

Exploring Indonesian New Culture in Thailand Boys Love ‘2gether the series’: The Perspective of Sociology of Love

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Abstract

Everyone has their respective definition in interpreting what love is. This article explores the meaning of love, especially the meaning of lover, in ‘2gether: The Series’, a Thai boys’ love series. In this article, the perspective of sociology is elaborated in the discussion for viewing the meaning of love. This study applied a descriptive qualitative method. Critical discourse analysis by Fairclough used for data analysis. Fundamentally, there are no restrictions at all for the meaning of love. However, it does not mean that love is free of values. On the contrary, love is full of values of goodness and life. Because of love, someone can burst into happiness by crying. Furthermore, because of love, someone can become infatuated with something. Love is full of value, which is rarely defined precisely. In the end, the meaning of love returns to purity and holiness (humanistic values).

Keywords: Sociology of Love, Same-Sex Love, Boys’ Love, 2Gether: The Series

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1. Introduction

‘2gether: The Series’ is a Thai drama TV series based on a novel by JittiRain entitled เพราะเรา...คู่กัน (Because We Are Together). This series tells the story of an old love that has blossomed again, in which Sarawat and Tine – when in high school they met at a concert by the band SCRUB – meet again because of enrolling in the same university. This second meeting brings back a long-lasting love of Sarawat for Tine.

“... And the only person I fall in love with is you, Tine.
I love you. I like you since seeing you for the second time.”
(*Sarawat to Tine in “2Gether: The Series” Episode 7*)

This drama series also attracts the attention of Indonesian people, especially among young people. This is shown by the large number of Indonesian media that have made reviews of this series, such as review by Pratiwi (2020) at Kompas.com and Adelia (2020) at Tribunnews Jateng. Not only media in Indonesia, CNN Philipines (2020) and South China Morning (2020) also reviewed this drama series. It indicates that this series is trending and viral in Asia.

Since it first aired in March 2020, this series has become a worldwide trending topic on Twitter with the hashtag #2gethertheseries in Indonesia because of its several episodes. For these reasons, it can be deduced that the Indonesian people have begun to be interested in same-sex love drama series (Boys’ Love or BL Series). BL as a genre is extremely diverse, but it still offers enough consistency, in its male-only relationships, to generate a shared frame for the users' expectations and preferences (Kam, 2013).

However, to date, no Boys’ Love series has aired on the national television platform in Indonesia. This is because it is something taboo. Furthermore, this taboo is due to the homophobic culture and attitudes attached by most groups in Indonesian society.

Essentially, the knowledge of most Indonesian people about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) is still very limited. This limited knowledge is due to restrictions on religious norms. This situation is generally prone to creating stigma, resulting in negative stereotypes that refer to LGBT as being abnormal condition or illness. Religious groups and government officials have intensified anti-LGBTI sentiment in Indonesia by calling for healing and discrimination against LGBT individuals and groups (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

The teachings of major religions, that are interpreted conservatively which reject the existence of LGBT people (homosexuality), are increasingly negatively affecting the views of the general public as a whole even though some progressive religious individuals accept the presence of those people (UNDP & USAID, 2014). The stigma even sometimes occurs among LGBT groups, in which they call themselves “sick” or “abnormal”. This means that LGBT problems in Indonesia occur not only externally but also internally.

Based on the Human Rights Declaration in 2006 which agreed on gender equality, population, and human rights, LGBT groups in Indonesia have a legal standing to struggle to gain recognition of their rights as citizens, including gender legal status, same-sex marriage, and demands for not being discriminated in social life (Ministry of Women’s Empowerment & Child Protection and Center for Health Research, University of Indonesia, 2015). However, the Indonesian government has not given priority to human rights concerning LGBT as a policy that is sensitive to the protection of LGBT

individuals and groups as citizens, as mandated in the 1945 Constitution (Muthmainnah, 2016).

The limitation of norms and values in Indonesia causes the series with the boys' love (BL) genre to be mostly rejected. In fact, this does not only occur in Indonesia. A study conducted by Ojanen (2009) indicates that although Thai people, in general, are not active in persecuting and intimidating individuals with sexual or gender minorities, there are often restrictions on the social space for LGBT people.

