

Exploring Papua through Sabine Kuegler's Life Journey: A Travel Literature Analysis of *Dschungelkind*

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ABSTRACT

Despite the popularity of Sabine Kuegler's novel *Dschungelkind*, little attention has been paid to how Papua and the Fayu tribe are represented and whether such representations reproduce or challenge colonial discourse. Therefore, this research aims to describe how Papua is portrayed in Sabine Kuegler's novel *Dschungelkind* through Carl Thompson's *Travel Writing* framework. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method by analyzing textual data that explicitly or implicitly reflect the dimensions of reporting the world, revealing the self, and representing others. Data were collected through survey reading, focused reading, and verification reading, while reliability was ensured through both intrarater and interrater procedures. The findings reveal that this novel presents the world through both objective and subjective depictions. Objective depictions appear in descriptions of climate, flora, fauna, and food, whereas subjective depictions dominate descriptions of Papua's landscapes, social interactions, health issues, and Fayu traditions. In the dimension of revealing the self, the author presents herself as a romantic self and shows her process of discovering the value of humanism within herself through her interactions with Papuan nature and the Fayu tribe. The representation of the other, the Fayu tribe (East) is not portrayed as inferior to Sabine (West). Instead, the novel adopts a cosmopolitan perspective characterized by empathy, awareness of equality, and the exchange of values. These findings suggest that *Dschungelkind* challenges conventional Eurocentric tendencies in travel literature and offers a more egalitarian framework for modern cross-cultural narratives.

Keywords: *Dschungelkind*, travel writing, Papua, German literature, colonial discourse

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INTRODUCTION

Human mobility has been an integral part of human history. People travel for a variety of personal, social, and economic purposes. These journeys can be extensive, such as international or continental travel, or limited, for example, traveling to different places within a single region. Whether on a large or small scale, these journeys share the commonality of having specific goals or motivations ([Cortini & Carrera, 2022](#); [Salazar, 2018](#)).

When someone embarks on a journey, they often encounter new experiences. These new experiences may share similarities or differences with their past experiences, leading to internal negotiation over what is considered new. Travel can be seen as a negotiation between the self and the other, arising from movement through space and time. As time passes, individuals who embark on journeys desire to narrate their travel experiences and depict the situations in the places they have visited. The portrayal of travel, presenting a narrative of events that occurred during the journey, often offers a fresh perspective from the writer's personal point of view. Travel narratives containing an individual's travel records are referred to by Thompson as *Travel Writing* ([Thompson, 2011](#)).

Travel literature or Travel Writing has three distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other literary genres. The first characteristic concerns encounters and differences. One never travels without meaningful experiences. In every journey, there will be challenging encounters, such as meeting new people, discovering new places, encountering different perspectives, and experiencing diverse lifestyles. These encounters serve as a source of ideas about the writer's identity as a traveler and their efforts to connect with the identities of other societies, as both the writer and the people in foreign regions share the same essence: being human. The second and third characteristics emerge from ideas about encounters, differences, and efforts to achieve harmony, namely creating spatial distance between the narrator and the object and introducing a temporal gap between the reader and the writer.

An example of travel literature is the novel *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* by John Steinbeck ([Steinbeck, 1962](#)), which depicts his travels across America with his pet dog, Charley, while reflecting on social and cultural changes. In Indonesian literature, a work that can be categorized as Travel Literature is the tetralogy *Laskar Pelangi* by Andrea Hirata, which portrays the author's journeys to various places, with Edensor ([Hirata, 2008](#)) specifically describing his experiences during his education in France.

In German literature, a story depicting someone's journey is called 'Reiseliteratur' ([Erb A, 2017](#)). *Reiseliteratur* not only describes a character's journey to a particular region but also portrays the cultural encounters encountered along the way. In these cultural encounters, there is a spatial and

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temporal boundary between the culture of the person's original country and the culture of the country they visit, which, in postcolonial studies, is depicted as the encounter between European and non-European cultures. (Holdenried et al., 2017)

In the history of German literature, there are various works classified as *Reiseliteratur*, written by renowned authors such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Jean Paul, Novalis, Heinrich Heine, Theodor Fontane, and others. In their writings, they document their experiences during travels to various places. For example, Goethe, in his work titled *Italienische Reise*, describes his journey to Italy. In this writing, Goethe depicts his purpose for traveling to Italy, the satisfaction he feels after experiencing Italy, and the gap between his experiences in Italy and the anticipation of his return to his hometown, Weimar (Bode, 1994)

Drawing on her experiences in Papua, Indonesia, Sabine Kuegler documented her encounters with the Fayu tribe in her novel *Dschungelkind* (Kuegler, 2006). Sabine Kuegler narrates her experiences when she had to leave Germany to follow her father, who was serving as a missionary and language researcher in Papua. In her book titled *Dschungelkind*, Kuegler describes various events she went through with the Fayu Tribe inhabiting the small jungle in West Papua, Indonesia. As her debut novel, *Dschungelkind* successfully became a bestseller and topped the charts in Europe. The popularity of this novel is further evidenced by its translation into several languages, including Indonesian. Its popularity is further reflected in its translation into several languages, including Indonesian, and its adaptation into a feature film in 2011.

