# Semiotics of "Top Gun: Maverick" Film as an Inspiration for Indonesia to Rise up from the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

Leadership, integrity, and dedication can be a foundation in teamwork. Even integrity is very much needed to achieve a bigger vision and mission to defeat a common enemy. It takes a corps spirit or a sharing the same fate so that the chemistry in a work team becomes more solid. Semiotic analysis of the film Top Gun: Maverick can be appointed as a communicative art study to convey filmmakers' messages to audiences. Qualitative methods with a construction representation perspective emphasize semiotics and discourse approaches more. The film Top Gun: Maverick as the object material is analyzed in a structured manner from the characterizations, film scenario, or story content in the scene, soundtrack, and cinematography. Cinematography in the film has its definition as a layered meaning. This presents the relationship between the visual signs in the film so that it can create a multi-layer entity. The construction of leadership values and moral messages here illustrates the importance of the spirit of war against a common enemy, shown from various places that can inspire efforts to recover conditions who are also struggling to face a common enemy in the era of the Covid 19 pandemic. During the Covid 19 pandemic, the common enemy took the form of the Coronavirus. which is also a threat to the entire nation and society. This requires an effective and efficient handling strategy. This film continues to inspire the creation of further works to make films the frontline in changing mindsets as an effort to develop human resources as viewers. It is hoped that Indonesian cinema will be able to use leadership strategies as a fundamental factor in realizing the efforts of individuals who have integrity.

Keywords: semiotics; leadership; rising Indonesia; communication; Top Gun: Maverick Film

## ABSTRAK

**Semiotika Film *TOP GUN: Maverick* sebagai Inspirasi Indonesia Bangkit dari Pandemi Covid-19.** Kepemimpinan, integritas, dan dedikasi dapat menjadi landasan dalam kerja sama tim. Bahkan integritas sangat dibutuhkan untuk mencapai visi dan misi yang lebih besar untuk mengalahkan musuh bersama. Dibutuhkan corps spirit atau berbagi nasib yang sama agar chemistry dalam sebuah tim kerja semakin solid. Analisis semiotika film Top Gun: Maverick dapat diangkat sebagai kajian seni komunikatif untuk menyampaikan pesan pembuat film kepada penonton. Metode kualitatif dengan perspektif representasi konstruksi lebih menekankan pendekatan semiotika dan wacana. Film Top Gun: Maverick sebagai bahan objek dianalisis secara terstruktur mulai dari penokohan, skenario film, atau isi cerita dalam adegan, soundtrack, dan sinematografi. Sinematografi dalam film memiliki pengertian yang berlapis-lapis. Hal ini menghadirkan hubungan antara tanda-tanda visual dalam film sehingga dapat menciptakan entitas yang berlapis-lapis. Konstruksi nilai kepemimpinan dan pesan moral di sini menggambarkan pentingnya semangat perang melawan musuh bersama, terlihat dari berbagai tempat yang dapat menginspirasi

upaya pemulihan kondisi yang juga sedang berjuang menghadapi musuh bersama di era pandemi Covid-19. Selama pandemi Covid-19, musuh bersama berupa virus corona. yang juga merupakan ancaman bagi seluruh bangsa dan masyarakat. Hal ini membutuhkan strategi penanganan yang efektif dan efisien. Film ini terus menginspirasi penciptaan karya-karya selanjutnya untuk menjadikan film sebagai garda terdepan dalam mengubah pola pikir sebagai upaya mengembangkan sumber daya manusia sebagai penonton. Sinema Indonesia diharapkan mampu menggunakan strategi kepemimpinan sebagai faktor fundamental dalam mewujudkan upaya individu yang berintegritas.

Kata kunci: semiotika; kepemimpinan; Indonesia bangkit; komunikasi; Top Gun: Maverick Film

## Introduction

At the beginning of 2020, there was a Covid-19 pandemic which caused social, cultural, and economic conditions to experience utmost drastic changes. One of these changes is in the world of film and the cinema business. The current conditions of film development in Indonesia have experienced a drastic decline. Data shows the current conditions that the media network recorded 97.3% of Indonesian cinemas selling less than 250 thousand tickets. This had a major impact on the development of the Indonesian film industry (Katadata.com, 2020). This fact was supported by data compiled by Forbes regarding the impact of the pandemic on the world entertainment industry's revenue which has also decreased by 28% (forbes.com, 2022). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic people were required to stay at home, so their movements and activities outside the home are very limited, especially activities in the film world as a result of regulations issued by the Indonesian government, namely the enactment of PSBB (Large-Scale Social Restrictions).

