

**Representation of Cultural Values in Animation Films: A Semiotic Analysis
of *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022)**



FINAL THESIS

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**COMMUNICATION SCIENCE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM
FACULTY OF SOCIAL CULTURAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INDONESIA
YOGYAKARTA
2026**

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Water (2022).**

FINAL THESIS

**Written and Proposed as the Requirements to Obtain a Bachelor's Degree in
Communication Science (Bachelor of Communication Science), Faculty of Social
and Cultural Science, Universitas Islam Indonesia**

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LETTER OF AGREEMENT UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

**Representation of Cultural Values in Animation Films: A Semiotic
Analysis of *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) and *Avatar: The Way of
Water* (2022)**

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It has been approved by the thesis supervisor to be tested and defended
in front of the thesis committer

Date: May 18, 2026

Knowing,
Thesis Supervisor

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الجامعة الإسلامية
الاستاذ الدكتور

**STATEMENT OF ETHICAL CLEARANCE UNDERGRADUATE
THESIS**

**Representation of Cultural Values in Animation Films: A Semiotic
Analysis of *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) and *Avatar: The Way of
Water* (2022)**

Written by:

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Knowing,

Head of Communication Science Department in
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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INDONESIA
FAKULTAS
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STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC ETHICS

I hereby declare that this thesis does not contain any work that has previously been submitted for the purpose of obtaining an academic degree at any institution of higher education, and to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain any work or opinions written or published by others, except those explicitly cited in this manuscript and listed in the bibliography.

Yogyakarta, May 21st 2026

A pink 10000 Indonesian postage stamp featuring a Garuda bird and the word 'METERAI' is used as a background for a handwritten signature in black ink.

Awwaylayssa Agno Putri

MOTTO

"It always seems impossible until it's done."

— Nelson Mandela

DEDICATION

I dedicated this work to:

**The best blessing, Mom and Dad, All of My Family, and everyone who's always
being the realest on by my sides.**

FOREWORD

Assalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb

Alhamdulillahirabbil'alamin, In the name of Allah SWT the most gracious and the most merciful, for the blessings that I have been privileged. Sholawat and salaam chanted to our Prophet Muhammad SAW for all the values until the end of time, so that the writer could accomplish this undergraduate thesis entitled “Representation of Cultural Values in Animation Films: A Semiotic Analysis of *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022)”.

This thesis stands not only as the culmination of an academic responsibility, but as a quiet testament to a journey filled with reflection, perseverance, and growth. Within these pages are not merely theories and analyses, but fragments of time—long nights of revision, moments of doubt in front of a blank screen, silent prayers before submission deadlines, and the courage to begin again after every setback. In this process, I have learned that every ending carries the weight of a beginning, and no journey is ever truly walked alone.

To my beloved parents, **Agus** and **Novel**, my deepest gratitude belongs to you. Your love, prayers, and sacrifices have been the unseen force that carried me through every uncertainty. In the quiet moments when I questioned my own abilities, your unwavering belief became my strength. Every step I have taken in completing this thesis is a reflection of your endless devotion and patience.

To my dear siblings, **Shaquilla**, **Challe**, and **Tsamara**, thank you for being the quiet light in my journey. Your presence, laughter, and even the simplest moments we shared at home became a source of comfort amidst the pressure of deadlines and revisions. You reminded me, without words, that I always had a place to return to.

To all of my family, I offer my sincere appreciation for your continuous support and understanding. Your encouragement, whether spoken or unspoken, has been a gentle reassurance that I am never alone in this endeavor.

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To my closest friend, **Oca. Via**, **Ica**, **Nafiisha**, and **Fella**, thank you for being my safe place throughout this process. From listening to my overthinking at midnight, accompanying me during stressful deadlines, to reminding me to take a breath when

everything feels overwhelming—your presence has been a quiet strength I will always be grateful for.

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And finally, to myself, Layssa. thank you for holding on through the days when motivation felt distant and exhaustion took over. Thank you for choosing to continue writing, even when the words did not come easily. Thank you for trusting the process, for embracing growth, and for believing that you are capable of reaching this point. This thesis is not a symbol of perfection, but of persistence—a quiet proof that you did not give up.

May this work stand not only as an academic contribution, but as a reminder that every process, no matter how demanding, carries within it the quiet beauty of becoming.

Yogyakarta, April 28 2026

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and lines, representing the name Awwaylayssa Agno Putri.

Awwaylayssa Agno Putri

Representation of Cultural Values in Animation Films: A Semiotic Analysis of *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022)

ABSTRACT

Awwaylayssa Agno Putri, 21321019

*Film is a communication tool to convey various messages through narrative media and is frequently interpreted as a medium of artistic expression for artists and filmmakers to express their story ideas (Rizal: 2014). Nowadays, movies are often used as a medium to convey messages and values. Cultural values are among those that may be embedded in films, such as the representation of archipelago culture. Examples of movies containing cultural values include *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022). This research analyzes the archipelagic culture contained in these films.*

Keywords: Film, Archipelagic Representation, Communication, Animation films

Representasi Nilai-Nilai Budaya dalam Film Animasi: Analisis Semiotik terhadap Raya and The Last Dragon (2021) dan Avatar: The Way of Water (2022)

ABSTRAK

(Awwaylayssa Agno Putri, 21321019)

Film adalah alat komunikasi untuk menyampaikan berbagai pesan melalui media cerita, dan biasanya juga diartikan sebagai media ekspresi artistic bagi para seniman dan insan perfilman untuk mengungkapkan gagasan ide cerita yang dimilikinya (Rizal: 2014). Saat ini, film sering dijadikan media untuk menyampaikan pesan dan nilai. Nilai budaya menjadi salah satu nilai yang mungkin terkandung dalam suatu film, seperti representasi kebudayaan nusantara. Contoh film yang mengandung nilai kebudayaan adalah film *Raya and The Last Dragon* dan *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2009). Pada penelitian kali ini, saya akan menganalisis kebudayaan nusantara yang terdapat dalam film.

Kata kunci: Film, Representasi Nusantara, Komunikasi, Film animasi

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Film serves not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a system of representation that constructs meaning through visual, narrative, and cinematic forms. In film studies, cinema is understood as a cultural text that actively organizes ideologies, identities, and social values through moving images, sound, mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and narrative structure. Turner (2006) states that film must be understood as a social practice because cinematic meaning does not naturally reflect reality but is actively produced through the process of representation. Thus, film does not merely present culture as it is but reconstructs and mediates cultural meaning through cinematic language.

As a visual medium, film communicates through a system of signs. According to Sturken and Cartwright (2018), visual representation is never neutral because images construct specific ways of viewing reality through cultural codes and ideological frameworks. Meaning in film is generated not only through dialogue and plot but also through visual composition, architecture, costumes, lighting, gestures, landscapes, sound, color, and spatial arrangement. Through these cinematic elements, film shapes how audiences understand identity, morality, tradition, and social reality. Since cinematic meaning operates through visual signifying processes, film becomes a crucial object for semiotic analysis, particularly in examining how ideology and cultural identity are symbolically represented through visual imagery.

This research primarily draws from the perspective of film studies, not cultural anthropology or ethnography. The aim of this research is not to verify the authenticity of Indonesian culture as represented in films, nor to directly investigate actual cultural practices. Instead, this research focuses on how global animated films construct symbolic representations related to the Nusantara identity through cinematic signs and representational strategies. Therefore, the researcher's position in this study is that of a film representation analyst, not a literal cultural analyst. The analysis specifically examines how

films encode meanings regarding spirituality, ecological harmony, maritime life, communal identity, and traditions inspired by indigenous cultures through cinematic forms.

The issue of Nusantara representation has become increasingly significant in contemporary global cinema as the cultural identities of Southeast Asia and the Indonesian archipelago are increasingly reconstructed into transnational visual narratives for a global audience. In this study, the term “Nusantara” does not merely refer to Indonesia as a geographical region, but rather to a symbolic cultural imagination associated with maritime civilization, ecological closeness, communal traditions, spirituality, indigenous knowledge, and traditional architecture originating from the Indonesian archipelago and the broader Southeast Asian region. In global media representations, these cultural elements are often transformed into universal symbols of ecological wisdom, indigenous authenticity, and harmony with nature.

The urgency of research on representations of the Nusantara lies in the increasingly widespread circulation of Southeast Asian cultural imagery within the global entertainment industry. Contemporary cinema frequently appropriates, stylizes, and universalizes local cultural symbols into simplified visual identities for international consumption. Hall (1997) explains that representation is an active process of meaning production through symbolic systems, not a transparent reflection of reality. Therefore, the cultural imagery that emerges in films must be understood as a construction mediated by ideological interests, industrial frameworks, and the logic of a transnational audience. Through the process of representation, films can simultaneously celebrate, romanticize, commodify, or depoliticize cultures inspired by indigenous communities, transforming them into visual myths that can be universally consumed.

This issue has become increasingly significant in animated films. Animation possesses a unique ability to construct cultural mythology because animated cinema allows reality to be distilled, exaggerated, and reconstructed through a fantasy-based visual world. Wells (1998) explains that animation operates through symbolic abstraction and imaginative stylization, enabling filmmakers to reconstruct reality beyond the limitations of photographic realism. Consequently, animation is highly effective in the process of myth-making because visual symbols can be transformed into emotionally resonant and

universally accessible imagery. Through animation, cultural elements can be aesthetically intensified and ideologically simplified into a coherent visual fantasy world.

In animated films, cultural representations often emerge through stylized architecture, ecological landscapes, rituals, mythological creatures, costume design, symbolic color schemes, and visual world-building, which collectively shape an ideological understanding of identity and civilization. Thus, animation does not merely reproduce culture but actively mythologizes it into cinematic fantasy. These characteristics make animation highly relevant for semiotic analysis, as meaning in animated cinema relies heavily on visual symbolism, the coding of representations, and ideological stylization.

Two contemporary films that strongly demonstrate this process are *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021) and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022). Although both are fictional narratives, they contain various visual elements related to the cultural imagery of the Nusantara. *Raya and the Last Dragon*, produced by The Walt Disney Company, reconstructs the cultural aesthetics of Southeast Asia through representations of traditional architecture, martial arts, communal rituals, culinary traditions, ecological landscapes, and the value of collectivity. Meanwhile, James Cameron's *Avatar: The Way of Water* portrays the Metkayina clan as a maritime society associated with marine life, stilt-house settlements, free-diving traditions, ecological spirituality, and communal dependence on the marine environment. Cameron himself acknowledges that certain aspects of Metkayina culture were partially inspired by maritime communities such as the Bajau people of Southeast Asia.

However, this study does not aim to claim a direct equivalence between the fictional societies in the films and real-world Indonesian ethnic groups. Instead, it focuses on how global animated films reconstruct symbolic aspects associated with the Nusantara identity into cinematic representations. This distinction is important because the research analysis focuses on the construction of representation, not ethnographic authenticity. Therefore, this study examines how the film organizes cultural meanings and ideological assumptions through cinematic language and symbolic representation.

In film studies, representation is closely tied to ideology because cinematic imagery influences how audiences imagine cultural identities and social realities. Consequently, the analysis of representation in film requires an approach capable of revealing not only the

visible meanings but also the ideological assumptions embedded within the visual narrative. To critically examine this representational process, this study employs Roland Barthes's semiotic theory as its primary analytical framework.

Barthes's semiotics is considered relevant because his theoretical framework allows analysis to move beyond literal meaning toward the ideological meanings embedded in representations. In *Mythologies* (1972), Barthes explains that signs operate through three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal meaning that is directly visible in an image or scene. Connotation refers to the symbolic and cultural meanings attached to visual signs. Meanwhile, myth operates ideologically by naturalizing meanings that are actually historical and constructed, making them appear universal, normal, and unquestionable.

Unlike structural semiotics, which primarily focuses on sign systems, Barthes' concept of myth allows researchers to examine how cinematic signs transform into ideological constructions within popular culture. This framework is particularly well-suited for analyzing global animated films because representations of Nusantara culture in these films often operate through myth-forming processes. Visual elements such as maritime life, ecological spirituality, traditional architecture, rituals, and communal harmony are often represented as timeless symbols of authentic indigenous life. Through cinematic stylization, these representations can naturalize ideological assumptions regarding ecological purity, sacred harmony with nature, and the moral superiority of indigenous communities.

Thus, Barthes' framework enables this study to critically uncover how cinematic representations transform cultural symbols into ideological myths for a global audience. The cultural representations of the Nusantara in both films do not merely function as decorative aesthetics but operate ideologically in constructing specific understandings of identity, civilization, spirituality, and environmental morality.

This study specifically focuses on film texts, rather than production analysis, audience reception, or media effects, as the research objective is to analyze how ideology is structurally embedded within the cinematic representations themselves. Audience studies primarily examine how viewers interpret media differently based on social backgrounds and reception contexts, while production studies focus on the industrial and institutional processes behind media creation. Conversely, this research focuses on textual analysis,

specifically regarding how meaning is encoded through visual signs, cinematography, narrative symbolism, and patterns of representation in selected scenes.

Therefore, semiotic analysis was chosen because it allows the research to examine in depth how films produce meaning through visual representation. Using Barthes' framework, this study analyzes how denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings operate in selected scenes from *Raya and the Last Dragon* and *Avatar: The Way of Water* to construct an ideological understanding of maritime identity, ecological harmony, spirituality, communal life, and cultural authenticity associated with the image of the Nusantara.

Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to film studies and visual culture studies by critically examining how contemporary global animated films reconstruct Nusantara-inspired cultural imagery into transnational cinematic myths. Through semiotic analysis, this study demonstrates how film representations function ideologically in shaping global understandings of indigenous identity, ecological civilization, and cultural authenticity within contemporary popular culture.

B. Problem Formulation

Based on the background described above, research questions formulated for this study are:

1. How are elements of Nusantara culture represented through signs, symbols, and cultural practices in the films *Raya and The Last Dragon* and *Avatar: The Way of Water* from a semiotic perspective?"

C. Research Objective

Based on the background and problem formulation outlined above, the objectives of this study are:

1. To identify signs in the two films that serve as representations of Nusantara culture.
2. To analyze the denotative and connotative meanings of the two films studied

D. Benefits of Research

Based on the background, problem formulation, and objectives stated earlier, the benefits of this research are:

1. Academic Aspect,

This study contributes to the development of linguistic studies and serves as a reference for future semiotic analysis.

2. Practical Aspect,

This study provides novel insights expected to benefit the public by analyzing specific signs and cultural meanings within the films. Films not only to see the story and action, but to be more critical of what they watch.

E. Literature Review

This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of previous research and relevant theoretical frameworks connected to the analysis of Southeast Asian cultural representation in animation films, with a focus on "*Raya and The Last Dragon*" and "*Avatar: The Way of Water*." The review covers key themes, methodologies, and scholarly discussions from various academic sources.

The literature review is structured thematically:

1. Cultural Representation in Film: Academic works discuss how films function as media that reflect, reconstruct, and sometimes stereotype cultural identities (Hall, 1997; Said, 1978; Storey, 2014). These sources establish a foundation for analyzing how visual narratives shape perceptions of local culture.
2. Southeast Asian and Nusantara Culture in Animation: Previous studies (Branayudha et al., 2025; Lenggu & Kristanto, 2022; Saptanto et al., 2024) have mapped how elements such as *batik*, *gamelan*, Rumah Gadang, and Bajau customs are represented in international animated films.
3. Semiotic Film Analysis: Foundational theoretical resources on semiotic analysis, particularly Roland Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1967; Sobur, 2013), provide the analytical lens for decoding signs and symbols in cinematic texts.
4. Comparative Works and Intertextuality: Studies comparing "*Raya and The Last Dragon*" to "*Moana*," "*Mulan*," or "*Avatar*" reveal patterns of cultural borrowing and adaptation, as well as how Hollywood negotiates authenticity and diversity (Tjahyadi et al., 2020; Limanta, 2021).

5. Gaps and Opportunities: While previous research highlights rich cultural references, most have not used Barthes' semiotic framework in detail, marking an opportunity for this thesis to contribute a deeper semiotic perspective (Putri, 2025).

In summary, this literature review synthesizes diverse viewpoints and identifies relevant academic debates, while positioning this study as a contribution that combines film semiotics and intercultural analysis to enrich discussions about Southeast Asian cultural identity in global cinema. Citations are included to demonstrate critical engagement with both local and international scholarship.

