

Conference Paper

Social Justice in the Fiction Series of 'Mata' Okky Madasari for Girl's Education

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Abstract

How is the life of the East Indonesia 'world' seen by a small Javanese women with her cosmopolitan glasses? Okky Madasari, the winner of the Equator Literary Award 2012, created a series of fantasy stories about the adventures of Mata, her mother and her imaginary friends as they explore areas far from the bustle of Jakarta. This article examines the first three novels in the series: *Mata di Tanah Melus* (which represents the culture of East Nusa Tenggara); *Mata dan Rahasia Pulau Gapi* (set in Ternate, North Maluku); and *Mata dan Manusia Laut* (which tells the story of Mata's adventures in Bajo, Southeast Sulawesi). The exotic world seen through Mata's eyes draws upon the post-colonial discourses which continue to influence Indonesian girls in the modern, global world of capitalism. This is contrasted with the narration of the Mother and miraculous friends of Mata in seeing 'the other world and others' in the eastern tip of Indonesia. This study uses a sociological approach to literature to uncover the issues of inequality and social justice that occur in post-colonial eastern Indonesia. Okky and his Mata series show that embodying Indonesianness is the task of a maturing imagination which develops upon ideals of the nation's children. The series encourages little girls like Mata to open their eyes to see the history, reality and direction of their country and nation.

Keywords: girl's education, social justice, children's stories

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Published: 29 July 2020

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the WCGS Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

"By reading children's literary works, actually we are also reading the future of our nation," writes Riris K. Toha-Sarumpaet [1, p. viii] to underline the importance of the study of children's literature. Literature reading of children in the present is a reflection of the development of a generation in the future. The study of children's reading materials over a certain period of time can provide an explanation of the dynamics of social and cultural life of the community in that period and the next because children's reading absorbs and shapes the spirit of their respective times. More specifically, as one of the children's readings, children's literature can be a means for children to recognize and understand themselves and their environment, "I consider us to be more human because of literary

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works: know ourselves, others, the environment, and various problems of life” [1, p. 1]. However, this requires a deep involvement between the reader and the literary work. In the case of children’s literature, an adult acts as a guide to children’s understanding of literary works read by children other than the author. However, along with the development of the world of publishing and the media, children themselves also play a role as children’s literary writers as seen in the “Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya” publishing line produced by Mizan. Therefore, it is necessary to redefine what Davis said about children’s literature which states “children’s literature is literature that is read by children ‘with the guidance and direction of adult members of a society, while the writing is also done by adults’” [1, p. 2].

In addition to the problem in defining children’s literature, the boundary in the classification of children’s literature has also experienced a shift, in line with the development of the creativity of its authors. The categorization of children’s literature in fantasy stories and realistic stories, for example, is increasingly blurred because they can become one entity by forming fantasy imaginations based on reality, surrealism. Thus, children’s literature is not only attractive to children’s readers, but also adults. One of the children’s stories that attract attention now is ‘Mata Trilogy’ by Okky Madasari. This trilogy presents the adventure story of a girl named Matara in the novels *Mata di Tanah Melus or Mata in the Land of Melus* (2018), *Mata dan Rahasia Pulau Gapi or Mata and Secrets of Gapi Island* (2018) and *Mata dan Manusia Laut or Mata and the Sea-Man* (2019).

The existence of Okky Madasari in the post-New Order Indonesian literary arena is identical to the themes of the struggle for freedom and social justice. By using genetic structuralism method and Pierre Bourdieu’s theory, Arsitowati [2] shows that in addition to her literary works, Okky Madasari fights for her existence and her vision of humanity and social justice through programs she initiated, such as the ASEAN Literary Festival (ALF) and Rumah Muara. More specifically, Arsitowati revealed the social arena homology, literary practices, and her work, namely the struggle of the Arimbi figure in her novel titled *86*. Arsitowati’s study shows Okky Madasari’s view that freedom, justice, and recognition are difficult to obtain in Indonesia because of social constructions and ruling hegemony.

