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**Adolescent interaction, local languages  
and peripherality in teen fiction**

by

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## Adolescent interaction, local languages and peripherality in teen fiction

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### 1. Introduction

*Globalisasi* has become a familiar term in Indonesian popular discourse. It refers to the inevitable coming of a totalising force that threatens to abruptly change everything, requiring everyone to alter the way they conduct themselves socially, politically, economically, culturally, and linguistically. Like elsewhere, the discourse-on-globalisation (Blommaert 2010: 1) has permeated different areas of Indonesian public life, including government. Towards late 1990s amidst mounting dissatisfaction with the government and the economic uncertainty linked to the Asian financial crisis, various regions took it upon themselves to demand greater political voice and a fairer distribution of resources. Decades of a centralised system that saw profits from resource-rich regions pooled in Jakarta was no longer seen as adequate in meeting the politico-economic needs of the regions. A major change of government in 1998 was followed a year later by the enactment of a new law that would see the regions granted greater autonomy. A major rationale for this decentralisation law is to meet ‘the need to adapt to new internal and external developments’ (*perkembangan keadaan, baik di dalam maupun di luar negeri*) and the ‘challenges of global competition’ (*tantangan kompetisi global*).<sup>1</sup> This law marked a monumental shift toward democratisation and has been a catalyst for the development of a more stable relation between the central government and the regions. The law provided a scope for greater political participation and encouraged regions to search for a unique identity in order to compete politically at national level. Meitzner (2013) refers to this situation as a “renaissance of local identities”. Such identities are projected through cultural and linguistic indexes such as use of local languages and traditional attire. This new democratic climate, increased prosperity achieved from strong economic growth in the previous decades, and higher level of education, gave citizens a higher level of mobility, particularly among the younger generation. It was within this context that concerns over the survival of ‘local’ languages and cultures emerged.<sup>2</sup> This paper examines how this societal concern is recontextualised in teenlit, a genre of popular fiction for adolescents.

This paper focuses on three teenlit novels that deal with the language/culture topic to show that the concern for local languages is communicated through layered representations that underscore the experience of localisation as a prerequisite for character transformation. The language champions in the novels are voices from the margins - minor characters who do not evolve emotionally but whose role is indispensable in enabling major characters to have that experience. These characters are indices of the

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<sup>1</sup> Undang-Undang Nomer 22 Tahun 1999, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> I use ‘local’ for what others commonly refer to as ‘regional’ or ‘ethnic’ languages and cultures, to align with the focus of this paper.

authors' alignment with the discourse of *wong cilik* (Javanese for 'little people'), a discourse that revolves around the plight of marginalised groups. *Wong cilik* are citizens with little social capital who are subjected to domination. Although they may actively promote their causes, they are inevitably caught in peripherality. The minor characters want to project themselves as global citizens but they do this by forging a uniquely local identity. In doing so, the meaning of their social participation remains localised. The major characters are the ones who have the social capital to go beyond the local. Through them the meaning of global participation is extended and redefined, from a peripheral aspiration to a more cosmopolitan, confident perspective. In this sense, the minor and major characters are necessarily linked as agents of social processes. Through such processes local identity is renewed and redefined. Whereas it is customary in literary analysis to consider characters as different, individualised subjects, here I argue for an analysis that stresses the continuity between subjects. The sociolinguistics of globalisation provides an appropriate frame for advancing the idea that social agents do not act alone; they are bound to others through spatial embeddedness, language, and shared ideologies.

## 2. Teenlit and localisation

Blommaert (2010: 79) argues that semiotic globalisation processes do not entail a transformation of the local into a global place. Localities remain local despite translocal influences. How does teenlit as a genre fit this view? In this section I discuss the process of localisation that follow the adoption of the genre from the US. How did teenlit become an Indonesian genre? I argue that the process of localisation has been driven by multiple factors but significantly by criticisms against the genre itself which emerged during the early phase of democratisation. Essentially, critics objected to novels that depict Indonesian teenagers with the lifestyle of middle-class American teenagers. Writers responded to the criticisms in different ways, one of which is by producing novels that deal with social issues, such as the impact of globalisation on regional languages and cultures. The novels discussed here are among these.

