

Signs, Symbols, and Identity: A Semiotic Reinterpretation of Javanese Womanhood in “*Losmen Bu Broto*”

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ABSTRACT

While traditional depictions of Javanese women in media have often reinforced stereotypes of submissiveness, gentleness, and familial devotion, such portrayals are increasingly being redefined in contemporary Indonesian cinema. This study investigates how Javanese women are represented in the film *Losmen Bu Broto*, a modern adaptation of the classic TVRI series, through a qualitative descriptive method using John Fiske's semiotic framework of television codes. The analysis examines three key levels of meaning: reality, representation, and ideology, focusing on narrative structure, character behavior, costuming, and cinematographic techniques. The findings reveal a spectrum of female identities within the film, ranging from the traditional and compliant *Pur* to the modern, expressive *Sri*, and the authoritative, business-minded *Madam Broto*. Although the film retains strong cultural symbols such as the *kebaya* and *konde*, these are interwoven with contemporary expressions of autonomy, emotional complexity, and leadership. These layered representations challenge the singular image of the Javanese woman as passive and instead present her as multidimensional and evolving. The study contributes to the growing discourse on gender representation in Southeast Asian media, offering a nuanced understanding of how cultural identities are both preserved and contested through film. In a broader context, this research highlights the role of visual media in shaping public consciousness and advancing more inclusive and dynamic narratives of womanhood within Indonesian society.

1. Introduction

Film functions as a powerful medium of social commentary, particularly in Indonesian cinema, where it engages deeply with themes of identity, power, and culture. Within the Javanese context, cinema becomes a crucial space for negotiating evolving notions of womanhood. On-screen portrayals not only mirror societal ideals but also actively shape them through narrative and character development (Izharuddin, 2017). Javanese philosophical traditions and gender norms provide filmmakers with a rich foundation to explore female identity, often juxtaposing traditional values such as meekness with expressions of agency and autonomy (Zaelani et al., 2021; Izharuddin, 2017; Putri et al., 2023). These representations provoke discourse on women's changing roles and the tension between cultural heritage and modernity. Notably, post-Reformasi independent films have redefined national identity by challenging conventional norms

and encouraging critical reflection on gender relations (Putri et al., 2023; Wibawa, 2024; Nurmansyah, 2023). Understanding the portrayal of women in Indonesian cinema, therefore, requires close attention to Javanese cultural contexts, where film persistently re-negotiates power and identity through visual storytelling (Izharuddin, 2017; Putri et al., 2023; Patria & Kristiana, 2018).

Javanese womanhood has long been shaped by cultural values such as patience, submission, nurturing, and silence, which are passed down through language, customs, and visual symbols. Traditional attire like the *kebaya* and *konde* serves not only as aesthetic expression but also as a cultural sign that embodies ideals of femininity. The *kebaya*, in particular, represents elegance and domesticity, conveying narratives of loyalty, obedience, and modesty (Toni, 2025). Recent studies emphasize its shifting role in balancing traditional norms with modern values,

offering a lens to question conventional gender expectations (Rizki et al., 2024; Antoinette et al., 2024). Literature and media continue to reinforce these cultural scripts by depicting women as figures of sacrifice and domestic devotion (Ismawati et al., 2020; Dewi et al., 2020). Rituals such as the Panggih Ceremony further encode gender roles through symbolic gestures (Prabowo et al., 2022). However, the image of Javanese womanhood continues to evolve. Digital platforms like TikTok recontextualize traditional symbols such as the *kebaya*, allowing younger generations to engage with their cultural heritage while redefining its relevance in contemporary society (Rizana et al., 2024; Nugroho et al., 2020).

Media plays a powerful role in reinforcing these norms. Fitriani et al. (2018) and Ardra and Irfansyah (2022) emphasize how female representations in media, particularly in visual storytelling, are shaped by socio-cultural expectations. These portrayals are deeply influenced by traditional texts such as *Wulang Estri* and *Candra Rini*, which offer a lens into historical constructions of womanhood in Javanese society (Ismawati et al., 2020). Through these embedded codes, the identity of the Javanese woman is framed as a cultural performance, sustained by symbols that operate across time and medium.

Feminist discourse has encouraged scholars to reexamine the portrayal of women in Indonesian culture, particularly in response to shifting social dynamics. Darni et al. (2023) observe a growing awareness of gender inequality and an increasing presence of empowered female representations in the media. Earlier literary and cinematic works often portrayed women as restricted to domestic spaces, lacking voice and agency. In contrast, recent narratives have begun to explore themes of resistance, autonomy, and emotional depth within these traditional frameworks (Putro & Wibowo, 2023). Language and politeness strategies also play a crucial role in shaping Javanese gender identity. Smith-Hefner (1988) explains that Javanese women use both verbal and non-verbal communication to preserve social harmony, reinforcing their roles as caretakers and moral figures. These communicative behaviors serve not only as expressions of politeness but also as cultural performances that transmit values across generations.

