

Representing Sexual Violence Trauma through the Character of Adil in Joko Anwar's Film *Siksa Kubur*

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ABSTRACT

Siksa Kubur (2024), directed by Joko Anwar, is a psychological horror film that delves into the trauma of childhood sexual abuse through the character of Adil, a survivor of sexual assault. This study analyzes how trauma is represented using John Fiske's semiotic framework, which includes the levels of reality, representation, and ideology. Using a qualitative approach, the research finds that trauma is depicted through Adil's physical responses such as vomiting, trembling, and emotional breakdowns. Visually, the film employs dark lighting, close-up shots, and long silences to emphasize psychological distress. At the ideological level, the film critiques patriarchal norms that silence male victims and uphold toxic masculinity, portraying how deeply rooted cultural narratives prevent men from expressing vulnerability. Adil's prolonged suffering underscores the lasting effects of trauma when victims are denied the opportunity to speak out. Ultimately, *Siksa Kubur* provides a symbolic space for confronting hidden trauma, challenging dominant societal views about gender, victimhood, and the silencing of male survivors.

Keywords: *representation, sexual trauma, semiotics, Siksa Kubur, patriarchy.*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of sexual violence is a pervasive global problem with devastating psychological, physical, and social consequences for survivors. Despite its prevalence, societal taboos and stigmas often silence victims, particularly in conservative cultures like Indonesia. Media, especially films, play a crucial role in raising awareness and fostering empathy by representing these traumatic experiences. This study examines how trauma from sexual violence is depicted in the character of Adil in the Indonesian horror film *Siksa Kubur* (2024), directed by Joko Anwar.

The relevance of this research lies in its contribution to communication studies, particularly in understanding how media constructs and conveys complex social issues like trauma. Films are powerful tools for shaping public perception, and their audiovisual nature

allows for nuanced storytelling that can evoke empathy and challenge societal norms. By analyzing *Siksa Kubur*, this study explores how cinematic techniques and semiotic codes represent trauma, bridging the gap between academic discourse and real-world advocacy for survivors.

The research problem centers on the underrepresentation of male survivors of sexual violence in media and society. While female victims are more frequently discussed, male survivors face additional stigma due to patriarchal expectations of masculinity. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing Adil's character as a male survivor, using John Fiske's semiotic framework to decode the film's visual and narrative strategies. The objective of this study are to find out the representation of sexual violence trauma in the character Adil in the film "*Siksa Kubur*" by Joko Anwar. So the formulation of the problem is how is the representation of sexual violence trauma in the character Adil in the film *Siksa Kubur* by Joko Anwar.

Previous research used by the researcher is the Representation of Feminism in the film *Poor Things 2023*. This study found that there were two streams of feminism found in the film through John Fiske's television code semiotics method. The difference between this study and Celline Christiara Median Putri's (2024) research lies in the subjects and objects used. In that study, the subject studied was the film "*Poor Things 2023*", while in this study the film "*Siksa Kubur*" was used. The object studied in that study was the Representation of Feminism, while the object studied in this study was the Representation of Sexual Violence Trauma.

The next previous research used by the researcher is the Representation of Cyberbullying in the film *Budi Pekerti*. This study highlights the behavior of victims of cyberbullying, with the values of fourth-wave feminism found in the film through John Fiske's television code semiotics method. The difference between this study and Russel Vernon's (2024) research lies in the subjects and objects used. In this study, the subject of the study was the film "*Budi Pekerti*", while in this study the film "*Siksa Kubur*" was used. The object of the study was the Representation of Cyberbullying, while the object of the study was the Representation of Sexual Violence Trauma.

Third, the previous study that the researcher used was the Representation of Sexual Violence in the Film *Penyalin Cahaya*. This study by Naviri Siswanto (2022) found that the Film *Penyalin Cahaya* communicates the issue of sexual violence to the public which is often considered taboo. Sexual violence is often around us in everyday life, starting from catcalling, verbal insults, temptations and the like. This study used the subject of the film "*Penyalin Cahaya*", while the researcher used the film "*Siksa Kubur*". Another difference lies in the object, namely the researcher focuses more on the representation of trauma experienced by victims of sexual violence, while previous research focused more on the representation of sexual violence.