1. Previous Research

The initial study focused on the analysis of semiotics in an animated film titled "The Cultural Identity of Nusantara in a Movie: *Raya and The Last Dragon*". This study employs semiotic analysis, utilizing qualitative methodologies. The research pertains to the analysis of the Nusantara culture depicted in the film "Raya and The Last Dragon." The signs in the movie are analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, focusing on their denotative and connotative meanings. The study aims not only to understand the symbolism depicted in the movie, but also to analyze and interpret the underlying mythologies. This study seeks to identify the distinguishing features of the archipelago depicted in this animated film produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios.

The second study, chosen for its investigation of cultural viewpoints in animated films using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, is titled "Eastern Cultural Perspectives in Disney Princess Films". This study discusses the portrayal of Eastern culture in Disney Princess movies. The principal theory utilized to analyze the portrayal of eastern cultural values in Disney films is semiotic theory, with a focus on representation. The current study examines two Disney princess films, specifically *Mulan* and *Raya and the Last Dragon*, as the subjects of its analysis.

The third study, titled "Southeast Asian Visual Culture In The Animated Film: *Raya and The Last Dragon*," was selected due to its analysis of cultural representation through visual storytelling in films. This study analyzes the portrayal of Southeast Asian culture in the animated film *Raya and The Last Dragon*. It focuses on the film's depiction of visual culture variety in popular culture items, Southeast Asian visual culture, character design, and the analysis of *Raya and The Last Dragon* film promotional poster. The

current study employs a qualitative methodology by examining and analyzing past studies, particularly focusing on the portrayal of visual culture in Disney princess animation.

The fourth study, titled "Postmodernism in Avatar: The Way Of Water" presents a comprehensive examination of the postmodern elements depicted in the film. This study employs qualitative methodology and Roland Barthes' analysis to examine the significance of denotation, connotation, and myth within its narrative. Past studies have identified both parallels and differences in relation to semiotic analysis in films. While sharing methodological similarities with prior works, the current study distinguishes itself by focusing on a film that has received limited scholarly attention in terms of its cultural representation.

Table 1.1 Comparison of Selected Studies

No	Title	Methodology	Advantages (+)	Limitation (-)
1.	The Cultural Identity of Nusantara in a Movie: Raya and The Last Dragon	Qualitative Method	This article references archipelagic culture and includes cultural analysis that provides valuable insights.	The study does not employ Roland Barthes' semiotic framework.
2.	Perspektif Budaya Ketimuran dalam Film Disney Princess	Qualitative Method	This study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic framework	This study does not focus on Nusantara culture but on Eastern culture.
3.	Southeast Asian Virtual Culture in The Animated Film: Raya and The Last Dragon	Qualitative Method	This study employs Roland Barthes' framework and analyzes signs in detail	This study does not focus on Nusantara Culture but on popular culture
4.	Postmodernisme dalam film <i>Avatar: The Way Of Water</i>	Qualitative Method	This study analyzes denotation, connotation, and myth within the film's narrative.	This study does not analyze cultural identity

F. Theoretical Framework

1. Film as a Medium of Representation

Film is not merely a form of entertainment, but also a medium of communication that constructs and disseminates meanings, ideologies, and cultural perspectives to audiences. As a mass medium, film shapes society's understanding of reality through visual, auditory, and narrative representations. According to Graeme Turner, film functions as a social practice because it actively reconstructs reality, rather than merely reflecting it objectively. Through cinematic elements such as mise-en-scène, lighting, costumes, dialogue, sound, and camera composition, films convey specific interpretations of culture, identity, and society according to Sturken and Cartwright (2018).

From a cultural studies perspective, representation is closely tied to the production of meaning. Stuart Hall (1997) explains that meaning is formed through language, signs, and symbolic systems operating within social and cultural contexts. Therefore, representation is never neutral because filmmakers selectively determine which identities, realities, and cultural values to highlight in the cinematic narrative. Through this selection process, film becomes a cultural text that shapes the audience's perceptions of culture and identity.

Film representation also functions ideologically because cinematic narratives often naturalize certain perspectives while marginalizing others. Cultural elements appearing in films are not merely decorative visual components but symbolic constructions carrying ideological meaning. In this regard, films serve as spaces where cultural identities are reconstructed and circulated within global popular culture.

In this study, *Raya and the Last Dragon* and *Avatar: The Way of Water* are positioned as cultural texts that reconstruct representations of Nusantara culture through cinematic symbolism. Both films convey ideas regarding communal identity, spirituality, maritime life, and ecological harmony through visual representations. Therefore, this study falls within the realm of communication and cultural studies, specifically focusing on the discussion of media representation, cultural identity, and ideological meaning in film.

2. Cultural Representation in Animated Films

Animated films have strong potential for representing culture because animation allows filmmakers to reconstruct cultural reality through imaginative and symbolic

visual forms. Unlike live-action films, animation offers greater flexibility in stylizing environments, characters, movements, and symbolic objects, enabling culture to be represented more expressively and emotionally. According to Paul Wells, animation functions as a symbolic medium capable of constructing ideological and cultural meanings through fantasy and visual imagination.

Culture in animated films is generally represented through symbolic visual elements such as architecture, costumes, rituals, gestures, music, environmental design, and traditional objects Hall (1997). These elements serve as cultural signifiers that represent specific traditions, identities, and value systems. Through visual stylization, animated films transform local cultural references into cinematic symbols that a global audience can understand.

However, cultural representation in animation is neither entirely neutral nor authentic. In global cinema, local cultures are often adapted into universal narratives through selective representation. Certain cultural symbols are highlighted, simplified, or romanticized to create a visual narrative that is more accessible to an international audience. Consequently, animation not only reflects culture but also actively reconstructs cultural identity through ideological and commercial processes.

This issue is particularly relevant in global animated films that incorporate Southeast Asian cultural influences. Although some studies discuss moral values or general representations in animated films, research specifically examining how Nusantara cultural values are symbolically reconstructed and ideologically communicated through cinematic signs using Roland Barthes's semiotic framework remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how Nusantara culture is reconstructed and circulated in global animated films.

In this study, *Raya and the Last Dragon* and *Avatar: The Way of Water* serve as key objects of analysis because both films reconstruct cultural values related to Indonesian and Southeast Asian identities, particularly maritime traditions, communal life, spirituality, and ecological relationships.

3. Cultural Values of the Indonesian Archipelago

In this study, Nusantara is understood not merely as a geographical term referring to the Indonesian archipelago, but as a symbolic cultural identity that embodies the

collective values, maritime traditions, spirituality, local wisdom, and ecological harmony inherent in Indonesian society. Nusantara reflects a multicultural civilization shaped by historical interactions, regional diversity, and shared cultural experiences across the archipelago.

As a symbolic identity, Nusantara embodies cultural values that are continuously reproduced through rituals, architecture, traditional arts, oral traditions, and social interactions. Despite ethnic and regional diversity, Indonesian society shares several consistent collective values, such as communal solidarity, mutual aid, kinship, spirituality, respect for ancestors, and harmony between humans and nature. These values form the cultural foundation that shapes social life and the cultural sustainability of Nusantara according Hall (1997).

One of the key characteristics of the Nusantara identity is maritime culture. As an archipelagic nation, Indonesia possesses a strong maritime tradition that influences the way of life and worldview of coastal communities. Maritime identity emphasizes collective survival, adaptation to the marine environment, ecological balance, and the interconnected relationship between humans and nature. Communities such as the Bajau people embody these values through diving traditions, fishing practices, the use of canoes, stilt-house architecture, and spiritual beliefs tied to the sea.

The Nusantara identity is also expressed through traditional cultural symbols such as batik, the keris, gamelan, Rumah Gadang architecture, floating markets, and wayang performances. These symbols serve not only as aesthetic objects but also as cultural markers carrying philosophical and ideological meanings related to spirituality, identity, local wisdom, and historical continuity.

In this study, the cultural values of the Nusantara are conceptualized as a system of cultural signs reconstructed through cinematic representations. The depiction of maritime life in *Avatar: The Way of Water* shows similarities to Indonesian maritime culture, particularly the Bajau community, while *Raya and the Last Dragon* reconstructs broader Nusantara cultural symbols related to Southeast Asian traditions. Therefore, Nusantara culture in this study is analyzed as a symbolic identity reconstructed within global popular culture, rather than as a static or purely traditional cultural object.

4. Roland Barthes Semiotics

This study employs Roland Barthes's theory of semiotics as the primary analytical framework for examining representations of Nusantara culture in animated films. Barthes's approach was chosen because film, as a visual text, not only conveys literal meaning but also constructs ideological meaning through a system of signs, symbols, and visual representations. In this context, culture in film is understood not as a reality represented directly, but as a construction of meaning produced through cinematic language.

In *Mythologies* (1972), Roland Barthes explains that signs operate through two primary levels of meaning—denotation and connotation—which then evolve into myth as a secondary system of meaning. Denotation refers to literal meaning or what is directly visible in the image, such as objects, characters, costumes, settings, gestures, or activities within a film scene. Connotation refers to the cultural meanings and social associations attached to the sign. Meanwhile, myth functions as an ideological process that naturalizes specific cultural meanings so that they appear normal, universal, and unquestioned.

For Barthes (1972), myth does not function merely as a traditional story, but as an ideological mechanism that transforms cultural constructions into “common sense.” In visual media, myth operates by simplifying social and historical reality into representations that appear natural. Consequently, cultural representations in global cinema often present specific cultural identities as harmonious, authentic, and timeless, even though these identities are actually shaped through processes of cinematic selection, aestheticization, and simplification.

This approach is reinforced by the visual culture perspective of Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright in *Practices of Looking* (2018), which explains that visual images are never neutral because they are always tied to power relations, ideologies, and social constructions. According to Sturken and Cartwright, visual images in the media shape how audiences understand identity, culture, gender, nature, and social relations through representational practices. Thus, visuals in animated films serve not only as aesthetic elements but also as a medium that produces and disseminates cultural meanings to a global audience.

Through a combination of Barthes's semiotics and the visual culture approach, this study analyzes how visual elements such as stilt houses, canoes, maritime traditions, spiritual rituals, ecological relationships, and communal activities are represented in films as cultural signs carrying specific ideological meanings. The focus of this study is not to claim that the film represents Nusantara culture literally or authentically, but rather to examine how the film reconstructs Nusantara cultural symbols into cinematic representations that can be universally understood by a transnational audience.

Thus, this study views animated films as representational practices that construct myths regarding the identity of the Nusantara—such as ecological harmony, communal spirituality, closeness to nature, and cultural sustainability—through visual language and cinematic strategies. Barthes's semiology enables this study to reveal how these meanings are naturalized into visual ideologies within global popular culture.

5. Semiotics in Film Analysis

Film is a highly relevant object for semiotic analysis because cinematic meaning is constructed through systems of visual signs organized within audiovisual representation. In this research, cinematic elements are understood not merely as technical components of filmmaking, but as representational signs that communicate cultural and ideological meanings related to Nusantara identity. Through visual organization, film actively produces meaning and shapes audience understanding of culture, identity, and social values.

According to Roland Barthes (1972), signs operate through multiple levels of signification consisting of denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal meaning directly visible within the image, including objects, settings, costumes, gestures, lighting, and actions. Connotation refers to the associative and cultural meanings attached to those visual signs through social and historical interpretation. Meanwhile, myth functions at the ideological level, where cultural meanings become naturalized and appear universal, normal, and unquestionable. Barthes argues that myth transforms historically constructed meanings into forms that seem natural within everyday consciousness.

Within film analysis, this framework is important because cinematic representation often works ideologically through visual naturalization. Cultural symbols presented

repeatedly in film may appear authentic or universal even though they are constructed selectively through cinematic representation. Therefore, semiotic analysis allows this research to examine how global animated films reconstruct Nusantara cultural identity through symbolic visual coding.

This perspective is strengthened by Sturken and Cartwright (2018), who explain that visual culture does not merely reflect reality, but actively constructs ways of seeing and understanding the world. Images operate within broader systems of representation shaped by ideology, power, history, and cultural discourse. In cinematic texts, visual elements such as architecture, landscape, costume, ritual performance, body movement, lighting, color composition, and spatial arrangement function as representational codes that guide audience interpretation. Consequently, film becomes a site where cultural meanings are produced, circulated, and normalized through visual representation.

In this research, cinematic signs associated with maritime life, ecological relationships, communal traditions, spirituality, traditional architecture, and ritual practices are analyzed as representational constructions rather than literal reproductions of Nusantara culture. The analysis therefore positions the researcher as an analyst of film representation, not as a direct interpreter of cultural authenticity. This distinction is important because films such as *Raya and the Last Dragon* and *Avatar: The Way of Water* do not ethnographically reproduce Indonesian culture, but selectively reconstruct symbolic elements associated with the Nusantara imagination into globally accessible cinematic imagery.

Furthermore, film scholars such as Graeme Turner (2006) argue that film functions as a social practice that actively organizes meaning through cinematic form. Cinematography, mise-en-scène, framing, lighting, and visual composition shape ideological interpretation by directing audience attention toward particular meanings while marginalizing others. Similarly, Stuart Hall (1997) emphasizes that representation is not a passive reflection of reality, but a productive process through which cultural meaning is constructed and communicated.

Using this theoretical framework, the research analyzes how denotative meanings, connotative associations, and ideological myths are constructed visually within selected scenes. Through this approach, the study critically examines how global animated films

transform symbolic elements associated with Nusantara culture into cinematic myths of ecological harmony, sacred spirituality, communal unity, maritime identity, and cultural authenticity for transnational audiences.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis in examining the representation of Nusantara cultural values in animated films. This study positions film as a cultural text containing a cinematic sign system to communicate ideological meanings regarding culture and identity.

The analytical process begins with the selection of film scenes that contain representations of Nusantara culture. These scenes are analyzed through cinematic elements such as architecture, costumes, environmental settings, ritual practices, gestures, and traditional objects that function as cultural signifiers.

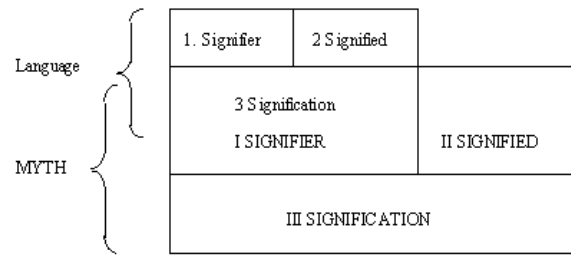
The first stage of analysis focuses on denotation to identify the literal meanings directly visible in the scenes. The second stage examines connotation to uncover the symbolic and cultural meanings associated with these visual signs. The final stage analyzes myths to uncover broader ideological meanings and naturalized cultural assumptions conveyed through cinematic representations.

Through this analytical process, this study aims to reveal how the cultural values of the Nusantara are symbolically reconstructed and ideologically communicated in global animated films.

G. Research Methodology

1. Research approach and paradigm

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis. The purpose of using Roland Barthes semiotic analysis is to deeply analyze the research object by interpreting symbols and signs through the lenses of denotation, connotation, and myth in the depicted cultural contexts. Furthermore, the study adopts an interpretive paradigm with the intention of understanding and interpreting the meanings inherent in social reality.



seen that in myth there are two semiological systems, one of which is staggered in relation to the other: a linguistic system, the language (or the modes of representation which are assimilated to it), which I shall call the language-object, because it is the language which myth gets hold of in order to build its own system; and myth itself, which I shall call metalanguage, because it is a second language, in which one speaks about the first.

2. Research Object

The research objects are two animated films: *Raya and The Last Dragon*, produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios, and *Avatar: The Way of Water*, produced by 20th Century Studios.

3. Type of Data

a. Primary Data

Primary data were obtained directly from the original sources, namely the animated films *Avatar: The Way of Water* and *Raya and the Last Dragon*, accessed through their official digital releases.

b. Secondary Data

Secondary data were gathered from indirect sources, including scholarly articles, blogs, articles, and previous studies related to this research.

The data curated for this research consists of both primary and secondary sources. The primary data include selected scenes, images, and cultural artifacts directly extracted from the films "*Raya and The Last Dragon*" and "*Avatar: The Way of Water*". These involve visual and narrative elements that clearly represent aspects of Nusantara culture, such as traditional clothing (*batik*), market scenes, traditional music instrument *gamelan*, traditional houses (Rumah Gadang), and community rituals. The selection of these

elements was based on their relevance to the research questions and their significance in representing local cultural values.

