

Negotiating Colonial Memory and Cosmopolitan Intimacy: Gendered Subjectivity in *Negeri Van Oranje's* Travel Narrative

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Abstract

This article examines the negotiation of colonial memory and cosmopolitan intimacy through the gendered subjectivity of Lintang in the novel *Negeri Van Oranje*. Drawing on Debbie Lisle's framework of travel writing as a politically saturated genre, the study argues that the narrative does not merely celebrate transnational mobility or intercultural romance. Instead, it demonstrates how these experiences are filtered through a hierarchy of value where Dutch spaces, white masculinity, and metropolitan institutions remain privileged signs of aspiration. Methodologically, the research employs a qualitative interpretive design combining close reading and discourse analysis of scenes involving desire, education, and romantic attachment. The findings reveal three significant patterns: first, colonial desire is internalized prior to departure through Lintang's aspirations for a Dutch education and a foreign husband; second, the Dutch social world is consistently narrated as morally and institutionally superior; and third, while interactions with figures like Arbenita and Jeroen introduce a fragile cosmopolitan ethic, it remains partial and conditional. The study concludes that the novel stages a "pseudo-cosmopolitan" formation rather than an egalitarian one. In this framework, an apparent openness to difference coexists with the persistent reproduction of colonial hierarchies, positioning the European "Other" as a lingering site of authority.

Keywords: travel writing; gendered subjectivity; colonial memory; cosmopolitan intimacy; *Negeri Van Oranje*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji negosiasi memori kolonial dan intimasi kosmopolitan melalui subjektivitas gender tokoh Lintang dalam novel *Negeri Van Oranje*. Dengan menggunakan kerangka kerja Debbie Lisle mengenai tulisan perjalanan (*travel writing*) sebagai genre yang sarat muatan politik, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa narasi dalam novel tersebut tidak sekadar merayakan mobilitas transnasional atau romansa antarbudaya. Sebaliknya, penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana pengalaman-pengalaman tersebut disaring melalui hierarki nilai di mana ruang-ruang Belanda, maskulinitas kulit putih, dan institusi metropolitan tetap menjadi simbol aspirasi yang diistimewakan. Secara metodologis, penelitian ini menggunakan desain interpretif kualitatif yang menggabungkan pembacaan mendalam (*close reading*) dan analisis wacana pada adegan-adegan yang melibatkan hasrat, pendidikan, dan keterikatan romantis. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkap tiga pola signifikan: pertama, hasrat kolonial telah terinternalisasi sebelum keberangkatan melalui aspirasi Lintang terhadap pendidikan Belanda dan suami warga asing; kedua, dunia sosial Belanda secara konsisten dinarasikan sebagai sesuatu yang lebih unggul secara moral dan institusional; dan ketiga, meskipun interaksi dengan tokoh-tokoh seperti Arbenita dan Jeroen memunculkan etika kosmopolitan yang rapuh, hal tersebut tetap bersifat parsial dan kondisional. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa novel tersebut menampilkan formasi "kosmopolitanisme semu" (*pseudo-cosmopolitanism*) daripada sebuah kosmopolitanisme yang egaliter. Dalam kerangka ini, keterbukaan terhadap perbedaan yang tampak di permukaan berdampingan dengan reproduksi hierarki kolonial yang terus bertahan, memosisikan "Liyan" Eropa sebagai pusat otoritas yang menetap.

Kata kunci: sastra perjalanan; subjektivitas bergender; memori kolonial; intimasi kosmopolitan; *Negeri Van Oranje*



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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Indonesian popular fiction increasingly turns travel, study abroad, and intercultural romance into privileged narrative sites for imagining modern subjecthood (Jaya & Pratama, 2021). Yet when these narratives unfold in the former colonial metropole, mobility never appears as an innocent experience of seeing the world (Ilma, et al., 2023). Dutch space carries sedimented histories of colonial administration, educational prestige, racialized civility, and archival authority that continue to shape Indonesian middle-class aspiration long after formal decolonization. Scholars of cosmopolitanism have shown that mobility is often celebrated as openness, worldliness, and ethical hospitality, but they have also warned that cosmopolitan aspiration can conceal social exclusion, symbolic hierarchy, and uneven access to recognition (Beck, 2002; Delanty, 2006; Skrbis & Woodward, 2007; Yeoh, 2004; Yeoh & Chang, 2001). In the Indonesian context, this problem becomes especially acute when Europe is encountered not simply as elsewhere, but as a historically charged site of desire and evaluation. For that reason, *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016) is crucial: it stages how a woman traveller's love, study, and everyday movement across Dutch space become a testing ground where colonial memory and cosmopolitan fantasy remain entangled rather than resolved.

Previous scholars have clarified important parts of this terrain, yet it have not fully addressed the problem at the center of this article. Travel-writing studies has long established that journeys produce knowledge through unequal encounters, framing the foreign world through narrative selection, embodied perception, and geopolitical discourse (Pratt, 1991, 1992; Lisle, 2006; Thompson, 2011; Culbert, 2019, Hidayah et al., 2022). Feminist critics further demonstrate that women's travel writing cannot be reduced to liberation through movement, because mobility is mediated by respectability, desire, vulnerability, and colonial discourse (Mills, 1991; Mulligan, 2000; Nestor, 2005; Short, 2015). Studies of Indonesian travel writing have started to foreground women's representation and colonial-cosmopolitan tensions (Jaya & Pratama, 2021; Akmal, 2023). By contrast, research on *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016) has mostly concerned nationalism, code-switching, or sexuality in its film adaptation rather than the female protagonist's postcolonial travel subjectivity (Yunita & Anggraini, 2020; Rukmawati & Ulinsa, 2022; Setiawan, 2018; Kurniawati & Atikurrahman, 2021). What remains underexplored, therefore, is how the novel's gendered travel narrative organizes desire, hierarchy, and



reciprocity through encounters with Dutch and non-Dutch others.

