

Mother Figure in Indonesian Children Book Illustration in Terms of Attribute, Domestic, and Public Space

Riama Maslan Sihombing

ABSTRACT: *A mother is often viewed as someone who is full of love, tender, helpful, nurtured, and loving her children unconditionally. Illustrators picture a mother in a certain worldview, so that cultural constellation can be seen in the illustration of a mother in children books. This paper aims to investigate the identity of a mother in children book's illustration pictured in personal and public space by descriptively reviewing meanings and codes of a mother on illustration using semiotic theory. This research, then, took ten children book illustration published in the 1980s – 1990s with ten purposive samples and some samples taken from year 2000 as comparison. This research is a preliminary study to find meaning of a mother figure illustrations with the finding that the traditional stereotype of the mother appears with a distinctive attribute of mothers wearing a “kebaya”, a hair bun and present in domestic sphere; and in further development, a mother appears in public space as a consequence to the change of her position as the breadwinner of the family.*

KEY WORDS: *Mother figure, children book's illustration, stereotype, Indonesian family, and social changes.*

INTRODUCTION

The figure of the mother, as caretaker and caregiver, is raised in various communication media such as product advertising, social campaigns, and various literatures. Advertisements of food and beverages to children and families use a figure of maternal caretaker, loving, and kind. In the literature of children such as school textbooks, picture books, and other books, a mother often appeared with a portrayal that comes as a part of a family. Family life becomes part of real life stories of everyday life, historical stories, tales, and textbooks. In fable stories, a mother also is often portrayed to be part of a family.

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Picture 1:

Relationship between Mother and Child in Milk and Food Advertisement

How children learn about themselves depends on the reference sample provided to them (Purcell & Lara, 1999:177). The representation of roles and parental figure in children book can affect the form of socialization of both parent and child (Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999:1). Every human movement which is revealed in the illustration of behavior/attitude/gesture gives visual signs towards its communicants, in this case, young readers. Gesture provides information for its observers. Illustrated/picture story books also gives role model in determining the standards for feminine and masculine gender stereotypes (Narahara, 1998:1).

Literature works, in one hand, is a socio-cultural document; and, on the other hand, it is able to represent the reality through metaphoric language (Duncan ed., 1981). In this paper, feminine connotation in a mother figure is reviewed by determining how the signs in the illustration are combined as an effort in creating connotation in marking level. The image of a mother figure is analysed as a "text" which revealed the varied expression in the illustration. The image of a mother in children books influences how children see themselves. Negative illustration of the image can affect the identity and view toward gender.

MOTHER AND FAMILY IMAGE

A child is born from a woman through a 9 month + 10 day period of pregnancy. Since in womb, a mother is united biologically with her baby and provides food so that the baby can survive and grow until he or she is born. This biological relationship creates a strong emotional relationship between the woman and her baby. A woman, in biological relationship which has this kind of reproductive role, is called a “mother”.

Biologically, a mother nurture and deliver a baby is physically differed from a woman who does not give the birth a baby but care for one without having to deliver him. Apart from biological mother, there is also a social mother; she cares for a child without having to deliver him, so that this kind of mother can play her function as a mother. This woman is called a “social mother”. Both biological and social mother are important figures in raising and taking care of children. A mother breastfeeds, feeds, nurtures, and educates children; hence, they can survive biologically and socially. The way a mother cares for and raises her children influences self concept, characteristics and behavior of a child.

In conventional structure, a mother exists in her relation with the immediate family, which is biological parents (mother and father) and the birth of a child as their descendant. There are some types of family structures which are formed by law, religion, and education. However, historical scientists consider human organization at the beginning was formed hierarchically, which is a group of human with a father as the protector and a mother as the caretaker (Loyd, 1981).



Figure 2:
Potrayal of Mother

CHILDREN BOOK AND MOTHER FIGURE

A book has three aspects which are as a source of information, education, and entertainment. Through books, children understand their environment and culture. Picture books are made for children from babies to teenagers. Picture books consist of pictures and text made according to the categories and age development stages (Sihombing & Triyadi, 2011).

