

## Virtuality of Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Eyewitness* as a Work of Magical Realism

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### ABSTRACT

In the authoritarian regime of the New Order (NO), news regarding Indonesian colonization and massacres towards East Timor could not be openly published. Seno Gumira Ajidarma who is actually a journalist had to convey his testimony through literary media instead of journalist report, particularly in the short stories collected in *Saksi Mata (SM)* (*Eyewitness*). The inquiry centers on the question: by what narrative strategy does Ajidarma convey the testimony? Since it is apparent that he uses magic realism technique to tell the stories. This raises the question of how the global genre made to be relevant to national political issue. This paper focuses on the strategy used by Ajidarma to communicate what could not be openly expressed, along with its ideological implications. By applying Aldea's virtuality theory of Magic Realism, which is based on Deleuzian ontology, this research finds that the short stories in *SM* employ magical realism virtuality to solve the problem of expression that is repressed by the NO. This enables them to achieve both relative and absolute deterritorialization of the knowledge system controlled by the NO regime in East Timor. Relative deterritorialization is conducted by transforming the identity of the narrator-character to a narrator that transcends the boundaries of NO identification, while absolute deterritorialization is conducted by linking the characters directly to the abstract creative power of Being through the "flute art" that continually to move without sound and words, dragging and displacing all categories of the actual world.

**Keywords:** New Order Regime; magical realism; actuality; virtuality; deterritorialization

### INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the narrative strategy chosen by Seno Gumira Ajidarma (Ajidarma) in writing a short story collection, *Eyewitness* (originally is *Saksi Mata* and hereinafter abbreviated *SM*), which can be ascertained to be the first short story written in magical realism (henceforth MR) genre in Indonesia. This short story collection, first published in 1994, shows the delay in Indonesian literature's following the MR boom worldwide. In her work entitled "The Global Life of Genres and the Material Travels of Magical Realism," Mariano Siskind (2020) states that in 1940-1970, in Latin America, MR was recognized as an emancipatory cultural discourse capable of expressing the historical particularity of the region and the desire to establish historical and aesthetic independence from European modernism. The movement, which began regionally, has expanded globally in recent years, particularly with the 1967 publication of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. There is a huge gap between the use of MR in Indonesian literature and the its global boom, spanning at least 34 years. *SM* was published when

MR had become an established genre of world literature, which was accepted passively and actively by the world's literary community, particularly those from former Western colonized countries.

This delay seems to have been caused by two possible reasons: (1) the condition of information technology in the 1980s, which was not as advanced as it is today, making it difficult to access world literary works, especially for the Indonesian literary community, including Ajidarma himself; and (2) the genre of magical realism contains two characteristics that are relevant for Ajidarma to narrate Indonesia's oppression of Timor-Leste. This second relevance includes two tendencies: (a) a strong association between this genre and Spanish cultures, which had a significant influence on Latin American and Timorese cultures, both of which were colonized by Spain for a relatively long time, and (b) the magical element, which is an essential aspect of the genre, allowing Ajidarma to obscure prohibited information regarding Indonesia's oppression of the region.

In the early days of its emergence, *SM* was very popular nationally and internationally. The collection gained its popularity mainly due to its relation to at least two factors; namely, the media depoliticization carried out by the authoritarian NO<sup>1</sup> regime and the story content that touched on a very sensitive political issue at that time, namely the issue of Indonesia's occupation of East Timor, which was originally a Portuguese colony<sup>2</sup>. In conjunction with the first factor, *SM* emerged as a smart solution for journalists operating in a depoliticized media environment to convey sensitive political events to the public. Due to the very strong media self-censorship, as a journalist Ajidarma was unable to convey his direct testimony reports on the political situation of East Timor to the public through the media where he worked. Such an experience seemed to make him so depressed that he later recounted it through literary works, specifically the short story in *SM* above. In an essay entitled "Life of Literature in the Mind," first published in *Kompas Daily* on January 3rd, 1993, Ajidarma openly presented the background of writing this short story collection. This article opens with a statement that has come to be known as the author's credo, namely, "when journalism is silenced, literature must speak" (Ajidarma, 2005).

It seems that the relationship between *SM* and political issues has made not only the work in question but also the author popular. Ajidarma was invited to various national and international forums to discuss the political context of his works.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that a year after

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<sup>1</sup> According to them, David T. Hill and Krishna Sen (2005), the licensing and supervision system of the New Order regime (ORBA) was in fact a continuation of the system that prevailed in the previous regime, namely Soekarno regime, which the New Order referred to as the Old Order regime (*Orde Lama*/ORLA), particularly during the Guided Democracy era (1957-1965). Like other authoritarian regimes around the world, the system is intended "to ensure that the government had the authority to remove publications deemed a threat to security and order but also to control ownership in the industry." At the beginning of the New Order's rule, the Government banned 163 newspapers that existed under the previous regime. In 1974, immediately following the anti-Japanese and anti-Government riots in Jakarta, twelve publications were banned, journalists arrested, and dozens of them fired from their jobs in the media industry. After showing sympathetic reporting of the student protests that took place in 1978, Jakarta newspapers and seven student publications were banned. Along with the development of the media industry, in the 1980s relatively few media had their Publishing Business Permits (SIUP) revoked (Hill and Sen 2005: 20-21). According to Hill and Sen, this is related to the growth of the media industry which "forces" the Government to implement a policy of openness in the journalism field. In line with the growing awareness of "free press" in society, in 1994, ORBA again demonstrated its authoritarian attitude by banning three leading news magazines, which was followed by street demonstrations and long resistance. The repression of the media above is supported not only by legal grounds, but also by institutions, which include the centralization of a single journalistic organization, the Indonesian Journalist Association (PWI), which is under the control of the government. Although with certain variations, applies not only to print media, but also to radio and television.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed description of Indonesian occupation process since 1976 of East Timor, which was originally a Portuguese colony, can be found, among others, in the writings of Robert Lawless (1976) in the Asean Survey which JSTOR republishes online at the <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2643535>.