The languages featured in the novels are essentially those with which the authors are familiar, either because of their ethnic background, the predominant language spoken in the locality where they are currently based, or both.<sup>3</sup> The novel *Fairish* (2005), which contains dialogue in Betawi, is written by Jakarta-born Esti Kinasih. Esti not only resides in Jakarta but also takes pride in coming from a Betawi background.<sup>4</sup> The second writer, Dyan Nuranindya, author of *Canting Cantiq* (2009; henceforth *CC*), is also based in Jakarta but comes from a Javanese background. The third writer, Ken Terate, is based in the city of Yogyakarta where she was also born and educated. Like Kinasih and Nuranindya, Terate's orientation toward her cultural background is strongly reflected in the setting and characters of her novel *Pieces of Joy* (2011; henceforth *PoJ*).<sup>5</sup>

'Teenlit' was introduced to Indonesia through translated novels at the end of 1990s. The *Princess Diaries* series, written by Meg Cabot, were among the early works that were

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<sup>3</sup> This is not necessarily the case for other writers however. Sitta Karina, for example, includes Spanish-speaking characters in her novel *Lukisan Hujan* ('Images of Rain') though she herself cannot speak this language. When asked about this, she revealed that for that novel, she engaged the services of a translator (interview with the author, January 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Betawi refers to the people indigenous of Jakarta as well as to their language.

<sup>5</sup> Information about the authors' background is from interviews I conducted between December 2010 and January 2011.

translated. This series helped define the genre for the Indonesian audience. In 2001, the publication of the first Indonesian teenlit novel *Eiffel ... I'm in Love* provided a momentum for the development of the genre. Budding young writers began producing local novels, encouraged by major publishers who saw that the new genre provided a lucrative market. As noted by Simamora (2005), teenlit filled the gap in a market dominated for many years by didactically written fictional texts and translated Japanese comics. Stories about the lives of urban teenagers written in a colloquial style, packaged as books with brightly coloured covers with images of cheerful looking teenagers, quickly captured the imagination of young middle-class readers. In a relatively short time, teenlit novels became the preferred read among urban teens. At the same time, it invited debates among educationalists, literary figures, and the wider public about what should count as good reading for young people.

The adoption of the genre from the US was not the main point of contestation. Rather, the fact that it led to an assumption among writers at the time that they had to replicate the themes of American novels was. Many works published in the first 2-3 years after *Eiffel ... I'm in Love* reflect this assumption. These novels bear themes that revolve around a comfortable but unfamiliar world resembling that occupied by middle-class American teenage girls but populated by Indonesian urban teens. The American-inspired themes, coupled with the colloquial style of writing, became the two major points of objections among critics. Fear that the language of literature would be corrupted by the deluge of colloquially written novels, and concern that young people would be preoccupied with 'foreign' lifestyles depicted in them, dominated public debates about the genre. Thus objections to the genre were expressed in terms of concerns not only about language but also morality (see Djenar 2012).

The theme of language/culture is explored in the three novels through characterisation and plot rich in cultural and spatial semiotics (cf. Blommaert 2010: chapter 3). It is represented most explicitly through the speech and conduct of minor characters and more broadly through those of major characters. In a sense, the novels can be taken to represent the author's participation in their community's discourse-on-globalisation. In Indonesia, and indeed elsewhere, the concern over the survival of local cultures and languages has been motivated, on the one hand, by greater awareness of the accessibility of English and its increased use among speakers. The rapid increase in the use of English has caused anxiety as well confidence. Educationists fear that the use of English would hamper the proper acquisition of standard Indonesian among the young. Debates about whether or not *bahasa gado-gado* 'mixed language' should be encouraged regularly surface in public discourse. In terms of local languages, the realisation that many members of the younger generation speak in colloquial Indonesian but lack knowledge of their parents' ethnic/local language have sparked concerns that local ways of doing things, including using language, may become obsolete. This concern comes not only from parents but also young people themselves, as seen for example in blogs and online forums. Thus at the same time as people enjoy having greater political participation afforded by the autonomy law and increased social capital linked to knowledge of English, there is a sense that they have to continue preparing for *globalisasi* - something which, in public imaginary, is yet to come rather than something ongoing.

The representations of youth interaction in the novels are local in multiple senses. First of all, the novels are Indonesian-language novels about characters culturally and linguistically grounded in Indonesia, though having translocal influences. Second, in

terms of locality, the social issues raised are anchored in settings centred around two main regions known as the origin of the languages/cultures highlighted – the Jakarta region as the home of Betawi culture and Yogyakarta as the centre of Javanese culture. Though the preservation of language/culture issue is shared by local groups across Indonesia (and globally), the maintenance of Betawi and Javanese are of most concern to the respective language communities. Third, though spatial mobility is highlighted, with the characters' movements are predominantly interlocal and revolve around main cities in Java.