The secondary data comprises scholarly literature, journal articles, previous thesis, official documents, and digital content (including YouTube documentaries and online articles) that provide background information and substantive analysis related to the cultural representations depicted in the films. The secondary sources serve to contextualize and support the primary data analysis, as well as to offer multiple scholarly perspectives on the subject matter.

All curated data were selected through purposeful sampling: Scene selection from the films prioritized moments that prominently feature cultural symbols, while supporting literature was chosen based on its academic integrity, relevance, and contribution to the theoretical framework. The rationale for this curation process is to ensure a comprehensive, evidence-based analysis of Nusantara cultural representation in these contemporary animated films.

4. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection employs a qualitative visual content analysis method. Films serve as the primary instrument for examination, involving systematic observation and analysis of symbols related to the representation of the archipelago's culture. Through the analysis and interpretation of visual content segmented into key scenes, the study examines the construction of cultural identity within the two animated films.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

Based on the background and problem formulation outlined previously, the following data analysis techniques are employed:

- a. Qualitative Descriptive Analysis, an analysis technique producing textual descriptions derived from close engagement between researchers and data through observation.
- b. Roland Barthes semiotic data analysis, a method utilizes the denotation and connotation system to describe the relationship between signifier and signified. Connotation uses socio-cultural conditions, while denotation uses the meaning of the sign as a real definition.

6. Data Presentation

After analyzing the data, the next step is data presentation. Data presentation in qualitative research may take various forms, such as tables. Sugiyono (2019) states “*the most frequent form of display data for qualitative research data in the past has been narrative text*”. Consequently, narrative text is the most frequently used data presentation technique in qualitative research.

Table 1.2. Raya and The Last Dragon (2021)

NO	SCENE DESCRIPTION	TIME
1	A woman sifting rice using a <i>tampah</i> , a traditional Indonesian winnowing basket.	00:08:19
2	Illustration of a process in traditional batik production.	00:08:20
3	Depiction of a typical traditional Indonesian floating market, specifically located in Kalimantan	00:09:05
4	A man and his daughter standing in front of a group of people	00:11:00
5	Depiction of <i>gamelan</i> , a traditional Indonesian musical ensemble.	00:14:36
6	Depiction of a <i>keris</i> , a traditional asymmetrical dagger from Indonesia used for	00:16:53
7	Depiction of a <i>Rumah Gadang</i> , a traditional house of the Minangkabau people	00:52:22
8	A scene in the village resembling a traditional Indonesian <i>wayang kulit</i> (shadow puppet) show, characteristic of Javanese culture.	01:11:26

Table 1. 3. Avatar: The Way of Water (2022)

NO	SCENE DESCRIPTION	TIME
1	The concept of “ <i>Mother Eywa, the goddess of life on Pandora, parallels the “Mother Earth” or “Dewi Sri”</i> in Javanese and Balinese beliefs	00:02:57
2	The Metkayina’s transportation uses <i>ilu</i> (reptiles species) and canoe, Bajau tribe uses canoe as their transportation	00:50:06
3	The lifestyle of the Metkayina clan resembles the maritime culture of the archipelago such as Bajau tribe (a tribe that lives on the sea)	00:53:10
4	The Metkatyina’s houses are stilt houses constructed over the water	00:56:17
5	The Metkayina’s members fish using nets, a practice shared by the Bajau people.	00:56:43
6	The Metkayina people can hold their breath in the water longer than other tribes, just like one of the skills of the Bajau tribe, which is to survive in water	00:58:04
7	Medical practices among the Metkayina rely on traditional healing administered by the <i>Tsahik</i> (spiritual leader), paralleling the traditional healing beliefs of the Bajau tribe.	01:36:00

CHAPTER 2 THE RESEARCH OBJECT

Based on the research objectives set out in the previous section, in which the researcher aims to analyze the culture of the archipelago in two animated films, it is important to clearly define the research objects. The research objects comprise the films *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022), which serve as the primary focus for detailed examination.

A. General Description

1. *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021)



Picture 2.1 *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) movie poster

Source: Amazon

Raya and the Last Dragon (2021) is an American animated film produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios and distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures. The film follows Raya, a warrior princess who must find the fabled last dragon in order to save her divided home world from a ravenous plague. It features the voices of Kelly Marie Trand, Awkwafina, Gemma Chan, Izaac Wang, Daniel Dae Kim, Benedict Wong, Sandra Oh, Thalian Tran, Lucille Soong, and Alan Tudyk. Released on March 5, 2021, it is the 59th animated feature film produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios.

2. Synopsis of *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021)

The story is set in the fictional land of Kumandra, where humans and dragons lived together in harmony. However, when sinister creatures known as the Druun threatened the land, the dragons sacrificed themselves to save humanity, leaving behind a magical gem to protect the people. Over time, Kumandra fractured into five separate tribes, each vying for control of the gem. Now, 500 years later, that same evil has returned, and it falls upon a lone warrior, Raya, to track down the legendary last dragon to restore the fractured land and reunite its divided people. However, along her journey, she learns that it will take more than a dragon to save the world.

Raya, a courageous warrior and the daughter of Chief Benja of the Heart Tribe, is determined to find the last dragon, Sisu, who is believed to have the power to defeat the Druun and restore the peace. When the gem is shattered and the Druun return, Raya embarks on a quest to find the pieces of the Gem and reunite the tribes. Along the way, she forms an unlikely team of allies, including Sisu, who is quicker and more humorous than expected.

The film explores themes of trust, unity, and resilience as Raya learns that saving the world requires not just strength, but also the ability to trust others and work together. With stunning animation, rich world-building, and heartfelt storytelling, *Raya and the Last Dragon* is a tale of adventure, friendship, and hope.

3. The Voiceover in *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021)

a. Raya

This Character is voiced by Kelly Marie Tran, who was born on January 17, 1989 in San Diego, California, USA. She is an actress, producer, and contributor to film soundtracks. Raya is the protagonist of the film; she is a brave and resourceful warrior from the Heart Tribe.



Picture 2.2 Raya
Source: IMDb

b. Sisu

This character is voiced by Awkwafina, who was born on June 2, 1988 in New York, New York, USA. She is an actress, writer, and producer. Sisu is the last dragon, who is brought back to life by Raya. Sisu is quirky, optimistic, and sometimes clumsy, but she possesses powerful magical abilities related to water.



Picture 2.3 Sisu

Source: rayaandthelastdragon.fandom

c. Namaari

This character is voiced by Gemma Chan, who was born November 29, 1982 in London, England, UK. She is an actress, producer, and writer. Namaari is a warrior from the Fang tribe and Raya's rival. She is skilled, determined, and loyal to her people, but her actions are often driven by a desire to protect her tribe.



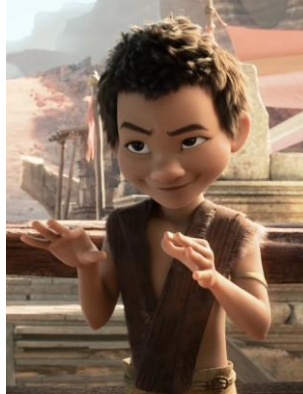
Picture 2.4 Namaari

Source: rayaandthelastdragon.fandom

d. Boun

The character is voiced by Izaac Wang, who was born on October 22, 2007 in Minnesota, USA. He is an American actor. Boun is a young shrimp boat captain

from Tail Tribe. He is cheerful, entrepreneurial, and provides comic relief while helping Raya on her journey.



Picture 2.5 Boun

Source: rayaandthelastdragon.fandom

B. Movie Award

Table 2. 1. Raya and the Last Dragon (2021) movie award

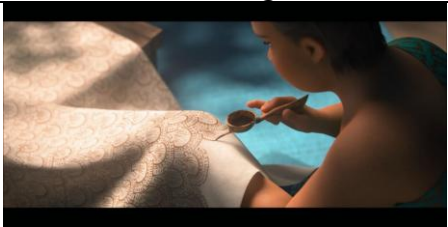
Year	Winning Award	Category
2022	Outstanding Achievement in Sound Editing	Motion Picture Sound Editors, USA
	Outstanding Effects Simulations in an Animated Feature	VES Award
	Best Original Score for an Animated Film	International Film Music Critics Award (IFMCA)
2021	Theatrical Film Award	BMI Film & TV Awards
	Best Voive Performance	WAFCA Award
	Best Animation Film	NTFCA Award

C. Unit Analysis

The following scenes were selected during the data collection process to represent Nusantara culture in the film *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021). These scenes below are the representation of Nusantara's culture within the film.

1. Avatar the way of water (2022)

Table 2.2 Raya and the Last Dragon (2021) Data Analysis

Scene	Time	Visual Reference
Scene 2	00:08:19	 Picture 2.6 A woman sifting rice using a <i>tampah</i>, a traditional Indonesian winnowing basket.
Scene 3	00:08:20	 Picture 2.7 Illustration of a process in traditional batik production.
Scene 3	00:09:05	 Picture 2.8 Typical traditional Indonesian floating market, specifically located in
Scene 4	00:11:00	 Picture 2.9

		A man and his daughter standing in front of a group of people
Scene 5	00:14:36	 Picture 2.10 Characters depicted playing a <i>gamelan</i>, a traditional Indonesian musical ensemble.
Scene 6	00:16:53	 Picture 2.11 A weapon wielded by Raya's father resembling a <i>keris</i>, a traditional asymmetrical dagger from Javanese culture.
Scene 7	00:52:22	 Picture 2.12 Depiction of a Rumah Gadang, a traditional house of the Minangkabau people in West Sumatera

2. Avatar: The Way of Water (2022)



Picture 2.14 Avatar: The Way of Water (2022) movie poster

Source: [james-camerons-avatar.fandom](https://james-camerons-avatar.fandom.com/wiki/Avatar:_The_Way_of_Water)

Avatar: The Way of Water (2022) is a science fiction animated film produced by Lightstorm Entertainment and distributed by 20th Century Studios. The film reaches new heights and explores undiscovered depth as James Cameron returns to the world of Pandora in this emotionally packed action adventure. The film centers on a Na'vi life and stars Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Sigourney Weaver, Stephen Lang, and Cliff Curtis, Joel David Moore, CCH Pounder, Edie Falco, Jemaine Clement, Kate Winslet. Released on December 14, 2022, with a runtime of 3 hours and 12 minutes, this film received both positive and negative responses from the public.

D. Synopsis of Avatar: The Way of Water (2022)

The film *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022) tells the story of the Sully family (Jake, Neytiri, and their children) and the trouble that follows them. It depicts the lengths they go to keep each other safe, the battles they fight to stay alive, and the tragedies they endure. Jake Sully lives with his newfound family formed on the extrasolar moon Pandora. Several years after the Na'vi repelled the human invasion of Pandora, Sully and his family continue to live there. In the backstory, Jake Sully, a former human who fell in love with Neytiri and befriended the Na'vi after becoming a member of Avatar program, eventually taking their side in their conflict with humans and leading them to victory. He left his human body to permanently join a Na'vi body. Jake Sully lives as a chief of the Omatikaya clan and raises a family, which includes his sons, Neteyam and Lo'ak; his biological daughter, Tuk; his

adopted daughter, Kiri (Sigourney Weaver);, and Miles Socorro, known as 'Spider.' Spider is the human son of Colonel Miles Quaritch, who led the RDA security forces. Born on Pandora, Spider was too young for cryostasis transport to Earth and was left behind.

Jake initiates a guerrilla campaign against the RDA supply lines by attacking a Maglev train carrying weapons. Quaritch and his Recombinants conduct a counterinsurgency mission, capturing Jake's children after they encounter Miles' team while searching for data on previous conflicts. Spider learns that Miles is his father and that was killed by Neytiri. Jake and Neytiri arrive and free most of them, but Spider is taken by Quaritch, who recognizes him as his son. He decides to spend time with him in order to draw Spider on his side, and in turn Spider teaches Quaritch about Na'vi Culture and language.

Aware that Spider's knowledge of their base and tactics poses a threat to their safety, Jake and his family exile themselves from the Omaticaya dan retreat to the Metkayina clan at Pandora's eastern seaboard, where they are given shelter, even though some tribesmen consider them to have "demon blood" for their genetic human heritage. The family learns the ways of the reef people. They are allowed to stay, and Jake is very keen to ensure that his family respects the ways of Metkayina.

Someday, Lo'ak gets into a fight with Tsireya's (a graceful and strong free divers of the Metkayina) Aonung, When he returns to apologize at Jake's insistence, Aonung and his friend entice him to a trip into the territory of a dangerous sea predator and leave him stranded on purpose and far away from their village. Lo'ak is attacked by the predator and is about to be killed, when it is saved by and best friend named Payakan. He is a Tulkun, an intelligent and pasifistic cetacean species whom Metkayina consider their spiritual family. Payakan is a loner and sees Lo'ak as a kindred spirit and saves him. Upon their return, Lo'ak takes the blame on himself, winning Aonung's friendship, but is told that Payakan is an outcast among this species.

Quaritch is able to track them to the archipelago where the reef people live. Accompanied by Spider, Quaritch commandeers a whaling vessel operated by a private sector hunting team led by Dr. Ian Garvin. This team hunts Tulkuns to harvest their brain enzymes for creating anti-aging remedies named Amrita. Quaritch begins to brutally question the indigenous tribes about Jake's location, he orders the whaling crew to wantonly kill the Tulkuns in order to draw Jake out. Lo'ak mentally links with Payakan and learns

that the Tulkun was cast out because he went against the ways of his species and attacked the whalers who killed his mother. Many Tulkun were killed and Payakan was blamed for using violence and violating the ways of their species.

When the Metkayina learn of the Tulkun killings, Lo'ak takes off to warn Payakan, followed by his siblings, Tsireya, Aonung and Rotxo. They find Payakan being chased by the whalers, and Lo'ak, Tsireya, and Tuk are captured by Quaritch. With their children in danger, Jake, Neytiri, and the Metkayina set out to confront the humans. A fight ensues between Jake and Miles as the vessel continues to sink. Jake, Quaritch, Neytiri, and Tuk end up trapped inside the sinking vessel. Following these events, happen with Metkatyina, Jake informs Tonowari and Ronal of his decision to leave the Metkayina. Tonowari, however, respectfully identifies him as part of the clan and welcomes his family to stay. Jake and his family accept and forge a new life at sea, with Jake vowing to keep fighting the human invaders.

E. Main Characters in Avatar: The Way of Water (2022)

1. Jake Sully

Jake Sully is portrayed by Samuel John Worthington, who was born August 2, 1976 in Surrey, England. He is an actor who was cast in *Avatar* (2009) after Jake Gyllenhaal and Matt Damon turned down the role. In *Avatar: The Way of Water*, he portrays Jake Sully, the protagonist and a former human who permanently transferred his consciousness into his Na'vi avatar.



Picture 2.15 Jake Sully

source. *james-camerons-avatar.fandom*

2. Neytiri

Neytiri is portrayed by Zoe Saldana, who was born June 19, 1978 in Passaic, New Jersey. She is an actress, producer, and writer. She had done an intense nonstop six-

month preparation for *Avatar* (2009) including material arts, archery, and horseback riding. In the film *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022), she portrays Neytiri, Jake's wife and a fierce warrior of the Omatikaya clan.



Picture 2.16 Neytiri

source. james-camerons-avatar.fandom

3. Kiri

Kiri is portrayed by Sigourney Weaver, who was born on October 8, 1949 in Manhattan, New York City, New York, USA. She is an actress, producer, and contributor to film soundtracks. In the *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022), she portrays Kiri, the biological daughter of Grace Augustine's Na'vi avatar, who was adopted by Jake and Neytiri.



Picture 2.17 Kiri

source. james-camerons-avatar.fandom

4. Quaritch

Quaritch is portrayed by Stephen Lang, who was born on July 11, 1952 in New York City, New York, USA. He is an Actor. In the *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022), he

portrays the primary antagonist, resurrected as a Recombinant avatar (a Na’vi body with his human memories).



