

## ECO-COSMOPOLITANISM, CULTURAL HYBRIDITY, AND INDIGENOUS AGENCY IN INDONESIAN CHILDREN LITERACY TEXTBOOK

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**Abstract.** This study examines the children's literacy textbook *Nona Bupu: Pemandu Cilik dari Lereng Gunung Inerie* through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism and cultural hybridity. Traditional children's literature from postcolonial regions frequently succumbs to a dual trap: either romanticizing the Indigenous subject as a static, pre-modern artifact or framing the regional landscape purely through the tourist gaze. This article investigates how the narrative subverts these paradigms by positioning its young protagonist, Nona Bupu, not merely as a passive cultural guide but as an active agent of eco-cosmopolitanism. By analyzing the intersection of sacred local geography (Gunung Inerie), traditional socio-religious practices (*ka sa'o* and *meghe*), and intercultural encounters with domestic tourists, the study demonstrates how the text fosters a nuanced space of cultural hybridity. The methodology employs a qualitative textual and ideological analysis rooted in postcolonial and ecocritical frameworks. The findings reveal that the text actively deconstructs the colonial binary of the civilized metropolitan observer versus the regional subject. Instead, it offers a contemporary model of indigenous agency where local ecological wisdom and global modernity coexist dialogically, establishing a vital precedent for progressive, decolonial pedagogical materials in primary education.

**Keywords:** children's literacy textbook, ecocriticism, cultural hybridity.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Children’s literature serves as a crucial ideological site where cultural identities, ecological values, and power dynamics are constructed and transmitted to the next generation[1]. In postcolonial nations like Indonesia, the production of regional literacy textbooks faces the complex challenge of balancing national integration with the preservation of localized, peripheral epistemologies[2]. Frequently, narratives featuring regional or Indigenous children fall into the trap of strategic essentialism or internal orientalism, wherein peripheral cultures are commodified, flattened, or cast as historical relics for the consumption of the urban, metropolitan center[3]. This research focuses on the children’s literacy book *Nona Bupu: Pemandu Cilik dari Lereng Gunung Inerie* (published by the *Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa*) [4] to explore how it navigates these representational tensions.

Set against the vivid geography of Kabupaten Ngada on Flores Island, East Nusa Tenggara, the narrative details the daily life and intercultural interactions of Maria Fatima Bupu (Nona Bupu), a young girl who acts as a mountain and cultural guide for tourists. The text operates at a rich intersection of indigenous tradition manifested through the sacred volcanic landscape of Gunung Inerie and rituals like *ka sa’o* and modern civic spaces. Current state-of-the-art study in postcolonial children’s literature emphasizes the necessity of moving beyond simple binaries of domination and resistance, advocating instead for the examination of "hybrid spaces" where subaltern subjects negotiate modernity on their own terms[5],[6]. Furthermore, contemporary ecocritical frameworks have increasingly integrated postcolonial critiques, giving rise to "postcolonial ecocriticism," which investigates how land exploitation and cultural marginalization are interconnected[7].

However, a significant gap remains in literary analysis regarding how contemporary Indonesian educational textbooks engage with postcolonial ecocriticism and cultural hybridity. Most existing studies on Indonesian literacy materials focus strictly on linguistic development, pedagogical readability, or generalized moral character building[8], completely overlooking the deeper ideological and literary dimensions of these texts. What this study intends to accomplish is a rigorous critical reading of how *Nona Bupu* disrupts the conventional tourist gaze. Rather than depicting the Indigenous child as an exoticized object of spectacle, the text positions her as an eco-cosmopolitan agent who possesses both localized ecological literacy and the capacity to negotiate with external modernities.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to analyze the narrative strategies in *Nona Bupu* that subvert internal orientalism, foster cultural hybridity, and assert Indigenous agency through eco-cosmopolitanism. The expectation of these research results is twofold: theoretically, it aims to enrich postcolonial ecocritical study within Southeast Asian children’s literature; pedagogically, it seeks to provide a critical framework for educators and policymakers to design and evaluate literacy materials that honor regional agency without slipping into regressive exoticism.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study adopts a qualitative, text-centered research design grounded in the critical paradigms of postcolonial literary theory and ecocriticism. The primary data source is the digital text of the children’s literacy textbook *Nona Bupu: Pemandu Cilik dari Lereng Gunung Inerie* (2022), written by Widayati Mia Pratiwi and illustrated by Bambang Wahyudi, under the auspices of the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The data consists of textual units (dialogues, narrations, monologues) and their interplay with visual illustrations across the book’s 56 pages.

