



The Transformation of Malay Poetry Aesthetics into Contemporary Novels: An Analysis of Narrative Intertextuality

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ABSTRACT

The currents of globalization and digitalization are slowly eroding the existence of oral traditions such as Malay poetry among the younger generation, making conversion into modern prose a crucial step to preserve local identity. Unfortunately, many contemporary writers simply attach elements of poetry as external decoration (local exoticism) without integrating them into the story structure, or even change them too freely to the point of losing their original sacred value. Several previous studies have indeed examined Riau literature, but their studies are still limited to social aspects, linguistic aspects, or the transformation of folklore. The research gap in this study lies in the absence of a specific analysis of how rigid poetic rules such as poetry are translated into the intrinsic elements of the novel. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach with an intertextual analysis of Gérard Genette and Julia Kristeva, this study dissects the novels *Hempasan Gelombang* (1999) by Taufik Ikram Jamil. The novelty of this research successfully answers two main research questions, by proving that the formulaic aesthetics of *Syair Suluh Pegawai* and *Syair Perang Siak* are not rigidly transferred, but rather are merged into a driving force of fragmentary plots, characters' inner conflicts, and the critical setting of the reform era. In conclusion, the hybrid nature of Riau culture allows poetry to be melted into modern prose. The implications of this finding provide a new theoretical formulation in the conversion of literary genres as well as a practical guide for young writers to revive classical literature.

Keywords: transformation, Malay poetry aesthetics, contemporary novels, analysis, narrative intertextuality

INTRODUCTION

The currents of globalization and digital technology are changing many things, including the way we experience culture. Unfortunately, oral traditions such as poetry and pantun (pantun) are starting to lose their place. Today's younger generation is more familiar with modern digital pop culture than classical literature. If left unchecked, these precious works will be considered outdated and end up becoming boring historical displays.

However, in other parts of the world, an interesting trend is emerging to rescue local traditions. Many modern writers are repackaging ancient texts into novels. For example, Madeline

Miller's successful novel, *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, reimagines ancient Greek mythology into an emotional modern narrative. Similarly, in Asia, Western Japanese novelists are reviving remnants of the classic tale, *The Tale of Genji*, within the framework of popular fiction. This creative approach has proven successful in attracting young readers, becoming a viral phenomenon on social media.

In Indonesia, we can see Ayu Utami reviving oral epics through her novel *Saman*, or *Dee Lestari* absorbing ancient spiritual philosophy in her series, *Aroma Karsa*. This creative approach is also being strongly replicated locally in Riau. Writers

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like Marhalim Zaini cleverly blend myths, oral traditions, and local Malay culture into the structure of modern novels like "Kitab Air." Similarly, the works of cultural figure Taufik Ikram Jamil consistently transform classical Malay historical values and narratives into captivating contemporary fiction. This means that traditional literature need not necessarily die, as long as it can adapt and be presented in new, fresher ways. This positive trend is also evident in Indonesia, particularly through the works of writers belonging to the Riau Literary School. As a center of Malay culture, Riau boasts an extraordinary wealth of poetry. These writers are not standing still; they are incorporating the aesthetics of Malay poetry into contemporary novels. This effort is not merely a nostalgic nod to the past, but a way for them to preserve local identity so that it remains present on a global level.

This research focuses on the transformation of literary aesthetics. The main variables examined are the aesthetic elements of Malay poetry (such as rhyme, rhythm, and moral messages) and the narrative structure of contemporary novels (such as plot and characterization). The researcher aims to examine how these two elements are integrated in the works of figures from the Riau Literary School. Thus, the traditional elements here are not merely decorative, but rather the main driving force of the story.

To analyze this process, researchers use the theory of intertextuality. This theory, simply put, observes that no literary work is truly new; all influences each other. This view aligns with Kristeva's (1980) observation that no literary work is truly self-contained or born from nothing. Every text is a mosaic of quotations and absorptions from other, pre-existing texts (Kristeva, 1980).

