

## **Kajian Film “Mereka Bilang Saya Monyet”: A Deconstruction of The Social Order On Female Sexuality**

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### **ABSTRAK**

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menggali makna-makna yang terkandung di dalam teks film mengenai justifikasi perilaku seksual perempuan dan laki-laki. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode dekonstruksi post feminis. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa ada upaya dari strudara melakukan pembalikan struktur hirarki soposisibine rmelalui tokoh-tokoh perempuan yang tampak dalam film, memproduksi makna yang baru tentang seksualitas perempuan, menolak status quo yang selama ini menunggangi makna seksualitas, seperti aktif-pasif, liar-beradab, sundal, dsb, dan tidak menentang siapapun justru membiarkan dirinya (perempuan) disebut sebagai monyet, liar ataupun sundal sebagai sebuah strategi untuk menentang sistem yang selama ini menuntut perempuan menjadi “anak manis”. Film ini juga menunjukkan bahwa penentangan terhadap tabu seksualitas sebagai sebuah strategi tidak mudah dilakukan karena masyarakat tetap cenderung memaknai seksualitas melalui serangkaian oposisi biner.

**Kata kunci:** film, seksualitas, dekontsruksi post feminis, oposisi biner

## **Film Assesement “Mereka Bilang Saya Monyet”: A Deconstruction of The Social Order On Female Sexuality**

### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is written based on a study that explores transcendent meanings contained in the film text, especially regarding the justification of sexual behaviors of women and men. This study applies a postfeminist deconstruction method. The postfeminist deconstruction discourse proves able to discover the contradictions containing in the text of the film. The results show that there is an attempt by the director to reverse the hierarchical structure of the binary opposition through the movie characters. The female characters seen in the film, is shown as the production of a new meaning of sexuality; women reject the status quo of mainstream sexuality, such as active-passive, wild-civilized, bitch-princess, and so on. In this film, women are allowing themselves to be called a monkey, she is wild or bitch - it is a strategy to oppose the system that has been demanding women to be "nice kids", but, it's just a mask. There is no female pleasure in this film. This film acknowledges that the look of the women remain the same instead, because the irony in this film is blind.

**Keyword :** Indonesian film, sexuality, postfeminist deconstruction, binnary opposition

## **INTRODUCTION**

Humans on the dimensions of biology are manifested by the penis and vagina. However, the penis is often regarded as having a central position in almost all human existential dimensions. Lacan then called it Phallus. Phallus in this case is a marker of sexual difference, and the phallus is always constructed as a sign of power and control through the setting of desire satisfaction. Thus, it affects how the position of sexuality in the community. The treatment of power towards sexuality ultimately creates a condition of injustice, in which women are the parties of the most affected by the injustice.

The issue of female sexuality is often marginalized, both in real life and in representation. In sexuality, women are often positioned as objects. Thus seeing the issue of sexuality will always be associated with the values and rules in a culture. The arrangement is primarily through taboos that are built, and the taboo focuses on male-female gender differences. So the intrinsic value of sexuality is ultimately obscured by the various interests that drive it.

Sexuality is always viewed through a series of binary oppositions, good/bad, natural/unnatural, active/passive. The

binaries are ultimately embedded as signs for regulating sexual behavior in society. For sex act, for example, a woman should be like this and should not be like that, while men can be like this and so fair. This is of course caused by men who have a penis feel superior and powerful, so they always assume the right to control women and their body.

The depictions of women related to sexual identity and sexual activity in the majority of films in Indonesia in fact increasingly reinforce the binaries of women and men. The media still reflects and produces meaning about female sexuality in order to regulate the sexual behavior of the community. Where women are the most affected. Such a man who managed to pursue women is considered a symbol of masculinity, otherwise women who are no longer virgins will immediately be labeled as "bitch" or "cheap".

Indonesian films that hold the theme of women are popping up with the rise of Indonesian film after diming. Increasing women's access to media provides space for women to offer different perspectives on women's issues. In films directed by women it allows women to appear in different versions of the male show; where women

are always used as icons, displayed for men's gazes and pleasures. The same thing has long been revealed by Zoonen that the main element of patriarchal culture is to showcase women as a spectacle to be seen, aimed at the gaze of audiences (men) (1994). However, from all the themes in the women's films that began appearing from 2000 until today, women always appear in the same form. Many other films affirming the interpretation that however, whatever education she attains, female must be female, in which case its meaning is not intrinsic but has the ideological meaning of how women should behave. Representative regimes continue to affirm that woman should be a "sweet child".

