

The Portrayals of Killer Mothers as Folk Devils in Indonesian Online News 2017-2022

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the portrayal of the mothers who kill the children as folk devil. The theory of folk devil by Stanley Cohen and Erving Goffman's theories on framing are used to determine the deviant images of the mothers that are created by the news using various means of framing. The mothers who kill the children in the news were depicted as having inhuman characters, having psychological problems, and having a weak nature for dealing with external problems, thus, they are portrayed as folk devils. This portrayal is based on the use of various kinds of elements of construction, such as choice of words, contradiction, perspective, comparison, symbolism, stereotype, exaggeration, highlighted and unhighlighted parts in the news, and assumption as means to frame the killer mother as folk devils. News can be fictionalized for certain purposes. There are many articles used to define mothers as having the quality of deviant characters. Therefore, many news stories in Indonesia are still subjective and biased toward women.

Keywords: Indonesian online news; killer mothers; folk devil; framing

INTRODUCTION

News being subjective may be an inevitable result brought by society. Phillipa Chong in "*Valuing subjectivity in journalism: Bias, emotions, and self-interest as tools in arts reporting*" (Chong, 2017) stated that traditional journalism hold objectivity as the key for journalistic practices, but today's journalism has incorporated emotion to the writing for engaging the readers and communicating information. Modern journalism tried to evolve on making better ways for people to understand the content, by incorporating emotions. News may exhibit subjectivity when it gets carried away when deploying too many emotions in delivering information. Subjectivity in news can be an involuntary and voluntary action of the writers. The involuntary subjectivity is the result of the influence of culture and ideology that have been the norm of the community. While on the other hand, people who deliberately use subjectivity want to use the effect that subjectivity brings, to achieve their goals. From thesis research on two news media in Indonesia, it is said that both media do not publish only facts, but also opinions, and the reason is to gain newsworthiness to attract the public's interest (Sayekti, 2015). Every being and community have their own beliefs. We do not know what comes first, whether subjectivity in news affects the order of the society, or whether society's beliefs influence the subjectivity in news. Whichever it is, subjectivity affects both news' content and the public.

The use of subjectivity is apparent in news reports on the topic of women and there are several studies that address this issue. The lack of agency for and by women, makes the media and news able to frame and shape women's identity and status. Based on a book, *Women and Media* (Byerly & Ross, 2006), the media as a powerful agent of social change has presented women as subjects that are easily misunderstood and stereotyped as what the society wants. Media can be a platform to enforce what is deemed to be the truth, and promote the stereotype of women. Women have been represented in the media based on their traditional domestic roles or treated as an object of sexual representation. Women have been regarded as passive or what

actually society expects women to be. The inferiority of women has been going on for a long time. Because of that, there are still many women in this modern world that are afraid of differentiating from what the community expects them to be and to behave, especially in Indonesia. Society has viewed women as an object with a value that can be used for convenience, and that means that women's thinking is not that important and insignificant.

News on the topic of women as mothers is particularly interesting to be discussed. According to compiled opinions written by The Himalayan Times, a mother is portrayed as a positive figure that is full of love, compassion, patience, responsibility, and the favorite person in the family (*Inspiring qualities of mother*, 2016). So, when a mother deviates from the standard, this is viewed as something unacceptable. Stereotypes or characteristics of mothers in Indonesia are portrayed in Indonesian myths, songs, poems, stories, and others. Here is a poem by Indonesian poet, Mustofa Bisri (Bisri, 2019) that defines the mother characters, and her meaning in her children's lives.

Ibu (Mother)

*Kaulah gua **teduh*** (mother as a calm person)

Tempatku bertapa bersamamu

Sekian lama

Kaulah kawah

Dari mana aku meluncur dengan perkasa (the reason he was born)

Kaulah bumi

*Yang tergelar **lembut** bagiku* (mother is a gentle person)

Melepas lelah dan nestapa

*Gunung yang **menjaga** mimpiku* (mother as protector)

Siang dan malam

Mata air yang tak brenti mengalir

Membasahi dahagaku (mother always working hard for her children)

Telaga tempatku bermain

Berenang dan menyelam

Kaulah, ibu, laut dan langit (mother always protect and be everything for the child)

