

The Fear of the Other: Xenophobia and Identity Crisis in Malin Kundang

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ABSTRACT

This study examines xenophobia and identity crisis within the legend of Malin Kundang through a methodological framework integrating textual analysis with deconstructive approaches. Grounded in a comprehensive literature review, drawing insights from previous applications of deconstruction theory in analyzing folk narratives, the research selects various versions of the Malin Kundang legend, ranging from traditional oral retellings to scholarly interpretations, alongside modern adaptations and comparative analyses of folktales from diverse cultural contexts. Through deconstructive analysis, narrative structures, content, context, and themes within the Malin Kundang legend are scrutinized to identify underlying binaries, contradictions, and tensions. This analytical process, informed by deconstruction theory, uncovers layers of meaning and ideological frameworks embedded within the narrative. The "Malin Kundang" story reveals that xenophobia, or fear of foreigners, can manifest as suspicion and hostility towards newcomers, as seen in the villagers' reaction to Malin Kundang's return. This fear of the unfamiliar and change is a common human response and contributes to the story's theme of identity crisis, as Malin Kundang struggles to reconcile his past with his present circumstances.

Keywords: Malin Kundang, folklore, xenophobia, identity crisis, deconstruction, textual analysis, cultural representation

INTRODUCTION

The problem that necessitates exploration in this study revolves around the presence of stereotypes and prejudices toward foreign cultures within the legend of Malin Kundang. Despite being a cherished folklore tale in Indonesia, there is a growing concern regarding the underlying biases embedded within its narrative. Specifically, the perpetuation of xenophobic tendencies within this beloved story poses a significant societal challenge, reflecting broader issues of cultural representation and inclusivity.

Previous researchers have made notable contributions to understanding various aspects of the Malin Kundang legend. Scholarly

endeavors have focused on its educational value, character formation aspects, and sociological implications. Studies have examined its role in vocabulary expansion (Sabily & Suryadi, 2022), translation strategies (Gulo, 2023), moral education (Maemunatun et al., 2021; Marlina & Erita, 2023), and parental dynamics within the narrative (Thahar, 2018). While these investigations have enriched our comprehension of the folklore's multifaceted nature, the exploration of its xenophobic undercurrents remains relatively underexplored.

What has escaped the attention of previous researchers is the critical examination of stereotypes and prejudices toward foreign cultures within the Malin Kundang story. While existing studies have delved into its educational, moral, and sociological dimensions, the nuanced analysis of its cultural implications has been lacking. By scrutinizing the language, characterizations, and thematic elements of the tale through a textual research approach, this study aims to shed light on the unexplored terrain of xenophobia present within this cultural artifact.

To address the gaps in existing research and illuminate the overlooked aspect of cultural bias within the Malin Kundang narrative, this study proposes the application of a textual research approach. By dissecting various versions of the legend and analyzing scholarly interpretations, this study endeavors to unveil implicit biases and challenge prevailing stereotypes. Drawing on concepts from critical cultural studies and literary analysis, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics at play within the folklore.

The primary objective of this work is to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices toward foreign cultures embedded within the tale of Malin Kundang. Through a comprehensive textual analysis, this study aims to elucidate the presence of xenophobic tendencies within the narrative and raise awareness about the implications of cultural bias in folklore. By interrogating the underlying socio-cultural attitudes depicted in the legend, this research endeavors to foster critical engagement, promote cultural sensitivity, and contribute to the ongoing discourse on inclusivity and representation in cultural narratives.

METHOD

In this study, we employ a methodological framework blending textual analysis with deconstructive approaches, drawing from insights gleaned from prior research on folktales and deconstruction theory. Our methodology is grounded in a comprehensive literature review, which synthesizes previous applications of deconstruction theory in analysing folktales (Harun & Abdullah, 2023; Kwiecien et al., 2021; Song, 2017). Additionally, insights from deconstructive analyses of modern adaptations of folktales and literary works inform our approach (Satria et al., 2022; Widyahening & Wardhani, 2021).

