

Transculturality, Cultural Broker, and Colonial Space in Jürgen Leskien's *Einsam in Südwest* (1991)

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ABSTRACT

Transculturality believes that cultural encounters are not always contrasting two poles. However, there are always processes of permeation among the differences, even in radically asymmetrical relations, such as in the colonial era. This paper aims to analyze the transcultural processes in the former German colony in Africa and the role of cultural brokers in Jürgen Leskien's Novel, entitled *Einsam in Südwest* (1991). Seeing cultural encounters at that time from a transcultural perspective will reconstruct our perspective on cultural differences during the colonial period and even in the contemporary era. The transcultural approach and close reading method were carried out with a focus on transculturation processes in the colony. In addition, it also focuses on cultural brokers' role in bridging existing differences. The research findings indicated that transculturality in colonial space requires a long process because transculturality at the macro level cannot occur if there is no awareness of transculturality at the micro-level on both sides, settlers and natives. However, the presence of cultural brokers plays an important role in negotiating the differences.

Keywords: colonial space, cultural broker, *Einsam in Südwest*, German colonialism, transculturality

1. INTRODUCTION

Transculturality exists as a critic toward single culture, perceiving culture as a static, homogenous, and close entity. In fact, there are three determining factors identify this classic perception toward: "social homogenization, ethnic consolidation, and intercultural delimitation" [1]. This fundamental conception further underlies the dichotomy among cultures. Essentially, cultural separation also refers to individual separation as cultural actors. Besides, this homogenous culture also limits an opportunity to adapt and unite into a heterogeneous entity. Therefore, Stein perceived the bound of homogenous culture with self and other binary opposition and the contradiction between sameness and difference, which is further expressed in the concept of oneness and foreignness [2].

This binary relation is no longer suitable to be implemented in a more complex society. Welsch argued that understanding culture as an inseparable entity, which is socially homogeneous and ethnically consolidated, is improper. The current contemporary culture is characterized by various mix and permeation, which he called transculturality. Instead of perceiving culture as separatist and exclusive, he viewed that transculturality aims to understand culture as multi-mesh and inclusive. It means that cultural boundaries are fading away. However, cultural boundaries have abilities of connecting and negotiating the transition [3]. Both of

these abilities will raise awareness of each individual's cultural layers; the awareness that there are cultures that pervade or are pervaded by other cultures. In short, cultural encounters in the view of transculturality will result in entangled and overlapping relationships.

Emmambokus [4] argued that "The word 'overlapping' recognizes the layering associated with identities which are enculturated with two (or more) cultural environments;" These identity layers which meet can recognize and accept that individuals can defend contradictive ideas. It is in line with Welsch [1], stating that transculturality cannot be taken as a uniformization, but rather providing chances for new various forms of diversity. The presence of new diversity creates differences between transcultural networks. This network is believed to have several similar and different elements. Thus, there are always overlaps between them.

Furthermore, transculturation was also discussed by Marie Louise Pratt in her book, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, published for the first time in 1992 [5]. She analyzed the contact zone in the cultural encounter of imperial space. Also, Pratt mentioned transculturation as contact zone phenomena. The "contact" perspective here highlights how subjects and their relationship are formed with each other. In other words, it represents the relationship between invaders and colonized ones, settlers and inhabitants, not in terms of separation, but instead on the presence, interaction,

understanding, and practice, and often in the radical asymmetric relations. Pratt underlined culture absorption; nevertheless, she viewed that the native always feels inferior compared to the settlers. In Pratt's opinion, the contact zone can be found on radical asymmetric reign relation. It is widely known as a power struggle, hierarchy struggle, and violent confrontation. This asymmetric relation is then regarded to suppress the native's opportunity to actively contribute to the culture encounter.

Moreover, Welsch' transculturality applies operatively rather than descriptively. It applies externally in society and internally in individual. An Individual's discovery and acceptance of the transcultural constitution are required to reach an agreement with the society transculturality. Through this opinion, Welsch intended to state that basically, every individual and culture are hybrids [1], [3], [6]. Therefore, opening a new space in colonial space should be appreciated no matter how small it is. Consequently, it will impact the broader cultural encounters in society and colonial space. In fact, Welsch [6] and Classen [7] believed that this phenomenon has happened for ages, identified with increased cultural penetration, which is no longer strange. Hence, it is not exclusive anymore. It indeed becomes the counter idea of homogenous culture.