Yang menjaga lurus horisonku

*Kaulah, ibu, **mentari dan rembulan*** (mother as someone who shine and as a role model)

*Yang **mengawal** perjalananku* (mother guide the children's life journey)

Mencari jejak sorga (mother as a spiritual role model)

Di telapak kakimu

From this poem, we can conclude that in Indonesia, a mother is the symbol of self-sacrifice, guidance, love, and gentleness. From a book, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia* (Blackburn, 2004), mothers' role is beyond taking care of the household affairs, the husband, and the children, but now able to work 'outside' in the condition of supporting the family. What the mothers are expected to do is that they must always sacrifice themselves unconditionally for the sake of the family. Mothers' identities are created for the sake of supporting the father and children, and even the mother's purpose of life is also centered in helping the family. Therefore, what would happen if a mother who is expected to always give her all for the family, stops aiding and actually harming the family? This will gain the people's interest, garner an opportunity for stirring public attention, and chance for the news to be viral, because this is the opposite of the norm. Based on a research presented in a conference with a title "The Representation of Women as Folk Devils in Indonesian Online Media: Mother Killers" (Djundjung & Meilinda, 2013.), news is biased and has a connection with politics, in how they select what information the readers should know and what information should be kept

from the public. This is also associated with the believed ideologies. Utilizing the believed stereotype of mothers in the community to evoke a common sense, and thus creating the truth.

Using the theory of folk devil (Cohen, 2011), assist me in analyzing the mothers as having deviant characters in the news and how they are not in line with the belief of the norm. Folk devils is a person or group of people that is portrayed by the media as the outsider and labelled as the villain. People are classified as villains because they are not up to or defy the standard of the society. Deviance is created by society. So according to this theory, deviance is not determined by the quality of the person's action, but by the label given to them by the society. The society identifies and labels who the folk devils are by the help of mythologies, stigma, stereotype, and segregation. The media plays a big part in constructing the so-called folk devils. The media has been used as a tool for labelling and constructing groups of people as the folk devils as they are deemed to threaten the harmony of the community. The folk devil theory works as the foundation of how news as influenced by the society's standard creates the image of mothers who kill their children as having deviant characters, thus they are labelled as folk devils. The news portrayed the mothers to be the complete opposite of the stereotype of mothers in the society as they are deemed to have deviant qualities.

To identify how the online news are able to construct the mothers as having the qualities of folk devil, I will apply the framing theory (Goffman, 1986). Goffman defined frame as the primary framework or schemata of interpretation, where every person is allowed to locate, perceive, identify, and give labels according to each individual's viewpoint. Framing is aimed to control the way people think. Using their own perspective to write and share the news, every individual creates their representation of the reality that is influenced by the society's ideologies. The intent and motive of the writer is very important. In other words, framing is the way news tries to share its intention to the people. Through packaging, organizing, and constructing the news from the perspective of the writer, news is presented to the public. It influences people's perception on how to process the information which is mostly done through wordings. Based on Goffman's framing theory, to influence people's process of thinking various elements are used, such as choice of words, contradiction, perspective, comparison, symbolism, stereotype, exaggeration, highlighted and unhighlighted parts in the news, and assumption. Combining Cohen's theory on folk devil and Goffman's theory on framing, I will prove that various elements are used in news reporting to construct the portrayal of mothers who kill their children as folk devils.

ANALYSIS

In this analysis, I analyze the news from various points of view that the news used to talk about the case, either from the mothers' confession, the neighbors', the husbands', and from the law. By using framing theory, I will be able to provide evidence of how the news tries to construct the mothers as having deviant characteristics. Based on the framing concept of influencing people's thinking process, there are various kinds of elements that help in uncovering the news construction, such as choice of words, contradiction, perspective, comparison, symbolism, stereotype, exaggeration, highlighted and unhighlighted parts in the news, and assumption. The folk devil theory is used to identify the news' portrayals of the mothers who defy the norms, such as killing the children. While the framing theory discovers how the news try to construct deviant characteristics in the mothers. The mothers are described as people who have deviant characters with these categories: possess inhuman characters, have psychological problems, and people who are weak in nature when dealing with external problems.