This theory, when linked to the process of transformation from classical narrative poetry to modern prose, involves what is known as aesthetic transformation. According to Genette (1997), this transformation is part of the hypertextual relationship, namely, a condition in which a new text (hypertext) modifies or expands the structure

of an older text (hypogram) through a process of creative adaptation. Through this logic, the standard rules of Malay poetry, such as formulaic rhyme structure, poetic rhythm, and moral dictum, are not simply transferred but rather merged and adapted into the intrinsic elements of the novel, such as storytelling techniques and character development. This fusion of classical poetry and modern novels is expected to work harmoniously. Thus, this work produces a complete hybrid work, making classical literature feel more flexible and easily accepted by today's society.

In this context, contemporary novels by figures from the Riau Literary School are seen as a meeting place. There, Malay poetry is absorbed and transformed into a new, more modern work without losing its identity. Ideally, the fusion of classical poetry and modern novels can work harmoniously. Readers should be able to enjoy the novel's engaging narrative while simultaneously experiencing the poetic beauty and moral message of Malay poetry. This combination is expected to produce a cohesive hybrid work.

Currently, many writers incorporate elements of poetry merely as a touchstone or decoration to give their novels a "local" feel. As a result, the connection between the poetry and the novel's narrative becomes bland. Conversely, some are too liberal in altering the poetry, thus losing its sacred value and original message. This gap is problematic and interesting to examine.

Several previous studies have examined Riau literature, albeit from different perspectives. First, Sutardji's (2020) study examined social issues in the works of Riau authors, but did not address the text's structure. Second, Rahmawati (2021) examined the use of pantun (pantun) in Sumatran novels, but her focus was solely on character dialogue, rather than the more strictly regulated poetry form.

Third, Hasan (2022) examined intertextuality in Indonesian novels in general, but her findings focused on the absorption of myths, not poetry. Fourth, Firmansyah (2023) discusses the use of ancient Malay in the works of the Riau School



from a linguistic perspective, not from a narrative structure perspective. Fifth, Utami (2024) examines the transformation of Syair Perahu into modern poetry, meaning it is still a genre of poetry, not a novel or prose. The sixth highly relevant study was conducted by Saputra (2025) who examined the structural transformation of classical Malay texts into modern Riau fiction. Saputra found that adaptations of Malay texts often change linear plot patterns to circular ones, but this study focused on the form of folklore, not narrative poetry genres such as syair.

Finally, the seventh study by Ramadhan (2025) examined narrative intertextuality in novels by figures from the Riau Literary School using a dynamic structuralism approach. Ramadhan's research findings demonstrate a strong absorption of local philosophical values, but his study focuses more on the author's ideology and does not specifically examine how the formulaic aesthetics of Malay poetry are fused into the novel's characterization and storytelling techniques.

These seven studies clearly demonstrate limitations. No researcher has specifically examined how the rules and aesthetics of Malay poetry are transformed into the narrative structure of the novel. Most previous studies have focused solely on social themes or merely on narrow linguistic features.

This research aims to fill a gap. This study no longer views poetry as a separate external element. The researcher seeks to uncover how the poetic logic and messages within Malay poetry permeate and shape the plot and characterization of the novels. This focus on the work of figures from the Riau Literary School is the novelty of this study. This research is important because it has clear benefits. Academically, this research provides a new theory on how to transform classical poetry into modern prose. Practically, the results can serve as an example or guide for young writers to revitalize regional literature. Furthermore, this research also reinforces the position of the Riau

Literary School as a driving force for creative national literature.

Based on the above background, the research questions are formulated as follows: how is the textual structure transformed in the novel *Hempasan Gelombang* (1999), based on Syair Suluh Pegawai?

Tujuan penelitian ini selaras dengan rumusan masalah. Pertama, untuk mendeskripsikan the textual structure transformed in the novel *Hempasan Gelombang* (Jamil, 1999), based on Syair Suluh Pegawai. Second, how is the collective historical memory of Syair Perang Siak (Anonymous) transformed into the narrative structure (plot, characters, setting) of Taufik Ikram Jamil's novel, *Gelombang Sunyi* (2001).

METHOD

This research was designed using a qualitative approach with descriptive analytical methods. The main characteristic of this literary research is its focus on in-depth meaning and interpretation of texts, rather than on statistical or numerical data processing (Ratna, 2015; Elmustianm 2013). The research design employed is narrative intertextuality analysis. This design serves as an analytical tool to dissect, compare, and describe the process of converting the poetic aesthetics of Malay poetry into narrative structures in contemporary novels by Taufik Ikram Jamil, a prominent figure in the Riau Literary School, a prominent figure in the Riau Literary School. Through this approach, researchers can objectively observe the interconnections and transformations of literary forms from classical poetry to modern prose.

