

Women's Portrayal in Indonesia Popular Film

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Abstract: The portrayal of women has long been a concern, especially in cinema, including Indonesian cinema. The modern era of Indonesian cinema began in 1998 and continues to the present day, as the best period for Indonesian cinema. In 1998, only five films were produced, but production gradually increased until its peak in 2016, with 124 titles being produced. This growth has had a positive impact on the image of women in cinema, but it has also presented different values regarding the portrayal of women. This paper examines the portrayal of women characters in Indonesia's popular films, focusing on the top three best selling films. Using the textual analysis method, the study reveals that women are often portrayed in relation to stereotypes entrenched in patriarchal culture. Men still have a strong image as the provider and women are dependent objects. The findings also show that social values are the primary determinants of women's portrayal in film. For instance, in appearance, a good girl is appropriately dressed, will be saved and happy. In contrast, aggressiveness for women will lead them into destruction. Additionally, the dominance of men and social values in the Indonesian film industry influences the depiction of women shown in cinema.

Keywords: *Woman, Portrayal, Indonesian Popular Film, Patriarchy.*

Introduction

Films not only reflect reality, they shape reality too.

Cinema and film represent one of the most prevalent forms of mass communication, exerting significant influence in shaping opinions, constructing imagery, and upholding prevailing cultural norms. Widely regarded as a source of global entertainment, cinema transports viewers to alternate realities, offering an escape from the mundanity of everyday existence. In doing so, it has the power to transform individual mindsets and instill fresh cultural, social, and political perspectives.

The emergence of Indonesian cinema in the 2000s was closely intertwined with political upheaval. The political situation in May 1998 marked a significant shift in the government's approach to various aspects of society, culture, and the economy, including the film industry, heralding what came to be known as the Reform Era. This period epitomized a democratic approach to storytelling, mirrored in the discourse surrounding the revitalization of Indonesian cinema post- 1998. This phenomenon can be proven from the productivity in film production. In

1998, only five films were produced, but production gradually increased until its peak in 2016, with 124 titles being produced.

Nowadays in Indonesia, cinema has become very popular. Indonesian Film Agency (BPI) reveals the positive trend of film in Indonesia can be seen from the number of films produced in the last 5 years, shown on the chart below.

The number of film productions in Indonesia

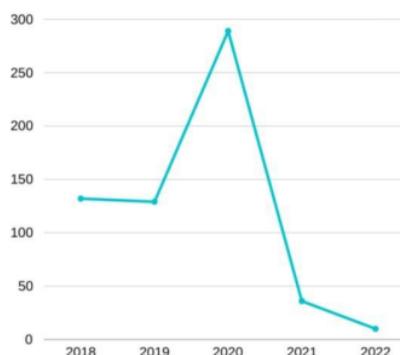


Chart 1: Film Productions in Indonesia (based on title)

In 2018, there were a total of 132 national film productions. The following year, in 2019, this figure increased slightly to 129 titles. However, in 2020, the number of film productions in Indonesia saw a significant surge, reaching a peak of 289 titles. It was only after 2020 that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a drastic decline in film production within the country.

Furthermore, cited from Antara (Ayudiana, 2024), according to data from the Indonesian Film Agency (BPI), the Indonesian film industry attracted 51.2 million viewers in 2019, but then dropped to only around 19 million viewers in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But it will get even bigger in 2022 with 24 million viewers. Cinema, direct or indirect, exerted a profound influence on society as the popular culture. From fashion choices to speech patterns and social conduct, movies have an impact on the aspects of daily life, shaping cultural norms and societal behavio¹⁸.

One of the popular film genres in Indonesia is horror. This genre is often perceived as a genuine reflection of national culture, as it frequently incorporates legends, local folklore, and supernatural elements. Local horror films tend to attract a larger audience than imported ones. Within Indonesian horror films, there is typically a portrayal of the struggle between forces of good (representing white supremacy) and evil (associated with black magic). These powers often originate from an elderly figure residing in a village. The storyline of horror films is typically straightforward, focusing on the protagonist's efforts to combat malevolent forces, which are often linked to the supernatural realm¹² the darker aspects of human nature. As shown on the table below, “KKN di Desa Penari” is the best-selling horror film in Indonesia.

