



Literary Studies

# Image of Bali From Western Perspective in Jamie James' *A Tale of Bali* and Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*

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**CORRESPONDENCE**E-mail: [seswita@hum.unand.ac.id](mailto:seswita@hum.unand.ac.id)**A B S T R A C T**

Many foreign writers have expressed their fascination with Bali in their works, among them are Jamie James in *Andrew and Joey: a tale of Bali* and Elizabeth Gilbert in *Eat, Pray, Love*. The two authors wrote about Bali from their personal experience during their stay in that island. Some images created in the works are seen and analyzed through the perspective of Postcolonialism and New Criticism. This article presents how the two authors depict Bali as an extravagant place in Eastern country which has adopted some Western values. The negative image is delivered to oppose the idea of Bali as the perfect island; moreover, as part of Indonesia, Bali still has some weaknesses to strengthen and truly support that it is part of Indonesia. The writer admits that this article is far from perfect. Due to the limitation of thinking and time, some more aspects can be explored more profoundly in terms of the image of Bali in these two works. Hence, there are still a lot of literary works that also talk about and discuss the image of Bali. Hopefully, there will be anyone who, willingly or even the writer himself, could continue the research and find out more about the images of Bali from the Western perspective as seen in some other novels and works.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Bali has been known throughout the world as one of the best tourist attractions in Indonesia. As one of the islands located in the natural world of Indonesia, Bali has been recognized by the world as a stunning and exotic island with its natural beauty, friendly people, and local culture, which are always proud of and preserved. On this basis, many foreign tourists are always interested in visiting this beautiful island to prove how beautiful the island is, so it is common for us to find some of these tourists choosing to stay and settle on this beautiful island because they feel they have fallen in love with the beauty of the island, Bali. Until now, many foreign writers have also expressed their fascination with Bali in their works. In these works, they seem to be telling stories about the beauty of nature and the people of Bali, who are very beautiful and friendly to their readers. Once lulled by the beauty and charm of Bali, these

foreign writers even said that Bali seemed to have integrated with the culture of feeling "Western" and seemed to be separated from Eastern culture. As we all know, some time ago, the media covered a lot of news about same-sex marriages in Bali. Residents and same-sex foreigners usually do this. They (foreign tourists) come to Bali for vacation and to stay and find that Bali also has the same glittering world as their country glittering world. One of the similarities is when they realize that living in Bali is the same as living in a Western country, especially in terms of entertainment and nightlife. It is common for these foreign tourists to find nightclubs full of lifestyle and free sex like in the Western world. Special clubs for gays can also be easily found in Bali. With the start of many foreign writers who tell about Bali in their works, they can see how important Bali is as part of one of the best places in the world. They convey and liberate the image of Bali from their point of view

and perspective as foreigners. Their works are written in the form of stories or narratives, which of course, are addressed to readers who will later enjoy the narratives of these works.

Narration, no doubt, has a significant influence on human life. Its role in forming human character and identity, individually and collectively, cannot be underestimated. In contemporary literature, the narrative is considered the main factor or medium in forming human identity. The famous literary critic Fredric Jameson (in Selden 166) even said that human knowledge about himself and his world is obtained from the narrative. The narrative is present in society in various forms. One of them is in the form of contemporary literature. Contemporary literature, generally, can be defined as a literary work written and produced in the 20th century by addressing general issues rife in its era. Among several writers who write about Bali in their works is Jamie James in his novel *Andrew and Joey: A Tale of Bali* and Elizabeth Gilbert in *Eat, Pray, Love*. Both are writers from America.

Jamie James is an American writer born and raised in Houston, Texas. James graduated from Williams College, Massachusetts with a major in art history. Since 1997, James has settled and lived in Indonesia, so it is not surprising that the two novels he wrote, *Andrew and Joey: A Tale of Bali* (2002) and *The Java Man* (2004), all have backgrounds in Indonesia. His first novel is a novel written in an epistolary style where the novel is written in the form of electronic letters from one character to another to weave a beautiful and narrative story. This novel tells about the clash of Western and Eastern cultures, represented by the two main male characters, Joey and Andrew, who have a similar relationship. It is said that Joey Beraux is a choreographer from New York who won a scholarship to study and work in Bali to develop further the world of choreography, which he loves so much. Joey is told to have a lover, an American man of Chinese descent named Andrew Tan. Joey invited his girlfriend to bring him to Bali, where their love story began—accompanied by sparks of jealousy when Joey had his heart and a new love affair with a dance partner from Bali who was also a man. From Bali to San Francisco and New York, Andrew and Joey poured out their love story in electronic messages (email) with full hope for their love bond to be together.