Similar regulations also occurred in several parts of the world to reduce activities outside the home and even implement work from home (WFH), so that activities such as watching movies in cinemas certainly experienced changes and reduce the number of viewers. A few cinemas in Indonesia have chosen to temporarily close down its operation until conditions improve. Even though shopping centers were still open, cinemas cannot yet be opened as a form of effort to suppress the breaking of the Covid-19 chain (Detik.com, 2021).

Under these conditions, the film industry must continue to exist for the survival of filmmakers and global economic growth. The business in the film world is a source of income to increase economic growth in various regions, so it requires creativity and innovation in making quality film works.

Creativity in film can be seen in how the some cut scenes greatly impact the audience. Not infrequently, film scenarios are also adopted from true stories as an inspiration for the audience to be able to pick up the messages contained therein. In this case, often films in the drama genre are inserted with more romance stories and action scenes that are utterly interesting. Besides that, action and war are also alternative films that are utmost popular. Character actions and interactions can be systematically constructed based on shared patterns of verbal elements and these patterns provide an analytical basis for understanding and interpreting individual characters. (Tseng, 2013a). The existence of specific characteristics in the actor's body functions not only as a bearer of symbolic meaning but also as a symbolic reference to the factual situation in the film (van Ooijen, 2011). From the two studies above, the film Top Gun: Maverick also raises characterizations and characters that are more oriented to their leadership style in solving the problems they face. The highlight of this leadership style is to be analyzed by combining Performance theory and its semiotic analysis.

The film Top Gun: Maverick when viewed from film semiotic studies and analyzed with Performance Studies Theory obtains layers of meaning and alternative solutions in dealing with war. In the context of Indonesia's Rise, the

Indonesian nation is also fighting against a pandemic situation that has become endemic, as is what the world is currently experiencing. The leadership style that is studied from the characterization of the main actors as well as the teamwork and political intrigue that is experienced is a factor in making alternative solutions.

## Literature Review

Indonesian films that feature leadership content and alternative solutions for handling a national problem can be prioritized under current conditions. Making creative and innovative scenarios is a separate consideration. An action shown in a film scene can be seen in terms of characterization, character, storyline, or scenario as well as the implied messages it can be found in almost all scenes in the film, as a form of assessing the appearance of the actors involved. Most film researchers have paid attention to the effects created by the images produced on the big screen that impact narrative, spectacle, aesthetics, genre, history, and the contemporary cinema industry (Lunenfeld 2000; Tudor 2008; Stewart 2012; Whissel 2010). As stated by previous researchers, the analysis category developed is only related to functional social semiotics (Leeuwen 2005; Bateman 2007). However, this research is more directed at semiotics which reviews dynamic materiality and the construction of the spatial meaning of characterization characters with the support of Performance Studies Theory.

In the film Top Gun: Maverick through the characterization role represented by the character Maverick this film is expected to be able to represent the character as an example of taking action to provide appropriate solutions in dealing with a common enemy. In this context, it can be analogized to the actual conditions of a war against an enemy in the form of the Covid 19 pandemic. A film can be a means of inspiration and motivation to make changes. The film Top Gun: Maverick has many inspiring ideas that can be implemented in the lives of Indonesian people. In this research, dig deeper into how the film Top Gun: Maverick can be applied in Indonesian society through a story that

has an important message to advance Indonesia's human resources to advance the nation. In addition, the researcher wants to see the leadership style of one of the main characters in this film. Maverick managed to attract the attention of the audience with his distinctive leadership style and became one of the character's perspectives built in an action/adventure genre film. This character then becomes the point of view and focus of interest in seeing the importance of conveying film messages in terms of Performance Studies to be able to inspire Indonesia to rise. Visionary leadership becomes a multilayer analysis using semiotics. So that the important question in this paper emphasizes more on how information about the behavior or character of the main character is mediated by the construction of the character's identity into a problem-solving model or alternative solution. This question wants to be explored in more depth to make Indonesia rise.

