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Representing Sexual Violence in Indonesian Cinema: A Semiotic Analysis of Woman from the Rote Island

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to critically examine how the representation of sexual violence against women is constructed in the film *Woman from the Rote Island* through the analysis of denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings. The main focus is to reveal the social messages, ideologies, and positions of women in patriarchal power relations represented by cinema. Thus, the research is directed to assess the role of film as a medium of social criticism and shaping public awareness. **Theoretical framework:** This study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which emphasizes the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth. This framework is used to read signs and symbols in movies. With this approach, patriarchal ideology can be critically analyzed. **Literature review:** A literature review discusses research on women's representation and sexual violence in film media. Previous studies have shown that movies can reinforce or challenge patriarchal values. This literature became the basis for placing film as part of social discourse. **Methods:** The method used is qualitative descriptive with semiotic analysis. Data is obtained from scenes, dialogue, and visual symbols in the film. The analysis was carried out by relating the findings to three levels of Barthes' meaning. **Results:** The results of the study show that films represent women as victims of physical, psychological, and social violence, as well as subjects who have courage and moral strength. On a connotative and mythological level, the film deconstructs the myth of women's honor shaped by patriarchy. The film's narrative emphasizes that sexual violence is a violation of humanity, not a disgrace to the victim. **Implications:** This study shows that film can be a medium of education and social criticism. These findings encourage the use of cinema to increase empathy and awareness about women's rights. Another implication is the strengthening of the discourse on gender equality in the public space. **Novelty:** The novelty of this research lies in the use of Barthes' semiotics to read the issue of sexual violence in Indonesian films. The study emphasizes women not only as victims, but also as agents of symbolic resistance. Thus, film is understood as a tool for cultural change.

Keywords: film, representation of women, sexual violence, woman from the rote island, patriarchy.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is a form of human rights violations that is still rampant and has become a serious social issue in various parts of the world, including Indonesia. Based on data from Komnas Perempuan [1], there were more than 457,895 cases of violence against women reported throughout 2022, with sexual violence occupying the highest position compared to

other forms of violence. This phenomenon not only reflects legal issues, but also shows the still strong patriarchal social structure that places women in subordinate positions and is vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination [2]. In this context, mass media, especially films, have an important role as a medium of social representation that not only depicts reality but also shapes people's perspectives on gender issues and violence. One of the Indonesian films that raises the theme of violence against women in a strong and realistic way is the film *Women from Rote Island*, directed by Jeremias Nyangoen [3].

The film highlights the story of a female migrant worker from Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara, who experiences sexual violence abroad and then faces social rejection and repeated violence upon returning to her homeland [4]. The narrative of this film not only shows the physical and psychological suffering of the victims, but also shows the social system that silences the voices of women victims of violence through patriarchal culture, social stigma, and power inequality between men and women. The film *Women from Rote Island* is an important representation of the condition of women in marginalized areas of Indonesia, especially in a socio-cultural context that still normalizes violence against women.

As revealed by Wulandari [5], the film depicts "women's struggles in the face of violence and gender discrimination through visual and narrative symbols that are full of social meaning." The representation of violence in this film is not only interpreted as a mere physical act, but also as a form of structural domination that is rooted in the social and cultural systems of society. In the context of media and gender studies, the representation of sexual violence in film is important to analyze because it serves as a mirror and critique of social reality.

According to Stuart Hall's theory of representation [6], the media is not just a tool for reflection on reality, but an arena where social meaning is formed, negotiated, and contested. Therefore, the representation of sexual violence in film, *Women from Rote Island*, can be read as a form of critical discourse against the patriarchal system that hegemonizes women and as an effort to voice the experiences of victims who are often silenced by a *culture of silence*. In addition, this film has a high relevance to the actual context after the enactment of Law Number 12 of 2022 concerning the Crime of Sexual Violence (TPKS Law). This law marks the state's commitment to strengthening legal protection for victims of sexual violence [7].