On the other hand, Elizabeth Gilbert is an American female writer who lives in Philadelphia,

Pennsylvania. Gilbert has won numerous awards for her non-fiction and fiction works. *Eat Pray Love* is a memoir about her life. By the time she turned 30, Gilbert was considered the near-perfect American woman, owing to her wealthy husband, country home, and successful career. But instead of feeling happy, Gilbert felt confused and panicked; she decided to give her space to find out and understand who she really was and what she wanted. Leaving behind all his near-perfect life, Gilbert takes a big step for his life and goes on a year-long journey to several places in the world alone. And this novel is a collection of stories about his long journey. He chose three countries for him to visit. The first is Italy, where he learned how to have fun. The second country is India, where he performs obedience to the creator. The last country he chooses to visit is Indonesia, a place where he seeks his ultimate goal of balancing the joys of life and obedience. Gilbert chose the island of Bali as a place to find that balance.

The two works by two different authors each have something in common in the choice of setting, namely Bali. Both narrate Bali in an ordinary way as foreign tourists tell or describe the charms of Bali. The author believes that the contents of these novels and memoirs can be explored carefully or closely. Therefore, this research was carried out using the textual analysis method, namely by carrying out careful reading, which would explore the organic unity between form and content of the novel *Andrew and Joey: A Tale of Bali* and the memoir *Eat, Pray, Love* with the application of New Literary Criticism.

## II. METHOD

In the two novels that will be analyzed in this study, the two authors: Jamie James and Elizabeth Gilbert, present the image of Bali from a Western perspective in their views and also insert the issue of gay issues in Bali (discussed more clearly in the novel *Andrew & Joey*). The issue of gays in Indonesia at that time was still considered strange and taboo. However, as an author, James dared to include this issue in his work, which is clearly set in Bali, Indonesia. The form of writing (form), which tends to be unique, makes this novel even more interesting to study and analyze. Meanwhile, in her memoirs, Elizabeth Gilbert includes comparisons between Bali (Indonesia) and the two other countries she visited, namely Italy and India. The writer assumes that the views expressed

by the two authors in each of their works have the same tendency, namely trying to “Western” Bali moreover by including the gay issue in one of the novels that the writer will analyze. James uses a formal element (form) that is entirely foreign to the reader by displaying an epistolary pattern that tends to cause boredom for his readers because it is considered monotonous without dialogue elements between characters, so the meaning contained in it tends to be rather tricky to find unless the complexity is unraveled first. In this study, the author will try to analyze the two works mentioned above, which both raise Bali as part of the story’s setting and then describe the image of Bali that is displayed by the two authors in each of their works and is also associated with the rise of LGBT issues ( in this novel is the issue of homosexuality) in Indonesia recently which has been brought up by James in his novel since 2002.

Research on contemporary literary works has been widely carried out along with the rise of contemporary literary works in the world of literature and education in Indonesia. It cannot be denied that contemporary literary works can also be said to be contemporary literary works that are experimental and emerge as a reaction to conventional literature, which has frozen and is considered not creative anymore. Contemporary novels emerge because they are motivated by a shift in the values of life as a whole. Problems of life are the spirit of the emergence of contemporary literature or novels to look deeper into life’s problems and later try to find solutions to these problems.

Related to New Literary Criticism, the author refers to Lois Tyson’s description in her book *Critical Theory Today* (2006), which says that New Literary Criticism or New Criticism began to develop in the 1940s to 1960s as a form of protest against historical and biographical approaches which always associated literary works with things outside the work, or commonly called extrinsic elements, such as the author’s background, social, historical, etc. (Tyson, 2006, p.135). New Literary Criticism views a literary work as a verbal object with unlimited time autonomy. If readers and readings can change, the text is different. The meaning contained in a text will never change, just as its physical appearance on paper will always be the same (Tyson, 2006, p.137). Therefore, practitioners of New Literary Criticism appreciate a text as it is without associating it with elements outside of literature. In addition, in Tyson’s explanation,