The mother is portrayed as having an inhuman character through specific words as a means to frame the mother as a deviant character. In the article below from Jpnn.com, a mother

killed her two children and abused her third child for the sake of money insurance is portrayed as cold-blooded.

Maree Crabtree adalah ibu berdarah dingin. Dia tega membunuh dua buah hatinya yang cacat dengan tangannya sendiri. Tidak hanya itu, perempuan 51 tahun tersebut juga menyiksa anak ketiganya yang difabel. (Ibu Biadab Bunuh Dua Anak Kandungnya demi Duit Asuransi / Jpnn.com, 2018)

A mother named Maree Crabtree is defined as a cold-blooded mother by the news. She has the heart to kill her two babies that are handicapped with her own hands. Not only that, this 51 years old woman also abused her disabled third child. In the above quotation, it is written that Maree Crabtree is portrayed as a cold-blooded mother that kills her, the writer mentioned the word cold blooded to depict the mother. Cold-blooded is also a term commonly used in Science for describing one of the animals' traits. To use it on a person means that the person has no feeling, has no empathy, and remorse. To make the mother look cold-blooded and have no human feelings at all, the news uses the word *tega* (has the heart) and emphasizes that the mother kills her children with her own hands. In addition to completing the picture of the mother as someone cold-blooded, the news mentions that the children who are killed are handicapped. Using the metaphor of cold-blooded to define the mother, the news opposes the ideology of a mother as a loving and warm-hearted person.

The news constructs the mother as having psychological problems to frame the mother as a deviant character that may bring danger to the community. The news from Liputan6.com stated that the mother killed the child because of depression.

AA, ibu rumah tangga yang juga orangtua tunggal, dengan wajah datar ketika menuturkan jika dia sudah menghabisi nyawa anak kandungnya sendiri.... Menurut Kapolsek..., pelaku diduga mengalami Depresi... (Diduga Alami Depresi, Wanita di Ogan Komering Ilir Bunuh Anak Kandungannya/ Liputan6.com, 2021)

Written on the news, a single mother with a flat face claimed that she killed her own child. According to the police, the mother is suspected of having depression. The news uses the mother's expression and describes it as a flat face, to show that she has no remorse for killing her child, an expression that contradicts what the society believes the mother expression should be after killing her child. There are two motives that the news uses this term, either for telling the mother is inhuman, or she is having a mental problem. And after that the news used the police claim that the mother killed the child because of depression. The news has started to label the mother from the start, when the news mentioned that she is a single mother. The idea of a single mother can leave an impression in two ways, either she is a strong, independent woman, or that she has a problem. And in this case, it is the latter. The news stereotypes that the single mother in the news has a problem, and so to support it the news utilize the words *wajah datar* and word *menghabisi* to associate those words to the mother. Using these, the news wants to label that mother is weak mentally and very unstable. The online news makes the mother as the villain who has mental problems and blames her for bringing this result because of herself.

The news builds the image of the mothers as having a weak nature in dealing with external pressure to frame the mothers as possessing deviant characteristics. In the following article from Kompas.com is about mother that killed the children because of economic struggle, and also how she tried to commit suicide.

Seorang ibu berinisial MT (30), tega membunuh tiga anak kandungnya sendiri yang masih balita... pelaku sempat berusaha melakukan upaya bunuh diri dengan menggorok lehernya sendiri dengan parang... penyebab pembunuhan sadis yang

dibarengi dengan percobaan aksi bunuh diri itu karena diduga terhimpit masalah ekonomi.... "Pelaku ada niat untuk bunuh diri sesaat setelah peristiwa tersebut, usai dilakukannya terhadap tiga anaknya kandungannya dengan cara menyayat lehernya sendiri dengan menggunakan parang," kata Kapolres Nias AKBP Wawan Iriawan.... "Namun niatnya tersebut gagal, lantaran diselamatkan oleh suaminya dan hanya mengalami luka pada bagian leher depan saja," Alasan pelaku melakukan tindakan keji terhadap tiga anaknya itu karena terhimpit faktor ekonomi sehingga sering bertengkar dengan suaminya.... "Karena tidak mau makan dan minum, tersangka lalu mengalami muntah-muntah, sehingga harus dilarikan kerumah sakit dan akhirnya meninggal...". Adapun penyebab kematian pelaku diduga akibat penyakit asam lambung yang dideritanya. (Fakta Ibu Bunuh 3 Anak Kandungannya yang Masih Balita, Motifnya Himpitan Ekonomi/ Kompas.com, 2020)