However, as depicted in the film, the implementation of the law still faces challenges in the form of a lack of social empathy, stigma against victims, and weak law enforcement in remote areas. Thus, the analysis of the representation of sexual violence in this film not only has artistic value, but also social and juridical value because it can reveal the gap between legal norms and social realities faced by women victims of violence. A study on *Women from Rote Island*, it becomes important to see how Indonesian cinema represents sexual violence as a complex social phenomenon, not only as a personal event, but also as a reflection of the unequal power structure between gender, class, and culture. This research is expected to enrich the study of women's representation in Indonesian films and make an academic contribution in an effort to build public awareness about the importance of protection for victims of sexual violence through the medium of popular culture [8].

The novelty of this research lies in its focused semiotic examination of sexual violence representation within an Indonesian regional film context, specifically through the film *Woman From the Rote Island*. Unlike previous studies that predominantly analyze sexual violence in mainstream or urban-centred cinema, this study foregrounds a peripheral cultural setting from East Nusa Tenggara, offering a rarely explored perspective in Indonesian film studies. By applying Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the research systematically decodes denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings embedded in visual imagery, dialogue, and narrative structure, revealing how sexual violence is symbolically constructed rather than merely depicted [8].

Another original contribution is the identification of cultural myths and patriarchal ideologies that normalize violence against women through silence, victim-blaming, and power imbalance. The study not only describes scenes of violence but also interprets how cinematic signs function ideologically to shape audience perceptions of gender, authority, and morality. This semiotic depth enables the research to move beyond descriptive film criticism toward a critical cultural analysis that connects cinematic representation with broader social realities. As such, the research enriches feminist film studies by situating sexual violence within local cultural narratives while maintaining analytical rigor applicable to global media discourse [9].

Theoretically, this study contributes to media and cultural studies by reaffirming semiotics as a powerful methodological tool for analyzing sensitive social issues such as sexual violence. It demonstrates that film operates as a cultural text capable of reproducing or challenging dominant patriarchal myths, thereby positioning cinema as an influential medium in shaping social consciousness.

Practically, the findings imply that filmmakers and media practitioners should be more ethically aware of how sexual violence is represented, particularly regarding the positioning of victims and the normalization of power relations. Educators and researchers may also utilize this study as a reference for incorporating critical media literacy into gender and communication studies. At the societal level, this research encourages audiences to critically engage with film narratives, fostering awareness of gender-based violence and supporting broader efforts toward social justice, gender equality, and cultural transformation [9].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Jeremias Nyangoen's film *Woman from the Rote Island* is one of Indonesia's cinematic works that dares to raise the dark reality of sexual violence against women in marginalized areas such as Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara. In this context, film functions not only as an aesthetic work but also as a social medium that represents women's suffering, trauma, and resistance to patriarchal power and social inequality [10]. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi, representation in the media can form a social construction of reality, where film becomes a means of reflection and shaping public awareness. In *Woman from the Rote Island*, sexual violence is represented in a complex way through the experience of Martha's character, who is a victim of rape while working in Malaysia and then returns to her hometown with deep physical and psychological wounds [11].

This film shows how personal trauma is part of the collective trauma of women in a region that is still strongly bound by traditional norms and patriarchal social structures. Sexual violence in this film is not only portrayed as a purely physical act, but also as a form of structural oppression that is legitimized by cultures, customs, and social institutions. This is in line with feminist theories that emphasize that sexual violence is a manifestation of the power imbalance between men and women, where women's bodies become objects of social and political domination [12]. In the context of this film, the representation emerges through the depiction of how the surrounding community actually blames the victim, as well as how traditional institutions and families pressure the victim to remain silent to maintain the "honor" of the family and village. According to an analysis in the *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, the film strongly highlights the dimension of structural violence that makes women not only victims of acts of violence, but also victims of social systems that fail to protect them [13].

The cinematic visualization used, such as the use of close-ups on Martha's traumatized face and the contrast of lighting in the rape scene, became a cinematic strategy that emphasized the psychological condition of the victim as well as social criticism of the permissive environment towards gender-based violence [14]. From the perspective of media representation, women from the Rote Island can also be read through the theory of the male

gaze introduced by Laura Mulvey, where the camera perspective and narrative often place women as visual objects. Although the film attempts to portray the reality of violence with empathy, some critics have highlighted that explicit visualizations of sexual violence risk creating sensational effects or even repeating trauma for viewers who are survivors [15].

