# Virtual Homecoming Culture During the Covid-19 Pandemic for Students in Malang City

## MUHAMMAD HASAN SURYAWAN

## ABSTRACT

Homecoming has been a tradition of Indonesian society for decades. Those who go home are generally migrants in big cities, such as professionals, workers and even students. For students, *Eid al-Fitr* homecoming is the right time to take a vacation and relax with their extended family. However, this year's homecoming must be canceled and even prohibited by the government to avoid the spread of Covid-19. So that the purpose of this study is to understand the feelings and experiences of students in Malang City who are not going home due to the Covid-19 pandemic and identify other alternatives as a substitute for going home. This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive research type. The source of data is from student immigrants in Malang City who do not do the *Eid* homecoming. Data collection techniques using in-depth interviews (independent interview) and observation. The data validity used triangulation between informant data. The data analysis technique used interactive analysis, namely data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing. The results of this study found that immigrant students in Malang City were unable to go home directly for several reasons, (1) restrictions from the government, (2) avoiding the spread of Covid-19 to their hometowns, and (3) prohibitions from their families for reasons of mutual health. . The purpose of the students homecoming in Malang is to have a vacation and stay together. For this reason, another alternative as a medium to substitute for *Eid* homecoming is to take advantage of sophisticated communication media such as direct face-to-face communication via video calls and taking virtual trips to tourist attractions or places in your hometown, for example using the street view feature in the google maps application. This kind of virtual homecoming certainly cannot replace students' experiences and feelings when going home directly, but the role of information technology of this kind is very important for students.

**Keywords : *Eid al-Fitr, Virtual homecoming, students, Covid-19 pandemic.***

Muhammad Hasan Suryawan is a student and researcher in Department of Islamic Religious Education Doctoral Program Based on Interdisciplinary Studies, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Email: hasansuryawan@gmail.com

## INTRODUCTION

Homecoming is one of the cultures of Indonesian society which is always carried out every year before *Eid*. The importance of going home for the community causes this tradition to be carried out every year by the community. The motives for the *Eid al-Fitr* homecoming vary, from takbiran, *Eid* prayers, friendship with family, friendship, giving gifts, zakat, haj burials, attending halal bihalal, and recreation (Muskinun Fuad: 2011). In general, there are two main reasons that underlie someone doing the *Eid* homecoming, namely first family recreation in a family atmosphere, secondly practical, efficient and socio-cultural on time (Gumilar R. Somantri: 2007).

However, the homecoming tradition that is deeply rooted in people's social life must now be prevented by the spread of the corona virus, or coronavirus disease (Covid-19) (Annisa Salsabila: 2020). The worst risk of going home in the midst of a pandemic like now is the spread of Covid-19 to areas that travelers may be able to carry. The reasons for public safety and health at large are of course far more important than people's reasons for returning home at normal times.

In big cities like Malang City, the social status of the people is certainly very heterogeneous, including student and student groups. The dominance of students and students studying there are immigrants because they come from various regions throughout Indonesia. The high level of positivity for Covid-19 which generally occurs in big cities raises concerns if there is migration of large numbers of people (going home) from cities to regions which can cause the spread of Covid-19 to become more massive. Therefore, the government policy prohibiting homecoming and restricting access between cities and all provinces in Indonesia causes most immigrant students who live in Malang City to not return home, especially those from provinces outside Java.

As a form of government prohibition from going home, a policy of limiting and even prohibiting going home for the community was issued. For example the issuance of Permenhub Number 25 of 2020 concerning transportation control during *Eid* 1441 H. (cnbcindonesia.com:2020). Likewise, the appeal from the government continues to be made including the prohibition of going home for government officials, ASN, TNI and Polri (national kompas.com: 2020). The aim of the homecoming ban is to prevent the spread of Covid-19 to the regions.

But in today's digital era, the moment to meet family and stay in touch can be done by utilizing the sophistication of social media, such as communication media with virtual platforms. People or young people are used to using Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook, Zoom and other social media applications. In addition, the platform for accessing a certain virtual place is widely used by the public, one of which is using Google Maps, and accessing the Street View feature in which there is a visualization of a place through 3D visuals. Street View content comes from two sources, namely Google and contributors (google.com:2020). With this feature, users can explore the environment and even places around the world virtually.

