

# The Voice of Gender Equality in VoD Films

## A Critical Islamic Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract

This study critically examines the depiction of women's inequality in digital films, focusing on gender disparity rooted in patriarchal culture, which endures despite Islam's emphasis on justice and equality. The shifting behaviour of audiences in accessing information, education, and entertainment situates digital films as a powerful medium for advancing gender equality, harnessing the influence of mass media to reshape religious and cultural values. This research analyses three significant films: *Yuni*, *Photocopier*, and *Before, Now and Then*, chosen for their emphasis on gender equality, wide audience appeal, and recognition through national and international awards. Employing Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the study explores textual, discursive, and socio-cultural dimensions. The findings reveal that, textually, the films highlight women's struggles with injustice, discrimination, and violence. The discursive dimension emphasises the need for women to assert their rights and the propagation of Islamic teachings that promote gender equality and universal compassion. From a socio-cultural perspective, the study underlines that systemic injustice will persist unless concerted efforts are made to challenge patriarchal dominance and societal authority over women through the medium of film.

**Keywords:** gender equality, films, Islamic perspective, critical discourse analysis

## Introduction

The ways in which people seek information and enjoy entertainment have undergone significant changes, particularly with the advent of new media platforms such as Video-on-Demand (VoD) streaming services. This shift has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which limited outdoor activities and led to a marked increase in digital service usage. According to research conducted by Populix in 2022, the percentage of Indonesians using VoD services reached 74%, a substantial rise from 50.2% in 2021. With an estimated 83 million VoD platform users, the demographic is diverse: 29% are aged 25–34, 23% are 16–24, 21% are 35–44, 17% are 45–54, and 10% are above 55 years old, indicating a broad appeal across age groups (Widi, 2022).

Moreover, data from *We Are Social* (2024) reveals that Indonesians spend an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes daily on the internet, of which 2 hours and 41 minutes are dedicated to watching broadcast or streaming video. This extensive engagement underscores the centrality of the internet in daily life. The rising public interest in VoD platforms is attributed to their accessibility and the variety of features they offer, including educational content, information, and entertainment. The autonomy afforded to users in selecting their preferred content has further driven subscriptions. Popular platforms such as Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, Prime Video, Vidio, WeTV, Viu, HBO Go, Hooq, Iflix, and YouTube cater to these demands, showcasing a dynamic digital ecosystem.

Among the most consumed content on VoD platforms are films, which have witnessed a surge in popularity in Indonesia. By 2023, the number of film enthusiasts had reached 55 million (Merdeka.com, 2023). The digital transformation in the film industry has brought profound impacts, extending beyond mere entertainment to address pressing societal issues. The concept of digital media transcends its technical functions, emerging as a powerful movement to communicate religious and cultural values. Films have evolved into an effective medium for Islamic propagation (*dakwah*), influencing public behaviour by promoting adherence to Allah's commandments and discouraging prohibited actions (Owie, 2024).

In contemporary media and communication culture, films are regarded as a vital medium for processing, conveying, and reinterpreting critical social topics. They play an essential role in popular culture, exploring themes such as postmodernism, feminism, gender, daily life practices, and values that communities seek to champion. Films not only serve as entertainment but also act as a vehicle for embedding and disseminating implicit values. Their dramatic delivery, combined with sophisticated audio-visual techniques, renders their messages more comprehensible and impactful for audiences than other forms of media. The relaxation experienced during leisure viewing further enhances message receptivity, aligning with principles of information processing.

Films hold a unique position in the continuum of mass media, enduring as a dynamic cultural artefact that evolves while mirroring the discourse and realities of human existence. As a medium targeting the masses, films possess the transformative power to shape

mindsets and behaviours (Sobur, 2017). Modern films integrate acting, audio, screenwriting, imagery, and visual aesthetics to construct cohesive and engaging narratives (Rosyidah & Rifai, 2022). These elements amplify the potential of films to voice social issues and captivate audiences' attention.

A prominent issue depicted in many films is the struggle against gender inequality. Gender inequality manifests as an injustice stemming from the roles and attributes ascribed by society to men and women. This inequality takes various forms, including (1) stereotypes, or negative labelling; (2) subordination, which devalues the status of one gender; (3) marginalisation, which restricts access to public resources and participation; (4) violence, causing physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm; and (5) an excessive burden, imposing disproportionate responsibilities that lower life quality. Women disproportionately bear the brunt of these injustices (Arbain et al., 2015).

The global gender gap remains wide across numerous domains. The *Global Gender Gap Report* (2023) noted a score of 68.4% for 146 countries, with no nation achieving full gender equality. It is estimated that achieving worldwide gender parity will require at least 135 years (WEF, 2023). In Indonesia, the *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS) reported a decline in the gender balance index to 0.447 in 2024, marking a 0.012-point drop from the previous year. Such statistics underline the persistent challenge of achieving gender equality, despite ongoing efforts by various stakeholders, including the media.

The movement for gender equality has long utilised media platforms, including film, to construct critical and alternative discourses on women's lived realities. While progress has been made, gender inequality remains prevalent, particularly in patriarchal societies where men dominate the public sphere and women are relegated to domestic roles. Historically, women have often been marginalised as "the second sex," excluded from significant fields of influence (A'yun, 2019). Films addressing these disparities contribute to reshaping societal narratives, especially when rooted in social facts or realities that resonate with audiences. The integration of digital platforms, such as VoD, further amplifies the reach and impact of these messages.

Over time, films have evolved to include nuanced portrayals of women's struggles, challenging the masculine lens that often dominates film theory. As a result, films have become an indispensable medium for voicing gender-related issues. The exploration of women's roles and gender equality from various perspectives has gained traction in both academic and informal discussions, whether in research settings, coffee shop conversations, or virtual forums.

This study focuses on three films: *Yuni*, *Photocopier* (*Penyalin Cahaya*), and *Before, Now and Then*. These works have garnered recognition both within Indonesia and internationally, reflecting their broad societal impact. Based on true stories of Indonesian women, these films offer compelling narratives that spotlight various aspects of gender inequality. *Yuni* portrays the constraints of patriarchal culture and the pursuit of education and career opportunities for women. *Photocopier* highlights the quest for justice by survivors of sexual violence, while *Before, Now and Then* delves into the pursuit of justice and freedom

for women within familial and social contexts.

The themes explored in these films form the foundation of this study, which applies a critical lens to analyse their discourses using Norman Fairclough's framework of critical discourse analysis. This approach examines the textual, discursive, and socio-cultural dimensions of the films to uncover the underlying messages. Religion, particularly Islam, plays a pivotal role in shaping these narratives, as it profoundly influences human civilisation, societal norms, and concepts of justice and equality. However, religious texts are sometimes misinterpreted to perpetuate discrimination against women, such as justifying the exclusion of women from leadership roles or emphasising unconditional obedience to husbands.

This research seeks to elucidate the complex challenges faced by women, as represented in these locally and nationally produced films, which have earned accolades on international stages. Furthermore, the study emphasises the active agency of women depicted in these films, presenting them as positive role models capable of inspiring change. By addressing the intersections of gender, media, and religion, this research aims to contribute to broader conversations about justice, equality, and the transformative potential of films.

