A Semiotic Analysis on Gender Representation in Seher Film: Does Women Muted In Sasak?

Maula Hidayatul Atqiya*[1]; Alauddin Shahih [2]

Universitas Negeri Malang, Jl. Cakrawala No.5, Sumbersari, Kec. Lowokwaru, Kota Malang, Jawa Timur 65145 [1]
Melbourne Polytechnic University, 77-91 St Georges Road, Preston VIC 3072, Australia [2]

maula.hidayatul.2402218@students.um.ac.id[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine gender representation in the film The Vengeance of SEHER using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. The film, a local production from East Lombok, presents a story of love, revenge, and black magic (sheer), while embedding symbolic messages about power relations and gender inequality in Sasak culture. The analysis focuses on six key scenes, interpreted through three layers of meaning: denotative, connotative, and mythological. Findings reveal that female characters are consistently portrayed as subordinate, burdened with domestic responsibilities, and silenced both verbally and symbolically. The film illustrates that patriarchal norms are not only upheld by men but also reproduced by women through the internalization of cultural values. These findings demonstrate how film can serve as a critical medium for reading gender ideology in local communities.

1. Introduction

The media has the power to provide information that can change people's perceptions on various issues. The media have undergone significant changes over the last few decades. [1]. They have evolved from print and broadcast to social media. In the era of technology 5.0, society's views are influenced by social media [2]. Today's society seems to live in two worlds. People in the virtual world, commonly known as Netizens, have their own lives. This, in turn, impacts real-life situations. Public perception of phenomena changes drastically as society interacts more deeply with the media. [3].

Film is the media that has the greatest potential to change society's perspective [4]. Films have a longer runtime than other media such as social media broadcasts, which only last 3-10 minutes. Films can show phenomena in more detail and depth [5]. Therefore, film is also a very suitable medium for conveying information or phenomena. Film can also serve as a tool to deconstruct existing social realities [6], [7]. This power is what has led many studies to begin examining phenomena in film.

The study of phenomena in a film employs linguistic analysis to interpret meaning, which can serve as an approach to understanding social conditions. Many theories involve semiotics when studying meaning. Ferdinand de Saussure explains that semiotics examines signs as a relationship between the signifier (form) and the signified (meaning). This relationship is arbitrary and shaped by social convention [7]. Similarly, Charles Sanders Peirce introduces three elements of a sign: representamen (sign form), object (reference), and interpretant (understanding of meaning) [8]. Roland Barthes further distinguishes between denotative (literal) and connotative (implicit) meanings culture.

In the author's opinion, this is suitable for use in this topic because it is important to see the hidden meaning of the excerpt in the Seher film to understand the interpretation of gender representation in Sasak culture. Several studies have discussed gender representation in Sasak culture. "Memotret bias gender dalam konteks socio-kultural lombok menuju sebuah humanisme sosial-kultural" is research written by Ulyan Nasri. This research discusses how women have the potential in joint development that is equal to men with a social-spiritual-justice perspective [9]. A case study was also conducted by Wulan Purnamasari, which discussed how women are depicted as a silenced group in the Sasak tribe. Wulan examined that women in several cultural aspects such as

marriage, law, and even the architecture of Sasak houses seem patriarchal [10]. Meanwhile, the analysis of gender injustice in the film itself is explained in a study conducted by Philips Jusiano Oktavianus entitled "analisis semiotika ketidakadilan gender terhadap perempuan dalam film marlina si pembunuh empat babak." This study discusses how women experience injustice using Charles Sander Pierce's theory [7].

Several other studies also discuss injustice faced by women in various films, both in English and Indonesian. To depict gender injustice in Sasak films, which has not been explored before, this study aims to analyze how gender bias manifests and what semiotic signs indicate differences in gender interpretation within Sasak cultural life as shown in the film "Seher" written by the Lenteng Tedes team. "The Vengeance of SEHER" is a fictional horror film that blends themes of love, revenge, and supernatural rituals, deeply rooted in Lombok's local culture. The story follows Burhan, a man whose proposal is rejected by the mother of the woman he loves, Salbiah. Feeling humiliated and desperate, Burhan turns to black magic (seher) to win her back, resulting in tragic consequences for himself and others around him. The film not only explores mystical traditions but also subtly depicts gendered power dynamics and cultural norms embedded in Sasak society.