At the center of this study lies a sustained concern with how *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016) imagines mobility, intimacy, and selfhood within a postcolonial landscape that is never entirely free from inherited hierarchies. Rather than treating travel as a neutral backdrop, the article examines how Lintang's subjectivity is shaped by her movement across spaces of romance, education, and everyday encounter in the Netherlands. It also considers how scenes that appear to celebrate cosmopolitan openness may still carry the residues of colonial memory, especially when freedom and intimacy remain tied to unequal structures of value. Just as importantly, the analysis attends to those moments when relations with others begin to move away from hierarchy and toward reciprocity, however partial or fragile that reciprocity may be. To pursue these concerns, the novel is read as a travel narrative whose political force lies not only in the destinations it presents, but in the ways mobility organizes affect, moral perception, and practices of self-fashioning. Debbie Lisle's (2006) account of contemporary travel writing provides the central conceptual lens because it helps illuminate how apparently liberal and multicultural encounters can continue to reproduce colonial relations through the management of difference. This perspective is further enriched by feminist and postcolonial scholarship on contact zones, mimicry, gendered mobility, and critical cosmopolitanism (Pratt, 1991; Bhabha, 1994; Delanty, 2006; Short, 2015).

The argument advanced here is that *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016) does not simply oppose colonial memory with cosmopolitan openness. Rather, it dramatizes a more unstable formation in which cosmopolitan intimacy is desired, partially experienced, and repeatedly compromised by inherited hierarchies of value. Lintang's attraction to foreign men, her admiration for Dutch institutions, her bodily mimicry of metropolitan habits, and her recurrent moral comparison between Indonesian and Dutch social life all indicate that travel does not erase colonial discourse; it relocates it into intimate and affective registers. At the same time, the novel is not reducible to colonial repetition, because it also offers moments of reciprocity, care, and mutual usefulness, especially in friendship and post-romantic domesticity. The central implication, then, is that the novel's politics are ambivalent: it imagines cross-cultural relation as desirable and even ethically productive, yet the equality it projects remains fragile, selective, and uneven. The text therefore exemplifies a pseudo-cosmopolitan formation in which openness to difference is real, but never fully detached



from colonial prestige and asymmetrical recognition.

Lisle's (2006) work is indispensable because it reconceptualizes travel writing not as a neutral literary record of movement, but as a political technology through which the world is narrated, classified, and made legible. In this account, travel writing is shaped by a tension: it claims to register multicultural encounter in a globalized era, yet often continues to organize foreignness through older colonial grammars of comparison, distance, and tutelage. This position extends earlier interventions by Pratt (1991, 1992), who defined the contact zone as a space of asymmetrical encounter, and by Thompson (2011) and Tarkka and Martin (2024), who show that the genre is structured by displacement and by the relation between traveller and travellee rather than by transparent description. Culbert (2019) similarly notes that travel theory must grapple with the category's limits, since "travel" is simultaneously material movement, narrative convention, and ideological frame. Read together, these perspectives define travel writing as a hybrid genre where geopolitics, embodiment, narration, and value judgment converge. *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016) turns mobility into a scene where subjectivity is narratively produced.

Once travel writing is treated as a political mode of narration, its main analytical dimensions become clearer. Lisle's (2006) framework invites attention to at least six interlinked indicators: the positioning of self and other, the relation between home and away, the management of difference, the ethical rhetoric of openness, the persistence of geopolitical hierarchy, and the affective tone through which travel is remembered and narrated. Pratt's (1991) notion of autoethnographic response and contact-zone reciprocity helps identify whether encounter leads to mutual revision or merely confirms prior assumptions. Posti (2014) shows that contemporary travel writing can articulate postcolonial critique while still retaining colonial sentiment, an especially useful warning for readings of apparently progressive narratives. Din-Kariuki and van Meersbergen (2025) further argue that the decolonial turn in travel studies requires attention to exclusions embedded in the field's own conceptual vocabulary. This article reads travel-writing politics through narrative indicators such as aspirational destination choice, evaluative comparisons, bodily adaptation, emotional attachment, and the degree to which foreign encounter redistributes authority rather than merely aestheticizing it.

A second core concept is gendered subjectivity. Feminist scholarship on travel insists that the travelling subject is never abstract or universal; it is always embodied, sexualized,



classed, and regulated by cultural expectations. Women's travel writing has therefore been studied not simply as an extension of male travel traditions, but as a field in which movement unsettles domestic femininity while simultaneously reproducing imperial and patriarchal discourse (Mills, 1991; Short, 2015a, 2015b; Doran, 1998). Nestor (2005) shows that travel can function as a site of self-negotiation for women writers, yet such self-making remains bound to the politics of location and difference. Mulligan (2000) and Lawrimore (2015) likewise demonstrate that women's travel narratives frequently combine agency with compromise, critique with complicity, and intimacy with discipline. In Indonesian scholars, Jaya and Pratama (2021) argue that representations of Indonesian women in contemporary travel writing reveal mobile identities that are shaped by discourse rather than liberated from it. Gendered subjectivity, then, refers here to the way a female character's desires, judgments, bodily comportment, and emotional responses become the narrative medium through which mobility is interpreted.

The analytical categories of gendered subjectivity extend beyond identity labels into recurrent practices and affects. At least six dimensions are relevant for reading *Lintang*: first, desire, including romantic preference and aspirational attachment; second, embodiment, especially clothing, skin, gesture, and movement; third, relationality, or how the self is redefined through friendship, romance, and rivalry; fourth, discipline, meaning the regulation of time, study, comportment, and public conduct; fifth, vulnerability, including exposure to disappointment, misrecognition, and asymmetrical judgment; and sixth, voice, or the terms through which a woman narrator or focalized character evaluates herself and others (Mills, 1991; Short, 2015; Bhattacharya, 2020). Pitman (2009) adds that the desire for a reciprocal gaze is central to postcolonial women's travel writing, because it marks the difference between being looked at and being mutually recognized. These indicators are especially useful for *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016), where romantic intimacy, educational aspiration, and everyday urban mobility repeatedly translate geopolitical hierarchy into gendered feeling and self-assessment.

