

The Representation of Racism in the Film *Pengepungan di Bukit Duri* (A Semiotic Analysis Based on Roland Barthes' Model)

Dani Fitrah Kurniawan¹⁾, Nursapia Harahap²⁾

^{1,2)} State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author

Email: dani0603223109@uinsu.ac.id, nursapiaharahap@uinsu.ac.id

Abstract

*This study is motivated by the persistence of racism in society, which does not always manifest explicitly but is reproduced through communication practices and media representations. The research problem addressed in this study is how racist communication is represented in the film *Pengepungan di Bukit Duri*. This study aims to analyze the forms of racist communication in the film as a system of meaning operating through verbal and visual signs. The method employed is a qualitative approach using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, which examines meaning at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. The data consist of scenes containing racist communication, collected through observation and analyzed purposively. The results show that racist communication is represented through labeling, stereotypes, microaggressions, hate speech, as well as dehumanization and collective violence against the Chinese ethnic group. Within the framework of the race discrimination system, racism operates at the interactional, social, and structural levels, which are interconnected. The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of racism as a communication practice based on a system of signs that is linked to social structures. Thus, the film not only represents conflict but also reveals how racism is normalized through communication. This study contributes to communication studies by positioning racism as a sign-based communicative system linked to broader social structures*

Keywords: Racism, Racist Communication, Semiotics, Roland Barthes, Representation, Film

INTRODUCTION

Racism is a social phenomenon that does not only manifest in overt discriminatory actions but is also produced and reproduced through communication practices and cultural representations. In communication studies, racism is understood as a process of meaning-making that operates through language, symbols, and narratives, constructing distinctions between “us” and “them.” Contemporary racism does not always appear explicitly; rather, it often emerges in more subtle forms such as microaggressions, stereotypes, and normalized expressions embedded in everyday interactions (Williams, 2021). This indicates that racism operates subtly through communication practices that may appear ordinary yet carry significant meaning. Communication practices in society demonstrate that the formation of social identity is inseparable from interaction processes shaped by cultural backgrounds and power relations (Harahap, 2020). Therefore, racism should be understood as a communicative practice that constructs social reality, rather than merely as isolated discriminatory events. Modern racism is not only expressed explicitly but is also internalized within social practices that sustain the dominance of particular groups (Danewid, 2022).

The development of mass media in modern society indicates that media function as agents of social change, not only reflecting reality but also shaping how society perceives social issues (Peranginangin et al., 2025). Within communication studies, media serve not merely as channels of information but also as spaces for meaning construction that influence social reality and public perceptions of certain groups (Uyun, 2025). Film, as a medium of representation, frequently portrays racism through character construction and conflict that reflect power relations in society (Andini, 2025). As a form of mass communication, film plays a strategic role in shaping and disseminating social meanings. Representation in film is not a neutral reflection of reality but a constructed process influenced by social, cultural, and ideological contexts (Hall, 1997). Through

narrative, dialogue, visuals, and symbols, film can shape audience perceptions of particular social groups. In the context of racism, film can function as a medium that reproduces stereotypes, prejudice, and power relations through complex systems of signs. Recent studies indicate that media representation contributes to the dissemination and normalization of hate speech and racial bias in society (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021). Thus, film becomes a crucial space for examining how racist communication is constructed and interpreted.

The film *Pengepungan di Bukit Duri*, directed by Joko Anwar and produced by Come and See Pictures, was released in 2025. The film presents a dystopian social depiction characterized by identity-based conflicts within the Indonesian context. The narrative centers on a riot situation that reflects escalating tensions between groups, where racial identity becomes a primary marker in social interactions. The main character, Edwin, along with Silvi and Panca, encounters various forms of racist treatment manifested in conversations, acts of violence, and symbolic expressions in public spaces. These representations indicate that racism in the film is not merely portrayed as conflict but as a communicative practice that is continuously reproduced across different situations. Representation in film is inherently constructed through narratives and characters that reflect particular social dynamics and ideologies (Adiprasetyo, 2023).

