

Postcolonial Journey in Maggie Tiojakin's *Kota Abu-Abu* Short Story

Endang Suciati¹
endangsuciati@fbs.unipdu.ac.id¹

Universitas Pesantren Tinggi Darul Ulum, Jombang¹

Abstract. This article explores the image of society in Maggi Tiojakin's *Kota Abu-abu* short story. The city described has only one color, 'grey'. This condition makes the society have different views. In terms of postcolonial journey by Upstone, it is considered as a border, a colonial construction. By applying descriptive qualitative method, this short story was analyzed to know the efforts of the society to find freedom and happiness by crossing the border. The result of the analysis shows that the society cross the border by postcolonial journey. The main character is doing continues journey in the form of *migrant serial* to cross the border, however, ironically she is not happy. Some of the society are satisfied to live in such kind of border but the rest of them are not. It indicates that the society in Tiojakin's short story are living in colonial construction related to the border.

Keywords: Postcolonial Journey, Migrant, Border.

1 Introduction

The society of the city are commonly heterogeneous moreover when the city is the urban city. Its society has different views related to what they have, they see, and they experience. In terms of postcolonial, the city, as Ashcroft said, has a crucial feature that it has always been imperial. In practice, the heterogeneous society cannot be controlled well as imperialism since imperialism practice tends to control as the colonial. With the different views they have, some of them are satisfied with the condition, the order or the border, and some are not. The society who are not satisfied try to cross the border by going somewhere from the city they live.

This kind of condition, living with border as the colonial construction, makes the society to cross. For Upstone, people use journey to cross the border. Journey in this case is the concept of space which is larger than nation. [4] People do journey to find freedom, to go out from the place with control and border, to find the comfortable place for them. It can be said that the people try to do fluid journey to find freedom.

One of the Indonesian short stories by Maggie Tiojakin entitled *Kota Abu-Abu* seems to represent this kind of condition. Tiojakin, a founder of Fiksi Lotus, has already produced many literary works in the form of books published by Mathe Publications and Gramedia. She also produced many short stories published on newspaper both in English and Indonesian. <https://maggietiojakin.com/bio-2/>. One of her short stories entitled *Kota Abu-Abu* published in *Kompas* newspaper. It talks about the society who live in a city which has only one color, *abu-abu* or grey that becomes the border of the city and the other borders in the story. Some of the societies are satisfied to stay in the one color city and some of them try to find colorful city. Thus, this short story is chosen to be the object of analysis because of the main issue related to journey

to cross the border. Previously, no research done toward this short story. Therefore, it convinces me to analyze it to find out the effort of the society in the city to cross the border in terms of journey by applying Upstone's postcolonial journey theory.

2 Literature Review

The theory used in analyzing this short story is postcolonialism. Specifically, it relates to postcolonial journey and borders. The detail explanations are as follows.

2.1 Postcolonialism

There are many definitions related to post colonialism. The first definition is from Ashcroft that Post-colonialism deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. [2] It can be said that it focuses on the condition of the society after colonization. The second one is from Loomba. On the other way, she says it by connecting to colonialism that colonialism can be defined as the conquest and control of other people's land and goods [1]. The word control here is the ways of colonial to manage the society that can be in the form of something fix or rigid. She continues then about Postcolonial theory. It has been accused of precisely on the shifts, from locations and institutions to individuals and their subjectivities [1]. Thus, the problem now is in the individual as part of postcolonial society where they are controlled with certain rules. It is the colonial construction. This concept is applied to see the postcolonial people living in the city related to the condition in their life in a one-color city.

2.2 Borders and Postcolonial Journey

Borders notion has a very important part in postcolonial studies and manifest itself related to the construction of boundaries between peoples, nations, and individuals. [2] This, in turns forces the people to cross it to find the resistance. Relating to place as a fix location or colonial construction and space as a more fluid condition, Upstone also talks about borders. This kind of border is not merely in the form of physical line but it can be also about the concept or rules. It has very close relationship to the journey in post-colonialism. In her concept of post-colonialism, she divides into five space levels; nation, journey, city, home, and body. This kind of border is not merely in the form of

Postcolonial journey is a kind of space concept which is larger than nation. [4] As a kind of space level, it becomes a way for people who wants to get freedom where they cannot be in a fix location as a colonial construction or in a border. Journey itself is divided into three; nomad, exile, and migrant. They are the journey which is rootless as the dunes, the journey for whom there 'is a dream of glorious return', and the journey where the point is to arrive' or think about the destination respectively. [4] Those kinds of journey have similar concept which is trying to cross the uncomfortable place.

3 Method

This research is a descriptive qualitative research. It aimed at describing the effort of the society who live in a city which is considered as postcolonial society to cross the borders in terms of journey. The data described are in the form of statement and dialogue of the main character and the people around her in Maggie Tiojakin's short story entitled *Kota Abu-Abu* that related to the borders and the journey they do. These data were collected by means of textual analysis based on the research problem then they were analyzed by describing each element related to the postcolonial journey: borders, the journey done by the characters, and kinds of journey they do.

