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Colonial and Cosmopolitan Visions in Ade Irma Elvira's *Merangkul Beruang Merah* (Hugging The Red Bear)

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ABSTRACT: This study analyzes the colonial and cosmopolitan visions in the novel Merangkul Beruang Merah (Hugging the Red Bear) (2016) by Ade Irma Elvira, which tells the story of the struggle of the main character, who comes from humble, ordinary family, to obtain a scholarship to Russia and live in that country. Using postcolonial approach, this study applies Debbie Lisle's theory of colonial and cosmopolitan visions. This paper analyzes how the main character, who comes from a former colonized country, views herself and the outside world. In the colonial vision, the results show that the main character initially experiences a sense of inferiority towards foreign cultures, while in the cosmopolitan vision, she finds a modern, developed atmosphere through putting forward open-mindedness, harmony, and empathy. In addition, there are several ways the main character conducts in relation to the both visions, namely resistance and negotiation.
Keywords: *colonial vision, cosmopolitan vision, resistance, negotiation*

Travel writing becomes one of the flourishing genres today in line with the running of globalization. It has just started to have attention since 1980 when the concern altered from the grand narratives works to the minor voices (Kuehn and Smethurst, 2015). In the context of postcolonialism, Memmi (1957) divides the categories of the opposing parties, namely colonizer and colonized. In the past, the colonizers made the countries they colonized to be more civilized by imposing the structures of its social, politics, economics, and others. As the consequences, travel writings written by Western writers are usually narrated in the sense that the West, as colonizers, are superior than the East, the colonized. They usually put West as the subject in reading the situation in the East through inheriting their colonialism and imperialism styles. Research by Akmal (2023) on how the West views Indonesia and Thailand finds that even though the West writers try to put Indonesia and Thailand as part of global world, however, their colonial legacies are still visible by articulating both countries in inferior position.

When the writing is written by subject from colonized country, then it might be different.

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The effect of the colonization might have embedded in the mind of the colonized, especially when they are out of their geographical borders to the more developed, modern countries (Licata, 2011; Mammadova, 2024). This effect brings influences to the way the colonized view himself and the other, especially to the West. On the other hands, they also have to adapt to the situation and attempt to be the subject (Chandra, 2025; Mukherjee, 2020). This swing leads into what Debbie Lisle calls as the colonial and cosmopolitan vision.

This paper is aimed to analyze the colonial and cosmopolitan vision through the lens of colonized subject, namely that from Indonesia. This will explore Merangkul Beruang Merah (Hugging the Red Bear) written by Ade Irma Elvira that depicts the experience of Indonesian student—narrated as I—who receives Russian Government scholarship for her master degree in Russia. Coming from a humble family in Medan, the character I faces some challenges that leads her into some unavoidable situations that may swing between both visions.

This novel is based on the writer's experience and narrated as more like a travel writing than a fiction. This writing is basically to raise motivation of the young generation to dare to pursue their dreams despite the socio-economic hardship. Even though the settings are in Indonesia and Russia, the discussion will focus on those of Russia. This is based on the novel that both visions are experienced during the character's interactions in Russia.

METHOD

When there is a negotiation between self and the other caused by movement, basically it can be called as travelling (Thompson, 2011). Fussell (in Thompson, 2011) makes a clear distinction between non fictional travel book and fictional novel about travel. The first one is usually using the first-person view point to elaborate the aestheticism and the information about the travel. Meanwhile, the second one is more fictional and the information about the situation may also be fictional.

Lisle (2006) states that travel writings have been popular in England in 1975. This period is considered important not only because the travelogue reveals the modern rebirth of travelogue, but also as it includes the colonial past in the hectic pace of globalization. Therefore, Leslie offers two approaches: colonial and cosmopolitan vision. Colonial vision happens when travel writers write their experiences through the lens of colonizer's, in which they try to show the colonizer's supremacy and maintains their domination over the colonized (Dirlik, 2002). They impose power and control over the colonized, and the same time consequently it reveals anxieties, insecurities, and difficulties. On the other hands, cosmopolitan vision leaves those all. Instead of creating the gap, this vision builds a bridge to celebrate the interdependence. They diminish colonial heritages by harmonizing the effects of globalization through upholding the values of understanding, solidarity, and respecting each other. Cosmopolitan vision attempts to connect the colonizer and colonized by reducing the differences between the two. However, the two cannot be defined separately, as they run together with their own ways of interacting (Murgia, 2024; Das & Roy, 2025; Skrbis et al., 2004).

This paper is conducted through the close-reading on the novel, classify the reading into some categories on the topics discussed and analyze the questions. The material object to discussed is Ade Irma Elvira's Merangkul Beruang Merah (Hugging the Red Bear). Using the Debbie Lisle's theory of colonial and cosmopolitan vision, the paper is analyzed.

