

# Filmic Technology in TV News and the Construction of *Monstrous Feminine*

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## Abstract

TV news of high profile corruption scandals in Indonesia often involves women as witnesses and the media tends to put focus on women's sexuality, making it as core of narrative, while the male corruptors are put aside into the margin of narrative. Politics of feminization and sexualization of corruption issues can be found in the news and most of them tend to denigrate and objectify women. By employing television's filmic technology, they reproduce women's rivalry and sexuality into *monstrous feminine* (bad female), which are considered as dangerous and threaten male superiority and the phallogocentric-order of society.

**Keywords:** women, TV news, narrative, monstrous feminine, sexuality.

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## Introduction

The dramatic proliferation of media technology and mode of communication causes a largely mediated social life. In a mediated

world, the reach and the exploration of communication as well as human interaction become limitless; its reach stretches beyond time and space. The expansion of interaction as the result of media technology goes hand in hand with Marshall McLuhan's (1964, 2001) view that "media are extensions of man." In the field of Media Studies, the word "man" in McLuhan's view has triggered another question. "Man" referred to "man" in *mankind* (human being or humans) or *male-sex* (male). The studies on the relationship of media and gender tended to show the latter definition, that *media as extensions of man (as male sex)*. Media, in this case, become the tool or instrument of male domination of women (Loon 2008: 80). Feminists' critique towards gender-biased media products became the real example of how media were inclined to be the instruments that allowed the practices of gender inequality. The studies conducted under Film Studies showed in detail how filmic or cinematic technology also played a significant role in mediating reality, including gender reality. Jean Louis Baudry (1970), one of pioneers in Film Studies, stated that filmic technology such as camera movement, editing, sound effect, and so on, was done in certain ideology to construct the positions of the subject, not only the subjects in the film (characters) but also the spectators (in Hayward, 2013: 22). Under gender context, media technical apparatuses and its usage contributed in organizing and mobilizing the ideas of gender. This filmic technology was not only used and utilized in film; advertisements and television also used such a technology. This study particularly examines how filmic technology plays an ideological role in constructing women's image in television news.

In recent years, Indonesian television has been about the news of Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK)'s achievements in revealing corruption cases in Indonesia. Some cases even seized the attention of television and had pretty high showing time. This tendency rised since the beginning of 2013, when some private television stations competed on broadcasting corruption cases involving women. These private television stations even completed the case with investigation report and 'exclusive'-labelled program about the involving of some women in the criminal case. The corruption case on SIM (Driving License) simulator involving Irjen Djoko Susilo and imported beef quota

involving Ahmad Fathanah and the president of PKS, Luthfi Hasan Ishaq, were two corruption cases that drew the media attention. The television stations took turns on airing the women involved in both corruption cases. In doing so, those stations raised various theme, title, visualization, and tagline on the news. For example, MetroTV in *Metro Hari Ini* (May 8, 2013) took the theme of "Woman and Fathanah's Scandal". TVOne in *Kabar Malam* (May 9, 2013) presented the tagline of "Woman behind Imported Beef", SCTV in *Liputan 6 Pagi* took the title of "Morning Coffee: Corruption and Beautiful Women" (May 11, 2013). In the end of January 2013 when Ahmad Fathanah, one suspect of imported beef corruption case, was caught by KPK when he was with a woman, some television stations immediately brought the report on this. For example, *Liputan 6 Siang* aired news footage with tagline "Sex Gratification behind PKS Bribery Case?" They repeatedly showed footage of a woman who was with Ahmad Fathanah in an expensive hotel in Jakarta. The woman's identity became a mystery they have to solved and scrutinized in public. The media televised her name, face, age, where she went to school, and her private life.

