

Symbolic Violence among Young Urban People Represented in the Short Stories “Wabah”

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Abstract. The paper aims at discussing the discourse of symbolic violence that happened among young urban people represented in the short story entitled “Benih Jahat itu Tumbuh, Bagaimana Saya Harus Memperlakukannya?” which is included in the collection of short stories “Wabah”. The story narrates the life of four young people living in a town in the Covid-19 pandemic situation. They shared the same house harmoniously though they come from different social-cultural background. However, when the pandemic hit the town, their life changed. Each of them had to make their own decision, and this situation leads to the tragic end, because of the symbolic violence happened to them. Focusing the issue of symbolic violence, this paper applies Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis and the Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence. The study reveals that symbolic violence might happen because of the different social power. Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence also emphasizes the use of language as the weapon in the violence. This kind of violence has destructive effect for the victim. In this story, the victim is Rahmad, who met his tragic end because of the violence. It is evident that symbolic violence may transform into physical violence.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Short Stories, Symbolic Violence, Urban Young People

1 Introduction

The two years of Covid-19 pandemic has affected people in many aspects of life, which affected people’s life in rural and urban areas [1]. Although the government and related institutions have been very busy in the centers of urban disruptive problems [2], the impact of pandemic unavoidably affected the individuals in their private life. This paper aims to discuss the pandemic effect on the lives of young people in urban areas, as represented in a short story entitled “Benih Jahat itu Tumbuh, Bagaimana Saya Harus Memperlakukannya?” (for the next discussion, it will be abbreviated as BJIT), which is written by Amanatia [3], compiled in the book “Wabah” (Pandemics) published in 2021 [4]. In the disruptive situation, they did symbolic violence and at the same time became the victims of the symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is important theme that will become the focus of this paper. For that reason, the research question of the present article is, how is the symbolic violence among young urban people in the pandemic context represented in the story of BJIT?

What is symbolic violence? And why is it important to discuss this? Symbolic violence is a non-physical violence that can be observed from the different power relation between social groups. We can find the manifestation of this kind of violence in an implementation of the

group norms. The implementation of norms involve greater social power on the subordinate group. In that way, symbolic violence might emerge across different social aspects like gender, sexual orientation, ethnic or nationality identities. Bourdieu [5] emphasized further that symbolic violence is generally not solely an action of hegemonic power, rather an (unconscious) reinforcement of the status quo, through the building of “norms” by those who are in the upper social stratification. Bourdieu also highlighted the importance of language in analyzing symbolic violence. He argued that symbolic violence is produced through language, and it is located in the signification of language itself. In that way, it can be concluded from Bourdieu’s concept that symbolic violence naturalizes the discourse about things and legitimates the domination system [6].

There have been some researches discussing symbolic violence as the lens to explore some issues as can be found out from the papers [7]. The symbolic violence in Indonesian television reveals that there is a dynamic relation between the social and cultural regimes and the construction of symbolic violence in the narration presented through electronic cinema in television. Television holds a powerful position in constructing the symbolic violence that is important in shaping the public ideas [8]. The other study on symbolic violence is done by Harris et.al., in which the focus of their study is the students loan. The student loans become symbolic violence when unequal agents unconsciously conspire in the oppression of the less empowered agent (students). Study on student loans as symbolic violence observed that the symbolic violence occurs and thus reinforces and legitimating existing stratifications. Thus, the student loan system is perceived as symbolic violence [9]. Differ from all of those studies, the current paper aims at exploring the symbolic violence to the young people in the pandemic context, as represented in the literature of pandemic, in the short story entitled “Benih Jahat itu Tumbuh, Bagaimana Saya Harus Memperlakukannya?” (BIJT) written by Amanatia [3].

2 Research Method

This study is a literary criticism applying the critical discourse analysis approach. The object of the study belongs to a pandemic literature of Indonesian context, that is a short story entitled “Benih Jahat itu Tumbuh, Bagaimana Saya Harus Memperlakukannya?” (Abbreviated into BJIT) which is included in the short stories book entitled “Wabah” (Pandemics) published in 2021 by FIB UGM in cooperation with the Kibul.In publisher. The BJIT, or “The Evil Seed Grown up, How Do I Have to Deal with It?” narrates the lives of four young men who live in a rented house in a city under the situation of pandemic. Many things happen among them, including the symbolic violence as the focus of this study. To explore this issue, the concept of symbolic violence is applied. This is a concept constructed by Bourdieu 1990 that strengthens the notion of symbolic violence as the ideas and values of the ruling cultural class who purposefully imposed them (often through subconscious means) onto a dominated social group.

