

MULTICULTURALISM IN ALMINO SITUMORANG'S NOVEL *SPRING* Multikulturalisme dalam Novel *Spring* Karya Almino Situmorang

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Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi relasi multikultural dalam novel *Spring* (2010) karya Almino Situmorang, yang dibagi menjadi dua bagian cerita yang menjadi inti fokus diskusi. Masalah yang dibahas ialah representasi relasi dan negosiasi antara empat tokoh utama yang berbeda suku, ras, agama, dan bangsa. Teori yang digunakan adalah teori multikulturalisme yang digagas oleh Will Kymlicka. Metode yang digunakan ialah teknik pembacaan cermat. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa (1) relasi multikultural yang direpresentasikan dalam novel tersebut mencakup keberagaman yang sangat luas dan kompleks dengan berbagai macam perbedaan, (2) perihal perbedaan latar belakang kultural dan agama dapat dinegosiasikan dalam praktik kesehariannya, terutama dalam relasi pertemanan, dan (3) untuk soal pernikahan, mereka masih terikat pada standar-standar tradisi dan adat-istiadat yang kuat. Simpulan penelitian ini adalah multikulturalisme di Indonesia masih cenderung terbatas pada praktik-praktik dalam ruang lingkup pertemanan dan belum sepenuhnya membaur karena tradisi kultural yang masih bersifat kaku dan monolitik.

Kata-Kata Kunci: relasi lintas negara; interaksi antarpemeluk agama; multikulturalisme

Abstract: The research explores multicultural relation in Almino Situmorang's *Spring* (2010), which is divided into two parts of story that become the main focus of the discussion. The main issues to discuss are representations of relation and negotiation among the four main characters who come from different ethnic, racial, religious, and national backgrounds. The theory used is Will Kymlicka's multiculturalism perspective. The method is the close-reading technique. The result of the study shows that (1) multicultural relation represented in the novel encompasses a broad and complex diversity with various differences, (2) issues concerning cultural and religious backgrounds are still negotiated in daily practices, specifically in friendship, and (3) for marital aspects, they are hardly free from standard norms and customs that are still strongly upheld. The conclusion of the research is that multiculturalism in Indonesia tends to be limited to social practices in the surface sphere. Therefore, it has not completely blended because of rigid and monolithic cultural traditions.

Key Words: cross-national relationship; interfaith friendship; multiculturalism

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INTRODUCTION

Will Kymlicka, in his *Multicultural Citizenship*, reveals that from that point, the term 'multicultural' is still deemed

inadequate to embody a country's identity for it does not specifically refer to ethnicity or the origin countries of the inhabiting immigrants (Kymlicka, 1995:

12). It is then interpreted that with the absence of a neutral public space, the majority of citizens would face a difficulty in holding onto a strong standpoint when it comes to evaluating differences, as they would only be able to view everything from their own cultural perspectives. Therefore, Kymlicka prefers 'cultural diversity' as the essence of multiculturalism and intends it for encompassing not only ethnic and racial minorities but also those who differ in social strata (Kymlicka, 1995:13). He further proposes that multiculturalism should pose beyond what is commonly known as a country's condition of having citizens with various cultural backgrounds, which is embracing the entire forms of different variations that can be found within the society in order that each of them is able to gain acknowledgement as well as equal rights and obligations. Different cultural practices should always be dynamic and strong enough to uphold national identity as well as its way of life, particularly if one does not maintain a neutral public space as its foremost orientation (Parekh, 2000:3).

In Indonesia, religion has become one of its foremost cultures for decades, with six acknowledged religions altogether: Islam, Catholicism, Protestant Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Kong Hu Cu. The entrance of Christianity came from the Dutch and mostly other European missionaries during the colonisation era. It was then that Catholicism and Protestantism began to conform with the local cultures of Java, Batak, Minahasa, and Flores (Orr, 2012:138). Although until today they are still considered minorities in Indonesia, their adherents have grown quite fruitfully for the past few decades among middle-class urbans that they pose as a threat to the radical Muslims (Hoon, 2013:459). These phenomena often

spawned into religion-based conflicts particularly ever since the fall of the New Order in 1998, indicating that the country's multiculturalism is frail and therefore serves as an easy target for frictions. Still, the sentiments and common generalisations toward Indonesian-Christians are somewhat misdirected since there is a vast level of heterogeneity found within their dynamics (Hoon, 2013:459). For example, Protestant Christianity alone has several major churches such as Protestant Church of Maluku, Javanese Christian Church, Toraja Church, Protestant Church of Papua, and the Batak Christian Church as well as various minor ones (Hoon, 2013:460). In Batak (originated from North Sumatra) culture, the Protestant Christianity belief is strongly maintained until today, which is quite significantly encapsulated within the two stories of *Spring*.