Meanwhile, Rothman [8] views that contemporary culture does not only "meet, clash, and grapple" by itself". The "different" cultures, in his view, are not predetermined facts, but an ongoing dynamic process. Therefore, it requires efforts to mediate and bridge these differences. This is where trans-imperial subject, as stated by Rothman, or is commonly known as cultural broker's role functions to bridge differences in cultural encounters.

The long history of transculturality allows us to see it in colonial times, where power relations were so dominant between cultures that met. Therefore, this article discusses the phenomena in the encounter spaces during the German colonial period in Africa. It is shown in *Einsam in Südwest* Novel (*EiS*), written by Jürgen Leskien and published for the first time in 1991 [9]. This novel contains a diary describing the main character, Hermann Köppen, in German South-West Africa (GSA), the former German colony in Africa. The story poured in that diary is started when Hermann manages to survive the sinking ship disaster, which kills his parents. After that unfortunate incident, he lives in a mission house and becomes a blacksmith. After a while, he marries Sister Ursula and has one daughter, named Anna. Unfortunately, Sister Ursula died when giving birth. When Hermann can move on from his grief, he marries a Herero woman, Elisa, Ursula's assistant. From that marriage, they are gifted with a son named Markus. This family from different backgrounds lasts until the end of World War II.

Even though this novel has reduced the tension and oppression in the German colony in German South-West

Africa, the misery is still vividly reflected in some novel's sequences. The misery peaks when his wife, Elisa, with a Herero tribe background, has to encounter inner conflicts due to that horrific incident. Hermann Köppen's family illustrates transcultural life in maintaining their hybrid family. Hermann, as a cultural broker, promotes some negotiation attempts. This negotiation process is conducted by letters and formal opposition in a court until it can change some people's mindsets.

So far, there is not much research on the *EiS* novel that has been conducted by previous researchers. One of traced researches was Ikobwa [10], which highlighted the novel as a memory site for the German people on the genocide that had occurred in the German South-West Africa region. There are 5 novels studied in this dissertation, three of which are about the annihilation of the Herero and Nama tribes in German southwest Africa (1904-1907), namely Gerhard Seyfried's *Herero* (2003), Jürgen Leskien's *Einsam in Südwest* (1991) and Uwe Timm's *Morenga* (1978). This research uses a theoretical approach to studying social and cultural memory as conceptualized by Jan and Aleida Assmann. This research shows that the historical African novel serves as an archive of memories of historical events. Who inspired the writing of its authors.

Meanwhile, a transcultural study of German literature was carried out by Martison [11]. He analyzed two plays by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (*Die Juden and Nathan der Weise*) and Johann Wolfgang Goethe (*Iphigenie auf Tauris*). This research focuses on the differences between intercultural and transcultural studies and offers a much more explicit transcultural space definition. The result is that the transcultural dimension of literary texts is believed to foster a transcultural mentality. Literary texts could provide experiences while still appreciating the differences authenticity.

Owe to that matter, this article investigated cultural broker's roles and transculturality during the German colonial period since not many researches examined that issue. To discuss the transculturality in that novel, two specific questions were employed as the analysis basics, namely, how did permeation occur in the colonial space amidst the inequality? What is the role of cultural brokers in bridging existing differences?

2. METHODOLOGY

Research on the *EiS* novel employed a transcultural approach. König & Katja stated that in the transcultural approach, the cultural interaction phenomena are not only viewed from one perspective, for example, "Eurocentric", but also analyzes each different phenomenon, for instance, "subaltern" [12]. Moreover, the transcultural approach was also applied to describe phenomena between different cultural environments, separated by linguistic, religious, norms, or other types of boundaries. This approach also focused on the environment and agents acting as an intermediary between different cultural environments. Such studies

focused on acts of mediation and translation as well as the so-called "cultural brokers". A closer look at the various disciplines or fields of research reveals that perhaps none of them lack a transcultural component. In human history, no language, region, religion, or legal system is immune to what we call "external" influences.

Also, this article employed close reading for the text analysis technique. Lemov (as cited in Corson) defined close reading as a process to obtain profound understanding of texts [13]. Meanwhile, Nicholson stated that "... close reading cannot be applied as a tool to reveal 'universal values', but rather to give more detailed attention to the politics and cultural significance from 'texts, pictures, languages, and experiences' which we find and consume as a researcher or in daily life" [14]. Hence, after detailed attention is given, it is expected that the tense and contradiction in the texts can be revealed. Moreover, it is expected to enlighten the experience moments by placing them in the context of cultural, art, and other social practices.