Table 1. Top 3 Indonesian Films

No	Film Title	Year	Total Viewers	Production
1	KKN di Desa Penari	2022	10.061.033	MD Pictures
2	Agak Laen 15	2024	9.121.767	Imajinari
3	Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1	2016	6.858.616	Falcon Pictures

Source: medcom.id, 2024.

6 KKN di Desa Penari

This film was adapted from a horror story that went viral in 2019 via Twitter, now X. According to the author, this story is taken from a true story of Six students who were undertaking a KKN (Field Study and Community Service) 8 program in a remote village in Java. The students participating in this KKN initiative are named Nur (Tissa Biani), Widya (Adinda Thomas), Ayu (Aghniny Haque), Bima (Achmad Megantara), Anton (Calvin Jeremy), and Wahyu (Fajar Nugra). On their first day in the village, one of the team members, Nur, begins to experience strange and mystical occurrences. Soon after, Widya also falls into a trance and begins to dance. The terror continues to escalate with each passing day, affecting almost all the members. The mystical disturbances intensify when Nur becomes possessed by the spirit of a grandmother who informs her that one of their KKN companions has violated the village's rules and disturbed the guardian spirit. Furthermore, Bima and Widya venture into a forbidden area that even Pak Prabu, the village chief, is prohibited from entering. Despite the warnings, they persist in breaking the rules. As these incidents disrupt the activities of the six students, they find themselves increasingly ensnared in terrifying situations, their lives even threatened. It didn't go smoothly, a series of horror experiences haunted them until the KKN program ended tragically.

Apart from horror films, comedy emerged as another beloved genre in Indonesia. Many Indonesian comedy movies feature renowned comedians who initially gained fame through other mediums like radio and performance arts, such as stand-up comedy. "Agak Laen" and "Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1" are the best-selling comedy film in Indonesia. Special for "Agak Laen", they have just achieved the status of the best-selling film in Indonesia at the end of March 2024. Here is the storyline of those two films.

Agak Laen

"Agak Laen" focuses on the story of four friends who try to change their fate from their deteriorating economic situation. One day, they saw a great opportunity to set up a haunted house attraction near their house. However, the attraction was not successful because it is not causing fear for the visitors who came. As a result, the four friends looked for a way to save the business. They chose to renovate the haunted house to create a more scary atmosphere. After renovation, the ride slowly succeeded in attracting the attention of visitors. However, in the midst of this success, there was an incident when a visitor named Gilang accidentally died at the haunted house due to a heart attack. They decided to bury Gilang's body in the haunted house and keep the incident a secret from everyone. Unexpectedly, this incident made the haunted house of four friends even more scary. Gilang's spirit that haunts the haunted house actually attracts attention and makes visitors curious. The attraction went viral on social media. On the other hand, Gilang, who was actually dead, was declared to have mysteriously disappeared. The police began investigating the case because Gilang was a legislative candidate. His unknown whereabouts aroused suspicion from the police. Information about the police investigating Gilang's disappearance was heard by four friends. They started to panic, especially when the police suspected the haunted house ride was part of the case of the disappearance of the legislative

candidate. The four friends also carried out various silliness to cover up the incident that actually occurred. The genre of the film is horror comedy.

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Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1

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"Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1" is a comedy film which is an adaptation of the Warkop DKI films *Dono (Abimana Aryasatya)*, *Kasino (Vino Bahana)*, and *Indro (Tora Sudiro)* are three friends who work as security officers at the CHIPS (Cara Hebat Ikut Ikutan Pelayanan Sosial) organization where their job is to maintain public security. However, their ridiculous and problematic behavior always annoys and angers their boss, Mr. Boss (Ence Bagus). Mr. Boss invites a CHIPS member from Paris named Sophie (Hannah Al Rashid) to help them. Their first patrol ended badly after they failed to catch a pickpocket (Arie Kriting), destroyed a local shop, and caused trouble at a painting exhibition. They were arrested and required to compensate by paying a fine of 8 billion rupiah. Sophie is feeling sorry, so she invites the three of them to a party. But they accidentally saw a man (Bene Dion) being hit by a mysterious car. They then took the man to the hospital, and when he was dying, the man handed the three of them a book containing a treasure map. Dono, Kasino, and Indro finally received the map and intended to look for the treasure so they could pay a fine of 8 billion. They went to Malaysia according to the code on the map with Sophie's help and sold their goods. When they arrived at the Malaysian airport, they realized that the bag containing the treasure book had been mixed up. Kasino found the airport CCTV screen which showed their bag had been swapped with the bag of a woman in a red dress (Nur Fazura). After chasing them by taxi all the way to ChinaTown, they lost track of the woman because many of the women there were also wearing red clothes.

