

Conference Paper

Symbolic Violence in *Mata Di Tanah Melus* By Okky Madasari

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Abstract

This article explores the symbolic violence experienced by children in their everyday lives as represented in an Indonesian contemporary children novel, *Mata di Tanah Melus* (2018) by Okky Madasari. Unlike physical violence where its effect can be clearly recognized, the nature of symbolic violence—though equally harmful—is very subtle, so the victims may not recognize the violence. The research aims to identify how symbolic violence from adult to children is represented—especially in daily life—and how a protagonist deals and then negotiates with it. This article applies Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and Maria Nikolajeva's theory of adult's aetonormativity. Several studies on adults' symbolic violence against children in Indonesia have been carried out in folklores and dystopian novels. This article examines a contemporary children's novel written by Okky Madasari. The novel is one of few Indonesian children's novel that contains the issue of symbolic violence against children within modern and traditional worlds. The result of this research indicates that there are many forms of symbolic violence from adult to children, one of which is the domination of adults who are not aware that children also have their own opinions and needs. Such domination silences children and makes them lose their voices. Nevertheless, the research revealed that despite adult's domination, the children characters in the novel found their agency and empowerment to negotiate the situation after encountering an otherworldly realm and going on their own adventures without the presence of their parents.

Keywords: aetonormativity, children's agency, Indonesian children literature, symbolic violence.

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1. Introduction

Childhood is a past that adults have gone through. With the biological fact about children being younger than adults, there is a tendency to understand children as people who have not earned sufficient amount of knowledge or experience compared to adults. Children are also perceived as fragile or vulnerable beings. This view causes adults to feel the responsible for giving guidance and teaching children but not vice versa. Consequently, children are obliged to comply with orders or instructions made by adults,

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and this situation creates a hierarchal position where adults are positioned as beings that have more control over knowledge compared to children.

In Shier's view (2010:3-4), the unequal position between adults and children causes the tendency for the world of children's literature to be written from the perspective of and based on the interests of adults. To Shier, such hierarchal relationship is also a socially acceptable form of discrimination against kids. Children tend to not understand this relationship as a form of discrimination since children are constructed to respect and obey their parents. In Bourdieu's concept, this can be understood as an invisible (symbolic) violence from a dominant party, and such violence is approved by the dominated as the relationship is based on a mutual consensus (Haryatmoko, 2016:57-59).

Violence can be defined as an action that is embedded with elements of domination and power to coerce a dominated party without their approval. Symbolic violence is a type of violence that is most difficult to resolve as it operates through discourses, and it targets a non-physical aspects of an individual, such as ways of seeing, feeling, thinking, and acting. This type of violence is defined as *symbolic* as it does not produce visible effects of physical violence (such as bruises, trauma, fear, or anxiety). While physical violence is visible, people are often unaware of symbolic violence due to its invisible nature [M1]. The form of violence grows even more subtle when it hides in plain sight with the society's approval [M2]. It is common for victims of symbolic violence to feel neither dominated nor manipulated. Symbolic violence persists because of the approval and the ignorance of the dominated group (Haryatmoko, 2010: 128-129).

Through questioning existing structure of power, several contemporary children's literature attempt to eradicate the very hierarchy which supports the existence of symbolic violence. An example of such children's literature would be *Mata di Tanah Melus* (MdTM), a work by Okky Madasari. Recognized as a prolific, young Indonesian author and literary critic who actively deliver criticisms to social issues and injustice in her (adult) writings (General information about the book and its author can be obtained from numerous media articles. An article written by Zainal (2018:1) describes Okky Madasari as an author who actively voices out social issues), Okky Madasari made her debut in the genre of children's literature through the publication of *Mata di Tanah Melus*, the first book in the series of Mata's adventure. Mata is the nickname of a 12-year-old girl named Matara who explores the outermost regions of Indonesia. The book was first published in January 2018, and it is continued by *Mata di Pulau Gapi* (published November 2018) and *Mata dan Manusia Laut* (published May 2019).

