CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of The Study

The degrading effects of human activity, especially in the last two to three centuries, leads to negative impacts, such as air, water, and land pollution, natural resource depletion, loss of habitat and biodiversity, soil erosion, desertification, and climate change (Zent & Zent, 2022). Given the severity of these impacts, a growing number of scientists, activists, and other actors advocate radical change in human attitudes and behaviors toward nature in order to alter the present course of ecological destruction (Díaz et al., 2019).

A number of monumental movements for nature and the environment were held with women as the dominating leaders who organised the activism of natural resources protection, mainly against capitalism and destruction. The activism and agendas which they conducted were dominated by non-violent demonstration, which focused on the preservation and nurturance of nature (Porselvi, 2016). For example, as early as 1931, Gabriela Mistral from Chile started to lead her fellow women to take up the fight both for conserving Latin America's natural resources and for keeping Latin American land in Latin American hands through her writings (Finzer, 2015). Forty six years later, the Green Belt Movement was held in Kenya, which was successful in creating a 'green belt' of around a thousand trees to avoid desertification of the village (Chivandire & Chirise, 2021). The

planting activity was initiated by Professor Wangari Maathai, a female activist of environment and politics in Kenya. In Indonesia, an environmental activist named 'Mama' Aleta Baun, was called as *Indonesian Avatar*, for her activism against the marble miner company in Nusa Tenggara Timur (Arivia, 2017). She organised demonstrations with other women in affected areas consistently for 17 years, which opposes mountain exploitation for mining (Scanlan, 2015).

The women who hugged trees, those who protect their villages from desertification, and others who fight for natural resources conservation are all rural people who live close to and grow up around nature, and firm believers in humanity's deep connection and interdependence with all other nonhuman life (Haynes, 2014). As stated by Porselvi (2016), local villagers are an important element in sustainable management of nature, such as forest areas. With their local wisdom and cultural values, they have lived as true conservationists (Bayau et al., 2019). This is affirmed by Zent & Zent (2022), who states that the value systems of Indigenous peoples and local communities are important, especially those who have successfully maintained rich and complex landscapes over long time periods. They represent potential alternatives for resource management more in tune with sustainable futures. According to their way of life, nature is no longer viewed as a meager commodity to be exploited. Instead, it is regarded as Mother Earth, a living being and the source of all life, sustenance, and knowledge (Madhanagopal et al., 2022). This notion of Mother Earth is shared by many indigenous people who live closely to nature, such as the rural folks in Africa, Latin America, and Asian countries. The term 'Mother' refers to motherhood as a powerful thing in

alignment with the reverence shown for life-giving (Norgaard, 1999). This term raises awareness that the earth has given many things to humans sincerely.

Inspired by the movements to protect the Mother Earth in her hometown and other developing countries, an Indian professor named Mary Vidya Porselvi initiated Mother Earth theory and its relation to literature, especially folktales, in a publication entitled *Nature, Culture and Gender: Re-reading The Folktale* in 2016, which receives recognitions from major modern ecofeminists, such as Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies (Swanson, 2015). Her work is especially moved by The Chipko Movement, one of the most impactful women's movements for the conservation of trees in India. As cited in Shiva (Wordsworth, 2016), it is about a woman named Amrita Devi who led a group of 300 people in a nonviolent protest to save the 'sacred khejri trees by clinging to them' 300 years ago in Rajasthan. The sacredness of the trees are conveyed in traditional folktales, which implies that Mother Earth is sacred and it is the duty of human beings to respect her, the provider of everything to all the living creatures. The tree-hugging movement has inspired people like Porselvi to explore the significance of environmental values in folktales all over the world. She believes that there is recognition of Earth as the giver of all life, the Mother, and that traditional folktales contain life affirming values that cares for Mother Earth. Her theory focuses on sustainable living that gets fortified by life-affirming values of rural people who live close to nature in folktales.

In the perspective of Ecofeminism, Porselvi's Mother Earth Discourse is closely related to the Ethic of Care which is rooted in an earth-based view, firstly

initiated by Nel Noddings. As Swanson (2015) states, the Ecofeminist Ethic of Care binds us to Mother Earth, as it highlights the importance of the mutual caring between humans and nature. In the literature, this theory focuses on environmental values and the preservation of nature which is represented through interactions between nature and humans, both men and women (Norlock, 2011). Noddings, according to Tong and Williams (2018), broadened the definition of Ecofeminist Ethic of Caring to be inclusive of both women and men. With Noddings' invitation for inclusion of both genders, and extending the invitation to all, consideration now turns to her Ethic of Care and the link to Ecofeminist Theory or Ecological Feminism. She used the notion of caring to propose an extensive ethic of care to Mother Earth (Tong & Botts, 2018).

The values that nurture Mother Earth can be found in traditional folktales told to the children of specific communities, specifically in rural areas whose residents live dependently on natural resources. The existence of traditional folktales as literary works serves not only as entertainment but also as an educational medium for the children. This is consistent with the perspective of Haratius, a Greek philosopher who believed that literary works in any form are fundamentally enjoyable and beneficial (Teeuw, 2016). The past generation taught life lessons to the youth through folktales. According to Propp (Gervás, 2013), folktales, like other arts, derive from reality or real life problems, as literature and reality are always in a dialectical connection. Literary works, in addition to being born from reality, serve as a model and reference for the community in comprehending and creating reality. This includes the fact that through folktales,

the readers, especially children, are also implicitly taught about environmental values from generation to generation. It is shown by the preservation of tales that include the nurturance of Mother Earth in them.

