




Standing Against Sexual Harassment in A Film: Analyzing Resistance in Penyalin Cahaya

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 <https://doi.org/10.21274/martabat.2023.7.1.113-126>

Abstract: The film entitled 'Penyalin Cahaya', which was released in 2021, garnered public attention because it tackled the issue of sexual harassment in educational institutions. Roland Barthes semiotic analysis delves deeply into the iconic signs that depict various elements in the film. The research approach used in this study is qualitative, employing a descriptive method. The results show that the Penyalin Cahaya film portrays several signs related to cases of sexual harassment, affecting not only women but also men. Additionally, the film depicts the settlement of sexual harassment cases, where the perpetrators are often those who hold power and can describe the dominant ideological factors that still exist in society. In this film, the perpetrators of sexual harassment abuse their power and their parents' wealth to cover up their crimes and silence their victims. Consequently, the victims must fight against the unjust systems in place and seek justice for the sexual harassment they endured.

Keywords: *Film, Semiotic, Sexual Harassment, Roland Barthes*

Abstrak: Film Penyalin Cahaya yang rilis pada tahun 2021 ini menyedot perhatian publik karena mengangkat isu pelecehan seksual di lembaga pendidikan. Analisis semiotik Roland Barthes mendalami tanda-tanda ikonik yang menggambarkan

berbagai elemen dalam film. Pendekatan penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa film *Penyalin Cahaya* menggambarkan beberapa tanda terkait kasus pelecehan seksual yang tidak hanya menimpa perempuan tetapi juga laki-laki. Selain itu, film ini menggambarkan penyelesaian kasus pelecehan seksual, dimana pelakunya seringkali adalah mereka yang memegang kekuasaan dan dapat menggambarkan faktor ideologi dominan yang masih ada di masyarakat. Dalam film ini, para pelaku pelecehan seksual menyalahgunakan kekuasaan dan harta orang tuanya untuk menutupi kejahatannya dan membungkam korbannya. Konsekuensinya, para korban harus berjuang melawan sistem yang tidak adil dan mencari keadilan atas pelecehan seksual yang mereka akhiri.

Kata Kunci: Film, Semiotik, Pelecehan Seksual, Roland Barthes

INTRODUCTION

Film is a series of texts that contain various photographic images that result in the illusion of motion and action in real life. Messages in films can be conveyed through dialogue, character actions, sounds used, and so on.¹ The topic in the film is also very important in determining the genre of the film, because there is a significance system that is responded to by the film audience. Film is one of the creations of human thought, and film is considered an effective mass media.² In addition, films are considered as effective mass media, because the stories told by films are mostly based on social realities that exist in one place.

Film is a form of art that has the power to reach social segments, so it has the potential to be effective in conveying messages to audiences. The reach of film as an audio-visual medium, has great emotional impact and popularity. Media institutions not only develop techniques and sophisticated

¹ Marudut Bernadtua Simanjuntak, Irma Rasita GloriaBarus, and Ira Resmayasari, "Analysis Violence in City of God Film Directed," *Journal of Advanced English Studies* 4, no. 1 (2021): 1–6.

² Fransisca Putri Kirana and Sunarto, "Resistensi Pelecehan Seksual Dalam Film Bombshell," *Interaksi Online* 10, no. 3 (2022): 117–127.

cinematographic aspects so as to produce quality films, but also develop the perspectives used in viewing facts and presenting them. A film is able to represent reality based on the codes, conventions, and ideologies of culture. The message in the film will present a picture of reality that has been selected based on factors both cultural, sub-cultural, institutional, industrial, certain values and ideologies.³

Without realizing it, films can have an influence in the form of positive or negative things, if the film is interpreted by the community. Good or bad film, depends on what is told by the story inside. A good and useful film is a film that tells the existing social reality, by adding a positive message in it. In sociology, film is a medium that can convey messages in the form of social criticism about sharing the same problem, namely the context of dealing with humans in society. The communication process in the film can shape social reality without requiring the presence of individuals both in that reality and vice versa.⁴ This reality is formed objectively by reconstructing and interpreting social reality that appears subjectively by other individuals. Based on the reality of sexual harassment that is developing in society, the topic of fighting against sexual harassment in films also needs to be made to support anti-sexual harassment movements. Because, films are seen as having the power to influence people perspectives in viewing the reality that occurs in social life.⁵

