

Aesthetics Feminism and Gender Ideology in Contemporary Indonesian Cinema (2020-2024)

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ABSTRACT : *This study examines the construction of gender ideology and feminist narratives in Indonesian films from 2020–2024 by positioning cinema as a space for the production of meaning, representation, and ideological negotiation. The study aims to analyze how women are constructed in film narratives, how films function as ideological agents in responding to feminist issues, and how feminist values are constructed through cinematic aesthetics. The study uses a qualitative approach by analyzing five Indonesian films: Tilik (2020), Yuni (2021), Like & Share (2022), Gadis Kretek (2023), and Dua Hati Biru (2024). The analysis uses Laura Mulvey's male gaze perspective, Antonio Gramsci's hegemony theory, and formalist film theory, with a focus on narrative, characterization, visual symbols, power relations, and cinematic elements. The results show that feminist narratives in contemporary Indonesian cinema represent women more complexly as subjects with voice, agency, experience, trauma, creativity, and awareness of power relations. However, this construction remains in an arena of negotiation with the dominant patriarchal structure. Film functions as an ideological agent that not only reflects gender inequality but also produces and negotiates social consciousness through narrative, symbol, and representation. The main finding of this research is the concept of the Aesthetic Visual Agenda, namely the cultural mechanism where film aesthetics instills the meaning of feminism through three dimensions—visual, emotional, and narrative—which works through the stages of representation, affection, internalization, and social normalization. This concept emphasizes that cinematic aesthetics is not just an artistic tool, but also an ideological mechanism in the formation of social consciousness regarding gender and feminism.*

KEYWORDS - gender ideology, feminism Indonesian film, male gaze, hegemony, film aesthetics

I. INTRODUCTION

Feminist film studies has long questioned the relationship between cinematic representation and patriarchal ideology. Laura Mulvey's concept of the *male gaze*, particularly in her seminal essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), demonstrates how classical cinematic structures tend to position women as objects of visual pleasure within a predominantly masculine mode of looking. This perspective established an important foundation for examining women's objectification and the unequal distribution of agency in cinema. Subsequent feminist approaches have expanded this discussion by examining how film can also become a site for challenging dominant gender relations, giving visibility to women's experiences, and contesting patriarchal narratives. Feminist approaches to film therefore do not simply ask whether women are represented, but also examine how

representation produces meaning, whose perspective becomes authoritative, and how gendered power relations are normalized or contested through cinematic language.

Within Indonesian cinema, the relationship between feminism and gender ideology has become increasingly significant. Following the Reformasi era, Indonesian filmmaking has diversified in terms of themes and social concerns, including narratives addressing women's experiences and gender inequality. Nevertheless, the increasing visibility of feminist themes does not necessarily indicate the disappearance of patriarchal ideology. Earlier studies and observations of Indonesian cinema indicate that women have frequently remained associated with stereotypical, subordinate, or victimized positions, while patriarchal assumptions continue to influence the construction of female characters and their social roles. At the same time, feminist narratives have increasingly emerged through stories of resistance, identity, agency, and criticism of gender norms.

This tension became particularly visible in Indonesian films produced between 2020 and 2024. This period represents an important moment in the transformation of Indonesian audiovisual culture, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, the expansion of digital platforms, and changing patterns of film circulation and audience engagement. During this period, feminist issues became increasingly visible not only in film narratives but also in public and digital discussions surrounding gender, women's rights, sexual violence, domestic relations, and patriarchal culture. Film consequently became an important arena for negotiating competing meanings of femininity and gender equality. The tension between feminism and patriarchy can therefore be understood not simply as a thematic conflict within individual films, but as a broader struggle over the production and circulation of meaning in popular culture.