The 1998 riots in Indonesia illustrate how anti-Chinese sentiment was reproduced through collective violence rooted in historical social constructions (Himawan et al., 2022). In various scenes, individuals of Chinese ethnicity are marked, labeled, and targeted through both verbal and visual communication. These communicative practices appear in forms such as labeling, insults, intimidation, as well as symbolic and physical violence. The ethnic identity of Chinese Indonesians has been shaped through complex processes of social adaptation in response to cultural pressures and discrimination (Harahap, 2020). Racism in this film occurs not only in interpersonal interactions but also within broader social spaces such as public environments and mass crowds. This demonstrates that racist communication is not sporadic but repetitive and structured across different contexts. Therefore, the film serves as a relevant object for examining racism as a systemic communicative practice.

Previous studies have examined racism in media; however, most have focused on its social impact or general representation. Such approaches tend to overlook how racism operates through systems of signs and communicative practices that construct meaning. Furthermore, semiotic studies often remain limited to connotative analysis without linking it to broader social systems. In fact, contemporary racism operates systemically through interconnected interactions, symbols, and social structures (Banaji et al., 2021). This limitation reveals a research gap in understanding racism as a structured and layered communicative practice. Semiotic analyses of visual media indicate that racism is represented through symbols and narratives that reinforce social stereotypes (Afifa Rahman et al., 2025).

In this study, racism is conceptualized as a race discrimination system that operates across multiple social levels, namely interactional, institutional, and structural (Reskin, 2012). This perspective emphasizes that racism is not merely an individual phenomenon but a system continuously reproduced through communication practices. Contemporary research shows that racism is reinforced through hate speech, media representation, and power relations that shape public perception (Devakumar et al., 2022; Tanasaldy, 2022). Thus, communication becomes a central medium in sustaining and disseminating racism in society. This approach enables the study to interpret racism not merely as an act but as a complex social process.

To identify forms of racist communication in the film, this study operationalizes racism into several communicative forms, including labeling, stereotyping, insults, intimidation, and symbolic as well as verbal violence. These categories function as analytical tools to examine how racism is manifested in film scenes. Through this approach, the analysis focuses on how communicative signs construct racist meanings within the film text. This is essential because racism does not always appear explicitly but is often embedded in seemingly ordinary

communication practices. Therefore, an analytical method capable of uncovering underlying meanings is required.

The analysis in this study employs Roland Barthes' semiotics, which conceptualizes meaning as a construction of signs operating at three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1972). Denotation refers to the literal meaning presented in the text, while connotation relates to meanings shaped by social and cultural contexts. At a deeper level, myth functions as an ideological mechanism that naturalizes meaning, making it appear self-evident. In this study, analysis is conducted by identifying signs within scenes, describing their literal meanings, interpreting their implied meanings, and revealing the underlying ideology. Thus, Barthes' method enables not only descriptive but also critical readings of racist representations in film.

The application of Barthes' semiotics in this study is integrated with the race discrimination system framework to understand how racist meanings are connected to broader social systems. Meanings identified at the connotative and mythological levels are interpreted as part of communicative practices that reproduce racial power relations. This approach allows the study to bridge representation in film with wider social structures. This is important to demonstrate that racism in media is not merely a narrative element but part of a system embedded in social life. Therefore, the analysis is conducted integratively between signification and social context.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze how racist communication is represented in the film *Pengepungan di Bukit Duri* using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. This study is expected to contribute to communication studies, particularly in understanding racism as a communicative practice operating through systems of signs. Furthermore, it aims to enrich media representation studies by linking meaning with social structure. Thus, this research positions racism not as an outcome but as a communicative process that shapes and sustains social relations in society. The novelty of this study lies in positioning racism as a sign-based communicative practice connected to social structures through the integration of Barthes' semiotics and the concept of race discrimination system.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a semiotic analysis method to examine the representation of racist communication in the film *Pengepungan di Bukit Duri*. A qualitative approach is adopted as the study focuses on the interpretation of signs and the construction of meaning within media texts, rather than on quantitative measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2021). In communication studies, this approach is particularly relevant for understanding how social meanings are produced and represented through symbols, language, and visual elements (Banaji et al., 2021). Semiotic analysis enables the researcher to identify both explicit and implicit meanings embedded in media texts (Chandler, 2022). Therefore, this method is utilized to reveal how racist communication is constructed and represented in the film as a system of signs.