This film tells the story of how a man seeks revenge on the woman he loves, justifying all means to win her over. Throughout the film, there are several depictions of the silencing of women, which I find very relatable because the author herself often experiences the same as a native Sasak woman. This research aims to reveal how Sasak women are frequently silenced and tend to be raised as listeners, not even being allowed to make decisions that concern themselves.

2. Method

This study will adopt a qualitative descriptive approach, referencing Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic theory to interpret the meaning of women's silencing in the film Seher by Lenteng Tedes Production. The object of this study is the film Seher. The primary data consists of film excerpts, while supporting data includes library research literature. Data collection involves documented library research. The analysis will be conducted by examining selected scenes from Seher, using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method

3. Results and Discussion

Film Description: The vengeance of SEHER

The vengeance of SEHER is an Indonesian horror film that combines a tragic love story with mystical nuances typical of Lombok culture. Produced by Lenteng Tedes, a local production house from Sambelia, East Lombok and the film was released on March 11, 2025.

Figure 1. Poster of Film Seher

The story revolves around Burhan, a man eager to marry Salbiah, but her mother rejects his proposal without explanation. Desperate, Burhan turns to visiting witch doctors, hoping to secure their blessing through mystical means. However, this step leads him into a dangerous supernatural force that gradually destroys his life and those around him. In Lombok culture, the term seher refers to the practice of black magic used for various purposes such as love, revenge, and control.

Seher film depicts strong gender dynamics through its characters, especially in how the decisions and actions of male characters significantly impact the lives of female characters. Burhan, as the main character, is portrayed as a man who cannot accept rejection and chooses the path of black magic to win his love. His decision, driven by male obsession and selfishness, results in suffering for the women around him, including Salbiah and her mother, who have no control over the situation that befalls them. This reflects a form of toxic masculinity, where men feel entitled to love and happiness without considering the limits and rights of others.

Seher's film highlights gender inequality through its character portrayals, where women like Salbiah and her mother are shown as passive and lacking control over decisions affecting their lives, while the male character, Burhan, is at the center of the conflict and acts as the decision-maker, even though his actions are wrong. Burhan's choice to use black magic for his love illustrates the construction of toxic masculinity, where men feel entitled to dominate women and their surroundings. Consequently, women become victims of men's ambition and ego, exposing unequal power dynamics and demonstrating how male dominance in a patriarchal culture remains a source of gender injustice.

Figure 2.

Dialogue:
Sasak:
Ibu: imaa, ka tulung kakak be juluk ka anakkku
Ima: nke juluk
Ibu: ye HP, HP kanyak! Pada marak kakak na, bilang kelem ye telponan kanyan
Indonesia:

Indonesia
Ibu: Imaa, bantuin kakakmu. Ima: sebentar bu,

Ibu: Bentar, bentar. Kamu itu pegang hape terus. Sama kayak kakakmu yang suka telfonan setiap malam

English:
Mother: imaa, help your sister first Ima: Hold on mom
Mother: you always say "wait! You keep playing on your phone like your sister who always has a call for the whole night.

Denotation:
Her mother asked Ima to help her older sister, but she refused, leading Salbiah to be teased by her mother for being busy on the phone with her boyfriend.

Connotation:
The mother expressed her displeasure at Salbiah's unproductive activities. It lightly criticizes women who often use mobile phones for personal communication (trivial).

Myth:
Women are often portrayed as engaging in "unimportant" private activities, such as talking on the phone about personal matters. This myth supports the stereotype that women are considered unproductive if they are seen to be preoccupied with emotional or romantic concerns.

Figure.3

Dialogue:
Sasak:
Salbiah: ima sengeno angkan maen HP, ka beliang ita gula semendak lik julu.
Ima: arak upaq nak e ini?
Salbiah: nke angkan bait angsulang na Ima: iii arak siu, ndek ta mauk meli voucer wifi
Salbiah: iii gayam be masih kodeq ndek nganggoang kepeng siu.

Indonesia:
Salbiah: ima udahan dulu dong HP-an, beliin kakak gula bentar di depan.
Ima: ada upahnya gak?

Salbiah: ya   ambil   aja   uang kembaliannya
Ima: ihh. Cuma seribu doang, mana cukup buat beli voucer wifi
Salbiah: gaya banget kamu masih kecil nggak mau uang seribu!

