

Bakhtinian Carnavalesque and Gender Erasure in Ziggy Zezszyzeoviennazabrizkie's *Kering*: Collective Child Voices and Communal Space

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Abstract

This study examines how Ziggy Zezszyzeoviennazabrizkie's short story *Kering* constructs an alternative social world by erasing gender legibility, centering child protagonists, and establishing the laundromat as a communal refuge. The research addresses three primary questions: (1) the laundromat's function as a carnivalesque liminal chronotope; (2) the role of the collective first-person plural voice in generating polyphonic child subjectivity; and (3) how motifs of voicelessness and bodily anomalies utilize grotesque realism to critique structural gender violence. Employing qualitative close reading and directed coding based on Bakhtinian carnivalesque theory, the analysis focuses on three axes: space, voice, and body. Findings reveal that the laundromat operates as a temporary egalitarian "common" that suspends patriarchal authority, enabling a communal life for children. The collective "we" narrative distributes agency across multiple figures, effectively weakening gender as a stable category of organization. Furthermore, grotesque imagery and "voicelessness" translate unspeakable harm into a material critique of violence, positioning gender erasure as a deliberate oppositional strategy. By integrating Bakhtinian theory with gender-inclusive narrative perspectives, this article reframes children as modern subjects who utilize literary form to contest normative gender structures and systemic violence.

Keywords: Bakhtinian carnivalesque; collective "we" narration; grotesque realism; gender erasure; Ziggy Zezszyzeoviennazabrizkie

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana cerita pendek *Kering* karya Ziggy Zezszyzeoviennazabrizkie mengonstruksi dunia sosial alternatif melalui penghapusan keterbacaan gender, pemusatan tokoh anak-anak, dan penetapan binatu (*laundromat*) sebagai tempat perlindungan komunal. Penelitian ini menjawab tiga pertanyaan utama: (1) fungsi binatu sebagai *kronotop liminal karnavalesk*; (2) peran suara jamak orang pertama kolektif dalam menghasilkan subjektivitas anak yang polifonik; dan (3) bagaimana motif ketidakterbakaraan suara (*voicelessness*) serta anomali tubuh menggunakan realisme grotesk untuk mengkritik kekerasan gender struktural. Dengan menggunakan metode *close reading* kualitatif dan pengodean terarah berdasarkan teori karnavalesk Bakhtinian, analisis ini berfokus pada tiga poros: ruang, suara, dan tubuh. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa binatu beroperasi sebagai "ruang bersama" (*commons*) egaliter sementara yang menanggulangi otoritas patriarki, sehingga memungkinkan kehidupan komunal bagi anak-anak. Narasi "kami" yang kolektif mendistribusikan agensi ke berbagai tokoh, yang secara efektif melemahkan gender sebagai kategori pengorganisasian yang stabil. Lebih jauh lagi, citra grotesk dan motif ketidakbersuaraan menerjemahkan bahaya yang tak terucapkan menjadi kritik material terhadap kekerasan, memosisikan penghapusan gender sebagai strategi oposisi yang disengaja. Dengan mengintegrasikan teori Bakhtinian dan perspektif naratif inklusif gender, artikel ini membingkai ulang anak-anak sebagai subjek modern yang memanfaatkan bentuk sastra untuk menggugat struktur gender normatif dan kekerasan sistemik.

Kata Kunci: karnavalesk Bakhtin; narasi "kami"; realisme grotesk; pengaburan gender; Ziggy Zezszyzeoviennazabrizkie.



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INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence against children remains an Indonesian concern and a global justice agenda (Fulu et al., 2017; Hayati et al., 2011; Neherta et al., 2024). SDG 5 calls for ending discrimination and violence against women and girls, so cultural narratives that render harm speakable matter for prevention politics (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2020; McIlwaine, 2024). KPAI's 2025 year-end report recorded 2,031 child-protection cases with 2,063 child victims; girls were the largest victim group (51.5%) and many incidents unfolded within family or other trusted circles (KPAI, 2026). National gender inequality is also tracked structurally: BPS reports Indonesia's Gender Inequality Index (IKG) at 0.421 for 2024, signalling persistent gaps (BPS, 2025). Empirical studies further show adolescents' violence experiences are substantially underreported in Indonesia (Syukriani et al., 2022; Yudha & Chuemchit, 2024) and child sexual abuse is shaped by secrecy and power asymmetries (Rumble et al., 2020; Wismayanti et al., 2019). Literary analysis can illuminate how such asymmetries are imagined, naturalized, or resisted.

