

Gender Equality and Children's Rights: The Adults' Ideology in Two Egyptian Children's Graphic Novels

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Abstract— Graphic novels have the advantage as children's literature. Didactic ideas as a requirement for children's books are easily accepted by children readers because the graphic novels are assisted by visualization through images. In this research, two Egyptian graphic novels are appointed as research objects, namely *Al-Bintu Mitslu al-Walad* (A Boy-Like Girl) and *Salma Ta'rifu Huquuqahaa* (Salma Knows Her Rights). Both show the existence of gender and social issues involving a child's figure named Salma. This is qualitative research by using the content analysis method. Based on the issue, data in this research which are words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs containing social ideas are analyzed with the psychological approach of children's development in children's literature. The results show that both show the idea of gender equality for children and awareness of children's rights in social life. However, the ideas become a dilemma because, on the one hand, it is important as the responsibility of the author. While on the other hand the author appears to apply the ideology of adults in the text.

Keywords— Children's rights, children's literature, gender equality, developmental psychology, graphic novel

1 Introduction

Graphic novels refer to narrative story books that are equipped with images. They are often equated with comics. However, some groups call it different. Some say that graphic novels emphasize more on stories, not images [1]. In the context of children's literature, graphic novels present images as visualizations of stories so that children's readers more easily grasp the contents and messages in them. This is in line with the characteristics of children's literature which must be easily read by children, both intellectually and emotionally [2]–[4].

Entertainment and education are two important principles of children's literature. In graphic novels, both aspects emerge as the most appropriate media to socialize ideas that children need to understand. These ideas include didactic elements that can be implemented by children in their daily lives, including emotional and language experiences [5], [6]. One of the didactic elements is trying to apply awareness in children's selves. This shows that children's literary works, including graphic novels, are responsible for the growth of awareness in the child. Awareness in children can be related to social life in which they live with others, including

fellow children. This can be related to awareness of gender diversity and stereotypes in the surrounding environment. In the context of Egyptian literary works, this is often assumed to be difficult because of how tight the understanding of people related to binary gender: men and women. Therefore, academic research in this regard is interesting to do.

Byers (2018) in his research described how the children's figures in the literary works he examined show revenge attempts towards prevailing gender normativity. In it, many ideas are represented by figures of children and adolescents related to how gender norms are implemented in everyday relationships. This normativity is often carried out in the Egyptian social structure. In another research, Al-Attar, etc. (2017) say that many Egyptian children prefer to play with other children of the same gender. This is partly due to gender normativity that runs in the environment. The issue of gender normativity is often raised as an important issue in children's literary works. In this research, this issue is analyzed in two Egyptian children's graphic novels, namely *Al-Bintu Mitslu al-Walad* (A Boy-Like Girl, subsequently written BMW) and *Salma Ta'rifu Huquuqahaa* (Salma Knows Her Rights, subsequently written SKHR). Both are written by Fatima al-Ma'dul, an adult author who writes many children's stories. The problem in it is not only related to gender normativity but also how the children's characters in it are characterized as "mature-thinking" children. Therefore, this research examines how the ideology of the adult appears in both graphic novels, especially those which are related to gender and children's right issues.

2 Methods

This is qualitative research using the content analysis method. It is a research technique that uses systemic text analysis, including pictures, illustrations, and symbols that appear in it. In these techniques, they are the material used to produce a valid inference [9], [10]. Thus, this method pays attention to explicit data and provides interpretation with certain relevant theories.

In this research, the data used are narratives that reveal the existence of normative messages about how children obtain their basic rights in two Egyptian children's graphic novels, namely BMW and SKHR. Explicit ideas are analyzed with the psychology of children's development. The analysis reveals how gender equality is built normatively according to the characteristics of children's literature and implies the author's ideology.

3 Result and Discussion

Two data sources in this research, BMW and SKHR, tell the story of a girl who faces some social issues in her surroundings. This girl's character is named Salma. At BMW, Salma is told as a girl who felt treated unfairly because she is not allowed to play the games and sports that boys normally play. While in the SKHR, Salma is told as a girl who has the initiative to build a library in her remote village. The stories of both texts present two main ideas related to children. First, gender equality for children. Second, awareness of children's rights in social relationships. They are explained as follows.

A. Normative Gender Equality

The main idea in BMW is the importance of equal treatment for boys and girls. The story begins with Salma's desire to play various games at a sports club. However, she is always rejected because she is a girl. In fact, rejection is also shown by adults, namely, a boxing coach

named Captain Fathi and a soccer coach named Captain Imad [11]. This appears in the following quotations:

Syadi plays foot ball. Salma wants to play with him. But, he refuses her and says, "You are a girl!" (Al-Ma'dul, 2006, p. 3).

Syadi plays boxing. Salma wants to play with him. But Syadi refused. He said to her, "You are a daughter" (Al-Ma'dul, 2006, p. 4-5).