Given its unique story and popularity, Sabine Kuegler's portrayal of Papua in the novel *Dschungelkind* warrants further investigation. Through this study, we can observe how the cultural and societal conditions of Papua are portrayed from the perspective of a German (Western) individual. As a Westerner in the East, Sabine's experiences are undoubtedly distinct and provide readers with insight into how Germans view the cultural and societal conditions of Papua in the novel. To examine how the narrative depicts Sabine's experiences in Papua and portrays its culture and society, the novel *Dschungelkind* is analyzed using Carl Thompson's concept of Travel Writing.

Travel writing encompasses all records that document encounters between the self and others, as well as negotiations over the differences or similarities that surround them (Thompson, 2011). Critics and academics use the term 'travel writing' in a broader and more inclusive sense, meaning not only publications related to travel are discussed, but also other forms of documents related to travel or cultural artifacts (Thompson, 2011: 10-13). To analyze travel narratives, Thompson proposes three key dimensions: (1) reporting the world, which concerns the representation of places, people, and events; (2) revealing the self, which examines the traveler's self-reflection and subjectivity; and (3) representing others, which focuses on the portrayal of

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cultures and communities encountered during the journey. This framework provides a relevant analytical lens for examining Sabine Kuegler's representation of Papua and the Fayu tribe in *Dschungelkind*.

To contextualize the cultural and power relations embedded in the text, alongside Carl Thompson's travel writing framework, this study draws on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism (Said, 2001). In literary studies, representations of the East (the 'Other') by Western writers are historically bound to Said's paradigm of Orientalism, which argues that Western narratives often project a dominant, superior lens that exoticizes or subordinates the Orient. However, while Said provides the macro-ideological critique of postcolonial power, Thompson's framework offers the micro-analytical tools needed to dissect how these dynamics are structurally operationalized in literature through three specific axes: reporting the world, revealing the self, and representing others. Integrating Said into the theoretical background is crucial because it serves as the ideological baseline, allowing this study to evaluate whether Sabine Kuegler's narrative reproduces traditional colonial subjugation or, conversely, subverts it. Therefore, by synthesizing Thompson's textual approach with Said's critical lens, this research can systematically justify how *Dschungelkind* shifts away from Eurocentric biases toward a more egalitarian, cosmopolitan representation of Papua.

Previous research on *Dschungelkind* has focused on the psychological aspect of the characters through an analysis of anxiety according to Freud (Ummah, 2015). Meanwhile, the same novel has been analyzed from the perspective of ecranization by emphasizing the process of transferring the medium from novel to film (Rahman et al., 2018). Beyond studies specifically addressing *Dschungelkind*, contemporary travelogues have been examined for the negotiation between lingering colonial perspectives and cosmopolitan tendencies in representing Southeast Asian realities (Akmal, 2023a). Against the backdrop of Western narratives that have frequently depicted tropical and jungle regions as exotic, primitive, and culturally distant spaces, this study investigates how Papua and the Fayu tribe are represented in *Dschungelkind* and whether Sabine Kuegler's portrayal reproduces or challenges colonial modes of representing the cultural other.

This study investigates the relationship between reporting the world, self-revelation, and the cultural 'Other' in *Dschungelkind*. Through its analysis of Papua and the Fayu tribe, the study aims to contribute to ongoing debates on colonial and cosmopolitan representations in travel writing and to broaden our understanding of how modern travel texts negotiate cultural difference. This study explores whether the portrayal of Papua transcends simple exoticism, revealing a mutual exchange of humanistic values. Therefore, this research seeks to offer a new conceptual understanding of how modern travel texts can foster cultural empathy rather than cultural distance.

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METHOD

This research is a qualitative descriptive study based on Thompson's Travel Writing theory. The data selection process follows specific inclusion criteria. Data (words, phrases, sentences) were selected if they explicitly or implicitly depicted: (1) reporting the world, (2) revealing the self, dan (3) representing others as conceptualized by Thompson's Travel Writing framework. The data source for this research is Sabine Kuegler's novel *Dschungelkind*, published by Knauer Taschenbuchverlag in 2006.

Data acquisition was conducted in three ways: survey reading, focused reading, and verification reading. Survey reading involved a global reading of the novel to identify the overarching research problems. The indicator used during this initial stage was the presence, explicit and implicit, of spatial and cultural descriptions of Papua. Focused reading was then applied to categorize the mapped segments into specific indicators using Thompson's Travel Writing framework. Finally, verification reading was conducted to finalize the selected research data. To ensure the reliability and validity of the categorized data, a peer-debriefing and expert-judgment process was conducted.

