

TECHNOLOGIZING METAPHOR, DEMYSTIFYING TRAUMA: ALLEGORY IN THE FILM *27 STEPS OF MAY*

TEKNOLOGISASI METAFOR, DEMISTIFIKASI TRAUMA: ALEGORI DALAM FILM *27 STEPS OF MAY*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims at elaborating the issues of trauma, violence against women and their agencies depicted in Indonesian film entitled *27 Steps of May*. By situating the issues within the theoretical framework combining theories on allegory and metaphor as elaborated by Jameson (2006), and Jakobson (1956), as well as theoretical premises pertaining to film technology by Turner (2002), this study shows how film as a form of narrative texts can visualize those issues through available technological features (camera techniques and mise-en-scene). Our close reading finds that the film presents metaphors of rape, women agency, amnesia and trauma through the presentation of the characters (May, Bapak, Pesulap and Kurir), also the mise-en-scene in its scenes. We argue that this film visualizes an allegory of national trauma in relation to Indonesian May 1998 riots, specifically the violence towards marginalized groups (Chinese and women), which also represents the Indonesian collective expectation in acknowledging the national trauma jointly.

Keywords: allegory, trauma, mise-en-scene, *27 Steps of May*.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan mengelaborasi isu-isu trauma, kekerasan terhadap perempuan, dan agensi mereka sebagaimana digambarkan dalam film Indonesia berjudul *27 Steps of May*. Dengan mendudukan isu-isu tersebut dalam kerangka teoretis yang merangkai teori alegori dan metafora sebagaimana yang dijabarkan oleh Jameson (2006) dan Jakobson (1956), serta premis-premis teoretis tentang teknologi film yang ditawarkan Turner (2002), penelitian ini menunjukkan betapa film sebagai bentuk naratif dapat memvisualkan isu-isu tersebut melalui peranti-peranti teknologis yang tersedia seperti teknik kamera dan mise-en-scene. Pembacaan ketat yang diterapkan dalam kajian ini menemukan bahwa film ini menampilkan metafora-metafora isu pemerkosaan, agensi perempuan, amnesia, dan trauma melalui tokoh-tokoh film (May, Bapak, Pesulap dan Kurir), juga mise-en-scene dalam adegan-adegannya. Kami berargumentasi bahwa film ini memvisualkan alegori trauma nasional sehubungan dengan kerusuhan bulan Mei 1998 di Indonesia, yang secara khusus berfokus pada kekerasan terhadap kelompok marginal (perempuan dan etnis Tionghoa) sekaligus merepresentasi ekspektasi kolektif bangsa Indonesia dalam menerima dan mengakui trauma nasional bersama-sama.

Kata kunci: alegori, trauma, mise-en-scene, *27 Steps of May*.

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian film entitled *27 Steps of May* (Ravi L. Bharwani) screened in Indonesian cinemas on April 27, 2019 leaves a surreal impression. This film tells the story of *May* as a gang rape survivor with a trauma that isolates her and her subsequent steps in coming to terms with her trauma. The film presents *Bapak* as a single parent to *May*, a doll decorator and a fighter, portrayed as being aphasically constrained in interacting with *May*. It also presents *Kurir* as the one who delivers dolls to be decorated by *Bapak*, and *Pesulap* who shows his unique magic tricks mediated by the wall inside the *May*'s room that steadily shifts their rigid lives.

The portrayal of trauma in this film indicates that there is a connection between individual and national traumatic experiences. According to Herman (2015), individual trauma may become a national trauma due to certain negative events experienced by a person which then evolves into a collective problem in particular social environments. The relationship between individual and national traumas can also be portrayed through narrative texts, such as film. Turim (2014) states that the depiction of trauma through flashback scenes of individual traumatic memories in film can be considered as a projection of personal memories onto the audience which then become memories (trauma) that are shared collectively and even nationally.