These concerns can be seen in the 5 selected stories of *The Tiny Boy and Other Tales* picturebook written by Murti Bunanta, which are set in the villages in several Indonesia regions. The book, which is targeted at children aged 9-12 years old, was chosen to be in The USBBY Outstanding International Books (OIB) List 2014, and the royalties of the book are donated to the development of children literature related programs in Indonesia (Bunanta, 2013). The author of the book, Dr. Murti Bunanta, is the founder and president of a non-profit organisation that pioneers the development of children's reading in Indonesia through various activities namely *Kelompok Pencinta Bacaan Anak* (The Society for The Advancement of Children's Literature) which was established in 1986. She wrote *The Tiny Boy and Other Tales* partly because of the environmental values in the stories which are still "particularly relevant today" (Bunanta, 2013). Hence the reason for how the selected stories have rural folks as the main characters who live close to Mother Earth. However, the 3 (three) other stories *(Princess Mandalika, The Legend of The Banyan Tree, and Princess Kemang)* are not included in the research, since they are set in the kingdom environment whose main characters do not live dependently on nature, and is revolved around kingdom environments.

The first story, *Hua Lo Puu,* is about a mother whose baby turned into a little bird after being abandoned on a tree when he cried and was comforted by the

local birds around the farm in the forest. She was helping her husband's work in the farm by clearing grass and bush after laying the baby in a swing on one of the tree branches. This story is based on a folktale book researched and published by the Department of Education and Culture in 1982, titled *Folktales from Maluku Province*. It includes stories told by the elders according to the local beliefs.

Masarasenani and The Sun is a tale about a farmer who negotiated with nature, when a poor farmer from Papua (Windesi) named Masarasenani caught the sun so that it would shine long enough for his people to reap sago, the staple food for Papua people. It also delivers the legend about the origin of Gatal leaves, a kind of medical leaves which grows in Papua forests. The source of this folktale is informants from local Windesi people in 1983, collected through verbal storytelling by a research team from *Kemdikbud* (Department of Education and Culture).

The Tiny Boy is about a boy the size of a thumb who was a son of a poor farmer who lives on the edge of a forest. Along with his brothers, he was left in the forest by his father who cannot afford to support their lives anymore. In the forest, they came across Nenekpakande, a giant who inhabited the forest and fed on humans and animals. There is the myth of Nenekpakande, a mythical creature that feeds on children among the traditional people in South Sulawesi, although the background is not specifically mentioned in the source.

Ampak and The Cunning Civet Cat is a tale from South Kalimantan, especially among the Banjar tribe. It tells a tale about Ampak, a farmer who loved his *limau* tree very much. He looked after it every night, and one night he found

out a civet stole his *limau* oranges. Upon being caught, the civet promised to help him to be a king if he let it go and gave it 3 (three) of his *limau* oranges. The story is resourced from similar publishers as the others (*Kemdikbud*) from informants in South Kalimantan but was published in 1984. There is no information about the background of the story. However, both civet and citrus are the prominent characteristics of South Kalimantan.

Senggutru, tells a story about a young woman with a size of a thumb who was swallowed by a giant but managed to escape and killed it with a knife that she used to sliver the palm leaf ribs. Her size started to get bigger and become normal like other girls her age as she escaped out of the giant's stomach. This story was told from the author's memory of the tales she heard during her childhood, but the complete version of Senggutru is sourced from G.A.J. Hazeu's retelling published in 1911 (Bunanta, 2013).

Based on this background, this study explores the symbols of Mother Earth in the 5 (five) selected Indonesian folktales for children using Porselvi's theory of Mother Earth. As stated by Porselvi (2016), the identification of Mother Earth symbols is significant in analysing the Ecofeminism values in folktales, not only from India, but also from around the world, including Indonesia, due to the universality of the 'green' or environmental values in tales about women and men who live close to nature in traditional folktales.

Previous studies have covered the 'Mother Earth' and Ecofeminism topic in literary work. However, none of them explored the theory in picturebooks as children's literature despite the raising representations of Mother Earth in

mainstream media for children, such as in *Epic* movie (20th Century Fox), which is inspired by W. Joyce's children's book, *The Leaf Men and the Brave Good Bugs* (Gilday & Giardina, 2014). The previous research covering Ecofeminism were mainly conducted on fiction novels, such as Theresa Burris' study on a novel titled *Strange As This Weather Has Been*. According to Burriss (2018), the contemporary Appalachian author Ann Pancake demonstrates in her writing "ecofeminist sensibilities." She makes this claim on the basis of Pancake's attention to the practical knowledge and spiritual orientation of her characters that demonstrate a deep connection with their rural surroundings. These characters demonstrate that over generations some Appalachian families have become inhibitory people, exhibiting the cultural and economic practices that are associated with indigeneity. Burriss takes readers into the heart of an ongoing environmental controversy in the middle of coal country: mountaintop removal. Zeroing in on a single family and the contradictions within it between short-term economic benefits and long-term environmental destruction, Pancake shows the damage being done to two interrelated environments: the natural and the cultural.

