



Narrative Framing through the 5C Cinematography Framework in the Indonesian Film 3: *Alif Lam Mim*

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Abstract: Indonesian films often employ rich visual styles, yet systematic studies on how cinematographic principles construct ideological meaning remain limited. This study addresses that gap by examining how Joseph V. Maselli's 5C cinematographic principles are applied in the film 3: *Alif Lam Mim*, emphasizing how visual storytelling shapes narrative and ideology. Using a qualitative-descriptive method and close reading of key scenes, the research analyzes composition, camera angles, shot size, continuity, and editing as visual tools for meaning-making. The findings reveal over 90% alignment between the film's visual language and Maselli's 5C model. Specific examples include the use of the rule of thirds (57:43), golden mean (1:12:37), and diagonal depth (2:00:58), as well as high and low angles to modulate vulnerability and dominance. Editing techniques, such as the smash cut at 29:21, effectively convey psychological rupture. The results indicate that 3: *Alif Lam Mim* employs cinematography not merely for aesthetics but as a critical narrative device, reinforcing ideological stance and emotional resonance. This highlights the role of visual grammar in socio-political storytelling within Indonesian cinema.

Introduction

Cinematography plays a central role in shaping how visual narratives are conveyed in film, serving as a vital bridge between artistic vision and audience perception (1, 2). While technological progress has expanded cinematic possibilities, many Indonesian productions continue to struggle with utilizing visual language effectively to convey thematic depth and emotional nuance (3). Despite growing academic attention to Indonesian cinema, few studies have systematically applied Joseph V. Maselli's 5C framework, Composition, Camera Angle, Close-Up/Shot Size, Continuity, and Cutting, to analyze how visual strategies shape narrative and ideological meaning (4). This lack of application represents a key research gap that this study aims to address.

In contemporary cinema, particularly within the action and drama genres, visual storytelling demands more than strong narratives; it requires precision in visual design and execution (5, 6). However, many local films remain reliant on dialogue and exposition rather than harnessing cinematography as a language of meaning (7, 8). This tendency reflects broader challenges of visual literacy in Indonesian filmmaking, where aesthetic choices often fail to translate thematic or ideological intent (9, 10). Understanding how visual techniques operate beyond surface aesthetics is, therefore, essential for decoding the ideological underpinnings of film narratives.

Accordingly, this study investigates how the 5C

cinematographic techniques construct ideological framing in the Indonesian film 3: *Alif Lam Mim*. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach and close reading of key scenes, the research examines how composition, camera angles, shot sizes, continuity, and editing interact to build emotional depth and ideological resonance. By integrating theoretical and practical perspectives on cinematographic design, this study contributes to a more coherent understanding of visual storytelling in Indonesian cinema and demonstrates how visual grammar functions as both an artistic and ideological tool in film.

Methodology

Study Design and Rationale

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design situated within an interpretivist epistemological stance, emphasizing the subjective construction of meaning through cinematic form. The interpretivist orientation views film as a cultural text, where visual structures convey ideological and emotional significance beyond technical execution. This perspective allows for an in-depth exploration of how visual strategies operate as semiotic expressions within a narrative framework. The research systematically examined the application of Joseph V. Maselli's 5C cinematographic principles, Composition, Camera Angle, Close-Up/Shot Size, Continuity, and Cutting, in the Indonesian feature film 3: *Alif Lam Mim* (2015). In this study, Maselli's model was not treated as a prescriptive guideline for correct

cinematography but rather as an interpretive lens that facilitates critical reading of how visual grammar constructs narrative coherence and ideological resonance. By integrating formalist observation with interpretive analysis, the study aimed to fill a methodological gap in Southeast Asian film scholarship, which has rarely addressed cinematography as a site of ideological production.

Sampling and Data Sources

The primary unit of analysis was the full-length feature film *3: Alif Lam Mim*, produced by FAM Pictures and directed by Anggy Umbara. The film was deliberately chosen due to its hybrid genre combining action-drama and speculative dystopian elements, its critical and popular reception, and its evident use of advanced visual strategies. Scene selection followed a purposive sampling technique designed to capture sequences of high cinematic density, those containing emotional, thematic, and compositional significance. Emotional significance referred to scenes expressing heightened psychological conflict or moral tension; thematic relevance described moments that articulated the film's ideological and socio-political discourse; and compositional richness involved sequences that demonstrated deliberate framing, lighting design, or spatial complexity. These parameters ensured that selected scenes were visually and narratively representative for applying Mascello's 5C framework.

