

## Nation and the construction of masculinities in the film *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*

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### Abstract

Films often represent masculinities influenced by social constructions produced and legitimised by the state. This research examines how the state shapes multiple forms of masculinity through the film *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*. The film critiques the hegemonic masculinity constructed by the state, while also illustrating that masculinity is not monolithic. Instead, it consists of diverse and sometimes conflicting contextually negotiated constructions. This study uses multimodal discourse analysis to explore the interrelationship between the state, masculinities, and gender representation within the film. The findings reveal that the state plays a significant role in maintaining hegemonic masculinity through policies and regulations that reinforce patriarchal norms. However, the film also opens up spaces for renegotiation, particularly for heterosexual men who fail to conform to dominant standards, allowing them to reclaim recognition within the masculine hierarchy. Furthermore, the film, produced in the Reformation era, set in the Orde Baru era, reflects a transitional moment where representations of masculinity become more fluid and contested. In a patriarchal system, while masculinity is still maintained through social control mechanisms, its boundaries are increasingly permeable, enabling cultural shifts and new gender negotiations. This research contributes to gender and media studies by showing how films, particularly *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*, can challenge and disrupt patriarchal constructions of masculinity shaped by the state, thereby opening up new avenues for understanding and redefining masculinity.

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## Introduction

Films often reflect the country's socio-political context, using male characters to symbolise national identity and societal expectations (Gurkan, 2022). Representations of masculinity in film are strongly influenced by the country's cultural and historical context (Kalmár, 2017). As ideological tools, films reflect social reality and construct public perceptions of gender and



power. Through their narratives, visuals, and symbolism, films can reproduce competing norms of masculinities, including hegemonic and subordinate forms. For instance, studies have shown that popular media often reinforce societal biases using narrative tropes, which can perpetuate gender stereotypes and influence audience perceptions (Gala et al., 2020). Analyses of the Bollywood film industry consistently reveal pervasive gender bias in both narrative structures and character portrayals, highlighting cinema's role in shaping and reinforcing societal norms regarding gender roles (Madaan et al., 2017). Through its narratives, visuals and symbolism, films can reproduce competing norms of masculinities, including hegemonic and subordinate forms. To explain the relationship between film and culture, Graeme Turner (2003) proposes two approaches practised simultaneously: the textual approach that focuses on the film text, while the contextual approach focuses on tracing the myth or ideology of the film back to the culture of society.

In Indonesia, particularly during the Orde Baru era (1966–1998), the state established an authoritarian regime that emphasised political stability, economic development, and social control. Within this context, masculinity was constructed as a symbol of national stability and state control, embodied in the figure of a disciplined, strong, and loyal military man (Bourchier & Jusuf, 2023). This militaristic ideology permeated various aspects of social life through media, education, and popular culture, positioning the male body as a representation of order, strength, and obedience to state norms. Hegemonic masculinity during the Orde Baru was shaped by narratives that emphasised dominance, hierarchical leadership, and legitimised violence, particularly in the name of national stability (Sen & Hill, 2007) Heryanto, 2008). However, since the transition to the Reformation era after 1998, there has been a shift in how masculinity is represented. Democratic openness and media liberalisation have allowed the emergence of alternative forms of masculinity that are more ambivalent, vulnerable, and even challenge dominant gender norms. The collapse of the Orde Baru regime in 1998 marked the beginning of the Reformation era, characterised by democratisation, decentralisation, and greater media freedom. This transition significantly influenced how masculinity and gender roles began to be reimaged in Indonesian cinema.

