Narrative Strategies and Interpretations of Emotions in the Works of Post-Islamic Generation Child Writers: An Analysis of Three *Kecil Kecil Punya Karya* Series

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ABSTRACT

Studies of emotions within the framework of the seminal work History of Emotion are rapidly developing, and this realm involves interdisciplinary studies from different sciences, including literature studies, since literature often contains emotion as its most important aspect. This research was inspired by a Max Planck Institute Berlin's (n.d.) project that investigated the socialization of emotion in works of European children's literature published from 1870 to 1970. This research focused on narrative strategies and interpretations of emotions used by the child writers in the *Kecil Kecil Punya Karya* (KKPK) [Children's Literature] series, published by Dar!Mizan. Using narrative studies and the sociology of literature while considering the child writers as members of the Post-Islamic generation, this research aimed to examine narrative strategies and interpretations of emotions within three KKPK series. The result of this research finds narrative strategies similar to fairy tales, and this can be interpreted as a sort of sharing session. Using Asef Bayat's concept of Post-Islamism, which is elaborated by Ariel Heryanto, this analysis shows a unique gender perspective and religious motivation within the narrative interpretations of Muslim middle-class child writers' emotions.

Keywords: Children's literature, emotion, gender, *Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya* (KKPK), post-islamism

INTRODUCTION

Emotion is an important dimension of human life, and this aspect has long been the object of studies in different disciplines. This understanding spurred the development of History of Emotion, a study on the history of human emotions examined through various disciplines. In November 2008, a study

center named The Queen Mary Centre for the History of the Emotion was established with the aim of conducting various interdisciplinary researches on the history of human emotions. Max Planck Institute Berlin also conducted a major project attempting to trace the history of emotion with the involvement of experts in history, psychology, education, anthropology, sociology, music, literature, and art, with a focus on Europe, North America, and India.

This research refers to one of Max Planck Institute's sub-projects, the study on the history of emotion within children's literature. One finding on the sub-project was published as a book titled *Learning How to Feel: Children's Literature and Emotional Socialization*, 1870-1970. The book argued that there had been subject-object interactional shifts in the process of children's emotional acquisition during the studied hundred-year period. If socialization of emotions was at first passed from adult characters to children, socialization of emotions was done among children characters themselves during the 1970s. Nevertheless, the study still depends on the works of adult writers who use children characters in order to explore aspects of emotion. This research aims to explore child writers' emotional narratives, which have not been further investigated by Max Planck Institute. The text that this research analyzes is a book series written by child writers, the *Kecil Kecil Punya Karya* (KKPK) [Children's Literature] series.

There have been numerous researches on KKPK. A research on gender was conducted in Soelistyarini's (2013) writing titled "Representasi Peran Jender dalam Cerita-Cerita Karya Penulis Anak Indonesia Seri Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya (KKPK) [Representation of Gender Roles in Writers of Indonesian Children in Children's Literature Serial]". This research found that traditional gender division and patriarchy was still strongly entrenched within the works written by millennial writers. This argument was evidenced with gender stereotype associations in male and female characterizations, and this was furthered by the strict boundaries between public and domestic spaces attributed to the series' male and female adult characters. Another study by Rosman (2017) highlighted the aspect of consumerism within the stories of KKPK. Titled "Consumerism in Fourteen Series of Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya," this research examined the symptoms of consumerism through Bourdieu's social criticism and found that these young writers, who generally came from middle-class families, often displayed signs of a bourgeois consumeristic lifestyle. This trait becomes particularly conspicuous through the depicted food consumption, appearance, and ownerships of upper middle-class goods supported by economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capitals of the characters. Nevertheless, there has not to this point been a single study of the aspect of emotions within KKPK, and this research is an attempt to fill that niche. This research's primary question revolved on how narrative strategies and emotional interpretation were conducted by Post-Islamic generational child writers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