In analyzing the *EiS*, special attention was required to analyze the relationship between the two cultures encountering and the role of cultural agents or brokers in mediating existing differences. Texts of colonial discourses were explored and contrasted transculturally. Hence, there was a cultural permeation, not only from the metropolitan area but also from the remote area. Thus, the mutual influence between two different cultures amid dominant and asymmetrical relations was revealed.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Transculturality in Colonial Space*

While most novels describe the colonial period, the *EiS* novel tells stereotypical depictions of the settlers and the natives. The stereotype that is often dominant is about skin complexion. The identity addressing through skin complexion is caused since it represents social dimensions. In other words, physical boundaries often appear to create hierarchies and social boundaries [15].

This issue also emerges in the *EiS* novel. Binarity to distinguish settlers and natives employs the words "black" and "white." Black is to identify the natives, and white is for the settlers. The following quotation illustrates this issue: "Black people made me scared, but they gave me fish to eat and fresh water to drink" [9] or "Black people's cunning is notorious" [9]. Meanwhile, to address the white people can be seen in the following quote: "For most white people, there were only a few white women ..." or "The white people restricted more land for cattle post" [9].

The use of black and white in this novel is highly dominant to address the natives or the African people, and the latter refers to the settlers or the German people. Moreover, skin complexion is significantly associated with the stereotype, which has existed for a long time; namely, the white people are more superior to other skin

complexions. The negative generalization of African with black skin complexion is often related to the stereotype of black skin. Meanwhile, white people are always positively depicted. It is reasonable since the Great Chain of Being developed in the Aufklärung period stated that the black Africans place the lowest point and become a different polar from the white European. Both of them indicate different civilization levels: European, which is identical with white, is on the highest civilization level (culture), and African with their black skin is regarded as 'uncivilized' (nature) [16].

In addition to skin complexion, the African people in *EiS* novel are often called *die Wilde*, meaning uncivilized insolent people. The term *die Wilde* refers to primitive people on a low cultural level [17]. Hence, the impression of using the word *die Wilde* will always be negative and barbaric, such as: "the barbarian (*die Wilde*) has destroyed station telegraph with the worst way" [9]. The words of destroying and other despicable actions are attached to the word of *die Wilde*.

Meanwhile, the white people are pictured in a very different way, as a civilization pioneer. It is in line with the statement of Loosen that the white colonial ruler wanted to "raise" the natives from the low civilization level by bringing them to a "civilization blessing," "educating" them based on Western Christianity. Thus, they could have a better life [18]. Therefore, the image depicted in the *EiS* novel will always be positive and constructive, as it is shown in the following quotation:

"We should be brave in embedding morality, German faith, and genuine Christian faith in our protectorate area" [9].

Besides, German people are associated with the image of hero and brave while, in fact, they slaughtered the African natives. It is identified in writing in a Windhoek monument to memorize their victory in defending the colony "Honoring the brave German soldiers that died for the emperor and to save and protect this land during the Herero and Hottentot uprisings between 1903 and 1907, and during the Kalahari Expedition in 1908." [9]

Black and white are not merely used to differentiate skin complexion. Nevertheless, as explained before, the addressing of black and white is beyond that matter. It gives social and political consequences in the German colony in Africa. This social status is also attached to white people of German settlers in the colony. German people consider that intermarriage could taint their pure identity, which is regarded as a *Verkaffern* attempt. This term refers to a condition where someone is considered Kaffir, namely a discriminative term addressed for black people, adopted from the Cape Dutch language [19]. The racist category between white German and black African as a differentiated border melts away with this term. German people who become infidel (*der verkafferte Deutsche*) will lose their white status symbolically. Consequently, they will lose their power. It proves how threatened the German superiority and German status was toward the Other in the colony [20] [19].

Notwithstanding, the essential construction in perceiving the culture and cultural encounter in the colony is not the sole entity measuring a relationship between the natives and the settler. In fact, the cultural encounter, despite the radical asymmetric relation, cannot be perceived as an active-passive phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is a two-way process. It cannot be simply regarded as a dichotomy encounter between black/white, man/woman, and good/evil. In fact, it is a process engaging multiple “reciprocal contagion and subtle intimacy.” [21]. It is congruent with Welsch's opinion [6], stating that the encounter is overlapping and entangled, which results in mutual influence between the cultures encountered.

