
Negotiating Multiculturalism: Recentering the Kid Characters' Voice in *NA Willa Dan Rumah Dalam Gang*

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ABSTRACT

Not all children's books provide the space to examine how children think and interrogate natural, cultural, and social phenomena through their cognitive and communicative lenses. However, *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang* foregrounds children's voices that are often overlooked, if not pushed to the periphery. Framing the text as a form of resistance narrative, this study aims to unravel how multiculturalism is negotiated through the perspective of the novel's protagonist and her interactions with adult characters. Given the focus of this study on uncovering the negotiation of multiculturalism in a children's novel, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework is employed. Consequently, the findings are structured according to Fairclough's three levels of discourse meaning-making. The first dimension of textual analysis examines authorial language style and intertextuality as tools for establishing an ideological stance. The second dimension highlights discursive practice in relation to the novel's production and circulation. The third dimension employs recontextualization of critical multiculturalism (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 1999) to explore how the novel recenters the child as an active subject in meaning-making and in negotiating multicultural issues. In addition to recontextualized critical multiculturalism, the analysis also draws on linguistic and narratological understandings of discourse. This approach helps clarify how the author's ideological orientation is textually manifested. The findings show that *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang* situates children's subjectivity at the centre of meaning-making around diversity, presenting it as a lived and celebrated experience rather than a merely anticipated ideal. Although children's voices are recentred, adult characters still function as primary moral guides within the narrative. Overall, the study offers a renewed perspective on children's literature as a medium for reimagining more nuanced forms of critical multiculturalism.

Keywords: *Children's literature, children's voices, critical discourse analysis, critical multiculturalism, narrative function*

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature has long served as a key medium for expressing and promoting ideological positions to young readers, thereby reflecting writers' socio-cultural beliefs. As narrative fiction for children is imbued with moral insights that shape behaviour, its ideological dimension is always inherently

constructed, whether explicitly or implicitly articulated. In revealing ideological agendas, this study critically examines the interrelation between language and narrative structure in children's fiction to explore "the interrelated issues of ideologies of texts and the subjectivity of readers" (Stephens, 1989:

5). From this perspective, the children's novel *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang*, written by Reda Gaudiamo, is approached as an ideological conduit through which diversity and social relations are negotiated. Building on this premise, the study aims to unravel how child characters act as active subjects in constructing and negotiating critical multiculturalism through everyday interactions. Accordingly, the research question guiding this study is: how is multiculturalism represented and negotiated within the textual, discursive, and sociocultural dimensions of *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang*? Addressing this question allows for an examination of the child-protagonist's central role in meaning-making.

Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang, published by the independent publisher Post Press in 2018, is a sequel to the earlier book *Na Willa*. It constructs narratives around Na Willa's interactions with friends, teachers, neighbours, and family members that shows multiculturalism. In the Indonesian context, critical multiculturalism remains a significant issue, as diversity forms the backbone of national identity. Indonesia's national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity), binds multiple ethnicities and cultural traditions under a unified national identity. However, while its intention is noble, its implementation has been uneven. Abdullah (2015) critiques how the Indonesian government has attempted to implement this motto while simultaneously eroding diverse cultural practices and expressions. In response to Abdullah's argument, this study adopts a critical stance informed by McLaren and Farahmandpur's (1999) concept of critical multiculturalism. Rather than treating multicultural literature primarily as a form of resistance against racial difference, the concept is situated within Indonesia's socio-cultural context, particularly around the 1960s.

A growing body of research has examined children's literature in relation to cultural minority representation (see Dandapat & Tripathi, 2020; Gu & Catalano, 2022), gender construction (see Caple, 2022; Shahnaz et al., 2020), and identity formation (see Adam & Urquhart, 2023; Smith, 2024; Venzo, 2024). Other studies have explored critical multiculturalism through intersections of race, class, and gender in US-based children's literature (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). However, research on how Indonesian children's fiction represents children's lived experiences of negotiating multiculturalism remains limited. One

study on *Na Willa* (see Assa, 2023) focuses on authorial memory in identity construction, whereas this study recontextualizes McLaren and Farahmandpur's framework within a postcolonial Indonesian setting.

