

TANAH AIR SHORT STORY BY MARTIN ALEIDA: STRUGGLING WITH THE CONCEPT OF NATION

Cerpen *Tanah Air* Karya Martin Aleida: Pertentangan Konsep Ruang Bangsa

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the paradoxical problems of the nation in Martin Aleida's *Tanah Air* short story. It also identified alternative spaces depicted in the story using a concept of spatial politics proposed by Upstone. By using textual analysis, the results showed that the meaning of the nation is problematic since the main characters glorify the nation, which in fact is a product of colonial culture. To overcome this problem, alternative spaces are present in the form of a journey as a nomad, exile, and migrant. The alternative space in the form of the most-free journey, as a nomad, is carried out as the character moves around from Indonesia, Egypt, China, and Belgium. As an exile, both grudge and nostalgia grow together in the inner self of the character with his background as a victim of the regime's atrocities. While as a migrant, the character emigrates from her origin country to the Netherlands.

Key Words: *National space, Exile, Migrant, Nomad, Tanah Air*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti masalah paradoksal terkait ruang bangsa dalam cerita pendek Martin Aleida yang berjudul *Tanah Air*. Penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi ruang alternatif yang digambarkan dalam cerpen tersebut menggunakan konsep politik ruang yang diperkenalkan Upstone. Dengan menggunakan analisis tekstual, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemaknaan ruang bangsa dinilai problematis karena tokoh utamanya justru mengagungkan bangsa yang sebenarnya merupakan produk budaya kolonial. Untuk keluar dari problematika tersebut, ruang-ruang alternatif hadir dalam bentuk perjalanan sebagai nomad, eksil, dan migran. Ruang alternatif berupa perjalanan yang paling bebas, yaitu sebagai nomad, dilakukan ketika tokoh berpindah-pindah dari Indonesia, Mesir, Tiongkok, dan Belgia. Sebagai seorang eksil, dendam dan nostalgia tumbuh bersama dalam diri tokoh dengan latar belakangnya sebagai korban kekejaman rezim saat itu. Sementara itu, sebagai seorang migran, tokoh yang lain beremigrasi dari negara asalnya ke Belanda.

Kata-Kata Kunci: *Ruang bangsa, Eksil, Migran, Nomad, Tanah Air*

INTRODUCTION

The idea of the nation becomes problematic when there is a paradox among the nations dreamed of by individuals and the basic concept of the nation itself. In the perspective of postcolonialism, the nation which always echoes nationalism, as a matter of fact, is a manifestation of colonial culture formed by invaders (Upstone, 2009). This is because the nation is constructed by bringing together individuals from various races, ethnicities, religions, genders, social classes, and other categories, who still have historical

similarities in terms of physical and cultural aspects, into a unit of a homogenous constituent. Consequently, this condition allows an attempt to colonize in terms of uniformity which seeks to eliminate minor cultures from the domination of major cultures. Therefore, the nation is nothing but a space of colonial construction.

Faruk (2007) defines postcolonialism as a set of theoretical and critical strategies that are used to examine culture (literature, politics, history, and so on) from the colonies of European countries and the relations of

those countries with the rest of the world. Although it does not have a standard analysis method, postcolonial studies introduce three focuses of analysis, including the negative effects of what is actually considered beneficial from imperial power, issues such as racism and exploitation, and the position of colonial and postcolonial subjects.

In the context of literature, postcolonial studies refer to literary studies after the departure of the colonizers and the historical consequences with a shift to new identities expressed through literary works. It is a set of concepts that reveal the cultural production of the colonized people with regard to their history of colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007). Upstone, in her book entitled *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* (2009), introduces a notion about spatial politics that occurs in countries experiencing Western colonialism. This space is a construction of colonial experience related to the control of the territorial region as an effort to perpetuate the colonial areas (Upstone, 2009).

The concept of a space with all its boundaries is created by the colonizers, which makes them appear as something absolute, firm, and even seen as a legitimate entity. This status also indirectly seeks to eliminate ethnical traditions because it aims to create homogeneity. Homogeneity itself is basically established to facilitate the supremacy of the imperialists against individuals who are in the scope of their colonies.

