

Listening to Marginalized Women's Expressions of Anger

(A Communication Study on the Use of Women's Language for Resistance in the Prostitution Boarding Quarter at Sunan Kuning, Semarang)

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Abstract—The study deliberately observes the anger expressions of the neglected marginal group, the female sex workers of *Sunan Kuning*, a prostitution boarding quarters in Semarang, Indonesia. The marginal nature of the group is also revealed by the fact that there are interests of surrounding parties trying to exert some control over the group. Thus the focal goal is to *explain the potency of female sex workers' expressions of anger for communicating their resistances*. The logic the theoretical framework of this research drew on Bourdieu's thought of masculine domination, and the feminist postmodern of language. A critical ethnography method was employed to reveal the use of anger expression in daily life of marginalized women. The result indicates that women from the marginalized groups are indeed speaking through their anger. As members of the groups, however, their voices are barely heard. So, in terms of theoretical implication, this study underpin the notion of how anger is an important expression in women's language. It also suggests that appreciating women's language, particularly those among the marginalized group, should be conducted to sensibly listen to them as we learn their numerous expressions that are commonly neglected because of the fact that those expressions are beyond the dominant languages.

Keywords— *Women's Language; Anger; Resistance, Marginalized Women*

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential tool for women to participate in power. The women's language in this regard is not merely considered as verbal speech, but also the various arrays of expression, including women's expression of anger. This paper explores how women's communication within a distinctive community signifies their power-relations in the social structure. In Indonesia, one form of the sex business is a community-based prostitution boarding quarters or known as localization. A localization is a sex business activity in which the female sex workers living in the middle of a local community area.

Prostitution is a profession that has a long history. The profession signifies the unbalanced relationships between men and women in society [1]. The rapid development of the sex business is indicated by the emergence of diverse forms of prostitution business. Although the commercial sex workers are the group that determine the economic

welfare of the community, but the sex workers are not necessarily enjoy the freedom to speak out and in the name of moral and social normality they tend to be muted.

Many Indonesians use particular labels to perceive the existence of the prostitution community. They usually use the dominant religious discourse to condemn the female sex workers who live and work in the boarding quarters. Being labelled as sinners has made the female sex workers lost their voices. Many parties (religious organization, government, etc.) Speak on their behalf without taking account the perspectives of the female sex workers. In other words, the existence of female sex workers is judged by using the dominant stereotypes so that their voices are barely heard.

There are about 500 female sex workers who work in the *Sunan Kuning* prostitution boarding quarters. The negative stereotypes embedded in the group of female sex workers has made many surrounding interests parties exerting control over the group, including religious authorities, the department of health, and the boarding quarter committee. The department of health, for example, has the interest of controlling female sex workers' bodies and sexualities. It is a compulsory for the female workers to have a routine health examination to prevent sexual transmission diseases (STD) and HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, the female sex workers also have to deal with the work pressure given by their pimps. With that many controls and pressures, the female sex workers have to incorporate their expressions of anger to share their feelings and emotions.

Theoretically, this study argues that women can challenge the patriarchal naturalization of domination by taking a different political position to the dominant gender construction. Traditionally, the social construction of women is divided into two opposite poles, good women (mother/wife materials) and bad women (lovers/leisure companions). Women must be non-desiring and non-sexual as mothers or wives, but the opposite as lovers. Socially a woman is constructed to understand that it is her responsibility to make her daughter becoming a "good" woman – a prospective mother. In relation to the mother-lover dichotomy, many media discourses valorise motherhood, while in the reality it continuously shows its flaws [2]. Moreover, if a woman publicly expresses her anger by using sexually rough language, for example, she will be perceived as a loose woman and will not have the opportunity to become a "good" Indonesian woman who

accepts her traditional roles as mother and wife. In the context of female sexual workers, most of them realize that their position is outside the social discourses of good women.

Some postmodern feminists attempt to formulate a new language that omits the male oriented language. They propose a language that liberating women. The language of women should be able to get out of the language of men that is using the logic of binary opposition (good/bad, active/passive, high/low and etc.) [3]. The binary opposition language tends to position women as the other. In other words, the language of women should be explored: sexuality, eroticism and femininity. Women language is the language that liberating women and getting out from the male authoritarian language [4]. The scope of this study is specifically looking at the way in which women's expressions of anger are useful for exercising their power.