<sup>3</sup> Most of his writings published in the book *Ketika Jurnalisme Dibungkam Sastra Harus Bicara (When Journalism is Silenced Literature Must Speak)* were originally presented orally (Ajidarma, 2005). For example, they were presented at the Asean Writers Workshop in Bangkok, Thailand on September 26th, 1997; IKIP Muhammadiyah Jakarta on November 28th, 1993; Lecture Series and Discussion in University of Victoria on February 4th, 1999, University of British Columbia on February 10th, University of Washington, February 11th, and Takeshi Kaiko Memorial Asian Writers Lecture Series on February 20th, 25th, 27th. Bodden (1999) says that *Eyewitnesses* and *Jazz, Perfume, and Incidents* earned Ajidarma

its publication, the previously mentioned short stories collection was translated into English and published in Australia by ETT Imprint under the title *Eyewitness* (Ajidarma, 1995). At the same time, it was translated and published by the same institution, an article which served as an introduction to the short stories collection in the English version, entitled "*Jakarta Jakarta & the Dili Inciden*:"<sup>4</sup> *A Context for Eyewitness Short Story Collection*."

Most studies on the short stories collection, either directly or indirectly, tend to be one sided by giving least attention to the aesthetic aspect of the works, focusing instead on the political issues. Michael H. Bodden (1999) discusses not only *SM*, but also the entirety of Ajidarma's works as acts of resistance against the New Order regime's authoritarianism, as what Ferdinal indicated by restricting himself to *SM* as well (2013). Tirto Suwondo (2009) makes a statement similar to those made by Muhammad Rizky Asrul and Yasnur Asri (2019). In short, *SM*'s involvement in East Timor's political issues appears to have influenced the researchers' perception of Ajidarma's works as a whole. Studies on the works of these authors are nearly always associated with political issues, whether in the form of resistance, criticism, counter-hegemony, and deconstruction, not only in relation to social realities in the NO era but also in the Reformation era. For example, Nurhadi's study of short story "*Iblis yang Tak Pernah Mati*" (The Devil Who Never Dies) (Nurhadi, 2004); Yulianeta and Halimah's analysis of Ajidarma's nine short stories which even have a religious and romantic theme (Yulianeta and Halimah, 2020); S. Prasetyo Utomo's article about the novel *Kitab Omong Kosong* (The Book of Nonsense) (Prasetyo Utomo, 2017); Arif Kurniar Rakhman's on the short story "Clara" (Rakhman, 2014) which is also discussed by Nandy Intan Kurnia, Burhan Nurgiyantoro, and Ciny Elsa Fitri (2021) and Muhammad Rifa'i's on *Penembak Misterius* (Mysterious Shooter) (Rifa'i, 2019).

It is not to say that the researchers above overlooked the aesthetic components of these authors' works. Bodden (1999), for example, makes the following reference to the aesthetic issue:

"Yet, it would be misleading to see Ajidarma's work as simply a register of resistance and dissent. For Ajidarma's stylistic peregrinations are also those of an extremely productive and creative cultural worker who is constantly seeking new ways to tell stories, to bring feelings and moments of reality to presence in fiction. One need only read the stories collected in *Negeri Kabut*<sup>12</sup> to get a sense of the way in which many of Ajidarma's stories are experiments in expanding the range of ways in which modern Indonesian fiction can convey a broad spectrum of human experiences. Ultimately, the combination of these aspects makes Ajidarma a very exciting writer, one whose efforts in the years to come should be worth watching."

According to Bodden (1999), Ajidarma was one of the pioneers in creating postmodern works that depict the world as fragmented and decentralized, making them an effective tool for resistance to the NO's totalitarianism that is among other things, which is defined as a centralized system of government with total subservience of citizens to the state. By examining Ajidarma's works from a postmodern aesthetic perspective, Andy Fuller (2011) expresses a similar view in his book which is originated from his master's thesis. Ferdinal (2013) identifies *SM* as a political allegory while Tirto Suwondo (2009) considers that referentiality does not cause *SM* lose its aesthetic quality. However, none of the above researchers saw *SM* as magical realism works. Bodden (1999) does mention a little about this, but he tends to think of it as a genre similar to other

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the respect of his contemporaries as well as activists and students. Ferdinal (2013) said, "His literary career rocketed after he was threatened with being banned for publishing the humanitarian facts of the 1991 Dili massacre his team gathered in East Timor."

<sup>4</sup> The so-called Dili Incident is the massacre carried out by the Indonesian military on November 12th, 1991 against unarmed demonstrators in Dili. The incident, according to John B. Hasemann (1995) killed about 100 people. Peter Carey (2003) places this event in the third phase of Indonesia's occupation of East Timor, a phase that marked the local community's awareness of the New Order's authoritarianism after going through two previous phases, the phase of military conquest from 1975 (1975-1979) and partial consolidation phase (1979-1989).

non-realist literary genres, such as absurdism, which is "breathtaking reversals of everyday logics and causality." This approach is insufficient for explaining the specific aesthetic, political, and even philosophical dimensions of MR as a whole. Therefore, this article tries to look back at the short story in *SM* as MR works with their unique problems and effects, both in the context of philosophical tendencies, as well as particular, political, and aesthetic ones.