Going further, Batak clan in Nusantara is divided into several ethnic groups, namely Batak Karo, Pakpak, Mandailing, Toba, Simalungun and more with their own local languages each. Batak has been known to have most of their folktales told orally rather than have them written (Kozok, 1999:15-16). They also have their own long possessed scripts or letters of alphabet with some have been translated to Latin alphabets (Kozok, 2009:15). From this point, Batak literature differs in a category according to the content of its narratives: a) *Hajajadi*, which retells the origin of anything that is plainview or transcendental (similar to *turi-turian* in Batak Toba that narrates about the beginning of humans), b) *Parsorion*, which refers to doomed fate, ill-fortune, and other unlucky circumstances, c) *Poda*, that provides life advices and pedagogical guidances, d) *Sigeok-geok*, which shows the comic sides of life (known as *torsa-torsa* in Batak Toba), e)

Tarombo, which like *Hajajadi* and *turiturian*, also tells about the origin of humans as well as Batak clans, and f) *Pangidoan*, which serves as a plea and prayer to the nature, known as poem and lyrical prose or *umpasa*, *tonggo-tonggo* and *tabas* in Batak Toba (Sinaga, 2012:17-18).

In recent years, there has been such growing interest toward studies regarding the local works of literature outside those which were published by Balai Pustaka (Wahyudi, 1998:114). This certainly includes local literature from regional areas with varying cultural ethnics, traditions and beliefs like those of Peranakan Chinese or Batak communities. Thus, the writer tries to have a research based on this fact from the multicultural perspective on the cultural and religious issues in the novel.

There are previous studies regarding Batak literature. The first is Yundi Fitrah's article discussing the local colour in Merari Siregar's *Azab dan Sengsara* novel, which is about the culture of Batak Angkola evolving around clan hierarchy, *martandang* or the tradition of visiting a maiden's house, a faith toward shamans and the spirits of the deceased, and inheritance sharing (Fitrah, 2008:5). The second is Sarmaida Sigalingging's work on a Batak Toba native folklore, *Huta Silahisabungan*, which concerns the kinship culture found within its six speech acts (Sigalingging, 2012:12). The last is Ratih Baiduri's study on injustices that often befall Batak Toba women particularly if they do not have any male sibling to defend their inheritance and position in society (Baiduri, 2015:21). What is more, the women are actually the ones who have to toil and earn money to support their family's life instead of men. As the writer has perceived from these preceding studies, most of them are focused on Batak canon literary works

and their relation to Batak patriarchal traditions. Meanwhile, multicultural issues in Batak contemporary literature have so far hardly received attention, of which the writer aims to explore in this research.

Belonging to Batak Toba lineage, Almino Situmorang is one of the Indonesian contemporary writers of romantic novels. She graduated from Universitas Indonesia, majoring in Japanese literature, and once had the chance to obtain an exchange program as a student in Soka University, Tokyo, Japan. Starting her debut in 2007, Situmorang has penned several books namely *Kau Tak Perlu Mencintaiku* (2007), *Karena Kutahu Engkau Begitu* (2007), *Sparks: Terkepung 3 Cinta* (2010), *Spring* (2010), *Senja Kaca* (2012) and *Splash* (2012). In addition to these novels, she has written several short stories published by *Femina* magazine. Currently, she is working and living in Jakarta with her family, as well as actively writing in her blog.

Spring (2010) is Almino Situmorang's fourth novel and also the sequel to *Sparks: Terkepung 3 Cinta* (*Sparks: Surrounded by 3 Loves*) (2010). It narrates two stories, with the very first chapter of 51 pages tells the life of Hide, a Japanese student who is romantically involved with Maria, an exchange student of Batak bloodline. The setting changes from Tokyo to Samosir Island in around the early 2000s. Both regard each other affectionately, but Maria is more drawn to environmental issues in her Toba village rather than embracing her feelings toward Hide. On the other hand, Hide succumbs to his emotions for her unconditionally and always tries to support Maria despite his parents' disagreement. However, in the end he is forced to accept the fact that he cannot reunite with her in matrimony for Maria is indeed an adopted child, and most importantly she is barren after having her

wombs removed in an accident while playing on the nearby river as a child. The rest of the book is taken up for Vomi and Keenan's story, whose lives are interlinked through their mutual friendship. Both are the main protagonists who moved from Jakarta to continue their junior high school in Sipoholon, the region of North Tapanuli, Sumatra, which is famous for its hot spring. Keenan Harahap has moved to Sipoholon for a year when his school welcomes Vomi, a new student from Jakarta. Like the rest of the male students in the school, he is immediately taken by his new classmate and even befriends her closely. However, he has to refrain from her eventually because of their different religious affiliations.