Most Indonesian people only recognize heterosexual love (between man and woman). Meanwhile, homosexual love (between man and man or woman and woman) is still in an "eastern" taboo that sticks to patriarchal/masculine culture (Niko, 2018).

Therefore, this article tries to discuss the description of love from the perspective of sociology. Then, it elaborates the meaning of love for same-sex love as shown in '2gether: The Series' (A Boys' Love Series). The researcher considers that, in the love story of Tine and Sarawat in '2gether: The Series', the shown expressions confirm that same-sex love can also be expressive, similar to the case with heterosexual love in general. This is in line with the statement of Sternberg (1986) that, no matter how strong or good it is, love without expression will be extinguished.

2. Research Methods

2.1 Data Collection

This study applied a descriptive qualitative method with primary and secondary data exploration through literature review. The primary data were the video of all episodes of '2gether: The Series' from Youtube of GMMTV. Meanwhile, secondary data were collected through tracing scientific and

popular writings, such as journals, newspapers, online media, and books related to '2gether: The Series'.

Table 1 the description of the Series

Title	2Gether: The Series
Genre	Romance, Boys' Love
Country	Thailand
Director	Champ Weerachit Thongjila
Production	GMMTV
Broadcasting Station	GMM 25, LINE TV, Youtube GMMTV
Showtimes	Every Friday, 21.30
Broadcast Period	21 February 2020 – 15 May 2020

In this article, author employed the approach of sociology of love. Therefore, the researcher conducted an unstructured online assessment through a repository of scientific journals, such as Google Scholar, Elsevier, and Taylor & Francis Group. The results of the desk review on the sociology of love were then described and reviewed in the discussion section.

2.2 Data Analysis

The author used discourse analysis for this study. Fowler et al. (1979), Fairclough & Wodak (1997) and Johnstone (2002) define discourse critically by placing discourse as a construction that is not value-free and not neutral. This means that discourse is a form of social action produced following the goals of those who produce it.

The analysis of this research data uses the critical discourse of the Fairclough (1995) model, which is divided into three dimensions, namely

microstructural, mesostructural and macrostructural. In particular, the analysis used is the macrostructural dimension of socio-cultural practical discourse. The analysis of media socio-cultural practices in Fairclough (1995) critical discourse analysis is a macro-level analysis based on the opinion that the social context outside the media influences how discourse exists in the media.

3. Research Results

3.1 Heteronormativity in the Indonesian Context

Sexuality, sex, and gender have different meanings in terms of terminology. Sex is an objective state of anatomy-biology (nature), which attributes humans as male or female (Raharjo, 1997). Furthermore, Raharjo also defined sexuality as a social construction related to attitudes, feelings, and values, which are related to sexual behavior and orientation. In addition, in the literature of sociology, gender is conceptualized as a social and cultural construct (Molo, 1993; Freud, 1994; Hart, 1996; Raharjo, 1997; Brickell, 2006; Biever *et al.*, 2007; and Haslanger, 2017).

In the Indonesian context, sex, sexuality, and gender are defined only in terms of 'sex', namely male and female. In fact, various expressions of sexuality and gender can be found in the Indonesian context. However, the ideology of heteronormativity has become a strong legacy of the patriarchal culture in Indonesia. This ideology states that it is a necessity to have heterosexuality which is oriented towards offspring reproduction. In short, heteronormativity is an imposition for humans who have male anatomy so that they must be masculine. Likewise, for humans who have female anatomy, they must be feminine.

The acceptability of sexuality other than heterosexuality in Indonesia collides with the demands of heterosexual marriage. For that reason, it becomes the basis for the rejection of sexuality outside of heterosexuality. Furthermore, sexuality outside heterosexuality also has always been clashed with religious teachings (Zuhri, 2015; Rohmawati, 2016; and Sanawiyah, 2016). In the Indonesian context, the religion, with the most adherents in terms of numbers, is Islam which teaches that LGBT is a sin (Harahap, 2016). Therefore, the culture of the Indonesian people is also influenced by religions that do not accept LGBT as part of society.