The fourth study that the researcher compared was the Representation of Sexual Violence in the Film "*Like & Share*". In addition to the focus of the object and subject, the

difference between this study and the research conducted by the researcher lies in the theory used. The researcher uses trauma theory and uses John Fiske's semiotic method, while previous research by Trisna Muria Achmad Yani (2024) uses feminist theory and the method used is Roland Barthes' semiotics. The last previous study used by the researcher as a comparison is the Representation of Sexual Violence Against Deaf Children in the Film *Silenced*. In this study, Fitriani Nur (2017) found that sexual violence in this film was carried out in various ways, from seduction to cunning. There is also Abuse of Power, Psychological Abuse, and Economic Abuse. Fitriani said that sexual violence against children in South Korea is not much different from Indonesia, because the indicators are both UNICEF. This previous study used Roland Barthes' semiotics, in contrast to researchers who used John Fiske's semiotics.

This research is significant for advancing communication science by demonstrating how media can serve as a platform for social change. By dissecting the film's representation of trauma, the study offers insights into the intersection of media, psychology, and societal norms, encouraging more inclusive narratives for survivors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trauma and Sexual Violence

Trauma from sexual violence manifests as long-term psychological and emotional distress, often leading to conditions like PTSD, depression, and dissociation (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Survivors may experience flashbacks, emotional numbness, and social withdrawal (Herman, 1992). Male survivors, in particular, face unique challenges due to societal expectations of masculinity, which often discourage them from seeking help (Suhalia, 2024).

Film as a Medium for Trauma Representation

Films combine visual and auditory elements to create immersive narratives, making them effective for portraying subjective experiences like trauma (Sobur, 2004). Horror films, with their emphasis on psychological tension, are especially suited to depict trauma's lingering effects. *Siksa Kubur* uses metaphors and symbolism to convey Adil's suffering without explicit visuals, aligning with theories of indirect trauma representation (Van der Kolk, 2014).

Semiotics and John Fiske's Framework

Semiotics examines how signs and symbols create meaning in media (Fiske, 2012). John Fiske's three-level model—reality, representation, and ideology—provides a structured approach to analyze how trauma is constructed in *Siksa Kubur*. This framework helps decode

the film's use of mise-en-scène, cinematography, and sound to reflect Adil's psychological state.

While previous studies have explored trauma representation in films, few focus on male survivors or non-Western contexts. This study addresses this gap by analyzing an Indonesian horror film, offering a culturally specific perspective on trauma and masculinity.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employs semiotic analysis using John Fiske's television codes framework. The research design is descriptive, aiming to interpret how trauma is represented through visual and narrative elements in *Siksa Kubur*.

Data Collection

Primary data consists of selected scenes from *Siksa Kubur* that depict Adil's trauma, accessed via Netflix. Screenshots of key moments were taken and categorized based on Fiske's levels:

- i) **Reality:** Physical appearance, setting, and dialogue.
- ii) **Representation:** Cinematography (lighting, shot composition), editing, and sound.
- iii) **Ideology:** Underlying societal norms (e.g., patriarchy, victim-blaming).

Data Analysis

Triangulation was used to validate findings, combining Fiske's semiotics with Freudian psychoanalysis to interpret Adil's behaviors (e.g., dissociation, aggression) as trauma responses.

Limitations

The study focuses solely on *Siksa Kubur*, limiting generalizability. However, its in-depth analysis provides valuable insights into trauma representation in Indonesian cinema.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

"*Siksa Kubur*" is a 2024 Indonesian psychological horror film directed by acclaimed filmmaker Joko Anwar. Produced by Come and See Pictures and Rapi Films, with additional support from Legacy Pictures, Komet Productions, and IFI Sinema, the film is a feature-length adaptation of Anwar's earlier short film of the same title. Filming took place in 2023, with key locations in Pangandaran, West Java. Released during the Eid al-Fitr holiday on April 11, 2024, the film received widespread acclaim, attracting over four million viewers and positioning itself as one of the highest-grossing Indonesian films of all time.

Beyond its surface-level horror elements, *Siksa Kubur* delves into profound philosophical and theological themes such as belief, doubt, sin, redemption, and the afterlife. The narrative centers on Sitha, portrayed by Faradina Mufti, a woman whose faith is

shattered after her parents are killed in a suicide bombing. This traumatic event drives her to question the existence of divine justice and the concept of the afterlife, particularly the torment of the grave—a belief rooted in Islamic eschatology.

Driven by a desire to disprove the existence of spiritual punishment, Sitha embarks on a dangerous journey to find the most sinful person alive. Her quest leads her to Wahyu, a notorious and sadistic religious leader. As she attempts to infiltrate his world and eventually follow him into the grave, she is forced to confront terrifying realities and existential dilemmas that challenge her skepticism. Sitha's journey is complicated by her relationship with her brother Adil, played by Reza Rahadian, whose devout religious stance contrasts sharply with her doubts. Their conflicting worldviews create a narrative tension that underscores the broader theme of individual struggle with faith amid trauma. The film also explores secondary characters connected to Wahyu, revealing layers of sin, regret, and spiritual conflict.