However, on the other hand, the representation has an important social function, namely, arousing public awareness about violence that has been hidden in private spaces. The film rejects the romanticization of suffering and affirms the importance of recognizing the victim as a subject who has a voice. In the context of trauma theory, this film reflects that survivors of sexual violence not only face physical wounds, but also social wounds due to stigma and exclusion [16]. Martha's character is portrayed as experiencing repeated trauma that affects her psyche and her relationship with the environment, illustrating that sexual violence is an event that destroys women's identity and subjectivity. Furthermore, women from the Rote Island also represent women's resistance to structural injustice through the character of Orpa, Martha's mother, who is a symbol of the strength and determination of village women. Through these characters, the film not only presents women as passive victims but also as agents of social change who dare to defy customary norms and social stigma [17].

This representation shows the transition from a female narrative of a victim to an empowered woman, in keeping with a contemporary feminist approach that emphasizes agency and resistance in the discourse of sexual violence. In terms of cinematography, the film uses the landscape of Rote Island with natural colors and contrasting lighting to depict the duality between the beauty of nature and the social darkness hidden behind it [18]. This reinforces the symbolic dimension that sexual violence is not just an individual problem, but part of a larger social system. A literature review on the representation of sexual violence in Indonesian films shows that this theme is still rarely explicitly raised due to social sensitivity and cultural norms. A woman from the Rote Island is important because it opens up a space for public dialogue about the reality of violence against women in the region, as well as challenging the hegemony of patriarchal discourse in national cinema [19].

Based on previous research, this film has high social value because it features a realistic and empathetic narrative of violence, although some people consider that its visual approach can still be criticized from an ethical aspect of representation [20]. Therefore, this film can be an important object of academic study to understand how film media plays a role in building social awareness about sexual violence, as well as how cinematic representation can influence the way society views victims and gender issues more broadly.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative method with a semiotic analysis approach to uncover the meaning and representation of sexual violence contained in the film "Woman from the Rote Island". The qualitative approach was chosen because it was able to provide a deep understanding of the social phenomena that appear in the film work through the interpretation of signs and symbols. Semiotic analysis was used to trace how the meaning of sexual violence is constructed visually and narratively in the film. The semiotic model used is Roland Barthes' concept, which distinguishes between denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings as a form of depiction of social reality through the media [21].

The object of the research is Jerold Kotta's film "Woman from the Rote Island", which was chosen because it highlights women's social issues and sexual violence in the East Nusa Tenggara region, a theme rarely explored in Indonesian cinema. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation and documentation of scenes that contained symbols, dialogues, and actions that represented sexual violence. In addition, this study also uses literature studies by examining scientific articles, interviews, and relevant online sources to strengthen the analysis.

Table 1. Research Methodology

Aspect	Description
Research Approach	Qualitative research approach
Analytical Method	Semiotic analysis
Semiotic Model	Roland Barthes' semiotic model
Research Object	Film <i>Woman from the Rote Island</i> directed by Jerold Kotta
Focus of Study	Representation and meaning of sexual violence
Data Sources	Film scenes, dialogues, visual symbols, and character actions
Data Collection Techniques	Observation of film scenes and documentation of relevant visual and verbal signs
Unit of Analysis	Scenes containing representations of sexual violence and gender relations
Analytical Stages	Denotation analysis to identify literal meanings; connotation and myth analysis to reveal cultural and ideological meanings
Analytical Focus	Construction of sexual violence, patriarchal power relations, victim positioning, and social messages conveyed by the film
Outcome of Analysis	Interpretation of how sexual violence is visually and narratively represented and its underlying social ideology

The data analysis technique is carried out by identifying visual and verbal signs in the film, then interpreting them through two stages of Barthes semiotic analysis, namely the denotation stage to understand the real meaning of the scene, and the connotation and myth stage to uncover the cultural and ideological meanings underlying the representation of sexual violence. The results of this analysis are interpreted to explain how the film depicts patriarchal power, the position of the victim, and the social message that the filmmaker wants to convey regarding the issue of sexual violence [22].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Representation of Women as Victims