Although research on gender representation in Indonesian film is expanding, many studies take a broad approach and overlook the ethnic and symbolic nuances in local portrayals. Ding (2011), Muñoz-González (2017), bridges thought and language, enabling film to either uphold or challenge cultural ideologies. Ardianda et al. (2016) examine how gendered meanings are shaped through visual and verbal signs. Films such as *Tilik* and *7 Hati 7 Cinta 7 Wanita* illustrate how Indonesian women negotiate the tension between social norms and personal desires (Rini & Fauziah, 2019; Surahman, 2014). Yet,

representations of Javanese women often lack attention to ethnic specificity. Cultural codes conveyed through clothing, gesture, silence, and speech are frequently overlooked in constructing gendered meaning within these portrayals.

John Fiske's theory of television codes provides a valuable semiotic framework for analyzing gender representation. He identifies three levels of meaning-making: reality, representation, and ideology. These levels explain how media texts construct meaning through cultural codes, technical elements, and ideological structures (Fiske, 2010; Zhou, 2023; Rodríguez, 2020). Although this framework has been widely used in studies of advertising (Siti et al., 2016) and music videos (Susilo et al., 2021), its application to gender and cultural representation in Indonesian cinema remains limited. Feminist critiques by Rutsyamsun and Sakinah (2023) and Santika and Kasir (2023) explore gendered portrayals but often overlook semiotic elements embedded in cultural context, such as clothing, body language, and tone. Hakim and Kurnia (2023) suggest that integrating Fiske's codes into film analysis can offer deeper insights into how signs convey gender ideologies within specific cultural frameworks.

This study addresses that gap by presenting a semiotic reinterpretation of Javanese womanhood in *Losmen Bu Broto*, a contemporary adaptation of the iconic TVRI series. By focusing on three central female characters, it examines how visual and verbal signs reflect both continuity and transformation in the portrayal of Javanese femininity. Instead of viewing gender as a universal category, the study emphasizes the symbolic interaction between tradition and modernity within a distinct cultural setting. It contributes to gender and media scholarship by revealing how identity is enacted through costume, gesture, and subtle acts of resistance or conformity. This approach highlights the power of visual language in shaping social meaning and offers a culturally grounded perspective on gender representation in Indonesian cinema.



Figure 1. TVRI series titled “Losmen Bu Broto”

The significance of this research lies in its capacity to decode layers of meaning that conventional gender studies often overlook. By applying Fiske's model to *Losmen Bu Broto*, the study provides a structured yet flexible tool to interrogate how visual signs create, negotiate, or resist cultural ideologies. It aims to uncover how identity is constructed through a complex assemblage of symbols and how these symbols work within the film to express a culturally situated femininity. The main objective is to examine how cinematic elements such as mise-en-scène, costuming, and character behavior interact with cultural codes to shape perceptions of Javanese womanhood.

This article is organized to provide a coherent analytical journey for the reader. The introduction contextualizes the study within theoretical, cultural, and scholarly discourse. The literature review evaluates previous research on gender, semiotics, and ethnic representation in media, identifying the gaps this study seeks to address. The methodology section details the use of qualitative descriptive design and outlines the application of Fiske's semiotic model. The analysis explores selected scenes in *Losmen Bu Broto*, focusing on how reality, representation, and ideology intersect in the characterization of women. Finally, the conclusion discusses the broader implications of the findings for gender representation and cultural studies in Indonesia.

Beyond its contribution to gender and media scholarship, this study also offers pedagogical implications within the field of English language and linguistics. Analyzing culturally rich films such as *Losmen Bu Broto* enables students to engage not only with language structures but also with cultural meaning-making. Through the exploration of signs, behavior, and narrative, learners can cultivate critical thinking and intercultural competence alongside linguistic skills. In English language teaching, integrating film-based analysis encourages deeper reflection on identity, tradition, and social values, reinforcing the importance of linking language education with cultural literacy in a globalized world.

2. Literature Review

The Film, as a cultural product, functions not only as a vehicle for storytelling but also as a medium for expressing societal values, ideologies, and identities. Wibowo (in Sutanto, 2017) notes that film holds immense communicative power, offering a platform where creators can embed complex social, political, and cultural messages through visual narratives. The cinematic medium has the capacity to present nuanced representations of gender, tradition, and transformation. In particular, the presence of visual and verbal signs in film opens pathways for semiotic analysis, which uncovers how meaning is encoded and interpreted by diverse audiences.

The portrayal of Javanese women within Indonesian cultural contexts reflects specific traditional values that are deeply rooted in the ethos of Javanese society. Fitriani et al. (2018) explain that Javanese women are conventionally associated with the traits of *nrima* (acceptance), submission, patience, loyalty, and gentleness. These characteristics are reinforced by symbols such as *kebaya* (traditional blouse) and *konde* (hair bun), which serve as visual codes representing ideal womanhood. Koentjaraningrat, as cited in Ardra et al. (2021), further emphasizes that these stylistic elements carry not only aesthetic but also philosophical meanings. For instance, the *konde* symbolizes a woman's strength in keeping secrets and upholding family values. These traditional codes shape expectations of how Javanese women should behave and present themselves in public and domestic spaces.