This also happened in the corruption case and alleged money laundry done by an authority in police agencies, Irjen Djoko Susilo. The report intensifies as the media revealed Djoko Susilo's polygamy. The media revealed women, who were assumed as Djoko Susilo's wives and allegedly received some monetary value he acquired from corruption practice. It became the main topic of most television news. For example, TransTV in *Reportase* (March 23, 2013) brought tagline "Djoko Susilo's wives" (*Istri-istri Djoko Susilo*) when they aired the investigation on Djoko's polygamy. On the other hand, RCTI in *Seputar Indonesia* (February 9, 2013) focused on one woman, whom the host called as Djoko's "young wife" (*istri muda*). While SCTV in *Liputan 6 Siang* (February 15, 2013) brought tagline "the Love Story of Irjen Djoko and Putri Solo" (*Kisah Cinta Irjen Djoko dan Putri Solo*). The media also aired women's face identified as Djoko Susilo's wives in the footage. Some photos of Djoko's wives were aired and they took close-up shot repeatedly, complemented with the narrator's explanation about those women and their relationships with Irjen Djoko. Even though they were supposed to be the witnesses of the corruption cases, some

women who were exposed in the news became the center attention, replacing the corruptor as the main suspect. How the media conveyed their news was deeply concerning. Not only through verbal news, had television employed filmic apparatuses that worked in certain ideology to construct women as the subjects, which actually brought demise to them. The camera movement and point of view, *mise-en-scene* (the way they put the incident), focalization (perspective through which a narrative is presented), and plot were the example of news narrative elements, which played a great role in constructing women's position.

### **Women in News Narrative**

The issues on how women were portrayed in the news were not novel. The previous critical studies on women's images in media also included news, even though it was still only a few of them. The Western feminists' works published more than 40 years ago such as Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*, 1963), Germain Greer (*The Female Eunuch*, 1970), and Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet (*Heart and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, 1978) focused on the media representation in entertainment programs such as soap opera, drama series, movie, or advertisements. These studies showed that the mass media tended to present the stereotypical woman images as passive, submissive, weak, emotional, male's sexual objects, and the domestic sphere was the most proper place for women (in Byerly & Ross 2006: 17). Different from entertainment programs, news was considered as a media text, which is closest to the reality, factual and not a fantasy. According to Schaap, news was "the factual information that its viewers need in order to be able to participate in their society" (2009: 1). As a fact-based information form, news program was indirectly obliged to present authentic information and possessed high credibility.

The first studies on media news tended to focus on how they acquired the factual information such as on how they wrote the news, news value and newsworthiness criteria, or how could they broadcast event A over event B. Gender issues on news studies were rarely examined until the end of 1970s (Gill 2007, 113). However, even though they rarely discussed gender issues, some studies on news text showed

that news was not simply presented *the real world*. If certain news brought up the principle of news value and newsworthiness, there was a party that constructed this principle and decided that a certain event was considered significant and had high news value, while the others were not. There was a selection process, a meaning production process on what so-called 'the important' and 'the unimportant'. Narrative news went through contextualization process. This was what we called as framing (Norris 1997; Entman 1989). The process included exclusion/inclusion, accentuation, erasing, and distorting some parts of reality. The structure of interpretation went in accordance to a certain ideology to construct an understanding about the displayed reality. Gitlin (1980) highlighted that the journalists conducted a framing process of their news according to the media institutions, working condition, journalistic practices, daily lives, and the news value, which was the product and the process of hegemonic structure (in Kara 2009: 341). Under the context of television news, Stuart Hall (1984) also stated that news value became a professional code used by television stations to conduct news selection, construction, and presentation (in Pearson & Simpson 2001: 436). News value basically referred to a line of cooperation policy that produced the news, which later provided a frame for the journalists to categorize whether an event had its news value or not. In other words, media conducted a selection process on a certain event they considered as valueable and worth to be brought to the public. Hence, news text was not neutral, which is only "showing the real world." Television news contained a constructed reality, which was done through editorial selection process and its audio-visual images selection. It meant, there was a certain narrative structure that could be used and utilized when they wanted to present what-so-called *good news*.

Furthermore, Rosalind Gill (2007: 114) emphasized that news was considered as a cultural product that represented the assumption of the dominant culture on what and who was significant, including the social position and relation they deemed 'normal.' News narrative on gender issues, according to Gill, also represented the acknowledged gender constellation and deemed as dominant in the society. News could be the entrance gate to see the dynamics of gender relation occurred in the

society on a daily basis. The dominant ideas of women's position, role, and lives could be seen through how the news narrated women (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Kara, 2009; Gill, 2007).