The third concept combines colonial memory and cosmopolitan intimacy. Colonial memory does not only refer to explicit recollection of empire; it also names the afterlife of colonial value systems in taste, prestige, institutional trust, bodily aspiration, and affective alignment. Cosmopolitanism, meanwhile, has been theorized both normatively, as openness to difference and shared humanity, and critically, as a field of exclusions structured by class,



race, and unequal mobility (Beck, 2002; Beck & Sznaider, 2010; Delanty, 2006; Skrbis & Woodward, 2007). Postcolonial literary scholarship complicates the concept further by showing that cosmopolitan identification often emerges through imperial routes, metropolitan aspiration, or the selective universalization of elite experience (Rastogi, 2006; Lewis, 2009; Horta, 2014; Bodden, 2016; Aatkar, 2020). The notion of intimacy sharpens this debate by relocating geopolitics into everyday feeling: attraction, trust, shame, forgiveness, domestic exchange, and embodied admiration can all become sites where hierarchy is either naturalized or unsettled (Barron, 2009; Tucker, 2009; Swain, 2009). In this sense, cosmopolitan intimacy is not merely emotional closeness across cultures, but a test of whether cross-cultural attachment actually suspends inherited asymmetry.

Colonial memory and cosmopolitan intimacy can be organized into four major forms. The first is aspirational cosmopolitanism, in which foreign space, foreign partners, or foreign institutions function as signs of status and escape. The second is mimetic cosmopolitanism, where belonging is sought through bodily imitation, linguistic adaptation, or disciplined self-correction; Bhabha's discussion of mimicry remains useful here, because resemblance does not eliminate hierarchy (Bhabha, 1994). The third is reciprocal cosmopolitanism, marked by mutual usefulness, emotional recognition, and a temporary flattening of self/other difference (Pratt, 1991; Delanty, 2006). The fourth is pseudo-cosmopolitanism, where the rhetoric of openness survives but the underlying hierarchy remains intact, as Posti (2014) and Akmal (2023) observe in different contexts of travel representation. These categories provide the conceptual bridge for this article: they allow Lintang's friendships, romances, and institutional attachments to be read not as isolated plot points, but as patterned travel narrative politics through which colonial memory and cosmopolitan desire are continuously negotiated.

The material object of analysis is the *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016) with particular emphasis on scenes focalized through Lintang, the only central female character. The case is delimited to narrative units in which Lintang interacts with foreign men, European educational institutions, Dutch urban routines, and non-Indonesian female companions. These units are treated as textual events rather than merely plot episodes because they condense the novel's politics of mobility into recurring sites of judgment: romance, study, transportation, bodily presentation, and domestic exchange. The analysis moves across Jakarta, Leiden, Rotterdam, and other Dutch locations named in the narrative, but it also

attends to the “home” domain in Indonesia where colonial aspiration is already formed before travel begins. In addition to the novel itself, the uploaded draft article is used as a contextual interpretive benchmark, not as a substitute primary source. This choice allows the study to remain text-centered while still acknowledging the emerging scholarly conversation around the novel’s colonial-cosmopolitan tension.

The most appropriate research design is qualitative, interpretive, and case-oriented. Rather than testing causal variables through survey or experiment, the study examines how meaning is produced through narrative form, focalization, evaluative language, and patterned scenes of encounter. This design is appropriate because travel writing and literary subjectivity are not stable external facts that can be measured independently of discourse; they are textual formations whose politics become visible through interpretation (Lisle, 2006; Thompson, 2011; Culbert, 2019). The study combines a single-case textual reading with feminist-postcolonial discourse analysis. The single-case orientation is justified because *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016) is not taken as statistically representative of all Indonesian travel fiction, but as a strategically revealing case in which Dutch postcolonial memory, female mobility, and popular romance converge. The discourse-analytic layer allows attention to how self/other relations are embedded in apparently casual descriptions, intimate conversations, and affective evaluations. The design therefore privileges depth, contextual sensitivity, and conceptual precision over breadth.

The sources of information are divided into primary and secondary materials. The primary source is the novel itself, especially passages involving Lintang’s reflections, romantic relationships, and encounters with Dutch and non-Dutch others. The selected excerpts reproduced in the novel are treated as verified textual anchors for the present article because they already identify scenes central to the argument, including Lintang’s desire for a foreign husband, her admiration for Leiden, her responses to Dutch punctuality, and her reciprocal relation with Arbenita. Secondary sources consist of scholarly works on travel writing, critical cosmopolitanism, women’s mobility, postcolonial intimacy, and Indonesian literary studies, with priority given to peer-reviewed journal articles from major indexed journals. These materials are not used to override the literary text, but to provide conceptual framing and comparative insight. Existing scholars on *Negeri Van Oranje* (nationalism, code-switching, and film discourse) is included to map the research gap and to position this article within a broader interpretive field (Yunita & Anggraini, 2020;



Rukmawati & Ulinsa, 2022; Setiawan, 2018).

Data were collected through systematic desk review and purposive textual coding. First, the novel was read repeatedly to identify all passages where Lintang evaluates foreign people, foreign institutions, Dutch habits, or her own Indonesian self. Second, these passages were grouped into a working corpus according to thematic relevance: colonial aspiration, metropolitan discipline, bodily mimicry, romantic hierarchy, and reciprocal intimacy. Third, the corpus was organized into evidence matrices that record quotation, page number, narrative context, self/other configuration, and preliminary analytical keywords. This desk-review procedure was preferred over interview or observation because the object of inquiry is a literary narrative rather than living respondents. Nevertheless, the procedure follows qualitative rigor by making selection criteria explicit and by retaining negative or complicating cases, particularly scenes where the novel departs from colonial admiration and gestures toward reciprocity. This study treats literary excerpts as qualitative data displays whose arrangement into tables and matrices helps stabilize comparison across scenes and conceptual categories.