FINDINGS

Even though the well-known travel writings are written from the colonizer's point of view, the novel depicts the visions from the eyes of the colonized. Even though Russia has never occupied Indonesia; however, the Indonesian's experience in being occupied by the West for quite long-time left impression into the Indonesians' minds. This inevitably leads into the character's

ways how to deal with her new, more developed circumstances in Russia. In this case, Russia, is positioned as the West hence it can be equated with the colonizer.

The Colonial Visions

As it is mentioned that colonial vision has the view that the West occupies higher position than the East. In colonial vision, the character reproduces the Western's values and strengthening the Western position. The writer will recreate and interpret the differences she/he encounters in some aspects such as economy, social-culture, politics, and other markers. In this novel, the writer writes how the character feels inferior to the world she would meet after crossing the geographical borders. In colonial view, this can be said as the effects of Western hegemony that leads her into some uneasy, clumsy, anxious feeling.

> *Aku yang dikenal sebagai anak manja, cengeng, penakut akan membukikan kalau aku bisa menjadi wanita dewasa yang berani dan tangguh dalam meraih impian.*
>
> *...Padahal sesenggukan dan tangisan itu sudah berkali-kali kutahan, namun tetap saja tidak bisa (100). […] Aku mencoba menikmati perjalanan ini, walau sebenarnya aku merasa sangat gugup.* (Elvira, 2016)

> *I, who am known as a spoiled, whining, and fearful child, will demonstrate that I can be a brave and tough adult woman in reaching my dreams.*
>
> *Even though I'd tried to hold back the sobs and tears many times, still I couldn't do it. Even watching movies and listening to music didn't make my tears lessen […]. I tried to enjoy the trip, even though I was really nervous. (Elvira,*

2016)

The visions swings in-between her own feelings. The first is that how the character feels fearful leads into her unreasonable anxiety. However, she immediately changes her mind into more positive and optimistic. Later on, she expresses her nervousness by crying despite the restrain she attempts to do. The cry, due to her recall of her mother who firstly does not give her permission to Russia, is also the expression both of her anxiety and relief that she was accepted for the scholarship.

At the next page, the situation repeatedly swings. The writer also explicitly shows her awkwardness when seeing the situation in Moscow. By mentioning herself as "orang kampung" (village people) which is characterized as awkward, nervous, nerd, and clumsy, the character unconsciously strengthens her colonial vision.

> *"Tanpa sadar aku meneteskan air mata. "Subhanallah…Ini salju??? Aku benar-benar sudah di Mooskow…?" Kota yang tidak pernah terlintas dalam pikiranku untuk hidup dan menuntut ilmu di sini sebelumnya. Aku bersikap seperti orang kampung yang baru pertama kali datang ke kota*." (Elvira, 2016).

> *"Unconsciously, I shed tears. "Subhanallah... Is this snow??? Am I really in Moscow...?" A city I'd never imagined to live and study in before. I acted like a village people who'd just arrived in the city for the first time."* (Elvira, 2016).

The swing is also visible during her early travels. At first, she was amazed with the beauty of Moscow; however, it directly changes with the anxiety and nervousness when seeing snow

covering the roads. She even asks to herself whether the Russians can live in an extreme temperature. Sometimes she does not understand how she can express the ridiculous question.

> *Benar-benar takjub dengan Moskow, kota yang sangat indah, penuh dengan bangunan-bangunan bersejarah.*
>
> *Terlintas satu pertanyaan saat menikmati perjalanan menuju asrama: "Seluruh kota ditutupi oleh salju, lalu bagaimana masyarakat ini bisa menjalani hidupnya di sini? Apakah aku juga mampu bertahan hidup di salju selama 3 tahun seperti layakny amasyarakat Rusia?" Heran dengan diri sendiri, kenapa setelah tiba di Rusia mengeluarkan pertanyaan bodoh seperti ini.* (Elvira, 2016)

> *Absolutely amazed with Moscow, a very beautiful city, full of historical buildings.*
>
> *A question crossed my mind as I enjoyed the journey to the dorm: The entire city is covered in snow, so how do these people manage to live here? Would I be able to survive in the snow for three years like the Russian people? I wondered why, after arriving in Russia, I asked such a stupid question*. (Elvira, 2016)

The character's points on the beauty of the Russian orderly system strengthens the colonial visions. She implicitly compares herself as person from colonized country who has never experienced the modern, orderly pattern. She acknowledges that finally she enjoys and gets accustomed to the well-planned system.

