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THE PORTRAIT OF LGBT PRACTICES IN CHILDREN ANIMATION

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Abstract

Media and power are inseparable. In this context, Netflix uses its authority including intellectual agents behind the scenes who have an interest in spreading the doctrine of LGBT ideology and gender inclusion so that it can be accepted by the public including children who are considered vulnerable. This study inquires how LGBT ideology is reproduced in the form of children's animation themes. This study focuses on the pattern of interaction and the spread of LGBT ideology packaged in the form of a children's movie commodity entitled Nimona. The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach involving library research. This study shows that the existence of LGBT practices depicted through two prominent characters is no longer shown as a taboo and immoral commodity but is considered as something normal and worthy of consumption and respect.

Keywords: children, ideology, LGBT, nimona

INTRODUCTION

Mass communication and human existence are two magnetic poles that attract each other. To spread information, there must be a communication mechanism via media intermediaries. Furthermore, the media includes not only print and electronic media, but also new media that has been digitized and converged. The use of new media by audiences and society has increased as a result of its digitization and convergence. The variety of content offered satisfies the audience's access requirements. One type of new media content that is often accessed is short and long-form video content, such as films, dramas, cartoons, and series (Khairunnisa., Oktarini., & Oxcygentri, 2021).

Speaking of new media, cartoons are basically 2D images that look funny and unique to represent an event or story. Cartoons from year to year have become a spectacle material

that is still the most favoured by children, even teenagers and adults are still there who spend their free time watching cartoons (Fairuzizdihar, 2022).

Nowadays, many cartoons are trying to follow trends so that many people are interested and many people recommend the cartoon to others to watch it. This is then utilized by the LGBT community and its supporters, which has been a hot topic of discussion among the world community since 2015 until now (Garretson, 2009). Because of the rise of this, many cartoons began to raise the issue of sexual disorder which of course is related to LGBT itself. One of the animated movies that showcases this practice is *Nimona*, which was produced in mid-2023 and broadcasted by Netflix. The movie tells the story of a knight named Ballister who is accused of murdering the Queen. His only hope to prove his innocence and find the real murderer is to team up with a hyperactive and chaotic teenager who is seen as a monster named Nimona. From the beginning to the middle of the scene, there is nothing flashy and it is still appropriate for children. However, the shocking thing happens at the end of the movie which shows a clear scene of romance between Ballister and Ambrosius, his old friend, who are both men. The ways used in this cartoon to show that they support LGBT include: showing intimate or romantic scenes (hugging, holding hands, kissing, etc.) between two characters of the same sex, showing characters whose behaviour tend to be the opposite of their gender, and showing through veiled messages that are symbols of LGBT.

As a subscription-based streaming service featuring animated programs, Netflix has a great responsibility in representing LGBT people. Netflix, itself, has already aired several similar movies, such as *Elite*, *The Boys in the Band*, *Queer Eye*, *XO Kitty*, or *Heartstopper*. It is important to notice that the display in public media can be likened to a circle that relates to the system that develops in society, the rules of norms that are considered as benchmarks, and the interpretation of a phenomenon. All of these things are in the form of a circle that influences each other. This is in line with Whittle's (2002) opinion that texts or images contained in media platforms have the power to influence. These displays will produce discourses that serve to perpetuate customs, produce power relations, and have ideological effects. The study conducted in this article aims to reveal the position of LGBT people in public media platforms, especially the animation entitled *Nimona* and broadcasted by Netflix. To achieve this goal, the study is based on the critical discourse model expressed by Michel Foucault on power relations. Discourse in Foucault's concept is an ideological articulation of reality formed by groups that compete with each other for the truth in the form of discourse.

Therefore, discourse is an ideological construction that is used to legitimize, maintain and contest power. Discourse analysis Foucault's critical discourse analysis model is one of

the methods of analysing media texts to uncover how the media constructs a discourse. Analysis discourse analysis emphasizes the constellation of forces that occur in the process of production and reproduction of meaning. Critical discourse analysis sees the use of language in speech and writing as a social practice. Language is analysed not by describing only the aspects, but also connects with the context. Context here means that language is used for certain purposes and practices including the practice of power (Eriyanto, 2015). Discourse analysis refers to Michel Foucault's thinking, including methods of analysing the genealogy of power and analysing the archaeology of knowledge. The genealogy process is to examine a series of discourses formed, analysing the historical relationship between power and discourse and not investigating a conspiracy through the consciousness of its actors (Foucault, 1994; Ritzer, 2003). Meanwhile, the archaeology of knowledge allows the investigation of discourse events, statements that are discussed and written down. This step is done to find out the archival analysis of a text. Archaeology is the analysis of discourse in its archival form. Archaeology describes discourses as praxes that are specialized in the elements of an archive (Foucault, 2002) specialized in the elements of an archive (Foucault, 2002).