## Research Method

The disclosure of meaning to see hidden meaning forms a multilayer entity that consists of three layers: the 1st layer, Maverick's character acts as a leader; 2nd layer Maverick acts as inspiration; and the 3rd layer Maverick as a humanist (ordinary human being who also has feelings of conscience, ambition, and the desire to love his partner and the environment). In this context, the semiotic analysis of the scene in the film Top Gun: Maverick is transformed into a drama confronted with everyday life that borrows the Theory of Performance Studies by Richard Schechner to analyze more deeply.



Scheme 1. Performance fan. (Source: Richard Schechner, Performance Studies: An Introduction (2013: 11))

In scheme 1, it can be seen that appearance or performance can also be a daily activity which is also an art-making process activity. The film scenario also contains part of the performance itself. Support for the definition of concepts about characters, constructions, and visual symbols is needed in the analysis of this study. An event or reality that is framed by the values, aesthetics, and ethics of film can be seen as a social drama. The framing process proves that an event happened. According to Pilliang, frames play a role in 'gathering', namely gathering various forms of 'existence' in a film representation format. 'Framing' is presenting as well as hiding the total thoughts, behaviors, and works of humans mediated by drama or film. It is not only limited to films about political events, violence, and blood but also records interesting events around us to be visualized and realized as material for inspiration in making films based on true stories.

This reality is packaged in a visual work in the form of a film, this lies in the existence of a story to be informed based on facts presented visually and creates a deep impression. Furthermore, Woollacott (1982) suggests how visual film operates (visual reality as it is which is formed from existing signs, without relating and raising further meanings) only then the second stage begins to relate signs that exist in the formation of ideology through social content. existing culture and politics, which occur naturally and make sense:

> "Film ... operate upon us in a manner which suppresses and conceals their ideological function because they appear to record than to transform or signify" (Woollacott, 1982: 99).

The theory of Semiotics by Roland Barthes in this context refers to his concept of thought in his book "The Semiotic Challenge" (Barthes, 1988). Thoughts related to the discovery of "scenes" used to characterize semiological situations. An adventure that is personal but not subjective in all forms that come as markers expressed in three moments: first, moments of admiration for language or dialogue, the discourse which becomes a constant object by assuring intellectual commitment by providing it with analytical instruments with various perspectives such as political and social culture; second, the moment of science makes a semiological analysis of very important objects such as their appearance or fashion clothes, expressions, names, which enter the "fun" into the marker towards the text; third, the reality is from the text. Discourse is being woven displacing a prejudice. Discourse is being woven around, which displaces prejudice, questions the "obvious," and proposes new concepts: Propp (1998), discovered through Levi-Strauss, makes it possible to apply semiology with some rigor to a literary object, and narrative; Julia Kristeva, who profoundly changed the semiological landscape, gave me personally and especially new concepts about paragrammatism and intertextuality; Derrida vigorously replaced the notion of the sign, postulating the retreat of the signified, the decentralization of structure; Foucault accentuates the problematic of signs by assigning them historical niches in the past. Lacan gives us a complete theory of subject dissection, without which science is doomed to remain blind and dumb to the place from which it speaks; Tel Quel, finally, initiated an attempt, unique even today, to relocate all these mutations within the dialectical plane of Marxist materialism (Barthes, 1988).

The character in question is an analogy of judgment in which the character systematically behaves in a certain way by identifying expressions, faces, actions, dialogues, and all character behavior as the main source. Anderson and Shames (2014) in Tseng's (2013) characterization of the film Top Gun: Maverick is adapted by looking at the actions and interactions of the characters by involving emotions and the whole narrative to be able to attract the audience's attention within the boundaries of the film's genre. This multilayer approach can systematically build visual, verbal, and audio collaboration effects in the narrative understanding of viewers as visual and verbal capital (Coco and Keller 2009) so that with this character a portrait of a leader is needed which can be interpreted and the relationship between scenes, communication or dialogue in the course of action from its story.

**Finding and Discussion**

The act of going to a movie theater has been articulated as a minor commercial element within the film industry. But this trend, with the arrival of COVID-19 and the accelerated ban on commercial cinemas, is producing a new multi-screen cinema: one that has dominated the international scene in 2020, the first quarter of 2021, and one that has brought about changes that will no longer be reversible (Perez: 2021) Revealing the effect of collaboration between social drama and performance techniques.