### **2.1 Data Collection Techniques**

In qualitative research, especially literary analysis, data collection is framed as a structured process of textual selection, extraction, and categorization[9]. The data collection process for this study was executed through a structured, three-phase textual extraction steps: First, Purposive Textual Sampling and Close Reading[10]: The primary data source is the children’s literature text *Nona Bupu: Pemandu Cilik dari Lereng Gunung Inerie* by Widayati Mia Pratiwi. The data collection began with a rigorous close reading of the narrative to isolate textual units including dialogues, narrative prose, and structural motifs that directly relate

to cultural representation and environmental landscapes. Second, Linguistic and Typological Extraction[11], to support the linguistic analysis from the dialogue. Last, Ideological and Conceptual Categorization: Data regarding narrative power dynamics and spatial representations were systematically logged. This involved extracting textual segments that contrast the external, metropolitan tourist gaze with the localized, ecological agency of the protagonist. These segments were categorized based on thematic indicators of "eco-cosmopolitanism" and indigenous environmental stewardship to provide the empirical basis for the subsequent theoretical synthesis.

## **2.2 Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic and ideological critique framework based on Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity using Third Space concept to analyze the third space created during cross-cultural encounters (Bajawa vs Tourist as foreigners). This concept is relevant to examine how traditional folklore and modern economic goals (tourism) merge to create a new childhood subjectivity [12] alongside Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's formulations of postcolonial ecocriticism to look at environmental commodification, local agency, and eco-tourism[13]. The analysis proceeded through three progressive stages: First, textual analysis, to analyze how the word-choices (such as the integration of the Bajawa language like *tima tii woso* and *molo gazi*) interact with standard Indonesian prose that resists linguistic homogenization[14]. Then, contextual and ideological analysis, by evaluating the power dynamics inherent with the narrative gaze specifically comparing the metropolitan tourist's assumptions with the lived realities and physical agency of the local children within their native terrain[12]. Last, theoretical synthesis, by conceptualizing the protagonist's role not merely as a localized subject, but as an "eco-cosmopolitan" a figure capable of articulating local ecological sanctity to a global/national audience while maintaining cultural integrity[15].

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The critical analysis of *Nona Bupu: Pemandu Cilik dari Lereng Gunung Inerie* reveals a sophisticated subversion of the traditional tourist gaze, replacing it with an assertion of Indigenous agency through space, language, and ritual negotiation.

### **3.1. Subverting the Tourist Gaze and Inverting the Power Dynamics**

In conventional colonial and postcolonial travel narratives, the traveler from the metropolis holds the active, observing gaze, while the regional landscape and its inhabitants are relegated to passive, exotic spectacles[5]. *Nona Bupu* destabilizes this hierarchy from the moment the character Kak Tiara, a hijabi tourist from Yogyakarta, is introduced. Although Kak Tiara possesses the material markers of modern privilege (a camera, specialized hiking gear, and the financial capital to travel across islands), she is rendered physically and epistemologically dependent on the local children. When climbing Gunung Inerie, the physical power dynamic is completely inverted. The narrative notes that Nona Bupu, Tuti, and Sherlin routinely navigate the steep, 2,245-meter volcanic terrain barefoot and without effort, while Kak Tiara struggles, pales, and requires multiple rest stops. The local children end up carrying her heavy backpack:

*"Bahkan, tas ranselnya telah berpindah ke punggung saya karena ia tak sanggup lagi menanggung bebannya... Kak Tiara sampai heran menyaksikan ulah kami." (p. 9)*

This inversion challenges the urban-centric assumption that regional subjects are underdeveloped or weak. The barefoot indigenous body is re-framed not as a signifier of poverty, but as a site of ecological literacy and physical mastery over a challenging environment. The camera, which traditionally acts as an instrument of surveillance and containment for the tourist[12], becomes a shared tool. The children actively participate in framing the images, transforming the photographic act from a one-sided colonial documentation into a collaborative, hybrid celebration of space.

**3.2. Eco-Cosmopolitanism and the Sacred Landscape**

Gunung Inerie is not merely a background setting in the narrative; it functions as an active character that anchors the protagonist’s eco-cosmopolitan identity. Eco-cosmopolitanism, as defined in environmental literary studies, represents an awareness of the interconnectedness of local ecosystems with global human cultures[16]. Nona Bupu does not view her mountain through a purely commercial lens, nor does she view it through an uncritical, static traditionalism. Instead, she articulates its beauty, peril, and sanctity to outsiders, acting as an environmental and cultural bridge. The text highlights this when the children and Kak Tiara perform an impromptu flag-raising ceremony at the volcanic summit to mark National Teachers' Day (Hari PGRI):

**Table 1. Spatial Domain and Ideological Synthesis in the Flag-Raising Ceremony**

<b>Spatial Domain</b>	<b>Traditional Signifier</b>	<b>Modern/Civic Intersection</b>	<b>Ideological Synthesis</b>
<b>Gunung Inerie Summit</b>	Volcanic crater, sacred ancestral domain	<i>Ranting pohon kering</i> (dry branch) used as a flag pole	Merging of localized earth-sanctity with national citizenship
<b>The Foothills (Sabana)</b>	Folk song "Besi Bero", ukulele/okalele	Interisland tourism, cross-cultural appreciation	Preservation of oral history within modern eco-tourism

By raising the Indonesian flag using a discarded dry branch on the summit of a sacred indigenous mountain, the text creates a potent metaphor for cultural hybridity. It suggests that national identity (the flag) does not need to erase or conquer regional indigenous spaces; rather, it can be supported by the literal detritus of the local earth (the branch). Nona Bupu’s eco-cosmopolitan agency is further emphasized by her ability to share the local flora, such as offering *anggur hutan* (wild forest grapes) to regenerate the exhausted urban traveler, demonstrating her deep, survivalist knowledge of the ecosystem.