From Kompas.com, the news said that the mother with the initial MT has the heart to kill her three toddlers. Not only that but she also tried to commit suicide by slashing her own neck with a machete. The article mentioned economic problem three times as the reason behind the mother's killing and suicide. Her attempt to suicide failed because her husband managed to save her. After getting treatment for her wound in the neck, the mother refused to eat and drink, so she began to throw up, and rushed to the hospital. Eventually she died and from the news it is suspected that the mother died because of her stomach acid disease. In a glimpse, the news is seen as telling the case complete, neutral, and unbiased. However, through reading this news people will get the idea that the mother is weak, and just because of money matters, she killed her children and tried to end herself. To get this idea, the news highlights the fact that she killed her children and attempted suicide because of economic problem. Through repeatedly telling in the news, and even through the police testimony, though the testimony of the police contains more or less the same as what the news has already claimed. The news also cited the police remark that her suicide attempt was failed and that she only has a wound on the front of the neck / *hanya mengalami luka pada bagian leher saja*. The word *hanya* and *saja* that the news incorporates for describing the wound make it seem not a big deal, even though a wound in the neck is also a serious matter. But the news wants to compare it to the fact that the wound in the neck is not a big matter as the children who lost their lives. With this we can see that the news sees the mother as an "enemy". Back to the news, the mother eventually died because of her stomach acid disease caused by her refusing to eat and drink. In a way, the news said that the mother attempt suicide. Concluded from the news is that they want to portray the mother as a weak person who gives up easily because of economic reasons, and the fact that she even killed the children because of it, and even suicide. Through highlighting that idea by repeating the words suicide to the readers, it successfully constructs the image of the mother as having a weak character different than what the society believe a mother should be. That the mother's love for the children is defeated by money and herself. The society's ideology that mother's priority is the children's well-being, is destroyed by this news, where they make the mother in the news as a vulnerable mother.

Two news articles below cover the same case, but have different ways in portraying the mother as weak in controlling her emotion.

Kronologi Kasus Ibu Bunuh Anak dengan Semprotan Obat Nyamuk ... Berdasarkan pemeriksaan awal, NW mengaku menyemprotkan obat nyamuk ke wajah anaknya yang sedang menangis. NW mengatakan dirinya kesal lantaran sang anak kerap mengompol. "Pelaku ini menggunakan ini (obat serangga) untuk mendinginkan anaknya nangis. Sehingga disemprot supaya dia diam. Padahal kita tahu sama-sama ini kan racun," kata Roycke memberikan konfirmasi.... NW sudah marah terhadap GW lantaran mengompol di tempat tidur. NW pun langsung memukul bagian kelamin dan menggigit kuping kanan anaknya. Setelah tertidur, GW

kembali bangun pada siang hari.... Saat terbangun GW kembali mengompol. NW marah dan meminta anaknya untuk tidur lagi. Namun, melihat anaknya tak tidur kembali, NW memarahinya dan menampar pipi kiri sang anak. NW memindahkan GW ke lantai, dan memintanya untuk tidur lagi. Mengetahui GW tak tidur lagi, kata Roycke, NW semakin murka. Sesaat setelah menyemprotkan obat nyamuk ke wajah anaknya, NW langsung mengikat kedua tangan anaknya ke belakang menggunakan tali rafia. "Dari keterangan tersangka bahwa korban ini sering ngompol. Sehingga pelaku kesal lalu melakukan tindakan ya mungkin hukuman, ya tapi berakibat fatal," tuturnya. (Kronologi Kasus Ibu Bunuh Anak dengan Semprotan Obat Nyamuk/ CNNIndonesia, 2017)