“Siksa Kubur” transcends conventional horror by presenting a nuanced examination of how grief and trauma can disrupt personal belief systems. Through a combination of compelling performances, atmospheric tension, and thought-provoking narrative structure, the film becomes a platform for reflecting on moral accountability, forgiveness, and the psychological consequences of loss. Joko Anwar's direction elevates the genre, offering both an emotional and intellectual cinematic experience that resonates with audiences well beyond its horror.



Figure 1 (Movie Poster “Siksa Kubur” by Joko Anwar)

Source : Kumparan.com

Reza Rahardian who plays Adil is a leading actor in the Indonesian film industry, who has also spread his wings as a model, singer, and director. With a mix of Persian blood from his father and Ambonese from his mother, Reza has a unique family background. The name Matulesy itself is a legacy of the noble clan of King Sahulau in South Seram Bay, Central Maluku. Born in Bogor on March 5, 1987, this Pisces and Muslim man studied at SMA

Negeri 2 Bogor. Although it was rumored that he would marry Prilly Latuconsina, he has not officially announced his relationship status. Since childhood, Reza has faced the challenges of life as an orphan, losing his father. His acting debut in soap operas occurred through "Culunya Pacarku" in 2004, and his career continued to grow until his film debut in "Film Horror" (2007). His popularity skyrocketed after starring in "Perempuan Berkabung Sorban" (2009), where he managed to get a challenging main role.

In the study on how the trauma of sexual violence is represented in the character Adil in the film "Siksa Kubur," John Fiske's Semiotics method is used which includes three levels of analysis: reality, representation, and ideology. This study aims to identify signs in the film and examine the depiction of the trauma of sexual violence through the character Adil. The depiction of this meaning is done through elements such as dialogue, costumes, backgrounds, and ideologies contained in the film. The researcher found several sub-themes that reflect the trauma of sexual violence in Adil, namely dissociation and withdrawal, expressions of depression and inner suffering, the victim's reactive response to his traumatic memories that arise when faced with genitals as a trigger, the emergence of aggressiveness, and the dynamics of power and helplessness.

Dissociation and repression reflect the trauma of sexual violence

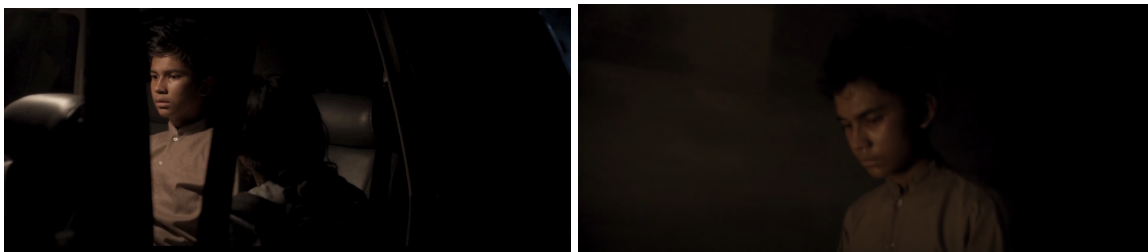


Figure 2 (Adil with his “freeze response”)

Source: “Grave Torture” Movie

In *Siksa Kubur*, the character of Adil is portrayed as a survivor of sexual violence, with trauma responses that are subtly embedded in his psychological and behavioral presentation. His characterization is marked by signs of dissociation and emotional withdrawal—key indicators of unprocessed trauma, particularly related to sexual abuse. One significant moment in the narrative illustrates Adil's inability to respond to external stimuli, demonstrating what Van der Kolk (2014) identifies as a "freeze response"—a survival mechanism in which the body and mind become immobilized in the face of overwhelming threat.

In a critical interaction, Adil is urged to leave a threatening environment by his sister Sitha, yet he remains physically motionless and emotionally unresponsive. His delayed response, characterized by a blank stare and rigid posture, exemplifies the phenomenon of dissociation. According to Herman (1992) and Porges (2011), dissociation in trauma

survivors reflects a disconnection between consciousness and the body, functioning as a protective response when the individual cannot escape or resist the traumatic experience. In Adil's case, this dissociation suggests a long-standing internalization of powerlessness, especially in the context of repeated abuse.