For Indonesian society, representations of masculinity in film are often closely intertwined with state ideology that has historically maintained the power of the patriarchal system through rules, policies, and ideological control mechanisms. The development of Indonesian films during the Orde Baru era tended to be confined by the authorities' interests. Masculinity was constructed to align with state ideals, portraying men as strong, dominant, and sexually assertive as part of a broader project to sustain social stability through gender hierarchy (Hermawan, 2017; Mahmudah et al., 2024). These films often served not merely as entertainment but as ideological tools that reinforced patriarchal norms, while restricting the narrative space available to alternative or subversive gender expressions. The film industry was under the supervision of the *Menkopolkam* and the Minister of Information, which resulted in so many regulations that showed the state's authority and castrated the creative ideas of filmmakers. At that time, film was a propaganda tool for the state to convey and influence the public to support government programs (Irawanto, 1999), including in the division of gender roles and functions. This strategic use of cinema was evident in portraying male characters who embodied the ideals of strength, control, and dominance, reflecting the government's efforts to reinforce patriarchal norms (Hegarty, 2021). As Foucault (1978) theorists theorise, modern states govern through law and repression and through *bio-power* by regulating bodies, reproduction, and health norms. In this framework, the KB program becomes a state apparatus that does not account for personal realities but seeks to discipline the population through standardised reproductive expectations.

The representation of masculinity in film cannot be viewed as a singular, stable entity. Instead, masculinity exists in various forms that compete with and negotiate one another within social and cultural contexts. As Pascoe (2015) argues, masculinity is a socially constructed concept whose meaning shifts depending on the context in which it is performed and represented. As a cultural artefact and agent of socialisation, film plays a key role in shaping

individuals' understanding of what it means to be masculine, with representations that differ across genres and reflect the multifaceted nature of masculine identities. The concept of *masculinities* developed by Connell (2005) emphasises that, in addition to dominant hegemonic masculinity, there are also subordinate, marginalised, and alternative forms of masculinity that are often excluded or sidelined within patriarchal systems (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Moreover, masculinity in media such as film is shaped by social and ideological symbols that allow both the reinforcement and contestation of dominant gender norms (Gürkan, 2022). In the film, this diversity is reflected in male characters who portray a dynamic interplay of strength, weakness, violence, and vulnerability. The film not only reproduces hegemonic masculinity associated with power and dominance but also offers a depiction of masculinity that is fragile, vulnerable, and negotiated within specific social boundaries.

Masculinity is often central to the formation of national identities. Nationalism often incorporates concepts of male courage and masculinity, positioning men as defenders of the nation (Nagel, 2019), where class, race and sexuality are components of national identities that differ by region (Manchanda & de Haan, 2018; Sherr & Adedoyin, 2020). During the Orde Baru era, idealised masculinity was characterised by a strong and aggressive man who acted as the dominant head of the family. At the same time, women were constructed as obedient companions who carried out domestic tasks (Heriyanto, 2023). Orde Baru is known as a regime that strongly emphasises the role of men as the guardians of national and family stability, creating a pattern of hegemonic masculinity that emphasises violence, discipline, and control over the body, including women's bodies (Wulan, 2024). Social representations of masculinity are directed by hegemonic perceptions that are perpetuated through symbolic violence (Nascimento et al., 2020). Symbolic violence is produced, consumed and reproduced in everyday social practices. Not only that, but symbolic violence is also consumed through text production in cultural products such as movies (Martin et al., 2021; Sartini & Adrian, 2023).

Representations of men in films are usually dominated by characters of hegemonic masculinity who are depicted as heterosexual, have physical strength, and can solve problems through or without violence (Barros-Grela, 2022). Meanwhile, subordinate masculinity groups are homosexual men (Connell, 2005) or men who are dominated and oppressed by hegemonic masculinity (Udasmoro & Rahmawati, 2021). In movies, they are usually presented as extras who complement the storyline or as characters who reinforce the position of hegemonic masculinity (Gürkan, 2022). One of the aspects of masculinity shown in movies is about sexuality, especially about sex roles (Fejes, 1992) and the male body (penis) (Lehman, 2013). In other words, sexuality is an aspect that is considered important to maintain male power within the patriarchal frame. In relation to socio-politics, nationalism not only shapes male identity but also limits women's role in the state. Men are considered warriors, leaders, and protectors of the nation. At the same time, women are often reduced to cultural symbols and mothers of the nation whose job is to maintain morality and give birth to the next generation (Nagel, 2019).

