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**Proceedings
Media in a Fast-Changing World**

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**ICONOCLASTIC POWER OF TELEVISION ON GENDER ISSUE
AS DEPICTED IN SITCOM *SUAMI-SUAMI TAKUT ISTRI (SSTI)*
TRANS TV**

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Abstract: Many *sinetrons* in Indonesian television stations tend to represent characters of women and men unequally. The female characters are presented as weak, passive, inferior, symbols of sex, dependent, sniveling, rude, and deceitful; meanwhile, the male characters are described conversely, such as, dominant, independent, and tough. However, *Suami-suami Takut Istri (SSTI)*, a situational comedy broadcasted in Trans TV seems to offer new representation towards the women and men. It converts the position by placing the female characters to be dominant over the male ones. From a number of comments in blogs, many viewing audience consider this new concept as a positive effort to raise the woman's position. Nonetheless, for the critical audience, the change of domination icon from the men into women does not assure the betterment in the women's image quality in television. This being the case, television has practiced its iconoclastic power in breaking the old image of women and men and spreading the new concept of both sexes. In the process of building the new image, the data in the storyline of *SSTI* seem to flow in the same destination, which do not represent gender equality. The men behind the scene decided to use the package of fresh comedy in a situational comedy that makes the domination of the women and the subordination of the men finally only become the object of mockery for their power is only on the trivial matters, such as being too ambitious in a negative sense, and being selfish. Nonetheless, the change of position seems to preserve the status quo presented in many *sinetrons*, even though the subject of oppression is changed from the male into the female.

Opening Remarks

Indonesian people still put television in the first rank for entertainment since it gives an easy access for everybody to get entertainment. The penetration of television is exceptional. As a product of human culture and civilization, television offers accessible information and entertainment for the society. Maya Susiani, a social problem observer, in her article *Matinya Ruang Kritis Anak*, explained about the percentage of penetration power of media based on the research of Nielsen Media Research. The research proved that TV has a bigger penetration power comparing to the other media for it reaches 90.7 %; whilst, radio, newspaper, magazine, and internet each reaches 39 %, 29.8 %, 22.4 %, 8.8 % (<http://www.jawapos.co.id>, 9 April 2008). The data come forth as people can get entertainment and information through TV without spending much money.

The accessible information and entertainment offered by TV enables the man behind the scene to spread a number of new ways of life, belief, and values through television. In one side, TV can maintain the status quo. In the other side, it has a remarkable iconoclastic power that can break down the old images or worldviews and replace them with the new ones. All these phenomena may take place if the viewing audience is not critical towards the program.

The existence of TV, thus, cannot be separated from the mission that it carries with it. R.S. Putra (as cited in Soemandoyo) asserts that TV has many

functions; two of them are as a media to develop the culture and as a dominant source that provides values and formative assessment dissolved in the news and entertainment. Related to this, there are many negative opinions towards the effect of TV in the society, such as, create creating a significant threat for the social values, constructing imitative attitude, generating demoralization, conceiving dehumanization, and spreading new social values (1999, pp. 19-20). These effects occur since the process of conveying the message through TV is repetitive through its program such as *sinetron* (Indonesian cinema electronic) and *sitcom* (situational comedy). Agus M. Irkham in *Suara Merdeka* states that seeing the dual function of television for the society, the people thus attribute many terms for it, such as, idiot box, stupid box, the second God, evil demon of image, electronic altar, miracle box, and window of the world ([www.suaramerdeka.com/harian/0507/18/opi4.htm - 8k](http://www.suaramerdeka.com/harian/0507/18/opi4.htm-8k)). In short, people go for TV, yet they also scorn it.

