Feminist Representation in the Film *Bidaah:*
A Critical Examination of Gender Norms in Traditional Society

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the representation of feminism in the film *BIDAAH*, focusing on its critique of established gender norms in traditional society. The film was selected for analysis because it explicitly presents the narrative of women who confront various cultural, religious, and social pressures within a patriarchal framework. Through a qualitative research approach, this study utilizes Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method to explore how language, visuals, and narrative structures in the film illustrate women's struggles against a repressive system. The analysis reveals that the female protagonist in *BIDAAH* is not simply depicted as a passive victim, but also as a dynamic agent of resistance. She challenges conventional interpretations of women's roles within the family and broader community, asserting her autonomy. The film symbolically represents resistance to male dominance and the unjust social structures that limit women's choices by portraying women's decisions that defy societal norms and expectations. These choices are often deemed 'deviant' within the traditional context, highlighting the film's subversion of gender roles. Thus, *BIDAAH* emerges as a cultural medium that conveys a feminist message, not only portraying the empowerment of women but also opening a space for deeper reflection on the pervasive issue of gender inequality in traditional societies. The film's critique serves as a compelling commentary on the need for social change regarding gender roles and expectations.

Keywords: *Feminism, BIDAAH film, gender norms, patriarchy, resistance*.

INTRODUCTION

In traditional Indonesian society, gender norms have long assigned distinct roles to men and women, often subordinating women and restricting their public participation. These roles are reflected in women's limited access to education and employment, along with the dominant expectation that they focus on domestic responsibilities such as child-rearing and household management, while men are seen as primary providers (Lewis, 2001).

Film, as a cultural medium, has significant potential to critique existing social norms, including gender roles (Surahman, 2018). Through narrative and character representation, films can highlight gender inequality and spark discussions on women's roles in specific social contexts. A recent example is *Women from Rote Island*, which addresses sexual violence and the struggles of women confronting trauma and social pressures (Nyangoen, 2023).

Other notable feminist films such as *Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts* and *Siti* have similarly depicted women's resistance to patriarchal control, offering layered critiques of gender-based oppression through culturally embedded narratives. However, *BIDAAH* stands out in its engagement with religio-cultural traditions, making it an urgent subject of analysis

in the context of feminist film studies, particularly in the context of Malaysia and Indonesia, where religious and culture cannot be separated.

This study focuses on the representation of feminism in the film *BIDAAH*, aiming to examine how the film critiques gender norms in traditional society. Unlike previous films that primarily emphasize personal trauma or domestic resistance, *BIDAAH* introduces a unique intersection of gender, tradition, and religious authority, which demands critical scholarly attention. Through this analysis, it is hoped that the ways in which *BIDAAH* represents women's struggles against gender-based oppression will be revealed, as well as how its narrative contributes to challenging patriarchal social constructions (Nyangoen, 2023; Setyanto et al., 2024; Wibowo, 2019).

Research on the representation of feminism in *BIDAAH* is crucial within Indonesia's social and cultural context. Despite increasing awareness of gender equality, women in media, particularly in films, often remain confined to traditional stereotypes that reinforce patriarchal dominance. Analysing *BIDAAH* offers valuable insights into how media shapes public perceptions of gender roles and sparks further discussion on women's emancipation. While extensive research on women in Indonesian films has been conducted from feminist, cultural, and discourse analysis perspectives, gaps remain, especially regarding *BIDAAH* and its critique of religio-cultural norms in traditional society.

Several feminist studies on film tend to analyse the representation of women descriptively, but they have not critically examined how visual language, narrative, and cultural symbols in films shape and reproduce patriarchal power. In particular, research employing Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2016) within Indonesian feminist cinema remains limited, leaving important questions about ideological representations and resistance in film largely unexplored.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist research in film often adopts a universal perspective, while the dynamics of local culture, particularly in traditional Indonesian society, have not been sufficiently explored in a contextual manner. In this study, feminist representation refers to how women are portrayed in terms of agency, resistance, and subversion of patriarchal norms within the narrative, visuals, and dialogues of the film. This study employs Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which analyses texts through three dimensions, i.e., text (description), discursive practice (interpretation), and social practice (explanation), to reveal how language and visuals in the film BIDAAH construct and contest gender ideologies. *BIDAAH*, as a film depicting women in conflict with religious and customary values, offers a rich analytical terrain filled with cultural and religious interpretations, which has not been extensively addressed in previous studies.

Several prior studies have emphasized the importance of female representation in Indonesian films. For instance, Putri (2024) in her study found that Indonesian films tend to portray women either as sexual objects or agents of change, with the representation of women as sexual objects or agents of change, with the representation of woman as sexual objects still being dominant. Similarly, research by Andriani (2025) shows that while there have been efforts to present women in stronger and more multidimensional roles, traditional gender stereotypes still dominate Indonesian films (Putri, 2024).

