

= Mereka Bilang , Saya Monyet ! =

Mereka Bilang , Saya Monyet ! (released internationally as They Say I 'm a Monkey !) is a 2008 Indonesian film directed by Djenar Maesa Ayu . Starring Titi Rajo Bintang , Henidar Amroe , and Ray Sahetapi , it tells the life story of Adjeng , who was sexually abused as a child by her mother 's boyfriend . Filmed over 18 days after several years of development , the film adapted two of Ayu 's short stories from her debut anthology of the same name . Owing to its low budget of Rp 620 million , its cast and crew were mostly amateurs and students , although several established actors appeared at reduced rates .

Mereka Bilang , Saya Monyet ! has been described as " anti @-@ Sjuman " because of the disparity between Ayu 's more personal directing style and the social realism of her father , Sjumandjaja . Although commercially unsuccessful , the film was well received by critics . It won five national @-@ level awards and was screened at several international film festivals . Two Indonesian publications , Tempo and The Jakarta Post , selected it as among the best films of 2008 .

= = Plot = =

Adjeng (Titi Rajo Bintang) lives alone in an apartment paid for by her boyfriend , a rich businessman (Joko Anwar) . A writer of children 's stories , she wishes to write short stories for adults ; in this , she is mentored by Asmoro (Ray Sahetapy) ? with whom she is also having sex . Meanwhile , Adjeng 's mother (Henidar Amroe) handles various aspects of her life , constantly calling her and making surprise visits . This has led Adjeng 's friends , Venny (Ayu Dewi) and Andien (Fairuz Faisal) , to tease her about her overbearing mother .

When Adjeng goes clubbing with her friends , she drinks too much and vomits , later passing out in a toilet . As she lies with her head on the seat she recalls that , as a child (Nadya Romples) , she had been forced to eat vegetables she had previously vomited . Later , when Andien uses her apartment for a one @-@ night stand , Adjeng peeks and recalls how she had observed her mother having sex with her lover (Bucek Depp) , a man who had previously molested Adjeng ? an act which is not shown explicitly . This background , as well as her recollections of life as a teenager (played by Banyu Bening) at the home of her womanising father (August Melasz) are worked into Adjeng 's short story " Lintah " (" Leech ") .

When Asmoro reads the story , he says that it is unrealistic and that readers need a climax . However , Adjeng insists that reality is unrealistic and that not all victims of rape are willing to call the police . Several days later , while they are lying in bed , Asmoro shows Adjeng that " Lintah " had been published in Kompas . Adjeng 's mother , aware of the story 's autobiographical nature , is furious and , after going to Adjeng 's apartment , blames everything on Adjeng 's father abandoning them .

Upset , Adjeng goes out with Venny and Andien , but when the two begin arguing about motherhood Adjeng leaves them both in the street . She then goes to a café to drink with Asmoro , who comforts her . When she returns home she checks her messages , most of which are about the short story . Venny and Andien , meanwhile , return to their families and think of the importance of children .

The following day , Asmoro sees the businessman , Adjeng 's boyfriend , leaving her apartment , which puts him in a foul mood . He and Adjeng fight , and Asmoro almost smothers Adjeng with a pillow before saying that they are through . As Adjeng lies on the bed , she recalls how her mother 's lover raped her and how her mother murdered him . As the phone rings , Adjeng watches the people from her past going about life in a residential complex , smiles , and returns to writing .