Data validity was established through semantic validity, which assesses the sensitivity of the analytical technique to the novel's symbolic and contextual meanings. To ensure this, the meanings of the selected literary segments were cross-examined using Thompson's framework to ensure contextual accuracy. Reliability was achieved through both intrarater reliability (the researcher's continuous re-reading over time) and interrater reliability (peer-debriefing and expert judgment). The stages to be carried out in this research are (1) Identifying three aspects of travel literature in the novel *Dschungelkind* by Sabine Kuegler and linking it to Edward Said's Orientalism theory and Cosmopolitan theory, (2) Interpretation and verification of data about of these three aspects of travel literature in the novel *Dschungelkind* by Sabine Kuegler, and (3) Conclusion of research results on three aspects of Thomson's Travel Writing framework in *Dschungelkind*'s novel.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The novel *Dschungelkind* by Sabine Kuegler is her first, narrating her life journey and thus akin to an autobiography. This novel can be categorized as travel literature, as it recounts the journey of the character Sabine from Germany to Nepal, then to Papua, and finally back to Germany, due to her parents' work as language researchers. With Sabine as the narrator (Ich-Erzähler), the novel tells the story of her life and journey from Germany, briefly depicting her time in Nepal and India, detailing how she and her family returned to Germany when their residency permit in Nepal expired, and

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ultimately relocating to Papua, Indonesia. Overall, the novel is predominantly focused on Sabine's journey to Papua.

Description of Sabine's Perspective on the World of Papua

The first aspect in travel literature is how the author portrays the world (reporting the world). In this case, Sabine describes everything she encounters, including events, places, people, and various other things she comes across. The author's approach in depicting this world can be distinguished into two types: objective portrayal and subjective portrayal. The portrayal provided by the author can be considered objective when the author describes things as they are, without expressing opinions, feelings, or judgments about the world they are presenting. Conversely, the portrayal of the world becomes subjective when there is emotional involvement, assumptions, and the author's thoughts in the depiction. The following will illustrate how Sabine Kuegler portrays the world she discovered.

Objective Depiction of the World

In this novel, the author extensively describes the natural conditions encountered. An objective portrayal from a distant perspective can be seen in the author's description of the Papua rainforest. The view from the plane as it crossed the skies of Papua towards the Fayu Tribe area is depicted. From the plane, all she sees is an expanse of large trees as far as the eye can see. Additionally, she only perceives the color of the trees during her journey from Danu Bira to Foida.

Another distant objective portrayal of the world is when the author provides information that the Fayu tribe had actually made contact with white people in the 1940s. This information is obtained from a journalist who called her father. The objective depiction of the world from this distant perspective is not widely used in Sabine's novel. She often employs close objective depictions, particularly in topics related to her living environment. For example, when she describes the house she shares with her family, she not only details the house's wooden structure but also explains the layout of the rooms. Every specific detail, such as the wire used to prevent insects and rodents and a bathroom covered only by a curtain without a door, is included.

Beyond the house, the author also provides an objective close-up portrayal of the appearance of the Fayu tribe. She describes the physical features, facial expressions, and accessories worn by the Fayu men, particularly upon her arrival in Foida. In her description, the author mentions that the Fayu people are taller than the Dani and Bauzi tribes, have dark skin with curly hair, and don't wear clothing. The accessories they use include Emu bird feathers on their heads and long bones piercing their noses. In this

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depiction, the author makes generalizations and mentions iconic elements of the Fayu tribe. These detailed

The author not only describes the physical appearance but also the flora and fauna around the Fayu tribe. For instance, she mentions the dingo, a domesticated animal of the Fayu tribe. „*Es war meistens Catfish, eine Art Wels, der nahezu einen Meter lang und bis zu fünf Kilo schwer werden konnte und köstlich schmeckte*“ (It was mostly catfish, a type of wels catfish that could grow to almost a meter long and weigh up to five kilos, and tasted delicious.) (Kuegler, 2006: 186-197). The author provides an objective depiction of animals considered useful, both as hunting companions and food sources. The author describes that snakes, crocodiles, rats, frogs, and larvae are sources of protein for the Fayu tribe. Pigs, on the other hand, are considered friends, not food. The author also mentions that the Fayu tribe consumes sago, sweet potatoes, rice, and local Fayu plants such as *kwa*, *kasbi*, and lychee.

Although Kuegler attempts to present an objective, factual representation of Papua's landscape and its people, a postcolonial reading reveals that a Western gaze heavily mediates these descriptions. In travel literature, the depiction of landscapes from a distance, such as Kuegler's aerial view of the Papuan rainforest from a plane, is rarely neutral. This perspective visually empties the space of its indigenous history, reducing Papua to a vast, untamed, and silent jungle the arrival of the western observer.

Furthermore, the text establishes a sharp binary opposition between western civilization and Fayu Tribe through its close-up descriptions. Kuegler meticulously details her family's house, emphasizing structural boundaries such as insect screens and designated rooms, which symbolize order, technology, and the containment of nature. In contrast, the physical depiction of the Fayu tribe focuses heavily on their dress, skin color, and exotic ornaments. By focusing on these detailed, iconic, generalized features, the narrative exoticizes the Fayu people.

The data's structural placement further compounds this exoticism. A detailed catalog of local flora, fauna, and food, including larvae and crocodiles, immediately follows the description of the Fayu people. In postcolonial critiques, grouping indigenous populations with wild animals and survival tools effectively pushes the native into the realm of nature rather than culture. Therefore, what the author frames as a close objective depiction is, in fact, a textual strategy that reinforces the otherness of Papua, romanticizing them as noble savages who exist outside of modern time and history.

