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## **Semiotic analysis of moral messages in the film Women from Rote Island for Christian religious education**

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**Abstract.** This study is entitled Semiotic Analysis of Moral Messages in the Film Woman From Rote Island for Christian Religious Education. The story in the film is taken from the cultural background in East Nusa Tenggara, where women are often victims of domestic violence. This study aims to understand how the moral message in the film is conveyed so that the message can support the values of Christian Religious Education. This film depicts the relationship between humans and others, the relationship between humans and God, and the relationship between humans and the social environment. This study uses a qualitative method, with a Roland Barthes semiotic analysis approach, taking the subject focused on the figure of Orpa representing the image of women in East Nusa Tenggara. Viewed from the Denotation (signifier) aspect, it explains the relationship between the signifier and the signified in reality, producing explicit meaning. Connotation (signified) describes the relationship between the signifier and the signified in non-reality, producing implicit meaning and Myths or customs and beliefs that apply in society. In this study, the scene is focused on the life of Orpa, a woman on Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara, who experiences violence and discrimination. This discrimination is rooted in centuries-old traditions that stigmatize women as second-class gender in society. In addition to the figure of Orpa, this film will also provide a perspective from Martha, Orpa's daughter. Martha is one of the women who experienced sexual violence that made her feel depressed and depressed—data collection by determining the corpus contained in the film according to the predetermined categorization. The results of this study indicate that the moral messages contained in the film Women From Rote Island are: First, the importance of upholding the value of resilience in facing difficulties, as described by the character Orpa, who is a single parent raising children. Second, courage and independence in rejecting gender discrimination and violence that occurs in Rote, East Nusa Tenggara. Third, there is concern and compassion for women who are victims of violence, including sexual violence. Moral messages can be seen through the data found in the study so that these three values are then integrated into Christian religious education.

**Keywords.** Film Women From Rote Island, Moral Message, Christian Religious Education, Semiotics

### **Introduction**

The presence of several films in Indonesia that convey deep moral messages to society has proven to be a lot. Some of these films include *Negeri 5 Menara*, *Laskar Pelangi*, *Sang Pemimpi* and many more. These films are able to present forms of character education, moral messages, motivation and even high religious values through elements such as storyline, characterization, setting, and the core message of the film, which are delivered in a very attractive and neat package (Kompasiana, n.d.). Likewise, the film *Women From Rote Island* also contains humanitarian values that are full of meaning, so the film *Women From Rote Island* was selected as the Best Long Story Film at the 2023 Indonesian Film Festival (FFI) (Abdurohman, n.d.).

The film *Women From Rote Island* is made by the production houses *Bintang Cahaya Sinema* and *Langit Terang Sinema*. It was produced by Rizka Shakira and directed by Jeremias Nyangoen. In addition to being selected as the Best Feature Film, the film *Women from Rote Island* received several other high awards, namely Best Director and Best Original Screenplay won by Jeremias Nyangoen, then Best Cinematography Director won by Joseph Christoforus Fofid (Abdurohman, n.d.). In addition, this film also managed to outperform several other films that were nominated for Best Feature Film, such as the film *24 Hours with Gaspar* by *Visinema Pictures* and the film *Budi Pekerti* by *Rekata Studio* and *Kaninga Pictures*.

Interestingly, this film is a film that raises issues based on the real experiences of victims of sexual violence. This real experience is one of the factors that led to the success of several awards received. It is undeniable that until now, sexual violence has been a major problem in East Nusa Tenggara. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (PPPA) noted that as many as 25,050 women were victims of violence in Indonesia throughout 2022. This number increased by 15.2% from the previous year of 21,753 cases (DA, 2023).

It should be underlined that this data does not include cases that were not reported by the victim or those closest to the victim. In addition, based on data from the Online Information System for the Protection of Women and Children (SIMFONI PPA) application in East Nusa Tenggara throughout 2022, cases of violence against women and children occurred most in Kupang City with a total of 263 reported cases, not including cases that were not revealed (Antonia, 2022, p. 97). Meanwhile, the latest data from the same source in January 2023 alone recorded 166 cases; 57 cases occurred in children and 109 cases experienced by women, namely cases of sexual violence, domestic violence against both children and women who experience physical, psychological violence and neglect (Indonesia, 2023).