Penyalin Cahaya released in 2021 and directed by Wregas Bhanuteja. This film is a mystery thriller drama genre that tells about cases of sexual harassment, which can serve as a reminder to the public and a lighter to alert the public about cases of sexual harassment that can happen anywhere. One of the most widely discussed films is the *Penyalin Cahaya* film which tells the story of Suryani or commonly called Sur, played by Shenina Cinnamon. Sur joined a theater club called Matahari and served as a website developer. After the successful Matahari theater performance, the team held a party at the

³ Panji Wibisono and Yunita Sari, "Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Dalam Film Bintang Ketjil Karya Wim Umboh Dan Misbach Yusa Bira," *Jurnal Dinamika Ilmu Komunikasi* 1, no. 1 (2021): 30–43.

⁴ Rima Sarah and Nurholis, "An Analysis of Moral Values in The Film Hafalan Shalat Delisa: Sociology of Literature Approach," *The Gist* 5, no. 1 (2022): 84–93.

⁵ Carl Plantinga, *Screen Stories: Emotion and the Ethics of Engagement* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2018).

house of Rama, who is the playwright for the Matahari Theater. Sur who initially refused the invitation was finally forced to come because of a job offer from Rama father to manage the website. Accompanied by Amin, Sur also came to Rama house to join the party. The party ended with drinking alcohol. Sur is not a drinker by nature, but she was forced by his seniors. Until finally Sur drank alcohol which became the origin of the tragedy for Sur. The tragedy that made her lose her alumni scholarship. Her drunk selfie at a party went viral on social media and made it to the scholarship board.

The scene of sexual harassment in the *Penyalin Cahaya* film is sexual exploitation where it is an act of abuse of power for the purpose of sexual gratification and obtaining benefits in the form of money, social, and others. In this case, Rama as a character who has a big role in the Matahari Theater exploits the bodies of Sur, Farah and Tariq for the purposes of the theater. The *Penyalin Cahaya* film received a lot of positive responses from film critics, and the public for daring to raise the courage to fight sexual harassment that is rarely told in other films. All events that become social realities in society, will be rearranged by the mass media, so that they can become news or stories that have meaning in them. Therefore, all the stories and news presented by the mass media have been constructed or changed by the mass media itself in order to influence people perspectives. Survivors of sexual harassment cases in the mass media are always interesting to discuss, considering the role of mass communication media that can shape people attitudes towards the status of survivors in society, and the perspective of a media can describe how people view them.

The previous research by Abiet and Prastiwi reveals that one of the films shown in 2019, 'Bombshell' depicts the sexual violence experienced by women in the workplace.⁶ This film is inspired by a true story that occurred within the Fox News network, portraying a scandal of sexual harassment involving prominent figures within the company. The film also illustrates how the dominant power structure within the workplace can be used to suppress and exploit women. This is evident in the relationships between the main female characters and male figures who hold significant influence in the company. Indirectly, the power structure enables the occurrence of sexual

⁶ Wahyu Lucky Abiet and Yeny Prastiwi, "Against Sexual Harassment in Workplace as Seen in Bombshell Movie (2019)," *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Culture Studies* 11, no. 1 (2022): 50–56.

harassment and highlights how gender inequality plays a crucial role in shaping these dynamics.

Furthermore, the research conducted by Ainiyah, et al, also revealed the film 'Girl in the Box', which was released in 2016⁷. The storyline of this film addresses the theme of sexual violence through a narrative that focuses on the real-life experience of Colleen Stan. She was a woman who was kidnapped, held captive, and subjected to physical and sexual torture by the couple Cameron and Janice Hooker. The film portrays how victims of sexual violence are regarded as objects that can be treated arbitrarily by the perpetrators. Women in such situations are treated as commodities that can be dominated and manipulated according to the desires of men.

