

Julia Kristeva Intertextual of Feminism in the Film Pangku by Reza Rahardian

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ABSTRACT

Keyword:

*Intertextual;
Feminism; Julia
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Reza Rahadian's film Pangku represents the lives of women who are under social, economic and patriarchal cultural pressure. Through the main character, Sartika, this film shows how women must face various life constraints while fulfilling their roles as mothers and breadwinners.

This study analyzes the film "Pangku" as a site of feminist discourse within Indonesian cinema. Employing Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality and semanalysis, the research examines how the film absorbs and transforms cultural narratives of female labor. The analysis reveals a dialectic between the patriarchal symbolic order and eruptions of the semiotic, manifested through the protagonist's corporeal resistance. The protagonist, analyzed as a "subject-in-process," locates agency in subtle disruptions, offering a complex feminist critique of systemic oppression rather than a simple narrative of liberation.

The researcher's findings show that five main frames occur, namely first, the existence of an Intertextual dialogue: "Pangku" and the Sociocultural Narrative of Indonesian Womanhood, second, the existence of Patriarchal Ideology in the Narrative and Dialogue of "Pangku", third, the Emergence of Semiotic Eruptions in Body Expressions and Affective Disorders that Challenge Dominant Meanings, fourth, Navigating Agency and Resistance in the Trajectory of Female Protagonists, and finally, the need for Negotiation of Subversion and Rewriting of "Pangku" in Indonesian Cinema.

ABSTRAK

Kata Kunci:

*Intertekstual;
Feminisme;
Yulia Kristeva;
Film Pangku.*

Film Pangku karya Reza Rahadian merepresentasikan kehidupan perempuan yang berada di bawah tekanan sosial, ekonomi, dan budaya patriarkis. Melalui tokoh utama, Sartika, film ini memperlihatkan bagaimana perempuan harus menghadapi berbagai kendala hidup sembari menjalankan peran sebagai ibu dan pencari nafkah.

Penelitian ini menganalisis film "Pangku" sebagai ruang wacana feminis dalam sinema Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan teori intertekstualitas dan semaanalisis Julia Kristeva, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana film tersebut menyerap dan mentransformasikan narasi budaya mengenai tenaga kerja perempuan. Analisis ini mengungkap adanya dialektika antara

tatanan simbolik patriarkis dan kemunculan unsur semiotik, yang termanifestasi melalui resistensi tubuh sang tokoh utama. Tokoh utama, yang dianalisis sebagai "subjek dalam proses" (*subject-in-process*), menempatkan agensi dalam bentuk gangguan-gangguan halus, sehingga menawarkan kritik feminis yang kompleks terhadap penindasan sistemik, alih-alih sekadar narasi pembebasan yang sederhana.

Temuan penelitian menunjukkan adanya lima kerangka utama; pertama, keberadaan dialog intertekstual antara Pangku dan narasi sosiokultural tentang sosok perempuan Indonesia; kedua, keberadaan ideologi patriarkis dalam narasi dan dialog film "Pangku"; ketiga, munculnya unsur semiotik melalui ekspresi tubuh dan gangguan afektif yang menantang makna-makna dominan; keempat, navigasi agensi dan resistensi dalam perjalanan hidup tokoh utama perempuan, dan terakhir, perlunya negosiasi subversi serta penulisan ulang makna Pangku dalam konteks sinema Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Indonesian cinema increasingly serves as a crucial arena for negotiating complex social issues, particularly those concerning gender, class, and power. Within this landscape, the phenomenon of "kopi pangku"—roadside coffee stalls where female servers offer physical intimacy for patronage—emerges as a potent cultural signifier of female economic precarity and moral contestation. The film "Pangku" directly engages this controversial subject, providing a rich narrative for critical inquiry. This research investigates how the film functions as a cultural artifact, examining its capacity to both reflect and challenge the dominant patriarchal ideologies that frame such female labor.