This study strives to discuss multicultural relation in Almino Situmorang's *Spring* (2010), which is focused on four main characters: Hide-Maria and Keenan-Vomi. For the first part, the analysis is intended for approaching cross-national relationship that happens between Hide who is a Japanese and Maria who is an Indonesian. Later, the second part deals with inter-religious friendship that is performed by Keenan, a Muslim, and Vomi, a Protestant Christian. The final part is portioned for the diversity stand of the novel which reflects the current Indonesian multicultural situation. The findings are directed within Will Kymlicka's multiculturalism principles that the only way for a diverse country to stand tall in times of upheaval is through embracing the people's cultural roots and maintaining equality between the majority and the minority.

METHOD

This research qualitatively analyzes the multicultural relation in Almino Situmorang's *Spring* (2010), of which the perspective is drawn from Will

Kymlicka. The data were collected through a close-reading technique toward the novel and then proposing arguments with the support of secondary sources such as journals and books of literary criticisms. There are two stories in the book, with the first part of the book being told from the perspective of Hide and set in Tokyo and Samosir Island, and the second being narrated from the changing perspectives between Vomi and Keenan simultaneously, set in Sipoholon (North Tapanuli, Sumatra) and Jakarta. The discussion is conducted on two stages: (1) identifying the ethnic and cross-national relationship as well as interfaith friendship in both stories, (2) identifying the cultural negotiations performed by the characters, and (3) relating the findings with the multicultural tradition and identity in Indonesia. The analysis is built through careful identification of events and languages the characters use, which contains the significant aspects of multiculturalism in them. As language is an instrument of interpretation and expression, it is only natural to pay prudent attention toward features of language which represent the ideals of the profound theme.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Multicultural relations belong to the concept of people with different cultural backgrounds who negotiate and interact with one another. Indeed, such relations can only be gained and maintained through intense cross-boundary interactions to determine it, along with the following cultural tensions that are tolerated. In this way, the multicultural relations of the four prominent characters in Almino Situmorang's *Spring* are derived from their actions as well as social interactions.

Cross-National Relationship between Hide and Maria

The initial encounter between Hide and Maria is hardly different from any other foreign students who meet and then befriend each other deeply, with both finally becoming lovers. Obstacles soon arise as Hide wishes his relationship with Maria to be more serious. It is clear to both of their families that the pair is fond of each other, but neither agrees that the relationship will have a future. Cultural bindings of certain countries, including Japan, demand comprehensive assimilation from their citizens in order to strengthen their social identities among the society (Hamamura, 2017:8). This translates as a condition when one is required to embrace every aspect of a culture in order to obtain a constant social identity among its society. On the other hand, if one only partially takes part in it, the cost will be exclusion as well as the loss of one's social stand in the society. Based on some cases in reality, couples from varying country backgrounds often have to struggle in facing cultural obstacles in which both have to negotiate things that are considered 'unreconcillable differences'.

In this novel, either Maria or Hide has the equal right to assimilate himself/herself to one of their cultures to establish their lives as a couple, but it is indeed difficult since Maria is very attached to her cultural ties. Repeatedly, she is described to take great pride in her Batak heritage, often declaring her love to her cultural origins. Below is Maria's statement of her love for Batak heritage.

"Di Indonesia, suku saya, suku Batak, terkenal paling blak-blakan, berbeda dengan budaya Melayu atau Jawa yang cenderung banyak basa-basi seperti orang Jepang," katanya suatu kali. "Suku saya kerap dijadikan perlambang

kaum kasar, sopir angkutan umum, inang-inang pasar, penggemar masakan babi yang haram, dan suku yang jago bernyanyi. Walau itu tak selalu benar"

(Situmorang, 2010:8)

"In Indonesia, particularly my ethnic community, Batak, is known for being outspoken, which is different from Malay or Javanese culture which tends to have more conventional courtesies like the Japanese," she said one time. "My ethnic community is often considered as brutes, being public transport drivers, market female traders, lovers of *haram* pork food, and good singers. Although not all of them are always correct."

Here, Maria's situation in Japan jibes with the common typical belief that every individual has the full right to express and perform his/her own cultural tradition (Kymlicka, 1995:107). For her cultural contribution as a foreign student, Maria also takes part in the Japanese culture celebration by dancing in *yukata* at the Bon Odori summer festival, but she chooses to embrace her own cultural heritage by informing every bit detail of it to Hide. Maria frequently 'promotes' her Batak inheritance to Hide in order to confirm that although she holds Japanese culture in high regard, she is still very much attached to her cultural roots. However, there are several hints showing that she tends to dislike Japanese courtesy and other certain characteristics of the culture. There have also been several times where her conversations with Hide tend to slightly degrade Japanese culture, which she views sharing conventional similarities to that of Javanese.