The rejection of sexual diversity outside heterosexuality is called homophobia. Homophobia is the state of hating sexual behavior outside of heterosexuality and without considering the diversity of individual sexualities (Plumer, 1995; Russell & Bohan, 2006; Downie, 2014; and Fraïssé & Barrientos, 2016). This homophobic state is the source of discrimination and criminalization against LGBT+ (Irwin, 2007).

Hate speech and negative stigma against LGBT groups and individuals even come from state officials and mass media in Indonesia (Niko, 2016; and Teresia, 2019). The examples of violence and persecution cases against LGBT groups and individuals in Indonesia are the eradication of the Bissu community in South Sulawesi, the attack on the HIV/AIDS activity in Yogyakarta, the murder of three shemale in West Jakarta, the dissolution of a shemale contest in Jakarta, the murder of LGBT individuals (such as the case of Budi in Sukabumi, Vera in Purwokerto, and Elly in Jakarta), the beatings of a lesbian couple in Makassar, the torture of gay couples in Aceh, and the terror against Arus Pelangi community in Banyumas (Ariyanto & Triawan, 2008). This situation indicates that most Indonesian people are homophobic.

3.2 The Sociology of Love: The Romance of Same-Sex Love

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) played a vital role in the development of the theory of sociology. Although Spencer did not call it specifically the theory of love, in many of his essays, he mentioned love as one of the important elements to be discussed in sociology. From the point of view of sociology, love possesses a distinctive “caste” (Herskovits & Malinowski, 1997; Charter, 2015). This means that love is an object of study which has the same position as economy, education, industry, gender, and many other objects of sociological study.

The sociology of love has actually been around for a very long time (Iorio, 2014). However, in the Indonesian context, it is still not too common to the public. In an article published in the journal of Humanistic Sociology, Sorokin (1950) argued that the creative power of love should contain creative love, friendship, non-violence, and non-aggression. Ideally, love means without domination, not hurting each other, and bringing peace to human life (Niko, 2018).

The sociology of love believes that more love will emerge in this world if love is put on the basis of humanity. In the definition proposed by Charter (2015), love does not only refer to two people who love each other. According to him, love is interesting because it is everywhere and has a significant impact on our culture, society, and lives, and yet we can know relatively little about what it actually means.

Furthermore, Charter (2015) stated that love is sociologically understood in several views, such as sexual love, intimate love, companionate love, romantic love, parental love, friendship love, inter-species love, love for places, love for belongings, and love for views. In other contexts, love is often interpreted as a wild emotional desire that exists in the history of human civilization (Marcuse, 2018). In ‘2gether: The Series’, love actually

brings out a variety of meanings, such as romantic love, friendship love, and intimate love, but not have a selfish attitude. This can be seen when Sarawat reveals the following.

“... You do not need to like me. You just need to open your heart to me.” (Sarawat to Tine in ‘2Gether: The Series’ Episode 7)



Figure 1 Sarawat and Tine in 2gether the series (property by GMMTV)

In general, love is always interpreted as a psychological emotion so that it is very personal, such as the triangular love theory approach by Sternberg (1986) that love is an interpersonal relationship with a combination of intimacy, passion, and commitment. The researcher considers that this

interpersonal relationship cannot be studied only from the psychological aspect (Mahmud, 2018), but also from the social aspect.

Love is not something that is merely instinctual or the involvement of feelings in a relationship. However, many things can be explored in the definition of love. This means that love is basically undefined (not having a single definition) or depends on its context. This is in line with the statement of Owens (2007) that sociologists do not have a uniform definition of romantic love.

Therefore, the researcher could define love as excessive jealousy. Furthermore, other people may also interpret love as a symbol of death. It is because each of us is free to have a personal definition of love. Some well-known experts, like Webster, stated that love is really a feeling. On the other hand, Capellanus also said that love is the suffering that is carried out since we are born (Krich, 2009).