The initial stage of our methodology involves the selection of texts for analysis. We choose various versions of the Malin Kundang legend, encompassing traditional oral retellings, written publications, and scholarly interpretations. Furthermore, we consider modern adaptations and conduct comparative analyses of folktales from diverse cultural contexts to broaden our understanding of narrative structures and cultural representations.

The core of our approach lies in the deconstructive analysis of the selected texts. We meticulously examine narrative structures, content, context, and themes within the Malin Kundang legend, aiming to identify underlying binaries, contradictions, and tensions. This analytical process is deeply rooted in deconstruction theory, which allows us to uncover layers of meaning and ideological frameworks embedded within the narrative (Kwiecien et al., 2021; Punday, 2012).

Moreover, our methodology includes comparative analyses of folktales in different languages and cultural contexts. Through these comparisons, we seek to elucidate how narrative structures vary across cultures, highlighting both universal and culturally contingent aspects of storytelling (Song, 2017). Additionally, we conduct character analyses within the Malin Kundang legend to explore their cultural significance and embodiment of cultural values. By examining the construction, representation, and interpretation of characters, we aim to uncover the roles they play in conveying moral messages and cultural norms (Harun & Abdullah, 2023). Through this detailed and systematic approach, we endeavor to provide a nuanced analysis of stereotypes and prejudices toward foreign cultures within the Malin Kundang legend.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The story of Malin Kundang, when analyzed through the lens of deconstruction theory, reveals a complex interplay of binary oppositions that reflect deep-seated social and cultural tensions. The narrative juxtaposes natives and newcomers, as well as fishing village residents and merchants from afar, highlighting the cultural clash and socioeconomic disparities. This analysis explores how these binary oppositions shape the characters and the moral message, illustrating the impact of cultural and economic transformations on identity and community values

Binary Oppositions and Cultural Tensions

Native vs. Newcomer:

The Malin Kundang story vividly depicts the binary opposition between natives and newcomers, illustrating the cultural tension between these two groups. The protagonist, Malin Kundang, and his mother, Mande Rubayah, belong to the fishing village, symbolizing the natives. In contrast, the wealthy couple, who arrive from a big city, represent the newcomers. This division serves as a metaphor for the cultural clash between the indigenous villagers and the affluent outsiders.

Mande Rubayah embodies the simplicity, poverty, and respectfulness of the native villagers. She embodies the virtues of the native villagers—selflessness, patience, and unconditional love. Unfortunately, she becomes a victim of her son's betrayal, which is exacerbated by the cultural and social influence of the newcomers. Her suffering and eventual curse upon her son highlight the moral high ground of the native perspective. Malin Kundang, though initially a native, transforms into a figure associated with the newcomers due to his quest for fortune and subsequent rejection of his roots. The wealthy couple, responsible for the mistreatment of Mande, epitomize the arrogance and disrespect often attributed to outsiders. This opposition is starkly illustrated when the wealthy couple demeans Mande by calling her 'rumpled, old, and dirty,' and Malin himself repudiates his mother and her humble status.

This narrative pits Malin, the "newcomer" who seeks fortune in the city, against his mother, who represents the "native" village life. This reflects the anxieties of a traditional society facing the influx of outsiders and the potential disruption of their established way of life. The villagers' identity and tradition are integral to their community's cohesion. Malin's return with his wealthy wife brings a stark contrast between their humble lifestyle and the newcomers' display of wealth and superiority. His wife's condescension towards Mande Rubayah exemplifies the newcomers' dismissive attitude towards the villagers' traditions and values. Malin's rejection of his mother symbolizes the perceived threat of assimilation and the loss of cultural identity.

The characterization of Malin as a newcomer emphasizes his loss of cultural and personal identity. His exposure to foreign influences during his time away from the village has "polluted" him, causing him to lose the purity of his original culture. This transformation is symbolized by his luxurious attire and disdainful attitude towards his humble origins. The narrative suggests that Malin's exposure to wealth and nobility has corrupted his values, leading him to reject the very foundation of his identity.

