

Orientalization of Nature in The German Translation of Mochtar Lubis's *Harimau-Harimau*

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ABSTRACT

Western perspectives about the East, formalized in the form of Orientalism in the colonial period, still dominate the discourse regarding the economy, politics, culture, and nature, even now in the postcolonial era. This study explores the influence of an orientalist perspective on the German translation of an Indonesian literary work, a novel by Mochtar Lubis, *Harimau – Harimau* (1975). The book describes the survival of resin collectors in the Sumatran jungle who fought against a tiger attack. The strength of this novel lies in the depiction of nature, humans, and the relationship between the two. This study uses a translational approach, which compares the syntactic and semantic structures of the Source Text (ST) and the Target Text (TT). Theories of Orientalism and the postcolonial approach are tools to examine to which extent Western views influence the German translation of the novel. The results of the analysis show that there is a tendency towards an orientalization of natural images. The translator, as the Western representation, changes the depiction of nature according to Western perception about the East and tropical countries. Another finding shows a shift in the description of the relationship between humans and the environment. Based on the results, a concept of equality-based translation should be the consideration for every translator.

Keywords: *Harimau-harimau, Mochtar lubis, orientalization, postcolonial approach, West and East*

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on the translation of literary works often reveal the reality of the unequal relationship between West and East. We can trace the inequalities to the strategies used by the translators. According to Venuti, the translation strategy of domestication dominates the practices of translation, especially the literary works. According to him, this strategy eliminates the values contained in the source language text (Bielsa, 2005). Since British and American cultural ideologies have become the standards for global achievements; in the case of English, it has "... become the tool of the colonist's cultural colonization" (Yang, 2017, p. 78). Cultural colonization is not only carried out by British and American cultures, but also by Western culture in general. Venuti's statement raises the question, why is this strategy widely used by translators, especially from the West, to translate Eastern literary works? The answer to this question can refer to postcolonial theories, whose primary purpose is to dismantle the forms of Western domination over the East in various aspects of life, in the postcolonial era.

In *An Introduction to Postcolonial Theory*, Childs and Williams (1997) state that the postcolonial era is going on now, since the late 1950s when one by one country became independent from the colonial ruler. The colonizers meant here are European countries, such as England, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and Germany, which had built colonial governments, especially in the continents of Asia and Africa, from the 16th to the 20th century. Then what is the object of the study of postcolonial theories? Childs and Williams summarize it into two points, namely:

1. ...writing (more usually than architecture or painting) ... from countries or regions which were formerly colonies of Europe.

2. The postcolonial is conceived of as a set of discursive practices, prominent among which is resistance to colonialism, colonialist ideologies, and their contemporary forms and subjectificatory legacies (1997).

Postcolonial theories especially for the study of literature developed among others, in Edward Said's writing, *Orientalism*, published in 1978 (Hamadi, 2014). Said presents excerpts from European literary works that explicitly or implicitly highlighted the superiority of the

West (Europe) against the East. According to him, the West describes the East as primitive inferior and uncivilized. For Western people, Orient or East is “European imaginative geography”, often narrated as places or old worlds that have just been discovered and need renewal (Said, 1977).

The imagination of the West about the geography of the East is not only found in literary works, such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, or Karl May's works on Indian or Arabic tribes but also translation. Yuan, in the study of the English translation of Chinese tourist brochures, saw that the conversion of place names with domestication strategies eliminates the cultural values of the places. He said: "If elements pertaining to the local culture are replaced with Anglophone elements, the translation would risk submitting to the ethnocentricity of the Anglophone culture, failing to promote cultural diversity and facilitate a balanced cultural exchange." (Yuan, 2018, p.173). We can find a similar case in the German translation of the Indonesian novel *Harimau-Harimau* (1975) by Mochtar Lubis.

The novel *Harimau-Harimau* describes the struggle of a group of resin collectors in the Sumatran jungle to make a living. Dark secrets kept by all members of the group, and the threat of a hungry tiger overshadowed their struggle and affected the solidity of the friendship. The setting for this novel is mostly in the wilderness of Sumatra. Therefore, nature, especially forest, played an essential role in the plot construction of this novel. The German translation of the story, entitled *Tiger-Tiger*, is suspected of being contaminated by the translator's orientalist ideology.