The analytical framework applied in this study is Roland Barthes' semiotics, which conceptualizes meaning at three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal meaning presented in film scenes, while connotation relates to implied meanings shaped by social and cultural contexts (Chandler, 2022). At a deeper level, myth functions as an ideological mechanism that naturalizes meaning, making it appear as common sense within contemporary society (Moriarty et al., 2022). The semiotic approach in communication studies allows researchers to uncover symbolic meanings in visual media, thereby explaining how social reality is implicitly represented through signs and symbols (Hasibuan & Harahap, 2025).

In its operationalization, this study adopts the concept of racism as a race discrimination system, understood as a system operating simultaneously across social interaction, institutions,

and societal structures (Reskin, 2012). To ensure contemporary relevance, the study also draws on recent scholarship indicating that racism is reproduced through everyday communication practices such as microaggressions, stereotypes, and hate speech (Williams, 2021). Moreover, racism is reinforced through symbolic representations in media that shape public perceptions of particular groups (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021). Other studies suggest that systemic racism operates in layered forms, ranging from individual interactions to broader social structures (Banaji et al., 2021). Accordingly, the focus of this study is directed toward forms of racist communication appearing in the film as part of a broader social system.

The data in this study consist of selected scenes in the film that contain indications of racist communication. Data were collected through observation by repeatedly viewing the film to identify signs relevant to the research focus (Flick, 2022). This technique enables an in-depth understanding of both visual and narrative contexts. The selected scenes were then classified based on forms of racist communication, including labeling, stereotyping, insults, intimidation, and symbolic violence. Data selection was conducted purposively, based on the relevance of the scenes to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2020). This approach ensures that the analyzed data are representative of the phenomenon under investigation.

Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2020). In the reduction stage, collected scenes were selected and focused on those containing racist communication. The data were then presented in the form of scene descriptions accompanied by relevant dialogue and visual elements. The analysis was subsequently carried out using Barthes' framework to identify denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings in each scene. The results of this analysis were then interpreted using the framework of racism as a social system to examine the relationship between signification and social structure (Banaji et al., 2021). This process was conducted iteratively to ensure consistency in interpretation.

The validity of the data in this study was ensured through theoretical triangulation by comparing analytical findings with various contemporary literature sources (Flick, 2022). The use of recent theoretical frameworks strengthens the interpretation of meanings within the current social context (Devakumar et al., 2022). Additionally, the analysis was conducted systematically and repeatedly to minimize subjective bias in interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2021). In semiotic studies, validity is not measured through generalization but through the depth and consistency of interpretation (Chandler, 2022). Therefore, this study emphasizes the interconnection between data, theory, and social context in producing credible findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Semiotic Analysis Based on Roland Barthes' Theory



Figure 1. Riot Occurring on the Street (04:25 – 04:30)

The scene depicts Edwin, Silvi, and Panca inside a public bus while a riot unfolds outside. A group of people approaches the bus and looks inside through the windows. After noticing

Edwin and Silvi, one member of the crowd shouts, “Hey, there’s a Chinese person! There’s a Chinese person!”, which draws the attention of others. The crowd then begins to force the bus to stop and attempts to pull Silvi out of the vehicle. The situation becomes increasingly tense as the crowd poses a direct threat to the passengers inside the bus.

Denotation

This scene shows a group of people outside the bus looking inside and shouting after identifying someone. The crowd gathers around the bus and attempts to stop the vehicle. One passenger inside becomes the focus of the crowd’s attention. An attempt is made to pull the passenger out of the bus. The scene takes place in a riot situation characterized by chaos and lack of control.

Connotation

The shout “there’s a Chinese person” indicates that racial identification becomes the primary basis for targeting individuals in the context of the riot. This statement transforms the individual into an identifiable and marked object within the crowd. It reflects the practice of “othering,” where an individual is separated from the social group and positioned as different. The immediate aggressive reaction of the crowd demonstrates the presence of collective prejudice toward the targeted group. The scene illustrates how racial identity can trigger acts of violence in unstable social contexts.

Myth

This scene represents the notion that certain groups can become collective targets in situations of social conflict. There is an underlying assumption that the presence of such groups is perceived as a threat or as fundamentally different from the majority. This representation reflects a social construction that associates racial identity with the position of the “other” in society. Furthermore, the scene demonstrates how violence against such groups can be carried out collectively. Thus, a pattern of meaning emerges that normalizes the collective targeting of individuals based on racial identity.