One of the films that represent masculinity in a socio-political context and its relation to the state's role in reconstructing the ideal male identity is *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas* (2022). Set during the Orde Baru era, the film tries to reflect on how the construction of masculinity is not only controlled by the patriarchal system but also by state intervention through policies, discourses, and media representations. The movie, which raises the theme of sexual problems of heterosexual men during the Orde Baru era, presents narratives that make men as Others in the politics of masculinity. This movie is interesting because although it takes place in the Orde Baru era, it was produced in the Reformation era. Of course, this will significantly affect how masculinity, intertwined with the state, is represented and why it is still interesting to be shown in films produced in the reform era. The constructions of masculinities shaped by the state in the discourse of sexuality, especially during the Orde Baru era, in the film *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*.

## Method

This research examines the film *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas* (2021) with a critical paradigm using Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse analysis. Multimodal discourse analysis was chosen as the method and technique of data analysis in this research because it provides a methodical tool to examine the configuration of discourse in a text. The text in multimodal discourse analysis contains a combination of different modes arranged in such a way as to form an ensemble so that it represents certain discourses about reality (Noviani, 2018).

The primary data in this research are images, sounds, and narratives in the form of scenes and character dialogues that represent masculinity constructed by the state in the film *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*. The analysis process also pays attention to the whole film, storyline, and characterisation, and unpacks the ideology conveyed in the film. In analysing the data, Kress and Leeuwen (2020) offer "grammar" as an important framework in multimodal analysis. Images can be treated like language and have three metafunctions, namely, ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Several stages are needed to analyse the data in the film, namely, scene selection, scene and dialogue description, composition analysis, and semiotic modes analysis (Kasni et al., 2022).

## Results and Discussion

Films are not only a medium of entertainment for the public. Mack (2017) shows that film reflects social reality and shapes how society understands identity and power relations, including those related to gender. Indonesia, as a country that adheres to the concept of heteronormativity, certainly always represents traditional gender values and norms that place the ideal male as a dominating and controlling figure (Afdholy, 2019). The policies produced by the government during the Orde Baru era were, in fact, based on a state ideology that wanted social stability and control, which ultimately limited gender roles, especially women, and strengthened patriarchal values in society. As Hyunanda et al. (2021) explain, the concept of "State Ibuism" promoted by the regime positioned women primarily as wives and mothers, legitimising gender hierarchies and limiting their social roles.

### Disciplining the Masculine Body in Sexual Discourse during the ORBA Period

In the discourse of sexuality, the male body is not just a free individual object. The male body is a symbol in a system that is influenced by power and domination in a socio-political context. Not only does power control men's physicality or sexuality, but it also controls a person's social role, behaviour, and gender identity. The male body becomes a tool to reproduce and maintain existing power structures (Elliott, 2016; Dvoryanchikov et al., 2024). In movies, one of the themes that experienced a heyday during the Orde Baru era, and is now shown in a different style and perspective in the Reformation era, is the theme of sexuality. If we look deeper, the theme of sexuality raised by filmmakers during the Orde Baru era has a very significant difference from the theme of sexuality that was raised during the Reformation period. Themes around sex in films during the Orde Baru were present and dominated because they brought in greater profits and, of course, were more attractive to the audience, even though in terms of stories, they were of lesser quality (Nugroho & Herlina S, 2015). The display of half-naked female bodies with seductive sighing sounds became the primary commodity for filmmakers during the Orde Baru, reflecting the commodification of women's bodies as visual pleasure under authoritarian censorship (Fatmawaty et al., 2022).

