

## **Words Representation of Postfeminism in Indonesian Heroine Character : Case Study of Valentine Film**

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### **Abstract**

*The heroine is a character who has succeeded in embracing the public imagination in terms of self-image and became the ideal image of female, including in Indonesia. The character of Srimaya/ Valentine is a heroine character coming from local comic taken into Indonesia's movies. The image presented on Srimaya/ Valentine is the symptom of capitalism in the Indonesian's movies, the character is also one of the case studies in image reconstruction product or the representation of female using their image as a heroine. The discourse of female representation in the character of Srimaya/ Valentine does not only show about image idealized however it also represents the ideology of post-feminism as well as a politic of identity presented in the world of local films. The achievement of identity exceeds physical image from female because, in character, there are many symbols about feminists. This research was done to know the discourse of identity in view of post-feminism delivered in the film of Valentine (2017).*

**Keywords:** valentine, representation, post-feminism, heroine

## **Introduction**

The superhero film is actually not new in the Indonesian big-screen film industry. Quoted on the page [www.filmindonesia.or.id](http://www.filmindonesia.or.id), it is known that the first-ever film aired was *Sri Asih* in 1954 by RA Kosasih with directors Turino Djunaedy and Tan Sing Hwat. After that, there were also *Rama Superman Indonesia* (1974), *Gundala Putra Petir* (1981), *Darna Ajaib* (1982), and *Gadis Bionik* (1982). The presence of these films was actually acceptable to Indonesian film viewers at the time. However, the character sank when the film industry experienced a downturn in the 1980s to the 1990s. In 1998, the film *Saras 008* appeared as a hero film, but the film only aired as a television series and was not appointed to the big-screen. Gradually these characters began to be forgotten because it was eroded by the many Hollywood superhero films present in Indonesia. If we look at the early history of film with the female superhero character (heroine)<sup>1</sup>, *Sri Asih* character is a pioneer of the Indonesian heroine character. This proves that film producers in Indonesia since the 1950s have, in fact, provided ideas for being fair and equal, primarily related to the issue of gender equality.

Film consumers in Indonesia have long been aware that film is one of the essential mediums that build civilization, including in terms of gender equality. Indonesian people also realize that the worship of one particular race and the exaggeration of male characters in a movie show is a big problem. The stereotype of women also made the film world give birth to feminist films. In addition, the birth of feminist films is driven by the fact that films tend to construct the reality of women biased and become a conservative force supporting patriarchal ideology (Sutanto, 2017). Therefore, currently in Indonesia it has begun to reproduce films with the character of a female hero called heroine after almost 2 decades of local heroine characters do not appear on the big screen. Currently, the average heroine character in a film is often a minor character (sidekick) and is covered by male characters or main characters who are given more portions to appear. But as a kickback for the return of heroine characters in Indonesia, Valentine's titular character has emerged adapted from local comic stories of the same name. Before being appointed as Valentine's big-screen film circulated in the form of comic books created by Sarjono Sutrisno as a native female superhero character from Indonesia. Aswin MC Siregar refined the concept into a story, while Ian Waryanto and Warnia K. Sahadewa drew illustrations of the comic. Valentine's comics are published under the auspices of Skylar Comics and were premiered on June 25, 2014, until September 8, 2018, for 20 episodes.

Valentine movie is directed by Agus pistol and first aired in 2017 on Indonesian cinema, but because of a flop, this film then withdrew after 3 days of airing. In 2019 Valentine was re-released in the form of home video/DVD and given a new title called *Valentine: The Dark Avenger* and is marketed internationally with the improvement of CGI quality and changing the use of Indonesian into English. Even though it is not accessible, Valentine's movie needs to be studied because of its status as a place for the return of local heroine characters after 2 decades of the original Indonesian big-screen heroine film emptiness. The emergence of Valentine character can illustrate how filmmakers of the millennial era can represent heroine characters in the midst of the many Hollywood heroine characters that appear in the country. The story in Valentine takes place in Batavia City (an acronym from Jakarta), a beautiful city that is unsafe to inhabit. In Batavia City, crimes often occur, such as robbery, violence, and various other forms of criminality because of the existence of a crime organization led by a mysterious man nicknamed Shadow. The story centres on the character of Srimaya, a beautiful cafe waiter with the ability to meet qualified martial arts Bono and Henry who

work as film directors. Their meeting brought Srimaya into the figure of Valentine will lead her to a dangerous and action-filled adventure against Shadow. Finally, Srimaya was fully incarnated as Valentine, a hero of Batavia City, although at first Srimaya had done it only because she wanted to be an artist and an economic boost.