One of the social criticisms put forward by Okky Madasari in her novel is aimed at the implementation of the education system in Indonesia. With the approach of literary sociology and content analysis, Andalusia et al. [3] showed that Okky’s serial Mata, namely *Mata di Tanah Melus* (2018), *Mata dan Rahasia Pulau Gapi* (2018), and *Mata dan Manusia Laut* (2019) express social criticism about formal education in Indonesia. The criticism is the perception that quality schools are expensive schools is not always true;

school privatization related to parents ambitions; dissatisfaction with formal education is overcome by homeschooling, and formal education curriculum is not relevant to the needs of the community.

In her three novels, Okky Madasari, who is the winner of the Equator Literary Award, expertly plays the elements of literary works to shape the imagination and convey the message of social justice. The world of "exotic" Eastern Indonesia comes with all its mysteries seen in the eyes of an author who came from the land of Java and now lives in the metropolis of Singapore. This novel is also interesting related to the main character and characterization of a girl, namely Matara, hence Mata is her nickname, who appears bravely adventuring with her imaginary friends. Her adventure presents a reflection of contextual social justice in Eastern Indonesia which is not only limited to the gap of access between Eastern Indonesia and other regions, but also about environmental and cultural preservation. As Amy E. Singer, a sociologist, argues that "novels can expose readers to information about social systems, about inequality, about gender stratification and racism" [4, p. 308]. Thus, the Mata trilogy provides a broader and contextual meaning about social justice in reading material for children which is an alternative educational medium. This alternative education media plays an important role in girls' education because education on social justice, especially for girls, develops awareness at the grassroots level to become empowered human beings in realizing sustainable development where "no one should be left behind". Therefore, through feminist literary criticism and in sociological nuance, this paper will see how the life of the "world" of Eastern Indonesia is seen from the eyes of small Javanese women with the cosmopolitan perspective of the Capital? Furthermore, this paper also examines what social justice issues are present in Mata's trilogy?

2. Methods

The plot of the story in a trilogy novel that is neither too thick nor too thin is not complicated. Moreover, the exposure of messages of moral values such as tolerance, multiculturalism, loving the environment that is framed in the world of eastern exoticism, wrapped in historical and socio-political knowledge that criticizes the other side of development and modernity, especially those that occur in eastern Indonesia, is very straightforward not too hidden [5], [6]. This is evident in all the early introductions to the story that brought Matara started from the world of reality to the world of fantasy. It can be said that these characters and their fictional atmosphere are not thrown from reality in the real world. It should be noted here that the author of this trilogy novel in the

process of writing traveled 'ethnographically' with the sensitivity as a social observer and literary activist. Not surprisingly, her novels can be said to be subversive novels which in Amy E. Singer's definition: "a subversive story for children will include not only strong role models at an individual level but also connections between social power and inequality [4, p. 311]." So, unlike Singer's study of American children's novels that need to be painstakingly "ask[ing] whether some of the narratives contained by children's novels might similarly allow the reader to understand how social systems work and how systems of inequality might be negotiated with or challenged" [4, p. 308], in the finding and discussion below the existing quotations have clearly spoken the social justice problems that occur but do not patronize.

As stated Ratna [7, pp. 19, 347], to return literary works to social structure, extrinsic analysis is carried out that is not separate from intrinsic research. As a literature review, an analysis of the object of research can be done directly, namely by reading literary works, in this case the novel series *Mata*, as a material object, while the formal object is the discourse of social justice. The novel series of *Mata* by Okky Madasari is sorted, entered into a data card system, with a certain label in accordance with the purpose of the study, which is to find out the social justice content in this novel series. This corpus of data is analyzed with the perspective of sociological literature to link literary works with aspects of the reality of existing community life.

3. Finding and Discussion

In the first novel series *Mata* entitled *Mata di Tanah Melus* [8], Okky Madasari tells the adventures of Matara, who is often called Mata, a daughter whose parents are writers. After the father lost his permanent job in a newspaper, the mother invited Mata to leave Jakarta and live in *Belu*, a land of "nowhere". Accidents that occur on the way from the airport to the hotel bring Mata on an adventurous "vacation" in an imaginative world. The car carrying Mata and her mother crashed into a cow to death. Consequently, Mata's mother has to hold a traditional ceremony because Mata continues to suffer from nightmares after the incident. The ceremonial leader conveyed the natural ruler's message that Mata's mother had to leave *Belu* immediately. But Mata's mother do not want to obey the message. On the way home, Mata is separated from her mother after she is taken away by the *Melus* people. At first, the *Melus* people suspected Mata as a dangerous person and threatened their existence. They thought Mata was a *Bunag*. "The *Bunag* people used various methods to destroy us. Even small children can be used with their magic and deception" [8, p. 82] When Mata rejects their accusations

