

# Hybridity in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Child of All Nations*

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**Abstract**—Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel, *Child of All Nations*, tells the story of Minke, an upper-class Javanese living under Dutch occupation. In this second book of the *Buru Quartet* series, Minke must come to terms with his allegiance and identity in the colonial world. This article examines *Child of All Nations* in order to reveal the portrayal of hybridity in Minke's characterization. Using Bhabha's hybridity theory (1994) and Rimmon-Kenan's character classification and characterization (2002), this study found that Minke is a hybrid character with complexity, development and open insights of his inner world. He shapes his hybridity through experience, study, and the act of accepting himself, something that is considered hard to do in the colonial era, especially for the colonized people. In this way, Minke is a unique hybrid character.

**Keywords:** *characterization, Child of All Nations, hybridity, Pramoedya Ananta Toer*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Postcolonialism is an academic study about the effects of colonialism on colonial subjects. It has given birth many theories such as hybridity, mimicry, and diaspora. Although the theory was first used to analyze real sociopolitical problems, it later reached language and literature. Nowadays, postcolonialism and hybridity in research on language and literature are not uncommon.

*Child of All Nations*, a novel written in 1981 by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, is an important piece of postcolonial literature. Toer was famously known for his imprisonment in the Indonesian New Order era. He has written many literary works, some of which are *The Buru Quartet*, written in Toer's time in Buru Island prison, consisting of *This Earth of Mankind*, *Child of All Nations*, *Footsteps*, and *House of Glass*. The most famous of the quartet, *The Earth of Mankind*, has received critical acclaims from critics worldwide.

*Child of All Nations* puts an emphasis on binary opposition, presenting colonialism and colonial governments as the evil antagonist, while the oppressed, indigenous people as its protagonist. However, the protagonists in this novel, and in *Buru Quartet* at large, show the sign of hybridity.

*Child of All Nations* revolves around the notion of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. One of the crucial aspects in the novel is Minke's hybridity. The theory of Hybridity used for this research is the one proposed by Homi K.

Bhabha (1994), supported by Rimmon-Kenan (2002) narrative theory.

Hybridity refers to the emergence of new cultural forms as a byproduct of colonization. As the world moves beyond the times of colonialism, the distinction of "economic class" or "gender" as a primary, defining identification is shifted to the processes and continuous instances that arise from the cultural differences. Identity is now viewed as an ever-shifting flux that is always negotiated. Hybridity may also give birth to 'dual consciousness,' a state of not fully assimilated to a new culture and not fully preserving the original culture (Blake, 2007).

One key concept of Bhabha's (1994) hybridity is the 'Third Space of enunciation'. Alternatively called 'in-betweenness,' it is a place for cultural negotiation that create new and different forms of culture from the previous ones. 'Third Space of Enunciation' challenge the notion of the concept of 'fixity', which is a fixed and rigid order and disorder that is not needed to be questioned or proven, like racial and national stereotypes.

Nyman (2007) used the concept of hybridity in analyzing how hybrid Asian-American identity breaks the dominant discourse of fixed proper American cultural and national identity in Cynthia Kadohata's "The Floating World". Meanwhile, Kuortti (2007) analyzed "This Blessed House", Jhumpa Lahiri's short story from her short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*. "This Blessed House" presents conflicts between cultures, specifically between American and Indian cultures in the form of a married couple.

Lucas' (2007) article is about cultural negotiation in two plays: in *Fix Up*, identities were negotiated through the realization of the character's historical past; meanwhile, in *Fragile Land*, the characters were torn into choosing one of the identities.

Specifically, the Third Space is further analyzed by Ghasemi, Sasani, and Nemat (2017) in their research on *My Children! My Africa!*, a play written by Athol Fugard, an African radical and anti-colonialist writer. According to them, the Third Space is represented in *My Children! My Africa!* by the debate competition between the black boy and the white girl. Trodd (2007) analyzed William Apess's and Charles Eastman's autobiographies and the collaborative autobiographies of Mary Crow Dog with Richard Erdoes and *Black Elk* with John Neihardt.

