

**Psycho-social Development of the Main Characters in the Novels *Redeeming Love* by Francine Rivers and *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan: A Comparative Study**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study conducts a comparative analysis of the psycho-social development of the female protagonists in *Redeeming Love* by Francine Rivers and *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan, using Erik H. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development as the primary analytical framework. Through a qualitative comparative literary approach, the research examines how Angel and Dewi Ayu navigate complex psychological trajectories shaped by trauma, identity crises, and sociocultural pressures. Despite cultural differences, American evangelical society and postcolonial Indonesian contexts, their developmental paths reveal both parallels and divergences in the negotiation of agency, intimacy, and selfhood. The analysis highlights how each character's psychological growth is influenced by intersecting personal and structural factors, including patriarchy, commodification, and cultural narratives of suffering and redemption. Angel's progression toward psychosocial integrity contrasts with Dewi Ayu's descent into existential despair, reflecting broader ideological distinctions in the authors' respective cultural milieus. While Rivers frames healing through religious faith and personal transformation, Kurniawan presents a critique of systemic violence and unresolved trauma. Textual analysis is based on close readings of key narrative moments that illustrate psychosocial struggle and adaptation, with attention to character development, thematic construction, and socio-historical context. The findings underscore the value of comparative literature in illuminating universal patterns of human development while also accounting for culturally specific experiences. This research contributes to the discourse on literature, psychology, and cross-cultural analysis by demonstrating how fictional narratives can reflect and interrogate the dynamics between individual identity formation and societal structures.

**Keywords:** Psychosocial Development; Comparative Literature; *Redeeming Love*; *Cantik itu Luka*

**INTRODUCTION**

Understanding how characters psychologically develop in literature offers a powerful lens into the social and cultural forces that shape human identity. Literary

narratives often reflect and interrogate these forces by dramatizing the internal conflicts, societal pressures, and emotional transformations of their protagonists. In this context, Erik Homburger Erikson's theory of psychosocial development serves as a useful analytical framework to examine how individual identities are shaped across different life stages and environments. This study applies Erikson's model to a comparative literary analysis of two novels: *Redeeming Love* (1991) by Francine Rivers and *Cantik itu Luka* (Beauty is a Wound) (2002) by Eka Kurniawan. While originating from distinct cultural, religious, and historical traditions, the American Christian West and postcolonial Indonesia, both novels portray deeply complex female characters navigating trauma, societal marginalization, and the search for selfhood.

Francine Rivers' *Redeeming Love*, set in 1850s California during the Gold Rush, presents Angel, a woman scarred by childhood trauma, abandonment, and exploitation. Her development is traced through Erikson's psychosocial stages, from Trust vs. Mistrust to Intimacy vs. Isolation, revealing the impact of early suffering on her sense of self-worth, capacity for love, and spiritual restoration. Christian allegory underpins her journey, framing her psychological healing within themes of grace, redemption, and transformation. Rivers critiques patriarchal society through Angel's struggle with identity and empowerment, highlighting the intersection of gender, trauma, and faith.

Conversely, Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik itu Luka* follows Dewi Ayu, a woman who endures war, sexual violence, and social oppression in postcolonial Indonesia. Through the lens of magical realism, the novel explores how personal and collective histories shape Dewi Ayu's identity. Her psychosocial development, too, reflects Erikson's stages as she wrestles with autonomy, identity, and meaning under conditions of patriarchal control and national turmoil. Kurniawan's narrative functions not only as a personal story but as a commentary on Indonesia's sociohistorical landscape, portraying the enduring scars of colonization and cultural repression on women's lives.

This research adopts a comparative literature methodology to explore the psychosocial development of Angel and Dewi Ayu within their respective socio-cultural frameworks. The choice to analyze these two protagonists across texts from the United States and Indonesia is grounded in three core observations. First, both authors blend realism with transcendental literary modes, Christian allegory in *Redeeming Love* and magical realism in *Cantik itu Luka*, to articulate psychological depth and thematic resonance. Second, Rivers and Kurniawan provide critical insights into gender inequality and the societal structures that shape women's psychological experiences. While Rivers draws from Christian humanist traditions to portray Angel's path to redemption, Kurniawan critiques the legacies of patriarchal and colonial violence through Dewi Ayu's tragicomic life. Third, both authors foreground the role of social environment in shaping identity and mental health, showing that individual development is inextricably linked to cultural norms, historical trauma, and societal pressures.