In the national space, Upstone (2009) explains that a nation is founded on the unification of cultural differences into one

picture in common. The population of a nation may not be naturally homogeneous, but they are encouraged to see themselves as homogeneous, ignoring the existing cultural differences. This shows that the nation is actually only a continuation of the colonial culture as an attempt to expand colonial power, not a form of liberation effort as much echoed in the anti-colonial discussion.

In a postcolonial perspective, space as an abstract concept—which is distinguished from a place as a physical location—is seen outside of colonial view, thus offering differences or heterogeneity. These heterogeneous voices emphasize divergence and subjectivity, so that they can lead to chaos (Upstone, 2009). Meanwhile, chaos can be defined as an attempt to dismantle established convictions and replace them with alternative convictions. A new conviction that presents the existence of an alternative space is a preference of spaces with certain limitations of colonial formations.

The alternative space is closely related to Post-Space, a concept that is outside the colonial boundaries and traditions. This space is even considered as a space beyond or formed before the boundaries mentioned earlier. Because this space is hybrid, shifting, and moving, it is no longer familiar with boundaries. Besides, in *Shifting Space*, it branches out in two shifting directions. The first scale is greater than the nation, which is in the form of a journey. Upstone (2009) suggests three forms of journey carried out by postcolonial subjects as an alternative to the nation in literary works: nomads, exiles, and

migrants. Further, the second scale is smaller than the nation: cities, homes, and bodies.

In Indonesian history, the practice of colonization that was realized on behalf of the nation occurred when there was a regime transition from Soekarno's leadership to Soeharto's. The anti-communist ideology promoted by Soeharto had an impact on the members of the Lekra (Institute of People's Culture), a prolific literary and social movement whose many of the members were affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Because they were considered to adhere to the ideology of communism, many members of Lekra were targeted by the military by being arrested, imprisoned, and even massacred without trial. Some of them became political exiles without an official identity. Meanwhile, ambassadors or students of government officials in communist bloc countries could not return to Indonesia because their citizenship had been revoked (Junaedi, 2010).

Those people who were expelled from their place of origin, which in this context is Indonesia, encountered many tragic experiences because of the uncertainty (Alham, 2002). Moreover, the alienation that happened beyond their control brought up feelings of (in Alham's terms) revenge as well as nostalgia rooted in themselves. Many of the life journeys of Indonesian (political) exiles are written in literary works, both by the exiles themselves and by other writers. One of the Indonesian writers who consistently raises the theme of exiles is Martin Aleida.

Aleida is a senior Indonesian journalist and writer born in Tanjung Balai, Asahan,

North Sumatera, who later spent half a century of his age in Jakarta as a student focusing on the field of writing. From March to May 2016, Aleida conducted research on Indonesian exiles stranded in a number of cities in Europe (Arcana, 2017). After exploring various information from the exiles in Amsterdam, The Hague, Berlin, Paris, Prague, and Sofia, he published journalistic writing entitled *Tanah Air yang Hilang (The Lost Motherland)*.

From Aleida's research on Indonesian exiles stranded abroad, literary works that reveal the lives of political victims are written. One of his short stories about exiles which was selected in the *Cerpen Pilihan Kompas 2016 (Kompas Selected Short Story 2016)* and which was named the best short story in the anthology is *Tanah Air*. The short story depicts a deep yearning of a victim of the regime's cruelty who then had to experience alienation from his family, countries where he belongs, and even his own people. As a quick solution to the problem, the exile chose suicide to end his suffering.

