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Deconstructing History and Nationalism in Afrizal Malna: Fragmentation, Intertextuality, and Symbolic Deflation

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Abstract Contemporary drama often serves as a critical space for questioning dominant versions of history, nationalism, language, and culture. This study aims to examine how Afrizal Malna's *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan (What Blooms Between the Plates)* deconstructs official historical reasoning and nationalist discourse within contemporary Indonesian theatre. Using a qualitative textual approach, the study analyzes the play as its primary corpus by applying Derrida's deconstruction, Anderson's concept of imagined communities, Chatterjee's view of anticolonial nationalism, and Boal and McBride's notion of theatre as political praxis. The analysis shows that the play destabilizes nationalist narratives through fragmentation, intertextuality, absurdist idioms, and the dislocation of time, space, and identity. It also reveals how state symbols are reduced to banal and unstable forms, while domestic space, theatrical language, and women's bodies become sites of memory, power, and ideological struggle. The study suggests that contemporary theatre can function as both an aesthetic form and a political intervention that challenges hegemonic historiography and opens space for alternative national imaginaries.

Keywords: *Afrizal Malna, Culture, Contemporary drama, Language, Nationalism*

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1. Introduction

Afrizal Malna's (2020) drama *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan (What Blooms Between the Plates)* stands as a profound intervention in contemporary Indonesian theatre, functioning as a powerful, multi-layered critique of how history and nationalism are discursively constructed and represented in the public sphere. Malna weaves together archival historical quotations, fragmented remnants of classical literature, and the idioms of postmodern absurdism. Through this method, he deliberately dismantles linear storytelling to challenge audiences to interrogate the boundaries between objective fact and subjective fiction, as well as the intersections of personal memory and state-sanctioned ideology. The play's aggressively experimental form and fragmented narrative architecture are not

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merely stylistic choices but direct extensions of Malna's renowned poetic sensibilities, deploying post-structuralist techniques, semiotic ambiguity, and relentless deconstruction to disrupt conventional, reified interpretations of historical reality. In doing so, this aesthetic fusion revitalizes the dramatic medium itself, transforming the theatrical stage into an active, vital locus for critical reflection on collective identity and the socio-political narratives that shape modern citizenship. Ultimately, Malna's (2020) methodological approach profoundly aligns with, and propels, broader progressive trajectories within Indonesian literature and cultural studies; it actively seeks to deconstruct stagnant, monolithic narratives of the nation, urging a radical re-examination of belonging by positioning nationalism not as a rigid, inherited ideology, but as a deeply complex, dynamic, and continuously evolving collective project (Maulana et al., 2024).

The dramatic text serves not only as a platform for artistic expression but also as a powerful vehicle for theatre practitioners to voice revolutionary and sociopolitical propositions through creative production. This dual function reflects a conscious choice by playwrights and theatre makers to bring pressing social and political issues to the public stage, transforming theatre into a site of activism and public engagement. Research shows that theatre has historically mirrored and shaped societal change, acting as a medium for social commentary, resistance, and education, from ancient tragedies to modern immersive performances. Movements such as the Theatre of the Oppressed exemplify how theatre can empower communities, transferring the means of production to the people and enabling them to use theatre as a tool for their own liberation and expression, echoing Boal and McBride's (2020) assertion that theatre is a weapon to be wielded by the people themselves (Gulkhara & Farzaliyeva, 2025; Krasnenko, 2023).

Moreover, theatre's role extends beyond mere reflection; it actively participates in shaping national consciousness, challenging dominant narratives, and fostering dialogue and democratic engagement. Through its symbolic language and emotional resonance, theatre becomes a key apparatus for constructing, contesting, and transforming collective identity and public discourse (Farzaliyeva & Seyidov, 2025; Kostin, 2025; Krasnenko, 2023). In this regard, theatre has long functioned as a potent space of political resistance, aligning closely with Boal and McBride's (2020) s framework that views theatre as a tool for empowering marginalized voices and challenging dominant power structures. Boal and McBride's Theatre of the Oppressed is designed to transfer the means of theatrical production to the people, enabling them to use theatre as a weapon for their own liberation and social critique. In this sense, drama is inherently a tool for advocacy and ideological expression, and Afrizal (2020), as a creative agent, consciously engages in the deconstruction of Indonesia's historical logic and nationalist discourse by shaping characters, fragmentary narratives, and postmodern absurd idioms into an aesthetic language of resistance (Sariah et al., 2023; Yusuf & Putrie, 2022).