Several previous studies provide valuable insights that inform the theoretical and contextual foundation of this research. Debora Irwanto and Jenny M. Djundjung's (2013) study, "Angel's Redemption in Francine Rivers' Redeeming Love," provides a theological reading of Angel's transformation, emphasizing her evolving self-perception through Christian symbolism. While offering a meaningful interpretation grounded in biblical themes, the study lacks engagement with broader psychological or feminist frameworks. This current research builds upon their insights by incorporating Erikson's theory and addressing socio-cultural influences that shape Angel's development.

A more psychologically focused perspective is offered by Rachel Adacia Yollanda's (2023) thesis, "The Psychological Conflict of the Main Character in Redeeming Love Novel by Francine Rivers", which applies Kurt Lewin's conflict theory to examine Sarah/Angel's internal struggles. Yollanda provides a close textual analysis of Angel's emotional responses, such as anxiety and frustration. While thorough in its psychological analysis, the study does not engage with comparative frameworks or broader cultural contexts. The current study extends these findings by contrasting Angel's psychological development with that of Dewi Ayu's, thereby offering a culturally embedded interpretation of character formation.

On the Indonesian side, Fajri, Azis, and Ulviani (2023) provide a feminist psychosocial reading of *Cantik itu Luka* in their article "Ufeminisme dalam Novel *Cantik itu Luka* Karya Eka Kurniawan," published in *Jurnal Motivasi Pendidikan dan Bahasa*. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, they examine how environmental and emotional pressures shape Dewi Ayu and other female characters' psychological lives. Their identification of 129 feminist-coded textual moments supports the argument that Kurniawan's work is both socially engaged and psychologically rich. This study draws on their insights but moves beyond a single-text focus by incorporating a comparative dimension and a broader psychosocial theory.

While the reviewed studies offer valuable insights into character development, identity formation, and feminist or spiritual themes, this research distinguishes itself by adopting an interdisciplinary comparative literature approach. By examining *Redeeming Love* and *Cantik itu Luka* through Erikson's psychosocial framework, the study seeks to uncover how different cultural, historical, and gendered contexts influence the psychological development of Angel and Dewi Ayu. In examining the intersection between literature and psychology, this study seeks to explore how literary characters reflect and embody complex human development across different cultural landscapes. Specifically, this research poses two central questions: What are the key similarities and differences in the psychosocial development of the main characters, Angel and Dewi Ayu, as portrayed in *Redeeming Love* and *Cantik itu Luka*? Furthermore, in what ways do the socio-cultural contexts of the United States and Indonesia influence these characters' psychological development, thereby contributing to a meaningful comparison between the two literary works? These questions are grounded in Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development

and framed within a comparative literature approach that pays attention to narrative, culture, and identity. By addressing these questions, the study aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which personal identity and social experience are shaped and represented in literature, offering insights into how cross-cultural perspectives enrich our understanding of psychological growth and resilience in fictional characters. It aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of universal human experiences, such as trauma, resilience, and redemption, while also highlighting culturally specific pathways to psychological growth. Through this dual focus, the research offers a more holistic interpretation of literature's capacity to reflect, critique, and humanize the complexities of psychological and social life.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploring psychosocial development through literature allows scholars to investigate how fictional characters mirror real-world identity formation processes. Erik H. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development has been widely applied to literary texts as a framework for understanding the stages of psychological growth in relation to social contexts. This study builds on that tradition by comparing the developmental trajectories of female protagonists in Francine Rivers' *Redeeming Love* and Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik itu Luka*. Both characters, Angel and Dewi Ayu, exemplify how trauma, identity, and societal structures intersect to shape psychological maturation across cultures. Previous research on *Redeeming Love* has primarily focused on religious symbolism. For instance, Irwanto and Djundjung (2013) emphasize Angel's spiritual redemption, tracing her transformation through Christian allegory. However, their theological lens overlooks the broader psychosocial aspects of her development. This study expands the analysis by integrating Erikson's theory, which allows for a more comprehensive understanding of Angel's struggle with intimacy, identity, and generativity in relation to her traumatic past and patriarchal environment.