From the result of a thorough investigation, several studies have examined matters related to postcolonial discourse, particularly on spatial politics. Some focus on the features of postcolonial spaces by assessing relevant samples, as seen in Lock (2016). Among them is a study by Sewlall (2003) which reviewed the idea of postcolonial space in Conrad's works, especially by seeing it from the angle of its racial, cultural, and sexual identity. With a different topic of discussion, Erritouni (2010) reported his findings on postcolonial

despotism from a literary work of a third-generation author who is overshadowed by postmodernism, including nomadism and exile. Still from the third-generation authors—those who were born *after* colonialism—Dalley (2013) underlined how spatio-temporal constructs influence the historical and territorial imaginaries on Nigerian literature. Furthermore, there is a considerable number of previous studies that evaluate postcolonial writing from different lenses. However, there remains a gap of research concerning the life of nomads, exiles, and migrants in Indonesian literary works as well as how they give meaning to their nation.

The explanation above reveals the problems faced by Indonesian exiles regarding the nation they dreamed of. Their longing and love for the homeland can even be sincerer than the longing and love of the citizens living in Indonesia. However, the zero answers towards these unrequited desires lead them to look for other spaces that could accept them as a whole. In response to these problems, alternative spaces are present to fill the hollow experienced by these people. Also, as underlined by Teverson & Upstone (2011), there is still not adequate research on the public space level regarding this issue. Therefore, this study aims to examine the paradoxical problem of nation and the alternative spaces in Martin Aleida's *Tanah Air* short story by adopting a perspective on the spatial politics introduced by Upstone.

METHODS

Data Sources

There were two data sources in this study. The primary data source was Martin Aleida's *Tanah Air* short story. This story is published in *Cerpen Pilihan Kompas 2016* by Penerbit Buku Kompas in 2017. The data taken from the story were the statements containing the concept of the nation from the main characters' perspectives and the alternative spaces they seek in responding to their circumstances.

The secondary data source was references related to the history of Indonesia, especially about Soeharto's New Order as it was correlated to the setting of the story. The explanation about the lives of political exile was also used to broaden the discussion of the topic.

Data Collection and Analysis

There were five steps carried out in conducting this study. *The first step* was reading Martin Aleida's *Tanah Air* short story closely to find out the explanation about the concept of the nation from the main characters' perspectives and the alternative spaces they seek in responding to their circumstances. *The second step* was reviewing the history of Indonesia, focusing on Soeharto's New Order, to build a context related to the story. *The third step* was explaining the image of the nation from the main characters' point of view. *The next step* was explaining the alternative spaces in the short story. *The last step* was drawing a conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Paradoxical Problem of Nation in Tanah Air

In *Tanah Air*, the nation is present in the portrait of the regime's atrocities, particularly in the transition period from the Old Order to the New Order. Ang, a journalist, was forced to flee from Indonesia when anti-communist ideology was echoed by the Soeharto regime. He became a nomad before finally settled down and became a political exile since starting his escape from Jakarta. In China, he witnessed the Cultural Revolution and eventually had to save himself to the Netherlands to avoid attacks by the Red Guards. However, his move to the Netherlands did not make him able to get out of the cycle of suffering. Because of his unending guilt for the family, he finally chose suicide as a shortcut to end his misery.

The story being discussed illustrates Indonesia as the depiction of the national space. In a colonial perspective, space is shaped by colonizers by giving certain limitations through political and aesthetic mechanisms. The formation of these boundaries aims to make restriction, so that the invaders can maintain the status quo of the colonized party. Basically, the limits set by the colonizers are not objective because there is an intention to perpetuate the domination of invaders in their colonies, so that colonial spaces formed are only mythical (Upstone, 2009).

From the point of view of spatial politics, Indonesia plays a crucial role, mainly because it is indeed a product of colonial discourse. When An Sui, Ang's wife, flew from Indonesia

to visit her husband in China, the very long distance that separated this married couple made Ang accuse An Sui of being unfaithful. However, when Ang realized his selfishness, he apologized to An Sui. He asked his wife to kiss a bundle of soil, the soil of Indonesia, which he had brought while leaving Jakarta. The description can be seen in the story excerpt below:

"Ciumlah... Ini tanah Indonesia. Apa pun yang akan terjadi dia akan mempertautkan kita," katanya lambat-lambat seraya memegangi tanganku, merebahkan kepala di bahu. Semacam permintaan maaf atas tuduhan yang baru saja dia timpakan padaku. Katanya, tanah itu dia bawa ketika meninggalkan Jakarta menuju Kairo dan kandas di Peking. (Aleida, 2017, p. 4)