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"Betapa teraturnya hidup di Rusia sehingga untuk naik dan turun kendaraan umum sudah ada tempatnya masing-masing. Sebagai pendatang pun, lama-lama aku terbiasa ikut teratur layaknya warga Rusia sendiri." (Elvira, 2016)

"Life in Russia is so orderly that everyone has their own certain place to get on and off public transportation. Even as a newcomer, I gradually became accustomed to following the order, just like a Russian citizen." (Elvira, 2016)

In her study, the character at first finds difficulties due to the high demand of the Russian academic atmosphere added with the character's lack of Russian language mastery. In her view, Russian academic tone is fast, competitive, and demanding students to work hard. Students who cannot follow the patch will lose the prestige opportunity.

"...Master itu tempatnya berkompetisi, bukan hanya datang, duduk, dan diam, tetapi berlomba, siapa yang cepat, dia yang menang." (Elvira, 2016)

"...Studying master is the arena for competition, not for coming, sitting, and keeping silent only, but competing, who is faster, he is the winner." (Elvira, 2016)

The words from the lecturer's character raises her motivation despite the earlier vexation due to the obligation to master every single thing. However, the feeling of vexation, anxiety, and happiness mix each other when she is assigned to teach the undergraduate students. The feeling of not being understood in speaking Russian becomes the situation that makes her uneasy. This

is aggravated with the condition when one of the undergraduate students is unable to understand her explanation; or when her professor is not satisfied with the character's elucidation due to her imperfection in speaking Russian.

"Selesai menjelaskan, aku disambut suara professor yang menggelegar, "PLOKHA! Ti ocen plokha! (Buruk, kamu buruk sekali)". Aku yang semula sudah duduk tegak, begitu mendengar suara menggelegar itu posisi dudukku semakin tegak, mata melotot, kepala menunduk, jantung berdebar kencang, ujung-ujung jari idngin, keringat dingin berkucuran dan dalam hati berkata: "Ya Allah tolong aku…" Kaget, takut dan semuanya bercampur jadi satu." (Elvira, 2016)

> *"After finishing my explanation, I was greeted by the professor's roaring voice, "PLOKHA! Ti ocen plokha! (Bad, you are so bad)". I, who was initially sitting upright, when I heard that booming voice, sat straighter, my eyes are bulging, my head lowered, my heart is pounding, my fingertips are freezing, cold sweat pouring down and I said to myself: "Oh God, help me..." Shocked, scared and all of the feelings mixed together."* (Elvira, 2016)

Due to initial feelings of anxieties, the character is sensible to the little-middle-shocking situation. In addition, it is aggravated with the professor's reaction to the character's explanation. However, she can finally overcome the feelings and begins to widen her vision into more cosmopolitan values.

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The Cosmopolitan Visions

Facing the new, complex circumstances, the character will enforcedly omit her colonial feelings and move towards the new visions, namely global harmony. The previous anxiety and negative sentiments are replaced with the new more positive feelings through lessening differences and expanding common ground, fostering empathy and understanding.

Lisle (2006) elaborates how the colonial and cosmopolitan vision are connected each other as follows:

> *"To the extent that travel writers seek to jettison their colonial heritage by focusing on the harmonizing effects of globalization, they employ what I call a cosmopolitan vision. I think contemporary travel writing is at its most interesting when it confronts readers and writers with the problem of global community of what values might cut through cultural difference and make it possible to develop a global order based on shared understandings, norms and sensibilities"* (Lisle, 2006)

Moreover, Lisle does not put colonial and cosmopolitan visions in opposing position. Instead, she put them together so that "…these two visions exist in a complex relationship with one another sometimes antagonistic, sometimes symbiotic, sometimes ambiguous" (Lisle, 2006). Hence, cosmopolitan visions complete the view by emphasizing on the harmonizing of the global society.

In *Merangkul Beruang Merah*, the main character plays between colonial and cosmopolitan visions. At first, mostly she feels the colonial senses. However, finally she switches the feeling towards the more extroverted and finds that accepting differences and upholding

understanding are the ultimate ways for adaptation process. Even though she finds the difficulties in learning Russian language and customs, she finally accepts the difference and reduces it by driving herself to learn seriously.

> *"Rusia terkenal dengan karakter orang yang tertutup dan kasar. Awal kedatanganku ke sini menganggap pernyataan itu benar karena tak jarang jawabanku ditanggapi dengan kasar oleh mereka bahkan setiap pintu selalu membanting dengan keras sehingga membuatku tidak betah dan ingin segera balik ke tanah air saat itu juga tetapi seiringnya waktu berjalan ternyata pernyataan itu sangat keliru. Warga Rusia sangat bersahabat layaknya kita di Indonesia[…] Pada dasarnya semua bisa dilalui dengan mudah dan terpenting adalah bagaimana cara kita membawakan diri kepada alam itu*." (Elvira, 2016)

> *"Russia is known for its closed-reserved, rude people. During my early coming here, it was regarded right since not often my answers were rudely responded; even the doors were always loudly slammed, things that made me uncomfortable and wanted to return home immediately. However, it turns out that this statement was very wrong. Russian people are very friendly just like us in Indonesia […] Basically, everything can be done easily and the most important thing is how we present ourselves to it."* (Elvira, 2016)

The above quote shows how the main character swings between the colonial and cosmopolitan visions. Her early uneasiness shows colonial nature which later is harmonized with her acceptance and positive feeling that she should prepare herself with the situation and present

well to the new environment. Her colonial vision then collaborates with her cosmopolitan view that coalesces with understanding and belief that there are still many positive sides that she can learn from Russia.