Picture 2.18 Quaritch

source. james-camerons-avatar.fandom

F. Movie Awards

Table 2. 3. Avatar: The Way of Water (2022) Movie Award

Year	Winning Award	Category
2024	Best Science Fiction Film	Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Film, USA
2023	Outstanding Achievement for Animated Effects in an Animated Feature	Annie Awards
	Outstanding Achievement for character in a Live Action Production	Annie Awards
	Best Achievement in Special Visual Effect	BAFTA Awards
	Best Visual Effects	Critics Choice Awards
	Best Director	Satelite Award
2022	Best Cinematography	DFWFCA Awards
	Best Visual Effects	FFCC Award
	Top Ten Films	NBR Award, USA

G. Unit Analysis

The following scenes were selected during data collection to represent Nusantara culture in the film *Avatar: The Way of Water (2022)*. These scenes below are the representation of Nusantara’s Culture within the film.

Table 2. 4. Avatar: The Way of Water (2022) Data Analysis

Scene	Time	Visual Reference
Scene 1	00:02:57	 Picture 2. 19 Eywa's tree  Picture 2.20 Eywa's tree  Picture 2.21 Tradition for every newborn baby The concept of “<i>Mother Earth</i>”: Eywa, the Goddess of Pandora's life is similar to “<i>Mother Earth</i>” or “<i>Dewi Sri</i>” in Javanese and Balinese beliefs.
Scene 2	00:50:15	 Picture 2.22 Transportation The Metkayina's transportation uses canoes
Scene 3	00:53:10	

Scene	Time	Visual Reference
		Picture 2.23 The activity of Mekatyine The life of the Metkatyina Tribe is similar to the maritime culture of the archipelago such as the Bajau Tribe (a tribe that lives on the sea)
Scene 4	00:56:17	 Picture 2.24 The house The Metkatyina's houses are stilt houses that are above the water
Scene 5	00:56:43	 Picture 2.25 Fishing net The Metkatyina Tribe's people catch fish using nets, the same thing is done by the Bajau people when catching fish
Scene 6	00:58:04	 Picture 2.26 Diving The Metkatyina people can hold their breath underwater for extended periods, akin

Scene	Time	Visual Reference
		to the renowned freediving endurance of the Bajau tribe.
Scene 7	01:36:00	 Picture 2.27 Medicine Treatment  Picture 2.28 Medicine Treatment Medicine treatment performed by Metkayina rely on traditional healing administered by the Tsahik (spiritual leader), paralleling the traditional healing beliefs of the Bajau tribe.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, the researcher describes the analysis and findings regarding the representation of Nusantara's Culture in the both films: *Avatar: The Way of Water* film and *Raya and the Last Dragon* film using Roland Barthes semiotics theory of sign find the form of messages in the form of symbols contained in the two animated films. The analysis explores the underlying meanings of the signs presented in the films *Avatar: The Way of Water* and *Raya and the Last Dragon*.

A. Findings

1. Semiotics Analysis of *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021)

Scene 1

Visual	 Picture 3.1
Sign	A character holding a woven bamboo tray full of rice grains is shown in close-up. Southeast Asian textile motifs can be seen in the character's patterned clothing. The visual arrangement is dominated by earth-tone colour schemes, warm lighting, and wooden textures; the camera framing places the rice in the composition's visual center.
Setting	In the morning, indoors
Timeline	00:08:19

a. Meaning of Denotation

A character carrying a woven bamboo tray filled with rice grains is shown in close-up in this scene. The scene includes clothing with traditional patterns, soft lighting, and hardwood floors. The rice and tray are centrally framed by the camera arrangement, which draws the viewer's attention to the domestic environment and food preparation activity

b. Meaning of Connotation

In Southeast Asian societies, especially Nusantara culture, rice serves as a cultural signifier linked to collective life, prosperity, and nourishment at the connotative level. The domestic setting, traditional textile motifs, and woven bamboo tray suggest associations with community and rural lifestyles that are frequently depicted in Indonesian cultural images. An atmosphere of closeness, simplicity, and social harmony is further created by the warm visual tone. The film symbolically reconstructs Nusantara cultural values associated with unity, agricultural tradition, and collective belonging through these cinematic cues.

c. Myth

The scene normalises the notion that Nusantara identity is intrinsically peaceful, social, agrarian, and spiritually linked to nature at the mythic level. The visual depiction, which adheres to Barthes' theory of myth, turns culturally particular rice-related customs into a universalised picture of Southeast Asian identity. In addition to being a staple food, rice is revered as a timeless representation of ecological balance, cultural continuity, and social cohesion. At the same time, the video reduces the historical and cultural complexities of Nusantara communities to visually appealing and instantly identifiable cultural iconography for viewers around the world. Consequently, Nusantara culture is ideologically recreated as an exotic but tranquil identity based on custom, simplicity, and harmony with nature.

d. Critical Interpretation

The scene normalises the notion that Nusantara identity is intrinsically peaceful, social, agrarian, and spiritually linked to nature at the mythic level. The visual depiction, which adheres to Barthes' theory of myth, turns culturally particular rice-related customs into a universalised picture of Southeast Asian identity. In addition

to being a staple food, rice is revered as a timeless representation of ecological balance, cultural continuity, and social cohesion. At the same time, the video reduces the historical and cultural complexities of Nusantara communities to visually appealing and instantly identifiable cultural iconography for viewers around the world. Consequently, Nusantara culture is reconstructed ideologically as an exotic yet tranquil identity based on custom, simplicity, and harmony with nature.

The scene illustrates how representation functions through ideological naturalisation using Barthes' semiotic framework. According to Barthes (1972), myth makes historically produced meanings seem natural and indisputable. The connection between rice, harmony, and collective identity is depicted in this scenario as a fundamental aspect of Southeast Asian society. But this meaning is created by stylisation, symbolic repetition, and cinematic choice rather than emerging organically.

Hall's (1997) contention that representation is a process of meaning formation rather than an impartial mirror of reality is also reflected in the scene. In order to establish an internationally recognisable image of Southeast Asian identity, the film deliberately reconstructs cultural markers connected with Nusantara society. The film conveys an idealised view of communal life that is visually appealing to audiences around the world through pleasant aesthetics, simplified household scenes, and traditional iconography.

From the standpoint of film studies, the close-up framing and visual arrangement serve as cinematic techniques that draw viewers' attention to cultural symbols. The composition reinforces the conceptual construction of Nusantara culture as ecologically balanced and spiritually anchored by visually elevating rice as a symbol of tradition, continuity, and societal harmony.

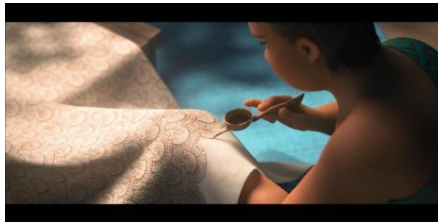
The picture also illustrates how local culture is often aesthetically transformed into edible visual identity in international animated films. The portrayal honours Southeast Asian cultural images, but it also reduces the complexity and diversity of real Nusantara societies to symbolic forms that are readily identifiable in popular culture around the world. As a result, the scene actively creates an intellectual sense

of Nusantara identity through film representation rather than just depicting cultural practice.



Picture 3.2 Sifting rice
Source: Flickr

Scene 2

Visual	 Picture 3.3
Sign	The scene presents a close-up shot of a character drawing symmetrical patterns onto a large piece of fabric using a small tool resembling a canting. The frame emphasizes intricate ornamental motifs spread across the textile surface. Warm lighting, soft shadows, and earth-tone colors dominate the visual arrangement, while the camera angle closely focuses on the interaction between the hand, the tool, and the fabric patterns.
Setting	In the morning, indoors
Timeline	00:08:20

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scenario shows a close-up of a character using a little tool that looks like a canting to create symmetrical designs onto a large piece of fabric. The frame draws attention to elaborate decorative patterns that are dispersed across the textile's surface. The visual arrangement is dominated by earth-tone colours, warm lighting, and gentle

shadows, while the camera viewpoint attentively examines how the hand, tool, and fabric patterns interact.

b. Meaning of Connotations

The drawing exercise and patterned fabric represent traditional workmanship connected to Southeast Asian textile culture, especially Indonesian batik customs, at the connotative level. The recurring themes stand for perseverance, creativity, cultural heritage, and the human labour inherent in traditional craft methods. The character's intimate relationship with the cloth also conjures up concepts of intergenerational continuity and cultural preservation. The film presents traditional textile-making as a culturally significant and emotionally rooted activity linked to identity and legacy through cosy visual tones and personal framing.

c. Myths

The scene normalises the notion that Nusantara identity is intrinsically peaceful, social, agrarian, and spiritually linked to nature at the mythic level. The visual depiction, which adheres to Barthes' theory of myth, turns culturally particular rice-related customs into a universalised picture of Southeast Asian identity. In addition to being a staple food, rice is revered as a timeless representation of ecological balance, cultural continuity, and social cohesion. At the same time, the video reduces the historical and cultural complexities of Nusantara communities to visually appealing and instantly identifiable cultural iconography for viewers around the world. Consequently, Nusantara culture is ideologically recreated as an exotic but tranquil identity based on custom, simplicity, and harmony with nature

d. Critical Interpretation

The scene normalises the notion that Nusantara identity is intrinsically peaceful, social, agrarian, and spiritually linked to nature at the mythic level. The visual depiction, which adheres to Barthes' theory of myth, turns culturally particular rice-related customs into a universalised picture of Southeast Asian identity. In addition to being a staple food, rice is revered as a timeless representation of ecological balance, cultural continuity, and social cohesion. At the same time, the video reduces the historical and cultural complexities of Nusantara communities to visually appealing and instantly identifiable cultural iconography for viewers around the

world. Consequently, Nusantara culture is reconstructed ideologically as an exotic yet tranquil identity based on custom, simplicity, and harmony with nature.

The scene illustrates how representation functions through ideological naturalisation using Barthes' semiotic framework. According to Barthes (1972), myth makes historically produced meanings seem natural and indisputable. The connection between rice, harmony, and collective identity is depicted in this scenario as a fundamental aspect of Southeast Asian society. But this meaning is created by stylisation, symbolic repetition, and cinematic choice rather than emerging organically.

Hall's (1997) contention that representation is a process of meaning formation rather than an impartial mirror of reality is also reflected in the scene. In order to establish an internationally recognisable image of Southeast Asian identity, the film deliberately reconstructs cultural markers connected with Nusantara society. The film conveys an idealised view of communal life that is visually appealing to audiences around the world through pleasant aesthetics, simplified household scenes, and traditional iconography.

From the standpoint of film studies, the close-up framing and visual arrangement serve as cinematic techniques that draw viewers' attention to cultural symbols. The composition reinforces the conceptual construction of Nusantara culture as ecologically balanced and spiritually anchored by visually elevating rice as a symbol of tradition, continuity, and societal harmony.

The picture also illustrates how local culture is often aesthetically transformed into edible visual identity in international animated films. The portrayal honours Southeast Asian cultural images, but it also reduces the complexity and diversity of real Nusantara societies to symbolic forms that are readily identifiable in popular culture around the world. As a result, the scene actively creates an intellectual sense of Nusantara identity through film representation rather than just depicting cultural practice.



Picture 3.4 Making hand-drawn *batik*
Source: wordpress

Scene 3

Visual	 Picture 3.5
Sign	The scene opens with a broad establishing view of a nighttime floating encampment. A water canal is bordered on both sides by stilted wooden buildings, and people and products are transported by tiny boats that pass through the middle. The chilly blue atmosphere of the nighttime sky and water's surface contrasts with the warm orange and yellow hues of decorative lanterns. The communities above the canal are connected by bridges, and the arrangement highlights the high level of social interaction in the waterfront setting.
Setting	In the afternoon
Timeline	00:09:05

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene displays a waterside settlement consisting of wooden stilt houses, narrow bridges, and multiple small boats moving along a canal. Human figures are shown engaging in trading and social interaction within the floating environment. Warm artificial lighting illuminates the houses and market area, while the camera uses a wide framing to capture the overall spatial relationship between architecture, water, and communal activity.

b. Meaning of Connotations

The floating market is a visual representation of Nusantara coastal culture's nautical livelihood, social connection, and economic interconnectedness at the connotative level. The canal-centered mobility, boats, and stilt architecture are reminiscent of Indonesian river-based towns and Southeast Asian floating marketplaces. An environment of social closeness and group cohabitation is created by the close-knit housing arrangement and public engagement. The scenario metaphorically depicts the lake area as the hub of social, cultural, and economic activity rather than as a place of solitude through warm lighting and a bustling visual arrangement.

c. Myths

The picture naturalises the notion that Nusantara identity is fundamentally communal, adaptable, and harmoniously connected with marine environs at the mythological level. The floating colony, in keeping with Barthes' idea of myth, turns historically particular marine cultures into a universalised representation of Southeast Asian authenticity. The portrayal minimises the socioeconomic complexity of actual marine communities while mythologising water-based existence as artistically lively, socially cohesive, and culturally harmonious. At the same time, traditional seaside life is transformed into a cinematic emblem of harmony, community, and ecological closeness, reconstructing Nusantara culture into an exoticized visual identity consumable within global popular culture.

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene demonstrates how cinematic space operates as an ideological construction of Nusantara identity. The floating market is represented not merely as a geographical setting, but as a symbolic environment organizing social relationships, cultural interaction, and collective life around water. Through the wide establishing shot, the film visually positions the canal as the structural center of communal activity, emphasizing maritime space as a foundation of identity rather than simply a physical background.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the scene reveals how myth functions through the naturalization of cultural imagery. Barthes (1972) argues that myth transforms historically constructed meanings into representations perceived as natural and self-evident. In this scene, maritime communalism is presented as an inherent characteristic of Southeast Asian society. However, this image is produced through selective visual stylization that emphasizes harmony, warmth, and collectivity while excluding social tensions or material realities commonly associated with coastal communities.

The scene also reflects Hall's (1997) argument that representation actively constructs cultural meaning rather than neutrally reflecting reality. Through cinematic selection, the film reconstructs visual elements associated with Nusantara maritime culture — such as stilt houses, boats, floating trade systems, and river-based interaction — into globally recognizable symbols of Southeast Asian identity. The representation prioritizes visual coherence and cultural familiarity, enabling local cultural references to circulate within transnational popular culture.

The visual organization is essential to the construction of ideological meaning, according to the film studies perspective. A visual sense of closeness and security is created in the shared space by the contrast between the chilly nighttime surroundings and the warm indoor lighting. In the meantime, the viewer may see the town as a networked social structure centred on water movement thanks to the raised camera framing. The intellectual construction of marine culture as socially integrated and collectively supported is therefore reinforced by the composition.

Furthermore, the scene reflects how global animated films frequently aestheticize local cultural environments into consumable visual spectacles. While the representation celebrates maritime cultural identity, it simultaneously simplifies Nusantara coastal life into an idealized image of harmony and exotic traditionalism. Consequently, the floating market functions not merely as a setting, but as a cinematic myth that reconstructs Nusantara identity as timelessly communal, ecologically balanced, and culturally picturesque for international audiences.



Picture 3.6 Floating market in South Kalimantan

Source: *Suara Nanggroe*

Scene 4

Visual	 Picture 3.7
Sign	The scene features a broad view of several groups congregated in a grassy, open space encircled by wooded areas. Each group is visibly distinguished by the colour of their costumes, flags, emblems, and formation patterns, and they each occupy a unique spatial location. Two people face the audience from an elevated platform in the front. Traditional-inspired carts, animals, flags, and ceremonial displays are all part of the visual presentation. The broad frame depicts the spatial interaction between the divided groups within a single communal setting, while natural sunshine equally illuminates the surroundings.
Setting	In the morning
Timeline	00:11:00

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene shows several groups of folks gathered outside. Each organization has its own banners and symbols, as well as unique outfits. The throng, the surrounding area, and the two front protagonists' elevated location are all framed by

the camera's wide-angle composition. Each group is kept within a single, cohesive frame despite being visibly separated by the spatial arrangement.

b. Meaning of Connotations

The visual contrast between groups represents social diversity, collective identity, and cultural heterogeneity at the connotative level. Spatial grouping, banners, and costume diversity serve as symbolic indicators of distinct groups coexisting in a common sociocultural setting. At the same time, the space for communal meeting suggests the potential for togetherness in spite of outward differences. The main actors' high posture denotes power and mediation, implying an attempt to bring disparate populations back into harmony. The video links variety to harmony, cohabitation, and societal integration through symmetrical composition and visual arrangement.

c. Myths

At the mythological level, the scene normalises the idea that political tension and structural conflict are not necessary for intercultural togetherness. Cultural variety is turned into an artistically organised and visually comprehensible system in accordance with Barthes' idea of myth. Instead of historical or sociopolitical complexity, differences between groups are reduced to simplistic visual categories conveyed by costume, colour, and symbolic grouping. Consequently, the film reconstructs Nusantara variety as an organically harmonious identity in which cohabitation seems permanent, natural, and universally attainable. By eliminating power disparity, social struggle, and negotiation from representation, this ideological construction depoliticises multiculturalism while also closely resembling Bhinneka Tunggal Ika's rhetoric. Consequently, diversity becomes a cinematic spectacle of harmony designed for global consumption, where cultural plurality is aestheticized into a universally appealing image of tolerance and collective belonging.