Jerold Kotta's film *Woman from the Rote Island* cinematically displays a portrait of women as victims of sexual violence within the framework of a patriarchal culture that is still firmly rooted in the East Nusa Tenggara region. In this context, the representation of women is not simply presented as an object of suffering, but as a subject who struggles to maintain her self-esteem, identity, and existence in the midst of oppressive social structures. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, these representations can be elaborated based on three levels of meaning, namely denotative, connotative, and mythical. At a denotative level, the film depicts women who experience physical and psychological violence, depicted through visual signs such as expressions of fear, trembling bodies, crumpled clothes, and a social environment that is repressive towards the victim [23].

These signs literally show the position of women as the party that suffers due to the dominant male power relations. However, at the connotative level, the meaning that emerges is more complex, because the physical and psychological suffering represents a broader social reality, namely, how patriarchal structures have placed women in subordinate positions and limited their space for movement. This condition illustrates that violence against women does not only originate from individual actions, but also stems from values and cultural systems that normalize gender inequality. Furthermore, through the level of myth as Barthes explained, this film reveals how the media can instill certain ideologies through symbolic representation. In this case, the myth of women as weak, submissive, and often blamed for

the violence that befell them appears subtly in the relationships between the characters and the film's narrative [24].

However, Jerold Kotta carefully deconstructs the myth by presenting the main female character who dares to speak out and fight against social injustice in the midst of an unsupportive environment. These resistance efforts show the dimension of women's agency that has been silenced by patriarchal culture. Thus, this film not only records the suffering of women but also serves as a form of social criticism of the power structure that does not favor victims of sexual violence. In the context of feminist theory, the representation of women in this film marks a shift from a passive image to an active image, where women are no longer solely the object of the male gaze but also the subjects who have a voice and awareness of the oppression they experience [25].



Figure 1. One of the Agedan Movies

Overall, the representation of women as victims in *Woman from the Rote Island* reflects the tension between two opposing poles: on the one hand, women are positioned as helpless victims in patriarchal social systems, but on the other hand, they also show moral strength and courage to reclaim control of their bodies, identities, and dignity. This film becomes a symbolic space for women to assert their existence and convey criticism of the oppressive social system. In Barthes' framework, the reading of the visual and narrative signs in this film reveals the hidden layer of ideology behind the cinematic text, namely that violence against women is not a purely personal phenomenon, but a consequence of the social system that produces gender inequality [26].

Combining Barthes's semiotic approach with feminist theory, the analysis of the film *Woman from the Rote Island* shows how the media can play a dual role: on the one hand as a reflection of social reality, and on the other hand as an instrument to deconstruct patriarchal myths and ideologies that normalize women's suffering. Therefore, this film deserves to be understood not only as a cinematic work but also as a cultural text that voices women's resistance to structural oppression and systemic gender injustice [27].

A number of previous studies support this analysis. Indriyana & Ulil Albab (2020) in the journal *Information of the State University of Yogyakarta* show that the representation of female victims in films is often still colored by patriarchal biases that place women as the cause of violence itself. Meanwhile, Niza in *Litera Budaya* asserts that the application of Barthes' semiotic theory allows for a critical reading of myths about the internalized role of women in popular culture.

On the other hand, the research of Barus in *the International Journal of Educational Research Excellence* highlights that the three levels of Barthes' meaning denotation, connotation, and myth can uncover the relationship between visual signs and ideological structures hidden behind mass media. Referring to these studies, the analysis of the film

Woman from the Rote Island emphasizes the importance of critical reading of women's representation in the media so that it does not get trapped in the reproduction of patriarchal myths, but instead becomes a medium of social awareness and transformation towards more equal gender justice.