It is important to emphasize that *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang* is approached here as a site of negotiation of critical multiculturalism through child-centred narrative. Recentering children's perspectives is crucial, as children are often framed as "innocent and inexperienced" (Nodelman, 2008) in contrast to adult-voiced narratives that typically deliver explicit moral instruction. To analyse this, Fairclough's (1989) CDA is employed as the main framework, supported by Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics and Stephens' (1989) narratological theory at the textual level, and McLaren and Farahmandpur's (1999) recontextualized critical multiculturalism at the sociocultural level. This integrated approach also considers how the text is produced, distributed, and interpreted within Indonesia's broader socio-cultural context shaped by ethnicity, class, postcolonial history, and religious diversity.

Regarding data selection, stories representing multicultural themes were identified in *cemara* and *cing-coang*. Further reading revealed that multicultural issues also include alienation based on physical differences, such as left-handedness represented in *kiri-kanan*. Analysis at the textual level follows Halliday's (1985) framework to inspect the strategic lexicogrammatical components, focusing on experiential, interpersonal, and textual meanings. Narrative structure of the novel is also examined using Stephens' (1989: 43) categories: mode, point of view, narrating voice, and order of events.

The second dimension examines discursive practice, focusing on production, distribution, and consumption. This analysis reveals authorial stance through narrative choices and publishing decisions, further supported by a virtual interview with Reda Gaudiamo conducted via Zoom in May 2025. The last dimension examines sociocultural practice by interpreting findings through McLaren and Farahmandpur's framework (1999), adapted to Indonesia's ethnic, religious, and class diversity. The findings are synthesized to show how child protagonists negotiate multiculturalism. Literature, in this sense, is not only ideological distribution but also a cultural artifact where real-world experiences are reimagined through creative narration.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Textual Analysis: Multiculturality as Negotiation

The representation of multiculturalism in *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang* can be traced through excerpts from *cemara* (Christmas tree), *kiri kanan* (left-right), and *cing-coang*. The analysis of these three texts is conducted using Halliday's framework, focusing on experiential, interpersonal, and textual meanings that construct the field (what is being discussed), tenor (who is involved), and mode (how language is used). In addition, Stephens' narrative framework is applied to examine focalization, point of view, narrating voice, and narrative sequence in relation to children's perception of multiculturalism. It is important to note that all story titles in the novel are written in lowercase. This is a deliberate stylistic choice reflecting children's fiction aimed at young readers. However, adult readers may also interpret this choice as a reminder of childhood perspectives.

In *cemara*, Willa expresses her desire to decorate a Christmas tree with her Muslim friend, Farida. Two contextual points are important. First, Farida's mother does not object to her daughter joining Willa in decorating a Christmas tree. Second, Farida's enthusiasm is portrayed as natural and unproblematic, as her mother does not respond negatively when she

pauses her task to play with Willa. It is also important to situate this story within the New Order era (*Orde Baru*), when state policy encouraged secularized social interaction and religious expression was less publicly foregrounded. This context may have contributed to a relatively open attitude toward participation in diverse religious festivities.

The excerpt is then analysed at the lexicogrammatical level, focusing on experiential, interpersonal, and textual meanings. For clarity, the excerpt is divided into three clauses: excerpt 1 clause 1 (E1C1), E1C2, and E1C3. The following tables display the analysis of the key clauses within the textual dimension.

The clause above shows Willa initiating interaction with an adult figure. Although grammatically declarative, it functions pragmatically as a request for permission. Experientially, E1C1 illustrates Willa's explicit request employing the desiderative mental process *mau* (want to) followed by a projected clause in which it is expressed by the material process *buat* (decorate) with *pohon natal* (a Christmas tree) as the goal. This foregrounds child agency in articulating intention. Interpersonally, the declarative form softens the request into an indirect appeal. Textually, the theme "aku" foregrounds the child protagonist as the central agent in meaning-making.

Table 1. Textual Analysis of E1C1

Register variable	Metafunction	Datum
Field: Willa's invitation to ask Farida to decorate a Christmas tree	Experiential: the sender/actor is <i>aku</i> (Willa); the process involved is the mental process <i>mau</i> , preceding the material process <i>buat</i> ; and the goal is <i>pohon natal</i> .	" <i>Aku mau buat pohon natal, Bude.</i> " (Willa) (Gaudiarno, 2018: 42) Trans: I want to decorate a Christmas tree, Auntie."
Tenor: Willa – Farida's mother (kid and adult relationship)	Interpersonal: declarative mood with no modality.	
Mode: interactive process in a spoken text	Textual: theme: <i>aku</i> ; rheme: <i>mau buat pohon natal, Bude</i> .	

