

THE VISUAL PORTRAYAL OF CHILDHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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INDONESIAN CHILDREN AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

- Indonesia has approximately 68,596,720 children (28.86% of the whole population of 235,000,000) living in about 2,300 islands. About 12% or 8,231,606 of them live in poverty, poor education and under fear or violence.



- My study (Purbani: 2009) on Indonesian New Order (published between 1995-2000) children's fictions reveals that Indonesian children books come with **minimum illustrations**. The child characters **are perfect children (idealized moral exemplar) with a little or no flaws**.
- While in real life Indonesian children live facing difficulties and problems, children in the stories **are not given opportunity to face then solve problems on their own**. Most stories **lack of conflicts, endurance and struggles** → Children in stories don't learn nor develop. They **are not becoming**.
- Most stories have explicit themes, and clear conclusion. Dark themes are silenced.



- Although slow, there is a sense of development in Indonesian children's literature.
- More children's books are published since then, more books come with pictures/illustrations.



- While picture books are immensely important for children there is a few qualified picture books found.
- I understand 'qualified' referring to Arizpe (2000) who stated that best picture books are picture books that **challenge readers**, that take readers beyond their literal meaning, out of their comfort zone and into complex thinking about relationships, the environment, war, reality and **even death**.

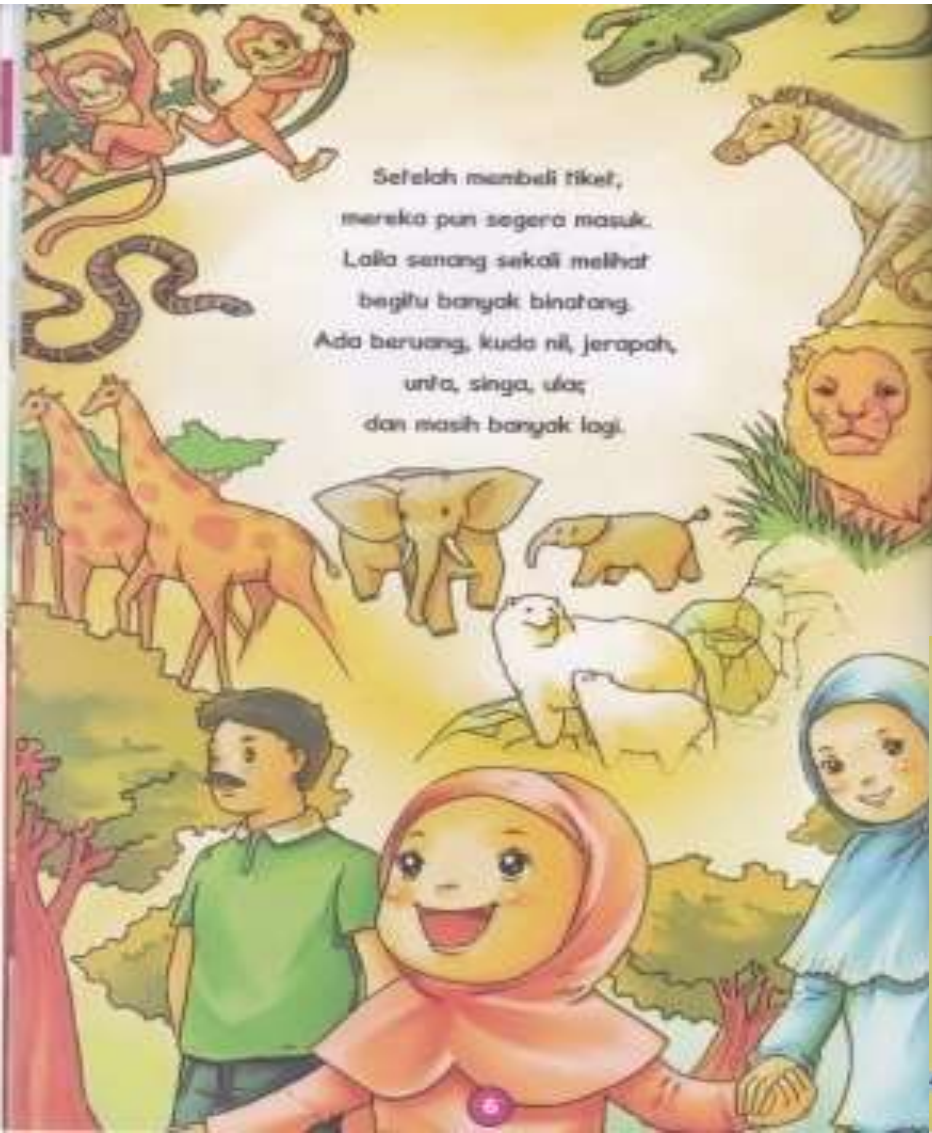
- What so called picture books are mostly traditional stories, folk tales, legends or moral stories. The last are getting produced massively lately.
- They mostly 15 x 20 sized, rarely come in hard cover, possibly for economic reason.
- The illustrations are mostly done in digitalized pictures.