Based on preliminary reading on *Mata di Tanah Melus*, it is found that the text gives critical perspective about how domination and symbolic violence against children persist and are legitimized by the society. The construction of domination and the worldview that entails it (and is legitimized by the society) are challenged and questioned. The text also shows how the child character negotiates violence and domination that she experiences. Referring to Bourdieu (in Haryatmoko, 2016:35), the investigation on the mechanism of domination can be a liberating instrument for those who are dominated. By examining how domination and violence work in children's literature, this study aims to give more understanding on instruments which have the potentials of opening of the possibility for a text to convey ideas that are more liberating for children.

2. Literature Review

In her thesis, Sari (2019) applied psychology of literature to investigate the personalities and values of hard work in the characters of the novel *Mata di Tanah Melus* and how these aspects pertain to literary pedagogy in high schools. The study has proven that the positive depiction of Mata's character has a relevance to children's character education through literary discussions in high schools classes. Similarly, a study by Sari, Suwandi, and Wardani (2018) applies psychoanalytic literary criticism in exploring id, ego, and superego of the protagonist. In the research, it is identified the dynamic of Freud's trinitarian aspect of personality works in *Mata* and results in the child's strong and positive characters.

Morellato (2016) applied Bourdieu's concepts to investigate aspects of symbolic violence in Japanese children's picture books with stories originated from folklores. The high amount of symbolic violence found in her study contradicts the standardization of folklores from all over the world where violence is omitted in children's reading. On the contrary, symbolic violence is a recurring theme in Japanese folktale texts since folktales used to be created for adult consumption, and violence was used as an element which made stories more attractive. Meanwhile, after gathering sociological data from children's novels, Singer (2011, 118) found that there are children's literature which contain critical perspectives that problematize practices of injustice. Another research by Islafatun (2017) examined types and methods of symbolic violence as practiced in a dystopian world in *The Giver*, a young adult novel by Lois Lowry. Islafatun found that symbolic violence persists through language or discourses that are commonly accepted by a society whose lack of questions emerge from the element of conformity.

Resistance starts to emerge when a child earns a gift in the form of knowledge that other members of the society do not have.

Prior research on *Mata di Tanah Melus* uses pedagogical approach and psychoanalysis, this study focuses its investigation on symbolic violence against children as represented in a contemporary Indonesian children's literature. While symbolic violence against children is commonly found in Indonesia, most research by social science scholars usually explore how the condition is manifested in the society (One of example is the research on online media violence against women and children in some headlines of news media by Purwandari in Luhulima (2007: 19) via Marsudi and Gassing (2018)), but not in literature. Such lack of research leaves a research gap that can be filled by the arguments in this article. As children's literature is a media which serves to transmit dominant values to children, it is essential to discuss how symbolic violence still persists in literary texts for children.

According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is not merely a form of violence that operates symbolically, but also a practice of violence which operates on the victim's approval for the same violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2002:167). Through this definition, Bourdieu discovers that social and cultural domination that persists in the society is considered as something normal. This practice of domination can remain in operation as there is a practice of discipline imposed by one party to another so that the dominated party does not object such positioning. The epitome of this would be the patriarchy's practices of domination over women.

This concept of domination is used by Nikolajeva in understanding the relationship between adults and children. With more amount time spent living, Adults' higher amount of experience is often used to support the assumption that adults have the authority over knowledge and truth. This perspective underlies adults' feeling of dominance as they are entitled to bringing order to children's lives. In the context of children's literature, Nikolajeva dubs such condition as aetonnormativity. The term comes from the Latin word "aetas" (which means "age") and "normative" (which means "rules/norms"). In other words, Aetonnormativity is age-based foundation of norms where adults' experience is treated as the virtue while children's experiences are marginalized and considered as the "Other". According to Nikolajeva, adults' version of normativity has been imposed to children's literature since its birth (Beauvais, 2012:3). This perspective allows children's literature to be understood as a representation of adult-children relationship that is dominated by adults' perspective. Therefore, such relationship will make objective representation of children impossible to happen as the texts have been contaminated by

adults' numerous assumptions about children, and these assumptions are constructed by political and philosophical beliefs that a writer holds.