After getting rejected by several people, Salma then comes to the chairman of the sports club, Captain Hasan. To him, Salma says that she wants to play the same game as a boy. Salma says, "Actually I have the right to play whatever I want and I like. Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has equal rights in society without exception. Both boys and girls. Adults or young children. Rich or poor. White or black" (Al-Ma'dul, 2006, p. 11). Hearing Salma's words, Captain Hasan is amazed. He is glad that there is a child who dares to express her rights. After that, he invites her to play with friends because it is her right. He also creates another sports club which can be played by girls. This shows that the main idea in the story is that Salma represents the enthusiasm of young children to fight for gender equality from the most basic things, such as playing with fellow children in a social environment. Inside BMW, Salma becomes a hero who voices normative gender equality idea from the point of view of children.

B. Awareness of Children's Rights

In the first finding, as explicitly stated [12] that Salma reminds Captain Hadi of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Salma talks about the importance of equal rights of children in social life, including choosing the games they like without discrimination. This shows that Salma is characterized as a child who has an awareness of children's rights.

The same thing also appears in the SKHR. Salma, who lives in a remote village in the eastern desert, feels uneasy because there is no library in her village. At her initiative, Salma then sends a letter to the mayor, governor, to the First Lady (Mama Susan, known as Susan Mubarak—wife of president of Egypt at that time, Husni Mubarak). In her letter, Salma writes as follows.

"I'm Salma. I live in the Eastern Desert. I like reading. And I want a library in this small village" (Al-Ma'dul, 2006, p. 6-7).

For her efforts, Salma receives praise from a government library employee, Ustadzah Asma. Salma is called a child who has an awareness of the rights that must be obtained by the children. According to her, "You have to thank your friend Salma. She is a girl who understands her rights as a child. And she sent us a letter asking for her rights" (Al-Ma'dul, 2006, p. 10).

This shows that Salma is constructed as a child with adult thoughts. She is described as a child who understands the social rights of children. In fact, explicitly in BWW, Salma says that the equality of rights was stated in the convention of children's rights. They refer to the Convention on the Rights of the Child which was initiated by the United Nations in 1989 [13].

In the data obtained from BMW and SKHR, it is seen that both texts display children characters who are categorized as "understanding their rights". This relates to their rights in gender equality and social role. The character of Salma is depicted as a child who has adult thoughts because she is able to call herself has rights that refer to the Convention on the Rights of Children at the UN. In addition, Salma is also able to make social changes in her village by building a library in her village. This shows that the idea of awareness of children's rights is an important theme raised by the author. Narratives that are built through the character of children become important issues that are deemed necessary to be socialized to child readers. In this case, the author tries to make the text very didactic according to the theoretical framework of

children's literature. The didactic idea is packed with visuals typical of graphic novels. At this stage, the author has succeeded in realizing the children's literary packaging that is able to foster moral awareness for children.

The implicit idea that emerges is the importance of adult readers to guide BMW and SKHR graphic novels. This is because adults have an important role in "watching over" stories read by children [4]. Adults, including parents, have a central role in providing understanding of adult issues such as children's rights in their social environment. Understanding of social and cultural rights depends on children's parents. Because if it is problematic or even fails to be given by parents, children find it difficult to recognize these rights, especially minority rights [14].

However, behind the explicit ideas of gender equality and awareness of children's rights, the author seems to give the impression that BMW and KSHR are mere representations of adult ideology. In the concept of the intellectual development of children, the story of Salma in BMW and KSHR belongs to the formal operational category with the characteristic that children are able to think abstractly, scientifically, and argumentatively [15]. However, even though her age is not explicitly mentioned, the character of Salma—through the visualization and setting created in the text—seems to be too young to be able to appear as an adult girl like that. This indicates that the author tries to display her ideology in the text that the children's books must display the whole and explicit ideas. Especially by presenting Salma figures getting appreciation from Susan Mubarak (Al-Ma'dul, 2006, p. 13) who incidentally is part of the authorities, BMW texts and KSHR are published as a way of socializing social campaigns to children.

4 Conclusion

The research analyzes two Egyptian children's graphic books written by Fatima Al-Ma'dul (2006). Both tell stories about a girl named Salma who fights for her rights in her daily environment. The ideas put forward revolve around two main ideas. First, the importance of gender equality for children starts from fundamental issues, such as the selection of games. Second, the importance of understanding children's rights that are beneficial to social life. Both are mentioned explicitly in the narrative. However, these messages pose a problem in a dilemma. On the one hand, the idea is important to be socialized to children in the framework of children's literature. But on the other hand, the characterization of Salma who becomes a hero and states explicitly as a child rights champion shows how the author tries to apply an adult ideology in a child figure whose psychological development has not been able to understand conceptual ideas and abstract concepts.

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