These dimensions of theatre, as a platform for sociopolitical critique and as a space for contestation of nationalism and historical authority, are precisely what Afrizal Malna's work enacts in contemporary Indonesian drama. This study aims to examine how *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan (What Blooms Between the Plates)* deconstructs historical reasoning and nationalist discourse through Afrizal Malna's experimental and fragmentary dramaturgy. The analysis also demonstrates how drama can serve as a site for sociopolitical critique where ideas and memories clash ideologically, while intervening in hegemonic narratives of national history. This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach using intertextual and critical textual analysis. The primary object of analysis is Afrizal Malna's (2020) play *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan*, with a focus on its dramatic structure, characters, dialogue, and postmodern idioms. Theoretical frameworks include Derrida's (1976, 1978) deconstruction to examine the dismantling of historical and nationalist narratives, Anderson's (1991) concept of imagined communities, Chatterjee's (1993) theory of anticolonial nationalism to interrogate the imagined and contested nature of national identity, and Boal and McBride's (2020) theory of theatre as political praxis, to understand drama as a tool of ideological expression and collective resistance. The research is guided by several key questions:

1. How does Afrizal Malna attempt to deconstruct the official narrative of national history?
2. How is nationalism represented as an unstable and contradictory discourse?
3. How do the play's experimental and fragmentary structures support this deconstructive agenda?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Analytical Orientation

This study uses an integrated analytical model to examine how *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan* deconstructs history and nationalism through dramatic form. The model combines Derrida's deconstruction as the primary mode of textual reading, Anderson's concept of imagined communities as a lens for interpreting the symbolic construction of national identity, Chatterjee's account of anticolonial nationalism as a way of locating that identity within postcolonial tensions, and Boal and McBride's (2020) theory of theatre as political praxis as a means of understanding how dramatic form operates ideologically. These frameworks are not treated as parallel theories of equal function, but as connected layers of analysis that move from textual instability to nationalist meaning and then to theatrical-political effect (Breen, 2017; Ilyasova & Gailomazova, 2020; Minaeva, 2024).

2.2. Derrida and Deconstructive Reading of Dramatic Text

Derrida's (1976, 1978) deconstruction provides the main analytical approach in this study because it allows the researchers to read the dramatic text not as a stable carrier of meaning, but as a site of tension, contradiction, and slippage. In dramatic writing, such instability often appears through fragmentation, disrupted chronology, ironic juxtaposition, shifting symbols, and the collapse of fixed oppositions. A deconstructive reading therefore focuses on binaries such as history/myth, public/domestic, authority/ marginality, and coherence/disorder, showing that these oppositions are neither natural nor secure. In theatrical texts, fragmentation and symbolic dislocation do not simply weaken narrative coherence; they also expose how ideological meanings are constructed and maintained through language and form. As studies of deconstructed national narratives in drama and performance suggest, dramatic fragmentation can unsettle mythologized versions of identity and open space for more plural readings of historical experience (Jurgutiene, 2015; Vosu & Joosepson, 2005). In this study, Derrida's framework is used to identify how Afrizal's (2020) play destabilizes official historical narration and nationalist coherence through ruptured structure, ambiguous speech, and symbolic excess.

2.3. Anderson and Chatterjee: National Identity in Postcolonial Context

While deconstruction reveals instability within the text, Anderson (1991) and Chatterjee (1993) help explain the ideological significance of that instability. Anderson's concept of imagined communities argues that the nation is not a natural entity, but a symbolic and discursive formation sustained through representation, repetition, and shared narrative. National identity is therefore imagined into coherence through institutions, collective memory, and cultural signs rather than derived from any essential unity. Chatterjee extends this discussion in postcolonial contexts by showing that nationalism develops through tension between the material domain, often shaped by colonial modernity, and the spiritual or cultural domain, where anticolonial identity is asserted and protected. This distinction is useful for reading literary and dramatic texts in which domestic space, cultural symbolism, language, and memory become sites of nationalist struggle. Recent studies also show that nationalist concepts such as nation, language, and identity remain fluid, contested, and politically mobilized across different historical settings (Almasi & Subaric, 2022; Titley, 2020; Yang & Chen, 2021). Likewise, postcolonial scholarship emphasizes that national identity is negotiated through everyday cultural practices rather than formed as a single and closed ideological structure (Forde, 2023; Panda, 2024). In this study, Anderson and Chatterjee are used to interpret how the play challenges the imagined unity of the nation and reveals nationalism as a contested discourse shaped by exclusion, representation, and postcolonial contradiction.