In symbolic violence against children, there is an unbalanced power relation. Some strategies to alter or put this relation to a balance may involve the use of particular genres (fantasy, adventure, dystopia), the use of narrative tools such as voice, children-centered focalization, and the attempt to position children as subjects (Nikolajeva, 2009: 13). By using Bakhtin's theory of carnivalism, Nikolajeva (2009:17) expands the theory to show the possibility of children's empowerment and subversivity in children's literature. Nevertheless, as Bakhtin's idea of carnivalism, the resistance is limited within a particular place and time.

The fantasy or the unreal world in children's literature are commonly used as a carnival space for the children. In the real world, the children characters are experiencing repressions or portrayed as helpless children. In the fantasy world, they are given the space to become the opposite characters. This carnival space is created by the adult writers to entertain the child readers. At the end of the story, the child characters are returned to the real world in which they are under the control of the adults. Good children's literature, in Nikolajeva's view, offers the child readers a room to question the adult's norms. The fantasy worlds are the room provided for the child readers to question and negotiate for a more balanced child-adult power relations.

3. Research Method

This research used textual analysis method to make literary interpretation. The research corpus is an Indonesian children's novel titled *Mata di Tanah Melus* written by Okky Madasari, the first edition that was published in 2018. The research is divided into two phases. The first phase was to identify and classify symbolic violence in the text by implementing Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and Maria Nikolajeva's theory of aetnormativity. The second phase analyzed the text's perspective and position toward symbolic violence in adult-child relations.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Symbolic violence in the children's novel *Mata di Tanah Melus*

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence is often applied in examining the domination of men over women through socially acceptable discourses. The dominated's lack of

knowledge leads to approval for the actions of the dominating. With such approval, symbolic violence will continue (Haryatmoko, 2016: 57-59).

In studying the relationship between children and adults, it is found that similar patterns of symbolic violence and domination are very likely to occur. In the novel *Mata di Tanah Melus*, how the relationship between adults and children may engender symbolic violence can be identified in the following aspects:

4.1.1. The marginalization of the world of fantasy as children's world

The text *Mata di Tanah Melus* shows the dichotomy between the world of children and that of adults through the conflict between the realm of fantasy (as the representation of children's world) and the real world (representing adults' world). In the children's world, children take control over situations and are depicted as victors. On the other hand, in the world of adults, adult characters are depicted as the group which dominates children characters. The text began with the depiction of children's defeat in the realm of adult's world. Below is the first paragraph of the novel's first chapter:

Every child always believes that not a single story is ever unreal – until they grow up and have no more time to read stories or even listen to them. Then, to cover the feeling of loss, these grown-up children will pretend to hate stories. They will say that not a single thing from stories can be believed. All of them are mere fiction and fantasy. (Madasari, 2018: 7)

Through *Mata*, the protagonist and the narrator, the text creates children's voice and perception to adults. Children's judgment for adults has been stated from the very beginning of the story.

Although the writer uses a child's perspective, the message is actually the voice of an adult who criticizes adults' attitude toward children. In her judgment, *Mata* states that adults in fact do not differ from children as they both believe that all stories are real. The only difference lies in adults' reluctance to admit this fact. They "pretend to hate stories" because "they don't have time to read one". Adults' hatred for stories is proclaimed by refusing to believe that stories are real and look at them as fantasies instead. Indirectly, the narrator shows adults' attitude which positions themselves as the party which possesses the true knowledge while children are positioned as a group of people who do not have sufficient knowledge to tell the difference between fantasy and reality. Such positioning places children as the unreliable group. In this case, *Mata* also unconsciously reveals the symbolic violence that children have to face. When

children are deemed unreliable, their views and judgments are also considered equally unreliable and therefore, can be dismissed. Such positioning justifies adults' negligence of children's views and opinions.