Figure 1  
Cover of Valentine Comics  
published by Skylar Comics  
in 2014



Figure 2  
Valentine Movie  
Poster produced by  
Skylar Picture in 2017



Figure 3  
Valentine Movie Poster:  
The Dark Avenger (English  
Version) produced by  
Skylar Picture in 2019

This article views Valentine in the frame of Cultural Studies because the stickiness of the issues attached to Srimaya / Valentine character can be interpreted as the representation of an ideal woman, for example in an appearance portrayed as a woman who has a perfect physique, beautiful face, ideal body, even a winning attitude. Broader representation actually refers to the description of social groups and institutions. The representation is usually associated with stereotypes, but it is not just about this. More importantly, the description is not only pleasing to the physical appearance visible from the outside, but also more important is the real meaning behind the outer appearance (Burton, 2007). As a pioneer or role model of heroine characters in Indonesia, Srimaya / Valentine is also a figure who represents the values of feminism in Indonesia because her presence as a heroine is a breath of fresh air for action movies in Indonesia which is still dominated by male heroes.

Fantasy characters, including Valentine, are the result of popular culture that is not free of value, with all the potentials contained in Valentine's characters present as studies for cultural studies researchers specifically feminists relating to women's studies and their implications for women's behaviour. The issue or discourse of women's representation in Valentine's character is certainly not just about the idealized image especially about body image which might be captured by consumers in plain view by consumers who are not critical. The problem is more about achieving an identity that exceeds the physical image of women because, in themselves, there are many representations such as class, race, sexuality, globality, and femininity. In essence, this research will try to understand critically based on complete and informed information. Thus it can analyze the media comprehensively and can see the formation of meaning contained in the heroine character. This research will individually examine the identity of postfeminism in the "Valentine". According to Chris Barker in Murtono, 2010,

examining the issue of identity is how we become someone, how we are produced as subjects and how we are identified with specific images (Barker, 2003). Some underlying assumptions made as the background of this research are: (1) Srimaya / Valentine's character is an ideal image of a globalized woman, namely an image production that exceeds a specific locality area. (2) The representation of women in Srimaya / Valentine character exceeds the physical image of women because, in themselves, there are many representations such as class, race, and femininity.

### **About Feminism**

Feminism today is an essential study for the community, especially women, a study on feminism often involve mass media, including movies. This has made the messages in feminism contained on movies become a particular discourse in the community, most likely would bring changes to the community or at least influenced by social conditions prevailing in the community. Therefore feminism messages in movies related to the role of the female characters that appear in the film. This situation makes the female characters in the film can be described in many specific roles and functions which show that women can be equal to men and even more dominant than men. Over time feminism also learns about how women should act and behave in society (Rachmah Ida, 2014). In scientific studies, feminism itself is understood as a movement aimed at determining, developing and defending the same political, economic and social rights for women. Feminism supports gender equality and assumes that humans and the environment are equally important (Sulastri, 2011).

### **About Post-Feminism**

Post-feminism produces a shift in feminism. In fact, not all women are in the second wave of feminism categorization. Post-feminism is a continuation of the second wave of feminism which is identical to the image of "new women". The image of "new women" meant is women who adopt masculinity and still have a feminine side such as love, tenderness, sharing, caring for each other (Tong, 2009). Post-feminism provides clues that the study of feminism is not limited to the suppression of patriarchy against women. Post-feminism with a new image of women seeks to create alternatives in the construction of patriarchal power. post-feminism responds to problems that arise from the second wave of feminism. Post-feminism is a critical movement to continue feminism before bringing resistance to patriarchal and imperialist discourse and other assumptions of uniformity. Post-feminism brings a 'difference' discourse on the experience and subjectivity issues that each woman has on the agenda of the problem that must be resolved. Post-feminism in the accessible realm says the focus of the problem is on equality of opportunity for each woman, meaning that the pluralistic basis is the primary concern. Post-feminism can be categorized in the sub-themes of competitive portrayals of women, depictions of women who are individualistic, as well as aggressive portrayals of women (Hendarto, 2017), in addition, *Freedom, gender equality* and compound representation becomes the initial foothold for post-feminism women (Sofyan, 2018) however in this article the discussion focuses on the problem of identity representation.

