

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN LEADERS IN FILM

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Abstract

This study focuses on representation of women leaders in The Post film. The aim of this research is to explore how this film represents women as leaders through characters construction of women as a leader in media corporate. Method used in this study is semiotic by Roland Barthes's model, which uses a two-stage interpretation system, denotation and connotation. The film released in 2017, is a biographical film about leader of first women publisher The Washington Post in United States. The results showed that women in the film depicted can be leaders based on family-owned company inheritance. Women are represented indecisively and cannot make decisions. Men are represented as controllers of women's decisions and thoughts.

Key Words : representation, semiotic, women leaders, The Post movie.

INTRODUCTION

Film as a medium of mass communication is able to convey certain views that are lifted from the social reality of society. One of the media that is believed to be able to mediate messages from a certain purpose to the public is film. Film has great aesthetic power because it juxtaposes dialogue, music, scenery and action together visually and narratively (Danesi, 2011: 100). Representation is used as a description of the social reality that exists in society. Reality itself means the creation human beings through the power of social construction on the social world around them. Films shape and represent reality based on the codes, conventions and ideologies of their culture, so that they are called representations of reality. Film has the potential to influence its audience because film media can reach many social segments (Sobur, 2018).

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Virginia Woolf in (Yani, 2018, p. 2) identify the results of research on the role of women in America culture related to women's rights to earn a living. Although the role of women is considered important to have work outside the home, women in American culture are still subject to patriarchal values. An environment that enforces a patriarchal ideology gives men more advantages. Women can be in the public sphere by working outside the home, but domestic work remains the property of women. There is no exchange of domestic roles between women and men in the household environment.

The Post Film (2017) is a 2017 Hollywood film directed by Steven Spielberg. The Post film stars Meryl Streep as Kay Graham, the United States' first women publisher, and Tom Hanks as Ben Bradlee, who is the editor-in-chief of the Washington Post. This film tells the story of Kay Graham who tries to balance her social life with her responsibilities as owner and publisher of The Washington Post. As owner and publisher, Kay was required to make a decision on the 1971 publication of secret Pentagon files in her newspaper The Washington Post.

The women lead character built in The Post film is generally based on the film's story, namely that women are represented as women who strive for equality in work life, one of which is that women can occupy leadership positions which are usually occupied by men. In this film, Kay Graham became the first women leader at that time, because she had to replace her husband who had died, so she had to put extra effort into running the company on her own. Based on the above background, this study aims to analyze how women are constructed as leaders in the film The Post.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To analyze how women constructed as a leaders in this The Post film, several theories and concepts explained are film as a medium of representation, representation of women in films and women's leadership.

1. *Film as a Medium of Representation*

Representation is an activity to form knowledge that is made possible by the capacity of the brain to be carried out by all humans. Film is a social process in making images, sounds, and signs that show something else, into a medium that represents reality which is then presented to the audience, Turner in (Yani, 2018, p.1). According to Stuart Hall, representation is using language to say something about meaning, or to represent, a meaningful word, to another person (Hall, 1997, p. 15). Stuart Hall describes three approaches to representation which can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Reflective: relating to views or meanings about representations that are somewhere (out there) in our social society
- 2) Intentional: concerned with the views of the creator of producer of the representation

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- 3) Constructionist: concerned with how representations are made across boundaries, including visual codes

Stuart Hall in *The Work of Representation* describes the three approaches, namely the reflective approach explaining how a truth is available as a view in real life, while the meaning is only something to deceive the phenomenon which in the end language has a role as a real conveyer of that view, so that it becomes a reflection of the existing view or meaning (Hall, 1997: 24).

2. Representation of Women Leaders on Film

The representation of women leader figure published in the mass media, the characterization of the women leader is never separated from the gender roles associated with the women figure. Women as leaders tend to be less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and more oriented towards respecting others (Eagly & Johanessen-Schmidt, 2001, p. 782). Film representing women as leaders can have an effect and impact on the ideology of society. The ideology of society can change because film as a medium is believed to be able to mediate messages from a certain purpose to the community. Film has great aesthetic power because it aligns dialogue, music, scenery and action together visually and narratively (Danesi, 2011, p. 100). The leadership played by women in the film will affect public's view that women can also occupy an equal position with men in the public sphere.

3. Women Leaders in Gender Perspective

Women's leadership is influenced by its gender roles. The behavior of women as leaders, when compared to men, tends to be oriented towards interpersonal, democratic, and transformational relationship. Women leaders are considered to have character who cares about others. Concern is identical with the communal character which is often associated with the character of women leaders. The communal characteristics is a person's tendency to feel concerned about the welfare of others. When expanded in an organizational context, communal characteristics include self-talk tentatively, not only paying attention to oneself, receiving direction from others, supporting and calming others, and providing solutions to relational and interpersonal problems (Eagly & Johanessen-Schmidt, 2001).