To answer the question of symbolic violence, this study applies Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis which provides three levels of analysis [10][11]. The first level, micro-level of analysis, discusses language use: words, metaphor, and syntax. In microanalysis, the discussion covers the aspect of naming, label, and particular terms that is meaningful in the plot. Second, meso-level analysis, deals with the production and consumption of the text, considering that the text and people is mediated through the discourse practice, in which a text is produced and consumed. In this context, the discussion covers the ideas (historical, cultural) that the characters consume and produce. In the macro-level analysis, it covers the socio-political

context of the issue. It is supported by Bandura's notion of the power of language; people internalize the social realities through languages they use in the daily narrative, objectify and externalize it in their daily life [9][12].

3 Finding and Discussion

3.1 Friendship and Delusion

The story of BJIT takes the setting of place in a city which is under pandemic time and the main characters are four young men living in a rented house [13]. Three of them are university students and one of them has been graduated. The micro analysis in this stories generates some important points to be discussed. They are the characters and characterizations, and several symbolical items that have important roles in the narration. The meso analysis goes to some ideas that construct the narration in which it has interconnection with the other discourse, and the macro analysis discusses the social political context of the Covid-19 pandemics covered in the story.

The four characters in the story of BJIT take important roles in the narration and in the events of symbolic violence. Each of the young men have different social class and therefore, each of them faces different problems which are getting more complicated in the pandemic time. The four main characters are „I“ or David, Jodi, Rahmad, and Wahyudi. Jodi is an activist, a university student who enjoys a good happy life before the pandemic, because his father supported him financially. As an activist, Jodi construct the critical discourse whenever they have conversation. However Jodi also has a problem of not finishing his thesis yet, beside his liberal life. Because of the pandemic, his father lost his job, so that Jodi was summoned to return home, bringing the bundle of thesis draft to make his father happy.

Rahmad, a young man who tries to build a small business, faced a hard times when the pandemics rampant the city. His business was crumbled down affected by the pandemics, so that he decided to go home. The surprising fact is that he has been married to a widow in his home town. Having no job in the town, forced him to make decision to go home to his village, while thinking how to nurture his wife and children. Before going home, in the rented house, Rahmad took important roles as the one who managed to do many house chores, from cleaning the house, cooking, and anything he could do to cover up his inability to pay the cost of house rent. His decision to go home surprised David. Moreover, he was shocked finding that Rahmad is a married man. Wahyudi, the most pious man among them, is considered as the big brother. He is respected by all other member of the house. However, without David's awareness, Rahmad told any problems he had to Wahyudi, who in turn, gave advice to Rahmad for many important decisions: polygamy, avoiding usury in business, all of which led him into his decision to get married to a widow in his home town, and his failure in business. The "I" or David, in this story is a young man, from a wealthy family, whose father has a company, which was still in a very good position. "I" do not like to have many friends. Having three friends is enough. He likes privacy very much, however, it also implies that he did not know his friends in a comprehensive way. He did not know that Rahmad is poor and a married man, and has to go home because of nothing he can do in town. He is shocked with many realities about his friends that he did not predict. He feels that their friendship is illusive. He made a decision to take revenge to Wahyudi, the most pious man. He planned to steal the charity box in the

mosque, for Rahmad. However, this is the tragic impact for Rahmad, who came to the kampung and was killed by a mob who accused him as the thief of the “donation box”.