As a work of magical realism, *SM* can be examined from various possible perspectives, such as spatial (Upston, 2009; Yee Jansen, 2017), dialogic (Mirmusa, 2014), narratological (Ali and Mohd. Ramli, 2019), critical regionalist reading (Winstein Hibbs, 2019), postmodernism (Myers, 1997; Pessó-Migeul, 2007; Ward, 2019), postcolonial (Ganapathi-Dore, 2000; Upston, 2004; Barnsley, 2014; Wilson, 2018), and feminist (Jenkins, 1994). Upston views works of magical realism as efforts by postcolonial authors to deconstruct the absolute colonial space that rigidly shapes and simultaneously controls the identities of colonized societies. Mirmusa perceives magical realism as a narratologically carnival-like work, resonating various voices dialogically, particularly the realist and magical voices. From a postmodern perspective, Myers interprets magical realism as diverse signifiers, which, however, only signify the blurred traces of the collapse of multicultural civilization. Ganapathi-Dore understands works in this genre as postcolonial efforts to reconcile the West with the East through a metamorphic process that produces subjects who have lost their roots. Jenkins regards magical realism as women's endeavor to reclaim their strength through the myths of their homeland. All of this reveals two fundamental tendencies: (1) that works of magical realism offer a construction of a new world that is distinct from or in opposition to the homogeneous construction of the realist world, and (2) that this new world construction points to specific historical contexts, including colonial politics, patriarchy, modernism, semiotics, and aesthetics. Grounded in Deleuzian ontological philosophy, Aldea connects magical realism not only with the particularities of historical experiential worlds termed actualities but also with the universality of abstract human energy referred to as virtualities, situating the literary genre within a dialectical relationship between specific territories and the movement of deterritorialization, beings with Being.

### MAGICAL REALISME IN DELEUZE'S ONTOLOGY

MR as a mode of narrative became highly popular worldwide starting in the 1980s/1990s, particularly since the publication and the reissue of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* for any reason (Bowers, 2005; Warnes, 2009; Siskind, 2020). As will be discussed later in this paper, this popularity is related to its postcolonial significance. Since that decade, MR works have not only been sold and translated globally but also notably encouraged the spread of production centers or creation in various countries, especially postcolonial ones such as Africa, India, Canada, and New Zealand. However, due to such popularity, MR works that are intended to be postcolonial ones have also been produced by not only immigrant writers from postcolonial countries but also by Western local writers who are supposed to be colonizer. Furthermore, MR works are also subject to capitalism, which is considered a fundamental aspect of colonialism, by entering the realm of film industry (Bowers, 2005).

Due to this quick and pervasive expansion, MR then undergoes ongoing changes and dissemination of meaning, making its definition both culturally and politically is undecided and challenging. As with their respective selections of understanding, this development has also made scholars try to construct the history of the literary genre and even its formal characteristics in

different ways. Nonetheless, in my opinion, there are at least four points that most scholars tend to agree regarding the historical trends as well as the formal characteristics of the genre. First, that new genre experienced rapid and global development in what Bowers (2005) refers to as the third period of magical realism, namely since 1955 in Latin America (Bowers, 2005; Aldea, 2011; Hart and Ouyang, 2005; Sasser, 2014). Second, the works that are considered canonical, which simultaneously sparked the global spread of MR, are Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children*, both of which have also received high awards in academic circles (Aldea, 2011; Hart and Ouyang, 2005). Third, almost all studies on MR show that the essential characteristic of the genre is the combination of two elements which are inherently contradictory namely realism and magic, as implied by the genre's name. Fourth, the area of distribution, reception, and production or reproduction of the genre is mostly in post-colonial countries. All of these points indicate that conjunction of the magic and the real is an essential element of MR's form or text while postcolonial history is an essential element of its' context.

Aldea (2011) provides an exploratory overview of various experts' discussions on MR, which focuses on the real and the magical relationship. Some of the experts whose views she discusses in her book entitled *Magical Realism and Deleuze: The Indiscernibility of Difference in Postcolonial Literature* are Roberto Gonzales Echevarria, Brenda Cooper, Jean-Pierre Durix, Fredrik Jameson, Louis Fredrick Aldama, Theo L.D. Hean, and Linda Hutcheon. Beside them David Neo's dissertation (Neo 2010) is also interesting to be involved in this case. Although his dissertation, which is entitled *The Cosmopolitics of Magical Realism in Cinema*, focuses his interest to late development of the genre of magical realism, that is, magical realism cinema and its relation with contemporary global cosmopolitan politics. Neo does not only discuss the cinema but also its entire historical background concerning with history of the genre and some theories on it. In his discussion about the difference between genre magical realism with the fantastic one, he gives an impression that the essential elements of magical realism work are the real and the magic and their relation each other. In this case he, based on Bowers' Glossary, defines "magical realism" as "was used to refer to narrative art that presents extraordinary occurrences as an ordinary part of everyday reality." Furthermore, based on both Irlemar Chiampi's work, he said that what is called Marvellous Real "contains the "effect of enchantment" where the unusual is incorporated into reality". He also discusses Amaryll Beatrice Chanady's work about the difference. According to him Charnady comprehends magical realism as the way to solve antinomy between the real and the magic by simply including the second into reality.

