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Tante Lala's Comedy: Representation of Symbolic Annihilation on Women in Media

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ABSTRACT

Tante Lala's comedy is a video depicting a mother who had difficulties while accompanying her child to study during Covid-19 pandemic. The video shows the character of a mother who is impatient, angry, and even fails to educate her child. Unfortunately, the video actually went viral on social media and was even made viral by an infotainment program on TV and some media. This paper aims to reveal how symbolic annihilation on women practiced and reproduced, and how the media presents stereotypes of women as a spectacle. This paper will also explore how female viewers perceive Tante Lala's video content. The research uses a cultural studies approach and critical discourse analysis as the method. The result shows that symbolic annihilation in Tante Lala's Video was represented by various texts, visual images, and also text flow. Within the duration of 10:6 minutes, it is found various texts connotation of woman character which contributes to the symbolic annihilation of women. Visually, the camera focuses on the face depicting a fierce and bitchy character. Second, symbolic annihilation is represented in the form of media affirmation of the video through news and infotainment. In addition to the form of affirmation, the media also explicitly uses language that discriminates against women's characters. Informants assessed that the content of Tante Lala's video and media reports and infotainment broadcasts related to the video gave a wrong depiction of women. According to the informants, the media is also considered to have contributed to stereotyping women based on emotion rather than rationality figure.

Keywords

representation; symbolic annihilation; tante lala; media; covid-19 pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

A video that depicts a mother struggling to educate her child has been widely discussed in the media. The woman was known as Tante Lala. In the 10:6 minute video, Tante Lala looks annoyed while teaching her son, Rafa, who repeatedly mispronounced the first principle of Pancasila, "Belief in One God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*)". In the video, the public is presented

with an image that shows the character of a mother who is impatient, angry, and even fails to educate her child. The language used also looks very rude to small children. The video uploaded by the owner of a Facebook account named Stella Ztart Makarena has been viewed 3.6 million times and shared 52 thousand times (Priatmojo, 2020).

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Figure 1, Tante [aunt] Lala who is viral because she was annoyed while teaching her son (source: SuryaTV, 2020).

Tante Lala's video is just one of many videos that describe the bad character of a mother in teaching children in this era of the covid-19 pandemic. Ironically, the depiction of women who tend to be negative has become a separate entertainment for netizens. The depiction of a woman who has the heart to beat her child in the context of online learning has also flooded the cyberspace in the digital era. Kompas.com reported that a mother beat her child with a wooden block because she did not participate in online learning. The video completes the depiction of a woman who seems far from motherly character (Syamsuddin, 2020).

The production and distribution of online learning videos are rife in the current pandemic era. It is undeniable that the Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to changes in human life, both economically and socially. The most obvious thing is the change in the education system, which was previously done face-to-face, now teaching and learning activities must be carried out online. Children also have to learn from home. This condition requires parents to be actively involved in the child's learning process. Speaking of parents, the logic concerns two human figures, father and mother. In reality, the education of children in the family is an issue that always intersects with women.

In this era of online learning, women are called back to become mother figures, as educators in the family. The concept of *ibuism*, which was echoed in the New Order government era through various ideologies, has now been revived in the era of the pandemic. Suryakusuma (2011, p. 17) explained that the

role of women in the New Order era was officially legitimized by the government at that time through *Panca Dharma Wanita*. This role is closely related to women in the domestic sector, which includes duties as husband's companion, printer of the nation's next-generation, educators and mentors of children, household organizers, and useful members of the community. Even though the New Order Government is no longer in control of the current government, *Panca Dharma Wanita* is still an inseparable part of the various roles that women play, especially in the current pandemic era.

Although women carry out various very important roles, the image of women is often not as beautiful as the role they play, especially the image in the media realm. Referring to the video of Tante Lala and the Kompas.com news above, the image of women is actually depicted as an angry and cruel figure. Cixous (in Woodward, 1999, p. 37) explains that men and women are always depicted in binary opposition. Women are associated with the heart and emotions, while men are associated with the head and rationality. It is not surprising that women and men are imaged differently in the media world. Men are often imaged as someone who has integrity and good reasoning skills. Friedan (1963) says that men are represented better qualitatively and quantitatively in media texts.