## Critical Discourse Analysis and Film Studies

This study employs Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) method, which examines three interconnected dimensions: microstructural (text), mesostructural (discourse practices), and macrostructural (socio-cultural practices). These dimensions enable an exploration of the interplay between micro and macro levels of social practices, facilitating the identification of the ideological content embedded within a film (Fairclough, 2003). At the textual level, linguistic analysis is conducted, focusing particularly on the selection of lexical forms. At the level of discourse practice, the study examines how references are utilised, as well as the interdiscursiveness and intertextuality of the texts. Finally, at the socio-cultural practice level, the social context external to the text is analysed to understand its influence on the emergence of particular discourses (Eriyanto, 2015).

Fairclough (2003) identifies several key aspects of formal linguistic features that function as carriers of ideology. First, experiential value is manifested through various linguistic choices, including classification patterns, ideological terms, lexical processes, meaning relations, and metaphors. Second, relational value is reflected prominently in the use of formal and informal language to establish relationships between participants in discourse. Third, expressive value emerges from linguistic choices that convey positive or negative evaluations.

Critical discourse analysis extends beyond traditional discourse analysis by adopting a critical perspective. It recognises that discourse is inherently tied to power dynamics and is rarely neutral (Eriyanto, 2015). Within the framework of CDA, texts and conversations are understood as practices that reflect specific values and missions. From a critical the-

ory perspective, discourse often reveals intentions of domination or marginalisation directed towards particular groups or individuals within the communication process. This study analyses three films through a critical discourse lens, examining their production and interpretation while presenting the perspectives communicated by the media.

This research began with a review of previous studies relevant to the topic, utilising the Systematic Review Accelerator (SRA) method. The review identified numerous studies that demonstrate the capacity of films, as a form of mass media, to depict social realities and phenomena, particularly regarding issues of gender inequality, violence, and stereotypes. Notably, earlier studies predominantly adopt a feminist perspective to examine gender inequality in films. However, there has been a lack of research that integrates religious and cultural perspectives into film analysis. This study addresses this gap by applying a critical discourse analysis approach, which is particularly well-suited for analysing language, text, content, and visual elements within films. The rationale for this approach is outlined as follows:

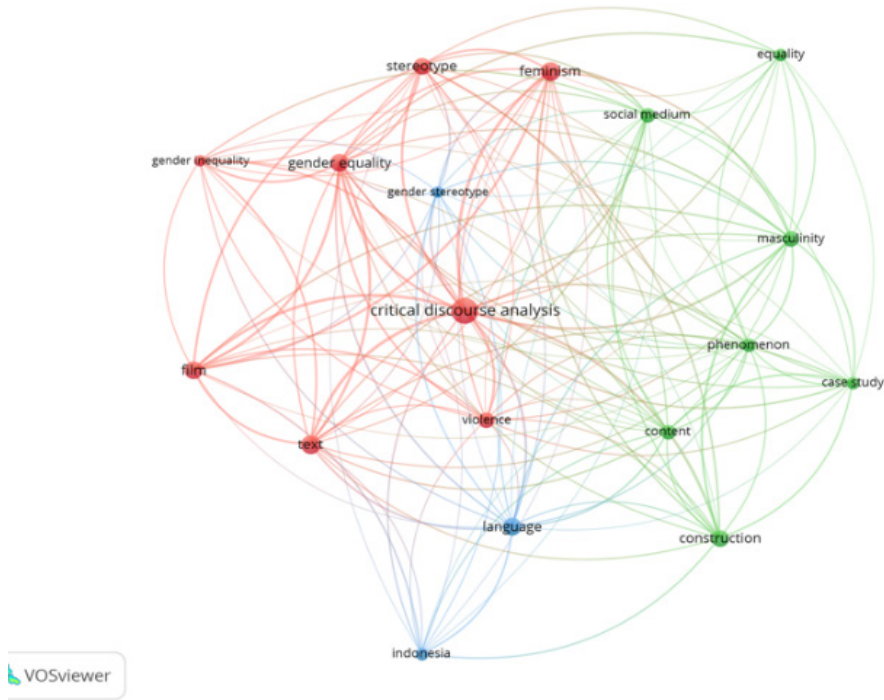


Figure 1: Word Cloud of Previous Research Related to This Study

Several previous studies have examined films through a feminist lens (Hannula, 2020; Ho, 2019; Yahaya, 2011). These works connect various feminist theoretical concepts with films, such as emancipation, chastity, marriage, gender equality, and related themes. A

critical approach is often applied to analyse films that perpetuate patriarchal practices prevalent in various societies, highlighting the challenges faced by women. Many Indonesian films also explore the struggles arising from patriarchal culture, revealing it as a deeply entrenched societal phenomenon with significant implications for gender relations.

For instance, the representation of patriarchal culture in the film *Istri Orang* was examined by Setiawati (2020). She found that women are frequently subjected to patriarchal control, including discrimination and violence faced by female workers, as well as societal control over women's sexuality and reproductive rights. Similarly, Oknadia et al. (2022) investigated the film *Photocopier*, uncovering patriarchal ideologies that position men as dominant figures and women as subordinates. These studies underscore the significance of analysing films with such themes, as they are not merely spectacles or entertainment but also vehicles for expressing religious and cultural values, shaping societal attitudes towards gender roles.

Other research corroborates that films, as audio-visual communication media, have the capacity to reflect and critique social realities. For example, the documentary film *Tanah Ibu Kami* serves as a form of social criticism, addressing issues related to women and the environment (Pamungkas & Sokowati, 2022). This study highlights how the choice of diction, such as “Ibu” (Mother), reinforces a dominant ideology of femininity while critiquing social structures. It also demonstrates how films can act as tools for fostering dialogue on overlooked or marginalised issues.

Further research includes an analysis of the film *Yuni* from the perspective of child marriage practices (Sulaiman & Indra, 2023), reflecting the prevalence of early marriages in Indonesia. Similarly, *Photocopier* has been studied through the lens of power relations affecting victims of sexual harassment, with a particular focus on women as victims (Ammar et al., 2023). These studies reveal how films can expose societal inequalities, bringing attention to systemic injustices.

What distinguishes this research from prior studies is its perspective. While earlier analyses predominantly rely on critical and feminist discourse frameworks, this study incorporates a religious perspective—particularly within the context of Islam—to examine socio-cultural phenomena depicted in films. This approach seeks to bridge gaps by integrating cultural and religious interpretations into the discourse analysis, offering an additional layer of insight into the dynamics of representation and ideology in films.

Existing studies affirm that films can function as a medium for critiquing social issues by presenting facts, opinions, and perspectives to the public. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides a robust framework for examining how films portray complex social realities, including dilemmas, conflicts, and the dynamics of relationships between individuals within the broader context of prevailing social and religious values. This analytical approach situates films not merely as entertainment but as potent instruments for social commentary and change.

Fairclough's CDA method is especially apt for understanding these social phenomena, with a focus on effecting positive social change. Beyond analysing the surface content

of films, CDA probes the underlying messages conveyed through dialogue, characterisation, and settings. This analytical approach reveals societal issues, identifies their origins and causes, and explores potential forms of resistance, offering pathways for addressing and resolving these problems. By doing so, it elevates the role of films as cultural texts that can challenge dominant ideologies and inspire transformative action.