Mata's comment on adults' marginalizing treatment for children who believe in fantasy is reinforced by her story about adults' attitude to Granny Mar (Mata's grandmother), who was once missing for 40 days because she was taken to the world of sun-eating giants. When she was found, little Mar told people about what she went through, but the adults (Mar's parents, other adults, and even her own daughter, who later became Mata's mother) who listened to her stories did not believe in her. All of them think that Granny Mar had her head in the clouds and made up the story. No one believes in her but Mata, her granddaughter. While the adults cannot believe in Granny Mar's explanation about her disappearance, they also find themselves unable to come up with a reasonable explanation about the incident

The text displays its affiliation to a child (Mata) since in the story development, Mata's Mother (who represents modern adults who do not believe in fantasy stories such as the one told by Granny Mar) eventually has to face numerous supernatural occurrences which transcend her reason.

4.1.2. Children characters are understood as having no independent opinion/choice

Although there are three different settings and three different characters (Mata, Tania, and Atok) in the novel, there is a common thread in the relationship between parents and children. The children characters represent three different groups of people. Coming from Jakarta, Mata represents urban society. On the other hand, Tania is a child from Belu, a transitioning society which has started adopting urban lifestyle (particularly commercialism and environmental exploitation) while still believing in supernatural elements as a part of reality. Meanwhile, Atok from the land of Melus (*Tanah Melus*) represents a traditional society who reserves themselves from outer worlds and is considered extinct by people of Belu. The land of Melus is guarded by supernatural powers, so no person can enter, and those who come inside will never get out.

In the three different settings, the three child characters are similar in their acceptance of rules and decisions made by their parents although they may not be pleasant or understandable. As a representation of the land of Melus, Atok shows obedience to the tradition of the people of Melus without feeling the necessity to question it. The adults' rule is absolute and indisputable. Any deviance from the rule is deemed as blasphemy

to the guardian deity, and it can lead to the demise of his people. On the other hand, as the representation of the transitional society, Tania is depicted to have more interest in urban life that she knows from the television. She is also depicted as a good kid who is obedient to her parents and always complies with any requests from adults.

Different from Atok and Tania, Mata is the representation of a child that is raised in a modern, urban setting. Mata constantly shows critical attitude toward the behaviors, rules, and decisions made by adults around her, including her mother. Even so, her critical perspectives are rarely expressed to adults. Readers may discover her critical attitude only from her comments as the narrator. When Mata encounters an adult, she tends to be silent and keeps her opinion to herself since most adults around her hardly give her any chance to express her views. An example of this would be Mama's response to Mata's story about her experience at school.

When I was on the first grade, Mama looked for my Religion teacher because I told her that in hell, people have their backs ironed. Mom's eyes goggled when I told her that. Then she asked where I heard it from. When I told her that the Religion teacher told me that, Mom said, "It's a lie. Tomorrow I'll talk with your teacher." (Madasari, 2018: 15–16)

Mama's rejection of the concept of torture in hell emphasizes Mama's position as an adult who puts forward rationality, so she cannot accept things that are beyond reason. In her view, the religion teacher's story is similar to any other fantasy stories since it cannot be proven. When the religion teacher believes this as the truth, she rejects it. At the same time, the story of torture in hell can be understood also as a form of adults' symbolic violence against children since it is the teachers' attempt to intimidate the students with the expectation that the students may have good character. Such intimidation is approved by the school, and this is what Mama refuses to accept. However, although Mama attempts to protect her child from a form of symbolic violence, the way Mama responds to the information is also another form of symbolic violence. By judging the story, labelling the story as "a lie", and deciding to have a conversation with Mata's teacher on the following day, Mama gives neither an opportunity nor space for Mata to express her opinion. Such authoritative action places Mata in a position where she is protected while her capability of thinking is negated. Mama also did not consider how her decision affect Mata.

Nobody knows what Mama told my religion teacher. The teacher also did not say anything to me. But since then, in the class, the teacher has always treated me as if I don't exist. (Madasari, 2018: 15)

The difference of perspective between parents and teachers is depicted as something that sacrifices children who do not understand anything about the dispute. In spite of this, as a victim, Mata not only accepts but also justifies Mama's decision by attempting to find the silver lining of Mama's doing.

