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The Social Construction of Lesbian Community in Kendari City, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Lesbian is one of the global issues in gender relations and sexual relations. On the one hand, it threatens the existence of social order, and on the other, it becomes a space for human rights struggle for the homosexual community. Therefore, this research aims to determine the construction process of the lesbian community in Kendari City. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with data collection techniques, namely interviews and documentation. The study showed that lesbian behavior in Kendari City did not occur naturally but resulted from social construction in three moments: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The moment of externalization is expressed mentally and physically in the form of homosexual relationships with fellow women with the same sexual orientation. The expression of lesbians in everyday life then experiences habituation in the form of community as an objective social world. Furthermore, the re-absorption (internalization) of the objective world into subjective consciousness through social media (Facebook) and personal socialization.

INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) are among the problems in the social order that occur globally. Not only in developed countries but also in developing countries. Several research results show LGBT cases. Rehman & Polymenopoulus (2013) states that several countries such as Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Mauritania, Sudan, and Iran have imposed the death penalty on homosexual perpetrators. Likewise, it is emphasized by Ali & Jelili (2018) that all activities and behaviors of LGBT groups are against the law.

On the other hand, Badgett et al. (2014) analyzed the relationship between LGBT rights and economic development. Of the 39 countries studied, he found ten countries that have active LGBT social movements and are significantly involved in global development. In a global context, LGBT is no longer seen as deviant behavior but has emerged as a social movement. They held many important meetings to fight for their interests as a minority group. They demanded the protection of International Human Rights (Onapajo & Isike, 2016). LGBT perpetrators feel disadvantaged by a

system of government, culture, and environment that does not prepare space for them (Serra, 2013).

Thus, the existence of LGBT in a State is primarily determined by the political regime, whether a State is democratic or not. Although LGBT rights are not found in all democratic States, LGBT rights are almost absent in non-democratic states (Encarnacion, 2014). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the legal basis for the development of LGBT globally. In some countries, many LGBT rights campaigns are framed as part of the struggle for internationally recognized human rights (Encarnacion, 2014; Polymenopoulou, 2018).

The various studies above show the pros and cons of LGBT existence. A country with strong religious and moral influence tends to reject LGBT and judge it as a violation of human nature. Meanwhile, states that adhere to liberal understanding tend to provide space, even protection to LGBT actors. It differs from this study, which intends to analyze the sociological aspects of the LGBT phenomenon from the perspective of social construction.

As intended by Berger and Luckmann (Segre, 2016), the perspective of social construction sees reality as a social product that takes place dialectically rather than naturally. Society is a product of man; conversely, man is also a product of society. According to Berger and Luckmann, this dialectical process has three moments: externalization, objectivization, and internalization. According to him, each individual has a different historical background, knowledge, and environment. On this basis, one can generate different interpretations when seeing and dealing with its object. On the contrary, reality also has an objective dimension: something that is experienced, external, and outside the individual self.

The LGBT context in Indonesia is a process of social construction, not a natural phenomenon. LGBT is constructed in dynamic time and space. Liberalization is a major issue that smooths the flow of LGBT in various regions, from big cities to small towns. The term LGBT in Indonesia began around 1968, known as “*Wadam*” or *Wanita Adam* (Adam’s Woman), which more subtly replaced the term homosexual. Then in 1969, the first *Wadam* organization was formed called the *Wadam Djakarta Association (Himpunan Wadam Djakarta/ HIWAD)*. Subsequently, in 1980, the term “*Wadam*” changed to *Waria* or *Wanita Pria* (Male Woman). While the Gay community started around 1982, which was marked by the establishment of an organization called Lambda. In 1985, a gay group in Yogyakarta founded the Yogyakarta Gay Brotherhood (*Persaudaraan Gay Yogyakarta/ PGY*). The LGBT movement intensified in 1993, namely holding the first Indonesian Lesbian & Gay Congress (KLG1) in Kaliurang, Yogyakarta (Muthmainnah, 2016).

Cases of homosexuals such as lesbians and gays have reached Kendari City, Southeast Sulawesi Province. In the socio-cultural context, Kendari City is known as the City of Religion (*Kota Bertakwa*), where the people still maintain religious and cultural values. This became the power of social control over various deviations. The people of Kendari City uphold the principle and social order that the male partner is a woman and vice versa. Therefore, the people of Kendari City consider LGBT behavior despicable, very disgusting, and deviant. However, the activities of homosexuals (Lesbians) in Kendari City remain to

exist, some are carried out clandestinely, for example, in Gyms and Salons, and some have been exposed on social media such as Facebook. On this basis, the researcher intends to elaborate on the social construction of lesbians in Kendari City.

