

ECOLOGICAL WISDOM OF ORAL TRADITION: SURFACE AND DEEP STRUCTURE TENSION IN PRESERVING THE LAKE ENVIRONMENT¹

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Abstract. This study is about ecological wisdom as the content of oral traditions. The oral tradition lives in its people who live in various topographic nature. Oral tradition is closely related to the local environment. The people living around the lake have the oral tradition in form of legends, myths, and fairy tales.

The existence of the oral tradition contains the tension between the surface and deep structure of the environmental preservation. Surface structure is supported by 'modern' humans, on the contrary, deep structures are used by 'traditional' humans. This phenomenon is caused by the advancement of knowledge and technology. For traditional humans, oral traditions have the function. However, for modern humans, it makes no sense. In addition, the oral tradition has meaning as the system of production and reproduction from ecological and environmental material for the benefit of human beings. Ecological wisdom gives enlightenment to make green moral human character in using of nature for sustainable development.

Keywords: *oral tradition, environment, function, deep and surface structure.*

1. Introduction

Bukan lautan hanya kolam susu (Not an ocean, just a pool of milk)
Kail dan jala cukup menghidupimu (Hooks and nets are enough for you to live)
Tiada badai tiada topan kau temui (There's no storm nor typhoon that you meet)
Ikan dan udang menghampiri dirimu (Fish and shrimp come to you)

Orang bilang tanah kita tanah surga (People say that our land is the paradise land)
Tongkat dan batu jadi tanaman (Sticks and stones become plants)
Orang bilang tanah kita tanah surga (People say that our land is the paradise land)
Tongkat kayu dan batu jadi tanaman (Wooden sticks and stones become plants)

"Kolam Susu" (pool of milk) is the song title from Koes Plus lyrics above. The song lyric describes the nature of Indonesia. The metaphor of "paradise land" symbolizes wealth and fertility, when the stick is put into the ground, it will surely grow into a plant. Indonesia's natural wealth is represented by the symbols of wood, stone, and fish. These natural resources constitute the infinite contents of Indonesia. The wealth becomes the magnet that attracts people from all over the world to come and enjoy it. All of the people from abroad come to Indonesia to exploit the natural wealth. Local people only get the factory waste as well as the threat of environmental disasters.

Oral tradition is the work of community groups that are passed on orally from one generation to the next generation. Oral tradition is still developing in society, including in West Sumatra. The word tradition identifies with rural societies that are the opposite of modern societies from the city. The oral tradition contains ingredients that deal directly with their collective local environment. The values of character, humanity, and natural harmony are behind the oral tradition. Gribstein stated

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that such discourse cannot be comprehensively understood if it is alienated from civilization and the environment. As the result, oral tradition is considered ancient that is not in accordance with the mindset and way of life from modern people.

Consequently, when modern humans greedily exploit the land of Indonesian by ignoring local oral traditions, disasters always threaten humans in the environment, such as fires, landslides, floods, and the destruction of the ecosystem. In one of the oldest ethnic groups on earth, the Minangkabau, its superstructure is reminiscent of utilizing nature in accordance with its topographic, *nan lereng ditanam bambu, nan gurun jadikan ladang, nan datar jadikan pemukiman, nan bancah jadikan sawah, nan rawa gembalaan itik dan kerbau* "the slope is planted with bamboo, the desert is made into fields, the flat is formed into settlements, the wet becomes rice fields, and the swamp is to herd the ducks and buffaloes." When nature is exploited not in accordance with its condition, then the natural disharmony and disaster will always threaten human life.

Therefore, the ecological wisdom contained in the oral tradition needs to be explored. The study will be beneficial for the sustainability and future of the earth and humans in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. The understanding of oral tradition must reach the deep structure, not only surface structure. The study is expected to be the effort of enlightenment to the "modern" humans in exploiting nature in order to create harmony with the environment, sustainable exploitation of nature, and green moral character. Oral tradition is not only seen as the antique encyclopedia in museums that contain ecological wisdom, but it is the norm in using the local environment. Thus, the lyric in Koes Plus' song above really becomes the paradise for humans in this world.

2. Methods and Theory

The study of ecological wisdom is interdisciplinary in collaboration with various disciplines, such as literature, folklore, culture, environment, sociology, politics, and economics. As stated by Garrad (2004: 14), ecological knowledge is not just seeing the balance and harmony of the environment but also knowing the interaction of humans and the environment, human attitudes and behavior towards the environment. Environmental issues require cultural analysis because these problems are the result of interactions between ecological knowledge and cultural change.

Ecocriticism has the strong moral and political commitment. The perspective of ecological wisdom considers that nature is parallel with other beings, not just objects. The analysis is carried out through several stages: 1. identifying the natural elements in oral tradition in the documented local environment, 2. identifying oral tradition relationships with the local environment, 3. analyzing the function of oral tradition within the local community, 4. revealing the meaning of oral tradition in the local environment.

