

The Other(s) Principle(s): A Screenplay Exploring Childfree Issue in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Childfree has become one of few topics still considered taboo in Indonesia. This creative work aims at helping Indonesian childfree women fight for their voices to be heard. Secondary research is used as a methodology to complete the thesis. The data are gathered from journals, e-books, credible websites, and online articles. To support the findings, theories that are used are gender role and attachment theory. This thesis explores the reason women decide to be childfree is the toxic relationship in the family. The thesis is in the form of a screenplay using the drama-romance genre. It tells a story about Ebba who struggles to be accepted by her family and friends. She had a rough relationship with her mother from her childhood phase until now. Her boyfriend, Bisma, distances himself after finding out that Ebba is a childfree woman. However, they manage to reconcile and Ebba gets married to Bisma.

Keywords: childfree; toxic relationship in the family

INTRODUCTION

The creative work is in the form of a screenplay. A screenplay, which can also be called a script, is made to be read by the script reader, whose job is to consume the story and be encouraged to turn the script into something that people can watch on screen. Before the story written in the script gets to the readers or viewers, there is an essential production process. Thus, people name the script as the blueprint for a film. Scripts will pass through many hands and it is their guide and template for producing the film. Therefore, the script must be clear, concise, and correctly formatted (Dougan, 2019). Screenplay script has its peculiar format to characterize each character differently and precisely. From the script, a fantastic movie is created. It sketches the story in broad outlines with enough detail. The details are there to convey the mood, the characters, and the plot in a reasonable way. It can also describe feelings visually so filmmakers can capture their style, look, or vibe (Jefferson, 2014). This form also helps to identify the phenomena in today's society. Other forms may also be a tool to portray it, but it cannot give more realistic scenes than watching it through a written script. There will be many scenes that will serve dramatic emotions in the story, so it will provide significant benefits if written in a screenplay. Although punctuation marks in a novel or short story describe a person's state or emotion, they will not deliver the dramatic emotion as straightforwardly as the screenplay is capable of doing it. Thus, the screenplay format conveys the dramatic tension in the story better.

The topic that will be discussed through this creative work is childfree. Childfree can directly be interpreted as people who choose to not have children of their own. Both men and women can decide not to have children. However, in this creative work, it will discuss more from a woman's point of view. Women particularly face stigma for living a childfree life. Also, this creative work will put its focus in Indonesia since childfree become the issue that is being discussed among Indonesians. Although, after doing some research, there is no movie that is produced by Indonesians regarding the theme of childfree.

Laurie Taylor and Matthew Taylor give insight about people who decide to be childfree and feel left behind. According to L. Taylor and M. Taylor (2003), what is happening is not an instinct but purely cultural fear and anxiety, the fear of being left behind and not fitting in with all your friends who have children. Many people who decide to have children after they are married primarily because of their surroundings pressure. They have a fear that they might be left behind by their friends or families, and people will keep talking about them for not having children after marriage. Not only that, but they are also afraid that when they are old, there will be no one taking care of them. Birthing a child has always been the parents' desire and choice, and most of them will state that their children will take care of them in their old days. This reason is purely selfish and claims that children are an investment. It is such an interesting statement from *What Are Children For?* that our decision to have children or remain childfree is heavily influenced by our anticipation of how others will view our choices (L. Taylor & M. Taylor, 2003). It is proven that people are still heavily influenced by society, not only in our own country, but also on the other side of the world. Nicki Defago in her book titled *Childfree and Lovin it!* mentioned that having children is the acceptable norm and having no desire to have children is considered as unusual (Defago, 2005). Society's prevailing norm is to have children. It is not an easy task to strive for public acceptance of being childfree. People who choose to be childfree should have the same right to live their life decisions as others who choose to have children in their family, though that is not what happens nowadays. Therefore, through this creative work, I hope to make a valuable story that portrays a real problem in our society, especially in Indonesia. Moreover, creative work may help people, especially women, who struggle to speak up about their decision to be child-free.