Recent Indonesian fiction often relocates critique from grand institutions to "ordinary" infrastructures, where marginal subjects improvise solidarity (Ambyo, 2026; Indriyanto & Br Barus, 2025). In Ziggy Zezsyazeoviennazabrizkie's *Kering*, (2023), the laundromat operates as a public refuge: a third space that is neither home nor school yet enables a temporary commons under precarity. Spatial theory notes how gender is produced and policed through everyday places, while nonconforming bodies disrupt that legibility (Browne, 2004; Doan, 2010). Narratively, the story's first-person plural voice aligns with "we-narratives," where collective narration distributes attention across multiple members and unsettles individual ownership of experience (Bekhta, 2017). These formal choices invite a Bakhtinian reading of carnival, where hierarchies are bracketed and informal relations flourish (Hanif et al., 2024; Pavlina & Baranova, 2022). The grotesque, especially the mouth and bodily openings, then becomes a key site for linking gender erasure to violence (Fawaid, 2020; Leite, 2023). It matters for reading children as agents.

Study on post-Reformasi Indonesian literature shows how expanded freedoms enabled writers, especially women writers, to foreground sexuality, violence, and everyday coercion as contested social knowledge (Aveling, 2007). Parallel research traces feminist movements and policy advocacy for protections against sexual violence, highlighting frictions between cultural norms, institutions, and legal reform (Maulina et al., 2025;

Poerwandari et al., 2018). However, these socio-political discussions are rarely connected to Bakhtinian models of carnival space, polyphony, and grotesque realism as tools for reading contemporary Indonesian short stories.

Critical work on grotesque realism often remains generic or Eurocentric, despite its usefulness for diagnosing how bodies are symbolically degraded and “uncrowned” in narrative (Leite, 2023). This gap is acute for Ziggy’s *Kering*, published in the 2023 collection *Kapan Nanti* (Zezsyazeoviennazabrizkie, 2023), whose child-centered communal voice is still understudied in Indonesian criticism. This article therefore pursues three linked questions. First, how does *Kering* stage the laundromat as a carnivalesque liminal chronotope where adult authority and patriarchal norms are suspended, enabling children’s communal life? Second, what strategies does the collective “we” use to generate polyphony and shared child subjectivity, and how do those strategies erase or destabilize gender legibility? Third, how do voicelessness and bodily or identity anomalies mobilize grotesque realism (degradation/uncrowning) to critique gendered structural violence?

This Study combines close reading with dialogic, gender-inclusive narratology. Analytically, the study focuses on spatial markers (inside/outside, calm/storm), voice economies (turn-taking, audibility, silence), and bodily motifs (mouthlessness, stains, metamorphosis). These axes are contextualized against recent Indonesian child-protection patterns and gender inequality indicators reported by KPAI and BPS (KPAI, 2026; BPS, 2025). *Kering* (2023) transforms a mundane service site into a child-centered carnival refuge: a calm center that momentarily inverts the outside world’s authority. The plural narrator does not simply aggregate testimony; it organizes a polyphonic commons in which minor voices circulate without a single adult master-voice, exemplifying collective storytelling’s ethical redistribution of agency. Within this commons, gender erasure functions as a strategy of refusal: by making gender unreadable, the text interrupts the classificatory logics that often enable domination. Grotesque motifs (missing mouths, bodily residues, and unstable identities) translate private harm into public critique by lowering the “ideal” into material vulnerability, thereby exposing structural violence while also imagining renewal (Leite, 2023; Pavlina & Baranova, 2022). If borne out, this reading positions children in Indonesian contemporary fiction not as passive victims but as modern subjects capable of renegotiating literary and social norms.



The communal space is treated as a spatial ethics: space produces equality when it loosens the scripts that police bodies, speech, and belonging (Heinonen, 2024). Spatial-justice scholars argue that space is never a neutral container; it is actively produced through power, and therefore can either reproduce domination or open room for egalitarian solidarities (Dikeç, 2001). Bakhtinian carnival helps specify the latter possibility: a “second world” where official seriousness is suspended, hierarchies are inverted, and the lowly body becomes shared ground rather than a mark of shame (Bakhtin, 2002; Gardiner, 1993). Yet public-space studies warn that “openness” is always contested and can be withdrawn through regulation, exclusion, or moral panic (Legacy et al., 2014; Mitchell, 1995). Such equality is less a stable property than a practice of co-presence, who may linger, who may speak, and whose vulnerability is held as collective rather than individualized injury alone. Reading communal space as “space produces equality” therefore holds two definitions together: communal space as an enacted commons of mutual care, and communal space as a fragile arrangement threatened by re-privatization and gendered policing (Doan, 2010). This double lens prepares: how *Kering* builds a laundromat-world that is egalitarian precisely because it is temporary, bounded, and negotiated (Zezsyazeoviennazabrizkie, 2023).