The work of ecological criticism is eclectic, which is embodied by the theory of cultural materialism proposed by Marvin Harris. According to Harris, the belief or tradition recognized by his people is concerned with maintaining material aspects (Sanderson, 1993). The belief to cows in India by Harris is essentially not to make the cow the god, but it is the ideology that seeks to preserve the ecosystem of cattle. Cows for Indian people are the source of animal protein (milk) and the source of energy for processing agricultural land. Cows give life to humans and cultural survival. Therefore, the cows are considered as gods, glorified in the community, and the cows should not be cut for consumption. If a cow is cut for consumption, it is likely that humans will lose protein and agricultural resources. At the end of that thought, the system of production and reproduction in the society is concerned with the aspects of material sustainability. The deep structure or internal structure of the belief is not understood by its people, the only visible surface structure is the cows' tradition.

Likewise with oral traditions that live in various societies on this earth. The people only look at oral tradition as the surface structure, namely as myths, legends, and tales. Based on that foundation alone, modern humans view it as the ancient thing, not in accordance with the mindset and way of life today. This assumption causes the oral tradition to be degraded from the life of modern society.

3. Oral Tradition West Sumatra

The oral tradition that exists in West Sumatera society consists of various genres. The oral tradition lives in the society that resides in different topographic of nature. Every society has the oral tradition in accordance with the nature of their residence. Like, on the coast, highlands, lowlands, rivers, and lakes. As the material of this study, samples of oral traditions of people living on the edge of the lake become the option. This choice is due to the limitations of this scientific expression medium. This choice is also restricted to the oral tradition of fishermen in the exploitation of natural wealth in the lake.

In West Sumatra, there are four lakes, namely Lake Maninjau, Lake Singkarak, Lake Di Ateh, and Lake Di Bawah or Lake Kamba. The four lakes have different ecosystem specifications. Lake Maninjau has Rinuak Fish ecosystem, Lake Singkarak with Bilih Fish, and Lake at Ateh and Below with Freshwater Fish. The survival of the ecosystem of these lakes is closely related to the oral tradition that existed in the fishing communities. Currently, the source of fish protein in the lake is almost extinct. Based on the assumption from the author and reinforced by the opinion from the community, it was caused by the people around the lake that did not have the same views and beliefs about the existing oral traditions, especially related to legends and myths. As a result, they drain the lake fish and other lake exploration activities without considering the continuation of fish life. There are several oral traditions around the lake, such as the origin of the Lake Di Bawah and Di Ateh, the origins of Bilih fish on Mandoa Tapi Pasia, and the origin of Rinuak fish.

A. Origins of Lake Kamba

This legend is about the occurrence of Lake Kamba or Lake Di Ateh and Di Bawah. Two adjacent lakes. This lake is created because of the conflict between powerful humans and animals. The gigantic snake blocked manusia sakti (sacred human) who was about to take the wood from the forest. In that fight, the snake is defeated and it bleeds. Because of the pain, the snake wraps its body into the figure of eight. While the blood of the snake continues to flow and flood the circle of its body, it forms two puddles which were originally red. That becomes the origin of Lake Kamba. The snake is believed to be still alive inside the people who always take care of nature and its inhabitants.

In the deal between the snake and *manusia sakti* (sacred human), they made various agreements, that the snake must preserve the natural surroundings of lake Kamba and should not disturb the humans. Similarly, the humans must follow the rules to live around the lake. The rules are the prohibitions to fish in the lake at night and to commit immoral acts. If there are foreigners entering the lake area, they must ask permission from the two figures. In the event of a violation, the storm will occur and the lake water will create the large ripples.

Once, a young man fished at night by the lake. The fish obtained are quite a lot. The young man feels happy. Then, the young man returns home while carrying the fish, but when he got home, he found the fish bag was empty, none of the fish he was fishing in the bag. The young man became shocked and the news of the incident spread to all citizens. Since the incident, there are no residents fishing on the edge of the lake at night.

B. The Origin of Bilih Fish and Mandoa Tapi Pasia

Bilih fish is the endemic fish in Lake Singkarak. People call it picky fish because of its small physical form. Because of its small physique, *bilih mato mancaliak* (it is difficult to see it. There are also those who call the fish as the incarnation of the sons and daughters of the lake keeper (spirits: *Inyiak Panjang Jangguik*). When the fish becomes big, it is called *sasau* fish.

Most people believe the fish as the embodiment of the spirits who lived in Lake Singkarak. The fish is the children and grandchildren of *Inyiak Panjang Jangguik* (Long beard elder) who lives on *batu basangka* (caged stone) in the lake. Originally, he is living on the edge of the lake, precisely around the hill in Nagari Kacang, which is marked with seven stone pillars on the edge of the railroad tracks.

However, due to the development of children and grandchildren and urged by the society, *Inyiak Panjang Jangguik* (Long beard elder) and his children and grandchildren willingly moved into the lake. Before moving, the elder and humans made an agreement. *Inyiak Panjang Jangguik* wants to move because he and his grandchildren can live in any nature, while the human can only live in the mainland.

To respect that tolerance, humans must give tribute to the lake once a year. So at the beginning of each Islamic year and when the harvest season is abundant, the surrounding community performs ceremonies Mandoa Tapi Pasia. During the ceremony, the people ate together and prayed on the edge of Lake Singkarak, especially one of *jorong* in Nagari Malalo. This ceremony is the thanksgiving ceremony for the abundance of fortune from nature around the lake for human life.