The films examined in this study illustrate different dimensions of this ideological negotiation. *Tilik* (2020) explores social surveillance, gossip, moral judgment, and the regulation of women's behavior within a communal setting. *Yuni* (2021) focuses on women's autonomy, education, marriage, and resistance to social expectations concerning women's lives. *Like & Share* (2022) addresses sexual violence, digital exploitation, victim blaming, and female solidarity in the context of social media. *Gadis Kretek* (2023) reconstructs women's creative contribution within a patriarchal family and industrial structure, while *Dua Hati Biru* (2024) examines women's negotiation of education, career, motherhood, and domestic responsibilities. Together, these films demonstrate a movement toward more complex representations of women as subjects with voices, agency, aspirations, trauma, and the capacity for resistance. At the same time, their narratives remain situated within social structures in which patriarchal values continue to shape women's choices and identities. Despite the growing body of scholarship on women and feminism in Indonesian cinema, an important analytical gap remains. Existing discussions have frequently focused on the representation of female characters, gender roles, or visual images at the level of surface meaning. Such approaches are valuable, but they may not fully explain how feminist narratives operate as ideological structures through which meanings of gender are produced, negotiated, and potentially normalized. The present study therefore shifts attention from representation alone toward the relationship between narrative, cinematic aesthetics, ideology, and power. It examines how feminist meanings are constructed not only through dialogue and plot, but also through visual composition, color, space, sound, bodily expression, and other formal elements of cinematic language.

This study consequently conceptualizes contemporary Indonesian cinema as a site of ideological contestation between feminist discourse and persistent patriarchal structures. Drawing on feminist film theory, particularly the concept of the *male gaze*, together with Gramscian hegemony and formalist film theory, the study investigates how five selected films negotiate women's identities, gender relations, and structures of power. The analysis asks how feminist narratives are constructed, how gender ideology operates within these narratives, and how cinematic aesthetics contribute to the production of feminist meaning.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the study of art and culture, film cannot be understood solely as an aesthetic product that serves to provide visual and emotional experiences to audiences. Film is a cultural text that has the ability to produce meaning, shape identity, and construct how society understands social reality. Every cinematic element, from narrative, characters, dialogue, shots, sound design, to visual symbols, works as a representational system that carries specific values and perspectives. Thus, film not only answers questions about what is shown, but also how something is shown and what ideological interests are at work behind that representation.

The perspective of cultural representation, developed by Stuart Hall, explains that meaning is not inherently inherent to an object or reality, but rather is shaped through social and cultural processes. Representation becomes a process of producing meaning through language, symbols, and knowledge systems prevailing in society. In the context of film, the representation of women is not simply a depiction of women in real life, but a construction of meaning influenced by social values, history, culture, and power relations that develop in society.

This understanding is crucial to this research because Indonesian films from the 2020–2024 period not only present female characters as part of the story but also demonstrate how female identity is shaped through specific narrative structures. Films become a space where various perspectives on women converge, both those that uphold patriarchal norms and those that seek to offer alternative understandings of women's positions.

In this context, films operate as an ideological space. Ideology is not always explicitly presented through propaganda or direct statements but can operate through seemingly normal and natural representations. The way women are portrayed as mothers, wives, daughters, workers, leaders, or individuals with the freedom to determine their own lives is a social construct that has consequences for how society understands gender roles. Therefore, feminist film analysis seeks to uncover how meanings about women are produced, negotiated, and contested in cinematic texts.

This view aligns with the argument in this study that film is a medium that not only reflects social reality but also shapes it through specific ways of viewing the world. Film becomes a symbolic arena where women can be positioned as objects controlled by the social system and as subjects capable of resisting dominant structures.

A. Feminism, Gender, and Power Relations in Film

In this study, feminism is understood as a critical perspective that questions gender inequality and the various forms of power relations that subordinate women in social life. Feminism not only addresses equality between men and women in legal and political aspects, but also examines how culture, language, social institutions, and media representations play a role in shaping women's positions.

In film studies, feminism plays a crucial role because cinema is one of the primary spaces where gender identity is constructed. Film can reinforce stereotypes about women through restrictive depictions, but it can also serve as a space for critique of social norms that place women in subordinate positions. Thus, film is ambivalent: it can be both an instrument of patriarchal reproduction and a medium for deconstructing that system.