Such applications are certainly familiar to young people, especially students and university students. The option to postpone or even not go home and be replaced with an application like this is certainly very effective and easy to do. Furthermore, in this study it is interesting to find out how students' perceptions and experiences of the new homecoming culture through virtual media in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive research type. Sources of data were obtained through interviews with informants or resource persons for immigrant students in Malang City who did not go home to *Eid* due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Data collection techniques using in-depth interviews (in-depth interviews) and observation. The validity of the data used method triangulation where the researcher compared the data findings obtained using certain methods. The data analysis technique uses interactive analysis, namely data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions as a result of the data collection process at each stage and cycle.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
### Virtual Homecoming Culture During the Covid-19 Pandemic For Students in Malang City

In Bambang B. Soebyakto's research entitled Homecoming *Eid al-Fitr* (Qualitative Study) (See Soebyakto, Bambang Bemby: 2011), he looked at *Eid* in terms of demographics such as the age of travelers, occupation and income of travelers. In addition, he also saw the means of transportation used by travelers as well as people's expenses when going home. The results of his research show excellent macroeconomic benefits due to the very large circulation of money to the areas where destination travelers or travelers pass.

In terms of economic benefits, the homecoming tradition has a significant influence on economic growth, so that it has an impact on the economy when the government imposes a ban on going home. This is explained in the research of Muhammad Ubaidillah and Rizqon Halal Syah Aji regarding Agglomeration at the Ministry of Transportation regarding the Prohibition of Homecoming and its Impact on Economic Growth. In this research, it is explained that agglomeration provides rules regarding population movement (going home) in certain areas (See Muhammad Ubaidillah and Rizqon Halal Syah Aji: 2020), it turns out that people discourage going home, of course this will have an impact on the economy. impact on the community.

From a person's perspective, feelings and experiences in interpreting the *Eid al-Fitr* homecoming tradition, Muskinul Fuad at least formulates family values that can be better intertwined. In addition, primordial values provide traces of a person's life history in his hometown which can be used to formulate life goals in the future. Then the existential value fulfills the psychological need for

recognition and appreciation of family members in the hometown after working and struggling in the city. And finally, transformative value, which means growing back the spirit of struggle for success after meeting family and relatives in the village.

The urgency of the homecoming tradition which is very important in terms of social, culture, tradition, religion and even economy, the researcher then wants to focus on studying the feelings, perceptions and experiences of students who come to Malang City in obeying. ban on going home in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, that does not mean that homecoming is not carried out, it's just that the form and activities are carried out with other alternatives. At least new terms appear, such as virtual homecoming, which makes it easier for travelers to make friends through digital social networks and visit places through the current sophistication of digitalization and information technology.

*Eid* homecoming is one of the right moments and times to gather with family members in the hometown. Those who return also consist of various groups, ranging from workers, professionals, businessmen, entrepreneurs, even students who are studying in big cities, including Malang City. However, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, their intention to return to their hometowns had to be postponed or even canceled.

The reasons for students in Malang City not to return home on *Eid al-Fitr* 2020 generally do not have a big difference due to the same problems and phenomena, namely the prohibition of going home to stop the spread of Covid-19. One of the informants provided information:

"I did not go home because I was worried that I would be the carrier of the family at home" (Interview with Halik, student from Lombok, 25/7/2020, Pkl.13: 00 WIB).

Students turned out to be aware of the dangers of spreading Covid-19. This is the impact of the ease of access to everyday information through their devices. On the one hand, socialization from the Government, NGOs and volunteers has been intensively carried out to educate the public about the dangers of Covid-19. So that the role through electronic media is currently very important in providing insight and education to the public about Covid-19 and the characteristics of its spread.

This education and outreach not only reaches technology-literate urban youth, but also people in areas far from big cities. This was conveyed by Halik, an immigrant student in Malang who gave information that her parents who were in Lombok ordered them not to come home during *Eid*.

"Parents at home also advised not to go home first because many parents were at home" (Interview with Halik, student from Lombok, 25/7/2020, 13:00 WIB).

