

**Beyond the Frame: Articulating Feminist Sensibilities through Cinematic
Language in *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021)**



FINAL THESIS

**Submitted to fulfill the requirements for obtaining a bachelor's degree in Communication
Studies at the Faculty of Socio-Cultural Sciences**

Written By

SHIFA GHANIA AARIFAH

22321270

BACHELOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

FACULTY OF SOCIO-CULTURAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INDONESIA

2026

THESIS AGREEMENT SHEET

**Beyond the Frame: Articulating Feminist Sensibilities through Cinematic
Language in *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021)**

Written by:

Shifa Ghania Aarifah
22321270

The thesis supervisor has been approved to be tested and defended before the Thesis Examination
Team.

Date: June 29th, 2026

Thesis Supervisor



Dr. Zaki Habibi, S.IP., M.Comms

NIDN. 0517078101

الجامعة الإسلامية
الاندونيسية

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

**Beyond the Frame: Articulating Feminist Sensibilities through Cinematic
Language in *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021)**

Written by:

Shifa Ghania Aarifah

22321270

Has been retained and ratified by the Thesis Testing Board
Communication Science Study Program, Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences
Universitas Islam Indonesia

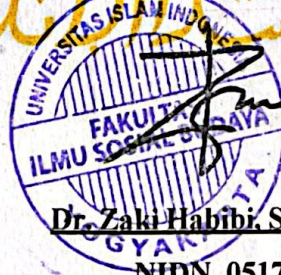
Day : Wednesday
Date : July 13th, 2026

Board of Examiners:

Head of Board : Dr. Zaki Habibi, S.IP., M.Comms
NIDN. 0517078101

Examiner: Iwan Awaluddin Yusuf, S.IP., M.Si., Ph.D.
NIDN. 0506038201

Knowing,
Head of Undergraduate Program, Department of Communication
Universitas Islam Indonesia



Dr. Zaki Habibi, S.IP., M.Comms
NIDN. 0517078101

MOTTO

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ

“The believing men and believing women are allies of one another.” (QS At-Taubah:71)

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” Simone de Beauvoir

“I am deliberate and afraid of nothing.” Audre Lorde

DEDICATION

This thesis is written as a dedication to:

1. I myself, for having the courage to begin this journey and the perseverance to see it through. This work stands as a testament to the resilience, growth, and determination I discovered within myself throughout the many challenges, doubts, and lessons that accompanied the completion of this thesis.
2. My parents and family, whose unconditional love, endless prayers, unwavering encouragement, and countless sacrifices have been the greatest source of strength in my life. Their faith in me has provided constant motivation and has made every achievement possible.
3. My friends, colleagues, and all those who have accompanied me along this journey, for their sincere support, understanding, and encouragement. Their presence, whether through words of comfort, shared laughter, or thoughtful assistance, has made this process far more meaningful and bearable.
4. UII campus and Communication Studies programme, for providing a valuable academic environment that has nurtured my intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and personal development.
5. My thesis supervisors, lecturers, and academic mentors, whose guidance, insights, and dedication have contributed significantly to the completion of this research and to my growth as a student and aspiring scholar.
6. Everyone who contributed to and supported this work in ways both great and small, whether through guidance, support, encouragement, or prayer. Your kindness and generosity have left an enduring impact, and this thesis is as much a reflection of your contributions as it is of my own efforts.

STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC ETHICS

Bismillahirrohamnirrahim

Undersigned, I henceforth

Name : Shifa Ghania Aarifah

Student Number : 22321270

Through this letter, I hereby state the following:

1. Throughout the completion of this thesis research, researchers upheld academic integrity by refraining from academic misconduct, such as plagiarism, enlisting assistance from others in writing the thesis, or engaging in any other violations that contradict the esteemed academic ethics upheld by the Islamic University of Indonesia.
2. This thesis represents solely my own scientific efforts as a student and researcher solely, without the involvement of any other individuals or parties.
3. If, after I graduate from the Communication Science Department in the Faculty of Psychology and Social-Cultural Science at the Islamic University of Indonesia, it is determined that this thesis shows clear evidence of plagiarism, or if the Islamic University of Indonesia imposes academic sanctions.

Thus, I truly agree with this remark.

Yogyakarta, 2026

Shifa Ghania Aarifah

FOREWORD

All praise and gratitude be to Allah SWT, the Most Merciful, for His abundant love, blessings, and will, so that this final thesis entitled *Beyond the Frame: Articulating Feminist Sensibilities through Cinematic Language in Mona Lisa Smile (2003) and Yuni (2021)* could be completed smoothly. The author realizes that this Final Project was more difficult than expected, but it would not have been possible without the help, guidance, and prayers of various parties. Therefore, on this occasion, the author would like to express his deepest gratitude to all those who have helped during the process of completing this Final Project, with the utmost gratitude to:

1. The author herself, little Shifa Ghania Aarifah, for surviving every chapter of this journey with courage and resilience. Through moments of self-doubt, overwhelming thoughts, painful experiences, and countless uncertainties, she continued to move forward. To the younger Shifa who once questioned whether she would ever make it this far, this thesis is a gentle reminder that she did. Every struggle, every tear, every lesson, every silence, and every small victory has led to this moment. The author is deeply proud of the woman she has become and of the strength she discovered within herself along the way.
2. The pillar of the family, Ayah, whose unwavering dedication and tireless efforts have always been devoted to providing the best for his beloved ones. Although no parent is perfect, the author has always recognized the sincerity behind every sacrifice, responsibility, and act of care. Much of what the author has achieved today is inseparable from Ayah's hard work, prayers, and steadfast commitment to ensuring that his family is well supported. For all that he has done, and for all that often goes unspoken, the author extends her deepest gratitude and appreciation. Your little girl did it, Ayah.
3. The person who shaped my life, Bunda, whose endless prayers, words of encouragement, and unwavering love have been a constant source of strength at every stage of my life. Through moments of disagreement, heartfelt conversations, and countless lessons, Bunda has shaped the author into a stronger, more resilient, and more independent person. The completion of this thesis is inseparable from her sacrifices, patience, and sincere devotion. The author is profoundly grateful for the love and guidance that have continuously illuminated her path. I've managed to go this far, Bun.
4. Azwa Zahia Aarifah, the author's younger sister, has been a unique blend of candid honesty, quiet care, and unwavering support. Although their relationship is often marked by playful

disagreements and the kind of affection that siblings do not always express directly, Azwa has consistently been a source of thoughtful advice and rational perspective. Her logical responses, stoic demeanor, and subtle yet sincere concern have provided the author with clarity during challenging times. While the author may still be learning how to become a better older sister, she is grateful for Azwa's presence. *Je te déteste, ma chère sœur.*

5. Dr. Zaki Habibi, S.IP., M.Comms. as the Main Supervisor and Head of the Communication Studies Programme, for his invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and thoughtful insights throughout the completion of this thesis. The author is grateful for his distinctive and thought-provoking approach to teaching, challenging conventional perspectives and exploring ideas beyond the obvious. This author sincerely appreciates his assistance and support during the proposal seminar process and other administrative matters.
6. All administrative staff of the Study Programme who have assisted in facilitating all administrative matters for the author during their studies at Communication Studies UII.
7. Amel, the author's dearest friend since the very beginning of her university journey, for being a constant source of comfort, support, and companionship through every high and low. Living away from home became far more manageable because of Amel's presence, warmth, and unwavering willingness to listen. More than just a friend, she has been like an older sister who, in many ways, has guided the author through the complexities of growing into womanhood. The author is deeply grateful for the countless memories, conversations, and moments of strength they have shared.
8. Spica, the author's fellow thesis companion, for her sincere help, encouragement, and solidarity throughout the thesis-writing process. Navigating the challenges of completing this research alongside her made the journey feel lighter and more meaningful. The author is truly thankful for the support and friendship they have built and hopes that the memories of persevering through this chapter together will remain a cherished part of their lives for years to come.
9. UNY management student with student number 19808141137, for the support, encouragement, and genuine care extended throughout the completion of this thesis. The author is deeply grateful for the thoughtful guidance, consistent assistance, and sincere efforts that helped make this process feel lighter and more manageable. His presence during this journey, in ways both practical and meaningful, contributed significantly to the timely

completion of this work. Although words may never fully capture the extent of the author's appreciation, she will always be thankful for the kindness, generosity, and support that were given so wholeheartedly.

The author realizes that this thesis is far from perfect. Therefore, the author sincerely hopes to receive criticism and suggestions from readers as input for future work. May this thesis be of benefit to the readers, the author herself, and the development of Communication Science. May all parties who have been involved and contributed to the completion of this thesis be rewarded with good deeds and blessings from Allah SWT. Finally, may Allah SWT continue to bestow His mercy and blessings upon us all. Aamin Ya Rabbal Alamin.

Yogyakarta, 2026

Shifa Ghania Aarifah

ABSTRACT

Shifa Ghania Aarifah

Aarifah, Shifa Ghania (2026). Beyond the Frame: Articulating Feminist Sensibilities through Cinematic Language in *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021), Communication Studies Program, Faculty of Social and Cultural Science, Universitas Islam Indonesia, 2026.

This thesis examines how feminist sensibilities are articulated through cinematic language in *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni*. Using qualitative textual and visual analysis, the study explores how narrative structure, dialogue, spatial composition, and performance construct the meaning of gender and agency. The findings show that *Mona Lisa Smile* expresses feminist sensibilities through intellectual confrontation and institutional debate, while *Yuni* articulates them through silence, repetition, and subtle acts of resistance within cultural constraints. Despite their different contexts, both films challenge simplified notions of empowerment by presenting agency as contextual, relational, and continuously negotiated. This study concludes that cinematic language does not merely reflect gender ideology but actively constructs and reimagines feminist meaning. It contributes to communication and media studies by demonstrating how film can serve as a powerful site for feminist expression.

Keywords: Feminist Sensibility; Cinematic Language; Gender Representation; Film Analysis; Mona Lisa Smile; Yuni; Communication Studies

ABSTRAK

Aarifah, Shifa Ghania (2026). Beyond the Frame: Articulating Feminist Sensibilities through Cinematic Language in *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021), Communication Studies Program, Faculty of Social and Cultural Science, Universitas Islam Indonesia, 2026.

Skripsi ini mengkaji bagaimana sensibilitas feminis diartikulasikan melalui bahasa sinematik dalam film *Mona Lisa Smile* dan *Yuni*. Dengan menggunakan analisis tekstual dan visual kualitatif, penelitian ini menelusuri bagaimana struktur naratif, dialog, dan komposisi ruang, dan penampilan (*performance*) membangun makna gender dan agensi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Mona Lisa Smile* mengekspresikan sensibilitas feminis melalui konfrontasi intelektual dan perdebatan institusional, sementara *Yuni* mengartikulasikannya melalui keheningan, pengulangan, dan tindakan resistensi yang halus di tengah berbagai batasan budaya. Meskipun berangkat dari konteks yang berbeda, kedua film ini sama-sama menantang gagasan pemberdayaan yang disederhanakan, dengan menghadirkan agensi sebagai sesuatu yang kontekstual, relasional, dan senantiasa dinegosiasikan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa bahasa sinematik tidak sekedar merefleksikan ideologi gender, melainkan secara aktif mengkonstruksi dan memaknai ulang makna feminis. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian komunikasi dan media yang menunjukkan bagaimana film dapat menjadi ruang yang kuat bagi ekspresi feminis.

Kata Kunci: Sensibilitas Feminis; Bahasa Sinematik; Representasi Gender; Analisis Film; *Mona Lisa Smile*; *Yuni*; Kajian Komunikasi

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	9
ABSTRAK	10
TABLE OF FIGURES	13
CHAPTER I Introduction	14
1.1 Background	14
1.2 Research Questions	16
1.3 Research Purpose and Objectives	16
1.4 Benefits of Research	16
1.5 Literature Review: Previous Research	17
1.6 Literature Review: Theoretical Framework	18
1.6.1 Feminist Theory: The Personal is Political, and The Frame is Feminine	18
1.6.2 Film Studies: Grammar of the Gaze, Anatomy of the Self	19
1.6.3 Perception Theory: Feeling the Frame, Sensing the Message	21
1.7 Research Methods	22
1.7.1 Feminist Textual Analysis	23
1.7.2 Unit of Analysis and Analytical Approach	24
1.7.3 Analytical Procedure and Scene Selection Rationale	24
1.7.4 Selected Scenes and Justification	25
1.7.5 Multilayered Interpretation: Narrative, Cinematic, and Ideological Structures	26
CHAPTER II Overview: Cinema, Feminism, and The Visual	28
2.1 The World of Cinema and Feminism in Contemporary Culture	28
2.2 Overview of <i>Mona Lisa Smile</i> (2003)	28
2.3 Overview of <i>Yuni</i> (2021)	30
2.4 Comparative Context: Cross-Cultural Feminist Expression through Cinematic Language	31
2.5 The Visual Terrain of Resistance	32
CHAPTER III Findings: Detailed Analysis of the Films	34
3.1 Inside the Frame: General Overview of <i>Mona Lisa Smile</i> and <i>Yuni</i>	34
3.2 Analysis of Selected Scenes	35
3.2.1 Analysis of Scenes in <i>Mona Lisa Smile</i>	36
3.2.2 Analysis of Scenes in <i>Yuni</i>	44
3.3 Narrative Paths, Spoken Resistance, and Women's Agency in Cinema	52
3.4 Comparative Discussion: Feminist Sensibilities through Cinematic	54
3.5 Character Analysis: Yuni and Katherine Watson as Feminist Figures	57
3.5.1 Yuni and the Performance of Quiet Resistance	57

3.5.2 Katherine Watson and the Performance of Institutional Resistance.....	59
3.5.3 Comparative Character Construction and Feminist Meaning.....	60
3.5.4 Characterization and Feminist Sensibility	61
<i>CHAPTER IV Discussion: Feminist Sensibilities as Constructed through Cinema Language</i>	63
4.1 Feminist Sensibilities Beyond Narrative Resolution.....	63
4.2 Narrative as a Cinematic Space of Feminist Negotiation.....	65
4.3 Dialogue as a Site of Feminist Contestation	66
4.4 Character Agency and Feminist Choice under Constraint.....	68
4.5 Cinematic Language as Feminist Expression.....	69
4.6 Comparative Feminist Sensibilities Across Cinematic Contexts.....	71
<i>CHAPTER V Conclusion, Limitations of Research, and Recommendations</i>	74
5.1 Conclusion	74
5.2 Research Limitations	75
5.3 Recommendations	76
<i>REFERENCES:</i>	78

TABLE OF FIGURES

Table 1 Selected Scenes and Justification	25
Figure 1.7.5.1 Mona Lisa Smile Poster (Source: Internet Movie Database)	29
Figure 1.7.5.1 Yuni Poster (Internet Movie Database)	30
Figure 3.2.1.1 Film still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Joan and Katherine in the Office (00:33:12-00:36:04)	37
Figure 3.2.1.2 Film still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Katherine secretly gives Joan a Yale application (00:35:26-00:36:05)	38
Figure 3.2.1.3 Film still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Joan and Betty argue in the kitchen about Yale (00:50:18-00:51:30)	39
Figure 3.2.1.4 Film still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Betty confronts Katherine in class (01:00:35-01:02:00)	41
Figure 3.2.1.5 Film still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Katherine's emotional lecture after Betty's editorial (01:08:34-01:11:54)	42
Figure 3.2.1.6 Film Still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Joan chooses marriage in conversation with Katherine (01:30:18-01:32:51)	44
Figure 3.2.2.1 Film Still from Yuni (2021): Yuni talks to her mother after Iman's proposal (00:32:10-00:34:20)	46
Figure 3.2.2.2 Film still from Yuni (2021): Bu Lies explains the scholarship requirements to Yuni (00:40:51-00:41:30)	47
Figure 3.2.2.3 Film still from Yuni (2021): Gossip among the mothers at Yuni's house (00:38:43- 00:40:45)	48
Figure 3.2.2.4 Film still from Yuni (2021): Yuni declines Iman's proposal (00:42:10-00:43:05)	49
Figure 3.2.2.5 Film still from Yuni (2021): Mang Dodi's marriage proposal with dowry conditions (01:08:40-01:09:57)	51
Figure 3.2.2.6 Film still from Yuni (2021): Yuni runs away on her wedding day (01:53:21- 01:56:50)	52
Figure 3.5.1.1 Arawinda Kirana (source: Tempo)	58
Figure 3.5.1.2 Arawinda Kirana (source: Internet Movie Database)	58
Figure 3.5.2.1 Julia Roberts (source: Yahoo News)	59
Figure 3.5.2.2 Julia Roberts (source: Internet Movie Database)	60

CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1 Background

Our understanding of gender often begins with simple divisions, yet these divisions carry histories far more complex than they appear. Feminist theory has always distrusted this simplicity; sorting the world into fixed opposites, reason, and emotion, male and female, does not describe reality much as manufacturing a hierarchy, where one team quietly dominates the other (Beauvoir, 1989). Rather than treating gender as a timeless essence, feminist theory has generally followed Beauvoir's insight that "One is not born, but becomes one," asking how gender roles come to be, insisting on analysis that is historical rather than static (Beauvoir, 1989).