Figure 2. Scenes and Roles in Films with Elements of Violence

Forms of Sexual Violence in the Film *Woman from the Rote Island*

In the film *Woman from the Rote Island*, sexual violence is portrayed not solely as an isolated physical act, but rather as an expression of the symbolic oppression inherent in the patriarchal social structure and local cultural conditions in the East Nusa Tenggara region. This representation shows that sexual violence appears in more complex schemes ranging from verbal violence in the form of threats or insults, physical coercion of women's bodies, emotional exploitation that erodes the victim's self-esteem, to the neglect of women's rights to determine the fate of their own bodies and identities. At the denotative level, the film features scenes that literally depict acts of sexual violence, such as intimate and threatening unauthorised touching, the perpetrator's gaze that contains domination, scenes of verbal intimidation that place women as objects of depreciation, and situations where women's bodies are used as a field of power that perpetrators use to assert male supremacy in social relations [28].

However, when we enter the connotative level according to the framework of the theory of semiosis in Roland Barthes, the signs are loaded with a deeper meaning: that violent acts not only produce physical and psychological suffering, but symbolically reinforce unequal power relations, in which women are placed in a subordinate position that is systemically inferior to respect, dwelling in a culture of "silence"), face social stigma and loss of the right to bodily autonomy. From a feminist perspective, this phenomenon explains that sexual violence is not just the result of individual actions but a product of a patriarchal system that normalizes male dominance and marginalization of women [29].

On a mythical level, Barthes shows how the media and popular culture can affirm social myths: in this film, the myth that "good women should take care of themselves", that "violence occurs due to the fault or negligence of the victim", or that "women's voices are not considered important" are subtly presented through narratives and visual symbols. However, the film then deconstructs the myth by presenting the main female character, who, despite experiencing violence, shows awareness of the injustice she experienced, gains a voice, and seeks to uphold her rights so that the film serves as a medium of symbolic resistance to patriarchal culture and *victim-blaming* [30].

Furthermore, the film places sexual violence within a broader social framework: poverty, educational inequality, and economic inequality are portrayed as structural factors that exacerbate women's vulnerability to sexual violence, so that this violence cannot be seen as a

single incident, but as a cumulative effect of the socio-cultural conditions that enable and sustain it. Thus, Barthes' semiotic analysis of denotations, connotations, and myths, combined with a feminist approach to gender power relations, allows us to understand that the film *Woman from the Rote Island* not only presents a depiction of sexual violence, but also articulates a critique of the patriarchal structure that underlies it. This film invites the audience to realize that violence against women is a systemic phenomenon that requires collective social change, not just individual recovery of the victim [31].



Figure 3. One of the Scenes of Violence in the Movie

However, the film then deconstructs the myth by presenting the main female character, who, despite experiencing violence, shows awareness of the injustice she experienced, gains votes, and seeks to uphold her rights, so that the film serves as a medium of symbolic resistance to patriarchal culture and victim-blaming [32]. Furthermore, the film places sexual violence within a broader social framework: poverty, educational inequality, and economic inequality are portrayed as structural factors that exacerbate women's vulnerability to sexual violence, so that this violence cannot be seen as a single incident, but as a cumulative effect of the socio-cultural conditions that enable and sustain it.

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Moral Message in the Film *Woman from the Rote Island*

The film *Woman from the Rote Island* not only functions as a cinematic work, but also as an educational and reflective medium that conveys moral messages to the public regarding the issue of sexual violence and gender inequality. Through its visual and narrative representations, this film invites the audience to empathize with the suffering of the victims and reject all forms of justification for violence. The moral message conveyed is not didactic or explicit, but is interwoven through symbols, character expressions, and social constructions displayed in the storyline [34].

Denotatively, the moral message in the film appears through the struggle of the female protagonist, who tries to rise from trauma and fight for justice for the violence that befell her. The film shows that the women who are victims are not weak figures, but individuals who have the moral strength to fight injustice. This depiction marks a paradigm shift in Indonesian cinema, where women are no longer positioned solely as objects of suffering but also as empowered subjects. This is in line with hooks' view that women's representation in

the media can be a means to reconstruct social awareness about equality and resistance to patriarchy. At a connotative level, this film conveys the message that sexual violence is not only an individual problem of perpetrators and victims, but also a reflection of broader social failures [35].