Schechner said that performance studies must be understood as a broad 'spectrum' or 'continuum' of human actions or actions which include rituals, drama, sports, and popular entertainment; performing arts which include theatre, dance, and music, as well as everyday life, including medicine, various media, to the internet. visualized by cultural configurations which are signs of a social drama that takes place in society (Schechner, 2013)

In order to reveal the depth of social drama contained in the political reality of the presidential election campaign in this performance, explained by Goffman's thoughts in The Dramaturgical Perspective regarding social life that can be understood as a series of performance related to an understanding that what is most visible about human life lies on how we see what appears on the surface. That appearance is existent and cannot be damaged by reality, but can only be replaced by another appearance. Goffman emphasizes movement, image, illusion, surface, and action. Goffman separates what is visible and what is fundamental in social life. Life for Goffman contains levels and consciousness, not layers covering a fundamental core that can be expressed through specific work. Performance theater is not something
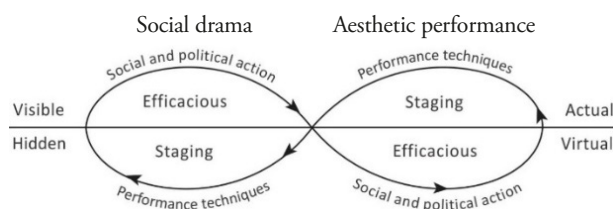


Scheme 2. Diagram of the social drama and aesthetic performance. (Source: Richard Schechner, Performance Studies: And Introduction (2013))

that's in people's minds, but what happens to public action. In everyday life, something exists as it is, but how something exists is something that changes (Schechner, 2013). The point is that the reality of human life that is visually recorded in film can be categorized as a social drama.

Goffman's thoughts become firm when connected with Kernodle's opinion that in a drama stage, there are elements, namely first, a structure that includes plot, character, and theme. Second, a texture that includes dialogue, mood or atmosphere, and properties or accessories (Kernodle, 1967, p. 337:340).

These two elements then become the main foundation of the film in representing or explaining the core of the film you want to show. Representation can be said as a sign regarding an image to be displayed based on similarity with social reality. In this case, the researcher relates this view to the suitability of reality regarding values and leadership attitudes depicted in the film Top Gun: Maverick (Intan et al., 2021).

It is from this view that some of the drama's elements are used to assist in the process of film analysis from the drama's perspective as a performance of social drama in everyday life. In line with what Schechner said, politicians, activists, lawyers, and even leaders use performance techniques (using a stage or podium, how to speak, addressing the audience, how to stand, and using certain settings) intending to support their actions. For that, Schechner said:

> Politicians, activists, lawyers, or terrorists all use performance techniques–staging, addressing various audiences, settings, etc. – to present, demonstrate, protest, or support specific social actions (Schechner, 2013:68).

Based on the idea that the narrative and image shown in the film do not exist by themselves, but exist as a form of construction of reality, the theory of social construction becomes important here. The social construction theory developed by Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann (2016) explains that reality has subjective and objective dimensions. Man is an instrument in creating an objective reality through an externalization process, as he influences it through an internalization process that

reflects subjective reality. Thus, society as a human product, and humans as a product of society, both of which take place dialectically: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

At the same time, this dialectical indicates that society is never a final product, but remains a process that is being formed. Humans as social individuals are never stagnant as long as they live in the midst of their population. Berger and Luckmann's main thesis states that humans and society are continuously dialectical, dynamic, and plural products. Society is not a single static and final reality, but a dynamic and dialectical reality. Reality is plural, marked by the relativity of a person when looking at reality and knowledge. The population is a human product but continuously has a return action against its producers. In contrast, humans are also products of society. A person or individual becomes a person with an identity if he stays and becomes an entity in his society. This dialectical process, according to Berger and Luckmann (Eriyanto, 2007, p. 13:15) has three moments; externalization, objectification, and internalization.

