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**Fleeting Escapades: Cosmopolite Experience
in Travel Stories Collection *Rumah adalah di Mana Pun***

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ABSTRACT

Local travel writing has become a trend in contemporary Indonesian youth culture. This growing practice of local traveling then produces a large number of stories featuring exploration and discovery of experience of Indonesia with Indonesian women writers producing number of stories featuring their exploration and discovery of archipelagic experience in Indonesia. Set in local tourist destinations across the archipelago, '*Rumah adalah di Mana Pun*' offers array of travel accounts from local young Indonesian women. Simultaneously, they also convey spatiotemporal representation of destinations and fleeting travelling experiences in which these women escape their monotonous everyday life. This paper focuses on the space/place these women travelled, the stories they wrote, and the experience they shared in their travel writing. I argue that these fleeting escapades phenomena form new practice of Indonesian popular travel writing, setting Indonesia as an open arena for globalization convergence. There is further involvement of contradicting home and destination cultures within the stories. These women writers try to become participants of the destination while still be tourists originating from their home. Their writings then create open and new orientation of spatiotemporal experience of Indonesia cosmopolites, juxtaposing their autonomous home culture and their distance from the destination culture within Indonesia archipelago.

KEYWORDS: cosmopolite women, Indonesian popular writing, spatiotemporal experience, travel stories.

The trend of travelling in Indonesia has set many young woman travellers to practice travel writing or document their travel in writing. The practice supports the production of a large number of stories featuring exploration and discovery of

Indonesia within tourist destinations. These young Indonesian woman writers focus mainly on their experience, first and foremost, and the sharing of their story, and the space/place of their destination. All their stories from exploring parts of Indonesia become a personal story and valuable experience for them. Furthermore, the process of sharing these writings has been done in various channels. From small publication in their personal weblog to commercial reproduction of a travel writing collection, young Indonesian woman travellers have been productively writing their experience and sharing them to the world.

One of the collections of travel stories written by young Indonesia women is *Rumah adalah di Mana Pun*, or literally *Home is Wherever*. Consisting of nineteen short stories, the collection puts forward the title of one of the short story titles, emphasizing the spirit of home being everywhere. The home searching theme, to be able to be taking home whenever one travels, is apparent in the short stories, signifying repeated theme of travel stories written by Indonesian young women. The space/place these women travelled, the stories they wrote, and the experience they shared in their travel writing, will be the focus of this paper. Destination and its culture becomes important to observe and analyze, in terms of its connection to how these women treat the destination culture as an arena of negotiation. The experience they shared in their writing will show their involvement with the destination culture and its relation to their home culture. These escapades of the women, no matter how fleeting, create orientation of spatiotemporal experiences of Indonesia cosmopolites. These personal experiences juxtapose their autonomous home culture and their distance from the destination culture within Indonesia archipelago.

COSMOPOLITE, IN DEFINITION

The term cosmopolite in this paper is synthesized from Ulf Hannerz's conception of the term cosmopolitan in his book *Transnational Connection*: (2001). Hannerz places parameters on cosmopolitanism into a stricter sense and a much more genuine concept. He states that cosmopolitan "would entail a greater involvement with a plurality of contrasting cultures to some degree on their own terms." (103). This concept is further supported with what the cosmopolitanism Hannerz stated as "an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other." I believe that Hannerz's emphasizes of "involvement" with the destination culture and "willingness to engage with the Other" is the key to conceptualize the term cosmopolite I used in this paper. Instead of merely a person within realm of cosmopolitan term, cosmopolite becomes someone who negotiates her home and destination culture. In order for one to be labeled as cosmopolite, she has to conduct shared activity involving not only herself as the traveller but also the destination culture. Both parties take equal role in the cultural negotiation and settles on an amicable outcome.

Cosmopolitanism, according to Hannerz, also "entails an intellectual and esthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences." (103). Cosmopolite then labels someone who possesses openness toward experiences that is different from their cultural ones. Unlike tourist who distances herself from the culture before her cosmopolite welcomes the different cultural experiences. She even embraces the difference and even radiates "the aspect of a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting, and reflecting." These practices of listening, looking and intuiting are apparent in almost all travel accounts. Yet, the practice of reflecting has not been applied in many travel writing. With most accounts focusing on reporting what could be heard, seen, and felt,

most of the times travellers, or in this case tourists, are not able to portray the reflection of their connection to their destination.

In order to further define cosmopolite woman in this paper, I include Bill Ashcroft's idea that that travel fiction operates as hybrid transcultural contact (2009). He believes that travel writing always moves through languages, time, and places and becomes representation of understanding that is "controlled, to some extent, by the boundaries of discourse, and as with all translation, a totally new reality is created." (234). The writing produced by these women are of course controlled, since all their writing comes from their own perspectives. They only write what they experience and willing to put in the stories. Yet they do create new reality, combining not only their own perspective but also their involvement with their destinations. This involvement with the destination presented what Ashcroft emphasized as "images of reality rather than reality itself." (235).