Stuart Hall's theory of representation supports the idea that meaning is produced and exchanged within a culture through a system of language and symbols. According to Hall, representation plays a central role in how cultural identities are constructed and communicated (Hall, 2020). This theoretical foundation is crucial in analyzing how films use signs to depict women and their roles in society. Ardianda et al. (2016) highlight three components in the representation process: the object (or subject matter), the sign (as the representation itself), and the coding system that links signs to meanings. These components work together to establish meaning in communication, whether through visual imagery, spoken dialogue, or bodily gesture.

John Fiske extends this theory through his model of "television codes," which classifies meaning construction in visual media into three levels: the level of reality, the level of representation, and the level of ideology. At the level of reality, meaning is encoded through appearance, dress, environment, behavior, and other cultural codes such as gestures and speech (Fiske, 1985). At the level of representation, technical elements such as lighting, music, editing, camera angles, and storyline shape how reality is structured and conveyed. Lastly, the level of ideology operates through belief systems such as patriarchy, feminism, or capitalism that guide the overall narrative and character development (Ardianda et al., 2016). This layered model offers a robust analytical framework for examining how gender roles and cultural identities are encoded in film.

Despite these theoretical insights, previous studies tend to examine female representation in Indonesian films from a generalized gender perspective, often lacking cultural specificity. For instance, Puspita and Nurhayati (2019) analyzed gender bias in advertisements, while Rini and Fauziah (2019) explored feminist symbolism in K-pop music videos using Fiske's framework. Other works such as

[Surahman \(2014\)](#) and [Toruan and Kusumastuti \(2022\)](#) examined women's identities in urban or generalized Indonesian contexts without focusing on specific ethnic cultural codes. Although [Ardra and Irfansyah \(2022\)](#) analyzed Javanese female characters in the short film *Tilik*, their study emphasized feminist character traits rather than engaging with the deeper symbolic and semiotic dimensions of Javanese womanhood.

This gap reveals the need for research that explores the intersection of semiotics, cultural identity, and gender in a focused ethnic context. The present study addresses this by analyzing *Losmen Bu Broto*, a film that uniquely juxtaposes traditional and modern portrayals of Javanese women. By applying Fiske's three-tiered framework, this research explores how symbols such as costume, movement, dialogue, and spatial roles work together to construct different modes of Javanese womanhood. The novelty of this study lies in its culturally specific and visually grounded analysis, offering a reinterpretation of how identity is communicated through signs and visual codes in a localized narrative. Unlike previous studies that only highlight behavioral traits, this research decodes the symbolic tensions between tradition and change, between silence and expression.

This study offers significant implications. Academically, it advances gender representation research by integrating semiotic analysis with local cultural perspectives. Practically, it sheds light on how ethnic and gender identities are negotiated in contemporary Indonesian media. It also enhances media literacy and critical interpretation, particularly in English language education. Overall, this literature review highlights the value of semiotic theory and cultural representation in analyzing female identity in film, bridging a gap in existing research and providing a useful framework for pedagogy in language and communication studies.

3. Method

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design, well-suited for examining cultural representations and symbolic meanings in media texts. As emphasized by Chariri (in [Ardra & Irfansyah, 2022](#)), this approach investigates phenomena in their natural contexts, focusing on understanding the what, how, and why of human behavior and cultural expression. Here, the study explores the portrayal of Javanese womanhood in *Losmen Bu Broto*, paying close attention to the symbolic and ideological dimensions embedded in its visual and narrative structures.

The primary data source for this study is the feature film *Losmen Bu Broto*, directed by Ifa Isfansyah and Eddie Cahyono. The film was released in November 2021 and is available for public viewing through the Disney+ Hotstar streaming platform. It serves as a rich text for analysis due to its emphasis on family dynamics, gender roles, and cultural tradition

within a Javanese setting. Specific scenes were selected purposively based on their relevance to the themes of womanhood, identity, and cultural symbolism. The selection criteria included visual markers such as traditional clothing, domestic and public roles, interactions among female characters, and moments of conflict or assertion of authority.

To analyze the film, this study adopts the semiotic framework developed by John Fiske, particularly his theory of the codes of television ([Ardianda et al., 2016](#)). Fiske's model divides the analytical process into three levels: the level of reality, the level of representation, and the level of ideology. The level of reality examines cultural codes such as dress, appearance, gesture, speech, and behavior. The level of representation analyzes how technical elements like lighting, editing, music, and camera work construct meaning.

Lastly, the level of ideology uncovers the underlying value systems or belief structures conveyed through the film, such as patriarchy, modern feminism, or Javanese cultural conservatism. Data collection was carried out through detailed observation and documentation of selected scenes. Each relevant scene was viewed multiple times to ensure accurate interpretation of signs and codes. Descriptive notes were taken regarding costume, body language, facial expressions, tone of dialogue, and spatial positioning. These visual observations were then categorized according to Fiske's levels of codes, allowing the researcher to systematically organize and interpret the signs according to their cultural, representational, and ideological significance.