From many entertaining programs and *sinetrons*, the paper takes *Suami-suami Takut Istri* as the analysis object for some reasons. Firstly, *SSTI* is one of the most watched entertainment program recently as it is broadcasted every Monday up to Friday in the prime time (18:00-19:00) in Trans TV. Secondly, the storyline is different from many other *sinetrons* in Indonesian television stations in which it put the woman as the dominant character toward the man. Thirdly, there are some comments for *SSTI* emerging in some blogs mostly do not realize that *SSTI* has new worldviews about the position of man and woman. It is ironic since most of the comments agree that this sitcom has raised the women's position and replaced the domination of the men (www.transtv.co.id). *SSTI* produced by Multivision Plus and directed by Sofyan De Surza has made more than 100 episodes. In each episode, it has different topic with fresh comedy package. Hardiansyah Lubis, the head marketing of public relations of Trans TV, asserted that the packaging with a fresh and qualified comedy style becomes the attraction of this program (<http://teguhimawan.blogspot.com/2008/03/300-episode-suami-suami-takut-istri.html>).

In fact, *SSTI* contains many ideas covered by the comedy packaging which is supported by Lubis who furthermore said that *SSTI* aims to disclose the women's power over their husbands. On the contrary, the husbands who in our society have been believed to have strong power over the wives, in this sitcom, they are described conversely as people who are very afraid of their wives (<http://teguhimawan.blogspot.com/2008/03/300-episode-suami-suami-takut-istri.html>). "*Takut.. takut.. takut... Sama istri sendiri kok malah takuuuutttt... Ciut.. ciut... ciut... Sama istri sendiri nyalinya ciuuuuuttttt...*". The previous quotation is the lyrics of *SSTI* soundtrack depicting the power of the wives towards their husbands, which is at a glance different from the mainstream of characterization in many *sinetrons*.

Therefore, the focus of this paper is to reveal a number of old concept about gender issue, which is reconstructed into new worldview spread by *SSTI*. The position of the women in this TV show, which is more dominant than the men, may be the efforts of certain people to project different images towards both sexes that

may be positive for some people but negative for the others. This thought occurs since nowadays there are many *sinetrons* beside *SSTI* showing the gender biases in the characterization of the women and men. For instance, the characterization of the men often dominates the women, even though the titles carry the name of woman. On the contrary, it is understood from the title that *SSTI* – the husbands who are afraid of their wives - reflects the domination of women towards men.

On the other hand, the domination offered by the storyline may not guarantee the woman's image becomes better comparing to the related programs. Based on the observation of the writer, *SSTI* seems to break down the old concept of woman and proposes new notion of the woman, which is ideologically loaded. In *sinetron Cinta Fitri, Jasmin, Melati untuk Marvel, and Aqso dan Madina*, the main character is constructed as the interpretation of the woman practiced in the society, namely, being dependent, being weak, and being more emotional than rational; the later character is believed to belong to the male character. *SSTI* deconstructs the old concept of women to become the characters that have strong power towards the men. Yet, the illustrating of strong and powerful women in this sitcom places them as the object of mockery. It comes about since the depiction of their power is only on the trivial matters, such as being too ambitious in a negative sense, being selfish, being garrulous, believing that they are clever, and enjoying intrigue.

Shannon Shebloski supports that the stereotypical characters might give negative influence towards our worldview to the people in our real surroundings. The people who watch a big number of TV shows begin to think about these people in the real life negatively. They use the TV show as the basis of their thought. In the other hand, the positive stereotypes also occur in the television; yet, the number is not significant comparing to the negative stereotypes. The studies of the women's stereotypes indicate that they are projected through television as passive, dominated by the men, emotional, and dependent (<http://coe.sdsu.edu/eet/articles/stereotypes/index.htm>).

Douglas Kellner explains the following idea in his book *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Post Modern* (as cited in Supriyanto):

Media culture refers to the condition in which audio-visual show or spectacles have assisted to bind together the every day life, even have shaped public opinion and social attitude, and have given material supply to construct someone's identity. The printed media, radio, television, movie, internet, and the latest forms of other media technology have provided definitions to be men or women, to differentiate someone's status based on class, race, and sex. In line with that, the communication experts argue that mass media has big influence toward the structuring of social reality. The mass media does not only have direct effect toward individuals, but it also affects the culture and collective knowledge and values in society. The mass media presents image apparatus, idea and evaluation as the source of the audience to choose and as the reference for the performer (<http://www.jokosupriyanto.com/2004/12/16/dampak-media-bagi-remaja-perempuan/>).

