

# The Social Class Representation in the Heidi Film

## Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Film and reality partake are engaged a relationship. It shows that film is a representational practice that relates the text with reality. The reality that appears and is raised in the film emerges from personal views or prejudices against the social issues raised. In this study, prejudice against social issues regarding social class appears in *Heidi* film. This film conveys the story of two people from different social class backgrounds who can live together. This study aims to show how the social class representation in the film is depicted through the signs. This research paradigm employed the critical paradigm realm. The data analysis method was semiotics Roland Barthes. The findings showed that social class is represented through differences in housing, education, and lifestyle in dress or fashion, food, and daily activities or hobbies. This representation indicated the habitus of each different class. Even though social inequality arises in the film, lower-class characters can match due to the hegemony of upper-class characters. This film presents the positive upper class.

**Keywords:** *Film, Heidi, Social Class, Representation, Semiotics*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication can be done through various media. One of the alternative media used to communicate is mass media. Mass media is a cultural industry (communication channel) that produces songs, novels, television shows, newspapers, films, video games, internet services, and other cultural products and distributes them to the audience widely [1].

The film is a social practice of producers and audiences. In terms of narrative and meaning, it can be proven how influential Indonesian culture is. According to Turner, films provide an aspect of convenience that is presented on the screen where we identify genres, movies stars, and styles [2]. The film is a mass media that can be used as entertainment. Currently, films are not only a medium of entertainment for the community but also an educative, persuasive, and informative medium in conveying information or messages [3]. The public can appreciate films regardless of the upper and lower classes to become a mass communication medium that can reach all circles [4]. One of the most common ways to analyze a film is to identify the type or genre of the film. Genres are mostly shared across society by filmmakers, critics, and audiences [5]. According to Marcel Danesi, film genres are divided into 18 forms: documentary, scientific, horror, romance, adventure,

war, comedy, and many more. The film genre tends to change or adapt to the situations and conditions of society and the times. Since it is almost impossible for a film to contain only one genre, the combination of different genres and the combination of genres make the film have a dominant genre role and other supporting roles. Circa 1980, voluminous films adapted from novels or comics were successful. There is a two-way relationship in the film-novel production cycle. Novels become more popular after being filmed, and after people watch the film, they are curious to read the novel. Films based on famed novels that people have read make them curious to watch the film. According to Ali Imran al-Ma'ruf, this film-novel cycle is called a literary film [6].

The film constantly captures the realities of growth and development in society and projects it onto the screen. According to Haryanto, there is a relationship between film and reality [6]. The personal views or prejudices reinforce the reality that appears and is raised in the film against the social issues. One of the films adopted in this research is *Heidi*.

*Heidi* is a Swiss-German film with the genre of drama, family, and adventure based on the 1881 novel of the same name by Johanna Spyri. The film, directed by Alain Gsponer, was first released on December 10, 2015. *Heidi* can be assumed to be an undemanding film

to watch because the storyline is easy to understand. Furthermore, some life values can be acquired from this film, such as true friendship and luxury. The moral message is that money cannot buy happiness. This film is very inspiring for children or parents.

*Heidi* is a relatively interesting film because it tells the story of two people from different social class backgrounds who can live together. Although the differences that exist in the characters of Heidi and Klara, especially differences in social class, lead to problems or misunderstandings between them, in the end, they reconcile the existing differences, particularly related to the social class of Heidi and Klara.

According to Karl Marx, social class refers to how a group of people participates in producing public goods and services. Karl Marx divided society based on economic aspects into three classes, namely the upper class or capitalist (bourgeoisie), the middle class, and the lower class or workers (proletariat) [7]. Social class plays a role in shaping the motives of a person's life, behavior, and individual thoughts of its members, such as political attitudes and lifestyles [8]. In *Heidi*, there are signs or symbols representing the social class. Isfandiary expressed that an image can represent something, and its appearance has meaning for the public. The film is one application that requires images to advertise the audience [9]. Therefore, this study analyzed the semiotics and social class contained in the film.