**Table 1:**  
**Critical Discourse Analysis of Films *Yuni*, *Photocopier*, *Before*, and *Now and Then***

| Film <i>Yuni</i>         |                                      |                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Analysis                 | Level Elements                       | Content in The Film                                                                                                                                      |
| Microstructural analysis | Representation                       | There is a societal view that women do not need to pursue higher education, and women who reject proposals will never get married.                       |
|                          | Social Interaction                   | Yuni lives in a patriarchal society that upholds the old tradition, asserting that women should marry and not attend university.                         |
|                          | Textuality                           | The framing of this film suggests that women must voice their rights and have the courage to break free from patriarchal culture and discrimination.     |
| Mesostructural analysis  | Topic Selection                      | Yuni's rejection of the proposal became the subject of gossip among her neighbors due to a myth that women who reject a proposal twice will never marry. |
|                          | Source Determination and Perspective | Women are considered materialistic, and dowry is determined by their virginity and young age.                                                            |
|                          | Imbalance in Representation          | The issue of child marriage in the film <i>Yuni</i> is well-presented and made visually engaging through the predominance of purple.                     |

|                                                     |                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Macrostructural analysis (social cultural practice) | Social context                       | The film Yuni portrays how women struggle against stigmas and stereotypes.                                                                                                                            |
|                                                     | Ideology and cultural values         | Culturally, myths, stigmas, and stereotypes are often imposed on almost all women, but the film <i>Yuni</i> offers a resolution to these problems.                                                    |
|                                                     | Power and social structure           | The film conveys the idea that women are not weak; instead, they are portrayed as strong, smart, capable of making decisions, and independent of their parents.                                       |
| Film <i>Photocopier</i>                             |                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Microstructural analysis                            | Representation                       | Representation includes dominant ideology and word choice, reflecting society's (campus) view of women who are victims of sexual harassment: instead of receiving protection, they face injustice.    |
|                                                     | Social Interaction                   | Conflict and concern arise from the fact that sexual crimes can happen to anyone, anywhere, and at any time.                                                                                          |
|                                                     | Textuality                           | Language style and framing: The language used employs satire and sarcasm to insult or demean people. The framing of the film emphasizes that women must voice their rights against sexual harassment. |
| Mesostructural analysis                             | Topic Selection                      | Suryani is a woman fighting for her rights and seeking to restore her reputation after being involved in a sexual harassment case.                                                                    |
|                                                     | Source Determination and Perspective | The film tells the story from the perspective of a victim of sexual crimes, focusing on her experiences and emotions.                                                                                 |
|                                                     | Imbalance in Representation          | There is an imbalance in power relations: the perpetrator of sexual harassment holds power, while the victim does not.                                                                                |

|                                                     |                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Macrostructural analysis (social cultural practice) | Social context                          | The issue of sexual harassment is a global problem, and such cases are increasingly occurring in society.                                                                                  |
|                                                     | Ideology and cultural values            | This film reflects the cultural values of Indonesian society, which tend to stereotype and stigmatize women as victims of sexual harassment.                                               |
|                                                     | Power and social structure              | The choices and framing in this film reflect societal realities, presenting a gender-fair perspective and supporting victims.                                                              |
| <i>Film Before, Now and Then</i>                    |                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Microstructural analysis                            | Representation                          | Society views women as only wanting their husband's wealth if he is a rich man.                                                                                                            |
|                                                     | Social Interaction                      | This film tells the story of a woman named Nana, focusing on her past, present, and future. Nana endures many wounds and traumas as a woman.                                               |
|                                                     | Textuality                              | The framing of this film portrays men as holding the most important position in society, creating a system of control over women, which leads to their discrimination and marginalisation. |
| Mesostructural analysis                             | Topic Selection                         | Nana is a woman striving to achieve happiness and freedom for herself.                                                                                                                     |
|                                                     | Source Determination and                | This film depicts the cultural reality in society that has persisted from the past to the present. Women at home are considered inferior and powerless against their husband's infidelity. |
|                                                     | Perspective Imbalance in Representation | There is an imbalance in power relations between husband and wife, as the husband holds a higher social class, making men dominant.                                                        |

|                                                     |                              |                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Macrostructural analysis (social cultural practice) | Social context               | The patriarchal culture in families positions women as wives, making them vulnerable to violence. In cases of divorce, women are subjected to negative stigma and often blamed. |
|                                                     | Ideology and cultural values | The film reflects the cultural values of Indonesian society, which tend to stereotype and stigmatise women.                                                                     |
|                                                     | Power and social structure   | The choices and framing in this film reflect societal realities, and the film adopts a gender-justice perspective.                                                              |

# Gender Equality in Digital Films

## Film *Yuni*

The film *Yuni*, released in 2021, debuted on both big screens and Video-on-Demand (VoD) platforms such as Disney+ Hotstar and Vidio. *Yuni* has garnered significant national and international acclaim for its exploration of gender equality, achieving milestones that are challenging for Southeast Asian films. Notably, it won the Platform Prize Award at the 2021 Toronto International Film Festival, an exceptional honour for films from the region. The film also received the Citra Cup award for Best Female Lead in 2021 and Best Actress at the Asian World Film Festival the same year. Moreover, *Yuni* represented Indonesia in the Best International Feature category at the 94th Academy Awards in 2022, although it did not secure a nomination.

The narrative of *Yuni* focuses on the enduring patriarchal practices that persist despite modern societal advancements. The protagonist, Yuni, is an intelligent teenage girl trapped within a cultural system that perpetuates child marriage and limits women’s autonomy. Her aspirations for higher education are curtailed by societal norms and familial expectations, which prioritise early marriage. The film critiques the enduring stereotype that reduces women’s roles to “kitchen, mattress, and well,” a reductive view that continues to constrain women’s autonomy over their bodies and futures.

The film’s director, Kamila Andini, brings a distinct gender equality perspective to *Yuni*, shaped by her personal and professional experiences. Inspired by the story of her household assistant who married young, Andini crafted a film that highlights the struggle for women’s rights in regional settings. Andini’s background, which includes a sociology degree from Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia, and the influence of her father, Garin Nugroho Riyanto—a renowned Indonesian filmmaker with a focus on social and environmental issues—has significantly shaped her worldview. Her husband, Ifa Isfan-

syah, also a filmmaker, provides further professional support, creating an environment that fosters her creative exploration of critical social issues.

A critical analysis of *Yuni* reveals its incisive critique of gender inequality often experienced by women in Indonesia. The film underscores how patriarchal culture exerts control over women's sexuality and reproduction. This is depicted through practices such as virginity tests for female students, a discriminatory practice absent for their male counterparts. The film also illustrates how societal expectations devalue women unable to bear children, viewing them as incomplete. For instance, in a subplot involving the character Suci, early marriage leads to psychological trauma, domestic violence, and eventual divorce, exposing the detrimental consequences of patriarchal norms on women's well-being.