This study employed a semiotic reading to analyze how meaning is constructed in the film through the interaction of visual and narrative elements that portray Javanese womanhood. At the level of reality, cultural codes such as the *kebaya*, *konde*, and verbal expressions were examined to interpret traditional norms; at the level of representation, close-ups, lighting, and mise-en-scène were analyzed to reveal visual meaning-making; and at the level of ideology, character dynamics were explored to uncover broader gendered and cultural ideologies. Using Fiske's framework, this method offers both analytical rigor and cultural sensitivity, enabling a nuanced interpretation of how signs and narratives in the film either reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles.

In summary, the adoption of a qualitative descriptive design, thoughtfully integrated with semiotic analysis, establishes a robust and culturally sensitive framework for investigating the nuanced ways in which identity is constructed, conveyed, and interpreted within diverse representational contexts. The method allows for in-depth interpretation of the film as a text and aligns closely with the study's aim to reveal how signs construct and convey the evolving image of Javanese womanhood in contemporary Indonesian cinema.

4. Results

The film *Losmen Bu Broto* portrays Javanese womanhood through three central characters: Madam Broto, Pur, and Sri. Each woman symbolizes a different negotiation of identity across generations, reflecting tensions between cultural continuity and personal transformation. Through the framework of John Fiske's three levels of meaning, namely reality, representation, and ideology, this section examines how signs and symbols are embedded within costume, gesture, space, and dialogue to shape the portrayal of Javanese femininity.

4.1 Reality Level: Cultural Codes and Visual Cues

At the level of reality, according to John Fiske's semiotic model, meaning is constructed through the most immediate and recognizable signs that mirror everyday life and cultural expectations through dress, gesture, speech, and setting. These signs serve as cultural codes that ground the viewer in a familiar reality, providing the surface-level context from which deeper interpretations can unfold.

In *Losmen Bu Broto*, this level is vividly illustrated through the character of Sri, whose introduction defies traditional expectations of Javanese femininity. In the opening scene, Sri is shown singing and playing the guitar in a modern café, an act that immediately separates her from the domestic and restrained image often associated with Javanese women. Her loose, casual clothing, unbound hair, and confident body language serve as visual codes of autonomy and non-conformity. These codes are further reinforced verbally when she proclaims, “*Aku mau nyanyi, Bu. Gak mau ngurus losmen*” (28:27). This line encapsulates her rejection of the prescribed domestic role and expresses a personal desire for self-fulfillment through music and public expression.

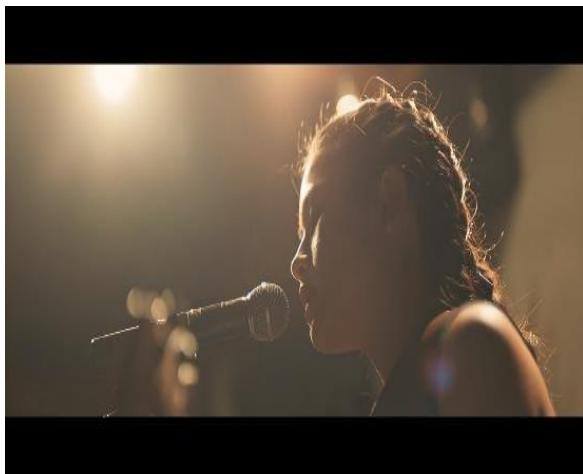


Figure 2. A Scene Showing Sri with a Modern Look Singing in a Café

In stark contrast, the character of Pur is introduced in the kitchen, which operates as a symbolic domestic space, wearing a *kebaya* and her hair styled in a *sanggul*.

These traditional garments are not merely aesthetic but act as semiotic signs of femininity, submission, and cultural compliance. Her composed movements and quiet demeanor reflect the internalization of culturally ideal traits such as patience and servitude. These qualities are further validated within the diegesis of the film through the comment of a guest who states, “*Masakannya Mbak Pur enak loh. Enak kan?*” (31:35), solidifying her symbolic role as the nurturer and caretaker, deeply embedded within the domestic sphere.



Figure 3. A Scene Showing Pur in Javanese Attire Preparing Food in the Kitchen

Madam Broto, the matriarch, consistently appears in elaborately arranged *kebaya* and large *kondé*, accompanied by a poised and commanding demeanor. Her physical appearance operates as a visual signifier of cultural authority and generational continuity. These signs serve a dual function by affirming her role as both the moral compass and the business leader of the family. The ideological undertone of her presence is amplified when she challenges Sri's dual lifestyle by asking, “*Sri, kamu ndak capek hidup dengan dua kepribadian seperti ini?*” (27:27). This line not only signals her disapproval but also reveals the semiotic conflict between tradition and individualism. Her question functions as a cultural checkpoint intended to draw Sri back into the expected normativity of Javanese womanhood.



