

Representation of Queer Muslim in @artqueerhabibi Postcard Illustration

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Abstract The relationship between social media platforms and the photo or illustration production equals to the visibility of gender and sexuality issues. The situation of the visibility of gender and sexuality issues become a complex problem, especially for queer in heteronormative Muslim majority countries. The Middle East countries faced the issue of homophobic due to gay imprisoned in Tunis during 2018. That issue represents a complex problem around its human values and cultural, sexual, faith, modernity in capitalism. Thus, the respond to the queer publicity depicted in the postcard illustration which posted by an active Instagram account, @artqueerhabibi. The representation of queer Muslim in @artqueerhabibi is analyzed using Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen social semiotic approach. This study is seeking to understand the meaning inherent of the postcard illustrations @artqueerhabibi instagram post. The data obtained in this study uses postcard illustration in @artqueerhabibi isntagram post from January 2018 to July 2019. The results of the study concluded that despite the queer Muslim facing problem of alienation in Middle East, the narrative that comes through them is pride. By expressing the pride, @queerhabibi postcard illustration offer a space that identity of being queer is a revolution.

Keywords: *queer, Muslim, postcard, Instagram, representation, identity*

1. Introduction

The heteronormative and homophobic society in Middle Eastern country have stigma to queer and LGBTQ+ community. Queer muslim can sometime find themselves isolated both their faith communities and local communities[1]. It means belonging to a queer muslim community indicates the otherness of their identities. The studies of queer Muslims are positioned in the ongoing debates about Islam and the cultural politics of capitalism [2]. This paper explores the representation of queer muslim depicted in postcard using the social semiotics. The previous study conducted a research of constructing, performing and embodying necessarily hybrid identities [3]. In this study, the queer Muslims in the West present a clash of civilizations between Western and followers of Islam. The other study conducts exploration of queer Muslim identity and experience complicated and conflicted queer politics of the West in the movies [4]. Whilst, this study analyzes the representation of queer muslim in cultural work, postcard, illustrated by @artqueerhabibi.

Representation is a sign which constructed in some way and stand instead of the referring object [5]. It cannot be the same with reality because we all have different experiences and interpretation of reality. If representation is shared without any context, their meaning can be constructed differently by the viewers. There are two system of representation [6]. First, there is a system which is correlated with a set of concepts or mental representation that we carry around in our head. Without this system, we cannot interpret anything meaning fully since meaning depends on the system of concept in our thought. The second is constructing a set of misunderstanding between our conceptual map and a set of signs and turned into languages which stand for or represent those concepts.

Social media is one of media to share its user's representation. It is personal, social and often made for the moment, not for eternity. It means people share their self-representation on social media with intention to impress, entertain, ask for support, or simply to connect with some friends. In this lense, @artqueerhabibi as queer muslim sometimes used social media to show a certain aspect of themselves. Queer itself is a contested term. It refers and relates to many things in many ways and eludes simple definition. It is originating from an examination of the lives of gay men and lesbians and it has taken on their marginalised position and developed into a tool with which to examine and deconstruct, often around the areas of gender and sexuality, and is referred to as queer theory [7]. It can therefore use to think of queer related to group, whereas gay and lesbian relied on binaries – gay/straight – queer explores transgressions of gender. This study focusses on how the postcard illustration represent the queer muslim through Instagram post. And the result will be comparing to the result of postcard analysis to see how illustration and caption on Instagram correspond in creating a meaning.

2. Research Method

This study uses descriptive analytical method to analyse seven Instagram post from @artqueerhabibi account. Stratified purposeful sampling is deployed to select the posting which represent queer Muslim. This textual analysis uses social semiotics by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen. Social semiotic is used to analyze the illustration. It is a sub-field theory from semiotics developed by Van Leeuwen. Social semiotics is not pure theory, it is a new distinctive approach to the practice and theory of semiotics [8]. Social semiotics is concerned with meaning makers and meaning making. There are three kinds of meta semiotics task to create meaning of an image, representational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, and compositional metafunction [9]. In representational metafunction we focus on the people, places, object within an image which called as Represented Participant. In interpersonal metafunction we focused on actions of all participants in producing and viewing the image. Moreover, in compositional metafunction, we focus on how representational and interpersonal metafunction relate to each other. In analyzing the postcard illustration, those metafunction used to discover what the illustration is about, how the it engages the viewer and how it makes meaning.

3. Results And Discussion

Instagram is a worldwide online social networking site that provides a platform for people to share photos and videos [10]. Moreover, the users can like and leave a comment on the other post using “like” and “comment” feature. Not only connecting people, Instagram also used as a platform to express themselves [2]. One of the active users that used the Instagram for activism is @artqueerhabibi. The illustrator posted the postcard project in Instagram to support the queer muslim community in Eastern country. By having similar experiences and goals, queer and LGBTQ+ community employ similar characteristics in their visual repertoire [11]. They have connection in social media when they share their inner self and experience to the other queer. A fundamental point to underscore about the community is that they have always encountered exclusion, since they do not follow normative standards [1]. @artqueerhabibi experience the fundamental religious and tradition of family and society make queer people feel wrong and out of place, especially the old people who do not want to accept the LGBTQ+ people living beside them. The illustrator takes inspiration from his/her own life and community aiming to bring visibility to Arabian queer culture. His/her project is representing the LGBTQ+ community of Arabian through postcard artqueerhabibi. Habibi means sweetheart, so it depicted that he/she wants to educate people of love.

