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Travel Writing Genre: A Critical Study of Authors and Readers Society in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

In sociological literature, a literary work is perceived as an evaluative response toward social change occurred in society. Travel writing, as a main corpus of this study, is a getting popular genre consumed by travel readers. In line with that, questions come up, is travel writing genre assumed as evaluation toward society change? Does pleasure become one of human needs nowadays? In response to those questions, a critical study about travel writing genre relate to society change particularly middle high people's lifestyle has been conducted. This study intends to describe social aspects as form of critical study and the relation between travel writers, works, and readers. For methodological purposes, library research was conducted to gain comprehensive data and questionnaire was addressed to travel writing readers as the subjects of the study. To analyze the data, sociology of literature approach was applied. The study shows that between works and readers, between travel writers and travel writing readers, all works are appreciated. The forms of appreciation are critique, suggestion, and or public enthusiasm. Travel writing works are appreciated by learning the knowledge of culture, lifestyle, values from narration written by the authors. About the readers who most of them are travelers, it is very common to have personal interpretations toward the works. There are bounds of psyche and sociological within the scenes of story through indirect communication between travel writers and travel writing readers.

Keywords: travel writing, travel writer & reader, critical study

Introduction

Literary Works and Society

Literary works relate to social factors that can be used to help readers comprehend the content either history, form and the content itself. These factors are characteristics of economy from where the works are published, society levels or groups, readers' characteristics, sponsor system, literature traditions influencing the works and last but not least the authors themselves (Damono, 2003:37). Readers nowadays are divided into group of certain tastes, consequently more genres are available for writers. For examples, in literature, there are children literature, teenagers literature, muslim literature and particular genre like modern literature. Besides readers' taste factor which has changed following the trend, another factor is mass media. In recent times, literature is easily published through media. Literary works are published in newspapers, magazines, books and electronic media. Through technology, these works are spread out using internet which then known as cyber literature.

Furthermore, there is also another factor to be discussed as the background of this study. The process of how literary works achieved their readers through reproduction process. Generally literary works publication depend on the amount of production, on the

contrary the concept of modern literature publication depend on readers' interest, literature appreciation and best seller target. What are literary works? Some work such as poems and prose belong to fiction literature. Narrative prose such as novel, short story, roman and drama are also included in fiction. Meanwhile, non imaginative literatures include essay, critique, biography, autobiography, ethnography, memoir to diary. Mostly readers know only imaginary literature, therefore non fiction are not taken into account as part of literary works.

There is a genre which is not quite familiar among literature readers but popular for travelers, travel writing. Travel writing is simply known as travel guide, however this genre has wider meaning. Travel writing can be interpreted as travel literature because it stories the journey of the authors. Andrea (2006) in his article states that in post modern, ethnografy becomes a trend and travel writing is a developing new form of ethnographic writing. Travel writing belongs to one of creative writing category about non fiction journey (travel information, memoir, travel diary). As travel writing is creative writing, the style is sometimes humorous writing, even directory style (tita, 2011:3).

In line with social factors, Damono states that sociology literature is perceived as evaluative response toward whatever occur in the surrounding, therefore literary works are not functioned as a mirror, but evaluation toward society change, culture and even politic. Travel writing which is the main focus of the study has been developed in Indonesia for 10 years, however it has been known in England since 17 century. Based on references and previous studies, it is briefly stated that travel writing genre started to be published in the early of 1990s. In line with Damono statement, are travel writing works identified as evaluation toward a change in society? Is basic need has been added to pleasure necessities because of the publication? Escarpit in Sundari (2003) states that literary works are adapted to newest trend of social group, not only language, genre, and literature forms, therefore the evolution of literature is in accordance with society evolution. Questions then occur, is travel writing genre occur because of the society lifestyle friction specially mid to high level people? Or is this genre a part of industrialization or capitalism of the authors? Or part of modern literature commercialization? Do public readers are mostly men or women? Start from those social factors, this study will describe the social aspects of selected genre and the relation between travel writers, the works and public readers.

Review of Literature

There are previous studies of travel writing genre. Rizal (2011) wrote an essay about why people write books about journey, and why people read those works during the trip. The study reveals how travel writing influence countries being described by the writer. This study also shows the differences between traveler and tourist by the motivations of why they read travel writing works. In 2010, Strand analyzed travel writers who shared idealism to show creative emancipation in their ways. This article is entitled *White Flight: Travel Writing, Globalization, and the American Middle Class*. Strand focuses on American travelers who traveled after world war II. The works are adhered to postcolonialism and imperialism. Hegemony and control full of imperialism soul dominated the content of travel writing works.