Based on the data above, there is an increase in cases of sexual violence against women and children that occur specifically in Kupang City. Faced with this condition, it is hoped that the education of the *Women From Rote Island* Film about identity and existence as women can raise awareness and change the patriarchal paradigm that contributes to acts of violence. If we look at the moral message contained in this film, we can see that it has strong human values. So from this, the author will explore in depth the moral message in the *Women From Rote Island* film, which is presented from the values of Christianity, education, politeness, friendliness, responsibility, and leadership.

This study aims to conduct a semiotic analysis of the moral messages contained in the film "*Women From Rote Island*," especially in the context of Christian religious education. By analyzing the symbols, narratives, and characters in this film, deep meanings can be found that are relevant to Christian teachings and values. The category of moral messages is the relationship between humans and God, the relationship between humans and humans and the relationship between humans and the social environment, raising the research title: Semiotic

Analysis of Moral Messages in the Film *Women From Rote Island* for Christian Religious Education, using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis which focuses on signs, researchers try to analyze and answer the question of how the moral message is represented in this film. So that the moral message in this film can support and provide a new understanding of how films can be used as an effective learning tool in integrating Christian religious values into education.

### **Conceptual framework**

#### **Feminism**

Feminism is synonymous with women's agendas and schools of thought. Adhikari and Saha (2021) define feminism as an ideology that provides a picture of the world and changes for the benefit of women. Another view of feminism is that it is a world movement organized by an institution in the name of women's struggle (Dewi et al., 2022). Feminism is also an interdisciplinary science that has been established since 1970 and involves women in every activity (Harp et al., 2018). Thus, feminism can be interpreted as a view, institution, and movement apparatus that fights for women's rights and interests.

Feminism lowers the understanding and benefits of gender equality for women. Health issues are one of the important roles that prioritize women, where gender equality and health are adaptively based on government norms and policies (T.L. King et al., 2018). Gender equality also enhances the principle of inclusivity, a policy benefit based on helping women and other vulnerable groups equally to get decent jobs (Wajcman, 2020). The voices of female workers are very important to be heard, and this capital is what allows them to survive in the industrial sector (Wajcman et al., 2020, p. 19). Meanwhile, in realizing access to education for children and women, state policies are required to cross social, political, and economic issues of a gender-friendly society (Ritter-Hayashi et al., 2019, p. 3).

The types of feminism are diverse and influence the context of social problems. Three types of feminism are often known: liberal feminism, radical feminism, and Marxist feminism (Renzetti, 2018). Liberal feminism is an approach that provides the same basis of freedom between women and men. Gender equality is an important agenda for liberal feminism in order to create decent employment, education, and social opportunities for women (ibid, p. 6). Different from radical feminism, part of women's struggle to fight against sexist oppression, gender inequality, and other crucial forms of inequality. For radical feminists, women are often the objects of oppressed and subordinate groups of men based on ethnicity, race, religion, or other identities (ibid, p. 10).

Meanwhile, Marxist feminism places social inequality on par with gender inequality because of the exploitation of women by capitalism (Ibid, p.11). Of the three types of feminism above, radical and Marxist feminism are closest to the study of the film *Women from Rote Island* because the depiction of oppression and forms of sexual violence against women on Rote Island reflects drastic gender inequality and injustice. The struggle and movement for Rote women to rise can be the implementation of the Marxist Feminism view, which aims to open up important opportunities and chances for women in various sectors.

