

A Discourse Analysis of Social Actor Representation on Mass Media Text: *New York Times* and *MERDEKA* on Gay Couples Punished in Aceh

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Abstract—This paper shows the contrast depiction in two different media texts reporting about gay couple punished in Aceh, Indonesia. These two media have opposite background for accepting same sex relationship and its community. Thus, it is interesting to figure out the way both media representing gay couples and their punishment in Aceh as social actors in their texts. An allegation emerges for *New York Times* as media from America in which has legalized LGBT likely represent the punishment as a homophobic act. Meanwhile, *MERDEKA* from Indonesia is alleged to represent it as an explicit act of Aceh government under Shariah law. Those hypothesis are solved by applying Theo Van Leeuwen's theory of social actor representation in media discourse (2008), exclusion and inclusion strategy to reveal the dominated and marginalised representation, especially the social actor involved. The analysis uses qualitative method as for describing the data and investigation by comparing both media toward each other to detect the difference of the discourse strategy.

Keywords—Analysis, gay, media, text.

I. INTRODUCTION

GAY relationship and even its LGBT community are still a controversial phenomena in society. It is accepted in some parts of nation and the rest still against it. America as the example. The constitution has legalized same sex marriage and acknowledged its community. Meanwhile Indonesia is the opposite. It is still taboo and has received contra from the chaplain and society. However, these contrast social behaviours from both countries may have influenced the media in depicting same sex relationship on their news article. As stated by Fairclough (1995), media could be affected by either the internal or external interest in portraying social reality. Gramsci (1971) also emphasized that media can be a medium of spreading the ideology of the authorities, the tool of legitimacy and the control of public discourse. Thus, further research is needed in order to reveal what lies under the discourse in mass media text that publicly consumed by many readers.

In May 2017, gay couple whipped publicly for having sex in Aceh, Indonesia, has lashed out many disputes. The country that supporting same sex relationship has seen the

punishment as a homophobic act and crossed human right meanwhile the contra party roots for it. *New York Times* from America and *MERDEKA* from Indonesia have released an article on their site reporting a couple men caned for having same sex. However, both media do not portrait the substance with the same approach. If it is seen with a closer look, each media has its own manner in giving roles for the gay couple and their punishment representation in the text. An allegation is emerged that both media has a dominant or excision description of any social representation in their narrative.

Thus, Theo Van Leeuwen's theory (2008) to uncover social actor representation on media text is applied. The theory uses exclusion strategy for detecting any representation, especially social actor or participant involved, that excluded from the text and inclusion for finding out any representation or the actor that included within the text. This strategy shows actors in events that are disclosed or concealed in text with discourse strategies. Van Leeuwen has introduced a model of discourse analysis to detect and examine how a group or person as a lower party is marginalized and leaning to be continuously as the object of ill-judgment and how a dominant group has more control over the interpretation of an event and its meaning in a discourse, mainly in media text.

II. METHOD

The method uses in this analysis is qualitative and discourse strategy by van Leeuwen's theory of social actor representation (2008) as an approach. The approach concern with exclusion and inclusion strategy. The inclusion strategy consist with differentiation- indifferntiation, objectification - abstraction, nomination - categorisation, nomination - categorisation, determination - indetermination, assimilation - individualization, and association - disassociation. Those strategies are aimed to uncover the inclusion acts for certain or particular participant as the actors in text. The exclusion strategy consist with passivation, nominalisation, and substitute clause. Those strategies are aimed to uncover the excluding acts for certain or particular participant as the actors in text. Qualitative research method is chosen since it

develops in the social sciences to study social and cultural phenomena and more pointed on uncovering its process meaning (Merriam, 2008). It is an inductive approach to gain a profound understanding of either individual's or group's experience.

The data analysis are the article from two different media with the same topic but have opposite background toward same sex relationship. The article comes from the country supporting gay relationship, as data no. 1, is *New York Times* with title "2 Men in Indonesia Sentenced to Caning for Having Gay Sex" by Jon Emont published in May 17, 2017. Meanwhile, the opposite article from contra country, as data no. 2, is *MERDEKA* with title "Pasangan gay dicambuk 82 kali di depan ratusan warga Aceh" (translated: Gay couples whipped 82 times in front of hundreds of Acehnese) by Afif published in May 23, 2017. Afterwards, the data is analysed by using the approach from van Leeweun (2008) and compared to each other to reveal their strategy.

