

From Stereotypes to Harmony: *TAPENG*SOR as a Cultural Bridge for Understanding Madurese Culture through the Representation of Local Identity

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ABSTRACT

Stereotypes portraying the Madurese people as harsh and conflict-oriented continue to hinder intercultural understanding in Indonesia, highlighting the need for media that can present a more balanced cultural representation. This study aims to analyze the representation of Madurese cultural identity in the film *TAPENG*SOR and examine its role in transforming stereotypes into social harmony. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, focusing on the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. Data were collected through observation of film scenes, dialogues, visual symbols, and documentation. The findings reveal that *TAPENG*SOR represents Madurese cultural identity through cultural symbols such as the Sumenep Palace, Pendopo Agung, traditional gamelan, cultural festivals, local language, and social interactions. These symbols communicate values of religiosity, social solidarity, kinship, respect for history, and cultural preservation while reconstructing a more authentic image of Madurese society. The film also illustrates a transformation in the main character's perception from prejudice to appreciation through direct cultural experiences. It can be concluded that *TAPENG*SOR functions not only as a medium of cultural representation but also as an effective intercultural communication tool that promotes cross-cultural understanding, strengthens local cultural identity, and contributes to fostering social harmony in Indonesia's multicultural society

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the world's largest multicultural countries, characterized by diverse ethnic groups, languages, traditions, and cultural practices that contribute to its national identity. While cultural diversity enriches Indonesian society, it also creates challenges in intercultural communication due to the persistence of stereotypes toward particular ethnic groups. Stereotypes often emerge as simplified and generalized perceptions that influence public attitudes, social interactions, and intercultural relationships. Among the ethnic groups frequently subjected to stereotyping is the Madurese community, which has often been portrayed as harsh, aggressive, and closely associated with conflict. Such perceptions are reproduced through interpersonal communication, mass media, and increasingly through digital media, creating a social image that does not always reflect the complexity of Madurese culture (Dwiyanti, 2025). Recent studies indicate that stereotypes against the Madurese remain prevalent in Indonesian society. Dwiyanti (2025) found that many non-Madurese university students continue to associate the Madurese with violence, emotional behavior, and conflict, which influences intercultural communication and social interaction. Similarly, Maulana (2025) demonstrated that social media platforms frequently reproduce ethnic stereotypes through humorous content, memes, and public discussions, reinforcing generalized perceptions about Madurese identity. These findings indicate that media play a significant role not only in disseminating stereotypes but also in shaping public understanding of ethnic identities.

Alongside the rapid development of digital communication, audiovisual media have become increasingly influential in constructing cultural meanings. Film, in particular, functions not merely as entertainment but also as a medium of cultural representation capable of conveying values, traditions, identities, and collective memories. According to Hall (1997), representation is the process through which meaning is produced and exchanged using language, images, and symbols. Consequently, films possess the capacity to construct, negotiate, and transform public perceptions of particular communities through visual narratives and symbolic representations. Recent international studies have highlighted the growing role of cinema in intercultural communication. Al-Maliki (2025) argues that contemporary films function as cultural bridges, facilitating cross-cultural dialogue by introducing local identities to wider audiences through authentic visual narratives. Likewise, Glotov (2023) emphasizes that accurate cultural representation in audiovisual media contributes to intercultural literacy by reducing misunderstanding and encouraging respect for cultural diversity. These perspectives suggest that films can become strategic instruments for reconstructing public perceptions toward marginalized or stereotyped cultural groups.

Within this context, *TAPENGSOR* emerges as a local Madurese film that offers an alternative representation of Madurese identity. Rather than reinforcing dominant stereotypes, the film presents various cultural symbols, including the Sumenep Palace, Pendopo Agung, traditional gamelan, cultural festivals, local language, and everyday social interactions. These representations portray

Madurese society as religious, historically rich, socially cohesive, and culturally vibrant. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist experiences a gradual transformation from prejudice to appreciation after directly engaging with Madurese culture, illustrating how intercultural encounters can reshape perceptions. Although numerous studies have examined cultural representation in Indonesian cinema, most have focused on identity politics, nationalism, or local wisdom in mainstream films. Other studies concerning Madurese society primarily discuss ethnic stereotypes, intercultural communication, or media representation in digital platforms (Dwiyanti, 2025; Maulana, 2025). Research specifically investigating local Madurese films as media for deconstructing stereotypes through cultural representation remains limited. Consequently, there is a significant research gap concerning how local cinema functions simultaneously as a medium of cultural representation and intercultural communication capable of fostering social harmony.