For students, homecoming for *Eid* is the right time to take time off from routine on campus. In addition to holidays, *Eid al-Fitr* homecoming is also used to stay in touch with extended family, relatives and family friends. Syafi'i, a student from Pontianak, said:

"The reason I went home earlier (the previous year) was to take a vacation as well as stay in touch with my extended family in Kampungn Halaman" (Interview with Syafi'i, a student from Kalimantan, 24/7/2020, Pkl. 09.00).

So that the essence and purpose of going home for workers and students is different. The homecoming workers because their goals are more complex in scope, starting from the goal of building spirituality, psychology, and social status in their hometowns. Meanwhile, students tend to only use homecoming as a holiday and solely as a gathering event.

"I used to go home because of the holidays, I kept wanting to meet my family" (Interview with Sullhan, a student from Lombok, 24/7/2020, 16:00 WIB).

To minimize the spread of Covid-19, the Government has also imposed a ban on going home. The general public also understands the purpose of this policy. Including students must accept this policy for the common good. However, that does not mean that the purpose of the students' friendship during *Eid al-Fitr* with their parents and families in their hometowns is obstructed. The current sophistication of technology can certainly be an alternative medium for sillaturhami and chatting with family, for example through the communication media Whatsapp, Facebook and others.

"During *Eid al-Fitr* yesterday, parents at home called via WhatsApp video. It's good to see the big family gathered at Grandpa's house. Even though it's sad because I can't go home. But at least seeing extended families through video calls can heal homesickness and feel calm too, (right) if going home is afraid of being attacked by this virus and others (Interview with Halik, student from Lombok, 25/7/2020, Pkl. 13) : 00 WIB). "

Conducting hospitality through the current sophistication of communication media is certainly the best choice. Of course, there are differences in the conditions and feelings of students when making friends through virtual communication media by meeting in person. Shafi'i stated:

"This virtual homecoming is very different from the original homecoming…. (Interview result from Syafi'i, Kalimantan Student, 24/7/2020, Pkl. 09.00) "

Sulhan added: "Because collecting and releasing homesickness is not enough just through virtual media ... (Interview with Halik, a student from Lombok, 25/7/2020, Pkl.13: 00 WIB)".

Although in general the informants thought that virtual syllabus through communication media like this is certainly different from direct friendship. But at least the existence of this communication media makes the students feel and condition less sad. They can interact directly, both audio and visual.

On the one hand, the reasons for students going home for vacation purposes cannot be conveyed only through communication media like this. Vacationing or refreshing is indeed synonymous with outdoor activities and traveling to a tourist spot. At the same time, all tourist attractions and vacation spots are of course closed to avoid crowds.

The virtual visit solution is actually not difficult, which is simply accessing the google maps application. A person can access photos and videos of

tourist attractions or even take a walk in his hometown. Furthermore, regarding the features on google maps, namely the street view feature, most informants answered that they knew this feature. But there are others who are not aware of this feature. As the name implies, street view allows people to access 3D visuals of a place or road conditions.

This kind of virtual homecoming has finally become an alternative to going home in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Of course, virtual homecoming as something new cannot immediately replace the habits and customs of the *Eid* homecoming tradition.

However, when asked how important the position of virtual media and social media is in the midst of residents like this, of course the answers of the informants all agree that the existence of social media and virtual media is currently very important as well as being an alternative social media for students who cannot go home and gather. with his family on vacation. Sulhan said:

"Urgent, Because it can convey a sense of longing to the family even if it's a little bit "(Interview result of Sullhan, a student from Lombok, 24/7/2020, Pkl.16.00 WIB).

Although on the one hand students feel that meeting family directly is better than through virtual communication media, it turns out that the benefits and urgency are very important.

"Media (digital communication) is very important to build emotional closeness with family" (Interview with Syafi'i, a student from Kalimantan, 24/7/2020, Pkl. 09.00).

This is because there are no other alternatives that can be done by students other than through this digital communication media.