Figure 2. Assault (05:47 – 06:20)

The scene depicts Edwin and his sister, Silvi, in a narrow alley during a riot. One of the perpetrators grabs Silvi by the collar and pins her against the wall, while Edwin is beaten by other assailants. Panca arrives to intervene and assist them. However, the perpetrators then threaten Panca and question his identity before continuing their acts of violence. Despite Panca’s attempt to respond, he is treated aggressively and forced to withdraw from the situation. The scene unfolds in a tense and threatening atmosphere.

Denotation

This scene shows acts of physical violence carried out by a group of perpetrators against several individuals in an alley. One perpetrator grabs and restrains a victim against the wall, while another victim is subjected to physical assault. During the incident, the perpetrators question the racial identity of one of the characters. After receiving a response, they continue their aggressive behavior and further question the individual’s involvement. The scene takes place in a conflict situation without any external intervention.

Connotation

The question of whether someone is “Chinese” indicates that racial identity serves as the primary basis for determining how individuals are treated. This statement implies an assumption that individuals belonging to a certain group are legitimate targets of violence. The subsequent questioning regarding why the individual defends the victim reflects the existence of social boundaries that separate “us” from “them.” This illustrates social exclusion directed toward a particular group in a conflict situation. Furthermore, the scene demonstrates how racial identity is used to justify aggressive actions against individuals.

Myth

This scene represents the notion that certain racial groups can be considered legitimate targets in situations of social conflict. There is an underlying belief that defending such groups is perceived as abnormal or as violating the norms of the dominant group. This representation reflects a social construction that positions certain groups as the “other,” placing them outside the sphere of social protection. Moreover, the scene illustrates how violence against such groups can be accepted under particular circumstances. Thus, a pattern of meaning emerges that connects racial identity with the legitimization of violence within a social context.



Figure 3. Racist Poster Inside a Train Carriage (08:45)

The scene depicts the interior of a train carriage with several posters attached to the walls. One of the posters reads, “CINA BABI NGEPET PERAMPAS HARTA” (a derogatory phrase targeting Chinese individuals). The text is clearly visible among other posters on the wall. Other passengers are present in the carriage but do not show any reaction to the presence of the poster. The situation inside the carriage appears normal and undisturbed.

Denotation

This scene shows the interior of a train carriage with multiple posters displayed on the walls. One of the posters contains harsh and offensive language directed at a particular group. The wording used in the poster is insulting and degrading. Other passengers are present in the carriage but do not respond to the poster. There is no direct interaction related to the poster within the scene.

Connotation

The text on the poster reflects a form of verbal abuse directed at a specific group through the use of derogatory language. The terms employed convey negative stereotypes that associate the targeted group with undesirable characteristics. The use of words such as “pig” and “plunderer” indicates forms of dehumanization and criminalization of the group in question. Furthermore, the presence of such a poster in a public space like a train suggests that this expression can be widely disseminated and visible to a broad audience. The passive response from surrounding individuals indicates a level of acceptance or normalization of such communication.

Myth

This scene represents the notion that certain groups can be collectively labeled with negative attributes. There is an underlying assumption that the group possesses inherent characteristics perceived as harmful or threatening to society. This representation reflects a social

construction that links racial identity with negative stigma. Moreover, the scene illustrates how such stigma can be disseminated and accepted within public spaces without resistance. Thus, a pattern of meaning emerges that positions certain groups as inherently suspicious and socially undesirable within everyday life.



Figure 4. Racist Graffiti on a Corridor Wall (09:15)

The scene depicts a corridor wall covered with various posters and graffiti. Among these, there is a graffiti reading “BALIK KE CINA BANGSAT” (a derogatory phrase meaning “Go back to China, bastard”), accompanied by an image of a pig marked with red lines. The writing is clearly visible and occupies a prominent position on the wall. There is no direct interaction between characters in this scene. The visual is presented as part of the environmental setting within the context of the riot.

Denotation

This scene shows a wall filled with posters and graffiti. One of the graffiti contains harsh language instructing a particular group to return to their place of origin. The graffiti is accompanied by an image of an animal that has been crossed out. There is no direct human activity in this scene. The visual appears as part of the background environment.