Figure 4. A Scene Showing Bu Broto Inquiring about Her Business



Figure 5. A Scene Showing Madam Broto Preparing to Wear a Neat Kebaya and Jewelry Alongside Sri

These contrasting portrayals of the three women construct a generational and ideological spectrum. Madam Broto anchors tradition and leadership, Pur exemplifies the idealized, self-effacing caregiver, and Sri represents the emerging identity of women who seek autonomy outside the confines of cultural expectations. Fiske's reality level analysis helps decode these surface-level signs not as static images but as active representations of cultural negotiation. The *kebaya*, the kitchen, the café, and even the characters' vocal intonations are not incidental but symbolically charged cues that communicate a broader discourse on womanhood, identity, and cultural allegiance.

In summary, the film's reality layer sets the groundwork for deeper interpretive processes. The visual markers observed in attire, gesture, and speech provide immediate cultural resonance while simultaneously opening up space for questioning and reinterpretation. Through these codes, *Losmen Bu Broto* stages a silent yet powerful debate over the meaning of Javanese femininity, placing tradition, modernity, and individual agency into a complex and intergenerational dialogue.

4.2 Representation Level: Cinematic Techniques and Symbolic Framing

At the representational level, *Losmen Bu Broto* constructs layered meanings through the deliberate use of cinematic techniques that shape how audiences perceive characters, relationships, and social dynamics. Drawing from John Fiske's concept of the representational code, meaning is generated through the strategic arrangement of technical elements such as camera positioning, lighting design, spatial composition, sound direction, and editing style. These elements function as symbolic vehicles that structure not only the visual texture of the film but also its ideological undercurrents. Representation in this context does not simply reflect the narrative but operates as a form of cultural signification that articulates values, emotions, and hierarchies in ways that words alone cannot fully express. Through its

representational design, the film communicates key tensions between individual agency and inherited tradition, between obedience and resistance, and between different models of Javanese femininity. Each visual and auditory decision contributes to the encoding of meaning, turning the film into a site of negotiation where power, gender, and identity are visually inscribed and continuously interpreted by its audience.

One of the most prominent techniques used in the film is the framing of characters through close-up and medium shots. When Sri performs at the café, close-up shots are employed to capture her expressive face, fluid hand gestures, and intense engagement with the music. These close-ups visually isolate her from her surroundings, emphasizing her emotional independence and her embrace of personal passion. The camera's focus on her body language and confident expressions invites the audience to read her as an assertive and creative woman, situated outside the expectations of domestic roles. Her modernity is not only conveyed through her clothing and setting, but also through the way the camera insists on her presence as a subject rather than as a background figure.

In contrast, Madam Broto is often filmed in medium close-up shots during moments of control and leadership, whether she is managing the losmen or engaging in family discussions. These compositions reinforce her position of authority by consistently placing her in the center of the frame with a firm posture, calm expression, and composed demeanor. Her presence is formal and commanding, structured through camera angles that enhance her authority. She is framed not only as a mother but also as a symbol of cultural preservation.



Figure 6. A Scene Showing Madam Broto Exercising Control Over Her Child

This scene demonstrates how representation constructs power visually. Madam Broto is shown delivering instructions with clarity and precision. Her upright position, traditional attire, and deliberate movements communicate discipline and structure. The symmetrical framing underscores her position as a stabilizing force within the family, reinforcing her role as both maternal figure and guardian of values.

The film also makes significant use of spatial composition, particularly in scenes where generational contrasts are emphasized. One key moment features all three women; Madam Broto, Pur, and Sri, positioned within a single frame, each displaying distinct postures, expressions, and clothing styles.



Figure 7. A Scene Depicting the Three Javanese Women (Bu Broto, Pur, Sri) with Different Characteristics

The film's visual composition offers a symbolic tableau of Javanese femininity through the distinct portrayals of Madam Broto, Pur, and Sri. Madam Broto stands poised in traditional *kebaya* and *konde*, embodying dignity and cultural adherence. Pur, seated calmly in soft-toned attire, reflects restraint and patience. In contrast, Sri stands apart with relaxed posture, casual clothing, and a direct gaze that suggests confidence and modern individuality. Their physical distance and differing styles visually represent generational and ideological tensions, with each woman signifying a distinct cultural stance that coexists within a shared but contested space.

Lighting plays a critical role in reinforcing these contrasts. Scenes with Sri are bright and naturally lit, highlighting her energy and openness, while those with Madam Broto often feature dim, warm tones that convey solemnity and authority. These choices mirror the characters' internal states and emphasize thematic tensions between freedom and formality, turning light into a semiotic tool that shapes meaning without dialogue.

Editing styles further enhance representational meaning. Sri's scenes use dynamic shots and rapid transitions to reflect her evolving identity, whereas Madam Broto's are marked by steady pacing and composed frames that echo her preference for order. This contrast illustrates the tension between tradition and change, between stillness and movement, and between preservation and transformation.