One important concept in feminist film studies is the male gaze, introduced by Laura Mulvey. This concept explains that classical cinema often uses a masculine perspective as the primary way of viewing women's bodies and experiences. Women in many films are positioned as visual objects existing to satisfy the male gaze, while men are positioned as active subjects that drive the narrative. This perspective then became the basis for feminist critiques of how camerawork, narrative, and characterization can perpetuate gender inequality in film.

However, developments in contemporary cinema demonstrate a shift in the way women are represented. Films no longer simply present women as victims or objects of suffering, but rather as subjects with complex

experiences, conflicts, and agency. Women in contemporary films can appear as individuals who make decisions, challenge social norms, question their identities, and build new relationships with the social space around them.

In the Indonesian context, the representation of feminism in film cannot be separated from local sociocultural conditions. Feminism in Indonesian cinema is not simply an application of Western feminist concepts, but undergoes a process of negotiation with cultural values, religion, family, traditions, and the social structure of Indonesian society. Therefore, reading Indonesian films requires considering the local context that shapes women's experiences.

B. Cinema Aesthetics and Feminist Narratives

As a work of art, film has its own aesthetic language, constructed through a combination of various cinematic elements. Film aesthetics relates not only to visual beauty but also to how artistic form is used to generate meaning. In this study, cinema aesthetics is understood as a mechanism that allows ideology and social experience to be translated into visual form.

Elements such as mise-en-scène, image composition, color, lighting, use of space, bodily expression, and the relationship between image and sound play a crucial role in constructing a particular perspective on women. A simple scene of a woman in a domestic space, for example, can have different meanings depending on how the camera positions the woman's body, how the dialogue is constructed, and how the narrative connects it to broader social structures.

In feminist film, aesthetics becomes a crucial space for presenting women's experiences, which have traditionally been underrepresented. Women's perspectives are presented not only through the main characters, but also through the way the film chooses its point of view, organizes the storyline, and provides space for women's subjective experiences.

The concept of the female gaze then emerged as an attempt to explore the possibilities of cinema that extends beyond a masculine perspective. This approach does not simply mean that films must be made by women, but rather relates to how women's experiences are constructed through a perspective that values women's subjectivity, complexity, and agency.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses an interpretive paradigm with a qualitative approach. The interpretive paradigm was chosen because the research does not aim to quantitatively measure feminist representations, but rather to understand how meanings about women, gender, and power relations are constructed through cultural practices such as film. From this perspective, film is viewed as a cultural text with layers of social, symbolic, and ideological meaning that must be understood through an interpretation of its production context and narrative structure.

The qualitative approach in this research allows researchers to understand film as a complex cultural phenomenon. Meaning in film is not only contained in the explicit story but also emerges through symbols, visual choices, conflict structures, characterization, and the relationship between the characters' personal experiences and broader social structures. Therefore, the analysis is conducted by considering the relationship between the film's aesthetic elements and the sociocultural context underlying the emergence of feminist narratives.

The material objects of this research are five Indonesian films produced between 2020 and 2024: *Tilik* (2020), *Yuni* (2021), *Like & Share* (2022), *Gadis Kretek* (2023), and *Dua Hati Biru* (2024). The selection of subjects was conducted purposively, considering that the five films present women's issues in various social contexts, ranging from social control, education, freedom of choice, sexual violence, women's history, to family relations and domestic roles.

The research data sources consist of primary data in the form of films as cinematic texts and supporting data in the form of academic literature on feminism, film studies, cultural representations, and public discourse related to the films being analyzed. As explained in the dissertation, the research sources come not only from films but also include various supporting sources such as film criticism, production archives, public discussions on feminism in film, and feminist literature.