In 2013, Margawati conducted a research entitled *Travel Writing, when Travelers Meet Creative Writing A Study of Travel Writing Development in Indonesia*. In her study, she found that travel writing genre was firstly published in the early of 1990s. on the other hand, in the west, this genre has been popular since Enlightenment Era. Nevertheless, Indonesian travel writings have been periodically published between 2007 and 2012 and getting increased since then. Through the works, travel writers told more about gender, race, nationalism, cultures, also values, characteristics, and lifestyle which all are appreciated in travel writing works. A year later, Margawati conducted another research entitled *Travel*

Writers: Studi Tentang genre, Gender, dan Identitas Penulis Travel Writing di Indonesia. The study shows that travel writing genre was firstly published in the early of 1990s by Indonesian male writer. mulai dipublikasikan pada awal 1990an oleh penulis pria Indonesia. In the mid of 2000, female travel writers came up like Trinity dan Matatita. In those years going for a trip was not perceived as a hobby but a need. There are similarities in themes and topics of Indonesian travel writings; however identity issue and gender identified from the works enable the readers to distinguish the characteristics of one work to others.

Travel Writing and Critical Theory

The Concept of Travel Writing

... Lo Arabnya di Saudi apa Abu Dhabi? Itulah pertanyaan yang menyerbu di FB setiap kali ak menceritakan berbagai pengalaman di Saudi. Akupun dengan sabar menjelaskan kalau Arab tidak hanya Saudi, Abu Dhabi atau Dubai. Lagi pula Abu Dhabi dan Dubai itu kan kota yang terdapat di negara United Arab Emirates. Negara Arab juga terdiri dari Algeria, Bahrain, Kepulauan Komoro, Djibouti, Mesir, Irak, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Maroko, Mauritania, Oman, Palestina, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan, Suriah, Tunisia sampai Yaman. Ketika mereka mulai bertanya sepanas apa, panasnya cukup membuatku menyesal mengapa terdampar di Saudi Arabia, angka 52 pernah bertengger di papan digital penunjuk suhu dalam skala celcius... (Valiant, 2011:105)

Malam di Edinburgh seperti sore yang cerah. Seketika langkah saya terhenti di gerbang Waverly Train Station demi melihat bentangan bangunan berarsitektur klasik di Edinburgh Old City. Saya sapukan pandangan ke sekeliling. Menengok ke kiri, ke sebelah selatan stasiun, mata saya menemukan deretan bangunan klasik kota tua, Edinburgh Castle, National Gallery dengan hamparan hijau taman kota Princess Garden, dan The Scott Monument yang berarsitektur Gothic yang menjulang ... (Matatita, 2009:113)

Segelas Deadly Coconut menemani saya menyepi di pulau berpasir putih lembut seluas 560 hektar. Jacob, manager in charge resort, berbaik hati dengan memberikan saya kamar dengan teras yang langsung menantang samudera biru. "jendela ini langsung menghadap benua Australia," katanya bangga. Jacob memang belum menginjakan kakinya di Australia, tetapi banyaknya tamu Australia yang menginap di resort membuat sang manager berusia 35 tahun tersebut mahir berbicara dialek Aussie... (Yudasmoro, 2012:43).

The quotations above are taken from *#Egyptology; Mesir bukan Hanya tentang Nabi Musa, Fir'aun, dan Cleopatra, Tales from the Road dan Travel Writer*. Those quotations present how travel writers narrate their experiences in the journeys. The first paragraph was written by Satari who storied his experience during his study in Egypt. Valiant wrote a story when he worked in Saudi Arabia. The typical texts look like biography although they can be categorized as literary works. In addition, the genre can be also assigned as travel literature even travel journal. However, popular term to call the genre for above quotations is travel writing.

Travel writing is a genre that mainly focused on documentation with literature to journalistic style which its narration contain jokes and seriousness at the same time. Very often, travel writing is associated to tourism because it usually describes and reviews advice for trips for travelers. In one hand, travel journal relates to tourism although it is generally published in both printed media and online such as website or authors' blog. Travelogue is

another term to name travel writing. Travelogue very common neglect the time when the writer did a journey. All terms mentioned previously indeed refer to similar genre but the structure is a bit different. Is travel writing a fact or fiction? Clark in Haryanti states that travel literature is similar to bureaucracy discourse, education, civilization, demography and cartography (2015:7).

