

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO CHILDREN WRITERS
(A Cultural Analysis on the *Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya (Children Writers) series:*
Indonesian Children Books Written by Children)

Rd. Safrina Noorman

Department of English Education, Indonesia University of Education,
 Jl. Dr. Setiabudhi No. 229, Bandung, Indonesia

Lina Meilinawati Rahayu

Department of Indonesian, Padjadjaran University,
 Jl. Raya Bandung-Sumedang km 21, Jatinangor, Indonesia

Nia Nafisah

Department of English Education, Indonesia University of Education,
 Jl. Dr. Setiabudhi No. 229, Bandung, Indonesia

And

Ernie Diyahkusumaning Ayu Imperiani

Department of English Education, Indonesia University of Education,
 Jl. Dr. Setiabudhi No. 229, Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract

The paper discusses the ways in which the worlds and societies in texts written by children for their peer are constructed in the book series, *Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya* (henceforth, *KKPK*). The study aims to unveil and reconstruct the underpinning ideas or concepts which might have contributed to the worlds created by these children writers in the *KKPK* texts. Based on the texts' theme, twenty two books are selected based on their genre for a qualitative analysis. The study is initiated with a formal analysis which looks into the elements of texts such as characters and characterization, plots, conflicts as well as the writers' crafts such as diction and figures of speech. Data from the formal textual analysis are read and framed to construct potential meanings using theoretical propositions from Hunt (1994) on ideology in children's literature and Bhabha (2004) on hybridity. The findings indicate that the texts have created a hybrid world which constitutes aspects indicating both global and local influences. The influences manifest, most of the time simultaneously, in the various elements of the texts resulting in hybrid texts which raise questions about the explicit ideology asserted in the texts. The children's textual constructions of their own world indicate the ease, comfort, and customary daily routines in choosing and using texts to show and assert an inclination toward a world (or worlds) dictated by capitalistic drives which are commonly wrapped in debatable Islamic or nationalistic (or local) perspectives. Despite the good intention on the adults' part in encouraging children to write and become writers, the texts reveal that texts for children-even when they are written by children- should not be taken for granted and assumed as innocent.

Keywords: *children's literature, children's world construction, hybridity, globalization, and ideology*

1. Introduction

Indonesian children's literature has grown very fast since 2000, which includes the birth of children's writers. Based on his reviews on Indonesian children books, Trimansyah (1999) states that books written by adults tend to be didactic, monotonous, and unrelated to the children's readers. Yet, children's books are often deemed innocent and so with books written by children. The reform era has opened up more possibilities for children's writers to write in different genres as major publishing companies facilitate their publications even workshops for these writers. The frontrunner in this type of publication, DAR!Mizan, for example has published more than 300 titles of book series *Kecil Kecil Punya Karya* (henceforth *KKPK*) from about 200 productive children writers (Rhamdani, 2013). The popularity of this type of children's books has made primary schools purchase the books for their libraries. The fact that the books and their content

tend to be taken for granted as good or suitable for children lead us to conduct this research. Specifically, it attempts to examine the ways in which the worlds and societies in texts written by children for their peer are constructed in the book series, *Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya* (henceforth, *KKPK*). Further, the study aims to unveil and reconstruct the underpinning ideas or ideologies which might have contributed to the worlds created by these children writers in the *KKPK* texts.

2. Literature Review

The literature review in this study focuses on the issues regarding children's literature in relation to ideology and globalization as well as issues on hybridity and children's world construction.

2.1 Children's literature

According to Lynch and Tomlinson (2005:3), "children's literature is good quality trade books for children from birth to adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interest to children of those ages through prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction". Hunt (1994) adds that what a culture thinks of as childhood is reflected very closely in the books produced for its citizens. Further, Milne (cited in Hunt, 1994:1) who wrote a classic tale *Winnie the Pooh*, asserts that

"children's books... are books chosen for us by others either because they pleased us; or because we have reason for thinking that they please children today; or because we have read them lately, and believe that our adult enjoyment of them is one which younger people can share. Unfortunately, none of these reasons is in itself a sure guide".

