

## Objectification of Women in the Film *Women from Rote Island* (2023)

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**Abstract**

Film as a cultural product functions not only as entertainment but also as a representational practice that constructs and reproduces social meanings. *Women from Rote Island* (2023) portrays women's experiences within an indigenous cultural context, particularly in relation to power relations, the female body, and gender-based violence. This study aims to analyze the representation of women in the film and the meanings constructed through its system of signs. This research adopts a constructivist paradigm with a qualitative descriptive approach. The method used was Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, focusing on denotative, connotative, cultural-affective meanings, and myth. The research data consist of twelve film scenes selected purposively based on their relevance to issues of women's representation and gender relations. The analysis examines visual and narrative signifiers presented in these scenes. The findings reveal that at the denotative level, the film represents women's everyday life in an indigenous community as ordinary and natural. However, at the connotative level, women are constructed as vulnerable and subordinate subjects, while men are represented as socially authoritative actors. Cultural and affective dimensions reinforce this construction through the depiction of shame, fear, and resignation attached to female characters. At the level of myth, patriarchy and customary law are naturalized as legitimate social orders, positioning the objectification and violence against women as acceptable social consequences. This study concludes that *Women from Rote Island* not only reflects social reality but also actively reproduces patriarchal ideology through symbolic and affective representational practices.

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### INTRODUCTION

Film is a medium that is not only used as a means of entertainment for the community, but film can also be used as a medium that can convey messages (Primadana Mulya et al., 2020). Society and film will always be related to each other, meaning that film can influence and shape society (Sobur, 2017). Films can have a closeness to the community because they often bring issues, backgrounds, anxieties, problems witnessed by the perspective of the writer or director so that the problems that are implemented into the film media often arise from the problems that exist around the community.

The raising of issues and unrest in a film is a form of effort by a filmmaker as a means of sending messages to the audience (Cantor, 2017; Tombu, 2024). Each message that wants to be conveyed is also arranged as best as possible through signs that are outlined with various instructions so that they can reach the audience through the film shown (Ramadhan, 2020). One of the issues that cannot be separated from society is the issue of gender. Etymologically, gender is most often interpreted as sex, but gender can also be interpreted as differences in behavior and values that can be seen and distinguished between men and women as well as expectations for men and women (Bangun, 2020). Therefore, gender differences can also be

seen from the social and cultural constructions that exist in the community (Handayani & Daherman, 2020).

Gender is not only differentiated by sex but also differentiated by various differentiating factors such as behavior, socio-culture, and other non-biological factors (Scheller-Boltz, 2018). According to Echols and Hassan Shadily (1983) in Zuriatin (2023a), gender and sex are different things even though they are etymologically interpreted the same, namely gender. Gender has a wider scope and concentrates specifically on social, cultural, and non-biological aspects, so gender emphasizes more on aspects of a person's masculinity and femininity (Zuriatin, 2023)

The issue of gender is often raised as a problem or background to Indonesian film stories because it is considered very relevant and close to people's lives (Fatihayah & Simanjuntak, 2022; Ilham, 2026; Rizka & Mutiara, 2025; Wijaya et al., 2025). The injustices and discrimination that are still experienced by women, especially such as status, role, and rights, are often voiced through media such as films as a form of struggle against the reality of patriarchal culture. Patriarchy can be interpreted as a form of male role which is likened to the only center, ruler, and everything so that it often forms inequality between men and women. This inequality also affects many aspects such as women being considered incapable of carrying out large roles such as men and women being limited figures due to this discrimination. Patriarchy considers that women are only assigned to reproductive functions so that the position of men becomes the main in social construction (Putri et al., 2022.).

Social construction in society often places women in a subordinate position so that the rights to their own bodies seem to be regulated and assessed by other parties. Women are often perceived not as autonomous subjects, but as objects shaped according to the point of view and interests of those who see them. This condition is in line with the theory of objectification pioneered by Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, which was later further developed by Tracy L. Tylka Calogero, which explains how women's bodies are often reduced to sexual objects. Objectification proves that women are often treated as a tool to satisfy the desires or interests of others, especially in the context of sexuality. In the realm of media, including film, this construction is not only represented explicitly, but also through visual cues, shooting angles, narrative, and character development loaded with patriarchal perspectives.

This phenomenon can be found in various genres of Indonesian films that are still influenced by historical and cultural aspects of patriarchy, where women are positioned as parties who do not have full power over themselves, both personally and structurally. Film as a mass media has an important role in spreading and reproducing these values to the public. One of the films that boldly raises the issue of gender inequality is *Women from Rote Island* by Jeremias Nyangoen. The film was released on October 7, 2023 and had its world premiere at the 28th Busan International Film Festival, and won various national and international awards, including Best Feature Film at the 2023 Indonesian Film Festival. The story centers on Orpa and her two children, Martha and Bertha, who have to deal with trauma and sexual violence amid strong patriarchal cultural and cultural pressures on Rote Island.