This sense is affirmed with the acceptance of the character in Russian community by being invited to a Russian family for cooking and dinner together. The main character attempts to harmonize the path through minimizing the differences and putting the universal thought as the main way to interact with the Russians.

> *"Keyakinan yang berbeda tidak membuatku tersisih dari keluarga, justru sebaliknya mereka sangat menghargai perbedaan itu dengan baik.*
>
> *Tradisi di Rusia itu sangat unik menurutku. Karena jika kita sudah diterima di hati mereka dan nayamn akan kehadiran orang asing maka mereka akan mengajak kita duduk di dapur dan masak bersama."* (Elvira, 2016)

> *"The differences in belief does not make me being left out of the family. On the other hand, they appreciate the differences well.*
>
> *The Russian tradition is very unique, in my opinion. If they accept us in their heart and feel comfortable with others' presences, they will ask us to sit in their kitchen and cook together."* (Elvira, 2016)

The Resistances and Negotiations

Despite the cosmopolitan visions that support the harmonious thrust, the acts of resistance cannot be avoided during the interactions. The differences in viewing the values lead the character is forced to conduct the acts of resistance when encountering the different habits. The problems usually arise are those relating the characters' belief as a Muslim.

> *"Aku menjelaskan dengan baik bahwa di Indonesia, perbuatan itu dilarang, di agama Islam juga dilarang serta dari segi kesehatan sebagai wanita akan dirugikan jika melakukan hubungan terlarang sebelum menikah. Dari seluruh sudut pandang telah aku jelaskan dan beberapa keberatan telah aku sampaikan karena malam itu aku tidak dapat tidur karena goncangan yang berasal dari tempat tidur mereka. Natsya dan kekasihnya tertawa geli mendengar penjelasanku. Mereka menganggap aku terlalu naif."* (Elvira, 2016)

> *"I openly explained that this practice is prohibited in Indonesia, and in Islam, and that engaging in illegitimate relations before marriage is detrimental to a woman's health. I explained it from all perspectives and asserted some objections, as I couldn't sleep that night due to the shaking coming from their bed. Natsya and her boyfriend laughed amusedly at my explanation. They thought I was too naive."* (Elvira, 2016)

The character and the Russians do not share the same values of the free-sex. The character upholds the Indonesian and Islamic values on free-sex attitudes by mentioning her Indonesian and Islamic beliefs. Meanwhile, the Russians who engage the modern, cosmopolitan values, consider the characters' beliefs as traditional and do not match with Russian cultures. Therefore, the conflicts, uneasiness and discomfort usually emerge in the inner within of the character. Bearing uneasiness and sharing feelings with people in hometown are the only acts that the character can do as argumentation cannot work in the situation.

Another the act of resistance is the character's attitude towards non-halal food. As a

religious Muslim person, she keeps upholding the principles of not consuming pork and alcohol. These raise differences and curiosity among her secular Russian community. However, different from free-sex act, the non-halal food is more acceptable among Russians as the spreading of Russian halal shops and the non-Muslim Russians' enthusiasm in consuming halal meat. This negotiation is strengthened with Russians' supportive attitudes for the character in consuming halal foods (Elvira, 2016). Negotiation can occur when one or both parties open up opportunities for compromising the values through lessening the boundaries. In this case, the Russians' compromises in accepting halal food become one of the factors that leads into negotiation.

Referring to the title, *Merangkul Beruang Merah* (Hugging the Red Bear), the word 'red bear' is the metaphor for the Russia country where the main character lived during her study. While 'hugging' connotes how the main character finally may embrace, interact well with Russian culture that brings her many positive experiences on her journey.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that the character experiences both colonial and cosmopolitan visions where the visions swing in-between. The colonial visions emphasize on the character's view as the citizen of ex-colonized, developing country through some feelings, such as anxiety, nervousness, and self-doubt in dealing with situation of a developed country. The feeling can be diminished through the character's internal resolution to overcome the uneasiness.

Meanwhile, the cosmopolitan vision can be seen when the character puts forward the values of harmonious and understandings. However, the dealing with cosmopolitan vision involves the acts of negotiation and resistance. It can be seen as well that even though the writing is written by colonized party, however, the sense that colonizer is more modern and developed is still evident.

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