This study offers three main contributions to the existing literature. First, it examines *TAPENGSOR*, a local Madurese film that has received limited scholarly attention within communication and film studies. Second, it integrates three major concepts ethnic stereotypes, cultural representation, and intercultural communication into a single analytical framework using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. Third, this research contributes to current discussions on cultural preservation and multicultural harmony by demonstrating how local films can reconstruct public perceptions of ethnic identity through symbolic representation. To achieve these objectives, this study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which analyzes meaning at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. Barthes' framework enables a deeper understanding of how cultural symbols within *TAPENGSOR* construct meanings beyond their literal representation and challenge dominant social myths regarding Madurese identity. The analysis is further supported by Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which explains how media actively produce meanings rather than merely reflecting reality, and Gudykunst's Anxiety Uncertainty Management Theory, which explains how intercultural interaction reduces prejudice and uncertainty toward different cultural groups. Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the representation of Madurese cultural identity in *TAPENGSOR* and examine its role as a cultural bridge that transforms ethnic stereotypes into intercultural understanding and social harmony. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the fields of cultural communication, film studies, and representation theory while providing practical insights into the role of local cinema in preserving cultural identity and promoting intercultural understanding within Indonesia's multicultural society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Representation Theory

Representation theory, proposed by Stuart Hall (1997), explains that media do not simply reflect reality but actively construct and produce meaning through language, images, symbols, and discourse. Representation is the process by which members of a culture use signs and symbolic systems to create and

exchange meaning. Therefore, films are not neutral reflections of society; rather, they shape audiences' understanding of cultural identity by selecting, organizing, and presenting particular images and narratives. Within cultural studies, representation plays a significant role in constructing public perceptions of ethnic groups. Positive representations may strengthen appreciation of cultural diversity, whereas biased representations often reinforce stereotypes and prejudice. Hall argues that meaning is continuously negotiated through cultural practices, making media an influential site in producing social identities.

In the context of this study, Hall's representation theory is employed to understand how *TAPENGSOR* constructs the identity of the Madurese community through cultural symbols such as the Sumenep Palace, Pendopo Agung, traditional music, festivals, local language, and social interactions. Rather than reproducing existing stereotypes, the film presents alternative meanings that portray Madurese culture as rich in history, social solidarity, religiosity, and cultural heritage.

Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory

Roland Barthes (1972) developed semiotic analysis by extending Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of signs into a cultural perspective. According to Barthes, every sign operates on three interconnected levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal meaning of a sign, connotation refers to its cultural and emotional associations, while myth represents broader ideological meanings that become naturalized within society. Semiotic analysis is widely used in film studies because cinematic narratives communicate meaning through visual images, dialogue, gestures, sound, costumes, settings, and other symbolic elements. Through Barthes' framework, researchers can reveal not only what is shown in a film but also the deeper cultural values and ideologies embedded within audiovisual representations. This study applies Barthes' semiotic analysis to identify how cultural symbols in *TAPENGSOR* reconstruct Madurese identity. The analysis examines how stereotypes initially introduced in the narrative are gradually transformed into representations emphasizing cultural richness, historical heritage, social harmony, and intercultural understanding.

Intercultural Communication Theory

Intercultural communication refers to interactions among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Gudykunst (2005), through the Anxiety Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory, argues that successful intercultural communication depends on individuals' ability to manage uncertainty and anxiety when interacting with members of other cultural groups. Stereotypes frequently emerge from limited intercultural experiences and insufficient cultural knowledge. When individuals rely primarily on second-hand information, prejudice tends to increase. Conversely, direct cultural interaction enhances understanding and reduces uncertainty. In *TAPENGSOR*, the protagonist initially perceives Madurese people through negative stereotypes but gradually changes this perception after experiencing Madurese culture firsthand. This transformation illustrates how cultural encounters facilitate intercultural understanding and reduce prejudice, supporting Gudykunst's theoretical perspective.