In 1995, the studies of Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in 71 countries showed that the number of women who appeared in media news, both as the newsmaker and informant, only reached 19%. GMMP research also showed that in Asia there were only 14% of women who appeared in news narratives and they did not even appear in political, business, or government-related news. Women often appeared in the news about health or arts. This emphasized the notion that women remained positioned in different domain with men (Byerly & Ross 2006: 41). The appearance of women in such news was stereotypically as the victim, mother, or wife. The further research conducted by GMMP in 2000 showed that the percentage of women's appearance as the main news actor actually decreased 1%. Until 2005, women's appearance in political or economic news in 71 countries remained low and "woman-as-victim" stereotype still was the dominant theme in the news narrative (Gill 2007: 115). This meant there was a quantity and quality problem on the representation of women in media news; in newspaper, radio, or television.

The studies on woman in news narrative had also been conducted in Indonesia. There was the similar tendency with the research findings done by GMMP that the media tended to present the stereotype of women as the victim. The study done by Widaningsih (2011, 2012) on news in national newspapers (*Kompas* and *Jawa Pos*) found that there was women marginalization and objectification, which was constructed through wordplay. The studied news was about woman physical abuse cases, and the news sounded like reproduced the violence through the diction, labelling, and sentence structure. In 2012, a study conducted by the Alliance of Independent Journalists (Aliansi Jurnalis Independen/AJI) showed that the quantity of news about women in printed media and television media were rather high ([www.ajiindonesia.or.id](http://www.ajiindonesia.or.id)). AJI conducted a research on seven newspapers published in Jakarta between March-Mei 2012; they are *Indo Pos* (*Jawa Pos Group*), *Kompas*, *Warta Kota*, *Republika*, *Suara Pembaruan*, *Koran Tempo*, and *Poskota*. The newspapers showed that there were 731 news about women. The recurrent news

category was about woman and law, especially corruption cases, there were 254 articles. This news category occupied the most aired program in six private television stations; they are RCTI, SCTV, Metro TV, TVOne, TransTV, and Trans 7. Out of 374 television news about woman for three months, 233 of it were the news about woman and law. Another remarkable thing from AJI's study was that out of hundreds of news about woman, the quality of woman representation in news narrative was still deeply concerning. The stereotype affirmation that "woman-as-victim" was still obvious and in the same time, the media reproduced the violence and victimized the female victims.

### **Feminization and Sexualization of the News**

Based on the studies conducted by *Aliansi Jurnalis Independen* (AJI) Indonesia, the number of news about women dealing with the law, especially on corruption cases, has significantly high portion in Indonesian television programs. The corruption case of SIM simulator and imported beef quote bribery case were the real example. The media consciously positioned women as the central attention of the corruption case, even though they were supposed to be the witnesses. The media dragged and forced them to be as if the main suspect of these cases. The corruptors as the main actors, who were male, were set aside as the bystanders, while the witnesses (female) became the center of the narrative. It was clear that women suffered from scapegoating of some corruption cases in Indonesia, which were aired constantly in Indonesian television stations. These could be seen through the news titles or taglines they put as they aired the corruption news on the screen.

The choice of title and tagline such as "Women and Fathanah's Scandal," "The Women behind Imported Beef," or "Corruption and Beautiful Women" gave the assumed interpretation that corruption and woman had direct and causal relation. This relation was understood by *first*, beautiful women became the cause of corruption (which was done by man) or *second*, due to the corruption case, there was a sexual scandal between male and beautiful female. Both assumptions brought disadvantages to women and assumed women as the inciter of male's corrupted moral. Tom Douglas in his book *Scapegoats: Transferring*

*Blames* explained that the process of scaegoating occurred when there was a low unwillingness and good intention to reveal the real cause of the unfavorable problem. This caused the dominant and authority party chose a certain group of people to take the blame, usually the unusual ones or was considered different or *other* (1995: 39). In corruption news, instead of focusing on the corrupted moral of the Nation's officials and politicians and the ruined Indonesian bureaucracy that allowed the chance of corruption to happen, the television news preferred to focus on woman and sexuality.