METHODS

This research was conducted in Kendari City, considering that the LGBT phenomenon has been manifestly present in the city, both in its social activities in the real world and the virtual world. To understand the process of its social construction, a qualitative approach is used. This approach is particularly relevant for unearthing information of a subjective and in-depth nature oriented towards the discovery of meanings and processes. Due to the absence of available data on the identity of informants, researchers used snowball sampling techniques (Naderifar et al., 2017). Researchers first found one Lesbian perpetrator, and then an in-depth interview was conducted. At the end of the interview, the researcher asked for information about his female friend who is also a Lesbian. And so on until redundancy, in-depth, and thorough data is obtained about the participant experience (Ningi, 2022).

In addition to in-depth interviews, data collection is also carried out by tracing and observing Lesbian activities on Facebook as information that corroborates the results of the interviews. After the data collection process is declared adequate (redundancy), the data analysis process is then carried out. Data analysis techniques are carried out interactively as intended by Miles & Huberman (2014). This process is carried out to get a complete and systematic picture of the process of the social construction of the lesbian community in Kendari City.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Kendari city as a religious city (*Kota Bertakwa*) views LGBT as deviant sexual behavior. A culture of intimacy with religious, ethical, moral, and cultural values that are still alive is a challenging factor for homosexual perpetrators. Any form of homosexual activity, such as Lesbian is not a phenomenon that can be taken for granted, but rather is perceived as disgusting behavior. Nevertheless, the current of liberalization continues to attack the social order of the people of Kendari

City so that the LGBT phenomenon cannot be contained by society. Amid the glitter and freedom of urban life holds room for homosexuals. They move secretly and blatantly in various arenas, such as in Salons, Gyms, Coffee Shops, entertainment venues, and social media.

This shows that the existence of values that are considered sublime in society experiences interaction with the freedom of actors. In the perspective of the social construction of Berger and Luckmann (1966), the power of structure in the form of values and subjectivity of actors takes place dialectically. The two form each other constantly. In this case, views on LGBT perpetrators who are despicable and incompatible with human nature continue to shape a mindset and behavior that is in accordance with the social order. But on the other hand, the result of lesbian actors' meaning of their world has an impact on the existence of a social value order. This dialectical process occurs in three momentums: externalization, objectivization, and internalization. These three moments are described as follows.

Externalization of the Lesbian Community

Externalization is the attempt of human self-expression into the outside world, both mental and physical activities. This moment is human nature; man always devotes himself to the place where he is. Berger and Luckmann refer to this stage as *society is a human product*. Man wants to find himself in a world, a community, and this distinguishes man from animals. That is, during life man always finds himself by way of devoting himself in the world. This trait of dialectics is carried out constantly to discover and shape the existence of the self. Elizabeth L. Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis state that lesbian identity is butchy and femme as part of feminist discourse that changes the meaning and obscures the dominant construction of gender and heterosexuality (Blackwood, 2010; Blackwood, 2012).

The result of the freedom of expression about the perspective of sexual relations patterns is actualized mentally and physically by lesbians in Kendari City. They judge and express sexual relations not always in the opposite sex between men and women, but sexual relations can be carried out between the same sex (homosexual), that is, between women. Despite the relationship of the same sex, lesbian actors have different roles.

Among them, there are those who play the role of "men," and there are as "women". Based on the results of the study, three externalization typologies are known among Lesbians, namely Butchy, Femme, and Andro. These three typologies are described as follows.

1. Butchy

Butchy lesbians are a type of lesbian who look like men, have a fairly short haircut like men in general. Butchy lesbians are more dominantly protective, strong, and more active like the nature of men in general (Masculine). In the lesbian world, butchy plays a man in a sexual relationship. Usually, this category is quite easy to recognize because of its Macho appearance. Therefore, this type of lesbian is commonly called Hunter. Butchy/hunter lesbians usually have a partner (girlfriend) who is a Lesbian Femme type. This is because lesbians with the *butchy/hunter* type tend to feel if there is a mental attitude impulse in masculinity. This masculine attitude is a sexual impulse that seems to get sexual satisfaction as a man in general. For butchy, the word beautiful or sweet always connotes ridicule. Meanwhile, dashing, cool, manly, or masculine expressions will make them even more proud.