Scenes that show the indifference of the surrounding community, negligent officials, and a culture of silence are connotative signs of how strong the social system that normalizes injustice against women is. The film contains the moral message that true justice is not only obtained through law, but also through changes in social attitudes and collective consciousness. In this context, a woman from the Rote Island serves as a social critique of cultural systems that still place women in subordinate positions.

From the perspective of myths as put forward by Roland Barthes, the film deconstructs the myths about women's honor and morality that are often used to blame victims of sexual violence. In patriarchal culture, women's honor is often associated with the purity of the body, so that when sexual violence occurs, the victim is considered to pollute the moral values of the family and society [36]. Through visual symbols such as torn clothes, wounds on the body, and the bitter gaze of the main character, the film rejects the myth by asserting that a woman's dignity is not measured by her physical condition, but by her courage to face and resist injustice. This moral message emphasizes that the responsibility for violence always lies with the perpetrator, not with the victim. In addition, this film also carries a universal moral message about empathy, humanity, and the importance of safe spaces for women. Through the presentation of realistic stories, this film invites the audience to reflect on the role of society in supporting survivors of sexual violence [37].



Figure 4. Movie Scenes that Oppose All Forms of Violence

This message is in line with the view of Egan and Cole, who explain that the media has great potential to shape people's attitudes towards sexual violence through narratives that foster empathy, not sensation. Thus, *Woman from the Rote Island* is not only a work of art, but also a tool of social transformation that drives a change in values and public awareness. Overall, the moral message built into the film is multidimensional: individual morality, social morality, and structural morality. Individuals are invited to dare to speak out and fight against injustice; the public is reminded to stop the culture of blaming the victim; and the state is reminded of its responsibility to protect women from sexual violence. Through layers of denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings, this film manages to convey a strong moral message that sexual violence is not only an offence against the body but also against humanity [38].



Figure 5. From Rote We Scream, Part of the Role in the Film

Researcher Analysis

In this study, Roland Barthes' semiotic approach was used to analyze the representation of sexual violence against women in Jerold Kotta's film *Woman from the Rote Island*. Through semiotic theory, the film is read as a cultural text full of signs and meanings, in which every visual, narrative, and symbolic element has an ideological function in shaping the audience's understanding of women and violence. Barthes explained that each sign has two levels of meaning, namely denotation and connotation, and a third level called myth, in which the dominant ideology works to naturalize certain values in society [39].

Thus, semiotic analysis allows researchers to uncover the hidden meanings behind the seemingly simple visual and narrative representations in the film. On a denotative level, the film features scenes that literally depict the sexual violence, suffering, and struggles of female victims. For example, the scene of the female protagonist being attacked in a closed space displays violence implicitly, through dark lighting, expressions of fear, and slow-moving cameras to build emotional tension. These visual elements are a literal sign of the sexual violence experienced by the victim, as well as presenting an empathetic atmosphere that invites the audience to feel the trauma experienced by the female character.

On this level, the film serves as a mirror of reality that highlights the dark side of social life, where violence against women often occurs without justice on the side of the victim. However, on a connotative level, the meaning of this film is much more complex. The dark space used in some scenes is not only the location of the incident, but also a symbol of social closure and repression of the issue of sexual violence. The blank gaze of the female character after the incident is a representation of deep psychological trauma, while the repeated silence in the storyline represents the *culture of silence* that is still inherent in patriarchal society. In this context, the film not only tells the story of violent events but also criticizes the social system that normalizes injustice against women [40].

In line with Hall's view in representation theory, film constructs meaning through signs that are always associated with ideology and social power. Sexual violence in this film is not only portrayed as a criminal act, but also as a form of patriarchal domination that controls women's bodies and morality. Furthermore, on a mythical level, the *Woman from the Rote Island* dismantles and deconstructs the old myth about women's honor that has been guarded by the patriarchal system. In a patriarchal social construct, women's honor is often identified with the purity of the body, so when women are victims of sexual violence, society actually blames them as "corrupt women." This film rejects this myth by presenting a female character who dares to demand justice and refuses to remain silent about the violence she experienced.