The minor characters portrayed as the torchbearers of local cause in the novels carry various indices of identity drawn from both local/ethnic and 'global' elements of style. For example, one character speaks in Javanese, dresses in Javanese traditional attire but sings effortlessly in English, another speaks in Betawi but prefers his ethnic name to be pronounced in English. In teenlit novels, translocal influences are thus a given, a starting point from which the process of localisation begins. At metapragmatic level, the adoption of the genre from a foreign source itself represents a process of localisation. At the story-world level, both the minor and major characters are urban citizens who have been exposed to translocal influences. The stories begin with them having had such influences. But the minor characters are also deeply local in world-view and stances. They are the symbolic vehicles by which major characters experience the local. Through the experience, these characters develop as individuals. Thus the novels begin from 'global' and proceed to 'local', rather the other way around.

The theme of language/culture preservation is not a new in Indonesian literature however. The theme of the survival of *batik* raised by Nuranindya in *CC*, for example, was also the main theme of an acclaimed novel by Arswendo Atmowiloto (1986). What is new in teenlit is the way in which this theme is packaged within the broader context of globalisation, linking the local city of Yogyakarta to Indonesia and the world rather. It presents a solution to the local issue by projecting outward beyond the local rather than looking inwardly into Javanese culture itself that Atmowiloto's novel promotes. Whereas Atmowiloto's characters end up having to admit that the traditional *batik* industry and its associated Javanese philosophy can no longer serve modern times, the protagonist in Nuranindya's novel recognises the value of this cultural heritage and that knowledge gives her the confidence to look and move beyond Yogyakarta and Indonesia. The protagonist can realise her dream of studying fashion design in Paris precisely because she has had an internship at a local boutique, working under the tutelage of a respected *batik* designer. Thus the experience at local level is what enables one to move beyond it. The next section discusses in more detail how this local-to-global trajectory is woven into this and the other two novels.

### **3. Adolescents and the preservation of local languages and cultures**

Teenlit novels are written in a style that draws on both colloquial and standard varieties of Indonesian in ways that depart from their older counterparts (see e.g., Iskandar 1977, Nockzee 1992). Whereas in older novels colloquial language is largely reserved for dialogue, teenlit writers also use it in narration, making the writing conversation-like. As some describe it, teenlit language is 'spoken language which is written' (see Tasai 2006, Gunawan 2006). The authors are likewise described as those who 'write the way they speak' (Kusmarwanti 2005). The themes too have been described in numerous blogs and book reviews as *sederhana* 'simple', and *ringan* 'light'. But these descriptions belie the complex and layered representations of young people and the languages and cultures they

embody. The layering is indicated through a range of semiotic indices, ranging from personal name, the languages the characters have knowledge of, their socioeconomic background, level of spatial mobility, and ideological orientation. Minor characters from an ethnic group whose social cause is advanced are presented as ideologically heterogeneous, suggesting not only the contested nature of ethnicity and ethnic causes but also the plurality of the voices that advance them. This in turn reflects the diversity of adolescents as a social group.

### 3.1 *Betawi* and the plight of a minority group in *Fairish*

*Fairish* (Kinasih 2005) is essentially a love story. The story is told from the point of view of a main character, Irish (short from Fairish), a quiet, plain-looking girl, student of a high school in the capital Jakarta. Another main character, Davi, is a newcomer to the school. Davi's good looks create fierce competition among the girls in Irish's class. These girls try all sorts of tricks to vie for his attention, but arrogant and belligerent Davi took to Irish precisely because of her quiet demeanour and ordinary looks. Through her calmness Irish helps Davi deal with his trauma caused by a car accident in which his previous girlfriend was killed. Being with Irish helps Davi overcome his guilt of being the driver of that car. The story tells of the gradual forming of relationship between the two.