= = Cast = =

Titi Rajo Bintang as Adjeng , a young writer who was abused as a child
Banyu Bening as Adjeng as a teenager , while living at her father 's house
Nadya Rompies as Adjeng as a child , while living at her mother 's house

Henidar Amroe as Adjeng 's mother , a former actress who is very controlling with her child
Bucek Depp as Adjeng 's mother 's boyfriend , a musician who molests the young Adjeng
Ray Sahetapy as Asmoro , Adjeng 's mentor and lover
Joko Anwar as a businessman , whom Adjeng dates to receive financial support
August Melasz as Adjeng 's father , a writer who enjoys womanising and interacts with his daughter

Jajang C. Noer as Bi Inah , Adjeng 's father 's maid
Ayu Dewi as Venny , Adjeng 's friend who enjoys clubbing and wants to have a child
Fairuz Faisal as Andien , Adjeng 's friend who enjoys clubbing and has a child at home

= = Production = =

The film was originally meant to be based on the short story " Mereka Bilang , Saya Monyet ! " from Djenar Maesa Ayu 's 2002 debut , a critically and commercially successful short story anthology of the same name . However , Djenar later chose to base the film on " Lintah " (" Leech ") and " Melukis Jendela " (" Painting the Window ") , two other stories from the anthology . Ayu had originally not intended to film her stories , but agreed after she was approached by a consortium who offered to fund her . She asked Indra Herlambang , a writer @-@ cum @-@ television personality , to help her write the screenplay as she " never could write stories with a plot " , and she needed him to keep her motivated . The two wrote the screenplay over a period of two years , having difficulty finding new investors after the original ones dropped out .

In 2004 Ayu began taking filmmaking classes to prepare herself to direct the film . She also watched several films directed by her father , the director Sjumandjaja , in preparation for production . Production began in October 2006 , with some of the film crew ? including art director Hardiyansah B. Yasin ? drawn in after Ayu met them at a cafe in South Jakarta and discovered that they were active in the local indie film scene . The group helped collect the Rp 620 million (US \$ 75 @,@ 000) needed for production ; as a cost @-@ saving measure , numerous crew members were film students .

Many of the roles were written with specific actors in mind , with casting for other roles promoted by word of mouth . Titi Rajo Bintang , a lecturer at the Daya Kemang Institute of Art , was cast in the starring role of Adjeng after Ayu and her then @-@ husband , Sri Aksana Sjaman (Ayu 's brother) , convinced her . At first she was uncomfortable with some of her scenes and her lack of training , as this was her first film role . However , she received support from her husband , who told her that she should act professionally and that " in a kissing scene ... [her] body should not reject it " . The couple also provided the soundtrack for Mereka Bilang , Saya Monyet ! , including three original songs ? " When You Smile " , " Someday " , and " Love , Sadness & Happiness " ? performed by Rajo Bintang .

Model turned actress Henidar Amroe was chosen to play Adjeng 's mother ; Ayu later said that the role had been written with her in mind . Although worried about the sexual content of the film , Amroe accepted the role , calling it a " crazy " plot that " read like a foreign movie " . The young Adjeng was played by Ayu 's daughter , Banyu Bening . Several of the established actors cast , including Jajang C. Noer , Ray Sahetapy , and August Melasz , agreed to appear in the film for less than their usual fee . Shooting took place over 18 days , although 14 had originally been allocated .

= = Style and themes = =

Mereka Bilang , Saya Monyet ! deals with the after effects of child molestation in a way that the Indonesian magazine Tempo describes as an " interesting time control experiment " , replete with flashbacks which clearly establish the time frame in which scenes happen . According to Wicaksono Adi , in his review for Kompas , Adjeng 's writing is her therapy , as it entails constant reconstruction and deconstruction of her troubled past ; he posits that this ultimately allows Adjeng to fight back against the authority figures who had troubled her since she was young . In a making @-@ of documentary on the film , Ayu said that she had no moral message or social criticism in mind when

creating the film , considering it instead a form of self @-@ exploration . Admitting that the film could be read as a critique of violence against women and children , she said that she could empathise as a woman .