The research will further explain the potency of female sex workers' expressions of anger for communicating their resistances. There were several previous studies that focused on the emergence of marginalized women's language or voices. A research conducted by Zakia Salime in 2008, for example, suggested that the veil can be used as a way to communicate the resistance to materialistic values and the objectification of women's bodies [5]. Ziba Mir-Hosseini's research, on the other hand, focused on Muslim women's quest for equality of power. The study discussed the emergence of feminist voices in Iran that effectively challenges the interpretation of sharia and questioned the legitimacy of the people who claimed the authority in interpreting the position of women in Islam [6]. In Indonesia, there are not many researches that focus on women's power and language. One of the studies that employed the perspectives of women's power is a research conducted by Dinnuriyah in 2007 that focus on woman's writing and the representation of woman power in chic lit fiction genre in Indonesia. The study looked at the concept of women's writing as a medium to 'reveal' the way women interpret their life by employing the concept of woman's power [7]. The result of the research failed to show the power of women's language because almost all chic lit in Indonesia are still using the logic of patriarchal (dominant patriarchal language). Although written by women, chic lit is part of the dominant media, which oblique to remain in the dominant patriarchal ideology for reaching the market. In other words, the genre of chic lit writing in Indonesia is primarily still using the male perspective of language. By looking at previous researches, it can be argued that this research on marginalized women's language of anger is contributing in evoking a better understanding of neglected expressions of women, particularly the language of female sex workers who live in prostitution boarding quarters in Indonesia.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

The study employs a critical constructionist paradigm of research. So, it does not refer to the uniformity of values as well as a major effort to change the structure. Theoretical statements contained in this study refer to the specific local context and show the diversity of subordinated women's experiences. The core research methods used in this research are critical ethnography. A critical ethnographic traditionally begins with the assumption that contemporary

society has a systemic inequalities which maintained and reproduced by culture [8]. Ethnographic research has a deep commitment to promoting equality in society and also a desire to create a better understanding of local knowledge of a specific community. The prime subject of this research is a female sex worker in *Sunan Kuning* prostitution boarding quarters. Four collaborative data collection techniques were used in this study: observation, participation, Dialogic or conversational interview, testimonial subalternity, and intertextuality [9]. Whereas the stages of data analysis were transcriptions of primary data, field notes, coding, primary data coding, constructing the meaning of main themes, and constructing the narrative of female anger [10, 11].

III. THE NATURE OF FEMALE SEX WORKERS' SPEAKING

The dominant social construction of women mainly uses the dualistic patriarchal logic of thinking. What is considered normal as women's expression is regulated by the patriarchal way of thinking. When women use expressions that are considered not within the construction of "normal feminine" then the woman would be considered as immodest or not feminine. Hysterical and irrational are labels that are often imposed on women who communicate their anger bluntly, and use the choice of words that are socially constructed as masculine words. Unlike women, men have more freedom to express their point of views.

Thematic analysis is used to see the way in which the community of female sex worker develops the logic of their utterances. By using an ethnological approach, the utterances in the prostitution boarding, quarter (localization) are analyzed in order to find the key words that are commonly used in the community. Desire is a theme that is interpreted differently for female sex workers who are working in the localization. They are interpreting desire as "ejaculation." This kind of libidinal binary opposition is of course not the logic of women desire. The nature of women's embodiment has made their sexuality not merely a singular act that can be explained simply as "ejaculation." Several key words indicate codes of speaking applied in the observed community.

TABLE I. CODES OF SPEAKING

Themes	Words
Desire	Hurry, ejaculation, Tissue, Guess (Customer)
Love	Husband, boyfriend, male concubines, male whore
Body	Screening, rubber, make up
Spirituality	Prayer, ritual for the spirit

Desire is an important theme in the prostitution boarding quarters. The logic of desire in a community is closely related to basic norms applicable in the social arena. Speeches that occurs among the research subjects signify that the logic of desire is mainly related to money. Such linkage emerges because they work in the field of desire so that money inevitably become an important part in the expression of desire. The number of male costumers the female sex workers have sex with every day has also contributed in the internalization of the logic of male ejaculations are equal to money. Also, the logic of male desire has made the female sex workers unable to express their feelings freely. Consequently, they use anger as a

form of expressing in order to channel their feeling and emotion.