2.4. Boal and Theatre as Political Praxis

Boal and McBride's (2020) theory of theatre as political praxis provides the performative dimension of this framework. For Boal and McBride, theatre is never neutral, because the staging of action, space, and voice always participates in the production of social meaning. Theatre may reproduce domination, but it may also become a site of critique, intervention, and resistance when it exposes the assumptions embedded in public discourse and invites spectators to confront ideological structures. This perspective is especially relevant to dramatic texts that depart from realism, linearity, and stable characterization,

since such forms may interrupt passive consumption and produce critical distance. Boal and McBride's emphasis on theatre as a contested social practice remains influential in educational, political, and community contexts, where performance is used to generate dialogue and challenge hegemonic narratives. In addition, postcolonial and subaltern perspectives remind us that representation is never innocent, since marginalized groups are often spoken for rather than allowed to speak within dominant cultural frameworks (Spivak, 2008). In this study, Boal and McBride's framework helps explain how Afrizal's (2020) dramaturgy transforms theatrical form into ideological action, turning the stage into a space where historical discourse and nationalist authority can be questioned rather than merely reproduced.

2.5. Relevance to *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan*

Applied to *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan*, this integrated framework allows the analysis to move in a clear sequence from textual form to ideological meaning. Derrida is used to read fragmentation, instability, and disrupted binaries in the dramatic text. Anderson and Chatterjee then clarify how those textual disruptions challenge the imagined coherence of national identity in a postcolonial setting. Boal and McBride (2020) finally explain how such disruptions function theatrically as political acts rather than as purely aesthetic devices. This approach also develops insights from earlier studies on Afrizal Malna (2020), which have highlighted absurdity, postmodern expression, and formal experimentation in his works, but have not specifically examined how those dramaturgical strategies deconstruct history and nationalism in *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan* (Miraviori, 2018; Rahmawati et al., 2024; Suyatno, 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

The primary material of this study is the published script of Afrizal Malna's (2020) dramatic text *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan*. To establish clear parameters for the research, it should be noted that this study focuses exclusively on the written dramatic text as a literary and discursive object; it does not incorporate an analysis of its performance history, stage adaptations, or live directorial interpretations. This specific published edition was selected because it presents a fragmented and experimental dramatic structure that is highly relevant to the study's focus on the deconstruction of history and nationalism. The play contains historical references, symbolic characters, domestic and political imagery, and intertextual elements that make it uniquely suitable for examining how nationalist discourse and historical reasoning are destabilized in contemporary Indonesian drama. In addition to the primary text, supporting secondary sources were used to frame the analysis, particularly works on deconstruction, nationalism, postcolonial discourse, and political theatre.

3.2. Procedure

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive design utilizing critical textual and intertextual analysis. The research was conducted in several systematic stages. First, the researchers performed a close reading of the published script to identify passages, scenes, symbols, dialogues, and character constructions related to history, nationalism, power, and ideological tension. Second, these textual elements were classified based on recurring patterns such as fragmentation, historical dislocation, absurdity, intertextual references, and the representation of state symbols. Third, the selected textual data were interpreted using Derrida's (1976, 1978) deconstruction to examine the instability of meaning and the dismantling of dominant narratives. Anderson's (1991) concept of imagined communities and Chatterjee's (1993) perspective on anticolonial nationalism were then used to analyze the construction and contestation of national identity within the text. Boal and McBride's (2020) notion of theatre as political praxis was also applied to explain how the written drama functions as a space of ideological critique and resistance. Finally, the findings were organized into thematic sections to demonstrate how the play deconstructs historical reasoning and nationalist discourse.