Understanding the role of women in cinema necessitates an examination of film as a cultural artifact. Throughout the evolution of cinema, women have been depicted in a myriad of roles, prompting scholars to delve deeper into their portrayal and its correlation with social constructs and the depiction of women on screen. Traditionally, women were often portrayed as powerless and passive, juxtaposed with the powerful and active portrayal of men (Wahyuni and Adnan, 2022).

¹³ The other issue about how women are portrayed in cinema is the position of women and men. The "male gaze" was a term introduced by British feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey. The "male gaze" refers to the scenario where heterosexual males view women in media from their perspective, often depicting them as passive objects of desire. This dynamic results in an imbalance between subjectivity and objectification in visual media.

It is undeniable that the presence of women is one of the attractions for the film industry. Historically, women in movies have frequently been portrayed unjustly. They are often relegated to secondary roles or depicted as vulnerable individuals in need of rescue. While there has been some progress in recent years towards more equitable representation especially in Indonesian film, many films still marginalize women, portraying them as insignificant images within the narrative. This raises questions about women's portrayal especially in the modern Indonesian cinema whether the images are stand still.

Accordingly, the researchers of this study concentrate on answering the following research questions: "How are women portrayed in 3 Indonesian best selling films?"

Literature Review

Essentially, there has been a surge in studies examining the portrayal of women in Indonesian cinema. Kartika (2023) explores the influence of female filmmakers within the modern Indonesian film landscape. Employing qualitative methodology, specifically textual analysis, this research delves into the portrayal of female characters in selected films. The findings reveal a notable connection between the depiction of women and the cultural context of Indonesia, reflecting societal norms and values. Consequently, it can be inferred that Indonesian female

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directors play a significant role not only in shaping the representation of women but also in advancing the discourse surrounding women in Indonesian cinema. Textual analysis is one of the best methods to understand deeply about the correlation between meaning-making processes. 2

Textual analysis as the method, also introduced on Alaklook (2016). The study focuses on how the Arab characters are depicted as sympathetic characters and how this in turn creates a sense of ambivalence. The result shows that one way of achieving sympathy is by portraying the Arabs as victims, that is, the film humanized these characters to reflect the Arabs and Muslims in the post 9/11 dilemma. However, since the Arab characters are caught between being linked with terrorist attacks by race and religion and being a victim of American collective fear of them, these sympathetic characters indicate the tool of the New Orientalist.

Other studies that address the topic about women portrayal in Indonesian movies also delivered by Biasini (2023). This study focused on our female characters - Sarah, Fella, Dina, and Alpha in two Indonesian movies released in 2022: "Mencuri Raden Saleh" and "The Big 4". Using semiotics analysis, indicate that those female characters were effectively depicted as individuals free from marginalization, resistant to male authority, and not conforming to traditional female stereotypes often depicted in movies.

Zalsabila (2021) presents a study that centers on the representation of women in leadership roles. The movie's release in 2017 is "The Post". It is a biographical movie about the founder of The Washington Post, the country's first female publisher. The research's objective is to investigate how people perceive women in leadership roles by creating fictional representations of these roles in corporate media. The semiotic model of Roland Barthes, which employs a two-stage interpretation system of denotation and connotation, is the methodology used in this study. Based on the study, women in the movie can have leadership positions in family-owned businesses. Women are portrayed as incapable of making decisions and as indecisive. Men are portrayed as in charge of women's decisions and ideas. The findings tell the reader that women in the global perspective (in media companies especially) still have a struggle in the public area.