Socially, women are made to continuously anxious, so that women tend to be called as hysterical when they are expressing their anger [12]. Women who are very angry often considered as emotionally defected or as uncontrollable hysterical women. Hysterical women are considered as abnormal or irrational. Hysterical label itself signifies the notion of women who need to be socially controlled. In particular cases, women who are in the marginal position have the chance to adapt the masculine, dominant language, especially when they are angry. In the context of this study, some female sex workers use masculine words in high-pitched feminine voices when they are angry. In other words, the anger is expressed by using masculine rough words in feminine hysteria tone.

A. Anger Expressions as Communication

There are certain anger expression of the prostitute group: straight forward, blatant, and using the harsh tendency of northern-Java-coastal dialect. The harsh talking, which mostly associate to masculine nature, is mainly used to express anger.

TABLE II. VERBAL COMMUNICATION OF ANGER

Verbal Expressions of Anger	Words of Anger
Using Label	Lonthe, park, ngrebut lanangan (<i>Slut</i>), Lonthe Lennon/Lola (<i>A man prostitute</i>), Gemblekan (<i>concubine</i>), tukiman (<i>male concubine</i>), Grak-Greek (<i>trouble maker</i>).
Sexual Connotation	Gathel (<i>rough word for intercourse</i>), tempik (<i>vagina</i>), konthol (<i>penis</i>), kenthu (<i>intercourse</i>), laki (<i>intercourse</i>).
Money	Kere (<i>poor</i>), rak duwiti (<i>give no money</i>).
Swearing	Bajingan (<i>bastard</i>), Asu (<i>dog</i>), raimu (<i>in your face</i>), resek (<i>trouble maker</i>), tai (<i>fesses</i>).

The glossary above shows the words used by female sex workers to express anger. It can not be said of all female sex workers in Sunan Kuning use all those words. However, when they are angry with those kind of words are used quite often. The words are usually applied when the sex workers engaged in arguments/quarrels either with the costumers, music operator, or with fellow sex workers. Another interesting point indicating in the table is the use of the label slut or in Javanese language, *lonthe*. One of female sex workers said that although her work as a prostitute, nevertheless she does not like to be called as a slut or a whore. This shows how those kind of labels are mentally and socially burdensome for the female sex workers. In addition to the use of labels, another category of words that often appear in the argument are sexually related words. The words with sexual connotation are considered as the lowest caste in the context of the Java language. The sexual connotation words are usually used by men who are originated from marginalized communities and living the "hard" life. Those words are not acceptable by most people.

The limited verbal expressions available for women to express their anger make them using another alternative form of expressions. The masculine structure of the dominant language makes women rely more on non-verbal

expressions. Female facial expressions (emotional expressions) have a wider array than men. The non verbal cues communicate both positive and negative expressions [13]. In a masculine dominated society, the diversity of feminine expressions is used as mockery materials. Expressive women are usually judged as unstable emotionally. The specific environment surrounding the marginalized women has made them more comfortable to channeling their emotions through non-verbal expressions.

TABLE III. NON VERBAL EXPRESSION OF ANGER

Non Verbal Expressions of Anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slamming phone • Slamming bottle • Hitting / slapping • Scratching clothes • Scratching her own arm
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For people from outside the prostitution boarding, quarter such non-verbal expressions of anger may be considered as extreme. But those expressions must be understood by considering that their everyday life experiences have indeed too extreme compared to those of most people's. The sacrifices they have made to their significant other, for example, are sometimes not properly valued and often their trusts are betrayed. The assumption that they are not fit in the good woman category has made them unfairly treated. In despair one of the female sex workers said that "Because I work as a sex worker, people assume that I will never be raped." The common assumption that sexual violences are inherent in the job of female sex workers has made the notion of violence regarded as natural to them. In other words, similar to the assumption that a husband will never rape his wife, many people still assume that it is very unlikely for sex workers being raped by their guests.