The experience of sexual violence often causes survivors to regress psychologically to earlier, more passive states. Freud's psychoanalytic framework helps interpret Adil's silence and immobility as forms of repression and regression. The repression of traumatic memory prevents its integration into conscious thought, while regression manifests as a return to a childlike state of helplessness in the face of renewed threat. These mechanisms signal the ego's attempt to defend against unbearable anxiety, caught between internalized norms (superego) and instinctive fear (id), resulting in an emotional shutdown.

Furthermore, Adil's reluctance to engage with the outside world after his abuse illustrates how trauma reshapes one's sense of safety and reality. His psychological retreat parallels what the DSM-5 (2013) describes as depersonalization—a perception of detachment from the self, often accompanied by social withdrawal and emotional numbing.

Ultimately, Adil's trauma is not articulated through overt dialogue or dramatic expressions, but rather through psychological silence and embodied stillness. His character serves as a representation of the invisible and often unacknowledged impact of sexual violence—where the body remembers what the mind cannot yet voice. This portrayal invites a deeper understanding of how trauma shapes subjectivity, not only through memory but through altered presence and behavioral disconnection.

The trauma of sexual violence manifests itself in the form of suffering and anger



Figure 3 (Adil's form of anger and suffering)

Source: "Grave Torture" Movie

Visually, Adil is depicted as a person who neglects self-care. His long, unkempt hair and beard, worn-out clothing dominated by gray tones, and perpetually somber face suggest psychological deterioration. Judith Herman (1992) identifies neglect of personal hygiene or compulsive self-maintenance as common symptoms in trauma survivors. In Adil's case, indifference toward his appearance reflects his withdrawal from social relationships and

feelings of worthlessness—both of which are commonly observed in individuals with unresolved trauma.

The dominance of gray in his appearance also carries strong symbolic meaning. According to Fehrman & Fehrman (2004), gray represents detachment, emptiness, and depression. This color reflects Adil's emotional void, his inability to trust the outside world, and his disconnection from his social environment. Such visual cues guide the audience to understand that the traumatic experience has eroded his vitality and emotional responsiveness.

In addition to visual elements, Adil's trauma is also conveyed through his facial expressions and interactions with others. His face often appears blank, gloomy, and devoid of enthusiasm—visual indicators of dissociation or emotional numbness resulting from severe trauma. Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen (2003) emphasize that a sorrowful expression and vacant gaze are signs of emotional distress, deep sadness, and repressed anxiety. Adil avoids eye contact, especially during conversations involving moral narratives or discussions about human goodness. This reflects his rejection of idealistic narratives that conflict with his traumatic reality.

Adil's skepticism toward moral narratives or posthumous praise of others suggests an internal reality distorted by trauma. He challenges the notion that the deceased were "good people," suggesting instead that hidden transgressions might lie behind seemingly virtuous facades. This can be interpreted as a psychological defense mechanism—specifically, projection—in which past trauma is transferred onto new contexts as a way to protect the self. Herman (1992) notes that trauma survivors often live in dual realities: a social world that urges forgetting, and an inner world that cannot forget. Adil appears to trust his internal world more, as it feels truer to his lived experiences.

Adil's behavior also suggests the presence of psychological repression. In Freudian psychoanalysis, repression is a defense mechanism where traumatic memories are pushed into the unconscious. These repressed experiences often re-emerge as neurotic symptoms such as unexplained sadness, disproportionate anger, or intense physical reactions. In Adil's case, his gloom, cynicism, and rejection of moral ideals can be read as manifestations of repressed memories resurfacing. His inability to believe in human goodness reveals an internalization of betrayal—particularly if his abuser was someone socially respected.

The tension between the id, ego, and superego is also apparent in Adil's characterization. His id-driven anger and suspicion clash with the superego's moral compass and guilt, while the ego attempts to maintain psychological balance. This instability manifests in defensive, cynical, and occasionally aggressive behaviors when he is exposed to trauma-related stimuli. For example, Adil's harsh verbal tone or dismissive attitude during social interactions is less a reflection of innate hostility and more a protective mechanism guarding his unresolved pain.

The peak of Adil's trauma is represented in a climactic scene where he confronts his abuser. His violent outburst, such as physically attacking the perpetrator, is not simply an act

of aggression but rather an expression of deeply repressed pain. Judith Herman (1992) explains that direct confrontation often triggers emotional eruptions in trauma survivors, as it represents an attempt to reclaim agency over one's body and dignity. Adil's physical act can be seen as a psychological counterattack against the powerlessness he experienced as a child—less within a legal framework, and more within a deeply emotional, psychological dimension.