The group of four young men in the story of BJIT, named themselves as the Beatles gang of Ketintang Chapter. The name of the Beatles refers to the small circle of friendship, and The Beatles were a very popular English rock band formed in Liverpool in 1960. The group was comprised of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr (4 personnel), which are regarded as the most influential band of all time. The four young men in the story BJIT named themselves with this group because of their similarity as four close friends. David was very proud of their gang, because of the principle of “help each other and privacy”. Those principles enabled them to live together in harmony even when they had different characteristics, social backgrounds and problems each other. Privacy is the ability of an individual or group to seclude themselves or information about themselves and thereby express themselves selectively. David loves and proud of this principle very much at beginning because it bounds them since the first time they lived together in the house. He did not interfere his friends’ business, and vice versa. But then, as consequence, after the pandemic hit their life, he did not know many decisions that his friends had taken. He was shocked and the friendship sounded illusive for him. David was shocked when Jodi immediately wanted to go home, and David could not stop him. David also knows nothing about Rahmad who had married and he just realized at the end that Wahyudi had influenced Rahmad very much for many decisions in his life. Eventually, the other three young men returned to their home, and leaving David alone in the house.

David realized to the fact that he did not know many things about his friends, so that in his loneliness and delusion, he planned to take revenge to Wahyudi. He thought that Wahyudi had to be responsible for Rahmad’s condition. As the target of his revenge is the mosque because this is the most favourite place Wahyudi spent most of the time before pandemic. Inspired by the crimes in action films he had ever seen, he planned to steal the „donation box“ in the mosque near by. In doing the plan, he wore the Beatle red jacket and a Dali mask as if a robber in the western action film. He did his plan successfully and returned home happily waiting for the next news. The jacket with the symbol of Beatles printed in red, was printed by Rachmad. David loved this Jacket but he also felt delusive with it. He wore it when he did the crime, stealing the donation box in the mosque, of which he planned to give the money to Rachmad. After his action, on the way back home, David threw the jacket away at street. Unfortunately, the next day David got a call from Wahyudi, saying that their friend Rahmad was killed by the mass near their house. David was more than shocked, and he knew from the photo in the news that the one killed by people in the kampung was wearing the Beatles jacket. He found out that Rahmad at first intended to go back to their house and planned to take his motorcycle, and on the way, he found the jacket and wore it. In doing so, he was accused as the perpetrator of the donation box robbery. The mob attacked and killed him.

3.2 Symbolic violence under the pandemic discourse

The terms symbolic violence refers to a non-physical violence that often happens because of the inequality of power relation between social groups [14]. This kind of violence takes form in the action of imposition of the dominant groups’ norms on those of the subordinate group (Bourdieu, 1990). The case of symbolic violence can happen in many different social arena and social domains such as social class, gender, or ethnic identity [5]. In the case of four young men as the main characters in the story of BJIT we can find out the narration of conflict and tragedy happens in the larger social context of Covid-19 pandemics in a Javanese city (maybe associated

as Surabaya, because of the name Ketintang mentioned in the story). Sociologically, we can find out from this story, how people who are non-permanent dwellers in a city (such as Surabaya) got impacted by the pandemics. The non-permanent people living in the city are mostly university students who come from many other places or town, or rural areas. The Covid-19 pandemics give different impacts for each of the people as we can find out in the story of BIJT. Though they live in the same boarding house and build a solid friendship, each of them faces different problems that can not be completely understood by another friend. The same problem of Covid-19 pandemics is responded in different ways and give different impacts for each of them.

With the different social-economic background, each of the young men has different habits and encounter different problems with each other. With the different social-economic background, their relations and social positions are unequal. The inequality is explored in more detail as the plots developed in the story. Each of them consumes and produces different discourse in line with their own habitus, their social economic background of family and habits where they are from. For example, David has no problem at all in facing the pandemics and quarantine, because his father is rich and has company and fulfill David's need. He has enough money, more than enough to stay in quarantine even for the whole years of pandemics. He can just stay at home without any financial issues.

The same quarantine issue is responded differently by David's friends. Rahmad have to return to his home in the village, to earn a living for himself and his family (wife and children) that needs his support very much. David could not understand Rahmad decision at the beginning, because David did not know the financial problems that Rahmad had to fight in his life. David also did not agree when his friend, Jodi, wanted to go home. They made a quarrel because of his disagreement on Jodi's decision to go home, because his father was fired and lost his job, because of the pandemics. David also got mad when Wahyudi also left the house. The pandemics forced all of the friends to go home to their family, leaving the study and the city as soon as possible, for many reasons such as economics, family reasons. Jodi and other friends did not care anymore about the rules of the pandemics that prevent people to go to other cities or towns. They did not have other choice, but leaving the city and going back to their village and family. David who did not face the financial problems like his friends, was left alone in the house, that made him crazily lonely. David was alone in the house, and this made him thinking over his friends and the problems that happened to them. His lonely, his pity to Rahmad, feeling guilty because of his inability to help his friend, made him developed a crazy plan.