Adi also sees a love ? hate relationship between Adjeng and her mother , which results in Adjeng 's promiscuity ? a common act in the Sastra Wangi literary movement of which Ayu is considered a part . The relationship between mother and daughter is reflective of themes in the earlier works *Pasir Berbisik* (*Whispering Sands* ; 2001) , by Nan Achnas , and *Eliana* , *Eliana* (2003) , by Riri Riza . However , unlike the aforementioned films , *Mereka Bilang* , *Saya Monyet !* did not end with the daughter and mother on divergent paths . The reviewer Totot Indrarto , also writing for Kompas , wrote that Adjeng was the title " monkey " character of the film , being looked down upon by everyone around her ; however , those who judge her do not actually know her , thus , in Indrarto 's opinion , making them the " monkeys " .

A review in Tempo described the film as " anti @-@ Sjumana " owing to the differences in styles between father and daughter . Sjumandjaja 's films tended to fall under social realism , while Ayu 's debut had more of a personal , symbolic aspect with a touch of surrealism . The film does not show Adjeng 's molestation , instead symbolizing it by showing a leech feeding ; in one case , when Adjeng is raped in a bathtub , losing her virginity , the scene is represented by blood @-@ red water and numerous leeches feeding .

= = Release and reception = =

Mereka Bilang , *Saya Monyet !* received a wide release on 3 January 2008 . Commercially unsuccessful in the country , the film was screened at several international film festivals , including the 2008 Singapore International Film Festival (SIFF) , the 2008 Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival in Estonia , and the 2009 Asian Hot Shot Film Festival in Berlin . The film was released on DVD in Indonesia on 9 May 2008 by Jive ! Collection , after passing through the censorship board in March . The DVD featured English @-@ language subtitles , English- and Indonesian @-@ language editions of the source short stories , and a behind @-@ the @-@ scenes documentary .

The film received generally positive reviews . Seno Joko Suyono , in a review for Tempo , stated that the cliched plot of family crisis became more interesting with the introduction of sex ; he also called the climax " sweet yet disturbing " . Later in 2008 the magazine selected *Mereka Bilang* , *Saya Monyet !* as the best local movie of 2008 , writing that Ayu had taken to directing like " a fish that had long floundered on the dry ground and was finally returned to the sea . " Iskandar Liem , writing for The Jakarta Post , also listed the film as among the top ten of the year , alongside international works such as Christopher Nolan 's *The Dark Knight* and another Indonesian film , Riri Riza 's *Laskar Pelangi* (*The Rainbow Warriors*) . He described the film as " unflinching in its brutal honesty and fluid in its visual allegory " , welcoming Ayu as " a rebellious new voice " in Indonesia 's film industry .

Ening Nurjanah , an organiser of the women @-@ themed film festival V , described Djenar as " an example of director who can portray a strong woman in her films " , with the film " breaking new ground " in portraying women 's sexuality . The Vietnamese @-@ American actor Dustin Nguyen , who judged the film at SIFF , considered the film unexpected and " un @-@ Indonesian " , " well made , well acted , but [with] more of a Western sensibility . Lisabonar Rahman , writing for Rolling Stone Indonesia , praised Rajo Bintang 's acting and the film 's portrayal of Adjeng 's background , on which she wrote " the expression of [the background] is very powerful , keeping us speechless from fear " ; however , she found the sound quality inadequate .

In his review for Kompas , Adi wrote that Ayu had made a well developed and acted film , a " good debut for [Indonesia 's] future director " , although he considered the cinematography incapable of fully expressing the character 's psychological torment . Indrarto described *Mereka Bilang* , *Saya Monyet !* as interesting despite technical flaws , containing a strong message that viewers should not judge someone or bother them when they are unlikely to know that person 's true background .

= = Awards = =

Mereka Bilang , Saya Monyet ! was nominated for two Golden Screen Awards at the 2008 Indonesian Movie Awards . It also received six Citra Award nominations at the 2009 Indonesian Film Festival (IFF) , winning three . Aria Kusumadewa 's Identitas (Identity ; 2009) bested Mereka Bilang , Saya Monyet ! in Best Film and Best Director , while Joko Anwar 's Pintu Terlarang (Forbidden Door ; 2009) took Best Editing .