Another study by Surahman (2018) analyses the film *7 Hati 7 Cinta 7 Wanita* and identifies the domestication of women and the politics of gender that position women in traditional roles as housewives. Additionally, research by Setyanto et al. (2024) on the remake

of the first Indonesian female superhero character, *Sri Asih*, reveals that feminist ideology is represented through women's empowerment and the rejection of violence against women (Setyanto et al., 2024; Zubad et al., 2017). While these studies enrich feminist discourse in Indonesian cinema, they predominantly focus on character analysis or narrative themes without engaging with the underlying discursive structures that sustain gender ideology. Furthermore, few have examined how feminist resistance is articulated through interactions between language, symbolism, and cultural norms using a critical discourse approach.

BIDAAH is part of a new trend in Malaysian drama series that not only presents personal narratives but also carries social critique, particularly regarding power structures and gender. Unlike films that primarily highlight personal victimization or emotional survival, *BIDAAH* provides a layered critique of traditional gender hierarchies intertwined with religious discourse, making it a unique site for CDA-driven feminist inquiry. This differs from previous feminist films that focused on personal struggles or individual emancipation, marking a new direction that merits further research.

Previous research has shown that while there have been efforts to present more progressive representations of women in Indonesian films, there is still a strong tendency to maintain traditional gender stereotypes. Therefore, this study occupies an important position in filling gaps, namely: the representation of women in alternative films laden with critiques of cultural and religious norms, the lack of critical discourse analysis in uncovering gender dominance, and the local context as an important landscape within Indonesian feminist discourse. By applying Fairclough's CDA model to the film *BIDAAH*, this study not only analyses the representation of feminist resistance in relation to local religio-cultural narratives, but also contributes methodologically by integrating textual, discursive, and sociocultural levels of interpretation. Consequently, analysis of *BIDAAH* is crucial to identify how the film represents women and whether it offers a new perspective that challenges gender norms in traditional society. The findings from this study are expected to provide new insights into feminist and media studies and encourage the production of more gender-sensitive films in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore power relations, ideologies, and social structures within *BIDAAH*. CDA allows for an examination of how the film critiques gender norms in traditional society, as discussed by Fairclough (2016), Machin and Mayr (2012). This method is particularly suited to the goals of the study, as it enables the researcher to uncover how discourse within the film reflects, maintains, or challenges patriarchal structures embedded in cultural and religious traditions.

The data for this study consists of a transcript of 65 dialogues from *BIDAAH* that reflect feminist representations. The film itself serves as the primary source, analysed as a cultural text through its narrative, dialogue, and character portrayals. The selection of dialogues followed a structured three-stage process as follows:

1. *Selection of Data Source*

The film *BIDAAH* was chosen based on its thematic emphasis on women's resistance against traditional and religious norms, making it relevant for feminist and discourse analysis.

2. *Criteria for Dialogue Selection*

From the entire duration of the film, 65 dialogues were selected using four criteria: (a) thematic relevance (those reflecting women's experiences of subordination or resistance); (b) gender discourse (scenes that illustrate power relations and gendered language); (c) centrality of female characters (dialogues that foreground women as key narrative agents); and (d) contribution to resistance narrative (utterances marking personal transformation or critique of norms).

3. *Transcription Process*

The film was watched at least three times to ensure contextual accuracy. Dialogues were recorded verbatim, along with significant non-verbal cues such as tone, gaze, and gesture. Scene timings, emotional delivery, and narrative background were also annotated. Dialogue segments were marked using screenshots to triangulate data.

Data collection is carried out using two techniques: documentation, which involves transcribing key scenes, extracting relevant dialogue, and noting symbolic or visual elements, and textual observation, which requires repeatedly watching the film to identify recurring patterns of gender representation, power dynamics, and narratives of female resistance. To ensure the validity of the data, a source triangulation technique is used, which involves comparing the film's findings with critics' opinions and contemporary feminist literature.

Throughout the research process, the researcher acknowledges their position as both an observer and interpreter. As a feminist-leaning scholar with cultural familiarity with Indonesian society, the researcher-maintained reflexivity to minimize bias by cross-checking interpretations with feminist theoretical texts and critical reviews. This positional awareness aimed to ensure that the findings were grounded in analytical rigor rather than personal bias.

Table 1: Data categorization

Scene/Dialogue	Category	Feminist representation	Critical Discourse implementation
Excerpt of dialogue between the female and male characters	Dialogue and Language	The female character expresses her rejection of polygamy.	Reflects resistance against patriarchal norms and a shift in gender consciousness.
Scene where the female character is ridiculed by society for being different	Social Symbols	The woman is considered "deviant" for not adhering to traditional customs	Demonstrates the social stigma against progressive women.
The female character boldly expresses her disagreement	Forms of Resistance	The woman transforms a toxic environment to build a new life.	Represents female agency within an oppressive traditional structure.