Film as a form of narrative employs metaphors which then constitutes an allegory as a way to link a certain event in the real world through its devices. According to Jakobson & Halle (1956), metaphor is a figurative language which replaces a certain concept with its closest concept to convey meanings. Metaphor is also commonly found in narrative texts such as poetry and prose to emphasize and elaborate aphasia; a certain disorder of the language system in explaining or expressing a concept (Jakobson, 1980). The visualization of metaphor in film is applied through the devices that operate continuously and coherently such as cinematography and *mise-en-scene* similar to language system, including the placement of elements in the frame captured by the film such as objects, background, lighting, color composition

through the camera (Turner, 2002). Reinerth (2016) and Pajaczowska (2017) support the argument by stating that the camera technique and *mise-en-scene* in the film can serve as a site of metaphor in visualizing a certain concept intended to be represented. These devices contribute to the way the film shows metaphors of social issues in its scenes operating in the allegory.

Struck (2017) states that symbols and enigma are the main concepts which constitute the allegory. Culler (2005) further explains that allegory can also be constructed through metaphor. In response to those statements, Jameson (2006) clarifies that the symbols and puzzles indicate the practice of political interests through narrative texts as a symbolic act. Jameson also views that narrative texts are a cultural product that can be used as a tool to preserve a certain group interests in depicting reality through the narrative devices such as characters or settings.

The preservation of the state's political interests in narrative texts have been performed specifically during the New Order era by the Film Censorship Board. According to Hanan (2017), the Film Censorship Board during the New Order era also participated in maintaining government stability by selecting and editing films to ensure the positive image of the New Order government before they were shown to the public. Several New Order policies such as the dissemination of patriarchal culture in films depicted the stereotype of the 'ideal' woman who submits to her husband as portrayed by Javanese women that heeded the Javanese customs (Blackburn, 2004). Films are also used to maintain the New Order policy in purifying Indonesian people from radical ideologies such as Communism (*PKI*) which was stereotyped as the main perpetrator of September 30th 1965 genocide and considered to be associated with the ethnic Chinese (Hanan, 2017; Kristanto, 2005). This caused the marginalization of the Chinese in the New Order by promoting stereotype of the Chinese as a greedy and unpatriotic group (Philpott, 2000; Suryaningtyas & Weningtyastuti, 2018).

Those stereotypes and labels became one of the triggers for the May 1998 riots in which most of the survivors were groups marginalized by the normative social order, such as women and ethnic Chinese. The May 1998 riots then became one of the national traumatic events due to the cruelty of its perpetrators against the marginal groups as well as the failure and negligence of the state in maintaining the stability of Indonesia (Siegel, 2018). This national trauma is one of the narratives that can be visualized in film through its devices in relation to cinematic violence and representation of women agencies.

Film devices such as camera techniques and *mise-en-scene* allow the transformation of negative experiences and memories, for instance violence, into visualizations that are considered enjoyable through cinematic violence (Young, 2009). McIntosh (2015) adds that cinematic violence involving the depiction of rape can change the image of personal experience (survivors) into collective experiences that are shown to the audience (male and female) through camera techniques. The restraints of agency (individual power to act according to their will), especially that of women, may also be portrayed differently in films by enacting the positive representation of the female body as a reaction to male fantasy and patriarchal narratives (Brownmiller, 1975; Horeck, 2013; Rooney, 1993).

Studies on allegory and metaphor as well as national trauma in relation to the representation of the violence against women through film technology are still uncommon in Indonesia. However, there are several studies conducted which are focused on the representation of national trauma and violence against women in the film. A study conducted by Wieringa & Katjasungkana (2019) focuses on the interpretation of the national trauma allegory in Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary film entitled *The Act of Killing*. This study explains that documentary films can serve as a re-exploration of past events as well as an allegory of national trauma caused by the 30 September 1965 genocide in Indonesia. Secondly, the study of Indonesian national trauma representation is