However, the sexual themes raised in films produced during the Reformation era show a much different perspective. Instead of presenting sexually idealised men, filmmakers in the Reformation era dared to raise men's sexual problems as the main theme in their films. The vital and sensitive realm for men to be discussed has shown that men also have weaknesses and experience pressure in meeting the social demands of society. One of them is the film *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*, which illustrates how social pressure on masculinity can



affect men's mental and physical well-being. It also highlights how toxic masculine constructs can negatively impact both individuals and the broader society (Khan et al., 2008).

In this movie, we can see how the state controls the discourse of masculinity and sexuality with a patriarchal regime supported by the militaristic Orde Baru. The film comes as a reflection on the social construction of masculinity that developed during the Orde Baru era, which was synonymous with power and violence. Conventional definitions of power and masculinity are used to describe both, such as authority, control and assertiveness. This conflation suggests that the male body symbolises power within the structures of society (Shapiro et al., 2011). However, Connell (2017) asserts that violence in patriarchal systems is not simply individual behaviour, but a structural mechanism that sustains the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, especially when cultural legitimacy is weakened.

The *warung* scene at minute 04:58 provides a striking visual representation of how verbal violence toward subordinated groups, especially women, becomes normalised in everyday male social interactions. Set in a dimly lit wooden *warung* adorned with small yellow lights, cigarette smoke, beer bottles, and a billiard table surrounded by men, the visual arrangement constructs an atmosphere of rough, body-centred masculinity. The camera adopts a static, wide shot, capturing the entire space without dramatic emphasis on any character. Remarks such as “*it's good to be a woman, her pussy can be used to pay debts... prostitute,*” are delivered casually, without overt emotion, making the misogynistic rhetoric appear ordinary and unquestioned. No character reacts with protest, and the audience is positioned as passive observers invited to witness, but not to intervene. The verbal aggression soon escalates into physical violence as Ajo Kawir incites a fight, and he appears to derive satisfaction from being beaten, suggesting a form of existential affirmation through pain.

What is particularly striking is the background music accompanying the scene, the dangdut song *Kerukunan* (Pancasila) by Mara Karma plays with lyrics such as “*let's uphold the image of the national philosophy, Pancasila*”. The ideological contrast between the harmonious nationalist lyrics and the chaotic violence on screen creates a sharp irony. Rather than embodying state values, this male space becomes a site where misogyny and masculine aggression are socially legitimised. The film subtly critiques the dissonance between state ideology and lived masculine power relations within lower-class male public spaces.

The film, which takes place during the Orde Baru era in 1989, displays masculinity and violence that work together as a means of control used by hegemonic masculinity to maintain its dominance. The choice of setting in the 1980s is certainly not without reason. The nation's political conditions at the time were turbulent, which the filmmakers used to show the complexity present in the paradox of the policies produced by the ruling regime, which was full of violence and control (Nugroho & Herlina, 2015). The character of Ajo Kawir is depicted as living in a social structure where physical strength is both evidence and a benchmark of masculinity that has been subordinated because of his inability to erect his penis. Ajo Kawir's violent behaviour compensates for his sexual impotence, reflecting the pressure to perform masculinity through physical dominance. Violence in this movie is associated with male virility. This means that even though Ajo Kawir's penis is sexually dysfunctional, he still strives for masculinity through his great physical strength and courage. Simply put, the movie shows that violence and masculinity are inextricably linked as mechanisms to maintain social control that builds power.

Ajo Kawir's impotence not only shows his inability to have sexual intercourse, but also illustrates how, in the patriarchal system of the Orde Baru, control over the male body was under the control of the state (state masculinity). The audience can see that the patriarchal culture that was so strong during the New Order not only had a physical impact but also put psychological pressure on men. Millet (2000) explains that subordinate groups tend not to have representation in several recognised political structures, so that their position tends to be unstable, and oppression takes place consistently. The film explicitly criticises and explores how society during the Orde Baru constructs ideas of toxic and violent masculinity, where men often feel the need to prove themselves through violence and physical strength or sexual ability.