In *Kering*, the laundromat’s egalitarian potential is legible through recurring textual cues. First, the setting is framed as a calm center against an outside “storm,” so the threshold itself functions as liminal protection and reorders fear into togetherness. Second, entry is ritualized: children arrive “dirty” and leave “white,” turning washing into carnivalesque purification that levels class, shame, and gendered respectability (Gardiner, 1993). Third, adult authority is spatially displaced (parents, teachers, and perpetrators remain offstage) while children occupy machines, benches, and waiting time as if these were their own civic infrastructure. Fourth, time is non-linear: the narrative counts “days” yet scrambles sequence, producing a chronotope where return and repetition matter more than progress, and where the community can outlast any single biography. Finally, the laundromat gathers children across economic and domestic situations, inviting a commons of mutual witnessing rather than private endurance (Zezsyazeoviennazabrizkie, 2023). Against domestic and sexual harm, the laundromat becomes a refuge that suspends patriarchal narration and lets children linger, listen, and survive together (Rumble et al., 2018; Wismayanti et al., 2019).

If space can “produce” equality, voice can enact it, especially when the speaking position refuses mastery. By collective child voices I (narrator) refer to the way *Kering* organizes perception and testimony through a first-person plural that is neither a simple sum of “I” voices nor an omniscient narrator in disguise. Narratology treats we-narration as a distinct form with its own epistemic and ethical consequences: it can shelter marginal speakers, but it can also exclude, ventriloquize, or claim consensus too quickly (Bekhta, 2017). In American fiction studies, the “we” has been read as simultaneously intimate and unsettling, because it blurs individuality while producing a social mind that can witness what single subjects cannot carry alone (Maxey, 2015). For texts about child violence, this matters: plural narration can transform trauma into communal witnessing, echoing calls for child-centered listening in violence research (Rumble et al., 2018). A Bakhtinian angle sharpens the stakes: polyphony is not mere multiplicity of characters, but an arrangement in which voices retain relative autonomy and meaning is produced dialogically rather than authoritatively (Bakhtin, 2002; Gardiner, 1993). Critics of plural narration note, however, that chorality may erase internal difference, turning collective speech into a new hierarchy. “Voice enacts equality” therefore names a tension to track: whether “we” becomes an egalitarian relay of vulnerable testimonies, or a rhetorical mask that smooths over gendered suffering (Fludernik, 2022).

The equality of voice in *Kering* becomes visible through several operational indicators. The plural narrator alternates between choral declarations (“we love the laundromat”) and character-specific fragments, so individual girls enter the narrative without being absorbed into a single protagonist (Zezsyazeoviennazabrizkie, 2023). Dialogue and reported speech arrive as turns rather than lessons: Sasha’s “ignorance”, Georgette’s quiet competence, and other children’s fears circulate without a final adult verdict, approximating polyphony as relational autonomy (Gardiner, 1993). The narrative’s sequencing (ellipses, summaries, and sudden temporal leaps) creates shared subjectivity through rhythm: the “we” remembers by revisiting, not by explaining. Agency is redistributed through collective verbs (“we see,” “we want,” “we hope”), which make witnessing itself a communal act (Bekhta, 2017). At the same time, the “we” draws a boundary that marks outsiders as unsafe, intensifying liminality. Finally, gender legibility is destabilized when the pronoun “we” foregrounds shared childhood vulnerability over sexed identity, opening space for non-binary reading while keeping violence intelligible (Doan,



2010).

The third reframes gender erasure as politics of the body: when gender markers fade, what comes into view are the social forces that demand gender to be readable. Literary form can therefore intervene, not only represent, in gendered harm. In interactionist sociology, gender is a routine accomplishment, achieved and policed through accountability; when recognizability fails, punishment often follows (Evaldsson, 2021; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Feminist geography extends this insight to space: bathrooms, schools, and streets materialize gender norms and make deviation risky (Doan, 2010; Fawaid, 2021). *Kering* stages a different economy of readability by thinning gender cues and by privileging bodily processes (washing, vomiting, swallowing, leaking) that Bakhtin scholarship names grotesque realism: degradation and uncrowning that bring “high” ideals down to the material body (Leite, 2023; Roderick, 1995). The grotesque is not mere horror; it is a method for exposing structural violence that targets girls’ bodies while pretending to protect morality. Studies of childhood sexual violence in Indonesia underline how such harm is frequently domesticated, silenced, and normalized, especially when it occurs within families (Rumble et al., 2018; Wismayanti et al., 2019). Gender erasure can be read in two competing ways: as universalizing neutrality that risks flattening difference, or as a strategic refusal of gender legibility that makes violence visible as a social system rather than an individual case.