This study aims to identify the social class representation contained in *Heidi*, the 2015 film by Petra Biondina Volpe. Based on the research objectives and the background of the problem, the formulation of the research problem is how to represent the social class in the 2015 *Heidi* film.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Social class**

According to Karl Marx, capitalist society consists of three classes, namely workers, capital owners, and landowners. However, since the alienation of landlords is not discussed in the analysis, at the end of capitalism, landlords and capital owners are equal, so there are only two classes. The two classes are upper class and lower class. The upper class or capitalists (bourgeoisie) are people who control the land and the means of production. The lower class or workers (proletariat) do not own land or the means of production, including laborers or factory workers [7]. Therefore, they are forced to rely on labor for their livelihoods and contribute to class relations, which cause them to produce bourgeois merchandise [10]. The relationship between the upper and lower classes is basically exploitation [11].

### **2.2 Representation**

According to Marcel Danesi, representation is the process of recording messages, ideas, or knowledge in physical form, which aims to describe something that is understood, felt, and imagined in physical form. People's perspectives and ways of thinking are different, so the meanings produced are also dissimilar [12]. According to Stuart Hall, representation brings together meaning and language with culture. Representation is an essential element of the procedure by which meaning is created and exchanged among members of a culture. Hall also mentioned that three representational theories explain how meaning is produced and used in social construction: the reflective, intentional, and constructivist approaches. In a reflective approach, language is interpreted as a reflection of reality or as a reflection of current meaning with existing reality. In the intentional approach, language is interpreted author's will. In the constructivist approach, language can create meaning or be construed as a series of words interpreted as meaning. From the previous explanation, it can be elucidated that representation is the production of meaning through language [13].

In representation, opinion construction uses symbols and is divided into different languages used to communicate with other people. Languages can use characters to represent objects and relate to objects. However, language also references imagination and fantasy or abstract ideas that have no clear meaning in the real world. Meaning is created in language through various representation systems called language [13]. In the practice of representation thus, there is a reality that is shown, and something is hidden in the text.

### **2.3 Semiotics**

Semiotics studies the social production of meaning through a sign system, which analyzes something that can replace something else [14]. Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, revealed semiotics and linguistics to study the role of signs as part of social life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century [15]. Saussure explained that semiotics studies the sign life that individuals can imagine. Saussure calls it semiology, which will show what signs are and what laws govern them. There is a capacity to justify why the human type has been regulated over time not by the forces of natural selection but by the forces of history, that is, by the aggregation of meanings that have been captured, stored, and transmitted from previous generations in the form of signs. [16]. Roland Barthes was the first to apply the ideas of semiotics in linguistics to visual images, such as food advertising, photography, and film. Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis adopted Saussure's semiotic theory of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Barthes has a significant difference, namely the existence of a mythological sign [17].

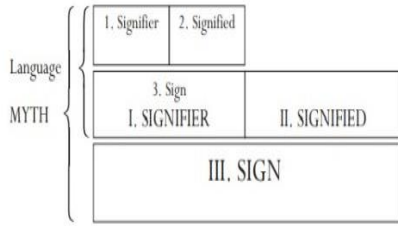


Figure 1. Sign Map by Roland Barthes

Barthes divided semiotics into two stages, denotation and connotation. Denotation is the first stage of significance, the most concrete meaning of the sign. Denotation is the relationship between the signifier (expression) and the signified (content) in a sign on the reality outside. Barthes calls the significance of the second stage connotation. It describes the relationship that occurs when a sign meets the emotions or gaze of the reader and their cultural values. Denotation is how the sign describes an object while connotation describes it. In the second signification, the sign functions through mythology. Myth is how culture interprets or understands certain aspects of reality or natural phenomena. Myth is a product of the dominant social class [18].

3. METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative research aims at interpreting phenomena about what is shown by the research subject, including behavior, actions, responses, and others holistically and described with words in a particular natural situation and by utilizing various scientific methods [19]. The form of descriptive qualitative research focuses on conveying a clear portrait of how social class is shown in the *Heidi*.

The data collection technique of this study was library research or documentation. The literature study obtains the data through searching various sources that contain data needed in this research. The sources of data included primary data and secondary data. Primary data are data obtained directly from researchers. In this study, primary data were in the form of *Heidi*, while secondary data were data acquired from other sources, such as journals, articles, and books. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling. The purposive sampling technique is a technique of collecting data sources with several considerations [20]. The samples in this study were the scenes that represent the social class in *Heidi*.

