



## CONTROVERSIAL BEHAVIOR OF POLITICAL ELITES IN INDONESIA DURING THE COVID-19

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### Abstract

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**Keywords:**

*Covid-19; political communication; political elites; social media*

*The Covid-19 pandemic, which has accounted for remarkable casualties in Indonesia, did not seem to make political elites more empathetic. The study aims to reveal how the mythology of the political elites behind the criticism of Instagram accounts @GejayanMemanggil. To fulfill this goal, we employed Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of nine contents of @GejayanMemanggil. This study has revealed five major results. First, the mythology of the political elite is represented as the 'ancilus' of oligarchic interests during the Covid-19 pandemic. Second, political elites and oligarchs have superior positions to control society and health workers. Third, the political elites' policies focus more on economic recovery than the people's safety. Fourth, @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account narrates the mythology of political elites who have no sensitivity towards people's hardship because they exploit their positions and facilities as public officials. Finally, political elites show that they do not empathize with the suffering of the people during the Covid-19 pandemic.*

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### **Abstrak**

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**Kata kunci:**

Covid-19;  
komunikasi  
politik; elit politik,  
media sosial

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Masa pandemi Covid-19 yang banyak menimbulkan korban jiwa di Indonesia ternyata tidak membuat perilaku elit politik berempati. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan bagaimana mitologi elit politik di balik kritik akun Instagram @GejayanMemanggil. Untuk memenuhi tujuan ini digunakan analisis semiotika Roland Barthes atas sembilan konten akun Instagram @GejayanMemanggil. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa pertama, mitologi elit politik direpresentasikan sebagai ‘*ancilus*’ dari kepentingan oligarki pada masa pandemi Covid-19. Kedua, elit politik dan oligarki memiliki posisi kontrol yang lebih superior dibandingkan masyarakat dan tenaga kesehatan; Ketiga, kebijakan para elit politik lebih mementingkan pemulihan ekonomi dibandingkan keselamatan rakyat. Keempat, akun Instagram @GejayanMemanggil mengisahkan tentang mitologi elit politik yang tidak peka terhadap kesulitan rakyat karena mengeksploitasi jabatan dan fasilitasnya sebagai pejabat publik. Akhirnya, penelitian ini menampilkan bagaimana elit politik tidak memiliki rasa empati terhadap penderitaan rakyat pada masa pandemi Covid-19.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Elaborate controversial behaviors of political elites and rulers during the Covid-19 pandemic have prompted a lot of criticism from netizens on social media. The Covid-19 pandemic has made Instagram a relatively free public space for its users. As a part of social media, Instagram has a solid influence to provide criticism and carry out surveillance (i.e. media watchdog) to disseminate information and political activities promptly

(Arianto, 2021; Larsson, 2021; Rogers & Niederer, 2020). Moreover, Instagram has become a medium of political communication to convey people's interests and criticism towards the government and political elites (Indrawan et al., 2020).

Political criticisms on Instagram target the political elites of policymakers or policy implementers; for example, criticisms of Juliari Batubara (a PDIP cadre and an ex-Minister of Social Affairs) who corrupted social aid funds during the pandemic (BBC Indonesia, 2020), criticism of the Omnibus Law passed by the legislative and executive political elites (CNN Indonesia, 2020), and criticism of the Covid-19 pandemic policies made by Ministers of the Advanced Indonesia Cabinet (Irham, 2020; Riana & Persada, 2021). Audinovic & Nugroho (2021) confirm that Instagram is one of the channels that display creative political criticism of the ruling government. These criticisms are addressed to dissatisfactory and detrimental policies for the public.

The use of Instagram to express critics and dissatisfaction with political elites and government policies has become a subject for academic studies. For example, Bodrunova (2021) compares the use of social media, such as Youtube, Instagram, and VKontakte, to voice people's dissatisfaction and dissent to governments in Russia and Belarus from 2010 to 2020s. He has discovered that poor political policies are sources for criticisms targeting the elites. Meanwhile, some studies have discovered that creativity in the form of political memes could manifest political criticism (Astuti et al., 2019; Fatanti & Prabawangi 2021; Jakubowski 2021; MacDonald 2021; Munawarah et al., 2021; Murru & Vicari 2021).