The analysis technique is carried out through several stages. First, in-depth observation of the films, paying attention to story structure, female characters, gender conflict, dialogue, and visual elements that construct meaning. Second, identification of feminist themes emerging in the films. Third, critical interpretation is conducted by connecting textual findings with concepts of feminism, gender representation, and power relations. Through this approach, the research seeks to understand how films not only depict women but also play a role in shaping discourses about women in contemporary Indonesian society.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Women, Social Morality, and Patriarchal Reproduction in the Film Tilik

The film *Tilik* (2020) presents a different form of feminist representation from the usual narrative of women's resistance. The film does not depict the primary conflict of direct male domination, but rather shows how patriarchal values can operate through social mechanisms involving women themselves. Through the conversations of mothers traveling by truck to the hospital, the film presents a social space where women monitor, evaluate, and determine standards for how women should behave.

The character of Bu Tejo is an important representation in understanding how patriarchy can be internalized in social life. She is a woman who has the courage to speak out, is dominant in a group, and possesses the ability to influence the opinions of others. However, at the same time, this communicative power is used to judge other women, particularly Dian, through the construction of a morality about women that is deemed inconsistent with social norms.

From a feminist perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates that the oppression of women does not always arise through direct relations between men and women. Patriarchal systems can persist because certain values have been accepted as social truths and reproduced through everyday practices. In the context of *Tilik*, gossip is not simply an informal communication activity, but a mechanism of social control that defines the boundary between women who are considered good and those who are considered deviant.

Thus, the main strength of *Tilik* lies in its ability to demonstrate the complexity of gender issues. The film does not construct a simple opposition between women as victims and men as perpetrators of domination, but rather demonstrates how patriarchal structures operate through culture, language, and everyday social practices.

The film *Tilik* shows how women can be both controllers and victims of the patriarchal system through the mechanisms of social morality. Through a realistic and satirical aesthetic approach, *Tilik* presents a critique of how society constructs standards for the ideal woman. The film demonstrates that the feminist struggle is not only about gaining equal space with men, but also questions how women can free themselves from restrictive value systems, even when these systems are deeply embedded in women's social practices.

B. Yuni: Women's Agency and Resistance against Patriarchal Norms

The film *Yuni* (2021) presents feminism through the narrative of an individual woman's struggle to determine her future. Yuni is depicted as a young woman who aspires to higher education, but faces social pressures that direct women toward traditional roles, particularly through the institution of marriage. The main conflict in this film lies in the conflict between Yuni's personal desires and social expectations for women. In her

social environment, women are still often positioned based on domestic roles, particularly as future wives and mothers. Women's education and personal aspirations become something that must be negotiated with entrenched social norms.

Through Yuni's character, this film presents the concept of women as subjects with the ability to make their own life choices. Yuni's rejection of the pressure to marry is not merely a personal decision, but a critique of the social system that limits women based on certain gender constructs. This perspective is related to existentialist feminist thought, which believes that women should have the freedom to define themselves, rather than simply accepting the identities assigned by society. In the film, Yuni's body and future become a space for struggle between personal will and social control.

Purple associated with Yuni's character also serves an aesthetic and symbolic function. The color is not merely a personal preference, but also a symbol of freedom and a rejection of social beliefs that limit women. Through this visual symbol, the film demonstrates how aesthetic elements are used to reinforce the idea of women's freedom. Thus, Yuni demonstrates that feminism in the Indonesian context does not always manifest through radical resistance to culture, but through women's struggle to gain the right to determine their own lives. The film demonstrates that education, life choices, and freedom of thought are essential components of the struggle for gender equality. Thus, *Like & Share* demonstrates a significant development in Indonesian feminist cinema: a shift from simply representing women to discussing bodily experiences, trauma, technology, and the social mechanisms that perpetuate gender inequality.

C. Like & Share: Women's Bodies, Digital Sexual Violence, and Feminist Solidarity

Gina S. Noer's film *Like & Share* (2022) presents a new dimension to contemporary Indonesian feminist narratives by placing young women's experiences within the context of digital technological developments. While previous feminist films have focused on women's issues within the family, education, and social communities, *Like & Share* expands this discourse to the digital space, which has become a vital part of the lives of the younger generation. The film demonstrates that technological development does not automatically bring freedom, as digital space can also become a new medium for the reproduction of power over women's bodies and identities.