### **Method**

This study examines the representation of identity in Srimaya / Valentine characters in the film; therefore, a visual study of the object is needed. Although visual,

these signs are also social and psychological or are in an unconscious nature. Therefore, to analyze, the researcher used a semiotics approach. Semiotics is used to probe the sign operating in Valentine's figure so that it can find ways on how the logic of the sign works at the same time a desire behind it. The signs that are read in this film are scenes, dialogues, stories and character backgrounds. Semiotics is more directed towards Baudrillardian semiotics because it is in the area of postmodernism that touches the hyper-semiotic region, namely the hyper-marked world of hyper). Valentine is an artificial and imaginative figure. She actually exists in the imaginary / fantasy spaces with excessive properties such as hy-power and hy-sexualisation when viewed as the role of a woman. The semiotic approach is used not to extend the standard structure of a standard sign but rather an ideological operation of phenomena which is produced by markers such as those present in Valentine's character. This approach is suitable because Valentine is more than just an imaginary figure because it has a reference to reality (body) as a biological, physical reality that belongs to women. A semiotic approach is an intense approach used in Cultural Studies, especially in studying pop icon or popular culture, ranging from comics, television, fashion, games and films because it is beneficial in reviewing the mass cultural phenomena behind visual displays (Piliang, 2003).

## **Results And Discussion**

The activity of watching a film is a problematic activity, when watching a film actually indirectly we see a screen in which there are various representations. The variety of representations is from the people we see on the screen, in every character that appears on the film displays the character representation that they play as well as representations of themselves. The screen has now replaced the mirror function because when we look in the mirror, what we see is a representation of ourselves, as well as the image of ourselves that we want. Each mirrored activity raises expectations about what we want to see in the mirror. Naturally, when we look in the mirror, we want an image or representation as attractive as possible.

### **Women and Double Standards of Feminity**

In Angela McRobbie's article entitled Post Feminism and Popular Culture. Postfeminism is a cultural critique of feminism that was popularized by the mass media such as films and advertisements, bringing women to a double entanglement (McRobbie, 2004). Double turns that can be read on the film Valentine lies in the scene "Looking for a Valentine Cast" at minutes 11.53 - 13.55.

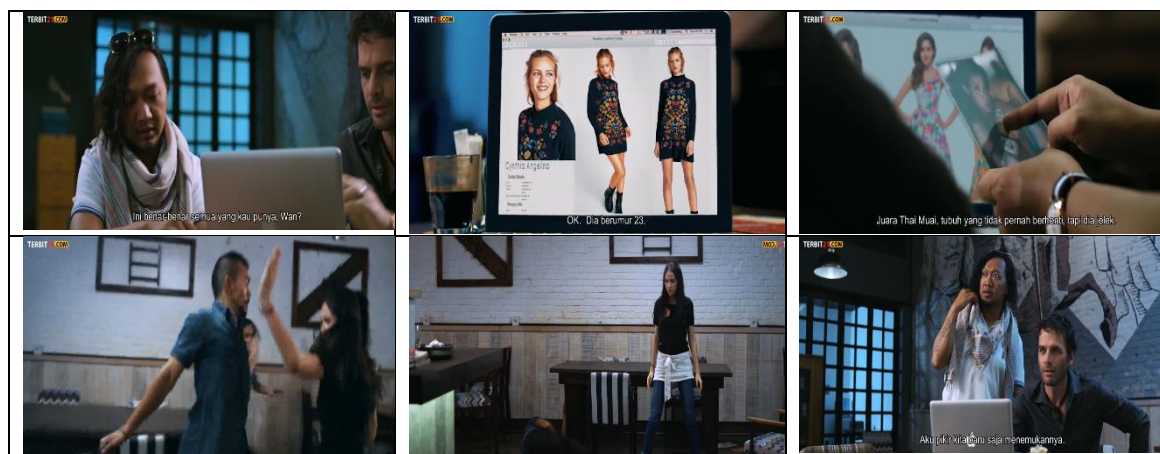


Table 1 Scene “Looking for Valentine Cast “ (minutes 11.53 – 13.55)