Data analysis adopts Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model (2016), which includes three main dimensions: Textual Analysis, which examines language, word choices, metaphors, and dialogues; Discursive Practice, which explores how the film is produced, distributed, and consumed by society; and Social Practice, which connects findings to the socio-cultural context, particularly regarding the position of women in traditional society. Additionally, cultural and post-structuralist feminist theory (Butler, 2019; Hooks, 2015) is used to frame the representation of women as agents of resistance against oppressive social structures.

The researcher serves as the key instrument, in line with the characteristics of qualitative research (Moleong, 2014). The researcher uses observation guidelines and text analysis based on feminist categories and the principles of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (2016).

Table 2: Research instrument

Aspect of Analysis	Indicator	Example Questions
Representation of woman	Female main character: Power relation, social roles, agency	What is the position of the female character in the family or society? Does she have autonomy?
Dialogue and language	Word choices, metaphors, interruption, verbal dominance	Does the female character speak with confidence? Is there any verbal harassment?
Form of resistance	Behaviour, decisions, resistance to customary values	Does the female character reject certain customs or religious rules? What form does her struggle take?
Gender Ideology	Implicit/explicit messages about gender norms	Does the film affirm or reject patriarchal values? Is there any critique of traditional culture?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study focuses on three main issues: how women are represented in the film *BIDAAH*, how the film critiques gender norms in traditional society, and how the female character's resistance to the patriarchal system is portrayed in both visual and verbal narratives.

1. Representation of Women as Empowered Subjects

The main female character in the film *BIDAAH*, Baiduri, is portrayed as an individual with critical awareness of her position within an oppressive social system. She does not passively conform to the traditional roles assigned to her, such as that of an obedient wife, a quiet woman, or a resigned victim.

Data 1

"Banyak cara lain untuk mendapatkan berkah Allah, aku tak butuh minum sisa orang untuk mendapatkan berkah." (Baiduri kepada para jemaah Jihad Ummah)

Translation:
"There are many other ways to receive Allah's blessings; I don't need to drink from someone else's leftovers to receive blessings." (Baiduri to the members of Jihad Ummah).

Visual expression: Baiduri delivers this line with a firm tone and slightly raised voice. Her sharp gaze, clenched jaw, and lifted shoulders reflect emotional restraint and resistance to patriarchal religious practices.

This statement occurs when the female character rejects a traditional ritual considered religiously significant but degrading to women's dignity. It reflects a cultural practice perpetuated by patriarchal norms under the guise of religion and tradition. "There are many other ways to receive Allah's blessings" signals her spiritual autonomy, rejecting dominant interpretations. "I don't need to drink from someone else's leftovers" explicitly challenges a degrading ritual that positions women as secondary recipients of blessings. The statement also critiques gender-biased religious authority, especially when religious teachings are manipulated to uphold inequality.

Data 2

"*Jika semua peraturan ditentukan oleh lelaki, maka mengapa kita berpikir?*" (*Baiduri kepada ketiga madu Walid*).

Translation:
"If all the rules are set by men, then why should we think?" (Baiduri to the three wives of Walid).

Visual expression: Baiduri speaks in a soft, sarcastic tone, with one eyebrow slightly raised and a faint, mocking smile. Her steady gaze and subtle expression of disappointment highlight her critique of gendered authority and internalized conformity.

This quote expresses resistance to the patriarchal system that marginalizes women's roles in decision-making. Baiduri critically questions women's subordinate position, especially in domestic power dynamics. Discourse-wise, the statement challenges the social practice that gives men sole authority over norms. Using Fairclough's (2016) approach, the word "we" signals gender solidarity, while "why should we think" ironically critiques a structure that ignores women's voices. At the discursive practice level, this discourse deviates from the dominant societal narrative. The film, at the social practice level, challenges the patriarchal structure and positions women as agents of change.

Data 3

"*Saya bukan milik sesiapa. Allah memberiku akal untuk berpikir, bukan hanya untuk patuh.*" (*Baiduri kepada Ibunya*)

Translation:
"I am not owned by anyone. Allah gave me the mind to think, not just to obey." (Baiduri to her mother).

Visual expression: Baiduri speaks in a calm yet resolute tone, her eyes sharp and filled with conviction. With her head slightly raised and posture firm, she asserts intellectual autonomy against inherited obedience.

This statement portrays women as autonomous subjects. The phrase "I am not owned by anyone" implies a release from the social construct that women belong to their husbands or families. The phrase "Allah gave me the mind" shows resistance to religious interpretations used to silence women. In terms of discourse, it represents a reappropriation of religious values from a feminist perspective, countering the dominance of patriarchal interpretations.

Data 4

"Saya boleh berdiri sendiri tanpa izin sesiapa. Itu sudah memadai." (Baiduri kepada salah satu jemaah Jihad Ummah)

Translation:
"I can stand on my own without anyone's permission. That is enough."
(Baiduri to one of the Jihad Ummah members)

Visual expression: Baiduri speaks softly but firmly, her shoulders pulled back and gaze steady. Her calm yet determined expression reinforces her self-reliance and quiet defiance.

