The World through the Eyes of Travel Writers: Agustinus Wibowo's Selimut Debu and Jihan Davincka's Memoar of Jeddah

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ABSTRACT

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This paper investigates depictions of the world in two travel stories by Agustinus Wibowo in Selimut Debu (2010) and Jihan Davincka in Memoar of Jeddah (2013). The dissimilarity of both stories particularly in projecting the view of the world does not only accentuate different nuances but also the propensity of authors' observations towards the objects they encounter such as places, people, and culture. Therefore, this study focuses on how travel writings own distinct ways in narrating the story of the author's journey. In accordance with the problem, this study employed theoretical concepts proposed by Thompson specifically about reporting the world; that travel writers have certain tendency in their descriptions of the objects they see and involvement of the 'self' during the journey. This study then explores these two works to seek the data indicating the subjectivity to be sequentially selected and analysed. Eventually, it is found that Selimut Debu performs alteration in the involvement of the 'self'; while Memoar of Jeddah emphasises more on personal involvement.

Keywords: travel writing; report of the world; culture; subjectivity, the 'self'

INTRODUCTION

In a contemporary context, where the Indonesian people have been introduced to many popular works, travel stories have been concurrently produced in a form of books, cyber literature, or popular media such as blogs, TV shows, and YouTube content. Although travel stories have become familiar since centuries ago (Kurnia, 2011), such as "The story of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca" which tells the journey to the southern part of the U.S or the well-known story of "Robinson Crusoe" narrating an Englishman who survived in a tropical island, the resurgence of travel writing

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in Indonesia denotes a spark of enthusiasm in travel writing. In fact, more and more works in travel literature genre appeared to enrich Indonesian literary works, such as that of Agustinus Wibowo which tells his overland journey wandering in Afghanistan and other bordering countries in Central Asia published in 2010 and 2011. Another book comprises the same wandering story in different countries entitled *Haji Backpacker* (2009), 99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa (2011), The Naked Traveler (2011), Shocking Japan: Sisi Lain Jepang yang Mengejutkan (2012), and The Road to Persia (2013) (Margawati, Yulianti, & Farida, 2015) were also published in around this decade. This phenomenon confirms that the wonder to meet with new people and to see new places is a possible way to do; and such theme has become a hit in the last decade.

For the most part of the stories presented seem to have an underlying theme namely about how Indonesians traveled across nations; as Maslihatin suggests, such travel stories mostly set in European countries are to simply meet and interact with people from various parts of the world (Maslihatin, 2015). So, this interaction with unfamiliarity described in the travel stories gives a new experience for the readers to immerse with the author's experience presented. In accordance with the concept of travel writing, travel stories engage the readers to see how the author interacts with their encounter, newness, unfamiliarity, and differences. Thus, the significant role of the authors seem to presenting stories which are not only interesting but also relevant and understandable, especially for the readers who come from different background. Consequently, the perception of the world becomes tangible to the readers when it comes to the authors' description of the things they see.

Selimut Debu by Agustinus Wibowo is a case in point; the story presents an adventurous journey that is hazardous and risky, yet it evokes a special sensation for the readers. This is proven by reprinting edition of Agustinus Wibowo's works, namely Selimut Debu (A Blanket of Dust), Garis Batas, and Titik Nol (Ground Zero) at the end of 2020. Accordingly, this extends the continuity of travel story to rejuvenate its existence among other genres in Indonesia. Amidst the rare female travel writers, Jihan Divincka appears to challenge different narrative of travel stories by combining her journey, the intricacies of life, cultural perceptions of people in Saudi, and a life lesson she might get from the journey (by providing a stock of enlightened excerpts taken from Qur'an and hadist). Based on these two different works, the report of the world described in the

narrative can be thoroughly observed whether these two authors have similar proclivity on reporting the world.