Table 2. Textual Analysis of E1C2

Register variable	Metafunction	Datum
Field: Farida's request of her mother's approval	Experiential: the actor is implied <i>aku</i> (I); the process involved is an implied material process <i>pergi</i> (go).	" <i>Boleh, Mak?</i> " (Farida) (Gaudiarno, 2018: 43) Trans: "Can (I go), Mak?"
Tenor: Farida – her mother (parental relationship)	Interpersonal: interrogative mood asking for approval, with modality <i>boleh</i> (can).	
Mode: interactive process in a spoken text	Textual: theme: <i>boleh</i> ; rheme: <i>Mak?</i>	

Table 3. Textual Analysis of E1C3

Register variable	Metafunction	Datum
Field: Farida's mother's approval of their request	Experiential: the actor is an implied you (Farida); the processes involved are an implied material process <i>pergi</i> (go) and an explicit mental process <i>mau</i> (want).	" <i>Sana kalau mau ikut.</i> " (Farida's mother) (Gaudiamo, 2018: 43) Trans:
Tenor: Farida – her mother (parental relationship)	Interpersonal: declarative mood with modality <i>boleh</i> (can).	"(You can) go ahead with Willa, if you want."
Mode: interactive process in a spoken text	Textual: theme: <i>sana</i> ; rheme: <i>kalau mau ikut</i>	

Table 4. Textual Analysis of E2C1

Register variable	Metafunction	Datum
Field: a motherly guide for interrogating status quo	Experiential: the actor is the question <i>ada apa</i> (what); while the circumstance is <i>dengan tangan satunya, yang biasa</i> (with the usual hand?).	" <i>Ada apa dengan tangan satunya, yang biasa?</i> "(Willa's mother) (Gaudiamo, 2018: 60) Trans:
Tenor: Willa – her mother (parental relationship)	Interpersonal: an interrogative mood with WH question to trigger further conversations.	"What is wrong with the usual hand?"
Mode: interactive process in a spoken text	Textual: theme: <i>ada apa</i> ; rheme: <i>dengan tangan satunya</i> .	

Both clauses above are in continuity, showcasing a typical interaction between a daughter and her mother. Experientially, E1C2 is the request with many implied elements, which in this case are the actor and the process, commonly found in spoken texts. The modality *boleh* (can) is the only emerging element, foregrounding the request for approval from a more powerful interactant as also the weight of the message in the textual meaning. This makes the modality 'can' a bearer of various possibilities of meaning and function in Indonesian spoken texts. Textually, this clause highlights the modality *boleh* (can) as the theme of the clause, signifying the unmarked finite operator in a yes/no interrogative, functioning as a request for approval, hence a hierarchical interaction is at work. In addition, E1C3, as a response, functions as conditional approval. The maternal figure holds decision-making authority, as reflected in the modal and conditional structure. Textually, *sana* operates as directive approval. The interaction ultimately reveals that while children initiate action, adults retain gatekeeping power.

From a narrative perspective, *cemara* employs multiple focalizations involving Willa, Farida, and Farida's mother. Each character has her share of

focalization of the matter discussed, i.e., decorating a Christmas tree. The typical focalization from the kid characters is brief as opposed to the adult character's response which is more elaborative, added with circumstances revealing the reasoning process.

In *kiri-kanan*, multiculturalism is expressed through physical difference. Willa, a left-handed child, attempts to use her right hand when colouring at school because others in her class do so. This reflects peer pressure emerging from school interactions, in which Willa has an unavoidable feeling of being an outsider as a left-handed person. The story is a subtle reminder to the readers that left-handedness is normal, and not a symptom of illness to cure. Following is the analysis of the key clauses in the narrative.

The clause above represents an intentional interrogative that is raised to demand information. However, since the participants involved are Willa's mother and herself, take this as a guiding question leading Willa to reflect on her take about being left-handed. The adult figure in this clause acts as a more knowledgeable person, capable of informing what is right. However, instead of playing a didactic role upon what is right or wrong, she triggers deeper reflection by the guiding question.

Table 5. Textual Analysis of E2C2

Register variable	Metafunction	Datum
Field: Willa's wish to be like the majority	Experiential: the actor is <i>aku</i> (I); the process is the mental <i>mau</i> (want); while the phenomenon is <i>seperti teman-teman</i> (to be like my friends).	" <i>Aku mau seperti teman-teman.</i> " (Willa) (Gaudiarno, 2018: 60) Trans: "I want to be like my friends."
Tenor: Willa – her mother (parental relationship)	Interpersonal: declarative mood unravelling Willa's desire to be like the majority.	
Mode: interactive process in a spoken text	Textual: theme: <i>Aku</i> ; rheme: <i>mau seperti teman-teman</i> .	

