christian and Chinese-Indonesian Governor, Basuki “Ahok” Cahaya Purnama. Ahok was elected as the Vice Governor together with Joko “Jokowi” Widodo as the Governor in 2014. He automatically stepped up to be the Governor when Jokowi was elected as the seventh President of Indonesia in October 2014.

With a strong tradition of *marantau* and matrilineal system described above, the question that emerges is whether the Minang people – women in particular – will pass on the Minang culture and language to the offsprings in the *tanah rantau* ‘the place of migration’. This issue, which is under-researched, will be the focus of this paper. Based on an in-depth interview with four adult Minang women, this paper will attempt to answer the following research questions:

- (1) How do Minang women perceive Minang language and Indonesian language? Which language is considered more important?
- (2) For the Minang women, are there important Minang values that are relevant to be maintained in the *tanah rantau*, in this case Jakarta?

RESEARCH METHOD

Participant Profiles

This qualitative study used an in-depth interview technique to four indigenous Minang women who live in the area of Jakarta. They are all married, aged between 39 and 55 years old. Three of them were born in Padang, and one of them in Jakarta, but they were all raised by Minang parents. The interviews were carried out between the months of March and September in 2016. To protect their confidentiality we use fictitious Minang names to be more personal rather than initials. Minang names will remind readers that we are studying Minang culture.

Gusmiati: 42 years old, born and grew up in Padang. After completing her bachelor's degree in Padang, she married a man from Bukittinggi and then they migrated to Jakarta. Gusmiati has three children; all of them were born and raised in Jakarta. Gusmiati speaks Minang very fluently.

Marshanda: 55 years old, born in Bukittinggi and lived there until she completed her high school. She then moved to Jakarta and stayed with her brother who migrated to Jakarta earlier. Afterwards, Marshanda spent her university life in Jakarta. She obtained her doctoral degree in a state university in Jakarta. She married a Minang man who is still her relative, born in Jakarta but moved to Bukittinggi when he was 7 years old, but moved back to Jakarta when he was in his second year of junior high school. Marshanda speaks Minang language fluently, and she has three children.

Fitri, aged 39 tahun, was born in Padang. She lived in Padang until she finished her junior high school, and then moved to Jakarta with her parents. She is married to a man from West Java. Fitri has no children. Her mother is very dominant, and although Fitri does not live in the same house with her parents, her mom still keeps reminding her to maintain the Minang culture. Fitri does not speak Minang fluently. Fitri is now pursuing her doctoral degree at a private university in Jakarta.

Rohana, aged 45 years old, has a Master's degree from a state university in Jakarta. She was born in Depok from Minang parents. She is married to Minang man from Bukittinggi, and she has two children. Rohana does not speak Minang very well, but she was raised in a Minang family who maintains the Minang tradition.

Insrument

Informed consent was signed up before the interview to ensure that the four participants understood about the study. The interviews were presented in the Indonesian language. They were recorded and then transcribed. The following questions were used as guidance:

1. *Sebagai perempuan Minang, apakah Anda masih mempertahankan bahasa Minang di ranah keluarga?* (As a Minang woman, do you use Minang language in the family domain?)
2. *Apakah anak-anak Anda menggunakan bahasa Minang?* (Do your children speak Minang language?)
3. *Apabila Anda mendengar seseorang berbicara dalam bahasa Minang, apakah terasa ada ikatan emosional dengan tanah Minang?* (When you hear someone speak in Minang, do you have an emotional tie with the Minang homeland?)

4. *Bagaimana sikap anak-anak Anda terhadap bahasa dan budaya Minang?* (What is your children's attitude towards Minang language and culture?)
5. *Menurut Anda, bahasa apa yang lebih penting: bahasa Minang atau bahasa Indonesia? Mengapa?* (In your view, which language is more important: Minang or Indonesian? Why?)
6. *Menurut Anda, mana yang lebih penting: mempertahankan bahasa Minang atau budaya Minang? Mengapa?* (In your view, which is more important: maintaining the Minang language or the Minang culture? Why?)
7. *Menurut Anda, nilai-nilai apa saja yang seharusnya dipahami dan dijalankan oleh seorang perempuan Minang?* (In your view, what values should be understood and practised by a Minang woman?)
8. *Nilai-nilai apa saja yang penting dan harus dipertahankan oleh perempuan Minang sampai sekarang? Mengapa?* (Which values are considered important and have to be maintained by Minang women up to now? Why?)
9. *Nilai-nilai Minang apa saja yang Anda yakini masih relevan dalam menghadapi perkembangan zaman?* (Which Minang values are considered relevant in this global era?)
10. *Menurut Anda, nilai-nilai Minang apa yang harus diteruskan ke anak-anak Anda?* (In your view, which Minang values have to be inherited to your children?)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions towards Minang language and Indonesian language

Every normal human being uses language as a means of communication. Language is also used to convey cultural messages for its speakers. Through language, parents can inherit moral values to their children, and they expect their children to apply them in their day-to-day lives. In many ways, it is through a local language – in this case the Minang language – that a cultural norm can be appropriately conveyed. We often find it is difficult to describe a particular cultural norm in a language where the words or expressions are not available. In relation to this, Rohana, who was born and raised in Jakarta, reflected the time when her mother always used specific Minang expressions or terms which did not have their equivalence in Indonesian.