The film's narrative centers on the experiences of two young women, Lisa and Sarah, who face complex issues of identity, social relations, sexual exploitation, and technology-based violence. Through the experiences of these two characters, the film demonstrates that women's bodies in a digital society remain an arena for power struggles. Women's bodies are controlled not only through traditional social norms but also through new mechanisms such as the distribution of non-consensual content, digital objectification, and a culture of victim-blaming.

From a feminist perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates that forms of oppression against women are transforming with technological and cultural changes. While in traditional patriarchal structures, control over women is exercised through family rules, social morality, or restrictions on public space, in the digital space, this control can emerge through control over women's images, bodies, and representations in virtual spaces.

The strength of *Like & Share* lies in its ability to shift perspectives on victims of sexual violence. The film does not position women as passive victims of suffering but rather shows the process of women understanding traumatic experiences, building awareness, and gaining social support. Solidarity among women is a crucial element in the film's narrative, demonstrating that the feminist struggle proceeds not only through individual resistance but also through the formation of collective spaces.

From a cinematic aesthetic perspective, this film employs a realistic approach to depicting the psychological experiences of victims. The use of domestic spaces, social media, personal conversations, and the characters' emotional expressions serve as visual strategies to demonstrate that sexual violence is not always present in visible physical forms, but also through invisible psychological wounds and social pressures.

As explained in the dissertation, *Like & Share* is one of the Indonesian films that explicitly addresses the issue of sexual violence and digital exploitation of women. This film demonstrates that violence against women does not stop at individual actions but is intertwined with social structures that often place women as the ones responsible for the perpetrators' actions.

D. Gadis Kretek: Women, History, and a Critique of Patriarchal Capitalism

Film series *Gadis Kretek* (2023) presents a feminist perspective related to history, the industry, and the recognition of women's contributions. Unlike previous films, which focused on contemporary women's experiences, this film explores the historical dimension by presenting the character of Dasiyah, also known as Jeng Yah, as a woman with skills, creativity, and knowledge in the kretek industry, but who has been erased from the dominant historical narrative. The character of Jeng Yah represents a woman with high intellectual capacity and creativity. She not only plays a supporting role in the kretek industry but also makes significant contributions to product innovation. However, the male-dominated social structure prevents these contributions from receiving equal recognition.

From a critical feminist perspective, the issues raised in this film demonstrate that gender inequality is not only related to individual discrimination but also to the economic and cultural structures that determine who gains legitimacy as creators of knowledge. Women often contribute to the production process, but do not always receive equal positions in decision-making or social recognition. The film also explores the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. The kretek industry in the film demonstrates how women's labor can be exploited economically yet remains within a male-controlled power structure. Thus, gender issues are inextricably linked to economic issues and the distribution of power.

Beyond the industry, *Gadis Kretek* also critiques how history is often constructed through dominant perspectives that ignore women's experiences. Jeng Yah symbolizes women who have been excluded from the larger narrative of history. The process of rediscovering Jeng Yah's identity within the storyline serves as a reclaiming of women's voices that have been omitted. Aesthetically, the film uses Indonesian cultural elements such as the kretek tradition, the family room, clothing, colors, and social landscape as visual devices to establish a connection between women, history, and cultural identity.

This aesthetic demonstrates that feminism in the Indonesian context does not exist separately from local culture but interacts with the history and values of society. The films series presents a critique of a system that exploits women's labor but denies them equal power and recognition. Jeng Yah is positioned as a symbol of women striving for recognition as creative and intellectual subjects.

