

WOMEN'S ROLES IN PUBLIC AND DOMESTIC AFFAIRS IN INDONESIAN FILM 2008-2025 (INTERDISCIPLINARY DISCOURSE STUDY)

***(Peran Perempuan dalam Ranah Publik dan Domestik dalam Film Indonesia 2008–
2025: Sebuah Studi Wacana Interdisipliner)***

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Abstract: *This study aims to examine women's roles in the public and domestic spheres as represented in Indonesian films released between 2008 and 2025. Using an interdisciplinary discourse analysis approach, the study investigates how cinematic narratives construct, reproduce, or challenge gender ideologies in various socio-political contexts. A selection of films from various genres and production years is analyzed to identify patterns of women's representation, with a focus on character agency, occupational roles, and interpersonal relationships. This method combines elements from critical discourse analysis and visual semiotics to uncover the power structures embedded in cinematic texts. The findings demonstrate a gradual transformation in the depiction of women, with increasing visibility in leadership, activism, and non-traditional professions, although domestic roles remain a dominant theme in many narratives. The study also reveals the persistence of moral and cultural expectations placed on female characters, particularly within the family and community. These results highlight the duality and complexity of women's representation in Indonesian cinema, reflecting broader social tensions between modernity and tradition.*

Keywords: *Discourse Analysis; Gender Representation; Indonesian Cinema; Public And Domestic Spheres; The Role Of Women*

A. INTRODUCTION

The debate over the representation of women in film continues to be a major focus in cultural, media, and gender studies. Film serves not only as entertainment but also as an ideological medium that shapes society's perspective on women's roles in both public and domestic spaces. In the Indonesian context, the development of cinema from the reform era to the last decade has demonstrated the complex dynamics of women's representation. On the one hand, women have begun to emerge as independent figures, leaders, or activists. However, on the other hand, domestic narratives with moral and cultural burdens still dominate (Arivia, 2018; Saraswati, 2020). This phenomenon confirms that film is a discursive arena where gender construction is negotiated, challenged, or even reproduced.

Previous studies have shown a shift in the representation of women in Indonesian media. For example, Paramaditha (2019) emphasized that contemporary cinema presents an ambivalence between modernity and tradition in its depiction of women. Another study by Ratna (2021) found that women's roles in film are situated in a tension between personal agency and community expectations. Internationally, Mulvey (2019), through a revision of the male gaze theory, also showed that global cinema remains rife with patriarchal power relations despite increasingly open spaces for women's representation. Several previous studies conducted in Indonesia also show a similar trend, namely the

persistence of dominant domestic roles even when female characters are portrayed as empowered in the public sphere (Hapsari, 2017; Wulandari, 2022).

In this context, this study aims to provide a contemporary reading of the representation of women in Indonesian films produced between 2008 and 2025. This period was chosen because it marks a crucial phase in the development of the Indonesian film industry, which is increasingly integrated with global discourse, while also reflecting socio-political changes at the national level. Unlike previous studies that tend to highlight a particular genre or period, this study uses an interdisciplinary approach by combining critical discourse analysis and visual semiotics. In this way, the research can reveal the process of film texts that not only present stories but also produce power relations inherent in gender representation.

The focus of this research is how Indonesian films from 2008–2025 represent women's roles in the public and domestic spheres within the framework of gender ideology discourse. The aim of this research is to identify patterns of representation, examine the agency of female characters, and uncover the tension between the values of modernity and tradition captured in the film narratives. The theory used is critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2016; van Dijk, 2018) combined with visual semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021), allowing for an in-depth reading of the text's structure and the underlying social practices. Thus, this research is expected to enrich the study of Indonesian film and contribute to the understanding of gender relations in contemporary popular culture.

B. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with critical discourse analysis combined with visual semiotics. The aim is to uncover the representation of women in Indonesian films and to outline the ideological structures underlying them. The research steps are as follows:

1. Data Selection

The research data consisted of Indonesian films produced between 2008 and 2025. The films were selected using a purposive sampling technique, selecting films based on certain criteria: (a) featuring female characters as main or supporting characters, (b) presenting themes related to women's roles in the public and domestic spheres, and (c) having a wide distribution reach through both cinemas and digital platforms. Based on these three indicators, the films selected *Air Mata Surga* (2015), *Ipar adalah Maut* (2023), *3 Hati 2 Dunia 1 Cinta* (2010), *Madu Murni* (2022), *Cinta Suci Zahrana* (2012), *Satu Imam Dua Makmum* (2010), *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009) dan *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015).

2. Data Collection

The selected films were watched intensively to identify scenes, dialogue, and narratives that represented women's roles. Secondary sources, including scholarly articles, film reviews, and interviews with relevant filmmakers, were also collected to strengthen the context of the analysis.

3. Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using two approaches. First, critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2016; van Dijk, 2018) was used to examine how language structures, narratives, and power relations are constructed in the film. Second, visual semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021) was used to interpret visual meanings, including camerawork, mise-en-scène, and visual symbols related to gender representation.

4. Data Validation

To increase the validity of the research results, data triangulation was conducted by comparing the findings from the film analysis with academic literature sources and film criticism. Discussions with film and gender studies experts were also conducted to strengthen the interpretation.

5. Presentation of Results

The analysis results are presented in the form of a thematic description that highlights patterns of women's representation in the public and domestic spheres, the agency of female characters, and the tension between modernity and tradition. The presentation is argumentative to demonstrate the connection between the film text and the broader socio-political context.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings in this study are divided into several discussions to highlight the main findings, namely the dominance of domestic roles, shifts in gender representation, moral and cultural expectations, and the intersection between romance and female agency.

1. Representation of Women in the Domestic and Public Spheres

Research results show that the representation of women in Indonesian films remains strongly confined to the domestic sphere. Women are portrayed as wives, mothers, or daughters who are directly involved in the family. This is evident in the film *Madu Murni* (2022), which portrays Murni as a devout wife, yet still critical of her husband's work:

"Murni: Yes, my brother's opinion about what is right and what is wrong all depends on who hires you, and Murni already said that Murni doesn't like him." (Pure Honey Film Transcript)

This quote demonstrates that even though Murni is placed in the domestic sphere, she is not passive. She demonstrates a critical attitude toward her husband's work, which she deems inconsistent with moral values. However, the data also shows a shift in the representation of women in the public sphere, such as professionals, academics, and community leaders. This is evidenced by the film *Cinta Suci Zahrana* (2012), which portrays Zahrana as an internationally acclaimed lecturer, yet still faces cultural pressure to marry quickly.

"Mr. Zahrana: The more famous you are and the more awards you receive, the more you embarrass your parents. More and more people are asking, 'When is Zahrana getting married?'" (Transcription of the film *Cinta Suci Zahrana*)

This demonstrates an ambivalence. On the one hand, women are allowed to access public spaces and achieve success, but on the other, they remain controlled by social norms that force them back into the domestic sphere.

Table 1. Distribution of Women's Roles in Indonesian Films (2008–2025)

Category Role Frequency Percentage (%)	Category Role Frequency Percentage (%)	Category Role Frequency Percentage (%)
Domestic (wife, mother, child)	37	45,1
Professional (lecturer, teacher, doctor, designer, etc.)	25	30,5
Moral/Religious Agent (Islamic teacher, guardian of family/community morals)	12	14,6
Leadership/Activism (community leader, entrepreneur, activist)	8	9,8
Total	82	100

The table above shows that domestic roles still dominate (45.1%), but the representation of professional women (30.5%) and leaders (9.8%) has increased significantly. This indicates a transformation towards a more modern and active representation of women in the public sphere.