The circulation of videos in cyberspace depicting mothers teaching their children in an annoyed and angry manner has actually become an entertaining comedy show. In an interview with a TV station, Tante Lala admitted that many netizens commented that the video was funny. This has an impact on the increase in the number of followers of Tante Lala's Instagram account which reaches 200 thousand followers (Harcis, 2020). Tante Lala's character that invites laughter, seems to reflect the character of women in general. To ensure this, we need to look carefully at how a medium works.

Stuart Hall in a lecture video entitled *Representation and the Media* (Jhally, 2005, p. 3) believes that various messages communicated by the media are complex and closely related to power relations and certain ideological interests. Referring to this opinion, we cannot be taken for granted in interpreting the representations produced and distributed by the media. Jackson and Jones (2009) view media representation as a false image of women as well as stereotypes that undermine women's self-perceptions. In line with this, Pollock (in Jackson, S. and Jones, 2009, p. 366) explains that the image of women comes from other places, namely the wishes of media producers or social structures.

Stuart Hall (in Jhally, 2005, p.14) also explains that language plays an important role in constructing and producing meaning. In the practice of representation, language is not only in the form of speech and writing. Representation also involves language in other forms, such as sound, visual images, facial expressions, gestures, emoji, and also fashion. In the context of representation, Hall (1997, p. 10-11) uses a constructive approach to see the role of language. According to Stuart Hall, language is not solely the property of the speaker but is a common property according to the prevailing social agreement. A speaker will remain subject to mutually agreed language rules.

The depiction of women in the media has attracted the attention of many parties through the various researches they have conducted. Sarkar Sumita (2014, p. 52) in his research entitled *Media and Women Image: A Feminist Discourse* said that the image of women in current media projects is an unrealistic standard of feminine beauty. The image related to the standard of beauty affects the way women perceive themselves. The standardization of beauty is also a concern of Hu (2020) in his research entitled *Toxic Royalty: Feminism and the Rhetoric of Beauty in Disney Princess Films*. According to her, the representation of women in Disney Princess animation expresses not only

the norms of passiveness and romanticized obedience but also the standard of female beauty.

In addition to beauty, women's studies in the media are also related to sexual harassment. Mallam (2019) in his research '*Sexual Harassment as Courtship: Performing Hegemonic Masculinity in Contemporary Telugu Cinema*' defines sexual harassment against women as the main starting point of his study. Research results show that dating behavior is often influenced by the need to carry out hegemonic masculinity and perpetuate rape culture.

Tante Lala's video explains something different and has nothing to do with sexual violence or women's beauty standards. The video provides a depiction of women who is associated with emotion rather than rationality, which seems to be the legitimacy of current gender theory. Haraldsson and Wängnerud (2019, p. 2) defined sexism in the media as "the (re) production of social sexism through under- and misrepresentation of women in media, leading to a false portrayal of society through a gendered lens." Referring to the definition of sexism, it can be concluded that the misrepresentation of women in the media is categorized as a form of sexism. In reality, the depiction of women in the media often does not represent the real condition of women. Related to this matter, Mulvey (in Sassatelli, 2011, p. 132) said that the body of women in everyday life is very different from the body circulated in images. The female image, for instance, in advertising, and in movies, didn't refer to the actual woman in everyday life, but to an image that could be put into circulation as part of commodity culture.

The ideological work of the media in affirming sexism also becomes a concern for Gaye Tuchman. Through her writing entitled '*The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by Mass Media*', Tuchman (1978) argued that media reflects the dominant values of the society in various images and representations. The media acts as a socialization agent that conveys a

stereotypical picture of gender roles. Tuchman assessed that the media has carried out the symbolic annihilation of women. Extermination is carried out in three ways, namely omission, trivialization, condemnation. Omission is intended as an act that considers the presence of women as unimportant so that women are deliberately not shown. Even if they appear, their existence is only limited to complementary without a role or what is known as trivialization. On the other hand, when women are presented in the media, their existence can no longer be blamed or discredited.