Connotation

The graffiti reflects an expression of hostility toward a particular group associated with racial identity. The phrase conveys elements of expulsion and rejection of the group’s presence within the social space. The use of offensive language intensifies the negative emotional tone directed at the group. Meanwhile, the crossed-out pig image signifies symbolic humiliation toward the targeted identity. Overall, the graffiti represents practices of social exclusion and dehumanization conveyed through visual symbols.

Myth

This scene represents the notion that certain groups are perceived as outsiders who do not belong within a particular social space. There is an underlying assumption that their presence can be collectively rejected or expelled. This representation reflects a social construction that differentiates between groups considered as “belonging” to a space and those regarded as “foreign.” Furthermore, the scene illustrates how hostility toward certain groups can be openly expressed in public spaces. Thus, a pattern of meaning emerges in which racial identity serves as a basis for legitimizing social exclusion.



Figure 5. Racism in the Classroom (14:11 – 14:20)

The scene depicts Edwin entering the classroom for the first time and introducing himself to the students. The classroom atmosphere appears orderly, with interactions occurring in a formal context between teacher and students. Following the introduction, one student responds to Edwin's stated identity. The remark is delivered in front of the entire class, while other students appear to listen casually without showing any objection. The classroom situation continues without any overt conflict.

Student: "Why don't you use your real name? Like Tan Jung Ho or something."

Denotation

This scene shows a student questioning the name used by Edwin. The student mentions another name as an example of what is considered a "real name." The interaction occurs through verbal communication within the classroom setting. Other students present do not provide any significant response to the statement. There are no physical actions or conflicts in this scene.

Connotation

The question regarding a "real name" indicates an assumption that an individual's identity should conform to certain predefined categories. The mention of a name such as "Tan Jung Ho" suggests an association with a particular ethnic identity. This reflects a practice of labeling individuals based on racial perception. Furthermore, the casual response from other students indicates that such a statement is considered normal within social interaction. This situation suggests an implicit acceptance of this form of communication.

Myth

This scene represents the notion that individual identity can be recognized and determined through specific attributes such as names. There is an assumption that individuals from certain groups possess identifiable characteristics that can be generalized. This representation reflects a collective understanding of identity differentiation between social groups. Moreover, the scene illustrates how such distinctions are embedded in everyday interactions without being questioned. Thus, a pattern of meaning emerges that positions identity as something socially categorized and normalized.



Figure 6. Mob Assault (17:49 – 19:12)

The scene depicts a group of students led by Jefri carrying out a mob assault against a Chinese ethnic student on the street after school. The victim falls to the ground and is restrained by several perpetrators, while others repeatedly strike his body and face. During the assault, the perpetrators repeatedly utter derogatory remarks toward the victim. At the end of the scene, Jefri smears the victim's blood on his own face while making a particular statement. The situation unfolds in an atmosphere of intense violence without any attempt at intervention from others.

Denotation

This scene shows an act of physical violence in the form of a group assault against a student in an open space. The victim is restrained and beaten by multiple perpetrators simultaneously. During the incident, the perpetrators verbally address the victim with specific statements. At the end of the scene, one of the perpetrators takes the victim's blood and smears it on his own face. The scene takes place in an aggressive situation without any external intervention.

Connotation

The use of the term “pig” in the context of violence reflects a form of insult that degrades the victim’s dignity. The term associates the victim with an animal, indicating a process of dehumanization based on identity. The act of smearing blood while referring to it as “pig’s blood” reinforces the symbolic meaning of the violence, suggesting that the victim is no longer perceived as human. Furthermore, the collective nature of the violence indicates a form of social legitimization of such actions. This scene illustrates how racial identity is used as a basis to demean and treat individuals in an inhumane manner.

Myth

This scene represents the notion that certain groups can be positioned as entities inferior to humans. There is an underlying assumption that such groups can be treated violently without significant moral consequences. This representation reflects a social construction that associates racial identity with an inferior position within the social hierarchy. Moreover, the scene illustrates how violence against such groups can be perceived as acceptable under certain conditions. Thus, a pattern of meaning emerges that normalizes the dehumanization of particular groups within a social context.



Figure 7. Conversation in the Library (34:56 – 35:00)

The scene takes place in the school library, where Edwin is speaking with Diana, a guidance and counseling staff member. Diana questions Edwin’s reason for choosing to teach at the school. Edwin responds by linking his decision to his identity. The conversation continues as Diana probes for other possible reasons behind his choice. The situation unfolds in a calm atmosphere without any physical conflict.