Beside society's assessment toward childfree women who are seen as less of a woman, this creative work also explores the reason why they decide to be childfree. The creative work puts its focus on the toxic relationship in the family. There is one real-life example of a woman named Adryan Corcione. She said that she does not want to pass her issue on mental health to another being. She realizes she needs to be healed from her childhood trauma and she will put herself first before anyone else's (Corcione, 2018). Corcoine made a clear statement about her decision not to pass her mental illness to her future children caused by her mother when she was a child. She realized the huge responsibility of caring for the children she gave birth to. Hence, she decides to take care of and heal herself before anything and anyone else's. Her statement inspires me to create the storyline of my creative work. I will highlight why Corcoine decides to be childfree. The childhood trauma Corcoine experienced made her aware to bravely choose not to pass her mental issues to another human being. She did not have a good mother figure, and she is afraid that she will not be able to become a good mother either for her children. On top of that, she will not be affected by the gender expectation to change her decision to become childfree. That is the factor that I also want to highlight in my creative work.

As for the genre, I choose romance drama. The drama genre has to be serious, portray life, tell a story, and the characters have to have an inner conflict. Throughout the story, the character must bring out their emotions at different chapters or times. In drama films, there are usually many values of life that are very useful for the audience (Buffam, 2011). I chose this genre because drama will play with the audience's emotions throughout the story. I want to give the audience the chance to get emotionally involved while enjoying my work. Despite the conflict that will be included in my work, I still want the audience to gain something valuable. As we all know, romance will involve love. The main thing about romance will center around individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work. The lovers, both parties, are risking and struggling for each other and their relationship. Generally, the lovers face obstacles such as finances, physical illness, psychological restraints, or family that threaten to break their union of love. As in all quite strong, deep, and close romantic relationships, tensions of day-to-day life, temptations (of infidelity), and differences in compatibility enter romantic

films' plots (Buffam, 2011). I chose this to be my primary genre because I will portray my main character struggling in her life because of the problems in her family.

This creative work could represent some Indonesian women who choose not to have children (childfree). By that, childfree women hopefully feel empowered and supported after reading the creative work. They may use this work as a tool to encourage them to live their decision. On the other hand, women in general, specifically Indonesian women, may realize that motherhood is not a natural calling for all women. The mindset that being a mother (birthing a child) is obligatory for women possibly would change. Realizing this fact could help them to escape the trap of patriarchal culture. Eventually, not only for the Indonesian women, but this creative work may be relatable to the old generation, who may have a rigid mindset and find it difficult to welcome the youngster's opinions and decisions. Indeed, not all parents can relate entirely to the whole story. Leastwise, this creative work may be a representation for them to get a grasp of childfree and not be so narrow-minded. Furthermore, those who still want to have children would not judge others who decide not to have one. They should not dictate or even judge women who decide to be childfree. The irony is that we live amid a society that thinks that marriage can be considered happy if it is completed with children.

For this creative thesis, I am doing secondary research. I read online journals, e-books, articles, credible websites, and news. The references that support my background in this creative work are from online articles and ebooks. The books that I read are *Childfree and Loving It!* (2005) by Nicki Defago, *Attachment: Second Edition (Attachment and Loss)* (1983) by John Bowlby, etc. Besides books, I also read some journals (*Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies, The Truth About (M)Otherhood Choosing to Be Childfree, etc.*). Furthermore, I look up credible news from Indonesia's platform, such as Urban Asia, for real example cases related to my topic; childfree. The news helps me to comprehend better Indonesian people's reactions toward childfree. The credible websites and a few articles helped me witness the Indonesian society toward childfree women and helped me find some women who experienced social pressure from their surroundings. Although they have their reasons, people would still look down on them. Lastly, all of the sources I have read will significantly benefit my creative work, and I can portray the topic as precisely as possible.

In exploring the reason why Indonesians become so easy to judge childfree women, a theory by Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan is used. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) explained a traditional domestic division of labor is that in which men have primary responsibility for the necessary financial provision of their family household, and women have primary responsibility for the management and performance of housework and caring work (such as cleaning, laundry, shopping, cooking, and caring for children). The women's domestic work is performed within the home (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004). The role of women centers on taking care of the children or any other responsibilities in the household, and they ought to stay at home. The purpose of affirming a sex or gender distinction was to argue that biological difference's actual physical or mental effects had been exaggerated to maintain a patriarchal system of power and to create a consciousness among women that they were naturally better suited to 'domestic' roles (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004). Domestic roles have always been directed to women only. Men are seen as the breadwinners, stronger leaders, powerful, and free to express themselves without mockery. While women are confined to domestic spaces, taking care of household affairs, birthing children, and raising children. As a result, society labeled a woman who chooses to be child-free as a lesser woman. Society sees women as the inferior side, which means when a woman decides to be childfree, they are considered less of a woman; they are seen as defiant to their natural calling. Women who act outside of this idea will be considered as outcasts. Therefore, women who receive pressure from society because they decide to be

childfree unconsciously believe that they are less of a woman for not doing what they ought to be.