In short, the aim of this paper is to reveal the iconoclastic power of television through *SSTI* sitcom in breaking the old concept of the woman and man and

spreading the new image of woman and man function in the society, which actually still preserves the status quo.

Iconoclasm and Concept of Gender

Iconoclasm or image breaking is "destruction within a culture of the culture's own religious icons and other symbols or monuments, usually for religious or political motives" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iconoclasm>). Related to this term, icon, in a broader meaning, is used in a wide number of contexts for an image, picture, or representation. A sign or likeness stands for an object by signifying or representing it either concretely or by analogy as in semiotics. By extension, icon is also used, particularly in modern culture, in the general sense of symbols, for example name, face, picture, edifice or even a person readily recognized as having some well-known significance or embodying certain qualities. For example, an image or depiction, that represents something else of greater significance through literal or figurative meaning, usually associated with religious, cultural, political, or economics standing (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icon>). Even though iconoclasm was firstly applied in the field of religion and politics, in the current years the use has been flourished into science and art. The art is included since most of the repertoire for criticizing and debunking the moulds of traditional representations has been coming, during the last century, from the various experiments led by all sorts of artistic movements. As a result, this paper will use the broader definition of icon in the context of representation of women and men in *SSTI* as an art performance through which TV shows its iconoclastic power. Being different from other *sinetrons*, *SSTI* may have an effort to expose the style of conventional image or interpretation of women and men through its story line.

In line with that, Bruno Latour proposes, "iconoclastic destruction cannot be separated from a production of a new image, which is a condition that creates an irreconcilable contradiction between the destruction of meditations and the proliferation of images. For example, especially classicist or traditionalist artists can regard the destruction of the image by avant-garde artists as an iconoclastic gesture, but they are also creating other images in the process." Therefore, what constitutes an iconoclasm and what constitutes an image can be relative, which is based on their placement within this process (<http://www.bruno-latour.fr/articles/article/084.html>). Matt Eatough, in his article *Iconoclasm* supports "one final point that needs some further explication here is that the destruction of images is always linked to an opposition to certain practices and individuals. In a sense, it is not about the image itself at all; however, the image is only a means whereby one imposes one's beliefs forcibly on another or attempts to inflict harm to an individual through the mediation of their images." (<http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/iconoclasm.htm>)

What is the thing to do with iconoclasm on gender issue? As the object of the analysis is on the *SSTI*, it is necessary to reveal that the representation or image of women and men offered by the mainstream of storylines of *sinetron* is different

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from what *SSTI* tries to put forward. So far, the women are characterized to be weak, passive, inferior, symbols of sex, dependent, sniveling, rude, and deceitful, and the men are portrayed conversely. However, *SSTI* converts this icon by picturing the women as more dominant characters in its storyline. In this case, it is arguable to say that through *SSTI*, TV shows its iconoclastic power in breaking the old concept of women and men and spread new image of both sexes. Yet, instead of giving constructive representation, the breaking of image also maintain the traditional image of the women and men. The changing position of domination from the men into the women is regarded as something ridiculous and abnormal. Therefore, to conceal its main goal, *SSTI* is presented to be a sitcom, which is full of humors. The uncritical audience may find it not more than only a joke.

There is nobody debates on the sex of man and woman. Biologically, the sexual organ of man is definitely different from the woman. Those organs cannot be exchanged between the man and woman. These are God's authority or what so called as the nature of man and woman. Different from the sex concept (nature), gender is a quality that sticks to the men or women socially or culturally constructed (nurture). This construction places the women as beautiful, graceful, emotional and motherly. Meanwhile, the men are positioned as strong, rational, macho, and manly. Those qualities might be exchanged as it is not hard to find graceful or emotional men and rational or strong women in this world (Fakih, 1999, p. 8). This labeling is not definite, for instance, the women in the suburb areas that become the breadwinners for the family, they are physically stronger than the men are. All men and women's qualities that can be switched over, can change at any time, can be different from one space/class to another space/class are called gender concept (Fakih, 1999, p. 9). The previous examples of gender differences can change depending on time, space, and era development since it acts as a nurture concept.