Visual aspects of children story books are important factors in developing stories and imagination. One of many functions of illustration in children books has become a tool in stimulating imagination. Imagination helps children investage and explores the world around them and creates ideas or meanings for their future lives. Imaginative experience for children is an important period in their mental and physical development. Adults and children like to read something that stimulates imagination and shows something new about themselves and their world.

Children story books have themes, plots, charaterization, and background. Characterization refers to techniques and development of the characters of a story, including the main character, his behavior, and his role and illustration in the story. Characterization plays an important part in a success (Sihombing & Triyadi, 2011:5).

A character appears in a background which is the place, time relation, and social environment, the place of events in the story. According to Guntur Triyadi, background means the choice and the exploration of background in bringing the story to life and gives a picture of "imaginary world" that covers the whole story (cited by Sihombing & Triyadi, 2011). At times, background does not only follow events, but it has been determined that it can bring colours to an event, in certain phase, it can create an event.

On the Children Book with Mother Figure. The chosen illustration is the one with the main figure of a mother. A mother exists in her constellation in a family. The mother in this study was a woman who became a male partner as a parent in a household managed together in a house. The elected book is the Presidential Instruction (INPRES, *Instruksi Presiden*) book. The government, in this case is the Educational and Cultural Ministry, publishes books through Department Project of Elementary School Children Reading Books Provider (INPRES, No.6/1984) working closely with private publisher with various family-themed stories.

In 1980s financial year, there were a lot of mother figures by placing them in the position of a mother as the husband's companion. The society considers a good mother is an obedient woman on the side of her husband and her children. This assumption is developed and perpetuated by the institutions that participate in society, thus affecting the outlook not only

by men against female figure, but women themselves in looking at herself and took place in the social process in the society (Aryani, 2005:16). In these books, there is the view which was triggered by the Javanese culture, considering the books are printed in Java and was written by people who have Javanese cultural background.

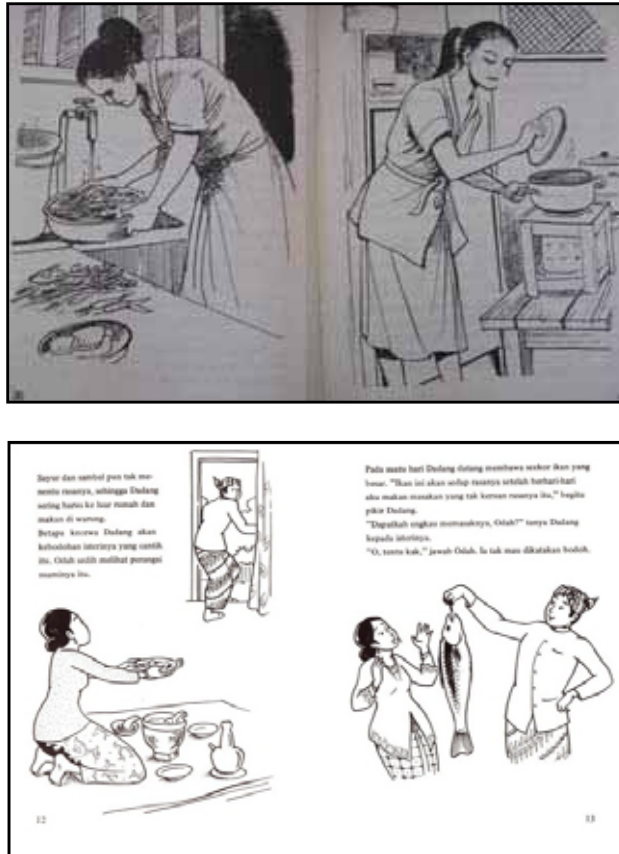


Figure 3:
Mother in the Kitchen

In Javanese culture that tends to be paternalistic, women do not get a position as special as men. According to Ester Lianawati (2008), Javanese is a society that has certain limitations in gender relations which show the dominant position and roles of men compared to women. In traditional Javanese society, a mother and a wife is considered as a *konco wingking*. A woman's job in a household is to serve her husband and her

family, especially as a *konco wingking*, as a companion in the kitchen (Supartiningsih, 2009).