The repatriation of *Eid* can be categorized as a spontaneous and temporary migration carried out by the community as a form of gratitude and happiness for the success of fasting. In addition, the *Eid* homecoming can also be a reflection of the success of relatives abroad with many items as gifts given by travelers (Soebyakto, Bambang Bemby: 2011). Besides that, going home is also a moment to stay in touch with parents and extended family and can visit the funeral of the family who has died.

Support for the right time and opportunity for a vacation from routine to another supporting moment that causes the homecoming tradition to always be carried out. However, this *Eid al-Fitr* 2020 homecoming must be canceled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The government's ban on going home to reduce the spread of Covid-19 is also supported by the concern of students for their family members in their hometowns. Due to the characteristics of this virus it allows a person to carry this virus into his body even if he is asymptomatic. If you continue to insist on going home, the health of family members in your hometown will be threatened. This kind of caring is in the nature of a person as part of a family member. Kingslet Davis in Murdianto (2003) states that family functions include building a sense of Care of the Ages, caring for elderly family members or can be interpreted as health insurance for parents. In addition, the function of physical protection is the definition of providing physical protection, especially in the form

of clothing, food and shelter for family members (Yoga, Dyah Satya, Ni Wayan Suarmini, and Suto Prabowo: 2015). This kind of rationalization is at least strong enough to discourage students from going home for *Eid* in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In general, there are at least three dimensions of going home, namely the spiritual, psychological and social dimensions (Agus Maladi Iriyanto: 2012). For students, there are two main reasons for doing homecoming, namely holidays and hospitality. These two reasons enter into their respective psychological and spiritual dimensions. As an alternative, establishing friendship with family can be done by utilizing the sophistication of information technology, namely through virtual communication media found on his smartphone device.

Social relations in virtual spaces like this existed long before the Covid-19 pandemic emerged. The development of virtual communities has created virtual social relationships in virtual spaces such as virtual shopping, virtual games, virtual conferences, virtual sex and virtual mosques (Yasraf Amir Pilliang: 2012). Even if we look at the basic features of a smartphone with Android OS, there is a google maps application that can describe a place or road with three-dimensional images. This can be an alternative to virtual travel. The general things above then become different when this sophistication must target deep into traditional practices that are carried out conventionally.

The main purpose of homecoming students is to have a vacation and stay in touch during *Eid*. However, this is rarely or never done virtually. But now this is something students do with half coercion. The author has at least two assumptions, first, that every change that will occur requires time and a long process, as stated by Arnold Toynbee in H.A.R Tilaar about linear theory and cycle theory (H.A.R. Tilaar: 2012). So that changes must go through a process of stages and cycles that must be taken first.

Meanwhile, the assumption of two direct and conventional homecoming traditions can never be replaced by digital technology. Given the dimensions of going home, especially for students, this is done because it is related to the spiritual and psychological dimensions. The spiritual dimension is formed by real experiences (reality) and direct mental processes (Ary Ginanjar Agustian: 2001). It is not possible to replace virtual objects in computer bits (system image).

The psychological dimension deals with the conditioning of feelings and experiences when gathering with extended families. Prof. Abd. Majid, that the sophistication of technology and engineering resulted from the advancement of science, science and technology has not been able to match and let alone defeat the caring of loving hands and sincere prayers of parents in the village who are able to survive and live life innocently and improperly (Abdul Majid: 2012).

In addition, virtual homecoming remains a new alternative choice for immigrant students in Malang. With this sophistication of technology, friendship on *Eid al-Fitr* can still be done face-to-face through video calls with family in hometowns. Indeed, it cannot replace the role and purpose of conventional homecoming that has been carried out so far, but rationalization of avoiding the risk of spreading Covid-19 and family health insurance is even more important.

## CONCLUSION

Homecoming has become a tradition and culture of the Indonesian people who have migrated to big cities, including students and university students. The *Eid al-Fitr* 2020 homecoming tradition must be postponed or even canceled because it avoids the spread of Covid-19 through the mobility of large numbers of people. For students, of course this is very sad, because not going home means they cannot vacation and stay in touch with their families in their hometowns. However, thanks to technological sophistication, it is now easier for people to communicate in virtual (face-to-face) long distances. This of course can be a new alternative as a substitute for going home. Of course, this virtual homecoming cannot replace the psychological experience and feelings of students during direct homecoming.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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