English*:*
Salbiah: Stop playing the phone ima.
Go and buy me sugar.
Ima: am I getting a salary? Salbiah: take the rest of it.
Ima: ihh. It only left me one thousand rupiah. It does not even enough for a Wi-Fi voucher
Salbiah: How rude a kid that doesn't want money!

Denotation:

Ima was asked by her older sister to buy sugar, but she was reluctant because she thought she would not benefit.

Connotation:

Ima is portrayed as a child who has started thinking transactionally and materialistically. Salbiah criticized Ima's behavior for not being a "child" at her age.

Myth:

There is a myth of women's role as executors of domestic tasks (such as shopping), and that young women should be selflessly obedient to their elders. Ima refusing orders is seen as deviating from this norm.

Figure.4

Dialogue:
Sasak*:*
Ibu: sai be pinaq ang kupi?
Salbiah: ni inaq ku miaq ang kak Burhan
Ibu: ohh yak na lite ke?
Salbiah: aok, ino kan julu taoq na wah Ibu: aik aik wah toloang ye, lite

ngelamasin doang.
Salbiah: yak te bae semel inaq
Ibu: yak be ngumbe lile! Laek amaq be sampan na gero biwih na ndek ku beng ye nginem.

Indonesia*:*
Ibu: kopi buat siapa?
Salbiah: ini bu, mau buatin mas Burhan Ibu: emang dia mau ke sini?
Salbiah: iya, itu orangnya udah di depan Ibu: taruhin air aja! Kesini ngerepotin aja!
Salbiah: malu lah bu
Ibu: ngapain malu! Dulu aja ayahmu sampe kering bibirnya nggak ibu kasi minum.
English:
Mother: For whom is this coffee?
Salbiah: For Burhan, Mom Mother: Will he come?
Salbiah: Yes, he's already.
Mother: Give him mineral water. What a parasite
Salbiah: it is embarrassing mom Mother: why would it be? Back then I
do the same for your father.

Denotation:
Salbiah wanted to make coffee for Burhan (her boyfriend), but her mother refused as a sign of disapproval and referred to her past experiences.
Connotation:

This dialogue contains allusions to gender relations: women are asked not to be too friendly or subservient to men. The mother describes the bitter experience with Salbiah's father as a lesson not to "serve" men with low economic means.

Myth:
Women are seen as always sacrificing, and this narrative can be used both to encourage loyalty and to resist compliance. Here, the myth is that women must learn to be tough and independent, but still within the narrative of subordination she learns from fellow women, not from a just system.

Figure.5

Dialogue:
Sasak:
Ima: kak biah, tesuruk ide beronas no sik inaq
Salbiah: aok nengke angkan
Ima: ane angkan, ite silik na sik inaq no! Salbiah: aok angkan, iiiih!

Indonesia:
Ima: kak salbiah, disuruh cuci piring tuh ama ibu
Salbiah: iya bentar
Ima: ayo dong, malah ima yang dimarah ibu nih!
Salbiah: iya bentar! (nada jengkel)

English:
Ima: Salbiah, ,mom said you need to do the wash.
Salbiah: okay wait a minute
Ima: come on, mom is angry with me
Salbiah: yes, why can't you wait a minute?. (grumbling)

Denotation:
Salbiah was told to wash the dishes but hesitated. Ima felt upset because her mother also scolded her.

Connotation:
Domestic responsibilities are a major burden on women. Even minor delays cause tension between women

Myth:
Women are automatically expected to do housework, and when they delay these tasks, it is viewed as serious neglect. This pressure doesn't mainly come from men but from other women, showing how the patriarchal myth has been internalized.

Figure.6

Dialogue:
Sasak:

Tetangga 1: ciee, kee lemak na dateng calon menantune inaq ima?

Tetangga 2: ye ampoq na luek siq na belanja ini

Ibu: ee aku yaq periapang dengan marak ngeno, ndeq na bedoe pepak.

Tetangga 2: ndaq kene meno angkan sd ini inaq kaka, laun tetu ya bejari menantunda

Ibu: ihh yak ku sudi!

Indonesia:

Tetangga 1: ciee, calon menantu ibu ima pagi banget datengnya? (nada bercanda)

Tetangga 2: itu lah makanya belanja banyak nih

Ibu: saya mau masakin orang kayak gitu? nggak punya apa-apa (nada marah). Jalang sialan.