Reza Rahadian's film *Pangku* uses a forward-looking plot but develops gradually until the end. The film begins with an introduction to Sartika's life as a young woman living in modest circumstances with her son, Bayu. Sartika is the protagonist in this film, and the term the researcher uses in the following discussion. Early on, the film depicts Sartika's daily life, as she struggles to work and provide for her family despite limited financial resources. As the story progresses, conflict arises when Sartika is faced with a career choice that doesn't align with her desires. Economic pressures force Sartika to survive in a work environment that places women in a vulnerable position and often faces unequal treatment. Throughout this process, the film depicts Sartika's inner struggle between maintaining her self-respect, meeting her needs, and fulfilling her role as a mother. (Sirait et al., 2026)

Pangku doesn't focus solely on economic conflict, but also showcases Sartika's social interactions with others like Hadi, Mrs. Maya, Bayu, and the surrounding community. The communication patterns between these characters demonstrate how patriarchal culture, social pressures, and environmental conditions influence women's lives. The film's conclusion demonstrates Sartika's continued efforts to survive and live her life despite the stressful situation (Sadriani, 2026).

To deconstruct the film's complex ideological layers, this study employs Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality and her unique semiotic analysis.

The definition of semiotics, as previously stated in historical records, is that it is the science of signs that examines the phenomena of social communication, society, and culture. These are considered semiotic signs in the study of systems, rules, and conventions. (Ambarini, 2012) This framework posits that a text is a mosaic of other cultural discourses and analyzes the dialectical tension between the symbolic order—the structured, patriarchal realm of language and law—and the semiotic, the pre-linguistic, corporeal drives associated with the feminine (Nasri, 2017). By applying this lens, the research aims to uncover how "Pangku" constructs meaning, investigating moments where the raw, affective genotext erupts to challenge the coherent, patriarchal narrative of the film's phenotext.

This analysis argues that "Pangku" articulates a nuanced feminist critique by examining the protagonist not as a fixed character but as a Kristevan "subject-in-process," whose agency is located in the ongoing struggle between conformity and resistance. (Abdurachman & Parmin, 2022) The study will demonstrate how the film absorbs and transforms pre-existing cultural narratives about female labor and sacrifice. It focuses on the female body as a primary site of ideological contestation, where symbolic commodification is challenged by semiotic disruptions. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary feminist discourse in Indonesian cinema.

This research utilizes Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality as its primary analytical lens. Kristeva posits that any text is not an isolated entity but a "mosaic of quotations," an absorption and transformation of other texts. This perspective moves beyond identifying simple influences to understanding a text as a dynamic intersection of various cultural, social, and historical discourses. In analyzing the film "Pangku," this framework allows for an examination of how it dialogues with, borrows from, and reconfigures pre-existing narratives concerning gender, class, and power within Indonesian society.

Central to Kristeva's theory is the dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic, which forms the basis of her unique semiotic analysis, or "semanalysis." The symbolic refers to the structured, grammatical, and logical order of language, often associated with patriarchal law and social stability (Dayu & Syadli, 2023). In contrast, the semiotic encompasses pre-linguistic drives, rhythms, and affects rooted in the maternal body. This research will investigate how the film's phenotext, its structured narrative, is punctuated and potentially disrupted by the underlying genotext of raw, feminine experience.

Applying this framework to a feminist critique, the symbolic order is understood as the realm of patriarchal ideology that structures social reality and representation (Sucipto, 2021). The semiotic, therefore, becomes a crucial site of potential subversion and resistance (Sucipto, 2026). It represents the repressed feminine that challenges the coherence of patriarchal discourse through non-verbal cues, emotional intensity, and bodily expression. This study will analyze how the female characters in "Pangku" navigate this tension, revealing moments where the semiotic erupts to challenge dominant symbolic meanings of womanhood.

Kristeva's concept of the "subject-in-process" is also integral to this study. This idea rejects the notion of a stable, unified self, instead viewing subjectivity as a continuous, dynamic process of negotiation between the semiotic and the symbolic. The female protagonist in "Pangku" will be analyzed not as a fixed character but as a subject constantly being constituted and reconstituted by the ideological forces surrounding her. Her agency is located in this ongoing struggle, where she both conforms to and resists patriarchal expectations.