On the Mother Figure and Attributes. Generally, mothers in the illustration are approximately between 30-40 years old wearing a hair bun and *kebaya*. The *kebaya* worn is in the form of daily short *kebaya* blouse with a model fit to the body length up to the hips with the sleeves covering the arms. The pattern of the fabric is usually small flowers and long cloth worn under it is similar to *batik*. Clothing has become limitation for certain groups of people, for example police clothing, we do not look at the person, but at the uniform, which shows power legitimization. As with the clothes of the clergy, inmates, civil servants, nurse uniform, hospital patient clothing, and so on.

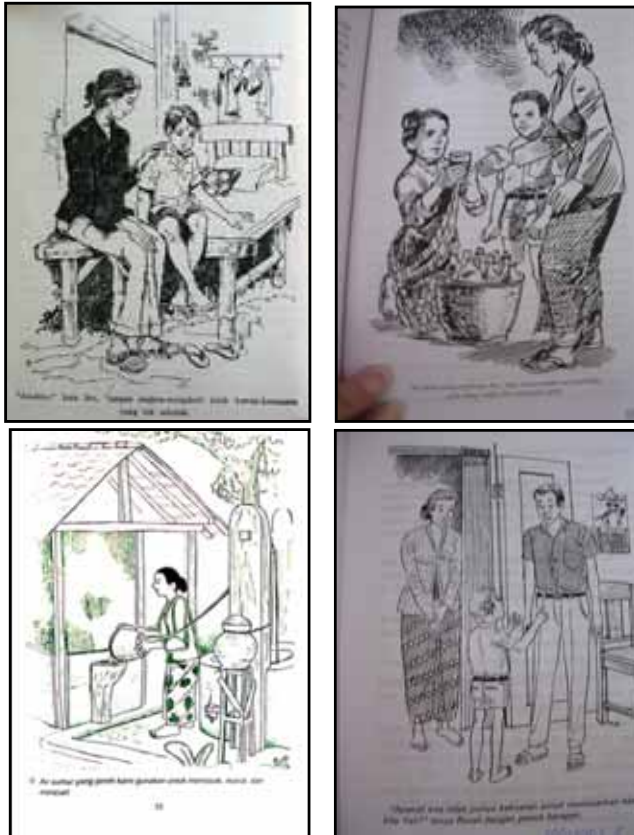


Figure 4:
Kebaya, Illustration form INPRES Books in 1980s

Uniform is used as symbols of power and subordination which muffle individuality and emphasize on unity and discipline. So that uniform becomes a “badge” of an organizational relationship (Sihombing & Triyadi, 2011).



Figure 5:
Kebaya, Illustration from *Nieuw Indisch ABC* by J. van der Heyden (1922)



Figure 6:
Many Books Nowadays Use Hooded Clothings

Besides, *kebaya* clothing is the notion’s national identity. In the 1945 independence year, *kebaya* became the expression of nationalism which was popularized by the first ladies (the Old Order and the New Order). At present, the image of a woman wearing *kebaya* is traditional, graceful, and feminine. *Kebaya* comes from the word *abaya* (in Arabic, *baya* means long

tunic), which later on came to the Indonesian Archipelago and spread to Malacca, Java, Sumatera, and other areas. This continuous adjustment of *kebaya* design receives modification which was influenced by many things. They are of social stratification upon the classification of the designs, where their significant differences appear in shapes, lines, silhouettes, proportions, textures, decoration varieties, details, and trimmings (Russanti, 2007).



Figure 7:
Mother as Children Caretaker, from INPRES Books (1995 and 2002)

On the Mother Image in a Nation. Values like the obedience of wife to her husband is strengthen by the government's effort in the concept of motherism in the New Order (1966-1998), an ideology which positioned as a wife support to his work. The Government policies, such as Family Welfare (PKK, *Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*) in 1973, then *Panca Dharma Wanita* which stated that a woman, a wife is a companion to the husband. In *Panca Dharma Wanita*, there are five duties of a mother, such as the organizer of a household, mother as descendant, and mother as children educator.