Table 6. Textual Analysis of E3C1

Register variable	Metafunction	Datum
Field: Willa's innocent question	Experiential: the actor is <i>Pak</i> ; the process is the verbal <i>bicara</i> (speak); while the verbiage is <i>apa itu</i> (what).	" <i>Pak bicara apa itu?</i> "(Willa) (Gaudiarno, 2018: 89) Trans: "What did Paks peak?"
Tenor: Willa – her mother (parental relationship)	Interpersonal: interrogative mood asking for information.	
Mode: interactive process in a spoken text	Textual: theme: <i>Pak</i> ; rheme: <i>bicara apa itu</i> .	

The clause expresses internalized conformity pressure, where readers get to know Willa's main desire as revealed by the mental process *mau* (want). It can be inferred that social pressure encouraged her to practice writing with her 'hesitant' hand to fit in. The phenomenon foregrounds desire shaped by social environment rather than biological necessity. In the narrative configuration of the text, this excerpt is focalized by Willa as the main character/narrator and her mother. Like the previous excerpt, this snippet consistently displays kid characters' perspective in a briefer manner, using simple language to express their cognitive processing. This influences the way the narrative is structured for an implied audience that are young readers as well as the adult ones who can revisit their childhood through Willa's way of making sense of the world around her.

In *cing-coang*, Willa interrogates her mixed Chinese-Indonesian identity. The title narrates how Willa, as a member of a Chinese family, questions her identity. Her mother's inability to speak Chinese language gives readers the context that Willa has a mixed ethnicity family background. Usually, the naming of one's unfamiliar language as what Willa addressed as '*cing-coang*' carries derogatory

connotations, but since this naming is made by an innocent kid from the insider mixed-Chinese family, this address represents pure curiosity. Below is the analysis of key clauses in the third excerpt.

The above clause expressed Willa's curiosity on the language in which her father spoke. This question opens a pathway to understanding the deeper level of contextual meanings, indicating Willa's distance from the first language of her father. This can mean two things. First, her father has never taught or spoken in this language at home. Second, her father's share of the upbringing role is not as much as her mother's. This is actually proven in Willa's choice of asking this question to her mother rather than directly to her father. Experientially, the clause highlights Willa's sense of interest in a new language she overhears. Textually, *Pak* as the theme also bears the importance of the whole clause message, as the focus is on the figure of *Pak* as the subject that spoke in a language foreign to her ears, not the language spoken. This clause ignites further analysis on a deeper level, which will be elaborated in the dimension of sociocultural practice. The second clause in the third excerpt portrays Willa's mother's response to her query.

This clause reveals a deeper layer of meaning.

Table 7. Textual Analysis of E3C2

Register variable	Metafunction	Datum
Field: Willa's mother conditional response	Experiential: the actor is <i>kita</i> (we); the process is the mental process of <i>belajar</i> (learn); while the phenomenon is <i>cing-coang-cing-coang</i> . There are also circumstances provided in which conditioning is made manifest, <i>kalau Pak tidak sibuk</i> (if <i>Pak</i> is not busy) that enables the learning process to take place.	<i>"Ya, kalau Pak tidak sibuk, kita belajar cing-coang-cing-coang."</i> (Willa's mother) (Gaudiamo, 2018: 89) Trans: "Yes, if <i>Pak</i> is not busy, we can learn <i>cing-coang-cing-coang</i> from him."
Tenor: Willa – her mother (parental relationship)	Interpersonal: declarative mood giving conditional information.	
Mode: interactive process in a spoken text	Textual: theme: <i>Ya</i> ; rheme: <i>kalau Pak tidak sibuk, kita belajar cing-coang-cing-coang</i> .	

The experiential meaning in this reflects a possibility of implementing the preconditioned plan of learning the language, if *Pak* is not busy. This circumstantial element foregrounded the absence of Willa's father in most of her upbringing in this clause. Interpersonally, the declarative mood is opted as a conduit of expressing her mother's power of deciding the condition that enables the learning to take place. Textually, the agreeing word of *ya* to Willa's request of assurance in learning *cing-coang-cing-coang* underlines her mother's authoritative power to actually grant a wish. The conditional structure reflects parental authority in regulating cultural transmission. While openness is present, it remains mediated by adult control.