Being an only daughter as well as the youngest child, Maria feels obliged to be the sole caretaker of her elderly mother, since her father has died and her elder brothers have lived

permanently abroad. Even more so, she feels greatly responsible for every wrongdoing that occurs in her village, which is on the Samosir Island, since she has had the rare opportunity of pursuing a master's degree abroad. Maria struggles to make sense of the village leader who wants to keep opening *keramba ikan nila*, which is a large pond for breeding *nila* fish and a source of work for the villagers. What most of the people do not realize is that the chemical waste from *keramba* causes *eceng gondok* or water hyacinths to grow fertility on Toba Lake, interfering the biodiversity of water organisms in it as well as polluting the lake. As an expert on agriculture, Maria understands the problem well and is committed to setting things right for her home village. However, her struggles have hardly brought a real change since Maria lacks gender power and the political influence that can transform the lives of her neighbourhood.

Even more so, her ferocious act of challenging unjust practices turns out to be a distraction of desire to destroy all hopes that she and Hide can reunite in matrimony. It becomes clearer why Maria is so keen on empowering her flawed environment; it is because she sees that as her only anchor to the status of a worthwhile person in her community. Here, nearing the end of the story, Maria is more and more shown to be in denial toward the idyllic possibility of her embracing a new culture and living a whole new life in Japan. This goes the same way as Maria realizes that Hide is an only son; indeed, he would be appointed heir to his father's company and could never really leave his country and culture to live with a foreign woman. Maria has seen everything beforehand and has come to the conclusion that even in such a modern country as Japan, the people are still

strongly bound to their tradition, regardless how far the young generation have tried to disentangled themselves from it and embraced the Western life values.

When continuing her studies in Japan, Maria belongs to the minority since it is not her country of origin while Hide certainly is a local. As Maria returns to her village in Toba, she belongs to the majority while Hide is a minority. During his visits Hide shows a great enthusiasm in participating and exploring Batak culture, indicating his high level of tolerance in accepting Maria's cultural background. Still, Hide is aware of the innate warnings which he receives from his mother. Although both of them are Asians, they come from different parts of continent, with Maria from Southeast and Hide from East. Naturally, there are several points of cultural difference which cannot be easily conquered. Since Hide is still young and highly optimistic, his parents quickly see that Maria's strong ethnic, cultural and social class background will soon tear them apart. Being more mature as well as conservative, Hide's parents have had experienced that such facts cannot be easily tolerated within certain cultural boundaries, especially since both Hide and Maria were brought up closely to their own cultural traditions. This is the quote that shows Hide's rebellion that he wishes to prove that cultural boundaries can be overcome:

Aku tertawa. Aku pernah bilang kepadanya jika ayahku juga menyukai senyumnya, walau kadar suka kami tentu sungguh berbeda. Tapi, tak pernah ku-sampaikan kepadanya ucapan ibuku. Hubungan kalian seperti kisah dongeng, kata ibuku. Aku tak peduli. Ibuku tak tahu bagaimana rasanya, semua terasa indah bersama Maria. Mungkin di mata ibuku, Maria terlihat bagai eceng gondok dari versi buruk, indah

tapi adalah gulma. Dia memang menarik, tapi dia tak baik untukmu. Kau hanya terpesona sesaat, kata mereka. Dan, akan kubuktikan bahwa mereka salah. Aku sudah tak bisa hidup tanpa Maria.

(Situmorang, 2010:13-14)

I laughed. I did tell her that my father liked her smile, though our level of fondness certainly differed. But, I never told her what my mother said. *Your relationship with her is like a fairy tale*, my mother said. I didn't care. My mother didn't know how it felt, everything felt beautiful when I was with Maria. Perhaps in my mother's eyes, Maria looked like the bad version of water hyacinth, beautiful but disturbing. *She is charming but not good for you. You're just momentarily captivated*, they said. And, I will prove them wrong. I can no longer live without Maria.

Kymlicka (1995:107) argues that generally people believe the incorrect mindset that "Every individual is free to create or join various associations, and to seek new adherents for them, in the 'cultural market-place'". Initially it seems correct as there are more and more people trying to assimilate or joining new cultures through various cross-national encounters every day. However, they hardly anticipate that by joining a foreign culture, they become the minority in a new cultural society and therefore face certain limitations given by the state and the majority. As new members, the minority certainly cannot completely abandon their own cultural ties whilst trying to adapt with the majority, as "the state unavoidably promotes certain cultural identities, and thereby disadvantage others" (Kymlicka, 1995:108). Hence, they will likely beget complications of cultural clash in the future. This is the case with Maria and Hide's budding relationship.

With Hide's strong willingness to neglect these inherent facts, it is only logical that Maria herself and his parents try to discourage him from having a possible matrimony to a member of foreign culture.