Yollanda (2023) offers a more psychologically grounded reading by analyzing Angel's internal conflicts using Kurt Lewin's conflict theory. Her work highlights Angel's emotional turbulence but remains confined to a single cultural and psychological perspective. The present study deepens this approach by embedding Angel's development within a cross-cultural framework, allowing for comparative insights alongside Dewi Ayu's parallel yet contrasting journey in *Cantik itu Luka*. On the Indonesian side, Fajri, Azis, and Ulviani (2023) examine Dewi Ayu from a feminist and psychosocial perspective, identifying how sociocultural oppression impacts her psychological well-being. Their work illuminates the nuanced portrayal of female trauma in Kurniawan's novel. However, the current research adds further depth by juxtaposing Dewi Ayu's development with Angel's, offering a comparative analysis that brings out both universal patterns and cultural specificities in their psychological trajectories.

The comparative literature methodology employed here situates both characters within Erikson's developmental stages, revealing both convergence and divergence.

While Angel finds resolution through intimacy and faith, Dewi Ayu remains entrenched in despair. These contrasting outcomes reflect the socio-cultural backdrops of the United States' evangelical tradition and Indonesia's postcolonial struggle. The literature reviewed underscores the necessity of accounting for cultural context when analyzing identity formation in fiction. Ultimately, this literature review supports the study's central aim: to illuminate how different cultural environments shape the psychosocial development of literary characters. The reviewed works collectively emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches to literature. By situating Angel and Dewi Ayu within Erikson's framework and their respective socio-historical realities, this study contributes to a richer, more nuanced understanding of trauma, identity, and resilience in global literature.

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Sample**

This study employs a qualitative research method to examine the psychosocial development of the protagonists in *Redeeming Love* by Francine Rivers (1991) and *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan (2002). The focus is on how the protagonists' inner experiences and identities are shaped by broader cultural and historical contexts. As Creswell (2014) explains, qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. In this study, the selected novels serve as the primary data sources, representing distinct socio-cultural backgrounds: Christian-influenced 19th-century American West and postcolonial Indonesia.

### **Instrument and Procedures**

The research instrument involves a series of close readings of both texts to uncover key narrative elements, particularly those related to the protagonists' psychosocial development. These elements include characterization, internal conflict, and emotional responses. The data collection procedure involved identifying relevant textual evidence and categorizing them based on Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. The eight stages of Erikson's model provided a framework for tracing the emotional and psychological growth of each protagonist throughout the narrative arcs.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted through an inductive approach, beginning with the identification of specific textual instances that reflect psychosocial development and progressing toward broader thematic interpretations. Using Erikson's eight-stage model, the study systematically analyzed each protagonist's developmental journey, focusing on how key psychosocial crises were experienced and resolved. Comparative analysis was then carried out to explore how each character's

trajectory is influenced by the differing socio-cultural environments of the two novels. This comparative framework helped highlight the role of cultural context in shaping individual identity and psychological growth.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Angel, from *Redeeming Love*, and Dewi Ayu, from *Cantik itu Luka*, are two complex protagonists who undergo profound psychosocial growth throughout their narratives. This analysis examines their development by exploring their experiences, emotions, and relationships through the lens of Erik Homburger Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1963).

### Industry vs. Inferiority (School Age - 6-12 years)

In *Redeeming Love*, Angel's Industry vs. Inferiority Erikson's stage (1963) is brutally distorted by childhood sexual exploitation. Explained by rivers in the novel *Redeeming Love*, instead of developing competence through education, she learns transactional skills, pricing her body (Rivers, 1991) and spotting counterfeit money, while envying schoolgirls from brothel windows (p. 148). Her failed escape attempt, punished by forced coin-swallowing (p. 47), cements her inferiority, reducing her self-worth to sexual utility. Conversely, Dewi Ayu in *Cantik itu Luka* (Kurniawan, 2022: pp. 80–90) navigates this stage amid colonial violence. While Angel's inferiority stems from personal exploitation, Dewi Ayu's arises from systemic oppression, she survives by weaponizing sexuality (a perverse "industry") but internalizes societal contempt for women. Both characters subvert Erikson's framework: Angel's "skills" reinforce trauma, while Dewi Ayu's survival tactics mask deep-seated inferiority from racial and gendered marginalization. Their contrasting contexts, individual abuse versus collective trauma, highlight how socio-historical forces warp psychosocial development.