Sexual violence in films is often presented as a tool of domination, both physically and symbolically, which is in line with the concept of *committed sexual violence* in patriarchal societies (Batool, 2018; Downey et al., 2023). In their article, Eastel et al. (2015) explain that sexual violence in popular movies is presented as a normal act in the context of power and domination, especially in patriarchal societies. Ultimately, this will encourage and reinforce permissive attitudes towards sexual violence in society. In the film *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*, not only physical violence, verbal violence through words that harass subordinate groups is considered normal. For example, in the dialogue at minute 04.58, when a visitor to the “warung” comments on the topic being discussed, “*it’s good to be a woman, her pussy can be used to pay debts ... basic ... prostitute*”. Hate speech, demeaning and harassing subordinate groups, namely women and men who are not ideal, can be found throughout the movie. The permissive attitude of the social environment shows the normalisation of violence as well as that violence is a tool to legitimise power (Patel, 2024).

In this film, subordinated male characters such as Ajo Kawir and Mono Ompong are often forced to adapt to certain expectations. The state, in this case, facilitates the creation of a strict discourse of masculinity where the male body is expected to be able to show strength and toughness to strengthen the state's power structure. In the movie *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*, we can see that the body is controlled by the state through rules that force everyone to submit to a consensus. In the scene at 41:01, for example, when the Population Census officer comes to Iteung (Ajo Kawir's wife) to socialise and record the number of family members through the “Keluarga Berencana” (KB) program, we can see the state present as a control over the body. If we connect Kate Millett's thoughts on sexual politics with the KB program in the Orde Baru era, then, in addition to aiming to control the birth rate, the KB program also acts as a mechanism that binds men and women in carrying out roles in the family. This reflects the Orde Baru broader project of governing gender through state apparatus and family planning policies.

This scene is constructed with a deliberate visual emphasis on two elements: the camera slowly zooms in on the census form, focusing specifically on the “Keluarga Berencana” (Family Planning) section, while the background sound or other dialogue is subdued. This cinematic choice centres the viewer's attention on the administrative symbols of the state as they enter the domestic sphere. By lingering on the form, the film not only documents a bureaucratic interaction but symbolically highlights how the state intervenes in its citizens' bodies through statistics and institutional language. This moment also reveals a compelling ambiguity if Ajo Kawir's impotence is already known by the community, why does the census officer still inquire about the couple's plans for having children? On one hand, this underscores how state mechanisms operate based on standardised expectations, often overlooking individual realities. On the other hand, it reflects a subtler form of symbolic violence: women are still positioned as reproductive subjects within a system that disregards whether such roles are feasible or relevant to their lives. Instead of deconstructing the biological function of the family, the state reinforces the imagination of a normative family structure, one that upholds masculinity as tied to the ability to produce offspring.

Overall, this scene illustrates that the state's control over men's and women's bodies is not limited to physical coercion but is also exercised through institutional policies and regulatory discourse. The state enters the private sphere not as a protector, but as a regulator, compelling individuals to conform to normative frameworks it has designed. In this context, Ajo Kawir's impotence becomes not only a biological dysfunction but also an ideological one he fails to meet the state's expectations of a productive, reproductive male body.

The state during the Orde Baru era represented patriarchal power through its policies that reinforced the idea that individuals do not have full control over their bodies. In other words, the body is often used as an object of state policies aimed at control (Arribas, 2024). The character of Ajo Kawir in this movie faces the paradox of masculinity. On the one hand, he tries to internalise a masculinity based on physical strength to meet the standards of ideal masculinity. However, on the other hand, his impotence puts him in a subordinate position in a

patriarchal system that judges masculinity by sexual dominance. His impotence is not only personally oppressive but also reveals how patriarchy imposes rigid standards that marginalise men who cannot meet them. Ajo Kawir, who was brought up in a harsh environment, was taught to be a strong man, but the traumatic event he experienced when he witnessed a crazy woman being raped by security forces damaged his body and mentality as a man. This means that the state controls the masculine body to be strong and aggressive, but in the process, it creates trauma that damages the body and mentality that is unable to withstand these standards.