On the Working Mothers. The background of domestic and public areas is suspectedly come from division of labour based on sex which is popularly known as gender (Supartiningsih, 2009:43). Gender based division of labour places work division, women at home (domestic sector) and men work outside the home (public sector). Feminists call it sexual division of hierarchically arranged. Again, Supartiningsih (2009) thinks that the creation of these categories is separated by certain gender which makes a typical working woman putting her as a subordinate.

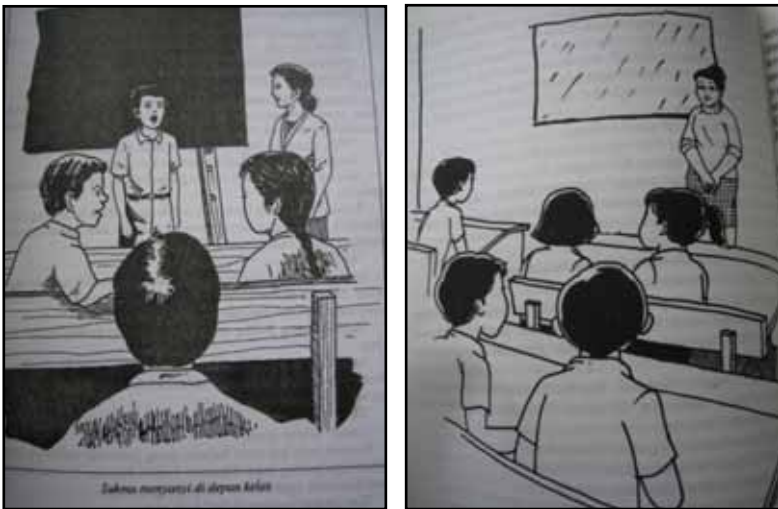


Figure 8:
Mother as Children Educator, from INPRES Book (1984 and 1997)

The tendency of the increasing number of mothers working outside the home, to get extra income/finance with a reason to improve the family's living quality, is how women express themselves in a productive and creative way (Suchatiningsih, 1996). Working in economic context is an

activity related with use and exchange values, something that produces traded goods and services. Women work to get additional income for their household needs. Anita Aryani (2005) mentions that, according to Sanderson K. Stepen, working woman is a new feminist awakening where women can see themselves as partners to the men and deserves equal economic and social benefits as men traditionally do.

Mother as a teacher often appears in children book published by INPRES (*Instruksi Presiden* or Presidential Instruction) book project. The selection of story theme and illustration of teacher figure by the illustrators gives bigger space of a mother in public space. A teacher figure as an educator and caretaker is still assumed as a task of a mother duty as an educator of children in the family and home.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Women and men have important roles in maintaining the core family. Traditional tasks for a woman are maintaining the house and preparing food. This difference is formed culturally through social process. The family system known nowadays is patrilineal and matrilineal. Bonnie Loyd (1981) said that thousands of years before patriarchal era, motherhood was the only existing relationship. While patriarchal was started 5,000 years ago; since then women subordination in family was formed, then it was instituted and codified with the law (Duncan ed., 1981).

In a research of gender stereotype in three Indonesian cultural background (Minangkabau, Batak, and Jakarta), housewife is one of the three common stereotypes for Minangkabau and Batak women. In Jakarta women, there is no housewife stereotype but materialistic, career, and workaholic women (YCT, 2011). From the conclusion of the research, it can be seen that women with matrilineal and patrilineal background still own the stereotype of a mother and a wife; meanwhile city/metropolitan women do not have the stereotype role as a housewife, not even a mother figure.

In the reviewed children book illustration in the 1980s, women stereotypes of a housewife and a caretaker were still strong. The traditional ideology of a mother figure which plays a role in taking care of the house has now shifted to working mothers and father figures have also contributed to domestic space. The phenomenon of the role of a mother from domestic to public space caused by financial/economic problem, social relation needs, and self-actualisation in the books in the 1980s still revealed mother stereotype as educating and nurturing teacher.

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Picture of Mother and her children
(Source: www.google.com, 1/4/2012)

The traditional ideology of a mother figure which plays a role in taking care of the house has now shifted to working mothers and father figures have also contributed to domestic space.