#### **Research method**

This research uses qualitative research using the Semiotic model, with the data obtained in the form of descriptive techniques, which will later be analyzed. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and the way in which humans create, understand, and interpret the meaning of these signs. The word "semiotics" comes from the Greek semeion, which means "sign," or seme, which means "sign interpreter." Semiotics is rooted in classical and academic

studies of the art of logic, rhetoric, and poetics. Semiotics is basically the study of codes, which are any system that allows us to view certain entities as signs or as something meaningful. The purpose of the semiotic analysis is "to try to find the meaning of a sign including things hidden behind a sign, symbol, reference, code, denotation and connotation). (Chandler, 2022). First, a sign is a basic point in semiotics consisting of a "signifier" and a "signified" (which is symbolized). For example, the written word "apple" (signifier) refers to the apple itself (which is symbolized). Second, symbolism is the study of how symbols are used to convey meaning. Symbols can be words, images, or other signs that have a certain meaning in a culture or context. Third, reference is the relationship between a sign and the object it symbolizes. For example, a word refers to an object in the real world. Fourth, a code is a system of rules or norms that govern the use of signs in a particular culture or community. Fifth, denotation refers to the literal or descriptive meaning of a sign, while connotation refers to a deeper or conceptual meaning.

Qualitative research methods with the Semiotic model are used in this study to provide a series of activities or processes to describe and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, views, and thoughts both individually and in groups (Sukmadinata, 2005). The data collection procedures in this study include: First, observing the object of study through images or videos in the *Women From Rote Island* film. Second, documentation is carried out by identifying symbols, signs, audio and visuals (Sugiyono, 2015). Images, symbols, and messages are obtained through dialogue from scenes in the *Women From Rote Island* film. While the data analysis in this study, Milles and Hubberman (in Tohirin, 2012) explains that the type of descriptive research aims to create a systematic description of the facts and values contained in the *Women From Rote Island* film.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Moral Message**

The meaning of the word moral in terms of language comes from Latin, *mores*, which is the plural of the word *mos*, which means customs. In the General Dictionary of the Indonesian Language, it is said that morals are the determination of good and bad actions and behaviour (language, 2023). In addition, the word moral also has a meaning that is used to determine the boundaries of nature, temperament, will, opinion, or actions that can be said to be right, wrong, good, or bad (Jalasutra, 1990). The definition of morals is also found in *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. In this book, several definitions of morals are presented as follows: First, principles relating to right and wrong, good and bad; Second, the ability to understand the difference between right and wrong; Third, teachings or descriptions of good behaviour (Anmol, 2020).

There is also a view from Frederich Nietzsche, quoted by Renanda Yafi, who said that morals are behaviours that a human being has that come out of the values of life that are already owned (Nietzsche, 2023). Based on some of the definitions above, it can be understood that morals are a term used to provide limitations on human activities with values (provisions) of good or bad, right or wrong. If in everyday life it is said that the person is moral, then what is meant is that the person has good behaviour morals as follows: First, principles concerning right and wrong, good and bad; Second, the ability to understand the difference between right and wrong; Third, teachings or descriptions of good behaviour (Anmol, 2020). There is also a view from Frederich Nietzsche, quoted by Renanda Yafi, who said that morals are behaviours possessed by a human being that comes out of the values of life that are already possessed (Nietzsche, 2023). Based on some of the definitions above, it can be understood that morals are a term used to provide limitations on human activities with values (provisions) of good or bad,

right or wrong. If, in everyday life, it is said that the person is moral, then what is meant is that the person has good behaviour.

### **Definition of Film**

According to KBBI, the film is a thin film made of celluloid for negative image placement (which will be made into a portrait) or for positive image placement (which will be played in a cinema). So, it is clear that films are in the form of negative and positive images. This can be seen from the function of each image (language, 2023).

A film is a living image, also often called a movie. Films are often called "cinema". Films are produced by recording people and objects (including fantasy and fake figures) with a camera. Film is also defined as a series of moving images with or without sound, either recorded on film, videotape, video disk, or other media. At the same time, the language of film is the language of images (Arifuddin, *FILM AS A MEDIA FOR ISLAMIC PROPHECY*, 2017). The first films introduced to the American public were "The Life of an American Fireman" (1903) and "The Great Train Robbery" made by Edwin S Porter in 1903.

However, The Great Train Robbery, which only had a running time of eleven minutes, is considered the first feature film because it depicted the situation expressively and laid the foundation for good editing techniques (Pasudan, 2020). In general, films are designed to convey their stories through a series of images that move from one scene to another, from one emotion to another, from one event to another. The main factor in a film is the ability of the image to tell a story to the audience. The human need for entertainment through a moving image gradually began to attract the interest of the general public. Here began to lie the existence of an organization that would regulate or supply films. The entry of film as an industrial world started with the film organization. Film work began to be traded, or in other words, there began to be a value that had to be issued by the community, and there began to be regulations about everything related to the film.

