



# Representation of Hegemonic Masculinity (A Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes in the Film Women from Rote Island)

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**Abstract:** The film *Women from Rote Island* (2023) depicts women's struggles on Rote Island facing repeated sexual violence in a strong patriarchal society. This study analyzes the representation of hegemonic masculinity using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory through the stages of denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings show that male characters as perpetrators are represented as symbols of dominant power that normalize control over women's bodies through physical and social violence. The myth of patriarchy is portrayed as a system perpetuating women's subordination, while Orpa and her daughters' resistance begins to deconstruct this hegemony. This research emphasizes the importance of myth deconstruction to promote gender equality in indigenous communities.

**Keywords:** Hegemonic Masculinity, Roland Barthes Semiotics, Patriarchy, Sexual Violence, *Women From Rote Island* Film

## Introduction

Hegemonic masculinity refers to a culturally dominant form of masculinity, in which men are positioned as ideal figures who hold power, control, and authority over other groups, including women. This form of masculinity often involves the glorification of men's role as physically and socially powerful rulers, making women's subordination feel natural and undeniable. In the Indonesian context, especially in the indigenous peoples of eastern regions such as Rote Island, patriarchy is still strongly embedded through traditions that limit women's rights and normalize gender-based violence. Such violence is not only individual, but is embedded in the social structures that make men have the highest power over women's bodies and lives (Mustaffa et al, 2022).

The film *Perempuan dari Pulau Rote* (2023), directed by Jeremias Nyangoen and available on Netflix, raises a true story that is quite heart-wrenching from Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara. The story centers on Orpa, a single mother who has just been abandoned by her husband, and her two daughters, Martha and Bertha, who are victims of repeated sexual violence. This violence does not come from strangers alone, but often involves close people or figures in the extended family circle, which actually exacerbates the trauma

because patriarchal customary structures do not provide adequate protection for women without a protective male figure. The female body in this narrative is often positioned as a controllable object, reflecting how patriarchy limits self-expression and systematically controls women's lives (Irmawati et al, 2025).

The representation of hegemonic masculinity in this film is quite striking through the male characters who play the role of perpetrators of violence or authority figures who enforce patriarchal norms. Men are portrayed as having dominant power, both through physical actions and social influences, so sexual violence seems like an inseparable part of the existing customary system. This is similar to the pattern that often appears in other Indonesian films, where masculinity is associated with physical strength, aggressiveness, and responsibility that seems to give rights to others (Saputra & Albab, 2024). From what we see now, this kind of representation not only reinforces the stereotype of men as rulers, but also puts women in a subordinate position that is difficult to resist.

To explore these representations in depth, this study adopts Roland Barthes' semiotics which divides signs into three levels of analysis: denotation as an immediate visible literal meaning, connotation as an inherent cultural and emotional meaning, and myth as an ideology that is naturalized until it appears to be something natural and undeniable. This approach has been shown to be effective in uncovering the layers of hidden meaning behind film visuals and narratives, both in traditional cultural elements and socially constructed gender values (Marcella & Azeharie, 2023; Wibisono & Sari, 2021). Thus, this analysis can trace how the signs in the film form a strong image of hegemonic masculinity.

The main question that is the focus of this research is how hegemonic masculinity is represented semiotically in *Women from Rote Island*, especially through scenes of violence, gender interaction, and custom-based conflict resolution. In addition, the study also looks at how films began to challenge the hegemony through the resistance of Orpa and her children, which echoes efforts to deconstruct patriarchal norms in indigenous peoples. This kind of resistance shows the potential for transformation, where masculinity is no longer just synonymous with dominance, but can move towards a more empathetic and emotionally responsible role (Wijaya & Winduwati, 2025).

Thus, this study does not only analyze one film, but also contributes to a broader understanding of the issues of sexual violence and patriarchy in the eastern region of Indonesia. In the midst of the rampant discussion of gender equality, films like this are an important medium to reflect on the power structures that still exist, while opening up space for more inclusive change.