The cultural background of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) which is thick with traditions such as *Belis* shows how women are often placed as status symbols and are even considered to be under the ownership of their husbands after dowry is given. In this context, domestic violence is often justified as a form of "teaching", while women who want to separate have to

face Belis restitution demands. Departing from this reality, this study focuses on the representation of women's objectification in *Women from Rote Island* through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, especially at the level of denotation, connotation, and myth. Film is understood as a space for the construction of meaning that is not neutral, but rather shapes public perception of gender power relations. Therefore, this study aims to describe how the visual and narrative sign system in film builds the meaning of objectification, while enriching academic studies on women's representation in Indonesian cinema and encouraging critical reflection on the practice of gender injustice.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Types and Properties of Research**

This research used a qualitative approach because it aims to understand social phenomena in depth through the interpretation of the meanings contained in symbols and representations in the film. This approach allows researchers to conduct a holistic and contextual analysis of the object of study. This type of research is research that explores and understands meaning in a group or individual that comes from social problems (Cresswell & Poth, 2017). The qualitative approach in this study is used to describe and interpret the representation of women's objectification through scenes, dialogues, and other visual elements contained in the film "*Women from Rote Island*". Researchers not only look at "what is visible", but also "what is the hidden meaning behind what is visible".

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as a key instrument. This is because the researcher is a data collector as well as an interpretation tool that is directly involved in the observation process to understand the meaning behind the phenomenon being studied (Cresswell & Poth, 2017). The description given in this study is not only narrative, but also interpretive. Qualitative descriptive research allows researchers to describe representational phenomena in detail, systematic, and contextual, as well as analyze the symbolic and ideological meanings of the visual signs found in film.

### **Research Methods**

This study uses a qualitative research method with an emphasis on semiotic text analysis to explore in depth how the signs that emerge from text and visual media shape social reality. Referring to the thinking of Cresswell & Poth (2017), the qualitative approach allows researchers to carry out an in-depth interpretation process of social interaction and cultural experiences in the film "*Women from Rote Island*". In this case, Roland Barthes' semiotics is used to figure out how women's representations are constructed through visual language and narrative. Through layers of denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings, this study seeks to uncover the ideological content that is often considered naturalized, while emphasizing the researcher's goal to find meaning in the film "*Women from Rote Island*".

### **Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis in this study is the film "*Women from Rote Island*" which was released in 2023 with a total duration of 143 minutes. This film is a work that has received attention at various national and international film awards events by discussing women in the traditional and cultural environment in Rote. This film certainly has a layered narrative and

visual meaning that the filmmaker wants to convey. In the research on the film "Women from Rote Island", the researcher will dissect the sequences in the film that contain female elements and all forms of objectification, the interaction of women's roles in customs, women's interactions with men, and the treatment that a woman gets from existing gender inequality. Narratively, the researcher will analyze the text or dialogue spoken by the female character in the film or the male character who objectifies the woman in the film.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

The data collection technique in this study is the documentation and textual observation method. As explained by Creswell & Poth (2017), qualitative data can be obtained through audiovisual materials that are relevant to the focus of the research. In this case, the film "Women from Rote Island" is the primary data source. The researcher selected a sequence that contained elements of representation of women's objectification and then dissected the sequence into pieces of images in a narrative manner and then analyzed with Roland Barthes semiotics so that the researcher could find out the layers of meaning that form myths by involving an understanding related to socio-cultural situations, personal contexts of characters, and challenges faced by women in experiencing women's objectification. The following are the elements that the researcher considers to determine the sequence that has elements of female objectification in the film.

Based on the concept of objectification put forward by Martha Nussbaum (1995), objectification can be recognized through several elements, namely instrumentality (treating others as tools for personal ends), denial of autonomy (ignoring the individual's ability to determine himself), inertia (considering that individuals do not have the capacity to act), fungibility (treating someone as something that can be exchanged), violability (considering that someone can be damaged or invaded), as well as possession (treating others as property). Based on these elements, researchers found 12 sequences that contained the objectification of women in the film Women from Rote Island and used them as secondary data for the study. Data collection was carried out through the technique of watching and recording by repeatedly observing each reading unit or lexias in the film, accompanied by a process of selecting scenes that are relevant to the focus of the research. This technique is in line with the opinion of Sri Wulandari (2024) who states that data analysis can be carried out through observation of dialogues, visuals, and scenes that represent the phenomenon being studied. Referring to the semiotic analysis framework of Roland Barthes (1972), the data collected in the form of cutscenes and dialogue transcripts were purposively selected based on their ability to represent women's objectification, so that this study not only shows the existence of objectification, but also explains how the practice is represented and normalized as reality in the film.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

This study uses data analysis techniques with Roland Barthes' semiotic approach which focuses on the interpretation of signs in film texts, both visually and audio logically. This analysis aims not only to identify forms of women's objectification, but further to unravel the connotations of such representations constructed through the signage system in the film "Women from Rote Island".

First, the selected scene will be viewed through the Visual and Dialogue paths. At this

stage, the researcher identifies how text (conversation) and image (visual) interact with each other. The researcher will observe how certain dialogues give meaning to images, or conversely, how images reinforce what is being said, in order to see the beginning of objectification representations formed in the narrative. In accordance with the data analysis technique that has been determined previously, 12 sequences were found that contained elements of women's objectification. Second, the sequence will be further dissected through the elements of the film that present this representation. The researcher will analyze in detail elements of the film such as *mise-en-scène* (such as costumes, settings, or visible objects), shooting techniques (shot size), shooting angles (camera angles such as high angle to reduce the position of women), and the editing process. This is done to find out how the layered meanings present in film media are arranged. Third, the sequence will be dismantled using the layers of meaning Denotation, Connotation, and Myth from Roland Barthes.