The primary data consisted of the complete audiovisual content of *3: Alif Lam Mim*, accessed through the official Vidio.com release, with a total duration of approximately 120 min. Secondary data included scholarly works on cinematography and visual semiotics, prior research on Indonesian cinema, and publicly available interviews and production commentaries by the film's director, Anggy Umbara, and cinematographer, Dicky R. Maland. These external materials were not treated as independent data sets but were integrated through triangulation to validate interpretive insights and enhance methodological credibility.

Instruments and Analytical Framework

The analytical process was structured around Mascello's Five C's of Cinematography as an interpretive framework for decoding the film's visual strategies. Each component, composition, camera angle, shot size, continuity, and cutting, was analyzed as a semiotic category rather than a purely technical measure. Composition was examined in terms of spatial balance, symmetry, and visual hierarchy to determine how framing directed viewer focus and supported narrative intent. Camera angle analysis explored the emotional and ideological effects of perspective, such as how high or low angles influenced perceptions of dominance or vulnerability. Shot size was assessed to understand how proximity and scale communicated intimacy or isolation. Continuity was reviewed for its role in maintaining spatial and temporal coherence, ensuring that scene transitions preserved narrative flow. Cutting was analyzed in relation to editing rhythm, pacing, and juxtaposition to interpret how montage structure contributed to thematic tension and psychological impact.

Data collection involved repeated, frame-by-frame viewing of selected scenes using VLC Media Player, allowing precise observation of visual detail. A coding matrix was constructed in Microsoft Excel to document the occurrence, duration, and interpretive characteristics of each visual element. To ensure analytical reliability, the coded data

underwent an inter-coder validation process and a peer audit. Two independent film researchers reviewed portions of the coded material and compared their interpretations with the primary researcher's findings. Discrepancies were discussed collectively until a shared understanding was reached, thereby reinforcing the transparency and credibility of the analysis.

Data Analysis

The analytical process employed qualitative content analysis with a deductive coding approach grounded in Mascello's 5C model. Each selected scene was examined to identify recurring stylistic tendencies, visual motifs, and narrative rhythms that contributed to emotional and ideological meaning. The resulting codes were synthesized to reveal how cinematographic strategies structured narrative flow and constructed ideological framing within the film.

To enhance methodological rigor, triangulation was implemented through cross-referencing multiple interpretive sources. Director and cinematographer interviews were examined to corroborate visual interpretations with creative intent, while scholarly commentary and related literature provided comparative context for analytical claims. Statements from Anggy Umbara and Dicky R. Maland, where available, were specifically used to confirm the reasoning behind framing choices, camera movement, and editing rhythm, thus reinforcing the empirical grounding of the interpretive findings. Although no statistical tools were employed, this triangulated approach provided methodological robustness by integrating formal visual analysis with practitioner insight and theoretical validation.

Results

Film Overview

3: Alif Lam Mim is a 125-minute action-drama film directed by Anggy Umbara and released in October 2015. It attracted 2.5 million viewers during its theatrical run and received multiple nominations at the 2015 Festival Film Indonesia, Piala Maya, and the 2016 Indonesian Movie Actors Awards and Festival Film Bandung. Notable awards include Best Editing (Piala Maya 2015), Best Director and Supporting Actor (FFB 2016), and Favorite Supporting Actor (IMAA 2016). Despite its success, the film sparked controversy for its themes of terrorism and state authority, resulting in a shortened theater screening period despite strong initial public interest.

Set in a dystopian Jakarta in the year 2036, the narrative follows three childhood friends, Alif, Lam, and Mim, who were trained in martial arts at the Al-Ikhlas boarding school. Their paths diverge as they grow into adulthood: Alif becomes a state agent determined to uncover the truth behind his parents' murder; Lam becomes an investigative journalist committed to exposing corruption; and Mim remains at the pesantren to continue teaching and defending its values amidst accusations of terrorism.

Main Characters

Alif (played by Cornelio Sunny): A principled and confrontational figure who joins the state security apparatus to seek justice. His mission puts him at odds with his own past and friends, particularly when investigations point toward the Al-Ikhlas pesantren.