In the study of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy, semiotic analysis offers a potent tool for uncovering the underlying meanings embedded within various media forms, including film. Utilizing semiotic analysis as articulated by Roland Barthes, many studies have demonstrated how the cultural and gender symbols contained within visual texts shape narratives that reinforce the dominance of masculinity and patriarchy (McPhail, Lorway, & Chevrier, 2022; Priyadharshini & Karthiga, 2025). Films, as a medium, serve as an effective way to depict and reinforce these ideologies, often portraying male figures as symbols of authority who dominate women in various social contexts (Sastre, Aránega, & del Val Núñez, 2025).

Hegemonic masculinity, a concept developed by Connell (1995), refers to the culturally dominant form of masculinity that marginalizes other forms of masculinity and femininity. This type of masculinity is often linked to cultural norms that reinforce gender hierarchies, rendering feminine roles and non-normative identities invisible or inferior (Foley, Lunnay, Kevin, & Ward, 2026). In the context of Indonesian cinema, for instance, the film *Women from Rote Island* portrays how patriarchy governs the lives of women in ways that are systemic, where sexual violence and physical domination become part of the social fabric that cannot be avoided (Wang & Bhatt, 2025).

It is important to note that semiotics is not merely about analyzing visible signs or symbols but also about how these signs function within a specific culture to create and reinforce social norms and ideologies (AC & GK, 2025). In this context, semiotics of gender helps us understand how representations of masculinity and femininity in films create and reinforce hegemonic patriarchy. Semiotic ideologies, as described by Wang & Bhatt (2025), illustrate how certain symbols—such as power, control, and domination—are introduced and accepted as norms in society.

Previous studies have shown that gender representations in mass media, including films, often serve to reinforce narratives that sustain gender inequality. McPhail et al. (2022), for example, highlight the importance of safe spaces that allow for deconstructing and challenging these social constructs; however, in many films, these spaces remain trapped within deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. On the other hand, Priyadharshini & Karthiga (2025) propose a biopsychosocial materno-semiotics framework, which provides an additional perspective on how film as a cultural text can be analyzed to understand gender roles within social structures.

Moreover, women's resistance against patriarchy, while often portrayed as individual acts of defiance, can also be seen as efforts to uncover the symbolic power structures that support male dominance. In the context of Indonesian films, depictions of female resistance are often met with countermeasures, where the female protagonists face further violence or social ostracism, highlighting how deeply rooted hegemonic masculinity is in society (Deumert & Mabandla, 2025). In *Women from Rote Island*, for example, female characters who resist sexual violence are often further punished, demonstrating the resilience of patriarchy in silencing dissent (Naeem, 2026).

Using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, this study analyzes the film as a text rich in signs and symbols that illustrate the power dynamics between men and women. Barthes (1972) argued that myth, or the ideological framework embedded in culture, creates meanings that are accepted as "natural" and unquestionable. In the case of patriarchy, this means that the power structures placing men as the ultimate authority over women's bodies are often considered inevitable or unchangeable (Izadi & Dryden, 2024). This study aims to deconstruct these myths and show that patriarchy is not a "natural" phenomenon, but a social construct that can be contested and changed through social deconstruction as seen in film.

Several related studies also highlight how gender representations in social media and digital spaces affect public perceptions of masculinity and femininity. For instance, Dhanesh & Marschlich (2025) examine how gender representation in advertisements influences user

engagement and creates narratives that reinforce gender stereotypes. Similarly, films, like those in Indonesia, are a powerful tool for shaping and either reinforcing or challenging patriarchal ideologies embedded in society.

Izadi & Dryden (2024) on the Iranian protest movement exemplify how gender symbols can be used as tools for social resistance, which is directly relevant to the study of Indonesian films that depict resistance against patriarchy. While the contexts differ, these findings are useful for understanding how female resistance in Indonesian films can similarly challenge dominant cultural symbols.

Overall, this research focuses on how representations of hegemonic masculinity in *Women from Rote Island* not only depict male power through sexual violence but also how patriarchy is woven into the broader social structure. By employing semiotic analysis, this study uncovers how the visual symbols in the film reinforce the myth of patriarchy, positioning men as unchallenged rulers of women's bodies. However, the film also shows the potential for change through female resistance, demonstrating that hegemonic masculinity is not indestructible, but can be altered through collective consciousness and individual actions (Schneider, 2023; Heyd & Karnatz, 2020).