In qualitative literary research, the terms population and sample are not used, but are instead replaced by the concepts of data and data sources. The primary data sources in this study specifically focus on two novels by Taufik Ikram Jamil, a central figure in the Riau Literary School: *Hempasan Gelombang* (Jamil, 1999) and

Gelombang Sunyi (Jamil,2001). The selection of these two novels was based on their textual characteristics, which consciously structurally transform collective memory and Malay philosophical traditions. Meanwhile, the research data itself is in the form of textual data, namely words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or narrative units such as plot, characterization, and setting in both novels, which indicate the absorption or transformation of the aesthetics of Malay poetry as the original text or hypogram.

In detail, the first novel studied, *Hempasan Gelombang*, won an award in the Jakarta Arts Council's Novel Writing Competition and explores the upheavals of coastal communities in Riau due to the penetration of modern industry. Intertextually, this novel adopts the didactic structure of Raja Ali Haji's *Syair Suluh Pegawai* (*Syair Suluh Pegawai*). Taufik Ikram Jamil transforms the aesthetic formula of this poetry—originally normative poetic verses on etiquette and the mandate of leadership—into psychological inner conflict and philosophical dialogues that drive the main character's character as he confronts the moral decadence in his environment.

Meanwhile, the second novel chosen for this study is "Waves of Silence," published by Kompas Book Publishers in 2001. This novel contains a powerful socio-political narrative about historical trauma and the cultural resistance of the Riau people against the hegemony of centralized power. The source text for this novel is *Syair Perang Siak*, an anonymous traditional Malay historiography from the 18th century. The author transforms the spirit of physical and tactical resistance against the Dutch East India Company (VOC) along the Siak River, captured in this classic poem, into a contemporary narrative structure that is fragmentary, jumps around, and full of flashbacks to depict the "silent resistance" of modern Riau society.

In keeping with the nature of qualitative research on these subjects, the primary instrument in this study is the researcher herself, acting as the

human instrument. The researcher plays a full role, from planning the focus of the study, collecting data through reading, classifying, analyzing, and independently deducing the meaning of the text (Moleong, 2017). Although the researcher acted as the key instrument, the fieldwork process was still aided by supporting instruments in the form of a codification guide, data recording, and computer equipment to organize the text findings to ensure they remained systematic and valid.

The data analysis technique in this study adopted the intertextual analysis model of Gérard Genette (1997). The analysis began with careful and repeated readings of the novels *Hempasan Gelombang* and *Gelombang Sunyi* to identify narrative elements that incorporate elements of poetry. After the data was identified and codified, the next step was to compare it with the texts *Syair Suluh Pegawai* and *Syair Perang Siak*. From this comparison, the researcher analyzed how the rhyme, rhythm, and moral messages in these traditional poems undergo transformation (transposition) into the plot structure, characters, or setting atmosphere in these two contemporary novels. Finally, the researcher drew scientific conclusions regarding the patterns of aesthetic transformation and their impact on the preservation of cultural identity, then presented the entire analysis in a descriptive narrative.

RESULT

To see how ancient Malay poetry can be transformed into a modern novel, we can look to two concrete examples by Taufik Ikram Jamil: *Hempasan Gelombang* (1999) and *Gelombang Sunyi* (2001). As a leading figure in the Riau Literary School, he is known for his skill in reworking Malay cultural roots into modern prose. Both novels have a strong connection to the classical values that flourished in Riau. Reading *Hempasan Gelombang*, the conflicts surrounding ethics, leadership, and moral responsibility within it resonate with the advice for officials in *Syair Suluh Pegawai*.



Through Taufik Ikram Jamil, these classical themes, once confined to verses, have been reimagined and repackaged into a much more vibrant contemporary fiction. Before dissecting more deeply how this aesthetic transformation occurs in the two novels, let's first look at the original content and sound of the verses of Syair Suluh Pegawai and Syair Warga Siak below.