Film *Mereka Bilang Saya Monyet!* (2008), is a film featuring single women, independent and free to celebrate her sexuality. The film directed by women featured several female characters, although the story in the film focuses on the main character that is Ajeng. Some of the female characters in the film have different life stories. Ajeng as the main character is not displayed as a woman in married life, but single and free women. Ajeng in this film is a writer who became a businessman's savings to finance her life, while she also dated a senior writer; who already has a

wife, as her mentor. The other character is friend of Ajeng, namely Andien, a prostitute who has children and struggles to feed his son alone, then Vanny is a married woman and has no children. The film is no longer addressing the issue of public and domestic space, or polygamy as in previous Indonesian films.

However this film presents a problem of sexuality that is different from the films of women who previously existed. So how did the film directed by this woman reveal the issue of sexuality? Why is the issue of female sexuality important to be reorganized in representational texts such as movies? This study aims to expose the issue of female sexuality by trying to open the "unsaid" information that is behind the text

### **Women's body and Injustice**

Control of the body is not only through violence, but also through more subtle rules such as writing, education, and administrative practices (Upstone, 2009). Not only that, the control is ultimately widespread through popular culture that unconsciously every meaning built through popular culture becomes a lasting belief in society. Correspondingly, Subandy explained that popular culture is not merely a practice of consumption, it is also an active

process of creating meaning and pleasures in a social system (Subandy, 2011).

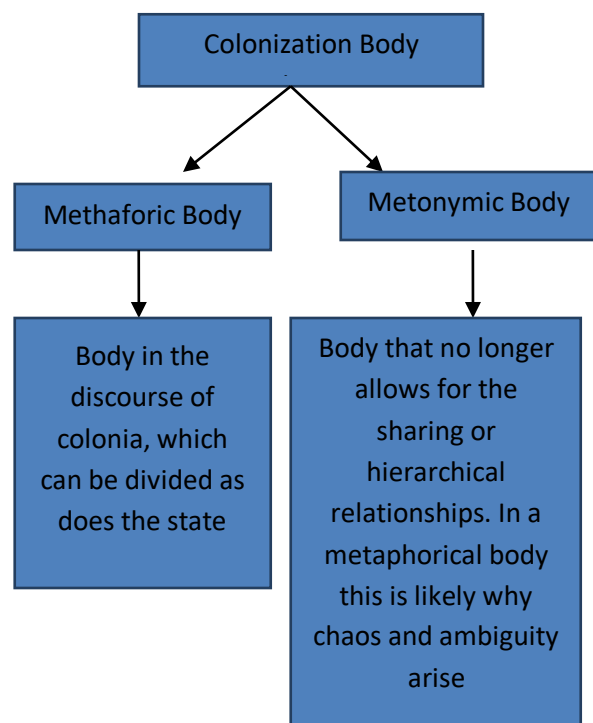
The female body represented in the form of representation is not an independent body. The female body is presented over another body, which is the male body. Mainstream film narratives in Indonesia that make women as a topic, are such as in the film of *Perempuan Punya Cerita* and *Berbagi Suami*. The movies still describe women who stay in the domestic area, describe the reality of women as victims, and even in the end they are still trapped in the concept of "sweet child" pinned to women, and are failed to touch the areas of sexuality that are also shackled by various taboos and myths and eventually give birth to rules which, of course, are not based on justice.

Women and their bodies are like a doll possessed and dominated by men metaphorically as a pleasure with their various proportions. The discourse continues to be planted hegemonically, representing how women and their bodies are dominated by a mere form of desire for men's pleasures. Women's bodies ultimately become ownership with all patterns controlled in certain ideal standards (Rahariyoso, 2017). In the end, men and

women increasingly define their position through the definitions obtained through representational forms.