For Gusmiati and Marshanda who speak Minang fluently, they do not specifically inherit the Minang language to their children. In their daily communication with their families, they used Indonesian. They said that their children understood Minang but they were unable to speak the language. Gusmiati admitted that she preferred to speak in Indonesian with her children as she thought that speaking in Indonesian would sound more elegant, elite, and educated.

[...] Kenapa ya saya dan temen-teman, kalo itu [berbahasa Indonesia] dibilang kaum terdidik. Mungkin dalam arti kita kuliah gitu yaa... eu.... Berbahasa Indonesia gitu. Berbahasa Jakarta gitu... ehm... kesannya kenapa lebih....apa bahasanya... apa itu kesannya lebih berkelas, lebih gaya atau lebih...lebih... lebih keliatan terdidik apalah namanya itu... [Gusmiati]

[I don't know].. why when my friends and I speak [Indonesian], people think we are educated. It might be because we are students [at a higher education] speak Indonesian... speak with Jakarta accent...gives impression of more [elite]... probably

the language.. gives an impression of higher class, more elegant or well....better educated...

Gusmiati, who speaks Indonesian with a strong Minang accent, often speaks in Minang with her husband, although her husband uses more Indonesian rather than Minang. Being a Minang is also demonstrated when Gusmiati meets her Minang friends. She will use Minang expressions, and actually the expressions are mostly swear words, which she said, were used to show closeness and solidarity. Fitri, who does not speak Minang very well, also uses some Minang swear words to show solidarity with her Minang friends.

Marshanda, in contrast, does not inherit Minang language to her children although she herself speaks Minang very well. In her daily communication with her husband and children, she uses Indonesian although sometimes she mixes it up with Minang. Marshanda was once criticized by one of her friends, who comes from a Batak ethnic background, for not teaching her children to speak Minang. Her friend speaks Minang very fluently even though it is not her first language. Marshanda said,

[...] “*Jadi waktu saya SMA itu kan saya punya temen Batak. Temen Batak itu... kami cukup dekat ya karena dia suka belajar di rumah. Nah dia tugas di di setelah di Jakarta dia pulang ke Medan. Terus dia ngomong bahasa Minangnya itu fasih. Saya jadi malu sendiri. Dia bilang kamu itu, katanya gitu, anaknya nggak diajarin bahasa Minang. Jadi ngomong dia bahasa Minangkan. Aden, aden itukan bahasa Minang yang kalo kita sesama, sesama temen itu pake aden gitukan. Guelah gitu kan. Gue aja yang orang Batak ngajarin anak gue bahasa Minang gitu. Masa lo nggak. Jadi anaknya dia bahasa Batak, Minang, Indonesia.*”

“When I was in high school I had a Batak friend. I was close to her as she often came to my house to study together. She used to work in Jakarta but now she is in Medan. She speaks Minang language very fluently, and she teaches her child to speak Minang. This makes me ashamed of myself. She asked me why I didn’t teach my children to speak Minang. Her child speaks Bataknese, Minang, and Indonesian.”

As for Fitri and Rohana, their parents always communicate with them in Indonesian. However, during our interviews with them, they both used particular Minang expressions—the way Gusmiaty and Marshanda did. When asked why they used the Minang expressions rather than Indonesian, they said that the expressions do not have the equivalence in Indonesian and can only be expressed in Minang. Some expressions that were uttered during the interviews were, among others, *maota* ‘chat about different topics while drinking coffee’, *ka bako* ‘go home to father’s family’, *tanah pusako* ‘inherited land’, *marandang* ‘cook rendang (typical food from Padang)’, *baruak* ‘a kind of monkey’, *tigo tungku sajarangan* ‘three leaders in the Minangkabau society’. This evidence indicates that the four Minang participants actually still keep the cultural values that they have inherited from their families, and most probably in this case mostly from their mothers. Even Rohana, who was born in Jakarta and grew up in the same city, used quite a lot of Minang expressions, which, according to her, were introduced by her mother. For Rohana, it is her husband who plays an important role in introducing a number of popular expressions to the children. He also taught his children how to greet their grandparents politely and appropriately in Minang. Rohana said that her husband purposively did that in order to remind his children that they should maintain their Minang culture.

Although Marshanda and Gusmiati regretted that they did not inherit the Minang language to their children, they think that Minang values do not have to be conveyed in Minang language. Marshanda also said that so far there have been no protests what ever from

their Minang communities in Jakarta whether they speak in Minang or Indonesian. For Gusmiati, although she knew that being able to speak Minang indicates the origin of being a Minang, she did not teach her children to speak Minang. Apparently, a similar condition happens with the Minang families in Padang, the capital city of West Sumatera. There is a tendency that among the educated, Minang language is not spoken in the family domain. These families think that Indonesian is much more important than Minang, as they have to prepare the children for better education. However, children raised in these families speak Minang language very fluently as they learn it from their surroundings (Permanadeli et al., 2016).