Cultural Representation in Film

Film has increasingly been recognized as an effective medium for cultural representation and intercultural dialogue. Beyond entertainment, films preserve local traditions, communicate cultural values, and introduce ethnic identities to broader audiences. Recent international research demonstrates that authentic cultural representation in cinema can reduce stereotypes and strengthen intercultural understanding. Al-Maliki (2025) argues that contemporary cinema functions as a cultural bridge, enabling audiences from different cultural backgrounds to engage in cross-cultural dialogue through visual storytelling. Similarly, Glotov (2023) found that authentic audiovisual representation contributes significantly to intercultural literacy by promoting empathy and reducing cultural misunderstanding. These findings support the argument that local films possess strategic potential for strengthening cultural identity while simultaneously encouraging intercultural communication and social harmony.

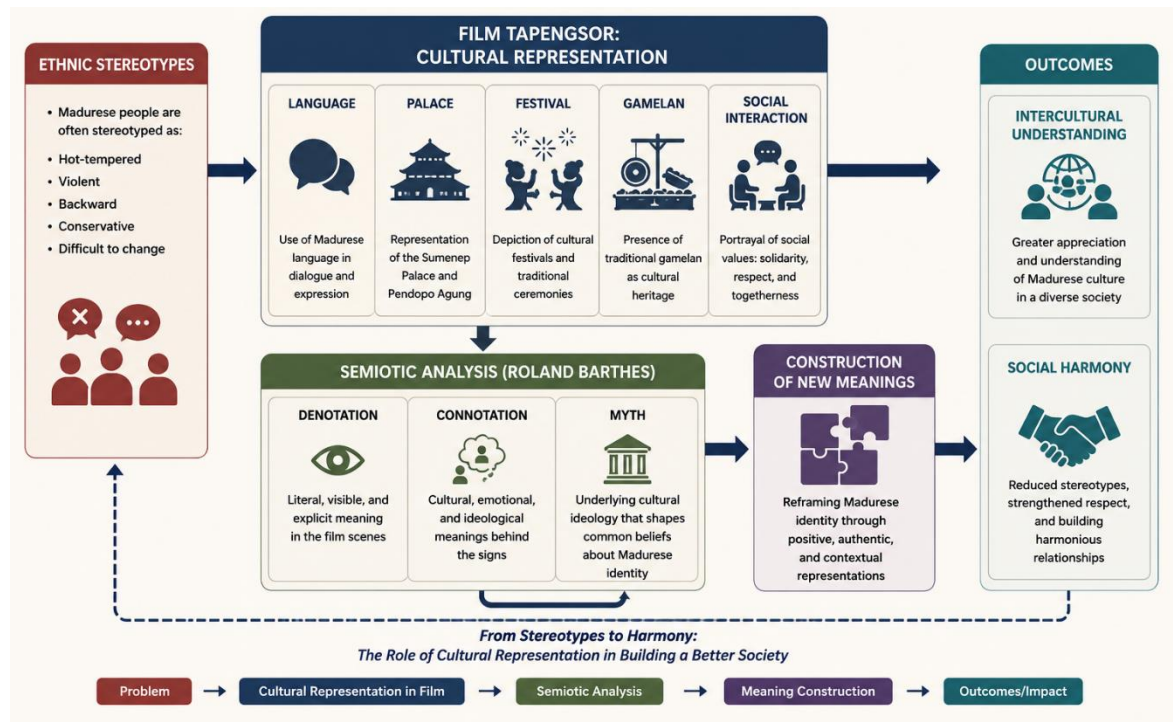
Previous Studies

Several previous studies have examined ethnic stereotypes, cultural representation, and intercultural communication. Dwiyantri (2025) reported that stereotypes toward the Madurese community remain prevalent among university students, influencing intercultural interaction. Maulana (2025) found that social media continues reproducing negative stereotypes of Madurese identity through digital discourse. Meanwhile, Dewi (2025) demonstrated that local films effectively preserve cultural identity through symbolic representation. Internationally, Al-Maliki (2025) emphasized cinema's role as a cultural bridge, while Glotov (2023) highlighted the contribution of audiovisual media to intercultural literacy. However, these studies primarily focus on digital media, intercultural communication, or general cultural representation. Few studies specifically investigate how local Madurese films reconstruct ethnic stereotypes through cinematic representation. Therefore, this study fills the existing research gap by analyzing *TAPENGSOR* as a local cultural film that simultaneously functions as a medium of cultural representation, stereotype deconstruction, and intercultural communication.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three complementary theoretical perspectives. Stuart Hall's Representation Theory explains how films construct meanings about Madurese cultural identity through symbolic representation. Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory provides the analytical framework for interpreting cultural signs at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. Gudykunst's Anxiety Uncertainty Management Theory explains how cultural encounters represented in the film contribute to reducing stereotypes and fostering intercultural understanding.