Patriarchal culture also manifests in the denial of educational opportunities for women, favouring marriage over academic pursuits. The film portrays societal pressures that prioritise marriage—especially to wealthy suitors—over personal development, as seen in Yuni's struggle to pursue higher education. Rather than encouraging educational aspirations, families and communities often reinforce patriarchal norms that marginalise women's potential. This systemic discrimination contravenes human rights principles, which emphasise education as a pathway to individual freedom and self-actualisation (Rahmayani, 2021).

The film highlights the pervasive stigma against widows, portraying the societal dilemma faced by women who must choose between enduring violent marriages or risking ostracism as divorcees. Widows are often viewed as disgraced individuals, particularly when their marital status results from divorce. This reflects a social structure in which male dominance in public and domestic spheres diminishes women's agency and perpetuates harmful stereotypes (Rachman et al., 2023).

The cultural practice of dowry is depicted as a materialistic valuation of women's worth, often tied to virginity. The film critiques the notion that higher dowries enhance a woman's social status while simultaneously subjecting her to patriarchal control, as dowries are perceived as a transactional "purchase" of women. This phenomenon underscores the commodification of women's bodies, a practice still prevalent in many parts of Indonesia. The representation of dowries in *Yuni* reflects a broader critique of how materialistic values perpetuate gender inequalities, often reducing women to mere objects of economic transactions.

Patriarchal culture is further criticised for denying women the freedom to make decisions about their own lives. Decisions such as marriage are dictated by familial and societal expectations, often prioritising economic stability over personal aspirations. The film portrays the broader societal belief that a woman's success is measured by marriage rather than education, perpetuating the reductive view of women's roles as limited to domestic duties such as cooking, washing, and childbearing. This deeply entrenched mindset reflects the societal preference for conformity to traditional gender roles, which stifles the potential of women to contribute meaningfully to both personal and societal progress.

The film explores how myths and superstitions, such as the *pamali* (taboo) in Javanese-Sundanese culture, reinforce patriarchal norms. For instance, Yuni's friends warn her that rejecting marriage proposals twice will curse her with eternal spinsterhood. Such myths, often perpetuated through generations, disproportionately burden women and restrict their freedom, further entrenching gender inequalities (Sriwati et al., 2022). These superstitions operate as a form of social control, maintaining the status quo by instilling fear and compliance among women. By exposing these myths, *Yuni* challenges audiences to question the validity and impact of such traditional beliefs on gender relations.

The recurring use of the colour purple in *Yuni* symbolises women's freedom and equality. Purple elements, present in Yuni's clothing, room decorations, and personal items, reflect her aspirations and struggles. Historically, purple and white symbolised women's suffrage and equality in England in 1908, with purple representing justice and dignity (Panggayu, 2021). This symbolism adds depth to the film's visual narrative, juxtaposing Yuni's struggles with the broader fight for gender equality. The consistent presence of purple throughout the film serves as a visual reminder of the resilience and determination required to confront societal injustices.

In addition to its thematic richness, *Yuni* stands out for its compelling cinematic techniques. The film's use of subtle yet evocative dialogue allows the characters' emotions and struggles to resonate with audiences. The cinematography, characterised by soft lighting and intimate framing, creates a poignant atmosphere that draws viewers into Yuni's world. The soundtrack further enhances the emotional depth of the narrative, complementing the visual elements to create a cohesive and immersive storytelling experience. These technical aspects contribute significantly to the film's ability to convey complex social issues in an accessible and impactful manner.

The broader societal implications of *Yuni* cannot be overlooked. By addressing gender inequality through a cultural lens, the film provides an opportunity for reflection and dialogue on the challenges faced by women in Indonesia and beyond. It calls on viewers to critically assess the cultural norms and practices that perpetuate gender disparities. Moreover, *Yuni* serves as an important educational tool, highlighting the need for systemic change to achieve gender equality. Its success at international film festivals underscores the universal relevance of its message, demonstrating how local stories can resonate with global audiences.

*Yuni* also highlights the importance of representation in media. The film's focus on a young Indonesian woman navigating societal pressures offers a voice to those who are often marginalised in mainstream narratives. By centring the experiences of women, particularly in a Southeast Asian context, *Yuni* challenges the male-dominated perspectives that frequently dominate the film industry. This shift in representation not only enriches the cinematic landscape but also empowers audiences to recognise the value of diverse voices in storytelling.

The critical discourse surrounding *Yuni* further enhances its impact. Scholars and critics alike have praised the film for its nuanced exploration of patriarchal culture and its

implications for women's lives. The use of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework provides valuable insights into how the film constructs and communicates its messages. By examining the interplay between text, discourse practices, and socio-cultural contexts, this approach reveals the ideological underpinnings of the narrative and its potential to inspire change.

Through its layered narrative and powerful symbolism, *Yuni* critiques the pervasive patriarchal norms that continue to shape women's lives in Indonesia. The film not only reflects the challenges faced by women but also calls for a re-evaluation of societal values to embrace justice, equality, and respect for women's rights. Its exploration of gender inequality, combined with its artistic achievements, positions *Yuni* as a landmark work in contemporary Southeast Asian cinema.

Ultimately, *Yuni* serves as a testament to the transformative power of storytelling. By shedding light on the struggles and aspirations of women, the film encourages audiences to envision a world where gender equality is not merely an ideal but a lived reality. It is a poignant reminder that cultural change begins with awareness and dialogue, and that films like *Yuni* play a vital role in shaping the narratives that define our societies.

### Film *Photocopier*

The second film analysed in this study is *Penyalin Cahaya (Photocopier)*, released on the Netflix platform in 2021. This film narrates the story of a female university student who becomes a victim of sexual violence, only to be manipulated into being portrayed as the perpetrator. The protagonist, Suryani, experiences profound losses, including the revocation of her scholarship and the erosion of her family's trust. The narrative highlights the pervasive nature of sexual violence, which occurs across various spaces—public, domestic, and even within digital platforms that are assumed to be safe. By focusing on the survivor's perspective, the film explores the multifaceted injustices faced by Suryani, played by Shenina Cinnamon.

The film was directed by Wregas Bhanuteja, demonstrating that films championing women's issues are not exclusively written or directed by women. *Photocopier* had its international premiere at the Busan International Film Festival on 8 October 2021. It went on to achieve critical acclaim, securing 12 awards at the 2021 Indonesian Film Festival (FFI), including Best Feature Film, Best Director, Best Male Lead, and Best Screenwriter. These accolades underscore the film's artistic and thematic significance within both national and international cinematic landscapes.

The plot centres on Suryani, an active member of her university's theatre group, who attends a celebratory party. Following the event, a photograph of her in a drunken state is disseminated across social media platforms. As a result, Suryani loses her scholarship after being accused of defaming the faculty and the university. Crucially, she has no recollection of the events at the party due to being unconscious. The film poignantly depicts the layers of injustice Suryani endures, highlighting her victimisation and the societal

prejudices that amplify her suffering (LSF, 2021).

Sexual violence remains a widespread issue globally, occurring in myriad forms and across various contexts. *Photocopier* expands its narrative scope by including the experiences of male victims, such as Thariq, alongside Suryani's ordeal. This representation challenges traditional perceptions of sexual violence as exclusively targeting women, acknowledging that men can also be victims. However, the film underscores that women remain disproportionately affected, with the highest prevalence of sexual harassment cases reported among female victims.