The video of Tante Lala which has gone viral in cyberspace needs to be reviewed in what context women are represented. Buikema (2017, p. 72), in his writing entitled *The Arena of Imaginings: Sarah Bartmann and the Ethics of Representation*, explains that language can be a means of making present whatever is absent. According to Buikema, it is not enough for women to just be present, because representation is not just a matter of being present or not. That is, when women exist and are viral in the media, they need a separate meaning, whether their presence gives a good image of women or reinforces the stereotype of women as people who live outside the limits of normality. Dyer in Durham & Kellner (2012, p. 355-356) stated that the standard of stereotype normality is based on the dominant group, which gives rise to the mode of society according to their own views, value systems, and sensibility. In stereotypes, the dominant group legitimizes its existence by applying certain norms to subordinated groups. Dyer also explained that the dominant party builds character and stereotyped characteristics as something that seems realistic, which is very close to everyday life.

Based on the various explanations above, this paper aims to reveal how symbolic annihilation on women practiced and reproduced in Tante Lala's video? and how the media presents stereotypes of women as a spectacle? This paper will also explore how

female viewers perceive Tante Lala's video content.

METHOD

This study uses a critical paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 105) define a paradigm as "a basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of a method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways." To explore the texts and discourse relating to symbolic annihilation that are reproduced and practiced in Tante Lala's Video and news created by media, the researcher uses a cultural studies approach. This refers to the opinion of Saukko (2003, p. 1) which stated that "the trademark of the cultural studies approach to empirical research has been an interest in the interplay between lived experience, texts or discourses, and the social context."

The method used in this research is critical discourse analysis. According to Van Dijk (2015, p. 466), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is "a discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context." Van Dijk (2015, p. 477) also stated that "critical analysis of media discourse has a central place in CDA."

The data in this study are in the form of text in the video, both in the form of voice, visual images, and characters. The data is also taken from the text of infotainment broadcasts and the writings of various media. Texts related to audience opinion were obtained by in-depth interviews with three women as informants. Data analysis was carried out in three stages, data reduction, data presentation, and data conclusion or verification. In performing data reduction, the researcher made a summary by hypothesis coding. The choice of hypothesis coding refers to the opinion of Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2019, p. 78), that said "the codes are developed from a theory/prediction about what will be found in

the data before they have been collected or analyzed."

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Symbolic Annihilation on Woman in Tante Lala's Video and Other Media

Symbolic annihilation in Tante Lala's video can be found in two forms. First, symbolic annihilation which is displayed through the language representation used in the video. Referring to Stuart Hall's opinion above, language in the context of representation can be in the form of sounds, visual images, facial expressions, gestures, and emojis. Second, symbolic annihilation in the form of affirmation of various media on the video.

Tante Lala's video represents a woman who is rude, angry, and even impatient in carrying out her role as a child educator. In the video with a duration of 10:6 minutes, Tante Lala repeatedly yells at her child when something goes wrong. At the 2:52 minute Tante Lala told her son to look at the notes with a yelling tone. Tante Lala shouted again and said "wait" in a yelling tone until her child gasped at 3:07 minutes. Then at 4:03 minutes, he asked someone to get a broom to scare his son to be more serious in studying. From the beginning of the lesson, Tante Lala continuously used a high tone of voice in giving understanding to her child. The climax, at 7:11 minutes she hit and pinched her son who always did not memorize the principle of Pancasila that she taught. Overall, Tante Lala's voice is always loud and full of anger from beginning until the end of the video. Finally, Tante Lala did not succeed in making her child memorized let alone understand the lessons she gave.

As explained by Stuart Hall (in Jhally, 2005, p. 14) above, in the context of representation, language plays an important role in constructing and producing meaning. If it is related to this opinion, the video of Tante Lala which is produced in harsh language depicts an emotional female character. Refers to the constructionist view that language does not only belong to the speaker, but also to social agreement which can

be interpreted from various points of view by the reader or audience.

Therefore, for the audience, especially women who are not guiding their children as shown in the video, it can be concluded that Tante Lala's video is a form of internal symbolic annihilation. It is said to be internal because the video is produced by women and affects women. There is internal sexism through the media where the perpetrators are women themselves.