Berger and Luckmann argue that reality is not scientifically formed, nor is it revealed by God. On the other hand, the reality is formed and constructed by humans. This understanding implies that reality

has the potential to have multiple or plural faces. Everyone can have a different construction of reality. Everyone who has experience, preference, level of education, environment, or social interaction will interpret or interpret reality based on their respective constructions (Hirsch & Boal, 2000). The leadership process in the film Top Gun: Maverick is influenced by the construction of human social-cultural reality itself. This applies to most socio-cultural realities in leadership styles in Indonesia.

Apart from being plural, reality (as a product of construction) is also dynamic. As a product of social construction, this reality is both a subjective reality and an objective reality. In subjective reality, there are meanings, interpretations, and results of relations between individuals and objects. Each individual has a different historical background, knowledge, and environment, which can result in different interpretations when seeing and dealing with objects. Conversely, reality also has an objective dimension, namely something that is experienced, is external and is outside the individual. This construction theory is used to help reveal the reproduction of values and symbols in the political reality implicit in the character building of the film's characterizations.

Table 1. Analysis of Leader Indicators on Maverick Figures

| No | Screenshot Visual | Category 1 (Leadership) | Category 2 (Inspirator) | Category 3 (Humanist) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Screenshot 1: (48:32) (Tactical, Efficient and Effective) | | | |
| 2. | Screenshot 2: (11:02) (Constantly striving to achieve the best and going through) | | | |

3. Screenshot 3: (34:44) (Understanding the limit self)
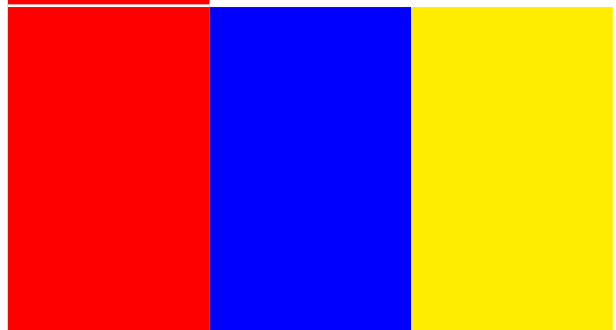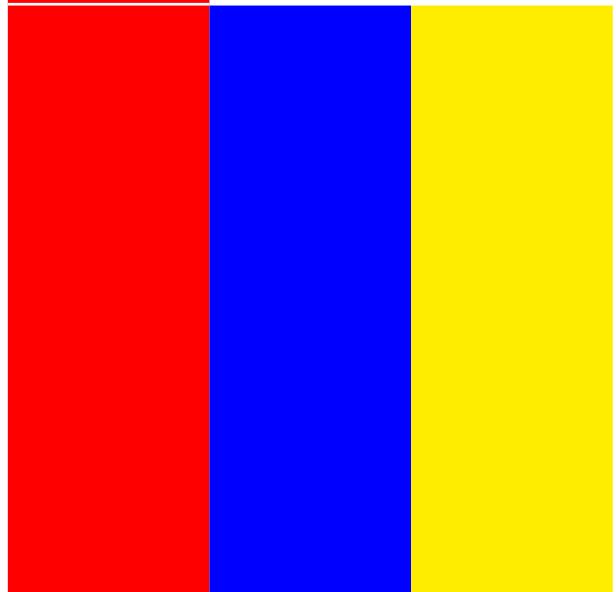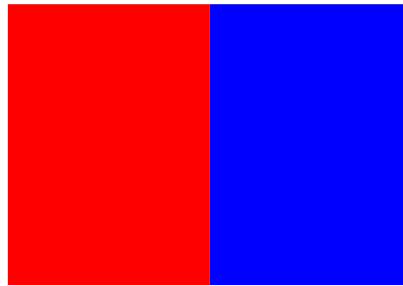


4. Screenshot 4: (44:10) (Wise Decision Maker)





5. Screenshot 5: (53:02) (Have a high curiosity)



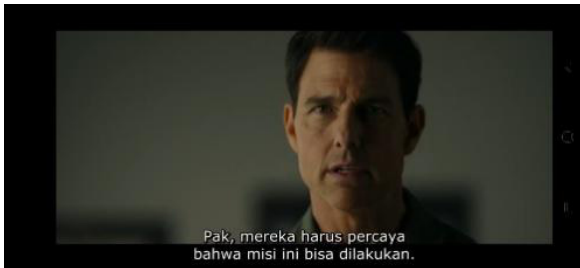6. Screenshot 6: (1:06:564) (Create a harmonious environment and have a high family spirit)

Kau bilang untuk membuat tim, Pak.