The indicators first is voicelessness: the children wonder whether they have “voices” outside the laundromat and fantasize about mouths, staging speech as a right that society can revoke (Zezsyazeoviennazabrizkie, 2023). The second is grotesque bodily imagery. Repeated scenes of being swallowed, drowned, vomited, and “whitened” by washing enact Bakhtinian degradation, lowering the body to its openings and fluids to unmask hypocrisy (Leite, 2023; Roderick, 1995). In this carnivalesque register, laughter becomes survival, and innocence becomes critique too. A third cluster is identity anomaly (gaps, holes, missing parts, and unstable naming) which works as uncrowning: the stable subject demanded by patriarchal institutions is disassembled. Read against Indonesian research that emphasizes silence and under-reporting of child sexual violence, especially in domestic settings (Bakhtin, 2002; Rumble et al., 2018; Wismayanti et al., 2019), these motifs suggest that gender erasure is not absence but exposure. The story refuses to “fix” girls into legible victimhood, so violence appears as a structural condition the communal “we” must

collectively contest.sebelumnya.

Ziggy's short story *Kering*, published in the 2023 collection *Kapan Nanti*, treated as a material text whose form carries social meaning. The research signals three inseparable objects within the story: the laundromat as a communal refuge, the collective first-person plural "we/kami" that distributes perception, and a recurring register of mouths, stains, swallowing, and missing parts that unsettles gender readability (Zezsyazeoviennazabrizkie, 2023). This focus is warranted because Indonesian research repeatedly shows that violence against children is common yet under-reported, especially when harm is domestic or sexual, and disclosure is mediated by stigma and power (Syukriani et al., 2022; Wismayanti et al., 2019). Reading *Kering* as a formal experiment therefore allows the study to ask what literary structures can reveal about gendered harm when children speak, gather, and survive together. Its brevity and repetition make it ideal for tracing shifts in space, voice, and corporeality.

The research design is qualitative and interpretive, combining close reading with directed qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Three research questions structure the analysis: (1) how the laundromat is staged as a liminal chronotope that suspends adult authority; (2) asks how the collective "we" produces polyphony and child subjectivity while destabilizing gender legibility; and (3) asks how voicelessness and bodily/identity anomalies mobilize grotesque realism to critique gendered structural violence. The study links spatial reading with feminist accounts of gendered regulation of everyday places and narratological work on we-narration as collective speaking. Bakhtinian (2002) carnival provides the interpretive hinge: it treats unofficial life as a method for reading how norms are contested (Lachmann et al., 1988). A coding protocol keeps interpretation grounded and revisable. *Kering* uses nonlinear fragments and focalization, the design privileges dialogic relations among voices over authorial explanation. This helps keep each claim tied to scenes.

The primary source is the short story text itself (Zezsyazeoviennazabrizkie, 2023), treated as the site where communal space, collective voice, and bodily politics are aesthetically produced. Secondary sources are used for contextual triangulation and to justify the article's contemporary stakes. Peer-reviewed scholarship on violence against children in Indonesia and the region helps calibrate what the story echoes or exaggerates, including a systematic review of child sexual abuse in Indonesia (Wisayanti et al., 2019),

an assessment of large-scale survey evidence on violence against children (Arifiani et al., 2019), and work on conducting national childhood violence surveys (Rumble et al., 2018). In addition, recent statistical and policy documents (KPAI's end-of-year 2025 report, Indonesia's Gender Inequality Index releases, and SDG 5 targets) are treated as situational evidence that frames why literary critique matters now (KPAI, 2026; BPS, 2025). Theses, dissertations, and reputable news reports are consulted only to map interpretive debates, not to replace close textual reading. First, the story is read iteratively to build familiarity, while annotating every passage that instantiates the three axes: spatial thresholds (inside/outside; calm/storm; washing as ritual), narratorial features (first-person plural clauses; character fragments; temporal ellipses), and bodily motifs (mouthlessness, stains, vomiting, holes, missing parts). Second, annotated segments are extracted into a corpus file with metadata (page, narrator position, character mentioned, and immediate spatial context), enabling systematic comparison rather than impressionistic quotation. Third, analytic memos record interpretive decisions (why a segment counts as "communal space" rather than "domestic space," or how a "we" clause shifts agency) so that the reading remains traceable (Nowell et al., 2017). This stepwise collection mirrors best practice in qualitative thematic and content approaches where transparency is part of rigor (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The data proceeds through three iterative stages (reduction, display, and verification) implemented through qualitative content analysis, thematic synthesis, and critical discourse sensitivity. In reduction, excerpts are coded with a hybrid scheme: a priori categories aligned with the research questions (Space-Liminality; Voice-Polyphony; Gender-Legibility; Body-Grotesque/Voicelessness) and inductive subcodes developed from repeated patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In display, coded excerpts are organized into matrices that juxtapose spatial scenes with narrator shifts and bodily images, making visible how the laundromat's equality is narrated, how "we" circulates agency, and where gender becomes unreadable. Verification involves returning to full narrative contexts to test whether claims hold across episodes, and triangulating interpretive inferences with contextual research on violence against children. Finally, a light critical discourse analysis examines how authority and blame are distributed in the text's phrasing, keeping power and inequality in view (Van Dijk, 1993). The result is a text-anchored interpretation answerable to Indonesia's urgent realities of child violence.