The analysis proceeded in three stages: reduction, display, and verification. During reduction, the corpus was narrowed to passages that most clearly dramatize the negotiation between colonial memory and cosmopolitan intimacy. During display, the selected excerpts were arranged into three thematic clusters: pre-departure aspiration, hierarchical evaluation in Dutch space, and conditional reciprocity. Each cluster was then interpreted through a combination of close reading, comparative analysis, and discourse analysis. Close reading was used to identify evaluative adjectives, narrative irony, repetition, and focalized emotion; comparative analysis tracked differences between Lintang's responses to Dutch, Indian, Moroccan, Macedonian, and Indonesian figures; discourse analysis examined how narrative language reproduces or unsettles hierarchical relations between self and other (Pratt, 1991; Lisle, 2006; Delanty, 2006). Verification involved returning each interpretation to the full narrative context and checking whether alternative scenes complicated or supported the emerging claim. This step was essential for avoiding reductive conclusions and for demonstrating that the article's pseudo-cosmopolitan argument arises from patterned textual evidence rather than isolated quotation.



RESULT

Lintang’s journey to the Netherlands does not begin at the airport, nor even with the formal announcement of departure. It begins earlier, in a field of longing, admiration, and social imagination that quietly gives meaning to Europe before Europe is ever reached. The novel makes this clear by showing that the desire to go abroad is already attached to recognizable promises: the promise of prestige, the promise of intimacy with foreignness, and the promise of becoming a more valued version of the self. In this sense, mobility is not simply geographical. It is emotional and symbolic, shaped by ideas about where a meaningful future can be found and which people, institutions, and habits are worth aspiring to. The Netherlands appears, then, not merely as a study destination, but as a charged cultural sign. Reading the early scenes in this way helps situate the data in Table 1: the excerpts do not stand alone as incidental details, but belong to a deeper structure of desire through which travel is imagined, justified, and made attractive.

The novel does not present such aspirations as morally suspect, excessive, or unusual. They circulate through everyday speech, family approval, youthful fantasy, and common social expectations. That normality is precisely what gives them critical force. It suggests that colonial memory survives not only in public history or formal discourse, but also in intimate habits of valuation—within which one is taught to admire, where one is encouraged to study, and what kinds of conduct are read as signs of arrival. Lintang’s wish to move outward is therefore inseparable from a prior education in desirability, one that links romance, achievement, and belonging to the prestige of the former metropole. Table 1 should be read against this affective background. The textual evidence gathered there captures the novel’s early moral geography, where Europe is imagined less as one destination among others than as the privileged horizon against which aspiration, femininity, and social worth begin to take shape.

Textual evidence	Narrative context	Analytical indicator
“...obsesi hidupnya: cowok asing ... mendapatkan suami WNA dan tinggal di luar negeri” (p. 37)	Foreign romance is imagined before departure.	Erotic aspiration

Textual evidence	Narrative context	Analytical indicator
Leiden is approved because it will produce social admiration and prestige (p. 82).	Dutch education is filtered through family recognition.	Institutional aspiration
Dutch people will regard a foreigner as “gone local” when cycling hands free (p. 86).	Belonging is tied to mimetic bodily competence.	Performative aspiration

Table 1. Colonial aspiration before and at departure

The first cluster of textual data shows that Lintang’s cosmopolitan itinerary is prepared by colonial aspiration long before she physically arrives in the Netherlands. Three excerpts are especially revealing. The first states: *“Ironisnya, skill menari jugalah yang menjadi senjata Lintang dalam mengejar salah satu obsesi hidupnya: cowok asing ... Lintang memiliki tekad kuat untuk suatu hari mendapatkan suami WNA dan tinggal di luar negeri”* (Wahyuningrat et al., 2016, p. 37). The second records her mother’s approval of Leiden because it will *“menimbulkan decak kagum”* among social acquaintances and because the university is associated with Sutan Syahrir’s success (p. 82). The third excerpt describes bodily mimicry in Dutch everyday life: *“Biasanya orang Belanda baru akan menganggap orang asing sudah gone local jika sudah bisa mengayuh sepeda tanpa memegang setang, alias hands free”* (p. 86). As displayed in Table 1, these excerpts can be read as three linked indicators: erotic aspiration toward foreign masculinity, institutional aspiration toward metropolitan education, and performative aspiration toward local Dutch legitimacy. This data suggest that travel begins not with neutral curiosity, but with a prior structure of desire in which the foreign man, the Dutch university, and the Dutch body-in-motion already function as desirable objects whose prestige exceeds mere practical value. None of these utterances is framed as scandalous within the narrative world; they circulate as intelligible, even aspirational, components of youthful modernity.

The descriptive pattern emerging from this first data set is one of anticipatory hierarchy. Lintang does not arrive in Europe as a subject emptied of prior judgment; she arrives already trained to read the foreign as socially elevating. The quote about seeking a *“suami WNA”* positions romance not only as emotion but as mobility strategy, tying intimacy to exit, status, and symbolic distance from the national home. Likewise, the Leiden passage demonstrates that educational choice is mediated by intergenerational prestige. What



matters is not simply academic quality, but the fact that Dutch institutional affiliation can still produce admiration within Indonesian middle-class social life. The hands-free cycling passage extends this logic into everyday embodiment: acceptance appears available through mimicry, yet such acceptance depends on mastering a pre-existing metropolitan norm. Hierarchy is not always declared aggressively. It operates through admiration, aspiration, and social common sense. The pattern is therefore subtle but consistent: foreignness is imagined as improvement, Dutch institutions as validation, and Dutch habit as a credential of belonging. In descriptive terms, colonial memory first appears in the novel not as trauma, but as aspiration organized through love, education, and bodily adaptation. The novel thus builds its transnational plot on a prior moral geography in which Europe is not one destination among many, but the privileged horizon against which self-worth is calibrated.