That insistence on history is exactly what intersectional analysis demands. Beltran (2016) argues this work cannot be done in the abstract; it requires thinking collectively about specific practices and histories. Alexander and Mohanty (1997) push further, rather than folding "women" into one global category. This is the sensibility guiding this study: read two films from two very different worlds on their own terms, side by side.

And those worlds have not treated women equally for a very long time. Women are pushed into a secondary social position as far back as ancient Greece and Egypt (Smith & Raeper, 2020), and the imbalance never left: as of 2015, women held only about one-tenth of head-of-state and head-of-government positions worldwide, according to United Nations data. Even now, women are judged less on competence than on how well they perform gentleness and submissiveness; positioned as companions who prop up male authority in the name of social "harmony" (Spradley, 2007).

None of this stays confined to real life; it shows up on screen, too. Framing, omission, and composition are how filmmakers construct meaning, not just record it (Rose, 2016), which is why film functions as both a mirror and a battleground for ideological conflict (Martinez, 2016). Apparatus theory takes this further: *mise-en-scène* and editing can just as easily prop up patriarchal norms as they can dismantle them, which is exactly why more filmmakers now treat cinematic language itself as a form of resistance.

The language does not write itself. Every choice a director makes, over objects, settings, movement, lighting, sound, shapes a constructed reality rather than a neutral record (Bordwell & Thompson, 2022; Pratista, 2008; Rose, 2016). These choices become signs carrying meaning well past their literal surface; it is the system of signs that this study calls cinematic language.

Work on *Mona Lisa Smile* (Cahyani, 2009; Omar & Abbas, 2022) and on *Yuni* (Khanifah & Fajriyah, 2023; Riskita & Rengganis, 2023; Febiola et al., 2023; Giwandhani, 2022) keeps returning to what each film says, through dialogue, narrative, and cultural symbolism, rather than how it says it through form, and always one film at a time. This is a communication gap as much as a film studies one: dialogue and plot are only half the message, and a film left unexamined at the level of form is a film only half understood. Closing that gap, by comparing how two films from two different industries construct feminist meaning through form rather than theme, is the task this study takes up

Two films from two different worlds. *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003), directed by Mike Newell, follows Katherine Watson (Julia Roberts), an art history professor unsettling domestic expectations at 1950s Wellesley College. *Yuni* (2021) directed by Kamila Andini, follows a teenage girl in modern-day Banten, Indonesia, resisting early marriage through restrained gesture, silence, and a lavender-toned visual language.

The pairing is not incidental; it is the argument in miniature. *Mona Lisa Smile* is mainstream Hollywood, built around a major star and an established commercial machine. *Yuni* sits at the opposite end of that spectrum: Indonesian arthouse and festival cinema, modest scale, distinguished by Platform Prize at the Toronto International Film Festival, shaped by curatorial recognition rather than box-office performance. Setting a commercial giant beside an arthouse film amounts to a genuine test: does feminist sensibility expressed through cinematic language survive the crossing between industry, budget, and audience, or does it belong to one context alone?

The test sits at the center of this research: a dialogue between feminist theory and cinematic language, tracing how resistance to patriarchal standards is constructed not only through what is said, but through what is seen, felt, and framed.

1.2 Research Questions

These concerns are formulated into the following questions, one addressing how this articulation takes shape on screen, the other addressing why it matters beyond it:

- a. How do the films *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021) articulate feminist sensibilities through cinematic language?
- b. What is the significance of such articulation in media and communication studies?

1.3 Research Purpose and Objectives

The study aims to examine how *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021) express feminist sensibilities through their cinematic language. This research positions both films as visual texts that explore gender, power, and resistance, aiming to comprehend how feminist concepts manifest not just through dialogue and story but also through the expressive techniques of filmmaking.

This study investigates the cinematic strategies that visually articulate feminist thinking, analyzing how framing and mise-en-scène portray defiance. It examines how the primary female characters represent feminist ideals through their individual narratives and the visual frameworks that encompass them, while recognizing the cultural and historical conditions that influence each film's ideological framework. This research aims to highlight how the directorial decisions of Mike Newell and Kamila Andini create unique yet connected criticism of gender assumptions, demonstrating cinema as a significant platform for expressing feminist opposition.

1.4 Benefits of Research

This research provides theoretical contributions to film studies, feminist theory, and visual communication by illustrating how cinematic language serves as a medium for expressing feminist sensibilities. This study enhances academic comprehension of how visual narrative techniques contest patriarchal norms in many cultural and historical settings through an analysis of *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni*. It enhances the current discussion on the relationship between ideology and representation, demonstrating how films actively participate in shaping, negotiating, and rejecting gendered power structures.

In addition to its theoretical contributions, this research offers practical advantages for filmmakers, students, and audiences who critically engage with cinema. The study discusses how visual choices, framing, and mise-en-scène possess ideological significance, thereby promoting more deliberate methodologies in film analysis and production. It enables audiences to identify

subtle forms of feminist representation within cinematic works, enhancing media literacy and encouraging new methods of valuing films as cultural actions rather than mere entertainment.

1.5 Literature Review: Previous Research

Cinema, when shaped by a thoughtful storyteller, evolves into a space where ideas are challenged, identities are reshaped, and silence holds power. Feminist cinema analysis thrives in this context, through existing studies of *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021) have approached that space from markedly different theoretical entry points, linguistic, narratological, cultural, and none of them from the angle of cinematic language itself. This section reviews those studies not only for what they found, but for the frameworks that shaped what they were able to see.

Cahyani (2009), in her thesis ‘Feminist Ideas in the Film *Mona Lisa Smile*,’ reads Katherine Watson’s rebellion through the lens of liberal feminism, treating her teaching methods and classroom discourse as sites where autonomy is fostered rather than simply taught. The reading is thematic and productive on its own terms, but it does not ask how camera work, framing, or editing participate in constructing that autonomy on screen; the risk is treating Katherine’s defiance as something the story simply states, rather than something the film visually withholds and grants through distance, angle, and framing.

Omar and Abbas (2022) push closer to form, but by a linguistic route. Their essay, ‘A Critical Stylistic Study of the Notion of Women’s Empowerment in *Mona Lisa Smile*,’ applies Jeffries’ (2010) critical stylistics to show how the film’s dialogue resists patriarchal expectations, positioning each line Katherine speaks as an act of resistance embedded in the script. Useful as this is, a reading anchored in dialogue risks overstating how much of Katherine’s resistance is spoken at all, when a significant part of the film’s feminist charge lies in what the camera lingers on when she says nothing.

Giwandhani (2022) turns to *Yuni*, offering a culturally grounded counterpart to Watson’s classroom revolt. Using Vladimir Propp’s narrative theory, she traces how female stereotypes are built and quietly disrupted at the level of plot function, arguing that *Yuni*’s silences, hesitations, and refusals carry as much ideological weight as any spoken line. This limitation is more consequential for *Yuni* specifically, since the film’s resistance is deliberately non-verbal; a framework built around narrative function is not designed to explain how a lavender palette, a held shot, or a restrained camera movement produces that same resistance visually.

Read together, these three studies converge on a shared claim, that filmic language, verbal or narrative, is never neutral, but they arrive at that claim through frameworks pitched at dialogue and story structure rather than at the visual system that holds a film together. Left unexamined, this shared gap means that what audiences see and feel, often before a single word is spoken, has been theorized least. This is the gap the present study addresses: not only comparing an American film to an Indonesian one, but also shifting the analytical lens toward cinematic language, framing, composition, editing, and mise-en-scène as a distinct object of inquiry, one that these prior readings gesture toward but do not take as their primary focus.

1.6 Literature Review: Theoretical Framework

These three theories are not deployed as independent, parallel lenses; rather, they operate in a hierarchy in which each performs a function that the others cannot. Feminist Theory comes first, as it supplies the analytical category this research depends on: what constitutes resistance, agency, or ideological rupture in the first instance, without which neither film would yield anything to examine. Film Studies builds on this foundation by supplying mechanics of construction, explaining how narrative structure, framing, and editing become the vehicle through which that named resistance is materially realized on screen, translating an abstract idea of resistance into a specific shot, cut, or pause. Perception Theory then completes the process at the point of reception, accounting for how that visually constructed resistance is actually felt and registered by the viewer, closing the gap between what the film does formally and what an audience experiences emotionally. The three theories trace a single process that this research undertakes to examine in *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni*.

1.6.1 Feminist Theory: The Personal is Political, and The Frame is Feminine.

In 1963, Betty Friedan published “The Feminine Mystique”, exposing the façade of ideal domesticity and articulating what she termed “the problem that has no name,” a subtle, enduring discontent experienced by several women confined to conventional roles. This concept establishes the foundation for the feminist viewpoint in this research. This research emphasizes a subtler type of resistance rather than overt activism: the minor, symbolic actions that frequently escape attention yet possess significant importance as what may be termed ordinary feminist agency. This theory explains how women reclaim their autonomy in an environment that restricts them. It shifts the focus from slogans and

protests to Katherine Watson's decision to teach outside the syllabus, defying conventional college norms, and Yuni's fragile yet strong rejection of marriage proposals. There are political statements throughout the story.

As Raina (2017) points out, there have been four waves of feminist theory that have looked at different parts of gender oppression, such as voting rights, digital activism, environmental justice, and intersectionality. Simone de Beauvoir and other scholars have had a big impact on this field and have inspired many people. In *The Second Sex*, she famously said, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman". This statement is still relevant today, that society, not birth, shapes gender. This understanding is particularly relevant when examining characters like Yuni and Joan. Both of them live in a world where men are in charge, but they make a room for themselves through both confident assertion and quiet rebellion. Feminist theory describes a counter-narrative as a reimagining of women that reclaims voice, identity, and power, as seen in their choices.

Raina (2017) also highlights the role of feminist literary theory to restore women's voices in cultural narrative. Key intellectuals include Virginia Woolf, who in *A Room of One's Own* championed women's intellectual and economic independence, and Elaine Showalter, who formulated the concept of gynocriticism, a framework that underscores the significance of women's writing as a legitimate area of scholarly inquiry.

Seen through this lens, *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni* are not just films; they are feminist texts. Whether it is in the courage to say no, or the choice to pursue knowledge over tradition, these stories remind us that the personal is political and that every frame has the power to resist.

Naming this resistance as feminist, however, only identifies what is at stake; the next section turns to Film Studies to explain the formal mechanics through which that resistance is actually constructed on screen.

1.6.2 Film Studies: Grammar of the Gaze, Anatomy of the Self

Comprehending cinema entails grasping its language, including how shots communicate, editing implies meaning, and structure influences experience. Film studies offers analytical methods to interpret cinematic grammar and explain how form conveys meaning. Narrative transcends mere chronological events; it serves as a coherent framework for conveying ideology through spatial-temporal construction.

Himawan Pratista (2008), in *Memahami Film Edisi 2*, emphasizes that narrative in film constitutes a system of logic, cause and effect, time, and place, intimately connected to shape audience perception. This creation of a narrative serves as a fundamental mechanism for the production of meaning. Pratista (2008) further argues that character objectives, conflicts, and development are fundamental to this method, particularly when synchronized with the audience's emotional experience. In feminist cinema, subverting that system serves as a mode of critique.

This is where the notion of Cinematic Disruption of Norms emerges. It refers to how feminist filmmakers intentionally disrupt conventional narrative structures to contest prevailing ideologies. Bordwell and Thompson (2020) assert that story patterns influence our interpretation and emotions; through nonlinear timelines, ambiguous conclusions, or characters that reject conventional closure, they encourage critical thinking among audiences. Petro (2023) contends that female aesthetics frequently oppose the traditional three-act framework, opting instead for emotional ambiguity, introspection, and open-ended reflection.

In both *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni*, the narrative framework becomes political. Katherine Watson's narrative centers on resistance rather than resolution, and her character development is intentionally ambiguous. She does not achieve victory but rather plants the seeds of transformation. Yuni likewise dismisses the neat conclusion of marriage in favor of ambiguous liberty. This inversion of narrative closure aligns with Pratista (2008), who describes it as the manipulation of narrative logic, wherein the cinema not only conveys a tale but also contests conventional expectations regarding story endings. Therefore, the narrative in feminist cinema serves as a domain of ideological exploration. It is not simply the medium of material but a well-crafted grammar through which identity, power, and resistance are examined. The narratives conveyed, whether through Katherine's educational resistance or Yuni's poetic silence, exemplify acts of feminist authorship.

Yet these formal constructions mean little until they reach a viewer; the following section turns to Perception Theory to explain how this visually built resistance is actually felt.

1.6.3 Perception Theory: Feeling the Frame, Sensing the Message

At its core, cinema viewing is an emotional event rather than merely a consumption of a visual story. Perception theory is a compass for comprehending how viewers interact with cinematic texts as diverse cultural and psychological beings, rather than passive viewers. Torben Grodal (2019) believes that perception is an embodied process in which emotion, cognition, and sensory response are deeply connected rather than a detached decoding of images. While film uses visual language to convey its message, this meaning is also experienced physically.

Every frame that the viewer sees is introduced with their own memories, cultural beliefs, and emotional past. This is where the idea of Perceived Visual Resistance comes into play, explaining how small filmmaking decisions can result in powerful feminist resistance moments. Even if these indications do not explicitly shout rebellion, they still provoke a natural response that appeals to viewers' emotions and ideologies.

As discussed in the *Handbook of Visual Communication* (Smith, Moriarty, Barbatsis, & Kenney, 2005), perception is shaped by both bottom-up and top-down processes: viewers first respond to the formal and sensory properties of an image, while interpretations are also heavily influenced by prior knowledge, cultural context, and expectation. In feminist cinema, this means viewers not only observe a woman refusing marriage but also feel the tension in her silence, the weight of societal pressure behind her pause, the triumph in her withheld "yes". When Yuni turns away from a suitor, or when Joan in *Mona Lisa Smile* chooses her own path, the emotional impact is registered in the body it is translated into thought.

These experiences function on a deeply emotional perceptual level. By allowing viewers to experience resistance through visual tension in addition to teaching them what to feel, they encourage them to take part in the meaning-making process. Visual communication is most effective when it moves beyond the literal and into the "felt realm," a domain where meaning is created by emotional intuition (Smith et al., 2005).

Perception thus turns into a feminist analytical tool. It allows us to examine how films convey resistance and strength through the sensory arrangement of visual clues as well as through narrative material. Warm lighting and gentle focus are used by *Mona Lisa Smile* to draw viewers into moments of confrontation. Conversely, *Yuni* expresses

considerable rebellion through intimate framing and color symbolism. This concept, where meaning is absorbed not only cognitively but also through the audience's skin, eyes, and breath, is mapped using the idea of perceived visual resistance.

1.7 Research Methods

This research employs a qualitative methodology to investigate how feminist resistance is articulated through cinematic language in the films *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021). This study examines films not merely as entertainment but as cultural texts, structured narratives that reflect, replicate, or challenge common ideologies (Rose, 2016). The study uses close reading to explore both visual and narrative elements, revealing meanings that extend beyond spoken dialogue, while focusing on how feminist messages are integrated into visual composition, gesture, spatial dynamics, and silence.

The analytical framework is based on Feminist Film Theory, namely Laura Mulvey's (1975) notion of the male gaze, which attacks the portrayal of women in classical Hollywood movies as passive objects of visual gratification for male viewers. Both *Yuni* and *Mona Lisa Smile* highlight female perspectives using distinct yet equally subversive visual techniques, exemplifying how these foundational notions shape the interpretation of both films. Expanding on this, Bell hooks (1992) introduces the concept of the oppositional gaze, which reclaims the visual agency of minority audiences, prompting them to critically examine and challenge prevailing cinematic viewpoints.

The research is supported by Visual Communication Theory, which explains the use of composition, framing, and color in generating meaning (Rose, 2016). Perception Theory is utilized to analyze how viewers emotionally respond to visual information. Maradia et al. (2025) utilize eye-tracking research to illustrate how minor alterations in cinematic focus and angles influence viewers' perception of gender, indicating that even the most trivial cinematic choices can possess ideological implications and either endorse or contest objectification.