A critical analysis of the film reveals several important dimensions. First, the film examines the societal tendency to position female victims of sexual violence as perpetrators of defamation or as instigators of their own victimisation. This stems from entrenched assumptions that women are inherently passive, weak, and unlikely to resist abuse. In the digital era, sexual violence is no longer confined to physical acts; it now includes electronic-based offences such as capturing and storing images or videos of certain body parts without consent. These materials are often weaponised by perpetrators as tools of blackmail, threatening to disseminate them if victims—particularly women—attempt to report the violence they have endured. In *Photocopier*, this is exemplified by the crime of electronic sexual harassment, illustrating how technology has been co-opted to perpetuate abuse.

Second, the film sheds light on the role of power dynamics in silencing victims of sexual violence. Perpetrators frequently leverage their authority or social status to intimidate victims into silence, discouraging them from reporting the incidents to the police. This systemic imbalance often leaves victims, especially women, at a severe disadvantage, exacerbating their social marginalisation. Women who come forward are frequently stigmatised as “unchaste” and subjected to harsher social sanctions than the male perpetrators. This reflects a broader societal bias that prioritises preserving male reputations over addressing the harm inflicted on female victims.

The film advocates for the pursuit of justice through storytelling and collective action. In *Photocopier*, Suryani and other survivors of sexual violence use creative means to voice their experiences by disseminating their stories on campus. They photocopy written accounts of the violence they endured and distribute them widely among their peers. This act of storytelling aligns with the “illusory truth effect,” which suggests that repeated dissemination of a narrative can establish it as a fact within societal consciousness (Pierre, 2021). The film underscores the importance of amplifying victims' voices, emphasising that silence only enables the perpetuation of lies and injustices.

Symbolism plays a crucial role in reinforcing the film's themes. For instance, the green shirts worn by members of the Matahari theatre group, of which Suryani is a member, symbolise resilience and strength. This choice of colour conveys the message that sexual violence is not confined to one gender; men, too, can be victims. Additionally, the film employs metaphors to critique societal attitudes towards sexual violence. In a scene involving fogging to control mosquitoes, the slogan “drain, bury, close” serves as a poignant

metaphor for the treatment of sexual violence cases. The phrase symbolises draining victims emotionally and physically, burying the truth, and silencing victims and witnesses. Such imagery reflects the grim realities faced by survivors in their pursuit of justice and highlights societal complicity in perpetuating a culture of silence.

Furthermore, the film illustrates the structural and cultural barriers that prevent victims from achieving justice. The intersection of patriarchal norms and institutional power dynamics creates an environment in which victims are often discredited or ignored. In *Photocopier*, Suryani's struggle to reclaim her scholarship and dignity mirrors the real-world challenges faced by survivors who must navigate a labyrinth of societal prejudices, victim-blaming, and institutional apathy.

*Photocopier* also critiques the systemic normalisation of sexual violence within communities, illustrating how silence and complicity allow these crimes to persist. By portraying the experiences of both male and female victims, the film broadens the discourse on sexual violence, challenging traditional gendered assumptions and advocating for a more inclusive understanding of victimhood. The narrative compels viewers to confront uncomfortable truths about societal attitudes toward power, consent, and justice.

#### Film *Before...*

The third film analysed is *Before, Now and Then*, released in 2022 on the Amazon Prime Video platform. Directed by Kamila Andini, this film highlights the plight of women affected by violence in rural areas. *Before, Now and Then* received critical acclaim, winning the Best Film award at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards (APSA) in Australia, alongside several national accolades, including Best Feature-Length Film, Best Picture Editor, Best Cinematography Director, and Best Artistic Director, among others.

Set in 1960s West Java, *Before, Now and Then* centres on Nana, a wife and mother grappling with the trauma of her past while striving for justice and freedom. Having lost her beloved family during a conflict, Nana relocates to Bandung, where she remarries an older, affluent man. Despite the material wealth of her second husband's family, Nana often feels belittled and accused of being materialistic. Her role in the household is confined to one of obedience and meekness, leaving her unfulfilled and burdened. The narrative takes a turn when Nana forms an unexpected bond with Ino, her husband's mistress. Together, they navigate their struggles and support one another (LSF, 2022).

Though *Before, Now and Then* is not explicitly a religious film, it depicts a Muslim family living within a predominantly Muslim community. Islamic values subtly permeate the narrative, providing moral and ethical undertones. The film illustrates the life of a woman who, as both a wife and mother, endures the dual challenges of reconciling past traumas and addressing present difficulties. Islam's reverence for the role of women, as highlighted in Qur'anic verses and hadiths, resonates within the film's portrayal of Nana's resilience and struggles.

From the perspective of gender equality in Islam, *Before, Now and Then* presents various

critical themes. One significant aspect is its portrayal of a woman's journey to escape societal pressures, as seen when Nana flees a group intent on arranging her marriage. The film juxtaposes the lives of women across different temporalities—the past, present, and dreamlike sequences—depicting their suffering as shaped by rigid social expectations. It underscores the enduring societal constraints faced by women, both during Indonesia's early post-independence era and in contemporary times, where expressing individuality remains challenging (Mannuntungi et al., 2023). Nana's pain and sorrow are vividly expressed through character dialogues and poignant visual storytelling.

Symbolically, the film critiques patriarchal culture through Nana's daily life, which revolves around serving her husband and family. Her monotonous routine leaves little room for personal happiness, as she prioritises others' well-being at the expense of her own. This dynamic reflects the pervasive cultural expectation that women must bear the emotional labour of their households. Nana's internal struggles are compounded by her miscarriage, which society attributes to her perceived negligence, perpetuating the stigma that women are solely responsible for reproductive outcomes. This scenario captures the unjust burden placed on women, highlighting the intersection of patriarchal norms and societal expectations.

The film also portrays the expectation for women to conceal their personal struggles, particularly those stemming from their husbands' misconduct. Nana's household conflict, involving infidelity and betrayal, illustrates how women were culturally pressured to maintain silence about their grievances. This secrecy is symbolised by the tradition of women tying their hair into buns, representing the concealment of their emotional turmoil. Despite her many challenges, Nana strives to find freedom and happiness. Her approach to resolving conflict—meeting her husband's mistress, Ino—demonstrates her maturity and wisdom in handling complex situations without resorting to impulsive actions. This reconciliation becomes a pivotal moment in Nana's journey towards self-liberation.

Nana's decision to divorce her husband attracts social condemnation, as she is accused of marrying him solely for his wealth and status as a village head. Such accusations reflect societal biases that stereotype women as materialistic when they marry affluent or high-status men. The film critiques this double standard and challenges the notion that women must endure unhappy marriages for the sake of familial stability or societal approval. Through this narrative, the film exposes the systemic barriers preventing women from achieving autonomy and happiness.

Symbolism is a recurring motif in *Before, Now and Then*, enriching its narrative with visual and thematic depth. For instance, the strained relationship between Nana and her husband is depicted in a scene where they pose for a family photograph while holding a yellow chrysanthemum. The flower symbolises uncertainty and unrequited love, reflecting the fragile state of their marriage. Earlier in the film, vibrant red roses on a dining table convey a sense of love and passion. As conflicts unfold, this imagery evolves, mirroring Nana's growing awareness of the truth about her relationship. In the film's conclusion, Nana unbinds her hair, symbolising her release from the secrets and burdens

she has carried. This act signifies her newfound freedom and self-determination (Rifian-da, 2017).