Therefore, these books cannot be considered as innocent and taken for granted, most of all, because of the obvious authorial intent as books for children are usually books written by adults and deemed relevant and interesting for the children.

2.2 Ideology and children's literature

Ideology in books for children written by children might work in the same levels of ideology and eventually reveal the world that they are living in and lived by. Hollindale's three levels of ideology in children's literature (1998) are (1) explicit ideology – the most obvious ideology which is usually closely related to the writer's social or political conviction, (2) passive ideology – the writer's unexamined assumptions, and (3) living ideology – the world lived by the writer and readers

2.3 Globalization and children's literature

Globalization, according to Lewis and Docter (2011), is characterized by the interactions of ideas, identities, and institutions across nations making up processes of complex economic and cultural interdependence. There are three ways to look into globalization: (1) as an extension of American capitalism, (2) as an unavoidable modern product which might result in neoliberalism and commercialism, and (3) as a cultural paradox. Further, Bhabha (2004: 247) states in his text the location of culture that:

"the transnational dimension of cultural transformation -- migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation -- makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. The natural (ized), unifying discourse of nation, peoples, or authentic folk tradition, those embedded myths of cultures particularity, cannot be readily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition".

Hence, globalization might also be evidenced in children's literature in forms which reflect the ways interactions of transnational dimension manifest or are consumed.

2.4 Hybridity

The notion of cultural hybridity has existed far before it was popularized in postcolonial theory as culture arising out of interactions between "colonizers" and "the colonized" (Yazdiha, 2010, Cohen and Kennedy, 2000). However, after colonialism or imperialism era, globalization has both expanded the reach of Western culture, as well as allowed a process by which the West constantly interacts with the East, appropriating cultures for its own means and continually shifting its own signifiers of dominant culture (Yazdiha, 2010). Bhabha (2004), for example, instead of seeing colonialism as something locked in the past; he shows how its histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations. Therefore, Bhabha (2004) sees hybridity as the emergence of new cultural forms from multiculturalism. In line with Bhabha, Cohen and Kennedy (2000:377) refer hybridity principally to the creation of "dynamic, mobile mixed cultures".

2.5 Children's world construction

Children's world construction in this study refers to the construction of the worlds and societies in the book series, *Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya* (henceforth, *KKPK*) written by children for their peer. It includes the underpinning ideas or concepts which might have contributed to the worlds created by these children writers in the *KKPK* texts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This is a study in the qualitative paradigm (Alwasilah, 2002; Silverman, 2005), using textual analysis within a cultural study framework. With reference to Belsey (2011), this study examines texts with a critical perspective by connecting the texts with their respective unique contexts.

3.2 Research subject and context

The texts under study are *Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya (KKPK)* series published by DAR! Mizan. The series are children books written by children between the age of 8-12 years old. Since the series are published in sets, the most current sets are selected. Out of 28 books, 22 are chosen because of the genre, novel, which has more potential in character and plot development.

3.3 Research procedure

Before analyzing the data, there were several steps taken. First, texts were chosen based on currency and genre. Then, a formal analysis on the texts was used to identify elements of texts such as characters, plots, and language used. In terms of characters, the study classifies characteristics of characters and analyzes characterization. For plots, the study classifies plots based on conflicts evidenced in the texts. As for the language used, dictions or word choices and figures of speech are classified. Data from the formal textual analysis are read and then framed by Hollindale's (1998) three levels of ideology and Bhabha's (2004) theoretical notion on hybridity to come up with potential meanings for the choices available in the texts. Finally, conclusions were drawn.