Television news became infotainment-like and tried to reveal trivial and gossip-based information. Television tabloidization made television news, which were initially public need oriented (public as the citizen), became market-oriented and profit-accumulation commodity (public as the consumer). Television industry believed that news as a commodity should attract advertisement, and in order to do that, news program should be popular (read: favorable to the audience). The problem was, "favorable to the audience" was also ideological claim. What was the definition of "favorable"? Who defined it, the media or the audience? Which audience? The rating mechanism often became the answer the television industry depended on. But, the one who did the rating research and the methods s/he applied in the research were often amised and ignored. The point was, by making rating as the sole popularity measure of a program was subjective and biased action for the political economy interest of television industry.

Commercial interest has transformed television news into an entertainment business, provocative, talked about trivial things and exploitative (Langer 1998: 1). Watching television news on corruption case was like watching drama or soap opera. The issues were dramatized and sensationalized, until it was hard to identify whether it was information or drama. The commercial interest established television industry practices to not only focus on giving information, but also entertaining. They had to please the public, therefore news format that were hard news, informative, and 'boring' had to be changed into soft news, entertaining, sensational, and pleasurable. Feminization and sexualization of the news became two strategies often done by the media (Holland 1998: 18), to soften the hard news. Feminization of



news was done by including 'feminine' topics in phallogocentric logics, for example, by raising issues of women in the domestic sphere. On the other hand, sexualization of news was done by including material topics and sexual activities, from sex scandal to body parts exposition, especially woman body. Both strategies made things, which were initially considered as private, personal, and secret became the public display (read: on television). This also happened on the reportage of women in the corruption case in Indonesia.

For example in the corruption case of SIM simulator, at first television presented the factual news on who Irjen Djoko Susilo was. When KPK investigation on the corruption case and money laundry revealed some women involved, television acquired new main characters they could expose verbally and visually. Television news emphasized on the women, aired their pictures, and took close-up shots dramatically. They made comments on the physical appearance, age, even the color of clothes they wore; while they sometimes ignored Djoko Susilo as the main actor of the corruption. They repeatedly labeled the women as "the young wife," "second wife," "third wife," complemented with the comments on their beauty, composed manner, and their physical appearance. The same thing also happened with the reporting of corruption case that a woman became the corruptor, like news about Angelina Sondakh. As the main suspect of building of Wisma Atlet corruption case, the media emphasized Angelina's feminine sides as the center of attention. They talked about her clothes color, hair style, and her role in domestic sphere as a mother of young children, until her sadness overcoming the grief after her husband passed away; and it sometimes changed the emphasis of the news as the corruptor who stole the Nation's money.

In imported beef bribery case that involved the president of PKS, Luthfi Hassan Ishaq and his close friend, Ahmad Fathanah, the narrative of television news on the women who allegedly received the money was complemented with the discussion of body and sexuality. They also included the visualization of women's body parts, accompanied with narrator's description on "sexy celebrity," "sexy photo model," and "adult magazine model." There was also news footage about "a young woman they caught red-handed in a hotel

room.” Woman sexuality and activity as well as sexual relationship eventually became the main topics of the news. Women’s private areas were exposed and brought into the public space. Even in an interview with Ahmad Fathanah’s wife in one of private TV stations, the news anchor (who was a woman) explicitly asked, “... since when are you (Ahmad Fathanah’s wife) married to pak Fathanah? Because ‘public’ of course want to know about this.” This trivial information was covered in the politics of representation, as if the public really wanted to know their marriage date. What was the importance of knowing their marriage date for the public interest?

News feminization and sexualization actually showed the endless domination of patriarchal thoughts behind the media practice and logics. News narrative and television filmic technology positioned women as the object of voyeurism—the [sexual] pleasure acquired by secretly watching others—that in phallogocentric culture was considered as male’s prerogative rights. Men were the active gazer; while women were the gaze objects (see Mulvey, 1974). As the media labeled “Djoko Susilo’s wives” or “Ahmad Fathanah’s women” in news narrative, it strengthened the assumption that television demeaned women and posed them as the object of [sexual] desire and became man’s property.

### **The Construction of *Monstrous Feminine***

By ignoring the presumption of innocence in Indonesian legal system, television news draw women, who were supposed to be the witness, into the case. On one side, television positions them as the victims, but at the same time, they were also the scapegoat. Thus, women became the victim as well as victimized in television narrative. The narrative on corruption cases did not only construct the women as the victim, they also dichotomized women—as the victim—and set them as rivals, as good victim versus bad victim.