An Instagram account that has consistently presented criticisms about political elites during the Covid-19 pandemic is @GejayanMemanggil. This account of social movement belongs to community groups in Yogyakarta and serves as a forum for channelling criticisms about detrimental government policies for the community and democracy in Indonesia

(Andreas, 2020; Nofrima et al., 2020). Posts on the @GejayanMemanggil account include posters, memes, action documents, visual writings, and videos representing people's resistance to government policies during the Covid-19 pandemic because these policies are controlled by oligarchs (Asrinaldi et al., 2021).

The criticism of the political elite is uploaded on @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account represents another form of *symbolic representation*. Pitkins (McLoughlin, 2019) proposes that social media can produce symbols representing real-life political conditions to simulate political reality. In this regard, Chistyakov (2020) argues that social media is in a position to represent social reality, reconstruct reality, and create reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966). With that in mind, it is safe to say that there has been a production of symbols containing meanings about the political elites.

The criticism of the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account aims to strengthen democracy by involving citizens' participation through new media. As a new social media, Instagram has become a channel used by citizens to participate in political activities and criticize the government and political elites. The criticisms on the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account are addressed to political elites, and this activity embodies political participation. Nasution (2021) and Nofrima et al. (2020) argue that @GejayanMemanggil provides discourse on social media and constitutes a pioneer of social and political movements to mobilize the community, especially university students, to question government policies and the attitudes of political elites in Indonesia.

Several studies have also highlighted the activities of social media accounts @GejayanMemanggil. For example, Hidayah et al. (2020) review the activities of #GejayanMemanggil as students' social communication to congregate strength, create movements, and confront government policies. Another similar study is conducted by Nofrima et al. (2020), who examined the phenomena of #GejayanMemanggil on Twitter,

which serves as a means of communication for students' socio-political movements to supervise government policies. Meanwhile, the study by Nasution (2021) proposes a different point of view, which depicts the #GejayanMemanggil movement on Twitter social media. Nasution (2021) collected data using in-depth interviews with student activists of #GejayanMemanggil and analyzed the data using framing analysis.

Another study by Andreas (2020) assesses the #GejayanMemanggil movement on Instagram by reviewing uploaded photos using the hashtag #GejayanMemanggil. These photos were then analyzed using Barthes' semiotic analysis method and Debord's spectacle society theory to reveal the self-construction of the participants of the #GejayanMemanggil action on Instagram. Ardiyanto (2021) has also revealed that the #GejayanMemanggil movement on social media initiated by student activists represents political communication to protest against government policies. Meanwhile, Ardiyanto (2021) demonstrates that as a political movement, the #GejayanMemanggil movement is a part of an endeavor against the oligarchy.

This current study fills a gap that the aforementioned studies have not provided in scrutinizing meanings behind criticisms addressed to political elites and uploaded on the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study proposes a research problem on "how the mythology of the political elites behind the criticism in @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account is". To answer this research problem, we employ Roland Barthes' semiotic method, consisting of denotation and connotation components to interpret oligarchic mythology in political criticism on the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account.

## **METHODS**

This research employed the constructivist paradigm to view the phenomenon of political criticism on @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account. According to Eriyanto (2011), the constructivist paradigm views that media could construct reality through its contents. The constructivist paradigm in the methodology discourse becomes a worldview for researchers to build knowledge through the upper buildings of the social reality analyzed (Bryman, 2012). Thus, this current study examines the mythology of political elites behind the political criticism on @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account.

A qualitative approach was selected to verbally and textually describe the database and explain the mythology of political elites behind criticism of the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram accounts. This qualitative approach used constructivist paradigms to build in-depth knowledge based on social phenomena and natural settings through verbal and textual descriptions (Neuman & Robson, 2018). The qualitative approach was employed to comprehensively describe and explain the mythology of political elites behind the criticism of the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account.

To acquire data, this study adopted a documentation technique. The information was taken from the Instagram account @GejayanMemanggil between 28 March 2020 and 2 September 2021. This period was chosen because it covers various crucial political decisions, such as the Omnibus Law and social limitations during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study retrieved a total of nine Instagram posts from the @GejayanMemanggil account. These express political criticism of Indonesian government actions and political leaders during the Covivirus-19 pandemic.

Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis, which consists of two components, denotation and connotation, was applied to the data gathered through the documentation approach to expose the mythology of the

political elite behind the political critique on the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account. Barthes (Hoed, 2014; Sobur, 2020) explains that denotation is the first stage of analyzing meaning by revealing explicit and clear relationships between signifiers and signified (the reality to which it refers). In contrast, denotation is a symbol that is seen and understood according to what is displayed. Connotation is the second stage of meaning analysis, which involves understanding the relationship between connotative signifiers and connotative signified markers. However, this meaning is indirect and concealed. The semiotic analysis model of Barthes is summarized in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis Model (Sobur, 2015)

The two stages of the analysis explore the mythology of the political elites behind the criticism of the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram accounts. This mythology refers to the meaning of the relationship between signs, which operates a scientific ideology believed by society (Barthes in Hoed, 2014). Furthermore, Barthes (Sobur, 2020) explains that this mythology is known through three-component patterns of signifiers, signified, and sign. In other words, this mythology is formed by a series of meanings available in the dimensions of denotation and connotation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### ***Political Elites As ‘Ancilus’ From Oligarchs During The Covid-19 Pandemic***

This study has revealed several symbols of criticism uploaded on the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account. These symbols demonstrate Indonesian political elites with *‘ancilus’* (a Latin word which means a politically enslaved person) of oligarchs whose interest is gaining monetary profit during the Covid-19 pandemic. The symbols represent the relationship between Omnibus Law policies during the pandemic and the Covid-19 management policies which focuses more on investment and economic growth rather than public health and safety.

The @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account presents that during the pandemic, political elites made more policies of economic crisis than the health crisis suffered by the community. The oligarchic interests behind this financial crisis policy are depicted several times in the symbols of political criticism that, in particular, manifests the meaning of connotations, operates inherently, becomes scientific, and is trusted by society (Hoed, 2014; Sobur, 2020). The oligarchy is represented as the master of *the ‘ancilus’ of the* political elite. It is identified with great rulers of coal mines and other prominent businessmen who carry out strategic projects of the government of political elites. The results of the analysis are as follows.





Figure 2. A Post From @GejayanMemanggil Instagram Account  
Uploaded On 26 April 2020

The denotational meaning of the above criticism is represented by several signifiers as follows. First, the image shows two men wearing suits, holding drinks, laughing from ear to ear, and holding a sign “*RUU Omnibus law cilaka*” (Curse to Omnibus Law Bill). This image shows that businessmen are exhilarated when political elites pass the Omnibus Law Bill. Second, the sentence “*Nanti juga dia sembuh sendiri*” (he will recover by himself) indicates that the people suffer from the plague, and they will heal themselves without needing assistance. Third, the picture of two health workers dealing with Covid-19 interprets mutual assistance efforts to help health workers deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The meaning of the connotations that arise from the above criticism is shown through several relationships between connotative markers in several forms. First, the picture of two men wearing suits portrays their high socioeconomic status. In other words, they are oligarchs who overjoy the Omnibus Law Bill passed by political elites of the executive and legislative governments. Second, the picture of a man in a suit saying “*Nanti*

*juga dia sembuh sendiri?* (he will recover by himself) indicates a disregard for a condition of hardship experienced by people. Third, the diction of “*cilaka*” (disaster/curse) written in uppercase indicates that the Omnibus Law Bill brings immense disaster to people while the benefits are only for businessmen. Fourth, the image of two health workers helping each other and fighting against Covid-19 means that political elites and business elites neglect health workers’ fight against Covid-19.

Based on the series of connotations above, the criticism is directed towards the political elites passing the Omnibus Law Bill to please oligarchic business people amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, the picture shows an immense disregard for people and health workers overwhelmed by Covid-19. This series of connotations of how elite politics act to be a slave of the oligarchy during the Covid-19 pandemic is a myth.

Another symbol of criticism on @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account represents the mythology of political elites who serve the interests of the oligarchy during the Covid-19 pandemic is as follows.