In general, the four participants agree that Minang language is considered not important in Jakarta. For Gusmiati and Marshanda, who are fluent speakers of Minang, speaking in Indonesian does not mean that they have lost their Minang identity and culture. They can still communicate in Minang with their in-laws, husbands, or friends. Gusmiati said that for many Minang people who have migrated, being able to speak Indonesian well means that they are considered successful in the migrated island.

For Fitri and Rohana, who understand Minang passively, they still consider themselves as native Minang, and they are proud to be Minang. They think that it is more important to maintain the Minang values rather than just being able to speak in Minang. In relation to this, Rohana explained that a number of respected national figures who happened to have Minang background – such as Mohammad Hatta, Hamka, Natsir, and Tan Malaka – consistently used Indonesian in their writings. Rohana assumed that those people are real nationalists, and writing in Indonesian does not mean that they denied themselves to be Minang.

Perceptions of Minang cultural values

Although the four participants live in Jakarta, they think that it is important to maintain their cultural values of Minang, especially those related to egalitarian and democracy. Interestingly, all of them claimed that they were proud to be Minang people. They noted that Minang culture respects women's dignity, and being an independent woman is much more important than speaking Minang language fluently. However, they all think that matrilineality is nowadays not too relevant for the modern society.

One important value that is maintained is the importance of education. Education is actually not just for men, but also for women. For the participants in this study, the main reason why they are now in Jakarta is because they think that education is very important for their children. We can see here that actually there might be a shift in the reason why the Minang people migrate. Before, they migrate because they want to find financial success in the migrated land, and now it seems that they do that for better education.

For Marshanda, it was her parents who encouraged her to go to Jakarta to pursue her higher education. Marshanda, who has obtained her doctoral degree in a state university in Jakarta, explained that the opportunity to obtain a higher education is not only for men but also for women. Fitri and Rohana, similarly, also argued that education is very important for them. Fitri is now doing her doctoral study in a private university in Jakarta, while Rohana has obtained her master's degree from a state university in Jakarta.

Nah kakak saya,.... selalu kalo ingin berubah, berubahlah di pendidikan. Jadi kami juga nggak diajarin dagang oleh..eu.. ayah-ibu saya itu. Padahal ibu saya itu konveksi dan jual hasil konveksinya ke Riau, ke Pekanbaru. ... Tapi itu tidak ada yang yang... kami tidak diajarkan seperti itu. Kalian belajar, jadi ya udah saya merantau”(Marshanda).

Well, my brother [said]... if you want to change, change the education first. Therefore, we were not taught in trading by our father and mother. Indeed, my mother is a trader and ships her goods to Riau, East Sumatra. We all children were not taught on how to do the business. "You go studying" so then I migrate

Apart from inheriting the importance of education, the four participants also think that it is important to maintain the value of adapting oneself. According to Marshanda, conflicts that involve Minang communities rarely happen, as Minang people always believe the value of *Di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung* and *Alam takambang jadi guru*.

In relation to the matrilineal culture, the four participants are no longer eager to maintain the culture or inherit it to their children. Rohana expressed her critical opinion about matrilineality in the Minang culture, which she thinks is unique since in reality the decision maker is the *ninik mamak* who happens to be a man. The ancestral property, as mentioned by Rohana, nowadays does not only go to the daughters, but to the sons as well.

Fitri claims that she is proud to be Minang as in the Minang culture women are respected. Although women are more dominant in the family, in many cases they should be obedient to their husbands. Obedience, for the Minang women, is actually a reflection of following the holy Q'uran. Fitri realized that in the Minangkabau culture, the strong religious Islam definitely influences the relation between men and women. In other words, there is a need to protect the Minangkabau Islamic tradition. However, all four participants agree that women are highly respected in the Minang culture, and thus they think that independence, which has become the main characteristic of Minang women, should be maintained.

In general, it can be concluded that although the participants are very proud of being Minang, they are of the opinion that Minang people are basically democratic and open-minded. They also appreciate other people, and that is expressed in their famous proverb *Dima bumi dipijak, disinan langit dijunjuang* 'Wherever you stand (on the land), that is when you should hold up the sky.'

CONCLUSION

It is a fact that in the matrilineal culture, women play a very important role. Apart from playing an important role for important matters, it is usually through women that the first language is introduced. In other words, women are expected to pass on important cultural values to the next generation.

This study uncovers the fact that Minang women who have migrated to Jakarta do not bequeath the Minang language to their offspring. They prefer to use Indonesian in their daily communication with the family members. As a result, the children, who were born and raised in Jakarta, are not able to speak in Minang. This is in line with what is conveyed by a number of scholars who argue that when two languages exist side by side in a community, the language that has a greater social function in the community will win (Gunarwan, 2006; Piller, 2004; Ravindranath & Cohn, 2014). In Jakarta, Minang has a limited function and that is why the younger generation would prefer to use a more prestigious language for daily communication, in this case Indonesian.

In the case of cultural inheritance, in general the Minang women claim that they are proud of being Minang, but they tend to just maintain the egalitarian and democratic cultural values. They all think that ancestral wealth, that used to go to the female offspring, should also be passed on to the males.

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