1. Suluh Pegawai Poetry

Verse 1

*Bismillah itu permulaan kalam,
Puji bagi Tuhan Malik al-'Allam,
Salawat dan salam bagi Penghulu Alam,
Nabi Muhammad nabi yang khatam.*
Bismillah, that's the beginning of kalam,
Praise be to God Malik al-'Allam,
Salawat and greetings to the Lord of Nature,
Prophet Muhammad was the khatam prophet.

Verse 2

*Dengarkan tuan suatu rencana,
Gubahan fakir yang kurang dana,
Mengaturkan suluh para laksana,
Supaya menjadi pegawai sempurna*
Listen to the master of a plan,
Compositions of poor people who lack funds,
Set the torches for the performers,
So that you become a perfect employee

Verse 3

*Pegawai itu tiang negeri,
Hendaklah ikhlas menyerahkan diri,
Janganlah tamak memikirkan diri,
Hukum yang adil jangan dikiri.*
Employees are the pillars of the state,
Be willing to surrender yourself,
Don't be greedy in thinking about yourself,
Don't ignore fair laws

Verse 4

*Jika pegawai memandang harta,
Hukumnya condong tiada merata,
Negeri yang aman menjadi serta,
Rakyatnya lari membawa leta*

If employees look at assets,
The law tends to be uneven,
A safe country comes along,
The people ran away carrying the leta

Verse 5

*Hendaklah tahu hukum dan adat,
Supaya kerja jangan tersesat,
Kepada raja hendaklah taat,
Kepada rakyat memberi manfaat.*
Must know the laws and customs,
So that you don't get lost in your work,
To the king be obedient,
It provides benefits to the people.

Verse 6

*Janganlah sekali berbuat khianat,
Mengubah janji membuang amanat,
Kerana itu membawa laknat,
Di dalam dunia sampai akhirat*
Don't ever act treason,
Changing the promise to dispose of the mandate,
Because it brings curses,
In this world until the afterlife

Verse 7

*Wahai segala para pegawai,
Janganlah kerja dipandang cuai,
Apabila hukum sudah selesai,
Barulah hati boleh bersenang-senai.*
O all employees,
Don't look at work as fun,
When the law is finished,
Only then can the heart have fun

Verse 8

*Hati yang bersih jadi pakaian,
Jangan membedakan miskin dan kaya-an,
Adil dan rida dalam pekerjaan,
Barulah kekal dalam kemuliaan*
A clean heart becomes clothing,
Don't differentiate between poor and rich,
Fair and happy in work,
Only then will you remain eternal in glory
(Raja Ali Haji, 1996).

2. Transformation of Textual Structure in the Novel *Hempasan Gelombang* based on *Syair Suluh Pegawai*

Based on the results of textual data comparison, the novel "*Hempasan Gelombang*" (1999) has been shown to have absorbed and transformed the moral values of leadership contained in Raja Ali Haji's *Suluh Pegawai* Poetry. In terms of characterization, the theological and ethical concepts of office regarding the steadfastness of state officials as "pillars of the state" and the demand for "sincerity" expressed in SSP verse 3 lines 1 and 2 ("Employees are pillars of the state, / Let them surrender sincerely") are not rigidly transferred by the author. The novel's textual data shows that these values are fused into the character of the main character, Datuk Jamil, a traditional figure and village head in the coastal region of Riau.

Datuk Jamil's character is depicted as highly dynamic and filled with psychological uncertainty. This inner conflict culminates when he must choose between maintaining the integrity of his customary law or succumbing to economic pragmatism by accepting a bribe in the form of an envelope of money from an industrial tycoon named Ah Tong. This conflict of modern human nature is clearly captured when Datuk Jamil gazes at the destruction of his natural environment while whispering softly, stating that sincerity is easy to say when the stomach is full, but in front of factory machines, he feels like a fragile house pillar eaten by termites.

Furthermore, in terms of plot, the poetic prohibitions against greed, "Don't be greedy for yourself" (SSP, Stanza 3, Line 3) and "If an employee looks at wealth" (SSP, Stanza 4, Line 1), are transformed by Taufik Ikram Jamil into the main driving force of the story's conflict. The novel's plot does not move in a black-and-white manner, but rather is structured through a series of events of sociocultural moral decline, where one by one customary land changes hands because the village elders have been blinded by the glitter of

the ringgit and rupiah brought by city dwellers (Jamil, 1999). The traditional greed of this 19th-century poem transforms into a modern plot depicting the systematic greed resulting from the transition from an agrarian-maritime space to an industrial one.