Lam (played by Abimana Aryasatya): Calm and technologically adept, Lam pursues truth through journalism,

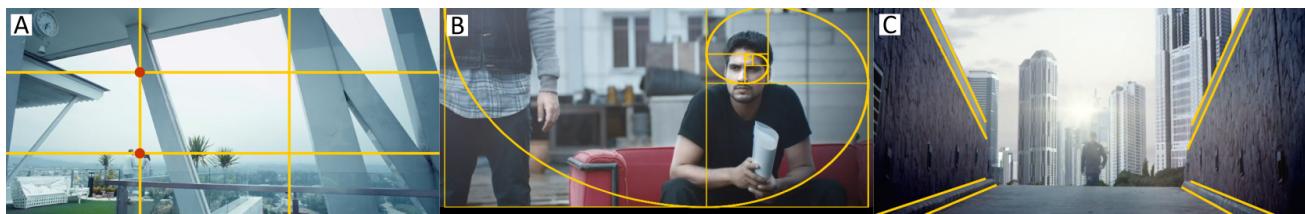


Figure 1. Examples of visual composition techniques in 3: Alif Lam Mim: (A) application of the rule of thirds in a scene where Lam reflects while supported by his wife (57:43); (B) use of the golden mean during the rooftop scene between Alif and Lam (1:12:37); and (C) application of diagonal depth composition in the scene depicting police entering a building (2:00:58).

often clashing with institutional interests. His career is marked by ethical struggles and personal tragedy, including the murder of his wife.

Mim (played by Agus Kuncoro): The most reserved of the trio, Mim dedicates himself to the pesantren. As the school faces terrorism allegations, Mim becomes its moral and physical defender, even when that means confronting Alif.

These character arcs are visually supported through deliberate cinematographic choices that reinforce their evolving ideological positions.

Production Team Narrative

The production of 3: *Alif Lam Mim* was led by FAM Pictures and distributed by Multivision Plus. This feature film brought together a multidisciplinary team of creative and technical professionals under the direction of Anggy Umbara. As both director and one of the screenwriters, Umbara collaborated with Bounty Umbara and Fajar Umbara in developing the story and screenplay, offering a cohesive narrative vision supported by experienced production leadership.

The cinematographic work was executed by Dicky R. Maland, whose visual direction helped translate the film's dystopian setting into immersive cinematic sequences. Lighting was managed by Maskot, while Siutha was responsible for production design, creating the spatial and aesthetic tone of the film. Costume design, handled by Andhika D., further contributed to the film's thematic depth and character embodiment. Editing was led by Bounty Umbara, who also co-wrote the screenplay, ensuring visual continuity and pacing that matched the film's dramatic intensity.

The cast comprises a diverse group of prominent Indonesian actors, including Cornelio Sunny, Abimana Aryasatya, Agus Kuncoro, Prisia Nasution, Tika Bravani, Cecep Arif Rahman, Donny Alamsyah, Verdi Solaiman, Tanta Ginting, and Bima Azriel. This ensemble contributed significantly to the film's emotional range and character complexity, enhancing its impact on Indonesian audiences and beyond.

Visual Grammar in 3: Alif Lam Mim: The Application of Cinematic 5C Techniques

The film 3: *Alif Lam Mim*, directed by Anggy Umbara, showcases a refined application of Joseph V. Mascelli's 5C principles of cinematography, Composition, Camera Angles, Continuity, Cutting, and Close-ups, which collectively enhance its narrative depth and emotional texture. Through the collaboration of cinematographer Dicky R. Maland and the visual design team, the film demonstrates a deliberate visual construction aligned with its futuristic and action-driven storyline.

Composition in 3: Alif Lam Mim

Composition serves as the visual foundation of a film's storytelling, guiding the viewer's focus and emotional interpretation. In 3: *Alif Lam Mim*, the use of compositional techniques is not only aesthetic but also narrative-driven, ensuring that key emotional and plot moments are visually emphasized.

Three dominant compositional methods are employed. The rule of thirds, evident at minute 57:43 during a reflective moment between Lam and his wife, places the subject at intersecting grid points to highlight psychological weight (see **Figure 1A**). This visual separation reinforces Lam's emotional isolation and spiritual disconnection, reflecting a crisis of faith central to the film's ideological conflict.

The golden mean area, visible at minute 1:12:37 during a rooftop discussion between Alif and Lam, aligns the characters within a 1:1.6 ratio spiral (see **Figure 1B**), drawing attention to facial expressions and emotional intensity. Finally, the diagonal depth composition, used at 2:00:58 when officers enter a building, leverages spatial lines to add depth and direct visual movement (see **Figure 1C**). These compositional strategies support the film's narrative by reinforcing mood, relationships, and dramatic tension.