I wasn't really bothered. I don't really like the lesson either. Secretly, I'm actually glad because the teacher never tells me to answer his questions or stand in front of the class to recite long verses that we have to memorize. (Madasari, 2018: 15 – 16)

In a single circumstance, Mata simultaneously experiences three forms of symbolic violence. The first one is her teacher's intimidation through stories about torture in hell. The second form is Mama's one-sided action which led to a change of attitude in Mata's religious teacher. The third one is the religion teacher's act of ostracizing Mata because he holds grudge against Mata's mother. The character of Mama does not know the consequence of her actions to Mata because Mata has been silent and provided justifications. As a result, Mama repeatedly does the same action. Throughout the storyline, Mama never asks about Mata's view. Almost all of Mama's utterances are statements, and only four of them are questions. Among the four questions, there is only one where Mama asks about Mata's opinion, and this is found at the end of the story after Mama's attitude changes.

The three child characters – Mata, Tania, and Atok – are also positioned as a group who is blamed and scolded when they experience unfortunate things. In the story, the adults never ask about the children's opinion or reason for doing actions that their parents did not expect. When Mata lost her consciousness out of exhaustion after walking for a long distance with Tania, both Mata's and Tania's mother blame their children.

"You passed out a few moments ago. What if Tania hadn't gone to the market to tell me about it? Why did you go play so far away from me without telling?"
Mama couldn't stop talking. She didn't give me a moment to breathe away my nightmares. I haven't even regained full consciousness. Now Mama's petty quibbling even makes my headache even worse (Madasari, 2018: 50)

Without considering Mata, who was feeble and sick at the time, Mama directly scolded Mata without asking Mata's condition or enquiring about the reason that Mata passed out. Mama does not even realize that Mata played by herself because of her own instruction as she wished to remain uninterrupted when talking with the people of Belu

in the attempt of gathering data for her writing. In addition to this, children are also considered to have no capability of defending themselves without the presence of an adult. Unexpected occurrences are understood as a child's fault for not asking for an adult's approval or permission. Tania also experienced a similar situation.

I looked away from Mama. I just realize that I'm in my hotel room. There's Tania and her mother here. Tania is standing by the door, and her eyes are red and swollen as if she just cried. She looks frightened. Tania must have just been scolded by her mother, just like Mama scolded me. Tania's mother is standing by my bed. She also looks tired and afraid. She must be worried about being blamed because her kid took me away that I passed out like this. (Madasari, 2018: 50)

After Tania was scolded, it is also known that her mother deals with her own fear by scolding Tania. An adult who is under pressure often seeks a way to cope up by targeting another person who is more vulnerable, and in this case, the person is a child. Here, children are not depicted to resist, refute, or give explanations. They remain silent. Mata even blames her own self as seen in the following quotation:

Ah, now I feel bad. It's all my fault. I was cocky about wanting to walk so far that I forced Tania to take me to her home. (Madasari, 2018: 50)

Mata does not even realize Mama told her to go play with Tania and even gave her pocket money so that Mata would not interrupt her work. There is an element of parent's negligence which causes children to experience misfortune. Unfortunately, the blame is put on children, and even the child character blames her own self.

Similar situation also happens in the land of Melus. Atok's mother directly scolded Atok for leaving the land and defying against the tribe's rule.

Atok's mother hugs her son while keep on venting. She must be angry at Atok, who left without a permission and went missing for days. Atok stays silent while putting on a jesterly smile. He also hugs her mother back. (Madasari, 2018: 179 – 180)

Although the mothers are depicted to scold their children, a different from of dynamic occurs between Atok and his mother. Atok's mother is portrayed to be scolding while embracing her child, so the scolding is understood as a sign of worry about her son, who left without asking for permission. Atok also responds with hugging and "jesterly smile", showing no signs of being intimidated. Therefore, there is no element of blaming

here. Not only Atok's mother, the people of Melus even understand Atok's transgression and forgive him. This could happen because of the presence of a character named Ema Nain, who is believed to have the capability of reading the minds of every person of the Melus Tribe. In this case, adult's understanding about children's actions will minimize the possibility for symbolic violence to occur.