## Methodology

This research is qualitative with Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis approach, which allows the decomposition of signs in film into hidden literal, cultural, and ideological meanings. Primary data were taken directly from key scenes in the film *Women from Rote Island* (Netflix, 2023), particularly those featuring representations of men as perpetrators of violence, authority figures in customs, and gender interactions that reflect dominant power. The selection of scenes was done by carefully re-watching the film to identify the moments in which sexual violence, control over women, and tradition-based conflict resolution emerge visually and narratively.

The analysis is carried out through Barthes's three stages: denotation to describe what is seen directly, connotations to explore the cultural and emotional meaning inherent in the sign, and myth to uncover patriarchal ideologies that are naturalized so that they seem like something natural and inevitable. This approach is in line with previous studies that applied Barthes' semiotics to Indonesian films to analyze gender and cultural representations, where these stages help uncover layers of meaning that reinforce or challenge social norms (Marcella & Azeharie, 2023; Wibisono & Sari, 2021). Secondary data come from literature related to hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy, which is used to enrich interpretations without changing the focus on the film's main object. The analysis process is carried out systematically by noting visual cues (such as lighting, camera position, and facial expressions) as well as narrative elements (dialogue and conflict plot), so that the results are still based on concrete evidence from the film itself.

## Result and Discussion

### Literature Review Table

Table 1. Literature Review Table

Reference	Focus of the Study	Methodology	Relevance to the Study
Amalia, R., & Tesniyadi, D. (2025). Representation of the masculinity values of the character of Angkasa in the film "The Far Road, Don't Forget to Go Home"	Semiotics of masculinity in film	Semiotic analysis	This study's semiotic approach informs the analysis of hegemonic masculinity in your research, providing a foundation for understanding the symbolic representation of masculinity.
An Nisa, L., & Safitri, L. (2023). Representation of patriarchal culture in the film Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap	Patriarchal culture in Indonesian films	Semiotic analysis	This paper enhances the understanding of patriarchal structures, which is central to analyzing how patriarchy functions in <i>Women from Rote Island</i> through Barthes' theory.
Gamelina, A. M., & Nurliah. (2024). Representation of patriarchal culture in Yuni's film	Patriarchal values in Indonesian cinema	Semiotic analysis	Offers a direct comparison to the patriarchy seen in <i>Women from Rote Island</i> , especially in terms of gender roles and societal norms depicted in the narrative.
Irmawati, Ayuni, R. D., & Puspita, A. (2025). Patriarchal culture in The Kretek Girl	Semiotics of patriarchy in a modern Indonesian context	Semiotic analysis	Provides insight into the semiotic analysis of patriarchy in film, applicable to your exploration of masculine domination and its depiction in the context of Rote Island.
Machsunah, U., Risnawati, R., & Amelia, S. (2025). Representation of male masculinity in "Dear Nathan: Thank You Salma"	Masculinity and male identity in modern films	Semiotic analysis	Key in understanding the portrayal of masculinity in contemporary Indonesian media, which helps in analyzing hegemonic masculinity in <i>Women from Rote Island</i> .
Marcella, S., & Azeharie, S. (2023). Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of Javanese culture in the film Inang	Barthes' semiotics applied to Javanese culture and societal norms	Semiotic analysis	Reinforces Barthes' framework used in your research, specifically in identifying how cultural