To intensify the nuance of children's fiction, *cing-coang* provides a broader view on what actually happened when the conversation took place between Willa and her mother through the eyes of the narrator/main character. From this focalization, readers can access how the conversation was carried: i.e., whispered, winked, and giggled. Another thing to note is the use of onomatopoeic expressions to describe how Chinese language sounds. This onomatopoeia is not intended derogatorily as it is addressed by insiders. The case can be oppositional if it is addressed by outsiders. Once *Pak's* point of view is taken, we will have insight on a different interpretation. Unfortunately, his voice is not taken in the story. Another possibility to ponder upon was why the narrative revealed that Willa and her mother conversed in whispers, could it be an act of secrecy?

Discursive Practices in the Representation of Multiculturality

Discursive practice concerns production, distribution, and consumption of the novel. The excerpts (*cemara*, *kiri-kanan*, and *cing-coang*) show child-initiated dialogue, but adult mediation maintains structural hierarchy. The author intervenes by constructing compassionate and reflective adult figures, aligning with her aim of imagining a more inclusive society. In a Zoom interview (May 13, 2025), Reda Gaudiamo mentioned that her initial intention to write *Na Willa* series was to channel her disappointment against the widening gap of social segregation based on ethnicity/religious beliefs that was internalized by the young generation (R. Gaudiamo, personal communication, May 13, 2025). The stereotypical treatment towards people from different cultural/religious backgrounds, which her daughter underwent, fuelled the author to write *Na Willa* series. As a consequence, her productive intervention here provides a space for readers to imagine a community that embraces differences with open arms.

Production choices reflect ideological intent, including the use of child-centred language and simple vocabulary. Distribution-wise, the author opted for an independent publisher due to resistance from mainstream publishers against narratives that question adult authority. This decision enabled preservation of ideological integrity over market conformity. In terms of consumption, the text is open to multiple readings: children engage with relatable everyday interactions, while adult readers interpret

moral and cultural dimensions. Meaning is therefore co-constructed across audiences.

Critiquing Multiculturalism through Child-Centred Narrative

This study recontextualizes McLaren and Farahmandpur's (1999) critical multiculturalism within Indonesia's socio-cultural setting. Unlike their focus on whiteness and capitalism, this study examines Indonesia's national ideology of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or unity in diversity, as a double-edged sword that binds Indonesia's varied cultural backgrounds but also a threat towards the diverse cultures within it. As a consequence, the critical approach in exploring the concept of the celebrated diversity in *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang* can be done if we look at the ground in which diversity and multiculturalism intersected in the social context of the novel's setting.

The discourse of multiculturalism can be traced in several of the stories in the novel, in '*cing-coang*' for example. The story is a ground to look critically at how one's cultural identity is co-constructed within a familial institution. In this story, *Mak* is the central figure in the upbringing of *Na Willa* as *Pak* needs to be away to fulfil his breadwinning duties as a ship crew (narrated in the first series of the novel, entitled *Na Willa*). That is why *Willa's* questioning of the Chinese language *Pak* talks with the street noodle seller is an alien code to her. *Willa's* wandering on the alien language *Pak* speaks is an expression of a child-driven curiosity about her own identity as a mixed Chinese-Indonesian. Another viewpoint to reflect is how *Pak* is unable to teach this language to his daughter.

It is important, however, not to reduce this to a simplistic gendered division of labour. Family, as the tiniest social institution, that perpetuates patriarchal norms segregating fathers as the providers and mothers as the family nurturers. Challenging this capitalist-driven parental involvement, *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang*, in opposition, portrayed an equal role. Evidently, the figure of *Pak* is presented as an active parenting agent as can be traced from several titles such as *seperti pak*, *oom sie#2*, and *ke sekolah bersama pak*. However, in the previous series, *Na Willa*, one of the parental figures was forced to work away for a long time to maintain the family's income intact as a ship crew. The professional conditioning needed to be highlighted since it was the malefactor behind

the familial constellation in *Willa's* upbringing. This is also confirmed by the publisher's note (Gaudiamo, 2018, p. 166) that the figure of *Pak* was hardly present in the previous series, leading to *Willa's* failure to identify him as his father, addressing him as *Oom* (uncle) when he came home. Liu et al. (2025) argued that the vulnerability of middle-income groups is a growing concern worldwide and should be further supported to ensure sustainable economic and social development.