This first pattern matters because it relocates colonial memory from formal politics into the sphere of desire. Lisle (2006) argues that contemporary travel writing often frames encounter in liberal and positive terms while leaving older hierarchies intact. Lintang's pre-departure imagination exemplifies precisely that structure. Her desire for a foreign husband is not reducible to private preference; it is narratively linked to a fantasy of elsewhere in which intimacy promises social transcendence. The Leiden passage intensifies that logic by showing how the Dutch metropole survives as a credentialed site of recognition within postcolonial domestic culture. Even the cycling scene, which seems playful, reveals mimetic discipline: belonging depends on becoming legible according to metropolitan norms. Bhabha's (1994) account of mimicry helps explain why this never becomes simple equality: resemblance can be desired and rewarded without erasing asymmetry. In that sense, the novel's travel politics begin with a gendered form of colonial desire in which femininity, romance, and class aspiration converge. The conclusion to be drawn from this first cluster is that Lintang's cosmopolitan mobility is structurally pre-shaped. Travel does not generate aspiration from zero; it activates a hierarchy already sedimented in the home culture that sends her abroad. That is why the novel's opening structure is best understood as an affective archive: colonial prestige is stored in intimate expectation and released through the language of modern female choice.

Arriving in the Netherlands does not simply broaden Lintang's horizon; it also reshapes the scale by which she reads everyday life. What had initially appeared as excitement about studying abroad begins to settle into a more persistent mode of judgment,



in which Dutch routines, institutions, and public habits are perceived not merely as different but as better. The narrative dwells on small encounters (punctuality, transport, study discipline, casual remarks about appearance) and through them constructs a world in which order seems naturally attached to Europe. These moments matter because they show how comparison works at the level of ordinary experience. No formal ideological statement is needed for hierarchy to emerge. Instead, value is produced through repetition: what feels efficient, clean, disciplined, and attractive gradually acquires moral force. In that process, Dutch space becomes more than a setting for student mobility. It turns into a normative environment that invites admiration while quietly training the traveller to evaluate herself, her habits, and her home through metropolitan measures of worth.

This shift is crucial because it reveals how cosmopolitan experience can deepen hierarchy even while appearing open, modern, and liberating. Lintang does not encounter Dutch life as a blank observer; she learns to inhabit it through comparison, and comparison soon becomes internalized judgment. Time, infrastructure, academic rigor, and bodily appearance are all drawn into the same field of valuation, so that civic order and personal desirability begin to mirror one another. The narrative, therefore, suggests that Europe's appeal lies not only in mobility or opportunity, but in its power to organize what counts as seriousness, refinement, and attractiveness. Such scenes are especially revealing when read through gendered subjectivity, since admiration is intertwined with self-fashioning: to belong is also to adjust, emulate, and sometimes diminish one's prior frame of reference. The data that follow should thus be read as evidence of a subtle but consequential process in which everyday Dutch life becomes a lived standard, and cosmopolitan intimacy begins to reproduce an unequal moral geography.

Textual evidence	Narrative context	Analytical indicator
<i>"culture shock dengan kebiasaan orang Belanda yang sangat tepat waktu"</i> (p. 87)	Dutch punctuality is contrasted with Indonesia.	Temporal hierarchy
<i>"Transportasi di sini ... jauh lebih nyaman dan tertib"</i> (p. 112)	Public infrastructure becomes moral comparison.	Civic hierarchy

Textual evidence	Narrative context	Analytical indicator
Leiden requires reading journals and constant study (p. 95); <i>“bule-bule yang ganteng”</i> and <i>“kalau item lagi”</i> (pp. 314-315, 373)	Academic rigor and beauty are aligned with Europeanness.	Moral-aesthetic hierarchy

Table 2. Hierarchical evaluation in Dutch space

The second data cluster shows that once Lintang is in Dutch space, her comparisons repeatedly organize the Netherlands as a moral and aesthetic standard. One excerpt records her reaction to Jeroen’s complaint about lateness: *“Kadang ia masih mengalami culture shock dengan kebiasaan orang Belanda yang sangat tepat waktu. Berbeda jauh bila dibandingkan on-timanya mulut Indonesia”* (Wahyuningrat et al., 2016, p. 87). Another presents her explanation to a new student: *“Transportasi di sini jangan disamakan dengan di Jakarta mas. Jauh lebih nyaman dan tertib”* (p. 112). A third passage contrasts her Indonesian university life with Leiden: *“sebagai pelajar Leiden Universiteit yang taat, Lintang tak pernah absen membaca jurnal meski pada akhir pekan ... akibat beban paper dan tugas bertubi-tubi yang dihadapinya selama di Belanda, tak ada pilihan selain giat belajar kapan pun dan di mana pun”* (p. 95). Two additional quotations extend this hierarchy into beauty politics: *“Di mana bule-bule yang ganteng?”* (pp. 314-315) and *“Sayang, kan, kalau item lagi”* (p. 373). As summarized in Table 2, the displayed evidence links punctuality, transport, study discipline, white attractiveness, and skin preservation into a single field of evaluative comparison through which Dutch space is repeatedly narrated as superior, orderly, and desirable. The straightforward: Dutch modernity is textualized here not only as a location but as a normative measure of proper living. Its authority appears quietly natural.