The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how *TAPENGSOR* reconstructs Madurese identity and functions as a cultural bridge that transforms stereotypes into social harmony.



Picture 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to examine the representation of Madurese cultural identity in the film *TAPENGSOR*. A qualitative approach was selected because the study seeks to interpret meanings embedded in visual images, dialogues, cultural symbols, and narratives rather than measuring relationships between variables. Qualitative research enables researchers to understand social and cultural phenomena in their natural context through an interpretative perspective. Semiotic analysis is appropriate for film studies because films communicate meaning through signs, symbols, and audiovisual narratives that reflect cultural and ideological values (Barthes, 1972; Hall, 1997).

Research Object

The object of this study is the local film *TAPENGSOR*, which portrays various aspects of Madurese culture, including historical heritage, traditional arts, local language, religious values, festivals, and social interactions. The unit of analysis consists of selected scenes, dialogues, visual symbols, character interactions, settings, and cultural artifacts representing Madurese cultural identity throughout the film.

Research Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary research instrument, responsible for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data (Qualitative Communication Research Methods). Supporting instruments included a semiotic observation sheet developed according to Roland Barthes' analytical model, consisting of five analytical components: (1) object/sign, (2) denotation, (3) connotation, (4) myth, and (5) interpreted meaning. Screenshots

of relevant scenes and dialogue transcripts were also documented to support data interpretation.

Data Collection

Data were collected using three techniques. First, observation was conducted by repeatedly watching the film *TAPENGSOR* to identify scenes representing Madurese cultural identity and stereotype transformation. Second, documentation techniques were employed by collecting screenshots, dialogue transcripts, subtitles, and visual elements appearing throughout the film. Third, a literature review was conducted by examining books, scientific journals, and previous studies concerning cultural representation, semiotics, intercultural communication, Madurese culture, and film studies to strengthen the interpretation of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic model, which consists of three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1972). The analysis followed several stages:

1. Identifying cultural signs appearing in each selected scene.
2. Describing the literal meaning (denotation) of each sign.
3. Interpreting the cultural meaning (connotation).
4. Identifying ideological or cultural myths represented through the signs.
5. Interpreting how these representations reconstruct Madurese cultural identity and transform ethnic stereotypes.

To strengthen the interpretation, the findings were further discussed using Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, which explains how media construct meanings through representation, and Gudykunst's Anxiety Uncertainty Management Theory, which explains how intercultural interaction reduces stereotypes and uncertainty toward different cultural groups (Hall, 1997; Gudykunst, 2005).

Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study employed theoretical triangulation by integrating three complementary theoretical perspectives: Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory, and Gudykunst's Anxiety Uncertainty Management Theory. Repeated observation of the film, comparison between visual scenes and dialogues, and cross-checking with relevant literature were conducted to ensure consistency and credibility of the interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Data Presentation

The findings are presented descriptively in the form of narrative explanations supported by tables summarizing the results of semiotic analysis. Each analyzed scene is organized into five analytical categories: object/sign, denotation, connotation, myth, and interpreted meaning. This presentation provides a systematic explanation of how *TAPENGSOR* represents Madurese cultural identity and reconstructs ethnic stereotypes into intercultural understanding and social harmony.

RESULTS

This study analyzed the representation of Madurese cultural identity in the film *TAPENGSOR* using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. The analysis focused on cultural signs represented through visual images, dialogues, settings, and cultural symbols appearing throughout the film. Each selected scene was examined through three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth, followed by an interpretation of its cultural significance. The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, scenes containing representations of Madurese culture were identified through repeated observation of the film. Second, screenshots and dialogue transcripts were documented as research data. Third, each scene was analyzed using Barthes' semiotic model to identify denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings. Finally, the findings were interpreted to explain how the film reconstructs Madurese cultural identity and transforms existing stereotypes.

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of Cultural Representation in *TAPENGSOR*

N o	Object/ Sign	Denotation	Connotation	Myth	Meaning
1	Dialogue: "Di Madura itu kasar, Pak"	A character states that Madurese people are harsh.	Represents a negative stereotype toward the Madurese community.	Madurese people are socially constructed as aggressive and conflict- oriented.	The stereotype becomes the starting point of the narrative before being challenged by subsequent cultural experiences.
2	Sumenep Palace	Characters visit the palace.	Symbolizes the historical and cultural heritage of Madura.	Madura possesses a long- standing civilization and cultural identity.	The palace represents Madurese historical identity and cultural pride.
3	Pendopo Agung	Traditional royal pavilion is shown.	Represents leadership, tradition, and community values.	Madurese culture emphasizes respect, deliberatio n, and social order.	Cultural heritage strengthens local identity.