A study focusing about gender and role in Indonesia from Saparinah Sadli (2002) that is published through a book titled *Women in Indonesia: Gender, equity, and development* said, feminism remains problematic for many Indonesians. The terms 'feminism', even 'gender' are still questioned by the majority of Indonesians. They assume feminism is a Western or northern concept (Sadli, 2002). Not many Indonesians are aware about the equality of gender. They assume that such perspective like gender and role, feminism, or feminist is not coherent with the culture of Indonesia. Indonesia holds a traditional value of gender roles. The patriarchal society has influenced Indonesian people to blame women heavily if they decide to be childfree. To be childfree in Indonesia is a difficult option to be decided. Fundamentally, we must never forget that a decision to be childfree is about the choice itself.

Another point related to my story is about the old Chinese belief. There is a study regarding this that is published through a book titled *Son Preference, Eldest Son Preference, and Educational Attainment: Evidence from Chinese Families* written by Wang et al (2019). The study focuses on son preferences rather than daughters. There are obvious son preferences in Asian countries like China. Influenced by the family and traditional marriage system, husband's rights are supreme (Wang et al., 2019). Patriarchy affects how Chinese favors boys over girls. This influences how Chinese parents favor sons rather than their daughters. Even though the study found that preferring sons over daughters happens in China, it does not mean it only happens in that country. Chinese people who live outside China could also hold this kind of belief. Leo Suryadinata (2008) in his book titled *Ethnic Chinese in Contemporary Indonesia* stated, the absolute number of Indonesian Chinese was the largest in the region. Chinese were divided into locally born, Indonesian-speaking *peranakans* and foreign born, Chinese-speaking *totoks* (Suryadinata, 2008). Chinese people who immigrated to Indonesia are called Chinese-Indonesians. They are no longer differentiated as another ethnic, but already considered as Indonesians. The Chinese old belief is continuously living within them and making them live with that kind of belief, namely that they prefer boys over girls. A study from Aline Wong & Shui Meng (1985) through a book titled *Ethnicity and Fertility in Southeast Asia: A Comparative Analysis* mentioned, the Chinese who are well known for their bias for sons is still predominantly a patriarchal system. Based on the data, it indicates that Chinese males of Indonesia place a high emphasis on this value (29-35%) (Wong & Meng, 1985). This kind of belief is being passed down from generation to generation as they reproduce. It is proven that Chinese Indonesian people still highly value male children more than female children. It is affecting how Chinese parents decide which gender of children they want to have. They are prioritizing having sons over daughters. I will refer to this theory in my main character, Ebba Santoso. Ebba comes from a Chinese family. Her mother is influenced by her parents to favor sons more than girls. That is why her mother always takes Ebba's brother's side no matter how many mistakes he has made.

To explain about the reason why women decide to be childfree is the hardship and toxic relationship in the family, attachment theory by John Bowlby is used. Beside Bowlby, a book titled *attachment theory workbook* and *abandonment theory workbook* by Emily Attached is also used to support the theory. Bowlby (1983) discussed how the early bond between infants and the mother could strongly affect the infant's behavior throughout their life. Every firstborn needs their first caregiver, the mother who gave birth. Therefore, infants with a strong bond with their mothers will usually be less likely to grow up messily. Bowlby (1983) also said, the attachment behavior was nearly always shown earlier, more strongly, and more consistently towards mother. Infants need a mother figure the earliest because they have been inside their mother's womb for approximately nine months. They had spent most of the time before they were sent into the world with only their mother. Hence, the role of the mother needs to be available to their children.

Moreover, Emily Attached (2020) discussed that it is speculated that many of these caregivers have faced tragic losses, abuse, or suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety, and fear of the infant. The toxic behavior of the caregiver is being passed down from generation to generation. Ebba's mother was also nearly the same as she did to Ebba. The mother was neglected by both her parents. The trauma that she had experienced during her childhood unconsciously affected her parenting behavior toward Ebba. The mother was emotionally abused and despised by her parents. The parents think that having a daughter can only bring misfortune to the family. According to Attached (2020), it is stated that it might not be a good option for children who rarely receive quality time from parents to enter the parenting world to raise their upcoming child. It is impossible to give what they never got (Attached, 2020). In the screenplay, the main character, Ebba, had a bitter past during her childhood, similar to her mother's childhood phase. Ebba never received enough love and attention from her mother, the primary caregiver. Hence, it will be tough for her to be an excellent mother to her children. On top of that, Ebba receives criticism from her mother due to her decision to be a childfree woman. Her mother pressures her to have her own family and asks Ebba to give her grandchildren immediately. Ebba is the only woman in her prominent family, both from her father and mother. Moreover, she decides to be childfree. Not only inside the family circle, but also Ebba's friends are married and have children. Therefore, they claim Ebba as less of a woman because she disobeys the natural role of women. Since she receives many critiques and pressures from her surroundings, Ebba eventually falls into society's stigma. She starts believing that she is not yet a whole as a woman because she is a childfree woman.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Premise & Design Principle