KKPK is published by Dar!Mizan, and the series was released for the first time in 2003. This series pioneers the publication of books written by children ages 7 to 12. Up to this moment, there have been 540 titles published with more than 600 child writers involved (Rumah KKPK, 2017). These child writers were born into Muslim middle-class families during the rise of Post-Islamism. Post-Islamism is Asef Bayat's concept that explains Muslims' efforts to redefine Islamic expressions. This concept is futher elaborated by Ariel Heryanto in the context of cultural Post-Islamism, defining it as a Muslim's effort to be simultaneously religiously devoted while actively consuming and taking pleasure in the cultural products of global modernity (Heryanto, 2015). Post-Islamism also gives room for a more open gender interpretation since its emphasis focuses on religiosity and rights as opposed to religiosity and responsibilities (Bayat, 2005). Growing up in this kind of environment heavily influences the worldview of KKPK child writers. Hence, this aspect will be taken into consideration in the process of examining their works.

Theoretical approaches from the sociology of literature, narrative review, and concepts of Post-Islamism (particularly on religiosity and gender) were used to answer the research question. The three-book series that had been selected as corpuses were *Teman Tapi Musuh* [Friend but Enemy] by Safina Fatiha, *London I'm Coming* by Nala Alysa Faradisa, and *Keep Smile for the World* by Nisrina Kamila Sekar. Both *Teman Tapi Musuh* and *London I'm Coming* presented a female protagonist, and the two works were selected for their achievement of becoming Gold Edition bestsellers. Meanwhile, *Keep Smile for The World* was chosen for presenting a male protagonist, resulting in a condition in which this work might become a comparative text to the other two corpuses, especially in the aspect of gender.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Position of Child Writers within Children's Literature

The existence of KKPK brings forth a fresh atmosphere to Indonesian children's literature. However, considering the definitionof children's literature as a form of literature read by children under the supervisions and directions from a particular society's representative member while the writer must be an adult (Sarumpaet, 2010), the definition of KKPK (which is written by children) as a form of children's literature is eliminated. However, in Irina's (2014) writing titled *Children's Literature: A Cinderella Story*, there is an indication that child writers can be accepted as the writers of children's literature. This indication comes into clarity when Irina questions the validity of the term "children's literature," as the majority of its writers are adults. Very few works of children's literature are written by children and adolescents (Irina, 2014).

Discussions of the nature of children's literature have heretofore been deeply rooted in literary traditions. One of Marah

Gubah's articles titled "On Not Defining Children's Literature" argued that the debate on the definition of children's literature should not be excessively perpetuated as it endangered the world of children's literature itself. Children's literature is most often recognized as literary works exploring the world of children and involving children characters within its narratives. Thus far, there has been sharp polarization between definers and antidefiners. Definers believe that it is possible to seek the essence of children's literature in order to formulate it. On the contrary, antidefiners believe that it is impossible to precisely define children's literature as each criterion proposed will be dismissed by extant writing samples (Gubah, 2011). In spite of the debate on the definition of children's literature, both definers and antidefiners concur that a major issue in children's literature is children's relations to adults. Nobelmann et al. (as cited in Irina, 2014) analogized the issue with colonization, in which writers viewed children readers as beings with little understandings, making necessary their education into complete human beings. Jown Rowe Townsend (as cited in Gubah, 2011) argued that children's ownership within the terminology of children's literature was a mistake as such term indicated a condition in which children owned and controlled texts that were generally written, published, edited, bought, and occasionally read by adults. This problem similarly occurs in the world of children's literature in Indonesia. In her writing titled "Sastra dan Anak: Penjajah dan Takhlukannya [Literature and Children: Colonialists and Their Colonies]", Sarumpaet (2010) argued that in the writing process of children's literature, adults imposed and forced their will upon children. This action is done in order to take the children into a version of civilization ruled and defined by adults.

Considering this aspect, the existence of KKPK is a pleasant development. One should appreciate the writers' honesty in telling the stories of their own world to readers as young as the writers themselves are. They exist completely as children, as children's writings, and furthermore as children's literature. This condition opens up opportunities of not merely reading and studying what critics have described as a "falsified" children's world constructed by adults through their memories and retrospective idealism of childhood (Irina, 2014). In all honesty, it is necessary to admit that there are literary elements that are neither neatly nor logically organized within the KKPK series. This aspect can nonetheless be forgiven, considering the children authors' limited understanding of literary elements. A different perspective, however, can view this dimension as strengthening the image of the "real" world constructed according to their images and their comprehension of their own world. The following analysis will explore the strategies of emotional narratives within the KKPK series. In order to highlight the issue of the "ownership" of children's literature as described above, the following section will compare children's literature written by adults.