Klapp (1964) states that good victim category would be able to raise sympathy amongst the spectators. The media often presented women’s powerlessness, inability to fight back, their physical or mental weakness to construct the image of good victim (in Langer 1998: 78-9). On the contrary, bad victim was the provocative party, unlikeable, and did not raise sympathy. In some corruption case narrative on Ahmad Fathanah,

the good victim image was Fathanah's wife who had a toddler. The media put Fathanah's wife as the victim of her husband's actions. She was represented based on patriarchal view and concept of ideal woman. On screen, she was constructed as dependent wife, willing to give up her career as *dangdut* (Indonesian music) singer to take care of her child and household, and had absolutely no idea of her husband's activity and work in the public. She was also portrayed as submissive woman and put her husband as her leader in the family according to her religious belief. Everytime she appeared in the media, Fathanah's wife did not look like powerless and weak woman. She looked fashionable with a Muslim wear. In every interview she attended, she was calm and content in dealing with her husband's case. She did not seem to be angry and blame her husband. Otherwise, she forgave her husband and positioned her husband as the 'victim' of other women's seduction. In some interview sessions, she also defined the women around her husband as vile women. She chose to concede to the fate, be patient, and to pray for her husband's problem. Fathanah also suggested her wife to do so. The news narrative tended to present Fathanah's wife as the victim, both by Fathanah's action and the women who allegedly had special relationship with Fathanah. The questions given by the host in some television stations were inclined to focus on the victim's emotional experience, who was betrayed by her husband.

Ahmad Fathanah's wife was represented as the protagonist against the women who allegedly had a special relationship with Fathanah. Different with when the media narrated Fathanah's wife, the media never placed these women as the victims, they positioned themselves and admitted that they were Fathanah's victims. The television news about the women focused more on the television's curiosity on Fathanah and the women's [sexual] relationship and how much money they received from Fathanah. When woman admitted that she was the victim, the television tended to portray her as *bad victim*, because of her own mistake, because she was thirsty for money, because she seduced a married man. These women were not portrayed as religious women like Fathanah's wife was; they were *other*, who were considered as immoral according to the society's normative view. Even though Fathanah's wife and the women who had special relationship with Fathanah were

similarly beautiful, they were portrayed as having different beauty. The negative stigma as “evil woman,” like seducer and snatcher of a married man, materialistic woman, materialistic widow, or a slut, was a common thing in the news narrative about these women.

This stigma became stronger as the television also showed the women’s background; a widow, a single mother, a sexy photo model, a *dangdut* singer, and a university student. All of them were seemingly hardworking and not uneducated. They stated that they tried to live by themselves to achieve career for her and her children. Were they actually the representation of *the new female individualism*<sup>1</sup> the media tried to promote in the 2000s? As the feminists’ critique upon media representation practices progressed, the images of woman in media shifted. There was an incorporation process of feminism agenda by the media and it took form of *the new female individualism* concept. Passive, submissive, and dependent woman was no longer popular in media. It was as if the media celebrated the success of feminism movement by introducing liberated, educated, and empowered women. In Indonesian media context, Krishna Sen (1998) noted that working woman images have replaced housewife images in the media (in Rony 2012: 160). Of course, the media concept of the new female needed to be criticized in some point as they distorted and simplified the woman empowerment agenda as promoted by feminism movement. The new female individualism emergence in Indonesian media was indicated by the appearance of some jargons in the 2000s such as “be yourself,” “playing with your beauty,” and “being an unbreakable woman.”