Tetangga 2: jangan ngomong gitu bu, nanti beneran jadi menantu loh (nada bercanda)

Ibu: ih nggak sudi!

English:

Neighbor 1: ciee, your son in law is coming, hm? (flirting on salbiah's mother)

Neighbor 2: that's why you shop so much.

Mother: me? Cooking for that poor? Bitch.

Neighbor 2: do not denial it, it'll be true (flirting)

Mother: in your dream!

Denotation:
Salbiah's mother strongly rejected the idea of having a poor man as her son-in-law.

Connotation:
Social standards regarding marriage remain strong: men are expected to be well-established, and women have the right to reject men who "have nothing". Judgments of men are still made from a woman's point of view, but within a materialistic patriarchal framework.

Myth:

The myth of the perfect marriage, where men are expected to provide financial security, is upheld by women themselves. This myth reveals how women also act as protectors of patriarchal values.

Figure.7

Dialogue:
Sasak:
Ibu: jelap be tokol malik! Wah slese ke pegawean be?
Salbiah: wah inaq
Ibu: ino popoq an be wah bekerem lekan rubin!
Salbiah: aok angkan inaq neke juluk angkan
Ibu: giliran aku ending tulung jaq ndek wah bae be denger! Awas bae kamu!

Indonesia:
Ibu: cepet banget duduk lagi! Emang kerjaan rumah udah selesai? (nada lantang)
Salbiah: udah ibu.
Ibu: itu cucian kamu belum di rendam sejak kemarin!
Salbiah: iya bu, makanya bentar
Ibu: coba giliran ibu yang minta tolong, nggak pernah kamu dengerin! Awas ya kamu! (sembari menunjuk ke arah salbiah)

English:
Mother: You were so fast! Did you do your job well? (with anger)
Salbiah: yes, mom
Mother: You still have laundry! Salbiah: Yes, Mom, hold on.
Mother: I have never been heard from you!
Watch your mouth! (pointing on salbiah)

Denotation:

Her mother scolded Salbiah for not finishing her chore. She disapproves of Salbiah being paired with Burhan because he is considered a poor man with no future.

Connotation:
Salbiah is portrayed as a young woman who must fully adhere to domestic duties and obey her parents. Tensions arise when she is seen as falling short of her mother's expectations. She lacks control over her own life.

Myth:
The myth of a good woman is one who is hardworking, obedient, and always willing to do housework. Mothers act as agents in internalizing this myth, reinforcing traditional values about women's roles. This influences the future of children, as it depends on the provisions approved by parents or mothers.

The analysis of gender representation in Seher employs Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Through three levels; denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings. It reveals that woman in Sasak culture are portrayed in a subordinate, domestic, and limited social role. This portrayal results in a form of symbolic silencing of women. With the following explanation:

Women and the Domestic Burden

Seher's films consistently feature women, both young and old, as the main actors performing household chores, such as washing dishes, making coffee, and shopping. These responsibilities are presented not as choices, but as obligations. When female characters (Salbiah and Ima) delay or refuse domestic duties, they are immediately subjected to emotional pressure and anger from authority figures, such as mothers, as shown in Figures 1, 4, and 6. This aligns with the theory of gender performativity [11] which states that "Gender is not something that one is, it is something one does, an act... a doing". In this context, domestic work becomes a performative practice imposed on women as a symbol of ideal femininity, used to reinforce women's identity, and failure to carry out these tasks is regarded as a failure to be a good woman.

Subordination and Silencing

When Salbiah attempts to make coffee for Burhan (a man she has a crush on), her mother immediately refuses, citing her bitter past experiences. This illustrates how the authority and influence of the older generation are used to control and silence young women's expression and will (see Figures 3 and 6). Salbiah lacks autonomy over her choices in relationships and feelings because she is not seen as domestically appropriate. In this context, the concept of muted group theory can be applied [11], [12] which states that "Muted group theory posits that language and communication norms are controlled by dominant groups, rendering marginalized voices unheard or altered." This creates a structure where women are silenced within society because language, values, and norms are constructed from a male perspective and uphold the dominant status quo. Although the silenced women in the film are women; specifically mothers they act as agents within an internalized patriarchal system. This exemplifies internalized oppression, where subordinate groups reproduce the very values that oppress them.