According to Ashcroft, to travel is also to signify power. In this research I used the word power in its most subtle term, more focusing on how power relates to one's ability of to do something for oneself, instead of consciously imposing their power toward others. If, as Ashcroft has stated, travel writing operates as contact zone and the site for a transcultural contact, these women has proposed potentials for a hybrid engagement, a cosmopolitan involvement. Despite the travel rules of inclusion and exclusion regarding cultural contact, this collection of travel stories has worked to construct and reconstruct the transcultural text presenting their own representation of parts of Indonesia.

The representations these women portray in this collection are personal and tightly spatiotemporally connected to the time and space they travelled. Transcultural involvement of these women in this case is through language, through their stories

about the places they visited. Through the stories these women travel and visit different cultures for many different personal reasons. These women fully realize that they are not the members of the culture they visited in their destination. This realization is important because it serves as one of the signifier of how these women construct and reconstruct the transcultural text of travel writing. These women's ability to make way into other cultures through their travels is their competence as a cosmopolite, one who seeks for power in the act of travelling, producing spatiotemporal images from their experience. They do not consciously deploy power over the Other. They instead take active participation in the destination cultures, exploit language to share spatiotemporal stories about Indonesia and produce their own stories, their own cosmopolite stories.

IS HOME REALLY WHEREVER?

Several stories I choose to discuss in this paper show not only clear portrayal of home and destination cultures but also experiences of the writers in dealing with the destination at a specific time. The stories also serves as overall representation of the whole collection, showing high level of involvement of the woman travellers into the visited culture, showing cultural negotiation and settling into destination activities without forgetting their home norms.

As the highlight of the stories collection—hence the use of the title of this short story as the title of the collection, *Rumah Adalah di Mana Pun* portrays longing to be away from home only to find another home. Keyko Cecillia recounts her short getaway to Belitung, leaving Jakarta only for a few days. With cheap promo tickets, her trip to Belitung has been planned beforehand. Easy access of information helps her connect with her host in Belitung, a man she meets on the Internet. During her trip, her primary concern is to be at home, which is a little off considering that she is travelling to be

away from home. Yet, in her longing for home, she finds herself focusing on to the relationship of her host and her host's wife, the welcome from the locals, and the 'family' she meets in Belitung.

This contradiction between being away from home and at the same time finding another home elsewhere becomes more apparent as she also narrates her dialogue with her close friend back in Jakarta through messaging service. She delightfully tells her friend that she's missing him, wishing he were there with her. The contradiction also shows negotiation in Keyko's personal writing. She longs to be home in her destination. She searches for the idea of home in her destination. Her involvement with the destination culture is apparent in her wish to also taking home in Belitung. Yet, Keyko does not wish to be an actual part of the destination culture. She is fully conscious about being on vacation, that the destination is not hers to keep and she still has complications at home. Keyko's power as the writer of the travel account is exercised with care, showing her acceptance of measured cosmopolite involvement.

Different subtheme of the collection, several of these women use their trips as fleeting escape from their heartbreak. In their stories, travel is used as means to distance oneself from the harsh reality in the every day life. Agita Violy in *Kabut Cinta Mandalawangi* (Love Mist (in) Mandalawangi) revolves around her attempt to forget about her ex boyfriend with a trip to climb Mount Pangarango and Mandalawangi Valley. As she reaches the peak, along with her friends, she feels "peace seeps into to the deepest parts of heart." (14). Her original intention of escaping her memory of her ex-boyfriend vanishes as she reaches the valley and falls in love with her new friend. In this story, the destination of her travel offers not only escape from the memory of her ex-boyfriend but a new found love. Agita struggles with her unwanted romance memory from home. She travels all the way to the mountain to help her make peace

with the memory. Contrary to her home, her destination serves as a place of solace, a place where she can detach her unwanted memory of her boyfriend.

Her involvement with her destination, in this story, Pangrango mountain and Mandalawangi valley, is apparent in her narration about the places. She describes her reaction as she sets her eyes on the valley, instantly calling it a “phenomenal love valley adorned by beds of edelweiss.” Her awe and wonder over the destination is dominating her entire narration. She is an example as she radiates her “personal ability to make [her] way [...] through listening, looking, intuiting, and reflecting.” Her reflection is emphasized with her description: “My eyes burn when we arrive at Mandalawangi. My entire body seems to relax, taking in what I am seeing and feeling. Overwhelmed. ... I have never seen a place as romantic as this place before. *This is the true meaning of travel.*” (13); italics emphasize is mine. This ending of the trip and the ending of the story are wrapped by this line of confirmation. This subtle reconstruction for the meaning of travel that she has believed all along is setting up new standard for her personal romantic place definition and has also, in extension, shows her power to write her spatiotemporal experience.