Subjective Depiction of the World

The portrayal of the world in a travel narrative becomes intimately connected with the reader when the author incorporates subjectivity. In this case, the author not only describes but also inserts opinions, assumptions,

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feelings, and thoughts regarding what she encounters. After living in the Papua forest with the Fayu tribe for years, the author describes the train as something enormous and frightening. She even sees the train as a white serpent crawling out of a black hole „*Dieser Zug ist so groß und Heimlich wie ein langer weißer Wurm, der aus einem schwarzen Loch hervor kriegt*” This train is as big and secretive as a long white worm emerging from a black hole. (Kuegler, 2006: 15). Sabine's depiction of the train reflects her subjective view of trains in Germany. The author holds a sense of foreignness towards the train and the station when she sets foot in Germany again.

Subjective feelings are also evident in the author's account of how Fayu men treat women. Fayu men do not treat their wives well, as seen when the author witnesses a Fayu man injuring his wife with an arrow. This incident makes Sabine feel hatred for the first time in her life (Kuegler, 2006: 166).

Subjective depiction of the world involves not only feelings but also the author's opinions and thoughts. This is evident when the author recounts the lychee tree that bears fruit every five years. For weeks, they would eat lychee fruit, peel its skin, consume the flesh, and discard the seeds into the ground for wild boars to eat. „*Ein perfektes Recyclingsystem,*” – a perfect recycling system (Kuegler, 2006: 205). According to the author, the way the Fayu tribe consumes lychee until the discarded seeds grow back represents a perfect recycling cycle.

In addition to opinions, the author also demonstrates subjectivity through assumptions about the events she describes. One example is when the Fayu tribe sings. The Fayu tribe can sing spontaneous songs according to the situation they face. The author provides details on how songs would be sung for different conditions. Here, the author assumes that through songs, the Fayu people can release their depression and suffering. The author's subjectivity in this novel is often explicitly displayed.

With the author's subjective portrayal of the world, stories of journeys undertaken feel closer and more easily understood by the reader, allowing them to immerse themselves in the journey. In presenting the depiction of the world, the author uses a first-person perspective or *Ich-Erzähler*. The alternating use of the pronouns *ich* and *wir* indicates that this journey actually happened and was undertaken. Additionally, the author introduces new information by comparing it to familiar concepts. For instance, the description of the *kna* fruit, or Brotfrucht, depicts it as green, the size of a melon, and with a taste combining bread and potatoes. Despite presenting detailed and intricate descriptions, the author articulates them in simple sentences for easy comprehension. Moreover, there are also accompanying photos that complement the descriptions written in the novel.

By incorporating subjectivity, Kuegler's narrative moves beyond mere geographical reporting into the realm of emotional and ideological positioning. The fear and panic experienced by the author during her first encounter with the Fayu chief, who is portrayed as heavily armed with bows,

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arrows, and stone axes, exemplifies the colonial literary trope of the threatening savage. In postcolonial discourse, documenting the traveler's fear serves to textually validate the native space's inherent "wildness" and danger, implicitly justifying the presence of Westerners as agents of order or pacification.

Furthermore, Kuegler's subjective judgment regarding gender relations within the tribe after witnessing a Fayu man injuring his wife projects Western modern moral benchmarks onto indigenous dynamics. The text frames the indigenous male as an uninhibited oppressor, thereby reinforcing the Eurocentric paternalistic gaze that views the native population as morally underdeveloped and in need of Western ethical intervention. This perspective treats the indigenous population not as complex contemporary political subjects, but as ecological relics of a pristine past living in uncorrupted harmony with nature.

However, a compelling subversion occurs when Kuegler returns to Germany and perceives a train as a frightening white serpent crawling out of a black hole. This highly subjective depiction indicates a significant shift in her positioning. Her trauma upon encountering Western technology demonstrates that her gaze has been contaminated by the very environment she sought to observe; she looks at Europe through the animistic, nature-centric lens of Papua. Thus, the alternating use of the pronouns *ich* (I) and *wir* (we) does not merely authenticate the journey, but maps the author's unstable positionality, oscillating between a judgmental Western observer and a displaced, hybridized subject caught between two incompatible worlds.

Sabine's Self-Expression

In expressing her assumptions, Sabine includes herself in observing the situations, conditions, and the world around her, offering many comments on what she sees during her journey. In other words, Sabine's subjectivity in narrating her travels and life story in Papua is prominent.

Sabine recounts several events from her journey and life in the Papua forest in a humanistic style. What she narrates is influenced by the values learned from her parents and the Fayu Tribe. At the beginning of the story, Sabine expresses her feelings upon returning to Europe (Switzerland). The worry she feels on the train makes her miss Papua. Looking out the train window, instead of seeing a colorful and populous city, she sees a dense jungle with towering trees. That is the Papua forest, which is Sabine's home. Sabine's subjectivity in describing her feelings is highly pronounced, resulting in metaphorical language. „*Ich fliege zurück in die Vergangenheit. Blaue. Weiße und grüne Farben ziehen vor meinem inneren Auge vorüber. Ich fliege in die Wärme, die Sonne lacht, ihre Strahlen fliegen mit mir, fangen mich ein, tanzen um mich herum und umhüllen meinen Körper mit wohliger Glut*” (I'm flying back into the past. Blue, white, and green colors drift before my mind's eye. I'm flying into warmth, the sun is

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laughing, its rays fly with me, capture me, dance around me, and envelop my body in a comforting glow) (Kuegler, 2006: 18). Sabine feels transported back to the past, where blue, white, and green colors glow before her eyes. She feels as if she is flying into warmth, with the sun laughing, its rays flying with her, enveloping her body in a pleasant glow.