E. Dua Hati Biru: Women's Negotiations in Domestic and Public Spaces

The film *Dua Hati Biru* (2024) presents feminist issues through the context of family and domestic relations. This film is compelling because it does not depict gender conflict through direct opposition between men and women, but rather through the process of negotiating roles within domestic life. The character of Dara represents a woman facing a dilemma between family responsibilities and the need to develop herself as an individual. After studying abroad, Dara again faces challenges in building relationships with her children, partner, and social circle.

This film critiques traditional views that often place women primarily responsible for domestic work and childcare. Within a patriarchal structure, women's success is often measured by their ability to fulfill their domestic roles, while educational and professional aspirations are often considered secondary options. Through Dara's character, the film demonstrates that women can simultaneously possess multiple identities. A woman can be a mother, a partner, and an individual with personal aspirations and needs. This complexity is important because the film does not present women as perfect figures, but as human beings experiencing conflict and a process of finding balance.

From a feminist aesthetic perspective, *Dua Hati Biru* is compelling because it gives greater space to women's emotional experiences. The camera and narrative not only view women as visual objects but also attempt to understand their subjective experiences. This approach demonstrates a shift from depicting women as objects to portraying them as the center of narrative experience. This film critiques gender stereotypes that consider domestic responsibilities to be women's primary responsibility. Through the character of Dara, the film shows a woman's struggle to maintain her personal identity while fulfilling her family role.

V. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that Indonesian films from 2020–2024 represent both a cultural and aesthetic space that demonstrates the complex relationship between feminism and patriarchy. Film not only serves as a medium for representing women's lives, but also as an arena where various social values, gender ideologies, and power relations are produced, negotiated, and contested. Through an analysis of five films: *Tilik* (2020), *Yuni* (2021), *Like & Share* (2022), *Gadis Kretek* (2023), and *Dua Hati Biru* (2024), this research finds that feminist narratives in contemporary Indonesian cinema emerge in diverse forms, adapted to their surrounding social contexts.

Tilik demonstrates that patriarchy does not always operate through direct male domination but can persist through social practices and control mechanisms implemented by women's communities themselves. This film demonstrates how patriarchal values can be internalized, allowing women to be both affected by and reproduce norms that limit other women. Meanwhile, *Yuni* presents feminism through the struggle of individual women to gain the right to determine their future, especially regarding education, life choices, and freedom over their identity.

The film "*Like & Share*" showcases new developments in Indonesian feminist discourse by presenting women's issues in the digital space. The film demonstrates that technological change has not eliminated gender inequality but has instead created new forms of control over women through bodily exploitation, digital sexual violence, and a culture of victim-blaming. However, the film also demonstrates the emergence of women's solidarity as a form of resistance to these power structures.

Furthermore, "*Gadis Kretek*" broadens the understanding of feminism through issues of history, knowledge production, and the recognition of women's contributions. The film demonstrates how women can play a role as creators of innovation and economic drivers, yet they are still erased in historical narratives dominated by male perspectives. Meanwhile, "*Dua Hati Biru*" presents feminism within the context of the family, demonstrating that women's struggles do not necessarily mean abandoning the domestic sphere, but rather gaining the freedom to determine how to pursue multiple identities in a balanced manner.

Overall, this study finds that feminism in contemporary Indonesian films does not exist as a single, homogeneous concept. Feminism emerged as a process of negotiation between the aspirations for women's equality and sociocultural structures still influenced by patriarchal values. These films demonstrate a significant shift in the way women are represented, from being objects of narrative to subjects with experience, voice, and the capacity to take social action.

The primary contribution of this study lies in the understanding that feminist film studies cannot be conducted solely through the superficial identification of female characters or symbols of feminism but rather require an examination of how gender meanings are shaped through the relationship between aesthetics, narrative, culture, and ideology. Thus, Indonesian cinema can be understood as a space for contestation of meaning that demonstrates the dynamics of social change regarding women's position in society.

This study also demonstrates that works of art, particularly film, hold a crucial position in social studies because they can serve as a medium for both reflection and cultural transformation. Film not only records societal

changes but also plays a role in creating the possibility of new perspectives on women, equality, and gender justice.

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