4. Results

Afrizal Malna's (2020) deconstructive approach to Indonesian national history in *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan* reflects a broader trend in Indonesian historiography and cultural production that seeks to

challenge and rethink dominant, state-sanctioned narratives. To clarify the main analytical findings, the deconstructive strategies identified in *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan* are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
The Identified Deconstructive Strategies in Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan

No.	Strategy	Textual evidence/ example	Analytical function	Effect on history and nationalism
1	Fragmented historical narrative	Re-staging of Bung Hatta's speech in an incomplete and domestic form	Breaks linear historical logic and disrupts heroic national memory	Shows history as selective, unstable, and open to reinterpretation
2	Dining table symbolism	The dining table becomes the site of ideological, biological, and historical "growth"	Converts domestic space into a site where the spiritual and material domains collide (Chatterjee, 1993)	Blurs boundaries between private life and national discourse
3	Banalization of nationalist symbols	Marching band sound, newspapers, feeding scenes, and everyday gestures	Dismantles the representational mechanisms through which imagined national unity is produced (Anderson, 1991)	Exposes nationalism as constructed, performative, and contestable
4	Intertextuality and historical dislocation	References to *Sandhyakala ning Majapahit* and *Caligula* in displaced contexts	Produces layered meanings through non-linear and cross-textual references	Challenges official history by inserting alternative cultural and political voices
5	Theatre as political space and subaltern articulation	Distorted speeches, symbolic staging, and marginalized figures	Positions theatre as a discursive site of resistance and ideological struggle	Reframes history as a contested field, not a state monopoly

This approach is characterized by fragmentary, experimental, and postmodern strategies that disrupt linear storytelling and stable character identities, inviting audiences to experience the instability and multiplicity of historical meaning. Afrizal Malna's (2020) strategy of deconstruction is reinforced by his use of specific aesthetic techniques that target the inherited myths of historical consciousness and nationalism.

4.1. Afrizal Malna's Attempt to Deconstruct the Official Narrative of National History

Afrizal Malna's (2020) most direct strategy for deconstructing official history is the fragmentation of national symbols and heroic voices. Rather than reproducing historical figures as coherent, monumental presences, the play stages them in incomplete, domestically displaced, and contextually unstable forms. The clearest instance is the re-staging of Bung Hatta's speech:

> *HUSBAND, wearing a suit and tie, is standing on a table or on a chair, delivering a speech straight ahead.* (Malna, 2020, p. 26)

> *The foundation of a university lies in its ability to bridge knowledge and the essence of life. [...] Indeed, that, in my opinion, is the purpose of a university or higher education institution.* (Malna, 2020, p. 27–28)

This staging relocates a nationally sanctioned speech, one whose authority depends on its association with a public, heroic occasion, into a domestic and theatrical context where its claim to truth becomes uncertain. From Anderson's (1991) perspective, national communities are imagined into coherence through the repetition of shared symbols, commemorative narratives, and authorized voices. Bung Hatta's speech is precisely such a symbol: its public circulation sustains the imagined unity of the

Indonesian nation by anchoring collective memory to a recognizable and stable historical figure. By fragmenting this speech and re-staging it as an incomplete, privately performed act, Afrizal (2020) disrupts the repetitive machinery through which national memory is produced and maintained. The fragment refuses to perform the unifying function that Anderson's imagined community depends upon; instead, it exposes the speech as a constructed artifact rather than a transparent record of historical truth. National history, in this rendering, is not inherited as a given but fabricated through selective repetition of heroic voices.

This deconstructive move is extended and deepened through intertextuality. The incorporation of passages from *Sandhyakala ning Majapahit* and *Caligula* into the dramatic narrative displaces the chronological and ideological ordering of Indonesian history. A key fragment reflects this approach:

> *HUSBAND: Maharesi, before Brahma took form, what existed in the universe?* (Malna, 2020, p. 19)

By inserting this intertextual reference without contextual explanation, the drama refuses the linear and teleological structure of official historiography. History, in this configuration, is not a secure progression from past to present but a discontinuous field in which cultural and political fragments from different times and traditions coexist in unstable proximity. This approach aligns with Derrida's (1976, 1978) argument that meaning is never fixed but always deferred through chains of signification that exceed any single authoritative interpretation. The play thus reveals official history not as a neutral record but as a discursive construction whose coherence depends on the suppression of alternative voices, counter-narratives, and discontinuous memories.