The art queer habibi project start in January 2018 with 521,000 followers and selling the postcards in online website about \$2.39. The postcard production as cultural work contributes to give senses and place identities, fundamental experiences, and cultural construction [12]. Art queer habibi postcard gives sense to the queer muslim identities in Middle Eastern country, it tends to spread awareness to educate and inform all of the Instagram followers that are people of LGBTQ+ in Arab just same as in any other country.

3.1 The signs and Practice of queer Muslim: postcard illustration

The findings consist of textual findings, whilst the discussion divided into four main sections. There are 81 photos of postcard (@artqueerhabibi) posted from 2018 (gays imprisoned in Tunis) until July 2019 (support project LGBTQ+). From the seven posts of @artqueerhabibi, the writer concludes that all of them share the images which tend to have a positive atmosphere to depict their identity as a queer muslim. The images shared the activity which related to everyday life event. Those postcard illustrations tend to have the similar way in demonstrate their queer muslim through Instagram post. Regardless queers are minority in the Middle East country, the postcard illustration show the queer muslim by sharing moments of their activities.

3.1.1 Alienation, Otherness, and Pride



The illustration shows one person as the represented participant [8]. This muscle person wore white basic and grey pants along with white turban on the head. The person is the main point in this image [8]. The body facing frontally to the viewers indicates that they believe it is his world and we as the viewers are not part of it. However, he is facing the viewers which implies that he wants to invite viewers to see his world. His facial expression shows a welcoming with demand gaze refers to us as the viewers to enter his world but still maintain distance with viewers as the outsiders.

The caption of the image is ‘All hateful commenters will be punished by Baghdaddy. Good boy can get some disciplined too’ followed by hashtag #gayart #gayillustration #gaylove. There is the verb in this caption, and this is a verbal process[8]. The mood in this text is concerned with his greeting in welcoming hateful comment. The tenor is baghdaddy as a “Baghdad soldier” with no weapon whilst his hand show he will take the weapon against the haters. The field is the captions of this image on Instagram post, and the mode is the greet for negative and positive comment of his sexual orientation as a gay. Rheme of this text is the greet for welcoming followers which has been said by the “Baghdaddy”. It means that the message of this caption is to greet his Muslim followers on welcoming and against the comments from them.

The second picture shows a narrative image with one vector. The reactional process [8] occurs in the diagonal lines created by eyeline from them to the viewers. The viewers tend to focus on their body and facial expressions which reflect their excitement whilst bring the rainbow flag. Its caption “Arab Queer” provide information about the situation in this image. This image and caption “Arab Queer” create a narrative that The Middle Eastern LGBTQ+ community is officially joining the long March 2018 LGBTQ+ Pride. They are almost naked and wear attributes related to the contrary feminine and masculine. It is symbolized their world to celebrate equality and freedom.

The next aspect are social distance and intimacy. The relation between human Representation Participant and the viewers is an imaginary relation [9] yet it can portray how close the RPs with the viewer, depend on the distance of the RPs on the image. In this image, the viewers can see RP from the whole body, it means that the producer make the RP is quite close to the viewers so the viewers would focus on the RP’s which happen in the centre of the image. This image use the frontal angle since the RP is presented frontally to the viewers. It implies that the Arab Queer is “one of us”. It means artqueerhabibi illustrator wants to convey that Muslim is also part of this world, even though they accept the otherness in their faith and countries [1]. The picture-illustrator might want to state that queer muslim is same as other

people and it suggest the otherness against queer must be stopped. In this image and caption analysis, it concludes that this image and caption is relatable[9]. This assumes that @artqueerhabibi used this image to illustrate his pride to be gay and against the alienation from the hateful comment. The attribute “Baghdaddy” and “Arab Queer” in this image are the key which indicates the identity of queer Muslim pride rather than suffering from the effect of alienation and social humiliation.

3.1.2 Sexual identity: “two hearts beat as one”

The queer is also alienated, wrestling with his identity in terms of sexuality, religion, ethnicity[1]. The reactional process occurs in the diagonal lines created by eyeline from them to viewers and it makes the viewers focus on them[8]. The sexual orientations are questioning by the society, they also focus on the individual’s choice to engage in activities that may or more likely may not be considered permissible (halal)[13]. The viewers tend to focus on her facial expression which reflect their excitement activity whilst stand in front of the disco Arabia club. Beside the “disco” word in Arabic letters, the halal word also noticeable. This makes disco is link with their sexual orientation. Thus, this image creates a narrative excitement romantic night which is symbolized by this couple. Their colorful shirt associate with the rainbow pride or supporting the LGBTQ+. On the left side, the long hair, moustache and wear earring and his eyes look straightly to the ‘audience’. It means that they want to show their performance are not associated with their gender. This illustration used the frontal angle to the viewers. It implies that the @artqueerhabibi wants to convey that queer Muslim is also part of this world and their sexual orientation does not differentiate them.