a literary work uses language in a different style from everyday language. If the language of science always has a denotative meaning, then the language of literature usually has a connotative meaning. Literary language has a choice of words and special arrangements, a complex whole, which creates its own aesthetic experience. Such language cannot be separated from its content. How a literary text conveys, something cannot be separated from what is conveyed by the text. This is what is called organic unity or: “...the working together of all the parts to make an inseparable whole...” (Tyson, 2006, p.138). This organic integrity then becomes a criterion for assessing the quality of a literary work from the perspective of practitioners of New Literary Criticism. If a literary work has organic integrity, it means that all of its formal elements work well in constructing meaning. Through an organic whole, a literary work offers both complexity and order. In other words, the literary value contained in a text is seen in the organic unity between complexity and order.

In a review of postcolonial Criticism, Lois Tyson in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (2006) says, “Because postcolonial Criticism defines formerly colonized people as any population subjected to the political domination of another population... However, the tendency of postcolonial Criticism to focus on global issues, on comparisons and contrasts among various peoples, means that it is up to the individual members of specific populations to develop their own body of Criticism on the history, traditions, and interpretation of their own literature”. By applying this approach, we can see clearly how the two authors present Bali in their respective works using the perspective of the colonialists (in this case, the United States as the author’s country of origin) and the colonized country (Indonesia). Tyson 2006 in her book also states: “Colonialist ideology, which is often referred to as colonialist discourse to mark its relationship to the language in which colonialist thinking was expressed, was based on the colonizers’ assumptions of their own superiority, which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native (indigenous) peoples.” Therefore, literary works can be an actual witness to the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer.

This paper analyzes the image of Bali in the novel *Andrew&Joey: A Tale of Bali* by Jamie James and the memoir *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert with an analysis of postcolonial literary

Criticism. The benefits expected to be generated from this research are enriching the discourse of contemporary literary research using the epistolary writing method, which tends to be rarely found in the writing patterns of other contemporary novels. This research is also expected to show how Western authors write or describe Indonesia in general and Bali in particular in their works from a postcolonial perspective.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis will go directly to the Image of Bali from the perspective of Western Authors of two novels: *Andrew&Joey* by Jamie James and *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert; as mentioned previously that both works that will be analyzed are viewing Bali

#### **A Place with a Western lifestyle: nightclub and gay life.**

All the characters in both novels experience nightlife in Bali. They went to a nightclub to hang out with some other foreigners and also local people. In the club, they quickly find

their usual drink in America, such as beer, champagne, vodka, cocktails, etc. When they go to a nightclub, they feel like they are in their country, their home. They feel that Bali is the same as their country in the United States, with no value of the Eastern culture they usually find when visiting Indonesia. Andrew, in *Andrew&Joey* writes to his friend about «the seamy nightlife of Bali, The aura of sex was so thick you could almost smell it...” (James, 2002, p.46). Elizabeth in *Eat, Pray, Love* also came to a nightclub in Bali, «and then we danced at this local nightclub. There was a live band of Balinese kids playing reggae music, and the place was mixed up with revelers of all ages and nationalities... all dancing freely, unselfconsciously.” (Gilbert, 2006, p.267)

Andrew and Joey are described as a gay couple. When they moved and stayed in Bali, they found that it was not strange for local people in Bali to see a gay couple. They even went to a gay cafe to meet many gay people with their couple. “Bob took us to Cafe Luna, and I was amazed at how gay it is... there are a lot of gay people here. There were lots of gay foreigners like us, of course, but there were also a lot of gay Indonesians..., as they call homosexual here” (James, 2002, p.45).

As the author, the quotation above shows that Jamie James would like to tell the readers

that Indonesia, especially Bali, has also adopted modern Western values in judging a gay couple as an average couple. As a matter of fact Indonesians still consider it taboo to fall in love or even date a homosexual friend. Almost all religions in Indonesia forbid this kind of homosexual relationship. The feeling of showing the issue of gay in Bali James as an author can be concluded as the feeling of superiority as a colonizer that he thinks it is customary to show the «seamy» nightlife in Bali and that the author also would like to show to the world that Bali. However, the considered part of Indonesia- viewed as having Eastern value- also adopt and sense Western value in some part of it. Gilbert, in her memoir, also depicts some of her «colonizer» opinions by showing her visit to a nightclub with people from different nationalities who mingled to enjoy Bali's nightlife which sensed Western culture.