4. Findings and discussion

The findings indicate that the texts have created a hybrid world which constitutes aspects indicating both global and local influences. The influences manifest, most of the time simultaneously, in the various elements of the texts resulting in hybrid texts which raise questions about the explicit ideology asserted in the texts. The children's textual

constructions of their own world indicate the ease, comfort, and customary daily routines in choosing and using texts to show and assert an inclination toward a world (or worlds) dictated by capitalistic drives which are commonly wrapped in debatable Islamic or nationalistic (or local) perspectives. The followings are the detailed explanation of the hybridity created in the texts

4.1 Hybridity created through word-choice and illustrations

A hybrid world is constructed from word-choice and illustrations reflecting a blend of transnational dimensions which evidence the impact of globalization as can be seen in the following excerpts.

[1]: “*Oh, no!* Itu Dinna, Vega, dan Helza. Mau apa mereka kesini? Pasti mau bikin kacau! Kata Lily yang mulai mengoceh sebal dengan mata terbelalak. (Abdillah, 2011:35) [Oh, No! That’s Dina, Vega and Helza. Why are they doing here? They must be up to no good!, Lily grumbled with her eyes]

[2]: “EVERYBODY QUIET!” teriak Dinna dari depan kelas. Spontan semua diam memperhatikan *Shinning Stars* yang berkacak pinggang. (Abdillah, 2011:39) [EVERYBODY QUIET!] shouted Dinna from the front of classroom. Spontaneously, all were silent watching *Shinning Stars* stood hand akimbo]

[3]: “Hoam....*Oh, My God!* Jam Tujuh! Mandi!” Masrya yang telat bangun segera mandi. (Fauzia, 2010:82) [Hoam.... Oh, My God! It’s seven o’clock! Take a shower!” Masrya, who woke up, late got up to take shower.]

Excerpt [1], [2], and [3] above are the example of the insertion of English expressions done by children writers in most of their texts. The use of English in one hand indicates global influences toward children writers’ customary daily routines. On the other hand, English is seen as more modern, sophisticated and superior than Indonesian as can be seen in excerpt [4] below:

[4]: “Pagi Anak-Anak....sekarang ada empat murid baru di kelas kita. Kalau yang bertiga ini, kalian sudah pasti tahu. Nah, kalau yang ini, coba kita tanya namanya?” kata Bu Silvia sambil menarik tangan anak laki-laki yang bertubuh tinggi kurus itu.

“Panggil saja Sam,” katanya.

“Waaah....namanya keren, kayak nama orang Barat,” puji Ghinny.

“Jangan-jangan keturunan barat. Coba nama lengkapnya? Tanya Rendra penasaran.

“Iya, coba.....,” dukung Fian.

“Siapa nama panjangmu, Sam?” tanya Silvia.

“Samsudin,” lanjutnya kemudian. Murid-murid langsung tertawa. Murid-murid yang tahu sopan santun, sih, berusaha menahan tawa mereka. Panggilannya keren, Sam. Kepanjangannya Samsudin? (Abdillah, 2011:35-36).

[“Morning Children.... Now there are four new students in our class. You have known the three of them. Well, this one, let’s ask his name,” said Bu Silvia while grabbing the thin tall boy.

“Just call me Sam,” said he.

“Waah....it’s a cool name, like a Western name,” praised Ghiny.

“Perhaps he has Caucasian blood. What’s his full name?” asked Rendra curiously.

“Yeah, please tell us....,” Fian seconded.

“What’s your full name, Sam?” asked Silvia.

“Samsudin,” he continued. The students burst out laughing. The students who knew manner tried to hold their laugh. The nickname was cool, Sam. But its full name was Samsudin?]

When Samsudin was introducing himself with Sam, everyone in the classroom considered it as a ‘cool’ name because it is Western name. Yet, after Sam explained that Sam is a nick name from Samsudin, everyone started to laugh at him.

Mostly, the names used in the texts are foreign names (English) such as Monika, Vanessa, Esther, Joey, etc. There are only few local names used in the story. This indicates the inferiority of western world which is considered as more advanced, modern, and sophisticated.

4.2 Hybridity constructed through the characters’ inclination toward material things and their preference for a closer proximity with the global world

A hybrid world underpins by a materialistic ideology where the impact of the global world is most apparent in the characters’ inclination towards possessing material things and showing them off, and their preference for a closer proximity with the global world as can be seen in the excerpt [5], [6], and [7] below.