This research also involves the characterization theory from Rimmon-Kenan (2002). Character exists in a story as a being and/or as an actor of a story. It may be created as a form of reality imitation of a real person or as a part of textuality. Character often has a multitude of traits that can help in defining itself. Character can be fleshed out further by its relation to other characters or to the world and the story itself.

The character classifications this article uses are the three axes of complexity, development, and penetration into the 'inner life'. On the axis of complexity, one pole contains the characters with a single prominent trait, while the opposite pole contains complex characters. On the axis of development, one pole contains characters with little or no character development, while the opposite pole contains characters with full developments in the story. The third axis, the axis of penetration into the 'inner life' comprises two opposite poles: one pole consists of characters with only the outside looks and motives revealed, while the other pole consists of characters with the inner workings revealed to the readers.

One example of character analysis is *The Fault in Our Star's* two main characters, Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters, written by Patmarinanta and Ernawati (2016). This article examines Hazel and Augustus's characterization mode and their character theme. This article found that Hazel has a dynamic personality, and Augustus's character improves Hazel's character growth.

Currently, there are some studies conducted on *Child of All Nations*, such as from Khurriyah (2013), Firmansyah (2013), and Sapriyadi & Mustofa (2012). Although *Child of All Nations* originated from Indonesia and is written in Bahasa Indonesia, this article will not take into account the translation and will focus on the novel's content, treating the novel as part of English literature, a term referring to any work written in English.

To fill in the gap, this article analyzes the portrayal of hybridity in *Child of All Nations*, using a theory of Hybridity from Bhabha (1994). *Child of All Nations* is interested in the perspective of hybridity since its characters tend to negotiate their position in the context of identity in colonial times.

## II. METHOD

The design used in this study is qualitative, which is included as interpretative research. It means the researcher is involved intensively with the data and making interpretations about it (Creswell, 2009). This study uses a novel, namely *Child of All Nations*, as its data source.

The first step of this research was doing a close reading of the novel. It was done in order to fully understand the story, setting, and characters. Characters were examined more since this study focuses on understanding the main character's hybridity. After doing close reading, the data were then collected and categorized into categories related to hybridity and cultural identity, with added analysis in order to deepen the analysis. The collected data with its description were analyzed through postcolonial reading. As the final step, the analysis was concluded through interpretation based on Bhabha's Hybridity theory, with suggestions and future research opportunities stated in the end.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Commonly, hybridity is referred to as a creation of a new cultural form by crossing more than one specific culture in an 'in-between space', or as Bhabha (1994) named it, the 'third space of enunciation'. While Minke does not create new forms of culture, his external appearance, language, and thought process can be considered as a form of hybridity.

In *Child of All Nations*, Minke goes through a hybridity process. Curiously, Minke is not a hybrid character in terms of race or class. Both of his parents are Javanese, and they come from Javanese noble caste. Rather, Minke's hybridity is portrayed by his thought process, language, and external appearance.

### A. Minke's Thought Process

The most distinctive characteristic of Minke's hybridity is his thought process, which is heavily highlighted in the story. Raised by two different sets of values, which are the Dutch and Javanese values, Minke sets himself apart from other characters in the novel by not leaning heavily towards either of the values. Instead, Minke can set apart those values, examine them objectively, and correctly point out what is good and what is bad from both values. He then applies the good values upon himself, while criticizing the bad values. Thus, he has to some extent mixes cultural values from both cultures.

In the first half of the first book, Minke is still learning in H.B.S., with his teachers heavily propagating the idea of the inferiority of the natives and the superiority of Europeans in all fields. This idea is stuck until the end of the first book and is carried over to the beginning of the second book. At the beginning of the second book, Minke has already shown his hybridity, by being a Javanese, knowing and applying some of the Javanese customs, while at the same time discarding some customs that he feels does not apply to his advanced status and education as an H.B.S. graduate. However, Minke sees himself as a European living in a Javanese land. In other words, he does not feel that he is truly a hybrid character, merely doing mimicry in order to be accepted in society. Mimicry, in colonized places, has a very strong presence and influence on colonial power relations (Godiwala, 2007). This attitude at the beginning of the story is mentioned by Nyai Ontosoroh, who pointed out Minke's inclination to deify Europe as such:

*"Don't be sentimental. You've been educated to respect and even deify Europe, to trust in it unreservedly. Then, every time you discover reality—that there are Europeans without honor—you become sentimental. Europe is no more honorable than you, Child!"* (p. 55).