Several unforgettable events occurred in the Papua forest for Sabine, where she faced and conquered wild animals. Sabine perceives these events as valuable experiences, making her feel resilient and invincible. „*Hinterher fühle ich mich unbesiegt*“ (Afterwards, I feel invincible). (Kuegler, 2006: 149). Additionally, when facing danger in the majestic wilderness, Sabine feels a sense of ‘life’ within herself. She feels more alive than ever because she successfully overcame the challenges of nature.

Sabine's journey is not just physical but also one that ultimately leads her to self-discovery. All the experiences she went through with the Fayu Tribe in the depths of Papua provided broader insights into life. Sabine eventually discovers that the humanistic values of the Fayu Tribe have intertwined in her thoughts and feelings. Towards the end of the book, Sabine describes how life in the forest has left a profound mark on her. Sabine and her family feel blessed for having experienced a unique and beautiful life with the Fayu Tribe. Sabine feels indebted to the Fayu Tribe, which shared their lives and accepted them as tribal members despite their different skin color and culture. Therefore, Sabine feels the need to express the highest gratitude to the Fayu Tribe. The statement made by Sabine reflects her subjective feelings after various life experiences living with the Fayu Tribe.

In Thompson's travel writing framework, the trope of revealing the self often operates through the traveler's internal transformation. When Kuegler hallucinates the Papuan jungle while riding a contemporary train in Europe, she structurally positions Papua as a timeless, pristine past. In postcolonial critique, this romantic longing constructs the global South (Papua) as an anti-modern, therapeutic utopia for the existential fatigue of the Western subject, frozen in a historical vacuum.

Furthermore, Kuegler's recollection of encountering and conquering wild animals, which left her feeling invincible (*unbesiegt*) and more alive, resurates with the colonial discourse of conquering the frontier. This heroic survivalist narrative mirrors the 19th-century colonial adventure novels, where the white protagonist tests their resilience against the hostile, untamed wilderness of the colony. By framing the Papuan jungle as a testing ground for her personal empowerment, the text subtly centers the Western ego, extracting psychological strength from the raw environment of the Other.

The climax of Kuegler's self-discovery occurs in her expression of ultimate gratitude toward the Fayu tribe for adopting her family as tribe members, despite different skin color and culture. From a postcolonial perspective, this narrative fulfilled a classic colonial fantasy of native consent and assimilation. By emphasizing that the indigenous population willingly

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absorbed the white subjects without hostility, the narrative erases the structural power asymmetries implicit in missionary and exploratory interventions.

Representation of the 'Other' in the Novel *Dschungelkind*

The "Other" depicted by Sabine in the novel *Dschungelkind* is the Fayu tribe and Fayu culture. Sabine views the Fayu tribe's culture as unique and distinctive because she had never encountered it before. As a European living in the Papua region, especially among the Fayu tribe, I found their culture markedly different from any I had encountered previously. Fayu culture's distinctive aspects, such as their clothing, greeting customs, treatment of animals, and the behavior of Fayu men towards women (their wives), are all detailed by Sabine. She observes the Fayu tribe's culture through her European perspective.

At the beginning of her arrival, Sabine endeavored to depict the cultural conditions in Papua, particularly among the Fayu tribe, which possesses a rather unique culture. She portrayed the male members of the Fayu tribe, who have a distinct dress code, wearing Emu bird feathers on their heads and long, thin bones piercing the soft tissue at the base of their noses (two upward and one horizontally). Additionally, they adorned flat bones above each eyebrow, secured with a thin headband made from tree bark.

Größer als die Eingeborenen der anderen Stämme, die wir bis jetzt kennengelernt hatten, dunkelhäutig, mit krausen schwarzen Haaren und vollkommen nackt. Teilweise bedeckten schwarze Straußenfedern ihren Kopf, lange, dünne Knochen zogen sich durch die Nasenflügel, zwei davon zeigten nach oben, und einer ging quer durch die Nasenflügel. Über den Augenbrauen hatten sie zwei flache Knochen mit Baumrinde festgebunden. Sie trugen Pfeil und Bogen in einer Hand und Steinäxte in der anderen. Die Unbekannten umzingelten uns, starrten uns mit schwarzen und undurchdringlichen Augen an.

Taller than the natives of the other tribes we had encountered so far, dark-skinned, with curly black hair and completely naked. Partial black ostrich feathers covered their heads; long, thin bones ran through their nostrils, two pointing upwards and one running diagonally across them. Above their eyebrows, they had tied two flat bones with tree bark. They carried a bow and arrow in one hand and stone axes in the other. The strangers surrounded us, staring at us with black, impenetrable eyes.

([Kuegler, 2006: 30](#)).

Sabine's Perception of the Fayu Tribe is her depiction of the Fayu tribe as Europeans when she first laid eyes on their physical appearance.