4.2. Nationalism Represented as an Unstable and Contradictory Discourse

The instability of nationalist discourse in the play is most evident in two interconnected strategies: the banalization of national symbols and the ideological overloading of domestic and bodily space. Together, these strategies draw on both Anderson's (1991) account of the nation as imagined and Chatterjee's (1993) distinction between the material and spiritual domains of anticolonial nationalism. Anderson (1991) argues that the nation is sustained not through essence but through representation, specifically through the circulation of symbols, rituals, and narratives that invite individuals to identify with a collective that cannot be directly experienced. Afrizal (2020) targets precisely this representational machinery by reducing nationalist symbols to banal, everyday, and even absurd forms:

> *A FEMALE SERVANT enters and pours a glass of water into the HUSBAND's mouth. Then, alternately feeds the WIFE and the HUSBAND continuously until the scene ends with the booming sound of a marching band concert playing a hymn.* (Malna, 2020, p. 10)

Here, the marching band concert and the ritualized feeding scene do not elevate nationalism into an occasion of collective meaning. Instead, they render its symbols mechanical, repetitive, and stripped of the affective authority on which imagined national unity depends. The nation, in this scene, is not experienced as a shared transcendence but as a routine and hollow performance. This confirms Anderson's insight by showing its underside: when the representational mechanisms of national imagining are made visible as mechanisms, they lose their capacity to naturalize the community they purport to represent.

Chatterjee's (1993) framework adds a further and distinct dimension to this analysis. Chatterjee argues that anticolonial nationalism in postcolonial societies operates through a structural distinction between the material domain, where colonial modernity governs economic, administrative, and institutional life, and the spiritual or cultural domain, where national identity is preserved and asserted through language, family, religion, and domestic practice. The spiritual domain functions as the sovereign interior of national culture, the space that nationalism claims as its own and guards against external penetration. In Afrizal's (2020) play, the domestic space of the dining table, the female body, and the household setting initially appear to occupy this spiritual domain. They are presented as sites of private life, intimate relationships, and cultural memory rather than sites of public political authority.

However, the play immediately and deliberately complicates this apparent separation. The scene in which the Wife places the crown of Dewi Suhita on her head and strikes a gavel at the dining table is particularly instructive:

> *A chant is heard for quite a long time. Amid the chant, the WIFE places the crown of Dewi Suhita, Queen of Majapahit, on her head. Then, the sound of galloping horses and various percussion instruments is heard. The WIFE, with unsteady steps due to the weight of the crown, moves toward the dining table. She then sits upright. The HUSBAND remains standing, frozen in place. The WIFE strikes a wooden gavel on the table to commence a session.* (Malna, 2020, p. 22)

In Chatterjee's (1993) terms, the female body here occupies the spiritual domain. She embodies cultural and historical memory through the figure of a Majapahit queen, suggesting that national identity is preserved and transmitted through feminized domestic and symbolic space. Yet this positioning is not stable. The crown makes her movements unsteady, and the gavel transforms the intimate domestic table into a site of institutional authority. The domestic and the political, the spiritual and the material, do not remain separate. The play thus exposes a fundamental contradiction within the nationalist framework that Chatterjee describes: the spiritual domain, which nationalism claims as a space of cultural sovereignty, is itself penetrated and reorganized by the very power relations it is supposed to transcend. The female body becomes not a secure site of national authenticity but a contested and unstable surface on which different forms of authority, historical, domestic, and political, compete for dominance. This contradiction reveals nationalism not as a coherent ideology but as a discursive formation sustained by ongoing tensions it cannot resolve. The dining table, the female body, and the domestic sphere together function as a microcosm of this instability, exposing the imagined unity of the nation as a fragile construction maintained through symbolic labor rather than any natural or essential coherence.

4.3. The Play's Experimental and Fragmentary Structures and the Deconstructive Agenda

The deconstructive critique of history and nationalism in the play is inseparable from its formal properties. The experimental and fragmentary structure of *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan* is not merely an aesthetic choice but a direct enactment of the ideological work the drama performs. First, the disruption of linear chronology prevents audiences from following a unified narrative that would reinforce the teleological structure of official historiography. Characters lack stable personal histories, scenes shift between registers of the mythological, historical, and everyday without transition, and the boundaries between time periods are deliberately blurred. This structural instability mirrors, at the level of form, the deconstructive argument the drama makes at the level of content: that history is not a linear and coherent progression but a discontinuous and contested field. From Anderson's (1991) perspective, the novel and the newspaper historically enabled the imagination of national communities precisely because they coordinated a shared temporal experience across dispersed individuals. The play refuses this coordinated temporality, denying audiences the synchronized narrative experience that Anderson identifies as foundational to national imagining.