### Identity vs. Role Confusion (12–18 years)

In adolescence, Angel loses her birth identity as “Sarah” and constructs a hardened persona as “Angel” to survive. “Sarah was the girl who believed in love. Angel knew better” (Rivers, 1991: p. 145) illustrates her rejection of vulnerability. Dewi Ayu's response to societal objectification is the adoption of a monstrous self-image “*Jika mereka menginginkan monster, aku akan menjadi monster yang paling menakutkan*” (If they wanted a monster, I would become the most terrifying one) (Kurniawan, 2002: p. 105). Both characters experience identity fragmentation, though Angel seeks recovery while Dewi Ayu embraces distortion.

### Intimacy vs. Isolation (19–40 years)

Angel, shaped by betrayal, initially rejects intimacy: “Love was a weapon” (Rivers, 1991: p. 135). Her bond with Michael Hosea, marked by patience and unconditional love, slowly dismantles her emotional walls. In contrast, Dewi Ayu deliberately

rejects love and vulnerability “*Aku tidak butuh dicintai. Aku butuh mereka takut padaku*” (I do not need to be loved. I need them to fear me) (Kurniawan, 2002: p. 225). Both characters exemplify how isolation stems from past trauma: Angel through fear of vulnerability, Dewi Ayu through destructive power dynamics. However, Angel eventually finds redemption through love, while Dewi Ayu remains trapped in a cycle of violence.

### **Generativity vs. Stagnation (40–65 years)**

In *Redeeming Love*, Angel achieves generativity through reconciling with her past and building a family with Michael. After escaping prostitution, she learns to love and accept affection, eventually becoming a mother to their children, a transformation demonstrating her ability to "give" to the next generation (Rivers, 1991: pp. 320-325). In contrast, Dewi Ayu in *Cantik itu Luka* remains trapped in stagnation. Despite bearing four children, her relationships with them are fraught with hatred and trauma. She fails to create a positive emotional legacy, instead of perpetuating cycles of violence and rejection (Kurniawan, 2022: pp. 280-285). These characters embody Erikson's polarity: Angel finds meaning through nurturing, while Dewi Ayu stagnates in isolation and bitterness.

### **Integrity vs. Despair (65+ years)**

Although Angel does not live into old age, she symbolically achieves integrity through inner peace and meaningful action. Her journey reflects acceptance and spiritual growth. Conversely, Dewi Ayu, even after rising from the grave, remains entangled in her unresolved trauma. She confesses: “*Aku tidak punya cerita indah untuk diceritakan, hanya luka yang kubawa sampai mati*” (I have no beautiful story to tell, only wounds I carry to my death) (Kurniawan, 2022: p. 402). Her ending exemplifies despair and unhealed regret.

### **Similarities and Differences of Psycho-social Development of Angel and Dewi Ayu**

Despite originating from vastly different cultural contexts, the American Gold Rush era and postcolonial Indonesia, Angel (*Redeeming Love*) and Dewi Ayu (*Cantik itu Luka*) exhibit parallel psychosocial disturbances rooted in traumatic exploitation. Both endure childhood identity annihilation: Angel is sold into prostitution by her father, while Dewi Ayu becomes a Japanese military "comfort woman". These experiences forge defensive identities, Angel's emotional detachment "love is a painful weapon," and Dewi Ayu's weaponized cruelty “*ketakutan lebih bisa diandalkan daripada cinta*” (fear is more reliable than love) (Kurniawan, 2002). Their oppressive environments (brothel culture and wartime patriarchy) normalize violence, crippling their capacity for intimacy and perpetuating cyclical self-isolation. Ultimately, both characters embody Erikson's theory of stunted development, where unresolved trauma distorts self-concept and relational patterns.

Conversely, despite sharing profound childhood trauma, Angel *Redeeming Love* and Dewi Ayu *Cantik itu Luka* manifest starkly contrasting psychosocial trajectories. During Industry vs. Inferiority, Angel develops pathological "skills" in prostitution (calculating client payments in three currencies) that reinforce her inferiority (Rivers, 1991: p. 134), while Dewi Ayu's complete absence of this developmental stage results in extreme survival mechanisms (Kurniawan, 2002). Their Identity vs. Role Confusion diverges radically: Angel fractures between her true self (Sarah) and imposed identity ("Angel"), whereas Dewi Ayu actively crafts a "monster" persona as armor (Kurniawan, 2002: p. 225). In Intimacy vs. Isolation, Angel learns vulnerability through Michael's love, contrasting Dewi Ayu's dominance-through-fear "*Aku butuh mereka untuk takut padaku*" (I need them to fear me) (Kurniawan, 2002: p. 85). Ultimately, Angel achieves Generativity by finding shelter for abuse survivors, while Dewi Ayu embodies Despair, perpetuating intergenerational hatred "*Dunia ini kejam, lawanlah dengan kejam*" (This world is cruel, and you must be crueller than it) (Kurniawan, 2002: p. 330). These opposing outcomes demonstrate how unprocessed trauma calcifies into cyclical violence (Dewi Ayu), while supportive relationships enable transformation (Angel).