The creative work tells a story about a childfree woman who falls into the society's stigma where women are considered as less of a woman for deciding to not have children of their own. She struggles to be accepted by her domestic sphere, which are family and friends. Eventually, her boyfriend will help her to realize the root reason why she decides to be childfree is because of her rough childhood phase. Throughout the story, the main character thrives in living her decision, a desire to be childfree, without caring about others' opinions or judgments. This creative work aims to help young Indonesian childfree women to fight for their voices to be heard by others.

Pitch

- a. Ebba is a 23 years old woman who is currently working to fulfill her needs, although she comes from a wealthy family. Unfortunately, her family and friends are not that supportive of her decision to be child-free, and they keep pressuring her to have children instead of her life decision.
- b. Throughout her life, Bisma, her boyfriend, eventually will help her to live her life decision. However, they will face both families' disapproval, which makes her involved in several severe quarrels with her mother.
- c. Ebba is seriously affected by her surroundings' opinion about her being less of a woman and of her decision to be childfree. Therefore, it affects her relationship with Bisma to come to an end. However, eventually, they will be able to write their story, and Ebba continues her life as a childfree woman.

Characters

Main Characters:

- Ebba Santoso
Age: 23 years old

Ebba is the family's second child. She has long, dark black hair and porcelain skin inherited from her mother. Ebba's body shape is skinny, and it is tough for her to gain weight no matter how hard she tries. She still lives under her Chinese-Indonesian parent's roof with her mother and older brother. Her father passed away when she was a child, and since then, she is not a jolly person. She is an organized woman who manages her schedules and activities well. Her mother always favors her older brother instead of her. Because of that, she decides to be childfree. Although deep down, she is a hopeless romantic woman who craves love, but she has attachment anxiety because of her childhood trauma. That is one of the reasons why she keeps pushing people away who love her because she does not want people to hurt or disappoint her. She tends to run away from her problems even though she knows she has to deal with them.

- Bisma Hutapea
Age: 25 years old

Bisma comes from a Batak family with mixed religious parents. He has dark brown-eyed color, tan skin, and is much taller than Ebba. Bisma has a broad shoulder, bushy hair, a dimple on his left cheek whenever he smiles, and a thin moustache. Bisma has a loving and complete family. He decides to leave his hometown, Palangka Raya, migrating to Surabaya. Bisma works at an art gallery because he studied Visual Design Communication in college. He has a passion for painting and can paint skillfully. He is a free-spirited guy who does anything without calculation. A guy who is never afraid of taking risks. The downside of him is that he rarely thinks about his actions' risks. For instance, he risks his relationship with his parents to be with Ebba. His decision brings a lot of consequences, but he always takes responsibility towards them. Bisma will be the one who helps Ebba to come to her realization regarding her choice to be childfree. Towards the end, Ebba and Bisma will write their stories together despite all the obstacles they have to face.

Supporting Characters:

- Maria Elisabeth
Age: 49 years old

Maria is Ebba's mother and is a Chinese woman. She is a strict, close-minded, and brute woman. Maria has short curly black hair, porcelain skin, thin and long legs, monolid black eyes, and thin lips. She favors her first child, Jonathan, Ebba's older brother, because she assumes that Ebba can only bring problems to the family. Maria will always take Jonathan's side, even though he makes a fatal error. When she was pregnant with Ebba, she had no idea that she would give birth to a girl. The doctor falsely diagnosed Ebba as a baby boy. During pregnancy, she has to take a lot of medicine to reduce the pain. She felt okay to do all of that because she tremendously wants a son. Unluckily, she almost dies of bearing the pain. The prime reason why Maria does not want to have daughters is that her parents mentally abused her. She is also treated the same by her parents as she treats Ebba. Maria's parents despise her existence. They think that having a daughter can only bring misfortune to the family. Unconsciously, that kind of mindset makes Maria treat Ebba the same way as how her parents treated her.