Second, the use of absurdist idioms transforms the stage into a space of productive disorientation. Scenes such as the ritualized feeding and the distorted political speeches refuse the conventions of realistic drama, in which characters speak with psychological coherence, and events follow plausible cause-and-effect logic. By departing from realism, the play prevents the kind of passive identification that allows nationalist ideology to be absorbed uncritically. Boal and McBride (2020) argue that theatre can become a site of critical intervention when it disrupts the conventions that normalize domination. The absurdist form of Afrizal's play enacts this principle by making the ideological operations of nationalism visible rather than transparent. Third, the drama's intertextual architecture places texts from different historical and cultural contexts in dialogue without resolving their differences. The coexistence of *Sandhyakala ning Majapahit*, *Caligula*, and Bung Hatta's speech within a single dramatic text creates a layered and unstable network of meanings that resists reduction to any single historical or nationalist narrative. This formal pluralism embodies, at the structural level, the critical pluralism the play advocates at the thematic level.

Finally, the figure of Caligula repositions the subject of history as neither a heroic national figure nor a stable sovereign but as a fractured and self-contradicting agent:

> *"WIFE: Caius!*
>
> *HUSBAND: No. Don't be weak! I must finish this. Time is pressing, dear Caesonia. (Groaning) Caligula! Who can condemn me now in this world, where there are no more judges to punish, where everyone is already guilty! But listen! The sound of weapons! Caligula! What I need is only the impossible. I have searched for it in every corner of the world, in every hidden curve of my heart. Do you see, poor Caesonia? I reach out my hand! Look! I reach out my hand into history."* (Malna, 2020, p. 17-18).

The Husband's appropriation of Caligula's voice while lamenting the inaccessibility of the impossible exposes the authoritative historical subject as internally incoherent. When the coherence of official subjects is thus disrupted, the space previously occupied by authorized historical voices opens to the marginalized, the contradictory, and the silenced. In this way, the fragmented and experimental form of the play does not merely accompany its deconstructive critique but constitutes it. Form and argument are inseparable.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine how Afrizal Malna's (2020) *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan* deconstructs historical reasoning and nationalist discourse through fragmentary dramaturgy, absurd idioms, and intertextual staging. The following discussion addresses each of the three research questions in turn, integrating the theoretical frameworks more fully to draw out the analytical and broader scholarly implications of the findings.

Regarding the first research question, the findings demonstrate that Afrizal (2020) deconstructs official history primarily by fragmenting and displacing its authorized symbols and voices. This supports Derrida's (1976, 1978) view that meaning is never fixed or complete but always deferred and open to re-signification. It also aligns with Foucault's (1972, 1980) perspective that history is not a neutral continuum but a field shaped by rupture, discontinuity, and power relations, where the telling of history becomes an instrument for contesting and negotiating meaning within society (Nisponska, 2023; Wright, 2022). For Foucault (1980), power operates not only through direct coercion but also through the production of knowledge and discourse, meaning that official historical narratives function as mechanisms that normalize particular versions of national identity while suppressing alternative voices (Sariah et al., 2023; Yusuf & Putrie, 2022).

Crucially, the findings also illuminate this process from Anderson's (1991) perspective. The fragmentation of Bung Hatta's speech is not simply a formal disruption; it targets the specific mechanism by which national memory is imagined into coherence. Anderson (1991) argues that the nation is held together through the circulation of shared cultural products, authorized narratives, and symbolic repetitions that allow geographically dispersed individuals to feel themselves part of a unified community moving through homogeneous, empty time. Bung Hatta's speech, as a nationally commemorated utterance, is precisely the kind of symbol that performs this unifying function. By re-staging it as a fragmentary, domestic, and incomplete performance, the play exposes the labor of fabrication that official history ordinarily conceals. The speech no longer anchors national memory; it reveals that such anchoring is always a construction, not a given. The use of fragments in narrative invites audiences to question dominant historical narratives and recognize alternative or marginalized voices (Wright, 2022), and this approach resonates with broader discussions on the manipulation of time continuity in shared narratives, where the fusion of fragments can shape collective memory and blur boundaries between past and present (Nisponska, 2023). These deconstructive practices highlight the need for a more plural, inclusive, and critical understanding of Indonesian history (Purwanta et al., 2023; Utami et al., 2024). The play makes space for new frameworks, alternative voices, and a more dynamic understanding of the past (Kellner, 2020; Kuznetsova, 2021), findings consistent with studies that view fragmented literary and theatrical forms as strategies for exposing the instability of official memory (Dinter & Marquardt, 2021; Kellner, 2020; Kuznetsova, 2021; Wright, 2022).