This confrontation scene highlights how unresolved childhood trauma can lead to extreme behaviors in adulthood. Adil, who has long suppressed his pain in silence, can no longer contain his emotions when directly re-exposed to his trauma. In Freudian terms, this represents the "return of the repressed," where previously suppressed content breaks through the defenses of the ego. His physical tension, tears, and intense anger are all manifestations of a suffering too complex to verbalize.

Furthermore, this scene also illustrates the defense mechanism of displacement. When perpetrators are inaccessible or confrontation is too risky, survivors often redirect intense emotions toward safer or closer targets. In Adil's case, his confrontational tone toward his sister may indicate displaced anger—emotions intended for the abuser that cannot be directly expressed. This highlights how sexual trauma not only damages the survivor's relationship with themselves but also with those closest to them.

Adil's psychological state is also conveyed through symbolic use of space and lighting. He is frequently shown in confined, dark, or dimly lit spaces. Symbolically, these spaces reflect a mental state of entrapment, isolation, and persistent shadows from the past. R. J. Lifton (1980) described trauma survivors as living in a "dark bubble," disconnected from the outside world and struggling to orient themselves within reality. The contrasting use of light and shadow, where the background is illuminated but Adil remains in the dark, visually reinforces his alienation and inability to fully engage with social life.

Taken together, Adil's character in *Siksa Kubur* embodies a deeply wounded and complex survivor of childhood sexual trauma. His trauma affects not only his psychological condition, but also his social behavior, visual representation, and symbolic environment. He becomes a living representation of how trauma lingers and shapes identity. His body, expressions, and interactions serve as the primary medium for expressing a suffering that cannot be directly spoken. From a media representation perspective, Adil's character illustrates how sexual trauma can be powerfully conveyed without graphically depicting the violence itself. Instead, the psychological aftermath is revealed through his demeanor, behaviors, and fragmented emotional reality—making the trauma visible through its haunting effects rather than its cause.

Adil's reactive response to traumatic memories when confronted with the perpetrator and genitals



Figure 4 (Adil's Response to trauma triggers)

Source: "Grave Torture" Movie

This section explores the visceral, somatic manifestations of Adil's unresolved trauma as depicted in key scenes. Particularly, it examines how his encounter with Wahyu—the perpetrator—and exposure to Wahyu's genitals trigger physiological and psychological symptoms consistent with trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Drawing on sensorimotor and psychoanalytic trauma theories (Ogden, Van der Kolk, Levine, Freud, Herman), this analysis reveals how cinematic techniques effectively externalize Adil's internal struggle.

In Scene 4a (00:54:09–00:54:52), Adil enters a room and unexpectedly encounters Wahyu. Adil's appearance is deliberately understated—no heavy makeup, just a natural presentation. His body slumps, posture visibly stooped, as he walks forward in halting, uncertain steps. Upon spotting Wahyu, Adil's expression registers shock and sorrow; it flickers between heightened arousal and visceral disgust—his head jerks and he chokes repeatedly—while his abdomen convulses with nausea.

From a sensorimotor perspective, this bodily collapse is not mere acting: it externalizes the freeze response described by Ogden (2006), where trauma survivors involuntarily contract their posture as a self-protective response when faced with their abuser. Psychologically, the tenseness etched across Adil's face and body signals a deep perturbation: a chronically activated sympathetic nervous system, characteristic of PTSD as outlined in the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Visual contact with Wahyu's face—a potent trigger—precipitates flashbacks and somatic symptoms such as difficulty breathing and rapid tearing, confirming Van der Kolk's (2014) assertion that the traumatized body stores memories that can be reactivated physically.

Cinematically, the sequence evolves from long shot to medium-close-up. At first, the viewer perceives Adil's full body—a fragile, slumped figure ensnared in a moment of decision. As he advances toward Wahyu, the framing tightens, isolating his chest and face, drawing us into his subjective experience. Lighting is muted and yellow-tinged, creating a melancholic atmosphere that echoes past trauma. The dimness suggests psychological

suppression, while low-key light shadows Adil's features—implying disorientation and inner conflict.

Editing employs abrupt cuts, matching the fragmentation of Adil's memory. Each cut—akin to a shutter—echoes how traumatic recollections often surface non-linearly, in sharp fragments rather than coherent narratives. Sound design reinforces internal psychic chaos: the hum of an old radio playing on Wahyu's cabinet seems nearly anachronistic, pressured, and intrusive, while an undercurrent of dissonant music shades the scene with instability. According to Michel Chion (1994), such dissonance underscores the character's mental turmoil through sonic representation—an “internal sound-scape.” This technique recalls scenes in *Hereditary* (2018) and *A Quiet Place* (2018), where auditory tension heightens subjective terror.

