

**Globalization V/s Ethnicity: Manifesting the Identity with
Race and Culture in Picture Books**

Sheme Mary P.U.

PhD Scholar, St.Thomas' College, Thrissur, Kerala

shememary@gmail.com

&

Dr. Anto Thomas C

Supervising Teacher (Research Guide)

Associate Professor & Head

Research and PG Dept. of English

St.Thomas' College, Thrissur, Kerala

Abstract

This paper discusses how race and culture depicted in the children's picture books could be an influential factor for young minds. The literature for children especially picture books with distinct illustrations are said to leave deep influence in the budding minds. Stories for children are meant for enculturation. They enlighten their imagination and opens up their window to the world. The authentic perspective of the people around the world and minority culture is generally found lacking in picture books. This distorted view of the world might lead young minds to develop predisposed outlook of the world. Above all, the present scenario of accelerated globalization overshadows cultural diversity. Globalization is definitely not a negative growth. The current trend in picture books should focus on incorporating the local culture and diverse voices around the world ensuring an unbiased view of oneself and of the world outside.

Key words: Children's picture books, globalization, ethnicity, retellings, race representations, cultural globalization

Introduction

Does the culture embedded books strive for ethnicity amidst globalization or does they move towards a world with one identity shedding the divergence? This tantalizing question is to be answered with thrust upon the factors that leave a picture book not as a children's first world of knowledge. "Studies show that young children are also developing their own racial identities, as well as racial attitudes. Therefore, the stories and illustrations within picture books that depict diverse racial populations are likely to have an influence in shaping children's racial attitudes towards others, and their own racial identities."(Jenna, 1)

Classics in new drift

Time and again, each popular story has been adapted and retold in different languages, consequently culture. “These identities – based on common language, collective memory, history, and culture – are immutable and fixed and inevitably result in ‘natural’ divisions between various groups” (Wolff, 33). “The best known classics of children’s literature books like *Pinocchio*, *Heidy*, *The Secret Garden* have been widely translated and always either explicitly or implicitly conveyed the culture, history, and sensibilities of a discrete, albeit exclusivist, cultural or national population at a given time in history”(Stan, 3). The cultural adaptation in these stories is at numerous levels. For example, in the German translation of *Pinocchio*, food is made more German. The reference to little creatures is shifted from cricket to Maybug. One is sure to notice the cultural adaptation in the setting of the story too, by taking away the fairy tale to Mediterranean planes. A direct translation of *Pinocchio* was impossible to German tradition, as the original Italian version bear a strong element of national character. The adaptation of a popular work is made with an eye to match the taste and traditions of the target culture. “Instead of the graphic vigour of the original, we find sentimentality reinforcing the moral attitude” (Sullivan, 119).

The culture imposed translations ultimately lead to retellings of the classics. These retellings adopt only the story line based on the morals to be imbibed by the children to whom the books are meant to be and to make them realize the universality of human problems; but they differ in all the other aspects like setting, dressing, expressions, and relationships even the names. The examples are ample and many. *Yeh Shen* (1982) a Chinese rendering of the famous children’s story *Cinderella*, *Lon Po Po* Chinese version of *Little Red Riding Hood* are a few among them. The cultural elements are affirmed at many levels in these works; in the former, Young breaks the pictorial plane into panels reminiscent of Chinese scroll paintings (Kiefer, 138). “...in the theme of the book, its setting in time and place and its overall effect is strengthened by the artists choice of certain historical or cultural conventions” (138) for example, instead of fairy granting the wishes it’s a carp which is a symbol of good fortune according to the Chinese values. The crucial point of the story, the lost slipper is a tiny one reflecting the traditional concept of beauty in China. Therefore we must judge the book, not as to, whether the illustration match the definition of a particular period or culture but as to whether the artist has chosen elements that enhance and extend the meaning of the book for today’s reader. Whereas, in *Lon Po Po* it is two clever sisters instead of Red Riding Hood takes over the scene. It is self evident through the retellings that the chance of being influenced to a different culture is resisted deliberately and thus the ethnicity of the culture is reinforced. Stories for children perform a major social function as to initiate children into social heritage. It is not a child’s play anymore. ‘’ these technological,

cultural, social underpinnings provide the basis throughout history for the individuals response to image and ideas now found in picture books.” (Kiefer, 71). Hence the retold stories perform the same function with concrete images of cultural heritage entrenched in them.

Globalization: intimidating or inclusive?