Ultimately, this theoretical approach enables a multi-layered analysis of "Pangku." By employing intertextuality, the study will trace the film's connections to broader cultural texts and social realities concerning women's roles. Through *semanalysis*, it will deconstruct how the film constructs meaning at both the symbolic and semiotic levels. This allows for a nuanced interpretation of how "Pangku" functions as a cultural artifact that simultaneously reinforces and challenges dominant patriarchal ideologies, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on feminism in contemporary Indonesian cinema.

METHOD

The film "Pangku" was chosen as the primary object of this study through purposive sampling. This selection is justified by the film's critical engagement with themes of female subjectivity, economic marginalization, and patriarchal

power dynamics within a contemporary Indonesian context (Sugiyono, 2011). Its narrative, which centers on a woman's struggle for agency amidst systemic oppression, provides a rich and pertinent case for feminist inquiry. The film's complex portrayal of gender and class makes it an exemplary artifact for analysis using Julia Kristeva's theories, allowing for a deep examination of how dominant sociocultural narratives are both reproduced and challenged.

The data for this research are sourced exclusively from the film "Pangku," encompassing its symbolic and semiotic dimensions as conceptualized by Kristeva. Primary data consists of the film's phenotext, including its narrative structure, plot development, and transcribed dialogue, which represent the structured, symbolic order. (Kristeva, 1985) Concurrently, data related to the genotext were systematically gathered, focusing on non-verbal communication, significant bodily gestures, affective displays, and key cinematographic choices like framing and sound design. These audiovisual elements are treated as crucial data points representing potential eruptions of the semiotic that disrupt the dominant patriarchal discourse within the film.

The data collection procedure involved a systematic, multi-stage viewing process (Ferdinand de Saussure, 1998). An initial screening was conducted to gain a holistic understanding of the film's narrative and thematic arcs. This was followed by multiple, intensive viewings for detailed scene-by-scene analysis, where data were meticulously documented on a pre-designed coding sheet. This instrument logged time-stamped scenes, relevant dialogue, and thick descriptions of mise-en-scène, cinematography, and the protagonist's non-verbal expressions. This rigorous method ensures the comprehensive capture of both symbolic and semiotic data, providing a reliable empirical basis for the subsequent stages of analysis.

The final stage of this method synthesizes the intertextual map with a feminist critique, focusing specifically on how the film's dialogue with other texts engages with patriarchal ideology. Each identified intertextual link will be evaluated for its ideological function: whether it reinforces dominant, often oppressive, representations of womanhood or provides a counter-discourse that highlights female resistance and subjectivity. This interpretive process assesses how the transformation of source narratives contributes to the film's overall feminist statement, revealing how "Pangku" negotiates its position within the broader cultural conversation on gender, power, and agency in contemporary Indonesia.

The initial procedure of this interpretive stage involves synthesizing the findings from the intertextual and semiotic analyses to construct a coherent feminist critique. This method evaluates how the film's dialogue with established sociocultural narratives and its internal tension between the symbolic and semiotic collectively articulate its ideological stance on gender (Nurmadani et al., 2025). Each identified instance of intertextual transformation and semiotic disruption will be critically assessed for its function in either reinforcing dominant patriarchal ideologies or offering a subversive counter-discourse. This synthesis aims to build a holistic interpretation of how "Pangku" negotiates its position within the broader cultural conversation on women's agency.

A central method within this phase is a focused analysis of the female protagonist's body as a primary site of ideological contestation. This procedure examines how the film represents her body in relation to economic commodification, patriarchal control, and the male gaze, as established in the symbolic phenotext (Prasetyo et al., 2025). Concurrently, it interprets her corporeal expressions, affective displays, and non-verbal gestures—the semiotic elements—as potential forms of embodied resistance and agency. This dual analysis will determine whether the film ultimately portrays the female body as a passive object of patriarchal discourse or as an active site of subjectivity and subversion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The initial phase of intertextual mapping involves identifying the broader sociocultural narratives and discourses that constitute the film's symbolic environment. This procedure entails a systematic review of relevant cultural texts, including Indonesian cinematic portrayals of marginalized women, news media coverage of the "kopi pangku" phenomenon, and literary works addressing female economic survival. The objective is to delineate the pre-existing symbolic frameworks concerning female agency, bodily commodification, and patriarchal power within which "Pangku" operates. These identified narratives, functioning as the hypogram, are cataloged to create a comprehensive repository of the cultural and social quotations the film potentially engages with.