Ridaryanthy (2024), try to examine portrays the househusband, the characteristics and roles of the househusband in The Intern film (2015). Using Roland Barthes' semiotics method this research analyze both the denotative and connotative meaning of the identified signs regarding the househusband. The findings portray househusbands as caregiving and constructed acts of service.

The research was conducted by Rahman (2020), explore the act of merajuk, often stereotyped as a feminine trait, through the character of Hang Jebat. It reinterprets merajuk as a form of rebellion against feudalism and examines its implications for understanding issues related to marginalization and class oppression. By conducting an intertextual study of this film, the finding reveals how Hang Jebat's rajuk represents a challenge to class inequality and gender representations.

Methodology

The aim of this research is to examine the portrayal of women, employing a qualitative research approach. Specifically, textual analysis will be utilized to delve into the film text itself, considering both its content¹⁰ and contextual factors such as socio-cultural backgrounds. According to interpretive approaches, textual analysis is a qualitative method that delves into the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions embedded within a text (Arya, 2020). Baxter (2019) suggests that textual analysis entails scrutinizing¹¹ all elements contributing to meaning within the piece, encompassing cinematic elements like acting, directing, lighting, cinematography, and mise- en-scene. Given the multitude of cinematic elements present in films, this study will focus on mise-en-scene (including setting and costume), cinematography, and film dialogue within selected sequences from each film.

The Findings

Two sides of women

In the best selling film, "KKN di Desa Penari", there are two girls that took part as the main characters. First, the rebels and a reckless girl called Ayu. Ayu is shown with a modern and masculine appearance. She has a very ambitious character especially to reach what she wants.

In contrast, another character is Nur. Nur is shown as the religious one. She is very polite and always wears or uses religious attributes such as hijab. Nur is the sidekick of Ayu. She helps Ayu to survey the village.

In the opening scene of the film, Ayu and Nur surveys the targeted village for field study and community service. When visiting the village, Ayu wears open clothes which expose her muscles. Meanwhile, Nur uses closed clothes to accompany Ayu. Beside the cloth type, the color of the cloth brings a different meaning. Grey color in Indonesian culture means independent and dominant (Rifda, 2022). While the blue color for Nur reflects secure, calm, and peace. In addition, the gesture for Ayu and Nur is the opposite. Ayu folded her arms while listening to the explanation of the village chief, in contrast Nur opened her arms at the same moment. The comparison of their clothes and gestures shown in the figure below.



Figure 1: Clothes of Ayu (right side) and Nur (left side)

The other scenes also emphasize the clothes of the girls, especially Ayu. Open clothes were criticized by the host where they stayed. Through the dialogue below, Bu Sundari, the host, reminds the girls to pay attention to what they wear while in the village. Ayu directly changes the clothes after Bu Sundari addresses her clothes.

 BU SUNDARI

Di desa ini, hampir semua rumah itu terbuat dari anyaman bambu.

Jadi, kita bisa denger

apa saja yang kalian bicarakan dan apa pun yang kalian pake.

[In this village, almost all the houses are made from woven bamboo.

So, we can listen whatever you are talking about and whatever you wear.]



Figure 2: Clothes of Ayu at first while in the village

Unlike the tradition in Indonesian horror movies in the 1970s, where the ending of the films is always won by the religious character, this film provides a different story. The religious character is not the answer to resolve the supernatural problems, including Nur or Pak Kyai (religious leader). Nur, in one scene, is possessed by her guardian, Mbah Dok, while she is praying. In addition, in the end of the film, the religious leader (Pak Kyai) can not even chase away Nur's guardian angel that is shown in the form of an ugly grandmother. The dialogue of Pak Kyai and Nur below indicates that Nur is still followed by the ugly grandmother.

NUR

Kyai tahu ada sosok yang menjaga saya?
 [Pak Kyai, did you know there is someone following me?]

9
 PAK KYAI

Namanya Mbah Dok.
 Dia sudah sangat lama mengikutimu.
 Saya sudah pernah coba usir.
 Tapi dia berjanji akan menjagamu. [Her name is Mbah Dok.
 She's been following you for a long time.
 I've tried to get rid of her.
 But she promised to take care of you.]