This dialogue emphasizes the importance of female agency. The phrase "without anyone's permission" signifies freedom from a system that has historically required male legitimacy for every decision made by women. Here, the woman is represented not as someone waiting to be saved but as the one driving her own life path.

2. *Representation of Women as Powerless Subjects*

Although *BIDAAH* generally highlights women's resistance against the patriarchal order, the narrative of the film also honestly captures the phases where women appear as powerless in the face of systemic social and cultural pressures. This representation is important because it shows that the process of women's liberation is not linear or easy. There are internal dynamics, emotional pressures, and submission that can sometimes feel "forced" due to the overwhelming oppressive power structures.

Data 5

"Kita sudah diajarkan untuk selalu menerimanya." (Sarina kepada Masyitah)

Translation:
"We have been taught to always accept it." (Sarina to Masyitah)

This statement reflects the female character's resignation to deeply ingrained social structures. The word "we" suggests a collective experience, representing women in society. "Taught" implies the internalization of values, showing that acceptance of gender inequality is not individual but a result of systemic social and cultural conditioning. "To always accept it" points to a norm that forces women to passively endure injustice, whether oppression, symbolic violence, or subordination.

Data 6

> *"Aku tak tahu cara menolaknya." (Dewi kepada Baiduri)*

> Translation:
> "I don't know how to refuse." (Dewi to Baiduri)

This statement highlights the dominance of social control in traditional society, where the female character feels her actions are constantly monitored and judged to conform to societal expectations. She is reduced to a passive social entity, losing autonomy over her choices. This aligns with Zheng (2024) findings that women in traditional societies also plays an important role in forming gender identities because cultural legitimacy is embedded in the representation of gender relations.

Data 7

> *"Aku takut dosa kalau tidak taat." (Jemaah Jihad Ummah)*

> Translation:
> "I'm afraid of sin if I don't obey." (Jihad Ummah member)

This statement shows how religious interpretations are used to subjugate women, with the fear of sin acting as a control mechanism that silences their critical questions and resistance to inequality. The female character feels her disobedience will result in both social and spiritual sanctions. This reflects hegemonic religiosity, as described by Goehring (2019) and Nurmila (2019), Indonesian films often contain implicit criticism of religious practices that position women as morally obligated to endure inequality in the name of piety and obedience. Where many women are denied the space to reinterpret religious teachings from an equality-based perspective.

The representation of women as powerless subjects in *BIDAAH* does not merely depict weakness but serves as a crucial marker of how patriarchal power functions in women's everyday lives—through family, religion, and society. However, this downfall becomes the starting point of the female character's critical awareness, gradually leading her to question and resist the system that oppresses her.

3. Critique of Gender Norms in Traditional Society
BIDAAH presents a sharp critique of deeply ingrained norms within social structures based on religious interpretations and customs. Baiduri, the main character, not only faces her mother but also encounters a society that views deviations by women as a form of deviation from the truth.

Data 8

> *"Selalu aku yang mengurus anak-anak ini, dipikirnya aku ini pengasuh." (Masyitah kepada Faizah)*

Translation:
"I'm always the one taking care of these children, they think I'm the caregiver."
(Masyitah to Faizah)

This statement reflects the female character's frustration with the unfair division of domestic roles. She feels trapped in an unequal workload and unrecognized as an individual, protesting against roles automatically assigned to women. The phrase "I'm always the one" conveys repetition and imbalance, emphasizing the routine and inequitable distribution of tasks. "Taking care of these children" highlights the biased division of labour, where women are seen as solely responsible for childcare without mutual agreement. "They think I'm the caregiver" ironically criticizes how she is treated not as an equal partner but as an invisible domestic worker, underscoring the power imbalance and the invisibility of women's labor in the family.

Data 9

"Jangan lupa kodrat sebagai seorang perempuan." (Jemaah Jihad Ummah kepada Baiduri

Translation:
"Don't forget your nature as a woman." (Jihad Ummah member to Baiduri)

This statement shows how patriarchal discourse frames knowledge as a male domain. The phrase "forget your nature" highlights cultural restrictions on women's freedom to think. Gender is socially and discursively constructed, not just biological. Baiduri's brief pause and continued walk symbolize silent resistance against social control. The film suggests that challenging gender norms can occur not through direct confrontation, but by steadfastly holding one's principles.

Data 10

"Dia hanya seorang istri yang menyuarakan ketidakpuasannya, apakah salah? Mengapa dia dihukum ke Labuan? (Masyitah kepada dua madunya)

Translation:
"She is just a wife expressing her dissatisfaction, is that wrong? Why is she punished by being sent to Labuan?" (Masyitah to Walid's other wives).

This statement protests unfair social practices towards women, especially wives, in traditional societies, where expressing dissatisfaction is seen as a violation. Social sanctions, like exile to Labuan, control women's bodies and voices, reflecting a patriarchal system that demands unconditional submission from women. The line "She is just a wife expressing her dissatisfaction, is that wrong? Why is she punished by being sent to Labuan?" critiques gender norms that enforce silence and obedience. It highlights the irony that a simple expression of dissatisfaction is punished, exposing how traditional society uses compliance to maintain an imbalanced gender structure.