What is more, the strong fundamental Asian tradition soon closes in with the foremost conventional pressure that women are expected to bear children and become the caretakers for their family. As a young girl, Maria had an accident that damaged her genital, which ruined her chance of getting pregnant. Maria quickly sees to this and therefore abandons all hopes of marriage as she is sure that her and Hide's attachment to one another would only beget misery and regret to him in the future. She foresees these defects as something that confirms her social identity as a wasted figure who certainly fails the most basic traditions and expected obligations of being a woman. In short, being an adopted daughter and a barren woman have greatly decreased Maria's value as a human being and also discarded her legitimation as a functional member of Batak Toba community. Although she is deemed a modern, open-minded and highly educated young woman, Maria still cannot escape her cultural boundaries that she is forced to thrust any hope of a normal life from her mind. Below is the statement that shows Maria viewing herself unworthy of the cultural standards of her own and Hide's:

"Tinggalkan aku, Hide. Hidupku telah dikutuk. Mungkin aku memang sudah dikutuk seperti putri ikan itu. Aku hanya anak adopsi yang tak bisa punya anak. Jika kau menikahiku, aku yang hanya anak adopsi ini hanya bisa memberimu anak adopsi. Anak adopsi mengambil anak adopsi," gumamnya, menahan tangis, berusaha tegar.

"Aku tak peduli, Maria. Aku tak peduli," sahutku.

"Tentu kau peduli, Hide. Jujurlah kepada dirimu sendiri. Kau tentu tak ingin punya satu set koleksi keluarga adopsi, 'istri adopsi dan anak adopsi', kan?" (Situmorang, 2010:49-50)

"Leave me, Hide. My life is cursed. Perhaps indeed I have been cursed like the Mer-woman in the tale. I'm just an adopted child who is unable to bear children. If you marry me—the barren girl—I will only be able to provide you with another adopted child. An adopted child who adopts a child," she murmured, holding back tears, trying to be strong.

"I don't care, Maria. I don't care," I pleaded.

"Of course you care, Hide. Be honest to yourself. Sure you wouldn't want to have a collected set of adopted family, with 'an adopted wife and an adopted child', would you?"

Upon hearing the truth that explains Maria's refusal to marry him, Hide at last fully understands their positions and social identities within each of their origins. One can live carefree and seem to be unburdened by cultural values and traditions, but sooner or later he/she has to 'throw an anchor' that can guarantee his/her identity as well as permanent stand in the society. Without it, anyone will be lost and therefore having difficulties in adapting his/her life to his surroundings. Since Maria is deemed 'unfit' to fulfill her expected roles as his life partner and biological mother to his future children, both finally has had to accept the fact that in the end each person has to succumb to his/her flows of origin or face a life of bitterness and seclusion from the society as he/she fails to meet their standards.

Kymlicka argues that with the government preferring to build its

standards based on the majority's cultural roots, then the minority is at disadvantage since they will undergo repression and exclusion of economic and political rights (1995:109). Hence, there will be no separation between ethnicity and the state (Kymlicka, 1995:113-114). Maria is fully aware of these consequences and so she purposefully expresses her reluctance and physical imperfections to Hide on many occasions since she foresees that neither she will be completely accepted in Japan nor she will have such cultural individual freedom as she does in Indonesia anymore. In short, both Maria and Hide have complete individual freedom of expressing their cultural traditions *only* when they inhabit their own home countries. Outside their comfort zones, they are powerless to determine which aspects of their culture that can be tolerated, and these difficulties hinder any possible union in marriage. Viewing that each of them has been immensely accustomed to living as the majority in Japan and Indonesia, both Maria and Hide eventually understand that none of them are able to bear the costly compensations of living eternally as the minority. All the same, even if Hide does marry Maria and live with her in Japan, in the end he will also face certain limitations from his own society since he is considered to have 'moved' into the territory of the minority, although Maria will always be the bigger bearer of cultural disadvantages.

Interfaith Relationship between Vomi and Keenan

Among the Batak society, religious belief is placed higher than any other cultural aspect, in particular regarding to its access to supernatural and social power (Pedersen, 1968:1). This means that being an adherent to Protestant Christianity, which is embraced by the

majority of Batak people, is indeed crucial for anyone who integrates to their society. As it symbolizes access to the acknowledged rights and roles of a respected member of Bataks, a person with a different religious faith will face certain obstacles in assimilating himself to the *adat* (custom-law). *Spring* provides this insight by placing Vomi and Keenan as close friends who come from Jakarta and have to adapt to the life of Batak society during their studies in the junior high school of Sipoholon, North Tapanuli, North Sumatra. The most prominent issue presented by the novel is the issue of religious minority in that small town.

If Indonesia is well-known for being a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, in Almino Situmorang's *Spring* readers gain a new perspective where Keenan, a Muslim, has to live as a minority in that town and integrate to the society where the majority of the people are Protestant Christians. Quite interesting, according to the context of the novel, in the period of 1980s the small town of Sipoholon did not possess any other religious service places than their Protestant church. Even more, the citizens of the city knew everyone well and they rarely encountered newcomers with such different cultural and religious backgrounds. That is why Vomi can hardly resist her curiosity upon finding another Jakarta newcomer who turns out to be a Muslim. Vomi's family herself is warmly accepted by the townspeople since they are also Protestants, but she realizes that Keenan's family surely has a different opinion about their position in the brand new society. Here is the quote that shows Vomi's curiosity toward Keenan's religious identity and situation:

"Keenan Harahap," sahut Vomi melengkapi. "Aku tahu kok namamu."