Through this video, women exist and are present to color the media stage. However, their presence actually reinforces the stereotype that women are people who prioritize emotion rather than rationality. Women who in fact undergo a double burden in this pandemic era are actually described as figures who are not good at providing learning to children. It is unfortunate when mothers who are able to teach their children patiently, politely, and are able to replace the role of teachers in schools do not appear in the news. This is where the symbolic annihilation of women in the context of omission occurs. Women who may be able to provide adequate education are drowned out by the virality of the video of Tante Lala, whose appearance actually gives a negative depiction of women.

Various things found in Tante Lala's video show that there is a common perspective in placing women as problematic subjects in the media, especially in films. A number of films often portray women as strong, independent, and also have high reasoning abilities. But on the other hand, they are still often sexualized, marginalized, and trapped in a patriarchal culture. In a study entitled *Monsters and Madwomen? Neurosis, Ambition and Mothering in Women Lawyers in Film*, Schulz and Youn (2020, p. 411-431) reveal the image of female lawyers in the film. In the three films, *Laws of Attraction*, *Michael Clayton*, and *I Am Sam* that became the object of their research, women who work as successful lawyers are described as ambitious, bad mothers, and mentally disturbed. The three

films build a narrative that women's ambitions have a negative connotation, different from the depiction of ambition in men. Although women who work as lawyers in these films are depicted as successful women, these depictions are accompanied by failures in personal life, such as bad mothers.

On the other hand, men who work in the same profession, even though they do not carry out the role of good fathers, are not considered to have failed in their domestic life. This study elaborates on Gilbert and Gubar's thesis about strong women who reject male authority and obedience as monsters. In this study it is emphasized that the construction and dissemination of monstrosity culture as a subjugation of women from ambition and intelligence.

This relatively new study shows that the image of women as marginalized objects in films has not changed over the past few decades. This can be seen from the research of Eva Flicker (2003, p. 307-318) entitled *Between brains and breasts—women scientists in fiction film: on the marginalization and sexualization of scientific competence*. This research tries to see the picture of women who work as scientists in 60 fictional films produced in America and Europe over a period of 70 years in the 20th century, 1929-1997 to be exact.

The results showed that female scientists who worked in teams were positioned as subordinate to male scientists. In terms of quality, female scientists are described as having lower abilities than male scientists. Despite her status as a scientist, her role is more related to the stereotype of women than her job role as a scientist. Viewed from a dramaturgical perspective, women are presented to strengthen the emotional element and cannot be separated from matters of love and sex. They don't even represent the figure of a scientist. This study also confirms that in the scientific world, women are generally still in second place, not because they lack quality, but because they are marginalized in a structured way.

Apart from the language produced in the video, symbolic annihilation of women through Tante Lala's video is also carried out by the media industry. A number of TV station infotainment programs deliberately blew up the presence of the video by inviting Tante Lala as a guest star. Trans TV's *Nih Kita Kepo* infotainment, Trans TV's *Brownis*, and Trans TV's *Rumpi No Secret* deliberately show the inability of women to accompany children's learning as an entertaining comedy. Tante Lala's presence at the event was portrayed as an angry woman, not as a person who struggles to educate children. In addition, the infotainment also focuses on revealing how the video went viral. This can be seen from the expression of the event host. In *Brownis*, for example, the host opened with the phrase "this is a guest star, this is viral, mother is angry when she teaches her child". The same thing also appears on the host's question, *Nih Kita Kepo*. On that occasion, the host asked, "Mama likes to scold Rafa at home, isn't she?" Meanwhile, the host of the show *Rumpi No Secret* asked who was also related to the grumpy character, "What is the broom for?" Tante Lala answered to scare her child.