This paper argues that the masculine male body in the Orde Baru era was not only controlled and disciplined but also victimised by the state. The state has imposed ideal standards of masculinity on men, but at the same time, it has also produced trauma that damages men themselves. So, when the character Ajo Kawir experiences sexual dysfunction because of these traumatic events, we can see how state-produced violence oppresses women directly but also destroys men indirectly. In the context of Kate Millett's sexual politics, this proves that sexuality is not just a personal matter but part of a larger system of power. Subordinated groups do not have adequate options through existing political institutions; thus, they will be prevented from organising themselves into conventional political struggle and opposition (2000).

In the context of citizenship, this film also reveals how the state during the Orde Baru era not only defined ideal masculinity but simultaneously determined who was considered an ideal citizen based on gender performativity. Men who are strong, disciplined, productive, and able to control women are represented as the ideal embodiment of the male citizen expected by the state (Heriyanto, 2023; Sherr & Adedoyin, 2020). Meanwhile, men with defective sexuality or bodies that fail to meet hegemonic masculine norms, such as Ajo Kawir, are placed in an ambivalent position: they are not only considered failures as men but also excluded from the narrative of the ideal citizen constructed by the state. In this logic, the masculine body is not only controlled to reinforce patriarchy but also politicised as a tool for shaping loyal and obedient citizens within the patriarchal state order. As Nagel (Nagel, 2019) and Connell (2005) explain, projects of nationalism and citizenship often involve the construction of masculinity as a symbol of state power. The state utilises masculine symbols to reinforce authority, thereby only certain forms of masculinity are accepted as the standard of full citizenship, namely, those who can serve, protect, and control in accordance with dominant gender norms (Nagel, 2019; Sherr & Adedoyin, 2020).

### **The Progressivity and Individualisation of Masculinity Politics in Indonesian Film**

During the Orde Baru era, Indonesian cinema was dominated by representations of hegemonic masculinity that presented men as dominant, strong, and aggressive (Budiman & Sofianto, 2018). During this period, films rarely provided negotiation space for weak or subordinated masculinities because the state held full control over the social order. In the film *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*, although it is set in the Orde Baru, it should be remembered that the film was produced in the Reformation era, where discourses on gender and sexual politics were more open. This allows for more explicit narrative in criticising the patriarchal system that not only oppresses women, but also men who are considered to have failed to meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity. As such, the movie is not only a historical portrait, but also a reflection on the changing sexual politics in Indonesia.

Ajo Kawir's character represents a subordinated masculinity in a patriarchal system that places masculinity in physical strength and sexual performance. Ajo Kawir's inability to prove his manhood through penile performance is the cause of the oppression he experiences from a system that defines men through the subjugation of women in a sexual context. Ajo Kawir, who is portrayed as an incomplete man, tries to negotiate his masculinity with physical strength. The audience can see how Ajo Kawir builds an identity as a fearless fighter to maintain his existence in the patriarchal system. In other words, although Ajo Kawir failed to meet the standards of manhood through sexual performance, he at least managed to meet the expectations of masculinity through his physical strength.

Through the dialog at 06:12 "*paid or not, I want to fight, do you know where I can find pak lebe?*" or when Iwan Angsa's character describes Ajo Kawir at 13:48 "*he may not need your money, but he'll be happy to have a reason to fight.*" The author sees that by continuing to look for physical fights, Ajo Kawir tries to show that masculinity is not only measured through sexual ability but also through physical fights. As Clark argues, Indonesian cinema has long portrayed masculinity through acts of symbolic violence that affirm male dominance while simultaneously revealing its fragility. Ajo Kawir's compulsive need to engage in physical fights, despite his impotence, is not only a literal form of violence but also a symbolic one, an attempt to assert agency in a system that renders him socially subordinate. This form of violence, as represented in the film, reflects what Clark describes as "the persistent anxiety over male legitimacy in post-authoritarian Indonesia" (Clark, 2004). However, what is interesting here is that physical combat is not Ajo Kawir's attempt to fight the patriarchal system that is deeply rooted in society, but rather an attempt to renegotiate his masculinity so that it can still be accepted and recognised in the system.