Aku menoleh agak terkejut. Senang. "Aku percaya memori dan daya tangkapmu bagus," desisku.

"Bagaimana rasanya tinggal di kota kecil yang tak ada masjid ini?" tanyanya kemudian.

Cerdas sekali. Dari margaku saja, dia tahu apa agamaku. "Betah," jawabku. "Tidak ada masalah."

(Situmorang, 2010:72-73)

"Keenan Harahap," Vomi chimed in. "I already know your name."

I turned, half-surprised. Pleased. "I believe your memory serves you well," I said.

"How does it feel to live in a small town with no mosque?" she asked afterwards.

What a bright girl. Just knowing from my family name, she already knew what my religion is. "I like it here," I answered. "No problem."

With restrictions given by the Christian Sipoholon society, Keenan's situation coincides with Kymlicka's concept of liberal tolerance on cultural rights. Liberal tolerance of minority rights is focused on allowing the minority to perform their internal restriction laws for their own members as well as externally protecting equality between those groups (Kymlicka, 1995:152). However, Kymlicka notes that this kind of liberalism still requires freedom within the minority group and that equality should always be maintained between the majority and the minority (1995:152). Through this narrative, Keenan is granted the 'external equality' that he is not oppressed or forced to follow the way of the Christian Sipoholon society, but unlike the rest of the people in the town, he and his family are unable to do their prayers in a mosque. The same is also proven when his classmates are planning to have a feast and

that they remember Keenan cannot consume the same kind of meat as they do. They try to provide equal compensation but at the same time reject Keenan's preferences. They refer Keenan to a specialized term for people like him and determine a cheap, less favorable food substitution for him without considering his taste in food. Here is the quote that proves the existence of external equality and also the lack of minority freedom in Keenan's case:

"Bagaimana kalau kita barbeque? Ah, tapi Keenan haram makan daging babi," kata Musa.

"Nggak apa-apa, nanti aku bawa daging untukku sendiri dari rumah," jawabku.

"Ah, jangan gitu dong. Nanti kita sediain aja makanan lain untuk parsubang," ujar Musa. Parsubang adalah sebutan bagi orang yang pantang memakan daging babi.

"Boleh. Aku pesan daging sapi, udang, dan kepiting, ya," sahutku.

"Alaaahh, buat kau sih gulamo saja!" tukas Musa.

"Gulamo?" tanyaku. "Maksudmu ikan asin, jenis ikan yang paling murah itu?"

"Eh, jangan salah, sekalipun murah, itu ikan paling gurih sedunia, Nan!" sela Vomi.

(Situmorang, 2010:122)

"What if we make a barbeque? Ah, but Keenan cannot eat pork since it's *haram*," said Musa.

"That's alright, I will bring my own meat from home," I answered.

"Oh, come on, there is no need. We will provide other food for *parsubang*," said Musa. *Parsubang* is the term for people who are forbidden to eat pork.

"Okay. Then I want beef, shrimp, and crab," I said.

"Heehhh... if it's only for you, *gulamo* will do!" Musa responded.

"*Gulamo?*" I asked. "You mean the salty fish, that cheapest kind of fish?"

"Eh, don't be wrong, though they're cheap, they are the crispiest fish in the world, Nan!" Vomi interrupted.

Indeed, Kymlicka's concept of liberal tolerance of minority rights operates significantly in the story. At school, Keenan is said to be allowed to wander freely when it is time for Christian religious lessons. Since there are no Islam teachers, he is given a standard of score seven and considered merely as a listener student. He has been treated externally equal and yet his individual freedom as a member of minority is unfulfilled for Keenan cannot freely join, learn and express his religious tradition like Vomi and Sipoholon people. Although he is freed from such obligations, that does not mean that he is free to perform his own cultural and religious traditions.

Meanwhile, feeling surrounded by such different cultural and faith situation, Keenan feels he has the chance to challenge himself by following many religious activities of the Protestant such as sitting in during religious lessons, joining the Church choir and several times visiting the Sunday churches with Vomi just to have a view toward a foreign faith. He also dislikes his authoritarian father very much that he keeps an inborn sense of rebellion toward everything his father commands him to, including religious practices. Vomi thinks that people surely deem his acts as a youth rebellion, but she is certain that Keenan only tries to develop himself to be an open-minded man who regards those who are different from him with nothing but respect. Here is the quote which shows Vomi and Keenan's interaction when discussing about the origin of Christian Nativity:

"Jangan sampai nanti aku disalahkan keluargamu karena dianggap

membuat kamu murtad lho," ucapnya berkelakar.

"Nggak apa-apa, anggap saja pelajaran sejarah," ujarku sambil mengedipkan mata. "Menarik sekali mengetahui Maria bisa mengandung oleh Roh Kudus dan Yusuf bisa menerimanya sebagai istrinya."