Figure 3. A Post From @GejayanMemanggil Instagram Account  
Uploaded On 26 April 2020

The connotative meaning of the criticism symbol is formed through several markers. First, men wear suits, loafers, and project hats. Another man carrying a pickaxe and a signpost “2020-2025 = *kontrak habis*” (2020-2025 = contract expired). Second, a man with a beard is standing under a spotlight in front of a row of men in suits while holding a sign that reads “Omnibus Law.” A discussion on balloons states: “*Bagi Pengusaha Batubara, Saya Beri Perlakuan Jangka Waktu Khusus*” (For coal companies, I will give a particular treatment period). Third, two men are wearing t-shirts. The man with a purple t-shirt is wearing a green hat written “*Tambang Tumbang*” (Mining Collapses) and clenching his fist. Meanwhile, the man in the orange shirt is wearing white headgear with a furious expression of bulging eyes and open mouth and using his hands to shield a tree behind him. There are also sentences “*Stop Tambang! Biarkan Alam Tenang!*” (“Stop mining! Let nature calm down!”).

The connotative meaning expressed from some connotative signs in the picture is as follows. First, men wearing ties, suits and shoes represent the upper classes, illustrating their high economic status. Second, a man carrying a pickaxe invokes the nuance of coal mining. Meanwhile, the picture of a man carrying the signpost written “2020-2025 = *kontrak habis*” (“2020-2025 = contract expired”)—when put in a similar context—refers to a group of power-holding coal mining projects and pressurizing for an extension of the mining contract. Third, the man with a diminutive physique in a white shirt with rolled-up arms describes the president of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, who is well-known for wearing a white shirt since his first Presidential Election in 2019.

Multiple conflicting connotations are depicted in Figure 3. Two men wearing short-sleeved t-shirts with a white sash and hats on their heads represent the grassroots in this illustration. A hat written with “*Stop Tambang! Biarkan Alam Tenang!*” (Stop mining! Let nature calm down!) Indicates a rejection of the president’s decision on the Omnibus

Law, which grants licenses to coal mining entrepreneurs. The rejection is apparent in the outraged facial expressions, body language, and fist-clenching movements of those who cover the tree with their bodies.

The series of connotative depictions above express that the mythology of the political elite in Indonesia represented by President Joko Widodo is controlled by oligarchs of the coal business who crave to renew their contracts during the Covid-19 pandemic. The depiction also shows that as the political elite, President Joko Widodo consented to these interests through the Omnibus Law. President Joko Widodo's political elites have received remarkable resistance from the public as the law ultimately puts jeopardy to the nature where people live. The findings of this political criticism correlate with those of Febriani et al. (2021), which show a close relationship between stone miners and elite government officials, and with those of Suryani et al. (2021), which explains that an increasingly powerful oligarchy will weaken democracy in Indonesia.

Furthermore, this study has found that criticism behind the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account represents the mythology of the political elites serving the interests of oligarchs during the Covid-19 pandemic. This finding is supported by Asrinaldi et al. (2021), who revealed that oligarchs controlled the Jokowi-era government during the Covid-19 pandemic; this control revolves around policies made by executive and legislative officials that benefit a group of people (i.e. oligarchs). Asrinaldi et al. (2021) name this condition *cartel politics*. This finding also strengthens Winters (2013), who states that oligarchs have always controlled democratic politics in Indonesia from the New Order Era to the Reformation Era.

This study has also revealed the mythology of political elites and oligarchs wearing suits, as presented in Figures 2, 3, and 8. The suits worn by political elites and oligarchs create connotation meanings; for example, luxurious cloth shows the high socioeconomic status of its wearers. This is inversely proportional to the clothes worn by the people

and health workers. Mythologically, political elites and oligarchs have different socioeconomic levels from ordinary people, and this difference is presented through the symbol of “suits”. Political elites and oligarchs wear suits that indicate their higher socioeconomic degree. This finding also confirms a critical study by Prianti (2018), who argues that “suits” in Indonesia are a Dutch colonial relic—an outfit signifying superiority to the indigenous people. Suits are normalized into the official dress of male elites, such as politicians, bureaucrats, CEOs, presidents, ministers, and members of the House.

Political elites and oligarchs wearing suits are interpreted as parties who loot resources in Indonesia, including natural resources, such as coal and human resources. This condition refers to Prianti (2018), who argues that suits are a legacy of the Dutch occupation closely related to the colonial culture. Sujoko et al. (2021) argue that western colonialism-imperialism has made the indigenous people of Indonesia *inlander*, who, at the same time, destroy the country’s natural resources. This explanation shows that political criticism of the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account aims to describe the political elites and oligarchy as superior to the people and health workers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Political Elites Being More Concerned With Economy Than Public Health**

The @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account criticizes how political elites make policies focusing only on economic recovery and growth rather than public health during the Covid-19 pandemic. Muhyiddin (2020) explains that the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly declined the economy of Indonesia. Therefore, it is expected that the government focuses on economic recovery. The government’s focus on economic recovery and negligence of people’s safety is not sensible. This criticism is expressed in the following post on @GejayanMemanggil’s Instagram account.