Therefore, examining these works will be essential to possibly find out variety of perceptions from different travel writers. Moreover, by contrasting these works, which were produced in the same era, will potentially give portrayal on how travel writing grows in its era. Exploring these works was also triggered by the latest research on the same object which excludes the study of literature, such as a research article written by Yuliarti, Y., Rustono, R., & Nuryatin, A. who examined *Selimut Debu* in order to identify and categorize speech act types along with its functions (Yuliarti, Rustono, & Nuryatin, 2015). While another research on *Selimut Debu*, in contrast, includes its narrative structure to study the representation of intolerance (Khoirunnisa, 2019); it does not observe this work based on the genre and the author's report of the world. Consequently, this research is conducted in the hope of being able to provide new findings especially in the study of literature.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Categorizing travel story as travel writing is sometimes referred to other terms such as 'travel book', 'travelogue', or 'travel narrative' but it actually suggests the same meaning. In short, the core characteristic that differentiates travel writing from other literary genre is that it contains travel reports about a wider world by attaching the unfamiliarity (people or places) or the 'unknown' to known. Huggan argues that travel writing at the end of the 20th century is often presented in various forms including adventure stories, political commentaries, and spiritual journeys that are facilitated by borrowing scientific instruments such as history, anthropology, etc. (Jaya, 2018; Huggan, 2008; Thompson, 2011).

At this point, travel writing can display illustrative materials such as maps, photos (pictures), journals, and other supplementary materials which need physical form of writing as Kuehn suggested the term 'orderly presentation' (Kuehn & Smethurst, 2009). Interestingly, all of those materials are inherent in the narrative which becomes the primary element in the story. However, the narrative constructed cannot be determined between its factuality and fictional composition. This is what distinguishes travel writing from novel stories in general, such as romance. In travel writing, the element of subjectivity drives the author as a first-person narrator. To some extent, the narrator is, however, not highlighted as in many fiction stories which have a

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first-person perspective; or Thompson calls it as 'self-effacing' where the subject 'I' is not very visible through the story. For this reason, it is due to the observations or reports of the objects that create the narrative, in a form of responses of the narrator. It is through this response that subjectivity is revealed in the story; how the self is involved, how others are told, which then affects the presentation of the 'view' in seeing a particular place or culture.

It is inevitable that the subjectivity or 'self' in travel writing can vary, namely travel writing with touristic agenda and those of having explorative journey in the story. Based on this categorization, subjectivity in describing the world can be clearly observed as the narratorial self may involve through its description. Romantic self is a case in point; this will show both 'outward-looking' form such as providing tourist view and 'inward-looking' form in a sense of self-realization. Meanwhile, postmodern self is seen as a narratorial self who keeps evolving or Thompson mentions it as "a more provisional, picaresque selfhood, conveying a sense that human identity is fluid, contingent construct, forever being performatively constituted in response to events and circumstances" (Thompson, 2011, p. 128). This ambiguity, in this sense, suggests how the narrator has always altered the growth of the 'self' through the explorative travel stories.

To apply the above concepts of travel writing, this research uses a descriptive-analytic method since it aims to explain, describe, and emphasize a response to the issues presented in the travel stories. According to Nassaji, descriptive research allows data collection techniques both qualitatively and quantitatively (by using tools such as frequency, percentage, or other statistical models) in order to see the relationship between them (Nassaji, 2015). However, this research is conducted qualitatively, which observation on the data such as the dialog or narration in the story will be studied based on the above concepts. This research also uses a literature study technique, where primary data, both of the books *Selimut Debu* and *Memoar of Jeddah*, and supporting data including journal articles are carried out by careful reading. Then, examining such dialog or narration that presumably relates to the issues is construed based on the theoretical concepts of travel writing. As it is mentioned by Palmer and Bolderstone that qualitative research focuses on an interpretive approach in seeing a phenomenon from the subjective experience of participants (Palmer & Bolderstone, 2006), which means that the analysis in this research will be carried out by valid evidence. So, at this stage it helps prove or argue a point (Mills, 1991), for instance,

whether or not travel writing has a different subjectivity particularly in reporting the world. Therefore, the results of the analysis can reveal the author's views of the world.