Data 11

> *"Apa yang harus diperjuangkan? Pernikahan kami bahkan tak terdaftar, kami hanya nikah mutah".* (Habibah kepada Baiduri)

Translation:
"What is there to fight for? Our marriage isn't even registered, we only have a *mutah* marriage." (Habibah to Baiduri)

This statement reflects a woman's awareness of her marginalized position in an unrecognized marriage, critiquing the normalization of unequal relationships in *mutah* marriage (temporary marriage). It highlights the lack of legal protection and the harm caused by social and religious norms that perpetuate this practice.

The phrase "What is there to fight for?" conveys despair, as the social and legal systems offer no support. "Our marriage isn't even registered" points to the lack of legal legitimacy, making the woman vulnerable. "We only have a *mutah* marriage" critiques the misuse of temporary marriages to justify the objectification of women. This statement exposes the exploitation of women under patriarchal structures disguised as culture and religion. The statement critiques the legitimacy of selective religious and cultural norms that favour men, ignoring their impact on women's dignity and future.

4. *Women's Resistance Against Patriarchal Social Structures*

Baiduri not only questions but also makes important decisions that symbolically and practically free her from the confines of traditional structures.

Data 12

> *Aku sudah tak tahan, aku sudah tak sanggup! Aku tak peduli! (Maesaroh kepada jemaah Jihad Ummah)*

Translation:
"I can't take it anymore, I can't stand it! I don't care!" (Maesaroh to Jihad Ummah members)

This statement reflects the female character's emotional outburst, resulting from the internal pressure imposed by a confining social system. It marks her personal rebellion against an intolerable situation, rejecting the patriarchal order that limits her agency. "I can't take it anymore" conveys exhaustion from psychological and social burdens, while "I can't stand it" shows helplessness and awareness that imposed roles have exceeded her emotional capacity. "I don't care!" represents the climax, where the character rejects societal expectations and ignores norms that silence her. From a radical feminist perspective, this statement is a form of resistance against the domestication of women, using verbal expression as a means of liberation from social control over their bodies, feelings, and choices.

Data 13

"Dia berusaha menipu wanita, hanya demi nafsunya sendiri." (Baiduri)

Translation:
"He tries to deceive women, just for his own lust." (Baiduri)

Visual expression: Baiduri speaks with anger in her voice, eyes wide, breathing heavy, and fists clenched. Her expression radiates intense fury and firm rejection of male manipulation.

This dialogue challenges social norms that restrict women's emotional expressions, shifting the blame from the woman to the system. The statement "He tries to deceive women, just for his own lust" rejects patriarchal pressures and cultural norms that demand women to submit. In *BIDAAH*, this marks a turning point in the female character's struggle for justice, turning anger into a political act that exposes the silent domination of an accepted system.

Data 14

"Aku tak akan pernah setuju". (Baiduri kepada ibunya)

Translation:
"I will never agree." (Baiduri to her mother)

Visual expression: Baiduri delivers the line in a loud, firm tone, with sharp eyes and lips drawn back. Her tense posture conveys total resistance and unwavering defiance.

This statement appears as an explicit form of resistance from the female character against values, rules, or decisions that are perceived to be oppressive to her. In *BIDAAH*, this is a turning point from submission to critical awareness and the courage to reject entrenched patriarchal norms. The phrase "I" signifies the presence of a conscious female subject with her own will, no longer speaking within a collective frame of submission. "I will never agree" is a total negation, not just a temporary rejection, but also a permanent boundary against the dominant ideology.

Data 15

"Sumpah, tak akan kubiarkan mereka menyentuhku dan ibuku." (Baiduri kepada Asyikin)

Translation:
"I swear, I won't let them touch me or my mother." (Baiduri to Asyikin)

This statement is a direct resistance to the domination and structural violence women face. It is spoken when the female character and her mother feel threatened by male power and oppressive norms. It shows courage to defy norms that force submission, offering self-protection and solidarity between women, while rejecting the objectification of their bodies. The word "Swear" intensifies the emotion, highlighting a moral commitment to reject oppression. "I won't let them" shows agency and determination to protect dignity and safety. "They touch me and my mother" uses "touch" literally and symbolically, indicating sexual, social, or cultural domination.

From a radical feminist perspective, this statement in Data 18 rejects the patriarchal structure that treats women as sexual objects or cultural property to be "touched" or controlled by men. Such resistance is crucial for breaking both symbolic and literal domination over women's bodies. From a postcolonial feminist view, women in traditional societies face dual oppression—both as women and as part of a lower social class or vulnerable group. Here, the female character rejects the collective structures (customs, family, or community) that sacrifice women for "honour" or the collective good.

DISCUSSION

This study reveals that *BIDAAH* not only portrays women as objects of the story but represents them as active and critical subjects in challenging the domination of patriarchal culture. This representation intertwines with a critique of traditional gender norms that are reproduced through social structures, religious values, and customs.