Other research concerning the theory is the one conducted by Peter I-Min-Huang (2018), "Cyborg-goddesses, Linda Hogan's Indios, and Jade Chen's Mazu's Body-guards" which reads Native American and Taiwan texts through a combinatory theoretical orientation. He comparatively analyses Linda Hogan's long narrative poem, *Indios*, as a rewriting of the western classical *Medea* story, which he defines as ecofeminist because it synthesizes the relationship of genocide and ecocide. Jade Chen's *Mazu's Body-guards* also calls up an ancient

myth, that of the Chinese goddess Mazu, who has become an indigenous spirit for the Taiwanese. Through this rewriting, Chen, like Hogan, critiques the relationship of colonialism, neocolonialism, patriarchy, and environmental destruction. In both myths, women are rendered as demons when they respond to patriarchal and colonizing abuse.

In studying Mother Earth symbols based on Porselvi's Mother Earth theory and Ecofeminist Ethic of Care represented in the book, the textual and visual narratives in the book are analysed using the theory of narratology and semiotics of art respectively. However, before looking closer to the visual and written texts, the space and place of the tales are being examined to bridge the internal space and external reality of the stories (Hunt, 2015). Then, the written texts are analysed by using Todorov's Narratology. Meanwhile, the visual texts are analysed by examining the 3 (three) metafunctions of Michael O'Toole's visual semiotics of painting (2020), including the Modal, Representational, and Compositional functions. The theory is commonly applied to displayed painting analysis, and there was no previous research on the picturebook using this theory, but since the illustration of the corpus is in the form of paintings, the researcher applies the concept to this study. The analysis results then are utilised to link the lines between the visual and written texts analysis results which relate to Mother Earth symbols and its relation to humans which represents Ecofeminist Ethic of Care before drawing the conclusion.

1.2. Research Question

According to the background of the study described, the research question is as follow:

1. How does the intertwining of space and place in the 5 stories *(Hua Lo Puu, Masarasenani and The Sun, The Tiny Boy, Ampak and The Cunning Civet Cat, and Senggutru)* represent the Mother Earth symbols?
2. How do the written texts represent the Mother Earth symbols in the 5 folktales *(Hua Lo Puu, Masarasenani and The Sun, The Tiny Boy, Ampak and The Cunning Civet Cat, and Senggutru)*?
3. How do the visual texts represent the Mother Earth symbols in the 5 folktales according to Porselvi's Mother Earth Motifs *(Hua Lo Puu, Masarasenani and The Sun, The Tiny Boy, Ampak and The Cunning Civet Cat, and Senggutru)*?
4. How much scope is the visual representation in line with the written texts and vice versa in the 5 folktales *(Hua Lo Puu, Masarasenani and The Sun, The Tiny Boy, Ampak and The Cunning Civet Cat, and Senggutru)*?
5. How do the relationship between Mother Earth symbols and human characters represent Ecofeminist ethic of Care in the 5 folktales *(Hua Lo Puu, Masarasenani and The Sun, The Tiny Boy, Ampak and The Cunning Civet Cat, and Senggutru)*

1.3. Objective

To firstly examine space and place in the 5 (five) stories of *The Tiny Boy and Other Tales*, consisting of 5 folktales *(Hua Lo Puu, Masarasenani and The Sun, The Tiny Boy, Ampak and The Cunning Civet Cat, and Senggutru)* by Dr. Murti Bunanta. Then, to examine the visual and written texts that represent the Mother Earth symbols before aligning the link between the representations of visual and written texts in the stories related to the Mother Earth symbols. Lastly, to analyse the Ecofeminist Ethic of Care represented by the nature which symbolises Mother Earth and its relation to the human characters.

1.4. Scope of The Study

The scope of this research is limited to 5 (five) Indonesian folktales retold by Murti Bunanta and 10 (ten) of the illustrations accompanying them by Hardiyono, entitled *Hua Lo Puu, Masarasenani and The Sun, The Tiny Boy, Ampak and The Cunning Civet Cat, and Senggutru*. The focus of these stories refers to the Mother Earth symbols in the 5 stories and the Ecofeminist Ethic of Caring represented by the symbols through Dr. Murti Bunanta's narration. Compared to the rest of the stories which include main characters living in the kingdom, the assorted ones are characterised by rural folks and their proximity to nature, thus aligning with the concept of Mother Earth.

1.5. Significance of The Study

Theoretically, the study conducted is expected to contribute in providing a rich understanding of the ecofeminism theory as the branch of ecocriticism, to enhance readers' knowledge of the issue of the mother earth discourse in children literature, especially in Indonesian folktales for children, and to serve a fuller insight of the ecofeminism in the characters of the stories. Meanwhile, practically this study is expected to contribute in increasing the number of research on ecofeminism, especially in children literature, and to serve as a reference for future researchers that are interested in studying the theory in literature.

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