However, Aldea asserts that none of them succeed in overcoming the antinomy between the real and the magical above, which is necessary to develop a unified understanding of MR. Even if an attempt is made to overcome the antinomy, as Amaryll Chanady and Robert L. Wilson have done, the effort is caught in two separate approaches between textual and contextual ones (Aldea, 2011). A similar trend applies to the placement of MR in a post-colonial context that tends to be contextual, particularly in socio-cultural and geo-political contexts, ignoring the textual issues of the above literary genre.

"Slemon thus concludes that magic realism can be seen to 'comprise a positive and liberating engagement with the codes of imperial history and its legacy of fragmentation and discontinuity' (MRPD 422). Slemon's view is echoed in recent major publications on magical realism. In her 2004 study of magical realism, Wendy Faris argues that the genre is 'a narrative inscription [that] begins to transfer discursive power from colonizer to colonized, to provide a fictional ground in which to imagine alternative narrative visions of agency and history'. Novelists such as Rushdie and Ben Okri use 'their magic against the established order' and '[this] use of magic often

ultimately highlights the historical atrocities narrated in them'. Also note Wen-chin Ouyang's unambiguous statement in his introduction to the section on 'The Politics of Magic' in the 2005 Companion to Magical Realism: 'Magical realism is inherently political concerned [sic] not only with the continuing influence of empire in the postcolonial world but also with the corruption of political authority set up in postindependence nation-states, not to mention the attendant cultural politics that partake in the formulation of a plausible postcolonial national identity'

(Aldea, 2011, p. 4)

It is for these two reasons that this paper intends to overcome the antinomy between the real and the magic of *SM* and its textual and contextual dimension.

Based on the problems, Aldea proposes what she terms the "Giles Deleuze Ontology" which, according to her, can provide a theoretical framework to comprehend the problem (Aldea, 2011). Being or the real, for Deleuze (in Aldea, 2011), are characterized by two conflicting yet inseparable aspects, namely the actual and the virtual. The actual refers to entities that exist within the dimensions of space and time, encompassing both matter and form, while the virtual represents an abstract and potential multiplicity that presupposed by the space and time. The virtual is the power of Being, manifested in the multiplicity of beings that constitute the forms or modes of immanent Being, which is self-determining and determined, univocal or singular. As a manifestation of Being, the multiplicity of beings in the actual realm is illusory as its existence depends on another, mediated, whereas the virtual exists directly, unmediated. The difference in the actual realm is a difference between things that depends on pre-existing definitions or notions and on the identity of the things themselves, thus being extrinsic. In the virtual realm, however, it is difference-in-itself.

Aldea notes that Deleuze places significant emphasis on the virtual in understanding reality. A perspective of reality that only considers the actual leads to error and illusion since it reduces the infinite potential of the virtual to a simple possibility or system. The expansion of the virtual into the actual always involves delays of the virtual. Virtual difference-in-itself transforms into specific difference, subsequently elevating the importance of identity over difference. Nevertheless, through the actualization of the virtual, the system of the actual simultaneously makes the virtual actual, rather than remaining purely abstract and potential. Aldea asserts that the central theme of Deleuze's project is to reject and correct the misconceptions of the world based only on the actual.

In order to overcome the "illusion of representation" caused by actualization above, Deleuze employs what he terms counter-actualization and counter-effectuation of the actual. Through these processes, the actual is reconnected, communicating again with the virtual. Since, according to Deleuze, the real contains an element of the virtual, an excess that cannot be fully actualized systemically by the actual. Counter-actualization itself is the act of reaching the full potential of reality or, on a personal level, the achievement of full freedom. In other words, counter-actualization is essentially an act of redemption (Aldea, 2011), a movement from the actual into the virtual, which represents a univocal existence, which is impersonal, apolitical and aspecific. The possible models of redemption include "counter-actualization, the process of becoming-imperceptible, and absolute deterritorialization".

Deleuze's definition of deterritorialization is complex. Aldea's applies this term to various systems, such as political system, language, and discourse. In the context of political system, it manifests, for example, in the phenomenon of social and political revolution, which is a movement to transcend the prevailing social and political system. According to Deleuze (Aldea, 35), language is territorialized when it is organized, codified, conceptually, socially, and politically to form a "major language". Conversely, a "minor language" is deterritorialized when it is appropriated by a

“minor literature” in which it “stops being representative in order to now move towards its extremities or limits”. Magical realism does not fully achieve the deterritorialization of language since it depicts the magical through realist elements. However, according to Aldea, the genre succeeds in deterritorializing discourse due to its hybrid and fragmented nature. Considering the definition of territory as any established and codified system—whether conceptual, linguistic, or social—as indicated in the paragraph below, my argument is that the real and the magical can be interpreted as two contradictory elements within the meaning systems of modern culture. Historically, modernization has fundamentally represented as a movement to eradicate all forms of irrationality, myth, and superstition. By reuniting these two elements of meaning, magical realism emerges as a form of deterritorialization.