No	Object/ Sign	Denotation	Connotation	Myth	Meaning
4	Traditional Gamelan	Traditional musical instruments are displayed.	Symbolizes artistic richness and cultural preservation .	Madurese culture is rich in traditional arts beyond public stereotypes.	Traditional arts become an important marker of Madurese identity.
5	Cultural Festival	Traditional performances and community participation are presented.	Represents solidarity, creativity, and cultural continuity.	Madurese society actively preserves its cultural heritage.	Festivals reinforce collective cultural identity.
6	Dialogue: "Yang katanya Madura keras..."	The stereotype is repeated by the protagonist.	Reflects prejudice shaped by indirect information.	Stereotypes are socially reproduced through media and public discourse.	The film intentionally presents stereotypes before deconstructing them.
7	Dialogue: "Itu tuh tidak, sama sekali tidak ada."	The protagonist rejects previous assumptions .	Indicates changing perceptions after cultural interaction.	Stereotypes are not absolute truths but socially constructed beliefs.	Direct cultural experience reduces prejudice.
8	Dialogue: "Nampaknya saya jatuh cinta sama Madura."	The protagonist expresses admiration for Madura.	Demonstrates appreciation toward Madurese culture.	Authentic cultural encounters reshape social perceptions .	Cultural understanding replaces stereotypes.
9	Dialogue: "Saya akan kembali lagi ke sini."	The protagonist intends to revisit Madura.	Reflects emotional attachment and acceptance.	Cultural experiences promote intercultural harmony.	The film concludes with the transformation from prejudice to appreciation.

Findings

The semiotic analysis identified five major forms of Madurese cultural representation. First, the film introduces ethnic stereotypes through dialogue suggesting that Madurese people are harsh and dangerous. These stereotypes establish the initial conflict of the narrative. Second, historical heritage is represented through the Sumenep Palace and Pendopo Agung, portraying Madura as a region with a rich historical civilization and cultural legacy. Third, traditional arts are represented through gamelan performances and cultural festivals, emphasizing creativity, artistic expression, and cultural preservation. Fourth, social values are represented through community interactions, hospitality, kinship, and collective participation in cultural events, presenting Madurese society as socially cohesive and culturally vibrant. Finally, the film presents a transformation of perception, in which the protagonist gradually changes from holding negative stereotypes to appreciating Madurese culture after directly experiencing its traditions, history, and social life.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that *TAPENGSOR* reconstructs Madurese cultural identity through historical, artistic, linguistic, and social representations while simultaneously challenging long-standing stereotypes. Rather than portraying Madurese society through conflict, the film presents an alternative cultural narrative emphasizing history, solidarity, religiosity, and intercultural understanding.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that *TAPENGSOR* constructs Madurese cultural identity through a series of cultural symbols, historical heritage, traditional arts, local language, and social interactions. Rather than merely depicting everyday life, the film reconstructs the public image of the Madurese community by presenting alternative cultural narratives that challenge long-standing ethnic stereotypes. This finding confirms Stuart Hall's (1997) argument that representation is not a passive reflection of reality but an active process of producing meaning through language, images, and symbolic systems.

Figure 1 illustrates the initial stereotype toward Madurese society through the dialogue "*Di Madura itu kasar, Pak.*" This scene functions as the starting point of the narrative before the protagonist experiences Madurese culture directly.



Figure 1. Initial stereotype toward the Madurese community in *TAPENGSOR*

One of the most significant findings is the film's strategy of introducing stereotypes before gradually deconstructing them. Instead of reinforcing dominant stereotypes, *TAPENGSOR* offers an alternative discourse that reconstructs Madurese identity through authentic cultural representation. Similar findings were reported by Dewi (2025), who argued that local films function as important media for preserving cultural identity while simultaneously reshaping public perceptions of local communities.

The film further reconstructs Madurese identity through historical heritage. The Sumenep Palace and Pendopo Agung are presented not merely as physical buildings but as cultural symbols representing civilization, leadership, and collective memory. According to Hall (1997), representation produces meanings through cultural symbols that communicate identity to wider audiences.