**3.3. Negotiating Alterity: Hybridity and Religious Tolerance**

A pivotal aspect of the text’s decolonial strategy is its treatment of religious and cultural alterity (otherness). Kak Tiara’s visible identity as a Muslim woman wearing a hijab introduces a layer of religious pluralism into a predominantly Catholic region of Flores. Rather than framing this difference as a source of friction, the text models a sophisticated form of indigenous hospitality and mutual respect that avoids superficial homogenization. This is explicitly dramatized during the morning water scarcity episode in Kampung Kolokoa. The local children assist Kak Tiara in fetching water from the mountain using heavy jerricans, explicitly recognizing her need to perform wudu (Islamic ritual ablution):

*"Pagi ini kami menemani Kak Tiara untuk pergi tadah air ke gunung... Satu jeriken air digunakan untuk berwudu, sedangkan sisanya digunakan untuk keperluan lain." (p. 17)*

Here, the indigenous children act as facilitators of the metropolitan outsider's religious practice, demonstrating that their local ecological labor directly sustains global/national spiritual diversity. Furthermore, during the *ka sa'o* (house renovation ritual) and the subsequent *meghe* feast in the megalithic village of Bena, the narrative directly tackles the limits and negotiations of cultural hybridity. The climax of the *ka sa'o* involves the communal consumption of sacrificed pork and beef. Acknowledging Kak Tiara’s dietary restrictions as a Muslim, Nona Bupu step in to protect her guest's boundaries while maintaining the integrity of the ritual:

*"‘Iya, Kak Tiara makan nasi kosong saja,’ ucap saya... ‘Menurut keyakinannya, Kak Tiara tidak boleh memakan daging babi, Santi.’" (p. 21)*

This moment is highly significant from a postcolonial perspective. Instead of forcing assimilation or creating a fractured space of exclusion, Nona Bupu constructs a dialogic compromise. Kak Tiara participates visually and socially capturing the *tari ja'i* and the architecture of the *ngadhu* and *bagha* through her camera while respecting the food taboos of her faith. The indigenous host does not alter her sacred ritual to accommodate the tourist, nor does the tourist judge the indigenous custom as primitive. This interaction exemplifies what Homi Bhabha terms the "Third Space" of enunciation, where cultural differences are negotiated dynamically rather than pre-determined by rigid hierarchies[12]. While *Nona Bupu* succeeds remarkably in granting agency to its peripheral subjects, a limitation of the text lies in its somewhat sanitized depiction of eco-tourism. The narrative glosses over the structural inequalities, environmental degradation, and economic dependencies that often accompany the influx of domestic and international tourists into vulnerable megalithic villages like Bena[17]. Nevertheless, the definitive novelty of this study lies in identifying this textbook as a counter-narrative to internal orientalism within Indonesian state-sponsored educational media. While historical pedagogy often framed outer-island children as passive recipients of Javanese development and civilization[18], *Nona Bupu* radically repositions the eastern Indonesian child as an epistemological authority, an environmental custodian, and a sophisticated mediator of modern intercultural dialogue.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

This study demonstrates that *Nona Bupu: Pemandu Cilik dari Lereng Gunung Inerie* transcends its primary function as a basic literacy textbook, operating instead as a progressive literary work that subverts internal orientalism and asserts indigenous agency. By subverting the traditional power dynamics of the tourist gaze, the narrative reframes the barefoot, regional child not through a lens of lack or poverty, but as an environmentally literate and physically authoritative eco-cosmopolitan figure. The text constructs a dynamic "Third Space" of cultural hybridity, wherein sacred volcanic landscapes, indigenous socio-religious rituals, and metropolitan Islamic identities enter into a respectful, pluralistic dialogue.

The importance of this research lies in its exposure of the ideological potential inherent in children's educational materials. The implications are profound for both literary studies and national curriculum development: educational authorities must actively transition away from patronizing, Java-centric depictions of peripheral regions. Instead, they should adopt the model established by *Nona Bupu*, creating pedagogical narratives that treat regional populations as active, modern, and self-determining subjects. Future literacy materials must continue to validate these localized ecological and cultural epistemologies, as they are vital to fostering a genuinely decolonized, inclusive, and eco-cosmopolitan national identity.

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