According to Patton (2012), the complexity of Deleuze’s political ontology is evident from the complexity of his concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Deleuze defines deterritorialization as “the movement or process by which something escapes or departs from a given territory, where a territory can be a system of any kind: conceptual, linguistic, social, or affective”. Conversely, reterritorialization refers to “the ways in which deterritorialized elements recombine and enter into new relations in the constitution of a new assemblage or the modification of the old.” Furthermore, Patton (2012: 208-209) suggests Deleuze’s categorization of deterritorialization, namely negative and positive deterritorialization on the one hand and relative and absolute deterritorialisation on the other. The former is a deterritorialization where its elements are subject to reterritorialization that obstructs or restricts their flight path, while the latter manages to win against forms of reterritorialization and can even intertwine itself with other elements of deterritorialization to expand its trajectory and even form entirely new sequences. Radical deterritorialization refers to the virtual realm, to pure events and becoming, whereas relative deterritorialization is limited to the actual realm, encompassing historical and embodied events and processes.

Deleuze’s ontology above provides new perspective in understanding the relationship between magical realism and postcolonialism. In this new perspective, the magical is placed as equivalent to the virtual, while the real is equivalent to the actual. The postcolonial context of magical realism is understood as manifestation of the actuality that must be transcended to enter into virtuality through counter-actualization.

### ***SAKSI MATA AS A MAGICAL REALISM WORK***

From the thirteen short stories in this collection, only three demonstrate a strong tendency towards magical realism, as evidenced by the presence of magical elements. The three short stories are “*Saksi Mata*” which is also the title of this collection, “*Telinga*” (Ears), and “*Misteri Kota Ningi* atau The Invisible Christmas” (The Mystery of Ningi City or The Invisible Christmas).” The magical events in the first short story is blood that is flowing continuously throughout the city from eyes of an eyewitness that no longer has eyes and a dream that comes true. In the second one, a large number of earpieces hang in the living room, which also constantly dripping blood on the floor, while in the third one, the appearance of so many invisible people roaming the city, whether in the house, on the street, or in the market place. All magical events and things are narrated in a realistic narrative mode, which seems to be integrated with the reality of people's daily lives who become the social environment of this magical presence. The following quote is an example of them.

"Dewi then hung the ears in the living room. When the wind blew through the windows and doors, the ears that were hung by a string sway slowly. The guests who come were always wondering.

"Whose ear is that?"

And Dewi always answered.

"Oh, that's the ears of the suspected enemy spy, my boyfriend sent them from the battlefield as a keepsake."

Sometimes, when Dewi missed her boyfriend, she looked at those ears alone at night. The blood on the ears hadn't dried yet, they were still wet, so wet they dripped on the floor sometimes. Dewi sometimes also felt that the ears were still alive, and moved, as if they were still able to hear the sounds around them.

"Ears of spy, anyway," thought Dewi, "Always want to keep eavesdropping."

Every morning, after waking up, Dewi moped the living room floor which was red from the blood dripping from the ears. Not too much actually, but on the glossy white marble floor, of course the red drops of blood are quite disturbing."

(Ajidarma, 1994, p. 14)

Due to the detail with which it is presented, such an empirical account of everyday life facts, the magical becomes as real as everyday life. As it is, the narrator describes it in a neutral tone. The story's magic is not portrayed as extraordinary, strange, or surprising. When Dewi received a package in the form of bleeding ears from her boyfriend for the first time, she did not show any surprise. She received it as she received an ordinary souvenir, which was used as a keepsake. In other words, the magical elements and events above are harmoniously aligned with the "laws of nature" as defined by positive (rational and empirical) way of thinking. However, these things and events can still be distinguished from the real, the actual that is not in accordance with the "laws of nature" above. The amalgamation of the real with the magical represents a juxtaposition of two unrelated, incompatible elements, which violates, and at the same time transcends the real, the actual. This juxtaposition triggers thinking about the other, moving in the virtual direction, which is universal in kind, in order to return to the actual or contextual one, to solve the actual problem.

Although it does not explicitly demonstrate a quality of magical realism, the short story "Rosario" paints a picture of the movement from one world to another, which is the virtual. The short story tells of a doctor who is surprised at a patient's attitude. In the patient's stomach there was a rosary, but the patient immediately stuttered as soon as the doctor asked about the history or the reason for the insertion of the object in the patient's stomach. Even if the patient began speaking, he spoke only one word: "bayonet", 'a blade that may be fixed to the muzzle of a rifle and used to stab an opponent in hand-to-hand fighting'. The doctor was perplexed by the connection between the rosary and the bayonet. He could not anticipate a response from his patient, as the patient passed out shortly after uttering the above remarks. When the doctor inquired about the relationship with a nurse, the nurse added another irrelevant word, graveyard, which contributed to the doctor's confusion. The nurse advised him to inquire at the cemetery. In other words, the short story above connected three unrelated events, which ultimately led the doctor to consider something he had never considered before, which are the mystery surrounding the city he had just resided in, which was filled with disjunctive events.

"Until now the doctor has not been able to understand how a city can be awakened from a mystery. Too many nameless graves, too many sentences without charge, too many trials without a court – blood flows like running water. Blood from gouged eyes, blood from cut ears, blood from gun butts."

(Ajidarma, 1994, p. 50)



All the doctor's questions above depart from a systematic and categorized mind, a convergent synthesis. Departing from this convergence, the divergent becomes visible; the virtual opened itself to the actual. As the title suggests, the third short story mentioned previously, "*Misteri Kota Ningi (The Mystery of Ningi City)* or The Invisible Christmas," makes visible what is not seen, makes actual what is virtual. The short story begins with the astonishment of a census officer as soon as he enters the city of Ningi. All "the laws of nature" regarding population growth do not apply in it. If based on the "law of nature," the population will continue to increase, but in Ningi city, the population decreases drastically. Therefore, to fulfill the demands of the "law of nature," the census officer no longer only counts what is seen but also what is not seen. The magical presence becomes valid when the real contradicts itself. It parallels the occurrence, in the real, of the juxtaposition of all disjunctives. There is a difference in similarity disjunction in conjunction. It happens when the unreal, the magical, reveals itself.