Importantly, the film avoids framing these differences in moral terms. Each visual style affirms a different kind of strength, from Sri's expressive independence to Pur's composed presence and Madam Broto's commanding authority. Their portrayals become sites where femininity is continuously negotiated in relation to cultural values. Symbolic framing extends beyond individual characters to their

relationships. Emotional distance is conveyed through long shots in domestic spaces, especially during conflicts. In a confrontation between Sri and Madam Broto, the wide framing shows them apart, emphasizing ideological separation and emotional disconnection until their tension climaxes. These spatial choices deepen the viewer's understanding of conflict by visually enacting division.

Overall, the film encodes identity, emotion, and power through a visual grammar composed of lighting, framing, editing, and space. This system is especially relevant in the context of Javanese womanhood, where expectations are communicated through bodily presence, dress, and gesture. Through cinematic language, Madam Broto's authority is defined by control and structure, Pur's restraint by quiet spatial positioning, and Sri's resistance by fluidity, illumination, and motion. These elements together construct a layered, culturally rooted portrayal of womanhood that is at once traditional and transformative.

In essence, *Losmen Bu Broto* leverages representational techniques to communicate meaning beyond spoken words. Cinematic devices become cultural signs that reflect evolving identities, tensions, and values, offering a nuanced, fluid narrative of Javanese femininity shaped by both heritage and personal agency.

4.3 Ideological Level: Authority, Resistance, and Transformation

At the ideological level, *Losmen Bu Broto* unfolds a deep narrative that interrogates the cultural values governing gender roles, family power structures, and identity formation. John Fiske defines ideology as the system of beliefs and values that underlies and shapes the meanings encoded in media texts. These meanings are not just communicated through dialogue or character action, but also through subtle patterns of behavior, emotional expression, and symbolic visual choices. Within this film, ideology emerges most clearly in scenes of conflict, control, and moral judgment, particularly when traditional norms are challenged by emerging forms of individual agency.

One of the most revealing ideological confrontations takes place when Madam Broto questions Sri's decision to continue her pregnancy. She asks, "Sri, kamu yakin gak kalau laki-laki ini bisa menemani kamu sampai tua nanti?" (41:29). This question reflects a cultural assumption that a woman's life is incomplete without the stability of a male partner, and that motherhood must be validated through marriage. The line carries the full weight of societal expectations, positioning Sri's decision as a threat to the established moral order and to the family's public image. Madam Broto's authority in this moment is both maternal and ideological, reinforcing the belief that female virtue is bound to proper domestic alignment.



Figure 8. Madam Broto's Firm Stance

This scene visually reinforces the power she holds within the household. Her upright posture and stern facial expression communicate her position as the guardian of tradition. The cinematic framing and her costuming further symbolize her role as the gatekeeper of Javanese womanhood as defined by ancestral values.

However, this moment of control is met with resistance. Sri replies with clarity and strength, stating, “Aku bisa kok ngurus anak sendiri” (22:00). Her voice, posture, and tone convey defiance, not just against her mother but also against the entire cultural script that demands women justify their choices through patriarchal approval. This response reframes motherhood as a personal and empowered decision, independent of marital status. Through Fiske’s framework, this scene represents a shift from dominant to negotiated meaning. Sri does not wholly reject the value of motherhood, but reclaims it on her own terms, thereby realigning cultural codes toward self-authorship.



Figure 9. A Scene Depicting Javanese Women Supporting Each Other

This figure captures a moment of quiet solidarity. As Sri stands in her truth, she is unexpectedly supported by Pur, her sister, who until this point has embodied silence, patience, and traditional obedience. This moment is especially striking because it challenges the audience’s expectations of Pur’s character. Her voice has been soft, her actions cautious, and her loyalty unquestioning. Yet here, she chooses to speak against her mother’s judgment, defending Sri’s autonomy and thereby positioning herself as a moral agent rather than merely a cultural placeholder.



Figure 10. A Scene Depicting Pur as a Submissive Javanese Woman

This image, showing Pur in her usual submissive role, becomes even more powerful when considered in contrast to the later moment of resistance. Her transformation is not dramatic in volume but in value. It reflects the capacity for resistance from within traditional roles and speaks to the power of ethical clarity nurtured through years of self-restraint.

Another scene further amplifies the emotional labor embedded within these cultural expectations. When Madam Broto reprimands Pur for a kitchen budgeting issue, Pur responds through tears, explaining, “Aku selalu loh bilang sama ibu, tapi kan Ibu gak pernah percaya... jadi ini hasil pengaturanku” (53:14). Her words convey a long-held frustration, a desire to be seen and trusted, and a subtle yet clear act of self-assertion. While she does not raise her voice, her emotional expression speaks volumes. The scene dramatizes the burden carried by women who fulfill expectations silently, often without recognition.



Figure 11. A Scene Depicting Madam Broto's Firm Stance

This scene invites a reflection on how strength is understood. In traditional contexts, strength is often associated with silence and sacrifice. However, Pur’s tears and calm defense suggest another form of resilience, one that quietly resists domination without open confrontation. The film also challenges masculine ideals through Jarot, Sri’s partner, who reveals his fear and vulnerability by saying, “Yang aku takutkan hanya ketidakmampuanku jadi ayah yang baik bagi anak kita nanti” (46:16). His emotional honesty complicates the stereotype of male control and stoicism, offering a more sensitive and introspective perspective that questions the assumption that caregiving is naturally a woman’s role.