The explanation on reporting the world according to Thompson is how material objects are arranged based on the author's observations. This process allows the author to have recorded the events or the objects either by note-taking or keeping a diary like a travel journal; so these are not described randomly and vaguely (Thompson, 2011). This proclivity can be studied through the authors' involvement in narrating the events or things. Thus, the narrator's point of view in reporting the world becomes a focal point in discovering its subjectivity.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Reporting the world in Selimut Debu

One of the most intriguing yet relevant quotes from a travel stories is as such written by Wibowo, which delineates conditions of a certain country. By providing this view, the author seems to challenge the stereotype in order to dismantle the truth. The way he makes sense the reality, that he is not seeing Afghanistan from the screen anymore, ensures that he is gone both beyond amazement of finally being there and ready to face the obvious challenges in front of his eyes. He knew that some of the news he read on the television like the bombings are real; and the disappearing of the giant Buddha statue in Bamiyan remains a mystery. Nonetheless, through his journey in Afghanistan somehow reconciles the sad truth and amazement of the Afghan's land; it even gives him a self-realization that among those challenges, he finds out the beauty of Afghanistan behind its blanket of dust.

Three years after initiation at the Bamiyan tavern, I am standing stumbling before the gates of Afghanistan, with *khaak* and a pile of dreams. The *qamiz* and the used *shalwar* combi pants that I was wearing were tattered, not inferior to the clothes of the Japanese traveler with a heavy voice and a pinch of beard that I met earlier. *Khaak*, has filled the cavity, esophagus, and lungs. I gazed at the gates of this land. "Afghanistan, *man miayam*. I come." (Wibowo, 2011, p. 15)

Tonight was like any other night in Ishkashim, cold and dark. Mountainous Badakhshan with raging torrents is a province in black. There is no electricity at all. Ironically, it is located right across from Tajikistan, an electricity exporting country. But the light didn't reach here. *Bacha* on the *samovar* turned on the generator at five in the afternoon, when people started arriving for tea and dinner. The television was turned on, the melodious songs filled the air. Mehruddin is like a close friend to me.

"In Wakhan it will be very cold. Your jacket will not be enough," Mehruddin reminded, "Do you have any other sweaters?"

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I shook my head. (Wibowo, 2011, pp. 197-198)

Wibowo describes, in the first excerpt, the moment when he was about to enter Afghanistan with a vivid view of the country covered in *khaak* or dust; and he considers his clothes as shabby as those worn by other traveler he met. It is clear that the description on the condition of Afghanistan and the clothes he wears seem to be real as it is in front of the author. This one also generates same effect, that the description engages the readers as if they see the real *shalwar qamiz* clothes and the dust-covered condition of Afghanistan. In this sense, the readers can contextualize the location of Afghanistan, which is very dry, so that dust is everywhere around the major areas of Afghanistan. Likewise what appears in the second excerpt, where the author is at *samovar* (tea shop) located in the border of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, explicitly shows the readers that Afghanistan is not only arid land but also its topography consists of a stretch of high mountains covered with snow. As stated in the story above, the location to Wakhan in Badakhshan province is a mountainous area and very cold. It is clearly described that some locations in Afghanistan have a dry climate; they will be very hot in the summer but they will turn to be very cold in the winter.

Wibowo also adds some captures from his camera to realistically show to the readers about the condition of the Badakshan mountains he visited. Furthermore, this style of writing which is accompanied by pictures can gain trustworthiness from the readers for it performs the realness of the journey. Beside this element in the writing, travel writing seems to always contain tangible description on the objects seen by the author; the way to narrate this will tend to be as objective as the author can be.

The attitude of 'naïve empiricism' espoused in much eighteenth and nineteenth century travel writing, then, does not necessarily produce travelogues that are any more reliable and trustworthy than their predecessors. Yet adherence to the formal and stylistic conventions outlined earlier became in this period a rhetorical necessity for travel writers who wished to be believed (Thompson, 2011, p. 79).

As stated by Thompson, that the proclivity of modern travel writing authors is trying to always provide an objective description, namely with *naïve empiricism* or stating their observation as real and factual as it seems. In addition, to support this *naïve empiricism*, travel writing author will include or combine their objective statements with evidence such as maps or pictures. Wibowo did the same thing in his story; especially in describing the conditions in Afghanistan, he added photos of places and people he met during his journey. Apart from his background as a journalist, according to Thompson, this would also gain trustworthiness from readers. One of the

compositions of Wibowo's travel story is from his experience of meeting many people with various backgrounds in Afghanistan, most of which are clearly seen through the quotes of commentary or dialogues incorporated in his story.