From a Freudian psychoanalytic angle, Adil's body evokes a psychosomatic breakdown: overpowered by id impulses—fear, disgust, rage—and the restraining force of the superego, his ego splinters—unable to marshal a rational response. His chest acts out the conflict, erupting in convulsions, gagging, nausea. This is symptomatic of repression being overwhelmed: trauma repressed in childhood resurfaces with a vengeance, erupting as somatic symptoms when presented with the abuser's visage. The confrontation physically and symbolically reignites the trauma, rendering Adil disoriented and fragmented.

In Scene 5 (00:58:40–00:59:38), Adil bathes Wahyu's corpse. He appears withdrawn and emotionally numbed—slouched posture, listless demeanor, near-mechanical movements. He pours water over the corpse, beginning an almost ritualistic act, until his hands reach Wahyu's genitals. Here his hand trembles; his gaze turns blank. Immediately he retches, vomiting into a nearby basin.

Drawing from Levine (1997), the trembling of limbs, especially the hands, is a hallmark of sensorimotor trauma response: the body literally revisits and relives traumatic experiences through involuntary physical reactions. The sudden onset of nausea and vomiting is a physiological alarm bell, a primal expulsion of danger associated with contact with the perpetrator's most intimate organ. According to Rozin & Fallon (1987), such gustatory/visceral disgust signals a moral and physical rejection, aligned with the disgust response that functions in part as a protective mechanism.

The cinematography closely observes process. A close-up on Adil's hand washing the corpse focuses the audience's attention on the tactile confrontation. The framing then shifts to an intense medium close-up of his face, to capture the onset of confusion, blankness, and revulsion. Finally, a medium shot depicts the sickness overtaking him. These editing choices mirror the narrative and physiological sequence of the trauma—touch, recognition, revulsion, reaction. The dissonant soundtrack persists, paired only with the visceral sound of retching, intensifying empathy while forcing the viewer to confront Adil's physical suffering directly.

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, this moment dramatizes ego collapse in response to repressed memories that bodily demand expression. The contact with the perpetrator's genitalia—a direct, physical reminder of the trauma—overwhelms Adil's capacity for

suppression. The embodiment of dissociated memories surfaces in a literal bodily expulsion: vomiting, literally rejecting the very organ that once violated his bodily integrity. Freud would consider this conversion of unconscious memory into a somatic symptom a classical manifestation of unresolved childhood sexual trauma.

In Scene 7 (01:30:27–01:31:21), Adil—again performing the corpse-washing ritual—unclothes the cadaver. Instantly, he fixates on the genitals, his gaze lingers before he recoils, averting his eyes and physically stepping back from the body.

This avoidance is emblematic of a trauma response known as trigger avoidance: PTSD sufferers instinctively distance themselves from reminders of the original harm, both to mitigate emotional pain and in an attempt to preclude re-experience (Herman, 1992). Adil's gaze aversion and physical retreat exhibit this dynamic. The corpse represents not only a body but the physical locus of his trauma.

The scene situates him in a cold, poorly lit morgue. Cinematographic choices amplify Adil's vulnerability: an initial bird's-eye view makes him appear small, trapped within the frame—suggestions of infantilization and helplessness. This visual positioning reflects trauma theorists like Bordwell (2017), who note that high vantage points can symbolize entrapment. The subsequent shot shifts to a medium angle from below, presenting Adil as burdened—visually dominated by invisible forces, reinforcing his powerlessness in the face of embodied memory. Low lighting and cool color temperatures complement themes of emotional numbing and depression among trauma survivors (Brown, 2018).

Across scenes 5 and 7, the film underscores how the perpetrator's genitals—whether through touch or presence—serve as potent trauma triggers. Van der Kolk (2014) has demonstrated how sensory cues tied to trauma can reawaken traumatic memory networks. Similarly, Rothschild (2000) notes that stimuli connected to the site or modality of traumatic input frequently evoke intense stress reactions. Adil's nausea, recoiling, gaze aversion, and physiological agitation confirm that his trauma remains unresolved—manifesting physically rather than verbally.

Though not delineated in the original request, Scene 8 (01:41:34–01:42:12) dramatizes the apex of Adil's trauma embodiment. He stands in a dim tunnel, shirtless in dishevelment, hands smeared with semen. He lets out a primal scream—raw, guttural. The sound resonates through the confined space while dissonant ambient lighting bathes him in a jaundiced glow. The camera's gradual shift from a distant long shot to a close-up on his semen-coated hands intensifies the emotional gravity: an unmistakable signifier of sexual violation and contamination. According to Rozin (2008), close-ups of bodily fluids tied to sexualized violence evoke moral disgust and alert responses. The semen represents both the perpetrator's intrusion and the re-activation of childhood trauma—a profoundly embodied, distressing iconography.