7. Screenshot 7: (1:09:24) (Prioritizing action to achieve goals and putting aside all risks)

Jalan keluarnya adalah melalui tanjakan tinggi yang curam

8. Screenshot 8: (1:17:14) (Integrity)

Pak, mereka harus percaya bahwa misi ini bisa dilakukan.

9. Screenshot 9: (1:18:21) (Never Give Up and Have a High Solidarity)

Kau jangan menyerah begitu saja.

Jika kau kehilangan rekanmu,

10. Screenshot 10: (1:20:28) (Able to be a good example)
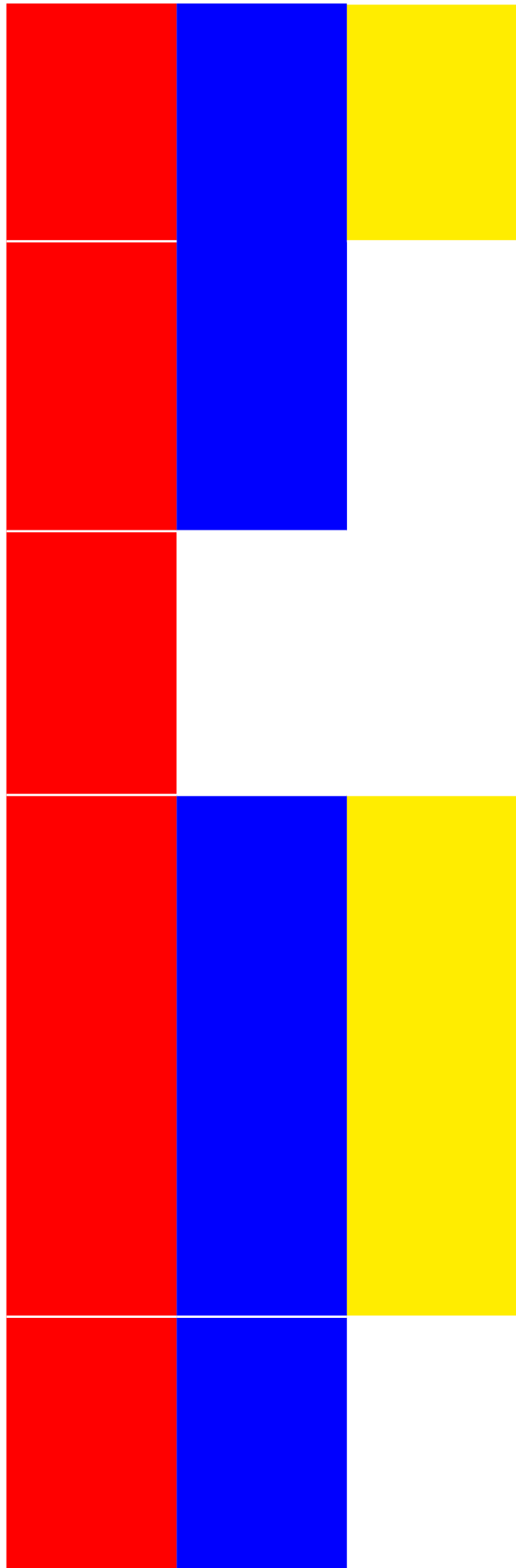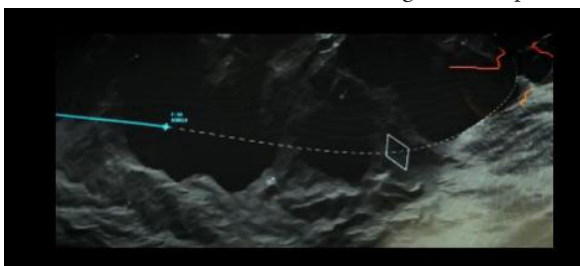
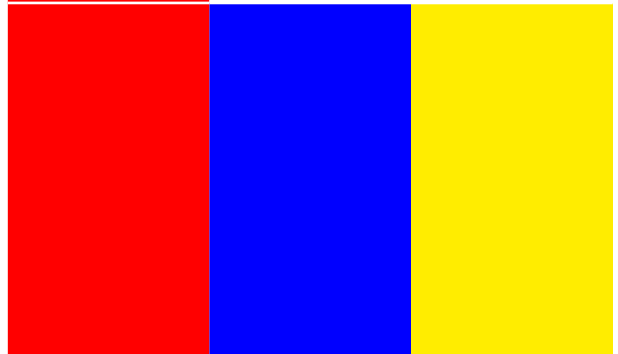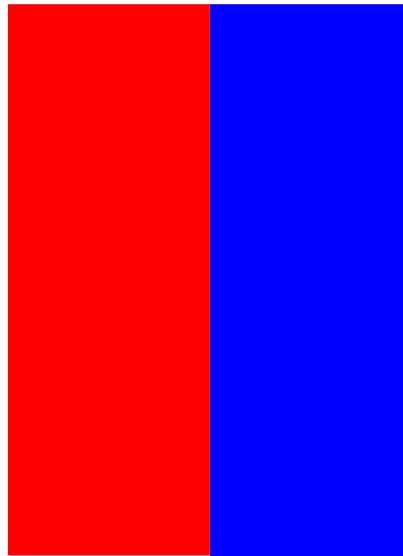11. Screenshot 11: (1:35:33) (Dare to take a risk)