For example, the researcher has a somewhat inhuman love experience. He loved a man that he has never met previously. He does not know what to call this love. The only thing that he knows is that he really loves whatever is in that man. He cried when the man left him. They have three months of intimacy by phone and by chat. He feels that all of those days are the days full of happiness from the morning (waking from the bad) to the night (back to sleep).

Once more, he cannot name what kind of love it is. He cried profusely when they parted ways. His lover had another man that basically the person loved first. He understood that but he still admitted it as a very painful feeling. He cried with tears and sobbed like a child losing his favorite toy. The love that he experienced may have been artificial but it was able to make his life having unique happiness. The researcher then got the prejudice that this is perhaps what Marcuse calls the transformation from fluid sexuality to eros (Marcuse 2018).

3.3 How Does Culture Affect Love?

Malinowski (1932) stated that, in a culture, love in the context of a couple grows from sexual desires, personal interests, economic interests, changes in social status, and so on. Therefore, according to the researcher, in this context, marriage is a social contract and not a true representation of love. For this reason, same-sex love should be legal because love basically has no attachment to sex.

In the context of the family, love will tend to exist through dynamic emotions and keeps changing — depending on the circumstances. Love in a marriage will always be followed by sadness, happiness, fear, and sexual desire. Meanwhile, marriage is an impulse imposed by institutions. Even by seen from this context, it does not close the fact that same-sex love (homosexuality) can build a happy family just like heterosexuals (Bertocchi & Guzzardi, 2017; Trappolin, 2017; Guzzardi, 2017). In the context of marriage, the researcher agrees with Susan (2013) who states that marriage is not just a piece of paper. There is a sense of security, a sense of comfort, a sense of love, and a sense of happiness.

In the perspective of sociology, love is always shown to two or more people. Love, which involves one person in emotionality, is rarely seen as complete love. Apart from that, loving yourself is basically also complete love (not just selfishness). When we take a bath (cleansing the body), it is evidence of our love for our bodies. However, in that case, it is not seen as love. Taking a bath is an obligation or the nature of humans is indeed to take a bath (a culture that comes from construction). This means that love is a cultural construct that exists in society (Bidney, 1947).

Basically, love and sexuality are one unity, in which expression becomes important. Niko (2016) viewed that same-sex love (homosexual love) is actually to meet, to love, and to leave. This means that love does

not look at gender in placing special feelings towards someone. In '2gether: The Series, Tine, who is confused about defining his feelings, is wondering "what is this feeling?" This can be seen in Tine's statement as follows.

“... Do you think I can control my feelings? Since the day you disappeared, I felt something was different in my life. Whatever I do and wherever I go, you are always there with me. Even in my dreams, you are there teasing me. Do you want to be responsible for what you have done to me?” (Tine to Sarawat in '2Gether: The Series' Episode 7)



Figure 2 First meet between Sarawat and Tine at the concert (Property by GMMTV)

What is the definition of love conventionally? Love comes from the Sanskrit word ‘*lubhayati*’ which means ‘s/he wants’ (Krich, 2009). The old definition perhaps presents it as a euphemism without meaningful description (abstract or absurd).

In the poems created in the past century, same-sex or homosexual love is even often presented as something vulgar and is always symbolized by a burning sexual passion (Spencer, 2004). In ‘2gether: The Series’, love, which is referred to as creative love, friendship, and romantic love by Sorokin (1950) and Charter (2015), is seen in Tine’s jealous expression when Sarawat is together with Earn, one of his band members. It is the embodiment of someone who expresses his love. Jealousy is an element in romantic love.

Jealousy may not be strange in the love story of man and woman. However, it will be strange if it is in a love story between man and man or between woman and woman. For most of the Indonesian people who adhere to heteronormativity, jealousy of the same sex is a feeling of taboo, pain, and “prohibition”. The researcher argues that this restraint of heteronormativity may lead to a stereotype of same-sex love which is solely based on sexual love. Creative love and intimate love are not seen in same-sex love stories.

Many people then simply interpret love by simply staring at the smiling face of the loved one, the simple love that appears when you are happy just looking at him/her drinking water, or many other things or simple ways to interpret love in everyday life.