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene demonstrates how cinematic composition functions ideologically by organizing diversity into a visually coherent social order. The wide framing and symmetrical arrangement do not merely depict multicultural coexistence, but actively construct the impression that fragmented communities can be naturally integrated into

a stable collective identity. Through spatial control and visual balance, the film transforms diversity into an ordered and governable spectacle.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the scene reveals how myth operates through naturalization. Barthes (1972) argues that myth conceals the constructed nature of ideology by presenting cultural values as self-evident truths. In this scene, unity is represented not as a contested political process, but as a natural social condition emerging from cultural difference itself. The representation therefore masks the historical complexity of multicultural societies by translating plurality into simplified visual symbolism.

The scene also reflects Hall's (1997) argument that representation constructs meaning through selective coding practices. Diversity is made visually legible through easily recognizable distinctions in costume, emblem, and color palette, allowing complex cultural identities to circulate as simplified multicultural imagery within global media culture. Rather than presenting the lived complexity of Nusantara plurality, the film reconstructs diversity into symbolic visual categories that are immediately understandable for transnational audiences.

From a film studies perspective, the visual arrangement reinforces ideological hierarchy through spatial organization. The elevated foreground position of the two central characters visually establishes authority over the assembled groups, while the high-angle composition organizes the crowd into a disciplined collective body. This cinematic arrangement constructs unity as visually controllable and socially regulated. Diversity therefore exists within the frame only insofar as it remains aesthetically balanced and politically manageable.

The ideological structure of the scene strongly resonates with the Indonesian principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. However, the film universalizes this principle into a depoliticized narrative of harmonious multiculturalism suitable for global circulation. In doing so, the representation shifts Nusantara identity from a historically negotiated sociocultural reality into a consumable cinematic myth of tolerance, unity, and collective harmony. The scene ultimately demonstrates how global animated films aestheticize cultural plurality into universally marketable

imagery while minimizing the tensions and contradictions embedded within real multicultural societies.



Picture 3.8 The form of unity in diversity in life
Source: SidoarjoTimes

Scene 5

Visual	 Picture 3.9
Sign	The image depicts a ceremonial interior setting with several individuals gathered around traditional musical instruments. A man figure stands in front of seated musicians playing percussion-based instruments that resemble gamelan ensembles in the middle of the screen. Turquoise, gold, and earth tones predominate in the visual arrangement, while symmetrical architectural features and decorative wall patterns adorn the background. The chamber is warmly lit by warm lighting, and the medium-wide frame depicts the surrounding ceremonial setting as well as the musical performance.
Setting	In a hall
Timeline	00:14:36

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene shows some figures assembled in an interior setting that has been decorated. A standing figure sits in the composition's center, surrounded by several traditional-inspired musical instruments. The visual arrangement is dominated by symmetrical spatial arrangements, pleasant interior lighting, and ornamental architectural motifs. The relationship between the main character, the musicians, and the ceremonial settings is captured by the camera framing in a single, well-balanced composition.

b. Meaning of Connotations

At the connotative level, the ceremonial ambiance, ornamental building, and musical instruments represent artistic tradition, cultural sophistication, and group ritual performance connected to Southeast Asian cultural identity. The group performance conjures memories of Nusantara musical traditions, especially gamelan culture, where music serves as a community and ritual practice in addition to being a kind of entertainment. The actors' coordinated placement and symmetrical composition imply discipline, social harmony, and group cohesion. In the meantime, tradition is constructed as visually pleasing and spiritually rooted by the elaborate visual surroundings, which represent sophistication and cultural history.

c. Myths

The scene normalises the idea that Nusantara civilisation is naturally peaceful, artistically sophisticated, and spiritually balanced at the mythic level. Traditional musical performance is turned from a culturally unique practice into a universalised emblem of tranquil cultural authenticity in accordance with Barthes' definition of myth. The portrayal separates tradition from historical, political, and material reality while mythologising it as timeless artistic harmony. Local artistic traditions can serve as globally consumable imagery of exotic elegance and social order when cultural performance is reduced to a visually organised spectacle. As a result, the movie reconstructs Nusantara identity as culturally sophisticated but non-confrontational, with tradition functioning more as an emotional and artistic ambiance than as a dynamic social practice influenced by historical conflict or change.

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene demonstrates how film performance space functions as an ideological representation of cultural harmony. The arrangement of musicians, decorative architecture, and ceremonial composition transforms traditional artistic expression into a controlled visual system emphasizing balance, refinement, and collective order. Music is represented less as an active cultural process and more as an aesthetic symbol of civilizational harmony.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the scene reveals how myth operates through aesthetic naturalization. Barthes (1972) argues that myth removes the historical complexity of cultural practices by presenting them as natural and timeless. In this scene, traditional musical culture is represented as an inherently harmonious expression of Nusantara identity. However, this harmony is produced through cinematic stylization that selectively emphasizes beauty, symmetry, and serenity while excluding the social, political, and historical dimensions embedded within real cultural traditions.

The scene also reflects Hall's (1997) argument that representation actively constructs cultural meaning through selective visual coding. Through recognizable instruments, ceremonial staging, and ornamental architecture, the film reconstructs Southeast Asian artistic traditions into globally legible symbols of heritage and spirituality. Cultural specificity is therefore translated into simplified visual markers that can circulate easily within transnational popular culture.

From a film studies perspective, the visual arrangement plays a central role in producing ideological meaning. The symmetrical framing and centralized character placement create visual stability, while the warm lighting and ornamental patterns reinforce an atmosphere of cultural intimacy and refinement. The spatial organization visually disciplines both performers and spectators into a coherent ceremonial order, transforming artistic performance into an image of controlled cultural unity.

Furthermore, the scene reflects how global animated films frequently aestheticize local traditions into depoliticized cultural spectacles. While the representation appears celebratory, it simultaneously transforms Nusantara musical heritage into exotic visual ambiance designed for international consumption. As a result, tradition becomes detached from its lived social context and reconstructed as a timeless cinematic myth of harmony, elegance, and spiritual balance. The scene ultimately demonstrates how global

media selectively repackage local cultural identity into universally marketable representations of peaceful multicultural heritage.



Picture 3.10
Traditional music instrument 'Gamelan' in Indonesia
Source: Indonesia Kayac

Scene 6

Visual	 Picture 3.11
Sign	At minute 00:16:53, a male character is seen brandishing a classic weapon with a curved blade and a carved handle. The guy has both hands on the weapon and is in a defensive stance. Low-key lighting, mist effects, and desaturated colour tones give the scene a gloomy, rocky appearance. The medium shot framing draws the viewer's attention to the blade as the composition's primary visual element by centring the character's contact with the weapon.
Setting	Inside the cave
Timeline	00:16:53

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene depicts a male figure holding a curved traditional weapon inside a dark outdoor environment. The character stands in a guarded posture while facing an unseen threat. Mist, shadows, and dim lighting dominate the visual atmosphere. The camera uses medium framing to emphasize the figure, body posture, and weapon simultaneously within the frame.

b. Meaning of Connotations

The weapon is visually similar to the *keris*, a classic Javanese blade that is closely linked to Indonesian cultural history, at the connotative level. Unlike contemporary weapons, the curved blade and carved hilt represent artistry, ceremonial symbolism, and historical identity. The guarded body stance suggests martial discipline, protection, and alertness. In the meantime, connections between the *keris* and mystical spirituality that are frequently ingrained in Nusantara mythology are strengthened by the gloomy atmosphere, mist, and dim illumination. Through cinematic stylisation, the weapon is shown as a precious cultural artefact associated with ancestry, moral authority, and spiritual force, rather than just as a fighting tool

c. Myth

The scene at the mythic level normalises the belief that spirituality, ancestry, and moral guardianship are integral parts of Nusantara manhood. The *keris* is converted from a historically particular cultural object into a universalised emblem of sacred valour and cultural authenticity in accordance with Barthes' concept of myth. The portrayal detaches the *keris* from its historical complexity, political role, and social context while mythologising Indonesian tradition as mystical, honourable, and spiritually uplifted. Additionally, the scene perpetuates a global cinematic dream that portrays Southeast Asian culture as unique, mystical, and old. As a result, symbolic spirituality and aestheticised traditionalism intended for international visual consumption are used to reconstitute Nusantara identity.

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene demonstrates how cinematic representation transforms traditional cultural objects into ideological symbols. Through framing, lighting, and atmospheric design, the *keris* functions not only as a weapon but as a visual signifier of sacred authority and inherited cultural identity. The cinematic composition positions the blade as an extension of the character's moral legitimacy and spiritual strength.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the scene reveals how myth operates through cultural naturalization. Barthes (1972) argues that myth removes the historical conditions surrounding cultural signs and presents them as timeless truths. In this sequence, the *keris*

is represented as an inherently mystical and honorable object deeply connected to Nusantara identity. However, this meaning is not natural; it is produced through selective cinematic stylization emphasizing spirituality, silence, darkness, and ritualized masculinity.

The representation also reflects Hall's (1997) argument that media actively constructs cultural meaning rather than neutrally reflecting reality. By emphasizing mystical atmosphere and symbolic weapon imagery, the film reconstructs Indonesian cultural identity into globally recognizable signs of "Eastern" spirituality and traditional heroism. Cultural specificity is therefore simplified into symbolic imagery easily circulated within global popular culture.

From the film studies perspective, the low-key lighting and medium framing support the ideological emphasis on the connection between body, weapon, and power. The *keris*'s symbolic authority is enhanced by the limited visibility caused by fog and darkness, and the centred composition makes the blade the primary visual emblem of identification. As a result, the cinematic arrangement turns archaic weapons into a beautiful representation of disciplined masculinity and revered cultural continuity.

Furthermore, the scene reflects how global animated films frequently commodify local cultural symbols into exotic visual mythology. Although the representation appears to celebrate Nusantara heritage, it simultaneously reproduces an orientalist visual logic in which Southeast Asian culture becomes associated with mysticism, ancient wisdom, and spiritual exoticism. As a result, the *keris* functions less as a historically grounded cultural artifact and more as a cinematic myth designed to construct an internationally consumable image of sacred Nusantara identity.



Picture 3.12 *Keris* from East Java

Source: *demokratis*

Table 3.7

Scene 7

Visual	 Picture 3.13
Sign	A massive structure with several upward-curving roofs that resemble buffalo horns is shown. Through an extremely long shot that highlights its vertical scale and architectural symmetry, the edifice takes center stage in the frame. The building's surface is dominated by earth-tone and brown textures, while gold decoration adorns the roof's borders. A vivid blue sky and sporadic clouds make up the background, which sharply contrasts with the architecture and the surroundings
Setting	In the midday
Timeline	00:52:22

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene shows a massive, majestic building with a harmonious architectural composition and several curved roof forms. Because of the extreme long shot used to frame it, the skyscraper stands out in the landscape. The building and surrounding sky are vividly illuminated by natural daylight, and gold decorative features can be seen around the roof's margins.

b. Meaning of Connotations

The horn-shaped roof is visually similar to Rumah Gadang, the traditional architecture of the Minangkabau population in West Sumatra, at the connotative level. The unique roof shape serves as a cultural symbol connected to Minangkabau identity, ancestry, and group customs. The gold decoration denotes grandeur, nobility, and cultural dignity, while the massive scale and symmetrical structure imply power, stability, and social order. The building is positioned not just as a physical location but also as a symbolic hub of cultural life due to its high architecture, which also invokes links with protection and preservation. As a visual reminder of the ongoing Nusantara history, historic architecture is recreated through cinematic stylisation.

c. Myths

The scene normalises the idea that Nusantara culture is ageless, cohesive, and great in terms of civilisation at the mythic level. Rumah Gadang is turned from a historically particular cultural institution into a universalised emblem of ancestral wisdom and cultural longevity in accordance with Barthes' concept of myth. The portrayal eliminates the historical and social complexity surrounding Minangkabau society, including debates of class, gender, modernisation, and regional identity, while mythologising traditional architecture as inherently harmonious, authoritative, and spiritually anchored. Additionally, the monumental visualisation perpetuates an ideological fiction of Southeast Asian culture as majestic but static, kept mostly as artistic legacy rather than as a dynamic and contentious social practice. As a result, architectural spectacle that serves as both a cultural celebration and internationally consumable exotic imagery is used to reconstitute Nusantara identity.

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene exemplifies the ideological role that architecture plays in cinematic representation. The building is positioned as a symbolic structure that conveys authority, permanence, and cultural validity rather than just as an environmental backdrop. The edifice becomes a cinematic symbol of civilisational identity through scale, symmetry, and visual domination.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the scene reveals how myth operates through the naturalization of cultural symbolism. Barthes (1972) argues that myth transforms historically produced meanings into representations perceived as timeless and unquestionable. In this scene, Rumah Gadang architecture is represented as an inherent expression of Nusantara cultural greatness. However, this meaning is produced through selective cinematic stylization emphasizing monumentality, harmony, and visual magnificence while excluding the socio-historical dynamics shaping Minangkabau culture itself.

The representation also reflects Hall's (1997) argument that media actively constructs cultural meaning rather than objectively reflecting reality. Through recognizable roof forms and ornamental design, the film reconstructs Indonesian traditional architecture into globally legible symbols of Southeast Asian heritage.

Cultural specificity is therefore condensed into simplified visual codes that can circulate efficiently within transnational popular culture.

From a film studies perspective, the extreme long shot plays a crucial role in producing ideological meaning. By visually minimizing human presence and enlarging the architectural structure, the cinematography elevates the building into the primary carrier of symbolic authority. The balanced composition and upward roof orientation further reinforce impressions of order, grandeur, and transcendence. Rather than functioning as lived social space, the architecture becomes an aestheticized monument of cultural identity.

Furthermore, the scene reflects how global animated films frequently transform local architectural traditions into depoliticized heritage imagery. Although the representation appears celebratory, it simultaneously freezes Nusantara culture into timeless visual spectacle detached from contemporary realities. As a result, *Rumah Gadang* functions less as a socially embedded cultural structure and more as a cinematic myth of noble tradition, ancestral continuity, and exotic cultural permanence designed for international visual consumption



Picture 3.14 Rumah Gadang from Minangkabau Tribe, West Sumatera

Source: *Investigasi.news*

Scene 8

Visual	 Picture 3.15
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Sign	Some kids sitting in front of a projection screen watches a storytelling performance in the scene. As visual material based on silhouettes is displayed onto the lit screen, a white-clad female figure stands next to it. The storytelling area is the main focus of the dark lighting, which gives the scene an elevated, contained appearance. The audience, storyteller, and projected silhouettes are all visible in a single, cohesive composition because the scene is framed with a long shot.
Setting	Taring's Village
Timeline	01:11:26

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene depicts a woman standing beside a projection screen while several children sit facing the performance. Silhouette imagery appears on the illuminated surface of the screen, suggesting a visual storytelling activity. The environment is dimly lit, with the brightest visual focus directed toward the storyteller and projection area. The camera uses a long shot to capture the spatial relationship between the performer, audience, and visual narrative simultaneously.

b. Meaning of Connotations

The storytelling performance represents cultural transmission, group education, and the oral tradition-based maintenance of societal values at the connotative level. The shadow-puppet performance customs connected to Southeast Asian storytelling culture, especially wayang, are visually reminiscent of the silhouette projection. The children's engagement with the storyteller represents intergenerational continuity, where morals, knowledge, and collective identity are passed down via storytelling. The increased emphasis on the storyteller establishes her as a cultural mediator in charge of forming social understanding and communal memory. At the same time, the organization of the audience supports the notion that storytelling is a collective cultural activity rather than a solitary one.

c. Myths

At the mythic level, the scene naturalizes the ideology that social unity and cultural survival depend upon collective moral education transmitted through

tradition. Following Barthes' concept of myth, storytelling is represented not merely as entertainment, but as an inherently noble and civilizing cultural practice that preserves communal order across generations. The film mythologizes oral tradition as a timeless mechanism of wisdom, resilience, and ethical formation while obscuring the historical and political processes through which cultural narratives are constructed and controlled. Furthermore, the shadow-performance imagery reproduces a globalized fantasy of Southeast Asian culture as spiritually wise, pedagogical, and deeply rooted in ancestral tradition. Consequently, Nusantara-inspired identity is reconstructed as morally harmonious and culturally unified through ritualized narrative transmission designed for transnational cultural consumption.

d. Context

This scene demonstrates how cinematic storytelling space functions as an ideological apparatus for constructing collective identity. The projected silhouettes, audience positioning, and centralized storyteller transform narrative performance into a symbolic mechanism of cultural preservation. Storytelling is represented not simply as communication, but as a ritualized practice through which moral values and communal identity are legitimized.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the sequence reveals how myth operates through the naturalization of cultural authority. Barthes (1972) argues that myth transforms historically constructed meanings into representations perceived as universal and unquestionable. In this scene, oral tradition is represented as an inherently positive and necessary instrument for maintaining social harmony. However, this ideological meaning is produced through cinematic selection emphasizing innocence, collective listening, and pedagogical intimacy while excluding contestation, power relations, or alternative narratives that may exist within real cultural systems.