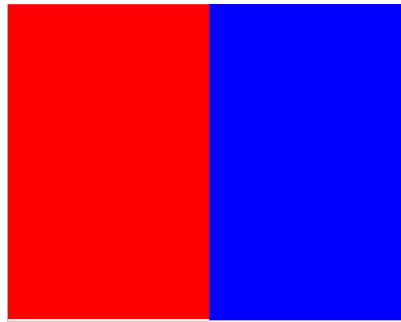12. Screenshot 12: (1:39:31) (Able to handle pressure)



13. Screenshot 13: (1:40:09) (Dare to Sacrifice and Have a Great Spirit)



14. Screenshot 14: (1:47:43) (Confident)

15. Screenshot 15 : (1:45:08) (Full of Dedication)

16. Screenshot 16: (1:57:37) (Able to carry out tasks properly)

17. Screenshot 17: (2:01:23) (Being a simple human being who also has a romantic side)

In line with Berger's view, which states that reality is being formed and constructed by humans, and everyone has a different assessment of a leader. In the film Top Gun: Maverick it is not uncommon to bring up adaptable leadership values. Maverick's characterization fits with Wahjosumidjo's (1999) leadership view which states that leaders should have intelligent, responsible, mature minds, be able to build social relationships and be highly motivated. This can be seen in the screenshots in screenshot 2 where the Maverick character has a high motivation to succeed but still prioritizes intellectual intelligence so that he can make the right decisions according to screenshot 4. In addition, a leader should be able to see the potential of his members to achieve goals precisely and effectively. However, this can be seen from how Maverick is experiencing difficulties caused by his superiors because the position he has is not in a strategic position. From the events taken in that scene, representing the social reality that occurs within military institutions, one realizes that there is often an inaccuracy in decision-making by leaders caused by the dynamics of political conflict so that the right man is not the right place in the professionalism of a position in a particular position.

In contrast to Wahjosumidjo, the construction of the reality of leaders according to Young (2003) refers more to how a leader is aware of his abilities and has the ability to encourage his members to make achievements and can resolve conflicts appropriately in special situations and conditions. That is also shown in screenshots 6 and 10 where Maverick can create a comfortable atmosphere without pressure for his members but can still be a good example. Even though he is a pilot captain, Maverick can think in an extraordinary visionary way and excels by common standards. Capability like this is a potential that must be developed and positively captured by visionary leaders as an

advantage to be able to benefit the institution. However, the reality that occurs, in reality, is the opposite. Individuals like Maverick tend to be seen as a threat, to be exiled, and often even tripped up for their rank. Things like this do not reflect a visionary leader and a neutral institutional environment to prioritize broader national interests. The issue of political intrigue in the dynamics of developing the capacity of Human Resources (HR) and leadership needs to be a concern of all parties to be more aware of moral responsibility in prioritizing the interests of the nation and state above personal and group interests.