Ibu yang Bunuh Anaknya di Jakbar Stres karena 2 Bulan Menganggur

Novi Wanti, pelaku pembunuhan anaknya, GW (5), membesarkan anaknya tanpa didampingi suami. Dia membesarkan GW tanpa status pernikahan. Novi membiayai keperluan dan sekolah GW sendirian. Namun, dua bulan terakhir dia menganggur. "Intinya, dia sedang gangguan psikologisnya. Kalau tidak kerja, bagaimana dia sekolahkan anaknya. Kemudian tabungan berkurang. Itu yang membuat dia setres," ucap Wakil Ketua Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia (KPAI) Rita Pranawati saat dihubungi, Senin (12/11). Novi membunuh anaknya dengan menyemprotkan obat nyamuk.... Novi mengaku kesal anaknya itu mengompol terus. Atas perbuatannya, Novi ditetapkan sebagai tersangka.... (Ibu yang Bunuh Anaknya di Jakbar Stres karena 2 Bulan Menganggur/ Detiknews, 2017)

The mother confesses that she sprayed insect repellent to soothe her crying child. She is mad that the child keeps on wetting the bed. The news also explains what the mother does, when she is furious at her child wetting the bed. She Hits the child's genitals, bites the ear of the child, slaps the cheek, makes the child sleep on the floor, and ties the child's two hands after spraying the insect repellent. The first news portrays the mother as someone with no self-control of her emotions. When mentioning the mother, the news always uses the word angry. Utilizing the word angry to symbolize the mother's feeling and the identity of the mother itself, the news can construct the image of a mother that has no control over her feelings. Another interesting point is that the news draws the mother's emotion into three degrees. First, it said that the mother is annoyed, *kesal*, at the child for wetting the bed. Second, the mother is angry, *marah*, when the child wet the bed. Lastly, the mother feels wrath, *murka*, for the child. And to wrap up the idea that the problem lies in the mother for having no self-control, the news inserted a statement from the police, that the mother does all these as a form of punishment, but has done too much and cost a life.

On the other hand, the second news illustrates the mother as having psychological problems, stress. From the news it is said that the mother raised her child alone, without the husband's accompaniment. To make it clearer, the news said the mother and the father of the child have no marital status. The mother is also stressed from having to bear the economic burden for raising her child alone, with the addition, for the last two months, the mother is unemployed. To top it off, the child also frequently wet the bed. Thus, making the mother kill the child by spraying insect repellent. Compared to the first news, the second news portrays the mother for being stressed for lots of problems. So, she does not kill the child just by feeling annoyed for wetting the bed, but the economic factor is the main problem for her stress. In addition, the news mentioned that the mother raising the child is not accompanied by the husband, this may bring two meanings. First, this may add as a stress factor for the mother, while, the other meaning is that a single mother can never raise the child alone. Mother is dependent on the husband, holding a stereotype where a mother's role is to support the husband and the family. Both of this two news portray the mother as someone lacking, the difference would be that the first news focus on making the mother seem to have no accountability of

managing her feelings. And the second news would be that she let stress from various factors influence her action, because of her weak mentality.

CONCLUSION

News is a powerful tool that may be used for bringing impact to influence people, be it positive or negative influence. News is the perfect way for influencing the public's perception, because it is commonly known that news is objective. News is believed to talk about the truth. However, does the truth that the people read really is the absolute truth, or is it packaged as the truth? Different perspectives and angles can also impact what the truth is. Many news stories in Indonesia impose the image of the Folk Devil in the portrayal of the mothers who kill the children. The news frames the mothers as having the qualities of the deviant characters because the mothers in the news are deviating from the norms of what a mother should be. The news blamed that the incident of mothers killing their children resulted from and for the mothers themselves, factors like external and internal struggles, family dispute, and children affairs are only the surface reasons. Murder is a wrong thing, and there is nothing that can justify a crime. However, a misleading portrayal, an excessive and exaggerated words to describe the mothers, a stereotype that is created that is not really true, assumption that is made as if it is the truth without proper back up, and choosing what the news consider the truth as what the reality is, all of these in a news are not able to be justified. The mothers in the news are believed to be deviated from the norm, thus, the news may consciously and subconsciously try to alienate the mothers who kill as a form of their belief in the Indonesian standards. The biased news about mothers killing their children is a mirror of women's position in Indonesia. The news is not only used to enrich people with information, but also can be a tool to control people's beliefs. Even news can be fictionalized for certain purposes. There are many articles used to define mothers as having the quality of deviant characters. Therefore, many news stories in Indonesia are still subjective and biased toward women.

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