However, not everything that is disjunctive in the real leads one to think about the virtual. The presence of an eyewitness who had no eyes in a court had made the judge think about justice and truth. However, his thoughts were immediately stopped due to sleepiness. He fell asleep "in an annoying traffic jam" (Ajidarma, 1994: 9). Traffic congestion itself is a contradiction in the modern colonial "law of nature," the law of a civilization that promises efficiency through a rational classification system. However, the judge was not strong enough to face the contradiction with all its ontological consequences. The same tendency is also seen in the short story "*Listrik*" (Electricity) which reveals the contradiction between the promise of science and its discovery of electricity and the fact that electricity is also used to carry out torture. A diplomat from a nation reputed to have always been "peaceful," who was in a chamber at the United Nations headquarters in New York, expressed remorse for having read prior accounts of detainee abuse, including electrocution. He stated that he should have read it later, "during a two-week holiday in Bali" (Ajidarma, 1994: 62).

As MR works the short stories in *SM* combine the real, any images and events that can be experienced and comprehended immediately by senses and reason, with the magic images and events which are unverifiable and irrational in kind. By combining the two contradictory or disjunctive entities, the short stories disrupt common perception of modern people about the world, bring them into another possible world, the virtual. However, as is experienced by some characters in the stories, some people tend to avoid to encounter the possibility with its' ontological consequences. "I", a main character in "The Mystery of Ningi City", is one that is brave enough to accept the consequences by transforming himself from being Census Officer into a new being with a new perception about the world, a new thought of the visible and the invisible.

### **EYEWITNESS' POSTCOLONIALITY IN DELEUZIAN ONTOLOGY**

The collection of short stories, *SM*, contains thirteen short stories, all of which address the same issue: the violent occupation of East Timor by the Indonesian government, which later became known as Timor-Leste after its successful liberation from this colonial rule. The thematic consistency across the stories makes them inseparable from one another. These stories can be regarded as Ajidarma's testimony to the series of oppressive events, alongside his cultural, literary, and even existential stances. As narrated in the short story "Misteri Kota Ningi (or ,The Invisible Christmas)", the oppression results in an existential crisis for the main character, a census officer. While initially viewing the world through a positivist lens, reducing it to a series of quantitative

figures, by the end of the story, he takes a completely opposite approach by contemplating life poetically and philosophically.

In general, the short stories in *SM* recount physical and behavioral events that occur in the social and cultural spheres of human life, whether involving visible or invisible entities. Only one story stands out with a seemingly opposing tendency, “*Seruling Kesunyian*” (The Flute of Silence). This story narrates events that are almost entirely mental, occurring solely in the thoughts of the main character. Descriptions of physical events are minimal, limited to the character’s occasional act of playing the flute. These events also do not take place in a human social environment but in the isolated wilderness, an area that could be described as a boundary or liminal space beyond territorial confines. Consequently, when viewed from a macrostructural perspective, encompassing the relationships between the short stories, *SM* can be divided into two groups of stories: those representing territorial actuality and those reflecting deterritorialized or virtual. Of course, both of these fundamentally opposing elements are also present in each individual story. However, these elements exist within a microscopic structural framework, in parts of the overall short stories within the collection.

It is in the structural framework the postcolonial issue has its specific meaning as well. In this collection the issue appears explicitly in a short story entitled “Salvador”:

"In the past the gate was part of the fortress of the invaders. The fort protected them from the natives' invasions for hundreds of years. Now the fort has crumbled scattered ruins, for any strong fort is useless in war without fighting. The only thing left now is the gate, where the soldiers hang the chicken thieves, a historical legacy that is a symbol of how colonialism is still repeating itself."  
(Ajidarma, 1994, p. 40)

The last sentence of the quote shows that even today, colonialism has taken place, which, when viewed from the context of the story, concerns the relationship between soldiers and those labelled as "chicken thieves," including a person named Salvador, a character after whom the short story is titled. The soldiers hanged Salvador, as a "chicken thief" at the city gates, and the townspeople expressed their sympathy by performing a funeral ceremony in the church. Soldiers were foreign invaders, whereas Salvadorans were the colonized indigenous people. This type of interaction is shown in the majority of the short tales in this collection. Indigenous people are those who are kidnapped, tortured, and murdered while transforming into invisible, magical beings. However, those who came from the outside were not only soldiers but also several immigrant figures who worked in the colonized area, such as the doctor in the short story "Rosario," the census officer in the short story "Misteri Kota Ningi (*The Mystery of Ningi City*)," and the short story "Klandestine," (Clandestine), and the narrators in the most of the short stories.

The doctor, who originally came only as a professional who does not like politics, turned into a more caring and involved in thinking about politics when he was faced with the rosary case in the stomach of a native named Fernando. The same thing happened to the census officer, who, as already stated, began to consider those who were not visible as residents whose numbers he had to also include in the enumeration. In fact, the change does come to not only the issue of counting but also a more spiritual issue.