3.4 The Role of Religion Affect Same-sex Love in Indonesia

The law guaranteed freedom of society in religion, politics, and other fields in Indonesia (Wahyudin, Maimun & Jalil, 2019). However, in freedom of self-expression and love-expression, the government prohibits attributes that violate norms and values. Many people from marginal gender groups get social punishment in society.

The relationship between religion and the state in Indonesia is very influential on the political relations formed. This means that religion and the state cannot be separated to reshape politics in Indonesia. More influence is on the religious majority of Islam, which rejects various same-sex love discourses.

Same-sex love in Indonesia still clashes with various layers such as religion and morality. Then other things such as socio-cultural are still thick with heteronormativity so that the marriage can be justified in heteronormative cultures. Sanawiah (2016) and Rohmawati (2016) mention that Islamic religious teachings rejected homosexual behaviour based on the Argunetasi Al-Qur'an and Hadith. The legal view still puts LGBT and same-sex marriage in God's eyes (moral) and is considered contrary to divine morality (Sirait, 2017). Therefore, same-sex love (marriage) would never be justified in the eyes of the law because of the contradiction of morality.

Heteronormative cultures are heterosexual love (marriage), whereas outside of it is not justified in Indonesian law that puts moral and religion as the foundation, while LGBT is regarded as moral and religious opponents. Thus, there is a narrative that LGBT is against God's will, so religion fights it. Even LGBT studies that have a human rights perspective is still biased on heterosexual human rights, such as in the study of Santoso (2016) and Sofyarto (2018), where LGBT is considered a magician, a The bully (meaning LGBT is called abnormal) and even justifies persecution and discrimination against to love expression.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the results & discussion section, it can be concluded that same-sex love in '2gether: The Series' contains a variety of sociological meanings. Same-sex love, like heteronormative love, has flexibility in

meaning and is not rigid. In the end, the perspective of sociology views humanistic love as full of expressions of friendship, non-violence, and without pressure/coercion.

Love is reflected in the variety of expressions, both shown by Tine and Sarawat, such as anxiety, doubt, jealousy, a flowery feeling, and others. In the Indonesian context, there is no specific conceptual framework in examining same-sex love because of heteronormativity. On the other hand because of the influence of culture and religion is still strong.

Then, the presence of context associated with the language factor was not satisfactory enough for the discourse analysis process. In the analysis of critical discourse Fairclough (1995) mentioned that socio-cultural practices influence discourse in the media. It is seen in 2gether the series that the Thai people do not mind this series airing into a public. While in Indonesia, LGBT nuances are strictly prohibited from being shown in the national media. There is a rule of the Indonesian National Broadcasting Commission (*Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia*) that states a ban on LGBT attributes appearing on television.

Furthermore, socio-cultural practices in Thailand are familiar to other genders outside of heterosexual relationships, thus allowing bl series to become a new cultural genre that develops. This is contrary to the situation in Indonesia, which is very thick with heteronormativity culture. Whereas actually, if viewed from Fairclough and Wodak (1997) opinion, the discourse itself becomes a form of social action based on the purpose of the society that produces it and constructs it.

The same-sex romance story in 2gether the series became an anti-mainstream entertainment that young Indonesians enjoyed secretly and freely. This means they have not dared to openly declare themselves as audiences of the Boys Love genre 2gether the series. The viral hashtag

#2gethertheseries evidence the number of lovers of this series on Twitter, carried out by fans in Indonesia. Based on Fairclough and Wodak (1997) opinion, discourse does not necessarily exist just like that but comes with a particular purpose that wants to be conveyed to the audience of connoisseurs. Here, GMMTV not only presents 2gether the series as entertainment, but also conveys the message "fight against heteronormativity" love, where the love of Win and Sarawat becomes a social fact that cannot be underestimated.

Fans of the homosexual series do not approve of same-sex relationships in the real world. They enjoy a romantic relationship with each other men only in the series. The existence of 2gether, the series that fans can enjoy, allows the existence of new pop culture in Indonesia; the Boys Love genre.

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