Orientalization is the application of: "... the West's already deep-seated fantasy about eastern" (Hasan, 2005, p. 31) or a kind of "foreign coverage" (Altun, 2011) in depicting various aspects of life in the oriental countries, or the East. This article discusses the phenomenon of the orientalization of the depiction of nature in the German translation of Mochtar Lubis's novel *Harimau-Harimau*, and its effect on the values contained in the text of the source language.

2. METHOD

This research is qualitative, with a translational and postcolonial approach. The data source for this research is the novel *Harimau-Harimau* by Mochtar Lubis (1975), and its German translation by Thomas Zimmer, which is published in 1992 by Horlemann-Verlag, Bad Honef, Germany. The first step of this research was close reading of the source language novel and its translation in parallel while making notes on translation problems. The translation problems meant were those related to linguistic structure, choice of words, and sequence of events. These records became a data collection. For this study, the data selected were those

related to descriptions of nature, humans, and the relationship between the two. The number of data collected is 72, 16 of which are translation cases that show the translator's intervention to change the picture of nature. Of the 16 data, eight were representative examples for this article. The selected data are then analyzed using the approaches of Orientalism and postcolonial theories to find the extent to which changes caused by translation change the values contained in the source text. The results also analyzed based on translational approach, which compares the syntactic and semantic structures of the Source Text (ST) and the Target Text (TT)

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Nature in the Perspectives of Westerners and Easterners

Nature and humans are two entities that influence each other. The definition of nature, according to the online Cambridge dictionary, is “all the animals, plants, rocks, etc. in the world and all the features, forces, and processes that happen or exist independently of people, such as the weather, the sea, mountains, the production of young animals or plants, and growth.” ([https:// dictionary cambridge.org/dictionary/English/nature](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/English/nature)). However, it turns out that the definition of nature is not easy to formulate. Ducarme and Couvet (2020) summarized the meanings of nature on the base of Western thinking, which are still valid today, namely:

1. The whole of material reality, considered as independent of human activity and history
2. The whole universe, as it is the place, the source and the result of material phenomena [including man or at least man's body] (Ducarme & Couvet, 2020)

These definitions show that the West views nature, including the human body as a material phenomenon, separate from human activities (culture). Meanwhile, the East considers nature as an entity which is "... inhospitable and dangerous, thwarting human efforts to subdue them or survive in harmony with them" (Sankaran & Nkengasong, 2016, p. 45). In other words, nature is not just a material phenomenon but seems to have a soul that demands cooperation with humans. Perspective differences in nature between the West and the East can be seen in the German translation of the novel *Harimau-Harimau* by Mochtar Lubis. The translator, as Westerner, included his ideology and imagination about the East into his interpretation, as described below.

3.2. *The Westernization of Nature's Existence and the Shift in the Description of the Relationship between Nature and Humans*

The German translation of the westernized novel the perception of the Sumatran people about nature. Westernization means “identification with Western ways of living” (Harrell, Ussery, & Greene-cramer, 2015), or: “... a process through which non-western societies choose to emulate western values” (Heath, 2004, p. 685). The explanation below shows how local values contained in the novel westernized.

ST [1] *Hutan raya berubah-ubah wajahnya. Yang dekat pantai merupakan hutan-hutan kayu bakau, dan semakin jauh ke darat dan semakin tinggi letaknya, berubah pula kayu-kayu dan tanaman di dalamnya, ... (HH, p. 1)*

TT [1] *Das Aussehen des Urwalds wechselte: Während man in Küstennähe überwiegend Mangrovenhölzer fand, nahm die Pflanzenwelt, je weiter landeinwärts und je höher es ging, einen ganz anderen Charakter an... (TT, p. 9)*

ST [2] *...hingga tiba pada pohon-pohon besar dan tinggi,...(HH, p.1)*

TT [2] *...bis man schliesslich zu jenen hohen und mächtigen Bäumen gelangte...(TT, p. 9)*