"Kiss this... This is Indonesian soil. Whatever will happen, it will connect us," he said quietly while holding my hand, laying his head on my shoulder. A kind of apology for the accusations he just made on me. He said, he took the soil when he left Jakarta for Cairo and was stranded in Peking. (Aleida, 2017, p. 4)

The bundle of soil brought by Ang showed his deep affection for Indonesia. When Ang said that his homeland was the only thing that could unite the two of them, he was unconsciously still under the influence of colonial culture. Ironically, as a Chinese descendant, Ang is a part of the minority group in Indonesia. Not only by his racial identity, but by his religious identity as a member of the church, he experienced double-minorities. Yet, by neglecting how the nation treats its minorities, he still praises the

nation with all his heart. In fact, the national space is nothing but a form of uniformity of the differences subjectively constructed by the invaders.

The absolute concept of the nation was embedded in Ang's mindset, so he did not realize that by believing in such an idea, he perpetuated colonial culture. Further, as a space constructed by the invaders, the nation supports the presence of white cultural interference when viewed from a postcolonialism perspective. This is because this nation is trying to homogenize subjects in certain colonies in order to make it easier for invaders to control their colonies. Although nationalism seems to give a certain role in upholding the independence of colonized populations from its colonizer, the nation itself is directly involved in exercising political control in the former colony (Upstone, 2009).

What is experienced by Ang is even way farther. In addition, to fight against the broader community, he still had to survive as an exile. As explained by Alham (2002), the separation of an exile from their national space can lead to feelings of revenge and nostalgia. This is illustrated in the paragraph below. Through the point of view of the character *I, An Sui* explained that Ang wrote a letter, asking his wife to sell all of their possessions and follow Ang to the Netherlands.

Setelah beberapa lama bermukim di Belanda, suamiku berkirin surat. Layaknya pecandu sepakbola yang ingin lawannya kalah habis-habisan, dia berteriak melalui baris-baris suratnya: "Juallah semuanya, jangan tinggalkan sepeser pun di negeri yang

dikuasai fasis itu. Terbanglah kemari! Tanahmu. Tanahku, walau segenggam, menunggu di sini...!" (Aleida, 2017, p. 5)

After staying in the Netherlands for a while, my husband sent me a letter. Like a soccer addict who wanted his rival to lose completely, he shouted through the lines of his letter: "Sell everything, don't leave a dime in that fascist-controlled country. Fly here! Your soil. My soil, even though it is a handful, is waiting here...!" (Aleida, 2017, p. 5)

A sense of revenge to Indonesia can be clearly seen from the way Ang called his country a 'fascist-controlled country'. The New Order's authoritarian government, which caused his alienation in the Netherlands as an exile, made hatred grow in him to Indonesia. However, the problem faced by Ang is becoming increasingly attractive because of the contradiction of what he said in the letter. Although Ang really hated Indonesia, he was still entangled in the national space. This can be proofed from the bundle of Indonesian soil that he was carrying, which always helped him to reminisce about his homeland.

This turmoil in Ang's inner self is in line with the nature of postcolonial writing which commonly offers endless, chaotic movement. A previous study conducted by Szeman (2001) showed that third-world literature formulates national allegory, a term proposed by Jameson. Globalization makes this type of writing problematic, as it portrays political allegory, not national allegory anymore. Singh (2019) took Sikh women's life writing as an example of postcolonial writing. These

narratives present hybrid practices of Sikh women diaspora to America through a postcolonial feminist perspective. Besides, Bhattacharya (2011) used a different object as the sample, which was in the form of films. By comparing two contradictory film creators, she analyzed the respatialization of politics and art which intersects in the South Asian decolonization through the history and aesthetics lens. Those previous studies represent postcolonial narratives of Ang's case, in which the endless journey in searching for his nation brings him to the dilemma of revenge and nostalgia. Another nostalgia is also seen in the following paragraph, this time from An Sui's part:

Di beranda aku merawat taman kami yang mungil, sekitar setengah kali dua meter. Di situ kutanam rose, juga dua pohon pisang, agar Indonesia tidak terlalu jauh dari kami. (Aleida, 2017, p. 7)

On the veranda, I maintained our tiny garden, about half a meter and two meters. There, I planted a rose, also two banana trees, so that Indonesia was not too far from us. (Aleida, 2017, p. 7)

In their home in Amsterdam, An Sui planted a rose plant and banana trees on the veranda to make them both feel close to Indonesia. What An Sui did to help her husband revive his memory of Indonesia is a form of nostalgia for the nation that Ang really missed. After all, revenge and nostalgia that had collided in Ang's self made him get lost in a state of vacillation, so that it eventually led him to do suicide as a practical solution.

Aku tak tahu sekuat apa aku menjerit. Sebesar apa mulutku terkuak menyerukan namanya: "Ang...! Aaaaang...!" Aku terjerebab di sampingnya. Jari-jemarinya masih mengempal tanah merah berbalut kain putih. Di dekatnya ada secarik kertas yang berkata:

Tanah Air Indonesia. Kalau terjadi apa-apa tolong hubungi istriku, An Sui. Ini nomor teleponnya... (Aleida, 2007, p. 9)

I didn't know how much I scream. How much my mouth was opened calling out his name: "Ang...! Aaaaang...!" I fell beside him. His fingers still held the red soil wrapped in white cloth. There was a piece of paper near him, saying:

Indonesian homeland. If anything happens, please contact my wife, An Sui. This is her telephone number... (Aleida, 2007, p. 9)

The paragraph quoted above illustrates the tragic situation when Ang ended his life by jumping from his apartment window. During his time as an exile, Ang felt very guilty because he could not be a responsible family leader, especially for their only son, Han. Because he fled Indonesia, Ang had no chance to raise Han. It was precisely An Sui who seemed to play a double role, being a mother as well as a father to Han, even earning a living so that Han could study in Australia.

When Ang's depression reached its culmination point, he chose suicide as a settlement to end his prolonged suffering. Ironically, the homeland which he considered to have robbed his identity so that he only became "a soulless soul" was still loved by him sincerely. It is proofed by the red soil wrapped in white cloth that was held by him when he

exhaled his last breath. Indonesia was still a nation he dreamed of. This duality in Ang's identity illustrates the contradiction of how he sees the notion of nation, a manifestation of the term's ambivalence in Bhabha's colonial discourse (1994).

Alternative Spaces as A Journey into the Unknown

Alternative spaces are present to freed the subject from the problem of the nation. In *Tanah Air*, these alternative spaces arise from the existence of shifting scales from nation to a scale larger than the nation, which is through a journey. The journey appears in three forms: as an exile, migrant, and nomad. In this story, Ang played a double role in journeying into his alternative realities. Firstly, as a nomad, he wandered from one country to another to search for sanctuary. Secondly, as an exile, he escaped the limits of national space to seek asylum in the Netherlands, though he always had a fantasy of a glorious return to his native country.

As a nomad, an individual who travels from one place to another without a clear destination, Ang experienced a never-ending-like journey, started when he was kicked from his homeland. When leaving Jakarta, Ang was forced to stay in Egypt until he finally settled temporarily in China. In China, he even had to live in some cities, from Peking to a small city, for the sake of his safety. Moreover, when An Sui visited him, they had to decide whether to meet in Macau or Canton (currently known as Guangzhou). In the following paragraph, An Sui revealed the journey experienced by her

husband. For a nomad, his home is indeed the process of carrying out the journey itself.