In the story of BIJT, with the characters of David and his friends, we can find out that the symbolic violence happened to Rahmad, the one who was the poorest among the young boys. Because of his business failure, Rahmad was lack of money, and in the pandemic situation, he made the rules in the house that he would take care of any household chores, such as cleaning, washing, cooking and other things. He said that all of this was for the sake of their health and safety in the pandemic time. Rahmad was unaware that he became the victim of symbolic violence, because unconsciously reinforced the status quo's "norms." In fact, David realized at the end, that rahmad did all that household chores because he had no money to feed himself. In the rented house, Rahmad tried hard to survive by doing anything, but he failed. The difference of social class, and capital has victimised Rahmad.

The other symbolic violence was done by David's father. He had a big company and had fired many of his employees with the reason of pandemic, although he still had much saving more than enough for his business. He said that he did not need to help Rahmad. „In business, up and down is common. Let him learn from his mistakes. Helping a young man in his business would not help him grow strong.“ The businessman did not understand that Rahmad's condition

is not the same as his condition. Rahmad had to struggle much only for feeding himself. David hated his father much, and he felt delusion of his father's unemphatic for the powerless. David's father has done symbolic violence to Rahmad so that nobody helped Rahmad in his miserable condition. That's why David wanted to help Rahmad in his own way, stealing donation boxes. David's plan is meant to be symbolic violence, revenge to Wahyudi. However, he did not expect the worst thing. His plant turned out to be a tragic end for Rahmad, who suffered a real violence to his death. David's father through his words that denied to help Rahmad is in line with Bourdieu's concept on the symbolic violence that located in the language. It is evident that his unwillingness to help Rahmad, brought about Rahmad's end his life.

4 Conclusion

Symbolic violence is a non-physical violence, that is caused by the unequal power relation in a social group. The inequality in a social relation accomodates the emergence of symbolic violence, that brings about harmful effect for the victim. The symbolic violence in fact leads to the physical violence, as evident in this story. In the story of BJIT, the symbolic violence happened through the narration of young people struggle to survive under the Covid-19 pandemic, in which government made new rules of "stay at home" and "no mudik," for examples. The new rules gave a big harmful impact for the people at large, the disadvantages effect that is not mitigated yet, for the people including the young men narrated in the stories (Rahmad, Jodi, and Wahyudi). In responding the government's rules in pandemics time that prohibit people to go back home to their village (mudik), Jodi, Rahmad and Wahyu did not care about that. Not because of they did not know the rules, but they have no other choice but going home. It is impossible for them to stay in the city, while their family (the father) lost the job, or face economic problems, that need their help. For Jodi, who was an activist who often staged demonstrations against the policy makers (the university or the government) immediately made a contrast decision. He left anything, and became practical, finishing his thesis writing.

As explained by Bourdieu, the symbolic violence is also done through the language. As language is the means of communication, it can build any message so that Bourdieu call that language is as as weapon [6]. The violence is unintentionally done by a pious person, like Wahyudi, whose advices and suggestions to his friend, Rahmad, made his struggle harder but not in a strategic way. Wahyudi gave suggestion through the prophet story of polygamy in which the Prophet married widows because of sacred reason. Rahmad did the suggestion and married to a widow, and this doubled his burden as a husband, a breadwinner, as well as his struggling business in pandemics time that leads to bankruptcy, all of which lead to his tragic end. David intended to help Rahmad, however, his plan went to another tragic end, that made Rahmad died. It is evident in this story that the perpetrators of the symbolic violence are those having power, both the economic, social and symbolic capitals. David's father's unemphatic attitude and respon, made him decide to keep continuing the evil deeds by planning a robbery to his own father. It can be seen that the symbolic violence is challenged by and transforms into physical violence.

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