It is told in the scene, Bono consulted with his colleague Henry who works as a fashion designer. Bono asked Wawan for help in finding a woman who would portray the figure of Valentine. Wawan gave some references to the beautiful female models to Bono, but Bono did not approve them because none of the models offered by Wawan had martial arts abilities. After that, Wawan again gave a reference to several other women who this time were martial artists, but Bono refused again because none of the women had an ideal beauty. According to Bono, the cast of Valentine must have the criteria of physical beauty while mastering the martial arts. Unexpectedly in the restaurant, there was a sexual harassment incident committed by one of the consumers, that's when the figure of Srimaya appeared and fought with the sexual harasser and could trounce him. Bono who witnessed the battle was immediately struck by the figure of Srimaya because Bono had found the cast of Valentine he had been looking for in Srimaya.

Scene “Looking for Valentine Cast“ clearly shows a double standard that twists women, there are at least 2 standards that emerge as a condition for Bono to recruit a woman to portray the figure of Valentine, these standards were "physical beauty" and "physical ability". Physical beauty meant here included facial beauty, ideal body shape and bright skin colour while the physical ability in question was the ability of martial arts identical to strength, agility and speed of movement. The double entanglement in the representation of women in Valentine's character proved that the heroine character must possess not only the standards of physical beauty but also physical abilities. The depiction of women in the heroine figure is actually given the impression of being strict, assertive, masculine and heroic, but still shrink their original image which is beautiful and sensual because these 2 things are images that are indeed fantasized by men (Setyanto & Adiwibawa, 2018).

### Representation of Class and Race in the film “Valentine.”

In addition to the double twist on the image of femininity in the film also had several class representations, race and globality. The representation of the class was drawn from common stereotypes through the Srimaya character profession, which was told as a restaurant waiter. Srimaya's character was also said to want to "move to the upper class" to become an artist / movie star which is a stereotype of the upper class. That's why Srimaya finally wanted to be cast as Valentine in accordance with Bono's wishes. The story also told that Srimaya was willing to do a real fight scene to get many viewers.



There were many racial markers that can be found in the film *Valentine*, one of which was the artist / actor Srimaya, Estelle Linden. Estelle Linden is Born on October 19, 1995, in Yogyakarta with a birth name: Estelle Van Der Linden. Estelle Linden is a mixed-blooded artist or also referred to as crossbreed. His father Casper Linden is of Dutch descent while his mother is Waty Linden of Javanese blood.

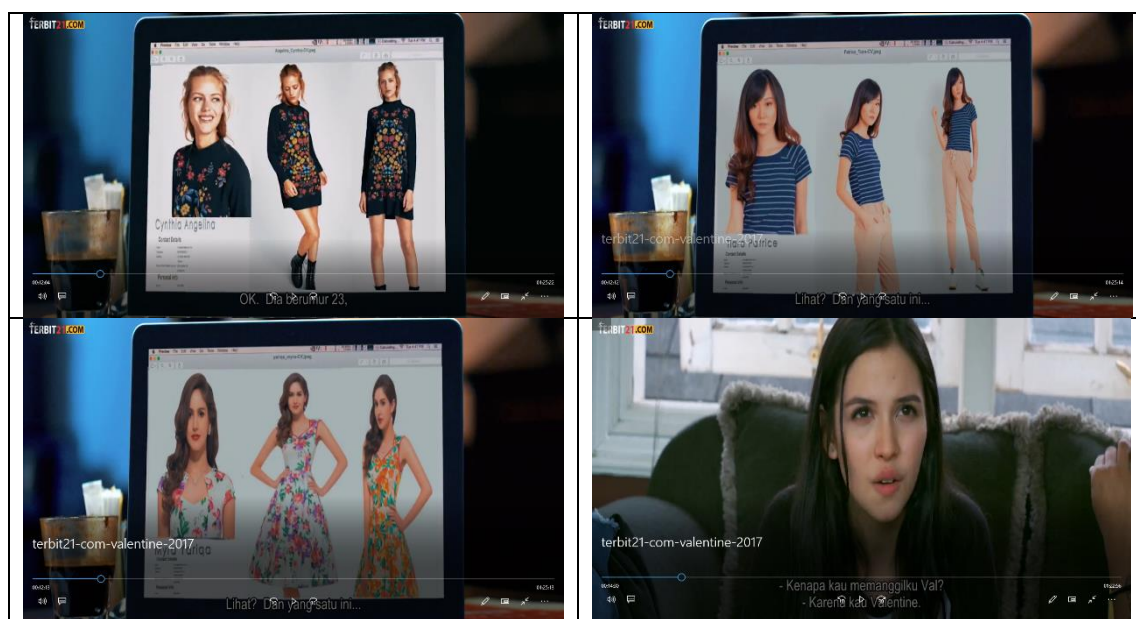


Table 2 Scene "Looking for Valentine Cast" "the scene when Wawan showed some prospective cast of Valentine (minutes 11.53 – 13.55)