It has been accepted that a media has benefits in shaping people's experiences of social and determine the reality of our society. A media such as television refers to what Silverstone (1988; cf Couldry, 2000: 42-44) as cited in Nick (2001) stated as a ritual 'frame': a cognitive, imaginative, and practical space accessible for everyone from the private and particular. Movie, as part of media platform is a symbol of the improvement of information technology is one of the most popular mass media recently. Mass media is an intermediary to deliver a message from the sender to the receiver which allows people to share information faster in every aspect of live. The huge development of media has influenced the society, not only in lifestyle, but also in culture or even ideology.

Besides the mass media has a positive function to spread information, it also has a drawback if the information which delivers is harmful. In addition, the mass media is illustrated as a double-edged sword because the mass media has a power in framing the public opinion through messages it provides.

In a Foucault perspective, discourse is basically to form a representation, codes, conventions, and habits of language that produce specific fields of culture and historical located meaning (Gang, 2015). In a very basis, discourse can refer to the use of language whether in spoken or written. (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013, p.24) as cited in Bhattarai (2020) stated that a plethora of literature notes that in the study of language, discourse often refers to the speech patterns and the usage of language, dialects, and acceptable statements within a

community. In a broad definition, discourse is not only focused on linguistics matter, but also social issue. Additionally, (Hall,1997, p.44) in Gang (2015) explained that based on Foucault's point of view, discourse is a part of knowledge and ideology and it is not an unaligned definition.

In analyzing a discourse based on Foucault theory, it should at least hold on Foucault's three key elements such as: discourse, history, and power to distinguish from other types of discourse analysis (Dhona, 2020). Further, it also should be distinguished between the concept and method of Foucault. Kendal & Wickham simplify the discourse into what could be said and what could be seen so that, discourse can refer to every human action over reality. As a result, discourse analysis of Foucault not only analyse textual linguistics but also non textual linguistics (Dhona, 2020). Foucault proposed another important aspect in analysing discourse which is called statement which constructs the discourse. This term renders the different view of Foucault discourse with another expert that use sentence or text. Foucault prefers to use statement rather than sentence or text, because not all statement can be analysed grammatically, also, a sentence could have the same speech act, but it has different statement analysis depending on existing situation when the meaning is addressed.

In the last few decades, the issue regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender or more known as LGBT has appeared in the world, it because the health problems concerning this issue has raised. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual is related to sexual identity while transgender refers to gender identity (www.decipher.uk.net). Lesbian as the first category of LGBT is refers to a woman who has an interest to another woman. The homosexual between women was less documented however it did appear in the dream book the Carlsberg papyrus XIII. This term is used to express sexual identity or sexual behaviour related to sexual orientation. Gay as the second part of LGBT is the so-called gay which attributes to someone who has a desire to the same sex and not interested in opposite sex. Basically, gay is addressed to men homosexual. Compare to lesbian, the history of gay has been well documented. It established at ancient civilization, then, started in 1994 in the Unites States there was an annual compliance called LGBT history month. Bisexual in This term is directed for those who have a tendency to be attracted to all genders. This interest could be in romantic form or sexual attraction to men or women. The last is transgender was first come up in the 1960s to consider those who have different gender identity they were assigned at birth. People who are transgender also classified as third gender. Transgender does not belong to someone's gender identity related to biological sex they acquired since birth.

This research is intended to investigate power relation that exist in children's animation movie entitle Nimona. This research employs a descriptive qualitative paradigm involving library research. The data in this study are in the form of images or screen shootings related to the representation of LGBT in Nimona. The data then analyse using discourse analysis proposed by Foucault. There are some significant differences between Foucault discourse analysis and other experts because he inserted some aspects in his analysis such as discourse and statement, history, and power.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Foucault analyses the history of episteme, and the relationship between power and knowledge, currently in the field of sexuality. Foucault sees the concept of power unlike the concept of power in general, where power is not centralized (centre), and not like a political structure (for example, the king holds absolute power). For him, power is everywhere, because it comes from everywhere.

Data 1



Pict. 1 Ambrosius and Ballister are holding hands (00:04:04)

The image above appears at the beginning of the movie showing the physical interaction between Ballister, a former knight of the Institute for Elite Knights that was established by the legendary heroine Gloreth, and Ambrosius who is his close partner. In the scene, Ballister looks anxious ahead of his coronation as the best knight by Queen Gloreth. He feels scared and unworthy of the public's opinion because his background is not of noble origin. However, Ambrosius managed to calm him down and ensure that Ballister deserved the award. The form of support shown by Ambrosius is by making physical contact in the form of hand holding. At first, the scene doesn't really show any strange interactions although there is a slight suspicion that the physical activity is considered unusual for two people of the same gender. Further suspicion turns out to occur in the next scene which seems to open slowly the assumption of a special relationship between the two.

Data 2



Pict 2. 00:04:14 Ballister resting his head on Ambrosius

Still in the same ambience, the action continues with more intimate physical contact. In this context, Ballister responds to Ambrosius' support by leaning his head as if to show that he agrees with Ambrosius' words. The act of resting one's head on the shoulder of someone of the same gender seems to clearly confirm that there is more than just a friendship between the two, which is romantic. It is a shocking sight to be shown to children and adults in a culture and situation that still forbids same-sex relationships.