and claims to be Jakartans, she is still considered dangerous, "Jakartans are far more dangerous than Bunag people!" [8, p. 82]. Their suspicion is not without reason because in the past, their group was attacked by people who wanted to seize their land and natural resources. "The Melus did not want to have problems with other peoples out there. We only protect what is ours since hundreds of years ago. Those who have entered here will not be able to get out of here."

During her stay with the Melus people, Mata became friends with Atok, Melus's son who tried to free Mata. Together with Antok, Mata finally realized the threats that lurked them, but not from Jakartans or outsiders. And these people are the Dili group, a close group of Bunag people, actively pursuing Belu people who are already considered extinct.

"They all want to destroy our village. Take all we have," [8, p. 9].

"Mount Lakaan for us is a heritage that must be guarded. For these people, all of this is only merchandise that must be dug up and then sold for money. For us, what is on Mount Lakaan is honor and strength. For these people, all for the sake of wealth." [8, p. 112].

Traumatic experiences as a result of attacks and deprivation of natural wealth are also told by the Queen of Butterfly who transformed into an eternal butterfly. "But then the people came. Fierce humans, like beast. They carried a variety of weapons that we had never seen. Noisy and deadly weapons. They also launch fireballs from a distance. They want to kill all the Melus people, then take all the treasures and heirlooms that are stored in the stomach of the Lakaan" [8, p. 137]. Not only the Bunag people who attacked them, but many parties. "Many kinds. Bunag people are just one. Everyone comes [from] various places far away, from across the sea, from other parts of the earth, only to pursue the riches of the Lakaan" [8, p. 138].

On Mata's journey back to his mother's arms, he encounters a "fierceness" that turns out to protect them. Together with Atok, Melus's son who helped her find a way home, Mata was stopped by a group of crocodiles led by Dewa Crocodile, Bei Nai. Bei Nai blessed their journey that did not have wicked intentions. However, a different purpose was shown by a group of crocodile hunters whose bodies were finally twisted and taken away by those crocodiles right after Atok and Mata gave a signal to Bei Nai to face threats from crocodile hunters.

After Atok finally succeeded in escorting Mata to rediscover her mother, the danger still threatens because Mata and her mother were again held hostage by the Melus people because they together with a group of scientists tried to enter the land of the

Melus people. Mata, her mother, and the scientists were finally released after Mata led them to flee. Even though they did not mean any harm, the Melus people still did not want their existence so they had to leave the land of Melus.

In *Mata dan Rahasia Pulau Gapi* [9] Mata traveled again when she and her family moved to Gapi Island, Ternate. On Gapi Island, Mata witnessed strange, mystical events, caused by supernatural powers. This power is sticking out because the universe feels threatened by the power of capitalism that wants to destroy the ancestral heritage of Gapi Island. Mata helps her "magical friends" to convey the message to the King so that the King cancels his decision to destroy the cultural heritage of the ancestors in the form of a fortress that witnesses the struggle of the people of Gapi who were targeted by the colonial invaders for their spices wealth. "New invaders" with the power of their capital want to destroy the fort and change it into a hotel. Finally, the local authority has the power to overcome the colonialism of capital.

This local power reappears in the third novel of the series Mata, *Mata and Manusia Laut* [10]. The existence of local characteristics sticks out through the figure of Bambulo, a little boy diver from Wakatobi, who does not like to learn formally in school, he prefers learning directly to nature, because he is the *Sama* people. He felt he could only live at sea, not on land. This underlines that the development program should be implemented in accordance with the characteristics of the community because the meaning of progress is not the same between one place and another. Efforts to change the community in the name of improving people's welfare often actually "kill" the community, especially related to environmental sustainability.