RESULT

Communal Space as Produces Equality

The laundromat is narrated as a shared refuge where children enter and leave together: “*Kami menyukai hari-hari di ruang cuci. Kami masuk dalam keadaan kotor dan keluar dengan tangan-tangan yang bersih*” (p. 30). Washing becomes a communal rite: “*Di dalam ruang cuci, kami ditelan dan ditenggelamkan dan dimuntahkan kembali dengan badan kami terkubur di dalam wadah penyucian. Kami keluar dari sini, kami putih*” (p. 30). Georgette’s brief scenes reinforce this equality-through-care: “*Di hari kedua puluh empat, Georgette memperkenalkan pengharum baru*” (p. 30); “*...dia mendorong kursi untuk jadi tempat rajut Zabka*” (p. 37). Yet the refuge also holds private grief: “*Georgette membilas pakaiannya dengan air mata*” (p. 40). The laundromat operates as a second-life commons where adult judgment recedes, bodily mess is normalized, and Georgette becomes the first responder when other children face danger or loss.

The laundromat’s equality is patterned, not assumed, and it invites shared, non-judgmental dwelling. It works like a threshold that reorders who may linger and be cared for, echoing arguments that public space is produced through struggle over access and legitimacy (Mitchell, 1995). First, the story repeatedly contrasts an unsafe “outside” with an interior calm, so entry into the laundromat marks a passage from exposure to mutual witness. Second, the washing rite (“*kotor*” to “*putih*”) levels embodied difference and temporarily suspends respectability politics that often police girls’ bodies in everyday places (Doan, 2010). Third, the narrative’s day-counting (“*Di hari...*”) is nonlinear and episodic, so time is organized by returns to the laundromat rather than by institutional schedules; this makes the space feel like a self-contained world. Finally, Georgette’s small acts (introducing fragrance, offering a chair, crying while rinsing) function as micro-governance: care replaces command. In Dikeç’s (2001) terms, the laundromat becomes a site where spatial arrangements make justice thinkable as lived practice.

Why does *Kering* need a laundromat to produce equality? The story implies that the outside world is already overdetermined by adult power, so children can only assemble ethically in a space that is mundane, semi-public, and therefore harder to monopolize. Bakhtinian readings of the carnivalesque emphasize that temporary “second worlds” suspend official hierarchies by shifting value to the low, the ordinary, and the bodily. In *Kering*, the machines, detergents, smells, and waiting time form that low material ground,

enabling children to relate as co-users rather than as ranked subjects. Georgette's role matters here: she does not govern by adult law, but by improvisational care, turning the laundromat into a fragile commons where grief and danger can be held without verdict. Because such equality is spatially bounded, it also reads as critique, showing that outside the laundromat, gendered norms and violence regain their force, and refuge must be repeatedly remade.

Collective Child Voices as Enacts Equality

The narrator opens: "*Kami menyukai hari-hari di ruang cuci*" (hal. 30) and "*Kami masuk dalam keadaan kotor dan keluar dengan tangan-tangan yang bersih*" (hal. 30). The chorus then names individuals: "*Sasha adalah yang paling bahagia di ruang cuci*" (hal. 30). It records her life in day-fragments: "*Di hari pertama, Sasha membawa rok panjang berwarna hitam dan celana dalam bernoda putih*" (hal. 31) and "*di hari keenam puluh delapan, dia tahu segalanya*" (hal. 32). The "*Kami*" (narrator We) questions audibility: "*...apakah kami punya suara di luar ruang cuci*" (hal. 54), and becomes desire: "*Kami ingin punya mulut. Kami ingin punya suara*" (hal. 56). The story distributes testimony through a plural, episodic voice that keeps gender cues intermittent. This chorus returns to persistent fear.