also conducted by Khoo (2010) that analyzes the use of camera technique in the short film entitled *Trip to the Wound* directed by Edwin. This study found that the use of camera technique can be a site to explore the survivor's memory of wounds, which in this case is closely tied to the representation of national trauma caused by Indonesian May 1998 riots. Then, another study conducted by Surahman, Corneta & Senaharjanta (2020) analyzes the types of violence towards women depicted in the film *Marlina Si Pembunuh dalam Empat Babak* (*Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts*) directed by Mouly Surya. By applying Roland Barthes' concept of denotation, connotation and myth, this study found the types of violence towards women represented in the film, such as physical, psychological, sexual, structural and cultural violence.

From those mentioned previous studies, the study conducted by Khoo (2010) and Wieringa & Katjasungkana (2019) may be closely related to this research in terms of representing the national trauma. The study conducted by Surahman, Corneta & Senaharjanta (2020) also can be related to this study in terms of the way of the violence against women portrayed. However, those three previous studies focused on analyzing the way the film depicts the narrative of national trauma and violence against women only through the use of camera techniques and semiotics. To fill in the gap of those studies, this research is conducted by analyzing not only the way of the film technology, specifically camera technique and *mise-en-scene*, but also analyzing the way the film visualizes the national trauma through the use of metaphors which construct the allegory.

With regards to those concepts and statements from the previous paragraph as well as considering the current discourse related to the issues of the May 1998 riots and the narratives about it, this article attempts to fill in the gaps in elaborating film as a narrative text with its specific language system (camera technique and *mise-en-scene*) which visualizes trauma. The film *27 Steps of May* mostly depicts scenes with surreal characteristics, minimum dialogue

and predominantly portraying silence. This film motivates this study to apply the concept of metaphor, allegory and film studies as an effort to demystify national trauma.

METHOD

This study was conducted by applying the close reading technique and the application of metaphor, allegory and film studies stated by Jameson (2006), Jakobson & Halle (1956) as well as (Turner, 2002) to describe trauma operating in the allegory constructed by metaphor. Close reading technique is used to identify and collect textual evidence in the form of film scenes, namely camera techniques including angle (point of view), lighting, color and *mise-en-scene*. These steps are done in order to interpret the data through describing and elaborating the issues included, for instance, issues of trauma, violence against women and their agencies as well as issues of patriarchal culture.

The analysis proceeds by looking at the scenes in the film 27 Steps of May repeatedly, collecting scenes highlighting the characters (May, Bapak, Kurir and Pesulap). The scenes are then classified according to the interactions and actions taken by the two central characters, such as the actions and interactions of May and Bapak as well as Pesulap, then the actions of Bapak and his interactions with May, Kurir and Pesulap. The analysis is carried out by applying the concept of metaphor that operates within the film devices such as camera and *mise-en-scene* to identify metaphors of marginal and dominant groups.

The analysis then continues by looking at the way the film portrays violence and violations as an effort to rob and gain agency which becomes a collective memory. It is shown mainly through the interaction of May and Pesulap as well as the interaction of May and Bapak which is highlighted through certain camera techniques. To interpret those findings, the analysis then focuses on the way the film describes its understanding of May 1998 riots as one of the Indonesian national traumas. Through the analysis of metaphors operated in allegory, it can be found that the tendency of

this film, 27 Steps of May, serves as a symbolic act to visualize its response towards Indonesian national trauma.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The construction of allegory based on metaphors through film devices (camera techniques and *mise-en-scene*) is divided into three sections: (1) The metaphors of Indonesian citizens and the state of amnesia in the film, (2) The visualization of violence against women and their agencies as a collective memory, (3) Film perspective on the national trauma. This surreal film entitled 27 Steps of May attempts to represent a fictional depiction of the Indonesian national trauma rather than the actual events of national trauma. This is shown particularly through the inconsistency of *mise-en-scene* in describing the events of May 1998. These aspects indicate that this film seeks to become an imaginary space as an intermediary between narrative and reality as well as narrative and fantasy in presenting a way of remembering, accepting and acknowledging national trauma, both individually and collectively, by the Indonesian state and its citizens as a nation.