The film's appeal is further enhanced by its visual aesthetics. The vibrant colour grading and meticulous attention to detail recreate the atmosphere of 1960s Java, immersing the audience in the cultural and social milieu of the time. The soundtrack complements the narrative's contemplative tone, creating an engaging cinematic experience. These artistic elements not only enrich the storytelling but also symbolically capture the experiences of women within a patriarchal society.

In comparing *Before, Now and Then* with the other films analysed, its visual and thematic strengths stand out. Yuni utilises visual pleasure to challenge the objectification of women, offering alternative narratives that deconstruct traditional masculine perspectives in mainstream cinema. It visualises women's roles in ways that reshape the audience's perceptions and encourages an internalisation of gender equality (Mulvey, 2013). Similarly, *Photocopier* employs compelling visuals and storytelling to highlight the resilience of women seeking justice for sexual violence. Through the lens of Laura Mulvey's "male gaze" theory, the film critiques the objectification of women and the manipulation of their images for exploitative purposes.

*Before, Now and Then* complements these narratives by focusing on the lived experiences of women in a historical and cultural context. The film captures the intricacies of women's struggles with identity, autonomy, and societal expectations. Its visual representation of Java's 1960s setting, combined with its nuanced character development, creates a powerful narrative that resonates across temporal and cultural boundaries. The symbolic use of flowers, traditional hairstyles, and domestic settings underscores the universal themes of resilience and liberation.

In conclusion, *Before, Now and Then* serves as a poignant exploration of the intersection of gender, culture, and societal expectations. Through its symbolic imagery and narrative depth, the film critiques entrenched patriarchal norms while celebrating the resilience and agency of its female protagonist. The film's artistic achievements and its subtle integration of Islamic values provide a compelling framework for analysing gender equality within a cultural and historical context. Together with *Yuni* and *Photocopier*, this film contributes to a broader discourse on the representation of women in Indonesian cinema, offering profound insights into their struggles and triumphs.

## Internalisation of Islamic Values in Films

The films *Yuni*, *Photocopier*, and *Before, Now and Then* are not explicitly categorised as religious films but are instead positioned as drama films imbued with cultural and Islamic values. While culture and religion are distinct entities, they remain deeply interconnected. Religious teachings originate from divine revelation, whereas culture represents traditions and practices passed down through generations. These three films incorporate moral messages directed at their audiences, including *da'wah* (Islamic propagation) val-

ues, which offer valuable lessons and insights.

The evolution of technology has significantly transformed the practice of *da'wah*. It is no longer confined to sermons or lectures delivered in mosques but has expanded into the digital realm, including social media platforms. These platforms often feature content by *kyai* (Islamic scholars) and *ustadz* (religious teachers), continuing traditional practices in modern formats. Recently, films have emerged as a powerful medium for *da'wah*, offering a compelling visual and narrative approach to promote moral and ethical principles. This cinematic *da'wah* approach invites viewers toward goodness and encourages ethical reflection through relatable storytelling.

In the film *Yuni*, Islam's recognition of women's reproductive rights forms a significant theme. The film critiques patriarchal norms that seek to control women's reproductive autonomy and sexuality. Women's biological roles, such as pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, are acknowledged as divinely ordained, with the Qur'an paying specific attention to these processes. Relevant verses, including QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 222–223, QS. Luqman [31]: 14, and QS. al-Ahqaf [46]: 15, emphasise the sanctity of these roles, countering cultural narratives that exploit or diminish their value. By foregrounding this perspective, the film illustrates the harmony between Islamic principles and the intrinsic dignity of women's reproductive roles.

Another key focus of *Yuni* is the right to education, which is strongly advocated in Islam. The film portrays the barriers imposed by patriarchal norms that restrict women's access to higher education, even in predominantly Muslim societies. This exclusion directly contradicts Qur'anic teachings that make education a universal obligation for both men and women. QS. al-Mujadalah [58]: 11 calls for the elevation of those who seek knowledge, without gender differentiation. Similarly, QS. al-'Alaq [96]: 1–5, the first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), underscores the importance of literacy and learning as collective responsibilities of the Muslim *ummah* (Kodir, 2021). By addressing these disparities, the film challenges viewers to reflect on the misalignment between cultural practices and Islamic principles regarding education.

The societal treatment of widows is another critical issue explored in *Yuni*. The film critiques the stigma and marginalisation faced by widows, who are often perceived as burdens or symbols of disgrace. In contrast, Islamic teachings elevate the status of widows, encouraging their inclusion and respect within society. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) exemplified compassion and support for widows, providing them with shelter during their *iddah* period and assisting them in finding suitable spouses. These actions align with Qur'anic teachings that advocate justice and dignity for all individuals, irrespective of marital status. However, the film illustrates the dissonance between these religious values and contemporary societal attitudes, urging audiences to confront such biases and embrace a more equitable approach.

The film *Yuni* also critiques the materialistic perception of dowries, often viewed as measures of a woman's social worth, particularly for virgins. Several scenes in the film portray dowries as indicators of a woman's value, reinforcing societal pressures on wom-

en to conform to these expectations. However, Islam frames dowries as symbolic gifts representing sincerity, love, and respect. QS. an-Nisa [4]: 4 explicitly highlights this perspective, dissociating dowries from materialistic interpretations. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) further advocated for simplicity in dowries, asserting their spiritual significance over their monetary value (Aini, 2014). By juxtaposing these teachings with contemporary practices, the film critiques cultural norms that commodify women through excessive dowry demands, encouraging a return to the Islamic principles of sincerity and equity in marital arrangements.

Islam accords women the right to make independent decisions, including the freedom to choose a life partner. This principle is highlighted in *Yuni* through the protagonist's internal struggle as she faces the dilemma of pursuing higher education or succumbing to familial and societal pressure to marry. This predicament reflects the experiences of many young women navigating the phases leading to marriage. Parental involvement in such decisions is significant, as parents often seek what they perceive to be the best for their children. However, tensions frequently arise when parents' perspectives conflict with their children's aspirations, particularly in patriarchal societies.

In Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the concept of *ijbar* refers to the authority of guardians over their wards, particularly in marital arrangements. However, this authority is not absolute and does not equate to an unchallengeable veto. A hadith narrated by A'isha (may Allah be pleased with her) recounts the case of a girl who sought the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) intervention because her father had arranged her marriage without her consent. The Prophet annulled the marriage, affirming the girl's right to choose. Ibn Taymiyyah and other Islamic scholars have similarly asserted that a father cannot force his adult daughter into marriage without her agreement. In *Yuni*, the protagonist rejects two marriage proposals, asserting her autonomy and prioritising her education. Her actions serve as an empowering narrative for young women who face similar challenges, offering a role model for resisting societal pressures that undermine personal aspirations.