Figure 4. A Post From @GejayanMemanggil Instagram Account Uploaded On 27 May 2020

The denotational meaning of the criticism in Figure 4 is shown by the following markers. First, a picture of the Coordinator Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment, Luhut Binsar Panjaitan, depicts joyful laughter and conveys the meaning of joy as a public official. Second, the sentence “*Karena nyawamu hanya angka statistik yang tak sebanding dengan pertumbuhan ekonomi & investasi yang mengisi pundi kekayaan para oligarki yang menguasai negeri*” (because your life is only a statistical number that is not comparable to the economic growth & investment that fills the wealth of oligarchs who rule the country) signifies that people’s lives are merely numbers that are not as important as economic growth and investment. Third, the words “*Welcome to the new normal*” with red highlights and a skull symbol in the red triangle-shaped image aim to welcome people to the new normal era of the Covid-19 pandemic. Fourth, the hashtag #*AtasiVirusCaburOmnibus* (#ResolveTheVirusCancelOmnibus) asserts the demand that the government repeals the Omnibus Law.

Connotative meanings in the criticism above are also shown in several signs. First, Luhut Binsar Panjaitan, a Coordinator Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment in Joko Widodo's Cabinet Volume II, has served in many positions in the Covid-19 handling policy. His smiling expression means contentment and disregards the people who are in hardships during the Covid-19 pandemic. Second, the sentence "*Welcome to the new normal*" in red highlights points out that people have no choice but to follow the new normal condition made by the government during the Covid-19 pandemic. Third, the image of a skull points out how the new normal policy of the government might prevent people. Fourth, the demand for repealing the Omnibus Law demonstrates the protest against the government's plan to put economic growth over public health during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, it is believed that the Omnibus Law is specifically designated for investment and economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The series, as mentioned earlier of connotations expresses that although the society (e.g. students and labor alliances) disapproves of the Omnibus Law, political elites still focus on investment and economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Political elites also neglect public health and believe that people's lives are nothing but a statistical number. The new normal policy made by political elites is also presented as a policy specifically modelled for economic recovery, not for the safety of people. Thus, the skull symbol is a sign of caution to people. In this criticism, political elites are represented as policy manipulators who are hiding under the image of keeping public health. In fact, the stipulated policies aim to create investment and recover economic conditions.



Figure 5. A Post From @GejayanMemanggil Instagram Account  
Uploaded On 27 May 2020

The denotational meaning in the above criticism is formed from several signifiers. First, the words “Indonesia Abnormal” with red highlights affirm bizarre conditions. Second, the sentence “*Rezim saat ini meletakkan keselamatan rakyat di bawah sepatu lars TNI/POLRI demi keselamatan investasi dan pertumbuhan ekonomi para oligarki yang berkuasa di negeri ini?*” (For the investment and economic expansion of the nation’s ruling oligarchs, the current administration places the protection of the populace in the hands of the military and police) To ensure the safety of the nation, the government grants greater authority to the military and police than to health practitioners and scientists. Thirdly, the image of seven people wearing plain clothing and masks trampled by army boots represents those suffering the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Next, connotative meaning arises between connotative signifiers in the following forms. First, the text “Indonesia Abnormal” is the main highlight of the image. The words are written in capital letters, and the



largest fonts are used in the title of other symbols. A title describes the emerging situation and shows the opinion of the media content on an incident (VanDijk, 1995). The diction “abnormal” in the title implies an action carried out beyond reasonableness. “Abnormal Indonesia” criticizes a peculiar condition the nation experienced and harmful government regulations.