From several previous studies that have been previously disclosed, it can be revealed that resistance in addressing sexual violence often becomes an action carried out by minorities against dominant groups. Acts of resistance are typically undertaken because the minority group does not wish to be oppressed by the power held by the dominant group. Resistance is also seen as a stance of survival and opposition to things considered demeaning. Thus, the *Penyalin Cahaya* film is intriguing to study as it serves as a mass communication medium in presenting issues of discrimination faced by survivors of sexual harassment around the world, while they engage in acts of resistance.

METHOD

This research is a descriptive study using a semiotic approach. Semiotic analysis is an approach to understanding the signs, symbols, and meanings present in a text or object. In the context of observing objects to interpret the text represented by a scene, semiotic analysis can be employed to uncover the hidden meanings behind the visual, symbolic, and linguistic elements present in that scene.⁸ Observation of the object under study in interpreting as best as possible the text represented by the scene in the *Penyalin Cahaya* film by relating it to the context of cases of sexual harassment as a social reality raised through Sur's character as a victim of

⁷ Syaifah Ainiyah, Faidah Yusuf, and Barsihannor, "Representation of Woman in the Movie 'Girl in the Box' Violence against Woman Theory," *Journal of Culture, Language, and Literature* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1–12.

⁸ Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2017).

sexual harassment in fighting for justice. A descriptive approach is used to describe social relations, so as to form the meaning of the storyline of each scene which is reflected in the activities, characteristics, changes, similarities and differences that are felt to be more appropriate for use in this study.⁹

The analytical method for dissecting visually leads to text analysis in the depth of messages, combinations of signs in film elements that form meaning in certain cultures and at certain times give meaning to the world around it. Text analysis is a branch of general semiotics, so various basic principles that form general semiotics also apply in it.¹⁰ Text analysis cannot be separated from the signs that make it up. The author dissects the film visual signs so that they reveal meanings that denote a particular culture. In this study, visual text analysis becomes a surgical tool to explore a set of signs of the *Penyalin Cahaya* film in describing cases of sexual harassment.

The data collection technique in this study is a documentation study. This documentation is done by watching the selected of the *Penyalin Cahaya* film in their entirety, then selecting scene by scene which can be used to analyze myths and dismantle the ideological foundations that lie behind them. The data described aims to explore the film concept as a whole before entering into the process of analyzing messages, meanings and myths.¹¹

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis in the Penyalin Cahaya film

Roland Barthes semiotic analysis through the sequence of scenes in the *Penyalin Cahaya* film shows that resistance by survivors of sexual harassment is a form of resistance against sexual harassment that cannot be separated from the power possessed by the dominant group. By examining the meaning of signs, or symbols by selecting lexia, which is an important scene in the film in which there is a text marker. The selected lexicon must have five main codes in Barthes semiotic analysis, namely, the hermeneutic, proairetic, symbolic, cultural, and semiotic code. The *Penyalin Cahaya* film applies theatrical concepts and symbolism in its films. One of the strong

⁹ Adinda Maharani and Acep Iwan Saidi, "Visual Representation of Hedonism in 'Parasite Film,'" *Jurnal Pakarena* 6, no. 1 (2021): 40–48.

¹⁰ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (Routledge, 2022).

¹¹ Vicky Dianiya, "Representation of Social Class in Film (Semiotic Analysis Of Roland Barthes Film Parasite)," *Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi* 13, no. 2 (2020): 212–226.

symbols in the *Penyalin Cahaya* film is the presence of the Greek mythological figures, Medusa and Perseus. Overall, the major stage theme of the Matahari theatre, to which Sur contributes as a web designer, is the story of Medusa.

The property of the head of Medusa is also present to determine Sur destiny to drink alcohol which will later be fatal to her fate on campus. Signs that are attached to the Medusa myth find that Medusa presence has a meaning that favors victims of sexual violence.¹² Medusa is a terrifying female figure with a serpent crown that can kill anyone who looks at her. In Greek mythology, Medusa is a victim of sexual violence committed by Poseidon at the temple of the goddess Athena. The goddess Athena then punished Medusa for desecrating her sacred space. He cursed Medusa with a head full of snakes and her gaze could turn a human to stone. Perseus is also present as a character who is believed to be a hero. He was asked to destroy Medusa by beheading.