In *Fairish*, the language/culture preservation issue is highlighted through two minor characters of Betawi background, Udin (whose full name is 'Chaeruddin') and Ucup, two students from the same class as Irish and Davi. Though both characters are Betawi and come from a low socio-economic background, they are presented as two ideologically different individuals. Udin is a champion for Betawi language and culture, while Ucup is a boy who wants to be a non-Betawi. Udin's mother sells homemade lunches for a living and Udin helps her by taking orders from his friends and delivers the food to school, whereas Ucup does little except annoy his friends. When Davi arrived at his new school, Udin was absent due to typhoid fever – an illness often associated people from the lower socio-economic stratum. While we are informed about Udin's background, not much is known about Ucup's. The little we know comes from the speech of another character, Metha, as shown in (1).

- (1) “Daripada elo! Jauh-jauh dari kampung hijrah ke Jakarta, eh begitu lahir namanya Ucup lagi Ucup lagi!” (Kinasih 2005: 7)  
“But look at you! You came all the way from the *kampung* to Jakarta, and the name you automatically got at birth was Ucup, yes it's Ucup!”<sup>6</sup>

Udin is close to Irish and is a respected class member. He speaks Betawi and demands that his friends reciprocate. His insistence on speaking this language is a form of activism, aimed as he says, to ‘slow down the currents of the globalisation’.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Kampung* can refer to a village or an urban village. Here *Jakarta* refers to the metropolitan centre, while *kampung* is the periphery where Ucup comes from.

<sup>7</sup> The language ‘Betawi’, also referred to as Jakarta Malay, is spoken by some 5 million people around the Jakarta region and is classified as ‘threatened’ (Lewis et al. 2015).

<http://www.ethnologue.com/language/bew>, accessed 28 April 2015.

- (2) Perlu diketahui, Udin memang cuma melayani pemesan yang memakai bahasa Betawi. Untuk **meredam arus globalisasi**, katanya, eh, katenye. Juga supaya nilai-nilai tradisional tidak tergusur. Yang kebarat-baratan kayak Yuwkap, *so* pasti tidak dilayani! (Kinasih 2005: 16)

‘For your information, Udin only serves customers who speak in Betawi. To slow down the currents of globalisation, he says (*katanya*), eh, he says in Betawi (*katenye*). Also to prevent traditional values from disappearing. Those who pretend to be westerners like Yuwkap, will definitely not be served.’

Ucup, by contrast, prefers to have his name pronounced as ‘Yuwkap’ – the Indonesian spelling of the English pronunciation of ‘U-cup’ – and does not answer to ‘Cup’, a common vocative for ‘Ucup’. Ucup’s attitude, according to the narrator, is a result of *pengaruh globalisasi* ‘influence of globalisation’ (Kinasih 2005: 7). Phrases such as *arus globalisasi* ‘current of globalisation’ and *pengaruh globalisasi* ‘influence of globalisation’ echo the discourse-on-globalisation in Indonesia. Both phrases suggest that participation in the globalisation processes is not a matter of choice but a case of being swept along an unfamiliar path (cf. Tsing 2009: 60). The differences between Udin and Ucup show the diversity in local responses to this process.

The contrast between the Betawi characters is a contrast between preferred and dispreferred ideological positions respectively. Udin is the preferred Betawi identity: feisty, socially active, and proud of his cultural heritage. This identity is communicated through several indices: possession of a full name, family, and his friendship with Irish. Ucup on the other hand, is known only by his nickname and has a precarious relationship with others, as indicated in (1). Both characters do not play a significant role in the latter part of the novel, but they are important in facilitating localisation. At the beginning of the story Udin is the person Irish took refuge in when Davi treated her carelessly. For Davi, Udin is a bridge to Irish. Through him, his experience of the local is made possible. When Udin takes orders the day he is back from his absence, Davi responds in Betawi, much to everyone’s surprise. In doing so, Davi signals to the group that he is now one of them. Davi’s connection with Udin thus marks an important part in the development of his character. Udin is his door to the ‘local’ culture and to Irish.

### 3.2 *Batik* heritage and global resonances in *Canting Cantiq*

*CC* is a novel with a strong message about the preservation of *batik* as an Indonesian heritage.<sup>8</sup> The message is packaged as a story about a teen girl, Melanie, who comes from a wealthy background and who, due to family misfortune, is forced to move from the capital Jakarta to Yogya in Central Java. Her interaction with Javanese-speaking young people in Yogya leads to a career success in *batik* design and the realisation of her dream to study fashion design in Paris. Saka is the first person who introduces her to the Javanese world.