ST [3] *Dan mereka bertujuh duduk di sekeliling api, masing-masing dengan kenang-kenangan sendiri, hasrat-hasrat sendiri, dan di sekeliling mereka tegak hutan rimba yang hitam dan besar. (HH, p.16)*

TT [3] *Zu siebt sassen sie dann um das Feuer, ein jeder mit seinen Erinnerungen, ein jeder mit seinen Träumen, während es um sie herum in dem dichten, dunklen Urwald lärmte. (TT, pp. 27-28)*

The excerpts [1], [2], and [3] from the ST imply that the Sumatran people perceived nature, in this case, the forest, as an independent existence. The perception is indicated in the sentence structure that placed ‘the forest area’ as the subject of the sentence: [1] “*hutan raya berubah-ubah wajahnya...*”; [2] “*...pohon-pohon besar dan tinggi*”; [3] “*...tegak hutan rimba yang hitam dan besar...*”. However, in the TT the forest was in the object position for the pronominal subject *man* (one/ someone) or *es* (it): [1] “*... Während man ... Mangrovenhölzer fand* (meanwhile, one/someone found mangrove forests)”; [2] “*... bis man zu ... gelangte* (until someone got to...)”; [3] “*...während es ... lärmte* (meanwhile there was ... noise)”. The explanation for this phenomenon can refer to Byrne’s (2014) opinion on the relationship between man and nature, based on Western philosophy. Byrne departed from the dualistic thinking of Plato and Descartes, which separated “mind from body, male from

female, master from a slave, rationality from emotion, universal from particular, and culture from nature.” (Byrne, 2014, p. 6). This thought places humans as being superior to animals and other natural objects because humans have logic. In the context of this research, it was humans who hold power over nature, which is represented by the use of the pronominal subject *man*. *Man* (one/ someone) is the party who discovered and explored the forest.

The comparison of the excerpts between ST and TT below shows the shifted picture of nature.

ST [4] *Berbagai margasatwa dan serangga penghuninya mempertahankan hidup di dalamnya. Demikian pula tanaman dan bunga-bunga angrek, yang banyak merupakan mahkota di puncak-puncak pohon tinggi. (HH, p. 1)*

TT [4] *Es war die Heimat vieler wilde Tiere und Insekten, genauso wie der Pflanzen und jener Orchideen, die wie blühende Kronen auf den Baumgipfeln sassen. (TT, p. 10-11)*

The clause “*mempertahankan hidup* (to survive)” in the sentence: “*Berbagai margasatwa dan serangga penghuninya mempertahankan hidup di dalamnya.*” in the excerpt [4] of the ST informs us that nature (forest) was more potent than other creatures, including humans. Other creatures must try to make peace with the woods to be safe. The principle is in line with the results of Sankaran and Nkengasong’s research (2016) on two novels by African and Singaporean writers, which showed the character of the forest as an ‘inhospitable and dangerous’ place, which forced other creatures to build harmony with it. On the other hand, the excerpt [4] of the TT describes a forest with a more welcoming and friendly character through the expression: “*Es war die Heimat vieler wilde Tiere und Insekten* (it was the home to various wild animals and insects)”. The phrase implies that the forest was not a frightening entity that is threatening. For Westerners, forest is a well-liked choice of places for walks, as one study concluded: “In spatially defined areas and open forests, by contrast, it is far easier to judge where one can venture safely and what to expect. Such categories tend to be highly favored” (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989, pp. 48-49).

Forest for resin collectors in the novel *Harimau-Harimau*, was not only material, as shown by definition summarized by Ducarme & Couvet (2020). It was also spiritual and sacred, as this quote implies:

ST [5] *Tetapi di hutan, biar kita di tengah hutan belantara sekalipun, kita dikelilingi oleh pohon dan tanaman, oleh margasatwa dan serangga, oleh yang kelihatan dan tak kelihatan, yang terdengar dan tak terdengar. Rasanya kita satu dengan bumi ini. (HH, p. 23)*

TT [5] *Das Meer schien leer, öde, einsam, anders als der Wald, wo man jeden Moment Fühlte, dass man lebte.* (TT, p. 35)