Viewing Afghanistan is not only from what is seen by him, but also from people's opinions about Afghanistan, namely both locals and outsiders like other travellers who joined in the journey. Based on the quote excerpted previously, there is a combination between the author's observations on what he saw or heard from people around him about Afghanistan; and its comparison to another country, Tajikistan. The author's statement is conveyed indirectly by using analytical and distance delivery technique in narrating the story. First, the Afghan views the samovar which travellers usually come to rest. To Afghans, stopping by at a samovar is not a usual thing to do; and it seems that there is no point stopping by at a samovar for a traveller. This view is later clarified by providing evidence based on his analysis of the samovar, that he gained a lot of knowledge about life lesson during his stay at several samovars in Afghanistan. This suggests that the view toward samovar is the opposite for the author. To the author, the samovar provides valuable knowledge through meeting and exchanging stories with the visitors and the shop owners. Second, the author seems to be providing an objective comparison between the conditions of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, namely by providing a distance to himself as an observer, namely on the views of the difference between both. In the second quote, the author seems to detach himself in giving judgment to these two countries. As Thompson explains that "...travel writing are notoriously prone to summing up cultures, passing judgments on people and places based on personal impressions or anecdotal evidence" (Thompson, 2011, p. 90), the author expresses his views on the comparison of the two countries through comments on the people's opinion. This places the author's position at a distance from the object he is observing. So, before coming to the final conclusion, the author seems to give the results of his interpretation which was supported by evidence seen in the following quote:

Tajikistan that appears in the very eye is not as close as it seems. Like the twin, there is also the city of Ishkashim, just across the river. To cross into Tajikistan's Ishkashim which is no more than three kilometers away, Mehruddin had to travel more than a thousand kilometers back and forth to Kabul to get a visa. (Wibowo, 2011, pp. 187-188)

On the other side of the river, there have been wars, struggles for independence, flows of refugees, people starving. Is that Tajikistan filling Afghans' dreams next to this river? (Wibowo, 2011, p. 188)

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Are they tired of war in decades, perpetual poverty, so that a drop of entertainment and the soft voices of the "dream world" of Tajikistan are greeted with great joy here? (Wibowo, 2011, p. 189)

In the quotes, it appears that there is a cross-reference to state the truth of Mehruddin's statement regarding the situation in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, comparing the two where the condition of one of them is not much better. With the final conclusion in the last quote, the author's personal impression seems to be verified; so that the author's personal opinion about these two countries can be perceived objectively. It shows that the author's personal judgments are not only based on impression or experiences, but most importantly it is explained carefully to make it more objective. As it will suggest, the modern trend of travel writing described by Thompson is that the author's findings are not a hasty and final conclusion in order to avoid subjective description. It is thus necessary for the author to support his personal impression with cross-referenced interpretation.

Based on the analysis of the depiction of the world in *Selimut Debu*, it can be classified that Wibowo's travel story is modern travel writing which factualising and authenticating strategies are utilized in the narrative. This factualization leads to making an objective description based on valid observations; the validity of the observation has been through such verification by referring to the relevant condition in Afghanistan; thus, the factualization is real objectivity. The second is the authenticating strategy, namely by providing a description of the journey he has experienced with statements of personal impressions, reflections, and interpretations.

Reporting the World in *Memoar of Jedah*

The story of Davincka's journey in Saudi Arabia is not depicted continuously in the narrative of *Memoar of Jeddah*. Davincka herself is as a narrator in this travel story. She seems to describe the part of her life journey that began with the decision to follow her husband who moved out from Tehran (Iran) to Jeddah (Saudi). At the beginning of the story, the narrator was reluctant and doubted the journey to Saudi; she thought that Saudi is merely a place for pilgrims not to live or to have a journey in. This is also due to the narrator's view on what she knows as "overseas" that is always referred and attached to the image of countries having four seasons. To her, hearing the word "abroad" is associated with European countries, not a kind of country in the Middle East.