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Sabine described the Fayu tribe's culture when introducing herself. Their unique way took Sabine by surprise. Instead of starting with a handshake, they didn't extend their hands; rather, they began by holding each other's faces, pulling them close, and rubbing their foreheads together. This was demonstrated by the Chief of the Baou Tribe when introducing himself to Sabine:

“Häuptling Baou bückte sich plötzlich zu mir herunter, nahm mein Gesicht in seine Hände und kam mit seinem Kopf immer näher. Ich erschrak, weil ich dachte, er wollte mich jetzt auf den Mund küssen. Aber stattdessen drückte er seine verschwitzte Stirn auf die meine und rieb mehrmal”

“Chief Baou suddenly bent down to me, took my face in his hands, and brought his head closer and closer. I was startled because I thought he was going to kiss me on the mouth. But instead, he pressed his sweaty forehead against mine and rubbed it several times.”

([Kuegler, 2006: 31](#)).

The unique introduction surprised Sabine because she initially thought the person would kiss her on the mouth. However, eventually, Sabine understood that the Fayu people only rubbed their foreheads together multiple times when introducing themselves. Sabine, a Westerner accustomed to shaking hands when meeting others, found this introduction method uniquely intriguing.

Sabine depicted the living conditions of children and women in the Fayu tribe during her time living alongside them with her family. Sabine described the physical appearance of Fayu children and women. The children had distended bellies due to parasitic worms in their large intestines and slightly reddish hair due to a lack of vitamins. The physical features of Fayu women included a smaller stature than men, and their breasts hung down to the 'navel.

„Was mich jedoch a meisten intessierte, waren die Frauen. Sie waren kleiner als die Männer, wirkten zum Teil aber sehr maskulin. Auch sie waren nackt, mit der einzigen Ausnahme, dass sie zwischen ihren Beinen eine aus baumrinde geflochtene Bedeckung trugen” ([Kuegler, 2006: 40](#))

What interested me most, however, were the women. They were shorter than the men, but some appeared very masculine. They too were naked, with the sole exception that they wore coverings woven from tree bark between their legs.

The condition of Fayu women made Sabine feel worried that, as an adult, she might look the same way, with breasts hanging down to the navel. This left a lasting impression on young Sabine.

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Belief systems also take center stage in Sabine Kuegler's novel *Dschungelkind*. The Fayu tribe follows an Animistic belief system that includes spirits and ancestral souls. The Fayu people's belief in ancestral spirits is illustrated by their ritual of not burying the deceased members of their family or tribe „Normalerweise ließen die Fayu die Toten in ihren Hütten liegen“ (Normally, the Fayu left the dead lying in their huts) (Kuegler, 2006: 257). This habit led Sabine to believe that the jungle was a primitive life full of mystical stories and experiences. Sabine described the forest as a world where reality and imagination seemed to blend (Kuegler, 2006: 258-259). Observing the conditions of the Fayu people and their culture, Sabine unconsciously tried to compare it with her European upbringing. For instance, when witnessing the violent relationships between men and women in the Fayu tribe, Sabine would then compare it to the loving and non-harmful relationship between her own parents. Later, after Sabine and her family lived with the Fayu tribe and the Fayu people saw the exemplary behavior of Sabine's parents, the men gradually began to change their attitude towards their wives. Sabine depicted this transformation through her European perspective.

Without diminishing the Fayu tribe's culture, Sabine portrayed how they embraced other cultures, particularly the white culture. The Fayu people did not reject what they perceived as good in other cultures. As a result, over the years, witnessing the examples set by the Kuegler family, significant changes occurred within the Fayu people. They no longer favored warfare and instead preferred peace.

Sabine described a shift in values among the Fayu people after the arrival of the Kuegler family. Those who initially enjoyed warfare and killing gradually developed a distaste for it and preferred a peaceful life. Similarly, the relationships between men and women in the Fayu tribe, initially marked by violence, eventually gave way to affection. Fayu men, who previously treated their wives harshly and used violence, changed their behavior. They learned to forgive during disagreements and began to understand the love between a husband and a wife. Sabine's parents' behavior inspired this transformation.

„Heute ist das anders. Langsam, über die Jahre hinweg, haben die Fayu-Männer durch die Begegnung mit meiner Mutter gelernt, auf ihre Frauen zu achten. Denn sie haben in dieser langen Zeit miterlebt, wie meine Eltern einander respektierten und liebten.“

Today things are different. Slowly, over the years, the Fayu men have learned to care for their wives through their encounters with my mother. For they have witnessed over this long period how my parents respected and loved one another.

(Kuegler, 2005: 167).

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From the excerpt, Sabine attempts to depict the transformation of the Fayu people after their interactions with the Kuegler family. In expressing this, Sabine views it from a humanitarian perspective, emphasizing the importance of mutual respect and love between life partners.

Sabine also describes how life in Papua and living together with the Fayu tribe and their unique culture ultimately influenced her. When she returned to Europe and attended school in Switzerland, she experienced a cultural shock—she had to adapt to a culture that never recognized clocks and measured time by the sun, moon, and insect activity. Upon returning to Europe, Sabine found it challenging to adapt to the concept of time, where everyone had to plan well in advance. It took Sabine about 10 years to fully embrace the Western approach to time.