This study also draws upon Gillian Rose's Visual Methodology, particularly her approach to semiotic analysis. This entails interpreting how signs, symbols, and visual design selections construct profound ideological significance. In their 2024 study, Khan and Akhtar investigated gender representation in Hollywood posters using visual codes. This research employs a comparable framework to analyze cinema, focusing on how *mise-en-scène*, costuming, lighting, body language, and spatial dynamics convey feminist agency on screen. For instance, in *Yuni*, the

character's internal struggle is subtly expressed through close-up shots and soft lavender hues. *Mona Lisa Smile* confronts the strict gender norms of the 1950s by comparing scenes of classroom and pedagogical defiance with classical art. This study integrates narrative and visual analysis, perceiving films as a multifaceted medium of communication, wherein concepts are conveyed not only through dialogue but also through color, discourse, and silence. Through this perspective, cinema transcends mere storytelling; it evolves into a site of feminist negotiation, where patriarchy is not only depicted but also critically and visually restricted.

1.7.1 Feminist Textual Analysis

To unpack these contrasting rebellions, this study anchors itself in feminist textual analysis. Cinema is treated here not as a passive mirror of reality, but as a dynamic arena where gender norms are constructed, policed, and ultimately fractured. Drawing on the insights of Rose (2016) and hooks (1994), this methodology looks beyond mere plot to interrogate the complete cinematic package: what is centered, whose voices are muted, and how the camera itself either reinforces or contests patriarchal structures. Grounded further in Laura Mulvey's (1975) foundational work on the dynamic of the gaze, the analysis scrutinizes how women are watched on screen, and crucially, how they stare back.

The two films mount their defenses from opposite ends of the stylistic spectrum. In *Mona Lisa Smile*, feminist disruption is distinctly verbal and combative; Katherine Watson weaponizes pedagogical authority and assertive dialogue against socially sanctioned domesticity. *Yuni*, conversely, crafts its resistance through silence, visual metaphors, and carefully choreographed scenes, actively subverting conventional Southeast Asian narratives of female submission.

To capture these divergent approaches, this analysis zeroes in on mise-en-scène, framing, color, space, and character positioning not just as set dressing, but as vital instruments of ideological expression. While *Mona Lisa Smile* juxtaposes classical art with feminist rhetoric to interrogate the gilded cages of educated 1950s women, *Yuni* relies on its aesthetic environment. The film's signature lavender tones and intimate close-ups manifest what Raina (2017) terms "everyday feminist agency" – small, intentional acts of defiance that push back against gendered expectations.

Ultimately, approaching these films as feminist texts requires looking past the script. Meaning spills over the edges of spoken dialogue into silences, lingering glances,

spatial arrangements, and subtle acts of resistance woven directly into the cinematic form. By shifting the analytical focus from what is loudly declared to what is delicately implied, feminist textual analysis transforms into an exercise in listening to the unsaid. It becomes an attentive practice of tracing exactly what the frame holds, what it implies, and what it quietly—yet fiercely—dares to contest.

1.7.2 Unit of Analysis and Analytical Approach

This research examines two films, *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) by Mike Newell and *Yuni* (2021) by Kamila Andini, as cultural visual texts that both represent and challenge patriarchal norms through cinematic language. Accordingly, the unit of analysis in this research comprises selected scenes from each film that significantly express the negotiation of gender norms through both narrative structure and visual aesthetics.

These scenes are approached as visual texts, ideological spaces where power, identity, and resistance are produced and contested (Rose, 2016). Through the analysis of particular scenes, camera movement, and editing become semiotic tools for encoding and expressing feminist sensibilities (Messaries, 2003; Bordwell & Thompson, 2020)

1.7.3 Analytical Procedure and Scene Selection Rationale

Before the analysis itself, it is worth making the selection processes explicit, since a comparative reading is only as credible as the criteria behind what gets compared. The process began with a full viewing of both films in their entirety, during which every scene carrying visible weight in relation to gender norms, whether through dialogue, silence, framing, or a character's action, was logged with its exact timestamp. This initial pass yielded eight candidate scenes from *Mona Lisa Smile* and fourteen from *Yuni*, a wider pool than what the analysis ultimately required, capturing any moment where a female character's agency, autonomy, or conformity to expectation was foregrounded, without yet judging which of these moments would carry the strongest comparative weight.

From this wider pool, scenes were narrowed down through thematic justification rather than by treating each film in isolation. A candidate scene was retained only if it performed a distinct thematic function, questioning a gendered expectation, offering or withholding support, escalating social pressure, enacting refusal, testing that refusal's consequence, or resolving it, and only if a scene performing that same function could also

be identified in the other film. This meant the comparison was not built on matching literal plot events (a classroom scene with a classroom scene, a wedding scene with a wedding scene), but on matching what each scene was doing thematically within its film's negotiation of gender norms. Scenes that repeated a thematic function already captured elsewhere in the same film were set aside in favor of the clearest instance of that function, which is why the eight and fourteen candidates each narrowed down to six: six was the number of distinct thematic functions that could be identified with a clear counterpart in both films, no more, and no fewer, without losing a stage in that negotiation.

This bottom-up process works from the films themselves toward shared thematic ground rather than imposing a predetermined framework onto the footage, which is what allows the analysis in the following section to treat *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni* as genuinely comparable texts, despite the sharp differences in culture, industry, and visual language surrounding them.

1.7.4 Selected Scenes and Justification

To address the research question, *how do the films Mona Lisa Smile (2003) and Yuni (2021) articulate feminist sensibilities through cinematic language?* The following scenes are selected based on their thematic weight and stylistic complexity. The analysis included six key scenes from both films.

Table 1 Selected Scenes and Justification

Scene number	<i>Mona Lisa Smile</i> (2003)	<i>Yuni</i> (2021)	Thematic Justification
Scene 1	Joan & Katherine in the office (00:32:12-00:36:04)	Yuni talks to her mother after Iman's proposal (00:29:50-00:30:53)	Young women quietly questioning marriage as the purpose of women and expressing personal hopes beyond domestic expectations.
Scene 2	Katherine secretly hands Joan the Yale application (00:35:26-00:36:05)	Bu Lies explains scholarship requirement to Yuni (00:40:51-00:41:30)	Institutional encouragement can open paths for women's intellectual growth, even within restrictive social environments.

Scene 3	Joan and Betty argue in the kitchen about Yale (00:50:18-00:51:30)	Gossip among mothers at Yuni's house (00:38:43-00:40:45)	Social pressure from peers and elders that frames women's ambition as a threat to tradition and social harmony.
Scene 4	Betty confronts Katherine in class (01:00:35-01:02:00)	Yuni declines Iman's marriage proposal (00:42:10-00:43:05)	Direct resistance (verbal and personal) against norms that expect women to prioritize marriage over self-determination.
Scene 5	Katherine's lecture after Betty's editorial (01:08:34-01:11:54)	Mang Dodi's marriage proposal with dowry conditions (01:08:40-01:09:57)	Women's value is measured through patriarchal standards, whether through domestic roles or control over the female body
Scene 6	Katherine and Joan's conversation at Joan's House (01:30:18-01:32:51)	The Runaway Bride (01:53:21-01:56:50)	Contrasting choices reveal different forms of agency: one embrace tradition consciously, while the other rejects it to reclaim autonomy

The scenes listed will be examined in greater depth using feminist textual analysis, also referred to as multilayered interpretation, which will be elaborated upon in the following section.

1.7.5 Multilayered Interpretation: Narrative, Cinematic, and Ideological Structures

A. Narrative Structure

- a. Both films challenge classical three-act narrative closure (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). Instead of a final triumph, they offer open-ended emotional transformations (Petro, 2023)
- b. Katherine's students do not become revolutionaries, but develop critical consciousness, "a quiet feminist evolution" (Cahyani, 2009).
- c. Yuni's story avoids resolution, aligning with de Beauvoir's (1989) idea of womanhood as a process rather than a fixed destination

B. Cinematic Structure

- a. Cinematic tools, such as color palette, shot size, and blocking, serve ideological functions (Maradia et al., 2025)
 - b. In *Yuni*, tight close-ups and pastel tones generate emotional immersion; in *Mona Lisa Smile*, classical compositions are destabilized through unconventional camera angles.
 - c. According to Khan & Akhtar (2024), framing and visual grammar are not neutral; they reflect the gender politics of the medium itself.
- C. Ideological and Affective Dimension (Perception Theory)
- a. According to Grodal (2019), viewers emotionally absorb visual ideology through tension, pacing, and spatial design.
 - b. When Joan hesitates or Yuni stays silent, the audience “feels” their resistance before interpreting it. This sensory engagement is what Rose (2016) and Smith et al. (2005) describe as the affective plane of meaning-making
 - c. These affective moments allow viewers to perceive feminist resistance not as spectacle, but as lived and embodied.

CHAPTER II

Overview: Cinema, Feminism, and The Visual

2.1 The World of Cinema and Feminism in Contemporary Culture

Cinema, as both an artistic expression and a cultural industry, has long operated as more than a mirror of society. It reflects the complexities of human life while quietly shaping how audiences come to see and interpret the world. As Gillian Rose (2016) argues, visual culture does not simply reproduce reality; it actively constructs it. Meaning does not rest solely in dialogue or plot. It resides in every frame, every cut, every choice of color and composition. Cinema, then, is not merely entertainment; it is a visual language through which collective identities are negotiated and challenged. Within this language unfolds a subtle yet persistent conversation between power and perception, where gender, race, and class are connected in ways that are often understated but never insignificant (hooks, 1992).

2.2 Overview of *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003)

Directed by Mike Newell and released in 2003, *Mona Lisa Smile* revisits the conservative terrain of 1950s America through the perspective of Katherine Watson, a progressive and, as described by Betty Warren, subversive art history lecturer at Wellesley College. The film situates its narrative within an elite women's institution where intellectual achievement coexists with the expectations of marriage and traditional etiquette. Wellesley becomes more than a setting; it serves as both a sanctuary and a battleground. In the postwar climate, women's lives were largely circumscribed by domestic ideals that privileged obedience and beauty over professional ambition (Friedan, 1963). Against this backdrop, Watson's arrival unsettles the institution's quiet certainty. By encouraging her students to think critically rather than memorize reverently, she subtly disrupts the established script of female education and selfhood. As Pratista (2008) suggests, film narratives function as ideological structures; in *Mona Lisa Smile*, that structure evolves into an ongoing negotiation between conformity and liberation.



Figure 1.7.5.1 Mona Lisa Smile Poster (Source: Internet Movie Database)

Watson's students represent very different ways women reacted to the strict expectations of the 1950s. Joan (Julia Stiles) is torn between her dream of attending Yale Law School and the pressure to get married. Betty (Kirsten Dunst), on the other hand, fiercely defends tradition, pushing the conservative values she learned from her mother onto everyone else. Their differences neatly capture Butler's (1990) idea that gender is not just a natural identity, but a role you constantly rehearse and perform. Wellesley College acts as the perfect stage for this routine. It works as what Mulvey (1975) states, a "framing apparatus"—a highly controlled environment designed to make women look like beautiful objects to be admired, rather than independent thinkers taking action. Yet, right in the middle of this strict setting, Watson's classroom becomes a space for what hooks (1992) calls 'education as liberation. Katherine's art history lessons are not just about admiring pretty pictures; they become a tool to awaken her students' feminist awareness.

Director Mike Newell weaves this tension directly into how the film looks. By using soft lighting, pale colors, and perfectly balanced shots, the camera creates a mood of elegant but suffocating control. The set design, filled with mirrors, framed portraits, and overly neat rooms, visually traps the characters, echoing struggles between societal rules and personal freedom (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). Even the clothes help tell the story; the restrictive shapes and polite pastel costumes make society's strict rules something the women literally wear on their bodies. The title, *Mona Lisa Smile*, is the perfect metaphor for this era: a polite, painted-on smile designed to hide complicated, spoken feelings underneath. In the end, Watson's departure does

not spark a loud, dramatic revolution. Instead, the change she leaves behind is quiet but deep. Katherine shifts how her students perceive themselves, suggesting that meaningful change often starts simply with the courage to look at the world, just like art.

2.3 Overview of *Yuni* (2021)

Directed by Kamila Andini, *Yuni* (2021), the film that won the Platform Prize at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), tells a story about a young Indonesian girl as she navigates the entanglements of societal expectation, sexuality, and emerging selfhood. Set in Serang, Banten, the film situates its narrative at the intersection of modern aspiration and enduring tradition, revealing how cultural norms shape a young woman's understanding of freedom. Andini has remarked that she seeks to create films that “listen to women's silences” rather than overwrite them (Andini, 2021). That philosophy permeates *Yuni*, where stillness, color, and rhythm communicate with greater force than overt declaration. What emerges is a cinematic portrait that transforms quiet observation into a subtle yet resolute form of resistance.



Figure 1.7.5.1 *Yuni* Poster (Internet Movie Database)

Yuni, played by Arawinda Kirana, is confronted with three marriage proposals before completing her education—a normative occurrence within her local context, which poses a severe threat to her personal future. Rather than fighting back with dramatic arguments, *Yuni* resists through hesitation, restraint, and careful silence. These quiet reactions steadily build into a strong form of defiance, giving a seemingly simple story deep emotional and political weight. Looking at this through Mulvey's (1975) framework, *Yuni*'s body is treated as a blank surface for her community to project its expectations onto. However, she refuses to remain a passive object.

Rather than looking directly at the camera, she resists by holding back, using downward glances, long pauses, and unfinished sentences. These actions align perfectly with what hooks (1992) calls the “oppositional gaze” and what Raina (2017) defines as “everyday feminist agency,” showing how small, daily refusals can add up to meaningful resistance.

Visually, the film uses aesthetics to express this political message. Cinematographer Teoh Gay Hian relies on natural lighting, long takes, and soft focus to build a sense of intimacy between the viewer and the subject. Furthermore, the constant presence of lavender throughout the film symbolizes transition, uncertainty, and quiet rebellion. Lavender becomes the emotional core of the film; it appears calm on the surface but feels restless underneath. As Bordwell and Thompson (2020) point out, color in film often communicates feelings that dialogue alone cannot capture. In this case, the lavender palette makes Yuni’s internal struggle visible on screen. Finally, the recurring use of Sapardi Djoko Damono’s poetry deeply roots the story in Indonesian literary culture, adding depth to both the film’s cultural setting and Yuni’s private, inner life (Andini, 2021).

2.4 Comparative Context: Cross-Cultural Feminist Expression through Cinematic Language

At first glance, *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni* appear to belong to entirely different cinematic universes; one unfolding within the polished corridors of mid-century American academia, the other rooted in contemporary Indonesia’s layered social landscape. Yet beneath these geographical and historical differences lies a shared preoccupation: both films center on women negotiating the limits imposed upon them by patriarchal expectations. Drawing on Butler’s (1990) notion that gendered power operates through cultural repetition, each narrative exposes how such repetition sustains social norms, while also illuminating the subtle moments when it falters. Katherine Watson and Yuni, though separated by decades and continents, embody a similar impulse: the desire to reclaim authorship and freedom over their own lives and revise the scripts written in advance for them.

The textures of resistance in these films differ, but their spirit converges. In *Mona Lisa Smile*, dissent unfolds through language: lectures, debates, and the deliberate articulation of alternative possibilities. Katherine challenges ideology with words. In *Yuni*, resistance is quieter, almost whisper-like; it resides in pauses, withheld responses, and the eloquence of silence. If Katherine’s rebellion is articulated verbally, Yuni’s resistance is experienced affectively. As Raina

(2017) suggests, feminist agency often resides in the ordinary rather than the spectacular. These various strategies reflect what Crenshaw (1989) conceptualizes as intersectionality: gender cannot be abstracted from culture, history, or locality. A classroom debate in 1950s Massachusetts and a hesitant refusal in present-day Banten may look different, but they contest the same structure. One confronts ideology through speech; the other through refusal to comply.

Formally, both films also challenge the gaze through their visual language. Mike Newell's controlled symmetry and carefully composed mise-en-scène employ order to critique the rigidity of order itself. Kamila Andini, by contrast, loosens structure through lingering shots, ambient sound, and contemplative pacing, thereby inviting viewers into interiority rather than spectacle. In both cases, the camera becomes a feminist instrument, not one that announces its politics out loud, but one that subtly repositions women from objects of beauty to subjects of meaning. As Rose (2016) and Bordwell and Thompson (2020) argue, film is inseparable from ideology; to reframe an image is to reframe perception. Feminist cinema, in this sense, is less a genre than a methodology; a way of seeing that privileges empathy over dominance and complexity over cliché.