Regarding the second research question, the study found that nationalism in the play is represented as banal, unstable, and deeply mediated by symbols, myth, and institutional power. This finding requires

a sustained reading through both Anderson (1991) and Chatterjee (1993), frameworks that have been underutilized in previous studies of Afrizal Malna's work. Anderson's (1991) concept of imagined communities is central to understanding how the play's banal nationalism operates. As Anderson argues, national communities are imagined rather than experienced directly, sustained through the ritualized repetition of symbols and the synchronized consumption of shared cultural forms. The marching band, the feeding scene, and the newspaper references in the play are not incidental details. They are the very mechanisms through which the imagined community is reproduced in ordinary life. By staging these mechanisms as hollow, repetitive, and aesthetically deadening, the play refuses to allow them to perform their usual ideological work. Nationalism, exposed as a set of performative rituals rather than an expression of genuine collective spirit, loses its capacity to naturalize the community it claims to represent. This confirms Anderson's insight by showing what happens when the seams of national imagining are made visible: the imagined unity of the nation is revealed as a fragile and contingent achievement rather than an organic reality. Discourse theory, particularly as developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), supports this reading by providing a framework for analyzing nationalism as an ideology constructed through ongoing antagonism between dominant and minority narratives (Sutherland et al., 2023). Nationalist discourses adapt to changing circumstances (Zabalo Bilbao & Odriozola Irizar, 2017), and the ambiguity and fluidity of key nationalist concepts allow for multiple interpretations (Almasi & Subaric, 2022), a dynamic evident globally where nationalist rhetoric is mobilized to address contemporary challenges (Titley, 2020; Yang & Chen, 2021).

Chatterjee's (1993) framework deepens this analysis by identifying where the play locates its most intense ideological contradictions. Chatterjee argues that postcolonial nationalism operates by dividing social life into a material domain, where colonial and modern institutional forms govern economic and administrative life, and a spiritual or cultural domain, where the authentic interior of national identity is preserved through language, family, religion, and domestic practice. The spiritual domain is the space that nationalism claims as sovereign, the inviolable core of cultural selfhood that resists external determination. The dining table, the female body, and the domestic household in Afrizal's play initially appear to occupy this spiritual domain. They represent the private, intimate, and culturally saturated space that stands apart from the material world of state power and institutional authority.

However, the play refuses to allow this separation to remain intact. The Wife's movement from domestic caretaker to crown-bearing political authority at the dining table, her unsteady steps under the weight of Dewi Suhita's crown, and the conversion of the household table into a session chamber all indicate that the spiritual domain is not a refuge from power but another site where power is enacted and contested. The female body, in Chatterjee's framework, is typically positioned as the guardian of national cultural authenticity in the spiritual domain, responsible for transmitting tradition, language, and values that define the nation's difference from the colonizer. In Afrizal's play, however, this positioning is exposed as an imposition rather than an empowerment. The Wife is burdened by historical symbolism, her bodily autonomy compromised by the weight of a crown that encodes others' narratives of national identity. She becomes a surface for ideological inscription rather than a sovereign subject. This reading reveals a contradiction at the heart of the nationalist project that Chatterjee describes: the spiritual domain, which nationalism presents as the authentic interior of national culture, is itself organized and disciplined by the same power structures that shape the material domain. Afrizal's work aligns with contemporary drama that foregrounds marginalized voices and challenges the emotional and ideological structures embedded in nationalist myths (Forde, 2023; Morden, 2016; Paftali, 2025), and with approaches in postcolonial drama that employ specific strategies of representation to foreground marginalized perspectives while undermining the authority of official narratives (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996).