In a similar mountaineering travel story, Gading Rinjani retells her story of finding a family at the end of a mountain climbing trip. The hardship of climbing Mount Mahameru has brought her closer to her newfound friends. She specifically refers to “[M]ount Mahameru that has turned us into family.” (87) and emphasizes on their precious shared experience of climbing Mahameru. What starts as mere friends meeting for the purpose of climbing the mountains has turned into a celebrated bond forged by the trip. This new bond is family-like; Gading considers her new friends as reliable close friends, almost like family, since they have overcome hardship together, and will be ready to face anything that comes next.

Gading's involvement in mountain climbing is part of her joining new culture, by quick observation and learning by doing. Mount Mahameru as a destination serves as a meeting place where new connection of travellers forge. Her writing explores the destination as a place she has never been to and as a place that will hold her memory from now on. In this fleeting moment, her escape from the city to the mountain serves as an arena where she engages with others willingly and openly. At the end, she is left amazed at the promise they made to each other while saying goodbye. Mount Semeru as the meaning of the destination for Gading and her friends has been restructured through shared experience. It is because of their shared experience, the destination becomes even more important for not only Gading but also the fellow traveller.

Other two striking examples of genuine cosmopolite traits, willingness to engage with the Other, and openness are found in these stories featuring two women in their exposure to cultures that are foreign for them. The first story is *Aku Terpikat Padamu, Wae Rebo* (I Am Enchanted to You, Wae Rebo) in which Chlara Sinta along with several of her friends visited Flores for the first time. The highlight of the trip is Wae Rebo, a traditional village located in remote Flores. She depends heavily on knowledge shared by fellow traveler in their travel blogs, stating that "We find the info from the blog of people who have visited the place. This discovery sends me into realization that all travelers in essence have camaraderie and are eager to share." (29). The self-research process shows Chlara's determination in travelling to Wae Rebo and her consciousness of mutual friendship among travellers.

Yet the travel to go to the village is portrayed as full of obstacles and with various change of plan. In details, Chlara retells the last minute cancellation of their flight, the new plan for the road trip, the draining hike to the hills where the village is located. She offers several reflections of having the opportunity to visit the village

despite its remoteness. Chlara then experiences religious ceremony to send off the death of one of the villagers and is enchanted. Since she joins the villagers in the procession, to the length of staying at one of the villagers' house in exchange for a hotel, Chlara is thoroughly involved in the culture she visited. Instead of contradicting her home and the destination culture in her account, she tries to become active participant of the destination's culture. She still counts as tourist, who comes a long way from her home for a purpose of vacationing, but she shows her openness and her involvement in the destination culture. This involvement and openness signify Chlara's cosmopolite trait, of not distancing one self during one's visit to a place, during the time she spends on the destination.

Meanwhile, Lucia Widi writes *Persisan Anta Tuan* (Persisan Ceremony in Anta Tuan), her travel account about her trip to Flores. She joins the procession of Great Friday and immerses herself in the culture of the destination. "Even if it's only two days, Larantua has opened my eyes toward things I have never seen before. My brain recorded, with bold letters, that Larantuka has a large group of people who has tremendously strong faith to something, to their God." (135). Travelling alone, Lucia steps into the destination culture without distraction, taking a full frontal involvement with the ceremony and the procession of the locals.

This direct involvement gives her the power to construct a personal transcultural text. Her travel account is merely coming from her own experience without any distraction from fellow travelers; to a certain extent she appears to be having a considerable distance with the destination space. Yet, her attempt in making numerous conversations with the people in the destination and her openness in answering questions from the locals signify her spatiotemporal construction of her destination. She is able to make way into a new culture through her travels and portrays

her competence as a cosmopolite, taking active participation in ceremonies and produces her own stories.

CONCLUSION

In these travel stories, these woman travellers reaffirm their power by conducting travel to destinations all across Indonesia and producing their own stories. They do start the whole travel due to their everyday life pressure, but as they take fleeting escapades they also exercise their power, their knowledge, and their openness to be involved with the destination culture. Travel, for these women, has never been about power, but about escape. And in their fleeting escapades, they find not only meet new places at a certain time but also use language to tell stories about these places at a certain time. It is with language and writing they gain further experience. They are able to relive their experience through their writing, eternalize their experience, and exercise their own power of writing about Indonesia. These stories of Indonesia are not mere accounts of travel stories but travel stories with involvement and openness. Involvement then contrasts the destination with the home culture. Yet openness emphasizes one of the cosmopolite traits of wanting to be participants in the destination culture—instead of being a spectator of a tourist.

These stories, in Indonesian tourism context, then set Indonesia spatiotemporal aspect as an open arena for globalization convergence. In these stories Indonesia is portrayed as inviting and open places for those who wanted to take a visit, no matter how fleeting it would be. Involvement in Indonesian local cultures is gladly received while openness for new culture to become participants is ever present. All the same, Indonesia is also seen as places that respect the home cultures of its visitors. The arena for cultural negotiation is fluid and flexible where juxtaposition of home and destination culture is considered as contradictive yet a welcomed event. These stories

of exploration and discovery of Indonesia become the products of woman travel writers and also the reflection of Indonesia as perceived by Indonesian contemporary cosmopolites.

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