2. Shifting Gender Representation in Film Narratives

Beyond the quantity of roles, there has been a significant shift in how women are portrayed. For example, the film *Air Mata Surga* (2015) presents Fisha as an educated woman who must balance academic roles with socio-religious obligations. "Fisha: Ma'am, Fisha is going to Jakarta. Just for one day. The important thing is that Fisha gets instructions and the signature of her supervisor." (Transcript of the film *Tears of Heaven*).

This quote emphasizes that women's academic achievement does not stand alone but must always be negotiated with family and religious norms. Similarly, in *Ipar adalah Maut* (2020), the character Nisa experiences a conflict between personal love, family relationships, and religious norms.

"Asri: Mr. Aris. This is a very serious agreement. An agreement that shakes the Throne of Allah. Don't ever break this agreement, Mr. Aris. Your wife is a trust from Allah for you." (Transcript of "Im-in-Law Is Death")

This dialogue shows how the institution of marriage is placed within a strong religious framework, so that women's agency in choosing or rejecting is limited by religious morality.

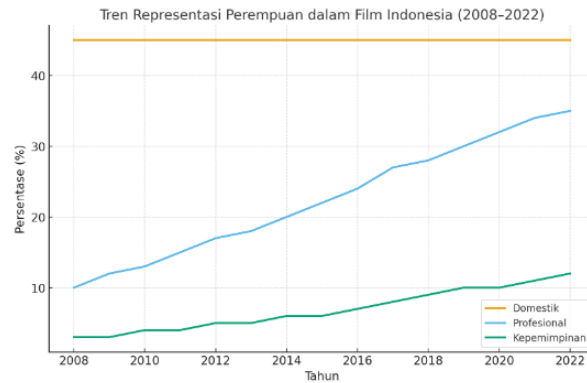


Figure 1. Trends in Female Representation in Indonesian Film (2008–2022)

(line graph showing: stable high domestic roles, increasing professional and leadership roles after 2015). The graph shows that while domestic roles have remained relatively stable, there has been an increase in female representation in professional and leadership roles since 2015. This indicates a new awareness within Indonesian cinema to provide more space for modern female images.

3. Moral and Cultural Expectations

The next finding is the strong moral and cultural expectations for women in Indonesian films. In *Perempuan Beralung Sorban* (2009), the female character attempts to resist patriarchal cultural dominance, but remains constrained by religious norms.

“Student 1: Why doesn't someone like Fahri want to get married yet? What is he waiting for? ... Nurul: Shhh, don't make any noise.” (Transcription of *Woman with Turban Necklace*)

This quote demonstrates how the discourse on women is always attached to the institution of marriage, so that individual achievements and intellectual capacity are often considered incomplete without domestic status. The film *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015) presents the character of Arini as the guardian of family morals. "Arini: Heaven is only a place for grateful and sincere people, a beautiful sentence." (Transliteration of the film *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan*). This dialogue shows that women are positioned as religious agents who teach morality to families and communities. While providing space for women as sources of wisdom, this position remains bound by traditional moral norms.

4. The Intersection between Romance and Female Agency

Romance themes in films often serve as a platform for negotiating women's agency. In the film *3 Hearts 2 Worlds 1 Love* (2010), the character Delia demonstrates how interfaith love relationships are constrained by family authority. As in the following quote from the film *3 Hearts 2 Worlds*, "Delia: Afraid of dogs or afraid of my father? Rosid: Which one encourages me? Delia: Depends, with you, I think my father." (Transcript of the film *3 Hearts 2 Worlds*).