Barthes asserts that myth is a second-level semiotic system that serves to naturalize dominant ideologies to appear as if they were universal truths. In this film, the patriarchal myth that places women as objects of suffering is transformed into a new narrative about the strength, courage, and solidarity of fellow women [41]. A new mythological value that emerged was the idea that women's honor and dignity did not lie in the purity of the body, but in the ability to rise, fight, and heal themselves. As a researcher, the analysis is carried out with a *double reading* approach, namely, reading film texts as aesthetic works and as cultural texts that are full of ideology. The researcher's position as a *reader of signs* allows for a critical interpretation of the symbols presented by the film, such as dim lighting, silent expressions, and dialogues that allude to social inequality.

This approach is in line with Fiske's view that popular culture has always been an arena for the negotiation of meaning between the text, the producer, and the audience. The film *Woman from the Rote Island* clearly shows this dynamic, where the meaning of sexual violence is not understood singularly, but is open to broader social interpretations. Visual criticism of male power also seems to be in line with the theory of the *Male Gaze* from Mulvey, who explained that traditional cinema often places women as objects of the male gaze. However, this film actually resists the *Male Gaze* by presenting the perspective of the victim as the center of the narrative, not just a voyeuristic object. The camera does not exploit the female body, but rather positions it as a subject with experience, trauma, and strength. Thus, Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis of *Woman from the Rote Island* shows that the film is not only an aesthetic product, but also an ideological text that offers a new discourse on women and violence [42].

At the level of denotation, the film shows the bitter reality of sexual violence; At the level of connotation, he criticizes a culture of silence and social inequality; Meanwhile, at the mythical level, she rejected patriarchal ideology and presented a new myth about women's courage and solidarity. This film becomes a symbolic space for women to reaffirm their agency and dignity, as well as challenge the power structure that has been oppressive. Therefore, *Woman from the Rote Island* can be read as a cinematic work that not only touches on the emotional side, but also arouses moral and social awareness of the issue of gender-based violence. The film emphasizes the important role of the media in shaping the collective consciousness of society to stop the normalization of violence and build a culture of empathy for victims.

CONCLUSION

The film *Woman from the Rote Island* presents a strong and reflective representation of the reality of sexual violence against women in the context of Indonesian society. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, this study shows that films not only display violence literally at the denotative level, but also contain connotative and mythological meanings that reflect social ideologies, morality, and patriarchal power relations that oppress women. At the level of representation, women are portrayed not only as weak victims but as individuals who have the fighting power, courage, and will to fight injustice. The film's narrative depicts the inner journey of a survivor from trauma to recovery as a symbol of women's efforts to regain control of their bodies and lives. This representation also reverses the pattern of patriarchal cinema that tends to place women as objects of passive suffering. In terms of forms of violence, the film shows the complexity of sexual violence, which includes physical, psychological, social, and structural dimensions. Violence is not presented as a purely individual act, but rather as a product of a social system that nurtures stigma, a culture of silence, and gender inequality. Thus, the film serves as a social critique of a society that still normalizes the subordination of women. The moral message conveyed by the film emphasizes the importance of empathy, justice, and collective awareness in responding to sexual violence. The film invites the audience not to blame the victim, but to understand the social context surrounding the event. The dignity of women is affirmed not by physical

purity, but by courage and integrity in the face of injustice. Overall, the results of the semiotic analysis show that the woman from the Rote Island serves as a symbolic space that deconstructs patriarchal myths about women's honor and roles. Visual and narrative signs build new discourses that emphasize solidarity, courage, and gender equality. Therefore, this film is not only a work of art but also an educational medium and an instrument of social advocacy that has transformative value in building people's critical awareness of the protection of women's rights and the struggle against oppressive systems.

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Author's Contributions

Both authors contributed collaboratively to this research. Tania Salsabela conducted data collection, film observation, semiotic analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Hetty Catur Ellyawati supervised the research design, refined the theoretical analysis, and reviewed the manuscript critically. Both authors approved the final version and are responsible for the integrity of the work presented findings ethically and transparently.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article. This study was conducted independently without financial support, commercial influence, or personal relationships that could affect the objectivity, analysis, or interpretation of the findings presented in this research by the authors in this study context.

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