Travel writing is not written to present travel guide for readers but to illustrate anomaly, remarkable, even a scandal of literary romanticism which can not be found anywhere by readers. (Haryanti, 2015:6). A text about travel can not free itself from cultural and historical elements although sometimes this genre is wrapped as natural as it looks. Travel literature is also a tool to meet the passion of traveling because it is full of fantasy which can not easily got even from the countries where the arbiters come from.

Travel Writers

Travel writers is a term for the authors of travel literature. Yudasmoro (2012) defines travel writers as travel journalist with the assumption they write article about journey to media. The term indicates that a travel writer can be classified into some genres. A travel writer has 2 purposes in writing; first exploring and recording facts through both interesting text and images. A travel writer should be able to understand tourism because the domain of text about travel and tourism are combined to their experiences.

There are Indonesian travel writers as quoted in Margawati (2014) Trinity, Matatita, Junanto, Valian Budi, Asma Nadia, Satari are some among many other travel writers who have published their works. One of the differences between male and female travel writers is the former mostly discuss things around countries or cities with all problems. The latter are more expressive in illustrating situation either fun or sad moments. Through gender aspect, Margawati identifies although physiologically, psychologically, and culturally male and female needs are different, travel writers realize that their readers can not be divided into sex. Therefore, feminine and masculine stories are always portrayed within travel writing narration either written by male or female travel writers.

Critical Study

A critical study toward literary works essentially is a study to figure out questions relate to how to interpret the works, the reason why the works are produced, and social, cultural and politic implication as the consequence of the works. To conduct the former 2 are not easy questions to answer. Also, figure out the social or cultural implications because it needs knowledge of theoretical across disciplined to support the analysis. With such background, it can be concluded that critical theory toward literature is a study which lexically involve steps of comprehend, check, investigate, consider examine, and conduct a research.

In conducting a critical study toward literary works, critical theory is needed. In wider definition, the application of critical theory philosophically does not concern on human and or humanity, but also all critical discourse which occur along with movements in society. There are approaches that can be categorized in critical studies; Marxism, feminism, cultural materialism, and cultural poetics.

Critical study applied in this study focuses on text in connection with writers and readers. It is believed that authors have their public who appears in their mind. In literary genre, there are a lot of works created from a personal message before it finally achieve its readers. Public readers as the target of the writers are parameter of successfulness and social environment of the writers. Public in general is divided into groups and sub-groups social, race, religion, professional, geography, history and other groups (Escarpit, 2003:84). Target readers do not only belong to authors, but also publisher. Travel writers target public whose

hobbies are travelling or reading travel literature without even interesting to go on trip. Meanwhile, modern publisher target bookstores in cities. Public readers of this study are community of travel writers and travel writing readers of annual event located in Ubud, Bali. Nevertheless, it is possible to access readers from social media community. It is assumed that public readers have varying response toward works, therefore this study applies receptive theory to examine readers, and applies sociological literature as the framework of social and cultural aspects of travel writing genre.

Findings and Discussion

A work, no matter what the genre is, is a media with characters such as multiple choice, codex form, commodity form and the like. A work is also a cultural document and intellectual product written by the writer who has strong cultural ability. When a work is published, based on commodity characteristic, it becomes an industry. Travel writing works have been published for years and target to certain segment which is close to popular culture. Ida (2011:10) identifies that 'pop' term means known by people and meet its readers' needs because a popular work will provide satisfaction for its readers. The process involve writer, publisher, bookstores owner and for sure readers as mentioned previously. In brief, popular culture can not be separated from commodity character.

A rapid increase of media affects the popularity of travel writing. It is simply illustrated as the following, all activities in spare time become part of people' social activity that they share to media. As budget trip is getting popular, it offers easiness for travelers to travel by any transportation mode. Rubrics of travel literature occurs everyday in both printed media and electronic media. Travel writing is a representation of popular work in society. Travel writing works also represent cultural aspect and author's lifestyle which direct and indirectly imitated by public readers. Social aspects implemented in popular culture also supports the increase of travel writing genre. As stated previously, traveling activity has become a trend and traveler document their experiences through travel literature and published in media. Traveling activity is also supported by typical community such as backpacker community and travel book lovers. Both communities are facebook groups which were formed when travel writing was getting popular in the late of 2009s. Travel writing works are full of narration and conversations as source of original travel literature. These narrations contain knowledge, intellectual sensation, overview, interpretations, instinct, and logic. Travel writing is a more real than fiction and more authentic than general facts.