Strategies of Emotional Narratives within Three KKPK Series: Fairy Tale-Patterned Sharing Sessions

In various definitions of literature, there is one important aspect that is constantly emphasized as it differentiates literary from non-literary works. This aspect is literature's inseparability from the factor of emotions within its narratives. The factor of emotions within a literary work is constructed through different aspects that constitute a literary text. Before discussing the strategies of emotional narratives within the KKPK series, there needs to be clarity on the definition of emotion itself.

In his book titled *History of Emotion: An Introduction,* Jan Plamper (2015) defined emotion as something very complex that involved the elements of who, when, and where in which the referred emotion was defined. Overall, it can be inferred that in interpreting emotions, there is a dichotomy that results in two extremes. Universalists believe that there are essential and universal aspects of emotions while social constructivists argue that emotion is a socio-cultural construction (Plamper, 2015). Both definitions can be discovered in various literary works as some of them present similar and universal aspects of emotions while some others imply that political, social, and cultural changes may result in different interpretations of emotions. Defining the context of who, when, and where of emotions in KKPK demands a further examination of the profiles of the child writers, who are mainly ages seven to 12 (the age range of

elementary school students). Within this age range, there are several keywords pertaining to emotional development, namely sense of self, sense of competence, gender identity, anxiety, bullying, peer pressure, and conformity (Thompson, 2012). The main conflicts underlying the three studied KKPK stories concern themselves with the previously mentioned concepts, particularly conflicts with their peers (bullying, peer pressure, conformity) and dreams that they wish to fulfill (sense of self and sense of competence).

Generally, narrative strategies used within the three KKPK stories remind us of fairy tale narratives. The depiction of characters is rather crudely black and white. The character who goes through conflicts that explore their emotions might be an evil but later repenting antagonist or a good protagonist who is under peer pressure. The narrative development also follows the format of a fairy tale: evil characters will get a punishment while good characters will get rewards. Furthermore, a heroic friendly character often appears and saves the day. In addition to this, there appears to be an isolation period in which the protagonist is ostracized before finally gaining their happiness. Through this fairy-tale-like narration, the story often ends up in a resolution in which the good characters achieve their dreams and goals. However, despite generally following the patterns of a fairy tale, these works do not entirely follow its conventions. Narrative developments and character transformation from evil to good becomes a possibility, and the aspect

of "repentance" often appears in the stories (as a religious motive). Moreover, another differentiating factor between these stories and fairy tales is the non-existence of magic, arguably the most important aspect of fairy-tales. In the three KKPK stories, the characters attempt to find a way out from the problems they face through help from their friends. Narrators are also depicted to be omniscient, and they often side with the protagonist. The narrator's voice explains the world's story through the children's rationalization.

In the book *Keep Smile for the World,* the conflict began when Andri, the main protagonist with albinism, was not happy going to a Special School when a rival replaced him as class captain. Competition and the feeling of being threatened by the presence of other students created anger and sadness, which led to Andri's asking to be transferred to a normal school. The portrayal of the Special School was interesting as the students had neither physical nor cognitive disabilities, and Andri's character was merely an albino. The character Tiara also had a minor speech impairment. This indicates the child writer's perspective that these special needs are serious enough to place the characters in a Special School. Andri's parent's anxiety about bullying that their kids would experience in a normal school was actually the child writer's own anxiety about bullying of kids who were viewed to be different.

This story also hinted at conflict with adults. Upon learning that he would go to a Special School, Andri accepted the decision without any arguments. When Andri later convinced his father that he was capable of achieving there, he was transferred into a normal school. Unfortunately, what the mother had been anxious about materializes when Andri was bullied. There was a caste system implemented by the school's students, and with his physical difference, Andri was relegated to the lowest caste. Andri then became ill, and he stopped going to school for a week, resulting in a fairy-tale-like isolation period. With help from his friends Shane and Hen, Andri finally succeeded in going through this dark time, emerging as a winner who overcame his bullies and befriended everyone.