The excerpt above shows Nyai Ontosoroh's attempt at making Minke realize that he has 'blindly' glorifying Europe. Indeed, Nyai Ontosoroh constantly attempts to open Minke's eyes and see the realities around him, the ones not taught in his European schools.

Nyai Ontosoroh's constant preaching and the meeting with Trunodongso and his family in the middle of the story become the two focal points for his journey that help shape his hybrid identity.

Nyai Ontosoroh acts as a foster mother and a teacher in Minke's life. She herself is a product of hybridity in colonial times, where she was from a poor Javanese family, sold by her father to Herman Mellema, a Dutch entrepreneur, to be his concubine. In her time as a concubine, she educated herself in order to have power over her husband, learning through books and knowledge from Europe, Dutch in particular. At the same time, she realized that the colonial government has done a very bad job in managing Indonesia, resulting in bad treatments of common people all around the country. This duality made her convince herself that while the Europeans were superior in terms of power and knowledge, they did many atrocious things in order to keep the colonization afloat.

By accompanying Ontosoroh every day, Minke learns from her that Europe, with their superior science and knowledge, did many bad things to stay in control, such as manipulating news and bribing the lawmen. Although in the beginning, Minke thought that Ontosoroh's ramblings were no more than the expression of anger, he later reflects on it and agrees with her opinion. It can be said that, at the end of the story, Ontosoroh's principle on anticolonialism is passed on to Minke. Minke manages to realize how the colonial power works and rejecting the colonial stereotype (Bhabha, 1994).

The meeting with Trunodongso and his family also changed his views, both on Dutch and Javanese cultures. Before, he saw Javanese peasants, especially the farmers, as uncultured, crude people with a weak mentality. This happens since Minke is a Javanese aristocrat, educated to feel more noble and higher than the ordinary peasants. His aristocracy is highlighted in some instances, such as in the passage below when he was interacting with Trunodongso:

*"What?" he (Trunodongso) hissed in low Javanese. "You too?" I was offended. I could feel the blood rise into my face. A Javanese had never spoken so roughly towards me, let alone used the familiar form for you.*" (p. 129).

Since Minke comes from the upper-class Javanese, he feels annoyed by low or 'familiar' form of Javanese language spoken by Trunodongso, as nobles are usually revered by peasants by using high Javanese, and in this passage, Trunodongso spoke with Minke using a low Javanese form. This is later emphasized in the story, as Minke keeps telling himself to stop worrying about the low Javanese language. Even so, he has to convince himself multiple times to let go of his ascribed status.

However, he then sees the oppression done by Tulangan's sugar company, owned by a Dutch businessman, which controls the whole village. He sees that Javanese people are not inherently weak and uncultured since the true problem of the villagers is the oppression done by the Dutch. According to the novel, the reason for the Javanese peasants' crudeness and impulsiveness is their poor condition, being forced to give their lands to the Dutch in order to provide sugar for the company.

In his short visit to Trunodongso, Minke also sees and feels Trunodongso family's lifestyle, from eating with ordinary peasant foods, sleeping with lice-filled bed, to tilling Trunodongso's farm in order to understand their suffering. This self-juxtaposition done by Minke also helps him understand the

value of hard-working held by the farmers, which changes his point of view about Javanese peasants.

After the encounter with Trunodongso and his family, Minke reevaluate his values, and he comes to a conclusion that the Javanese peasants are suffering because of the Dutch and their act of colonialism, and he, as an educated person, is responsible to help those peasants. That being said, he realizes that he cannot let go of his heritage and its benefits easily, as exemplified in the narration below:

*When someone spoke to me in low Javanese, I felt my rights had been stolen away. On the other hand, if people spoke to me in high Javanese, I felt I was among those chosen few, placed on some higher plane, a god in a human's body, and these pleasures from my heritage caressed me* (p. 151).