Not only displayed on the TV screen. Various shows are also uploaded to the YouTube channel so that the audience reach is wider. Youtube entitled *Tante Lala Bawain Nyai Klappertaart Ala Manado* (Tante Lala Brings Nyai Klappertaart from Manado) which is a broadcast of *Nih Kita Kepo* uploaded on October 7, 2020, watched by 410,552 viewers. Meanwhile, Youtube entitled *Wendi Babysitting Anak Tante Lala, Mamanya Nyanyi Terus Sih* (Wendi Babysitting Tante Lala's Child, Meanwhile His Mama Sings) which was uploaded to the *Brownies* program, October 6, 2020, was watched by 58,157 viewers. Youtube entitled *Kocaknya Tante Lala si Ibu Pengajar Pancasila yang Viral* (Funny Lala, the Viral Mother Teaching Pancasila) which is a broadcast from *Rumpi No Secret*, uploaded on October 4, 2021, was watched by 188,547 viewers. These various shows make female characters who are angry

and fail to teach their children as comedy shows to entertain the audience. If it is related to the opinion of Sara Mills (2008, p.140) which states that sexism can take refuge under a form of humor that is not realized by the audience, then the media has committed sexism to women by blowing up videos of Tante Lala.

A number of online media have also confirmed the angry female character who is able to anesthetize the audience. In line with infotainment TV, the media also highlighted how the video went viral. Manadopost.jawapos.com wrote the title *Begini Tips Jadi Viral ala Tante Lala* (these are tips to become viral like Tante Lala). In the news posted on November 18, 2020, the media explained the opinion of Tante Lala who said that she represented mothers throughout Indonesia whose blood pressure immediately rose when accompanying children's online learning.

The depiction of an angry woman has become title of a number of media. Tribunternate.com wrote, *Viral Tante Lala Ngegas Ajari Anak Hafalkan Pancasila, Berikut Fakta-fakta Tentangnya* (Viral, Tante Lala's "Ngegas" while teaching her child to memorize Pancasila, here are facts about it). The same title was also written by tribunbatam.id *Fakta Tante Lala yang Ngegas Ajarkan Anak Pancasila, Ternyata Ini Profesi Sebenarnya* (Fact, Tante Lala who is "ngegas" to teach Pancasila to her child, that's her real profession). The title containing the content of woman who was angry when teaching her child is also available at www.viva.co.id. This media wrote *Sosok Tante Lala, Emak Viral yang Ngegas Ajarkan Anak Pancasila* (The figure of Tante Lala, a viral mother who is in high tone while teaching Pancasila to her child).

The various headlines in the media represent an angry female character, although the language used is slightly different. The word "ngegas" in this sentence can be interpreted as loud and high-pitched, all of which represent anger. The media framed the video content to describe how women are. The media also

indirectly leads the public on how someone can become famous and viral. In other words, the media participates in confirming the stereotype of women which is not necessarily the same or represents the character of women in general. This condition is in accordance with the opinion of Jackson and Jones (2009) who view media representation as a wrong image of women, as well as stereotypes that damage women's self-perceptions.

The representation of female subjects in gender-biased media is inseparable from the existence of the media as an ideological product. Stuart Hall in a video lecture entitled *Representation and the Media* (Jhally, 2005, p. 3) believes that various messages communicated by the media are complex and closely related to power relations and ideological interests in certain historical contexts. Furthermore, Stuart Hall (ibid, p. 6) explains that when the media provides an overview of a topic that represents people, events, and even facts, there is a distortion between the actual object and what is represented in the media. This is because representation is not a neutral and value-free practice, because the practice of producing meaning in representation always involves selection, reduction, addition, framing, and various other actions (Noviani, 2020, p. 70).

In the practice of representation, language has an important meaning. To see this role, Stuart Hall (2003: 25) uses a constructionist approach. According to him, language is not only reflective which is rooted in the meaning attached to material objects. Language also does not work like a mirror that only captures and displays existing meanings. In addition, the meaning of language cannot only be based on the speaker's intention, because the use of language refers to mutually agreed rules in the social sphere.

In this regard, Stuart Hall (in Jhally, 2005) asserts that "the notion of representations is the idea of giving meaning. So, the representation is the way in which meaning is somehow given to the things which are depicted through the

images or whatever it is, on screens or the words on a page which stands for what we're talking about" (p. 6). Referring to the quote, representation is basically the practice of giving meaning to an object or event through images on the screen or the words we speak. As a practice of giving meaning, representation involves social actors who construct meaning based on their cultural concepts.