Following the identification of source narratives, a comparative analysis will be conducted to map the absorption and transformation of these texts within "Pangku." This involves a meticulous scene-by-scene comparison, juxtaposing the film's plot points, character archetypes, and dialogue against the established cultural scripts.

1. Intertextual Dialogues: "Pangku" and the Sociocultural Narratives of Indonesian Womanhood

Analysis reveals that "Pangku" consciously absorbs the sociocultural narrative surrounding the "kopi pangku" phenomenon, a discourse prevalent in Indonesian news media. These media portrayals typically frame the women involved as either victims of economic precarity or figures of moral decay. The film's initial act functions as an absorption of this hypogram, establishing a familiar symbolic environment. It presents the protagonist's entry into this world in a manner that directly quotes the sensationalist yet sympathetic tropes found in journalistic and public discourse on the subject.

However, the film critically transforms this absorbed text rather than merely affirming it. Where media narratives often objectify the "kopi pangku" woman, the film reconfigures this archetype by granting the protagonist significant interiority. Through extended scenes focusing on her perspective, the narrative shifts from an external, judgmental gaze to an internal exploration of her motivations and emotional complexity. This transformation subverts the simplistic victim/vixen binary, recasting the narrative as a complex negotiation of survival, dignity, and personal agency.

Furthermore, the intertextual mapping identifies a critical dialogue with the enduring archetype of the self-sacrificing woman, a staple in Indonesian cinematic melodrama. The protagonist's motivation—securing her family's welfare through morally compromised labor—directly quotes this established cultural script. Yet, "Pangku" complicates this trope by foregrounding the protagonist's internal conflict and resentment, refusing to sanctify her sacrifice. This creates a tension between the traditional narrative of noble suffering and a more modern, cynical portrayal of economic necessity.

The ideological function of these intertextual transformations is primarily subversive (Rifka Alkhilyatul Ma'rifat, *I Made Suraharta*, 2024). By juxtaposing the contemporary "kopi pangku" discourse with the classic melodrama trope, the film critiques the patriarchal frameworks that produce both narratives. It refuses to offer a simple moral judgment, instead using intertextuality to expose the limited and often hypocritical ways in which female economic and bodily autonomy are represented. This process of absorption and critical transformation constructs a feminist counter-discourse that challenges viewers to reconsider their complicity in these dominant cultural scripts.

2. The Symbolic Order: Constructing Patriarchal Ideologies in "Pangku"'s Narrative and Dialogue

The film's phenotext establishes a rigid symbolic order where patriarchal logic dictates the narrative trajectory (Ayu, 2025). The plot is initiated by male-centric economic failure, positioning the female protagonist's subsequent commodification not as a choice but as a necessary, almost predetermined, solution to a crisis created by men. This narrative structure reinforces a patriarchal ideology that confines female agency to a reactive role, her body becoming the final, exploitable resource within a system that offers no other viable paths for economic survival (Mutya, 2024). The film's universe is thus constructed as one governed by patriarchal law.

Analysis of the transcribed dialogue reveals the linguistic reinforcement of this patriarchal structure. Male patrons and employers consistently use language that objectifies the female workers, reducing them to their physical attributes and service function. Dialogue frequently frames female worth in relation to male desire and economic transaction, explicitly codifying their subordination. Furthermore, conversations among the women themselves often reflect internalized patriarchal values, discussing their survival in terms of pleasing men, thus demonstrating the pervasive nature of the symbolic order's ideological grip on their subjectivity.

The symbolic order in "Pangku" meticulously constructs a social hierarchy that naturalizes male dominance. The film's structured discourse consistently portrays men as the holders of capital and authority, while women are depicted as dependent laborers whose livelihoods are contingent upon male patronage. This power imbalance is visually and narratively codified in scenes within the "kopi pangku" stall, where the spatial arrangement and character interactions reinforce a clear client-server dynamic that extends beyond economics into social and gendered power, establishing the dominant ideological baseline of the film's world.