Unlike Udin in *Fairish* who struggles to maintain his ethnic heritage, Javanese youth in *CC* are portrayed as confident about the survival of their language and culture. Unlike Udin who explicitly says his purpose in speaking Betawi is to guard it against

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<sup>8</sup> *Batik* was inscribed by UNESCO as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009. The author mentioned that *CC* was inspired by it (interview with Dyan Nuranindya, 2011).

obsolescence, Saka in *CC* does not have to justify his use of Javanese language. He uses this language to speak to Melanie, whom he knows is not from the local area. Melanie encounters Saka at her grandfather's house in Yogyakarta when she arrives from Jakarta. Saka is one of the student boarders there. Her description of him is given in (3).

- (3) Cowok itu kelihatannya cowok baik-baik. Tutar katanya lembut dan sopan banget. Penampilannya terkesan jadul. Dengan baju lurik Jawa, sandal jepit, dan rambut yang dikucir dengan karet. “**Kula** Saka,” cowok itu memperkenalkan diri dalam bahasa Jawa. (Nuranindya 2010: 28)

‘He looks like a good guy. His manner is gentle and very polite. His clothes look classically old fashioned. With a *lurik* shirt, thongs, and hair tied with a rubber band to a ponytail. “Im Saka,” he introduced himself in Javanese’<sup>9</sup>

The description portrays Saka as a cosmopolitan Javanese young male: soft-spoken like stereotypical Javanese but unconventional in physical self-presentation. Saka cleverly blends tradition with modernity by pairing traditional *lurik* with a flip-flop and ponytailed hair. He introduces himself in *krama*, the high register of Javanese. The first person *kula* in (3) is a humbling pronoun, but Saka's use of this pronoun to a stranger from Jakarta whom he knows is unlikely to speak Javanese, is an indication of self-confidence. It is also a symbolic act of inviting Melanie to adapt culturally to Yogya and Javanese culture. Later in the story, Melanie's positive impression of Saka grows stronger when she hears him play the guitar and sing articulately in English.

Like Udin, Saka is a minor character. He is only one among several people who befriends Melanie. But he is ideologically important. Saka embodies a modern Javanese youth identity. This is shown through several indices. First, his name means ‘pillar’ in Javanese, suggesting he is of strong character. Second, he is local to the city of Yogyakarta – a city known as a centre of Javanese culture and youth activism. Third, he does not shy away from showing off his cultural roots. Melanie's experience in meeting him marks the beginning of a process that leads to her self-transformation. Through interaction with Saka and other Javanese characters, Melanie gradually sheds the smug superiority that comes from being a wealthy Jakartan and learns to appreciate another culture. Thus for her, being open to local influences lead to future opportunities. These come in the form of an internship at a prestigious *batik* boutique, followed by a scholarship to a Paris design school.

### 3.3 Youth and Javanese language in *Pieces of Joy*

Like *CC*, *PoJ* (Terate 2011) deals with the question of Javanese identity. The difference is, whereas in *CC* this identity is highlighted through contrast with a Jakartan cosmopolitan identity, *PoJ* contrasts two Javanese identity positions: preferred and dispreferred identities. Like *Fairish*, the juxtaposition of different identities highlights the heterogeneity of an ethnic group.

*PoJ* is told from the point of view of Joy, a girl from Bandung (West Java) who goes to school in Yogya. The novel opens with her meeting Stink, the dispreferred character. Stink's unlikeable character is indicated through several semiotic indices. First of all, his

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<sup>9</sup> *Lurik* is Javanese handwoven fabric, typically featuring stripe motif.

name is not a flattering one for a young man though being an English word, it may sound like the name of a rock singer. Second, he is a university drop-out who works as attendant a comics and DVD rental shop called ‘Utopia’, and supplements his income by busking in the main streets of Yogya. Third, Stink wears a batik shirt and a choker, and talks to his friends in *ngoko*, the low register of Javanese. Joy falls for Stink because his easygoing temperament. Her description of him is shown in (4).

- (4) Tapi dia beda. Dia aneh, urakan, cuek, tapi lucu, manis, dan perhatian banget. Kalau kamu sudah mengenalnya sih. (Terate 2011: 9)

‘But he’s different. He’s strange, wild, couldn’t care less about what others think, but also funny, sweet, and really caring. When you get to know him that is.’

Joy’s infatuation with Stink is short-lived however. His unpredictable behaviour makes her realise that his carefree lifestyle does not suit her. As she becomes ambivalent toward him and eventually initiates a breakup, Joy meets Ronal, son of her father’s friend who studies geology at the prestigious Gajah Mada University. She then begins to reorientate herself toward study and look to possibilities after high school. The novel ends with her developing a close friendship with Ronal.