These excerpts reveal how "voice enacts equality" through a repeatable narrational pattern. First, the grammatical dominance of "*kami*" installs a collective narrator whose authority is plural and internally negotiated, matching Bekhta's (2017) account of we-narration as an independent form. Second, the text alternates choral sentences with short, character-centered inserts (Sasha's days, Georgette's gestures), so voices remain adjacent rather than absorbed into a single protagonist; this adjacency is a version of polyphony (Fludernik, 2022). Third, focalization slides between "*kami*," an individual child, and the laundromat's agency, while the day-counting sequence is scrambled, keeping experience fragmentary and shareable. Agency is voiced in collective verbs: "*kami menyukai*", "*kami berharap*", "*kami ingin*", and even silence is communal: "*Mungkin ketika kami terdiam...*" (hal. 56). This is reinforced when the chorus contrasts inside safety with: "*Di luar adalah pusaran badai*" (hal. 70). Finally, gender markers appear episodically (*rok, celana dalam*), but the "*kami*" frame makes gender less central than shared vulnerability, challenging the accountability regime through which gender is made readable (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Kering chooses this polyphonic "*kami*" because collective speech can bear what individual speech cannot. In contexts of gendered harm, a solitary child voice is easily

disciplined, doubted, or shamed; a chorus converts vulnerability into mutual witnessing, while still preserving differences through turn-taking and episodic focalization (Bekhta, 2017; Fludernik, 2022). The strategy also destabilizes gender legibility: by foregrounding “we” as the primary identity, the text refuses the demand that subjects be quickly categorized and held accountable as “proper” boys or girls (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This refusal is carnivalesque in the cultural-critical sense that carnival authorizes unofficial, anti-hierarchical speech communities (Lachmann et al., 1988). When the chorus asks whether it has a voice outside the laundromat (hal. 54), it implies that voice itself is spatially and socially granted. Thus, the narrative form becomes the argument: equality appears not as a moral claim, but as a practiced redistribution of speaking rights among children. Polyphony here works as survival technology for narrating violence without adult mastery.

Gender Erasure: Body Reveals The Politics

In Ziggy’s (2023) *Kering*, gendered harm is registered through voicelessness and bodily anomaly, most pointedly in Sui. The narrative gives Sui an anti-heteronormative origin: “*Sui lahir dari kegelapan dan kepada kegelapan; dari tubuh lelaki ke lelaki berikutnya*” (hal. 65). Sui is also the first to inhabit the laundromat: “*Yang pertama menghadiri ruang cuci adalah Sui*” (hal. 51), and returns on Wednesdays, peeling potatoes “*dalam diam*” while smoking (hal. 52). The body refuses realist scale: “*Di bulan Agustus, Sui berukuran sebesar kacang polong... perlu dua belas bulan Agustus untuk kembali membesar*” (hal. 53). Death is narrated with the same flat precision: “*Hari itu, Sui mati*” (hal. 55), before the body is displayed: “*Sui mati terpancang di dinding ruang cuci dengan ratusan duri di tubuhnya*” (hal. 55). Elsewhere, perception becomes visceral: “*Matanya ada di dalam perut sekarang... hanya kegelapan dan gerakan organ dalam*” (hal. 46). The story makes the body a public archive of what cannot safely be spoken, so that gendered violence appears as structure rather than scandal.

The grotesque is less an ornament than the story’s way of tracking who is allowed to be heard, its own audibility: “*...apakah kami punya suara di luar ruang cuci*” (hal. 54), then turns desire into anatomy: “*Kami ingin punya mulut. Kami ingin punya suara*” (hal. 56). Silence becomes collective strategy: “*ketika kami terdiam, kami berharap ruang cuci ini yang akan menggantikan teriakan kami*” (hal. 56). Sui’s Wednesday routine of peeling potatoes “*dalam diam*” (hal. 52) and the abrupt, sensory close-up of an eye-in-the-belly scene (hal.

46) minimize narrative distance, forcing readers to inhabit sensation rather than moral explanation. At the same time, gender cues appear only as unstable traces; Sui's origin "...dari tubuh lelaki ke lelaki berikutnya." (hal. 65) and shifting size (hal. 53) make recognizability unreliable. The effect is a shared corporeal register in which bodies, not labels, carry the weight of violence and survival.

This keeps the scene ethically, firmly child-centered. Interpreted through Bakhtin's grotesque realism, these images perform degradation: they lower what is "proper" into the material body so that authority can be symbolically uncrowned (Lachmann et al., 1988; Leite, 2023; Roderick, 1995). Mouthlessness figures the social withdrawal of speaking rights, while Sui's shifting size and spiked death expose how some lives are rendered disposable under regimes of normalization. This refusal also targets the accountability logic of "doing gender," where recognizability is demanded and deviation becomes punishable (Doan, 2010; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This resistance matters in contexts where child sexual abuse is constrained by stigma, silence, and unequal power, making disclosure both risky and frequently impossible (Wismayanti et al., 2019). Rather than offering catharsis through confession, *Kering* (2023) makes the grotesque body a political instrument: it renders structural violence readable while protecting children from being reduced to a single, legible category of victim. In that sense, gender erasure functions as critique, not neutrality.