Before conducting data analysis, the researchers watched *Heidi* from the beginning to the end of the story at the data analysis technique stage. Then, researchers examined the scenes and the semiotic signs or symbols in *Heidi* using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. Based on Barthes' stages, the data were examined by analyzing the denotation, connotation, and myth of the elements of social class representation contained in *Heidi*. This study implemented triangulation analysis to examine the validity of the data. According to Susan Stainback the

purpose of triangulation analysis is not to pursue the truth about some phenomena but rather to develop what has been obtained [20]. Triangulation is a technique to verify the validity of data with something other than the data and is applied to examine or compare with the data [21]. In this study, theoretical triangulation analysis was applied. Triangulation theory uses two or more theories to be underlying or combined.

4. RESEARCH RESULT

The following are the research findings.

4.1 Housing Aspect



Figure 2a. House of Heidi's character



Figure 2b. Klara's house

**Denotation:** In figure 2a, a child is sleeping on a pile of hay and using a burlap headboard, while figure 2b shows a child sleeping on a mattress and using a pillow.

**Connotation:** There are differences in conditions in the aspect of housing. Figure 2a shows how the lower class sleeps in a simple bed while the upper class sleeps comfortably.

**Myth:** The lower-class society have economic factors demanding to meet the needs of clothing, food, and house so that they cannot meet the needs of housing or buy goods with superior production like those of the upper class. Figures 1a and 1b show the difference in living conditions in each social class. The existence of community stratification between class groups can affect the comfort and lifestyle in society [7].

#### 4.2 Class Representation in Daily Activities



Figure 3a. Activities done by Heidi and Peter



Figure 3b. Activities or hobbies

**Denotation:** The scene in Figure 3a shows a boy carrying a stick while holding a rope tied to a goat's neck accompanied by a girl beside him, and there is mountain in the background. In contrast, the scene in Figure 3b shows a girl and an adult woman embroidering in a luxurious room.

**Connotation:** The activities done between the two different classes are shown in the figure. The lower classes were seen herding goats in the mountains while the upper classes were embroidering indoors.

**Myth:** The difference in the lifestyle of the lower and upper classes can be noticed from the daily activities or hobbies they perform when they have spare time. Upper-class society spends their spare time with more beneficial activities and is oriented to the future. In contrast, lower-class society spend their leisure activities and are not future-oriented, such as herding goats and just playing with friends.

#### 4.3 Clothing or Fashion



Figure 4a. The clothes Heidi and Peter are wearing



Figure 4b. The clothes Klara is wearing

**Denotation:** The scene in figure 4a displays a boy wearing ragged and torn clothes while wearing a hat and a girl wearing a plain shirt. The scene in figure 4b illustrates a girl wearing green and more fashionable clothes. There are ornaments on the edges of the clothes.

**Connotation:** The difference in social class in clothing style can be observed. The clothes used by the lower class are still a bit rugged, while the upper-class clothes are already made from much better production materials, and there are ribbons on the clothes.

**Myth:** The way people dress can be used as a differentiator between social class, social role, gender, and social identity. In capitalism, the capitalist class owns industry and technology, while the bourgeoisie or workers only work in factories, along with factories and technology. Therefore, the existing classes are the class of freemen, masters, and the bourgeoisie or proletariat, and all of them are the results of different relations with the means of production [22].

#### 4.4 Footwear



Figure 5a. Footwear for the lower class



Figure 5b. Footwear for the upper class

**Denotation:** The cut scene in Figure 5a displays a girl wearing brown shoes made of uneven material, while the scene in Figure 5b shows shoes with a more



striking color and a softer material than the image above.

**Connotation:** Shoes are one of the elements in fashion. The upper class has higher tastes than the lower class. The differences in shoe materials are influenced by means of production where the lower class does not have adequate production facilities so that the footwear used is not as superior as that of the upper class.

**Myth:** According to Wilson in the book History of Shoe Fashion, in 43 A.D., the Romans distinguished the footwear color as a sign or symbol of social status. The lower classes and farmers widely used the black color, while the upper class or nobles used colorful footwear. After the Roman collapse, their influence dominated the changing social structure of Europe. In general, there are two classes in society. Those classes are the noble class representing the upper class and the peasants as a representative of the lower class. Upper-class society decorated their clothes with various ornaments, such as shoes, which are an essential part of their clothes. Shoes will be decorated with accessories made of selected materials such as precious metals, precious stones, embroidery, golden thread, colored threads in the shape of animal and plant ornaments [23].