1. Representation of Women and Agency in BIDAAH

The female characters in this film are not depicted as passive; they possess the awareness and courage to resist the oppressive systems. This aligns with the concept of female agency in liberal and existential feminism, but *BIDAAH's* novelty lies in its indie positioning as a religious critique that reinterprets spiritual authority through a feminist lens, unlike mainstream portrayals. As de Beauvoir (2023) states in *The Second Sex*, women become "the other" because social systems place men at the centre. The character Baiduri in *BIDAAH* reclaims her subjectivity, no longer being "the other," but "the one who decides."

Furthermore, Baiduri's agency is shown in her self-determined life choices, echoing existential feminism (Hooks, 2015; Setyanto et al., 2024). While (Mulyani, 2021) highlights female agency in Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts, BIDAAH differs by situating resistance within religious ritual reinterpretation rather than violent rebellion. For example, Baiduri's critical statement, "There are many other ways to receive Allah's blessings, I don't need to drink from someone else's leftovers," challenges symbolic domination in religion, demonstrating how language becomes a tool of liberation (Baxter, 2020).

In the framework of postcolonial and spiritual feminism (Budiana, 2024; Hooks, 2015), the statement "There are many other ways to receive Allah's blessings, I don't need to drink from someone else's leftovers to receive blessings" highlights the position of women rejecting being objects of masculine and rigid religious interpretations. It asserts that women have the right to a spiritual relationship that is not controlled by rituals that demean or symbolically represent patriarchy. This statement also aligns with transformative feminism, which not only challenges social norms but also reinterprets spirituality from a gender justice perspective.

The statement "There are many other ways to receive Allah's blessings, I don't need to drink from someone else's leftovers to receive blessings" also echoes findings by (Badara & Jamiludin, 2020; Peduho, 2024) In her examination of the film Perempuan Berkalung

Sorban, the researcher highlights how the narrative portrays women who critically interrogate religious interpretations that are used to justify patriarchal cultural traditions. The film illustrates that what is often presented as religious obligation is, in fact, deeply intertwined with customary norms that restrict women's autonomy and agency. By depicting female characters who challenge these oppressive structures, the study emphasizes the tension between genuine religious values and socially constructed practices that perpetuate gender inequality. This analysis also suggests that the film functions not only as a form of cultural critique but also as a call for reinterpretation of religious teachings in ways that promote justice, equality, and women's empowerment. Biasini and Zeusta (2023), Rizkiani and Lestari (2023), together with Hughes-Freeland (2019) note that in tradition-based films, women are often used as tools for legitimizing symbolic obedience, even when the practices are painful or degrading. The statement "There are many other ways to receive Allah's blessings, I don't need to drink from someone else's leftovers to receive blessings" represents the peak of women's resistance against symbolic domination that is justified by religion and culture. It rejects being part of unjust ritual practices and establishes its own spiritual authority. This shows that feminism in BIDAAH is not only operating in the social realm but also negotiating religious meanings to advocate for women's dignity and equality.

In a critical discourse perspective (Fairclough, 2016), the statement "We've been taught to always accept it" reflects the patriarchal ideology embedded in language, reinforcing female obedience. In existential feminism (de Beauvoir, 2023), it shows how women are conditioned to accept their defined role as "the other." According to Butler (2019) in Gender Performativity, this statement illustrates how gender norms are perpetuated through repeated performances of obedience, positioning women in passive roles. This aligns with findings by Zheng (2024) and others, who note point out that many locally produced films tend to portray women as individuals weighed down by cultural and social expectations, implicitly encouraging them to accept restrictive norms without resistance. "We've been taught to always accept it" symbolizes the internalization of patriarchal values, marking the shift from silence to resistance in BIDAAH, subtly critiquing norms and encouraging viewers to challenge them.

In perspective of Islamic feminism (Chin, 2012; Hyunanda et al., 2021), the statement "Can't we preach without polygamy?" is a form of ijtihad or reinterpretation of religious practices that are seen as subordinating women. The female character does not reject preaching or religious teachings but critiques how religion has been used to perpetuate male power over women's bodies and lives. In radical feminism, this question can also be read as a form of resistance to social structures that allow men to hold dual authority, both in the public realm (preaching) and in the private realm (polygamy), while women are sacrificed for the "sacred mission." This statement aligns with research by Izharuddin (2017) examining how Indonesian films portray women's resistance to polygamy that is justified through religious narratives. Furthermore, Andriani (2025), Hasanah dan Nuraini (2023), with Wibowo (2019) show that in many visual representations (films and soap operas), polygamy is often romanticized or justified through preaching rhetoric, despite its traumatic effects on women. The statement "Can't we preach without polygamy?" is an interrogation of the power relations that are legitimized by religion. The female character shows awareness that religious values can exist without sacrificing gender justice. She rejects the idea that women's sacrifice is a prerequisite for the success of preaching. *BIDAAH* presents a feminist perspective that is

not anti-religion but calls for a re-evaluation of social practices that have hidden behind religious symbols and perpetuate inequality.