Camera Angles and Perspective Dynamics

Building upon compositional framing, the film further refines its visual narration through deliberate camera angle selection, consistent with Mascelli's (1965) framework of visual storytelling. Each angle establishes a specific point of view, affecting how characters and situations are perceived by the audience.

Three types of angles are strategically deployed. The objective angle provides a neutral observer perspective, as



Figure 2. Examples of camera angle techniques in 3: Alif Lam Mim: (A) objective camera angle showing Alif, Lam, and Mim observing the sealing of the training facility (29:29); and (B) subjective camera angle during the rooftop conversation between Alif and Lam (1:12:29-1:12:35).

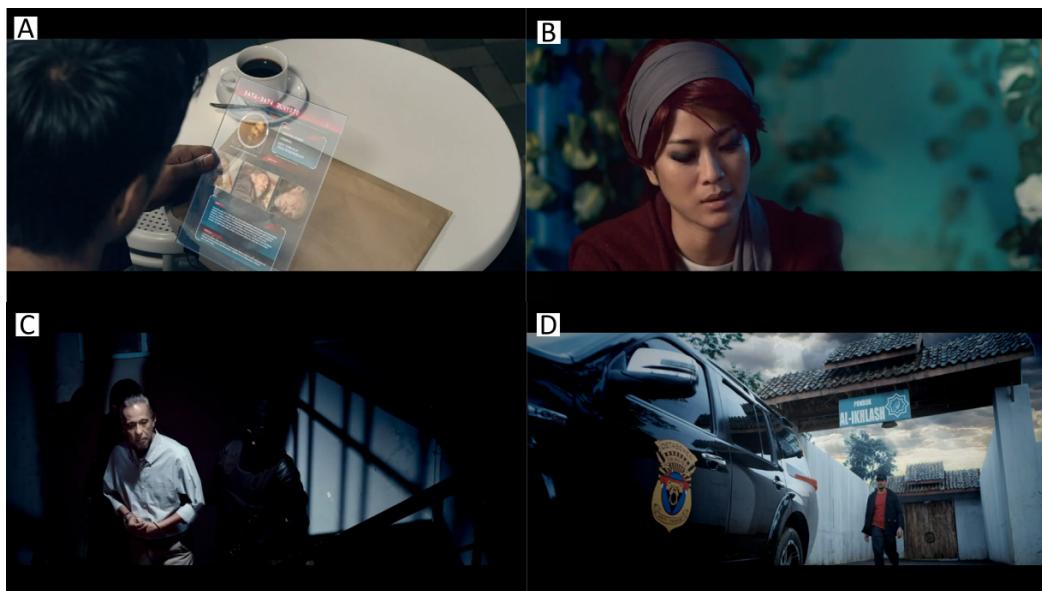


Figure 3. Examples of shot type variations in 3: Alif Lam Mim: (A) point-of-view shot of Alif examining his phone (1:15:11); (B) eye-level shot during the café dialogue between Alif and Laras (22:50); (C) high-angle shot depicting Kyai Mukhlis being arrested (1:32:57); and (D) low-angle shot as Alif exits the pesantren gate (1:33:03).



Figure 4. Examples of close-up shot variations in 3: Alif Lam Mim: (A) extreme close-up of Alif waking from a nightmare (44:41); (B) standard close-up of Lam grieving his wife's death (1:21:44); and (C) medium close-up of Mim opening the pesantren gate (1:05:29).

seen in the scene at 29:29, where Alif, Lam, and Mim witness the closure of their training facility (see **Figure 2A**). Conversely, the subjective angle, used in the rooftop conversation scene (1:12:29-1:12:35), immerses viewers into the emotional state of the characters (**Figure 2B**).

Meanwhile, the point-of-view (POV) shot brings intimacy, such as at 1:15:11 when Alif examines his phone, aligning the viewer directly with his gaze (**Figure 3A**). The emotional tone of each scene is further modulated through camera height (level). The eye-level shot promotes neutrality and equality, such as in the café dialogue between Alif and Laras (22:50, see **Figure 3B**). This framing reinforces the balanced conversational dynamic between the two characters during a moment of ideological tension.