Like Stink, Wening is also Javanese and a close friend of Joy’s. However, unlike Stink, Wening is the embodiment of a ‘good’ Javanese. Her name means ‘calm’ in Javanese, and she is described by Joy as *pendiam, sederhana, dan cenderung minder* ‘quiet person, down to earth, and tends to be introverted’ (2011: 10) – stereotyped characteristics of Javanese women. From Wening Joy learns about the different registers of Javanese and their social meanings (2011: 28-29), and it is through her that Joy comes to appreciate what is culturally preferred and what is dispreferred in Javanese culture. This knowledge enables Joy to recognise that Stink is not the kind of person for her. This realisation in turn enables her to understand her own mistakes and develops as a character. Meeting Ronal in this sense marks the new phase of her life.

#### 4. Discussion

In all three novels, the issue of language/culture preservation is conveyed through the construction of the local. Only the champions of local cause are given indigenous names: Udin and Ucup in *Fairish*, Saka in *CC*, and Wening in *PoJ*. The other characters, including the protagonists, have (adapted) English names (Fairish, Melanie, Joy, Stink, Ronal) reflecting both the genre’s roots and the contemporary orientation toward English as a new cultural resource in Indonesia. Local characters – the language champions or the dispreferred characters – are characterised by low mobility. While the main characters such as Davi in *Fairish*, Melanie in *CC*, and Joy in *PoJ* all come from outside the locality, the local champions remain in the locality throughout. The main characters undergo self-transformation through localisation but also have the social capital to chart a future trajectory beyond the local.

The use of indigenous names and the rendering of relevant dialogues in local languages give local flavour and create an air of authenticity. These are also a political act. To include Betawi or Javanese in a genre dominated by colloquial Jakartan Indonesian is to make a point about the value of these languages and the cultural heterogeneity of the speakers. This act can be understood in different ways. One may interpret it as the authors

wanting to say that young people too are concerned about the ‘currents of globalisation’, and that youth from minority groups can own their social struggle rather than being struggled for. Alternatively, one can also interpret it as a didactic message, namely that young people should care about maintaining local cultures and languages and get directly involved in the efforts. Either way, it remains that the local characters are represented as socially peripheral. At one level this representation could be considered as not being commensurate with the importance of the cause, and that it only reinforces the peripherality of marginal voices. By incorporating Betawi and Javanese in the novels, the authors in effect emphasises the minor status of those languages *vis à vis* Indonesian and English. However, at another level one can argue that the representation is “quasi-mimetic” (Fludernik 1996: 13) – it approximates real life in Indonesia where some ethnic groups are indeed a minority, and that even a large ethnolinguistic group such as the Javanese is not free from concerns about language loss. By having minor characters as language champions, the novels stay true to the small, peripheral scale of the voices of *wong cilik*.

## 5. Conclusion

Teenlit is peripheral and localised in several senses. Though the genre links Indonesian writers and readers to their counterparts in the US and other parts of the world such as the UK and Australia where teenlit novels are published, the link is essentially unidirectional. English language novels are imported to Indonesia and read either in original or through translation, while Indonesian novels are basically read by local audience because of the language in which they are written, a situation not dissimilar to that concerning the Tanzanian novel discussed by Blommaert (2010: chapter 3). Many Indonesian novels have been translated into English, but teenlit novels being of a pop genre, do not attract the interest of literary translators. Indonesian teenlit thus remains peripheral in global fiction market.

Teenlit is also peripheral in another sense. Within Indonesia itself, teenlit writers are considered as commercial writers, not as writers of *sastra* ‘Literature’ and hence are peripheral in the literary world. At story-world level, the inclusion of local languages such as Betawi and Javanese and their speakers may signal a renewed interest in ethnic identity and draw attention to the plight of marginal people. However, it also highlights Hobsbawm’s (2007) point that globalisation deepens the socio-economic disparity between peoples. It also accentuates the stratification of language that Bakhtin (1981: 263) alerts us to, and the ideological tension among its speakers (1981: 314).

Nevertheless, it is useful to remember that teenlit is read by middle-class Indonesians. They are social agents who have the resources to take local issues at a broader level, either nationally or beyond it. In this sense, raising the language preservation issue in the novels could well be as a strategic move.

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