“Erst um meinen dreißigsten Geburtstag herum, vor zirka zwei Jahren also, habe ich angefangen, mein Leben zu planen- so lange dauerte es, bis ich diese neue Art der Zeitbehandlung verstand und auch umsetzen konnte”

It was only around my thirtieth birthday, about two years ago, that I started planning my life - it took that long for me to understand and implement this new way of managing time.

[\(Kuegler, 2006: 242\).](#)

The barter culture in the buying and selling transactions between the Fayu Tribe and Sabine's family, as well as the culture of bargaining in Papua, also influenced Sabine. This influence manifested when she went shopping in supermarkets in Europe. Sabine initially felt angry when she had to shop without the opportunity to negotiate.

Sabine's portrayal of the Fayu tribe illustrates how, as a white person, she viewed Fayu culture. Sabine saw the Fayu tribe's culture as distinct from European culture. Sabine did not depict the 'other' culture as inferior to her own; in fact, towards the end of her book, Sabine acknowledged that the Fayu tribe's culture is unique and special. She expressed that the Fayu people have every reason to be proud of their traditions. Sabine even stated that the Fayu people deserve the highest respect because they willingly accepted the Kuegler family as part of their tribe, despite differences in skin color and culture.

“Das Leben im Urwald hat uns alle tief geprägt. Wir sind heute noch dankbar und fühlen uns reich beschenkt, eine so ungewöhnliche, wundervolle Zeit gehabt zu haben. Und am meisten danken wir den Fayu, die ihr Leben mit uns teilten und uns als Stammesmitglieder aufnahmen, trotz unserer anderen Hautfarbe und Kultur”

Life in the rainforest profoundly shaped us all. We remain grateful and feel incredibly blessed to have had such an unusual and wonderful time. And most of all, we thank the Fayu, who shared their lives with

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us and welcomed us as members of their tribe, despite our different skin color and culture.

([Kuegler, 2006: 343](#)).

From the depiction of the "other" in the novel *Dschungelkind*, it can be concluded that the Fayu culture is portrayed from Sabine's perspective as a European navigating a fundamentally different culture. This portrayal stands in sharp contrast to traditional Western discourses. As [Edward Said \(2001\)](#) argues in his framework of Orientalism, Western narratives historically construct the "Other" or the non-Western world as inherently inferior, backward, and uncivilized to assert cultural superiority. While traces of cultural othering remain in Sabine's description, it simultaneously complicates conventional Orientalist frameworks by portraying her surprise at the Fayu Tribe's distinct culture, evident from her initial arrival in the Papua jungle and her encounter with the Fayu Tribe. Sabine's initial reactions reflect the unfamiliarity rather than an attempt to assert Western superiority.

Although there are aspects of the culture that Sabine may not like, she makes a conscious effort to adapt to it and refrains from passing negative judgments. In fact, some aspects of the Fayu Tribe's culture even become ingrained in Sabine as she endeavors to assimilate herself into their way of life. Therefore, when she returns to Europe, she struggles to readapt to European culture, experiencing severe culture shock. Towards the end of the story, instead of maintaining the distant, superior gaze typical of Orientalist depictions, Sabine genuinely admires the Fayu culture, ultimately offering the highest praise to the Fayu people.

The Fayu Tribe's culture is portrayed without being seen as inferior. When depicting the culture of the Fayu Tribe, Sabine only expresses her initial surprise, evident from her arrival in the Papua jungle. Although she states that she has never met anyone as wild as the Fayu people, this is a spontaneous, objective description rather than a patronizing, Eurocentric judgment.

The way Sabine portrays Papua, especially the Fayu tribe, both objectively and subjectively, illustrates her understanding of Papua. Sabine explores Papua in detail, covering flora, fauna, and the people and their culture. When providing her perspective on the Fayu tribe, Sabine appears deeply immersed and subjective in her approach. Her experience of living with the Fayu people is vividly depicted and involves emotional elements (subjectivity).

Sabine undergoes self-discovery through her journey, especially through her experiences with the Fayu tribe. Her journey of self-discovery and the cultural values of the Fayu tribe reflect a postcolonial approach, namely her encounter with the "other" (the Fayu tribe), which subsequently prompts internal negotiation. The negotiation involves Sabine's attempt to understand the Fayu tribe's culture and identity. The encounter between

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European and non-European cultures (Eastern culture, in this case, the Fayu tribe's culture) doesn't cause Sabine to experience culture shock; instead, it inspires her to understand Eastern culture. Culture shock is actually felt when Sabine returns to Europe after an extended period of interaction with the Fayu tribe.

The novel *Dschungelkind* serves as an example of how a journey undertaken by an individual, in this case, Sabine, becomes a vessel for Sabine to express a deeper understanding of the characteristics and identity of the Fayu tribe. The cultural encounters she experiences contribute to Sabine's growing embrace of humanistic values. Sabine realizes that her interactions with the Fayu tribe enrich her experiences and make her increasingly aware of the humanistic values within the Fayu tribe, which have now become a part of her. The way Sabine portrays herself reflects a cosmopolitan perspective, in which the distinct culture of the Fayu tribe, unlike her own (European), is celebrated positively and with empathy.