HOW ARE CHILDOOD VISUALIZED IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN TEXTS

- I examined 10 Indonesian contemporary (published between 2005-2015) children's literature with pictures and illustration. They are: *Aku Anak Santun, Mainan Baru, Aku Senang Belajar, Tabib Kerajaan, Burung Kecil dari Pohon Nangka, Kemana Rangga dan Sekar Pergi?, Ani dan Pesan dalam Botol, Bobi dan Perkemahan Musim Panas yang Aneh, Cica dan Guci yang Hilang, Taman Cahaya.*

- The stories reveal that although the children are almost always happy and content, some are visualized sad because they lost some things/someone or being bullied by others.
- Although some kids face no conflicts, some are challenged with problems such as having to ride a giant elephant, being blind, being an orphan, having to find cure for an ill grandpa.

THEY ARE HAPPY CHILDREN AND SAD ONES



Selamat! Dari berhasil membantu si makhluk hijau pulang dan ia kembali dengan selamat ke rumah. Dari tidak akan pernah melakukan ilakarnya yang terbesar itu.

Dari memilih untuk tinggal. Tapi setelah 3 hari, ia pindah pada Nenek. Ia pun pulang Ontung saja 3 hari di planet hijau itu sama dengan beberapa jam saja di Bumi. Ketika tiba di rumah Nenek, Nenek memang sedang menanti-nantinya karena bingung Dari tidak berada di kamarnya. Nenek langsung melihat Dari sudah kembali.

Bobi mengambil hadiah yang besar. Ia merangkak kembali ke Kawan. "Jin, perkerahan ini memang aneh. Lihat apa yang kudapat dari kelinci di dalam sana!" kata Bobi sambil menunjukkan hadiahnya kepada Jin. Bobi lalu membagi wortel-wortel itu dengan para peserta lain se-

Lanjutkan ke halaman 23 untuk mengetahui apa yang terjadi selanjutnya.

Cica menyukai pekerjaan nusia panasnya. Di museum itu, banyak benda-benda menarik yang dapat diamatinya.

"Cica, hari ini kita perlu menata kembali ruang patung," kata Bu Mimi, supervisornya. Cica mengangguk.

Lanjutkan ke halaman 3.



Ani sedih. Siang tadi Ibu mendapat kabar bahwa Kakek sakit. Kakek Ani tinggal seorang diri di tepi pantai. Ibu segera berkemas untuk berangkat ke rumah Kakek. Karena Ani sedang libur ia ingin ikut. Ibu dan Ani pun berangkat berdua ke rumah Kakek.

Lanjutkan ke halaman 3.



2

Mainan Baru

100

They are brave...

"Huwaad.. huwaad..." terdengarlah suara tangisan.
Laila menoleh, oh ternyata seorang anak yang
sama-sama menunggang gajah sedang menangis keras.
Rupanya dia ketakutan. Anak itu berusaha turun,
dan saking takutnya, dia pun berteriak-teriak.



Rod took Kev to all secluded parts of the kingdom to collect all those herbs. The journeys were difficult even for people with normal eyes. For Kev, it was nearly impossible. But neither Rod nor Kev gave up.