In contrast, the high-angle shot at 1:32:57 positions Kyai Mukhlis as visually subordinate, emphasizing his vulnerability and the state's dominance during his arrest (**Figure 3C**). The elevated camera not only signifies state dominance but also frames religious faith as a subjugated force under authoritarian ideology. The opposing low-angle shot, exemplified at 1:33:03 as Alif exits the pesantren gate, elevates his dominance and narrative authority (**Figure 3D**). These varying heights reinforce power dynamics and psychological positioning between characters.

Shot Size and Emotional Focus

In tandem with angle and height, shot size modulates the emotional proximity between characters and viewers. 3: Alif

Lam Mim uses these size variations strategically to reveal inner turmoil, emotional resonance, and narrative emphasis.

An extreme close-up, such as the scene at 44:41 showing Alif waking from a nightmare, conveys psychological disruption (**Figure 4A**). The standard close-up, used at 1:21:44 as Lam mourns his wife, emphasizes facial emotion and vulnerability (**Figure 4B**). The medium close-up, captured at 1:05:29 when Mim opens the pesantren gate, balances character expression with setting context, blending personal and environmental narratives (**Figure 4C**).

Continuity and Temporal Fluidity

The film ensures visual logic and temporal coherence through continuity editing, which maintains spatial and narrative consistency. At 1:12:23, during an exchange between Alif and Lam on the rooftop, seamless shot transitions preserve dialogue rhythm and spatial orientation, guiding the audience through the emotional and ideological shift in their conversation (**Figure 5A**).

Editing as Narrative Pacing

Finally, the film's editing integrates offline assembly and online refinement. Offline editing weaves audio and video into coherent scenes, while online editing enhances aesthetic quality through color grading and visual effects. Editors utilize various cut types, including cut-in, jump cut, and smash cut. The smash cut at 29:21, depicting Alif's traumatic memory, is particularly impactful, using abrupt visual

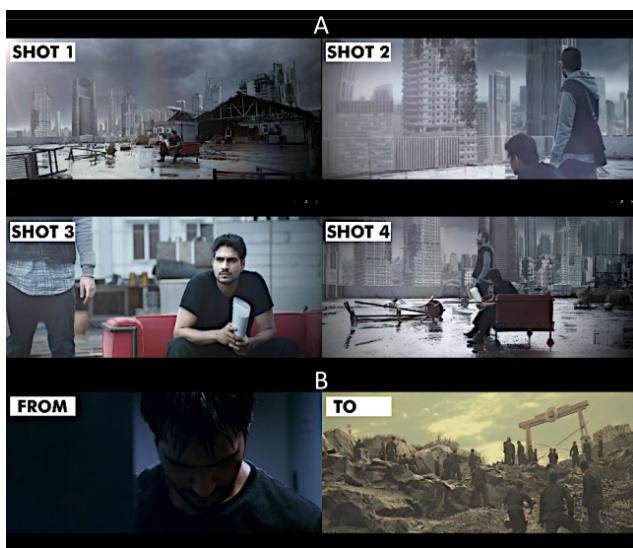


Figure 5. Examples of editing techniques in *3: Alif Lam Mim*: (A) continuity editing during the rooftop dialogue between Alif and Lam (1:12:23); and (B) a smash cut illustrating Alif's traumatic flashback (29:21).

contrast to convey psychological rupture and narrative tension (**Figure 5B**).

Discussion

This study investigated the application of Joseph V. Mascelli's 5C principles of cinematography in the film *3: Alif Lam Mim*, focusing on how visual elements such as composition, camera angles, shot size, continuity, and editing contribute to the film's narrative clarity, emotional intensity, and ideological stance. The findings reveal that the cinematographic decisions in this film are intricately interwoven with its storytelling strategies, enabling a multi-layered cinematic experience that extends beyond aesthetic appeal.

The visual composition in *3: Alif Lam Mim* functions as more than a means of framing; it actively shapes meaning and emotional nuance. Techniques such as the rule of thirds, golden mean, and diagonal depth are employed not only to maintain visual balance but also to signal character psychology and power dynamics (11, 12). For example, Lam is framed off-center using the rule of thirds during a moment of vulnerability, amplifying his emotional disconnection while subtly retaining the architectural structure in view, which in turn situates his crisis within a broader societal context. Likewise, the use of diagonal lines in scenes involving police movement directs the viewer's gaze dynamically, guiding attention and enhancing spatial realism (13).