I would love to live abroad. Living, I mean. If it's for a vacation, frankly don't really want to. The best vacation spots from beaches to mountains are all in Indonesia. Why having vacation abroad then? One of the best beaches is in Losari, where I was born, in Makassar. Been there?

Abroad in my mind used to be gazing at the mighty Eiffel tower, walking around and busy taking pictures of flowers bloomed at the Keukenhof, or busy throwing snowballs with children when winter came. (Davincka, 2013, p. ix)

For some reason, I have never put any city in the Middle East to the list of places I should live there someday. If it's a vacation, fine. I want to go to Dubai, Abu Dhabi and maybe Doha. But Saudi? Only for Hajj (Davincka, 2013, p. 3)

The excerpt above suggests that travel writing comprises author's beliefs that are inherently implied through the story. Additionally, it is also mentioned by Purwaningsih that travel writing has a tendency to convey values understood by the author as well as assumptions about things that the author knows through the journey (Purwaningsih, 2015). As exemplified above, the author's understanding on living abroad shows rigidity in differentiating countries. In this case, the author specifically conveys her assumption on "foreign countries" which are associated with their binary, Indonesia or other eastern countries. So, the author has the assumption that going to Saudi is not "overseas", but she links the characteristics of Saudi Arabia with pilgrims, namely the place for Hajj. Meanwhile, overseas or abroad is described typically in a Eurocentric idea, namely a country that is neat, organized, has a difference in seasons from countries like Indonesia; it is European country that comes into her mind in describing "foreign" and "non-foreign". In the above excerpt, it is implied that the comparison between self and other can be highlighted from the beginning of the story of the journey; the colonial discourse is embodied through the narrative particularly in the description of the West and the East. The West is the European country, while the East is the other; such as the Middle East which is considered to have no tourism potential. This is presumably because those countries with its regularity guarantee a well-developed tourism potential; it is like a concept of a trip that is well planned and arranged. Meanwhile, Middle Eastern countries are closely associated with the common stereotype as a country of pilgrims or even a chaotic country, so there is neither regularity nor tourist destinations.

Although the above discourse is a common thing when an author encounters the differences or the unknown, basically travel writing focuses on conveying information about the unfamiliar or newness. For instance, it is particularly describing places or people and even phenomena that are

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not known yet (Nasution, 2015). In the following quote, Davincka summarizes a description of condition at a certain time in Saudi.

In Indonesia, when Ramadan arrives, shops close even faster, right? However, in Jeddah it was different. The morning in Ramadan month seems like a dead city in Jeddah. There is almost no activity whatsoever. All schools must be off. Only people who will go to work pass by on the highway. The grocery stores are all closed. All outlets in the mall were closed, except for places to hang out like for the Arabs like *Hyperpanda*, *Danube* and *Bin Dawood*. Those three places are like *Carrefour* in Indonesia. This silence last until the time of Asr (afternoon). After Asr, several outlets in the mall begin to open. The dining restaurants also start to open. After Maghrib, they immediately close again. Then, after lsya, life begins! (Davincka, 2013, pp. 22-23)

This describes dissimilar custom, which needs adaptation to follow particularly for Indonesians. It also depicts a wider world beyond the scope of the author, namely beyond the culture and location of Indonesia. Such newness that she experienced is very interesting to be reported to a wider world; and by this being reported can give useful information that might work for others.

Therefore, the agenda of *Memoir of Jeddah* travel story is to provide useful information for readers. With such agenda, it can be understood that the author involves herself as an observer. As it also discussed earlier, the 'outward-looking' is employed through the story, that of course implies the observation to things she saw. Correspondingly, this is categorized by Feifer (Thompson, 2011, p. 127) as a touristic agenda, where the author acts like a tourist. The journey that she will go through seems like a trip that has been well arranged. On the other hand, 'traveler' is mostly associated with such exploratory, unpredictable journey that is not tied to a travel agency. In accordance with Feifer's opinion, some excerpts from Davincka's story when she visited Al Hijr, the station built in the period of the Ottoman Empire, can assert that her journey is touristic.