In the following sections, there are several important keywords such as the word 'citizens' and 'state'. The word 'state' is associated with dominant groups and patriarchal narrative while the word 'citizens' is associated with civil society or citizens which are marginalized by the state (specifically survivors of the May 1998 riots).

The Metaphors of Indonesian Citizens and State Amnesia in the Film

The metaphors of the amnesia suffered by citizens and the state portrayed in this film are associated with the depiction of remembering and forgetting a traumatic event. These are shown through the depiction of May and Bapak portrayed as the characters that experience traumatic events; May who was raped by a group of unknown men while Bapak blamed himself because of his inability to protect May. In describing the metaphor of trauma, the film juxtaposes aspects of repetition and progression, noises and silence, and then activeness and

passiveness. However, the film also seems inconsistent in presenting these aspects because it sometimes shows ambiguous and excessive scenes.

In the beginning, the film shows a change in depicting *May* and *Bapak*. In this film, *May* is a character that can be associated with the metaphor of marginalized people (the mass rape of Chinese women survivors in May 1998) by the film through the *mise-en-scene* attached to the character. The film depicts the changes of *May* from cheerful and curious to rigid, silent, and alienated. The change in *May* is shown notably through the scene of rape against her by a group of unknown men while the carnival scene and the scene of her returning to the house are shown to depict the initial and final conditions of *May*.



Figure 1 The change in depicting May.
(Source: 27 Steps of May)

In the scene of May visiting the carnival, the film uses a medium wide shot angle to highlight the crowd as well as the hustle and bustle of the carnival. This is done to show the crowd, the colorful background which supports the audience to understand the portrayal of *May* that tends to have a high curiosity and cheerfulness. In contrast to this depiction, the lower figure shows May is shot from behind and focusing on a mirror reflection in a lighter background. The spotlight displays the isolation, alienation, and the absence of May as a subject. According to Turner (2002), the placement of

the subject in the frame of a scene affects the integrity or coherence of the subject. The change in representing May can be associated with the subject separation from her body which in this case can be linked to the trauma and amnesia; the representation of memory dislocation triggered by the trauma in the film (Kaplan, 2005).

This dislocation of memory is also shown through the change in depicting *Bapak*. The film shows *Bapak* as a character who can be associated with the state (the dominant patriarchal narrative) in relation to May (as the character associated with marginalized groups).



Figure 2 The change in depicting Bapak.
(Source: 27 Steps of May)

Figure 2 (upper part) shows Bapak and May in a medium close-up shot to depict the close relationship between the two figures. However, the difference of the spotlight (May is highlighted from behind) changes the closeness of their relationship into an alienation. The lower part features a medium shot highlighting the focus on Bapak which is shot from the front while May is from the side. The change of close up shot into medium shot and the direction of the spotlight shows a change in the depiction of Bapak as the dominant character. The traumatic event experienced by May is shown to affect Bapak in interacting with his daughter as shown by the change in the camera focus which can be indicated as a metaphor of the state discomfort in interacting with the survivors.

Through the lower part of Figure 2, the film also displays silent interactions that can be associated with metaphors of trauma and amnesia. The picture depicts Bapak which is placed in a wider frame than May, indicating that the dominance of Bapak is greater than May's. It also describes aspects of activeness and passiveness; Bapak is shown more active while May is more passive. However, the film does not seem to fully represent Bapak as the very dominant figure to May, as evidenced by May's gesture to reach for the glass independently. In relation to the patriarchal narrative, Bapak's gaze and space are a metaphor of the state supervision of the survivors. The silence of the interaction between Bapak and May can be understood as a metaphor of amnesia and trauma due to negative memories that are difficult to express through language (dialogue).