These moments together construct an ideological landscape shaped by negotiation rather than imposition. Ideology is not portrayed as a fixed external force but as a dynamic field where characters maneuver, resist, and reinterpret the roles assigned to them. Madam Broto serves as a guardian of tradition, yet her rigidity distances her from her daughters. Pur, initially a quiet emblem of cultural ideals, emerges as a moral voice. Sri, the most visibly defiant, asserts her individuality while also redefining family and societal expectations. The ideological climax unfolds when Madam Broto expels Sri from the household after learning about her pregnancy, ignoring her husband's attempt to mediate. This act exposes the emotional consequences of tradition enforced without compassion, turning the home from a place of belonging into one of exclusion. Sri's calm and firm parting words signal a critical turning point, rejecting passive womanhood and embracing a self-defined identity.

Instead of resolving these tensions, the film intentionally leaves them open, inviting reflection rather than closure. Within Fiske's semiotic framework, the ideological layer becomes a space where dominant cultural codes are confronted, and meaning is shaped through interaction, resistance, and transformation. By portraying different expressions of womanhood such as obedience, leadership, and defiance, the film questions fixed notions of identity and illustrates the complex process of navigating inherited traditions in a changing society. In the end, *Losmen Bu Broto* uses ideology not to reaffirm social norms but to interrogate them. It encourages viewers to reconsider the structures that define womanhood and to explore how roles, expectations, and identities are continuously reimagined through lived experiences and cultural discourse.

5. Discussion

This study presents a refined and multidimensional portrayal of Javanese womanhood in *Losmen Bu Broto* by employing John Fiske's semiotic framework, which consists of three analytical levels: reality, representation, and ideology. These levels collectively reveal the intricate cultural codes and ideological tensions that are embedded within contemporary Indonesian cinema. At the level of reality, the film constructs femininity through culturally loaded visual signs, including traditional attire, spoken expressions, and spatial behavior. The character Sri, for example, openly rejects conventional domestic expectations through her choice of casual clothing, musical performances, and assertive speech. Her depiction embodies a form of modern autonomy that stands in stark contrast to Pur's representation, which aligns more closely with traditional ideals of Javanese femininity. Dressed in *kebaya* and *konde*, Pur exemplifies patience, modesty, and quiet submission. In between these two poles stands Madam Broto, whose graceful yet authoritative appearance serves as

a visual and narrative bridge between tradition and leadership. These characterizations, while culturally grounded, reflect broader discursive patterns in gender representation commonly found in both educational and media contexts (Setiawan et al., 2020; Syarif & Mulyono, 2023).

At the level of representation, the film articulates meaning through a deliberate orchestration of cinematic techniques that collectively render the complexities of female identity. Elements such as camera angles, lighting schemes, spatial compositions, and editing rhythms work together to convey underlying emotional dynamics and shifts in power relations. For instance, Sri is often depicted through close-up shots that draw attention to her expressive face and physical confidence, reinforcing her image as emotionally independent and self-directed. Conversely, Pur is frequently framed in restrained compositions with softer lighting, subtly suggesting her internalized role within a domestic and culturally prescribed order. Madam Broto is characteristically shown through symmetrical and centered shots that affirm her matriarchal authority and emotional control. These visual strategies align with feminist film theory, which seeks to expose the ways technical features of cinematic storytelling can either reinforce or challenge dominant gender ideologies (Hirudayaraj & Clay, 2019; Muñiz, 2018; Sirkinti & Çelik, 2023). Moreover, the film's nuanced use of visual framing echoes insights from earlier studies on femvertising and media discourse, which highlight how seemingly minor stylistic decisions can significantly shape viewers' interpretations of power and gender roles (Sobande, 2019; Domecq et al., 2015).

At the ideological level, *Losmen Bu Broto* navigates the delicate balance between cultural fidelity and the evolving agency of women. Rather than portraying identity as fixed, the film allows its characters to actively engage with and reinterpret dominant cultural values. Madam Broto, as a figure of traditional authority, upholds long-standing norms that offer both stability and constraint. Her rejection of Sri's decision to continue her pregnancy exemplifies generational conflict and reinforces patriarchal ideals that tie female virtue to marital legitimacy. In contrast, Sri's firm assertion of her right to both motherhood and independence illustrates a transition from dominant to negotiated meaning, aligning closely with Fiske's ideological framework.

This ideological tension deepens when Pur, who initially embodies traditional femininity, chooses to support Sri. Her shift from silent compliance to vocal defense represents a subtle yet powerful form of feminist resistance emerging from within conventional roles (Dong, 2022; Cuenca-Soto et al., 2023). The film also challenges masculine stereotypes through the character of Jarot, whose expression of vulnerability as a prospective father undermines rigid expectations of

male stoicism. His emotional honesty invites a broader and more inclusive understanding of gender roles (Mahmoud, 2023; Dean et al., 2019).