The laundromat's "second world" shows what equality might look like when it is practiced rather than promised. The refrain "*Kami menyukai hari-hari di ruang cuci. Kami masuk dalam keadaan kotor dan keluar dengan tangan-tangan yang bersih*" (hal. 30) recasts washing as a shared rite that levels shame, status, and respectability. Its protection is declared with almost impossible certainty: "*Tak ada yang mati di sini*" (hal. 30), and reinforced through micro-acts of care: "*Ketika Georgette yang lembut hati menemukannya, dia mendorong kursi untuk jadi tempat rajut Zabka*" (hal. 37), and later "*Georgette membilas pakaiannya dengan air mata*" (hal. 40). The room holds trauma without forcing confession; dysfunctionally, it is a refuge that must be repeatedly remade. Public-space scholarship notes that commons are reversible (Mitchell, 1995), yet such moments make spatial justice thinkable (Dikeç, 2001). Set against: "*Di luar adalah pusaran badai*" (hal. 70), its calm feels earned, but strictly local. The washing rite: "*Kami keluar dari sini, kami putih*" (hal. 30), signals renewal.

This spatial equality is necessary because the “official” places of childhood are saturated with gendered discipline. Homes and schools train obedience and respectability, and they can punish disclosure as shameful or disloyalty. Feminist geography shows that everyday sites regulate who belongs and which bodies must remain legible to be safe (Doan, 2010; Parikh, 2024). When harm is interpersonal and domestic, children rarely control the terms of narration; silence becomes a rational strategy (Piotrowski & Letourneau, 2020; Salomão et al., 2021). Research on child sexual abuse in Indonesia highlights underreporting shaped by stigma, family hierarchy, and fear of retaliation (Wismayanti et al., 2019). Large-scale violence surveys likewise stress that reporting depends on trust in institutions and perceived protection (Rumble et al., 2018). In this context, a semi-public laundromat functions as a low-stakes threshold: accessible enough to gather, marginal enough to evade surveillance. Its very ordinariness helps suspend patriarchal scripts, even as that suspension remains temporary and contingent. Such refuges emerge where public space is contested, and safety is negotiated through routines, not rights (Mitchell, 1995).

The plural narrator extends the laundromat’s equality into language by redistributing speaking rights among children. Choral lines: “*Kami menyukai hari-hari di ruang cuci*” (hal. 30), anchor a collective subject, yet the text repeatedly yields the floor to singular stories: “*Kami melihatnya di hari pertama. Sasha adalah tumpukan pakaian...*” (hal. 32), followed by disordered day-markers (“*Di hari kedua...*”, “*Di hari keempat...*”, hal. 32) that prevent any one biography from becoming definitive. Voice becomes an explicit stake: “*...apakah kami punya suara di luar ruang cuci*” (hal. 54) and “*Kami ingin punya mulut. Kami ingin punya suara*” (hal. 56). Functionally, this “we” produces a polyphonic commons, aligning with accounts of collective narration as an ethical form of shared witnessing (Fludernik, 2022). Dysfunction appears too: the chorus can blur internal differences, making vulnerability sound uniform, even when injuries are not. Because “we” foregrounds membership over gender labels, it softens the demand for instant classification for now; in carnivalesque counter-speech, hierarchy is mocked by choral inclusion (Lachmann et al., 1988).

Collective narration becomes necessary where listening is structurally unreliable. In contexts of gendered harm, children’s accounts are often treated as contamination of family honor or as evidence of their own “misbehavior,” so silence is rewarded and speech is sanctioned. Studies of child sexual abuse in Indonesia emphasize how stigma, dependence

on caregivers, and fear of consequences inhibit disclosure (Wismayanti et al., 2019). Survey-based research similarly shows that reporting hinges on perceptions of safety and institutional credibility (Rumble et al., 2018). The story translates these constraints into form: rather than presenting a single confessional “I,” it assembles a “we” that can absorb shock and redistribute risk across a group. This is consistent with narratological arguments that collective voice can protect vulnerable speakers by turning testimony into shared memory rather than isolated claim (Fludernik, 2022). The price of that protection is opacity: the chorus withholds details, signaling that not everything can be said. The chorus mirrors how communities whisper when institutions refuse hearing.