Adil's scream, postural collapse, and frantic display of the hands represent the culmination of bodily trauma discharge—an unmediated expression of horror, shame, disgust, and grief. As Janoff-Bulman (1992) describes, screams may serve as a symbolic exhalation

of intolerable psychic pain. Scene 8 thereby illustrates the film's thesis: trauma—and specifically sexual trauma—resides not in memory alone but in the imprinted tissues of the body.

Helplessness and self-destruction as a result of the trauma of sexual violence



Figure 5 (The dispute between Adil and Sitha)

Source: “Grave Torture” Movie

The emotional aftermath of sexual violence is rarely confined to the moment of abuse. In *Siksa Kubur*, Adil's character exemplifies how trauma, when left unprocessed and unreconciled, mutates into self-destruction, fractured relationships, and chronic helplessness. These elements are vividly portrayed in a pivotal scene where Adil engages in an emotionally charged argument with his sister, Sitha, in a secluded mortuary setting. The confrontation between the siblings reveals not only the psychological disintegration of Adil but also the complex mechanisms through which trauma undermines identity, agency, and moral coherence.

From a narrative perspective, the scene is constructed as a psychological unraveling. The sibling argument revolves around a missing memory card, which Sitha believes Adil deliberately switched to conceal evidence. While Adil denies this accusation, his behavior throughout the confrontation—his withdrawn gaze, his passive stance, and eventual emotional outburst—communicates deeper emotional disturbances than the immediate subject of the argument. The dialogic exchange between Adil and Sitha discloses suppressed emotions, unresolved blame, and the overwhelming weight of past suffering. At the heart of this interaction is not a simple dispute over evidence, but a manifestation of deeply embedded trauma rooted in childhood sexual violence.

Judith Herman (1992) notes that trauma, particularly that which occurs in childhood, often reemerges in adult interpersonal relationships, especially those defined by intimacy and trust. This dynamic is evident in the way Adil projects his internal turmoil onto Sitha. His accusation—“You killed our parents”—is not only irrational but deeply symbolic. It serves as a displacement of guilt and pain associated with his own powerlessness during the abuse he experienced. The confrontation is a dramatic moment in which trauma, long repressed, finds expression through misdirected anger.

Freudian psychoanalysis offers a compelling framework for interpreting this displacement. According to Freud, trauma often leads individuals to employ defense mechanisms such as projection and displacement. Projection involves attributing one's unacceptable feelings to another, while displacement entails redirecting emotions from a threatening object to a safer substitute. In this context, Adil redirects his rage and guilt—originally caused by the sexual abuse perpetrated by Wahyu—toward Sitha, his only remaining family member. The phrase “I’m already broken. You know that? Because of you,” encapsulates this displacement. Sitha becomes a surrogate target for emotions too painful or dangerous to direct at the actual perpetrator.

From a semiotic perspective, John Fiske’s layered codes—reality, technical, and ideological—can be applied to unpack the deeper meaning of this scene. The reality code is represented by Adil’s verbal confession of helplessness: “I couldn’t do anything back then.” This line signifies not just a moment of regret, but a persistent psychological condition. It reveals the long-lasting impact of trauma on Adil’s sense of agency, echoing the feeling of paralysis often reported by survivors of sexual abuse.

The technical codes—especially *mise-en-scène* and cinematography—further reinforce Adil’s emotional collapse. The use of cold, desaturated lighting and the gradual transition from medium shots to medium close-ups parallel the increasing intensity of the conflict. The visual composition underscores the emotional claustrophobia and psychological isolation experienced by Adil. His reluctance to maintain eye contact, his hunched posture, and the tightening of his facial muscles collectively signify what Pat Ogden (2006) refers to as *body memory*—the nonverbal imprint of trauma on the physical body. In this framework, the body itself becomes a text that communicates unspeakable suffering.

The absence of background music in the scene also functions as a technical code that highlights emotional realism. The silence emphasizes the rawness of the dialogue, compelling the audience to focus on the emotional stakes of the exchange. The editing style—marked by abrupt, cut-to-cut transitions—mirrors Adil’s fragmented psyche. This style simulates the unpredictable and invasive return of traumatic memories, aligning with Herman’s observation that trauma disrupts linear temporality and narrative coherence.