The dialogue between *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni* thus gestures toward a broader transnational feminist conversation. Resistance, these films suggest, is not exported wholesale from one culture to another, nor is it performed according to a universal script. It is adapted, translated, and locally negotiated. Whether through the assured rhetoric of a teacher encouraging intellectual independence or the contemplative silence of a teenager safeguarding her autonomy and freedom, both characters exceed the frames designed to contain them. Their stories affirm that feminism in film does not reside solely in slogans or overt rebellion. Rather, it manifests in the visual, emotional, and ethical choices that shape the moving image, in how a character speaks, hesitates, looks back, or refuses to look at all (Mulvey, 2019).

2.5 The Visual Terrain of Resistance

Cinema's most radical potential resides in its capacity to render the invisible visible, exposing the subtle operations of power and the interior worlds that social norms attempt to obscure. Through light, rhythm, and composition, it turns emotion into evidence and ideology into image. As Rose (2016) and Pratista (2008) both suggest, film is a system of signs; every choice of framing and movement encodes a worldview. *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni* occupy this visual terrain as sites of feminist negotiation: one speaks in the vocabulary of dialogue, the other in silence, yet

both articulate resistance as perception. By teaching viewers to look differently, these films reframe the act of seeing itself as a political gesture.

In *Mona Lisa Smile*, articulation, the courage to call out what society hides, structures resistance. In *Yuni*, stillness or the courage to keep quiet in a society that demands obedience, becomes the primary mode of organizing resistance. Collectively, these narratives demonstrate what Minh-ha (1991) refers to as "the political of location", emphasizing that feminism must speak from inside its cultural context. Both movies find emancipation in "re-vision" — the capacity to alter what the camera and thus, society, chooses to perceive—rather than only in revolt.

Ultimately, to move "beyond the frame" is to recognize that cinematic language itself contains the seeds of liberation. Whether illuminated by the soft glow of Wellesley's classrooms or washed in the lavender dusk of Banten's bedrooms, these films demonstrate that the gaze is neither fixed nor owned; it can be reclaimed, redirected, and reimagined. Feminist cinema does more than contest representation; it reconfigures the very terms through which representation operates. It suggests that seeing and being seen are never neutral acts, but ongoing negotiations of power, empathy, and selfhood (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). In this light, the frame, once understood as a boundary that confines, transforms into a threshold. What once limited now opens; what once contained now enables. Within that threshold, resistance does not merely appear; it takes shape.

CHAPTER III

Findings: Detailed Analysis of the Films

3.1 Inside the Frame: General Overview of *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni*

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis by examining how feminist sensibilities are articulated through the cinematic language of *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni*. Rather than treating feminism as a fixed doctrine, the discussion approaches it as a lived and visual experience, expressed through style, narrative structure, character positioning, and sociocultural context (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020).

Set in 1950s Wellesley College, where rigorous gender norms and academic success coexist, is vividly yet critically depicted in the 2003 movie *Mona Lisa Smile* (Omar & Abbas, 2022). Even though Katherine Watson is portrayed as a progressive art history teacher, it is her students who represent the different kinds of pressure that women in their era faced, and are the true emotional core of the story (Fitri, 2019). Betty Warren, Joan Bradwyn, and Giselle Levy each embody different negotiations with patriarchy. Giselle confronts sexual double standards without apology; Betty internalizes conservatism, clinging to the ideal of marital perfection even as it fractures her emotionally; Joan stands at the crossroads between Yale Law School and marriage. Through their intersecting narratives, the movie shows how identity, marriage, and education become contentious spaces for women (Beauvoir, 1989). Whether Wellesley liberates its students or subtly restricts their prospects, this film explores different pathways available to women.

In contrast, *Yuni* (2021) immerses viewers in the intimate rhythms of contemporary Indonesian life, where a young girl negotiates education, family expectations, and the looming pressure of early marriage. Yuni, a gifted student with aspirations for higher education, finds her ambitions at odds with entrenched norms surrounding obedience, virginity, and feminine virtue (Khanifah & Fajriyah, 2023). She is surrounded by women whose lives represent various potential futures: Suci, portrayed by Asmara Abigail, is a beautician and confidante whose candid reflections on desire and independence complicate conventional moral judgments. Tika, still a teenager yet having already experienced motherhood, represents another trajectory shaped by circumstance rather than choice. Through these intertwined experiences, the film suggests that patriarchy operates not only through explicit commands but also through ritual, routine, and inherited expectations. Rather than dramatizing rebellion through confrontation, *Yuni* accumulates emotional force through silence, symbol, and atmosphere. Through Kamila Andini's subtle

direction, these women's intertwined experiences illustrate how patriarchy operates through routines that shape a girl's future long before she chooses it for herself (Putri et al., 2023).

Both *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni* serve as highly effective films for exploring feminist themes because they place their female protagonists in vastly different cultural, historical, and ideological settings, while tracking their shared fight for personal autonomy (Petro, 2023). *Mona Lisa Smile* highlights classical second-wave feminist issues, such as the pursuit of identity, independence, and the right to make one's own choices, set against a Western, postwar backdrop (Woolf, 1929). In contrast, *Yuni* addresses modern, intersectional feminist topics by showing how gender expectations collide with religion, culture, class, and community standards in present-day Indonesia (Febiola et al., 2023). Examining these differences strengthens the overall comparison, demonstrating that feminism is not a single, uniform story, but rather a wide variety of experiences deeply shaped by surrounding social structures (Rose, 2016).

Ultimately, these two films work perfectly together as case studies because they demonstrate how feminist messages can be delivered using entirely different styles of filmmaking. One film relies on emotional subtlety and visual symbols, while the other leans on spoken arguments and direct debate (Lester, 2014). Their contrasting pacing and storytelling methods allow for a much deeper understanding of how resistance is imagined, acted out, and shared across different cultures (Raina, 2017). By comparing these films side-by-side, this study develops a broader perspective on the diverse ways feminism can be expressed. Furthermore, it highlights how cinema, as a medium, can transform a woman's internal struggles, dreams, and demands into powerful visual narratives (Khan & Akhtar, 2024). Together, both films provide a rich foundation for analyzing the daily realities of womanhood and the specific filmmaking techniques used to bring those realities to life on screen (Pratista, 2008).

3.2 Analysis of Selected Scenes

The primary data in this study consist of twelve selected scenes, six from *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and six from *Yuni* (2021), which are examined closely in this chapter. These scenes were chosen because of their thematic relevance to the previous discussion on women's agency, education, marriage, and resistance to patriarchal norms.

Instead of applying theoretical frameworks from the outset, this section begins by situating each scene within its narrative context and cinematic construction. Attention is given to elements such as visual composition, camera movement, dialogue, sound, and character interaction. By first

describing how the scenes unfold on screen, this approach establishes a clear analytical foundation, allowing the interpretations that follow to remain firmly grounded in the films themselves.

3.2.1 Analysis of Scenes in *Mona Lisa Smile*

This section discusses six sequences from *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) to argue that feminist sensibility here is constructed less through explicit declaration than through the accumulation of scenes that refuse to resolve their ambiguity (Petro, 2023). Rather than treating each scene as illustrating a single, stable feminist meaning, this analysis attends to the moments where the film's visual choices, framing, lighting, and pacing support more than one plausible reading, and argues that this openness is itself part of how the film constructs meaning, not a gap to be resolved (Rose, 2016; hooks, 1992). From a communication perspective, attention is given to how meaning is shaped not only through dialogue, but by what the camera withholds, delays, or leaves visually unsettled (Beauvoir, 1989).

The film introduces the conflict between ambition and tradition in an intimate and personal way, inviting viewers to empathize with Joan's situation (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). In the scene where Joan visits Katherine Watson's office to discuss her academic achievements, the warm color palette and soft lighting create a calm and welcoming atmosphere (Rose, 2016), a visual softness that arguably works to make Joan's dilemma legible as ordinary rather than exceptional: this is not staged as a crisis, but as the kind of conversation any bright student might have. The use of medium shots and shot-reverse-shot techniques allows the audience to observe both characters' facial expressions and emotional reactions clearly (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020), positioning Joan's ambivalence, rather than any external obstacle, as the scene's central tension.

Joan's composed posture and polite demeanor can be read as disciplined acceptance of institutional expectation (Butler, 1990), but through this reading is not the only one available: the same poise could equally signal confidence rather than compliance, a young woman already comfortable enough in her ambition that she does not need to perform urgency about it. The camera's tendency to center her in the frame as Katherine asks about her plans supports either reading, since centering can denote both a subject under scrutiny and a subject in command of the conversation (Mulvey, 1975). This ambiguity is arguably

the point: Joan's character is legible neither as fully compliant nor as fully rebellious, and the scene withholds the visual cues that would resolve her into either category.

The clearest interpretive claim the scene offers comes from its editing choice, not its imagery. After expressing interest in Yale Law School, Joan quickly adds that she plans to marry after graduation, and the film does not pause on this juxtaposition. The absence of background music and the measured pacing normalize the sequence rather than dramatize it, which suggests the film is less interested in resolving the tension between ambition and marriage than in establishing that, for Joan, the two are not yet felt as contradictory (Beauvoir, 1989). Narratively, this scene does not simply introduce a conflict; it withholds judgment on which side of that conflict, career or marriage, the film considers the "right" choice, leaving that resolution to accumulate across the six scenes that follow (Petro, 2023).



Figure 3.2.1.1 Film still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Joan and Katherine in the Office (00:33:12-00:36:04)

Although Joan's dilemma is first introduced through dialogue, Katherine's quiet intervention in the second scene, when she hands Joan the Yale application, transforms this internal conflict into a creative action (hooks, 1992). Taking place shortly after their office conversation, the moment unfolds in the classroom, where a symmetrical seating arrangement and muted lighting reinforce the formal and orderly atmosphere of Wellesley College (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). As Mulvey (1975) suggests, the camera creates intimacy even within a public setting by positioning Katherine and Joan slightly apart from the other students. Through close-up and medium shots, viewers witness the discreet exchange of the Yale application. The absence of surrounding dialogue directs attention to the physical transfer of the document itself. In this way, the application becomes more than

paper; it functions as a symbolic object representing possibility and alternative futures (Beauvoir, 1989). The secrecy of the gesture suggests that encouraging women's academic ambition carries social risks (Butler, 1990). Katherine's action acknowledges the pressures imposed by peer expectations and institutional norms. Through restrained editing and minimal camera movement, the scene frames resistance not as open confrontation, but as a quiet yet meaningful act of encouragement (Petro, 2023).



Figure 3.2.1.2 Film still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Katherine secretly gives Joan a Yale application (00:35:26-00:36:05)

As institutional encouragement opens new possibilities for Joan, the narrative shifts to examine how these possibilities are received and challenged within her closest social circle (hooks, 1992). Scene 3, “Joan and Betty Argue in the Kitchen,” moves the story from the academic sphere into the private, domestic space of the household kitchen, and the choice of setting is itself an argument: staging this disagreement in a space traditionally coded as feminine and domestic (Beauvoir, 1989) makes Betty's objection legible not as an isolated opinion but as the domestic order defending itself. The bright lighting and confined space create an atmosphere that is familiar and emotionally charged at once (Rose, 2016), and the camera's alternation between medium shots and close-ups (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020) keeps both women's faces available for scrutiny, refusing to let either position go unexamined.

The framing's tendency to isolate each character within her own shot (Mulvey, 1975) supports a reading of this as a genuine ideological standoff rather than a simple disagreement between friends; visually, neither woman shares the frame with the other's

certainty. Yet Betty's position deserves more than a dismissive reading. Her framing of Joan's Yale admission as a threat to her marriageability is not merely reactionary; it can also be read as Betty accurately naming a real social cost that Joan, still shielded by ambition, has not yet had to confront. Joan's rejoinders, "there's no ring on this finger" and the insistence that she can "do both," are not a rebuttal to that cost so much as a deferral of it (hooks, 1992).

This scene does not simply pit resistance against tradition; it stages an argument in which each woman is partly right on her own terms, Betty about the price of ambition, Joan about her right to pursue it anyway, and the film declines to adjudicate between them. That refusal to settle the disagreement is arguably the scene's strongest claim: peer relationships in this film do not only reinforce patriarchal values, as a purely descriptive reading might suggest, they also make visible a genuine incompatibility between two versions of womanhood the film refuses to rank (Petro, 2023)



Figure 3.2.1.3 Film still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Joan and Betty argue in the kitchen about Yale (00:50:18-00:51:30)

The film shifts the conflict from the private sphere of friendship, where pressure is subtle and personal, to the public space of the institution, where ideological differences become openly visible (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). In scene 4, when Betty confronts Katherine in class, the classroom becomes a charged site of authority and power (Mulvey, 1975), and the frontal framing that emphasizes hierarchy and discipline (Rose, 2016) makes a specific argument before either woman speaks: this confrontation will be

adjudicated by the room itself, its rules of order, its visible chain of authority, not settled privately as the kitchen argument was.

Betty's firm tone and confident posture align her with institutional expectations (Butler, 1990), and it is worth taking that alignment seriously rather than reading her simply as an obstacle to Katherine's progressiveness. Connie Baker's aside, "most of the faculty turn their heads when the marriage students miss a class or two," complicates any clean reading of Katherine as the sole voice of integrity in the room: it suggests the institution itself already tolerates the very accommodation Betty demands, which means Betty's confrontation, "Don't disregard our tradition just because you're subversive," can be read as more consistent with the school's actual practice than Katherine's insistence on equal standards is.

Katherine's reply, "Don't disrespect this class just because you're married," is the scene's most quotable line, but its force depends on which of two things a viewer takes it to be doing. It can be read as a justified refusal to let marital status excuse lowered expectations, a defense of Joan's and every student's academic seriousness. It can equally be read as Katherine's own blind spot surfacing, a failure to recognize that for Betty, being taken seriously as a married woman is itself the position she is fighting for, not a status she is hiding behind. The absence of background music leaves the exchange without any cue directing the viewer toward either reading (Rose, 2016), and this analysis takes that neutrality as significant: the scene stages a conflict between two forms of legitimacy, academic rigor and domestic commitment, without visually endorsing either woman's to claim it (Petro, 2023)



Figure 3.2.1.4 Film still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Betty confronts Katherine in class (01:00:35-01:02:00)

The classroom confrontation sets the stage for Katherine's more personal, emotionally charged response in Scene 5 (Beauvoir, 1989). Entering the classroom, Katherine's instruction, "Quiet. Today you just listen," inverts her own teaching method, and this inversion is the scene's first interpretive claims: a pedagogy previously built on dialogue and student voice becomes a lecture that permits none. The visual style shifts accordingly, with varied camera angles, quicker slide transitions, and sharper delivery (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020; Rose, 2016), formally marking a break from every classroom scene before it.

As Katherine projects images of highly educated women confined to domestic roles, her question, "What will future scholars see when they study us, a portrait of women today?", frames the entire lecture as a challenge aimed at the present rather than the past, asking her students to see themselves as the evidence, not merely the audience. Her ironic asides, "I wonder if she recites Chaucer while presses her husband's shirts" and "Now you physic majors can calculate the mass and volume of every meatloaf you make." Can be read as a pointed critique landing exactly as intended, exposing the contradiction between women's education and the domestic futures still expected of them. But there is a second, less flattering reading available: Katherine's control of the room here, silencing rather than inviting response, arguably repeats the same institutional authority she has spent the film challenging, an irony the scene does not explicitly acknowledge. Close-ups of the students' discomfort (Mulvey, 1975) could equally register as recognition of the critique's truth or as unease at being lectured rather than engaged, and the film does not disambiguate which.

Her repeated question, “What does that mean?”, directed at the advertisement slogan “A girdle to set you free,” pushes this same ambiguity further. Read one way, the question is rhetorical; Katherine already knows the phrase is empty and is forcing her students to notice its incoherence for themselves. Read another way, the repetition suggests something closer to genuine frustration, a teacher has run out of arguments and is left simply repeating the contradiction back to the room, unable to resolve it any more than her students can. The scene does not indicate which of these Katherine intends, and that uncertainty carries into what follows.

The emotional climax, Katherine’s concession, “I give up, you win. The smartest women in the country, and I didn’t realize that by demanding excellence I would be challenging... what did it say?... the roles you were born to fill,” is arguably the most polysemic moment analyzed here. It can be read as capitulation, a teacher admitting the limits of what conviction alone can change against entrenched expectation. It can equally be read as her most honest and least didactic moment in the film, the point where Katherine stops arguing a position and instead admits her own uncertainty out loud, which several of her students, notably rehearsed in argument themselves, have not yet done. Whether this is defeat or the film’s most genuine instance of vulnerability, the scene declines to resolve it, and that irresolution itself is consistent with how patriarchal expectation is shown reproducing itself even within an institution built to challenge it (Petro, 2023).