This tendency is vividly illustrated in the scene where Ajo Kawir stands in a combat stance facing Iteung, as seen in the frame. Set against a mountainous backdrop with bright daylight, the composition presents a striking contrast to the earlier depictions of violence in dark, chaotic environments. Here, the fight is not driven by rage or domination, but rather by a desire for affirmation. Ajo Kawir does not fight to destroy, but to feel through pain; he seeks to confirm his presence as a man. His posture, framed symmetrically with Iteung, does not assert superiority but equality. This moment reflects his internalised belief that masculinity can still be earned through physical struggle, even if sexual virility is no longer attainable. However, this struggle is not aimed at dismantling patriarchal standards, but at negotiating space within them, maintaining visibility and legitimacy through the only mode of masculinity left accessible to him, the language of the body in combat. The film tries to open a space for subordinate masculinity to represent its vulnerability on the one hand, but on the other hand, it also emphasises that the ideal standard as a man must still be pursued by showing other forms of strength and dominance. The film does open space for a more inclusive sexual politics, but it still operates within a patriarchal framework, where both men must conform to the existing system to exist.

In the end, even though the film opens a discourse of masculinity that is more progressive, the representation still operates within the boundaries of patriarchy that are maintained. However, the question then becomes whether the negotiation space given to subordinated men in this film is a form of liberation and resistance to the patriarchal system or only offers a new form of adaptation within an unshakable patriarchal system. This aligns with the findings of Aminudin et al. (2024), who argue that male actors in Indonesian comedy films of the Reform Era use their bodies not just for visual narration but as a medium to express deeper themes related to power, identity, and social dynamics, indicating a form of masculine resistance within the constraints of existing power structures. The character of Ajo Kawir in the film, *Seperti Dendam, Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*, is only given the space to negotiate his masculinity through violence. Ajo Kawir's standard of masculinity refers to the patriarchal system that formulates ideal masculinity as a strong man, not afraid of death, and brave. The authors see that there is no space other than violence available for Ajo Kawir to exist and prove his masculinity. The flexibility provided is not a form of resistance but rather proves to the audience that the patriarchal system still survives by providing a little negotiation space for subordinate masculinity within limits that it can still control.

However, the deeper issue is not only about how masculinity is negotiated within the patriarchal system, but also how the struggle for masculinity is constructed as a personal responsibility rather than as part of structural change in this film. Although the film opens space for complex discussions on gender and sexuality, it ultimately adopts an individualistic approach that restricts broader structural critique. In such a film, *the* character of Ajo Kawir, who becomes an outsider in the politics of masculinity due to his impotence, is shown to have to continuously prove his ability through physical violence to be recognised as a man, while the



patriarchal system that creates pressure on the male body is only presented implicitly without deeper exploration.

The film does not show the audience how impotence is viewed and discussed in society, or how the patriarchal system produces standards of masculinity based on penis performance, and to what extent the state plays a role in constructing ideal masculinity as a reference for men to fulfil. As a result, the audience cannot see how structured gender norms force men to constantly prove their masculinity through sexual performance. And because the only solution offered is through violence, the character of Ajo Kawir faces his problems and inner turmoil alone without any social support, there is no space to share experiences between men who experience similar experiences. In fact, the author sees in the scene where Ajo Kawir's penis finally regains its erection as if it were marked as individual victories alone. There should be a broader reflection on how patriarchy has defined masculinity so strictly and rigidly.