[5]: Kak Nafi tersenyum puas dan melanjutkan makan *Macaroni Schootel*-nya. Rafi memakan *Spaghetti Bolognese Cheese*-nya dengan garpu sampai tersedak. Marsya segera menyodorkan air putih. Rafi cengengesan, seakan berkata, “makasih, Kak....”

Selesai menyantap *Cream Soup*, Marsya memanggil Ara dan Zia lewat *handphone* agar datang ke rumahnya. Rupanya, Marsya kekenyangan, sehingga tak kuat berjalan ke rumah Ara dan Zia. Jaraknya 12 m, sih....kan, jauh! (Fauzia, 2010:92)

[Sister Nafi smiled satisfactorily and continued eating her Macaroni Schootel. Rafi ate his Spaghetti Bolognese Cheese with his fork so fast that he choked. Marsya offered a glass of water. Rafi grinned as if saying, “thanks, Sis....” After eating Cream Soup, Marsya called Ara and Zia by cellphone to come to her house. Apparently, Marsya was so full that she could not walk to Ara and Zia’ house. It was 12 m, it’s far...isn’t it?]

[6]: Tapi, Lily selalu membawa kartu anggota salon. Dinna, Vega, dan Helza kayaknya selalu membawa kartu anggota Sparkly Neil. Dan Rendra selalu membawa kartu anggota *School Comic*. (Abdillah, 2011:69)

[But, Lily always took her beauty salon membership card. Dinna, Vega, and Helza seemed to always have their Sparkly Neil membership cards. And Rendra always took his School Comic membership card.]

[7]: “Setiap murid mempunyai kuda favorit di *Shayla Dormitory*,” Chira seperti menebak pikiran Alison. “Biarpun anaknya tidak suka pada kuda, tetap saja merasa sayang pada seekor kuda!” (Setyanto, 2013:77)

[“Every student has a favorite horse in Shayla Dormitory,” Chira seemed to be able to guess Alison’s thought. “Although the kid is not fond of horses, he cares about the horse!”]

4.3 Hybridity constructed through an instantaneous attitude implying capitalistic ideology at work

A hybrid world where characters solve problems driven by an instantaneous attitude implying capitalistic ideology at work as evidenced in the following excerpts [8] and [9] below

[8]:

SMS ku ke Jane:

“Hai sobat, aku g bermaksud lancang. Tp aku punya usul, untuk mengobati rindumu pd kak Beylin, bagaimana bsk kalau kt cri Kak Beylin? Kalau tidak setuju jg g pa2, aku tahu kok perasaanmu.

Balasan SMS dari Jane:

“Aku tdk mrh kok, em, iya, kebetulan saat aku umur tujuh thn pernah diajak mama papa ke rumah Om Georn. Bsok kta janji di markas aja. Thanks ya, salam persahabatan. (Jasmine, 2014:47)

My SMS to Jane:

“Hi friend, I didn’t mean to be nosy. But I got an idea to cure your longing for Sister Beylin. How if tomorrow we look for her? It’s okay if you don’t want to. I know how you feel.”

Jane’s reply:

“I am okay. Em...yes, once when I was seven my mom and dad took me to Uncle Georn. Tomorrow we’ll met at the HQ. Thanks. Kind regards.]

This excerpt [8] show how the characters in this case Jane and her friend solve the problem of finding Kak Beylin, her sibling by relying on Jane’s memory when she was still 7 years old.

Another instantaneous attitude is also depicted in the following excerpt.

[9]:

Sesampainya di alamat yang dituju, kami melihat seorang gadis yang sedang berdiri di depan rumahnya. Jane lalu membuka pagar rumah itu dan menyapa gadis tersebut.

[On arriving at the destination, we saw a girl standing in front of her house. Jane then opened the gate and say hi to that girl]

“Maaf, saya Jane dan ini teman-teman saya. Saya hendak mencari Om Georn karena saya ingin bertemu kakak saya, Kak beylin,” kata Jane.