In the framework of Roland Barthes' semiotics, denotative meaning is the first level of meaning that displays literal meanings that appear natural, objective, and as if they are, especially in photographs or films that present visual representations that are considered close to reality, thus becoming the basis for the formation of connotative and mythical meanings. At the second level, connotative meaning refers to additional meanings formed by culture, ideology, aesthetics, and ways of depiction, which arise through poses, compositions, visual techniques, cinematic styles, and narrative settings, thus opening up the space for symbolic interpretation and cultural values attached to a scene. Meanwhile, myth is an advanced system of meaning that uses denotative marks as new markers to convey ideological messages, transforming historical and social constructions into something that seems natural, normal, and unquestionable, and depends on the cultural competence of the audience in recognizing the codes used; In the context of the film, myth works by utilizing the impression of the naturalness of the image to disguise the ideological interests behind it. To identify the representation of female objectification in the film *Women from Rote Island*, this study uses Barthes' five reading codes, namely the hermeneutic code that deals with questions and mysteries in the narrative, the semi-code that marks characters through connotative attributes, the symbolic code that reveals binary contradictions and abstract meanings, the *proairetic* code that governs the logic of action and reaction in the plot, and cultural codes that refer to knowledge and ideologies that live in society, so that through the stages of denotation, connotation, and myth, this research is expected to be able to reveal how women are constructed through symbols, narratives, and ideologies as objects in the cultural context represented by the film.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

After explaining the depiction of the research object in general, the following are the results of the research that presents an analysis in the form of a narrative system and cinematic elements in the film "*Women from Rote Island*". The researcher will begin to enter the results of his research related to the narrative system that presents the character dialogues in the sequence and plot of the story, *mise-en-scène*, cinematic elements, cinematography elements, and editing in the film as a basis for analyzing the level of meaning according to Roland Barthes' theory, namely the level of denotation, connotation and myth in 12 sequences that have been determined. The analysis of the layers of meaning in the film "*Women from Rote Island*" will also use five reading codes, namely hermeneutics, semic, symbolic, proaireic, and cultural





to help find out the myths that are naturalized in the film related to the representation of women's objectification.

### Representation of Women's Objectification

Based on the analysis carried out on 12 sequences in the film "Women from Rote Island", it was found that women's objectification is consistently and diverse. The main findings of this study are summarized in the following Table 1, which maps each sequence along with its form of objectification, elements of objectification according to Nussbaum, and visuals.

**Table 1. Recapitulation of Findings of Objectification of Women in the Film "Women from Rote Island"**

No.	Timecode	Characters	Form of Objectification	The Element of Objectification (Nussbaum)	Visual
1	00.07.40–00.08.00	Orpa	Sexual harassment in the market	Instrumentalities, Violability	
2	00.40.28–00.43.03	Martha	Spied on and harassed while falling a tree	Foamability, Violability	
3	00.53.11–00.54.02	Martha	Manipulation by Ezra (grooming)	Instrumentality, Denial of Autonomy, Inertia	
4	00.55.30–00.58.33	Martha & Bertha	Rape by Ezra on the beach	Violability	
5	01.04.34–01.05.00	Orpa	Blamed by the customary administrators	Denial of Autonomy	
6	01.06.35–01.08.35	Bertha	Seduced & bullied by Cabbage	Denial of Autonomy, Violability, Ownership	
7	01.14.07–01.15.39	Martha	Attacked in a confinement room	Instrumentality, Rejection of Autonomy, Inertia, Violability	
8	01.19.28–01.20.10	Martha	Attacked in sleep, beaten to death	Instrumentality, Rejection of Autonomy, Inertia, Violability	

9	01.43.55– 01.45.10	Bertha	Mutilation & murder	Instrumentality, Rejection of Autonomy, Inertia, Violability	
10	01.52.00– 01.53.45	Martha	The revelation of Abel (uncle) as the perpetrator	Fusibility, Denial of Autonomy, Ownership, Violability	
11	02.09.56– 02.13.55	Orpa	Sex is made a condition of information by Kobis	Instrumentality, Denial of Autonomy, Futility	
12	02.14.54– 02.19.41	Orpa	Strangled by Kobis after the perpetrator's confession	Instrumentality, Rejection of Autonomy, Inertia, Violability	

Source: Researcher's Processed Data, 2025

Table 4.1 above shows that of the 12 sequences analyzed, all sequences contain elements of female objectification based on seven dimensions formulated by Nussbaum (1995), namely Instrumentality, Rejection of Autonomy, Inertia, Fungibility, Violability, Ownership, and Rejection of Subjectivity. The most dominant elements that emerge are Violability (10 sequences) and Denial of Autonomy (9 sequences), which indicate that these films consistently represent the female body as something that can be invaded and that women's free will is often ignored.

### Analysis of Women's Objectification Per Sequence

The following is the presentation of the results of the analysis per sequence that answers the research objectives regarding how women's objectification is represented through film elements and the meaning of semiotics in "Women from Rote Island".