The context accompanying the quote [5] was the event when the resin collectors rested while telling stories about their life experiences. Pak Haji, who had experience wandering across the ocean, argued that the atmosphere of the forest was more pleasant than the atmosphere on the sea. The clause: "...oleh yang kelihatan dan tak kelihatan, yang terdengar dan tak terdengar,...", implies the existence of other beings besides those which the human senses can see and hear, namely spiritual beings. The sacred quality of nature hinted by the presence of the invisible and inaudible entities influenced the attitudes and feelings of its visitors. The expression of Pak Haji implied the holy quality of nature: "*Rasanya kita satu dengan bumi ini.*". The forest is sacred because "one can have only disdain for the profane, while the sacred inspires a kind of fascination" (Marshall, 2010, p. 65). However, the translator gave a free picture of the forest: "... *der Wald, wo man jeden Moment Fühlte, dass man lebte* (... the forest, where a person feels at all times that he is alive)", so that the material, spiritual and sacred nature of the forest became unclear.

Westernization found in the German translation of the novel caused a shift in the characteristics of the relationship between humans and nature depicted in the ST. The ST implies that nature, represented by the jungle of Sumatra, was a more prominent and higher entity (excerpts 1, 2, and 3 of the ST), which provided protection (quotation 4 of ST), life, as well as threats to material and spiritual beings as well as humans, who lived and made a living in it (excerpt 5 of ST). In the TT, the use of the pronominal subject, *man*, positioned the forest as the object of humans who came to explore it (excerpts 1 and 2 of the TT). Also, in the excerpt [5 of TT], the forest seemed to be passive in accepting the existence of material creatures and behaved as a friendly home (*Heimat*) for them.

3.3. Orientalization of Nature

Orientalization, as explained in the introduction, is the application of the Western imagination about the East, be it geographic, social, or economic, to various issues or discourses related to the East. The following are the examples:

ST [6] *Tetapi di sana tak ada pohon dan tanaman, dan tak ada makhluk hutan. Tak ada bunyi-bunyi hutan. Rasanya seperti kosong di tengah laut.* (HH, p. 23)

TT [6] *Stille-keine Bäume, keine Pflanzen, keine Tiere des Waldes. Kein Vogelkreischen, Ästeknaken, kein Trompeten der Elefanten, kein Tigerbrüllen. Stille, nur Stille gab es auf dem Meer.* (TT, p. 35)

Pak Haji, one of the characters in the novel, told all the resin collectors that he often felt an emptiness in the ocean, unlike in the middle of a forest (ST 6). What's interesting about the translation of the excerpt is the expression: "*Tak ada bunyi-bunyi hutan*" became: "*kein Vogelkreischen, Ästeknaken, kein Trompeten der Elefanten, kein Tigerbrüllen* (No birds chirping, no sound of broken branches, no sound of elephant trumpets, no roaring of tigers)". Changes also occur in the excerpt [7] below.

ST [7] *Bunyi air yang menderas di antara batu-batu, hembusan angin di daun, dan jauh di dalam hutan bunyi si amang yang mengimbau-imbau tak berhenti-hentinya, seakan bunyi orang bergendang, amat sangat menyenangkan perasaan.* (HH, p. 24)

TT [7] *Das Tiefe Glucksen des Wassers, das leise Rascheln der Blätter im Wind, und tief drinnen im Wald das Zwitschern der Vögel in den Bäumen.* (TT, p.36)

The clause: "... *bunyi si amang yang mengimbau-imbau tak berhenti-hentinya* " is changed into "*das Zwitschern der Vögel in den Bäumen* (squeaking of birds in the trees). *Si amang* is a kind of long-armed black-haired monkey that lives in the forests of Sumatra. In the translated version, the monkey was replaced by the sound of birds singing.

The changes made by the translator, whether he realized it or not, were an expression of his perspective on the East, which was internalized through various mediums, such as news, teaching at school, education at home, etc. In describing of Sumatran nature, his ideology was likely to work more dominantly than his knowledge of tropical forests. Many Germans internalize such orientalist imagination, as stated by Wilke: When it comes to an analysis of the oriental tropics, a common concept for reading tropical nature is 'tropicalization,' referring to a process of ascribing certain features to a non-European, non-temperate environment that play up its lushness, its fecundity, its colors, and its proximity to primitive states" (Wilke, 2015). The translator transformed the reality of the forest in the source language text into his orientalist imaginative reality of the colorful and cheerful eastern forest in the target text.