Discussing a relation between travel writers and the works, between travel writers and travel writing readers, the existence of the works is inseparable. A work is truly called as work when it comes to public readers, being enjoyed and received as a work. Therefore, the role of readers is absolutely needed. By the readers, literature through works production and scholarly aspects is getting increase. Literature function nothing without its readers. Recent times, more and more literary works occur, for example newspaper provides one column for literature every weekend. Final destination of publication is to make literary works owned by public readers. Readers are named king in literature (Damono). In literature, writer and readers are like chain which generate literature development. Writer is a starting point of literature existence, and theirs works will be received by literature devotee.

Travel writing works have their own public readers. They commonly have interest to adventurous activity. However, each readers has his/ her own varying understanding and interpretation because literature itself is interpretation discourse. The readers of travel writings are not classified into male or female readers although the content of the works occasionally expose gender issue as follows:

... tapi yang jelas, saya sangat mengagumi keperkasaan perempuan Bali. Keperkasaan itu nggak sebatas saat menunggi sesaji yang menjulang tinggi di atas kepalanya dalam upacara adat, yang membuat wisatawan takjub dan fotografer berdekatan untuk mengabadikannya, tetapi juga pada pekerjaan-pekerjaan “kasar” seperti buruh bangunan (Matatita, 2009:104).

In the quotation above, Matatita shows the skill of Balinese woman whose character is forceful. Male readers enjoyed the topic and voted through observation sheet distributed to sources of data. On the other hand, an Indonesian male Travel writer pria wrote one scene that is bias gender. Uni Emirat Arab was a setting where Valiant Budi narrates his story during working there. Negative perception addressed to one of woman characters in a story entitled *Kedai 1001 Mimpi* as quoted the following,

... seorang wanita membuka cadarnya secara perlahan. “buatkan saya grande latte half shot dengan extra raspberry.” Bibirnya mendadak manyun, lalu ia bubuhkan lupstik merah menyala di atasnya. Kemudian ia membuka abayanya dengan gaya bintang iklan sabun membuka handuk,”dan tolong pakai skimmed milk.” Begitu ‘milk’ terucap, tepat ketika belahan dadanya tersingkap (2011:343).

Although the narration contain a harassment toward women, gSekalipun isi narasi Valiant di atas sedikit melecehkan kaum wanita, however his writing is appreciated because almost no manipulation in the story. Readers indirectly get involve in the narrative story.

There is a reciprocal relationship between travel writers and public readers. Without the readers, a work is just a work, therefore public reader create literary works as medium to the writer. Travel writing readers have interpretation based on their experience and knowledge. When the readers appreciate travel writing works, there is an indirect communication between. Through the result of interview, it is identified that there are bounds of physics and sociologic within the narration which possibly experienced by the readers. One of sample questions in the instrument is “do the readers more or less experience scene narrated by the travel writers?” most of them confirmed the answer.

As stated in previous sub chapter, travel writing readers are generally those who have interest in adventure, therefore it is definite that they fully understand between content and real experience. Each reader has his/ her own way to receive literary works. In connection to travel writing, there is an emotional relationship between travel writers and public readers. To express hidden things within the story written by the travel writers, there are always narrative stories examined by the readers and then interpreted the meaning sent by the author.

Last but not least, another form of relationship between travel writers and travel writing readers is basically readers function as a critic to determine whether the works are interesting or conversely. Readers are judges who score the works by writers. From a question addressed to readers target, I found surprising response. Travel writing readers expect from the writers to not only narrating sweet stories describing beautiful spots and inviting people to go there. Smart readers will more believe to natural story because they know a good story is a narration which is rich of experience, and experience is not always a nice one. According to Yudasmoro (2012: 117) writing bad things in an article is something contradictive, however this contradictory will enrich the essence of article itself.

Conclusion

Travel literature is one of appropriate sample to study about society and its social aspects. It is an appropriate place to figure out the relation among the literary works, from any genre, the writers, and public readers. There are a lot of social aspects within travel writings that readers can appreciate. Between travel writers and readers, travel writing works

and the readers, reciprocal relationship will always occur through appreciation. The appreciation is in the form of critique, suggestion and or public enthusiasm which is indicated by selling target. In more specific relationship, there are psychic and sociological bounds between travel writing works and readers. Readers learn about culture, tradition, and lifestyle from the story narration. Readers sometimes figure out hidden meaning from the story written by travel writers. Through the questionnaire, the readers response it over the works of travel writers enthusiastically.

In discussing social aspects of certain genre/ work, reference is needed. To avoid an overlapping discussion, specific topic should be determined first. If this genre to be taught in literature class, it can be included in literary appreciation, or style and structure in literature class. This research is just the beginning of travel writing topic, therefore upcoming study is needed to get deeper understanding of travel literature aspects.

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