This second cluster reveals a broader shift from aspiration to internalized evaluation. If the first cluster showed that foreignness is desired before departure, the second shows how Dutch everyday life becomes the yardstick by which Lintang measures both Indonesia and her own body. Time is coded as discipline, transport as civic order, academic labor as seriousness, and whiteness as attractiveness. Importantly, these valuations are not confined to explicitly political statements; they are embedded in casual observations, jokes, and embodied choices. The line about punctuality converts lateness into a civilizational contrast. The transport passage translates infrastructural comparison into moral language, where Dutch systems appear *“nyaman dan tertib”* while Jakarta becomes the implicit negative. The



Leiden passage transforms academic survival into self-correction, as if metropolitan rigor exposes the deficiency of prior habits. The beauty quotations then make the pattern more intimate: aesthetic desire is directed toward “bule-bule yang ganteng,” and bodily care is oriented toward not becoming darker. The descriptive pattern is therefore cumulative. Dutch superiority is not asserted through a single ideological declaration, but through many small acts of comparison that bind social order, intellectual seriousness, and embodied desirability into the same narrative economy of value. In narrative terms, these are not disconnected impressions; they form a patterned regime of observation through which Europe is aestheticized, moralized, and domesticated as common sense. Their repetition matters analytically.

Why does this pattern emerge so strongly? The answer lies in the way travel narrative converts infrastructure and everyday routine into evidence of civilizational worth. Pratt’s (1991, 1992) contact zone is never purely dialogic; it is mediated by prior classificatory frames that tell the traveller what counts as progress, beauty, and rationality. Lintang’s responses suggest that Dutch space activates an inherited grammar in which metropolitan order appears self-evidently superior. The quotation about punctuality is especially telling because it attaches moral seriousness to Dutch time and casual inadequacy to Indonesian time. The study and transport passages extend the same logic to knowledge and public life, while the beauty quotations show how colonial valuation reaches the body through race-coded aesthetics. This is where cosmopolitan intimacy becomes deeply gendered: Lintang does not merely admire Europe from afar; she disciplines her own conduct and appearance through the standards it embodies. At the same time, the contrast between her compliance with Jeroen’s rationality and her firmness toward Tejas and Khaaled indicates that hierarchy is unevenly distributed across different “others.” The interpretive conclusion is that Dutch modernity functions in the novel as an embodied norm, not only a setting, and that Lintang’s cosmopolitan self-fashioning proceeds through repeated acts of self-inferiorization before metropolitan value. The deeper implication is that intimacy with Europe is sustained by ordinary narrative habits of comparison, and these habits quietly transform admiration into an internal social hierarchy.

What becomes especially interesting at this stage of the novel is that cross-cultural intimacy no longer appears only as admiration directed upward, nor simply as a series of unequal comparisons. The narrative begins to open a quieter space in which relation is



sustained through exchange, care, and ordinary usefulness. Lintang is not only the one who learns, desires, or measures herself against others; in several scenes, she also gives, contributes, and is valued for what she brings into shared life. Cooking, companionship, aesthetic advice, and everyday presence create a more reciprocal texture than the earlier scenes of aspiration and self-correction. Yet the tone remains deliberately modest. The novel does not suddenly replace hierarchy with a fully equal cosmopolitan world. Instead, it offers brief instances in which difference becomes livable because each person is useful, attentive, and emotionally available to the other. That is why this section matters: it captures the narrative at the point where hospitality becomes possible, even as the deeper asymmetries of value have not entirely disappeared.

At the same time, these warmer scenes invite caution rather than easy celebration. Reciprocity in *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016) does not emerge as a triumphant principle governing the whole plot; it appears in small, contingent moments, often after the pressure of prestige has weakened. When Lintang and Arbenita exchange skills, or when post-romantic civility becomes possible around Jeroen’s new family, the narrative imagines coexistence without turning difference into competition. Still, such moments remain fragile because they do not fully reorganize the larger symbolic order that has already privileged Dutchness, European modernity, and white desirability. In other words, mutual recognition is imaginable, but it is not yet structurally secure. The emotional generosity of these scenes is real, yet it operates within a narrative world still shaped by older hierarchies of admiration. Read in that light, the evidence that follows is important not because it proves cosmopolitan equality in any complete sense, but because it reveals how ethical relation survives conditionally, locally, and with visible limits.

Textual evidence	Narrative context	Analytical indicator
Arbenita praises Lintang’s cooking as “the best chicken soup, ever!” (p. 46).	Difference becomes reciprocal appreciation.	Mutual usefulness
Arbenita serves as Lintang’s “ <i>penasihat mode jempolan</i> ” (pp. 365-366).	Competence travels in both directions.	Shared competence

Textual evidence	Narrative context	Analytical indicator
Jeroen, Mieke, and baby Keith accompany Lintang's graduation; "You look beautiful" (pp. 448-449).	Post-romantic relation becomes familial civility.	Conditional reciprocity

Table 3. Conditional reciprocity and its limits

Two excerpts centered on Arbenita are crucial. First: "*Lintang baru saja beranjak dari dapur setelah selesai menyantap makan malamnya bersama Arbenita, teman serumah yang berasal dari Makedonia. Arbenita sudah ketagihan masakan Indonesia buatan Lintang ... 'the best chicken soup, ever!'*" (Wahyuningrat et al., 2016, p. 46). Second: "*Arbenita ... terlahir sebagai penasihat mode jempolan. Lintang sudah berkali-kali memanfaatkan jasanya*" (pp. 365-366). A later scene after Lintang and Jeroen have broken up states that he, Mieke, and baby Keith still come to accompany her graduation, and Jeroen tells her, "You look beautiful, Schaatje," while Mieke adds, "You really do look gorgeous!" (pp. 448-449). These passages, displayed in Table 3, differ markedly from the more hierarchical scenes discussed earlier. The restatement is that cross-cultural relation here becomes reciprocal usefulness, ordinary care, and affective continuity rather than romance as prestige acquisition. Yet the very fragility of these moments is equally striking: reciprocity appears most fully not in triumphant cosmopolitan union, but in small domestic exchanges, post-romantic civility, and mutually supportive friendship. Their importance lies precisely in this scale: the narrative can imagine ethical cohabitation, but only in dispersed scenes that never fully displace the earlier hierarchies of admiration. That tension is central to the section's evidentiary force. The pattern persists.