"Menarik atau tidak masuk akal?" tantang Vomi.

"Tidak masuk akal," jawabku."

(Situmorang, 2010:151)

"For all I care, I don't want to be blamed by your family as someone who makes you *murtad*," she said jokingly.

"That's fine, I'll consider it as a history lesson," I said lightly and winked. "Very interesting to know how Maria could bear a child by the blessings of the Holy Spirit and Joseph could accept her as his wife."

"Interesting or illogical?" Vomi challenged.

"Illogical," I answered."

Here, Keenan is shown to be neutral and open-minded, trying to see for himself what it feels like to study a different religious belief. He tries to maintain a cool and relaxed exterior in understanding the history of the birth of Jesus Christ while at the same time cannot help feeling ethnocentric toward what he considers as 'normal' or logical, which is derived from his own personal experience as a Muslim. Here, Kymlicka argues that the government and state always conform national standards based on the cultural aspects of the majority, be it languages, public holidays, state symbols and more (1995:108). Will Kymlicka and Baogang He emphasize that in Indonesia, it has become a statute law that each of its citizens is demanded to adhere to one acknowledged religious belief and that interfaith marriages (especially between Muslims and non-Muslims) are usually fraught with difficulties to the point of complete

prohibition because of their dealings with religious laws (Kymlicka, Will and He, 2005:6-7). Critical multiculturalism examines these issues carefully as a contradiction of unbalanced power within the society (Kellner, 2010:21).

That is why Keenan immediately realizes that however strong their friendship ties are and how powerful his feelings toward Vomi, they would never be successful in developing a mutual relationship without one of them sacrificing his/her religious belief. Despite being skeptical towards religion from the start, Keenan is still strongly bound by his Muslim family and does not have any other choice than keep following the same tradition. This is even more strong as Keenan shares the same fate as Hide, being an only son and heir to his father's company. What is more, unlike Hide to Maria who are still able to confess their feelings to each other (as they do not face a strong interfaith barrier), Keenan neither can express nor confess his love directly in words toward Vomi. Keenan knows perfectly that in Indonesia, religious affairs are always a number one priority that cannot be bent or broken, which is far different from the situations in Western or East Asian countries.

Below is the quote when Keenan sings at the church choir during Christmas night service and realizes that his friendship with Vomi will never grow into something mutually romantic as they face such strong cultural and religious boundaries:

Dan, sambil bernyanyi, aku menoleh ke barisan suara sopran, memandangi wajah gadis yang selalu menghiasi mimpi malamku, bersinar di atas cahaya lilin sambil menyanyikan lagu itu dengan syahdu. Kutatap wajahnya yang selalu membuatku berdebar. Aku telah lama mencintainya dan entah sampai kapan

akan terus menyimpan perasaan itu dengan tersiksa.

Mendadak kuraskan perih yang sangat menyakitkan ketika aku menyadari dengan sangat jelas, seberapa besar pun cintaku kepadanya, itu hanya akan jadi impian di siang bolong, pungguk yang merindukan bulan. Aku yakin aku dan dia sama-sama takkan pernah melepaskan keyakinan masing-masing. Walau masih dalam usia yang sangat muda, kusadari perbedaan agama di antara kami adalah penghalang yang takkan dapat kuterobos.

(Situmorang, 2010:153-154)

And, while singing, I turned to the soprano row, gazing at the face of the girl who had appeared in my dreams, shining by the candle light whilst singing the song beautifully. I looked at the face that had always made my heart flutter. I have loved her for so long and I didn't know when I would stop keeping that feeling inside.

Suddenly I felt such a pain in my heart when I realized crystal clear that, however great my love for her, it would be just a useless daydream, an unrequited love. I was certain that neither she nor I would ever give up our religious faith. Although I was still very young, I realized that the religious difference coming between us would always be a wall that I could never break.

From the quote, it is evident that Keenan is highly tolerant toward cultural and religious differences surrounding him. He is eager to try and experience interfaith encounters with Vomi and his Christian friends, but he is eventually aware that there are limitations to his tolerance. Keenan acknowledges that joining and taking part in the Christian tradition is the furthest tolerance he can afford. Beyond that, especially regarding marital decisions, Keenan claims truthfully that he is incapable of converting and adhering to a new religion which is going against his

conscience. Indeed, Vomi is also viewed to be an open-minded and objective although she, too, has the same level of tolerance in terms of religion. As religious tradition in Indonesia is still strongly performed within conservative boundaries, it is really difficult for anyone to cross them without facing severe social exclusion and denial.