The story’s most unsettling critique arrives when gender becomes unreadable and the body takes over as evidence. Sui’s origin: “*Sui lahir dari kegelapan... dari tubuh lelaki ke lelaki berikutnya...*” (hal. 65), refuses heteronormative lineage, while bodily scale collapses realism: “*Sui berukuran sebesar kacang polong... perlu dua belas bulan Agustus untuk kembali membesar*” (hal. 53). Violence is then staged as spectacle: “*Sui mati terpancang di dinding... dengan ratusan duri di tubuhnya.*” (hal. 55). Another scene pushes intimacy further: “*Matanya ada di dalam perut sekarang... hanya kegelapan dan gerakan organ dalam.*” (hal. 46), compressing distance so readers inhabit vulnerability rather than judge it. The grotesque realism exposes structural violence by lowering abstract morality into wounds and fluids, an uncrowning gesture associated with carnivalesque critique (Lachmann et al., 1988). Dysfunction remains: extreme imagery can risk aestheticizing harm if read as mere shock. By thinning stable gender markers, the text confronts the accountability regime through which gender is enforced in everyday spaces (Doan, 2010; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Gender is not simply an identity category but an ongoing accomplishment policed through surveillance and correction; when recognizability fails, discipline follows (Jeanes, 2007; Magnet & Orr, 2022; McInnes, 2016). Because public and domestic spaces encode these expectations, deviation becomes risky in precisely the places children are told to feel safe (Berasategi Sancho et al., 2024). In settings where sexual harm is heavily stigmatized, speech is constrained by fear and family hierarchy, and disclosure can trigger further punishment (Wismayanti et al., 2019). The grotesque therefore operates as an indirect language: it displaces what cannot be said into images of missing mouths, shifting sizes, and pierced bodies, forcing attention without naming perpetrators. Carnavalesque counter-



culture relies on such lowering moves to unseat official seriousness and expose hypocrisy (Bakhtin, 2002; Khurosan, 2021; Lachmann et al., 1988). Seen this way, gender erasure is deliberate: it refuses the demand that victims be legible before they are protected, and it makes structure, not scandal, the object of critique, and keeps children's dignity intact.

CONCLUSION

Kering imagines equality as something a place can briefly enable. The room functions as a fragile commons where ordinary routines (washing, waiting, sharing tools) dampen the moral policing that often shadows girls' bodies in everyday sites (Doan, 2010; Mitchell, 1995). Lesson two is vocal: a first-person plural chorus turns survival into shared witnessing, allowing many small stories to circulate without demanding a single confessional hero (Fludernik, 2022). Lesson three is corporeal: grotesque motifs and voicelessness translate what cannot be safely reported into sensations that readers must confront, lowering "high" moral talk into wounds, fluids, and missing parts in a carnivalesque uncrowning (Lachmann et al., 1988). Taken together, the story suggests that protection is not only legal or institutional; it is also infrastructural and narrative, made through temporary refuges, collective speech, and bodies that refuse to be neatly categorized. It shows why children seek 'second worlds' when adult spaces are linked to suspicion, shame, and disbelief.

The study's contribution is to braid three literatures rarely read together in Indonesian fiction: spatial justice, collective narration, and the politics of the grotesque. Methodologically, it operationalizes the laundromat as a liminal chronotope and treats access, lingering, and care as analyzable cues, echoing the view that justice is spatially produced through everyday arrangements (Dikeç, 2001; Mitchell, 1995). It also repositions the "we" not as a stylistic novelty but as an ethical technology that redistributes agency and risk among children (Fludernik, 2022). Finally, it links gender erasure to accountability regimes, how gender must be "done" and monitored, showing why unreadability can work as critique rather than neutrality (Doan, 2010; West & Zimmerman, 1987). These moves matter beyond literary studies: the SDG 5 agenda, Indonesia's IKG indicator, and the 2025 KPAI year-end report all underline that violence against girls remains pressing. By staging critique in form, the article complements epidemiological evidence on underreported child sexual abuse (Wismayanti et al., 2019). It clarifies solidarity's formation without adult



sanction.

Several limits should guide how far these claims travel. First, the reading is built on one short story, so patterns of communal refuge, choral narration, and grotesque unreadability cannot be assumed to represent all recent Indonesian writing about children. Comparative work across Ziggy's other texts and across contemporaries would test whether laundromat-like "second worlds" recur or whether they are idiosyncratic to this narrative experiment today. Second, close reading cannot substitute for reception evidence: how child readers, parents, teachers, or activists interpret the "we," the erasure of gender cues, or the shock of bodily imagery remains unknown. Third, linking literary form to social indicators (KPAI reports, IKG trends, SDG 5 targets) risks oversimplification unless paired with fieldwork or policy analysis. Future studies could combine textual coding with interviews, classroom-based reading sessions, or corpus methods to map how collective voices circulate in Indonesian short fiction. Such extensions would deepen the dialogue between narrative ethics and the social science of violence prevention (Wismayanti et al., 2019).

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