Rod membawa Kev ke tempat-tempat terpencil untuk mengumpulkan tanaman-tanaman obat. Perjalanan seperti itu sudah sulit bagi orang biasa yang bisa melihat. Bagi Kev, tentu itu hampir tidak mungkin. Tetapi, Rod dan Kev masih tidak menyerah.

- Because they are encountered with problems they are visualized struggling and try to be brave.
- Some are visualized to be persistent.
- Children are not totally adult's masquerade where the child character perform the dimension of an adult's psyche.

- According to Goodenough, although individual children might (problematically) be presumed innocent, childhood itself-as both an intellectual category and as an actual condition-is never innocent of war. Indeed, for a considerable percentage of the global population, **the experience of childhood is also the experience of war**: at this very moment, children serve as soldiers, forced laborers, human shields, trafficked subjects, prisoners, informants, orphans, and "collateral damage."

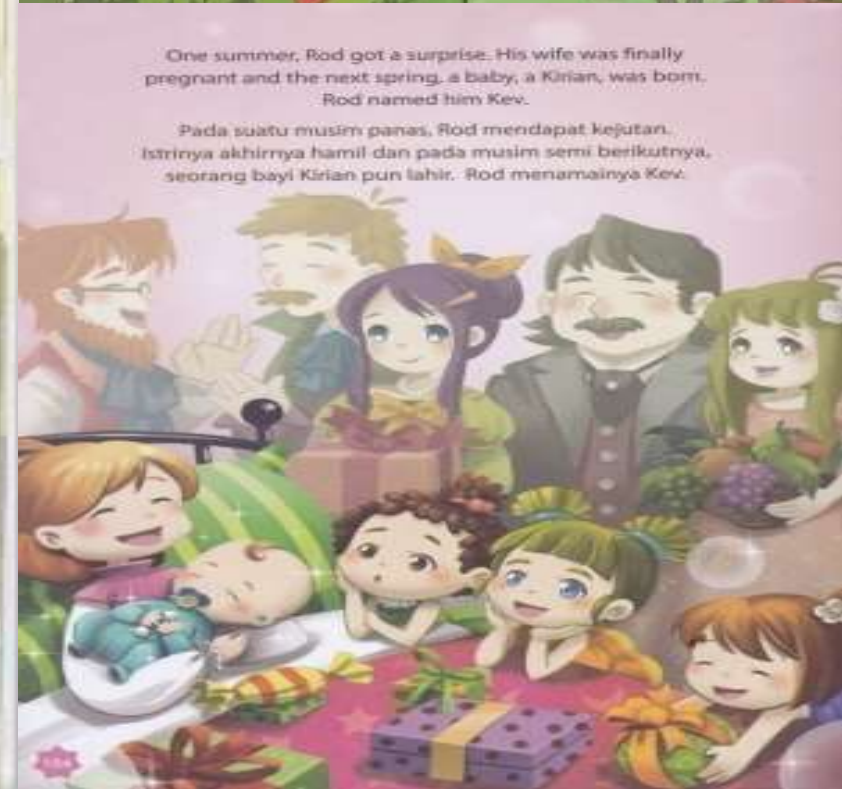
- Even the most sheltered of children living in affluent and ostensibly peaceful nations are not beyond the reach of war's choking tentacles: not only are they both the subjects and objects of propaganda, but, according to the logic of Foucault's argument, their very performance of citizenship **implicates them within structures of power based on war.** (Goodenough and Immel: 2008)

- What had been shown by the books is therefore a positive progress in Indonesian children books. Although not yet very strong, there has been an awareness that **child characters shouldn't be protected from conflicts and "war" of life.**

ADULTS' CONTROL

- There has been a dualism in term of adults' influence and control towards children in the childhood.
- Some children in the stories are mostly surrounded by adults.
- Adults could be very dominant, overriding so the child characters are dependent on them. They even dictate and instruct.

They are surrounded by adults.....



Almost dependent..