### **Socio-cultural Influence Analysis**

This comparative study of *Redeeming Love* by Francine Rivers and *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan highlights how literature reflects both universal human experiences, trauma, identity, and redemption, and the specific socio-cultural frameworks that shape them. Despite their vastly different origins, evangelical America and postcolonial Indonesia, both authors embed deep critiques of patriarchy, social injustice, and spiritual struggle through the lens of their respective traditions.

Rivers writes out of an ideological conviction rooted in American evangelicalism. Her narrative in *Redeeming Love* channels this belief system, emphasizing personal conversion, divine forgiveness, and spiritual rebirth. Embedded in the 1980s evangelical revival and the American ethic of individual transformation, her work reflects a collective faith grounded in personal redemption. Although according by Brian Reynolds (2005) raised in a Christian home that shaped her basic identity, Rivers experienced a crisis when writing secular romance novels that conflicted with her beliefs. Her conversion in 1986 resolved this crisis, as she chose to fully integrate Christian values into her literary work. Rivers' works, such as *Redeeming Love*, began to explore the relationships between people, God, and each other, reflecting her attainment of spiritual and emotional depth. Not only did she build meaningful relationships through her writing, but she also cultivated a strong community of Christian readers.

Rivers was shaped by key external factors as explained in Smith's research, including the evangelical movement of the 1980s, which provided a framework for combining faith and art; American individualism, which aligns with his focus on personal transformation; and his own experience of spiritual emptiness, which



provides the psychological foundation for his theme of redemption (Smith, 2020). Rivers used her influence to create works that were not only entertaining but also carried a message of faith. *Redeeming Love* became one of the best-selling Christian novels of all time, where she imparts a legacy of spiritual values to readers. As an established writer, Rivers reflected on her life journey through the themes of redemption and reconciliation in her works. Rivers belief that "God uses human stories to reveal His love" shows his achievement of integrity after overcoming the "brokenness" of the years before his conversion (Rivers, 2005, in an interview with the Christian Book Association).

Rivers' journey follows a clear pattern: identity crisis, resolution through faith, and ultimately meaningful creativity. The power of *Redeeming Love* comes from the fact that Rivers has lived through its main story arc - from identity confusion to clarity of calling, from artistic compromise to purposeful creation. *Redeeming Love* is ultimately the literary fruit of her development, resulting in works that are not only literary achievements but also transformative for their readers. According to Eugene Peterson (2021), the socio-cultural influences on Francine Rivers' development particularly her Christian faith, the 1980s evangelical movement, and American individualist culture shape *Redeeming Love* as a work that is not only commercially successful but also spiritually impactful for readers. The novel reflects Rivers' personal journey from an identity crisis to self-integrity through the integration of faith and literature.

Kurniawan's work is shaped by Indonesia's historical trauma, colonial occupation, wartime violence, and Reformasi-era upheavals. According to Hatley (2015) on *Trauma and memory in Eka Kurniawan's Beauty is a Wound*, this novel integrates shared socio-historical dynamics by narrating these events through Dewi Ayu's experiences, highlighting collective trauma and societal injustice. His story is ideologically shaped by postcolonial perspectives, amplified through the lens of Javanese cultural traditions and communal consciousness (Hatley, 2015: pp. 59-74). Kurniawan, who grew up in Tasikmalaya with strong Javanese cultural roots, faced tension between the local traditions inherent in him and the pressures of modernity. This identity conflict is reflected in the characters in his novel, such as Dewi Ayu, who is trapped in the world of tradition and brutal modern violence. Kurniawan's simple family background and the life of the West Java community rich in oral traditions are important foundations for his literary imagination. Kurniawan grew up in a rural environment with folk tales, local myths, and daily cultural practices providing him with creative raw materials that were then processed into magical-realistic narratives in his works. Vickers's research also highlights how limited access to global literature in his childhood sharpened his ability to develop an original storytelling style, which combines local elements with modern literary techniques (2020).