#### Sequence 1 – Orpa's Harassment in the Market (00.07.40–00.08.00)



Figure 1. Visual Sequence 1: Orpa is harassed in the market by a teenage boy

Source: Researcher's Processed Data, 2025

The first sequence shows Orpa a grieving middle-aged mother being sexually assaulted in a market when a teenage boy sticks his genitals to Orpa's buttocks. This scene represents two elements of objectification: Instrumentality (Orpa's body is used as a tool for the perpetrator's self-gratification) and Violability (Orpa's body is invaded without consensus).

Cinematically, the use of medium shots with tilt ups visually emphasizes the situation. Semiotic analysis shows that the perpetrator's actions connote masculine superiority that is internalized from an early age, as well as reinforcing the myth that sexual harassment in public spaces occurs due to the normalization of male dominance in East Nusa Tenggara, which is supported by YSSP (2023) data on 128 cases of sexual harassment in one period.

### **Sequence 2 – Martha Spied on and Harassed (00.40.28–00.43.03)**



**Figure 2. Visual Sequence 2: Ruben and Marco peeking at Martha from under a tree**

Source: Researcher's Processed Data, 2025

In this sequence, Martha who is trapped on a tree is peeked at by Marco and Reuben, and when he gets downstairs with help, Marco takes advantage of the opportunity to hold Martha's private area. The element of objectification of fungibility is seen in the logic of "help as a medium of exchange" which positions the female body as a commodity. Medium shot and long shot techniques are used to show the power dynamics between the characters. Connotatively, Martha's position of being "above but trapped" represents the vulnerability of the female body as an object of the Male Gaze as analyzed by Mulvey (1975). The myth that exists is related to the Belis culture in NTT which strengthens the view that male help deserves "rewards".

### **Sequence 3 & 4 – Manipulation and Rape by Ezra (00.53.11–00.58.33)**



**Figure 3. Visual Sequence 3: Ezra visits Martha alone**



**Figure 4. Visual Sequence 4: Ezra sexually assaults Martha on the beach**

Source: Researcher's Processed Data, 2025

These two sequences are interrelated and depict a series of grooming to the rape that Ezra committed against Martha. Sequence 3 shows coercive abuse through situational manipulation Ezra exploits Martha's vulnerability in order to save the bird's nest. Sequence 4 depicts brutal rape with a very explicit element of violability, accompanied by the destruction of a bird's nest as a symbol of the destruction of women's dignity (symbolic violence, Bourdieu, 2002). Cinematically, the consistent use of low-level angles depicts Martha always under Ezra's dominance, while the fast-paced rhythm editing builds intense tension. The myths constructed are the patriarchy and tradition of Belis that place women as "accessible" objects.

**Sequence 5 & 6 – Strengthening Patriarchy Through Custom and Intimidation (01.04.34–01.08.35)**



**Figure 5. Visual Sequence 5: Orpa is declared to have violated customs by the customary administrator**



**Figure 6. Visual Sequence 6: Cabbage intimidates Bertha while paying compensation**

Source: Researcher's Processed Data, 2025

Sequence 5 represents the objectification of the institutional Denial of Autonomy: Orpa as the victim's mother is actually blamed for customary violations, while the perpetrators of harassment do not receive equal sanctions. Orpa's bowing gesture semiotically marks the internalization of women's oppression and obedience to male customary authority. Sequence 6 features Kobis who teases and intimidates Bertha who is still wearing a school uniform, with elements of Denial of Autonomy, Violability, and Ownership. Bertha's firm verbal resistance became a symbol of women's subversion to objectification. These two sequences criticize the customary law mechanism analyzed by Nurtjahyo (2020) which tends to harm women victims of violence.

**Sequences 7, 8, & 9 – Escalation of Violence: From Confinement to Murder (01.14.07–01.45.10)**



**Figure 7. Visual Sequence 7: Martha is locked up with her legs chained inside the hut**



**Figure 8. Visual Sequence 8: Martha is attacked by a mysterious man while asleep**



**Figure 9. Visual Sequence 9: Bertha is helpless in the face of a chainsaw-wielding perpetrator**

Source: Researcher's Processed Data, 2025

These three sequences represent an extreme escalation of women's objectification. Sequence 7 features Martha chained in a hut a symbol of patriarchal control over women's bodies then sexually assaulted by a mysterious man. The chains on Martha's legs connotatively

represent the most radical Inertia and Rejection of Autonomy. Sequence 8 shows a similar pattern at night, where the perpetrator beats Martha to death as a form of deliberately created Inertia. Sequence 9 is the culmination of the violence with Bertha being tied up, stripped, and facing the threat of mutilation. The use of high-level angles confirms the victim's defenseless position. Culturally, these three scenes represent the condemnation of women's bodies through customary law identified in the research of Lestarini et al. (2019) and Rahayu et al. (2025).