Reference	Focus of the Study	Methodology	Relevance to the Study
Mustaffa, R. Z., Priyatna, A., & Adipurwawidjana, A. J. (2022). The construction of fatherhood in the movie <i>27 Steps of May</i>	Construction of fatherhood and masculinity in Indonesian cinema	Semiotic analysis	myths shape gender roles and masculinity in Indonesian films. Provides insights into the representation of fatherhood as part of masculinity, which can be applied to analyzing male authority figures in <i>Women from Rote Island</i> .
Rahmah, F. N., Sintowoko, D. A. W., & Maulana, T. A. (2025). The construction of masculinity in the film <i>Like Vengeance, Rindu Must Be Paid in Full</i>	Masculinity and victimization in Indonesian film	Semiotic analysis	Adds to understanding how masculinity is constructed and deconstructed in Indonesian films, aligning with the depiction of male violence in your chosen film.
Saputra, F. A., & Albab, C. U. (2024). Representation of masculinity in the character of Dom in <i>Jakarta Vs Everybody</i>	Masculinity in urban Indonesian film	Semiotic analysis	Urban masculinity is explored here, contrasting rural representations in <i>Women from Rote Island</i> , broadening your understanding of masculinity across different Indonesian contexts.
Veltin, R., & Widagdo, M. B. (2025). Representation of male sexualization and victimization in the film <i>Dear David</i>	Male sexualization and victimization in film	Semiotic analysis	This reference expands on male victimization, offering a broader perspective on the role of masculinity in <i>Women from Rote Island</i> where men are both perpetrators and victims.
Wibisono, P., & Sari, Y. (2021). Analysis of Roland Barthes' semiotics in the film <i>Bintang Ketjil</i>	Barthes' semiotics in analyzing Indonesian film culture	Semiotic analysis	Supports the theoretical framework for your analysis using Barthes' semiotics, focusing on the cultural symbols and signs present in Indonesian films.
Wijaya, C., & Winduwati, S. (2025). Representation of the role of the domestic father in the film <i>Two Blue Hearts</i>	Depiction of domestic masculinity in Indonesian cinema	Semiotic analysis	Useful in contrasting the domestic roles of masculinity with the hegemonic masculinity in <i>Women from Rote Island</i> , particularly in

Reference	Focus of the Study	Methodology	Relevance to the Study
			terms of fatherhood and authority.

Scene 1, at 0:40:27-0:42:33 minutes



**Figure 1.** Marco and Ruben seem to want to help Martha who fell from a tree and accidentally grabbed Martha's sensitive breasts

### 1. Denotation

This scene shows Marco and Reuben approaching Martha after she falls from a tree. They appeared to be trying to help by touching her body, including the sensitive part of her breasts, while holding or lifting Martha to stand again. The touch is seen as direct physical contact in the context of help, with the man's facial expressions appearing to be concerned or helpful.

### 2. Konotasi

Touching the breast is not just an accidental incident, but sexual harassment disguised as help. This scene depicts men taking advantage of women's vulnerable positions (falling and helpless) to satisfy lust, reflecting masculinity associated with physical strength, aggressiveness, and a sense of entitlement to women's personal space without consent. This connotation also shows how men feel safe doing such actions because social norms do not directly blame them, so that women become objects that can be touched at will in everyday situations.

### 3. Myth

This kind of harassment is naturalized as a "natural" part of inter-gender interactions in indigenous communities, where men have unfettered access to women's bodies, especially when women are in a position of weakness or unsupervision. This ideology reinforces the hegemony of men as rulers who do not need to be held accountable for their actions, so that sexual violence seems like a regular consequence of women's vulnerability, rather than a serious offense.

**Scene 2, at 0:55:33-0:57:39 minutes**

**Figure 2.** Martha was initially followed by a man and offered to take her home, but she was raped by a middle-aged man around the beach or the sea

**1. Denotation**

Martha walked alone, followed by a man who approached and offered a ride home. The scene continues to a remote location on the beach or sea, where the middle-aged man coerces Martha and sexually assaults her.

**2. Konotasi**

Offers of help turn into a trap of violence, showing men as predators who take advantage of Martha's isolation (after trauma from Malaysia) to dominate sexually. This scene depicts hegemonic masculinity through physical and sexual control over a single woman, reinforcing the norm that women without a protective male figure are vulnerable to exploitation. The connotations also include the perpetrator's sense of security due to remote environments and customary norms that tend to protect men.

**3. Myth**

Sexual violence against women is considered a "natural" consequence of the absence of male protectors in customary structures, so that male perpetrators are protected by a social system that blames the victim for his own vulnerability. This myth makes men's domination over women's bodies inevitable, reinforcing women's subordination as part of the societal order.

**Scene 3, at 0:58:01-0:58:23**

**Figure 3.** Martha's sister, Bertha, tried to help Martha but was also strangled by the man but Bertha managed to stab her

**1. Denotation**

Bertha tries to save her sister Martha from violence, but is instead strangled by the man's perpetrator. Bertha then managed to stab the perpetrator to escape and save herself and Martha.