Unlike the scenes organized by aspiration or self-inferiorization, the Arbenita passages depict a relation built on exchange without clear civilizational ranking: Lintang cooks, Arbenita advises on style, and both forms of competence are recognized as valuable. The scene does not erase difference, but difference becomes socially productive rather than hierarchical. The graduation scene with Jeroen is more ambiguous, yet it still matters because it transforms a failed romance into a workable interpersonal ethic. Lintang's anger subsides, the new family welcomes her, and the language of beauty now circulates as affection rather than as evaluative domination. The novel does contain genuine cosmopolitan moments. However, their location is revealing. They occur when competition



over romantic possession has ended, when domestic exchange replaces metropolitan awe, or when the relationship is no longer burdened by the fantasy of foreignness as upward mobility. Reciprocity in this novel is thus modest, situational, and interpersonal. It is strongest in scenes of sharing and care, weakest in scenes where prestige, desire, or civilizational comparison dominate the encounter. The description therefore supports a mixed conclusion: the text can stage hospitality and mutual recognition, but it can do so most comfortably when the burden of prestige has receded from the scene. It never becomes the unquestioned organizing principle of the plot. The qualification matters.

Interpreting this final cluster clarifies why the article argues for pseudo-cosmopolitanism rather than simple colonial repetition. Delanty (2006) defines critical cosmopolitanism not as abstract universal goodwill, but as a transformative relation in which encounter revises both sides. The Arbenita scenes come closest to that model because each woman's skill becomes meaningful to the other without requiring assimilation into a single norm. Likewise, the graduation scene suggests that intimacy across cultures can persist after romance, becoming familial rather than possessive. Yet these openings remain partial because the wider narrative still gives greater symbolic weight to Dutch prestige, Dutch discipline, and white desirability. In other words, reciprocity appears locally, but not structurally. Lisle's (2006) warning is useful here: contemporary travel narratives often gesture toward equality while leaving the broader geopolitical architecture untouched. That is exactly what happens in *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016). Its ethical horizon is not closed, but neither is it fully decolonized. The final interpretive conclusion is that the novel's travel narrative politics are double: it imagines cross-cultural intimacy as possible and sometimes generous, but it repeatedly reabsorbs that promise into a hierarchy where the metropolitan other remains the more authorized figure of value. Pseudo-cosmopolitanism names this contradiction: encounter produces warmth and revision at the micro level while preserving unequal valuation at the macro narrative level. The novel reaches toward equality, but stops short of redistributing symbolic authority.

One important implication of the novel's early narrative pattern is that female mobility cannot be understood simply as a straightforward sign of emancipation. Lintang's wish to travel, pursue higher education, and form intimate relations across national boundaries does express a desire to move beyond the limits of domestic life. At the same time, the narrative makes clear that this desire is not formed in an empty space; it is already shaped

by the lingering prestige of the former metropole. This complicates celebratory readings of popular travel fiction as a transparent marker of cosmopolitan self-confidence in contemporary Indonesia. When the foreign husband, the Dutch university, and even Dutch bodily habits appear as desirable before departure, movement abroad becomes less a neutral encounter with difference than a passage through symbols already ordered by unequal value. As feminist scholars on travel writing has shown, women's mobility may expand personal agency while still operating within inherited hierarchies (Mills, 1991; Mulligan, 2000; Short, 2015). Read in this light, the novel not only imagines transnational possibility but also exposes a postcolonial middle-class femininity that pursues autonomy through movement while continuing to seek recognition from metropolitan authority. Cosmopolitan desire, therefore, emerges as both enabling and constraining at once.

This tension persists because Lintang's mobility is shaped by several forces working together: postcolonial memory, middle-class aspiration, and the conventions of romance narrative. Within the novel, the former colonial metropole continues to appear as a recognizable source of educational prestige, cultural sophistication, and social distinction, while the romance plot translates that prestige into intimate desire through the figure of the foreign male lover. As Delanty (2006) argues, cosmopolitanism is never simply a matter of individual ethical openness; it is mediated by social structures and cultural imaginaries. Likewise, Yeoh (2004) shows that cosmopolitan discourse often depends upon selective forms of inclusion and exclusion. Lintang's longing should therefore not be read as merely private preference. It is embedded in wider circuits of admiration that attach value to Dutch institutions and foreign masculinity. The family sphere also plays a crucial role, since it does not resist these hierarchies but helps reproduce them as ordinary and desirable. What sustains this pattern, then, is not only youthful fantasy or personal vulnerability, but the endurance of a social imagination in which Europe remains the privileged marker of achievement. Romance deepens that structure by turning unequal recognition into something emotionally intimate, personally meaningful, and seemingly natural.

A more troubling dimension emerges when cosmopolitan travel begins to function as a pedagogy of self-correction. In these scenes, Dutch punctuality, orderly transport, academic discipline, and white attractiveness are not merely described as features of another society; they gradually become the criteria through which Lintang evaluates her own habits, her home city, and even her body. The narrative effect is significant because



metropolitan authority is not asserted openly as doctrine, but diffused through ordinary impressions and everyday comparisons. What appears at first to be cultural adaptation slowly takes the form of moral calibration, where Indonesia comes to signify lateness, disorder, weaker academic seriousness, and diminished aesthetic value. This matters because colonial memory often persists most effectively not as explicit ideology, but as practical judgment and intimate taste. Barron (2009) and Tucker (2009) remind us that emotion and intimacy can carry geopolitical force, and the novel renders that insight vividly in literary terms. Yet this openness to the world remains compromised, because admiration is secured through self-diminishment. What emerges, then, is a form of cosmopolitanism marked by unequal recognition, in which expanded mobility is accompanied by a quieter devaluation of one's own origins.