The representation also reflects Hall's (1997) argument that representation actively constructs meaning through selective symbolic coding. By incorporating shadow-based imagery visually associated with *wayang* traditions, the film reconstructs Southeast Asian cultural identity into globally recognizable signs of

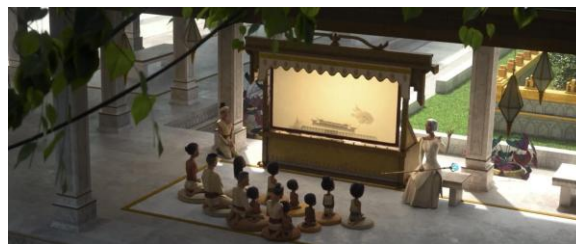
ancestral wisdom and moral spirituality. Cultural specificity is therefore simplified into symbolic imagery that can circulate easily within transnational popular culture.

From a film studies perspective, the long-shot composition reinforces the collective dimension of the scene. The framing positions the storyteller, audience, and projected imagery within one integrated visual system, emphasizing communal spectatorship rather than individual experience. In addition, the controlled lighting directs audience attention toward the illuminated screen, transforming the storytelling performance into the ideological center of the sequence. The cinematic arrangement therefore frames narrative tradition as a stabilizing cultural force capable of organizing collective identity and moral consciousness.

Furthermore, the scene reflects how global animated films frequently aestheticize traditional cultural practices into depoliticized symbols of wisdom and harmony. While the representation appears celebratory, it simultaneously reconstructs Nusantara-inspired oral traditions into universalized myths of peaceful collectivism and inherited morality. As a result, storytelling becomes less a historically dynamic social practice and more a cinematic symbol of timeless cultural coherence designed for global audience consumption.



Picture 3.16 leather shadow puppet in Indonesia
Source: The Jakarta Post



Picture 3.17 Show on the screen in Fangs Village
Source: Raya and The Last Dragon (2021) film

2. Semiotics Analysis of Avatar: The Way of Water (2022)

Scene 1

Visual	 Picture 3.18
Sign	The scene presents a massive tree with long luminous blue roots positioned within a dark cave-like environment. Several Na'vi figures stand surrounding the tree in a solemn formation while facing toward it in silence. The roots emit soft bioluminescent light contrasting with the surrounding shadows and desaturated environment. The sequence is captured using a long shot that frames the tree and the surrounding figures within one unified visual composition, emphasizing spatial balance between the sacred object and the community.
Setting	In the dark place
Timeline	00:02:57 - 00:03:20

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene depicts a large glowing tree surrounded by several Na'vi figures inside a dimly lit environment. Long luminous roots extend downward from the tree while blue-toned lighting and mist dominate the atmosphere. The figures remain still while facing the tree in a ritual-like arrangement. The camera uses a long shot to simultaneously capture the sacred object, surrounding environment, and collective positioning of the characters.

b. Meaning of Connotations

At the connotative level, the tree signifies spirituality, interconnected life, and ecological dependence. The glowing roots visually suggest energy circulation and continuity between living beings and the natural environment. The ritualized body positioning of the Na'vi connotes reverence, submission, and collective spiritual consciousness. Through lighting, composition, and atmospheric design, the film constructs nature not as a passive landscape but as an active spiritual presence governing communal existence. Rather than directly reproducing a specific Nusantara belief system, the representation symbolically resonates with ecological philosophies commonly associated with indigenous traditions across the Indonesian archipelago, particularly ideas concerning the interconnected relationship between humans, spirituality, and the natural environment. Through cinematic stylization, the film reconstructs these values into universal visual symbols of ecological harmony and sacred interconnectedness. Consequently, the scene should not be interpreted as a literal depiction of Nusantara culture, but rather as a global cinematic representation that selectively appropriates and rearticulates indigenous-inspired ecological imagery for transnational audiences.

c. Myth

At the mythic level, the scene naturalizes the ideology that authentic civilization is achieved through spiritual submission to nature. Following Barthes' concept of myth, ecological spirituality is represented as timeless, morally pure, and universally sacred. The film constructs indigenous-inspired cosmology as ethically superior to industrial modernity, reinforcing an ideological binary between technological civilization and harmonious ecological existence. Simultaneously, the representation universalizes and aestheticizes indigenous spiritual values into globally consumable environmental mythology. Rather than presenting specific cultural realities, the film reconstructs spirituality into a transnational fantasy of sacred indigeneity designed for global spectatorship. Consequently, nature becomes mythologized not merely as environment, but as a sacred moral authority regulating identity, survival, and collective existence.

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene demonstrates how cinematic representation constructs ecological spirituality through visual symbolism and ideological framing. The sacred tree functions not merely as a narrative setting, but as a cinematic signifier organizing the relationship between nature, spirituality, and communal identity. Through spatial composition, lighting contrast, and ritualized character positioning, the film visually encodes nature as an object of reverence and moral authority.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the scene reveals how myth operates through the naturalization of ideology. Barthes (1972) explains that myth transforms historically constructed meanings into representations perceived as universal and unquestionable. In this sequence, ecological spirituality is presented as an inherent truth embedded within indigenous-inspired society. However, this meaning is not naturally occurring; it is produced through cinematic stylization that selectively emphasizes sacred atmosphere, visual harmony, and collective ritual behavior.

The representation also reflects Hall's (1997) argument that media actively constructs cultural meaning rather than neutrally reflecting reality. The film does not reproduce a specific Nusantara belief system directly. Instead, it reconstructs symbolic values associated with indigenous ecological philosophies into globally recognizable visual imagery. Through luminous natural elements, ritual performance, and collective reverence toward nature, the film translates complex spiritual traditions into simplified cinematic symbols understandable for international audiences.

From a film studies perspective, the long shot plays an important ideological function by minimizing individual dominance within the frame and visually integrating the Na'vi figures into the surrounding ecosystem. The balanced composition reinforces the perception that identity is inseparable from ecological existence. Meanwhile, the contrast between darkness and bioluminescent roots guides audience attention toward the sacred tree as the visual and ideological center of the sequence.

Furthermore, the scene reflects how contemporary global cinema frequently aestheticizes indigenous-inspired spirituality into universal environmental

narratives. Although the representation appears celebratory, it simultaneously commodifies ecological belief systems into emotionally accessible visual mythology. Indigenous-inspired values are detached from specific historical and cultural complexities and reconstructed into transnational symbols of sacred environmentalism.

Therefore, this scene does not simply portray a spiritual ritual, but ideologically constructs nature as a sacred moral system through cinematic representation. The sequence ultimately demonstrates how global films transform indigenous ecological values into universalized visual myths that circulate within contemporary popular culture.



Picture 3.19 Dewi Sri
Source: nationalgeographic

Scene 2

Visual	A photograph of a shallow marine environment. The water is a vibrant turquoise color. Several narrow wooden boats are visible on the surface. Below the surface, coral reefs are visible. The scene is bright and clear. Picture 3.20
Sign	The scene presents a shallow marine environment dominated by turquoise-blue seawater with visible coral reefs beneath the surface. Several narrow wooden boats float across the water while groups of figures are shown swimming, diving, and interacting with the surrounding marine environment. A wooden stilt structure stands above the

	water, supported by vertical poles anchored into the seabed. The sequence is captured using a high-angle long shot that emphasizes the spatial relationship between the human figures, boats, marine landscape, and coastal architecture within one integrated visual composition.
Setting	In the sea
Timeline	00:50:15

a. Meaning of Denotation.

The scene depicts multiple figures engaging in maritime activities within a shallow coastal environment. Several wooden boats float on the water surface while coral formations remain visible beneath the sea. Human figures are shown swimming and diving around the boats. A stilted wooden structure occupies part of the frame above the waterline. Bright natural lighting and wide spatial framing visually emphasize the openness of the marine environment and the interaction between the characters and the sea.

b. Meaning of Connotations

At the connotative level, the marine environment signifies interconnectedness between communal life and the ocean ecosystem. The transparent seawater and visible coral reefs connote ecological intimacy and environmental dependence, while the lightweight boats symbolize mobility, adaptation, and navigational knowledge. The repeated depiction of swimming and diving bodies visually constructs the sea as an inhabited social space rather than a distant natural landscape. Meanwhile, the stilt architecture signifies permanence and collective settlement within a maritime environment. Through cinematic stylization, the sequence constructs oceanic life as culturally integrated, ecologically balanced, and socially collective. The representation also symbolically resonates with maritime identities frequently associated with coastal societies in the Nusantara region, particularly values emphasizing coexistence with marine environments and inherited ecological

knowledge. However, these associations operate through cinematic reconstruction rather than direct ethnographic representation.

c. Myth

At the mythic level, the sequence naturalizes the ideology that authentic civilization is achieved through ecological harmony and spiritual integration with nature. Following Barthes' concept of myth in *Mythologies* (1972), maritime life is represented not as historical labor or environmental struggle, but as a timeless and morally pure mode of existence. The film constructs indigenous-inspired oceanic culture as ethically superior to industrial modernity, reinforcing a binary opposition between technological civilization and ecological spirituality. Simultaneously, the representation aestheticizes maritime cultural identity into globally consumable environmental imagery. As a result, culturally specific maritime traditions are transformed into universal cinematic mythology centered on purity, sustainability, and collective coexistence with nature. The ocean therefore becomes ideological space: a symbolic alternative to industrial capitalism and environmental exploitation.

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene demonstrates how cinematic representation constructs maritime identity through environmental imagery, spatial organization, and ideological framing. The ocean functions not merely as physical setting, but as a symbolic structure organizing social interaction, ecological meaning, and communal identity. Through wide spatial composition, bright natural lighting, and fluid bodily movement within the sea environment, the film visually encodes the marine world as a space of harmony and collective belonging.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the sequence reveals how myth operates through naturalization. Barthes (1972) explains that myth transforms historically constructed meanings into representations perceived as natural and universal. In this scene, coexistence with the sea is represented as an inherently balanced and ideal way of life. However, this harmony is ideologically constructed through cinematic stylization that selectively emphasizes beauty, fluidity, and ecological intimacy

while excluding material realities commonly associated with maritime existence such as labor exploitation, environmental vulnerability, or economic precarity.

The representation also reflects Stuart Hall's (1997) argument that representation does not merely reflect reality but actively produces cultural meaning through selective construction. The film does not directly depict a specific Nusantara maritime community. Instead, it reconstructs visual elements associated with indigenous sea-oriented societies into globally recognizable cinematic symbols of ecological wisdom and spiritual coexistence. Through boats, diving practices, coral environments, and stilt architecture, maritime identity becomes simplified into accessible environmental imagery for transnational audiences.

From a film studies perspective, the high-angle long shot plays an important ideological role. According to Graeme Turner (1999), cinematic representation operates as social practice because films actively reconstruct cultural reality rather than objectively reproducing it. In this sequence, the elevated framing minimizes individual dominance within the composition and visually integrates human activity into the surrounding ecosystem. The spatial arrangement therefore reinforces the ideological perception that identity is inseparable from ecological existence.

Furthermore, the visual emphasis on environmental beauty reflects what Susan Hayward (2013) describes as cinema's ability to aestheticize cultural space through *mise-en-scène* and environmental spectacle. The coral reefs, transparent water, and synchronized human movement transform the ocean into a visually idealized ecological environment. Nature is represented less as contested material space and more as sacred visual atmosphere.

The sequence also reflects broader ideological tendencies within contemporary global cinema. As David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2013) argue, cinematic form guides spectators toward specific emotional and ideological interpretations through visual organization and narrative emphasis. In this scene, environmental harmony is emotionally reinforced through balanced composition, luminous color palettes, and fluid movement patterns. Consequently, the audience is positioned to perceive ecological coexistence as morally desirable and spiritually authentic.

Critically, the scene demonstrates how global blockbuster cinema frequently commodifies indigenous-inspired ecological values into universal environmental mythology. Although the representation appears celebratory, it simultaneously detaches maritime cultural identity from specific historical and political contexts. Indigenous-inspired oceanic traditions are reconstructed into transnational symbols of ecological purity designed for global spectatorship and consumption.

Therefore, the scene does not simply portray maritime daily life, but ideologically constructs the ocean as a cinematic myth of sacred ecology, collective harmony, and moral resistance against industrial modernity. Through cinematic representation, maritime identity becomes a universalized environmental fantasy circulating within contemporary global popular culture.



Picture 3.21 Bajau Tribe Transportation
Source: Mongabay



Picture 3.22 Bajau Tribe Canoe
Source: YouTube ("7 Days with The Tribe that Breathes Underwater Bajau Sea Nomads" by JoeHattab)



Picture 3.23 Canoe's Metkayina Tribe
Source: james-cameron-avatar-fandom

Scene 3

Visual	 Picture 3.24
Sign	The scene presents a coastal settlement constructed above shallow seawater. The village consists of interconnected stilt houses supported by large wooden pillars anchored into the seabed. The architectural structures display curved and organic forms resembling marine creatures, while woven bridges connect one building to another across the water. Earth-tone color palettes dominated by brown, yellow, and blue visually integrate the settlement with the surrounding marine environment. Several Na'vi figures are shown walking across the bridges and moving between the structures. The sequence is captured using a wide framing that emphasizes the spatial relationship between architecture, water, and communal movement within the village environment.
Setting	In the afternoon, in the sea
Timeline	00:56:10

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene depicts a water-based settlement consisting of multiple stilt houses connected by woven bridges above shallow seawater. The structures are supported by large wooden pillars extending into the seabed. Organic architectural forms and woven textures dominate the visual design of the village. Several figures move between the houses while the camera uses wide framing to capture the settlement layout and surrounding marine environment simultaneously.

b. Meaning of Connotations

At the connotative level, the stilt architecture signifies adaptation to marine conditions and close dependence on the surrounding ecosystem. The use of woven materials, organic shapes, and sea-inspired architectural forms connotes environmental knowledge, sustainability, and collective coexistence with nature. The interconnected bridges visually signify social interdependence and communal solidarity, suggesting that survival within the maritime environment depends upon collective organization rather than individual isolation. Through spatial composition and environmental stylization, the sequence constructs the village as an integrated ecological community in which architecture, social interaction, and natural surroundings operate as one interconnected system. The representation also symbolically resonates with maritime settlement imagery frequently associated with coastal societies in the Nusantara region, particularly communities known for water-oriented spatial organization and ecological adaptation. However, these similarities function as cinematic reconstruction rather than direct cultural reproduction.

c. Myths

At the mythic level, the sequence naturalizes the ideology that ideal civilization is achieved through ecological harmony, communal integration, and sustainable coexistence with nature. Following Barthes' argument in *Mythologies* (1972), the village is represented not simply as built environment, but as a moralized spatial system embodying purity, balance, and collective ethics. The film mythologizes indigenous-inspired maritime architecture as timeless ecological

wisdom positioned in opposition to industrial modernity and environmental exploitation. Simultaneously, the representation transforms culturally specific maritime practices into universally consumable environmental imagery. The settlement therefore functions ideologically as a cinematic fantasy of sustainable civilization in which communal life, spirituality, and ecology exist without social conflict, economic struggle, or political tension. Consequently, the oceanic village becomes a symbolic alternative to modern capitalist urban space, reinforcing contemporary environmentalist ideology through visual spectacle

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene demonstrates how cinematic space functions as an ideological representation of ecological communalism. The village is represented not merely as physical architecture, but as a symbolic environment organizing identity, social interaction, and environmental coexistence. Through wide framing, organic production design, and integrated spatial composition, the film visually constructs maritime life as balanced, collective, and ecologically harmonious.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the sequence reveals how myth operates through naturalization. Barthes (1972) explains that myth transforms historically produced meanings into representations perceived as natural and universal. In this scene, ecological coexistence appears as an unquestionable and ideal social condition. However, the representation is ideologically constructed through cinematic stylization that selectively emphasizes harmony, environmental beauty, and social unity while excluding material realities commonly associated with maritime settlements such as environmental vulnerability, social hierarchy, economic precarity, or territorial conflict.