**2. Konotasi**

Women's resistance to male domination is immediately countered with more intense physical violence (strangulation), creating fear and dependence. This scene highlights the fragility of male hegemony when challenged, but also its power in suppressing through threats to life. Bertha's stabbing of the perpetrator becomes a small symbol of resistance, but still shows that women must use counterviolence to survive.

**3. Myth**

Hegemonic masculinity seems unshakable as violence becomes the main tool for maintaining power; Women's resistance is considered "dangerous" and must be stopped by force. This myth reinforces the ideology that men are entitled to absolute control over women's bodies and safety, so that countermeasures often end in more victims.

**Scene 4 at 1:00:37-1:01:00 minutes**



**Figure 4.** Martha gets angry and burns someone's house because the one who harassed her was in the house and the uncle who saved the man was angry and slapped Martha

### 1. Denotation

This scene shows Martha being overwhelmed with deep anger after experiencing repeated abuse. He committed the act of burning someone's house because he knew the perpetrator of the harassment was inside. A fire began to burn in the house, and Martha looked very emotional and out of control. Later, the uncle (as an authority figure in the extended family) shows up to save the man from the flames, and soon after, the uncle slaps Martha in the face hard in response to his actions. Martha's expression after being slapped showed a mixture of physical pain, disappointment, and deepening helplessness.

### 2. Konotasi

Martha's anger that exploded into an act of burning down the house was not just an impulsive reaction, but a final form of protest against the prolonged injustice she experienced as a victim. However, the uncle's response that directly slapped him showed the patriarchal society's top priority: protecting male perpetrators rather than listening to or protecting female victims. The slap is not just ordinary physical violence, but a powerful symbol of affirmation of gender hierarchy—women who dare to resist or take their own initiative are considered to have violated customary norms and must be "reprimanded" directly to return to a position of submission and silence. This scene also highlights how the anger of the female victim is always considered destructive and dangerous to the "harmony" of the family or community, while the actions of the male perpetrator are protected and considered unquestionable. The connotations that emerge further emphasize that in patriarchal structures, the emotions and actions of the female victims have no legitimacy, while the power of men is still upheld even though they clearly make mistakes.

### 3. Myth

Patriarchal structures in the family and customs normalize the protection of male perpetrators, while female victims are positioned as a source of chaos that must be controlled immediately so as not to disrupt the social order. This myth keeps male hegemony maintained despite obvious lawbreaking, as the act of burning down the house by Martha is considered a threat to the "safety" and "good name" of the family, while rape or harassment committed by men is not seen as a similar threat. The ideology naturalized

here is that justice for women is difficult to achieve because society prefers to maintain the patriarchal status quo rather than confront and punish male perpetrators. As a result, victims like Martha have to bear a double burden: the trauma of sexual violence and social punishment from the family and the community that is supposed to protect them. This myth reinforces the belief that societal harmony can only be maintained at the expense of women's rights and voices, so that gender-based violence continues without significant change.

Scene at 1:02:14-1:05:04



**Figure 5.** The community, including the traditional chief, asked Martha to be locked up or chained even though the culprit was not Martha but the people who had harassed Martha. This condition is a mistake in thinking from the community

### 1. Denotation

This scene shows a community meeting involving the Traditional Head and extended family members. They discussed Martha's condition which was considered "disturbing" after experiencing repeated sexual violence and severe trauma. The decision was to have Martha locked up in the house or even chained so that she would "calm down" and no longer cause problems. Martha looks passive and depressed, while the perpetrators of harassment are not mentioned to be punished. The visual of the chains or confinement of the house becomes a central element that emphasizes Martha's physical isolation from the outside world.

### 2. Konotasi

Female victims are isolated and blamed for the "chaos" caused by the violence she experienced, while male perpetrators are fully protected by customary decisions that ignore justice. The chains used symbolize both physical and symbolic restraint over women's

bodies and freedoms, reflecting extreme patriarchal control over women who are considered "disturbing of harmony" or no longer conforming to submissive norms. This scene shows how society collectively chooses to sacrifice victims rather than punish the perpetrators, because punishing men means suing the power structure they have always upheld. The connotations that emerge further emphasize that in a patriarchal society such as Rote, female victims do not have the right to speak out or seek justice; They are actually objects that must be "improved" so as not to threaten the existing social order.