Related to this, Ann Oakley (as cited in Fakih, 1999, p. 71) gives details about gender as behavioral differences among the men and women that are socially constructed. Media, i.e. television, is one influential factor that constructs these differences. The men and women themselves create such distinctions through a long social and cultural process. The television maintains the concept of women's nature that has main and illustrious duty to be graceful, more emotional, and weaker physically, which is for the experts; these matters have contributed to the gender culture in the society. By carrying such nature, the women are more proper to work in domestic sector that is famous in Java language with 3 M (masak/cooking, macak/making up, manak/childbirthing) or menstruation, birthing, and breastfeeding. Nevertheless, there are also a number of data that attack this concept, yet, this culture keeps on taking place in our society (Ibrahim, 1998, p. xxvi).

Discussion

SSTI is a sitcom that pictures the phenomena of some husbands who live in a certain area of a neighborhood. Their wives have a big power towards them.

Since those husbands have similar 'fate', they agree to create an alliance in the function of the scared husbands towards the wives. They support one another, yet they often insult each other as well. These husbands frequently influence each other to react against the oppression, yet foolishly, the advisor is also still afraid of his wife. Likewise, the wives form the same association as they encourage one another of not to loose control over their husbands ([http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suami-suami Takut Istri](http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suami-suami_Takut_Istri)).

Set in a small neighborhood in a Rukun Tetangga (RT), this sitcom criticizes the society. The characters are Pak RT, his wife and daughter (Betawi people); Mas Karyo (Javanese) and Sheila (Betawinese), his wife whose obsession as an artist; Uda Faisal, a writer and Deswita (stingy Padang people); Bang Tigor (muscular Batakese) and Welas (plain Javanese); Pretty, a sexy widower (Betawinese); and Mang Dadang's family (mixed ethnics: Javanese, Chinese, and Sundanese). Recently, there are some new characters come forth, such as Ki Daus (a Sundanese security) who becomes the husband of Mang Dadang's wives after the later character left for Arab to work there and Asep (Mang Dadang's brother). These characters have multi-colored characteristics, yet they have the same quality of being afraid of their wives as their wives do not want to relent with their husbands. The followings are the data of the relation of the women and men characters in *SSTI*.

In an episode of *SSTI* entitled *Ke Hutan Cari Buah Manggis, Konsultan Dadakan Bikin Menangis* Sarmili (Pak RT) could not keep his promise to see his friends (Tigor, Karyo and Faisal) to play chess in the guard post since Sarmila (his wife) forced him to take her to her uncle immediately. At first, Sarmili tried to negotiate it, but it failed as Sarmila yelled at him to get ready soon by using her loud voice and wide-open eyes to intimidate her husband that he will be incarcerated in the bathroom as usual, if he disobeyed her order. At last, as the viewers can guess, Sarmili followed the order reluctantly (Trans TV, Jakarta, 21 April 2008). After the scene, the audience can hear the sound of people laughing, which might be considered as the proof that the domination of the woman is not more than a mockery. Moreover, in almost every similar scene like the previous one, the sound of laughing always occurs after the scene is over.

Another episode entitled *Takut Sakit Kok Malah Sakit*, Karla, daughter of Karyo and Sheila got fever. Karyo and Sheila anxiously talked about the possible causes why Karla got sick. They thought that it could be because of unclean snacks that Karla bought in her school, or probably she missed her breakfast. For the later cause, Karyo, by raising his voice, asked Sheila to prepare Karla's breakfast in the next morning. Instead of obeying her husband's instruction, Sheila yelled at his husband, which was louder than Karyo's voice, raised her hand to Karyo's face and said that she did not want to do it. On the contrary, Sheila instructed Karyo to do it (Trans TV, Jakarta, 24 April 2008).