"On Christmas Eve, I was the only one who was seen in the city. The church bells rang, their clanging echoed throughout the city. I heard the echo of the choir singing Holy Night, and in the sky I saw the stars so bright. I celebrate Christmas with invisible people.  
Maybe I should write a poem about this. Maybe I'll title it The Invisible Christmas. I am, of course, just a simple census officer – but, may I contemplate the meaning of mortal and eternal life?"  
(Ajidarma, 1994, p. 80)

This trend becomes more apparent in the short narrative "Klandestine." As an immigrant, the protagonist gets admitted into an underground movement organization that operates completely underground by digging a dwelling place that is the same size as the metropolis above. "I," as the character came to be known, canceled his membership and resolved to find a way out of the subterranean. He took the decision when his group's underground guide described their plan to bring the entire city down from below. "I" interpreted it as a personal grudge against the innocent residents of the city's upper section.

The entire tendency is in contrast to the "I" inclination depicted in the short tale "Manuel." In a subsequent short story, "I" is recounted from the perspective of an actual soldier. He listened to the accounts of the indigenous characters above about the harshness of the city's conquerors during his rendezvous with Manuel in a bar. The abuse was so heinous that it caused "I" to vomit, spilling all the exquisite meal he had just had. In this case, as with previous short stories, it appears that "I" exhibits a movement away from its original self. However, as a soldier, the "I" in this short story returns to his heroism, which is defined by the clash between self and enemy, colonist and colonized. As a result, despite his apologies, he imprisoned Manuel, who was in a "drunk" state at the time, for disclosing his identity to strangers. At the same time, the arrest was an act of eradicating differences in accordance with the principle of identity, syntheses of connectivity and convergence.

By moving out from their original territorial contexts, as foreigners in front of the natives, the characters in the short stories above have taken an act of deterritorialization. But, before the stories coming into a short story entitled "Seruling Kesunyian" ("The Flute of Silence") the whole move of them have merely reached a relative deterritorial position. It is only in the "Flute of Silence" the move of the stories reached absolute deterritorialization of the virtual. In this short story, the flute is understood as a movement out of "words", solitude and silence, but which is constantly being pursued by and at the same time seeking and presenting various realities, which lead to and originate from "mu-" (you), the only Being whose existence is in a distance and closed, in so personal and impersonal voice, in between the actual and virtual, as implied, among others, in the following quote.

"My mother was telling me about the shootings and my missing brothers and sisters but I couldn't listen because I was blowing the flute with a vulnerable feeling that stirred reality into me that was so empty that every city that flowed echoed without distinction without desire without dreams to memories that printed on the plate was slashed with the flesh of animals that were eaten half-cooked in the name of civilization so gray as the morning mist that embraced me in the cold that emitted a whisper like a long groan.

I blew the flute with the wish that all this would soon pass but history crept from every hole of the flute so that the rustling wind carrying the sand drowned its voice behind the crashing waves crashing against the time window from which I watched the group of refugees in wheelless wagons move with the bundle of fate in the beam of light from a lighthouse written in blood that is still wet and will always be wet and will always drip so that its red notes are always changing aimlessly under a layer of ice that never knows the sun."

(Ajidarma, 1994, pp. 100-101)

By devoting his entire heart to playing the flute, which transcends the territories of language, "I" simultaneously transcends the actual, the political, and the historical aspects of life, namely his mother's story about the shooting and his missing siblings. The movement transcends the language is evident not only in its referentiality but also in its linguistics structure. Like the continuous flow of the flute's sound, moving, and traversing an expanding flight path in various directions, the use of language in the quote flows far, moves wildly in various directions, touching on various

unrelated issues that are diverse in actuality but unified, loosing their differences with in the face of the virtual, the singular, univocal Being. The above quote also shows the presence of the virtual, which performs an act of “counter-actualization” by erasing all categories, differentiations that apply actually, and absorbing them into a difference-in-itself.

In ontological explanation, as has already been conducted in the whole analysis above, “Seruling Kesunyian” represents the virtuality, stands out as a divergent element that draws all the other stories into the unity of Being. However, the unity of Being itself is a difference-in-itself that reflects back into the actuality of the other stories. All the stories in the collection of *SM*, therefore, become actualizations of Being, a creative, wild force that moves beyond existing system, breaking the identification between Indonesia and East Timor that results in acts of violent consolidation and colonialization, moving instead towards an absolute, singular difference between the two nations, countries, and societies.

Being itself is something abstract, which cannot be directly perceived, but its power is impersonal, metaphysical force that operates beyond the will and capabilities of individuals. The virtual Being seems to “hide behind the crashing wave,” and “sing alone within my chest.”

“I want to stop playing my flute because there are no more notes in my heart, yet my flute continues to sound like the hum of dreams from the past and future centuries, like you whom I thought was hidden behind the waves but vanished into the emptiness.”

(Ajidarma 1994, p. 104)

The flute, therefore, becomes the Being, the virtual, which represents difference-in-itself, constantly seeking its other self, the actual, independent of individual human will. However, the last part of the short stories above shows that it also relies on the real, its existence and presence, needing the presence of historical human beings who will listen to “the soundless sound according to books without letters called silence” (Ajidarma 1994: 105). This means that, in a postcolonial context, the position of magical realism in this novel simultaneously exists within the actual and virtual, where the individuals both choose and are chosen, both speak and remain silent. What is conveyed is not just its own words, but the words that emerge from his/her ancestors. In this short stories collection, this is also expressed through the pattern of framed stories, which is reminiscent of the storyteller tradition evident in the short story “*Telinga*”: “Tell me about cruelty,” Alina asked the story teller” (Ajidarma, 13). When a storyteller narrates a story, he is echoing what has been told by generations of people before him. Faris (2004: 44) refers this pattern of focalisation “defocalization.” Geleuze (Aldea 2011: 116) considers storytelling as a mode of narration that transcends territorial boundaries, without specific territorial and cultural origins, pointing not to the real but to the creation of legends and the creation of new human beings.