Malam pertama, dia bercerita tentang rencananya berangkat ke Belgia, yang tak lama lagi akan membuka hubungan diplomatik dengan Tiongkok. Sehingga visa tinggal di negara itu diperkirakan akan mudah diperoleh. Dari negara itu, katanya, dia akan melompat ke Belanda, di mana beberapa orang temannya senasib sudah siap menampungnya. (Aleida, 2017, p. 4)

The first night, he told me about his plan to leave for Belgium, which would soon open diplomatic relations with China. So that the residence visa in that country was expected to be easily obtained. From that country, he said, he would jump to the Netherlands, where some of his friends had been ready to accommodate him. (Aleida, 2017, p. 4)

In the history of Ang's journey, China was only a part of his temporary sanctuary. Due to the chaos in China which was no longer safe for him and hundreds of fellow friends, Ang planned to move to the Netherlands. In this phase, Ang continued to take part as a nomad by leaving for Belgium to settle in Amsterdam. This, however, indicates a contradictory issue for Ang himself. The movement, though it seems like a way for the colonized party to run away, also demonstrates the colonizer's practice in conquering territory. Thus, the movement is actually a metaphor for the whole colonial practice.

Quite different from the role of Amsterdam in *Tanah Air's* short story, other previous studies explore some cities as alternative spaces. McElroy & Werth (2019)

examined a phenomenon of displacement in Oakland, one of the largest cities located on the east side of San Francisco Bay. The decolonial activism in this city called for a campaign against violations, evictions, and foreclosures. As a result, the communities of color in this city denied the White to control their space. Another study conducted by Stevens & Meulder (2018) explored the role of space in Bixiga, a neighborhood founded by Italian immigrants in the center of São Paulo, Brazil. With its distinguishing culture from the major cultural convention, it takes the role of an allotopia, a space that adopts a multitude of dissimilarities all at once. Further, Fois (2018) investigated this issue from the standpoint of the subject, not the setting. The findings show that Damanhur, a community that resided in Italy, encounter “affective, emotional and embodied experiences” as a result of utopian enactment (2018: 112).

Once Ang had resided in Amsterdam, he began his new chapter as an exile. Exiles, different from migrants who have strong hopes about their destination country, psychologically encounter different experiences regarding their new country of residence. Because of the desire to return home which cannot be fulfilled and because of the upheaval in the new country, most exiles come up against depression. The depression had actually been started when Ang was in China, which then grew even worse as he reached the Netherlands. The following paragraph shows the conditions faced by Ang:

Dia bersama ratusan kawan senasib disingkirkan ke sebuah kota kecil, jauh dari

Peking. Alasannya demi keamanan. Supaya tak jadi sasaran mereka yang datang dengan senjata “Buku Merah”. Dia benar-benar merasa dikucilkan, disingkirkan, dari dunia yang wajar. Dilarang keluar dari kompleks perumahan. (Aleida, 2017, p. 3)

He and hundreds of friends of the same boat were expelled to a small town, far from Peking. The reason was for security. So as not to be the target of those who came with “Red Book” weapons. He really felt ostracized, expelled, from the natural world. It was prohibited to leave the housing complex. (Aleida, 2017, p. 3)

When he fled to China, Ang became one of the witnesses of the Cultural Revolution pioneered by Mao Zedong, who, in Ang’s term, was called “a man worshiped more than Goddess Guan Yin” (Aleida, 2017, p. 3). The idea of anti-capitalism carried by Mao Zedong was intended to eradicate the revisionists who were considered counter to the revolution. The Red Guards formed were the beginning of the chaos, bloodshed, and economic destruction in China for 10 years (Wang, 2018). Ang and hundreds of other escaped friends who fled because they were labeled communists were removed to a small town far from Peking. Being alienated from the country where he was looking for safety also made him begin to experience depression.

Dari kawan-kawannya sesama pelarian, yang tak bisa pulang karena paspor mereka ditangkap penguasa baru di tanah yang kutinggalkan, kudengar dia merasa sangat bersalah. ...Tak sekali-dua-kali kawan-kawannya di Tiongkok, sebelum mereka

mendamparkan diri ke Amsterdam sini, memergokinya sedang membisikkan nama anaknya berulang kali dan membentur-benturkan kepalanya ke meja makan. Juga tembok. (Aleida, 2017, p. 2)

From his fellow escapees, who could not go home because their passports were captured by a new ruler on the land I left behind, I heard he felt very guilty. ... Not once did his friends in China, before they threw themselves to Amsterdam here, caught him whispering his son's name repeatedly and banging his head on the dining table. Also the wall. (Aleida, 2017, p. 2)

The narrative quoted above illustrates how Ang's depression was getting worse. Ang often deliberately hurt himself because he could not bear the enormous guilt on his son, Han. Living in China as a carrier of human waste without being able to fulfill the living needs of his family he left in Indonesia made him even more imprisoned in his suffering.