III. ANALYSIS

A. Exclusion Strategy

A.1. Passivation

In this strategy basically, one group or a certain actor as the real subject is not involved in a conversation or discourse. The removal of these social actors are used to hide in order to protect themselves. The passive sentences implicitly present the actor in the text. Such as the data no.1 shows that the text has the tendency to expel actors with this strategies in sentences by containing it with negative report on how homosexuals are treated and what causes them to have served such a treat. The data is shown as follow:

"A death penalty for homosexuality is **codified** under Shariah law, but it has not been put into practice."

Meanwhile, the data no. 2 in the text shows the tendency to expel actors with this strategies in sentences that contain description of the consequence of doing homosexuality. The data is shown as follow:

"Marzuki mengatakan, hukum cambuk ini **dilakukan** untuk efek jera." (Translated: Marzuki said that the caning sentence **is done** for giving deterrent effect).

A. 2. Nominalisation

This strategy is supposed to change the verb into a noun with an aim to hide individual or group as subject. The subject is replaced, since it is essentially a process of turning an action/ activity into a meaningful noun to full fill subject position. Such as the data no. 1 shows that the word "sentence" is nominalised to be "sentencing". From paragraph as follow:

"Although **the timing of the sentencing** appears to be a coincidence, Wednesday is the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia."

Data no. 2 shows that the it happened on words "**Pengurangan hukuman cambuk**" (Translated: **The reducing of caning** punishment). From paragraph as follow: "**Pengurangan hukuman cambuk setelah diperhitungkan potongan masa tahanan.**" (Translated: The reducing of caning punishment after accounting for deductions).

A. 3. Substitute Clause

Substitute the subject can also be done by using a clause that also serves as a substitute for the actor. Such as in the data no. 1 in paragraph as follow:

"The two were **then beaten, an attack recorded on video, and were later taken to a local police station.**"

The data shows that the abandoned subject is replaced by a clause in a sequence form of the arresting actions such as beatings and submitting the couple to a police station. The group or party as the perpetrator involved in those activities is the local resident in Banda Aceh who caught them on the spot. Meanwhile, the data no. 2 shows in paragraph as follow shows that the excluded actor from the discourse in the sentence is an actor who imposed a caning sentence. The hidden actor or subject is the judge of the Shari'a Court of Banda Aceh.

"Marzuki mengatakan, hukum cambuk ini dilakukan untuk efek jera. **Tidak ada melanggar Hak Asasi Manusia (HAM) hukuman cambuk ini.**" (Translated: Marzuki said that the caning was done for a deterrent effect. There is no violation of the human rights of this caning).

B. Inclusion Strategy

B. 1. Differentiation - Indifferentiation

In differentiation and indifferentiation, the strategy is used for including an actor by showing any contrast representation or not In the data no. 1, discourse tends to be compiled by presenting other groups as a comparison with the main actors, the Aceh government. The groups shown are more pro or more positive in addressing homosexuals than the Aceh government and more clearly in affirming LGBT rights than Indonesia's role. It is shown in data as follow:

"Homosexuality has been illegal in the highly conservative province since 2014, but this is the first time citizens have been punished for it."

Meanwhile in the data no. 2, No presence of other groups as a comparison with the actors is reported in it. The discourse tends to feature a thing or event with actors treated equally with the main actor, especially a couple who are caught for immoral act against Shariah law. So that, the data uses indifferentiation strategy as data follow:

"Selain pasangan gay ini, Kejaksaan Negeri (Kejari) Banda Aceh juga mengeksekusi **4 pasangan ikhtilat** (bermesra-mesraan ditempat sepi). **Mereka masing-masing dicambuk...**" (Translated: In addition to this gay couple, the State Prosecutor (Kejari) Banda Aceh also executes **4 couples ikhtilat** (having a romance in a quiet place). **They were each whipped...**).

B. 2. Objectification - Abstraction

In objectification and abstraction, the discourse uses strategy with concrete or abstract explanation. In the data no. 1, it is seen that the tendency of discourse presentation gives an explanation as an illustration of the number of countries that have taken steps to clarify their attitude toward the homosexual issue as an objectification. Meanwhile, the abstraction is used to mention excluded party in which still against homosexuality. The abstraction remains the data as a vague explanation because it does not clearly state which part of Indonesia still against it. This contrast data indicates

that the data show Indonesia as the exception within these pro countries but a part of countries that view homosexuality as an illegal. It shown in data as follow:

“Sixty-three countries have nondiscrimination laws that protect gay men and lesbians, and 23 recognize same-sex marriage — most recently Finland and Slovenia, which did so this year.”

“Homosexuality has been illegal in the highly conservative province since 2014.”