Second, the text “*Rezim saat ini meletakkan keselamatan rakyat di bawah sepatu lars TNI/POLRI demi keselamatan investasi dan pertumbuhan ekonomi para oligarki yang berkuasa di negeri ini*” (Today’s regime puts the safety of people under the shoes of military and police for the sake of investment and economic growth of the oligarchs who rule the nation) denotes that the situation of the country is more precisely described as “abnormal” instead of the “new normal”. This political criticism addresses the peculiar political movement of the government as they entrust the army and the police to handle the Covid-19 pandemic and underestimates health practitioners and scientists to handle the Covid-19 pandemic.

Third, the people bearing the heavy burden of government policies who prioritize the army and the police are presented as being stepped on by army shoes. This criticism is directed toward the policies of political elites to let the army and police handle the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, people suffer more during the Covid-19 pandemic. These series of connotations indicate widespread criticism of the Indonesian government’s policy for not entrusting the Covid-19 handling to health practitioners and scientists, who understand public health, but entrusting the military and police. The irony is hard to understand because the military and police function and are responsible for defending and treating the country’s security. As a result, people are forced to bear the burden of the problematic policies stipulated by political elites during the Covid-19 pandemic. Whereas, the political elite can use rhetoric as an instrument to build a mutual understanding of the community in handling the Covid-19

Pandemic (Sujoko et al., 2022) without using the instruments of the army (TNI) and police (POLRI).

### **Political Elites Taking Benefits From Covid-19 Pandemic To Corrupt**

Juliari Batubara, the former Minister of Social Affairs and a PDIP Cadre, corrupted social aid funds during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, he is a target of political criticism by the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account. Andreas (2020), Nasution (2021), and Nofrima et al. (2020) explain that activities of the #GejayanMemanggil movement on social media are based on driven by corruption cases committed by public officials. Corruption is an extraordinary crime and should be fought by all circles. The Minister of Social Affairs' corruption of social aid funds has been sharply criticized in the posts of the @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account. The posts are analyzed as follows.



Figure 6. A Post From @GejayanMemanggil Instagram Account  
Uploaded On 7 August 2021

The denotational meaning of criticism above is found in several markers. First, the sentence “*Penyimpangan Bansos yang terungkap selama*

*PPKM level 4*” (The revealing of social aid embezzlement during social distancing of level 4) signifies inappropriate actions when distributing social aid during social distancing of level 4. Second, the image of a black rat carrying a light brown bag written “Rp” illustrates a rodent who is taking a bag containing rupiah bills. Third, the picture of other piles of bags written “Rp” is similar to the bag carried by the rat. These bags mean a lot of rupiah bills.

The connotative meaning of the criticism above is found in the following connotative signs. First, the clause “*Penyimpangan Bansos yang terungkap selama PPKM level 4*” (The revealing of social aid embezzlement during social distancing of level 4) explains the misuse of social aid funds during the social distancing level 4. This picture politically criticizes the corruption of the financial aid that should be distributed to the community that is monetarily affected by the pandemic. Second, a rat taking a bag of rupiah depicts a public official stealing social aid funds intended for the community. Third, the piles of pockets containing money refer to the social aid fund that should be distributed to the community during the social distancing of level 4.

The series of connotations above portrays political elites as ‘rodents’ who rob the Covid-19 social aid funds for those financially affected by the pandemic. Political elites are depicted as animals taking advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic policy for their benefit. In other words, the political criticism conveys that political elites have made the Covid-19 pandemic a chance to corrupt social aid funds.



Figure 7. A Post From @GejayanMemanggil Instagram Account Uploaded On 26 August 2021

The meaning of the above denotation of criticism is found in the following markers. First, the picture contains a clause “*Komplotan lima maling yang dipimpin seorang menteri?*” (A gang of five thieves led by a minister). Second, a picture of a man wearing a suit and washing his hands while two hands of another person take his brain out. This picture describes someone cleaning his hands, and others controlling his mind. Third, the picture contains the sentence “We wash our hands & politicians wash our brains”.

The connotative meaning of the above criticism is found in the following connotative markers. First, the picture of five thieves led by public officials or political elites politically criticizes corruption committed by five people led by the Minister. This criticism is directed at the five staff of the former Minister of Social Affairs, Juliari Batubara, who helped him corrupt social aid funds for the community during the Covid-19 pandemic. Second, the image shows a man washing his hands, and a mysterious

hand is washing his brain. The sentence supports this picture, “We wash our hands & politicians wash our brains”. This sentence connotatively criticizes public officers, such as Ministerial staff, who are directed by a political elite to corrupt the Covid-19 social aid fund collaboratively.