Data 3



Pict 3. 01:03:42 Ambrosius revealing his feeling to Ballister

This scene describes an argument involving Ballister and Ambrosius somewhere. At that time, Ambrosius asked Ballister to meet him secretly in a restaurant without Nimona knowing. Nimona herself is a monster in the form of a girl who actually has a good heart. In the scene, Ambrosius begged Ballister to immediately stay away from Nimona and work together to catch Nimona. However, Ballister refused. At that moment, Ambrosius went after him and eventually expressed his feelings to Ballister as a sign that he did not want Ballister to get into trouble in the future. The declaration of love for the purpose of romance expressed by Ambrosius shows a relationship that should not be expressed by the same gender. In this case, the consensus between the two convinces researchers that sexuality is increasingly open and

not exclusive. This can be seen from Ballister's reaction, which seems to accept Ambrosius' feelings regardless of their position in the gender context.

Data 4



Pict 4. 01:21:43 Ambrosius embracing Ballister on her arms

After Nimona and Ballister defeated Rector, Ballister fell down and almost fainted. At the same time, Ambrosius saw him and immediately embraced him. This scene clearly shows how Ambrosius treats Ballister differently and romantically. The sexual behaviour shown in this scene is undeniably influenced by social norms that impact the way individuals act, think, and identify themselves. What Ambrosius and Ballister do in this scene is believed to be conscious and the severity of this scene is shown in animation.

Data 5



Pict 5. 01:22:46 Kissing

Towards the end of the movie, Ambrosius and Ballister are shown doing a scene that is considered very inappropriate for children. Taking place in a park visited by children, Ballister and Ambrosius seemed not to care about the situation in the park. They only focus on the feelings they have at that moment. This scene implies that love is universal and open and can be practiced anywhere regardless of the surrounding situation.

The ways in which this film tends to show indicating the support for LGBT views include: showing intimate or romantic scenes (hugging, holding hands, kissing, etc.) between

two characters of the same sex (Fairuzizdihar, 2022). The representations of LGBT characters and themes in this movie can be examined, as well as how they either uphold or subvert societal standards and power systems. For instance, one can look at how LGBT people are portrayed either stereotypically or authentically. Moreover, it is also seen on how they encounter prejudice, interact with other characters and the greater social world.

In this context, Netflix as a subscription-based streaming service, has a very large role in airing *Nimona*. Netflix in its role as a technological media seeks to socially construct sexuality by assuming that what society has seen as abnormal so far is normal from both a religious and cultural context. The scene that shows sexual intercourse between Ambrosius and Ballister in the form of children's animation seems to agree that LGBT should have equality and need to be accepted and not considered sick. Netflix as a pro-LGBT party has the power to accelerate and spread LGBT ideology to the public including children. Netflix has the power to intervene in defining LGBT through sexual behaviour and gender identity. Sexuality behaviour is dominantly shaped by a network of power relations which are then manifested in the form of discourse or knowledge (Foucault). This is then produced by the media, which serves as a means of ideological publication. Texts and images in media spectacles carry certain ideological meanings in winning support (Eriyanto, 2015). The process of publication of ideology built by the media is done by the use of images or words in visual form. The use of both is used to represent LGBT and is found in data 1 to data 5.

As a consequence, this ideology has slowly become a commodity in the form of spectacle consumption. The intensity of consumption of this spectacle then urges the emergence of overstimulation to supply consumers with various libido-fulfilling products. Censorship activities in this era no longer take the form of reducing or removing information, but censorship activities have shifted to providing as much information as possible, without covering up anything, so that expectations of desire fulfilment are maximized and without passing through the filter first. This clearly shows that the superiority of media and spectacle is transformed into "secular religion and God". If censorship had been applied to other children's animations with similar themes before they were broadcast by Netflix, the situation would have been different. With such a large viewing capacity, and with access to a wide-open audience, sex that is considered taboo has become an aspect that can be discussed shamelessly. The collapse of moral structures and taboo aspects in postmodern society legitimizes that sexual activity and various activities that resemble it, are very freely interpreted and practiced. For example, romantic relationships should not be carried out by the same gender but only by two different genders, male and female. The authority of the

media and the power of capitalism force LGBT ideology to enter and settle in the public sphere. In the public sphere, this ideology is commodified and becomes a commodity that is considered normal.

Free and easy access to media allows for the proliferation of similar LGBT content in other media such as cartoons. With the help of Netflix and other media platforms, individuals are no longer ashamed to display sexual behaviour and attributes that are classified as LGBT. The conclusion is that capitalism transforms by taking a "new form", utilizing the urge to fulfil desires, and fulfilling these desires through visualization of spectacle.

CONCLUSION

There are images or texts that reflect both and behind them there is a meaning. In this analysis, Foucault's sexuality gives us the assumption that LGBT as a marginalized group is used as a subject of sexuality in spreading its ideology through Netflix, which is known as one of the largest subscription-based streaming platforms. In this context, Netflix uses its authority including intellectual agents behind the scenes who have an interest in spreading the doctrine of LGBT ideology and gender inclusion so that it can be accepted by the public including children who are considered vulnerable.

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