Diana: “I’m also wondering why you would choose to teach here.”

Edwin: “Because I’m Chinese?”

Diana: “Is there any other reason you’re hiding here?”

Denotation

This scene shows a conversation between two characters in a library setting. One character questions the reason why the other works at the institution. The respondent links his answer to his personal identity. The interaction occurs through verbal communication without any physical action. There is no overt conflict in the scene.

Connotation

Edwin’s response, which connects his decision to his racial identity, reflects an awareness of his social position within a particular context. The exchange suggests that racial identity is a relevant factor shaping individual experiences. Furthermore, the use of the term “hiding” implies that Edwin’s presence in the school may be interpreted as a form of self-protection. This reflects the existence of social pressure experienced by individuals based on their racial identity. The scene demonstrates how racism does not only manifest in overt actions but also influences how individuals perceive and respond to social situations.

Myth

This scene represents the notion that individuals from certain groups occupy a vulnerable position within the social structure. There is an underlying assumption that they must adapt or

seek safe spaces in response to particular social conditions. This representation reflects a social construction that positions certain groups as needing to adjust to environmental pressures. Moreover, the scene illustrates how racial identity can indirectly influence individual life choices. Thus, a pattern of meaning emerges that links racial identity to the necessity of survival within unequal social conditions.

Discussion

Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis of the Representation of Racism in the Film *Pengepungan di Bukit Duri*

Based on the analysis of the selected scenes, racist communication in the film does not appear as isolated incidents but rather as a layered system of meaning. The representation of racism in *Pengepungan di Bukit Duri* demonstrates that racism operates not as a singular event, but as a complex communicative system. Within the framework of the race discrimination system, Reskin (2012) conceptualizes racial discrimination as a process reproduced through social interaction, institutions, and societal structures. The findings of this study support this framework, as racist signs in the film extend beyond individual insults into collective, symbolic, and institutional practices. Contemporary support for this multilevel perspective is also provided by Banaji, Fiske, and Massey (2021), who emphasize that systemic racism operates from interpersonal interactions to broader social levels, with negative stereotypes embedded in everyday perception. Thus, the film represents racism as a system sustained through language, imagery, and interrelated power relations.

Communication practices in society indicate that meaning-making is influenced not only by message content but also by social context, cultural background, and interpersonal relations, all of which contribute to the formation of stereotypes toward particular groups (Siregar & Sazali, 2022). At the individual level, scenes such as the comment about a “real name” and Edwin’s conversation with Diana demonstrate that racist communication does not always manifest as overt hostility. Instead, such expressions can be understood as racial microaggressions—everyday remarks that may appear trivial but nonetheless mark individuals as “different” and not fully belonging to the dominant social space. Williams (2021) argues that racial microaggressions are closely connected to systemic racism, particularly through practices such as denigrating, pigeonholing, and excluding individuals. In the film, questions about Edwin’s name and assumptions that he is “hiding” shift Chinese identity from a personal attribute into a problematic social marker. At this point, Barthes’ connotative level reveals that racism operates through the normalization of questions, assumptions, and insinuations, rather than solely through explicit hatred.

Scenes of violence in the alley and on the street illustrate an escalation from microaggressions to interpersonal and collective violence. Expressions such as “Are you Chinese too?” or insults like “pig” function not merely as verbal abuse but as mechanisms of categorization that determine who becomes a legitimate target of violence. In Barthes’ framework, such verbal signs at the denotative level appear as insults, but at the connotative level they construct associations of inferiority, contamination, and threat. When these meanings are repeated within violent contexts, they form a myth that the victims deserve brutal treatment due to their racial identity. Banaji et al. (2021) highlight that modern racial bias often involves non-human associations, linking certain racial groups to animalistic or inferior status, thereby reinforcing systemic dehumanization. Therefore, the violent scenes in the film do not merely depict conflict but reveal how racial identity becomes the basis for legitimizing violence against minority bodies.