The metaphors of Indonesian citizens and state amnesia are also seen in the way the film presents Pesulap that is shown to be paired with May. Pesulap is shown as a character which interacts with May through the walls of her room which is sometimes displayed irregular and mysterious.



Figure 3 The interaction of May and Pesulap.
(Source: 27 Steps of May)

The representation of Pesulap in this way can be seen through the use of medium long shot and low angle. Both camera techniques reflect the distance between the perspective of the subject and the object that is seen (Turner,

2002) as shown in the upper part of figure 3. Although Pesulap is portrayed in an irregular manner, it is possible that Pesulap is also shown as a representation of May's imagination in the process of exploring her traumatic memory. The hole in the wall also depicts a memory gap that can display positive memories (depicted by magic tricks as shown in the lower part of figure 3) and negative memories. The lower part of figure 3 supports the finding that Pesulap is a mysterious character, but he can still be associated with the figure that supports May (neighbor of the survivor) to trigger exploration of her memory. It also indicates a metaphor of trauma and amnesia that shows the film's effort to give a flashback to the national trauma caused by the May 1998 riots.

Aside from the interaction of May and Pesulap, the film portrays different interactions between Bapak and Kurir which are shown to interact verbally (dialogue) done in the terrace of Bapak's house. The film represents Kurir as a close acquaintance of Bapak to act as the site of Bapak's thoughts specifically regarding the problem concerning his house, notably May's situation.



Figure 4 Kurir shares his idea to Bapak.
(Source: 27 Steps of May)

In addition to his portrayal as a doll courier, Kurir is also shown as a character who explains May's situation which cannot be understood by Bapak based on the information provided by Bapak. In the figure 4, the camera shoots Kurir from behind and focuses on the messy and unadorned garden of Bapak's house. Through the focus of the camera, the position of Kurir and the absence of Bapak from the frame illustrates the unequal perspective of Kurir and Bapak in perceiving the situation of May. According to Kurir, the arrangement of the garden may fix

and re-enact the relationship and situation in Bapak's house. Meanwhile, according to Bapak, this is illogical. The inequality of perspective also illustrates the metaphor of trauma and state amnesia in perceiving the traumatic memory; there is an attempt to reject and deny the memory. In this case, Kurir can be associated as a citizen who tries to voice his opinion about the state to solve the problem even though the state cannot understand his opinions (or cannot execute the opinions).

The Visualization of Violence against Women and Their Agencies as a Collective Memory

Film devices such as *mise-en-scene* and camera techniques represent violence against women and their agencies as a reflection of the collective memory of Indonesian. In relation to the previous section, this section describes the visualization of violence as aesthetic violence as well as an effort in remembering or forgetting traumatic memories. This can mainly be seen through the way the film portrays a violation of personal space, attempts to gain self-agency and attempts to accept or reject past memories.

The visualization of personal space violation which also acts as a metaphor of violence against marginalized groups is shown through May and Pesulap.



Figure 5 The violation of Pesulap against personal space of May.

(Source: 27 Steps of May)

As shown in the upper part of Figure 5, the film represents the violation of May's self-agency by Pesulap. The medium wide shot camera technique shows Pesulap as the dominant figure than May. However, the obscure camera shot on Pesulap and May shows the unclear form of the violation committed. This inequality is in line with the way the film shows a metaphor of an irregular and blurred violence that is unknown because of the trauma and amnesia. The lower part of Figure 5 also displays a flashback scene in a monochrome and shot using the close up technique. This depiction is used by the film to change traumatic personal memory of May into the collective memory of the audience.

Figure 5 also shows the film's attempt to explore the traumatic memories of survivors thoroughly. However, the portrayal looks like it was planned and included in the narrative (the scene of Pesulap's violation triggers the traumatic memory of May) so that there is an ambiguity when displaying the survivor's memories. In relation to the male fantasy, film seems to be constrained by the normative social order (patriarchal narrative) through the representation of women memories which are used as the depictions of dominant narrative memories (state) which may be related to the attempt of showing the state's guilt and regret of May 1998 riots.