Eka Kurniawan, whose literary career emerged during Indonesia's *Reformasi* (Reformation) era in the late 1990s, cultivated a distinctive narrative style that fuses magical realism with incisive sociopolitical critique, as analyzed by Marshall Clark

(2019). In this phase, his relationship with Indonesia's collective history finds its form through a narrative that highlights the isolation of victims of political violence, especially the 1965 tragedy ... (Kurniawan, 2002: pp. 125-130). According to Keith Foulcher's analysis (2016), this novel functions as a powerful medium through which the author constructs an intimate dialogue with Indonesia's historical past while simultaneously exposing the profound alienation experienced by historical victims.

Kurniawan reaches the peak of his creativity with *Cantik itu Luka*. Here, he not only writes a novel, but also creates a cultural legacy in three ways: reconstructing Indonesia's traumatic history from a rarely revealed perspective (Foulcher, 2016), giving voice to marginalized groups that have been silenced by the official narrative (Kurniawan, 2002: pp. 80–85), and creating a new literary form that unites Javanese oral tradition (such as the story structure of *wayang* or puppetry and folklore) with modern writing techniques (Clark, 2019). Kurniawan's work "not only reveals historical wounds but also transforms them into productive art" (Foulcher, 2016). More than just a literary work, this novel is a form of psychological processing of the complexity of modern Indonesian identity, a masterpiece born from inner conflict (Foulcher, 2016), but precisely because of that it can touch similar conflicts that live within its readers. Thus, Kurniawan not only writes a novel, but also creates a space for shared reflection on who we are as a nation and where we are going. By Tiwon research: Kurniawan's work excavates buried histories, transforming the novel into a contested arena for redefining 'Indonesianese' (Tiwon, 2017) and Budiman's "The interrogation of national identity in post-reformation literature reflects society's unfinished reconciliation with its past" (2021: p. 131).

Despite differing backgrounds, both novels address universal concerns on how individuals rebuild after extreme suffering and how love, suffering, or faith shape identity. These shared inquiries highlight universality in the human condition as one important aspect in the study of Comparative Literature and the reason why two or more literary works from different countries and cultural contexts can have silver lines in their themes and plots. Each novelist transforms specific cultural and historical conflicts into narratives that speak to global readers, testifying to literature's power to bridge cultural divides. this comparative lens positions *Redeeming Love* and *Cantik itu Luka* not just as culturally bound narratives, but as complementary responses to shared ethical and existential questions. Their respective deployments of ideology, interpretations of history, and portrayals of love show that even vastly different cultures converge when probing the heart of human resilience.

Francine Rivers and Eka Kurniawan transform cultural identity conflicts into powerful narratives, with *Redeeming Love* bridging American evangelicalism and mainstream fiction by Alexander research (Alexander, 2018), while *Cantik itu Luka* negotiates Javanese tradition and Indonesian modernity (Clark, 2019). Both authors repurpose trauma, Rivers channels personal spiritual struggles into redemptive allegory, whereas Kurniawan transposes collective historical wounds into social

critique (Foulcher, 2016). Their works emerged from pivotal sociocultural movements: Rivers' novel reflects 1980s evangelical revival, while Kurniawan's responds to Indonesia's reformation era (Foulcher, 2016). Stylistically, both blend traditions with contemporary forms, Rivers merges biblical themes with romance conventions (Alexander, 2018), and Kurniawan combines *wayang* storytelling with magical realism (Clark, 2019). Ultimately, their novels serve as healing instruments: *Redeeming Love* offers spiritual restoration, while *Cantik itu Luka* facilitates historical reconciliation (Tiwon, 2017). Despite differing contexts, both demonstrate how literature can transform societal tensions into universal narratives of identity and resilience.

Though cultural contexts, American evangelical versus Javanese Indonesian, are vastly different, Rivers and Kurniawan share a remarkable creative approach: they turn socio-cultural dissonance into literary fuel. By confronting identity, tradition, modernity, and trauma within their societies, each produces fiction that resonates far beyond cultural boundaries. Ultimately, *Redeeming Love* and *Cantik itu Luka* stand as globally relevant works that reflect modern humanity's struggle with selfhood, heritage, and transformative growth.