### 3. Myth

Patriarchy is naturalized as a system that maintains the "balance" and "harmony" of society at the expense of female victims; Locking or chaining Martha seems to be a "wise" and "traditional" solution to maintain the status quo, not a form of cruelty. This myth reinforces the belief that men's power is unfettered and unquestionable, while sexual violence experienced by women is not considered a serious offense that requires legal or social punishment against the perpetrator. The hidden ideology here is that society's "thinking error" is not on male perpetrators, but on female victims who "cannot control themselves" or "disturb order". As a result, justice for women becomes difficult to achieve, because the customary system prioritizes the protection of male hegemony over the human rights of the victim. This myth not only perpetuates the subordination of women, but also perpetuates the cycle of violence by making the victim feel guilty for her own suffering.

The representation of hegemonic masculinity in Women of Rote Island is built strongly and layered through the repeated sexual violence experienced by Martha and Bertha, in which men as perpetrators not only show direct physical dominance, but also gain full protection from the patriarchal customary structures that are still very thick on Rote Island. Key scenes such as harassment disguised as help (Scene 1) to rape in a remote seaside location (Scene 2) denotatively depict explicit and brutal acts of violence, while connotatively portraying men as predators who exploit women's vulnerabilities without a protective male figure in the family. This is in line with the pattern of subordination and marginalization of women that is clearly seen in family and community interactions, where the highest power is in the hands of men so that women are forced to submit and obey without room to resist (An Nisa & Safitri, 2023). In the specific context of Rote Island, this violence is not just a personal incident or coincidence, but part of a customary system that normalizes control over women's bodies, makes victims like Martha even more isolated after experiencing severe trauma from her migrant work in Malaysia, and ends up being subjected to repeated exploitation in her own homeland.

On a mythical level, the repeated sexual violence against Martha and Bertha is naturalized through the community's decision to confine or chain the victim (Scene 5), rather than punishing the actual perpetrator. Traditional Chiefs and extended families chose to isolate Martha because it was considered to "disturb the harmony" of society, reflecting how patriarchy restricts women's self-expression, tightly controls their lives, and causes systematic and repeated oppression and discrimination (Irmawati et al, 2025). This myth works particularly strongly in indigenous peoples such as the Rote, where women without a protective husband or father are positioned low and vulnerable, so that their bodies

become objects that can be exploited without significant consequences for male perpetrators. The film portrays this myth through dialogue that emphasizes internal settlement in order to preserve the good name of the family or community, as well as actions that prioritize the status quo over justice for the victim, so that sexual violence appears to be an integral part of the seemingly irreversible social order.

Bertha's resistance in Scene 3, when she tries to help her sister Martha but is strangled by the perpetrator and finally manages to stab her to escape, becomes a crucial moment that begins to challenge male hegemony directly. The denotation of this scene is an attempt at protection between women that leads to physical violence back, while the connotation suggests that resistance to masculine dominance is often retaliated with more intense and life-threatening violence, creating a deep fear and dependence on oppressive patriarchal structures. Nevertheless, Bertha's stabbing of the perpetrator becomes a small but significant symbol of resistance, as it shows that male hegemony can become fragile when physically and emotionally challenged, similar to how hegemonic masculinity often hides fragility behind displays of physical strength and dominance (Rahmah et al, 2025). In the context of this film, the resistance is not only individual, but also symbolic, because it depicts that women begin to take space to resist the norms that have been oppressing them, even at high risk.

Martha's anger in Scene 4, when she burns down the perpetrator's house because she can no longer stand the harassment she experienced, but is instead slapped by the uncle who actually saved the male perpetrator, further clarifies the patriarchal protection mechanism for the perpetrator. The denotation shows the victim's anger turning into destructive acts as a form of protest, responded to with direct physical violence from male family authority figures, while the connotation confirms a strict gender hierarchy: women who dare to resist are considered to be violating customary norms and must be physically "reprimanded" in order to return to a subordinate position. This echoes the glorification of masculinity as a role of ruler that should not be violated, even though such actions are clearly inconsistent with the principles of justice and protection of victims, so the space for women to voice their suffering remains very limited (Mustaffa et al, 2022). In Rote society, figures such as uncles or traditional chiefs often act as guardians of patriarchal norms, making the resistance of individuals like Martha feel futile and high-risk, and can even exacerbate the stigma attached to the victim.