2. Representation of Women as Powerless Subjects

In *BIDAAH*, women are represented as powerless subjects, reflecting how traditional societies construct women through cultural, religious, and patriarchal ideologies. This powerlessness is not personal weakness but a consequence of a system that marginalizes women. The dialogue "I just want to be a good wife, as Mother and Mursyid said". This reinforces findings by Hooks (2015) about how gender injustice is often inherited and perpetuated by social agents that are considered sacred and unquestionable. The female character in this film represents many women in traditional societies who fall victim to internalized patriarchy, which is when women accept their subordinate position as something natural and right

Furthermore, the statement "If I refuse, what will the people in the village say?" highlights social pressure that stifles women's autonomy, aligning with research by Pratiwi and Sasmita (2022) and Putri (2024), which found that communal norms emphasize women's obedience. Here, the social role of women becomes narrow and defined through external views, rather than based on autonomous choices. Meanwhile, the statement "I'm afraid of sin if I don't obey" illustrates how religious structures legitimize women's submission, reinforcing male dominance. shows how religious structures are used as a legitimacy for women's submission. Ahlstrand (2021) and Ilham (2025) within religious communities shaped by patriarchal power structures, dominant interpretations of doctrine frequently hold hegemonic authority, thereby constraining women's ability to articulate alternative readings or to participate equally in meaning-making processes.

In the context of *BIDAAH*, the fear of sin becomes a psychological instrument that strengthens men's dominant position in both the household and the public sphere. However, the film shifts this powerlessness, gradually building tension that leads to the female character's critical awareness and resistance, mirroring the feminist dynamic where recognizing oppression sparks the process of emancipation (de Beauvoir, 2023).

Compared to Mulyani's (2021) research on the film *Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts*, which directly presents women as active subjects who fight against patriarchy through extreme actions, *BIDAAH* presents phases of powerlessness more subtly, reflectively, and contextually with local culture. This enriches the understanding that feminist struggles are not always revolutionary, but can also be gradual and socially considered.

According to Bourdieu's theory Bourdieu (2018) on habitus and doxa, this role is seen as a "natural habit" in patriarchal societies, yet it is actually a form of symbolic power that indirectly oppresses women. The statement "I'm always the one taking care of these children, they think I'm the caregiver" is closely related to feminist critiques of gender roles or the division of labour based on sex. In radical feminist theory, the unequal division of domestic labour is seen as a form of exploitation of women's labour, even in the private sphere (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Nyangoen, 2023). In the framework of Marxist feminism, this inequality also reflects the imbalance in production and reproduction relations: women are seen as responsible for social reproduction (child-rearing, housework), yet their contributions are never valued economically or symbolically (Federici, 2012).

The statement "I'm always the one taking care of these children, they think I'm the caregiver" strengthens the findings of Adytama (2024) Macdonald (2016), who emphasize that within Indonesian cinematic narratives, women are consistently positioned as the central caretakers of the home, whereas men are portrayed as detached from or liberated from

domestic labor and caregiving duties. This role is maintained through language and visual representation that depict women as the "appropriate" ones to take care of children. Andriani (2025) and Onyenankeya et al. (2020) her research also shows that the labour performed by women in the domestic sphere is routinely rendered invisible and is rarely acknowledged as productive or valuable within the narrative representations of local films and television soap operas. The statement in BIDAAH raises awareness that this task is a cultural construction, not a biological destiny.

The statement "I'm always the one taking care of these children, they think I'm the caregiver" offers a sharp critique of the social construction that burdens women with domestic work unilaterally. It is a clear representation of the subordination and invisibility of women in traditional families. Through this statement, *BIDAAH* gives voice to women who are beginning to question and challenge the injustice that society has long considered normal. Thus, the representation of women as powerless subjects in *BIDAAH* is not merely a portrayal of weakness but a narrative strategy to show how complex and systemic the oppression of women is in traditional society. The film successfully voices how this powerlessness can become a turning point toward critical awareness and liberation.

3. Critique of Traditional Gender Norms

This film portrays a society that upholds a conservative interpretation of women's roles: they must obey, remain silent, and submit. In this context, *BIDAAH* becomes a counter-discourse that critiques the dominance of religious and cultural interpretations as instruments of oppression against women. This aligns with Hooks (2015) argument in *Feminism is for Everybody*, where feminism is a struggle to end sexism and gender-based oppression perpetuated by cultural and religious systems.

The dialogues in the film show how women who think critically are considered deviant or wrong. Here, the film highlights the cultural irony that places women in a no-win situation: speaking up is seen as rude, while silence is perceived as ignorance. This critique intersects with Butler's (2019) concept of gender performativity, which posits that gender roles are socially and performatively constructed, not inherent. The character Siti disrupts these social roles and refuses to play the "gender script" written by patriarchal society.