Economics and the Representation of Marriage

In Figure 5, the mother openly rejects a poor man as a potential son-in-law. Although this demonstrates that women have some influence over marriage decisions, patriarchal logic still heavily influences how a man's worth is judged: economic status is the primary factor. Marriage is regarded as an economic arrangement rather than an emotional one. This illustrates how women can also act as custodians of the patriarchal system through double standards and stereotypes of men who are unestablished. The theory of symbolic interactionism by George Herbert Mead, further developed by Herbert Blumer, explains that social meaning is constructed through symbolic interactions [13]. In this context, a prospective husband's value is interpreted using economic symbols rather than personal attributes. Women, through this symbolism, are not only constrained but also restricted.

Myths of Traditional Femininity in Sasak Culture

Roland Barthes in Mythologies explains that myth in modern society is a secondary sign system that disguises ideology as natural [14]. In the context of Seher's film, the myth of women as obedient, diligent, non-argumentative, and obedient to their mothers is presented as a natural trait of women. In reality, this is a social construct that continues to be reinforced by culture. "What the world supplies is a historical reality, defined, even if this is not immediately evident, by the very way in which it exists." [15]. This myth has a strong influence in Sasak culture, as reflected in the internalization of women's roles by the mother and Ima characters, who unwittingly become "guardians" of the patriarchal system, silencing fellow women within the family.

Semiotic analysis of Seher's film reveals representations of women that, while not explicitly silenced through dialogue, are symbolically silenced through cultural norms and visual narratives. In the six main scenes that the researcher obtained, women are consistently depicted within the confines of domestic duties, emotional burdens, and compliance with family expectations. This condition is in line with the concept of symbolic silencing proposed by [2] that in a patriarchal society, women's voices are often present but not heard or not considered important because the dominant discourse comes from a male perspective.

Dialogue in the film often shows female characters, especially Salbiah and Ima, caught between traditional gender roles and intergenerational control. For example, Salbiah's wish to serve coffee to male guests is sharply criticized by her mother, who even mentions her bitter past experiences. This suggests that women should be cautious when serving men, both emotionally and financially. It reinforces the gender myth described [16]. which portrays women as patient and submissive, while criticizing women who act too actively or take initiative. The mother figure is also depicted as a patriarchal figure who repeatedly scolds her daughter for neglecting household chores and not being a good woman according to tradition, reflecting the view that women must obey their parents' wishes and cannot freely decide their personal rights [17]The idea that women's worth is linked to household productivity and loyalty to family mirrors the strong influence of traditional Sasak gender values, where grace and honor are associated with being quiet, obedient, and skilled in domestic tasks [18], [19]. Even when female characters show resistance or delay; such as Ima refusing to be told what to do or Salbiah postponing housework other characters' responses quickly restore the established order. This demonstrates how women's expressions are filtered, reshaped, and directed to align with the dominant patriarchal narrative. Furthermore, the expectation that male partners must be financially secure, as shown when the mother rejects a poor prospective son-in-law, indicates that although women seem to have the right to choose a partner, that autonomy exists within a materialistic patriarchal framework [20], [21] This portrayal supports Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic power theory in [20] which states that class and gender are closely intertwined in determining who is considered "valuable" within the social hierarchy.

Overall, the scenes in Seher's film show that women's silenced position in Sasak culture results not only from spoken bans but also from semiotic structures that shape meanings, roles, and values unequally. Visual cues, the tone of dialogue, and interactions between characters create a gender symbolic economy, where women's voices are systematically directed, ignored, or conform to traditional expectations.

4. Conclusion

Analysis of the film The Vengeance of SEHER through Roland Barthes' semiotic lens reveals that the portrayal of women in Sasak culture is filled with symbols of silencing and subjugation. Women are depicted as domestic subjects with no say over their own life choices, even in private spheres such as love and family. Domestic chores, emotional sacrifice, and obedience to family norms are ingrained from an early age. Interestingly, this inequality is maintained not only by male dominance but also by women themselves through cultural internalization. The mother and daughter in this film illustrate how the patriarchal system operates across generations. This portrayal shows that in a patriarchal society, control over women is exerted not just through outright prohibitions but also via symbols, social expectations, and cultural narratives regarded as normal. Therefore, Seher is not merely a form of entertainment but also a narrative space that demonstrates how social myths about women are constructed, sustained, and handed down. This study underscores the importance of viewing local media as a reflection of ideology, as well as the need for critical awareness of the cultural messages embedded within visual discourse.

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