The series of connotations above shows the mythological representation of Juliari Batu Bara, a political elite who commits corruption with his staff at the Ministry of Social Affairs. Corruption in a network is a political critique that refers to the reality of corruption in Indonesia. Antoni (2013) demonstrates that corruption is repeatedly committed in a network of interlocking relationships to conceal corruptors’ crimes. Likewise, Capri et al. (2021) and Rahman et al. (2018) argue that corruption is not usually committed by an individual political activist but by a network with similar interests.



Figure 8. A Post From @GejayanMemanggil Instagram Account Uploaded On 10 August 2021

The meaning of the criticism above is found in the following markers. First, the image consists of the words “*Ketua KPK: Jangan*

*Pernah Berani Korupsi Dana Bansos, Terancam Pidana Mati!*“(The Chairman of Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK): Don’t Risk the Death Penalty by Corruption of Social Assistance Funds!). Moreover, the image of people wearing colored clothes written with “KPK Detainee”, means that Juliari Batubara, who had corrupted social aid funds, is threatened with a death sentence, as depicted by a man in a brown suit. Second, the picture consists of texts “*Korupsi Bansos Corona, Eks Mensos Juliari Dituntut 11 Tahun Bui & Ganti Rugi Rp 14M*” (Corruption of Covid-19 Social Aid, the Juliari, Former Minister of Social Affairs, Jailed for 11 Years & 14.5 Billion of Fine”). The picture also shows a man wearing a mask and handing over a white bag to a crowd of people also wearing masks. Third, the image also shows a stray cat sticking out its tongue and bulging eyes as if it is gagging.

Then, the connotative meaning of the criticism above is found in the following signs. First, “The Chairman of Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK): Never Dare to Corrupt Social Aid Funds, Threatened by Death Sentence!” is the headline of “Merdeka.com”, a media in Indonesia. The news headline explains that the chairman of the KPK, Firli Bahuri, warns all government officials not to corrupt Covid-19 social aid programs because the punishment for this corruption is the death penalty. Second, the headline “Corruption of Covid-19 Social Aid, the Juliari, Former Minister of Social Affairs, Jailed for 11 Years & 14.5 Billion of Fine” reports corruption in the social aid fund. This headline politically criticizes the lighter prosecution than the threat of the chairman of the KPK. Third, the shocked cat, which sticks out its tongue and bulges its eyes, criticizes the demands of the lighter prosecution, namely Juliari Batubara. This criticism also reminds us of the KPK chairman, who previously threatened the corruptors of the Covid-19 pandemic social aid corruption with the death penalty.

The series of connotations above show that there is a discrepancy between the threat of the KPK chairman regarding the death penalty for social aid corruptors and the prosecution of Juliari Batubara, who had committed social aid fraud. This critique is also depicted with a photograph of a cat with a shocked expression, as it was taken aback by the verdict that was deemed overly lenient. The mythological representation of the political elite was manifested in Juliari Batubara as a former Minister of Social Affairs conferring immoral acts by committing social aid embezzlement when the community was in exceptional distress due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Kannabiran et al. (2022) unequivocally explain that corruptors are immorality officials for knowing their actions are wrong but still doing so.

### ***Insensitivity Of Political Elites During The Covid-19 Pandemic***

The criticism behind the upload of the @GejayanMemanggil account represents Indonesian political elites who do not empathize with society during the Covid-19 pandemic. When society is devastated due to health and economic crises, the elites show their ignorance by leisurely travelling to Europe. The @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account represents the mythology of Indonesian political elites who are insensitive to the health and economic conditions of the country. This criticism is posted on 31 July 2021 and shows a series of denotation meanings and interrelated connotations. The results of the analysis are as follows.