Figure 3.2.1.5 Film still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Katherine's emotional lecture after Betty's editorial (01:08:34-01:11:54)

The narrative shifts once more in Scene 6, moving from the public atmosphere of the classroom into the private domestic space of Joan's house. The stable medium shots and soft natural lighting (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020), together with framing that positions both women on equal footing (Mulvey, 1975), make a visual argument this study takes as central: that the scene refuses to stage Joan's choice as either a defeat or a corrective to Katherine's worldview, positioning it instead as simply a different answer to the same question both women have been asking all along.

Joan's declaration, "I know exactly what I'm doing. It doesn't make me any less smart," is the line the whole film's feminist argument arguably turns on, and it is worth naming the two ways it can be read. It can be read, as this study primarily argues, as a genuine reclamation of agency: Joan choosing marriage not by default but as a conscious, examined decision that does not require Katherine's model of success to validate it (Butler, 1990). But a second reading is available and should not be dismissed: the line's defensiveness, insisting on her own intelligence unprompted, could equally suggest Joan has internalized Katherine's standard of what counts as a smart decision closely enough that she still feels the need to argue against it, even while walking away from it.

Katherine's visible dissatisfaction, never voiced as disagreement, leaves the tension unresolved rather than adjudicated (Beauvoir, 1989). The absence of dramatic music (Rose, 2016) refuses the viewer any external cue for which the film endorses. What the scene does establish, under either reading, is that Joan's arc concludes without offering a single template for what feminist success looks like; agency here remains legible only in the specific, personal terms each woman claims for herself (Petro, 2023).



Figure 3.2.1.6 Film Still from Mona Lisa Smile (2003): Joan chooses marriage in conversation with Katherine (01:30:18-01:32:51)

Across these six sequences, *Mona Lisa Smile* constructs feminist sensibility less as a fixed position than as a set of unresolved tensions the film declines to settle, ambition against marriage, confidence against compliance, covert support against institutional caution (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020; Petro, 2023). Each scene analyzed here admitted more than one plausible reading, and rather than treating this as a limitation of the analysis, this study argues that the ambiguity is load bearing: it is precisely because the film withholds a single verdict on what counts as the “right” choice for Joan, Betty, or Katherine that its feminist sensibility reads as lived and negotiated rather than programmatic (Beauvoir, 1989; Minh-ha, 1991). Resistance, in this film, is not a moment the viewer is told to recognize, but an interpretation the viewer is left to construct.

3.2.2 Analysis of Scenes in *Yuni*

Across these six sequences, *Yuni* constructs feminist sensibility through moments that consistently resist a single settled reading, hesitation that could be either resistance or deferral, warmth that could be either care or coercion, silence that could be either withdrawal or self-preservation (Khanifah & Fajriyah, 2023; Riskita & Rengganis, 2023). Rather than treating this ambiguity as an interpretive shortfall, this study argues it is central to how the film represents resistance under conditions where open confrontation is not a viable option: when a clear refusal carries real social cost, ambiguity itself becomes a liveable form of agency (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1992). By situating these moment within their broader cultural context, this sections considers how pressure, expectation, and

resistance can coexist within a single gesture without the film declaring which one dominates (Riskita & Rengganis, 2023).

The film introduces Yuni's situation through an intimate private conversation that reveals the emotional weight of familial expectations (Putri et al., 2023). In Scene 1, "Yuni Talks to Her Mother after Iman's Proposal," Yuni sits in her bedroom and calls her mother shortly after receiving a marriage proposal. The subdued tones of the room and its soft lighting create a calm yet emotionally isolated atmosphere (Rose, 2016), and the camera's stillness, relying on medium shots and close-ups (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020), invites a reading of Yuni's interiority as the scene's real subject: the proposal itself is never shown, only its emotional aftermath in her face.

Her hesitation, however, resists a single interpretation. When she admits, "Yuni, arep pernah mikirin nikah, bu," the line could be read, as this study argues, as evidence that marriage has already entered her imagination as a live possibility, not a foreclosed one, complicating any reading of Yuni as a straightforward refusal narrative from the outset. But the same hesitation is equally legible as strategic vagueness, a daughter managing her mother's expectations without committing to either acceptance or refusal. The film does not adjudicate between these readings, and that ambiguity is itself significant: in a domestic space where a clear answer would carry real consequences, withholding one is already a minor act of self-preservation (Khanifah & Fajriyah, 2023).

Her response about wanting to continue school, "Yuni arep ngelanjutin sekolah maning kayakne," carries a similar interpretive weight. It can be read as an early articulation of resistance, education positioned against marriage, but it could equally be read as a deferral rather than a refusal, delaying a decision rather than making one. Given that the scene ends without resolution, and the absence of background music leaves her uncertainty unresolved rather than emotionally underscored, the strongest claim of intention, establishing ambiguity itself, rather than clear resistance, as her starting position (Riskita & Rengganis, 2023).



Figure 3.2.2.1 Film Still from Yuni (2021): Yuni talks to her mother after Iman's proposal (00:32:10-00:34:20)

As Yuni's personal struggles begin to surface, the narrative gradually introduces the institutional forces that shape her future choices (Petro, 2023). In Scene 2, "Bu Lies Explains Scholarship Requirements," the setting shifts to the teachers' room, where Bu Lies outlines the conditions attached to a scholarship opportunity. The teachers' room is presented in a simple and orderly manner, characterized by natural lighting and minimal décor (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). By positioning Yuni close to her teacher, the camera subtly conveys a sense of mentorship and trust (Mulvey, 1975), which together suggest mentorship. Yet the content of the mentorship complicates the image it is wrapped in: Bu Lies explains that scholarship recipients are prohibited from marrying, and it is worth pausing on what this scene is actually claiming, that institutional support for women's education here is not unconditional encouragement but a trade, one constraint (marriage) exchange for another (a scholarship's terms) (Beauvoir, 1989).

This scene admits at least two readings of Bu Lies herself. She can be read, as this analysis leans toward, as a figure offering Yuni a genuine path forward, someone working within a restrictive system to expand Yuni's options as far as that system allows. But her supportive tone could equally be read as the institution's way of making constraint palatable, framing a limitation as an opportunity so that Yuni experiences the trade-off as her teacher's care rather than as a structural condition. The film does not clearly favor one reading over the other, and that refusal to resolve Bu Lies's role is itself telling: it suggests institutional support, in the film's world, cannot be cleanly separated from institutional control.

Yuni's attentive listening, paired with an expression that suggests growing awareness rather than relief (Putri et al., 2023), supports reading this scene less as a moment of hope than as a moment of recalculation: an addition to the list of conditions Yuni must weigh, rather than a solution to any of them. Through restrained camera movement and measured dialogue delivery, the scene withholds the emotional payoff a mentorship scene might typically offer (Rose, 2016). Which is arguably the point, education is not staged as unconditional empowerment but as a fragile and conditional opportunity, one whose cost Yuni is only beginning to register.



Figure 3.2.2.2 Film still from Yuni (2021): Bu Lies explains the scholarship requirements to Yuni (00:40:51-00:41:30)

The film shifts its focus from formal institutional authority to more subtle pressures embedded in everyday communal interactions (hooks, 1992). In Scene 3, an informal gathering of mothers takes place at Yuni's house, where conversation flows easily with light laughter and casual exchanges. Although the atmosphere appears warm and relaxed, the camera positions Yuni at the edge of the frame (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020) can be read as the clearest visual argument the scene makes, that her marginalization is spatial before it is verbal, established by composition before a single normalizing comment is spoken.

The dialogue supports this reading but also complicates it. When Yuni's hesitation, "Masih dipikiraken, Yuni masih pengen sekolah disik," is met with "Awewe mah yang penting dapur, sumur, Kasur" (Butler, 1990), the remark can be read, as this study primarily argues, as casual reinforcement of rigid gender roles, delivered without apparent malice

precisely because the norm is unquestioned, it requires none. An alternative reading is available: the mother's comment may function less as an attack on Yuni specifically and more as a scripted, almost ritual line these women exchange with every young woman in her position, which would make the scene's target not Yuni's ambition but the reflexive, generational transmission of expectation itself, with Yuni simply its latest recipient.

Either reading supports the same interpretive claim, that Yuni's quiet demeanor and lowered gaze (Minh-ha, 1991) register as withdrawal rather than agreement, but the two readings differ on what exactly Yuni is withdrawing from: a personal judgment in the first case, or an impersonal script she cannot yet see a way to opt out of in the second. What the scene makes clear, under either reading, is that resistance here has no clear opponent to resist; the pressure is collective and diffuse enough that no single line, and no single person, is the norm's author (Riskita & Rengganis, 2023)



Figure 3.2.2.3 Film still from Yuni (2021): Gossip among the mothers at Yuni's house (00:38:43-00:40:45)

After experiencing repeated indirect pressure, Yuni is eventually placed in a situation that demands a more personal response (Beauvoir, 2011 [1949]). In Scene 4, when Yuni rejects Iman's proposal, the film presents the moment with striking restraint. The setting remains modest and unadorned, mirroring the ordinariness of everyday life rather than dramatizing the refusal as a turning point (Rose, 2016; Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). This restraint is itself an interpretive choice worth pausing on: by refusing to visually mark this as the film's climax, the scene arguably resists the expectation, built up across three prior scenes of accumulating pressure, that a refusal this significant should look significant.

Her line, “Kite ora bisa nikah karo sire,” delivered softly but firmly, admits more than one reading of what kind of act this is. It can be read, as this analysis primarily argues, as quiet determination, resistance that does not need volume to be complete, refusal as an act of emotional courage rather than confrontation (Butler, 1990). But the same softness could equally be read as a face-saving gesture aimed less at asserting Yuni’s autonomy than at preserving Iman’s dignity and the social relationship between their families, a refusal calibrated for minimum disruption rather than maximum self-assertion. These two readings are not mutually exclusive, and the scene does not force a choice between them.

What the scene does make legible, under either reading, is conveyed through Iman’s reaction: his disappointment registers through subtle shifts in expression rather than protest, and the absence of any escalation on his part confirms that Yuni’s restraint was, at minimum, successful in keeping the refusal within socially survivable bounds. Whether that restraint is read as the shape her courage takes or as a concession to the social cost of refusing to be visible, the scene establishes that in this film, resistance and social tact are not opposites; they are, at this moment, the same gesture.



Figure 3.2.2.4 Film still from Yuni (2021): Yuni declines Iman's proposal (00:42:10-00:43:05)

Although Yuni manages to assert herself in the previous moment, she is soon confronted with another, more transactional form of negotiation. Scene 5 emphasizes financial compensation and virginity as explicit conditions of marriage, and the camera’s stillness (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020) makes an argument through restraint: the scene’s discomfort is produced entirely by what is said, since nothing in the visual style dramatizes it.

Mang Dodi's opening terms, "seniki mahar panjere, selawe jute," set the negotiation's register explicitly financial before the conversation turns to anything else, establishing dowry as a number to be settled rather than a gesture to be offered. His second statement makes the terms more explicit still: "Insya Allah, mungkin umapme Yuni sampun sah sareng kulo lan neng malem pertame Yuni malih perawan, akan kontan tambah malih, selawe jute," tying an additional sum directly to virginity, confirmed on the wedding night. Read plainly, this line is the scene's most direct evidence for what this study argues is its central claim: that Yuni's body, at this moment, functions as a site of contractual verification rather than personal autonomy, her worth itemized in terms that could be quoted in a ledger (Riskita & Rengganis, 2023).

Mang Dodi's wife occupies an ambiguous position worth pausing on rather than passing over. Her silent presence can be read, as this study leans toward, as normalization through witness, her quiet participation lending the negotiation a communal legitimacy it would lack if Mang Dodi spoke alone. But her silence admits a second reading: it could equally register as discomfort she is not positioned to voice, a woman present at, but structurally excluded from objecting to, a negotiation that also implicates her own history within the system. The scene does not indicate which is correct, and arguably cannot, since the same silence would look identical under either reading.

The contrast between Mang Dodi's transactional dialogue and the film's calm visual register (Minh-ha, 1991) does not soften the claim his words make, but sharpens it: restraint here does not indicate the absence of coercion, it indicates how thoroughly this kind of coercion has been absorbed into ordinary, unremarkable social ritual, delivered in the same measured tone one might use to discuss a land sale, which is precisely what makes it difficult to resist through confrontation (Petro, 2023).



Figure 3.2.2.5 Film still from Yuni (2021): Mang Dodi's marriage proposal with dowry conditions (01:08:40-01:09:57)

The climactic sequence corresponds to Scene 6: Yuni running away from her wedding ceremony. As she walks forward in her pulper wedding gown, the camera's focus on her feet and the handheld tracking shot following her steps (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020) makes a specific interpretive choice legible: by declining to show her face, the scene withholds the one visual cue, her expression, that would most directly tell the viewer how to feel about what she is doing.

This choice opens the scene to at least two readings. It can be read, as this analysis primarily argues through Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity, as her body enacting a refusal that speech never could, the walk itself a re-performance of her gendered position, resistance made physical because it could not be safely made verbal. But the scene's refusal to show her face also permits a more cautious reading: panic, and the film may be declining to specify which this is, leaving open the possibility that this act carries as much fear as resolve.

The repetition of purple in her gown and nail polish, linking her body to the color that has marked her restrained individuality throughout the film, supports a reading of continuity, this Yuni's color reclaiming her, on her terms, at the moment she is meant to disappear into a bride's role. The recitation of Sapardi Djoko Damono's *Hujan di Bulan Juni* against dimming light and calm sound (Rose, 2016) reinforces this reading without confirming it outright. Consistent with Beauvoir's (1989) argument that women's freedom remains shaped by structural constraint rather than secured through a single act of defiance,

the scene does not resolve whether this moment is an escape or merely a postponement, an ambiguity that this study argues is the scene's most significant interpretive claim, not incidental to it.



Figure 3.2.2.6 Film still from Yuni (2021): Yuni runs away on her wedding day (01:53:21-01:56:50)

Across these six sequences, *Yuni* constructs feminist sensibility through moments that consistently resist a single settled reading. Hesitation that could be either resistance or deferral, warmth that could be either care or coercion, silence that could be either withdrawal or self-preservation (Khanifah & Fajriyah, 2023; Riskita & Rengganis, 2023). Rather than treating this ambiguity as an interpretive shortfall, this study argues it is central to how the film represents resistance under conditions where open confrontation is not a viable option: when a clear refusal carries real social cost, ambiguity itself becomes a liveable form of agency (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1992). By declining to resolve these moments into a single meaning, the film mirrors the very condition it depicts, a woman whose resistance must remain legible to herself without being fully legible, or refusable, to everyone around her (Beauvoir, 1989; Minh-ha, 1991).

3.3 Narrative Paths, Spoken Resistance, and Women's Agency in Cinema

This part builds on the analysis of twelve chosen sequences in Sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 to make an interpretive comparison of how *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021) use distinct cinematic techniques to create feminist sensibilities. This section examines how narrative rhythm, patterns of dialogue, and visual language, shaped by cultural and historical contexts, produce meaning. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter 1, it analyzes how both films

construct feminist sensibilities through form as well as content. Both films address women's struggles for independence and self-definition, articulating resistance in different but related ways.

As demonstrated in the debates, private conversations, and symbolic gestures discussed in Section 3.2.1, *Mona Lisa Smile* foregrounds feminist negotiation through speech and institutional engagement. In contrast, as shown in Section 3.2.2, *Yuni* emphasizes emotional resilience and quiet refusal through tentative phone calls, measured responses, and physical withdrawal within everyday social settings. These differences suggest that feminist meaning does not arise from a single formula, but from communicative practices shaped by specific cultural and historical contexts. Rather than portraying feminism as open revolt, both films construct feminist sensibilities through everyday negotiations, both spoken and unspoken, visible and subtle, embedded in narrative structure, dialogue, and visual composition. In doing so, they highlight cinema's role as a site of ideological struggle, where gender norms are not merely represented but questioned and gradually redefined (Rose, 2016).

Dialogue plays a central role in both films, through different registers. In *Mona Lisa Smile*, dialogue is direct, argumentative, and confrontational. Editorial debates, classroom discussions, and personal exchanges create spaces where opposing viewpoints openly clash. Katherine's conversations with Betty, in particular, dramatize the tension between traditional expectations and emerging feminist ideas. The educational setting reinforces this dynamic, positioning language as a tool to challenge authority and expose internalized norms (Mulvey, 1975). By contrast, *Yuni* relies on restrained and indirect communication. Conversations are shaped by silence, politeness, and cultural etiquette. Informal remarks about morality, marriage, and education carry significant ideological weight, even without obvious confrontation. The dialogue remains political precisely because power operates subtly within everyday speech. Yuni's hesitant replies, unfinished sentences, and strategic silences reveal feminist sensibilities not through open disagreement, but through quiet resistance (Febiola et al., 2023).