Several scenes that also represented racial identities in the film, the scene was also found in the scene "looking for Valentine cast" in table 2. When Henry gave a prospective Valentine's reverence to Bono at least, Henry presented 3 photos of women on his computer plus Srimaya character. All the women depicted in the scene were white / bright women; this shows that the physical identity of white race women is still a stereotype of women with ideal beauty. This white representation is undoubtedly also a contradictory thing in terms of the stereotypes of the typical skin of Indonesian women who tend to be darker or brown. (Wirasari, 2017).

Western influence in the film *Valentine* also appeared from the heroine Valentine's character design and its villain. In addition, this film used the main cast of artists from America and a crossbreed, this film also used English for the release in 2019, naming the characters in this film are also many which used typical "western" names such as Valentine, The Shadow, Bono, Zola dan Hydro.



Table 3 Display of designs of heroine characters and villains in the film Valentine

Mass media, including films, are in fact a very dominant variable in reconstructing social reality. The film also plays an essential role in the process of externalization, subjectivities, and internalization of a reality that lives in society. The construction process made by the mass media is not something that happens suddenly, but through various stages, such as preparing construction materials, spreading construction, forming the construction of reality, and confirming the construction of the new reality. (Irawan, 2017). The world of cinema is now the arena of ideological battles for those with interest in the discourse. The media carries out political representation on an issue or event that is related to the discourse of a woman's body (Rochimah, 2018). In the context of construction identity and post-feminism, Valentine film constructs identity through at least 4 things, namely through a series of stories and advocacy, characterization, use of language and selection of artists (cast).

The film is used as a propaganda tool in order to influence the attitudes and social and political behaviour of the community (Irwanto, 2018). In the context of Srimaya / Valentine's character, identity propaganda is found that leads to "western identity". The representation of western identity can be seen from the many elements in the film that are strongly influenced by the heroine stereotype of the west. In fact, to become a film serving a globalized film does not have to appear to be westernized because something "global" is not the same as "western". As a form of the rise of heroin films in Indonesia and even labelled as a superhero film native to Indonesia, Valentine as a film apparently has not really raised the identity and local wisdom in Indonesia. That is because the commercialization of culture in the world of film enriches the phenomenon of mass culture always rests on the tastes of the masses by putting the taste of "Americanism" as a benchmark (Murtono, 2010).

## Conclusion

The female body is a form of the definition of various interests, for example, a female artist in a film basically does not define the model itself, but instead defines the situation, defines the interests of film consumers, producers and other parties who are behind the formation of a film (Wirasari, 2017). The context of femininity and female sexuality in films, women's bodies are constructed to suit market tastes, in which case the market is the power that determines whether forms of sexuality or femininity (including beauty, body shape, hair type, etc.) are accepted or not. (Wolf, 2005). In the context of identity, Srimaya / Valentine character is one proof of the post-feminism representation in a film. As in Brooks' view that the stereotype of 'new women,' used by the film is white women, dressed in men wearable identified as heterosexual, competitive, aggressive, materialistic, individualistic, and reversing their role towards



men (Brooks, 2011). The identity of "new women" in Srimaya / Valentine character is a representation of women who have moved forward towards androgen society, namely women who are a mixture of definite feminine and masculine traits. It is attached to the figure of Srimaya / Valentine which is actually a combination of two paradoxical elements between feminine and masculine, on the one hand, they are tough, fighting, strong and decisive figures who represent masculine traits, but also physically (sexually) and sympathetic beauty representing feminine nature. It can be concluded that the representation of Srimaya / Valentine character who is a heroine in the film raises its own problems for women because for them there is not much choice for them to follow the stereotypical tendencies raised through the media. These problems get more significant when the representation of women is imaged by a fantasy exceeding limits and only existed in a hyper-reality world such as the character of the heroine. Double standard offered in post-feminism, of course, become something difficult to achieve in the context of the reality faced by women.

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