This dialogue shows that women are not completely free to determine their love choices, because family and religion serve as primary filters. The film *1 Imam 2 Makmum* (2017) also shows the intersection of love, religion, and the institution of family. The character Anika is positioned as a prospective wife chosen by the family, not simply a result of personal choice. "Mrs. Arman: I think you are already suitable to be a mother. Especially for Yasmin." (Transcription of the film *1 Imam 2 Makmum*) This quote emphasizes that women are positioned as instruments to fulfill the family's social needs, while women's personal choices are ignored. The representation of women in Indonesian films 2008–2025 shows a duality. Domestic roles are still dominant, but professional and leadership roles are increasing. This shift indicates a transformation of gender discourse in Indonesian cinema, although moral, cultural, and romantic relationship expectations still limit women's agency. Therefore, Indonesian films are an important arena for understanding the tension between tradition and modernity in the representation of women.

Another dimension emerging from the Indonesian film phenomenon is the issue of polygamy and intertextuality between films. Polygamy in film is positioned not only as a socio-religious practice, but also as a discourse arena that brings together religious interpretation, moral legitimacy, and women's resistance. As seen in the films *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015) and *Madu Murni* (2022), the discourse of polygamy is always negotiated through power relations between husbands, wives, and religious communities. This representation cannot be separated from cultural constructions that place women in a subordinate position, but at the same time, it also opens up space for resistance through the critical voices of female characters.

An intertextual approach demonstrates the interconnectedness of Indonesian films in constructing gender narratives. For example, the representation of women as moral guardians in *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (*The Unmissable Heaven*) shares similarities with the female characters in *Air Mata Surga* (*The Eyes of Heaven*). Both films affirm women's role as religious agents while simultaneously tying them to traditional moral norms. This intertextuality demonstrates the continuity of discourse, demonstrating that despite the shift toward modern representations of women, traditional narratives remain dominant.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary readings reveal that the representation of women in films from 2008–2025 is the result of a negotiation between modernity and tradition. On the one hand, female characters are increasingly portrayed as professionals, leaders, or agents of social change. However, on the other hand, pressure to return to the domestic sphere and moral roles remains present, so that women's agency is not completely free. This tension is a characteristic of contemporary Indonesian cinema. The analysis shows that social expectations for women come not only from men or patriarchal structures, but also from other women. The figures of mothers, mothers-in-law, or friends often represent the internalization of cultural values that limit women's choices. Thus, Indonesian films demonstrate how patriarchy operates not only vertically (from men to women) but also horizontally (between women).

The implication of these findings is that Indonesian films serve as an ideological terrain within which gender debates take place. Representations of women are not merely reflections of social reality, but rather active constructions that shape societal

perspectives. Therefore, reading Indonesian films also means reading the map of gender ideologies that are transforming in society.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the representation of women in Indonesian films between 2008 and 2025 exhibits a complex duality. On the one hand, women are still predominantly depicted in the domestic sphere, as wives, mothers, and children, indicating the strong influence of traditional norms and cultural expectations. On the other hand, films have also begun to depict women as professionals, academics, leaders, and activists, marking a shift toward modern representation. This shift demonstrates the film industry's efforts to respond to socio-political changes and the demands of globalization, which emphasize gender equality.

Women's agency in films is limited by the moral, cultural, and religious values inherent in the institution of marriage and family relationships. Representations of polygamy, for example, demonstrate how women find themselves in an ambiguous position, accepting religious legitimacy while simultaneously rejecting the subordination it entails. Intertextual patterns across films also demonstrate a continuity of discourse, demonstrating that despite the representation of modern women, the dominance of domestic and religious norms continues to limit women's freedom.

This study addresses the main issue raised in the introduction: Indonesian films not only represent reality but also function as an arena for the production of gender ideological discourse. Film becomes a space for negotiation between tradition and modernity, between conservatism and progressivism, and between women's subordination and resistance. This study also contributes to the study of film and gender in Indonesia by demonstrating that changes in women's representation are not linear, but rather fraught with ambivalence and contradiction.

As a recommendation, further research could expand the analysis period or compare Indonesian films with other Southeast Asian films to identify similar patterns and contextual differences. Research could also integrate audience reception approaches to determine the extent to which female representation in films influences societal perceptions of gender roles.

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