B. The Codes of Women's Anger

Every culture, no matter how small, has a specific code that is used by its members to communicate with each other. The cultural code is a rule that determines what to say and how to speak in a particular community. The action of speech is a part of cultural activities that are practiced and defined by a specific community. Codes of speaking, refer to the system of speech that includes various terms, specific meanings, premises, as well as rules related to communicative actions [14].

Every community has specific speech codes, for those who are living in it, the speech codes are something that they perceive as natural (taken for granted) figure of speech. The pronunciation and the choice of words used in the *Sunan Kuning* community reflects that they use the coastal Javanese language. Coastal Javanese language is not the language that is considered as "classy" or "smooth." Coastal language is the language predominantly used by the marginal Javanese community and mainly articulated by the people who are living in the coastal area. The characteristic of Coastal communities tends to be more open and less strict in applying language rules [15]. The characteristic of the speech that is not paying attention to the social hierarchy in the Javanese language signifies that coastal communities are open minded and tend not to hide their feelings. In addition to the influence of coastal culture, the "hard" social condition in the prostitution boarding,

quarter itself has created a favorable environment for "rough" speech language. Those kind of "rough" language is usually identified as the language of low class working men (men who are working in the informal sectors). The coastal suburb coarse words are usually used by female sex workers, particularly when they want to be heard or to attract attention. The use of such language is often intended to show the power inherent in the language that is predominantly masculine oriented. Female sex workers adopt the masculine language as a tool for catharsis to the feelings that are neglected in the name of social decency.

Dominant construction of women and negative stigmas attached to the female sex workers has made feminine expression of anger, not sufficient enough to communicate their point of views. Therefore, they are trying to attract attention by using language commonly used by men. However, the way they express the words are usually identified as "female hysteria." Hysteria is usually associated with conditions in which women are very angry, so frustrated, and out of control.

Choice of words the female sex workers used when they are angry in the Javanese language ranked as the lowest utterance. Javanese language has at least four levels in which each level reflects the social ranks or level of respect. The first level is the level of the finest, the language used to refer to or talk with people who are respected and called "*kromo inggil*". Level two is the language that is intended to refer the activities conducted by ourselves as we are talking to a respected person or the language we use to people who are casually respected (less formal than the first language), the language is called as "*kromo madyo*." The third level is "*ngoko*," the language used to talk with peers or people who have a lower social status. The lowest level is coarse language in which the language is only used by marginal groups who usually live in the harsh social environment. The verbal anger expressions of female sex worker mostly are fitted in the lowest level of language. For example "*nyeksek*" word meaning "eat" is a rude word that not everyone understands the meaning. The word is only used by particular marginal groups. In a way, their marginal position has enabling female sex workers to use masculine language in expressing their feeling and emotion.

In other words, for particular female sex workers, expressing anger is a strategy for uttering resistance. Through anger female sex workers are able to speak up by utilizing modality, adopting masculine dialect, and exaggerating women's sexualities that hardly understandable to men. The interpretation of the speaking actions relies on speech codes that are used by the speaker and the listener in creating mutual meanings. To understand the utterance in a particular community, we must listen to how people talk and the way they give responses - their speaking practices in establishing meaning. Including listen to their expression of anger.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The study indicates that the existence of a prostitution boarding quarters (localization) that accommodate female

sex workers is a naturalization form of male domination. The existence of female sex workers also signifies the logic of male libido. Social structure in the localization indicates the power imbalance in the social arena. Many parties (government, pimps, localization committee) who have particular interests of female sex workers feel that they have the right to speak on behalf of them. Understanding the expression of anger in *Sunan Kuning* signifies how the women's language is a tool for expressing women's ideas and feelings. As the member of a subordinate group, the voices of female sex workers were barely heard. Their subjectivities are mostly interpreted based on negative social constructions that are embedded in their profession as sex workers. So, listening to their voices, particularly in the context of their subordinate positions, should be conducted with sensibly listen to them as we learn their numerous expressions that are commonly neglected because of the fact that those expressions are beyond the dominant patriarchal values. Socially, female sex workers are considered as outcasts (outside the social standard of normal women). Therefore, sexual violence toward them is considered as normal or as a part of their job. This circumstance indicates that women's experiences of violence tend to be interpreted in a male oriented language. The dominant language is often omitted women's chances in expressing their feelings and emotions.

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