This was the ambiguity point of television media. Television filmic technology actively created new expression spaces for women to celebrate their individuality and freedom, but in these spaces too, the same technology also killed and murdered these women. In the corruption case of imported beef, the media represented the women who were close to Ahmad Fathanah as the new female images. They were educated, independent, and had their own job or career in public space as photo model, singer, or celebrity. But the news narrative tended to represent them negatively; they were matched against the old gender construction, passive, submissive, and dependent woman. The media matched up both women categories to construct the image

of 'good' and 'bad' woman. The discourse on women rivalry above was directed to the sensuality and sexual relationship of man and woman. Thus, the binary opposition between good victim and bad victim emerged in the narrative of television news. For example, if seen through their appearance, good victim was portrayed as religious and conceding, while bad victim was the opposite, revealing clothes, sexy, and impious. The other binary oppositions were seen from the discussion about the first wife vs. second/third wife, old wife vs. young wife, legal wife vs. illegal wife (*Wanita Idalaman Lain/WIL*), religious wife vs. a seducer. Woman became the core of the narration, while man who actually is the main actor sometimes is pushed aside or removed from the narration and placed merely as a spectator. The problem of man's sexual desire became woman's responsibility. The presentation of women rivalry in the television showed that the patriarchal culture refused to promote woman empowerment in public space. In television discourse, women are warned and forced to remain submissive under phallogocentric social structure. The society rejected bad victim women and the media even constructed them as *monstrous*.

Barbara Creed in her work entitled *Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* stated that menacing women's image in Hollywood horror movies was the personification of misogynist fantasies (1993). Women's sexuality was something men desired but it was also a terrifying thing and brought the worrying issue of castration. The fantasy that women were the *castrating agent* frightened men that women would be able to weaken and robbed their masculinity, which also meant their pride and superiority. Phallogocentric logics despised this. Therefore, *phallic* woman image was portrayed as *monstrous*, devious, and accused as the cause of men's corrupted moral. According to Creed, the personification of *monstrous feminine*, which was portrayed as cruel and destructive, constructed in Hollywood horror movies was the representation of men's giddiness on facing the undeniable fact on the power and superiority of resourceful women.

## Conclusion

The phallogocentric logic also establish the base of the narrative of television news on corruption cases involving women. The construction

of *monstrous feminine* in corruption news began from the shifting of the real corruption case to the sexual relation of man and woman. The feminization and sexualization of television news in the end positioned woman as the main reason of the [male] corruptor's corrupted moral. Narrative of woman's rivalry represented the dominant idea of patriarchal society to keep placing woman to be passive, submissive, and dependent as the good and ideal woman image. The woman's image as the personification of *the new female* concept, who was independent, had her own career, educated, and had her own power to choose, was constructed as *monstrous* and she had the potency to disrupt male's pride and to damage the ideal construction of family under patriarchal viewpoint. The narration on pliable rejection of resourceful women can also be found in the divorce news of women who were involved in politics. Among others, the charge of child negligence, inability to manage work and household, the wife earned more than the husband became the discourse often discussed in such news as the reason for their divorce. The media ignored or even completely overlooked the women's capacity, voice, and potency as politicians. Independent, successful, and able women were considered as *monstrous phallic women* and they needed to be overlooked by television news narration and filmic apparatuses. As the result, the news on women tended to be disproportional. As we kept ignoring this type of news reporting, the reproduction of objectified, victimized, and discrimination of women would remain in media. Public, especially the television society, needed to stand up and played an active role as the critics and the controller of misogynist practices in television media.

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## Endnotes

- 1 The discourse of "new female" has been exposed by the media, including the television since 1990s. Andrea Stuart (1990) noted that since the beginning of 1990, mass media such as advertisement, magazine, television through soap opera and drama, offered a new concept of feminism called *the new popular feminism*, which was feminism

constructed through the consumption behavior, highlighting individuality and pleasure. Thus, feminism as a political movement and a collective idea was considered as old-fashioned. Stuart's term experienced a shift from *popular feminism* into *power feminism* and later changed into *post-feminism* (see Thomham 2007). Subjectified women as offered by the media also went an alteration. The keywords in women's ideal image in the 90s were *individualism, freedom, and choice*. Angela McRobbie (2004) called this woman image as *the new female individualism*. This image was presented by the media through female characters such as Ally McBeal and Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City* as well as Bridget Jones and Buffy in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* series. In this case, the media technology created a new space for women to define their individuality, to choose the pleasure they desired, and to enjoy their freedom. Indonesian media started to also introduce the similar women discourse. Women have more opportunities to study higher and the shift in Indonesian politics, culture, and economy also has the role to position women as the subject in media.