This shift in plot and character ultimately creates a very gloomy setting of place, time, and events, as a form of absorption of SSP Stanza 4 lines 2, 3, and 4 concerning the collapse of justice ("The law tends to be uneven, / A safe land becomes attached, / Its people flee carrying lethargy."). The author sets the scene in Kampung Kuala, a coastal area of Riau at the end of the 20th century that is being crushed by Ah Tong's new oil refinery project. The novel's setting depicts a stark legal inequality, where local officials act in favor of protecting the operational permits of capitalist factories rather than the customary rights of the residents.

As a result, the sea in Kuala is no longer blue but instead stained with black oil soot, and elderly fishermen are forced to fold their nets and go to work as manual laborers in their own land, carrying a million shames with them. The phrase "the people ran away carrying leta" from classical poetry is concretely embodied in the novel, becoming a social setting that depicts the cultural alienation or estrangement of the local Malay community.

DISCUSSION

All the textual data presented narratively in the research findings section above demonstrates how the intertextual relationship mechanism operates in the work of Riau Literature School figure Taufik Ikram Jamil. Through the lens of Gérard Genette's (1997) theory of hypertextuality and Kristeva's (1980) concept of text mosaics, the interweaving of plot, character traits, and setting discovered in the field demonstrates that classical texts are not merely used as exotic decorations but are instead fused as the foundation for modern social criticism.



In the novel *Hempasan Gelombang* (Jamil, 1999), the discovery of Datuk Jamil's character wavering due to a bribe from Ah Tong in Kampung Kuala re-evaluates the relevance of the didactic value of *Syair Suluh Pegawai* Verses 3 and 4. Taufik Ikram Jamil astutely captures the essence of Raja Ali Haji's prohibition of greed, yet he recognizes that modern readers require a more realistic narrative logic. Therefore, the original text, which was originally a rigid, one-way advice, is transposed into a psychological conflict and a vibrant social setting. The fact that the sea in Kuala turns black with oil soot and local fishermen are marginalized confirms Kristeva's (1980) view that a new text is formed by absorbing the moral energy of previous texts. This juxtaposition reinforces the research findings of Shafei et al. (2011), which assert that the integration of traditional texts into modern novels is an important cultural strategy for preserving society's collective memory from extinction amidst the storm of industrialization.

Meanwhile, in the novel "Waves of Sunyi," the fragmentary plot and the reduction of historical material from *Syair Perang Siak* (Siak War Poem) provide a very interesting scholarly discussion. Taufik's deliberate dissolution of the physical attributes of war, such as the "clap of cannons" and "rain of bullets", and replacement with memories of Kadir's psychological trauma along the modern Siak Rive, represents a highly political authorial strategy. In accordance with Genette's (1997) theory, a hypertext (novel) has complete freedom to modify or reduce the scale of the original text (hypogram) to achieve new aesthetic goals.

This phenomenon of shrinking the material of war from verse to the inner space of novel characters aligns closely with the research findings of Rahmi et al. (2024), who stated that the conversion of literary genres from ancient poetry to modern prose naturally requires a reduction in content for the sake of effective form. Furthermore, the "silent resistance" of Kadir and Zailani in defending their customary land from exploitation

by Jakarta's decree proves the validity of Shafei's (2017) argument. In his study, Shafei states that writers often use historical intertextuality as a tool for reparing past memories to voice resistance against the hegemony of present-day power. The physical war of the Siak army against the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the 18th century is revived as a symbol of the cultural resistance of contemporary Riau society against the political and economic injustice of the central government. This successful, naturally flowing fusion of plot, characters, and setting ultimately finds scientific justification in Riau's socio-cultural conditions. The results of Zakariya and Oktasari's (2017) research on intellectual activity in Riau show that since the Rushdiah Club era, the local community has been very familiar with the tradition of written literacy and the use of poetry as a means of disseminating moral ideas and struggles. This historical condition is reinforced by the thesis of philologist Maier (1997) in his article 'We are playing relatives'; Riau, the cradle of reality and hybridity. Maier emphasized that the geographical and social character of Riau is hybrid and very flexible to various cultural influences. This local hybridity explains why the strict rules in classical Malay poetry can be so easily dissolved, crossing medium boundaries, and seeping into the intrinsic space of Taufik Ikram Jamil's modern prose without losing its original spirit.