Medusa story is a depiction of victims of sexual violence who were silenced by the system. The heroic label for Perseus is also a form of patriarchal values that easily kills the voices and rights of victims of sexual violence. The story of Greek Mythology is brought by director Wregas Bhanuteja along with Sur journey, a victim of sexual violence, in seeking justice. Just like Medusa, in her struggle, Sur is like cursed by the environment, especially her family, because her voice is not trusted.

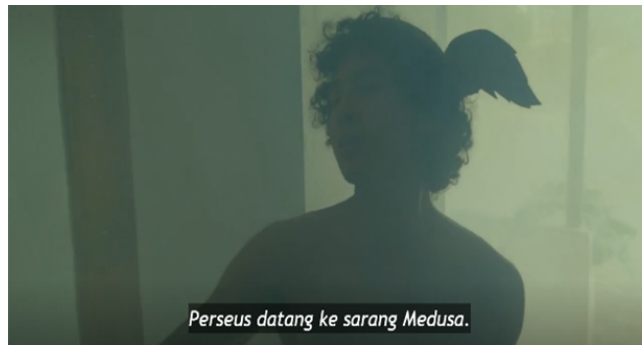


Figure 1. Visualization of the Signs of the Story of Medusa and Perseus in the Film *Penyalin Cahaya*

¹² Jennifer Hedgecock, *Cultural Reflections of Medusa: The Shadow in the Glass* (London: Routledge, 2019).

Women bodies on a certain occasion is perceived no more than an ornament; what develops from this cultural construction is a patriarchal rationale that often regards women merely as mere decorations.¹³ The perpetrator of Sur sexual assault is said to have a power relationship and easily silences the voices of Sur and other victims. At the climax of the scene, the actor arrives accompanied by fogging smoke and the slogan drain, close, bury. Theatrically, the actor is present in the name of Perseus, a demigod, a symbol of masculinity who will behead Medusa.



Figure 2. Visualization of Fogging Smoke Signs in the Film *Penyalin Cahaya*

Dengue fever is synonymous with slogan (drain, close, bury). As in the case of sexual harassment experienced by Sur fogging and 3M can describe the case of Sur and some of her friends who are not getting justice, the case is like being drained, closed, and buried just like that by the perpetrators of the crime. Fogging here also describes how easy it is for someone with full control and power to kill the small mosquitoes that bother him. Fogging smoke makes the visual image blurry. The visual depicts an uncertain situation, the efforts and courage shown by Sur and her friends do not necessarily get the results they want.

¹³ Riska Hidayatul Umami, "Cyberfeminisme: Counter Atas Komodifikasi Tubuh Perempuan Di Media Baru," *Martabat: Jurnal Perempuan dan Anak* 4, no. 1 (2020): 111–136.

In the *Penyalin Cahaya* film, the term fogging refers to the act of spraying mosquito repellent en masse by the school in an effort to deal with the dengue fever epidemic that is spreading in the school. However, the meaning of fogging in this film can also be interpreted symbolically, illustrating how the school tries to cover up problems and suppress information that is actually happening in the school environment. This indirectly shows a form of victimization of victims of sexual violence through unfair and discriminatory treatment.¹⁴ Fogging can be considered as a metaphor for hiding facts and obscuring the truth about the sexual harassment case that occurred at the school. This can be seen from how the school tries to cover up cases of sexual harassment that occur, by manipulating information, blaming the victim, and protecting the perpetrator. Thus, fogging can be interpreted as an attempt to hide the truth and put pressure on victims to reveal cases of sexual harassment.¹⁵

Representation of Resistance to Sexual Harassment in the *Penyalin Cahaya* film

Sur character as the main character was initially described as a character who was described as coming from the weak so that when he did resistance, his situation was in which his position required submission to the dominant group. In addition, other survivors, namely Farah and Tariq, also received similar harassment in a weak position which made them afraid to speak the truth. But along with the injustice in the case of sexual harassment, Sur, Farah and Tariq dared to fight against the dominant group.