The representation also reflects Stuart Hall's (1997) argument that media actively constructs meaning through selective representation rather than objectively reflecting reality. The film does not directly reproduce a specific Nusantara maritime settlement. Instead, it reconstructs visual elements associated with indigenous coastal societies into globally recognizable symbols of ecological civilization. Through stilt houses, woven bridges, sea-oriented spatial organization,

and communal movement patterns, maritime identity becomes translated into simplified cinematic imagery designed for transnational audiences.

From a film studies perspective, the spatial organization of the village plays a crucial ideological role. Graeme Turner (1999) argues that films function as social practices because cinematic representation reconstructs cultural reality through narrative and visual selection. In this sequence, the interconnected architecture visually disciplines the community into a coherent collective structure where individual identity appears inseparable from communal and ecological systems. The settlement layout therefore communicates ideological values of cooperation, environmental adaptation, and social integration.

Furthermore, the environmental design of the sequence reflects what Susan Hayward (2013) identifies as the cinematic aestheticization of cultural space. The curved architecture, woven textures, and synchronized color palette transform the village into a visually idealized maritime environment. Nature and architecture are merged into one harmonious visual system, reinforcing the perception that indigenous-inspired societies exist in natural equilibrium with the ecosystem surrounding them.

The ideological dimension of the scene also aligns with David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's (2013) argument that cinematic form guides audience interpretation through visual organization and environmental emphasis. The balanced composition, fluid movement across bridges, and absence of visible conflict encourage audiences to interpret the settlement as morally desirable and socially stable. Consequently, ecological communalism becomes emotionally normalized through cinematic spectacle.

Critically, the sequence demonstrates how contemporary global cinema frequently commodifies indigenous-inspired environmental values into universal ecological mythology. Although the representation appears celebratory, it simultaneously detaches maritime cultural imagery from specific historical and political contexts. Indigenous-inspired architecture and social organization are reconstructed into transnational symbols of ecological purity and sustainable living designed for global spectatorship.

Therefore, the scene does not simply portray a coastal settlement, but ideologically reconstructs maritime communal life as a cinematic myth of ecological harmony, collective integration, and moral resistance against industrial modernity. Through cinematic representation, the village becomes a universalized environmental fantasy circulating within contemporary global popular culture.



Picture 3.25 Bajau's Tribe Houses

Source: Wix.com



Picture 3.26 Metkayina's Tribe House

Source: James-camerons-avatar.fandom

Scene 4

Visual	 Picture 3.27
Sign	The scene depicts a seaside setting with shallow seawater pools that have developed along rocky, uneven ground close to the coast. Several Metkayina characters are positioned in the pools as they go about their regular lives. The

	seabed beneath the surface is visible by the clear, reflective appearance of the ocean. While far-off mountain formations can still be seen in the background, two flying animals are seen moving across the sky above the seaside community in the upper frame. Wide framing is used to capture the sequence, combining surrounding natural features, human figures, and maritime space into a cohesive visual composition.
Setting	Awa'atlu village coral border
Timeline	00:50:01

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene depicts a coastal landscape containing shallow water pools and several figures standing or moving within the seawater. The environment is illuminated by natural daylight, while mountains and open sky occupy the background. Two flying creatures are shown crossing above the shoreline area. The camera employs a wide shot that simultaneously frames the coastal environment, human activities, and surrounding natural space.

b. Meaning of Connotations

At the connotative level, the shallow marine pools signify a daily life structured around environmental intimacy and maritime dependence. The repeated visual interaction between bodies and seawater constructs the ocean as an ordinary social space rather than a distant landscape. The transparency of the water connotes ecological purity, balance, and environmental harmony, while the calm atmosphere reinforces the perception of stability and collective coexistence with nature. The flying creatures visually connect sky, sea, and land within one integrated ecosystem, symbolizing interconnected ecological existence. Through spatial composition and environmental framing, the film represents maritime life as adaptive, peaceful, and naturally synchronized with the surrounding ecosystem.

c. Myth

At the mythic level, the scene naturalizes the ideology that authentic communal life emerges through harmonious coexistence with nature. Following Barthes' concept of myth in *Mythologies* (1972), maritime existence is represented as timeless, morally balanced, and ecologically pure. The film constructs the Metkayina as an idealized environmental society whose survival depends on respect for natural equilibrium rather than technological control. Simultaneously, the sequence romanticizes indigenous-inspired maritime life by transforming ecological labor and coastal survival into aesthetically pleasing cinematic imagery. The representation universalizes maritime indigeneity into a transnational environmental fantasy designed for global spectatorship. Consequently, the sea becomes ideologically framed not as territory of economic struggle or political contestation, but as a sacred ecological space producing collective identity, moral order, and cultural authenticity.

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene demonstrates how cinematic representation constructs ecological ideology through environmental composition and spatial harmony. The coastal landscape functions not merely as narrative background, but as a symbolic space organizing the relationship between identity, labor, and nature. Through wide framing, environmental balance, and calm visual atmosphere, the film positions maritime existence as naturally integrated with ecological order.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the sequence reveals how myth transforms historically constructed meanings into seemingly natural truths. Barthes (1972) argues that myth depoliticizes cultural representation by presenting ideology as common sense. In this scene, the Metkayina's relationship with the sea appears organic and unquestionable. However, this harmony is cinematically produced through selective stylization emphasizing tranquility, balance, and environmental purity while excluding material tensions commonly associated with coastal survival and maritime labor.

The representation also aligns with Stuart Hall's (1997) argument that media actively produces meaning through representation systems rather than neutrally

reflecting reality. The film does not literally depict a specific Nusantara maritime community. Instead, it reconstructs symbolic elements commonly associated with maritime cultures — such as shallow-water activity, environmental dependence, and collective coexistence with the sea — into globally recognizable cinematic signs of ecological living. The analysis therefore focuses on representation strategies rather than ethnographic equivalence.

From a film studies perspective, the wide shot plays an important ideological role by visually minimizing individual dominance within the frame and emphasizing environmental totality. Human figures occupy only a small portion of the composition, while water, sky, and landscape dominate the visual field. This framing reduces anthropocentric perspective and reinforces the ideological perception that humans are only one component within a larger ecological system. The calm pacing, bright natural lighting, and balanced composition further aestheticize the environment as peaceful and spiritually coherent.

The sequence also resonates with broader cinematic representations of maritime cultures frequently associated with the Nusantara imagination, particularly communities such as the Bajau people, who are often represented in media discourse through narratives of environmental intimacy and oceanic adaptation. However, the film selectively appropriates these symbolic associations into a generalized environmental narrative rather than directly portraying Bajau cultural reality. This distinction is important in maintaining the analytical position of the researcher as an analyst of film representation rather than a literal interpreter of culture.

The scenario also highlights an ideological trend in modern international film that romanticises ecological cultures with indigenous influences as alternatives to industrial modernity. Because of their proximity to nature, the Metkayina are portrayed as morally authentic, whereas technologically advanced communities are subtly linked to ecological damage and alienation. This dichotomy reduces the political and historical complexity of actual maritime communities to a universal ideal of sustainable coexistence and ecological purity.

As a result, the sequence ideologically reconstructs maritime life as a cinematic myth of ecological harmony rather than merely showing ordinary coastal

activity. Avatar: The Way of Water turns indigenous-inspired marine imagery into a universalised depiction of holy cooperation between humans and nature for international audiences through environmental stylisation and spatial composition.



Picture 3.28 Bajau's Tribe Activity

Source: Youtube (*The tribe that evolved to stay underwater longer* by BBC)

Scene 5

Visual	 Picture 3.29
Sign	The scene presents a maritime environment during sunset. A male figure is positioned in open seawater while handling a fishing net. The orange-toned sky and warm natural lighting indicate late afternoon conditions, while calm ocean waves dominate the surrounding atmosphere. In the background, silhouettes of additional figures and a small canoe are visible moving across the sea surface. The sequence is captured using a wide framing that integrates the fisherman, surrounding water space, and distant community activity into one visual composition.
Setting	The sea around Awa'atlu Village
Timeline	00:56:48

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene depicts a man fishing in open seawater using a net during sunset. Additional figures and a canoe appear in the distant background. Warm natural lighting illuminates the ocean surface, while the camera uses a wide shot to capture the relationship between human activity and the surrounding marine environment.

b. Meaning of Connotations

At the connotative level, the fishing activity signifies dependence on the sea as a source of livelihood and collective survival. The fishing net connotes inherited maritime knowledge and environmental familiarity rather than industrial extraction. The calm sea and sunset atmosphere construct fishing as an ordinary and continuous social practice embedded within everyday life. Meanwhile, the presence of additional figures and the canoe visually reinforces communal cooperation and shared labor within the maritime environment. Through environmental composition and visual pacing, the film represents marine labor as balanced, sustainable, and harmoniously integrated with nature.

c. Myth

At the mythic level, the scene naturalizes the ideology that indigenous-inspired maritime societies possess an inherently ethical relationship with nature. Following Barthes' concept of myth in *Mythologies* (1972), fishing is represented not as economic exploitation but as spiritually balanced coexistence with the environment. The film mythologizes the Metkayina as ecologically responsible communities whose cultural authenticity derives from sustainable interaction with the sea. Simultaneously, the representation romanticizes traditional maritime labor by removing material struggles, economic precarity, and ecological conflict commonly associated with real coastal communities. As a result, maritime life is reconstructed into a transnational cinematic fantasy of ecological purity, communal harmony, and moral environmentalism designed for global audiences.

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene exemplifies how the ideological image of ecological harmony is created through the film representation of marine labour. Fishing is shown as a symbolic activity that organises the relationship between identity, environment, and

group survival rather than just as a means of subsistence. The sequence presents nautical life as aesthetically serene and inherently sustainable through the use of warm lighting, serene surroundings, and spatial composition.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the scene reveals how myth functions through the naturalization of ideology. Barthes (1972) argues that myth depoliticizes cultural representation by presenting historically constructed meanings as natural and unquestionable. In this sequence, the Metkayina's fishing practice appears inherently balanced and environmentally ethical. However, this meaning is cinematically produced through selective visual stylization emphasizing tranquility, simplicity, and ecological equilibrium while excluding the material complexity of maritime labor and resource dependency.

The representation also reflects Stuart Hall's (1997) argument that media actively constructs meaning through systems of representation rather than neutrally reflecting reality. The film does not directly reproduce a specific Nusantara maritime culture. Instead, it reconstructs symbolic elements associated with indigenous maritime societies — such as communal fishing, environmental dependence, and traditional ecological knowledge — into globally recognizable cinematic imagery. Therefore, the analysis focuses on representational construction rather than literal cultural equivalence.

From a film studies perspective, the wide framing and sunset cinematography play an important ideological role. The human figures occupy relatively small positions within the larger ocean environment, visually reducing anthropocentric dominance and reinforcing the perception of coexistence with nature. The warm orange lighting and calm pacing aestheticize labor into a serene visual experience, transforming fishing from physically demanding work into an emotionally harmonious cinematic spectacle. As Graeme Turner explains, film actively organizes social meaning through cinematic form rather than simply recording reality. In this scene, cinematography reconstructs maritime survival as visually sacred and environmentally ethical.

The sequence also resonates with broader cinematic representations frequently associated with the Nusantara maritime imagination, particularly

communities such as the Bajau people who are often symbolically linked with oceanic knowledge and environmental intimacy. However, the film does not literally depict Bajau culture itself. Instead, it selectively appropriates symbolic associations of maritime indigeneity and recontextualizes them into a universal environmental narrative accessible to transnational audiences. This distinction is important in positioning the researcher as an analyst of cinematic representation rather than a direct interpreter of cultural reality.

Furthermore, the scene reflects a broader ideological tendency within contemporary global cinema to romanticize indigenous-inspired ecological lifestyles as moral alternatives to industrial modernity. The Metkayina are represented as environmentally authentic because of their closeness to the sea, while technologically advanced societies are implicitly associated with ecological disruption and alienation from nature. This binary simplifies the historical and socio-economic realities of maritime communities into a universalized fantasy of sustainable coexistence.

Therefore, the sequence does not simply portray fishing activity, but ideologically reconstructs maritime labor as a cinematic myth of ecological sustainability. Through environmental stylization and visual harmony, *Avatar: The Way of Water* indigenously-inspired maritime imagery into a universal representation of moral coexistence between humans and nature for global spectatorship.



Picture 3.30 Bajau's people fishing

Source: ANTARA Foto

Scene 6

Visual	 Picture 3.31
Sign	The scene at minute 00:58:05 presents a young Metkayina boy diving beneath the ocean surface. The underwater environment is visually dominated by coral reefs, marine vegetation, and schools of fish moving around the characters. Another figure is positioned behind the boy, also submerged underwater. The sequence uses an extreme long shot that frames the human figures together with the surrounding marine ecosystem, emphasizing spatial immersion within the underwater environment. Blue-green lighting, fluid camera movement, and high underwater visibility reinforce the expansive visual atmosphere of the sea.
Setting	In the deep sea
Timeline	00:58:05

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene depicts a young boy diving underwater within a marine environment containing coral reefs and sea life. Another character is shown swimming behind him. The camera employs an extreme long shot to capture both the characters and the surrounding underwater landscape simultaneously. Blue-green color grading and fluid cinematography visually emphasize movement beneath the sea surface.

b. Meaning of Connotations

At the connotative level, diving signifies bodily adaptation to the marine environment and the integration of everyday life with the ocean. The ease with which the Metkayina child navigates underwater connotes familiarity, inherited knowledge, and environmental intimacy rather than recreational activity. The underwater framing constructs the sea as a lived social space rather than a dangerous or alien environment. Simultaneously, the contrast between the Metkayina children and Jake Sully's family symbolically differentiates maritime and terrestrial identities. The Metkayina figures appear visually synchronized with the ocean environment, while the newcomers are framed as physically inexperienced and environmentally disconnected. Through cinematography, movement, and environmental immersion, the film represents maritime identity as embodied knowledge shaped through continuous interaction with nature.

c. Myth.

At the mythic level, the scene naturalizes the ideology that authentic ecological existence emerges through total adaptation to nature. Following Barthes' concept of myth in *Mythologies* (1972), the Metkayina's bodily relationship with the sea is represented as natural, harmonious, and culturally pure. The film mythologizes maritime communities as ecologically superior societies whose moral legitimacy derives from environmental intimacy rather than technological advancement. Simultaneously, the sequence reproduces a romanticized global fantasy of indigenous maritime life by transforming ecological adaptation into an aesthetic spectacle of purity, balance, and spiritual authenticity. Rather than representing specific maritime cultures directly, the film reconstructs indigenous-inspired oceanic identity into a universal environmental myth consumable within global cinema. Consequently, the sea becomes ideologically framed not as territory or economic space, but as a sacred environment shaping identity, morality, and collective survival.