The creative power of this short stories collection lies not only in its language, which seems to flow endlessly, but also in its ability to connect systemic elements of standard, major, canonical Indonesian language with minor, two-layered language elements, namely local language, specifically Javanese language in one layer and Javanese slang in another. The minor language is further identified as Javanese *walikan* (Reversed),<sup>5</sup> which was used among the youth in

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<sup>5</sup> *Walikan* language consists of regular Javanese but uses a phonological pronunciation based on a modified version of the Javanese alphabet. The Javanese alphabet is arranged as follows:

*Ho No Co Ro Ko*

*Do To So Wo Lo*

*Po Dho Jo Yo No*

*Mo Go Bo Tho Ngo*

A letter in a certain position of a certain line is read along with the letter in the same position but two lines down. If a letter should be in the bottom line, then the next line order starts back at the first line and so on. Using this system or logic, Dili, which should be in the second position of the

Yogyakarta during the 1970s. By linking major linguistic elements with the minor language, the short stories in this collection are able to express what cannot be conveyed within the major language system. This is achieved, for example, by changing the word Dili into Ningi based on the codification system of *walikan* language above.

The collection of short stories in *SM* represents a linguistic work of art that has fully carried out its mission or redemption project through its magical realism storytelling technique and its “wild”, yet creative, linguistic composition, which opens the way for the growth of awareness of the virtual as part of reality, obscured by the actual system, which is in fact only an illusion. This awareness of the virtual simultaneously fosters an awareness of the existence of the real truth, Being, which continually actualizes itself through movements of differentiation, divergence, and deterritorialization, engaging in an unending dialectical relationship with identification, convergence, and reterritorialization.

This position alligns with Ajidarma’s own stance. Like the “I” character in the short story within this collection, Ajidarma originates from Indonesia, the country that colonized East Timor. In order to find a true picture of the true nature of colonization with its various oppressive practices, he not only had to leave his home country, but also had to escape the mainstream, hegemonic, media system both in his home country and his workplace. He visited East Timor, particularly Dili, but like the characters mentioned above, he was unable to fully integrate into the local community and remained a stranger, distinct from them. But, at that moment, he broke free from the hegemonic categories that separated Indonesia from East Timor, discovering himself as a free individual.

This, it seems, is also the reason for the use of internal focalization “I” in stories involving non-native characters, as opposed to zero focalization employed in most of the stories within this collection. The movement towards becoming oneself, as a free individual, paves the way for discovering a larger self that is simultaneously aligned with this greater self, the virtual one. Both do not adhere to or transcend territories associated with culture, civilization, order, structure, hierarchy, and so forth. His freedom is the freedom within and through playing a flute without sound, without words, in a wilderness that Deleuze himself uses as an actual example of a deterritorialized territory. Similarly, the flute’s sound in the silence of wilderness. With and through this flute, Ajidarma speaks but also remains silent, he both chooses and is chosen. He represents the literature of magical realism that both visible and invisible, voiceless yet speaking, precisely when “journalism is silenced.”

## CONCLUSION

The short stories collection in *SM* represents an aesthetic, political, and philosophical response to Indonesia’s colonization of East Timor, which occurred from the early 1970s to the late 1990s, a period marked by violence and caused many casualties, particularly among the militarily weak local population. Ajidarma, the author, is himself from Indonesia, the colonizing and ruling party. Nevertheless, through *SM*, among others, he seeks to escape the repression of the NO rulers, addressing not only as an individual, but also social, cultural, humanitarian and philosophical. He realizes this effort very representatively through the above short stories collection, both in its entirety and in the specific works that clearly show the characteristics of his magical realism genre.

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third line, *Dho*, and the fifth position of the second line, *Lo*, becomes Ningi, which is in the second position of the first line, *No*, and, *Ngo*, in the fifth position of the fourth line.

However, this movement does not necessarily mean that he fully alligns himself with East Timorese side. His works shows that for the indigenous population of the country he remains an outsider, distant from them. He overcomes this territorially dual position with an act of relative and absolute deterritorialization. This tendency is evident in the structure of his short stories, which on the one hand is based on the real, the actual, the realist mode of narration, bound to a modern, rational, and empirical worldview, while on the other hand incorporating the magical, the virtual elements, which makes the realist mode of narration, with its claims to representation or referentiality, problematic and open to new, multiple, meanings.

The most intriguing regarding *SM* is the use of the flute as a metaphor for magical realism literature or even literature itself. The flute is situated in a silent space, removed from any territory and civilization, yet its soundless sound, cannot escape the historical violence of human civilization. Moreover, the flute is also portrayed as a voice of freedom, detached from the actual, historical, yet at the same time necessary will of humanity. It is in this dialectic between Being and beings, the virtual and the actual, that this collection of short stories, through its narrative strategy of magical realism, contributes to the dialectical process between the creative power of potential life and the possibility of its actualization with all of its opportunities and obstacles.

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