This disciplinary pattern can be understood, in part, through the logic of the genre itself. Travel narrative often turns everyday practices into readable signs of collective identity, and in doing so it tends to compress difference into moralized comparison (Pratt, 1992; Lisle, 2006; Culbert, 2019). In the novel, Dutch punctuality comes to signify seriousness, transport efficiency becomes a marker of civic maturity, and white skin or European physicality is associated with beauty. Once these substitutions begin to structure perception, Lintang's responses are no longer shaped primarily by singular encounters, but by a broader civilizational script that tells her what to admire and how to interpret difference. Gender intensifies this process. Because her subjectivity is narrated through romance, embodiment, and self-presentation, national hierarchy is translated into the language of bodily discipline and intimate conduct. Her cosmopolitan formation becomes inseparable from how she studies, cycles, keeps time, desires men, and manages her appearance. What appears to be background detail is therefore central to the novel's politics of representation: it is through ordinary habits of self-improvement that colonial difference is made to feel natural, desirable, and quietly unquestionable.

Even so, the novel does not lead to an entirely pessimistic conclusion. Its scenes involving Arbenita, as well as the more civil post-breakup relation with Jeroen, suggest that cross-cultural intimacy does not always have to be structured by prestige, instruction, or erotic hierarchy. At several points, difference becomes the basis for reciprocal usefulness, everyday care, and enduring affection. This is important because it keeps the analysis from reducing the text to a mere repetition of colonial residue. Delanty's (2006) notion of critical



cosmopolitanism remains relevant here, not because the novel fully embodies it, but because it opens space for mutuality in modest, unspectacular forms of shared life. These moments have a reparative force: they show that ethical relation across difference becomes more imaginable when it is freed from the pressure of social climbing or civilizational validation. At the same time, their limits are revealing. Reciprocity appears only in scattered episodes rather than as the novel's governing logic. What emerges, then, is a partial cosmopolitan ethic, one that feels most persuasive at the interpersonal micro-level even as the larger narrative continues to be shaped by colonial prestige.

Reciprocity remains partial because the narrative allows ethical equality to emerge only under limited circumstances. It becomes most visible when exchange is practical and mutual, as in the sharing of food or fashion advice; when romance has softened into civility, as in Lintang's later relation with Jeroen's family; or when the encounter is no longer burdened by the promise of status. Once prestige returns, however, hierarchy tends to reassert itself. Posti's (2014) observation that contemporary travel writing may criticize colonialism while still preserving colonial sentiment helps illuminate this fluctuation. Bodden (2016) likewise reminds us that cosmopolitan imagination does not arise outside unequal social worlds, but within them. *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016) gestures toward an ethics of relational openness, yet it does so in a narrative field still organized by the symbolic authority of Dutchness. For that reason, pseudo-cosmopolitanism remains the most persuasive term for describing the novel's politics. The term captures both the sincerity of its openness and the persistence of asymmetry. What the novel ultimately stages is not simple hypocrisy, but a productive ambivalence that is structural, recurrent, and central to its travel narrative logic.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016) stages travel not as a break from colonial history, but as an intimate arena where that history is emotionally reorganized. Through Lintang, the novel shows that the afterlife of colonialism often survives in modest and affective forms: admiration for Dutch institutions, desire for white or foreign masculinity, trust in metropolitan discipline, and bodily investment in Eurocentric attractiveness. At the same time, the text also preserves limited scenes of reciprocal relation, especially in friendship and post-romantic care. The lesson of the



research is therefore not that cosmopolitan intimacy is false, but that it is unevenly available and easily recaptured by older hierarchies of value. What appears as openness to the world may remain tethered to the symbolic authority of the former colonizer. In that sense, the novel's ethical significance lies in its ambivalence. It reveals how postcolonial subjects may sincerely seek mutuality across difference while still carrying inherited scales of prestige into the very texture of intimate life.

This study contributes in several closely connected ways. It places Lisle's framework on travel writing in productive dialogue with feminist discussions of subjectivity and critical debates on cosmopolitanism, showing that the politics of travel narrative in popular fiction cannot be separated from desire, embodiment, and the ordinary comparisons through which self and other are imagined. At the level of method, the study also shows the usefulness of reading selected literary excerpts as qualitative evidence that can be grouped, contrasted, and interpreted across recurring patterns of self/other relation. Its significance becomes even clearer in relation to the object of study itself. By reading *Negeri Van Oranje* (2016) through the longer history of Dutch-Indonesian postcolonial memory, the article moves beyond earlier discussions centered on nationalism, code-switching, or cinematic sexuality. In doing so, it offers two important renewals: it treats a widely circulated work of popular fiction as serious cultural evidence, and it demonstrates that cosmopolitan representation in Indonesian travel fiction may be full of aspiration without necessarily producing equality. This combination of close reading and travel-politics analysis provides a more precise language for understanding gendered mobility in contemporary Indonesian literature.

This study focuses primarily on Lintang, so the male protagonists and secondary Indonesian characters are discussed only insofar as they shape her subjectivity. It also concentrates on one novel and one cluster of Dutch-European settings, which means the findings cannot be generalized to all Indonesian travel narratives without caution. The article privileges textual discourse over reader reception, adaptation history, and publishing circulation; these dimensions may further illuminate how pseudo-cosmopolitan values are socially reproduced. Future research could therefore compare multiple Indonesian travel novels set in former colonial metropolises, investigate how readers interpret interracial romance and European prestige, or analyze how film adaptation modifies the novel's gendered politics of travel. Comparative work involving other destinations (such as the



Middle East, East Asia, or Africa) would also help clarify whether the pattern identified here is specifically Dutch-postcolonial or part of a wider structure of postcolonial cosmopolitan desire in Indonesian popular culture.

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