### Sequence 10, 11, & 12 – Reveal and Match (01.52.00–02.19.41)



**Figure 10. Visual Sequence 10: The Revelation of Abel's identity as the perpetrator**



**Figure 11. Visual Sequence 11: Kobis makes sex a condition of information to Orpa**



**Figure 12. Visual Sequence 12: Orpa against Kobis after the perpetrator's confession**

Source: Researcher's Processed Data, 2025

Sequence 10 is a narrative turning point when the identity of the mysterious perpetrator is revealed to be Abel, Martha's own uncle. This disclosure criticizes the mechanism of violence that is rooted in the family (Muriani et al., 2025), in which kinship relations become the most dangerous space for the victim. Sequence 11 displays the objectification of Instrumentality and Fungibility: Kobis makes Orpa's body a condition of access to information, representing coercive sexual harassment (Tong, 1984 in Kurnianingsih, 2015). Sequence 12 as the conclusion features the physical confrontation of Orpa and Kobis, in which Orpa manages to turn the tide. Orpa's triumphant smile and the cigarette she lights become a symbol of women's resistance and a reclaim of her body sovereignty, as well as a subversion of masculine authority.

After analyzing the results of the research on the representation of women's objectification in the film "Women from Rote Island", the researcher found the elements and meanings of objectification representation of women. The results of many studies show that the objectification of women is present in the midst of the customs and culture of the community so that it is often normalized or become a myth.

### **Women's objectification is represented through the level of denotation and connotation marks in the film "Women from Rote Island"**

The film "Women from Rote Island" represents the objectification of women in a systematic and structured manner through the construction of visual, narrative, and symbolic signs that work simultaneously on two main layers of meaning, namely denotation and connotation as formulated in semiotic theory. At the level of denotation, the film presents a series of events that at first glance seem to be a representation of the daily life of the Rote people: women shopping in the market, women in the outdoors, women climbing trees, women asking for help, and women interacting with men in public and semi-private spaces. However, it is precisely through this "normality" that the film builds its social criticism. These seemingly

ordinary activities serve as markers that carry deeper meaning, because in almost every daily situation the female body is consistently placed in an unequal power relationship. Women are not positioned as sovereign subjects over their bodies and decisions, but as objects of gaze, objects of touch, objects of manipulation, and objects of domination. Objectification in this film does not present as a single incident or social anomaly, but rather as a repeating, interconnected, and integrated pattern in the narrative structure of the film, thus creating a cinematic experience that subtly normalizes women's vulnerability as part of social reality.

At the level of denotation, women's objectification is represented through concrete actions that can be explicitly observed by the audience, such as physical harassment, unwanted touching, sexual gaze, verbal intimidation, and situational coercion. This denotation is evident in the scene of abuse in the market, when a teenage boy attaches his genitals to Orpa's body. Literally, the sign only shows an incident of sexual harassment in a public space. However, this denotative meaning becomes significant because the film does not feature a firm institutional response, such as the intervention of the authorities, legal sanctions, or victim protection mechanisms. The absence of this protective structure at the denotation level suggests that from even the most basic layers of meaning, women have been placed in a structurally insecure position. On the contrary, male perpetrators are described as having the freedom to move and act without real consequences. Thus, the denotation in this film is not only to describe the event, but also to reveal the absence of a social system that favors women's safety and dignity.

The objectification denotation is also manifested through cinematic visual language, particularly the selection of camera angles, shooting distances, and visual compositions that consistently focus attention on the female body. Cameras often use eye-level angles, medium shots, and even framing from below that allow the viewer to be in a visual position that is parallel to the male perpetrator. In the scene of Martha trapped on a tree, for example, the film denotatively only shows a woman who is unable to get down and needs help. However, the camera angle from below visually accentuates Martha's body as an object of view. This framing creates a voyeuristic condition that allows for the "male gaze", where the female body becomes the center of visual pleasure. Thus, at the level of denotation, objectification is carried out not only by the male characters in the story, but also by the cinematic mechanisms themselves. The film shows how visual technology can function as a tool of objectification reproduction by "showing" the female body in a vulnerable position to the audience.

When they enter the level of connotation, these denotative signs begin to produce a much deeper and more complex ideological meaning. Harassment of Orpa, for example, is no longer interpreted solely as an individual's deviant behavior, but as a representation of masculine superiority that has been internalized from a young age. The connotation built is that women's bodies, even middle-aged women, dress modestly, and are in a reasonable social context and are still considered legitimate to be invaded. This meaning emphasizes that women's objectification is not related to the provocation, morality, or appearance of the victim, but rather is rooted in a patriarchal structure that views the female body as a permanent sexual object in the social space. In other words, the film notes that sexual harassment is not a social deviation, but rather a product of a value system that has been normalized in everyday life.

In the scene of Martha being spied on and harassed by Marco and Ruben, the connotation of objectification becomes even more complex because it is wrapped in a narrative of "help". Denotatively, men help women who are in difficulty. However, connotatively, the assistance is

interpreted as a power transaction, where the act of helping becomes the legitimacy of access to women's bodies. This connotation is very important because it shows that objectification does not always appear in the form of frontal violence, but also through social relations that seem normal and are even considered positive. Women are constructed as the indebted party, while men place themselves as dominant subjects who feel entitled to demand retribution, including sexual retribution (Wulandari et al., 2025). Thus, the film reveals how patriarchal relations can infiltrate the most banal and socially accepted social interactions.

The connotation of objectification is also reinforced through the representation of social responses around the victim. In some scenes, the community only reacts verbally through swearing, momentary anger, or moral expression, without any concrete action to protect the victim or stop the perpetrator. The resulting connotation is the normalization of sexual harassment as part of a "unfortunate but accepted" social reality. The film clearly annotates that women's bodies are in a legal and moral gray space: their suffering is symbolically acknowledged, but structurally ignored. When society does not move beyond verbal reactions, objectification becomes a social practice that is constantly reproduced, because it is never really challenged or stopped.