Moving on to the second film. There are 4 characters shown on “Agak Laen”. First female character is Intan. Intan is the mistress of a politician, Basuki. Second character is Marlina. Marlina is a ticket seller and one of the team of four friends who manage the haunted house attraction. Third is Naomi, she is Bene’s fiance. and the last one is the wife of Basuki, the politician.

Intan is the protagonist in this film. As the mistress of a politician, Intan is portrayed as an aggressive woman. She looks like a normal woman but flirty enough. As a normal woman, she used to dress properly and not so sexy but show her body curve. Uniquely, she is the only female character who shoots in her bedroom, her private area. As shown in the picture below, in her private area, Intan is shown wearing open clothes. She wears a tank top and blue shorts. She sits on the edge of the bed to represent her feeling in confusion because of Basuki’s death. In contrast, Intan’s appearance is different from Basuki’s wife which is portrayed as a good woman with modest clothing.



Figure 3: Comparison of clothes of Intan and Basuki’s wife

The other characters on “Agak Laen” are Marlina and Naomi. These two characters reflect the good girl. They have a naive character. Naomi for instance, she patiently waits for Bene until free from prison to get married. While Marlina tries to build a relationship with the officer that has a crush on her. Marlina often ties her hair, her appearance is polite and innocent like a country girl.

Meanwhile, a good girl in the private area is shown by Oki’s little sister. She spends most of his time inside the house, taking care of her mother. Their appearance also supports the character, closed shirts and long pants often used by them.



figure 4: Marlina, image of innocent girl in “Agak Laen”

Another example of a different personality shown in “Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1”. Nikki and Sophia. Nikki is shown as slut who wears a minimum dress while Sophia portrays a professional with a complete suit similar to a police uniform. Brown color means a color that will give the impression of reliability and strength. The picture below is the comparison of Nikki (left) and Sophia (right) appearance.



figure 5: Nikki and Sophie appearance comparison.

16 Furthermore, clothes served as a symbol of women's moral character. 7 Women wearing sensual and open clothes are usually perceived to be less competent, intelligent and moral than those women who are more fully or more appropriately dressed for the context (Gurung and Chrouser in Fasoli, 2018). Three films above compare the morals and values of women characters, especially which has good and bad morals and values.

Aggressiveness of women

Most of the film above, shows an aggressive woman as the bad girl. In KKN di Desa Penari, the demon is depicted with a female figure and symbolism as a snake. In the Bible, for instance, snakes

are often related to evil and deception. The combination of the symbol snake and women, builds a perception of women that has an evil spirit. The story also explains that the evil spirit seduces the male character to do the intercourse every night in order to do reproduction in the supernatural realm.

The aggressiveness of the female character portrays women as the subject of violence. For instance, in the climax of the story, the evil spirit which is symbolized by a snake, is always asking for sacrifice from the villagers. Once again, the aggressiveness of the evil spirit pays with another 'women' soul. The village chief feels sorry for the sacrifice that was always done in the recent year as shown in the dialogue below.

5
MR. PRABU

Dulu, nenek moyang kami percaya dengan menumbalkan anak-anak perempuan,
desa kami dijauhkan dari kemalangan.
[In the past, our ancestors believed
by sacrificing girls, our village is kept away from misfortune.]

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Another scene in the KKN di Desa Penari shows women as the actor of sexual violence. It shows Ayu is very ambitious to get Bima (her classmate). To reach her ambition, she cooperates with the evil spirit to seduce Bima. She wears a cursed scarf to hypnotize Bima and making out with him. As a result, she needs to pay the evil agreement by her soul. It concludes that the aggressiveness of the female character brings bad consequences in the future.

The aggressiveness of women, symbolized with color in "Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1". In her first appearance, Nadia is wearing a red dress and high heels stiletto. The color red symbolizes passion, love, and confidence (Washington, 2023). In addition, Segran writes of the heels associated with women's sexuality (Segran, 2022). So, the appearance of Nadia represents the aggressiveness of women.



figure 6: Nadia wearing red dress and stiletto that symbolized aggressiveness

Objectification of Women

Women and sexuality somehow became a point of interest in films to attract the audience. The sexuality is one of the elements in "Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1". At the first appearance, Nikki is mad because she waits mr. boss too long. But the way he persuades Nikki refers to the sexual stuff as shown in the slice of dialogue below.