In a scene entitled *Tamu Kuliner Mas Rudy*, Deswita had just woken up, and she asked her husband, Faisal to cook her fried rice, but Faisal said that he had not finished his work typing on the laptop. However, Deswita insisted on him to do

it, but Faisal still refused to move. Finally, Deswita closed the laptop forcefully, opened her eyes widely, and yelled at her husband to move quickly into the kitchen. Faisal, then, walked into the kitchen fearfully (Trans TV, Jakarta, 17 April 2008).

Different from the previous wives who usually carry out physical violence towards their husband such as pinching the stomach, pulling the hair, and locking up in the bathroom, Welas seldom conducts such violent behavior to her husband, Tigor. Nevertheless, Tigor is also afraid of his wife, as he does not want to lose Welas' loving care. In this case, as a Javanese woman, Welas knows how to please her husband. She is very tactful and graceful in her behavior, and she is smart in cooking. Her attitude can subjugate her Batakese husband's forcefulness. For instance, when Tigor wants to beat someone emotionally, Welas can prevent him for not to do so by asking him to help her doing the housework. In another occasion, when Tigor tells a lie to her, Welas does not scold him, but she politely asks her husband to sleep outside the house. She performs the power of a Javanese woman without doing any physical punishment if her husband commits a mistake. Welas has also ever performed the physical violence in many episodes of *SSTI*, but the actions are not as rude as the other wives' actions. The man behind the scene probably wants to refine the physical power of Welas as she represents the Javanese woman who is believed to be graceful in her attitude. However, this opinion still needs a deeper research. Welas only throws her sandals towards her husband, which do not directly strike Tigor physically; therefore, this action only intensifies the comedy nuance of the program. Overall, the representation of many ethnics with their own characteristics in *SSTI* can be another research object.

From the previous data, *SSTI* actually still preserves the status quo of constructing the woman's stereotype. Nevertheless, it has a significant difference occurring in the exaggerating description of the women's power towards the men, which makes the women's position unrespectable. Their power becomes the object of mockery, for in the patriarchal society such occurrence is not natural. Besides, the representation of the men's images in *SSTI* that is not in line with the main stream of the men's image scorns their existing image in the society to be abnormal men who are too afraid of their wives. One way of delivering joke in Indonesian culture is by showing the violence. The man behind the stage understands this very well. Therefore, it is proper to argue that the package of spreading new image and breaking old image about the man and woman is a very smart decision. When *SSTI* offers some new values that actually tend to be unfair, the viewers will find them as something funny and there is nothing wrong with the program. *SSTI* covers its main mission to reconstruct the images of both sexes by making use of the way of joking of Indonesian people that they may consider the show not more than a jesting. It is arguable to declare that the viewing audience may not take what is offered in the program as something serious, which is may be vice versa as well. However, when the messages often come in their mind – five days in a week in the prime time (the media workers often say it as a 'striping' show), it is possible that eventually their consciousness can be shaped in taking the messages as something

natural. Moreover, when it occurs, in this very moment, the iconoclastic power of television has done a good job in breaking the old images and delivering the new images.

Associate Director Marketing and Client Service AGB Nielsen Media Research, Hellen Katherina, explained that the data of TV viewers from July up to December 2007, those who are from middle and lower class society tend to watch entertaining program such as *sinetron* and sitcom, TV movie, quiz, concert of music, variety show, and reality show. The research also elucidates that seeing from the habit of watching TV for the whole day; it proves that the lower audience's social economic status, the more frequent they watch TV, particularly in the prime time. Moreover, the TV watching habit is supported with the viewers' educational background. The higher educational level of the viewers, the less frequent they spend time to watch TV (<http://www.media-indonesia.com/berita>, November 2007). For those who have lower educational level, they might have less critical thinking in observing the TV programs. If the message from certain program on TV is just accepted without filtering it in the first place, the society will obtain the spread of the ideas including the stereotypes of women and men as something destined by nature.