Tante Lala's Video in the Eyes of Female Viewers

Although a number of media cover the stereotype of women in such a way, viewers do not always interpret it the same as what the media wants. Some viewers negotiate readings based on certain arguments. A number of informants in this research think that what is shown by the video of Tante Lala does not reflect women and has the potential to worsen the image of women. Siti Rohmah Shobariah, a mother of three children who also works as a teacher said,

Tante Lala's video indirectly weakens and demeans women. Women seem unable to educate children properly. Even though many women are able to accompany their children while studying well. They have knowledge and awareness that mothers are the first school for their children. The video does not represent women and is not good for viewing. If the video is actually viral by several media, it is feared that an image will emerge depicting how mothers teach their children (Siti Rohmah Shobariah, interview, April 3, 2021, Sangatta).

Meanwhile, Fira Vimartrhani, a mother of two children who works as a private employee, highlighted the video of Tante Lala as a form of harassment against women which was packaged in a comedy show. According to her, the video seems to represent the standard of women's abilities. The reality is that there are more women in Indonesia who work as educators than men, especially for the level of kindergarten education. Based on data and statistics from the Ministry of Education and Culture of the

Republic of Indonesia in 2018, the number of male kindergarten teachers and principals in Indonesia was 10,330 people, while the number of female kindergarten teachers and principals in Indonesia reached 303,317 people. The ratio of the number of men and women in this profession is 1: 30 people. Fira also highlighted the current trend of media broadcasts:

The screening of Tante Lala's video by a number of media shows that media creativity is weak. They only copy viral social media uploads without looking at the quality and contribution of the media in providing public enlightenment. Media work is more dominated by the interests of audience gain and advertising so that quality impressions will be defeated by topics that are considered viral (Fira Vimartrhani, interview, April 3, 2022, Sangatta).

A slightly different opinion comes from Defy Yeni Nadira, a housewife with two children. According to her, the video will not necessarily create a bad image of women when viewed from the side of the problems faced by mothers in the current era of online learning. Defy explained,

The difficulty of teaching children at home is a problem faced by women in online learning today. Ideally, of course, how to teach children is not as shown by Tante Lala in the video. Therefore, the media, both TV and online media, should focus on that side, so that the problems faced by mothers become a common concern. Instead of emphasizing the issue of angry female characters or the viral sensation of the video (Defy Yeni Nadira, interview, April 3, 2022, Sangatta).

Various opinions regarding the video of Tante Lala and the work of the media in helping to make it viral show that the meaning of the video content is not solely the property of the meaning producer and the media industry. Viewers, especially women, will negotiate the reading of the message. The framing of the video by the media industry illustrates that representation is not a value-free practice.

There are certain interests that various parties want to achieve through the media.

The disapproval of a number of women who became informants in this study also showed that the figure of Tante Lala who was viral by the media did not represent women in general. In other words, the representation of women's images shown in the video can distort women's roles who are successful in educating their children well.

CONCLUSION

Tante Lala's video represents a woman who is rude, angry, and even impatient in carrying out her role as a child educator. This representation confirms the notion that women are figures who emphasize emotion rather than rationality. The video raises a symbolic annihilation of women in the media. On the one hand, women are presented in the media, but their presence is negative and often distorts women's roles. Symbolic annihilation can be found in two forms. First, symbolic annihilation is displayed through the language representation used in the video in the form of sound, visual images, facial expressions, gestures, and emojis. Second, symbolic annihilation in the form of confirmation by various media on the video through news and infotainment.

Based on interviews with the audience who became research informants, they judged that the content of Tante Lala's video and media reports and infotainment broadcasts related to the video gave a wrong picture of women. The video is considered not representative of women in general. The media is considered to have contributed to the stereotyping of women as someone who bases emotion rather than rationality.

The results of this study indicate that the representation of women in the media is still problematic. Women benefit from their appearance in the media. However, on the other hand, the presence of women in the media is often nothing more than objectification which leads to stereotypes of women. Therefore,

there needs to be certain efforts that can encourage the media to report something in a balanced way. If the Tante Lala's video depicts a female figure who is not appropriate in educating her child, then women who are judged to be able to provide proper teaching to children should also have the same stage in the media.

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