The central finding of this study reveals that Javanese womanhood, as portrayed in the film, is not a singular or static identity but a fluid and contextually situated construct shaped by the ongoing interplay of cultural traditions, personal agency, and generational dynamics. This understanding aligns with broader feminist discussions on cinematic representation, where identity is recognized as a continually evolving process. Rajkumar and Devi (2023) point out that female characters in cinema often navigate societal expectations and patriarchal norms, thereby embodying a dynamic expression of agency and identity. Within this context, the portrayal of Javanese femininity reflects an ongoing negotiation that responds to changing societal conditions. The film illustrates this complexity through a deliberate use of narrative and visual strategies that foreground women's roles within a culturally specific yet evolving landscape.

The film conveys these identities through visual and narrative codes that include costume, gesture, dialogue, and spatial positioning, all of which reflect long-established gender roles and culturally embedded meanings. Indonesian cinema frequently presents archetypal figures such as the virtuous wife and the morally ambiguous woman, which, according to Swetin (2012), serve to reinforce traditional expectations while also providing space for critique and reinterpretation. Cohn (2012) explains how visual storytelling functions as a mechanism for constructing layered meanings, especially in the portrayal of identity. Thematic analysis of the film shows how these visual elements preserve aspects of tradition while simultaneously enabling negotiation, a process observed in Noer's (2021) work on cultural representations in horror genres. The film's engagement with these discourses reveals a shifting portrayal of Javanese femininity, shaped by the dual pressures of heritage and contemporary change. Zaki and Zainodin (2020) emphasize that cinematic narratives offer a convergence of visual structure and thematic depth to articulate collective identities. Similarly, Zhang (2023) demonstrates how feminist cinematic techniques shape the depiction of gender identity, and in this film, they facilitate a nuanced exploration of women as both shaped by and shaping cultural narratives in modern Indonesian society.

While previous studies on Indonesian media have tended to adopt broad or homogenizing approaches to female representation, often overlooking ethnic specificity, this research responds to that critical gap by focusing explicitly on Javanese semiotic markers. The analysis foregrounds culturally resonant symbols such as the *kebaya*, the *konde* hairstyle, movement within domestic and public spaces, and ritualized gestures, all

of which contribute to the construction of gendered meaning. Through this emphasis on cultural specificity, the study illustrates the dynamic interplay between inherited tradition and ongoing transformation. Furthermore, it offers a methodological contribution by rigorously applying John Fiske's semiotic model in tandem with feminist interpretive frameworks. This integration enables a deeper examination of how gender and identity are constructed, contested, and communicated within a localized cinematic context (Hakim & Kurnia, 2023; Ciancio, 2018).

Academically, this study contributes to the intersection of media semiotics, feminist critique, and cultural studies by demonstrating how films can function as ideological tools that reflect, challenge, or reinforce societal norms. In applied contexts, it supports media literacy and curriculum development by providing analytical strategies for educators and students to critically interpret visual texts. Films like *Losmen Bu Broto* become valuable resources in the classroom, fostering intercultural awareness and encouraging reflection on gender roles and identity within culturally rich narratives.

For future research, it is important to explore how similar semiotic constructions operate in cinematic depictions of other Indonesian ethnic groups, such as the Sundanese, Balinese, Bugis, or Batak. These comparative studies would provide a broader understanding of how tradition and gender intersect within different cultural frameworks. Additionally, examining newer forms of media such as web series, short films, and digital storytelling on platforms like TikTok and YouTube could offer insights into how younger audiences are reimagining gender identities through hybrid cultural expressions. Such directions would not only enrich discussions on gender and visual semiotics but also contribute to a more inclusive and diverse understanding of Indonesian media and identity formation.

6. Conclusions

The semiotic analysis of *Losmen Bu Broto* reveals a nuanced portrayal of Javanese womanhood, challenging traditional stereotypes while simultaneously preserving cultural symbols. At the level of reality, the film employs traditional attire such as the *kebaya* and *konde* to signify cultural continuity, yet it subverts the conventional image of Javanese women as solely submissive and obedient. Characters like Madam Broto and Sri embody assertiveness, independence, and modernity, while Pur represents the traditional ideal of patience and domesticity, albeit with moments of quiet resistance. This interplay between tradition and modernity highlights the evolving identity of Javanese women, offering a multidimensional view that transcends simplistic categorizations. The novelty of this study lies in its application of John Fiske's semiotic framework to a culturally specific context, uncovering how visual and

narrative codes construct and contest gendered identities in contemporary Indonesian cinema. The findings underscore the importance of visual media in shaping public perceptions of gender roles and suggest that films like *Losmen Bu Broto* serve as discursive spaces where cultural norms are both preserved and challenged. For future research, it is recommended to explore similar semiotic analyses in other regional cinemas within Indonesia, particularly focusing on how ethnic and gendered identities are negotiated in films that address themes of globalization, migration, or intergenerational conflict. Such studies would further enrich our understanding of the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in Southeast Asian visual culture.

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