In the relationship between Martha and Ezra, the connotation of objectification reaches the most extreme and dangerous forms, namely situational manipulation and sexual violence. Denotatively, Ezra is described as a man who offers help and solutions. But connotatively, his actions represent a grooming strategy, where the perpetrator slowly creates a situation of dependence and isolation. Ezra not only objectifies Martha's body as a sexual object, but also objectifies her autonomy as an individual. Martha was not given the space to make decisions independently; She is directed, psychologically suppressed, and finally forced to follow the will of men. The connotation that emerges is that in patriarchal systems, women are often positioned as beings who are considered irrational, incapable of making choices, and therefore "needing to be directed" by men, a narrative that ideologically legitimizes domination and violence.

The connotation of objectification in "Women from Rote Island" is closely intertwined with the myth of the patriarchal culture that lives and operates in Rote society. Women's bodies are constructed not as autonomous personal property, but as social property that can be regulated, assessed, and controlled. Through the repetition of visual and narrative signs, the film builds the myth that male dominance is something natural, while women's suffering is an accepted consequence (Wulandari et al., 2025). Objectification is not represented as an individual action alone, but as a system of meaning that is inherited across generations, seen from the perpetrators of abuse who are even teenagers. Thus, the film reveals how patriarchal ideology is subtly reproduced through everyday practices, visual language, and seemingly normal social relations.

By reading "Women from Rote Island" through layers of denotation and connotation, it can be concluded that women's objectification is represented not just as a series of events of sexual violence, but as a complex, layered, and ideological structure of signs. The denotation displays the physical reality of abuse and domination, while the connotation dismantles the system of meaning that normalizes gender inequality and patriarchal power relations. This film critically shows that women's objectification never stands alone, but is rooted in culture, social structures, and collective neglect that continues to be reproduced. Thus, "Women from Rote

Island" serves as a cultural text that not only records social reality, but also criticizes and challenges the system of meaning that has placed women as objects in social life.

### **Representation in Women from Rote Island**

Representation is a key concept in the study of culture and communication science because it relates to the way meaning is produced, exchanged, and understood in a society. Stuart Hall (2013) explains that representation is a process in which meaning is formed through language, signs, and symbolic systems that humans use to understand the world. Thus, representation functions not only as a means of conveying messages, but also as a mechanism for shaping social reality. In the context of film, representation works through visual language, narrative, dialogue, and story structure that collectively construct a certain meaning for the audience.

Based on the division of representation according to Stuart Hall, namely reflective, intentional, and constructivist representations, the film *Women from Rote Island* can be predominantly categorized into a constructivist representational approach. This film not only reflects social reality as it is, and also does not only convey meaning based on the subjective intentions of the filmmakers, but actively builds and constructs meanings about women, women's bodies, and gender power relations through a sign system that can be collectively understood by society.

The reflective representation approach holds that language and imagery only serve as mirrors that reflect real-world reality. However, *Women from Rote Island* cannot be categorized as a reflective representation because the film not only shows that the harassment and objectification of women occur in social life, but also emphasizes a certain way of depicting these events. The selection of scenes, camera angles, narrative plots, and characterization of female characters show a process of selection and framing of meaning. For example, the scene of harassment of Orpa in the market not only shows social facts, but also confirms the position of women as vulnerable and structurally unprotected. This shows that movies do not simply "imitate reality", but construct a certain meaning of that reality.

In addition, the film also cannot be included in the category of intentional representation. The intentional approach places meaning as a result of the individual message creator's intent or intent. Stuart Hall emphasized that this approach has limitations because meaning cannot be completely controlled by the individual, but must work in a social system of language and culture (Asyraf, 2025). In "*Women from Rote Island*", the meaning of women's objectification does not appear solely because of the director's subjective intentions, but because the film uses cultural codes that are widely known and understood by the audience, such as gender stereotypes, patriarchal power relations, and the normalization of male dominance. The meaning in this film is collective, not private.

The constructivist representational approach views that meaning is not naturally attached to objects or events, but rather is formed through the system of representation used by humans. In the context of the film "*Women from Rote Island*", the female body is not inherently meaningful as a sexual object or an object of domination. This meaning is constructed through the repetition of visual and narrative representations that place women in a position of weakness, dependence, and exposure. The camera, dialogue, and relationships between the characters serve as signs that together form the concept of women in the minds of the audience.

For example, Martha's character is repeatedly represented in situations that demand dependence on men. This representation not only displays certain physical conditions, but also establishes the meaning that women do not fully have autonomy in making their life choices. In the framework of constructivist representation, the meaning of women's powerlessness does not come from biological reality, but from the way the film arranges signs and narratives (Asyraf, 2025). The objectification of women in this film does not only occur at the level of the body, but also at the level of identity and subjectivity.

Through a constructivist approach, the film *Women from Rote Island* shows how women's objectification is produced and reproduced as a social meaning. Women are represented as objects of gaze, objects of control, and objects of domination through a system of signs that seem natural and natural. In fact, this meaning is the result of the construction of patriarchal culture that works through representation. The film implicitly reveals how visual and narrative language can serve as ideological tools in perpetuating gender inequality.