Within this established phenotext, the representation of womanhood is strictly policed by patriarchal norms. The protagonist is constantly measured against an implicit ideal of the virtuous woman—a role she is forced to abandon. The narrative generates conflict from this deviation, framing her work as a source of shame and social transgression. This symbolic opposition between the "pure" domestic woman and the "fallen" working woman serves to maintain patriarchal

control, as the film's structured narrative punishes her for transgressing these ideological boundaries, reinforcing the limited roles available to women.

3. Semiotic Eruptions: Bodily Expressions and Affective Disruptions Challenging Dominant Meanings

Analysis of the genotext reveals significant semiotic eruptions through the protagonist's bodily gestures, which directly contradict the symbolic performance of compliance (Pratama, 2025). In scenes where she is seated with clients, intense close-ups capture her hands clenching her skirt or her fingers digging into her own thigh. These involuntary movements, rooted in the semiotic chora, function as a corporeal rejection of her commodification. While her dialogue and overall posture conform to the patriarchal transaction, these micro-gestures signify a raw, pre-symbolic resistance that destabilizes the coherence of her submissive role.

The protagonist's facial expressions serve as a primary site for semiotic disruption, challenging the symbolic order's demand for affective labor (Carolina, 2023). Micro-level analysis of her interactions with patrons identifies moments where her feigned smile falters, replaced by a fleeting, almost imperceptible expression of contempt or dissociation. The camera frequently employs extreme close-ups on her eyes, which appear vacant and look through, rather than at, the male client. This disembodied gaze functions as a semiotic rupture, puncturing the illusion of intimacy and revealing an uncolonized interiority.

Vocal prosody and sound design are key channels for the eruption of the semiotic. While the protagonist's dialogue often adheres to the symbolic script of subservience, its delivery is laden with semiotic markers of resistance. Her speech is frequently characterized by a monotonous tone and rhythmic hesitations that subvert the intended meaning of her compliant words. Furthermore, the film's soundscape punctuates these scenes with non-diegetic, low-frequency drones or the amplified sound of her own sharp intake of breath, signifying an underlying affective turmoil that destabilizes the patriarchal narrative's surface.

The analysis identifies pivotal scenes where the semiotic chora erupts through raw, affective displays that shatter the symbolic order's composure. In a sequence depicting the protagonist alone after work, her repressed trauma manifests in a non-linguistic, violent scrubbing of her own body. This act is rendered through disruptive cinematography, employing jarring jump-cuts and unstable, handheld camera movements that mirror her internal chaos. The scene's visceral intensity, devoid of coherent dialogue, represents a powerful

eruption of the genotext, momentarily overwhelming the structured narrative with pure, corporeal affect.

4. The Subject-in-Process: Navigating Agency and Resistance in the Female Protagonist's Trajectory

The protagonist of "Pangku" exemplifies Kristeva's "subject-in-process," continuously constituted by the dialectic between patriarchal demands and her own corporeal reality. Initially, she conforms to the symbolic order, adopting the role of the commodified female body as a pragmatic response to economic crisis. This conformity, however, is not a stable state of being but a performance. Her trajectory is marked by a constant negotiation, where her submission to the patriarchal script is perpetually undermined by semiotic forces, revealing a subjectivity in constant, dynamic formation.

Her agency is located not in overt rebellion but in subtle, strategic negotiations within the oppressive structure. This is evident in moments where her semiotic resistance challenges the symbolic transaction. For instance, while her body is physically present for the client, her vacant gaze signifies a psychological withdrawal, a refusal to be fully consumed by the patriarchal gaze. (Sucipto, 2021) These acts of micro-resistance, where she strategically withholds her affective self, demonstrate an agency that operates within the fissures of the dominant symbolic order.

The protagonist's subjectivity is reconstituted through pivotal narrative junctures where the semiotic erupts violently. The scene of her frantically scrubbing her body is not merely a depiction of trauma but a moment where her subjectivity is remade. In this non-linguistic, corporeal act, she rejects the symbolic defilement imposed upon her, attempting to reclaim her body from its commodified status. This affective explosion demonstrates the subject-in-process, where identity is shattered and reformed through the raw, pre-symbolic drives of the genotext.