Our guide, a middle-aged man, a native of the town of Al-Ula, started telling stories. This station is one of a series of train stations built during the Ottoman Empire to connect Syria-Jerusalem and the Holy City area. Its main purpose is to transport pilgrims to Mecca and Medina. (Davincka, 2013, p. 135)

Our guide again told the story, the rock was carved in an unusual way, namely from top to bottom. Only on a piece of wood to carve and water to soften the surface of the rock. Imagine, with these simple methods and equipment, the Nabateans were able to build a unique temple that is still strong today. (Davincka, 2013, p. 137)

The author's visit to places around Jeddah frequently uses the services of a travel agency, as well as when she went for Hajj; at least, if it does not involve the service of a travel agency, the trip is carried out by herself alone (with the family) with a well-arranged plan and consideration.

As the journey narrated in the previous quote, the author visited Al Hijr by using the service of a travel agent. On the description of the journey, factual description of the places she visited is primarily based on the explanation of the tour guide. It is very clear here that the story of the journey in *Memoir of Jeddah* is a touristic journey; namely providing important information about the "unknown" to the readers so as to make the places become "known". The narrative seems to be sequentially prepared, from finding out the information of the location of Al Hijr to presenting it in a narrative. The author communicates something new or unfamiliar—it turns out that there seems to be a historical and archaeological site in Saudi—as an interesting tourist site. In this case, Davincka looks for information first about the Al Hijr site, then incorporates more information about Al Hijr from a tour guide. Thus, it can be well communicated to the readers through the story.

The report of the world in the *Memoir of Jeddah* has a descriptive and epistemological principle. In line with the explanation by Thompson, this dualism can potentially work yet it is also arguably complex.

In various ways, then, travellers often proceed by some sort of principle of attachment', both as they seek to make sense of their experience, and as they seek to convey that experience to the reader. This is arguably all that a traveller can do when faced with the new and the different, yet at the same time it is an epistemological and descriptive procedure that can be highly problematic. (Thompson, 2011, pp. 70-71)

In this case, Davincka seems to make sense all her personal experiences or at least these can be understood logically although presenting story in this way is problematic—this is what most travel writing authors do when they encounter various things during their journey. In other words, this principle maintains two opposites, namely personal experiences which are subjective and factual descriptions supported by relevant references, which are objective. Therefore, the composition of travel writing is a combination of these two elements which makes it an autobiographical but it is still objective on the other side. It can be explicitly taken from Davincka's personal experience in *Memoar of Jedah*, that such writing provides abundant information of the unknown based on factual and relevant matters of places and people in Saudi Arabia.

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CONCLUSION

Both of the travel writings, *Selimut Debu* and *Memoir of Jeddah*, indicate that they comprise a report of the world through observation, depictions of things, assumptions they have, and positioning of the *self* when the encounters happened. In addition, based on these two travel stories, the comparison between self and others becomes central because the journey produces this encounter. Consequently, the authors' role in communicating their travel experience in the stories becomes significant; because it will affect how the view of self (inward-looking) and others (outward-looking) appear in the narrative.

From the findings in the discussion, it can be concluded that the self-subjectivity offered in these novels is different. In Selimut Debu, the visible subjectivity is the self as a postmodernsubject; that the author is not only an observer or the self who gets enlightened or realized from the journey he takes. However, as the journey goes through the subject "I" is no longer the central self; so that the subject "I" sometimes mixes with the subject of "the other I" which makes it ambiguous. It is though in this process that the subject becomes fluid, sometimes it comes to be "the other I" and return to be the "imperious I". Based on this result, it is understood that the subject "I" undergoes alteration and turns to be the self that is always growing in the journey. Meanwhile, Memoar of Jeddah shows the existence of a romantic self or Romantic-subject where the author reacts to whatever she encounters, thus, making her go through a process of selfrealization—the subject truly finds herself. Therefore, it asserts that the self in this story is not only the observer but also the self who always involves to each situation and condition occurred in the journey, which is categorized as the romantic-self. Finally, these two works have different proclivity in reporting the world; Selimut Debu owns subject alteration which accordingly does not restrict the subject as either 'self', 'other' or beyond; and this is distinctively performed by *Memoar of Jeddah* which indicates stability of the subject as the observer.

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