[“Excuse me, I’m Jane and these are my friends. I’m looking for Uncle Georn because I’d like to meet up with my sister, Beylin,” said Jane]

“Jane? Jane Fita Nita?” tanya gadis itu. Dia mirip sekali dengan Jane.

[“Jane? Jane Fita Nita?” asked the girl. She looked like Jane a lot]

“Iya. Lho, kok Kakak tahu nama saya? Kakak...Kak Beylin...?” tanya Jane.

“Iya, ini Kakak, Kak Beylin,” kata kak Beylin sambil memeluk Jane.

[“Yes. How did you know my name? Sis... You’re Sister Beylin...?” asked Jane]

[“Yes. It’s me. Sister Beylin,” said Sister Beylin hugging Jane]

“Maafkan Kakak ya Dik. Kakak sebenarnya kangen sama kamu, tapi...,” Kak Beylin belum selesai bicara sudah disela oleh Jane.

[“Please forgive me sis. I actually missed you, but...” before she finished her sentence, Jane cut her in,

“Tapi Kakak tidak boleh sama kedua orang jahat itu, kan?” tanya Jane.

[“But, you are not allowed by those evils?” asked Jane]

“Jangan bilang seperti itu, Dik. Mereka sayang sama Kakak. Mereka sudah merawat Kakak dari kecil,” kata Kak Beylin.

[“Don’t say like that, sis. They love me. They have taken care of me since I was a kid,” said Sister Beylin]

“Ah! Mereka Jahat! Kalau Kakak tetap mau tinggal bersama mereka, aku pulang sekarang!” kata Jane marah dan hendak pergi meninggalkan rumah itu. Saat hendak keluar pagar, Om Georn memanggil Jany.

[“Ah! They are mean! If you still want to stay with them, I am leaving now! said Jane angrily, and when she is about to leave the house, Uncle Georn called Jany]

“Jane, maafkan kami, ya? Kami baru sadar kalau kami itu memang jahat. Kami tidak memperbolehkan anak angkat kami bertemu dengan keluarganya. Kami piker, jikalau Beylin dipertemukan dengan kedua orang tuanya, dia tidak mau kembali kepada kami,” jelas Om Georn.

[“Jane, please forgive us, will you? We just realized that we are mean. We don’t allow our foster daughter to see her family. We thought if Beylin met her parents, she would not want to stay with us anymore,” explained Uncle Georn.

“Maafkan Jane juga, ya, Om. Jane sudah lancang...”

[“Please forgive me too, uncle. Jane has gone too far...”]

“Pa, Beylin boleh main ke rumah orang tua Beylin sekarang?” tanya Kak Beylin.

“Boleh, Sayang...” kata Om Georn. (Jasmine, 2014:47)

[“Pa, can I go and visit my parents’ house now?” asked Beylin].

[“Yes, you may dear...” said Uncle Georn]

Here the excerpt show how characters such as Jane, Kak Beylin and Om Georn are not given sufficient space and time to process problems, instead are provided with short cuts and happy endings.

4.4 Hybridity created through characters' materialistic entangled with religion as an ideology attached to other living ideologies

A hybrid world where religion as an ideology is attached to other living ideologies resulting in complex and often times questionable contexts. Islam as the ideology explicitly presented in the books is entangled in the characters' materialistic and instaneous attitudes and actions that it becomes superficial and might send mixed messages to the implied readers.

Excerpts [10 and 11 below] for example show the religion stereotype, in this case Islam, attached to the character.

[10]: Tak lama kemudian, Nurul pun datang. Model seragam Nurul berbeda dari model seragam perempuan lain di sekolah mereka. Kemeja Nurul berlengan panjang. Roknya juga panjang. Selain itu, Nurul mengenakan jilbab putih.

“Assalamu’alaikum!” Salam Nurul.

“Wa’alaikumsalam!” balas Dania, Tiara, dan Lily. (Abdillah, 2011:25-26)

[Not long after, Nurul came. Her uniform looked different from other girls' uniforms in their school. Nurul's shirt has long sleeves. The skirt is also long. Besides, Nurul also wears white hijab].