This issue also emerges in the *EiS* novel. The superiority construction and German genuine are broken into by Hermann's character, perceiving that the natives' relationship is not merely a relation between black and white essentially. He argued that “... Black African is not only about black color.” [9]. As a matter of fact, there are many tribes in the GSA area with various skin complexions. Also, this cultural mix has been rooted in the natives for ages. Hybridity for them is improbable; hence, their essential identity fades away.

In the transcultural discourse, this hybridity emphasizes that there is no pure culture. Nation, culture, language, ethnic groups, objects and artifacts, images, concepts, as well as practices - all of these are transcultural and entangled [22]. In this case, culture or cultural phenomena cannot be viewed separate but rather as something related to each other. The boundaries are always open and fluid.

Black is also not identical to the wild nation. Herman expressed this thought in his diary as a response to a written in a newspaper about the natives' attack against the German settlers: “To be honest, I thought it is too much. Perhaps somebody is right in saying some things to the black people; however, they are not slaughterers” [9]. A balanced perception toward a problem existing is one of Hermann's transcultural skills; thus, he can consider a problem from two sides. It includes when he scrutinizes a theft of livestock committed by the Herero people. He considers that this case is inflicted by the natives' reaction toward the land and livestock takeover cunningly and forcefully committed by the German people.

The more apparent action against the essential culture is Hermann's decision to marry Elisa, a black Herero woman. Dixon believed that the most intuitive method to diminish stereotype is by giving an example to the outside group who strongly rejects that stereotype [23]. To fight that stereotype, Hermann decided to marry an ill-mannered Herero woman. The settlers even protest it since Hermann is regarded as disgracing German women.

The relationship between Hermann and Elisa has been going on for a long time because Elisa previously is an assistant to Sister Ursula, Hermann's former wife, who died after the birth of her daughter. Relation emerging in

mixed-marriages in the colony is identical to the relation with power relations. It is reasonable due to the assumption that the colony and everything in them belonged to the settlers so that control over indigenous women is also considered part of the conquest of the territory [18]. However, some relationship exists, which are natural ones, like the relationship between Hermann and Elisa.

Many people consider Hermann's marriage taboo and violate German norms. Even in the matrimony ceremony solemnized by Pastor Holländer, Hermann gets a telegram threatening him to terminate that marriage. Rejection on a large scale also occurs in Germany. Loosen stated that in the homeland, particularly, “mixed-marriage” is increasingly viewed as a threat to “German status” in the colony [18]. As a result of this rejection, the anti-mixed marriage Acts emerges. In the novel, it says: “According to the Windhoek High Court's ruling under imperial law, marriages agreed before the 1905 ban were declared null and void” [9].

Responding that Acts, Hermann delivered the following statement: “What do they know in Berlin about our life!” [9] His statement implies that the German government does not know about the protectorate area's culture; instead, the government fixates too much on an essentialist culture, prioritizing racial purity without seeing the possibility of a cultural mix. Also, it also implies Hermann's rejection of the law because, for him, marriage is a life choice, and he really adores the figure of this Herero woman.

Hermann's attitude demonstrates an understanding of transculturality in the colony. Cultural identity is no longer defined as homogeneity and free from other cultures mix. It even opens a new difference space crossing the cultures exist, or Sethi called it “based on the recognition that they live “with and through” differences and cannot be separated from it [21].

3.2. Cultural Broker and the Negotiation of the Identity

Transculturality phenomena in a colony space are also inseparable from cultural brokers. The cultural brokers have a significant role in bridging cultural elements intersecting. In *EiS* Novel, Hermann's role as a cultural broker is crucial since he has bridged the cultural encounter more positively. In line with Dixon, it is argued that we could promote the transcultural reality by asserting multiple ways to recognize, communicate, and act, which result in the interaction among cultures and groups more positively [23]. Besides, transcultural reality cannot be separated from the mediation conducted by cultural brokers.

Meanwhile, a dialogue through a letter between Herman and his brother, Herbert, represents different viewpoints about the colony and the natives' culture. Responding to Herbert letter, Hermann's brother, quoting the news of rebellion in the German colony in South-

West Africa, Hermann tries to deliver the truth that what is written in the newspaper is not entirely valid. Hermann also provides different perspectives when discussing the rebellion. He further denies all objections about the natives' villainy. "... And who open the eyes, they can see" [9] The significant problem occurring is the high number of reality denied and twisted by the German settlers. The openness to adapt to various socio-cultural settings, either with or without prior knowledge of the cultural orientation of the people and society they face, is a transcultural competence [24] required in complex and even asymmetric cultural encounters.