The caption of this image is ‘two heart beats as one through the disco’ New postcard with emoticon link in bio followed by hastag #disco #lgbt #queer #gayillustration, and so on. This caption is a main clause as well as represent romantic visually by the illustration. In this Instagram post, the image is the focus of the post, yet it still needs the caption as explanation for the image. The caption is describing the context of the image. This also led the image to bring up the Muslim identity in this image, contrasting the halal term and the queer’s disco. The caption and image share the message of the main clause about what happen when it is time for disco. The image implies that disco, time for queer Muslim showing their romance.

3.1.3 Queer and place identity

Many public display resistance of LGBTQ+ like the majority of Arab world, criminalize on other phenomenon same sex attraction or homosexual acts [13]. This illustration below captured a man and woman figure. Both illustrations give an offer gaze by facing the viewers. This gaze makes the RP as an object observation for the viewers [9]. On the left side, a man figure need affirmation through her/his 'woman' shirt covering her/his figure. The image seems to be taken from distance, the city landscape behind and the pyramid as the key place. This is conceptual image with classificatory process since this image can be analytical if we as the viewers assume the pyramid as the carrier and the 'woman' is the attribute, it means the pyramid is the main point in this image as the place of queer Muslim, while the 'woman' is queer. The misconception about Middle Eastern queers is that all queer men are masculine and women feminine, but that's not always happened look at below photos.



Both illustrations faced frontally to the viewers, this indicates that they believe it is their world and we as the viewers are not part of it. Their facial expression shows welcoming the viewers to enter their world. They are still maintaining the distance with the viewers as the outsiders by capturing the image in a public distance. The place depicted in the postcard shows the relation or sense of belonging with the producer [12]. It implies both images want to create strong engagement with the location to see their world. It indicates their hope to have a great place to catch the attention as queer Muslim.

3.2. Coming out as empowerment

Self-reflection on social media to engage in identity development and circulate new understandings across publics [10]. The mirror conceptual image captured a man and woman figure (picture 8 and picture 9). Both are self-reflecting their appearance. They wore make up and showing their inner self through their look. The woman figure is bald, and the man figure is holding a lipstick. On the left side, the mirror reflects the background photo of a hijab woman and a rimless cap man. The illustrators want to show that the RP is coming out by telling the truth to his/her parents. On the right side, the small *neki neko*-yellow cat implies a persuasive invitation to accept and rejoice in one's inner self. Both represent the image of a queer in strong frames. It indicates they are welcoming the viewers to accept, see their true self, and be an inspirator of a queer. The image is using a frontal angle [8], even though they are facing back. It is considered as a frontal angle because the image was taken frontally as if the photographer was standing directly in front of them. This angle implies that they are in the image as one of us. This angle is also used to amplify the position in this image. @artqueerhabibi indicates that they have equal power like the viewers even though they are queer Muslims. The caption on this image is a motivational word to tell the truth of their queer identities. The acceptance of their inner self

is like a greeting in celebrating their queer muslim identities. Some emoticons used to support the illustrator feeling about this caption. The inspirator labeled and the capital hastag #GRLPWR indicates their excitement in celebrating their inner self as empowerment and revolution. In line with that the love following emoticons also symbolized their love and happiness in celebrating empowerment as queer muslim. This image and caption tend to read by receiver, queer muslim followers because they can relate with this caption. The caption and the image assume the action to greet the muslim followers to celebrate their inner self [14].



4. CONCLUSION

From these nine Instagram posts, they represent their queer Muslim through images and its caption. Two post shows the pride of being Arab queer. It indicates the viewer can see the queer muslim symbolized by the images without link it to the caption. Yet the caption helps the image to deliver the message to the viewer. In the third image, by seeing the caption the viewers find out that this image part of showing sexual identity in their daily life. Other posts demonstrate their queer muslim by telling the truth of their inner self as queer. In conclusion, @artqueerhabibi postcard illustration as platform of queer Muslim communities for coming out and finding their places. Those nine postcard illustrations show their queer muslim identities by creating a relation with their muslim followers through showing their support for fellow queer. @artqueerhabibi also depicting the revolution for important events for queer as a revolution and important event for them. In addition, showing the queerness through the Instagram post and postcard does not mean they have to share about their worship to God or any other thing which can be offensive for some people. They choose to share some image which indicate the queer muslim identity. In spite of the fact that queer muslim are minority, they proud of being queer muslim and not ashamed to show their identities.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, the writer would like to give big thank to all people who always support and help in completing this study. The writer would like to thank @artqueerhabibi for the data, all parties in State University of Jakarta, Mrs. Lilawati Kurnia, and the hospitality from BASA III 2019 Universitas Negeri Sebelas Maret. The writer hopes this study can

contribute in media and cultural studies fields. As this study mainly focus in textual analysis, for the future study, the writer can add the reader respond to explore more information about this issue.

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