Fishing Village vs. Merchant Class:

The story also explores the tension between the fishing village residents and the merchant class, representing the local community and outsiders with wealth and power, respectively. Mande Rubayah and Malin represent the fishing village residents, who are poor, humble, and reliant on local resources. In contrast, the wealthy couple symbolizes merchants from afar, who bring wealth and power, and often exploit their influence.

The fishing village residents, epitomized by Mande Rubayah, symbolize the traditional, humble, and often impoverished way of life. These villagers rely on the sea for their livelihood, embodying a close-knit community that values hard work, simplicity, and mutual support. Mande Rubayah epitomizes the resilience and enduring spirit of the villagers. Despite their modest means, they maintain a rich cultural heritage and a strong sense of identity rooted in their connection to the land and sea.

In stark contrast, the merchants, represented by Malin's new elevated status and his wealthy wife, embody commerce, wealth, and mobility. These merchants bring both opportunity and disruption to the traditional lifestyle of the villagers. Malin, who left the village as a poor young man, returns as a wealthy merchant, embodying the transformative power of commerce. His wife's finery

and wealth starkly contrast with the village's impoverished conditions, highlighting the socioeconomic divide.

The merchants, while bringing economic benefits, introduce values and behaviors that clash with the villagers' way of life. The ship's crew, with their worldly experiences and commercial acumen, represent a transient, profit-driven perspective, often at odds with the villagers' stability and communal ethos. Malin's transformation and his wife's arrogance further accentuate the cultural and economic rift, underscoring the tension between the traditional, subsistence economy of the villagers and the dynamic, profit-oriented world of the merchants.

This dichotomy between the fishing village residents and the merchants encapsulates broader themes of economic disparity, cultural clash, and the impact of modernization on traditional societies. The villagers view the merchants with a mixture of envy and resentment. While they recognize the material benefits of wealth, they are wary of the social and cultural costs, fearing the erosion of their values and way of life.

Malin's return, with his newfound wealth and status, serves as a catalyst for these tensions. His wife's condescending attitude towards Mande Rubayah and the villagers symbolizes the broader disdain of the wealthy for the poor, exacerbating the villagers' sense of alienation and resentment. This narrative highlights the complexities of socioeconomic transformation, where the infusion of wealth and new values can lead to both prosperity and discord, challenging the fabric of traditional communities.

Malin's transformation from a fisherman to a wealthy merchant creates a gap between him and his mother and his village community. When he returns with a luxurious ship and fine clothes, Malin no longer sees himself as part of the poor fishing community. His rejection of his mother in front of his noble wife highlights the stark contrast between the identities of a fishing village resident and a wealthy merchant from afar.

This opposition reinforces the idea that Malin, as a newcomer, has not only changed his social status but also his cultural identity. He has adopted the values and behaviors of the wealthier, foreign society he has become part of, further alienating himself from his roots. The story implies that this adoption of foreign values has "polluted" his original identity, making him impure and morally corrupt. On the other hand, Malin, who becomes a wealthy merchant from afar, represents wealth, luxury, and higher social status. The story conveys that the wealth and power brought by outsiders can corrupt and cause estrangement from one's roots and community.

The binary opposition between the humble fishing village and the wealthy merchant class is evident in the stark contrast between Mande Rubayah's poverty and Malin's newfound affluence. This opposition highlights the social and economic disparities that often fuel resentment and prejudice. Malin's transformation from a loving son to a wealthy, arrogant merchant represents the corrupting influence of wealth and foreign culture. His rejection of his mother signifies a broader rejection and alienation of his native roots.

Xenophobia and Representation of Other Cultures

The story indeed portrays a strong undercurrent of xenophobia, particularly in the tension between the villagers and the newcomers. This binary opposition highlights how fear and distrust are often directed towards those who

come from different cultural or social backgrounds. The villagers of Malin Kundang's hometown, who have lived simple, traditional lives, view the arrival of outsiders with suspicion. These newcomers, represented by Malin and his wealthy wife, embody a stark contrast to the villagers' way of life, bringing with them not just new customs and behaviors, but also a perceived threat to the established social order. The villagers' wariness of these strangers reflects a common human reaction to the unfamiliar, rooted in a deep-seated fear of change and the unknown.