The visualization of these violations not only marginalizes, but also triggers the reaction of marginal groups to the dominant narrative in the efforts of gaining self-agency. As shown in the lower part of Figure 3, Pesulap's violation of May personal space can also trigger positive memories of survivors, depicted by the magic tricks mediated by the hole in the wall. This is also associated with the metaphor of the survivor's efforts in remembering the traumatic past event.

In addition to the depiction of violence, the film also appears to show the violence as an artistic aspect.



Figure 6 The fighting scene portraying Bapak.
(Source: 27 Steps of May)

Aside from keeping the subject of the spotlight away from the audience, the use of the medium long shot also displays more informative highlights. The camera focus supported by the lighting on Bapak shows his alienation in the frame (portrayed as a figure that is surrounded by the dim light and the audience). However, the film features crowds and punching noises which can be perceived as cinematic violence. In this way, the film seeks to change the negative stereotype of violence into artistic violence to captivate the audience.

These violent presentations are used by the film as a way to convert personal memories into collective memories through *May* and *Bapak*. The visualization of violence and agency is a metaphor of the survivors and the state efforts in responding to the traumatic memories that may be associated with the film memories of the Indonesian national trauma. Through these two sections, the film presents the allegory by portraying its perspective on the national trauma caused by Indonesia May 1998 riots.

Film Perspective on National Trauma

The metaphors of amnesia and trauma, violence, violation and agency show that the film has a tendency to remember national trauma through the allegory of the May 1998 riots in Indonesia. These issues are visualized through the way the film applies symbolic actions in one of the narrative texts (film) which are indicated by aspects of collectiveness, which is constructed by the openness to possibilities and acceptance. The openness and acceptance to the possibilities are related to the film's attempt in portraying the way the characters respond to the problems and acknowledging the wounds, trauma, and

amnesia. For instance, the portrayal of the attempts to cope up with the trauma, amnesia, and violence are depicted by May and Bapak. The attempts and the way they respond to the trauma, amnesia, and violence are also depicted in their interactions with Pesulap and Kurir, which portrays the aspect of collectiveness in acknowledging the wounds, trauma, and amnesia.

The aspect of collectiveness is depicted through the interaction of May and Pesulap in an effort to respond to the traumatic memories. May's willingness to interact with Pesulap, which appears to be fully or partially presented, is used by the film as an effort to portray aspects of openness and acceptance of possibilities. Those aspects are shown through the depiction of May's consent in responding to the things that are depicted enigmatic and illogical, such as Pesulap and his magic tricks. This is also portrayed specifically through Pesulap, which is shown as a mysterious figure through camera techniques and *mise-en-scene*. In Figure 3, it has been shown the way the film depicts Pesulap as a character who is occasionally highlighted irrational and fully displayed from afar or close up (shown only his hand). Regarding the aspects of openness and acceptance, the film uses May as a figure to describe the response towards something illogical or enigmatic. Although in the process there is a violation of personal space, the film still relies on the consistency of the openness and acceptance depiction through the interaction between May and Pesulap.

Different from that representation, the depiction of openness and acceptance of the possibility seem inconsistent when it is associated with the interaction between Bapak and Kurir. Bapak that is visualized to be associated with the metaphor of the state seems difficult to understand Kurir, which is portrayed to be associated with the enigmatic and illogical aspects, as shown by his idea in helping Bapak. Bapak is portrayed as the character who is reluctant to listen to people's opinion, in this case, Kurir. Kurir is a character that is portrayed as a figure who voices his opinion towards Bapak's family issues, specifically concerning May's situation, with his

illogical idea, for instance, the film's portrayal of Kurir voicing his idea to Bapak in arranging the garden of Bapak's house. As shown in figure 4, the absence of Bapak from the camera frame, even though the scene shows a dialogue between him and Kurir, indicates Bapak's reluctance in listening to Kurir's ideas. This can be related to the metaphor of the state's reluctance in dealing with traumatic memories.