The film also critiques the influence of myths (*pamali*) in perpetuating restrictive social norms, particularly for women. Myths, often presented as prohibitions or taboos, serve as informal mechanisms of social control, regulating behaviour and attitudes. While myths are rooted in cultural traditions, they frequently become instruments of oppression, especially when applied disproportionately to women. In *Yuni*, myths such as the prohibition against sitting near doors (believed to obstruct marriage prospects) or rejecting multiple marriage proposals (assumed to result in lifelong spinsterhood) illustrate how these beliefs constrain women's autonomy. These cultural narratives act as figurative shackles, limiting women's ability to chart their own paths in life.

Islam explicitly discourages superstition and reliance on baseless beliefs, referred to as *tathayyur* in Sharia. Superstition fosters anxiety and a lack of trust in Allah's divine decree. A hadith narrated by Muslim, An-Nasai, Abu Dawood, and Ahmad states, "Among us there are people who believe in *tathayyur* (superstition or bad luck). The Prophet

Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, ‘The feelings that arise in your heart should not become obstacles. Do not pay attention to them.’” By addressing the myths embedded in societal norms, *Yuni* challenges audiences to differentiate cultural traditions from Islamic teachings and to align their actions with faith-based principles rather than unfounded superstitions.

Another significant theme in the film is the limitation placed on women’s roles by patriarchal stereotypes, which confine them to domestic spheres symbolised by the phrase “kitchen (dapur), mattress (kasur), and well (sumur).” These stereotypes continue to persist in many societies, perpetuating the belief that women’s primary roles are confined to household responsibilities. However, Islam does not mandate such restrictions. Women are recognised as equal partners with their husbands in household responsibilities and are not solely obligated to manage domestic tasks. There is no definitive Islamic basis for relegating women to the domestic realm or suggesting that their primary and sacred duties are limited to family and reproduction.

Islamic teachings advocate for reciprocal roles between spouses, ensuring mutual support and collaboration. This principle is reinforced by Qur’anic verses such as QS. at-Tau-bah [9]: 71, which highlights the cooperation between believing men and women, and QS. al-Imran [3]: 195, which acknowledges the equal efforts of both genders in societal and familial contributions. *Yuni* challenges these patriarchal norms by portraying a narrative that promotes a broader understanding of women’s roles, both within the family and in the public sphere, urging audiences to reconsider deeply ingrained stereotypes.

The film *Photocopier* also incorporates Islamic values, particularly in its portrayal of justice and dignity. Suryani, the protagonist, is depicted as a woman from a Muslim family who adheres to the teachings of Islam. The Qur’an explicitly prohibits sexual violence, holding both men and women accountable for maintaining ethical conduct. Verses such as QS. An-Nur (24): 30 and 33, and QS. Al-Mu’minun (23): 5–7, emphasise the sanctity of human dignity and forbid acts of sexual misconduct. QS. Al-A’raf (7): 33 further condemns abominable behaviour and associating partners with Allah. One of the underlying causes of sexual violence, as highlighted in QS. An-Nur (24): 30, is the failure to “lower the gaze,” an injunction that applies equally to men and women, underscoring the Qur’an’s holistic approach to ethical behaviour.

*Photocopier* also expands the discourse on sexual harassment by illustrating that men, too, can be victims. While the film centres on Suryani’s experiences, it highlights that the stigma of sexual violence is deeply entrenched in societal taboos. The narrative reveals how victims, regardless of gender, are often manipulated, with their reputations and dignity tarnished, while perpetrators exploit power dynamics to evade accountability. The film critiques law enforcement’s susceptibility to corruption, illustrating how bribery and power relations further marginalise victims and obstruct justice. By exposing these systemic failures, the film underscores the importance of upholding Islamic values of equity and justice in addressing social issues.

The film *Before, Now and Then* similarly integrates Islamic teachings, particularly regard-

ing kindness, reciprocity, and decision-making in familial contexts. Nana, the protagonist, navigates societal and marital challenges, providing a lens through which Islamic values are explored. The Qur'an and hadith emphasise the importance of kindness towards women. A hadith narrated by Ibn Majah quotes the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "Advise each other among you to always do good to women. Because they are often not taken into account by you. Indeed, you have no right at all over them except by doing so (doing good)" (Ibn Majah, no. 1924). Nana's experiences reflect the societal neglect of this principle, as she endures betrayal and emotional neglect.

Good behaviour between husband and wife, as outlined in the Qur'an, is foundational to a harmonious household. QS. An-Nisa (4): 19 advocates for reciprocity and mutual respect in marital relationships. In *Before, Now and Then*, Nana's initial interactions with her husband depict a harmonious dynamic, where her efforts in managing the household and garden are acknowledged and appreciated. This reciprocity aligns with the Qur'anic ideal of marriage as a *mitsaqan ghalidzan* (a strong and solemn covenant), as highlighted in QS. An-Nisa (4): 21. However, the film later portrays the erosion of this ideal, illustrating the complexities and challenges of sustaining marital harmony.

The film also addresses the decision-making process involved in remarrying or seeking divorce, reflecting Islamic principles that prioritise thoughtful deliberation. A hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim states: "A woman is married to a man (and vice versa, a man is chosen by a woman) usually because of four things: (abundant wealth), (good) social status, good looks, and (high) religious commitment. So, choose the one who has (commitment to) religion, so that your hands (the responsibility of your life) will be free (from the misery of life)" (HR. Bukhari, no. 5146). Nana's decision to remarry and later seek divorce reflects this balance, as she evaluates her circumstances based on personal and ethical considerations.

The film further underscores the importance of dialogue in household decision-making, aligning with QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 233, which calls for consultation and mutual respect between spouses. Nana's discussions with her husband in the film highlight the value of shared decision-making, even in moments of conflict. This portrayal challenges societal narratives that often restrict women's agency, particularly regarding divorce. While cultural norms may discourage women from initiating divorce, the film advocates for a balanced perspective, urging both spouses to exercise patience and consider the broader implications of their decisions (Kodir, 2021). By addressing these themes, *Before, Now and Then* invites audiences to reflect on the alignment between Islamic principles and contemporary familial dynamics.

## The Power of Films to Influence Audience

With the advancement of technology, films have emerged as a significant component of global culture. They are not merely narratives displayed on screens but also serve as a powerful medium of mass communication capable of delivering impactful social mes-

sages and influencing audience perceptions (Imran, 2012). Through scenes, dialogue, and visual storytelling, films transcend cultural and geographical boundaries, connecting audiences from diverse backgrounds via Video-on-Demand (VoD) platforms. By depicting everyday life, social issues, and political and cultural contexts, films have the unique ability to reflect social realities. They address critical issues such as injustice, inequality, human rights, and social transformation, fostering awareness and sensitivity among viewers. Through cinematic experiences, audiences are invited to witness and empathise with scenarios they may not have encountered firsthand, deepening their understanding of diverse social contexts.

Beyond reflecting social realities, films play a vital role in conveying societal values and ethics. Embedded within their narratives and characters are moral lessons and, in some cases, religious values that resonate with viewers. By portraying strong, inspiring characters, films can become a source of motivation, encouraging audiences to internalise these values and apply them in their daily lives and social interactions. Films possess the power to shape audience perceptions and influence actions, serving as a medium for both reflection and behavioural change.