In a research entitled *Representasi Perempuan dalam Sinetron* conducted by a lecturer of communication from UPN Surabaya, Yudiana Indriastuti SSos., MSi and the head of Ilmu Komunikasi Major of UPN, Yuli Candrasari SSos., MSi, they reveal that in Indonesian *sinetrons*, the role of the women is always dominant. Nonetheless, the domination is not followed by the betterment in quality of the role itself. They are usually exploited not in the sense of sexual harassment, but the exploitation in the nature and personality of the women that tend to be negative and irrational. They are presented as weak, passive, dominated, symbols of sex, dependent, sniveling, rude, and deceitful. The women's traditional stereotypes that humiliate their position are shown up in the prime time *sinetron* or drama. (<http://www.antara.co.id/arc/2007/11/4/peran-perempuan-dalam-sinetron-selalu-dieksplotasi/>).

It has been well understood that the spirit of woman to go public is to make the world becomes more feminine. Nonetheless, *SSTI* traps the women to be the male clone who carry out the oppression towards the men mentally and physically. The man characters in other *sinetron* storylines often carry out the physical violence; however, in *SSTI*, the doers are the women. In this being the case, *SSTI* does not release the oppression, yet it preserves the oppression although the actors are different in sexes. Budi Wahyuni, a gender equality activist, asserts that the definition of emancipation is a process to be free from any kind of oppression such as physical, psychological, sexual, economic, ideological, and social subjugation. However, the process seems to be out of control (Kedaulatan Rakyat, 21 April 2008). In line with this, Lawrence Kohlberg states that the determining of development stage of feminine morality that is only put at the third stage from six stages of someone's morality development implicate that feminine quality is a more inferior character than masculine character. This phenomenon could be the

factor why the feminists tend to detach their feminine quality that stick to the women, and they become male clone. The domestic job whose orientation is to the feminine quality is usually judged as inferior. However, the public job whose orientation is in self-actualization (ambition and competition as masculine nature) is regarded as more valuable job (Megawangi, 1999, p. 100). The people many times define women emancipation as the movement that the women are free to control the men. On the contrary, feminism aims to lift the women's position up that for such a long time they have been discriminated. Therefore, the actions of the women in *SSTI* may not be part of feminism, yet their behavior concerns much with their ego.

Julia Kristeva (as cited in Soebandy and Suratman) states that gender equality is a condition in which there is no more constructed symbol in the society (hegemony gender), yet it does not convert the situation by replacing the position of the men as the oppressors that creates the new feminine hegemony (1998, p. xviii). Therefore, it is appropriate to assume that this action only maintains the oppression. The difference lies only on the performers. *SSTI* exposes the new feminine hegemony since it is easy to find the conception of the women's control that tends to be superfluous and not normal. The women's struggle to be free of the constructed differences of male and female only upholds the difference itself although the position of the performers is flipped-over; this being the case, the female replaces the male as the subject of the oppression. It may give negative implication if the audience is not critical in seeing the worldview and even if they consider the phenomena as something natural. As the ideological agent that has iconoclastic power, TV and the people behind it succeed to enliven or to give soul in the concept. As has been asserted earlier, TV has an iconoclastic power on creating public opinion and even creating new image in the society. The well-established phenomena of image are destructed by the new image. Soebandoyo asserted that TV is believed to have the power of iconoclasm, and the people inside it act as iconoclastic agents (1999, p. 26).

Closing Remarks

By using the viewpoint of iconoclasm concept, it is possible to argue that the storyline and characterization of women and men in *Suami-suami Takut Istri* break the traditional image of both sexes represented in most of *sinetrons* in Indonesian TV stations nowadays. Instead of portraying the women to be dominated by the men, *SSTI* is exceedingly brave in contradicting the mainstream of many storylines of *sinetrons*. It put the women to be more superior to the men characters. However, this dominance does not guarantee the betterment of image or representation of the women themselves. In other words, it is appropriate to assert that this change only preserves the status quo of the notion of domination even though the actors of oppression are the women. Moreover, by using the package of situational comedy, the viewing audience may consider the 'abnormal' representation of women and men in *SSTI* (seen from the traditional viewpoint of the women and men's characterization) as the object of mockery. In other word,

The International Conference on Media

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