Davis (2003) also identified the main characteristics of a leader, one of which is having an attitude and building humane relationships. This characteristic can be seen in screenshots 9 and 17 where Maverick can maintain a solidarity relationship and does not eliminate the fact that he has romance. Leaders like this will look more humane and can give a friendly impression to their members to build positive chemistry so as to create a conducive work environment. If the situation and conditions of the work environment are positive, productivity and creativity can increase so as to be able to achieve common goals.

Handoko (2003) also mentions that one of the characteristics of a leader is having a position or position. In this case, the researcher found an interesting point where Maverick is still able to play and behave as a leader with his superior abilities, even though he does not occupy a strategic position or position. However, what Maverick did still adhere to his ideals even though his superiors had full authority against it. Where not infrequently leaders who have full authority by occupying or occupying strategic positions often forget their main obligations and tend to be more authoritarian. In contrast, Maverick's leadership spirit can be seen clearly in screenshots 12 and 13 where he can remain calm to overcome problems but is also not afraid to make sacrifices for the safety of many people even though pressured by his leadership (Hani T. Handoko & Reksohadiprodjo, 2003).

A leader's background can be influenced by habitat, culture, and level of education. The

concept of culture relates to the accumulation of shared symbols that are important in a particular community, where the context will depend on the semiotic system. Thus, culture cannot be said to be the final result because it is a continuous and ongoing process. Culture is the way of life and the rules of life of people. This, for example, emphasized by Jenks:

> ... the concept of culture, the implies a relationship with the accumulated shared symbols representative of and significant within a particular community – a context-dependent semiotic system. Culture, however, is not simply a residue, it is in progress; it processes and reveals as it structures and contains. Culture is the way of life and the manner of living of a people (Jenks, 1993: 5).

In line with this definition, it can be seen that the concept of cultural reproduction arises from various contemporary investigations from social sciences which all refer to social continuity through change (Jenks, 1993). So that leaders who implement culture tend to be acceptable, accepting, and adaptive in responding to environmental conditions and can properly protect their members. Such a leader is able to see the potential of his members to build greater strength so that they can optimally achieve common goals.

## Conclusion

This article has analyzed the Top Gun film using the symbolic functional semiotic method to understand pattern of actions and interactions between the film characters. It is in this perspective that the symbolic functional semiotic framework used in this paper can be seen as a methodology for producing analyzes that can be tested effectively at various levels of film meaning analysis. By looking at film construction, it is confronted with performance studies as an analysis support tool to transform a drama into everyday activities or everyday life. This daily activity looks at the actor's leadership style which can later be adopted in solving problems in various lines of life. This research work, firstly, inspires young filmmakers

to create a work that puts more emphasis on creative ideas in making creative and innovative scenarios such as providing alternative solutions for every problem that occurs in life, so that this becomes a separate consideration. in filmmaking. A performance shown in a film scene can be seen in terms of characterization, character, storyline/scenario and implicit messages that can be found in almost all scenes in the film, reviewing the appearance of the actors involved.

Second, the message contain in the film's actions is related to values in society, especially in terms of leadership. The construction of leadership values and moral messages here represents how important the spirit of war is to face a common enemy, shown from various scenes that can provide inspiration in efforts to recover the condition of the nation that is also struggling to face a common enemy in the era of the Covid 19 pandemic. During the Covid 19 pandemic, the common enemy was tangible Corona virus is also a threat to the whole nation and all walks of life. This requires an effective and efficient handling strategy. This film inspires the creation of further works to make film the front line in changing mindsets as an effort to continue to develop human resources as its audience. It is hoped that Indonesian filmmakers will be able to make leadership strategy a fundamental factor in the effort to create individuals who have integrity.

Third, the need for developing the capacity of Human Resources (HR) in the education process for one's career path to become a leader. So that a leader in his management must be able to operationalize the "gas" and "brake" in making decisions and be able to act quickly tactically and strategically according to data in the field. Not only that, a leader should be able to make a clear mapping to see the potential that exists and make the most of it, concretely and precisely in its portion and not forgetting humanist values. Visionary leaders need to be sincerely oriented towards noble goals and must have experience in institutions and bureaucracy, adaptive, intelligent in character, with integrity, honest, educated and have broad insights. Egocentric, inhumane, greedy, thirsty for validation, and ego-sectoral attitudes need to be removed by a leader.

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