From a gender perspective, there is a stigma that men are considered superior to women. This stigma places women as second-class citizens, including in terms of leadership. Due to this stigma, the view then emerged that power and leadership are male dominant which is manifested in masculine identity. A women leader has the potential to face tougher challenges than a male leader. Women's leadership is often seen from a masculine perspective. Women can be accepted as a leader if they are able to develop masculine characteristics in their leadership (Ditaria, 2016: 2).

4. Leadership Character

The character of the leader is one of the factors that determine the success or failure of a leader. The character of a leader can be seen among others from the way and style that is relatively fixed in treating subordinates and people. In general, the character of a leader can be divided into two, namely positive and negative characters. The character perspective in the context of leadership can have implications for three basic understandings (Wijaya, Purnomolastu, & Tjahjoanggoro, 2015, p. 19), namely: Personality of the leader, Attribute Approach, and Character Building.

A leaders has several leadership traits that will affect the success of leading a company or organization. According to Keith Devis in (Siswanto & Hamid, 2017, p. 191) there are four leadership traits, namely intelligence, maturity, flexibility in social relations, self-motivation and achievement drive and human relations attitudes.

5. Women Leadership

The character of the leader is one of the factors that determine the success or failure of a leader. The character of a leader can be seen, among others, from the way and style that is relatively fixed in treating subordinates and people. In general, the character of a leader can be divided into two, namely positive and negative characters. The character perspective in the context of leadership can have implications for three basic understandings (Wijaya, Purnomolastu, & Tjahjoanggoro, 2015, p. 19), namely: leader personality, character approach, and character building.

Women's leadership has the characteristics of encouraging participation, sharing power and information, inviting others to increase their personal value, and giving others the opportunity to feel proud of their work. In women's leadership, empowerment is the basis for taking sides. Empowerment means feeling confident in working based on one's own authority (Murniati, 2004 : 186). Women as leaders are seen as open, not too hierarchical (Book, 2000).

RESEARCH METHODS

This type of research is descriptive qualitative research with constructivism paradigm. The method used is the semiotic method of the Roland Barthes model (Ida, 2018: 75-81). The data collection techniques used for this research are documentation and literature study; and the object of research is the 2017 film *The Post*. *The Post* is a Hollywood film with a biographical genre of American historical drama, based on a true story about *The Washington Post* newspaper whose leader is a woman. Barthes examines the meaning of a sign by using a two-stage meaning system, namely denotative and connotative as well as myths about the signs in the film.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of *The Post* film, using the semiotic analysis method of Roland Barthes' model, the researchers found how the women figure is represented in this film, namely that women become leaders because of family inheritance, women are not assertive and cannot make decisions.

1. Women Leaders by Family Inheritance

Kay Graham was able to become chairman of *The Washington Post* by continuing in the position of her deceased husband. Kay became a leader not because of her achievements as a leader, not because of her leadership experience that made her a leader, nor because of the wishes of her subordinates. *The Washington Post* is a family-owned local newspaper company, therefore the family members are entitled to take leadership positions. After Kay's father died, *The Washington Post* was led by her husband, then when her husband died, it was Kay who continued to lead *The Washington Post*.



Image 1. Kay talks with her daughter about *The Post's* dilemma

The scene that shows the explanation is when Kay is in one of her grandson's rooms, Kay tells her daughter that she used to feel happy because she only took care of and raised children. Then all that changed when her husband died. She is 45 years old and has never held a company, Kay has never held a job in her life. But she didn't want to disappoint her husband and father because of her decision.

The women leadership represented in *The Post* is in accordance with the explanation above that Kay became a leader on the basis of the company's heritage, not because of Kay's ambition, which aspires to lead a company owned by her family. The leader character is assumed by social observers represented in the film *The Post* that they consider Kay unworthy and unable to occupy the position as a leader, because the person who deserves to occupy the position as a leader is a man. This is in accordance with the patriarchal culture which is a social system that places men as the main central authority figures in organizations and in other social life.

Fathers have authority over women, children and property. Implicitly this system instituted male government and privileges and demanded the subordination of women. If

implemented in the social aspect, the attribution of various jobs for men and women is determined by the sexual division of labor in this case dominated by men. (Irwanto, *Film Wonder Woman: Dominasi Wanita dalam Dunia Patriarki*, 2018, hal. 5).

The male-dominated cast of *The Post* are described as workers like the board of directors and employees of *The Washington Post* who are subordinate to Kay Graham as the leader of the newspaper. Here it can also be interpreted that men who are mythical as superior people are visualized as subordinates to women in the context of work. Women who are considered as people who are identical with the domestic sector have shifted. But still men are represented as controllers of women's decisions and thoughts. This interpretation is in accordance with the existing construction in society which assumes that women cannot lead as well as men.