On the other hand, the story *Teman Tapi Musuh* did not strongly display the pattern of a fairy tale narrative since the theme focused on a peer conflict with rather a circular plot (not a linear plot that progresses from a beginning to an end). This tale told a story of friendship between a female gang in "Sekolah Islam Full Day" [Full Day Islamic School]. Their daily activities were filled with different conflicts and problems that tested the strength of their friendships. Each conflict always ends up being resolved well.

A narrative similar to the pattern of a fairy tale recurred in the book *London I'm Coming*, which told the struggle of a dyslexic little girl, Shara, to get a scholarship to London. Shara also fought against bullying she faced in both Indonesia and England. Her success in getting a scholarship to London was based on her strong will to devote herself to Indonesia and a wish that her name be remembered

for good reasons after her death. The writer granted her wishes as Shara was given an opportunity to accomplish many things, struggled, and made friends in London before finally passing away in the city. Her journey of achieving her dreams and the many problems she encountered during her struggles resulted in the protagonist's various emotions. In the story, dyslexia was a vehicle to portray the difficult battles the protagonist had to face and how patient she really was in achieving her dreams. Nonetheless, there occurred a plot jump in which a sufferer of dyslexia who had never got an opportunity to attend school was suddenly and easily admitted to a prestigious boarding school before being offered a scholarship to the U.K. through an IQ test and an interview. Another improbable plot hole was apparent in that the departure date to the U.K. took place only a day after the scholarship award announcement.

This plot jump affected the interpretations of emotions, making absent any "nuance" within the emotional narrative. Narratives of emotions tended to be flat when there were broken sequences of conflict and hasty jumps in events. Emotion was only present in simple emotional words (sad, happy, and anger), without any further emotional evocations. Consequentially, literature readers who are accustomed to stories with emotional evocations would encounter difficulties in getting an impression or empathizing with the characters' emotions. While this would certainly be a problem to adult readers, the opposite would occur

to child readers. To them, expression and emotional processes are plain and simple. There is no need for in-depth evocation and elaboration on many emotions of sadness, happiness, anger, or anxiety. An example of such is shown through the child writer's way of writing emotional expressions using direct uses of emotive words without subtly presenting the emotional atmosphere that would more strongly evoke a "feeling" of an emotion. In a way, this is a form of children's literature's originality:

> "It is time for Andri to go. Of course, Triani and Satya are sad. They already think of Andri as their best friend" (Sekar, 2016, p. 17).

Simple depictions of emotion are also obvious in the scene where Andri needs to conceal his emotion when being laughed at in an introduction session in class:

> "I thought you were a European", someone comments while his other friends laugh. Andri can only lower his head. He has to conceal his emotions (Sekar, 2016, p. 20).

Readers can find a totally different situation in the elaboration of children's emotions written by adult writers. Amelia's character in the novel titled, *Amalia, serial Anak-Anak Mamak* [Amalia, Mamak Children series] showed signs of emotional maturity. This notion was strengthened through emotional depiction built up through the surrounding atmosphere and expressions:

"My sentences suddenly stopped. I really didn't realize that since this morning, my anger has made me lose control of my words. Once I saw father's changing face upon hearing the last sentence I made, his fading expression on his face, I've just realized it. I bite my lip. I gulp. Silence reigns for several minutes. My God, what have I said?" (Liye, 2014, p. 25).

Regardless of Amelia's status as an elementary school student, her emotional maturity was guided by justification and rationalization that the writer built. Amelia's character was portrayed as the strongest person from the Syahdan family. Her strength did not lie in physical prowess but rather in her sincerity and strong willingness to empathize with others. Such rationalization would crumble without a strong narrative style. If one viewed Amelia's character through the eyes of a child (as the KKPK universe would do), she was absolutely not emotionally childlike. The most significant example would be Amelia's burst of emotion when she was upset with Chuck Norris for ruining the world map, their school's only valuable good (Liye, 2014). It could be inferred that the narrator was voiced by grown-up Amelia who was telling her story when she was a child. Therefore, in this work, a child's emotion was portrayed via an adult's images and memories. In spite of the oddity of Amelia's emotional maturity, the presented elaborations of emotion had the power to persuade the reader into the intended feelings and emotions.

