

Representation of Gender Roles in the Household in the Film *Sore Istri dari Masa depan* (Semiotic Analysis of John Fiske)

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Article history

Submitted: 2026/05/01; Revised: 2026/07/11; Accepted: 2026/08/06

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the representation of gender roles in the household in the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* using John Fiske's semiotic analysis. Although the film presents a seemingly progressive futuristic narrative, the main issue addressed is whether it genuinely challenges domestic stereotypes or instead perpetuates patriarchal culture. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive-interpretive method, data was collected through scene observation and documentation, then analyzed across three semiotic levels: reality, representation, and ideology. The results indicate that the film does not represent an equal division of roles but rather operates as pseudo-feminism. At the reality level, the female character is burdened with emotional labor as the husband's caregiver and savior. At the representation level, cinematic techniques manipulatively romanticize the wife's suffering and sacrifices. At the ideology level, the film perpetuates patriarchal hegemony by reinforcing the myth of women as natural caregivers. In conclusion, the film uses the illusion of female independence as an aesthetic veil to maintain traditional patriarchal power structures in the domestic sphere.

Keywords

Gender Representation; John Fiske's Semiotics; Domestic Roles



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INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender equality is now an important concern in society, especially in Indonesia, in line with the social and economic transformation that provides wider space for women to play an active role in the public sphere. Conceptually, gender equality is not solely related to the biological similarities between men and women, but rather emphasizes a balance in the division of roles, responsibilities, access to resources, and involvement in decision-making in family life. Family welfare has been proven to improve when there is equality in gender roles between husband and wife. However, these social changes gave birth to complex phenomena such as *female breadwinners* or women as the main breadwinners of the family. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (2025), around 14.37% of workers in Indonesia are included in the category of *female breadwinners*, which indicates a

shift in the dynamics of the role of modern households.

Behind this increase in participation, there is a crucial reality that women still bear a lot of double roles (*double roles* or *double burdens*), namely the need to work outside the home while managing full domestic responsibilities. In feminist literature and gender studies, this double burden is often associated with patriarchal structures that are still entrenched. A study by Qothrunnada et al. (2024) found that patriarchal interpretations often limit women's participation in a balanced manner, confirming that although gender equality in the public sphere has progressed, role inequality in the domestic sphere is still a major challenge. The media, especially films as a product of mass culture, have great potential in representing and reproducing people's views on gender roles. Films work through the process of selection, emphasis, and framing of reality, so that what is shown on the screen is a construction of meaning that carries a certain ideological message. In contemporary Indonesian cinema, many studies have been conducted on women's representation. Research by Andriani (2024) found that conventional stereotypes are still dominant, while studies by Sutandio (2023) and Prasetyo et al. (2025) highlight how women's bodies in horror films are often exploited but also used as a symbol of *reclaiming women's power*. Another study by Yuliantini (2021) and Hasan Sazali et al. (2024) on the highest-grossing film and *Yuni's film* reveals the strong shackles of patriarchal culture in the social context of society.

Although these studies enrich academic discourse, much of the literature still focuses on common stereotypes or gender hierarchies in the public sphere. There is still a *research gap* about how power relations and the division of specific roles in the domestic realm are interpreted symbolically, especially in films with science fiction or *time travel premises* that are rarely raised. Therefore, the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* (2025) is a very relevant object of research. Through its representation of a future wife who comes to discipline her husband, the film invites critical questions: does the futuristic narrative really challenge established domestic stereotypes, or does it repackage patriarchal culture to look progressive without any fundamental structural changes?

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the representation of gender roles in the household in the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan*. This research applies the framework of John Fiske's semiotic theory, which provides a systematic view of reading media texts through three levels: reality, representation, and ideology. The selection of Fiske's framework was based on his ability to dismantle how the popular media produces myths and naturalizes dominant ideologies in society. Thus, this research is expected to provide practical contributions for film industry players to be more sensitive to gender equality issues, as well as theoretical contributions to enrich the literature on cultural studies and visual communication in Indonesia.

METHODS

This research uses an interpretive paradigm with a qualitative research approach to text analysis. The interpretive paradigm views that social reality is not a single and objective entity, but rather the result of the construction of meaning formed through symbols,

language, and cultural interactions. The nature of this research is descriptive-interpretive, which aims to describe and interpret the meaning behind social phenomena without intending to test statistical hypotheses. The object as well as the primary data source in this study is the romantic science fiction film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* (2025 release) which lasts approximately 144 minutes. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from literature studies of various academic literature relevant to the study of gender, film, and media semiotics.