Progressing through the story, his views on Europe's 'greatness' slowly recedes. Such view is changed by a new perspective about how he gains knowledge, experiences, and culture from multiple sources. After a long contemplation in Trunodongso's house, Minke comes to a conclusion:

*This modern age had provided many breasts to suckle me—from among the Natives themselves, from Japan, China, America, India, Arabia, from all the peoples on the face of this earth. They were the mother wolves that gave me life to become a builder of Rome! Is it true you will build a Rome? Yes, I answered myself. How? I don't know. In humility, I realized I am a child of all nations, of all ages, past and present. Place and time of birth, parents, all are coincidence: such things are not sacred* (pp. 136-137).

The zenith of this perspective is when he says that he is a 'child of all nations', meaning that he now acknowledges himself as a hybrid character. The realization of hybridity here is a crucial part of Minke's character, and it is the turning point of his life. Afterward, he is more objective, not leaning to a particular value without contemplating the merits and morality. This passage also reflects the constructive and mutual relationship between the colonized and the colonizer in hybridity (Ghasemi, Sasani & Nemati, 2017), as Minke realizes that he has to learn from many sources in order to understand things better.

In the later part of the story, when Minke boards the ship to Batavia, he meets Ter Haar, a former sub-editor at the Soerabaiaasch Nieuws, who talks very much about political conditions outside of Indonesia. After discussing the Philippines with Ter Haar, Minke still thinks highly of European education:

*And the Philippines—salute! Defeated? Defeated in its fight against America? At least this mighty people had defeated Spain. It's a pity, Mr. Ter Haar, but we are not Filipinos. I could not imagine it: The Indies without the Dutch! We must draw as deeply as possible on the well of European knowledge and learning. Just as Japan is doing. There is no honor without European science and learning* (p. 223).

This is not because he still visualizes Europe as a superior power, but speaking matter-of-factly. In the setting, there is almost no formal education from the natives. All formal schools and universities are funded by the Dutch, thus explaining

Minke's trust in European education. This thought of his proves his hybridity.

Since one of the keys to hybridity is through cultural synergy (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007), Minke successfully becomes a hybrid character by synergizing multiple cultural items and values inside his persona. This self-acknowledgement made Minke see through multiple perspectives without losing himself to a single point of view. Minke's hybridity is gained through study, experience, and acceptance of himself. Other than his thought process, hybridity also extends to Minke's language use.

### B. Minke's Language

Language is a powerful sign to convey identity (Bhabha, 1994), and one of the most easily recognizable aspects of Minke's hybridity is his language. In the novel, Minke speaks Dutch and Javanese fluently, while having knowledge of English and Malay. He also reads some French literature, attributed to his partial knowledge of French. He can use those languages to converse with others, and even sometimes acts as a translator in order to facilitate other's communication.

Minke writes almost exclusively for Soerabaiasch Nieuws in Dutch language. One of the main conflicts in the story is Minke's hesitation to write in the native languages, such as Javanese and Malay. In *Child of All Nations*, Malay as a lingua franca is discussed in great length, with Minke formerly taking a stance against its usage in journalism because of its status:

*Now I was being incited to explode again, after my disappointment with Nijman. I attacked: "What can you (Kommer) say in Malay? An impoverished language like that? Riddled with borrowed words from every country in the world? And even to say 'I am not an animal,' you need all these borrowed words."* (pp. 84-85).

On one hand, in the passage above, Minke's stance on the Malay language is very adamant: he thinks that the Malay language is very limiting and insufficient for him and his works. On the other hand, Kommer, the one who suggested the usage of Malay, commented that although writing in Dutch is commendable, writing in Malay is considered as a sign of love for Minke's people. This is a very interesting banter of ideas, considering that Kommer is a half-blood foreigner whereas Minke, while not an active speaker of Malay language, is a native. It shows that how culture is viewed by both parties is irrelevant to their place of birth or their race.