Upstonesaw colonization as an attempt to manipulate and utilize the body. Colonialism bred cruel treatment of the body, in which the body was regarded as a territory through slavery, so that man was regarded as a property or property (Upstone, 2009). Here is a picture of the concept of a colonized body:

Chart 1 Body Concept of Metaphoric and Metonymic



Source: in Upstone, 2009

Foucault described that the body becomes an area where power relationships run on it. The power relations train, force, torture, mark, call, instill strength and rule the body. Thus the body regarded as a productive body and having the power is when the body is "obedient" (Rahariyoso, 2017). According to Foucault, mechanism of power is always a prohibiting mechanism. Power always says no, forbids, prevents, and outlines boundaries. He also added that ultimately the unconscious arises from a power relation (Carrete, 2011).

### Film and Women

The woman's body in society has been disciplined ever since she was born, and the discipline continues in representative work, especially film. Freud pointed out that the subject's misunderstanding of himself is not of itself in general, but of its desire or its sexuality (Carrete, 2011: 166).

Film can be a mirror of the reality that is around the community, because from the film a mentality of a nation is reflected through the texts that are arranged in the film, but it must be realized that the film can also form the social reality itself.

The movie of *Mereka Bilang Saya Monyet!* is the first film of

a feminist activist; Djenar Maesa Ayu. The title of this film is taken from a collection of short stories that are also written by Djenar Maesa Ayu. The story in the movie and in the book of *"Mereka Bilang Saya Monyet!"* is somewhat different, although the leech metaphor in the movie is taken from one of the short story titles in the book.

### Political Representation and Postfeminism

The exploration of female sexuality as a form of representation in popular culture texts ultimately leads to the term of postfeminism. However, it does not mean postfeminism views that the patriarchal system has collapsed. As Brooks argued:

*"Just as postmodernism and postcolonialism do not mark that modernism and imperialism have not been replaced or superseded, postfeminism does not mean that patriarchy has been overcome. Rather, postfeminism engages with the discourse of feminism's fight against patriarchy while also challenging the hegemonic assumptions that oppression is universal among women, race, and class" (Kim, 2015).*

It is almost impossible to undermine the patriarchal as a system that is rooted so deeply in man. Therefore, subversive

readings should also be done in a subtle way (subtile).

As Brooks said that being an irony and an ambiguity to amuse women themselves is the way the body of postmodernism reverses its gaze, for body boundaries that are influenced by gender are a past form:

*“Postfeminism negotiates, restyles, and even apologizes for feminism and then offers up a new woman (but a different kind of new woman from the 1980s or even the 1920s) who is comfortable and confident in her sexuality and, more specifically, in sexual difference. But this notion of sexual difference is drawn from the sense of empowerment a woman feels by believing she has reclaimed her power over man, which is sex.”* (Kim, 2001)

Regarding the reversal of his gaze, Brooks stated that Doanne moved farther from Mulvey who in his article raised about the female pleasure. Mulvey missed the female pleasure in analyzing the female gaze. While Doanne mentioned that female voyeurism and "the reversal of the gaze" is impossible (ibid). As Brooks described:

*“Doane goes further than Mulvey, in maintaining that the female gaze can gain control of the image by two means. She contends that a distance can be established by the female spectator by adopting the male spectatorial position, which Doane calls “transvestism,” or*

*by using femininity as a mask* (Brooks, 1997)

## Method

Film text of *Mereka Bilang Saya Monyet!* is a method of deconstruction analysis. Researchers deconstruct and reconstruct the text of this film from the point of view of postfeminism, looking at what is said, what is not said and what may be said.

## Deconstruction Efforts of Female Sexuality in the Movie

In the characterization of Ajeng on the movie *Mereka Bilang Saya Monyet!* as a woman is shown consciously to choose a free life by separating himself from his mother, lives in an apartment rented by her lover who is a businessman.

In the early sequences of *Mereka Bilang Saya Monyet!*, Ajeng as the main character loudly mentions "sex". A pretty startling depiction at the beginning of the film. Showing this film focuses on the unusual things found in previous women's films.