Differences in the emotional elaborations between a child and adult writer are strongly related to their writing style. A tale written by a child is very effective in giving deep impressions for younger readers, which can be contrary to stories written by adults. An adult-written tale is frequently intended to be advice literature. Through this advice literature model, adults are guiding children to react to a particular event (Frevert et al., 2014). Similar cases can also be found in child writers' works, in which they are trying to give a "guideline" on how one should act. However, age similarity and the depiction of a world understandable to the minds of children make the conveyed story become a form of a sharing session. Didactically, a sharing session has more potential to be effective and comprehensible in influencing children. It is easier for children to identify themselves through a medium that they know well. Therefore, the use of the fairy tale narrative is parallel to this process, considering that the fairy tale is a form of literature generally closest and most well-known to children. Fairy tale narrative strategies and sharing sessions results in a union capable of delivering strong messages for child readers, which could possibly explain the growing number of KKPK sales.

KKPK Writers as Members of the Post-Islamic Generation: Religiosity and Gender within Intrepretations of Emotions

Considering that emotion is a result of social construction, the socio-cultural factors of KKPK child writers need to be discussed as well. Generally, these child writers

share common socio-cultural factors of a Muslim middle-class family. This becomes more logical if one takes into account Dar!Mizan's identity as a publisher of mainly Islamic books. Both of these factors influence the worldview of the stories.

As mentioned in the introduction to this research, these child writers grow up in an environment that celebrates religious practices. Asef Bayat's concept of Post-Islamism can be a good explanation for this phenomenon. Post-Islamism can be viewed as both a condition and a project. As a condition, Post-Islamism explains the condition of the Islamic government in Iran in which it regresses, wavers, and loses support. Meanwhile, as a project, post-Islamism refers to the consciousness to redefine the meaning of Islamness in various aspects of life. If previously Islamism linked Islam to responsibilities, Post-Islamism links Islam to rights (Bayat, 2005). This concept was further elaborated by Ariel Heryanto in his book *Identitas dan Kenikmatan: Politik Budaya Layar Indonesia* [Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture]. Emphasizing cultural aspects (of cultural Post-Islamism), this book argued that expressions of religiosity and Western consumerism were woven into one new Muslim middle-class lifestyle (Heryanto, 2015).

In line with Post-Islamism's emphasis on a strong relation between religiosity and the glamour of Western consumerism, the same idea is clearly asserted by the KKPK series. Sides of religiosity articulated through both emotion and religious practices

are presented within a modern world centering on global cultures, particularly the use of Western-like names, overseas-oriented locations, a considerable amount of English usage within the text, and the consumption culture of music, movies, or food from abroad. All these traits can be found in the three examined KKPK stories in different gradients, ranging from feeble to strong articulations. The consumption of foreign music and film can also be compared with religiosity-related motivations within the depicted emotions.

Religious emotion and motivation are detected within different parts of the story *London I'm Coming*. One of the examples took place when the character Shara encountered Akarin, a leukimia sufferer who kept herself motivated by believing that God was just. The conversation between Shara and Akarin transformed Shara's fear and anger into sincere acceptance [of fate] that triggered a fighting spirit (Faradisa, 2016, p. 79).

In the story *Keep Smile for the World,* religious motivations reappeared. The character Andri expressed his dislike of Triani, who insisted on being his friend. Andri thought that Triani made him jinxed. Hen and Shane reminded him that no single creation of God could be used as jinx-maker. Andri admitted this, and his hatred changed into guilt (Sekar, 2016, p. 45).