At the socio-symbolic level, graffiti such as “BALIK KE CINA BANGSAT” and posters stating “CINA BABI NGEPET PERAMPAS HARTA” demonstrate that racism in the film also operates through visual texts in public spaces. This form is significant as it shifts racism from interpersonal communication to socially distributed messages that can be seen, read, and

internalized collectively. Matamoros-Fernández and Farkas (2021) argue that hate speech and racism in media cannot be understood as merely individual expressions, but as phenomena shaped by user practices, media logic, and broader social contexts. In the film, graffiti and posters function as symbolic infrastructures that disseminate stigma, reinforce stereotypes, and create a social environment permissive of anti-Chinese hostility. Thus, the semiotic reading of these visual signs demonstrates that the film not only portrays hatred but also illustrates how such hatred is maintained and normalized in public space.

The representation of dehumanization reaches its most extreme form when Chinese ethnic victims are no longer addressed as human beings but are reduced to “pigs,” with their blood used as part of symbolic humiliation. At this level, the myth constructed by the film no longer merely positions Chinese identity as “different,” but as existing outside the boundaries of humanity deserving protection. Studies on visual dehumanization suggest that constructions of otherness operate by intensifying the distinction between “us” and “them,” rendering the out-group as objects that may be excluded, insulted, or attacked (Martikainen & Sakki, 2021). In this analysis, visual violence, derogatory language, and perpetrators’ gestures collectively produce an ideological meaning in which minorities are no longer recognized as full social subjects but as targets of hostility. This reinforces the finding that symbolic racism and physical violence in the film are not separate phenomena but mutually reinforcing processes within the logic of dehumanization.

The Indonesian context further amplifies the significance of this representation. Tanasaldy (2022) argues that anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia has not disappeared in the post-Reform era but has transformed from formal institutional expressions into more diffuse and subtle grassroots forms. This aligns with the film’s portrayal, as *Pengepungan di Bukit Duri* does not depict racism solely as state policy but as everyday practices, public discourse, mass riots, and social relations that position Chinese ethnicity as the “other.” Similarly, Nurisman (2023) highlights that xenophobia and anti-Chinese sentiment persist within Indonesian social consciousness, indicating that such stigma cannot be understood merely as a historical residue. Thus, the film operates not only as dystopian fiction but as a cultural text that reactivates collective memory of prejudice, resentment, and fear associated with Chinese bodies.

Overall, the analyzed scenes demonstrate that the film represents racist communication as a layered process: beginning with microaggressions and labeling, progressing to hate speech and symbolic representation in public space, and culminating in dehumanization and collective violence. Within Barthes’ framework, this chain of signs constructs a myth that positions Chinese ethnicity as an external, problematic group that can, under certain conditions, become a legitimate target. In Reskin’s framework, this myth reveals that racial discrimination in the film follows a systemic logic: everyday interactions produce stigma, social symbols disseminate it, and conflict structures legitimize violence. Therefore, the primary contribution of the film lies not merely in portraying racism, but in revealing how racist communication is reproduced, normalized, and legitimized through audiovisual signs. At this point, film as a popular medium plays a crucial role in shaping public common sense regarding race, ownership of social space, and the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within society.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that racist communication in the film *Pengepungan di Bukit Duri* is represented through various forms of signs, both verbal and visual, which can be identified through Roland Barthes’ semiotic analysis at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, racist communication appears through dialogue, actions, and symbols that directly indicate the labeling of particular ethnic groups. At the connotative level,

these meanings develop into more complex forms, including stereotypes, prejudice, and practices of social exclusion. At the mythological level, racism is normalized as a taken-for-granted aspect of social relations, particularly toward the Chinese ethnic group.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that racist communication does not function as an isolated event but rather as part of a broader system, as conceptualized in Reskin's race discrimination system. Racism in the film operates across multiple levels, ranging from individual interactions and group dynamics to practices reflecting broader social structures. Forms of communication such as microaggressions, hate speech, and symbolic as well as physical violence demonstrate the interconnectedness of these levels. This suggests that racist communication functions as a mechanism for reproducing and sustaining social inequality. Thus, this study affirms that racism in film is not merely represented as social conflict, but as a communicative practice grounded in systems of signs that shape and normalize particular meanings within society. The integration of Barthes' semiotic approach with the concept of racial discrimination systems provides a more comprehensive understanding of how racism operates in media. This study also contributes to communication studies by positioning racism as a symbolic phenomenon inherently linked to social structures. Therefore, film can be understood not only as a medium that reflects reality, but also as an active agent in constructing social meanings related to racism.

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