If women have been given 'mandates' from generation to generation to be "sweet children""good children" or "holy children", to take care of themselves, to resist sexual

desire for the norms prevailing in society, while male is a sexual identity that may be doing this and that may be so, so that anything done by a man can ultimately be normal, then in this film, in the plot of the story of Ajeng, Asmoro and "he", there is an attempt to show a reversal of gaze that deliberately seems to allow themselves to be vulgar and inadequate, to let others call them "*monyet*" female, to reject construction as the object of patriarchal desires, and to reject the polarity of the dichotomy of male and female binary opposition, in which vulgar men, not quality and all his corruption always get declaration, while women must always appear to be good, perfect, sacred, and passive inclined. All the reversal patterns of gaze are very typical to postfeminism body portrayals.

This film indeed impresses many things and it is done by female director, where the point of view used is not male fantasy about ideal women, the camera is also not in position as the eyes of men as occurred in the majority of films that make the female body as a commodity. Female sexuality is portrayed in opposite way, the way of postfeminism views on the body and female sexuality. However, in this film, sex seems to be the only way for women to consciously get the subjectivity of women

themselves in the patriarchal society. Meanwhile, in real life women also have a choice of diverse strategies. Feminine traits in this film are only described again as limited to sexuality, not professionalism or others.

In the film, Ajeng and her two female friends are unable to strengthen each other's own subjectivity. Ajeng, Vanny and Andien tend to be themselves in the face of problems.

In another scene, when Ajeng tried to give another idea to his two friends about herself-concept, the film's text shows an attempt to undermine the patriarchal dominant pattern that has so far formed a stable idea of women. When Ajeng strongly opposed the opinions of her friends (Andien and Vanny) to listen more to Asmoro who forbade him to write in her own language which is not in line with the symbolic order.

*Tau apa lu semua? Heh, tau apa lu semua?! Lu tau gak rasanya punya cowok yang gak bisa diandelin? Boro-boro ngomongin soal tulisan, minta waktunya aja susah! Gue gak pernah minta macam-macam! Gue gak pernah nyuruh dia nyerai-in bininya! Tapi gue selalu dimarahin kalo gue pergi sama cowok lain, gue tidur sama cowok lain! Apa itu fair buat gue?*

### English translation

*What is it all? Heh, what are you doing?! You know I do not have a guy who cannot be relied on? Not only talking about writing, asking for his time is so difficult! I never asked for anything! I never told him to divorce his wife! But I always get scolded if I go with another guy, I sleep with another guy! Is that fair for me?!*

Injustice experienced by women especially in terms of sexuality becomes counter discourse that tries to be torn down by the director through the portrayal of Ajeng characters. In the text, it clearly shows a condition of injustice experienced by women. The concept of sexual identity has always been used to regulate human behavior, the behavior of women and men.

In a scene depicting the life of Andien and Vanny. The scene lacks any dialogue, only describes the brief interaction between Vanny and her husband who refuses her teaching to get in touch, then the rejection of her husband makes Vanny seem depressed while staring at the blank frame underneath bearing the words "baby".

So also with Andien, who weeps for her condition as a single parent, who is busy earning a living to support her son by prostituting herself. Andien's cries in front of the maid's room where Andien's son who prefers to sleep there also shows

unhappiness. Andien in one side lives her life consciously, but on the other hand she later regrets, because the time for her only daughter becomes little and make her son more comfortable in the other room.

In sexual activity or sexual scenes between Ajeng and Asmoro, is displaying different viewpoints. Not because women are featured in "women on top", but because of camera movements that use a point of view that does not place women as the object of male desire, and the issue of orgasm. While the penis is symbolically seen by Foucault as a symbol of wealth and possession because it alternates expands and buds and because it is possible to produce and negate (Gunawan, 2000). Ajeng as a control or woman as a control in this scene is not only limited to women on top and the achievement of orgasm by women, but when the peak of orgasm has been felt, Ajeng then refused to serve Asmoro who has not reached the point of orgasm.

*Asmoro: "honey, where are you going?"*

*Ajeng: "bathing"*

*Asmoro: "come here, I'm not yet"*

*Ajeng: "I am already!" (Smile)*

In the text above it appears a depiction that wants to show that women are very capable of power to say no. During this time, it is not impossible that many women



grow in the perspective that serving is an obligation and nature, then even though women have not reached the point of climax, as long as men have achieved it, then sexual activity is over already.

Not an issue of Ajeng should also let Asmoro achieves orgasm, but above all, what the director has overlooked in describing the body of postfeminism is about woman's pleasure. The female body is in the grace of being able to feel what is called a "multiple orgasms", and that is an advantage that men do not have.