### **Previous Research**

Rokhayah conducted previous similar research with the title of the thesis Moral Messages Forming a Sakinah Family. This research comes from the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, Walisongo State Islamic University Semarang. The formulation of the problem in the study is How moral messages form a sakinah family according to Barthes' semiotic meaning. The research method is Qualitative Descriptive. The results of the study indicate that the film Habibie Ainun contains

- moral messages to form a sakinah family in it,
- namely carrying out the obligations of husband and wife,
- building good communication with partners and the steadfastness of partners in carrying out Islamic morals.

Previous similar research was further studied by Jaquiline Melissa with the title of thesis Moral Messages in the Film To Kill A Mockingbird, from the Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Hasanuddin University Makassar. The formulation of the problem in the study is as follows: What is the meaning of the moral message in the film To Kill a Mockingbird? The research method is qualitative descriptive. The results of the study show that the movie To Kill a Mockingbird conveys a strong moral message to its audience by using history, moral instructions and character development in the film.

## Understanding the Film Women From Rote Island



Sumber: <https://www.idntimes.com>

The film *Women from Rote Island* is one of the feature-length film genres that tells the story of a single mother named Orpa (Linda Adoe) who has three children. Orpa is faced with the problem of discrimination that occurred to her, about women who are stigmatized as a second-class gender in society and the status of single parents that is attached to her. This discriminatory view has been built for centuries for women as a second-class gender in society. This societal view leads Orpa to receive unpleasant treatment, such as sexual violence. This is felt by Orpa and her daughter, Martha (Irma Rihi) (Abdurohman, n.d.). Martha mengalami trauma dan depresi setelah mengalami kekerasan seksual ketika bekerja di luar negeri. Film ini menggambarkan kehidupan wanita di Pulau Rote yang penuh kekerasan, karena perbedaan stigma dari laki-laki (Kompasina, n.d.).

Jeremias Nyangoen is the director and screenwriter of *Women from Rote Island*, which is the debut film that has been released. Not only Jeremias Nyangoen, this film also stars actors whose names are not yet familiar to the public or newcomers to the film world. Here is the list (Nanda, 2023):

Linda Adoe as Orpa  
Irma Rihi as Martha  
Sallum Ratu Ke as Bertha  
Van Jhoov as Damar

Jeremias Nyangoen and the cast of *Women From Rote Island* were nominated for the 2023 Indonesian Film Festival for the first time. This team won four categories, and all of the nominations were won. Here is the list:

Best Cinematography Director - Joseph Christoforus Fofid  
Best Original Screenplay Writer - Jeremias Nyangoen  
Best Director - Jeremias Nyangoen (Nanda, 2023).

### Discussion of the Film Women From Rote Island

In this section, three scenes are selected to describe the meaning of the representamen (icon, index, and symbol), object, interpretant, and moral message contained in each scene. These categories are described based on the visual (image) and verbal (dialogue) included in the scene. The selection of scenes is based on the background of the problem being raised.

### Scene 1: Orpa is telling a story



Picture 1, Orpa said that

"If a mother can conceive and give birth to a child, it means she is able to do anything for her child". Orpa made a statement that, as a mother, Orpa would protect and do anything for her child. This illustrates that Orpa is a single mother who is responsible for her three children and is willing to do anything for her child. So she dares and firmly says that she is able to do anything for her child.



Picture 2: Martha is asking for help from her mother.

Orpa is calming her child, and Orpa's role as a responsible mother is visible.

The representation of images 1 and 2 shows Orpa's struggle as a single parent who struggled amidst discrimination against women at that time.

Based on the author's analysis, the dialogue and images above present a mother as a single parent who is depicted wearing simple clothes who firmly says that as a mother, she will struggle and be responsible for raising her children and is willing to do anything for her children.