If the human body can be considered a part of nature (see Ducarme & Couvet, 2020), then the following excerpt shows that the intervention of Western fantasies about the East, especially fantasies about the beauty of Eastern women, is obvious.

ST [8] *Rambut Zaitun panjang, dan amat hitam warnanya, berombak-ombak, terurai sampai ke bawah pinggang. Pinggangnya amat ramping, dan kakinya cantik sekali. Pergelangan kakinya*

ramping. Kulitnya kuning langsung, dan giginya putih dan teratur. (HH, p. 14)

TT [8] *Ihr langes schwarzes Haar reichte bis unter die zierlichen Hüften. Die Haut an ihren schlanken Fesseln war so braun, wie eine Dukufrucht. Ihre Zähne blitzten weiss, wenn sie lachte.* (TT, p. 25)

For Indonesians, women with fair complexion (*kuning langsung*) are considered beautiful, as mentioned in the quote [8] from the ST: “*Pergelangan kakinya ramping. Kulitnya kuning langsung ...*”. However, in the target text, the standard of beauty is adjusted to the Western imagination about the beauty of Eastern women, namely: “*Die Haut an ihren schlanken Fesseln war so braun, ...*” (The skin of her slender ankles was so brown...). The quoted expression is a typical narrative of Exoticism. Exoticism is a form of discourse practice carried out by (Western) Europeans against the cultural practice of the Eastern culture, which is called the culture of the “Other”. However, Exoticism views these differences as ‘positive’ in the sense of giving appreciation because Western culture is considered more advanced; therefore, it has the authority to provide an assessment (Netto, 2015). The excerpts [7] and [8] from the TT are shreds of evidence that Orientalism has settled in the mindset of Europeans (West). This perspective always presents in their narrative productions, which describe the East.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis of the German translation of the novel *Harimau-Harimau* by Mochtar Lubis should awaken the awareness of academics, translation practitioners, and readers of translated literary works, that translation practices that do not respect the principle of equality still exist. Various translation theories produced by Western experts, on behalf of the interests of the target language readers, are the reason for many translators to ignore the position of the source language. These theories have academic terms for the strategy, such as ‘domestication’, ‘equivalence’, etc. The dissemination of these theories through various forms of learning media effectively instills certain principles that the target language reader’s understanding is the most crucial factor that must be considered by translators, especially literary translators. In some instances, translators must be wise indeed in dealing with sensitive discourses that can disrupt good relations between nations and cultures. However, translators should respect the values, uniqueness of the social, and cultural messages contained in the ST, and translate it as faithful as the target language and his/her competence as a translator allows.

It is common knowledge that the function of literary works is as a specific mode of communication. As a medium of communication, literary works are easy to access to “understanding values and valuable thoughts

within a society” (Lewis, Rodgers, & Woolcock, 2008, p. 10). That’s why literature is an excellent medium of communication to build a good understanding among nations and cultures. A good understanding will exist when all participants of the relation are in an equal position. The translation is a communication bridge which task is to facilitate interested parties so that they come to an understanding in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The German adaptation of the novel *Harimau-Harimau* betrayed the values and beliefs of the people described in the story. The westernization and orientalizing of the depiction of nature in the story can lead TT readers to a wrong understanding of Eastern culture. The domestication strategy used by the translator replaces the social and cultural values of the people described in the novel with values and views that are familiar to the target language readers, namely their values and perspectives. Readers may not realize that they have learned little from the translated works they read because they are reading their habits and beliefs.

The German translation of the novel *Harimau-Harimau* is proof that the colonial ideology is still strong in the West. Analysis using the postcolonial theory approach can uncover this tendency. This study was held not to sharpen the dichotomy between West and East, but to build awareness that West and East are indeed different. The differences exist to develop mutual understanding and respect in a spirit of equality.

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