In addition to the ceremony, there is the provision that in harvesting fish from the lake, the people must not use the tiger's net, because it will catch all fish from small to large size. The only nets that can be used are those who have the net size of at least 2 centimeters so that those netted are only large ones.

C. Origins of Rinuak Fish

In Lake Maninjau, there are endemic fish called *rinuak*. The fish is small in size, just as half of a matchstick. The fish are clustered in the lake so it can be easily captured for the consumption by the local community around the lake.

Rinuak fish is believed to come from people who became victims when the eruption of Mount Tujuh. Many victims fell at that time. Over time the eruption was flooded and turned into a lake. Maninjau Lake is the caldera crater of Mount Tujuh that erupted in the past. After being flooded by water, the surrounding community saw many objects floating on the surface of the water. They observed or looked closely, there were many fish swimming. The community believes it is the incarnation of the victims of the volcanic eruption.

In another story, the fish are the incarnation of the human victim as the result of natural disaster, which is believed to be the Creator's wrath from someone's sin, this is associated with the story of Bujang Sambilan. In the story, the lake area previously is the crowded village. In the large family with nine sons, there was the fight between brothers. The quarrel was caused by the beautiful girl who was also part of the big family of Bujang Sambilan. One of them fell in love with the girl and wanted to marry her. According to the norm, it cannot be done. Then, there was conflict in the family. They secretly engage in illicit relationships. As the result of immoral behavior, nature became angry, which is marked by the eruption of Mount Tujuh. As a result of these actions, many people become victims. The former eruption turned into the crater which was flooded over time by

water, known as Lake Maninjau. Once in a while, from bottom the lake, the sulfur comes up that many fish in the lake is dead.

To honor the victims, the fish should only be harvested when nature has sent them out as the sulfur comes out of bottom of the lake, the fish will appear on the surface of the lake. Apart from that time, it is not allowed to harvest the fish.

4. Function and Meaning

The three samples above only live in the people memory of the older generation from the place where the oral tradition lived. Only a few young people know and happen to be working on oral traditions as their scientific work or study assignments.

The data shows that the creation of Lake Kamba, the origin of Bilih and Rinuak fish due to the human conflict with nature. The synthesis of conflict created the norms that must be followed by the community. Non-human nature is nothing but the passive test. Nature will never conflict with humans. It is human beings who always create conflict with nature. As the result, nature feels the imbalance that will always threaten human life. For humans, nature is considered to threaten humans without any introspection about their views and treatment of nature.

Oral tradition still has functions for people living in the lake environment. The function of oral tradition is as **the norm and social control**, which regulates the social behavior of society in relation to nature, such as performing ceremonies and praying on the edge of Lake Singkarak, not fishing at night on Lake Kamba. *Second*, as **the education** for the young generation, that humans must maintain ecological and environmental sustainability so that life can continue. Environmental and ecological literacy education can only be obtained through understanding local oral traditions. *Third*, as **the cultural affirmation** that oral tradition is part of the society culture in protecting the environment. *Fourth*, as **the promotion of tourist destinations**. Stories that develop orally or through the internet media have become local tourism promotion tools. The impact is that many visitors come to the place of oral tradition.

Beyond that, oral tradition has meaning. Oral tradition is the phenomenon of natural material production and reproduction of ecological environment. This oral tradition is the effort to maintain ecological sustainability so that humans do not lose food resources. Humans are given signs of managing nature. Green moral characters for human beings and the sustainability of nature are indications of the main meaning of the oral tradition.

In traditional society, oral tradition is the tool to disseminate and socialize rules and norms. Deep structure or values that exist in oral traditions are more important than the forms of legends, myths, and tales themselves. However, on the contrary, for modern society, it is only concerned with the appearance of the surface structure. Meanwhile, the advancement of knowledge brings people who rely solely on logic. If it does not make sense, then it is not the truth. It will not be in accordance with the legends, myths, and tales. As the result, that cultural aspect is removed from human life.

Of course, it will have the impact on the perspective of oral tradition. Some believe and follow, and some do not believe. There is the interesting attraction between the deep and surface environmental structures in maintaining the ecological and earth sustainability. This will affect the policy on the environment in development. If the deep structure is not the consideration, then the ecological sustainability and sustainability of the earth is at stake.

5. Conclusion

Oral tradition still lives in the community around the lake although some have been almost extinct. The oral tradition has the function in the life of the community as the norm and tool of social control in human interaction with environment, ecological and environmental education, inauguration as the culture, and environmental promotion as the tourist destination. In addition to function, oral tradition implies its existence collectively. The function is to run the system of production and reproduction of the material aspects of ecology and sustainable environment.

The tension between surface and depth structure is the test-antithesis dialectic that must be given the solution in the form of synthesis of environmental harmony. Empowering oral traditions as social capital is the right choice. It gives enlightenment to modern humans towards oral traditions that contain ecological and environmental wisdom. The goal is to form a green moral character in sustainable development.

6. References

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