Furthermore, films provide alternative perspectives, enabling viewers to experience the world through the eyes of marginalised communities, minority groups, or individuals with vastly different life experiences. By presenting these alternative viewpoints, films challenge dominant narratives, fostering a broader understanding of diversity and inviting audiences to engage in the pursuit of justice and equality. The ability of films to open minds and promote dialogue underscores their importance as cultural artefacts and tools for social transformation.

In an increasingly interconnected and digitised global society, often described by McLuhan as a “global village,” films serve as a window into varied experiences and perspectives. They are not only reflective and inspirational but also instrumental in driving social dialogue and action. Films that tackle pressing social issues have the potential to ignite public discourse, raise awareness, and mobilise audiences to participate in social change. Through the dissemination of their messages, films can act as catalysts for concrete action, encouraging positive societal transformation. In this context, films become more than entertainment; they emerge as platforms for advocacy and instruments for expanding conversations around relevant social challenges.

Films also transcend local phenomena, operating as borderless media that foster cross-cultural understanding. They utilise the concept of “soft power” to build bridges between nations, promoting mutual appreciation and dialogue. The cultural dimensions of films can be examined through the lenses of discourse and semiotics, revealing deeper meanings and connections (Athique, 2019). By addressing global issues—such as discrimination, injustice, human rights, environmental crises, and migration—through narratives rooted in local experiences, films facilitate relationships between diverse audiences (Yang et al., 2020). Cinema, accessible to a broad range of viewers, becomes a foundation for human-to-human dialogue, accelerating the mediated exchange of ideas and values be-

tween civilisations.

Moreover, films contribute to breaking down stereotypes and prejudices, fostering empathy and understanding across cultures. By presenting nuanced depictions of other societies, they encourage audiences to engage with different worldviews and challenge preconceived notions about other countries. As such, films are not merely tools for entertainment but also vehicles for global education and cultural diplomacy, playing a crucial role in fostering a more interconnected and harmonious world.

The imperative for Muslims to improve societal conditions stems from the essential role of da'wah in advancing Islam. Da'wah, as a fundamental responsibility of all Muslims, is not limited to religious scholars or specific individuals but is a collective obligation. It is characterised not by coercion or violence but by an invitation to embrace Islamic teachings. Islam firmly upholds the principle of non-compulsion in matters of faith, as encapsulated in the Qur'anic verse, "There is no compulsion in religion" (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 256). In this context, films have emerged as a significant medium for portraying lived realities, capturing societal truths, and disseminating powerful messages. Whether based on true events or fictional narratives, films are widely recognised as a form of leisure activity that transcends sociocultural divides. By utilising audio-visual storytelling, films influence societal perceptions and behaviours, reflecting the complexities of human experiences and societal progression (Sobur, 2016).

In the realm of Islamic discourse, gender issues exemplify the tensions that can arise between scriptural texts, their interpretations, and the sociocultural contexts in which they are applied. These issues often originate from women's critical awareness of their marginalisation within societal structures. However, contemporary discussions on gender equality are no longer confined to women; they are increasingly championed by men who recognise the need for justice and equality. Against this backdrop, many Indonesian writers, producers, and directors have used their creative platforms to highlight gender disparities and advocate for equality through their works. Films, in particular, have become effective mediums for da'wah, enabling the dissemination of messages that champion justice and equality for women.

Despite advancements, many women still face barriers in expressing their views, particularly in digital and online media, due to entrenched power dynamics. Gender inequality often arises from patriarchal cultural structures that marginalise women and undervalue their contributions in public domains. Unfortunately, these biases are sometimes perpetuated by the media, which reinforces harmful stereotypes (Adiningsih & Hastasari, 2019). For example, women victims of sexual crimes are frequently blamed for their attire, perpetuating the narrative that revealing clothing incites male lust. Additionally, media portrayals often reduce women to symbols of sexuality or impose narrow beauty standards that equate attractiveness with being white, slim, and tall. Intelligence, leadership, and other substantive qualities are rarely highlighted in female characters, as these attributes are traditionally ascribed to men. Films, however, offer a powerful medium to challenge these stereotypes and address these issues through thoughtfully constructed

narratives and scenes.

The media, unfortunately, often creates a disconnect between the realities experienced by women and the images presented on screen. Women are frequently depicted in domestic and international films as objects of male desire, defined by their beauty, sexual appeal, and submissive behaviour. These portrayals perpetuate negative stereotypes, erasing the multidimensionality of women's experiences and capabilities. Despite these challenges, the Indonesian film industry has increasingly succeeded in transforming narratives of inequality, injustice, and subordination into compelling stories that raise awareness of the systemic issues faced by women (Kartikawati, 2020).

Islam, in contrast to such representations, has long upheld the principles of gender equality. The religion grants women the right to freedom, justice, and equality within both familial and societal contexts, rights historically reserved for men in many societies. From an Islamic perspective, men and women are equally servants of Allah, equally entrusted as caliphs (stewards) on earth, and equally bound by the primordial covenant (mithaq). Both genders possess equal potential for spiritual and intellectual achievement. These foundational teachings challenge patriarchal norms and affirm the inherent dignity and equality of all individuals.

In the context of new media, such as films, these teachings gain renewed relevance. By leveraging the expansive reach of digital platforms, Islamic values regarding gender equality can be disseminated to broader audiences, fostering greater understanding and challenging societal inequities. Films that embrace these principles not only serve as vehicles for entertainment but also act as instruments for education and transformation, encouraging societies to align more closely with the ethical and moral imperatives of Islam.

## Conclusion

Digital films have emerged as a powerful medium for critiquing entrenched social constructions, realities, and inequalities. In Indonesia, films such as *Yuni*, *Photocopier*, and *Before, Now and Then* exemplify how gender inequality, often experienced by women, is being increasingly addressed through diverse media platforms. Each of these films highlights distinct dimensions of gender issues: *Yuni* critiques patriarchal norms that hinder women's access to education; *Photocopier* explores the struggles of survivors of sexual violence seeking justice amid societal stigma; and *Before, Now and Then* delves into the quest for justice and freedom within the institution of marriage. These narratives resonate with the principles of gender equality as enshrined in Islamic teachings, offering a lens through which religious values and contemporary social issues intersect.

This study makes a significant contribution to the fields of Islamic studies, communication, critical discourse analysis, and sociology by demonstrating how films can function both as reflections of social realities and as agents of social transformation. Through the application of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the research elucidates the ideological underpinnings of these films, revealing their capacity to challenge patriarchal

structures and promote values of justice, equity, and human dignity.

On a practical level, this research provides a valuable framework for filmmakers seeking to craft narratives that address urgent social issues while integrating cultural and religious values. It also serves as a resource for educators and policymakers in leveraging digital media as a tool to advocate for gender equality. The findings align closely with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, underscoring the potential of media narratives in advancing global equity and justice initiatives.

Moreover, this study invites further exploration of the intersection between religion, media, and gender. It encourages future research to investigate audience reception and the broader societal impacts of films that address gender issues within religious and cultural frameworks. Such inquiries could provide deeper insights into the transformative potential of media in fostering critical awareness and driving actionable change, particularly in societies where religious and cultural norms heavily influence social dynamics.

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