4.2. How the text *Mata di Tanah Melus* views adults' symbolic violence against children

4.2.1. The land of Melus as a carnivalistic attempt of negotiation

The novel *Mata di Tanah Melus* has positioned the child protagonist as the narrator and focalizer of children's thought-world. A child character is supposed to take the role of a subject who negotiates the domination of adults and the symbolic violence that affects children. The world of fantasy or "the unreal" that was initially depicted as a marginalized realm in the beginning of the novel finally becomes the children's space of negotiation.

When Mama and Mata visited Belu region, they were suddenly lost into an other-worldly realm, which is the land of Melus. The Melus tribe is an ancient group of people who are considered as the first inhabitants of Belu. They are known as "Emafatuk Oan Ema Ai Oan" (people who live with stones and woods). The tribe is known to be extinct as they are marginalized by migrants who have lived in Belu since their first arrived (belukab.go.id). Initially, Mata entered the land of Melus alone. She left her mother who was asleep at the time as she was swayed by the wonder of Fulan Fehan. Mata was then captured by the people of Melus, who thought that Mata is a spy sent by the Bunag tribe, the enemy of Melus people. The territory of Melus tribe is said to be a mystical realm, and the people of Melus live here since they do not wish to be seen by the outside world. The realm cannot be seen or entered by people outside of the Melus tribe. Such protection is a way of the Melus tribe to survive and live peacefully without interference from external parties.

In the land of Melus, Mata is separated from the adult character, Mama, who has been dominating her. In these moments of separation, Mata found a peer whom she could not find in the real world, and had dangerous and exciting adventures which empower her. When Mata accidentally entered the territory of the Melus people, she was not allowed to go out so that she would never jeopardize the existence of the people of Melus. Although Mata was treated nicely and allowed to play with the children of Melus, Mata

was sad and troubled because she could not meet Mama. This garnered the sympathy of a child from the Melus Tribe named Atok. Atok was then willing to go against his people's rule so that he could help Mata go back to her home and meet her mother.

According to Webb (2007), the fantasy world can function as a good and safe territory for children to go on an adventure and explore roles that cannot be taken in their real, daily lives. Naturally, children have a wild dynamic of emotions. They are full of curiosity for everything. They can be irrational, but they always have the spirit of adventure. However, at the same time, their young age and lack of experience may endanger them as they explore everything through actions. In the world of children's literature, fantasy worlds or otherworldly realms frequently function as either a terrain of negotiation or a space which gives resolution for problems that the child character faces in the real world.

The experience of going on an adventure with Atok empowers Mata in ways that being with her mother could not do. She met the Lonely Queen of the Butterflies who wanted to keep her and Atok as her companion which forced Mata and Atok to jump into a deep ravine to escape from the Queen. They met the crocodile man who appeared frightful but turned out to be kindhearted. They encountered the cruel crocodile hunters and the evil Bunaq tribe. While exploring with Atok, Mata had the courage and initiative to protect friends and family. She also showed empathy and appreciation to others.

The adventure and friendship made Mata develop different perception about Melus Land from Mama and the other adult characters, such as the scientists. For Mata, Melus Tribe is the tribe and family of her best and valued friend, Atok. She doesn't want anything bad happen to Atok and his tribe. Quite the opposite, the adults perceive Melus as an object. The scientists view Melus Land as their research object, while Mama perceives Melus Land as the object of her writing.

"We are following these uncles, Mata," said Mama. "We are going to find the traces of Melus people. We are looking for their treasures, we are going to have an incredible experience. This can be a valuable materials for my new book!"