On the ideological level, the scene challenges common assumptions about masculinity, victimhood, and familial duty. Adil’s breakdown contradicts the traditional image of male stoicism and emotional control, suggesting that men, too, can be deeply damaged by sexual violence. His emotional vulnerability resists the ideological norm that equates masculinity with strength and dominance. Furthermore, his confrontation with Sitha exposes the pressure on trauma survivors to “function normally” and maintain familial roles despite their psychological wounds. Adil’s outburst can thus be read as a refusal to conform to these social expectations—a moment of ideological resistance to the suppression of trauma in patriarchal contexts.

The climax of the scene—when Adil exclaims, “You killed mom and dad!”—serves as a symbolic rupture. This accusation, though factually unfounded, reveals the disorientation

caused by trauma. The boundaries between victim, perpetrator, and bystander become blurred. The accusation is not merely a false memory or confusion; it is a projection of guilt that Adil cannot process or assign accurately. In psychoanalytic terms, this moment marks the failure of the superego to mediate between the demands of the id (impulse for emotional release) and the ego (reality-based self). The result is a moral breakdown, in which Adil lashes out in desperation, unable to reconcile his traumatic past with his present ethical identity.

The dialogue also contains elements of regression, another Freudian concept. When Adil says, “I couldn’t do anything back then! What did you expect me to do?”, he is not only recounting his past helplessness but emotionally reliving it. He momentarily returns to the psychological state of the abused child, unable to act or speak against the perpetrator. This regression is not just emotional but cognitive, as Adil's reasoning reverts to a more primitive, self-protective mode. In doing so, the scene highlights the enduring presence of trauma in the unconscious, which shapes behavior long after the original event has passed.

Moreover, the scene reflects the erosion of the symbolic order—a Lacanian concept referring to the structures (language, law, familial hierarchy) that govern subjectivity. The failure of language to bring resolution, the breakdown of sibling solidarity, and the inability of Adil to clearly identify his abuser within the moral framework of his current life all signify a collapse of symbolic mediation. Trauma, in this sense, is not just a psychological wound but a crisis of meaning.

In broader cultural terms, the scene articulates how trauma manifests in spaces of silence and familial repression. Sitha’s insistence that she has always protected Adil (“If it weren’t for me, you would have been destroyed”) ironically mirrors the coercive denial that often surrounds abuse in family contexts. This dynamic aligns with what Herman describes as the “dialectic of trauma”—the tension between the desire to speak and the compulsion to remain silent. Adil’s outburst, then, is not only an emotional release but a political act of breaking silence.

Taken as a whole, this scene represents a microcosm of the long-term psychological consequences of childhood sexual abuse. It illustrates how trauma becomes embedded not only in memory but in posture, gaze, tone, and affect. The interpersonal rupture between Adil and Sitha is a symptom of a deeper intrapsychic fragmentation—one in which the past continues to haunt the present, and the survivor’s self is split between victimhood, guilt, and a desperate need for recognition.

This depiction of trauma avoids sensationalism and instead opts for emotional realism. It resists the narrative closure often found in conventional cinema and instead offers an unsettling, open-ended portrayal of what it means to live with the consequences of sexual violence. The film thus contributes to a critical discourse that acknowledges the complexity of trauma: its resistance to healing, its intrusion into the everyday, and its power to fracture the most intimate human bonds.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the representation of sexual violence trauma through the character Adil in *Siksa Kubur* (Joko Anwar), employing John Fiske's television semiotics and Freudian psychoanalysis. Key findings reveal three central themes.

First, trauma is conveyed symbolically through cinematic codes (dim lighting, close-ups, confined spaces) and physical manifestations (withdrawn posture, vomiting, freeze responses, uncontrolled screaming), avoiding explicit depictions while emphasizing profound psychological impact.

Second, Adil's trauma reflects psychoanalytic defense mechanisms—dissociation, repression, and regression—stemming from id-ego-superego conflicts. Bodily reactions (tremors, vomiting, hysterical outbursts) serve as unconscious expressions of unprocessed traumatic memories, while also critiquing patriarchal norms that silence male victims.

Third, the film links trauma to patriarchal structures, where masculine power (embodied by the perpetrator Wahyu) perpetuates violence and stigma. As a male victim, Adil faces dual burdens: unacknowledged trauma and societal pressure to perform masculinity.

Siksa Kubur transcends personal suffering, exposing systemic power dynamics that exacerbate trauma. It functions as counter-narrative, raising awareness of sexual violence, particularly against men, whose victimhood is often invisibilized.

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