¹⁴ Novie Purnia Putri, "Viktisasi Perempuan Human Trafficking," *Martabat: Jurnal Perempuan dan Anak* 3, no. 1 (2019): 205–224.

¹⁵ Delmarrich Bilga Ayu Permatasari, Uswatun Chasanah, and Sahnaz Gusti Faradiazahary, "Binar Redup Perempuan Dalam Film *Penyalin Cahaya* (2021)," in *Prosiding Seminar Nasional & Call for Paper "Peran Perempuan Sebagai Pahlawan Di Era Pandemi"* PSGESI LPPM UWP, vol. 9, 2022, 190–199.

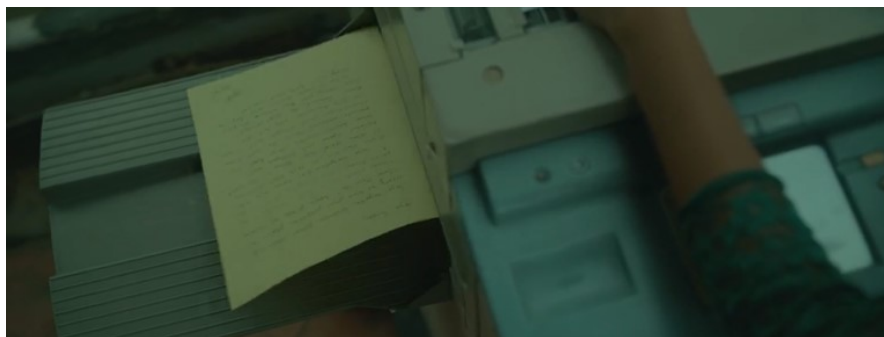


Figure 3. Visualization of Copier Signs in the Film Penyalin Cahaya

In addition, at first, Sur character was described as moving individually to achieve her rights so that the scholarship was not revoked and the sexual harassment case that had befallen him to be investigated thoroughly. Then Sur, Farah, and Tariq unite to work together with each other to fight against the dominant group. The form of resistance to sexual harassment in the *Penyalin Cahaya* film is marked by the visualization of a photocopier. The photocopier in the *Penyalin Cahaya* film is not just a tool for doing student work in the film. Photocopies in this film have very strong symbols. This photocopy machine is actually used by Sur to look for evidence that she considers odd. Sure enough, the incident that Sur considered odd was resolved with the help of a photocopier. At the end of the film, the odd incident was resolved through a photocopier. This photocopier is like a problem solver, from something that was previously silenced and distrusted, to something that is viral and listened to. After the evidence was spread, people began to believe that there was sexual violence on campus.

Sexual harassment survivors experience a lot of discrimination in the mass media. The media sees cases of sexual harassment from the perspective of survivors and influences the formation of stereotypes for survivors of sexual harassment. And in this case, the media has the potential to be the perpetrator of victim blaming which certainly hurts survivors of sexual harassment for the umpteenth time.¹⁶ The suffering of the survivors does not only come from incidents of sexual harassment, but there is also suffering caused by the behavior or perspective of the community which views the survivor as a person who must be responsible for what has

¹⁶ Hedgecock, *Cultural Reflections of Medusa: The Shadow in the Glass*.

happened. As a result of this stigma, victims find it difficult to report and request access to services.