4 Result and Discussion

The result of this study shows that Maggi Tiojakin's short story clearly describes the condition of postcolonial society and the way of the society try to cross the border in terms of journey especially the main character in the story. Here are the detail explanation.

4.1. Border in the city

This short story begins with the city condition that has border. What is meant by the border in this case is the color of the city, which is only grey all around, as the title *Kota Abu-abu*. The border, consequently, become the basis of the society who live there to do a journey. The border exists in the city is the condition of 'fix', it never moves or changes the color. It never shows the other color, except grey. As we can see from following statement:

Hanya ada satu warna yang konstan di sini; yaitu abu-abu. Bahkan air laut yang mengelilingi tepian kota tampak keabuan. Begitu juga dengan langit yang memayungi serta tanah yang jadi pijakan kami.
There is only one constant color here, grey. Even the blue water around the city seems to be grey. As well as the sheltering sky and the land of stepping earth.

The quotation above indicates that grey color becomes the own border of the city that can differentiate it from the other, it is not yellow, not black, not blue and even it is not colourful. It is also stated in the quotation that the word "kami" or "we" refers to the people or society who live there. According to Upstone, something with border is considered as the colonial construction as it happens in this city of grey. It, then becomes the reason for the main character, Greta, to do postcolonial journey to cross the border of the city because she is not satisfied with the things in the city she lives in.

4.2. Postcolonial Journey done by the main character and the other people in the city

Most of the society are not happy to live in that city. It can be seen from one of the members of the society who tell the journey story from the other city he visits to his friends in his grey city. His friends are very enthusiastic and very happy to listen the story, as if they are not happy and satisfied with the city they have. As we can see from the quotation "*Sesekali ada saja warga kota yang pergi melanglang buana, mengelilingi dunia, dan kembali membawa segenggam*

tanah merah atau daun kering yang telah kemuning. Cerita petualangan mereka selalu beragam dan sangat menarik untuk dijadikan anekdot penghibur di saat berkumpul. It indicates that the society are very happy to listen to something colorful, various, and with no borders which is different from the city they live. It also indicates that they have willing to cross the border, to have a journey.

In that city, there is a couple who has different view. In one side, the husband, Remos, feels comfortable to live in the city. He feels satisfied and happy and has no problem to live with the borders in the city. No plan and even feeling to cross the border to leave the city. As it is stated in the story "*Duniaku sudah indah,*" *sahutku. "Karena ini dunia yang kutahu."* On the other hand, the wife, Greta, who dominantly takes the roles of the journey story, has a very strong feeling to leave the city that never change. She really wants to find colorful city which gives beauty which is different from the city she has. Greta says in the story "*Aku penasaran.*" dan "*Aku ingin melihat warna lain selain abu-abu.*" She's not satisfied with the condition of grey. Furthermore, when this couple meet their old friend, Temuji, who always has an adventure or a journey outside of his city. Temuji offers the beautiful city that the couple never seen in their city, as Temuji says "*Aku yakin kalian tidak pernah ke mana-mana,*" *ujar Temuji seraya menghabiskan isi gelasny.* "*Kalian tidak tahu ada apa di luar sana. Keindahan yang tak bisa diungkapkan dengan kata-kata.* It shows that the couple should do their own journey to enjoy the untold beauty. Unfortunately, only Greta wants to do it not Remos, her husband.

Even though, on one occasion, the journey story told by Temuji is the black city that is hot and dark and no guide or even map to go there, Greta is still eager to know more. "*Seperti apa Kota Hitam yang kau kunjungi, Muji?*" *tanyaku. "Gelap dan panas," jawab Muji. "Rasanya seperti masuk ke dalam perut bumi."* Then "*Kau pakai pemandu? Ikut tur khusus?*" *tanya Greta.* For Greta, this story indeed makes her wonder. It becomes one of the plans of her journey since it gives different color from her city. Greta hopes to find happiness there. It is clearly seen that the city told by Temuji has no fix border or borderless. It makes Greta to have a journey.

According to Upstone, the journey done by Greta is not *nomad* which do not think about the destination, it is also not *exile* because of thrown away, it is indeed a *migrant*, a journey with certain destination, has been planned to visit certain place. Greta think about the destination before. Finally, Greta decides to do it alone without her husband who has different view. As she says "*Kau takkan merasakan kepergianku, aku janji,*" *sambungny.* "*Aku akan kembali sebelum kau sempat merindukanku.*" She also says "*Tidak lama, tentunya,*" *lanjut Greta. "Paling satu atau dua bulan. Kalau kau tidak sudi menemaniku, aku ingin minta restumu untuk melihat dunia lain seorang diri."* It clearly proves that Greta wants to find happiness in destination city she thought.