“...and homosexuality is legal in most of Indonesia.”

In the data no. 2, it shows that the tendency of presentation of the discourse is explained with objectivation to clarify how the level or quantity of punishment and the process. While in abstraction, the data show that the discourse presented does not specifically present the quantity or the exact participant in witnessing the execution of the punishment. It is shown in this data below:

“Pasangan sesama jenis (gay) dieksekusi cambuk masing-masing sebanyak 82 kali. Eksekusi lebih rendah dari putusan majelis hakim Makamah Syariat (MS) Banda Aceh yang memvonis 85 kali cambuk.” (Translated: Gay couples were whipped **82 times each**. The execution was lower than the judgment of the Makamah Syariat (MS) judge of Banda Aceh which **sentenced 85 lashes**).

“Ribuan warga memadati arena percambukan saat eksekusi berlangsung yang dieksekusi oleh 3 algojo secara bergantian” (Translated: **Thousand citizens** were crowding the caning arena during the execution is held by **3 executioners** in turn).

“Eksekusi cambuk kali ini mendapat perhatian serius dari berbagai kalangan.” (The execution this time attracted serious attention from **many parties**).

B. 3. Nomination - Categorisation, Nomination - Identification

In this strategy, the actor or event as the nomination can be explained with categorisation or identification alone as its representation. The data no. 1, shows that the nomination represents the actors as themselves are two homosexual men, homosexual groups, transgender people, government and Aceh activists. The data is shown as follows:

“Two men accused of having sex with each other were each sentenced on Wednesday.”

“The sentences alarmed rights activists.”

“Homosexuality has been illegal in the highly conservative province since 2014.”

“Transgender people can be more easily identified.”

“The national government had the right to unilaterally cancel discriminatory local legislation,....”

“The Indonesian government granted Aceh a special right.”

“Mr. Oetomo said that Acehnese activists told him...”

In the data no. 2, the nomination shows actors as themselves are only the gay couples.

The actors in categorisation shows in the data no. 1 are as conservative civil society groups depicted against homosexuality. It shows in this paragraph below:

“But a nationwide campaign by conservative civil society groups against homosexuality culminated in a major case now before the country’s Constitutional Court, which will decide whether sex outside marriage should be banned

throughout Indonesia.”

The actors in categorisation shows in the data no. 2 are the defendants who violate the *Shari’a* law in Aceh who are distinguished by the category of *liwath*, *ikhtilat*, and gay couples. The different category of the defendants will differentiate their punishment. It shows in paragraph below: *“Mereka merupakan pasangan liwath yang ditangkap warga.”* (Translated: They are a couple of *liwath* who were caught by the citizen).

“Selain pasangan gay ini, Kejaksaan Negeri (Kejari) Banda Aceh juga mengeksekusi 4 pasangan ikhtilat...” (Translated: Besides these gay couples, Banda Aceh national counsel of prosecution also prosecuted for 4 couples of *ikhtilat*).

“Pasangan gay yang mengheboh/kan warga Aceh itu masing-masing berinisial MT dan MH.” (Translated: **A gay couple** who causes a commotion among the citizens has initials as **MT and MH**).

In the data no. 1 and no. 2, the identification are the actor who conducts investigations, Marzuki Ali. This is the paragraph:

Data no. 1: *“Marzuki Ali, chief investigator for the Shariah police, asked the men, ages 20 and 23, shortly after they were taken to the police station in March.”*

Data no. 2: *“Kepala Seksi Penyelidikan dan Penyidikan Polisi Syariat Provinsi Aceh, Marzuki mengatakan, hukum cambuk ini dilakukan untuk efek jera.”* (Translated: **The head of Syariat Police for Investigation of Aceh Province, Marzuki** said, the caning sentence is held for deterrent effect).

B. 4. Determination - Indetermination

In this strategy, the actors can be included by explaining clearly or even hidden as initials. The use of determination strategies is found on both articles featuring a pair of homosexual men as the main topics with an anonymity. The difference in *MERDEKA* anonymity is done with the initials of the name **MT** and **MH** followed by age, whereas in *New York Times* only done with the mention of the age of both that is 20 and 23 as the data below:

Data no. 1: *“Marzuki Ali, chief investigator for the Shariah police, asked the men, ages 20 and 23, shortly after they were taken to the police station in March.”*

Data no. 2: *“Pasangan gay yang mengheboh/kan warga Aceh itu masing-masing berinisial MT dan MH.”* (Translated: A gay couple who causes a commotion among the citizens has initials as **MT and MH**).