In fact, people tend to do victim blaming. The community does not see cases of sexual harassment as violations committed by the perpetrators, but considers these cases to be due to the condition of the survivors. This of course makes the survivors experience a double clinical reaction, where the survivors become victims again and the perpetrators are the community. In this context, the view that the female body serves merely as an ornament in an event reflects a social norm that diminishes the value and experiences of women. Victim blaming in feminist theory is related to the way society tends to blame the victims, in this case women, by doubting their actions, clothing, or behavior that is assumed to have caused the harassment they have experienced.¹⁷ The story of Sur depicts the culture of victim blaming that often occurs with victims of sexual harassment within the framework of patriarchal dominance. Frequently, society tends to blame and corner the victims instead of defending them and providing a safe space for the sexual harassment they've experienced. Many consider victims of sexual harassment to be merely imaginative, as they lack sufficient evidence. Even when Sur obtains solid evidence and strong support, she still has to face the perpetrator who holds more power than her. Indirectly, victims of sexual violence encounter disappointment due to the lack of support. The perpetrator is capable of turning the situation around to evade punishment.

The reason why women are often victimized is because of patriarchal thinking that women have their own weaknesses. In a patriarchal culture, women are placed in a subordinate or second position.¹⁸ The existence of discrimination against women survivors of sexual harassment is a result of the inherent patriarchal culture that exists in society. In the *Penyalin Cahaya* film, there are several signs and symbols that show women survivors of sexual harassment as subordinate parties. This happens because of the patriarchal system that exists in society. Female survivors of sexual

¹⁷ Kaibin Xu and Yan Tan, "Let Feminists Tell Me My Fault' : a Study of the Discourse Strategies of Sexual Harassment Suspects," *Feminist Media Studies* 20, no. 5 (2020): 623–638, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1690023>.

¹⁸ Saifuddin Zuhri and Diana Amalia, "Ketidakadilan Gender Dan Budaya Patriarki Di Kehidupan Masyarakat Indonesia," *Murabbi: Jurnal Ilmiah dalam Bidang Pendidikan* 5, no. 1 (2022): 17–41.

harassment are ensnared within the structural conditions of patriarchy that subordinate them. Sexual harassment serves as an expression of gender domination exacerbated by social and cultural inequalities.¹⁹ Survivors often face difficulties in attaining justice due to norms that uphold male superiority. The patriarchal structure fosters an environment where victims are prone to blame or neglect.

This explanation proves that issues related to social survivors are important issues to be raised. Social issues like this are a factor in the birth of ideas with the aim of eliminating the negative stigma of society towards survivors or victims of sexual harassment by visualizing it through films. Social issues like sexual harassment have driven the emergence of ideas to combat stigma through film. Cinematic works possess a potent potential to reshape societal perceptions by empathetically visualizing survivors' experiences.²⁰ Films can embrace the complexity of trauma and victims struggles, evoke empathy from audiences, and shift prevailing paradigms. With compelling narratives, films can inspire changes in attitudes and foster a deeper understanding of the impact of harassment. However, films must be grounded in accurate understanding and sensitivity toward real experiences to effectively achieve the goal of eradicating stigma. Films that raise these issues are expected to bring change in society. Film are basically built using a lot of signs. The signs used are iconic signs that are able to describe something. Films contain messages conveyed through the signs and symbols used. A film has very complex signs and symbols, so semiotic analysis is needed to examine and examine the purpose and meaning of using a sign and symbol in the film and the meaning implied in it.

CONCLUSION

This film raises an issue that is still being discussed, namely the issue of victims of sexual harassment. Because previously, society only focused on the sexual harassment that occurred and the perpetrator. People seem to

¹⁹ Anne Kathrin Kreft, "Civil Society Perspectives on Sexual Violence in Conflict: Patriarchy and War Strategy in Colombia," *International Affairs* 96, no. 2 (2020): 457–478.

²⁰ William Uricchio, "From Media Effects to the Empathy Machine: The Nature of the Audience and the Persistence of Wishful Thinking," in *A Companion to Documentary Film History*, ed. Joshua Malitsky (John Wiley & Sons, 2021), 461–478.

ignore the victims. In the film, the forms of sexual harassment shown are not limited to rape, but also sexual harassment, sexual exploitation. Meanwhile, films with the theme of sexual harassment are synonymous with rape. In addition, there are several social issues that are shown in this film. Such as victims who are forced to make peace, victims who are afraid to speak up and are intimidated, victims who have to solve their own problems, sexual harassment in college environments, to unresolved sexual harassment cases.

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