MR BOSS
Yuk. Semua orang sudah aku suruh pulang.
Kita bisa kelonan sampai pagi. [Come on. I've told everyone to go home.
We can make out until morning.]

While persuading Nikki, the boss's gesture is pointing into Nikki's breast area. Indirectly, this gesture refers to sexual things.



figure 7: Mr boss's finger pointing Nikki's breast area

The other scene, dialogue snippets below, shows Nikki as the lover of mr.boss, she considered as “things” that can be “used” anytime by mr. boss. Nikki is associated as something and it means Nikki seen as an object to satisfying the sexual desire of mr. boss.

NIKKI

Oh, jadi aku ini berkas yang udah lama nggak kepake?
[Oh, so I'm an old file that can not be used anymore?]

MR BOSS

Tidak, sayang. Kamu selalu baru.

Dan bisa dipakai.

[No, honey. You are always new. And can be used.]

Jump to Sophia introduction scene, there are 2 shots that refer to sexual meaning. First shot shows Sophia's butt. Then the next shot emphasizes Sophia's cleavages. The female body has evolved as a lasting, portable mechanism for sexual signaling, specifically designed to attract male attention for reproductive purposes. Among the various features, buttocks, breasts, and legs play the most significant role in this signaling process. Those shots indicate the sexuality objectification of women's bodies. In addition, close up shots in this scene are used to signify the object that has an important role and often these shots have a symbolic value. In this case, the close up shot of butt and boobs emphasizing women as the sexual object of men.



figure 8: close up shot on Sophia's butt and cleavages

On the other hand, “Agak Laen” does not underline the sexual problems as the main story. It shows less women as an object. They often use the medium or long shot while taking shots of women characters.

Money, Power, Women

There is an idiom of Indonesian men's problem; Harta, Tahta, dan Wanita (Money, Power, Women). This idiom is shown in “Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1”. There is one scene that shows Nikki angry because of mr. boss statement and he tries to relieve Nikki's anger by giving her some money.



figure 9: mr. boss gives some money to calming Nikki's anger

Another example is shown in “Agak Laen”. After the death of Basuki, her secret lover, Intan is in a chaotic situation because chased by the police. She mentions to four best friends that she needs money to escape. The dialogue shown below:

INTAN
(Menangis tersedu-sedu)
Saya cuma ingin pergi dari kota ini secepatnya.
Tapi saya ngga punya uang.
[I just want to get out of this city as soon as possible.
But I don't have money.]

Both “Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1” and “Agak Laen” capture the background of female actors who come from urban areas. From the scenes the audience understands that the main problem for women who live in urban and suburban areas is money. Male as the hero provides the money that they need. As a consequence, women are still dependent on men who have power to fulfill their needs. Moreover, money is seen as a shortcut solution to relieve women's anger or comforting women when they are sad. In addition, the position of male in the public area as the boss of the company or politician, glorifies the domination of men among women in the society. As the movie is a cultural product, the presence of a patriarchal system is evident among Indonesian society. Patriarchism is a view that places men as more powerful than women or men's power over women.

Conclusion

From the findings above, there are several conclusions that can be drawn. First, The appearance and aggressiveness of women determine social value. Womens with sensual clothing and aggressive attitudes, as portrayed in the film, are often crossing the line in terms of social norms. At worst, their aggressiveness leads to death. While a good girl with a nice appearance and character stays. The good image of a woman will be to receive good things in her life (in terms of relationship for example), safe from danger, and get other positive consequences. Second, the objectification of women's bodies still becomes a magnet to fulfill men's sexual desires. Explicitly, sexy clothes plus gesture and camera angle, indicates body parts that refer to sexual tension. Third, male domination somehow is related to money and power as the basic need of women, especially in the city or suburban area. Money and power legitimates men as the provider of women. While womens are portrayed as passive and dependent subjects. To sum up, it should be noted that the portrayal of women in Indonesian best seller movies cannot be separated from patriarchal and social values. In addition, not all the films above highlight women as the sexual object by choosing a neutral shot, long shot or medium shot, to capture a female actress.

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