Character agency further distinguishes how feminist meaning is constructed. Katherine Watson embodies visible and institutional agency: she teaches, questions, and speaks with authority. Yet the film complicates this portrayal by refusing to present her as the sole feminist subject. Joan's decision demonstrates that agency may also take the form of conscious acceptance of traditional roles, provided the choice is genuinely self-determined. This tension prevents the film from reducing feminism to a single model of empowerment (Beauvoir, 1990). On the other

hand, in *Yuni*, agency is quieter and more fragile. Lacking institutional authority or economic independence, Yuni's agency manifests through endurance, refusal, and the capacity to imagine alternatives despite constraint. Even when her choices are limited, the film carefully preserves her interiority. Here, feminist sensibility is grounded not in victory, but in persistence; the insistence on maintaining selfhood within systems that seek to define and confine her (Khanifah & Fajriyah, 2023).

Altogether, *Yuni* and *Mona Lisa Smile* demonstrate that feminist sensibilities in cinema are not confined to a particular culture or aesthetic mode. Through different narrative rhythms, communicative styles, and representations of agency, both films articulate resistance in ways that are thematically connected yet contextually distinct. In these works, feminism does not provide exact answers; rather, it sustains critical questions about autonomy, choice, and women's capacity to shape their own lives within, sometimes beyond, the frames that surround them (Petro, 2023).

3.4 Comparative Discussion: Feminist Sensibilities through Cinematic

Despite having different cultural, historical, and creative contexts, *Yuni* (2021) and *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) both emphasize women's autonomy, decisions, and compromises within patriarchal frameworks in order to convey feminist sensibility. Instead of portraying feminism as overt rebellion, both films use every day struggles, both stated and unspoken, that are woven into dialogue, story development, and visual composition to create feminist meaning. Situations like Joan's interaction with Katherine at work and Yuni's unsure phone call to her mother serve as prime examples of how social norms define personal struggles. These scenes imply that everyday scenarios that viewers are familiar with frequently give rise to feminist awareness in films. Accordingly, both films position cinema as a site of ideological struggle, where gender norms are challenged, reinterpreted, and at times reproduced (Rose, 2016). To fully understand how these meanings are constructed, it is necessary to examine the narrative structures and storytelling rhythms through which they are articulated.

In *Mona Lisa Smile*, verbal conflict and intellectual debate are central, supported by a character-driven and largely linear narrative structure. Classroom confrontations, such as Betty's challenge to Katherine and Katherine's response to Betty's editorial, demonstrate how feminist sensibilities are articulated in public discourse. The scenes position ideological disagreement as visible and discussable. Katherine's pedagogical method encourages students to reconsider conventional life paths, including marriage and domestic life (Omar & Abbas, 2022). This

narrative pattern aligns with the inspirational teacher genre, exemplified by *Dead Poets Society* (1989), which foregrounds classroom dialogue and moral awakening. However, while *Dead Poets Society* centers resistance on charismatic male authority, *Mona Lisa Smile* shifts attention to collective reflection and negotiation among women (hooks, 1992). Meanwhile, *Yuni* adopts a quieter and more ambiguous narrative mode, emphasizing repetition, silence, and temporal gaps. Scene such as Bu Lies's explanation of scholarship conditions and Yuni's refusal of Iman's proposal show how explanation of scholarship conditions and Yuni's refusal of Iman's proposal show how social pressure accumulates gradually through institutional and communal interactions. This restrained storytelling approach resembles *Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts* (2017), which also employs slow pacing, sparse dialogue, and landscape-centered framing to depict women's resistance. Yet the two films diverge in tone: *Marlina* dramatizes resistance through a visible act of vengeance, whereas *Yuni* emphasizes emotional endurance and silent refusal. This contrast illustrates that feminist sensibility may be expressed either through confrontation or through sustained negotiation. It can be conclude these differences reinforce the idea that feminism often prioritizes process and becoming over fixed outcomes (Butler, 1990).

Beyond narrative form, dialogue and communication patterns further shape feminist meaning. In *Mona Lisa Smile*, dialogue functions as intellectual sparring. Classroom debates about attendance and marriage, along with domestic arguments between Joan and Betty, transform language into a site of ideological struggle. These exchanges reveal how peer monitoring and moral judgement reinforce patriarchal values (Friedan, 1963). Although *Dead Poets Society* similarly presents speech as a tool to challenge institutional conformity, *Mona Lisa Smile* reorients this dynamic by centering female voices and shared discussion rather than heroic monologues. On the contrary, in *Yuni*, communication is marked by indirectness and restraint. Conversations about dowry, virginity, and neighbourhood gossip are shaped by hesitation and silence. Here, silence itself becomes meaningful. Rather than signalling passivity, it reflects the risks attached to open disagreement in conservative environments, aligning with the intersectional feminist perspective (Rose, 2016). A comparable use of silence appears in *Marlina*, where minimal dialogue intensifies emotional tension and foregrounds women's marginalization. However, whereas *Marlina*'s silence culminates in violent rupture, *Yuni*'s silence sustains long-term negotiation and survival, suggesting a different form of feminist agency.

In both films, agency is framed not as absolute freedom but as negotiated decision-making with restrictive social structures. In *Mona Lisa Smile*, Joan's final conversation with Katherine complicates simplified notions of feminist success. By choosing marriage over law school as a conscious and reflective decision, Joan challenges linear models of empowerment (Beauvoir, 1989). Similarly, in *Yuni*, agency manifests through endurance and selective refusal. Her rejection of Iman's proposal and her absence from her own wedding ceremony represent resistance formed through emotional persistence rather than public confrontation (Khanifah & Fajriyah, 2023; Riskita & Rengganis, 2023).

This negotiated model of agency contrasts with *Dead Poets Society*, where resistance often appears as individual rebellion, and with *Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts*, where autonomy is achieved through vengeance. In comparison, *Yuni* and *Mona Lisa Smile* emphasize relational and contextual empowerment, suggesting that feminist autonomy is shaped by institutional limits, cultural expectations, and social responsibilities.

Cinematic language further reinforces these ideological positions. In *Mona Lisa Smile*, classroom scenes rely on symmetrical framing, shot-reverse-shot patterns, and steady medium shots. These techniques create a sense of institutional order while supporting verbal negotiation. *Dead Poets Society* employs a similar visual balance, reinforcing academic structure. Yet *Mona Lisa Smile* reworks these conventions to foreground female subjectivity and collective dialogue. Meanwhile, *Yuni* uses extended close-ups and deliberate camera movement, particularly in private spaces and during the wedding escape sequence. The recurring use of purple and lilac is significant. Yuni is frequently associated with purple surround elements (clothes, motorcycle, etc.), visually distinguishing her from her environment. Historically linked to introspection, dignity, individuality, and quiet resistance, purple visually reflects her internal tension between personal aspiration and social expectation (Rose, 2016). These stylistic choices intensify psychological vulnerability and inner conflict. Although *Marline* uses wide landscapes and static framing to emphasize isolation and power imbalance, its aesthetic highlights external confrontation, whereas *Yuni* focuses on interior struggle. Such differences demonstrate how cinematic form actively constructs ideological meaning (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020).

To sum it up, when read alongside *Dead Poets Society* and *Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts*, *Yuni* and *Mona Lisa Smile* reveal that feminist sensibilities in cinema do not adhere to a single expressive model. Whether articulated through classroom debate, silent refusal, symbolic

educational aspiration, or embodied resistance, feminist meaning emerges through the interplay of narrative structure, dialogue, character agency, and visual form. This comparative framework positions feminism not as a fixed message embedded in plot, but as a dynamic sensibility shaped by cultural context and cinematic tradition. In this way, feminist cinema becomes a reflective space that invites the audience to reconsider their assumptions about gender, agency, and possibility.

3.5 Character Analysis: Yuni and Katherine Watson as Feminist Figures

This section examines how the performances and characterizations of Katherine Watson and Yuni convey feminist ideas. Beyond narrative structure and cinematic technique, feminist meaning is also constructed through performance, emotional framing, and screen presence. By analyzing Julia Roberts' portrayal of Katherine Watson and Arawinda Kirana's portrayal of Yuni, this section explores how character development and acting style articulate women's agency and resistance within their respective social contexts.

3.5.1 Yuni and the Performance of Quiet Resistance

Arawinda Kirana portrays Yuni as a contemplative and emotionally contained protagonist whose resistance rarely manifests through overt confrontation. Rather than dramatic outbursts, Yuni's inner conflicts unfold through pauses, lowered gazes, restrained speech, and carefully measured expressions. In her interactions with her mother, Bu Lies, and potential suitors, her calm posture and minimal dialogue communicate more than words could. The tension lies not in what is spoken, but in what is withheld.

This restrained mode of performance aligns with Bordwell and Thompson (2020), who describe as realist cinematic traditions, where emotional authenticity emerges from subtle behavioural details rather than theatrical exaggeration. Arawinda's naturalistic acting style, steady breathing, controlled facial movement, and expressive yet guarded eyes invite the audience to interpret meaning through visual cues. In this sense, the film trusts viewers to read silence as discourse. The camera does not demand spectacle; instead, it lingers, allowing Yuni's quiet hesitation to become narratively significant. Through this minimalism, Yuni appears not as a dramatic heroine but as an ordinary young woman navigating extraordinary social expectations.



Figure 3.5.1.1 Arawinda Kirana (source: Tempo)



Figure 3.5.1.2 Arawinda Kirana (source: Internet Movie Database)

Furthermore, Yunis’s characterization also reflects what Khanifah and Fajriyah (2023) conceptualize as “situated agency”, where resistance operates within existing cultural and moral frameworks rather than outside them. Her rejection of Iman’s proposal and running away from her own wedding ceremony are not framed as an explosive rebellion. Instead, they deliberate, reflective decisions made within narrow possibilities. This measured defiance resonates with Beauvoir’s (1989) notion that women negotiate their existence within historically structured limitations; freedom is often incremental rather than revolutionary. Arawinda’s subdued performance reframes feminist resistance as persistence rather than provocation. The film does not present empowerment as loud confrontation, but as moral endurance and emotional resilience. In this way, vulnerability itself becomes a site of strength. Through controlled gestures and intimate expressivity, Arawinda transforms silence into an articulation. What might initially appear as passivity gradually reveals itself as conscious refusal. Her performance thus becomes central to the

film's feminist articulation, demonstrating that resistance can be quiet, embodied, and deeply personal, yet no less transformative.

3.5.2 Katherine Watson and the Performance of Institutional Resistance

Julia Roberts's portrayal of Katherine Watson represents a more explicit and vocal form of feminist action than Yuni's quiet resistance. Katherine is constructed as self-assured, articulate, and intellectually assertive, occupying positions of authority within institutional spaces from her first classroom appearance to her confrontation with Betty and her emotional lecture after the editorial. This construction reflects Beauvoir's (1989) notion of woman as a subject who actively asserts transcendence rather than remaining confined to immanence. Her presence signals self-definition within patriarchal institutions. Julia's performance relies on dynamic facial expressions, assertive body language, and controlled yet empathic speech delivery. Through vocal modulation and physical confidence, Katherine functions as both an ideological critic and a persuasive educator. This mode of characterization reflects classical Hollywood traditions in which strong female figures are framed through charisma and rhetorical command (Mulvey, 1975). Rather than being visually passive, Katherine actively commands space, gaze, and dialogue.



Figure 3.5.2.1 Julia Roberts (source: Yahoo News)



Figure 3.5.2.2 Julia Roberts (source: Internet Movie Database)

Positioned between conservative institutional structures and emerging feminist ideals, Katherine operates as a mediator of change. In scenes such as her confrontation with Betty and her private conversation with Joan, she swings back and forth between firmness and emotional vulnerability. Julia's ability to balance professional authority with personal tenderness makes the character approachable. This duality prevents Katherine from being portrayed as a rigid feminist figure and instead presents her as a complex negotiator of change. Such negotiation also resonates with Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity, as Katherine's authority is enacted through repeated performances of confidence, discipline, and intellectual command within a gendered institutional framework.

In addition to her well-established Hollywood reputation, Julia Roberts contributes a familiar celebrity persona linked to self-reliance, wit, and emotional strength. Julia's standing strengthens Katherine's legitimacy as a forward-thinking role model and increases the movie's appeal to general viewers. Julia makes a feminist speech approachable rather than exclusive.

3.5.3 Comparative Character Construction and Feminist Meaning

Katherine Watson and Yuni offer two opposing yet complementary feminist subjectivity frameworks. Yuni represents resistance in marginalized social situations by embodying emotional resilience, hesitancy, and vulnerability. In contrast, Katherine reflects resistance from within existing structures and stands for assurance, articulation, and institutional authority. Their narrative paths make these distinctions clear. Repeated

social restraints influence Yuni's character development, resulting in an ambiguous and open-ended ending. In contrast, Katherine's reflects resistance from within existing structures and stands for assurance, articulation, and institutional authority. Their narrative paths make these distinctions clear. Repeated social restraints influence Yuni's character development, resulting in an ambiguous and open-ended ending. In contrast, Katherine's storyline makes a more obvious transition from outsider to powerful teacher, ending with her departure while maintaining moral authority. Yuni's agency is characterized by emotional survival and bodily autonomy, whereas Katherine's agency is strengthened by her education and professional standing.

From the standpoint of communication, these characters construct a show how representation and performance mediate feminist meaning. Whereas Katherine expresses resistance through conversation and expression, and power dynamics are reflected in both tactics (Rose, 2016). Importantly, neither character is shown as a perfect example of a feminist. Rather, both films highlight emotional struggle, compromise, and imperfection. This strategy is in line with modern feminist theory, which emphasizes lived and contextual experiences above universalized ideas of empowerment (Butler, 1990; Beauvoir, 1989).

3.5.4 Characterization and Feminist Sensibility

In general, the portrayals of Yuni and Katherine Watson demonstrate how feminist ideas are articulated through performance, emotional expression, and narrative positioning. Julia Roberts' expressive leadership and Arawinda Kirana's restrained realism represent two contrasting cinematic strategies for depicting women's agency. Arawinda presents Yuni as socially constrained yet quietly resistant, relying on subtle body language, subdued speech, and emotional containment. In contrast, Julia employs assertive speech, dynamic facial expression, and confident physical presence to frame Katherine as an intellectual force within an institutional setting. These contrasting performance styles illustrate that both expressiveness and restraint can function as vehicles of agency (Mulvey, 1975).

Both films cultivate viewer empathy by embedding feminist meaning within lived character experience rather than abstract ideological declaration. Rose (2016) argues that audience emotional engagement with on-screen characters is deeply shaped by visual and performative elements. Yuni's silent perseverance and Katherine's articulate defiance demonstrate that feminism in film operates through diverse modes of self-negotiation and

communication rather than a singular doctrinal stance. This multiplicity resonates with Butler's (1990) understanding of gender as a performative process continuously shaped through social interaction and repeated acts.

Furthermore, the emotional trajectories of both characters suggest that feminist consciousness develops through lived negotiation rather than rigid proclamation. Beauvoir (1989) explains that women assert subjectivity within constraining social structures, a dynamic reflected in Yuni's hesitations, silences, and persistent refusals. Similarly, Katherine's refusal to conform to institutional expectations parallels Friedan's (1963) analysis of the tension between social conformity and individual autonomy. In both cases, feminist sensibility emerges as an ongoing process of negotiation rather than as absolute liberation.

This study argues that embodied performance, emotional identification, narrative construction, and visual language collectively generate feminist sensibility. Character-centered analysis supports this claim. Smith et al. (2005) emphasize that meaning in visual media arises from the interaction between representation, performance, and audience perception. Through Yuni and Katherine Watson, film becomes a space where moral courage, verbal resistance, and personal vulnerability converge, allowing feminist significance to operate simultaneously on emotional and intellectual levels.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion: Feminist Sensibilities as Constructed through Cinema Language

Chapter IV moves from descriptive scene analysis toward a more focused analytical engagement with how feminist sensibility is articulated through cinematic language in *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021). Feminism here is approached not merely as a thematic concern, but as a mode of being shaped by resistance, negotiation, and choice (Butler, 1990).