- Hartono Santoso
Age: 53 years old

Hartono is Ebba's father. He has narrow eyes, a thick beard, bald hair, and a heavysset body. He is a loving, caring, and warm person. He loves his children equally. He never picks sides with his children and always is the one to bring justice inside the family. He passed away because of a plane accident.

- Jonathan Santoso
Age: 25 years old

He is the first child of Ebba's family. He inherited his father's eyes, narrow eyes with black eyeballs usually tied his hair into a man bun, muscular and robust body, slightly dark skin compared to Maria. Jonathan is the type of man who will make women around him swoon. He has a girlfriend and he is accused of impregnating his girlfriend. Turns out, he is an infertile man. Her mother is always on his side, no matter how worse his mistakes are.

- Santi Jayasubrata
Age: 30 years old

She is Ebba's co-worker. A married woman with two children. Santi will be the one that emphasizes the idea that being childfree is less women. She is influenced by the hereditary tradition that makes her believe that being pregnant is a woman's duty.

- Johan Sebastian
Age: 26 years old

Johan is Ebba's boss in the office. He is about to get married. He is so proud that he can marry his girlfriend at such a young age. He thinks that being financially stable in marriage is more important than being mentally tough. He suspects Ebba as an infertile woman because she decides to be childfree.

- Meralda Beatrix
Age: 19 years old

She is Jonathan's girlfriend who accuses him of impregnating her. She is still in her last semester of Senior High School.

- Bystanders
 1. Receptionist (a woman who works at Bisma's apartment as a receptionist)
 2. Bisma's parents (mother and father)
 3. A little girl (selling newspaper)

Conflict

The main conflict is Ebba's mother's acceptance towards her decision to be childfree and get married to her boyfriend who is Batakese. Ebba's relationship with her mother has never been on a good term since she was a child until the present. Ebba received unfair treatment from her mother because her mother's childhood was similar to hers. Her mother wants Ebba to have children of her own, but she does not realize the reason Ebba chose to be childfree is because of her. On top of that, Ebba's brother is infertile and it makes the whole

situation become more complicated. The peak moment is when Ebba is kicked out from her house and is away from her family for about three years. After a while, time does help and heal each one of them to reconcile.

Synopsis

A Chinese-Indonesian woman named Ebba lives with a cruel mother who always picks the other children's side. Her childhood phase was so rough that it eventually made her decide to be a childfree woman. Her decision to not have children invites her surroundings to come at her negatively. They judge, persuade, manipulate, and pressure her to have children. All of the pressures come from her own family and working environment. They give her a social construction where women must fulfill their obligation to marry and have children. They see her as less of a woman for deciding to be childfree, and their opinions heavily affect Ebba.

At one point, she does not know what is happening to her, and there is one sudden time when her partner, Bisma, helps her realize what makes her act like that, which is the effect of her toxic relationship with her mother when she was a child. After that moment, Ebba approaches her mother and voices her opinion that she has been hurting. Feeling rebuked by her daughter, her mother kicks Ebba out because Ebba still insists on being a childfree woman and having a relationship with Bisma. The mother disapproves of their relationship because Bisma does not come from a wealthy family and has a different race from Ebba's family. Eventually, Ebba and Bisma can maintain their relationship and find a way out of Ebba's struggle to accept herself and marry as a voluntary family without children.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this creative work is exploring childfree issues in Indonesia and it focuses on the perspective of a childfree woman. To be specific, this creative work is made to find out the reason why women decide to be childfree is because of the toxic relationship in the family. The narrative is in the drama-romance genre. The screenplay depicts the struggle of the main character to be accepted by her family and friends of her decision to not have children of her own. It is shown by how Ebba receives rejection from her own mother and harsh opinions from her co-workers.

The first purpose of the creative work is to explore why the main character's family and friends become so easy to think that she is a lesser woman due to her decision to not have children. The theory of gender and role is used to support the first purpose. In the theory, it says that patriarchal culture affects society to determine the role of men and women. The center of women's role is to take care of the children or any other responsibilities in the household. The second purpose is to examine the base reason why the main character decided to be childfree, which is a toxic relationship in the family. The theory that I used to support it is the attachment theory by John Bowlby. The theory says children who rarely receive love from their parents are unlikely to enter the parenting world without full knowledge and preparation for raising their upcoming child. Therefore, Ebba believes that she cannot be a good mother since she never experienced one in her childhood.

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