Camera angles further reinforce narrative perspective (14). Objective angles maintain a neutral observational stance, while subjective and point-of-view (POV) angles immerse the audience in the emotional interiority of the characters (5, 15). Notably, high-angle shots, such as the one capturing Kyai Mukhlis during his press interrogation, position the character as subdued and disempowered, visually reflecting the state's ideological dominance. In contrast, low-angle shots of Alif convey rising agency and assertiveness, highlighting the shifting hierarchies within the story. These angle variations are not arbitrary but serve as ideological tools, aligning viewer perception with evolving character roles (16).

Shot size also plays a vital role in emotional mediation

(17). The extreme close-up of Alif awakening from a nightmare exposes internal distress through visual isolation, whereas close-ups on Lam's grief communicate raw emotional collapse in the aftermath of personal tragedy. Medium close-ups allow a balance between character expression and environmental context (18), as seen when Mim confronts state forces outside the pesantren. These choices bridge the visual with the psychological, allowing audiences to engage empathetically while also interpreting the broader implications of each scene.

In terms of editing, the film demonstrates a high level of structural precision. Continuity editing ensures logical progression and temporal clarity, particularly in emotionally and ideologically charged scenes such as the rooftop exchange between Alif and Lam. The transitions between shots preserve both rhythm and spatial orientation, avoiding disorientation and reinforcing narrative fluidity (5). The cutting strategy is especially effective in heightening dramatic impact (19). For instance, the smash cut used during Alif's memory flashback at minute 29:21 delivers abrupt emotional rupture and visual contrast, signaling psychological fragmentation while accelerating narrative tension.

Altogether, the film's use of the 5C cinematographic framework reflects a mature grasp of visual storytelling. Each element, composition, angle, shot size, continuity, and cutting operates cohesively as an expressive system that supports the film's thematic depth and ideological subtext. Rather than functioning as isolated techniques, these visual components are deployed to sustain narrative cohesion, articulate character transformation, and underscore the socio-political tensions inherent in the plot. The result is a compelling cinematic work that demonstrates how formal visual strategies can serve as potent vehicles for meaning within contemporary Indonesian cinema.

Building on this synthesis, the integration of composition, camera angle, shot size, continuity, and cutting constructs a coherent visual ideology centered on moral duality, between obedience to state authority and fidelity to faith (20). The compositional symmetry between Alif and Lam visually symbolizes divided loyalty, while the recurring low-angle framing of Alif asserts the moral tension between power and conviction. Continuity and pacing sustain this ideological negotiation, allowing viewers to perceive conflict as both external and spiritual. Collectively, these visual strategies transform Mascelli's technical grammar into a vehicle for moral discourse, where the 5C framework not only organizes the film's visual rhythm but also encodes its ethical commentary on belief, control, and human agency. In doing so, *3: Alif Lam Mim* transcends aesthetic execution, translating formal cinematographic principles into an ideological narrative about faith, loyalty, and resistance.

Conclusion

The film *3: Alif Lam Mim* demonstrates a deliberate and cohesive application of Joseph V. Mascelli's 5C cinematography principles to support narrative depth, emotional engagement, and ideological critique. Each visual component, composition, camera angle, shot size, continuity, and editing, functions as an integrated system that shapes audience perception and reinforces the film's thematic and ideological resonance. This synthesis reflects the filmmakers' advanced command of visual language in articulating complex socio-political narratives within the Indonesian

context.

Beyond its practical implications, the study contributes to film theory by reaffirming cinematography as not merely a technical craft but a site of ideological production. The findings suggest that Mascelli's 5C model, when interpreted through an interpretivist lens, extends into a semiotic framework capable of decoding how visual form constructs meaning. This theoretical insight situates cinematography within broader discourses of narrative theory and visual semiotics, emphasizing that visual composition can serve as both a storytelling mechanism and a carrier of ideological discourse. The research also underscores the pedagogical potential of the 5C framework in film education and analytical training. As a structured tool, it offers a systematic approach for students and practitioners to dissect visual narratives and understand how framing, rhythm, and perspective function within a film's ideological context. Integrating the 5C framework into film curricula can therefore bridge the gap between production practice and critical theory, cultivating both technical precision and analytical depth.

Future studies should continue to expand this theoretical-practical dialogue by exploring how the 5C framework operates across different genres and cultural contexts of Indonesian cinema. Comparative analysis with international films could further illuminate how visual grammar interacts with cultural ideology, advancing the theoretical understanding of cinematography as a dynamic intersection of art, narrative, and ideology.

Declarations

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Contribution: Data Curation, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicting interest.

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The unpublished data is available upon request to the corresponding author.

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Additional Information

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