Based on this description, it can be concluded that the representation of women in the film *Women from Rote Island* is predominantly in the category of constructivist representation according to Stuart Hall. The film not only represents social reality, but also actively shapes the audience's understanding of the position of women in social structures. Thus, *Women from Rote Island* can be understood as a cultural text that shows how the system of representation plays a role in establishing and normalizing women's objectification in social life.

### **The formation of the myth of this representation builds the objectification of women in the film "Women from Rote Island"**

In the perspective of Stuart Hall's theory of representation, meaning is not natural or neutral, but rather is formed through a system of representation consisting of language, visual imagery, narrative, and social practices that work in a particular cultural context. The films *Women from Rote Island* serve as cultural texts that represent women through a series of visual and narrative codes that consistently place them in subordinate positions. The objectification of women in this film does not only exist as an individual act, but as a result of a process of representation that constantly constructs women as "the Other", that is, a group that is positioned differently, inferior, and controllable. Through Stuart Hall's approach, it can be understood that this film does not simply reflect social realities, but actively shapes the audience's understanding of the position of women in patriarchal social structures.

One of Stuart Hall's key principles is that representation works through the repetition of meaning until it seems natural and natural. In *Women from Rote Island*, women are repeatedly represented in vulnerable situations: being in unprotected public spaces, alone in natural spaces, or dependent on men. The scene of Orpa being harassed in the market shows how public spaces are represented as unsafe spaces for women. Through this representation, the film builds the meaning that the female body is always in an open position to male intervention. In Hall's framework, the meaning does not arise by chance, but rather is the result of a system of cultural representation that has long normalized women's vulnerability in social spaces.

The representation of women as permanent sexual objects is one of the most dominant and consistent patterns of meaning in the film *"Women from Rote Island"*. Within the framework of Stuart Hall's theory of representation, this pattern can be understood as the result of a process of stereotyping, which is a cultural mechanism that simplifies the identity of a

particular group into a single characteristic that is constantly repeated. The film systematically represents women primarily through their bodies, not through their intellectual capacity, life experiences, or social roles. Women are rarely shown as subjects who have a voice, will, and control over the situation, but rather as visual entities whose existence is always associated with the potential to be gazed, judged, and sexually accessed. With the repetition of this kind of representation, the film builds the meaning that the female body is the main and even the only aspect that defines women's identity in social space.

Orpa's character is the clearest example of how sexual stereotypes work across ages and social contexts. Although Orpa is represented as a middle-aged woman who dresses modestly and goes about her daily activities in the market, her body remains the target of sexual harassment. In Stuart Hall's perspective, this representation shows how stereotypes erase the complexity of individual identity and replace it with a simplified meaning. Orpa's age, morality, and social context have no relevance in the system of representation that the film constructs; All that matters is the fact that she is a woman. Thus, the film constructs the meaning that women, under any circumstances, are always in a position vulnerable to objectification. The female body is represented as a sexual object that is always available, not as a part of a subject that has dignity and autonomy.

Through the visual and narrative reproduction of sexual stereotypes, the film "Women from Rote Island" builds an understanding that a woman's ultimate value lies in her body, not in her social identity, life experiences, or personal agency. Stuart Hall emphasizes that stereotypes serve to maintain power relations, and in this context, female sexual stereotypes serve to reinforce male dominance. By repeatedly depicting women as sexual objects, the film shows how patriarchal representation systems work to reduce women to mere "objects." This objectification does not only occur in acts of physical harassment, but also in the way women are symbolically positioned in the film's narrative (Asyraf, 2025). As a result, women lose their status as whole social subjects and are reduced to bodies that can be seen, judged, and controlled by men. Stuart Hall also explains that representations often work through binary oppositions, such as strong/weak, active/passive, subject/object. In "Women from Rote Island", this opposition is very clearly seen in gender relations. Men are represented as active parties, decision-makers, and situation controllers, while women are represented as passive, dependent, and powerless. Martha's character, for example, is repeatedly shown in a position of needing help. This representation establishes the meaning that women are inherently weaker and need male intervention, thus opening up a space for legitimacy for control and domination over women's bodies.

Through Stuart Hall's theory, it can be seen that the representation of "man as helper" is a very ideological construction of meaning. In Martha's scene on the tree, the man who comes to help is not represented as a threat from the start. However, the assistance turned into harassment. This representation shows that the meaning of "help" in patriarchal cultures often hides power relations. According to Hall, meaning is always related to power, and in this context, the representation of aid becomes a tool of legitimization of objectification. The women who are helped are represented as the debtor, while the men gain a dominant position over the woman's body.

Women's objectification is also built through the representation of social reactions to sexual violence. In this film, the surrounding community often only reacts verbally without any

real action. Stuart Hall emphasizes that what is not represented is just as important as what is represented. The absence of legal protection and social solidarity represents sexual violence as an imurgent problem. The meaning formed is that harassment against women is part of the social reality that must be accepted, not resisted. This representation contributes directly to the normalization of women's objectification (Djami, 2026).