In the scene at 01:34:24, Ajo Kawir's character is seen letting Mono Ompong's character fight for money to treat his condition of premature ejaculation. Rather than showing solidarity with other sexually subordinated men, Ajo Kawir reinforces the notion that everyone must bear their own burden. This makes the author realise that this film reinforces the assumption that masculinity problems are personal problems, not part of social problems that require structural changes. Patriarchy allows limited negotiation for subordinated men—but only if they conform to its prescribed values.

One aspect that the authors observe has not been raised in this film is criticism of the broader social structure. Films *Seperti Dendam Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas* could have further explored how impotence is perceived by society or how state control over the male body influences the construction of masculinity. Instead of only presenting physical fights as a personal solution, this film could also present a broader discourse on how subordinate masculinity is a product of gender norms that are systemically shaped by state power and religion.

The tendency of Indonesian films in the Reformation era to present solutions to gender issues in the individual sphere is not without reason. Some of the reasons, according to the author's observations, that underlie this include the fact that the film industry is still market-oriented. In the context of the media industry, film is a cultural industry that moves in business logic by calculating profits and often must ignore the role and position of film for the interests and education of the nation (Komalawati, 2017). Films that are too political and offer social criticism are often considered less interesting and less sellable. Narratives that are personal and full of emotional scenes are, in fact, easier to accept because they can build audience empathy. Narratives that emphasise the dramatisation of individual journeys and struggles are considered to display stronger character dynamics that are easier to attract viewers and guarantee the success of the film. In addition, although the space for freedom of expression has opened, censorship and regulation remain a challenge for films that want to convey sharper social criticism of the political system and dominant culture (Pradsmadji & Mutmainnah, 2022).

This is a challenge for filmmakers in the Indonesian film industry to prioritise structural criticism without having to eliminate market considerations, regulations, and a sense of dramatic narrative. By shifting the focus from personal struggles to broader social movements, Indonesian films can offer more complex and in-depth representations. This means that the challenge for filmmakers in the future is no longer limited to raising themes or presenting characters who dare to go against the norm, but also how systemic changes can be brought about through solidarity, collective resistance, and more organised resistance.

## Conclusion

The film *Seperti Dendam, Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas* illustrates how the state plays a pivotal role in shaping and regulating masculinity through ideological mechanisms inherited from the Orde Baru regime. Rather than merely portraying masculinity as an individual trait, the film reveals how it is systematically constructed and constrained by state power, through discourses on violence, sexuality, and the ideal male citizen. Masculinity in this context is not monolithic. While the state-prescribed patriarchal order restricts the possibilities for non-

normative expressions of masculinity, the film shows that the hierarchy is not entirely rigid. Through characters like Ajo Kawir, we see that masculinity is constantly negotiated, albeit within a framework that still upholds dominance, physical strength, and sexual performance as benchmarks of male legitimacy. In her study of gender and nationalism in Indonesian cinema, Paramaditha (2007) notes that post-authoritarian films often become a battleground for competing masculinities and alternative imaginaries of citizenship. *Seperti Dendam, Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas* engages with this contestation by presenting a protagonist who neither fulfils the phallic norms of masculine power nor aligns with militaristic ideals. Instead, Ajo Kawir's body becomes the site of contradiction between power and vulnerability, violence and impotence, compliance and resistance.

This study highlights how cinematic representations of masculinity function not only as cultural critiques but also as reflections of the state's gendered construction of citizenship. In this framework, hegemonic masculinity emerges as a hidden criterion for ideal citizenship, rewarding men who perform strength, control, and obedience to state ideology. Conversely, men who fall outside this model, such as those with sexual dysfunction or emotional vulnerability, are positioned on the margins of political and cultural belonging. By exposing this dynamic, the film raises urgent questions about how Indonesian masculinity and citizenship itself is defined, performed, and policed. Future research may explore how other films across Southeast Asia similarly negotiate or resist state-sanctioned gender norms, especially in post-authoritarian or transitional societies. Ultimately, this study affirms that masculinity is not a fixed identity, but a political project, constantly shaped by the tensions between state power, cultural ideology, and individual experience.

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