[“Assalamu’alaikum/Peace be upon you!” greeted Nurul]

[“Wa’alaikumsalam/Peace be upon you too!” replied Dania, Tiara, and Lily]

[11]: “ALHAMDULILLAAH!” seru keenam gadis cilik itu sambil melakukan sujud sukur

[“Alhamdulillah/ Praise be upon God!” cried all the six girls while prostrating as a form of gratitude]

“Kalian juga bisa kok, asal serius, tekun berkemauan keras, dan tidak mudah menyerah. Kalau ada kemauan pasti ada jalan,” “Eh kalian belum solat Zuhur, ya? Sana Solat dulu!” (Paramita, 2013: 44-46).

[“You can also do that, as long as you are serious, diligent, determined, and persistent. If there is a will, there is a way. “Eh, you haven't prayed Zuhur/ Noon prayer, have you? Go pray first!”]

Another example of a hybrid world where religion as an ideology is attached to other living ideologies is excerpt [12] below from *Berdakwah Lewat Chatting, Siapa Takut?* and *Another Chatting Story: Masih Ngobrolin Islam* included in *Little Miss Perfect* (2011). This excerpt explicitly presents Islam as the ideology is contrasted with other religion. In this text, Islam is represented as the most righteous religion.

[12]:

Salsa Archuleta: hey, can I ask you something?

Liz. Archie : sure.

Salsa Arculeta: What religion are you?

Liz. Archie: Christian

Salsa Arculeta: Oww...

Liz. Archie: How does it feel being Christian?

Salsa Aruleta: Not good...

Liz. Archie: Why?

Salsa Arculeta: Ehm.....welll, personally, I think not everything is true in the 'bible'
(Salsa, 2011:83)

The excerpt above shows how a character is very passionate about introducing Islam. However, at the same time, when he/she faces other characters that have different beliefs or religion, he/she does not have enough relevant references to show that Islam is better.

In the same book, it is also depicted how someone can convert from one religion to another religion easily as evidenced in excerpt [13] below:

[13]:

Kat. Siarot: you're muslim, right?

Me: yup! Why?

Kat. Siarot: How does it feel? Because I want to be one

Me: hmmm... I PROUD to be a muslim! It's fantastic!

Kat. Siarot: is it hard??

Me: No! Not really! For a starter, you have to pray 5 times a day.....

Kat. Siarot: that sounds easy....I usually pray 5 times also (daily) (Salsa, 2011:95-96)

The conversion to the new religion is often a complex and not an easy matter. Yet, the text reflects instantaneous attitudes and actions by showing verbally how a person is interested in converting his/her religion into a moslem.

5. Conclusion

Despite the good intention on the adults' part in encouraging children to write and become writers, the findings reveal that children texts or books-even when they are written by children-should not be taken for granted and assumed as innocent. First of all, it is because children writers construct worlds which raise questions about the values being upheld and presumably delivered to a wider audience. Another reason is that ideology which is explicitly resented in children books is entangled with the ideologies that both writers and readers live in. Therefore, there is a need for the roles played by adults in the production and distribution of the text. In other words, adults need to be more aware and critical of texts for children.

6. The Authors

Rd. Safrina Noorman, Department of English Education, Indonesia University of Education, lecturer of Children's and Adolescent Literature.

Lina Meilinawati Rahayu, Department of Indonesian, Padjadjaran University, lecturer of Comparative Literature.

Nia Nafisah, Department of English Education, Indonesia University of Education, lecturer of Exploring Prose and Survey of Contemporary English Literature.

Ernie Diyahkusumaning Ayu Imperiani, Department of English Education, Indonesia University of Education, lecturer of Historical Linguistics and School of Linguistics.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Safrina Noorman, Department of English Education, Indonesia University of Education, Jl. Dr. Setiabudi No. 229, 40154 Bandung, INDONESIA.

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Contact: safrinanoorman@gmail.com

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Appendix