Cosmopolitanism is a concept, idea, or worldview aimed at developing the notion of 'world citizenship' or a 'world society,' to form an identity not bound by territorial or national boundaries, thereby promoting peace. The emergence of the cosmopolitanism concept can be traced to the globalization process, which has brought changes across various aspects of societal life. This process, dating back to the 19th century, involves advancements in communication, media, and transportation, creating broader and more extensive interactions among societies across nations and shaping cities with populations of diverse backgrounds, income levels, and lifestyles (Ariwibowo, 2019).

The concepts of cosmopolitanism and globalization are closely intertwined. Cosmopolitanism is a worldview that transcends national boundaries, while globalization is the process of global integration and interconnectedness. Both concepts mutually influence each other in efforts to create a more open and connected world. A cosmopolitan perspective that values diversity and human unity worldwide aligns with the goal of globalization, which seeks to connect people across regions. The impact of global interconnection has led to an open-minded attitude toward cultures, ideas, and experiences from around the world. The concept of cosmopolitanism is often used to describe individuals or communities that embrace and acknowledge diversity in a global context.

In literary analysis, previous studies have often used this framework to examine how characters navigate cross-cultural encounters. For instance, Ariwibowo (2019) highlights that global interconnectedness shapes individuals who are open-minded toward diverse cultures, ideas, and experiences. By drawing on this perspective, the discussion of cosmopolitanism can be extended from a macro-societal level to an individual psychological level, specifically by examining how a person internalizes a foreign culture when detached from their original national boundaries. This

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perspective is particularly relevant to this study, as it provides a framework for examining how cross-cultural encounters shape Sabine's perception of difference, identity and relationship with Fayu Tribe.

The character Sabine in the novel *Dschungelkind* serves as a concrete example of an individual who applies a cosmopolitan perspective in accepting and understanding cultural diversity. She not only adopts the humanistic values of the Fayu tribe but also acknowledges that these values have now become an integral part of her. From a cosmopolitan perspective, she does not view the values of the Fayu tribe's culture merely as exotic or foreign, but as a valuable addition to her identity. This approach reflects empathy toward diverse cultures and people worldwide, an essential aspect of the cosmopolitan viewpoint. It also illustrates how this perspective inspires individuals to celebrate cultural diversity positively. This aligns with previous research, which shows that not all Western writers describing Eastern conditions necessarily view them from a colonial perspective but strive to distance themselves from colonialism by embracing and taking emancipatory actions possible in the current cosmopolitan global situation (Akmal, 2023: 1-16). This aligns with Sabine's portrayal of the Fayu tribe in Papua.

CONCLUSION

Sabine's journey to Papua resulted in encounters with nature, flora, fauna, people, and the culture of the Fayu tribe in Papua. These encounters inspired her to narrate a travel story that reflects Thompson's three aspects of travel writing: (1) objectively and subjectively describing Papua, particularly the Fayu tribe (reporting the world); (2) presenting herself in the form of an autobiography that narrates physical, emotional, and psychological journeys (revealing the self); and (3) representing the "other," by portraying the Fayu tribe and their culture in line with a cosmopolitan perspective. The cosmopolitan perspective is reflected in Sabine's sympathy toward the Fayu tribe's culture, distancing herself from a colonial perspective. Unlike many travel narratives that position the "other" within a colonial framework, *Dschungelkind* portrays the Fayu culture as equally meaningful and capable of influencing the traveler herself. Sabine's awareness of viewing the Fayu tribe's culture openly prevents her from regarding it as inferior and placing herself in a superior position. Instead, Sabine experiences how the Fayu tribe's culture influences her, leading to culture shock upon her return to Europe. The novel *Dschungelkind* employs a cosmopolitan perspective that presents cultural encounter not as a one-sided observation but as a reciprocal process filled with empathy, awareness of equality, and the exchange of values. While this study offers valuable insights into *Dschungelkind*, it is limited by its focus on literary work single novel and specific cultural setting. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to all contemporary travel narratives or postcolonial literary text. In addition, the analysis primarily relies on Sabine's

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narrative perspective, leaving other interpretive possibilities for future textual explorations. Therefore, suggestions for future research include conducting a comparative analysis of Dschungelkind with other modern travelogues written by female Western authors in non-Western environments or utilizing a broader eco-critical framework to examine the spatial relationships among nature, identity, and intercultural encounter. This study also contributes to contemporary literary analysis of modern travel writing. Instead of merely stating that the novel tends to celebrate cultural differences, these findings suggest that modern travel writing is evolving from a rigid, ethnocentric documentation of the "Other" into a fluid space of mutual transformation, in which the host culture reshapes the traveler's cultural core. By moving beyond the dominant focus of previous studies on anxiety and adaptations, this research highlights how Sabine's encounters with the Fayu tribe reshape her cultural perspective and sense of identity, demonstrating that travel may function as a process of mutual transformation rather than a one-sided observation of the cultural other.

CRediT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Isti Haryati: Conceptualization, Reviewing, Editing. **Diyan Fatimatuz Zahro:** Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation. **Sri Megawati:** Data curation

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