The relationship between Martha and Ezra represents a more complex and subtle form of objectification than direct physical abuse, because objectification is not only directed at the female body, but also at subjectivity, identity, and decision-making capacity. Within the framework of Stuart Hall's theory of representation, meanings about who are "powerful" and who are "powerless" are formed through the way characters are represented narratively and visually. Ezra is consistently portrayed as a rational, calm, and seemingly understanding male figure better. He appears as a figure who has solutions, direction, and control over the situation. Instead, Martha is represented as a woman who is confused, depressed, and has no clear grip. This representation establishes the typical binary opposition of male patriarchy as an active subject and female as a passive subject that underlies the legitimacy of Ezra's domination over Martha.

In Stuart Hall's theory, representation not only creates meaning about the body, but also shapes a social understanding of an individual's identity and will. The representation of Martha as a figure who "needs direction" serves to negate her autonomy as a social subject. He is not represented as an individual who is able to assess risks, make choices, or control the direction of his own life. Instead, important decisions in the relationship were gradually taken over by Ezra. This process does not happen suddenly, but through a narrative that normalizes male dominance as a form of care and protection. In this context, objectification works on a symbolic level: Martha is positioned not only as a sexual object, but also as an object of psychological and social control. Her will is reduced, her voice is marginalized, and her identity is formed through a male perspective.

Thus, Martha and Ezra's relationship shows that the objectification of women in "Women from Rote Island" is not always visible or brutal, but often works through seemingly rational and "reasonable" mechanisms of representation. In Stuart Hall's perspective, this kind of representation is particularly dangerous because it establishes the sense that male dominance is something natural and necessary. Women are represented as parties who are not fully able to determine their own fate, so men's intervention is considered legitimate and even necessary. Objectification in this relationship not only robs Martha of control over her body, but also over her identity and future as an individual. In this way, the film shows how patriarchal representation systems work subtly to perpetuate gender power inequality, making women not as full subjects, but as objects that can be directed, controlled, and determined by men (Arrosyid et al., 2025).

The representation of the younger generation as abusers also has an important meaning within the framework of Stuart Hall. By presenting adolescents as perpetrators without serious consequences, the film represents the objectification of women as a value that is learned and inherited. Hall calls this process the reproduction of meaning through cultural practice. This representation shows that masculinity is formed through domination over women, and objectification is part of the process of forming male identity from an early age. Thus, the film reveals how patriarchal culture is reproduced across generations.

The visual aspect of film, especially the work of the camera, also functions as a representation system. Stuart Hall emphasizes that visual language has the same great power as verbal language. The camera angle from below, the framing that highlights the female body, and the long duration of the shot build the meaning that the female body is an object of gaze. This visual representation reinforces the position of women as objects, while the viewer is unconsciously placed in the position of the viewing subject. Thus, objectification is built not only in the story, but also in the viewing experience itself.

The silence of women in this film is also a significant form of representation. Stuart Hall explains that meaning is formed not only through speech, but also through silence. Many victims in the film are not given the space to voice their experiences in full. This silence is represented as resignation, when in fact it is the result of a repressive power relationship. This representation of silence builds the meaning that women receive the treatment, so that objectification seems legitimate and unquestionable.

Overall, the representation system in "Women from Rote Island" forms a collective understanding that women are objects, while men are subjects with power. Stuart Hall asserts that representation has always been linked to ideology. In this film, patriarchal ideology works through the repetition of images, narratives, and social relations that place women in subordinate positions. Objectification does not emerge as extraordinary violence, but rather as something that seems ordinary and socially acceptable.

Using Stuart Hall's theory of representation, it can be concluded that the objectification of women in "Women from Rote Island" is constructed through a systematic and ideological process of representation. The film shows how the meaning of women as objects is shaped, circulated, and normalized through visual language, narratives, and social practices. Thus, "Women from Rote Island" not only represents patriarchal reality, but also opens up a space for criticism of how cultural representation systems continue to perpetuate women's objectification

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the analysis of the film *Women from Rote Island*, this study concludes that women's objectification is represented as a complex and ideological sign structure that works through layers of denotation and connotation meaning; At the level of denotation, the film presents the physical reality of harassment and domination through concrete actions such as unwanted touch, sexual gaze, as well as cinematic visual language that exploits the vulnerability of the female body, while at the level of connotation, the signs reveal a deeper system of meaning in which objectification is positioned as a product of patriarchal values that have been normalized, so that the female body is constructed as a sexual object that its access is legitimized through unequal power relations, even in the narrative of "help" that actually reproduces domination. In the perspective of Stuart Hall's constructivist representation, the film does not simply reflect reality, but actively builds a collective understanding of women's subordination through stereotyping and binary opposition that places women as passive parties and men as powerful active subjects, so that objectification not only touches on the physical aspect, but also penetrates the realm of subjectivity and autonomy through psychological manipulation and social control. In the end, this objectification transforms into a cultural myth that seems natural, as seen from the involvement

of the younger generation as perpetrators and the absence of structural protection in the narrative, so that through the repetition of images and the silence of the victim, this film shows how the patriarchal representation system normalizes gender inequality as a daily reality. Academically, this research is expected to be a reference in the development of semiotics-based communication, film, and gender studies studies and encourage further research with other approaches such as critical discourse analysis or feminism, while practically, this finding is expected to be a reflection for film and media practitioners to be more sensitive in representing women and local culture by considering the value of justice, humanity, and gender equality so that social inequality does not reproduce in a sustainable manner.

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