Globalization readily identified by many as a borderless world where the territorial divisions are seemingly irrelevant. Pronouncing the rise of a borderless world, hyperglobalizers seek to convince the public that globalization inevitably involves the decline of bounded territory as a meaningful concept for understanding social and political change (Steger, 61). The much debated term globalization could find a lot many definitions. According to Ritzer and Malon globalization is the transnational flow of people, financial resources, goods, information and culture and has recently been increasing in a drastic way and has profoundly transformed the world (160). So there is a flow of culture but ethnicity resists the unidirectional flow of culture from western meta ethics threatening the localized one. The cultural flows around the world also get seemingly influenced by globalization. The cultural globalization gets entangled with the set practices and symbolic expressions of life which remain enrooted in culture. The inception of cultural globalization went unnoticed initially and later on, apart from the civilizational exchanges in addition to new technologies, consumerism, and similar symbolic practices the cultural transformations were stamped as cultural globalization. Further, the technological advance like internet accelerated the pace of the same. Cultural theories of globalization tend to line up along one of three positions (Robinson, 140).

The three positions suggested were (1) that of homogenization theory which sees global cultural convergence resulting in a uniform pattern of existence. (2) Heterogeneity theory or approach maintains the cultural difference and establishes the autonomy of the local culture. Finally, (3) hybridization stresses a new and constantly evolving cultural forms and identities produced by manifold transnational processes and the fusion of distinct cultural processes.

The surfacing through globalization over the years is likely to realize in hybridization than any other. In an era of convergence and divergence the two former positions that of homogenization and heterogeneity is dubious to take place; as the former, homogenization is an improbable situation. The uniform pattern of existence is always challenged by heterogeneity of local culture. Hence the major points of debate in cultural theories of globalization are universalism and particularism. As culture continually evolves, the authenticity of the local culture will also be lost and likely to embrace new forms which

in turn lead to hybridization. The continual conflict between homogeneity and heterogeneity for authority levels by synthesizing both to a new connection and giving a new form of cultural hybridization; though the claim for the other two continue to exist.

The reflective analysis will fetch you the realization that the focus on ethnicity results from globalization. That is until and unless a unified code was regularized and forced, the awakening remained latent. Furthermore, cultural globalization faced the criticism how sameness is enforced among all cultures or how difference is preserved. Among the two which one should be given weightage is still an intriguing question. As long as sameness of culture does not guarantee the diversity of the local culture and effectuate the western culture or dominant culture upon others, cultural globalization will remain under the shade of doubts. Slowly, taking the garb of nationality, ethnicity became a point of presence. Though started slowly it was steady, stressing at the social and individual level of identity. Ethnicity, however, evolves from cultural interactions which results from practices and perceptions and helps to differentiate a group or community from the rest and at the same time scoring a lasting consciousness. "...the pessimistic hyper globalizers argue that, we are not moving towards a cultural rainbow that reflects the diversity of the worlds' existing cultures. Rather we are witnessing the rise of an increasingly homogenized popular culture underwritten by Western Culture industry based in New York, Hollywood, London, and Milan"(Steger, 70). This demonstrates how cultural globalization in turn ends into cultural colonization. The cultural colonization is resisted and ethnicity is preserved in extremism. This tendency grows from the roots of religion through literature and other activities.

Why ethnicity epitomized?

Claim for ethnicity can be reasoned as the under representation of minority culture and also the misrepresentation of the culture. These tendencies mirrored on picture books for children just like any other area. Nodelman writes

"...it is inherent in the nature and purpose of the picture books that the pictures in them be specifically oriented towards meaningful elements. Those picture books that have practical purposes such as alphabet books require their viewers to focus on the names of the objects their pictures convey; picture books that tell stories force viewers search the pictures for information that might add to or change the meaning of the accompanying text." (18).

Two basic concepts related to visual narratives are suggested through this, firstly, how illustrations remain an inevitable part of the story; second, these illustrations must be recognized as what they represent; whereas, the accurate representation is found lacking in most situations. Under representation is a situation where the culture of the minority

community hardly get represented in the major works thereby the children really cannot identify themselves with the situations dealt with. As the major works of art are produced by the western developed countries tend to relate and portray the situations of their culture giving no extra emphasis to the culture of the marginalized and under developed countries. The lack of cultural proximity in these works leaves a kind of estrangement in the young minds.

Misrepresentation too is another situation where the ethic of the minority culture is presented pleasing to the larger spectrum of readers than the real benefactors of the culture. The food habits, dressing, customs all produced as replicas of the established stereotypes as illustrated by western artist and appeal to the readers, but remain detached from reality. This creates the cry for ethnicity louder.