Minke's views towards the Malay language might be related to his education, since Minke graduated from a Dutch school, which imprints a belief in Minke that European culture is superior to the natives'. He also believes that the ideas of the foreigner, especially the European's, have changed the native's way of thinking and their needs. This sheds light on one of Minke's characterizations, which is his inclination to view European ideas and culture as the more superior compared to the native's own. Thus, Minke feels that Kommer wants him to write in Malay in order to defame and lower down his status. Even worse, Minke feels that he has no character other than his proficiency in Dutch, as written below:

He (Kommer) wanted me to write in Malay so that he himself could read my writings directly, while destroying my fame and achievement and prestige.

*Perhaps he simply didn't want to face reality: my character, my individuality, could not be separated from the Dutch language. To separate these things would only make this person named Minke nothing better than roadside rubbish* (p. 40).

In the first half of the story, Minke uses language as a tool to gain higher power, which is why he uses Dutch in his writing. However, his attitude on language later changed after meeting Trunodongso, who indirectly convinces Minke to write for the oppressed. This shift of attitude is also a sign of hybridity for Minke, as he realizes that in order to alleviate the burden of the oppressed, he has to side with them, thus using the native languages as a sign of mutual identity (Bhabha, 1994).

Lastly, Minke's hybridity comes in the form of his external appearance.

### C. Minke's External Appearance

Another aspect of Minke that can be seen as a sign of hybridity is his clothing. This aspect particularly mentioned in a passage:

*So on that day, in European clothes (people called them Christian clothes), carrying a bag containing pen and paper, a bottle of water, and a little dried food, I set off alone in a southerly direction* (p. 127).

Wearing European clothes by a Javanese can be considered as a sign of hybridity, since it is a mixture between two cultures, creating a unique, new cultural form in its process. Moreover, Minke is a Muslim, and wearing clothing dubbed 'Christian' is another part of cultural hybridity. As a side note, Minke's views and attitude as a Muslim is not explored in the novel. It should be brought to light that Minke does not use 'European clothes' in special occasions only; he wears them almost all the time.

Minke himself acknowledges that he is closer to a European than a Javanese person, as stated in the passage below:

*I wore Christian clothes, I wore shoes, I was closer to Europeans than they were. And it was Europeans who wanted to catch Trunodongso, husband and father* (p. 195).

At this point, Minke has realized his standing as a hybrid person. Thus, although his clothing indicates that he is of a higher status, he does not feel superior to the Javanese farmer family. It is different from the previous entries, where Minke feels superior when he uses the 'Christian clothes'. Because someone's clothing is his or her cultural item, it might be subjected to the hybridity process. This aspect of clothing is also prevalent in *Fix Up*, where Brother Kiyi uses Kente cloth shirt to denote his disposition to his African heritage, despite his mixed heritage of British and African lineage (Lucas, 2007).

## IV. CONCLUSION

*Child of All Nations* is a historical novel with colonial Indonesia as the setting. In this space, Minke finds himself interacting with many different cultures from different places.

As a developed and complex character, Minke grows his multiple traits alongside the story. Through his experience, study, and the act of accepting himself throughout the story, Minke becomes a hybrid character. The signs of his hybridity are shown in his cultural identity. In this way, Minke is a unique individual, different from the rest of his peers, namely the natives, because he can see from the perspective of the colonizer and the colonized, without having to take sides. He has gone through mimicry, a process that the natives usually struggle with, and become his true, hybrid self.

Compared to other characters with hybridity, Minke's hybridity is not his birthright, since he is not from a hybrid race or caste or any other hybrid dispositions. He is also not categorized as a diasporic entity, a common trait of other characters with hybridity.

Different literary works portray hybridity differently. Some portray hybridity as a uniting force and a mutual relationship between two parties, while others claim it as a dividing wedge, an incompleteness of identity that cannot be filled whatsoever. Through Minke, *Child of All Nations* portrays hybridity as a powerful process of change. By going through the hybridity process, Minke realizes that he is a unique individual, with his lack of character complimented by the people from different cultures around him. Moreover, Minke is one of the few characters in the story who realized their hybridity. Considering the colonial setting, Minke is an exceptional and unique character, different from his peers.

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