Interestingly, emotional religious motivation was not found in the book *Teman Tapi Musuh* despite a clearly religious setting taking place in Sekolah Dasar Islam Full Day (Full Day Islamic Elementary

School). The writer most probably felt that expressing religiosity in the work was enough by setting a religious background. The uses of an Islamic school, Mosque, and the theme of *Anak Pintar di Masjid* (PITAJID) [Brilliant Kid of the Mosque] as one conflict putting the story into motion also did not present emotional religious motivations. Alternatively, what occurred was the theme of being diligent and effective, as described by Fika when she was chosen as PITAJID (Fatiha, 2016, p. 81).

Aside from the aspects of religiosity, facets of gender also appear in the interpretation of the KKPK child writers'emotions. In the context of Post-Islamism, which advances rights as opposed to responsibilities, there is a broader exploration of gender equality. This dimension can more or less be identified within the KKPK series. As depicted in the cover illustrations and brief descriptions of the writers, the majority of the writers and the illustrated protagonists are female. Both *London I'm Coming* and *Teman Tapi Musuh*, for instance, presented a female main protagonist. These female protagonists were depicted with a myriad of emotions expressively conveyed. What they felt and thought were expressed straightforwardly. Furthermore, both series presented male supporting characters whose emotions differ from their female counterparts.

London I am Coming presented the character Leo, a senior portrayed as a silent, cool, and intelligent person. Like Shara, Leo also was successfully awarded a scholarship to London. Unfortunately, Leo felt ill in London and was diagnosed with stage IIB blood cancer. Throughout the story, Leo's muteness was depicted almost without emotion as opposed to Shara, who easily expressed what she felt (Faradisa, 2016, pp. 45-46).

Teman Tapi Musuh focused on a female gang and strongly conveyed each character's emotional expressions. In this story, there was also a male supporting character named Fiki. The characteres in the story were shown to be aware of gender differences. When one of the group members named Fika felt that they needed a male friend to learn about boys, the other members initially disagreed. However, they finally realized that understanding the world boys was important. Unlike Leo, who did not have sufficient room for emotions, Fiki's emotion is articulated more, although this is hidden within his mind. (Fatiha, 2016, pp. 46-47)

Keep Smile for the World by Nisrina, on the other hand, was distinctive in that it had a male protagonist, Andri. His emotional depiction in the story did not follow gender stereotypes in which boys might not cry or express emotions boldly. In the text, Andri was depicted as someone who acutely felt. He often cried as he wished to be a little angel for his mother and therefore made his mother happy. This depiction was interesting as the choice of the phrases "becoming a little angel" and "little doll" were often linked to femininity. More interestingly, although the mother no longer called him a "little angel" in several scenes (calling Andri "little hotshot" instead), Andri still identified himself as a little angel (Sekar, 2016, pp. 46-47).

In the end of the story, Andri's parents confirmed Andri's identification as his parent's little angel by giving Andri a birthday gift of a little tiny-winged angel statue. Nisrina, the story's female child author could be seen as reflecting her emotion and soul in Andri's character. Nisrina's honesty in the emotions the male character appeared to challenge the common perspective on gender. This finding is intriguing when compared to preceding research by Titien Diah Soelistyarini titled "Representasi Peran Jender dalam Cerita-Cerita Karya Penulis Anak Indonesia Seri Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya [Representation of Gender Roles in Writers of Indonesian Children in Children Literature Serial]", which argued that gender stereotypes were still strongly entrenched in the KKPK series. However, this research proves that influences from Post-Islamism make more space for exploring gender equality. It would be very interesting for future researches to study how male child writers depict the role and gender expressions of female child characters.

CONCLUSIONS

Examinations of narrative strategies and interpretations of emotions in the three child writers' works of *Kecil Kecil Punya Karya* published by Dar!Mizan revealed that the child writers used narratives similar to fairy tales in conveying the story and its emotional meaning, and this writing style could be seen as a sharing session. The depiction of emotion written in units of simple emotive words without involving a narrative with evocative emotional elaboration became the main characteristic of these child writers' narration of emotion. Growing up in the project of Post-Islamism, these KKPK child writers portray their world in defining Islamness with particular emphasis on rights but not responsibilities. This is particularly evoked through the portrayal of religious practices followed by the consumption of global culture and an understanding of gender equality. All three texts make more room for the varied dimensions of gender perspectives and emotions.

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