Kev had to be able to know a thousand herbs and plants by heart. This task was difficult even for people with normal eyes. But neither Rod nor Kev gave up.

Kev harus mengenal seribu jenis tanaman obat. Pengetahuan ini sulit untuk dikuasai orang biasa. Tetapi, Rod dan Kev tidak menyerah.



Some characters are under control and guidance

Sesudah makan, Laila mencoba menunggang kuda.
Ini pengalaman baru untuknya dan rasanya sungguh menyenangkan.
Selesai menunggang kuda, Ayah bertanya kepada Laila,
"Kamu mau coba menunggang gajah?"
"Hmm... siapa takut?" jawab Laila dengan penuh percaya diri.



They are guided and dictated



Who are the hero?



Aku senang deh, belajar dengan Bapak. Habis, sebelum pulang ke rumah, Bapak selalu membelikan buku.

Kadang-kadang malah ditambah segelas jus jeruk kesukaanku. Alhamdulillah terima kasih ya, Pak! ASYIIK . . .

- However, in some stories, we see children are let alone, solve their problems, fail, learn and therefore find some values.
- It is also a positive progress that we don't see some years ago. As stated, focus on children's literature has moved gradually from collective to individual (Ommundsen: 2010). That what has happened in Indonesian contemporary books.

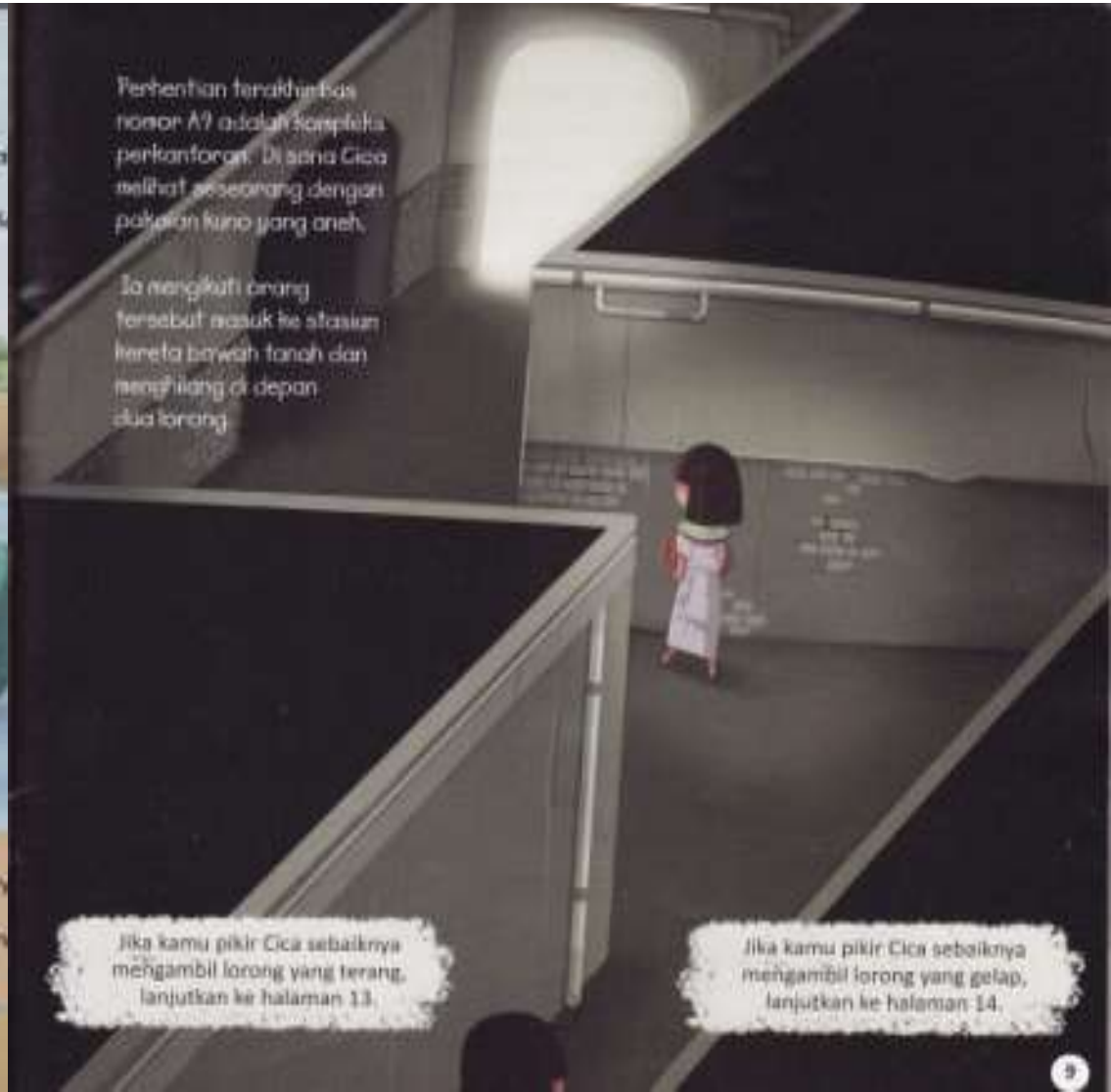


Ani tiba di sungai. Ia menemukan goda di tepian sungai. Di dalamnya, ia menemukan beruang yang sakit. Beruang bukan hewan jinak, tapi Ani kasihan melihatnya mengerang kesakitan.

- Jika kamu pikir Ani sebaiknya meninggalkan beruang itu, lanjutkan ke halaman 14.
- Jika kamu pikir Ani sebaiknya mencoba menyembuhkan beruang itu, lanjutkan ke halaman 19.



They search all alone on their own



Some struggle

Ani membuka botol itu dan mengeluarkan pesan di dalamnya. Pesan itu berupa peta. Ada dua tanda X pada peta itu.

- Jika kamu pikir Ani sebaiknya mencari lokasi tanda X merah, lanjutkan ke halaman 8.
- Jika kamu pikir Ani sebaiknya mencari lokasi tanda X berwarna hijau, lanjutkan ke halaman 9.



Di perpustakaan, Dani tidak menyalakan lampu sehingga orang-orang berpikir pesawati sudah menghilang. "Jangan khawatir," kata si pembantu hijau. "Saya ikut aku. Kita langsung saja ke 'toko'," katanya.


Lanjutkan ke halaman 24.



Orang dengan kostas aneh itu ada di sini!

Ia sedang berlompat sambil menegang goni itu seraya mengucapkan mantra. Matanya terbelak. Goni berlari mendekat dan merebut goni itu. Tibu-tibu serduanya pelat.

Lanjutkan ke halaman 30 untuk mengetahui apa yang terjadi selanjutnya.