Herbert's reply emphasizes his position as a German citizen who has a right over GSA's natural wealth. At the end of the letter, Herbert's closing greeting is only for his niece, Anna. Herbert does not say anything to Hermann's wife, Elisa, and Hermann's son from Elisa, Markus. It indicates that Herbert disapproves of Hermann's marriage and mixed-family.

However, the situation changes when Herbert comes to GSA to work on a quarry and witnesses that something is wrong with the colony. "Herbert soon realized problems here, in the southwest area. Even though he was anxious, he wanted to change everything" [9]. At the end of Herbert's life, he hears many things about his brother fighting injustice in court. In the last letter before he is reportedly shot dead by British soldiers, he writes the closing greetings in his letter to Elisa and Markus, which he has never included in his previous letters.

Hermann's effort to bridge the asymmetric relation in a colonized space is by extensively defending the natives' rights, which has been violated by the settlers. One of his significant attempts is his defense toward Maria Awende, working for Krämer peasant. Maria is abused, and Hermann thought this case is extremely evil and should not be committed by the German people: "It is not appropriate with most of our mission" [9].

Although Hermann cannot be a witness due to Krämer's peasant lawyers' objections, his efforts pay off. The court has convicted the Krämer peasant, who is deemed guilty of abusing his employee. On the other hand, Hermann's views, which generally always advocate equality in the colony, are accepted by the priests at the mission house. It is viewed in Pastor Holländer's letter:

"Your effort, our beloved Hermann Köppen, to help human beings and your Christian attitude toward a victory did not succeed in the court. However, you have spoken for all honest Christians here, in this country, which has been heard by many people everywhere." [9]

This attempt is also a part of operative transculturality action, which tries to eliminate foreignness from the cultures encountered. Foreignness is no longer deemed as something strange for them. It instead becomes content in their daily life, as Welsch states that for every culture, any other cultures tend to be an inner content or satellite [3].

Despite both parties' cultural permeation in a colony space, macro transculturality is unfortunately not successfully achieved. It is caused by the imbalance in micro transculturality. Herero tribes dominantly master the understanding and hybridity. Nevertheless, in that novel, transculturality at the micro level is not really shown by the German settlers. Hence, no matter how many cultural brokers' efforts are, transculturality at a macro level will never be achieved without the transculturality at a micro-level from both parties.

It is aligned with the idea of Welsch, stating that "the individuals' discovery and acceptance of their transcultural constitution is a condition for coming to terms with societal transculturality [3]. Owe, to that matter; it is evident that there is a vital requirement to promote transculturality in society; namely, the transculturality that emerged in each individual. Furthermore, Welsch highlighted that: It is precisely when we no longer deny, but rather perceive, our inner transculturality, that we will become capable of dealing with outer transculturality.

Additionally, transculturality is also a process that takes a relatively long time and cannot be done instantly. There will always be rejections and negotiations in constructing macro transculturality. Hence, it is acceptable to say that transculturality is a dynamic process that occurs continuously. Even if macro transculturality is achieved, the dynamic will always subsequently happen.

4. CONCLUSION

From the explanations elucidated above, it can be concluded that cultural brokers can provide different perceptions in viewing differences and conflicts amid the asymmetric relation in a colony space. Efforts to promote similarities instead of differences are key in transculturality. Similarities are not the final goal from transculturality; rather, the presence of new diversity is. Cultural permeation is possible, even in a colony space, as it is identified through Hermann's efforts in the *EiS* novel.

From several examples, some efforts are identified to balance transculturality at a macro level. Nevertheless, it fails to achieve due to an imbalance in the micro transculturality. The natives have mastered the understanding of transculturality and hybridity for ages. In contrast, the settlers more prioritize homogeneity. Through cultural brokers' role, the balance of macro transculturality has been attempted through negotiation with multiple media. It, unfortunately, does not bring a significant impact. It is identified from colonial discourse dominance, which is always propagated by the German colonial government. Thus, despite many cultural broker's efforts, transculturality at a macro level will not be successfully achieved without the awareness of both parties encountered about transculturality at a micro-level.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the study's conception and design. Material preparation, data collection, and analysis were performed by Dudy Syafruddin and Lilawati Kurnia. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Dudy Syafruddin, and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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