*Clinical experience indicates that having multiple orgasms is indeed possible for all women who can cross the finish line, and women who orgasm need a mere one or two minutes, on average to reach their second climax (Harris, 2015).*

Ajeng probably succeeded in lifting the theme of sexuality which in this case is sex act as a form of struggle against patriarchal ideas. However, sex as a pleasure is less of a concern, so the sex issue in this case is only limited to how it can take a kind of revenge against patriarchal patterns. Sexual turmoil, sexual desire in the end is still a muted space, and Ajeng is busy with all the revenge. It is describing the phenomenon of pseudo postfeminism, the blurring of boundaries such as

passive/active, male/female, holy/profane etc. becomes blurred and the foundational truth about sex and gender which is believed to be unsuccessful by the representation of this film, because the sexual attainment of the highest pleasure is when the person engaging the desire of the soul and the physical together

### **Reconstruction of *Mereka Bilang Saya Monyet!***

From the deconstruction discussion on the film text of several story lines and characterizations, it shows the ambivalence of the deconstruction effort. On the one hand, the director has sought to dismantle a stable idea by raising the theme of women's body and sexuality in the viewpoint of postfeminism, through characterizations, storylines and point of views. However, on the other hand, this film actually defends and even reinforces the values of feminism in which the desire of sexuality is damped and drowned in other "struggles" which are more visible as revenge against the patriarchal. While patriarchal in the view of postfeminism cannot be torn down, the female body that fights in postfeminism's view is not a body that fights against feminine sexualization and objectification, but a body that consciously conducts a

strategic simulation to challenge a stable idea and present women independent of male control. However, instead of doing the irony that leads to self-subjectivity, this film only describes the condition of women as victims in the injustice of sexuality. Although Ajeng consciously participates and seeks active appearing, but in reality it actually further perpetuates the injustice of sexuality.

If this movie wants to undermine the old concept of women and uses deconstruction to sneak and disturb the idea of being stable, then the concept of pleasure becomes an important point. While in this film woman's pleasure is much neglected. Woman is shown freely and able to choose her own way, but in the end she is dumped and called "prostitute", and Ajeng's rage after her conflict with Asmoro only makes the statement "look, it must be because she is too free". "Look, she ends up in confusion and depression because of her freedom." Women's perspectives and experiences are not shown as important in this film. Ajeng and her two friends seemed to take a quiet room, to weep over the situation compared to enjoying her life as a woman. Pleasures or favors cannot be achieved in the film. The early film shows the life of urban women, (discotheque scene), ultimately not taking

urban spaces to then participate in the urban spectacle and enter through it to subtly disturb the stable idea. Ajeng, Andien and Vanny also do not portray postfeminist pleasure, because they do not show a dynamic life. Life is displayed only about apartment, car, discotheque and cafe. There is no depiction like hanging out places, talking about women's lives, making choices without regretting, doing what they want to do without coercion or impulse from outside themselves, making mistakes and then forgiving themselves for the mistake, then going through the day with joy. This film will probably be a different movie if every female character in the film is portrayed as happy, happy in this case not without problems, not without patriarchal interruptions that in fact always govern the lives of women and men, but women, who are in the complexity and imperfection of their lives, can still be happy.

### **Concluding Remark**

The deconstruction reading in this postfeminism point of view ultimately reveals the fact that patriarchal unconscious has turned female director getting stuck into the circle by still impressing the duality of oppression and temptation that ultimately hinders the question of women's desires.

Women's desires are still laid in a vacuum that seems hesitantly expressed in the text of this film.

Thus, the movie of *Mereka Bilang Saya Monyet!* in the end is only a film with a slightly different face but has the same way of representing women with films that previously existed. Pleasure watching, woman's pleasure, female gaze, ultimately are not obtained by women through this film. Women are still described as victims or even worse, women are considered unhappy because they do not obey the norms prevailing in society. Instead of implanting the construction that it does not matter to women make a mistake, it is not bad to resist a man's rejection, it does not matter choosing a way of life that any woman wants, the depiction in this film can actually restore the woman to her understanding of being perfect ideal image of women in society, otherwise women will not be happy and rejected by society.

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