Synthesizing her trajectory with the film's intertextual dialogue reveals a complex form of agency. She simultaneously inhabits and subverts the cultural scripts of the "kopi pangku" woman and the self-sacrificing female. Her struggle does not lead to a triumphant escape but instead functions to expose the contradictions within these patriarchal narratives. Her subjectivity remains unresolved, a subject perpetually in process, thereby resisting the narrative closure that would re-inscribe her neatly into a fixed ideological position, whether as victim or heroine.

5. Feminist Contribution: "Pangku"'s Negotiation of Subversion and Re-inscription in Indonesian Cinema

Synthesizing the intertextual and semiotic analyses, "Pangku"'s primary feminist contribution is its refusal of a simplistic narrative of liberation. The film articulates a complex ideological stance where moments of semiotic subversion are constantly threatened by the overwhelming force of the symbolic order. Its dialogue with cultural scripts of the "kopi pangku" phenomenon and cinematic melodrama creates a critique, yet the protagonist's trajectory suggests that individual resistance is often contained within the very patriarchal structures it seeks to defy, presenting a nuanced feminist statement.

The protagonist's body is the central site of this ideological contestation. Symbolically, it is commodified, an object within a patriarchal economy of desire and survival. However, the film's focus on the genotext—the involuntary twitches, the dissociative gaze, the violent scrubbing—reclaims it as a site of semiotic resistance and embodied subjectivity. This dual representation prevents the body from being merely a passive object of the male gaze, instead portraying it as an active, though fraught, locus of agency and suffering (Pasha, 2026).

The film's narrative resolution is crucial to its feminist contribution, as it resists a triumphant conclusion. The protagonist does not escape her circumstances in a way that would offer cathartic closure. This lack of resolution can be interpreted as a re-inscription of patriarchal power, suggesting the futility of resistance. However, it also functions as a powerful critique of narratives that demand female suffering be redeemed by escape or martyrdom, presenting a more sobering and realistic portrayal of systemic oppression in contemporary Indonesia.

Ultimately, "Pangku" functions as a progressive, albeit challenging, text within Indonesian cinema. By foregrounding the dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic, the film moves beyond simplistic portrayals of victimhood or heroism. It contributes a vital feminist discourse by refusing easy answers, instead exposing the deep-seated nature of patriarchal ideology and the complex, often contradictory, ways in which female subjectivity is negotiated. The film's value lies in its honest depiction of resistance as an ongoing, internal process.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the film "Pangku" constructs a complex feminist discourse through a dialectical process rooted in Julia Kristeva's theories. By

intertextually engaging with and subverting sociocultural narratives of the "kopi pangku" phenomenon, the film critiques dominant patriarchal representations. The analysis demonstrates that the film's symbolic order, which codifies female subordination, is consistently disrupted by eruptions from the semiotic chora. These disruptions, manifested through the protagonist's corporeal gestures, affective displays, and vocal nuances, represent a raw, embodied resistance that challenges the coherence of the patriarchal phenotext, positioning her body as the primary site of ideological contestation.

The research confirms the protagonist functions as a Kristevan "subject-in-process," her subjectivity continuously constituted through the tension between symbolic conformity and semiotic resistance. Her agency is not located in triumphant rebellion but in micro-level negotiations and strategic withdrawals that subvert the patriarchal gaze from within. The film's refusal to provide a cathartic resolution is a key finding; instead of offering narrative closure, it presents a sobering portrayal of systemic oppression. This unresolved trajectory critiques simplistic cinematic tropes and highlights the ongoing, often contained, nature of female resistance within deeply entrenched patriarchal structures.

Ultimately, this analysis posits that "Pangku" makes a significant contribution to contemporary feminist discourse in Indonesian cinema. By employing a complex semiotic and intertextual strategy, the film moves beyond binary representations of victimhood or heroism. Its primary value lies in its nuanced depiction of resistance as an internal, corporeal, and often contradictory process. The film functions as a progressive cultural artifact not by offering a simple narrative of liberation, but by exposing the pervasive nature of patriarchal ideology and foregrounding the difficult, unresolved struggle for female subjectivity in the face of systemic constraints.

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