Overall, the representation of men as perpetrators of violence in this film not only shows real physical and sexual dominance, but also implies a hidden masculine vulnerability through social pressures that protect the perpetrator from punishment. Some scenes imply that male power can turn into a secondary form of victimization, where perpetrators face pressure to cover up their actions in order to protect the good name of their family or community, so that the boundaries between perpetrators and victims become increasingly blurred in patriarchal dynamics (Veltin & Widagdo, 2023). The specific context of Rote Island adds a deep layer of complexity, as sexual violence is often resolved internally in order to maintain the harmony of society, so victims like Martha and Bertha have to bear

the brunt of severe trauma without adequate legal support, and end up being double victims of the system that is supposed to protect them.

Orpa's resistance as a single mother who struggles to find justice for her children becomes a very important narrative turning point in this film. Although it does not explicitly show the transformation of male characters, the film opens up a wide space to understand the potential for masculinity changes towards more empathetic and emotionally responsible forms, such as the role of the father protecting his children without coercion of domination or violence (Wijaya & Winduwati, 2025). In the context of the highly patriarchal Rote customs, where women without a husband or protective father are often looked down upon and vulnerable, Orpa's struggle challenges the myth that societal harmony can only be maintained through the total subordination of women, while inviting the audience to reflect on the power structures that have been strong in the indigenous peoples of eastern Indonesia.

Roland Barthes' semiotic approach manages to reveal that the myth of patriarchy in this film works through seemingly natural and undeniable signs, such as customary decisions to confine victims, slaps from male family figures, or internal settlements that ignore justice for women. This representation is very similar to the patriarchal pattern that restricts women in strong customary environments, where early marriage, sexual violence, or control over women's bodies are the main mechanisms for maintaining male power (Gamelina & Nurliah, 2024). However, the film does not stop at strengthening hegemony alone; The increasingly visible resistance of women began to slowly deconstruct this myth, showing that male power was not something eternal or natural, but rather a social construct that could be changed through collective consciousness, collective action, and individual courage.

Finally, *Women from the Island of Rote* not only depicts the suffering of women under oppressive hegemonic masculinity, but also offers a narrative of hope through the struggle of Orpa and her children who persistently seek justice. This analysis enriches understanding of how Indonesian films, especially those that raise real issues from eastern regions such as East Nusa Tenggara, can be a very powerful medium for critiquing patriarchy and gender-based violence. By exposing explicit denotations of physical and sexual violence, hidden connotations of control and abuse of victims, and the seemingly natural myth of normalization of male power, the film invites the audience to not only reflect on the gender structures that still exist, but also to encourage real change towards a more equal society, where masculinity is no longer synonymous with domination and violence. rather, it can be transformed into a form of responsibility that is inclusive, empathetic, and respects women's rights in full.

## Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the representation of hegemonic masculinity in the film *Women from Rote Island* (2023) using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. The findings reveal that male characters in the film are depicted as symbols of dominant power, exercising control over women's bodies through both physical and social violence. The myth of

patriarchy, as constructed in the film, portrays a system that perpetuates the subordination of women, while the resistance from Orpa and her daughters begins to deconstruct this hegemony.

Specifically, this study identifies that the sexual violence experienced by the female characters is not only an individual act but is embedded in a broader social structure that normalizes male control over women's bodies. The film further highlights how patriarchal systems within Rote Island's indigenous community maintain male figures as authority figures that are difficult to challenge, despite the resistance from the women.

Future research could further explore the impact of female resistance on social structural changes, particularly in other regions of Indonesia. Additionally, further studies could investigate how other films with similar themes might play a role in altering societal perceptions of patriarchy and gender inequality.

As a practical recommendation, films like *Women from Rote Island* can serve as an educational tool to raise awareness about the importance of deconstructing patriarchy and empowering women in indigenous communities. Policymakers and educational institutions can leverage film media to educate the public on gender-based violence, women's rights, and the importance of creating safe and equitable spaces for women to speak out and challenge injustice.

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