Francine Rivers and Eka Kurniawan transform cultural tensions into powerful narratives, though their approaches diverge significantly. Both authors channel identity conflicts into their works - Rivers bridges American evangelicalism with mainstream fiction (Alexander, 2018), while Kurniawan negotiates Javanese tradition with modernity (Clark, 2019). They similarly repurpose trauma, with Rivers focusing on personal spiritual redemption and Kurniawan addressing collective historical wounds (Foulcher, 2016). Their works emerged from distinct sociocultural movements: 1980s evangelical revival for Rivers (Lei, 2008) and Indonesia's Reformasi era for Kurniawan (Foulcher, 2016: p. 433).

Key differences emerge in their social roles and creative approaches. Rivers serves as a moral storyteller reinforcing conservative values [16], while Kurniawan acts as a public intellectual challenging power structure (Alexander, 2018: pp. 435-438). Their generativity manifests differently - Rivers fosters faith-based communities (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992: p. 1008), whereas Kurniawan builds critical historical consciousness across cultures (Foulcher, 2016). Their narrative styles contrast sharply: Rivers employs allegorical resolution (Lei, 2008), while Kurniawan utilizes grotesque, open-ended storytelling (Budiman, 2021). Ultimately, according to Griffith "their works reflect their cultural roots - Rivers' American individualism and Protestant theology" (Griffith, 2017) versus Kurniawan's Javanese collectivism (Hatley, 2015). Both authors demonstrate literature's power to address identity and trauma, though through markedly different cultural lenses and narrative approaches. The fundamental divergence between the two authors lies in their outlook: Rivers writes from a faith-based perspective seeking reconciliation and narrative closure, whereas Kurniawan writes from a skeptical standpoint that sustains social tension and ambiguity. *Redeeming Love* moves toward resolution through repentance, while *Cantik Itu Luka* maintains

open-ended social commentary. Yet, despite their contrasting cultural contexts, both Rivers and Kurniawan succeed in converting personal psychosocial struggle into literature that resonates broadly, each enriching global literary expression through their distinctive voices.

## CONCLUSION

This comparative study of *Redeeming Love* by Francine Rivers and *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan explores the psychosocial development of two female protagonists, Angel and Dewi Ayu, through the lens of Erik H. Erikson's theory of psychosocial stages. Despite emerging from markedly different cultural and historical contexts, American evangelical culture and postcolonial Indonesia, both characters embody the long-lasting effects of trauma, the negotiation of identity, and the pursuit (or denial) of healing. Angel and Dewi Ayu endure systemic violence: Angel through sexual exploitation and abandonment, and Dewi Ayu through colonialism and patriarchal oppression. Their respective strategies for survival involve adopting alternate personas: Angel becomes emotionally detached and distrustful, while Dewi Ayu embraces a monstrous self-image to exert control. These manifestations of trauma reveal shared psychological patterns despite cultural divergence. Yet, the narrative resolutions of their journeys diverge. Angel's development follows a redemptive arc rooted in faith, intimacy, and generativity, ultimately allowing her to break cycles of violence. In contrast, Dewi Ayu's trajectory ends in existential resignation, perpetuating intergenerational trauma and resisting narrative closure. Theoretically, Angel's development exemplifies progression toward Erikson's stage of integrity, facilitated by unconditional love and spiritual faith. Dewi Ayu, by contrast, represents stagnation and despair, encapsulating unresolved trauma and societal indictment. These differences are not merely individual but emblematic of broader ideological frames: Rivers advocates healing through Christian redemption, while Kurniawan critiques the entrenched violence of postcolonial and patriarchal systems.

The study underscores that trauma may be universal, but its negotiation and resolution are culturally contingent. Angel's recovery is supported by a narrative of individual salvation, while Dewi Ayu's fate critiques the insufficiency of personal resilience in the face of systemic violence. In this way, the novels function not only as psychological portraits but also as cultural texts that reflect and contest dominant ideologies. Together, they highlight how literature can serve as both a mirror of psychosocial development and a critique of the socio-historical conditions shaping that development. While Rivers and Kurniawan approach identity, trauma, and recovery from distinct cultural and ideological perspectives, both illuminate the complex interplay between individual agency and structural constraint. Their works collectively contribute to a transnational dialogue on suffering, survival, and the diverse narrative possibilities for healing, reconciliation, or resistance. These insights reinforce the value of comparative literary analysis in deepening our understanding of the universal and particular dimensions of human experience.

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