The main data collection technique was carried out through observation of film texts and documentation. Observation was carried out systematically by watching the film repeatedly to identify visual and verbal signs that represented the division of household roles and power relations between the characters. The researcher assigned five *main scenes* as units of analysis that were observed specifically based on certain *time codes*, including: *Scene 1* (47:00–47:36) regarding the debate on smoking habits; *Scene 2* (40:23–40:55) shows the resistance of the male figure; *Scene 3* (48:50–49:11) when the female character cries silently; *Scene 4* (01:31:33–01:32:09) is about the anxiety of the female character; and *Scene 5* (01:51:59–02:00:04) is about the pilgrimage at the funeral. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the study applied triangulation techniques that included data triangulation (comparing different scenes in the film), method triangulation (comparing analysis between semiotic levels), and theoretical triangulation (linking findings to the concepts of gender and patriarchy).

Data analysis was carried out using John Fiske's semiotic approach. Fiske's analysis examines how media works as a system of signs through three hierarchical levels of meaning. First, the reality level, where the analysis is focused on social codes that are directly visible, such as appearance, clothing, facial expressions, gestures (*kinesics*), and verbal interactions that represent the characteristics of masculinity and femininity. Second, the representation level, which examines how the reality is technically constructed through camera codes (*camera angle, framing, close-up*), lighting, music, and narrative structure. Third, the ideological level, where the researcher uncovers the hidden meanings of the values of power relations, domestic division of labor, and patriarchy that are disseminated through the combination of these codes of reality and representation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study dissects the representation of gender roles through five *key scenes* in the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan*. Using John Fiske's semiotic analysis knife, the meaning is carried out in stages starting from the level of reality (character behavior), representation (cinematographic execution), to ideology (hidden message). The results of the analysis show that this film does not purely display gender equality, but is wrapped in a *pseudo-feminist discourse*. The following is a summary of the tabulation of data from the results of semiotic analysis in this study:

Table 1. Summary of John Fiske's Semiotic Analysis on the Movie *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan*

Scene / Time	Reality Level	Representation Level	Ideology Level
Scene 1 (47:00–47:36)	Debate on smoking habits; Jonathan is defensive, Sore assertively intervenes in personal space.	Medium-two-shot composition; low-key lighting (<i>chiaroscuro</i>); locking the character in tension.	Preservation of male privilege; the wife is positioned as the moral guardian of the husband.
Scene 2 (00:40–00:40)	Jonathan looked at Sore with a serious expression, jaw hardened, and a denial/defensive attitude.	Medium close-up on Jonathan; Dramatic low-key lighting ; framing centers emotions on the male ego.	Maintaining a male ego hierarchy that resists female authority and intervention.
Scene 3 (48:50–49:11)	Afternoon lying down and crying beside Jonathan who was asleep; endure heavy emotional burdens.	Close-up shot of Sore's crying face; blurring effect on Jonathan's figure in the background.	The glorification and normalization of emotional labor; the myth of women as natural <i>caregivers</i> .
Scene 4 (01:31:33–01:32:09)	In the afternoon, he sat pensively on the mattress with an anxious expression and a lowered posture.	Close-up shots that focus on Sore's anxious face; the dim lighting reinforces the personal atmosphere.	Strengthening the essential function of the wife as a passive supporting figure who must always be anxious and sacrificed.
Scene 5 (01:51:59–02:00:04)	Afternoon standing alone in a quiet cemetery area with a deep expression of grief.	Long-shots that isolate the character of the wife; dim lighting that romanticizes suffering.	The discourse of <i>pseudo-feminism</i> ; women's agency is sacrificed in order to save relations with men.

The discussion of the results of the analysis is elaborated into the following three main findings:

1. The Burden of *Emotional Labor* on the Wife's Character In *Scenes 3, 4, and 5*, it is clear how the female character bears the emotional burden (*emotional labor*) which is very

uneven. At the level of reality, this is shown through the gestures and expressions of Sora's face who is exhausted, crying in silence, and having to make a pilgrimage alone in the cemetery area. This suffering is then exploited at the level of representation through cinematic choices. The use of *close-up shots* intensely frames Sore's anxious face, combined with *low-key lighting* techniques to dramatize her grief. During the funeral scene, *long-shot* compositions are used to isolate Sore in a quiet landscape. Ideologically, this visual language actually romanticizes women's mental suffering, reduces their excess across time to mere a tool to rehabilitate their husbands, and reinforces the myth that women are actually natural *caregivers* who must continue to make sacrifices.