The author interprets this image as the condition of a single parent who is struggling to raise her children. From the scene above, both verbally and visually, it shows a moral message that we can take, namely:

1. The character Orpa describes a Rote woman who is responsible for raising her children
2. There is a need for empathy and appreciation for single parents who raise their children.
3. As a single parent, Orpa continues to provide love, protection and anything for her children.

The representation of images 1 and 2 shows Orpah's struggle as a single parent who struggled amidst discrimination against women at that time. When associated with the Marxist feminist view, the struggle of women as single parents is evidence of social and gender inequality that objectifies women in maintaining life. The limited access to funding and social gaps, such as the lack of public trust in single-parent women, are examples of other comparative cases in interpreting women's resilience in facing the injustice of life.

### Scene 2: Orpah hugs her daughter Martha



Picture 1 Orpah hugs her daughter Martha (while crying)

"This is a lesson for all our children and grandchildren that this incident has indeed happened and will not happen again."

Martha: sobbing in her mother's arms.

Picture 1: an older woman in her simple clothes (Orpah) tightly hugs a young woman (Martha) while sobbing with a village scenery in the background and a hut depicting simplicity as the background of this story's plot.



Picture 2, Martha, the daughter of Orpah, who experienced sexual violence, can be seen from Martha's condition, who is tied up and not wearing underwear. It depicts the condition and circumstances of Rote women who experience sexual violence. Based on the author's analysis, the picture above represents a mother wearing simple clothes who is crying and hugging her child because of the sexual violence experienced by her child. Violence against women often occurs in NTT, especially on the island of Rote NTT, which is the focus of this film. Women are the second class in social status in society, and this is what causes the rampant cases of violence against women, as in the movie watched.

The author interprets this picture as the condition of women as victims of sexual violence. From the scene above, both verbally and visually, it shows a moral message that we can take, namely:

1. The need for empathy and respect for women so that cases of violence no longer occur in East Nusa Tenggara.
2. The Orpa character teaches women to be resilient when facing difficulties, namely gender discrimination.
3. The audience is taught to have a correct understanding of gender equality for both men and women. The three moral messages above are in line with the meaning of values and the importance of building equality of perception in humanizing a woman. Women, as part of a vulnerable group, are often fragile in gender discrimination, and this is where the openness of mind and heart is very important.

### **Scene 3: image of women in Rote holding a demonstration**



Picture 1, voices from the Mothers group, Rise Mothers...

Investigate all cases of harassment against us women

Move forward, mothers...

Picture 1, a group of women holding pans, brooms, and bowls are seen holding a large-scale demonstration to demand justice for the violence that women have experienced.



Picture 2, a mother is seen about to take off her clothes in front of law enforcement officers because she is asking for justice for women. This illustrates that women in Rote firmly reject the cases of sexual violence experienced by women in Rote.

The picture above can also be aligned with the Marxist Feminist view that revolutionary struggles and movements are the spearheads for changing women's lives. The demonstration by the Rote mothers reflects the persistence of women in demanding rights and other basic things that have been lost from themselves as individuals. The social order has also changed because of the massive movement of these Rote mothers to get firm legal action against sexual violence against Rote women.

Based on the author's analysis, the picture above represents women on Rote Island, NTT, firmly rejecting violence against women. The demonstration above shows that women in Rote want to break the chain of violence that has occurred so far and, at the same time, ask for justice from state officials to uphold justice for women who are victims of violence (Ndeo et al. #).

The author interprets this picture as a condition where women actually do not want to be victims of violence, especially as victims of sexual violence. From the scene above, both verbally and visually, it shows a moral message that we can take, namely:

1. Rejection of violence against women.
2. The existence of justice for victims of violence against women, including victims of sexual violence.