The metaphor mentioned above is a way the film attaches contradictory aspects to Bapak in dealing with trauma. This depiction is shown especially through the scene of the garden arrangement by Bapak.



Figure 7 The arrangement of the garden by Bapak as recommended by Kurir.
(Source: 27 Steps of May)

In the figure above, the garden is shown as a metaphor of the life of Bapak and May. By rearranging the garden, the film shows the realignment of Bapak and May's daily lives as suggested by Kurir. Kurir, who is shown more dominant in the scene portrays that the citizens' opinions may be a way to respond to the state problems. The visualization of Bapak's willingness to organize his garden is also the way the film shows the aspect of collectiveness between the citizens and the state in rebuilding Indonesia. However, the contradictory aspect attached to Bapak shows a different representation in terms of the acceptance and the openness to the possibilities, specifically the way the film portrays Bapak's attempt to respond to the wounds, trauma, and amnesia.

The aspects of collectiveness, openness and acceptance can be shown through May that tries to reconstruct the rape against her. The reconstruction is shown as a metaphor of embracing and accepting the traumatic memories despite the presence of the setbacks such as

wounds, scars, and dislocations. This is shown through May's steps in responding to things that seem surreal, mysterious, and imaginary that can be viewed through Pesulap and his magic tricks.

Meanwhile, the inconsistently portrayed Bapak is used by the film to show that the violence and closedness to possibilities can hinder the process of acknowledging the traumatic memories. Bapak, who is mostly shown as a character that is firm in his stance and determination, possibly due to the influence of the patriarchal narrative, becomes unclear in responding and accepting the traumatic memory. Even though the film attempts to present Kurir as Bapak's close acquaintance, it has not been able to change the role of Bapak. This is the reason that the film prefers to present its perspective through May's endeavor.



Figure 8 May embraces the trauma.
(Source: 27 Steps of May)

As shown in the figure above, Bapak is highlighted smaller than May with the camera panning at him from the side while May is fully shot in a brighter cloth. The difference in the way of the film shows these two characters can be related to the metaphor of the survivors who accept and acknowledge their traumatic memories, while the state can only monitor and supervise them. This finding is reinforced by the way the film shows the garden falling apart for the second time and the darker clothes of Bapak while May is dressed in a brighter cloth and firmly looking ahead. Through the techniques and *mise-en-scene* of the film, it can be understood that this film chooses and prefers the way May responds to her traumatic memory over *Bapak*, which is also the film perspective towards the national trauma caused by the May 1998 riots in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

27 Steps of May focuses on visualizing national trauma as an incomprehensible event through metaphor which operates within the allegory. The ambiguity is visualized through the film devices such as the camera techniques and *mise-en-scene* as shown by the representation of May's traumatic memory as a collective trauma. The changes in portraying May and Bapak through the film devices contributed to the demystification of trauma and amnesia; the endeavor to remember or retain memories. However, the film seems ambivalent when it tries to provide the space for women in expressing their agencies towards the violence against them. Through the dominant portrayal of male characters in discussing women problems (rape), the film seems to place May as an anomaly rather than male characters in the film. Film seems to be restrained by the patriarchal culture as a part of the Indonesian collective memories who seek to present the issue of women agencies and violence against them as a tool to portray positive representation of the state towards the marginalized groups.

Aside from that inconsistency, it cannot be denied that this film serves as an allegory of the Indonesian citizens and the state as the figures who are confused and reluctant in remembering the national tragedy in May 1998. The May 1998 riots is not only a problem of the parties involved, but also a collective problem for the Indonesians. Thus, this film can be understood as an allegory to the May 1998 riots that depicts the way to respond to national trauma according to the representation of the Indonesian collective ideal memories, in accepting and acknowledging national trauma together.

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