In her life, Greta takes *migrant serial*. It is *serial* because there are many places to visit. When she has already arrived in certain destination, she then is thinking about another destination. It goes and continues with no ends. For example, in her first departure, Greta has already thought about the destination place, the black city or the other city with other color. Then on the way, Greta does not give news even the promise to her husband. As we can notice from dialogue between Remos and bartender "*Sudah berapa lama?*" *tanya Puma, seorang bartender yang sudah lama mengenalku. Ia menuangkan bir ke dalam gelasku yang beku. "Setahun?"* Remos answers "*Setahun, delapan bulan,*" *kataku. "Hampir dua tahun."* It means that Greta forget about the promise, a border she makes. In the uncertain condition about Greta's news, Remos meets Temuji who suddenly goes home after the long journey. As in the following statement:

Seperti yang kutakutkan—dan kuantisipasi—Greta tak pernah kembali. Aku sempat bertemu lagi dengan Temuji, beberapa tahun kemudian, di bar yang sama saat dia

tengah dalam perjalanan ke sebuah kota di kaki gunung yang padat dengan kabut. Kota tersebut terkenal sejuk dan merupakan salah satu kota wisata paling ternama di dunia. Kabut yang menggantung selalu berganti warna mengikuti interval kalender kuno. Dan setiap kali warna kabut berganti, warga kota selalu merayakannya dengan mengadakan festival seni. Temuji bilang dia sempat bertemu Greta di atas kereta menuju Kota Tropis di mana matahari memancarkan sinar keemasan tanpa henti. Aku tanya apakah istriku tampak bahagia. Temuji mempertimbangkan jawabannya.

From the statement above, it can be said that Greta, when she meets Temuji, wants to continue the journey, and the destination has been thought. Thus, it is called *migrant serial*. While according to Remos, Greta has already found the freedom, happiness in the different city, the city that offers different color.

However, at the end of the statement it is said that *Aku tanya apakah istriku tampak bahagia. Temuji mempertimbangkan jawabannya*. It shows that Remos prediction that Greta has already found the happiness is wrong. Although Greta has already found the borderless difference or the colorful city outside her city, journey for her does not offer resistance, the *migrant* life done by Greta does not offer happiness and freedom.

It shows the chaos that in the story of *Kota Abu-Abu* Greta crosses the border to find happiness, but she is not happy because she's not with her husband. As we can see here '*Aku tanya apakah istriku tampak bahagia. Temuji mempertimbangkan jawabannya*.'

Then Temuji replies with the answer that Remos can predict the answer by himself in Temuji's last sentence: "*Tidak,*" kata teman lamaku. "*Dia sedih karena kau tak ada bersamanya. Tapi ia puas karena telah mengambil langkah pertama untuk keluar. Perjalanan panjang seperti itu lebih baik dilakukan berdua; tapi kalau salah satu di antara kalian tak melihat poin dari perjalanan tersebut—sebaiknya dilakukan sendiri.*"

From the quotation above, it can be said that *journey* does not make her free, since Greta still needs her husband, a chaos, for Greta. Husband-wife relationship is also a border since it gives rules, control, and dependence. It is the colonial construction. A rules of marriage causes unhappiness or restless for Greta in doing the journey. Greta takes *migrant serial* and always think about the destination also becomes a border. So that, the first goal of Greta to find happiness by doing journey to cross the border from the one color city, she instead, hopes a border in the form of the relationship with her husband. She seems not happy because she is not with her husband who has different view.

Greta's husband thinks in colonial way, thinking about the borders as he says '*Janjinya dia akan kembali sebelum aku sempat merindukannya. Tapi itu mustahil. Aku merindukannya setiap saat*'. A promise which is said by Greta is actually a border. Moreover when it tends to colonial concept related to months, for example *Ia tidak mau buru-buru. Satu atau dua bulan, katanya*. In addition, this statement shows that they like and feel comfortable to live in the city with borders "*Aku tak ada masalah dengan kota ini,*" kataku. "*Aku nyaman di sini.*" "*Bagus,*" kata Temuji. *Ia menepuk pundakku berkali-kali. "Memang sudah seharusnya begitu. Tak ada apa-apa untukmu di luar sana."*

Temuji is actually not doing *migrant* because he finally comes back to the city, he meets Remos. It is different from Greta who never be back again. Temuji is happy to have journey, he is happy to see the other city outside his city. At the end, Greta, Temuji, Remos as well as the society in the city still hope the borders. It means that they are tight to colonial construction although Temuji has already tried to cross the border and got freedom and happiness. It happens to Greta as well.

5 Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that basically the characters in the story cannot be separated from the colonial construction. Although they have already taken some efforts to cross the borders by doing journey, they cannot truly be free. It cannot give rigid happiness and comfortable especially for the couple, Greta and Remos.

Thus, it can be said that the writer here wants to send a message that in the short story, human do not like borders but they actually need and hope the borders. It shows that they like to be bordered. There is only one character that always like border starting from the beginning to the end of the story. Border here is needed to control the life of human.

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