In this context, xenophobia manifests in the villagers' suspicion and resentment towards Malin and his wife. Malin, who was once a part of their community, returns transformed by his experiences in the outside world. His new status and wealth, represented by his wife's foreign culture and opulence, create a visible and unsettling divide. The villagers, who have struggled to maintain their cultural identity and values amidst their humble surroundings, see in Malin's wife a symbol of everything they fear losing. Their animosity is not just about the economic disparity that Malin's return highlights, but also about the broader implications of cultural erosion and identity loss.

Malin's wife, as a symbol of wealth and foreign culture, embodies the threat to the villagers' way of life. Her disdain for Mande Rubayah underscores a broader theme of cultural superiority and the devaluation of local customs as the "other" – the poor, the rural, and the culturally different. This clash of cultures is not merely a personal affront but represents a larger societal tension. The villagers perceive Malin's wife as an outsider who not only disrespects their way of life but also seeks to impose her own values and norms upon them. This perception exacerbates their fear and hostility, as they worry about the potential loss of their cultural heritage and the dilution of their traditional values.

This xenophobia is not merely an individual bias but reflects a broader societal attitude towards those who are perceived as outsiders or inferiors due to their socioeconomic status and cultural background. The villagers' reaction to Malin and his wife illustrates how deeply ingrained these attitudes can be, often stemming from historical grievances and social hierarchies. Their fear and distrust are amplified by a sense of vulnerability, as they recognize their own precarious position within the broader socio-economic landscape. This dynamic illustrates how xenophobia can stem from a perceived threat to one's cultural and social identity, leading to a collective defensive stance against perceived encroachments.

The villagers' negative perception of the newcomers is thus not merely an economic or social reaction but also a cultural one, where the fear of losing their unique way of life to an external influence drives their distrust and animosity. Their reaction to Malin's transformation and the presence of his wife is a manifestation of their broader anxiety about the future. They see in the newcomers a force that could undermine their traditions and disrupt the cohesion of their community. This fear is compounded by the villagers' awareness of their own limitations and the overwhelming power and allure of the wealth and modernity that the newcomers represent. In essence, the story of Malin Kundang captures the timeless struggle between tradition and change, illustrating how deeply cultural identity is intertwined with social and economic realities, and how easily it can be threatened by the forces of modernization and globalization.

CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of binary oppositions in the Malin Kundang story, we can see how this narrative reflects social and cultural tensions between

natives and newcomers, and between fishing village residents and merchants from afar. This story not only teaches the importance of respecting family and roots but also illustrates deep cultural values in Indonesian society. The narrative warns against the loss of cultural identity due to external influences, emphasizing the need to remain true to one's origins. The Malin Kundang story also illustrates cultural and social representation in Indonesian society. Through the binary opposition between natives and newcomers and between fishing village residents and wealthy merchants, the story reflects complex social dynamics and cultural values. Respect for family, simplicity, and roots are highly valued, while arrogance and denial of family are depicted as major transgressions leading to ruin. These binary oppositions reinforce the moral message in the story of Malin Kundang. The story emphasizes the negative consequences of neglecting one's roots and family for social status and wealth. When Malin rejects his mother and denies his origins, he faces a severe divine punishment—being turned into stone. This message teaches the importance of respecting and valuing one's family and roots, regardless of the social status or wealth one achieves. The narrative condemns Malin's actions as a betrayal of his cultural and familial identity. By forgetting his culture and being influenced by foreign, materialistic values, Malin loses his purity and ultimately faces dire consequences. This serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of abandoning one's cultural heritage and succumbing to external influences. The tale underscores the importance of cultural purity and the dangers posed by external influences that can lead individuals away from their true identity. By highlighting Malin's transformation and subsequent punishment, the story reinforces the value of maintaining one's cultural integrity and the perils of forgetting one's origins. Therefore, the Malin Kundang story remains relevant as a tool for moral education and social reflection for future generations.

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