#### **A place with higher respect for a foreigner**

As a foreigner who comes to Bali, both authors have the same experience in viewing how Balinese or local people treat them. They consider themselves to have a higher degree than the local ones. It is rare to have a servant in America, but when Joey and Andrew live in Bali, they have a couple of local people as their servants, and they feel proud of it. Joey said, “Here, I am tuan. Do you know the word? It means lord. When the servants walk past me, they dip their heads deferentially. Being «tuan» is FUN (James, 2002, p.58). Elizabeth in her memoir implicitly also depicts her “proudness” as a foreigner in Bali with some people put high respect on her. Liz, whose short name is Elizabeth, makes friends with a Balinese older man, Ketut, known as a traditional healer. In her book, she describes how Ketut always feels happy every time Liz comes and visits him in his house, as stated in the quotation below: “Every day I’ve been asking him if he’s sure he wants me around, and he keeps insisting that I must come and spend time with him. I feel guilty taking up so much of his day, but he always seems disappointed when I leave at the end of the afternoon. “I always have time for you” then he asked me to tell him some stories about India, about America, about Italy, about my family...” (Gilbert, 2006, p.243)

#### **A place with hypocrisy and no rules**

Despite their amazing opinion toward Bali, both author, James and Gilbert implicitly depicts the

negative views of Bali. They consider it as a place which full of hypocrisy and where a regulation is made to be broken, therefore they simply said that there is no rule. When Joey decides to buy a car in Bali, he wrote to his friend about how the local people usually drives in Bali. "It's a little terrifying to drive here; you have to sort of conceptually close your eyes or you get too scared to keep going" (James, 2002, p.58) Joey also stated in his email "what I love about Bali is that you can do whatever the hell you want as long as you don't hurt anyone else. America is getting to be like Germany – too many goddamn rules and regulations. Here, nobody cares. The only rule is, do it." (James, 2002, p.58). Andrew also give his opinion about the idea of Joey buying a car which he oppose it. He stated in his email to his friend "You simply can't imagine how insane the drivers are here... it's like nobody knows how to drive. (James, 2002, p.56). Gilbert in her memoir also stated about how Bali "quite literally live off their image of being the world's most peaceful and devotional and artistically expressive people" (Gilbert, 2006, p.238) . she happens to see by herself on how policeman in Bali receive money in order to illegally extend her visa so she could stay longer in Bali. During her first visit to Bali, she told her friends about Bali as "a perfect Eden with no history of violence or bloodshed ever" (Gilbert, 2006, p.236), she even told that Bali is so peace that "even the policemen wear flowers in their hair" (Gilbert, 2006, p.236) but she finally realize that it is not as innocent as it seems to be at all. She stated:

"In reality, though, it turns out Bali has had exactly as bloody and violent and oppressive history as anywhere else on earth where human beings have ever lived.. the policemen really do wear flowers tucked behind their ears, but there's corruption all over the place in Bali, just like in the rest of Indonesia." (Gilbert, 2006, p.238)

The quotations above shows how both American authors depicts their negative opinion toward the image Bali with their perspective as a westerner or foreigners who happen to have a chance to live and stay in Bali.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Jamie James and Elizabeth Gilbert are both implicitly viewing their opinion or notions about the image of Bali in each of their work; a novel by Andrew&Joey; A tale of Bali, and a memoir by Elizabeth Gilbert entitled Eat, Pray, Love. By applying postcolonial Criticism, the writer wants to

analyze those images through the perspective of the colonizer – in this case, America – and colonized country (Indonesia). Through literature, one can see how postcolonialism is portrayed in a literary work.

After analyzing the two works, a novel and a memoir, from two different authors yet both of them are American authors. The writer concludes that each of them depicts Bali at first as a living paradise on earth where almost everyone who comes and visits it will be satisfied and happy. Still, as the stories continue, we will also find some negative images implicitly stated in both works. The negative image is delivered to oppose the idea of Bali as the perfect island; moreover, as part of Indonesia, Bali still has some weaknesses to strengthen and truly support that it is part of Indonesia.

The writer admits that this article could be better. Due to the limitation of thinking and time, some more aspects can be dug more profound in terms of the image of Bali in these two works. Hence, there are still a lot of literary works that also discuss the image of Bali. Hopefully, there will be anyone who willingly, or even the writer himself, could continue the research and find out more about the images of Bali from the Western perspective as seen in some other novels and works.

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