The second dimension of multicultural critique appears in *cemara*, where religious difference is normalized through shared activity. Children focus on play and decoration rather than religious boundaries. Gaudiamo notes that children tend to see difference as unproblematic, while adults often impose boundaries upon it. Gaudiamo in the interview session also revealed that for children, being different was perfectly fine, but being different could be a nuisance for adults around the children. Therefore, the portrayal of the harmony in this story is a radical act of representing the ideal manifestation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. In other words, children's curiosity and excitement are pivotal to revive the spirit of unity without the internalized segregating perspective that mostly is inculcated by adult figures. In alignment with this, Botelho & Rudman (2009, p. 150) also provide that 'prejudice' keeps happening 'because there are institutional policies and social practices in place that are racist, classist, sexist' and discriminatory towards people from different religious backgrounds.

The typical kid-voicing narrative style in *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang* is grounded in children's limited vocabulary and child characters' honest commentary offers a space for authors to resist the hegemonic children's literature uniformity as a means of circulating certain moral-centred didactic practices. This narrative style can be interpreted as an aesthetic resistance to which Oliver Marchart argued as explicitly political. In accordance with this argumentation, what Reda Gaudiamo did in writing *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang* exemplified an attempt to what Marchart (2019) addressed as an act of resistance aiming at 'disconnecting from doxa'. However, the dichotomy of child reasoning versus adult logic similarly put on an ambivalent ground. In the same fashion, Ong (2022) also advocated that critical reflection and observation on emergent cognitive and affective patterns was a fertile ground

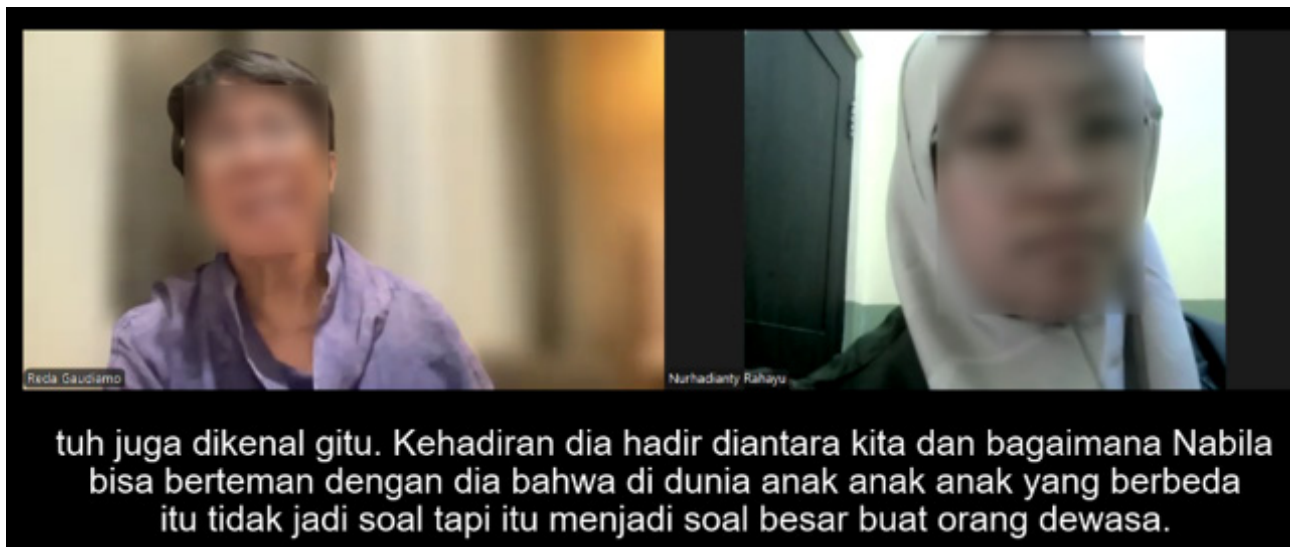


Figure 1. An interview session with the author

to construct a counter-hegemonic agency.