In sociology, the patterns of preference in marrying into one's own community (endogamy) and choosing a spouse from the same social status (homogamy) are typically caused by the lack of group identification by the children of the mixed marriages and religious as well as law sanctions (Kalmijn, 1998:401-402). Indeed, they especially depend on one's sense of belonging to one's own culture. The stronger they are, the less likely a person is going to marry exogamously. This is still a strong culture-influenced practice in Indonesia, with its *adat* (local ethnic-based laws and customs) which dictates actual marriage behaviour (Butthenheim and Nobles, 2009:2). It has persisted since the twentieth century during the transformation of Indonesia's social and economic condition until the twenty first century, where globalization triggers some parties to be more persistent in strengthening their cultural ties through marital practices. Such is the case with Malaysia, mixed marriages in Indonesia, both interfaith and interethnic, indicate a 'loss' of a cultural member although it is mostly concerned with a change of religious affiliation (Embong, 2001:73). What is more, since Indonesia is the biggest Muslim-populated country, they strongly adhere to the *sharia* laws which prevent them from marrying and converting to another religious belief since it is considered *murtad*, an "apostasy" (Embong, 2001:74). Indeed, this explains why Vomi and Keenan would never likely to have a possible future

together, since they are bound by these endogamy and homogamy practices. This shows that cultural traditions, particular religious practices, are not liberal in their tolerance since mixed marriages are seen as a violation toward their codes and laws (Kymlicka, 1995:156).

Indeed, multiculturalism endorses all differences that belong to each member of the society but tends to lack a neutral public sphere that should become a centre of guidance standard to the lives of the people, which is why it is difficult for many to put issues in a neutral perspective. Since the people who come from the cultural majority group are in control of the government, they become leading patrons in defining the way of life of the society. Therefore, it is only natural that they expect others to make transformations and affiliations if they wish to be truly accepted as rightful citizens worthy of equal rights and obligations. The condition is indeed critical and serves as an easy target for segregation and discrimination, but multiculturalism is highly needed to empower those who are subordinated.

In Indonesia, schools indeed play such a significant role in determining cultural transmission that formulates individual's cultural and religious identity (Hoon, 2011:403). They provide the basic education that will set the 'permanent' cultural as well as religious identity of the students, such as Christian schools (Hoon, 2011:403). Still, a careful and deep understanding toward these 'Christian' identities is required to maintain a harmonious relationship, as they cannot be simply perceived homogeneous (Hoon, 2016:414-415). With a long history of religious conflicts, Indonesia is in need of a new social and cultural understanding which should be deeply taught from the roots of early education. Based on the findings from

multicultural perspective toward Almino Situmorang's *Spring* novel, it is true that generally most young people in Indonesia are indeed far more supportive toward inter-ethnic as well as interfaith friendships than inter-religious marriages (Parker, Lyn, Hoon, and Raihani 2014:467). This is most strongly proven in the way Vomi and Keenan's relationship is presented.

Moreover, with the fast growing population of Muslims all over the world (Jones, 2006:244) and intense sentiments from many Western countries such as the United States of America and European countries, the necessity for multicultural comprehension and tolerance has never been greater. Immigrants in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Europe also need to adopt a resilient cultural prestige while most of them being underclass so that they can uphold their cultural identity within their new inhabited country (Van Den Berg, 2004:197). These situations are also similar to Indonesia, with around 300 ethnic groups and vast-varying cultural backgrounds to embrace, the people need to have resilient cultural prestige to strengthen its multicultural *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika's* 'unity in diversity' values, which can be implanted in schools for the young generation from an early age (Parker, 2014:487 and Raihani, 2014:541). Relating to the findings of the novel, cultural identities based on multicultural tradition in Indonesia tend to be 'rigid and monolithic' in which many still feel obliged to attach to their strong cultural roots (Budiman, 2011:233). Somehow these facts have prevented the creation of a solid intercultural understanding between different ethnic society members in Indonesia, and therefore the country is generally prone to conflicts and cultural clashes.

CONCLUSION

Multicultural relations in Almino Situmorang's *Spring* provide a deep insight toward the importance of building strong understanding and friendship that occur among people with different ethnic, national and religious backgrounds. Still, multiculturalism in Indonesia has certain limits in the way of customs and traditions are conducted in the present-day Indonesia, especially concerning marriage affairs. Maria and Hide's cross-national relationship shows that many states conduct their government policies based on the cultural values of the majority and they do not fully accommodate the freedom rights of the minority and equality between the minority and majority. This results in the social exclusion of both the minority and majority when they try to bridge their disparaging 'territories'.

However, from Vomi and Keenan's interfaith relationship, it can be concluded that Indonesia's biggest intolerance is still about interreligious relationship. Although with its multicultural nature Indonesian people are always encouraged to strengthen their bond in interfaith relationship, it rigidly stays on the surface level. These complexities arise since Indonesia still sees that mixed marriages, whether they are interfaith and interethnic, are considered a 'loss' for certain cultural communities as well as a violation toward religious codes and laws. They also tell that cultural tolerance has strong limits toward each member of every cultural community, which is shown by the communities putting on social sanctions toward those who dare to breach their *adat*.

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