Figure 2. Representation of Sumenep Palace as Madurese cultural heritage



Figure 3. Pendopo Agung Representing Traditional Leadership and Local Wisdom

These historical sites communicate that Madurese identity is deeply rooted in historical civilization rather than the stereotypes commonly associated with violence. From Barthes' (1972) semiotic perspective, traditional arts also function as important cultural signs. The traditional gamelan displayed in the film operates not only as a musical instrument but also as a symbol of cultural continuity and artistic identity inherited across generations.



Figure 4. Traditional Gamelan as a Symbol of Madurese Cultural Identity

At the connotative level, the gamelan represents creativity, harmony, and respect for tradition, while at the mythological level it reconstructs the perception that Madurese culture possesses rich artistic traditions beyond public stereotypes. The cultural festival becomes another significant representation of Madurese identity. The colorful performances, traditional costumes, music, and community participation portray Madurese society as socially cohesive and culturally vibrant.



Figure 5. Madurese Cultural Festival Representing Collective Identity

The dialogue "*Yang katanya Madura keras...*" is deliberately juxtaposed with the festive atmosphere, creating a contrast between stereotype and lived cultural reality. This narrative strategy supports Barthes' concept that myths can be challenged through alternative representations. The subsequent scene strengthens this deconstruction process when the protagonist explicitly rejects previous assumptions by stating, "*Itu tuh tidak, sama sekali tidak ada.*"



Figure 6. Rejection of Stereotypes After Experiencing Madurese Culture

This transformation illustrates Gudykunst's (2005) Anxiety Uncertainty Management Theory, explaining that direct intercultural experiences reduce prejudice and uncertainty toward different cultural groups. The protagonist's transformation reaches its culmination in the final scene, where admiration toward Madurese culture is explicitly expressed through the dialogue "*Saya akan kembali lagi ke sini.*"



Figure 7. Transformation from Prejudice to Appreciation

This final scene symbolizes the successful reconstruction of Madurese cultural identity. Rather than perceiving Madurese society through stereotypes, the protagonist recognizes Madura as a community rich in history, arts, cultural heritage, hospitality, and social solidarity. These findings support Al-Maliki's (2025) argument that cinema functions as a cultural bridge, while Glotov (2023) emphasizes that authentic audiovisual representation enhances intercultural understanding and cultural literacy.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the representation of Madurese cultural identity in the film *TAPENG SOR* using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. The findings reveal that the film reconstructs Madurese identity through cultural symbols represented in historical heritage, traditional arts, local language, cultural festivals, and social interactions. At the denotative level, these symbols portray the everyday realities of Madurese society. At the connotative level, they communicate values of religiosity, kinship, solidarity, historical awareness, and cultural preservation. At the mythological level, the film challenges dominant stereotypes portraying the Madurese as harsh and conflict-oriented by constructing an alternative narrative that emphasizes cultural richness, hospitality, social harmony, and historical civilization.

The study further demonstrates that *TAPENG SOR* functions not only as a medium of cultural representation but also as a medium of intercultural communication. Through the protagonist's transformation from prejudice to appreciation, the film illustrates how authentic cultural encounters can reduce stereotypes and foster intercultural understanding. The integration of Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory, and Gudykunst's Anxiety Uncertainty Management Theory confirms that audiovisual media possess significant potential to reconstruct ethnic identities and promote social harmony. Therefore, local films can serve as effective cultural communication

media for strengthening local identity while encouraging greater appreciation of cultural diversity in multicultural societies.

Recommendations

Future research is encouraged to investigate audience reception to determine how different viewers interpret the cultural representations presented in *TAPENGSOR*. Comparative studies involving other Indonesian local films may also provide broader insights into the role of cinema in representing cultural diversity and reconstructing ethnic identities. Furthermore, future studies may adopt mixed-method or quantitative approaches to examine the influence of cultural films on audience perceptions, intercultural attitudes, and stereotype reduction. Expanding research into digital film distribution and audience engagement would also contribute to understanding how local cultural narratives can reach wider national and international audiences.

FURTHER STUDY

This study is limited to the semiotic analysis of a single local film, *TAPENGSOR*. Future research is recommended to examine audience reception, compare cultural representations across different local films, or employ mixed-method approaches to explore the impact of cultural films on intercultural understanding and stereotype reduction.

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