In this framework, film functions as an ideological arena in which meaning is produced through visual composition, narrative structure, and character agency rather than dialogue alone (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). This chapter, therefore, examines how cinematic elements interact with language and characterization to contest patriarchal norms surrounding women's education, marriage, and autonomy through close analysis of selected scenes. *Mona Lisa Smile* foregrounds confrontation within the institutional setting of 1950s American education, while *Yuni* portrays resistance through silence, visual restraint, and everyday negotiation within contemporary Indonesian culture. This comparison illustrates how feminist ideas are applied across diverse historical and cultural contexts. The argument in this chapter builds on the close readings developed in Chapter III, extending them into a broader argument: that cinematic language is not merely a site where gender norms are questioned and, at times, left deliberately unresolved (Mulvey 1975; bell hooks, 1992)

4.1 Feminist Sensibilities Beyond Narrative Resolution

This section explores how *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021) express feminist sensibilities not through overt ideological proclamation, but through cinematic language and narrative negotiation. Despite emerging from distinct cultural and historical contexts, both films treat feminism less as a slogan and more as a lived condition, shaped by doubt, resistance, and personal choice. Empowerment, in both cases, does not arrive as spectacle; it surfaces instead in hesitation, compromise, and carefully weighed decisions, positioning feminism as a process continually shaped by social structures and individual aspiration rather than a fixed endpoint (Beauvoir, 1989; Butler, 1990).

In *Mona Lisa Smile*, this process takes shape through tension rather than certainty. Joan Bradwyn's internal conflict illustrates that feminism is not a singular path but a negotiation between ambition and expectation: when she visits Katherine Watson's office (00:32:12-00:36:04), Joan articulates her desire to attend Yale Law School while also stating her plan to

marry after graduating, and the film declines to frame these goals as mutually exclusive, allowing the contradiction between them to remain unresolved rather than requiring Joan to choose one over the other. Katherine's subsequent gesture of handing Joan the Yale application during class (00:35:26-00:36:05) quietly challenges institutional boundaries, suggesting that change can be of that gesture also signals the limits placed on how openly such support can be offered.

That private tension does not remain contained for long: in the kitchen confrontation with Betty (00:50:18-00:51:30), Joan's academic ambition is reframed as a betrayal of feminine destiny, revealing that patriarchy operates not only through formal institutions but through peer enforcement and internalized standards. The stakes become explicit in Joan's final conversation with Katherine at Joan's house (01:30:18-01:32:51), where Joan asserts, "it was my choice, not to go. He would have supported it." The film complicates the easy equation between career and liberation without settling what the choice ultimately means: Joan's insistence on framing the decision as her own can be read as a genuine reframing of domestic life as self-definition, but the very need to assert this so explicitly also permits a second reading, that Joan is still answering Katherine's standard of what counts as success even while declining it. As Beauvoir (1989) argues, subjectivity is forged within constraints, not in their absence, and it is this unresolved tension, rather than a clear resolution in either direction, that this study takes as the scene's central claim.

If *Mona Lisa Smile* dramatizes feminism through articulate confrontation, *Yuni* approaches it through quiet persistence. Yuni's conversation with her mother following Iman's proposal (00:32:10-00:34:20) places education at the center of her imagined future, and Bu Lies's explanation of scholarship requirements (00:40:51-00:41:30), particularly the condition that recipients remain unmarried, momentarily positions the school as a space of possibility, one that Chapter III argues is conditional rather than unconditionally supportive. That possibility is repeatedly interrupted: gossip among mothers (00:38:43-00:40:45), invoking the phrase "*dapur, kasur, sumur*," demonstrates how restrictive gender roles circulate through everyday conversation, diffusing patriarchal pressure across a whole social scene rather than locating it in any single voice.

When Yuni refuses Iman's proposal (00:42:10-00:43:05), the refusal is delivered calmly rather than dramatically, and this restraint can be read either as the shape her courage takes or as a concession to what open confrontation would cost her socially, a tension Chapter III leaves deliberately open rather than resolved. The later negotiation over Mang Dodi's proposal (01:08:40-01:09:57) intensifies this pattern: what might elsewhere read as sudden rebellion instead reads as

accumulated refusal reaching its threshold, consistent with Butler's (1990) concept of performativity, in which resistance operates through repeated non-compliance rather than open confrontation. Yuni does not overturn the structure that constrains her; she interrupts it by repeatedly declining to fully inhabit the role assigned to her, and this study treats that incremental quality, rather than any single decisive act, as the clearest evidence of her agency.

Taken together, these two narratives resist simplified models of empowerment. Neither Joan nor Yuni achieves an unambiguous liberation: what both films offer instead is a claim to authorship over their own decisions, however partial or contested that authorship remains, and it is this distinction, between total liberation and authored negotiation, that this study takes as its central analytical claim. Feminist meaning in cinema emerges through form as much as through content: gesture, silence, dialogue, framing, and character trajectory together construct feminism as contextual, negotiated, and perpetually in motion, consistent with Beauvoir's (1989) and Butler's (1990) shared premise that subjectivity is not a finished state but something continually shaped and reshaped within lived experience.

4.2 Narrative as a Cinematic Space of Feminist Negotiation

Building on the scenes discussed above, this section considers narrative structure itself, not only characters' choice, as a site of feminist negotiation. In *Mona Lisa Smile*, this negotiation is built into the film's refusal to visually mark any single scene as its turning point. The classroom confrontation between Katherine and Betty (01:00:35-01:02:00), for instance, is staged with the same restrained editing and absence of non-diegetic music that characterizes the film's quieter scenes, offering no formal cue that this moment carries more narrative weight than Joan's private conversation in Katherine's office. As Chapter III argues, this consistency of visual register across scenes of open confrontation and private hesitation alike suggests that the film locates feminist tension in accumulation rather than in a single decisive narrative beat, consistent with Butler's (1990) view of gender identity as shaped over time rather than resolved in one dramatic instance.

Yuni constructs this same negotiation through a narrative logic of repetition rather than escalation, and the film's visual choices reinforce this structurally rather than merely reflecting it. The restrained camera work noted in Chapter III, particularly the stillness during the Mang Dodi negotiation (01:08:40-01:09:57) and the refusal to show Yuni's face during her departure from the wedding, withholds the emotional cues, especially facial expression, that would ordinarily signal a narrative climax. The narrative does not build toward a single moment of rebellion so much as

accumulate a series of formally similar refusals, each shot with the same visual restraint as the last, so that no single scene is permitted to stand out as the moment resistance “happens.” This narrative flattening is itself significant: it resists the expectation, built into more conventional resistance narratives, that defiance should be visually legible as a climax, and instead positions Yuni’s resistance as continuous and cumulative rather than singular, consistent with Beauvoir’s (1989) view of becoming as an ongoing process rather than one decisive act.

Read as narrative strategies rather than isolated character choices, both films construct feminism as negotiation embedded in structure itself: *Mona Lisa Smile* through a visual consistency that treats confrontation and hesitation as narratively equivalent, *Yuni* through a repetition that withholds climax, neither offering a single scene the audience can point to as the moment liberation occurs.

4.3 Dialogue as a Site of Feminist Contestation

In *Mona Lisa Smile*, dialogue functions as a clear space for ideological conflict, where feminist ideas are expressed not through agreement but through tension. In classrooms, private conversations, and public disagreements, competing ideas about what it means to be a woman, to be successful, and to be fulfilled collide directly. Katherine Watson’s emphasis on intellectual aspiration and self-determination runs against her students’ firmly held convictions about marriage and domesticity, with Betty Warren emerging as the most passionate defender of those convictions. Rather than using dialogue to deliver a straightforward moral lesson, the film presents these exchanges as open-ended, reflecting broader social uncertainty about women’s roles in the 1950s; conversation here is less about persuading an opponent than about exposing, questioning, and momentarily destabilizing patriarchal norms (Beauvoir, 1989).

The dynamic is evident across several scenes: Betty’s confrontation with Katherine in class (01:00:35-01:02:00), Katherine’s response to Betty’s editorial (01:08:34-01:11:54), Joan’s calm justification of her choice to marry, and Katherine’s own moments of irritation and self-doubt. What these scenes share is a refusal to let any single voice stand as the film’s feminist position; Betty’s opposition, Joan’s justification, and Katherine’s doubt are each allowed to stand without being quickly dismissed or resolved in favor of one another. This is consistent with feminist theory’s rejection of binary thinking, which treats freedom and oppression not as clear opposites but as forces that can coexist in complicated and sometimes contradictory ways (Beauvoir, 1989; Butler, 1990). Feminist significance in the film’s dialogue arises less from any character winning

an argument than from the conversation itself being sustained, kept open rather than settled, across scenes as different as Joan and Katherine's talk at Joan's house (01:30:18-01:32:51) and Joan's earlier office visit (00:32:12-00:36:04).

Dialogue in *Yuni* operates on markedly different terms: limited, indirect, and generally conducted in groups rather than one-on-one confrontation. Patriarchal attitudes surface informally in adult conversation, particularly among women, who legitimize early marriage and devalue education through phrases such as "*dapur, kasur, dan sumur*." As Rose (2016) argues, ideology often circulates through discursive practices that appear ordinary, shaping meaning without exerting obvious pressure, and this is precisely how power operates in *Yuni*: not through open debate, but through ambient social repetition. This is visible in the gossip among mothers at Yuni's house (00:38:43-00:40:45), where gender expectations circulate through casual talk rather than direct instruction.

Within the environment, Yuni's limited speech carries interpretive weight, though, as Chapter III argues, that weight does not resolve into a single fixed meaning. Her pauses, brief responses, and restrained refusals, in her rejection of Iman's proposal (00:42:10-00:43:05) and her constrained reactions to Mang Dodi's proposal (01:08:40-01:09:57), can be read as consistent with feminist theory's recognition that resistance need not appear as loud confrontation and can instead be enacted through withdrawal, hesitation, and quiet non-conformity (Butler, 1990). At the same time, this study has maintained that the same restraint remains open to a more cautious reading: as accommodation calibrated to minimize social cost rather than resistance in any assertive sense. Minh-ha's (1991) argument that alternative modes of representation challenge dominant frameworks precisely by refusing expected forms of visibility supports reading Yuni's silence as expressive rather than passive, but it does not, on its own, settle which of these two readings the film ultimately endorses. Her final departure from her own wedding (01:53:21-01:56:50) extends this same ambiguity into the film's closing image: this study has argued in Chapter III that the scene withholds the visual cue, her expression, that would distinguish a decisive interruption of expectation from an act shadowed by uncertainty. What dialogue and silence share, across both readings, is a mode of resistance that remains subtle, relational, and embedded in everyday life rather than declared outright.

4.4 Character Agency and Feminist Choice under Constraint

In both films, character agency is created through making choices within structural bounds rather than by dominance or extreme rebellion. Most notably, Katherine Watson's pedagogical confrontations in the classroom and her insistence on academic discipline regardless of marital status most visibly in her confrontation with Betty Warren over missed classes after marriage (01:00:35-01:02:00), demonstrate her agency as an educator who challenges institutional traditions. She maintains professional authority against the normalization of domestic privilege even as she confronts a student on this exact point. Yet Katherine's influence remains bounded by the deeply internalized social and cultural norms shaping her students' lives, revealing the limits of institutional rather than externally imposed norms (Beauvoir, 1989).

Betty's public editorial criticism of Katherine's instruction (01:08:34-01:11:54) extends this same limitation, and Joan's eventual choice not to attend law school complicates it further. Even though Katherine gives Joan the Yale application and actively supports her academic ambitions (00:35:26-00:36:05), Joan ultimately decides to marry, and while the film frames this as a conscious declaration of her own desires rather than subservience, the analysis in Chapter III suggests this framing is not the only one available, since the same choice can also be read as Joan settling a tension the film raised earlier without fully resolving it. This ambiguity crystallizes in Joan's final conversation with Katherine at Joan's house (01:30:18-01:32:52), where her insistence that domestic life does not equal intellectual failure gestures toward redefining agency as self-definition rather than adherence to a single feminist script, though the very insistence of that line keeps open the question of whether the redefinition fully succeeds. *Mona Lisa Smile* supports Beauvoir's view that becoming is a process shaped by context, choice, and conflict rather than ideological purity, consistent with feminist theory's rejection of any universal route to empowerment (Beauvoir, 1989; Butler, 1990).

Yuni's agency is even more unstable and situational, expressed not through a single act of rebellion but through a series of repeated refusals: rejecting Mang Dodi's transactional offer, turning down Iman's proposal, and eventually fleeing her own wedding. Each of these refusals carries a real social cost, made visible in the gossip among mothers who implicitly reject Yuni's wish to continue her studies (00:38:43-00:40:45), a cost measured in rumor, moral judgment, and financial instability rather than in any single confrontation.

Unlike Katherine Watson, Yuni lacks adult legitimacy, economic independence, and institutional authority to defend her decision outright, and even the figures positioned to help her operate within their own constraints: Bu Lies offers encouragement only in conditional form, tied to scholarship requirements that prohibit marriage (00:40:51-00:41:30). This conditionality sharpens further in Mang Dodi's proposal, where dowry terms are explicitly tied to Yuni's virginity (01:08:40-01:09:57), positioning her body within a transactional logic that reduces her value to purity and exchange. Within a framework this constrained, resistance cannot take the form of grand defiance; it instead takes a fragile, situational shape, endurance, hesitation, and emotional withdrawal becoming the strategy through which feminist sensibility is expressed, agency operating here as negotiation within limitation rather than as full autonomy or outright victory (Beauvoir, 1989).

4.5 Cinematic Language as Feminist Expression

Cinematic language functions as a primary medium for expressing feminist sensibilities in *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021). Both films construct feminist meaning through camera movement, spatial organization, and rhythm rather than through explicit ideological statements, positioning cinematic form as an active participant in feminist critique rather than a neutral vessel of meaning (Rose, 2016; Bordwell & Thompson, 2020).

In *Mona Lisa Smile*, classical framing, symmetrical composition, and regulated interior spaces visually reinforce institutional discipline and gender conformity. Balanced framing and stable camera positioning organize lecture halls, classrooms, and faculty offices, emphasizing hierarchy and order; this visual rigidity is evident in Joan and Katherine's office conversation (00:33:12-00:36:04), where medium shots and soft lighting create a polite, controlled atmosphere that appears supportive even as its compositional stability subtly signals how institutional norms limit women's ambition. A similar restraint governs the moment Katherine gives Joan the Yale application (00:35:26-00:36:05): minimal camera movement and restrained editing frame this act of support as careful and strategic rather than confrontational, suggesting that feminist goals must first operate within spaces where visibility itself is structured and controlled.

As ideological tension intensifies, the film's visual language becomes sharper correspondingly; In the classroom confrontation between Betty and Katherine (01:00:35-01:02:00), the initially static framing conveys authority and control, but as the conflict escalates, tighter close-ups isolate each character, transforming the classroom into a visual arena of

competing values; the camera's refusal to privilege either woman's perspective reflects feminist theory's rejection of simple moral binaries, treating institutional authority as inherently unstable rather than settled (Beauvoir, 1989; Butler, 1990). This visual critique reaches its most explicit form during Katherine's emotionally charged speech following Betty's editorial (01:08:34-01:11:54), where her intensity contrasts sharply with a rapid montage of domestic imagery, household appliances, smiling housewives, and beauty advertisements. Through this exaggerated juxtaposition, familiar icons of femininity become objects of critique, and editing, framing, and repetition together expose how cultural ideals of womanhood function as ideological constraints (Rose, 2016), cinematic excess operating here as a deliberate strategy of feminist disruption.

The film's aesthetic tone softens considerably by contrast during Joan and Katherine's final conversation at Joan's home (01:30:18-01:32:51). Gentle lighting, steady medium shots, and balanced composition create a reflective atmosphere in which Joan's decision to prioritize marriage is framed without condemnation or triumph; this compositional neutrality reinforces the film's broader suggestion that agency lies in self-definition rather than adherence to any single feminist script (Butler, 1990), though, as this study has maintained, that self-definition remains open to more than one reading rather than settled outright.

Where *Mona Lisa Smile* relies on visual contrast and rhetorical staging, *Yuni* builds feminist sensibility through aesthetic restraint and emotional minimalism. Subdued colors, static framing, and limited camera movement reflect the narrow social space available to Yuni from the outset; during her phone call with her mother after Iman's proposal (00:32:10-00:34:20), the camera remains still, observing her uncertainty without dramatic emphasis, and silence, pauses, and bodily stillness communicate emotional conflict more powerfully than dialogue could (hooks, 1992; Mulvey, 1975). Resistance here registers as internal and felt rather than declared outright.

This visual restraint persists through the gossip among mothers (00:38:43-00:40:45) and Bu Lies's explanation of scholarship conditions (00:40:51-00:41:30), in both of which Yuni is positioned at the edge of the frame, visually reinforcing her limited agency within communal and institutional structures; these everyday environments are presented without dramatic styling, highlighting how patriarchal norms reproduce themselves through routine interaction rather than explicit force, social control operating as quietly as the film's own visual language. Yuni's refusal of Iman's proposal extends this pattern: the camera avoids emotional manipulation, relying instead on steady framing and natural sound, and while her restrained delivery, as this study argued, as

quietly radical departure from cinematic traditions that equate empowerment with dramatic visibility (Mulvey, 1975; hooks, 1992), that same restraint remains open to more cautious reading, as calibrated accommodation rather than assertive resistance.