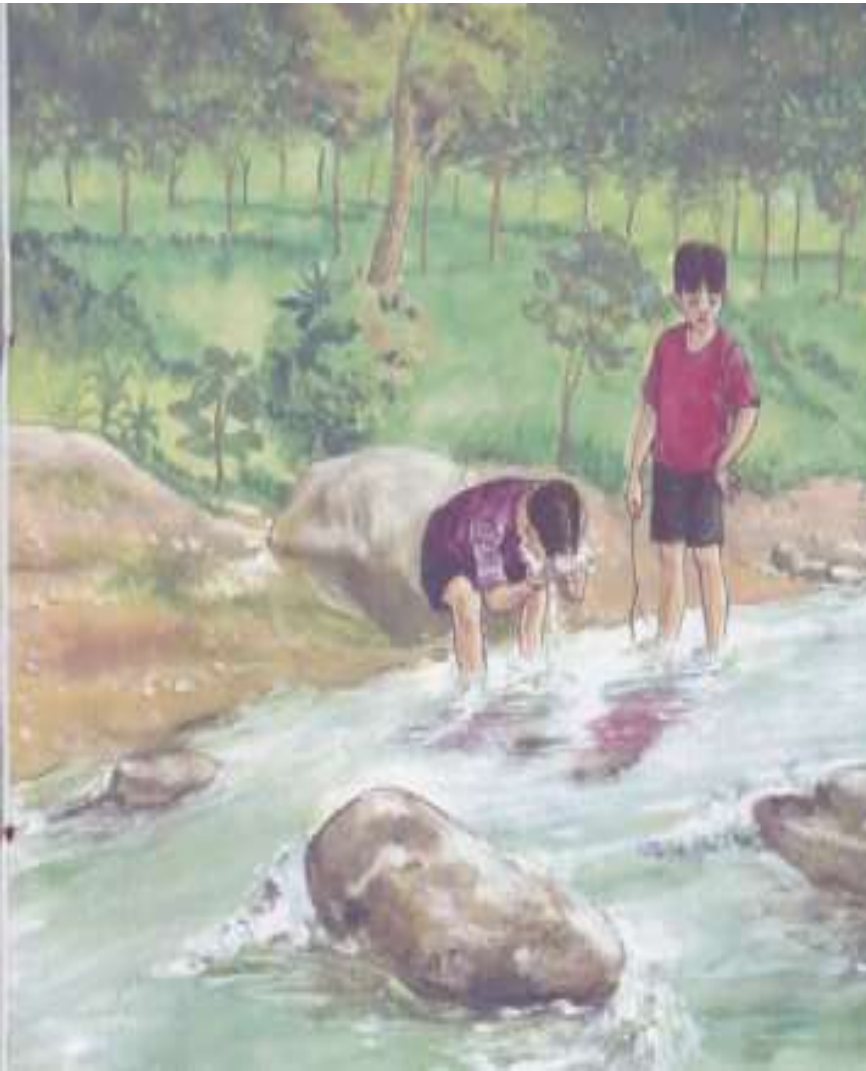
A young boy with dark hair, wearing a brown jacket and blue pants, is shown in profile, looking towards the right. He is standing on a path in a dark, misty forest at night. In the background, a glowing green orb with a yellow center is visible in the air, surrounded by a faint, circular glow. The scene is dimly lit, with some light reflecting off the ground and the boy's jacket.

Setelah tombak hijau ditekan, balokan itu langsung meluncur dari tanah dan terbang menjauh. Doni berlari mengikutinya. Balokan itu kemudian jatuh ke sungai.

Jika kamu pikir Doni sebaiknya membiarkan bulatan itu hanyut dibawa air, lanjutkan ke halaman 14.

Jika kamu pikir Doni sebaiknya terjun ke sungai untuk mengambilnya, lanjutkan ke halaman 15.

Some are persistent



REPRESENTATION

- Although as a collective entity they have represented the existing groups in the Indonesian society, individually most of them are not good representations of Indonesian children and a multicultural childhood. In some books the children distinctively male or female, moslem or non moslem, rich or poor. In particular books the good children are visualized with moslem clothes, and the bad guys not.
- In one book the character is happy welcoming a summer vacation which does not exist in Indonesia. The neat and ordered traffic does not represent most Indonesian city roads.
- Only *Taman Cahaya* visualized inclusivism multicultural Indonesia.