2. Women Leaders Tend to be Indecisive

Women as leaders in the film *The Post* are represented tend to be indecisive. Kay always seemed indecisive about the choices she had to make. Snippets of dialogue that show Kay's indecisiveness as a women lead are "I'm not sure if I can" and "I'm really nervous about the stock market tomorrow and I have to give a big speech". Several pieces of dialogue show the lack of confidence and insecurity by Kay as a leader to deliver a speech in front of investors, all of whom are played by men.



Image 2. Kay met her colleague and revealed that she was very nervous to deliver the speech

The scene of the meeting between *The Washington Post* company and investors showed Kay's expression, who felt unsure and did not have the courage to give an explanation about the decision on the number of journalists that had been determined. Kay's presence as a leader in the meeting room was not paid much attention, Kay's voice was not heard. This made Kay less confident to convey the reasons underlying the decision that had been determined.

Another scene that shows women leaders tend to be less assertive is when Kay gets word that the *Washington Post* will be prosecuted for the decision to publish the Pentagon

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Papers report. Kay came out of his study while walking and saw his employees who were busy with their respective work. Then Kay stopped walking with a worried expression on her face. Kay was worried because she had risked the survival of the Washington Post when she published the Pentagon Papers.

Tjokroaminoto in (Habibah, 2015, hal. 103) mentions that what causes women to participate less in the public sphere, namely: (1) culturally and reinforced by religious interpretations, women are in a subordinate position to men, they are still considered as creatures under male leadership, so that in decision making , relating to social life, political economy and personal life itself, generally women do not have the right to vote, let alone the right to make and implement decisions; (2) women's access to the economy and information is very small. This makes it difficult for women to improve their bargaining position in every policy formulation and decision making; (3) since the destruction of the movement in the new order, immediately followed by the doctrine of the forced image of women; (4) lack of self-confidence. These points are in accordance with the representation in the cut scene above which shows Kay's lack of confidence in being the leader of The Washington Post.

Attitude leadership involves the process by which “influence” is intentionally given to others to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships within groups or organizations (Hendriwinaya, 2016, p. 44). As a corporate leader, his decision was deemed to be devastating to The Washington Post and his decision could not be realized. The reality of women who are ambitious to achieve success is still negatively perceived in American culture.

3. Women Leaders Can't Make Decisions

In the mass media, women are depicted as weak, unable to control and not having the power to influence their co-workers and subordinates. This is in accordance with the character of the women leader depicted in The Post film, the depiction of Kay's character as a women leader cannot make her own decisions. Kay always asks the editor or the editorial board, which are all male. Although Kay's final decision to publish the Pentagon Papers in her newspaper has succeeded in making The Washington Post not only a local newspaper.



Image 3. Kay was discussing with the board of directors over the phone, and asking for their opinion

A leader needs to be wise in making a decision (Azkiya, 2017). When Ben Bradlee, editor of *The Washington Post*, asked Kay to agree to publish the Pentagon Papers, the board of directors argued otherwise. Kay tried consistently to publish the Pentagon Papers despite the mistakes in her previous decisions. This scene illustrates that men and women have differences when they become leaders, and then gender is used as a measure of a leader's ability. Kay trying to be consistent in her decisions is an attempt at her role as a women leader.

Several scenes depict Kay when faced with two choices between publishing the Pentagon Papers or not, Kay always cannot make her own decision firmly. Kay cannot make a decision by choosing the best alternative between the two. So he always asked his editor whether it should be published or not. Until the end of the story, Kay asked how high the success of the company if he had to publish, according to the dialogue "can you guarantee that we can?", to which Ben replied "100 percent." This shows that Kay cannot make a decision on her own.

CONCLUSION

Women can become leaders because of the legacy of family-owned companies. *The Washington Post* is a family-owned local newspaper company, so that family members can take leadership positions. From a gender perspective, Kay is considered unable to succeed in her company, as a woman she is "disliked" for her position as a leader. Kay's existence is always controlled by her subordinates who are occupied by men. In this film, men are described as superior and have the power and influence to control Kay's thoughts.

Women as leaders tend to be indecisive. Kay was always hesitate and insecure about leading her company. She is described as having no courage and confidence in the choices she makes. Not even sure that she can lead the company well. Women as leaders cannot make decisions. Kay always asked her subordinates when he had to decide to publish the Pentagon

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Papers in his newspaper. Kay is represented as a leader who doesn't know what to do, she can't make his own decisions.

Women leaders in this film described as being gentle and obedient, considered incapable of being in the public sphere, especially in leading a company that is generally occupied by men. His position as a leader tries to show the position and degree of women who can be equal to men; However, in this film, women are constructed as leaders in *The Post*, but they cannot be separated from the great influence of men.

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