What Ang felt was very different from An Sui's psychological experience. In this story, An Sui played the role of a migrant who moved from Indonesia to the Netherlands. Since she is the narrator, the storyline is constructed from a migrant's perspective. This hybrid text can also be called "post-migratory" literature in Boehmer's term (Gamal, 2012: 598). The results of Gamal's study—portrayed by two Anglo-Pakistani writers in the scheme of post-9/11 writing—showed that migrant literature provides a contemporary view of the global and the postcolonial context.

As a migrant, An Sui faced an alternative reality that she thought to be much better than

her life back in Indonesia. The journey led her out of dystopia to utopia, a place in which everything is perfect. Her migration was not like a journey on the basis of compulsion as her husband had, but with a definite goal, which was to live and reunite with her beloved one. The following quote illustrates that part of the story:

Tetangga, sanak-famili boleh acuh-tak-acuh, karena takut, namun gereja membukakan pintu untukku. Walau hanya bubungan gereja kecil. Di situlah aku tinggal sambil menunggu aba-aba keberangkatan yang akan datang dari daratan impian. (Aleida, 2017, p. 5)

Neighbors, relatives might not care, out of fear, but the church opened the door for me. Even though it was only a small church ridge. That was where I stayed while waiting for the signal of the upcoming departure from the land of dreams. (Aleida, 2017, p. 5)

An Sui explained that the people closest to her at that time were no longer willing to give her shelter assistance because they were fearful of being considered to be associated with the communists. An Sui had hope for the church while waiting for her flight to the Netherlands after initially being postponed due to unstable political conditions. Based on the narrative, it can be seen how An Sui really fought for her journey even though she had to go through many obstacles. Indeed, she was very obsessed with the Netherlands as she called it 'the land of dreams'. It is her utopia where everything seemed flawless.

Singkat cerita, aku mendarat di Schiphol. Dia menyambutku di pintu keluar. Dada sesak oleh kebahagiaan. Aku dirangkulnya berlama-lama. Lantas mendorong barang bawaanku menuju kereta api. (Aleida, 2017, p. 5)

Long story short, I landed at Schiphol. He welcomed me at the exit. Chest tight with happiness. I was embraced by him for a long time. Then, he pushed my luggage towards the train. (Aleida, 2017, p. 5)

The paragraph describing the meeting between Ang and An Sui above shows the excitement of An Sui as she arrived in the city she had dreamed about. She felt happiness that was overflowing because the purpose of the journey was achieved. However, her desire for migration indicates the absence of the nation in her narratives. In her practice of journey as a migrant, there emerges a deconstruction of the major scheme of her point of view as a result of the alternative spatialities. This is because once she set her journey to be a migrant to the Netherlands, she unconsciously contributed to shaping the city, the representation of the West.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that in the *Tanah Air* short story, the meaning of the nation is problematic as the characters glorify the nation, which is actually a colonial culture. In fact, the concept of homogeneity constructed in the national space resulted in various minority groups being marginalized. Ang, a nomad and exile with different racial and religious identity

from the dominant community, becomes a victim of uniformity, which neglect these diversities. Ironically, Ang indeed preserved a great affection and longing for the nation. Symbolically, his feelings are also represented with a handful of Indonesian soil in a bundle of white cloth that he carried when leaving his country as a political exile. To deal with the complicated circle of national space, postcolonial studies offer other alternative spaces. These alternative spaces are in the form of a journey as a nomad, exile, and migrant. The journey as a nomad and an exile is represented by Ang as he traveled to a number of countries before finally settling down in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, An Sui with a completely opposite desire compared to Ang, acts as a migrant who longs for her dream destination.

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