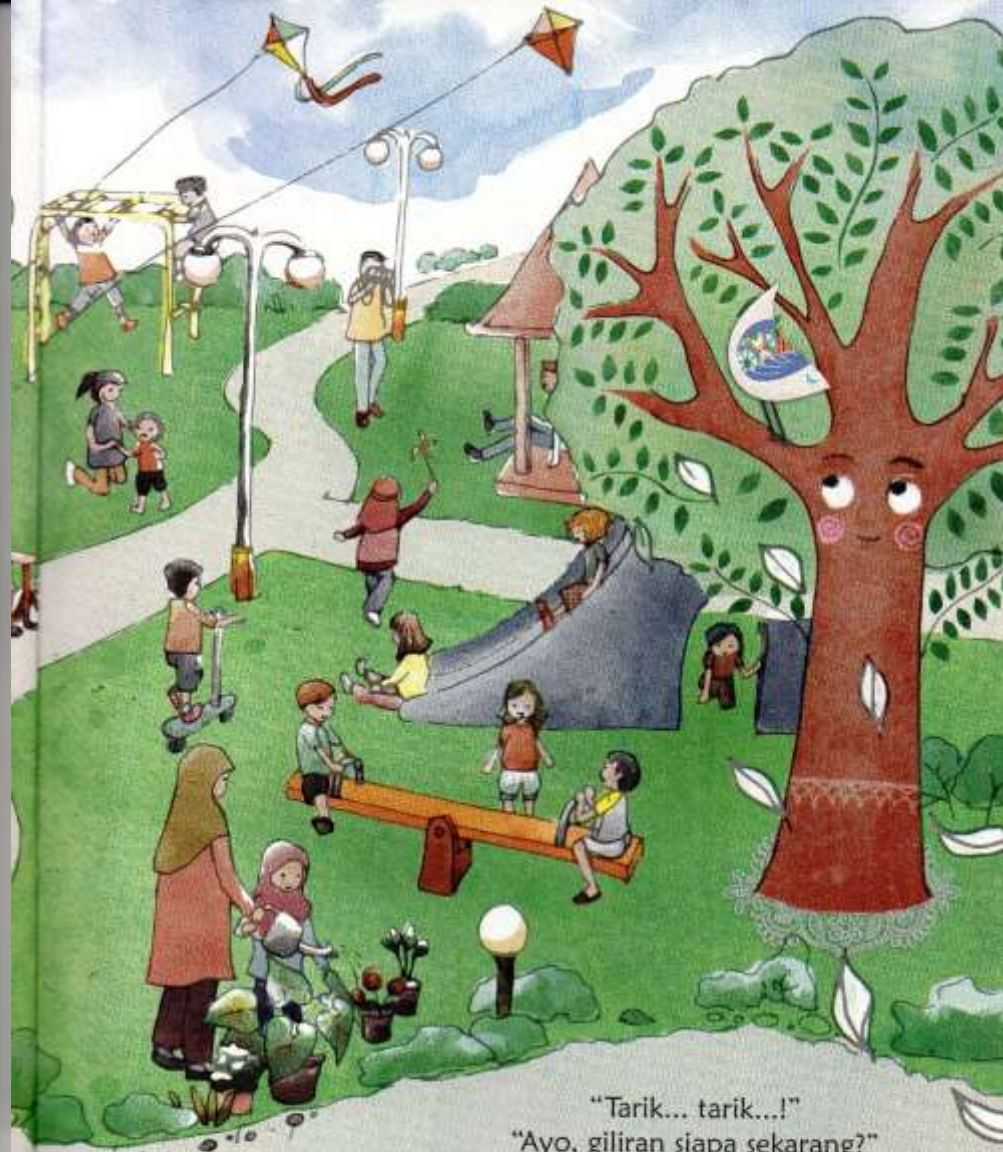
He got more and more patients at each place. Even though he was proven to be an effective healer. And when it was time for him to move on, the people was sorry to let him go.



"Ayo Lala, kita berangkat," kata Ayih.
 Lala membantu Ibu mengangkat keranjang bekal makanan.
 "بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ (Bismillaharrahmaanarrahim)"
 Dengan usap Lala kaffka mengangkat keranjang itu.
 "Wah, berat juga. Apa saja isinya, Bu?" tanya Lala.
 Ibu berseruan dan menjawab, "Semuanya adalah kesukaanmu, Lala."



Minggu yang cerah di Kota Gemilang.
Akhir pekan selalu menyenangkan.



"Tarik... tarik...!"
"Ayo, giliran siapa sekarang?"
"1... 2... 3... 4... 5... 6..."

"Coba lagi! Ayoo kamu bisa!"

- As quite a good number of Indonesian children remain living in villages, slums or poor environment under fear and difficulties, the clean, neat, bright, optimistic, joyful images does not represent the real life of most Indonesian children.



CONCLUSION

- There has been some changes/progress happen in Indonesian contemporary children books with pictures/illustration.
- In spite of conventional ones, there are now more visualizations of children facing problems all alone without control of adults.
- Except for *Taman Cahaya* as an individual the books does not represent multicultural Indonesia.