The patriarchal discourse in traditional society depicted in *BIDAAH* is the main target of critique. The female characters face pressure from a culture that positions women as inferior. This finding is consistent with the research by Zheng (2024), which analyses local cinema in regional languages as an ideological arena, where local culture is often used to legitimize conservative gender roles. BIDAAH reverses this position: it frames tradition as a battleground between old values and new critical awareness.

This is further emphasized by Mahmudah et al. (2024), who, through her research on the representation of women in Javanese indie films, argues that films produced outside the mainstream industry are generally more candid in delivering social criticism, including critiques of gender stereotypes imposed on women through cultural and religious symbols.

4. Forms of Resistance and Emancipatory Discourse

The main character's resistance against the social structure can be categorized as a form of discourse resistance that is not only personal but also ideological. Through her speech and actions, the female character demonstrates that she does not submit to the dominant

interpretation. She even manages to dismantle the meaning of "*bid'ah*" (heresy) as a tool of symbolic repression and transform it into a symbol of resistance.

This aligns with the findings of Badara (2020), which show that the representation of women in Indonesian indie films tends to present women as critical figures against social constructs. Their study concluded that alternative films provide space for female narratives that are not just "victims" but creators of new realities.

Furthermore, Susanti (2023), in her study on gender discourse in the film *Tilik*, states that visual media today has become an important arena for the formation and deconstruction of gender ideologies. In this context, *BIDAAH* becomes an effective medium of critique against the systems that oppress women, especially in regions still deeply rooted in patriarchal culture. One of *BIDAAH*'s significant contributions is its courage in criticizing the use of religious terms like "*bid'ah*" as tools of control over women. The statement "I am not opposing God. I am only opposing the interpretation that causes me suffering" marks a critical awareness of the monopoly on religious interpretation, which is often gender biased.

This finding expands the scope of Zheng (2024) research on the role of women in contemporary religious interpretations. Az-Zahra concluded that women are often silenced in interpretive forums because they are seen as lacking authority. *BIDAAH* portrays resistance to this dominant interpretation through a female character who explicitly states that her suffering is not rooted in religion but in interpretations that are patriarchally constructed.

From the perspective of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2016), the statement "I will never agree" is a symbolic resistance against a system that has dictated women's positions. Language becomes a tool of emancipation, no longer a tool of subjugation. This statement reflects the core feminist principle of agency, the ability of women to think, decide, and act on their own choices. From the perspective of liberal feminism Tong (2009), this statement reflects the struggle for personal rights and autonomy in the face of unjust rules.

In comparison to the framework of radical feminism, this statement signals resistance to power structures rooted in culture, family, or religious institutions. This rejection is not just about a particular decision, but against a value system that systematically oppresses women. The statement strengthens the findings of Mulyani (2021), Nababan and Ananda (2024) in Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts, women's resistance is depicted through unwavering actions, even when such acts require challenging unfair legal and moral standards. Additionally, Nababan and Ananda (2024) states that a woman's verbal declaration of "disagreement" is an essential part of forming her identity as an active subject, not a cultural object. The statement "I will never agree" becomes a direct representation of the transformation of female consciousness from submission to conscious rejection. In *BIDAAH*, this represents the awakening of women's voices, rejecting continued marginalization by traditional gender norms. She no longer remains silent, no longer "accepts," but states her disagreement as the beginning of the struggle for self-liberation.

BIDAAH successfully represents feminism not in the form of harsh narratives or frontal agitation, but through strong ideological visual choices and subtle dialogues. Women in this film are not only depicted as victims but as conscious, critical agents and changemakers. Thus, the film presents an important emancipatory discourse in contemporary feminism, especially in societies that still use tradition as a tool of social control over women.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that *BIDAAH* firmly represents feminist values through the narrative, characters, and dialogues of the main female character, who rejects submission to the

patriarchal system perpetuated by traditional gender norms and conservative religious interpretations. The protagonist in this film emerges as an agent of change, courageously voicing criticism against the social order that restricts women's freedom to think, act, and make life choices. The representation of feminism in this film is depicted through three main forms: (1) the portrayal of female agency as a conscious and critical subject toward her social environment; (2) a critique of traditional gender norms that place women as those who must obey, submit, and remain silent; and (3) resistance against hegemonic religious interpretations that are used as tools to justify male domination over women.

These findings confirm the relevance of existentialist feminist theory (de Beauvoir), gender performativity theory (Butler), and critical feminist discourse (Hooks), which argue that gender identity is not innate but the result of social construction that can be criticized and resisted. *BIDAAH* serves as an alternative medium that not only voices gender injustice but also presents hope for the critical awareness of women in traditional societies. Compared to previous studies, this research offers a new contribution by focusing on dialogue as a form of ideological expression, as well as using local indie films as a data source rich in cultural and gender-political context. Thus, *BIDAAH* is not only relevant as an art form but also as a cultural text that encapsulates resistance and emancipation within a feminist framework.

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