I stared hard at Mama. After all I have gone through, what Mama had just said sound terrifying. I turned to Atok who looked very tense and frightened. (Madasari, 2018: 167)

In the real world, Mata has never showed any resistance toward her mother. She always finds justifications for her mother's domineering acts. Here, in the never-never land, Mata's resistance and subversive acts appear. She refused her mother's idea to

exploit and objectify the Melus people who have adopted her as part of their family. Friendship has become the reason for Mata to negotiate the ongoing symbolic violence inflicted on her by her mother.

At one point, in Melus Land, things are reversed. The adult (Mama) is depicted as being in a weak condition, frightened, and helpless. Meanwhile, Mata and Atok had the initiative and capability to save people while understanding well the risk that they have to face. There is a part where Mata and Atok run at the front, leading the rescue of adults who run behind them (p. 184). This is the part that shows the carnivalistic element of the novel. The other world or the fantasy world is used as a place in which the children's characters are being empowered that they develop the courage to negotiate and to subvert the adults norms and decisions which they used to accept and approved in the real world. As a carnivalistic element, the resistance and subversion are localized and not permanent. The children returned to their real world and their daily routine under the domination of the adults. Nevertheless, the story offers a change in Mama's behavior. Mama started to consider Mata as a person by asking for her opinion (p. 187), the first time in Mata's history. Children's world and the child character is returned to the real world in which they are dominated, however, there has been a winning negotiation as reflected in Mama's changing behavior to the better.

4.2.2. The legitimation of adults in children's world

Differing from little Mar's experience in an otherworldly realm that is not acceptable to the world of adults, Mata's experience ends in a more positive impact. As stated before, Mama shows a change of attitude as she appreciates Mata more than she did. When the experiences of little Mar and those of Mata are compared, there is a difference. Little Mar went through the experience all by herself while Mata experienced it all with Mama. Although Mama did not experience everything that Mata witnessed, she still took part in Mata's journey. With Mama's presence, Mata does not have to be alone when she wishes to tell her experience in the real world. This is completely different from what Granny Mar has to experience. This indicates that essentially, children's world is unbelievable for adults unless the adults experience it by themselves. In other words, the legitimation from adults is required to validate children's world.

4.2.3. A children's world that is isolated from the knowledge of adults

Readers who follow the story from the perspective of Mata would understand the reasons and motives behind the child characters' actions of defying adults' expectations. Through the use of a child character as the narrator of children's world, most adults are positioned as a group of people who do not know anything about the children's world, and such lack of knowledge leads to different forms of symbolic violence against children. There are also extraordinary characters such as Ema Nain, who could read the minds of the children. Through Ema Nain's role, adults' symbolic violence against children can be negated.

5. Conclusion

In general, the novel *Mata di Tanah Melus* shows an attempt to side itself with children through the positioning of a child's character as the narrator, the celebration of fantasy/unreal world, and the empowerment of a child's potentials. However, the element of symbolic violence against children or children's world still exists and is sometimes unintentionally strengthened. There is an ironic ambiguity in the text's attempt to give a space for children's position or voice, and this can be found in events such as when Mama objected to the teaching of Mata's religion teacher. In Mama's view, the religion teacher's story about punishment in hell is a form of repression and violence against children. However, Mama's unwise act of protest is also another form of repression.

In an otherworldly realm, child characters are indeed given dominant positions and depicted as people who are capable of saving adults who are in danger. However, the existence of such otherworldly realm requires affirmation of adults. While this could be an effort of protecting children from strange and mysterious things, it also shows adult legitimacy over children's world. In other words, a strange world is only believable when adults are involved, or the realm has been validated by adults.

Referring to Bakhtin's theory of carnivalism, Nikolajeva (2009: 17) perceives such circumstances as a temporary power transfer from adults to children before the power is restored to adults' normativity. It appears that the child characters are given power and achieve their goals and expectation, but the condition is but transient. Although it is safe to say that the attempt of negotiation through an otherworldly realm has been successfully done, the child characters are required to go back to the real world where their positions will be dominated as it was once before. Despite this, the text has shown

that through understanding the way children think, adults may improve their attitude to children.

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