4.5 Food



Figure 6a. How the lower class eat



Figure 6b. How the upper class eat

**Denotation:** The cut scene in Figure 6a illustrates two people consuming processed livestock products in the form of milk and cheese and with a wooden bowl. Meanwhile, the scene in Figure 6b shows people consuming various kinds of food, such as bread, jam, fruit, and tea. The tableware used is also more complete

and luxurious, such as knives, spoons, forks, and there are bells.

**Connotation:** The tastes of upper-class people are different from those of the lower classes. Food ingredients also influence this factor. Mountain communities or villages will consume processed livestock more often because some of them have livestock as their livelihood. In addition, the upper-class society has etiquette while eating. In the film, it is shown that the upper-class society eats quietly. They also wipe their mouths with cloth, and they eat using cutlery, while the lower class eats in a bit of a hurry because they have never eaten it and do not use cutlery.

**Myth:** One way to perceive the differences in a social class is through the three forms of consumption, namely food, culture, and appearance [24]. Parenting patterns in etiquette while eating in the upper and lower classes are different, producing other behaviors or traits. Children in upper-class families have better cognitive outcomes and fewer behavioral problems than children in working-class families [25].

4.6 Educational Aspect



Figure 7a. Heidi's character



Figure 7b. A Private Teacher

**Denotation:** The scene in Figure 7a depicts a girl saying that reading is unnecessary for the mountains, while the scene in Figure 7b shows an adult man saying that everyone should learn to read.

**Connotation:** Heidi's character has a background as a lower-class society. She believes education is not as important as her friends in the mountains say it is unnecessary because their daily lives are herd goats. As a private teacher from upper-class figures, he advises that everyone must be educated or able to read.

**Myth:** People with high educational backgrounds believe that they can achieve prosperity and success through education. Income and education independently predict subjective social status: Those with higher education and those with higher incomes rank higher in social strata or hierarchies [26].

## 5. DISCUSSION

According to Karl Marx, the class will emerge when the relations of production have a diverse division of labor, creating conditions for the formation of producer surplus to become a model for relations of exploitation or mass use of producers. Thus, according to Karl Marx's idea, the social class will arise because of economic factors, namely ownership and non-ownership of the means of production and social relations in the manufacturing world [11]. Karl Marx divided the class into the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In *Heidi*, Heidi's character is represented as a lower-class society because she does not have the means of production and works for the dominant class, while Klara's character is described as an upper-class society.

It can be seen that Heidi's house is narrow, small, and a bit shabby because she lives next to the livestock area. Then, Heidi's educational aspect describes that she cannot read because, according to her, reading is not needed in the mountains. In Bourdieu's work, a context is provided for examining the impact of social class positions. The model draws attention to conflict, change, and inequality and explores the changing nature of the relationship between structure and agency [27]. Inequality, upper-class society receives an education in their home environment. Thus, the education system decides children from lower-class society. They do not realize this because they remain under the dominion of the dominant class. They blame themselves for their failures, which lead to dropping out of school or sifting themselves down a path of lower quality education [28].

Heidi's character lifestyle as the lower class is also different from that of Klara's character as the upper class. It is depicted through clothing or fashion, food consumed, and daily activities. Lifestyle is limited by and depends on social class and individual activities, to the stratification of the status of the groups in it. The group lifestyle marks boundaries and strengthens the honor system that supports group status [29]. It shows habitus in the representation of social class in Heidi film. Habitus is a social value internalized by humans and is created through a socialization process of values that last a long time so that they settle into ways of thinking and patterns of behavior that persist in humans. Habitus produces a set of characters acquired as a result of social conditions. Therefore, it can be wholly or partially the same in people who are the product of the same social situations (such as individuals occupying petty-bourgeois positions in society or different eras) [30]. According to Bourdieu, the analysis of a lifestyle is systematically produced by habitus,

with the function of signing social qualifications or conditions [29].

## 6. CONCLUSION

*Heidi* conveys the story of two people with different backgrounds living together. Even though the existing differences in the characters of Heidi and Klara, especially differences in social class, lead to problems or misunderstandings between them, in the end, they reconcile the existing differences, especially those related to the social class of Heidi and Klara. Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, social class is represented through differences in aspects of the house, education, and lifestyle in clothing or fashion, food, and daily activities or hobbies. This representation shows the habitus of each different class. Even though there is social inequality in the film, due to the hegemony of the upper-class figures who can match the lower classes, this film presents the positive existence of the upper class.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have contributed equally in the preparation of this article.

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