### **Integration of Moral Messages in the Film Women From Rote Island into Christian Religious Education**

From the discussion and analysis of the moral messages in the film "Women From Rote Island", the author tries to integrate them into Christian religious education with an approach that considers the universal values contained in the story. The film "Women From Rote Island" conveys a profound moral message about the struggle against sexual violence and gender discrimination experienced by women on Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara, in the context of patriarchal traditions. The moral messages conveyed by this film are very important and appropriate to be included in Christian religious education. This film raises the themes of gender discrimination, courage, care, compassion, and the traditional values of the Rote community. Here are some steps to integrate the moral messages from this film into Christian religious education:

1. Learning the Scriptures using stories and teachings in the Bible that support the principles of equality and justice. For example, I am raising the stories of female figures in the Bible who show courage and moral strength (Tahalele et al. #).
2. Class discussion accompanied by a case study by raising issues in the film, such as sexual violence and gender discrimination, and writing a Christian response in guiding for dealing with these issues.
3. Thematic Analysis by examining themes such as justice, gender equality, and women's empowerment in the film and linking them to Christian values.
4. Reflection and prayer encourage students to reflect on the experiences of the characters in the film and link them to worship and personal reflection as Christians.
5. Social projects by organizing social activities or projects that involve students in advocacy for gender equality and the eradication of discrimination. Real action in this social project can encourage students to be involved in supporting gender equality and fighting discrimination as a real manifestation of their Christian faith. This integration not only enriches students' understanding of Christian teachings

but also helps develop empathy and deeper social awareness of the culture that exists in the midst of society. Thus, Christian Religious Education becomes relevant and

responsive to contemporary issues and cultures faced by society. To understand how the moral message of the film "Women From Rote Island" can be integrated into Christian religious education, it is important to identify each scene in the movie, the moral message displayed in the film, and then connect it to the values in Christian Religious Education.

The following is the integration of the moral message of the film "Women From Rote Island" for Christian Religious Education:

1. Resilience in the Face of Adversity. The scene in the movie Women on Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara, faces various challenges, such as poverty, limited access to education, and gender inequality. Nevertheless, they show resilience and a high fighting spirit in overcoming these obstacles. Relevant Christian Religious Education Values: James 1:2-4 states that the test

of faith produces perseverance. The strength of the women on Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara, reflects this teaching, where through trials, they strengthen their character and faith.

2. Courage and Independence. Scene in the film: The female character (Orpah) in this film may show courage to fight for their rights and make important decisions for their future. They have to face social and cultural pressures to achieve their goals. Relevant Christian Religious Education Values: Joshua 1:9 emphasizes the importance of courage and steadfastness, "Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." The courage and independence of the women on Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara, reflect this teaching. In the Christian context, courage can also be associated with James 1:2-4 which talks about perseverance in the face of trials. The brave and honest actions of the main character can be related to Christian values of truth and moral courage (Ephesians 6:14).

3. Caring and Compassion for Others. Scenes in the film: Solidarity and support between women on Rote Island East Nusa Tenggara in a community are the central themes in this film. Women in Rote are seen helping each other face challenges and showing deep concern and compassion. Relevant values in Christian Religious Education: Matthew 22:39 teaches about loving others as yourself. The actions of helping each other and the solidarity shown by the women on Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara, are a real implementation of this teaching. The moral message about social concern can also be associated with Jesus' teachings about acts of love as a manifestation of faith (James 2:14-17). Compassion can be manifested in forgiveness and reconciliation. The film can be linked to the Bible's teachings on the importance of forgiveness (Colossians 3:13) and reconciliation as part of the Christian mission (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

### **Conclusion and suggestions**

Based on the analysis that was done using Charles Sander's semiotic approach, many data points showed moral messages. The study includes three discussions in the form of representamen, objects, and interpretants. Based on the hypothesis proposed in this study, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, the film *Women From Rote Island* has a moral message that we can analyze more deeply. The moral message includes the importance of upholding the value of resilience in facing difficulties, as described by the character Orpa, who is a single parent raising children. Second, courage and independence in rejecting gender discrimination and violence that occurs in Rote, East Nusa Tenggara. Third, there is concern and compassion for women who are victims of violence, including sexual violence. This film, of course, will help Christian Religious Education by providing effective learning and integrating Christian values into education.

The suggestion a writer can give is that this film can be used as a reference material for education for the community to reject violence against women. This film can be educational material against the culture inherent in the NTT community, which puts women second in the status of society and culture. This film can be a reference for instilling values in Christian Religious Education for students in the world of education.

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