This ambiguity carries into Yuni's escape from her wedding (01:53:21-01:56:50), where the film again avoids triumphant framing: the handheld camera follows her movement closely but with control, emphasizing footsteps and ambient sound over spectacle, transforming physical escape into something closer to emotional expression than declaration. Consistent with the reading developed in Chapter III, the scene does not resolve into a single meaning; agency here remains ongoing and fragile rather than complete, and escape is left legible as either survival or victory without the film specifying which.

Taken together, the cinematic language of both films demonstrates how feminist ideas are shaped through culturally distinct visual strategies: *Mona Lisa Smile* through institutional interiors, confrontation, and symbolic excess that dramatize ideological tension, *Yuni* through stillness, repetition, and restraint that render patriarchy as atmosphere rather than event. Both films reject any simple visual association between feminism and triumphant success; their formal structures instead foreground ambiguity, negotiation, and emotional endurance as central to women's lived experience, positioning cinematic form itself, rather than resolution or closure, as a site of feminist becoming.

4.6 Comparative Feminist Sensibilities Across Cinematic Contexts

Comparatively, *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021) reveal that feminist sensibilities do not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, they are shaped by specific context. While both films explore women negotiating social expectations, they do so within very different cultural and institutional landscapes. Katherine's struggle unfolds inside a prestigious postwar American college, where feminism takes the form of intellectual debate and pedagogical challenge. Yuni's resistance, by contrast, develops in a rural Indonesian setting structured by tradition, religion, and economic precarity. As Minh-ha (1991) argues, feminist representation must remain attentive to cultural specificity rather than assume a universal model of resistance.

Before confrontation becomes visible, both films begin with something quieter: hesitation. In *Mona Lisa Smile*, Joan's conversation with Katherine in the office (00:32:12-00:36:04) does not erupt into rebellion but lingers in uncertainty. Joan expresses her desire to attend Yale Law School while still planning to marry, holding ambition and tradition in the same breath. Similarly,

in *Yuni*, the phone call with her mother after Iman's proposal (00:32:10-00:34:20) reveals careful negotiation rather than open defiance; Yuni does not reject marriage outright but expresses a wish to continue her studies instead. In both cases, feminist awareness appears as inward reflection, where personal aspiration subtly unsettles inherited expectations rather than confronting it directly (Beauvoir, 1989; Butler, 1990).

If these early moments foreground internal tension, the next scenes introduce institutional mediation. Katherine secretly handing Joan a Yale application (00:35:26-00:36:05) and Bu Lies explaining scholarship requirements to Yuni (00:40:51-00:41:30) both suggest that systems can provide limited openings, though these openings remain conditional rather than free: in *Yuni*, access to education depends explicitly on remaining unmarried, revealing how opportunity here is secure through moral regulation rather than granted outright (Febiola et al., 2023). Both films suggest that feminist action tends to operate within restrictive structures rather than outside them, agency growing out of constraint rather than in its absence (Beauvoir, 1989).

However, private negotiation cannot remain private forever. As the stories progress, social pressure intensifies: Joan's argument with Betty in the kitchen (00:50:18-00:51:30) mirrors the gossip among mothers at Yuni's home (00:38:43-00:40:45). In both settings, women's ambition is treated as disruptive and subversive. Betty's emotional response exposes how deeply patriarchal values are internalized, while the mothers' casual remarks normalize limitation through everyday conversation. As Rose (2016) argues, ideology often circulates through ordinary discourse rather than overt enforcement. Feminist struggle here unfolds within friendships and family spaces, not just formal institutions.

When resistance finally surfaces more clearly, it does so differently in each context. Betty confronts Katherine publicly in the classroom (01:00:35-01:02:00), drawing on institutional visibility, while Yuni's refusal of Iman's proposal (00:42:10-00:43:05), by contrast, is private and socially risky. The contrast suggests that access to authority shapes the very form feminist expression can take: resistance that can be spoken openly in one context must be measured and controlled in another, agency here appearing structured by social position rather than uniform across contexts (Butler, 1990).

The ideological stakes become still more explicit in the comparison that follows. Katherine's emotionally charged lecture after Betty's editorial (01:08:34-01:11:54) critiques domestic ideology through satire and visual exaggeration, while Mang Dodi's proposal with its

dowry condition (01:08:40-01:09:57) reduces Yuni's value to economic exchange and sexual purity. One scene exposes symbolic regulation within an elite institutional space; the other reveals material commodification within a rural one (Khanifah & Fajriyah, 2023). Though stylistically different, both moments lay bare the systems that define women's worth in their respective settings.

By the time each narrative approaches its conclusion, the divergence becomes even more telling. Joan's final conversation with Katherine at Joan's house (01:30:18-01:32:51) frames marriage as a deliberate, reflective choice within tradition rather than against it, while Yuni's departure from her wedding (01:53:21-01:56:50) takes the form of physical withdrawal. Joan negotiates her place within the structure; Yuni, as this study has argued in Chapter III, appears to step outside it, though the film withholds the visual cue, her expression, that would confirm whether this departure is read as liberation, and both remain consistent with Butler's (1990) insistence that subjectivity is formed within social limits rather than free of them.

Placed side by side, these narratives resist easy celebration. In both films, empowerment does not arrive as triumph or final resolution. Instead, feminist sensibilities unfold through doubt, hesitation, endurance, and selective refusal by embedding feminist meaning in everyday negotiations rather than spectacular victories. Both films expand the cinematic vocabulary of agency: feminist speech or silence, in formal authority or in everyday life, depending on what each protagonist's position allows.

Consistent with Beauvoir's (1989) understanding of subjectivity formed within constraint, and Butler's (1990) conception of gender as continuously enacted rather than fixed, freedom in both films appears not as a final scene but as an ongoing negotiation shaped by culture, class, institutional access, and personal choice. Cinema, in this sense, becomes a space where feminist becoming is lived and redefined gradually rather than conclusively achieved.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion, Limitations of Research, and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined how *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni* articulate feminist sensibilities through cinematic language and why such articulation matters within media and communication studies. Drawing on feminist theory, film studies, and perception theory, the findings indicate that feminist meaning in cinema is not confined to explicit ideological statement, but is constructed through framing, spatial organization, dialogue, performance, and narrative structure.

The analysis indicates that *Mona Lisa Smile* articulates feminist sensibilities primarily through verbal confrontation and institutional discourse, with resistance rendered visible and argumentative within formal educational structures. *Yuni*, by contrast, constructs feminist sensibilities through silence, repetition, and emotional restraint, with agency expressed through hesitation, selective refusal, and embodied endurance under cultural and economic constraint. In neither case, however, does the protagonist's narrative arc resolve into a single, determinate meaning. As argued in the close readings in Chapter III and the discussion in Chapter IV, moments such as Joan's final decision to marry and Yuni's departure from her wedding remain open to more than one plausible interpretation, legible as either liberation or accommodation depending on the reading applied. This study treats such interpretive openness as an analytical finding rather than a limitation of the analysis. Despite their differing cultural and institutional contexts, both films reject a simplified model of empowerment, presenting feminism not as a total liberation but as a contextual and relational process shaped by negotiation, compromise, and ambiguity.

This articulation is significant for communications studies specifically because it demonstrates that cinema does not merely reflect gender ideology but actively constructs it, and that this construction occurs as much through what a film withholds, an unshown expression, and unresolved line, an uninterpreted silence, as through what it states directly. Feminist sensibility in these two films is therefore not only narrated but visually encoded, formally constructed, and left partially open for audience interpretation, positioning cinematic language as an ideological medium that produces and circulates meaning about gender and power rather than a neutral vehicle for a message that exists independently of its form.

This thesis concludes that feminist sensibility operates beyond explicit rhetoric, emerging instead through everyday gesture, institutional tension, aesthetic choice, and interpretive

ambiguity. By presenting agency as an ongoing negotiation rather than a resolved outcome, and by treating multiple, at times competing, readings of the same scene as analytically significant rather than as gaps requiring resolution, *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni* extend the communicative vocabulary of feminism cinema, demonstrating that resistance may be articulated through speech or silence, confronting or restraint, certainty or ambiguity, shaped throughout by the cultural and historical context in which it is produced and read.

5.2 Research Limitations

Although this study clarifies how feminist sensibilities are articulated through cinematic language in *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and *Yuni* (2021), several limitations should be acknowledged:

1. Methodological limitation

This research relies on textual and visual analysis of selected scenes. The focus is on dialogue, character agency, narrative structure, and cinematic language to interpret feminist meanings. Similar studies on *Yuni* and *Mona Lisa Smile* emphasize representation and discourse rather than audience reception. Consequently, this study does not include empirical data on how audiences interpret these feminist articulations in real social contexts. The findings, therefore, reflect analytical interpretation rather than actual viewer experience.

2. Selective scene analysis

The study examines twelve carefully selected scenes from both films. While this approach allows for detailed and focused analysis, it limits the scope of interpretation. Other scenes may contain additional ideological variation that was not explored. Comparable research, such as Hasan et al. (2023) and Giwandhani (2022), also employs selective scene analysis to maintain depth. However, this method risks overlooking broader narrative patterns that could emerge from a more comprehensive examination of the films.

3. Theoretical framework limitation

The analysis primarily draws on feminist and film theories. Although these frameworks are valuable for examining gender representation and visual ideology, they were largely developed within Western academic traditions. While still relevant, they may not fully capture the specific socioeconomic,

religious, and cultural dynamics shaping Yuni's experiences in rural Indonesia. Studies by Hasan et al. (2023) and Khanifah and Fajriyah (2023) emphasize the importance of local cultural contexts in shaping female subjectivity, suggesting that certain contextual complexities may remain underexplored in this study.

4. Comparative scope limitation

This research compares only two films. While this focused comparison highlights differences between Western and Indonesian cinematic contexts, it does not represent feminist cinema as a whole. Similar scope limitations are found in comparative and single case studies. Therefore, the findings should be understood as context-specific rather than universally applicable to all feminist films.

5. Researcher positionality

As this study applies theoretical frameworks to cinematic texts from a communication student perspective, interpretation inevitably involves subjectivity. Visual analysis is influenced by analytical perspective and cultural positioning. Scholars from different disciplinary or cultural backgrounds may offer alternative readings of the same films.

Acknowledging these limitations does not diminish the study's contributions. Rather, it situates the findings within clear methodological and theoretical boundaries. Recognizing these constraints strengthens the research's credibility and opens avenues for future scholarly inquiry.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations are proposed.

First, future researchers are encouraged to expand the analysis of how feminist sensibilities are articulated through cinematic language by examining a wider range of films across different historical, cultural, and industrial contexts. The inclusion of independent cinema, regional productions, or digital streaming platforms may provide deeper insight into how feminist meaning evolves across media environments. Incorporating audience reception studies, such as interviews, surveys, or focus groups, would also strengthen the understanding of how viewers interpret and negotiate feminist articulations in real social contexts. Second, future research may apply more

explicit intersectional frameworks by examining how gender interacts with class, religion, race, geography, and economic structures within cinematic narratives. Such an approach would enrich the analysis of women's lived experiences and prevent overly generalized interpretations of feminism.

For media practitioners and filmmakers, this study highlights the importance of articulating women's autonomy beyond predictable empowerment tropes. As demonstrated in *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Yuni*, feminist sensibilities can be conveyed through hesitation, limitation, negotiation, and subtle aesthetic choices. Filmmakers are therefore encouraged to explore complex female subjectivities through deliberate cinematic language rather than relying solely on obvious confrontation and dramatic transformation.

For educators and communication scholars, this research may serve as a reference for teaching visual communication, gender studies, and film analysis. By demonstrating how feminist theory can be applied to cinematic texts, the study promotes critical media literacy and encourages audiences to interpret films as ideological and communicative systems rather than mere entertainment.

Overall, this thesis suggests that feminist sensibilities in film should be understood as an ongoing dialogue among directors, characters, audiences, and social structures. Through careful analysis of cinematic language, the understanding of such dialogue can remain dynamic, reflective, and transformative.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, M. J., & Mohanty, C. T. (Eds.). (1997). *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures*. Routledge.
- Beauvoir, S. de. (1989). *The second sex* (H. M. Parshley, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)
- Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (2020). *Film art: An introduction* (12th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Cahyani, L. (2009). *Feminist ideas in the film Mona Lisa Smile* [Undergraduate thesis, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta].
- Febiola, N., Aritorang, A. I., & Budiana, D. (2023). Representasi patriarki dalam film *Yuni*. *Scriptura*, 12(2), 100–112. <https://doi.org/10.9744/scriptura.12.2.100-112>
- Fitri, A. (2019). Analisis standpoint theory dan gerakan feminisme dalam film *Mona Lisa Smile*. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun: Studi Ilmu Komunikasi dan Dakwah*, 1(1), 1–6.
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Giwandhani, M. (2022). Stereotipe perempuan dalam film *Yuni* (Analisis struktur naratif Vladimir Propp). *Humanika: Kajian Ilmiah Mata Kuliah Umum*, 22(3), 222–230. <https://doi.org/10.21831/hum.v22i3.48749>
- Grodal, T. (2019). Emotions, cognition, and narrative patterns in film. *Projections*, 13(2), 1–15.
- Hasan, Y., Wulan, R. R., & Nurhayati, N. (2023). Dekonstruksi representasi perempuan dari sudut pandang sutradara perempuan dalam film *Yuni*. *Jurnal Riset Komunikasi*, 6(1), 1–15. <https://jurnalrisetkomunikasi.org/index.php/jrk/article/view/1245>
- hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. South End Press.

- Khan, M., & Akhtar, R. (2024). Framing femininity: Analyzing visual objectification and gender dynamics in Hollywood movie posters through semiotic and sociocultural lenses. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(11), 1164–1174.
- Khanifah, A. N., & Fajriyah, I. M. D. (2023). Film *Yuni* karya Kamila Andini: Tubuh perempuan dalam kungkungan patriarki dan pamali. *Musāwa: Jurnal Studi Gender dan Islam*, 22(1), 73–86. <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2023.221.73-86>
- Lester, P. M. (2014). *Visual communication: Images with messages*. Cengage Learning.
- Maradia, P., Agarwal, A., Bhupathiraju, S., & Vemuri, K. (2025). Framing perception: Exploring camera-induced objectification in cinema. *arXiv*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2504.10404>
- Martinez, M. (2016). *Film and ideology: Apparatus theory overview* (Master's thesis, Western University). Western University Institutional Repository. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=9858&context=etd>
- Minh-ha, T. T. (1991). *When the moon waxes red: Representation, gender and cultural politics*. Routledge
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6–18.
- Omar, A. A., & Abbas, N. F. (2022). A critical stylistic study of the notion of women empowerment in *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003). *Arab World English Journal*, 13(3), 482–497.
- Petro, P. (2023). Feminist aesthetics in contemporary cinema. *Camera Obscura*, 38(2), 1–20.
- Pratista, H. (2008). *Memahami film* (2nd ed.). Homerian Pustaka.
- Putri, A. D., Sunarto, & Santosa, P. B. (2023). Resistensi perempuan terhadap domestifikasi dalam film *Yuni*. *Interaksi Online*, 11(2), 1–10. <https://ejournal3.undip.ac.id/index.php/interaksi-online/article/view/39340>
- Raina, J. A. (2017). Feminism: An overview. *International Journal of Research*, 4(13), 3372–3376.

- Riskita, H., & Rengganis, R. (2023). Eksistensi perempuan dalam film *Yuni* karya Kamila Andini (Kajian feminisme eksistensialis Simone de Beauvoir). *Jurnal Sapala*, 10(1), 1–10. <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/jurnal-sapala/article/view/53732>
- Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Showalter, E. (1979). Toward a feminist poetics. In M. Jacobus (Ed.), *Women's writing and writing about women* (pp. 25–40). Croom Helm.
- Smith, K., Moriarty, S., Barbatsis, G., & Kenney, K. (Eds.). (2005). *Handbook of visual communication: Theory, methods, and media*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Tempo (n.d.). Film *Yuni* tentang stigma menikah dini. *Tempo*. <https://www.tempo.co/arsip/film-yuni-tentang-stigma-menikah-dini-842132>
- Tribunnews.com. (2022, July 6). *Deretan film yang dibintangi Arawinda Kirana raih sukses besar setelah perankan tokoh Yuni*. <https://www.tribunnews.com/seleb/2022/07/06/deretan-film-yang-dibintangi-arawinda-kirana-raih-sukses-besar-setelah-perankan-tokoh-yuni>
- Woolf, V. (1929). *A room of one's own*. Harcourt, Brace and Company.