Regarding the third research question, the findings confirm that the experimental and fragmentary structures of the play are not separable from its deconstructive ideological function. This supports Boal and McBride's (2020) understanding of theatre as political praxis, since the drama turns the stage into a space for contesting ideological domination and amplifying marginalized perspectives. The strategy of deconstruction is also reinforced by representing events that transcend rational logic through the use of the subconscious, drawing upon myth as a narrative source (Turahmat et al., 2018). Turahmat et al. note that the material world can merge seamlessly with the immaterial or mythical realm, a dialogical

interplay that allows for the coexistence of everyday reality and myth, reinforcing the postmodern aesthetic of ambiguity and complexity (Boswell, 2019; Jarcho, 2021; Strashkova, 2024) and producing layered meanings rather than straightforward opposition.

From Anderson's (1991) perspective, the formal dimension of the play carries specific ideological significance. Anderson identifies the rise of print capitalism and its temporal structures, particularly the synchronized, linear experience of reading novels and newspapers, as foundational to the emergence of national consciousness. The novel's capacity to present individuals moving through a shared, homogeneous time encouraged readers to imagine themselves as members of a community defined by co-presence rather than face-to-face encounter. The experimental form of Afrizal's play refuses this temporal structure altogether. Its disrupted chronology, absent character biographies, and shifting registers of reality deny the audience the coordinated temporal experience that underpins national imagining. In this sense, the play's formal strategy directly intervenes in the mechanisms Anderson identifies as constitutive of national community. By denying the audience a stable narrative temporality, it refuses to reproduce the imaginative conditions in which national belonging feels natural or inevitable.

Boal and McBride (2020) argue that theatre becomes politically transformative when it disrupts the conventions that make domination appear normal and unavoidable. In Afrizal's (2020) play, the absurdist idioms, the intertextual dislocations, and the fractured characterization do precisely this work. They make the ideological operations of nationalism visible rather than transparent, inviting critical reflection rather than affective absorption. Theatre has become a vital space for amplifying subaltern voices globally, as seen in solo narrative performances such as Heather Raffo's *Nine Parts of Desire*, which empower oppressed women to express subjectivity (Abdelfattah, 2022), in Mahesh Dattani's plays giving voice to India's excluded hijra community (Thakar, 2013), and in Chinese avant-garde theatre demonstrating a commitment to subaltern themes (Chen & Cheng, 2019). Afrizal's work participates in this broader dramaturgy of resistance, and in doing so, theatre becomes a space for reimagining national identity and collective memory (Forde, 2023; Poorshahidi, 2024; Watt, 2014).

Overall, this study has several implications. First, it contributes to literary and cultural studies by showing that contemporary Indonesian drama can function as a critical medium for rereading national history beyond state-centered and monolithic narratives. Second, it demonstrates that dramatic texts should be read not only as aesthetic objects but also as discursive interventions that expose how nationalism is culturally produced and politically maintained. The explicit application of Chatterjee's (1993) material and spiritual domain distinction to the domestic space, female body, and cultural symbolism of the play reveals that the private sphere in Indonesian nationalist culture is not a neutral domestic interior but a politically charged and ideologically organized domain where the legitimacy of national identity is both asserted and contested. Third, the expanded application of Anderson's (1991) imagined communities framework beyond the level of thematic symbol to the level of formal and narrative structure shows that the play's deconstruction operates not only by challenging what national history says but by dismantling the formal mechanisms through which it produces the experience of national belonging. More broadly, this study implies that theatre remains a significant cultural arena for negotiating memory, identity, language, and power in postcolonial contexts.

Further studies may expand this discussion in several directions. Future researchers could compare *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan* with other plays by Afrizal Malna (2020) to trace the consistency of his deconstructive aesthetics across texts. Comparative studies with other Indonesian or postcolonial dramatists may also clarify whether similar strategies are used to challenge nationalism and historical authority. In addition, future research could examine performance aspects, audience reception, gender representation, or language use in staged productions of the play. Such studies would deepen understanding of how deconstructive theatre operates not only at the textual level but also in performance, interpretation, and public cultural discourse.

Disclosure Statement

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethics Declaration

The study analyzed the published dramatic text *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan* by Afrizal Malna along with other publicly available academic literature; no human participants, animals, or personal data were involved; therefore, institutional review board approval and informed consent were not required.

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