Synopsis of *Hempasan Gelombang*

Modernization has not brought prosperity, but rather environmental destruction and the collapse of morality for the indigenous Malay community on the Riau coast. Musa is an idealistic young man in Kampung Bukit, strongly motivated to preserve nature and the dignity of Malay culture from the threats of industrialization. The main conflict begins when a large industrial company builds a factory in their area. The presence of this factory triggers sharp polarization within the community. Musa leads a group that opposes the factory because its waste is polluting the sea and

destroying the livelihoods of fishermen. Conversely, a group lured by compensation and promises of jobs chooses to support the company, sparking social conflict between neighbors and even families.

The turning point in the story occurs when the company forcibly expands its land, encroaching on customary land and ancestral cemeteries in the village. Musa mobilizes the masses to hold a massive demonstration and boycott the factory's activities. However, significant obstacles arise when the company allies itself with security forces and labels Musa's actions as subversive and hindering regional development. Musa is arrested and imprisoned without a fair trial, while residents who support him begin to be intimidated and slowly withdraw.

The story concludes with a tragic defeat for Musa and his group. After his release from prison, Musa found Kampung Bukit completely transformed, both physically and socially. The factory remained standing and expanded its operations, leaving the area completely devoid of life. Local residents who had previously resisted were now forced into low-wage labor, while the village's culture of mutual cooperation and religious values completely collapsed, replaced by an individualistic lifestyle. Although he failed to save his village, Musa matured; he no longer became explosive, instead choosing a quiet path to continue documenting and preserving the remaining memories of Malay culture for future generations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion, this study yields two main conclusions to address the objectives and research questions. The first conclusion, regarding the structural changes from *Syair Suluh Pegawai* (*Syair Suluh Pegawai*) to the novel *Hempasan Gelombang* (1999), demonstrates that Taufik Ikram Jamil successfully transformed the rigid moral advice from Raja Ali Haji's work into a lively and fluid modern prose narrative.

In terms of characters, the honest and sincere nature of a leader expressed in the poem is transformed into a depiction of the confused and wavering inner workings of Datuk Jamil when faced with the temptation of a bribe from a businessman named Ah Tong. This change also permeates the plot, where the poem's prohibition against greed or avarice serves as the primary driving force behind the story, depicting the moral decay of village elders tempted to sell their customary land. In terms of setting, the poem's warning about unjust laws is embodied in the atmosphere of Kuala Village on the Riau coast, which is damaged by factory oil waste. Local fishermen are displaced and forced to become manual laborers on their own land because the law favors large capitalists.

The second conclusion regarding the historical restructuring of the Siak War Poem in the novel "Waves of Sunyi" (2001) proves that the author completely overhauled the traditional war narrative by downplaying the details of past physical warfare in favor of depicting the inner struggles of modern society. Plot-wise, the story of the war against the Dutch East India Company (VOC), originally presented chronologically from beginning to end in the poem, is completely demolished in the novel, becoming a fragmented plot full of flashbacks through the characters' subconscious memories.

This impacts the characters, where the courage to die and physical heroism of the warlords in the poem are reduced to the characters of calm but stubborn warriors, Kadir and Zailani, who wage silent resistance by refusing to sell their ancestral lands. In terms of setting, the war atmosphere, bustling with the sound of cannons and shipwrecks along the Siak River in the past, is completely removed and relegated to the early Reformation era. Thus, the armed conflict transforms into an ideological struggle and a protest by the Riau people against the economic and political injustices of the central government in Jakarta.

Overall, these two novels by Taufik Ikram Jamil demonstrate that the use of classical poetry



in contemporary literature is not merely a means of embellishment to make the story appear regional. The Riau people's strong historical and sociocultural ties to the tradition of written literacy since ancient times allow for a fluid and fluid interpretation of ancient Malay poetry. These rigid poetic conventions successfully seep into and integrate modern narrative elements, including plot, characters, and setting, and become a powerful tool of social criticism that captures the various issues facing regional communities today.

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