The imaginative adventures of Matara and Bambulo to the middle of the sea and the bottom of the sea show how human greed poses a threat to the preservation of life at sea. Many local people are also involved in the destruction of their own natural environment because of their ignorance and indifference so that they are used by people from outside. This is evident from the story of the crew members who were caught for carrying explosives to catch fish. They only felt that they were crew members, not merchants nor fishing vessels whose purpose was to make profits. However, in reality they are involved in illegal fishing circles that are very damaging to nature. They also felt that their efforts were legitimate because they got the "blessing" of the security forces they had bribed. However, thanks to layered security it finally stops the gluttony cycle. This is where the role of law enforcement can be seen in preserving nature, especially when people lose their awareness and conscience, because of the glare of lucrative coffers.

The story of Matara's adventure in the Mata trilogy is an alternative education about social justice for girls, in particular. Social justice here includes post-colonial discourse which awakens the power of local communities to rise up against the new, neo-colonial model of capitalism that widens social inequalities, threatens the preservation of history, culture, and the environment. As stated by Katrin Bandel, "When judged from our perspective now, [neo] colonialism is the annexation of land where others live, as well as the oppression and exploitation of its inhabitants [11, p. 5]."

Thus, as an educational medium, this child's story provides a broad picture of the meaning of gender equality which also includes social justice in various aspects of life, especially education, social, cultural, and environment. In terms of education, this novel trilogy no longer only elevates the importance of education for children, especially girls, but also their right to get an enlightening education. Criticism of the education system arises through the story of Matara's mother who expelled Matara from her school because she felt that religious education and the examination system at school were actually suppressing her child.

Then Matara felt she got a lot of inspiration from her new religion teacher who used a local wisdom approach. On the other hand, the determination of Matara's mother in determining the educational model that feels best for her child shows that in the hands of the mother the education of the child, especially the daughter, is determined. Of course, that does not mean showing a father's indifference. Therefore, the tradition of childcare should be the basis for strengthening gender awareness in the Nusantara. Aside from being an amplifier, it is also necessary to conduct a critical review of parenting values that have prevailed in society. Paternalistic values of obedience in commonly Eastern Indonesian society, for example, need to be reconstructed because they leave women helpless when they get violent.

Feminist discourse that highlights "ibuisme/motherism" needs to be reviewed more wisely to elevate local wisdom. The history of the struggle of Nusantara women shows how local wisdom became a power source. *Perempuan Perempuan Menggugat - Literasi Rupa Sejarah Perempuan Indonesia*, written by Esthi Susanti Hudiono and Seruni Bodjawati [12], records the story of Mama Aleta Baun's Struggle using traditional values to save the environment from the threat of mining in East Nusa Tenggara [12, p. 147]. Likewise with Mama Yosepha Alomang who dared to oppose the transnational forces that destroyed the traditional land of the Amungme tribe which was believed to be a sacred mountain that also illustrated the plurality of the women's movement, especially outside Java [12, pp. 141-144]. Thus, this Mata trilogy can overcome the "simalakama fruit" of feminist discourse, such as that called Katrin Bandel, which is

suings the injustices around without being trapped in a colonial discourse that shows the Eastern world as a world that is lagging behind, patriarchal, and needs "to be saved" [11, p. 3].

4. Conclusion

The trilogy of the novel *Mata Okky Madasari* marks the struggle of gender in a broad sense. Gender struggle is not solely a "women's struggle", but includes social justice in the form of cultural, social and environmental preservation which also involves all men and women. By raising the main female character, Mata, who is brave and caring, this novel in particular can become an alternative learning medium for girls. On the other hand, Eastern Indonesia, which is the imaginative setting of this novel, also promotes the plurality values of the women's movement.

The analysis approach of the researcher as a reader as carried out in this study eliminates the cognitive aspects of the official readers, i.e. the children. Theoretical approach of reception to see the genuineness response of children in understanding real life that is full of prejudice, injustice, the issue of the importance of environmental sustainability in which humans live and the various inequalities that are present in the 'adult' world around him as instructed by Okky Madasari, the author, seems necessary to be revealed to see the extent of the message arrived and understood by the children. It would be even more interesting if we could also find out the distribution of trilogy book turnover in the market, with age range and gender of the readers, to get an idea of the impact factors of these novels.

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