B. 5. Assimilation - Individualisation

In this strategy, the social actor is shown clearly as a person or the case alone or associated to others. The category could not be a specific social actor but rather the community associated with the actor. However, the data no. 1 individually presents the details of the events experienced by both homosexual men in Aceh from the arresting process, sentencing process, and post-punishment. The actor, action, and place are represented clearly by a series of acts. For example, *“The two were then beaten, an attack recorded on video, and were later taken to a local police station.”*

Similar to the previous, the data no. 2 presents the details even more specific about a pair of men who caught for

having same sex by the the local citizens who had no relevance to other events so the category is clearer. An example exists in the explanations of the categories involved that can be seen in the categorization analysis. It shows that the focus is only on the actors only. However, the data also shows an act to associate the main actor with others, for example “*In addition to this gay couple, the State Prosecutor (Kejari) Banda Aceh also executes 4 couples ikhtilat (having a romance in a quiet place). They were each whipped...*” but it is for strengthening equality treatment for the main actor, the gay couple, and the rest is most likely preached independently.

B. 6. Association - Disassociation

In this strategy, the social actor is shown with association related with other groups or not. The use of association strategies tends to be found in both texts. The data no. 1 relates the main topic with other events as a contradictory. It is shown by mentioning the facts about several country that legalized or given distinct act toward the same sex marriage. These facts are a contrast description with Indonesia that still against the issue but has not formally take an order yet. Thus, it seems to have a purpose to portray Indonesia as a hesitation.

Meanwhile, the data no. 2 also relates the main topic with other events. However, the events related all have the connection and not a contrast one. The events related are the explanation of the facts to supporting the punishment. Thus, the facts explanation aim to make a clear statement that the punishment is equally sentenced to anyone, group, or party in Aceh as long as it is a violation for Shariah law. It is also to make clear that the sentenced is not a homophobic act but rather as a free sex or sex before marriage in which forbids in Aceh.

IV. CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis on the exclusion strategy show each article has different representation for the same substance, gay couples punished in Aceh. *The New York Times* represents counter-attitudes toward same sex relationship. The article as data no. 1 has depicted the gay couple as the victim of Indonesia indecisiveness act toward same sex relationship. It is shown by the way of Aceh government is excluded as the pro actor with a certain law and order towards homosexuality. The actors who held the punishment is represented as the contra actor. However, the actors are eliminated in order to hide an offensive act towards the Indonesian side directly or explicitly. So the actors and punishment representation opposed in the discourse do not insult the executing party. Meanwhile the data no. 2 from

MERDEKA shows that the exclusion is done for protecting the government of Aceh and the citizens in order to obey and protect the Shariah law.

The results of the analysis on the inclusion strategy show that the data from *New York Times* have many actors represented with contradictory discourses. This contradictory discourse indicates that there is an attempt to compare the acts of the main actors, especially the government of Aceh who sentenced the caning and the Indonesian government for supporting it, with conflicting actors, the pro-LGBT countries. It can also indicate that the text contains contradictory discourse to show how the Aceh government is more strict and conservative in addressing homosexual issues, as it is ruled under certain religious laws, compared to other countries that do not base on certain religious or customary laws. The actors include are those who establish and execute the punishment of the two homosexual men. The discourse represented the punishment as a negative portrayal and discouragement attitude. While in *MERDEKA*, the discourse tends to present a thing or event with actors treated equally as the main actor, the gay couples in the article. The presence of the discourse indicates that the topic being discussed, the execution of the whipping punishment, is not a taboo thing to do in Aceh. Thus, the same event is presented as a support to show that the punishment applied equally to all who violate Shariah law and no difference or special treatment in homosexual case.

Based on the findings of the analysis, the *New York Times* tends to lead the discourse on the topic of a couple of homosexual men punished in Aceh in a negative direction. The actors who sentenced the couples are considered to be ill-justice to the homosexual minority. This is shown in how the actors related to the topic of discussion are displayed and hidden. Also, in *New York Times* more concerns in LGBT rights with dominant explanations in representing every participant involved to expose homosexuality as the marginalized party in the text. This is shown in the contradictions of the discourse presented. While the national media, *MERDEKA*, tends to lead the discourse with the same topic in a more positive direction. The executors are represented as a law enforcer who not against minorities but against individuals who violate local rules, namely in Aceh. The existence of an effort to present a discourse containing illustrations that in Aceh Shari'a law applies to all moral offenders to all its people. The impression is to dispel the notion that because the convicted person is homosexual, it is punishable. On the contrary, the presence of other actors is involved to show that there is no suggestion that minorities are marginalized.

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