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene demonstrates how cinematic representation constructs maritime identity through visual immersion and ecological embodiment. The underwater

environment is not treated merely as narrative background, but as an ideological space organizing bodily movement, cultural identity, and social belonging. Through framing, camera mobility, and environmental composition, the sequence visually positions the Metkayina characters as inseparable from the ocean ecosystem.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the scene reveals how myth transforms historically constructed meanings into naturalized ideological truths. Barthes (1972) argues that myth functions by emptying cultural signs of historical complexity and presenting them as universal and self-evident. In this sequence, the Metkayina's diving ability is represented as an organic extension of their identity. However, this representation is produced through cinematic stylization that aestheticizes environmental adaptation into visual harmony and bodily perfection.

The analysis also reflects Stuart Hall's (1997) argument that representation actively constructs meaning through selective visual coding. The film does not literally reproduce a specific Nusantara maritime culture. Instead, it reconstructs symbolic characteristics associated with indigenous maritime societies — such as environmental intimacy, inherited ocean knowledge, and communal coexistence with nature — into globally recognizable cinematic imagery. The representation therefore operates at the level of cultural symbolism rather than ethnographic realism.

From a film studies perspective, the extreme long shot plays a crucial ideological function. By visually minimizing the human body within the underwater environment, the framing reduces anthropocentric dominance and reinforces ecological interdependence. The fluid camera movement and uninterrupted underwater composition further construct the perception of seamless integration between body and environment. As Graeme Turner argues, film does not neutrally reflect reality, but actively reconstructs social meaning through cinematic form. In this sequence, cinematography reconstructs maritime existence as visually harmonious and spiritually coherent.

The scene also aligns with broader cinematic representations of indigenous-inspired maritime cultures associated with the Nusantara imagination, particularly communities such as the Bajau people who are frequently represented through

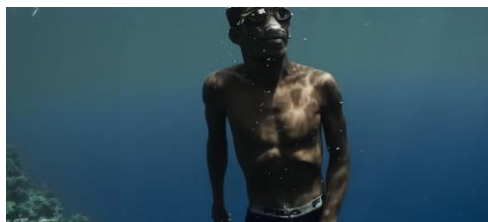
narratives of oceanic adaptation and intimate marine knowledge. However, the film does not directly depict Bajau culture itself. Instead, it selectively appropriates symbolic features of maritime indigeneity and recontextualizes them into a transnational environmental narrative. This distinction is important because the analysis focuses on filmic representation rather than literal cultural equivalence.

Furthermore, the sequence reveals the ideological tendency of contemporary global cinema to romanticize indigenous ecological identity as an alternative to industrial modernity. The Metkayina are constructed as morally authentic because of their closeness to nature, while technological or terrestrial societies appear environmentally disconnected. This ideological binary simplifies the political and historical complexity of real indigenous maritime communities into an emotionally accessible fantasy of ecological purity.

Therefore, the scene does not simply portray underwater activity, but ideologically reconstructs maritime identity through cinematic symbolism. Through visual immersion and environmental stylization, *Avatar: The Way of Water* transforms indigenous-inspired ecological values into universalized myths of harmony, adaptation, and sacred coexistence with nature for global audiences.



Picture 3.32 Metkatyina Tribe diving skills
Source: james- Cameron-avatar.fandom



Picture 3.33 Bajau's People diving
Source: Youtube (Salt in their Veins Full Award-Winning Documentary by Rita Hencke)

Scene 7

Visual	 Picture 3.34
Sign	The scene at minute 01:36:28 presents Kiri lying weak inside a dimly lit interior space located at the back of a coastal dwelling. Ronal, the Tshahik of the Metkayina Tribe, is positioned beside her while performing a healing ritual involving bodily gestures and ritual instruments. Another female figure assists the process by holding medicinal materials. The sequence employs low-key lighting with limited sunlight entering from outside, producing a confined and solemn atmosphere. Medium shot framing emphasizes the interaction between healer, patient, and supporting figures, directing audience attention toward the ritual process and bodily movements rather than the surrounding environment.
Setting	Jake Sully's family home
Timeline	01:36:28

a. Meaning of Denotation

The scene depicts a healing activity performed inside a domestic interior space. A young woman lies unconscious while another woman performs ritual gestures beside her. Supporting figures are positioned around the patient while ritual objects and medicinal materials are used during the treatment process. The scene

utilizes medium-shot framing, dim lighting, and restricted spatial composition to emphasize intimacy and seriousness within the healing ritual.

b. Meaning of Connotations

At the connotative level, the healing ritual signifies spiritual authority, ancestral knowledge, and communal dependence on traditional forms of healing. Ronal's gestures, ritual tools, and spoken incantations connote healing practices rooted in spirituality rather than biomedical logic. The visual contrast between the earlier scientific intervention by the Sky People and the ritual-based treatment symbolically opposes technological rationality and indigenous spiritual knowledge. Through lighting, framing, and ritual choreography, the film constructs healing as a sacred communal process involving emotional, spiritual, and ecological balance. The medium-shot framing intensifies bodily intimacy and reinforces the perception that healing emerges through collective care and spiritual connection rather than technological detachment.

c. Myths

At the mythic level, the scene naturalizes the ideology that indigenous spirituality possesses a deeper moral and existential truth than modern scientific rationality. Following Barthes' concept of myth in *Mythologies* (1972), the Tsahik is transformed from a culturally specific ritual figure into a universalized symbol of sacred feminine wisdom and spiritual authenticity. The film mythologizes traditional healing as morally pure, holistic, and spiritually superior, while modern medicine is represented as emotionally limited and spiritually disconnected. Simultaneously, the sequence reproduces a global cinematic fantasy in which indigenous-inspired societies become symbolic correctives to technological modernity. Rather than representing a literal Nusantara healing system, the film reconstructs symbolic elements associated with indigenous ritual traditions into a transnational mythology of sacred ecological spirituality consumable within global popular culture. Consequently, spiritual healing becomes ideologically framed as an authentic alternative to modern civilization and scientific materialism.

d. Critical Interpretation

This scene demonstrates how cinematic representation constructs spiritual healing through ritualized visual language and ideological contrast. The healing ritual is represented not merely as medical treatment, but as a symbolic encounter between spirituality, communal identity, and ecological belief systems. Through restricted lighting, intimate framing, and ritual choreography, the sequence visually positions indigenous healing as emotionally grounded and spiritually authoritative.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the scene reveals how myth transforms historically constructed cultural meanings into naturalized ideological truths. Barthes (1972) argues that myth depoliticizes cultural signs by presenting them as universal and self-evident. In this sequence, ritual healing is represented as an inherently authentic and spiritually meaningful response to illness. However, this authenticity is produced through cinematic stylization that selectively emphasizes sacred atmosphere, bodily intimacy, and emotional solemnity.

The analysis also reflects Stuart Hall's (1997) argument that representation actively constructs meaning rather than neutrally reflecting reality. The film does not literally reproduce a specific indigenous healing tradition. Instead, it selectively reconstructs symbolic characteristics associated with ritual healing practices — including spiritual mediation, collective participation, and ancestral knowledge — into globally recognizable cinematic imagery. The representation therefore functions as symbolic cultural coding rather than ethnographic documentation.

From a film studies perspective, the medium-shot framing plays an important ideological role by concentrating audience attention on bodily interaction and ritual performance. Unlike the sterile and technologically mediated medical scenes associated with the Sky People, this sequence uses close spatial arrangement and subdued lighting to produce emotional immediacy and spiritual intimacy. As Graeme Turner argues, film actively reconstructs social meaning through cinematic form rather than merely reflecting reality. Here, cinematography and spatial restriction reconstruct indigenous-inspired healing as spiritually authentic and morally grounded.

The sequence also reflects broader cinematic representations associated with the symbolic imagination of Nusantara traditional healing systems, particularly maritime and coastal communities where healing practices are frequently connected to spirituality, collective rituals, and ecological beliefs. However, the analysis does not claim that the Metkayina directly represent Bajau or other Indonesian communities. Instead, the film appropriates and universalizes symbolic elements associated with indigenous healing traditions into a globally accessible environmental-spiritual narrative.

Furthermore, the scene reveals the ideological tendency of contemporary global cinema to romanticize indigenous spirituality as an antidote to modern technological alienation. The ritual healing process is framed as emotionally sincere and spiritually effective, while scientific medicine appears limited because it cannot address metaphysical imbalance. This ideological binary simplifies the complexity of both indigenous knowledge systems and modern medicine by positioning spirituality and technology as oppositional forces.

Therefore, the scene does not simply portray a healing ritual, but ideologically reconstructs indigenous-inspired spirituality as sacred moral authority through cinematic representation. Through ritual aesthetics, intimate framing, and symbolic contrast with modern technology, *Avatar: The Way of Water* transform traditional healing imagery into a universalized myth of spiritual authenticity, ecological wisdom, and ancestral truth for global audiences.



Picture 3.35 Traditional Medicine of Na'vi People
Source: James- Cameron-avatar.fandom



Picture 3.36 'Duata' Traditional Medicine of Bajau Tribe
Source: RRI News

B. Summary of Research Findings

The selection of signs such as *tampah* (rice sifting tool), *batik*, *gamelan*, Rumah Gadang (traditional house), *keris* (dagger), floating market, puppet shows, and various customs reflects not only the physical representation of Nusantara culture but also its deeper social, historical, and philosophical significance. For example, *tampah* is analyzed not just as a rice sifter, but as a symbol of simplicity, togetherness, and respect for nature, which are central values in Javanese tradition.

Each scene is evaluated on two levels:

1. **Denotation:** The surface meaning of symbols (e.g., dragons or tribal rituals as representations of local folklore or traditional ceremonies).
2. **Connotation:** The associative meanings that arise in cultural context (e.g., a puppet show in the film echoes the ancient leather shadow puppet tradition, revealing philosophical values about morality and ancestry).
3. **Myth:** The ideological meaning that emerges when connotations become naturalized and accepted as cultural "truth." In this context, the cultural signs construct a myth of Nusantara identity as harmonious, spiritual, and closely connected to tradition. Elements such as batik, gamelan, and traditional rituals are not only seen as cultural heritage, but also reinforce the belief that Indonesian identity is inherently rich in moral values, communal harmony, and spiritual depth.

C. Intertextuality with Other Works

Scenes in "*Avatar: The Way of Water*" depicting Bajau sea nomad life are compared with actual Bajau documentary footage on YouTube ("7 Days with The Tribe that Breathes

Underwater Bajau Sea Nomads" by JoeHattab) and sources from National Geographic. This supports claims of cultural adaptation and authenticity from the director, James Cameron. The representation of Southeast Asian culture in "*Raya and The Last Dragon*" is compared with elements from other Disney films such as "*Mulan*" (Chinese cultural adaptation) and "*Moana*" (Oceania/Pacific tradition), showing Hollywood's negotiation between authenticity, diversity, and global storytelling.

The concept of Mother Earth in Avatar (Eywa) is juxtaposed with Dewi Sri, the rice goddess in Javanese and Balinese beliefs, demonstrating deep mythological parallels between global and Indonesian local wisdom. Academic sources and previous research on Southeast Asian visual culture (Branayudha et al., 2025; Lenggu & Kristanto, 2022) are used to supplement the analysis of traditional arts, architecture, and spiritual beliefs.

The author's perspective adds critical depth by explaining why certain symbols such as Rumah Gadang's architectural design, *gamelan* music, and traditional healing rituals are both artistically significant and represent local values of harmony and balance.

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

A. Conclusion

This research comprehensively analyzes the representation of Nusantara cultural values in the animated films "*Raya and The Last Dragon*" (2021) and "*Avatar: The Way of Water*" (2022) through the lens of Roland Barthes' semiotics. Employing a qualitative approach and an interpretive paradigm, the study successfully identified various signs, their denotative and connotative meanings, and the myths embedded in selected scenes from both films, which distinctly reflect Indonesia's rich cultural heritage. Film, as a powerful communication tool, proves effective in conveying messages and cultural values, making it a vital medium for promoting and preserving Nusantara culture on a global stage. The selection of "*Raya and The Last Dragon*," inspired by Southeast Asian culture, and "*Avatar: The Way of Water*," acknowledged by its director as influenced by Indonesia's Bajau Tribe, allowed for an in-depth exploration of customs, locations, weaponry, and food depicted. The primary objective of this research was to identify these Nusantara cultural signs and understand their layered meanings, contributing to linguistic and semiotic development while enhancing public appreciation for the cultural values subtly embedded in cinematic works. Within the theoretical framework, the study defines representation as the use of signs to depict reality, where meaning is shaped by ideology. Roland Barthes' semiotics serves as the main analytical tool, dissecting signs into denotation (literal meaning), connotation (implied and emotional meaning), and myth (underlying cultural ideology). A qualitative methodology was applied, wherein primary data were collected from film scenes and secondary data from various sources, then analyzed using qualitative descriptive techniques and Barthes' semiotics, with findings presented in narrative text.

The research findings reveal a rich and diverse representation of Nusantara culture in both films. In "*Avatar: The Way of Water*," the maritime culture of the Bajau Tribe is prominently featured, evident in the "Mother Earth" concept (Eywa) resembling Dewi Sri, the use of canoes and stilt houses over water, sea-based livelihoods, exceptional diving abilities, and traditional healing practices. This film effectively portrays the community's adaptation to and dependence on the marine environment, as well as spiritual values and

local wisdom in maintaining ecological balance. Meanwhile, "*Raya and The Last Dragon*" showcases a broader spectrum of Indonesian culture, including traditional tools like "*tampah*," the "*batik*" making process, the phenomenon of "floating markets," the philosophy of unity in diversity ("Bhinneka Tunggal Ika"), traditional musical instruments like "*gamelan*," the traditional weapon "*keris*," the architecture of "Rumah Gadang," and the performing art of "*wayang*." This film emphasizes the importance of trust, unity, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

In conclusion, this research convincingly demonstrates that international animated films possess significant potential to introduce and preserve Nusantara culture for global audiences. Through semiotic analysis, viewers are not only entertained by the storyline but are also invited to understand and appreciate the profound cultural meanings integrated into the visual narrative. This not only enriches the cinematic experience but also fosters awareness of the importance of maintaining national cultural identity amidst globalization, thereby building broader intercultural understanding.

B. Research Limitations

It is important to take into account the following limitations of this research:

1. **Qualitative research:** Although semiotics analysis has been used to minimise this, results may be influenced by personal ideas or specific cultural viewpoints due to the qualitative and subjective nature of the analysis, which depends on the researcher's interpretation.
2. **Access Restrictions:** Understanding the creative background underlying cultural representations is hampered by limited access to original sources, such as interviews with filmmakers or internal production data, which makes analysis more reliant on the visuals and narrative texts that are readily available.
3. **Emphasis on Characterisations and Visuals:** Due to time and budget limitations, this study does not experimentally investigate the cultural impact on audiences, such as through audience analysis. Nevertheless, these findings can serve as a basis for future comparative research across films or empirical studies on cultural reception.

C. Recommendations

Based on the findings of a semiotic analysis, which reveal that the representation of Nusantara culture in animated films often involves denotative, connotative, and mythical

signs, the following recommendations can be implemented. These findings show that representations often reinforce the myth of the archipelago's culture as “magical” in a global context, which can misrepresent the diversity of indigenous cultures. These recommendations aim to improve semiotic accuracy and encourage more critical representations.

1. For filmmakers and animation producers

- a. Deconstructing myths and narratives: Findings from the analysis show that the cultural myths of the archipelago are often represented as colonial or exotic ideologies, such as in international films that portray the archipelago as a “tropical forest” without historical context. Producers are advised to deconstruct these myths by creating more complex narratives, for example through connotative signs that emphasize ethnic diversity or contemporary values.
- b. Collaboration with semiotics experts: To improve the accuracy of denotative and connotative signs, filmmakers are encouraged to collaborate with semiotics or cultural experts to ensure that elements such as traditional symbols (e.g., *batik* or *wayang*) are not only literal but also carry authentic cultural meanings, so that the representation can be more profound.

2. For researchers

Expand semiotic analysis to digital platforms: Findings are limited to specific samples, so researchers are encouraged to expand their scope to animated films on platforms such as YouTube or TikTok, focusing on how connotative signs and myths develop in the digital age.

3. For the public or consumers

Awareness in semiotics: Findings show that myths in animated films can influence cultural perceptions. The public is encouraged to hold social media campaigns that educate about the deconstruction of signs in animated films, such as online discussions about how Nusantara symbols are represented, to encourage more critical consumption of content.

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