Figure 9. A Post From @GejayanMemanggil Instagram Account  
Uploaded On 31 July 2021

Several markers and signs produce the denotations that criticize elites. First, the text “*Rakyat Merana*” (People Suffering) is written in black font, and the text “*Pejabat Meraja*” (Officials Dominating) is written in red font. These texts express that officials take advantage of people’s hardships. Second, black and white pictures of tall buildings and two men, as well as the texts “*Pejabat di Cianjur Liburan ke Eropa*” (Officials of Cianjur City on Vacation to Europe) and “*Lapor Covid-19*” (Report Covid) explain public officials were on vacation abroad during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Then connotations in the criticism above are represented from the following aspects. First, the text “*Rakyat merana, pejabat meraja* (People suffering, officials dominating)” is written in different colors to contrast people distressfully facing the Covid-19 pandemic with political elites living in luxury. Second, the officials of Cianjur were on an expensive vacation abroad and showed their luxurious privilege during the Covid-19 pandemic. These connotative markers are addressed as a satire to the



political elites who lacked empathy as they were on holiday to Europe amidst the Covid-19 pandemic; in fact, the pandemic has taken a remarkable toll on people's lives.

The series of connotations above mark the municipal officials' insensitivity toward the national situation because when people suffered from the devastating Covid-19 pandemic, these officials were on holiday. The insensitivity of these government officials is contrasted with the diction of "king". The series of connotations mythologically represents the political elite as a figure with no empathy for people's affliction during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Figure 10. A Post From @GejayanMemanggil Instagram Account  
Uploaded On 26 April 2020

The denotational meaning of the above criticism is observable in the following signs. First, the picture shows a man wearing a suit, a tie, loafers, and green glasses written with "Rp", carrying a book written "Omnibus Law", walking with excited eyes and wide open mouth, and showing his teeth. The picture is combined with a dialogue balloon written, "Screw

the Covid-19 outbreak!!”. This picture depicts an elite who does not care about the Covid-19 pandemic. Second, a man in a white hazmat suit, green masks, gloves, and transparent face coverings says, “I am fighting on the front line, Sir”.

Meanwhile, another man in a green medical suit says, “It is suspicious that he comes to work”. These two figures depict health workers who struggle against the Covid-19 pandemic. Third, the picture of the building of the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR) shows the workplace of the legislative elites.

The connotative meanings of the above criticism are found in four connotative markers. First, the man in a suit carrying the text of the Omnibus Law Bill runs in front of the People’s Consultative Assembly building. He says, “Whatever the Covid-19 outbreak!!”. This picture suggests that members of the House discuss the controversial Omnibus Law Bill, which only benefits business elites. Second, the picture of green glasses written with “Rp” represents the monetary-related actions of political elites. Third, the picture of two health workers with miserable expressions signifies that they are overwhelmed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Fourth, the dialog balloons “I am fighting on the front line, Sir” and “It is suspicious that he comes to work” are satires on political elites who show very little empathy for health workers who deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The series of connotations above show that political elites pass policies that generate monetary profit for them, serve the interests of oligarchs, and have no sense of empathy for health workers who battle against the Covid-19 pandemic. This series of connotations portrays the mythology of political elites in the legislative who do not empathize with health workers who struggle against the Covid-19 pandemic because these elites use Omnibus Law to benefit themselves and oligarchs.

The criticism manifested in the two symbols illustrates an ideological operation, namely mythology, that represents little empathy for the social and medical workers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The symbols are embedded in the characters of political elites. Scudder (2016) defines empathy as a person's imperative-emotional capacity to succeed and strengthen democratic discourse, particularly during health and economic crises due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account has produced criticism symbols that represent the mythology of political elites who do not show empathy to people and health workers affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that the criticism of @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account negatively narrates political elites' mythology. First, political elites, who are “*ancilus*” of the oligarchy and have sole interests, accumulate resources in the country during the Covid-19 pandemic. Political elites and oligarchs are portrayed to dress in suits to show their superior socioeconomic and political status to society and health workers. Second, the criticism of @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account narrates political elites who only regard investment and economic recovery, not public safety during the Covid-19 pandemic. Third, @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account presents political elites who ironically corrupt social aid funds during the Covid-19 pandemic. Fourth, @GejayanMemanggil Instagram account narrates the mythology of political elites who have no sensitivity towards people's hardship because they exploit their positions and facilities as public officials.

## **Suggestion**

This study academically provides a cornerstone for investigating the mythology of oligarchy and views political elites as an *ancilus* during the Covid-19 pandemic. The mythology is observed through symbols of political criticism on @GejayanMemanggil Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. In practice, this study advises social media management activists to produce criticism through creative and exciting means, such as memes, to communicate ethics. Therefore, the delivered messages do not violate ethical or legal dimensions, such as the Electronic Information and Transaction Law.

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