2. Pseudo-Authority and the Preservation of Male Privilege The interaction in *Scenes 1* and *2* reveals how power relations in the domestic space are actually still uneven. On a reality level, Jonathan's character shows closed *body language*, hardened jaw, and defensive attitude as his wife tries to improve his smoking habit. At the representation level, this scene is constructed using a *medium-two-shot* composition and *shallow depth of field* with *chiaroscuro* (high contrast) lighting. This technique visually imprisons the two characters in a highly confrontational atmosphere. Although Sore appears to have the authority to regulate her husband's lifestyle, ideological analysis shows that Jonathan's neglect is a manifestation of *male privilege*. Men seem to be free to make mistakes and be careless, while women are required to have extra patience to correct them, so that the real control is still held by the men.
3. Cinematic Manipulation in Naturalizing Patriarchy The most critical finding is how the technical elements of cinematography are used as a tool to normalize patriarchal hegemony. In *Scene 3*, the director's decision to focus the lens sharply on Sore's suffering face while giving Jonathan's figure in the background a blur effect is a *framing manipulation*. The audience is psychologically led to sympathize only with the wife's grief, without being invited to criticize the root of the problem: the husband's negligence. As branded *content*, this film practices *gender-washing*. Conservative patriarchal ideology is wrapped in aesthetic visuals to make it look as if it carries the value of women's independence. This kind of representation is very risky because it can instill a false consciousness in society, giving the impression that enduring mental anguish for the sake of male selfishness is a natural form of love in marriage.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of John Fiske's semiotic analysis that dissects the level of reality, representation, and ideology, this study concludes that the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* does not show an equal division of gender roles in the household at all. Instead, the film operates as a problematic negotiation arena, where the independence and agency of female characters are only used as an aesthetic veil to perpetuate traditional patriarchal ideologies in the domestic realm. More specifically at the level of reality, this film codifies the inequality of the distribution of psychological burden through *emotional labor* that is completely imposed on the character of the wife. The character of Sore is constructed as a figure who

must always supervise, discipline, and think about the safety of her husband's future. On the other hand, Jonathan's character is represented through passivity and defensiveness that clearly reflects male *privilege*. Men are indirectly understood for their carelessness, while the privilege of *time travel* that women have in the end remain imprisoned within the limits of the domestic parenting function.

At the level of representation, the inequality of the relationship is naturalized through the manipulation of cinematographic elements in a structured manner. The use of *close-up shot*, *low-key lighting*, and *framing* techniques consistently exploits the wife's suffering, tears, and anxieties to provoke the audience's empathy. This visual decision effectively romanticizes women's unilateral sacrifice and transforms the subordinated discourse into a seemingly beautiful and noble narrative of love. At its peak at the ideological level, the film is proven to produce a *pseudo-feminism* discourse (pseudo-feminism). Although on the surface of the film it seems progressive by giving the authority of domestic regulation to the wife, this power is actually still shackled by the ancient myth about the nature of women as *caregivers*. The ideological message that is firmly embedded is that no matter how far a woman's achievements or abilities may be, her main existential task remains to sustain and resolve the chaos created by men in order to maintain the integrity of the institution of marriage.

As an implication and prospect for future development, this study emphasizes that film media does not only reflect reality, but actively participates in shaping and reproducing gender ideology in society. Therefore, these findings are expected to be practical evaluation material for filmmakers and creative industry players especially in producing *branded content* to be more careful in designing visual narratives so as not to get caught up in *gender-washing*. This study can also serve as a foothold for follow-up studies to examine audience reception of similar content, while encouraging the improvement of critical media literacy for audiences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express his deepest gratitude to the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Esa Unggul University, for the facilitation and academic support during this research process. Special appreciation and deep gratitude were conveyed to Mrs. Dr. Yumelda Sari, S.Sos., M.Si., as the supervisor who had taken the time to provide valuable direction, critical advice, and motivation until this research could be completed properly. Gratitude was also addressed to the Dean of the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Mrs. Dr. Erna Febriani, S.Si., M.Si., Head of Study Program, Mr. Dr. Ballian Siregar, S.Sos., M.Si., and the Head of Broadcasting Specialization, Mr. Dr. Bayquni, S.Sos., M.Pd., M.IKom., for the guidance and institutional support provided. Finally, the author expresses his gratitude to the family and all parties who have provided moral and material support so that this scientific article can be realized.

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