Daniel Hade observes, "the mass market place selects which books will survive and thus children's books becomes less a cultural and intellectual object and more an entertainment looking for mass appeal (511). The globalization brings under its claws the independent interest of creators as well as the children, the target group. The mass appeal towards something in the globalization era tends to lean towards western hemisphere. The idea of globalization is resisted mostly as it is identified with western ethics. "The impact of globalization in the cultural sphere has most generally being viewed in pessimistic light. Typically it has been associated with the destruction of cultural identities, victims of the accelerating encroachment of a homogenized westernized, consumer culture." (Tomlinson, 269). Globalization also indicates the powerful influence of other cultures bringing about changes in the local culture thereby the cultural peculiarities and characteristics of the society moves in tune with the dominant culture. This trend of cultural standardization results in uniformed set of values to which one cannot relate. The inclination against globalization or western universalization reinforces ethnicity.

Diverse cultural voices are not heard much in children's picture books. The reasons are the number of minority authors is few; the minority experience portrayed is less. The portrayal many a times lacks either clarity or credibility. These inaccurate representations tend to give only a stereotype account of the minority culture. Susan Jeffers' highly acclaimed *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* depicts Seattle a Squamish chief from the north west wearing regalia of the Lakota people a tribe of the Great Plains. (Drolet et al, 190). In Lynne Cherry's book, *A River Ran Wild* (1992) an inaccurate portrayal of Native American children painted as wearing feathers. Native Americans are pictured as ghostly spirit beings implying that their culture is a quaint relic of the past rather than a vital contemporary culture. Along with misrepresentation under-representation too creates an adverse consciousness. It leaves a distorted view of the world that it belongs to a majority. And that they are not important

enough to be portrayed and to be known among the rest of the world. With a lighter skin, the children will get a biased reflection of the world.

Conclusion

Picture books prepare young minds with a fundamental understanding of the world and initiate them to a cultural diversification through visual language. We need to understand that the impact left by books in the minds of children is powerful, deeper and lasts their lifetime. As it is difficult to alter the impressions, we must be careful so as to provide with accurate and authentic cultural traditions through the books. The way the children comprehend the picture books today is based on the cultural heritage, social trends, and technological advancements of which they are part of. Hence, the literature for children should embrace cultural essentials equipping them to deal with the issues through their reading and learning. It helps to develop a chance to see the similarity among people around and also appreciate the differences. This could be facilitated when the culturally authentic representations are brought in the picture books for children. The goal should be to affirm the cultural existence of and give voice to the groups of people being erased by the move toward global culture in picture books. Globalization is definitely not a negative growth; but the course of path should be amalgamating both dominating and minority culture alike. What should be focused is the fruitful interaction between the particularity of the local culture and the global significance of the local knowledge.

Works Cited:

1. Cherry, Lynne. *A River Ran Wild*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.
2. Creany, Ann Drolett., Richard A Couch., Edward J Carpreso. "Representation of Culture in Children's Picture Books". New York: Clarion, 1993. Print.
3. Hade, Daniel. "Story Telling: Are Publishers Changing The Way Children Read?" *The Hornbook Magazine*, 78 (2002): 509-17 Print.
4. Jeffers, Susan. *Brother Eagle Sister Sky*. New York: Dial, 1990.
5. Kiefer, Barbara Z. *The Potential of Picture Books: From Visual Literacy to Aesthetic Understanding*. New Jersey: Merrill Prentice Hall, 1995.
6. Louie, A. *Yen Shen*. New York: Philomel, 1987
7. Nodelman, Perry. *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art Of Children's Picture Books*. Athens: University Of Georgia Press, 1988.
8. Robinson, William I. "Theories of globalization". *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*. Ed. George Ritzer. Oxford U.K. Blackwell, 2007. Print

9. Stan, Susan. "Globalization And The Picture Book" *Keimena*. 25 (2011): 1-16. pdf
10. Steger, Manfred B. *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: OUP, 2003
11. Sullivan, Emer O. *Comparative Children's Literature*. Trans. Anthea Bell. New York : Routhledge, 2005. Print.
12. Tomlinson, John. "Globalization and Cultural Identity". *The Global Transformations Reader: an Introduction to the Globalization Debate*. Eds. David Held and Antony McGrew. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003. Print.
13. Wilson, Jenna. "Race Representations in Children's Picture Books and Its Impact on the Development of Racial Identity And Attitudes" Western Linguistics Under Graduate Research Award. 2014 http://cedar.wvu.edu/library_researchaward/4
14. Wolff , Stefen. "The Path to Ending Ethnic Conflicts." TED: Ideas worth Spreading. England, Oxford. 9 June 2013. TED: Ideas worth Spreading. TED, July 2010. Web. 10 June 2013. http://www.ted.com/talks/stefan_wolff_the_path_to_ending_ethnic_conflicts.html. Speech.
15. Young, Edward. *Lon Po Po*. New York: Philomel, 1989.