This novel does not only take child characters as a starting point to criticize the concept of multiculturalism, but also how they negotiate their different identity compared to other child characters. In *'kiri-kanan'*, Na Willa was portrayed as a girl who developed her concept of diversity because unlike her classmates who were right-handed, she was left-handed. She tried to fit in by dissolving her identity to be a part of the dominant. Her sense of being different was consequently perceived as something wrong so she attempted to colour a picture using her right hand, which made her work hard to finish. *Mak* intervened in this misleading image by showing her that she was left-handed too and there was nothing wrong with being different. This story unravelled the complexity of children's perception and though *Mak*, as an adult character, helped Willa construct her concept of being different, the initiation of self-discovery processing was still initiated by how the protagonist made sense of her world. This datum explicitly put children in what Zimmerman (2025) confronted as subordinate beings. Quite the contrary, they were active agents in shaping their perspective about the world (Riza et al., 2024). In the novel under scrutiny, the adult characters in the story thus fulfilled the role of the supporting force instead of an authoritarian figure that fed children ready-made moral lessons.

From the narrative style we can look at what is implied in the story, that Willa's critical viewpoint is very much influenced by the adult's way of behaving, whether it is a parental figure or a teacher at school. *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang* does not only offer a terrain for playful exploration but also a seed to nurture agency and strengthen solidarity and resistance (Kérchy & Malilang, 2025), which in this context, is directed against the dominant discourse of multiculturalism. And the fact that Willa's perspective is put under the spotlight, the text functions to redirect children's literature as the playground for young readers to interrogate many things around them. Considering this, *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang* extends its avenue to prepare children in developing their cognitive reasoning when facing contradictions of opinions (Riza et al., 2024).

Criticizing how multicultural society is constructed in the universe of *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang* requires us to also consider the intersection of class, gender, ethnicity, and diverse religious beliefs as the backbone on which the societal norms are co-created. It is therefore important to question, among others, Willa's family background as a part of middle-class society that has been exposed with a strong educational foundation. However, the case of social class and ethnicity are immersed not only to construct the level of Na Willa's reasoning,

but also a demarcating line beyond which the father's role is put as a lesser visible figure in the process of Willa's upbringing. The middle-income background of her family thus prevents the father figure to be more involved in guiding Willa's behavioral and cognitive development. In one of the narrative scenes, Willa attested that her father brought her an English picture book from a business trip. However, in another scene, the father is torn between letting his family stay in Surabaya or move to Jakarta to survive financially. This gives readers context about Willa's family background and unconsciously also portrays the personal struggles of the adult characters within contexts of capitalist-driven injustice and oppression (Al-Lawati, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how multiculturalism is negotiated through the child protagonist's perspective in *Na Willa dan Rumah dalam Gang*. The findings demonstrate that multicultural meanings in the novel are actively constructed through the child's everyday interactions, linguistic choices, and narrative positioning rather than being transmitted didactically. Across the textual, discursive, and sociocultural dimensions, the analysis highlights that the child protagonist is an active subject who interprets and negotiates multiculturalism through situated experiences treated as a site of knowledge-building.

At the same time, this subjectivity interrelates with a relational dynamic in which adult characters still occupy authoritative positions in the kid's meaning-making processes. Even though the narrative recenters the child's voice, it does not fully dismantle adult authority. Nevertheless, the agentive role of child characters offers a middle ground from which children's perspectives develop dynamically with that of adults' guidance. This dichotomy highlights the complexity of representing child subjectivity in children's literature.

The study contributes theoretically by recontextualizing the concept of critical multiculturalism within the Indonesian socio-cultural setting, moving beyond its original focus on Western racial and capitalist structures. By integrating Critical Discourse Analysis with Systemic Functional Linguistics and narrative theory, this

research demonstrates how linguistic and narrative features jointly function as mechanisms for ideological construction in children's fiction. In doing so, it positions children's literature as a critical site for examining how multicultural values are not merely transmitted but discursively negotiated. Practically, this study offers insights into how children's literature should be progressively developed, taking children's narrative as the central channel of voicing their concerns regarding the social issues they encounter.

Nevertheless, this study is limited by its focus on a single literary work and selected excerpts, which may not fully represent the broader landscape of Indonesian children's literature. Future research may extend this analysis by examining a wider range of texts, incorporating reader-response perspectives, or exploring how similar negotiations of multiculturalism occur across different socio-cultural contexts.

STATEMENTS OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors herewith declare that this article is totally free from any conflict of interest regarding the data collection, analysis, and editorial process, and the publication process in general. The authors also do not have any competing interests regarding the publication in *Poetika: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra*. All authors in this article were not involved in any step of the editorial review and editors' decision at all costs.

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