2. Femme

Femme lesbian is a type of lesbian who has a feminine figure with an appearance like a woman (*girly*) in general. The lesbian femme doesn't change her appearance or haircut, but her sexual orientation favors her fellow women. Lesbians with this type tend to pair up with butchy lesbians where this type of lesbian is looking for a male character figure in a woman's body. Lesbian femme plays a woman in a relationship. According to Pasterski (2019), Femme identity is usually defined as a gay woman who identifies as feminine.

3. Andro

Andro lesbian is a type of lesbian who looks like a man, but a haircut that is not too short like a Butchy lesbian haircut. The lesbian Andro nature is dominantly protective, strong like a butchy lesbian. Lesbian Andro is a lesbian who has a masculine impulse when she has a relationship with a woman with a girly nature. A person with lesbian andro traits can become more responsible for his relationship with his girlfriend, thus giving rise to a mental attitude of masculinity.

Women in this category are figures who can be both. The point is that in dress-up, they can look feminine like femme but tend to act like butchy. The andro label itself is divided into two, Andro butchy and Andro Femme. Andro femme usually looks tomboyish but still looks like a woman and acts like a femme. Meanwhile, Andro butchy looks like a man, but there is still a girl nature and plays the role of butchy.

In the context of social construction, lesbian externalization is a mental and physical expression of women with the same sexual orientation. Lesbians in Kendari City are present not due to biological (genealogical) factors but rather because they have the same concept and perception of sex. This is in line with the findings of Crawley & Willman (2018) that the embodiment of homosexuality is malleable in social contexts and discursive moments. The satisfaction of sexual relations is no longer obtained from the relationship between men and women but from fellow women who have the role of a man (Butchy) and a role as a woman (Femme).

Objectivization of the Lesbian Community

Objectivization is the result that has been achieved both mentally and physically from the externalization activities of the human being. According to Berger and Luckmann (Segre, 2016), all human activities that occur in externalization will undergo a process of habitualization which then undergoes institutionalization as an objective social world. At this stage, Berger and Luckmann (1966) mentioned the term *society is an objective reality*. In this context, Lesbians in Kendari City are objectified into objective reality in various forms overtly. Some have declared themselves Lesbians to their parents, gathered in lesbian communities in coffee shops and entertainment venues, and formed a Facebook group called *Komunitas Belok Kendari*. At a higher level, such a social movement, Lesbians have not been found in Kendari City as in other major cities (Adiego, 2020). Their professional backgrounds include students, parking attendants, shop assistants, and self-employed.

Internalization of the Lesbian Community

Internalization is the process of re-entering the values and meanings of the objective world into subjective consciousness so that individuals are re-produced by social structures. Various elements of the objectified world will be captured as symptoms

or reality beyond his consciousness and at the same time as internal symptoms of his consciousness. For Berger and Luckmann (1966), at the stage of internalization, *humans are social products*. In this context, Lesbian perpetrators are social products of the Lesbian community that have been objectivized. The process of internalizing lesbians in Kendari City through social media (Facebook) and personal socialization. This is in line with the findings of Mattei & Vitorino (2020) that the LGBT Facebook group is quite effective as a means of exchanging experiences and forming identity.

Through social media on Facebook, the Lesbian community in Kendari City introduced themselves by using cipher language while sharing their mobile phone numbers. Through Facebook, also they offer products that Lesbians commonly use. In addition, through social media (Facebook), they find new friends with similar sexual orientations, forming groups on social media. After they shared their mobile phone numbers in the Facebook group, they communicated personally and held meetings in various entertainment venues. They meet and understand each other, so the Lesbian community is even more solid.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the existence of Lesbians in Kendari City does not occur naturally but is the result of social construction that takes place in three moments, namely externalization, objectivization, and internalization. The moment of externalization is expressed mentally and physically in the form of homosexual relationships with fellow women with the same sexual orientation. Lesbian activities that are externalized in the form of Butchy, Femme, and Andro subsequently undergo a process of habituation that then undergoes institutionalization in the form of community as an objective social world. Furthermore, re-entering the values and meanings (internalization) of the objective world into subjective consciousness is carried out through social media (Facebook) and personal socialization.

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